

Search for the Ultimate Real: the Collapse of Narrative in *Shirley*

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リアルさの探求： *Shirley* における語りの破綻をめぐって

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Abstract : Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* has been criticized as a failure since its first publication in 1849. It is undeniable that the novel crucially lacks the unity in its plot and thematic focus. My main concern in this paper is to clarify where this lack of unity originates and what effect the lack generates, by exploring the process of the narrative collapse.

In this novel, Charlotte declares her intention to write "something real," which is totally different from her former, more successful, novel. However, in her earnest exploration in searching for the "real," the novel *Shirley* results in lacking unity both in plot and theme, as well as the narrative collapse. Yet, the collapse and inconsistency of its narrative simultaneously shows the dynamic process of the author's radical, ongoing change in her persistent and consistent endeavors to search for the ultimate real; even if it only, as a result, shows her continual denial of whatever real has been achieved, and her endeavor still to continue the search for it.

Key Words : *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë, narrative collapse

抄録 : Charlotte Brontë の *Shirley* は、出版直後から失敗作だと評価を受けてきた。この作品は確かにテーマやスタイルという点で一貫しておらず、物語を語る語り手の視点すら、一人称に近い主観的立場と三人称的な客観的立場の間で揺れ動いている。本稿では、この小説の統一性のなさがどこに起因しているかを、語りが破綻していく過程を追いながら探っている。

Shirley の語りの破綻は、実は、状況小説からフェミニズムのプロパガンダ、そして主観的現実を求めるロマンスへと作者が揺れ動きながら、自分にとってリアルなものを探し求める、その意識の変化の過程を示している。リアルさを求める作者の姿勢は自らの描き出した「現実」に安住せず、描き出した「現実」を常に拒否し続けることによって示され、結果としてプロットすら崩れてしまう。しかし、そのパワフルな語りの破綻の過程それ自体が、否定を通して究極のリアルを探求しようとした、作家の誠実な試みの記録となっているのである。

索引語 : 『シャーリー』, シャーロット・ブロンテ, 語りの破綻

Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* has been criticized as a failure since it was first published in 1849.¹ The main reason for this criticism is, as G. H. Lewes pointed out directly after its publication, that this novel as a whole lacks unity. Lewes observes as follows:

Hence the unity of *Jane Eyre* in spite of its clumsy and improbable contrivances, [sic] was great and effective: the fire of one passion fused the discordant materials into one mould. But in *Shirley* all unity, in consequence of defective art, is wanting.... The various scenes are gathered up into three volumes,—they have not grown into a work. (466-7)

It is true that this novel splits and wavers in many of its aspects such as themes, style, and narrative. As to the theme, it contains that of romance, love, and marriage, as well as various social issues such as religion, politics, class, history, nation and nationality, and sexual discrimination. With regard to the style, it contains not only "chunks of text in foreign languages, old ballads, hymns, poems, even a school essay interspersed with extended reflections upon such themes as the effects of the war with France and the sufferings of old maids" (*Charlotte Brontë* 144), but also miscellaneous genres such as Shakespearean comedies, memoirs, diaries, comedy of manners, social novels, fairy tales and myth. In addition, what causes confusion for the readers the most is that the point of view of the narrator, who narrates the storyline, wavers between the subjective, first-person-like point of view and the objective, third-person-like one. My main concern in this paper is to clarify where this lack of unity originates in the novel and what effect the lack generates, by following in some detail the process of the narrative collapse.

After the immense success of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë, for the first time in her life, had the experience of writing a novel as a famous author. After searching for a topic and accepting Lewes's advice to "beware of Melodrama" and "adhere to the real" (*The Brontës* 547), she chose to write a novel with the background of the Luddite Movement in the 1810s. Published under the name of "Currer Bell, Author of 'Jane Eyre,'" this novel shows us the author's eager and ambitious attempt to write something different from her former successful work.²

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken.... Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning.... (5)³

Charlotte's declaration to write "something real" and "something unromantic" suggests, at least in the first half of the novel where the time and space are concretely set in the history and also the topic is focused on Luddite Movement, that she intended to write something similar to the "condition-of-England novels," a group of social novels of her time. In this part, the first-person narrator describes every character and scene from an impartial, objective point of view. The narrator does not take anyone's side, and depicts a scene as if he were describing a picture in front of him.⁴

You shall see them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward into the little parlour—there they are at dinner. Allow me to introduce them to you:—Mr. Donne, curate of Whinbury; Mr. Malone, curate of Briarfield; Mr. Sweeting, curate of Nunnely.... At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside.... (6)

Here, the narrator plays the role of an omniscient narrator, who narrates the story directly to the readers, and freely handles the scene from a distance through his objective descriptions. This is emphasized by the efficient

use of the pronoun "we" here, which enables the first-person narrator "I" to create an interaction with "you," the supposed listeners, i.e., the readers. The narrator retreats to the readers' side in order to comically and ironically describe the curates, who are not "us" but just "objects" to be looked at. In other words, the narrator at this point creates the scene panoramically by keeping a certain distance from the characters he describes. This ironical distance between the narrator and the characters assures the "realistic" description of society.

Another assertion of the objectivity of his point of view is made by the narrator himself when he emphasizes his conscious and impartial technique to create the characters: "I describe imperfect characters (every character in this book will be found to be more or less imperfect, my pen refusing to draw anything in the model line)" (61). The narrator tries to make all the characters imperfect and human-like, therefore, more realistic by refusing any romantic or idealizing characterizations. This conscious use of neutral descriptions of the characters, without any partiality for a certain character, clarifies the narrator's determination to portray real life as objectively as possible.

This seemingly objective stance of the narrator's, however, is not at all stable, and easily collapses in various parts of the novel. As is frequently noticed, in spite of Charlotte's own denial, many of the characters and episodes in this novel are modeled after real people and actual events,⁵ and partly because of this fact, the narrator sometimes deviates from the fictional narrative and inserts elements utterly irrelevant and foreign to the plot of the novel itself. One such instance is seen when the narrator describes Mr. Yorke's children: he depicts the future life of each of the Yorke children, which is totally unrelated to the storyline, thereby consequently resulting in the collapse in the unity of the plot.

Mr. Yorke, if a magic mirror were now held before you, and if therein were shown you your two daughters as they will be twenty years from this night, what would you think? The magic mirror is here: you shall learn their destinies—and first that of your little life, Jessie....Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose's guardian arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials....

Now, behold Rose, two years later....The little, quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere. Will she never come back?

Martin might be a remarkable man: whether he will or not, the seer is powerless to predict: on that subject, there has been no open vision. (149-152)

Here, the narrator abruptly shifts the temporal point of view into the future, and puts an unnatural "authorial" comment on their future totally irrelevant to the plot. The present for the narrator here is no longer the point of time from which he narrates the story: it turns to the present, in which he lives, and accordingly, the characters described in the narrative are no longer just fictional characters; instead it is as if they were the real people who the narrator actually knows. At this point, the narrator is not an objective observer of the scene. The omniscient narrator, who at first looks at a picture with the readers and narrates the scene from a distance, now feels a personal sympathy with the Yorkes, and uses the awkward, jarring future tense. The readers cannot help feeling as if the narrator were one of the characters in the novel, and the critical and ironical distance between the narrator and the characters in the beginning is no longer maintained.

Another instance of this strangely intrusive presence of the narrator is shown in the following passage:

Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women, especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness.... but the most downcast glance has its

loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel-survey of life. I remember once seeing a pair of blue eyes, that were usually thought sleepy, secretly on the alert, and I knew by their expression ... that for years they had been accustomed to silent soul-reading. The world called the owner of these blue eyes "bonne petite femme" (she was not an Englishwoman): I learned her nature afterwards...she was the finest, deepest, subtlest schemer in Europe. (273)

The general description about how women are supposed to be and are treated in a patriarchal, androcentric society is abruptly interrupted by the personal experience of the narrator "I." At this point, the narrator emerges in the middle of the novel as his own person, and accordingly, his view becomes anything but the omniscient, third-person narrative point of view. At the same time, however, this novel does not deal with the inner subjective reality of the narrator "I," and therefore, it gives us a very abrupt and strange impression, because the narrator suddenly and intrusively narrates his own personal experience here, which is again utterly irrelevant to the plot of the novel.

It is in Caroline's description that the narrator most noticeably discards the position of an objective observer. In fact, the narrator repeatedly and deeply sympathizes with Caroline, and urges the readers to empathize with her as well. It is noteworthy that Caroline's relationship with Robert is mostly described from her viewpoint, and thereby that her suffering and agony are directly and vividly depicted. In addition, what is important here is that the narrator consciously employs such a close, sympathetic viewpoint.

...whatever she [Miss Keeldar] felt for Moore, she felt it seriously. And serious, too, were his feelings, and settled were his views, *apparently*....Miss Keeldar *looked* happy in conversing with him, and her joy *seemed* twofold,—a joy of the past and present, of memory and of hope.

What I have just said are Caroline's ideas of the pair: she felt what has just been described. In this feeling, she tried not to suffer; but suffered sharply, nevertheless. (251-2, italics mine)

What the narrator implies here is that Caroline's agony brought by this seemingly intimate relationship between Robert and Shirley is in fact nothing but an illusion based on her own judgment. However, to describe her agony, the narrator does not use the same comical way nor does he keep the same ironical distance as in the description of the love affairs of the curates. Instead, the narrator who is sympathetic to Caroline tries to make readers understand her agony by showing the world just as she sees it. Since the narrator consciously and tactically shows the gap between Caroline's sufferings and the real situation, the readers feel even more sympathetic to Caroline's pitiful state of mind here. This conscious manipulation is even more apparent in the following scene:

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she framed many a prayer after the Christian creed; preferred it with deep earnestness; begged for patience, strength, relief. This world, however, *we all know*, is the scene of trial and probation;...*Most people have had* a period or periods in their lives when they have felt thus forsaken. (351, italics mine)

Here, the use of the pronoun "we" in the description of Caroline's state of mind works effectively to rouse the readers' sympathy towards her. While the same pronoun "we" is apparently used, in the beginning of the novel, in order to keep a certain distance from the characters to be looked at, this pronoun is, at this point, used to get closer to the viewpoint of only one character, Caroline, and to share her experience as "our" own. At this point, the objective narrator resembles, in a way, the passionate, subjective first-person narrator of *Jane Eyre*, who persistently asks for the readers' sympathy and affirmation. Since the readers are very much exposed to Caroline's

viewpoint and are manipulated by the narrator's skillful narrative tactics, we feel it natural to have a sense of identification and sympathy, as well as pity, felt by those who know better than her, with Caroline's way of thinking.

However, this intrusive narrator sometimes exceeds or deviates from the normal narrative in this manipulation as well. When Caroline suffers from Robert's change, after she felt happy because of some affection shown by him on the previous day, the narrator describes her agony as follows:

A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing.... You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyred.... Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift [of a scorpion]. Let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob....

But what has been said in the last page or two is not germane to Caroline Helstone's feelings, or to the state of things between her and Robert Moore. (105-6)

Here, again, the narrator digresses from the main plot and unveils his own subjective feelings, while putting aside describing the characters' feelings and episodes as an objective bystander. Moreover, another strange digression is shown here: though, as I pointed out earlier in note 4, the narrator is supposed to be a male by the author herself, this description is made as if the narrator were a female, because the viewpoint of the narrator is much closer to the "lover feminine." This is another level of intrusiveness, this time, by the author herself. In fact, what makes the narrative point of view waver the most, especially in the latter half of the novel, is this frequent intrusiveness of the author's. In some parts, the shifts in the narrator's point of view between objective and subjective are the author's conscious manipulation, such as the scene that leads the readers' sympathy towards Caroline. However, sometimes the author's absorption into the narrative exceeds the limits of a fictional narrative, and some instances of this digression eventually led the readers to identify the author, and the narrator deviates from his own role to "narrate" a story, just like in this scene, and tends to expose the author's own feelings or thoughts. In this sense, it is more accurate to say that the author herself deviates her own role as a novelist, and makes her own personal comment on a topic, which, consequently, brings about a crucial and sometimes fatal destruction in the unity of the plot and the novel.

As the novel develops, the plot transforms itself from a social novel at the beginning to a romance centering Caroline in the middle, and in accordance with this, the narrator's point of view is changed from an objective, panoramic one to a subjective, sympathetic one, which utterly confuses the readers.⁶ The lack of unity in the plot, which is regarded as the major failure of this novel, is actually closely related to the narrative waver and ambiguity between the narration of objective, third-person realism and that of subjective, first-person romance. At the same time, however, when Caroline experiences an unrequited love and bitterly considers the problems of the society, especially how a woman should and can live inside it, the reality of her feelings exerts an overwhelming power. For example, when Caroline thinks her love is rejected by Robert, she contemplates where she can belong in this world, if she cannot obtain the "ordinary destiny" (174) of being married and becoming a mother. Then she thinks over the three options open for women: namely, a wife, a spinster, and a governess.

...but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do

—better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus, I have no impression that I displease God by my words.... Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents....the matrimonial market is overstocked. (390-1)

Here, Caroline strongly makes the point that women cannot find a place to belong to inside society because society itself does injustice to women and deprives them of a place to live. As Gilbert and Gubar name this novel "a novel about the 'woman question'" (374), the theme of the search for the meaning of women's life is, at this point, very conspicuous and impressive for the readers because of its genuine reality as an urgent social issue, which manifests itself as an even more realistic social issue than class conflict. In this sense, Terry Eagleton's criticism is on the mark that this novel never depicts nor explores the labor issue or the class issue though it superficially mentions them (47). It is the woman issue alone that this novel actually focuses upon, though, in appearance, women's status is regarded as equal to those of laborers or poor people. The determination of the narrator to write something unromantic, namely, something real, results here in the deliberation over the woman issue, which is the most familiar and real matter for the author herself. Accordingly, in her urgent search for the genuine real, she cannot help deviating from the unity in plot of the general Luddite Movement and that of one of the "condition-of-England" novels. In fact, what these thematic uncertainties, caused by the narrative shift from the objective to the subjective point of view, show is that the author is still on the way in searching for what the genuine reality is.

Then, why is the "romantic" marriage, opposite to the unromantic "reality," waiting for both of the heroines, Shirley and Caroline, after all the reflections on the social disputes including the woman issue? Actually, this ending is also one of the points that are criticized as proving the novel's thematic incoherence. Can it truly be right to say that it is romance that offers the final solution to all the problems, leaving those social issues such as sex, labor, and class distinctions on one side? In fact, for Caroline, what is most important in life is love, and the reality of love for her is substantiated and testified in that it is her mother's love that saves her when she is struck by serious illness. Caroline, who asserts that "Love is real: the most real, the most lasting" (378), cannot live without love, and she wastes away when Robert rejects her love. The reciprocal and perfect love between the mother, Mrs. Pryor, and herself alone can save her, because it proves and affirms the subjective reality of love for her, and is far from the mere romantic love: "My own mama,...who belongs to me, and to whom I belong! I am a rich girl now: I have something I can love well, and not be afraid of loving" (448). This reciprocal, interactive relationship is the "love" for Caroline, which can solve every problematic issue in the world for her. In other words, as soon as she obtained her mother's love, the ontological as well as social question as to where she should belong in this life is automatically answered and answered well, because the reality of her life indeed lies in love. Actually, as this love is so genuinely real for Caroline, in this novel, even Providence is tender for her who firmly believes in the reality of love, in that the historical reality perfectly affirms her love in the end: finally her desired romantic love comes true. The Orders in Council which has interfered in Robert's business is, as a historical fact, withdrawn at the end of the novel, and the hero and heroine now can attain happiness through their mutual love and marriage. Though Robert smiles at Caroline when she declares that she will protect him, the mutual, reciprocal love in which she believes can assure, at least on the surface, their happiness in the end. The seemingly "feminist" question of how

women should live in the patriarchal world is never actually taken or addressed seriously as a real social issue there. The most important and pressing matter in this novel is Caroline's own subjective sense of emptiness and how *she* should live inside the world, and now that love fills her void, it can offer the ultimate solution to the question for her, as well as for the author. It is because the reality and substantiality of this "feminist" question is, for the author, ultimately represented only by Caroline's quite subjective impression of her own emptiness.

Thus, it seems that this novel offers love, rather than violent destruction of Luddism, as the ultimate solution to the difficult social issues such as sexual distinctions, class cleavages, and the gap between the rich and the poor. However, it is significant that this novel does not portray Caroline's life alone. There is another important as well as strangely uncanny relationship in the latter half of the novel: namely, that of Shirley and Louis Moore, which is entangled with that of Caroline and Robert. Apparently, Shirley and Louis also attain happiness through their mutual love. The class distinction and inequality of wealth between them is overcome by the unity of their soul, according to the narrator. For example, the narrator describes Louis' proposal and Shirley's acceptance of marriage as follows:

"You do know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you myself. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man."... (621)

..."at your peril, you ever again name such sordid things as money, or property, or inequality. It will be absolutely dangerous to torment me with these maddening scruples." (624)

However, it is difficult to believe that Louis, the wise and admirable mentor, protects Shirley, the helpless, tender pupil, and leads her to happiness, as the narrator asserts. In fact, the unexpected, even abrupt, transformation of Shirley into a very feminine, helpless girl, who previously calls herself an "esquire" (200) and has power, status, and opportunity as well as a strong intention to live inside the male world, is not described in the narrative itself, and makes readers feel uncomfortable. What the novel actually shows us is that this abrupt and unexplained change of Shirley's is only noticed by Louis himself, because the narrator strategically employs Louis's diary to describe their relationship. The power game depicted by the exceedingly proud and nervous viewpoint of Louis's first-person narrative reveals that he distorts and pervades their relationship. He aggressively judges Shirley "womanish" (511) and, as though he still minded their class distinction, he firmly asserts his own superiority to Shirley, saying "You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I," as a response to Shirley's question, "Are we equal at last?" (623). The utopian dream of Louis's does not bear any genuine reality of the women's suffering the narrator describes in Caroline's or Mrs. Pryor's thought and life. As Louis himself admits that "I should sometimes forget Common Sense and believe in Romance" (504), it seems, what happens between Shirley and himself is, in fact, something "Utopian" (495) and a perfect "Romance" (504). Instead of bestowing on his story any reality or giving his view any corroboration, what the narrator actually implies in the novel is Shirley's hesitation in marriage and the fact that their marriage is artfully manipulated by Shirley herself, though these tactics are totally inexplicable in the biased and distorted narrative of Louis's.

Louis had presaged difficulties, and he had found them: in fact, his mistress had shown herself exquisitely provoking; putting off her marriage day by day, week by week, month by month. At first coaxing him with soft pretences of procrastination, and in the end rousing his whole deliberate but determined nature to revolt against her tyranny, at once so sweet and so intolerable.... Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined...but a remark she made a year afterwards proved that she partly

also acted on system. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern: the incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier." (637-8)

The realization of romance, which the narrator depicts in the end of the novel, then, becomes ultimately tentative, uncertain, and even manipulative. The denouement of Caroline's plot is uncannily distorted and marred by the existence of Shirley's plot. As a result, the readers cannot have any assurance as to their happiness in matrimony of both couples. The narrator never offers an optimistic view on their fairy-tale ending, which they apparently obtained through the unity of their souls after all the troubles and obstacles. In fact, there is no description of the matrimony between the self-complacent Louis and the enigmatic Shirley, and the future envisioned by Robert threatens Caroline, who anticipates the environmental destruction brought by his scheme, which also shows the narrator "a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel" (645). At the end of the novel, the narrator himself enters onto the stage of the novel and tells the scene he saw to the housekeeper, who laments, with the broader viewpoint and perspective than that of the narrator, over the disappearance of fairies in England. Thus again the superiority of the fairy-tale romance that Caroline believes in is subverted. The narrator, who implies the end of fairy tales in England, emerges in the novel in his own person as a member of the harsh real society, and betrays the precariousness of the easy happy ending and the romance based upon one's subjective reality only.

It is undeniable that the novel *Shirley* crucially lacks the unity of its plot and wavers in its thematic focus. This lack of unity is closely related with the frequent, awkward shift of the narrator's viewpoint: the narrator repeatedly approaches and distances himself from each character and episode, exposing his inability to maintain a stable point of view. At the same time, however, this instability of the narrator's viewpoint itself shows that the author is still on the way to exploring what is genuinely real to her, starting from a condition-of-England novel, through the feminist propaganda, to a romance of subjective reality. In the end, the author makes the narrator himself one of the characters and destroys even the subjective reality which is regarded as what is real in Caroline's plot, in order to explore and search more for the ultimate, genuine real. If, generally speaking, the fundamental basis for a first-person narrator to create an objective, realistic world needs that he/she has the solid, retrospective perspective to tell the story of the historical past, it is true to say that this novel in which the narrator becomes a character in the end cannot maintain an objective, realistic view on the world. Simultaneously, in order to make clear this work's difference from the former, quite successful *Jane Eyre*, the author avoids using the same technique of describing the inner, subjective realism of the narrator alone, though she uses a first-person narrator again. *Shirley* actually wavers and splits in this sense, but the process to explore what is the ultimately real is also productive in spite of its undeniable awkwardness. No matter how much the subjective reality seems to be true and assertive as well as persuasive, the solution through Caroline's subjective reality alone would have been no different from Jane Eyre's view on the world. The interaction between the plot of Caroline and that of Shirley only enables the author to make the subjectivity plural, and then, for the first time, to explore the possibility of the universal reality.

Kate Lawson calls the novel's fragmentary plot the "structure of deferral" (564) and estimates it as the author's conscious experiment to show some "gaps" made by its deferral. It can be said that this experiment develops into, as it were, the "narrative of deferral" in the next, more ambitious novel, *Villette*, in which Charlotte creates an

intricate and enigmatic first-person narrator, Lucy Snowe, who narrates in an utterly different way from the monotonous, though passionate, narrative of Jane Eyre. It is true that finally Charlotte Brontë chooses to return to the subjective world of a first-person narrator in the next novel, but the struggle and exploration for reality in this novel definitely helps her to develop and improve various techniques and skills as a novelist. Also, when we think of Charlotte Brontë as a novelist, it is highly significant that she employs Shirley's name as the title of this novel. Though the title figure does not appear in the novel until the end of volume I, she gave her name, after much wavering and deliberation, to the novel which actually gives us an impression that Caroline is the main heroine. This title indeed is the author's declaration that she denies the single subjectivity and makes it plural, and also her radical resistance against herself, by destroying the subjective reality of romance that Jane Eyre and Caroline believe in. In addition, what is even more significant here is that the name Shirley is, in the novel, that of a girl who bears, as her rather odd Christian name, the "masculine family cognomen they [the parents] would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed" (198). This girl, though of course female, regarding herself as "Captain Keeldar, Esq.," inherits the family title and property just as the male successors do, and joins the male business world. Thus, the title figure's sexual ambiguity is the author's conscious strategy to offer, though not perfect, the possibility of an alternative way of living for a woman, when we compare her privileged surroundings with that of Caroline's.

Moreover, we find this title even more implicative, when we recollect that the author, who gave this sexually ambiguous name to not only her heroine but also her novel, also struggled herself with ambition to win fame and status as a novelist in the male dominant world under the pseudonym of yet another sexually ambiguous name, Currer Bell. Not only Caroline but also the author herself might envy and crave for Shirley's sexually ambiguous, in a sense androgynous, power. However, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, Shirley herself cannot escape from the feminine destiny, because she is also fatally connected with Mary Cave, a symbol of femininity, just as Caroline is (388). Shirley, whose power Caroline yearns for, cannot be a true solution to the feminist issue, because the author herself, although she actually endeavored to create a woman beyond sexual and gender cleavage, ultimately bestows a submissive status in marriage on Shirley, at least on the surface, in order to destroy the happy, fairy-tale ending of marriage. Here this novel betrays the author's artistically fatal inconsistency and splits in thematic focus: she cannot pursue any issue thoroughly in this novel, even the feminist issue, which was the most compelling matter for herself. The focus consequently wavers more and more when the author endeavors and struggles to discover something genuinely real. At the same time, even the narrator's sexual identity becomes more and more obscure as the plot develops and the author emphasizes the "real" social issue of women's life, which results in not only thematic but also narrative instability and makes the novel all the more awkward. Then, as a result of Charlotte's insufficient treatment of, for example, such a sensitive issue as the feminist issue, contemporary critics including G. H. Lewes attacked the author's deviance from femininity, who struggled to explore the ultimate real beyond sexual distinction with her sexually ambiguous narrator and the strangely androgynous title figure. It is, however, understandable in this context that Charlotte Brontë rebelled strongly against Lewes' criticism in that he adheres to his opinion as to Currer Bell's sexual identity and treated her thoroughly as a female writer, saying "we take Currer Bell to be one of the most remarkable of *female* writers; and believe it is now scarcely a secret that Currer Bell is the pseudonym of a woman" (465). Charlotte writes to Lewes, and expresses how she was hurt by his criticism:

I will tell you why I was so hurt by that review...not because its criticism was keen or its blame sometimes severe; not because its praise was stinted (for indeed I think you give me quite as much praise as I deserve) but because, after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an author not as a woman, you so roughly—I even thought—so cruelly handled the question of sex.... (*The Brontës*, 614)

Eventually, Charlotte Brontë herself did not recognize her own contradiction in dealing with her heroine and the feminist issue, including the problems of the marriage plot and romance, as her desperate exploration into the ultimate real as an "author" was, at least, keen and sincere.

The novel *Shirley* actually lacks unity both in plot and theme, because of its narrative collapse. Yet, the collapse and inconsistency of its narrative simultaneously shows the dynamic process of the author's ongoing change in her persistent and consistent endeavors to search for the ultimate real. Therefore, this novel, in some parts, succeeds in offering reality of, for example, Caroline's suffering, which strongly conveys its absolute reality to the readers. After all, this constant exploration for the ultimate real itself is responsible for the novel's inevitable lack of unity and awkwardness: for, although the author continuously searched for the real, she could not affirm positively what she regarded as the real. In other words, the author's sincere attitude as an artist towards the genuine real can be seen most clearly in her repeated refusals to be content with whatever real she has attained, once she found and concluded something as real. In consequences, she could not help destroying the plot through her struggle for the ultimate real. However, this powerful collapse in narrative itself conveys to the readers the dynamic record of the author's serious exploration as an artist to discover and represent the ultimate real; even if it only, as a result, shows her denial of whatever real has been achieved, and her endeavor to continue the search for it.

Notes

The present article is based upon the paper read at Kansai Regional Conference of the Brontë Society of Japan, held on the 28th of March, 2006.

1. According to the summary given by Juliet Barker, *Shirley*, published on the 26th of October, 1849, was generally accepted as a failure in her contemporary literary society, and was criticized severely, with criticisms mainly focused on the author's sexual identity. The first criticism against *Shirley* appeared in *Daily News* five days after its publication: "Not one of its men are genuine. There are no such men....They are all as unreal as Madame Tussaud's waxworks" (*The Brontës* 610-13). Among recent criticisms, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar particularly observe the novel's structural deficiency: "*Shirley* fails to develop organically," because "Brontë becomes enmeshed in essentially the same male dominated structures that imprison the characters in all her books" (373).

2. The original manuscript of *Shirley* more clearly and enthusiastically expresses this intention: "Do you expect passion and stimulus and melo-drama?...Twice in succession they are not good for you—you must have a change: something—what you would call—*slow* is more wholesome—something real and severe and unromantic as Monday Morning..." (Introduction, vii-viii). However, as Margaret Smith points out, it is also interesting that

Charlotte Brontë tried to allow some space for the imagination to be active, when she chose the Luddite Movement which was thirty years before her time, although Chartism was contemporary and closer to her (Introduction, xi). In this sense, as soon as she chose the topic, her splits and wavering between the reality and her own romantic imagination started.

3. Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981) p. 5. Page references shown in this paper refer to this edition throughout.

4. As to the narrator's sexual identity, the author does not allude to anything obvious, which is natural as this first-person narrator mostly calls him/herself "I." Probably this is one reason why no criticism, as far as I have read, has discussed the narrator's sexual identity itself. However, in some parts, the narrator actually refers to him/herself as a general novelist with a masculine pronoun: "Child torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of jailers; the novelist may be excused from sully^{ing} *his* page with the record of their deeds" (61). In this part, because the author tries to attain reality by using the detached, objective narrative style of the "conditions-of-England" novels, Charlotte seems to use the male pronoun in order to generalize the narrative voice. However, as the plot progresses, the narrator becomes more and more intrusive, and in accordance with it, this generalized "male" narrative voice becomes more and more uncertain; for the author, who disguised herself under the sexually ambiguous pseudonym of Currer Bell, is actually female, and the narrator "I" gradually begins to merge with the author, as I will discuss later when I argue on the ambiguity of the title. What I point out here is another level of the split between the author's original intention to make the narrative voice "male" and the actual uncertainty brought by her own intrusiveness, which becomes more and more distinct later in the novel. The feminist theme concurrent with the narrator's sexual identity is not the conscious and central matter for Charlotte in this novel. Therefore, in this paper, I will provisionally use the male pronouns to indicate the narrator, according to the novel's intention.

5. Charlotte Brontë herself in her letters asserts that creative writing is merely a fiction, and that, in spite of some implication, she does not describe real people in the novel as they are: "You are not to suppose any of the characters in 'Shirley' intended as literal portraits—it would not suit the rules of Art—nor of my own feelings, to write in that style—....the heroines are abstractions, and the hero[e]s also.... Since you say you could recognize the originals of all except that heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moors to represent?" (*Life in Letters* 249-50). However, Elizabeth Gaskell emphasizes how precisely these characters were modeled after real people and how easily recognizable they were: "She thought that if these [incidents and situations in the novel] were purely imaginary, she might draw from the real without detection, but in this she was mistaken; her studies were too closely accurate" (Gaskell 314). Juliet Barker also discusses how the descriptions in *Shirley* of people and episodes were connected with the exposure of the author's identity, which Charlotte Brontë herself wished to keep obscure (*The Brontës*, 608-9).

6. Recently, some critics have evaluated *Shirley*'s narrative as a successful experiment. For example, Gisela Argyle regards the narrative shift in *Shirley* as the effect of an experimental technique which organically connects three genres of "the comedy of manners," "the historical romance," and "the psychological romance," and clarifies how splendidly they are finally related with each other in the last chapter of the novel (744, 752). Kate Lawson observes that the gaps in the narrative are brought as a result of its "feminist dissent" (570) and the gaps themselves play an important role to attract the readers' attention to the awkwardness. Heather Glen compares

Shirley's narrative made by the "intrusive narrator" (*Companion* 123) with those of Charlotte Brontë's earlier works, and, clarifying the importance of the symbolism of the Tower of Babel, discusses how the text itself joins the "verbal controversy" inside the text (*Companion* 128). What I try to point out in this paper is that the structural deficiency of *Shirley* is not the author's intentional experiment but a mere result brought by the author's struggle to explore what is real, and, in this particular point, my argument is different from these critics.

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