

The Thematic Study of Margin in
Tennessee Williams' Plays

田纳西·威廉斯剧作的
边缘主题研究

张新颖 著



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序

摆在读者面前的学术专著《田纳西·威廉斯剧作的边缘主题研究》是张新颖博士在其博士学位论文《边缘上的变奏——田纳西·威廉斯剧作中同性恋维度的精神分析》的基础上推出的科研新成果，可喜可贺。

通过精神分析法来研究美国剧作家田纳西·威廉斯作品中的同性恋主题似乎是个显见的选题，但张新颖博士所做的发掘与同类研究相比显得更深入、更全面、更有新意。如张新颖博士明确指出，威廉斯的戏剧想象力源自于他边缘的性取向，因此将同性恋作为对威廉斯剧作研究的对象可以帮助我们更深层次地挖掘威廉斯剧作中丰富的思想内涵，而且通过威廉斯剧作来探讨他的边缘思想在当下这个多元化的时代具有重大的现实意义。张新颖博士的专著以弗洛伊德的个体心理学、弗洛姆的社会心理学、荣格的分析心理学以及拉康的后现代精神分析为理论框架，从社会、文化、政治等方面入手对威廉斯各个时期的剧作（包括其长期被忽视的后期作品）进行全面、多层次的解读，并始终关注与其边缘的性身份紧密相关的边缘思想，从而为国内威廉斯研究展现了一个新的平台。

作为张新颖博士当年在华东师范大学时的导师，我荣幸地向各位推荐《田纳西·威廉斯剧作的边缘主题研究》一书。是为序。

费春放

2011年3月

于美国纽约

前 言

作为美国二战后最著名的剧作家之一，田纳西·威廉斯以其不朽的艺术成就成为美国及世界剧坛的奇葩。在长达50年之久的戏剧创作生涯中，他奉献剧作70余部，作品不同程度地受到了人们的热烈称颂和赞誉。

《玻璃动物园》是他迈向成功的第一部作品，剧作中，他将饱含浓郁诗情色彩的现实主义引入了美国剧坛；《欲望号街车》堪称性与心理完美结合的典范，极大地丰富了美国的文化意蕴；《热铁皮屋顶上的猫》则对政治与性道德进行了大胆的追问。近年来，一度被视作其败笔的后期剧作脱颖而出成为评论界瞩目的焦点。田纳西为美国及世界戏剧文化做出的巨大贡献使其先后获得普利策奖、纽约剧评家协会奖、托尼奖等诸多文学奖项，并最终奠定了他在美国乃至世界剧坛的地位。《剑桥文学指南》的编辑者马修·路德恩在评述美国二十世纪的剧作家时提到：“田纳西·威廉斯在美国剧坛的中心地位并非时序使然，而是在于他的戏剧想象力。”

然而，这位以其独特创作风格丰富美国及世界舞台的戏剧大师却备受争议。由于威廉斯本人复杂、“病态”的生活经历、作品中荒诞离奇的戏剧情节以及性、暴力、疯癫等敏感的戏剧主题，他曾一度被排斥在美国主流文化之外，一些评论家对其剧作大加贬斥，认为他的剧作道德败坏、有失伦常。因此，当这位戏剧大师离世之时，琳达·瓦恩纳在《今日美国》中对其给予这样的评价：“当听说田纳西·威廉斯刚刚在楼上去世时，没有人在打听他是谁……当然，名声并不能说明什么，但现代剧作家中再也找不出一位像威廉斯这样复杂而又生动地影响美国意识的剧作家了。尽管他的吸毒、酗酒、同性恋和后期剧作的失败是众所周知的，但他的那些获奖作品却依然存在，这正是匕首与诗歌同存的有着缺陷的人性的体现。”

威廉斯在美国和世界剧坛的巨大影响力及其剧作的负面评论显示了一个不争的事实：蕴含于威廉斯剧作中丰富的人性内涵深深地触动了现

代人脆弱而多感的灵魂，然而扑朔迷离的人物以及迷幻的语言风格使其剧作晦涩难懂，长期以来遭到误读。鉴于此，有必要对威廉斯剧作进行全面解读以期挖掘出其中更深层次的思想内涵。与同时代的其他两位戏剧大师尤金·奥尼尔和阿瑟·米勒一样，威廉斯也十分关注精神迷惘的现代人的内心世界，但不同的是，他所关注的是那些形形色色无法融入主流社会的边缘人群，剧作中，他竭力展现这些“有缺陷的人”那饱受痛苦煎熬的灵魂。追本溯源，威廉斯在其剧作中对于边缘群体的热切关注源自于患有同性恋恐惧症的美国社会带给他这个“性倒错”者的创伤与痛苦。因此，威廉斯剧作中的主旋律必定是与他边缘的性身份紧密相关的边缘思想。

威廉斯的个人经历以及美国社会政治文化背景对其作品的影响使其剧作中同性恋的表达十分复杂，这一复杂性要求必须在充分考虑到文学评论的四大要素，即作品、作家、世界、读者的基础上，从与作品相关的社会、文化、政治等方面入手对其剧作进行全方位、多层面的解读。经过严密的论证，精神分析发展的重要里程碑——弗洛伊德的个体心理学、弗洛姆的社会心理学、荣格的分析心理学以及拉康的后现代精神分析顺次成为论著的理论框架。

弗洛伊德的个体心理学主张通过作家与作品的关系进行文学研究，认为梦的形成与文学创作有着异曲同工之妙。鉴于梦的隐义可以通过梦的显像来表达，那么威廉斯作品中显现的作为同性恋艺术家的自画像则成为探索他个人边缘感的主要渠道。威廉斯的剧作大多是情感性自传，并非他个人经历的真实展现而是其心理世界的反映。剧作中，他情不自禁地将自己的边缘情结投射在剧中人物身上：早期剧作中，这位年轻的剧作家将女性人物视为他的情感之根；麦卡锡时代，作家的使命感敦促这位成熟的剧作家将面戴神秘面纱的自我送上了为边缘人群乃至整个人类寻求救赎希望的神圣之旅；当社会对同性恋的态度有所缓和时，威廉斯的生命和艺术之火已渐渐燃尽，于是他在作品中留下一份空间，期望在真实自我的寻求中重返艺术世界。这些游弋于作品中鲜活的人物形象所汇聚而成的威廉斯作为同性恋艺术家的自画像向我们展示了威廉斯的个人边缘感。

弗洛姆的社会心理学研究的是社会如何利用社会无意识对个体意识

进行控制的，这为探讨威廉斯流于作品中社会层面的边缘感打开了方便之门。在推崇异性恋的社会里，同性恋被视为一个规避的存在，这种内化了的同性恋恐惧症使大多数社会成员神经过敏，致使同性恋这一群体痛苦地挣扎在主流社会的边缘之上。剧作中，威廉斯在表达他个人边缘感的同时，也通过从多角度展现社会强加给同性恋的心理创伤来表达同性恋作为边缘群体的边缘感：所有的社会成员在内化了的同性恋恐惧症这一社会无意识的作用下孤立、排斥同性恋；出于对排斥的恐惧，备受压抑的同性恋只能选择逃亡作为他们的出路；然而不幸的是，正是逃亡使他们陷入了无尽的孤独之中。由此，在见证威廉斯作为一个成熟的剧作家如何将个人情感转化为艺术情感的过程中我们领略到了他社会层面的边缘感。

威廉斯的剧作中饱含大量的神话和原型，运用这些具有极强的象征意义的神话和原型，威廉斯展现了他对世界的感知。荣格的原型理论认为，神话和原型代表了人类最普遍的情感，因而具有文化的内涵。剧作中，他在描绘主流文化所推崇的二元对立模式下残缺不全的世界的同时，竭力凸显他构建的以和谐、相容为文化理念的理想世界：在个人意识的范围内，他摒弃了精神与肉体的分裂、呼唤完整的人性；在两性世界里，他打破了两性的界限，崇尚双性同体；看到同自然的分离乃是人类痛苦的根源，他表达了逃离这个腐朽社会、与自然和谐相融的美好愿望。两种文化模式下两个世界的对比彰显了他对异于主流文化的边缘文化所做的贡献。

福柯认为，语言是各种权利运作的载体，运用探索无意识与语言关系的拉康后现代精神分析对威廉斯剧作中同性恋话语的解读可以使我们充分体会到他在剧作中所表现的对主流话语的独特的应对机制，其作品中语言风格的流动可以看成是美国社会政治气候及威廉斯文学地位变化的晴雨表：早期剧作中模棱两可的语言显示他“欲语还羞”；麦卡锡时代，既得的文学地位使他得以在作品中构建同性恋新形象来对抗主流话语对同性恋形象的贬损；石墙事件以后，和其他同时代的同性恋作家一样，威廉斯采用了“直言不讳”的表述方法，与此同时，他还调动各种戏剧手段作为语言符号来表现同性恋的心理问题。剧作中语言风格的变化展示了威廉斯政治层

面的边缘感。

至此，这部为徜徉于威廉斯剧作中的边缘思想而唱响的精神分析的变奏曲终于落下了帷幕：威廉斯所热衷的自我表述将我们带进了他的内心世界，使我们可以真实地探求他作为一个同性恋无法融入主流社会的边缘感；作为同性恋艺术家的“非个人化”将我们的目光引向了他剧作中所描述的和祂一样生活在社会边缘的同性恋群体，在对其进行剖析的过程中，我们深切地感受到了蕴含其中的浓郁的社会意识；神话和原型增强了威廉斯剧作的普遍性，这使威廉斯得以在作品中构建一个与现实世界相抗衡的理想世界，由此为被主流文化所不容的同性恋文化做出了贡献；对威廉斯流动变化的写作风格的研读使我们嗅到了其中强烈的政治味道。这样，四个理论节点所形成的四个变奏，即著作的四个部分交相辉映形成了这部变奏曲的多彩乐章。

尽管威廉斯的作品频频受到非议，但近半个多世纪以来，观众及读者对之兴趣依然不减。一些曾因威廉斯戏剧而名声大噪的演员如马龙·白兰度、保罗·纽曼、杰西卡·唐迪至今依然令人难以忘怀；他诗性妙曼的语言依然回响在舞台上；他笔下栩栩如生的人物还扣动着观众与读者的心弦。如今，威廉斯已离世二十余载，其剧作在世界舞台上又开始了新一轮的巡演，其戏剧研究也日渐趋热。威廉斯戏剧的再热不仅从一个侧面论证了其剧作强大的艺术生命力和感染力，而且从某种程度上也显示出他笔下的那些形形色色在道德和人性上错位的边缘群体在这个多元化的时代终于唤起了人们的广泛关注，这些人物所展现的苟存于主流文化之中的生活方式和边缘文化意识都有待于我们对之进行重新鉴赏和审视，去挖掘其中所蕴含的超越于时空丰富的思想内涵。笔者真诚希望本著作可以为此方面的研究打开一个局面，从而为日益多彩的威廉斯戏剧研究抹上虽不炫目却十分真实的一笔。

本著作在撰写和出版过程中得到了国内相关领域许多专家和学者的热心帮助。华东师范大学的费春放教授系笔者博士期间的导师，为本研究给予了全方位悉心的指导，并为之欣然作序；此外，国内一些知名学者，华东师范大学的黄源深教授、刘乃银教授、上海外国语大

学的乔国强教授、复旦大学的孙建教授以及北京大学的周小仪教授等先后为本著作的完善提出过可行性建议；科学出版社的郝建华女士、阎莉女士、刘彦慧女士、张迪女士都为该著作的顺利出版提供了技术上的支持与保证；此外，本著作还获得杭州电子科技大学校方的出版资助以及外国语学院领导和老师多方面的支持。在此一并致以最诚挚的谢意。最后还要感谢我的家人对我一如既往的支持，让我能够潜心于科研。由于编者水平有限，撰写过程中疏漏和欠妥之处在所难免，恳请读者批评指正。

张新颖

2011年3月

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), with his immortal artistic achievements, is regarded as a wonder in American and the world theatre. In his writing career that spanned almost five decades, he created an extensive canon of more than seventy plays. *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), his first success, introduced poetic realism to the American stage; *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) colored American culture with its sexual and psychological issues; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) initiated a discussion of the political and sexual mores. And his later plays that were once labeled as failures have proved to be excellent ones and gained wide attention in recent years. Williams' contribution to American and the world theatre won him many honors, with which Williams established his place in the American literary canon. As Matthew C. Roudane noted:

Tennessee Williams animated the middle years of the century. In the real sense, then, Tennessee Williams inhabits a central place within the American theatre, however, has less connection with chronology and more with the original nature of his theatrical imagination. (15)

Williams' theatrical imagination originated from his sexual orientation. For him, writing was inseparable from his homosexuality. In one of his letters to Donald Windham, his literary and gay friend, Williams wrote, "There are only two times in this world when I am

happy and selfless and pure. One is when I jack off on paper and the other when I empty all the fretfulness of desire on a young male body." (Windham, ed. 1996: 105) In his *Memoirs* (1975), he exclusively recounted the two indispensable parts of his whole life. Homosexuality, as an integral part of his creativity, is therefore one of the most important dimensions in which to understand Williams and his plays.

It is well admitted that Williams' sexual orientation had traumatized him psychologically since very young. As a child, an illness diagnosed as diphtheria changed his robust, aggressive, almost bullying nature. His mother's overtly solicitous attention planted in him the makings of a sissy. (Williams 1975: 15) With the strong feelings of alienation, he kept aloof from the group, only playing alone games of his own invention, and gradually became a neurotic and introverted child. In silence and repression, he found release in writing, "I discovered writing as an escape from the world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable [...] It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge." (Tischler 1961: 29) When he grew up, his sexual orientation was confirmed. As a sexual deviant in an intolerant society, he placed more reliance on writing as an important means of psychotherapy, incessantly venting his repressed feelings in his writing. Yet, he did not confine himself to his own sufferings but showed his concerns for those alienated from the mainstream society like him and dramatized them with much understanding and great compassion in his plays. As a result, diverse marginal themes such as insanity, homoeroticism, fugitive artists, death wish and the like came to occupy a central place in his plays.

Doubtlessly, a writer's work is associated with his ideology, for a writer is an "ideological figure" (Foucault 1988: 209). Accordingly, Williams' theatrical work offers the main space where we can explore his marginal ideology, which is the key to understand Williams. As

stated above, homosexuality plays a rather significant role in forming Williams' marginal ideology, so the study of Williams' marginal ideology in relation to homosexuality becomes the focus of the present book.

1.1 Literature Review

For more than half a century, an enormous range of critical and scholarly responses to Williams and his plays have been continuously emerging from diverse perspectives. However, America's long-standing homophobic culture occluded Williams study on homosexuality. What's more, Williams' insistent presentation of homosexuality in the complex socio-political milieu intensifies the complexity of his plays, which diversifies and complicates the criticism in this respect.

Due to the awkward situation of homosexuality in American society, the relevant literary works have long been concealed from the public view. This may partly explain why Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* excludes any gay word but turns out to be a gay play and the overtly gay characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* die before the curtain rises. In 1948, Alfred Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, which provided gays with scientific evidence for fighting equal rights and invited various literary works depicting homosexuality. As the echo to the rise of the homosexual literature, Williams published *Camino Real* (1953), in which he presented an overtly gay character but often ignored, for he is "disembodied", "not really a character" (Paller 72). However, Kinsey's treatise, though giving a push to the emergence of gay subculture, did not better the homosexuals' condition but caused the panic of anti-gay forces. The panic eventually cultivated the McCarthy antigay hysteria, which frightened not only the playwrights but also

the critics. In the intense homophobic atmosphere, the critics were very cautious not to involve themselves into the taboo subject, so the criticism in this period had been very sparse, if any, was restricted to the interpretation of the characters, and mostly was characteristic of disparagement.

Brick in *Cat on the Hot Tin Roof* is the first sexually uncertain character Williams presents in his plays. Upon the debut of this play, the critics embarked on heated disputes, seeming to share none of the uncertainty concerning Brick's relationship with Skipper. Robert Coleman saw it as "unnatural"; John Chapman labeled Brick "a drunkard and queer" and felt "frustrated [...] some heart or point or purpose was missing"; Walter Kerr seemed to agree with Chapman on the point that something was missing when he wrote "In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, you will believe every word that is unspoken; you may still long for some that seem not to be spoken"; Richard Watts wrote that Brick "has a deep terror that he is homosexual"; John McClain observed that Brick "finds himself unable to rid himself of an infatuation for his college room-mate [...] and is hence incapable of either [a] normal relationship with his wife or any protracted periods of sobriety." All these claims convey a message that Brick may have abnormal feelings to his dead friend. However, Williams Hawkins thought that "in the end is the truth of the young men's puzzling relationship clarified". Facing these disputes, Williams responded:

Was Brick homosexual? He probably — no, I would even say quite certainly — went no further in physical expression than clasping Skipper's hand across the space between their twin-beds in hotel rooms and yet — his sexual nature was not innately "normal". (Williams 1991: 109)

Since the end of the mid-twentieth century, Williams' sexual

identify had been gradually publicized. Some critics grasped any possibility to interpret Williams' female characters with the idea that they were actually transvestite women. This was the notorious "transference" initiated by Stanley E. Hyman, who coined the term "Albertine Strategy" to designate "the writing of stories of homosexual love in the guise of heterosexual love" (2), seeing Williams as one of the practitioners of disguising homosexual romance by turning male characters into phony female characters. Employing this strategy, Hyman analyzed Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* and his novel *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1958). Thereafter, Stephen S. Santon, Robert E. Jones, coupling with Molly Haskell invoked this strategy to interpret Williams' female characters in their respective books (Santon's *Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*; Jones's *Sexual Roles in the Works of Tennessee Williams*; Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*). Williams was extremely mad at the "transference" reading, barking, "People who say I created transvestite women are full of shit. Frankly. Just vicious shit." (Rader 344)

The Stonewall Riots that broke out in 1969 led American gay literature out of the shadow of the Cold-war ideology. Williams thus depicted his first openly and widely acknowledged gay character who was often regarded as his self-reflection — Quentin in his *Small Craft Warning* (1972). From this play on, Williams departed from his habitual "oblique" style, writing far more frankly about life as a gay, but not from a political agenda, instead, indulging in self-searching. Different from the criticism in the mid-twentieth century when Williams' plays were always called by some hostile critics "fetid swamps" (Stanton 1), the criticism during this period witnessed an unprecedented upheaval that American social stance toward homosexuality underwent. Some gay activists and critics, taking as evidence Williams' "oblique" (Wager 129) treatment in the early plays,

together with his seemingly indifferent stance toward gay liberation when compared with that of those newly emergent gay playwrights who were active in gay movement, complained that Williams was not "out" enough, and one gay playwright went even so far as to assert: "He has yet to contribute any work of understanding to gay theatre." (Barton) Simultaneously, his more candid personal disclosure in his later plays also failed himself to escape from attacks. Some heterosexual critics referred to one of his 1970s plays as "faggotty" (Bailey 29), though Williams himself thought that his plays in this period "reflect new attitudes" (Brown 274). *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* (1981), his last autobiographical confession, was cast upon harsh words: Michael Feingold referred to August, Williams' self-portrait in this play as not "the poet pining for doomed love, but the unscruplers, horny bastard on the make" (89); Catherine Hughes seemed to largely share Feingold's viewpoint when she wrote Williams had become a "prisoner of a form of myopia" and his works were "too personal, too autographical to communicate the inner world of its creator" (202). It seems that Williams can never do right, in spite of his success in the early writing.

The unfavorable criticism lasted till the 1990s, though its mood softened a lot. Not a few critics concentrated their criticism on the accusations Williams received in the 1970s, often characterizing Williams as a self-hatred playwright. John Clum, in writing his "*Something Cloudy, Something Clear: Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams*"(1989), refuted Edward Sklepowitch's assertion on "the significant change" Williams' treatment of homosexuality had undergone, insisting that Williams' "split presentation of his own homosexuality" resulted from his "multiple split personalization" and showing his seeming dissatisfaction with Williams' "language of indirection and homophobic discourse" (162); even in 1995, Rainer Rilke saw Williams' drama "not overtly political" (22) by comparing