EUGENE O'NEILL'S DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS:

THE FORTUITOUS BLEND

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EUGENE O'NEILL'S *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS*:

THE FORTUITOUS BLEND

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PREFACE

Although the name Eugene O'Neill has often been associated with sensationalism and sordidness, any study of his most significant serious dramas -- Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Iceman Cometh -- makes clear, regardless of his merits or limitations as a playwright, that he was certainly a sincere individual honestly wrestling with man's deepest problems. O'Neill honestly admitted on numerous occasions that he could never resolve the problem of presenting his view of truth to the public to his own satisfaction. This fact is evident in his writings -- from the various fragments of philosophies which he was to examine, embrace, discard, or partially retain in his restless search to find immortality. He was a failure in many ways. In his tortured concern to have all, he lost much; in his desire to learn of immortality, he was destined to experience a full measure of sorrow as he lived his life.

At any rate, O'Neill's idealism was bound to leave him frustrated whenever he compared his "pipe dreams" to the life he found on earth. This wide disparagement caused him to search for explanations which finally led to a biological conception of immortality. In this way, the defeats which man inevitably suffers become meaningful and even victorious by man's sharing in the endless metamorphosis of life.

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CHAPTER I

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since numerous literary authorities consider Eugene O'Neill to be the foremost American dramatist, and several even call him "the father of the American drama,"[1] a study of his statements, written and implied, about his theory of tragedy and an application of this theory to his most highly acclaimed serious dramas is a significant contribution to scholarly research.

Thus the purpose of this dissertation is to determine whether O'Neill's theory of tragedy can be traced successfully through his most serious dramas that follow the tragic mode and contain tragic elements. In spite of the eminent position which O'Neill holds in modern literature, there has been no thorough attempt to evaluate his theory of tragedy as revealed through his statements and his dramatic writings.

Doctoral and other graduate research studies relating to various aspects of O'Neill's theory of tragedy have not been extensive. In fact, the only ones listed under any of the authoritative sources are: Mary E. Dawson, "The Idea of Tragedy in the Contemporary American Theater," an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Iowa, 1945; Edwin A. Engel, "Recurrent Themes in the Dramas of Eugene O'Neill," an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan, 1953; Doris V. Falk, _Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension_, a published Ph.D. dissertation from Cornell University, 1952; Arthur S.

Gould, "The Idea of Tragedy in Modern American Drama," an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan, 1948, and Rae Dalven, "The Concepts of Greek Tragedy in The Major Plays of Eugene O'Neill," an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1961. All of these dissertations have been thoroughly examined by this investigator, and none covers completely Eugene O'Neill's specific theory of tragedy as revealed in his most significant serious dramas; nor does any book or magazine article written about O'Neill.

The scope of this study is confined to the tracing of O'Neill's theory of tragedy through his most significant serious dramas. Obviously, the one-act plays of the sea, such as "Bound East for Cardiff," "Moon of the Caribbees," "The Long Voyage Home," "Where the Cross is Made," "Ile," and others of that genre; his comic monologue "Before Breakfast"; his full-length comedy _Ah Wilderness_; his melodramas such as _Anna Christie_, _Beyond the Horizon_, and _More Stately Mansions_; the long biographical and autobiographical plays, such as _Long Day's Journey Into Night_, _A Touch of the Poet_, _A Moon for the Misbegotten_; the experimental plays, such as _The Emperor Jones_, _The Great God Brown_, _The Hairy Ape_, _All God's Chillun Got Wings_, _Strange Interlude_, and others of this genre are not tragedies.

To many modern playgoers, _Long Day's Journey Into Night_, _A Touch of the Poet_, and _More Stately Mansions_ may seem to fit the category of tragedy, but even though the two latter plays, a part of his cycle entitled _A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed_, and _Long Day's Journey Into Night_ are filled with pathos, these three dramas lack the magnitude of O'Neill's more strictly patterned tragedies and are much too biographical and autobiographical to claim the focus of the outward eye of the

poet that is necessary for significant tragedy. This has been established by the compilation of American critical opinions made by Jordan Y. Miller in his book entitled Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic.[2]

According to the Miller investigation, only three of the O'Neill dramas emerge as being acclaimed by the majority of American critics for merit as traditional or modern tragedies. These dramas are Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Iceman Cometh. Thus, only these three O'Neill dramas which are most frequently cited by the critics as tragedies will be thoroughly examined in this dissertation.

The basic assumption of this investigator is that these three serious dramas of O'Neill are worthy of being evaluated because they are included in the core of those that are judged to be among the essential dramas of American literature.

As is stressed in O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism: "O'Neill, when he died, was a forgotten man, or remembered only by literary historians, academicians, and an older generation of drama critics as someone who had once started a revolution in the theatre."[3] Three years after O'Neill's death, an autobiographical play, Long Day's Journey Into Night, brought him the plaudits of a new generation of theatergoers and drama critics whenever it was presented, although the general admission is that it is too autobiographical, too introverted, to be established in the pattern of traditional or modern tragedy; however, Long Day's Journey Into Night did lead to the revival of other plays by O'Neill and to the critical acclaim of other posthumous dramas such as A Touch of the Poet and Hughie.

But the battle of the critics over the importance of O'Neill's contribution to American drama or to drama in general is not over, and is not likely to be for some decades to come, if ever. If O'Neill did succeed in writing high or modern tragedies, then his three dramas acclaimed to be tragedies are worthy of study.

Just why tragedy of any type should bring pleasure and why the Greek type should bring the highest degree of pleasure is no part of this investigator's task to explain. The fact that it does will be granted by all qualified people who pass scholastic judgment upon the merits of drama. And the fact will also be granted that in the modern theater, the theater since the decline of spontaneous poetic speech and the coming of realism, tragedy in the Greek sense, removed from the personal and elevated where the speculations about life, especially the problems of good and evil, of Man's place in the universe, became a dominant element, has almost vanished from the stage. These are basic assumptions for this study.

Into the modern theater of individual character study came Eugene O'Neill, a man deeply troubled by the ancient riddle of good and evil, vexed by the problems of Man's place in the universe, his mixed inheritance, his evil deeds, and his capacity for struggle. A clue to O'Neill's real relation to the Greek tragedians is found in a remark he made to Barrett Clark: "Too many people are intent upon writing about people instead of life."[4] O'Neill was intent on writing about life; and because life is profound and perplexing and filled with dark things, of pitiful frustrations of the human spirit, and because these things troubled him, O'Neill constantly tended to make his characters subservient to some tragic end far larger than they. He had no racial

legends to draw on, and he of necessity worked in the modern realistic theater. But he did not work completely in the spirit of the modern realists. Such dramas as Desire Under the Elms and Mourning Becomes Electra were written under the influences of the Greek tragedians, and there are even elements of these influences in his modern tragedy The Iceman Cometh, according to the compilations of American critical opinions made by Jordan Y. Miller.[5]

Sophus Keith Winther affirms:

> In the final analysis O'Neill's plays must be judged in the terms of tragedy. That is exactly what he wanted, for he held that whatever greatness a man may have his ultimate stature is measured in the terms of his ability to experience tragedy in his own life and in the life of man.[6]

The problem of whether o'Neill succeeded in achieving his theory of tragedy in his most highly acclaimed serious dramas is significant because there is need to evaluate the tragic merits of three of his plays--Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Iceman Cometh--for the sake of estimating the extent of his contribution to drama.

NOTES

[1]T. K. Whipple, Spokesman (New York, 1928), p. 230.

[2]Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic (Hamden, 1962), p. 84.

[3]Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher, O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism (New York, 1961), p. 1.

[4]B. H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (New York, 1929), p. 17.

[5]Miller, pp. 84-87.

[6]Sophus Keith Winter, Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study (New York, 1961), p. 296.

CHAPTER II

EUGENE O'NEILL'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

From 1929 until 1946, critics persistently discussed the major works of Eugene O'Neill primarily on the basis of traditional tragedy in accordance with the stipulations in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Margaret Mayorga asserts that the O'Neill serious dramas from the presentation of *Beyond the Horizon* to the time of the Broadway opening of *The Ice-Man Cometh* succeed for the most part in meeting "the old Greek principle of man's unsuccessful struggle with fate."[1] Arthur Hobson Quinn states that *Beyond the Horizon* "fulfills the most severe test of tragedy which has come down to us from the Greeks, that it purifies through our sympathy with suffering."[2]

Although most American critics disagree with such extravagant statements, according to the compilation of critical opinions of American dramatic authorities made by Jordan Y. Miller, three of the O'Neill dramas--*Desire Under the Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *The Iceman Cometh*--fully qualify as tragedies by O'Neill's expressed theory of tragedy.[3]

That O'Neill brought a fresh point of view to tragedy is evident from a mere reading of his major serious plays, but that he also saw a distinct relationship between ancient Greek tragedy and modern tragedy is a conclusion that the scholar must also affirm after studying O'Neill in depth. His employment of choral effect, masques, and

Greek dramatic themes establishes this point. Although O'Neill himself never wrote much about Aristotle's famous six elements of tragedy, he certainly must have known the Poetics and have discussed the ancient theories of tragedy in his many sessions with George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, and the other members of the circle comprising the Provincetown Players, that experimental group which helped to bring his name into prominence. Besides, he would certainly have known the Poetics from his involvement with the dramatic workshop class with Professor George Pierce Baker at Harvard University in 1914. And he would have absorbed the traditional ideas of Aristotle in regard to plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle from having been reared close to the theater where his father was a prominent actor on the American stage.

Aristotle's findings that plot is the sine qua non of tragedy, that character is the sum total of the choices made for good or bad by the protagonist, that thought is the argument which produces the course of action, that diction is the ability of the character to state the right thing at the right time in the right manner, that music is the arrangement of the vocal inflections and choral speeches, and that spectacle is the arrangement of the physical aspects of the theater[4] would certainly have been a part of O'Neill's subconscious mind. But he was not so much moved by the working definitions of aspects of tragedy as he was moved by the meaning behind the working aspects. O'Neill was a visionary, and he insisted that "where the theatre is concerned one must have a dream," and that "the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever."[5] To O'Neill, the "dream was everything,"[6] even if it meant bringing back an attitude toward tragedy

that the average theater-goer in modern times does not have. For example, Mourning Becomes Electra, which he declared to be his last drama attempted in the Greek-traditional pattern of tragedy,[7] is O'Neill's chief effort to establish "transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre."[8] And in defending the ending of Anna Christie, O'Neill once said impatiently, "It's mere present-day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy! The Greeks and the Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift to it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life."[9] No two statements that O'Neill made on tragedy exhibit better the writer who was a fusion of two worlds: he respected the high tragedy of the Greeks and set it as his ideal; yet he was the product of a society which demanded a different kind of tragedy in compliance with "transfigured modern values."

Tragedy itself has made two great leaps in history--when the Greek and Roman tragedies were unearthed and reevaluated during the Renaissance, thus influencing Shakespeare and his followers, and once again in the mid-nineteenth century when Strindberg, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Wedekind, and others attempted to go beyond realistic tragedy by way of symbols, new philosophical credos, and psychological experiences. The great leap with Hamlet appears to have come from the inner control of character. Shakespeare was presenting the personality of a very complex person. In the classic drama the character's awareness of himself as one being was certainly requisite; but in Shakespeare's Hamlet the leading character is a variety of personalities while at the same time he is one and indivisible. Shakespeare, then, had brought drama a step forward by depicting a multiple personality who was still

very much one actor. Questions were raised as to how a playwright could attempt such a task of creation and still present a centrality of ego and an overriding personality. Shakespeare accomplished this brilliantly, thus creating a boundless characterization, one that was of classic, Renaissance, and modern mold all at the same time.

In the development of tragedy after Shakespeare, there appears to be little new until the impingement of new philosophical, psychological, social, and economic concepts on the interpretation of the role of modern man after the middle of the nineteenth century. Once again there was an attempt to focus on the multi-level personality of man, who must play many roles. There was a new emphasis on the common man. No longer did one have to be of noble birth to be worthy of the concern of others. The American and industrial revolutions brought about this change. The concept of everyone's being equal now had to be transferred to the arts. And no matter how low or how demented or how mystical or how despicable a personality was, he was a fit subject for dramatic portrayal. As seen through the eyes of Strindberg, Ibsen, or Gorki, to be noble, a character merely had to appear with strength and a bag full of dreams.

Eugene O'Neill fell into accord with the Strindbergs, Ibsens, and Gorkis and into discord with the melodramatists of his day who furnished plays like The Count of Monte Cristo for his father to enact. As a seaman who trafficked with the flotsam and jetsam of life aboard tramp steamers, O'Neill had come to know ports which were far different from aristocratic New Haven, Connecticut, where he was reared. After being suspended from Princeton University, he had wandered for five years from Spanish Honduras to Buenos Aires and then

had undergone a long period in a sanitorium while suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. In the sanitorium he reflected on and developed concepts about the plight of modern man as compared with that of ancient man.

O'Neill developed philosophical and dramatic concepts during this time based upon his reading of the dramas of Strindberg and Ibsen and the treatises of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. For example, O'Neill became convinced that the modern dramatist can "develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage."[10] These "transfigured modern values and symbols" come from psychology, resulting in his departure from the traditional concept of tragedy. To O'Neill, the physical conditions of modern life are transitory and peripheral. The mystery of fate is an eternal one, not to be mediated or medicated out of existence. It expresses itself significantly, not in the eternal or tangible world, but in the individual's soul. The conflicting social values of today have always existed in one form or another. It is not society which makes tragic heroes but the inexplicable structure of the mind which must find itself in that society.

O'Neill added to the physical aspects of the traditional interpretation of tragedy a concept of "God, Fate, Mystery"[11] as being part of the subconscious end of the struggle of each man to have his conscious will assert itself against an unconscious will. This is a tragic struggle: for neither force, the conscious or the unconscious, can ever be completely dominant without causing death or defeat for

the individual. Even when the conflicting opposites within the self are apparent to the conscious mind, the very existence of that opposition is due to some mysterious force exerted by the unconscious. If the principal struggle of man is with his unconscious, self-knowledge must be the prime step in his attempt to control and make constructive use of the mysterious force.

In spite of these "transfigured modern values and symbols," however, O'Neill wished to have his serious dramas judged primarily on criteria established for the great tradition in tragedy, and these are the criteria which the scholar must examine in order to understand what aspects O'Neill follows to the letter and what aspects he embellishes or changes. O'Neill professed to be interested "only in the relation between man and God";[12] thus such a serious drama as Mourning Becomes Electra should be evaluated primarily by the standards already prescribed in the Greek tradition. Yet The Iceman Cometh, acclaimed by Norman C. Chaitin to be "the most powerful theorem any playwright has ever put on paper"[13] should also be studied with an emphasis placed on two points on which modern tragedy departs from the classic definition. The first point of departure in dealing with O'Neill's concept of tragedy involves character, and turns toward the developing theory of tragedy of O'Neill which Aristotle felt only a man of high station could have.

The spirit of tragedy reflected in Desire Under the Elms must be given detailed consideration because O'Neill intended for this drama to reflect his blend of the modern and classic as will be detailed in the explication of this play in this dissertation. In modern tragedy, according to August Strindberg, whose dramas influenced the

writings of O'Neill, it is an abstract ideal of life that gives universality to the tragic character, not social status. This concept is what Matthew Arnold designated as an "inward condition of spirit, not an outward set of circumstances that measures the meaning of life."[14] O'Neill himself asserted that the tragic protagonist can evolve from the "most ignoble, debased lives."[15] Thus, his significant and serious dramas should be analyzed by the modern as well as the traditional standards for tragedy. Even before the initial presentation of The Iceman Cometh, no O'Neill serious drama, with the exception of the portrayal of General Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, had as a principal character a tragic hero who met the "character" qualification of Aristotle.

The second point of departure involves Aristotle's interpretation of hamartia, the fall of the tragic hero through some flaw or human error. The classic hero makes a tremendous struggle, and the O'Neill hero does not. This fall brought about a catharsis, "the purging of the emotions through pity and fear."[16] Although there is "doom" for the principal characters of the O'Neill dramas, his principals are victims of a cold and impersonal cosmic trap, what might be termed an "existential" trap. Man is powerless to deal with life, and in The Iceman Cometh the helplessness of the situations of these characters who prefer illusions to reality has been established long before the first scene opens. O'Neill reduces man to ultimate negation in The Iceman Cometh.

This investigator intends to show that these two points of departure from traditional tragedy in the O'Neill dramas must be examined because they are a part of O'Neill's widening of the Greek concept into

an understanding of how "our biological past"[17] creates our present. For instance, in the O'Neill plays written before The Iceman Cometh, the full-length dramas have plots, and the characters participate in a struggle. But in The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill portrays human beings who are unable to act against the forces of nature. This dilemma, along with the professed influences on O'Neill of the philosophies of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, C. G. Jung, and Arthur Schopenhauer, broadens O'Neill's theory of tragedy from the strictly traditional into modern interpretations.

The heart of the classical definition of tragedy, according to S. H. Butcher's translation of Aristotle's Poetics, still remains unchanged for either traditional or modern tragedy.

> Tragedy, then is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.[18]

The cathartic function of tragedy is the principal point in this definition; and, important as it has been in criticism, even S. H. Butcher cannot determine with certainty exactly what catharsis means.

John Dewey expresses in Art as Experience his concept of how catharsis brings power to the qualities that comprise the tragic in drama:

> The absence of reality in the dramatic event is, indeed, a negative condition of the effect of tragedy. But fictitious killing is not therefore pleasant. The positive fact is that a particular subject matter in being removed from its practical context has entered into a new whole as an integral part of it. In its new relationship, it acquires a new expression. It becomes a qualitative part of a new qualitative design.[19]

This point of view does provide for flexibility in the emotional impact of tragedy.

Empirically, a tragedy does produce in the spectator an emotional response to which Aristotle's definition does not seem to be inappropriate. Modern critics would include with pity and fear certain other emotions, such as libido urges and will-to-survive. Tragedy, according to Murray Krieger, "brings home to us the images of our own sorrows, and chastens the spirit through the outpouring of our sympathies, even our honor and despair, for the misfortunes of our fellows."[20] This definition of modern tragedy does not relate completely by any means the entire elements; but it is a useful, suggestive explanation that is capable of wide application. In brief, the effect of catharsis should be felt both in the theater and afterwards as a renewal and confirmation of the individual's will to live, act, and face the trials and bitternesses of ordinary life. It is precisely for this reason that Aristotle cites specifically Sophocles' Oedipus Rex as containing the prime qualities of great tragedy.[21]

In Oedipus Rex the spectators are filled with sorrow for a world in which the impending injustice can exist. They witness repeated attempts to discover the source of the evil; they share the inevitability of the approaching doom. The superior knowledge of the spectators over that of Oedipus as to the identity of Laius' slayer becomes unbearable and calls for the height of human pity. In such a situation, the spectators would rail at the malevolence of the universe. When Oedipus stands self-convicted after blinding himself, he makes no complaint:

> That this deed is not well and wisely wrought
> Thou shalt not show me.[22]

Whatever merit the spectators possess appears insignificant beside the merit of Oedipus; and his decision dignifies and elevates the human

race. Just as the spectator feels insignificant beside Oedipus, so is he insignificant beside the invincible universal forces whose triumph after this chaos restores order and serenity.

Aristotle used the Oedipus Rex as a model for tragedy because all of the classic elements of tragedy are included: a man of great stature who falls from a high station to low because of a fatal flaw in his personality--hubris, or arrogant pride; the unity of time (one day) and one setting (the exterior of the royal palace at Thebes); the emotions of pity and fear aroused in the spectator, and the final sense that the catharsis has been effected with the one inevitable conclusion of the plot. In doing so, the emotions of pity and fear are purged in the spectators, and they feel "a calm of mind, all passion spent."[23] The plot has been of prime importance, and the characters have developed in strength and grandeur through the clear-cut beginning, middle, and end of the action. The ending, though tragic, is completely proper; and nothing can be added to the drama.

Though written in 1603 in England for a different kind of audience in a different theater and making a great stride forward in character portrayal, Shakespeare's Hamlet produces a remarkably similar cathartic effect. The admittedly great tragedies throughout the centuries thus have many elements in common which may be established as canons of traditional tragedy.

Tragedy, then, from the traditional point of view, presents an admirable character who wins the spectators' pity when he is ruined by a frailty. This tragic flaw does not prevent the spectators from sharing sympathetically with the lot of the protagonist. Thus the fall of the tragic hero from a noble place in life brings about sorrow for the common

lot of humanity. The hero acknowledges his guilt, and his grandeur in suffering reveals that mankind can make a significent struggle against the forces of nature. The hero's acceptance of his punishment as necessary results in the spectators' feeling that forces bigger than the hero have triumphed; with the coming of order after the fall of the hero, spectators are filled with a sense of relief and well-being.

The characteristic effect of tragedy may thus be said to arise from these ingredients. Surely these are the ingredients and method of the tragic theory with which O'Neill comes to grips. O'Neill's letter to Quinn departs from the general aspects of Aristotle's conception of tragedy on only two points. One passage in parenthesis states, "Fate, God, our biological past creating our present,"[24] and another passage emphasizes the second point, "to make Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression."[25] Although these lines differ from Aristotelien interpretations of tragedy, they do not violate the spirit of the Greek concept. As can be ascertained from the analysis of the Oedipus Rex, fate or God did determine the destiny of the tragic hero. But in the world of O'Neill such conditions as the Greeks knew no longer exist except in a theoretical sense. O'Neill, as has already been noted, influenced by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Jung, must of necessity substitute for the modern audience biological and psychological interpretations for the unveiling of man's behavior.

The concept of the "will-to-life"[26] expounded by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer influences the character developments in the O'Neill dramas that portray a grim world. Schopenhauer's philosophy holds that the ultimate reality is "will"--"an all-impelling force expressing itself

in the individual as the will to live, and only by renouncing desire can the will be allayed."[27] The development of the "superman" ideology of Nietzsche stemmed from this concept of Schopenhauer, with this Nietzschean superman being "an idealized superior, dominating man, regarded as the goal of the evolutionary struggle for survival."[28] To O'Neill and Nietzsche, death does not mean the negation of living, and the fear of death should not destroy the value of life. As Sophus Keith Winther points out:

> The men and women that move in the world of O'Neill are boldly defiant. They realize defeat, but scorn it--even cursing it. The world of O'Neill is a world of bitter struggle and tragic lives, but to those who accept its reality it is a world rich in experience, adventure and daring, where men and women demand that life give them some positive value.[29]

This "will to power" or "will to live" does not exclude the bitterness and despair which is contained in all significant tragedies. Eugene O'Neill wrote to Mary B. Mullett that when the Greeks "saw tragedy on the stage they felt their own <u>hopeless hopes</u> ennobled into art."[30] In the serious dramas of O'Neill, as will be detailed in a later chapter, the principal characters hope for a way out of each dilemma but always fail to find the way; thus all is lost. The <u>fate</u> as a power in the life of man, bringing about his doom in Greek drama, has as a substitute in the O'Neill dramas man's past life, stemming from heredity and environment. In writing about Yank in <u>The Hairy Ape</u>, O'Neill asserted: "The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt 'to belong'."[31]

In such biological and psychological struggles involving the heredity and environment of man, it is quite apparent that O'Neill's theory of tragedy would include bitterness and irony as important factors. Sophus Keither Winther further comments about the O'Neill tragic

theory: "It combines the futility of life with its paradox, that there is meaning from moment to moment and that we should get the best of experience since we are doomed to that by being here."[32]

This outlook on life was stimulated in the mind of Eugene O'Neill by his reading of the works of C. G. Jung, according to Doris V. Falk, who states:

> Jung sees man's primary need not in the desire to satisfy physical drives or to fulfill any single emotional necessity such as power, security, or love, but in a longing for a life of meaning and purpose--for a sense of order in the universe to which man can belong and in which he can trust. Jung is a mystic in the same sense that O'Neill is mystical.[33]

Apparently the terms used by O'Neill in his theory of tragedy, such as "Fate," "Mystery," "the biological past," are identified in relationship to forces at work in the human psyche. Jung believed that "psychological truth"[34] exists independently of objectively provable fact. By "psychological truth" Jung means "the constant, eternal longing of the human mind for a universal order and the expression of the longing in archetypal symbols."[35] Falk believes that

> O'Neill assumes, with Jung, that one's problems and actions spring not only from his personal unconscious mind, but from a "collective unconscious" shared by the race as a whole, manifesting itself in archetypal symbols and patterns latent in the minds of all men.[36]

Seeing O'Neill's works from the Freudian point of view, Dr. Philip Weissman, in an article entitled "Eugene O'Neill's Autobiographical Dramas," has interpreted O'Neill's work as "sublimation of his own Oedipal drives."[37] He states that "O'Neill is chiefly concerned with the resolution of inner conflicts; with the search for a philosophy which can give order and meaning to such inevitable conflict."[38]

Modern psychoanalysts emphasize that the unconscious is an autonomous force which exists independently of the individual man but is

expressed through him. Throughout life man wrestles with this unconscious force while striving to reconcile its demands with those of his conscious ego. The forces become stuff of action and eventually become plot, character, and thought of tragedy. Like Jung, O'Neill feels that man is in fatal error when he depends upon his conscious ego to fulfill all his needs without considering the power of the unconscious, the modern parallel to the Greek conception of the gods. The conscious ego, nevertheless, must attempt to assert itself; for complete submission to the unconscious drives brings about withdrawal from reality and action. Falk states:

> O'Neill's answer, like Jung's, is the classic one. Man must find self-knowledge and a middle way which reconciles the unconscious needs with those of the conscious ego. This means that life inevitably involves conflict and tension, but that the significance of this pain is the growth which Jung calls "individuation"--the gradual realization of the inner, complete personality through constant change, struggle, and process.[39]

In regard to the diction and music of tragedy, O'Neill also strove in his serious dramas for what Aristotle called "language embellished. . . into which rhythm, 'harmony', and song enter."[40] O'Neill wished to be "a bit of a poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't."[41] Thus O'Neill agreed with the traditional concept that tragedy is a serious drama in which the highest possible poetic expression is appropriate. He even used music, such as "Shenandoah" in Mourning Becomes Electra. Most modern drama is in prose, not merely because its creators did not have the gift of poetic expression, but because the whole conception is prosaic. O'Neill, however, conceived dramas to which poetry would be appropriate; and he certainly managed to produce "language embellished" in The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, and Desire Under the Elms.

His concern for poetic language was further expressed in a letter he penned to Joseph Wood Krutch during the time that he was writing Mourning Becomes Electra. O'Neill exclaimed, "Oh, for a language to write drama in! For a speech that is dramatic and isn't just conversation."[42] His theory of tragedy, therefore, is traditional rather than modern in regard to "language embellished."[43]

Spectacle plays a more minor role in the serious plays of O'Neill than does any other element of tragedy; yet it is employed artistically. In future chapters this investigotor will show how O'Neill used spectacle--the visual ordering of the serious plays--in different ways through employing technical devices to enhance the production; for example, the trees hovering over the house in Desire Under the Elms.

"The spirit of inquiry meets the spirit of poetry and tragedy is born," states W. Macneile Dixon.[44] O'Neill's spirit was certainly inquiring and protesting, and he strove for the proper medium for that spirit. Still, the question remains, "To what extent is the O'Neill theory of tragedy consistent with his accomplishments in his most significant, serious dramas?"

NOTES

[1]Margaret Mayorga, A Short History of the American Drama (New York, 1932), p. 317.

[2]Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, II (New York, 1936), p. 200.

[3]Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic (Hamden, 1962), p. 146.

[4]James B. Wilbur and Harold J. Allen, The Worlds of Plato and Aristotle (New York, 1962), pp. 163-165.

[5]Quinn, p. 201.

[6]Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), p. 78.

[7]Ibid., p. 286.

[8]Quinn, p. 200.

[9]Eugene O'Neill, letter to Philadelphia Public Ledger, Jan. 22, 1922, quoted by Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (New York, 1929), p. 146.

[10]Quinn, p. 201.

[11]Ibid., p. 200.

[12]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Introduction," Nine Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York, 1954), p. xvii.

[13]Norman C. Chaitin, "O'Neill: The Power of Daring," Modern Drama, (Dec., 1960), p. 240.

[14]Mattew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (New York, 1932), p. 17.

[15]Quinn, p. 200.

[16]S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (London, 1923), p. 27.

[17]Quinn, p. 200.

[18]Butcher, p. 27.

[19]John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1934), p. 96.

[20]Murray Krieger, *The Tragic Vision* (New York, 1960), p. 34.

[21]Wilbur, p. 166.

[22]Theodore Howard Banks, *Three Theban Plays* (New York, 1956), p. 42.

[23]Ibid., p. 44.

[24]John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1960), p. 48.

[25]Quinn, p. 200.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, quoted by Henry Alonzo Myers, *Tragedy: A View of Life* (Ithaca, New York, 1946), p. 101.

[28]John Henry Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1965), p. 184.

[29]Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr., James Goddard (New York, 1932), p. 287.

[30]Sophus Keith Winther, *Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study* (New York, 1961), p. 226.

[31]Mary B. Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene O'Neill," *American Magazine* (Nov., 1922), p. 118.

[32]Walter Prichard Eaton, "Eugene O'Neill--'New Attic Risen Stream'?" *The American Scholar* (Summer, 1937), VI, p. 305.

[33]Winther, p. 213.

[34]Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), p. 6.

[35]Ibid., p. 4.

[36]Ibid., p. 9.

[37]Ibid., p. 11.

[38]Philip Weissman, "Eugene O'Neill's Autobiographical Dramas," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, V (July, 1957), p. 451.

[39]Ibid., p. 456.

[40]Falk, p. 7.

[41]Butcher, p. 23.

[42]Quinn, p. 200.

[43]Joseph Wood Krutch, "O'Neill's Tragic Sense," The American Scholar (Summer, 1942), p. 288.

[44]W. Macneile Dixon, The Tragic View (New York, 1940), p. 31.

CHAPTER III

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

> So the essence of Tragedy reduces itself to this--the pleasure we take in rendering life both serious and true. It must be serious, whether or no it has incidentally comic relief; it must seem to matter, or else the experience would belong to a different category and need a different name. And it must also seem true, or it will not move us. --
> F. L. Lucas[1]

Perhaps when man in his search for truth moves another space in the realm of "isms"--classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, impressionism, surrealism--Eugene O'Neill's plays can be formalistically evaluated; perhaps some future Joseph Wood Krutch or Cleanth Brooks can look back on the ethics of our time and determine whether O'Neill achieved his desire to brush man against the infinite and spark beauty. Those who are firmly enmeshed in O'Neill's own "hopeless hope" view of life can but find it difficult to separate his truly lofty from the hysterical, the good from the bad, the consummate from the attempted; however, since to ascertain accurately his position in our time is to ascertain that of our own, a measure of self-knowledge within his works must be sought.

The purpose of the writer of this chapter is to examine one of O'Neill's dramas that is acclaimed by many modern critics to have elements of tragedy. It would have been O'Neill's wish to have _Desire Under the Elms_ and _Mourning Becomes Electra_ examined "to see the

transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives"[2]; for, as Maxwell Anderson, in his search for a successful formula for the writing of tragedy, found, "however unaware of it we may be, our theater has followed the Greek patterns with no change in essence, from Aristophanes to our own day."[3]

If no dramatist since the classical period except Shakespeare has achieved the art of tragedy (and Prosser Frye excludes even Shakespeare),[4] it is not enough to state that O'Neill falls short of his mark here or hits it there and disregards the other elements contained within the Greek form; it is necessary to examine these two serious dramas with the minutiae of the Greek yardstick.

Aristotle, chief critic of the Greek tragedy, sets forth in his _Poetics_ the nature, style, form, and function of tragedy, which, he states, lies "deep in our nature."[5] In the sixth chapter of the _Poetics_ he defines tragedy by first stating what it is and what it represents: "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude"; then he outlines its style: "in language embellished with each type of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play"; next, he limits the form in which it is communicated: "in the form of action, not of narrative"; lastly, he explains the function it embodies: "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."[6]

What does he mean by "an imitation of an action" which he parallels to the work of nature? In Chapter II of the _Poetics_, "The objects of imitation are men in action,"[7] adding in Chapter VI the six formative elements which constitute that representation of the whole _mimesis_,

which, interacting with and reacting to each other, still have an order of importance: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. He adds:

> . . . For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all.[9]

Aristotle states that the order of the plot--beginning, middle and end--should proceed in a logical or inevitable sequence and that it should be long enough to allow the hero to pass from "a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune."[10] Not everything in the life of one man should be included in the whole; he states, "that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole."[11]

He further defines the actions within the plot as being so enmeshed and dovetailed as to effect a unity which would be sacrificed if one of the contingent parts were missing. It is by this "linking together of parts"[12] that the writer of tragedy is able to achieve an action and a character greater than itself. Oedipus Rex, for example, is more than its title, and it is more than a certain number of scenes placed together under one title--just as an actual man is more than his name or his definition. "Oedipus ... not only presents a certain unified and significant image of reality, but is itself a form of reality."[13]

What does Aristotle mean by "an action that is serious"? The Greek word for "serious" means "that matters," "that is worth troubling about." Since Aristotle uses analogously the terms "serious themes," "gravity and seriousness," "historical personages," "philosophic and grave," and

since he states that the subject of the plot should present an ideal, or "universal truth"--as "poetry is more philosophical than history," as tragedy is more closely linked to the historic names ("What convinces is the possible")--it is clear that his term "serious" tragedy refers to that which is "nobly serious." In other words, tragedy treats historic personages who, while unveiling an image of an universal truth which parallels nature, present man to be better than he is.[14]

Who are these historical personages, and with what serious universal truths are they concerned? They are the historical-legendary Kings of the Sacred Wood engaged in primitive religious rituals designed to explain the mysteries of human existence. Based upon bloody fact, the reigning King was put to death "at the end of a fixed period or whenever his health and strength began to fail,"[15] his wife being then possessed by the victor or slain with her husband.

Lying at the root of a large part of all the religions of mankind, these stories form the basis for Greek tragedy and are seen particularly in the tragedies of _Oedipus Rex_ and _Oresteia_ to which _Desire Under the Elms_ with a certain notable exception can be compared. Whether O'Neill modeled _Desire_ upon one--or both--of these tragedies, or whether he transposed the original historical-primitive conceptions and rites to a modern setting, there is no question but that his story contains the same myth-religions; for, if the action of _Desire_ were superimposed upon that of the _Oresteia_, the image would reveal many remarkable similarities:

1. In both stories, the hero is the son of an ancient religious king whom he has superseded or is in the process of superseding. The first primeval king and queen in the primitive myth out of which the

Oresteia grew were Uranus and Gaia. Uranus, fearing his children, "hid them away," but to no avail; his son Cronus, aided by the Mother-Queen Gaia, cast him out and set up his rulership with his wife Rhea. Cronus "swallowed up each of his children,"[16] but their son Zeus escaped, and aided by his Queen-Mother Rhea, cast out Cronus.

In Desire Under the Elms, O'Neill employs the same Gods in the Hebrew-Christian myth, the first one being Eben, the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews. Eben was succeeded by Ephraim, founder of the Kingdom of Israel. In Desire, O'Neill gives Ephraim three symbolic sons: Simeon, who, when he saw the infant Jesus in the temple, begged permission to depart; Peter, who forsook Christ and then later became bishop and founder of the papal line; and Eben, the Ebionite, half Hebrew and half Christian, whose name frequently symbolized among dissenters "a house of worship." The women in the stories--Gaia, Rhea, and Abbie--symbolize the Earth-Mother; and Abbie also comes to mean a "house of worship."

In Agamemnon:

> He was that Lord of old,
> In full-blown pride of place and valour bold,
> Hath fallen and is gone, even as an old tale told:
> And he that next sway,
> By stronger grasp o'erthrown
> Hath pass'd away!
> And whose now shall bid the triumph-chant arise
> To Zeus, and Zeus alone.
> He shall be found the truly wise.[17]

In Desire, Emphraim speaks:

> God o'the lonesome! I got t' be--like a
> stone--a rock o' jedgment.[18]

2. In both stories the old king is dethroned because of his unremitting hardness, cruelty, and injustice. In the Oresteia, Agamemnon is killed by his treacherous wife while he is bathing.

Clytemnestra and her lover are killed by Agamemnon's son Orestes and his sister Electra. In Desire, Simon-Peter repudiates and forsakes the Father-God to found a new line; but Eben, the Ebionite, remains to possess the Queen-Mother and, through her assistance, to complete the dethronement of the old king.

3. In the beginning of both stories, the king is returning home with a woman--Cassandra and Abbie. Both women are treated scornfully by the king's household.

4. Both stories are shadowed with a blood-curse. In Agamemnon, Thyestes speaks:

> As darkly as I spurn this damned food,
> So perish all the race of Pleisthenes.[19]

In Desire Ephraim speaks:

> Lord God o' hosts, smite the undutiful sons with the
> wust cuss![20]

5. Both kings are involved in their blood-guilt for which revenge is demanded. Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia calls for Clytemnestra's revenge; Ephraim has sacrificed two wives in his lust for power, and Eben says passionately: "An' sooner'r later, I'll meddle. I'll say the thin's I didn't say then t' him' I'll see t' my maw gits some rest an' sleep in her grave!"[21]

6. Hate is the force which brings together the avenging pairs: Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra, and Eben and Abbie. They become lovers as well as plotters in crime.

7. In both stories, the Furies are loosed by the spirits of the dead women to "help and seize and bound their prey."[22] In Desire, Abbie frequently becomes their instrument; and, at times, she can foretell the future. Ephraim says to her: "Ye give me the chills

sometimes. It's cold in this house. It's oneasy. They's thin's pokin' about in the dark--in the corners."[23]

8. Both Orestes and Eben take strength from the dead. Orestes calls upon his dead father to aid him in his revenge; Eben calls upon his dead mother.

9. In both stories the hero is the victim of some kind of madness. Orestes has dreams and visions, and he vacillates in his purpose; Ephraim says that Eben is not to be heeded for he is "a dumb fool--like his maw--soft an' simple. No hope in him. A born fool."[24]

Identical themes recur again and again in both plays. This theme also occurs in the drama of the Theatre of the Absurd, serving as a spiritual link for man's helplessness in a world controlled by forces which he can neither understand--"Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes!"[25] "unseeing eyes that turn inward"--nor mitigate:

> But he whose will is set against the gods,
> Who treads beyond the law with foot impure,
> . . . .
> Know that for him . . . .
> Tangled in toils of Fate beyond escape. . . . . .
> Upon the reef of Rightful Doom is hurled. . . . . .

and,

> His defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's
> in activity.
> Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped
> but inwardly unsubdued.[26]

In the Oresteia, these forces are controlled by Zeus: "'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way /Of knowledge: He hath ruled, /Man shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled."[27] He administers, however, the higher law of retributive justice: "For even o'er powers divine this law is strong--/Thou shalt not serve the wrong."[28]

For Aeschylus, Justice derives from a balance in the universe; the evil within--"Craft, Revenge's scheming child"[29]--equating with the

evil without--suffering. In Desire, O'Neill substitutes for the forces of Fate the sterner, irrevocable force of hereditary, economic, and social determinism, against which there is no power, not even the caprice of the gods: "I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' work agen in others' hums. . . Ye might's well own up t' it fust's last: Nature'll beat ye, Eben."[30]

Aeschylus further states that since finite mind cannot comprehend an infinitude of harmony, much less order it, "No man doth justice in the world of men."[31] Orestes' tragic flaw is contained in his attempt to exercise divine judgment; therefore, he is fated to disaster and moral blindness--moral because, in assuming the task of divine judgment he eliminates himself from judgment; also, in measuring a moral issue with the criteria of finite limitations, he agitates the cosmic order.

> For thou too heinous a respect didst hold
> Of man, too little heed of powers divine![32]

Only tragedy could follow from such an error. In Desire, Eben also holds his father "t' jedgment for the somethin'--drivin' him--t' drive us,"[33] and he asks Abbie, when she seeks to restore the harmony of their love, "But ye hain't God, be ye?"[34]

The meaning of both dramas is embedded in the religious myth: man's participation in the spring-renewal ceremony in a desperate effort to make a home for himself in an alien world; both involve "the relation between man and God" and deal with the "death of the Old God and the failure of society to give any satisfying new One for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."[35] The chief difference between the themes is that Aeschylus finds the ultimate meaning in the peace

of death: "All fame is happy, even famous death,"[36] and

> Call none blest
> Till peaceful death have crowned a life of weal.[37]

Desire, too, begins with an affirmation of death, and it is this "bent" of Eben's character which drives him. That each day is a trap, he takes in sullen rebellion; he blames his father and wishes him dead; he believes that possessing his father's wife is tantamount to possessing the farm and, at the same time, revenging his mother's restless spirit who "can't find it nateral sleepin' and restin' in peace, who can't git used t' bein' free--even in her grave."[38] When he is made to believe that Abbie's love is a trick to cheat him out of the farm, he wishes her dead. He wishes the baby dead. When Abbie kills her baby to prove to Eben that her love has risen above her desire for possession, he recognizes the force and magnitude of his own love for her and affirms life and love rather than death and possession. Ironically, in choosing life he also chooses death. It is in the recognition scene that Eben acknowledges complicity in the crime, and both he and Abbie acknowledge the necessity of suffering and punishment as a way of expiation for the sins of the past and restoration of an ordered pattern. They "present men as better than they are" and effect a triumph in defeat. Consequently, Desire fulfulls Aristotle's suggestion in Chapter II of the Poetics that "discovery is a change from ignorance to knowledge brought on as a natural result of the situation, and the finest form of discovery is one attending by a reversal and change of fortune."[39]

Joseph Wood Krutch, in The American Dream Since 1918, sees the

> . . . oldest and the most eternally interesting tragic legends here freshly embodied in a tale native to the American soil. . . .It is one of the great achievements of the play that it makes us feel them not merely as violent events but as mysteriously fundamental in the human story and hence raises the actors in them somehow above the level of mere characters in a single play, giving them something which suggests the kind of undefined meaning which we feel in an Oedipus or a Hamlet.[40]

The design of Eugene O'Neill's drama is the history of man's artistic and spiritual inquiries into the timelessness of tradition--the living source of authority--with the contemporary milieu; indeed, the point this investigator finds insistent in dealing with O'Neill's three chief tragedies is that O'Neill was seeking a fortuitous blending of the traditional, classical mode of tragedy with that of the modern mode with its sociological and psychological emphases. By contrasting the mind and situation of the past with the mind and situation of the present, he recreates experience, giving it added meaning and rendering the present significant; for tradition is the expression of the universal mind. It is through his use of symbols that he unveils those emotions, drives, sufferings, fears, desires, and passions that lie embedded so deep within racial memory that they appear only as instinctual.

It is through symbolism that O'Neill attempts to fulfill Aristotle's call for clear and "not mean" diction, "lofty, but not obscure, with the judicious inclusion of strange words, metaphors, and the rest,"[41] adding, that for tragedy:

> the greatest thing by far is to be a master of the metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.[42]

It is through the clustering of metaphors--symbols--that O'Neill achieves the "linking together of parts" which renders the action one

of magnitude and seriousness: that Ephraim is more than his name, that Desire Under the Elms "not only presents a certain unified and significant image of reality but is itself a form of reality."[43] Yet, somehow, language always seems to be O'Neill's weak point, even though he comes closer to reaching that high plane Aristotle pictured in Desire than in any preceeding play.

It is through the flow of its traditional symbols that his "characters come second" to the action or object represented; for "by Character he does not mean an individual agent in a tragedy, as Agamemnon or Romeo; he means the moral bent which disposes an Agamemnon or a Romeo to choose or avoid a certain course of action."[44] Only by seeing the play as a unified entirety with its beginning, middle, and end (which in Desire are so tightly structured that it is divided into three parts rather than acts) through its interwoven symbols can one visualize its elemental, evolutionary theme of "man's search through myth for a rationality, a meaning, and a justification to the universe."[45] Since the tentacles of the play reach deep into primordial myth, the logical avenue toward its analysis is through T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative," about which he says:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[46]

The objective correlative of Desire Under the Elms is contained in the traditional myth symbols with which O'Neill parallels contemporaneous symbols; in fact, the whole structure of the play is manifest in the symbols contained in the setting and in Part One. At the rise of the curtain, the audience sees the south side of a two-story New England

farmhouse in good condition but whose walls are "a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded."[47] This gives the impression of austere strength going to seed. More significant, "two enormous elms are on each side of the house."[48] Now a number of superstitions have grown up about trees, especially enormous trees such as these. Ancients worshipped them, for it was believed they housed the spirits of the departed dead, especially the souls of women who had died in childbirth; and great offerings were piled under their branches. These tree spirits were believed to bring rain or sunshine, to make the crops to grow, and also to bless women and offspring; consequently, the tree has come to symbolize fertility or regeneration; furthermore, in antiquity, such trees were generally surrounded by protective fences, rendering them forms of temples.[49] In a similar manner, these two elms are surrounded.

These are not ordinary trees:

> They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingle.[50]

There can be no doubt from O'Neill's description of the elms that he meant them to convey a symbolic portent. Since these trees form the temple for the action of the story, of equal significance is the continued recurrence of stones. The stones tossed toward women in ancient days in a fertility rite[51] may be associated with the unyielding stone fence with its firmly protecting gate, with the stone as the very symbol of the ancient God of <u>Numbers 20:8</u> to whom Ephraim Cabot prays and in whom he moves and has his being.

The rock fence encloses and confines within the temple under the elms the characters and their desires. The protective spirits of the elms are not strong, virile, happy symbols of fertility, but "flabby-breasted, oppressively jealous," brooding "symbols as sickly grayish" as the walls of the house, suggesting suppressed desires. It is obvious that O'Neill meant these symbols to be interpreted from a modern, Freudian view point, even though their function in introducing atmosphere was as ancient as Homer.

Part One of the play, then, introduces the mood, the symbolism, the characters; and it foreshadows the action of the characters. Eben, youngest son of old Ephraim Cabot, comes out on the porch in the gathering twilight of an early summer day. The tone set by O'Neill's symbolic underlay, as with every scene except the last one, takes place during the dark of the day. He looks out over the landscape at the sunset as he expresses halting appreciation: 'God Purty!" He is darkly handsome, but wears a "resentful," "defensive" expression, and

> his dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce, repressed vitality about him.[52]

Here O'Neill is clearly conscious of a sociological force purely naturalistic with which he endeavors to imbue the play.

Continuing, Eben rings the supper bell which calls up his two older brothers from the field; then he goes back into the kitchen. They appear to be much like Eben, although a bit coarser. They have an elemental look of the earth and its seasons; and they, too, stand awed before the sunset, responding inarticulately to its beauty. "Gold" is repeated again and again in their conversation. There is gold in the sunset which recalls Simeon's dead wife's golden hair; gold is a

promise, a promise in the West: Golden Gate, Californi-a, field o' gold, Fortunes!

Peter surveys the rocky farm:

> 'Here its stones atop o' the ground--stones atop o' stones--makin' stone walls--year atop o' year--him 'n yew 'n me 'n' then Eben--makin' stone walls fur him t' fence us in![53]

Simeon agrees that they have worked--given their years--"Plowed 'em under in the ground--rottin'--makin' soil fur his crops." Though dumbly rebellious, they are proud that "the farm pays good for hereabouts."[54]

Their dream is Californi-a, but going there would mean giving up all they had worked and sweated for--in case their father, whom they fear and hate, should die. He might <u>be</u> dead; he has been gone for two months--without a word. Peter adds:

> Left us in the fields an evenin' like this. Hitched up an druv off into the West. That's plum onnateral. He hain't never been off this farm ' ceptin' t' the village in thirty years or more, not since he married Eben's maw.[55]

The kitchen lights up, and Cabot's sons start eating supper. Eben adds his bitterness against his father. He feels that his father's cruelty and constant driving "as good as killed his maw," but Simeon interrupts: "No one never kills nobody. It's allus somethin'--drivin' him--t' drive us!"[56] From their talk, Ephraim's elemental nature is pointed out. He moves in nature as part of its primal flow: spring sap has risen in him--that sap which buds out the trees in the spring and regenerates vitality in a dry body, and he responds to its seasons as do the cows and the chickens and the fallow earth.

In the third scene, Eben returns from town just before dawn to announce what he has heard there: Their father has taken to himself a new wife! Peter and Simeon, practical, see no hopes of ever achieving

their desires--security and some measure of independence and self-respect in the inheritance of their part of the farm--so they yearn for the promised land, Californi-a. Eben, more passionate in spirit, and younger, clings to his desire for possessing the farm and offers them money for passage to California in exchange for an affidavit signing over to him their part of the farm. The money rightly belongs to him, he says; before his "maw" died she told him where it was hidden. Peter and Simeon are not sure. They will stay around awhile and see if it is true that Ephraim is married--and get a glimpse of "her". Besides, their hatred is not confined to their father; some they save for Eben whom they unconsciously recognize to be stronger. Considering also Eben's prowess at whorin', Simeon suggests, "Mebbe ye'll try t' make her your'n, too?" He is "like his Paw--Dead spit n' image," and they become prophetic, "Dog'll eat dog!"[57]

It is gray dawn outside when they see Ephraim and his new wife "pull up" to the barn. Peter and Simeon give up, sign the paper, grab their bundles, count out the money, and move into the yard. They hope "she's a she-devil that'll make him wish he was dead an' livin' in the pit o' hell fur comfort."[58] Celebrating their freedom, they break loose in a wild dance. Simeon knocks the gate off of its hinges and puts it under his arm. "We heartily 'bolishes shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates, by thunder!"[59] he shouts, dancing in fierce glee.

> Cabot and Abbie Putnam approach the house. He is seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder, yet there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its own narrow strength. His eyes have a straining, ingrowing quality.[60]

Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality and strength. Her jaw shows her to be gross, sensual, and obstinate. In her eyes there is a hard determination, and about her whole "personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben."[61]

Cabot chides the two boys for their idleness; they spit contemptuously at Abbie, laugh derisively at the old man, and give a war whoop and dance, telling him they are leaving. He thinks they are mad and threatens to lock them up in the asylum. They pick up stones and hurl them at the parlor window, breaking it, yelling, "Maw'll be waitin' in the parlor;" then they taunt him with Eben's being his "spit n' image," "hard n' bitter's a hickory tree!" and the prophecy that "He'll eat ye yet, old man--Dog'll eat dog."[62] Then they leave, singing of the promised land, Simeon with the gate still under his arm.

The open gate sets the stage for inevitable tragedy with the forces of these interwoven symbols: the two elms suggesting suppressed carnal desire; the rocks and stones hinting at three things--regeneration of Eben's "maw", a stern God hemming them in, and Ephraim himself; unseeing eyes that turn inward; the elemental animal nature of the characters suggesting their affinity with the soil. Continuing throughout the play like a motif from Tschaikovsky is the unconscious yearning refrain for some kind of beauty, beauty of nature, to which each character responds in dumb awe and reverence.

It is chiefly in this respect that Desire fulfills Aristotle's stipulation that a tragedy be written in poetic language.

Beauty, however, is not the central, nor even the recognized desire. The intense, fierce, elemental desire of each character is for sustenance and security; security is the farm which Abbie covets

fiercely as her place in the universe, a measure of self-respect for which she is prepared to fight tooth and claw. Even her previous marriage had taught her that without owning a place of one's own, freedom meant nothing more than freedom to work in others' homes. Eben clings to that farm, his anchor to the universe; for it is the umbilical cord tying him to his mother, the proper owner. Ephraim's desire for the farm, however, is strongest of all: he _is_ the farm. At the cost of blood and sweat he wrung it bodily from the God of the stones, a hard, demanding God satisfied with no less than a man's life. Once he, too, had sought the easy God of fertile soil, but his God whipped him home with: "This ain't wuth nothin' t' me!" Ephraim adds: "when ye can make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew!"[63] His passion for possession is so great, his sense of natural order so strong, he is anguished at the thought of leaving his "child" to Eben whom he hates because he is soft.

Eben's God is a soft God; and it is for this reason that Ephraim hates and scorns him. Ephraim prays, "God o' the old! God o' the lonesome!" and Eben mocks, "T' hell with yewr God!"[64] Ephraim would take the farm with him if he could--or burn it--or do anything Abbie asks if she will leave him a proper son to inherit it.

Ephraim's instinctual desire for natural order is so strong, so earthy, that he seeks his identity with the surges of the seasons. Because he was lonesome, he says, "I rid out t' learn God's message t' me in the spring, like the prophets done."[65] After his first wife died, the lonesomeness came over him again. His second wife, he tells Abbie,

> was purty--but soft. She tried to be hard. She couldn't. She never knowed me nor nothin'. It was lonesomer 'n hell with her. Then this spring the call came--the voice of God cryin' in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness--to go out an' seek an' find! . . . I sought ye an' I found ye! Yew air my Rose of Sharon! . . . Sometimes yew air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t' ye in my lonesomeness.[66]

The times when he has no woman in whom to find himself, he seeks out the cows in the barn--restful, understanding creatures who move in nature's rhythm.

Eben seeks his identity in the love of his mother, still real enough to be a palpable, brooding presence, guiding protecting, loving, him. So real is her presence, Eben has to justify to her his taking his father's wife before he can do so. Her presence is so strong, especially in the parlor where she had been laid in death. Abbie unknowingly chooses the parlor as her battleground for possession of Eben; it is through her assuming the role of Eben's mother that she breaks down his defense. For her, the search for identity is simple: "A woman's got t' hev a hum";[67] she knows she has "got t' fight fur what's due me out o' life, if ever I 'spect t' git it";[68] and if the job of seducing her step-son were pleasant, well, occasionally "life throws a cherry one's way!" O'Neill works in the Oedipal complex that Freud had named from literature at the turn of the century.

Eben's "maw" is as dominant a character as any in the play; she is the spirit of the dead women, the Fates, reincarnated in Abbie, urging Eben to redress her wrongs. She is motivated by only emotion and intuition, for she is the "Daughter of the Night," that female half of mankind at the opposite pole from Light and Reason.

Abbie is all this and more. She is the Eternal-Mother, the Earth-Mother--warm, expensive, sensuous, but being the earth, she is that

half of humanity which is unenlightened--the physical, emotional, creative force. As she becomes the source through whom the Furies work, their force of retributive justice is felt as a pulsing, palpable reality which Ephraim recognizes:

> Even the music can't drive it out--somethin'--ye can feel it droppin' off the elms, climbin' up the roof, sneakin' down the chimney, pokin' in the corners. They's no peace in houses, they's no rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye.[69]

The action of Desire begins when Abbie undertakes to secure complete possession of the farm and commits herself to adultery--incest, perhaps--in order to carry the project through. When Eben possesses her, he releases to her passionate, creative exigency his will, his reason. She is fulfilled, and the harmony of physical fulfillment progresses to the spiritual symbol of her name: a house of worship. She draws away from the Old God to that half of Eben which his name symbolizes: a house of worship; hence, the two become one, the male and female unified mutation of religion--the "Yin" and "Yang" the Chinese celebrate; and "unto them a Child is born." She bears Eben's son and makes Ephraim believe that it is his. Yet the irony of the scene is double-edged; thinking that he is avenging himself and his mother by possessing Ephraim's wife, Eben loses his heart to both Abbie and the baby; Abbie loses her heart in genuine love for Eben. Each is caught in his own trap.

It would seem that the Fates would be stilled: they are avenged. Both Ephraim's sons, Simon-Peter and Eben, have repudiated him; his regeneration is ended; he is goaded from the house as he is no longer a part of its rhythm. Revenge, however, is not justice; justice is order. That half of Eben which has been regenerated in a new faith of

love demands entity and continues to war with the Old. Eben's emotions are so great that their lie can no longer be concealed; and Eben boasts to Ephraim of his "possessions." Ephraim retaliates by revealing Abbie's avowed pretense of love to secure the farm for herself. Convinced of Abbie's perfidy, Eben is disillusioned, disappointed, furious, so he abandons her in disgust and loathing.

She is unable to convince him that she has changed, that now her love for him comes first, that she has become a victim of her passions. Only through love has she attained her place, her fullfillment and harmony; and she fights tooth and claw to keep that love. She is faced with a choice: Her love has raised her beyond toleration of Ephraim; she cannot lose Eben; only violent tragedy can result. Since she is not a thinking, rational creature but one motivated by emotions and instincts, she removes the thing that stands between them--the child; and the destruction of even the house of worship is imminent. Eben is at last convinced; but, shaken with horror, he goes for the police.

He returns, however, to take his place by her side, assuming his share of the guilt, thereby eliciting his father's grudging praise, "Purty good fur yew."[70] In facing their guilt, they face life's limitations with optimism and a kind of elation. It does not occur to them to cringe or complain. They reach their true moral stature by accepting their guilt; in singling themselves out from their contemporaries, they choose to live their lives on their own terms. Thus O'Neill's pessimistic, indeed naturalistic, concept of "Life in terms of lives" is fulfilled, re-echoing in a more earthy manner Aeschylus' classical message of "wisdom through suffering." It is significant to note that they are willing to pay for the murder of the child, but

they defy the old God to hold them accountable for their love. Abbie says, "I don't repent that sin! I hain't askin' God t' fergive that!"[71] The play, then, becomes not just a work of lust, incest, and murder. It is far more than this. It is a unified, moral drama of self-recognition, an affirmation of life rather than death. The very symbols show it to be so: the preceding scenes are all played in man's darkness; in this last one, Abbie and Eben leave in the blazing light of sunrise. Here O'Neill can point up through spectacle touches of naturalism impossible to the ancients.

To state, as does Barrett H. Clark in Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays,[72] that Abbie should have killed Ephraim rather than the baby is to deny her consistency of character and deny O'Neill's knowledge of the Greek pattern. In Chapter 15 of the Poetics, Aristotle states, "In the characters there are four points to be aimed at".[73]

> They should be good, true to type, true to human nature, true to self and consistent throughout. In addition, it is right to endeavor after the probable or logically constructed and also the idealized.[74]

divide

Abbie, of course, did not want to kill her baby; she is the Earth-Mother--warm, fecund, protective; but she is also the Daughter of the Night, that other half of mankind motivated by passion and instinct rather than reason. Virtually suspended in a cocoon of ecstatic bliss, the perfect harmony of fulfillment, she is oblivious to everybody and everything except Eben and the baby.

Suddenly, with a paralyzing blow, Eben shatters her cocoon with harsh curses and threats to abandon her. He wishes her dead; he wishes himself dead; he wishes the baby dead; and again he asserts his weakness, his failure to involve himself in life's exigencies--he calls upon his "maw" for help. For Abbie, the baby ceases to become her flesh;

it becomes a wedge disturbing the harmony, the reality of her existence; and immediately she makes her intentions clear. Eben substantiates them when he replies to her plea whether, if she could restore the situation to its previous state, he would still leave her. "I calc'late not," he replies. "But ye hain't God, be ye?" She is exultant, "Remember ye've promised!" (Then with a strange intensity), "Mebbe I kin take back one thin' God does!"[75] Had she analyzed the problem with reason and logic, she would not have killed the child; but, as an unreasoning creature, she was caught in the vortex of her own emotions, frantic for a resolution. Moreover, O'Neill, striving to be true to traditional Greek form, would not have seen any other solution. In essence, he was attempting to marry the traditional Greek form of the tragedy to the modern, many-faceted concept of man with his in-depth psychology and social concern. Abbie's feeling is supported by her reaction to Eben's supposition that it was Ephraim whom she had killed. The thought just occurring to her, she says wildly. "That's what I ought t' done, hain't it? I oughter killed him instead," and she throws the responsibility back where it belongs, on the thinking, reasoning half of mankind, "Why didn't ye tell me?"[76] Eben's reason also has been dulled by his exploding emotions. Bemoaning the loss of life, he seeks the answer in death: "Maw, whar was ye, why did't ye stop her?"[77] This is the supreme irony of the play, the kind which Aristotle favored, that which grows out of the deeds. Since irony depends upon the revelation of ignorance which is mistaken for knowledge, the audience, watching Eben's and Abbie's foolish acting stemming from emotion unguided by reason, uneasily sees that here is a symbol of man's condition.

Had Abbie's intention been introduced earlier in the play, had she had time to reason, her act--whether she killed the baby or Ephraim--would have been a "vicious and unjust act of choice following knowledge and deliberation,"[78] which Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics assesses the greatest culpability, for it incites neither identification, fear, nor pity. Fear and pity are extended to that other part of ourselves which is "asleep, mad, or drunk,"[79] or which is at the mercy of capricious gods; Aristotle states it is in this way: that a person arrives at a satisfaction of poetic justice and a catharsis is wrought.

Herbert J. Muller, in The Spirit of Tragedy, states that O'Neill "was in fact closer in spirit to Greek tragedy than have been any other modern dramatists,"[80] because, while his drama is pessimistic and humanistic, it is aspiring toward positive values. He continued to define tragic spirit as:

> The final impression left by Greek tragedy, Andre Malraux remarked, is 'not man's defeat but the poet's triumph, his victory over destiny through his art.' Historically, it was a sign that a man had met death on its own grounds, asserted his own spirit. In terms of the tragic rhythm, the hero not only proved equal to the 'perception' of his fate, but is a better man for this perception. Finally, he is superior to his fate. The major element in the tragic pleasure . . . is a reverence for the human spirit. Man retains his dignity and failure in death whether or not he is to enjoy a life to come. Because of this dignity all is not vain.
>
> . . . .
>
> He is forever doomed, by whatever divinity or blind chance has shaped his ends; and he remains free in his thought and feeling, choosing his ends.[81]

When Desire Under the Elms was produced in 1924, Joseph Wood Krutch wrote of O'Neill in his review for The Nation:

> He has learned that souls confined in a nut-shell may yet be lords of infinite space; that spirits cabined and confined by very virtue of the fact that they have no outlet explode finally with the greatest spiritual violence.[82]

Sophus Keith Winther, in Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study, adds:

> O'Neill's task is to give dramatic reality to the deeper, inner, universal struggle of man to free himself from the invisible forces that bind him like Ixion to the wheel of his discontent.[83]

No better summary than that given by John Gassner is his estimation of Desire Under the Elms can be found:

> Powerful characterization and dialogue are combined here with a stark elemental theme and a sulty kind of nature poetry. Eben's Oedipus complex, the effects of farm life, and an inhibitive religion are fused into a tragice unit; they are so inter-related that it is difficult to isolate them, and the play is another example of how, intuitively, the creative artist can be in advance of the scientific thinker. Desire Under the Elms is consequently the most consistently wrought of O'Neill's plays and marks the peak of his relatively naturalistic period. Moreover, this is true tragedy; the power of the passions, the impressiveness of the characters, and the timelessness of the inner struggle between a son and a father ensure tragic elevation.[84]

Louis Bromfield, in "The New Yorker," asserts:

> This simple and terrible story on fine level of Greek tragedy is best analysis of witch-burning Puritans yet done: better than Scarlet Letter.[85]

A review of Desire by Alexander Woolcott, for Vanity Fair, states:

> "A mad play, my masters," but still the kind that will be read long after other contemporary work has been forgotten.[86]

Brooks Atkinson, for the New York Times, is extremely lavish in his praise of Desire:

> It may turn out to be the greatest play written by an American; the design of a masterpiece.[87]

After summarizing and analyzing all the significant reviews of the major American critics regarding the merits of Desire, Jordan Y. Miller states:

> It has often been regarded as the nearest O'Neill ever came to establishing the feeling of Greek tragedy. Many still think it is his best play.[88]

This investigator believes the critics should have seen deeper into Desire Under the Elms than the mere plaudits they express. It appears obvious from this examination that O'Neill attempted and succeeded in executing a "modern Greek tragedy." He structured Desire entirely in accord with the Greek pattern for tragedy, using the Hebraic myth to lend nobility to his characters. He imbues his tragic trio (symbolic of modern man's fragmented personality requiring more than one to make a whole, and symbolic of the ancient realization that both male and female forces are needed for unity) all with the tragic flaw of greed, naturalistic greed, focusing on Abbie. Furthermore, O'Neill built pity and fear in the audience--pity for the predicament of Abbie and Eben and fear for their safety. There is a genuine catharsis produced by the downfall of the characters and their great and symbolic house. The tragedy is heightened by the ironic signs and symbols of recognition and paradox. All of this follows the Greek pattern of tragedy to the letter.

Yet, O'Neill has at the same time kept his tragedy modern, contemporary for 1924--indeed for the twentieth century. He has stressed the naturalistic in mood and symbol. He has implied that a Freudian interpretation is needed (and Freud had only been translated into English seven years previous to O'Neill's writing Desire.) In addition, while Desire fits the Greek mold by adhering closely to the Greek requirements of the noble man and family--hence the Hebraic archetype--it also perfectly fits the then current "objective correlative" experience first defined by T. S. Eliot. The plot, the thought, the deeds that molded the characters of the players are a pure blend of ancient and modern; the spectacle is enhanced by the symbolic and Freudian associations.

There is only one point at which Desire Under the Elms fails somewhat in its bid to be the perfect twentieth century tragedy; that is its language. The language of Desire Under the Elms is colloquial, unpoetic, and at times base. Yet even here O'Neill has attempted through multiple symbolic associations to push the language far beyond its surface meanings.

Despite this minor flaw, this investigator believes that Desire Under the Elms is O'Neill's most nearly perfect tragedy and his most artistic work; for it is the one time that O'Neill reached what he was aiming for in accordance with his theory of tragedy--a fortuitous blending -- the golden mean with ancient and modern concepts of tragedy.

In the remaining chapters the investigator will attempt to relate what happened when O'Neill became too formalistic in his so-called high tragedy Mourning Becomes Electra and what happened when he attempted another new turn and became too novelistic in his tragedy The Iceman Cometh, and finally what this boded for later developments in American theater, such as the Theater of the Absurd.

NOTES

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[3]Maxwell Anderson, "The Essence of Tragedy," quoted by Walter Havinghurst, Robert F. Almy, Gordon D. Wilson, and Ruth L. Middlebrook, eds., Selection: a Reader for College Writing (New York, 1955), p. 275.

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[5]S. H. Butcher, tr., Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th ed. (London, 1923), p. 21.

[6]Ibid., p. 23.

[7]Ibid., p. 11.

[8]Ibid., p. 25.

[9]Ibid., p. 27.

[10]John Jones, On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy (London, 1962), p. 24.

[11]Ibid., p. 25.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., p. 27.

[14]Wimsatt and Brooks, pp. 24-30.

[15]James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, I, Abr. (New York, 1960), pp. v-vii.

[16]Charles Mills Gayley, The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art (New York, 1939), pp. 3-6.

[17]Aeschylus, The House of Atreus, ed. by Charles W. Eliot, The Harvard Classics, VIII (New York, 1961), pp. 13-14.

[18]Eugene O'Neill, Desire Under the Elms, quoted by Eugene O'Neill, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York, 1955), p. 249.

[19]Aeschylus, p. 72.

[20]O'Neill, Desire, p. 227.

[21]Ibid, p. 226.

[22]Aeschylus, p. 74.

[23]O'Neill, Desire, p. 240.

[24]Ibid., p. 236.

[25]Aeschylus, p. 123.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 14.

[28]Ibid., p. 16.

[29]Ibid., p. 19.

[30]O'Neill, Desire, p. 240.

[31]Aeschylus, p. 151.

[32]Ibid., p. 128.

[33]O'Neill, Desire, p. 227.

[34]Ibid., p. 265.

[35]Cargill, Fagin, and Fisher, p. 115.

[36]Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," p. 58.

[37]Ibid., p. 41.

[38]O'Neill, Desire, p. 243.

[39]Jones, p. 71.

[40]Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918 (New York, 1957), p. 97.

[41]Jones, p. 21.

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[43]Wimsatt and Brooks, pp. 33-34.

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[46]T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," Selected Essays (New York, 1950), pp. 124-125.

[47]O'Neill, Desire, p. 202.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Fraser, pp. 126-134.

[50]O'Neill, Desire, p. 203.

[51]Ibid., p. 204.

[52]O'Neill, Desire, p. 203.

[53]Ibid., p. 204.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid., p. 205.

[56]Ibid., p. 206.

[57]Ibid., p. 211.

[58]Ibid., p. 215.

[59]Ibid., p. 221.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Ibid., p. 224.

[63]Ibid., p. 237.

[64]Ibid., p. 227.

[65]Ibid., p. 237.

[66]Ibid., pp. 237-238.

[67]Ibid., p. 222.

[68]Ibid., p. 226.

[69]Ibid., p. 253.

[70]Ibid., p. 265.

[71]Ibid., p. 266.

[72]Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (New York, 1947), p. 99.

[73]Butcher, p. 53.

[74]Jones, p. 49.

[75]O'Neill, Desire, p. 259.

[76]Ibid., p. 260.

[77]Ibid., p. 261.

[78]Wimsatt and Brooks, "The Verbal Medium: Plato and Aristotle," p. 67.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Herbert J. Muller, The Spirit of Tragedy (New York, 1956), p. 315.

[81]Ibid., pp. 19-22.

[82]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Desire Under the Elms," The Nation, November 26, 1924, p. 579.

[83]Sophus Keith Winther, Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study (New York, 1961), p. 105.

[84]John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, 3d. ed. (New York, 1954), p. 651.

[85]Louis Bromfield, "The New Yorker," Bookman, 60 (January, 1925), p. 621.

[86]Alexander Woollcott, "Desire Under the Ellums," Vanity Fair, 23 (January, 1925), p. 27.

[87]Brooks Atkinson, "At the Theatre," New York Times, 23 (January 17, 1952), p. 4.

[88]Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic (London, 1962), p. 147.

CHAPTER IV

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

My sister was Electra
Like yours, you will allow;
And you may have a mother
That needs a bullet now,
I've come to this great drama,
Destruction for to deal;
And if you dare insult me, sir,
I'll tell Eugene O'Neill.

--Anonymous parody in "Conning Tower"[1]

In a diary dated "Spring, 1926," Eugene O'Neill states his intention to write a "Modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy as a basic theme. . . ."[2] He weighed the relative advantages of up-dating the Oresteia or the Medea and concluded in his "Notes from a Fragmentary Diary," ". . . story of Electra and family psychologically most interesting--most comprehensive, intense, basic human interrelationships."[3] This diary was to become a record of a struggle O'Neill was to have over a period of five years to produce in the Greek manner his Mourning Becomes Electra.

Since O'Neill set out deliberately to parallel the Oresteia of Aeschylus, since he wished Mourning Becomes Electra to be evaluated by Aristotelian rules for tragedy, and since he did attempt to capture the physical aspects of classical tragedy, it is essential to compare and contrast the elements of Aeschylus' Oresteia with those of O'Neill's Mourning before any accurate estimate can be made regarding the merits of this serious drama.

His conception of the Electra theme when he was forty years old fit in with the trends of his emotional life. He had elevated himself to grand heights in the passionate outpourings in Desire Under the Elms, based on the tragic vision and spirit found in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Aeschylus' Oresteia. As a result, after his marriage to Carlotta Monterey, he was spurred on to attempt the literal as well as figurative interpretations of Greek tragedy in Mourning Becomes Electra, frequently referred to as "Carlotta's play."[4]

> Oh, for a language to write drama in! For a speech that is dramatic and isn't just conversation! I'm so straight jacketed by writing in terms of talk! I'm so fed up with dodge-questions of dialect! But where to find that language.[5]

O'Neill uttered this cry in a letter to Joseph Wood Krutch when he began outlining this trilogy of Mourning. His words conveyed his artistic frustration and sense of inadequacy in tackling the most ambitious project of his career. Krutch relates: " . . . it is true that O'Neill's language weighs him down for the very reason that he is a modern."[6]

Concerning this trilogy, O'Neill's "#16 note" reads:

> The unavoidable entire melodramatic action must be felt as working out of psychic fate from past--thereby attain tragic significance--or else!--a hell of a problem, a modern tragic interpretation of classic fate without benefit of gods--for it must, before everything, remain modern psychological play--fate springing out of the family.[7]

"After several false starts, all rotten, think I have hit right line for first draft now," O'Neill recorded in his work diary in October, 1929.[8] Then on January 15, 1930, he presented Carlotta O'Neill with the notebook containing his entries about the characters and plot of the first two plays of this trilogy.

He scribbled the following inscription: "To Carlotta--my wife--these first fruits (very unripe!) of my work in Our New Year--with all my deepest love and gratitude for all you have meant to me!--and all your help!"[9] By April 9, 1930, O'Neill was able to write triumphantly: "All work finished--script off to Guild."[10]

He wrote an inscription to his copy of the final long-hand version, dated it April 26, and gave it to his wife:

> In memory of the interminable days of rain in which you bravely suffered in silence that this trilogy might be born--days when I had my work but you had nothing but household frets, and a blank vista through the salon windows of the gray land of Le Plessis, with the wet black trees still and dripping, and the mist wraiths mourning over the drowned fields--days when you had the self-forgetting love to greet my lunchtime, depressing such preoccupations with a courageous, charming banter--days which were for you like hateful, boring, miserable enemies nagging at nerves and spirit until an intolerable ennui and life sickness poisoned your spirit!
>
> In short, days in which you collaborated, as only deep love can, in writing of this trilogy of the damned! These scripts are rightly yours and my presenting them is a gift of what is half yours already. Let us hope what the trilogy may have to it will repay the travail we have gone through for its sake! I want these scripts to remind you that I have known your love with my love even when I have seemed not to know; that I have seen it even when I have appeared most blind: that I have felt it warmly around me always--(when in my study in the closing pages of an act!)--sustaining and comforting, as warm, secure sanctuary for the man after the author's despairing solitude and inevitable defeats, a victory of love-in-life--mother and wife and mistress and friend! And collaborator!
>
> Collaborator, I love you.[11]

Let us examine the paralleling themes of the Oresteia and Mourning Becomes Electra. The theme of the Oresteia depends upon a literal interpretation of the Greek concept of Diké. According to Gilbert Murray,

> Diké is the form of Judgement ... It is always connected with Moira, that exact Portion which belongs to each man: his share of the land, the harvest, the spoils of battle, and the joys and sorrows of life. Every man . . . has a Moira. If one claims more than his Moira, and commits Hubris, excess, then Diké casts him back. The vindicators of Diké are the Furies who terrorize a transgressor to insanity or suicide. The Law of Justice (Diké) may be stated more simply in these words: "On him that doeth, it shall be done."[12]

Aeschylus took this idea and amplified it to form the theme of the Oresteia, which may be stated: How can the concept of Dike admit the possibility of forgiveness? His solution was an attempt to make the ruling principle of the universe a living and free mind. From this he evolved Justice, which is to Aeschylus, according to J. H. Finley, Jr., ". . . more than retribution: it was the discovery of innocence which introduced divine harmony into mortal life and makes true creativity possible."[13]

The theme of O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra is also based upon the concept of retribution, from which an important question arises: How must the children pay for the sins of the fathers? His solution is offered through the psychological aspect of fate, which is, according to O'Neill, "fate springing from the family."[14]

Mourning Becomes Electra is contrasted to the Oresteia in that it does not attempt to establish a universal order for mankind, but rather attempts to establish an order in the universe for a specific part of mankind.

In the Oresteia, Justice, Diké, Fate, Retribution are set into motion by one crime--the progenitor of the guild that reappears from generation to generation. To Aeschylus, the first cause was the corruption of Aerope, the wife of Atreus, by his brother Thyestes. Atreus' revenge was to give his brother the flesh of his own children to eat.

When Thyestes learned what he had eaten, he cursed Atreus and all his line--a curse which did not depart for three generations.

From this beginning the revenge is continued through Aegisthus, the son of Thyestes, who corrupts Clytemnestra, the wife of Atreus' son, Agamemnon. Together they form a plot to kill Agamemnon upon his return from the Trojan War--a plan which is carried out. It then falls upon Orestes, the son of Agamemnon to revenge his father's most foul and unnatural death. This charge to require blood for blood is laid upon Orestes by the god of the Delphic Oracle, Apollo. Orestes, therefore, kills his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. For this act of matricide the Furies demand the life of Orestes and pursue him until he is freed by a higher concept of the law of Dike. This concept is that Zeus, the 'living and free Mind', and Dike, the blind law of what must be, are united, and a universal order is established.

In _Mourning Becomes Electra_, Justice, Diké, Fate, Retribution are likewise set in motion by one crime which is the progenitor of the guilt which reappears from generation to generation. This crime is committed before the opening of the play by Abe Mannon, father of Ezra (Agamemnon) and grandfather of Lavinia and Orin (Electra and Orestes). Abe's younger brother, David, had been involved in an affair with a French-Canadian governness, Marie Brantome, which resulted in her pregnancy and subsequent marriage to David. Abe, having been in love with and rejected by Marie, violently threw them out of the house with his curse--a curse which did not depart for three generations. Their son, Adam Brant, vowed revenge upon all Mannons for his mother's shame, exile, and subsequent death.

Adam Brant (Aegisthus) corrupts Christine (Clytemnestra). the wife of Abe's son, Ezra. Together they form a plot to kill Ezra upon his return from the Civil War--a plan which is carried out. Lavinia and Orin, Ezra's children, then take it upon themselves to revenge their father's "foul and most unnatural" death. Orin is easily persuaded by Lavinia to kill Adam Brant. In consequence of the murder of her lover, Christine commits suicide. Guilt-ridden, Orin develops insanity and takes his own life. Lavinia, now alone, brings about her own retribution.

It is noted in both trilogies that by virtue of the enactment of justice man is led to wisdom through suffering. In the Oresteia, Orestes' suffering leads to the conception of a Universal wisdom which will benefit all mankind. In Mourning Becomes Electra, through the process of self-analysis (suffering) which leads to self-recognition (wisdom), Lavinia is able to carry out the means of justice which will establish for her a place in the universal order.

There would be no point in comparing the O'Neill trilogy to the Aeschylus trilogy if it were not that the attempt sheds light on O'Neill's attitude toward his aims as a writer. He turned to Aeschylus because the Greek playwright had ready a set of conventions that enabled him to present certain aspects of life that seemed important without having to explain too much of the background of his characters. The chorus, the masks, the formal literary language, the common heritage of history, legend, politics, religion--such were the advantages enjoyed by the ancient Greek dramatists who were not concerned with the surface of things and the accidentals of daily existence. Greek tragedy offered O'Neill a more synthetic form for the expression of his personal ideas than if he had chosen a modern scene and modern characters.

In writing Mourning Becomes Electra, O'Neill discovered that his play was assuming proportions beyond that of merely three acts; therefore, he decided to follow the Greek example and build his theme into a trilogy form. As a result, Mourning Becomes Electra is similar to the Oresteia in form, since it is a great single tragedy in three separate parts, each part with its own dramatic purpose, yet harmonized by a common inspiration.

The complete trilogy, as well as its single parts, shows unity of action in its rise, crisis, and fall. The action progresses in a series of orderly developments toward a dramatic goal. The main crises of the first and second play are only temporary, their finalities only relative. The crisis of the third play is the ultimate climax of the complete trilogy.

Mourning Becomes Electra retains the basic elements of adultery and murder as found in the Oresteia. "Homecoming," the first part of the O'Neill trilogy, is concerned with situations fundamentally like those of the "Agamemnon." In Aeschylus' play Agamemnon returns to his wife Clytemnestra, who has been unfaithful to him by having an affair with Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin. Upon Agamemnon's return from the wars, Clytemnestra murders him because he has sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia for victory in battle, shamelessly brought home with him a concubine, Cassandra, and personally because she wants her lover-cousin, Aegisthus, to rule over the kingdom. In the O'Neill play, "Homecoming," Ezra Mannon returns to his wife Christine, who has been unfaithful to him with Adam Brant, Ezra's cousin. Christine murders him because of her abnormal growing hate for him, stemming from their wedding night, and because she desires to marry Adam Brant.

Instead of making the son, Orestes, the chief instrument of vengeance as Aeschylus did, O'Neill gave the daughter, Lavinia, the combined dramatic functions of the prophetess, the avenger, Orestes, and the Choruses. It is she who learns of the quarrel between her grandfather Abe and his brother David over David's marriage to a servant girl and the resulting deaths. She also learns that her mother's lover is the avenger-son of Ezra's uncle, David Mannon, and his servant-girl wife, Marie Brantome. Because Lavinia is an inevitable product of the combined hatreds of her parents and their parents in turn, she cannot rest until she has pursued the guilty parties to their final punishment. She will see to it that they pay the wages of sin--death. Whereas Aeschylus ended the "Agamemnon" with the temporary triumph of Clytemnestra, O'Neill ended "Homecoming" with Christine's standing accused of Ezra's murder by Lavinia.

The "Choephoroe," the second play of the Greek trilogy, introduces Orestes and Electra; but Electra soon fades into the background, and Orestes undertakes to seek revenge on his mother and her lover alone. He has consulted the Delphic Oracle and is commanded by Apollo to punish the guilty pair in accordance with the decree of Zeus. He acts quickly with the help of his friend Pylades, but almost immediately after the double murder, he is beset by the avenging Furies, symbols of yet another power not under the control of Zeus and at variance with the laws of the Olympian hierarchy, and he is driven mad.

In O'Neill's second play, "The Hunted," the same broad course of events is followed up to a certain point. Lavinia and Orin together track down Christine and Adam. Orin kills Adam, an act which drives Christine to commit suicide. In the belief that her mission is ended,

Lavinia turns to her temporarily unbalanced brother, determined to find happiness, and ultimately to marry the normal and unimaginative Peter. She has reckoned, however, without the Furies, those powerful and as yet not fully understood forces within that wreck the mind and body when they are no longer under control. Orin, being the weaker, is the first to succumb. His case is complicated by a certain introspective malady that was not touched upon by Aeschylus.

In "The Eumenides," the final play of the Greek trilogy, the moral and ethical problems are faced and resolved by Aeschylus. Prior to the final play Orestes had scrupulously performed his religious duties and consulted the Oracle, the highest source of religious authority. Zeus commanded him to do the deed; yet, having done so, Orestes found that he had transgressed another law decreed by the Furies. This dilemma is faced by Orestes in "The Eumenides." Orestes is shown appealing to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens. The Furies, however, are no less insistent upon their rights, Athena or no Athena, for it is their claim that matricide is punishable by annihilation regardless of what may have prompted it. A jury of Athenian citizens is summoned by the goddess; court is held on the Areopagus, and Orestes is tried. Orestes is acquitted by the deciding vote of Athena, and at this point Orestes disappears from the play; however, the final problem of the trilogy must be solved. What is to become of the Furies, the instruments of revenge? The differences between the Furies and Zeus are settled by the establishment of Zeus as the god-head and master of the universe. The Furies are compelled to submit. They are then offered recognition by Athena as mighty powers whose function is no longer to be revenge and cursing, but plenitude and blessing.

The close of "The Eumenides" (Kindly Ones: the transformation of the Furies) is anything but anti-climatic. To the outer vision, the myth is the story of a youth, scion of a blood-stained race, who has been caught, by no fault of his own, in the toils of fatal necessity. To the vision of the soul, it is the triumph of the Divine working in and through Fate. Moral tranquility must be won if there is to be moral unity in the world. Out of the collision of moral principles with passion, human and divine, emerges a final harmony. Fate at last is discovered to be One with the will of God. In the slow marches of time, good is victorious over evil by the power of the Eternal Justice. Orestes is the last of his blood-stained race. Peace comes to the House of Atreus, and there is eternal harmony for the rest of mankind in the universe.

In the third O'Neill play, "The Haunted," the playwright parts company entirely with Aeschylus. Barret H. Clark has provided an amusing literal parody of "The Eumenides" in the following:

> He might, of course, by way of furnishing a counterpart to the Furies, have taken Lavinia and Orin before the Supreme Court at Washington, and introduced an Archbishop instructing the nine justices as to what procedure they should adopt in dealing with the culprits; only he would have to reduce the number of justices to eight or increase it to ten and make the Statue of Liberty the final arbiter in case of a tie. Further, the jury would have to be told that it would remain forever under proper religious guidance, the ultimate standard of all human conduct.[15]

At the opening of "The Haunted," Lavinia and Orin have returned from their South Sea Island trip; the time lapse has been one year. Lavinia now assumes the transcendence of her mother's position and Orin that of his father's. Orin, realizing his helplessness in overcoming his guilt and facing eternal chaos, takes his life to find peace. Lavinia, her causes and images of justice completely invalid to her

now, lives in the morass of her realized guilt until the end of her natural life.

While Aeschylus focused his attention upon universal problems, O'Neill centered his on Lavinia and Orin, these two being his Orestes. Lavinia, the product of the very forces in her family which precipitated its peculiar and inevitable fate, discovers that she has at last become like her own mother, that in demanding payment for that which grew out of lust and hatred she is herself inevitably drawn to her own brother, now that her father, to whom she is also drawn by forces, not exactly filial, is no longer alive. All her natural instincts, thwarted by a maniacal desire for vengeance, have turned upon her. This is her fate, and she marches to a doom which is actually inescapable, from which no god-from-the-machine, no benign court is able to free her. For such victims of the evil that seems inherent in life there is no salvation. With the suicide of Orin, Lavinia realizes that peace is not for her; and, in order to requite the Mannon Curse, she, as the last of the Mannons, must meet it alone. Therefore, she shuts herself into the House of Mannon where she will spend the rest of her days until "the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die."[16]

Because Aeschylus may have preferred to write trilogies whose parts were intimately connected with the theme, his chief interest did not lie in the emotional reactions of man but in God's relation to man; therefore, he was not primarily concerned with the reaction of events on human personality. Nor does he show, according to Herbert Smyth,

> . . . complete transformation of character. It was not his [Aeschylus'] purpose both to follow a human soul through the various phases of its existence and at the end to depict the last day of a life when all its issues are compressed into one great final issue. It cannot be too insistently emphasized that the personages of the Aeschylean drama, as they disclose themselves in the limits of a single play, do not really develop at all.[17]

Despite the alluring opportunity of presenting the evolution of personality in the course of a three-part drama, Aeschylus did not allow his characters to change much, even when they reappear in a later play. The sheer progress of time and the storm and stress of life, however, alter the situation and are not without their proper effect on the moral, substantially static. Fixed in advance, it simply manifests itself. Consequently, at the beginning of each play, the tragic flaw in the character merely awaits a chance to materialize and reap its consequences.

In order to understand O'Neill's characterization, it is well to understand the Aristotelian definition of character and observe the link between classical tragedy and O'Neill's modern psychological drama. Doris Falk in her book Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension throws considerable light upon the subject.

> Character, according to Aristotle, is 'ethos.' It is 'that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids.' The tragic hero brings about his own destruction through some flaw, 'some error of frailty', in his character. He is free to choose his course of action, but within the limitations of the structure of the self with its flaw.[18]

The ethos or moral purpose of an O'Neill character is to perpetuate or strengthen an illusion about himself. This moral purpose often runs counter to another life-long aim, self-discovery. This illusion is, of course, a false self-image substituted for the real self, the latter becoming unconsciously hated and rejected by the character.

This self-hatred and the consequent pursuit of illusion constitute the tragic flaw which destroys him. Moreover, within the framework of the plot and theme of the play, O'Neill's characters' personalities are probed to lay bare their very essence. His characters realize and understand one aspect of themselves, only to confront another aspect which requires the same process. This procedure is followed until there is a final harmony established by self-recognition.

A character analysis of both the Greek and the modern play are necessary in order for one to ascertain the paralleling attributes of the characters. The following constitutes an outline of the character development of each of the major characters in each trilogy. The minor characters are briefly noted since they do not add to further development of either trilogy.

Clytemnestra is the outstanding figure in the "Agamemnon" and is the only person to appear more than once. The one impression she creates is that of supreme power. She possesses traits which suggest masculinity and prompt the chorus to say of her "Woman your . . . words are like a man's, most wise in judgement."[19]

It also requires great physical strength to hack to death a warrior such as Agamemnon. This physical resource is controlled by a mind of invincible driving force. At no point is there any sign of indecision, wavering, or debate as Clytemnestra moves toward the realization of her purpose.

Clytemnestra is one of the most impious hypocrites in literature. She builds altars, adorns them with beautiful wreaths, and fills them with sacrifice and incense. She can invoke all the gods by name and with proper phrase. Bad dreams can drive her to the altars with suitable libations.

The queen knows the forms of religion. She is meticulous in observance of formal rites, but one searches in vain for any manifestation of a truly religious spirit. "Her actions belie even the crude, primitive ethical demands of her professed religion."[20]

There is complete incongruity between her professions and actions. She is treacherous, lustful, cruel, and jealous. Her soul is full of bitterness and hatred. Agamemnon's queen is a perfect incarnation of irreligion. She defends the murders of her husband and Cassandra on religious grounds. Her daughter, Electra, however, puts aside such an argument with the reply that lust for Aegisthus is the real motive for the crime. This fact is irrefutable.

Clytemnestra is a master of deception. When she confronts Agamemnon upon his return from a ten-year absence, she has need of all her intellectual vigor lest she awaken any suspicion of her purpose, alike in the mind of her victim and in that of the Argive Elders, who know of her infidelity and must distrust her every act. She assumes those accents of affection that will cajole Agamemnon into crediting her wifely devotion; she "must bear welcome in her eye and hand and tongue."[21]

At length, she tells him of her fear and anxiety for his safe return, of her nightly vigils and fallen tears, and of her constant fidelity. Then she entreats him to alight from his chariot and tread upon gorgeous, purple tapestries on the way into the palace. The Greeks were suspicious of such luxury because they feared that it would arouse the envy of the gods. By means of appealing to his vanity, however, Clytemnestra causes him to suspend his better judgement, which brings him to his doom. After the dreadful deed is

done, she feels no moral anguish, no relapse to womanly weakness. She freely admits to the act and rejoices in it as she says: ". . .I struck him . . . there he lay prostrate . . . while I rejoiced . . . I glory in it . . . My husband, dead, the work of this right hand . ."[22]

She disclaims, nevertheless, all guilt by these words:

Why dost thou declare that the murder was mine?
Name it not so, nor
Call me Agamemnon's wife. 'Tis not I
But a ghost in the likeness of woman, the vengeful
Shade of the banquetor whom Atreus fed,
Now crowneth him King;
First fruits with a perfect obligation.[23]

Her deed is to her, a further act of Diké; she is a minister of required justice. She is the spirit of revenge incarnate. When that revenge is accomplished, however, she professes to be content if she may make a compact with the daemon: that it quit the house and revenge some other race. Now that she has her lover and her throne, she feels that blood has reaped a sufficient harvest.

Time was to work some alteration in this masterful woman. In the "Choephoroe," she is assailed in sleep by the wrathful spirit of her murdered husband and by visions of a snake taking her life. She seeks comfort from the gods and placates her husband's tomb with libations, but all is to no avail. When caught in the toils of fate, she asks for the axe which murdered her husband that she may defend herself against Orestes. She pleads for her life, but hardly in a cowardly fashion. She goes to her death calling Orestes a snake.

In "The Eumenides," she appears as a ghost and is even more terrible than when she was alive. To the Furies she speaks with authority, reproaching them for sleeping, telling them of her dishonored place

among the dead, spurring them on in the pursuit of her son. Even in death she is confident and assured.

Aeschylus has created a tremendous work of art in the portrayal of Clytemnestra. She is unequal to the first-rate opportunities of family life. She is an unashamed adultress. She has little feeling of love, she cruelly sends Orestes away under the pretext of seeking his safety and later makes a servant of her daughter Electra. She has had every advantage of breeding and training; yet she sinks to the lowest depths of depravity. "She disgusts and angers us with her corrupt brutality. It is a loathsome creature that Aeschylus depicts."[24]

Christine Mannon is O'Neill's approximation of Clytemnestra. Although she retains some of the characteristics of her Greek counterpart, exceptions and additions have been made to satisfy the plot.

Christine, like Clytemnestra, is an adultress and a murderess. In contrast to the man-willed Clytemnestra, who was driven by elemental passions, Christine is a frail, feminine creature. Christine's murder of Ezra is motivated by hate and revenge springing from frustrated love: her hate and disgust for Ezra, and her desire for revenge when she was deprived of her son's (Orin's) love. She explains to Lavinia that Orin was born while Ezra was with the army in Mexico.

> He seemed my child, only mine. I loved him for that! I loved him until he let you and your father nag him into the war, in spite of my begging him not to leave me alone . . . when he had gone there was nothing left--but hate and a desire to be revenged--and a longing for love.[25]

Bitterness over the loss of her son's love is a parallel to Clytemnestra's fury over the sacrifice of Iphigenia. It is also interesting to note that in the "Agamemnon" it was Clytemnestra who sent Orestes away because her affections had been taken over by Aegisthus,

while in the "Homecoming" it was Ezra who sent Orin away to war. This caused Christine to seek love and affection elsewhere.

Christine, as noted above, is part pagan in nature. She is warm, sensuous, loving. She first fell in love with Ezra because of his romantic nature. It was not until their wedding night that she found him capable of only lustful love. His ideas of life were stern and cold, formulated from the harshness of his Puritan upbringing. Since he stifled all feelings of love in Christine, he became a symbol of death for her. This idea is corroborated in the following speeches:

> Christine: I loved him/Ezra/ once--before I married him . . . he was handsome in his lieutenant's uniform. He was silent and mysterious and romantic. But marriage soon turned his romance into disgust.[26]

> Christine: You seem the same to me as death; Ezra. You were always dead to me.[27]

When Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon, the memory of all his previous sins were awakened. He not only earned his fate but also was well motivated on all levels. At the same time, it was evident that her deed was criminal. In killing Ezra, Christine merely destroys the statue of a dead man. He was a symbol of her desire and frustration of love. The killing is merely redundant; she kills that which is already dead. Christine's deed arouses neither pity nor fear.

Christine is brazen about her affair; although she fears detection, she is very careless in concealing it; therefore, her adulterous relationship with Adam is known to everyone concerned except Orin and Ezra. This is approximately the same situation as in "Agamemnon."

Christine is the instigator as well as the instrument of Ezra's death. The choice of murder weapon is representative of each female's character. The "man-willed" Clytemnestra uses an axe, and Christine

chooses the feminine weapon of poison. The method by which Christine carries out the murder is almost parallel to that of Clytemnestra. She, too, plays the hypocrite in her welcome upon Ezra's return. She, too, paints the picture of a loving, faithful wife. She says to Ezra: "You can't imagine what a strain I've been under--worrying about Orin and--you."[11] Later, she says, ". . . what is the good of words? There is no wall between us. I love you."[12]

She entices him into the house by means of sexual satisfaction; but before she administers the poison, she cannot resist the womanly impulse to tell all. She must hurt him as he hurt her; hence, she tells him of her infidelity. This revelation prompts a heart attack, as Christine had hoped. She withholds his medicine from him and substitutes the poison. The deed is accomplished.

Christine's reaction to the murder is totally different from Clytemnestra's. Whereas the latter proudly proclaimed her deed, Christine faints from the horror of what she has done. Thereafter she lives in fear. She fears that Lavinia knows all and will tell Orin. She conspires to marry Orin off to his childhood sweetheart so that he will not come in contact with Lavinia. The attempt, however, is in vain; and Lavinia plants the seed of suspicion in Orin's mind. She recalls the happy times they had together when he was a child. She tells him that she loves him and that they will go away together. Triumphantly she faces Lavinia with the news: "Go on, try and convince Orin of my wickedness. He loves me! He hated his father. He's glad he's dead. Even if he knew I had killed him he'd protect me!"[30]

All is lost, however, when she learns of Orin's killing her lover, Adam Brant. She collapses in shock. Upon recovering her senses, she

flies to Ezra's study and shoots herself. Unlike Clytemnestra, who is murdered by her own son, Christine meets death by her own hand.

Christine has become a victim of the curse on the House of Mannon. She has been denied love. Since love is life to her, she has no recourse but to end her life. It is as if she had fulfilled the question she had asked of herself earlier:

> Why can't all of us remain innocent and loving and trusting? But God won't leave us alone. He twists and wrings and tortures our lives with each others' lives until--we poison each other to death.[31]

It is necessary to turn to the character of Agamemnon in the Greek play. If Agamemnon does nothing in person that morally justifies his murder, that moral justification is rooted in the foul deeds committed previous to the action of the play. He provided Clytemnestra with a motive for his murder when he slew their daughter Iphigenia and offered her as a sacrifice to the goddess Artemis.

> . . . To slay my own child, who my house delighteth
> Is that not heavy? That her blood should flow
> On her father's hand, hard beside an altar?
> My path is sorrow wheresoe'er I go.[32]

Driven by ambition, he consented to the sacrifice in order to secure a safe voyage for his troops to the Trojan shore. Though tormented by his deed, he feels the victory of war well worth the price, thereby destroying any sympathy that his anguish might have aroused.

Further justification for his murder lies in his more recent desecration of the temples of the city he has overthrown. This news is provided by the Herald. "...Agamemnon cometh... who...hath wrecked Troy's towers and digged her soil beneath. Till her god's houses, they are things of death."[33]

Though Agamemnon has been sent by Zeus to be the minister of justice, he has instead committed sacrilege by leveling the altars of the Trojan gods. Moreover, there is one further incrimination that demands his punishment. He is responsible for the young lives destroyed in the war.

In the light of the previous events, Aeschylus could do no more than represent Agamemnon as ambitious, cold, proud, weak of will, self-confident, and self-duped; accordingly, Agamemnon sees himself, his authority, his greatness always in the public eye.

One is now prepared for Agamemnon's arrival. He enters in a royal chariot at the head of a triumphal procession, followed by another chariot in which is seated the captive Cassandra. To the warning of the Elders upon his arrival, Agamemnon replies:

> Age, Heaven hath led me back,
> And on this hearth where still my fire doth burn
> I will go pay heaven my due return.
> Which guides me here, which saves me far away.
> O, Victory, now mine own, be mine always.[34]

His conceit has entirely prevented him from properly understanding the veiled warning of the chorus. His monstrous egotism prevents him from penetrating the insincerity of Clytemnestra. An unconscious hypocrite himself, he is foiled by a hypocrite. With frigid formality he at first declines Clytemnestra's homage with these words. "...Let my road. Be honored, surely, but as a man, not a god."[35]

Even though his ego is flattered by the homage from his wife, he refuses to walk upon the tapestries that are laid before the entrance to the palace because he fears the wrathful jealousy of the gods; however, he soon succumbs to Clytemnestra's flattery. Although he submits

with a show of reluctance, he is actually quite willing to commit this final act of pride which he feels does credit to his majesty.

After ordering his sandals to be untied because he is about to tread on holy ground, he draws attention to the captive Cassandra, and with unruffled effrontery asks his wife to extend welcome to her. Then, as he sets foot on the tapestries, he likens himself to the star of summer after the long winter's cold and proclaims his own perfection in these words: "... on that house shall coolness fall. Where the true man, the master walks his hall."[36] Therefore, to the end he is boundlessly ignorant of human nature and of himself. With arrogant authority he moves into the doomed house to fulfill the curse laid upon it.

In O'Neill's play, Ezra Mannon is not at all like his Greek prototype, Agamemnon. If Ezra's offenses earn for him the retribution that he receives, they are trifling when set beside those of Agamemnon. Ezra, according to Edwin Engel, "is simply the tired business man masquerading as a Civil War general and Christine is his dissatisfied and unhappy wife."[37] Although Christine's desire to be rid of him is comprehensible, he has done nothing to deserve the fate of murder.

Ezra, a pitiful, pleading figure, returns from the war, as Agamemnon did, seeking to love his wife and asking only that she love him. Far from lingering at Appomattox, returning home with a mistress, or killing his daughter, Ezra's only crime consists of possessing the characteristic Mannon ineptitude where love is concerned.

Ezra was raised in a Puritan atmosphere and explains his upbringing to Christine with these words:

> That's always been the Mannon's way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. How in hell people ever get such notions. That white meeting-house. It stuck in my mind, clean-scrubbed and whitewashed, a temple of death.[38]

Ezra had pride in himself and in his family which was a bit excessive. It did not allow room for mistakes. He was unwilling to forgive Marie Brantome for the disgrace that she brought upon the Mannons. She had appealed to Ezra for financial aid, but he refused it, and she died in destitution. In the eyes of Adam Brant, her son, Ezra was a murderer. Adam explains to Lavinia:

> She'd sunk her last shred of pride and written to your father asking for a loan. He never answered her. ...He could have saved her--and he deliberately let her die. He's as guilty of murder as anyone he ever sent to the rope when he was a judge.[39]

Finally, Ezra was unable to fulfill Christine's conception of romantic love. To a man of the Puritan faith, physical sex is a form of sin. Although he loved Christine deeply, he feared his wedding night; therefore, to mask his anxiety, he approached Christine with a brutality that frightened her. The mistake of their wedding night was never to be reconciled.

These are the crimes of which Ezra was guilty: Puritanical demands and limitation, pride in self and family, and unwitting sexual brutality. All of these had happened before the "Homecoming." Ezra has been seen only through the eyes of Christine, who loves him not, and Lavinia, who loves him too much. The Ezra Mannon who comes home from the war is totally different from any picture given of him. He is weary of death and war. He desires peace. Feebly he tries to explain to Christine his behavior in the past.

> ...There's always been some barrier between us--a wall hiding us from each other ... I made up my mind I'd do my work ... and leave you alone. That's why shipping wasn't enough--why I became judge and a mayor ... you'll find I've changed Christine. I'm sick of death! I want life! Maybe you could love me now. I've got to make you love me![40]

But it is too late. Their relations the night of the homecoming are merely a repetition of their wedding night. Again he appears to Christine and himself as a lustful beast. His hope for a new life is shattered. "...I had hoped my homecoming would mark a new beginning--new love between us! ...by god, I'm an old fool!"[41]

Ezra's conversion from the belief that life is death to the belief that life is love comes too late, and he is killed by the love he seeks to possess. His murder is the irony of his prophetic statement: "All victory ends in the defeat of death. But does defeat end in the victory of death?"[42] For Ezra Mannon it does.

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In the "Agamemnon" Aegisthus, more than any other character, personifies the curse upon the House of Atreus. As the son of Thyestes he has sworn to fulfill the curse laid upon the house by his father.

Previous to the play Atreus banished Aegisthus from the house; for years he lived in exile, feeding upon dreams of revenge. Consequently, when Agamemnon, son of Atreus, left home to fight in the Trojan war, Aegisthus took advantage of his chance for retribution. By playing upon the sympathies of Clytemnestra, he persuaded her to kill Agamemnon. With the guile of an expert criminal he was able to conceal his own reasons for the murder from Clytemnestra and justified it to her through Agamemnon's sacrifice of their daughter. Added to this, he pretended to love Clytemnestra, a fabrication necessary in

aiding him to claim a throne he felt to be his. He knew that he could never rule alone, but a marriage with Clytemnestra insured his position as king.

Aegisthus is a coward. He is likened in spirit to a woman by Orestes: "For he bears, I know, a woman's heart."[43] Yet it seems that he is even more cowardly than a woman, for he leaves the job of killing Agamemnon to Clytemnestra. He appears in the "Agamemnon" only after the deed has been done.

Like all cowards, Aegisthus cannot resist boasting of the deed once it is accomplished. He stands arrogantly before the chorus gloating over the triumph of justice and speaks of the servitude he expects from his subjects. "To entice him was the wife's work. I was known / By all men here, his old confessed blood foe./ Howbeit, with his possessions I will know/ How to be King. And who obeys me not shall be yoked hard."[44]

He would even draw arms and strike down the feebled men of the chorus if he were not restrained by Clytemnestra. But Aegisthus lives in fear of Orestes' return. His heart hears one word of joy, the news of Orestes' death. Even then he must be convinced and rushes into the palace ready to kill the messenger if his news be false. It is too late, however, for Orestes will reap his revenge upon Aegisthus.

It is indeed strange that Clytemnestra could have loved such a cowardly, tyrannical man; yet it was the fate of each of Atreus' sons to be inferior to his wife and the fate of Aegisthus to be inferior to him whom he supplanted.

In his drama O'Neill diverges somewhat from the pattern of Aeschylus. Adam Brant is unlike his prototype, Aegisthus, except in

one respect; he, too, is a coward. His relationship to the Mannon family is approximately the same as that of Aegisthus to the House of Atreus. Adam hates the Mannons because they would not accept his mother as one of them. He felt only hatred for his father, David Mannon, because of the way he treated Marie, the mother. Speaking of his father he says: "He was a coward--like all Mannons. ...He grew ashamed of my mother--and me ... and he ... hit my mother in the face."[45] Hating his father, Adam refused to forgive him; whereupon David Mannon went out in the barn and hanged himself. "The only decent thing he ever did,"[46] says Adam.

Following his father's suicide, Adam ran away to sea, leaving his mother alone. He says to Christine: "I forgot her until two years ago... I found her dying ... not knowing where to reach me, she'd sunk her last shred of pride and written to your father asking for a loan. He never answered her, and I came too late."[47]

Adam held Ezra responsible for the death of his mother and swore revenge upon the Mannons. "I swore on my mother's body I'd revenge her death on him."[48] What he managed to overlook, however, was his own part in his mother's death. He neglected her for years, forgot about her completely, and arrived at her side only when it was too late; therefore, his guilty conscience transferred the guilt to Ezra Mannon. He was unable to face the truth about himself and the verbal accusation he hurls at Lavinia is quite applicable to him: "You're a coward ... like all Mannons, when it comes to facing the truth themselves."[49]

Adam Brant's virtue is his ability to love. This ability he received from his mother. Although he is half Mannon, he is also half Brantome. In him are mixed all the traits of the two; he is a hybrid

of Puritan death and pagan love. Even though he resembles the male members of the Mannon family, his personality is far different. "He's such a darned romantic-looking cuss. Looks more like a gambler or a poet than a ship captain," says Peter, Lavinia's childhood acquaintance. Lavinia replies, "That's his trade--being romantic."[50] Accordingly, he fulfills Christine's romantic concept of love: "He's gentle and tender ... He's what I've longed for all these years ... - a lover."[51]

Aegisthus' love for Clytemnestra and Adam's love for Christine were both born of revenge. When Adam found out that Christine was Mrs. Ezra Mannon, he thought: "... by God, I'll take her away from him and that'll be part of my revenge! And out of that hatred my love came."[52] Now that they are lovers, they are forced to play the part that all lovers play: one of jealousy, suspicion, hiding, pretense, and longing for what they cannot have. Finally, they cannot play their parts any longer; so they plan to rid themselves of Ezra.

Adam is repulsed by the idea. He merely wishes Christine to run away with him, but the implication of public scandal will not allow it. Adam wants to get rid of Ezra in an honorable fashion and proposes the idea of a duel. This idea is rejected by Christine, who proposes the safe recourse of poison. "Poison," says Adam, "is a coward's trick!"[53] Nevertheless, he is persuaded.

Like Aegisthus he has only an indirect part in the crime. Although he procures the poison, he does not administer it. Instead, he waits on his boat, The Flying Trades, for Christine to come to him. He rebukes himself and finally he sees himself for what he is, "A coward hiding behind a woman's skirts."[54] His dreams and his illusions

shattered, his only alternative is to turn wholly to Christine. It is too late, however, for he is killed by another cowardly Mannon, Orin.

***

Orestes is the central character of the Oresteia. He is the heir to the horrible duty of vengeance which obligates him to set right one wrong by perpetrating another equally terrible wrong. It is his fate to fulfill the curse upon the House of Atreus. According to Herbert Smyth, the " ... very center of interest lies, to Aeschylus, not in the struggle in Orestes' soul but the impulsions to his resolve and the manner of its accomplishment ..."[55]

At the onset of the "Choephore," Orestes has returned to his native Argos after years of exile in Phocis, where he had been sent by his mother previous to her murder of Agamemnon. His purpose is to revenge Agamemnon's murder, and he is unfaltering in his resolve.

There are inducements to his purposed act. First and foremost is the charge laid upon him by Zeus through his mediator, Apollo. This charge is to requite blood for blood. If he fails to acknowledge his obligation, then the unseen wrath of Agamemnon has the power to inflict on Orestes the very same penalties that would have been visited on him had he himself been guilty of bloodshed. Thus Orestes stands in a pitiable state. Whether he slays his mother or not, the punishment is the same. Thus he appears at his father's tomb and utters this prayer: "Oh Zeus, grant me this day / My vengeance and be near me in the fray!"[56]

Upon his reunion with Electra, he outlines his plan of action. He will disguise himself; and, after gaining access to the palace, he will kill both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. He is careful to enlist the aid of both Electra and the Chorus. He then enters the palace to carry out his duty.

Orestes hesitates only once upon confronting his mother. When she reminds him that it was she who gave him life, he turns to his friend Pylades for aid and is reminded of the charge laid upon him by Apollo.

> Clytemnestra: Hold my son! My child, doest thou not fear
> To strike this breast? Hast thou not slumbered here,
> Thy gums draining the milk that I did give?
>
> Orestes: Pylades! What can I? Dare I let my mother live?
>
> Pylades: Where is God's voice from out the golden cloud
> At Pytho? Where the plighted troth we vowed?
> Count all the world thy foe, save god on high. . . . .
> . . . .
> Orestes: . . . . . . Most sinfully
> Thou slewest: nowhath sin her will of thee.[57]

After the deed is done, the passion that he has controlled up to this point bursts all bounds and mounts in tension until he is conscious that his reason is slipping; yet, he vehemently proclaims the justice of his cause. He states that he will go to the shrine of his champion, Apollo, in order to be freed from his misery; for his frenzied fancy now beholds the figures of the Furies.

It is common with Aeschylean critics to discover in the apparition of the Furies to Orestes a symbol of the torments of a guilty conscience; however, according to Herbert Smyth, the "overthrow of Orestes' reason and the subsequent vision of Avenging Spirits of his mother mark the acute consciousness of his unhappy state, produced by a deed of such frightful ... justice, rather than the agonies of a sin-stricken soul."[58]

Orestes knew that the result of matricide would be the hounding of his soul by his mother's avengers. The Furies are the embodiment of the moral law and of all living men. Orestes alone can see them.

"These are no fantasies. They are here; they are here/ The Hounds of my dead Mother, hot to kill./ You cannot see them. I alone can see./ I am hunted ... I shall never rest again."[59]

He then departs to the Delphic Oracle to seek Apollo's aid. In "The Eumenides," the central figure is no longer that of Orestes but rather the gods and the Furies. Orestes, beset on either hand by potencies greater than himself, becomes the battle ground of immortals. Although he had been the chief person in this trilogy, he now declines to a subordinate position in a drama of superhuman forces.

When Orestes appears at the shrine of Apollo, a change has been wrought. He now is in full possession of his faculties. The Furies are no longer figments of his imagination, but they are flesh and blood creatures visible to all.

In the first scene Orestes has only one speech and that is supplication to Apollo to defend him. "... Lord--not to forget!/ Thy strength in doing can be trusted well."[60] Orestes does not falter; he still believes and affirms that his act was sanctioned by the gods. Upon the command of Apollo he flees to the city of Athens, there to take refuge from the Furies and to appeal to Athena, daughter of Zeus, for protection. His speech to Athena is forthright and direct; he is now calm and collected:

> I struck dead my mother, Nought will I deny;
> So, for my sire beloved, death met death.
> And Apollo in these doings meriteth
> His portion, who foretold strange agonies
> To spur me if I left unsmitten these
> That slew him ... Take thou me, and judge if ill
> I wrought or righteously. I will be still
> And praise thy judgement, whatsoe'er betide.[61]

Athena, however, declares that it is beyond her province to judge any case of murder especially if the petitioner claims to be blameless; therefore, a trial is held to decide Orestes' guilt.

Even during the trial Orestes remains staunch in his convictions. His testimony to the jury is direct; he confesses the crime. "I slew her ... Aye. Denied it cannot be."[62] In answer to the question as to who his tempter was, he replies. "He who is with me now,"[63] that is, Apollo. Obviously the person to be judged of the crime is no longer Orestes, but Apollo, Zeus' spokesman.

At this point Orestes disappears as an active figure from the play. Upon his acquittal Orestes, overcome with joy, bids the court farewell and declares that his support and aid will always remain with Athena.

Orin Mannon plays a lesser part in O'Neill's trilogy than did his Greek prototype in the Oresteia. Orestes was fated to be the avenger of his father's murder because of the moral beliefs held by the Greek civilization; therefore, he assumed the proportions of a tragic hero. In the society of Puritan New England, however, revenge by the son for the murder of his father was not sanctioned by law. Thus O'Neill had to establish another premise whereby revenge was justified as a necessary action of the characters. This premise took the forms of narcissistic Mannon self-love and incest. Orin Mannon is the embodiment of both faults.

Following the same plot outline as the Oresteia, Orin does not make his appearance until the second play of the trilogy, "The Hunted." He has not returned from exile, however, but merely from the Civil War. Upon his return Ezra has already been murdered.

Far from mourning the death of his father, Orin quietly rejoices in it, feeling that at last he has his mother to himself. He says to her, "I'll tell you the truth, Mother! I won't pretend to you. I'm not sorry he's dead ... I love you! I do! ... And I'll never leave you ... You're my only girl! ... We'll get Vinnie to marry Peter and there will be just you and I."[64]

Orin has not counted, however, on his mother's new love. When he is confronted by Lavinia's accusations, he exclaims: "You say Brant is her lover! If that's true I'll hate her! I'll know she murdered Father then! I'll help you punish her."[65]

He cannot bear the thought that his mother could love someone else above him. Once Lavinia proves Christine's guilt, Orin remains in a murderous rage, his face distorted with jealous fury, until he can kill Adam. Having done so, he stoops over the body and stares into Brant's face to observe the resemblance between Adam and Ezra. He says to Lavinia: "Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed come back and change to Father's face and finally became my own? He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide!"[66]

According to Edwin Engel:

> O'Neill was exploiting here Freud's Oedipus complex, according to which the son, in his guilty wish to destroy the father that he might gain the mother, identified himself with the father. Seeing his new rival accomplishing what he himself has always wished to achieve--the removal of the father, possession of the mother--he once again sees his own image in the rival's face.[67]

There was no delay in Orin's murder of Adam after Lavinia proved her mother's infidelity, just as Orestes unhesitantly killed Aegisthus. What dark wishes were present in Orestes' unconscious mind can be surmised if the Freudian premises are accepted; but, on the surface

the Greek hero savagely killed his cousin and fulfilled his duty to Agamemnon by removing the man who usurped his kingdom.

What the Freudian psychologist might detect in Orestes' disapproval of Clytemnestra's affair with Aegisthus, O'Neill makes perfectly explicit in his play. Still, Orin is able to understand Adam's attraction to Christine. He says to Lavinia: "If I had been he I would have done what he did! I would have loved her as he loved her--and killed father--for her sake!"[68]

Orin confesses to his mother his part in the murder of Adam Brant. He has vainly hoped that now she will be his alone. He has not realized how deeply she felt about Adam, and he desperately pleads for her forgiveness; however, the act has been done; there is no forgiveness, and Christine kills herself. Too late, Orin realizes his mistake, and he says to Lavinia in a blind rage: "Why didn't I let her believe burglars killed him? She wouldn't have hated me then! She would have forgotten him! She would have turned to me! I murdered her!"[69]

Guilty, sick at heart, and near the brink of insanity, Orin lets Lavinia persuade him to take a trip to the South Sea Isles, a place he longed to go with his mother. While there, a strange thing takes place. Orin assumes the physical characteristics and the beliefs of his father. Lavinia also becomes like her mother, and the incest motive is made complete. He says to Lavinia: "Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother? That's the evil destiny out of the past I haven't dared predict! I'm the Mannon you're chained to!"[70]

Orin hates Lavinia as much as he desires her; she has become to his tormented mind what the Furies were to Orestes, a constant reminder of guilt made manifest; therefore, he wants to become her lover in

order to force her to share his guilt. He says to her after spurning his childhood sweetheart:

> I love you Lavinia now with all the guilt in me--the guilt we share! Perpaps I love you too much. Vinnie! ... How else can I make sure you won't leave me? You would never dare leave me--then! You would feel as guilty then as I do! You would be damned as I am!"[71]

Although Lavinia's feeling of love for her father had been rather excessive in nature, her love for Orin does not take an abnormal course.

Repulsed by Orin's rantings, Lavinia cries that he is too vile to live. She has rejected him as Christine rejected Ezra. Harshly he says to her:

> You want to drive me to suicide ... now you are Mother. She is speaking through you ... yes, it's the way to peace ... Mother ... I'll get on my knees and ask your forgiveness ... You're calling me! You're waiting to take me home![72]

Eventually Orin commits suicide, hoping to find rest and peace in his mother's forgiveness. Herein O'Neill corrected what he felt to be a flaw in Aeschylus' play. He did not let his Orestes find peace by arbitrary means and outside forces.

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Only Electra appears in the "Choephore," the second play of Aeschylus' trilogy. Her importance in furthering the action of the play is secondary; Orestes and the Chorus are more important; however, Electra is worthy of recognition because her character undergoes a complete change during the course of the play.

At the outset of the play, Electra is gentle and hesitant in nature. Although she desires revenge for her father's murder, she is unable to take any concrete measures herself; but by the end of the

play she has turned into a woman as savage and relentless in her purpose as her mother Clytemnestra.

The "Choephoroe" takes place several years after the murder of Agamemnon; nevertheless, Electra still wears mourning clothes. She is on her way to her father's tomb to offer libations from Clytemnestra to her father's spirit. Electra is accompanied by a chorus of captive Trojan women. She struggles to form a fitting prayer to accompany the libations which she, the true mourner, has been commanded to make by her mother. Electra states her uncertainty as to whether to make these offerings as from a loving wife, which she feels to be impious, or whether to ask requital from her father for his death, or simply to turn away. Instead, she appeals to the chorus for instructions.

> ... give your counsel ...
> ... shall I say due gifts I bear
> From a loving mistress ...?
> I dare not ...
> Or shall I pray him ...
> To send ...
> Requital due ...?
> Or fling the cup, and fly and look no more? ...
> Speak, if thou knowest of wiser words than these.[73]

It does not occur to her, until the chorus women suggest it, to pray for revenge. Even then she is reluctant to comply, and the thought of her mother's wickedness prompts her to pray for greater purity of heart, Orestes' safe return home, and that an avenger may appear. "O Father .../ Guide thou Orestes homeward/ ... give me a heart to understand .../ ... and let there rise / Against them thine Avenger./[74]

The recognition scene between Electra and Orestes demonstrates a wide range of emotions in Electra. Her feelings are neither childish nor uninteresting. In offering her libations at the tomb, Electra, with her absent brother already in her thoughts, sees a lock of hair.

Immediately she jumps to the conclusion that it is Orestes'. She cannot, however, bring herself to believe it. Desirous of confirmation, she seeks the affirmation of the chorus, who finally concedes the possibility of Orestes' presence. She welcomes the support of the chorus, but is instantly assailed by doubts. Perhaps the lock of hair is not from Orestes at all, but left by an enemy. As she struggles to fight down this idea, she sees footprints. Her joy once again mingles with anxiety, and at this point Orestes confronts his sister. At once Electra undergoes a transition from unbounded joy to reserve and suspicion. She is not convinced that it is Orestes until he shows her a garment that she wove for him many years before. Face to face with the brother on whom she has lavished in his absence the full devotion of her naturally loving nature, Electra forgets everything except the happiness of the moment.

> O best beloved, O dreamed of long ago,
> Seed of deliverance washed with tears as rain,
> By thine own valor thou shalt build again
> Our father's House! O lightener of mine eyes,
> Four places in my heart, four sanctities,
> Are thine, My father in thy face and mine
> Yet living: thine the love that might have been
> My mother's--whom I hate most righteously
> And my poor sister, fiercely doomed to die,
> And thou my faithful brother, who alone
> Hast cared for me . . . . O Victory, be our own
> This day, with Justice who doth hold us fast,
> And Zeus most high, who saveth at the last![75]

In this speech are contained all of Electra's feelings. Herein she speaks of her love for her brother, sister, and father, her hatred for her mother, her hope that the house of Atreus will be freed of its corrupt powers, and that with the aid of Zeus, Justice will be done.

In the short interval that follows, Electra assumes great proportions as a character. Upon learning that Orestes has been commanded by

Zeus to avenge their father's murder, Electra is transformed. The girl who shortly before could hardly bring herself to pray for retribution, now becomes as savage and relentless as her mother in her endeavor to help Orestes. The curse of the House of Atreus becomes manifest in her.

Electra is not really a weak character. During the long prayer of invocation to Agamemnon's spirit, she flagellates herself into a strong and savage fury. Again and again she cries for revenge and heavenly blessing upon their deed. "Zeus of the orphan, when / Wilt lift thy hand among men?/ I ask for right after much wrong./"[76] "O great King hear us. Awake thee to the son. Be with us against thy foe!"[77] "O Zeus, bless thou the murder to be this day."[78]

Shortly after this, Electra disappears from the play. She has served her purpose. She has lessened all sympathy felt for Clytemnestra, thereby preparing the way for the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Although she takes no active part in the murders, she has been the chief means of its instigation. She fans the flame into a consuming fire. Electra is caught in the meshes of the family curse. She decides to break the bonds of sin and restore peace to her family; however, revenge is an ugly, brutal business that produces only tragic results.

The character who parallels Electra in Mourning Becomes Electra is Lavinia rather than Orin (Orestes). In O'Neill's "Notes from a Fragmentary Diary," he wrote:

> Greek plot idea--give modern Electra figure in play a tragic ending worthy of her character. In Greek story she peters out into undramatic married banality. Such a character contained too much tragic fate within her soul to permit this--why should the Furies have let Electra escape unpunished?[79]

Accordingly, Mourning Becomes Electra is the story of Lavinia's crime and her punishment.

Lavinia struggles to realize and to escape from a self-image which is only a reflection of her father. She was conceived in hatred, and she is instinctively aware of it. When Christine tells her the truth, Lavinia replies: "So I was born of your disgust. I've always guessed that, Mother ... I used to come to you--with love--but you would always push me away."[80]

As a result of being denied her mother's love, she transfers all her affections to her father. Consequently, she copies her father's mannerisms and loves him with an unhealthy intensity. Her love also includes Orin, since he resembles his father. In every way possible she tries to replace Christine as a wife and mother.

Interestingly enough, Lavinia is as attracted to Adam Brant as her mother is. When Lavinia discovers the relationship between her mother and Adam, she becomes jealous of Christine. She confronts her mother with the news that she will tell her father everything unless she gives up Adam.

When Ezra returns from the war, Lavinia hovers about him solicitously. "Don't let anything worry you, father," she says, "I'll take care of you."[81] Ezra, however, is too interested in regaining Christine's love to pay any attention to Lavinia. As Christine and Ezra enter the house, Lavinia says to Christine's retreating figure: "I hate you! You steal even Father's love from me again! You stole all love from me when I was born."[82]

Fear for her father makes her uneasy and unable to sleep; so she goes to Ezra and Christine's bedroom just in time to witness Ezra's

death. Suspicious of Christine she refuses to believe the story of a heart attack and denounces Christine: "You murdered him ... I suppose you think you'll be free to marry Adam now! But you won't! Not while I'm alive! I'll make you pay for your crime. I'll find a way to punish you!"[83]

The figure of Lavinia, having grown in significance and stature during "Homecoming," assumes the proportions of a goddess of vengeance in "The Hunted." She plans revenge because she is driven not only by the Mannon's sense of justice and her love for her father but also by her frustrated love for Adam Brant and her hatred and jealousy for her mother. Since Christine has stolen the love of both men from Lavinia, the fitting retaliation for Lavinia is not to take her mother's life but to take from her the love which is her life. In a scene reminiscent of the one at Agamemnon's tomb, Lavinia tells Orin of Christine's infidelity in the presence of Ezra's body lying-in-state. By fanning Orin's jealousy of Brant to the point of frenzy, Lavinia goads him into murdering the sea captain. The crime drives Orin over the brink of sanity. Lavinia had explained to Orin previous to the murder that if she and he did not take measures into their own hands in the name of justice they would be punished by damning memories all their lives. "you and I, who are innocent, would suffer a worse punishment than the guilty--for we'd have to live on."[84] Orin's freedom, however, takes the form of loving his mother. When she commits suicide, he is no longer free but is wracked by guilt. As Orin raves insanely, Lavinia insists that they have done the right thing: "He paid the penalty for his crime. You know it was justice. It was the only way true justice

could be done."[85] Finally, Lavinia sooths Orin with these words: "Bosh! You have me, haven't you? I love you. I'll help you forget."[86] These words are prophetic of the horrors to come.

Up to this point Lavinia has resembled the character of Electra found in the latter half of the "Choroephore," the Electra that resembles Clytemnestra. She has coldly planned the revenge of her father's murder, and though her plan did not include the death of Christine, she nevertheless feels it to be a part of the justice that her father demanded. She has been in full charge of the situation and confident of her innocence. With Christine's suicide, the spirit of vindictiveness and death in the Mannon house seems to be temporarily satisfied, and Lavinia can come to life.

At this point in the trilogy, she begins to assume the Electra character at the beginning of the "Chorosphore," the kind, loving gentle-natured Electra who mirrors the softer aspects of Clytemnestra's character. This change results in Lavinia's becoming the image of her mother in both looks and manner. Confident that the past is dead, she returns with Orin to the Mannon House after a journey to the South Sea Islands. By virtue of the symbolism set up previously, however, she and Orin have actually returned from the freedom and peace of the islands to the hatred and death of the House.

During their trip Lavinia has become the image of her mother. O'Neill's description reads: "She seems a mature woman, sure of her feminine attractiveness. Her ... hair is arranged as her mother's had been. The movements of her body now have the feminine grace her mother's possessed."[87] Now, at perhaps her guiltiest, she has lost her

sense of sin and death; and while she assumes the characteristics of the mother, Orin takes on those of the father.

Jealous and suspicious, he instinctively grasps the reason behind the deaths of Adam and Christine. He says to Lavinia: "You know damned well that behind all your pretense about Mother's murder being an act of justice was your jealous hatred. You wanted Brant for yourself."[88]

Fiercely she denies it. "It's a lie; I hated him; will you never lose your stupid guilty conscience. Don't you see how you torture me? You're becoming my guilty conscience, too!"[89]

Finally, the transference is complete for Orin. He wishes to become Lavinia's lover in order to force her to share his guilt. Lavinia, both fascinated and repelled, shouts her hatred at him: "I hate you! I wish you were dead! You're too vile to live! You'd kill yourself if you weren't such a coward."[90] With these words Lavinia has committed her last murder. Orin shoots himself, and Lavinia's last illusion of her innocence begins to crumble. The Puritanical conscience, from which she had found release in identification with her mother, now reasserts itself. She shouts defiantly at the portraits of her ancestors: "I'm mother's daughter--not one of you! I'll live in spite of you ..."[91] but even as she does so, the Mannon pride claims its own. The once feminine Lavinia now squares her shoulders in the manner copied from her father, and she marches stiffly from the room.

Desperately, Lavinia fights for love and life. She begs her childhood sweetheart, Peter, to marry her. Frantically she pleads with him: "Want me! Want me so much you'd murder anyone to have me. I did that--

for you! Take me in this house of the dead and love me! Our love will drive the dead away. It will shame them back into death. Want me. Take me, Adam."[92]

With these words that could easily have been spoken by her mother, and the tragic slip of the tongue, "take me, Adam," she realizes that she cannot escape her past. The dead will always be between her and happiness; their justice must be performed. All the dead Mannons have become Lavinia's Furies. She must pay for their lives with her own, not be the easy expiation of actual death but by returning to death which is life without love, the Mannon fate. She sends Peter away; then she tells Seth to nail up the shutters, explaining:

> I'm bound here with the Mannon dead ... I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself. Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or poison. I'll live alone with the dead and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born![93]

Thus, when Lavinia pivots on her heel and marches into the house, the conflict between love and pride, life and death is resolved; only pride and death remain. The trap of self has finally and with finality claimed its prey. The House of Mannon has been restored to order.

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The minor characters in the Oresteia all represent Aeschylus' skillful usage of the third actor, a practice which had been developed approximately ten years previous to the writing of his trilogy. For example, in the "Agamemnon" there are three minor characters: the Watchman, the Herald, and Cassandra. All three are used by Aeschylus to create atmosphere and to contribute to the mood. The Watchman

represents the plain Argive citizen whose sufferings are more than once contrasted with the misdeed of their rulers. He provides a vivid impression of their weariness of waiting. With his obscure remark, " ... these walls .../ If walls had speech, what tales were their's to tell,"[94] starts a rhythm of apprehension which increases throughout the play.

The Herald is not so natural a character as the Watchman since he has a more important and dignified station in life. He increases expectation by ushering in Agamemnon in a kingly way and gives a detailed account of the war. His purpose is to throw light, from an unexpected quarter, on what Agamemnon has done; and it is more revealing because it is casual.

Cassandra, the strange prophetess, is the most important of the minor characters. She is an insult to Clytemnestra because she is Agamemnon's mistress. Her presence throws some illumination upon Agamemnon, but her chief function is to accentuate at the moment of crisis the ethical and emotional undertones of the drama. Because of her gift, she is able to tell of all the horrors of the House of Atreus--past, present, and future. Through Cassandra, time and action are suspended or rather are made to live in her dazzlingly lyrical speech.

The "Choephore" contains two minor characters, Pylades and the Nurse. Pylades plays a very obscure part in the play; yet his one speech is given at the climax of the play. His function is to strengthen and reaffirm Orestes' resolve to kill his mother. He is the voice through which Zeus' command is carried out: "Count all the world thy foe, save God on high."[95] His words indicate the moral issue which "The Eumenides" resolves.

The Nurse serves an unexpected purpose in the "Choephore" because she is the means by which Aegisthus is summoned and sent to his death; yet this is accomplished without her knowledge. The Nurse is more than an amplification of the plot, for her genuine emotions are a welcomed contrast in the midst of characters who are devoid of natural affections. She is the perfect foil, a scale by which the rest of the action and characters can be measured. In her concern for Orestes is contrasted the baby she loved and cared for and the tragic man whom circumstances have made.

The minor characters of "The Eumenides" are the Priestess, Apollo, and Athena. Although Apollo and Athena become focal points of the whole trilogy, they cannot be considered as major characters, if even characters at all. They are merely the embodiment of the divine law of Zeus and are fixed in their beliefs at the outset of the play. They are the foils for the Furies, and they assume stature only in their relationship to the Furies. The position of honor which Zeus holds at the beginning of the play is reaffirmed and strengthened by Apollo and Athena.

The Priestess of the Delphic shrine establishes the mood of the play, the horror and chaos, which is maintained until the divine wisdom of Zeus is reaffirmed. Her prayer reveals the condition of perfection that should exist but does not, that perfection being marred by the vision of the Furies whom she describes in all their horror. Ultimately she prepares the way for the struggle which is to climax the trilogy.

The Choruses must be considered. They are each different and maintain various attitudes toward the theme of the play.

All three choruses, however, serve one chief purpose: to supply information which is necessary. They are Aeschylus' means of exposition.

The Chorus in the "Agamemnon" consists of the old men of the town known as the Argive Elders. They foretell that something is rotten in the state of Argos. They hint of the reversal of Agamemnon's fortunes, though they never mention it morally.

The chorus in the "Choephoroe" is composed, according to Gilbert Murray, of "Captive maidens of Troy who are held in bondage by the House of Atreus."[96] This chorus, in contrast to the Argive Elders, lends its full moral support to Orestes by sharing and strengthening his purpose.

The Chorus in "The Eumenides" consists of the Furies who are transformed by Athena from the Erinys (the Wrathful Ones) to the Eumenides (the Gentle Ones). They represent the old law of justice which is transformed from its former state of wrathful revenge to the gentle wisdom of forgiveness. They are the means by which the theme is expressed and is resolved: "The law that is Fate and the Father the All-Comprehending/ Are here met together as one."[97]

The most important of the minor characters in Mourning Becomes Electra are Hazel and Peter Niles, who are O'Neill's counterparts to Pylades and Hermoine. The connection is very slight, since Hermoine is not even represented in Aeschylus' trilogy, and Peter's function is entirely different from that of Pylades.

Peter and Hazel are employed as a complete contrast to Orin and Lavinia. They represent the normal healthy aspect of love that both Lavinia and Orin vainly seek to know. Peter and Hazel are almost characterless since they do not change one iota during the course of

the trilogy. According to O'Neill in his "Notes," they are "untroubled, contented, good, a sweet, constant unselfconscious, untempted virtue amid which evil passion works."[98]

This 'evil passion' is not recognized by either of them until the end of the trilogy, when circumstances force this recognition. Still they do not change; they merely take refuge in the solace of religious dogma. Hazel says piously to Lavinia: "I know you're suffering Vinnie-- and God will forgive you."[99]

Peter, however, expresses to Lavinia the other view of God's justice when he exclaims: "...you are bad at heart ... God, I hope you'll be punished."[100]

The townspeople of the trilogy represent O'Neill's modern conception of a chorus. They are a fixed device used at the beginning of each of the three plays. They are a means of exposition, but they merely view the events in terms of superficiality and without any understanding. They, too, are almost characterless, being confined to external expression.

The final character, Seth Blackwell, serves as a modern counterpart to the trusty old servant and confidant of the Greek plays. It is he who starts the action in the first act of the "Homecoming" by revealing to Lavinia the identity of Adam Brant. In "The Haunted," he prepares the way for Lavinia's self-inflicted justice by commenting upon the "evil spirit" that resides in the House of Mannon.

Seth does not appear in "The Hunted," but he is replaced by the Chantyman who appears in the third act of that play. The Chantyman provides the same comic relief as the drunken Porter in Macbeth. He is the only character in the trilogy who is not involved in some

way with the Mannons and further heightens the aspects, freedom, and escape which are the motifs of this portion of the drama.

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Both Aeschylus and O'Neill expanded and developed the theater of their respective periods by means of their own creative genius; however, only those devices employed by Aeschylus in the Oresteia that were used again by O'Neill in Mourning Becomes Electra will be analyzed. It should be noted that many of the theatrical artifices used by Aeschylus were incorporated by O'Neill into his trilogy as having symbolic significance.

The theater known to Aeschylus consisted of three parts--the auditorium, the orchestra, and the stage building or skene. The heart of his theater was the orchestra or dancing area upon which the chorus was stationed throughout the action of the play. Beside the altar in this orchestra stood the sacrificial table upon which the single actor mounted. The orchestra was placed at the bottom of a slope and the spectators stood or sat on the higher ground. On the farther side rose the stage building or skene.

The art of beginning scene painting has been ascribed to both Sophocles and Aeschylus. Whichever is correct, it is clear from the fact of its being attributed to both poets that it must have been introduced at that particular period when both were exhibiting upon the stage. The most probable date is some period not very long before the production of the Oresteia and subsequent to the production of the four early plays of Aeschylus. By the middle of the fifth century, B.C., then, it may be assumed that the use of painted scenery was fully established.[101]

The Oresteia, the last dramatic production of Aeschylus, 458, B.C., shows a great change. Instead of a single setting or locale, several are used. In the first two tragedies, "Agamemnon," and "Choephoroe," the scene is laid in front of the palace of Agamemnon at Argos. In the third tragedy, "The Eumenides," there are two scenes, the temple of Apollo at Delphi and the Temple of Athena at Athens.

According to Vetruvius, the Roman architect who wrote about the plan and scenery of the Greek theater, "The main features of a tragic scene were columns, pediments, statues, and signs of regal magnificance."[102]

The question as to the number and the type of entrances leading upon the stage is of some importance in connection with the Greek manner of staging. It is generally surmised that there must have been three doors in the wall of the stage building and two doors at the sides, one leading from each wing. The central door was generally reserved for the entrances and exits of the principal characters. The minor actors coming from the neighborhood or from a distance had to enter the stage from the side doors.

It is supposed that in the Athenian theater the only side entrances were those leading into the orchestra. The actors who entered and departed other than through the scene-building doors supposedly made entrances and exits at the sides of the orchestra in front of the skene or stage building. Such is the case in "The Eumenides," where the actors and the chorus leave together in a procession at the end of the play. In the "Agamemnon," several of the actors arrive in chariots followed by a retinue of soldiers. On these occasions, it can hardly be doubted that the actors entered and departed through the side entrances.

Scene changing was quite simple in execution. In "The Eumenides," the earlier part of the action takes place in front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, the latter part before the temple of Athena in Athens. According to Haigh, "All that was necessary to change the scene was to change the statue in front of the temple. The background remained the same during both portions of the play."[103]

One of the unusual means of changing the scene was the use of the eccyclema. This was a small wooden platform upon which was arranged a group of figures, representing in a sort of tableau the deed or occurrence that had just taken place inside the building. The sudden spectacle of the back door opening to reveal the murderer standing beside his victim's body with the instruments of death in his hands might be presented as a very impressive tableau.

The eccyclema was twice used in the Oresteia. In the "Agamemnon," after the murder has been committed, Clytemnestra is shown standing over the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. In the "Choephoroe," there is a parallel scene. Orestes is brought into view standing beside the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

In addition to scenic inventions, Aeschylus helped to stabilize the costumes of the tragic actors. The garments worn were the same as ordinary Greek dress, but their style and color were more magnificent. They consisted of an under-garment or tunic and an over-garment or mantle. The tunic was brilliantly varigated in color. The tunic of the male hung down to the feet, but the tunic of the female swept the floor. Queens (like Clytemnestra) wore tunics of purple. The mantles worn were gorgeous in color, being saffron, gold, or purple. Queens wore a white mantle trimmed with purple. These were the colors worn

under ordinary circumstances, but if a character were in mourning (like Electra), the color used was black.

Slight additions helped to depict different types.

> Gods and goddesses always appeared with the particular weapon or article of dress with which their names were associated. Apollo carried a bow, and Athena wore the aegis. Kings (like Agamemnon) were distinguished by crowns. Warriors were equipped with complete armour, and occasionally had a short cloak of scarlet or purple wrapped around the hand and elbow for protection. Old men (The Argive Elders) usually carried a staff in their hands, and crowns of olive or laurel were worn by messengers who brought good tidings.[104]

The costumes of the tragic chorus were usually the ordinary Greek dress, consisting of a tunic and mantle. Coloring was more subdued than that of the principles. The chorus of women in the "Choephoroe" who came to offer libations at Agamemnon's tomb were dressed in black. Perhaps no tragic chorus ever caused as great a sensation as the chorus of the Furies in "The Eumenides." Their costumes were designed by Aeschylus himself and is said to have caused great panic and terror among the spectators. The Furies rush onto the stage dressed in black, with distorted features, rheumy eyes, and snakes entwined in their hair.

The most outstanding feature of the costumes was the mask. Aeschylus is given credit for being the first to employ painted masks and to portray features of a dreadful and awe-inspiring nature. Though not the innovator with the mask, he was the first to give it distinct character. Tragic masks were depicted in bold and striking lines. The expression was often gloomy and fierce. Usually masks denoted the general types, such as the brutal tyrant (like Aegisthus), the suffering maiden (like Electra), etc. By this convention a person was easily identified upon his entrance.[105]

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Three great symbols were employed to unite the plays of the Oresteia. These symbols are light, law, and earth. They are extended and given meaning by the usage of the minor symbols of the eagle, the net, the axe, riches, the snake, and the seed.

Light is the chief symbol. It is announced at the opening in the watchman's sighting of the beacon that tells of the fall of Troy. This light, however, proves deceptive when the flashing triumph of Agamemnon's return is darkened by his murder; furthermore, the light is quenched during Orestes' exile and shrowded even in his revenge. The light is awakened at Delphi in the figure of the bright Apollo and emerges radiant at the end when the dark Furies are changed into the figures of light and are guided to their new shrine in Athens with torches.

A good understanding of the light symbol is provided by John H. Finley, Jr.

> The light is associated with creativity, the male sex, and the Olympians. When the light fails in the first play, it is because Agamemnon's heroic and military greatness and the brilliance of his wealth do not coincide with justice, hence are a delusive light. His creativity did not reveal the Olympian creativity ... Only as Agamemnon dies and partly lives again in the purgatorial sufferings of Orestes, is the Olympian strain in his heroism freed of disfigurement. The Olympian creativity then becomes the Olympian justice, and the male will to achievement ends its quarrel with female continuity and process.[106]

The symbols of law and earth concern the same change. Agamemnon is originally the eagle who avenges the despoiling of its nest; he is the agent of Zeus' retribution which destroys injustice; yet the very choruses which thus describe him show him also in an opposite role as the eagle who kills the innocent hare and as the conqueror who, through war, sends back ashes in place of men. It follows that he himself

shall fall victim to such a stroke as that which he dealt Troy and that the net which he threw about Troy shall become the fatal robe with which Clytemnestra entraps him. He is executed by the law of half-justice which he dealt out, and this imperfect law descends to Clytemnestra and Orestes until it is made perfect by the judgment of Athena in the Areopagus.

The figures of earth and seed express atonement for the imperfect. This is given further meaning by John H. Finley, Jr.

> Orestes and Electra cry to their father for the reflowering of the ancient seed. Their revenge first seems to them the promised flowering, but when Clytemnestra is dead and the Furies pursue Orestes, the concepts of seed and earth take on a deeper meaning than he had grasped. He himself becomes an atonement for the family's violation of natural sanctities, and being afflicted by spirits of earth and night, he enters darkness.[107]

Apollo had previously threatened Orestes with corrupting diseases, a mark of nature out of joint, if he failed to avenge his father; now his entrance into darkness is the promise of reborn health. When the Furies, in the end, yield to Athena, Orestes' salvation is the flowering of the earth in a new innocence; and the blessings which the Furies, changed at last to the Eumenides, pour out on Athena express the fruitful union of earth with light. Aeschylus, then, uses the symbolistic pageantry of nature to underlie and strengthen the outer conflict of the relationship of God to man.

Eugene O'Neill himself was greatly indebted to the Athenian theater for many of the devices he employed in Mourning Becomes Electra. Several forms of procedure are used throughout. The main setting is the Mannon house, which is of that Greek revival architecture popular in early New England. According to O'Neill's description: "At the

front is a driveway which leads up to the house from the two entrances on the street."[108]

This is immediately reminiscent of the Greek orchestra area. O'Neill continues his description with the following: "Behind the driveway the white Grecian temple portico with its six tall columns extend across the stage."[109] This pillared portico, the adjoining walls, and the broad massive central door all correspond to the Greek palace front used as Athenian scenery.

In accordance with Athenian staging, the major characters of O'Neill's play enter and exit through this main doorway; the minor characters arrive from the driveway to the right and left. The beginning of each of the three main parts of the trilogy employs the use of the quasi-chorus of townspeople who come to spy on the exclusive and elusive Mannons, and they are always stationed in the driveway (orchestra) area.

Two other devices are worthy of brief consideration. Lavinia makes her first appearance dressed in black. This is a correlation to the first entrance of Electra in the "Choephoroe." Her dress also serves to heighten the meaning of the title given to the trilogy, Mourning Becomes Electra. Its derivation is from the following: "mourning" being the participle form of the infinitive "to mourn," "becomes" being used in its old sense of "befits," and "Electra" establishing the relationship to Oresteia. Hence, the title means that it is Electra's (Lavinia's) destiny to mourn, and her attire is an outward sign of this fate.

The final procedure worthy of notice is the correspondence between the scene at Agamemnon's tomb in the "Choephoroe" and the third act of

"The Hunted." While Orestes and Electra were stationed at their father's tomb, Orin and Lavinia are in the Mannon House (which has previously been referred to by Christine as a tomb) in Ezra's library, where his body is laid out on a bier covered with black drapes. The parallel between the two plays is emphasized in this scene, since Orin and Lavinia are plotting retribution for their father's murder and invoking from the spirit of the dead man aid and sanction for the deeds about to be committed just as Orestes and Electra had done.

The physical aspects of O'Neill's work are rich in symbolism. The two conflicting forces in Mourning Becomes Electra are life and death. Each seeks to counteract the other and claim the Mannons for its own. The two forces are represented in the trilogy through various means.

The death force is represented by the Mannon House, which was built upon the outraged pride and Puritanism of Abe Mannon. Christine Mannon describes it in these words: "... it appears more like a sepulchre. The 'whited' one of the Bible-pagan temple front stuck on like a mask on Puritan grey ugliness."[110]

The Mannon House underscores the tragic flaw of its occupants. It represents the Mannon self: the pride system and the Puritanical tenet that life is death. The House with all its corrupted beliefs leads inevitable to death for all the Mannon line. For them, pride is the source of death; and love is the source of life. Existence for the Mannons is a life-in-death from which love, represented by Marie Brantome, has been shut out.

This living death is reflected in the faces of the family which are "life-like death masks."[111] O'Neill's approximation of the Greek

mask is further clarified in his "Notes." He explains, "What I want from this mask concept is a visual symbol of the separateness, the fated isolation of this family, the mask of their fate that makes them dramatically distinct from the rest of the world."[112] This mask concept was carried out through the use of make-up rather than by actual masks.

In their longing to escape the ugly reality of their actual lives, the Mannons yearn for release in love untainted by pride and sin. O'Neill suggested this longing with three principal symbols--the fused mother images, the South Sea Islands, and the sea chanty, Shenandoah.

The principal female characters are connected together by their physical resemblance to one another. This can be noted in O'Neill's description of the characters. First to be considered is Christine Mannon:

> ... a tall striking-looking woman ... She has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with flowing animal grace. She wears a green dress which brings out the peculiar color of her thick curly hair, partly copper brown, partly a bronze gold .. One is struck at once by the strange impression her face gives in repose of being not living flesh but a wonderfully life-like pale mask, in which only the deepset eyes, of a dark violet blue, are alive. Her black eyebrows meet in a line above her nose. Her chin is heavy, her mouth large and sensual ...[113]

The above description is similar to the one given of Lavinia.

> One is immediately struck by her facial resemblance to her mother. She has the same peculiar shade of copper gold hair, the same pallor and dark violet eyes, the black eyebrows meeting in a straight line above her nose, the same sensual mouth, the same heavy jaw. Above all, one is struck by the same strange, life-like mask impression her face gives in repose.[114]

Thus Lavinia is identified with her mother, Christine; and both are the image of Marie Brantome. Adam Brant falls in love with Christine because he associates her with his mother, Marie. For the

same reason, he is attracted to Lavinia, to whom he says:

> You're so like your mother in some ways. Your face is the dead image of hers. And look at your hair. You won't find hair like yours and hers again in a month of Sundays. I only know of one other woman who had it. You'll think it strange when I tell you. It was my mother ... Yes, she had beautiful hair like your mother's that hung down to her knees, and big, deep, sad eyes that were blue as the Caribbean Sea![115]

Ezra Mannon upon returning from the war is similarly attracted to his wife, Christine: "You're beautiful. You look more beautiful than ever ...your hair is the same--strange beautiful hair ..."[116] In the same manner, Orin says to his mother: "And do you remember how you used to let me brush your hair? ... You've still got the same beautiful hair."[117] Thus by a visual symbol, the copper-gold hair, all the women are linked together.

The second symbol, the South Sea Islands, expresses the fulfillment of Mannon's longing for love and peace. The South Sea Islands represent release, peace, security, beauty, freedom of conscience, sinlessness, for the Mannons, and a longing, according to Doris Falk, "... for the primitive--and mother symbol--yearning for pre-natal, non-competitive freedom from fear."[118]

> Christine says to Brant: I remember your admiration for the naked native women. You said they had found the secret of happiness because they had never heard that love can be sin.
>
> Adam Brant: (surprised--sizing her up, puzzledly replies) So you remember that, do you? (Then romantically) Aye! And they live in as near the Garden of Paradise before sin was discovered as you'll find on this earth! Unless you've seen it, you can't picture the green beauty of their land set in the sea. The clouds like snow on the mountain tops, the sun drowsing in your blood, and always the surf on the barrier reef singing a croon in your ear like a lullaby! The Blessed Isles, I'd call them! You can forget there all men's dirty dreams of greed and power![119]

Adam's wistful revelation is followed by Ezra's hopeful suggestion to Christine that they "... leave the children and go off on a voyage together--to the other side of the world--find some island...."[120]

Orin's wish follows the same pattern. He tells Christine of the wonderful dreams that he has had about her. Then he asks:

> Have you ever read a book called Typee--about the South Sea Islands?
>
> Christine: Islands. Where there is peace?
>
> Orin: Someone loaned me the book. I read it and reread it until finally those Islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security. I used to dream that I was there. There was no one there but you and me. And yet I never saw you, that's the funny part. I only felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same color as your eyes. The warm sand was your skin. The whole island was you. (He smiles with a dreamy tenderness) A strange notion, wasn't it? But you needn't be provoked at being an island because this was the most beautiful island in the world--as beautiful as you, Mother![121]

When Orin decides to kill himself, he declares, "It's the way to peace--to find her again--my lost island--Death is an Island of Peace, too. Mother will be waiting for me there--"[122]

He escapes for death-in-life, from the "tomb" which Abe Mannon had built, to the death-birth-peace, to the womb.

Christine and Lavinia also yearned to escape, but they were prevented. The former plotted with Adam to sail to the Blessed Islands where they would be happy. And Lavinia actually realized her wish, voyaging there with Orin. To Lavinia, the Islands were Paradise:

> I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful--a good spirit--of love--coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world--the warm earth in the moonlight--the trade wind in the palms--the surf on the sand--the natives dancing naked and innocent--without knowledge of sin.[123]

She returned to New England with Orin, however, who was too much of a Mannon to turn into a pagan and enjoy her islands. Home again, she is filled with love for Peter who is like the natives, simple and fine. Throwing her arms around him, she exclaims:

> Oh, Peter, hold me close to you. I want to feel love. Love is all beautiful. I never used to know that. I was a fool. We'll be married soon, won't we, and settle out in the country away from folks and their evil talk? We'll make an island for ourselves on land, and we'll have children, and love them and teach them to live life so that they can never be possessed by hate and death.[124]

Lavinia's instincts, once she has replaced her mother, are directed towards love and life and are the antithesis of all that her Mannon heritage represents. Her effort to break the Mannon chain of destiny is the most vigorous in the entire trilogy, but in the end she is defeated by the "curse" and the Mannons claim their own.

As noted before, the destiny against which the Mannons struggle is that of death itself. Ezra looks like the "statue of an eminent dead man."[125] Accordingly, all the men resemble him. This is seen in O'Neill's description of the characters. First to be considered is Ezra Mannon.

> He is a tall, spare, big-boned man ... One is immediately struck by the mask-like look of his face in repose, more pronounced in him than in the others. His nose is large and acquiline, his eyebrows heavy, his complexion swarthy, his hair thick, black and straight.[126]

Adam Brant's description is similar.

> His face resembles in repose a life-like death mask rather than living flesh. He has a broad, low forehead, framed by coal black straight hair ... He has a big aquiline nose, bushy eyebrows. His wide mouth is sensual and moody--a mouth that can be strong and weak by turns ... In figure he is tall, broad shouldered and powerful.[127]

Finally, there is the son, Orin, whose description completes the resemblances.

> One is struck at once by the startling family resemblance. There is the same life-like mask quality of his face in repose, the same aquiline nose, heavy eyebrows, swarthy complexion, thick straight black hair, light hazel eyes. His mouth and chin have the same general characteristics as his father's had, but the expression of his mouth gives an impression of tense oversensitiveness quite foreign to the General's, and his chin is a refined weakened version ... He is about the same height as Ezra Mannon and Brant but his body is thin and his swarthy complexion sallow.[128]

It is Seth, the Mannon gardner, who calls Lavinia's attention to this fact when he says:

> Ain't you noticed this Brant reminds you of someone in looks? ... You're Paw; ain't it, Vinnie? ... He ain't only like your Paw. He's like Orin, too--and all the Mannons I've known.[129]

Also, this physical resemblance is strengthened by the portraits of their ancestors which decorate the walls of the Mannon house. These pictures, objectifications of the family destiny, symbolize the evil influence at work. To the Mannons, "Life was dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born."[130] Consequently, they all long for release.

The third symbol of release is the sea chanty, Shenandoah. O'Neill explains in his "Notes," ... it's simple, sad, rhythm of hopeless sea longing is peculiarly significant--even the stupid words have meaning when considered in relation to the tragic events of the play."[131] The Shenandoah is the river of life, and all the Mannons love its laughter.

By virtue of these symbols the outside world becomes only a distant threat of invasion or a vague promise of freedom to the Mannons. True-fated reality lies inward--behind the facade, behind the masks.

In the Eric Bently article, "Trying to like O'Neill," he compares Robinson Jeffers' view of tragedy to that of O'Neill:

> Poetry is not a civilizer, rather the reverse, for great poetry appeals to the most primitive instincts. . . . Tragedy has been regarded, ever since Aristotle, as a moral agent, a purifier of the mind and emotions. But the story of Medea is about a criminal adventurer and his gun-moll; it is no more moral than the story of Frankie and Johnny; only more ferocious. And so with the yet higher summits of Greek Tragedy, the Agamemnon series and the Oedipus Rex; they all tell primitive horror stories, and the conventional pious sentiments of the chorus are more than balanced by the bad temper and wickedness, or folly, of the principal characters. What makes them noble is the poetry; the poetry and the beautiful shapes of the plays, and the extreme violence born of extreme passion. . . . These are stories of disaster and death, and it is not in order to purge the mind of passions but because death and disaster are exciting. People love disaster, if it does not touch them too nearly--as we run to see a burning house or a motor crash. . . .[132]

Bentley goes on to attack the point of view of Robinson Jeffers:

> Aristotle's view of tragedy is humane, this one--that of Robinson Jeffers--is barbaric without the innocence of barbarism; it is neo-barbaric, decadent. O'Neill is too simple and earnest to go all the way with Jeffers. Puritanism and the rough-hewn honesty keep him with the realm of the human. But Mourning Becomes Electra does belong, so to speak, to the same world as Jeffers' remarks, a world with titillates itself with tragedy in the head. Your would-be tragedian despises realism, the problem play, liberalism, politics in general, optimism, and what not. Hence Mourning Becomes Electra is unrealistic, unsocial, illiberal, unpolitical, and pessimistic. What of the Oresteia? It celebrates the victory of law over arbitrary violence, of the community over the individual. It is optimistic, political, social and with permissible license might be called liberal and realistic as well. O tempora, o mores![133]

Brooks Atkinson asserted in the New York Times:

> O'Neill's only masterpiece, but not a great play because of lack of nobility of character and appropriate language. One of supreme achievements of modern drama.[134]

Joseph Wood Krutch, in an article entitled "Our Electra," states:

> A great play, not "meaning" anything in the sense of Ibsen or Shaw, but like Hamlet it means that human beings are great and terrible when in the grips of passion. One of the "very greatest works of dramatic literature" despite a lack of appropriate language.[135]

The majority of critical opinions expressed by American critics are lavish in their praise of the merits of Mourning Becomes Electra. In an article by Kelcey Allen entitled "Mourning Becomes Electra seethes with epic tragedy," he states: "Magnificent tragedy of classic proportions; has quality as pitiless and remorseless as the original Greek."[136] John Anderson in "O'Neill's Trilogy" uses the following words: "Unreserved praise for masterpiece with strength, clarity and unflagging intuition, putting flesh of modern psychology on the bare bones of impersonal Greek original."[137] George Jean Nathan in "The theatre of--" acclaims Mourning to be "One of the most important plays in the history of American drama. Monument not only to O'Neill but American theatre as well."[138]

An overall summation of the American critical opinions concerning the merits of Mourning Becomes Electra is made by Jordan Y. Miller in Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic. Miller concludes:

> This trilogy which ran for many hours and many acts was commonly regarded as O'Neill's masterpiece and the climax of his career. It did have its violent detractors. . . .[139]

In Desire Under the Elms, the "objective correlative" involved a double-edged character interpretation, because with the Cabot family came the connotation of the biblical Hebraic family of Abraham which lent the required noble stature to fit the Grecian pattern of tragedy, while if the family were taken to represent only surface values, the Cabots fit the psychological and sociological emphases of twentieth-century tragedy.

In Mourning Becomes Electra, however, the "objective correlative" situation involving the Mannon family has only one edge; for this family can only be taken to represent what it denotes. Even though O'Neill has followed the Greek pattern more closely in his form--the three sections of the play to represent the trilogy, the physical aspects, the tighter structuring of the action--he fails to meet the first requirement of high tragedy, the nobility of the principal character or characters. It is not that the Mannon family could not be noble, because since the American Revolution with its new emphasis on the value, esteem, and creative possibility of the average man, even the lowest of the low, if he dreamed glorious enough dreams, fought for noble enough causes, or aspired to the best he was capable of, a noble hero he could be. The Mannons do not aspire to that beyond themselves. They are not striving to improve the conditions of the people around them, such as the great Greek noblemen did for their countrymen. Therefore, Mr. Bentley is correct when he terms Mourning Becomes Electra "unsocial." At best, the play is interpreted from the modern psychological standpoint because of the multifaceted symbolisms involved. It is, then, a strange play with its Grecian structure and its modern context and relevance.

Because it is an unsocial play, it is by its nature a highly subjective play. In order for Mourning Becomes Electra to be a truly great tragedy, it would have to be more objective, more macrocosmic than microcosmic in its sweep. The play is too involved with family crises and complexes which either do not extend to or affect the outside world of the Mannons.

Eric Bentley also states that Mourning Becomes Electra is "unrealistic," "illiberal," "unpolitical," and "pessimistic," whereas the Oresteia is the "positive" of all these qualities.[140]

Certainly the play is unrealistic at time: for example, whereas Clytemnestra is a strong, active villainess who goes into the bath, stabs Agamemnon to death, and is ready and willing to accept the consequences, Christine, her paralleling character in Mourning Becomes Electra, chooses to poison her prey and is neither strong nor active, but vacillatory, having been featured as a wronged, weak, and whining person throughout the play. Her protestations are too much; her strong actions are too few; her character seems too inconsistent to be realistic. Lavinia's introverted self-punishment is another inconsistency in the play which makes it seem unrealistic; Electra's fate was much more believable on the desert.

Naturally, since the play is unsocial, deals with introverted characters, and is microcosmic rather than macrocosmic, it seems much more illiberal and unpolitical than the Oresteia. This investigator can derive only a pessimistic outlook from Mourning Becomes Electra; it is definitely a situation of "hopeless hopes." Lavinia has entered the Mannon home, never to come out again. The action ended, once and for all. But in the Oresteia the intrigue affecting the leadership of the community is over. Perhaps there will be a change which will better the conditions of the people. Thus O'Neill's values are not those of the Oresteia. He has structured his play for high tragedy, but he has stacked the cards against himself. The Mannons can only be taken for what they are; and their tragedy, because their aspirations do not derive from the best that is in them, does not equal that

nobility of the Cabots in Desire Under the Elms, which is of two-fold intensity. Furthermore, the language of Mourning Becomes Electra is far more prosaic than that of Desire Under the Elms, and lastly, O'Neill in this very long play has failed to realize that even though he has structured it in the manner of a trilogy, it does not merit an exact comparison to the Oresteia because the Greeks saw their trilogies at a single sitting, and these trilogies had much more of a dramatic build, with each segment lasting only about ninety minutes. Much of the force of Mourning Becomes Electra was lost to its audience because it was overly long and prosaic rather than concise and poetic. Therefore, in reaching toward a high, Grecian-type tragedy structured so tightly, O'Neill went beyond his powers and was unable to achieve the fortuitous blend that he has in Desire Under the Elms.

NOTES

[1]Arthur Gelb and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), p. 755.

[2]Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of Drama: With a Supplement on the American Drama (New York, 1947), p. 530.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Gelb, p. 699.

[5]Ibid., p. 698.

[6]Joseph Wood Krutch, "O'Neill Again," The Nation, CXXIV (June, 1932), p. 210.

[7]Sophus Keith Winther, Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study (New York, 1961), p. 179.

[8]Gelb, p. 721.

[9]Ibid., p. 723.

[10]Ibid., p. 728.

[11]Ibid., pp. 734-735.

[12]Gilbert Murray, Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy (Oxford, 1940), pp. 83-84.

[13]John H. Finley, Jr., Pinder and Aeschylus, quoted by James Martin in Classical Lectures, XIV (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 266.

[14]Clark, p. 533.

[15]Barret H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (New York, 1947), p. 133.

[16]Eugene O'Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra, quoted by Joseph Wood Krutch in Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill (New York, 1945), pp. 866-867.

[17]Herbert Weir Smyth, Aeschylean Tragedy (Berkeley, Calif., 1924), p. 160.

[18]Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Jersey, 1958), p. 139

[19]Gilbert Murray, "Agamemnon," Fifteen Greek Plays, ed. by Lane Cooper (New York, 1945), p. 340.

[20]Sherman Plato Young, The Women of Greek Drama (New York, 1953), p. 19.

[21]Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," p. 38.

[22]Ibid., p. 53.

[23]Ibid., p. 73.

[24]Young, p. 21.

[25]Eugene O'Neill, "Homecoming," Nine Plays, p. 714.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., "The Hunted," p. 787.

[28]Ibid., "Homecoming," p. 736.

[29]Ibid., p. 740.

[30]Ibid., "The Hunted." p. 778.

[31]Ibid., p. 759.

[32]Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," p. 41.

[33]Ibid., p. 50.

[34]Ibid., p. 60.

[35]Ibid., p. 63.

[36]Ibid., p. 64.

[37]Edwin Engel, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 254.

[38]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 738.

[39]Ibid., p. 709.

[40]Ibid., pp. 739-749.

[41]Ibid., p. 746.

[42]Ibid., p. 732.

[43]Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," p. 98.

[44]Ibid., "Agamemnon," p. 84.

[45]O'Neill, "Homecoming," Nine Plays, p. 708.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid., p. 709.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., p. 707.

[50]Ibid., p. 697.

[51]Ibid., p. 746.

[52]Ibid., p. 720.

[53]Ibid., p. 724.

[54]Ibid., p. 794.

[55]Smyth, p. 195.

[56]Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," p. 90.

[57]Ibid., pp. 118-119.

[58]Smyth, p. 203.

[59]Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," p. 122.

[60]Ibid., "The Eumenides," p. 129.

[61]Ibid., p. 141.

[62]Ibid., p. 145.

[63]Ibid.

[64]O'Neill, "The Hunted," pp. 772-773.

[65]Ibid., p. 785.

[66]Ibid., p. 803.

[67]Engel, p. 25.

[68]O'Neill, "The Hunted," p. 803.

[69]Ibid., p. 811.

[70]Ibid., p. 843.

[71]Ibid., p. 853.

[72]Ibid., p. 855.

[73]Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," p. 92.

[74]Ibid., p. 93.

[75]Ibid., p. 96.

[76]Ibid., p. 101.

[77]Ibid., p. 103.

[78]Ibid., p. 103.

[79]Clark, European Theories of the Drama, p. 530.

[80]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 214.

[81]Ibid., p. 735.

[82]Ibid., p. 741.

[83]Ibid., p. 749.

[84]O'Neill, "The Hunted," p. 783.

[85]Ibid., p. 809.

[86]Ibid., p. 811.

[87]Ibid., p. 825.

[88]O'Neill, "The Haunted," p. 841.

[89]Ibid., p. 839.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Ibid., p. 856.

[92]Ibid., p. 865.

[93]Ibid., p. 866-867.

[94]Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," p. 36.

[95]Aeschylus, "Choephoroe," p. 117.

[96]Gilbert Murray, Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy (Oxford, 1940), p. 49.

[97]Aeschylus, "The Eumenides," p. 149.

[98]Clark, European Theories of the Drama, p. 533.

[99]O'Neill, "The Haunted," p. 862.

[100]Ibid., p. 866.

[101]A. E. Haigh, The Attic Theater (Oxford, 1900), p. 206.

[102]Ibid., p. 207.

[103]Ibid., p. 215.

[104]Ibid., p. 218.

[105]Ibid., p. 219.

[106]Finley, Pindar and Aeschylus, p. 248.

[107]Ibid., p. 249.

[108]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 687.

[109]Ibid.

[110]Ibid., p. 699.

[111]Ibid.

[112]Ibid., p. 690.

[113]Ibid., pp. 690-691.

[114]Ibid., p. 692.

[115]Ibid., p. 704.

[116]Ibid., p. 737.

[117]Ibid., p. 777.

[118]Falk, p. 131.

[119]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 706.

[120]Ibid., p. 740.

[121]O'Neill, "The Hunted," p. 776.

[122]O'Neill, "The Haunted," p. 854.

[123]Ibid., p. 834.

[124]Ibid.

[125]O'Neill, "The Hunted," p. 780.

[126]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 730.

[127]Ibid., p. 703.

[128]O'Neill, "The Hunted," p. 759.

[129]O'Neill, "Homecoming," p. 701.

[130]Ibid., p. 738.

[131]Clark, *European Theories of the Drama*, p. 537.

[132]Robinson Jeffers' view of tragedy, quoted from Eric Bentley, "Trying to Like O'Neill," by Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fisher, and William J. Fisher, *O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism* (New York, 1961), p. 344.

[133]Bentley, "Trying to Like O'Neill," p. 345.

[134]Brooks Atkinson, "Tragedy Becomes O'Neill," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1931, VIII, 1, p. 1.

[135]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Our Electra," *Nation*, XXXIII, Nov. 18, 1931, p. 551.

[136]Kelcey Allen, "*Mourning Becomes Electra* Seethes With Epic Tragedy," *W. W. Daily*, Oct. 27, 1931, p. 7.

[137]John Anderson, "O'Neill's Trilogy," *New York Journal*, Oct. 27, 1931, p. 7.

[138]George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre of --," *Judge*, Nov. 21, 1931, p. 4.

[139]Jordan Y. Miller, *Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic* (London, 1962), p. 154.

[140]Bentley, p. 346.

CHAPTER V

THE ICEMAN COMETH

That O'Neill considered The Iceman Cometh a tragedy to be classified among his best is proved the following letter from the author to Lawrence Langner, dated August 11, 1940, and related by the Gelbs in their biography of Eugene O'Neill.

> "Personally I love it!" said O'Neill, "And I'm sure my affection is not wholly inspired by nostalgia for the dear dead days 'on the bottom of the sea' either! I have a confident hunch that this play, as drama, is one of the best things I've ever done. In some ways, perhaps the best. What I mean is, there are moments in it that strip the secret soul of man stark naked, not in cruelty or moral superiority, but with an understanding compassion which sees him as a victim of the ironies of life and of himself. Those moments are for me the depth of tragedy, with nothing more that can possibly be said."[1]

This time O'Neill is doing the converse of what he did in Mourning Becomes Electra; he is veering to the left in his emphasis and plan: instead of stressing a tight Grecian pattern, he brings to The Iceman Cometh a modern, loose form with a new kind of feeling. O'Neill expressed what he was attempting to do in a press interview on September 2, 1946, at the Theater Guild:

> "There is a feeling around, or I'm mistaken, of fate, Kismet, the negative fate; not in the Greek sense. . . . It's struck home as time goes on, how something funny, even farcical, can suddenly without any apparent reason, break up into something gloomy and tragic. . . . A sort of unfair non sequitur, as though events, as though life were being manipulated just to confuse us. I think I'm aware of comedy more than ever before; a big kind of comedy that doesn't

> stay funny very long. I've made some use of it in The Iceman. The first act is hilarious comedy, I *think*, but then some people may not even laugh. At any rate, the comedy breaks up and the tragedy comes on. . . ."[2]

O'Neill now feels that the modern playwright must interpret the elements of tragedy as he finds them in the new spirit of conditions of twentieth-century living; still several elements of the Greek tragic pattern are present. For example, The Iceman Cometh conforms, for the most part, to the Aristotelian suggestion for length of time during which the action should take place in that the action confines itself to little more than a single revolution of the sun. But the running time of the play was about four hours and fifty minutes, quite a bit longer than the usual Greek tragedy.

In The Iceman Cometh the characters do battle against the forces of Nature, not in a military battle, but against the "most vicious and evasive antagonist of all enemies, the self."[3] O'Neill is concerned with the resolution of inner conflicts, for the real action in the play takes place within the mind of the protagonist. As Falk states, "He sees that life and action exist in a perpetual tension between opposites, each of which owes its existence to the presence of the other."[4]

One definition of Pride, or *hubris* as the Greeks termed it, the most deadly evil of man against himself and others, is the attempt to create oneself according to an impossible, untrue self-image. This tragic flaw appears, to some extent, in each of the characters of The Iceman Cometh but is most fully developed in the protagonist, Larry Slade. In the Fall through Pride, in the classical tragic sense, the hero unconsciously rejects his real, imperfect self for an imagined self. The shame of his inevitable failure to achieve what he has

imagined himself to be causes him to seek asylum from the struggle in the sick, distorted form of paralysis and self-destruction--the apathy of death.[5] Obviously, O'Neill is interested in staying close to the tragic flaws of old in The Iceman Cometh.

The conflict between prideful illusion and shameful reality can only be evaded by continuing an illusion. Life is pictured as an endless struggle between opposite images of the self. Man, who spends his life trying to live up to an illusion, finds that neither the self nor its conception has any real existence or importance and that the conflict is not only hopeless, but worthless. Death, the "iceman," comes when "the self images which keep the characters alive become known to them as mirage."[6] When the protagonist becomes aware that self and its ideal are the same, and "both equal to zero,"[7] the reader finds that, instead of action, equilibrium results. When the conscious self reaches this paralytic state where there is no further search for self, the only alternative left is death. The Iceman Cometh emerges as an enduring example of "O'Neill's perennial theme of love-hate, reality-illusion, and the search for life's meaning."[8]

O'Neill reaches back into his life thirty-four years, to the year 1912--the approximate date in which his earlier plays of the S. S. Glencairn take place. The illusions are similar to those of his earlier works but are more fully developed. As pointed out by Edwin A. Engle, there is a resemblance between the squalid interior of Harry Hope's saloon and Hell's Hole, where O'Neill spent his youthful days along the New York City waterfront. Hell's Hole is portrayed vividly in Anna Christie. One, in Anna Christie, is the abode of homeless sailors; the other, in The Iceman Cometh, of homeless derelicts.

Both are "cages without bars for creatures who have no better place to go."[9] Yet, to both types, this kind of establishment represents home. Both groups of men are of different nationalities and are held together in an animal-like herd, not by friendship, but by situation. Both groups eagerly choose liquor to dull their sensibilities, although neither group could be called sensitive. Their ape-like actions strike the reader as comic rather than pitiful. Both groups, honestly vulgar, out of tune with beauty, seem more in tune with Nature than with any one of their fellowmen. It would seem that the world belongs to the being who is insensitive, unperceptive, and unselfconscious.[10]

In the Aristotelian concept, a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Although The Iceman Cometh is not an experimental play, O'Neill uses the effective Ibsen technique of concealing the starting point of the play from the audience. "The crucial events having taken place before the curtain rises, he lets them leak out so slowly that we are still discovering some of them in the last act."[11] The chief characters are Larry Slade, the passive philosopher; Hickey, the activist; and Parritt, the mediator. Although the death of Hickey's wife has occurred before the play opens, the reader does not meet Hickey until late in Act I, knows nothing against him at the end of Act II, only knows his wife is dead at the end of Act III, and only toward the end of Act IV does the reader find Hickey has murdered her; so, although the play has a beginning, a middle, and an end, they are not presented in chronological order.

The Iceman Cometh is filled with indirect symbolism. Intricately woven together are life and death, hope and fear, dream and reality. "In no other play are these symbols brought so closely together or so

perfectly conceived as in The Iceman Cometh."[12] Larry Slade, the grandstand philosopher, states the theme when he says, "The worst is best here, and East is West, and tomorrow is yesterday."[13] This reflects the philosophical outlook of the concepts of the Theatre of the Absurd. This statement introduces O'Neill's use of paradox. "Later Larry gives a more comprehensive statement of the extent to which life's paradoxes are reduced to unity with all conflicts reconciled into complete nothingness."[14]

> Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery are nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life, and in the end they rot into the dust in the same grave. All things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death.[15]

Winther further states a point of view about O'Neill's use of paradox:

> The recognition of the paradox treated not as a clever device for satire, but as a serious instrument of tragedy is the key to the art as well as to the meaning of the play. In no other play has O'Neill combined his technical skill so completely with a searching analysis of life. No separation of thought from technique will reveal the meaning of the play. The paradox reigns supreme: the dream is the true reality, reality is a dream, hope leads to despair, despair breeds hope; the Cause, Movement, Crusade, all lead to Harry Hope's hotel, "a cheap ginmill" of the "last resort variety." The paradox brings that close juxtaposition of opposites which in time reduces all opposites to a oneness.[16]

In tragedy, the protagonist does not face life as does an ordinary man, but is driven to the breaking point by uncontrollable forces of Nature. "The outward contradictions provide the action which leads to the reconciliation of the paradox, an inward unity which is the tragic end."[17]

Each character in The Iceman Cometh represents a paradox. Each has, at one time or another, represented what is best in mankind and has participated in some idealistic Cause, Movement, or Crusade of

national or social importance. When each is disillusioned with the idealism in which he believes, he drifts slowly downward until he settles himself in Hope's Bar--where there is no Hope.

Consequently, a minor theme is the political-social motif. "Politics provide a background for a 'timeless' theme."[18] It is not a theme demanding radical change in government but is a comment on the political disillusionment of Larry Slade, Don Parritt, and Hugo Kalmar.

Even the lives of the minor characters who inhabit Hope's Bar are filled with paradox or illusion. Harry Hope, at one time an active worker and minor political figure in the Tammany machine, now refuses to venture a walk around his political ward. He blames this upon his grief over the death of his beloved wife, Bessie; but this is an illusion; in reality she was "a nagging bitch." So, fear, not love, keeps Harry Hope from venturing out. He has become useless and detached from anything meaningful.

Next, there is Ed Mosher, Hope's brother-in-law, a former circus man, who once had a real zest for life. Now he feeds on the illusion that he will one day return to the circus.

Pat McGloin is a former police lieutenant. He is the symbol of law and order and dreams of being reinstated in his former position. But, in reality, he was found to have taken bribes and knows a "crooked cop" cannot regain a place of honor.

Willie Oban, another of Hope's derelicts, is the son of a rich man who was convicted of embezzlement; he has had the finest education in law so that he may fight for truth and justice. Yet he, too, must find an alibi for life: He blames his father for his not having been

accepted, for his failure to "belong," which has driven him to drink. In reality, he is a coward with no real desire to fight for anything.

Joe Mott, the Negro of The Iceman Cometh who once owned a gambling house and was influential among his Negro friends, dreams of regaining his former status. Actually, he cannot obtain a stake--and if he did, he would rather spend it for drink.

Piet Wetjoen, nicknamed "The General," was an officer in the Boer War, fighting for freedom and independence. He envisions himself returning in triumph to South Africa, but he was a coward who abandoned his men in battle and would return to South Africa only to disgrace.

Another habitué of Hope's saloon is Cecil Lewis, nicknamed "The Captain," who fought in the Boer War for the glory of Great Britain. His illusion is that he will sometime return home to England. He cannot. He has stolen company funds and cannot return.

James Cameron, nicknamed "Jimmy Tomorrow," has at one time been a successful reporter and writer. As his name indicates, he plans to go back to his job "tomorrow." He has maintained that his true love for his wife, shattered by her unfaithfulness, caused him to turn to drink. Seen correctly, it was his drinking which drove her to unfaithfulness; and he confesses he did not really care.

Hugo Kalmar, a former editor of Anarchist periodicals, who has served ten years in prison for his Cause, dreams of the dawn of freedom. Conversely, he would like for the "Capitalist slaves" to serve him.

Rocky Pioggi, night bartender for Harry Hope, has a "stable" of whores. He contends he cannot be a pimp because he also holds the job of barkeeper--and pimps don't have steady jobs. His bar glasses are obviously rose-colored.

Pearl, Margie, and Cora maintain that they are just "tarts" instead of whores. It is tremendously important to them to convince themselves that there really is a difference. But their actions are the same when they lose their illusion temporarily and call themselves "whores."

Chuck Morello, the day bartender, fancies himself the true love of Cora. He maintains an illusion with Cora that they will one day be married and live on a farm. Both know, however, that such an arrangement can never be.

These decaying remnants of humanity have nothing left except pipe dreams kept alive by their perpetually drinking cheap whiskey. ". . . but the paradox is that they are all this, while at the same time they are symbols of all that is meaningful in the life of man."[19] Each has developed a pipe dream in order to have an illusion of self-respect. Each foolishly hopes for a future which will never exist. Unconsciously, they know the truth about themselves and each other, but they know, too, the vital necessity of illusion. Each accepts the other at his own evaluation and demands to be accepted. They live together in a spirit of human emptiness--broken, tired, and drunken--but existing because of their romantic illusions about themselves. To keep from facing their hopeless inadequacies, they have submerged their hostilities toward their fellow men. Larry says:

> It'll be a great day for them, tomorrow--the Feast of All Fools, with brass bands playing! Their ships will come in, loaded to the gunwales with cancelled regrets and promises fulfilled and clean slates and new leases![20]

Yet they are the symbol of man's humanity.

According to Aristotle, character must be good, true to life, consistent with itself and with the class to which the person belongs.

O'Neill has chosen to reproduce a variety of life that is inherently ugly. These are descriptions of people he actually knew when he lived at Jimmy the Priest's.[21] Although they are not typical of ordinary people, each is a character true to himself in speech and action. O'Neill's representation is accurate and entirely believable, even though these characters are at the same time symbols. Although they are outcasts of the lowest order, they are, paradoxically, the only hope man has in an ideal world. If these individuals had been flexible enough to adjust to their situation, as does the ordinary man, they would not be chronic alcoholics.

These characters, however, do not portray a completely empty outlook. They underscore the fact that man, in order to survive, must maintain some romantic ideal.

> O'Neill's characters are not perverts; they are not "sick." They are, to be sure, deluded and disillusioned. They are obnoxious and bullying, or pitifully decayed. They are not, however, depraved. Their tragedy is their inability to maintain their romantic dreams in the face of a world unsympathetic to them.[22]

The pipe dreams, the illusions, self-delusions and bitter disappointments of wasted lives are universal, not of any one time. This "eternal look at life through the distorting lens of 'pipe dreams' and illusions lies at the heart of existence. Without it, all perish."[23] Men live on illusions, on dreams of a brighter tomorrow. When their illusions are shattered, death arrives.

These minor characters provide a choral background for the main characters. Although there has been much criticism of O'Neill for being too wordy and for having "an aversion to the editor's pencil,"[24] the material is not too extensive since it creates the characters and

their pipe dreams--an element upon which the story depends. Perhaps, however, he could have created the illusion without creating so many characters.

The protagonist, Larry Slade, a drunkard and a wreck like the others, differs from them in his sensitivity. Although he drinks continually, it does not cause him to become unconscious and does not mar his ability to analyze the situation. In his youth he had been an Anarchist but has seen since then that "greed is stronger than any other power in man; that man will 'never pay the price of liberty.'"[25] In severing all ties with the Anarchist Movement, Larry feels that he is the one member of the group without a pipe dream and, therefore, is in a position to observe the foolishness of others--to be a grandstand "foolosopher"--or so he is called by his fellowmen. He is pleased with himself and feels he can truthfully say:

> . . . the lie of a pipe dream is what lives life for the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober. . . . Mine are all dead and buried behind me. What's before me is the comforting fact that death is a fine long sleep and I'm damned tired, and it can't come too soon for me.[26]

Larry has failed to realize that what he has taken to be detachment is really his inability to take action in any direction. He looks at both sides of everything until they have equal value. He has failed to choose a course of action; consequently, his power of choice is at a standstill. Although he maintains that he looks forward to death, he remains alive because he is afraid of this alternative.

Larry's complacency is disturbed by the arrival of eighteen-year-old Don Parritt, son of a woman Larry once loved. Throughout the play, Larry appears to be indifferent to Parritt and his story, but is finally forced to make the choice that sends Parritt to his death.

Shaken to the depths when his illusion of indifference is shattered, Larry cries, "Go, get the hell out of life, God damn you, before I choke it out of you!"[27]

With closed eyes, Larry listens for the fall of Parritt from the fire escape. With the sound of the fall, "A long forgotten faith returns to him for a moment. . . ."[28] When he opens his eyes, however, it is to the realization that he is no philosopher--just another bum.

> The objectivist (as Larry thought he was at first), who looks at both sides of everything until they have equal value, must be a paralyzed spectator, unable to take action in any direction; but when the "two sides" are the masks of himself and both are worthless illusions, perfectly balanced against each other, he is not even a paralyzed spectator; he is dead.[29]

Larry is the one person who is fundamentally changed by the course of events. "Death is the single solution to his dilemma, since only annihilation of self can annihilate the dilemma."[30] Although he still does not want to live, he is no longer afraid to die, and says:

> By God, there's no hope! I'll never be a success in the grandstand or anywhere else. Life is too much for me. I'll be a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything till the day I die! . . . By God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now.[31]

The second major character, an antagonist, is the hardware salesman, Hickey. He well illustrates a technique used by O'Neill in the repetition of words. (Two particular words used over and over again are the words "pipe dream.") This, however, is in character with the theme of the play.

> Hickey talks a salesman's language, but he is selling, he thinks, what no salesman has previously attempted to sell--truth, despair, peace. The counterpoint between his message and his language not only ensures theatrical vitality but is altogether right for this play in which men do not dare to say or to accept when another says it, the simple truth about themselves.[32]

During the first act, the inhabitants of Harry's Bar, who are looking forward to Harry's birthday and Hickey's semi-annual spree, describe Hickey in detail. "O'Neill makes him the epitome of the commonplace in order that the paradox which is the essence of the tragedy may be the more startling and effective."[33] When Hickey arrives, his manner is disturbing.

He, who has been known for his drinking, his traveling salesman jokes, and his stock comment that his wife, Evelyn, is at home in the hay with the iceman, refuses to drink. In explaining why he has reformed, he claims he does not need whiskey any more because he has found peace. The peace was obtained by replacing his illusions with reality. Hickey preaches his doctrine of peace to help them save themselves. In order to do this, they must face "tomorrow" today. Although they try to resist his sales talk, the derelicts are shaken from their stupor. As they start shaking off their illusions and try to live again, they make plans to take up their lives where they left off. All but Larry go out and attempt the social rehabilitation they have always promised themselves. Without their illusions, they make the frightening discovery that they are hollow and alone. One by one, they realize that their illusions and their tomorrows are dead; and they return to Harry's Bar, robbed of their last trace of hope. Upon their return, "not even liquor can make them happy; their old friendships turn into antagonisms."[34] Hickey maintains that now the time of lying is over and peace must come, but they do not respond as he had thought. In an effort to explain the failure to himself and to them, he reveals that he is at peace because he has killed his wife, Evelyn.

> Hickey has convinced himself that he killed his wife because he loved her and wanted to spare her unhappiness over his uncontrollable drunkenness and dissipation--but as he speaks, his real motive comes through. He hated Evelyn because no matter what he did she always forgave him, never punished him, was always faithful. His running gag with the boys at Hope's had been that Evelyn was betraying him "in the hay with the iceman," but this was his own wishful thinking. She never even gave him this relief from his own guilt. Hickey killed Evelyn because that was the only way he could free himself from her eternal forgiveness and achieve the ultimate in self-punishment.[35]

In explaining, more truth escapes than he has realized.

> Hickey: (Obliviously). And then I saw I'd always known that was the only possible way to give her peace and free her from the misery of loving me. I saw it meant peace for me, too, knowing she was at peace. I felt as though a ton of guilt was lifted off my mind. I remember I stood by the bed and suddenly I had to laugh. I heard myself speaking to her, as if it was something I'd always wanted to say: "Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!" (He stops with a horrified start, as if shocked out of a nightmare, as if he couldn't believe he heard what he had just said. He stammers.) No! I never. . . .![36]

Hickey, the reformer, the salesman of peace, has paradoxically become the bringer of the "iceman" of death.

Hickey, reasoning that if he really said such a thing he must have been mad, becomes the possessor of the biggest pipe dream of all. His dream that he killed in the spirit of love is replaced by the dream that he killed in the spirit of madness. Before his confession he had called the police and now insists both that he is mad and that he wants to die in order to join Evelyn. In truth, he has already resigned from life and is dead in spirit. "Hickey's illusion is a blessing to his friends, for it restores their own. Now they can go back to their bottles, convinced that they knew Hickey was insane all the time and faced reality only to humor him."[37] Their brief encounter with reality is ended; and they return to their alcoholic illusions, singing in their drunkenness.

The third major character, also an antagonist, Don Parritt, driven by guilt, has sought his mother's lover, Larry Slade, whom he remembers from early childhood. [Some remarks would indicate that Larry may actually be his natural father.] Parritt repeatedly tries to talk to Larry and gradually reveals his story. During Act I, the reader learns that Don's Anarchist mother, who had believed in freedom for everyone except her son, has been arrested and will be sentenced to life in prison. In Act II, the reader learns Don is the one who has betrayed her and her cronies; but he maintains the illusion that he betrayed the group because of patriotic feeling and did not know his mother would be arrested. During Act II, the illusion is changed; the reader discovers that Don betrayed his mother for the money he received as a reward. Only near the end of the play, does the reader ascertain that Don purposely betrayed his mother because he was jealous of her many lovers. "She just had to keep on having lovers to prove to herself how free she was."[38] This Oedipus complex which turned his love to hate now leaves him filled with an overwhelming feeling of guilt. ". . . the Oedipus complex is a patent device for plot motivation in O'Neill's plays."[39]

There is a symmetry between the confessions of Hickey and of Parritt. With each passing act, the reader comes closer to the truth. The name Parritt seems to be a play on words, for his confession "parrots" that of Hickey. While Hickey makes his public confession, Parritt makes his private confession to his "father confessor," Larry. In Act IV, when Hickey reaches the end of his narrative with the words, "So I killed her,"[40] Parritt "suddenly gives up and relaxes limply" saying, "I may as well confess, Larry. There's no use lying

any more. You know, anyway. I didn't give a damn about the money. It was because I hated her."[41] Just as in the case of Hickey, Parritt, "thinking of her fate, says to himself: 'You know what you can do with your freedom pipe dream, don't you, you damned old whore?'"[42]

Since Parritt has broken no civil law for which he can be punished, he must inflict self-punishment. He feels he, too, must be tried and sentenced to death, as Hickey will be and, therefore, turns to Larry to act as judge and jury. When Larry is finally driven to pronounce the death sentence, Parritt is relieved and grateful. Parritt goes to his self-inflicted death.

In the style of Aristotle, the unraveling of the plot must arise out of the plot itself. Both the characters and the audience are unaware of Hickey's guilt until the last minutes of the play. Hickey will receive punishment for the murder he has committed; Parritt has punished himself through suicide, and only Larry remains--doomed to wait for death, punished through the bleakness of his inability to regain his pipe dream.

> The progress of O'Neill's mind was steadily away from the outer world where purposeful activity and event . . . were important, through an inner world where conflict is important, to an innermost world where nothing is important.[43]

Larry is still unable to take positive steps to end his dilemma and is left with the life-sickness from which others may find a solution in dream and drunkenness, but which for him holds no solution.

> The only logical happy ending to an inner conflict is its cessation or a deeply felt insight into it which makes it worthwhile or meaningful to the protagonist. When the conflict ceases simply because . . . the hero has given up the fight altogether, . . . the ending is unspectacular but logical.[44]

As Falk says, ". . . the world of the inner life is a desert of nothing, where even the vision of death is an oasis in a mirage."[45]

The final message is not entirely devoid of hope. The failure of the protagonist to make wise choices or to maintain a pipe dream which will enable him to continue life does not call for a similar failure in all mankind. For, "each man has not only the responsibility, but the opportunity to create his own destiny. . . ."[46]

Eugene O'Neill has succeeded in interpreting elements of tragedy in twentieth-century terms to bring the message that for the man without hopes and dreams the Iceman cometh.

According to Sophus Keith Winther, The Iceman Cometh may "very well come to be recognized as O'Neill's greatest tragedy."[49] Winther sees the play as a tragedy of the "inward condition of spirit."[50] Some critics, however, term it a comedy: for example, Clifford Leech states it is a "dark comedy, brilliantly and movingly written,"[51] while Robert R. Heilman calls it "a dream of disaster."

Certainly O'Neill's form seems indeterminate. There is even a good case for calling it a melodrama because it begins with many comical bits and ends with pathetic conclusions to several pipe dreams. In using a form which might be interpreted in several manners by the critics, O'Neill was certainly looking ahead to the Theatre of the Absurd and the existential condition of modern man. All of this is inherent in the remark he made about the "play's beginning with comic remarks, which soon turn tragic." Here O'Neill's sense of irony and paradox is hard at work. This investigator notices it particularly in such lines as "the worst is best here," "East is West," and "tomorrow is yesterday."

All the characters whenever they reach Harry Hope's saloon have already enacted their tragedies. They are in a state of living death. What they need most is self-knowledge; and Hickey, like Luka in Gorki's The Lower Depths, comes as a deliverer, bringing a note of Christian concern to the existential trap. And the habitués of Harry Hope's saloon see the light, however fleetingly; then, convinced that Hickey is insane whenever he tells of killing his wife, they grope blindly back to their individual dilemmas. These characters have been greatly hurt in life; so they have rejected it. Theirs is a "hopeless hope." Even Larry Slade tells them that in order to survive they must be involved with life. Here again this investigator sees them as existential characters who must first of all become aware that they are in a trap and then decide whether they are going to "become" beings by asserting their active spirit.

Not only the spirit of the characters but also the spirit of the entire play worried Eugene O'Neill. According to notes made by Lawrence Langner on a visit to the O'Neill's home in 1944 in San Francisco, the author felt that the play must be produced at an auspicious moment.

> "He felt," according to Langner, "that the timing for the play's opening was very important, and that if it were to be produced immediately after the war was over, the pessimism of the play would run counter to public optimism and would result in a bad reception by the audience. He thought a year or so after the peace, there would be considerable disillusionment, and that the public would then be more inclined to listen to what he had to say in this play."[53]

The spirit of "hopeless hope" in The Iceman Cometh runs counter to the spirit of classical tragedy; so O'Neill in one more way is departing from the pattern of Grecian tragedy. In Grecian tragedy, the spirit is uplifting rather than pessimistic. When the Grecian tragedy

ends, men feels there is still hope. But what O'Neill is really doing is diagnosing the sicknesses of modern society and ending by stating that there is no cure.

Not only has O'Neill greatly changed the spirit of his tragedies with The Iceman Cometh, but he has also evolved a style which draws his work out to great length and brings about the repetition of words like "pipe dreams" again and again. The Iceman Cometh is written in a much more novelistic style than O'Neill employed in his other dramas. This often happens with a playwright who becomes overly concerned with social problems. His play became plotless, and his characters descriptive rather than active. He even began the play in medias res, a convention much more characteristic of the epic and novel than of the play.

Moreover, when O'Neill attempted to deal with Dan Parritt's Oedipal complex and thus introduce modern psychology, he did not do it actively by showing Don's going through the developing stages of the neurosis. Instead, he simply had Don talk and slowly and tediously remove tissue after tissue of lies to strip his soul bare. In a sense, all of these O'Neill characters are like Greek messengers who appear after the fact. They are characters whom the spectators pity rather than sympathize with, and thus the three-fold personae--Larry, the protagonist; Hickey, the antagonist, and Don Parritt, the mediator--are certainly a twentieth-century development by O'Neill. The characters of The Iceman Cometh lack the necessary nobility to cause the spectator to identify completely with any of them. Their lives are spun out bit by bit in a prosaic fashion.

O'Neill's manner of telling the story allows for little excitement. Although Hickey is frequently pointed up as the antagonist,

there is really not too much of the antagonist in him because he is an accepted crony of the group. Clifford Leech is quick to point out that one of the weaknesses of the play is that there is no villain. Actually there is a villain. It is the same villain that plagued Oedipus--ignorance. But O'Neill does not make the idea of ignorance as predatory as it seems in Oedipus Rex. His loose but complicated structuring caused him to do much backing and filling; even O'Neill admitted that the length of the play was a problem. The Gelbs report: "He had tried to cut The Iceman Cometh by about three quarters of an hour, he told George Jean Nathan, but had been unable to cut it more than fifteen minutes. 'If there are repetitions,' he added, 'they'll have to remain in, because I feel they are absolutely necessary to what I am trying to get over.'"[54]

The paramount quality of The Iceman Cometh is the thought behind O'Neill's characters. They are not seen in action; they deliberate their choices only after they have been made and carried out; so the thought behind O'Neill's characters--so rich, so varied, so complex, so incisive--engages the viewers' or readers' minds in a masterful, intellectual intrigue. It is the power of O'Neill's intellect which carries this play. It radiates his knowledge of the psychological and sociological motivations of mankind. It pierces to the very core of the world. In his intellectual insight, O'Neill is still Grecian. His intellectual and psychological probings go on far past those of other modern playwrights.

In the related tragic flaws of his characters in The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill reworks the Grecian hubris and hamartia--pride and ignorance. He places the tragic flaw in its new societal context with a

tri-partite hero, certainly representing the fragmented man of today. By doing that, he made the spectator see into the soul of beings.

In the language of The Iceman Cometh, symbolism is presented much more subtly than in Mourning Becomes Electra. Of course, the most important bit of symbolism is the linking of the iceman to death. An obvious bit of symbolism is in the name Parritt, suggesting parrot or the parroting of everything that Larry says. There are also other symbols with names, such as Jimmy Tomorrow and Harry Hope.

Throughout the play, although there are touches of poetry, the language never reaches a high plane. Frequently there is dialect in the play. Once in a while there are musical flashes, such as in the speeches of Pat McGloin. Spectacle in the play only registers when the characters threaten each other and come to the brink of fights. But the setting itself is unspectacular. It is what it is and alludes to nothing.

In summary, Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh veers sharply from the form, structure, and style of Mourning Becomes Electra and is not at all the fortuitous blend of the Grecian and modern tragic elements. As O'Neill went far to the right in emphasizing the classical elements in Mourning Becomes Electra, so he has gone far to the left in emphasizing the modern tragic elements in The Iceman Cometh, in fact, so much so that several critics disclaim its right to be called a tragedy. The Iceman Cometh is too long, too novelistic, and too descriptive to be seen as a balanced blend; yet it opens the door to Theatre of the Absurd by stressing the "hopeless hope," the existential trap, the inner condition, and the psychological and sociological motivations. The Iceman Cometh is a great intellectual

achievement; and whether it be called _tragedy_ or _dark comedy_, regardless of whether it follows O'Neill's early notion of melding Grecian tragedy and modern tragedy equally, it leads the theater into a new direction.

NOTES

[1]Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York, 1962), pp. 836-837.

[2]Ibid., p. 855.

[3]Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), p. 201.

[4]Ibid., p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 8.

[6]Ibid., p. 158.

[7]Ibid., p. 151.

[8]Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic (London, 1962), p. 5.

[9]Edwin A. Engel, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 10.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Eric Bentley, The Atlantic Monthly, November, 1946, quoted by Jordan Y. Miller, O'Neill and the American Critics (New York, 1965), p. 126.

[12]Sophus Winther, "The Iceman Cometh: A Study in Technique," Arizona Quarterly, Winter, 1947, p. 293.

[13]Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh (New York, 1940), p. 44.

[14]Winther, p. 263.

[15]O'Neill, p. 128.

[16]Winther, p. 295.

[17]Ibid., p. 294.

[18]Bentley, p. 129.

[19]Winther, p. 294.

[20]O'Neill, p. 9.

[21]Doris M. Alexander, "Hugo of The Iceman Cometh: Realism and O'Neill," American Quarterly (Winter, 1953), p. 365.

[22]Miller, p. 88.

[23]Ibid., p. 8.

[24]Robert Coleman, "The Iceman Cometh," The New York Mirror, October 11, 1946, quoted by Jordan Y. Miller, O'Neill and the Critics (New York, 1965), p. 124.

[25]Winther, p. 295.

[26]O'Neill, p. 10.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 258.

[29]Falk, p. 162.

[30]Ibid.

[31]O'Neill, p. 258.

[32]Clifford Leech, Eugene O'Neill (New York, 1963), p. 106.

[33]Winther, p. 296.

[34]Falk, p. 160.

[35]Ibid.

[36]O'Neill, p. 241.

[37]Falk, p. 161.

[38]O'Neill, p. 125.

[39]Falk, p. 9.

[40]O'Neill, p. 241.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., p. 125.

[43]Ibid., p. 21.

[44]O'Neill, p. 248.

[45]Falk, p. 199.

[46]Ibid., p. 197.

[47]Ibid., p. 199.

[48]Ibid., p. 163.

[49]Sophus Keith Winther, _Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study_ (New York, 1934), p. 300.

[50]Ibid., p. 304.

[51]Leech, p. 106.

[52]Ibid., p. 107.

[53]Gelbs, p. 855.

[54]Ibid., pp. 869-870.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Eugene O'Neill came to the modern theater as a man deeply troubled by the ancient question of good and evil; he was interested in determining man's place in the universe, his relationship with his fellow man, and his relationship to the supreme being. He states that modern man came from a mixed inheritance, was drawn to evil deeds, and had need for a capacity for struggle. Although twentieth-century man was delving into the ideologies of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Jung, O'Neill saw a relationship to the ancient Greeks and their struggle and looked for his theory of tragedy primarily in the Greek tragedians. Evidence of his concern with ancient Greek tragedy is found in remarks he made to Barrett Clark, his personal diary and notes, his letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, his interviews with various news men, and his confidences with Agnes Bolton, Mary Mullett, and Carlotta Monterrey.

After writing his earlier one-acts about the sea, O'Neill became more and more concerned with the theory, form, and structure of Greek tragedy. He seemed to be searching for a way to blend the essence of ancient Greek tragedy with the essence of modern tragedy. After all, he had no significant racial legends to draw on; and he, of necessity, worked in the modern realistic theater. Still, time and time again, he turned to the Greeks for a pattern, for a spirit, for a philosophy. Indeed, Jordan Y. Miller points out that such dramas as Desire Under

the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and even the modern tragedy The Iceman Cometh were written under the influences of the Greek tragedians. Moreover, critic after critic today is coming to the conclusion that these three plays represent the high points in O'Neill's career as a tragedian, even above and beyond his more recent serious plays, such as Long Day's Journey into Night and A Touch of the Poet, now generally conceded to be too autobiographical and too lacking in the form of tragedy to be considered as more than serious dramas.

In this study, the investigator has attempted to evaluate the tragic merits of Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Iceman Cometh in order to determine when, where, and if Eugene O'Neill effected a fortuitous blend of the Grecian and modern elements of tragedy. The significance of the study, then, lies in the fact that its answers will help to determine how much Eugene O'Neill was affected by the Greeks.

O'Neill reveals in his dramas that fate as a power in the life of man, bringing about his doom in Greek drama, has a parallel in man's past life, affected by heredity and environment and determining his future. The author also came to twenteith-century theater armed with Freud. Consequently, O'Neill became chiefly concerned with inner conflicts and attempted to find answers to man's complexes by searching for a philosophy of life which would give order and meaning to the chaotic times.

This investigator believes that the critics should have seen deeper into Desire Under the Elms than their mere plaudits expressed. In this play, O'Neill attempted and succeeded in executing a "modern

Greek tragedy." He structured Desire entirely in accord with the Greek pattern for tragedy, using the Hebraic story of the family of Abraham to lend nobility to his characters. He imbued his tragic trio (symbolic of modern man's fragmented personality, requiring more than one to make a whole, and symbolic of the ancient realization that both male and female forces were needed for unity) with the tragic flaw of greed, naturalistic greed, focusing on Abbie. Furthermore, O'Neill aroused pity and fear in the audience--pity for the predicament of Abbie and Eben and fear for their safety. There is a genuine catharsis produced by the downfall of these characters and their great and symbolic house, heightened by the ironic signs and symbols of recognition and paradox. All of this follows the Greek pattern of tragedy to the letter. Yet O'Neill has at the same time kept his tragedy modern, contemporary to 1924--indeed, for the twentieth century. He has stressed the naturalistic in mood and symbol, implied that Freudian interpretation was needed, and perfectly fitted the objective correlative experience to the situation of the play. The plot, the thought, the deeds that molded the characters of the players are a pure blend of ancient and modern; and the spectacle is enhanced by the symbolic and Freudian associations. The play falters in only one element, and that element is language. The language is colloquial, unpoetic, and at times base; but even here O'Neill has attempted through multiple, symbolic associations to push the language far beyond surface meaning. In this investigator's mind, Desire Under the Elms is O'Neill's most nearly perfect tragedy; it is the one time in which O'Neill reached what he was aiming for in his theory of tragedy--a fortuitous blend of the ancient and modern concepts.

In O'Neill's so-called high tragedy _Mourning Becomes Electra_, he tries to come even closer to the Greeks and is very formalistic in his approach. He has a great deal of trouble, however, in making _Mourning Becomes Electra_ succeed in the way that _Desire Under the Elms_ did. Whereas in _Desire Under the Elms_ O'Neill used an objective correlative which involved a double-edged character interpretation (because with the Cabot family came the connotation of the biblical Hebraic family of Abraham which lent the required noble stature to fit the Grecian pattern of tragedy, yet at the same time connoted a modern family with psychological emphases), in _Mourning Becomes Electra_ the objective correlative situation involving the Mannon family has only one edge, for this family can only be taken to represent what it denotes. Even though O'Neill has followed the Greek pattern more closely in his form--the three sections of the play to represent the trilogy, the physical aspects, the tighter structuring of the action--he fails to meet the first requirement of high tragedy, the nobility of the principal character or characters. The Mannon family produced no glorious dreams, fought no noble causes, refused to aspire to the best of which it was capable. The play seems best interpreted from the modern psychological standpoint because of the multi-faceted symbolisms involved. It is then a strange play with its Grecian structure and its modern context and relevance. Also it is a play that is too subjective, unlike truly great tragedy in that it is microcosmic rather than macrocosmic in sweep. It is a play too involved with family crises and complexes which either do not extend to or do not affect the outside world. Although the play attempts to parallel the _Oresteia_, it is as Eric Bentley has stressed, "unrealistic," "illiberal," "unpolitical," and

"pessimistic," whereas the Oresteia is the positive of all of these qualities. In addition, it should be noted that the Greeks saw their trilogies at a single sitting and, therefore, combined plays had much more of a dramatic build, but O'Neill's play in three segments had to be produced on three separate evenings. Consequently, much of the force of Mourning Becomes Electra was lost to its audience because it was overly long and prosaic rather than concise and poetic. This investigator concludes then that in reaching toward a high Grecian-type tragedy structured so tightly, O'Neill went beyond his powers in Mourning Becomes Electra and was unable to achieve the fortuitous blend that he had in Desire Under the Elms.

The critic Sophus Keith Winther points out that O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh may very well come to be recognized as the author's greatest tragedy; others, however, such as Clifford Leech and Robert Heilman, see this modern drama differently: the former terms it a "dark comedy," while the latter calls it a "drama of disaster." Certainly the form of the work is indeterminate. In using such a loose form which might be interpreted in several ways by the critics, O'Neill was truly looking ahead to the Theater of the Absurd and the existential condition of modern man.

The author began his play with comic remarks which soon turned tragic. O'Neill was depending on his sense of irony and paradox to put the tragic elements across. In doing so, he produced many memorable lines, such as "the worst is best here," "east is west," and "tomorrow is yesterday."

All of the characters are denizens of Harry Hope's saloon. They have already enacted their tragedies before they appear, and thus they

are in a state of living death. What they most need is self-knowledge; and Hickey, like Luka in Gorki's The Lower Depths, brings Christian concern to their existential trap. Although there is not much of a plot because much of the action is described rather than shown, contrary to the Greek pattern, O'Neill does make tragic flaws of pride and ignorance in the Greek vein. The characters of The Iceman Cometh are in a state of "hopeless hope." Even Larry Slade, a major character, tells the others that in order for them to survive they must be involved with life. Once again this investigator sees a connection with the existential trap and Theater of the Absurd: such characters must first of all become aware that they are in a trap and then decide whether they are going to "become" beings by asserting their active spirit. Consequently, the spirit of the play is extremely pessimistic, not uplifting like the spirit of Grecian tragedy.

Throughout the play, O'Neill seems to be diagnosing the sicknesses of modern society and then stating that there is no cure for such ailments. Because he has so many sicknesses to deal with and because he has a tri partite persona in Larry, the protagonist; Hickey, the antagonist, and Don Parritt, the mediator--he must continually probe, and time and time again the play becomes flat and repetitious. Eventually it becomes quite novelistic--far too long, with an in medias res beginning that is more akin to the epic or novel than to the drama. The structure of the work is loose but becomes quite complicated as tissue after tissue of lies is removed to bare the souls of the characters. Ultimately the outstanding characteristic of the play is the power of intellect which O'Neill displays; it radiates his knowledge of the psychological and sociological motivations of

mankind. It pierces the very core of the world. O'Neill's intellectual insight is still Grecian. His intellectual and psychological probings go far beyond those of other contemporary playwrights.

The language of The Iceman Cometh is prosaic, but symbolism is presented more subtly in it than in Mourning Becomes Electra. At times there are touches of the poet, but the language never reaches a high plane. The setting itself is unspectacular; the bits of excitement in the play come when the characters reach the brink of fights.

In summary, Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh veers sharply from the form, structure, and style of Mourning Becomes Electra. It prepares the way for Theater of the Absurd. As O'Neill went far to the right in emphasizing the classical elements in Mourning Becomes Electra, so he has gone far to the left in emphasizing the modern elements in The Iceman Cometh: It is too long, too novelistic, and too descriptive to be seen as a balanced blend; it is a great intellectual achievement which leads modern theater into a totally new direction. However, according to this investigator's findings, the only time that O'Neill managed a fortuitous blend of the ancient Greek and modern elements of tragedy was in Desire Under the Elms.

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