

# Perpetual Life on Mourning Becomes Electra by Eugene O' Neill

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**Abstract-** Mourning Becomes Electra is, as its title suggests, a play based on the Greek legend of Orestes as represent in the play of Euripides and Sophocles. The Greek overtone and the classical chastity borrow a sort of tragic dignity to this Play. In this play O'Neill has recast the famous Greek legend of Agamemnon myth which has been so artistically presented in Aeschylus Oresteia trilogy Sophocles 'Electra and Euripides 'Electra in terms of American social atmosphere and Freud's stress on psychology.

The problem of O'Neill was how to adapt the Greek situation and story to modern American life .but as an inspired artist he exploited the parallel events in Greek and American life.

**Index Terms-** Grandeur to this plays, Classical chastity, artistically.

## INTRODUCTION

In the Greek story Agamemnon returns from the Trojan War; in our play general Ezra returns from the Trojan War in our play general Ezra returns from the American civil war. Agamemnon is murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus; in our play Ezra is murdered by his wife Christine with the help of poison supplied by her lover Adam Brant. So Agamemnon is recognizable in general Ezra; Christine is the prototype of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus her lover is reincarnated in Adam Brant, Christine's lover. Orin, their son stands for Orestes and Lavinia represents Electra.

The Mannon House with its porticoed New England architecture stands for Agamemnon's classical setting. Seth Beckwith and the local townfolks take the place of the Greek chorus. Orestes avenges the death of his father by punishing his mother and her lover; similarly Orin avenges the death of his father by shooting his mother's lover and goading Christine to commit suicide. In the Greek story Electra wants

her brother Orestes to come back and avenge their father's death. In our play Lavinia persuades her brother Orin to avenge their father's death. Electra is left behind after the death of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and others, as Lavinia goes into lifelong mourning and solitude after her father, mother and Orin are dead. So mourning becomes Electra as it becomes Lavinia in a more pronounced manner.

O'Neill brings out a modern change in the conclusion of the play. O'Neil as well as Aeschylus, includes a sense of judgment in the last part of his trilogy. Aeschylus' judgment is the tribal judgment where the goddess Athena intervenes and the Furies are pacified; they stop harassing Orestes. In Mourning Becomes Electra Orin and Lavinia are the last surviving Mannons. Lavinia taunts Orin into committing suicide. In the Greek story Orestes is at last absolved of his guilt of matricide; in our play Orin pays for his guilt by shooting himself. So Orin is not vindicated or absolved of the guilt of his mother's suicide; he commits suicide. In the modern society such absolution would sound absurd and the effect of the tragic doom would be shattered, if Orin had lived and married Hazel. The dramatic self-isolation of Lavinia deepens the tragic gloom of the play. So although O'Neil's conclusion is different it is correspondingly more traffic because Orin was not guilty of his mother's death; he believed that he was guilty. Moreover, his death comes as a sort of inevitable conclusion. It is the morbid psychology that drives Orin to death and Lavinia to a perpetual life of mourning and isolation among the Mannon dead. O'Neill is more or less faithful to the plot of Oresteia trilogy. But the tones, the tragic impression as demanded by the modern American society are determined by the interpretation of puritan

inheritance and imposition of Freudian psychology. This stress on psychology is reasonably different from the tribal code of vengeance and intervention of a goddess. This gives a modern twist to the significance of the play. In *Oresteia*, the relation between the individual and society remains stable. In *Oresteia*, Orestes has to flee to the shrine of Delphi and to be judged by the jury of the citizens. Then and then his equation with the society remains acceptable. He is pardoned; the furies are satisfied and he is accepted by his society.

Not so in O'Neill. The Mannons occupy an exclusive position; they are venerated and admired, and envied. But in the last act the people are afraid of entering the haunted house. And so mourning or isolation becomes Lavinia. She is cut off from the society. In the Greek legend the society, the tribe, accepts the help; in the American play isolation, being cut off from the society, is the modern approximation of the old story.

In the Greek story, the psychology of the characters is simple, almost elementary the code is the code of 'eye for an eye' and the guilt complex is metamorphosed into pursuit by the furies. O'Neill had better resources of psychology of the subconscious at his disposal. Ideas of Freud find the characters complex and more introverts. O'Neill's characters suffer self-torture, klunder go self-punishment, not because they have committed a crime because their conscience feels guilty. Death or life long isolation alone can solve their guilt complex. So O'Neill adapts the old well known Greek legend to modern American circumstances. The sense of doom and fate which the Greek dramatist intensified through the judgment of god has been equally well achieved and intensified through the judgment of one's own guilt. Complex or by self-punishment.

The Greek tragedy was a trilogy similarly O'Neill underlines the Greek tragic effect by dividing his play into three parts. Electra becomes the catalytic agent in the revenge story of Orates; so also Lavinia becomes the motivating power in bringing about the revenge of her dead father.

Eric Bentley says, 'If we ask what difference it makes that Orin and Lavinia are versions of Orates and Electra the answer is that they acquire an artificial prestige. They have become more important without any creative work on the authors part. We

now associate them with the time – honored and sublime'.

His modern parallels for the Electra story are appropriate and unforced. The civil war and the New England Greek-style for his history. The details true provided a satisfactory time and place for his history. The details of the relationship in the house of atrioms created the structure of the Mannon clan. Lathe names, following the punning allusion to "Agamemnon" in Ezra Mannon, with its connotation of power and wealth, were developed by the alliterative scheme which at one time wealth, were developed by the alliterative scheme which at one time he tried to maintain in Lavinia by falling her "Lavinia". In the ancient servant of Electra he found Seth, just as Peter emerged from payloads and hazel from such innocents as Sophocles' *Chrysothemis*. In similar fashion his chorus of gossips came naturally, if not entirely convincingly, from his source. Such details are obvious, but less so is O'Neill's remarkable fidelity to basic motifs of the myth; the presence of the sea in the Troy story finds congenial recapitulation in O'Neill's response to the sea and the islands of the south Pacific; the primitive need to honour the dishonoured father, and the horrifying origin of the curse in the devouring of children is echoed in the fate of the curse Mannon heirs, Lavinia, Orin, and Adam Brant; the sense of a haunted world, peopled with ghosts, and of men and women thrust into action by the dictates of a compulsive and destructive will and pursued by the furipus of their own guilt are admirably brought alignment with the legend. By the same token the trilogic structure parallels in its scope the cyclic evolution of the *Oresteia*. Thus mourning becomes Electra is a beautiful adaptation of the Greek legend and Greek plays; the result is one of the greatest tragedies in American literature.

#### REFERENCES

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