

## An analysis of symbolism in English literary works

Puqing Shi

School of Foreign Language, China University of Petroleum, Beijing 102249, China

Shipuqing20@163.com

**Keywords:** Symbolism, Structural symbols, Color representation, English literary

**Abstract:** This paper mainly analyzes symbolism from the perspective of literature. In terms of form, it is analyzed from the aspects of context, polysemy and color expression; In terms of structure, from words and sentences, paragraphs to chapters, and then to the whole work, from surface to point, from shallow to deep, one by one, so that readers can obtain a comprehensive understanding of the wonderful use of symbolic techniques from micro to macro. All the texts are from famous foreign works, which can accurately and vividly express the theme of this paper. This paper makes readers construct a holistic framework for the use of symbolism.

### 1. Introduction

Just as literature is an example of human creative use of language, the process of readers' interpretation of the text is a kind of communicative behavior, which is related to the author's intention and readers' expectation. The understanding of the text is based on intention and expectation. Readers look for the best relevance from the author's explicit communication behavior, and relevance itself is the wonderful application of artistic techniques such as symbolism.

### 2. Symbolism is most commonly used to express the author's writing intention

Symbolism is used to obtain unexpected contextual effects. Ellen piper's a bucket of white wine tells a crazy story of revenge, in which symbolic techniques are used in many places. At the beginning of the novel, the author introduces Fortunato "dressed as a clown in bright tights"; Montessori "put on a black silk mask" after Fortunato agreed to identify the wine. The author describes Fortunato as a clown because the character is really fooled by Montessori like a clown in the novel. Montessori's name is similar to "monstrous" in English, which means "devil". He symbolizes death. In the novel, he also took Fortunato's life as death. When helping Fortunato to the cellar, Monterey took two torches and began to use the word "flame" about the torches. As they went deep into the cellar, when Fortunato was buried, the torches became "glow", which symbolized Fortunato's transition from the world of life to the world of death. The key symbol in the story lies in the Montessori family's family emblem, which is "a huge human foot, gold, against a sky blue background, tramples the jumping poisonous snake, and the snake teeth bite the heel", engraved with the motto "Whoever hurts me will be punished". If the "foot" is the symbol of Montessori, then the "poisonous snake" represents Fortunato. Although Fortunato's insult hurt Montessori, Montessori finally trampled on Fortunato, followed his family's maxim and punished the enemy. The ending of Montessori's story contains a strong ironic symbol, which leads the story to a climax. His "farewell" to the dead - "may he rest in peace!" contains profound symbolic meaning. Some of the effects of this eulogy were not realized by Montessori. First, it emphasizes the cruel nature of Montessori's actions: Fortunato may not have received a proper funeral, and no one had prayed for his soul to rest before; Secondly, this eulogy reminds us that Montessori himself has not been at peace in the past 50 years. In this way, Allen Pope invites the reader to infer that Montessori, who is not far away from the deadline, said this Sabbath not only for Fortunato, but also for himself. In other words, through Montessori's last eulogy, the author expresses Montessori's subconscious desire to have peace in death, which was deprived by revenge in his life. Therefore, Montessori's last eulogy is a symbol of his criterion of revenge ("the avenger himself

gets retribution, and the revenge is gone"). The author uses symbolic techniques to make the character's character clear, but hides the expression of intention between the lines. It can be said that every word is precious.

### **3. Symbolism is the use of one thing instead of another**

Whether people or places, actions or things are endowed with meaning beyond themselves.

#### **3.1. "The scarlet letter"**

The concept of polysemy of symbolism is reflected incisively and vividly in the scarlet letter. Hawthorne is a great American romantic novelist in the 19th century. As the founder of American novels, Henry W. Longfellow and Washington Owen are "recognized as three immortal masters of the 19th century". "The scarlet letter" is recognized as Hawthorne's most outstanding masterpiece. "The novel not only describes the dreamy romantic atmosphere, but also depicts the delicate psychological activities. More importantly, a large number of symbolic techniques have been widely used. Hester, the heroine of the scarlet letter, was sentenced to wear the letter embroidered on her robe for life to show that she committed adultery. Therefore, she was punished by Calvinism by making her wear the red-letter (the first letter of adultery). There is an unforgettable plot in the novel: when Hester saw the armor with a pearl in the living room of Governor Bellingham's house, in order to amuse the children, she looked inward: due to the special function of the convex mirror, the scarlet letter was magnified into the most striking part of her body in an exaggerated giant scale. Puritan society tried to exaggerate individual sin and its seriousness, so as to drown individual souls and character. At this level, the red a is a sign of punishment. On the other hand, it is also a means of punishment implemented by the authorities for the unity of education and education. For this reason, the scarlet letter is known as the first symbolic novel in the United States. This artistic technique has had a great impact on the development of American novels.

#### **3.2. " Purple "**

In 1983, Alice Walker caused a sensation in the American literary world with her interpretation of "Purple". Therefore, she won three major American awards and became the first black female writer to win the Pulitzer Prize. Through the discontinuous communication between the heroine Celie and different objects in the form of letters, "Purple" constructs the growth process of Celie as an American black woman. In this novel, it is not difficult for us to find the expression with symbolic meaning hidden in it. Niede's letter to her sister Celie described their first Christmas in Africa. "We spent our Christmas on this dark continent. We prayed, sang carols and ate the Eucharist together" (Walker, 1983:154). The reference to darkness has two meanings. First, it means that the local economy is underdeveloped and there is no electricity at night, so it is dark around. Second, the "darkness" here has a symbolic meaning, implying that the place is still a barbaric and primitive place that has not been developed and enlightened by modern human civilization. As we all know, Christmas is a landmark festival in western culture, with rich western cultural connotation and religious symbols. Spending this religious symbolic festival in this "dark" remote continent undoubtedly shows the collusive relationship between their activities and cultural colonization. In the novel, the author uses purple to express the image of color, which can be described as well-intentioned and amazing. It has played a finishing touch on both the characterization of characters and the deepening of the theme.

### **4. Symbolism can be used not only in the beginning and end of a paragraph, but also throughout it.**

#### **4.1. "The Great Gatsby "**

The Great Gatsby by Fitzgerald, a famous American writer, is recognized as a masterpiece by the world literary circles. Symbolism runs through the beginning and end of the novel. In this excellent work, the use of symbolism is not scattered as in the previous example. The uniqueness lies in that,

first, it plays a role at several different levels at the same time, that is, when several levels express ideas with one behavior, symbolism appears one after another, forming a pattern of displaying from the horizontal and pulling back from the vertical, so as to echo and integrate. Secondly, symbolism is integrated with the development of the plot, which makes people feel natural rather than sudden; Produce in behavior, rather than exist in isolation; Sublimation in the plot, not abstract expression. Wealth is the central symbol of Fitzgerald. The author of the novel tries to achieve the purpose of symbolizing the disillusionment of idealism that some Americans realized the "American Dream" by exploring, taking risks and accumulating wealth in the early 1920s. Compared with the early western pioneers, Gatsby dreamed of recovering lost youth and love through wealth, while the pioneers dreamed of realizing the "American Dream" by accumulating wealth. Fitzgerald connects the two in his novel, symbolizing the disillusionment of American idealism with Gatsby's disillusionment. The Great Gatsby is a work with strong practical significance and tragic color. By excavating and analyzing the skillful use of the author's symbolic techniques in the characters in the novel, this paper discusses the profound connotation given by the novelist to these symbolic entities, and explains the pivotal role of the symbolic techniques in the novel in the shaping of the characters, the development of the plot, and the deepening of the theme of the work. The perfect combination of plot and symbolism is a remarkable feature of Gatsby's works.

#### **4.2. "The golden notebook"**

Dotis less is a famous and prolific contemporary British female writer, known as the evergreen tree of British literature. The novel the golden notebook is generally recognized as Lessing's masterpiece, which has established dotis less's position and reputation in the history of contemporary literature. The golden notebook is composed of the story of a "free woman" and five notes in black, red, yellow, blue and gold. It describes the experience of the owner, Anna Woolf, who suffered many setbacks in her life, leading to mental collapse, then overcome the collapse and regain her integrity. In the Golden Notebook, the charm of symbolic art is fully displayed: first, the symbolic meaning of structure. The uniqueness of the Golden Notebook lies in Lessing's attempt and innovation in structure and form to express the theme of the novel. The whole novel is not divided into chapters and takes the third person novella called "free women" as the framework. The combination mode of the first four parts of the book is "free women", and the four notes of black, red, yellow and blue have been repeated four times. The first impression of this overall layout is "chaos". However, this strange layout is what the author deliberately pursues. This chaotic impression is also made by the author with his heart. The chaotic structure corresponds to the theme of the work. In the preface to the 1971 reprint of the Golden Notebook, Dotis less said: "my main purpose is to make the structure of this book comment by itself. It is a wordless expression that speaks through its structural way". Lessing interleaved the story of "free women" and several notes of the heroine into fragments, forming a seemingly broken and connected network structure with both vertical context and horizontal connection, which symbolizes the deformity and rupture of this society. It is the projection of people's actual helplessness, pursuit confusion, emotional panic and other psychological imbalances in writing. The 20th century was a century of turbulent vicissitudes, and the movement for independence and freedom of the colonial people and all the oppressed classes in the world was surging. The cruelty of the war has caused the panic of the western spirit and the shaking of their faith. They have sought new faith fulcrum to save their lost soul. People are trying to survive in the ruins of civilization. "The Golden Notebook" is launched in this context. Dotis less wants to use the "chaos" of art to symbolize the complexity of the external world and the resulting mental disorder. The second is the symbolic meaning of the five colors. These note fragments are named after the colors black, red, yellow and blue of the notebook, symbolizing the whole world of multi-ethnic and multi-ism. Black corresponds to colonialism or racism, red corresponds to communism, yellow corresponds to capitalism, etc. If the description of the golden notebook only stays in the objective external world, like Balzac's novels, it should be classified in the archives of realistic literature. However, the symbolic meaning of black, red, yellow and blue is not just a picture depicting the world in the objective world, but goes deep into people's soul

through the representation of color, so that the application of symbolic meaning in works reaches the highest level.

#### **4.3. " The sun also rises "**

Est Hemingway is famous at home and abroad for its world-famous "iceberg principle". As the spokesperson of the "lost generation", EST Hemingway did his best to use symbolism in his masterpiece "The sun also rises" and conquered thousands of readers. In a sense, the sun also rises is a reproduction of the life experience of EST Hemingway. Jack, the protagonist of the novel, is also a victim of war. From him, we can see Hemingway's shadow everywhere. Jack has a writer friend named Robert Cohen. He thinks he is a romantic hero. After pursuing Brett, he can't face the reality. Instead, he goes to a young matador to duel. Cohen actually represents the traditional moral standards. His final defeat symbolizes the fragmentation of traditional American moral beliefs and the disillusionment of ideals. As a modern means of transportation, taxi appears in the sight of readers more than once. This common means of transportation in life has been given a deeper meaning by the author in the sun also rises. Shortly after the beginning of the story, the protagonist Jack meets a prostitute in a taxi. Although he holds Brett in his arms, he still complains helplessly that he can't do anything. Later, the heroine Brett took taxis countless times, and taxis seemed to become an integral part of her life. Until the end of the novel, Brett and Jack meet again in a taxi on the streets of Madrid. It can be said that the taxi in this novel is not only used as a means of transportation for the characters to travel, but also plays a role in helping the author connect the various story scenes. More importantly, the author suggests that the characters in the story seem to roam idly on the road of life with the help of the taxis that are always moving, but actually wander helplessly and aimlessly. As the narrator of the story in the sun also rises, the hero Jack's body was disabled in the first World War, which made him unable to live a normal life, which brought him a heavy spiritual blow. Like other characters, drinking has become the best way for him to forget his pain. The more painful he is, the more he wants to get drunk. However, they do not know the truth of drowning their worries with wine. It is through the protagonist's behavior that the author shows that no matter how they struggle, their pain and sadness can only increase unabated, and any escape behavior is useless. Jack and his companions are the epitome of the whole "lost generation". The "trauma" he suffered symbolizes the physical and mental pain of the whole "lost generation" devastated by the war. This is also the root of their pessimism, pessimism and debauchery. To sum up, it is not difficult to see that the symbolism used by Hemingway in the sun also rises has played a very important role in the success of the work. A full understanding of this writing technique of EST Hemingway will help us better grasp the theme, truly understand the ideas that EST Hemingway wants to convey in his works, and listen to the author's anti war cry. To this day, the sun also rises, a classic of the "lost generation", is still a mirror reflecting American society in the 1920s.

#### **5. Conclusion**

As a means of literary creation, the symbol has been applied in many literary forms such as poetry and novels for a long time. "Symbolism is made up of this mystery. It implies the object bit by bit to express a state of mind," said the French poet Malay. Critic Nan fan believes that "symbol is to express or imply a certain idea, philosophy or emotion with a specific image". Eliot, the representative of modern symbolism poetry, said, "the poet should find an objective counterpart, that is, a symbol, for his thoughts and emotions in the real world". To sum up, symbol is a literary creation means that indirectly expresses the author's thoughts and emotions with the help of specific images or things in the real world, such as color and sound. Symbolism can arouse readers' rich associations and have multiple meanings, which gives great artistic power to the original ordinary things, which may be the charm of symbolic art.

#### **References**

- [1] Guo Lei, the true manifestation of the subconscious——on a barrel of amontilado by Alan Pope Chinese language and culture research, no.04, pp.123-126, 2000.
- [2] Sun Lei, text analysis of purple from the perspective of post colonialism Foreign language and culture research, no.09, pp.86-90, 2009.
- [3] Li Xi, on the role of color description in the characterization of characters in the Great Gatsby Foreign literature research, no.03, pp.256-259, 2002.
- [4] Zhang Yuxia, a close reading of Anna lecarena Literature and humanities, no.11, pp.145-150, 2008.
- [5] Ding Zhaoguo, the symbolic meaning of the sun also rises Journal of Changzhou Teachers College, no.20, pp.36-40, 2002.