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The Bildungsroman Controversy in Pendennis

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The Bildungsroman Controversy in *Pendennis*

Takamichi Ichihashi

I

Whether or not Thackeray’s *Pendennis*, which was serially published from 1848 to 1850, should be regarded as the first British Bildungsroman has been very controversial. The arguments, however, have frequently been made with little investigation into both the novel and the genre. Gordon Ray said that *Pendennis* was “the first true Bildungsroman in English fiction,” (109) but in fact his comments were not well grounded. He neither refers to the history of Bildungsroman, nor gives a full account of the requirements for it, let alone demonstrate to what extent the novel itself met them. All he depends on, instead, seems to be his inference from biographical data, and his own view of the novel and knowledge of the genre:

This process of recollection and reflection dominated his [Thackeray’s] mind while he was writing the first half of his novel [*Pendennis*], which accordingly became the first true Bildungsroman in English fiction. The reader is given not merely the experience of Pen’s “forming”, but also the judgment of maturity upon this experience. (Ray 109-10)

Ray has arguably given too much importance to the historical fact that Thackeray often recollected his adolescence while he was writing the first half of the story. Thackeray would make the most use of his youthful experiences to describe Pen’s early life. However, Ray doesn’t logically explain how the author’s “recollection and reflection” spontaneously creates a Bildungsroman-type novel. Moreover, we are not sure whether depicting “the experience of Pen’s ‘forming’” and giving the readers “the judgment of his maturity” upon it are necessary
qualifications of this genre, though Ray seems to believe firmly in both of them. In fact, Ray has not offered any biographical evidence that Thackeray had been aware of any literary mode at that time. Thus, his introduction of the author’s life at the time of writing has not well supported his argument about the novel’s identification with Bildungsroman. He should have carefully examined the genre itself and demonstrated how many elements of it the fiction had throughout the text.

Ray’s remark has evoked controversy because it can be very significant when we think of the British precursor of this genre in the history of British literature. Two critics, who also considered this problem from a different approach, have not entirely agreed with him. Paying attention to the constitutional aspect of the novel as a whole, Jerome Buckley suggests that Dickens’s David Copperfield, which started its serial six months after Pendennis, should be rather regarded as the dawn of the English Bildungsroman because it describes the hero’s real “development” (42) with a sustained focus on theme, both of which Pendennis lacks:

*Pendennis* has been called “the first true Bildungsroman in English fiction.” And indeed it has many elements of the genre. Insofar as he ‘develops’ at all during a prolonged and protected adolescence, Pen moves from a naive provinciality to a bland worldliness.... Though it presents a host of engaging minor characters and a good many animated episodes, Pendennis achieves no sustained focus on either hero or theme; it is in fact a singularly uneven novel. (Buckley 28-9)

Buckley finds fault with the consistency of Thackeray’s fiction here. His point cannot be denied if it is considered that Thackeray could not actually concentrate on depicting the hero’s life only; he would need to add some episodes or sub-plots to the main story to complete each installment without any blanks. Consequently, there must have been some cases in which he could not help subordinating his primary intention in the novel. However, Buckley does not consider the possibility that a leitmotif in Pendennis is buried so deep in the story that one cannot easily discover it through a casual reading. He cannot state definitely that Pendennis does not have any focal points or themes at all unless he is the author himself. Another problem here is that Buckley, just like Ray, has also built up his argument with only
his own interpretation of Bildungsroman. Although he seems to have some idea of the legitimate elements of the genre, he does not account for it straightforwardly, and instead hints at the difference between them and the "elements" which Pendennis could have.

John Sutherland's claim illustrates the worst case of the problem in the discussion by the two critics above; he cites two other novels for the first British Bildungsroman, but these are based on his misunderstanding of the prototype:

Ray's claim is almost but not quite true. As its borrowed name implies, the genre originated in Europe with Goethe's 1774 bestseller The Sorrows of Young Werther. Following Goethe, the Bildungsroman typically depicted the growth, through suffering, love, experience of the world, and moral crisis, of a literary young man. Suicide or death from sheer hypersensitivity was a standard climax. In Britain, the Bildungsroman was pioneered by two notable Germanophiles: Edward Bulwer-Lytton with Earnest Maltravers (1837) and G.H. Lewes with Ranthorp (1847). (Sutherland xi)

Unfortunately Sutherland here has confused Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship with The Sorrows of Young Werther. Therefore, it is natural that he has acquired a different idea of it. Nevertheless, as for Pendennis, he somehow points out its "distinct resemblances to Lewes's novel" (xi) in the main plot. So at least he admits that Thackeray's work can be included in its literary genealogy, though he denies its precedence.

The differences of the three critics' comments above are derived not only from the approaches they took but also their own understanding of Bildungsroman. That is, it seems that they all have an unreliable definition of the genre. These situations require me first to review what would form their background knowledge of Bildungsroman.

II

The term Bildungsroman has been made current by Wilhelm Dilthey since he first used it in Das Leben Shleiermacher (1870). His explication of the genre in Erlebnis and die Dichtung (1906) has been so dominant and pervasive that the three scholars would surely be aware of it for their discussion. Dilthey gave the name to
a group of novels describing the historic German concept "Bildung" which, he thought, had been developed by some writers through the Enlightenment in the late 18th century. Dilthey thought of Goethe and Jean Paul as the first practitioner, and explained that all such novels illustrate:

... wie [der Jüngling] in glücker Dämmerung in das Leben eintritt, nach verwandten Seelen sucht, der Freundschaft begegnet und der Liebe, wie er nun aber mit den harten Realitäten der Welt in Kampf great und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserfahrungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiss wird. (Dilthey, Erlebnis, 299)

... how he [the youth] enters life in a happy state of naivete seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through diverse life-experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world. (Trans. Ross 335)

Here Dilthey does not just abstract common features in the novels' stories. Rather, he would specifically expound on the process of "Bildung" along a course of the protagonists' life. His comment is intelligible, and has been a good criterion to consult. However, it must be noted that the excerpt above is not enough to fully understand Dilthey's view of "Bildung." He expatiates further on the significance of each step of "Bildung"; particularly, he regards "the hard realities of the world" not as natural obstacles which the hero happens to face and can avoid if possible, but as something indispensable for his maturation:

... jede ihrer Stufen hat einen Eigenwert und ist zugleich Grundlage einer höheren Stufe. Die Dissonanzen und Konflikte des Lebens erscheinen als die notwendigen Durchgangspunkte des Individuums auf seiner Bahn zur Reife und zur Harmonie. (Dilthey 329)

... each of its levels has intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher level. Life's dissonances and conflicts appear as necessary transitions to be withstood by the individual on his way towards maturity and harmony. (Trans. Ross 336)

Needless to say, this is ascribed to Goethe's organic conception. In
addition to this, Gisela Argyle, who thoroughly scrutinized Dilthey’s accounts on Bildungsroman, summarized them to bring up another point in the proponent’s view of “Bildung”: “Bildung is a special type of development in its stress on the hero’s conscious effort and on the manifold aspects of human endeavour; it is distinguished from education in its stress on the hero’s interior motivation and goal” (Argyle 26). These facts above show that Dilthey has succeeded in epitomizing the historic German concept by organizing several representative novels of it into a literary genre; but its core concept is so profound that one needs to follow the content.

The essentials for Bildungsroman referred to thus are indeed decisive factors in considering whether Pendennis is one of the models or not; nonetheless, it must also be remembered that Thackeray could hardly have got any guide to learn the German concept properly except for Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Briefly speaking, he had not been aware of Dilthey’s prescription before he started writing Pendennis. Therefore, one has to keep in mind that it is impossible to claim that what Thackeray acquired through Wilhelm Meisters accurately corresponds to his novel, even though some of his ideas he got from Goethe do conform to it because Dilthey had considered the same material to make his comments. Indeed, Pendennis’s resemblances to Goethe’s novel in the plot have been pointed out by S. S. Prawer:

This novel [Pendennis] of personal development had some similarities with Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Both novels entangle their eponymous protagonist with an actress at the beginning, offer him a variety of temptations and opportunities for growth in the middle, and marry him off to a noble-minded lady at the end. (Prawer 302)

It can be said with fair certainty that Thackeray had given some consideration to the prototype of Bildungsroman to write Pendennis. These comparable points indicated by Prawer can be construed as a message from the author that he had also created a novel which describes his own idea of “Bildung.” Such a message can be read in the fact that Thackeray, like Goethe, introduced some autobiographical elements into his work, as Ray verifies. G. B. Tennyson, who condensed down to five points the whole concept of Bildungsroman as told by Dilthey, cites this component as the third: “the biographical
element, usually supplied from the author's own life in what Dilthey calls the "conscious and artistic presentation of what is typically human through the depiction of a particular individual life" (Tennyson 136). Taking into account these circumstances above, what should be done here is not to find any answers to a dichotomous question, "Is Pendennis a Bildungsroman or not?" but to elucidate Thackeray's view of "Bildung" through the text, and discern its similarities and differences with Dilthey's. By doing so, some reasons for the controversy hitherto shall become apparent.

III

Although Buckley argues that Pendennis does not have any leitmotifs, the preface, which Thackeray wrote subsequently when all of the serials were published into the two book volumes, is adduced as sufficient evidence to reconsider his assertion:

... but I ask you [readers] to believe that this person writing strives to tell the truth .... If truth is not always pleasant, at any rate truth is best, from whatever chair—from those whence graver writers or thinkers argue, as from that at which the story-teller sits as he concludes his labour, and bids his kind reader farewell. (lvii)

Thinking over the fact that the author presented an overview of the meaning for the whole story here, this excerpt, first of all, is read to imply a profound topic underlying throughout the fiction. This preface has been normally understood to mean that Thackeray is preparing his readers for any description of stark realism before his tale starts. On top of this, however, the latter half is often interpreted to suggest the importance of insight into truth regardless of any position. Actually, whether the protagonist Arthur Pendennis can discern the truth or not does matter in every stage, in which he falls in love with women and tries in vain to marry them. Corresponding to the content of the preface, the keyword "truth" and its adjective "true" are often used throughout the story as well as in the crucial scenes cited below.²

Several scholars including the ones mentioned above have maintained that Pendennis describes the hero's "development"; nevertheless few of them have fully revealed how Arthur does so,
though this point is particularly important in discussing the legitimacy of the novel as Bildungsroman in the strict sense. For this reason, the process of Arthur’s growth needs to be carefully examined in the first place. Reflecting on Dilthey’s concept of “Bildung” introduced above, the following three key points must be analyzed; (1) whether each of the stages in Arthur’s life has its own value and becomes the basis of a higher stage; (2) whether Arthur makes a progress through his conscious effort; (3) whether he has any interior motivation and defines his goal.

Arthur meets three women and gets interested in marrying them before he takes his cousin Laura to be his wife in the end. His experience with each woman functions as a training for his perspective. In order to get the right partner ultimately, Arthur has to acquire the ability to judge the things and situations impartially, considering various kinds of things. His first love with the actress, Emily Costigan, well illustrates how he lacks of a balanced viewpoint and worldly wisdom. A series of his experiences with Emily is described with a focus on his visual sensation; the splendor of her costume and her heavy makeup for the stage has dazzled him, and this good impression he has gained then persists when he visits her house for the first time:

[Arthur] ‘How simple and how tender! How charming it is to see a woman of her genius busying herself with the humble offices of domestic life, cooking dishes to make her old father comfortable, and brewing him drink!...’ (66). In this stage, he has built up a false image of her mainly through the delight he takes from watching her actions. Here, we notice that even when Arthur sees Emily after the curtain, he is still just like a spectator who is entertained by the performance on the stage, and is not interested in, nor even tries to guess, the actual hard life of actors and actresses. Namely, he just observes her and her life according to his preference with little knowledge of lower class life, and doesn’t strive to learn who she really is. In fact, Emily has to work on stage by day for her keep and take care of her father at home by night. Furthermore, she is not intelligent at all, as Arthur’s uncle Major Pendennis readily finds out. Accordingly, when Arthur has made a hasty decision to be her husband, his uncle Major, who is supposed to find him a desirable marriage partner as a guardian, tells him the true facts concerning her and her family, and persuades him to give up marrying her. In spite of being prevailed upon, he cannot stop thinking of her for a while. A few years later, however, seeing her again in London, Arthur can now as a college student apprehend
his uncle’s remonstrance and his own immaturity in those days: “His uncle’s lessons had not been thrown away upon him; the mist of passions had passed from his eyes now, and he saw her as she was” (209). As Buckley comments, Arthur has just grown up to be worldly wise in accordance with his uncle’s selfish intention; nevertheless, from these two crucial scenes of Arthur’s first love affair and its consequence, it is inferred that there is a more important focus set on his perspective along with his development as a man. Moreover, it must be noted that Arthur has indeed improved his insight into women, but he owes it rather to his uncle’s admonition than to his own conscious effort.

Although this first stage does have a great significance for the next, it is so powerful that Arthur makes another mistake in grasping the situation. Learning the lesson from his first romance of enthusiastic absurdity, he comes to imagine his ideal marriage of convenience and begins to stick to this idea. While keeping such a realistic view, however, he, at this second stage, fails to be aware of the true state of his own mind and the facts. Since his living in a lodging, he has gradually experienced solitude for the first time in his life though he is not absolutely alone there. Nonetheless, he doesn’t realize himself that such loneliness makes him desire his prospects and expectations for his marriage:

... he [Arthur] is of his mood and humour lonely, and apart although not alone. Yes, Pen used to brag and talk in his impetuous way to Warrington. ‘I was in love so fiercely in my youth, that I have burned out that flame for ever, I think; and if ever I marry, it will be a marriage of reason that I will make with a well-bred, good-tempered, good-looking person who has a little money, and so forth ...’. (588)

His glib remarks here also sound that he has felt frustrated with the incompatibility of true ardent love and “marriage of reason.” That is to say, his real intention in this passage is that he still does believe in and long for a platonic affection leading to matrimony. His words in the excerpt cannot be read at all as expressing any goals in his life. As a result of these circumstances and his subconscious desire, Arthur thinks that he has conceived a love for Fanny Bolton, the daughter of the landlord. Leading a corrupt life without any care for his health, Arthur eventually makes himself ill. Fanny, then, lavishes
her constant attention on him. When he is nursed back to health by her, his loneliness is also assuaged by her thoughtful kindness and the warmth of her devotion. Consequently, mistaking this relief and his gratitude to her as love, Arthur eagerly wishes to live with her as a married couple. His reckless hope this time, however, is damped down by the precedent of his friend George Warrington, who has already made a bad marriage to a country girl. Being told of his intention of marrying Fanny, Warrington realizes that Arthur is now having similar experiences to his as a teenager, and talks him out of such a rash idea by presenting his own affair (734-35). When Warrington’s persuasion does have much effect on him, Arthur, who has calmly reflected on the actual condition of his mind and his folly, resolves never to see Fanny.

Arthur’s qualification for a Bildungsroman hero is called into question at this second stage. In spite of being aware of the danger in making a precipitate decision, he can neither objectively analyze his psychological state nor control his own mind. While uttering very sane opinions on his marriage, he does not make any effort to realize them. On the contrary, he indulges himself in a carefree life as a bachelor. On top of this, he again needs his friend’s advice to make a sensible choice in the end. It is clear that Arthur is not strong enough to exercise self-restraint. This characterization of the protagonist is derived from Thackeray’s idea, which he expresses in the preface:

Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art. Many ladies have remonstrated and subscribers left me, because, in the course of the story, I described a young man resisting and affected by temptation. (lvi)

This statement by the author is understood as one of the biggest reasons why Pendennis cannot be received unanimously as Bildungsroman. Thackeray has created Arthur not after Wilhelm Meister but Tom Jones. Coincidentally, Tom Jones was the very novel which Dilthey cut out from the genre, as Tennyson comments: “But Dilthey had explicitly excluded Tom Jones on the grounds that, while it emphasizes the important moments in an individual life in terms of their typicality, it does not exhibit those features I cited earlier, especially the emphasis on development and culture in short the emphasis on
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*Bildung*” (Tennyson 137). Thackeray would not have been interested in producing an admirable hero who can consciously strive to improve his own self. Rather, his sympathy would lie with a man, who, like everybody else, has several faults as well as virtues in his personality, and naturally grows with the help of people around him. In this way, Thackeray’s intention in designing the main character differs fundamentally from Dilthey’s image.

**IV**

Although the first two episodes examined above feature Arthur’s fault and his moderate development, it is not that he neither has any good points by nature nor learns any lessons through his failure. The stages hitherto illustrate how Arthur’s judgment is impaired by his own passion and feelings, but the third stage delineates how he cannot well display such ability unless his desire and emotion get involved in it. In fact, Arthur has a keen sense of justice and shrewd discernment for good books. While working in London as a critic of the magazine *Pall Mall Gazette*, he exercises his talent to write fair and splendid reviews. His honest appreciation makes him offer favorable criticism to whatever publications he finds excellent, even one a rival company has brought out. That’s why Mr. Bungay the manager, who always tries to increase sales on his side, is not necessarily gratified with Arthur’s sincere performance:

> But though he [Arthur] might justly be blamed on the score of impertinence and a certain prematurity of judgment, Mr. Pen was a perfectly honest critic; a great deal too candid for Mr. Bungay’s purposes, indeed, who grumbled sadly his impartiality. (445)

He believes in the righteousness of his objective critique. So his commitment to it has become firm when the chief editor makes difficulties for him. He has no intention at all to abandon his policy: “[Arthur] ‘... No, by heaven’s grace, we [critics] will be honest, whatever befalls, and our mouth shall only speak the truth when they open’” (446). His utterance here reminds us of the preface by the author because his faith as a reviewer corresponds to the gist of it “truth is best.” Because of this similarity of the point, moreover, it can be read as a proof that Thackeray incorporated some biographical
elements into this fiction, which is one of the requirements for Bildungsroman. Thus, Arthur’s competence for the job signifies that he can make a careful and objective assessment. The problem is that it is still developing and has not worked well on his private life. Arthur’s goal in life would be to cultivate this talent deliberately and harmoniously, but he neither realizes nor establishes it by himself. Instead, such an objective is symbolized by his marriage with his cousin Laura, who has had a keen insight from the beginning.

Laura plays an important role to reflect Arthur’s ideal of perception. Her great acumen is exemplified in two episodes in contrast with Arthur’s and his mother’s poor judgment. The first is the scene in which she refuses Arthur’s first proposal of marriage when he offers it just before he leaves for London. Having been aware of his mother’s inner and constant wish for their marriage, Arthur proposes to Laura only to satisfy his parent. However, seeing through the true motive behind his action, Laura refuses it (346). She fully perceives that he does not love her, and anticipates that such a fake courtship would not succeed in attaining its primary aim as well as in the matrimony itself. Although his offer is favorable for her, she puts greater faith in the truth of rejection. Her foresight highlights, all the more for her discretion here, the shortcoming of Arthur’s insight. In other words, she doesn’t make a biased interpretation to her advantage. Arthur’s feeling toward her has not indeed grown to love yet at this stage, so he has no difficulty in leaving her for the moment. Yet, Laura’s fidelity to reality does not always make everyone satisfied.

The second episode describes a negative aspect brought by her faculty. When Fanny is looking after Arthur in London, her relationship with him has been indecently understood and so caused a scandal. Then, an anonymous letter is sent to his mother Helen in the country Fairoaks to let her know about it. First she believes it and becomes disappointed. Meanwhile, Laura immediately finds it false and realizes that someone has written it to injure Arthur’s reputation:

In her first moment of agitation she [Helen] had dropped the letter, and Laura had read it. Laura blushed when she read it; her whole frame trembled, but it was with anger. ‘The cowards,’ she said.—‘It isn’t true.—No, mother, it isn’t true.’

‘It is true, and you’ve done it, Laura,’ cried out Helen fiercely. ‘Why did you refuse him when he asked you? …’. (639)
The repetition of the word "true" in this passage impresses on us the thematic importance of this scene. While Helen has just been deluded, Laura readily sees into the insidious plot. From Helen's blame on Laura, however, it is clear that what mainly misleads Helen here is her mortification about her unrealized wish. Like her son, Helen has understood this incident based on her temporary feeling. That is, she makes a fallacious assumption that Arthur would just satisfy his desire with Fanny, which Laura has thwarted. Thus, although the contrast in their reactions to the letter well illustrates Laura's intuition and her firm faithfulness to reality, this event also describes the problem she has to encounter because of such a personality.

There is no doubt that one can see Arthur's development in the final stage. Examining its process carefully, however, it turns out that it is rather a part of natural growth of his mentality than the outcome of his own self-cultivation. What disturbs Arthur's judgment at this stage is the very worldly knowledge, which he almost lacked in his youth and could have only gained through his experiences and seniors' advice. After giving up his relationship with Fanny, Arthur makes up his mind to get engaged to a noblewoman Blanche Amory on his uncle's recommendation. For him this would be an ideal marriage of convenience with a lady of nobility, but in fact it is still only for his desire for social climbing. He only agrees to the arrangement by his uncle, who has dealings with her uncle Sir Francis Clavering and demands his seat in Parliament for his nephew in exchange for great financial reward. Initially, Arthur gets interested in going to Parliament and makes friends with her uncle to proceed on his plans. At its final phase, however, he starts himself to suspect his opportunist actions. Hence, he feels tormented to imagine Laura's keen eyes for truth and honesty in advance of seeing her:

His [Arthur's] worldly tactics and diplomacy, his satire and knowledge of the world, could not bear the test of her [Laura's] purity, he felt somehow. And he had to own himself that his affairs were in such a position, that he could not tell the truth to that honest soul. As he rode from Clavering to Baymouth, he felt as guilty as a school-boy who doesn't know his lesson and is about to face the awful master. (855)

Arthur's sense of guilt here reflects the improvement of insight into the truth. He has already realised himself his selfish and false intentions
underlying his engagement to Blanche before someone points it out. Nonetheless, it must be also considered that his realization is partly supported by his strong moral sense, and that the improvement is brought, like that of anyone, by what he has learned from bitter experiences in the past. The metaphor of school in the last sentence is very important not only in this sense but also in that it indicates that Arthur’s development is designed on the education model, which is radically distinct from the concept of “Bildung” as Argyle comments. Besides, it is noteworthy that Laura is set as a character for Arthur to follow in this model.

Although Arthur has thus succeeded in discerning by himself his desire for worldly success in the marriage project, he still needs “instruction” or reproach from others to analyze the state of his mind thoroughly. Even when overwhelmed by his scruples, all he decides is not to break his betrothal to Blanche as a whole but only give up the seat in Parliament and the money brought by it (909). Arthur has become so worldly sophisticated through his experiences that he has not taken notice of the gravity of Laura’s lesson yet. She taught him once that no one would be gratified with a loveless marriage in the long run. To put it another way, his wisdom of the world this time makes him take true love lightly. As a result, although he carries on as Blanche’s fiancé, he is fairly blamed by her for his false affection in the end: “‘You are spoiled by the world,’ Blanche wrote; ‘you do not love your poor Blanche as she would be loved, or you would not offer thus lightly to take her or to leave her. No, Arthur, you love me not …’” (922-23). Thus, even in this very final stage, remarks from the third person assist Arthur to realize the actual condition of his attitude. In his involvement with Blanche, he displayed a better assessment of the fact, but his recognition of his own mind has not entirely ripened yet. A primary task for Arthur would be to get a self-analytic ability, but one cannot know whether he achieves it in the end or not, for there are no description of Arthur’s introspection. However, the story at least concludes with the suggestion that he has acquired a developed command of his insight. It is represented by his realization of Laura’s betterment in her appearances, which also synchronizes with his renewed regard for her character:

Laura had so much improved in health and looks that Pen could not but admire her. The frank and kind eyes which met his, beamed with good-health. ... As he looked at her, artless and
graceful, pure and candid, he thought he had never seen her so beautiful. Why should he remark her beauty now so much, and remark too to himself that he had not remarked it sooner? ...he looked in her bright clear eyes, and read in them that kindling welcome which he was always sure to find there. He was affected and touched by the tender tone and the pure sparkling glance; their innocence smote him somehow and moved him. (858)

The repetitive descriptions of their eyes and seeing here intimate the focus of the story. Laura’s full-hearted eyes reflect her marvelous insight as well as her character. Arthur’s inherent ability to look, this passage shows, has been obscured by his uncontrollable passion and knowledge of the world. What he has perceived in meeting her, however, is not only her charming expression, but also the greatness of her honesty and keen eyes for truth underlying it. In this way, Arthur appreciates the character of his female companion for the first time in his life to feel a growing affection and respect for her, though it cannot be denied that his values, which have changed now through various kinds of experience, contribute to revaluation of Laura’s personality (942). The process of Arthur’s development thus ends in his matrimony with Laura, who embodies his improved perception and so will become indispensable for him as his model. In this manner, the history of the progress of his insight is deeply involved with whether he can choose the right marriage partner. The story of Arthur as a bachelor tells how many things one has to consider harmoniously to acquire a proper perspective.

V

Although one can identify many Bildungsroman components in Pendennis, Thackeray’s concept of the protagonist’s development which he mainly describes in the novel is essentially different from Dilthey’s idea of “Bildung.” This can be one of the main causes for the difficulty in admitting the novel as one of the models in the strict sense. Thackeray would originally prefer to describe natural mental growth, which anybody attains through various experience including failure and even blamable but forgivable actions, than self-cultivation which only some admirable men can manage. He would pay attention to the passive aspect of humans who need any external guides to make
progress, such as instructions and admonitions. Thus, his view of the developmental process is now regarded as a very naturalistic one.

NOTES

1. Thackeray wrote his impression of it in his diary entry of June 28th 1832 though it was first and unfavorable one: “To day was occupied in reading Wilhelm Meister, and a wretched performance I thought it — without principle & certainly without interest — at least the last volume — Neither delicacy morality or philosophy as I thought, but not being initiated have perhaps no business to judge of the latter — of the two former most people are competent judges — If the mystick statues scrolls & sphinxes &c — only typify the actual & bodily part of the book why the mysticism is but a doting drivelling sentimentality not worth the pains of deciphering — It is a mean book I think & have done with it — can a man with impure views of human nature be a philosopher? What shall I say in ten years?” (Letters 1:213)

2. Thackeray uses the word “truth” 114 times and its adjective “true” 60 times in Pendennis while 75 times and 37 times for the counterparts respectively in Vanity Fair. The number of them surpasses those of the previous work about by 50 in spite that both of them have an approximate total sum of words.

3. Major Pendennis is also first enchanted by Emily’s performance on stage. When he visits her father at their home, however, he sees through who she really is by talking with her: “... the major began to comprehend that the young lady herself was not of a particular genius, and to wonder how she should be so stupid and act so well” (128).

4. This point is made clearer by considering Wilhelm’s words in Goethe’s text:

Daß ich Dir’s mit einem Worte sage: mich selbst, ganz wie ich dan bin, auszubilden, das war dunkel won Jugend auf mein Wunsch und meine Absicht. Noch hege ich eben diese Gesinnungen, nur daß mir die Mittel, die mir es möglich machen warden, etwas deutlicher sind. (Goethe 7:290)

“To speak it in a word; the cultivation of my individual self, here as I am, has from my youth upwards been constantly though dimly my wish and my purpose. The same intention I still cherish, but the means of realizing it are now grown somewhat clearer.” (Carlyle 17:8)

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