SENSIBLE DEDUCTIONS ? FALLACY OF REASON IN SARAH WATERS' THE LITTLE STRANGER

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Abstract - The Little Stranger (2009), the British writer Sarah Waters' fifth novel as well as a third novel shortlisted for Man Booker Prize, incessantly receives both popular interest and academic enthusiasm. The novel describes the old gentry Ayres family in Hundreds Hall, an eighteenth-century magnificent estate that has lived far beyond its former glory in the late 1940s Warwickshire. Through deliberate contacts with the Ayreses, the country physician Faraday gradually makes acquaintance with the Ayres family. Yet his frequent visits and progressive involvement with household affairs are later followed by a few of unnatural things. Since the house is laden with confidences and tricks as if there is a sinister presence, the Ayreses fall into an underlying fear and anxiety so that their lives slowly unravel. This paper endeavors to assert the underlying significance of Faraday's deductions and their effects, exploring how Waters reveals the complicate yet fragile construction of the narrative structure in The Little Stranger.

Index Terms - Deduction, reason, Sarah Waters, The Little Stranger

I. INTRODUCTION

The Little Stranger (2009) describes the old gentry Ayres family in Hundreds Hall, an eighteenth-century magnificent estate that has lasted far past its former glory in the late 1940s Warwickshire. The Ayres of Hundreds Hall began to withdraw from the upper-class social life after the master, Colonel Ayres, was deceased. The Ayres family comprises the unmarried daughter Caroline, her younger brother Roderick, who continues to heal physically and mentally from his war experiences, and their mother Mrs Ayres, the lady of the estate. Faraday, a country physician with a humble background, is summoned to treat a new young maid, Betty, who play-acts ill due to her dislike for the large, draughty emptiness of the house. Through deliberate contacts with the Ayres family, while treating Roderick's lingering wounds, Faraday gradually befriends them. Yet his frequent visits and aggressive interference with household affairs are later followed by a few unnatural things: the normally gentle family dog bites a child guest at a family party, strange black marks appear on the ceiling and curious childish scribbles on the walls, the maids' bells ring without anyone calling them, and so forth. Confronted with these paranormal phenomena, Faraday always offers a rational answer for everything. Since the house is intertwined and laden with confidences and tricks, as if there is a sinister presence, the family members lapse into their underlying fear and anxiety so that their lives unpredictably fall apart: Roderick being compellingly sent to a mental clinic, Mrs Ayres unpredictably hangs herself, and Caroline's death occurs in suspense. The family thus ends in tragedy, whereas Hundreds Hall is left in place in the chaos.

Faraday, as a singular narrator with a unitary viewpoint, designates Sarah Waters' new experimental narrative structure in The Little Stranger. On account of her sensational plots and grim nineteenth-century scenarios, scholarly attention has often concentrated on Waters' inspiring textual and discursive historiography. Departing from her overt lesbian themes in the earlier Victorian quasi-trilogy, The Little Stranger is instantly relegated as "an eerie ghost story" out of its vivid haunted scenes; and as "the country house novel", in which Hundreds Hall, manifest of "society in microcosm," appears as a remarkably representative country house. Set in a gloomy, old-fashioned mansion, the fiction is also dedicated to "the spirits of Henry James and Edgar Allan Poe" since it is just one turn of the screw away from Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." At the core of those rich inter-textual references with literary traditions of haunted country houses, Faraday denotes a very critical clue regarding the treacherous fate of the house.

At the outset, Faraday is characterized as a rather transparent narrator who bears direct, objective witness to the decline of Hundreds Hall and its aristocratic inhabitants. As the first-person narrator of the novel, Faraday claims to frankly convey what he sees in front of him, and then makes sensible deductions because "that's what doctors do." Faraday's observation and narration, however, render a partial perspective of the eccentric Ayres as the story proceeds. The sensible deductions he makes, as he announces, about Roderick and Mrs Ayres, are

contrary to the Ayresian inner belief that he is a faithful friend because his deductions and advice lead instead to the Ayres' misconceptions and misfortunes. The more sensible the deductions that Faraday makes for the hall events, the more horrifying the events that emerge afterwards! His role as an objective narrator is suspected and challenged: what he states about what he sees in front of him is also opposite to readers' convictions. The slight discrepancies in what Faraday says to the family as their doctor and his devotion to the house at their expense reveal his later untrustworthy perspective and narrative.

Faraday's deductions premised on reason are predominant over the Ayres' fate, fostering disintegration of the house. The following questions are thus to be explored: What is characteristic of Faraday's deductions about the Ayres of Hundreds Hall? What is problematic of his ambiguous deductions? Addressing to these concerns, this paper endeavors to assert the potential ambiguity and desire within Faraday's sensible deductions and their succeeding effects, exploring how the fallacy of reason is revealed in the novel.

II. SENSIBLE DEDUCTIONS?

First of all, Roderick Ayres, the young landlord and master of Hundreds Hall, is proven to be foremost when Faraday first comes into contact with the family. Through the treatment of Roderick's leg muscle injuries, Faraday has routine visits and teas with Caroline and Mrs Ayres every Sunday. In an attempt to cheer up the family and possibly match Caroline to a potential husband, the Ayreses spend their quite limited budget to throw a party for a few friends. The new neighbouring manor house settler, the Baker-Hydes bring their young daughter, Gillain, who is unfortunately mauled by Caroline's elderly gentle Labrador, Gyp. The Ayres are in a more distressing situation when the news spreads across the town. On that day, Roderick should have participated in that party but was absent for unknown reasons. Later, Roderick has a bruised eye, and often suffers small injuries in the night. Roderick begins to behave moodily and drink heavily as if something ghastly tried to play tricks down to him. His mother and sister are seriously worried about his physical and mental health, yet Roderick avoids their compassion and remains silent concerning any unusual matters he encounters.

Having trust in Faraday, Roderick confesses to him about what transpires as Faraday incessantly encourages him. On that night of the party, he could not find the collar and cuff link he prepared in advance, yet the missing collar and cuff link both abruptly dropped into the water bowl after he made his utmost searches. The most grotesque thing of all, was that the shaving mug, as if it came to life, shudders, moves toward him, and intentionally launches itself at his head. Roderick realizes that the uncanny object specifically targeted him. When Roderick is frightened about the unseen malevolent force and cries out for the thing to leave him alone, the dreadful thing seems to pass to the dog Gyp controlling the dog to bite the Baker-Hyde little girl.

After hearing Roderick's odd occurrences about the very night of the party, Faraday makes his 'infallible' deductions. In accompaniment with Roderick's confession and symptoms, Faraday provides Roderick with some reasonable solutions for his mental disorder. Due to Roderick's exhaustion about work, he advises Roderick to get away from the Hall for a while right away; or he will introduce a good mental doctor in Birmingham to listen to him. Faraday further proposes he can spend some time with Roderick and see if that strange thing appears; or he could talk to Mrs Ayres about what happened to him so that he may ease his symptoms stemming from the pressure that he is under. After hearing Faraday's solutions, Roderick feels completely cheated by Faraday's hypocrisy of care and concern. He is aware that Faraday does not believe what he says and what's worse, Faraday accuses him of being mentally ill. In rejection of all Faraday's advice, Roderick firmly insists that Caroline and Mrs Ayres mustn't know about what had happened at the party if Faraday diagnoses Roderick as a lunatic patient. Yet no agreement is reached between Roderick and Faraday. Faraday spreads his sensible deductions to generate more sensational opinions about Roderick's mental illness.

III. FALLACY OF REASON

Meanwhile, Faraday takes a chance to tell Caroline briefly everything he heard from her brother in his dispensary the night before. To Faraday's astonishment, Caroline agrees with what Roderick says about the smudge appearing on his ceiling and shows sympathetic comprehension of Roderick's strange experiences. Deliberately overlooking Caroline's comprehension of those so-called ordinary things: the collar, cufflinks and shaving-mirror, Faraday emphasises Roderick's own problem as mental illness. Faraday persuades Caroline that Roderick might have made the smudges himself simply to back up his own delusion. Faraday appeals to the authority of David Graham, the original Ayres family doctor who may agree to have Rod forcibly

committed to a psychiatric ward if his condition worsens. Caroline is too hesitant to accept such a radical means of treating Roderick because she believes Roderick's words and considers him to be sane. Faraday convinces her of his deductions about Roderick's mental illness as the strangest mix of sanity and delusion he has even seen. Paradoxically, Faraday's deductions are nothing more than those related to an infection, which demonizes Roderick as a mental patient in need of an extraordinary cure.

The sensible deductions on Roderick's mental illness become more and more widespread as Faraday predicts. When Caroline awakes in the middle of the night she finds Roderick's room on fire, though he had passed out in a drunken stupor, the flames not only appear in the room, but and also from Roderick's head. Caroline has no choice but to tell Mrs Ayres about Faraday's deductions about Roderick's condition. Again, Faraday describes to Mrs. Ayres all about Rod's bizarre and frightening story and posits a consistent solution of mental clinics. Unlike Caroline, Mrs Ayres feels shame regarding her son, claiming that Roderick was never strong like his father. Faraday takes advantages of familial intimacy and naturally intrigues Mrs Ayres as an accomplice to achieve his goal. When Roderick says that he must keep the unseen force focused on him so as not to direct its attention to his sister or mother, Faraday counters Roderick's claims of protecting his family as a loss of mind, and that he hardly knew what he was saying. Faraday intends to send Roderick away, but knows it cannot be done by force. Faraday's sensational deductions about Roderick's mental disorder make Mrs Ayres, due to her pride, fearful and ignorant concerning the vicious presence; she finally agrees with Faraday that Roderick should be committed to a mental hospital.

Those professed sensible deductions have an adverse effect on Roderick. Faraday thoroughly carries out his plan and successfully gets the heir away from the Hall: "the rooms seemed dead as paralysed limbs. Soon it was eerily as though Rod had never been master of the house at all—as if, more thoroughly even than poor Gyp before him, he had vanished and left no trace. Roderick's disappearance is considered to be Faraday's first move in the whole project. It is Faraday who is most indignant about the family, especially Roderick, who undertakes to sell their land and possessions. Faraday imagines that Roderick's way of managing the estate is at fault. From the very start, Faraday means to turn his sensible deductions about Roderick's unusual behaviours into sensational ones, and then making those deductions absolutely infectious.

CONCLUSION

As a matter of fact, Faraday confesses to knowing and loving Hundreds Hall at first sight. When he was a child, he visited once to receive a commemorative medal in a crowded outdoor ceremony and remained entranced with the building since then. Since his mother was once a nursery maid in the hall, Faraday vacillates between his affection and memory of his mother, and often revisits his memory of the first significant impression of the mansion in comparison with its current obsolete state. Faraday's discontent with his humble background is subtly entangled with his affection for Hundreds Hall. His complex about class looms from time to time as he recounts how his family sacrificed everything, including his mother's health and life, to give him his elite medical education. His lament for little achievement by virtue of his humble class background is ubiquitous in his memories. Faraday is a more problematically unreliable narrator than anybody else in Hundreds Hall because his motives to get along with the family are so ulterior and less convincing. Faraday's "sensible deductions", derived from unknown intention, become more and more suspicious. Faraday's advocacy of reason for everything strange in the house soon turns into his opacity and unreliability. Although Faraday is characterized as a rather transparent narrator who bears direct, objective witness to the decline of Hundreds Hall and its aristocratic inhabitants, Faraday's perversion of reason suggests an irony to the sensible deductions in The Little Stranger; his deductions seem scientific enough to explain Roderick and Mrs Ayres' mental disorder, yet these deductions are transformed from sensible to sensational, permeated with an atmosphere of treachery and hypocrisy. Faraday's deductions are far from sensible but rather infectious and poisonous. After the Ayres family is gone, Faraday continues his solitary visits to the abandoned mansion as if the house seems his now. The house is fully captured by rational lies and irrational truth, and perhaps a mixture of both. Hundreds Hall reflects, in general, an unscientific and irrational rapacity in the human psyche for property, reputation and social status, as exemplified by Faraday.

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