华莱士·史蒂文斯的《看黑鸟的十三种方式》的解构主义解读

王沈 黄晓燕

（湖南大学 外国语学院，湖南 长沙，410082）

摘要：作为诗人中的诗人，华莱士·史蒂文斯是20世纪最具影响力的美国诗人之一。哈罗德·布鲁姆称他为“我们这个时代最具代表性的诗人。”《看黑鸟的十三种方式》是他早期的诗歌之一。本文将从德里达的解构主义的角度解读其诗歌背后的意义。

关键词：德里达；解构主义；华莱士·史蒂文斯

1. Wallace Stevens

 Considered as one of the five most prominent, talented and influential poets in America in the 20th century, Wallace Stevens was known as “poet of poet”, enjoying almost the same position with T.S.Eliot. His poetry image is abstract and vague, making his poetry profound in meaning and hard to grasp. From his life experience and his works, we can find that the poet shuttled back and forth between the reality and the imagination world, exploring vigorously the relationship between objective reality and art. He claimed that art should be deeply rooted in reality; if break away from it, art is merely a castle in the air. And the disordered and meaningless reality can only regain its order and meaning through art. Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird is a typical example.

2. Derrida and Deconstruction

 Deconstruction is a form of philosophical and literary analysis derived principally from Jacques Derrida's 1967 work Of Grammatology. The French critic Jacques Derrida is the originator of deconstruction. He gave the speech, Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences in front of the major structuralists at that time. He points out that it was the contradiction of structure and its center that announced the death of structuralism. Later he published other three books: Of Grammatology, Writing and Difference, and Speech and Phenomena. In his works, he opposed the concept of traditional metaphysics that exists in western ideology, and opened a new way for wide possibilities of text reading and writing. It believes that a text could have many infinite types of interpretations which are all as important as the text itself. It can help us open up a text that we may have seen as closed or limited.

There are several basic connotations in deconstruction such as: subversion of binary opposition, differance, dissemination and intertextuality and so on. Here we just focus on the subversion of binary opposition.

In critical theory, binary oppositions are pairs of theoretical opposites. Structuralism usually bases on the search of underlying binary oppositions as explanatory device. They argue that our imaginative world is based on binary oppositions, such as speech/writing, presence/absence, theory/practice, nature/culture, truth/error, meaning/expression, and reality/appearance and so on. In western tradition people always consider that the former of each pair is superior while the latter
is somewhat inferior and it always serves and supplements the former. The former one belongs to the logos and marks a higher presence while the latter one marks a fall. Therefore, logocentrism considers the priority of the former one and assumes the latter one in relation to it, as a complication, a manifestation, a negation or even a disruption of the former. However, Derrida discovered an interesting satire in each pair, as the supplement reinforces presence as well as reminds people its absence.

However, Derrida subverts binary oppositions and its significance. By questioning the “center” of a structure or system firstly, Derrida demonstrates his deconstructive thoughts. Actually, both the structuralists and the Western philosophy believe that any structure has a fixed origin as the center, which is in fact called “logocentrism”. It both allows and limits the freeplay of the structural factors. Since it can both organize and balance the structure, but to preside over the structure, this organizer isn’t part of the organization so that freeplay will not influence the center. In this sense, the center is both within and outside the structure, thus is both the and not the center, and a structure, which doesn’t have a center ceases to be a structure any more.

For example, this pair of “writing” and “speech” is what Derrida calls a violent hierarchy, binary opposition. He says, “To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the Hierarchy”. So he subverts what has been regarded as inferior. Speech has full presence, while writing is subordinate and threatens to contaminate speech with its materiality. Western philosophy supports this in order to preserve presence. However, Derrida subverts this hierarchy by figuring out that they both share some authorly characteristics: both are signifying processes which lack presence. To complete the reversal of the hierarchy, people can observe that speech is one kind of writing. In order to make it clearer and fight with phonoencentristm, Derrida continues to deconstruct this hierarchy by pointing out that when people interpret oral signs, they have to recognize certain stable and identical forms (signifiers), whatever accent, distortion or tone may be involved in the utterance. It seems that we have to exclude sound and recover a pure form. This form is repeatable signifier, which people had considered the characteristic of writing. So once again, speech is a species of writing. Derrida also subverts other binary oppositions such as philosophy and literature.

Derrida’s subverting the binary oppositions undoubtedly provides people another way to study the literature. With the dissolution of the binary opposition, the “deep structure” disappears. And by subverting those binary oppositions, people can see that one term in fact relies on and inheres within the other. When doing the subversion, people will pay more attention to the marginal information. And by this way, much neglected information can be reread as the “center”.

3. Construction---Integration---Deconstruction

Living in the modern society gradually losing its order, faith and morality, Wallace Stevens was aware of the hardships and importance of artistic creation. Many of his poems centered on the relationship between art or poetry and reality, manifesting his ideas that art should be rooted in reality and has objective values only when it is based on reality; on the other hand, the function of
Taking Stevens’ preference for the theme of art and reality, I think that the black bird in this poem is the symbol of art. Setting upon the background of nature and human society, Stevens here discussed the relationship between art and reality, including nature, society and human beings, as well as the incredible charm and huge function of art. In this poem, on one hand, Stevens tried to construct an “order” with art in this indifferent, absurd and disordered world. On the other hand he denied the previously constructed “order”, abandoning the absolute power of art and confirming the power of reality. Therefore, the whole poem formed the complete process of construction---integration---deconstruction.

The first and second stanzas are the process of construction, constructing an art world in the reality world. “Among twenty snowy mountains/The only moving thing/ Was the eye of the blackbird.” As a modern poet, Stevens didn’t discuss art and reality directly, instead he used some images, like the snowy mountains and blackbird. In this stanza, the poet used “twenty”, intending to refer to the twentieth century. And he described a vast, cold and lifeless wasteland just like what T.S Eliot showed, which symbolizing the relentless and disordered reality world. However, “the blackbird” moved, bringing the deserted world life and vigor and people hope and courage. Here art is the incarnation of art and imagination, full of emotional charm and edification, providing the nature and people with meaning and essence of life and bring modern people into a wonderful spiritual world. Stevens put the construction of art in a very high position, through which people can forget the disorder and pressure of reality. The magic change the blackbird brought reminds us of the same effect the jar brought: “I placed a jar in Tennessee/And round it was, upon a hill/It made the slovenly wilderness/Surround that hill.” In the second stanza, “I” refers to the artist, who is the ruler of the art world and construct an artful world with various art forms.

Since an art world has been constructed, the following part is about how art or imagination is integrated with the reality world. In the third stanza: The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds/It was a small part of the pantomime. The “autumn winds” may refers to the nature or the deserted and bleak surrounding. At this time, “the blackbird whirled in the autumn winds” means that art is just a small part of nature and is inseparable from nature. “A man and a woman/ Are one./A man and a woman and a blackbird/ Are one.” Traditionally thinking, the human world are made up of men and women and people are supportive of the binary opposition of man and woman. However, according to deconstruction, we have to break this kind of opposition. Therefore, this opposition between man and woman no longer exist, rather man, woman and art constitute a new whole as art or imagination is necessary for the enrichment of human society and spiritual world. And only by relying on the power of art can human acquire the wisdom about survival and life and can the reality world become more orderly and complete. The fifth stanza is about the artist’s confusion when facing different forms of art. To some extent, the artist seem to be controlled by art and art seems has taken the upper hand. The next stanza “Icicles filled the long window/With barbaric glass.” Although the reality world is cold and barbaric, the art still permeate into it and
influence people’s life and attitude. “The shadow of the blackbird/crossed it, to and fro.” We can sense the incredibly great influence and creativity of art. In the seventh stanza, “golden bird” actually refers to something unpractical like money, position, power and reputation which are against the tenet of art. Stevens pointed out the fact that most people are pursuing the so-called secular things while neglecting “the blackbird walks around the feet of the women about you”, that is the art, the most wonderful thing in the world. The next stanza is about the fact that art or imagination is the source of literary creation. On the other hand, art derives from the reality world as “the blackbird is involved in what I know.” “When the blackbird flew out of sight/It marked the edge/Of one of many circles.” It means that even though art flew out of the reality world, it still has a solid place in this world, and “It marked the edge”. That is, no matter how people avoid and banish art, anything related to art will not disappear. Again in the next stanza, we get an understanding of the power of art. “green light” is the symbol of life, representing the earthly reality world. “blackbirds/Flying in a green light/ Even the bawds of euphony/Would cry out sharply.” The power of art reached every corner. The same idea is expressed in the following stanza. The people who rode “a glass coach”---the colorful reality---feel uncertain and scared as they can’t feel the charm of art. In this integration process, art or imagination derives from reality and is an inseparable part of reality. Actually, to some degree art has controlled the reality as people living in the reality world was at a loss when art was absent.

Although Stevens likes to discuss the relationship between art or imagination and reality and he often advocates the great power of art or imagination, he still hold a reasonable attitude to it. He see clearly the limitation of art. Stevens believes that “poetry is a passion, not a habit. This passion nourishes itself on reality. Imagination has no source except in reality and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality.” Based on this poem, it’s the deconstruction process. In the twelfth stanza: “The river is moving./The blackbird must be flying.” It is an affirmation of the reality. Even though art has great power, it cannot change or completely remove reality. The last stanza shared the same idea: “It was evening all afternoon/It was snowing/And it was going to snow/The blackbird sat/In the cedar-limbs.” Although Stevens advocates the power of art and he did constructed an art world, this kind of construction was temporary and he later deconstructed this world as if art break away from the reality, it will no longer exist. This kind of view is in accordance with Derrida’s deconstructive thinking, that is there is no center, no fixed meaning. In the end of the poem, the world is no longer an art world and it is still a reality world, but filled with art. The reality is still bleak and gloomy, but it takes on a different look with the power of art.

参考文献
Interpretation of *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird* from the Perspective of Deconstruction

WANG Shen    HUANG Xiaoyan
(College of Foreign Languages, Hunan University, Changsha, Hunan, 410082)

**Abstract:** As the poet of poet, Wallace Stevens was one of the most influential America poet in the 20th century. Harold Bloom called him “the best and most representative American poet of our time.” *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird* one of his early poem. The thesis will interpret this poem from the perspective of Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive theory to reveal the thoughts behind this poem.

**Keywords:** Derrida; Deconstruction; Wallace Stevens