



Study on the Dionysian Spirit of Yank in *The Hairy Ape*

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Abstract

The Dionysian spirit is the core of Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetics, the origin of western irrationalism and is regarded as the beginning of Greek tragic spirit by Nietzsche. Eugene O'Neil was one of the most intelligent modern playwright in America and had wrote many tragedies throughout his life. It could be found that many characters in his tragedies were the adapted according to the archetypes in Greek mythologies, and most of whom demonstrate obvious Dionysian spirit. Yank in *The Hairy Ape* is the typical example. Applying Nietzsche's Dionysian spirit to analyze Yank's spiritual tragic can further trace American people's alienation in the environments, O'Neil's creative philosophy and his tragic aesthetics.

Key words: *The Hairy Ape*; Eugene O'Neil; Nietzsche; Dionysian spirit

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INTRODUCTION

Dionysus, the god of wine, was one of the main gods in ancient Greek mythology and was in charge of Greek culture and theater culture. Because of his unique identity and extraordinary life experience, people hold sacrificial rituals to commemorate his death and resurrection. The tragedy art of Greece is thus rooted in the ritual activity. As early as in ancient Greece, Aristotle said in *The Art of Poetry*: "Tragedy and drama are developed from

impromptu creation. The former is derived from the ode to the god of wine, and the latter the worship of the genitals." (Aristotle, 2007, p.15) In the ancient Greek rituals to worship Dionysus, the god of wine, the believers celebrated the immortality of Dionysus, they drank and drunk, wandered, ignoring all the rules and precepts, and let the natural desires catharsis. Nietzsche then used the concept of "Dionysian" in *The Birth of Tragedy* to symbolize people's passion and fanatical state and related art forms, thus extracting the concept of "Dionysian spirit". Nietzsche believes that the "Dionysian Spirit" pursues "the cancellation of personalized and bound contact and the joy of fusion with the world's ontology, that is, affirming the eternity of the whole life through the destruction of the individual." (Zhou, 2005, p.3) At the same time, Nietzsche opposed Schopenhauer's theory of personal will and took the will of life as the core of the Dionysian spirit. He argued that "the essence of the Dionysian spirit is the human's inner emotional power against the various repressions brought about by civilization, and its source of motivation. A powerful life will from the human subject." (Wu, 1995, p.41) Heidegger argues, this is "the will to master something and transcend one's own; the will to be passionate (affect) (a disturbing psychological impact), the will to be lust (passion) to expand into the domain of the being."

The United States under Eugene O'Neil experienced two world wars, the industry and commerce were highly developed, and money worshipers, speculators, and Babbitts emerged in an endless stream. Mechanization and commercialization have brought about various social problems, and the contradictions between polarization were very acute. People are gradually alienated into "monsters of the soul" under the squeeze of the trauma of war and social contradictions, and O'Neill himself is no exception. He had a crisis of confidence in his early years, gave up his religious beliefs, and turned to the psychology of Freud, Jung and Nietzsche. "He

often uses psychological theories in his plays to conduct psychoanalysis on characters and open up the inner world of the characters so as to explore the value of life from a totally new angle indirectly.” (Guo, 2011, p.94) At the same time, he boldly explored and innovated artistic techniques, combined the ancient Greek tragedy model and modern expressionist techniques, so that his plays can be traced back to the ancient Greek classicism period, and based on the modern historical and cultural reality, creating a serious American drama. Arthur Miller once summed up: Eugene O’Neill “had read many books, was familiar with Chinese and German philosophy, and had also studied ancient Greece carefully, and was an extraordinary writer”.

“*The Hairy Ape*”, written in 1922, is composed of a large number of dialogues and confessions of the protagonist Yank. It is a mid-term expressionist play of O’Neill which digs into the inner world of the characters. In the play, Yank is a fireman who is sturdier, more ferocious, more combative, more powerful, and more confident” than the others. He believes that he is the prime driven for the normal operation of the world. However, just because of the phrase “this dirty beast” from Mildred, the daughter of the steel king, he felt that his self-esteem was insulted and he began to doubt his status in society. In the end, Yank, who turned out to be unable to realize his self-value, walked to the zoo and “died” in the embrace of his “fellow”—gorilla. Over the years, many researchers at home and abroad have conducted in-depth research on O’Neil’s “Dionysian Spirit” and believe that O’Neil’s interest in Nietzsche’s irrational philosophy and aesthetics is important evidence. Even O’Neil himself in the Nobel Prize speech called Nietzsche as his “mentor”. But up to now, domestic and foreign researches on *The Hairy Ape* were mainly focused on trauma, ecologism, tragic themes, and artistic expression techniques adopted by O’Neil. Few scholars have discussed the Dionysian spirit of the protagonist Yank. Last year, Zhang Weiyu wrote a master’s thesis on the Dionysian spirit in O’Neil’s tragedy. He analyzed the culture of Dionysian spirit of firemen in O’Neil’s tragedy, and briefly mentioned Yank. But his analysis only focused on a general level, and did not carry out a careful analysis of Yank and his Dionysian spirit. This article believes that Yank’s rebellious and perceptual personality, the fascination after a sudden loss of self-identification, and the final “death” in the arms of a gorilla with another identity “reincarnation” highly evoke Dionysus’s character traits and his own life experience. By digging deeply into the Dionysian spirit manifested by Yank, looking back at O’Neil’s artistic view of integrating life experience, ideas and concepts with ancient Greek mythology, we can further understand the artistry, history and tragic aesthetics of the work “*The Hairy Ape*” and O’Neil’s tragic aesthetics.

1. MASS CARNIVAL: SACRIFICIAL CEREMONY OF DIONYSUS

In order to commemorate the great contributions that Dionysus made to mankind, in ancient Greek mythology, people held large-scale Dionysus sacrificial activities during the autumn harvest season. According to the legend, during the sacrificial ceremony of Dionysus, the Satyr chorus sang and danced heartfully. People dressed in wild animal skins, drinking and having fun, were crazy, noisy, and completely immersed in physical intoxication. Nietzsche recorded: “The Satyr chorus is a singing team of pervers. Their civic experience and social status have been forgotten. They have become servants of their gods who transcend time and beyond all social fields.” (Zhou, 2005, p.30) That is to say, in the sacrificial ceremony, all the ritual personnel forgot about their status and sang together. They escaped from the constraints of reason and trivial matters, sang praise to the non-individual and irrational free will of Dionysus, and were indulged in a state of intoxication and freedom.

1.1 The Carnival Features of Firemen

At the beginning of “*The Hairy Ape*”, it described a chaotic scene of a group of firemen arguing, singing, beating and scolding. Some furnace firemen only “wear singlets, but the majority are stripped to the waist.” (Eugene O’Neil, p.1) They looked like “Mid Paleolithic Neanderthal Men”, “hairy chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eye”. This kind of portray makes the characters appear exaggerated and barbaric, and at first glance were known that they did not come from a civilized society. They loved to drink, whiskey, beer, gin, medicated mox, etc. made them linger. On the one hand, their respective personalities are revealed in the type of wine they drink; on the other hand, through drinking, they can temporarily forget the fatigue and pain of “tiring their backs” and enter a state of intoxication. When intoxicated, they no longer care about previous disputes or conflicts. “Under the magic of Dionysus, not only the alliance between man and man is re-established, but the alienated, hostile or enslaved nature and its prodigal son, man, shake hands again.” (Nietzsche, 1986, p.7) Together they cursed the “whistles” of the engineers whom they did not dare to resist in a sober state. They were completely out of a state of selflessness, and their sanity ceased to exist. They cursed “the lazy pig” sitting in the first-class cabin, the “stinky pig” who kept blowing their whistles and the bastard engineers who “supervised slaves”, so they felt assimilated with the mysterious nature, felt the eternal vitality of the ocean, and gained a unspeakable sense of resistance. At the same time, when they finished drinking, they felt their strength again, and even the coal-digging shovel is part of their body, with a strange, clumsy, and swaying rhythm. They threw themselves into the digging,

and piled the dug coal on the floor below them. Led by the enthusiasm of the leader Yank, they kept stuffing coal into the stove to prevent the ship from stopping. Although “they are impoverished”, they are “struggling to act in concert” in the state of drunk. Nietzsche believed that “the essence of drunkenness is the enhancement of power and the sense of fullness.” (Zhou, 2005, p.312) Although the day and night, almost never-ending work makes them physically and mentally exhausted, and they even felt that their backs were about to break, the intoxicating effect of wine allows them to get together to talk freely and enjoy carnival-like happiness. Liquor helped them find a channel for venting, dispersing their physical fatigue, allowing them to find a destination on the big ship, and find a sustenance in the cabin, and felt that the work of the stove burner also brought them a sense of fulfillment and realized their personal value.

1.2 Yank’s Dionysian Spirit Manifested in the Firemen group

It is generally believed that the sacrificial ceremony of Dionysus has “cognitive function, missionary function, control function, cohesive function and entertainment function” (Zhang, 2020, p.1) Yank undertakes the role of the leader invisibly under the acquiescence of all the firemen. His understanding on work, particular attention on drinking, and the abandonment of oppression deeply affected other firemen. Because of their low status, they were locked in “a cramped space in the bowels of a ship imprisoned by white steel,” and they were urged to work unceasingly under the whistle of engineers outside the cabin. After drinking, Yank spoke “with an arrogant and authoritative accent”, which made the noisy carnivals of other furnace firemen stopped yelling, and instead began to talk in depth about the identity of each other in an angry tone. At the beginning, the firemen Leon believed that they were living in hell. The Bible said that they were born equal but only applied to those first-class, lazy fat pigs, and they were “slaves of wages” in the cabin, sweating and suffering. Yank immediately glared at Leon. He despised Christianity, thinking that those who believe in Jesus are “junks”, those who sit in the first class are “idiots”, and the firemen are the “top things”, and they set off the whole ship. This set of preaching made other firemen regain their “strong self-esteem”, and instead thought that Leon would only “play lip service” and never did his job well. Yank’s intoxicating and confident speech made “a chaotic, initial noise gradually rise into a unity and a meaningful silence”. In an instant, everyone began to cheer up again, thinking that their work has great significance. Joy made them drink. “All of a sudden, they were happy and kind again. They slapped each other on the shoulders and talked and laughed loudly.” Everyone began to enter the carnival; celebration-like ceremony. It can be seen that Yank is full of pride after drinking. He believes that his work is indispensable, even the most

important work on the ship. Without him, the ship would not travel. Under the leadership of Yank, the other firemen have also entered a state of intoxication, agreeing with Yank’s statement, and have found their identifications through strong wine, and believe that their work is of great existential value. Yank is like the god of wine in the sacrificial ceremony. He is confident, proud, and work-centered. He uses the dependence of other firemen on work to promote their importance, so that firemen who are confused and decadent for a while and those who just want to spend their time drinking find their respective positions and regained their confidence and courage under the influence of wine.

O’Neil is an epoch-making playwright in the history of American drama. (Liu, 2005, p.424) Freud’s and Jung’s psychological theories and Nietzsche’s irrational philosophy fit his own life situation and life state. He integrated these theories into the drama creation, using writing skills focused on “exaggeration, distortion, emphasizing the intensity and strength of speed and rhythm” (Liu, 2005, p.424) to deeply portray the inner world of the characters, explore the contradiction between the inner impulse and rational order hidden in the various manifestations of the world, thereby indirectly revealing the various disadvantages of the society at that time. Yank’s crazy confidence in his lower-level work, Leon’s spurning of upper class and resentment at work undoubtedly formed a sharp contrast. Other firemen’s noisy of following Yank’s after being drunk, their “same and sharp laughs” and the bossy, annoying, and merciless whistle outside the cabin also formed a “Symphony” of the same time and space, highlighting the brutality, ugliness, indifference and ruthlessness of the bourgeoisie, and the “exaggerated and powerful” sense of helplessness of the firemen who use alcohol to revel and vent their pain in order to find personal value. It can be seen from this aspect that what O’Neil wants to create is a “spiritual tragedy” in which all living beings are noisy, individuals are confused, and alcohol is used to dissipate sorrow.

2. YANK AND MILDRED: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DIONYSUS AND APOLLO

In fact, the conflicts of two different representative thoughts and lifestyles between Yank and Mildred connected the whole drama. Although Mildred did not directly mention that Yank was a “hairy ape”, her disgusting eyes and roaring “this dirty beast”, and other firemen’s cheering and vinegar, caused Yank to hate her and always try to prove himself from different aspects to people from all walks of life.

2.1 Yank: The Transformation of Dionysus

Nietzsche believed that the Dionysian spirit can be equated with irrationalism and advocated excessive behavioral

will and artistic aesthetics. Yank has left home since he was a child, drifting away alone, and has long regarded the ship as his home. He does whatever he wants, prides himself on being strong and fierce, and leads the entire team of firemen. Among all the firemen, he is "broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful and more sure of himself than the rest", representing "the most highly developed personality", so the rest of firemen fear him and "have to show respect" to him. He is crazy, savage, and exhilarating, guided by Dionysian the impulse featuring "the driving force of indulgence." Yank's personality is impulsive, he speaks only by thoughts without thinking, and most of his mouth is unmodified swear words. At the same time, wine is an indispensable companion for him. He always wanted "energetic" wine, holding the bottle in his hand, sometimes angry, mad, and sometimes "suddenly became gentle", or fell into deep thought. Yank firmly believes that he and his comrades started the entire ship, and they are "top things, and those who are in first class are nothing but 'stinky skins'." At the same time, years of sailing experience have made him get accustomed to life on the ship, even the soot and smoke in the cabin are his "fresh air". Yank, an extraordinary person, is not confined to the framework of traditional values and concepts. He follows his inner impulse and life will to loudly proclaim his importance to the society. His strong body makes other firemen never dare to disobey his orders, but to look up to him.

Different from Apollo, who seeks individual identity, Dionysus aspires "pursue the freedom of individualization and the joy of fusion with the world's ontology." (Nietzsche, 1986, p.2) After Mildred ridiculed Yank as a "dirty beast", Yank felt that his dignity was immediately bruised and his personal values collapsed suddenly. After that, he disembarked and went to the city to find Mildred's revenge. Revenge is an act of self-defense by living creatures for the purpose of self-defense and counterattacks against forces that infringe upon themselves. But sometimes "revenge behavior reflects the individual's will to life and the dignity of the individual." The maintenance of "savage justice" is a kind of "barbaric justice". Yank's barbaric act of revenge is very similar to the noisy carnival of Dionysus and his followers during the harvest festival. In addition, Yank deliberately provoked the arrogant upper class to prove his identity and offered to help the union work to prove his worth. Even if he failed time by time, he is still eager to prove that he is no worse than others. Han Lei and Lin Haibin pointed out: "Dionysian spirit refers to the ecstatic life instinct of humans who desire happiness and full of joy in human nature. Or human being's the whole emotional system is excited", 'is the total excitation and total release of emotions.'" (Han and Lin, 2001, p.122) Yank's pursuit of individual freedom and personal values, the carnivals and anger at the sudden loss of identity when he was with

other firemen have undoubtedly verified that his essence is dominated by strong will, and he is subject to "be driven by the blind and aimless impulse of life." (Zhou, 2005, p.16) His firmness in personal values and yearning for carnival made him "break the boundaries of individual existence and enter the realm of the unity of all living beings." (Zhou, 2005, p.19)

2.2 Mildred: The Transformation of Apollo

Mildred is the exact opposite of him, and more in line with Nietzsche's image of Apollo. Mildred is the daughter of a steel tycoon. She was born noble and has an arrogant personality. She has a "slender, delicate, pale, pretty face with a sense of disdainful superiority," which was integrated as "the boundless hallucinations of beauty". Living in a wealthy life, she does not need to worry about earning money to make a living, nor her physical tiredness, so she occasionally goes to social service centers to work for free, but she has no mercy or feelings for the poor. Volunteer service is just a way for her to "investigate how the other half lives and works on a ship". Even her aunt thought it was "wearisome enthusiasm" that made poor people appear to be poorer. Mildred ignores this. Even though she does not have the energy and perseverance to serve others, she considers herself very sincere. In order to better understand how people who are different from her survive, she personally came to the ship, intending to go down to the front cabin to "investigate" their lives. Compared with the dirty and tattered clothes worn by the firemen, Mildred wore a white suit that was expensive, which undoubtedly appeared to be "pretentious" for the move to "investigate" the poor firemen in the cabin, afraid that those firemen will not be able to understand her noble birth and social status based on her weak face alone. Although the ship's pilot advised her that the cabin was too dirty and her white dress would inevitably get oil and dirt, she disagreed. Even if the pilot advised her to put on his old clothes, she refused to change her clothes so as not to reduce her identity and social status, insisting that she "has a lot of white clothes", or she can "throw all the dirty clothes into the sea". It can be seen from her appearance and clothes that she represents the image of the "noble, perfect and more beautiful" Apollo. Her life is a beautiful illusion that poor firemen desire to achieve. In the illusion, people can "create for themselves a wonderful world where they could escape from the real world." (Lu, 2002, p.71).

2.3 The Conflict Between Yank and Apollo

Silk and Stern pointed out: "The core of Nietzsche's interpretation of tragedy is the dialectical relationship between the Apollo impulse and the Dionysian impulse". (Silk and Stern, pp.256-266) Nietzsche believes that Dionysus and Apollo are opposites and united with each other. Dionysus represents the irrational spirit of indulgence, unrestrained, and returning to the original

state, while Apollo is a strict definition of unrestrained passion. Yank and Mildred come from completely different classes. Their birth background, education level, and professional philosophy determine their completely opposite personality characteristics, and their recognition of the value of life leads to completely different self-recognitions. Yank's thinking method is still in the "stage of primitive chaos" (Cui, 1991, p.86). He has not received formal education, advocating intuition and inspirational and irrational thinking, and knows nothing about nature and the internal knowledge of the operation of ships. He only appeals to the mysterious experience of his heart, and subconsciously believes that he is the driving force for the normal operation of all things. The appearance of Mildred instantly overturned the value system he had formed over the years. Mildred, who symbolizes Apollo, comes from a wealthy family and has received good and advanced education. She has already bid farewell to primitive chaotic thinking. Although the behavior of the lower cabin inspection is pretentious, compared with other upper-class people, she actively "investigating" the lives of people of different classes and have a certain ideological awareness. Meanwhile, she also has a clear understanding of herself: I'm a waste product in the Bessemer process--like the millions. Or rather, I inherit the acquired trait of the by-product, wealth, but none of the energy, none of the strength of the steel that made it. I am sired by gold and darned by it, as they say at the race track--damned in more ways than one." (O'Neil, p.8) A clear cognition and positioning of herself signifies that her thinking has entered a simple and intuitive stage of cognition. She can use her strong imagination to recreate and synthesize things. In a common sense, Yank, who represents the "Dionysus", and Mildred, who represents the "Apollo", could have complemented each other. Yank's impulse was neutralized by Mildred's restraint. Perhaps "*The Hairy Ape*" would end with a perfect ending. Because "Dionysian impulse was originally an impulse to get rid of the principle of individualization and return to the world's ontology, with a tendency to destroy the individual." If it is allowed to wreak havoc, it will inevitably cause huge damage to human life and cause "a nasty mixture of carnal desire and cruelty." It must be restrained and guided by the cultural power of "Apollo Impulse." (Zhou, 2005, p.9) But Mildred's personality is not just Apollo-like elegance and rationality. She has a clear understanding of herself but ignores others' importance. In the name of her father, she demanded the engineer that she would go to the front cabin to "investigate" the lives of different people, but at the same time her behavior showed an artificial personality. Therefore, she and Yank are destined to not be completely complementary. This is also the source of Yank's hatred for his pride and freedom, and finally went forward to his "death".

3. YANK'S "DEATH": THE "SUPERHUMANIZATION" OF DIONYSIAN SPIRIT

3.1 Yank's Fight Against the Upper Class

After being cursed by Mildred as a "dirty beast", Yank plunged into a period of contemplation. In contrast to other firemen; he became a dark, contemplative person. And the strong will of Dionysus and the proud and indulgent character, as well as the limitation of class and the limited knowledge, determined that he could not really think deeply, and could not come up with reason. Under the individual's silence and the noisy and indignant instigation of other firemen, Yank was so mad Mildred regarded himself as a hairy ape with no human dignity, humble and stupid, mindless and empty muscles. that he embarked on the "road of revenge" in search of self-recognition and identity value. He cursed Mildred as a skinny tart and white-faced bum of no use, a "smelly" with visible bones. Yank, controlled by irrationalism, disembarked and went to the bustling street to find Mildred. The animal leather in the window resonated with him, and his hatred of the upper class released his instincts of non-retreat and fearlessness in his bones. The loss of dignity made him unscrupulous, closer to the freedom of body and mind, and he seemed to have returned to an irrational state of mind. Nietzsche proposed the concept of superman from the perspective of biological evolution, thinking that superman is "the ruler of the future era, he dares to face life..... he is a strong man, a new man born after breaking the shackles of old values." (Lu, 2002, p.71) Yank is in charge of his own life, he "has a sound life instinct and a strong will". He laughed at the upper class who liked monkey skins and dressed in white, thinking that they were useless "puppets", and he was the "internal and foundation" of all infrastructure, the "steel". Foul language became his weapon against the glitzy society. He used his strong fist to confront the brightly dressed and pretentious upper class, and his superhuman will urged him to continue to demand proof of his value from the union, and offered to blow up and crush the steel company. It can be seen that Yank's spirit is very consistent with the "positive pessimism" advocated by Nietzsche. This concept has made Yank "abandon the prejudice of "negative pessimism", put resistance in the first place, and advocate that he is constantly struggling in order to realize people's self-worth." (Cui, 1991, p.89)

3.2 Physical Death and Spiritual Rebirth

The journey to be a Superman is bound to experience hellish suffering, and Superman's strong will "does not fear suffering, nor does it avoid obstacles, and loses and overcomes it." (Lu, 2002, p.72) Looked down upon by the trade union secretary, and was even ruthlessly mocked and indifferently rejected, Yank went to the zoo and had

an in-depth conversation with the gorillas. He analyzed society, his life and his own values, and finally hoped that the gorillas would help him to change the world so that bring the world back to its original path. But in the end, Yank was pinched to death by the gorilla he released. On the surface, Yank has died physically and can no longer continue to realize individual cognition or change the world. But in terms of the identity of the “hairy ape”, another explanation can be made—the death of Yank’s body as a human actually represents the rebirth of Yank’s soul as the “hairy ape”, and Yank’s soul has undoubtedly been transferred to the gorilla, and the gorilla will complete his mission of transforming the world and helping him realize his identity recognition. Yank’s experience of being crushed his bones is very similar to the experience of Dionysus’s being dismembered. The dismembered Dionysus was reborn because Athena transferred his heart to other gods, and the same way Yank attached his soul to the orangutan to regenerate. Nietzsche believed that dismemberment symbolizes “the suffering of Dionysus in the original sense”, that is, “individualized pain”, implying that the individualized state is the “root and cause of all suffering” (Nietzsche, 1986, p.39), and the rebirth of superman represents the end of “individualization.” (Zhou, 2005, p.39) Superman’s strong will “takes the expansion of life and the fullness of life as happiness. The destruction of the individual cannot weaken this happiness, but strengthen it.” (Lu, 2002, p.72) Yank’s physical destruction enabled him to regenerate his soul. The regeneration at this time made him no longer limited to the human body, nor to the barriers of class. He could use the powerful gorilla’s body and superhuman will help him to better confront upper class society.

Different perspectives produce different interpretations and form different conclusions. Liu Yanjun believes that Yank’s “death” is a tragedy: “He was strangled by a gorilla, then thrown into a cage, and died like a wild ape.” He concluded that Yank’s tragedy was that his understanding of the world was subject to personal vision and thinking. Limitations of culture, and class prevent him from making correct judgments about his direction of action. (Liu, 2005, p.430) Guo Jide believes that Yank is “a symbol of modern people’s “dislocation”, a representative figure who loses oneself and cannot find a home.” (Guo, 2011, p.93) O’Neill believes that “Yank is indeed you, me, and he represents everyone.” (p.127) O’Neil was deeply influenced by Jung’s theory of “collective unconsciousness” and wrote about the phenomenon of ancestry. (p.93) A person in a civilized society appears as a illusion of a gorilla through “death”. Yank, whose ribs was crushed by the gorilla, chased his identity with his own Dionysian madness, overconfidence and arrogance, and pursued professional dignity, but only forced to entrust one’s soul with the flesh of animals to actively resist the society manipulated by the upper class, which perfectly demonstrates O’Neil’s portray on the alienation

of humans from the mechanized society. Through a lot of confession and dialogue, O’Neill used the creative skills of expressionism to dig deeply into Yank’s inner world of perseverance and strong will, as well as Yank’s undefeatable determinations, reflecting O’Neil’s own positive pessimistic aesthetics.

CONCLUSION

Literary creation is inseparable from the historical background. Eugene O’Neill presented Yank with his physique, life, and character in the form of the Dionysian spirit to show his own resistance to the mechanization and polarization of American society at that time, which caused alienation of human nature and the distortion of human psychology. On the other hand, his ingenious combination of Greek mythology and Nietzsche’s aesthetics embodies his great breakthrough in realistic creation techniques. O’Neill gave Yank the cultural temperament of Dionysus, taking the conflict between him and Mildred who symbolizes the sun god but surpasses the sun god as the main clue, taking the collective carnival with other firemen after drinking as a contrast, and taking Yank’s constant searching for “revenge” in order to achieve self-recognition after being cast aside by Mildred, as the climax of the drama, thus highlights Yank’s fascinating pride, self-confidence, leadership and superhuman will. Yank’s death is like Ah Q in Lu Xun’s writings, and his physical death won him a spiritual victory. This kind of spiritual victory actually is a spiritual tragedy in real life, which reflects Eugene O’Neil’s own positive pessimistic aesthetics.

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