

The Study of Drama Narrative of David Hare's Skylight

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Abstract

In order to deepen the understanding of the method of chamber drama creation and finally put the method into practice, the author took *The Skylight* by David Hare as the research object, and analyzed the law of chamber drama creation from two aspects - from narrative characteristics of "story" and from narrative characteristics of "discourse", based on Stanislavsky's realistic drama theory and the general characteristics of chamber drama creation.

Keywords

Chamber drama; David Hare; Skylight; Locked structure; Compound structure.

1. Introduction

Skylight was created by a British playwright David Hare in 1995 and premiered in London's West End. The unique feature of this work is that it is a chamber play with two acts and four scenes, all completed in one space. Only one night has passed in time, but it tells a story as long as 7 years. All these characteristics follow the law of the Three Unities. Although the Three Unities as a method of drama literature creation have been put forward for a long time, in the real drama creation, writers often find it not easy to create works that strictly follow the Three Unities. It is the significance of this study to explore the application of the Three Unities in this play.

The character of "interior space" or "single space" determines that the creation of chamber play is full of hardships, because it is inevitable that chamber play cannot show the scene as it progresses, as most films or Shakespeare's plays do. This characteristic determines the writers can only accommodate large capacity plot within the small space, which brings creative difficulties, also decides the writers have to pick a unique narrative structure and characteristics, such as the extensive use of conversations, multi-line parallel narrative, and so on. It is precisely these characteristics that make the audience of chamber play obtain the aesthetic experience completely different from that of other drama types, which is the unique charm of chamber play.

In classical narratology, narrative text is divided into "story" and "discourse", which are used to distinguish the content and expression of narrative works. This "story" is different from literary stories in our daily life, which refer to events or contents arranged in a logical order. "Discourse" is the expression of an event or content.

To be more specific, the "story" refers to the content related to the story itself, such as the plot, characters, and environment, etc, which make up the story of the play. The "discourse" refers to the structure and strategy adopted to present the plot, such as the structure of narrative and the space and time of narrative. Through the analysis of these two, the creation rules of the Three Unities play and chamber play can be clearly demonstrated.

2. Skylight's Drama Narrative Features of Story

2.1. The Plot of Story

Because the play is a realistic script, the analysis of "fact" and "event" which was put forward by Stanislavsky can be used to analyze the plot of the script. The "fact" is everything that happens in the script, everything that happens as the story progresses, everything that the character says in words, everything that's relevant to the story. The "event" are those facts above that are important enough to move the plot forward and affect the overall situation. When the script is determined, it can be divided into sections according to character relations, conflicts, plot development, etc, so as to find a clear support point for rehearsal and performance, which is also better for actors and directors to grasp the context of the script and better present the performance.

Because of its "backward looking" character (which is common to most chamber plays), the facts of the play are more important than other plays (such as Shakespeare's plays). These are the important facts of *Skylight*: Tom and Kyra met seven years ago when Tom had married. They fell in love and had an affair for six years, during which Kyra stayed at Tom's house and almost became part of his family. Eventually, Tom's wife Alice found out about their affair and Kyra walked out. Not long after, Alice was found to be terminally ill and would die soon after. Kyra started a new life, and now is teaching in a middle school, living a poor life. These things that sound particularly "events" are actually facts, because they happened before the play actually begins, and are spoken by the actors. Thus, the first characteristic of the creation of the chamber drama is shown, that is, there are facts beyond the time and space of the plot, and it should be explained clearly through the lines of the characters.

Events of this play are much simpler than the facts, as many events just slowly uncover the facts. Here are the events of first Act: Edward, son of Tom comes to Kyra's apartment for help; Kyra says she misses the breakfast of the past time; Tom comes to Kyra's apartment and they recall the past; Tom comments that Kyra's living conditions are very bad now, and two people argue what true respect is; Tom admits his cowardice and miss to Kyra, then two people reconcile. And there are events of second Act: Kyra tells about her commitment to education; Tom cannot understand Kyra's choice, and they accuse each other; Tom is angry; Kyra recalls their love, then these two eventually break up; Edward brings breakfast.

It is not hard to see that the events of the second Act are actually more significant to the theme. The events of the first Act are more intended to explain to the audience the history of the two characters, namely the content of the facts. As a result, what can be concluded as the second characteristic of chamber drama creation is that the events must be used to carry the facts, but it can not only carry the facts but the events themselves must have a great development. In the short time of narrative, the characters also have to have the huge change, whether in terms of characteristic, or the relation between the characters. At the same time, the director's thoughts and insights are presented to the audience through events rather than facts. David Hare wants to highlight the conflicts between capitalists and social workers in British society, which is not inherent in the fact of a love triangle, but one that unfolds in Tom and Kyra's conversation.

The above is the analysis of the *Skylight*'s plot. In short, facts provide historical support, events provide character transformation and reveal the author's thoughts. Facts are the fundament, events are the quintessence.

2.2. The Entity of Story

All stories have entities. The entity of a story refers to all the existing entities involved in the progress of story, including characters, environments, etc. The characters bring the previous history, characteristics and relationship. The environment includes time environment, national

environment, regional environment, and the specific environment of the characters in the plot. This paper will analyze from these two points.

In terms of characters, Tom, Kyra and Edward are the three main characters. In terms of character-building methods, the most important thing is the lines, that is, the characters are shaped and built through their lines with their characteristics are gradually revealed through the dialogue. This is also a feature of the creation of chamber play: Each character should have his or her own specific language style, maintain the consistent style throughout the play, and consolidate this language style in the conversation with other actors, so as to reflect the unique personality of the character.

Due to different values and beliefs, the conflicts between the hero and the heroine is gradually revealed. In the first Act, the powerful Tom controls the stage. Kyra has her own pursuits, but Tom tells her not to waste her life in school but to try new things. Tom's arrogance and self-righteousness, the biggest obstacle to communicate between them, destroy the balance". When Tom accuses Kyra why did she feel comfortable to "run away" and "betray" everyone. At that time, Kyra thinks she had always been able to love Tom quietly. The unspeakable love, to her is the purest, because this kind of love is based on trust. In fact, Kyra acts as a family "mediator". The seemingly peaceful life has been plagued by extramarital affairs.

In the second act, the mature Kyra, begins to control the rhythm of the stage. As mentioned above, Kyra completely contradicts Tom from love view to values. The differences in values eventually lead to their parting. When the relationship breaks down, it is not just Alice who gets hurt but is almost everyone in the family. By reflecting on the incident, Tom learns to pull back - never coming to Kyra, and to blame himself - even though his wife's illness has little to do with it. But in essence, Tom's values have not changed much. He still conceals his inferiority with arrogance, his selfishness with luck, and still sees Kyra as a lover who enjoys material comforts. In fact, the shift in Kyra's values is most evident in the epilogue. Kind and innocent Edward brings her a hearty breakfast, thinking that he can make her "go home". Kyra is no longer the "material love" addicted, but a reality-facing, willing to fight with the real world. Hence, a breakfast, is just a breakfast.

In terms of the environment, the background is London in the 1990s when social atmosphere was proud of being an entrepreneur or a capitalist, and devalued workers who served the society. The location is in a lonely single flat in northwest London, and the time is from dusk till morning. From these environmental characteristics, it can be concluded that, generally speaking, a chamber play should have a clear background of time, nationality and region, at the same time, the specific location and scene of the plot must also be clear. This is determined by the fact that setting in chamber play cannot be changed. The more detailed scenes and background settings are, the more clear information can be given to audience with the more conducive to the direct development of the plot, rather than the need to elaborate the scene, so that the plot is more compact, which can get straight to the theme at the beginning of the drama.

3. Skylight's Drama Narrative Features of Discourse

3.1. The Structure of Discourse

Narrative structure is an essential feature of drama as literature, and all dramatic texts have their own structures. The structure of this play is a typical structure commonly used in the chamber play - closed-loop. Generally speaking, chamber drama capacity is small, the length is limited, in order to avoid loose, delay and waste, the more frequently choice is the exquisite closed-loop structure. The closed-loop structure has the characteristics of small breadth and great depth. In such a structure, the development of conflicts and the resolution of conflicts must be rapid and concise. Although not all chamber plays should adopt the closed-loop

structure, but this structure is very suitable for the characteristics of short and concise chamber plays.

There are not many characters in this drama. Story is not complex. Hence David Hare used the closed structure, focused on the performance of dramatic crisis. Through constantly looking back on the past history, it gradually reveals the profound conflict of conception between the two people, and reveals the profound conflict of the society. After the conflict is fully exposed, it returns to the relationship itself, forming a closed loop that tells the whole story smoothly.

Thus, there is an important form of structure in the narrative of the play - double line structure. The double line structure, as opposed to the single line structure, refers to the parallel narration method adopted in dramatic narration. The two lines relate to characters, undertake events, or reflect each other in themes. The two clues in the play, one is the action line of interaction between the two main characters, the other is the historical line of recalling the past. The two clues intersperse and alternate, constituting the completion the story, conveying the theme that the writer wanted to express. Based on the above analysis of facts and events, these two clues can also be called "fact line" and "event line" in this play. Most of chamber plays have parallel lines in their narrative structure. Thus we can get the structural characteristics of chamber play, that is, the use of "fact line" and "event line", or "history line" and "reality line" double parallel structure of cross-narrative.

As a situational play, *Skylight* adopts a typical expressionist narrative approach, which is different from the external narrative mode of traditional drama-beginning, development, climax, ending, prologue and epilogue. Instead, it adopts the form of situational debate drama to promote the theme narration layer by layer. The theme narration of expressionism is the externalization and symbolization of playwright's idea, which usually realizes through the personification of author's idea, the abstraction of characters, or the scenization of author's idea. One of the means of expressionism thematic narration is the scenization of playwright's subjective idea and the observation of dramatic scenes and the promotion of thematic narration in the form of scene debate play. The "double lines" structure of *Skylight* is built on Kyra's plentiful debates with Edward and Tom which are gradually completed. Timely debate scenes, indirect flashbacks or interludes of the hero and heroine's past, form a "compound line" narrative mode where the light line and the dark line intersect. The whole complex of the story is completed by "fragmentation" narration and "welding" step by step.

3.2. The Time and Space of Discourse

For drama art, drama time refers to the time flow presented by the continuous changes of stage scenes and actors' performances. In drama performance, stage time has three aspects: performance time, drama time and experience time. Performance time of a play is from the beginning to the end; Drama time refers to the continuous time of drama content, that is, the time that the characters experience in the plot; Experience time refers to the time impression directly felt by the audience. Among them, drama time is the unique creation of drama artists. Stage time refers mainly to drama time.

Stage space belongs to the category of visual art. The treatment of stage space refers to the creative activity of artistic representation of a certain dramatic scene in the stage space that the audience can see. The stage space is not only the visual art creation of the stage artist, but also the necessary component of the complete stage image created by director. In drama performance, stage space has two main connotations, one is physical space, the other is dramatic space. Physical space refers to a realistic space that provides a venue for the performance, such as a theater, a park used in an immersive play, etc. Drama space refers to the specific environment space and atmosphere provided for the development of drama plot and actors' action in a performance. In contemporary performance, it also refers to the psychological space created for the development of dramatic plots and dramatic actions.

The time and space in this play contains real space and time and psychological space and time these two different nature of space and time. Real space and time include natural space and time, physical space and time and other space concepts. The so-called real time and space is reflected in the organization of the drama plot as real time and space. This means that the drama develops a real space environment, and the timing process also passes along with the development of plot, and the stage performance image is created strictly in accordance with the realistic style. In this case, it's the first floor of a single apartment in north-west London where Tom and Kyra meet.

Non-realistic space and time mainly includes psychological space and time, philosophical space and time and other space concepts, it is in addition to the real space and time. Psychological space and time refers to the non-realistic, non-logical, non-material space and time. Philosophical space and time refers to the space and time that can rise to the philosophic thought that director wants to express. Non-realistic space-time is mainly reflected in the non-rational and non-logical space-time phenomena presented by genres other than realism, which are different from the characteristics of real space-time. For example, the stream of consciousness, dream and illusion all of which contain the manifestation of the inner world. In this show, Tom recalls Kyra's living in his house and the drawing he pulled off, as if he is in his house and the drawing is on the wall, when he enters psychological space. Similarly, Kyra recalls her traveling experience, missing Tom by the sea, and writing to him as if everything is happening, a psychological space. The description of psychological space and time in the drama can well show the characters' emotions, show their attitude towards the past, then fully expose the characters to audience, arousing audience's deep feelings.

Since most chamber plays generally have a "line of history" in which memory is an indispensable part, some show the playwright's choice through characters, so that they can be unified in real time and space, also some playwrights, David Hare, for example, is by putting the character "immersive" to "return to the past", build a character's psychological time and space, and have echo with real time and space. There is no better or worse between these two techniques, which requires the creator to make a choice according to the needs of expression and aesthetic tendency.

4. Conclusion

This paper studies the narrative methods of *Skylight* from the perspectives of story and discourse.

In the aspect of story, there should be a fact beyond the time and space of plot, and it should be explained clearly through the lines of characters. Script events must be used to carry the facts with a great development of events themselves; Each character should have his or her own specific language style, and maintain a consistent style throughout the play, and consolidate this language style in conversations with other roles; There must be a clear time, ethnic, regional background, at the same time, the plot takes place in a specific venue.

As for discourse, closed-loop structure and double-line structure of "historical line" and "realistic line" are mostly used to conduct discourse. In space and time, we can integrate the real space and time, the psychological space and time, even the philosophical space and time, or we can only use the real space and time.

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