

**THE THEME OF *ORESTEIA* IN EUGENE O'NEILL' S
*MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA***

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Abstract. *The paper is concerned with the mythical theme of Oresteia as it has been reworked in Eugene O'Neill's play Mourning Becomes Electra. After juxtaposing the key elements in the story as they appear in Aeschylus and Sophocles on the one hand, and Eugene O' Neill on the other, the analysis moves on to consider the significance of the changes introduced in O'Neill's version of this ancient story. The focal point of the analysis is the brief comparison of two disparate models of reading – the Freudian and the Jungian model – and the relevance of their different implications for the patriarchal culture of reason.*

Key words: *Oresteia, Eschylus, Eugene O'Neill, the myth of Oedipus, Fromm, Freud, Jung*

While dreaming, man is a great poet;
when he wakes up he is a wretched man
again. At least in most of the cases.¹

I

In his dreams man comes back to his inner self. Both dreams and myths are messages that we send to ourselves from the depths of the unconscious. They are the storehouse of our deepest insights connecting modern man with his primeval roots. In them we have the perennial experience of the human race recorded. And yet, in his waking hours, while preoccupied with the self-centered drives of the ego, modern man seems to have forgotten the language of his true self.²

According to Giambattista Vico, the 18th century Neapolitan philosopher, man is instinctively poetic in his response to the world.

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¹ *Borhes/Sabato, Razgovori*, Decje Novine, 1988, p. 175

² This is a briefly summarized argument of Fromm's book *The Forgotten Language*.

The one genuinely distinctive and permanent human characteristic is discernible in the faculty of 'poetic wisdom', which manifests itself as the capacity and the necessity to generate myths, and to use language metaphorically: to deal with the world, that is, not directly but at one remove, by means of other agencies: not literally, but 'poetically'.³

That is why, for Vico, the first science to be learned should be mythology, or the interpretation of fables. By learning how to interpret myths properly we can draw nearer to understanding our own selves. Yet, in the past, and even today, myths were given unfair or misleading treatment. By the proponents of science as the only true instrument of knowledge and the only right approach to reality myths were looked upon as merely naive representations of the world - quaint relics of the nursery age of mankind⁴; or they were taken to be figments of the poet's imagination, which had nothing to tell us about reality. From the point of view of the orthodox believer, myths were taken to be true stories recounting events that had really happened. In all instances - whether we take a mythical story to be a relic of the past, or a kind of ornamental embroidery of reality, which we can enjoy at leisure, or, finally, a recorded account of the events as they really happened - we are bound to miss its most significant dimension.

From the end of the nineteenth, and the beginning of the twentieth century, however, a different approach has gradually taken shape. The most distinguished among those who initiated a different viewpoint are J.J. Bachofen and Sigmund Freud. The former pointed at the significance of myths in terms of their religious, psychological, and historical meaning, while the latter explained their importance in terms of their peculiar language, which is the language of symbol. The language of myth was thus taken to be significantly related to the understanding of our own psyche. And yet, one has to bear in mind that, in spite of the liberating aspects of his thought, the key word, actually, for the system Freud developed is - *control*. The rationalistic element in Freud, as Lionel Trilling was right to emphasize,⁵ is foremost in his system - by no means secondary or accidental. Freud himself described the therapeutic aim of his psychoanalytic method as 'the draining of the Zuyder Zee' - his aim, in other words, was the control of the irrational, non-logical, 'night side' of man's life. The measures he, therefore, proposed were all aimed at the strengthening of the ego at the expense of the id. Ironically, it was by adopting this approach that he actually remained true to the ideals, and the ideology, of the pro-patriarchal cultural background of the age that he was so insistent on opposing. Indeed, in spite of his repeated criticism of it, Freud actually remained a devoted spokesman of the age of Enlightenment. He spoke from within the limitations of the patriarchal culture of the Western world, and his view on myths, based on his interpretation of dreams (which he took to be in the service of the pleasure principle as opposed to the reality principle) necessarily reflected the patterns prevailing in the culture he spoke from. His mode of thinking can be, therefore, traced back to the early Greek philosophers who initiated a

³ Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Routledge, 1989, p. 15

⁴ How much this viewpoint has been pervasive in modern thought is made clear in Ellmann, who makes reference to James Frazer. According to Ellman, the most influential name associated with the study of myth early in the 20th century is precisely that of Sir James G. Frazer, and his influential study *The Golden Bough*. And yet, Ellman warns, Frazer is essentially a rationalist. "Though he recognizes and fully illustrates the workings of myth in human culture, myth for him is a primitive habit of mind that we have largely outgrown; it is an addiction to magic." Ellmann, *The Modern Tradition*, p. 617

⁵ Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature", *20th Century Literary Criticism*, ed. by D. Lodge, Longman, 1975, p. 280

new religion in honour of their patron Apollo - the religion of logos and rational thought - and in doing so laid the foundation for the still dominant culture of today. The new rational thought proved to be particularly hostile towards the heritage of early mythology. With their latent and ambiguous meanings, the language of myths was found to be profoundly disturbing, and was disqualified, accordingly.

*One of the most uncompromising rejections of early Greek mythology was made by Socrates. Myths frightened or offended him; he preferred to turn his back on them and discipline his mind to think scientifically Socrates, in turning his back on poetic myths, was really turning his back on the Moon-goddess who inspired them and who demanded that man should pay woman spiritual and sexual homage: what is called Platonic love, the philosopher's escape from the power of the Goddess into intellectual homosexuality, was really Socratic love.*⁶

Unlike Socrates who, in the interpretation of Graves, decided to 'turn his back' on myths, Freud chose to interpret their validity by shedding the light of science upon them. His scientific method, however, proved to have followed the very same impulse which once had moved Socrates - the impulse of the male intellect trying to hide its own wish to control meaning, or make itself spiritually self-sufficient. And yet, since like all true poetry, myths speak through symbols and not directly, they can not be self-explanatory, but remain radically open to interpretation. The method we use to approach myths, or art in general, will necessarily reflect some of our own standpoints - some basic choices we have made in our own lives. An understanding of the language of myth, in other words, cannot be unrelated to our readiness (or our lack of it) to oppose the one-sided patterns prevailing in the male-oriented culture.

*A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal. A dream never says: "You ought", or "This is the truth". It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and we must draw our own conclusions.*⁷

II

The mythical story of the murder of the Greek Commander-in-chief, king Agamemnon, by his wife, and the consequent murder of the mother by the son avenging the father, was treated by all three ancient Greek tragedians. The version written by Aeschylus, however, surpasses the rest by its depth and significance. It is also the one complete trilogy to have been preserved from the Greek theatre. In his version the focus is on the conflict between the right of the mother, and everything she stands for, and the right of the father. The conflict is resolved in the city of Athens, where at length Orestes takes refuge with the goddess Athene, who affords him protection and appoints the court of Aeropagus to decide his fate. In Greek mythology the goddess of wisdom, Athene, was the offspring of Zeus and was believed to have sprung forth from her father's head, 'purified' from the mother's part in creation. Ironically, it will turn out that Athene herself, a

⁶ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 10

⁷ C.G. Jung, "Psychology and Literature, *20th Century Literary Criticism*, p. 187

zealous defender of the male principle, and the logos of the Father, is expected to cast a decisive vote on whether Orestes should be punished for murdering his mother or not. It is with her decision to forgive the abhorring act of matricide that the play ends. The ending image in the play is that of the terrifying Furies, who have now been turned into kindly Eumenides blessing the new Order in a triumphant procession through the City. The celebration is that of the justice done and the beginning of a new Age⁸.

It comes as no little surprise that, thus far, most of the readings of the play have sympathized with Agamemnon and Apollo - the new patriarchal god of reason, who ordered the son to murder his mother. O'Neill's re-creation of the grisly tale, and his disguised, yet unsparing condemnation of the Mannon family offers, however, quite a different reading of Aeschylus. In O'Neill's vision, the first act of official, democratic justice that the Greek play ends with is shown to be the exact reversal of what it seems to be. The play presents the vote in favour of male supremacy as nothing less than - fatal, which is exactly the opposite to how Aeschylus has been read so far. The triumph of the Law and Logos, implied by the outcome of the trial, marks the beginning of Western culture. But with the ironic victory of the patriarchal deities confirmed, and the one-sided position taken, the birth of modern Western civilization comes to be viewed as the birth of - oppression.

To his story O'Neill gives a significant modern focus - the Oresteian theme in it is localized in New England immediately after the conclusion of the Civil War (1865), and there is a necessary translation of the narrative elements in terms of the American environment of that period. At this point it would be helpful to briefly summarize and compare the main narrative intersections of the two plots. Since O'Neill followed the framework of the ancient trilogy very closely, this comparison will reveal to us the points where he deliberately, and significantly, deviated from his model.

The Greek trilogy begins with the Greek Commander-in-chief and king of Mycenae, Agamemnon, returning triumphantly from victory in the Trojan war to his palace Argos. The very same night he is to be murdered by his wife Clytemnestra, assisted by her lover Aegistheus, who, on his part, is motivated by a desire to avenge a crime of Agamemnon's father against his own. The Agamemnon of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Ezra Mannon, returns from the Civil War only to learn that his alienated wife, Christine, has been unfaithful to him with the secret cousin from a rival branch of the family, the seafaring Adam Brant. Ezra is poisoned, and he dies the very same night he returns from the war. Several years later, in the Greek trilogy, Electra is awaiting the return of her brother Orestes from the court of their uncle where he has found shelter. Eventually, assisted by his sister, Orestes murders both Clytemnestra and Aegistheus. All along, he has actually been carrying out the orders of the god Apollo. As soon as the murder is committed, Orestes is seized and then pursued from place to place by the relentless Furies, goddesses of retribution. In O'Neill's play, the son, Orin, after murdering the mother's lover in frenzied jealousy and disappointment, finds himself incapable of murdering the mother, with whom he has been close to the extent of idolatry. Thwarted in her dreams of escaping to the sea with her lover, Christine commits suicide. Without hurting her physically, Orin has killed his mother symbolically, having broken the life-giving connection between her and the sea. Here, the persecution of the Furies becomes the haunting con-

⁸ Athens has been considered the cradle of Western democracy despite the fact that in its definition of 'the people' three quarters of its population were conveniently excluded: women, slaves and foreigners (!?). And yet, the readings of Aeschylus as well as adaptations of his plays have mostly chosen to disregard this fact. In the case of orthodox feminist readings he has been presented as militant, conservative and pro-patriarchal in his attitude.

science of Orin driving him to insanity and suicide. The Greek trilogy ends with a public trial of Orestes demanded by Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Although the jury, consisting of Athenian citizens, is evenly divided, implying that the case is basically insoluble, Athena is the one to cast the deciding vote. Orestes is acquitted, and the play ends with a procession through the City celebrating the establishment of the new Order.

In O' Neill, the end of the play brings Lavinia/Electra into focus. For his Lavinia, as it was for Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, life appears to be a jewel she cannot find. The play actually ends - there being nothing else to be done - with Lavinia ordering for all the shutters of the house to be drawn so that no light could ever come in again. She condemns herself to a life of death inside the ghastly house:

*I'll have the shutters nailed close so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! (with a strange cruel smile of gloating over the years of self-torture) I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born!*⁹

As the words suggest, the house has turned into prison, the burden of the past being too heavy to let the present choose its own way. The last Mannon is left with no choice as the choice had been made for her a long time before. The expiation she must go through is, therefore, much worse than literal self-murder - it is a terrible punishment of living on with the ghosts of her house to haunt her until death. What O' Neill seems to be saying here is that the lives of all his characters were already damned long before the play begins. That the choice made in the past is crucial for all that happens to the protagonists of his play is additionally emphasized by frequent allusions to ancestral guilt - the original sin. As in Christian cosmology, the original sin as interpreted by O' Neill was also committed by our parents in the long past, but the parental guilt here is of a quite different nature. The guilt which led to the fall of Man(non) is in the choice made by his forefathers.

Interpretations of O'Neill's play, and his work in general, usually state his connection to Freud and orthodox psychoanalysis. It has been said that in treating Orin's youth and Christine's death O' Neill relied on the ancient tale of Oedipus.¹⁰ That is why, as seen by psychoanalysis-oriented critics, the play resembles a case-study rather than a powerful tragic drama. The source of the confusion is to be found in the fact that O' Neill is wrongly believed to have relied on Freud's own interpretation of the *Oedipus*, instead of the mythical story itself. We should, therefore, turn our attention now to the central aspects of this related and equally significant Western 'story'.

The story of Oedipus in Sophocles' trilogy begins, remarkably, after all the crucial events have already happened. The story is focused upon Oedipus conducting a quest for

⁹ Eugene O' Neill, "Mourning Becomes Electra", *Eugene O' Neill, Complete Plays 1920-1931*, New York, 1984, p. 1053

¹⁰ See, for example, Margaret Loftus Ranald, *The Eugene O' Neill Companion*, Greenwood Press, 1984, p. 502. In his influential study *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Raymond Williams, too, shows preference for the Freudian 'Oedipus' as the most fitting referential frame to be used for understanding the relationship between Orin and Christine. With this thesis as the starting point in his analysis, it is no wonder Williams can not appreciate O'Neill's decision to take *the Oresteia* as the meaningful background for his own modern story. In Travis Bogard we can read O'Neill's cry of impatient despair for having to deal with the charge that his play makes an overly explicit use of Freudian ideas. (*Contour in Time - the Plays of Eugene O' Neill*, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 345).

the slayer of Laius, the former king of Thebes, the discovery and punishment of the culprit being demanded by the oracle. According to the oracle, Thebes is going to suffer under a plague and a drought (its crops, herds and women mysteriously infertile) as long as Laius' slayer remains unpunished. In the end, although he has intelligently intended every step of the quest, Oedipus learns that he, actually, knew nothing of what his quest was really about. His search is successful, but, ironically, his success proves to be his own undoing. The quest for the slayer of Laius turns out, significantly, to have been the quest for the hidden reality of his own being. Eventually, he discovers that he himself is the one he has been seeking to find all along. The proud solver of the riddle, the Saviour of the City, and the one who has prided himself on his wisdom learns his ultimate truth - that he knew the least about his own inner self. He realizes that his eye-sight has been, in fact, a kind of blindness - although he had eyes he was really in the dark. The former Oedipus is shown to have had to die for the land to become fertile again - for renewal to take place. By the same token, the welfare of the City is shown to depend on Oedipus finding his own true self. In the whole story, it is important to emphasize, there is not a single hint of any sexual attraction between Oedipus and Jocasta. The only reason, as Fromm points out,¹¹ offered for his marriage to Jocasta is that she was part of the reward - she came together with his succession to the throne. The myth therefore, in Fromm's view, should be seen as symbolizing the rebellion of the son against the authority of the father in patriarchal society. The crime committed by Jocasta was that she had betrayed the duty of a mother - to save her husband she had given up her own child, which, from the point of view of earlier matriarchal ethics, was looked upon as an unforgivable sin. We should, however, keep in mind that the mythical story such as it was available to Sophocles was already given a patriarchal pattern. The conscious mode of thinking is patriarchal already, whereas the earlier matriarchal meaning appears only in a distorted form - the hidden meaning has to be worked out. In this sense, the end of the second play is deeply suggestive. Oedipus, the wanderer, comes to Athens to find solace for his troubled soul. He dies in a grove sacred to the Eumenides, female spirits of fertility and night, and through his death he is finally back to where he truly belongs - to the realm of the mother.

In *Antigone*, the third play of Sophocles' trilogy, the point is made even easier to grasp. Here we see the dramatization of the conflict between two contrasting principles or two approaches to life - the one embodied in king Creon, representing the authority which relies on political power and crude force, and the other embodied in Antigone herself, representing the authority of the private self, and the power of love. Here again, as in *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles uses Tiresias, the blind seer, to reveal a truth which others, who have physical eyes but choose moral blindness, find hard or uncomfortable to see. The end of the play records, again, the triumph of the Apollonian principle - the principle of the patriarchal law. Creon succeeds in eliminating Antigone (she dies buried alive, her connection with the goddesses of the earth being stressed), yet his victory is nothing but personal defeat. The law and order have triumphed indeed, but have only produced havoc. In the end, however, Creon is shown to be a tragic figure. His self-knowledge comes too late, and only after his principle has killed both his wife and his son does he realize how disastrously wrong he has been all along.

The tragic destiny that befalls the characters in O'Neill's play is, thus, suggested to be the necessary consequence of this fatal victory recorded in the plays of the Greek

¹¹ Erih From, *Zaboravljeni Jezik*, Matrica Hrvatska, p. 167

dramatists. It would be appropriate therefore to look for the most revealing clues in the part which brings into focus the relationship between Ezra Mannon and his wife Christine. Far from being triumphant, the renowned judge and military hero comes back from war with a growing sense of waste. In the most poignant pages of the play, he admits to feeling too weary to go on keeping up appearances.

*I thought about my life - lying awake nights - and about your life. In the middle of battle I'd think maybe in a minute I'll be dead. But my life as just me ending, that didn't appear worth a thought one way or another. But listen, me as your husband being killed that seemed queer and wrong - like something dying that had never lived. Then all the years we've been man and wife would rise up in my mind and I would try to look at them. But nothing was clear except that there'd always been some barrier between us - a wall hiding us from each other! I would try to make up my mind exactly what that wall was but I never could discover. Do you know?*¹²

Instead of bringing them closer together, their marriage, he can now spell out, has actually moved them further apart. He has always felt, and is now able to say, that all along there has been something that made him hide the very things he wanted to show - something that kept him "sitting numb in his own heart". Although he is now eager for closeness and reconciliation, and finally unashamed of his own feelings, he proves incapable of taking any further steps in the process of self-recognition. The ingrained habits of thought seem to be too strong to let him "tear down" the wall of separation. The words of simultaneous force and appeal he addresses to his wife "I've got to make you love me" speak not only of profound despair, but also of his inability to see that force is not the way to make somebody love you. Unlike Ibsen, who in his *Lady From the Sea* made a reunion of the two lovers still possible, for Eugene O'Neill the gap separating the husband and the wife remains unbridgeable. Here, as well as in Ibsen's play, the contrasting images of the sea (and a demon-like stranger connected to it) and the land (or the house) are deeply suggestive of what the whole problem is about. In poignant words, Christine - another dying mermaid stuck to the rock to which she cannot acclimatize - reveals why their marriage has brought no happiness to either of them:

*You want the truth? You've guessed it! You've used me, you've given me children, but I've never once been yours! I never could be! And whose fault is it? I loved you when I married you! I wanted to give myself! But you made me so I couldn't give! You filled me with disgust!*¹³

The climax is reached when Christine finally confesses to having a lover. Hearing the words, the Mannon male - his proprietor's pride fatally injured - cries out hysterically: "You - you whore - I'll kill you".¹⁴ Instead of realizing that the lover is what she has wanted to have in him all those years they were together, which her words make explicit, the Mannon reacts as if, suddenly, some precious possession has been unlawfully taken away from him. The moment when truth seems to be within reach, which might be a turning point for them both, comes to nothing. When it comes to facing the truth about

¹² "Mourning Becomes Electra", p. 938

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 944

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 945

himself, the Mannon, a proud army commander, shows himself a coward. Ezra Mannon dies without ever crossing the barrier which keeps him away from happiness. He dies without ever realizing that what was keeping the two of them apart was, in fact, his inability to see through the falseness of the official concept of marriage. Their marriage, in other words, was all built on "external things" - it was all about duty and respectability, and was never about intimacy and emotion.

It is no coincidence that the background for the family tragedy here, as well as in Aeschylus, is WAR. The Agamemnon of the Greeks and the Agamemnon of our own age are both hailed as military leaders and war heroes. The former has one of his daughters killed to obtain favourable winds for his army to sail safely to the battlefield. The latter has his son sent to the battlefield to help him become a true Mannon. "I've made a man of him"¹⁵ says Ezra in his misguided notion of a fatherly pride. Curiously enough, war is where they both feel most at home. Home is where more delicate choices are to be made; it is where one has to deal with feelings, and dealing with feelings is revealed as something to which the Mannon proves tragically unequal. It is extremely significant that once back home, Ezra feels curiously insecure and unprotected: "I can't get used to home yet. It's lonely. I've got used to the feel of camps with thousands of men around me at night - a sense of protection, maybe!"¹⁶ So, he will die without ever trying to redefine the concept of his male identity, without looking for the deep roots of his insecurity. He will remain incapable, to the very end, of realizing that he has built his whole life on wrong premises. And this is why the blissful island of peace of which the Mannons all dream cannot be theirs. There is something in the Mannons' mode of thinking that prevents them/us from ever getting there. There is something terribly wrong in the way their/ our culture cuts them off from the very sources of life.

III

That Eugene O' Neill is no Freudian is made evident in his other plays as well. In *The Great God Brown*, for example, (the Brown in the title standing for the demi-god of our materialistic myth), the main protagonist, Dion Anthony - Dionysus cries out in despair:

*Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the loving colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or be touched?*¹⁷

His questions, however, remain unanswerable. There is nothing in the American way of life to nourish his spirit. The religion of his age is as dead to him as the worship of that god from whom he takes his name. Even Margaret, his future wife, is so alarmed by the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 933

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 937

¹⁷ "The Great God Brown", *Eugene O' Neill, Complete Plays 1920-1931*, p. 480

vehemence of his declaration of love that he feels compelled to resume his mask and vow that she will never again see him as he really is:

*Wake up! Time to get up! Time to exist! Time for school! Time to learn!
Learn to pretend! Cover your nakedness! Learn to lie! Learn to keep step!
Join the procession! Great Pan is dead! Be ashamed!*¹⁸

With this decision made, the path to his future is chosen. Several years later he will recognize in himself another "snivelling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave."¹⁹ The epilogue of the play ends (Dion already dead and buried, significantly, in the garden) with Margaret standing on the very spot where he once proposed to her, kissing his mask lovingly. She is shown blissfully ignorant to the very end of what the man she thought she loved was really like; ignorant of the fact that what was missing all along was "something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and ripped the cold contact of man and woman..."²⁰

To explain why so many characters in O'Neill's plays - his Mannons in particular - suffer from the "death of soul", it seems that, again, we cannot turn to Freud. For Freud never admitted the visionary wisdom of the id. He never admitted that the power able to heal our conscious, utilitarian ego lies not in the "draining of the Zuyder Zee", but in our relearning how to communicate with the unconscious depths - with the realm of the mother, as Jung would put it. Man is ill because he doesn't understand that his Enlightenment is born of fear: "in the daytime he believes in an ordered cosmos, and he tries to maintain his faith against the fear of chaos that besets him by night."²¹ He uses "the shield of science" and "the armour of reason" to protect himself and escape this fear. With this in mind, Jung's theory of personality seems preferable to Freud's: it is focused upon establishing the right balance, and a healing connection of the parts that patriarchal regimes have kept apart and disconnected. According to Jung, the conscious mind, which seeks to make things rational, cannot function on its own. The Self represents the whole man - it includes both the conscious and the unconscious; the centre of totality, therefore, in his view, must not be the Ego, but the Self. But Western man, Jung warns, seems to be fatally incapable of getting in touch with his most authentic being. How much did Christianity contribute to healing the painful split in the psyche of the western man? Has it taught man connection and reattachment? In Greek mythology the patriarchal gods still married the goddesses of the land; in Biblical mythology all goddesses have been exterminated. In the Christian mode of thinking the feminine has been found both lacking and profoundly threatening. The woman as both creator and destroyer appears to be too much of a burden for the righteous Christian to take along. The only feminine character worth the status, and the one who, seemingly, softens the all-maleness of the Christian Trinity is Virgin Mary. She is the mother whose motherhood, however, is quite specious, as she conceives, symbolically, through the ear (the Annunciation) when the Holy Spirit approaches her in the form of a dove (or the angel Gabriel). Once again, the symbolism of the official version of her story seems to make no creative union possible (nor desirable, for that matter) between the two contrasting, but complementary principles. The Christian myth, or at least its more orthodox proponents, glorify the crucifixion of the body, and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 482

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 504

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, Granada, 1981, p. 30

²¹ C.G. Jung, "Psychology and Literature", p. 182

the triumph of the spirit. Through one of the key concepts in Christian mythology, Immaculate Conception, the female principle has been denigrated as polluted and unacceptable. It is, in other words, accepted only in its 'immaculate' form, after all potentially subversive elements have been purged away.²² The third stage of cultural "development" of Western Civilization, as Robert Graves explains, is, therefore, purely patriarchal. At this stage, there are no goddesses at all in the exclusively masculine domain of orderly arrangement and knowing fact. Here, no creative antagonism is left between the Dionisian oneness with the natural world, and the Apollonian principle of individualisation²³. Last, it is the world in which, by excluding the whole realm of human experience (that which defies reason and logical thought, but is no less important), man has achieved an illusory sense of triumph over Nature, and his own mortality. It is in this easily manageable, rationally knowable world that Man(non) has built his house. By building his metaphysical villa, as Huxley would put it²⁴ - Man(non) has brought ruin on both himself and his whole family.

The last point to be made, therefore, is related to the symbolism O'Neill used to depict this 'mournful edifice' of Western culture. Even in its physical appearance, the house of the Mannons is suggestive of frigid restraint, and a death-in-life existence of its inhabitants. The somber greyness of its walls stands in sharp contrast with the luxuriant green of the lawn and shrubbery around it. "The temple portico is like an incongruous mask fixed on the house to hide its somber gray ugliness."²⁵ It is the house with a horrifying "skeleton in the cupboard" - concealing frustrated passion and bitterness held in check by the Puritan code of respectability and self-control. For Christine, the house is much more like a tomb or a sepulchre than home: "It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity - as a temple for his hatred."²⁶ Numerous references to the glowering portraits of the Mannon forefathers hanging on the walls additionally emphasize both parental guilt, and the unreal quality of life it confers upon those still living. The Mannons too, both living and dead, look as if all life has evaporated from them. O'Neill's descrip-

²² Among the many who criticized Christianity for its one-sided view of sexuality and the sexes, in its both literal and symbolic meanings, I would like to single out Bertrand Russell for an especially convincing, though quite uncompromising, critique he expounded in his *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1957). For an exquisitely balanced and informed discussion see Djuro Šušnjić (*Religija* II, 1998, especially p.63-85), but also Ann Belford Ulanov (*Žensko i Učenje o Hristu i Bogu*, V.B. Popović (ed.), *Psihologija ženskog.: Jungovo nasleđe*, Nolit, 1995)

²³ It is worth quoting Northrop Frye here, who, while writing in a similar vein, also pays tribute to Robert Graves and Blake: "In the Biblical myth there is no complementary creative force to set against the artificial creation of God, no earth-mother or sexual creator, such as we find in many Oriental mythologies as well as the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions. A female principle, who represents the earth itself, and is therefore the mother, the mistress and eventually the witch-destroyer of the dying god, is at the centre of all the myths studied by Frazer, but Frazer politely overlooks her existence for the most part, and it was left for Robert Graves to incorporate her into contemporary criticism in *The White Goddess*. Blake had set forth the whole story in *The Mental Traveller* and the third part of *Jerusalem*, and it was because he had done so that I knew how important *The Golden Bough* and *The White Goddess* were. (...) For Blake Jesus is a redeemer, but Christian civilization emphatically was not: it merely set up the old projection figures of gods, angels, priests and kings once again." (Northrop Frye, "The Expanding Eyes", *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth and Society*, Indiana University Press, 1976. quoted from L. Petrović (ed.), *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX Century Literary Theory*, Niš: Prosveta, 2004., p. 163)

²⁴ Aldous Huxley, "Wordsworth in the Tropics", *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, vol. II, ed. by Frank Kermode and John Hollander, Oxford University Press, 1973. p. 2088

²⁵ "Mourning Becomes Electra", p. 893

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 904

tion of their physical appearance - the ghostly pallor and the stern expression devoid of any warmth being the prominent features - is deliberately suggestive of illness and death.

Here, we are 'seduced' into recalling that other infamous house of Western literature - Poe's melancholy House of Usher. With its bleak walls, vacant eye-like windows, surrounded by a few ghastly trunks of decayed trees, it is the building which at the first imperfect glimpse provokes a sense of gloom and insufferable depression of soul. And yet although in extensive decay, the house does not openly reveal its instability. It stands erect and seemingly whole. The eye of a scrutinizing observer will, however, discover "a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, (makes) its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it (becomes) lost in the sullen waters of the tarn."²⁷ The inhabitants of the house, the twin brother and sister, are suffering from a long-continued but mysterious disease. The mask-like looks of the twins, and the ghostly pallor of their skin are strikingly reminiscent of the Mannon faces. The male twin speaks of a strange bodily illness, a mental disorder oppressing him. Lady Madeline, the female twin, is mysteriously wasting away. For her physicians, the nature of her disease is quite baffling and unfathomable. Finally, finding no way to help recover her vigour, they put her in a tomb - "one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building." The end of the story records the female twin, who, though still alive, is made to stay in a tomb, struggling out of her grave to look for the other part of her disunited psyche, and make the Self complete. Their union, however, comes only too late to bear fruit: the mighty walls of the house are torn asunder in a terrifying roar sounding like "the voice of a thousand waters", and the House - falls down.

In contrast, the rigid edifice of the Mannon house will remain erect and proud. In this house, though, mourning does, indeed, become Electra, for all the lamentations of it have found union in the woman. Intended as a shelter originally, the house of our civilization has become the prison one cannot escape.

In conclusion, we should, once more, go back to *The Great God Brown* to bring out the final observation and round off the argument presented in this paper. In fitting correspondence with its telling title, the play ends with a brief exchange between a police captain, who investigates the death of Billy Brown, and Cybel, the prostitute, who was Dion's friend, and the only one who knew him for what he really was.

Captain - (comes just into sight at left and speaks front without looking at them - gruffly)

Well, what's his name?

Cybel - Man!

*Captain - (taking a grimy notebook and an inch long pencil from his pocket) How d' yuh spell it?*²⁸

Indeed, what O' Neill seems to be saying is that man has forgotten the vital thing about himself, and that what he stands in urgent need of is a warning - at least; man has to be warned repeatedly of that which he should hold as the most precious and prior to all - the fullness of his being, his painful but authentic humanity which he must not betray. And, in O'Neill's vision, this has always been the true purpose of ART.

²⁷ E.A. Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher", *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 233

²⁸ "The Great God Brown", p. 533

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TEMA ORESTIJE U TRILOGIJI JUDŽINA O' NILA CRNINA PRILIČI ELEKTRI

Petra Mitić

Rad se bavi analizom O'Nilove trilogije Crnina priliči Elektri u pokušaju da pokaže ne samo opravdanost O'Nilovog dramskog postupka, već i značaj njegovog izbora Eshilove Orestije za tematski okvir sopstvene drame. Suštinsko nerazumevanje, pa i naglašeno neprijateljstvo, koje religija logosa i racionalne misli iskazuje prema simboličnom i subverzivnom jeziku mita ukazuje na njegovu značajnu povezanost sa načinom na koji čitamo sopstvenu kulturu. Ovo čitanje kulture koje O'Nilov dramski tekst uobličuje u specifičan simbol i umetničku metaforu dovoljno rečito ukazuje na potrebu pružanja otpora jednostranim obrascima dominantnog patrijarhalnog modela civilizacije. Uporedna analiza O'Nilove trilogije i Eshilove Orestije navodi na zaključak da je Judžin O' Nil upravo u ovom ključu pročitao mitsku dimenziju Eshilove drame. U tom smislu, ono što se dešava ličnostima njegove trilogije samo je tragični finale fatalnog izbora kojim se završava Eshilova Orestija - za O' Nilove junake teret prošlosti isuviše je težak da bi sadašnjost mogla da odabere sopstveni put. Iz ove, i ovakve, vizure, prvi čin oficijelne demokratske pravde kojim započinje novo doba Zapadne kulture, a koji okončava Eshilovu trilogiju, preokreće se, ironično, u sopstvenu suprotnost. Potpuni mrak kojim se O' Nilova trilogija završava nije zato znak tragičnog fatalizma ovog autora, već ima težinu - opomene.

Ključne reči: *Orestija, Judžin O'Nil, Eshil, mit o Edipu, From, Frojd, Jung*