

The Narrative Structure of Victorian Novels

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Abstract

The choice and design of narrative structure reveal the concept of narratology of the writers. The Victorian novels was greatly influenced by folk culture, and thus the narrative structure obviously absorbed the narrative pattern of folk literature. More specifically, three typical narrative structures are widely used in Victorian novels, such as binary opposition structure, triple formula structure, and closed circular structure. The stories using these narrative structures adopted from folk culture attracted many readers including children, youngsters and adults. This craze reveals the charm of traditional writing approach compared with modern writing approach.

Keywords

Narratology; Binary opposition structure; Triple formula structure; Closed circular structure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Narratology attaches great importance to the eternal and universal structure (pattern, law). As Jameson said, "we'd better understand structuralism as a kind of formalism in philosophy, which is the extreme of the universal trend of breaking away from concrete content and various theories about signifier in modern philosophy". [1] Moreover, Eagleton believes that structuralists' narratology "mercilessly removes the mystery of literature. After the narrative analysis of Greimas and Genette, if you read *The Empty People*, you will not easily hear the sound of sword cutting in the third line; after reading it, you will not easily realize what it is like to be a scarecrow". [2] 7Eagleton thinks that it helps to break away the romantic prejudice and expose a literary fetishism, which is a kind of "harvest". But in my opinion, the fact he points out and his feelings can be used to explain the problem of narratology.

The structure of novel is one of the elements that novelists always attach importance to. Especially since Aristotle emphasized his syllogism (Dispute — Crisis — Settlement), novelists regard structure as the necessary condition of novels. In our country, Mrs. Wei in *Ging Dynasty*, Ruan Yuan in *Qing Dynasty* and Wu Han all points out the importance of the structure in their representative works. In Chinese, structure is expressed as Jie Gou. From the semantic point of view, "Jie" means "combination", while "Gou" means "construction". Therefore, structure, as a noun, refers to the combination of subjective and objective construction. For example, building materials are organized into houses in a certain way, which is the new structure between materials. This kind of organization is "structured", and house demolition is the "deconstruction" of materials. In the relationship of couples, husband and wife and the tightness of their relationship is the content of structure. Graphite and diamond have the same raw materials but different organization modes, that is, different structure modes have different properties. There are many kinds of structure forms of folktales, such as opposite structure, triangle structure, progressive structure, partial positive structure, circular structure and repetitive structure. These structure forms make folktales more lively and attract readers, which is worthy of further study.

Novel is a kind of literature form with strong tolerance and freedom. Because of its strong inclusiveness, writers face more difficulties in novel structure than in drama; because "freedom" is easy to cause structural laxity. Therefore, structural art is a particularly important aspect of novel art, and also a difficult problem in novel creation. Literature originated very early, but novels didn't see light until the Renaissance, and they didn't really surge until the 18th century. We can't help but blame the ancient writers, who only considered the legend of the story, and never painstakingly studied the action of the characters and the arrangement of the plot. Therefore, the story is spread for a long time, but it can not become a novel in the end. Later, it was thought that an interesting and moving story alone was not enough to meet people's needs. Therefore, the structure of the novel was established. Writers began to pay attention to the disputes and disputes between people, people and things, and even things and things, and then there was a relationship. This relationship was observed by the keen novelists. He based on his insight. The observation, analysis and arrangement of things, and then expressed with his skillful skills, become a novel, not a legend. Some people say that the structure of the novel originated from Robinson Crusoe by the 18th century British novelist Daniel Defoe, while others say it originated from Vica of Wakefield by goldsmith. In the 19th century, the novelists had a more mature understanding of the structure of the novel, so they integrated the typical narrative structure of folk narrative into their creation, such as binary opposition structure, triple formula structure and closed circular structure.

2. BINARY OPPOSITION STRUCTURE

For theorists of structuralist, binary opposition structure is one of the basic logic formed before the emergence of human thinking. In western culture and philosophy, the concept of binary opposition is very significant. The binary opposition narrative structure widely exists in folk literature and also exists in a large number of English novels in the 19th century. The binary opposition structure in novels can promote the conflict and suspense in novels. Conflict and suspense can attract readers' attention to the greatest extent and give the novels the power to continue to develop. If there is no conflict and suspense in novels, novels will almost become stagnant water. In the 19th century English novels, this dual opposition structure not only adds vitality to the novels, but also gives them profound connotation.

In the Victorian period, with the rapid development of industry and science and technology, various social problems emerged. For example, the gap between tradition and modernity was too big to be repaired, the gap between the rich and the poor was growing, and the spirit was lost and degenerated. The binary opposition reflected in the Victorian novels not only shows the value judgment standard of the 19th century novelists, but also reveals the main contradictions and core contradictions in the 19th century English society. Moreover, after carefully tracing the binary opposition structure in Victorian novels, it is not difficult to find that the binary opposition mainly includes the weak and the strong, good and evil, tradition and modern, poverty and wealth, etc. Specifically, for example, in almost all Scott's novels, there is a Robin Hood who represents the bottom of the people, and a King John who represents the ruling class. The sharp contrast between the strong and the weak shows the irreconcilable contradiction between the bottom proletariat and the upper bourgeoisie in Victorian British society in Dickens' novels, all things in the world seem to be very clear. They seem to be a simple form of binary opposition between good and evil. On one hand, there are a large group of good and kind people, on the other hand, there are ferocious and terrible villains. Good and evil are quite clear. The kindness of the people at the bottom is in sharp contrast with the hypocrisy and indifference of the people at the top, which is also reflected in the hierarchy. Finally, Hardy's novels focus on the strong contrast between tradition and modernity. As a writer at the turn of the century, Hardy witnessed the gradual destruction of tradition and the growing prosperity of modernity, and the contradiction between tradition and modernity is also the contradiction

between classes in the final analysis. In addition to these three novelists, most of the novelists in the 19th century also deeply praised and sympathized with the good qualities of the people at the bottom, such as kindness, bravery and tenacity, and fiercely attacked the fatuity, selfishness, hypocrisy and indifference of the middle and upper classes. Therefore, through these binary opposition structures, we can see that although the British industry and technology were highly developed in Victorian period, the fate of the people at the bottom had not been significantly improved, and sometimes it was not as good as before. The main contradiction of society was actually the contradiction between classes.

Moreover, the binary opposition structure meets the aesthetic needs of mass culture. In Victorian period, British culture was no longer exclusive to the elite. The rise of the middle class, the development of publishing industry and the emergence of new media made the British middle class the main enjoyment of cultural products. The typical contradictions, conflicts and distinct value judgments in the binary opposition structure catered to the aesthetic taste and aesthetic needs of the middle class, stimulated their interest in reading, and promoted the wide spread of literary works. Therefore, the common binary opposition structure in the folk narrative widely exists in British novels in Victorian period.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in Victorian English novels, the binary opposition structure in folk narrative sometimes promoted the occurrence and development of the plot, sometimes set off the atmosphere of the novel, and sometimes even deepened the deep meaning of the text. Therefore, readers can read out the deep meaning of the underlying structure of the text from these binary opposition structures. For example, there are many binary opposition structures in Hardy's novels, such as Henchard and Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Eustacia and Thomasin in *The Return of the Native*, Alec and Angel in *Tess* and Sue and Arabella in *Jude the Obscure*. It not only promotes the development of the plot, but also sets off and enhances the tragic atmosphere of the novel. From a deeper level, the British novelists in Victorian period attempt to use this binary opposition structure and obvious binary opposition value judgment to appeal people for tolerance, kindness, rationality, caring for the poor and the elderly, respecting tradition, and respecting and love for life. We should be kind to animals, love nature, hate all the cruel acts of tyrants and villains, and reflect on modern society.

3. TRIPLE FORMULA STRUCTURE

In the field of folk literature, the triple formula structure is a significant expression technique of folk narrative literature, and has always been the focus of theoretical researchers. In China, Qu Yude is one of the domestic scholars who most systematically studied the narrative structure of triple formula. She believed that the triple formula structure is the conventional structure of folk narrative works. [3] The triplex narrative structure in folk narrative literature consists of three (or five or seven) consecutive events (E). Denmark's researcher about folk narrative Alrik has done more detailed studies, he gave three overlapping type continuous event Numbers for the repetitive structure of E1 and E2 and E3, and further points out that the first two events between E1 and E2 and the last event of E3, there is a homosexual and heterosexual relationship, the storytellers generally narrate with maximum weight of E3. [4]

In ancient times, before the creation of writing, long poems such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Manas* survived only because they were passed down from generation to generation from the inheritors of folk oral literature, who often had prodigious memories and brilliant acting talents. However, if these works itself, without logic and rules to follow, such as the structure, even the storytellers of oral tradition has high endowment and amazing memory, also can't guarantee that the essence of the folk maximum limit. Moreover, the folk narrative literature in three overlapping type repetition structure like a triple jump in the sport, the former two steps is a great leap for the third step and make the indispensable good matting, the narrative

structure is oral inheritance the summed up in the long-term practice, highlight three overlapping type repetitive structure in the last event the best and the most effective method. The triplicative repetition structure of folklore is not a completely random meaningless repetition, nor is it a mechanical accumulation, but has a deep primitive psychology. According to the linguistic phenomena of many primitive nations, the French anthropologist Levi Breuer observed that the discovery and expression of the number "three" is one of the important indicators for thinking to be promoted from a concrete concept to an abstract concept. Many languages say "many" when there is more than "three", which is the simple concept of "many" that can be expressed numerically. [5]

The Victorian novels were mainly read by the middle class, and most of them were read for entertainment. This kind of cultural consumption doomed that their novels were not as difficult and boring as classical literature, but as easy to understand as most novels in this period. For example, the Christmas tales in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, there exists a typical three overlapping type structure, the three overlapping structure is unfold through three fantasies, on the eve of Christmas, the miser Scrooge deceased soul to common business associates, he happened to see the three fantasy: one is the passed Christmas, he has his own joy in childhood; the second one is the Christmas now, in the home of Bob Cratchit, a poorly paid writer with a brave and crippled son Little Tim; the third one is the Christmas in the future, when Scrooge dies unmourned and his grave unattended. When he woke up on Christmas morning, he became a different man. He gave Bob Cratchit a turkey and became a kind old man. The three ghosts brought by the ghost of Jacob Marley (the Spirit of Christmas) completely change Scrooge, who is selfish, cruel, greedy and stingy. The spirits of the past, present and future inspire Scrooge, and the three-fold plot repeats eventually lead the plot to the happy ending of Scrooge's return to the nature of human kindness. It is the most popular Christmas story in the English-speaking world. There are numerous examples of this triplicate narrative structure in 19th century English fiction, so what is the appeal of this triplicate repetition structure?

First of all, the triple formula structure makes the whole narrative not only innovative in the repetition, but also makes the characters more distinctive. In this triplex repetitive structure, E1 and E2 and E3 constitute this narrative mode of breaking the old balance by the new balance. Secondly, from the perspective of structuralist narratology, the triplicative repeated narrative structure is the aggregation form of synchronic narrative of diachronic narrative, forming a bidirectional narrative chain structure with both depth and width. Finally, the pattern of triplicate repeated narrative structure is conducive to the development of the plot, the shaping and characterization of the character images and characters, the expression of the theme, and so on, which conforms to the logic and the common understanding of the people. In Triassic type, therefore, can repeat narrative structure across borders, widely exist in Chinese and western oral narrative literature and western writers in the narrative literature, for example, in China's four great classics are widely adopted the narrative pattern, such as in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, granny Liu went to Rong Mansion three times, and in *Pilgrimage to the West*, the demon of corpse tease Monk Tang three times, etc.

4. CIRCULAR STRUCTURE

Circular structure, also known as closed structure, is also quite common in the folk narrative literature. Magic realism extensively adopted the narrative structure of a circular and attracted many readers around the world. That's because the circular narrative structure exists in the writers' and the receivers' subconscious, conforming to the public's aesthetic needs and expectations. As stated above, Britain in the Victorian period made amazing progress in industry, science and technology as the carrier of rationalism, thinking that the development is linear. However, in this new historical background, the traditional dichotomy such as "what goes

around comes around” , “Jack shall have Jill” and so on still exists in the mind of people. The Victorian British novelists inherit the traditional philosophical concept and thinking mode, they created a lot of works by using this kind of happy, enclosed circular narrative structure.

The writing techniques of Scott and Dickens belong to the traditional techniques which pay much attention to the story itself. Most of their novels end with a happy ending and adopt the typical circle structure.

Scott's novels often use the structure of the 18th century legend, the story is often the hero and heroine "love at first sight - tribulation - fidelity - all's well that ends well" this kind of typical closed structure, the hero is often encounter "embarrassment - trials - hang on - a final success" this kind of sealing structure. In Scott's *The Antiquary*, Major Neville, a young officer, falls in love with Isabella Wardour, an English woman. Due to his father Authur's deep relationship with his family, he refuses to marry him. Neville changed his name to Lovel and went to Scotland. And met Authur Wardour's neighbor, Jonathan Oldbuck, a good antique, knowledgeable, but fond of dinnery things. Lovel once risks his life to save Authur and his daughter from danger, duels with a rival in love, and saves Authur from a trap of deception. At last it became clear that he was the son of the late Count, and Isabella was won over, to everyone's delight. Henry Morton was an upright and brave young man, a moderate Presbyterian, who had been arrested for sheltering a fiery churchgoer of his father's friends, whose participation in the assassination of the archbishop was unknown. Morton was so enraged that he was nearly executed that he joined a religious rebellion, known as the Covenanters, and committed armed mutiny. He fell in love with Edith, the granddaughter of Sir Bellington, who was the King's party, and they had a bitter quarrel. He becomes a rival in love with Sir Evandale, both of whom are Edith's pursuers. Morton was saved from death after his capture by Edith and Evandale. As the rebels gained ground, Mr. Morton rewarded them with a reprieve. Then, after the rebels' defeat, Morton fled and Edith thought he had been killed in battle. Just as he was about to marry Evandale, Morton suddenly returned to England. Evandale dies in a fight, and Morton finally makes peace with Edith. Francis Osbaldistone in *Rob Roy* is the son of a wealthy businessman in London who refused to run his father's business and was sent to England to be arrested by his uncle. His uncle's son, Rashleigh, was sinister, but his daughter, Diana, was lively and lovely. Francis's love affair with Diana provokes Rashleigh's jealousy, and Rashleigh attempts to harm Francis and further destroy his father's estate. With the help of Rob Roy, Diana was able to save her life. Rashleigh, who was also a member of the rebel group, was killed by Rob Roy for misbehaving and betraying a fellow party member. Francis was reunited with his father and married Diana. In *Quentin Durward*, he was a heroic Scotsman who went to France to serve Louis XI in the Scottish Guards. King Louis XI loved him so much that he ordered him to escort Isabelle and her aunt, a family member of the Duke of Burgundy, with the intention of secretly getting the robber William de la Marck to marry Isabelle. Quentin sees through the ruse and safely escorts Isabelle to her destination. William de la Marck and his men attacked, killed the bishop, and Quentin and Isabelle escaped. Isabelle returned to the Duke of Burgundy, unwilling to be protected by King Louis. The King and Bagendi joined forces to besiege William de la Marck, and Bagendi declared that whoever could subdue William de la Marck could marry Isabelle. Quentin wins and finally marries Isabelle. In *The Betrothed*, The Norman nobleman Berenger's fortress was trapped by Hugo de Lacy, Prince of Wales. Berenger died in The battle and his only daughter Eveline was rescued by Hugo de Lacy. When she was in a hurry, she had promised to marry him, but they were engaged, but this marriage no matter from the age or emotional point of view, there is no reasonable reason to exist. Hugo de Lacy then had to leave immediately for the Crusades, leaving Damian, his nephew, to take care of his fiancée. When Eveline falls in love with Damian and a heated debate threatens their execution, the elderly Hugo de Lacy returns in time to break off their engagement, which is a good thing for the young couple. These are typical round (closed) structures with happy endings. Dickens' Christmas series, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*,

Little Doris, Our Mutual Friend and so on are also typical of the circular structure. At the end of the novel, poor and weak individuals often have happy endings. The circular structure of Dickens' novels reflects not only his deep love for the laboring people, but also ruthlessly exposes the evils, famine, the threat of unemployment and so on in capitalist society.

5. CONCLUSION

However, the reason why many modern novels no longer use the structure with strict logic as traditional novels to narrate, but show some disorder and laxity, which has various deep reasons. First, because they think they can get closer to the essence of life. Furthermore some new novelist think, in the novel the modern readers had no intention of looking for relaxing pastime, because this kind of pastime can often easily in the emerging media such as film and television, games, and this pastime is obtained through the emerging media, stereo, vivid, the written form of the single than fiction shaping characters and set up the story more vivid, fascinating. According to this view, it is obvious that the art of fiction should leave the story to the film, and work in the world beyond the story. As a result, the story has been withdrawn from many "new novels", which is worthy of modern and contemporary literature to reflect on how to find a meeting point between tradition and modernity in order to give the novel a new life.

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