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### **Mental Deterioration in Eugene O'Neill's Plays *The Emperor Jones* and *Desire Under the Elms*: A Psychoanalytic Study**

#### A B S T R A C T

Diving deep in human mentality and cognitive functions is highly treated by American dramatist Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) in his dramatic productions. Notably, O'Neill's plays are based on what he himself calls "hopeless hopes" or "little formless fears". Thus, the present study aims to discuss and analyze two of O'Neill's plays; *The Emperor Jones* and *Desire Under the Elms*, in relation to psychological and socio-psychological theories to diagnose the reasons and results of mental disorders. *The Emperor Jones* is analyzed according Carl G. Jung's theory of the Collective Unconscious. *Desire Under the Elms*, on the other hand, is analyzed in the view of Erich Fromm's theory of Mother-Fixation.

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التدهور العقلي في مسرحيتي يوجين أونيل "الإمبراطور جونز" و "الرغبة تحت شجرة الدردار"

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### الملخص:

لقد حظيت محاولة فهم العقلية الإنسانية والوظائف المعرفية لدى الإنسان باهتمام كبير من قبل الكاتب المسرحي الأمريكي يوجين أونيل (1888-1953) في نتاجاته الدرامية ، والتي حاول فيها أن يعكس خبراته وتجاربه الشخصية. والجدير بالذكر أن مسرحيات أونيل تعتمد على ما يصطلح عليه هو "الآمال اليائسة" أو "المخاوف الصغيرة التي لا شكل لها". وبناء على هذا هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة وتحليل اثنتين من مسرحيات أونيل ؛ هما "الإمبراطور جونز" و"الرغبة تحت شجرة الدردار"، واللتين تم تحليلهما نقدياً من خلال النظريات النفسية لمحاولة فهم طبيعة الاضطراب النفسي الذي يؤدي بدوره إلى اختلال شخصية الفرد. حيث تم تحليل مسرحية "الإمبراطور جونز" على وفق نظرية "كارل يونغ" حول اللاوعي الجمعي. وتم تحليل مسرحية "الرغبة تحت شجرة الدردار" من خلال نظرية "إريك فروم" حول عقدة التشبث بالأم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أونيل ، يونغ ، فروم ، اللاوعي الجمعي ، عقدة التشبث بالأم ، علم النفس ، علم النفس الاجتماعي ، العقل ، الاضطراب.

Human psyche is a strange dynamism. The way it operates to face various experiences has been always a matter of debate and thus multiple psychologists have attempted to theorize or at least provide their own understanding of human actions, reactions, behaviours, responses etc. The American dramatist Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) has a special interest concerning psychological operations of human actions and the way they are functioning. In almost all his plays, he has been able to create characters whose psychologies can be "translated" according to the dramatic conflicts they find themselves entrapped in. Part of such treatment can be attributed to the way O'Neill has tried to dramatize his own personal experiences in his characters and dramas:

O'Neill brought to the stage a richness of detail and psychological depth rarely seen before in American drama. ... Few playwrights in American theatre have made use of their personal life – family, experiences, and inadequacies – with similar candor. O'Neill's dramas explore his alcoholism, his life at sea, his father's disappointments, his mother's drug addiction, his brother's suicide by alcohol, and his own shortcomings. His plays probe the American Dream, race relations, class conflicts, sexuality, human aspirations, disappointment, alienation, psychoanalysis, and the American family with a thoroughness and intensity at a level his contemporaries could barely contemplate. (Krasner, 2005: 142-3)

An example of such elaboration, two plays are tackled in this paper to shed light on psychological hybridity in O'Neill's heroes in view of psychological analysis. These two plays are *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) respectively.

In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill dives deep in the psychological agony of Emperor Jones or Brutus Jones whose character can be analyzed according to the theory of the Collective Unconscious by the Swiss Carl Jung (1875-1961), founder of analytical psychology. Despite the fact that Jung has agreed with Sigmund Freud's psychological theories at the beginning of his studies, yet the two have disagreed concerning the way the Collective Unconscious maneuvers:

Jung and Freud hold different conceptions on the unconscious; differences that led them to a final break. For

Jung, there exists an unconscious composed of two parts which should be distinguished from one another: (i) One of them contains the forgotten material, and the subliminal impressions and perceptions which have little energy to reach consciousness (ii) There is yet a deeper layer called impersonal, universal, collective, common to all men, even though it expresses itself through personal consciousness. Its contents are not personal, they do not belong to any individual alone, but to the whole of mankind... The collective unconscious is a common psyche of super-natural kind, whose contents are not acquired during the individual's lifetime. (Moreno, 1967: 176)

To provide a further explanation, Jung sees in the operations of the Collective Unconscious as the accumulation of the knowledge inherited from Man's ancestors. According to Jung, every individual is born with a collective mind of ancestral past knowledge and thus this individual might not be aware of the knowledge inherited in his\her mind unless to be exposed to certain circumstances that "bomb out" these hidden past experiences just for passing by a certain catastrophic situation. The reason for bringing up such theory of the "Unconscious" is the need to describe human reactions rationally. Jung remarks:

Since we perceive effects whose origins cannot be found in conscious, we are compelled to allow hypothetical contents to the sphere of the nonconscious which means presupposing that the origin of those effects lies in the unconscious precisely because it is not conscious. (Cited in Shelburne, 1976: 6)

Jung's Collective Unconscious is activated according to what he has called four universal archetypes. These archetypes are "signs, symbols, patterns of thinking, and patterns of behaviour" which are all inherited in the human mind. Moreover, Jung sees in world religions as a very clear manifestation of collective unconscious. As such, religion might be responsible for transforming spirituality in the inherited experiences of the unconscious. Phobias and mental fears are also similar to religions concerning their effect on the individual's mind. Whether children or adults, there are different ways to respond to terrifying experiences. This response in turn will affect the mental stability of those individuals. Phobias from the sea, bridges, and blood may all be genetically rooted in the collective unconscious. In addition to that, Jung has proposed that the collective unconscious is the container of all past myths, superstitions, and legends that ancestors passed through in old generations.

Remarkably, O'Neill in his play *Emperor Jones* elaborates Jung's theory of collective unconscious, mingling it with superstition, expressionism and realism; all are dealt with on stage. As a matter of fact and apart from the dramatic and psychological dimensions of the play, *Emperor Jones* is based on a personal experience which O'Neill has actually passed by: "The idea for *The Emperor Jones*," O'Neill reported:

[c]ame from an old circus man I knew ... [who] had been traveling with a tent show through the West Indies. He told me a story current in Haiti concerning the late President Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one.... This notion about the silver

bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. (Wilkins, 1980: n.p.)

In this fragment of a legend lays the gem of O'Neill's idea for a tragic romance of American history. *The Emperor Jones* shows the downfall of a flamboyant Afro-American criminal. This man is Brutus Jones who sets himself up as the emperor of a Caribbean island who is:

[c]orrupted by the mercantile mentality of the whites who had enslaved his ancestors, and his flight from the natives on his West Indian island would symbolize a disintegrating culture confronting again the forest primeval that had always haunted its dreams. (Gascoigne, 1962: 110)

Brutus Jones is a black former Pullman porter (then a high-status, unionized, black domination). He has killed many men, black and white, and is a gaolbird, but he has risen "from stowaway to Emperor in two years" (O'Neill, 1920: Sce. 1: 13) by means of his cunning, pride, and boastful nature that leads him to enslave his people. He treats the "low-flung bush niggers" with contempt, convincing them that he is immortal and can be killed only with a silver bullet for he believes that " ' I'm de on'y man in de world big enuff to git me. No use'n deir tryin'. And dey falls down and bumps deir heads" (Sce. 1: 17). Hence, Emperor Jones superstition begins. He has actually had one silver bullet made, telling his "subjects" that when the time comes, he will kill himself with it. In the first scene Smithers, a Cockney trader, gloatingly warns Jones that there is at last a rebellion against him in the hills:

JONES— (*puzzled*) What's dat you say? Talk plain.

SMITHERS—Ain't noticed any of the guards or servants about the place today, I 'aven't.

JONES— (*carelessly*) Dey're all out in de garden sleepin' under de trees. When I sleeps, dey sneaks a sleep, too, and I pretends I never suspicions it. All I got to do is to ring de bell and dey come flyin', makin' a bluff dey was wukin' all de time.

SMITHERS—(*in the same mocking tone*) Ring the bell now an' you'll bloody well see what I means.

.....  
SMITHERS—(*watching him with malicious satisfaction, after a pause—mockingly*) The bloody ship is sinkin' an' the bleedin' rats 'as slung their 'ooks.

JONES—(*in a sudden fit of anger flings the bell clattering into a corner*) Low-flung, woods' niggers! (*then catching Smither's eye on him, he controls himself and suddenly bursts into a low chuckling laugh.*) Reckon I overplays my hand dis once! A man can't take de pot on a bob-tailed flush all de time. Was I sayin' I'd sit in six months mo'? Well, I'se changed my mind den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute.” (Sce. 1: 20-21)

The natives are already working themselves into rage against Jones with their tom-toms, a sound that is basically related to the deterioration of Jones himself as it accelerates, driving Jones closer to superstition and hallucinations. O'Neill explains the use of the tom-tom as based on a personal experience:

One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there – how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly accelerated until the heartbeat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. Here was an idea for an experiment. How could this sort of thing work on an audience in a theater? (Runald & Bradbury, 1991: 328-9)

As Jones flees through the forest so as to make his escape, claiming that the forest "ain't nothin' dere but de trees!" (Sce. 2: 34) Eventually, the forest proves that Jones has been totally mistaken as the forest itself turns to be the ever greatest superstition as all Jones victims appear in forms of different apparitions, called by O'Neill the "Little Formless Fears" (Sce.2: 32) with their glittering eyes creep around him, accompanied by the tom-tom beat that grows faster and faster as the beating heart of Jones . The first of these 'black, shapeless' objects Jones meets is the ghost of Jeff, the Pullman porter Jones had killed with a razor after a gaming dispute. At first Jones assumes that he is seeing a living human being, but then he realizes the truth as the ghost of Jeff continues to play dice in a spontaneous way:

*[t]he figure of the negro, Jeff, can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, etc. He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. The heavy, plodding footsteps of someone approaching along the trail from the left are heard and Jones' voice, pitched in a slightly higher key and*



*strained in a cheering effort to overcome its own tremors.* (Sce. 3: 34-5)

In panic, Jones fires at the ghost, who disappears, but in response the beat of the "tom-tom is perceptibly louder and more rapid." (Sce. 3: 36) Jones, realizing that he has revealed his whereabouts with the shots "lunges wildly into the underbrush." (Sce. 3: 37) As a matter of fact, Jones in his running from the increasing tom-tom sound and the apparition of Jeff, he is only running from his past and past actions. Gradually, the great superstition of the great emperor starts to fade away. His uniform is tattered as he himself tears off his uniform coat and spurs to travel lighter "I gits rid o' dem frippety Emperor trappin's an' I travels lighter". (Sce. 4: 38)

Jung calls this type of personalities as the "fragmentary Personality" as the unconscious contents are intermingled. (Shelburne, 1976: 20). Jones is fragmented or falls apart from power to fear. As fear increases to overcome Jones, he becomes more superstitious and afraid of meeting more ghosts but then recalls that "de Baptist parson" had told him there are no such things; after all, Jones knows himself to be civilized, not "like dese ign'rent black niggers heah." (Sce.4: 38) However, he still hopes that he will not meet any of them. Suddenly a black prison road gang enters, and Jones is choked with fear. He murmurs "Lawd Jesus!" as the prison guard cracks his whip and Jones almost hypnotically obeys the guard's motion to join the others. Jones goes through the motions of shoveling dirt until the Prison Guard approaches him angrily and cuts at him with his whip. As the guard turns contemptuously away, Jones rushes at him as if he is indeed carrying a shovel reenacting his second murder of the white prison guard but realizes his hands are empty. Struggling with his rage, he frees his revolver and shoots the guard:

*In the act of crashing down his shovel on the white man's skull, Jones suddenly becomes aware that his hands are empty. He cries despairingly.)*

*Whar's my shovel? Gimme my shovel 'till I splits his damn head! (Appealing to his fellow convicts) Gimme a shovel, one o' you, fo' God's sake! (Sce. 4: 40)*

Suddenly, as the walls of the forest close in, darkness falls, and Jones escapes in terror as the sound of the distant tom-tom sound increases in volume and beat. Again, Jones finds himself in an area in the woods where another chapter in the history of African American is reenacted. This time it is a slave auction, and Jones, "his pants...in tatters, his shoes cut and misshapen," (Sce. 5: 41) is placed on a tree stump that serves as an auction block and is bid for. In rage, Jones asserts his rights as "a free nigger" and fires two shots at the Auctioneer and the Planter. Darkness descends as Jones exits, crying with fear, followed "by the quickened, even louder beat of the tom-tom." (Sce. 5: 45)

Jones, being haunted by different apparitions, faces another dilemma. This time the other scene dramatized in the history of African American people is the slave ship with Jones on it as one of the participants. The low melancholy murmur which rises to a cry of pain seems almost to be directed by the insistent tom-tom in the distance. As Jones joins the others, "his voice reaches the highest pitch of sorrow, of desolation." (Sce. 6: 47) The light fades slowly, and Jones moves away as "the tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation."(Ibid) Here, the unconscious of Jones is activated because according to Jung's theory of the unconscious anything that is not present immediately in the attentiveness is unconscious. In other words, memories can be the tools of the

unconscious that is brought into conscious when any individual is exposed to a threat or danger. (Shelburne, 1976:17).

Remarkably, O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* has switched from an expressionistic presentation of a guilty conscience to a "clever" use of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, experimenting dramatically on a high scale. (Venkateswarlu & Karunaker, 1996: 52) Gradually O'Neill has achieved purer and higher psychological realism by using the expressionistic techniques to expose the deep souls of his protagonists. The importance shifts from the external to the inner hidden reality. (Gascoigne, 1962:111) The "visions" in *The Emperor Jones* reveal the inner springs of Jones' nature as they come to conflict with his assumed, outward characters , but

[the] role is not consciously "put on" – Jones thinks himself as a bold and unscrupulous exploiter, albeit a fraudulent emperor – nor is he at all aware of the impulses which finally destroy him. Since he is dealing with hidden, subconscious elements in man's nature, O'Neill doesn't beat round the bush, trying to slip sly hints into a "realistic" medium, but he presents them directly and dramatically. (Whitman, 1964: 148-9)

The "forest scenes" with all their apparitions demonstrate the decline of Brutus Jones from self - sufficient ruler who had easily put away his Baptist religion and laid "Jesus on de shelf"(Sce. 1: 27) into a panic-stricken, almost naked creature calling "Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!" (Sce. 5: 42): "O'Neill manifests Brutus Jones's psychotic paranoia in physical terms." (Beard, 2005: 61) Through

these scenes, Jones is driven mad by the obsessive and incessant tom-tom sound which has haunted him through the replaying of his past vicious crimes and finally he finds himself on the bank of the Congo, almost naked, before a low stone altar. Feeling that he has been in this sacred place before, he kneels fearfully before it, and the Congo Witch-Doctor comes to dance out a supplication to a malevolent deity which requires sacrifice. Jones, now hypnotized by the drumming and the dancing, sways with the Witch-Doctor, who indicates that Jones is to be the sacrifice to the dark god who comes up from the water in the form of a huge crocodile. Jones writhes toward the crocodile, which slowly advances toward him, as Jones calls not upon the gods of the Witch-Doctor, but upon that Baptist God, whom he had put aside in Scene i, yet repeatedly invoked against the forces of the supernatural. Finally, as he calls on Jesus, he remembers his revolver and the silver bullet. With that last shot the crocodile disappears, a deity of darkness vanquished by a silver bullet. (Ranald, "*The Emperor Jones*": 2015: n.p)

At the next scene Jones himself is killed, also by a silver bullet, this one cast by Lem and his allies, ending by such action a superstition of a man whose temporary glory lured his eyes, drifted him to believe in his false power as his safe protected harbor, turning his superstition against him and finally the tom-tom sound dies away. The emperor after all has been right in one thing; his assassination is finished by a silver bullet just as this bullet can assassinate a vampire, a creature who is very much applicable to Emperor Jones.

As a matter of fact, Jones' mentality is perfectly applicable to Jung's theory of the collective unconscious as being superstitious and melancholic. Explicitly, Jones wants to avoid the destiny of his ancestors of being a slave by fighting to be the unfair master, not against the white man but against the people of his own race. Genetically, fear, melancholy, phobia, and superstition are deeply inherited in his

own mentality that urge him to behave in such vicious manner. Moreover, according to Jung's, dreams are the keys for the collective unconscious. Following the archetypes he has proposed, symbols in dreams may take two forms; personal and universal. As far as the personal level is concerned, the understanding of any individual's dream requires a full knowledge of the life of this dreamer. Whereas the universal level of the dream is related to the way in which human beings share the same symbols and the same past experiences and thus are reflected in their dreams.

Interestingly, Jung's collective unconscious was not the sole effect on Eugene O'Neill concerning the psychological effect. Once again, in his play *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), O'Neill exploits another psychological theory to show the effect of mental deterioration on the human psyche. In addition to its psychological dimension, O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* in all measures is rare among twentieth-century plays that could be called a "Neoclassical" play due to its Classical and Modern flavours. The play contains a simple naturalistic form that reflects a sense of the "American" of the nineteenth century: "[O'Neill] has developed a play with an American setting and a recognizable locale with its historical and emotional connotations of Puritanism, Protestant ethic, and hardness, but he has superimposed that mythic structure on the ancient myths of Greek drama". (Ranald, "*Desire Under the Elms*", 2015: n.p.)

The stark simplicity of the play and its strict concentration on multiple themes raises a plot that could have become melodrama into tragedy. (Venkateswarlu etl., 1996: 50) Based on the Classical mythology of Hippolytus, the play tackles various themes such as greed and hatred of the parent of an opposite sex in New England. Nonetheless, *Desire Under the Elms* comprises a sense of doom through which, without ever seeming superfluous, the mother haunts the play like a figure of an ill-

omen simply because of the son's confidence that his father has killed her. The ill treatment of the father figure against the mother figure looms like a crime in the past, awaiting penitence: "she becomes the Thyestes or the King Hamlet of the plot". (Gascoigne, 1962: 91-2)

As for the psychological effect, *Desire under the Elms* reveals the influence of a number of psycho-analytical theories of Freud, Jung, Fromm and other contemporary psychologists which are all accommodated with classical tragedies and influences. Most importantly of these theories is that of Erich Fromm (1900-1980) who "maintains that pre-oedipal attachment is far more intense than Freud's Oedipus complex, based on a child's sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex." (Biancoli, 1998: p.5) Fromm was the first theoretician who used the term Mother – Fixation to describe the ill-fondness of the mother towards her son which leads the son to be over-reliant on his mother. Thus, the mother in this consideration is having a damaging influence upon the life of her son(s):

The phenomenon of mother-fixation ..., is characterized by a type of behaviour briefly described as "over dependent on the mother," and by a presumptive explanation in terms of over fondness on the part of the mother and a conscious or unconscious holding of the child to a close intimacy beyond the appropriate age of infancy. (Cowen, 1938: 249)

Such excessive love for the parent of the opposite sex is seen in the character of Eben whose "defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's in captivity" (O'Neill, 1924: pa. 1, sce. 1: 3). Eben's mother is dead, but he cannot forget her.

The mother's image is constantly present before his mind's eye. He desires to possess the farm, for he knows that it lawfully belonged to his mother.

Consequently, after her death this farm should belong to him as he is her heir. He thinks that his father has stolen it from her, and consequently, he hates his father and wishes for his death: "I pray he's died" (pa. 1, sce. 1: 4) for he even does not recommend him as his own father :

SIMEON--(suddenly turns to Eben) Looky hereYe'd  
oughtn't t' said that, Eben.

PETER--'Twa'n't righteous.

EBEN--What?

SIMEON--Ye prayed he'd died.

EBEN--Waal--don't yew pray it? (a pause)

PETER--He's our Paw.

EBEN--(violently) Not mine!

SIMEON--(dryly) Ye'd not let no one else say that about yer  
Maw! Ha! (He gives one abrupt sardonic guffaw. Peter  
grins.) ( pa. 1, sce. 2: 5)

Eben considers himself a reflection of his mother and her own tool of revenge: "Eben-- (intensely) I'm Maw--every drop o' blood!... I'm her--her heir." (pa. 1, sce. 2: 6) He has a view that his father has over-worked his mother and thus killed her by inches: "An' fur thanks he killed her!... Didn't he slave Maw t' death?" (Ibid). He wants to take revenge upon this father for all the wrongs he did to his mother. Fromm theory provides answers for the reasons of such excessive hatred:

In a certain type of peasant family structure, a  
situation of authority exists in the relation of the son to the

father. The father is feared and obeyed without contradiction or hesitation; sometimes a feeling of respect, sometimes a feeling of hate or fear predominates and gives the relation its particular color. As long as the father is alive, his will is the only law, and any hope of autonomy and independence is linked, consciously or unconsciously, with the hope of the father's death. Such a hope, or even such a wish, is absent in a certain type of relation between soldier and officer. The subordinate only too gladly surrenders his own personality, becoming a tool of the leader whose will replaces his own. (Fromm, 1936:10)

Eben hates the authority of his father upon all family members. He keeps on feeling that his mother's spirit is ever restless, ever hovering round the house, ever watching over him, and that she would never be at rest until all those who wronged are avenged. Eben is, therefore, hostile to his father and in the very beginning of the play one finds him praying for his death (Gascoigne, 1962: 92):

SIMEON--She never complained none.

EBEN--She'd got too tired. She'd got too used t' bein' too tired.

That was what he done. (with vengeful passion) An' sooner'r later, I'll meddle. I'll say the thin's I didn't say then t' him! I'll yell 'em at the top o' my lungs. I'll see t' it my Maw gits some rest an' sleep in her grave! (He sits down again, relapsing into a brooding silence. They look at him with a queer indifferent curiosity.)" (pa. 1, sce. 2: 8)

It is to spite his father that Eben visits Min and thus possesses his woman "The p'int is she was his'n--an' now she b'longs t' me!" (pa. 1, sce. 3: 12) It is also



for this reason he steals his father's fortune so carefully concealed by the father and with the amount purchase the shares in the farm of his own elder brothers. Thus, mother fixation spoils Eben's relation with his father, leading him to quest possessing what so ever belongs to this father, the fortune, the prostitute and eventually the wife. He fails to achieve satisfactory and harmonious relationship with his parent of the opposite sex. (Ranald, 2015: n.p)

Another damaging Mother - Fixation influence on Eben which becomes an obsession to him and prevents him from establishing satisfactory sex relationship is his complicated relationship with Abbie. At the beginning, Eben spurns the advances of Abbie though he is sexually attracted to her. He hates her for he considers her the woman who usurped the place that belonged to his mother. Eventually, he becomes torn between his desire and his resentment for Abbie, but she finally leads him to the parlor that had not been opened after his mother's death. Eben feels the strong presence of his mother in this room and talks to her. He thinks that his mother will approve his union with Abbie- as a way of revenging herself on Cabot (Tilak, 2006: 219-20)

ABBIE--...They's one room hain't mine yet, but it's a-goin' t' be tonight. I'm a-goin' down now an' light up! (She makes him a mocking bow.) Won't ye come courtin' me in the best parlor, Mister Cabot?

EBEN--(staring at her--horribly confused--dully) Don't ye dare! It hain't been opened since Maw died an' was laid out thar! Don't ye . . . ! (But her eyes are fixed on his so burningly that his will seems to wither before hers. He stands swaying toward her helplessly.)

ABBIE--(holding his eyes and putting all her will into her words as she backs out the door) I'll expect ye afore long, Eben.

EBEN--(stares after her for a while, walking toward the door. A light appears in the parlor window. He murmurs) In the parlor? (This seems to arouse connotations for he comes back and puts on his white shirt, collar, half ties the tie mechanically, puts on coat, takes his hat, stands barefooted looking about him in bewilderment, mutters wonderingly) Maw! Whar air yew? (then goes slowly toward the door in rear.) (pa. 2, sce. 2: 32)

Acting the role of Eben's mother-image, Abbie externalizes for him his infantile wish to return to his mother: "Seems like Maw didn't want me t' remind ye"(pa. 2, sce. 3: 33). Abbie is clever enough to exploit this weakness of Eben towards his mother so as to entrap Eben in her lusty trap:

EBEN--Ay-eh. (with passion) I does, by God!

ABBIE--(taking one of his hands in hers and patting it) Thar! Don't git riled thinkin' o' him. Think o' yer Maw who's kind t' us. Tell me about yer Maw, Eben.

EBEN--They hain't nothin' much. She was kind. She was good.

ABBIE--(putting one arm over his shoulder. He does not seem to notice--passionately) I'll be kind an' good t' ye!

EBEN--Sometimes she used t' sing fur me.

ABBIE--I'll sing fur ye!

EBEN--This was her hum. This was her farm.

ABBIE--This is my hum! This is my farm!

EBEN--He married her t' steal 'em. She was soft an' easy. He couldn't 'preciate her.

ABBIE--He can't 'preciate me!

EBEN--He murdered her with his hardness.

ABBIE--He's murderin' me!

EBEN--She died. (a pause) Sometimes she used to sing fur me.

(He bursts into a fit of sobbing.) (pa. 2, sce. 3: 33)

Eben's feelings towards his mother are totally exposed to Abbie. He sees in Abbie a reflection of his dead mother and Abbie is totally aware of this fact and she in turn uses Eben to revenge her lost youth with his father:

ABBIE--(both her arms around him--with wild passion) I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! ... Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! (She pulls his head around. He makes a bewildered pretense of resistance. She is tender.) Don't be afeered! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben--same 's if I was a Maw t' ye--an' ye kin kiss me back 's if yew was my son--my boy--sayin' good-night t' me! Kiss me, Eben... (Don't ye leave me, Eben! Can't ye see it hain't enuf--lovin' ye like a Maw--can't ye see it's got t' be that an' more--much more--a hundred times more--fur me t' be happy--fur yew t' be happy?)

EBEN--(to the presence he feels in the room) Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye tellin' me?

ABBIE--She's tellin' ye t' love me. She knows I love ye an' I'll be good t' ye. Can't ye feel it? Don't ye know? She's tellin' ye t' love me, Eben! (pa. 2, sce. 3: 33)

Ironically, their kisses are but momentarily pure, and then surge into fierce passion. After their night of love, Eben is bold, confident and at peace with himself; his Oedipal feelings purged, now his mother can sleep in her grave. He doesn't respond to the love of Abbie as a young healthy man would do; rather he is glad that he has avenged the wrongs of his mother. It is not an act of love that has taken place in the parlor; rather it is an act of revenge for the wrongs of his mother :

EBEN--(his face suddenly lighting up with a fierce, triumphant grin) I see it! I sees why. It's her vengeance on him--so's she kin rest quiet in her grave!

ABBIE--(wildly) Vengeance o' God on the hull o' us! What d'we give a durn? I love ye, Eben! God knows I love ye! (She stretches out her arms for him. (pa. 2, sce.3: 34)

After this situation, Eben feels himself victorious on his father. He even starts mocking him, showing himself as superior to Cabot for he has taken from him the last thing Cabot possesses that is Abbie:

EBEN--(jovially) Mornin', Paw. Star-gazin' in daylight?

CABOT--Purty, hain't it?

EBEN--(looking around him possessively) It's a durned purty farm.

CABOT--I mean the sky.

EBEN--(grinning) How d'ye know? Them eyes o' your'n can't see that fur. (This tickles his humor and he slaps his thigh and laughs.) Ho-ho! That's a good un!

CABOT--(grimly sarcastic) Ye're feelin' right chipper, hain't ye?  
(pa. 2, sce. 4: 35)

Later in the play, he grapples with his father who knows that he was fooled and that Abbie has used him as a tool for getting a son, and thus also the farm, he is mad with rage. He tells Abbie that he would tell Cabot the truth about his son, and then would go off to California. They would not know a moment of rest for his mother would be out of her grave at night and they would be troubled by her presence. When Abbie has murdered the child, Eben asks his mother's spirit "Oh, God A'mighty! A'mighty God! Maw, whar was ye, why didn't ye stop her?"(pa. 3, sce. 3: 47) Eben's mother really has her revenge when Eben and Abbie are taken away by the sheriff, and old Cabot is left alone in the farm 'more lonesome' than ever before. (Tilak, 2006: 220) It is the mother-image which comes in the way of harmonious relationships in the Cabot household and wrecks the family apart. It seems that the mother figure in the play is very much akin to the role of classical gods who dominated the lives of classical heroes, tiring their lives apart and leading them to total destruction. The word "damaging" is used here because the memory or the apparition or the ghost of this mother is really destroying the life of her son from being anything but normal. The son in turn is suffering this over-clinging to his mother.

In conclusion, both protagonists, Jones and Eben, are destroyed by the ghosts of their past lives. The first is haunted by his crimes and the other by his

mother's apparition. All their actions and reactions are attributed to their disturbed personalities that eventually cause their downfall.

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