FROM AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIA TO EUGENE O'NEILL'S MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA: TEXT, ADAPTATION AND PERFORMANCE[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The Royal National Theatre's production of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* at the Royal National Theatre (London 2003–4) downplayed the relationship between O'Neill's trilogy and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Rather than following the stage directions of O'Neill, which are evocative of classical staging conventions, the RNT production sought to foreground O'Neill's theatrical legacy of nineteenth-century melodrama and fusion of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realism and expressionism. Moreover, the director Howard Davies presented a political interpretation of O'Neill's text that focused on changing political worlds. In so doing, the production offered an innovative view of O'Neill that located him within his theatrical context, rather than juxtaposing him with his classical source material. However, Davies' directorial interpretation raises interesting questions about O'Neill's relationship with his classical source material. The main aim of this article therefore is to re-examine the relationship between O'Neill (1888–1953) and Aeschylus.

To this end, this article divides into three main parts: part one explores O'Neill's understanding and use of classical material; part two examines O'Neill's stagecraft in the light of his own theatrical context and his use of classical staging conventions; and part three forms a review of the RNT production. The critical argument in the final section is that O'Neill's response to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and indeed all the classical House of Atreus plays,[2] is derived from an interpretation of the mythic material that is shaped by psychoanalytical factors. In particular, O'Neill's interest and participation in psychoanalysis shapes his character-orientated response to the Atridae myth. Accordingly, O'Neill's primary focus is seen to be domestic and results in a de-politicized interpretation of Aeschylus' trilogy. Indeed, O'Neill's thematic response to Aeschylus is concerned with the effect of fate and determinism on characters' decisions, but he defines fate not as an autonomous agent or inherited propensity, but as a shared human condition that shapes and regulates sexual desire. Consequently, O'Neill suggests continuity of meaning through what are held to be the universal precepts on which desire is based. Paradoxically, however, it is exactly what O'Neill considers to be the 'universal' aspect of the Atridae myth that dates his interpretation and circumscribes its relevance. Therefore, it will be argued that O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is in fact quite removed from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (and the Atridae plays of Sophocles and Euripides), and, as Davies' production in part realized, is more suitably considered a product of its day, that is a realistic, domestic, melodrama with echoes of expressionism.

O'NEILL'S UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF CLASSICAL MATERIAL

Continuity of meaning

O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* transposes the mythic events of the House of Atreus to New England at the end of the American Civil War (1865–66); therefore, several historical filters determine and shape O'Neill's vision of the classical past. O'Neill places the American

Civil War as an intermediate location between his 1931 present and Aeschylus' production in 458 BCE. By setting the play in the nineteenth century, O'Neill utilizes the neo-classical sanitized and romanticized interpretation of the classical world to suggest equivalence with classical Athens. Yet, as will be discussed below, the extent to which this neo-classical, American Civil War background determines his thematic interpretation of the classical texts is minimal. Initially, it should be noted that the choice of an intermediate historical setting between Aeschylus' and O'Neill's own time suggests continuity of meaning between different historical/cultural periods, a suggestion that illustrates O'Neill's 'universalizing' agenda. While it is true that theatrical interpretations/adaptations of the classical past are often justified on grounds of continuing relevance, a distinction needs to be drawn between relevance and continuity of meaning. O'Neill's sense of the universal is problematic because he is not really concerned with issues/questions that transcend the immediate production environment of classical texts in a political, social or thematic capacity; nor is he concerned with embedded emotional reactions indicated by playwrights in the plot and characterization of their plays. Rather, O'Neill reads the past and determines his thematic agenda in the light of his perceptions of Jungian philosophy and psychoanalytical theories of sexual relations; thus, O'Neill's idea of universal issues, in effect, understands the past in light of the concerns of the present.

Fate and determinism

O'Neill's response to the Greek source material is primarily derived from his understanding that Greek tragedy is concerned with issues of fate and determinism. Initially, it must be remembered that O'Neill was writing before the explosion of secondary scholarship in Greek tragedy in which the complexity of action (independent or determined) was explored. Indeed, it is in scholarship of the latter half of the twentieth century that issues of motivation have been pored over and endlessly debated.[3] Moreover, O'Neill was also writing under the growing influence of psychological realism in American theatre and expressionism in European theatre,[4] whereas in more recent times the idea that Greek characters can be interpreted in psychological terms has been rigorously challenged (Dawe 1963, Easterling 1972, Pelling 1989).[5] Thus, given the date that O'Neill is writing, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that O'Neill is not judged in comparison with modern scholarship. O'Neill considers that characters and events in Greek tragedy are shaped by divine agency. In his 'Work Diary' (1926– 31) he makes two significant entries. In 1926, at the very beginning of his artistic endeavour to write *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill asks:

> Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of today, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by?[6]

<div align="right">Work Diary, Spring 1926</div>

And in answer to this question O'Neill later, in 1930, writes:

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

<div align="right">Work Diary, 1930</div>

The first of these quotations evidences O'Neill's acceptance that action in Greek tragedy is determined by divine agency, and the second quotation establishes that fate and the existence of gods are directly linked in a causal relationship. This indicates that O'Neill sees action in Greek tragedy as determined by divine will. In modern times this view has become problematic: since Albin Lesky's *Greek Tragedy* (1965) the idea of double determinism has become ingrained in modern analysis of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. In later twentieth-century

criticism, characters are often considered to be acting on the basis of personal motives as well as under the influence of supernatural forces (gods, curses, *Ate*); thus characters are responsible, in part, for their actions. Moreover, in more recent interpretations of the *Oresteia,* explanations of responsibility in the light of mythic/Epic material, cultural and political concerns, and/or gender prerogatives have joined religious and ritual explanations as indicative of motive. Thus, because critical stances have changed, and as each critical fashion gives way to the next, the previous interpretation seems dated. O'Neill's focus on, and definition of, divine agency as fate dates his interpretation of Greek tragedy.

O'Neill's question and answer in effect consider 'modern psychology' as an appropriate equivalence for divine agency and the motivations of his characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are therefore presented in psychological terms. Before an analysis of fate and determinism in relation to motivation can take place, however, what needs to be understood is that O'Neill's concept of 'psychology' is a combination of nature, nurture and psychic connection. Although expressed in modern terminology, it would be fair to say that O'Neill's concept of psychology is a fusion of genetically determining and socially determining factors that are also held to be intrinsically common to the 'human condition'. This is where O'Neill suggests a continuous link between the different eras of the past and the present: that there is a common bond that transcends the individual psyche and the cultural, political and social influences of time and place. Thus, according to Doris Falk (1982: 6): 'O'Neill assumes, with Jung, that one's problems and actions spring not only from his personal unconscious mind, but from "collective unconscious" shared by the race as a whole, manifesting itself in archetypal symbols and patterns latent in the minds of all men.'

What O'Neill holds as common to the 'human condition' is the need to feel love, which is then expressed through sex; thus, neither love nor sex is shameful as they are part of the natural 'human condition'. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the human need for love is distorted by the repression of puritanism, which results in a yearning for the sexual freedom offered by paganism. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* the South Sea Islands, presented as a primitavist and pagan idyll without the concept of sin, serve as a symbol of escape for the Mannons and as a symbol for a return to Mother Nature. In modern times, however, O'Neill's construction of paganism is questionable: the idealizing of the South Sea Islands as a prelapsarian world filled with naked natives frolicking in the waves and under palm trees is a racist stereotype that ignores the complexity of different societies (see Clapp 2003).[8] Moreover, although O'Neill suggests a parallel between the pagan South Sea Islands (1931) present and the pagan classical past, in the light of modern studies of classical times, his assumption that ancient classical society expresses the same freedom as his depiction of life on the South Sea Islands is seriously problematic. In O'Neill, the freedom that paganism represents is a freedom to love and to express that love sexually. However, modern scholarship of classical times has shown that classical sexuality, at least for citizen women, was policed and regulated. Indeed, O'Neill's assumption (derived from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 1993) that classical times expressed a Dionysian joy in life no longer holds currency as an uncontested interpretation of classical Greece. Consequently, to a twenty-first century audience O'Neill's dialectical opposition between puritanism and paganism does not have the same resonances today as it would for a 1931 audience; thus, the psychological need to express love, symbolized by yearnings for a happy pagan existence, is less persuasively used as psychologically determining factor.

The incest motif

O'Neill's psychology also has a genetically determining aspect. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the children inherit the propensities of the parents, thus each generation is sexually enthralled by their opposite sex parent figure: Ezra Mannon is attracted to Christine Mannon because she looks like the family nurse Marie Brantôme, a similarity which also provokes Marie's son

Adam Brant to an Oedipal-based desire of Christine; Lavinia Mannon desires her father Ezra and his physically similar cousin Adam; Orin Mannon desires his mother Christine and his sister Lavinia who bears a striking maternal resemblance. In this inherited sexual desire for a parent, O'Neill utilizes Freudian precepts whilst aiming at finding equivalence with his concept of fate and inherited crime in Aeschylus. First, it is important to examine O'Neill's use of Freud. Although O'Neill actually denied any Freudian influence and claimed that the incest motif was common to Greek myth,[9] what links O'Neill with Freud is that he understands and interprets incest in the classical plays through a Freudian filter. Obviously, as has been noted by Bernard Knox (1982), Freud's Oedipal complex is not a description of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus.*[10] Sophocles, whilst showing the full emotional range that is caused by the revelation of incest, is careful to explain that Oedipus' marriage is a matrilocal political marriage that secures the Theban throne (Soph. *O.T.* 258–60).[11] Moreover, although Sophocles' Oedipus certainly loves Jocasta, he loves her as wife, not as a consequence of a suppressed desire for his mother; in fact he finds the thought of bedding his mother fearful (Soph. *O.T.* 976). What is more important is that Sophocles intends both the love between Jocasta and Oedipus and the realization of incest to expand the scope of the tragedy rather than evidence secret fantasies. Thus, O'Neill, in making his Orestes figure (Orin Mannon) motivated by desires that Freud abstracted from the Oedipus myth, indicates that he is responding not to the Greek text, but to Freud's appropriation of the myth.

O'Neill's use of the Electra complex for his interpretation of Lavinia Mannon is more complicated, principally because the Greek tragedians' interpretation of Electra's relationship with her father is made problematic by the distorted family relationships after the murder of Agamemnon, who is the legitimate *kurios.* The extent to which Electra could be considered as desiring her father is a very complicated issue and cannot be fully debated here; however, it is vital to note that Electra's attachment to her father is determined by social conventions that are not considered by O'Neill. In Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Electra's attachment to Agamemnon is linked to her position in the house after her father's death; therefore, issues of gender expectations, patrimony and *oikos* politics all determine her relationship to her father. Most important, however, is the point that Agamemnon is deceased. Therefore, Electra's lamentation for her dead father, whilst incorporating gender issues and expressed in gendered language and action, is not evidence of a sexual attraction based on a realizable desire for a living person. This said, it is possible that O'Neill is inspired by the relationship between Sophocles' Electra and Agamemnon. Sophocles' Electra, hoping to secure her father's aid, sends him her *zoma* (Soph. *El.* 452): to the original audience this would possibly be interpreted as a reference to the practice of dedicating belts to Artemis as *Lysizonos* to mark the sexual transition from virgin to wife (see Cole 1998: 43),[12] and the audience would appreciate that Electra is performing a highly irregular act that abdicates any expectation of sexually fulfilled love in the future. It is far from clear-cut, however, that Sophocles intended his audience to consider this action as indicating that Electra is sexualizing her relationship with Agamemnon. Indeed, it may be more likely that Sophocles is extending pity for Electra through stressing her isolation: as her father as her legitimate *kurios* is dead and she has not heard from Orestes, her action signifies the sacrifice of any future happiness in order to secure Agamemnon's help from beyond the grave. Moreover, Sophocles contrasts the gifts of Clytemnestra and Electra in that Electra's gift is more emotionally precious than Clytemnestra's standard libations, but this does not place mother and daughter in a sexual competition, as is the case in O'Neill. Sophocles' purpose is to dehumanize Clytemnestra (in preparation for the matricide), and this is partly achieved through distinguishing and alienating Clytemnestra from Agamemnon's bloodline and legitimate inheritors of his *oikos*, not to show that Electra is usurping Clytemnestra's marital status. Therefore, arguably, even if there is more evidence for problematic sexual relations in Sophocles' *Electra* than in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, O'Neill is still significantly 'wide of the mark' by choosing to have Lavinia in a sexual

thrall with her father. In more general terms, although O'Neill's interpretation of incest is more directly linked to Freud than to gender relations in the Greek plays, his concept of inherited propensity and preference for one parent over another is evident in Aeschylus and Euripides respectively. In Euripides' *Electra* Clytemnestra does explain Electra's love of Agamemnon as the natural result of the common fact that children often prefer one parent to another (Eur. *El.* 1102–4), but she does not suggest that this preference is motivated by sexual desire and it is far from clear that preference is determined by gender.[13]

On a more abstract level, although there is no evidence for filial gender attraction to a parent in Aeschylus, O'Neill's sense of sexual desire determined as a consequence of blood ties does aim to replicate inherited propensity in Aeschylus. In O'Neill, the sins of the fathers are replicated by their children as each successive generation of the Mannon family participates in inward-looking sexual desire that is doomed to be frustrated, which provokes desire for revenge which in turn is masqueraded as justice. For example, Ezra Mannon behaves in the same brutal way towards Marie Brantôme as did his father Abe; and Ezra's son Orin Mannon behaves in the same way to his sister Lavinia Mannon as his father does to his mother. In Aeschylus, the crimes of the past are, to an extent, determining factors in the present: for example, the perversion of marriage can be traced back to the adultery of Aerope and Thyestes (Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1191–3)[14] and Agamemnon's ability to sacrifice his daughter could be linked to Atreus' murder of Thyestes' children. However, scholarship since O'Neill has shown that inherited propensity as a motivation for action is not unproblematic, given that the crimes of the past are not related (in the Cassandra scene) until the crimes of the present (sacrifice of Iphigenia and excessive action at Troy) have been understood.[15] Arguably O'Neill, by focusing on inherited distorted family values, makes explicit what is implicit and only one among several strands of causation in Aeschylus.

Sex and motivation

In seeking a universal expression of the need for sexually expressed love (symbolized by the island archetype) and by reading the Greek plays through a Freudian filter, O'Neill posits sex as the primary motivation for action in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (see Bentley [1952] 1989: 77).[16] It is out of sexual jealousy that Abe Mannon drives his brother (David Mannon) and his lover (Marie Brantôme) from the Mannon house, and this same jealousy provokes him to tear down the house where the affair took place and build the present house visible on stage. That same sexual jealousy provokes Ezra Mannon to ignore Marie's pleas for assistance and allow her to die in poverty, and his inability to express love properly means that he is guilty of debasing his wedding night from an expression of love to crude lust and for treating Christine brutally since. Correspondingly, Christine's love for Ezra has been perverted to hate, and her love of Adam Brant becomes a means of revenge. Orin murders Adam out of sexual jealousy of Adam's affair with his mother and suggests a sexual relationship with his sister in order to keep her from leaving him; and Lavinia, who loves Adam, also provokes Orin to murder Adam, also out of sexual jealousy. In his depiction of these complex sexual relationships, O'Neill is more rightly placed in the intellectual context of the early twentieth century, rather than bearing any direct relationship with the Greek material. In his focus on sexually problematic relationships between generations, which then results in marital sexual difficulties, O'Neill draws on his familiarity with psychoanalytical approaches to sex and marriage. According to Doris Alexander (1992: 153), O'Neill and his wife Agnes Boulton participated in the research for the psychoanalytical study of marriage by G.V. Hamilton's *What Is Wrong With Marriage* (published by Albert & Charles Boni in 1929), in which the conclusion is drawn that man's idea of beauty is derived from his boyhood experience of his mother and that sexual problems in marriage are derived from a man's initial 'ineptitude as a lover'. On both these conclusions O'Neill builds the action in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and perhaps to O'Neill, whose relationship with his mother was complicated by guilt and endless

recriminations (Black 1999: 369),[17] the psychoanalytical understanding of marriage possessed a greater universal veracity than would be accorded to the theory now. Thus, what is problematic is whether or not inherited desire for an opposite sex parent and doomed sexual relationships in marriage can convince a twenty-first century audience of tragic inevitability. Given that Freud's ideas about desire for a parent no longer hold currency and the role/expectation of women in marriage has changed so fundamentally (although not for all), O'Neill's use of Freudian gender relations, and depiction of crippled sexual relations, do not have the wider application now as they may have done in 1931 (see Weismann 1960: 258).[18] Therefore, arguably, the Mannon family is relevant only to itself and the issues that determine motivation in *Mourning Becomes Electra* do not translate through time. O'Neill's entire focus on the domestic concerns of the Mannons, rather than incorporating the many strands of causation woven into the Greek tragic material (political, economic, religious), ensures that *Mourning Becomes Electra* has an entirely domestic focus.

Sex as a motive for action is also problematic when considered in the light of the Greek source material. O'Neill legitimizes sexuality as a motive for action in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, whereas in the Greek canon sex as a motive undermines action rather than justifying action. In O'Neill, Christine's adultery and murder are justified on the grounds that Ezra has sexually mistreated her; but in no way does Ezra's betrayal of the idea of marriage (through coldness and sexual failure) approach Agamemnon's betrayal of the bonds of marriage and the *oikos* by his sacrifice of Iphigenia. Therefore, Clytemnestra's action in the *Agamemnon* is more powerfully motivated than Christine's action in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (see Bigsby [1982] 1989).[19] Moreover, in Aeschylus, Agamemnon's actions are not only examined with reference to the domestic sphere, rather his betrayal of the *oikos* is over-determined by religious necessity and family honour; thus, in Aeschylus, action is placed in a wider political and religious framework which deliberately complicates issues of justice. Furthermore, the Greek tragedians use Clytemnestra's sexuality in order to question and undermine the justice of her actions: as a vengeful mother Clytemnestra is justified at the end of the *Agamemnon*, but as an adulterer who has murdered her husband she deserves the punishment. In Aeschylus' *Choephori*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides', *Electra* and *Orestes* Clytemnestra's lust and adultery are presented as her primary motive, and it is on the basis of this adultery that she is punished.[20] Whereas O'Neill invests sympathy in Christine's desire to love, the Greek tragedians, especially when considered in the light of the socially determined gender attitudes of the fifth-century male audience members, ensure that Clytemnestra's sexually-based decision justifies her death.

In his presentation of Orin, O'Neill also uses sexual motives in place of the political and religious motives that underlie and validate (in part) Orestes' actions. In all versions of the myth Orestes' motives are reasonably straightforward: in addition to punishing adultery, the rights of his father, the command of Apollo and the need to overthrow tyrants and reclaim his patrimony all motivate him.[21] Although Aeschylus (in the *Eumenides*) and Euripides (in *Electra* 1244–48 and *Orestes* 285–93) may explore the rights and wrongs of Apollo's command and Orestes' action, in many respects his revenge is necessitated politically, socially and personally, which means that the audience are invited to respond to the complicated issue that a just act is simultaneously a wrong act. O'Neill, by having Orin motivated by sexual desire for his mother, robs the character of any real legitimate basis for his actions, and, as will be discussed further below, in so doing undermines the complexities of reciprocal justice.

Similarly, O'Neill has Lavinia motivated by sexual desire (sexual jealousy of her mother and desire for her father and Adam). There is slightly more supporting evidence for presenting his Electra figure in a sexual light, but again performance context is crucial. In all the *Electra* plays, Electra mourns the fact that she is not allowed to fulfil her gender expectations: mourning rituals, marriage and children (in Sophocles) and sexually consummated marriage

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(in Euripides). A *prima facie* reading of the character of Electra (especially in Euripides) may suggest that she is particularly focused on her sexual role, but it is noteworthy that Electra's lament over her imposed virginity is not as a consequence of sexual desire, but as a consequence of being kept in an unnatural state of virginity which prevents her from fulfilling the gender expectation of marriage. Marriage, however, is not interpreted sexually but politically: she is stopped from marriage because any children would potentially be a threat and the legitimate organizers of her marriage are dead or in exile. Therefore, again, although there seems to be a sexual motive, this sexual motive, understood within the wider historical context, should be seen as part of a more complicated political and economic landscape. Moreover, Electra's continued virginal state (virgin and unmarried in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides' *Orestes*, and virgin and married in Euripides' *Electra*) stresses her isolation and ensures audience sympathy, and her final marriage to Pylades in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* indicates resolution and a return to the semblance of natural order. O'Neill, however, entirely rejects the political and emotional aspects to Electra's sexual status. In his 'Work Diary', O'Neill considers that Electra is married off in banality and questions how Electra can escape punishment.[22] In order to redress what he sees as a failure of the myth, O'Neill has Lavinia punishing herself as a consequence of realizing that her actions were based on an unnatural desire. In presenting Lavinia as motivated by questionable desires, O'Neill undermines the legitimacy with which Aeschylus and Sophocles invest their versions of Electra; in his desire to make Lavinia guilty and compose an ending that he considers more fitting for a tragic diva, O'Neill departs entirely from his source material. The central point of importance is that sex as a motivation means something radically different in O'Neill from its significance in Greek tragedy: in O'Neill the reasons to sympathize with action motivated by natural desires whilst condemning action based on unnatural desires is far removed from the Greek more gender-determined attitude to sex which is also more overtly politically and culturally circumscribed.

Political landscape

The domestic focus of O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is also seen in his depoliticized response to Aeschylus' use of the Trojan War as the military background to the *Agamemnon*. In his 'Work Diary' for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill is specific about his reasons for selecting the American Civil War as an equivalent for the Trojan War, and specific about not wanting the political dimension of war to eclipse or detract from his psychological interpretation of the trilogy:

> No matter in what period of American history play is laid, must remain a modern psychological drama—nothing to do with period except to use it as a mask—What war?—Revolution too far off and too clogged in people's minds with romantic grammar-school-history associations. World War too near and recognizable in its obstructing (for my purpose) minor aspects and superficial character identification (audience would not see fated wood because too busy recalling trees)—needs distance and perspective - period not too distant for audience to associate itself with, yet possessing costume, etc.—possessing sufficient mask of time and space, so that audiences will not unconsciously grasp at once, it is primarily drama of hidden life forces—fate—behind lives of characters. Civil War is only possibility—fits into picture.[23]
>
> Work Diary April 1929

In this quotation it is evident that O'Neill is actively working against any possible politicized reading of his trilogy: other possible conflicts are considered in order to be rejected because of the danger that a political response detracts attention from the focus on the psychology of

the characters. In so doing, however, O'Neill does not really consider the important and complex use that Aeschylus makes of the motif of war in the *Oresteia*.

Aeschylus is deliberately ambiguous in his use of war in the *Oresteia*. In the *Agamemnon*, the Trojan War is both a divinely sanctioned conflict and a questionable war undertaken for a woman of dubious worth (Aesch. *Agam*. 60–62). Moreover, in his description of the fall of Troy, Aeschylus engenders sympathy for the old and young who die together (Aesch. *Agam*. 326–29); thus, the sack of Troy becomes an excessive response to the seduction of Helen. Furthermore, the sacrilege committed by the Greeks at Troy results in the destruction of the Greek fleet. Consequently, the Trojan War in the *Agamemnon* is for a questionable motive, dangerously excessive and punished by the mass loss of Greek lives; it is not presented as a heroic action worthy of unmitigated praise, rather the chorus hopes never to be a 'sacker of cities' (Aesch. *Agam*. 472). In the *Choephori*, however, the dubious motive for, and excesses of, the Trojan War are downplayed; the lament of Orestes and Electra presents Agamemnon as a father and hero who is more deserving of a glorious death. Agamemnon's death and mutilation at a woman's hands is presented as shameful (Aesch. *Cho*. 430–43) in contrast to death in war. Thus Orestes and Electra wish that Agamemnon had died at Troy (Aesch. *Cho*. 345–71). Although this does not explicitly indicate that Troy is to be re-figured as a glorious episode, the absence of foreboding and uneasiness (which was communicated by the *Agamemnon* chorus [*passim*]) coupled with the *Choephori* chorus' belief that those that died in Troy died gloriously (Aesch. *Cho*. 354–55), does, to an extent, prepare for the positive attitude displayed towards the Trojan War in the *Eumenides*. In the *Eumenides*, the Trojan War is presented as a glorious episode that results in divine favour: Zeus privileges Agamemnon as a noble king (Aesch. *Eum*. 618–39), and Athena enters explaining that she has been dividing the Trojan spoils due to Athens (Aesch. *Eum*. 397–402), both of which add legitimacy to the action. Athena, moreover, encourages external foreign war, whilst requesting that the Erinyes never cause Athenians to engage in the mutual fratricide of civil war (Aesch. *Eum*. 861–5), which they grant as part of their blessing on Athens (Aesch. *Eum*. 976–87). In Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra* the motivation for the Trojan War is not challenged as overtly, but in Euripides' *Orestes* the lack of worth of Menelaus and Helen does serve to undermine the legitimacy of the war.

Although O'Neill follows Aeschylus in having a military backdrop to *Mourning Becomes Electra* and echoes the uncomfortable attitude to war displayed in the *Agamemnon*, the fundamental difference is that whereas Aeschylus does not question the validity of war *per se*, O'Neill questions the legitimacy of war as a whole. Through Ezra's war weariness and Orin's tortured insight into the universal soldier (whereby all soldiers become an image of himself allowing battle conflict to be configured as suicide), O'Neill uses the American Civil War as generic, rather than questioning its specifics. It is possible that O'Neill is responding to war weariness after the horrors of World War One (Egri 1988: 47) and literature that questioned the legitimacy of war (Wikander 1998),[24] but such pacifist sentiment is alien to Aeschylus' characters: Agamemnon enters glorying in what he has done (Aesch. *Agam*. 810–28) and Orestes glorifies what his father has done. Thus, Aeschylus' ambiguous use of the Trojan War does not suggest a challenge to war as a concept, whereas O'Neill does. That said, although O'Neill alludes to the horror of war, he does not include nor invite a politicized response to the concept of war. Even though O'Neill is specific about his choice of war, he does not consider to any degree the political and social motivation of the American Civil War. Accordingly, he does not have Ezra and Orin Mannon embark for war as a consequence of allegiance with the Unionist cause, but rather as a consequence of personal family motives. Aeschylus, however, interprets the Trojan War in a religious, family and legal capacity and presents the sack of Troy as divinely sanctioned and legally correct but excessive. O'Neill, however, does not consider the rights and wrongs of the American Civil War: he chooses not to activate the wider historical awareness of his (1931) audience (and audiences since),

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which would suggest that the abolition of slavery was a just cause and that federal hegemony at the expense of state independence prepared for economic advancement. Thus, O'Neill avoids a political dialectic in which the actions of Ezra are interpreted in the light of the motivation and justification for his participation in the Union side. But in so doing, O'Neill ignores the complexity that justified, but excessive, punishment is fundamental to the presentation of the Trojan War in Aeschylus and, correspondingly, to the nature of justice.

In his depoliticizing of the trilogy, O'Neill also separates himself from Aeschylus at a fundamental level. Aeschylus explores the tension between, and transition from, justice as defined, claimed and enacted by an individual according to domestic prerogatives in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*, to institutionalized and conventionalized justice in the *Eumenides*. To bring about this resolution Aeschylus focuses attention on the threat to Athens posed by the Erinyes if the decision goes against them (Aesch. *Eum.* 719-20), which turns attention away from the acquittal of Orestes. In replicating the concern that an action viewed as wrong by one aggrieved party will result in excessive punishment for the other, Aeschylus links the fate of Athens with the issues of crime and punishment that have been explored in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*, which, thereby, leads the audience to consider the threat posed to Athens as part of the same cycle of crime and punishment. However, this is 'sleight of hand' on Aeschylus' part. The acquittal of Orestes on arbitrary grounds rather than on legal grounds means that justice has not been changed in order to accommodate Orestes' actions, but remains essentially still based on reciprocity. Aeschylus, however, does not allow his audience to linger on the point, but turns their attention away from the acquittal to Athena's persuasion of the Erinyes to bless rather than blight Athens. In the divine hegemony that ensues, Aeschylus thematicizes and foregrounds the political and non-theatrical implications of reciprocal justice: the warnings of Athena and the Erinyes involve the audience in a political discourse centred on the dangers posed to Athens from not respecting ancient and august institutions which could result in potential factional strife. Accordingly, Aeschylus encourages the audience to reflect on the real danger of internal *stasis* present at 458 BCE, which thereby widens the scope of the trilogy to embrace the contemporary non-theatrical political landscape (see Sommerstein 1989 and Podlecki 1989).[25] In conventionalizing rather than redefining justice, Aeschylus ensures that the concept of justice remains an unresolved productive issue.

Although O'Neill responds to the structure of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephori* in *Homecoming* and *The Hunted* respectively, in his final play *The Haunted* he radically departs from the judicial and political resolution offered by Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* (also followed in part by Euripides in *Electra* and *Orestes*). The political vision offered by Aeschylus is reinterpreted by O'Neill purely as a psychological drama in which justice, as an abstract concept or practical virtue is not defined, but, as has been discussed above, the claim of justice is appropriated by characters in order to validate revenge based on questionable and often unnatural desires. This is particularly evident in the resolution of *Mourning Becomes Electra* in which Lavinia imprisons herself in the Mannon house as a punishment necessitated by her realization (through a Freudian slip) that her motivation for inspiring her brother to murder Adam Brant is a result of her suppressed desire for Adam and, by extension, her father, which then also motivates her sexual jealousy of her mother (see Berlin 1989: 52). Thus, the resolution that O'Neill offers is not concerned with justice in a legal capacity but as a process of psychological insight into the motives of the self. Therefore, O'Neill deliberately does not respond to the same difficulties of justice as Aeschylus does. Aeschylus, by showing action as simultaneously just and wrong, places the concept of justice under strain. O'Neill, however, by showing that his characters are subconsciously motivated by personal hatreds and desires, distances motivation and action from the concept of justice, which remains undefined. Thus, the focus in O'Neill is not on justice, nor the workings of justice, but on how hidden and suppressed desires are the 'true' motivators for action. This allows O'Neill to

close down the ending of the trilogy by circumscribing the relevance of psychological insight to the sexually determined and inward-looking Mannon family (see Heilman [1973] 1989 and Berlin 1989: 54–5). O'Neill offers no hope and no salvation; without the wider judicial context the trilogy simply ends with the last Mannon inflicting her own punishment. Aeschylus, in contrast, offers an ambiguously hopeful ending that collides the joyous distraction of pageant and ritual with the uncomfortable truth (certainly for a modern audience) that justice, as reciprocity, remains the same. Where O'Neill offers a vision of the tragic individual fixed in resolve and inwardly focused, Aeschylus provides the distraction of hope in an external civic, political, religious capacity: hope resulting from the blessings bestowed on Athens by the Eumenides and hope for a new political accord with Argos, yet it must be noted that, although this hope ends the trilogy in a triumphant climax, the fear of reciprocal justice remains in place.

STAGECRAFT IN *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

The complexities of O'Neill's relationship to Greek theatre are also evident in the staging of *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Through the staging it is possible to explore further O'Neill's inward-looking, domestic, realistic and depoliticized focus in contrast with Aeschylus' more outward-looking, varied and complex political focus. While it is impossible to include a full treatment of the stagecraft of the two playwrights, what can be discussed is how O'Neill responds to key staging elements in the *Oresteia*. For the purposes of discussion, O'Neill's staging in *Mourning Becomes Electra* can be divided into three interrelated areas: his response to general elements of Greek staging, his particular response to staging issues in the *Oresteia*, and his use of realism and symbolism inspired by his admiration of European theatre.

O'Neill's use of Greek staging conventions

As a general response to the presentational modes of Greek theatre, O'Neill, to an extent, adopts the Greek use of mask. According to his 'Work Diary', O'Neill initially planned to use half masks in order to reinforce the physical similarity between the principal characters; however, he decided against mask use principally because he considered that half masks suggested 'an obvious duality-of-character symbolism quite outside my [O'Neill's] intent in these plays.'[26] Thus, O'Neill's idea of the mask is primarily as a psychological tool that hides or draws attention to the psychologically alternate states of existence, which, by virtue of foregrounding alternate selves, undermines realism as his preferred theatrical mode. Therefore, his reason for rejecting them (which in his diary he links to rejecting soliloquies) is that they detract from the realism of the Mannons. In his alternately entertaining and dismissing the use of masks, there is a tension between O'Neill's preference for realist theatre and expressionist theatre, in that he wants to present both a realistic view of life whilst still expressing the restrictions placed on freedom through symbolic representation. Consequently, when he finally decides to use a mask-like quality, rather than actual masks, it is because he wishes to synthesize realistic and expressionistic techniques in order to present the Mannons as emotionally and psychologically detached, their calm and removed composure broken only by extremes of emotions (see Berkowitz 1992: 67). His 'Work Diary' entry for 21 September 1930 reads:

> What I want from this mask concept is a dramatic arresting visual image of the separateness, the fated isolation of this family, the mark of their fate which makes them dramatically distinct from the rest of the world—I see now how to retain this effect without the use of built masks—by make up—*in repose* (that is *background*) the Mannon faces are like life-like death masks—(death-in-life motive, return to death-with-peace yearning that runs through plays)—this can be gotten very effectively by makeup, as can family resemblance -[27]
>
> Work Diary 1930

By using make up O'Neill manages to avoid shattering the realism of the play whilst still using the mask-like faces as symbolic and expressive of the Mannon sense of self.

In addition, there is also a tension between his need to write the plays in psychologically realistic terms and the Greek theatrical legacy that, in many respects, inhibits realism. In positing psychology as a modern (1931) equivalent to Greek fate, O'Neill is in difficulties when it comes to incorporating Greek staging practices. Indeed, at the point that O'Neill was writing, the modern study of Greek theatrical performance had not really begun; thus, O'Neill's concept of the mask is probably derived from his modern idea of the mask as a mask of emotion. In his idea of the emotionless mask, O'Neill is possibly inspired by the neutral, plain appearance of the Greek mask (see Green 2002: 90),[28] but whether the Greek mask hides emotion has been questioned. Current directorial use of the mask has noted that masks do not inhibit emotion, rather the more neutral the mask the more emotion can be expressed through it,[29] for example, the angle at which it is held, the gestures and movement of the body and the accompanying text, all reinforce the mask's emotional range. Thus, the difference between O'Neill and Greek theatre is that he uses mask to restrict emotion rather than to present emotion.

In his general response to Greek tragic staging practices, O'Neill also utilizes, to an extent, the Greek theatre space. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill provides his audience with different perspectives on the Mannon house: the plays open with a curtain that shows the house from a distance (as others would see it); immediately outside the house (the garden, steps, colonnaded porch); and inside the house (study, drawing room, Ezra and Christine Mannon's bedroom. The Mannon house and garden can be seen as approximates to the Greek *skene* and *orchestra*, but, as with the use of masks, O'Neill's theatrical influences are by no means exclusively Greek. In presenting the view of the house from the street and from the garden, O'Neill aims at creating the illusion of realism by providing a specific location—the semblance of a real world in which to locate his psychologically realistic characters. O'Neill's interest in expressionism, however, also determines his external theatre space: the description of the house as 'a temple of hate and death' is in conflict with the romantic garden idyll, and the townsfolk perception of the house as 'purty' stands in contrast with Abe Mannon's motive for building the house and with the events that take place in the house. This conflict expresses the idea that reality and appearance are in conflict in the trilogy. Moreover, the house, described as a tomb, exists in contrast with the fecundity of the garden: Christine, for example, attempts to bring flowers into the house to assert life, but like funeral flowers they are redolent only of death. According to Egil Törnqvist ([1969] 1989: 63–5), in the juxtaposition of the fertile garden and the tomb-like house, O'Neill uses the symbolism of the staging and stage action to express his thematic point that the Mannons are in constant conflict, craving the spirit of life-loving pagan joy, yet too filled with hatred and repression to be able to truly embrace that spirit. Importantly, although the garden is used as a public space (in that the townsfolk gather there to look at the house) it is still primarily a domestic space, whereas, in the *Oresteia*, the *orchestra* is a political space that Aeschylus presents in conflict with the *skene*. In the *Agamemnon*, the chorus is in a gender-based conflict with the house controlled by Clytemnestra (which then gives way to a more overtly political conflict when Clytemnestra and Aegisthus usurp Agamemnon's throne); in the *Choephori* those loyal to Agamemnon are in symbolic 'exile' in the *orchestra*; and in the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes in the *orchestra* are in conflict with Athena and Athens (symbolized by the temple of Athena which the *skene* represents). Indeed, the resolution of the trilogy is matched by a spatial resolution of the *skene* and *orchestra*. The important distinction to be drawn from this comparison is that Aeschylus uses his theatre space as furthering the different external and internal conflicts that the *Oresteia* establishes, whereas O'Neill uses the conflict between garden and house as an expression of internalized emotions and desires. Therefore, O'Neill rejects the Greek spatial

dialectic between the politically inclusive *orchestra* and the restricted and private *oikos* (*skene*).

Craving the spirit of pagan joy is what motivated the hate-filled Abe Mannon to build the Mannon house and this duality of the Mannon spirit and aspirations is made manifest in the structure of the Mannon mansion: the 'Puritan' grey stone is masked by the 'life-affirming' classical colonnaded porch. Thus, again, the juxtaposition of repressiveness and desire for freedom is expressed in the set, which leads to the conclusion that the expressionist concern with conveying emotion partly determines O'Neill's staging choices. A *prima facie* examination of the Mannon house could, however, suggest a comparison with the Greek theatre *skene*, but given that little is known about the *skene* in the fifth century, it is impossible to establish the relationship between the *skene* in classical times and O'Neill's vision of it. Instead, what is apparent is that O'Neill is using a nineteenth-century romantic fusion of temple and domestic architecture as an interpretation of the *skene*. Indeed, according to Doris Alexander (1992: 151), O'Neill researched the appearance of the house in Howard Major's *Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic* and the Mannon mansion is modelled on Marshall House at Rodsman's Neck, New York.[30] As has been discussed above, with regard to historical location, the nineteenth century forms a bridge between the classical past and visions of the classical past. The nineteenth-century construct of a romantic image of classical Greece is problematic, however, and this impinges on the extent to which O'Neill is seen to be responding to classical material. Investigations into Greek religion since O'Neill have dispelled the sanitized view of the nineteenth century. Given that temples were places of sacrifice and that sacrifice aimed at propitiating gods as well as invoking their support, the Greek temple cannot be seen as the life-affirming building that O'Neill saw in 1931. Therefore, the whitewashed idealized temple façade of the Mannon house is now problematic in that it no longer expresses the same duality.

O'Neill's response to Aeschylus' stagecraft

By focusing on the centrality of the house, O'Neill does respond to the use of the house of Atreus in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes*. In all these plays the palace is key to understanding the complexity of the family relationships: both Agamemnon and Helen betray the family bonds which Aeschylus relates to events taking place within the house; the gender distortion caused by Agamemnon's murder at the hands of his wife is foreshadowed in Clytemnestra's dominance of the house; and it is to the house (and hearth) that Agamemnon and Orestes have to come to complete their homecomings. As well as being a domestic and ritual space, the house is also a political space, control of which means control of Argos. To support the centrality of the house, Aeschylus spends a significant amount of time developing the solidity of the house through pointing to its existence in analeptic narratives in choral odes and suggesting the interior through implying the occurrence of unseen events. Most importantly, the house augments the trilogy's major themes and issues: political *stasis*, gender conflict, family versus military values, justice (explored through the family *oikos*), perversion of ritual and sacrifice, are all explored in reference to the house. The key difference between Aeschylus' use of the house and O'Neill's use of the house is related to theme. In Aeschylus the house is certainly domestic, indeed, it needs to be to reinforce the betrayal of family bonds, but *oikos* and *polis* exist in a complex relationship of shifting loyalties in the *Oresteia* (not simply dialectical); therefore, the house is not simply a domestic space. O'Neill, in contrast, creates the house principally as a domestic space, which is also an indicator of the Mannon psyche.

What Aeschylus leaves impressionistic O'Neill makes more explicit: whereas Aeschylus never takes us behind the scene façade,[31] O'Neill opens up the Mannon house locating action in different rooms, all of which entail symbolic and psychological significance.

According to Egil Törnqvist ([1969] 1989: 64):

> Fittingly, Ezra, Christine, Orin and eventually, we must assume, Lavinia all die in the house which symbolises the Mannon way of life, in the house which has worked their destruction: Ezra in the matrimonial bed which he had abused by his inability to love his wife naturally; Christine in the room where she succumbed to the evil Mannon spirit the moment she decided to murder her husband; Orin in the room where his mother committed suicide, partly due to his Mannon harshness.

The Mannon house is an expression and extension of the Mannon spirit and in the journey that the audience take into the house, O'Neill mirrors the psychological journey into the motivation of character. (see Bigsby [1982] 1989: 3).[32]

Although the rooms have symbolic significance they are also realistically described in O'Neill's extensive stage directions. O'Neill aims at realism on two fronts: the theatre space is consistent with nineteenth-century historical accuracy and is an environment that the Mannons would conceivably create themselves. By placing the family within the home, O'Neill reinforces the domestic focus of the trilogy, but the very realistic domesticity of the environment also suggests elements of melodrama: poisoning in the marital bed, tense scenes in the drawing room, conflicts in the study, all point to the theatricality of the 'well made play' and are more directly inspired by O'Neill's nineteenth-century theatrical legacy (see Benchley [1981] 1989: 46).[33]

The melodrama of O'Neill's staging is also evident in his use of the visual elements of gothic horror. A *prima facie* connection could be made between Aeschylus' presentation of the house of Atreus as haunted by the violent crimes of the past and O'Neill's presentation of the Mannon house as haunted by the Mannon dead. The difference, however, is that Aeschylus' use of past haunting the present is presented in religious terms and understood in the light of fifth-century religious/ritual practices (Ervine [1948] 1989), whereas O'Neill's use of the past haunting the present is designed to reinforce his thematic concept of inherited psychology mixed with popular superstition about ghosts. In Aeschylus, for example, Cassandra's mantic vision of the dead children of Thyestes is understood with reference to two important religious factors: the vision is a mantic gift from Apollo, who, given the role of Delphi, lends legitimacy to Cassandra's vision (that is, the audience believe her); and her vision is also part of a wider collage of images of the house as possessed by a choir of Erinyes and a spirit of destruction, and given the fact that the Erinyes do later appear, Cassandra's vision, although horrific, is not horror but insight and prophecy. In contrast, O'Neill is unreconciled in his use of supernatural elements. He indicates that the past haunts the living by having pictures of past generations of hate-filled Mannons reaching back to 'witch-burning' days in order to stress his thematic point of inherited psychological propensity, and to create an atmosphere of foreboding in which the Mannons are driven to judge themselves. O'Neill follows Aeschylus in the creation of an ominous sense of possession, but O'Neill makes this ambiguity explicit by having the townsfolk gossip that the house is possessed by Christine's ghost, and by having one of their number scared witless, believing that he sees her ghost when in fact he is frightened by her portrait. The problem with O'Neill's use of the past is that it is interpreted through visual elements derived from gothic horror. In the suggested haunting by Christine, O'Neill enters the realm of 'pictures with moving eyeballs and chains rattling in the attic': he confuses the visual gothic horror elements used by melodrama with Aeschylus' disturbing and ominous use of commonly held religious notions.

Whereas Aeschylus builds tragic inevitability by focusing the action entirely at the house of Atreus in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*, O'Neill offers the illusion of hope in the possibility of escape to the South Sea Islands. At the very centre of the trilogy, O'Neill briefly transfers

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the action to deck and captain's cabin of Adam Brant's clipper ship *The Flying Trades.* Arguably, however, in the purpose and staging of the scene, again O'Neill is more rightly placed in the canon of melodrama than in tragedy. Although Aeschylus exploits and explores false hope through the image of false light, hope in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephori* is a vain wish for action to turn out well; in Aeschylus hope is not based on the possibility that another morally questionable course of events could take place. O'Neill, however, transforms Aeschylus' use of thwarted hope into melodramatic suspense by raising the possibility that Christine and Adam could escape retribution by fleeing to the South Sea Islands. The scene on *The Flying Trades* is crucial to this suspense, as it seems to offer the possibility of escape, a possibility that is immediately thwarted by Orin's murder of Adam. O'Neill's staging creates the maximum of suspense/intrigue melodrama as Orin and Lavinia crouch above on deck as Adam and Christine make plans below in the captain's cabin. O'Neill constructs the set in order to further the suspense of whether or not the characters will discover each other: a suspense that is heightened by the fact that the audience can see both parties simultaneously. The important difference to grasp is that, whilst not positing a dialectical definition of fear as the emotion of tragedy and suspense as the emotion of melodrama, Aeschylus certainly uses fear created by the inevitability of events juxtaposed with audience expectation, whereas O'Neill exploits the suspense/intrigue of melodrama as the dominant emotion.

The differences between O'Neill and Aeschylus can also be seen in O'Neill's attention to theatrical signifiers as symbolic of characters' psychological state. In respect of costume, although Aeschylus does build costume into the text of his play, costume essentially develops the issues of wealth wantonly destroyed (Agamemnon walking on tapestries) and perverted ritual (Iphigenia's garment and gag during the sacrificial sequence and Cassandra's disrobing of her mantic garb). O'Neill uses costume in an expressionist manner in order to physically communicate the psychological development of character and symbolize the conflicting Mannon repressive nature and desire for freedom. According to Egil Törnqvist ([1969] 1989), Christine wears life-affirming Green, which connects her to the natural world and joy in life (see Alexander 1992: 155),[34] whereas Lavinia wears black like the Mannons in the portraits and conforms to the stereotype of the austere Puritan maiden; by wearing the colour of mourning she is connected to the Mannon obsession with death. After Christine's suicide, however, Lavinia transforms into her mother, wears her hair in the same manner and dresses in the same clothes. In having Lavinia become Christine, O'Neill not only reaffirms her motivation as sexual jealousy, but also indicates how Lavinia is psychologically linked to her mother and subject to the same conflict of feeling, inclined to a more natural life, but duty-bound to the Mannon repressiveness. Thus, by the end of the play Lavinia returns to previous Mannon mourning clothes, as the need for revenge inflicted on the self takes over from the inclination of nature.

O'Neill's use of realism and expressionism to communicate his thematic interest in psychology as a determining factor in the events of the trilogy is evident in his incredibly detailed and novelistic stage directions. Perhaps because he mistrusted the theatrical process and the interpretations of actors, directors and designers (see Wikander 1998: 220–21),[35] O'Neill reinforces his ownership of the trilogy in his prescriptive instructions for staging. Indeed, O'Neill describes every detail of the set and the movement, expressions and reactions of characters in a way that seems to prohibit any deviation or innovation from what he saw in his mind. The reader of *Mourning Becomes Electra* could be forgiven for considering the trilogy as a novel with the stage directions providing the narrative comment of the playwright and communicated in the third person. Alternatively, as O'Neill requires physical subtlety of psychological expression, modern readers would not be far wrong if the attention to the presentation of psychological detail was more aptly communicated by the intimacy of celluloid (film or television) rather than theatre. O'Neill's instruction for intimacy

and his general distrust of theatrical adaptation and innovation make his plays difficult to adapt and invigorate for modern production. In order to prevent every production from being a re-run with a new cast, productions need to innovate, but innovation in the light of O'Neill's ever present authorial voice is complicated.

THE ROYAL NATIONAL THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

A study of the text of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, with reference to changing critical attitudes to Aeschylus and changed attitudes to Freudian psychoanalysis, make the trilogy seem somewhat dated. Furthermore, the limitations imposed by O'Neill's authorial voice make theatrical innovation leading to any thematic relevance problematic. O'Neill's complex relationship with his own theatre legacy of nineteenth-century melodrama, his sometimes conflicting inclinations for expressionism and realism, and his use of Greek theatrical practices, collide a variety of theatrical styles which raises potential difficulties in any re-staging of the trilogy. In the 2003/4 production of *Mourning Becomes Electra* at the RNT, costume and set, melodrama, historical realism and expressionism respectively took precedence over any direct relation to the Greek source material. Indeed, the RNT production consciously distanced itself from any direct relationship with Greek theatrical style. Although relevance to the ancient material was communicated through quoting extracts (sections that dealt with the thematic issue of fate in Greek tragedy) from O'Neill's 'Work Diary' in the programme notes, this relevance was undercut by a quotation from a letter to Robert Sisk (28 August 1930) in which O'Neill claimed:

> Don't get the idea there is a lot of the Greek stuff in this. There isn't much as a matter of fact. I simply pinch their plot, as many a better playwright has done before me, and make a modern psychological drama, realistic and not realistic at the same time.

Set design

The gulf between the RNT production and O'Neill's use of Greek theatrical motifs is most particularly evident in the RNT set designed by Bob Crowley. Where O'Neill's Mannon mansion is derived from the Greek *skene* (albeit mediated through nineteenth-century architecture), the RNT's interpretation of the Mannon house was expressionistic rather than Greek. Whereas a Greek staging suggests a frontal view of the *skene* with a performance area in front, the RNT production had the Mannon House diagonally angled stage left. In Crowley's design, expressionistic and political elements overshadowed O'Neill's Greek and thematic elements. Most notably in Crowley's design the Puritan grey stone was replaced by whitewashed clapperboard and O'Neill's six-column temple façade was pared down to a three-columned porch with each column in descending order of size (downstage to upstage) in order to create a distorted perspective. Although Crowley's design was theatrically stunning and created a memorable effect of space and distance through the distorted lines of perspective, he compromised O'Neill's thematic intentions. As has been noted, O'Neill sought to express the conflict between Mannon values and aspirations through the physical appearance of the house, but in the RNT production there was not the same dialectical opposition suggested by white clapperboard and white columns as is suggested by O'Neill's contrast of grey stone and white marble. As a result, in the RNT production the exterior of the Mannon house did not seem as imposing as O'Neill's set indications prescribe. Moreover, the diagonal view, whilst creating an interesting performance zone, prevented the inside/outside dialectic suggested by the Greek *skene* form preferred by O'Neill.

In the design for the Mannon house Crowley foregrounded and developed political elements beyond those indicated by O'Neill: on the roof of the porch a faded and worn

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American flag was painted and the dilapidation of the house matched the peeling and washed-out flag. The number of stars and stripes clearly indicated that the flag was pre-Civil War, which stressed Ezra's adherence to the Union cause. As has been seen, however, O'Neill plays down any overt political aspect to the trilogy and refuses to allow political cause to act as a motivation for action. Therefore, arguably, in using the flag to stress the war, Crowley overplays what O'Neill deliberately suppresses. Moreover, the state of the house suggested the end of an era, similar to the collapse of Belle Reve in *Streetcar Named Desire*. Indeed, the political focus of Crowley's design extended to the relationship between the Mannon house and the New England community. As has also been seen, O'Neill suggests the wider location of the Mannon house through a curtain that sets the house in the context of the street; the RNT production, however, developed the idea of the relationship of the Mannon house to the local community by depicting the view of the town from the house. As part of Crowley's design, stage right of the diagonal porch and house façade were dimly lit model houses, a church and council chamber, etc., all the main buildings of an East coast American town in miniature. The scale of the model buildings in relation to the exaggerated size of the Mannon house accentuated the Mannon dominance of the community. Given that the Mannon house was in a dilapidated state, it was possible to read the relationship between town and dominant family as decaying, which further signified the sense of transition from a pre-Civil War America to modern America. In O'Neill, however, the house is more permanent, more symbolic of the indomitable Mannon spirit, fashioned out of stone that is as unyielding as the Mannon temperament. Indeed, as the text makes clear, the house is only one generation old (built by Ezra's father Abe) and is meant to be as solid and permanent as a tomb. Although the trilogy does allude to the end of an era, it is an allusion rather than a thematic point and, as has been seen, O'Neill is explicit in his desire that political baggage does not obscure the focus of the individual's psyche. Thus Michael Billington (2003), responding to the political significance of the faded grandeur of Crowley's design, is excessive in his position that O'Neill is using 'a classic archetype to explore the link between doomed individuals and a decaying society.' Doomed individuals certainly; decaying society, only marginally. The political focus of the RNT production was then developed in the programme that contained several pages examining the impact of the Civil War on the foundation of a modern America, but also the difficulties caused by the implied failure of democracy to stop mutual fratricide. As has been noted above, however, O'Neill does not invite the audience into a political debate about war, but is more concerned with Orin's psychological and inwardly directed response to the war. Therefore, the political indicators used by the RNT should be seen as an interpretation of O'Neill that is by no means unassailable.

The expressionistic distortion of reality indicated in the exaggerated perspective of the columns and scale of the house in relation to the town and the faded grandeur of the Mannon house exterior established a motif that Crowley used in his design for the interior scenes. Again, in the interior of the house Crowley created a memorable design through rooms (study, sitting room, bedroom) created by movable flats of distorted perspective. O'Neill pictures the Mannon house as decorated in cold grey décor, but Crowley transformed this with faded red/orange wallpaper fading to grey at the corners which picked up on the faded exterior. In line with O'Neill's stage directions, the faded walls of the sitting room were adorned with black and white portraits of the generations of Mannon dead and the period furniture was sparse and uncomfortable looking. In changing the wall colour and minimizing the furniture, Crowley's design aimed at sharpening the expression of the emotional existence of characters: the oppressive blood-like colour may have compromised the O'Neill's Puritan grey, but it did communicate the sense of the house as built as a consequence of bad blood. The use of movable flats allowed Crowley to redefine the playing space fluidly whilst suggesting distortion in the arrangement of the rooms: the exaggerated perspective disturbed

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spatial harmony which, juxtaposed with the colour scheme, was redolent of the Expressionist movement in Art. In this way Crowley physically interpreted O'Neill's theatrical expressionism, and, by fusing artistic and theatrical media, made the audience more aware of O'Neill's expressionistic influences. This was again stressed in the RNT's programme where a quotation from Raymond Williams comparing O'Neill and Strindberg served as a strapline to Tony Kushner's essay 'The Genius Of The Fog: On O'Neill'.

Crowley's use of artistic Expressionism created a haunting image for the final scene. In O'Neill, Lavinia enters the house strong and defiant, ready to face the Mannon ghosts, we do not see Lavinia again but imagine her inside as Seth (the gardener), according to Lavinia's instructions, nails shut the house shutters, which serves to reinforce Lavinia's self-inflicted prison. In contrast, the RNT production created another final scene showing Lavinia inside the Mannon house. The movable flats changed position to become a long, distorted corridor comprised of massive walls that dwarfed Lavinia's black frame. Under the weight of the Mannon sense of retribution, the RNT Lavinia collapsed, which provided a tableau on which the trilogy ended. This tableau was particularly redolent of Expressionism: the collapsed, pale-faced black figure in a long corridor of red/orange evoked Edvard Munch's expressionist masterpiece *The Scream* (1893), which although set out of doors has the same colour palette, and the tortured figure at the end of the bridge is similar to Lavinia at the end of the corridor. Although Howard Davies' directorial decision to end the trilogy in this way created a memorable *tableau vivant* to end the trilogy, it is possible that he sets himself at odds with O'Neill. Simply because O'Neill is so specific about how he wanted the play to end, Davies' ending, whilst adding a fresh directorial perspective, is quite removed from the intentions of O'Neill. Indeed, O'Neill apparently attended the rehearsals by the Theatre Guild (who premiered *Mourning Becomes Electra*) and he was specific in his instruction to Alice Brady (Lavinia) that she should show no emotion in the final scene (Alexander 1992: 168). Arguably, in the text Lavinia enters filled with the Mannon spirit of hatred and pride; thus, there is no catharsis for O'Neill's audience, only an ending that upholds revenge as the motive for Mannon action. In showing Lavinia broken down, the RNT production engendered sympathy for her, which provided a distinctly different perspective than that which O'Neill's text prescribes.

Costume design

The production also departed slightly from O'Neill's prescriptions for costume. As has been discussed above, O'Neill is specific in his symbolic choice of green satin for Christine's gown, which is also described as expensive and smartly cut. In the RNT production, Christine's identifying colour was changed from the life-affirming green to variations on an iridescent red: in her confrontation with Ezra Mannon she wore a crinoline Civil War-era taffeta gown with the bust accentuated by a gathered bodice; after his death she wore a black silk, less full, crinoline mourning gown elaborated by a black velvet cape effect on the shoulders, which again accentuated the bust; and in her final scene she wore a simple reddish umber-coloured, high-waist, crinoline-supported skirt with low-cut white silk shirt. However, in Christine's portrait with which Orin confronts Lavinia she wore a vibrant green satin opulent gown. The choice of different colours and fabrics dissipated the effect of O'Neill's symbolic use of colour, so that when Orin accuses Lavinia of robbing their mother of her colour the effect was less powerful. The design of the gowns used by the RNT, however, did serve to sexualize Christine in contrast with Lavinia. Christine's gowns were all derived from fashion that accentuated the female form (high bust, corseted waist, full hips), which drew attention to her sexual nature, whereas the costume for Lavinia was designed to suppress rather than enhance the female form. In accord with O'Neill, the RNT Lavinia wore a simple black dress buttoned up the front to suggest her alliance with her military father and less full at the skirt to downplay her femininity. O'Neill describes Lavinia as having her hair pulled back to disguise

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the similarity with Christine, but the RNT production chose to tie back Lavinia's hair more in the manner of a schoolgirl in contrast to Christine's womanliness. In Lavinia's transformation into her mother, the RNT foregrounded Lavinia's sexual transformation: on her return from the South Sea Islands she wore a corseted gown, which signalled her development into womanhood. The negative similarity with her mother was suggested, however, when, in her confrontation with Orin, she wore her mother's silk tapestry-print dressing gown, which Christine had worn in the scene in which she poisoned Ezra: Lavinia becoming her mother extending to robbing her mother of her clothes, rather than just her signal colour, and the sense of crimes being repeated was communicated, in part, through costume. The use of costume to symbolize character and repeated situations was also evident in the male costumes: their military uniforms linked Ezra and Orin initially; but, more interestingly, in *The Haunted* Orin's transformation into his father was signalled through their similarity of clothes: Orin wore a black dress suit with high collar and sloping shoulders that was a mirror image of the clothes his father wore in the portrait of him in the study, not in the regalia of a judge as in O'Neill. Similarly, Adam Brant was dressed in a black dress suit, but his exaggerated cravat indicated a romantic foppishness suitable for his role as a lover. In a theatre as large as the RNT it is impossible to appreciate the facial resemblances that are so necessary to O'Neill's sense of the inherited Mannon spirit, but the costumes served the purpose admirably, as natural or chosen affiliation was communicated through costume choice.

Melodrama

The RNT production, although embedding a political reading of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, also foregrounded O'Neill's use of melodrama through the acting style and composition of the programme. As a programme can direct the focus of the audience, it is worthwhile noting that at the end of the credits and biographies there is a quotation from Robert Benchley's review ([1931] 1989: 46) in which Benchley considers that *Mourning Becomes Electra* is filled with nineteenth-century melodrama. The choice of this quotation evidences Davies' directorial intention to draw attention to the melodrama inherent in O'Neill's plot and stage directions. In the production the melodrama was particularly evident in the direction of the actors: for example, Christine's persuasion of Adam to purchase the poison to kill Ezra was interpreted in the RNT production as blatant and humorous manipulation: as Christine in sham tortured 'Northern Belle' pose looked to the audience in collusion as she obviously schemed to involve Adam in her plans, the audience laughed as the duplicitous intrigue of melodrama obliterated any sense of tragic propensity to action. Furthermore, the production did not shy away from the melodramatic opportunities offered by the events and historic location: Ezra Mannon's death throes were particularly elongated and his vigorous twitching was positively humorous; and, for a modern audience familiar with the excesses of the depiction of a romanticized era (for example Victor Flemming's 1939 film version of *Gone With The Wind*), women dressed in Civil War attire kneeling to men in military uniform is filled with the romance of melodrama rather than the fear and pity of tragedy.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the relationship between O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is problematic: current ideas and attitudes about the *Oresteia*, which explore the text with reference to the wider performance context, are very different from O'Neill's understanding of the text in 1931. Indeed, O'Neill's romanticized view of the classical past and his Freudian response to classical texts now seem dated and reductive. O'Neill's romanticized view of the past supports a dialectical contrast between pagan freedom and Puritan repression, but, given that O'Neill equates pagan freedom with sexual freedom, the regulated nature of classical sexuality means that for a twenty-first century audience 'Greek pagan freedom' is no longer an appropriate benchmark for uninhibited love. Similarly,

nowadays equating pagan classical times with contemporary pagan societies is also problematic: constructing the South Sea Islands as a pagan 'sexually free other' objectifies and simplifies a society by constructing it as a 'primitavist' contrast to American society. Clearly current scholarship about classical texts encourages various responses: political, social, ritual, theatrical, thematic etc., and this variety of analytical approaches was not available to O'Neill, so it would be inappropriate to assess him in the light of debate which has occurred after his time. However, it is still appropriate to explore how O'Neill's gender, social, and political perspectives provide a filter for his interpretation of Aeschylus, and to note that this interpretation is circumscribed by changes in critical thinking. To this end, it has been seen that in the process of adaptation and transposing of historical context, O'Neill de-politicizes Aeschylus' trilogy. Indeed, neither the political non-theatrical landscape of O'Neill's time, nor the political or military imperatives of the trilogy's setting, impinge on character motivation or action. Rather, O'Neill posits sexual relations as a constant, but his understanding of sexuality is determined by his experience of psychoanalytical responses to marriage, which, for a modern audience of today, are no longer as persuasive as they may have been in 1931.

As has also been seen, O'Neill supports his thematic agenda through his stage directions. Although O'Neill seems to respond to Greek staging practices, in effect he is more explicitly concerned with theatrical realism and expressionism. His novelistic stage directions aim at ensuring realism by the suppression of theatricality, whilst he uses expressionistic motifs in order to communicate theme; for example, paganism and joy in life are symbolised through stage architecture and colour. However, in his composition of events, O'Neill is influenced by nineteenth-century melodrama, rather than Greek theatrical practices. The influence of realism, expressionism and melodrama, rather than any relationship to the Greek material, shaped the RNT production: through Crowley's set design, particularly, any relationship with the Greeks was suppressed, and in the programme this gulf was widened. The RNT production was more concerned with presenting a political interpretation of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, by using the set design to go beyond what is indicated in the text to imply politically unstable times. The production also responded to O'Neill's use of expressionism to explore the emotional content of the trilogy and heightened the melodrama through the performances. Whilst it is possible to argue over the interpretation of the political and emotional aspects, the production did focus on the theatrical modes that influenced O'Neill most and thus drew attention to the differences between O'Neill and Aeschylus.

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NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Prof. Douglas Cairns, Dr Stuart Gillespie, Dr Paul Innes, Dr Costas Panayotakis and Dr Ian Ruffell for their advice and help.

[2] The extent to which O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is exclusively a re-working of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is a complex issue. In his review of the original 1931 production, John Mason Brown ([1931] 1989: 40) stressed that Aeschylus rather than Euripides or Sophocles was O'Neill's major influence for the structure of the trilogy, but notes the influence of the other tragedians in the focus on Lavinia. In critical studies since, Doris Falk (1982: 139) stresses the influence of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, rather than the other Greek playwrights, although this is in preparation for her Aristotelian interpretation of O'Neill. Stephen A. Black (1999: 369–71) notes the difference in character focus between O'Neill and Aeschylus but he does not consider the influence of other *Atridae* plays, rather he compares Lavinia with Sophocles' characterization of Oedipus. Normand Berlin (1989: 50, 56), whilst considering similarity and difference with Aeschylus, also considers Sophocles' *Antigone* as an influence. Robert B. Heilman ([1973] 1989) focuses on Aeschylus rather than the other tragedians; as does Raymond Williams ([1966] 1989); Eric Bentley ([1952] 1989); and, most recently, Marianne McDonald (2004: 24). However, in his review of the original 1931 production, Brooks Atkinson ([1931] 1989: 43) notes O'Neill's legacy from all three tragedians. In critical studies since, Rush Rehm (2003: 60) stresses that O'Neill conflates the *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Electra*; Aeschylus and Sophocles are pinpointed by Egil Törnqvist (1989: 19); James A. Robinson (1998: 76) considers that O'Neill borrows from Euripides and Sophocles (although he does not name which plays) but mostly from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Similarly, Doris Alexander (1992: 149) considers that all three Greek tragedians inspire O'Neill, but she does not cite specific texts. Peter Egri (1988: 53) distances O'Neill from Aeschylus and Sophocles and claims that: 'In its fundamental world-picture O'Neill's play is more closely aligned with Euripides' *Electra*…'; St John Ervine ([1948] 1989) also conflates the character of Clytemnestra in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* with Aeschylus' Clytemnestra in his analysis of O'Neill's Christine.

[3] It is worthwhile noting that O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* premiered nine years before Gilbert Murray's influential book (1940) *Aeschylus The Creator Of Tragedy.*

[4] O'Neill read the works of August Strindberg whilst convalescing from tuberculosis. He is quoted as saying that Strindberg was the dramatist: 'who gave me the vision of what modern drama could be.' cited in Normand Berlin (1989: 15). On the relationship between O'Neill and Strindberg see further Egil Törnqvist (1998: 25).

[5] For example see R. D. Dawe (1963: 21–62) for a discussion of character as a theatrical construct, but cf. P. E. Easterling (1972: 3–19) who argues for human intelligibility. For a more recent discussion of characterization see Christopher Pelling (1989).

[6] Cited in Berlin (London: 1989: 21).

[7] Ibid p. 26.

[8] Modern difficulties with O'Neill's racial stereotyping were evident in Susannah Clapp's review of the RNT (2003) production 'Julie, do you want me: A brilliant reworking of Miss Julie revives the play. And Electra's still electric'.

[9] In a letter to Martha Carolyn Sparrow (13 October 1929) cited by Egil Törnqvist ([1969] 1989: 22), O'Neill claimed: 'There is no conscious use of psychoanalytical material in any of my plays. All of them could easily have been written by a dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life-impulses that is as old as Greek drama…' and in a letter to Barrett H

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Clark (August 1931) cited in the *Mourning Becomes Electra* programme (Royal National Theatre, 2003): 'I think I know enough about men and women to have written *Mourning Becomes Electra* almost exactly as it is if I had never heard of Freud or Jung or the others. Authors were psychologists, you know, and profound ones, before psychology was invented.'

[10] The point is made by Bernard Knox (1982: 132–33): 'At any rate, though the primordial urges and fears that are Freud's concern are perhaps inherent in the myths, they are not exploited in the Sophoclean play.'

[11] For the matrilocal marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta see Sarah B. Pomeroy (1975: 19).

[12] 'Artemis as Lysizonos [is], "she who loosens belts", presides over the sexual transition associated with marriage because a woman's belt was a visible sign of the invisible boundary by which she protected her body. The untying of a female's belt could represent both intercourse and childbirth. Recognition of Artemis at the time of first breaking this boundary was important for enlisting her support at the next.' (see Cole 1998: 43)

[13] See further the discussion by J. D. Denniston (1939: 186) in his edition and commentary of the play.

[14] The adultery of Thyestes and Aerope also forms the subject of the second stasimon of Euripides' *Electra* (699–746), but Euripides' chorus does not consider the mythologized events of the past as causing the present (737–46).

[15] On the importance of inherited guilt see H. Lloyd-Jones (1962: 187–99) and H. D. F. Kitto, (1961); compare, however, N. G. L. Hammond (1965: 42–55) and Albin Lesky (1965).

[16] Eric Bentley offers a distinctly negative reaction to O'Neill's use of sex as a motive for action: 'Instead of reverent family feeling to unite an Orestes and an Electra we have incest. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is all sex talk. Sex talk—not sex lived and embodied, but sex talked of and fingered. The sex talk of the sub-intelligentsia.'

[17] For an implied correlation between Orin's relationship with Christine and O'Neill's relationship with his mother see Stephen A. Black.

[18] It is worth noting that Philip Weismann wrote of the greater identification felt with O'Neill's characters than with Aeschylus' characters: 'We can more readily feel a personal identity with O'Neill's less dated alternatives. His portrayal of the members of the Mannon family finds confirmation in the most recent psychoanalytical concepts on the process of mourning.'

[19] C. W. E. Bigsby makes the point even stronger by claiming: 'Compared with Clytemnestra, Christine is motiveless: a mawkish schoolgirl with a crude, novelettish mind.' (1989: 75)

[20] In the *Choephori*, Aeschylus suppresses the sacrifice of Iphigenia in order to foreground Clytemnestra's adultery as her primary motive (Aesch. *Cho.* 915–21), see further the edition and commentary by A. F. Garvie (1986: 298). In Sophocles' *Electra*, Electra plainly accuses her mother of being motivated primarily by lust (Soph. *El.* 558–62, 593–4), discussed in the edition and commentary by J. March (2001: 176). In Euripides' *Electra*, Electra accuses her mother of being primed for adultery before Agamemnon had embarked for Troy (Eur. *El.* 1068–75); and in Euripides' *Orestes*, Electra cites lust as Clytemnestra's motivation (Eur. *Orest.* 24–27); Orestes justifies his matricide on the grounds of Clytemnestra's adultery and on the premise that all wives could be faithless and murder their husbands if he did not punish Clytemnestra (Eur. *Orest.* 556–77).

[21] In Aeschylus' *Choephori* Orestes establishes that his revenge is motivated by political, family, economic and religious concerns (Aesch. *Cho.* 269–305). In Sophocles' *Electra* Orestes indicates patrimony as his motive at lines 67–72 and the command of Apollo at lines

32–37. In Euripides' *Orestes*, after Clytemnestra's death patrimony is among Orestes' chief concerns (Eur. *Orest.* 1058–59).

[22] O'Neill makes the point in his November 1928 entry to his 'Work Diary': '– give modern Electra figure in play tragic ending worthy of character. In Greek story she peters out into undramatic married banality. Such a character contained too much tragic fate within her soul to permit this—why should Furies have let Electra escape unpunished…' quoted in Berlin (1989: 21). It is worth noting, however, that of the three tragedians only Euripides in *Electra* and *Orestes* includes Electra's marriage to Pylades.

[23] Quoted in Berlin (London: 1989: 22).

[24] According to Mathew H. Wikander Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* apparently served as the model for Orin's victorious 'charge' described in *Hunted* Act 3.

[25] On the non-theatrical political implications of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* see the introductions to the editions of the play by A. H. Sommerstein and A. J. Podlecki.

[26] 'Work Diary' entry 20 September 1930 quoted in Berlin (1989: 28).

[27] Quoted in Berlin (1989: 28).

[28] For a comparison between the plain mask and the restraint of classical sculpture see Green in Easterling and Hall (eds).

[29] See, for example, Peter Hall's discussion of the emotion of the mask (2000: 28–30).

[30] According to Alexander, O'Neill changed the number of the steps as a mercy to the actors and added shutters for the final catastrophe.

[31] Although this has been challenged lately by Rush Rehm (2002: 89–91), who argues that the action of the *Eumenides* takes place inside the temples of Apollo and Athena. Similarly, A. H. Sommerstein (1996: 224) argues that episodes at Athena's statue are set indoors. Rehm's point, however, does not negate the point that we never see inside the house of Atreus.

[32] 'And in moving through the gauze curtain, which his stage directions indicated should be painted with the social inclusion of the Mannon estate, through the external walls of the house to the interior, we are moving from the social to the psychological, from the public to the private—a path which took O'Neill to his central subject…'

[33] O'Neill's use of melodrama was grasped by Robert Benchley in his 1931 review of the original production: 'Let us stop all this scowling talk about "the inevitability of the Greek tragedy" and "O'Neill's masterly grasp of the eternal verities" and let us admit that the reason why we sat for six hours straining to hear each line through the ten-watt acoustics of the Guild Theatre was because *Mourning Becomes Electra* is filled with good, old-fashioned, spine-curling melodrama. It is his precious inheritance from his trouper father …'

[34] Interestingly, according to Doris Alexander, O'Neill's first choice for Christine's signal colour was purple/crimson but he changed to green to signify life.

[35] 'The extensive stage directions in O'Neill's published plays speak of frustration with the medium in which he has chosen to work… Identifying acting with his father's theatre, and identifying his father's theatre with star actors out of control, strutting and fretting at the expense of literary texts, O'Neill forestalls interpretation, demands fidelity to the lines as written, and elaborates intention in explicit dialogue and stage directions… O'Neill's frustration with actors may stem from a wholly understandable frustration with the star system and a commercial theatre that undervalued the written word. But O'Neill's aversion to performance

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and refusal to acknowledge the collaborative nature of theatre affects the "play as written", as well.' In Wikander's article there are many insightful quotations from O'Neill that evidence how much he distrusted actors and the theatre in general and the revealing belief that the production was always better in his mind than it was in the theatre. For a description of the premiere see Ronald Wainscott (1998: 108–9).

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