

The Depiction of the Tragedy and Psychological Aspects in the Selected Plays of American Dramatist Eugene O'Neill

Haider Ibrahim Al-Selman, Abdullah Mohd Nawi, Ansam Ali Flefil

Abstract: — *The paper is to present the tragedy and psychological aspect of Eugene O'Neill's selected plays. Reviewing the dramatic life of the father of American drama is the main objective of this study while also finding out some tragic and psychological aspect in the plays such as Desire under the Elm; The strange interlude and; the long day's journey into night and The Hairy Ape. The analysis is the narrative analysis, as well as the data analysis, is to narrate the tragedy and psychological concepts in original content of selected plays in Eugene O'Neill.*

Index Terms: American drama, Eugene O'Neill, Family relationship, Psychology, Tragedy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the dramatist, Eugene Goldstone O'Neill was born on October 6, 1888, in a hotel room on Broadway, New England, as the son of James O'Neill and Ella Quinton. As his family was sweltering. Today's playwright must crack into the roots of today's sickness as he feels: the death of the old god and the failure of materialism, provide any new fulfilment to the outstanding primitive religious instinct. He finds a meaning for life and act with the fear of death. (2, 3)

These revealing words of O'Neill provide key elements to our understanding of the playwright. No other playwright introduced the American drama in dramatic realism and naturalism as it was started by Russian playwright Anton Chekov, Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen and Swedish playwright, August Strindberg. In his own life, O'Neill had recognized himself as the most noticeable American playwright. He had his achievements: he was awarded the Pulitzer awards for beyond the horizon, Anna Christie, strange interlude and a long day of travelling at night. He won the highest international recognition. (4)

It is reported that O'Neill was the genius behind the greatest change that came over American theatre, represent the year 1920's and 1930's the highest period in the history. He has written things of current interest by open-handed American drama requiring its genius and authority, dynamism and force. American theatre was found to be in a desperate need for reform and dynamism.(5) There were famous playwrights before O'Neill had trapped in a stereotyped pattern and worn out condition. He showed

Revised Manuscript Received on June 8, 2019.

Haider Ibrahim Al-Selman, Iraqi Ministry of Education/Iraq
Salmanhaider868@gmail.com

Abdullah Mohd Nawi, Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi
Malaysia

Ansam Ali Flefil, College of Education for Humanities/ ThiQar/
University, Iraq

himself to be the chief worn out a dramatic rise against the conventions and the romantic banal and established himself as the symbol of a renaissance that paralleled on the stage that is called a renaissance in poetry. And he was an untiring experiments.

O'Neill experimented with a variety of dramatic ways and modes. When he was successful in a way in stylishness, he was going to move to another and this experimentation continued from the beginning to the end. His works involve characters that inhabit the margins of society, who participate in depraved behavior when they struggle to keep their hopes and desires but ultimately slide into disillusionment and hopelessness. "Characters face the life and death or give up fighting. Defiant courage is the keynote of them all. A never-failing spirit of defiance is the chief quality of O'Neill's tragic heroes. They are unable to dominate forces that they do not understand or master (6). In this paper, the researcher wants to reveal the tragedy and psychological aspect in the modern American drama. It is represented by the father of American drama and his dramatic plays.

This paper explains that Eugene O'Neill is a great realist in the field of drama and literature throughout his lifetime, he has committed himself to dramatize live vibrant human beings. He is one of the influential American dramatists, the creator of a serious American, almost one, who has gone to the International center of conservation in America. As a dramatist of the modern era, Dramatist is said, "It has been said that he has taken a lot of parts in the modern dramas and his dramatic world is nothing but a type of drama that illustrations the mind and conscience of men the quantity of its exaggeration is too large, in the twentieth century adventurers. It is countless to retain it carefully. As this drama is related to the intuitive school, it is generally called the common level of reality, the nature of tragedy (1).

II. STUDIES ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND TRAGEDY ASPECT IN O'NEILL PLAYS

A. In the Strange Interlude

It is nothing but a perfect study of Neurosis. The central theme may be stated as Nina's search for the self, her search of pleasure and her attempt at the avoidance of pain. Being one of the most ambitious plays. Based on the play strange interlude, four different characters were carried through a searing emotional crisis in their lives over a period of twenty-eight years. Nina Leeda is the heroine of the play, has



been involved to an aviator. Her stern and puritanical father did not permit too many of her fiancés and prevented her from making love and the lover Gordon was killed in the World War I. Nina was left with severe mental pain and being a scholar, she was withdrawn, isolated but severe in self-discipline. After the death of her lover, she leaves the home and becomes a nurse. She attempts to calm her guilt by sacrificing her body to wounded ex-serviceman. She dedicates her life to the struggle against her fate. Gordon is a symbol of love of the escape from the proud mask of the father. (7)

In the *Strange Interlude*, O'Neill explores the concept of psychology and thinking. From the beginning, the character of Nina Leeds is dominated by her vague dream of Gordon Shaw. The character of her father, Marsden, and Darrel all fight against the reality of life whereas Gordon and Sam Evans are the only men in Nina's life who approach reality. Almost all the characters in the play have their existence fixed but the action is conceived as psychic duration. Here in the play, the psychological complexes are represented by four main characters. Both the male and female characters express their inner feelings psychically. The characters like Nina, Edmund Darrell, Marsden and Sam Evan are possessed with deep psychology. O'Neill treats the male characters as 'inferior'. Nina is measured the strongest. The character in the sense that she initiates the action of the play. She acts, and the men react out of their need for her. She is the source of life and identity in the woman herself. She is the center of focus for the four men, three of them are sexual partners. For these men, she is the source of life and well-being. (8).

B. The Desire under the Elms

This is a play about the teenagers longing to hold the patrimony of their father and hatred of him. It is largely caused by his authority over them due to his possession of the farm, but O'Neill embodies Freudian psychology with which its highlight on the attachment between mother and her son. Hostility between son and daddy which strengthens the inner meaning of the Greek tragedies with their desirability for incest is clearly evident in the play (3, 9). This play is set on a farm in New England and here the characters are presented as overpowered with emotions and unconscious influence expressed in terms roughly equivalent to the Oedipus complex. O'Neill strengthens *Desire under the Elms* by integrating into a single complex of Freudianism. Each character has a lust for material possession particularly for the farm and each has a sexual lust that leads to his or her final downfall (10). The characters move suddenly with life and initially, both the male and female characters are possessed with psychological complexes. Specifically, the story settings on the three characters Eden, Abby and Ephraim. Eden owns a complex psychological i.e. mother complex whereas Abbie burns with desire to have a sexual intercourse with Eden exhibits her abnormal psychology. Ephraim plays a minor role. He is also offered with psychological complexes (11).

The stage that object mediates between the unconscious and the ego. At his mother's death and in the following years his anima, his need for love has never been able to establish a psychic equality with his need to possess the form. As Rod W. Horton says "opposing the persona, there is presumed to

exist in the unconscious a contrary force, the anima which tends to check every outward manifestation of human behavior. Thus, a kind of dialectical opposition is set up within the individual which is not properly resolved results in frustration and neurosis" (12).

C. The Hairy Ape

The hairy ape is the tragedy and the expressionistic play of Eugene O'Neill selected plays. It has shown the different perspective of the conflicts and struggle in life. The expressionist is the term which used by the first painter of American culture and society (13). The play has shown the great idea of fighting, is a great distinguish from painting from the representations. (8, 14) The concept of depressions is used to represent fighting, conflict, struggle, and the bad relationship among the characters in the plays, According to M.H Abrahams point that the vital feature of Expressionism is an essential revolt against realism. The representing the world as it objectively, the playwright adopts the direct experience by identifying the world as it appears to his state of mind. This work implies that mental illness is representative of anxiety-ridden recent man in an industrial and technological civilization which is nomadic toward chaos. It is regarded as the radical revolt against the tradition of the people in the society and cultures (15).

The dramatist, O'Neill has produced in *Nina Leads* a female counterpart who needs a spiritual union and so she makes a quest for happiness in sex and a moral existence lying across all values and gives herself to men without love. She is neurotic, tense, frustrated and vindictive. Through this sort of behavior, she is said to have possessed abnormal psychology. Thus, the character of Nina is formed in this drama as a powerful heroine whose character has manifested with a deep psychological study of womanhood. Through representation of the character Nina, O'Neill has consciously search to generate a heroine who would personify a cross-section of all womanhood. What he actually created is nothing but an embodiment of his ambivalent feeling towards the sex, a female who is a victim in the society (16).

III. THE REPRESENTATION OF SON IN THE PLAYS OF O'NEILL

Psychically, the representation for all the sons in the play *The Desire under the Elm* on the patriarchal morals of greed cannot be modified, complemented or disciplined by the anima energies of love. That is why Eben is passionately bound to his mother and love. Eden hurts from the psychic spirit of wanting love because of mother fixation (10). The theme of his mother's curse that Eben introduces runs throughout the action. It is linked with some of the developments like the growth of Eben's personality through incest. Eben succeeds home news that his father had got married again. It makes all 3 of them with anger and frustration. Simon and Peter decide to leave for California at once. Eben wants to make a deal with them. He identifies whether his father has hidden gold for three hundred dollars to each Simon and Peter will write off their share of the farm to Eben. In a language full of lust, hatred and animal

imagery, Eben describes his adventure with Minnie. Eben's obsession with Minnie exhibits his complex psychology. The wishes and the desire of the mother is essentially uncovered in an idealized and exalted mother. The dependence of Eben's desire on his mother is the eternal width of Eben's drama. Eben is jumped into severe psychological pain at the thought of his mother being exchanged in his father's affection by somebody else Abbie. (4) O'Neill marks the use of the mother archetype to probe into Eden's personality. Eben's internal conflict is the psychological core of O'Neill's play is investigation of Eben's personality created on the relationship with his mother, is the chief basis of Eben's tragedy. The female character who enjoys unusual psychology is Abbie. Like Eden, she wants the farm. Her immediate reaction to the farm is one of the gluttonies and possessiveness. Abbie's burning desire for Eben displays her odd psychology. Abbie is a compelling character. (17) .The analysis the tragic points in the plays of Eugene O'Neill. The study has revealed a different type of tragedy and psychological aspect in the plays of Eugene O'Neill so as to reveal the tragedy of modern times.

These analyses are depicted in the modern drama as contained in Table 1. It revealed the picture and struggle of the characters in the plays. The tragedy has happened because of different action leading to the dark side of the American culture and society. These actions of the plays lead to the disintegration of American family than the society (18). The tragic action include the loneliness, sexuality, incest, murder, suicides and revenge. These actions are referred as psychological factors to human beings

TABLE I: THE TRAGEDIES AND ANALYSES

No.	Tragedy expression in the selected plays	The analysis view points
1	Gif me drink dere, you! Ave a Salute wet! Gesundheit! Skoal Drunk as a lord, God stiffen you! Here is how! Luck! Pass back that bottle, damn you! Purin it down his neck Ho Foggy! Where the devil have you been? La Touraine I hit him smash in yaw py Goat And the copper nabbed him – and I run – Scene one -73	The speech by the voice is to express the drinking of the lord. The comparison is given as the lord. This is lead to the tragedy.
2	Voice : we must be passing the hook She is beginning to roll to it Six days in hell – and then Southampton – scene 1-P74	The tragic position refers to the days of hell and the punishment of people in doing problems of the society
3	Voices (Mockingly) the zoo? That's a	The tragic idea is given the name zoo

	new name for this coop --- a damn good name! Who is that boob talking? He is up fierce the bloke they burning in out of his head .The bulls had beat him. 98	as yank has gone to the zoo and compare himself with other people
4-	Peter (with sardonic bitterness) Here- it is stone atop on the ground –stones atop o stone – Makin stone walls- -year atop o year –him ‘n’ me ‘n’ then Eben – Makin stone wall fur him to fence	Suffering tragedy which is represented by the main tragedy is outrages against others.
5	Simeon: Dogs eat Dogs. Waal. (Eben comes out of the front door and around the corner of the house. .the sky is beginning to grow flush with sunrise. Eben. Stops by the gate and stares. Around him with glowing possessions. Scene two-15	The hardest things in the life. This is features of the exaggeration of the study of life.
6	Simeon said that (vindictively) Waal – I hope she's a she devil that make him wish .he was dead an "living in the pit o hell fur comfort.part1 Peter: (fervently) Amen! –scene three.	The tragedy is the devil of Siemen that makes him

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like thank all his previous teachers in English language and literature. The first author also like to thank his supervisor for his courage, supports, and the guidance during his academic journey.

Also thank those who help me of publishing this paper, expresses my thankfulness to the members of (IJET) for their academic help in language and literature. I thank my family because of their finical supports.

REFERENCES

- [1] MD Higgins, "Reflecting on the Irishness of Eugene O'Neill: Speech at the Eugene O'Neill Society Gala Dinner National University of Ireland, Galway, Friday, July 21, 2017". *The Eugene O'Neill Review*. vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 163-173, 2018.
- [2] M Robinson "The other American drama", *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge; 1994.
- [3] Y. S. Cruising Faery, "Queer Desire in Giles, Niggler, and Smith", *Tolkien and Alterity*: Springer; pp. 149-79, 2017.
- [4] D. McGovern, "Eugene O'Neill's Place in Irish Theatre Today: Interviews with Irish Theater Scholars", *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 140–162, 2018.
- [5] J. Kennedy, "Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953)", *Visions of Tragedy in Modern American Drama*, 2018.
- [6] K. Eisen, "The Theatre of Eugene O'Neill: American Modernism on the World Stage", *Bloomsbury Publishing*, 2017.
- [7] S. H. Garvey, "Strange Interlude by Jack Cummings III", *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 183–186, 2018.
- [8] A. D. Pierce, "No Way Out: Violence in Selected American Expressionist Plays", *University of Missouri--Kansas City*, 2017
- [9] K. Scott, "The Tragic Aspect of Teaching: Hope in Face of Uncertainty", *Religious*



- Education*, vol. 112, no. 3, pp 275-286, 2017.
- [10] C. Yingying, "Analysis of Abbie's Tragedy From the Perspective of Androgyny", *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 22-29, 2018.
- [11] A. Pettit, "Comedy and Metacomedy: Eugene O'Neill's Desire under the Elms and Its Antecedents", *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 1, pp. 51-76, 2017.
- [12] S. Chelliah, "O'Neill's Dramatic Skill in Depicting the Most Pressing Psychological Complexity of Modern Men with a Focus on Treatment of Adultery and Love in His Plays", *An Appraisal. Language in India*, vol. 17, no. 7, 2017.
- [13] R. Thornton, "The Hairy Ape by Richard Jones", *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 170-174, 2017.
- [14] M. Ebrahimi and A. Taheri, "The Tragedy in the Story of Rostam and Sohrab in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh", *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 96-105, 2017.
- [15] E. O'Neill, "The hairy ape", *Charles River Editors via PublishDrive*, 2018.
- [16] C. M. Pilon, "Suffering and Storytelling-Exploring Extreme Leisure through Trails, Trials, and Tales", *University of Waterloo*, 2017.
- [17] O. Amani, H. Pirnajmuddin, and S. M. Marandi, "Sam Shepard and the 'Familial Maze': Possible Worlds Theory in Buried Child", *Journal of Language Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2017.
- [18] A. Weller, V. Florian, R. Tenenbaum, "The concept of death — 'Masculine' and 'feminine' attributes", *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 253-263, 1989;19(3):253-63.



Haider Ibrahim Khalil is a teacher of English language in high school in the ministry of Education in Iraq. I have studied B.A of English language in Thiqr University and Master of Art in B.A.M.U University in India. I am a Ph.D. scholar of University Technology Malaysia I am studying English literature under the supervision of Dr.Abdullah Mohd Nawi and Dr.Ansam Ali Both supervisors are Ph.D. holders of English language and literature.



Dr. Abdullah Mohd Nawi is Assistant Dean (External and Global Engagement) at the faculty of the Social Science and Humanities. He obtained his Ph.D. in Education at Canterbury University in New Zealand has taught and trained students and professional in Malaysia, New Zealand, and UK. His research interests are the developing field of drama in ESL/ELT, and also in the development of

ESL as a whole

Dr. Ansam Ali Flefil Al-Hussainawy received her B.A. in English from Iraq/ University of Thi-Qar / College of Education for Humanities / Department of English in 1999. She received her M.A. in English literature from Iraq/ Al-Mustansyriah University/ College of Arts in 2003. She received her Ph. D. in English literature from India/ Pune University/ IASE in 2013. Currently, she is an Asst. Professor in Iraq/ University of Thi-Qar / College of Education for Humanities / Department of English from 2003 up to. Her