

The Fiction of the Epic of “Janger”

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Abstract—Possible world theory provides a new perspective and framework for the study of literary fiction. Possible world narratology holds that the characteristics of fictional world are mainly manifested in cognitive limitation and focus, semantic density, system nesting and impossible fictional world. The Mongolian heroic epic Janger has obvious fictional world features, which is consistent with the fictional world features of the theory.

Keywords—possible world theory; epic; fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and the real world, which has been less studied, has always been an important field of literary research, but fiction is precisely the essence of literature. Rene Wellek held that fiction, creativity or imagination is the prominent features of literature, among which fiction is the core nature of literature, “The essence of literature is most clearly manifested in the category involved in literature. The focus of literature and art is obvious on the traditional literary types such as lyrics, epics and dramas that dealing with a fictional and imaginary world.”¹ It can be seen that fiction should be the focus of literary research. The literary genres like myth, epic, drama, legend and fiction are all with strong fictional characteristics. Northrop Frye even believed that these literary genres are based on myths. Literary fiction is mainly represented by the fictional world in the works. By studying the fictional world characteristics of a work, its fiction can be studied, and then how narrative constructs empirical reality and how realistic experience restricts people’s understanding of the fictional world can be classified. Possible world theory provides possibilities for the study of the characteristics of literary fictional world.

Possible world theory is closely related to religious philosophy, logic and quantum mechanics. Gottfried Leibniz, a German philosopher in the 17th century, pioneered the theory of the possible world, believing that the real world was the best that God had chosen for mankind among all possible worlds. In the mid-20th Century, the theory of possible world revived in Britain, represented by David Lewis and Saul Kripke. Lewis believed that things could have been different from what they are now, that they could have been different in countless ways, and what is possible is

the possible world. “Possible world is regulated, not discovered by high-power telescopes.”² Kripke vividly explained. Like the real world, the fictional world is a kind of possible world. The real world is objective reality while the fictional world is subjective existence. The concept of possible world theory has been borrowed into the field of literature research, providing valuable reference for the study of fiction in literature.

Quantum theory, which emerged in the 20th century, provides more powerful support for the development of narratology in the possible world. Max Tegmark and John Archibald Wheeler’s Quantum Analysis Framework theory divides the world into three sub-systems, namely, subject, object and environment, which provides a reference model for the study of possible world narratology: retaining “subject”, transforming “object” into fictional world (possible world), and transforming “environment” into real world. In this way, “subject”, “fictional world” and “real world” construct the research framework of possible narratology. With one of them as the center, the narrative relationship between them can be studied: the fictional category is centered on the real world; the empirical category is centered on the subject; and the narrative is centered on the fictional world. Possible world narratology is a new branch of narratology after the narrative turn. It is the product of the combination of narratology and possible world theory, providing a new perspective and framework for the study of literary fiction.

The feature of fictional world is the category of fictional research. Possible world narrative theory holds that the feature of fictional world is mainly manifested in such aspects as limited cognitive breadth, focus of cognitive intensity, semantic density, systematic nesting and impossible fictional world.

II. COGNITIVE LIMITATION

The fictional world of literature is a special possible world, not as real as the real world, but exists in the world of human thinking. Because of the limitation of human cognition and speech expression, people’s understanding of the fictional world must be incomplete. The incompleteness of the fictional world has become a consensus in academic

¹ [US] Saul Kripke. Naming and Necessity. Translated by Mei Wen. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2005.75.

² [US] Saul Kripke. Naming and Necessity. Translated by Mei Wen. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2005.75.

circles, which is influenced by many factors. "The variables affecting the incompleteness of fictional world include physical factors (such as incomplete texts), aesthetic pursuit (such as implicit and spiritual), and author's style (such as Hemingway's simplicity).³ Although the fictional world is incomplete, its characteristics are varied. The Mongolian heroic epic Janger is a model of historical narration and fictional narration, with prominent fiction. From the perspective of the possible world narrative theory, the cognitive limitation of its fictional world is mainly influenced by the simple narrative style and text factors.

Simple narration is a prominent feature of Janger. The epic describes Baomuba's homeland as follows:

"Janger's Baomuba is a happy paradise on earth. People there are always young, always like 25 years old, never aging, never dying.// Paradise Janger is spring all the year round, no hot summer, no bitter cold, the wind is singing, the precious rain is falling, the flowers are blooming and the herbs are fragrant. // Paradise Janger is vast. The horse galloped for five months without running to its frontier, where the five million slaves of the saint-lord lived and thrived. // The lofty Baitou Mountain rises all over the sky, and the golden sun gives it a shamanistic glow. The vast Saldaga Sea has two branches, north and south, roaring and laughing day and night, shining with brilliant light!// The water of Kuitun River, which Janger drinks, is clear, sweet and surging, flowing endlessly in winter and summer.// The owner of Baomuba is the orphan Jangle. He holds the four principles in his hands, benefiting the people, making heroic achievements, illuminating others, and his reputation as warriors spreading everywhere".⁴

This paragraph describes the ideal homeland of Baomuba, shows the Mongolian Weilat people's yearning for eternal youth, immortality, spring-like climate, vast and rich territory, beautiful natural environment and ideal monarch, which is the "Utopia" in the hearts of Weilat people at that time. In the preface and each chapter, there are often such concise descriptions of Baomuba homeland. This concise narrative style is the concrete embodiment of the ethnic narrative style, not only leaves great imagination space for the recipient, but also affects the understanding of the integrity of the fictional world. Compared with Plato's Republic and Thomas Moore's Utopia, the epic Janger focuses on war and marriage, without specific description of the political, economic, legal, institutional, transportation, religion, diplomacy and other aspects of Baomuba. Instead, it nests them in the two themes of war and marriage, with brief narrative and rough outline. Thomas G. Pavel seems to give a reasonable explanation, "The era of stable world outlook tends to adopt strategies to minimize the incompleteness, while the era of transition and conflict tends to maximize the incompleteness of the fictional world."⁵ From this point of

view, "Janger" came into being in the era of transformation and conflict.

The cognitive limitation of fictional world is also manifested in textual factors. Western epics, such as Homer's Epic and Aeneid, attach great importance to the arrangement of plot structure, which is also a prominent artistic feature of written epics. Some scholars believe that epics should be written from the middle, and the whole story should be told through narrative means such as interpolation. Such structural integrity of Western epics was not born from the start, but formed through the continuous processing of artists in the process of inheritance. However, Janger is a living epic, which is still passed down in people's mouths. Now, more than 200 works have been collected. Each work has its own independent poem, that is, a complete sub-story, with Saint Janger as the core to form a story cluster. This structure is similar to that of Balzac's Human Comedy, especially that the same character appears repeatedly in different works, such as Janger, Hongul, Alatanzeji and so on. These works together enrich and improve the image of heroes. Compared with the integral structural epic, this decentralized and centralized structural type reflects the nature of its oral living form, which is convenient and flexible for inheritance and singing. Ren Chin Dorje believed that Janger has a complex plot structure, which is composed of the overall plot structure and the chapter plot structure. He summarized the plot structure of Mongolian epic poems, "The plot structure of the heroic epic Janger can be divided into two types: the overall plot structure and the plot structure of each long poem (each chapter). Its overall plot structure is the parallel complex of more than 200 long poems, so it can be called the parallel compound heroic epic."⁶ The plot structure of each long poem can be divided into preface poem and basic plot. The basic plot can be divided into four types: marriage type, war type, marriage + War type, and War + War type. From the point of view of Ren Chin Dorje, Homer's Epic and Aeneid belong to the type of marriage plus war. Helen was the cause of the war. Aeneas wanted to marry the princess of Tiernus as his wife. From an evolutionary perspective, Homer's epic has completed the transition from oral to written, and gradually become a whole and grand structure. The heroic epic Janger came into being relatively late and is in the period of writing. Most of the written versions are based on oral recording. These poems have been found and arranged in China, Russia and Mongolia, and many versions have been found: the same story is sung by different Janger, which is the different versions of the same story; there is also a variant text of the story, such as the impromptu elements added in Janger's singing. These textual factors also affect the integrity of the cognition of the fictional world in Janger.

The fictional world is incomplete in ontology, which inevitably leads to cognitive incompleteness. The limited understanding of the fictional world in Janger does not constitute a shortcoming of literature. Instead, it encourages the audience's imaginative participation and enthusiasm in

³ Zhang Xinjun. Possible World Narratology [M]. Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011.53.

⁴ Ren Chin Dorje. On "Janger"[M]. Huhhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1999.4.

⁵ Quoted from Zhang Xinjun. Possible World Narratology [M]. Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011.53.

⁶ Ren Chin Dorje. On "Janger"[M]. Huhhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1999.286

the study of the fictional world. More importantly, it plays an important role in strengthening the perception of the depth of the theme of the fictional world.

III. CULTURE FOCUSING

Literary fictional narrative often embodies causality, axiology and teleology, which requires that events and characters be purposefully allocated and narrated through a certain perspective in order to construct a humanistic world full of implications. Therefore, "much information is deformed, magnified or lost through viewpoint filtering."⁷ Focusing maximizes one aspect of the fictional world to its largest extent. In the Mongolian epic *Janger*, the focus is mainly reflected in the memory and inheritance of national culture from the perspective of the narrator (Janger). Horse culture is an important part of Mongolian culture. The warhorse is the closest comrade in arms of the Mongolian people. The description of the horse has become an important part of the epic. Before going out to battle, people need to prepare horses and saddles, and they will be the soldiers' legs and the guardian during the war. If the master is in danger, he will help the master out of danger and even can speak. As in Chapter 2, the description of horses before Alatanzeji's expedition is as following,

"Glorious Janger, my holy lord,
My big red horse is running fast and fast,
I'm still strong and energetic,
My bow and arrow are still sharp,
Willing to make great achievements for Baomuba."⁸

Among the three preconditions for the success of Alatanzeji, horse is in the first place, followed by body and weapons, which shows that horse is the first important factor for warriors. Then it describes the process of harnessing horse by the housekeeper in detail, including the ears, eyes, bridle, felt, saddle, and the action of the big red horse in great detail. This focused description reflects the Mongolian horse culture and recognizes the importance of the horse in the national culture. The fictional narrative also reflects the focus of horse culture. Horse is the only partner, who can talk and communicate during the heroic march,

"You are running and roaring like an bat out of hell,
You are so swift and violent that you look like a Grfalcon
in the clouds,
Why haven't you run out of your wall yet?

At this speed, when will we finish our journey?"⁹ After listening to Alatanzeji's complaints, the red horse began to run rapidly. The great red horse was also the hero's assistant

in defeating the enemy. After Alatanzeji tied up Sanara's palace with a rope, the great red horse worked hard with him to pull down Sanara's palace. It can be seen that through the singing of generations of epic artists, the focus description of horse reflects the memory and inheritance of ethnic culture. This way of inheriting national culture is really a kind of national wisdom.

In the description of characters, the main focus is on heroic deeds, rather than the detailed and integral description of the character's life. Generally, there is no detailed description of the birth of characters, only some introduction of the ancestors and grandfathers, and parents. In the preface to *Janger*, Janger is introduced as follows,

"In that ancient golden age,
In the early days of carrying forward Buddhist Dharma,
Orphan Janger,
Born in the holy land of Baomuba.
Janger is the descendant of Tahazhaola Khan.
The grandson of Tangsuk Baumbach Khan,
Son of Ujon Aradal Khan."¹⁰

Then the heroic deeds of Janger at the ages of three, four, five, six and seven are briefly described. 6012 warriors are often mentioned in the 700,000 army, among them, the twelve warriors are mainly introduced, and Hongul and Alatanzeji are the two most important. The former is the first warrior on the left hand, and the latter is the first warrior on the right hand. Hongul is the representative of the brave warriors, and Alatanzeji is the representative of the wise warriors, which is very similar to Archeliu and Odysseus in *Iliad*, belongs to the typified character image. The description of Hongul is focused on his bravery and loyalty,

"Janger's left-handed warrior,
Is the honest and simple lion-like, Hongul.
He is the descendant of Hercules Tebuchin Silugai.
The only son of wrestler Sillick,
The beloved son born by a virtuous mother, Mrs.
Shandangrille, at the age of 22.
Hongul is Janger's brother
He is the glory of the 700,000 troops.
Hongul is the most important leader of Baomuba.
An example for millions of warriors.
Hongul never retreat in battle.
Like a wolf and a tiger!
Hongul spared his precious life,
To conquer seventy demons by himself."¹¹

⁷ Zhang Xinjun. *Possible World Narratology* [M]. Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011.54.

⁸ *Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger*. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983.30.

⁹ *Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger*. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 33.

¹⁰ *Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger*. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 1.

This is a brief introduction to the status, life, influence and bravery of Hongul, explains his close relationship with Janger. The image of Hongul is gradually enriched in other poems. "An honest and brave man never bows his head in front of the enemy and is not afraid of any difficulties" is the deepest impression to the audience or readers. The description of Alatanzeji focuses on his wisdom,

"Janger's right-handed warrior,

His name is Bayan Hueng Alatanzeji.

Clairvoyant Alatan Tanjiduan sat on a black satin cushion.

He was in charge of the political and religious powers of the 70 states of Baomuba.

No matter what difficult case encountered,

He can detect and decide quickly and correctly."¹²

Wisdom is his main characteristics. He can predict what will happen in the next 99 years and know what happened in the past 99 years. Alatanzeji is an important character in many chapters. He often knows his opponent's background and real situation, and can predict the outcome of the event. However, this is the only way to understand Alatanzeji, and there is no more information about the details of his family. The introduction of other characters, such as Sabul, Sanara, and the handsome man, also highlights the main heroic deeds rather than the complete image. The epic blank is always blank. "How many children Mrs. Macbeth has" will never be known. There is no description of the hero's final death in Janger, which is the most unique feature of Janger. Even when he died in battle, he rose to life with the help of divine power, such as Hongul. The blankness of heroic death image in Janger is related to the cultural beliefs and outlook on life of Weilat Mongolians. In the Iranian epic "Kings-Warriors Rustam", Tibetan epic "Gesar" and Kirgiz "Manas", there are complete descriptions of the life of the main characters, such as the birth, horse selection, youth, middle age, old age and death of Rustam. The description of Rustam's life is like a scroll of history, while the description of heroes in Janger is more like heroic statues.

In addition, wine banquet, wrestling, horse racing and archery are also the focus of Mongolian epic Janger. Poetry usually begins and ends with a wine banquet; even if there is no wine banquet at the beginning, the ending will be a feast of mellow wine, which becomes the symbol of the end of the story. Through focusing, the national culture is highlighted.

IV. DETAIL DENSITY

Human imagination determines the size of the fictional world. The fictional world is all-inclusive. At the same time, the fictional world also has a specific space-time dimension and specific fictional individuals. The specific space-time

dimension refers to the space-time dimension of the story world at the discourse level. Narratology has made a lot of achievements in narrative time, establishing a relationship between story time and discourse time, such as Rico's Time and Narration, but in space research, there is still a lack of effective research between story space and discourse space. Text density theory tries to explain story space and discourse space. The relative intensity of text density refers to the amount of information or the density of details about the story world expressed by a particular length of narrative text. The content related to the text density of fictional world includes the external information needed to understand the text, the narrative cluster, the text layout, and the cognitive approach to the text world. Every chapter of the epic Janger is full of information about horses. The description of horses runs through a poem. In the chapter of Hongul's wedding, Janger asked the horsekeeper to prepare for the wedding, followed by a series of detailed descriptions of horses and saddles,

"Put a mat on the horse's back first,

With a delicate saddle drawer on the top,

Then lay six flat saddles.

With a huge carved saddle like an anvil above it,

The carved saddle is a precious saddle cushion and saddle mantle.

Colorful belly belt,

Once infected in the saliva of vipers,

There are 88 buckles on the belly belt,

Tightly fastened,

Make that fat belly,

With seventy-two wrinkles.

On the fuller buttocks,

There are 108 silver bells.

Beautiful neck,

Eight iron bells were hung."¹³

Next, the horse's forelegs, eyes, hind crotch, long tail, ears, mane and four hoofs are described in detail. By describing the details of the horse, the color and characteristics, types and values of the horse, as well as the harness and its functions are represented. Therefore, the text density of horse detail description is high, reflects the Mongolian people's unique feelings and understanding of horses, and also provides a basis for in-depth study of national culture.

The high density of details is the prominent feature of Janger's narrative, and it is a means to retain human memory and represent the human world.

¹¹ Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 10-11.

¹² Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 10.

¹³ Mongolian Folk Epic • Janger. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 111.

V. WORLD NESTING

One text world can be nested in another text world, but ultimately it must be nested in an upper real world. The narratology of the possible world regards the inner world of the characters in the text as a number of micro-worlds, thus describing the fictional world as a huge text system with the real world as its core. The text world is mainly divided into the possible world imagined by the narrator, the possible world imagined by the storyteller and the imaginary world imagined by the reader. "The nesting of possible world can reveal the causal relationship between different worlds, properly locating and distinguishing the specific proposition of fictional world, to define whether it is a narrative fact or a purely imagination of character. Because the lower possible world always parasitizes the upper world which it nests, the upper world can comment on the lower possible world."¹⁴ There are three worlds concept in the epic *Janger*: the world of heaven, the world of man and the world of lower world. It is generally believed that God dominates the world of heaven, people live in the human world, and demons live in the lower world, and only witches or magicians can go freely among the three worlds, which is a traditional mythological thinking. This concept originated from the ancient religious Shamanism and was later influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. From the perspective of possible world theory, these three worlds are existing possible worlds, in which the narrator's textual world is the core and the imaginary world of characters is embedded in the narrator's textual world. The description of Baomuba in the epic is the narrator's imaginary world: no aging, no death, evergreen all the year round, no war, no oppression, and people live happily. The imaginary world of the narrator reflects the "utopia" thought of the grassland people.

The imaginary world of the characters in the epic is embedded in the narrator's text world: when the hero Sanara's parents died, they described Baomuba to Sanara, "My dearest son, you must bear in mind that in this sunny land, *Janger* dominates everything. He has 82 changes and 72 spells. He is the holy lord of Baomuba. He benefits the people. Baomuba of *Janger* is a paradise on earth. Lonely people will be flourishing there, and poor people will be rich and prosperous. There is no riot, always peace, eternal happiness, and with countless lives. Once we die, you should rush to Baomuba paradise. Don't stop during the day, don't rest in the night, you need to find *Janger* and meet him."¹⁵ In the eyes of Sanara's parents, *Janger* is like a God, and Baomuba is a paradise on earth. The world imagined by the character is nested in the narrator's text world, which is consistent with the images of *Janger* and Baomuba in the narrator's word, highlights the causal relationship between the two possible worlds, because of the rule of holy lord *Janger*, the homeland of Baomuba is so beautiful and happy, the world imagined by Sanara's parents before their death was not the imagination of story characters, but embedded in the text world of the previous layer. *Janger* can use 82 kinds

of magic, 72 kinds of general changes, war horses can speak, Hongul can be transformed into bald boys, and so on. The magic world of these characters surrounds the real world of the text and forms a responsible text system with the core world of the text. In *Odyssey*, this kind of nesting is obvious, including the world of Olympus gods, the world of human beings and the world of ghosts. The world of God is always commenting on the world of human beings and deciding the fate of human beings, which shows that people's dominant thinking at that time was divine thinking, so that they could respect God, love God and fear God. Nowadays, scientific rational thinking dominates people. People are accustomed to looking at everything and evaluating everything from a scientific point of view. If looking at the fictional world in *Janger* from a scientific point of view, the work cannot be truly understood and interpreted.

VI. IMPOSSIBLE FICTIONAL WORLD

The fictional world includes the logical possible world and the logical impossible world. The Peach Garden in the Chinese concept, the Utopia in the eyes of Westerners constitute the logical possible world, but the logical impossible world also has its significance and value of existence that it often exists in literary and artistic texts and personal inner world. In the early literary world, such as epics, the impossible fictional world mostly originated from traditional folk stories and myths, which may be the visual expression of human memory of major events. Folklorists and anthropologists are trying to reveal the true connotations of folk stories and myths. Prop's *The Historical Roots of Magic Stories* is a famous work in this respect. Although most people think that the existence value of impossible world lies in its high entertainment, it is a part of the human heart and exists in the human mind. Its value may not only be highly entertaining, but also be more comfortable and suggestive to the human mind. The epic *Janger* is full of countless logical impossible plots and scenes. People of Baomuba, the homeland, will always be young, no aging, no dying; many heroes in the works can be changed, war horses can talk; the human soul is hidden in the animal body; Alatanzeji pulls down Sanara's palace with magic rope; Hongul's confidant transforms into a swan to revive Hongul; *Janger* revives the sacrificed Hongul and so on. These impossible fictional worlds can not only make people happy, but also are the comfort or positive hints of people's hearts, showing the positive and optimistic heroism spirit of Mongolian Weilat people.

The epic *Janger* describes many vivid fictional worlds that have been handed down from generation to generation. The fictional world of *Janger* is created orally by the narrator *Jangerqi* based on his memory. The fictional world is determined by oral tradition, *Jangerqi*, the receiver and the context. It is not a fantastic fiction, but a combination of individuals drawn from the real world according to certain attributes and relationships. This fictional world is the collective memory and distortion of national culture, deeply embedded in the real world.

¹⁴ Zhang Xinjun. *Possible World Narratology* [M]. Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 2011.56.

¹⁵ Mongolian Folk Epic • *Janger*. Translated by Sedaoerji. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1983. 51.

VII. CONCLUSION

The possible world narrative theory provides a new spatial dimension for the study of the fiction in literary works. The fiction is one of the basic attributes of epic. The closer the combination of epic and myth is, the older the epic is, and the stronger the myth will be. The Mongolian heroic epic Janger came into being and developed in the 13th and 17th centuries. Its mythological factors were weakened and its reality was strengthened. However, its fiction was not weakened. In addition to some mythological factors, the fiction of the epic Janger is mainly influenced by the narrative style of the text, oral inheritance, the focus of horse culture, the density of details and the possible world. It is not difficult to see that the fiction of the epic develops from the impossible world to the possible world.

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