

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS14/H13/19 _____ (please insert ref. above)
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**

*(for completed projects only)*

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b>six</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b>12</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

‘Permanent parabasis’: Irony and self-consciousness in Dostoevsky’s novels

「永恆的進場詩歌」：杜斯妥也夫斯基小說中的反諷和自我意識

**2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	FUNG Kai Yeung	Department of English, HSUHK
Co-Investigator(s)	N.A.	
Others	N.A.	

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	2020.01.01	-	-
Project Completion Date	2021.12.31	2022.06.30	Approved by HSUHK on 24 November 2021
Duration ( <i>in month</i> )	24 months	30 months	
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	2022.12.31	2023.06.30	

## **Part B: The Final Report**

### **5. Project Objectives**

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To evaluate the critical discussion of irony in Paul de Man's essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality'. This objective involves the work of consolidating the links between various writers of irony of the long nineteenth-century, including Friedrich Schlegel, Baudelaire, Kierkegaard.
2. To establish Dostoevsky as an ironic writer. The project will use wide range of examples in Dostoevsky's novels to demonstrate that his heroes are consistently self-conscious and double-minded. Their words create no synthesis but series of self-referential remarks, which constitutes the basic structure of an ironic mode of existence.
3. To complete two journal articles for submission by the end of the project. The first piece, adopting de Man's deconstructive criticism, will demonstrate the centrality of madness in Dostoevsky's representations of irony. The second piece will explore the positioning of Dostoevsky as an ironist in relation to the concept of modernity as formulated by Charles Baudelaire.
4. To incorporate my research findings into teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I intend to provide refreshing perspectives to students by introducing to them the critical issues in the study of irony. I will show the relevance of irony to literary theory by introducing the basic concepts of irony and how they can help us rethink literary texts. The goal is to teach students to be sensitive to the multifarious meanings of a text, rather than rushing to foreclose them.

#### 5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N.A.

Reasons for the change: N.A.

- 1.
- 2.
3. ....

### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

1. The analysis of Paul de Man's essay, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', is a major part of my research article. De Man's essay covers a wider range of topics in rhetoric, namely the historical development of symbol, allegory and irony in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century literature. De Man refers to the French poet Charles Baudelaire to illustrate his theory of irony. Irony for him takes place at a moment of 'fall', in which a person wakes up from the mystified reality that he or she has created and dwelled in. I have used the concept of the fall to generate a new reading of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. I have shown that the fall is not only applicable to Baudelaire's poetry but also the Russian writer's novels. My conclusion shows that the fall did not stop the Dostoevsky heroes from mystifying realities. In fact, what distinguishes the heroes is their continual tendency to mystify the world they live in, regardless of the fact that such mystification is constantly exposed and questioned.
2. My research article shows that Raskolnikov and Porfiry in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* are two major ironist characters. Raskolnikov immerse himself into a murder plan, considering himself as an extraordinary man who can be free from a guilty conscience. At the same time, he is constantly aware of the fact that, psychologically, he cannot overcome any moral barriers. It is this alternation between transgression and submission that forms the ironic structure of Raskolnikov's consciousness. The case officer Porfiry plays an essential role in exposing Raskolnikov to his impractical dream of becoming an extraordinary man. I have shown that Porfiry is the jester in the novel, capable of exposing all sorts of dreams and mystification from a distance.
3. Two short articles positioning Dostoevsky as an ironist writer and analyzing his *Crime and Punishment* have been published in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*. The article on *Crime and Punishment* was published before the project so it was not included in the report. A new article is ready to be submitted to the comparative literature journal *CLCWeb* in July 2023. Please see appendix for copies of the published article and the drafted article to be submitted.
4. I incorporated my findings in both my undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. In *ENG3112 Romanticism*, I introduced the concept of romantic irony to my students. I taught William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, specifically Book VI, to demonstrate the poet's mystification of reality. Nature for Wordsworth is a perfect platform for projecting his idealistic thoughts. Hence the famous line during his climb over the Alps: 'The immeasurable height/ Of woods decaying, never to be decayed'. With the power of irony that is marked by its two-mindedness, although the poet fails to reach the top of the mountain, he can review his failure and appreciate nature once again. In *GELC 6001 Critical Approaches to Literary and Cultural Studies*, a postgraduate course, apart from the concept of romantic irony, I taught irony through Bertolt Brecht's technique of alienation effect. I showed to my students that irony is the ability to both act and step away from acting at the same time. This is to present a distance, even a disconnection, between the actor and their act, so that the audience can critically review the performance on stage.

### 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	<b>Addressed</b> <i>(please tick)</i>	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To evaluate the critical discussion of irony in Paul de Man's essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality'.	✓	100%
2. To establish Dostoevsky as an ironic writer.	✓	100%
3. To complete two journal articles for submission by the end of the project.	✓	70%
4. To incorporate my research findings into teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.	✓	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

Using Paul de Man's theory of irony as a framework for rereading the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, this project has found that the writer is highly conscious of the complex relationship between symbol and irony. It becomes clear that Dostoevsky's heroes are always driven to a kind of thinking that is symbolic by nature. Symbolic thinking likes to find similarities among things. Sometimes because the subject wants to find similarities, they have to forsake differences. So, in the case of Raskolnikov, one of the key examples in Dostoevsky's novels, the young man consider himself as similar to historical leaders such as Napoleon and Julius Caesar. By seeing himself as extraordinary as those leaders, Raskolnikov has overlooked the basic temporal and geographical differences between himself and those leaders. Before this project, one may say Raskolnikov overestimated his abilities. After this project, we can say that Raskolnikov is haunted by a particular kind of thinking that is symbolic in nature. Such thinking makes him ignore differences in nature and history. Such a reading would align with the Russian writer's skeptical attitude towards the idea of brotherhood arising from the French Revolution.

Irony in Dostoevsky becomes an important mode of thinking that counteracts symbolic thinking. Irony is no longer a simple rhetorical device (When I say A I actually refer to the opposite of A). It becomes a different kind of thinking that pays attention to differences rather than similarities. Porfiry the police officer is especially good at pointing the difference between Raskolnikov's half-baked fancies and his empirical reality. With all his ironic remarks and questions, Porfiry exposes Raskolnikov's mystified reality using various cunning techniques. He shows the hero that his dream to become an extraordinary person is a mystified project. All in all, irony is used by Dostoevsky not so much as a rhetorical tool to embarrass others as a mode of thinking that ultimately helps the heroes to better understand themselves. The infinity detachment in irony does not apply to Dostoevsky. Rather, irony leads the hero to a complex situation in which he is given a broader picture for understanding the self. Although this picture can be contradictory from the first glance, this is a necessary step in the hero's pursuit of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge here does not mean a definite idea of the self but a thicker understanding of the contradictory condition of the self. In the case of Raskolnikov, the novel succinctly demonstrates the impossibility of pinpointing either a remorseful or an aggressive self.

## 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

The subject of irony has strong connections with other critical issues in modernity. Irony is a double-edged sword. It can be used, as in Dostoevsky, to thicken the description of the self. But it can also lead to infinite digression where the subject loses interest in knowing the self. The latter is closely connected with the rise of existentialist philosophy and other writings that reflect on the subject of boredom, disillusionment and the meaninglessness of existence. My next project is a book project. It expands on the study of irony to other 19<sup>th</sup> century writers. My aim is to find out the intricate relationship between irony and all those sentiments surrounding the movement of existentialism (boredom, inaction, hopelessness and pessimism). My project is motivated by some fundamental questions about mental health: how do we find happiness? How is it related to the understanding of the self?

## 7. Layman's Summary

(*Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words*)

This project examines the use of irony in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Irony in the world of the Russian writer is not only a rhetorical device for expressing opposite meanings. Rather, as the literary critic Paul de Man argues, irony encompasses a dominant mode of thinking where the heroes step away from their current occupation and reflect on their reflection. The heroes of Dostoevsky are named as contemplators, hypochondriacs, mad people who talk to themselves on the streets. Reflection on reflection could be a distressing experience at first glance. My project, however, shows that this is a fruitful pathway towards a deeper understanding of oneself, and irony is the key to understanding this complex reflective activity in Dostoevsky's world. This project will be of interest to those who work on the topics of rhetoric, modernity and existentialism in literary studies.

**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2021	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	Paul Fung	'Fyodor Dostoevsky', in <i>The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham)	2023	Yes Appendix 1	No (I will request my publisher to add the acknowledgment after the submission of this report)	Yes <a href="https://researchdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202200199">https://researchdb.hsu.edu.hk/view/publication/202200199</a>
N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	2023	Paul Fung	'Temporal Predicament: Dostoevsky and Paul de Man'	2023	Yes Appendix 2	I will include the acknowledgment in the submission to the journal	Under preparation

**9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered**

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
August/2023 /Nagoya	The Demon of Irony: Rethinking Evil and the Will in Dostoevsky's Novels	The 18 <sup>th</sup> International Dostoevsky Symposium	2023	Yes Appendix 3	I will include the acknowledgment in my conference presentation.	Yes

### 10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

*(Please elaborate)*

As mentioned in Objective 4 of my project, I incorporated my research experience and findings into my undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, specifically in a UG course on romanticism and a TPG course on literary and cultural theory.

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### 11. Student(s) Trained

*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

### 12. Other Impact

*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

N.A.

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### 13. Statistics on Research Outputs

No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
					Type	No.
	1 (under preparation)	1 (to be presented in August 2023)	1 (see appendix 1)	0	N.A.	N.A.

**14. Public Access Of Completion Report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

<b>Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
N.A.	N.A.