

Comparative Study of Description in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly*

Xinmei Wang

Shandong University of Finance and Economics, Shandong, China

Abstract—*The Libido for the Ugly* and *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* are two important texts in Advanced English. Both of them are description. However, they show significant differences in aspect of objectivity, use of figure of speech and language features, etc. Through a comparative study of the differences between *The Libido for the Ugly* and *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, this paper aims to help readers to improve their understanding of the two texts, so as to further help readers to deepen their appreciation of the textual features of classic descriptive texts.

Index Terms—psychological contract, English film appreciation, elective course

I. INTRODUCTION

The subjective description of *The Libido for the Ugly* and the objective description of *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* are important texts in Advanced English. Both of them are written with descriptive techniques. However, the stylistic styles of the two discourses show significant differences, which provide a model worthy of discussion and study for readers. Through a comparative study of the differences in textual characteristics between *The Libido for the Ugly* and *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, this paper aims to help readers to improve their understanding of the thematic connotations and linguistic forms of the two works, so as to further help readers to deepen their appreciation of the textual features of classic descriptive texts.

II. DESCRIPTION

Description is painting a picture of a person, a place, an object, a scene, etc. with words (Ding et al., 2009). The purpose of a descriptive text is to involve the reader enough so he or she can actually see the things described. A descriptive essay is generally developed through sensory details, has one clear dominant impression, uses detailed words like specific adjectives, adverbs, and vivid verbs, uses figures of speech to make the description more powerful (Zhou, 2004).

The describing of a place is usually organized and developed by space order (Ding et al., 2009). Places may be described for their own sake, as in essays on visits to famous scenic places, but also for the purpose of revealing the personality and character of a person, or creating a feeling or mood (Ding et al., 2009).

A descriptive essay can be objective or subjective.

Description is objective when topic is viewed from an objective point of view; the writer paints a verbal picture of the realistic world, like a camera without the author's personal feelings involved (Mei, 2018). Description is subjective when the writer wants to share a kind of prevailing impression. When writing subjective description, the author tries to evoke in the reader his feelings about the subject; therefore he selects words rich in connotative meaning and appeals strongly to the senses (Mei, 2018).

III. INTRODUCTION OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN BAZAAR AND THE LIBIDO FOR THE UGLY

A. Introduction of *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*

This is a typically well-written and well-organized piece of description. Unlike *The Libido for the Ugly*, this text is objective and realistic. The writer is trying his best to present a vivid picture of this particular Middle Eastern Bazaar for those who have never visited such bazaar.

This passage describes all kinds of markets, colorful goods and various funny people in the Middle Eastern bazaar. It is so vivid that a picture of the Middle Eastern bazaar appears in readers' mind.

This article is arranged according to the dimensional orientation. As you can see, the author starts from the entrance of the bazaar and goes on the cloth-market, the copper-Smith's market, the carpet-market, the food-market, the dye-market, the pottery-market, the carpenters' market and so on. It seems that there is a tour guide leading us into the bazaar.

Most of the language in the text is plain, so it is not difficult for us to read. At the same time, with refined language, it not only attracts our interests in reading this article but also makes us feel that we are visiting this place when reading this essay.

B. Introduction of *The Libido for the Ugly*

The Libido for the Ugly is a piece of subjective, impressionistic or emotional description. In this essay Mencken is very subjective and personal. In this strong impressionistic or highly emotional piece of description, ugliness, as the dominant impression, stands out vividly and prominently.

Libido is a term used in psychoanalysis, meaning emotional energy or urge that in psychoanalytic theory is derived from primitive biological urges (Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, 1997). Libido does not involve cognitive process, and this is a meaning Mencken intends for the desire for ugliness. The writer deliberately uses this technical term in the title to suggest that the love and passion for ugliness among Americans is a kind of pathological problem and that his observations have a scientific foundation.

Henry Louis Mencken is very famous American educator, author, and critic. He was a central figure in American intellectual life during the 1920's and is well-known for his exaggerated style and acid tongue. In this text he doesn't just criticize and denounce the ugliness of Westmoreland, he assails the whole American race---*a race that loves ugliness for its own sake, a race which hates beauty as it hates truth* (Zhang, 2017). In his violent attack he employs the strongest words such as *dreadfully hideous, abominable, agonizing wiliness, revolting monstrosity leprous hill*, and so on. Besides words, he uses rhetorical devices frequently to create horrible and dreadful images to highlight his verbal attack in sentences like *"so abominable that they would have disgraced a race of alley cats"* (Para. 1) (Zhang, 2017, p76); *"one blinks before them as one blinks before a man with his face shot away"* (Para. 2) (Zhang, 2017, p77); *"like gravestones in some gigantic and decaying cemetery"* (Para. 3) (Zhang, 2017, p77); *"it is the color of an egg pas tall hope or caring"*(Para. 4) (Zhang, 2017, p77), etc.

Mencken uses a lot of overstatements to exaggerate and also uses sarcasm, ridicule and irony to taunt and jeer (Zhang, 2017). While overuse of such rhetorical devices makes readers doubt the objectivity of the writer. In fact one might say Mencken employs all the force of diction, structure and rhetorical devices only to batter his readers into insensitivity (Zhang, 2017). This makes his writing very funny, at least for modern readers.

IV. CONTRAST OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN BAZAAR AND THE LIBIDO FOR UGLY

A. Order of Description in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly*

In *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, the writer organizes the paragraphs in a pattern of spatial development, beginning from the entrance to various markets in the bazaar. Each paragraph has a topic sentence and a central idea illustrated by relevant details. Paragraph 1 is a general description about the entrance. Here the writer describes the crowded scene and noise made by the crowds and their donkeys. From Paragraph 2 to paragraph 9, the author describes different markets in this bazaar. Paragraph 2 is a contrast to the first one in that the cloth market is muted, with the sound and noise absorbed by the earthen floor and mud vaults. Influenced by the general atmosphere, the customers speak in a soft voice. Paragraph 3 continues to describe the cloth market. The writer is attracted by the way of bargaining. And he devotes a whole paragraph to showing how the bargaining can go on for days. Then the writer turns his attention to the coppersmiths' market by using a topic sentence *"One of the most picturesque and impressive parts of the bazaar is the coppersmiths' market."* In this part, details are given to show the sound (*"As you approach it, a tinkling and banging and clashing begins to impinge on your ear."*(Zhang, 2010, p3)) and the sight (*"until you round a corner and see a fairyland of dancing flashes, as the burnished copper catches the light of innumerable lamps and braziers."* (Zhang, 2010, p3)) and finally the combination of sight and sound (*"a tiny apprentice blows a big charcoal fire with a huge leather bellows worked by a string attached to his big toe - the red of the live coals glowing bright and then dimming rhythmically to the strokes of the bellows."* (Zhang, 2010, p3)). If the writer goes on describing every market in great detail, the reader may get tired. And so the writer condenses the descriptions of several markets together in Paragraph 7, each market with a striking detail: *"the carpet market, with its profusion of rich colors, varied textures and regional designs"* (Zhang, 2010, p3); *"the spice market, with its pungent and exotic smells"* (Zhang, 2010, p3); *"the food market, where you can buy everything you need for the most sumptuous dinner"* (Zhang, 2010, p3); and finally *"the dye market, the pottery market and the carpenters' market lie elsewhere in the maze of vaulted streets which honeycomb this bazaar"* (Zhang, 2010, p3)." In the last two paragraphs, the most unforgettable thing in the bazaar---linseed oil market is described.

It is clear that the writer thinks the Middle Eastern Bazaar interesting and exotic and he is trying his best to convey and share with the reader what he saw and heard at the bazaar in a realistic but effective way.

The Libido for the Ugly generally also follows the space order. The author describes what he sees from Pittsburg to Greensburg, a distance of twenty-five miles. In the first part (para1-para2), the author contrasts the great wealth of this region with the abominable human habitations seen everywhere, and emphasizes the continuous ugliness in the country to imply that ugliness is not due to poverty but to something innate in the American character. In part two (paras. 3-5), the author focuses on the ugliness of the house design and the ugliness of the color of the bricks, and he also evaluates the ugliness of this region as the top one in the world. In the third part (paras. 6-8), the author tries to trace the source of the ugliness from the foreigners, speculates on a solution for the puzzle (libido for the ugly), and attacks the whole American race which hates beauty as it hates truth. In the last part, the author finally gives an answer---pathological and etiological reason.

Although both texts follow spatial order, in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, the author guides the readers from one market to the other, makes the readers see, hear, smell and taste the scene in the bazaar. In *The Libido for the Ugly*, the author mainly focuses on the ugly design and color of the houses that he sees along the line from Pittsburg to Greensburg, a distance of twenty-five miles, and tries to explore the reasons for the ugly buildings.

B. Objective Description in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and Subjective Description in *The Libido for the Ugly*

In *The Middle East Bazaar*, the author is just like the director of a TV travel program. He keeps himself out of the picture and captures these rare shots one by one with a camera, presenting the audience with a very rich and vivid experience of tourism at close range, leading the readers to the primitive but lively market life in the ancient Oriental civilization.

The author of this text stands in the perspective of a westerner and describes it in the second person, which reflects the author's mental activity with infinite curiosity in his calm observation. He effectively unveils the mystery of this place where ancient civilization was born with a unique perspective.

Writing with the second person is rare in ordinary texts, and the author's communicative intention in writing is therefore highlighted. Specifically, the author tries to reproduce the exotic customs in his travel experience realistically in an objective and rational way, so that readers can follow his description to generate their own rational inference, so that they can avoid the interference of the writer's subjective opinions.

The Libido for the Ugly is a piece of subjective, impressionistic or emotional description. In this essay Mencken is very subjective and personal. In this strong impressionistic or highly emotional piece of description, ugliness, as the dominant impression, stands out vividly and prominently.

In *The Libido for the Ugly*, a work completed with subjective description, the author Mencken describes the content from the perspective of the first person "I", and repeated the first person "I" in the text, so as to continuously strengthen his personal views and personal feelings, thus pouring into the article a strong subjective emotional color. This style of writing is a feature for which Mencken has long been known.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Mencken was a pioneer of American literary radicals. As a critic, Mencken often embodied his prominence of personal thoughts and his publicity of his own personality with exquisite and majestic vigor in his poignant style of writing.

When commenting on Mencken, the researchers once pointed out that "he advocated that critics should improve their subjective consciousness, integrate their own feelings, inner experience and personality into the critical process, and show their individual and creative opinions."

Therefore, in *The Libido for the Ugly*, the author Mencken chooses to describe it from the perspective of the first person, and repeatedly emphasized his subjective evaluation, which is the embodiment of the author's own consistent writing style.

In short, in *The Libido for the Ugly*, with his subjective description and with its subjective strong first-person narration, the author vividly depicts the ugly appearance of industrial town, and mainly criticizes the area in the form of an invective building in aspects such as shape and color. Then it reveals the distortion and deviation of value orientation in industrialized society at that time.

On the contrary, *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* is created with objective description. The author, with an objective perspective of the second person, shows readers the lively market workshop in the ancient civilization objectively through the moving street scene.

C. Rhetorical Devices in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly*

Rhetorical devices are the ways in which words are made to mean other than what they would normally imply, for the purpose of lending force to an idea, heightening effect, or creating certain atmosphere. Rhetorical devices exist in almost endless variety and many are closely related or intricately overlap, hence no completely satisfactory system of classification has ever been devised.

Both of *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly* use various rhetorical devices to make the description vivid and attractive.

In *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, the author, by using metaphor, parallelism, hyperbole, contrast, onomatopoeia, transferred epithet, makes the readers see, hear, and smell the vivid scene of the bazaar. For example, in the first paragraph, the author says:

You pass from the heat and glare of a big, open square into a cool, dark cavern which extends as far as the eye can see, losing itself in the shadowy distance. Little donkeys with harmoniously tinkling bells thread their way among the throngs of people entering and leaving the bazaar. The roadway is about twelve feet wide, but it is narrowed every few yards by little stalls where goods of every conceivable kind are sold. The din of the stall-holder crying their wares, of donkey-boys and porters clearing a way for themselves by shouting vigorously, and of would-be purchasers arguing and bargaining is continuous and makes you dizzy. (Zhang, 2010, p.1)

Here by using contrast, onomatopoeia, parallelism, the author effectively makes the readers sense the contrast of the noisiness out of the bazaar and quietness in the bazaar, and hear various sounds of bells, bargaining of the customers entering and leaving the bazaar.

In paragraph five, the author describes:

As you approach it, a tinkling and banging and clashing begins to impinge on your ear. It grows louder and more distinct, until you round a corner and see a fairyland of dancing flashes, as the burnished copper catches the light of innumerable lamps and braziers. (Zhang, 2010, p.3)

By using onomatopoeia and metaphor, the reader could hear various sounds in the copper-smith market and see the light reflected by the burnished copper dance in the fire.

In paragraph seven, by reading the sentences like:

The dye-market, the pottery-market and the carpenters' market lie elsewhere in the maze of vaulted streets which honeycomb this bazaar. Every here and there, a doorway gives a glimpse of a sunlit courtyard, perhaps before a mosque or a caravanserai, where camels lie disdainfully chewing their hay, while the great bales of merchandise they have carried hundreds of miles across the desert lie beside them. (Zhang, 2010, p.3)

Metaphor and personification in them make readers see the bazaar which is like a big honeycomb and arrogant camels which are chewing their hay leisurely. The refraction of the light produced a brilliant, fairyland luster.

The whole process of oil pressing presented by the author seems to let the readers clearly see those pictures and hear those sounds. Even the linseed oil gurgling out is so bright and translucent flowing in front of his eyes.

In *The Libido for the Ugly*, the author, by using metaphor, irony, sarcasm, contrast, hyperbole, transferred epithet and understatement, highlights the ugliness of Westmoreland. In the opening paragraph, in sentences like:

Here was the very heart of industrial America, the center of its most lucrative and characteristic activity, the boast and pride of the richest and grandest nation ever seen on earth--- and here was a scene so dreadfully hideous, so intolerably bleak and forlorn that it reduced the whole aspiration of man to a macabre and depressing joke; Here was wealth beyond computation, almost beyond imagination--- and here were human habitations so abominable that they would have disgraced a race of alley cats. (Zhang, 2017, p76)

By using metaphor, hyperbole and contrast, the author subjectively exaggerates the richness and grandeur of this region, exaggerates habitations so abominable that even homeless cats would have felt ashamed to live, contrasts the richest and grandest region with the hideous, bleak and forlorn scene, contrasts the wealth and abominable habitations.

In almost each paragraph, the author uses hyperbole to exaggerate the intolerable ugliness. For example,

What I allude to is the unbroken and agonizing ugliness, the sheer revolting monstrosity, of every house in sight; But in Westmoreland they prefer that uremic yellow, and so they have the most loathsome towns and villages ever seen by mortal eye; It is as if some titanic and aberrant genius, uncompromisingly inimical to man, had devoted all the ingenuity of Hell to the making of them, etc. (Zhang, 2017, p76)

Apart from hyperbole, other rhetorical devices the author frequently uses are irony and sarcasm. For example,

obviously, if there were architects of any professional sense or dignity in the region, they would have perfected a chalet to hug the hillsides--a chalet with a high-pitched roof, to throw off the heavy winter snows, but still essentially a low and clinging building, wider than it was tall. (Zhang, 2017, p77)

This sentence sarcastically emphasizes the fact that there were no architects worthy of its name and honor demanded of by its profession in this region. If there had been such architects they would naturally have built Swiss-type houses which would lie low and clinging to the hillsides. *But what brick! When it is new it is the color of a fried egg. When it has taken on the patina of the mills it is the color of an egg long past all hope or caring* (Zhang, 2017). In this sentence, "patina" generally refers to the beautiful green or greenish-blue color. Here Mencken uses "patina" ironically to describe the grime of the mills, the dirty smoke from the mills.

In paragraph five, the author says *I award this championship only after laborious research and incessant prayer* (Zhang, 2017, p77). Here irony is used. The author implies that he had given Westmoreland the highest award for ugliness after having done a lot of hard work and research and after continuous praying. He then draws the conclusion that this area has the ugliest towns and villages after visiting and comparing many places both in U.S. and in other countries and after constantly praying to God for guidance.

Other examples are: *They are incomparable in color, and they are incomparable in design* (Zhang, 2017, p78). Sarcasm is used in this sentence. The author sarcastically points that people can't find such terrible color and design in any other places. *It is incredible that mere ignorance should have achieved such masterpieces of horror* (Zhang, 2017, p78). It is hard to believe that people built such horrible houses just because they did not know what beautiful houses were like. Mencken uses "masterpiece" ironically to say that the houses were so horrible that no one could build worse ones. *After painfully designing and erecting it, they made it perfect in their own sight by putting a completely impossible penthouse painted a staring yellow, on top of it* (Zhang, 2017, p79). They made the architecture perfect in their own way by putting a completely ridiculous and staring yellow penthouse on top of it. Here ridicule is used. The author is laughing at their ignorance.

Rhetorical devices are everywhere, and they are part of human cognition. The frequency of figures of speech in certain texts may show authors' purposes in writing. To make the description vivid, impressive, imaginative and believable, the author of *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* uses more figures of speech like metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, etc. While the author of *The Libido for the Ugly* uses more irony, sarcasm, hyperbole and ridicule to satirize and exaggerate the ugliness of houses in Westmoreland.

D. Language Features in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly*

In the analysis of *The Libido for the Ugly*, it can be found that the author Mencken's emotional expression is strong antipathy, his judgment of the ugly buildings is that this is due to national values deviating from the routine. From the perspective of aesthetic appreciation, he thinks the local buildings both in shape and color are very ugly.

It is believed that vocabulary is also an important symbolic resource of concrete communicative meaning. It is through the frequent use of words related to "ugly" and "disease" that the author Mencken brings a huge cognitive impact on reading and achieves the purpose of discourse communication.

In this text, the author uses a peculiar writing skill, applies impression technique and uses many derogatory words and derogatory imagery, so as to outline a very thought-provoking image of pathological eccentricity.

In this text, there are about more than 20 words about "ugliness" (mainly adjectives and nouns), and about 5 words about "disease" (mainly adjectives and nouns). These words about "ugliness" and "disease" are presented in different parts of speech with profound semantic connotations, like *macabre*, *abominable*, *hideousness*; *leprous*, *eczematous*, *etiology*.

As for the words about "ugly" in *The Libido for the Ugly*, some researchers say these words are repeated by the author, let the reader feel from the beginning of shock to fear, and the distance has been extended from the visual image to the inner feelings. From an external scene, it becomes an unforgettable and lingering sensory impression that settles in the heart, and then becomes a dominant impression.

The parallel use of expressions with opposite meanings is also a typical language feature of this text. For example, *deadfully appalling desolation and industrial heart*; *intolerably hideous alley and lucrative center*; *bleak and rich boast*; *forlorn and grand pride*; *macabre and aspiration*, etc.

In conclusion, the existence of the eccentricity has its deep social roots. Through the intense contrast between *industrial America* and *Westmoreland*, *American Industrialists* and *Westmorelanders*, we can see both the prosperous industrial America and its most ugly towns and villages. On this ground, "the libido for the ugly" is not the foible of laborers, but the eccentricity of industrialists and industrial America. It is a pathological eccentricity.

In real life, people perceive things mainly by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. When describing a scene, in order to reproduce in words the perception of an object and to make the description vivid, the author must be able to use the same senses as the real scene.

In *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, in order to show the hustle and bustle at the entrance of the Middle Eastern bazaar, the author not only describes the picture of pedestrians, but also describes the scene of various sounds, such as *harmonious tingling bells*, the cries of *stall-holders*, the cries of *donkey-boys and porters*, the bargaining of *purchasers*.

Meanwhile, the heat and glare outside the bazaar and cool dark cavern form strong contrast; this sharp tactile contrast highlights the shade of the old bazaar.

The most powerful sensory impact of the copper market was the sound of the various pieces being hammered and the glare of the reflected light and the fire of the furnace.

Therefore, in describing this market, the author makes full use of various onomatopoeic words, such as *tinkling*, *banging and clashing* on the one hand, and on the other hand captures the ingenuity of the fire, such as *dancing flashes* and *glowing bright and then dimming rhythmically*.

As the smallest ideographic unit that can exist independently, vocabulary is the most basic tool of scene description. To make the description of the scene vivid, it is essential to use vivid vocabulary. When expressing a particular meaning, words have upper and lower meanings. The hyponyms are more abstract and general than the hyponyms, while the hyponyms are more precise and specific than the hyponyms. In order to make the description more vivid, the words should also be as specific as possible. For example, in *The Middle Eastern Bazaar*, The authors use adjectives and nouns as verbs to simplify the expressions, such as *thread*, *narrow*, *price*, *honeycomb*, *tower*, and *dwarf*. In addition, the author tries to use vivid words or expressions, such as *extend as far as the eye can see....* These scenes were made deep in a crowded market, or an oil maker *threw his weight on to a pulley* in a linseed oil market.

The author also frequently applies the technique of contrast of different connotations like brightness vs. darkness, noise vs. silence, heat vs. coolness, tiny apprentice vs. huge leather bellows, humble meal vs. luxurious dinner, a sunlit courtyard vs. a somber cavern of a room etc. to make the readers fully imagine and feel what this bazaar is like.

V. CONCLUSION

Description is a kind of literary style which reflects the basic skills of writing, and the excellent scenery description works can show the author's meticulous observation, profound language expression and rich imagination. Although both *The Middle Eastern Bazaar* and *The Libido for the Ugly* are description, due to the different purpose and writing styles of authors, they show difference in their objectivity, use of figures of speech and language features, etc.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ding Wangdao, Wu Bing, Zhong Meisun, Guo Qiqing. (2009). *Ying Yu Xie Zuo Shou Ce* [A Handbook of Writing] (3rd ed.). Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press.
- [2] Mei Renyi, Wang Lili. (2018). *Gao Ji Ying Yu (Jiao Shi Yong Shu)* [Advanced English (Teachers' Book)]. Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press.
- [3] Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary. (1997). The Commercial Press.

- [4] Zhang Hanxi, Wang Lili. (2010). *Gao Ji Ying Yu(Di Yi Ce)* [Advanced English (Book One)]. Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press.
- [5] Zhang Hanxi, Wang Lili. (2017). *Gao Ji Ying Yu(Di Yi Ce)* [Advanced English (Book One)] (3rd ed.). Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press.
- [6] Zhou Guoqiang. (2004). *A Course for Advanced College English Writing*. Shanghai Jiao Tong University press.

Xinmei Wang was born in Dezhou, China in 1977. She received her master degree in linguistics from Chongqing University, China in 2004.

She is a College English teacher for English majors in Shandong University of Finance and Economics in Jinan, has been teaching English majors for more than 10 years. The courses she has taught include Advanced English, Basic English Writing, etc. During this decade, she published several papers. Her research field is theoretical linguistics.