

# The Folkloric Narrative Perspective in Victorian Fantasy

Lu Gan

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Hubei, Jingzhou, China

## Abstract

**The choice and design of narrative perspective embody the writer's literary wisdom. The Victorian fantasy was greatly influenced by folk culture, and thus the narrative perspectives obviously absorbed the narrative pattern of folk literature. Most writers of fantasy use omniscient narrative perspective which is the same as folk literature. And, some other folkloric perspectives of narration adopted by the writers of fantasy were extensively adopted, such as the perspective of child (children) and the perspective of ghost(s). The perspective of child(children) was originated from the folk fairy tales and the perspective of ghost(s) was originated from folkloric ghost stories. The perspective of child(children) has an incalculable mystical power, and its religiously pious belief in the power of kindness and kindness to dissolve all indifference and hatred in society was widely adopted in Victorian fantasy. And the perspective of ghost(s) makes people conscious about what is happening in the society and stimulate the creativity of human beings.**

## Keywords

**Narrative perspective; Victorian Fantasy; Child(children); Ghost(s).**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the history of English literature and even the history of world literature, it seems that the perspective of ghost(s) and child (children) has never left people's vision. Then, how does the narration in Victorian fantasy differ from that in other periods? What cultural secrets do these differences embody? It seems that the secrets could be revealed in the perspective of folk narration.

Why are 19th century English literature full of fantasy? In the 19th century, when romanticism and nationalism prevailed in Britain, people turned their eyes to the middle ages, trying to find the root of their own literature and culture from the ancient times, and enhance their national self-confidence. The Middle Ages was a period full of folk cultural resources and folk cultural soil. In folk fairy tales, fantasy characters such as devil, fairy, angel, witch, spirit, monster and giant appear frequently and are widely spread among the British people. These supernatural fantasy factors were widely accepted and used by British Victorian writers in the 19th century. Therefore, their works are full of imagination, which easily arouse people's wonderful reverie.

## 2. THE PERSPECTIVE OF GHOST

The British people take it for granted that ghosts do exist in the world. The ghost stories in ancient countryside and modern society are of the same nature, this phenomenon attract the attention of the folklorists. Folk stories about ghosts are not only handed down orally, but also presented in newspapers and magazines. What's more striking is that in Victorian fantasy, the fantasy created from the perspective of ghosts are widespread. We can not only find those ghost stories that have never appeared in the newspapers or by word of mouth in these fantasy, but

also get the profound cultural implications of English ghost stories in Victorian period more scientifically.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890~1937) is a famous Gothic novelist in the United States. He has put forward many times on different occasions that "fear is the oldest and strongest emotion since the birth of human beings". Edmund Burke (1729~1797) is an Irish statesman, writer, speaker, political theorist and philosopher, he has also put forward that "fear is one of the most magnificent human emotions. Fear can make people experience the mysterious supernatural forces, so life is often fleeting and insignificant. Ghosts are the eternal reference of this perceptual experience." [1] Therefore, we can say that works created from the perspective of ghosts can bring people the emotional experience of fear, which can purify people's mind, reduce the psychological pressure in life, and even bring people spiritual comfort and salvation. Therefore, the works created with the perspective of ghosts can stimulate the audience's reading interest and produce reading effect in the largest scope and from the deepest level, and the perspective of ghosts became a narrative perspective that many writers were keen on to adopt.

The ghost story of the Victorian fantasy is in the same line as that of the ghost story in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. R.H. Baham, a superstar, rose up in the "ghost world" in the 1830s. The two gothic fantasy of *The Ghost of Tapington* and *The doctor of Foxton*, which were written from the perspective of ghost, are still very popular throughout the 20th century. In the middle of Victorian period, in addition to Dickens, who was famous in the literary world, there were a large number of female writers who created fantasy from the perspective of ghosts. The perspective of ghosts is a major feature of Dickens' creation. In Dickens' early creation, with *The Story of Pickwick* as the representative, the perspective of ghosts appeared. But the most outstanding works created by Dickens with the perspective of ghosts are a series of works combined with Christmas events, such as *Christmas Carols*, *The Cricket by the Fire* and *The Struggle of Life in Dickens' Christmas Tales*(1843~1848). They are all Christmas stories created from the perspective of ghosts, which further enhance Dickens' popularity, Dickens is more and more popular with readers. Besides, there are many works written by Dickens himself or some other well-known writers in his own magazines *Family Talk* and *All the Year Round*. Mrs. Gaskell was invited to give her a contribution. The reason why Dickens can combine the ghost perspective with the Christmas story so subtly is that in his life, with his extraordinary observation ability, he has a special deep understanding of the traditional customs of Christmas. Therefore, it's easy to narrate them, and even he can write on the subject with great familiarity. Dickens reposes him in this kind of Christmas story, which combines horror, humor and satire, that's because as a responsible writer to the British society, he is eager to change the world and save the weak. In addition, it can not be ignored that a series of female writers who created from the perspective of ghost in this period are also a beautiful scenery in the history, such as Margaret Oliphant, Mrs. Reid, Rose Malherdland, Mrs. Braden and Amelia Edwards. They all are all enthusiastic to create from the perspective of ghosts, and Margaret Oliphant is the most popular one among the readers. Her works such as *Little Pilgrim of Ghost World*, *Open Door* and *Fortress Besieged* have attracted wide attention of readers.

The fantasy narrated from the perspective of ghosts in Victorian period are mainly gothic. Gothic fantasy is the product of social turbulence and the challenge of mainstream ideology. Specifically speaking, Gothic fantasy is the product of the opposition toward Enlightenment and classicism. English Victorian gothic fantasy are deeply influenced by religion, just like Chinese ghost fantasy of the Six Dynasties. Besides the official religion, the folk belief gives the Gothic novelists inexhaustible creative inspiration. As what is mentioned above, Gothic fantasy are obviously closely related to the ghost stories in the popular ballads in England and Scotland. Gothic fantasy express infinite anxiety and disappointment by ghost fantasy, and show people's emotions and desires which are difficult to achieve in reality. The narration in the perspective

of ghost(s) satisfies our curiosity about the strange, terrible and potentially dangerous events that may happen, which reflects the leisure function of folk custom. At the same time, according to the inherent interpretation system of human beings, people interpret these strange things or continue to explore the truth of the events related to spoofing, which reflects the human's persistent desire to perceive the strange phenomena of life. People have a persistent and eternal desire to explain these phenomena, thus producing a firm motivation to seek knowledge and innovate in the unknown world. Maybe we don't need to carefully explore the authenticity of the supernatural stories. Maybe there are other caves outside the heaven. Human beings can never know everything. Which is superstition? Which is rationality? It's hard to say in a short period of time. From the point of view in materialist science, the horror and supernatural events such as the ghosts are really unscientific, but who can assert that it will not become a real science after a few years? The true meaning of this kind of folk custom may be a kind of fear of death, disaster and strange environment, so people imagine another space that can communicate with this world, so that people can get spiritual comfort, so that they can cherish their lives more and constantly activate the power of innovation. Therefore, folk culture has an insight into the social life and its problems in modern science, such as transportation, marriage, family, public security, economy, science and technology, tourism, medical care and so on, which are closely related to the people. It makes people aware of the shortcomings of modern society and stimulates the creative vitality of human beings.

### 3. THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN

Children's perspective has immeasurable mysterious power. It believes that benevolence and kindness can resolve all the indifference and hatred in society with religious piety. It is widely used in the fantasy of the Victorian period. The reflection of the perspective of child(children) in the novels of the Victorian period reflects the great changes of children's view. The concept of children has its own historical development process, it is not static, but has been dynamic in the process of development. In the primitive society of extreme material shortage, children have been in a state of absence. Children are regarded as accessories of adults and can be disposed by adults at will. In the long and dark middle ages, children's consciousness is still not awakened. Centuries of Childhood as a landmark in children's history is a French work published in 1962. It put forward the view that "there was no sense of childhood in the Middle Ages", which triggered a research boom on children's concept and history. At one time, there were more than 100 related works. [2] If the Renaissance found people, then the Enlightenment found children. Influenced by the Christian doctrine, when children appear in people's vision, they are still with original sin, even sinful, just as the proverbs of the Old Testament says: "Do not discipline children. If you beat them with a stick, they will not die. If you beat him with a stick, you can save his soul from the abyss of hell. " From the romantic period in the early 19th century, the romantic literature represented by Wordsworth made a great reversal of the concept of children. The traditional concept of children was completely subverted. Children not only had their own place in the historical stage, but also became pure and flawless. So far, people not only focused on children, but also promulgated the "Child Protection Act" in the 1920s, which even preceded the "Labor Law" for adults. It can be seen that the status of children has been unprecedented recognized and improved. In addition, in 1883, Britain announced the abolition of slavery, including all the colonies. In the same year, the "Factory Act" banned child labor under the age of nine. People between the ages of nine and thirteen were limited to 48 hours a week, or nine hours a day. People between the ages of thirteen and eighteen were limited to 69 hours a week, or 12 hours a day. People under 13 must read for two hours a day. This reform was only carried out in the textile industry, and it was far from the ideal state, but it was the first in the reform movement. Although these reform measures also reflect the dark social reality, the concept of children themselves as independent people has been quietly formed, and the literary works of

viewing the world from the perspective of children are also quietly emerging. It is under the influence of this view of children in the Victorian period that people often think that children are innocent, simple and lovely. So far, children's "being found" and folk romantic imagination are integrated, "folk" and "children" have become the outstanding representatives of noble barbarians, and children's perspective has thus entered the Victorian fantasy.

### 3.1. The Supernatural Imagination of Children'S Perspective

"A country without fantasy and legend has not, cannot and will not occupy a great position in the world." [3] Fantasy is the eternal theme of the folk world. In the folk fairy tales, this kind of fantasy is particularly prominent. In the 19th century Britain, the flourishing age of its fantasy is closely related to the fantasy factors full of fantastic ideas. The most vivid way to show this kind of fantastic idea is to use children's perspective to create their works. The fantasy color of Victorian fantasy created from children's perspective can arouse people's yearning for purity, kindness and beauty.

In the fifties and sixties of Victorian period, the fairy tales full of imagination and fantasy reached its boom, Robin Hood and other heroes of the greenwood, King Arthur and his knights, St. George's, etc all widely spread. These stories originated from folk literature were full of imagination and became the source of Victorian fantasy. [4] Narrated from the perspective of child(children), these fantasy vividly represent a wonderful journey in a strange fantasy world. George MacDonald (1824-1905) is a representative who always wrote in the perspective of child(children), and showed a powerful and unconstrained style of imagination. George MacDonald was crazy about the fantasy space because he was disseminated by folk myths and legends. His fantasy *Phantastes* (1858) maps reality with a world full of fantasy, this kind of imagination became the only way to realize human self-salvation and hope. In addition to George MacDonald, Barrie, James Hogg, Robert Louis Stevenson, William Carleton, William Sharp, John Ruskin and Charles Kingsley all use this dreamy, imaginative perspective of child(children). Their works such as *The King of Golden River*(1851), *Water Babies*(1862-1863), *Treasure Island*(1881) all became popular children's books in the world. They are not only full of illusory escape of fantasy fantasy, but has the educational value for their ethic judgment. Moreover, they were not only for children, also can awaken the adults, increasingly to realize one's own kindheartedness, self-redemption and growth.

### 3.2. The Childhood Life Experience of Children'S Perspective

The realistic and supernatural childhood life experience were also written in the Victorian Fantasy. The second characteristic of Victorian fantasy in this period written from the perspective of child(children) is that he takes children as the main body, showing their life in childhood. The mainstream novelists of this period, Charles Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and the Brontë Sisters, all made children in their fantasy under the strong emotion of nostalgia and simplicity. Their experiences of childhood are varied, but the children in Dickens' is the most profound and moving. The tragic childhood experiences of little Oliver, little Copperfield, little Dooley, little Pip, little Nell, and so on are all moving readers into tears. But the childhood experiences and experiences of little Maggie, little Beckie, little Amber and little Jane Eyre described by other writers can also arouse readers' feelings of sympathy. Dickens' insisting on using the perspective of children to create and show the hardships of his childhood life is inseparable from his childhood experience. At the age of 12, his father was in debtor's prison for debt, so Dickens had to leave school and work as a child in a factory of shoe cream. This painful childhood experience, though less than half a year, became a lifelong nightmare for Dickens and aroused his deep sympathy for the suffering children. In addition, Dickens' contemporary fantasy about social problems also depicted their tragic experiences in childhood from the perspective of children, which reflected the dark side of society and the loss and

degradation of social culture. So the writer describes the the childhood experience has gone far beyond the description itself, they are eager to arouse children even adults' sympathy with children suffering from exploitation, abuse of the miserable situation and ill-fated bumpy life shock, thus in order to make the readers see themselves clearly in the scientific and rational power of modern society. Although from the perspective of industry and technology, human society has made progress, but from the perspective of social humanistic care, there seems to have no further progress.

#### 4. SUMMARY

It can be clearly seen that the romantic Victorian fantasy created from the perspective of child(children) and ghost(s) in Victorian period are not only naive fantasy or evasive fantasy, but also explore the profound issues of the times and arouse people's deep thinking. Children are the group that can best represent the living conditions at the bottom of the society. Although their joys and sorrows have not been concerned by the ruling class, they have received all the sympathy and pity from a large number of writers with humanistic feelings in Victorian period. They are eager to use their nibs to awaken the remaining conscience of the human heart and fill the world with love and harmony.

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