

The Interpretation of the Narrative Mode in "The Great Gatsby"

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Abstract: *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's masterpiece. The distinctive narrative techniques in his work attract many literary critics' attention. Based on the characters' experiences in *The Great Gatsby*, this paper presents narrative mode of this novel, which takes the inner-focus narration as the primary one and is complemented with diverse narrative modes, such as appropriate perfect-focus narration and external-focus narration. That manifests characters' traits and inner world deeply, portrays characters preferably and deepens the theme.

Introduction

The Great Gatsby re-appears American contemporary spirit vividly and reflects the traditional theme in American literature-the American Dream profoundly with unique artistic skills. The author used some traditional realistic writing techniques with some modern narrative techniques, which enhance characters' depiction and story narration, and deepen the social significance of the work. Therefore, it has a lasting artistic charm. To a great extent, the author's narrative techniques make *The Great Gatsby* a classic work.

Inner-focus Mode

Most chapters of *The Great Gatsby* use the first-person and inner-focus narration. Inner-focus type is also known as the same vision style or characters' viewpoint style. In this narrative type, the narrator seems as a character in the novel and knows everything about the protagonist by seeing, hearing, feeling and thinking. Although this work is about Gatsby's story, Fitzgerald designed a special character -Nick Carraway. He is the narrator and a key figure in the story. From the starting of the story, Nick made a self-description that he was tolerant and did not judge easily. Therefore, many people were willing to share their secrets with him. His special status - Gatsby's neighbor, Daisy's cousin and Tom's university schoolmate made him the undisputed and reliable narrator of this story. Nick, the observer of this story told witnessing truth to readers. He used direct speech to relay characters' words so that readers can "see" the characters' real activities and "hear" their sound. For example, in the fourth chapter, he described the scene that men and women in fashionable society pursued pleasure on Gatsby's lawn. "'He's a bootlegger,' said the young ladies, moving somewhere between his cocktails and his flowers. 'One time he killed a man'...honey, pour me a last drop into that there crystal glass." As a reliable narrator, Nick did not give any judgment on these discussions and he just continued to observe and narrate the truth. As a spectator, he had an objective and impartial attitude to all his observations. Readers learned quite a lot of other things from Nick's words and experiences, such as Gatsby's true identity, his family history, his luxurious life in his lifetime, the desolation after his death, Gatsby's qualities different from others, the reunion with Daisy, the conflict between Gatsby and Tom, and Tom's lover and his misdeeds. Through Nick's eyes, readers can not only see the American refulgence in 20th-century but also see the demoralization. Using internal-focus narration exposes Nike's inner world and makes other

characters' description more natural, and objective. Furthermore, it narrows the gap between the narrator and the story, and makes readers integrate to the story easily.

Xu Dai, in his *Novel Narratology*, pointed out that the most important feature of inner-focus narration is to control the narrator's scope and authority definitely. This not only eliminates the unequal relation between the narrator and readers to enhance sense of reality, but also provides some space in the novel to stimulate readers' imagination. At the same time, the inner-focus narrator's reality in the work makes his actions greatly limited. His reflection on life not only remains blank, but also has a number of dead zones. Fitzgerald was aware of defects of inner-focus narration and cleverly avoided these defects by the use of other types of focus narration in the novel.

Perfect-focus mode

Perfect-focus narration is also known as zero-focus narration, which is an omniscient narration with no fixed view. The narrator can narrate stories from any perspective, space and time. He can overlook the whole picture from a height and see everything happening in other places at the same time. Furthermore, the narrator can know characters' past, present and future very well and be free to enter characters' inner world to survey characters' consciousness or subconsciousness. In short, he seems as a superior God and controls human activities. Therefore, this narrative mode is also called God narration.

There are many mental descriptions which cannot be explained by first-person narrator in *The Great Gatsby*. For example, in the fifth chapter, when Gatsby and Daisy had a reunion, Nick made a series of descriptions of Gatsby's inner world. "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it draw from her well-loved eyes." Then, Gatsby had passed vividly through two states. "After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy he was consumed with wander at her presence. He had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now in the reaction, he was running down like an over wound clock." As Nick went over to say goodbye, he saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face. He entered Gatsby's inner world again: "Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything." The vivid description of Gatsby's psychology is a typical third-person perfect-focus mode. At the moment, the narrator, Nick used a lot of words to describe Gatsby's feelings, which presents characters' psychology that helps promote plots development to readers. This well makes up the defect that inner-focus narration cannot describe characters' psychology. Moreover, it makes the story content and plots well-rounded and portrays characters profoundly.

Nick, the narrator, took us into the other two characters' mental world with the same narrative mode. In the seventh chapter of this novel, the conflict that Gatsby and Tom competed for Daisy's came out into the open. When Gatsby demanded Daisy to say she never loved Tom, Daisy's psychology changed and she hesitated, "Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing—and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late". Obviously, she was with the bias towards Tom, even though she had deeply loved Gatsby once. Similarly in Chapter VII, when Tom recognized the love between his wife and Gatsby and when his lover mistook Myrtle as Tom's wife and looked at him jealously, "Tom was feeling the hot whips of panic. His wife and his mistress, until an hour ago secure and inviolate, were slipping precipitately from his control." The exposure

of characters' inner world has a very important significance in revealing characters' thoughts. Despite in different occasions, Daisy's and Tom's mental activities devote to enriching their images that Daisy was fickle, shallow and selfish while Tom was arrogant, hypocritical and swashbuckling. On the other hand, this reflects upper class's moral emptiness and hypocrisy in the 1920s in the United States according to the description.

Fitzgerald described the three protagonists' inner world in the story remarkably with perfect-focus narration. This not only allows readers fully to grasp every character's psychological changes in a complex conflict, but also is suitable to the content and plots.

External-focus mode

External-focus mode presents characters and scenes from the outside. In this mode, the narrator knows less than characters in the story, just as an outsider or spectator. Nick is not omniscient God in the story, because as a narrator, his own activities, scope, time and space are limited and he cannot know things that he is absent or has never experienced. In order to develop the story, sometimes Nick must give way to other people and let them complete the narration. For example, the love story between Gatsby and Daisy is an important plot for readers to understand the dream and hope that Gatsby wanted to reconcile with Daisy, so it is necessary to introduce this to readers. However, this story took place before Nick knew Gatsby and he could not narrate it with knowing nothing. Therefore, Nick acted as a listener and listened to Jordan's description of the love story between Gatsby and Daisy with readers together. "One October day in nineteen-seventeen, —I was walking along from one place to another...The officer looked at Daisy while she was speaking, in a way that every young girl wants to be looked at sometime...It wasn't until then that I connected this Gatsby with the officer in her white car. " Also Chapter six where Gatsby told his life experiences and Chapter 9 where Sam Wolfe talked about Gatsby's fortune after Gatsby's death and Gatsby's father told his dream are narrated by other people. These plots all use external-focus narration. Although we cannot know the character's psychology, we can know people's activities in specific scenes. The narrator, Nick was a spectator in these scenes and made no judgments. He just presented it as it were and maintained objectivity in real life fully. External-focus mode makes the story three dimensional, which enhances the artistic appeal of the novel and enriches the connotation of the novel. Furthermore, it makes plots more natural, complete, logical and attractive.

Conclusion

Each mode has its own strengths and weaknesses. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald skillfully used modern narrative techniques and multiple focus narrative modes to overcome defects and limits of one certain mode. He combined advantages of different narrative modes cleverly and naturally to show characters' traits and inner world, which effectively serves the development of the story and helps readers to have a better understanding of the subject of this work. Fitzgerald's unique narrative mode plays an important role to make *The Great Gatsby* an immortal and famous literary work.

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