



Analysis of Abbie’s Tragedy From the Perspective of Androgyny

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Abstract

As the representative tragedy of Eugene O’Neill, the preeminent American playwright, *Desire Under the Elms* has been a blockbuster since its advent due to its unique pulchritude in tragic art, and it is hailed as one of the greatest American tragedies. Critics generally ascribe the cause of Abbie’s tragedy to O’Neill’s deliberate design. This thesis attempts to probe into the cause of Abbie’s tragedy based on a relatively new perspective— androgyny, initiated by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung and introduced into literature by English feminist writer Virginia Woolf, and therefore to remind modern people of the appropriate way to pursue happy life.

Key words: *Desire Under the Elms*; Androgyny theory; Abbie; Tragedy

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INTRODUCTION

Eugene Gladstone O’Neill, the prominent American playwright who won four Pulitzer Prizes and a Nobel Prize, is regarded as the founder of American drama. As the most influential American dramatist, Eugene O’Neill dedicated himself to the reformation of serious dramas, experimented with a variety of theatrical skills, probed into the relation between psychology and society via critical analysis, and therefore established American drama an international reputation.

As one of the most representative tragedies written by Eugene O’Neill, *Desire under the Elms* was a play under the backdrop of New England in 1850. The 76-year-old puritan Ephraim Cabot married his third wife Abbie, whose only intention of remarriage was to acquire the ownership of Cabot’s farm. Therefore Abbie cajoled and seduced Eben, her stepson, and eventually gave birth to a baby. Whilst being told the truth that Abbie wanted the new-born son to inherit the farm, Eben inadvertently drove Abbie to kill the baby to substantiate her genuine love. The tragedy culminated when Eben confessed his love to Abbie and determined to accept the punishment in jail with Abbie.

Viewed as the American Shakespeare, Eugene O’Neill has always been the focus of academia. And Scholars show immense zeal for the masterpiece *Desire under the Elms*. Much attention has been paid on to dissect it from different perspectives, ranging from the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy to eco-feminism. This paper, however, aims at analyzing Abbie’s marriage, love, and social tragedy based on androgyny theory and therefore to remind modern people of the appropriate way to pursue happy life.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF ANDROGyny THEORY

1.1 Evolution of Androgyny

Androgyny is a rather old term derived from ancient Greek. Viewed from the perspective of etymology, the morpheme “andr-” means male and the morpheme “-gyn” means female. The concept of androgyny among humans is attested to the ancient Greek myth concerning Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, whose name is the blending of his parents’ names and who is born with a physical body that is an integration of both male and female. Henceforth, Hermaphroditus turns to

be a typical image of the fusion of men and women in mythology.

Before dealing with the androgyny theory, it is of importance to distinguish the concept of “gender” from the concept of “sex” as “Gender is a very complicated set of interrelated cultural ideas which stipulate the social meaning of sex” (Wood, 2001, p.23). To be concrete, “sex” concerns more of biological aspect including appearance or body parts, especially the reproduction mechanism. Gender is a range of characteristics, pertaining to and differentiating between masculinity and femininity. Apart from biological state of sex, these characteristics also contain sex-based social structures or gender identity, which is closely related to sociological aspects.

Sociologist Judith Lorbre (1994, p.70) holds that gender is “something particularly pervasive in our lives; it is a social institution that most societies operate in terms of two genders, masculine and feminine...people should be aware of that, like class and age, gender might be better described in terms of continuum or continua.” That testifies the view that the understanding of gender is closely related to the collective value and culture of a society.

The term “gender role” was first coined by John Money in 1955 during the course of his study of intersex individuals to describe the manners in which these individuals express their status as a male or female, in a situation where no clear biological assignment exists. Gender role is a set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on his or her biological or perceived sex. It is a kind of gender stereotype, or rather, gender dualism, which is more socially structured than biologically determined.

Gender role or gender dualism is “entirely socially created expectation of masculine and feminine behaviors” (Galliano, 2002, p.185). In other words, the society with specific culture defines how men or women should perform or what they are supposed to do. For instance, when it comes to temperament, men are always portrayed as rational, aggressive, and objective while women are viewed as emotional, submissive, and subjective. Also, in the professional field, it is a commonplace that specific occupations are male-oriented or female-oriented.

Nevertheless, gender role can only be a tag attached by society. Notwithstanding the intrinsic biological characteristics we endow, it can never accurately define the true disposition of us because the so-called masculinity and femininity are not absolutely different. Judith Butler, the eminent gender scholar, purports that “the existence of a binary category of sex and gender has no reason except to meet the economic and political needs of heterosexual society” (Butler, 1989, p.95). Hence, the discrepancy between the fixed gender role and our genuine feelings and performance paves way for the reevaluation of

masculinity and femininity and propels the research of androgyny theory.

In the early study of androgyny, God is inferred to be the image of androgyny. It can be referred from the Bible that since God created both male and female, Adam and Eve, in the image of himself, and then God must have been androgynous (Beckett, 2010, p.27). Androgyny has also attracted great attention from philosophers. The illustrious philosopher Plato discussed the issue related to androgyny in his Symposium, “Original human nature was not like the present. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number: there were men, women and a union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which has a real existence, but is now lost, and the word “androgynous” is preserved only as a word of reproach” (Edman, 1928, p.353). Plato’s assumption about androgyny, though still lies in the biological aspects, is the cornerstone of androgyny theory.

1.2 Woolf’s Concept of Androgyny

Though the concept of androgyny has been used in various fields including mythology, religion, and philosophy and so on, this thesis concentrates most on androgyny in literature. It is universally acknowledged that Virginia Woolf is the first writer who elaborates the idea of androgyny in literary criticism.

On the one hand, in her point of view, androgyny is an irreplaceable state for writers in the process of literature creation and sexual-consciousness is fatal to both male and female writers. In other words, a male writer must leave spacious room for his feminine consciousness and a female writer is supposed to give sufficient room for her masculinity. Woolf elucidates the concept of androgyny in her book *A Room of One’s Own*, expressing her idea via a grotesque but enlightening scene:

When I saw the couple get into the taxicab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate. One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favor of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the complete happiness. (Woolf, 2004, p.113)

Corresponding to Samuel Taylor Coleridge for ratification—“The truth is,” the celebrated poet and philosopher wrote in 1832, “a great mind must be androgynous” (Ibid., p.115) — Woolf highly praises those mentally androgynous writers, especially William Shakespeare. The existence of cross-dressing female characters in his dramas is perfect evidence which reflects the writer’s androgynous mind. For instance, Portia, one of the female protagonists in *Merchant of Venice*, disguising herself as a young male barrister by dressing like a man, composed and steady, stepped into the court to give the sentence and rescued Antonio from being adjudged to physical torment. Another example is Viola in

Twelfth Night: or What You Will, who dressed herself as a man and served as the messenger of Duke Orsino. While facing Duke Orsino, Viola spared no efforts presenting her feminine tenderness; confronted with Lady Olivia, Viola spoke and acted like a man with wit and humor and finally won the love of Lady Olivia. By molding those androgynous characters, Shakespeare is not confined by sexual consciousness. Instead, he tries to express his presumption of ideal personality.

On the other hand, apart from androgyny in literature creation, Woolf purports spiritual androgyny to be the ideal personality for both male and female. In *A Room of One's Own*, she holds the view that "In each of us two powers preside, one male, one female. And in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating" (Ibid., p.113). Androgyny in that case is based on Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's bisexuality in psychology with the notion of "anima and animus". According to Jung, "anima" refers to a man's femininity hidden in his unconsciousness, an expression of his inner personality; equivalently, "animus" is the presence of women's masculine inner personality. In Jung's theory, "the harmonious coexistence of the two genders depends on the inner harmony of an individual" (Hall & Nordby, 1973, p.89). In General, what Woolf intends to emphasize, taking anima and animus as her theoretical reference, is the coexistence of masculinity and femininity in every mankind. And only by utilizing both of these two properties and harmonizing them can the talent of mankind be brought into full play.

Additionally, as a feminist writer growing up in a Victorian patriarchal family, Woolf's concept androgyny is wrapped with feminism. It seems that she tries to utilize androgyny to deal with women's fight against the patriarchal society and therefore to coordinate the relation between two halves of human being because androgyny exalts the merits of both genders and supports the combination of those advantages. In her novel concerning androgyny—*Orlando*, in which the protagonist experienced gender-transformation from a man to a woman, Woolf presents the inequality women endured by the struggle of Orlando who preferred his privileged life as a man because he realized the imposing social force on women and the sexism from the society after the change of his sex. Also, in *A Room of One's own*, focusing on figuring out the solution to change the status of women in the man-dominated society, Woolf repeatedly reminds us of the difference that men and women have in social status. "Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?" (Ibid., p.113). Faced with the situation which is hard to change, the concept of androgyny, the ideal image of personality equipped with masculinity and femininity, turns to be a measurable approach for women to gain more power.

Woolf insists that the crucial adjustment needed in relations is psychological acceptance: men and women must make emotional acknowledgement of each other as individuals (Batchelor, 1968, p.1). In that case, androgyny has been assumed as new meanings—relieving oppression and eliminating unequal relations. In the revolution of gender relationships, Woolf's androgyny in this aspect has been rediscovered and reinterpreted as the tool to oppose gender discrimination.

2. ABBIE'S MARRIAGE TRAGEDY: CONSEQUENCE OF HER EXCESSIVE FEMININITY

Just as Woolf once claims that, "If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her" (Woolf, 2004, p.113). For women, while femininity is the dominant factor which controls their temperament, masculinity as well plays a pivotal role in perfecting women's personality and guiding their behaviors. On the one hand, some man-oriented traits including the decisiveness to make decisions and the encouragement to fight against inequality and violence are fundamental qualities for women to acquire freedom, physically and mentally. On the other, once the undue femininity smothers masculinity, or rather, the equilibrium between two different features is destroyed, the aftermath of this breakdown is nothing but disaster.

Simone de Beauvoir, the French writer and existentialist philosopher, believes that the education a woman receives and the social norms a woman is taught to abide by are closely germane to the existence of femininity (Beauvoir, 1989, p.808). Growing up in New England, where male chauvinism prevailed, Abbie seldom attempted to find the masculinity in herself, let alone desire to fight for herself. She was solely a meek slave of her fate. The paucity of masculinity always tortured her and usurped her right to pursue bliss.

2.1 Being Resigned in Her First Marriage

During the incipient interaction with Eeben, Abbie told him about her bitter life experiences. Taking the idea of Beauvoir as theoretical bases, on the one hand, being an orphan, who suffered from poverty, tribulation, loneliness, and countless hardships, worked hard for others but only could make ends meet and never obtained the sense of security, Abbie could not have the chance to accept education. On the other, the man-oriented social structure and depressive puritanism robbed her of the alternative to realize and utilize her unconscious masculinity. Thus, the dominant femininity eroded her mind and induced her to be obedient and security-oriented.

Even worse, the only word which can be used to delineate Abbie's first marriage is calamity. "Then I

married an' he turned out a drunken spreer an' so he had to wuk for others an' me too agen in other folks' hums, an' the baby died, an' my husband got sick an' died too" (O'Neill, 1988, p.339). Abbie, being tossed into the torrent of uncertainty and turmoil of life, was still tied by her femininity. Just as she herself said, "I was glad sayin' now I'm free fur once, on'y I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' wuk agen in other folks' hum doin; other folks' wuk till I'd most give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum" (Ibid.). She was never allowed to have the freedom to live for herself.

"Masculinity and femininity may each become negative and destructive when they are represented in extreme and unadulterated way" (Bem, 1976, p.51). Controlled by her femininity, Abbie was absolutely resigned in her first marriage for marriage for her is a total compromise with life. She accepted the drunken husband that life arranged for her, she accepted the job that fate designed for her, and even she accepted the death of her mother, her husband, and her baby. The only method she adopted to cope with adversity was to endure, to sacrifice her freedom to work for other folks until she wanted to give up.

Additionally, just like Blanche in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, following the tracks of an overthrown chariot, the approach she found to eliminate misery and to gain complete liberty was to rely on man—she married Cabot instead of being self-reliant and independent. Thus, the extravagant femininity inside Abbie gradually weakened her tenacity to pursue happiness, sapped her determination to sweep away obstacles to love, and even killed her desire for the refinement of herself. Had she possessed masculinity, the ambition to control her life and strong mind to overcome impediments beset in the life journey, she would have a happy marriage and harmonious life.

2.2 Being Covetous in Her Remarriage

The play took place in New England, 1850, the time around which America was on the verge of stepping into monopoly capitalism. Materialism, the excessive desire to acquire material wealth, was all-pervasive in American society. The corrupting impact of material gaining upon people, or rather, the greed to get the farm, was perfectly represented by Abbie. It once again signifies her overwhelming femininity for the only goal of her remarriage was to own the farm.

In the first act, the fourth scene, Abbie was given her debut to us: "Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality...a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality, which is so apparent in Eben" (O'Neill, 1988, p.335). Compared the charming appearance of Abbie with that of old Cabot who was already seventy-five, the discrepancy of this marriage was so overt that the covetousness of Abbie was soon revealed by her words and attitudes.

"(With lust for the word) hum! (Her eyes gloating on the house without seeming to see the two stiff figures at the gate) It's purty—purty! I can't be'lieve it's r'ally mine" (Ibid., p.339). Moreover, at the very beginning, she had formed the thought that everything in this farm was hers which was suggested by the use of her words "my" and "mine". She even admitted straightforwardly to Eben her longing for the farm: "What if I did need a hum? What else'd I marry an old man like him for? (Defying him) this be my farm, this be my hum, this be my kitchen!" (Ibid.).

It is a matter of fact that every character in *Desire under the Elms* was indulged in materialism, and they were all dying to own the farm. Abbie, however, with extreme want for security which is a typical property of female, expressed her strong aspiration repeatedly and defiantly. She was seeking for a warm and comfortable house to get material security. Also she was looking for a home which is in charge of her to change her role as slave of fate. Ellen Pile Cook holds that masculinity can neutralize, more precisely, to balance some traits of femininity (Cook, 1985, p.66). But in her remarriage, Abbie still failed to combine her masculinity and femininity, only focusing on the farm she wanted. She was described as a secular woman with short-term perspective that on hearing Cabot would leave the farm for his son Eben, she decided to give birth to a son of herself. Thus, her being covetous in remarriage resulting from excessive femininity foreshadowed her love tragedy.

3. ABBIE'S LOVE TRAGEDY: BY-PRODUCT OF THE ERUPTION OF MASCULINITY

It is a typical stereotype that women are always gentle, docile, and obedient. But once the underlying desire for power and control wakes, women will break the shackle set by the society and they will perform various behaviors which are deemed as inappropriate for women by patriarchy.

In the androgyny theory of Woolf, she holds that "It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like them, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how could we manage with only one?" (Woolf, 2004, p.73). Being tormented by poverty, forlornness, and anguish in her early life, Abbie came to realize that femininity, which was presented by succumbing to the vested situation and repeating her early life which was inundated with endless work for other folks, could not help her to change her fate, and only masculinity would propel her to be the master of her life.

Hence, after arriving at the farm, she was determined to occupy everything in the farm. In that case, the eruption

of masculinity, like a volcano, stimulated her to be aggressive and manipulative. For Cabot, Abbie was a wild horse whose rein had been shaken off. For Eben, Abbie was a strip of line which controlled the action of a puppet.

3.1 Being Aggressive to Cabot

Despite the fact that so harsh Cabot was that he was like the brutal king of the farm, Abbie challenged his authority as soon as she came to the farm. When Abbie saw the comfortable bedroom, she just could not help defining the room as hers, which stirred Cabot's alertness. "Yewr'n? Mine!" (He stares at her penetratingly. She stares back. He added reluctantly) Our'n—mebee!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.335). Through all her actions and words, Abbie did not pretend to hide her hatred to Cabot. When Cabot sincerely told Abbie his experience in the farm, Abbie was indifferent and showed no interest, only caring about Eben, who could satisfy her physical desire. The night Abbie had adultery with Eben, they had a hearty talk and both of them confessed the malice to Cabot: "Eben—Maw b'ars him a grudge." "Abbie—Waal, so does all o' us" (Ibid.). The seed of vindictive revenge to Cabot was planted deep in Abbie's heart. Controlled by masculinity, her hysteria and aggressiveness soared to its zenith when she murdered her little baby.

To assess Abbie by androgyny theory, the femininity faded away in her morbid way to pursue what she was eager for. Rather, masculinity totally took charge of her sense and reason. According to Jung, there are four stages in animus, namely man of mere physical power, man of action or romance, man as a professor, clergyman, orator, and man as a helpful guide to understanding herself (Jung, 1989, p.23). These refer to the positive impact that animus, or rather, masculinity, can bring about. Pitifully, Abbie was robbed of the ability to pursue love, as well as tenderness and sympathy, which consisted of the virtue of female. She just performed her desperate trait of males.

Judith Butler puts out that influenced by historical and social background though, gender is something flexible and unstable (Butler, 1989, p.50). Abbie's change from being docile and tolerable to be aggressive and controlling stems from her androgynous personality. That is, on the one hand, because of femininity, including the dream to have a steady life, she pins hope on her remarriage with Cabot to obliterate the hardships in the past and turbulence in the future. On the other hand, because of her masculinity, including the tenacious mind to be the governor or "queen" of the farm, she awakens the animalistic instinct to occupy and invade Cabot's "castle". Thus, the affluent masculinity surpasses femininity, contributing to the destruction of her normal life. That is not Woolf's ideal state of a female, the fusion of merits of both men and women, but a mistake caused by maladjustment of the coexisting qualities.

3.2 Being Manipulative and Over-Obsessed With Eben

"The animus manifests itself in independence, assertiveness, ambition, intellectual striving, and other kinds of behaviors that did not seem quite appropriate for women as viewed by men" (Singer, 1997, p.36). Apart from being aggressive to Cabot, another manifestation of Abbie's masculinity was her relationship with Eben. In general, she was manipulative and over-obsessed with Eben, which accounted for all the frenzy she gained in the end. Basically, the development of their relationship can be elucidated from the following periods.

During the first period, the relationship between Abbie and Eben was antagonistic and Abbie was wily in interacting with Eben, which was directed by her masculinity. There was no denying that the previous goal for life, in Eben's notion, was to wait for the day of his father Cabot's death as he thought that his mother's death was the result of Cabot's oppression. Hence, the existence of Abbie was a fatal threat to Eben, and that was the reason why he deliberately restrained himself from being attracted by Abbie, though capitulated to his intrinsic desire later. Confronted with Eben's rage, Abbie, in lieu of yielding to him, continued to challenge him and also tried to induce him by her physical charisma. Furthermore, throughout the entire period, Abbie was clearly aware of her attraction to Eben. With cunning and frivolous attitudes, Abbie was engaged in flirting with Eben. Via the description of their interaction, it was apparent that Abbie was confident that Eben finally would be beaten by his nature. Her manipulative property was fairly obvious.

The second period of their relationship was mutual affection. Abbie, however, was over-obsessed with Eben that she even killed her baby to prove her love for Eben. Sandra L. Bem believes that "Two domains of masculinity and femininity are both fundamental.... Limiting a person's ability to respond in one or the other of these two complementary domains thus seems tragically and unnecessarily destructive of human potential" (Bem, 1976, p.51). Considering from the perspective of androgyny, Abbie's tragedy of her genuine love lies in her excessive and improper masculinity. For one thing, her adoration to Eben was so violent that she nearly turned to be a mania who had invested all her passion in the relationship with Eben. The extravagant physical and spiritual satisfaction finally led to the irrational infanticide. For another, since the day they started their relation, Abbie's role had its duality. On the one hand, she was Eben's lover, and they fell in love with each other and confessed their emotion straightforwardly. On the other, Abbie was to Eben what Jocasta was to Oedipus, who was in deep love with his mother. "Abbie—I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! (In spite of her overwhelming desire for him, there is a sincere maternal love in her manner and voice—a

horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love)” (O’Neill, 1988, p.355). The role as a lover and the role as a mother mixed to constitute the straws that break up the camel’s back because Abbie’s desire to control, to guide, and to dominate everything in the farm never changed.

As for the last period of their relation, there existed a kind of dauntless courage and noble decisiveness, which was part of masculinity, in both Abbie and Eben. After Eben went to the sheriff’s to inform him of the murder, Abbie was gallant and willing to accept what she deserved to. “Abbie—(shaking her head) I got t’ take my punishment—t’ pay fur my sin” (Ibid., p.375). She even said that she did not repent what she had done neither would she ask God to forgive her. When the sheriff arrested Abbie and Eben, they performed a state of composedness and ease which even made their incest pure and devout. At that time, masculinity beat femininity. The aggressive, manipulative and material-oriented Abbie intended to use her masculinity to live for herself, to fight for the love she cherished, and to take responsibility to her crime. The function of masculinity was complex during this period. To some extent, though masculinity more or less propelled Abbie’s determination to break the fetters beset by desire, it also precipitated Abbie’s tragedy on the whole.

4. ABBIE’S SOCIAL TRAGEDY: CONTINUATION OF HER FEMININITY

The American society in the early twentieth century was filled with prejudice towards women. On the one hand, men dominated property, political power, moral authority, and social privilege. On the other, with the publicity and exposure of the so-called gentility, women were oppressed to obey various rules concerning moralities set by men. The image of women was stiffly defined as virtuous wives and loving mothers who should sacrifice everything to support their family, and in that way, father or father-figure was regarded as the role of protector while mother was considered the role of supporter.

In addition, the prevailing patriarchy system had its reveal in almost every aspect of social life. Sociologist Sylvia Walby composed six overlapping structures that unrolled the influence of patriarchy, namely, the position of females in different aspects. For example, in physical perspective, women’s sexuality is more likely to be treated negatively. And in family life, women are more likely to play the role as housekeepers who do the housework and raise the children. Even worse, women are more likely to be misrepresented or to be abused in most cultures (Walby, 1997, p.24).

4.1 Being Fragile in Defending Against Patriarchy

To some extent, the farm in *Desire under the Elms* was a miniature of the patriarchy society, where women’s

subordination appeared in different areas. O’Neill mainly depicted two female characters in *Desire under the Elms*—Eben’s mother and Abbie. There was no denying that throughout the play, Abbie, compared with Eben’s mother who was submissive and being tormented by Cabot until her death, is a “heathen” who attempted to shake off the manacle on her. Nevertheless, the reality was, no matter how hard she had tried, she was still mesmerized in her femininity, which resulted in her tragedy, though the social factors could not be ignored. Generally speaking, Abbie’s tragedy in combatting against patriarchy, ruined by both her femininity and the society, can be presented in two parts.

The first cause of her misery is Abbie’s repressive desire for physical and psychological satisfaction. As a normal and mature woman, Abbie showed conspicuous physical desire even at the first glance on Eben since Cabot could not fulfill her needs. This kind of desire, however, was restricted by Cabot. When he heard Abbie’s lie that Eben showed lust for her. Nevertheless, the femininity, especially the aspiration to find a man who could appreciate her and love her, and a man who she could depend upon, seduced her to have adultery with Eben. And the grave for this repressive desire was death.

The other manifestation of patriarchy is the oppressed desire for material gaining. She was fragile in fighting for her material wealth. In *Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir holds that for female the only means to support and the sole means to justify their existence is marriage (Beauvoir, 1989, p.416). The fastest way Abbie found to change the actuality was to marry the old Cabot who was in possession of a large farm. In that way, she did not need to work hard to support herself. As it mentioned above, in patriarchy system, men are in the absolutely dominant position of properties. The oppressor in *Desire under the Elms*, Cabot, was a representative leader in his family, especially in material wealth. “Cabot is seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great, wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder, yet there is a weakness in it, a pretty pride in its own narrow strength” (O’Neill, 1988, p.334). Apart from his harsh appearance, the personality of Cabot was revealed by the plot that he wanted to fire the farm when he died instead of leaving it to his sons and wife.

Indeed, Abbie’s physical desire and her hope for a steady and comfortable life are beyond reproach. But what prevents her from getting on the train for happiness is her weak and incomplete consciousness to fight against patriarchy rules. Her courage to challenge Cabot’s authority by pursuing her true love deserves acclaim. But her innate femininity, represented by her reliance on men to get economic strength, is the exposure of her fragile mind to break the confinement of patriarchy.

4.2 Being Ambivalent in Fighting Against Puritanism

Puritanism, originated in England but got its development in America, played a crucial role in shaping American thoughts and literature (Chang, 1990, p.2). Puritanism laid tough and rigid social and moral frameworks for women, which deprived women's rights to gain development. For one thing, women were confined by the fixed image of considerate and loving mother whose only task was to deal with housework and care for children. For another, in the puritan culture, sex is always defined as corruption, sin, and infinite subtle shame. Puritan women had no freedom to find their sex roles that might have been more personally satisfying and their relations with men were apt to be moral rather than romantic. Women are trained to be "cold and virtuous" because they shouldered the burden to maintain social morality (Johnson, 2005, pp.70-71). Therefore, women with excessive emotion and independent thoughts were severely oppressed by puritanical creeds; women with sexuality were definitely considered to be immoral. In that condition, even women possessing androgynous personality would find it difficult to struggle for love and freedom.

Desire under the Elms was set in New England in 1850. The special setting foreshadowed the intense conflicts between Puritanism and the awakening women. In *Desire under the Elms*, the anti-Puritanism thoughts were presented by the contrast between the tyranny of a typical puritan—Ephraim Cabot and the rebellious heathen Abbie Putnam who possessed androgynous mind to question the holiness of God. Cabot was a tough but devout puritan who accepted everything God granted him. For him, his possession of the farm was based on the divinity of God. Even when he was informed that his money was stolen by Simeon and Peter, he viewed it as the guide and arrangement of his God. Contrary to Cabot, Abbie was a rebellious and brave wife or even a heathen who equipped herself with men's strength and men's determination to escape from the rule of puritanism. If there exist two kinds of women in the world—"the angel in the house" and "mad woman in the attic"—Abbie would never be the former. Her rebellion to God was reflected in her manner and expressions. Especially, when she proposed the idea to have a son of herself, the old Cabot was so excited that he blurted, "It'd be the blessin' o' God, Abbie—the blessin' o' God A'mighty on me...Pray, Abbie! Pray fur him to hearken!" (O'Neill, 1988, p.347). When Cabot bowed his head and prayed, Abbie only pretended to pray and gave Cabot a side glance of scorn and triumph.

Abbie, the "mad woman in the attic", finally lost the battle against Puritanism. For one thing, out of masculinity, Abbie did have the consciousness to be an independent new woman as she had realized the need to seek for love out of her own will, which was a decisive

blow to the hypocritical social rules for women set by Puritanism. Moreover, Abbie's courage to accept her crime because of the deep love for Eben rather than the almighty God perfectly indicated her defiance to Puritanism. But she was still sentenced to destruction by social customs. For another, influenced by femininity, Abbie had not perceived that her crazy material desire itself was actually an influential part of Puritanism, which poisoned her heart and afflicted her and she could do nothing to help. Material desire had clouded her vision. She did not understand that the absolute liberation of a woman was freedom and independence in all aspects, economically, physically and psychologically. Vexed by the desire to get the farm from the beginning to the end, Abbie's attitude to Puritanism was contradictory.

In a word, the resolution to defeat stiff dogma of Puritanism and the lack of masculinity to resist the temptation of material wealth tangled each other, consisting of Abbie's ambivalent attitudes in the war against Puritanism.

CONCLUSION

As one of the representative tragedies of Eugene O'Neill, *Desire under the Elms* contains various elements that compose the tragedy of Abbie. By analyzing Abbie's tragic fate through her marriage tragedy, her love tragedy, and her social tragedy from the perspective of androgyny, there comes the conclusion that the dissonance between her masculinity and femininity is the arch-criminal that leads to the disillusionment of her life.

As an essential part of women's personality, femininity is important in directing their decision for life. But more importantly, masculinity is also a crucial facet that can rectify errors brought about by excessive femininity. As for Abbie's marriage life, she was kidnapped by her overwhelming femininity. During her first marriage, driven by typical feminine property, such as obedience and resignation, accepting whatever life arranged for her. The dearth of masculine courage and passion brought her only loneliness and misery. In her remarriage, eagerly aspiring to change her life, she chose to marry Cabot, who was nearly her father's age, to obtain material comfort and to occupy the farm. The paucity of masculine decision-making ability and economic independence tossed her into endless afflictions.

For women, masculinity propels them to be independent and audacious. But when masculinity goes to extreme, predominating femininity, their behavior will go amiss. When it comes to her love life, controlled by masculine ambition to inherit the farm and dominate everything in the farm, Abbie was aggressive to Cabot, whom she married only for the purpose of getting possession. In addition, her manipulative personality induced her to lure Eben to have a son with her to usurp

Eben's right for inheritance. However, Abbie gradually fell in love with Eben. Thus, the satisfaction of physical desire was transformed into passionate affection; the ambitious scheme for possession turned out to be a cruel abyss. The eruption of masculinity stimulated Abbie to kill her son to attest her love to Eben, horrifying and bloody.

Masculinity and femininity coexist in everyone's temperament, conducting different tasks in directing human behavior. While as a rebellious woman, Abbie had consciousness to acquire her physical and material as well as spiritual right just as men did. The approach she used was still her female attractiveness which was part of femininity. Also, showing contempt to Puritanism morality, Abbie was a heathen who was immersed in desire for wealth and properties. She detested the restriction laid by the society but her femininity hindered her to change. The destination of her defiance was death.

To sum up, probing into Abbie's miserable fate by androgyny theory, it is apparent that both masculinity and femininity are embedded with positive and negative effect on mankind. As the proverb goes, "Going too far is as bad as not going far enough." Abbie's tragedy enlightens us that everyone should be aware of the masculinity and femininity on our personality. And only the proper and harmonious coexistence of these two properties can promote modern people's capability to handle with homogeneous unexpected conditions and help to coordinate their physical and psychological condition, which paves the way to a happy life.

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