

Books and Arts; Literature and its influences; Mother, may I

文艺; 书评; 文学及其影响力; 妈妈, 我能不能...

New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and Their Families. By Colm Tóibín. Viking;

《弑母新法》: 讲述作家及其家庭的文献。科尔姆·托宾著。

When the mother of Henry James, a 19th-century American novelist, appeared at a seance with a message for him, he was not surprised. As in life, so too in death, did his "dear Mother" have an uncanny knack of "pouncing upon the first occasion ... to get at me".

当十九世纪美国小说家亨利詹姆斯的妈妈出现在降神会上, 给他留句话, 詹姆斯并不感到惊奇。活着的时候, “亲爱的母亲”有神秘的能力能够“在第一时间冲出来.....修理我”, 死后亦然。

"New Ways to Kill Your Mother", the latest collection of essays from Colm Toibin, an Irish novelist and critic, is full of such moments when a writer and his family "get at" each other. Fractious family relations may not be uncommon, yet the extent to which these writers-including W.B. Yeats, Thomas Mann, James Baldwin and John Cheever-managed to fight with their parents, siblings and children make arguments over the dinner table seem like a specialised art form.

《弑母新法》是科尔姆托宾, 爱尔兰小说家评论家最新的散文集, 书中充满这样的细节, 作家和他的家人如何“修理”对方。家人之间的剑拔弩张也许并不少见, 但是和一些大师, 包括叶芝, 托马斯曼, 鲍德温和约翰契福等, 曾和父母兄弟姐妹子女动手的程度相比, 在晚餐时拌拌嘴就像是种特殊的艺术形式。

Mann justified spoiling his eldest child over his five others with the line, "One should get the children used to injustice early." J.M. Synge, an Irish playwright, was similarly pampered by his mother, and another, Samuel Beckett, admitted that he was what his mother's "savage loving has made me". Georgie Yeats implored a friend of hers not to speak with her mother, because she "loves to make a whirlpool and especially if she can suck me in to it", and W.B. Yeats was busy dissuading his father from trying his hand at writing, an effort inspired in old age by his son's success.

托马斯曼溺爱长子超过其他五个孩子, 他为自己辩护道, “人们应该让孩子在小时候就对不公平习以为常”。爱尔兰剧作家辛格也曾经得到过母亲如此的溺爱。荒诞派作家贝克特承认, 他是母亲“野蛮的爱造就的”。诗人叶芝的夫人 Georgie 曾经请求她的一位朋友不要告知其母, 因为她“喜欢制造混乱, 特别是那种能把我吸走的混乱漩涡”, 叶芝曾经忙于阻止父亲尝试写作, 这股劲头是他在晚年因为儿子的成功而激起的。

Mr Toibin writes in muscular prose and has a keen eye for detail. Dividing his book in two, "Ireland" and "Elsewhere", he places these family wranglings within the larger context of trying to find an Irish voice, and of the struggle for writers such as Tennessee Williams to work out their identities as gay men in America. In Mr Toibin's opinion, "killing your father or your mother" is a necessary precursor to becoming an original writer.

托宾散文笔道刚劲, 拥有对细节敏锐的观察力。他将自己的书分成两部分: “爱尔兰”和“其他”, 他将这些家庭争吵融入更广阔的背景中, 那就是找寻一种爱尔兰式的创作, 以及为如田纳西威廉姆一样的作家, 为在美国寻求同性恋的作家身份而斗争。在托宾看来, “弑父弑母”是称为一个原创作家的必要前提。

For most of his book, this argument is persuasive. However, not all of Mr Toibin's chapters hang together well. The essay on Beckett reads more like the book review it started out as, and the final piece on Baldwin only just about succeeds in comparing his literary style with

the recent autobiographies by President Barack Obama.

对于托宾的大多数作品，这个观点是有说服力的。但是，并不是托宾书中所有的章节都很好的结合在一起。关于贝克特的文章读起来更像是他将着手写的书评，写鲍德温的最后部分只谈及了他在文体上更胜一筹，是和总统奥巴马新近出版的自传之间做的比较。

Instead, the finest moments of Mr Toibin's book are when he focuses on the writers' prose and how they went about creating their "grim black marks on the page". Hart Crane, a young American poet who committed suicide aged 32 in 1932, writes with a syntax that has "something hard and glittering in it". Baldwin had "a fascination with eloquence itself, the soaring phrase, the rhythm pushed hard, the sharp and glorious ring of a sentence."

反而，托宾书中最棒的章节是关于作家的文章本身，以及他们如何写出“纸页上的冷酷黑色文字”的。年轻的美国诗人哈特克莱恩于 1932 年自杀身亡，年仅 32 岁，他的写作句法有种“坚硬闪光的东西在里面”。鲍德温“对雄辩，高翔的措辞，迅猛推进的节奏，句子尖锐辉煌的回环很着迷”。

Such phrasing stands out and suggests the strength of Mr Toibin's writing style. In this respect, it is a shame that not more of Mr Toibin comes through. Obviously fascinated with families, he has written eloquently elsewhere about his relationship with his mother, and has peopled his fiction with fractured family relationships. But in this volume his parents are never mentioned, and any personal recollection is brief. By concentrating only on the liberated voices of others, Mr Toibin has somehow managed to constrict his own.

这样的措辞出类拔萃，也显示了托宾行文的强有力。由此看来，非常可惜没有更多托宾的作品取得成功。托宾显然对家人入了迷，在别的地方，他富有表现力地道出和母亲的关系，让自己的小说充满了折裂的家庭关系。但是在这卷书中，托宾的父母没有被提及，个人回忆也一笔带过。和着重描写其他人的无拘无束的语言相比，托宾不知为什么对自己的故事如此压抑。