https://doi.org/10.37420/j.pir.2024.004

A Study on the Irony System of Walton's The House of Mirth from the Perspective of Irony Theory

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Abstract
The House of Mirth is the masterpiece of American female novelist Edith Wharton, and this work can't be famous for so long without the author's subtle use of ironic writing style. The novel "The House of Mirth" utilizes irony on a large scale, and this study attempts to reproduce the ironic framework it contains from part to the whole, from the paragraph to the storyline, from the character image to the thematic idea. Next, based on this structural system, the types of irony are distinguished and their roles are analyzed, so as to achieve the interpretation of the work from different perspectives and a deeper understanding of the text.

Keywords
Irony, The house of Mirth, Wharton, Theme presentation, characterization, language style

1.Introduction

Irony is a topological concept, one of the oldest concepts in Western literary theory, with a variety of manifestations and a connotation that has evolved and improved over time. Irony is not only a rhetorical pattern, but also an artistic narrative strategy and narrative structure; it can be used as a principle of literary creation, but also can be expressed as a way of cognizing the world and constructing the art world. Irony narrative, because of its own nature of opposing and contradictory, makes ironic works have the characteristics of being subtle and gentle, yet profound and powerful, and intriguing in narrating events, shaping characters, and indicating the author's emotional attitude. Therefore, people pay more and more attention to irony. Nowadays, the theory of irony is still very much alive, especially in literature. It can be said that irony has developed into a meaningful cultural phenomenon.

The House of Mirth is the famous work of Edith Wharton, an American woman writer at the beginning of the last century. The success of this work made her became a professional writer from an amateur writer. In this work, Wharton's use of irony throughout the whole situation, forming from macro to micro multi-level, multi-angle, multi-dimensional ironic structure. The use of irony has also become a major feature of this work, the author reproduces the "Gilded Age" American New York high society, and profoundly exposes the heroine Lily Bart as an aristocratic fringe who tries to get out of the family's destiny of falling down and return to the upper class, but the tragic fate of not being able to end well.

Theoretically speaking, The House of Mirth is the most influential work of Wharton and has attracted the attention of critics, but most of the critics failed to notice its linguistic style. So this study analyzes the irony of

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this novel from the point of view of artistic means, which may help to enrich the study of Wharton.
Practically speaking, through this thesis, people can reach a new height of understanding of the words of Wharton. One can benefit from the analysis of irony to better understand it. Therefore, the practical value of the study of Walton's irony should not be ignored. Through an in-depth study of Walton's irony, readers can also grasp the importance of irony and better understand the author's purpose of writing.
All in all, the investigation of irony in "The House of Mirth" is particularly important. This topic belongs to the category of literature, aiming to understand more deeply the characteristics of The House of Mirth through an in-depth analysis of the irony in The House of Mirth, and at the same time to gain further knowledge about irony.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review of Edith Wharton and The House of Mirth

Since its publication, The House of Mirth has aroused the research interest of many scholars, and scholars at home and abroad have studied it from different perspectives. The research keywords of foreign scholars are especially rich, including religious connotation, tragic implication, feminism, racism, naturalism, and even many scholars have made the exploration of new historicism and consumerism from the perspective of historiography and economics, which has formed a cross-disciplinary trend between literature and historiography, and literature and economics.

Although domestic scholars started to study Walton's novels late, the domestic research is not lackluster, and the same colorful discussions have been carried out from the above-mentioned themes. In the new century, more and more people are focusing on Edith Wharton, a talented writer, and studies on her have begun to spring up. According to the CNKI database, the research on Wharton consists of 480 works, including 280 academic journal papers and 133 dissertations. Throughout the analysis of The House of Mirth in China, in general, feminism, naturalism and new historicism are the focus of most scholars' attention.

2.2 Current Research Status of Irony Theory

Irony as a rhetorical device has always attracted attention. Especially after the 20th century, it has attracted more attention, and is even regarded as one of the main ways to dominate modern comprehension. Irony is not just a rhetorical device that has been brought into people's view, but it is also a way of thinking, a way of looking at the world. Ironic statements or depictions always contain meanings that are the opposite of what is directly perceived. The research on irony will attract more scholars to study it more deeply in the future.

2.3 Synthesis

Although previous studies have paid meticulous attention to the literary value and ideological content of The House of Mirth, and have also explored the writing style of irony in detail, few have been able to explore the linguistic techniques and ironic features of The House of Mirth. According to the database of CNKI, there are no more than three papers published by domestic scholars on the ironic writing style of The House of Mirth since the beginning of this century, so this topic still has relatively considerable research space and academic value.

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2.4 Questions Raising

To summarize the above, it is particularly important to discuss the following questions: How does the author construct the system of irony in The House of Mirth? What is the role of irony in the novel?

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 The evolution of irony theory

3.1.1 Irony as Rhetoric

Aristotle used irony to refer to the use of language in a "self-depreciating pretense". In the Alexandrian Rhetoric, irony is "when an orator tries to say something, but pretends not to say it, or refers to a fact by using a name contrary to it." He defined irony as praise through condemnation or condemnation through praise. In ancient Rome, Cicero limited it to a rhetorical device or a Socratic irony as a habit of conversation. Later the rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quntinlianus expanded it to include ways of dealing with adversaries in debate and the linguistic strategy of the debate as a whole.

Traditional irony is rhetorically based and focuses on the definition of the phenomenon of irony. most of this rhetorical sense of irony is literal irony, remaining mainly at the level of the linguistic text.

3.1.2 Irony as a method of expression and a principle of creativity

The concept of irony in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was expanded as a way of thinking about literary creation. With the efforts of German Romanticists, irony was no longer a localized rhetorical device, but expanded to the metaphysical level as a literary method of expression and principle of creation.

In the book British Romantic Irony, Anne Myler gives a clearer definition for this concept: "Romantic irony is an ideology, or a mode of worldview corresponding to it in literature, where the artist sees the whole world as an infinitely rich and mingled state, unpredictable, and where man's existence is finite, and his perception of the infinite inevitably has a one-sidedness, thus resulting in the finiteness and even wrongness of man's consciousness. Conflict, contradiction, oscillation and drift are the intrinsic nature of spiritual life, the living reality of spiritual life, and at the same time, man's consciousness is in a process of constant change and development, they constitute the duality of man, and this duality creates the two basic impulses in man... ...which manifest themselves in the artist as two mutually corresponding activities: an active, dynamic, creative, what may be called self-creative zeal; and a counterproductive, limiting, self-destructive or self-limiting element to the creative zeal. The ironic artist is eagerly engaged in the difficult but exciting balance of self-creation and self-destruction, deliberately maintaining in his work a dynamic equilibrium between generation and affirmation as well as reflection and skepticism."

The theoretical starting point of the German Romantic view of irony is primarily to point out the contradictory oppositions of the writer's descriptive attitude: "For in order to write well, he must be both creative and critical, subjective and objective, passionate and practical, appealing to feelings and reason, inspired by subconscious inspiration and a The sober and self-conscious artist whose work describes the world, yet is fictional in nature, feels a responsibility to give a true or perfect description of reality, but knows that this

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is difficult to accomplish .....". Specifically in the works, it is mainly manifested as: the theme of the works sometimes exists the phenomenon of multiple contradictions; the various images or various characters in the works sometimes exist contradictory polysemy. German Romanticism transformed the rhetorical device of irony into irony with a philosophical standpoint, where irony is self-contradictory, and this contradictory and antagonistic attitude reflects the antagonism of the real world as well as indicates the antagonism between literature and reality, which contains both the whole and the disintegration of the whole, and both the order and the destruction of the order.

3.2 Definition of Ironic Narrative

3.2.1 Definition of Ironic Narrative

In the historical process of the development of irony theory, the use of ironic techniques and strategies implies or reveals two elements that are both self-contained and interconnected. But the connection between the two is in the face of mutual mockery and deconstruction and subversion. On the one hand, the surface meaning of ironic literature seems to be intact, forming an independent discourse system. On the other hand, a certain contradiction between the surface meaning and the deeper meaning makes people savor it again, and thus get a conclusion that is diametrically opposite to the surface meaning. In irony, the author's intention is always invisible, and the relationship between the author's intention and his speech is always antagonistic and tense. This tension is expressed through the author's narrative of praise and irony and the rhetoric of contradiction, while the author's real intention is also presented to the reader in the tension of speech.

Therefore, D. C. Meek describes irony as "having both surface and depth, warmth and transparency, both focusing our attention on the level of form and directing it to the level of content." The inconsistency between the apparent and hidden meanings of irony is similarly highlighted by Andy Pu in Chinese Narrative, who defines irony as "a set of structural and rhetorical devices used by authors to illustrate the disparity between the surface and the reality of the novel's intended meaning." In Modern Rhetoric, Brooks and Warren also define irony as follows: "Irony always involves an inconsistency between what is literally said and what is actually meant by the statement. On the surface, an ironic statement says a certain thing, but the actual meaning is quite different."

The boundaries of the meaning of irony continue to expand with the development of the practice of ironic literary creation and the theory of irony. In defining the concept of irony, therefore, it is important to take into account the essential element of dislocation and contradiction between speech and meaning, and meanwhile, we should make it inclusive of the richer phenomenon of irony, reflecting not only the basic feature of irony founded on rhetoric, but also its strategic and structural creative spirit in the sense of modern narrative rhetoric.

Based on this understanding, according to Li Jianjun's "On the Rhetoric of Irony in Novels", irony can be defined as: "A kind of implicit mockery, denial, and playfulness as well as a revealing nature that the author adopts due to his insight into the paradoxical state of the complex factors of the object of expression in terms of its content and form, and the phenomenon and its nature, and in order to maintain the balance of these complex antagonistic factors of euphemistic and cryptic rhetorical strategies, structures and creative

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principles."

3.2.2 The nature of ironic narratives

First, an ironic narrative represents two messages in one set of codes. According to Wallace Martin, "Irony means that a set of codes represents two kinds of information." We can recognize it from the two levels of text and context: firstly, the text of ironic narrative contains double meanings: behind the surface narrative is the opposite subtext. The deeper meaning is hidden potential, which is usually not directly expressed in the work, but depends on the readers to comprehend the author's real intention. Secondly, irony has two contexts that are mutually subversive in a narrative. One of them unfolds in accordance with social norms or social reality, and the other is precisely a mockery of the norms or reality; the real meanings of the two contexts are completely different, and the effect of irony arises from the tension formed by the contrast between these two different contexts. The greater the difference between the two contexts, the deeper and sharper the irony.

Secondly, ironic narratives have a critical spirit generated by transcendence. There is no absolute either/or dichotomy in actual life. Ironists in ironic narratives usually possess a condescending mental posture. They believe that their own creed and yardstick are absolutely superior to the object of irony, thus keeping the reader reading with a spectator attitude, distancing the author from the narrator. Hence, the ironist can discover the depths of the ridiculousness of the object of irony, and choose the most appropriate and implicit way to show them out. The narrative stance of transcendence and the critical spirit are at the heart of irony. Thus, the critical spirit generated by transcendence becomes the essence of ironic narrative.

3.2.3 Types of Irony

Due to the variety of studies on irony, it has been categorized in a variety of ways. This study chooses its main branches. The categorization can be done at two levels: the basic types and presentation types of irony.

On the one hand, there are various types of irony. Yang Jun divides irony into four types: verbal irony, situational irony, structural irony and pattern irony. Among them, three basic types are commonly used: verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony. First of all, "verbal irony" is the most common type of irony, also known as "literal irony". In Glossary of Literary Terms, Abrams defines verbal irony as "a statement in which the implied meaning is quite different from the meaning ostensibly expressed by the speaker". "Verbal irony" refers to the linguistic dimension where what the speaker says does not correspond to actual behavior and intentions. Secondly, "dramatic irony" means that the characters don't know the truth, but the author, viewer, or reader can clearly realize it. According to Lodge, dramatic irony arises "when the reader becomes aware of the discrepancy between the facts of a situation and the character's understanding of it". Its most distinctive feature is that the events are obvious to the viewer, the reader and the writer, while the characters know nothing. Finally, "situational irony" is based on "verbal irony" and "dramatic irony". It is no longer limited to a sentence or a plot, but is based on relatively independent and complete plots and scenes. In "situational irony", the scenes in the novel are predetermined. For example, in the arrangement of characters, on the one hand, the development of the plot is contrary to the expectation of the characters, or even completely against the reader's conception. On the other hand, the thoughts, words and behaviors of the characters or narrators in the novels are irregular, which are in sharp contradiction with the popular

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social concepts and accepted codes of conduct. In addition to this, the atmosphere is created in such a way that there is a great contrast between the atmosphere and the personalities or the flow of emotions. Through the author's intentional setting, the scenes in the novel are ironic. In other words, "situational irony" can be interpreted as the irony of the whole event, which results in an unexpected ending.

On the other hand, there are three ways of presenting irony. The first type is the homonymity of the theme's characteristics. In the case of a series of literature, there is an irony between the theme and the subject. Tragic irony is one of the typical forms. The second category is the irony of literary images. Irony of literary images is a common type. This kind of irony mainly refers to the strong effect produced by the contrast between the style of the statement of the work and the character's disposition. The third type is the irony of literary style. This kind of irony tends to present a macro-trend, often comical, absurd and sometimes even stylistically incomprehensible. However, its thematic features are unusually deep and thought-provoking. All in all, when irony is expressed in thematic features, literary images and literary styles, it becomes a basic attribute and way of thinking in literature, as well as a macro-level mode of irony, with far-reaching effects on literary creation and theoretical criticism.

For The House of Mirth, this paper mainly analyzes its irony from the perspective of three presentation styles, supplemented by verbal irony and situational irony.

3.2.4 Irony as a Literary Artistic Means

According to the Spanish critic and thinker Jose Ortegay Gasset, irony is essentially one of the elements of the modern novel and is "the decisive sign of literary modernity" . The plot of a good novel is often driven by the ironic tone that runs through its internal structure, rather than by coincidences put together. According to J. A. Cuddon, irony "involves the perception or a discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality; in appearance and reality, or between appearance and reality; in all cases there may be an element of the absurd and the paradoxical". So irony is regarded as an artistic device that has three essential elements in fiction.

Firstly, the author's non-direct rhetorical intervention in the novel is the first and indispensable element that constitutes irony. The author's intervention in an ironic novel is designed to harmonize and control the antagonistic elements that constitute irony, especially the contrast between clarity and ambiguity, so as to ensure that the reader can accurately grasp the meaning of irony. In other words, the writer must provide the reader with the clues necessary to understand irony." Without such unmistakable clues, irony will always lead to malady, and it is unreasonable to assume that it is readers' fault not to grasp irony". However such so-called clues are not provided directly, but rather subtle hints are used to give the reader information. That is to say, the author deliberately avoids telling the reader directly and positively the exact meaning of what he or she is trying to say, but instead adopts an ambiguous attitude. This attitude is necessary and is based on the author's trust in the reader's ability to understand and judge.

Secondly, irony also comes from the contrast between two opposing elements. This contrast can be between the appearance and the essence of something, between a character's actions and the facts of the plot or the narrator's evaluation, between a character's words and his or her actions, or between two very different

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qualities, behaviors, events, or situations. Two very different elements can reveal to each other the illusions and falsehoods created by each other, thus dissecting the truth more clearly from a different point of view. The third element is relaxed and confident indifference and detachment, which is a state that shows the superiority and self-confidence of the ironist. In other words, the ironist believes that he or she is superior to the object of irony and has the ability to control the mental state of the object. It creates an impression of formality that is unobtrusive, but always mocking and satirizing in the most incisive way. meanwhile, the reader is invariably affected by this sense of indifference and detachment and believes that he or she is also scrutinizing the object in a superior manner.

4.Case analysis

4.1 Thematic irony: situational irony

4.1.1 The contradiction between men and women under the patriarchal society's view of marriage

In this study, thematic irony mainly refers to situational irony, which exists in the paradox between the subjective desires of the characters and the objective facts of the plot. It roughly means that the means used by the characters to achieve their goals ironically turn out to be something that hurts them. In The House of Mirth, thematic irony is reflected in the oppression of people in a patriarchal society, both women and men. According to Fetterley, In the patriarchal society, "marriage is fatal because it is an economic transaction, and whoever has the money can afford beautiful women who are treated as commodities" (Fetterley 78-82). And this view of marriage affects both men and women, making them collectively victims of a patriarchal society. Men control women and women are dependent on men, which, on the one hand, makes women become ornaments and possessions of men, and even used to cheat men out of their money; on the other hand, it also makes men become women's ATMs. As a result, neither men nor women can get true love in this kind of marriage premised on economic benefits. All in all, through situational irony, this chapter will explain the dilemmas faced by both men and women in a patriarchal society.

According to Fetterley, "as long as men are rich enough, they can afford beautiful women who are treated as commodities". In other words, women are objectified in a patriarchal society. Especially women who marry into the family because of their appearance, their function is to be viewed and played with by the rich and powerful. In The House of Mirth, the female beauty thus becomes an object of irony. On the one hand, for the women themselves, their beauty becomes a bargaining chip in the marriage transaction; on the other hand, for the men, they can afford the women's beauty if they are rich enough. Thus, beauty becomes an important quality. As the author herself says in her memoirs, "In that shallow society, there was an almost pagan cult of physical beauty. The first question about any young person entering the world of high society is, 'is she pretty?' or 'is he handsome?' because good looks are very important to both young men and women". In The House of Mirth, this is well exemplified by the heroine, Lily Bart. As a typical character, she is oppressed or scrutinized as an "object" by various men. These men include Selden and Rossdale, but also Gus Traynor. The three men represent three different positions and have different attitudes toward Lily Bart. First, in the case of Selden, he has always played the role of an observer. He likes to observe Lily Bart like a work of art. Selden's point of view is used several times in the novel to observe Lily Bart's appearance. This shows that he is very good at appreciating her delicacy and elegance. And he never lends a helping

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hand when she is in trouble; instead, he always watches from the other side of the fence with a condescending attitude, which will be analyzed later.

If she is a work of art in Selden's eyes, she is a commodity to Rossdale and Gus Traynor. Unlike Selden, Rossdale does not understand her elegance, but rather her "use-value". He measures everything in terms of money and profit, including marriage. So he tries to propose to her, not out of love, but because of her ability to help him rise in society. This explains why he no longer holds interest in Lily Bart when she is banished from high society. Like the previous, it is also a situational irony which makes the utilitarian view of marriage exposed.

As for the crass Gus Trenor, he is again different from the previous two in that he totally sees Lily Bart as a sex object. Attracted by her beauty, he offers to ease her financial crisis by investing in the stock market. However, his intention is to make her pay for it by having sexual intercourse with him, and the so-called "stock dividends" don't exist, but actually come from Gus Trenor's own pockets. To put it bluntly, It was a money and sex deal led by Gus, who traded his wealth for Lily Bart's body.

Besides, other female characters in the novel, such as Judy Trenor and Bertha Dorset and other married women, while enjoying the material conveniences and squandering their husbands' money for indulgence, they also lose their spiritual pursuits and emotional support, and become the kind of people Lily Bart doesn't want to be.

To summarize, The House of Mirth is a typical monetary society dominated by the hegemonic desires of men. The many constraints imposed on women make it difficult for them to embody their values and control their destiny. "Under the discrimination of patriarchal culture, women are isolated from society, and almost all social outlets are blocked, leaving only a ' That is, to attach to a powerful man". Through situational irony, the author shows the gap between ideal condition and real condition, reflecting the tragedy of women being reduced to commodities and decorations, thus presenting the oppression of patriarchal power on women.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "men are captured by the dominion they own, and in the midst of oppressing women, men themselves are oppressed.That is to say, like women, men are at risk of being objectified, reduced to having to work continuously as women's money-making machines, which is a manifestation of situational irony that also exists in the contradiction between the subjective desires of the characters and the objective reality of the plot. In such irony, the means adopted by the characters for their own ends ultimately become the direct cause of their tragic fates without them realizing it. According to Showalter, "men are expected to develop business, and they do contribute to the prosperity of business. However, as they have worked for a long time in offices, factories, and fields, they will feel too exhausted to have any time or interest to communicate with family or friends". The men in The House of Mirth face this same dilemma while struggling to find true love, as does Gus Trenor, as does Mr. Bart and the other men who play the role of husbands in their marital relationships. Gus Trenor uses his fortune to support his wife's large expenses; Mr. Bart is exhausted from trying to earn money just to support his wife's purchases of jewels and other expensive luxuries while keeping the family afloat; And the late Mr. Peniston seems to have become synonymous with estate-based legacies for Julia Peniston. How is it not situational irony that these hus-

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bands appear to have more power, but are in fact oppressed.

First, take Gus Trenor, for example, who has complained, "Judy Trenor has no idea of what she spends-not that there isn't plenty to keep the thing going," he interrupted himself, "but a man has got to keep his eyes open and pick up all the tips he can". "The women all think--I mean Judy Trenor thinks-I've nothing to do but to go down town once a month and cut off coupons, but the truth is it takes a devilish lot of hard work to keep the machinery running". In the traditional marital relationship represented by the Trenor family, men, in addition to taking full responsibility for providing for the family, had to do everything they could to support their wives in all of their spending and fulfill all of their material needs. On this level, Gus Trenor is pathetic, "who was seldom listened to, either by his wife or her friends, settled down into the rare enjoyment of a confidential talk.

Another example is Mr. Bart. His wife overspends without restraint and he accepts it in silence. There is no love between such a couple; all we can see is the wife's endless demands and the husband's submissive behavior; the husband is forced to work all day long with little time to spare, and the wife does not care about her husband in the slightest. In the end, Mr. Bartes meets a tragic end of bankruptcy and death, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he is a victim of a patriarchal society.

To sum up, it can be seen that men have been objectified under the influence of patriarchal society's view of marriage and become impersonal work machines. they are forced to accept the roles defined for them by the patriarchal society, and they work hard to earn money but can hardly get the solace they deserve, and all they can get is oppression.

4.1.2 Contradiction between Ideal and Reality in Materialistic Society

In The House of Mirth, both the hero, Lawrence Selden, and the heroine, Lily Bart, are caught in a dilemma between ideals and reality. In order to present such a situation perfectly Wharton skillfully uses situational irony to show the tension between "gilt cage" and "republic of spirit" and the author's own attitude towards it. Specifically, spirit cannot be separated from matter. For Lawrence Selden, what he seeks is the so-called "pure" spirit, which has nothing to do with material things, while he himself is in the material world and enjoys the benefits of such a society. As for Lily Bart, although she has a kind character, she is forced by poverty to lead a miserable life. In addition, in response to the contradiction between "social role" and "real self", Wharton uses irony to focus on the contradiction between Lily Bart's traditional virtues (gentility) and new values (materialism).This explains why Lily Bart tries to find a rich husband, only to give up the chance of marriage every time she is about to get one because of the other person's vulgarity or unwisdom.

Therefore, through irony, especially situational irony, this chapter will reveal the irreconcilable conflict between ideals and reality in a materialistic society. This conflict refers to the tension between "gilt cage" and "republic of spirit" and the conflict between "social role" and "republic of spirit". At the same time, what Wharton really wants to express is that spiritual superiority is based on money, and that there is no such thing as a spirit separate from matter.

4.1.2.1 The Tension between "Gilt Cage" and "Republic of Spirit"

In The House of Mirth, the author adopts a situational ironic attitude towards Selden's "republic of spirit". According to the hero Lawrence, "From everything-from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from

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all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit ". This shows Lawrence Selden's unwillingness to be bound by the solidified chains of the upper class, which he calls the "gilt cage". He wanted to escape from it and seek freedom and his true self, the so-called "republic of spirit". However, the spirit is subjected to the material, he himself lives in the material world that he looks down upon and cannot get out of it, and he does not want to get out of it, too. As Lily Bart said of him, "you spend a good deal of your time in the element you disapprove of". So the gap that exists between Lawrence Selden's expectations and reality constitutes situational irony. His own four-year affair with Bertha Dorset, a married woman, is one of the most powerful ironies of his so-called "republic of spirit".

As for Lily Bart, she believed that happiness came from wealth. Her tragic fate precisely proves the impossibility of Lawrence Selden's "republic of spirit" and the necessity of the fact that spirit must depend on matter. Spiritually, the most outstanding quality of Lily Bart's spirit was her kindness, which was praised by George Dorset in the following words: "You ARE kind--you're merciful--you always were!" She gave generously to help Gerty Farish and Nettie Farish. Gerty Farish and Nettie Crane. Ironically, however, her acts of kindness came from a material and financial base. In addition, she burnt the letter that would restore her reputation and allow her to marry Rossendale, just to help Selden. However, conscience and virtue do not bring her a happy life; instead, she is reduced to being victimized and exploited by others in the upper class because of her poverty. Here again, situational irony emerges from the great discrepancy between the reader's and Lily's own expectations of a happy life for Lily Bart and Lily Bart's eventual tragic end to her life.
In short, both Lawrence Selden and Lily Bart are caught in a dilemma between "gilt cage" and "republic of spirit". Through the use of situational irony, the author presents us with a paradox between the characters' expectations and real situations. In this part, such an irony is mainly on characters' imagination on pure spirit.

4.1.2.2 Conflict between "social role" and "real self": the pursuit of materialistic values or traditional virtues
Situational irony is also used to characterize the dual personality of the heroine Lily Bartes. A glimpse of her dual character can be seen in Wharton's 1936 preface: "The meek, innocent Lily Bart falls victim to the power of vengeful morality for her seemingly deviant behavior." In this regard, R.W. Lewis states. Lewis notes: "Wharton chooses a heroine who is essentially incapable of decisive action". On the one hand, she plays the social role of pursuing materialistic values, while on the other hand, she seeks her true self and aspires to traditional virtues. This inherent contradiction causes her to lack both the boldness to achieve her goals and the foundation to support her ideals, and she is ultimately abandoned by society. This is a two-way opposition between expectation and reality, which constitutes the irony of her dual character and her own contradictions.

4.2. Irony in Characters: Verbal Irony and Situational Irony

4.2.1 Male Characters

In The House of Mirth, the author uses situational irony to portray a series of male characters. In this chapter, Lawrence Selden and Gus Trenor, will be chosen to be analyzed.
The character of Lawrence represents a young man who is on the fringe of the upper class, who is free-thinking but unable to get rid of the traditional concepts, and his irony comes from his irrational belief in "the republic of spirit", his double standards of judging others and his indifference, The irony comes from

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https://doi.org/10.37420/j.pir.2024.004

his irrational belief in "the republic of spirit", his double standards in judging others and his indifferent and irresponsible attitude.

First of all, he thinks that "the republic of spirit" he has been expecting is "from everything-from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents, from all the material accidents". However, what he calls "the republic of spirit" is theoretically flawed because, as mentioned earlier, spirit cannot exist apart from matter, and man, as a product of society, cannot be completely disconnected from social influences. This is the reason why he is unable to escape from the society and material things that he despises, nor is he able to pursue the spiritual kingdom to which he aspires.

Secondly, he has double standards in judging others and himself. He allows himself to have an extramarital affair with a married woman for four years, but cannot tolerate Lily Bart's relationships with others. For example, when he sees Lily Bart alone near Gus Trenor's house, he assumes, like everyone else, that Lily Bart is having an affair with Gus and gives up on the idea of proposing to her. He is so hesitant and timid that he never dares to give his heart, and is always a deserter at critical moments. This is why the author calls him a "passive hero" (Wolff 11). In the end, he has to accept the death of his beloved Lily Bart.

In addition, he maintains a sense of superiority over Lily Bart by remaining detached and on the sidelines. This is reflected in the fact that, as a detached bystander, he fails to observe Lily Bart in a comprehensive and objective manner; he fails to see Lily Bart's zeal for charity, her resistance to rape, and especially the price she pays for preserving his honor; and that, as a proponent of opinions, to a certain extent, he is able to point out the problems and dilemmas she faces but he is unable to provide him with a viable solution, nor was he able to be there for her in her moments of helplessness. This is why Lily Bart complains to him, "Why do you make the things I have chosen seem hateful to me, if you have nothing to give me instead?" In fact, "what Selden appreciates is an elegant Lily who is wearing fashionable clothes in and out of the social circle, and is a beautiful and dignified Lily who dresses herself appropriately in the live scene show".

4.2.2 Female Characters

In The House of Mirth, the author uses verbal and situational irony to portray a series of women in the old New York society. What they exhibit is hypocrisy and snobbery. As wives, they marry to reap material prosperity; as friends, they are suspicious of and take advantage of each other; as relatives, they value honor more than affection. In this chapter, Lily Bart, Mrs. Bart and Mrs. Peniston will be chosen for analysis.

4.2.2.1 Lily Bart

What is most ironic in Lili Bart is her dual personality and internal contradictions. On the one hand, she was taught by her mother to develop materialistic values in pursuit of a materially wealthy life, with the goal of marrying into a wealthy family; on the other hand, he is both elegant and cultured from her father, focusing on the nobility of sentiment and spirituality. Such a dual character makes her hesitant and wavering in her actions, which directly leads to her tragic end of being abandoned by the society and eventually dying a tragic death. This tragic fate is undoubtedly a great irony, " she is not as lucky as the heroine in the fairy tale, who can always be lucky enough to make bad luck reverse itself ".

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Her mother, Mrs. Bart, educates her in a way that directly contributes to her desire for money and material things. Her mother admonished her to "rely on her pretty face to marry into the family and return to high society." She is not made for mean and shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of poverty ... the only climate she can breathe in". Growing up in such an educational environment, she sincerely believes that poverty is shameful and that poverty is failure. In addition, she longed to be noticed, admired, recognized, and superior to others. Her father, however, had a completely different side than her mother. Her father can be said to be a representative of traditional virtues, focusing on noble sentiments and the literary arts. For example, it is mentioned in the book that he used to spend the whole night appreciating poetry. Under her father's influence, she also had an idealized side: a love of artistic elegance, especially painting and sentimental novels. Unable to reconcile the contradictions between her father's and mother's different values, she became complex and uncertain.

Her beauty attracts the attention of men. Selden sees her body as "the touch of poetry", arguing that her beauty "had held out suppliant hands to him from the world in which he and she had once met for which he and she had once met for a moment, and where he felt an over mastering longing to be with her again". Gus Trenor also fell in love with her. As for herself, she longed for both material abundance and an ideal life of freedom that transcended the material. Yet such an ideal seemed impractical in the social conditions of the time. So she shunned or rejected four men from the upper class, gave up four opportunities to reach the upper class. In addition she fell into heavy debt, became poorer and more indisposed, and was gradually alienated from her former friends. "Lily Bart stands apart from the general movement .... she is probing the very depths of insignificance".

In short, she hopes to pursue her desired freedom through the pursuit of money, yet without it, all of this effort fails. Without the skills and abilities to support herself, she is unable to survive in the lower echelons of society, and ultimately be drowned and forgotten in the cruelty of society. Just as Simone de Beauvoir says, "If a woman has reached the end of her resistance, there is only one way out that remains. there is only one way out that remains open to her-that is suicide".

4.2.2.2 Mrs. Bart

The irony of Mrs. Bart is mainly in her excessive gold-digging. She never shows love and care for her husband, but coldly sees him as a money-making machine. She has an extreme aversion to poverty, believing that "To be poor seemed to her such a confession of failure that it amounted to disgrace". In her opinion, poor people "live like a pig". This is why she pursues a life of luxury and spending, which leads to the death of her husband under financial pressure. She is so intent on molding her daughter, Lily Bart, into the perfect wife for the rich and powerful that she insists on warning Lily Bart not to "live like a pig" even when she is sick and bedridden. Ironically, however, after her husband's bankruptcy and death, she and her daughter lived a life she had once scorned "like a pig", and had to "wandered from place to place". And she is "now paying long visits to relations whose house-keeping Mrs. Bart criticized". This is certainly a great irony.

In addition, the irony of Mrs. Bart is also reflected in her failed expectations of her daughter, Lily Bart. Firstly, Because of her money-oriented mindset, she expects Lily to marry into high society by virtue of her beauty, but Lily doesn't give her what she wants; secondly, after being expelled from the upper class, Lily has difficulty to get a foothold in the lower class of the society. Despite her efforts and attempts, it was to

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no avail. This is because Mrs. Bart only teaches her how to please the men of the upper class, but does not teach her job skills to earn a living. These are all ironic to Mrs. Bart and her values. She "followed in imagination the career of other beauties, pointing out to her daughter what might be achieved through such a gift", but never expected that daughter would be as penniless as she had been in her own lifetime." She had hated dinginess, and it was her fate to be dingy", and "her last adjuration to her daughter was to escape from dinginess if she could", yet her daughter's fate was equally unexpected.

In conclusion, Mrs. Bart's extreme gold-digging not only caused her own tragedy, but also led to the tragic end of her daughter, Lily Bart.

4.2.2.3 Mrs. Peniston

The irony of Mrs. Peniston is mainly reflected in her vain and hypocritical image in the high society.

First, when her niece Lily Bart is orphaned, her original intention of adopting her niece is not out of the care, concern and love between relatives, but from her vanity - in order to be seemingly noble. To borrow from the novel, she adopts her niece "because noone else will have her, ... but with the eyes of her little world upon her she takes a certain pleasure in her act". "If she was by no means the richest of the family group, its other members nevertheless abounded in reasons why she was clearly destined by Providence to assume the charge of Lily Bart". She also always gave money and gifts to Lily from time to time as she raised her. "Lily Bart, who is intensely practical, will have preferred a fixed allowance; but Mrs. Peniston likes the periodical recurrence of gratitude evoked by unexpected cheques ...". On the surface, Mrs. Peniston "supported the girl's scanty income by occasional handsome presents" in what appears to be a selfless act of kindness. Her actual purpose, however, is to ensure that Lily is grateful to her at all times and to make her niece Lily Bart dependent on her. All of this demonstrates her hypocrisy, vanity and selfishness.

Moreover, she is an avid gossip enthusiast whose greatest hobby is prying into other people's secrets and finding out their scandals. "No one can have kept a more accurate record of social fluctuations, ... or lands triumphantly beyond the reach of envious breakers". Ironically, however, she ultimately died as a result of gossip about her niece. Believing her reputation to be tarnished by rumors about her niece, she fell ill and died soon after. Her fervor for rumors becoming the exact cause of her death, which is also the embodiment of situational irony, through which the author shows the dullness of Mrs. Peniston's life and the emptiness of her spirit.

4.3. Irony in Language Style: Irony in Image

Often, an image has both a symbolic form and a symbolic intension. And if a paradox exists between the symbolic form and symbolic intension of the image, strong ironic effects will be produced (e.g., the image of a woman in a novel is a symbol of a woman in a novel). strong ironic effects will be produced. This is called the image irony, which mainly incarnates ironic significance through the unique preposterous combination between symbolic form and symbolic intension of the image. This is called the image irony, which mainly incarnates ironic significance through the unique preposterous combination between symbolic form and symbolic intension of the image. In The House of Mirth, Wharton skillfully utilizes image irony, which serves to enhance the expressive effect and help the readers understand the author's intention. In this paper, we choose the most typical and significant one to analyze, which is "the house of mirth" mentioned in the

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title of the novel.

4.3.1 "The house of mirth" is not mirthful

In The House of Mirth, "the house of mirth" literally means a cozy family full of laughter. However, this is not the case for the heroine, Lily Bart. On the contrary, she lives in a house of "morning". such a paradox between the symbolic form and symbolic intension of the image constitutes Such a paradox between the symbolic form and symbolic intension of the image constitutes an irony on a suffocating patriarchal and materialistic society. One cannot fail to mention the author's good intention in giving the title to the novel. "The House of Mirth" comes from Ecclesiastes: "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; The heart of fools is in the house of mirth". In The House of Mirth, Wharton compares the materialistic value believers in the upper class to the "fools" in the Bible, who are empty and bored in their hearts, and pursue the materialistic enjoyment of sex and pleasure to the neglect of the enhancement of the spiritual realm; and compare Lily, who has awakened to a certain consciousness, to what the Bible calls "the wise". Just as Howard Maureen says, Lily embodies a typical obsidian phenomenon where there is no room for her".

"The house of mirth" ironically represents a living space with no "mirth".The first living space in which Lily lives is the home of her birth, where she is denied the love and care of her parents, and the term "the house of mirth" satirizes the alienation of the husband-wife and parent-child relationships in such a family. Wharton describes Lily's family's villa as follows: A house in which no one ever dines at home unless there was 'company'. Wharton describes Lily Bart's family's villa as follows: A house in which no one ever dines at home unless there was 'company' ... such is the setting of Lily's house. Such is the setting of Lily Bart's first memories.

The second living space in which Lily lives is the residence of Mrs. Peniston. Here she is also unhappy because she has to follow the rules set by her aunt and to please her at all times. As "the richest of the family group", Mrs. Peniston admits Lily because "no one else would have her, and because she had the kind of moral MAUVAISE HONTE which makes the public display of selfishness difficult, though it does not interfere with its private indulgence ". Besides, she "liked the periodical recurrence of gratitude evoked by unexpected cheques, and was perhaps shrewd enough to perceive that such a method of giving kept alive in her niece a salutary sense of dependence". The hypocritical Mrs. Peniston, as already mentioned, adopted Lily purely out of her own vanity. In such a family, there is little real kinship between aunt and niece.

The third living space in which Lily lives is Bellomont, where she is ostracized by the upper class. In The House of Mirth, Bellomont is the epitome of upper-class society - a stiflingly patriarchal society. It's a place where the richest men and the most influential women come together in a dizzying array of extravagant lifestyles. Clearly, Lily does not belong here; she is not accepted by the people and is eventually ostracized and banished.

The last living space in which Lily lives is her boarding house. The House of Mirth contains many details about the boarding house, such as "the blistered house-front", "the paintless railings of the door-step", "darkened window", "the blistered brown stone front", "the windows draped with discolored lace" and "the Pompeian decoration of the muddy vestibule. Lily says, "I have gone over my expenses very carefully, and I rather think I shall be able to manage it". From this, it has been suggested that Lily lives a pathetic life

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with "a sense of deeper impoverishment". Finally, "as she looks back ... from which it can draw strength". from which it can draw strength for itself and tenderness for others". The fact that Lily lives in such poor and difficult circumstances is yet another ironic reference to the term "the house of mirth".

By describing Nettie's home, she shows the reader what a true "house of mirth" should look like-although it's an "unusually small room," it is at least a "surprisingly clean" and "surprisingly clean" room. least a "surprisingly clean" and "warm shelter from the wind and rain" . Actually, the peace and warmth that Lily Bart, a down-and-out girl, experiences in Nettie's house is the core of the "The House of Mirth" in the true sense. Lily, who has lived in a number of mansions and villas in her short life, ultimately sees what a truly happy life should look like in a shabby, cramped-looking room. this is also a kind of situational irony.

5.Conclusion

Wharton's skillful use of irony in The House of Mirth is a great success. Her profound use of irony on all levels of the novel, from theme and characters to style of language, gives the novel a deeper and deeper meaning than the surface meaning of the language.

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