

中文摘要

悲剧是在漫长的人类发展过程中产生并不断衍化而成的文艺表现形式。悲剧是戏剧的一种，它起源于古希腊的祭祀表演。随着社会的发展，在经历了古希腊悲剧和莎士比亚悲剧两大传统的辉煌后，现代的悲剧呈现出其特有的时代特征。作为 20 世纪美国最伟大的剧作家之一，尤金·奥尼尔毕生致力于悲剧创作，并根据时代需要对其进行改革和创新。他的名作《悲悼》既涵盖了传统悲剧的元素，如：合唱队、面具等；同时又对悲剧艺术进行了发展和创新，使其呈现出现代的特征。本文基于亚里士多德的《诗学》中的相关悲剧理论，通过对奥尼尔的《悲悼》和古希腊悲剧进行比较分析，揭示了奥尼尔的悲剧作品对古希腊悲剧的继承和创新。

在正文部分，本文以亚里士多德的《诗学》为理论基础，从悲剧人物、悲剧技巧、悲剧意识和悲剧效果等四个方面，将奥尼尔的悲剧作品《悲悼》与古希腊悲剧²进行了对比分析。第一，关于悲剧人物。亚里士多德在他的《诗学》中提到：情节是古希腊悲剧的灵魂，而悲剧人物只不过是任凭作家摆布的木偶。然而在奥尼尔的悲剧作品里，悲剧人物都具有自我意识，他们的行为均源出自己的意志。在被征服的肉体和灵魂下，是他们对人性的永恒不懈的追求。生活在这个世界上，他们一直与不可预知的力量做斗争。在古代悲剧中，他们的对手是无所不知、无所不能的上帝。而在奥尼尔的悲剧创作中，他们抗争的对象充满矛盾的极不和谐的自己的内心世界。第二，关于悲剧技巧。奥尼尔另一创新就是拓展了古希腊悲剧技巧—面具和合唱队的使用域。与古代悲剧中利用面具区别角色不同的是，他利用面具来展示人物的内心冲突和变化。另外，他还创新性地用镇上的居民代替合唱队来介绍故事的背景情况，为故事的发展做好了铺垫。第三，关于悲剧意识。从古希腊悲剧到现代悲剧，悲剧作者的悲剧意识都是在探询人类的本性和生存意识。现代的奥尼尔在他的悲剧作品《悲悼》中再一次为读者展示了强烈的悲剧意识：即人不得不同时面对自身和宇宙中那神秘而不可抗拒的力量。它构成了

² 这里的古希腊悲剧仅仅只包括古希腊三大悲剧家所写的悲剧。他们分别是埃斯库罗斯（公元前 525—456），作品有《波斯人的故事》，《被缚的普洛米修斯》，和著名的三联剧《阿瑞斯特斯》等等；索福克勒斯（公元前 496—406），作品有《俄狄浦斯王》，《安提戈涅的故事》，《厄勒克特拉的故事》等等；欧里庇得斯（公元前 486—406），作品有《美狄亚》，《特洛伊妇女》等等。

悲剧中的宿命感，使悲剧充满了悖论，同时还表现出了人类对世界的认识和对自我的认识。这种自我意识包括自我求证、自我实现的意识以及对自身悲剧性处境的认识。第四，关于悲剧效果，或曰悲剧感受。亚里士多德认为：悲剧通过激起怜悯和恐惧来达到这些情绪的净化。然而奥尼尔的悲剧带给大家的并不仅仅是怜悯和恐惧，它还毫无保留的向观众或读者展现了宇宙间最高的真实：人生是一个充满无望希望的过程，希望以及理性精神和意志力量都体现在人与命运的无望的抗争中。因此，悲剧效果也就是悲剧要展示给观众的一种正视人生苦难、反抗命运捉弄、争取人生自由的崇高精神。

最后，本文得出结论：奥尼尔的作品不仅继承了古代悲剧的重要基本元素，同时还呈现出现代悲剧的时代特征，揭示了文学史上文学体裁的继承性和时代性的不可逾越的事实，而一切美好的文学创作都是作家对文学艺术的继承和创新的心血结晶。文中作者所用的分析方法同样也可用于其它作品或主题的分析。

关键词：尤金·奥尼尔；继承；创新；悲剧人物；悲剧技巧；悲剧意识；悲剧效果

ABSTRACT

Tragedy is a cultural concept which has been developing and evolving in the long history of human being. As a kind of drama, tragedy originated from the performance of the sacrifices-offering to Gods and ancestors. Later, after the glory of the two traditional forms, ancient Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy, along with the social development, tragedy timely presents specific modern features. As one of the greatest playwrights in the early 20th century of American history, Eugene O'Neill devotes his whole life to tragedy writing, inheriting and innovating tragedy writing in accordance with the ever-changing expression need of the realistic human society. His famous novel *Mourning Becomes Electra* not only contains the essence of traditional tragedy, but also brings forth new elements in the art of tragedy. This thesis tentatively takes O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* as an opening to unfold his inheritance of ancient Greek tragedies and innovation of tragedy writing by applying certain theories of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* to the said play.

According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, this thesis respectively analyzes the main characters in O'Neill's work and compares the tragic techniques he experimented, the tragic sense manifested in this work and the tragic effect he aroused by help of those of ancient Greek tragedies¹. Firstly, according to Aristotle's *Poetics*, plot is the soul in ancient Greek tragedies, and the character is only a puppet-like role whose behavior is determined by the will of the writer. However, O'Neill's characters act and speak in accordance with their own wills and instincts. Underneath their conquered or conquerable physical entities and their spiritual souls there is uniformly an inextinguishable quality—eternal pursuit of human nature in human existence. Living in this world, man is persistently fighting with an unknown power. In ancient Greek tragedies his rival was the omniscient God and in O'Neill's tragic creation the

¹ Greek tragedies refer to the tragedies written by Aeschylus(525-456 B.C.), whose famous works include *The Persians*, *Prometheus Bound*, the great trilogy on the story of *Orestes*, etc.; by Sophocles(496-406B.C.), whose famous works include *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, *Electra*, etc.; and by Euripides(486-406B.C.), whose famous works include *Medea*, *the Trojan Women*, etc....

disharmony between incompatible or antithetical conflicts in his mental world turns out to be the most powerful opponent of himself. Secondly, O'Neill's other great experiments are the more extensive use of the ancient Greek tragic techniques – the mask to show his characters' spiritual changes and conflicts and the chorus made up of town people to formally introduce the narrative background significant to the progression of the action or the plot. Thirdly, from ancient Greek tragedies to modern tragedies the author's tragic sense finds its way to the exploration into man's nature and existence. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill once again shows us the splendor of the tragic sense that man has to face mysterious demonic forces in his own nature and outside. It not only makes up fatalism in Tragedy and fills tragic works with paradoxes, but also shows man's consciousness of the world and of himself, that's the awareness of self-fulfillment and of his own tragic situation. Fourthly, concerning tragic effect, or the tragic pleasure, or the tragic spirit, Aristotle puts forward that Tragedy arouses pity and fear in the audience and produces effect on them through purifying such emotions in their minds. However, fear and pity are not the only feelings aroused in the audience by O'Neill's plays, they also manifest to us without any reservation the highest truth of the universe: life is a course filled with a hopeless hope and this hope is reflected in man's hopeless resistance with his destiny, so are his rational spirit and willpower. Therefore, the tragic effect or pleasure is a sublime spirit of envisaging painful realities of life, resisting the tease of fate and striving for freedom of life.

Finally, the thesis comes to its conclusion that O'Neill not only inherits the fundamental and crucial elements from the traditional Tragedies but also embodies the features of modern tragedies which discloses an invariable truth that the inheritance and innovation are both inevitable in literary styles and in literary history. All the great literary works of the corpus of world literature are the painstaking production of all the literary writers' life-devotion to the inheritance and innovation of the art of literature. The analysis the author has practiced in the thesis could also be applied to the study of other literary works.

Key Words: Eugene O'Neill; inheritance; innovation; tragic character; tragic technique; tragic sense; tragic effect

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Objective of the Thesis

This thesis tentatively takes O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* as an opening to unfold his inheritance of ancient Greek tragedies and innovation of tragedy writing by applying certain theories of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* to the said play. In this way it is comparatively easier for us to see that O'Neill's works not only inherit the features of the western traditional tragedies but also embody those of the modern ones, which reveals that simple assimilation is not enough, innovation and development based on inheritance is an inevitable way for modern literary writers to contribute to literary prosperity.

The specific research questions are addressed here:

- 1) How does O'Neill turn the central focus from the tragic plot to the tragic character?
- 2) How does O'Neill inherit the ancient tragic techniques and use them in modern tragedies?
- 3) What is the tragic sense that O'Neill inherits from ancient Greek tragedies?
- 4) What is the tragic effect the audience gets from O'Neill's works?

1.2 The Background Information of the Thesis

1.2.1 The Position of Eugene O'Neill in the World Literary Stage

Eugene O'Neill is generally considered as one of America's greatest and foremost playwright. His artistic style and creative contribution to the American modern stage have established his position as one of the greatest American

playwrights. American drama had no place in the world stage until his appearance, and it was his excellent works that made the world begin to know American drama. What O'Neill concerned about was human existence and the force behind it, which attracted many people's attention. In 1936, he won the Nobel Prize for literature as the first American dramatist, which made him the founder of American 20th century modern tragedy.

1.2.2 The Background Information of Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill was the first important American dramatist, one towering literary figure in the world history. His Great achievements owe a lot to his father, James O'Neill, one of the most famous American stage actors. Eugene O'Neill grew up at the backstage, and both of his parents were pious Catholics. When he was a young boy, he was once a sincere Catholic. But then he altered his view on religion, because the omnipotent God who he had prayed to did not save his mother who was at that time addicted to the drug. His inner struggle between the deep-rooted faith and the rebellious skepticism grasped him tightly over the years. In his *All God's Chillun Got Wings* the hero Jim, on behalf of the playwright, accused God of having them suffer so bitterly, "Maybe He can forgive what in accordance with the middle-class fashion of those days you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive-Himself." (O'Neill, 1988, p314)

In 1906, he went to Princeton University. Two years later he quitted from the university since the routine life there did not fit him. In 1909, he was sent for gold hunting by his father; since the father of his newly married wife insulted his father that O'Neill had cheated his daughter into the marriage. Luckily, this voyage helped him a lot with his writing the play *The Emperor Jane*, in which there were a lot of detailed descriptions of Central America. Then he returned home penniless. He turned to his parents for money, but they rebuffed to teach him a lesson. To retaliate his parents, he committed suicide but failed, through which, however, his sense of tragedy was fully manifested. From then on, he found different kinds of jobs to do and

kept on seeking for the meaning of life.

In 1912, O'Neill was diagnosed to have infected tuberculosis and had to stay in a sanatorium for three months. During these three months, O'Neill was kept from humanity and very near to the Grim Reaper, and at the same time he was fortunately given enough time and space to have a retrospective view over his life. At that time, he totally realized that his predestined fate was playwriting. Actually his childhood experience of growing up in the stage gave him the first lesson of theatrical art, and he was as familiar with the theatrical tricks as an experienced craftsman in this field. Furthermore, various jobs he had taken in the early time and his wandering life also gained him the opportunity to observe the true life and collected enough source writing materials.

In 1914, he went to Harvard University to attend playwriting class of a famous Professor, Baker. As to O'Neill, he was already very familiar with the basic requirements for playwriting—the concept of taking plays as a physical medium. The professor warmly welcomed him and encouraged him to go further on this way to art, which means a lot to him as a beginner in this field. In most of O'Neill's works, the common themes are death, diseased love, frustrated hope, etc. His daring techniques and untraditional plots all seemed incompatible with the main trend. It was *Provincetown Player* that helped him a lot at the crucial point of his life. The *Provincetown Player*, which was composed of novelists, journalists, painters, teachers and architects, was founded to bring literary and artistic value onto the American stage. They first introduced to American the works of such European masters as Anton Chekhov, Maurice Maeterlinck, Henry Ibsen and Bernard Shaw with the advanced theatrical forms and techniques. They try every effort to find someone who had mastered the theatrical techniques and grasped the genuine feeling which invited echoes in the hearts of the audience. O'Neill was the one they wanted who could make any experiments he liked with his creation and innovation on the basis of others'. The *Provincetown Players* helped him turn his experiments into reality. In this way, O'Neill founded a foothold in this field and was gradually accepted by the mainstream theater.

1.2.3 The Background of the Creation of *Mourning Becomes Electra*

To better understand the reason why Eugene O'Neill chooses to adapt an ancient Greek tragedy, we should first take a brief look at the development of this nation's theater.

In the early 1920s, when the Puritans first settled down in this new land, fiction and poem began to flourish in America. However, drama in America was regarded as something inferior that might demoralize people's minds. Due to this public prejudice against drama, this form of art, like a malnourished baby, had a hard time and developed slowly. Thus, American drama undoubtedly lagged far behind his European counterpart who did not receive such unfair treatment and developed abreast with fiction and poem. Under such circumstances, no innovation or experimentation was possible, even many classical masterpieces of such famous dramatists as Shakespeare, Ibsen and others were ruined to exchange audience's temporary laughter and applause. American drama barely developed. It was the main actor rather than the author that was featured in lights and attracted the audience on the road. It was common for the chief actor to go on tour and rehearse very briefly. The key point was that he could really make the audience laugh. These actors were busy making money, "by showing themselves rather than challenging their abilities, by repeating favorite roles and speeches rather than widening their artistic range." (Berlin, 1982, p.38) Actually, there had been some writers making attempts at poetic drama. But they were essentially dramatic poetry, not serious drama for stage performance. The main trend was the juicy storylines with abnormal love, murder and revenge to testify the public's appetite for visual stimulation and entertainment. These American playwrights aimed at exchanging applause from the obliging audience who traded money and laughter for a good joke in the drama. They seldom thought about any deep subject as man's existence or man's fate.

When O'Neill took his pen, he was sick of these stuffs and willing to devote to fighting with this abnormal environment. He would return the art its original form. Furthermore, he wanted to add something new to the drama. In his opinion, ancient

Greek Tragedy represented the sublime of tragedy, and fully embodied man's difficult position and unconquerable fighting spirit, and modern tragedies were just lack of such sublime religious spirit and firm belief towards life. Thus as a playwright who concerns man's fate, O'Neill pursues the ideal of ancient Greek tragedies and revives the tragic spirit of ancient Greek in his own tragedies. (Doris V, 1958, p.105) In his works, he inherited the essence of Greek Tragedy and meanwhile made innovation and experimentation of them, which embodied them traits of modern tragedy. Thus we can find numerous similarities between O'Neill's tragedies and ancient Greek tragedies. For instance, the plots of *Desire under the Elms* are inherited from ancient Greek tragedies of Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Medea*, such as the incestuous love between the stepmother and her son, and to prove her true heart, the mother kills the infant. Therefore, Norman Berlin (1982) calls this play as O'Neill's "first Greek drama". The most representative and enduring masterpiece is *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which represents the playwright's most complete inheritance of Greek forms, characters, techniques, clues and themes. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a trilogy, namely, *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted* respectively corresponding to *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides* of *Oresteia*. O'Neill once clearly mentioned that the motion of creating this play was to put ancient Greek tragic plots into the modern tragedy. These similarities of the two plays show how deep O'Neill had influenced by the revenge subject of ancient Greek tragedies. Furthermore, he made some innovation and experimentation in this play, which successfully modernized this ancient fatal tragedy. Thus with great insight and artistic sensitivity, O'Neill has triumphantly managed to bring heroic and noble colors to the most debased human action and it is this beauty that has established his position of the leading dramatist in America.

1.2.4 The Origin of Tragedy and Its Early Development

Tragedy, the highest form of poetical art, originated from ancient Greece and rose to its peak in the 20th century. In ancient Greece, people acted on the sacrifice to

the God. The original form was just one actor playing all the roles and the audience distinguished different characters from the change of the masks. A chorus commented on the characters' actions or expressed their thoughts. Then later dramatists made some improvements and pushed tragedy to its flourishing age. Aeschylus, one of the three masters of ancient Greek tragedies, added some actors, which made the audience easily distinguish the characters and concentrate on the plots. He was renowned for his elevated tone and his idea of "knowledge through suffering". His most famous works included *Prometheus Bound* and *The Oresteia* (a trilogy comprising *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides*) which was just the prototype of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The former was the first part of a trilogy of which the last two parts had been lost, and the latter was praised highly in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The other two noted playwrights were Sophocles and Euripides. Sophocles' greatest play was *Oedipus the King*. As the other two masters, his theme was mainly about man's existence situation, the relationship between human and the gods, and man's permanent struggle with the unknown force, which seemed to control his fate. Sophocles' works displayed a more humanistic and familiar world than that of Aeschylus'. Euripides, who reduced the importance of the chorus, was the first playwright who set women as the central character. His famous works were *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *The Trojan Women*. After Euripides' appearance, no more such playwrights came out and ancient Greek tragedies were past their prime time.

Generally speaking, ancient Greek tragedies bear the following features: human lives independently and hopelessly in the unknown world; man's fate and sufferings are closely related to the force or power behind. On behalf of man, tragic heroes fight against the power that governed the human world.

Based on thorough study of these three ancient Greek playwrights' works, Aristotle gave the first definition of tragedy in his *Poetics*, and revealed the constituents of tragedy including plot, character, diction, spectacle, thought and song, and tragic effect, etc.

Skillfully applying tragic techniques, the three outstanding ancient Greek tragic playwrights created these great works. In this thesis, the author chooses *Prometheus*

Bound, *Oedipus the King* and *Medea* as the objects to make comparative analysis, since no matter from tragic techniques, tragic sense or tragic effect, these three works are apparently representative ones, which has been widely accepted by many experts in their theses. (Esterling, 2000, p.134)

1.2.5 The Outline of *Mourning Becomes Electra*

T. S. Eliot once observed that good poets borrow, while great poets steal; the plot for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, produced in 1932, was stolen from the works of Euripides, Sophocles and especially the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. (Manheim, 2000, p.76)

O'Neill set the story of *Mourning Becomes Electra* in New England, and the characters in the play were normal modern people. In O'Neill's hands, this ancient story embodied colorful modern traits, such as characters full of self-consciousness, mask-like appearance and so on, and was full of dramatic changes. Part One of the trilogy, *Homecoming*, describes that Ezra, the father, is poisoned by Christine, his wife, upon his return to New England in 1865 from serving as a Union General in the American Civil War; Part Two, *The Hunted*, depicts that the outraged Lavinia, the daughter, manipulates her neurotic, oedipal brother, Orin, into killing Brant, their mother's lover, goading Christine, their mother, into committing suicide. The final play, *The Haunted*, finds that Lavinia worries that Orin, driven half-insane by guilt and incestuous desire, will confess and tarnish the Mannon name. She drives her brother to suicide, and finally entombs herself within the family mansion for the remainder of her life.

The prototype, *Oresteia*, the collective name given to the three Greek tragedies (trilogy including *Agamemnon*, *Clytemnestra*, and *Orestes*) by Aeschylus, produced at Athens in 458 B.C. It is the only trilogy that survives completely. The story is taken from the mythical history of the descendants of Atreus in which crime led to further crime through several generations. In the first part *Agamemnon*, the father Agamemnon is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus, with the

excuse of his sacrifice of their daughter Iphigeneia. In the second part *Choephoroe*, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, returns to avenge his father following the God Apollo's instructions. With his sister Electra's help, Orestes kills his mother and her lover in the palace, but finally the avenging Furies (ancient goddess) come to haunt him. The last part *Eumenides* is ended with the reconciliation between the God Athena and the Furies.

Although O'Neill has "stolen" the plots from this ancient Greek tragedy, he does not automatically imitate his ancient Greek ancestors. From almost the same plots, he comes to a modern end, in which the protagonist does not yield to the fate, but bravely faces the cruel reality. Especially in the third play, which is the moral and religious finale in Aeschylean tragedy, and there is no more description of Electra, while through vivid description of Lavinia's struggle, in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill newly creates a modern character, Electra, who bravely fights with the fate. By doing this, he endows this play a heroic color, which makes his play not only different from the Greek one but far beyond its model. Besides the plots of this tragedy, in other details, from providing a narrative background of lust and betrayal in the previous generation to experimenting with the formal use of a "chorus" of town people to introduce the plays, and to innovatively using the "masks" to describe characters' inner spiritual world, O'Neill attempts to transfer this ancient Greek tragedy to the American modern stage, and he successfully makes it.

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters including an introduction and a conclusion.

Chapter one is a brief introduction of the objective and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two is the literature review, which provides the background information of the theme of this thesis, such as Eugene O'Neill's literary experience, the former study of this great playwright, the similarities of *Mourning Becomes Electra* and its

prototype, and the relevant theory – the foundation of tragedy theories – Aristotle's *Poetics*, and accordingly brings about the reason why the author of the thesis chooses to analyze O'Neill's work basing on this ancient theory.

From chapter three to chapter six the author respectively analyzes the main characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and compares the tragic techniques Eugene O'Neill has experimented, the tragic sense manifested in this work and the tragic effect the audience got from tragedies. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the plot is the soul in ancient Greek tragedies, and the character is only a puppet-like role whose behavior is determined by the will of the writer. However, O'Neill's characters act and speak in accordance with their own wills and instincts. Underneath their conquered or conquerable physical entities and their spiritual souls there is uniformly an inextinguishable quality – eternal pursuit of human nature in human existence, which makes man an undefeatable, though destructible, character. O'Neill's other great experiments are the use of ancient Greek tragic techniques – the mask to show his characters' spiritual changes and conflicts, and the formal use of the chorus formed by the town people to introduce the narrative background which is important to the progression of the action or plot. From ancient Greek tragedies to modern tragedies the author's tragic sense finds its way to the exploration into man's nature and existence. In modern times, O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* once again shows us the splendor of the tragic sense that man has to face mysterious demonic forces in his own nature which not only makes up fatalism in Tragedy and fills tragic works with paradoxes, but also shows the consciousness and self-consciousness of man: the consciousness of self-fulfillment and the awareness of his own tragic situation – no truth is achieved without the high price of self-destruction. Concerning tragic effect, Aristotle puts forward that Tragedy effects through arousing pity and fear and purifying such emotions in the audience's minds. However, fear and pity are not the only feelings aroused in the audience by O'Neill's plays, they further manifest to us clearly that the highest truth of the universe is that life is a hopeless hope and full of sufferings and tortures; man has to be aware of this situation and fights with his destiny. So, the tragic pleasure is a sublime spirit of bravely facing his miserable fate

and persistently resisting his destiny, though there is only a hopeless hope.

Chapter seven is the conclusion, which summarizes the analysis of inheritance and innovation of ancient Greek tragedies seen from the play of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, presents some thinkable limitations and gives some conceivable suggestions intended for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Former Studies on Eugene O'Neill

During his 65-year life, Eugene O'Neill wrote thirty-four plays, seven of which were familiar to the audience.: *Beyond the Horizon*(1919-20), *The Emperor Jones*(1920-21), *Anna Christie*(1921-22), *Desire Under the Elms*(1924-25), *The Great God Brown*(1925-26),*Strange Interlude*(1927-28), and *Mourning Becomes Electra*(1931-32). During his life, three times he won Pulitzer Prizes respectively for *Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christie*, and *Strange Interlude*. In 1936, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1956, three years after he died, *Long Days Journey into Night* won him the fourth Pulitzer Prize. It was a singular record unmatched by any other modern American dramatist of the Twentieth. His devotion to playwriting might be roughly divided into three periods: the early apprentice years (1913-1920), the middle experimental years (1920-1934) and the late mature years (1934-1943). In the first period, as a young writer, he composed mostly one-act plays among which *Bound East for Cardiff*, *Moon of the Caribbees*, and *He* were comparatively popular. Ever since his first long play, *Beyond the Horizon*, which won him his first Pulitzer Prize, he switched to write plays full of experiments and surprises, including *All God's Chillun got Wings*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *The Great God Brown*, *Strange Interlude*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Lazarus Laughed*, and *Days Without End*. After the extremely innovative middle period, O'Neill again returned to realism in playwriting. The third mature period included one one-act play *Hughie* and three important full-length plays *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Unlike the former two periods, the style of this period was lack of theatrical tricks and machinery.

In the history of theatre, O'Neill has been the subject of more discussions than any other American playwrights. According to John H. Housh, (1933) the life and the works of O'Neill have been the focus of two groups of scholars: theatre critics and literary scholars. When he was alive, the theatre critics mainly discussed the manner in which O'Neill dealt with the traditional elements of language, plot, and characterization; his experiments with formal elements such as masks, asides, soliloquies, and sound effects; and the controversial subject matter in his plays such as misogyny, incest, matricide, patricide, abortion, alcoholism, and drug addiction. On the other hand, the literary scholars addressed O'Neill's plays as literature rather than scripts to be performed. This kind of study was mainly carried on after his death. It can be roughly divided into four categories: interpretative studies, comparative explorations, historical analysis, and biographical and psycho biographical research. The interpretative studies investigated topics such as biblical interpretations, symbolism of certain scenic elements, the female characters, examinations of facial portrayals and discourses on various philosophical attitudes. The comparative explorations examined O'Neill's relationship with other major literary figures in the western world comparing sources, attitudes, and influences. The historical analysis mainly traced the development of certain writing projects or documents and the staging of certain productions. The biographical and psycho biographical research attempted to indicate how O'Neill translated his personal experiences into dramatic statements. (John H. 1933, p.4-6)

In China, experts and scholars began to study O'Neill in 1930s. The research of Eugene O'Neill and his works includes the following aspects.

Firstly, the scholars explore O'Neill's innovation and inheritance of European traditional elements. According to his creating techniques, O'Neill's works can be roughly divided into three types: expressionism, realism and symbolism. The researchers probed that he has absorbed the essence of Jack London, Ibsen, Maupassant, etc., by respectively studying his masterpieces *The Emperor Jones*, *Desire Under the Elm*, *Strange Interlude*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *The Hairy Ape* and *The Iceman Cometh*. Secondly, from perspective of psychology, they probe

the influence of Freud's psychologi-analysis on O'Neill's writing, analyzing detailed spiritual activities of tragic characters in O'Neill's plays. Thirdly, they explore social origin of O'Neill's tragedies. Lastly, they make comparative study on O'Neill's relationship with eastern countries, especially with China.

O'Neill is a multi-influenced playwright, and each side of his writing is meaningful. The survey on each side seems exhaustive. The ancient Greek tragedy's influence on him and his experiments of Greek tragic techniques are the foundation of his playwriting. The author of this thesis aims at analyzing O'Neill from the very beginning of his writing career and laying firm foundation for my further study in the future.

2.2 Aristotle's *Poetics* and Other Tragic Theories

Aristotle, the great philosopher of ancient Greece, wrote the influential book *Poetics* based on his thorough study of the three masters of the ancient Greek tragedies. In his *Poetics* he gave tragedy the first complete definition:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions...Every tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality: namely, plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, song. (Aristotle, 1999, p.38-39)

In this definition, Aristotle reveals the nature, the constituents and the peculiar aesthetic effects of tragedy. In respect of nature, tragedy is a kind of imitation. On the level of constituents, tragedy includes these major elements of plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song. In respect of aesthetic effect, tragedy arouses feeling of pity and fear. Besides the outline of tragedy, Aristotle also comments on other elements in a tragedy such as the unity of action, recognition and reversal, nature of the tragic hero, etc.

Afterwards, numbers of scholars of different fields make various comments on Aristotle's *Poetics*, or put forward some new theories based on this fundamental tragic theory. After Aristotle, the first one who makes breakthrough in this field is Hegel, a renowned German philosopher. Based on his thorough study of Tragedy, he applies the theory of contradictions to the analysis of Tragedy. In his theory, Tragedy is a process of two different as well conflicting ethic aspects fighting with each other and ending in triumph of eternal justice. The value of this theory is that Hegel innovatively analyzes Tragedy with the identity of opposites. Another outstanding German philosopher making great contribution to Tragedy is Schopenhauer, who, unlike the other optimistic philosophers, stresses suffering in Tragedy. In his opinion, man is born to experience tortures and there is no hope in man's life. His theory influences a number of followers, and stresses that life is full of pain and tortures. Inspired by Schopenhauer but basically contrary to his pessimism, Nietzsche optimistically borrows the names of two Greek deities Dionysus and Apollo, to symbolize two fundamental psychological experiences in his masterpiece *The Birth of Tragedy*. He reevaluates everything in the world since God is dead. He rationally realizes that life is full of pain but everything is meaningful. If one just feels painful in Tragedy, he misses the essence of tragic spirit: though painful, man still reacts optimistically. He is great since he realizes the two sides of Tragedy, the truth of life. Then in 20th century, with rapid development of science and society, people's spiritual life changes greatly. Scholars and criticisms try to negate and renew traditional tragic theories. Besides, they apply various literary theories to the study and analysis of certain playwrights and their concrete works.

In short, with the development of society, tragic theory changes gradually. As the basic tragic theory, Aristotle's *Poetics* still plays a crucial part in guiding followers' exploration into the essence of Tragedy.

CHAPTER THREE

INNOVATION SEEN FROM TRAGIC CHARACTERS

As to tragic character, Aristotle has an influential definition that the tragic hero “must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families.”(Aristotle, 1999, p.33) From these words, we can get that the protagonists in ancient Greek tragedies are mostly those emperors, great men or heroes from noble families or the upper-class, and the characters in ancient Greek tragedies are only the doers of action, connectors of plots, promoters of progress and do not have obvious distinctive features of their own. In *Oedipus the King*, although Oedipus encounters and suffers a lot, everything he experiences has been arranged. No matter how hard he has tried, he can never escape from this fate. Since his only function is to fulfill this oracle, and his own characteristics do not function in or lead to his behaviors, any other character can take his place and play well his part.

However, when the 19th century came it witnessed many outstanding intellects such as Charles R. Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and the others. Darwin's theories of the origin of species and the descent of man indicated that man descended from primal apes, but not from Adam and Eve as the Bible depicted. Freud's psychoanalytical works studied man's consciousness and disclosed the existence of the unconscious. Modern tragedy is violently affected by these social and intellectual revolutions. Therefore, the tragic cause is found not to be the God's will or the fate, but the conflict of people's subconsciousness. And in most of O'Neill's tragedies, the protagonists are no longer heroes like Prometheus or Oedipus but common people from all walks of life such as stokers, lonely sailors, prostitutes, derelicts poets, businessmen and so on. And their mission is to reflect not only the confusion of its times, but also human's existence in the more complex and uneasy world. By then man realizes that he is not controlled by the omniscient God but by his own

unconscious pulse and the tragic characters are the tragedy makers and victims at the same time. So what he fights with is not the unknown power, but his own characteristics, that's, the character tries to control his own uncontrollable character. Under such circumstances, modern playwrights such as O'Neill turn more obviously to psychological subtlety and transition from outer conflicts to inner ones. It can be inferred that it is the development of science that human beings realize that they are the real hosts of themselves, and fate is controlled in their own hands; they are no longer the connectors of plots, and they have their own will to decide their choice. This is O'Neill's apparent contribution to the development or innovation of ancient Greek tragedies.

3.1 Lavinia

Lavinia is the central character in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Compared with the model Electra, she is the representative of the typical modern characters full of free will.

3.1.1 Electra—The Model of Lavinia

From the title of O'Neill's work *Mourning Becomes Electra*, we can clearly get that the main character of this work is a girl whose model is Electra. However, in *Oresteia*, Electra is not a main character. The author does not distribute too much length to her. She plays a role of a plot connector in this play to expect her brother's return and his revenge for their father's death. She appears at the second part of this play. Although, the author compares Electra with her younger sister, who is weaker and more cowardly than the former, there is still so limited description of her characteristics, let alone her spiritual world, that the audience or readers could not get strong impression of her.

In O'Neill's modern play *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Electra turns into Lavinia, a modern lady, who experiences her spiritual struggle and finally dares to fight with her doomed fate.

3.1.2 Lavinia

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the central figure is apparently Lavinia. She is a tragic figure of double characters.³ Her failure is not the result of the pressure from the outside but from her own spiritual world. In the first two parts of this play, Lavinia is depicted as a defender of Puritanism, which is a part of feature inherited from his father. The central line of the first two parts is the conflict between Lavinia and her mother Christine. On the surface, the problem seems to be the family conflict between mother and daughter caused by the mother's betrayal of the family, but actually, the truth is not as simple as it seems.

As Christine's daughter, Lavinia "has the same peculiar shade of copper-gold hair, the same pallor and dark violet-blue eyes, the black eyebrows meeting in a straight line above her nose, the same sensual mouth, and the same heavy jaw." (O'Neill, 1988, p.23) and the author emphasizes "one is immediately struck by her facial resemblance to her mother." From the appearance, Lavinia is a copy of her mother Christine. But not as soft, gentle and passionate as her mother, Lavinia's "movements are stiff and she carries herself with a wooden, square-shouldered, military bearing. She has a flat dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like an officer giving orders." (Ibid) Lavinia does her utmost to emphasize the dissimilarity rather than the resemblance to her mother, "she wears her hair pulled tightly back, as if to conceal its natural curliness, and there is not a touch of feminine allurement in her severely plain get-up." (Ibid) Why does she appear like this? Because she is different from Christine from inner consciousness.

Born in an England family with a history of more than 200 years, Lavinia accepted restrict education of Calvinism and grew up as a faithful Puritan. In her mind, beauty is disgusting, and love is the cause of crime. Since the nature of human is evil, people should live a hard life to redeem an eternal soul. Evil things on the world are deserved to be punished, and just power should never stop fighting with devil forces.

³ Double characters: The hero's double characters did not only mean inside and outside of the character, but also that human's inner world was self-contradictory.

It is this thought and the lack of her mother's love since childhood that cultivates an indomitable, cunning and calm character in her. However, "Christine Mannon is a tall striking-look woman of forty but she appears younger. She has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a flowing animal grace. Her face is unusual, handsome rather than beautiful." (O'Neill, 1988, p.20) She is hot and romantic. Beautiful, lovely and full of romantic dream, 17-year-old Christine fell in love with handsome, mysterious Ezra at the first time and married him. But after their wedding, Christine completely changed the first impression of Ezra, and transmitted her disappointment and hatred to her daughter—Lavinia. The conflict between mother and daughter was born when Lavinia came to the world. As a little girl, Lavinia ran to Christine for mother's love, but Christine always pushed her away. Although Christine sensed that it was wrong to treat her child like that, she still refused to correct her manner. As time passed by, Lavinia naturally attached increasingly to father, who she felt, was rejected by mother as she herself was. Lavinia complained and began to hate. Finally she shouted, "I hate you! It's only right I should hate you!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.35)

Under such circumstance, when Lavinia finds that her mother falls in love with captain Brant, she flies into a fury, which strengthens their conflict. She follows and surveys her mother, gives mother a warn, and finally the bottom line. This is because of her puritan role, and she has the responsibility to protect her father and her family fame, let alone she discovers that her mother makes fool of her. To defense about their adultery, Christine forces Brant to lure Lavinia who then unbelievably falls in love with Brant in only four times' meet. Undoubtedly, she can't calm down when she discovers Brant and her mother's love affairs and hears their conversation about her. Then she hears from Seth, the old servant, that Brant is her uncle coming to revenge his mother, which strengthens her hatred of Christine. From Christine's words, Lavinia senses that Orin is a key role, and Brant is her lifeblood, since Christine pleads, "You know there is nothing I can do now—but obey your orders." (O'Neill, 1988, p.62) Realizing this point, Lavinia draws Orin on her side by every possible way. She cheats Orin to go to Pritar with her, and kills the captain secretly. On her returning home, she tells Christine about Brant's death and kills her last hope. Lavinia

is the embodiment of the avenging force. She is like the agency of the ancestors of Mannons, trying fanatically to protect the family name. She takes the revenge in name of them and acts ruthlessly and coldly without the slightest qualms about the murders.

Yet in the third part of the play, after the death of Christine, there occurs an apparent transformation in her. She looks more and more like her mother. When she spends holiday in the South Sea Island, she is freed of the oppression from the mansion. The sensual and sweet air in the island restores her feminine beauty, "her body, formerly so thin and undeveloped, has filled out. Her movements have lost their square-shouldered stiffness." (O'Neill, 1988, p.72) The sea, the island and the local people all give her a complete fresh feeling. Her primitive desire is awakened and is bold enough to dance with those local people nakedly. She wants to forget about the ancestors of the Mannons, murders in that mansion and everything that fetters her. She is far away from that tomb-like environment and restarts a newly exciting life. She enjoys the life on the island and is tired of the lifeless and depressed life she has lived and escapes from the shadow of her ancestors; she does not want to be a puppet or a tool for the dead spirit, and just lives a life for herself. What she does not figure out is that all these are the result of her mother's heredity. Actually, her nature has been fully awakened, and she completely transforms from a defender to a traitor. She shouts to portraits of dead ancestors on the wall, "Why do you look at me like that? Wasn't it the only way to keep you secret, too? Bet I have finished with you for ever now, do you hear? I'm mother's daughter – not one of you!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.272) which fully indicates her decision and determination.

When she notices Orin's incestuous love for her, she feels repulsed and sick of the diseased feeling. When Orin threatens her with the family name, she warns Orin, "take care, Orin! You'll be responsible if..." (O'Neill, 1988, p.78) Under her indomitable resistance, Orin fails in every possible way, only shouting to the dead ancestors, "You hear her? You'll find Lavinia Mannon harder to break than me!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.82) All she wants is to be an ordinary woman, marrying some one she loves and leading a normal life. She assumes the role of a woman in nature and yearns to be loved. She says to Peter, the young man, who admires her so much, "I

want to feel love! Love is all beautiful! I never used to know that!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.70) Yet, to her surprise, when Peter comes to propose to her, she behaves like a whore and calls out the name "Brant". Until then, she is completely awakened. She learns that the truth of her heart that her lover is Brant. She thought that she acted as a goddess of justice to stop her mother's guilt. In fact, she was just an infatuated young girl and jealousy of her mother and her purpose was to gain the heart of her beloved Brant. She played every trick to clear away the obstacles on her way to happiness, even if it meant the death of her mother. Realizing that she can not escape from the fatal curse, Lavinia finally throws away flowers, which enter into her life not too long, and locks herself in the Mannon's building. She bravely faces the fate by herself, avoiding the curse transmitting to the next generation of Mannons. She says firmly,

Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a sore act of justice than death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed close so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and last Mannon is let die! I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born! (O'Neill, 1988, p.95)

She resumes her former posture and "marches woodenly into the house." (O'Neill, 1988, p95) Thus, in this way, Lavinia fully manifests her determination to fight against the fate. Just like the other characters in ancient Greek tragedies, Lavinia is trapped by the fate. However, the difference is that the fate concerned here is no more controlled by omniscient God, but by the characters themselves, which is also O'Neill's most apparent innovation of ancient Greek Tragedies. Lavinia inherits the characteristics partly from her father, a rigid Puritanism, and partly from her mother, a newly capitalist. It is these two powers forming the dominating power that controls her life. She dreams to live a new and vigorous life, but she fails to escape from the influence of Puritanism. At last, she chooses to face it on her own.

3.2 Christine

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, another successful female character is Christine. From the perspective of her complicated psychological change, O'Neill portrays, in great details, a many-sided character.

3.2.1 Clytemnestra—The Model of Christine

In *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra is undoubtedly a main character. She is the cause of the vengeance. To be with her lover, she kills her husband Agamemnon on behalf of her daughter Iphigenia who has been sacrificed to the god, Zeus, by Agamemnon. She covers her guilty heart with elegant and stately excuse. The arrangement of her action is only to shadow the following vengeance plots. Like the other characters in ancient Greek tragedies, she is lack of description of inner heart and set as a successful plot connector who fulfills Orestes' vengeance action.

3.2.2 Christine

In O'Neill's hand, Clytemnestra becomes another successful female character, Christine, Lavinia's mother. She was such a passionate and romantic beauty genuinely in love with her puritan England husband before and during their marriage. From "her father is a doctor in New York" (O'Neill, 1988, p.19), we can get some background information of her. Born in a family of middle-class, she lived in the biggest city of America – New York, and accepted new capitalistic education. She was taught to enjoy love and freedom in the world. Everyone was equal to the others and man had right to love or hate. Enjoying life was the most important thing in her life. Even from her childhood, she aimed at pursuing a romantic and harmonious life, and never gave up after she gets married. This feature shapes her – a strong-willed, passionate, selfish and sometimes cruel woman. When she first met Ezra at a dance party, she was attracted by him for "he was silent and mysterious and romantic".

(O'Neill, 1988, p.13) But then this attitude on their wedding night turned "his romantic into – disgusting" (O'Neill, 1988, p.14), and her sweet dream into nightmare.

She was so disappointed and transformed her hatred for Ezra to their daughter Lavinia. She never hugged Lavinia and coldly pushed Lavinia away when the latter ran to her unsteadily. Her strong desire is hidden under the lifeless appearance. She had been waiting for a chance to release her violent passion until their second child, Orin, came to the world. She poured her whole love to Orin and talked with him about the lovely South Sea Islands where she dreamed to live with her true lover in her deep heart. However, Orin was sent to the battle field by Lavinia and Ezra. So her sweet dream was smashed again. Then another man slipped into her life and lit her love light in her heart. This seaman gave her the romantic feeling she has been longing for since her childhood, and awoken her dignity as a human being. Her life was full of hope again, and she was willing to elope with Brant without thinking of her family. However, Ezra returned home from the battle field and disrupted her eloping plan. More terribly, Ezra wanted to restart with her and Lavinia discovered her adultery and warned her. She had no choice then, but poisoned her husband to get freedom. Opposite to her expectation, after Ezra's death, she was not confronted or tranquilized, but felt guilty and frightened all day long. She was blamed by her deep soul. When she got to know that her lover Brant was shot by her children, but not killed by waterfront robbers, she knew that this was what she deserved and her last hope was vanished. She committed suicide in the end.

Christine was vigorous and full of love. She never ceases pursuing the peaceful and romantic life she dreamed about when she was a little girl. She is powerful enough to love vigorously and hate violently. To her husband, she is hopelessly, apathetic cold-blooded and vicious; to her lover, she is gentle and lovely; to her children, she is terrified and scared. As a typical capitalist, her every trait is in conflict with the Mammon's traditional rules. She is the strongest power to resist and break the Mammon's suffocated atmosphere. However, it is her strong love and lack of confidence in beating the Mammon's fate that dooms her tragic fate to be another

sacrifice in this fight.

3.3 Orin

In this play, O'Neill successfully portrays a typical figure, Orin, who has a sharp contrast with his model Orestes, which is in accordance with the modern psychological theories.

3.3.1 Orestes—The Model of Orin

In *Oresteia*, following Apollo's instruction, Orestes fulfills his vengeance but is chased by the Furies. His every action is simply instructed by the God. He follows Apollo's instruction to kill his mother and her lover; He gets the news from Apollo and escapes to avoid the Furies punishment; finally, he is saved by Athens who intends to solve their resentment. From this play, we may not even know what kind of person he really is.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Orestes becomes Orin who fully endures the tortures of Oedipus complex.

3.3.2 Orin

With the rapid development of modern psychology, the western writers have converted the focus of their writing from exterior description to inner psychological portrayal. One of the masters, Freud, published a famous book *Interpretation of Dreams*. In this book, he firstly puts forward the notion of "Oedipus Complex". From the name of the notion, we can sense that it is mainly about the hero Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*, who kills his father and marries his mother. Accordingly, this theory states that the son in a family suffers from a repressed sexual desire for his mother while taking his father a rival in love...

Orin is a victim of such "Oedipus Complex". Since his birth, he has been estranged from his father and spoiled by his mother. He is willing to take his father's

place and goes to the dreaming island with his mother. He is always worried that there would be some other men who share his mother's love. That is the reason why he is so anxious to know about the relationship between his mother and the frequent visitor Brant. Actually, what he concerns about is not her mother or the family's reputation but whether her mother's love has transformed to another man. He once says to her mother these words, which seems to be said to his girlfriend, "...For God's sake. I only mean that no matter what you ever did, love you better than anything in the world..."; (O'Neill, 1988, p.17) "you are my only girl...Oh mother, it's going to be wonderful from now on! We will get Vinnie marry Peter, there will be just you and I!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.22) He has no grief at his father's death, but he flies into a rage and kills her mother's lover when he follows his mother to the boat with Lavinia, and overhears her mother's eloping plan with Brant. His behavior, in fact, is a disguised form of Oedipus complex. In his subconsciousness, who he kills is not a stranger, but his father. This action satisfies his subconsciousness of killing his father. Then he finds that Lavinia resembles their mother during their holiday in the island. Transforming his love to Lavinia, he gets another way to release his oedipal desire. To gain Lavinia's love, he breaks up with his girlfriend Hazel, and even threatens Lavinia with the family name. Finally, when he fails in every possible way, he is despaired and really understands his mother. Before he commits suicide, he sincerely wishes her mother to find her true lover and his sister Lavinia to win in the fight with Mannon's fate. He suffers too much as the most innocent one in this play.

Under the influence of modern psychology, O'Neill successfully unlocks man's inner world in his play. These characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* all have to fight with enemy of their inner heart. Though most of them yield to this power, at last they begin to know that the problem is in their heart, but not the unknown power anymore. This is the most distinguishing feature of modern Tragedy and of O'Neill's, which is evolved and also different from that of the ancient Greek tragedies.

CHAPTER FOUR

INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION VIEWED FROM THE TRAGIC TECHNIQUES

Concerning tragic techniques, Aristotle did not give an apparent notion. However, there were still many excellent tragic techniques in ancient Greek tragedies. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the most distinguished two techniques O'Neill inherited and innovated are the chorus and the mask. As to the chorus, in the ancient Greek tragedies, we can sometimes find what Aristotle calls "songs or choruses" which can "expound the past, comment on the present and predict the future course of the event, and provide the poet with a mouthpiece and the spectator with a counterpart of him." (Lucas, 1972, p.82) The use of the mask can also be traced back to the festival ritual, and the prime form of tragedy in which the ritualists put on masks to distinguish the different roles that actors are playing. O'Neill inherited these two traditional tragic techniques but in an innovative way of integrating some modern factors with them. In ancient Greek tragedies, mask is used to figure out the characters, and chorus is usually a group of people standing at the stage singing songs, from which the audience can get the background information of the play. However, in modern times, what the playwrights concern about is the characters' inward activities. In his works, O'Neill finds a new way to convey man's inner struggle, which is mask-like appearance. Modern plays are common people's plays; correspondingly, the townsfolk play the role of the chorus giving the audience the background information.

4.1 The Mask

The mask is one of the basic tragic techniques in ancient Greek tragedies. However, in O'Neill's hand, it has its completely new function.

4.1.1 The Mask Used in Ancient Greek Tragedies

As to the use of mask, it can be traced back to the origin of Tragedy—the sacrifice ritual. On the ritual, there was only one actor who was playing all the characters, and the audience could only distinguish the roles by the different masks the actor put on. As time passed by, the mask became an accepted rule and developed into a theatrical technique. They used it to make the actors strange to the audience; even they have been very familiar with the roles the actors played. It was a tool to testify Aristotle's stage distance.

4.1.2 The Mask Used in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Growing up in the theater, O'Neill had an intuitive sense of this visual effect on the stage and showed great interest in Greek Tragedies. However, his use of mask is completely different from the conventional form. In his opinion, mask is a vehicle of characterization; some of the traits of the real man behind this mask are exaggerated to express the character's inner struggle and the inner spiritual world. That's, he uses the mask as a way to disclose people's intrinsic quality and researches their subconsciousness. This innovation makes the audience clearly see the intricate and evasive mental activities of the characters. Kenneth Macgowen says, "so far as I know, O'Neill's play is the first in which masks have ever been used to dramatize changes and conflicts in character." (Clark, 1927, p.95)

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, since the ancient Greek tragic content and factors were too clear, O'Neill just gave up the use of real masks but stressed the mask-like appearance of the Mannons to show their psychological changes and conflicts. Each member of the Mannons has a mask-like appearance. On seeing Ezra, the father of this family, "one is immediately struck by the mask-like look of his face in repose, more pronounced in him than in the others." (O'Neill, 1988, p.16) He hides his real emotions behind the mask, which gives him a disposition of a gentle and romantic person and attracts Christine at the first time, but then makes her feel disgusted about it. When he returns home from the battle field experiencing the death, he makes his

decision to take off his mask to show his true love for Christine and has a restart of their love. But it is too late since his wife has fallen in love with another man while his love she needed has been absent. She is not willing to give him a chance to restart. At last, with regret and hatred he dies from poison.

Inherited from his father, Lavinia “carries herself with a wooden, square-shouldered, military bearing.” “She has a flat dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like an officer giving words.” “Above all, one is struck by the same strange, life-like mask impression her face gives in repose.” (O’Neill, 1988, p.8) On the surface, she hates love and rejects Brant’s love. After her father’s death, Lavinia becomes ruthless, cruel and cold-blooded, and she punishes her mother in the name of the Mannon’s reputation. She coldly rebuffs her brother’s incestuous love and forces him to commit suicide. Spending her holiday on the island, she thinks that she is free from the fetters. When she calls out the name of Brant, we clearly get that behind her cool and expressionless mask-like appearance is her deep and violent love toward Brant. In the play, even the old servant Seth Backwith gives one “the strange impression of a life-like mask.” (O’Neill, 1988, p.5) In order to cover their real emotion, the Mannons all live behind their “masks”. Their psychological conflict between love and hatred all link with their “masks” by every possible way.

As to the Mannon’s house, “the temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its somber grey ugliness.” “The pure white temple font seems more than ever like an incongruous white mask fixed on the somber, stone house.” (O’Neill, 1988, p.3) Superficially, the Mannons obey strict Puritanical spirit of New England noble families; in private, they are naturally longing for true love. Exposing human’s inner heart by using masks, O’Neill symbolizes and concretizes invisible thoughts, and he as well reveals protagonist’s double characters, which does not only mean inside and outside of the character, but also means that human’s inner world is self-contradictory.

4.2 The Chorus

From a group of singers to townsfolk, and then to a pure melody, O'Neill innovates upon the way to furnish the background information.

4.2.1 The Chorus Used in the Ancient Greek Tragedies

In the ancient Greek tragedies, we can sometimes find what Aristotle called "songs and chorus" which can "expound the past, comment on the present and predict the future course of the event, and provide the poet with a mouthpiece and the spectator with a counterpart of himself" (Lucas, 1972, p.82) Aristotle thought the chorus should also be regarded as part of the tragedy, as "one of the actors." (Aristotle, 1999, p.47) And these chorus actors should "share in action" (Aristotle, 1999, p.47), that's to say, they help with the development of the plot. Take *Oedipus the King* for instance, in which the chorus was composed of a group of elders who were the helpers and sympathizers of the protagonist. They possessed the prudence and wisdom and gave comments upon the main character, thus gave the audience or readers the background information of the story. However, the chorus only acts the minor role of the plot, for if the whole story is permeated with the chorus' plot, it may disturb the major event and may even work the other way round.

4.2.2 The Chorus Used in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

In O'Neill's hand, the chorus is arranged so properly that it does not distract the audience's attention from the main plot, but adds some special atmosphere to the whole tragic effect.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the townsfolk led by Seth Beckwith assume the chorus. In Act One of *Homecoming*, after explaining who are the three people following Seth, O'Neill says, "These last three are types of town folks rather than individuals, a chorus representing the town comes to look and listen and spy on the rich and exclusive Mannons." (O'Neill, 1988, p.17) They are arranged to appear in the

background chanting as in the drama. Although they do not function as the main characters, they are, more often than not, equipped with common sense and insight toward the conventions. Through their conversation, we get the background indispensable to the progression of the action or plot. Firstly, we know that the Mannons have been top dogs around them for nearly one or two years, and Ezra has several renowned social status, such as major, judge, mayor and general; Secondly, Ezra gets along badly with his wife, because Christine forces him to join the army even though he is so rich and renowned; Thirdly, vigorous and strongly emotional, Christine is different from the conventional Mannons; Fourthly, the Mannons all have masks since they do not want folks to guess their secrets; Fifthly, the past resentment of Mannons is that "old Abe Mannon's brother David marrying that French Canuck nurse girl he'd got into trouble." (O'Neill, 1988, p.6) This forebodes that the Mannon's descendants would deserve for their ancestor's sin. Here the protagonists are not only introduced by the chorus, but the incidents are mentioned by the chorus as the prerequisite for the background of the plot and the development of the plot. Besides offering the information for the story, they are the chorus who, like that in the ancient Greek dramas, "look at the plot with a concerned and impartial attitude" (Chentaoyu, 1986, p.77-82) They express their different opinions toward the Mannons, and their dialogues, like the overtures of the chorus, forebode the family tragedies of the Mannons.

Another obvious way imitating the chorus is the use of the mournful melody of "Shenandoah" sung time and again by Seth Backwith, the gardener, to express their inescapable death – the theme of the play. It is sung each time when a Mannon member dies. At first, it is sung at Ezra's death, then Brant, later at Christine, Orin and finally at Lavinia's lock of herself. It seems sure to say that they are summoned successively by the Mannon's ancestors from the underground. Although it is just pure music, it has the same function of announcing the characters' fate as the Greek chorus in ancient Greek plays. It contains desolate and magnificent natural power of the ocean, builds a mournful and miserable environment, and injects a kind of fatalism into the characters' tragedy.

Mask and chorus, two ancient theatrical techniques in Greek tragedies, are inventively used in modern tragedies by Eugene O'Neill. The former makes the least of tragedy only as a visual art which can not express the characters' inner struggle; the latter assumes the function of the sideway description often seen in a play, promoting progression of the story and adding to the whole tragic effect. In this way, the tragedy in O'Neill's hand does not lose its loftiness and mysticism as the ancient Greek ones, but embodies modern traits, which make the tragedy more acceptable by the audience nowadays.

CHAPTER FIVE

INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION VIEWED FROM THE TRAGIC SENSE

With regard to tragic sense, it is closely associated with the origin of Tragedy. The farmers of ancient Greece offered sacrifices to Dionysus, the god of fertility, regeneration and wine. When the grapes were harvested in the season year after year, Tragedy took shape gradually in the religious ritual – the dance of mourning in the fall festival at the death of the old year. It corresponds with the ceremony forming fatalism of Tragedy, on which bases the tragic sense of life. And the ceremony itself is an action, a response to a condition, a kind of answer to the question of existence, representing man's first attempt to deal creatively with pain, fear and suffering. Aristotle says in his *Poetics* that Tragedy is an imitation of action, which is just the superficial understanding of such aesthetic notion. In fact, Masters of Tragedy in the 20th century, take O'Neill as an example, all have deep insights into it: Man's situation is necessarily tragic; human beings exist in an evil situation; the world is cruel and ruthless; there is an opposition of forces dividing man from man and man from himself; Tragedy is aimed at exposing the ugly reality to the audience; Tragedy is inevitably concerned with human's painful endurance and suffering. Tragedy, taking exploration into man's nature and existence as its duty, is full of tragic sense.

Although as time passed by, the tensions and terrors have been changed in different times, which makes the direction and the focus of Tragedy change with them, tragic sense has never changed. In *Eugene O'Neill and the Sense of the Tragedy*, Sewall says, "In my career-long fumbling with the idea of Tragedy, I have come to at least one conclusion: if the set of your mind is not tragic, you'd better not try to write a tragedy." (Richard F, 1991, p.5) And then, he compares Eugene O'Neill with Shelley. When Pierce Baker, a professor at Harvard, asked Eugene O'Neill, who was only

twenty-six years old then, why he would like to choose these grim and depressing subject for his play. O'Neill answered simply, "Life looked that way." Another writer Shelley, at the same age, only tried once to write tragedy, and then he gave up forever. His wife explained then, "the bent of his mind went the other way." (Richard F, 1991, p.5) This example shows how indispensable a part the tragic sense plays in the creation of Tragedy. Without the tragic sense of life, a writer could never create a good tragedy no matter how hard he had tried.

5.1 Fatalism

Fatalism, the basic form of expression of the author's tragic sense in Tragedy, is just what we are scared of. From ancient Greek tragedies to O'Neill's modern tragedies, fate has its new concept.

5.1.1 Fatalism in Ancient Greek Tragedies

From ancient times, man has sensed that he is born weak and ignorant but has to face a powerful and unknown force which dominates his fate. In front of such power, man is feeble and hopeless. This power, controlling man's pleasure and emotion, may fall on and crush man at any time, in which situation; man has neither power to resist, nor wisdom to comprehend. The idea of fate not only plays a very important role in ancient Greek tragedies, but also exposes the essence of the tragic sense. In ancient Greek tragedies, man is always fighting with gods living in Olympus, who stand for the will of the unknown power, the world and the universe. Living in the world, man acts to oppose the god, which is only to take him to fulfill the fatal oracle, and this is an aspect of the tragic existence of human beings. This dilemma man can never escape. This sense is fully displayed in ancient Greek playwrights' masterpieces. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus standing for man resists Zeus the god. He says,

*I have known all before,
all that shall be, and clearly known; to me*

nothing that hurts shall come with a new face.

So must I bear, as lightly as I can,

the destiny that fate has given me;

for I know well against necessity,

against its strength, no one can fight and win

(David Grene & Richmond Lattimore, 1992, p.315)

From this paragraph, we get that he has fully sensed his situation: He is weak and helpless; the supreme god is majestic and irresistible. Still he does man good through his own sufferings, which represents ancient Greek's unconquerable and unyielding spirit.

Euripides' *Medea* fully displays man's free will against fatal arrangement, which only leads to protagonist's destruction. Medea's every act changes into the opposite side and it is the doom that nobody can reverse. Medea gave up many things to pursue her dreaming love: her dear brother, her own country and her beloved children all become the obstacles on her way to happiness. Her passionate love and eternal promise only get back matchless hatred and shameless betrayal. What she got in the end was endless suffering. This is the irresistible fate which can be seen in this play now and then:

Zeus in Olympus is the overseer

Of many doings. Many things the gods

Achieve beyond our judgment. What we thought

Is not confirmed and what we thought not god

Contrives. And so it happens in this story.

(Maynard Mack, 1992, p.772)

Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* is the most popular and representative Greek tragedy, in which human's free will and fate's irresistibility are completely reflected. This tragedy is about an intelligent man trying every effort to avoid his own tragedy and to find out the truth. However, the cruel reality shows that he can never escape the fatal arrangement. This tragedy is as full of significance for Sophocles' contemporaries as it is for us. At the beginning of this play, normal life in the city

threatened by the unknown force is experiencing a severe crisis. They turn in despair to Oedipus, an intelligent youth in their country. In fact, Oedipus was decreed before his birth that he is to kill his father and marry his mother. Thus he is treated as an unpropitious person and abandoned in the field. When he grows up, he saves the citizens by solving Sphinx riddle. He exerts every effort to help the country and avoid his own doom. Then after he marries the queen, another severe crisis befalls to the normal life in the city, unless they find out the murderer of their old King. Through penetrating investigation, Oedipus desperately discovers that he is the real slayer, and his wife – the queen – is actually his mother. Until then the oracle is fulfilled. Oedipus, banished from the land he rules and loves and from the people who are faithful to his power, takes out his eyeballs. To be honest, it is not Oedipus' fault, since all of those things take place in ambiguous circumstances. Oedipus' original idea is to save his people. Though Oedipus does have faults of temper and kills a stranger on the road, he does not consciously do evil, and yet he suffers greatly. He has no awareness of his father and mother when he slays the stranger and marries the queen. It seems that evil happens to those who intend the best. The messenger, thinking to bring the best news to his king, brings the worst. Oedipus, trying to find out the truth for the good of the country and his people, brings calamity on himself. The queen is shamed into committing suicide, and his daughters are to face a lonely and desolate life in the future. In fact, *Oedipus the King* is Sophocles' farthest penetration into the mysterious and irresistibility of fate. All his life, Oedipus is trying every way to fight against the oracle; however, the fate is ruthless. His every action only makes him nearer to the disaster; his intelligence probing into the truth turns out to him that he can never escape from the oracle. By showing the irresistibility of the fate and the fight experience of human, *Oedipus the King* warns the common people that there is an unknown power in the universe that humanity can never resist, or even fully understand. His every action, every step and every passion is under the power's control. This is life: no matter how hard you have tried, you can never escape from the fate.

5.1.2 Fatalism in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Based on thorough reading of modern psychological works, O'Neill was gradually attracted by modern psychoanalysis. However, ancient Greek spirit was still the most touching emotion deep in his heart. In his mind, ancient Greek Tragedy was inimitable and unsurpassed. He pursued the Greek Idea as his noblest view of life and set for himself the goal to create modern tragedies full of the Greek spirit. He interprets the fatal feeling, "I am always, always trying to interpret life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. I am always acutely conscious of the Force behind." (Manheim, 2000, p.20) He interprets "force" as the combination of the social circumstance and the character's personality, since during the advancing process of western civilization, God has been dead, which brought about men lonely and loss sense of living in such an absurd world. Besides, believing in Jungian collective unconscious⁴, he said, "Our emotions are instinctive. They are the results not only of our individual experiences but of the experiences of the whole human race, back through all the ages." (Manheim, 2000, p.23) As a result, in his tragedy, there is no goal, but repetition of the fate of creating a crushing sense of inevitability. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the curse on the house of the Mannons clearly mirrors the curse on the house of Atreus, since the frame of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is copied from the legend *Oresteia*. In the play, the past determines and controls the tragic action. The characters Ezra, Christine and Orin were watched by the portraits of the dead Mannons on the wall. They were in the cage formed by the shadows of the dead and lost into fatal repetition. Each of them had tried to escape from his fate, but there was no escape for all of them. Ezra intended to restart with his wife Christine to atone for his indifferent manner in the past year; Christine dreamed of ending her nightmare through poisoning her husband Ezra and eloped with her lover to a mysterious island; Orin incestuously fell in love with his own sister and escaped from the fatal fetters with his sister. In the end, they all paid for what they have done in the past: Ezra was

⁴ Collective unconscious means that the varieties of human experience have somehow been genetically coded and transferred to successive generations.

poisoned by his wife, though he had felt regret about his past cold attitude toward her; Christine committed suicide because her lover was shot by her children; Orin took his own life because he was abandoned by his brave sister.

In O'Neill's tragic world, there is no present or future but only the past happening over and over again. Life is full of endless cycles and repetitions. People can never escape from atoning for their past sins which controls their present and future. This is a permanent theme in tragedies no matter in ancient Greek's or in O'Neill's. O'Neill successfully inherited this theme and set it in his modern tragedy to embody the modern people's helplessness and their undefeatable spiritual world as well.

5.2 Paradox

Paradox, another form of the strong tragic sense in Tragedy, is well expressed by Bradley in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*, "We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact, or the no less inexplicable appearance, of a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. And this fact or appearance is tragedy." (Bradley, 1985, p.29)

To fully comprehend paradox in Tragedy, we should trace back to the origin of Tragedy and also Nietzsche's masterpiece *Apollo and Dionysus*. As to the former, the religious ritual we have discussed in the former sections is the farmers sacrifice to the Dionysus in the fall festival at the death of the old year and the rebirth of the new year. It simultaneously contains painfulness and vigorousness. Although the hero's fall is uncomfortable, it does benefit the spectators, who pity for hero's destruction and is inspired from the scene at the same time. From this aspect, the hero himself stands for the old year and also the new year, which indicates that the tragedy is doomed to be full of paradox. With regard to Nietzsche's *Apollo and Dionysus*, which is written many years later to probe into Tragedy's essence, we should first figure out the difference between Dionysus and Apollo. Although both of them are Greek deities,

they are completely distinctive. Dionysus, the god of wild flute music and of wine and intoxication, memorialized by ancient Greeks, stands for disillusion. Oppositely, Apollo, the god of the poised harmonious plastic art and of light and dream, represents illusion. In Nietzsche's tragic world, the essence of Tragedy is alternate illusion and disillusion. The artists create Tragedy just under the stimulation of these two violently conflicting art impulses. In the artists' mind, life is full of pain, suffering and loss, and human's existence situation is awkward and hopeless. The ancient Greeks were fully aware of life's perplexity and almost lost will to live. It was the Apollonian spirit that pointed out a way for them to escape. From this spirit, they understood that there was not only disillusion in life, but still happiness they could gain through the gate of illusion. Through Nietzsche's artistic representation of life, we can deeply experience the ancient Greeks' desperate but struggling spirit as human beings whose existence in this world is full of hardship. We can also experience this active process from Williams' words,

It makes us realize that everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution. It forces us to gaze into the horror of individual existence, yet without being turned to stone by the vision: a metaphysical solace momentarily lifts us above the whirl of shifting phenomena. For a brief moment we become, ourselves, the primal Being, and we experience its insatiable hunger for existence. Now we see the struggle, the pain, the destruction of appearances, as necessary, because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life, because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will. (Williams, 1979, p.39)

In this way, following Nietzsche's instruction, we can totally understand the two sidedness of life in Tragedy, hopeful but hopeless, encouraging but depressing, significant but meaningless, confident but despaired. Tragedy is full of this paradox, which not only shows the strong tragic sense and acute insight of the artist, but strongly impresses the audience with the strength of Tragedy. From Dixon's comprehensive description of paradoxes of Tragedy, we can get further knowledge of paradox.

He (Aristotle) overlooks the violent paradox of tragedy, that it presents the worst and excites in us the best, that it appears to sum up and complete the accusation against life, to be occupied with the case for the opposition, that there poetry meets the hostile facts, the injustices, the cruelties, the dark forbidding elements, the aspects of the world which profoundly discourage us and arouse our comfort and delight; that it kindles fires it should extinguish, should dismay, and on the contrary, inspire us, should dispirit and yet increases our resolution; that its conclusions are not contained within its premises, that it radiates light from darkness, destroys hope and harbors it; that do what disaster may with these heroes they gain the more upon us, overthrown they are not overcome, and defeated with every circumstance of ruin they still triumph; that when Nature has vanquished and cast them out they continue to reign in our affections, in a kingdom inaccessible to Fortune, uncircumcised by time and with a relish of remoter duration. (Dixon, 1929, p.145)

5.2.1 Paradox in Ancient Greek Tragedies

Paradox is displayed in almost every ancient Greek tragedy. In *Prometheus Bound*, the hero brings brightness and knowledge to human beings but brings himself endless pain and sufferings. He exchanged man's happiness and wisdom with his own strength and freedom. Then in *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus, who is pitied and sympathized by every reader or audience, intends to rescue the people in his country from a crisis, but leads him and his family into despair abyss. When he has his eyes, he pursues the truth of everything; when he gets the truth, he pulls out his eyes. Oedipus' miserable fate completely expresses the artist's paradoxical insight. Oedipus, save the people in the country by solving the Sphinx riddle, but at the same time, he destroys the order of nature and fulfills the oracle by murdering his father on the way and marrying his mother in the palace. In *Medea*, the heroine betrays her father and brothers, escapes from her own country, and follows her lover to live her dreaming

life. Unfortunately, she was cast away by her faithless husband who is willing to get more power and treasure by marrying another princess. She cruelly kills her two young sons to punish her husband and express her hatred for him. Here, her pursuit of love is through the way of releasing of hatred.

5.2.2 Paradox in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Inherited from ancient Greek Tragedies, as a great tragedy playwright in modern times, O'Neill made the full use of the paradox by his ingenious designing of contradictions in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Being a Mannon member and born to her condition, Lavinia is made a victim as well as a victimizer. She is helpless in the face of the terrible fate; however, she has pretty dreams in her deep heart and a convincing proof is the trip to her dreaming Island. In her eyes, these islands symbolize serenity, safety, beauty, innocence, freedom of the soul and extricate her from the immersion in the sin and death of the Mannons.

I love those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful – a good spirit of love – coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death...the warm earth in the moonlight – the trade wind in the cocoa palms – the surf on the reef – the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart – the natives dancing naked and innocent – without knowledge of sin! (O'Neill, 1988, p.68)

The old Lavinia dies in this island and the new Lavinia is born in this place in which she finds her true emotion. She throws off the old fetters and gains her soul. After returning from the trip, Lavinia completely changes, "her body, formerly so thin and undeveloped, has filled out. Her movements have lost their square-shouldered stiffness." (O'Neill, 1988, p.69) She shows her passionate love for Peter and has a great longing for a happy future. But, as a member of the Mannons, she is unable to escape from the fatal fetters. After Orin committing suicide, the influence of the family once again grabs her, physically and mentally. She realizes that she must face the ancestors of the Mannons on her own and accept the fatal curses by herself so as

to stop the curse from befalling the next generation. She bravely enters the tomb-like mansion and let her servant nail the door and windows, taking the punishment of suffering the tortures until her death. She realizes her defeat, but scorns it and even curses it. In this play, the personal emotions of Ezra, Christine, Orin, and Lavinia are true to their human nature. On the one hand, they are victims of their psyches; haunted by the past that controls their present, they are as fated as the characters in Greek Tragedy who are caught in the net of the gods. (Norman Berlin, 1985, p.114). But on the other hand, the free will of the tragic characters fully shows their courage to face life. For in Tragedy it embodies the eternal contradiction between man's weakness and his courage, his stupidity and his magnificence. It is the two-sides of man, the complication of his nature, which makes tragic literature immortal. And it is O'Neill successful inheritance of the essence of such tragic spirit and his development of it that makes him stand at the head of his contemporaries in world literature.

5.3 Consciousness and Self-consciousness

Many playwrights devote their whole life to probing into what man is in the world. As a man comes to the world, he starts to work hard, consciously and even self-consciously to explore the internal riddle of himself and the external world around him. That's why consciousness and self-consciousness has been manifested amply in tragedies since ancient times and it is another essential form of playwrights' tragic sense. Through the protagonists' painful experience and sufferings in the drama, the playwrights let man know the situation of their existence in the real world, possessing knowledge and self-knowledge. In the play, the heroes fight with their fate, trying hard to find out the meaning of life. At the end, they may get the truth through his destruction. From the beginning to the end, the characters are led by the playwrights from ignorance to knowledge and self-knowledge. This process also benefits the audience or readers, who learn to examine his own life, begin to recognize himself and try to find a way out of his own awkward situation.

As we can see, what the tragedies present to us is human's unhappiness and

painful experience, why could the audience get satisfied and pleased from the play? Does it mean that all the audience is cold-blooded and prefers to witness the others' destruction? The answer is definitely no. As a spectator, you sit in the theatre and watch the hero struggling with the unknown force. It will really make you think about something: the existence, the fate and also yourself. In tragedies, man aims at seeking the truth of his own nature, and of the nature of man, as near the truth as he can, though it may cost the price of his own fall. Man encounters great numerous difficulties on the way to the truth and knowledge. Although he is fully aware of what he should pay for the knowledge will be his destruction, he still adheres to this choice. This self-discovering and self-proving consciousness which involves in courage to prove, claim and create himself develops and strengthens in the process of human history. It is just this consciousness that also prompt social development. Actually, the tragic sense here is in fact converted into a deep sense of life. Because of this sense, Adam and Eve, the ancestors of human beings, are willing to accept the snake's allure to eat the apple and start their tragic but meaningful life on the earth; Christ chooses to come to the earth to rescue the normal people through his sufferings. This sense penetrates tragedies from ancient Greece up to modern times.

5.3.1 Consciousness and Self-consciousness in Ancient Greek Tragedies

The most representative works is Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, in which the hero fully shows his self-discovering consciousness in his struggle with fate. As I have introduced before, the hero Oedipus is decreed as a guilty man before his birth. He helps the country with his own intelligence and becomes the king of the country. Unfortunately, another crisis befalls this city that he must find out the slayer of the former king. When it shows that the murderer might be himself, he chooses to go on hunting for the truth and save the people in the country instead of escaping. According to the answer, he finally gets the knowledge of himself, and also disaster of himself – he is the slayer and the former king is actually his father, the queen he married is his

mother. This is the answer he gets after experiencing innumerable hardships. Until then, he has full knowledge of the question what he is and what the world he lives in is. The fate has arranged before his birth, and God does not care about how much he suffers to achieve the knowledge. In the process of gaining the knowledge, Oedipus has fully shown his strong will and unconquerable spirit. The following dialogues clearly show his strong determined mind,

*Jocasta: Stop – in the name of god,
if you love your own life, call off this search!
My suffering is enough.*

*Oedipus: Courage!
Even if my mother turns out to be a slave,
and I a slave, three generations back,
you would not seem common.*

*Jocasta: Oh no,
Listen to me; I beg you, don't do this.*

*Oedipus: Listen to you? No more, I must know it all.
must see the truth at last.*

...

(Maynard, 1992, p.688)

*Oedipus: Let it burst! Whatever will! Whatever must!
I must know my birth, no matter how common
it may be – I must see my origins face-to-face.*

...

(Maynard, 1992, p.688)

*That is my blood, my nature – I will never betray it,
Never fail to search and learn my birth!*

(Maynard, 1992, p.688)

Although the answer is tragic and unacceptable and seems unable to compensate for what man has suffered, it is the knowledge that makes the human life more meaningful and the sufferings more endurable and worthwhile. Here, Oedipus,

searching for his own identity in the play, stands for each of us, who lives on the earth and seeks for the answer to “who I am” and “what the world is”. He is brave enough to fight against the fate and ready to take whatever comes.

In Euripides' *Medea*, the heroine Medea is a typical woman full of strong consciousness. Throughout the whole play, Medea exerts her every effort to prove and transcend herself. Her actions of betraying her father and escaping from her homeland fully display her will of self-fulfillment. She pursues true love through her own effort. This clearly manifests that she is willing to control her life by herself and fulfills herself in the choices. This is also an expression of her self-consciousness of controlling her own life. Unfortunately, she is betrayed by her husband. She felt cornered to make her last and terrible choice: killing her two sons to punish her faithless husband. As a mother, she deeply loves her children as the other mothers. But as a woman, the only way for her to prove herself is to avenge on this evil society. However, we can still feel how painful her heart is, when she takes this action.

*O arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back
From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.
O come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the sword
Take it, step forward to this bitter starting point,
And do not be a coward; do not think of them,
How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just for
This one short day be forgetful of your children,
Afterwards weep; for even though you will kill them,
They were very dear, O, I am an unhappy woman!*
(Maynard, 1992, p.768)

Through this action, she proves and surpasses herself.

5.3.2 Consciousness and Self-consciousness in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

In modern times, man's consciousness and self-consciousness are gradually

awakened as the natural living condition is getting worse and worse, and the relationship between people is more and more alienated. Striving a way to find out the meaning of living becomes a common desire. O'Neill, who has a deeper insight into both the modern man and the modern society, fully manifests his tragic sense of his contemporaries and his time at the end of *Mourning Becomes Electra* – Lavinia realizes her fate and calmly accepts it. She locks herself in the tomb-like mansion and throws out those vigorous and colorful flowers. She chooses to take whatever comes and faces it bravely even it is more terrible than death,

I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself? Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I will never go out or see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed close so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! (O'Neill, 1988, p.26)

How moving and tragic this is! She successfully proves and transcends herself by her last action.

Lavinia's mother Christine is another protagonist who successfully shows her strong consciousness in her struggle with the Mannons. Actually, since she just got married with Ezra she has realized that she does not belong to this family. But the lack of courage or direction kept her from escaping until Brant comes to her. She is courageous enough to pursue her dream no matter how much she should pay for it. To cover up her betrayal of family, she even makes her lover lure her own daughter. After her husband returning home, she poisons him to fulfill her eloping plan. At last when she gets the news that Brant has been killed by her children, she is completely conscious that she or any member of this family can never escape from the tragic end no matter how brave or how hard they have struggled. She makes her last fearless choice to free herself from the fetters of Mannons eternally and leaves her children facing the fate by themselves. She is also the first Mannon manifesting self-consciousness, and it is her death that evokes Lavinia's sleeping soul, who is the bravest one to face the fate instead of escaping.

Very clearly, consciousness and self-consciousness are fully displayed in plays in different times. It is a permanent topic of men struggling in this absurd world. On the one side, it is about man's consciousness of self-fulfillment and the acquisition of knowledge and self-knowledge. On the other side, it is man's awareness of the tragic situation of human beings: he could get the knowledge and self-knowledge only through his persistent fighting and even his destruction. It embodies man tragic but noble quality. Inherited from ancient Greek tragedies, O'Neill successfully displays in his works the strong tragic sense of fatalism, paradox, consciousness and self-consciousness of human beings living in modern times, which makes his works more touching and influential than the other contemporaries.

CHAPTER SIX

INHERITANCE AND INNOVATION VIEWED FROM THE TRAGIC EFFECT

Concerning tragic effect, Aristotle said that tragedy should arouse feeling of pity and fear, “for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.” (Aristotle, 1999, p.25) Although the tragedy traditions strictly stick to this principle and achieve this effect, many philosophical masters focused on this point and put forward various theories. No matter how violently they argued, the modern tragedy does arouse not only pity and fear, but complex feelings, this is because man lives in a triple existential predicament of society, spirit, and man himself. These feelings concern the following aspects: in 19th century Nietzsche’s exclaiming – God is dead – brings about man’s crisis of belief; the advanced industrialism, science-technologies and commercialism make the world seem cold and inhuman; man who is disappointed with the real world turns to his spiritual world to get redemption. O’Neill’s tremendous contribution as a tragedy playwright depends on his courage to take audience so close to the basic horror of things and make them acquire great spiritual satisfaction and pleasure from the life, which enhances Tragedy effect, in other words, cognitive pleasure and rational pleasure.

6.1 Cognitive Pleasure

The cognitive pleasure of Tragedy is not defined apparently but implied in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In Chapter Fourteen of *Poetics*, Aristotle mainly concerns about imitation. Since he observes that human could get natural pleasure from imitation, he describes the elementary learning pleasure like this,

The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just

for philosophers but for others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it. This is the reason why people take delight in seeing images; what happens is that as they view them they come to understand and work out what each thing is. (Aristotle, 1999, p.30)

As Aristotle says, tragedy is an imitation. Then the process we are watching and comprehending the story or the plots is just similar to the process of recognition and understanding. Moreover, this process is more complex than that of recognizing a picture. When we are watching the tragedy, we must follow the plots and put the relationship of these characters in good order, in which case, we can really comprehend this tragedy. Although these plots do not really take place in our daily life, the audiences still sense that they are watching something corresponding to some universal pattern. Their minds are pleased by this, for they are receiving some new objects they never knew before. Aristotle emphasizes that this pleasure is not simply about the audiences' initial excitement when they are watching the play, but they tend to recall the plots and give deep thought of them when the play is over. Especially when the audiences sincerely follow the plots and finally come to the miserable and hopeless end, the pleasure they get is incomparable in their lives.

6.1.1 Cognitive Pleasure Achieved in Ancient Greek Tragedies

Following Aristotle's expression, we can find that in ancient Greek tragedies, the playwrights transmit such information to the audience: the protagonists of the play try their every effort to pursue the truth, which does them not good but harm. Take *Oedipus the King* for instance, this play is about an ordinary person fighting against his fate – a typical conflict between man and the unknown force. As the king of the country, to rescue his people in the country, Oedipus tried every effort to find the murderer in accordance with the God's hints. However, the reality is so cruel that he finally finds out that himself is the guilty murderer, which takes his wife, his daughters and himself to endless painful abyss. He intends to do good for his people and his country, but he can never escape from his own tragic fate but accept severe

punishment and endure pains and punishments. On the other side, his country and his people are released from the crisis and live a peaceful life as he wished.

Humanity achieves the best and highest of which it is capable by committing an offence and must in turn accept the consequences of this, namely the whole flood of suffering and tribulation which the offended heavenly powers must in turn visit upon the human race as it strives nobly towards higher things... (Nietzsche, 1999, p.50)

The central idea of ancient Greek tragedies is such cognition. The playwrights mean to let the heroes know the truth, no matter good or ill. They are arranged to pursue the truth, but they are not promised whether it is a good ending or endless disaster after they get such recognition. The only significance is that the thing itself is good, and it is good for man to know what man is, how guilty he is. When he gets this knowledge, he would make redemption either in his mind or in real life.

6.1.2 Cognitive Pleasure Achieved in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

As a modern playwright, Eugene O'Neill, whose strong tragic sense and deep insight into life make him present to the audience the life truth lying beneath, provides cognitive pleasure in his works consciously. After he successfully wrote *Anna Christie* and *The Straw*, O'Neill was invited to Provincetown to give a lecture. When he was asked why he could so deeply present real life, which was just superficially displayed in other author's works, and if he could stick to his writing style to expose the cruel reality since he had been so successful, he said these words,

What I see everywhere in life; is drama – human beings in conflict with other human beings, with themselves, with fate. All else is a side issue, I just set down what I feel in terms of life and let the facts speak whatever language they may to my audience. It is just life that interests me as a thing in itself. (Gelb, Arthur and Barbara, 1962, p.487)

It is in this way that he leads the audience to wander in his tragic world and rouses them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, when Ezra returns home from the battlefield, he expects to restart everything with his wife after experiencing death in the war. Unfortunately, no matter how sincerely he communicates with his wife Christine, everything is just a waste of his energy, since Christine has made up her decision to end their awful relationship. He at last subconsciously realizes that he is unable to retrieve their broken marriage. He shouts,

Is that your notion of love? Do you think I married a body? (Then, as if all the bitterness and hurt in him had suddenly burst its dam.) You were lying to me tonight as you've always lied! You were only pretending to love! You let me take you as if you were a nigger slave I'd brought as auction! You made me appear a lustful beast in my own eyes! – As you've always done since our first marriage night! I would feel cleaner now if I had gone to a brothel! I would feel more honors between myself and life! (O'Neill, 1988, p.17)

From these words, we find that Ezra has attained knowledge of truth. His recognition of the underlying truth is thus brought out clearly and our pleasure is double, as we ourselves have already realized the truth transmitted by the tragedy.

At the end of this play, Lavinia, disillusioned, makes the decision to cut herself off from the society and never steps out of the Mannon building again. She asks the servant to “close the shutters and nail them tight.” (O'Neill, 1988, p.93) The flowers which successfully steal into her life after her vacation in the island are thrown out. From this scene, the audience or readers profoundly understand and recognize the awkward situation of man in the world. This is O'Neill's original attention to let man know the truth of existence in his tragic world. But morality is the thing he never concerns about in his play. He once said,

I love human beings as individuals, but whether I like them or not, I can always understand and not judge them. I have tried to keep my work free from all moral attitudinizing. To me there are no good people or bad people, just people. (Gelb, Arthur and Barbara, 1962, p.832)

This view, inherited from his ancient Greek predecessors, lifts lofty tragedy out

of the level of mere judgment on matters. Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound*, suffers endless pain for his gift of fire and knowledge to man; Oedipus, pulls out his eyes when he finally gets the cruel answer which he is seeking for; Medea kills her two beloved children to punish her husband. The audiences are pleased to witness their sufferings, not because the pleasure it arouses is morality, but something aesthetic. If they judge the play from a moral view point, they may easily feel pessimistic, but an aesthetic view may help them get the knowledge and the truth beneath. Human's existence is full of endless sufferings, full of difficulties and full of tortures. In artists' world, all of these are enveloped with illusory appearance. Appreciating the plays, we get the basic truth, which seems tolerable, but meaningful and worthwhile. "Thus tragedy, however stark and challenging, cannot bring us to despairing nihilism; indeed it is our antidote to such nihilism." (Keith M, 1990, p.487) The worth and meaning of human existence in the world is the rational pleasure, which the author of this thesis is going to talk about in the following section.

6.2 Rational Pleasure

As we have discussed before, tragedy is created to present the basic truth of life and the readers or audiences are pushed to be so close to the cruel truth to get the cognitive pleasure. Human beings that live in the world must face many difficulties during their lives. What they pursue is not simply food, clothes or shelters; they are persistently pursuing happiness of life itself. They fight for it with every possible effort, they do not intend to beat the opposite side but gain their own freedom and independence. At the very beginning, they clearly understand what they will get may not be what they expected, what they are sure to get will probably be desperate failure and self-destruction. Even though, they would never submit to the fate, but persist till the very end. From this tragic revolt the readers or audiences acquire an utmost pleasure. Man is great, for he never escapes from his tragic fate; on the contrary, he valiantly faces it and challenges it. As a man living in the world, he is confronted with continuous hardships and tribulations, and he has to learn to face them and overcome

them. During the life process, every choice he makes may lead him to victory or to the opposite, but it is his fighting will and unconquerable spirit that decide whether he can be the hero in the great Tragedy of life. No matter what result the hero gets, only the pleasure, which the audience or readers obtain from the process in which he is fighting with the fate, is the rational pleasure.

6.2.1 Rational Pleasure Achieved in Ancient Greek Tragedies

In *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus, as a god, sympathizes with man in his hardships:

*But man's tribulation,
That I would have you hear – how I found them mindless
and gave them minds, made them masters of their wit...
First they had eyes but had no eyes to see,
and ears but heard not. Like shapes within a dream
They dragged through their long lives and muddle all,
haphazardly. They know not how to build
brick house to face the sun, nor work in wood.
They lived beneath the earth like swarming ants
in sunless caves.*

(David Grene & Richmond Lattimore, 1992, p.318),

He steals fire from the heaven, and gives it to man as a gift. He hopes to save man and arm man with intelligence, and brings man with brightness and hope. But he is severely punished by Zeus to whom he does not yield. When Hermes comes to seduce him to surrender, he replies definitely,

*So let him hurl his smokey lightning flame,
and throw in turmoil all things in the world
with white-winged snowflakes and deep bellowing
thunder beneath the earth: me he shall not
bend by all this to tell him who is fated*

to drive him from his tyranny.

(David Grene & Richmond Lattimore, 1992, p.322)

He is not destroyed but gets reborn from the tortures. From his shout "I was wronged!" (David Grene & Richmond Lattimore, 1992, p.347) His perseverance and tenacity are extremely revealed and the readers or audiences get maximum delight in it.

In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus, the hero, is a complete doer. He is brave and smart enough to choose his own way, though he is not able to escape from the oracle. When he knows his destiny, he moves to another country to avoid the fate. He saves the people by solving the Sphinx Riddle, but slays a stranger on the road because of his bad temper. He tries every effort to find out the murderer to rescue his people and his country out of the crisis. When Jocasta stops him, he gives a categorical rebuff, "I must pursue this trail to the end." (Maynard, 1992, p.689) Perhaps, he has sensed that what he does or says may result in his destruction, but he bravely gets the truth and takes the responsibility of it. Just through his actions, man can learn, grow, and gain wisdom, and the readers or audiences have the chance to grasp the unique and profound beauty of Tragedy.

In *Medea*, the heroine, Medea, to pursue her true love, commits a series of tremendous crimes. Although it seems cruel and cold-blooded, readers or audiences are still shocked by the greatness of human nature. Medea keeps on transcending herself step by step, and the spectators are raised to the loftier heights of tragedy.

6.2.2 Rational Pleasure Achieved in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

As a modern playwright, O'Neill once expressed his understanding of the rational pleasure in one of his letters:

It is at bottom a message of the significance of human hope—even the most hopeless hope.... For we know deep down in our souls that, logically, each one of our lives is a hopeless hope – that failure to realize our dreams is the inexorable fate allotted to us. Yet we know that without hope there is no

life, and so we go on pursuing our dream to the last grasp, convinced in spite of our reason that there must be some spiritual meaning behind our hope which in some "greener land" will prove it was all justified. (Marc Maufort, 1989, p.112)

This passage may be taken as the reason why he always creates tragedies, not comedies to make people laugh or feel happy after watching his plays. "Hopeless hope" is a very good annotation of O'Neill's tragic world. Though fruitlessness and hopelessness, man still gets strength and courage through the process. The process itself can be seen as a victory, and man's rebellion and sufferings are also a tragic joy. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, every character has stricken back at fate when they realize that they are all trapped by their own dooms: after experiencing death in the battle field, Ezra wants to have a restart with his wife; Christine plans to elope with her lover, after she is desperately disappointed with her marriage; Orin dreams to get happiness from his incestuous love with his sister. Though none of them escapes from death, we can still feel everyone's strong and violent will at every poignant and tragic moment. Especially at the end of this play, Lavinia condemns herself to a life worse than death. Her composure and calmness to such a fate force out the tragic climax in the drama, and springs out the most moving part of the play. These characters' actions make all the difference between cowardice and heroism, sentimentality and tragedy. Man's primitive and ultimate quest for the meaning of life is a permanent subject and transcends all other topics. A play probing into this subject, no matter how humble and insignificant it seems to be, will produce echoes and tragic pleasure in the deep hearts of the readers and audiences.

Just like most of ancient Greek playwrights, O'Neill not only presents in his work the real nature of life, though cruel and horrible, but also emphasizes the process of human struggle and resistance, giving the readers or audiences strength to strive in real life. Being taken so close to the true life, the readers or audience get power to keep on living stoutly in the world rather than disappointment and lose faith in living. It is this essence, which Eugene O'Neill inherits from ancient Greek tragedies, which gives his own plays power and vigorousness and his readers or audience spiritual

satisfaction and pleasure.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Through the previous analyses of the tragic elements in the ancient Greek tragedies and in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the thesis now comes to the concluding chapter. This chapter first summarizes the findings from the analyses, then presents the limitations, and finally gives some suggestions for further study.

7.1 Findings

Eugene O'Neill is one of the greatest playwrights in the early 20th century of American history. He devotes his whole life to tragedy writing and makes innovation of tragedy writing. After successfully making some experimentation with different theatrical techniques in the first phase of his career, O'Neill becomes more confident in his stagecraft and starts to work on grand themes adapted from the Greek tragedies. He intends to revive the Greek spirit on the modern stage by proving to the public that the noble feelings and proud ideas could survive in the most debased environment. What concerns him is the truth under the surface. By this means, he tries to explore and reveal mankind's spiritual dilemma between death and struggle, pursuit and disillusionment to give some reasonable light to the modern people who are in horror and despair. He not only inherits the essence of the ancient Greek tragedies, but also makes some innovations with some modern features of literature. He could be called the father of American drama as he led the American drama out of the stage of melodrama, which was dominant until he took up the pen. And only due to his prominent contribution, American drama began to gain world attention.

Tragedy, the most highly developed form of poetry in western literary history, profoundly and comprehensively explores into the relationship of man and nature. The source of all true study of the essential elements of tragedy started from *Poetics* by Aristotle, who put forward the fundamental theoretical frame of Tragedy in the 4th century B.C. His opinions and ideas, formed on the basis of his profound study of

Greek Tragedy, dominated tragic criticism for centuries and they are still enlightening and instructive nowadays. In *Poetics*, Aristotle deduces from the tragedies he has read that there are certain general characteristics of the tragic hero, the effect of tragedy, the tragic sense of playwright and also of the structural devices commonly used in tragic writing. Aristotle's definition of Tragedy and his tragic theory lay the foundation for tragedy analysis in western literary history. Based on his fundamental tragedy theory this thesis analyzes the tragic factors in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

After a simple review of the former study on O'Neill and his works as well as the basic tragic theory – Aristotle's *Poetics*, the author herein begins to analyze the inheritance and innovation of the ancient Greek Tragedy in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which bases on *Poetics* and on the author's reading and understanding of the ancient Greek tragedies, O'Neill's writings and the related materials.

O'Neill undertook to recreate the great Greek trilogy, *Oresteia*. O'Neill designated that his works were to be understood in the context of the Greek tragedies. For it is not too difficult to find that each major narrative element of the Greek drama finds its counterpart in his works. Moreover, in the final part, all the remaining characters must come to face their own parts in the family's history of crime and punishment. Standing on the shoulders of the masters who have written plays on this thematic plot, O'Neill incorporated diversities and established his uniqueness, which embodied both the inheritance and breaking-through innovation of the ancient Greek tragedies. His plays are not only the restage of Aeschylus's, but also the show of the thoughts of his time and the reflection of his talented creation.

O'Neill has brought new look onto the American stage and greatly enhanced the theatrical expressions. By tracing the development of his career, we find that he is subject to no rules but stick to his own ways. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is the plot that is the most important factor in a tragedy, thus the character plays a trivial part in ancient Greek tragedies and the protagonists are only noble people. However, O'Neill felt disgusting about the regular trappings of theater and tried with all his efforts to create live characters instead of some puppet-like characters who behave at

the will of the writer. His characters are usually mean people who act and speak in accordance with their own wills and instincts. Low and ignoble as they are, these characters never completely yield to the depressing ambiances. Underneath their conquered or conquerable physical entities and their spiritual or mental world there is an inextinguishable eternal pursuit of real being in human existence, which makes man an undefeatable, though destructible, character. Another great experiment made by O'Neill is the use of the ancient Greek tragic technique, the mask, to show his characters' spiritual changes and conflicts. His innovation is manifested in his description of the mask-like appearance of the Mannons. He also experiments the formal use of a "chorus" of the town people to introduce the narrative background which is important to the progression of the action or plot.

Tragedy, taking as its duty the exploration into man's nature and existence, is full of such sense that man has to face the mysterious demonic forces from his own nature and from the outside. In modern times, fate emerges as something even more complex and intricate, and O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* once again shows us the splendor of the tragic sense. Tragic sense not only makes up the fatalism in Tragedy and fills tragic works with paradoxes, but also shows the consciousness, and self-consciousness. This tragic sense originates from Greek Tragedy and is produced and felt the most in O'Neill's works. Concerning tragic effect, Aristotle puts forward that Tragedy effects through pity and fear and the purification of such emotions. O'Neill's plays manifest to us the highest truth of the universe without reservation: life is a "hopeless hope". Life is a hopeful course in which man's rational spirit and the willpower are reflected in his persistent resistance against his destiny. Therefore, the tragic pleasure is a sublime spirit of facing squarely the pains in life, resisting the tease of fate and striving for freedom.

7.2 Significance of the Findings

In this thesis the author makes a more comprehensive analysis from the four aspects: the tragic character, the tragic techniques, the tragic sense and the tragic

effect, which covers almost all the course of the study of a play. Inspired by the contemporary tide of the literary criticism, the author tentatively adopts a comparatively comprehensive method to analyze this subject from the following three angles: the text (including the aspects of tragic character and tragic technique), the playwright's tragic sense and the tragic effect, which is more systematic than the previous studies of the kind. Through the analysis of the inheritance and innovation of ancient Greek tragedies in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the thesis gets a fact that the inheritance and innovation in literary history is inevitable. The analysis the author has practiced in the thesis could also be applied to the study of other literary works.

7.3 Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Studies

In this thesis, we have discussed the inheritance and innovation of ancient Greek tragedies from four aspects according to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Due to the limited time and the author's personal ability, there are some limitations in this thesis, which need improving in the author's further study of this subject.

a. Firstly, although Aristotle's *Poetics* – the theory on which the thesis bases – is the foundation of all tragedy theories up till now and still influences modern playwrights' tragedy writing, it is, after all, summarized by a philosopher of 2000 years ago. Due to the limitation of time and lack of references on hand, the author just made an attempt to study the theory before writing this thesis. Secondly, as society progresses and man's deeper understanding of the world, tragedy theories on the basis of Aristotle's *Poetics* enrich themselves with further research orientations and distinctive characteristics, a comprehensive analysis of the "inheritance" and "innovation" of the ancient Greek tragedies is far beyond the young and inexperienced author. However, this is the first step of the author's research on O'Neill's tragedies. The exploration of other masters' influence on O'Neill such as Freud, Jung Nietzsche and others and of O'Neill, the playwright himself and his other

works will be the course of the author's further study.

b. In the author's opinion, an analysis of the theme of the thesis – the inheritance and innovation of the ancient Greek tragedies in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* from those four representative aspects is helpful to fulfill a comparative study of tragedy theories and tragedies by the playwrights of different times.

All in all, the study of O'Neill and his works is an effortful and endless job for his descendants, for he and his works leave behind too much for them to explore. Thus this thesis is just the author's first try to study about O'Neill, and further studies will be followed to probe into O'Neill's colorful and meaningful writing world.

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