

# 语言与分裂的自我

尤金·奥尼尔剧作解读

谢群◎著



*Language and  
the Divided Self:*

**Re-Reading Eugene O'Neill >>**



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## 前 言

迄今为止,关于美国著名剧作家尤金·奥尼尔的研究已结出丰硕成果。其自传性特征,表现主义风格,东方宗教色彩,弗洛伊德精神分析的影响,以及对古希腊悲剧思想的继承等等,都是研究者们广泛讨论的话题。连女权主义者也以其独特的视角加入了评论者的行列。然而,奥尼尔所关注并努力表现的一个主题——人对于自我本质的探求,现代人悲剧之根源,并未得到充分诠释。奥尼尔自言他所担忧的问题是“美国获得了整个世界却失去了自己的灵魂”。这句话的寓意究竟是什么?它是否反映出现代西方人的普遍困惑?造成这种困惑的根源是什么?这些始终吸引着我,成为我在香港中文大学三年博士生涯中所昼思夜想的问题。

人对于自我的探求是西方文化不倦的话题。古希腊悲剧以朴素的辩证观将人的命运既视为神的安排,又归咎于人性的缺陷。而各种哲学流派,心理学和社会学理论从不同角度对于人的本质提出不同见解。作为美国现代剧作家,奥尼尔不可避免地受到种种历史文化和哲学思想的熏陶。他的自我观和悲剧意识既包含历史性的传承,又具有个体性的经验和独创性的观察。因而,本书旨在将奥尼尔置放于西方戏剧发展的历史框架和现代伦理学和心理分析的理论框架中进行考察。通过对奥尼尔塑造的自我形象的分析,解读奥尼尔的自我观,揭示奥尼尔剧中的个人性的悲剧与西方道德秩序崩溃的社会性痼疾之间的联系。

在中国一家作风严谨的出版社出版一本英文专著,尤其是关于外国作家的文学评论,是非常具有挑战性的。语言能否过关,内容是否具有原创性,分析是否合逻辑,立论是否能成立,这一系列疑问让作者驻足。然而,当中国改革开放的步伐越来越大,当高等教育日益变成一个无疆域的全球化论坛,中国的外国文学研究无可逃避的要

面对国际研究同行,并发出自己的声音。因而,我们需要自己的外国文学批评,以一种国际化的媒介进行交流。另一方面,在我国为数众多的高等学府,有数目惊人的本科、硕士、博士和教师在从事外国语言文学学习和研究。他们所能得到的相关参考资料非常有限,而资料的来源也基本上依赖西方学者的研究成果。因此,从中国外国文学研究走向国际化的角度,从高等教育和学术研究发展的角度,我们都迫切需要一批由中国学者自己以英文创作的文学文化批评著作。

开始,总会稚拙,总会困难重重。然而,毕竟有了开始就有了存在和成长的可能性。因此,非常感谢北京大学出版社从“治学为本”的角度出发,让拙作有了面世及与国内外同行交流的机会。

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## **Primitivism and Expressionism in Eugene O' Neill's Drama**

Eugene O' Neill has been ranked, along with Shakespeare and Shaw, as one of the three greatest playwrights in the English-language theatre. He is so far the only American playwright who has been awarded the Nobel Prize. In the history of American theatre, O' Neill's significance lies in his contribution to the establishment of off-Broadway serious drama. He is noted for the powerful effects of psychological conflicts and intense emotions in characterization. Known as the inventor of a new dramatic form, O' Neill seeks to explore through his characters the inner workings of the human self.

O' Neill is a complex playwright. Critics find it intriguing to study not just O' Neill himself as an author, but also his plays that shed lights on the complexity of human psyche. Included in the 1936 Nobel Prize Presentation Lecture are the following remarks on O' Neill: "A primitive sense of tragedy, as we see, lacking moral backing and achieving no inner victory—merely the bricks and mortar for the temple of tragedy in the grand and ancient style. By his very primitiveness, however, this modern tragedian has reached the well-spring of this form of creative art, a naïve and simple belief in fate." Such remarks point to the deep trouble felt by O' Neill in his life, which is reflected in his writings. O' Neill was full of frustrations in his life, which gave him the special

power of vision. He was awarded the Nobel Prize, "for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy." The originality of O' Neill's concept of tragedy arises from his vision of primitivism in the human self. It is also this vision of primitivism that has given O' Neill's drama the form of psycho-moral expression.

O' Neill's vision of human subjectivity is closely linked to the discovery of the psychological self at the beginning of the twentieth century. The view of the human self as psychological consciousness led to a revolution in the conception of dramatic characters in the 1910s and 1920s. August Strindberg, whom Eugene O' Neill admired so much, first experimented with a new form of characterization that dramatizes hidden repressed desires. Action in drama has since then been reframed in its psychological dimension, which gives later playwrights a new critical idiom in the examination of language and dreams as expressions of the unconscious in characters. Different from Ibsen and Shaw, who examine characters in the light of their outer moral and social dimensions, Strindberg explores his characters in their inner action. It is in this context of a new understanding of the dramatic form as psychological processes that O' Neill creates his characters.

The power of O' Neill's drama lies not in its external action, but in its depth of characterization. He sees characters as embodiments of a consciousness that reveals the troubled psyche. For this reason, he has been considered as an expressionist playwright. *Emperor Jones* and *Mary Tyrone* are typical examples of the mind, whose troubles may be rooted in culture, history and religion, but they are manifested as moral or political issues. In depicting these troubles, O' Neill presents his characters as visualizations of the mind, which are subjected to the uncontrollable forces in human psyche. Such a style of characterization necessitates the use of a new dramatic structure, in which characters are

able to reveal themselves as engaged in the world of the unconscious.

In his plays, O' Neill often employs a structure that resembles the clinical observation of patients with neurotic/psychiatric problems. Characters in the play fall into categories of observers and the observed. The protagonist is someone who is deeply troubled in his/her psyche, and is being observed and analyzed by other characters. In this process of observation, the observed drifts into his/her world of the unconscious and displays the hidden desires or anxieties, while the observers argue about the moral and social implications as well as their roles and responsibilities in the protagonist's sufferings. This structure of observation is developed from the dramatic device of "spectatorship," which other playwrights have successfully used. In Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*, for example, the observed is not just a victim, but he/she also serves as a mirror of the problems that the observers have. In displaying the psychological problems of the protagonist, O' Neill tends to dig into the roots that are beyond the personal level. In this way, O' Neill is able to show that psychological problems have roots in society, culture and history.

Critics in general believe that autobiographical elements play an important role in O' Neill's drama. Here a distinction may be made between the author's life as "autobiographical elements" in the story and the "autobiographical style" of how characters are constructed by telling their own stories in drama. The autobiographical style in characterization refers to how the life of the protagonist is viewed and narrated by the protagonist him/herself. Both aspects of autobiographical elements can be found in O' Neill's plays. The intense emotions, the dreamy atmosphere and the loss of self all lead the protagonist to an inner world of the mind. Psychological trauma is presented as inseparable from the moral and social issues in the characterization of human subjectivity. In other words, the self in O' Neill's drama is a psychoanalytic space that has its moral sources in self-identity.



To understand the complexity of O' Neill's protagonists, one has to refer to the theory of self that can provide a critical framework for the analysis of the human subject. In this book, Dr. Xie Qun, the author, has demonstrated how the insights of Charles Taylor, an anthropological philosopher, and Jacques Lacan, a linguistic psychoanalyst, can illuminate the problems of the personal in O' Neill's construction of characters. In both Taylor and Lacan, language is the means by which human agency is constituted; and in O' Neill, characters reveal the problems of their mind through the use of a language that engages the self in threatening situations of moral disintegration, and in mental fragmentation. Employing the theories of Taylor and Lacan, this book studies how language serves as a means to express the alienated self in the drama of O' Neill. It is in this respect that the critical interpretation the author offers constitutes original contribution to O' Neill scholarship. It is a pleasure to read this book, and to see a young Chinese scholar's insights in the study of a great American dramatist.

Kwok-kan Tam

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

3 March, 2005

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## Abstract

Of all the disciplines that concern the self, the theories of Charles Taylor and Jacques Lacan illuminate our interpretations of this subject from ethical and psychoanalytical perspectives. Taylor's theory emphasizes that orientation to the "moral good" is the ontological nature of the self. He holds that there are three moral sources that constitute the Western modern identity, and the identity problems faced by the moderns are caused by the collapse of the theistic vision—a supportive moral source among the three. Lacan's elaborations of the psychic structure of the self, for instance, the mirror stage, and the construction of the unconscious, reveal that the self is alienated by nature, and that it is both reliant on the reflection of the Other and subject to the influence of the Other.

The purpose of this book is to interpret the selves represented by Eugene O'Neill in the light of Taylor and Lacan's theories. My research shows that O'Neill's interest in selfhood can be found on both the ethical and psychological aspects, though his dramatic focus shifts in different periods of his career. In his early plays, O'Neill dramatizes the features of uncertainty and fluidity, which is caused by multiple and irreconcilable "moral goods" harbored by the self. In the middle period, O'Neill's concern remains on the moral problems that exist in American culture. But in his drama he explores the psychological experiences of the self in order to demonstrate the connection between the fragmentation of the self and the influence of society. In his late plays, O'Neill focuses on the "displaced" selves—those who live in social, temporal and spatial displacements so as to reveal that the displacements are

strategies employed to cope with modern man's spiritual loss. Through staging the aimless and meaningless existence of the "displaced" selves, O'Neill deals with modern man's identity crisis as related to the moral malaise of Western culture—the "death of God" and the collapse of the Western moral order. In his drama, O'Neill has unconsciously reflected the moral and psychological truth about the self that is revealed by Taylor and Lacan. Nevertheless, his opinion on the self is too complex to be explained in any single theory. This dissertation thus will include a discussion of O'Neill's views on selfhood and his contribution to modern drama in terms of the quest motif.

## 内 容 提 要

在所有关于自我的研究学科中,查尔斯·泰勒和雅克·拉康的理论从伦理和心理分析角度启发了我们对于这一主题的理解。泰勒的理论强调趋“善”为自我的本体性属性。他认为现代西方之道德认同由三大道德源组成,而现代人面临的认同问题正是由于三大道德源中占支撑地位的宗教视野崩溃引起的。拉康关于自我结构的阐述,如镜像阶段和无意识之形成,揭示出自我在本质上是异化的:一方面,它必须依赖他者以获得镜像;另一方面,它屈从于来自他者的影响。

本书旨在借助泰勒和拉康的伦理和心理分析理论,解读尤金·奥尼尔塑造的自我形象。我的研究显示,奥尼尔对于自我的关注包括伦理和心理两个层面,在不同创作时期其侧重点有所不同。其早期作品表现的是自我的不确定性和流动性。这两种特性是由于自我所继承的多样性和不可调和性的“善”所致。在其创作生涯的中期,奥尼尔依旧关注美国文化中存在的道德问题,但他的戏剧表现重点转向对于自我的心理体验的探索进而揭示出自我的破碎感与社会文化之间的联系。在晚期作品中,奥尼尔着重表现“迁徙”的自我——失去社会角色,寄居于想像时空中的自我,奥尼尔将这种“迁徙”诠释为现代人用以应对精神失落的策略。通过展现他们无目标、无意义的生存状况,奥尼尔揭示出现代认同危机与西方文化的痼疾之间的联系,即由“上帝之死”带来的整个西方道德秩序的崩溃。在作品中,奥尼尔无意地对自己的伦理和心理的某些现象流露出与泰勒和拉康相似的观点。

然而,奥尼尔关于自我的理解如此复杂,仅仅以某一种理论无法解释。因而,这本书亦包含了对奥尼尔的自我观的探讨,以及他从寻找自我的主题方面对于现代戏剧所做的贡献。

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*Chapter*

*ONE*

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## **Quests for the Self: Theoretical and Dramatic Contexts**

### **Language and the Self: Negotiating the Subject between Taylor and Lacan**

To compare two great figures from different fields may seem absurd at first sight. However, the nature of the problem of identity or selfhood determines the vast scopes covered in this dissertation. To confine our view to only one field such as sociology, psychology, history or literature means an inevitable loss of other perspectives on identity. Thus a comparative discussion of Charles Taylor and Jacques Lacan, two prominent figures who have contributed to the understanding of identity from two different perspectives, philosophical anthropology and psychoanalysis, may inspire new insights in this area as well as shed light on literary works, specifically the plays of Eugene O' Neill which are the focus of the following chapters.

One issue that centers the discussion of identity in almost all approaches is human agency. Anthony Elliott clarifies the distinction between different approaches as that "[ they ] adopt alternative orientations to mapping the complexities of personal experience, such that the conceptualization is squarely pitched between those that deny the agency of human subjects and argue in favor of the person's



determination by social structures on the one hand, and those that celebrate the authenticity and creativity of the self on the other" (9). This distinction in fact marks the fundamental difference between Taylor and Lacan. Psychoanalysis is initiated by Freud with an attempt to examine the workings of the human mind in the framework of natural science. Taking a stance as such, psychoanalysts see the self as determined by the unconscious desires or emotion, which in turn are the results of factors outside personal choices, such as gender, sexual, racial or ethnic experiences. On the other hand, Taylor's theory is based on the rationality of the Western tradition, giving the role of the subject to human beings and setting them apart from animals and other mere objects. Taylor's philosophy thus allows space for free will—the exercise of human agency.

Despite their divergence in orientation and conclusion, however, there are common points shared by Taylor and Lacan. Both Taylor and Lacan attribute an important role to Language. Language not only provides the tool for self-reflection and self-interpretation; it also provides the only material that psychoanalysts can work with in relation to their patients. The role that language plays in our concept of the self in Taylor's and in Lacan's theories is thus an interesting and important subject for exploration, and an essential linking point between the two.

This section consists of three parts. Part I contains an introduction of Taylor's definition of the self and how it is related to language. Part II will be devoted to the analysis of how Lacan's notion of the subject is tied to Language. Part III will involve a comparison between the two figures in terms of their ideas on language and the subject. Also in this part I will explain what implications Taylor's and Lacan's theories have in analyzing the plays of Eugene O' Neill.