
Re-reading Greek Myths in O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*: A Psychoanalytical Study

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Abstract

Eugene O'Neill's plays are a continuous record of his psychological and spiritual quest. He explores the myths of Oedipus, Medea, Phaedra-Hippolytus-Theseus, and Orestes that have served as hypo texts to two of his famous plays, *Desire under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The paper will also examine how Freudian psychoanalysis has given shape to the action of the plays concerned. The play *Desire under the Elms* is an exploration of Oedipus complex projected by Sigmund Freud. Oedipal instincts are found in Eben as he wants to possess all his father's possessions, even Minnie and Abbie, his father's mistress and wife respectively. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill has rewritten Aeschylus's Orestia trilogy in a New England setting during American civil war. O'Neill sets the action in a town in New England. The drama of love and lust of Christine and Adam is played to its tragic climax against such a geographical background and tough place. The Freudian view has been exemplified through the attraction and repulsion of characters. Orestes takes revenge against the killing of his father, by murdering his mother and her lover. In the same way Orin takes revenge against Ezra Mannon's death by killing Adam Brant.

Keywords: Myth, Psychoanalysis, Oedipal complex, Mother fixation, Incest, Revenge

Eugene O'Neill's plays are a continuous record of his psychological and spiritual quest, a journey in search of the mind and the heart that remain unexplored and unrepresented. The search leads him not only to explore the myths of the ancient Greece, the myths that inspired the Athenians – Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides – to produce their immortal tragedies, but also to recontextualize them in the twentieth century phenomena bathed with all the theoretical and philosophical postulations.

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O'Neill was particularly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis that flooded all intellectual exercises in the early twentieth century and left an indelible mark in every genre of literary enterprises. While dealing with Greek myths on the one hand and reappropriating them in American context from a psychoanalytical perspective on the other, O'Neill takes recourse to different facets of dramaturgy: realism, expressionism, naturalism, symbolism, fantasy, and so on. The plays penetrate deep into human psyche and make all innovations in theatrical representations. The present paper will make an attempt at exploring the myths of Oedipus, Medea, Phaedra-Hippolytus-Theseus, and Orestes that have served as hypo texts to O'Neills two famous plays, *Desire under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The paper will also examine how Freudian psychoanalysis has given shape to the action of the plays concerned.

The play *Desire under the Elms* lays open diversified desires – craving for wealth, craving for inheritance, craving for incestuous relationship, and so on. The dramatist has shown a group of peasants with an ardent passion for land, an earnest desire for power, frantic search for women and sexual gratification, thus problematizing human psyche. The play takes as a hypo text the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus as dealt with by the Athenian dramatist Sophocles. O'Neill also makes use of the contemporary Freudian theory of Oedipus Complex. O'Neill's probing deep into the subconscious, which was definitely inspired by his study of Freudian postulations, is an important aspect of his portrayal of human nature. "*Desire Under the Elms* is an amalgamation of the incognizant Oedipus complex projected by Sigmund Freud. It is a quintessential drama depicting the Greek tragedy and myth being much germane to its convulsions on fate. It is also considered as the most paradigmatic masterpiece being symptomatic of O'Neill's menacing Oedipus complex" ("The Impact of Psychoanalysis").

Desire under the Elms unfolds the story of the 19th century New England farm house. Three principal characters namely Cabot, Eben and Abbie reveal dissimilar and varied levels of desire. A link of psychological realism supports the play through some conspicuous happenings like loathe and fear of Cabot and Eben, Eben's revengeful attitude upon his father, and oedipal desire; Abbie's incitement in marrying old Cabot and having a son. The play enters deep into the core of human psyche. O'Neill's psychological realism is seen in his treatment of such psychological theories of Freud and Jung as the Oedipus complex, of sexual repression and inhibition leading to neurosis and of the primordial father-son conflict. These

psychological theories have been studied and put into practice in their most intense form in *Desire under the Elms*.

In the 20th century Sigmund Freud became immensely popular because of his theory of psychoanalysis. It is a form of literary theory to analyze a literary work which investigates the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious minds of the characters. Freud has categorised human psyche into three different levels known as the Conscious, the Subconscious and the Unconscious mind. The most important part of our mind is the Unconscious which is the storehouse of desires, feelings, conflicts, ambitions, passions, fears that remain unfulfilled. It governs our Conscious mind, and the repressed part in our Unconscious does not come out to the Conscious level. There are three routes to enter into the unconscious, such as, slip of tongue, jokes, and most importantly, dreams. According to Freud, in the unconscious we suppress mainly our libidinal or sexual urge which is the most basic urge felt by every human being. He stated that sexual desire does not appear with maturity; rather it is instinctual, and a baby starts to feel it right after birth. Baby's natural urge for food, warmth, comfort produces a feeling of pleasure. The baby derives this pleasure from the mother's body and it can develop at the time of nursing, cleaning and it occurs when it passes through the stages like Oral, Anal and Phallic. The bond between the mother and child is what he calls incestuous. Freud finds that civilization is governed by Reality Principle and Pleasure Principle. Freud believes that Pleasure Principle instigates an individual to satisfy what he feels good and pleasurable without any restriction. It is important to note that by Pleasure he means sexual pleasure. Freud finds that Reality Principle checks our desires and channelizes the energy into something useful and productive such as games, paintings or religious activities. Reality Principle plays a vital role to build up civilization and to run it smoothly. In Phallic stage a child becomes aware of his genitals and sexual pleasure and this type of child is called polymorphous perverse child who is a pleasure seeker. Oedipus complex also takes place during the phallic stage which ends the phallic stage and the child enters the next stage of psychosexual development, that is, the latency period. In the latency period, the libidinal desire of a child comes to an end and helps the child to develop as a normal non-incestuous adult. The child later realises that his mother and even the sister do not have penises as he has, and immediately the child considers it as a punishment and he becomes afraid of his own father. This is called Castration complex which forces the child to enter into Latency period. The child is forced to give up his desire for the mother because of the fear of

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his father. First repressed desire of a child is the 'Oedipus Complex' or the desire for the mother which creates his unconscious for the first time and his fear of the father forms his superego which will shape the child's morality. Superego can also be defined as conscience and that enforces the child's Reality Principle and at the same time subdues his Pleasure Principle. Oedipus complex and Electra complex are significant stages that occur in the life of a boy child and a girl child respectively and they help the child to develop as a normal non-incestuous heterosexual adult. This is considered as the most significant and important part of psychosexual development of a child.

The drama is an exploration of Oedipus complex projected by Sigmund Freud. Freud takes the term 'Oedipus complex' from *Oedipus Rex* written by Sophocles. Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. Here Freud's view is that the preference which a son has for his mother has essentially a sexual basis. Eben's making love to the prostitute Minnie and afterwards having a torrid love affair with his step mother Abbie are both incestuous in nature because Minnie has once been his father's mistress and Abbie is now his father's wife. Oedipus Complex implies the emotions and attractions that the mind deposits in the subconscious, in proposition to a dynamic suppression, that persistently contemplates upon the boy's ambition to sexually possess his mother and to eliminate his father. Actions revolve round the Freudian details of characterization in the portrayal of Eben and proceed with mounting energy towards its destination. Eben's agony towards his father comes out for his mother's death due to imposed work in the farm house and snatching of farm's ownership. Eben and Abbie become simply victims of their lust. Eben's strong passion for his mother drives him to remain in the house and to do the household chore which were performed by his mother when she was alive. His two brothers along with the father considers him as soft as his mother and he himself admits that every single drop of his own blood is made of his mother only ("I am Maw- every drop o' blood!" [DE 6]). Eben very sharply and directly accuses both Simeon and Peter for not uttering a single word or rather to protest against the tyranny of his father and save his mother who was kind and good to them also.

There is an instance of Eben's strong attachment to his mother what is called Mother Fixation in psychoanalysis when he tells Simeon and Peter that he even after his mother's death can still feel the presence of her in the kitchen beside the stove whenever he feels difficulties. He is even obsessed with the idea that his dead mother cannot rest in peace in her grave because her son has gone through the similar

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injustice. When Eben comes to know that Simeon and Peter cannot progress in their journey to California due to lack of money, he immediately makes a plan to eliminate the brothers to secure his position in the farm. Eben agrees to provide them with money, and in return Simeon and Peter have to transfer their rights on the farm to Eben by signing an agreement. Eben brainwashes them against their father and they leave their father along with the hard works of farm. It is the Mother Fixation in Eben which provokes him all the time to take revenge on his father.

The Oedipus complex embedded in O'Neill's metaphysical cosmos, is explicitly evident in his dramas and *Desire under the Elms* is an outstanding one in its exhibiting that feeling. Oedipal instincts are found in Eben as he wants to possess all his father's possessions. Eben suffers from the absence of motherly affection and Abbie reveals her unwillingness to become his mother; rather she needs him to satisfy her bodily hunger. Abbie begins to tantalise him with lustful look and provocative gestures. Most importantly Eben too feels attracted from the very beginning towards Abbie although initially he suppresses his desires and abuses her as a whore. The only reason behind Eben's cursing and refusing Abbie is that he thinks she can replace his mother's position and can snatch his mother's right in the farm and as well as in the house. Abbie once tantalises Eben by saying that he has contested against his natural instinct which is called libido in Freud's Psychoanalysis. Major instance of Eben's yearning for the mother figure is presented by the dramatist where Eben is sitting in his own room and Ephraim and Abbie in their room. Ignoring Ephraim's presence, Abbie goes on thinking about Eben. Both Abbie and Eben feel so much of libidinal desire for one another that the concrete wall seems to become transparent for them.

Unconsciously he stretches out his arms for her and she half rises. Then aware, he mutters a curse at himself and flings himself face downward on the bed, his clenched fists above his head, his face buried in the pillow. (DE 39)

Here it is Eben's unconscious mind that governs him as the unconscious is largely guided by the suppressed desires and it is thus evident that Eben has repressed his strong passion for Abbie. Their love making may be incestuous, but they do not feel a sense of guilt because Abbie does it for the man she loves. Infanticide confirms their love for each other. We see an application of Freudian and Jungian psychological theories blended with the assumptions of ancient Greek Mythology. O'Neill himself asserted his interest in his letter to Barrett Clark,

Perhaps I can explain the nature of my feeling for the impelling,

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inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays. (O'Neill 234)

The dramatist shows that when the Subconscious overpowers the Conscious; the attitude of all beings almost appears the same. Desire, the deepest and subconscious desire of human beings is the keyword of the drama.

The central issue of the play are related to the Eben-Ephraim relationship and the Eben- Abbie relationship. The Eben-Ephraim relationship is full of tensions as Ephraim is a dominating character and Eben certainly refuses to follow his dominance especially because of Ephraim's inhuman treatment towards Eben's dead mother. At another level, Eben and Abbie share extremely intricate relations, which start from hatred and end with their becoming committed lovers. Abbie becomes so much intimate with Eben that she kills her child to prove her genuine feelings for him. The subject matter and the focal events surely direct towards the elements in three myths – Phaedra-Hippolytus-Theseus, Oedipus, and Medea. Hippolytus was the bastard son of Theseus who fell in love with his mother Phaedra. Phaedra hanged herself alleging she had been seduced by Hippolytus. Banished Hippolytus was dragged to death by a sea monster. O'Neill's display of characters is reminiscent of this myth.

Abbie's murder of her child reminds us of another play *Medea* also written by Euripides. Here O'Neill has used his source material much more freely. As in Euripides's play, the father, Ephraim Cabot has returned, bringing with him a young wife, who is immediately attracted to her stepson. Like Phaedra, Abbie conceals her growing passion for Eben under the mask of scorn. Like Phaedra again, she asks her stepson to be banished. Like Phaedra, Abbie makes advances, but with more success than her dramatise ancestor. Like Hippolytus, Eben muses constantly on his mother. He responds to Abbie's sexual overtures in the spring season, the season of awakening. His affair with Minnie affirms O'Neill the opportunity to define the usurpation theme. The characters in their stark confrontation speak in a heightened manner and seem to be responding to the force of destiny that is at once real and mythic.

Ephraim's inhuman dictate can be compared with the merciless ruler like Theseus. Ephraim too has many wives. Oedipus myth holds the key to understanding the society and religiously unacceptable behaviour from Eben and Abbie. The tale of incest is glorified into a tale of destiny and human predicament because of its implicit reference to the Oedipus story. Eben's incestuous relationship with Abbie results in the birth of a son which would be murdered by his mother, referring to another Greek

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myth, that of Medea. Jason pleads to abandon Medea and to get married again. Medea after that decides to kill his children just to make Jason heirless. According to Medea, that would be the best punishment for Jason. Medea kills the children for the man Jason whom she has loved dedicatedly. In *Desire Under the Elms* also, Abbie too just like Medea kills her son just to get back Eben's lost confidence. Abbie commits the most monstrous crime to negate Eben's curse ("I wish he never was born! I wish he'd die this minute! I wish I'd never set eyes on him! It's him-yew havin' him-a purpose t' steal-That's changed everythin!" [DE 64]). Abbie chooses from the two options she has at that point of time – the child or the lover. Phaedra and Medea, the women characters reveal the victimization of the women at the hands of the male, especially the powerful ones. Phaedra has to suffer at the whims of Theseus whereas Medea has to kill her own child just to prove her innocence. Abbie has to undergo both these heinous acts in order to survive in the male dominated world. Multiple association with myths hints that the play is more than a tragedy. These myths not only influence the overall content and structure of the play, but it also brings to light the complex issues in modern American culture and especially the changing scenario of Puritanism in the 20th century.

Eugene O'Neill has rewritten Aeschylus's Orestia trilogy in a New England setting in the days of the American civil war. O'Neill sets the action in a town in New England– a locale with the soiled, rock strewn countryside with small barren mountain ranges. The people are like the landscape – tight, thrifty, joyless Puritans. The drama of love and lust of Christine and Adam is played to its tragic climax against such a geographical background and tough place. The dramatis personae in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the result of motivation of the understanding of Puritanism of O'Neill, but the drama and the audience view their actions in a broader context that contradicts with but also in some sense explains Puritanism. When O'Neill adopted Freudian psychology to motivate the action, he widened the dimensions of his play world into areas as broad as the Olympus of Aeschylus. O'Neill dramatises convincingly the sequence of dualisms, stemming from the basic tension between the Oedipus and Electra complex in the story of a brother and a sister. The popular view of Freudianism is noticeable in the play. Naturally every man is inclined towards the woman who is like his mother and every female is attracted by the person who resembles her father. According to Doris M. Alexander, "In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill uses this peculiarly non Freudian version of the Oedipus complex as the force determining much of the family love and hate. All of the main characters in

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the play love the parent of the opposite sex, hate the parent of the same sex, or, in the case of parents, love the child of the opposite sex, hate the child of the same sex. Adam Brant loves his mother, hates his father. His hatred of the Mannons is a carry-over of his attitude toward his Mannon father. Lavinia loves her father, hates her mother" ("Psychological Fate"). Ezra, Adam and Orin – the three Mannons have certain common similarities resulting in complications in love affairs. Adam Brant's conversation with Lavinia is revealing in this context:

Brant: Well, I suppose that's the usual way of it. A daughter feels close to her father and a son to his mother. But I should think you ought to be a born exception to that rule.

Lavinia: Why?

Brant: You're so like your mother in some ways. Your face is a dead image of hers. And look at your hair. You won't meet 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.

Seth: Ain't you noticed this Brant reminds you of someone in looks?

Lavinia(struck by this): Yes, I have ever since I first saw him-but I've never been able to place who-who you mean?

Seth: Your Paw-aint it, Vinnie?

Lavinia(startled-agitatedly): Father? No! It can't be!(Then as if the conviction was forcing itself on her in spite of herself.) Yes! He does-something about his face-that must be why I've the strange feeling I've known him before-why I've felt-(Then tensely as if she were about to break down.)Oh! I won't believe it! You must be mistaken, Seth! That would be too-

Seth: He ain't only like your Paw. He's like Orin, too-and all the MannonsI've known.(Act 1)

The Freudian view has been exemplified through the attraction and repulsion of characters: Adam's attraction towards Christine, and hatred for Ezra and Orin who are also in love with Christine; Lavinia's love for Brant and Orin and attraction towards her father and hatred towards Christine; Orin's disgust towards Brant and Ezra and Christine's repulsion towards her husband. All these can be explained from Freudian perspectives.

This play has been written based on themes in which the characters are

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motivated by incest, Oedipus complex and Fixations. Brant's inclination to his mother who dies in his arms engenders hatred in him towards his father and ignites his revengefulness towards those who humiliated his mother. He tells Lavinia that he would take revenge on Ezra Mannon who has been the main culprit in bringing misery and death upon his parents. Christine is Brant's weapon of revenge and his illicit relationship with her grows because of her resemblance to Marie Brantome. His fascination for Lavinia may also be attributed to this factor. The Oedipus complex is more distinct in the case of Orin. Christine also tells Orin how his father is envious of him referring to his disgust and her deep affection:

I want to make up to you for all the injustice you suffered at your father's hand. It may seem a hard thing to say about the dead, but he was always jealous of you. He hated you because he knew I loved you better than anything in the world! (Act 2)

Orin would like to return to his mother in frustration. Christine believes that Orin will save her, even when she knows that she has killed her husband. Orin's affection for his mother leads him to identify his mother with peace, a sense of assurance and stability. At the time of war, driven crazy and disgusted, he hopes to be with his mother, the symbol of stability-the peaceful South Sea Islands. The islands are bounded with water and Orin's dream of 'The Blessed Isles' is like going back to the womb of his mother and the security of his infancy. With this dream comes the idea that every soldier killed in the war resembles his father. There is a strong desire to murder his father and possess his mother. Orin's condition predicts the working of Oedipus motive. The dream visits to the islands, a symbol of mother, recalls minding the return to the womb, the pre-birth forgetfulness referred to by Freud. This dilemma compels him to murder Adam Brant or the father figure, who is the purpose of his hatred.

Lavinia from the very beginning displays a deep sense of attachment to her father.

Lavinia: I love my father better than anyone in the world. There is nothing I wouldn't do to protect him from hurt!

Brant (watching her carefully-keeping his casual tone): You care for him more than your mother?

Lavinia: Yes.

Brant: Well, I suppose that's the usual way of it. A daughter feels closer to her father and as on to his mother. (Act 1)

Lavinia's abnormally strong fascination for her father drives her to shout at the

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windows of the second-floor bedroom where Ezra Mannon is occupied in love with Christine on his first night home after returning from the war.

Lavinia(*in an anguish of jealous hatred*): I hate you! You steal even father's love from me again! You stole all love from me when I was born! (*Then almost with a sob, hiding her face in her hands.*) Oh, Mother! Why have you done this to me? What harm had I done you? ... Father, how can you love that shameless harlot? ... I can't bear it! I won't! ... (Act 3)

Adam Brant and Orin, too, like her father, exercise to confine her imagination. With her profound hatred towards her mother, Lavinia loves Adam Brant who discovers in her an image of his own mother, Marie Brantomé. She also loves Orin, a duplicate of her father Ezra Mannon. The Lavinia-Orin connection is certainly illicit.

O'Neill's struggle to illustrate his tragic vision and the "Profound Conflicts of Mind" drove him to find some methods to reveal this internal conflict in his work. He turned to Carl Jung for the purpose. Again, Travis Bogard pointed out, "O'Neill is right in asserting that as a dramatist, and therefore presumably as a student of human nature, he will necessarily see patterns that reflect Freudian truths. Yet this explanation, while it satisfies for Shakespeare and for Sophocles does not quite relieve O'Neill of indebtedness to psychoanalytic theory, which loomed large in his life in the years immediately preceding the writing of the trilogy" (Bogard 345).

Mourning Becomes Electra is a play written after the Greek Legend of Orestes, as portrayed in the plays of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. In his first note to the play, O'Neill doubted: "Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or moral retribution, could accept and be moved by?" ("Mourning Becomes Electra"). He got the way from Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), the famous Athenian poet who is believed to be the founder of Greek tragedy and who participated the battle of Marathon with the Athenian army and was beaten by his younger rival Sophocles (496-406 B.C.) in 468 B.C.

Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, was saved by uncle Strophius when his father was killed by Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Strophius and his son Pylades educated Orestes and a close friendship grown up between Orestes and Pylades. Orestes avenged his father's death by assassinating Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Electra, sister of Orestes provokes her brother to avenge their father's death. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill has rewritten the Greek tale up to this

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pint from Aeschylus's 'Oresteia' trilogy, Sophocles's 'Electra' and Euripides's 'Electra' in terms of American society and Freud's prominence on trilogy. His problem was how to mould Greek events to modern American life.

In the Greek tale, Agamemnon returns from his Trojan war; in O'Neill's play Brigadier-General Ezra Mannon reverts from the American Civil war. Agamemnon is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus; so in this drama, Ezra is poisoned by his wife Christine which is supplied by her lover Adam Brant. Agamemnon is therefore, is like Ezra Mannon; Christine is the replica of Clytemnestra, and Adam Brant is the new version of Aegisthus. Orestes, their son, is prototyped as Orin and Lavinia stands for Electra. As S. Georgia Nugent asserted, "Each major narrative element of the Greek drama finds its counterpart here. The war hero(Agamemnon/ Ezra Mannon), returning home, is treacherously murdered by his unfaithful wife(Clytemnestra/ Christine) with the aid of her lover, also a dispossessed heir of the household(Aegisthus/ Adam Brant). Subsequently, the children(Electra/Lavinia, Orestes/Orin)take their vengeance upon both lover and mother and, in the final play, must come to terms with their own part in the family's history of crime and punishment"("Masking Becomes Electra").

The Mannon House with its range of columns represents Agamemnon's ancient society. Seth Beckwith the Mannon's old gardener and the townsfolk substitutes the chorus in the Greek tragedy. Orestes takes revenge against the killing of his father, by murdering his mother and her lover. In the same way Orin takes revenge against Ezra Mannon's death by killing Adam Brant. Lavinia in the same way as Electra provokes her brother to avenge their father's murder. Like Electra, again, Lavinia is left unaccompanied after the demise of her father and the suicide of her mother and brother. She goes into mourning throughout her existence. Travis Bogard observes, "His(O'Neill's) modern parallels for the Electra story are appropriate and unforced... The details of the relationships in the House of Atreus created the structure of the Mannon clan. The names, following the running allusion to Agamemnon is Ezra Mannon, with its connotation of power and wealth, were developed by the alliterative scheme which he at one time tried to maintain in Lavinia by calling her Elavania. In the ancient servant of Electra he found Seth, just as Peter emerged from Pylades and Hazel from such innocents as Sophocles's Chrysanthemums. In similar fashion, his chorus of gossips came naturally... horrifying origin of the curse in the devouring of children is echoed in the fate of the Mannon heirs, Lavinia, Orin and Adam Brant...By the same token, the tragic

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structure parallels in its scope the cyclic evolution of *Oresteia*"(Bogard 341).

O'Neill institutes a modern charge at the end of the play. Aeschylus introduces a judgement in the final part of the trilogy. The goddess Athena intervenes. Aeschylus's tribal judgement is paused and the furies are calmed and Orestes is no more harassed. In this drama, Electra, Orin and Lavinia are the last living Mannons. Lavinia provokes Orin into committing suicide, whereas in the Greek legend Orestes ultimately set free from the sin of matricide. Nowadays such washing would sound absurd and the effect of tragic doom would be shattered if Orin had lived happily marrying Hazel. Here Orin pays for his sin by killing himself and the dramatic self-isolation of Lavinia deepens the tragic effect of the play. O'Neill concludes differently and more tragically because Orin is not ashamed of his Mother's death; he only believes that he is guilty. Moreover, the tragedy of the Mannons concludes with the inevitable death of Orin. It is sickly psychology that compels Orin to choose death and Lavinia to a life of everlasting mourning and isolation.

O'Neill divides his play into three parts – "Homecoming," "The Hunted," and "The Hunted," like the Greek trilogy. *Agamemnon* and "Homecoming" deal with situations that are basically the same. In Aeschylus's play, Agamemnon comes back to his wife Clytemnestra, who has been unfaithful to him being in love with Agamemnon's cousin Aegisthus. Clytemnestra kills him because he has sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia, who lives together with Aegisthus whom she wants to rule over the kingdom. Orestes along with Electra is rarely mentioned in the Greek play. In O'Neill's play Ezra Mannon returns to his wife Christine, who has an illicit affair with Ezra's cousin Adam Brant. Christine murders him because she wants to marry Adam, whereas with Aeschylus the first play concludes with temporary win of Clytemnestra, with O'Neill Christine already facing charge of murder by her daughter Lavinia, a woman whom we feel at once to be the mistress of the situation.

In "The Libation-Bearers," the second play of the Greek trilogy, Orestes and Electra are brought in, but the woman soon disappears into the background and Orestes is solely engaged to oppose his mother and her lover. He has consulted the Delphic oracle and is commanded by Apollo to punish the guilty pair. He acts hurriedly with his friend Pylades as per the decree of Zeus, but immediately after the double murder he is surrounded by the avenging Furies, symbols of yet another power beyond the control of Zeus and contrary to the laws of the Olympian hierarchy, and he is gone mad.

In O'Neill's second play, "The Hunted," we conclude to ascertaining the broad

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course of the events; Lavinia with her brother Orin together finds Christine and Adam Brant, kills the man, and forces their mother to commit suicide. In the realization that her mission is complete, Lavinia is inclined to her temporarily disbalanced brother, hoping at last to find happiness, and ultimately to marry the normal and unimaginative Peter. But she has judged without the Furies, those powerful and yet not uncanny forces within us that ruin our mind and body when they are beyond control. Orin being the weaker is the first to sink under. His case is complex by a certain inherent illness that was unknown to or at least untouched by Aeschylus. O'Neill has thus adopted the Greek legend of Orestes to the contemporary American situation in the line of Freud's stress on psychology.

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