

Free Indirect Speech in *Northanger Abbey*

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Abstract—The thesis mainly analyzes the Free Indirect Speech in Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (Volume 2). When Austen describes Catherine's feeling for Henry Tilney, it is difficult for us to distinguish the subjective consciousness of the narrator from the character. Their calm and objective tone is prone to arouse the resonance with the readers. Authorial narrator sometimes appears to explain the fate of Catherine. When Austen describes Catherine's expedition to Northanger Abbey, the character has more prominent subjective consciousness, and readers can distance themselves from the character and examine Catherine's ridiculous and irrational behavior and feel the ironic effects. The thesis points out that Austen used this technique to portray Catherine, who was able to deal with her feeling for Henry reasonably, however, was influenced greatly by the Gothic novels at that time, and could not handle the relationship between reality and fiction very well.

Index Terms— narrator, character, free indirect speech, resonance, ironic effects

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the introduction of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen began writing *Northanger Abbey* in 1798. After revising it in 1803, she named it *Susan* and revised the novel again in 1816. The *Northanger Abbey* was published in December 1817, and was positioned as a legend by *Morning Chronicle*. (Sun Zhili, 2009, p.1) The reason for positioning the legend may be related to the Gothic plot described in the novel: the heroine often reads some Gothic novels and has nightmares, and what she has experienced in Northanger Abbey is in sharp contrast with the Gothic horror scenes described in the novel, so this is just a means of publicity.

The novel refers to several Gothic novels at that time: *Castles of Wolfenbach*, *Clermont*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, *Midnight Bell*, *Orphan of the Rhine*, and *Horrid Mysteries*. (Austen, 2015, p.25) Throughout the novel, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is the most important, which has a profound influence on the heroine. Austen did not follow the trend to write a Gothic novel. Instead, she portrayed a heroine who wanted to verify the Gothic plot described in *Udolpho* through her experience at Northanger Abbey. The characters are directly projected by the heroine on the real-life characters (the heroine projected the ferocious gangster Montoni in the novel of *Udolpho* on General Tilney), and the Gothic novels at that time are thus satirized. Therefore, it can be viewed as an "anti-Gothic intention". (Sun Zhili, 1988, p.35)

In her early twenties Austen wrote this novel which was composed of two volumes. The first volume is about how Catherine Morland of ordinary origin got to know Henry Tilney who was a clergyman and of a very respectable family in Gloucestershire. They admired each other, but they were thwarted by Thorpe and Tilney's father. There are also other characters, to name a few, Catherine's brother James Morland, Catherine's friend Isabella, Catherine's neighbor Mr. and Mrs. Allen, Tilney's sister Miss Tilney, Tilney's father General Tilney, who were closely related to Catherine's fate. Isabella turned out to be a person who at first was fond of James Morland and later Henry Tilney's brother. She was in marked contrast to Catherine in personality. The second volume is about Catherine's visit to Northanger Abbey. Catherine was invited to visit Northanger Abbey but was turned from Northanger Abbey by Tilney's father without any reason and abruptly. Later, Henry apologized to Catherine, and they had a happy ending.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Current Research on Free Indirect Speech

Free Indirect Speech was theoretically officially named by Saussure's student Charles Bally in 1912. Hu Yamin once traced the history of Free Indirect Speech: Bally, Lorck and Spitzer's views on Free Indirect Speech. He defined Free Indirect Speech as follows: a kind of discourse mode narrating the language, feelings and thought of a character from the perspective of the character in the third person. It presents the form of objective narrative and the narrator's description, but what evokes in the reader's mind is the character's voice, action and mood. (Hu Yamin, 1989, p.81) Free Indirect Speech mainly has three features: the third person, past tense and non-reported clause. Free Indirect Speech can achieve different effects. (Shen & Wang, 2010, p.161-167; McHale, 1978, p.249-287; Cohn, 1978, p.116-126) Free Indirect Speech can achieve effects of irony, empathy, ambiguity, semantic density, and has the strengths of both indirect and direct Speech. (Shen & Wang, 2010, p.161-167)

Because there is no reported clause, the retelling is consistent with the narrative in person and tense. If the character's language does not have obvious characteristics of subjective consciousness, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish it from the narrator's description when expressed in Free Indirect Speech. (Shen & Wang, 2010, p.164) Some instances of Free Indirect Speech are authoritative descriptions by omniscient narrators. The author sometimes uses an ambiguous form to "mislead" readers and thus a dramatic effect can be produced. (Shen, 1991a, p.11-16) When illustrating the effect produced by character's discourse mode, Shen Dan mentioned that we should pay attention to the relationship between character's subjective consciousness and narrator's subjective consciousness. For example, we should pay attention to the extent to which the narrator summarizes the discourse of the character; whether the narrator replaced the character's point of view with his own point of view; whether the narrator used his calm and objective words to replace the linguistic component with the character's personality or emotional characteristics; whether the narrator reveals his attitude while retelling the character's discourse. (Shen, 1991b, p.18)

The domestic research on the novel *Northanger Abbey* is mainly conducted from the perspectives of Gothic elements, marriage, money, intertextuality, Cooperative Principle, figure and background, just to name a few. Hao Lianxin and Che Xiaorui discussed the use of Free Indirect Speech in *Northanger Abbey*. The article focuses on the fifteenth chapter of the novel: Tilney came to visit Catherine and apologize for his father's behavior after Catherine was turned from Northanger Abbey. The article points out that Austen's use of Free Indirect Speech can show how she views things. (Hao Lianxin & Che Xiaorui, 2010, p.61-62)

Narelle Shaw argued that in volume one, there are just four brief examples of Free Indirect Speech. By comparison, the incidence of Free Indirect Speech is inordinately high in volume two, and there occurs an intriguing concentration in conjunction with the figure of General Tilney. (Shaw, 1990, p.597) In volume one, the following four examples are related to Bath: when Isabella expressed her feeling for Catherine's brother James Morland, and Austen used Free Indirect Speech to express Isabella's prevarication, and her egotistical absorption in her own affairs or self-centered personality; Austen used Free Indirect Speech to express Mrs. Allen's views on the weather to create ironic effects; Austen used Free Indirect Speech to indicate General Tilney's protests when he thought Catherine came from a wealthy family and was angry with servants' negligence; Catherine did not have idea why General Tilney invited her to spend a day with his daughter, Austen used Free Indirect Speech to achieve ironic effects and reveal General Tilney and Catherine's personality. In Volume two, Austen used Free Indirect Speech to describe Isabella's indifference to friends; Catherine's belief in the Gothic world reached a comedic effect; when Catherine and General Tilney communicated with each other, General Tilney's greed nature was exposed and he became a villain who will thwart Catherine and Tilney's marital career. Shaw argued that Austen used this technique to achieve ironic effects and revealed her potential to shape characters. (Shaw, 1990, p. 591-596)

B. Author's Views on Free Indirect Speech

This thesis mainly uses the method of close reading to analyze the second volume of the novel, and explores the intention and effects of Austen's use of Free Indirect Speech in depicting Catherine's inner feelings. When Austen described the love between Catherine and Tilney, it is difficult to distinguish the subjective consciousness of the narrator from the character. They were calm and objective, and thus aroused readers' resonance with the character. Authorial narrator sometimes appeared to explain the fate of Catherine. When Austen depicted Catherine's exploratory journey to Northanger Abbey, the narrator's description gradually disappeared, the subjective consciousness of the character gradually became prominent. Austen focused more on character's mental activities, and depicted the character who wanted to confirm the description of the Gothic novel was unreasonable. Readers can distance themselves from the character and fully appreciate the absurdity of the character's thought as onlookers and thus feel the ironic effects.

III. ANALYSIS OF FREE INDIRECT SPEECH

A. Mixed Subjective Consciousness of Narrator and Character

The second volume of the novel continues to depict Allen and Catherine's stay in Bath. Under the same roof as the beloved Tilney, Catherine became very sensitive to Tilney's behavior. She felt that "Tilney had never said so little nor been so little agreeable." (Austen, 2015, p.103) By the 6th week of Bath's trip, there might be only one week left, and she didn't even want to be separated from Tilney. Since deciding to renew the house for two weeks, Catherine was full of expectations now, and "the present was now comprised in another three weeks, and her happiness being certain for that period the rest of her life was at such a distance as to excite but little interest." (Austen, 2015, p.110). However, "Miss Tilney told her of her father's having just determined upon quitting Bath by the end of another week." (Austen, 2015, p.110) Then General Tilney invited her to go to Gloucestershire (Tilney was born in a decent family in Gloucestershire) to accompany her friends. Catherine was about to start a trip to Northanger Abbey:

Northanger Abbey! These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine's feelings to the highest point of ecstasy. Her grateful and gratified heart could hardly restrain its expressions within the language of tolerable calmness. To receive so flattering an invitation! To have her company so warmly solicited! (Austen, 2015, p.111)

Austen used three exclamation marks to highlight Catherine's surprise and excitement. On the one hand, Catherine loves to read Gothic novels. In *Northanger Abbey*, she can verify everything described in the novels in person. On the other hand, she can enjoy her stay with her sweetheart Tilney. Most importantly, this was an invitation from General Tilney who assumed that Catherine came from a wealthy family. Catherine innocently thought that the invitation was a great honor. When she was later turned from the *Northanger Abbey*, she still did not know Thorpe's plot.

The Free Indirect Speech in this paragraph is mixed with the voice of the narrator, expressing the character's excitement. Free Indirect Speech has certain advantages in expressing the mental activities of character, and it can be switched freely from the voice of the narrator to the voice of the character. Catherine was in a bad mood when she knew the sudden change of agenda of the Tilneys, and later she had mixed feelings about having the opportunity to improve her acquaintance with Tilney. Does Catherine come from a wealthy or poor family? General Tilney thought that Catherine came from a wealthy family based on Thorpe's words. As for Catherine, she presents herself as poor, however, the narrator said in the final chapter: "that in no sense of the word were they necessitous or poor, and that Catherine still had three thousand pounds. (Austen, 2015, p.211) According to the third chapter, her family was not as respectable as Tilney's. This makes her very sensitive to her and Tilney's relationship. In chapter four, Catherine looked forward to Tilney's appearance. When she did not see Tilney, she would feel lost but still remain reasonable. She always viewed the relationship between her and Tilney with reason. She always maintained her dignity and did not blindly draw a conclusion and until she saw Tilney again in chapter eight. Readers also think that General Tilney has been thoughtful and they hope that she will further develop her acquaintance with Tilney.

Before Catherine set out for *Northanger Abbey*, Austen described Catherine's state of mind:

The Tilneys, they, by whom, above all, she desired to be favorably thought of, outstripped even her wishes in the flattering measures by which their intimacy was to be continued. She **was to be** their chosen visitor, she **was to be** for weeks under the same **roof** with the person whose society she mostly prized – and, in addition to all the rest, this **roof was to be the roof** of an abbey! Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney- and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill. (Austen, 2015, p.112)

This paragraph can also be viewed as the description of the omniscient narrator and summary of Catherine's discourse, or Free Indirect Speech with an ambiguous effect. The author used the parallel structure "she was to be" to express Catherine's ardent expectations and having a chance to see the Gothic place she had longed for. Austen used "roof" three times to indicate two meanings: under the same roof as the beloved Tilney, and under the roof of the *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine's juxtaposition of her feeling for Henry and *Northanger Abbey* shows that *Northanger Abbey* plays a very important role in her mind. She was sensible about her and Henry's feelings, with eager anticipation, and was convinced of the scenes described in Gothic novels.

Later, Catherine's love encountered a crisis, and she almost lost her beloved Tilney due to her suspicions. *Northanger Abbey* was not the place described in the novel she had read. When Catherine suffered a double blow, readers couldn't help crying for her suffering. When the readers read the most heartbreaking chapter thirteen in the second volume, they may find it hard to distinguish the subjective consciousness of the narrator from the character:

Turned from the house, and in such a way! Without any reason that could justify, any apology that could atone for the abruptness, the rudeness, nay, the insolence of it, Henry at a distance – not able even to bid him farewell. Every hope, every expectation from him suspended, at least, and who could say how long? Who could say when they might meet again? And all this by such a man as General Tilney, so polite, so well-bred, and heretofore so particularly fond of her! (Austen, 2015, p.188)

The narrator brings the readers completely into Catherine's mental world and makes them feel the indignation of being turned from the house by General Tilney. Catherine was very helpless at this time, and neither Henry nor her family could share her sorrow and help her out. She has to rely on herself. Readers are angry about the sudden change in General Tilney's attitude, and compliment her on her calm and objective tone. Catherine was not defeated because of this, she was still full of hope for the future.

Austen's novels often have "storms in the teacup". These seemingly small storms can subvert the lovers' boat. Austen created many "small storms" in the novel, which will be resolved satisfactorily in the end. We will resonate with Catherine and worry about Catherine's encounter with many unfortunate things. What Catherine had experienced is in sharp contrast to Catherine's previous expectations of *Northanger Abbey*. The readers involuntarily sympathized with Catherine and hated General Tilney. When Catherine returned home with great loss, the *Morlands* also thought that "it was a strange business, and that he must be a very strange man." (Austen, 2015, p.195). They used "strange" to comment on General Tilney, but did not explore the misunderstanding behind this.

We should mention that in *Northanger Abbey*, "I" sometimes appeared to explain the fate of characters. "I" said in Chapter fourteen:

It gives credit to every conclusion, and the author must share in the glory she so liberally bestows. But my affair is widely different; I bring back my heroine to her home **in solitude** and **disgrace**; and no sweet elation of spirits can lead me into minuteness. A heroine in a hack past chaise is such a **blow upon sentiment**, as no attempt at grandeur or **pathos** can withstand. (Austen, 2015, p.194)

Lancer views “I” in this novel as authorial “intrusion” or authorial voice. She said: many of Austen’s adolescent writings create authorial narrators who engage spiritedly in extrarepresentational acts.” (Lancer, 1992, p.63) Austen uses authorial “I” to either parody fictional convention, or qualify or personalize, and render ambiguous the resolutions to plots...each creates as well a sense of community with characters or with audience. (Lancer, 1992, p.72-73)

The above boldfaced words can summarize Catherine’s mood when she was turned from Northanger Abbey. The voice of “I” can be seen as author’s further explanation for the heroine’s encounter and also creates a sense of community with readers and won the approval or understanding of readers. The reasons behind Catherine’s humiliation were only revealed in the final chapter. It turned out that Thorpe intentionally misled General Tilney and made Catherine have experienced hardships. Catherine and Tilney finally cleared up the misunderstanding when Tilney came to apologize to her. Austen seems to keep the readers in suspense. If we trace back to the first volume, we find that we have ignored the character “Thorpe”. Because the second volume of the novel mainly deals with Catherine’s journey to the Northanger Abbey, there is no reason for Thorpe to appear. “I” must explain the mystery behind the event.

In Chapter sixteen of the second volume, “I” said:

Concerning the one in question, therefore, I have only to add - aware that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable - that this was the very gentleman whose negligent servant left behind him that the collection of washing-bills, resulting from a long visit at Northanger, by which my heroine was involved in one of her most **alarming adventures**. (Austen, 2015, p. 211)

Austen used authorial narrator “I” to explain why Catherine’s journey to Northanger Abbey turned out to be so alarming. When authorial narrator revealed the truth, if readers recall Catherine’s earlier behavior and found what she had done rather ridiculous and worthless; the washing-bills turned out to be so ironic when Catherine was busy relating them to her earlier reading of Gothic novels. This kind of authorial voice also enhanced the ironic effects produced by Free Indirect Speech.

Park Honan thinks that “what is weak in *Northanger Abbey* is its freshest and most innovative feature - its narrative voice.” (Honan, 1987, p.141) and it is “a lithe and slippery eel of great energy which is less than fully controlled.” (Honan, 1987, p.143) In this novel, generalizations (explicit expressions of ideological stance that refer to “world” beyond the fictional) are quite plentiful. After *Northanger Abbey*, generalizations do not disappear, rather they are rendered contingent and ambiguous through Austen’s use of an “indefinite” free indirect discourse that allows the narrator an equivocal participation in the thoughts of her characters. (Lancer, 1992, p.73)

B. More Prominent Subjective Consciousness of Character

From chapter five to chapter thirteen, Austen describes Catherine’s expedition to Northanger Abbey. Catherine often read some Gothic novels in Bath and had a very rich imagination. She felt that the Northanger Abbey should be consistent with the description in the novel, but the actual exploration disappointed her. In Northanger Abbey, Catherine made an unreasonable guess on General Tilney and explored Tilney’s mother’s room. The narrator has drifted away from the character of the novel, allowing the character of the novel to speak for themselves, and the subjective characteristics of the character become more obvious. The incidence of Free Indirect Speech has increased when Austen describes Catherine’s mental activities, with the aim of expressing irony and highlighting the contrast between ideal and reality. The reader can distance themselves from the narrator and hear the voice of the character reproduced by the narrator, and realize the absurdity of her behavior and thought. With regard to the death of Tilney’s mother, the following examples can illustrate Catherine’s subjective consciousness:

- (1) Why was Miss Tilney embarrassed? **Could** there be any unwillingness on the general’s side to show her over the abbey? The proposal was his own, and was not it odd that she should always take his walk so early? (Austen, 2015, p.144)
- (2) Here was another proof. A portrait – very like- of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! He **must have been** dreadfully cruel to her! (Austen, 2015, p.147)
- (3) Of her unhappiness in marriage, she felt persuaded. The general certainly had been an unkind. husband. He did not love her walk: **could** he therefore have loved her? And besides, handsome as he was, there was a something in the turn of his features which spoke his not having behaved well to her. (Austen, 2015, p.147)
- (4) It was the air and attitude of a Montoni! What **could** more plainly speak the gloomy workings of a mind not wholly dead to very sense of humanity, in its fearful review of past scenes of guilt? Unhappy man! (Austen, 2015, p.153)

The above boldfaced modals can indicate Catherine’s suspicions and reveal her inner world. Readers as onlookers may appreciate her own cleverness temporarily. However, readers will find that her seemingly meticulous mind was full of fantasy. She considered General Tilney a brutal and vicious person. She never asked Tilney what his father and mother were like. However, she would like to take an adventure in person, and view Northanger Abbey as a place of terror. Henry Tilney reminded her of the age, country and religion, laws and education (Austen, 2015, p.162). Henry scolded her for her malicious ideas, and she became rather embarrassed and shed tears. Austen uses Free Indirect Speech to create a dramatic effect, allowing readers to directly feel the mental activities of the character and experience the character’s irrational and ridiculous personality.

IV. CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the effects caused by the Free Indirect Speech in *Northanger Abbey*. When Austen depicting Catherine's feeling for Henry Tilney, it is hard to distinguish the subjective consciousness of the narrator from the character. This kind of mixed description can arouse the readers' resonance with the character. Authorial narrator sometimes appeared to explain the fate of Catherine and later became indefinite and participated in the thoughts of characters in the form of Free Indirect Speech (Discourse) in Austen's other novels. When Austen depicting Catherine's journey to Northanger Abbey, the narrator's description gradually faded away, and the subjective characteristics of the character in the novel became prominent as Catherine's adventure was further described. In this way the readers will distance themselves from the character and experience Catherine's irrationality as onlookers. Austen did not explicitly indicate how Gothic novels did harm to people, but through Free Indirect Speech allowed readers to experience the protagonist's ridiculous and exhausting shuttle between the ideal world and the real world. Especially when Catherine returning to reality, everything Catherine carefully planned seemed so redundant, and her feeling of frustration and shame made readers involuntarily admire Austen's seemingly gentle but ironic writing technique.

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