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The Authorial Voice through Irony in *Of Human Bondage*

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Introduction

If there was a correct way of how to interpret a literary work, the author would be the most responsible for leading the reader to the right interpretation of it. However, the more the author dominates his work, the less the reader is allowed to interpret it freely. In general conversation, if an addressee misunderstands what a speaker has said, the speaker corrects the error. The purpose of communication is to exchange information, in which the speaker is authoritative with his remarks. In the meantime, in the case of the novel the way it is expressed is as significant as what is meant in the words.

Lilian R. Furst indicates that in *Pride and Prejudice* the theme is shown "in the tension between acquiescence in the established system and a doubting disaffection from it" (51). She quotes the first sentence in the novel; "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). By denying the initial concept with development of the story, the "disaffection" to the idea is implied as irony (Furst 49-51). There are two different sides in this theory; the rhetoric "irony" and the theme which is implied in the irony of the words.

I will analyse the author's position in his work through these two aspects: the way of expression and what is meant in the wording. First, is it appropriate to see the theme of the novel as the author's concept? Wayne C. Booth insists that there are

two kinds of authors in a novel: the "real author" and "his various official versions of himself," that is, the produced image of the author (71). It is possible to see that the theme of *Pride and Prejudice* is not the author's own idea, but one of Austin's "official versions." As long as the work is fiction, every concept in the work can be interpreted as a mere creation of the author. Second the expression of the wording is directly connected with the "real author." Behind the rhetoric there is always the author's intention to express well, and this purpose is universal in every kind of an art work. While the theme about matrimony in *Pride and Prejudice* may be Austin's pretence, the irony of the novel is absolutely shown in her own intention.

These ideas are based on the concept to see the work as a creation. On the other hand, in the standpoint of realism, the fiction is a copy of reality. According to Plato, painting is a mere optical "representation" of the object, and it is "at third remove from the throne of truth" (425). First, an object is "only one real," when it is seen as a creation of "god" (424). Second, the object can be reproduced following its standard, like a "carpenter" "produces" a piece of furniture (424). However, what the artist shows is no more than the "appearance" of the object, so it is further than the former two from truth (424-25). According to him, the object itself does not "make any difference" regardless of which "angle" it is observed, "sideways or endways" (426). However, the "angle" the artist can catch is limited to one of them, as his visibility is confined (426). Therefore, Plato concludes that art is "a long way removed from truth" (426). From this theory it shows that what is expressed in the art work is the experience of the artist rather than the object itself which exists outside of his mind. When the artist draws what he sees, his optic experience is represented in it. Because it is one's own experience, the art work is far from truth, assuming the truth

means a substantial object. If the truth is presupposed to be the outer world, the experience is unreliable. The scenery from "sideways" and "endways" cannot be witnessed at once, because one's view is limited. In the meanwhile, it follows from Plato's theory that the aim of art is to be close to "truth." To fulfil the complete copy of "truth," the artist is required to be objective.

In comparison with such a way favourable to restrain the author's subjective view, irony is one of the exceptional examples. When the author uses irony in his work, the reader needs to comprehend both the literal sense and what is implied between the lines; thus irony even highlights the authorial being. Through the analysis of irony in *Of Human Bondage*, the connection between the author and his work will be speculated in this essay.

1. Irony in *Of Human Bondage*

As I mentioned in the introduction, to comprehend the author's implication in irony, the reader cannot help being conscious of the author intruding on his work. Such nature of irony contradicts with the aim of art to be objective.

However, on the contrary, Booth suggests irony as a technique, where the author controls how the reader will interpret his work (155-59). According to Booth, the author produces irony by regulating the "distance" between "the narrator," "the implied author," "the character," or "the reader" (156-59). The "distance" is generated through the difference of "norms" of these four elements (156-58). The author creates certain "norms," by several aspects such as "value, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical" (155-56). The four factors—"the narrator," "the reader," "the character," and "the implied author"—have a mutual gap in relation with the "norms," though the degree of interval varies "from identification to complete opposition" (155-56). Booth calls

the narrator "reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), are unreliable when he does not" (158-59). The "distance" is reflected in a conflict between such "unreliable" and "reliable" elements in the work, in which the author implies his true message (159). Irony is one of such operations done by the author.

In the case of *Of Human Bondage*, the distance of "norms" is mainly seen between the narrator and protagonist Philip. The narrator is the third person and "reliable," stating how Philip acts and feels from an omniscient standpoint. As Philip grows up and matures throughout the story, such a narrator's standpoint gradually overlaps with Philip's. In other words, the "norm" of the narrator and Philip approaches with Philip's growth. The following passage is one of the narrator's comments which accord with that of Philip.

The answer was obvious. Life had no meaning.... There was no meaning in life, and man by living served no end. It was immaterial whether he was born or not born, whether he lived or ceased to live. Life was insignificant and death without consequence. (602-03)

This is the conclusion Philip achieves after various hardships in his life, and the two "norms" of the narrator and Philip are almost identical in this part. However, before finding the conclusion that "life had no meaning," Philip is far from the narrator's position.

Before getting "the answer" of life, he faces incessant disappointments with others throughout his life. First, he gives up continuing his study at Oxford because he is weary from his lonely life without friends in school (86-88). After that he stops believing in God, being inspired by older friends in Germany

(130). Furthermore, he tries to be "a chartered accountant" (157), and changes his way again to be a painter in Paris, after growing tired of isolated life in London (192). He gives up studying art too, because he finds himself not talented and weary of all the friends and events there, facing the miserable death of Fanny Price (266-89). Although he chooses to be a doctor next, he is afflicted from his love for Mildred. Despite the fact that he knows that Mildred does not deserve such affection, he cannot forget her.

Through these ceaseless difficulties, he is thoroughly overcome by "the lack of the affection which had surrounded his youth," and feels life is "inane" (602). However, despite his harsh situation, he finds peace of mind from this conclusion: "life had no meaning" (602). By getting rid of every conventional concept, he finds himself "happy," in spite of actual hardships (605). This mental change from desperation to happiness in Philip implies that what torments him is in fact not the hardship itself, but his inferiority complex or expectation of others to love him. When he stops comparing his life with others and how they evaluate him, he feels free and peaceful.

However, before getting to this calm state, he expects others to love him, and such hope disappoints him repeatedly through former part of the story. Such immature expectation of others is pointed out by Cronshaw, an old writer who leads Philip to the conclusion.

You demand unselfishness from others, which is a preposterous claim that they should sacrifice their desires to yours. Why should they? When you are reconciled to the fact that each is for himself in the world you will ask less from your fellows. They will not disappoint you, and you will look upon them more charitably. Man seek but one thing in life — their pleasure. (240)

There are incessant disappointments in his life caused by too much expectation of others as Cronshaw warns. The "distance" of "norms" is shown by a comparison of this matured standpoint of Cronshaw and narrator, and inexperienced Philip. At first Philip does not see his life as "meaningless" like the narrator does. He finds his guardian William is "weak and self-indulgent" as he grows up (145). Moreover, although he admires Hayward at first in Germany, he is again disappointed by him; "he mingled idleness and idealism so that he could not separate them" (368). After falling out of love with Miss Wilkinson, he feels "reality" is "so different from the ideal" (176). Furthermore, Philip faces the limitation of art too. He sees a lot of would-be painters failing due to poverty in Paris, such as Fanny Price who kills herself in despair. In the end, he dismisses the ideal of Christianity, love, and art one after another.

However, when he gets over the disappointment, he is calm. Despite the fact that the process is hard, the destination he arrives at is peaceful. This difference between the former sufferings and latter calmness is reflected on the idea of the narrator not to have an expectation of others.

In conclusion, the "norm" of the narrator is to deny every way of thinking created by others as "an illusion" (135). On the other hand, Philip develops his "norm" through the incessant disappointments and hardships. The irony of the novel is shown in the contrast between the narrator and immature Philip.

Furthermore, the value of the narrator who does not believe conventional concept is reflected on the way he tells the story. The scene where Philip loves Mildred unreasonably shows the value of the narrator. The more Mildred puts humiliation on Philip, the more he cannot "get her out of his mind" (309). The scene where Philip gives money to Mildred even after her betrayal is far from conventional norms to expect justice on evil.

(430-31).

But he had a fiendish desire to break down their scruples, he wanted to know how abominably they could behave towards him; if he tempted them a little more they would yield, and he took a fierce joy at the thought of their dishonour. (431)

Philip keeps giving Mildred money, knowing she does not even thank him. This immorality of Philip's deed and the motive "fiendish desire" accords with the value of the narrator. In the meantime, it cannot be said that the narrator does not have any concepts. As represented in Cronshaw's words—"Man seek but one thing in life—their pleasure"—each characters' behaviour is motivated by their egotism (Maugham 240). In short, the characters act according to their desire, and this principle is reflected on the narration through the story. For instance, Philip starts to follow Mildred, because he feels he is "humiliated" by her (309). In short, the motivation of his love is seen in his desire to be respected by others. Second, many of his decisions in his life are caused by his intolerance to loneliness in his life. He gives up continuing his study at Oxford because he cannot stand his school life without any friends (86-88). Furthermore, he abandons his life in London to be a chartered accountant for exactly the same reason, the loneliness (190). In short, as we can see from these decisions, there is a lack of other's affection toward him. On top of that, his egotism also consists of pride, and is reflected on the numerous descriptions of contrast between his "emotional" personality and shyness, which hides the real emotion (88). "Flushing" is one of his few signs to show such oppressed feelings (88). In short, there is always the desire to be loved and respected by others deep down behind his

behaviour, but the hope is often not attained, since others have the same desire as well. In other words, the structure of this novel is based on a principle of a collision between egotism of each character.

Throughout the text, the attitude of the narrator is consistent. He sees the motivation of every act of characters "their pleasure." One of the typical examples is William, whose selfishness is reflected on the modesty of Mrs Carey. He is always given better foods and a more comfortable chair than his wife, justifying himself with the importance of his job as a Vicar. His hypocrisy is revealed through the ironical description of how he does not appreciate his wife yielding him the most comfortable seat in the house. The principle of his acts, following the desire for mere "pleasure," is implied in this contrast ironically.

In short, the "norm" of the narrator not to follow conventional values is expressed in the way he narrates. For example, because Mildred and Griffiths are not punished they do not repent their deed betraying Philip. The aim of the narrator is not to see how justice is done, but show the fact that they behave following their instinct to be happy.

In the meantime, "control of sympathy" is also one of the techniques of the author to adjust the distance between the reader and character (Booth 274). Booth insists that the reader shares the experience with the character, and has an illusion as if the character's fault is his own (280). When the reader feels sympathy towards Philip and shares his despair, he is also the target, for whom the author intends to give advice to abandon fixed ideas. In other words, through sharing the experience with Philip, the reader is also supposed to learn how life is vain, when measured by conventional ideas. Irony in this novel, as a message from the author to the reader, is completed by this link between Philip and the reader.

2. Paradox of sympathy

However, with regard to the reader's sympathy to the characters there is an unreasonable paradox. As I quoted in the introduction, according to Plato, art is far from truth, since what is expressed in art is a mere optical experience of the artist (425-26). In other words, the audience and painter share the experience of perception through the picture. It follows from this assumption that if the painter succeeds to represent his experience perfectly, the audience can perceive the same view. However, is it really possible for different subjects to experience things in the same way? Is the experience as simple as Plato describes?

To analyse the experience as an object of art, I will quote Franz Roh's theory of the perception in connection to art.

When I see several apples on a table, I receive an extremely complex sensation (even without leaving the plane of aesthetic intuition)... I am overcome by a much wider amalgam of colors, spatial forms, tactile representations, memories of smells and tastes; in short, a truly unending complex that we understand by the name of *thing*. (19)

According to Roh, this "unending complex" of apples' description including the viewer's response is what should be expressed in painting (19). There is a development from Plato to Roh, in a sense the experience is rendered to be connected with both external and internal factors of mind. The experience is seen not only from optical, but also mental aspect such as the impression of the object (19). For Roh, the perception is "unending complex," since it entails the movement of mind such as "memories" (19).

This development from Plato to Roh shows significant change in relation to the object of art. According to Ian Watt, while "Realist of the Middle Ages" believed that "the true realities"

were found in "universals, classes or abstractions, and not the particular, concrete objects of sense-perception," "Modern realism" sees it in "the individual" (89). This is consistent with the change of the standpoint from Plato to Roh. The object of art became more and more abstract, being connected with the subject of the artist and audience.

I will compare this new definition of art's object with the author's intrusion on his work. To attract the reader's sympathy for characters in the work, the experience as an object of art is presupposed to be universal. It is essential that the expressed emotion is shared by the author and reader, to entail "sympathy" through the text. In other words, the author and reader need to be connected by the emotion of characters as an assumption of "sympathy."

However, this notion of commonness in the experience contains an essential contradiction. Roh insists that "unending complex" of the experience should be depicted with "a full objectivity" (19). It follows from the notion that the experience, including the mental aspects, can be represented in an objective way. From this view it can be said that the reader feels sympathy through "full objective" description of the character's mind. However, while what is expressed in the picture is the painter's personal experience, each of the audience also receives it in their own way.

According to Watt, a novel is "original," since the experience represented in the work is "individual" (90-91). The author writes what he feels as it is, and the reader interprets the text in his own way. It follows from this theory that sympathy is fiction. Since the author and reader share different experiences, it is impossible to confirm whether they share same emotion through the character. Even if the author depicts how the character feels with "a full objectivity" as Roh says, the reader's impression may

not be equal with the description (19). In this standpoint, the author is unable to control the reader, for he cannot predict how the text will affect the reader. The author and reader are isolated from each other with regard to the experience.

On the other hand, there is a contrary way of thinking. If what is expressed in the novel is shared among the author and reader, the "originality" of the text would be denied. Julia Kristeva insists that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). There are bases under different texts, such as "social value" or "moral *message*" which connect them (69). She sees language "double," because it is always linked in the dialogue between the speaker and addressees (69). On the premise that communication through language is based on the "linkage," sympathy with characters is possible. Even though the way to perceive things varies among the individuals, the essence of their emotions such as sadness or happiness can be shared. In other words, though the progress differs, the nature of the experience can be the same. Such sympathy between different subjects leads to the possibility of the dominance of the author in his work. According to Kristeva, "the one who writes is the same as the one who reads" (86-87). If the experience is shared between the author and reader, they are connected mutually through text. The author's intention to control the reader to feel sympathy is based on this assumption. She sees the text from the opposite view from Watt's, who thinks the text is "original."

To sum up, the dominance of the author depends on how the experience is seen. If the experience is personal, as individual views are not identical with each other, the experience through the text is also "original." Therefore, the author is not responsible for his work. On the other hand, if one sees the nature of emotion from the experience equal among different subjects, the

content of the text can be universal. Thus the author is dominant in his work.

However, Booth's theory gives a clue into solving this apparently unresolvable contradiction. He suggests the method of reading the text in both subjective and objective ways at the same time. First, he denies the possibility of an objective view like "science" (68). To express with complete neutrality is impracticable, for any words uttered by a certain subject cannot be free from the speaker's value (68). The notion of "neutrality" itself is a paradox, because the approval of "neutrality" is valued (69). Therefore, he denies the possibility of "neutrality" of the narrator as a first condition (68-70). In the meantime, he also insists that the too impersonal way of the narration ruins his work (86). The author's personal view which is disclosed by a clumsy way, such as partiality towards the character, should not be seen in the work (77). In short, although the author's subjectivity could not be removed completely, the way how to express it should be objective. The "implied author" is his theory to show the subjectivity in an objective way (71). According to Booth, the "real author" and "implied author" must be distinguished (71). He insists that "signs of the real author's untransformed loves and hates are almost always fatal" for the work (86). In the case of *Of Human Bondage*, some readers may disagree with the idea to deny conventional views such as religion. Booth says that "all of us would like the novelist somehow to operate on the level of our own passion for truth and right, a passion which by definition is not the least prejudiced" (70). "To project persona" and the "real author" are "two extremes of subjectivism," and the ideal position of the author is in between them; thus the author should be a subject who is objective (Booth, 83).

Although a standpoint expressed in the work is possibly the author's disguise, the intention of the author to express a certain

theme through the work is definitely true. For instance, Booth says the author controls the "distance" between the reader, narrator, and the character (155). This "intention" of controlling is the real author, although every other element in the novel can be his disguise.

As I mentioned in the introduction, to see art as a creation or copy of reality, the author tends to be excluded. In any case the authorial intrusion makes the work unnatural. On the other hand, Booth's theory of irony suggests the author's intentional intrusion, and this is the key to solve the antinomy over the experience.

The experience is infinite, because both a subject and object of the perception is abstract. When one sees an apple, the apple causes infinite mental reaction. Similarly, when a certain word is uttered, it has an intention of the speaker behind it. In other words, the intention of the speaker gives the uttered word a certain direction. Here I return to Plato's theory. Plato discriminates art from real objects, as it "represents" just superficial factors of the model (425), but there is another aspect in the difference. The object in the picture has its purpose to be good as art. In short, the function of the language to give the object certain "direction" is consistent with the nature of art itself.

When the author intrudes on his work using irony, the same thing happens. He gives a certain direction on the infinite object, that is, the experience. In this sense Booth insists that what is told in the novel is "reliable," for there is an assumption that it is fiction (Booth 3). He says that in the novel the reader can get information "no one in so-called real life could possibly know" (3).

What is told in the novel is far from truth, since it is the experience rather than realities, following Plato's theory (Plato 425). This reality has two opposite dimensions. If the reality is a

solid fact, the artist should restrain his own view as much as possible. On the other hand, if the centre of the world is a subject to witness an object, the artist needs to represent his subjectivity in detail. The former reality is proved to be impossible to be represented by Plato, since art cannot transcend the subject of the artist. The work is produced through the artist's intention, while it is accepted through the audience's impression. Therefore, at least with regard to art, realities should be aimed at a subject rather than an object.

However, there are opposite ways of thinking which can never be reconciled with regard to this experience. If the experience is "individual" and "original" as Watt says, what is expressed in art cannot be shared between the artist and audience (91). It shows that the speaker and addressee are isolated and incommunicable. On the other hand, if the experience is universal, no element in the novel is original and derived from other factors in the context, as Kristeva insists (66). Therefore, the distinction completely "subjective" or "objective" way of narration is not possible. Every word is inseparable from a subject, since it cannot be free from the context.

"Artificial authority" suggested by Booth solves this paradox (4). When the author's personal view is shown through rhetoric such as "irony," the subjectivity is qualified with the very "artificial" nature of the expression. Although the experience is infinite and ambiguous in reality, it is given a certain direction when it becomes an object of art. The irony is one of such ways of expression which gives the direction. Irony discloses an artificial aspect of the work, since it shows the shadow of the author.

Conclusion

Seeing the author's shadow in the text is equal to regard it

among its context, which opens up infinite abstraction. Once a given word is uttered, the definition is involved in unlimited ambiguity. The impression of the word varies with each individual, since each of them belongs to the infinite movements of mind such as memories. In the meantime, the text is essentially involved in the context where irony is implied. Since the ironical message is hidden behind the superficial sense, the reader is required to understand both literal and implied meanings of the text. In short, the speaker's shadow in the text is stressed by irony.

According to Booth, irony is one of the techniques of the author controlling the reader's interpretation of the novel (155-59). He insists that through irony, the "distance" between the "author, narrator, the other characters, and the reader" is regulated (155). In *Of Human Bondage*, the "distance" is seen between the narrator and protagonist Philip. Philip finds that the conventional standards such as religion, love, or happiness are indeed an illusion as he goes through various difficulties in his life. On the other hand, the narrator observes his growth from the omniscient standpoint. These two opposite values are compared, and irony is implied in the distance between them. Furthermore, irony in these novels is intended for the reader, on top of the protagonists. It is essential for the reader to have sympathy for them to fulfil the author's intention. Thus, the author dominates how the reader will interpret the novel through both irony and sympathy.

Booth insists that the author should be neither "subjective" nor "objective" (85-86). What is expressed in the novel such as the theme of the novel is certainly a reflection of his subject, so "no author ever manages to create a work which shows complete impartiality" (Booth 78). However, the author can express the subjectivity through an objective way, "to protect himself rather than to reveal his subject" (85). The protection of the clumsy

subjectivity is the "implied author" (71), and irony is one of the means of how to show such an "implied author" (85).

What is expressed with language is ambiguous when it is concerned with the context. The impression of one word differs with each of the speaker and addressee. However, at the same time the word is given direction when it is involved in the context. When a word is uttered through a certain subject, there is a certain intention behind the act of speaking.

Booth says what is narrated in the novel is "reliable," because it is supposed to be "artifice" (3). When the reader is conscious of the fact the work is fiction, the ambiguity of the experience as an object of an art work is solved. Irony is one of such devices which tells the reader the work is not real. It cannot be proved if the reader really comprehends what the author says in his work or not, since the experience is infinite and the gap between the author and reader can never be removed.

To read a novel is an indirect experience, since the reader experiences the life of the character through the text. In the text, the author creates a certain standpoint, and the reader sees the world through the angle. The angle has to be consistent, for if the angle fluctuates, the fictional world is ruined. In *Of Human Bondage*, the narrator's angle is to see the world without any kinds of conventional ideas. The immorality of the novel such as Philip's unreasonable love for Mildred is one of the factors that creates this angle. This personal view created by the author is legitimated through rhetoric such as irony.

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