

Original Paper

Multi-Angle Interpretation of H.G. Wells's Binary Structure in “The Door in the Wall”

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Abstract

H.G. Wells, as a famous writer, has been paid less attention to his idea of binary structure. In the short story “The Door in the Wall”, H. G. Wells portrays two different worlds separate from each other by a wall, and the only channel connecting the two realms is the green door in the white wall. H.G. Wells tells us the protagonist's attempt to pass through the door to achieve the integration of the world inside and outside the wall, which turn out to be a failure. This article provides a multi-angle interpretation of H.G. Wells' binary structure of the story: H.G. Wells' view on interpersonal relationship, his utopian imagination and writing thought.

Keywords

H.G. Wells, The Door in the Wall, idea of structure

1. Introduction

As a pioneer writer of science fiction, Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) was a prolific writer who worked tirelessly throughout his life, writing 30 novels, a large number of review articles and news report articles in more than 50 years of his creative career. H.G. Wells learned from Huxley and once worked as a doctor and teacher before the transformation of his career to writer.

“The Door in the Wall”, published in the early first quarter of the twentieth century, is the most representative and popular late stage of his short story. (Hammond, 1979) By setting two different worlds inside and outside the wall, the novel tells that the protagonist who lives outside the wall, after witnessing the scenery in the garden inside the wall, attempts to pass through that door and enter a different world, but the crazy craving is proved to be in vain. There has been relatively little research into the story. Shadurski regards that Wells's writing involves “mediating frames”. (Shadurski, 2013) Keith Williams notes that in Wells's literary works, the “characters and narrators are constantly seeing

or being seen through lenses, screens, windows, doors and apertures of all kinds.” (Williams, 2007) Besides, Scheick emphasizes “Well’s fascination with structure” (Scheick, 1985), and Wells himself admits that compared to characterization, in his fiction, structure is more important. (Wells, 1984).

The two worlds inside and outside the wall set by Wells in the novel, the door connecting the two worlds, and the hero’s tragic ending are employed together to illustrate the dualistic barriers.

2. The Baffle: Unresolved Interpersonal Relationship

The protagonist Wallace, described in “The Door in the Wall,” is a pitiful boy who lost his mother at the age of 2. He grew up under the care of a nanny and was mentally precocious. His father, a lawyer, cares little about him, but has high expectations on Wallace. “In the world set in Wells’ works, the central image is often the protagonist trapped in the environment.” (Bergonzi, 1976) Trapped in reality, Wallace turns to find a way out. It is under such a kind of depression and “a loneliness of the iconic members of society” that Wallace in the real world first encountered that unlocked mysterious green door when he was four or five. (Batchelor, 1985) As he hesitated in front of the door, messy scenes of daily life began to spring up in his mind: small messy shops, plumbers, dusty microwave tubes, and faucets, wallpaper and enamel. Thereby, with a hope of getting rid of the annoying current situation, he screwed up his courage, ran to the door with his arms open, and entered the garden where his life had been haunted forever.

Despite the fact that Wallace has excellent academic performance and been a successful politician in his career, he is constantly frustrated in interpersonal relationships, including the interaction with his friends and lovers. When he was a boy, he was always on the weak side when getting on with his classmates. He found it difficult to integrate into the social space. As for getting along with the lovers, Wallace has suffered two failed relationships. One of the female friends talked about his attitude towards love and lovers that “suddenly, the interest goes out of him. He forgets you. He doesn’t care a rap for you under his very nose...” (Wells, 2008, p. 1) Wallace’s eccentric attitudes towards his lovers reflects what Wells’s mentioned as “lover shadow”, which Wells mentioned in a book, that “the fundamental love of my life is the lover-shadow” and “all those ‘lover affairs’ in life are attempt to embody and concentrate the lover-shadow in human being”. (Wells, 1984) Scheick in his article comments that “Wells thought he could never find this ideal in any one person, and he admits that most of his affairs had little or no emotional impact on him.” (Scheick, 1985) In the novel, Wallace also felt that he could not fit in at the emotional side, where there is always a wall, separating the ideal and real lover apart. When he is really involved in a relationship, he just wants to escape.

This estrangement and loneliness from reality leads Wallace to begin to gaze at the garden behind the door in his imagination. And filled with endless yearning and expectations, Wallace is looking forward to entering it and reluctant to return to the real world.

On the contrary, inside the wall Wallace felt great pleasure from getting on with the beautiful and fair girl, whom he called girlfriend and the kind woman, the other warm-hearted people in the garden. He is

so obsessed that he almost forgets to come back. In the garden, it seems that Wallace has become the master of the garden: people and animals are around him.

Scheick comments that Wells' search for stability can be reflected in his earlier writing and the pursuit of stability "structurally brings his later thoughts around full circle with their origins." (Scheick, 1985) In the novel, the wall is used to create a dualistic structure and scene. Wells uses a door in the wall to penetrate through the interior and exterior of the wall, striving to achieve such a state of stability. Wallace's failure of integration of the two worlds shows his failure to improve and better the interpersonal relationship around him.

3. Wells' Utopian Imagination

In the real world outside the wall, Wallace father's attitude towards Wallace was severe and cold, and he was also indifferent to his son. Wallace himself is relatively cold and indifferent to women. In short, the connection between people is relatively loose. In the novel, Wells describes the real circumstances the tattered environment of dirty streets, crowded paths, etc., which is presented on the one hand in elegance and on the other hand in defeat. Shadurski remarks that "Wells' utopias disclose a similar imaginative impulse, to regain a defunct garden, which may also be a redeemed version of England." (Shadurski, 2013) The pace in the garden is slow, and the atmosphere is peaceful. In the Victorian era, Britain no longer led the world in terms of military strength, political system, economy, and ideology. It has undoubtedly declined gracefully compared to the era of "the empire on which the sun never sets". Elegance is reflection of a harmony, a tolerance of heresy, a sacrifice of speed, and a loneliness of fall. In the novel, the protagonist questions the real life in which he lives and fights against the environment around him. By escaping from the real city, imagining passing through the door in the wall and stepping into the garden inside the wall, Wallace is exposed to an imaginary land and an ideal utopia created by Wells.

Wallace's nostalgia and longing for the magic and fantastic garden inside the wall reflects his utopian illusion. The scenery in the garden is pleasant and the relationship between people is harmonious, equal and free. There is no difference between rich and poor, and human nature is not bound. People become close friends with nature. The garden was full of joy and lightness. This is an enchanted garden and Wallace told his friend that he seems to have returned to his home. In the garden that the door leads to, Wallace can forget all the unhappiness in life in the real situation. Everything is controllable. Monkeys and leopards have become Wallace's pets. They are extremely docile and are no longer beasts that pose a threat to Wallace's security. The little girl and the stern women that Wallace met in the garden imply the motherly care that Wallace has always lacked and wanted to have. In the garden, Wallace is popular in the whole paradise.

At the end of the novel, Redmond, the first-person narrator, found that Wallace died out of an illusion. He appeared next to the railway and saw the door that tempted and attracted him to the world in the wall for countless times. Here, Wells intends to arrange the scene of railway in the novel, where readers

naturally think of the journey and time. It was impossible for Wells to return to the utopian land again. Wallace had died before reaching another desired destination. The garden is thus a literary fantasy. Wallace's been waiting for the opportunity to connect the beautiful garden inside the wall with the real world outside the wall. The binary structure of arrangements of two worlds inside and outside the wall, in this perspective, directly shows readers the incompatible reality and Wells' utopian imagination.

4. The Channel: Fusion of Realistic and Artistic Style

Wells himself is constantly changing in careers such as journalists, news reporters, and writers, and he is more inclined to be called a reporter than a writer. It can be seen that his works tend to be more realistic. The characters, events, and other materials displayed in Wells's writing are true. The realism he advocates also includes attention to the process of individual development and survival. Yin Qiping believes that it is on this issue that Wells has confronted Henry James. Unlike James's "restricted perspective", Wells argues that characterization should not be restricted by any perspective, and that readers should be allowed to view characters from various angles. (Yin, 2001) Through unrestricted viewing, Wells realized his portrayal of authenticity. In "The Door in the Wall", the protagonist Wallace recounts his own growth process. The mysterious wall and door that plagued his life accompanied his growth process successively and repeatedly coincided with his life trajectory at different stages of life. From being tempted by the door in the wall in childhood, to the disillusionment of life lost in the door in the wall, this arrangement makes the character's activity space infinite, showing a three-dimensional and developing dimension, which is also consistent with what Wells personally advocates: the novel should be as close to life as possible and serve life. In advocating realistic fiction, Wells has unabashedly argued that literature is for him like architecture, a means, and it has a purpose. (Edel & Ray, 1958) He just wanted to show real life. (Liu, 2008)

Also, Wells's works are artistic. The garden to which the interior door of Wells creates in the novel "The Door in the Wall" refers to the artistic quality of literary creation and the elegant language after repeated polishing. James' view of the nature of the novel as art is that "art is essentially a choice, but it is a choice with typicality and comprehensiveness as its main goal." (James, 1979) It is just like Wallace's dream garden, beautiful, obedient and without ugliness and rebellion in real life. James emphasized from the perspective of psychology and aesthetics that the novel should "create the illusion of life". (Yin, 1998) This is different from Wells's emphasis on directly reflecting the reality of life, not the illusion of reality.

On the contrary, for a time he was a supporter of the aesthetic movement led by Wilde. John Batchlor wrote in a biography for Wells that "science, especially biology, philosophy, and utopianism and romanticism during this period had an important influence on Wells, but we also noticed his literary career at the beginning happened to meet the peak of the aesthetic movement, and for a time he seemed to join the ranks of Wilde and Beardsley." (Batchlor, 1985) It can be seen that under the influence of "art for art", Wells himself does not simply deny the importance of language and artistry in literary

creation. And Zhang Yujiu in his research pointed out that many originals and drafts of Wells himself proved that he paid great attention to language and art, and even took great care. (Zhang, 1993)

In the novel, Wallace waits for an opportunity, trying to connect the beautiful garden inside the wall with the real world outside the wall. James in this writing tries to “hide his own reproduction program, put his constructiveness in the background, and transform it into a transparent window facing the world, trying to create an immersive experience.” (Herman, 2002). But Wells is opposed to the creation of such a hierarchical system to divide people into several groups. Even if there is a barrier or binary structure, a hole or other channel should be created to contain the elements of original life and artistic materials together.

5. Conclusion

H.G. Wells's dualistic structure is shown to the reader in the two worlds separated by the wall in the story “The Door in the Wall”. It also provides readers with reasonable thinking and imagination of the text to give it more possible interpretation and meaning. Throughout H. G. Wells' lifetime, there are many similar walls erected and they are involved in interpersonal relationship, the author's ideal social consciousness and reality as well as his writing thought. Wells puts much effort to keep the stability of the binary structure. Everyone in daily life may be confronted with different choices, and they want to transit from one state to another, or even merge two different things. The door in the wall, like a kaleidoscope, lets us see the infinite possibilities of life. This is also the charm of this novel.

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