

Poetic Presentation of Theme of Trauma in Jean Genet's Drama

Yang Jian

The Central Academy of Drama, China, Beijing, 110710

Keywords: trauma drama; Jean Genet; poetic power

Abstract: The earliest mention of wound is in L'atelier D'alberto Giacometti, Genet actually emphasized the "poetic power" of the stage interpretation of the trauma theme. This paper analyzes the poetic power of Genet's drama, including stage performance, and how to present the theme of trauma in the drama.

1. Poetic power——The act and ritual of Genet's drama

Around 1955, after the formation of "trauma aesthetics", Genet's drama creation has undergone a great transformation. He began to think about a new type of drama, a drama with an inflammatory effect, a drama ruined by setbacks. "Modern drama has become an amusement and lacks a 'poetic power,' that is, an evil power,"¹ he said. His theatrical work seems to be all about the radical ways he is trying to prove himself as an outsider.

However, in the later stage dramas *The balcony*, *The blacks* and *The screens*, the time and space of the ritual is gradually compressed, which is only reflected in the climax of the drama. Unlike the early two dramas, which are full of mystery from the very beginning, they are gradually pushed to the climax with the development of the plot. Because there is an important change in Genet's aesthetics thought. Inspired by the works of Rembrandt and Giacometti, he forms the systematic "trauma aesthetics". He begins to focus more on society, politics and the identity between people instead of being obsessed with the difference in his earlier drama works. Genet tries to do what Giacometti did to get more of the "dead" to recognize themselves in his plays. He tries to make his plays such monuments to the dead as the queen in *The balcony* builds for her dead heroes. Based on this need, the ritual in Genet's drama gradually becomes a kind of lyric means with a new function in its late stage drama, which is to let drama intervene into the society. For the way of intervening in society, the traditional approach is to let the audience witness the whole event and deeply participate in it through empathy, so as to deeply involve them in the social facts.

2. Poetic evocation——gestures in Genet's play

British scholar Carl Lavery commented on Genet's drama and said his plays were both real and unreal, gesture rather than action. He mainly generalizes the performance of actors in Genet's drama with "gesture" rather than "action", which actually points out the requirements for symbolization and symbolism of performance style in Genet's drama. Genet frequently emphasizes in his stage prompts the posture of the characters, which is not a specific action but an extremely symbolic modelling, or a kind of metaphysical stage show, including both the actor's body movements, the tone of stage language, modelling, music, lighting and sets. On this level, one can regard the gestures in Genet's drama as a comprehensive, symbolic and poetic means of stage performance. It is difficult to make a precise definition of poetry as itself has a metaphysical meaning.

The dance, modelling and figures are also symbolic and symbolized in the gestures of Genet's drama. First of all, dance is a means of expression that is often used in Genet's drama, especially in the ritual of drama. His favorite gestures to express a character's inner desire appear in *Death watch*, *The blacks* and *The screens*. In a rite of *The blacks*, blacks dance around the coffin. Each man solemnly takes out a cigarette, forms a circle around the coffin and puffs smoke, trying to drive the

¹ Carl Lavery. The politics of Jean Genet's late theatre. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, p89.

body away. They close their mouths, and sing *I love my white sheep*. Black members of the entire court then knelt in front of the white queen. The dance here, which is similar to a mysterious ritual, shows the black people's extreme hatred of white people. The blacks show their hatred after being insulted and losing their dignity, and their trauma is presented in the dance.

Similarly, in *Death Watch*, when Green Eyes tells the story of his own crimes, he uses his own dance to replace the language. The language can reveal the wound. In Genet's drama, dance can also reveal the wound: "I want to leave here, to a world full of straw hats and palm trees. You will find out that it's easy to start a new life. I realize that when I kill the girl. I see the danger. Do you understand me? I find my own danger in the dilemma of others. I am scared. I want to go back. Stop! Don't go back, I try to work hard. I run around, I have changed. I try every shape and form so as not to be a murderer. I try to be a dog, a cat, a horse, a tiger, a table, a stone! I even try to be myself, a rose! Don't laugh! I have done all things that I can do, I am so upset and distorted. People think that I am convulsive. I want to turn back the clock, erase everything I did and put my life back before the crime. It seems easy to go backwards, but my body can't do this. I try again. Impossible. People surround me and make fun of me. They don't realize the danger until they start to worry. My dance! You really should watch my dance! I danced, kids, I danced." On the stage, Genet designs a dance for actors, showing the desire of Green Eyes to return to the past. Genet shows the desire of Green Eyes and the wound behind the desire by a spiral dance.

In terms of styling, Genet creates the space of illusion and imagination by shaping images that contrast with reality. For example, in "Screen", the character's toenails are colorful, and the color of clothes is similar to that of the French painter Matisse. The kind of solid color blocking, such as red jackets and green pants, creates a dreamy effect. The effect is to draw a line with reality. At the same time, when the humblest person wears the most colorful costumes, this humble image is extremely magnified, forming a strong contrast, and the wound is hidden in this contrast.

In terms of figure, in the "Balcony", actors must wear thick boots and characters must show a complex mixed state. They need to show both the sacred solemnity of mass in the church and hacker's sense of vulgarity in the brothel. The characters in "Balcony" are no longer specific, but symbolized. In "Black", the black people wear a white mask. When the village is telling the climax of the murder, the black people wearing the mask will give a reply to every sentence of the village with a symbolic body movement. Like the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy, it's just the figure that replaces the function of language. The physical movement of the character becomes a symbolic vocabulary, which plays a role of commenting and revealing. Especially in "Black", the figure in this position has a strong political connotation.

3. Conclusion

Before and after Genet, many dramatists tried to use the ancient means of ceremony in the drama. However, in the exploration of the ritual spirit of the whole drama, Genet is at the forefront of the most modern Western dramatist. In Genet's drama, we realize the rationality that is put on hold and the irrationality that is being promoted. Lukacs believes that the most original, widespread, and primitive connection is the soul of mankind. Drama arises from the roots of religion. On the one hand, emotions and world views must leave the foundation of religion, or must lose its innocent self-confidence, so that drama can be produced; but on the other hand, it must also preserve many essential things from the fanaticism of the religious sense, from which drama is possible. And drama is possible only if the poet and his audience feel life in this form. Genet's drama skilfully utilizes the carrier with the essence of religion to show us the possibility of drama with a poetic stage interpretation.

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