

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Revitalization of Classical Art Form with Reference to
Mourning Becomes Electra

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Tribhuvan University, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Arts in English**

by

Mahesh Chand

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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The thesis entitled Revitalization of Classical Art Form with Reference to *Mourning Becomes Electra* by Mr. Mahesh Chand has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Mahesh Chand

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Abstract

The present research is the study of tragedy in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It mainly focuses upon the revitalization of classical art form caused by employing the classical techniques and theme pattern which are inherited within the artistic world of drama. It analysis how modern psychology has replaced the classical version of fate as the root cause of human sufferings. It suggests the struggle of modern man against the psychological force lurking beyond the conscious world. The modern man often appears to be helpless puppet in the hand of the malignant power because of the conflict between his body and self. This very strong passion of love and hatred makes the terrible creature and ironically the most tragic and non-repulsive end of Lavinia, the protagonist of the play. She is morally stronger than the ordinary man. So, she has strong sense of duty to search justice for her father by getting punishment to her mother and protect the honor of Mannons and her real life situation pull her in different directions and divides her within herself. This complexity of thoughts and emotion prompts to the agonies of hell in her life and 'pity and fear' on the audience.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This study intends to explore the techniques employed by Eugene O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* with special reference to revival of classical art form, namely that of attic tragedy. Basically, the ideas, principles and style of ancient Greek tragedy, that inspired O'Neill, will be studied.

From the modern reader's point of view, it is impossible to claim that *Mourning Becomes Electra* has revived the classical spirit of art. because it is obviously interpreted as a modern psychological drama as it dramatizes the conflict between conscious motives and unconscious desires of modern man. And, how does a modern psychological drama-no matter how tragic it is —revive the spirit of classical Greek tragedy ?

O'Neill has revitalized the dramatic spirits of classical tragedies by employing classical dramatic techniques in conjunction with the insights of Freudian psychology. He takes the human beings as an integral part of society. He does not go beyond the human being as far as subject matter is concerned. His creations rather have always depicted human instincts, their attitude, feelings and thoughts, in a highly expressionistic way. The use of 'expressionism'; however, is only a technique. He has always been interested in the basic reality of human nature and 'reality of situation'; the real people and their problems. In this sense he has brought out the true sense of the common phrase 'imitation of life'.

Moreover, O'Neill has reintroduced the Aristotelian concept of presenting "complete action in certain magnitude in a language embellished with highly imaginative power in the form of action." In other words, he takes great care of the needs of the serious plot. His aim has always been to purge 'pity and fear' to attain the

proper aim of tragedy, that is, to effect a 'Catharsis' of these emotions. In this sense, he revives the classical art form by providing dramatic justice to the modern American plot.

This study intends to minutely study the implication of the classical dramatic technique in *Mourning Becomes Electra* to support the thesis that the classical art form has been revived. In Greek tragedy, fate is believed to be a prominent determinant that leads to the tragic hero's wrong judgment of action and to tragic down fall. These are replaced by the psychological force which leads the protagonist to disastrous end. O'Neill has used not only Freudian psychology but enlarged the awareness of conscious and subconscious realities, as the modern substitute of fate, is a powerful force, that the modern mind can easily identify with. This, however, does not take away from the grandeur of classical tragedy.

Like classical writers, he takes the art as a guideline to portray humanity in the modern fragmented age. For him, art should sustain humanitarian values, morals and ethics. So, *Mourning Becomes Electra* is concerned with aesthetic values, and the moral purpose of ordering human life. Its didactic purpose is to sustain balance in modern society in the absence of the 'power of gods' and also scientific failure. It portrays human passion as the source of sufferings and also a strong force which shakes human being to the bottom of their soul.

O' Neill believes that literature is an imitation of action. It requires innate talent. And it has to be perfected by long study and practice and also that it consists mainly in the deliberate adaptation of style and thematic effect of the work on human beings.

For O'Neill, literary writing should follow certain rules to have an impact on social life. So, he revitalized the old classical art form of tragedy. He has reintroduced

Aeschylean 'trilogy' as a 'form' after more than two thousand years. He also has reintroduced the masque, ghost, chorus, soliloquy and direct addresses to his audience. He employs stage lights and songs to convey inner emotions that usually are not expressed in undramatizable action, namely in the world of the mind, memories and fears.

O'Neill also seems to defend the distinctive quality of art, by ignoring the boundary of the play. However, he has to express the inner reality of human beings in an unreal way. He dramatizes undramatizable action of the unconscious world. His practical knowledge of the theatre and vision of life and nature give to his works a solid quality.

The general nature and shared values of humanity are the basic sources and the basic test of art. Always and everywhere, the fact of universal human agreement is the test of moral and religious truth, as well as aesthetic value. It deals with the general nature of human beings and truth that is always moral and at the same time, creates aesthetic value.

O'Neill also uses myth. Myth has to be conceived not as a collection of fixed and final stories but as an ongoing and ever-changing process. The classical myth of Electra undergoes changes according to its appropriateness in modern America. He has deliberately weaved modern materials into the pattern of ancient myth. He has not introduced the Electra myth to depict the position of man in relation to the gods, but he has revived that classical manifestation and toured the general nature of human beings. He has used the myth, to give insights into the changing social environment .

O'Neill has a strong sense of tradition, which has inspired him to meditate on the classical art form and make effort to revive it. He has always distrusted radical innovation in play writing It does not mean that he has not experimented. He has

written short and long plays, but he does not depart from the major spirit of Aristotelian conception of tragedy.

O'Neill's respect for classical writers, the Greek tragedians who have achieved excellence and established enduring models in all major literary genres, so, it is not surprising. This explains their influences on O' Neill's art and perspective of life. It was from this deep respect for them that O' Neill saw the possibility of revitalizing the classical art form and merging the classical perspective to life with the modern contemporary time.

Revival of Classical Art form

In Aristotelian terms, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, like the original Aeschylusian tragedy treats human beings as limited agents, who fail to accept their limitations and aim for an inaccessible goal. Or he presents characters that refuse to accept that human achievements are restricted in the cosmic order. There are also characters who cannot resist their urges even though they may struggle against them, and as a result they meet their doom.

Because of moral strength, a tragic hero always seems greater than ordinary people. Thus, his tragedy leaves a very serious impression upon the audience. Certainly, this creates higher kind of pity and fear among the audience. But according to Aristotelian tragic theory, representation of suffering and defeat of protagonist does not leave an audience feeling depressed, but relieved and even exalted. This, O' Neill has reemployed in MBE. In this manner, he has helped revive the classical art form and to imbue it with dramatic justice in the classical sense.

Though O'Neill does not adhere strictly to the three unities, he has employed the unity of place- and restricted action within a single location. The achievement of an illusion of reality requires that the action represented by play must be close to the

actual condition of life. Thus, the 'imitation of action' in classical term is appropriately employed by O'Neill in MBE.

He has used the form of trilogy in MBE to depict modern psychological problems. The same was used by Greek playwrights in depicting the relationship between man and his fate. O'Neill does not care about the length of the play as long as it reveals basic human nature.

O'Neill has also reintroduced the chorus and song for the same purpose as the classical tragedians to give hints of the coming actions and to comment on the action of the protagonist. Commentary through the song of chorus is employed in an appropriate way as the Greek tragedians in MBE. He introduces the chorus as character as his vehicle for commentary on the play, as well as exposition of its subject and time, and description of the happening events. He uses the term 'Choral character' to refer to a group of gossiping villagers who stand apart from the action. Their comments provides the audience often an ironic perspective to view the other characters and events. He also uses the lyrical function to express traditional moral, religious and social attitudes.

Revitalization is a process of getting relief with full vigor and vitality. In a sense revitalization of classical art form is a process of giving meaningful existence to it. What is classical art has to be understood in order to understand its revival.

The principles, ideas and style of art of ancient Greece and Rome are basically known as the classical art today. It is art which has become synonymous with excellence and artistic quality of high distinction. It is an art which imitates life instead of romanticizing it. Its purpose must be to state the condition of humanity. It must have clear didactic purpose, not in the medieval sense but in the sense of the Greeks. It deals with the suffering of human beings, neither of the heroic past nor the

speculated future, but the terrible present. So the efforts to maintain artistic quality of high art is none other than its revitalization.

Theory of Tragedy

Tragedy is a dramatic representation of serious action, which eventuates in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. But deep discussion of tragedy started from Aristotle's classical analysis in the 'poetics' (400 BC). He based his theory on the examples available to him from the Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He could not foresee the development of tragedies, in the subsequent two thousand years. Though many attempts came after Aristotle to develop the theory of tragedy, and later tragedies seemed very different, some aspects of his discussion apply to all of the many tragic plots. His theory has become the starting point for all theories of tragedy even the non-Aristotelian tragic plot construction. So his theory of tragedy is a touchstone.

Aristotle defined tragedy as, "The imitation of an action, that is serious, complete and certain magnitude, in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornamentin the form of action, not narrative, with arousing pity and fear and has its goal a catharsis of emotion" (53).

Basically, he focused on two things in his discussion of tragedy. The tragic representation of suffering and defeat do not leave audience feeling depressed but relieved or they even undergo purgation, and the 'pleasure of pity and fear' remains the basic way of distinguishing the tragic form.

Aristotle further said, a tragic hero equally evokes both 'pity and fear'. It will be more effective if the hero is better than real life. Because the tragic hero is higher than ordinary mortals, his happiness and pride changes into suffering and even death. Because his 'hubris' overweening self-confidence compels him to Hamartia error of

judgment. It leads the protagonist to disregard the divine warning or moral code and compels him to meet a tragic fate.

It moves the audience to pity because the hero is not evil. Thus, his misfortune is greater than his punishment. Such a state of affairs moves the audience to fear because the audience recognize possibilities of the same fate among themselves. But in MBE, O'Neill has not borrowed 'divine warning' instead he has substituted it with psychology. Because of Passion modern man goes to disregard the law of nature. This is mysterious force behind human life, which lies unconsciously in the human body. It creates tragedy of high artistic quality and rouses 'pity and fear'

Literature Review

O'Neill is not influenced by the Greek plot, but he has borrowed it, and captured the spirit of the 'tragedy' in the true sense and served it through *Mourning Becomes Electra*. This study intends to depict such techniques of O'Neill's dramatic writing in MBE, which contribute to revitalize the classical art form. This study is different from the other critical studies mainly because most critics charge that O'Neill borrowed the plot form and even the story of the Orestiad because he did not have anything original of his own; whereas this study will prove that the borrowing was an innovation, that would explore the deep recesses of the human psyche and relate those undramatizable incidents to our own selves.

The originality of this study lies in the fact O'Neill revitalizes the classical art form in modern drama on the basis of certain new psychology, not simply Freudianism but the enlarged awareness of all conscious and unconscious realities of human nature. O'Neill does not only borrow the Greek theme and reinterprets it but he introduces a spirit of distinctive quality of art and addresses the basic problems of modern human beings, which lies mysteriously in the human psyche. O' Neill seems

to be proving that suffering of human beings give true knowledge that is beauty. In a sense, he has philosophized tragedy. The result is a new depth of seriousness, a new vitality in drama itself through revival of classical tragedy.

Eugene O'Neills; *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a modern psychological drama which dramatizes the popular myth of Electra on the basis of modern psychological theory. The hidden mysterious force, which lies behind life is the root cause of suffering and tragedy in modern life as 'fate' is the cause of it in classical tragedy. O' Neill wanted to borrow the theme pattern of Aeschylus to reinterpret it according to modern people. As Arthur Hobson Queen has quoted O' Neills own statement as

I did not follow consciously anyone of Greek dramatist, on the contrary I tried my best to forget all about their differing Electra etc. All I wanted to borrow was the theme pattern of Aeschylus and to reinterpret it in modern psychological terms with fate and furies working from within the individual soul. (255)

The play is a script of the conflict between conscious motives and unconscious desires. If unconscious desires become more powerful than conscious motives, then human beings are terrible creature because they are blind with great passion, as Joseph Wood Krutch has interpreted

It is no more an exposition or defense of a modern psychological conception than Aeschylus is an exposition or defense of the tenets of Greek religion. It is on the other hand, like all the great literatures, mean the something that human beings are great and terrible creatures when they are in the grip of great passion. (112-13)

It is explicit that O'Neil did not write MBE to reveal the inner state of human thought and irrationality only but he wrote it to search out the super rationality in modern human beings. As Krutch has explained, "O'Neill may try to disappear in Freudian psychology, a rational exploration of what seems superrational" (83).

MBE is a modern interpretation of the story of the Orestiad. It depicts human interrelationships and psychologically suppressed chain of criminal thoughts. It shows the deep rooted human instincts and complex human interrelationship. Where sub conscious ideas dominantly pull conscious mind to its grip. This struggle between two aspects create great passion and arrogance on human being which leads through wrong action to ultimate tragic end as the fated crime in classical sense. It is an appropriate implication to grasp the main problem of modern man to gain its scope. As Arthur Hobson Quin said, "The Electra story with its complex human interrelationship and its chain of fated crime and retribution, seemed best suited in its scope and its implication" (255).

It is the human psychology that compels an individual, family and all human beings to face its influence, intense love of life, and motives of self-preservation. Then, there is compulsion to take a wrong judgment in action which leads to tragic fortune. M.H. Abraham said that tragedy of fate is connected into a tragedy of psychological compulsion of family trapped in a tangle of Freudian complex. (324)

MBE is tragedy of today. It is not only the ironic tragedy of an individual but also the sympathetic end of an entire family. It is a conflict between the inner strength and outside reality. It intends to search for existential meaning in modern life. It dramatizes inner strength and conflict in the search for existential meaning. More explicitly, it dramatizes the sickness of modern man created by the moral strength and conflict about sense of duty and justice, and love and hatred. These are the

sources of strength of modern man which enhance him/her to struggle for space and existence. The modern malady of frustration comes out from the struggle for existence that compels the protagonist to judge wrongly and act upon it to take a wrong judgment in action because there is no alternative for a sustainable way out of the degraded condition.

Thomas E. Porter said, "The Freudian motivation in *Mourning Becomes Electra* moves Orin and Lavinia to a fate consistent with psychological theory" (212). George Perkins' thrust is also psychological. He says "O'Neill's liberation was fundamentally psychological and that he enriched his art through the new psychology that involves all conscious and sub conscious realities."

O'Neill has dramatized the complicated pattern of civil war in American life, in which he has brought certain ideas of Freudian psychology: the power of irrational drives; the existence of the subconscious, the role of suppressed adult suffering; the importance of sex, and the life-long influence of parents. But he found an access to Greek tragedies. Nina Baym states:

He found inspiration and conformation for this approach in classical Greek drama, which has always centered on families. His 1931 *Mourning Becomes Electra*, based on Orenstein cycle of the classical Greek playwright Aeschylus, situated the ancient story of family murdered and divine retribution in civil war America with great success. (1288)

However remote the origination of the drama, it has brought the traditional resource of dramatic art. What has been called 'pity' and 'exaltation' of tragedy is the extending wisdom that is the essence of a new sense of unity.

T.R. Henn states as

It can question and unconscious, of the immediate and the traditional, in a medium of the utmost complexity; yet which continues at a number of levels because it, and it alone, can use the traditional resources of dramatic art with a consciousness, however remote, of its ritual beginnings. (292)

This interest in Greek myths in 20th century seems more complex.

O' Neill's main problem for the play is to restore the religious as well as moral power in tragedy as the classical playwrights in modern pagan world. Robert Burstein adds, "O' Neill's problem is the problem of modern drama as a whole: how to bring a religious vision to bear on a totally secular world" (329). O' Neill claimed that his objective as a playwright was to depict the 'transfiguring nobility.... He was always acutely conscious of the force behind fate, god, our biological past creating present, whatever one calls it.

O'Neill himself believed that tragedy alone has significant beauty and that is truth. But in short, the existing literatures on the play have not dealt with how the play has reflected revival of classical art form and how it stands as a landmark of modern tragedy, or tragedy in its true sense. This study on the revitalization of classical form of art in the play specifically focuses on the dramatic tradition and theory of tragedy of classical writings and it should be of some critical and academic significance.

Delimitation of the Study

This study explores the classical techniques of dramatic writing which are employed in O' Neill's play *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It does not claim that MBE, is a classical drama nor has it adopted the classical vision of human beings.

It is only an effort to identify the classical dramatic techniques, for reviving the spirit of the classical art form, by reinterpreting the ancient Greek myth in the modern context.

The identification of psychological realities which has replaced the Greek concept of 'fatalism' to bind modern human beings is not the subject matter of this study, but it accepts that the causes of human suffering in the modern times is as intense as the suffering of man inflicted by fate.

Chapter TWO

Evolution of Tragedy Down the Ages

Greek tragedy originated from religious festivals dedicated to Dionysius. Even before the dramatic form developed, the festivals often told the story of a protagonist who was trapped in a cyclic doom and produced the sensation of a complicated and mysterious personal as well as collective guilt. The rituals that culminated in the genre that we commonly know as tragedy showed the sufferings of Dionysus, whereas those rituals that celebrated his revelries developed into comedy.

The Greek dramatists have obeyed the same instinct as the early Greek philosophers. They contemplated the innumerable phenomena of the universe. They assumed instinctively that these were the ultimate realities of the universe. The mind of Greek dramatists had only one focus. There is the one area of illumination, and, outside that, a darkness tempts us to explore. The action is played out within a strictly defined area of illumination. Therefore Greek drama does not have detailed reality. But they have explored the reality of the gods, the laws, and universal principles.

Greek tragedians are constructive rather than representational. They were interested in human character above all things. They use all the subtle resources of their art for the purpose of representing a nobly idealized type of human character in action. Because conditions of their theatre did not allow for lively and representational drama.

Aeschylus was a religious dramatist. He deals with the evolution of civilization. He is interested in the upward path of mankind from barbarism to civilization." The establishment of moral and social order out of chaos is an essential part of his religious thinking. Sophocles is much more naturalistic. Personal relation and appearance are studied much in his drama. His idea is not evolutionary. he

contemplates rather upon the human condition, which is fixed and governed by laws which are inherent in the nature of the universe and of man, they are eternal. It includes the known laws of morality and the mysterious regions of human experience in which innocent action can have terrible results.

Drama was staged on festive occasions. The dramatic festival was a contest and the contest had rules. The circumstances of Greeks changed the rules of the 'single character'. They changed the number of actors twice within a generation. Aeschylus found himself increasingly hampered by the one-actor rule. Because it was impossible to say things within the existing framework. Therefore, he introduced second actor. A generation later, Sophocles developed his dramatic possibilities with a third actor by finding two actors insufficient.

The main episode of the play is performed by three actors appearing simultaneously on the stage. How Greek tragedian's work has been recorded in the comments of Aristotle is given in his critical treatise 'Poetics'. According to Aristotle, the protagonist is morally admirable but not a complete man. He is confronted by hostile forces both inside and outside. He is divided between imperative and impulse, between morality and passion. He had to make a difficult ethical choice in order to solve the conflict. He searches for meaningful existence by struggling with those forces. But his destiny leads him to a tragic end.

Seneca's tragedies were lessons on the inconstancy of fortune. The theme of fortune's inconstancy is often linked with that of murder. He treats the murderer and his deeds as the most important. It inevitably made the greatest impression upon Elizabethans, particularly after the translation of Seneca into English. Almost every one of his tragedies is built upon a 'strong theme' which gave ample opportunity for 'blood' and 'horror'.

Seneca delighted in dramatizing the great crimes of antiquity. He took only those subjects which would yield psychological development and permitted detailed study of passion: love, hate and jealousy. So, Seneca is convinced that man has liberty of choice between good and evil. The will is all-powerful. Criminal heredity is a punishment, therefore the guilt of ancestors does not create circumstances that favor descendants.

Seneca's tragedy strongly emphasizes blood revenge for murder or a serious revenge from motives of jealousy. For instance, in *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra avenges the death of her daughter Iphigenia, but she is also driven by jealousy of Agamemnon's infidelities and by fear of the consequences of her own adultery. His tragedies were populated by ghost and filled with, revenge and blood. But he had relegated such materials to off-stage action that was narrated, while Elizabethan tragedy brought them on to the stage.

The tragedy of revenge has been classified as a definite Elizabethan tragedy of blood, more obviously plays like Spanish Tragedy. Tragedy of blood is a cluster of plays which work according to a rigid dramatic formula, blood revenge for murder as the central tragic fact. On the other hand, it is amorphous with no such definite characteristics, linked by a delight in blood and sensationalism. Thus, set apart artificially, the revenge tragedy of the Hamlet school has been defined as "a distinct species of the tragedy of blood - - - a tragedy whose leading motive is revenge, leading to the death of the murderer and often the death of the avenger himself". Such distinction was very usefully employed for a small group of early plays written almost under the influence of the Kydian formula of tragedy.

Early Kydian tragedy and Italian short stories not only provided perfect materials for Elizabethan tragedians, but also trained the audience to accept the plot

and characterization as dramatized truth. Elizabethan tragedians firmly believed in the law of god forbade private vengeance. There was a very real tradition existing in favor of revenge under certain circumstances. It was generally linked with the heir's legal duty to avenge his father even though this could be satisfied by bringing in a legal appeal.

Elizabethan tragedians presented revenge and bloody actions on stage to satisfy the appetite of the contemporary audience for violence and horror. They have brought suicide, ghosts, sensational incidents and bloody endings in their tragedies Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592) and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1590) have followed the Senecan spirit of revenge tragedy with bloody action on stage. Beside the 'blood', Elizabethan tragedians brought horror into play also. This includes ghosts and supernatural powers. For e.g. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and John Webster's *White Devil* are horror plays.

The central action of Elizabethan tragedy presents both the tragic and comic sense of life. It is not merely a matter of the tragic and the comic but also the high and low, the dignified and humble. Elizabethan drama combined these humanitarian and social aspects of life. These matters were sometimes treated with some degree of realism. The slaves, the watchman and gravediggers are brought into the same context as the kings and queens. They also speak much the same language. This dramatic justice of presenting humble life gives the feeling that Elizabethan plays are true to life. There is tragic action surrounded by life.

In this sense, Elizabethan drama is representational art. This method of representation is entirely different from that of classical drama. Classical dramatists construct to embody the conception, that wrong must be punished. This inevitably to further wrong and ultimate chaos.

Most Shakespearean tragedies also depart from the basic concept of tragedy. Though his tragedies introduce humorous character and actions for comic-relief, it is relevant to the tragic plot in various ways. There is developed such a mixed mode of tragic plot named 'tragicomedy'. It is a popular dramatic form. It produced one of the greatest dramatic successes in non-Aristotelian form. The chief characters and the central actions are embedded in a rich context of minor characters and subsidiary actions, some of which are not very closely related to the main action.

Ben Johnson's tragedies are more learned but less inspired than Shakespeare's. But the classics had a great influence on it. He is known as the best producer of masques for dramatic entertainment. He has also believed in unities of time, place and action. Another tragedians is John Webster, who depends a lot on violence, murder and revenge. He is not afraid of showing almost unbearable sufferings of human beings.

Generally, with regard to the tragic protagonist, Shakespeare does not depart from the outer trappings of the Aristotelian tragic hero. He is larger than life comes from high social status. But some minor tragedies have protagonists from the middle class and even from the lower class. Such protagonists are more to be found in eighteenth and nineteenth century tragedy. But in the seventeenth century, restoration playwrights produced new and original tragedy called 'heroic tragedy'.

Restoration tragedy, where the hero is noble born, is typically represented in a situation in which his passionate love conflicts with patriotic duty to his nation. It is a specific dramatic form called 'Heroic tragedy'. It is a heroic play which imitates heroic poetry. Consequently love and valor are its subject matter.

France produced two significant tragedians, in 17th century, Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. They offer an interesting contrast of tragic vision. Corneille explores

the possibility of human free will as characters gradually move to their destiny by their own choices. His tragedies have more pessimistic view of tragedy in which the hero is noble but helpless pawn in a cosmic game of uncontrollable forces who claims death as victory. Whereas, Racine presents a much bleaker view of human nature. His characters' uncontrollable passions drive them unavoidably to destruction. They lack the willpower to combat the passions that consume them. Love comes upon them as an irresistible force ultimately leads them to doom.

Minor, Elizabethan tragedies have for their protagonist a man from the lower class with prosaic language. It remained for eighteenth century playwrights to popularize the common people's tragedy. It is written in prose. It represents the hero from the lower class, who suffers from domestic disaster. Since then, most successful tragedies have been written in prose. Many tragedies revolve around the issue of general social and political significance. The effect on the audience is one of compassionate understanding rather than 'pity and fear'.

Recent tragedies are not the tragedy in the purist because they do not follow the form and content of classical tragedy. The protagonists of modern tragedy depart from the classical concept of the 'tragic hero'. They are pathetic, passive and ineffectual instead of manifesting largeness, dignity and heroism. But they struggle for meaningful existence. The struggle between 'external authority' and personal integrity is one of themes. The struggle within a person as in psychological drama is also one of the tragic themes. Can the common man not be the subject of tragedy ? Arthur Miller answered — "the common person is not ordinary in spirit". They have also the fear factor in their tragic end, though they seem 'anti heroic' in the eyes of the audience.

The tragedies since the world war I, are more innovative and experimental. But some tragedies have included experimentation with ancient types. They reintroduce the spirit of classical tragedy. T.S. Eliot's, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and O' Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (31) are such tragedies which are written in an innovative as well as original style. They use poetic diction, and have a choral lyrical function incorporated with the basic theory of classical tragedy.

Theories of Tragedy till O'Neill

Tragedy is generally an event which ends in sorrow. Tragedians supposed the principle of tragedy independently as the system of explaining and analyzing, in the different ages. But the norms of Aristotle's theory of tragedy imported a never ending, impression upon them and even those non-Aristotelian tragedians. So, Aristotle's analysis of tragedy is the source of all theories of tragedy in the western dramatic world.

Aristotle defined tragedy as

Tragedy is an imitation of action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornaments in the form of action, not narrative . . . incidents arousing pity and fear, where with to accomplish the catharsis of emotions. (53)

Aristotle says in his 'Poetics' that tragedy is an imitation of life action, which is serious, not trivialized nor romanticized. That should be complete and of a certain magnitude because to reverse the fortune of the protagonist it takes, sometime. As for the language, some time poetic language should be used in action form. Narrative tone should not be used because that goes against the concept of dramatic action.

Aristotle, mainly focused on two issues with which most of commentators agree. The first is that the tragic representation of suffering and defeat leaves the

audience feeling not depressed but relieved and even exalted. Second the pleasure derived from the purgation of 'pity and fear' - as the basic distinction of tragedy from comedy and other dramatic forms. Aristotle regards the tragedian's aim to produce 'pity and fear' in the highest degree as the principle that determines the choices and moral quality of the tragic hero and the organization of tragic plot construction.

Accordingly, the tragic hero rouses both 'pity and fear'. If the hero is better than we are the tragic effect will be stronger. The tragic hero is represented as higher than ordinary moral worth. The hero is depicted as suffering a change fortune from happiness to misery because of mistaken choice of action. 'Hamartia' - flaw in character and 'Hubris' self-pride and confidence lead the hero to take a wrong judgment in action that ultimately leads to the tragic consequences because the hero goes against divine law and violates the moral law, which sustain the whole cosmic order.

So, the 'tragic hero' evokes 'pity' because he is not an evil man and his misfortune is greater than his punishment. He moves us to 'fear' because we recognize similar possibilities of fate in ourselves. In the same way the very structure of the play effectively evokes tragic 'pity and fear' which depicts unknown facts related to the hero and results in reversal of his fortune from happiness to disaster.

Seneca believed that tragedy should make moral and cultural crisis its subject matter, because the 'shock' of moral and cultural crisis is the style of tragedy. He says that 'self' control is the basic way of resolving the probability of 'shock'. It is relevant to the morality of king or ruler, because morality creates a stable kingdom, but tyranny is supremely unstable. So, true kingship lies in 'self-control', not on wealth and power. When kings are corrupt society is corrupt and it extends through out the cosmos.

He brought the vision of relation between morality and power to depict the reality of his time. If one crosses the restriction of moral law on the basis of power, it will invite revenge and blood. In a sense, Seneca seems nearer to the concept of classical Greek theory of tragedy but he never seemed to expect the catharsis of emotions from tragedy.

For centuries *The Poetics* offered the only definition of tragedy available to dramatic critics. Aristotle's ideas concerning dramatic structure established the terms of debate. His ideas were never challenged. His categories of tragedy are assumed to be valid for all time among critics who discuss tragedy. However, closer reading reveals that Aristotle's formal definition does not include many plays which are generally thought of as tragedies. Not all tragic heroes suffer because of tragic error, nor does recognition always occur in the tragic plot.

Besides Aristotle some other renowned thinkers have offered alternative, definitions of tragedy. The 19th century philosopher, Hegel described the tragic situation as "the collision of mutual exclusive but equally legitimate causes: both Antigone and Creon stand for principles - loyalty to family and obedience to the state - which are morally justifiable if taken by themselves, but when these ethical positions conflict, tragedy results for both side.

Friedrich Nietzsche represented the origins of tragedy symbolically represented in the confrontation between Apollo and Dionysos, the Greek gods of order, form and impulse and instinct respectively. The tragic hero is divided 'between imperative and impulse, between moral ordinance and unruly passion . . . between law and lust'. Dr. Faustus rejects the limits of science (imperialtives) to seek diabolic knowledge and power (evil impulse). So, both Hegel's and Neitzsche's views are helpful to describe the tragedy in non-Aristotelian term.

Aristotle saw the extremism of the tragic hero as a failure to find the way leading to his downfall. In contrast, Nietzsche felt that this extremism was the sole justification for the hero's existence. As one, who possesses the courage to live dangerously, to risk all in order to gain all. Testing the boundaries of his finite nature, the tragic hero seeks to surpass his limitations and reach the unattainable summit. The energy which takes him towards his goal is often so intense that it eventually kills him as well. We admire the daring and uncompromising spirit of the tragic protagonist while recognizing that he gains in intensity of life.

The tragic vision does not assume the hero's ultimate downfall. Rather, it explores the possible ways to extend free will in the world. Walter Kerr defines tragedy as "an investigation into the possibility of human freedom" (21). Human beings are creatures existing in the universe with the power to change themselves and the world itself. The will decides and then acts on its decision and calls out its own destiny. The hero remains his own master even though the gods appear to have a hand in his destruction. So, the hero's determination leads him to a disastrous end. This is the test of the basic substance of humanity and its meaning.

Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that existence precedes essence. Human liberty is co-existent with human existence. To be is to act; not to act is to cease to be. So, we attempt often to fill up our free will ourselves by drawing the goodness of the world. But the eternal reality is human action often leads towards 'nothingness'. Man who is ever conscious of this nothingness is subject to fear and anxiety. T.R. Henn writes':

In Sartre's world there is a curious strain of brutality which is at once the result of and justification for, despair. Characters appear to be determined by events; and the protagonists are confronted by

simplified systems of conflicting claims, each of which demands a sacrifice. (238)

Like Satre, Albert Camus concludes after reading two tragedies that the tragic hero is determined neither by heredity nor his environment, but is moulded by the tremendous pressure of events

T.R. Henn, explained thus, "Tragedy communicates, through suffering, a supreme sense of harmony with the universe" (232). Because a tragedy projects the personal and collective values which are potentially put in danger, at the same time the danger of these values evokes a positive response from the audience. Therefore Henn define: "The harvest of tragedy is the freedom and enrichment of the human spirit" (237).

George Steiner says that the triumph of rationalism and a secular world have removed the metaphysical ground for tragedy in the modern world. The Greeks saw themselves as a part of larger reality. Steiner argues: "In Greek tragedy as in Shakespeare, mortal actions are encompassed by forces which transcend man . . . We cannot conceive of Oedipus without a Sphinx nor of Hamlet without a ghost" (193). These tragedies depict life as 'a great mystery beyond human understanding by instructing how small the world belongs to man'. So, he emphasizes, that by banishing divinity from the universe, humanity has decreased its significance.

After the successful opening of *Death of Salesman* (1949), Arthur Miller published an article in *The New York Time* entitled "Tragedy and the common Man". In this essay, he admits that few tragedies are written in the modern times due to lack of heroes among them, because of skepticism of science. However, he states, "I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were". He then gives his definition of modern tragic hero, "The tragic feeling is

evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character, who is ready to lay down his life."

Arthur Miller defined

Tragedy, bewildered defeat by life, is representative of the ordinary man whose aspirations reflect the false values of a society, the effect on the audience is one of the compassionate understanding rather than of tragic pity and fear. (324)

He sees the tragic vision demonstrating 'the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.' The tragic hero could have such a belief in himself and in the rightness of his consciences that he would give up his life rather than say what he thought was false.

Despite the changing times and pronouncement of critics in different era, the Aristotelian principles of criticisms are still relevant even in today's world. And the third chapter—the textual analysis of *Mourning Becomes Electra* will prove this to be true.

Tragic Vision

It is always been a fact that men are moved by force whose reason and influence can not be justified. But O'Neill has a vision on the force which is almost proved tragic in human life. The force of individual desires or secrete passion is the source of conflict which shakes the human beings to the bottom of their soul. The height and depth of the human passion and meanness of deeds are the basic causes of human sufferings which leads the human being to the divine redistribution.

The world of mind memories and fear are the results of 'the forces' which lies in human body. It leads to the sense of futility at the tragedy of human life because this is the penalty of human kind for living in the modern world under the pressure of loss of humanity.

So, O'Neill has philosophized tragedy instead of sympathizing on it. He says that human nature is greater than the conscious mind. There is always conflict between conscious motives and unconscious desires. Unconscious desires is the force behind the life which is more powerful and mysterious than the conscious mind. And it makes human being a great and terrible creature when it grasps the situation. Consequently human being or a tragic hero is compelled to have a wrong judgment in action and face the tragic end. O'Neill further said that the novelist is eternally the most tragic and tragedy alone had that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life and the hope and only one source of knowledge.

Tragic Life

O'Neill's main concern is to enter into the human nature and find out the main source of human sufferings which lies mysteriously in human body and gives the true sense of beauty, truth and knowledge. In a sense he invites not only the human life but

also the forces behind life' in expressive way. For that purpose his own tragic life experiences become the resourceful guideline for him.

O'Neill was born after American civil war (1878) and lived a pathetic childhood because of his father's theatrical profession. He used to live in a train box, third class apartment during journey where he did not get freedom as he wished. The whole family disappointed with his father because he did not have time for family. His mother became drugs addict, he himself became drunkard and nearly dead of tuberculosis. He joined series of different occupations and wondering because of his varied and interrupted education. His job as a sea man on merchantship to the south America and his unhappy married life led him towards the confusion about finding himself, was bound to have a profound effect on his philosophical outlook and nature of this play.

It was time of First World War, when O'Neill has started his career as a playwright. Everybody has extreme ego of superiority, there were declining of humanitarian values and respect. He witnessed the predicament of the world war, 'added more torture in his thoughts. He dig out the root of the sickness of the contemporary time that death of the old god and failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory surviving of primitive religious instinct to find the meaning of life in and to comfort its fear of death with.

So, O'Neill is compelled to see the dark side as a source of making a track in human civilization. For that he has not other options to use for didactic purpose in modern time. Hence, he has borrowed the old story of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra and attempted to reinterpret it in terms of modern psychology. He has taken a further step in philosophical disillusionment, concerned for the moment not with the inhumanity of God but with the mystery of human own soul. He attempt

to depict inner reality in unreal way by using abstraction symbolism and distortion, known as expressionism. It was an excellent medium for satire and social comment. At the sometime he has offered an excellent opportunity for imaginative stage designs and production.

O'Neill has borrowed the mythical story in American civil war setting to depict the human offering in modern world. Modern psychological theory gives a complete shape to his sense of human sufferings. He believed that suffering is inevitable in human life because it is neither fated nor emerge from the world of sense but it lies in human body. The desire which lies in the human body and its conflict with the conscious mind and individual passion and meanness are responsible facts that create suffering in human life.

The conflict between the conscious mind and unconscious desire is the source of suffering which shakes the human being to the bottom of their soul. The unconscious desires of human mind lie in a condensed form in a strong position rather than the conscious motives. So, it compels human being to choose action against the law of nature and moral codes.

The height and depth of human passion and meanness cause the human sufferings. O'Neill came to the conclusion that passion is a strong force which makes blind and creates an illusion to identify the moral laws and humanitarian values. It leads to choice a wrong action to fulfill the thirst because it changes the human beings into great and terrible creature.

So, O'Neills' sense of human suffering is highly influentially because human beings are fighting a terrible war with their own nature and defeated. Individual desire which goes against law of nature, goes against the law of 'cosmos'. It brings the

conflict between inner self and body is known as the human sufferings, human beings themselves are responsible for it.

Chapter Three

Textual Analysis

O' Neill has revitalized the classical form of art with special reference, generally to modern American tragedy, particularly with regard to *Mourning Becomes Electra*. This study adds a new perspective to the interpretation of *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It studies the major techniques employed by O'Neill in this play. He has given a particular force and direction to the tragic plot, the result is an American tragedy not particularly in Greek terms, but remarkably more effective and tragic. In a true sense, it becomes a perfect tragedy by reviving the spirit of the classical art form.

Imitation of Action

Mourning Becomes Electra helped to establish his position as the greatest dramatist of art theatre in America. It is impossible for the art theatre to divorce itself from the everyday world, its people and its problem. But American drama committed to the expression of poetry and imagination for the tragic plot. So, he has created the realism of situation where characters depict day to day problems of the modern materialistic American world.

O'Neill has taken an American civil war family and their sufferings as a presentation of contemporary society and the primary subject matter of the day. He never romanticizes the problems, rather he has sketched a real picture of human nature.

He has expressed the nature of an American family which represents the basic nature of all human beings with modern fragmented thoughts. He does not go beyond the basic instinct of human beings, their attitude, feelings and thoughts, their nature and culture, morality and arrogance. He has brought subconscious reality into existence. In this sense, he has brought true sense of imitation of life. He has

represented the action of humans in its basic sense. He has imitated the actions and represented them in highly dramatic manner.

He has created a real post-civil war situation and shown people are directly or indirectly involved and victimized by it. Ezra Mannon, a responsible patriot is in the battle field away from home along with his son, leaving his passionate wife at home along with her self-oriented daughter. Christine, the mother has extra marital affairs with her daughter's boy friend. So mother-daughter relation is not good. General Mannon has a good reputation in society but he does not have time for his wife. So, she is carrying on an affairs with Mr. Brant a ship captain. She murders her husband because of her passionate love for Brant. So, the daughter wants to complete her duty by punishing her father's murderer. This leads to the tragic end of the entire Mannon family. In the sense O' Neill has imitated the action that takes place in Mannon, family as the day to day frustration of contemporary society.

Serious, Complete and Certain Magnitude

Mourning Becomes Electra is a dramatic representation of serious action which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion of the protagonist. It has a serious plot ending in a catastrophe in the classical sense. O' Neill has destroyed the stereotypes of the convention of the well-made play in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. He has substituted an essentially different dramatic imagination, fundamentally liberating it with modern psychology. He has not based his analysis of human nature upon Freudianism, but upon the conflict between conscious and sub-conscious realities. The result is the new vitality, new spirit and a new depth of seriousness in the drama itself.

Mourning Becomes Electra is a profound study of tragic relation represented by highly serious actions of the Mannon family, a family of strong passion that is proud of tradition. It is an analysis of the social environment of family members, their

nature, and the conflict between their appearance and subconscious realities. The passionate love of daughter Lavinia for her father and the hatred of mother Christine for her husband lead the family to an unexpected tragic end. Christine's passion for Adam Brant leads her to murder General Mannon on the night of his homecoming from civil war.

Lavinia, who takes it as her duty to punish her father's murderer dominates the play because, it is Lavinia, who leads her brother Orin to kill Brant and drives her mother, and Orin to suicide. Then judging the real ground of her position, she shuts herself in Mammon's house. The moral strength of Lavinia, her sense of duty and dignity makes her ending not pathetic but tragic. At least, subconsciously, Lavinia has to be punished by her own conscience after Orin's suicide. So, it seems a tragic and deeply serious plot and metaphorically reaches the mourning of Electra in the Greek myth.

The tragic flaw in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is stretched to a certain magnitude, from happy to the reversal of tragic fortune of the hero. It does not affect the protagonist only, but all the family members who contribute to creating the tragic end of the Mannons on one hand, and on the other, the effect of the sufferings result in purgation or exaltation of the soul of the audience rather than depressing them. It begins from the highly passionate love of Lavinia and hatred of her mother toward her father and ends with the tragic disaster of the Mannon family. So, the play has a certain magnitude that it starts from the general instincts of human beings like love and hatred reaching a disastrous conclusion.

Mourning Becomes Electra grows from the nature of its own conflict of conscious and subconscious faculty which is different from person to person. It is conflict in both senses', one is the conflict within the individual's outside appearance

and inside reality. And other is the conflict of subconscious of different individual. So 'Neill has created an organic form itself. In the play, Lavinia is struggling with her outward appearance but she has not succeeded in dealing with the outside world. To do so, her dignity and sense of duty towards her father leads her to take wrong judgment. So, the play is complete in itself and stretched to a certain magnitude with serious effect. O'Neill demonstrate the acute sense of organic form about the mystery of life which made him a leader of American expressionism too.

Language

According to Aristotle, the language of tragedy should be poetic, it should be imaginative language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament. It needs a great language to lift it beyond itself. But O'Neill does not have such language because he does not think that such language is possible in the discordant, faithless rhythm of modern society. So, he has used the language of the civil war society in an expressive manner. The poetry of classical tragedy is altered to a rather flat prose.

But the play illustrates O'Neill adaptation of the language of poetic symbolism which has become associated with the new European drama particularly of Norwegian playwright Henric Ibsen. O' Neill is 'a bit of poet' although his plays are not written in verse; he recognized that the imagination and emotion of high drama are more nearly those of poetry rather than those of prose because poetic language is the language of serious matter. O'Neill's bold expression of sub-conscious reality helped to establish him as a great playwright of the art theatre and as a poet.

O' Neill has dramatized the inexpressible. He has created a subconscious world with the vigour of imagination. With Christine accusing her daughter of trying to become the wife of her father and mother of Orin, O' Neill creates such a world that can exist only in the mind but not in reality. Although he has not written the play in

verse, the effect of language is serious. So, because of his power of imagination and expression *Mourning Becomes Electra*, rises to excellent poetic expression for highly serious matter.

O'Neill has also included songs. Time and again he uses highly metaphoric language in the play like when Orin says, "I hate the day light it is like a accusing eye" (134). "The breaking of the waves was your voice, the sky was the same colour as your eyes. The sand was like your skin. The whole Island was you" (79). He frequently expresses his poetic feelings throughout the play. Lavinia becomes romantic with Peter as, "There was only this world – the warm earth in the moon light – the trade wind in the coco palms – the surf in the reef–the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart – the native dancing naked and innocent – with out knowledge of sin" (126).

And in the last part of the play Orin says, "Death is an island of peace" (149).

And even on the topic of the play. O' Neill metaphorically expressed the suffering of the civil war American family as an excellent representation in comparison with Electra a suffering character of the Greek myth. Though O'Neill has been depicting the real people and their problems, he has distorted the outside reality and expressed the subconscious reality of the characters' nature without romanticizing it. So, he does not create poetic feeling and emotions in the play but excellently fuses expressionism and realism.

All the actions that have been taking place in the play are highly dramatic. Nothing in the actions of the play is narrated. It is presented dramatically. In the play, home coming of Ezra Mannon and his murder on his own bed by his own wife is unexpected. Likewise the murder of Brant, suicide of Christine are developing actions that makes a perfect tragic plot construction. Orin's suicide and Lavinias self

imprisonment are the climaxes which gives a perfect shape to the tragedy in a dramatic manner.

Different actions grow gradually and end disastrously. The curtain of the play goes up with the Mannon family gathering and closes with the tragic end of the family with high dramatic justice.

Pleasure of Pity and Fear

Mourning Becomes Electra shows incidents arousing pity and fear in the mind of the audiences. This play is able to leave undeniable impressions of tragic representation of suffering upon the audiences, leaving them not depressed but relieved. He has followed this classical definition to make the plot must tragic. He has employed the principles of 'pity and fear' to produce the tragic effect in the highest degree to determine the choice and moral qualities of the 'tragic hero'.

The tragic hero like Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra* moves us to pity because she is not evil by birth. But because of her love for her father and her duty to punish her father's murderer and to give him justice even after his death, Lavinia takes the wrong way. Her moral strength is too powerful but as she misjudges the way of punishment she meets not only her doom but the end of the entire Mannon family.

She moves the audience to 'fear' because they recognize similar possibilities of error in their own life. They start to search for passion within themselves, which can make them terrible as well as tragic creatures in real life as Lavinia is in the play. So, the play keep the audience in illusion as do classical plays. But O'Neill's intention is not to depress the audience but to create the 'pleasure of pity and fear' until the catharsis of emotion. When Lavinia shuts herself inside Mannon's house after the end of all family members, the audience feels catharsis. So, his intention is to create a healing force for suffering of the modern human beings.

Catharsis of Emotions

It is a common phrase that the tragic plot ends in disaster of the protagonist to accomplish the catharsis of emotion.

So, the tragic representation of suffering and defeat should not leave feeling of depression. In O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Lavinia, the protagonist, because of senses of duty, has such self-weening confidence that she discards the divine warning or the moral law. She says to Orin just after Christine's suicide, "It is justice ! It is your justice Father !" (109). Lavinia just wants to give justice to her father, she does not have interest in the remaining Mannon family members. Her absolute hatred for her mother and passionate love for her father makes her violate the moral law, which most effectively evokes tragic pity and fear.

It creates the 'Pleasure of fear and pity' up to the end of the play. It was O'Neill's objectives to produce the highest degree of tragic effect upon the modern audience, because he understands the basic reality of human beings and their nature. The events of the play are developed through complication to the catastrophe; It releases their emotions which keeps them in the world of illusion of the stage.

Tragic Plot

O' Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is an excellent tragic plot. In this tragic plot, Aristotle's concepts serve as a suggestive starting point of the tragic construction.

The play is the organization of moral and natural qualities of the tragic hero. For instance, Lavinia's moral duty to punish her father's murderer and give him justice becomes an obsession for her. Though she is not evil She assumes the role of the avenger filled with sexual jealousy. Her passion grips her and leads her to disregard

the divine rules. As a result, she discovers the facts after Orin's suicide, leading the sudden reversal of her fortune.

So, the plot, most effectively evokes tragic pity and fear which is developed through subconscious complication to catastrophe accompanied by obvious 'dramatic irony'.

Dramatic irony is the element which has the most crucial role for the tragic plot and tragic hero. Of course, Lavinia's tragic overweening self leads to her doom, but she does not know the facts and attempts perpetually to regain the love of her father by punishing her mother. But it is obvious for the audience that she is going to her end. So by reusing the tragic plot in the classical sense O' Neill revives the spirit of classical art.

Tragic Hero

Lavinia, the protagonist of the play is a general's daughter thus, there is that sense of the noble argues in her as her family background.

O' Neill has shown Lavinia as possessing dignity and courage as classical hero such as Electra and Oedipus Rex. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Lavinia does not lose her dignity and courage until her own doom. At the very last moment of the play she expresses her dignity to her housekeeper, "Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment". She has such boldness until her doom; but she cannot sustain her defeat at the hands of destiny or unseen force.

A tragic hero should effectively evoke both pity and fear. If the hero is not thoroughly good or not thoroughly bad; his tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is better than real life projection. But he does not have acute tragic effect if he is antiheroic. What happens, to Lavinia is tragic. She has a good sense of duty and action, but she is unaware of the consequences of her action. She is heroic because

she has a strong dignity and she is tragic because she could not bear the load of the conflict between her conscious and unconscious mind. So, O'Neill grasps the spirit of the tragic hero in a classical sense.

Characterization of the Play

Lavinia is the protagonist of the play. She is a well known character, who ends her life to secure justice. She appeals to her father at the end of the play to tell her that she has guarded the Mannon family honor. She has loved Adam Brant, and crushed her love. She hates her mother for taking her lover away from her. Actually she has a mixture of motives for the action. O' Neill has given her such qualities that she has been animated by' a fate stronger than herself, a powerful dignity which makes her doom tragic.

Christine is another important character of the play. She is not so unqualified. But was mentally beyond the Mannon family, because of her ruthlessness in pursuing her passion for Adam Barant and hatred for her husband. So, she is weak before the moral strength of Lavinia. But she is not a lofty figure. Rather, she is like Aechyus' 'Clytemenstra, who hates Agameminon because he sacrificed their daughter, Iphigenia. Christine hates Ezra Mannon, first because of her passion for Brant and second because of her motives, her disgust at the implied brutality of her husband on their wedding night. So, she seems a serious woman with no instinctive repulsion towards passion.

But there is nothing in *Ezra Mannon's* character as he appears in *Hornecoming*. He is indicated as brutal and proud of family tradition. Indeed he comes back home to break down the wall of misunderstanding between husband and wife. So, he reveals his feeling deeper than he can express on the day of this death. But his death has major importance to develop the play in this direction.

Orin, brother of Lavinia and son of Mannon is a master representative character of a man, who is torn between love and duty. He is wounded during war and brought at home by his father. He is too weak to resist the dominance of strong nature. He is not a self-oriented character so he becomes the victim of Oedipus complex who transfers his incestuous love to Vinnie and becomes insanely jealous of her attentions to other men. And he is mentally depressed more after his mother's suicide. Because he thinks that he is responsible for her death. So, he shows in same behavior and takes the way of suicides. Adam Brant is failure commander of his vessel at sea as well as in his love. He is a jealous character wants to take revenge to Ezra Mannon by pursuing her wife.

Seth, an old gardener of the Mannon house, is the most important of the minor character. O' Neill has employed the old servant as an eyewitness of all the events that take place in Mannon faculty. And the town people, who appear at the beginning of each part of trilogy with lyrical functions and gossiping. O'Neill has attempted to revive in a modern way the ancient chorus.

Dramatic Irony

'Dramatic Irony' is employed, in the situation of the play in which the audience shares information of the protagonist's (character) futures circumstances with the playwright, of which the character is ignorant. In such a situation the character unknowingly acts in a way audience recognizes as generally inappropriate to the actual circumstance. The character acts on his own but the result comes not at all the way he intends.

O' Neill's, Lavinia for example presents a very complicated case of dramatic Irony. She engages in a mission to give justice to her father and punishes his murderers, she suffers a complex conflict between her conscious mind and her sub

conscious reality. She wants an end to the murders, and to protect the honor of the Mannon tradition but she finds herself as the cause of the end of the Mannon family. After attaining this, she shuts herself in the house.

O' Neill presents the reality, which was already known to the audience, but because of Lavinia's blind pride, she ignores the reality and follows wherever her wrong judgment lead. Eventually the hits her and she realizes her fault but it's too late. This particular technique employed by O'Neill produces the vitality of classical tragedy in a modern play.

O' Neill also has revitalized the ancient myth, which is a prominent term in literary analysis and has to be conceived not as a collection of stories but as an ever changing process in a work of art. He has changed it according to its appropriateness as modern literary art. He has deliberately woven modern materials into the pattern of ancient myth, but not introduced the Electra myth to depict the position of man in relation to God. He has reinterpreted classical manifestation to understand the general nature of human beings. He has revitalized the myth to attain the end of rousing 'pity and fear' in the classical sense.

Modern Version of Fatalism

The tragedy of 'fate' of classical tragedians is converted into a tragedy of psychological compulsions of a family trapped in a tangle of not only Freudian complexes, but also complication and conflict between conscious and sub-conscious reality. he has used, the modern version of fate, psychological forces to interpret the modern human problems.

All the characters struggle with their subconscious realities in the play. Lavinia is victimized of her inner reality. She wants to deny the fact because of her self-weening confidence and her actions are guided by the sub-conscious force. But

her faith is stronger than her, and her dignity makes the end most tragic. Christine, by nature, a sensuous woman, without instinctive repulsion to passion, ends her life because of her passionate love, an undeniable power. Orin is a man torn between love and duty and becomes a victim of Oedipus complex. So all the characters meet a tragic fate because of their psychology, because their sub-conscious reality is more powerful than they are, and as a result become the slaves of their own fate.

Art for Humanity

O' Neill's play *Mourning Becomes Electra*, has more than aesthetic value, for it is concerned with moral and practical reason and cultural and natural experiences of human beings for ordering human life. It has the didactic purpose of striking a balance in the modern life fought with religious displacement and scientific failure. O'Neill depicts the experience of the lost generation in America by placing it in the backdrop of human suffering in the post-civil war setting.

The conflict between the conscious mind and unconscious motives is the source of suffering which shakes human beings to the bottom of their soul. Unconscious motives are stronger than the conscious mind. So, it compels human beings to chaotic action against the law of nature and moral codes. Such heights and depths of human passion makes human beings tragic.

O' Neill concludes that passion is a strong force which blinds man and creates delusion. It changes the human being into great and terrible creatures and compels them to chaotic wrong action, which leads to defeat. He sees humans fighting a terrible war with their own nature and being disastrously defeated. Individual motives go against the law of nature and then the law of cosmos which bring the conflict between inner self and the mind.

Gossiping Villagers and Trilogy

The villagers of an American town gossip a lot about the fate of the protagonist. They appear in the beginning of every part of the play and comment upon the actions of the character. For example "Lousia: Seth is so proud of his druned old Mannons ! I couldn't help given' him a dig about Ezra's wife. Ames: Wal, don't matter much. he's alas hated her." They also indicate the future result of the protagonist's action on "Seth: Oh, hers and a hull passel of others, The grave yard's full of Mannon and they all spend their nights to hum here. You need not worry but you will have plenty O' company, Abner !" (115). In a sense, the gossiping villagers are the modified version of Greek chrous. Seth is the old servant of the house who advises Lavinia for her betterment but becomes unable against per dignity.

O' Neill has completed the play in Trilogy' form to give certain magnitude to the tragic plot. The plays different parts are filled. 'Homecoming' 'The Hunted', and 'The Haunted'. This gives the play magnitude and also makes O' Neill's aim more ambitious. He began to experiment with techniques to convey inner emotion, that were usually not expressed in dramatizable action. The world of the mind and memories. So, he paid no attention to the length of the play and he ignored normal division of the play into acts and scenes. But he seems to revive the principles of 'Unity of action' in each part of the play.

'Unity of action' was regarded as the most important structural aspect of tragic plot. O' Neill has also employed the theory of 'unity of action' for achievement of an illusion of reality. The unity of action requires that the actions represented by a play approximate the actual conditions of the staging of the play. So, the dramatic action in the play represents actual conditions. All of the action from Mannon's home coming to Lavinia's self imprisonment have special significance. Each of the action has a very

important role to make the plot perfect. So, if we take away any action from the play, it will disrupt the play as a whole.

Chapter-IV

Conclusion

In a sense, Eugene O' Neill has revitalized the classical art form in *Mourning Becomes Electra* by employing techniques of classical writing to deal with a modern subject matter in the setting of the American civil war. For that purpose, he has returned to human beings, particularly to the root of human suffering. He intended to study human life and human action, their nature and suffering. For him, human actions are guided by terrible passions, which create conflict between the subconscious, and the conscious mind. So that passion leads man to the grip of tragic fate. That tragic condition is the ultimate truth, which is the absolute source of knowledge .

Because the human being is a limited agent confined to the great chain of natural law, God in a classical sense, should accept the limitation . If she thinks of the self as more powerful than the law of nature, then the actions take wrong ways to the ultimate end. A tragic hero then becomes the symbol of mankind struggling against the force of evil in search of happiness. But the internal conflict in his mind between two opposite ideas, pulls him in different directions. So he is torn and divided and suffers the agonies of hell .

To create artistic quality of high distinction he employed the writing techniques of classical writers, thus creating the 'realism of situation' . On the basis of this theory, he has created human action that depicts the every day world, its people and their problems.

O'Neill has taken an American family as a representation of contemporary society, to represent the suffering of human beings because of their own nature . He

has brought out their sub conscious reality; their attitudes and thoughts and their morality and arrogance which are the root causes of their tragic end.

Mourning Becomes Electra is an acute dramatic representation of serious action which eventuates a disastrous conclusion, thereby accomplishing the catastrophe in a classical way. Because, O'Neill has destroyed the stereotypes of the well-made play of his time, substituted it with an essentially different dramatic imagination, that is fundamentally liberating in the form of modern psychological problems. He has not based his analysis of human nature merely upon Freudian theory, but upon conflict between conscious mind and subconscious realities. The result is a new vitality, new spirits a new depth of seriousness and a new dramatic height.

Lavinia, the protagonist of the play, with her moral strength, her dignity and self weaning confidence, makes her end not pathetic but tragic and serious. Her duty to punish a mother who takes her lover away from her and kills her father satisfy her passion, drives her mother and Orin to suicide when she realizes the fact it was too late to punish her father and to protect the honour of the family. So she shuts herself in a house as a pathetic creature.

So, O'Neill develops the concept of the tragic hero a fundamental technique of classical tragedy. He has given his 'hero' an extreme form of dignity and courage like the classical heroes Electra, Oedipus etc. The protagonist, Lavinia, does not lose her dignity and courage until her own doom. She accused her mother and Orin because they went the way of escaping punishment. Though she has been alone in the Manmon house, she does not understand her tragic end.

Lavinia, as a tragic hero, effectively evokes both 'pity and fear' because she is not thoroughly good or not thoroughly bad. She is also better than ordinary humans,

so she rouses the strong feelings of pity and fear. She is morally strong and better than we are because she has acute sense of duty, but she has one weakness, that the audience knows, she is ironically ignorant about it. She does not know what will happen after completing her duty. Hence, she is more tragic because she could not be the objective facts, she is more heroic because she maintains her dignity until her tragic end.

The language of MBE is poetic, imaginative, and embellished artistically. Because tragedy has a serious plot needs the particular kind of language that lifts it beyond itself. But O' Neill has not such ornamental language because, elevated language is not possible in discordant, faithless rhythm of fragmented society.

But the play illustrates O'Neill's adaptation of the language of poetic symbolism associated with new European drama. Although his plays are not written in verse; he recognized that the imagination and emotion of high drama is near that of poetry rather than prose. Because of his bold expression of sub conscious reality, he has been established as a great playwright of the art theatre and as a poet'.

He has used metaphoric language like, 'Death is an island of peace and even the title of the play metaphorically expresses the suffering of modern people comparable to highly tragic characters of Greek tragedy. He has portrayed real people and their problems but he has distorted the outside reality and expressed the sub conscious reality of people without romanticizing it. So, he has used highly artistic language creating excellent fusion of expressionism and realism, to uplift the dramatic action.

The concept of pleasure through evocation of 'pity and fear' is employed in the play to produce the tragic effect in the highest degree. This highlights the choices and moral qualities of the tragic hero as well as organization of the tragic plot. Lavinia,

tragic hero, moves us to pity because she is not an evil woman by birth. She is morally strong but she misjudges the way of punishment and justice because of the intense passions of love and hatred which leads not only to her own doom, but also the tragic end of entire Mannon family. She also rouses fear because we recognize a similar possibility of error in our own life. So, the play is able to keep the audiences under illusion. But O' Neill's intention is not to depress audience but to rouse the pleasure of pity and fear and purge these emotions.

The tragic plot with a disastrous end for the protagonist accomplishes the catharsis of emotions. The events of the play, developed through complication to the catastrophe in which we are moved through empathy with the suffering of the tragic protagonists is an Aristotelian agenda which the play fulfills.

Of course, O' Neill's MBE, is concerned with the moral experiences of human beings. This concern is presented as conflict between the conscious and sub-conscious realities which O' Neill sees as the source of human suffering. This shakes the human being to the bottom of their soul. It compels the hero to choose action against natural law and moral codes. Such height and depth of human passion makes a human being a great and terrible creature. The play is a picture of the human being is fighting a terrible war with his nature and being disastrously defeated.

Therefore, O' Neill has revived classical art form by employing the techniques of classical tragedians. who had more precisely focused on art as a guideline to save human values. O'Neill has also served the didactic aspect of art in MBE.

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