

An Aspect of the Linguistic Features of Thought Asides in *Strange Interlude*

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Strange Interlude (1928) written by Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) consists of two kinds of speech; one kind being conventional dialogical speech and the other kind being thought speech. O'Neill employs this latter technique as a device to project his characters' inner selves onto the stage. Whereas in the dialogues the characters speak out using modified and constrained language to communicate with the characters peopling their outer world, in their thought asides, they express diverse aspects of their inner consciousness.

Although in drama dialogue is the fundamental mode of presentation, in *Strange Interlude* the thought aside technique seems to play a vital role. O'Neill himself writes in a note titled 'Method 1926': 'anyway the thinking aloud being more important than the actual talking'.¹ Thought aside technique has attracted much attention among O'Neill scholars since the first performance in 1928. Some (e.g., Tiusanen, 1968; Törnqvist, 1969; Floyd, 1985; Dubost, 1997) are concerned with the expository function. Others (e.g., Yamanouchi, 1964; Tiusanen, 1968; Törnqvist, 1969) argue that one of the major purposes of the thought aside technique is to show the conflict between a character's spoken words and his thoughts. Bogard (1972: 308; and also see Wainscott, 1988) mentions that *Strange Interlude* is based on 'two time schemes', each represented by the dialogue and the thought aside, which create the play's dual time patterns in 'an extraordinary counterpoint of movement and stasis, of time and timelessness, of sound and silence'. Dahl (1970: 56) contends that thought asides illustrate the flux of the character's inner life with associations welling up in the mind, and Törnqvist (2004: 158) suggests that they represent what

the characters are silently thinking.

In short several studies have been made on the use of the thought aside technique in *Strange Interlude*. Dahl (1970: 59) and Dubost (1997: 163) discuss some examples of thought asides where the characters analyze themselves, but in general these issues concerning self-analytic thought asides have not been fully researched because little attention has been paid to the relationship between their linguistic features and the consequent dramatic effects.

This paper will consider what dramatic effects the self-analytic thought asides produce, and secondly what contribution their linguistic features may make. I will try to do this by means of an analysis of the interrogative sentences and the changes in the pronouns used in the self-analytic thought asides. In addition to these two points, I would like to investigate speaker-hearer relationship by using the following three communication models:²

---Dialogue

(a) W [S(Ch-X) → (text) → H(Ch-Y)] R/A

---Thought aside

[A] W [S(Ch-X) → (text) → H(Ch-X)] R/A

[B] W [S(Ch-X) → (text) → H(Ch-X')] R/A

W: Writer R/A: Reader or Audience S: Speaker H: Hearer Ch-X: Character X Ch-X': alter ego of Ch-X Ch-Y: Character Y

In the speaker-hearer relationship for dialogue (a), a real writer creates a fictional dramatic world, and in the dramatic world, a given character-X as a speaker utters his/her words shown as 'text' in the diagram to a given character-Y as a hearer, through which communication between character X and Y is conveyed to the real reader or audience. In the case of the speaker-hearer relationship in a thought aside, as is shown in diagram [A], character-X as a speaker utters his/her words to him/herself as a hearer, thereby creating communication between Ch-X and Ch-X to

the real reader or audience. In diagram [A], the speaker and hearer are coincident with each other. However, in diagram [B], character-X as a speaker utters his/her words to his/her alter ego as a hearer indicated as *Ch-X'* in the diagram, as a result of which communication between Ch-X and *Ch-X'* is made with the real reader or audience. In this case, the speaker and hearer are not coincident. Some of self-analytic thought asides depend on this type of speaker-hearer relationship.

Before I examine any self-analytic thought aside, it would be useful for my argument to give a quick overview of the speaker-hearer relationships in one dialogue and in two typical thought asides. The following dialogue between Evans and Marsden provides a good example:

1.

EVANS— . . . (*eagerly—with intense admiration*)

(1) In the war! He was an ace! And he always fought just as cleanly as he'd played football! Even the Huns respected him!

MARSDEN—(*thinking cynically*)

[1] This Gordon worshipper must be the apple of Nina's eye! . . .

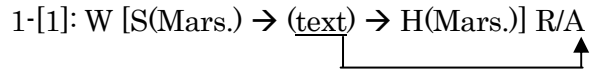
(*casually*) Were you in the army? (658)³

In this dialogue, Evans and Marsden are talking about the late Gordon Shaw. In dialogical speech (1), Evans as the speaker of this speech utters his admiration for Gordon Shaw to the hearer Marsden, as the diagram 1-(1) below shows:

1-(1): W [S(Evans) → (text) → H(Mars.)] R/A

In response to Evans's dialogical speech, in his thought aside [1], Marsden utters his thought or his estimation of Evans to himself as his own hearer. He then continues his conversation with Evans, without communicating his thought to him. In this

thought aside, the speaker-hearer relationship is coincident, and we cannot notice any kind of division in his personality, as the following diagram 1-[1] below shows:



However speaker-hearer relationships in thought asides are not always coincident, and there are some thought asides where a character speaks to his/her alter ego. The following one of Evans's thought asides provides a good example:

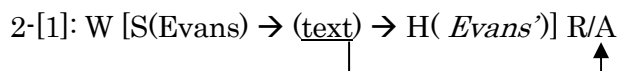
2.

EVANS—(. . . *He stops inside the doorway and looks at her with a pitiable furtiveness, arguing with himself, trying to get up his courage.*)

[1] Tell her! . . . go on! . . . you made up your mind to, didn't you? . . . don't quit now! . . . tell her you've decided . . . for her sake . . . to face the truth . . . that she can't love you . . . she's tried . . . she's acted like a good sport . . . but she's beginning to hate you . . . and you can't blame her . . . she wanted children . . . and you haven't been able . . .

(716)

Imperative sentences and the use of 'you' here indicate that the Evans as the speaker of this thought aside, who is determined to give a divorce to his wife Nina, encourages his alter ego, shown as *Evans'* in the following diagram 2-[1], who hesitates to carry through this decision:



Looking at the diagram 2-[1] above, we may observe that Evans's personality is divided into two selves in this thought aside, one being the Evans who has made up his mind and the other the *Evans'* who still hesitates. Although we may notice a division in Evans's personality and encouragement of an alter ego in this example, we sense neither a figure observing his own action and thought nor a figure

searching for his own identity, as we would find in self-analytic thought asides.

Having observed some dialogical speeches and two types of thought aside, I would like to turn to an account of yet another type of thought aside, the self-analytic, and I would like to deal with both its style and dramatic effects in Act IV, because, in the progress of the latter half of this act, self-analytic thought asides play an important role. In this part of the play, Nina asks Ned Darrell whether or not she should have intercourse with someone other than her husband in order to have a child, and Darrell, in his persona of Dr. Darrell, gives her his opinion in a professional and objective manner, as can be seen in the following extract:

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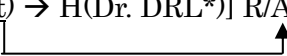
NINA— . . . (*frightenedly—comes after him*) (1) But she is ashamed. It's adultery. It's wrong.

DARRELL—(*moving away again—with a cold sneering laugh of impatience*)


(2) Wrong! Would she rather see her husband wind up in an asylum? Would she rather face the prospect of going to pot mentally, morally, physically herself through year after year of devilling herself and him? Really, Madame, if you can't throw overboard all such irrelevant moral ideas, I'll have to give up this case here and now! (*thinking frightenedly*)

[1] Who is talking? . . . [2] is he suggesting me? . . . [3] but you know very well I can't be the one, Doctor! . . . [4] why not, you're healthy and it's a friendly act for all concerned . . . (711)

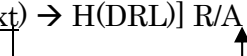

In Nina's dialogical speech, she expresses her anxiety about committing adultery to Dr. Darrell as his social self. That is to say, Nina, in dialogical speech (1), conveys her words to Dr. Darrell, the hearer, as in diagram 3-(1):

3-(1): W [S(Nina) → (text) → H(Dr. DRL*)] R/A

 *Dr. DRL= Darrell's alter ego as social self.

In response to Nina's speech, Darrell gives her his opinion as a doctor. Thinking of the speaker-hearer relationship of his dialogical speech, Darrell, the speaker of the dialogical speech (2), wearing the mask of a doctor as his social self, expresses his opinion to Nina as his hearer, as shown by diagram 3-(2):

3-(2): W [S(Dr. DRL) → (text) → H(Nina)] R/A


After this dialogical speech, Darrell makes a thought aside. In its first interrogative sentence, the Darrell of the speaker of the first sentence asks himself who the speaker of the previous words in the dialogue was. And in the second sentence, this Darrell continues questioning himself as to who the doctor is referring to. The speaker-hearer relationships in these two interrogative sentences, [1] and [2], are coincident with each other, as the diagrams 3-[1] and 3-[2] below show:


3-[1]: W [S(DRL) → (text) → H(DRL)] R/A

 3-[2]: W[S(DRL) → (text) → H(DRL)] R/A


However the 'Who' in [1] indicates that the Dr. Darrell, the speaker of the previous dialogical speech, is the object of his question. In addition, the 'he' reference in [2] shows that the Darrell speaking the second sentence recognizes Dr. Darrell as the object of his observation or his questioning. From these linguistic features we can see that the Darrell of these two thoughts observes and perceives Dr. Darrell as his social self. Thus these two interrogative sentences intimate the separation of Darrell's personality into two selves, Ned Darrell and Dr. Darrell.

In the third sentence, the Darrell of the speaker of thought aside [3] is speaking to Dr. Darrell, which is shown by the 'you' reference and appellation 'Doctor'. As is shown in the diagram 3-[3], the speaker and hearer in the third sentence are

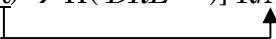
inconsistent with each other:

3-[3]: W[S(DRL) → (text) → H(Dr. DRL)] R/A



Taking these things into consideration, the third sentence explicitly discloses the dichotomy between the Darrell uttering the third sentence and the Dr. Darrell. However, in the fourth sentence, the Darrell who utters is questioning the speaker of the third sentence who feels he is not right for Nina. The interrogative ‘why’ and ‘you’ reference in thought aside [4] indicate that the Darrell of the fourth sentence recognizes the Darrell of the third sentence as his hearer at this moment, which shows the Darrell of the third sentence has become another alter ego at this moment and is shown as *DRL*” in the diagram 3-[4]:

3-[4]: W[S(DRL) → (text) → H(*DRL*”**)] R/A



***DRL*”= another alter ego of Darrell= the Darrell of the speaker of the third sentence

From the linguistic features and speaker-hearer relationships, through the series of thought presentations in quotation 3, we may uncover Darrell’s three-part self-division: one part being the dichotomy between Dr. Darrell and the Darrell uttering his thought that the doctor cannot mean him, and the other between this Darrell thinking he is not ‘the one’ and another, third Darrell questioning this judgment.

After quotation 3, Darrell’s disintegration of self union continues to develop. It is only in the last moment of Act IV, as he reveals his division of self and search for identity, that he does finally discover it:

4.

(1) DARRELL— . . . The man should like and admire her, he should be her good friend and want to help her, but he should not love her—although he might, without harm to anyone, desire her.

(2) NINA—Ned does not love her—but he used to like her and, I think, desire her. Does he now, Doctor?

DARRELL—(*thinking*)

[1]Does he? . . . [2]who is he? . . . [3]he is Ned! . . . [4]Ned is I! . . . [5]I desire her! . . . [6] I desire happiness! . . .

(*tremblingly now gently*) But, Madame, I must confess the Ned you are speaking of is I, and I am Ned. (712-3)

In this dialogue, Darrell as a doctor gives Nina his opinion about the right man for her, and Nina tells Dr. Darrell what Ned Darrell used to be, and asks Dr. Darrell whether Ned likes and desires her now. The speaker-hearer relationships in these two dialogical speeches between Dr. Darrell and Nina and Nina and Dr. Darrell are shown in the diagrams 4-(1) and 4-(2):

4-(1): W [S(Dr. DRL) → (text) → H(Nina)] R/A
 4-(2): W [S(Nina) → (text) → H(Dr. DRL)] R/A

In the following self-analytic thought aside of Darrell, he repeats Nina's question. This parallel sentence has two functions: the first is that repeating the parallel sentence right after Nina's speech shows Darrell's swift response to her question in his mind; and the second is that the form of interrogative sentence and the 'he' reference of this parallel sentence intimate that the object of his consideration refers to the 'he' Nina mentions, connoting the Ned at present. In this way the parallel

sentence leads him into further self-questioning. In the later draft of *Strange Interlude*, right after Nina's question, 'Does he now, Doctor?', Nina has a thought aside, 'I take my baby', and just before Darrell's repetition, 'What' is inserted, as follows:

Later Draft⁴

Nina

Ned does not love her---but he used to like her and admire her and, I think, desire her. Does he now, Doctor?

(Thinking triumphantly)

I take my baby!

Darrell

(Thinking)

What?---Does he?---Who is he?---He is Ned!--Ned is I!--I desire!--I desire happiness!

(Tremblingly now—gently)

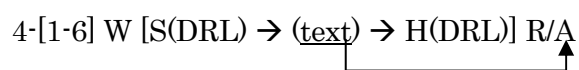
But, Madame, I must confess the Ned you are speaking of is I, and I am Ned!

However, O'Neill deleted these two utterances in the final published version. This deletion allows the published version to express Darrell's swift response to Nina's question and emphasizes the function of the parallel sentence as a cue indicating Darrell's consciousness turning into a self-questioning train of thought.

In the second interrogative sentence, the interrogative 'who' and use of 'he' in thought aside [2] indicate that the object of the Darrell's consideration is the identity of the particular 'he' that Nina mentions and he himself has repeated in the previous sentence. Immediately after the second sentence, in thought aside [3], Darrell

realises that the 'he' is equal to 'Ned'. In thought aside [4], this Darrell discovers that the 'Ned' is himself, which is expressed by the use of 'I'. This pronoun switch from 'he' to 'I' carries out a pivotal function in generating the dramatic moment in which Darrell in search of his identity discovers his identity as Ned in the train of thought. As a result of this pronoun switch, Darrell utters his desires without showing any conflict about his identity in the succeeding thought asides [5] and [6].

The speaker-hearer relationships in these six sentences are coincident with each other as is shown in the following diagram 4-[1-6]:



Because of this correspondence in speaker-hearer relationships in these six sentences, it may be a little difficult to find any dual-structured self-division, but when we take both dialogue and thought aside into consideration we may perceive a dual self-division in quotation 4: one part being a dichotomy between Dr. Darrell speaker of the dialogical speech and the Darrell uttering his thought, the other between the Darrell uttering his thought and Ned of the object of his consideration.

In this paper, I have tried to investigate the particular linguistic features and their consequent dramatic effects in O'Neill's unique usage of self-analytic thought asides. It follows from what I have proposed that the linguistic features such as 'he'-references and 'you'-reference, the pronoun switch from 'he' to 'I', interrogative sentences and interrogative 'who' and 'why' serve to project such dramatic effects onto the stage showing dichotomous divided selves, interaction between separate individual selves, and the search for identity. All of them create dramatic moments of intrapersonal conflict and project a figure's inner struggle onto the stage, which I think is what O'Neill intended to achieve in this play.

Notes

1. With the permission of Yale University, I cite this note from Eugene O'Neill, 'Ideas, scenarios, and notes for plays (1920s-1930s)', ms., Eugene O'Neill Papers, YCAL MSS 123, Box 77, Folder 1426, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rarebook and Manuscript Library, Yale University. All quotations from O'Neill's notebook and draft are transcribed by the writer. Floyd (1981) mentions the importance of this note.
2. For a discussion of the pragmatic structure of fiction, see Adams (1985).
3. All quotations here from *Strange Interlude* are cited from *Eugene O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, ed., Travis Bogard (New York: The Library of America, 1988), 629-818. Henceforth, only the page is indicated in the brackets. All thought asides here are underlined.
4. Eugene O'Neill, '*Strange Interlude*—Later draft', ts., Eugene O'Neill Papers, YCAL MSS 123, Box 72, Folder 1364, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rarebook and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Circles are added for emphasis. Three extant drafts and notes of the play form part of Beinecke Rarebook and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The three drafts of the play reveal the creative process of *Strange Interlude*.

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