

The Narrative Strategies in Albert Camus' *The Plague*: A Metafictional Reading

He Xiaohong

Gannan Normal University: School of Foreign language

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ABSTRACT: *The Plague by Albert Camus appears to be a biographical and traditional narrative, but in fact Camus employs various postmodern meta-fictional narrative strategies in his novel, such as overtly indicating the author's presence in the work, occasionally the author intrudes directly to make comments, revealing its artificial fiction; changing narrative perspectives; parodying traditional diaries and heroic legends; intertextuality, collage, etc., which, to a certain extent, demonstrate the literary characteristics of postmodernism: indeterminacy, anti-center, everything is nothingness, etc., and also subvert its narrative conventions, breaking our readers' expectations. This is to a certain extent the literary characteristics of postmodernism: anti-determinism, anti-center, everything is nothingness, etc. It also subverts its narrative rules and breaks our readers' reading expectations. Camus's use of meta-fictional narrative strategies reveals the postmodernism hidden in Camus, his view of the world of vanity, and the plight of contemporary human existence.*

KEY WORDS: metafiction, postmodernism, living dilemma, narration

INTRODUCTION

Camus is a famous French writer and philosopher, who wrote many excellent works. From the study of Camus from all walks of life, we know his importance to the entire literary world. There are external studies on the influence of social context on Camus's creative techniques, and there are studies of ideas such as absurd philosophy, binary opposition, existentialism, humanism, etc. that exist in the text. However, there is basically no author to use the narrative technique of metafiction to conduct a special study of *The Plague*, which is to a certain extent not conducive to our understanding of the metafiction techniques that exist in the works, and at the same time, it is not possible to fully understand the significance of its artistic characteristics to the theme reveal. Therefore, this article aims to reveal Camus's use of metafiction writing techniques in this novel, and the significance of this unique creative feature for the interpretation of the theme.

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Metafiction is also called "reflexive fiction", "hyper-fiction", "post-fiction", etc. The first idea of metafiction came from William Gass's 1970 book *Fiction and Figures of Life*. Subsequently, Patricia expressed her understanding of metafiction in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, arguing that "metafiction is a term for fiction writing that consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact, thus questioning the relationship between fiction and reality (Patricia, 1984)." This passage shows two characteristics of metafiction. The first is the fictional and artificial nature of the narrative text. The second is the anti-reality of the novel. In addition to being a characteristic of metafiction, the former is also a means of reflecting the anti-reality of the novel. Fiction is not about destroying the real, but about making the real more authentic. There are a large number of metafiction narrative techniques in *The Plague*, mainly including indicating the author's existence in the work, and occasionally the author directly breaks in to comment and reveal its artificial fiction; changing the narrative perspective; parody of traditional diaries and traditional heroic legends; Intertextuality, collage, etc.

Artificial Fiction

Metafiction grew up in a postmodern social environment, so it has the characteristics of postmodernism anti-centered, anti-determined, subversion of tradition and so on. One of the major features is the subversion of traditional novel writing techniques. It is different from the traditional novel in which the author hides his creative traces in order to pursue the authenticity and verisimilitude of the work, and the author who pursues the characteristics of meta-novel creation constantly exposes the artificial fiction of novel creation with a strong sense of self. "What the metafiction does is to 're-semanticization' the traces of operations that exist in the narrative of the novel, to push them forward from the background, to deliberately play with these means of 'the novel talking about itself', to make the narrator a storyteller with a strong 'sense of self', thus negating the assumption that he reports the truth (Zhao, 1998)." Therefore, in this sense, the novel does not dissolve the reality and practical meaning of its existence because of the exposed revelation of self-fiction, on the contrary, it can prompt us to rethink the conventional behind it. In fact, meaninglessness is a meaning in itself.

Intruding Narrator

Author appearance means that the writer deliberately exposes himself in the creation of the novel, intentionally shows signs of fiction in the work, and sometimes even appears directly in the novel to discuss the writing skills of the story, enter the story to evaluate the characters, or use himself as a character in the novel, and even directly open dialogue with the reader. First of all, the author begins by quoting Defoe's Robinson Crusoe in his opening inscription: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not..." (Camus, 1960). This directly shows that the story is

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fictitious. The author of *pestis* often reveals himself, for example, he will interrupt the narrative discourse of the novel from time to time, suddenly insert his own creative ideas and comments on the characters in the narrative text, and sometimes directly describe the arrangement and development of the novel plot. For example, after the *pestis*, the author appeared directly to comment on the characters: "The word 'plague' had just been uttered for the first time. At this stage of the narrative, with Dr Bernard Rieux standing at his window, the narrator may, perhaps, be allowed to justify the doctor's uncertainty and surprise (1960, 34). It also exposes the existence of the author: "it is not the narrator's intention to ascribe to these sanitary groups more importance than their due. Doubtless today many of our fellow-citizens are apt to yield to the temptation of exaggerating the services they rendered. But the narrator is inclined to think that..." (Camus, 1960). Or the author will directly discuss the data source and creative skills of this story. For example: The narrator has aimed at objectivity. He has made hardly any changes for the sake of artistic effect, except those elementary adjustments needed to present his narrative in a more or less coherent form" (Camus, 1960). The author's direct statement in this way indicates that the text materials may be purposefully selected and rearranged for the sake of story coherence, which indicates that some statements may be one-sided and inaccurate to a certain extent, which makes readers wonder whether the author has made untrue or contradictory statements in order to achieve the purpose? The author also has a direct public dialogue with the readers in the narrative text, asking whether the readers feel exiled to the plight caused by the *pestis* like the residents of the small town. And the narrator and reader are mentioned many times to tell the reader that this is a fictional story.

Contradiction

Patricia believes that "metafiction writers pay particular attention to the creative techniques of contradiction, permutation and short circuit". (Waugh Patricia, 1984). 'Contradiction' refers to the coexistence of the binary opposites of right and wrong, false and true, right and wrong, which are mutually comprehended in the text. The words in the text are self-denial and self-destruction, which are both true and false, and highlight the uncertainty of the text itself. "(Waugh Patricia, 1984) reveals the fiction of the whole text. At the same time, the contradiction will not only exist in the structure and elements of the novel text, but also in the micro-level of the sentence in the text. There are many contradictory statements in the text. For example, the author first expressed approval for the authenticity of a matter, and then expressed doubts about it.

The whole text of Camus adopts the way of diary transmission, which makes the whole text present an objective and real state, and also expresses the accuracy and objectivity of the record many times in the text. However, on the contrary, his direct expression has strong personal subjectivity, which often makes the whole story text more untrue. "before entering on a detailed

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account of the next phase, the narrator proposes to give the opinion of another witness on the period which has been described”(Camus,1960). Here we describe the characteristics of Taru's chronicle, thinking that he lacks a keen sense of smell for some small things, but then we describe a paragraph of Taru's chronicle, which records the scene of a family of four eating in a hotel restaurant: “I find a family which has its meals in this hotel quite interesting. The paterfamilias is a tall, thin man, always dressed in black and wearing a starched collar. The top of his head is bald with two tufts of grey hair on each side. His small beady eyes, narrow nose, and hard, straight mouth make him look like a well-brought-up owl. He is always first at the door of the restaurant, stands aside to let his wife -a tiny women,like a black mouse - go in, and then comes in himself with a small boy and girl, dressed like performing poodles, at his heels. When they are at the table he remains standing till his wife is seated and only then the two "poodles" can perch themselves on their chairs. He uses no terms of endearment to his family,addresses politely spiteful remarks to his wife, and bluntly tells the kids what he thinks of them” (Camus,1960). From the scene of dress, movement, expression, dialogue and detailed description of Taru, we can see that he has no prejudice to detail description. On the contrary, he is meticulous, which is different from the previous author's discussion, and also makes readers doubt which words of the author are true. In addition, when the town began to get rid of the pestis, the author said in the article that since the pestis seemed to be slowly away, the reported data was also getting lower and lower, but the handwriting in Taru's diary was difficult to identify, and the content was often aimless, one sentence after another, and full of comments on other characters and their own opinions, which no longer seemed objective and fair, which further aroused the readers' doubts about the authenticity of the text.

Multiple narrative perspectives highlight uncertainty

The vast majority of Camus's dialogues are both omniscient and subjective (the protagonist's perspective is inserted in the omniscient perspective). The narrative perspective is variable, and the time and space span in the dialogue is large. The time and space may change in a period of time. Narrative perspective is the specific narrative perspective selected by the writer to better tell the story. "Perspective" usually refers to a person's perception of an event and a person, and the perception angle is related to the person's position and emotional attitude towards the event and the person. Viewing the same event from different perspectives will produce different ideas and conclusions, which depends on the psychological perception process of the perception subject. In the article, many people have expressed their views on the pestis event that caused a sensation in the whole city, and the author always seems to reflect a prejudice that focuses on small things (Camus, 2013). The author directly expressed his view on Taru's notes, thinking that it lacked a description of the details of the event, which made him unable to understand his behavior. At the same time, the relationship between the author and the narrator is ambiguous, sometimes within the text, and they experience the pestis together with

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the people in the text story. For example, when the governor announced the closure of the city, the author worried "once the town gates were shut, every one of us realized that all, the narrator included, were, so to speak, in the same boat"(Camus, 1984). Sometimes the author is outside the text story and comments on what happened in the story-"Our fellow-citizens had fallen into line, adapted themselves as people say, to the situation, because there was no way of doing otherwise. Indeed to some. Dr Rieux amongst them, this precisely was the most disheartening thing; that the habit of despair is worse than despair itself. Here, the author comments on the story and characters of the text, and at the same time expresses his own ideas by using Rieu's ideas. This, to some extent, shows the author's narrative choice and bias, and further reflects the unreliable narrative of the author. Therefore, the effective supplement of the characters to the social background of the "personal perspective" and other aspects will help us understand the values of the viewpoint characters in the novel, and through the moral standards of the viewpoint characters, readers can feel the conflict of ideas existing in the consciousness of different characters. The writer's control of perspective in his works shows a purposeful choice, which can convey the writer's attitude and evaluation of characters and events through the perspective of characters. In *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge also pointed out that "it is the most important choice for a novelist to determine the perspective from which to narrate the story, because it directly affects the reader's response to the novel characters and their behavior, whether it is emotional or moral"(David Lodge, 1997). For example, in most of the fragments or two-thirds of the story plots, the author uses the omniscient perspective to narrate. The author, like an omniscient God, observes everyone's every move and their psychological activities. But when Panalu was infected with pestis and the landlady of Panalu told Panalu about the situation, he repeatedly stated that "The only available account of what followed comes from the lips of the old lady. She had suggested most politely(as she put it) that a doctor should be called in. When he said nothing, his hostess, wishing to (according to her account) to do her duty by him"(Camus,1960). In this narrative, the author changed the previous omniscient narrative perspective to a restrictive one, and repeatedly added parentheses to emphasize that it was only from the mouth of the landlady of Panalu, and then continued to use the God's perspective, which revealed the contradictions in the text and the uncertainty of readers about the authenticity of the text. To some extent, it also reflects the author's intentional use of artistic techniques in his creation, and exposes the artificial fiction of the novel text.

At the same time, we can also see the clues of multi-level narration in the novel. "In any case the narrator(whose identity will be made known in due course) would have little claim to competence for a task like this, had not chance put him in the way of gathering much information, and had he not been, by the force of things, closely involved in all that he proposes to narrate. This is his justification for playing the part of an historian... He proposes to draw on these records whenever this seems desirable, and to employ them as he thinks best. But

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Parody

Parody is a writing technique often used by many postmodern novelists. "Parody is also known as banter imitation, satirical poetry, and satirical works. In postmodern novels, parody is a destructive imitation, which uses humor, satire, or irony to ridicule its object, making the original work and its theme, author, style, or some other object despised". (Chen, 2012) Parody is a narrative technique often used in metafiction, It "can imitate previous literary works, literary genres or myths and legends, with the aim of breaking these narrative frameworks to dispel the epistemological concepts hidden behind them" (Li, 2012). Parody is also an important strategy of the historiographer's metafiction. Hutcheon believes that the paradox of postmodernism is reflected through parody: "The art forms (and theories) of postmodernism use and abuse the traditional concepts in a parody way, establish them first and then overthrow them. They not only consciously point to their inherent paradox and temporality, but also point to their critical or ironic reinterpretation of the past art"(Hutcheon, 1988). The parody in *pestis* is mainly reflected in four aspects: diary novels, the Bible, classical hero legends and historical metafiction.

Parody of diary style

We can note that the author uses the special form of diary throughout this novel. "The most important feature of diary is the truthfulness of the facts and the sincerity of emotion, while diary novels have many similarities with diary, which adopts the structure of diary and has the basic characteristics of diary." (Chen, 2001). Date is its landmark element. "The diary novel has two unique features in realizing its' authenticity 'function: first, in terms of content, the author can express his mind freely, and the narration has inherent authenticity and integrity; second, the diary is a unique style that ordinary people can do for other than professional writers, close to life, concrete and reliable construction of the authenticity of the work is often the primary purpose of the writer. The writer uses various means to avoid readers' doubts and make people I believe that diaries are not made up "(Sun, 2008). So we can think that most of the authors use the diary style documentary theme to show the authenticity of the novel. However, in *pestis*, although Camus uses a lot of features of this diary style in the text to write, he is not trying to create a real artistic atmosphere for the novel text, on the contrary, He tries to reveal the fictional nature of the novel to the readers at the narrative level of the text, which is far

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from the practice of traditional diary writers. It seems that diaries are close to life and authentic, but their advantages are also disadvantages. Diaries generally have their own subjective opinions. At the same time, diaries are not real-time records. They may be written at the end of a busy day, or they may talk about it when they think about it, so to a large extent, they are untrue. The novel has changed the traditional narrative genre to the form of diary, which creates an atmosphere that seems to be real but not real. Therefore, this parody of traditional diary-style novels breaks the characteristics of diary documentary description in a certain sense, and also dispels the authenticity of events and characters' feelings.

Parody of *the Bible*

In addition to the parody of diary novels, the works also parody the narrative of *the Bible*. In the sixth section of the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament, it is said that "none of them have been forgotten before God." Through reading the whole text, we can understand the strong irony of Camus to this sentence. In the Bible, God is God and the creator. He is omnipotent and omniscient. He is tolerant and kind. He will save the lives of the people and will not leave any of them. But God in Camus' works is not so. When the pestis spread for nearly a month, the church authorities in the city decided to fight against the pestis by collective prayer. Father Panalu, a Jesuit priest, regarded the pestis as a disaster of God. He quoted the original text of the Exodus in the Bible about the plague in Egypt, "The first time this scourge appears in history, it was wielded to strike down the enemies of God" (Camus, 1960). But this road full of darkness and thorns leads "us" to real peace and the origin of all life. The God here is different from the God who saves the people from the sea of fire and fire. Here it is the judge and the perpetrator who brings suffering and hatred - "He put us, so to speak, with our backs to the wall" (Camus, 2013). The son of Mr. Ao Dong, the president-elect in the preliminary hearing, was unlucky to catch pestis, and his bony body twisted into a weird position like being nailed to a cross due to pain on the bed. Panalu watched the child get sick and knelt down. My God, save the child. In the face of such sincere pleadings, God still took the child's life. Is God really the kind God who saves the people? After this, Panalu began to doubt that he no longer relied on God to save those who were infected with pestis or were about to be infected with pestis. He began to join the Health and Epidemic Prevention Organization and dedicate himself in his own way. He even wrote a short essay entitled -Can a priest invite a doctor to see a doctor?. Whether the child died in the shape of a cross, the short essay written by Panalu, or the people's sincere plea for God, all these are subversion and irony of the traditional image of God.

Parody traditional hero stories

Since ancient times, countless writers have been writing and eulogizing heroic characters and stories. In Britain, as early as the 8th century BC, Britain has written a long narrative poem

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK about Beowulf, a national hero who saved the lives of the people and sacrificed his life; In the 12th century, the legendary hero Arthur, who saved the country from danger, and Robin Hood, who robbed the rich and helped the poor, were created. These heroic characters all have the same characteristics: they are both wise and brave, fearless in the face of danger, have the heart of the world, can do what ordinary people can't do, can achieve a great achievement, and let people have high respect. The protestors from different classes in pestis are all ordinary people. The only one who can count his noble birth is Taru. They are not afraid of danger. They are also afraid of pestis like ordinary people. They chose to join the Health Protest Organization not because they had been thinking about the world at the beginning, but because they had to. "That who enlisted in the 'sanity squares' as they were called had, desired, no such great merit in doing as they did, since they knew it was the only thing to do, and the unknown thing would then have been not to have broken through pestis to do it"(Camus, 1960). Therefore, the author does not give too much publicity and praise to heroes in the story. He believes that "by attributing over-importance to praiseworthy actions one may, by implication, be paying directly but potential hope to the best side of human nature"(Camus, 1960). The "anti-heroes" composed by these ordinary people in Camus's works are a challenge to the official order. Those who have money and power should have assumed their due responsibilities for this common disaster, but what they did was ignore the pain faced by the city and the death of these poor people, and hide behind the house and live a luxurious and decaying life as before. This is a question of social norms, a mockery of hypocrisy and hypocrisy, and a satire of the surrounding elite culture. The absurdity and absurdity caused by this strong contrast is the author's deep reflection on his own living world at that time. In such a special social context, the meaning of traditional heroes has passed away.

Intertextuality

There are two typical postmodern techniques, one is metanarrative, and the other is intertextual irony: "direct reference to other famous texts, or almost direct reference to those texts"(Ike, 2010).

At the same time, Genette also showed that the most straightforward way of intertextuality is to quote word by word. "Preface is a kind of basic and typical intertextuality. The inscription at the beginning of the volume is separated from the main text, and is superior to the main text, or is derived from the main text in a sense. Usually, an introduction is followed by the relevant reference materials of the author and source of the introduction. The quoted sentence is pasted at the beginning of the text, which makes it also separate from the main text: if a writer or an existing text is famous or desirable, The main text absorbs it: write such an inscription in the opening position, which implies that the text is derived from it "(Tifina Samovayo, 2002). Camus quotes Defoe's Robinson Crusoe at the beginning of his pestis: "It is as reasonable to

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK represent one kind of impact by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not"(Abel Camus, 2013). Describing a certain kind of imprisonment life with another kind of imprisonment life is full of despair. No matter how hard you try, you still live another kind of imprisonment life. As Camus described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the endless and futile efforts. In the book, the author uses an old man with chickpeas to complete his intertextual parody of ancient Greek mythology. The old man with chickpeas has been counting chickpeas, taking them out of one pot, putting them into another pot, and putting them back into the original pot when the other pot is full, like Sisyphus, and as the old man said, pestis is just life. Therefore, part of its significance has been established through the connection between the two texts to a certain extent.

In addition, Father Panalu often quoted the past events of the pestis period when he prayed and preached collectively. In a mass prayer activity, they prayed to the saint - Saint Roque - who died to care for the sick. The Golden Legend is a biography of saints written by Italian biographer Jacques de Volardine around 1260. In The Golden Legend, St. Locke was born in Montpellier, and later became a pilgrim to Rome due to family changes. When he came to Rome, the Black Death was rampant, but he was not afraid of being infected with the Black Death. He prayed for and took care of the patients. Unfortunately, he was also infected. At the same time, the priest also quoted other stories in the Golden Legend, such as a pestis in Lombardy, northern Italy, during the reign of King Umberto. At the same time, the priest also read the original text about the plague in Egypt in the Exodus of the Bible during his prayer. The description of the scene when the plague god scattered the plague on this land is intertextual with the process of the plague god invading the world in Oedipus King. "Here Paneloux stretched forth this two short arms towards the open porch. see him there, that angel of the pestilence, comely as Lucifer, shining like Evil's very self ! And even now the plague is entering your home and settling down in your bedroom to await your return. And winnowed like corn on the blood-stained threshing-floor of suffering, you will be cast away with the chaff. striking at random, swinging up again in a shower of drops of blood, and spreading carnage and suffering on earth"(Camus, 1960). The people who experienced the pestis were compared to Cain and his son, people before the flood, Sodom and Omera, Pharaoh and Job.

Collage and open ending

The most common way of collage in pestis is to directly quote news, slogans, posters, etc. Collage refers to "breaking the continuity advocated by modernism by juxtaposing pictures and scenes that have no logical relationship and are in different time and space, or rearranging and combining sentences with different styles and characteristics and different problems, presenting the unique" discontinuous "space-time view of post-modernist literature, and dissolving the meaning of the novel" (David Lodge, 1987). The juxtaposition of sentences is widely used in novels. Camus uses a large number of juxtaposed sentences, such as movie subtitles, slogans, printed patterns, uppercase and lowercase letters, bold characters, italic characters, etc., which are intended to show that various so-called "objective" but are actually

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full of false society, and the news media aimed at mocking the authorities use various false data to confuse people.

David Lodge said: "We can't see the closed ending of the traditional novel that the truth is revealed and the fate has been determined, nor the open ending of the modernist novel that is" satisfying but not ending "as Conrad said to James, but can see multiple endings, false endings, mocking or ironic endings"(David Lodge, 1987). The novel text leaves us a lot of space for readers to imagine and solve. For example, the short old man in the article likes to tease cats. Before the pestis started, it was the happiest and most meaningful thing for him to tease cats with paper scraps in the afternoon. When the pestis swept the town, the city government ordered that most of the cats were killed. The short old man came to the balcony as usual to sprinkle paper scraps, but the cat disappeared from time to time. This was still the case in the next few days, and the short old man's face also appeared increasingly depressed and disappointed. When the pestis gradually moved away from the town and all order was about to be restored, the kittens returned to their original places. But when the dwarf old man used to appear, the blinds of his house were still tightly closed. In the following days, Taru never saw the hundred leaf window open again. This not only makes Taru curious, but also makes our readers wonder whether the old man is dead.

CONCLUSION

Although Camus' pestis presents many meta fiction techniques, this does not mean that Camus is deeply trapped in the traps and cages of postmodern language games, nor is it different from those postmodern writers who believe that the real world is separated from words. Camus once said, "If art is indispensable to me, it is because it is not separated from anyone, and it allows me to live like everyone else in my original face. In my opinion, art is not a kind of enjoyment alone. It is a way to move the majority of people by giving them a special image of common pain and happiness" (Camus, 2013)

Therefore, Camus's novels are inextricably linked with the real world in which we live. Like all his contemporaries at that time, Camus was lonely and lost in the turmoil of the times. Some of his contemporaries chose to run to desperation with self-denial, while some chose to resist oppression in their own way. Camus is the latter. In his works, Dr. Lieu and Sisyphus are actually the embodiment of Camus in another world. Even if they know that one day, the pestis will still sweep across another city. Even if they know how hard to work, Sisyphus will still be unable to push the boulder to the top of the mountain. Even if they know how hard to work, they will still be unable to prevent the world from falling apart. But their efforts let us see the hope for life and the world in frustration and bitterness. Perhaps this is the best proof that Camus's novels are closely related to reality.

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