

Decentralization and Diversification: The Redefinition of Traditional Drama by the Post-theater Theater

Xiurou Wang

Performing arts, Cheongju University, Co 28503, Republic of Korea

Abstract: This paper discusses in detail the characteristics, discussion and acceptance, countertradition and its influence and future development of modern theater. First, this paper analyzes the core characteristics of plot weakening, multi-focus presentation of stage and space, and the use of real time, etc. Then, the controversy over the translation of "post-drama" and the debate on drama "literariness" and "theatrical" are discussed. Subsequently, it discusses the countertradition of post-theater, especially the de-plot and de-role, as well as the imbalance between form and content. Finally, the paper summarizes the challenges of traditional drama and the future development direction, emphasizing its potential in diversified ways of expression and narrative means.

Keywords: Post-Theater Theater; Lehman; Plot Weakening; Multi-Focus; Drama Literature.

1. Introduction

The concept of "post-theater theater" was proposed by the German theater theorist Hans-Tis Lehman (Hans-Thies Lehmann) in his book "Post-theater Theater". In 2010, Li Yinan translated the book into Chinese, which sparked discussion in the domestic drama community. In his book, Lehman points out that the post-theater is not against the text, but combines openness with the theater form to explore new ways of expression, aiming to clarify the misunderstanding that the post-drama is misunderstood as "anti-text". Nevertheless, some scholars criticize post-theatrical theater, which often regard it as "antitext" like, and take unconventional texts as an example to try to prove its lack of literariness. However, this critical approach has misread Lehman's view. Lehman's post-theatrical theater does not abandon literature, but to integrate it into the theater in a new way, making it work together with other dramatic elements. The text does not disappear in the post-drama, but redefine its role in the theater through a decentralized and diversified narrative structure. Text is no longer the only core, but together with the performance, space, time and other elements of the theater experience. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the post-drama theater needs to break through the traditional drama concept and realize the diversified expression of the text in different dramatic forms.

2. Features of the Post-drama

2.1. The Plot is no Longer High, but Opens Itself to the Theater

In Lehman's book, he divides the theater into three stages: the former theater, the theater, and the post-theater. Pre-theater refers to the ancient Greek drama and ethnic drama traditions; theater refers to the ancient Greek drama, especially after the Middle Ages; and post-theater began in the early 20th century and flourished in the 1970s until today. From Plato to Aristotle, the definition of drama is based on the "imitation" of reality. In Aristotle's view of drama, the six most important elements are plot, character, image, words, thoughts, songs, among which the most important is the plot, through the plot appeal to emotion, make people purify and

vent. In the post-theater, the plot is no longer the most important, but opens itself to the theater and becomes one of many dramatic elements, facing other elements, rather than independent of other elements. For example, for example, Samuel Beckett (Samuel Beckett)'s *Waiting for Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), the plot is weakened, two people are waiting for an unknown person, in the process of constantly wearing shoes and shoes, said a lot of meaningless words, but the focus of the story is not the plot itself, but the performance of human loneliness and meaninglessness. In the play, Vladimir and Estragon characters wait for Godo's arrival in the wilderness of nothing, and they repeatedly discuss and question the meaning of their waiting. This wait itself became a symbol of existentialism, reflecting the anxiety and despair that humans experience in seeking meaning. The repeated meaningless dialogues and repetitive behaviors in the play, such as the two constantly wearing and taking off their shoes and discussing the feasibility of rope suicide, these seemingly meaningless behaviors actually reveal their deep confusion and doubts about their existence. The structures of the first and second acts are almost identical, and this repetition not only breaks the linear plot development of the traditional drama, but also emphasizes the stagnation of time and the meaninglessness of life through the circular pattern. This form of drama makes the audience realize that the plot is no longer the core of the drama, but it is important to convey the profound philosophical thinking and emotional experience through these meaningless actions and dialogues. *Waiting for Godot* uses a minimalist plot and scene design to direct the audience's attention to the character's inner world and state of existence, thus achieving a unique dramatic effect. This is an important feature of the post-theater. -- By weakening the dominance of the plot, other dramatic elements such as space, time, and the inner world of the characters can get more display and play.

2.2. The Stage and Space are Regarded as Pictures and Landscapes, and the Focus Is Blurred

In space, post-theatrical works often try to create landscapes that are usually more pictorial, while the focus is often vague or multiple exi. When we watch the film, the

focus has been selected and presented to the audience through the editing by the director. On the traditional drama stage, the concentration of the voice, lines, image and contradictions of the actors makes the audience pay attention to the actors who are talking or acting, and becomes the focus. In post-drama, there are often multiple focus, even no focus, just to create a landscape, with multiple focus available at the same time.

For example, Robert Wilson's *Robert Wilson (Einstein on the Beach at the Beach)* creates a complex stage landscape through a combination of visual images, lighting effects and background music. Instead of a traditional linear plot, the play consists of a series of visual and auditory pieces, where viewers are free to choose their viewing angles and points of attention. Each segment in the play is an independent visual and auditory experience, and the lighting and stage design create one shocking picture after another through color and composition. These images do not point to a single storyline or theme, but evoke the audience's emotion and thinking through the visual and auditory impact. When watching "Einstein at the Beach", the audience no longer passively follows the development of the plot, but actively seek their own understanding and experience in the numerous visual and auditory information.

Slow-motion, repetitive, and symmetrical stage composition are often used in Wilson's work, allowing the audience to experience it in a multi-level, multi-focal environment. Each element on the stage is an independent visual symbol, and the audience can understand the meaning of these symbols from different angles. Lighting design plays a crucial role in Wilson's work, creating a surreal atmosphere through the change of light and shadow. For example, in *Einstein at the Beach*, there is a scene where the actor moves slowly against the background of a giant clock, and the lights are constantly changing, giving the audience a sense of time stagnation and infinite extension.

This multi-focus stage design breaks the limitations of a single narrative in traditional drama, giving the audience more autonomy to choose and explain what they see. This approach not only enhances the audience's sense of participation, but also makes each audience's experience unique and personalized. Through his stage design, Wilson takes the concept of post-theater to the extreme, showing how post-theater challenges audiences' traditional viewing habits and thinking patterns by blurring the focus and creating the landscape.

2.3. Time is the Real Time

In the post-theater, time is usually presented in the form of real time, which is significantly different from the fictional concept of time in the traditional drama. The time processing of traditional drama is often broken and compressed, and the flow of time is not synchronized with the real time. Ancient Greek plays, Shakespeare's plays and even the realistic plays of the 19th century often serve the narrative and dramatic effect through the jump, concentration and expansion of time. Although *Oedipus King* is presented within two hours in the theater, its story spans many years and beyond, and the audience experiences the ups and downs of the fate of the characters and the development of the plot through the fictional time of the drama.

However, post-theater theaters reject this treatment of fictional time, emphasizing the occurrence of events and the audience's experience flowing at the same time. German drama theorist Lehman pointed out in his book "Post-Theater"

that the post-theater pays more attention to the direct interaction and immediacy between the audience and the performers. The concept of time in post-theater is not constructed through plot and narrative, but through the real, unmodified passage of time.

For example, Pina Bausch's "The Full Moon" is a vivid example of this theory. In "Full Moon", the performance time of the dancers is completely real, and the audience sees every movement, every drop of sweat and every emotional outpouring of the dancers in the real time. The water on the stage, the lights, the body movements of the dancers all happen in real time, without any jump or fiction in time. Through this experience of real time, the audience not only saw a dance performance, but also experienced a period of time together with the dancers, sharing the emotion and experience of this moment.

The use of real time in the post-drama generation theater not only breaks the time frame of the traditional drama, but also challenges the audience's perception and experience. The audience is no longer passive recipients, but active participants, whose attention and emotion are closely linked to every moment on the stage. This treatment of time makes the post-theater more live and improvisational, the boundary between the audience and the performer becomes blurred, the audience becomes a part of the performance, and the performance becomes a part of the audience's life. This treatment of real time also reflects the reflection of post-theater on the rhythm of modern life and the concept of time. In modern society, time is often fragmented and accelerated, and people's life is compressed in a period of time. Through the presentation of real time, the post-theater tries to let the audience experience the passage of time and the reality of existence. This treatment is not only a formal subversion of the traditional drama, but also a criticism and reflection of the modern way of life.

Through the use of real time, the post-theater breaks the time frame of traditional drama, making the audience feel the power and emotional resonance of performance more directly and more truly. Pina Bowsh's "Full Moon" is a typical example of this post-dramatic time treatment. Through the presentation of real time, the audience and the dancers can experience a real emotional journey together, creating a unique and profound theatrical experience. This kind of time processing method makes the post-drama theater not only innovate in form, but also trigger the audience's profound thinking on time, existence and life in terms of content and concept.

3. Post-drama Discussion and Acceptance

3.1. Discussion of the Translation and Naming of the "Post-drama"

First first the discussion of the concepts of "ma" and "theatre" and questions about lexical translation. The core argument of post-theater is Lehman's clear distinction between the concepts of "Lama" and "Theater". Translator Li Yinan translated "Lama" into "drama" and "Theater" into "theater", making a strict distinction. In Western languages, the meanings of these two words differ in different historical periods and contexts, sometimes even confused.

In English, "drama" usually refers to the script and the play itself, emphasizing the literary and narrative structure of the text, while "theatre" points more to the overall performance

of performance, performance and theater art, and emphasizes the comprehensiveness of stage presentation and audience experience. It is through this distinction that Lehman put forward the concept of "post-theater theater", which aims to highlight the importance of theater practice and performance process, rather than relying solely on the literariness of the script. In the process of translation, Teacher Li Yanan followed this theoretical context and accurately distinguished these two concepts in the Chinese context, which provided a basis for the domestic academic circle to understand and discuss the post-drama theater.

This distinction is not only of great significance at the linguistic level, but also causes profound discussion in theoretical discussion and practical creation. Drama theorists have discussed the influence of this distinction on the creation, criticism and acceptance of drama, believing that this distinction contributes to a clearer understanding of the theoretical connotation and practical significance of post-theater. For example, in the post-theater, the interaction between the performers and the audience, the use of the stage space, and the application of non-traditional narrative methods are all important manifestations of the theater, rather than only relying on the literariness of the script.

3.2. Discussion on the "Literary" and "Theater" of the Script

The criticism of domestic drama theory has extensively discussed the topic of "calling for the literary nature of drama". Director Wang Xiacong has said that the literature is the most dangerous enemy of drama, which has caused widespread controversy and discussion. Professor Fu Jin agrees with this view, believing that what drama needs is the literature of drama, and many drama writers nowadays "lose the unique ability of drama to narrate through the actions of characters and the evolution of relationships". He pointed out that the literariness of drama should not only be reflected in the beautiful language and complex plots, but should also show the power and charm of drama in the actions, conflicts and relations of the characters.

Professor Zou Ping believes that drama creation should first pursue the ideological nature of the script reflecting social life. "Drama needs the thought naturally revealed from the conflict between the drama characters and the drama and the drama plot, which is the dramatic thought". This point of view emphasizes the social responsibility and ideological depth of drama creation, and believes that drama is not only a means of entertainment and expression, but also a tool to reflect and explore the social reality. Drama should reveal the social problems and the complexity of human beings through the vivid characters and tense plots, and provide the space for the audience to think and reflect on themselves.

In addition, Professor Dong Jian has insisted on and emphasized the view of "dramatic dichotomy", that is, the drama in literary composition and the drama in stage presentation. In his opinion, the literariness and playariness of drama are not opposite, but can complement and enhance each other. In script writing, literariness can be shown through exquisite language, profound thoughts and complex plots, while in stage presentation, literariness is realized through actors' performance, stage design and audience interaction. These two together constitute the integrity of the drama, which makes the drama have both the depth of literature and the appeal of the theater.

To sum up, the discussion and acceptance of post-drama

not only involves the discussion at the theoretical level, but also causes profound thinking in the actual creation and criticism. Through the distinction between the concepts of "ma" and "theatre", and the discussion of the "literariness" and "theater" of the script, theater theorists gradually formed the understanding and identification of the post-theatrical theater. These discussions not only enrich the content of drama theory, but also provide new directions and possibilities for drama creation, making drama radiate new vitality in contemporary culture.

4. After-drama and "Anti-tradition" and "Do Not Understand"

4.1. Anti-tradition and De-plot and De-role

One of the characteristics of post-drama is that it is against tradition, no longer focuses on text and breaks the traditional narrative structure. "Not understanding" refers to de-plot and de-role, removing the stage medium of "imitation", blurring the boundary between performance and audience, fiction and reality, and no longer taking the performance of people (including actors and their roles) as the core. These characteristics are in sharp contrast to the traditional theatrical theatre.

For example, in the Japanese body drama "Box", the main character of the box is a box. For 80 minutes, the actors constantly move 20 boxes in front of them on the stage. When the boxes are moved into "walls", "doors,", "road", "and" steps ", they have relations with the actors and go back and forth to the end. When staged in Japan, the audience sitting in the theater was deeply touched. They felt the movement of several boxes presented the current situation of Japanese society, which was desperate. This form of innovation and plot reduction makes the audience no longer only rely on the traditional plot promotion, but directly feel the emotions and thoughts of the play through the visual and sensory experience.

In theory, this anti-traditionality of post-theater can be traced back to Brecht's modern theater theories such as "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and Anthony Aalto's "Cruel Drama" (*Theatre de la Cruaute*). Brecht advocated breaking the fourth wall by making the audience aware that they were watching the play. Aalto advocates the audience through extreme visual and sensory stimulation. Post-drama theater inherits and develops these ideas, and through the deplot and derole, breaks the narrative framework of the traditional drama, and makes the audience rethink the essence and meaning of the drama in a new viewing experience.

4.2. Imbalance between Form and Content

In the current Chinese context, there is often another misleading discussion about the "literature" of drama, which usually points at the post-theater. However, a large number of stite, vulgar and boring works, calling themselves "post-drama" just because they adopt the traditional drama form, seem to be exempt from criticism. Against the principles of "post-drama" under the guise of "post-drama". The market is filled with a large number of form greater than the content, excessive use of multimedia, play haven't start to pull three curtain do projection, as if no projection cannot claim itself as "drama" after "pioneer", "experimental drama", is actually missing the literature, form do addition, but do subtraction on the content, to the audience look not to understand to flaunt their drama how art, this is very deformed phenomenon, this

is "the emperor's new clothes".

Behind this phenomenon reflects the misreading and misuse of the post-theater theory. Post-drama theater does not simply reject plots and characters, but explores deeper ways of dramatic expression through new forms. Its core is to create a new language and experience mode of drama by breaking the traditional dramatic narrative and expression techniques. This kind of formal innovation must be based on the rich and profound content, in order to truly realize its artistic value and ideological connotation. In theory, the form innovation of post-theater should serve the expression of content, rather than the opposite. For example, Anthony Aalto's cruel drama and Brecht's dissociation effect, although extremely innovative in form, their ultimate purpose is to more deeply express the ideological connotation and emotional power of the work. Therefore, the balance of form and content is always an important principle in the creation of post-theater theater.

The anti-tradition, de-plot and de-role of the post-drama theater reflects its breakthrough and innovation in the traditional drama form and narrative structure. However, in the actual creation, the balance of form and content is still a key issue. Only on the basis of the profound ideological and emotional power in the content, the formal innovation can really give full play to its artistic value and influence. For those works under the guise of "post-drama" but lack substance, the theoretical circle and the audience should be vigilant to avoid being confused by formal appearance.

5. The Influence and Future of the Post-drama

The post-drama has a profound influence on the modern drama, which has not only triggered extensive discussion in theory, but also promoted the innovation and change of the drama in practice. The post-drama theater has brought a wisp of new wind to the drama, providing a novel form of creation, and the dramatic creation view of Glotovsky, Peter Handke, Richard Shekner and other masters have contributed to the post-drama. At the same time, we should pay more attention to the new direction of the development of world drama, pay more attention to the artists' attempts to push forward the boundaries of drama, and view and accept the arrival of new things with a broader vision and inclusiveness.

5.1. The Challenge of Post-drama to Traditional Drama

The post-drama theater breaks the narrative and expression means of traditional drama, making the drama more diversified and complicated. Traditional drama often relies on linear plot and character relationship, while later drama emphasizes non-linear narrative, fragmented structure, the use of multimedia and the active participation of the audience. This change not only enriches the expression form of the drama, but also makes the audience's experience more diverse and profound.

Theoretically, the emergence of post-theatrical theater is closely related to the re-examination of the nature of drama in the late 20th century. Hans-Tes Lehman in his *Post-theater Theater* pointed out that the traditional Aristotelian view of drama emphasizes drama as an art form of imitating reality, which focuses on the development of plots and the shaping of characters. However, the core of the post-theater is to break the framework of imitation, emphasize the locality and

expression of the drama, and regard the drama as a unique artistic experience rather than a realistic representation.

The nonlinear narrative and fragmented structure of post-theater originates from the influence of reflection and deconstruction on neuroscience since the middle of the 20th century. The theory of multi-voice narrative and temporal reorganization, proposed by narrators such as Genette and Bakhtin, challenges the traditional single perspective and linear time view. These theories provide theoretical support for the post-theatrical theater, enabling it to adopt multiple perspectives and temporal order in the narrative, thus breaking the continuity and logic of the traditional narrative.

The use of multimedia and the active participation of the audience reflect the redefinition of drama space and audience relationship in the post-theater. Brecht's theory of dissociation effect emphasizes the breaking of the fourth wall and keeping the audience maintain a rational critical attitude, which has been further developed and applied in the post-drama. Through the intervention of multimedia, drama is no longer just the performance of the actors on the stage, but a comprehensive artistic experience. The audience is not only a passive recipient, but an active participant, and their reaction and interaction become a part of the drama.

This breakthrough in the traditional theater form makes the post-theater an open and inclusive form of drama that adapting to diverse social and cultural backgrounds. As Lehman said, the post-theatrical theater is not against the text, but goes beyond the limitations of the text and creates a new dramatic language and way of expression. This new language of drama not only challenges the audience's traditional viewing habits, but also provides new possibilities and space for drama creation. The post-theater theater breaks the traditional narrative and expression means of drama through the nonlinear narrative, the fragmented structure, the multimedia use and the active participation of the audience, which makes the drama more diversified and complicated. This change not only enriches the expression form of the drama, but also makes the audience's experience more diversified and profound, and at the same time is theoretically supported by narratology, deconstruction and the theory of dissociation effect. The post-theater theater thus became an innovative and experimental form of drama, which had a profound influence on the development of modern drama.

5.2. The Future Development of the Post-drama

The future of post-drama lies in continuing to explore and break through the boundaries of traditional drama and find new ways of expression and narrative means. With the development of technology, the application of multimedia and virtual reality technology will bring more possibilities for post-theater. For example, virtual reality can create immersive theater experiences that allow audiences to participate in the theater. The application of this technology will make the boundaries of drama more blurred and the audience and actors interact more closely. For example, Dutch troupe Orkater's virtual *Island* (Virtual Island) uses virtual reality technology to make the audience wear VR glasses as if they are in a virtual island, interact with the virtual characters, and experience the immersion completely different from traditional dramas. In addition, the future of post-drama also lies in the wider integration of other art forms, such as music, dance, film, etc., to create interdisciplinary works of art. This fusion can not only enrich the expression means of the drama,

but also attract more audiences with different backgrounds and interests, and expand the influence of the drama.

Finally, the future of post-drama also lies in focusing on social reality and human experience, using drama as a medium to reflect and explore the problems and challenges of contemporary society. For example, the documentary theater works of the Rimini Agreement (Rimini Protokoll), through interviews and field visits, put real people and stories on the stage, so that the audience can see the real face and contradictions of the society in the drama. This way of creation focusing on reality not only makes the post-drama closer to life, but also enhances its social influence and cultural value.

The influence and future development of post-drama lies in its challenge and innovation to traditional drama. Through new forms and technologies, it enriches the means of expression and audience experience of drama, while pays attention to social reality and human experience, so that drama can play a greater role and influence in contemporary culture.

6. The Conclusion

The literariness of the post-theatre, although reduced, has not been replaced. It brings new possibilities and vitality to the dramatic art by breaking the narrative structure and expression means of traditional drama. In the context of globalization and the development of science and technology, the post-drama theater will continue to explore new forms of creation and expression, and promote the continuous development and innovation of drama art. Post-drama is not only a rebellion against the traditional drama, but also a return

to the essence of the drama. Through diversified means and forms, the drama is more close to the audience's life and experience. We should accept and understand the post-drama with an open mind, and contribute our wisdom and strength to the development of the drama art.

Through the in-depth discussion of post-drama theory and practice, the uniqueness and development potential of this drama form can be better understood. Post-drama theater is not only an art form, but also a cultural phenomenon, which reflects the diversity and complexity of contemporary society. In this rapidly changing era, post-theatre theatre provides a new perspective to help us better understand and cope with the world around us. Through continuous exploration and innovation, the post-dramatic theater will continue to lead the development of dramatic art and bring more rich and profound dramatic experience to the audience.

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