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## Review Article

### Intertextuality: Allusion, Convention and Transformation in *The Oresteia* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to show the relationship between the plays of O'Neill and his European counterpart, Aeschylus. O'Neill subscribes to Greek mythology but modifies or transforms it in the American scenario. Our study of the plays has considered the way meanings are constructed by a network of cultural and social discourses which embody distinct codes, expectations and assumptions. Besides, the thematic and linguistic similarities and differences between the works of the European and that of the American author selected have enabled the researcher to have an insight into literary influences and affinities. This article has demonstrated that there is no end in the making of texts, as O'Neill has revisited classical literature to write his play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*. This paper argues that intertextuality must not be limited to influences as Aeschylus had no direct influence on O'Neill though O'Neill rewrites his play *The Oresteia*. Both writers have no biographical similarities nor do they come from the same generations. O'Neill alludes to Aeschylus's Greek mythological form of play writing but transforms it into the American scenario, through American Realism. To analyse these plays, the critical approach used was Postmodernism since intertextuality is the major tenet of postmodernism. The paper concludes that, although O'Neill subscribes to Greek mythology, he deviates from European playwrights of this dramatic convention. His work has aspects of American Realism, and he is equally a social critic who writes about the ills that plague his society, in order to create awareness in his countrymen.

**Keywords:** Intertextuality, allusion, convention, transformation.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The term intertextuality is derived from the Latin word “intertexto”, which means “to intermingle while weaving.” When Julia Kristeva coined this term, she associated it primarily with post-structuralist theorists. In one of her essays, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” she broke with traditional notions of the author’s influences and the text’s sources positing that all signifying systems (texts) are constituted by the manner in which they transform earlier signifying systems. A literary work

is not simply the product of a single authour, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. In *The Kristeva Reader*, she outlines that any “text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (66). A text is a piece of writing made up of previous writings. Literary creation calls for intertextuality, as any piece of writing is the absorption and transformation of previous writings. Intertextuality is also seen as the interconnectedness of a text with another or the rewriting or transformation of a text by an authour.

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The aim of this article is to show the extent to which the plays selected interrelate with one another, through forms of intertextuality such as allusion, convention and transformation. It also shows that intertextuality is not only limited to influences but equally playwrights can rewrite the works of others irrespective of the places they come from and the differences in their epochs, as the case with Aeschylus and O'Neill. This interrelatedness will be analysed through the elements of literature like setting, characterisation, plot, themes, style and structure as well as, dramatic conventions such as chorus, prayers, songs and stage direction. This study examines intertextuality to demonstrate the relationship between Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Aeschylus's *The Oresteia*. This comparison gives an insight into literary influences and cultural studies by showing the connection between culture and intertextuality. Intertextuality shows the link between literary texts and their connections to other cultural productions. Writers are influenced by everything that they have seen or read and even seemingly disparate fields, such as music and philosophy, can exert a strong influence on each other through intertextuality. Similarly, authours from different cultures and historical periods can influence each other. As Carolyn Heilbrun points out:

*We can only retell and live by the stories we have read. We live our lives and experiences through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.* (*Writing a Woman's Life* 1)

The above statement implies that there is almost nothing new to be written by writers again, since their life experiences depend on the stories they have read. Stories come to writers naturally through songs and murmurings passed on from mother, or electronically, telling them about different conventions. However, writers can use old stories to create new fictions and narratives.

Writing in an atmosphere of social and cultural upheaval, when poststructuralist theories of difference were supplanting the certainties and boundaries of structuralism, Julia Kristeva found in intertextuality a means of questioning the relationship between texts which avoid fixed meanings and hand over authority to the reader. The term intertextuality was coined to describe not merely the influence of previous sources, but also the wholesale transposition of various linguistic structures and practices into others. Julia Kristeva's theories commented upon and developed those of Mikhail Bakhtin concerning dialogism, written four

decades earlier. This approach recognised the importance of locating language within specific social situations, drawing it out of the abstract system of Saussurian linguistics and positioning it in the social networks within which language is exchanged (*The Dialogic Imagination* 27). This is central to understanding intertextuality's transformative capability, and will form a key role in understanding the variant nature of the texts presented. In Bakhtinian thought, rather than existing as a fixed sign, constituents of a language carry within them traces of other utterances and uses which render them unstable and open to meaning: "Our speech is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of 'our own-ness'" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 27 ). Utterances respond dialogically to other utterances, recall previous texts and retell traces of otherness, thereby resisting both neutrality and authoritative meaning. From this perspective, a word has the potential to compress conflicting meanings within it; hence, language can be recovered and reformulated at different times and by different socio-cultural groups, so that a word resounds with a multiplicity of voices.

## 2. ALLUSION

An allusion, according to *Merriam Webster's Dictionary*, is an implied or indirect reference especially in literature; a work that makes allusions to classical literature, also the use of such references. Allusions can be seen in various domains such as historical, geographical, biological, and classical domains, just to name a few. O'Neill's work, *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a direct allusion to Aeschylus's classical play, *The Oresteia*. Eugene O'Neill's accommodation of the ancient dramatic tradition and the classical intertext within *Mourning Becomes Electra* has mainly focused on the works of his predecessors. These dramatic models include Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, from which O'Neill draws Orin's Oedipus Complex, and above all, *The Oresteia* (and the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides), on which the plot of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is based. Though *Mourning Becomes Electra* undoubtedly is foremost a psychological adaptation of Aeschylean, Sophoclean, and Euripidean tragedy, O'Neill's trilogy contains several more subtle classical allusions drawn from conventions and other non-tragic forms of classical drama (*International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 1). We therefore argue that Eugene O'Neill maps Aeschylus's *The Oresteia* onto his modern tragedy.

O'Neill's engagement with Aeschylean tragedy, *The Oresteia*, holds specific thematic significance to its context in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, linking forces of causality with the motifs of death and family destiny. O'Neill alludes to

Aeschylus's trilogy, *The Oresteia*, not only through characterisation, but stage directions, structure, the use of chorus and through the Chanty man and Lavinia, who symbolises Electra in *The Oresteia*. Before delving into this intertextual reading of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, it should be noted in brief that few authours have left so many clues to their literary ideal as has O'Neill. We will begin the analysis of allusion in this article with the setting of both plays.

*Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines setting as, "the time, place and circumstances in which something occurs or develops, or the time and place of the action of a literary, dramatic or cinematic work". It should be noted that when we talk of setting, it is not limited to historical, (time), and geographical, (place), but there is also the psychological setting which brings in the stream of consciousness technique. Sarah Anyang Agbor in her book, *An Introduction to Commonwealth Literature*, defines setting as, "The time and place in which the events of literary work take place" (76). A setting can also be symbolic in the manner in which it makes ideas larger and more significant. Setting will be analysed in *The Oresteia* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, through the angles listed above.

*Aeschylus wrote The Oresteia in the fifth-century B.C. His play is strongly based on the philosophical and political consciousness of his time. It was a time of transition when Greek civilisation was moving towards a cultural cohesion after passing through a long period of wars and bloodshed. Athens was about to play a critical role in coming years as on the one hand, it had emerged successful in its struggle against tyrannical regimes of the past, and on the other hand, it had to consolidate the Greek city states against the possible invasion of the Persian Empire. This explains the war theme in Aeschylus's plays, particularly The Oresteia.*

*O'Neill wrote his play in the 1930s when most of the writers were struggling with the social and economic realities of the times. The New York Stock Market crashed in October 1929 destroying the hopes and aspirations of the American people, founded on the American Dream. Consequently, much of the literature produced in the context of 30s aims at finding out the social and economic causes which led to the Great Depression and its implications on the lives of the common Americans. Hence, a spirit of pessimism prevailed both at the individual and societal levels. However, O'Neill rejected the economic study of man's conditions and diverted his attention to explore the deep hollows of the human soul.*

The first setting of the first part in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the exterior of the Mannon house,

built in imitation of Greek style with the white pillars in front, which creates afunctional irony for the New England setting with its Puritanical view. C.W.E Bigsby in *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama*, states that "The self-destructive fatalism of Greek theatre, symbolised by the furies, is transmuted into a Calvinist conscious which makes the self its own enemy" (80). In *The Oresteia*, the setting of the first play *The Agamemnon* is "Before the royal palace of Argos" (*The Oresteia* 17). Argos in *The Oresteia* becomes the New England of 1865 in the play and New England, with notions of sin, guilt and punishment, is a perfect setting for such a trilogy. Through the external walls of the 'tomb-like Mannon house' (*Mourning Becomes Electra* 15), we move to the interior and symbolically from the social to the psychological, from the public to the private. O'Neill's purpose of changing the situation and the setting from Athens to New England is also his search for expressing the human condition related to his own culture. Aeschylus and O'Neill mostly make use of the outside setting, though O'Neill frequents the internal part of the house. In the second play of Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, the setting is "The grave of Agamemnon" (*The Oresteia* 77), which is still the out space. The second play of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Hunted*, takes place still in the exterior of the Mannon house (*Mourning Becomes Electra* 113). In the last play of *The Oresteia*, *The Eumenides* takes place still in the outer setting but this time a little metaphysical because it was in the shrine (*The Oresteia* 121). Likewise, the setting of the last play of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Haunted* takes place still in the exterior of the Mannon house (*Mourning Becomes Electra* 209). The next element to analyse is the characters of both plays.

*Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines characterisation as "One of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual". According to Sarah Agbor Anyang, characterisation refers to the way that a person looks, talks, acts or thinks (79). Since O'Neill alludes to Aeschylus's play, *The Oresteia*, his characters are an emulation of those of the Greek dramatist. We will begin this study of intertextuality by the characters of Adam and Lavinia.

Adam's opening dialogue with the Chantyman mirrors that of Aegisthus and Leader and, in a strange appropriation of the Aeschylean narrative, the Mannon family's destiny unfolds from Brant's departure to the underworld. Brant is the captain of a ship, who has spent years sailing around the world after being banished from his ancestral home. The case for an Adam/Aegisthus comparison becomes particularly enticing when one considers the principal source of conflict for Adam: Lavinia.

O'Neill's system of allusion to *The Oresteia* works in at least two ways: one in its most general recollection of what the playwright perceived to be the Greek sense of fate, the other, the numerous murders in both plays and the differences in the death of the characters. Fate holds that Clytemnestra will die in the hands of her son Orestes and her daughter, Elektra. But in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the oedipal complex manifests in a way that Orin cannot kill his mother, Christine due to the love he has for her and Christine, also disappointed because her lover Brant has been killed by her children, decides to commit suicide.

The murder of Brant by Orin effectively determines the fate of the Mannon household, as it is this killing that sets off a chain of emotionally catastrophic events for the family Orin, whose feelings toward his father are depicted as rather ambivalent, seems far more preoccupied with his mother's adultery than his father's murder. It is not until he witnesses Brant and Christine together as lovers that Orin resolves to act, and his motive is clearly jealousy, rather than filial piety, since it was Christine who had actually killed Ezra. Orin, who has just been restrained by Lavinia after first seeing his mother with Adam, exclaims:

Orin—...*(then with bitter anguish)* I heard her asking him to kiss her! I heard her warn him against me! *(He gives a horrible chuckle.)* And my island I told her about—which was she and I—she wants to go there—with him! *(then furiously)* Damn you! Why did you stop me? I'd have shot his guts out in front of her! (*Mourning Becomes Electra* 186)

Orin's dead father is merely an afterthought at this point in the drama, and Ezra's name does not even appear as a pretext in Orin's rage. Orin executes the murder of Brant almost exclusively as a result of his Oedipal attachment to his mother. Hence, it is this murder, not Ezra's, which carries more weight as an impetus for the further dramatic action. It is this murder that drives Christine to suicide, which in turn triggers Orin's suicide and Lavinia's symbolic tomb within the Mannon house. This act constitutes the defining moment of the Mannon family's tragic destiny, and its striking juxtaposition, by allusion to *The Oresteia*.

The magical nature of the Chantyman extends beyond his hyperactive surroundings. In a work explicitly conceived as a modern adaptation of *The Oresteia*, the Chantyman (for this is the only name by which O'Neill refers to him) has no correspondent character in either Aeschylus or the later iterations of *The Libations Bearers*, the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides. The context of the Chantyman's entrance into *Mourning* is tense and

threatening. Christine Mannon (Clytemnestra), a wealthy New England woman, has murdered her husband Ezra (Agamemnon), the town's civic leader and a Union general, upon his homecoming from the Civil War. Fearing retribution from her daughter, Lavinia (Electra), and recently returned son, Orin (Orestes), Christine is preparing to elope with her lover, Captain Adam Brant (Aegisthus), the vengeful cousin of Ezra Mannon. Brant meets the Chantyman while aboard his anchored clipper ship, awaiting the arrival of Christine. Plot and structure are the subsequent elements of the plays that are related to allusion.

Plot, in Aristotle's terms, is the arrangement of the incidents. It is also the structural principle, which defines the limits of the action within the limits of the cultural pattern, and provides a form, which the dramatist can use to present his ideology. According to Sarah Anyang Agbor, "plot provides the structure of the story. The plot of a story can be chronological or begin in medias' as well as from the end of the story" (*An Introduction to Commonwealth Literature* 72). Structure is defined as "the design or form of the completed action" (74). It is structure that gives a story balance and coherence. Aeschylus's play *The Oresteia*, follows the structure of a traditional plot, which O'Neill later adopts. A traditional plot begins from the beginning or exposition, and later proceeds to conflict which will lead to a complication that moves to the climax and lastly, the denouement or the falling point where the protagonists pass away as a result of hubris or weakness of character.

O'Neill borrows the three divisions of *The Oresteia* (changes them as *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*), and fits them into his plot structure. Before the action of the first play, Abe Mannon (Atreus) dispossesses his brother David Mannon (Thyestes) because of David's seduction of, and subsequent marriage to, Marie Brantome whom Abe himself desired. Abe avenges his brother by ruining the family house, in which the seduction took place, and building a new one for himself. Abe Mannon's hatred of his brother is the start of the fated family life of the Mannons. In *Homecoming*, the first play, David Mannon's son Adam Brant (Aegisthus) seeks vengeance for his father's death and seduces Christine Mannon (Clytemnestra) away from her husband, Ezra Mannon, Agamemnon of the play.

*Mourning Becomes Electra* follows the general outlines of the Aeschylean trilogy very closely. The playwright borrows the three play division, the sequence of events and the climactic order. Although O'Neill follows the three play divisions of *The Oresteia*, he further expatiates them

by dividing the plays into acts. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Home Coming*, which is the first play has four acts (14), *The Hunted*, has five acts (112) and the last play, *The Haunted*, has four (208). This can somehow show the slight difference between the structural patterns of Aeschylus and O'Neill. *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus has 154 pages while O'Neill's, *Mourning Becomes Electra* has 288 pages. This little distinction shows that despite the fact that O'Neill emulates Aeschylus's structural pattern in the writing of his play, he writes with a lot of details and descriptions.

### 3. CONVENTIONS

According to *Merriam Webster's Dictionary*, a convention is an established technique, practice or device in theatre. A convention is a technique employed regularly in the drama so that the audience come to attach specific meaning to it. When a technique is used repeatedly in drama, the audience recognises its significance. They buy into it as an established way of telling the story. Some dramatic conventions to be discussed include: prayers, masks, chorus, stage directions. *The Oresteia* uses some conventions common to Greek tragedy. These include the use of masks as well as the use of a chorus. These conventions are also used in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, though to a lesser degree.

In Greek drama, the chorus is a group of actors who respond to and comment on the main action of the play. In Aeschylus's plays, the chorus has a large role in the play, telling most of the story. The reason the chorus's part is so significant is because ancient Greek plays feature only one or two main actors who use many masks to perform the various roles. Aeschylus, in fact, is the playwright who added a second actor. Before Aeschylus, plays only had one, so it fell to the chorus to tell most of the story. After Aeschylus changed the convention to two actors, the chorus still had a large part in telling the story. An instance of the chorus telling the story is seen after Clytemnestra and Aegisthus kills Agamemnon and Cassandra. Chorus narrated by saying:

Insolent is thy mood,  
Thine utterance arrogant, therefore even  
As with the deed of blood frenzied is now thy soul,  
So doth a gory smear fitly adorn thy brow.  
With none to avenge, none to be friend, verily yet  
shall you  
Pay  
Stroke for stroke in reprisal. (*The Oresteia* 65)

Chorus above is blaming Clytaemnestra for the assassination of her husband, saying that she will never find joy as she will remain nervous forever. He goes further by saying that she could be

arrogant in speech now because she thinks nobody will avenge the dead of her husband and no one will equally be her friend, but justice shall one day prevail.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill uses several minor characters to fill the role of the chorus. Chief among these is Seth Beckwith, who not only comments but also moves the action along. Other characters simply comment or, as in the case of the chantyman in *The Hunted*, are used for exposition, or explanation. Most of the chorus characters in the play appear infrequently and are present more for effect than out of necessity. Some productions of the play eliminate these characters, with the exception of Seth.

The actors in *The Oresteia* wear masks to portray several different characters. O'Neill considered having actors in masks in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. However, in the end he simply referred to the "masklike" appearance of the characters' faces. Thus, O'Neill takes the old-fashioned conventions of Greek tragedy and brings them to modern theatre in this trilogy.

Prayers are another example of conventions in both plays. *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines prayers as an address such as petition to God or a god in word or thought. In *The Oresteia*, the opening scene of Agamemnon, the watchman feels tired of performing his duties for the last ten years. He wants a release from this toil and prayer to gods for the safe return of Agamemnon. In the very idea of praying lies the affirmation of some divine order in which when the suffering becomes unbearable beyond a certain point, the humanity can turn to some powers for release. The watchman is not an ordinary guard on whom Aeschylus places the duty of opening the play with beautiful lyrical poetry. He becomes a presenter of human wish for order and harmony in life. When he has finished his prayer, he sees the beacon-light. Troy has been captured and Agamemnon will soon be coming home.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the prayer is repeated in the form of a longing throughout the play to reinforce the idea of human helplessness and despair. Seth Bede, a minor character, and a close helper of Lavinias sing a chanty:  
"O, Shenandoah, I long to hear you  
A-way, my rolling river  
Oh, Shenandoah, I can't get near you  
Way-ay, I am bound away  
Across the wide Missouri." (*Mourning Becomes Electra* 16)

The watchman in *Agamemnon* never appears on the stage. His absence reinforces the idea of

*fulfilment. He got what he prayed for of gods. But the longing to go across the river Missouri to see the beloved Shenandoah remains a longing. This little song is embedded in the structure of the play to suggest firstly, the cyclic nature of time and secondly to reinforce the idea that longings in O'Neill's world are never to be materialised. The play ends with Seth appearing on the stage for the last time to sing to the audience that he would never be able to go across the river Missouri*

#### **4. TRANSFORMATION**

*Merriam Webster's Dictionary*, defines transformation as an act, process, or instance of transforming or being transformed. One of O'Neill's most interesting and most important experiments is his adjustment of *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus to an American situation. This adjustment is O'Neill's attempt to construct the Athenian idea and define its variable realisations particularly in America. After defining the key terms, we will examine the theoretical frame for the analysis of the selected plays.

Eugene O'Neill transfigures Aeschylus's play, *The Oresteia* to suit the context of his American society. Aeschylus's dramatic form was classical history of loft drama and it was a form which could be imitated to suit O'Neill's search for aesthetic dramatic form and the reinterpretation of myth, psychology and culture in relation to social criticism. Aeschylus, who lived from 525 to 456 B.C., is the first important Greek dramatist, and is often regarded as the founder of Western drama. "He wrote largely about traditional themes, based on myths and Olympian law" (Cassady Marshal and Pat Cassady *Theater and Drama* 3). Aeschylus's most cited work today is considered to be *The Oresteian Trilogy* (458 B.C.), which is based on Greek mythology, and "is the only present-day trilogy by any Greek dramatist" (Cook Albert and Edwin Dolin, *Greek Tragedy* xxxv). The plays (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*), which make up the trilogy deal with the concept of revenge, the record of crimes and their inevitable punishment (judgment) in the house of Atreus.

In American drama, it is O'Neill, as one of the first modern dramatists, who experimented with theatrical devices by using the works of major predecessors of the Greek theatre such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The adjustment of *The Oresteia* to an American situation was, in a way, a result of his experiment with the Greek dramatic form. According to Porter Thomas, O'Neill was attracted to Greek tragedy because "it dealt with the 'Mystery within a conventional structure; it came out of a relatively homogenous culture and was well supplied with legendary themes" (*Myth and Modern*

*American Drama* 28). On the other hand, O'Neill tried to convert the Greek myth into modern psychology in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. O'Neill adopted both form and the content based on Greek myth in order to create modern psychological drama. His purpose of adjusting the Greek text into his own style stems from his interest in metaphysics and human psychology in relation to social paradoxes. The social dimension of O'Neill's action in *Mourning Becomes Electra* extends into Puritanism, in particular. In broader sense, however, it extends into the spiritual evils of human relations and experiences. O'Neill models his work, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, on *Oresteian Trilogy* by adapting the plot structure into a modern context to convey his own messages to his audience. As Patrick Roberts notes, "the circumstances of blood-feud are remote enough from the modern audience's experience, especially in the context of a totally different age and culture" (*The Psychology of Tragic Drama* 179). It is obvious that the complex of Hellenic and Christian values is in sharp contrast. O'Neill changes the personalities and the motivations of the characters in the action, and thus replaces the traditional Greek cultural pattern of blood revenge and Olympian theology with modern psychology and Puritanism. As the cultural situation changes, the significance of the traditional pattern is modified.

O'Neill revamps the myth in *The Oresteia* and provides a key to the meaning of the action in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. So, the tragic patterns in Aeschylus and O'Neill relate very differently to the overall meaning of the plays in question. As earlier mentioned, the first setting of the first part in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the exterior of the Mannon house, built in imitation of Greek style with the white pillars in front, which creates a functional irony for the New England setting with its Puritanical view. According to C.W.E Bigsby, "The self-destructive fatalism of Greek theatre, symbolised by the furies, is transmuted into a Calvinist conscious which makes the self its own enemy" (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* 80). Argos in *The Oresteia* becomes the New England of 1865 in the play and New England with notions of sin, guilt and punishment is a perfect setting for such a trilogy. Through the external walls of the 'tomb-like Mannon house', we move to the interior and symbolically from the social to the psychological, from the public to the private. O'Neill's purpose of changing the situation and the setting from Athens to New England is also his search for expressing the human condition related to his own culture. The main incident of the plot in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is, then, given a name, Puritanism, as O'Neill visualises it.

Puritans were the strict guardians of public morality, and sexual indulgence was one of the most degrading sins among them. O'Neill's observation, however, is that they were associated with a repressive attitude towards sexual impulses. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, a dominant symbol of love is degenerated by Puritan values into lust. Lavinia, who has a sort of romance with Captain Brant tries her best not to reveal her feelings and declares that she 'hates love'. Physical love is dirty and degrading in Puritan ethics. In this sense, it is impossible to deny the Freudian psychology on the play, especially on the sex drive, life adjustment, and the dangers of repression and more importantly on the Oedipus complex. So, apart from implied oedipal fantasies (Orin's love for his mother, further transmuted to his sister, Lavinia) and Electra complex (Lavinia's love for her father), Christine's sense of love for Brant and Lavinia's secret love for him all end up with self-destruction and death. Love, as the only life force, turns out to be the agent of death rather than a cure for the Mannons. The values in the Mannon family are so distorted that there is a sexual and psychological deformity, which is the mark of their Puritan heritage and O'Neill's interpretation of Puritanism.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill deals with the traditions, ideals, attitudes and values of a part of his own community and he uses Greek myth in order to shape the plot and character types. O'Neill sees a rich source of material in ancient myth for his study of human nature. He also attempts to create a mythicising procedure by elevating the status of the Mannon family to a classical model in regard to universally shared human feelings and emotions such as ambition, hatred, revenge, love, etc. Yet, the play holds references, marking the American Puritanism in 1865, which, unlike the ancient Greek idea of communally shared guilt and redemption, charges the individual with sin and punishment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As far as themes and style are concerned, Aeschylus and O'Neill can be considered as social critics as they satirise the evil of their societies, one way or the other.. Concerning style, they use devices and techniques like symbolism, satire, humour, metaphors, similes, tragedy, chorus, mask, and stage directions, but O'Neill make use of detailed writing as he expands his work with a lot of analysis. This explains why *The Oresteia* has 154 pages and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, has 288. They satirise man's greedy nature and the wickedness of man to another. After performing a careful analysis of this intertextual study, we discovered that O'Neill modified the myth in *The Oresteia* and provides a key to the meaning of the action in *Mourning*

*Becomes Electra*. So, the tragic patterns in Aeschylus's and O'Neill's relate very differently to the overall meaning of the plays in question. The plot of *Mourning Becomes Electra* is remarkably faithful to *The Oresteia*. Its characterisation and symbolism, however, are determined by O'Neill's interpretation of the puritan heritage, by Freudian psychology, and by the aftermath motif of salvation by spatial remove. *The Oresteia* proclaims a constant relationship between the individual and society. Orestes's crime does not isolate him from the community, as he flees to the communal shrine and is judged by a jury of citizens and his personal fate changes the structure of society from clan-centred to city-centred. It should be noted that O'Neill borrows from Greek tragedy but varies a bit from the Athenian society. Athenians believe in the presence of gods who can always purify them, whenever they sin or commit a terrible act. Thus, there is still hope left for Aeschylus's character but O'Neill's characters bear the consequences of their actions all by themselves as there is no god to back them up. Thus, intertextuality can be deliberate as well as not deliberate, like Aeschylus and O'Neill. After carefully analysing this article, it was discovered that Aeschylus had no direct influence over O'Neill. This paper also came to the compromise that although O'Neill rewrites Aeschylus's play, *The Oresteia*, he avoids plagiarism by transforming it in to the American scenario, through American realism. O'Neill focuses his realistic work more precisely on Puritanism.

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