

The Strategy of “the Other” in Walter Abish’s *How German Is It*

Kumiko Honma

The purpose of this study is to investigate postmodern techniques and the influence of the Holocaust in *How German Is It* (1980) by Walter Abish from the viewpoint of “the Other.” The concept of “the Other” was developed by Emmanuel Lévinas, who lived in the period of the Holocaust as Walter Abish also did. In this study, it is regarded as a point in common between them that they do not regard totalitarianism as a disaster of the past, and try to find ways of always considering “the Other” in writing their own books, in order not to repeat the past error in the future.

In Chapter 1, it is revealed how the real evil of totalitarianism is indicated in this novel from the viewpoint of “the Other.” The real evil of it is not a specific political system but the attitude of regarding everything as understandable by defining it and ignoring inexplicable things. That is, even if it is not in a state of war, such a world where people forget “the Other” as “the absolute difference” has already been involved in totalitarianism. So totalitarianism is suggested as a problem which we are also related to.

In Chapter 2, focusing on the technique of defamiliarization in *HG*, the effect of this technique is investigated. The technique of defamiliarization subverts the order of a familiar world and reveals the fragility of the world which we believe we can understand. In addition, what is disclosed by the technique is that what supports our identity is nothing but “the Other,” which we tend to forget in order to maintain our identity.

In Chapter 3, I investigate what methods are suggested in *HG* in order not to repeat totalitarianism in the future. In spite of the fact that we tend to forget “the Other” in defining things and familiarizing them, it is not recommended that we should abandon language in this novel. Instead, in order to avoid forgetting “the Other” while maintaining its inexplicability, it is suggested that we should manifest “the Other” as the trace of the absentee in what was said. That is to say, it is required that we acknowledge the

imperfection in what was said and that it cannot completely express what we mean. In this novel, it seems to be suggested that we should “misread” what was said, being aware of its imperfection, and investigate the truth, relying on language in order to create a world where people always consider “the Other.”