



# 苏珊-洛莉·帕克斯戏剧的 后现代历史书写研究

A Study of Postmodern  
History Writing in  
Suzan-Lori Parks' Drama

张琳 著

中国社会科学出版社



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## 前言

苏珊-洛莉·帕克斯（Suzan-Lori Parks，1964—）是第一位荣获普利策戏剧奖（2002）的黑人女作家，也是当今美国剧坛最具实验性、最具挑战性的剧作家之一。帕克斯凭借极高的文学创作禀赋和大胆的创作技巧颠覆了戏剧传统，极大地推动了当代美国戏剧的繁荣，引领了美国戏剧的发展方向。然而，正是其戏剧作品呈现出的异质性特点和后现代主义特征给读者带来不小的挑战。

像许多同时代黑人族裔作家一样，帕克斯将历史书写作为文学创作的重要主题。帕克斯的历史书写不是重写历史，而是通过重访历史事件修正官方历史记录。对她而言，太多黑人祖先的历史被白人历史编纂者肆意歪曲或抹除；只有重访历史、不断修正历史，才能重塑黑人历史记忆，彰显黑人话语和历史书写权力。像新历史主义者一样，她拒绝接受整体性的、线性的、封闭的历史观，主张异质性的、开放的、多元化的历史书写。帕克斯的戏剧带有明显的新历史主义印记。

在戏剧创作中，帕克斯借助幽灵元素，让已故的黑人祖先复活，由他们来讲述生前不能言说的故事，从而还原被白人抹除的黑人历史。她反对黑人本质主义观念；她将白人主流文化塑造的黑人原型形象重新放置于特定的历史语境中，力证黑人本质主义实质上是白人霸权话语建构的产物。除了修正、重构黑人历史之外，她还向胜利者书写的官方历史发起挑战，质疑所谓美国精神、英雄主义等宏大历史叙事的权威性。帕克斯的戏剧既注重历史事实，又充满文学想象，不断穿梭于历史和想象、过去和现在之间，巧妙地将个人历史、家族历史、族群历史以及国家历史融为一体，建构起了一个动态的、交互的、多维的历史想象空间。

本书由引言、正文和结论三部分组成。引言部分简要介绍帕克斯的戏剧创作思想和戏剧表现手法、国内外研究现状,以及新历史主义观点。正文部分对所选取的三部帕克斯戏剧作品进行文本解读,分为三章。第一章通过对《全世界最后一个黑人的死亡》的分析,探讨帕克斯如何运用幽灵元素将历史和想象、过去和现在、生者和死者完美地融合在一起,使幽灵成为历史的见证人和修正者。《死亡》剧中,受种族暴力迫害的“黑人先生”死而复生,向生者讲述自己的死亡经历。“黑人先生”反复死亡、多次生还,讲述不同的死亡体验,其身份逐渐由个体延伸到整个黑人族群。“黑人先生”的幽灵通过回忆,不仅使个人历史得以再现,还勾连起集体记忆,表现了黑人创伤的普遍性。作为对“黑人先生”讲述的回应和补充,幽灵歌队队员各自引领一条线索,讲述不同的故事,形成多线交叉的网状叙述,他们实际上在主场景之外建构了一个独立的新文本。帕克斯借助众幽灵,还原了一段被掩盖的历史,并完成了黑人历史的复线书写。

第二章通过对《维纳斯》的分析,探讨帕克斯如何以黑人女性身体为切入点、重访并修正黑人历史。从“畸人秀”展览、法庭,到医学解剖实验室、死后被展览的博物馆,南非女性萨特杰·巴特曼的身体一直是白人观众凝视的客体,同时也是白人霸权话语运作的载体。帕克斯在重写巴特曼事件时,以现存的历史文本档案及其他文字记录为参照,借助文学想象,在历史文本的踪迹中捕捉权力运作和意识形态的交互作用,呈现出一幅殖民主义、种族主义、法律、医学、宗教等权力话语交织的图景,揭示出所谓“黑人身体”不是本质存在的,而是白人殖民者的权力话语和医学知识共同作用的产物。在重构权力话语图景的同时,帕克斯将法庭、医学解剖教室降格为同“畸人秀”一样、充斥着种族主义观念和白人窥淫欲的场所,解构了法律的严肃性和医学知识的权威性。此外,帕克斯在重塑巴特曼的形象时,将其塑造成一个既与白人主流话语抗争、又与之同谋的黑人女性,凸显其人性的复杂性。为了呈现历史修撰的多样性,帕克斯在剧中运用了大量的后现代戏剧创作手法,如歌队、不可靠叙述者、双层叙事结构、剧中剧等。更重要的是,帕克斯不断借用剧中人物向观众发出诘问,让观众直接参与到巴特

曼事件的重构中，充分发挥了戏剧引导、塑造和组织观众身心经验的力量。

第三章通过对《美国戏剧》的解读，分析帕克斯如何解构白人历史书写中的宏大叙事、如何对历史遗产进行批判性思考。在这部剧中，帕克斯将剧本放置于后现代文化语境中，聚焦当下人们对历史的认识和态度。后现代主义削平了深度模式，拒斥对事物本质的探寻。对历史的理解也是如此。历史变成了一种纯粹的形象或幻影，甚至降格为大众娱乐消费的对象。《美国戏剧》由两幕剧组成。第一幕中，刺杀林肯总统的游戏充分体现了大众巴赫金式娱乐历史的狂欢精神。扮演白人总统的黑人模仿者，以及扮演杀手布思的游客们，一方面参与了历史重构，另一方面颠覆了林肯神话。对黑人模仿者“弃儿父亲”来说，他通过游戏，挪用、模仿林肯总统的历史，得以从边缘走向中心；但表演中身份的错位，以及其他诸多不确定的因素令其陷入严重的自我认同危机中。第二幕中，家人在挖掘“弃儿父亲”尸骨的过程中意识到：所谓历史遗产，不过是无数无迹可寻的历史“回声”和一堆零碎的、毫无意义的物质符号；继承者必须发挥主观想象，才能赋予这些符号新的意义。

结论部分总结帕克斯戏剧作品中呈现出的历史意识及其后现代戏剧创作手法。帕克斯将观众习以为常、普遍接受的文化观念渗透到历史事件的重构中，引导观众感受所谓真相或知识背后隐藏的各种差异和断裂，使观众从中受到启发。之后，这些新的认识势必会从戏剧中重新回到社会中去，在某种程度上促进文化观念的更新，实现戏剧和社会能量之间的流通和交换。帕克斯的戏剧意义不仅仅局限在对黑人历史的发掘和重构上，她的戏剧作品为所有观众呈现了一个全新的审视历史和社会的维度。

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## Introduction

Suzan-Lori Parks (1964— ), the first African American woman writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, has been widely recognized as the most challenging and experimental dramatist among her peers. Her plays are distinguished for historical allusions and innovative dramaturgy. Since she created the first play *The Sinner's Place* (1984) for the senior project at Mount Holyoke College, Parks has created more than ten plays, one novel, some radio plays and screenplays, and even musical scripts.<sup>①</sup>

In addition to the Pulitzer Prize for *Topdog/Underdog* in 2002, Parks has been awarded two Obie awards,<sup>②</sup> a Tony nomination, another Pulitzer Prize nomination, a MYM50,000 Alpert “mid-career” award, National Endowment and Guggenheim fellowships, Ford and Rockefeller Foundation grants, and the MacArthur Foundation’s whopping MYM500,000 “genius” grant. With a number of prizes and handsome bonuses, Parks’ literary status as an ingenious dramatist in the circle of contemporary American drama has hardly been challenged.

As an avant-garde dramatist, Parks has inevitably evoked some bitter criticism. Her detractors contend that her works are “extremely difficult and esoteric” (Brown-Guillory 39). However, Parks’ innovation in both form and content has been embraced by many critics. She is highly esteemed as

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① A list of Parks’ major works is given in the Appendix.

② Parks received the first Obie in 1990 for *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* and the second one in 1993 for *The America Play*.

“some rare kind of witchcraft genius” (Louis 141) and “year’s most promising playwright”.<sup>①</sup> Laurence Maslone even claims that Parks is sufficiently qualified to pull American theatre out of “the doldrums, or maybe the abyss.” He remarks, “Her voice has already made a difference on our stage. ... If we can’t hear her, there’s nothing wrong with her voice, just something wrong with our ears” (Munk 33). Alisa Solomon best sums up her works, “Though it is so abstract in form and language as to make any attempt at interpretation provisional at best, it is, at the same time, clearly and firmly rooted in a forthright political sensibility, one absolutely concerned with African-American experience under the weight of a hostile world” (Solomon 73).

Parks’ great success lies in her obsession with the matter of history and her ingenious theatrical representations of history. Realizing the absence of African Americans from American history, she engages herself in historical re-writing. Her rewriting does not mean positing a new edition of history; instead, she revises bits and pieces of the grand narratives that are recorded in the official historiography by repeating the historical events. In this way, Parks makes her version of history and leaves an African American imprint on American history.

## 1 Parks’ Dramatic Creation

As for African American writers, history is a recurrent theme in their works, because “[their] past is absent or it’s romanticized, [and] this [American] culture doesn’t encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with the truth about past” (Gilroy 179). Attempting to fill in the void of their history, the black writers either excavate the buried experiences excluded from

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<sup>①</sup> Mel Gussow named Suzan-Lori Parks the “year’s most promising playwright” in 1989 in *New York Times*.

the white historiography or retell the known stories from a new perspective. Kimberly W. Benson states that "all Afro-American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of the black presence in America" (Gates 123).

In Parks' view, (the black) history is "A Great Hole,"<sup>①</sup> metaphoric of an absence, a gap and a grave. Parks once explained the connection between the symbolic meanings of the "hole" and her dramatic creation, "You can riff off the word, you can think about that word and what it means and where it takes you. ... You think of h-o-l-e and then w-h-o-l-e and then black hole, and then you think of time and space and when you think of time and space you think of history" (Pearce 46). Parks' deliberate conflation of the word "hole" with its homophone "whole" suggests that the whole (continuous and coherent) history made by the white oppressors means an empty hole for the black oppressed. About this, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory comments, "As long as Blacks are relegated to the 'hole' ('absence') of history, the possibility of wholeness becomes limited" (Brown-Guillory 184). Mary F. Brewer expresses the similar idea by stating that:

The hole symbolizes the erasure or distortion of Blacks in White historical narratives. It reflects too the practice of denying African Americans a recognizable U. S. parentage, so that, as orphans, Blacks do not inherit the same privileges as the nation's White descendants. What they inherit instead Parks calls "The Great Hole of History." (Brewer 165)

Parks believes that the "history of History" is akin to the history of American literary canon, for both of them are always "in question" (Parks "Possession" 4). Regardless of the great contribution African American writers have

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<sup>①</sup> The metaphor comes from Parks' play *The America Play*.

made, their names have been largely erased from the list of the literary canons. Likewise, black history has been plucked from American history, even though it constitutes an important part of the national history of the United States.

Parks is not the first writer to compare the national history to “a hole.” Prior to her, Neil Bissoondath<sup>①</sup> claimed that “the past [of Caribbean history] amounts to no more than a ‘big, black hole’” (Boehmer 188). However, different from Bissoondath’s pessimistic attitude, Parks views the hole not only as a grave site where black history is buried, but also a repository of the stories of black ancestors. This idea inspires her to “force a new kind of archaeological practice, a new way of ‘digging’ the past to look at the world” (Geis 163). Concerning her opinion of the past or history, Parks says, “It’s history that you don’t know what to do with or history that’s hiding in the shadows or is being pushed to the edges, or its in the margins, the gaps and the crevices. It’s not the big story, it’s the fringe stuff. Particles of things. Writing for me is so much like archaeology” (Savran 96).

The “(w)hole” idea spurs Parks to take up the work of historical reconstruction. In her dramatic creations, Parks employs imaginative fabrication to illuminate the blind spots the white historiographers have shadowed intentionally. She contends, “Where is history? Because I don’t see it. I don’t see any history out there, and so I’ve made some up” (Pearce 46). She even jokes that her stories always go in this way, “‘Once upon a time you weren’t here.’ You weren’t here and you didn’t do shit! And it’s [history is] that, that fabricated absence” (Drukman 296).

As an ingenious dramatist, Parks declares that theatre is the most instrumental medium to fabricate or make history. She has found some affinity between theatre/drama and historical reconstruction. In her view,

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① Neil Bissoondath (1955— ), is a Canadian novelist, whose representative works include *The Innocence of Age* (1993) and *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night* (2005).

A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature. Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to “make” history — that is, because so much of African American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out, one of my tasks as playwright is to — through literature and the special strange relationship between theater and real life — locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bone sings, write it down. (Parks “Possession” 4)

Furthermore, Parks looks upon theatre as an ideal site to re-member history. By restaging history, she recuperates the dis-remembered (forgotten) history and restores people’s memory of the past. Deborah Geis points out that Parks does well in playing on the tropes of remembering/re-membering and dis-re-membering/dis-membering. In her plays, “dis-membering” not only means cutting off limbs of a person, which invokes the dark history of lynching, but also means dissociating a person from his/her membership of a community or society, which is related to the dispossession of membership, identity and history of black people (Geis 11). In addition to the punning meanings, “dis-membering” signifies all the things that have been forgotten. With the multiple connotations, the motif of “dis-membering” haunts Parks’ plays. For example, in *Venus*, the body of The Venus/ Saartjie Baartman was anatomically dissected by the white anatomist. In *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, Black Man with Watermelon experiences multiple death executions and gets confused about his fragmented body and identity. In *The America Play*, the Foundling Father suffers metaphoric deaths in the repeated reenactments of President Lincoln’s assassination. These figures not only suffer the pain of being physically dismembered, but also suffer the spiritual trauma as the consequence of their dis-membered experiences. Therefore, Parks tries to re-member these black victims by means of restaging their embodied experiences. She once said, “I’m remembering and staging historical events which, through their happenings on

stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history" (Parks "Possession" 5).

Since theater is a perfect site to re-member the dis-membered black history, Parks performs her archeological practice onstage, the most "recognizable SLPisms."<sup>①</sup> Her archaeological practice is a three-step process, including "digging for bones, hearing the bones sing, and writing it down" (4). Her first step is to dig out the remains left by the deceased ancestors (including bones, private properties and stories). Correspondingly, the motif of digging and images of digger run through most of her plays. In *Venus*, The Negro Resurrectionist digs out the corpse of The Venus/Baartman and makes her resurrected. In *The America Play*, the Foundling Father, a grave digger by trade, responds to the call of dead Abraham Lincoln by digging "The Great Hole of History." And Brazil, the Foundling Father's son, digs out his father's corpse and his possessions from the same great hole. For both Parks and her characters, the act of digging reveals their desire for seeking, perceiving and transferring their forefathers' legacy.

The second procedure of Parks' archaeological practice is "hearing the bones sing." This procedure is accomplished by the resurrection of the dead who are allowed to "sing" or tell their stories to the living. Conjured up by Parks' metaphoric spells, black ancestors get resurrected from the buried past and bring their experiences to light, especially the pain and sufferings that were once unspeakable or unspoken. In addition to Baartman/The Venus in *Venus*, the ghost of Black Man with Watermelon along with the ghost chorus in *Death* and the ghost seers in *Imperceptible Mutabilites in the Third Kingdom* demonstrate the ghostly dimension of Parks' plays. Together with their stories, these historical figures get out of the shadow of the margin and come to the center of the stage to perform history, becoming the leading roles on stage.

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① "SLP" is the abbreviation for Suzan-Lori Parks.

For Parks, "hearing the bones sing" is far more than listening to the stories of ancestors. It is a complicated process of theatrical fabrication of black history indeed, since "their [the ancestors'] song is a play" (4). In the process of making a new version of black history, Parks has to deal with racial issues; however, she refuses to highlight the racial conflicts. She insists that the black drama should not be equated with race drama. Irritated by the label of an ethnical writer, Parks defends herself in these words, "Can a White person be onstage and be other than oppressed? For the Black writer, are there Dramas other than race dramas? Does Black life consist of issues other than race issues?" (Parks "Equation" 21) After a series of questions against the racial theme in the black drama, she firmly proclaims her reflections on the issues of black people's existence, "There is no such thing as THE Black Experience; that is, there are many experiences of being Black which are included under the rubric. Just think of all the different kinds of African peoples" (21). She even employs mathematical equations and reasoning to illustrate what a black play should be and what it shouldn't be. She writes:

BLACK PEOPLE + "WHITEY" = STANDARD DRAMTIC CONFLICT  
(STANDARD TERRITORY)

*i. e.*

"BLACK DRAMA" = the presentation of the Black as oppressed

*so that*

WHATEVER the dramatic dynamics, they are most often READ to EQUAL an explanation or relation of Black oppression. This is not only a false equation, this is bullshit.

*so that*

BLACK PEOPLE + X = NEW DRAMTIC CONFLICT  
(New TERRITORY)

Where X is the realm of situations showing African-Americans in states other than the Oppressed by/Obsesses with "Whitey" state; where the White when present is not the oppressor, and where audiences are encouraged to see and understand and discuss these



*dramas in terms other than that same old shit.* (20)

Obviously, Parks neither confines her concern to the racial issues nor creates the plays “in which the black people just feel good and the white people are just ‘mea culpa-ing’” (Munk 34). On the contrary, she takes efforts to represent various experiences of black people and encourages the audience to think more about the social realities, not merely race.

Aiming to turn the “song(s) of the dead” into the plays, Parks employs various dramatic strategies. In *Death*, she adopts the ghost play and creates a surrealist world on stage. The dead come back to life and offer “a collective voice speaking for a people and its experience in broad mythic tones and incantatory rhetoric” (Malkin 157). In *Venus*, Parks resets Baartman, a stereotypical image of Other<sup>①</sup>, in her own historical context. In this way, Parks examines the mechanism of the historical discourses that defined Baartman as “The Venus Hottentot” and challenges the black stereotypes the white culture has molded. *The America play* is not a historical play in the traditional sense, but it refers to the repetition and revision of the historical event of President Lincoln's death. Moreover, it is filled with images of holes and digging. For this reason, *The America play* can be also viewed as a historical play “in the sense of attempting to ‘locate the ancestral ground, dig for bones, find the bones, hear the bones sing, write it down’” (Thompson 167). These plays go beyond the repetition of the racial conflicts and represent multiple black experiences, through which the audience can hear the dead sing.

The final procedure of Parks' archaeological practice is to write down the songs of the dead. By writing, Parks is able to transform her reconstructed version of history into dramatic scripts. However, she never attempts to establish the fixed connections between words and meanings; instead, she endows

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① The concept of “Other” is based on the thoughts of Hegel, Sartre and Said, and it signifies what is antagonistic or opposite to a dominant subjectivity or established authority.