

Discussion on Whether Non-vocal Protagonists Could Be Narrative Perspectives

-----A Comparative Analysis on Yan Geling's Bedside & Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis

Zhaoming Li

Humanities Institute, Changchun University, Changchun City, Jilin Province

hunter2011@foxmail.com

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Abstract. As part of the narratology, narrative perspectives in novels have obtained attention and have been researched worldwide. Narrative perspectives, as a disciplinary study, have been popular around the world since the 20th Century. The research fever tended to reach its peak in the International Seminar on Narrative Perspectives held in Holland in 1995. This paper selects a special and infrequent perspective of the third party----- a narrative perspective of the non-vocal protagonist as a third party, two representative works "Bedside , from the third party's perspective of single internal focalization" and "The Metamorphosis, from the third party's perspective of stationary internal focalization", to do the comparative analysis from two aspects, and draws a primary conclusion of "Whether Non-vocal Protagonists Could Be Narrative Perspectives".

Introduction

Yan Geling handed in her river novel of the year to us----- Bedside(Chuang Pan) in 2015. As an internationally renowned Chinese American writer, an academician of the Writers Guild of America, a judge of Oscar for Best Screenplay Award, every piece of her new works would attract the attention of literature fans all over China and even the world. She always has a unique selection for her work, as well as this piece of work----- Bedside tells a love story between a young nurse in the army and a heroic railway corps she was taking care of, who was a vegetative patient and hadn't woke up until cremated at last. The nurse called Wan Hong refused all the other possibilities in life and another available love for her to guard the vegetative patient. The plot confused many readers, and it was unacceptable to them. Yan Geling answered that it is not a novel of realism or empiricism, but of symbolism. The non-vocal protagonist who is unable to communicate with other roles in the novel reminded me of the protagonist Gregor Samsa in Kafka's The Metamorphosis. He woke up only to discover himself turned into a big beetle who was also non-vocal and unable to express himself to others and communicate with them, and he was confined to a narrow room. Besides, both the protagonists of the two novels share a lot in common: after the loss of the capacity for normal human activities, being abandoned by their families, and rejected and oppressed by others.

China's famous scholar, chief expert of the social science funding project, Mr. Yang Yi said: "Perspectives possess the nature of universality. They are unpronounced but omnipresent. If you read the work with the awareness of perspectives, you will find the perspectives everywhere. " The narrative perspectives appeared in literature works quite early. After modern fiction blossomed and sprang up, the western literature theoretical cycle had deep theoretical discussions and studies on "narrative perspectives", and summarized the concepts and classifications of narrative perspectives, which served as a model for later researchers. This paper discusses whether non-vocal protagonists who are unable to communicate could be narrative perspectives from the angle of "the narrative perspective".

Bedside , from the third party perspective of single internal focalization

Narrators as the third party can be classified into four types: omniscient and omnipotent, selectively omniscient, speaking as the center of consciousness, and objective. *Bedside* chose an objective third party narrator, a kind of inner visual angle called by Tzvetan Todorov ,who has as much knowledge as what the roles in the novel do. This type is named as Inner Focus Narrative by French critic on structuralism Gerard Genette. The inner visual angle contains the angle of the protagonist and the angle of the eyewitness. *Bedside* chose the angle of the protagonist, unfolding the narration from what the nurse Wan Hong knew and thought, with a sense of cordiality and reality, which reached the inner world of the protagonist and was convenient for emotional expression.

The narrative perspective Yan Geling chose is undoubtedly wise. She had hesitated for quite a long time on which narrative perspective to choose for *bedside*. She started to conceive and create the work quite early. She had discussed with her father, China's famous writer Xiao Ma, over the narrative perspectives at the beginning of her creation. Her father's advice for her was to narrate the story from both perspectives of the two protagonists, that is to say, from the perspective of the vegetative patient Zhang Guyu, and the perspective of the nurse Wan Hong. However, Yan Geling soon realized two unavoidable troubles after writing in this way for a time. One of them is the whether the writing is scientific. Though the work is defined as symbolism, it is also written according to the context of historical facts, different from *The Metamorphosis*, classified as absurdist literature. The scientificity and authenticity of the plot in the novel should be inspected and weighed. Even modern medicine is unable to give a final verdict whether vegetative patients own coherent and clear consciousness. So it is improper to narrate and depict from the perspective of the vegetative patient Zhang Guyu. The other problem is about the implication of the novel. After many years since the manuscripts being put aside, Zhang Yimou, China's well-known director, suggested adopting only the nurse Wan Hong's perspective to narrate during a discussion with Yan Geling. In this way, Wan Hong's will is a certification for Zhang Guyu's being alive. The will strengthens both the shocking effect and authenticity of her adamant guard for the vegetative patient. Great minds think alike, Yan Geling overturned all the conception she had before, and recreated.

In *Bedside*, readers follow the perspective of the nurse Wan Hong to come into the plot, without switches to any other perspectives or subjective emotions of the writer. The novel with the narrative perspective of a single role is demanded that the role should be constantly taking part in the plot without any temporary absence. The stationary narrative perspective of internal focalization is in accordance with the Tree viewer Mode of traditional western thinking mode of rationalism, which stresses the uniformity, the binary oppositional structural pattern of key and non-key roles, positive and negative characters. It facilitates the linear development of the plot, and gradually adds fuel to the flame along with the plot development. This sort of narrative perspective strongly carries out the "to be", fascinating the readers to foreseeing the perspective of the protagonist. Adoption of the single stationary narrative perspective of internal focalization is also a challenge to the writing skills of the writer, because the perspective is inclined to lead to boring narration, vacuous plots. But we have no reason to worry about Yan Geling on this issue, since she has already informed us of the feasibility with her vivid river novel.

In addition, the writer's subjective consciousness and aesthetic orientation are embodied by the ideology and the angle of the narrative perspective. We can imagine, if the novel adopts alternant narrative perspectives of the first person and the third party, then the prior problem will be the plot development. The perspective of the vegetative patient Zhang Guyu is fixed, and all the plots he participated in are limited. If the narration of his mental activities is in a large number, the plot can't be enlivened. Another issue is about the central theme of the novel. The publisher of *Bedside*, An Boshun called the book a "Moral Idealism Novel". It couldn't be any better choosing the nurse Wan Hong' stationary narrative perspective of internal focalization for a concentrated reflection of her lofty spirit. If it adopts Wan Hong's perspective as the first person, a lot of plots involving other roles which are of necessity for the whole novel to convey the moral ideal of "rescuing life and never give up" will be lost. And it would be boring and dilatory to verify these plots by Wan Hong

from the first person's perspective. Therefore, Bedside chose neither non-vocal Zhang Guyu, the vegetative patient nor Wan Hong from the first person's perspective to narrate. It is most reasonable to finally pick Wan Hong' single stationary narrative perspective of internal focalization to narrate.

The Metamorphosis, from the third party's perspective of stationary internal focalization, supplemented by alternant narrative perspectives of non-omniscient perspective and omniscient perspective of zero focalization

There is the following narration on narrators of internal focalization in Western Literature: The History Of The Spirit written by China's notable western literature expert, Xu Baogeng:"On one hand, it observes things by shifting the perspectives into that of focal characters to its greatest extent; on the other hand, it retains the freedom to refer and depict the focal characters from a third party." The Metamorphosis adopts the perspectives of main characters to narrate as well as the writer's perspective to give a calm and objective narration from time to time. This can not only help the readers to understand Gregor's pain profoundly and immediately through his inner activities, but also convince readers of the authenticity of the story through a calm and objective narration from the writer's perspective. Besides some symbolic means to connect the absurd world in the writing to reality, narration from the non-omniscient writer's perspective to reflect vivid and real details is the only way to embody the authenticity in absurdist works. Georg Luckacs said: "The precondition of the overall absurdness of Kafka's works is detail description." In the work, it describes a lot of real details in a calm and objective, fine and smooth manner from the non-omniscient narrator's perspective. "One day, he spent two hours dragging a bed sheet on his back onto the sofa, covering up his body entirely. And then he could no more see him even if lean over." Gregor is so considerate that he didn't want to frighten his family with his appearance. There are a lot of detail descriptions from the non-omniscient writer's perspective in the work. What the protagonist, Gregor saw and thought was all the information the writer got. There is no difference in narration if the third party "he" in the work all turned into the first person "I". This kind of narrative method is closer to the first person narrative, so why the writer chose the third party's perspective of stationary internal focalization? It is mainly for the convenience to transit narrative perspectives without bringing abrupt feelings for the readers.

Such narrative perspectives also gets the roles closer to readers while it is absurd for such absurdist literature. Readers move forward along with Gregor's perspective and thoughts-----he was quite clear of his sad status, but unable to communicate with his family. The deepened sadness, continuously eroded insect nature caught the focal character into endless and aggravating despair and loneliness. The narration from the non-omniscient writer's perspective is wearing any sentimental color, to convince readers of the current scene by narrating the objective fact in the most concise and indifferent tongue, and then gets Gregor closer to readers for communication from the protagonist's perspective of stationary internal focalization as the third party, to further understand his inner despair. Readers stand with the protagonist on the same side together in the story, and feel sad about the actual plots, which creates a sense of pictures as a movie.

The narrative perspective of zero focalization can be quite capable of displaying complicated plots or scenarios difficult to narrate clearly from other perspectives. It also does well in the dispatch of the main idea, layout, and plots. By the end of the novel, it converts into an omniscient and omnipotent perspective of zero focalization as the third party. After the protagonist "exhaled the last swaying faint breath", his family were actually sitting in the shiny carriage happily for a trip, which made a striking contrast to Gregor's miserable experiences. If the narrative perspective wasn't converted, the story after Gregor's death couldn't be told. Then the sorriness of indifference and egoism among people of current western society could not be displayed and comprehended by readers.

In The Metamorphosis, Kafka set the non-vocal protagonist Gregor as the narrative perspective, as he said himself: "Art is not about copying the objective reality, but an expression of the inner world." He emphasized to reveal outer facts through inner world, to restore the world through

subjective technique of expression. According to *The Metamorphosis's* theme and its strong subjective color, it is the best choice to apply the third party's perspective of stationary internal focalization-----under the combined effects of taking the third party's perspective of stationary internal focalization as the principal narrative perspective, supplemented by alternant narrative perspectives of non-omniscient perspective and omniscient perspective of zero focalization, readers enter the dissimilated Gregor's inner world following the perspective of internal focalization, and comprehend the background of the work and words and deeds as well as mentalities of all the roles through the details from the perspective of zero focalization. The flexible shift of different narrative perspectives presents us the actual woe, the solitude, despair and powerlessness of lower-class people behind the absurd story.

Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of narrative perspectives in Yan Geling's *Bedside* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, a primary conclusion has been reached----- Whether non-vocal protagonists could be narrative perspectives of the novel depends on which narrative perspective fits the story and the main idea of the novel, what the school of art and literature as well as the background of the novel are, the relations and the framework among plots and roles. Researches on narrative perspectives are of significance in both novel studies and novel creations, which provide us a new way to understand and dig novel studies. As a specialized researching area, narrative perspectives have gained worldwide attention though, academic compositions direct at narrative perspectives are still very rare, which demands the attention and researches from researchers on theory of literature and art all over the world. Long literary piece, novelette or short story that taking non-vocal protagonist as the narrative perspective are really few. I hold positive attitudes towards this sort of rare and fresh narrative perspective of the third party. It is a brand new branch of narrative perspectives of the third party that deserves the future writers as a reference for creation. I hope that other scholars and expertise could go on correcting and discussing.

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