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孙冬 著

A Theater against Interpretation:

A Study of the Indeterminacy of Meaning in Sam Shepard's Plays

反对阐释的戏剧

论美国剧作家山姆·谢泼德戏剧意义的不确定性

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序 言

本书为我的博士论文的完整稿。从开始构思到2009年4月最后完成历时三年多的时间。这其中的滋味虽不足道,又非平常道,只好著书为证。

在此首先感谢我的博士导师刘海平教授以及南京大学的王守仁、朱刚、杨金才、何成洲、江宁康和赵文书等老师,短短几年的教诲和启蒙,裨益一生的成长。无以为报,也只好著书为谢。我的硕士导师唐俭教授一直敦厚博学、以帮助学生为乐,因而,我也没有过多客气,在本书出版之前请他在百忙之中帮助我校对语言和格式。我的朋友和同学多为同道中人,大家的同病相怜减轻了这求学遭际中的痛苦和迷惘。

最后,感谢我的家人。他们的牺牲成就我在学业上的自我完善。大爱无言,愿以同样的牺牲还之。

本书虽穷思竭虑写成,但因时间仓促和才学短浅,仍有很多纰漏之处。对于书中的妄断、疏忽和肤浅之言还望专家和读者批评指正。

孙 冬

2009年10月24日,南京

Abstract

American playwright Sam Shepard's drama is one of indeterminacy. The spontaneous writing style, collage of varied materials, and fantastic reversals have created numerous "ambiguities," "incongruities," "blanks," and "contradictions" in his drama, which breach the cognitive framework as well as dramatic conventions within which the audience interpret dramatic experiences. Paradoxically, these theatrical and textual features open up a proliferation of ways in which audience can read meaning into his plays and demands more interpretative effort from them than does realistic drama. Indeterminacy plays itself out in three terrains of Shepard's drama: theatricality, dramatic narrative, and theme.

The main body of this dissertation consists of three chapters. Chapter One employs the theatrical semiotics and phenomenology to shed light on the indeterminacy of Shepard's theatrical language. In his early and middle plays, Shepard displays a tendency to prioritize visual and aural images as well as body movements that form the vocabulary of a physical language. This language, with its grammar written in perceptual codes, breaks the commonly recognized representational relationship between sign and object, undermines dramatic conflicts, and dissociates itself from verbal language as well as believable motivations, thus disrupting meaning and stymieing critical closure. Speaking in this language, Shepard hopes to agitate for a radical and alternative mode of perception and to capture the contour of unconscious. Yet, it is doubtful whether it is possible to remove the barriers of rationality to communicate with the audience intuitively. Furthermore, this language is not always effective to ensure universal euphoria as the playwright intends.

Chapter Two incorporates the concept of "the fantastic" proposed by Eric Rabkin and Tzvetan Todorov in a semiotic study of the narrative mode of Shepard's drama. Shepard's fantastic mode of presenting events, characterization, and dramatic discourse abstains from the normative authorial norm inter-

ested in the communal, the psychological, the chronological, and the fully rounded characters. This fantastic mode frustrates the audience's or the readers' wish for definite messages, yet it forces them to participate actively in the construction of meaning and invites them to reexamine some of the ontological problems concerning the nature of reality, the self, time, and language. In Shepard's plays, different realities co-exist, collide, and interpenetrate, leading to the dissolution of the boundary between reality and fantasy. In Shepard's view, reality is what one feels better to believe. It is established by language and inextricably intermingles with fantasy. The characters split, transform, or metamorphose abruptly, which challenges the notion of an integral and intelligible "self." Self is fragmented and changing, constructed by language and cultural "traces." Moreover, both the warped time sequence and the fragmented structure seek to ramify immediacy and contingency. They reflect the fissure of the world, the non-linearity of time, and the interpenetration of past, now, and future. Finally, words in Shepard's plays are odd and often lack signifying structures. Arias and dialogues are disconnected from their dramatic contexts and are organized into musical rather than meaningful patterns.

Chapter Three analyzes Shepard's strategy of self-subversion in thematic development. In some of his middle and late plays, the playwright does not envisage any easy choice between the antagonistic forces he "arranges" for the characters to confront. The co-existence of mutually exclusive claims at once undercuts the significance of any particular viewpoint and embraces all possibilities. The indeterminacy of thematic ideas indicates that contradiction is the "true" state of the world and that in all conflicts, any singular solution is impossible without taking into consideration of its very opposite. Furthermore, indeterminacy conveys Shepard's paradoxical visions about the American West, artistic creation, cultural industry, gender relationship, and the destiny of American society. It promotes a postmodern ethical agenda, proposing the forgoing of ideological absolutes, which will help people remove the falsities of the past, inform them of the present, and push them towards an unpredictable future, and calls for the acceptance of "alterity," deliberate moral choice, and responsibility.

Indeterminacy in Shepard's plays is affirmative. It defies authoritative in-

terpretation, challenges modernist notions of the world, articulates the unspeakable, and lays bare the nature of the self, art, and life. It explores the "twilight zones" of culture and art as well as the possibilities of integrating antagonistic poles, and promotes a postmodern ethics. Yet, in Shepard's weaker plays, indeterminate elements are in danger of becoming a major defect. The throwing together of theatrical signs and various materials may probably undermine the serious concerns of the playwright and lead to superficiality and anarchy.

中文摘要

在斑驳庞杂、光怪陆离的当代舞台上,美国剧作家山姆·谢泼德的戏剧独树一帜。其间,各种话语杂糅喧嚣,各种经验偶发混乱,各种形式兼容并蓄,各种观念相生相悖。这种独特的风格在谢泼德的戏剧中造成大量的“空白”、“断裂”、“歧义”和“矛盾”等不确定性特征,从而打破终极的阐释,使意义似是而非、悬而未决,使戏剧具有永恒的开放性和无限的可阐释性。这种在舞台风格(theatricality)、叙事和主题方面体现出来的不确定性旨在摧毁现代主义的理性解决方案,去除创作陈规,打破传统的感觉和认知模式,表现混沌无序的现实,重估传统的价值理念,并引领观众和读者去关注创作和阅读过程本身。本文试图从戏剧文本(戏剧风格、戏剧叙事和主题)和读者(观众)反应的角度来阐释这种不确定性,并探讨不确定性所反映出来的剧作家的审美思想、文化视野和伦理观念。

本文共分三章。第一章运用戏剧符号学和现象学的方法分析了谢泼德戏剧中不确定的感性语言以及它对观众的接受造成的影响。谢泼德的戏剧是听觉和视觉的盛宴。它舍弃传统再现戏剧以对话为主的文学性特质,突破戏剧叙事的结构,突出视觉、听觉意象及演员的姿势和动作,将被自然主义和现实主义戏剧传统所贬抑的“舞台形象”推向前景。这种语言的使用在谢泼德早期和中期的戏剧中尤其突出。戏剧家将这种语言的能指和约定俗成的所指分开,破坏其原有的对应关系,抽离其显性的心理动因,使符号的外部指涉和意指之确定性丧失,这些舞台意象犹如画谜、呓语和咒语,呈现奇异、变幻、公然越轨和跨界混搭等特点。同时,由于各种语言在谢泼德的戏剧中各行其是,互不协调,因而无法有效地传达清晰的信息。这些谰言呓语受无意识的情绪策动,超越于智识之外,去言说一种“不可言说,只可体悟”的主观感受;它们以“残酷”的活力震撼观众,使其更直接地和人物感同身受;它们反抗理性霸权,调和被文明割裂的身心。但事实上,这种语言无法完全去除表征和意识形态的藩篱,也并不能保证总是有效地引领观众进入“无人之地”。使用不当,他们会演变成重复和僵化的符号以及肤浅和堆砌的意象。在谢泼德后期的“现实主义”家庭剧中,剧作家将这种语言与文本相结合,使舞台形象和戏剧语言相得益彰。

益彰,更加有效地展现了戏剧冲突和人物之间关系。

第二章运用戏剧符号学并结合奇幻叙事的概念来分析贯穿于谢泼德整个戏剧创作当中的后现代奇幻叙事风格。这种风格颠覆了传统戏剧的叙事模式对故事铺展、人物刻画、结构安排和对话的规定。在他的戏剧当中,现实和幻想并置、人物破碎、变形、时间顺序颠倒、闲墨旁逸、跨界拼凑、情节偶发而突转、词汇生僻、含混、言语错位、语义异常、语句功能趋向音乐、对话语焉不详,又或各执一词,相互抵牾。奇幻模式取消了人物身份、关系、情节的完整性、抹杀了现实和幻想之间的界限,使任何想确定准确意义的企图完全落空,然而却激发读者参与建构戏剧发展、突出戏剧的“即时性”。通过使用奇幻模式,剧作家表现出对当今世界主体性、现实、时间的发展等问题的关怀。在谢泼德看来,现实是一种个人选择、是一种语言建构、并与幻想交织在一起。自我是分裂、变化的,由无数文化和语言的“痕迹”构成。时间的发展是非线性的,个人时间和社会时间错位,现在、过去和未来相互渗透。

第三章解读了谢泼德后期戏剧中思想的矛盾性。谢泼德在戏剧中预设了冲突的机制。通过设置和解构“二元项”、“成对人物”和“戏仿”等手段进行逆向和反思性思维,重新阐释了美国西部神话、艺术创作的原则、艺术与文化工业的关系、两性关系以及美国家庭和社会的命运等问题。在再现各种矛盾冲突的角力之中,剧作家反拨旧有的等级概念,打破二元对立思维,让各种观点既相互否定又相持并存。这种不确定性在他的剧中形成了无法解决的张力,却并没有否定价值诉求。相反,它确立了一种后现代的价值体系,号召人们打破各种幻想,接受现状,认清善恶的多面性,接受“道德他律”,不断地进行道德选择,并为人类的未来承担更多责任。

不确定性是谢泼德戏剧的一个显著特征。它超越理性和常识,言说不可言说之物;它颠覆戏剧传统,开拓新的阅读(观看)经验;它挑战现代主义的理念和方法,建立新的现实和自我的标识;它探索社会和文化观念的冲突和相互协调的可能性,并试图确立一种后现代的伦理价值。但是在一些戏剧中,不确定因素也会使戏剧流于表面和陷入混乱,成为肤浅喧闹的平庸之作。

A Chronology of Sam Shepard's Plays

Title	Year of First Publishment	First Performance
<i>Cowboys</i>	1964	1964
<i>Rock Garden</i>	1964	1964
<i>Chicago</i>	1967	1965
<i>4-H Club</i>	1970	1965
<i>Icarus's Mother</i>	1967	1965
<i>Red Cross</i>	1967	1966
<i>Fourteen Hundred Thousand</i>	1967	1966
<i>La Turista</i>	1966	1967
<i>Melodrama Play</i>	1967	1967
<i>Cowboy #2</i>	1972	1967
<i>Forensic and Navigators</i>	1970	1967
<i>The Unseen Hand</i>	1971	1969
<i>The Holy Ghostly</i>	1970	1970
<i>Operation Sidewinder</i>	1970	1970
<i>Shaved Splits</i>	1971	1970
<i>Mad Dog Blues</i>	1972	1971
<i>Cowboy Mouth</i>	1972	1971
<i>Back Bog Beast Bait</i>	1971	1971
<i>The Tooth of Crime</i>	1972	1972
<i>Geography of a Horse Dreamer</i>	1974	1974
<i>Action</i>	1976	1974
<i>Killer's Head</i>	1976	1975
<i>Angel City</i>	1976	1976
<i>Suicide in B^b</i>	1976	1976
<i>Curse of the Starving Class</i>	1979	1977
<i>Seduced</i>	1979	1978
<i>Tongues</i>	1981	1978

<i>Buried Child</i>	1979	1978
<i>Savage/Love</i>	1981	1978
<i>True West</i>	1981	1980
<i>Fool for Love</i>	1983	1983
<i>A Lie of the Mind</i>	1986	1985
<i>States of Shock</i>	1993	1991
<i>Simpatico</i>	1994	1994
<i>When the World Was Green</i>	1997	1998
<i>The Late Henry Moss</i>	2003	2000
<i>The God of Hell</i>	2004	2005
<i>Kicking a Dead Horse</i>	2008	2007

Abbreviations List

The following abbreviations of Shepard's titles are used in the following text:

A = Action

AC = Angel City

BBBB = Back Bog Beast Bait

BC = Buried Child

C = Chicago

CP = Cruising Paradise

CS = Cowboys

C#2 = Cowboys # 2

CM = Cowboy Mouth

CSC = Curse of the Starving Class

4HC = 4-H Club

FHT = Fourteen Hundred Thousand

FL = Fool for Love

FN = Forensic and the Navigators

GH = The God of Hell

GHD = Geography of a Horse Dreamer

HG = The Holy Ghostly

IM = Icarus's Mother

KH = Killer's Head

LM = A Lie of the Mind

LT = La Turista

"LVI" = "Language, Visualization and Inner Library"

MDB = Mad Dog Blues

MP = Melodrama Play

OS = Operation Sidewinder

RC = Red Cross

RG = Rock Garden

S = Seduced

SBF = Suicide in B^b

SOS = States of Shock

SS = Shaved Splits

TC = The Tooth of Crime

TW = True West

UH = The Unseen Hand

WWG = When the World Was Green

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Introduction

Sam Shepard (1943-) is one of the most significant playwrights of contemporary American drama. He has written over 50 plays since his first double bill of *Cowboys* and *Rock Garden* was produced in 1964. Over the course of his career, he has received high distinctions including eleven Obie Awards, one Pulitzer Prize and many other accolades. Martin Esslin, speaking of the importance of Sam Shepard, declares succinctly yet appropriately, "He is contemporary American Theater" (qtd. in Robert Coe 58). The *San Francisco Chronicle* dubs him "the best contemporary American playwright" (qtd. in *Sam Shepard: Seven Plays* Front Cover). Leslie Wade alleges that "No playwright in the recent history of the American theater has garnered more attention and acclaim than Sam Shepard" (1). With a career that has spanned three decades, Shepard has achieved the rank and stature accorded such figures as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller.

Several distinctive characteristics contribute to the distinguished esteem of Shepard's work. Firstly, Shepard's plays are overwhelmingly emotional, in which the characters are afflicted with various unspeakable inner angst. They were born injured, preoccupied with their frailties and trapped in some irresolvable dilemmas. Secondly, his plays are quintessentially American. As *Time Magazine* once put it, "If [Shepard's] plays were put in time capsules, future generations would get a sharp-toothed profile of life in the U. S. in the past decade and a half from the works of Sam Shepard" (qtd. in *Seven Plays* Front Cover). Lastly, Shepard's plays are wildly experimental. His plays merit attention and acclaim, not only because they have delineated various private experiences and documented the cultural sentiments of contemporary America onstage, but also because they have presented both individual and national angst with daring originality and frustrating complexity, which make his plays attract and repel the audience/readers at the same time.

Critics have widely acknowledged the difficulty in interpreting Shepard's

plays. C. W. E. Bigsby, feeling short of vocabulary to adequately discuss Shepard's work, makes the assertion that Shepard's work is "simply not susceptible of analysis in conventional terms" (*Twentieth Century American Drama* 228). In *Inner Landscapes, The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, Ron Mottram expresses a similar view that "even the critics who admired him readily confessed that they found his work to be fragmented and at times beyond exegesis" (vii). Different from Bigsby and Mottram, Walter Keir's comment is more concerned with the reception of the audience. He claims that "Shepard either can not or will not write plays that are accessible to a wide audience. . . [he] is a cult-artist whose drama appeals to a coterie audience that possesses some mysterious communication with the playwright" (qtd. in Wongchanta). Richard Gilman, in the introduction to Shepard's *Seven Plays*, illustrates this feature more specifically, putting the principle blame on the formal deviations of Shepard's plays:

Many of his [Shepard's] plays seem partial, capricious, arbitrarily brought to an end and highly unstable. They spill over, they leak. They change, chameleon-like, in self-protection as we look at them. On the whole, [Shepard's work] rejects linear construction, cause and effect sequences, logical procedures, coherent or consistent characters, and the tying of language to explicit meanings" (xxc-vx).

The complaints of Michael Smith and Robert Woodruff are the result of their frustrating experiences directing and producing Shepard's plays. Michael Smith reflects, "It is always hard to tell what, if anything, Shepard's plays are 'about,' although they are unmistakably alive" (159). Woodruff adds to the picture:

The plays are almost assaultive, without being hostile, and they are full of holes and contradictions that you just can't fill in . . . when an audience leaves one of Sam's plays, they are probably really confused. They've just had several hundred images thrown at them-flash, flash, flash-and they can't synthesize it all. (qtd. in Bottoms 2)

Richard Gilman's argument in his introduction to *Seven Plays* best sums up the above remarks:

Sam Shepard is the most interesting and exciting American playwright. Few [critics] however, can articulate just where the interest and excitement lie. There is an extraordinarily limited and homogenous vocabulary of critical writing about Shepard. He refuses to make the readers and audience comfortable in the process of decoding the work at hand or before eyes, and to assure them that they are on the right track" (xvi).

This general agreement justifies indeterminacy as a particularly appropriate topic to discuss with respect to Shepard's plays. Shepard's work displays characteristics of contingency, spontaneity, ambiguity, hybridism and patterns of internal tension that keep his work from achieving closure and frustrate the spectators' or the readers' desire for completion of meaning. Meaning in Shepard's theater is fluid, provisional, and indeterminate.

"Indeterminacy" is defined as the antithesis to determinacy,¹ closure, fixture, and wholeness of understanding²—concepts that are upheld by a Newtonian view of the world. Newtonian mechanics rests on the assumption of a nature that can be, at least in principle, completely explained by an objective observer. As John Barrow describes in *A Theory of Everything*, in the Newtonian dispensation, the universe is just a realm of logic and law whose fundamental unity is revealed through the magic of what is called "algorithmic compressibility"—a pattern of logic that allows "observed data to be represented in a truncated form" (11). The Newtonian vision of the world is projected in the works of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spenser, and Emile Zola,³

1 According to Charles Altieri, a general case for determinacy must show that "we either have a basic sense of informing purpose or we know the kind of evidence which would resolve competing interpretations" (215).

2 Timothy Bahti argues "Traditionally, the wholeness of understanding has been a cornerstone of hermeneutics or the science of interpretation. That is, the thesis that an interpretation must be whole or complete has been operative within all mainstream hermeneutics models, either as a hypothesis or regulative principle posed as the counterpart to the individual and the partial aspects of an interpretation or as horizon to be approached asymptotically, thus giving direction and purpose to the practice of interpretation, both individual and collective" (211).

3 In "The Experimental Novel," Emile Zola observes that the naturalistic author "gives the facts as he observes them. . . displays the solid earth on which his characters are to tread and the phenomena to develop" (qtd. in Demastes, *Realism*, 255). In this article and as well as in his later work *Naturalism and Theater*, the influence of modern science is fully felt and the logic of induction is forcefully established.