

Review of Literary Themes and Techniques in Eugene O'Neill's Drama

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces previous studies on selected works by Eugene O'Neill. The study sheds light in the different critical perspectives through which scholars identified the latent attributes of the selected works. It examines both the thematic and technical features of previous studies on O'Neill's dramatic structure. On the one hand, the thematic characteristics of the selected works will be limited to the discussion of the subject matters, motifs, and meanings of the plays' texts. On the other hand, the technical attributes of the selected works will be limited to the interpretation of the plays' dramatic characters, structure, and dialogue. Therefore, the study follows a descriptive as well as critical scrutiny of the existed studies on the selected works and how they contribute to the study of contemporary drama. It applies a qualitative study to demonstrate how O'Neill uses his dramatic structure and dialogue to offer a quasi-real view of the American society at the time. Hence, the study will be a close reading of previous studies and how they provide the reader with comprehensive and panoramic view of O'Neill's dramatic legacy. The study's finding lies in its exploration of the significance of literary themes and techniques in understanding modern drama via O'Neill's plays.

Keywords: Drama, O'Neill, Techniques, Themes

مراجعة للموضوعات والأساليب الأدبية في مسرحيات يوجين أونيل

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ملخص

تستعرض هذه الورقة البحثية الدراسات السابقة حول مختارات من أعمال يوجين أونيل. وتسلط الضوء على مختلف المنظورات النقدية التي استخدمها الباحثون لتحديد السمات الكامنة في هذه الأعمال. كما تتناول الدراسة الجوانب الموضوعية والتقنية للدراسات السابقة حول البنية الدرامية لأونيل. فمن جهة، تقتصر الخصائص الموضوعية للأعمال المختارة على مناقشة موضوعاتها ورموزها ومعاني نصوصها. ومن جهة أخرى، تقتصر

الخصائص التقنية على تفسير شخصياتها الدرامية وبنيتها وحوارها. ولذلك، تتبع الدراسة منهجًا وصفيًا ونقديًا في آن واحد، لدراسة الأعمال المختارة وكيفية إسهامها في دراسة الدراما المعاصرة. وتُطبق الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا لتوضيح كيف يستخدم أونيل بنيتها الدرامية وحواره لتقديم رؤية شبيهة واقعية للمجتمع الأمريكي في ذلك الوقت. لذا، سنتناول هذه الدراسة بالتحليل المتعمق الدراسات السابقة، وكيف تُقدّم للقارئ رؤية شاملة وواسعة النطاق لإرث أونيل الدرامي. وتكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في استكشافها لدلالات وأساليب الأدب في فهم الدراما الحديثة من خلال مسرحيات أونيل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراما، أونيل، الأساليب، المواضيع

1. Introduction

Eugene O’Neill’s drama abounds literary themes and techniques representing the American contemporary states of affairs. They reflect the true prosperity of the American drama that flourished during modernism. In *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*, Alison Donnell (2006) approaches the literary prosperity of the American drama via O’Neill’s writing which “often seems to generate an extraordinary myth of a doubled spontaneous genesis” (p.11). Donnell (2006) approaches the motif of the history of the Caribbean traits in the American drama which had affected O’Neill’s dramatic quality because “the most important debates with which Caribbean writers have persistently engaged have been those concerning history – both the history of colonialism and the history of English Literature. Yet the history of Caribbean writing is rarely addressed as a subject of such struggle or Contestation” (p.1). The theme of culture, therefore, is similar to the notion of resistance in O’Neill’s drama. Donnell (2006) attributes the idea of nationalism in the American drama to the socio-cultural discourses that left their enormous impact upon O’Neill’s drama as a whole.

Furthermore, Neil Kortenaar (2011) expounds the literary influences upon O’Neill’s drama in *Postcolonial Literature and the Impact of Literacy: Reading and Writing in African and Caribbean Fiction*. Kortenaar (2011) focuses on the effect of the African literary conventions upon the American literature which exemplifies “the divide between literacy and orality can seem even wider than it does in African literature” (p.7). These conventions are inherently affected by the African dramatic compositions: “where the bulk of the population is descended from African slaves” (p.7). Kortenaar (2011) says that most the African literature is derived by the Caribbean drama that influenced the American writings in the long run since “the Afro-Caribbean was and is oral in expression” (p.7). This obvious influence of the African literary conventions upon the American drama is expressed through “oral culture [which] has commonly been regarded as the repository of Afro-Caribbean cultural authenticity” (p.7).

In this respect, O’Neill’s fictional personas suggest the American social norms which expose the illusory quality of the continuity and coherence of the subject, in the sense of an individual person, a literary tradition, or a mono-vocal national culture.

Vanessa Rosario (2010), in *Hispanic Caribbean Literature of Migration*, claims that colonialism is a representative aspect of the American drama; whereby there are different historical clues dominating the majority of his plays. This is due to the fact that his plays had “played an important role in documenting significant historical moments” (p.41).

Rosario (2010) adds that O’Neill’s drama conjures “conjuring the distant homeland and a distinct future through bitter, intimate knowledge of the metropolis” (p.34). Furthermore; Rosario (2010) says that the American “nationalism was clearly not the answer for any of them ... interrogating a metropolitan fantasy that crumbles beneath the undeniable embodiment of otherness” (p.199). O’Neill, consequently, is a significant American dramatist who is deeply concerned with these individuals and how they interact with each other (Saleem, 2014, p.68). His plays reflect the true sense of the social contacts that identify the Americans’ ways of life in different aspects. He unravels the most significant cultural phases of the American society by polarizing realistic plots about people and their inner lives. The American ways of life are both traditional and modern in his plays due to their utilization of original techniques reinforced in the modern theatre. As such, O’Neill’s plays are profoundly concerned with themes and techniques expressing the American status quo in a universal sense leading to the culmination of his own unique style.

The realistic attributes of O’Neill’s plays are characterized by dealing with the core conceptual themes of individualism, loneliness, subjectivity and so forth. Consequently, his plays are mere exemplification of the drastic social changes which had stormed in the American society at different consecutive historical phases. Hence, critics tried their hands to reveal the latent motives of his realistic writings in order to demonstrate how they are influenced by the social circumstances which shaped the bulk of his dramatic compositions. The interpretation of his plays is closely associated with his tremendous influence upon his erudite and exceptional style.

That is, he writes in a distinctive use of diction to convey to the reader his own authorial insights about reality outside the text. This is due to the fact that he employs pedantic expressions reflecting the genuine sense of his plays within many cultural vernacular contexts. Furthermore, he uses meticulous words to precisely give a comprehensive view of the American ways of life through realistic atmospheres. In this sense, his plays are appropriated within the wide scope of modern drama which has its own styles and techniques labeled with experimental dexterity (Killian, 2022). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to highlight some of O’Neill’s plays in the light of previous studies to demonstrate how he left a massive dramatic legacy which is still affecting the American drama. The discussion of these plays will rely on the

existed scholarship on his drama and its pertinent topics within many critical approaches.

It tries to discuss the thematic and technical elements of O'Neill's drama. It scrutinize a number of previous studies on O'Neill's drama to demonstrate how he employs diverse dramatic styles during modernism. The study traces various critical perspectives conducted on O'Neill's drama to reveal his dramatic erudite dexterity.

The study, furthermore, tries to examine O'Neill's dramatic legacy to offer an in-depth understanding of his massive influence upon the American drama as a whole. For this reason, it sheds light on the technical and thematic attributes of O'Neill's plays from different perspectives. The study will be primarily a review of the existed scholarship on O'Neill's plays in addition to some critical readings of selected plays in order to demonstrate how O'Neill could achieve matchless dramatic compositions that are still affecting the current American stage premiers. Furthermore, the study identifies selected plays by following analytical readings some of their critical attributes, such as psychology, culture, society and so forth. In the first place, it follows a textual close reading of the plays' themes and techniques to explore O'Neill distinctive dramatic dexterity to create genuine as well as realistic recounts of the American individuals. Hence, the study's finding lies in its qualitative discussion of O'Neill's dramatic compositions in terms of diverse contemporary issues.

2. Selected Reviews

2.1 *Strange Interlude*

Karim and Butt (2011) contend that O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* deals with the unconscious mind that controls the personas' behavioral conducts. The dramatis personae suffer from certain remembrances that make them traumatized (p.3). They are repeatedly haunted by the past and its memories; whereby the reader could notice the great impact of the past on their personalities (p.3). According to Karim and Butt (2011), Nina, who is a central character in *Strange Interlude*, develops trauma as she always remembers her past. The existence of the past in her memory reveals her traumatic psychological state (p.3). One of these negative remembrances is the death of her fiancé Gordon who was killed in France by a gunshot before their marriage (p.3). As a sequence, her psychical behavior became to be controlled after this accident. The detrimental remembrance of her fiancé's death is the legitimate cause of her traumatized behavior (p.3). Being so, O'Neill dramatically conveys the deterioration of human morality at the expense the principal characters' health (pp.3-4).

In *Conflict between the Individual and the Society*, M. Jayachandran (2014) studies loneliness in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. Like Karim and But, Jayachandran (2014) handles the play and its appropriation if loneliness within social contexts. However,

he treats the theme of loneliness from other critical insights. Here, it would be beneficial to overview the subject of his study before reviewing the function of using loneliness to analyze the selected play. M. Jayachandran (2014) preambles his study by maintaining that the play has a vast perceiving audience. The play appeals to the readers since it parades a great deal of tragedy elements in the text of the play. It is offers tragic view of life which is an indispensable category of its dramatic themes (p.i).

The tragic scenes of the play could not be ignored due to the harsh event told in its dramatic structure. The play, ultimately, is a stereotype of the conflict taking place between the society and its individuals. Henceforth, Jayachandran (2014) aligns the theme of loneliness with the other themes: among which are the theme of despairs and the theme of disillusionment (p.iii). Therefore, they are classified as sub-themes typifying the most comprehensive theme i.e., loneliness wrapped in the classical conflict between society and its individuals (p.iii).

Jayachandran's (2014) claims that O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* is a classic example of human being looking for prime identity. It also hinges on the idea of searching for belonging and belief (p.43). The protagonist, Nina Leeds, is a young woman; and she is highly emphasized in the play's plot. She spends her life with her father. She is immensely influenced by the behavioral attributes of her father which became a determining factor of her destiny (p.43). Her father, known as Prof. Leeds, goes to war. While he spends his days in the war, he convinces Gordon Shaw not to marry his daughter till he could be able to come back from war (p.43). But, to Nina's disappointment, Gordon Shaw dies in the course of the World War I. at this stage of her life; Nina leads a life of loneliness (p.43). She really feels the passionate vacuum left after the death of Gordon Shaw (p.43).

Nina now changes drastically. The psychic wound left in her psyche is now widening. Her behaviors radically changes. The psychic sequences her lover's death, Gordon Shaw, do make her neurotic (Jayachandran, 2014, p.43). Furthermore, she begins to loathe her father. As a result, she volunteers as a nurse for wounded soldiers as a sacrifice reaction towards Gordon Shaw (p.43). Form this moment; presumably, we can infer the psychic influence of the death of her lover upon her behavior. She first became abhorrent of her father. As a rule of thumb, the relationship between a girl and her father is ideal. But she loses this relationship since she loses her beloved. Then, the death of her lover negatively affects her personality. She develops a blatant neurosis. As such, her personality becomes different form before. Jayachandran (2014) tries to shed light on the psychological complications of her life after the death of her father. Most interestingly, Nina gets prone to the life of loneliness because she is fully disappointed when Gordon Shaw is killed in the war.

Choman (1981) tackles the theme of wholeness in terms of the life of Nina. In fact, O'Neill is concerned with the future of dramatic theaters (p.50). The play's narrative

structure also deals with serious health issues regarding adultery and miscarriage. Such narrative is scandalous since it tackles these healthy matters openly (p.50). Choman (1981) maintains that O'Neill tells the story of a woman in all her passionate and emotional states, especially when she plays significant roles in her life (p.50). She, above all, manages these roles in controlled manner (pp.50-51). As such, the female figure – represented in Nina's character – tries to accomplish unity by means of "God-force" that grants her great liberty to move on in the essence of the play's dramatic plot (p.51).

Tarcisio Campo (1975) studies artistic dramatic potential in *Form in Selected Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Campo (1975) claims that O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* is an example of the dramatic proficient dexterity. For this reason, Campo (1975) analyzes the play's form to explore O'Neill's dramatic expertise (p.1). However, Campo (1975) refers to some aspects from the play's content in order to support the study's argument and discussion (p.1). Therefore, the study's interpretation depends on the structure rather than the content in order to come up with original arguments about O'Neill's distinguished dramatic prowess. Being so, Campo (1975) tries to explore some latent elements about the play's technical construction as stylistic trends that make O'Neill's dramatic ability startling (p.1). One of these stylistic trends is the device of "audible thinking" that is obviously utilized in by O'Neill in *Strange Interlude*. This technical device is used to express the sense of distraction and agitation coming out of the felling of love between Eben and Abbie in the play's narrative events (p.30). Here, the technical device is utilized to highlight some thematic contents.

Campo (1975) scrutinizes another artistic device used in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. Such device is the technique of dialogue-monologue (p.32). The function of this device is to expose the characters' both inner and outer traits during the performance of the play on the stage (p.32). In this regard, Campo (1975) specifies the effect of the technique of dialogue-monologue that could tell the audience of the characters' personalities and characterization. In such a technique, O'Neill experiments with the traditional dramatic limitations as he depicts the play's scenes in nine acts in meticulous examination and precise involvements (p.32). Consequently, Campo (1975) figures out the play as O'Neill's ultimate dramatic ingenuity done in experimental techniques to foreground the psychic themes of interpolated in the plot. Thus, the play is an overlapping connection between avant-garde structural techniques used to unravel certain thematic matters.

2.2 The Iceman Cometh

Zohreh Ramin and Mohammad Reza Hassanzadeh Javanian (2014) apply the concept of chronotope to analyze O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* in "A Chronotopic Reading of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*." The concept of chronotope is essentially argued by Mikhail Bakhtin. It is used to interpret the discourse elements

in literary works. However, the concept is primarily applied to analyze the novel genre rather than other literary genres, such as poetry, drama, and diaries. Ramin and Javanian (2014) argue that they will apply the concept to analyze a dramatic work, namely, O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (p.115). According to them, the concept has been rarely applied to analyze plays. Hence, Ramin and Javanian (2014) depend on Bakhtin's arguments about the concept of chronotope; and they use it to elucidate the interrelated overlaps between the components of time and space as a mode of destroying the play's main characters (p.115).

Donald Gagnon (2003), in *Pipe Dreams and Primitivism: Eugene O'Neill and the Rhetoric of Ethnicity*, claim that O'Neill has a distinctive features in his plays. These features are dealing with the human complicated, emotional and psychological characteristics of black people (p.iii). Gagnon (2003) adds that O'Neill has discrepant and various descriptions of black characters in his plays, especially *The Iceman Cometh*. But these characters are not of pure black organic. They are an offspring of white and black parents. This offspring is called "mullato" (p.iii). The black mullato is, therefore, has been a crucial subject of discussion to both critics and academicians (p.iii). Gagnon (2003) concentrates on the pessimistic Joe Mott as a fine example of mullato black character in the play (p.8). Joe Mott has interlocations with white characters. Gagnon's objective, here, is to discover O'Neill's depiction of earnest human circumstances by using overwhelmingly grim naturalism dramatic mode (p.8).

Mohamed Amine Dekkiche (2014) tries to examine the exploration of the self in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. Dekkiche (2014) conducts Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to discover the representation of the self in the play (p.iii). In the intertextual sense, the play has different utilization parody, depressing climax and the disappearance of dramatic traditional plot. The play has also repetitive statements that render it special intertextual elements (p.79). Being so, the play is an intertextual response to other literary works like Joseph Conrad's "To-morrow" (p.79). The play is put forth as a universal literary canon as it corresponds to other great literary masterpieces, like Conrad's "To-morrow" (p.79). Both of the works have similar fictional traits (p.84). They have psychological dilemmas. In O'Neill's play, the psychological dilemma is relative to Harry Hope and his saloon's world. These dilemmas are presented in the play in four dramatic acts (p.84). In the rest of the study, Dekkiche (2014) follows a comparative methodology between the protagonists O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and "To-morrow" in order to identify O'Neill's profound concern with self-discovery in play projected in the play.

In *A Touch of the Poet: A Psychobiography of Eugene O'Neill's Recovery from Alcoholism*, Geoff Thompson (2004) studies the themes of addiction and the dominance of alcoholism in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (p.ii). In essence,



addiction and alcoholism are greatly associated with O'Neill's real life. Thompson (2004) contends that O'Neill's could get rid of alcoholism; and he dramatizes his recovery from alcoholic addiction in the play (p.ii). Consequently, the play serves as the author's autobiographical means to depict his real life in a dramatic story (p.ii). Therefore, O'Neill uses several strategies to stop addicting to alcoholism. Chief among these strategies are coping with reducing the amount of alcoholism (pp.ii-iii). In so doing, O'Neill could resolve his own experiential dilemmas (p.iii).

Karim and Butt (2012), in "Catharsis and Eugene O'Neill's Modern Tragedy," tackle the dramatic elements of tragedy in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. They apply the Aristotelian concept of catharsis (p.220). In drama, the concept of catharsis is utilized to analyze feelings of fear and pity in tragedy. Such feelings identify the personality emotional reactions on the stage that make the audience feels pity and fear at the seam time. To explain, when the play presents tragic scenes, the audience benefit from these scenes. The audience gets experiential knowledge about two emotional reactions. First, they feel pity of the characters who are the victims of tragic events. Second, they feel afraid of these tragic events since they might be victims of them but in the real life rather than dramatic tragedy. In this manner, the concept of catharsis offers didactic lessons about life and how to live in it.

Therefore, Karim and Butt (2012) apply the concept of catharsis to analyze the interaction between the watching audience and *The Iceman Cometh's* tragic scenes (p.220). The play parades some repressive situations because it tackles the lives of disreputable and destructed people who still live in their past (p.224).these characters pay continuous visits to Harry Hope's saloon where they could get involved in a futile and existential life. Karim and Butt (2012) pinpoint Hickey, Parrit and Slade as the main characters that undergo severe sufferings and the states of psychological depression (p.224). In fact, they are the casualties of deceptive illusion (p.224). This is because they lead a purposeless life by drinking and futile arguments (p.224). They have a nihilistic vision of life and death because both of them are equal i.e., they are matters of illusion (p.224).

This is true to Slade's consideration of death as a mere elongated sleep (Karim and Butt, 2012, p.224). Slade, and the other characters, believe that death does not exist as they lead despondent, sensual and mechanical world (p.224). They resent life; and they are sick being victims of illusion (p.224). They have deceptive pipe dreams which contradict with life. As a result, their dreams gradually deteriorate (p.224). Karim and Butt (2012) scrutinize the psychological sates of these characters in order to identify the effect of catharsis on the audience. The characters have tragic life. They are agents of depression and dependency that lead them to meaningless living. The audience, in turn, learns a lot form the play's didactic messages. The audience could avoid the harmful futile life which resembles the characters' lives in the play;

and they sympathize with them at the same time. Such sympathy is the core of pity, which is the other aspect of the concept of catharsis.

2.3 Eugene O'Neill: Style and Legacy

They are humorous categories of O'Neill rare comedy plays (Manheim, 2012, p.41). Notwithstanding this, they have realistic implications about life and American people. The advent of "metaphysics, for example, paved the way for new relative perceptions. American people began to interpret the world according to their personal judgment. The rise of secularism, furthermore, is one genuine change that took place in the twentieth century which left the American people in divided attitudes. These attitudes were the sources of their psychic alienation (Karim and Butt, 2011, p.10).

The obvious meaning of illusion and reality is the "vernacular" practice; whereby people tend to obtain things for their values and interests (Nagwan, 2013, p.25). In addition, it involves the personal feelings of the other things i.e., persons feel that they need a lot of things regardless the others' desires to have them as well. This is the psychological aspect of illusion and reality. Persons want to achieve their needs which they psychologically lack. In psychological illusion, people aspire to gain things by different instruments or means, like money or bribe, to fulfill their purposes. In addition, the psychological illusion includes an escape from exaggerated pride acquired from family surroundings (p.27).

Additionally, the illusion has a rational feature. The rational characteristic of pride is that people try to achieve their goals by using clever procedures to obtain what they want (Nagwan, 2013, p.27). In this way, the cognitive procedures play an important role. People use their knowledge about other people's psychology. They come close by those people and depend on them for subjective interests. Furthermore, rational illusion takes place in everyday actions. It does not need time to be achieved. It relies on knowing other people and the way they can be exploited. It differs from psychological illusion which needs a long time to be fulfilled. It takes place in the form of "interplay" between citizens and "modern American society" (p.27). This psychological illusion results in the characters' alienation.

In "O'Neill's Diversity of Form and Technique: A Study of His Short Plays," Asadullah Larik *et al.* (2013) claim that another conspicuous technique is the experimentation with play's structure (p.74). O'Neill wrote some one-act plays which are rarely written in modernist drama (p.77). He wrote some plays in a short structure in order to express different aspects of reality through drama (p.74). Therefore, his plays were of utmost importance for writers who were still writing dramatic compositions. In so doing, his experimental technique was vitally influential. O'Neill had "effectively" used experimental techniques because he

believed that the real manifestation of “drama” is completed and “unfolded” through performance “on the stage” (p.75). This is, in essence, O’Neill’s predilection to write in realities “mode” as an expression of his “externalized” dramatic vision (p.75).

2.4 *Long Day’s Journey into Night*

O’Neill portrays these psychic metamorphoses even in his comedies. They embody the reconciliation between ambitious persons with their bleak reality (Manheim, 2012, p.36). In this fashion, persons do not go along with their hope. They fall into depressed disillusionment and spiritual deterioration (p.118). Even though they are few in number, they are illustrative patterns of subjective quests that are destined to pessimistic temper. In *The Movie Man* and *Ah, Wilderness!* O’Neill affords comic intervals in the course of the plot. They include happy endings. This dramatic component makes them comedies in the plain sense.

O’Neill, in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, discovers the human consciousness and its impact upon society and culture (Nagwan, 2013, p.25). This impact is divided between illusion and reality in the play’s literary context. It refers to the instrumental and intrinsic values in ethical studies. This means that egoism is the selfishness individual practice by a person to attract different benefits for his/her own interests. It also includes subjectivism, psychological allusion, and rational reality. The idea that the best life, for example, is getting what a person wants is called the realization of fact. The notion of illusion and reality in drama dates back to Greek times (p.25).

O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* has other dramatic insight to do with alienation. However, it represents alienation from the racial perspective (Gagnon, 2003, p.25). Not all charterers suffer from alienation. Only the black characters feel alienated. O’Neill’s is disappointed with the expediency of the American society and the exploitation of the blacks. This expedience exploitation is really a human dilemma. Discrimination is another behavior related to the educational process. It is also similar to egoism in a negative way when used to exploit the others (p.143). It is an ethnical principle attributed to the discussion of negative practices at the colonial agendas. It is basically founded on the idea that exploitation and ethnical discrepancy are the main focus of the play’s racial implication of “mutual alienation” (p.150); whereby they depend on the individual desires of person, and the benefit of utilitarian racism goes to black individuals not to their white counterparts (p.153).

O’Neill’s *A Moon for the Misbegotten* does not cope with the common fraternity standards of the American society (Watt, 2016, p.496). The gap between the play and reality is an obvious factor of the loss of human fraternity. The traditional American society maintained this fraternity for decades. But the inherited traditions dissolved when, suffering, together with “egotism,” did not reconcile. At this point,

the play stands out as literary exemplification of “materialist decay” which was prevalent in the American society. Such decay dismantled the American ideals of fraternity (p.496). The discussion of these thematic aspects in O’Neill’s plays will be elaborated in chapter three where we will review the main scholarly studies applied to O’Neill’s drama. The section below will introduce the O’Neill’s authorial background.

For example, Theodore Hickman, who is also known as Hickey; in *The Iceman Cometh* introduces the main characters to the audience. These characters are the patrons of the rooming house and a saloon in Greenwich Village. They have been living in oblivion for the sake of spiritual pleasure. Consequently, they become interested in the life of Theodore Hickman. Their individual perception of life changes. They feel that life is worth living. However, they are stunned when they know that Hickey is a murderer as he killed his wife. As a result, they are thrown into anxious turmoil.

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, for example, the initial actions take place in The Tyrones’ house, New London: Connecticut. In this house, several characters meet together. In the course of the events, they seek comfort rather than work. Here the sense of place, in New London, changes. Such changes are brought about the need for the solitary life. In this research, solitary life will describe interchangeably with isolation because both of them exemplify the specific peculiarities of alienation.

In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, for example, Josie is a domineering lady from Ireland. She does not take the feelings of other people into consideration. She is conniving and opportunist. Being so, the latent reason of her notorious reputation relates to the lack of communication between her and other characters. Jr., Hogan, who is another main character, is different from her. He is the landlord. Therefore, the cultural discrepancy between them is created by their cultural differences.

O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* has been studied in other critical fields. In *Images of Adversity: A Chronological Study of Women in Selected Plays by Eugene O’Neill*, Lorelee Anne Choman (1981) argues that O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* is about women and their possible integration. The play exemplifies O’Neill’s interest to exalt women’s identity, self-fulfillment and integration in a world that seems to be prevailed by patriarchy (p.1). The patriarchal world is characterized by a male mainstream; whereby male supersede and dominate society rather than females. For this reason, the play highlights the life episodes of the heroine, Nina, who embodies this feminist stance (p.1). Choman (1981) says that the representation of patriarchy in the play goes through the image of God-the-father. The father is the source of Nina’s suppression and predicament (p.47). The father, who incarnates the notion of

patriarchy, imposes harsh life upon his daughter, Nina. The result of this life is that she becomes suppressed by her father male dominance.

Choman (1981) describes the plight of Nina as the “search for wholeness” (p.49). The depiction of the heroine, Nina, in the play renders O’Neill’s the quality of being concerned with uniting the persistence need for a life of spiritual plentitude (p.49). Nina typifies the misfortune of female heroines. She is O’Neill’s prime female stereotype (p.49). She stands out as O’Neill’s genuine dramatic device that foretells the Dionysian feminist figure in dramatic performances (p.49).

In so doing, Nina brings back the feminist archetype of females on the stage. This is because she experience a treble periods of love. She survives self-destruction as she is not destroyed by her three loves experiences throughout her life. She is portrayed as “Woman-as-Overseer” who endures passion, materialism, and complicated love (p.49). Just so, O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude* recounts the story of a woman’s determination to withstand the plight of her experiences to the sake of wholeness; and, consequently, she obtains the truth of life midst the temptation of self-destruction (pp.49-50).

Martin Kich (1983) examines the play’s comic elements in *Comedy in Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Kich (1983) contends that the play is a realistic account that appeals to the sensitivity and the complexities of its readers (p.1). Being placed in this position, the play is hardly studies from this perspective (p.1). There has been much controversy about the play’s generic status whether it is a melodrama or an exaltation of melodrama in a pathetic tone written in classical dramatic manner (p.1). The play holds conspicuous affinity to the features of comedy though it abounds with tragic and melodramatic peculiarities (p.1). Kich (1983) says that the study of the comic elements in the play embodies the significance of his study (p.1). There is less attention paid to the comedy feature sin the course of the play’s structure.

Kich (1983) explores the comedy characteristics in the lay by scrutinizing the characters and their circumstances that are presented in pathetic dramatic fashion (p.1). The Tyrone family severs as the tool for discovering the comedy elements because they complicated personalities (p.1). In the course of his analysis, Kich (1983) examines these personalities to come up with new critical insights regarding the comic features of O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. The play’s characters, especially the Tyrone, have complex personal attributes which paves the way for discerning the comic factors in the plot. The characters’ pathetic emotions are presented in fascination reactions rather than being odd and eccentric (p.1). Kich (1983) places James in the first rank of analyzing the comic elements on the play. James, who is a distinguished Tyrone family member, has the most conspicuous token of comic structure (p.1). He is assigned a melodramatic role in performing the

play. He aspires to perform many other roles out of the stages in order to succeed in any of these roles. He has several personality attributes, like being patriarch or having extreme strange sympathy (p.1). When he interacts with Mary, he pessimistically faces banality as a husband; while with Edmund, he is utterly delicate and emotional and in some situation defends himself clumsily (p.1). He also appears debauched when it comes to meet Jamie; and he reacts comfortably as he disagrees with something (p.1). Kich (1983) says that James's fluctuate personality has been utilized to explore the comic elements in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. James's changing attitudes towards other render the play the classic elements of comedy which is scarcely studied in the previous studies conducted on the play.

Dey (1989) argues that *Long Day's Journey into Night* was O'Neill's dramatic means to fulfill his aims (p.12). The aim that he was used to cherish during his life time (p.12). The primal goal of writing the play is that it is a family dramatic unit (p.12). The play tackles the issue of cultural situations. There are two central characters that exemplify the tragic depiction of the American cultural positions (p.16). They are James and Edmund of the Tyrone family. Their clannish customary patterns are kept by Irish people in New England (p.16). Before they are judged by the Irish, they were completely overwhelmed by their familial qualities of their clans (p.16). In essence, the original cultural customs of the Tyrone family are Irish (pp.16-17). At this point, Dey (1989) attempts to interpret the play as a documentation of cultural customs instead of pursuing the autobiographical factors that are variously studied in the play. Yet, this culture relates to New England that is influenced by Irish Catholicism.

This religious culture embodies the play's critical meanings (p.17). Information about O'Neill's own family and his early life seems to furnish the play with autobiographical fundamentals (p.17). Dey (1989), accordingly, studies the play in the light of social consideration (p.17). That is, the play is set in striking social ambience (p.17). For this reason, Dey (1989), finds that these social factors incarnate the struggle between coincidences and devoted affection (p.17). The struggle also takes place between the outer reality and the inner drives of life (p.17). In the long run, O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* is about the Irish opposition of the British authority over them (p.17).

Kari Mathisen (2009) studies the disintegration of the American family in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Mathisen (2009) claims that family affairs are of paramount importance since they relate to anyone who is concerned with family issues (p.3). The reason for choosing the family issues is that family is a universal archetype (p.3). The play has a historical setting that makes it suitable for the analysis (p.4). This setting is appropriate for dealing with the "gender roles" concerning the classification of labor in the same family (p.5). The play offers a desolate view of the complex relationships among the American family's members (p.5). The play's dramatis personae are constrained by their time (p.7). The father, for example, brings

about great hope for his son, yet this hope leads to rivalry clash (p.8). The play is about the struggle of conflicting ambitions (p.13).

Feminism is another issue tackled in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Gerardine Meaney (1991), in "*Long Day's Journey into Night: Modernism, Post-Modernism, and Maternal Loss*," studies the feminist themes in the play in the light of modernism and post-modernism literary aspects (p.53). The critical appreciation of the feminist peculiarities in the play corresponds to the theme of loss, especially the loss of the mother, Mary (p.54). This loss is appropriated in the specific context of family. However, Meaney (1991) approaches this loss in the general context which refers to the cultural loss by which authenticity and legitimacy are devastated (p.54). To use modernism terminology, Meaney (1991) describes this loss as "disinheritance" caused by the concept of "Other" which inherently means feminism (p.54). Moreover, the continuous quarrels between the father James and his sons Tyrone and Edmund as well as the disputes between Tyrone and Edmund elucidate the dichotomy between literary fictional authority before modernism and in post-modernism (p.60). Ultimately, these disputes represent the uncanny reality of a suffering female, Mary (p.60).

Ramin and Javanian (2014) cite Bakhtin's claims about the concept of chronotope which inherently indicates the plot's organic unity (p.115). In this unity, the fictional protagonist dwells in the dramatic narrative space (p.115). At this point, the chronotopic space is revealed by designating the interrelation between the protagonist and space depicted in the play (p.115). The organic unity merges space, or place, with time in literary works. But it is unorganized in the historical development of literary genres. This is the theoretical background of Ramin's and Javanian's study. Being so, the historical time sequence depicted in the play corresponds to the dialogic feature of the play. That is, the play has dialogic, or multi-voicedness, interactive integrity between time and place (p.115).

In O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, the time temporality is connected with the readers (p.116). In this way, the play appeals to reads at all time eras of different historical periods (p.116). As an example, Ramin and Javanian (2014) interpret the initial fragments of the play where Harry Hope's deserted saloon conveys O'Neill's precise depiction of time temporality (p.116). O'Neill's accurate description of the abandoned saloon carries out the play's tragic scenes intended to be delivered to the reader's perception (p.116). Therefore, Ramin and Javanian (2014) focus on the saloon as the play's proper place; and for them, the place is more significant than time in the play (p.116). Such significance is analyzed by the use of Bakhtin's concept of chronotope.

Gagnon (2003) supports his claims by focusing on another character, that is, Hickey in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (p.11). Gagnon (2003) highlights Hickey because

he exemplifies the theme of mankind's ultimate gloomy moods in a fatal world (p.11). Such gloomy mood leads Hickey to lose confidence in tomorrow i.e., tomorrow is absent in Hickey's life (p.11). His blackness is what makes Hickey's gloomy moods. In like fashion, Gagnon (2003) explores O'Neill's aesthetic portrayal of the position of black people in a class-dominated society (p.11). The black represent the sub-class category of society (pp.11-12).

The play is an everlasting struggle between people and destiny and demise, and the quest of authentic self in form of destroyed fake self (p.22). In so doing, O'Neill's exposes ethnicity through the collective humanity. He chooses the word "Thirst" as an indication of black people's external as well as internal forces which govern their characterization (p.23). Moreover, the white characters are controlled by the same forces. In the long run, both of them are destined to same fate i.e., destruction (p.23). The concept of "Thirst," therefore, leads Gagnon to explore other significant ideas, such as ethnic myths, universal brotherhood and eliminating reliance in psychological complexities (p.23). Larry Slade, for example, embodies the psychological disillusionment and apathy in the play (p.83). In this context, the play is an ultimate exemplification of O'Neill's conceptualization of multicultural and diverse brotherhood (p.109). The residents of Harry hope's saloon illustrate this brotherhood (p.109). Another grim mode in the play is Hickey's deliberate killing of his wife; and this murder unravels the struggle between Hickey's psychological and physical dimensions (p.151).

Furthermore, it incarnates the discrepancy between the need for achieving dreams and its opposite, namely, destruction (p.151). As such, the play is a rhetorical account of the chaotic ethnicity told through repeated dramatic plot of diverse individual experiences (p.167). The play's characters have different ethnical origins, but share and speak the same language (p.167). Additionally, the black characters are classified in sub-classes. They are controlled by the American capitalist class. In the play, Joe is an example of the victims of capitalist control. He is a subordinate on American capitalism (p.180).

In "Eugene O'Neill's Exorcism," Robert Dowling (2013) approaches the erotic elements in O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Dowling (2013) asserts that O'Neill recounts the story of his brother, James, who is the protagonist of the play (p.4). Jim and another character, Ned, take part in filthy prostitution (p.4). Both characters use the word "rotten" as an expression of wry grimace, or an indication of profound self-loathing attitudes (p.4). By analyzing these dystopian elements, Dowling (2013) offers us a grim picture of how O'Neill's society was. Dowling (2013) delves into O'Neill's intricacies of the time. The play abounds with moral chaos that does not cope with O'Neill's satisfaction with the common standards of ethics of his age. Consequently, the play is the story of O'Neill's brother who

experiences tragedy in its meticulous sense (p.7). James is an exemplification of the death-in-life experiences that spanned the time for more than ten years (p.4).

Dowling (2013), here, studies the biographical facets; and the play remains O'Neill's historical mysterious account that he intended to remove it from the historical list of his drama. However, we still reserve the original script as a proof of his brother's life (p.7). These characters embody O'Neill's stereotypical depiction of degenerated souls that are disillusioned by themselves and the worse life around them (p.10). They reach the crux of their pain due to their love affairs (p.10). For this reason, they resort to committing suicide as an exit of their painful sufferings (p.10). As a matter of fact, Dowling (2013) says that love affairs are the basic premise of vicious exorcism that leads the characters to their tragic end (p.10).

3. Conclusion

This study reviewed some scholarly studies applied to analyze selected works by O'Neill. It mainly depended on the descriptive nature of previous studies to interpret the plays' thematic and technical aspects. Moreover, the study elaborated these aspects by pursuing different critical concepts to demonstrate how O'Neill uses his dramatic techniques to reflect the true sense of the American society. Again, the explicated some critical insights about the selected plays and the possibility of analyzing them from various critical perspectives. Consequently, the research's methodology unraveled the way by which O'Neill appropriates the core essence dramatic compositions and how they could enhance the essential attributes of modern drama as a whole. For this reason, the study's recommendation falls into two categories, namely, psychoanalysis and trauma.

This study also tried to examine O'Neill's dramatic legacy to provide the receptive reader an in-depth understanding of his deep influence upon the contemporary American drama. It identified the dramatic insinuations projected in his plays which correspond to the events and changes that were the mere characteristics of the time. These changes brought about new visions of life as the American society was heading to new life styles. Therefore, the study of O'Neill's play's thematic and technical dimensions are required and they provide multiple views concerning the American contemporary society. In this sense, the O'Neill's plays could be grasped as real portrayals of both the American family life and domestic affairs in relation to their social backgrounds. The study also unraveled O'Neill's profound concern with the way by which he portrays the American people's transformational states i.e., they progressively change psychically and spiritually in order to cope with their continual challenges.

As for psychoanalysis, future researches could apply Sigmund Freud's concept of trauma. This concept involves other concepts that relate to the general implication of neurosis. For example, the concept of neurosis branches out of the concept of trauma.

In this sense, the concept of neurosis comes to be considered as a psychic disorder. To explain, the notion of psychic disorder, as a psychological disease, relates to some sort of psychological problem in concerning the behavioral attitudes of human personality. Accordingly, what psychoanalysts concerned with is how neurotic persons behave in an abnormal way. Future researches, therefore, might mainly analyze the characters' psychic disorder as an indication of neurosis by depending of Freud's arguments about neurosis as a psychic disorder that comes out of trauma. In this regard, psychoanalysis would be a viable methodology to explore the original causes of the characters' traumatic feelings and, thus, providing suitable solutions for them.

For the sake of clarification, future researches could explain and discover the reviewed plays from different critical perspectives. Strikingly, these diseases accumulate and develop into complex stages in the unconscious mind where the people could not have a complete control over them. On the other hand, people's trauma makes them neurotic, i.e., they behave in an abnormal way which is noticed by other people. This is because they react to their social conditions and circumstances in a negative manner. The authorial discourse could be also analyzed by future researches. This is because the authorial discourse projects the author's own ideas about reality in the dramatic text. Being so, the reality might be psychic trauma and how the author (O'Neill) opposes this through the dramatic discourse. In this sense, he employs the characters' interlocutory social encounters and their speech that might be interpreted as a means of exploring the effect of trauma on the character's disordered psyches. Moreover, the dramatic settings could be pinpointed to reveal O'Neill's concern with the American social state of affairs during modernism. These settings do reflect the genuine locations of trauma tackled perceived and depicted by the selected plays. In this way, both the spatial and temporal settings of the selected plays would be accentuated by future researches to examine the lurking stimuli of their anxious psyches and trauma. As such, psychoanalysis and trauma would appropriately applied to study the selected plays in particular, and O'Neill's drama in general.

Furthermore, the study found that O'Neill's dramatic legacy can be embodied in many kinds of literature from the time of *Beowulf* up to the contemporary drama of the recent epoch because his plays are fine examples of literary themes and techniques. The first persons to be alienated from their place, were Adam and Eve, when they dismissed from the Garden of Eden, it is the same for those people who are alienated not only from their life but also from their society. One of the study's contributions is the discussion of a number of O'Neill's plays through juxtaposing the primary and essential characteristics of his themes and techniques which are hardly tackled in previous researches. That is, he keeps the original and authentic elements

of drama, yet he gives them new experimental traits to replenish modern exhausted dramatic techniques.

Another major contribution of the study is O'Neill's artistic choice of diction in his plays which inherently embody the meticulous state of their psychic and psychical conditions. The precise selection of the characters' role on the stage and the qualities of their personalities illustrate their psychic thoughts and moods via pithy diction and purposeful words. Such words convey to the reader the typical authorial concern with reality outside the dramatic text. O'Neill's repetitive technique of using such words as "irritably", "thinking wearily" among others gives the impression of how the characters' inner psyches are and how they are affected by their interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the study found that these psychic conditions are the reflection of the contemporary American attitudes towards the modernity and social prosperity.

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