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# EUGENE O'NEILL'S MYTHOPOESIS: REPRESENTING AMERICAN MYTHS IN DRAMATIC LITERATURE

# MITOPOETIKA EUGENA O'NEILLA: PREDSTAVLJANJE MITOVA O AMERICI U DRAMSKOJ KNJIŽEVNOSTI

MA Thesis

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## Contents

## 1. Introduction

When he was not lying drunk in the small hours in a bar, young Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) spent his days and months on ships that would take him to distant places, away from his home and family, only for him to realize how much he missed them and the country which he equally loved and despised. Through all his ordeals, love affairs and life mistakes, O'Neill's constant companion and mentor – Nietzsche – was hidden in his coat pocket. These episodes from O'Neill's life are foregrounded because without them, one could argue, there would be no Eugene O'Neill as the paragon of the American drama.[1] For what they are worth, all O'Neill's 'adventures' and failures of his youth shaped his future dramatic outpour and, inevitably, modern American drama as a whole. While some O'Neill's plays are more autobiographical than others – *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) being the most autobiographical – O'Neill can be found in all of his plays through the characters' philosophies and actions. Far more important for the US drama that came after O'Neill was his representation of the then contemporary society as well as the periods prior to the twentieth century. His plays reflect the American culture of the first half of the twentieth century even when he temporally moved away from the contemporary into the period(s) that had already passed.

This thesis is interested in precisely that aspect of O'Neill's dramatic outpour: how his own life, combined with other cultural texts, influenced O'Neill to produce new cultural texts which overtly or covertly represent, discuss and critique various, uniquely American myths. To that end, this paper is divided into five main sections. The first section serves as a general introduction to key concepts and terminology this paper shall use throughout. It also provides a brief overview of the theoretical texts and corpus which includes O'Neill's plays in the analytical focus of the paper. The second section deals with the main aspects of O'Neill's myth-making whereby a detailed overview of the process of O'Neill's mythopoesis is intended to be given. It will also include a thorough socio-historical context as the possible influences which affected O'Neill's grasp of the world around him, as well as how those influences affected O'Neill in his myth-making. The third section presents a comprehensive discussion of the American Foundational myths which, as this paper shall argue, can be found in O'Neill's selected plays. The third section is divided into four sub-sections which individually present four American Foundational myths. For this part, the

[1] As Pamela S. Saur writes: "O'Neill is, after all, often called the 'father of the American drama.' A 1984 book on him contains a typical statement of his prestige, 'He towers above American drama like a colossus.'" (103).

thesis heavily relies on Heike Paul's *The Myths That Made America* for its theoretical background, as well as on other relevant sources. Each sub-section will conclude with a short paragraph discussing the importance of a particular modern myth in the context of O'Neill's myth-making in selected plays. Moreover, the concluding paragraphs will also serve as introductions for more detailed discussions of the selected plays (corpus) in the fourth section. The fourth, analytical, section addresses selected plays by O'Neill through qualitative and descriptive analysis. In order to keep the paper more concise, all selected plays shall be examined under one section rather than two separate ones as most myths appear in all the corpus. While keeping its focus on distinct Foundational myths, the analysis will include various interpretations of plays' formal characteristics and provide character analysis as well. Throughout the analysis, episodes from O'Neill's biography shall be incorporated only when pertinent to the topic of the paper. The fifth (and final) section serves as a general conclusion in which the main ideas and points of the analysis of the selected (primary) corpus shall be presented in a concise manner.

### 1.1. Terminology and Theoretical Background

This master thesis strictly adheres to Stephen Greenblatt's notion of cultural texts as not being cultural because they discuss "the world beyond themselves," rather: "they are cultural by virtue of social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed" ("Culture" 438). O'Neill's plays are soaked with various cultural 'artifacts' – American and European, religious and secular, but also personal and intimate details – which influenced O'Neill's drama production. Culture, in that sense is "[…] concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group" (Hall 2). Representing various aspects of a culture means participating in the exchange in "a particular network of negotiations" (Greenblatt, "Culture" 439). Eugene O'Neill not only participated in such an exchange, but more to the point, criticized ideological nature of American Foundational myths. In the context of this paper, 'America' and 'American,' specifically refer to the territory of the United States and those who live in it, or that which is commonly associated with America (the US), as they are colloquially known. On the other hand, the term 'myths' in the thesis is used to refer to what is generally known as modern American myths or Foundational myths, that is, a set of images, ideas and concepts which originated with the first European settlers in the New World and which have since then served as ample driving force in the nation-building of the US.

Therefore, this paper understands and uses the term 'myth' to mean a form of ideology and in Roland Barthes's term "a message" (107).[2] It is the aim of this paper to explore what ideological messages these myths send and what their role in O'Neill's plays is. With its discussion of ideological dimension of these myths, this paper follows Richard Wattenberg's argument that:

> [i]deology/truth, as it is understood here, is sometimes crystallized into a form that takes on a simple narrative and/or imagistic structure – a form that is most powerful and evident in artistic and certainly theatrical representations where reasoned arguments give way to other modes of communication. In this form, ideology can take the shape of myth – where "myth" is not understood as a universally true action or narrative pattern, but as a synthetic or "constructed" narrative pattern that seems true and significant to those who value it. While myth may thus be viewed as concretized ideology, it is useful to separate more purely "ideological" representations from those that are more purely "mythological" […]. (14)

Myths-as-ideology should be understood primarily as "belief rather than rationality" (Paul 17). Moreover, these myths, as R. W. B. Lewis argued, are not the product of only one man, but of trans-generational effort to (re)define America through various cultural narratives (4). It should be mentioned that, similarly to O'Neill in his own time, contemporary readers are also constrained by their own sets of beliefs and ideas as well as the temporal markers from which they read and understand early twentieth-century drama. However, American Foundational myths labor under the same archetypal imagery even if circumstances of labor, market, capital, and forms of representation have changed (which was also true during O'Neill's time); the myth of the self-made man once meant procuring a land to work on, and today it means something completely different, but the underlying image of a rags-to-riches story remains exactly the same. Taken together, these myths form a utopian vision of America and as such carry strong political and ideological undertones. Where contemporary readers' and O'Neill's interests merge is summarized in Barthes's question: "How does he [the reader of myths] receive this particular myth today?" (128). Therefore, both the myth-making process as well as various interpretations of these myths

[2] In this sense Barthes discussed myths as everyday cultural texts that can be found everywhere from commercials to movies, therefore: myths as ideological signs rather than "mythological" representations in Richard Wattenberg's sense.

are always closely tied to geo-temporal dimension, that is, the place and the time of myth creation *and* interpretation, as well as the historical circumstances which affect and limit the production of a myth. So far, Bertrand Russell's remark rings true: "The goat was the symbol of fertility, because the peasants were too poor to possess bulls" (13). As Walter Burkert argued, "[i]f we are to understand any given myth in all its details, we have to face the fact that it bears the marks of its history […]" (27). But it must be emphasized that contemporary interpretations of the said myths also bear the mark of extant time, and this is what allows the readers to peek into O'Neill's interpretation of the myths present in his plays.

### 1.2. Corpus: An Overview

For the main theoretical background, this paper relies on Heike Paul's 2014 study *The Myths That Made America* where the author lists and discusses main American Foundational myths from the time the very first Europeans set foot on the American soil. Those myths which this paper is interested in include: a) the agrarian myth; b) the myth of the American West (frontier myth); c) the myths of the self-made man and self-made woman; and d) the myth of the Promised Land. All of these myths can be found in O'Neill's plays which this paper shall further analyze in detail.

The plays selected for the paper's analytical corpus include *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931).

*Desire Under the Elms*[3] is set in 1850 on a New England farm. The plot follows the Cabot family of which there are only two brothers (Simeon and Peter), their stepbrother (Eben), and their father and patriarch (Ephraim). The brothers hate their Puritan(ical) father who, as the audience later learn, went West to find a wife and marry for the third time. When the patriarch finally returns with his new wife, Abbie Putnam, Simeon and Peter decide to go West to California to try their luck in gold-mining. Eben, on the other hand, not only wants to remain on the farm, but wants to possess it, since the farm belonged to his deceased mother, and by that right, to him. Abbie quickly squashes Eben's dream of owning the farm when she openly states the farm belongs to her and to her future children. Despite their initial hatred, Abbie and Eben fall in love and conceive a baby which Ephraim thinks is his. By the end of the play, Abbie kills her infant to prove her love to Eben, who acknowledges he shares equal feelings for Abbie only too late and only after he reported

[3] *Desire* in future references.

Abbie's infanticide to the sheriff. The play ends with Eben and Abbie being taken to jail, and Ephraim leaving the farm to follow in the footsteps of his other two sons to California.

*Mourning Becomes Electra*[4] is a trilogy which consists of *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*. The action is set in 1865 immediately after the Civil War (*Homecoming* and *The Hunted*) and in 1866 (*The Haunted*). Like *Desire*, *Mourning* revolves around a family – the Mannon family. Unlike the Cabot family however, the Mannons are an affluent New England family who live in a beautiful mansion. The patriarch, Ezra Mannon, is a successful businessman who was also a mayor and when the play starts, is a Union general fighting in the Civil War, accompanied by his son Orin. The mansion is occupied by Ezra's wife, Christine and their daughter Lavinia. Lavinia soon discovers that her mother traveled to New York City to meet with her lover, Adam Brant, who, as it turns out, is Ezra's uncle's illegitimate son. Adam is seeking revenge against the Mannons, but falls in love with Christine. Lavinia's own feelings for Adam and strong love for her father make her despise her mother. Lavinia threatens Christine to reveal the affair to her father if Christine and Adam continue the affair. When Ezra returns from the Civil War, Christine poisons him and assures everyone (except Lavinia) that Ezra has died of a heart attack. After Ezra's funeral, Lavinia and Orin follow Christine who visits Adam on his ship. After she leaves, Orin kills Adam, and together with Lavinia, they go home where Christine awaits them. When they reveal what Orin has done, Christine goes to Ezra's study and commits suicide. Orin, who loves his mother, cannot contain the grief and a sense of guilt for his mother's death; he struggles mentally to the point where he confesses to Lavinia that he loves her. Lavinia is shocked and tells Orin that he is insane, after which Orin goes to the study and commits suicide. By the end of the play, Lavinia sends Peter, her love interest, away, realizing her punishment is to live alone, locked in the Mannon mansion.

**2. O'Neill's Mythopoesis**

O'Neill's role in representing characters and spaces which carry some form of mythological or archetypal dimension is not new in Western drama: "[t]heater in the Western world has been, above all, a mixture or ritual, imitation and myth" (Beşe 13). Where O'Neill's mythopoesis does make an appearance first and foremost, is in the mixture of Ancient Greek myths with American Foundational myths. For both *Desire* and *Mourning,* O'Neill used ancient Greek

[4] *Mourning* in future references.

sources; namely, for *Desire*, O'Neill primarily relied on Euripides's *Hippolytus* and *Medea*, while for *Mourning*, he used Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (Zaki 875).[5] O'Neill's myth-making process therefore begins with established ancient European sources, but he completely transforms their geo-temporal locations as well as the structural dimensions in terms of formalistic elements such as subdivision of texts and action into acts and scenes, and those of characters to better reflect an idiosyncratic American experience. By placing his *American* characters, with all their uniquely American experiences and problems, in a specific timeframe and location, O'Neill in effect creates what Louis A. Montrose, in his discussion about gender and power in Elizabethan culture, referred to as a "culture-specific dialectic" (35). This is the first, in a sense, visible dimension of O'Neill's mythopoesis.

Another dimension of O'Neill's myth-making occurs on a cultural, historical, political and psychological planes. This is where O'Neill himself reflects the ideas and views which circulated in American cities and institutions at the onset of the twentieth century. O'Neill manages to combine ancient Greek sources in a new guise with Foundational myths which are deeply imbedded in the American psyche. In turn, O'Neill makes reflections about what these myths do to those who choose to observe and adopt them, especially what these myths can do on a psychological level. Here, the discussion must take into account the growing capitalistic tendencies of a strong and rising American nation as well as the development in psychological thoughts and experiments, namely Freud's theoretical and practical outputs and the growing popularity of psychoanalysis in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, O'Neill's characters carry within them O'Neill's personal experiences from before he first met the Provincetown Players (in 1916).

Most important, however, is how O'Neill chose to represent these myths. At the time when American dream and entrepreneurial spirit of the self-made man myth ran rampant due to the growing capitalist tendencies, O'Neill saw a degrading culture which failed in the same way other European industrial nations had failed. He offered catharsis in the form of drama where religious institutions failed to inspire a more spiritual purification: "[the theater] should give us what the

[5] There are critics and scholars who choose Sophocles's *Electra* and *Oedipus Rex* instead of or together with Euripides's version. Jesse Weiner argued that Virgil's *Aeneid* also played an important influence on O'Neill when he was writing *Mourning* (42). Wei H. Kao mentions Seneca the Younger's *Phaedra* as a possible influence (123n17). See also section 2.1 for other influences on O'Neill in general and on the selected plays in particular. O'Neill was inevitably influenced by various sources and in most cases, he was influenced indirectly, as is the case with psychoanalytical thought that was prominent during the 1920s and 1930s.

church no longer gives us – a meaning. In brief, it should return to the spirit of Greek grander. And if we have no Gods, or heroes to portray we have the sub-conscious, the mother of all Gods and Heroes […]" (O'Neill qtd. in Dey 94). To that end, O'Neill represented these myths as merely that – myths. For him, there was nothing noble in the growing materialistic and individualistic sentiments Americans chose to adopt as their national character. The argument this paper tries to present, therefore, is that O'Neill did not invent his own religious and/or secular modern myths; he presented American Foundational myths through critical lens and in turn criticized his own contemporary society through the prism of the mid-nineteenth-century characters and issues, all the while influenced by the then current cultural texts circulating in the psyches of most Americans as well as his personal experiences. His plays 'absorbed' contemporary and historical; secular and religious; ancient and modern sources and have become "[…] the creative agents in the fashioning and re-fashioning of [the historical] experience" (Greenblatt, Introduction viii). This is not to say O'Neill intentionally incorporated the above-mentioned Foundational myths, but by reexamining the American national character, he used the well-established archetypal images of what America stood for after the European settlers first populated New England region.

**2.1. Influences on O'Neil's Mythopoesis**

"Is it possible" O'Neill wondered "to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate […], which an intelligent audience of today, possessed of no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by?" (qtd. in Törnqvist 23). O'Neill in effect succeeded in this endeavor, especially in *Mourning*. But O'Neill's pondering about the incorporation of psychological dimension to replace metaphysical ones so that modern audiences could truly feel the tragic power of his plays, reveal his, and in turn, his contemporaries' interests. It did not take long for critics and reviewers to notice strong Freudian and Jungian influences in *Desire* and *Mourning*. In *Desire,* the stepmother and her stepson surrender to the passions which they try to control but never can; and *Mourning*'s Electra – Lavinia Mannon – would sooner kill her mother than approve of the former's love affair with another man, behind her husband's back. O'Neill adamantly repudiated such notions to Barrett Clark stating that he knew "[…] enough about men and women to have written *Mourning Becomes Electra* almost exactly as it is if I had never heard of Freud or Jung or the others […]" (qtd. in Dowling 383). But O'Neill not only knew

about Freud and Jung, he also had psychoanalytic sessions with Dr. Gilbert Hamilton.[6] He jokingly revealed to his friend, Jimmy Light, that "[…] all [Dr. Hamilton] had to do […] was read my plays" (O'Neill qtd. in Black 182). What is more, as Stephen Black argued and as Steven Bloom relates in his article "Eugene O'Neil," O'Neill's dramatic production was precisely yet another exercise of "self-psychoanalysis" (Black qtd. in S. Bloom 249). Both O'Neill's psychological elements in the two plays as well as his contemporary critics' interpretation of these plays as Freudian only reveal the cultural environment of the US in the 1930s. As Philip Weissman stated: "[t]he late twenties and early thirties were imbued with the new discoveries of Freud. Man's fate and destiny were reshaped and re-evaluated by artists as well as scientists in the context of this new knowledge" (257). Even if O'Neill was only sub-consciously influenced by the pervading interest in psychoanalysis, *Desire* and *Mourning* are psychological plays[7] insofar as they do present characters who grapple with numerous cultural and institutional constraints which affect their behavior – this is especially visible in female characters of both plays as further discussion shall reveal. This psychological dimension made O'Neill's characters more developed than their Greek counterparts ever could have been. Inevitably, *Desire* and *Mourning* have been analyzed, since their first performances, as strong representative texts of Oedipal and Electra complexes (Kao 119-20).

O'Neill might not have been interested in what Europe had to offer in terms of its geographical characteristics,[8] but European influences (psychoanalysis included) far outreach any other O'Neill might have had. O'Neill quite openly revealed that he "[…] read everything I could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans – practically all the classics – and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg […]" adding, "especially Strindberg" (qtd. in Törnqvist 18). Indeed, some literary critics tried to move O'Neill away from the Greek sources and bring him closer to another dramatic paragon in his own right – Shakespeare. Martin Mueller and Frenz Horst see more similarities between *Mourning* and *Hamlet* than with any ancient Greek source[9] and Normand Berlin's discussion about past events controlling present action also points to *Hamlet* as

[6] Dr. Hamilton was not the only psychoanalyst O'Neill had contacts with. As Egil Törnqvist writes: "[…] O'Neill had personal contacts with *at least* three psychoanalysts" (22, added emphasis).
[7] The so-called "psychologic" drama saw its inception in the West in 1914 and continued gaining popularity among the public and playwrights who started to move away from the nineteenth-century melodrama (Zaki 873).
[8] As argued by O'Neill: "Europe somehow means nothing to me […]. Either the South Seas or China, say I" (qtd. in Dowling 338–9).
[9] For a detailed discussion see Horst and Mueller, "More Shakespeare and Less Aeschylus in Eugene O'Neill's 'Mourning Becomes Electra.'"

one of the influences (75); John Stafford views Lavinia's character as closely resembling Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* rather than her Greek counterpart Electra (177). Even if Shakespeare is not O'Neill's direct source, as John Diggins writes: "O'Neill took American history as seriously as Shakespeare took English history, and both sought to cover a century of their respective histories" (81).

Ibsen's and Strindberg's influences are likewise present in O'Neill's plays. In one year alone (in 1907), O'Neill saw Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (per. 1891) ten times; five years before the first performance of *Mourning,* O'Neill was reading Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (1903) in translation. Two weeks later, he made a note to "[…] use Greek Tragedy plot in modern setting […]" (O'Neill qtd. in Black 169). Lastly, Murray Hartman suggests Strindberg's novel *The People of Hemsö* (1887) and the play *The Bridal Crown* (1901) as two influences for O'Neill's *Desire* (368). Harold Bloom also viewed Strindberg as the paramount influencing force for O'Neill (1).

Moreover, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical discussions held a special place in O'Neill's heart and mind (Krasner 144). Indeed, he reread *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883) annually since the age of eighteen, and carried *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) "[…] in his coat pocket" (Weiner 43). Nietzsche provided O'Neill with a worldview which Catholicism no longer could (Diggins 184).

In a letter from 1930, O'Neill wrote to his oldest son, Eugene Jr.:

> […] this is the destined time for America to fall back upon itself in a cultural sense, to cease running to Mama and Papa Europe whenever it feels spiritually wounded […], to realize appreciatively and with pride that the adolescent attitude has become a pose, that it is adult, if it will only examine itself. (qtd. in Sanchez 1)

O'Neill's influences might be European by and large[10] but his interest was America – American history and politics as cultural texts, and American institutions as power structures which created hegemonic orders proved to be the main driving force in creating plays which focused on American themes, characters and issues. His play *Emperor Jones* (1920), which features an African American lead actor, or *Marco Millions* (1923), set in thirteenth century but in reality, a "comedy satire by an American of *our* life and ideals" shows his willingness to tackle

[10] There are some discussions about possible American influences on O'Neill also. One of them is Emily Dickinson herself (her poetry was discovered in 1914) as a possible influence for Lavinia Mannon since both women lived secluded lives in their respective family homes (Black 186–7). He might have also been influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Henry David Thoreau's philosophies for his own anarchistic worldview (Diggs 46).

and present stifled voices and various ideological and political issues of his own time (qtd. in Dowling 291; Dey 40, added emphasis). Perhaps O'Neill could relate to various marginalized groups' oppressions and issues as he himself, being an Irish American, had "[…] an outsider's perspective of the troubles and impulses of his American fellow-countrymen" (Kao 122). Indeed, he viewed his professional calling not as entertainment but as means of revealing social issues which affected the lives of Americans: "[a playwright] must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it" (O'Neill qtd. in Tarish et al. 623). As John P. Diggins stated:

> [O'Neill] focused on society as well as the self, and he perceived the masses of humanity leading lives of "pipe dreams" and escapist enchantment. O'Neill also delved into subjects that rarely came up within the circle of his family, especially politics, the working class, and sympathy for the oppressed race, the ghetto, and the plight of black Americans; women, feminism, free love and gender identity; and history itself […]. (19)

O'Neill was not the only playwright to tackle what Felicia Londré called "uneasy modernity" during the 1920s. The main concern of the majority of American playwrights, including Elmer Rice and Clifford Odets, during this period was, to put it in one word, money. Plays of this period tackled this subject matter from both positive and negative aspects, that is, the benefits of the capitalistic goal of 'being on top' as well as the negative impact money can have on people. As realistic drama gained prominence, melodramatic heroes of the previous century were replaced by middle-class families whose adventures were everyday struggles of survival under growing capitalistic system of power (Londré 71; Dey 1).

Eugene O'Neill, the "[America's] national everyman," was to present the greed and materialism that was growing in America (qtd. in Dey 14). As this paper will display, this greed was represented in *Desire* and *Mourning* through characters' desire to possess spaces, persons and lives. Many decades after O'Neill had written his first plays, Arthur Miller commented: "It was O'Neill who wrote about the working-class men, about whores and the social discards and even the black man in a white world, but since there was no longer a connection with Marxism in the man himself, his plays were never seen as the critiques of capitalism that objectively they were" (qtd. in Dowling 15). In fact, O'Neill's engagement in discussing social issues of his time coalesced with his own anarchistic views. In 1924, the Bureau of Investigation took interest in O'Neill's professional and private life; the Bureau's charge on O'Neill was treason (Dowling 14).

Another episode from O'Neill's life reveals his sympathies toward anarchism. O'Neill's friend, Ed Keefe, recounted that when the two friends went to a bookstore, O'Neill insisted that Keefe should buy Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (1844) – the anarchist manifesto of sorts (Dowling 51-2). O'Neill's pessimistic view regarding materialistic grip on the American people, combined with his anarchistic worldview, help us understand his negative sentiments about the American dream as a modern American myth.

### 3. An Overview of American Foundational Myths Present in O'Neill's Selected Plays

American Foundational myths are always tied with two overarching concepts in American studies, that of American exceptionalism, and the myth of the American dream. In short, American exceptionalism is a loose term which reflects Americans' views about their unique and/or special status as a nation superior to other nations. The term has obvious ideological markings and relies on historic accounts of American founding as a place where republican ideals squashed any older systems of governance, such as European feudal or aristocratic (anti-democratic) models (Volle). Heike Paul suggests that American exceptionalism appears in three forms: religious, political and economic (15). These manifestations of American exceptionalism in turn "[…] champion religiosity, patriotism, and individualism […]" (Paul 16). That O'Neill was not adherent to any of these to a large extent suggests his willingness to critique the myths millions of people around him believed in.

American dream is the conglomerate of all other Foundational myths (Paul 16). However, the premise of the American dream is closely tied with individuals' success stories, and as such, it still pervades American society today. An important point about American dream is that one has to be an active agent in the race for success (Cullen 10). Jim Cullen put it best in his *The American Dream* when he defined the main aim of the American dream for humans pursuing it to become masters of one's own destiny (18). In that sense, American dream does not necessarily have to imply materialistic aspect of success. As Cullen states: "[…] the Pilgrims may not have actually talked about the American Dream, but they would have understood the idea: after all, they lived it as people who imagined a destiny for themselves" (5). Therefore, the idea which is nowadays (and during O'Neill's time) known as the American dream, draws its origins from the first European settlers of New England.

In 1931, the same year when O'Neill's *Mourning* was published, James T. Adams published *The Epic of America*. The two works stand at the opposite ends in the discussion and

understanding of the American dream. Adams contributed American exceptional status in the world precisely to the American dream: "[i]f America has stood for anything unique in the history of the world, it has been for the American dream, the belief in the common man and the insistence upon his having, as far as possible, equal opportunity in every way with the rich one" (104). And for Adams, the father and the "apostle of the American dream" was Thomas Jefferson (138). Jefferson's role in co-authoring the Declaration of Independence meant that the apostle was sure to transmit his ideal which, through the Declaration: "[…] shapes the way [Americans] live [their] lives […]" even to this day (Cullen 37). This myth thus has become a part and parcel in the fabric of the American nation as a whole.

O'Neill on the other hand understood that American dream was merely a myth and as such, it had become mired in the pursuit of materialistic goals which, in the context of growing capitalistic tendencies of his time, meant only a few could enjoy (Dowling 16). O'Neill's friend and journalist Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's unpublished notes on the subject of O'Neill and the American dream reveal that: "In so far as O'Neill has written of American life […] he has written its un-success story, discussed the places where the American dream has broken down into something rather raw and unacceptable" (qtd. in Dowling 39). In fact, O'Neill himself was quite vocal about the subject. In a press briefing, O'Neill quite openly shared his pessimistic views about his contemporary America in the context of the American dream:

> This country is going to get it – really get it. We had everything to start with – everything – but there's bound to be a retribution. We've followed the same selfish, greedy path as every other country in the world. We talk about the American Dream, and want to tell the world about the American Dream, but what is that dream, in most cases, but the dream of material things? I sometimes think that the United States, for this reason, is the greatest failure the world has ever seen. We've been able to get a very good price for our souls in this country – the greatest price perhaps that has ever been paid – but you'd think that after all these years, and all that man has been through, we'd have sense enough – all of us – to understand that the whole secret of human happiness is summed up in a sentence that even a child can understand. The sentence? "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (qtd. in Murphy 135-6)

O'Neill here not only mentions the American dream in its manifestation of the pursuit of material gains as the root issue of America's failure as a country; he also makes constant comparisons between past (as good and pure) and present (as bad), and between materialism (bad) and spirituality (the quote from the Bible at the end). For O'Neill, the American dream, together with all other myths associated with it, was the main cause of everything bad that had happened to America. When he represents these myths in his plays through the critical lens, he creates what Sanja Nikčevič terms *subversive drama*[11] (17-8). Both *Desire* and *Mourning* challenge and subvert the American dream and other Foundational myths through numerous characters who, even though they try to be active agents and adherents of these myths, constantly fail in their endeavors. There are, O'Neill seems to suggest, larger forces at play, and an individual's desire for success will more often than not have the result opposite to what the myth narratives (re)present.

### 3.1. The Agrarian Myth

Heike Paul brings her discussion about the agrarian myth as part of the larger topic in her book – that of the American West myth. For Paul, American West is constructed in those well-established images of violent expansionism under the guise of Manifest Destiny. But another aspect of the American West is the utopian and pastoral representation of farming communities that travel West to procure a piece of land and make their living on arable land (Paul 314). For the purpose of this paper, the same agrarian myth will be analyzed, but instead of focusing on the American West as a space of these pastoral landscapes, the focus will remain on New England region since O'Neill placed the farm (*Desire*) and the mansion (*Mourning*) somewhere in New England. The same principles of the agrarian myth of the American West apply and are pertinent for the discussion of the farmer family in New England region as presented in O'Neill's plays. Prior to Industrialization of the Eastern cities and states, farming and agriculture was the "[…] most common occupation in the region until 1869" (Holloran 14). The utopian characteristic of farm life in the American West came only after people moved to the frontier to escape the growing urban population or to procure more land, because the utopian vision has somewhat shifted in the nineteenth century. Earlier farms (those in the New England region) proved to be unprofitable, compared to immense prairie lands that beckoned able farmers to leave everything and move westward – and move they did (Thorson 118).

[11] "subverzivna drama" (translated by E.M.) as opposed to "afirmativna drama" (17–8).

In the agrarian myth, the hero "[…] was the yeoman farmer, its central conception the notion that he is the ideal man and the ideal citizen" (Paul 315). The origin of this myth is as old as the young American nation itself, and the image of a farmer who works the earth to procure food for the family invokes a sense of primitive pride and simplicity of life. Naturally, such an image bears religious connotations in Christian discourse – Adam too was punished by God to toil for his food after the Fall. But the myth-making does not stop there. The idealized vision of a farmer also served for the early narratives of American national character. The most prominent example was Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), in which Jefferson's God's chosen people are yeomen farmers (Paul 315-6). Farmers as heroes of this myth are hard-working, honest, and honorable *men* who are not defiled by urban way of life, and growing capitalistic class.

As will be shown, O'Neill offers a bleaker image of the farming life in New England. Part of the reason farmers decided to move West was not only because of the available space, but also the quality of the land. New England soil was particularly good at 'harvesting' stones and even though people learned to live with them and use them for practical purposes when building stone walls, many preferred to avoid them altogether and find better opportunities on the frontier. Ephraim Cabot, the patriarch in *Desire*, reflects the nonarable nature surrounding him; he is as cold and hard as the stone walls around his farm.

### 3.2. The Myth of the Promised Land

When one reads John Winthrop's words that: "We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, 'the Lord make it like that of New England.' For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill" (11), it is easy to understand what Andrew Delbanco meant when he stated that the "myth-making began almost at once" (xvii-i). The myth of course was that of (what would become) the US as the Promised Land. In this myth, the heroes are Pilgrims and Puritans who sailed to the New World to practice religious freedom they could not find in Europe. The first European religious groups that populated the New England region truly believed their ancestors were the tribes of Israel in search of a Promised Land (Cullen 10). The myth of the Promised Land, firmly established in theological roots and supported by religious narratives, slowly but surely became one of the Foundational *cultural* myths which have helped shape American nation (Paul 139). Once again, Thomas Jefferson jumped to the

opportunity to recycle one of the oldest American myths and turn it into a nation-building foundation when in his second inaugural address he hinted at their origins, mentioning God "[…] who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land; and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life" (qtd. in Paul 160). The first settlers might have had some difficulty in understanding which "comforts of life" Jefferson was referring to, but the first Puritans in the New World were not interested in comfort. Yet the myth-making reshaped how future Americans would view their nation and the origins of its founding. As Steven K. Green points out in *Inventing a Christian America*:

> […] the idea of America's religiously inspired founding was a consciously created myth constructed by the second generation of Americans in their quest to forge a national identity […]. This process of reinterpreting the founding began as early as 1790s but gained momentum in the second decade of the following century as a new generation of leaders arose who had little first-hand knowledge of the founding period. In seeking to construct a national identity that conformed to their own religious sentimentalities and political aspirations, they invented a myth of America's Christian past. (199)

This paper is interested in both the Puritan background of the myth of America's religious founding, as well as in the aspect of New England as the Promised Land since O'Neill situated both *Desire* and *Mourning* 'somewhere' in the New England region (he did not specify any states or cities), and the characters espouse the Puritan(ical) spirit, especially Ephraim who represents almost a prophetic figure. Even though O'Neill himself was an atheist and his family Catholic (Dowling 44), he depicted his characters in the two selected plays as Puritans (except Eben who was, like O'Neill, an atheist). In foregrounding this aspect of his characters (which he did not need to do), O'Neill attempted presenting and critiquing the myth of the Promised Land since his New England is not Winthrop's city upon a hill but a cold place, filled with past sins, grotesque and darkened spaces from which some characters run away toward new Promised Land(s).

### 3.3. The American West (Frontier Myth)

Eugene O'Neill was only five years old when, in 1893, Fredrick Turner wrote in his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" that: "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of

American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character" (2). For Turner, the frontier was the development and progress of the American nation as a whole. However, his vision of, what he called, "Americanization," that is, of reaching the frontier and taming the wilderness into habitable spaces according to the standard of the white hegemonic power-structures, proved to be idealized, since before a pioneer could tame the wilderness, the wilderness had to tame the pioneer: "[the wilderness] finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin" (Turner 3). Three years before Turner's essay, the US Census Bureau declared that there was no frontier any longer, so the notion of any frontier, let alone wilderness, in 1893 revealed the deeply ingrained image of and the desire for open spaces waiting to be placed under the American flag (Paul 313). Turner grasped this when in 1914 he wrote that: "[…] the free lands are gone, the continent is crossed, and all this push and energy is turning into channels of agitation" (qtd. in Grandin 107). Turner's Frontier Thesis reflected not only individual aspirations but also the institutionalized policy of the US government.

Everything started with the annexation of Texas. When John O'Sullivan published in an article from 1845 that: "The American claim is by right of our *manifest destiny* to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us […]," he could not even dream that the phrase he coined and the ideas he professed would become the official US policy (qtd. in Paul 322, added emphasis). And so, the Manifest Destiny, a product of "settler futurity," gave the US complete autonomy *and* the right to expand its territory together with its ideological principles, institutions and civilizational norms (Wanzo 119; Mountjoy 9-10). And then in 1848, James Marshall discovered gold in California (Rohrbough 1).

The California Gold Rush is part of the reason why pioneers were so willing and at ease with traversing vast expanses of land to the West, thus expanding the American frontier. Foreigners noticed Americans' ease with which they abandoned everything and moved to new locations. Jacques Moerenhout, the French consul for the US at the time, commented, as follows:

> the former [the Anglo-American], quick to decide, with almost nomadic habits, and dominated by a single passion, that of enriching himself, as in the present case abandons home and interests or disposes of them as he can, and taking only the bare necessities,

> leaves with wives [*sic*] and children for an unknown place where he and his family will be exposed to a thousand privations and sufferings, but where he hopes to find wherewithal to satisfy his ambitions, change his social position and assist in the execution of his projects for the future. (qtd. in Rohrbough 193)

This paper is interested specifically in this aspect of the Frontier myth, since Simeon and Peter, two brothers in *Desire,* explicitly state they wish to leave their father's farm and go to California where gold is waiting for them. Naturally, the stark reality they could have encountered would have astonished them, and O'Neill knew that. The two brothers share the same idealistic and optimistic notions as their contemporaries would have, but gold prospecting in 1850 was only a trace of its old glory. Gold was hard to find; the conditions were harsh and competition almost unbearable. But their desire to leave the farm – an enclosed space – for an open horizon points to both materialistic as well as individualistic tendencies whereby one could succeed in the world through minimal work which happens to be in the farthest US territory in the West. Such notions were all too popular during O'Neill's own time, and, as this paper attempts to present, he used the characters of Simeon and Peter to critique the myth of easy success and vast riches through minimal effort. Likewise, as Paul suggests: "[…] the myth of the West includes a pastoral dimension […]" (312). This is in effect how the two brothers from *Desire* see California in their minds – as a land where gold flows in the rivers and decorates the river banks. In this context, the frontier also carried strong materialistic and capitalistic undertones (Grandin 13).

### 3.4. The Myths of the Self-made Man and Self-made Woman

Henry Clay is accredited to have invented the phrase "self-made man" in 1832[12] (Paul 369; Cullen 73). Heike Paul defines the myth of the self-made man in the following terms: "[i]n its hegemonic version, the myth of the self-made man refers, first of all, to expressive individualism and individual success and describes a cultural type that is often seen as an 'American invention' and a 'unique national product'" (368). Naturally, the myth of the self-made man with its emphasis on individual success through hard work in order to climb the vertical ladder of mobility and

[12]According to Paul, Clay stated the following: "In Kentucky, almost every manufactory known to me is in the hands of enterprising self-made men, who have whatever wealth they possess by patient and diligent labor" (qtd. in Paul 369).

procure financial security and independence does not work hand in hand with Christian tenets and ethics that focus on communal (spiritual) life and anti-materialistic rhetoric (Paul 369). The followers of this myth believe in the 'ideology of mobility' whereby the race is 'open to all' and only the best can win in this world. The fellow human beings are thus perceived as competitors in a race where room for success is limited. That the race to the top is not equal for everyone goes unnoticed by the participants who believe in this myth. How one defines success remains on the individual level, but it is almost always in the form of some physical manifestation, especially property (Paul 369). O'Neill's philosophy on the issue of materialism, as presented in *Desire* and *Mourning* (among others), is always tied with greed; it is always seen as the lowest sign of human degradation. Almost every major character in both plays analyzed in this paper want to possess something or someone; or, when they already do possess something, they would rather see it destroyed rather than to see it in someone else's hands. In O'Neill's two plays, the rags-to-riches success story is never present; the characters can never achieve what they set their minds and hearts to.

As a stark contrast to the myth of the self-made man stands the myth of the self-made woman. Especially in the context of the nineteenth century, women, the hegemonic structures believed, could not and should not participate in the race 'to the top.' They could 'succeed' in life but their success could be achieved by marriage or at least an inheritance; women lived to be, in Paul's words "passive subjects" and in Lori Anne Loeb's words, "consuming angels" (Paul 399). The woman, in other words, could not be self-made, nor should they strive to be such, according to the logic of their hegemonic masters: "[…] women's function is precisely not to become independently successful but to further highlight male success by yielding to men's efforts at changing women according to their ideals" (Paul 399). In the context of the American West myth, much like their counterparts across the Atlantic Ocean in the antiquity,[13] the pioneering women who moved westward with their patriarchal masters, whether their fathers, brothers or husbands, were forgotten where historical records were concerned. Their images are now represented in Madonna of the Trail statues, but their voices are hard to trace. In what Susan Armitage (in

[13] In reference to the 2022 Nils Klim seminar entitled "Historical Perspectives on Women's Mobility" where three speakers presented their work on women's mobility in ancient Mediterranean region and how women were often kept out of any record which discussed specific travels. The entire seminar is available on YouTube and can be found on the link specified in the Works Cited page.

"Through Women's Eyes") called "Hisland," there is only room for "mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners and desperadoes […]" but not women (qtd. in Paul 326).

O'Neill, "[l]ike many other male writers […] created a world populated primarily by men" (Barlow 164). It is true that O'Neill's male characters in *Desire* and *Mourning* far outnumber the female characters. It is also true that his female characters are more memorable than some of their male counterparts. Abbie (*Desire*) and Lavinia (*Mourning*) keep the spotlight on themselves from the moment they step onto the stage. What is more, where Aeschylus used Orestes as the protagonist of his tragedy and in large part kept his sister Electra to minimal speaking part, O'Neill switched their roles and made Lavinia (Electra) the protagonist/antagonist and the main driving force of the trilogy. As will be presented, these female characters exude strong desires to possess, be it a physical space as in the case of Abbie, or a sexual desire to possess specific male characters whom they are forbidden (by societal norms or in some cases legal limitations) as in the case of Abbie and Eben, or Christine and Adam, or even Lavinia and a tribe member on her voyage with her brother Orin. For the mid-nineteenth-century standards, these women transgressed every notion of decorum and no longer represented perfect 'angels of the house.' Of course, O'Neill created these characters in the 1920s and 1930s, in the post-19$^{th}$-Amendment America, and in the midst of the Roaring Twenties period, and his female characters do not even wish to be perfect angels of the house; they are willing to take matters into their own hands and at least try to control their destinies.

## 4. Representing American Myths in *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*

### 4.1. The Agrarian Myth: "this stinkin' old-rock pile of a farm"[14]

Pamela Saur classifies O'Neill's *Desire* as a "rural play" precisely because of the significance of the play's (rural) setting (104).[15] In fact, while writing the play, O'Neill himself referred to it as the "play about New England" (Dowling 269). New England as a region of historical and symbolic significance proved to be a suitable location for both *Desire* and *Mourning*. For anybody who shared O'Neill's anti-materialistic sentiments, New England at the onset of the twentieth century represented a gruesome image of a society living for material gain. In *Desire* in particular, O'Neill provides a binary opposition between New England and the West. For O'Neill,

[14] The quote is taken from O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms* (20).
[15] The opening didascaly of *Desire* states: "*The action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farm-house in New England, in the year 1850*" (O'Neill 4).

New England bears the marks of its dark history as well as the strong Calvinist and non-conformist principles on which it was built. What is more, numerous characters in both plays try to leave New England and their familial origins – to be free from any form of collectivized identity.

### 4.1.1. Contested Places and Spaces

The Cabot farm's history, much like New England's, is a history of spatial possession and repossession. When Ephraim Cabot married his second wife, Eben's mother, he found himself an owner of a farmland which he, as a patriarch, repossessed from his wife. As a reward, Eben's mother had to toil on the farm for which she ultimately died. Eben's maternal side of the family naturally tried to repossess the farm from Ephraim, all to no avail – perhaps because, as Simeon and Peter reflect at one point in the play: "[Ephraim] skinned [the courts] too slick. He got the best o' all on 'em" (O'Neill, *Desire* 7). While Ephraim busied himself with the farm, Eben stored the hatred for his father; he saw how Ephraim treated his mother and how that slowly led her to the grave. When the play starts, Eben's hatred is all but too apparent, as well as his grief for his mother. Since the farm belonged to his mother, Eben believes it now belongs to him, and neither Ephraim, nor Simeon and Peter, should have any part of it.[16] This is evident in the scene where the three (step-)brothers discuss the issue:

> EBEN. (*Decisively*) But 'tain't that. Ye won't never go because ye'll wait here fur yer share o' the farm, thinkin' allus he'll die soon.
>
> SIMEON. (*After pause*) We've a right.
>
> PETER. Two-thirds belongs t' us.
>
> EBEN. (*Jumping to his feet*) Ye've no right! She wa'n't yewer Maw! It was her farm! Didn't he steal it from her? She's dead. It's my farm.
>
> SIMEON. (*Sardonically*) Tell that t' Paw – when he comes! I'll bet ye a dollar he'll laugh – fur once in his life. Ha! (*He laughs himself in one single mirthless bark*.) (O'Neill, *Desire* 9)

[16] The history behind farm's acquisition and Ephraim's role in it is never clear. Brief excerpts of monologues and dialogues allow the readers to piece together the story which is, it should be noted, highly unreliable. The above summary comes from Eben's point of view, but at one point, in his private talk with Abbie, Ephraim contests the validity of that view and suggests that he acquired the farm long before he met Eben's mother; the confusion occurred because "[Eben's mother's] folks was contestin' me at law over my deeds t' the farm – my farm! That's why Eben keeps a-talking his fool talk o' this bein' his Maw's farm" (O'Neill, *Desire* 34).

The repossession of the farm for Eben signifies both a revenge for his mother's death for which he blames his father, and the natural legal reality – the farm belonged to his mother's side of the family, therefore it is only proper it should go to Eben alone, not to his older step-brothers. Therefore, the farmland, from the very beginning of the play, is a space on which, and over which, different characters try to establish their authority; it is a space of unclear historic origins, but most importantly, it is a far cry from the older (fictional) representations of American farmlands. The Cabot farm is anything but a utopian space where hard-working farmers plow the fertile fields, accompanied by the blazing sun (Ranald 57-8). As such, the farm serves as a constitutive element of different characters' individualisms and, as Ibe Santos mentions in his analysis of the play, their "selfish or capitalistic agendas" (109). *Desire*, much like the majority of plays of the early twentieth century,[17] revolves around a family, but the Cabot family is a dysfunctional unit of, predominantly, men who hate each other; the long-established patriarchal hierarchy which is reaffirmed by a sign of respect of subordinated subjects – be they female or male subjects – cannot be found in *Desire*. Ephraim completely fails in his role of a patriarch; his need for emotional and physical detachment – a need which he imposes on his children and wives – is reflected in the physical characteristics of the farm. A didascaly describes the Cabot farm and the immediate natural surroundings in the following terms: "[*t*]*he south end of the house faces a stone wall with a wooden gate at centre opening on a country road. The house is in good condition, but in need of paint. Its walls are a sickly greyish, the green of the shutters faded*." Moreover, the didascaly for Act 1, scene 1, states that: "[*t*]*here is no wind and everything is still. The sky above the roof is suffused with deep colours, the green of the elms glows, but the house is in shadow, seeming pale and washed out by contrast*" (O'Neill, *Desire* 4, 5).

In her study, Heike Paul focuses primarily on farms in the West in the context of the agrarian myth. Farmlands of the West, as represented in various cultural texts, were enormous autonomous spaces where farmers held almost sovereign power over their land (Paul 318-9). As a strong binary opposition to the image of the Western farmlands stand smaller[18] gloomy New England farms, framed by grey stone walls – symbols of New England (Holloran 33). O'Neill in effect subverts the image of an autonomous farmer-as-hero into a tyrannical figure of disputed

[17] For a detailed discussion about the representation of family in American Drama in general and the representation of families in the twentieth-century American drama, see Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama*.

[18] Antebellum farms of New England were usually about 100 acres (ca. 40 hectares) (Holloran 14).

right to the farm. This in turn transforms the farmland from a stable and self-sufficient private property into a contested space filled with past sins, sinister presences, and unyielding and unrewarding nature filled with stones and soil which have to be tamed (Kao 125; Lee). And Ephraim accepted the challenge: "Waal – this place was nothin' but fields o' stones. Folks laughed when I tuk it. They couldn't know what I knowed. When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew" (O'Neill, *Desire* 33). In the same long monologue, Ephraim also reveals to his new wife, Abbie, that he left the farm at one point and went West, where farming does not require nearly as much effort:

> But I give in t' weakness once. 'Twass arter I'd been here two year. I got weak – despairful – they was so many stones. They was a part leavin', givin' up, goin' West. I jined 'em. We tracked on 'n on. We come t' broad medders, plains, whar the soil was black an' rich as gold. Nary a stone. Easy. Ye'd on 'y to plough an' sow an' then set an' smoke yer pipe an' watch thin's grow. I could o' been a rich man – but somethin' in me fit me an' fit me […]. (O'Neill, *Desire* 33)

This force within Ephraim Cabot which forced him to return to his old farm resides in many Americans who believe that success comes from hard-earned labor. O'Neill jokingly called such sentiments "Cabotism" after his character (Diggins 84). As shall be presented in a later subsection (4.2.), the force behind Ephraim's reluctance to abandon *his* farm in New England and establish himself as a new farmer-owner of another private property in the West, bears religious/Puritan undertones. It shall also be presented that his sons, Simeon and Peter, stand as a stark opposition to Ephraim's religious sentiment, wholeheartedly accepting the myth of easy success as a possibility and a system in which they have equal chances of success. However, on a highly secular level and in combination with capitalistic understanding of private properties, Ephraim also represents an individual who has achieved the American dream primarily by acquiring land. Wei Kao links *Desire* with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "Desiring Machine" in which "the land, or territory, is the basis of capitalism which may bring forth a schizophrenic social system" (129). Such an understanding of what Kao calls "land as capital" (132), ties directly to one's sense of sovereignty and this is in turn connected with the American national character as viewed primarily by hegemonic power-structures. Indeed, John Marshall, one of the Founding Fathers, in his role of a chief justice to the US Supreme Court argued that precisely because European settlers

occupied and *cultivated* a piece of land, as opposed to Native Americans who supposedly merely roamed it, they could claim the sovereignty over that land (Bartels et al. 135).

### 4.1.2. Old and New American Heroes: Farmers, Kings, Generals and Heirs

Whereas prince Hippolytus returns to his step-mother Phaedra and to the castle of Trozen with a garland "[…] from a green / And virgin meadow […] / Where never shepherd leads his grazing ewes / Nor scythe has touched. Only the river dews / Gleam, and the spring bee sings, and in the glade / Hath Solitude her mystic garden made" (Euripides 15-6) Ephraim's 'kingdom', as we have seen, is a stark contrast to the Arcadian representation of the natural landscape. A larger point here is the farm as an equivalent of ancient-Greek kingdoms which served O'Neill as suitable sources. Where Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus and other Greek sources deal with ruling classes and their tragic episodes, O'Neill deals with American metaphorical and mythological equivalents of the aristocratic class (prior to and during the nineteenth century). As discussed in a previous section, the image of the American farmer bears one of the oldest as well as the noblest sentiments – if Europe had land-owning aristocrats, America had free land-owning farmers; but where the two representative signs differed was in the moral, if not political, status. Farmers could inherit their land, but they likewise performed all the manual labor and reaped the benefits which they alone (with the help of nature) set into motion.[19] In this sense, farmers represent old American heroes – ideal men who came, saw and 'conquered' a piece of land. *Mourning* on the other hand goes in another direction and represents a new American hero of the mid-nineteenth century – those intellectually-inclined professionals who live and work in cities and towns. By the mid-nineteenth century, farmers started to move from industrialized and urbanized New England to the West for prairie lands – the old ways were dying out. In his report for the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences (written sometime between 1830 and 1845), John Treadwell melancholically noted that:

[19] Here the discussion is limited to the ideological/mythological representation. If the history of slavery in the US teaches humans anything, it is that the farmers in the South/plantation owners depended on both indentured service and later exclusively on slavery to manage and financially succeed in this line of, what at that point became, business. Indeed, as Anke Bartels and co-authors argue, the agrarian mass production originated in Portuguese colonial territories in the fifteenth century (4). Such mass production: "helped to shape and establish notions of wholly disenfranchised labor and standardized modes of production, of forced mass migration, of the managerial relation to land, of the pervasive commodification of both humans and nature, of racial hierarchy and social stratification based on capital and skin color rather than inherited title, of technologies of mass surveillance […]" (Bartels et al. 5).

> […] labour is growing into disrepute; and the time when the independent farmer, & reputable citizen could ivhistle [*sic*.] at the tail of his plough […] is fast drawing to a close. The present time marks a revolution of taste & of manners of immense import to society but while others glory in this as a great advance in refinement, we cannot help dropping a tear at the close of a golden age of our ancestors; while, with a pensive pleasure we reflect on the past & with su[s]pence and apprehension anticipate the future. (qtd. in Thorson 120)

The representative of this new American future in *Mourning* is Ezra Mannon. It is ironic that a man well in his prime, who appears only briefly in the play and is killed by his wife at the end of the first part of the trilogy, should represent a new type of American hero; his professional background, however, proves him to be exactly that. We are told by Seth, the Mannons' gardener, that Ezra:

> […] had been a soldier afore this war [the Civil War]. His paw made him go to West P'int. He went to the Mexican war and come out a major. Abe [Ezra's father] died that same year and Ezra give up the army and took holt of the shippin' business here. But he didn't stop there. He learned law on the side and got made a judge. Went for politics and got 'lected mayor. He was mayor when this war broke out but he resigned to once and jined the army again. And now he's riz to be General. (O'Neill, *Mourning* 895)

Whereas Ephraim represents the old strand of ideal(ized) American men who lived from their 'honest' work, Ezra stands for a new type of American man, as well as a higher social stratum. He is a patriot who has served his country as a soldier, major and now a General; but he is also a businessman, and "on the side" an intellectual who also served his country as a judge and a mayor. The new hero of the latter part of the nineteenth century onward was no longer an independent farmer who served himself and his family; the new hero became an urban bureaucrat or a venture capitalist – the farm was replaced by a mansion or a city apartment, and the plough by a pen and ink. Yet both of these types of heroes still relied on suitable male heirs who would take up their fathers' mantles and continue the family line.

The image of an heir is significant for both ancient-Greek sources as well as O'Neill in the two plays.[20] Both Hippolytus and Orestes are princes and heirs to their fathers' kingdoms. Likewise, in O'Neill's rendition of these myths/tragedies, heirs carry a strong symbolical significance. As we have seen, in *Desire,* Eben adamantly puts himself as the only rightful heir of the Cabot farm. But O'Neill once again subverts the ancient *and* feudal European (through primogeniture) systems of inheritance in both plays. Whereas the patriarchal hegemonic system transposes a title or land from the father to the (first-born) son, O'Neill's Cabot farm in Eben's eyes is a property he is willing to inherit only because it comes from the maternal family line:

> 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.*)
>
> EBEN. (*Very pale*) I meant – I hain't his'n – I hain't like him – he hain't me –
>
> PETER. (*Dryly*) Wait till ye 've growed his age!
>
> EBEN. (*Intensely*) I'm Maw – every drop of blood! (*A pause. They stare at him with indifferent curiosity.*)
>
> PETER. (*Reminiscently*) She was good t'Sim 'n' me. A good step-maw's scurse.
>
> SIMEON. She was good t' every one.
>
> EBEN. (*Greatly moved, gets to his feet and makes an awkward bow to each of them – stammering*). I be thankful t'ye. I'm her. *Her heir.* (O'Neill, *Desire* 8, added emphasis)

Eben in effect establishes himself as the sole heir to a contested piece of land only through his mother's claim to the farm. Whereas Ephraim represents what Nikčević calls an "old divine king"[21] through his Puritan *and* authoritarian zeal over the farm, and thus stands to represent O'Neill's vision of an American farmer that subverts the archetypal imagery of such a calling, Eben represents a somewhat naïve farmer who views the farmland as means of procuring freedom from his tyrannical father (Diggins 102-3). What is more, Eben believes that by repossessing the farm, his mother will finally be able to rest in her grave. When Eben hears about his father's new

[20] And indeed for the American history in the context of the agrarian class: "[t]he basics of Agrarian society in America in 1850 was the need of an heir" (Gupta and Mahal 199).
[21] "stari božanski kralj" (Nikčević 46; translated by E.M.).

marriage, he thinks he can finally become the owner of the farm. He buys Simeon's and Peter's share of the farm, thinking he can 'handle' Abbie and Ephraim easily. However, Abbie makes it clear that the farm is hers. What Eben and Abbie do not understand until the very end of the play is that the farmland can provide neither freedom nor independence for the two of them, and neither can any other private property in O'Neill's view (Diggins 99-101). This is what Lavinia ultimately understands by the end of *Mourning*. Whereas Abbie and Eben (and even Ephraim) (are forced to) leave the farm, Lavinia realizes (by the end of the play) that her punishment is to live inside the mansion until she dies.

### 4.2. The Myth of the Promised Land: "To what purpose came we into this place"[22]

#### 4.2.1. What Promised Land?

When God said to Adam "[…] cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; / thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee […] / in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread […]" (*KJV,* Genesis 3.17–9), the first Pilgrims and Puritans who arrived to what would become New England region in the seventeenth century must have related to Adam and finally experienced not only the banishment from their home countries, but the hard physical labor which awaited them on the American shores. They must have sensed their privileged status of chosen people and they accepted the harsh conditions of their new home as a sign of God's favor upon them – after all, as Christian religious narratives relate, every chosen people suffered the same fate, and the Puritans are merely the new heroes of the myth of the Promised Land (Paul 137; Green 64). The first Puritans were ready to sacrifice much of their old lives if that meant being closer to God. Naturally, the rigid social structure governed (initially) by strong religious sentiments of the Covenant and *sola scriptura* would slowly but surely produce what Normand Berlin called the "death of the soul" (112). New England was not a polyphonic space where different voices and opinions could impinge on or originate from the public sphere. And strong Puritan ties remained present in American culture all through the nineteenth century (Green 63). Even later, mainstream history lessons discuss New England (together with Jamestown), as a space of American origin of not only republican spirit but also of religious founding. O'Neill, as somebody who grew up and lived in New England as an Irish American, knew about its historical

[22] The quote is taken from Danforth (15).

significance upon spreading the colonial power that ultimately reached the Western coast of the US – the power that played a key role in killing and marginalization of the US' minority groups, especially Native Americans. As first a Catholic, and later an atheist, O'Neill provided an alternative view of New England's (religious) history and how the entire local culture was influenced by Puritan sentiments (Bessadet 112n4). But O'Neill's critique of New England ultimately becomes the critique of the entire America. America's failure to escape the grip of materialism and growing capitalism[23] for O'Neill represents deeper issues which originated with those first European colonialists (Sanchez 7–8).

Starting in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, there was a growing distancing and dissociation from America's religious founding (Ibe Santos 114). However, nothing helped accelerate the proliferation of secularism and strong critique of religious discourses more than World War I. O'Neill could not serve in the War due to medical reasons, but his anti-war contribution in the form of (post-war) drama[24] is still visible in the representation of the difficult psychological wounds this War, and all others, leave on people (Dowling 154). And no religion could help those who returned from the front on a spiritual level. What is visible in both *Desire* and (especially) *Mourning* is that traumatized characters are always haunted by ghosts of their past as well as, as in the case of Orin, some form of PTSD. Additionally, the entire concept of Puritan insistence on close communal and familial relationships completely crumbles in O'Neill's plays, and this is transposed to the whole America. As John Diggins wrote in his analysis of *Mourning*: "[t]he fate of the American republic and that of the Mannon family share a common destiny; neither the country nor the household will ever be the same after the ravages of war" and "O'Neill's tragedy dramatizes a family at war with itself" (212; 213). The same is true of *Desire*, but because O'Neill directly included the Civil War in *Mourning*, the latter play presents this issue of communal and familial incongruence in a much better light. One of the ways O'Neill presented the larger community's incongruence in *Mourning* is through racist discourse. In this sense, a group of people who either come to see the Mannon garden (I.1.1.) or a group of attendants who leave the Mannon house after the celebration of the end of the Civil War (II.1.1) can be interpreted not only as individual local voices; rather, they represent sentiments and views of New Englanders

[23] One should neither forget that *Mourning* was published in 1931 – two years after the stock market crash and Great Depression.
[24] O'Neill also volunteered for an anarchist paper called *Revolt* during WWI (Dowling 121).

as well as the entire America of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When Louisa, one of the visitors in the first part of the trilogy, says to Seth that Christine Mannon, Ezra's wife, is "[f]urrin lookin' and queer" because she is "French and Dutch descended," or when Mrs. Hills in the second part says "[t]here's something queer about her," these characters show the Americans' stance on foreigners, especially after WWI (O'Neill, *Mourning* 895, 952). A hint of racism towards African Americans is also included when Seth says "[t]hat durned nigger cook is allus askin' me to fetch wood fur her! You'd think I was her slave! That's what we get fur freein' 'em" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 897). Such a discourse bears some similarities between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century views about African Americans even across cities of New England. But the biggest critique is presented through the discourse about wars. As already mentioned, *Mourning* is set immediately after the end of the Civil War – in a sense, O'Neill did not have much choice but to place the action of the trilogy at the end of *some* war since Aeschylus's *Oresteia* also takes place when victorious Agamemnon (Ezra in *Mourning*) returns from the Trojan War. But the Civil War suitably served O'Neill to both reflect the horrors of WWI as well as to critique the dark period America placed itself in during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Civil War played a crucial role in (re)defining American national character which has continued to shape America to this day, especially in the context of the racial issues; as Cullen observes: "[t]he Civil War's outcome not only made places like Starbucks possible but also determined who went there […]" (37). What then, O'Neill seems to have asked his audience, is the point of religion and this myth of New England as some sacred ground that was promised by God to 'sinless' and 'chosen' people when humans/Americans are willing to shed each other's blood? Ezra Mannon conveys this sentiment when he states: "I've seen dead men scattered about, no more important than rubbish to be got rid of. That made the white meeting-house seem meaningless – making so much solemn fuss over death" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 938). No one was more affected by the horrors of war than Orin. Whereas before the war Orin was a disappointment to his father due to dependency on his mother, after the war he became a hero in his father's eyes since the war finally 'made a man' of him and earned him a wound as a sign of his bravery on the battlefield. Orin reveals to Lavinia that his overzealous volunteering for the most dangerous situations on the front was there to hide the fact he was afraid, something his father would never understand (O'Neill, *Mourning* 976). For O'Neill, Orin becomes an agent of anti-war sentiments – a propagator of peace – when he says:

> I thought what a joke it would be on the stupid Generals like Father if everyone on both sides suddenly saw the joke war was on them and laughed and shook hands! So I began to laugh and walked toward their lines with my hand out. Of course, the joke was on me and I got this wound in the head for my pains. I went mad, wanted to kill, and ran on, yelling. Then a lot of our fools went crazy, too, and followed me and we captured a part of their line we hadn't dared tackle before. I had acted without orders, of course – but Father decided it was better policy to overlook that and let me be a hero! (*Mourning* 977)

The families in both plays are highly dysfunctional units, and if a family is supposed to present and serve as a metaphor for a larger communal unit, the Cabots and the Mannons stand to shatter the ideological representation of expected familial relationships. But O'Neill already knew just how superficial and unrealistic the image of a perfect American family was. He was a son who allegedly made his mother addicted to morphine, a son who could never make his father proud, and a younger brother to an alcoholic who kept Eugene out of a portion of inheritance.[25] O'Neills themselves resembled the Cabots and the Mannons in ways more than one. This is what has made his plays realistic and reliable for so many. When a theater critic and a friend of his father's told him to "[k]eep [his] eye on life, – on life as [he has] seen it," O'Neill listened (qtd. in Dowling 103). The Cabots and the Mannons try to present themselves as functional family units in a place which, for O'Neill, tries to present itself as a space of utopian and religious significance – and neither were quite successful in that endeavor.

How then did O'Neill manage to subvert the image of New England/America as the Promised Land? He did it by incorporating both the pervading Puritan force present in New England as well as ancient Greek sources which he used for *Desire* and *Mourning*. By combining these two cultural/religious forces, O'Neill in effect clashed Christian and pagan imagery, and created a new version of New England as a space where larger metaphysical forces affect various characters in *Desire* and *Mourning*; his New England is a gothic space where past familial sins come to haunt those who occupy this space (Alexander 32; Beşe 16). In *Desire*, the entire discussion about the true ownership of the farm creates a tense family relationship between the father and the son. But, more to the point, there is always the sense that the farm is haunted by a

[25] For a full biography of O'Neill from which these important episodes are taken, see Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts* and Black, "'Celebrant of Loss' Eugene O'Neill 1888-1953."

ghostly presence of Eben's dead mother. Indeed, O'Neill hints that she cannot leave the contested space until the farm falls in the hands of Eben. When Abbie enters the "grim, repressed room like a tomb" (O'Neill, *Desire* 36), and when Eben follows her, they cannot help but feel some presence:

> ABBIE. When I fust come in – in the dark – they seemed somethin' here.
>
> EBEN. (*Simply*) Maw.
>
> ABBIE. I kin still feel – somethin' –
>
> EBEN. It's Maw. (O'Neill, *Desire* 37)

Moreover, O'Neill uses symbolism to present the metaphysical forces which are embodied by the two elms that frame the house. The opening didascaly describes the two elms in quite a detailed fashion:

> *Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof – they appear to protect and at the same time subdue; there is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. When the wind does not keep them astir, they develop from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house, they are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles*. (O'Neill, *Desire* 4)

It is necessary to read the entire description to truly see and feel two important aspects: how 'oppressive' the elms are, *and* their oddly feminized qualities since these two trees do not only have a "sinister maternity," but they also look like "exhausted women." The natural world becomes the symbol which stands for the oppressors and the oppressed on the farm: the elms thus represent the female force, whereas the stones which cage the farm represent the oppressive masculine force embodied by Ephraim Cabot himself. Therefore, the force that in large part affects the outcome of the plays is not merely in the minds of certain characters; they are real agents that have the power to affect varying outcomes and move the story forward (Nellhaus 59–60; Asselineau 146). What is particularly important to recognize here is O'Neill's insistence on almost pagan symbology. There is nothing Puritan about the metaphysical level of these images which O'Neill incorporated in these plays.

Similar symbolism can be found in *Mourning*. Firstly, the mansion itself reminds the readers and the audience members about the Greek quality to these plays: *"[t]he house is placed back on a slight rise of ground about three hundred feet from the street. It is a large building of the Greek temple type that was the vogue in the first half of the nineteenth century. A white wooden portico with six tall columns contrasts with the wall of the house proper which is of gray cut stone*." (O'Neill, *Mourning* 890). Here, O'Neill combines the Greek architectural style with the history of New England, since the house was built in the popular style that was prevalent in America. Moreover, according to Wei Kao, the incorporation of ancient Greek tragic elements combined with the critique of Puritan ideals, served O'Neill to present the growing immigrant (read marginalized, new, and even 'contrapuntal') voices and presence in America at the onset of the twentieth century (123). By the end of the play, however, it becomes clear that the mansion becomes a symbol of death as it represents both a Greek tomb as well as a Puritan coffin. Namely, the mansion is constantly depicted as a dark and sinister space where the portraits of the Mannon ancestors hang and watch the present generation.[26] It is also incessantly described as a tomb. Christine states at one point:

> I've been to the greenhouse to pick [the flowers]. I felt our tomb needed a little brightening. […] Each time I come back after being away it appears more like a sepulcher! The 'whited' one of the Bible – pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan gray ugliness! It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity – as a temple for his hatred. (O'Neill, *Mourning* 903)

In *Mourning*, hence, just like in *Desire*, the mansion becomes a haunted space by the dead and a tomb for the living.[27] By the end of the play, Lavinia is the only Mannon to survive, and she intentionally locks herself in the mansion to "[live] alone with the dead […]" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1053). What is also visible in *Mourning*, as in *Desire*, is the punishing sense of Fate in the form of past sins of previous generations. The present generation of the Mannons are punished for the sins of previous generations. Had there been no love triangle between Abe Mannon (Ezra's father), his

[26] There are also portraits of significance for American and New England history: "O*n the right wall is a painting of George Washington in a gilt frame, flanked by smaller portraits of Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall*" and "*Portraits of ancestors hang on the walls. At the rear of the fireplace, on the right, is one of a grim-visaged [sic.] minister of the witch-burning era*" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 914, 962). According to Auréle Sanches, the reference to the "witch-burning era" served O'Neill to point to America's unjust and sinful past (5).

[27] O'Neill also incorporated ghostly presences in *Mourning*, especially in *The Haunted*, Act I, scene 1.

brother David and Marie Brantôme, the Mannon nurse girl, Adam Brant, as the product of the love affair of Marie and David, would have never been born to seek revenge on the Mannons who occupy the mansion at the time of the action (Berlin 113). There would have never been a chain of murders and suicides which left every Mannon, except Lavinia, dead. In that sense, one can interpret these dark, cold and haunted spaces and the sins of previous generations as O'Neill's critique of America in general and New England's Calvinistic history in particular. The religious founding does not absolve America of its past sins; nor does it absolve the sins which were committed in the name of religion, such as the witch trials of the seventeenth century. In that sense, the mansion in *Mourning* and the farm in *Desire*, albeit completely gothic and sinister in their portrayal, do not represent heterotopic spaces in Foucauldian sense of the term, precisely because the surrounding larger space around these places bears the same oppressive and sinister quality. In other words, the mansion and the farm, with all their ghostly presences and "grey ugliness," fit perfectly (in any sense of the word) into the space which surrounds them.

### 4.2.2. Prophets and Blasphemers

New England as a Promised Land must have its religious representatives who speak for it. Who would be those prophetic voices that speak for it, and what message do they send? Who can speak for O'Neill's New England – such as it is? O'Neill himself was interested precisely in this relationship: "Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that doesn't interest me at all […]. I am interested only in the relation between man and God" (qtd. in Diggins 184). Ephraim Cabot is one voice which presents a latter-day Puritan prophet of sorts. Before Simeon and Peter left the farm and headed West, Ephraim was already there, seeking God's message:

> SIMEON. […] and he says, lookin' kinder queer an' sick: "I been hearin' the hens cluckin' an' the roosters crowin' all the durn day. I been listenin' t' the cows lowin' an' everythin' else kickin' up till I can't stand it no more. It's spring an' I'm feelin' damned," he says. "Damned like an old bare hickory tree fit on'y fur burnin'," he says. An' then I calc'late I must've looked a mite hopeful, fur he adds real spry and vicious: "But don't git no fool idee I'm dead. I've sworn t' live a hundred an' I'll do it, if on'y t' spite yer sinful greed! An' now I'm ridin' out t' learn God's message t' me in the

> spring, like the prophets done. An' yew git back t' yer ploughin'," he says. An' he druv off singin' a hymn. (O'Neill, *Desire* 10)

Ephraim as a prophetic figure in *Desire* is formulated through various representational strategies that can be traced throughout the play. For a start, his name bears strong Biblical origins since one of the twelve tribes of Israel was called Ephraim ("Ephraim"). Additionally, as discussed previously, his 'means of production' as a farmer who employs physical labor on his private property connects him to Biblical Adam. But, at this point, the paper focuses on Ephraim's linguistic characteristics as means of representing himself not only as a prophetic figure, but also as some form of 'residue' from earlier Puritan ministers. This is ultimately achieved through Ephraim's sermon-like way of speaking as well as his verbal reprimand of numerous characters in *Desire*.

In his study *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England,* Harry S. Stout focuses primarily on New England sermons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose, "topical range and social influence were so powerful in shaping cultural values, meanings, and a sense of corporate purpose that even television pales in comparison" (3). It is to be expected that vestiges of such powerful religious and cultural phenomenon remained not only in religious institutions from which they originated; rather, they become part of a culture as religious adherents to such cultural texts try to live by the sermons which, after all, were there to warn, teach and create a desired behavioral pattern in private and communal life. Ephraim's lines in the play are highly reminiscent of the New England sermons in the sense that they carry clear Christian/Biblical discursive markers, themes and messages. One example would be when Abbie tells Ephraim she wants to conceive a child with him; Ephraim proclaims: "Pray t' the Lord agin, Abbie. It's the Sabbath! I'll jine ye! Two prayers air better nor one. 'An' God hearkened unto Rachel an' she conceived an' bore a son.' An' God hearkened unto Abbie!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 32). Moreover, some of his lines provide dogmatic and theological framework which he shares with other characters. This is best seen in the long monologue Ephraim gives when alone with Abbie in their bedroom. As he tells Abbie, the only reason why he left Western prairie (arable) lands is because of a voice that commanded him to return home; he continues:

> I got affeered o' that voice an' I lit out back t' hum here, leavin' my claim an' crops t' whoever'd a mind t' take em. Ay-eh. I actooly give up what was rightful mine! God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build My church on a rock – out o' stones an' I'll be in them. That's what He meant t' Peter! (*He sighs heavily – a pause*.) Stones. I picked 'em up an' piled 'em into walls. Ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin' over the hills up and down, fencing in the fields that was mine, whar I'd made thin's grow out o' nothin' – like the will o' God, like the servant o' His hand. It wa'n't easy. It was hard an' He made me hard fur it. (O'Neill, *Desire* 33)

In the speech O'Neill in effect connects Ephraim with Puritans' theological foundational arguments about God; namely, that God is 'hard' and that God can be found in his natural creation. Puritans therefore tried to emulate God's nature and this is perhaps best reflected in Samuel Danforth's "A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness." But Ephraim's character, through the lines above, presents and reflects the philosophy of Cotton Mather who stated: "[t]o fall down before a stone and say, *Thou art a God,* would be an idolatry that none but a soul more senseless than a stone could be guilty of. But then it would be a very agreeable and acceptable homage unto the glorious God for me to see much of Him in such a wonderful stone as the magnet" (24). Like Mather, Ephraim does not believe that stones are God, but for him, God is in those stones which he must arrange around the parameters of his own small 'kingdom.' In that sense, Ephraim becomes the "agent of God on earth" (Block 63). Still, Ephraim's zealous relation with God is represented by O'Neill as highly hypocritical. At the start of the play, Ephraim is in the West, following God's message. That message, as it turns out, is to replace his deceased wife with another, much younger wife (Ephraim is 75 and Abbie is 35). What is more, Simeon and Peter reveal to Eben that not only did both of them sleep with Minnie – a local widow notorious for her promiscuity – but Ephraim had also had sexual relationship with her before Simeon and Peter (O'Neill, *Desire* 11).

As opposed to *Desire* whose characters have recognizable Biblical names[28] (as well as some similarities with Biblical narrative of those characters), *Mourning* remains loyal to the

[28] For a detailed discussion on the topic of major characters' names as related to their Biblical influences and counterparts, see Ou, "Classical, Biblical, and Shakespearean Intertextuality in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*", especially pp. 93–4.

ancient Greek ur-text in regards to its dramatis personae (in names and characterization). Although there is Adam, a name which obviously bears important Biblical significance, it is more probable that O'Neill chose this name in order to keep some traces of the Greek character's name from *Oresteia* (Adam/Aegisthus). One can notice similarities between some characters' names of the source and O'Neill's text (Christine/Clytaemestra [*sic*.]; Ezra Mannon/Agamemnon; Orin/Orestes), but Lavinia (Electra) seems to be the exception.[29] Almost all characters in *Mourning* reflect the growing atheistic worldview. As previously discussed, Ezra and Orin have lost any faith in God (if they even had any to begin with) after the horrors they witnessed on the battlefield – much like many soldiers who returned from WWI. But more importantly, whereas Ephraim represents the religious and spiritual dimension, Ezra stands for secular values and, quite literally, represents the law (as a judge) and political dimension (as a mayor). In that sense, Ezra also shares his ancient-Greek counterpart's role since Greek rulers (*wanax*) performed military, judicious, ceremonious, religious and economic roles (Kilian 193; Haskell 152).[30]

The discussion about atheism is pertinent only if it is viewed as a piece of a larger puzzle. Namely, O'Neill himself was an atheist since he was fourteen (Dowling 43–4). Furthermore, atheistic discourse seriously impinged on the mythological image of New England as the Promised Land. These oppositional voices not only questioned and contested such notions as a religious sanctity/special status of a space. Likewise, the same oppositional voices are presented in *Desire* and *Mourning*, especially through the character of Eben. In the scene where Simeon and Peter leave the farm, Ephraim turns to God:

> CABOT. (*Raising his arms to Heaven in the fury he can no longer control*) Lord God o' Hosts, smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss.
>
> EBEN. (*Breaking in violently*) Yew 'n' yewr God! Allus cussin folks – allus naggin' em!
>
> CABOT. (*Oblivious to him – summoningly*.) God o' the old! God o' the lonesome!
>
> EBEN. (*Mockingly*) Naggin' His sheep t' sin! T' hell with yewr God!
>
> CABOT. (*Wrathfully*) 'The days air prolonged and every vision faileth!'

[29] It is possible that the true source for Lavinia's character is Electra's sister, Iphigenia, who does not appear as a character in Aeschylus' version of the myth, but bears a more similar-sounding name to Lavinia. For further discussion see Miller, "Iphigenia: An Overlooked Influence in 'Mourning Becomes Electra.'"

[30] The role of the *wanax* is merely one of many as ancient Greek history spans over centuries. Therefore, *wanax* was one type of ruler during the Bronze Age, as opposed to later variations, such as *basileus* in Hellenistic period (Neils 419). Furthermore, ancient Greece saw varied forms of governance from monarchy to democracy in different *polei*. Cf. Thomas, "On the Role of the Spartan Kings" and Starr, "The Decline of the Early Greek Kings."

EBEN. (*Spitting*) Good enuf for ye! (*Cabot turns. He and Eben glower at each other*.)

CABOT. (*Harshly*) So it's yew. I might've knowed it. (*Shaking his finger threateningly at him*.) Blasphemin' fool! (O'Neill, *Desire* 25)

As Rafael Ibe Santos argues, in scenes like these, Eben shows utter animosity toward not only Puritanism as a denomination and Christianity as an organized form of belief, he also shows animosity directly toward God as a mythological figure in Christian narratives (112–3). In *Mourning*, Lavinia and Christine are the main proponents of anti-religious discourse. Christine directly blames God for being, in her view, malicious: "But God won't leave us alone. He twists and wrings and tortures our lives with others' lives until – we poison each other to death!" (O'Neill' *Mourning* 956). Lavinia, on the other hand, asserts herself to the level of a deity when she states: "I'm not asking God or anybody for forgiveness. I forgive myself! (*She leans back and closes her eyes again – bitterly*) I hope there is a hell for the good somewhere!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1049). Such a statement is a clear indication of Lavinia's animosity and forsaking of any hegemonic textual system (most especially religious) which suppresses individual critical voices against any such institutionalized and systematized forms of oppression. With this statement Lavinia frees herself, and accepts her fate (and any possible punishment that might arise from voicing her anti-religious credo).

### 4.3. The American West (Frontier Myth): "Californi-a! – Golden West! – fields o' gold!"[31]

As Richard Wattenberg argues in his introduction to *Early-Twentieth-Century Frontier Dramas on Broadway: Situating the Western Experience in Performing Arts,* it was the frontier themes in Euro-American drama of the twentieth century that provided "a distinctly American experience" (1). More to the point, the western frontier imagery still serves as a defining characteristic of America (Wattenberg 1; Paul 312). John G. Bourke's diary which recorded various episodes of the military life on the frontier, and which focused primarily on General George Crook, serves as an excellent example of the significance of California Gold Rush (as one of the most significant episodes of frontier history in the American West) in the Americans' psyche as the diary was published in 1891 – long after California Gold Rush became part of the American history. One entry of the diary states the following: "[n]ot an evening passed on this trip across the

[31] The quote is taken from O'Neill's play *Desire Under the Elms* (6).

mountains of the Mogollon Range that Crook did not quietly take a seat close to the camp-fire of some of the packers, and listen intently to their 'reminisces' of early mining days in California […]" (173). Those mining days bear almost a legendary quality in the way Americans' hear and carry those narratives with them, and Crook's interest in the story is merely another indication of the fascination which the West as a space and Gold Rush as a historic event has had on the American psyche.

### 4.3.1. In Search of Freedom and New Promised Land(s)

Especially during and after the Westward expansion, combined with the rapid industrialization of Eastern states in the nineteenth century, Americans' focus turned aggressively to the western frontier as a space of what seemed unlimited potential. Steadily, the West became a new Promised Land. As Greg Grandin writes: "[f]acing west meant facing the Promised Land, an Edenic utopia […]" (7). Therefore, the American West becomes a space of mythical potential, a space which bears obvious religious and imaginative significance.[32] The frontier, and California in particular (after the gold was discovered), became a space as capital, to paraphrase Kao's term; it was precisely the frontier's vastness and, in Wattenberg's words "frontier mystique" (1) that affected the frontier being exploited in various ways, including imaginatively through countless artistic endeavors from paintings to prose fiction (dime novels for instance). The West thus became one part of the binary opposition, standing as a stark contrast to Eastern part of the US (New England). Whereas New England was dark, cold, confined with well-established borders, and industrialized, the West was seen as warm, open, vast, unfixed, fluid, and quite primitive (waiting to be 'civilized'). The frontier (especially before the Civil War) was a borderless and almost endless space filled with possibilities and opportunities (Bank 149). This binary aspect is also strongly emphasized in O'Neill's *Desire* by Simeon and Peter:

> SIMEON. (*Excited in his turn*) Fortunes layin' just atop o' the ground waitin' t' be picked! Solomon's mines they says! (*For a moment they continue looking up at the sky – then their eyes drop*)
>
> PETER. (*With sardonic bitterness*) Here – it's stones atop o' the ground – stones atop o' stones – makin' stone walls – year atop o' year – him 'n' yew 'n' me 'n' then Eben – makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in. (6)

[32] Similar to the Orient in European Imperial discourse.

Whereas Simeon and Peter present the pioneering spirit of American cultural and historical fabric, Eben stands for that old American hero: the farmer. In spatial context, Simeon and Peter regard the farm as an enclosing and oppressive force, opposed to the West which they view as a financial potential (Diggins 96–7). For Eben, the farm and the immediate surroundings – that which he can see from the farm and not some far away space – represent the ideal and idyllic space:

> SIMEON and PETER. (*Together*) Ay-eh. They's gold in the West.
>
> EBEN. Ay-eh. (*Pointing*) Yonder atop o' the hill pasture, ye mean?
>
> SIMEON and PETER. (*Together*) In Californi-a!
>
> EBEN. Hunh? (*Stares at them indifferently for a second, then drawls*) Waal – supper's gittin' cold. (*He turns back into the kitchen*) (O'Neill, *Desire* 7)

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and gold discovery in 1848, California became the ultimate goal for many Americans (and non-Americans alike). California primarily offered a specific form of material opportunity which resulted in California Gold Rush, and this aspect will be discussed in detail in the last sub-section of Chapter 4.3. For now, however, the paper focuses on California as a mythological space and how such a space was represented in cultural texts, including O'Neill's drama. When the news about gold in California reached every part of America and the world, people of all races and faiths gave up their old lives and professions, and headed to California where gold 'waited patiently' (so the legend has it). Gold in California soon became the main driving force for many (mostly men) to migrate. Early on in *Desire*, Simeon and Peter reflect the same sentiments even though by that point (1850) the Gold Rush was already two years old:

> PETER. […] They's gold in the West, Sim.
>
> SIMEON. (*Still under the influence of sunset – vaguely*) In the sky?
>
> PETER. Waal – in a manner o'speakin' – thar's the promise. (*Growing excited*) Gold in the sky – in the west – Golden Gate – Californi-a! – Golden West! – fields o'gold! (O'Neill 6)

This is in effect the image of an American hero according to Lewis. As Lewis stated, the American hero as Adam is "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling" (5). O'Neill perfectly presents Simeon and Peter as new American heroes as they too, literally, sell their share of the farm to Eben and use the money to sail to California (*Desire* 13, 18–19). Once in California, no one will know who they are; they in effect get to create their identity from scratch (in that sense, the identity-formation becomes closely tied to a physical space). But the crucial aspect of this myth[33] is the freedom which agents of this myth stand to gain: freedom from earlier identity constraints in the context of the American hero (surname, inheritance, sense of belonging to a specific community, etc.), but also financial freedom (Tompkins 4). O'Neill incorporates rhetorical figure apostrophe when Simeon and Peter turn to the farm and to its soil and make the binary opposition between the farmland and the frontier:

> SIMEON. (*Stamps his foot on the earth and addresses it desperately*) Waal – ye've thirty year o' me buried in ye – spread out over ye – blood an' bone an' sweat – rotted away – fertilizin' ye – richin' yer soul – prime manure, by God, that's what I been t' ye!
>
> PETER. Ay-eh! An' me!
>
> SIMEON. An' yew, Peter. (*He sighs – then spits*) Waal – no use'n cryin' over spilt milk.
>
> PETER. They's gold in the West – an' freedom mebbe. We been slaves t' stone walls here. (O'Neill, *Desire* 17)

In the same scene, when they see their father approaching with his new wife, Simeon and Peter once again return to this aspect of freedom from their father's and the farm's oppressive qualities:

> SIMEON. […] Fur once we're free!
>
> PETER. (*Dazedly*) Free?
>
> SIMEON. The halter's roke – the haness is busted – the fence bars is down – the stone walls air crumblin' an' tumblin'! We'll be kickin' up an' tearin' away down the road!
>
> […]

[33] In his study entitled *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation,* Jim Cullen also introduces the "Dream of the Coast" as a separate myth. For Cullen, the "California gold rush is the purest expression of the Dream of the Coast in American history" (170). However, the ideological aspect of this and other Foundational myths did not reflect the reality.

SIMEON. (*Takes the gate off its hinges and puts it under his arm*) We harby 'bolishes shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates, by thunder! (O'Neill, *Desire* 20)

In *Mourning*, we do not have as strong a discourse about the American West, but at least one character, Adam Brant, was in the West (among other places). As Lavinia reveals to Peter: "He went to sea when he was young and was in California for the Gold Rush. He's sailed all over the world – he lived on a South Sea island once, so he says" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 902). In this play, the West is certainly presented as a regressive and lawless place, where outdated forms of punishment are still a part of its spatial and 'legal' reality. This is visible in a scene when Christine and Adam discuss how to kill Ezra:

BRANT. If I could catch him alone, where no one would interfere, and let the best man come out alive – as I've often seen it done in the West!

CHRISTINE. This isn't the West.

BRANT. I could insult him on the street before everyone and make him fight me! I could let him shoot first and then kill him in self-defense.

CHRISTINE. (*Scornfully*) Do you image you could force him to fight a duel with you? Don't you know dueling is illegal? Oh, no! He'd simply feel bound to do his duty as a former judge and have you arrested! (O'Neill, *Mourning* 923)

As in *Desire*, there is a binary opposition present, except that in *Mourning* New England is presented as a 'civilized' space governed by law, whereas the West is presented in the well-established archetypal image of the 'Wild West' where any form of justice operates on the regressive communal ('mob justice') or individual levels (dueling as one form). The temporal difference between the two plays is also significant. Whereas the time of action in *Desire* is 1850 – at the height of the Gold Rush – in the *Mourning* it is set fifteen years later, by which time the Gold Rush, and the West in general, have lost their old glory – and so there is a need for a new Promised Land. Instead of focusing on the West, O'Neill turned to the sea and the Far East in *Mourning*.

The Mannons, unlike the Cabots who depend on land, procure their livelihood through a shipping business, as Seth states early on: "Ezra's made a pile, and before him, his father, Abe Mannon, he inherited some and made a pile more in shippin'. Started one of the fust Western

Ocean packet lines" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 895). Adam Brant is even a captain of a clipper, and the entire Act IV of the second part of the play takes place on a clipper ship "*moored alongside a wharf in East Boston*" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 984) where a chanteyman sits with the ship's crew when the curtain is raised. Lastly, the entire play's dialogue is filled with the discourse about ships, sailing, the sea and specifically South Sea Islands. Where the West and California in *Desire* stand for utopian spaces that offer financial security through easy labor and freedom, South Sea Islands and ships represent the same sentiment in *Mourning* – these Islands are yet another Promised Land for individual characters (albeit these places are devoid of any religious connotation). For many of these characters, these islands offer a world where they can be free from their previous identities or, in Orin's case, trauma:

> ORIN. […] Have you ever read a book called "Typee" – about the South Sea Islands?
>
> CHRISTINE. (*With a start – strangely*) Islands! Where there is peace?
>
> ORIN. Then you did read it?
>
> CHRISTINE. No.
>
> ORIN. Someone loaned me the book. I read it and reread it until finally those Islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security. I used to dream I was there. And later on all the time I was out of my head I seemed really to be there. There was no one there but you and me. And yet I never saw you, that's the funny part. I only felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same color as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you. (*He smiles with a dreamy tenderness*) A strange notion wasn't it? But you needn't be provoked at being an island because this was the most beautiful island in the world – as beautiful as you, Mother! (O'Neill, *Mourning* 972)

Orin's response is one of many examples where the Oedipus complex marks its presence. While in *Desire* the dramatist himself brings the elms in relation to certain female characters or female characteristics *grosso modo,* in *Mourning,* Orin himself connotes an island from his imagination with his mother. These islands additionally offer safety for different characters. When Christine visits Adam on the clipper in Act IV where they can contemplate how to escape Lavinia's revengeful grip, Christine states, "Don't talk like that! You have me, Adam! You have me! And we will be happy – once we're safe on your Blessed Islands!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 992). The sea,

together with the South Sea Islands, do not only represent a safe haven – a new Promised Land – for many characters in *Mourning*, but they might have meant the same for O'Neill himself, introducing a strong autobiographical element. O'Neill loved sailing. Sailing was for O'Neill, like for many of his characters, a way of escaping the reality and all the consequences he would have had to deal with. When he fathered a child in 1909 (a child he would not see until the latter's twelfth year), his father arranged for him to sail to Honduras. After that, O'Neill sailed again, this time to Buenos Aires, then again to South Africa in 1911, and to England (Berlin 30–2; Graham-Yooll 170; Dowling 53–5). These 'adventures at sea' were anything but financially lucrative endeavors, nor did O'Neill enjoy the physical places once he reached the shore. Instead, they offered the dramatist an escape from troubles and issues (personal and political) of his time, in the same way as the South Sea Islands offer escape from the Mannons, the mansion, New England and America.

### 4.3.2. The American West as a Male Utopia

The American West as a space with utopian potential is a gendered space. Another examination of Bourke's diary points to an entry which discusses General Crook's reminiscing about California Gold Rush and the 'forty-niners' (first gold-miners who went to California in 1849); for Bourke and the company: "[t]hese were 'men' in the truest sense of the term; they had faced all perils, endured all privations, and conquered in a manly way, which is the one unfailing test of greatness of human nature" (173). The West, and California during the Gold Rush specifically, represent a male utopia for a range of reasons: it was a space occupied predominantly by men, and it was represented in various cultural texts predominantly *by* men as a space designed *for* men. It is the West – the frontier – Bourke suggests, where men can prove their 'manliness.' What can essentially be observed in Bourke's quote above is the representation and parallelism of the early gold-miners with heroic figures of antiquity who had to survive countless perils and be victorious in the end; therefore, this image provides an ideological element as it presents the pioneers and 'argonauts' as national heroic figures. The Westerns, as a long-established genre, certainly helped in spreading the image of the West as a purely masculine space, a 'Hisland' in Armitage's term (Cooper 1; Paul 326). The Westerns as a movie genre also played a key role in shaping the image of the frontier as a male space. As Krista Comer writes, the hero of these Westerns: "[…] can be pioneer surveying open land, cowboy riding into the cinematic distance,

proud Marlboro man atop his horse […]. As visuals, most of these have traveled the world for nearly two hundred years, producing profit and various knowledges about the American, the real, the Other, the masculine, the sublime […]" (37–8). But the utopian quality of California, especially San Francisco, was always led by the opportunistic possibility of gaining economic power and freedom in a speedy manner. Malcolm Rohrbough relates the sentiments those early gold-miners felt upon reaching San Francisco in the following manner:

> [e]ven the businesslike de Massey was moved by the sights of the city and the bay. The sparkling lights made it seem "just as if every star in the heavens had been seized with gold rush fever and had migrated to the coast of California." The lights that reflected off the water "seem to have a supernatural and magical air about them." Like so many other arrivals, beyond the rain, mud, and confusion, de Massey found the scene suffused with an air of magic. (106)

It is easy to imagine that if O'Neill had provided his audience with a few scenes showing Simeon and Peter traveling and finally arriving to San Francisco, their reaction would be almost identical – provided, of course, they survived the treacherous journey many potential argonauts did not in reality (Altman 10).

Most importantly, in the true sense of the word 'utopia,' such an idyllic space never existed. This is in effect O'Neill's main argument when it comes to the American West in the context of easy success myth. O'Neill sailed for Honduras in 1909 for a gold-mining expedition, and many years later, he summarized the results briefly: "[m]uch hardship, little romance, no gold" (O'Neill qtd. in Dowling 56). Even though we do not know the fate of Simeon and Peter, O'Neill most certainly offers a realistic possibility with the quote above. From their vantage point, Simeon and Peter imagine riverbanks and mountains filled with gold, but as Steven Napier writes: "[…] already by 1849, the 'easy' gold had been collected […]" (129) and "[m]ost of the miners in California returned to the occupations they had had before the Gold Rush" (130). Their dream of easy success would not last long in 1850's San Francisco. Ironically, they cursed the soil on the farm, but the same physically-straining work of digging the soil and spending days in dust awaited them in the West. As the reality usually shows, only very few would stand to gain some economic benefit, and those few are almost certainly venture capitalists who already own enough capital to either pay

'hands,' to use the well-known synecdoche, to perform the physical labor, or to use available mechanical technology which surpasses human labor in speed and precision.

### 4.4. The Myths of the Self-made Man and Self-made Woman: "I'm not your property!"[34]

According to Paul, American individualism presents the economic dimension of American exceptionalism because "American individualism is often seen as a precondition for individual success, which is mostly understood in economic terms" (15–6). And the main hero of this myth is the self-made man – an individual who achieved his American dream through hard work in the race to the top (Paul 16). O'Neill presents the purely ideological dimension of such a myth, especially when combined with the myth of the self-made woman, in a more realistic fashion. More often than not, individualistic and materialistic pursuits bear no fruit, especially when a sense of Fate and national collective sin are not considered.

#### 4.4.1. The Myth of the Self-made Man

What the myth of the self-made man propagates in its hegemonic form is that everybody can become an active agent in the race for success. As Nikčević reminds her readers: "[…] from the start, everybody is equal, the principles of achieving success are well-known to everyone, all that is needed is to enter the race" (25).[35] Of course, the hegemonic origins of this particular myth operate under the principles of exclusivity, which immediately points to the ideological dimensions of this myth. For even though the myth of the self-made man propagates equality, the reality is that not everybody can be an active agent in the success story (Paul 368). In the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the phrase itself immediately excluded everyone that was not male, and even then, the hegemonic order dictated that only men of certain predispositions (race, economic status) could be self-made. For O'Neill, however, the myth of the self-made man in the form of American individualism and growing secularism stands to shatter personal and communal relationships, including familial relationships, for material gain. Naturally, O'Neill was not the only one, nor was he the first, to critique the ideological dimension of the myth of the self-made man. Paul lists a few authors who had produced cultural texts which directly criticized this

[34] The quote is taken from O'Neill's play *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1031).
[35] "[...] na startu su svi jednaki, principi postizanja uspjeha svima poznati, treba samo krenuti u trku" (translated by E.M.).

myth, and such authors that came before O'Neill include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser (Paul 380–3).

In O'Neill's dramas, the degradation of son(s)-father relationships shows that the desire for some materialistic goal destroys both patriarchal hierarchy and personal relations between family members. What O'Neill presents in these plays is that the father figure – the patriarch – is no longer respected if that means disregarding individual 'pursuits' of potential materialistic gain (Ibe Santos 111–2). The Cabot sons' hatred for their father and *vice versa* is visible and strongly felt throughout *Desire*. This is perhaps best seen in a scene where Simeon and Peter are leaving the farm. Once they have the financial means to leave the farm and travel West, they no longer feel obliged to show any respect for their father:

> CABOT. I'll hav ye both chained up in the asylum!
>
> PETER. Ye old skinflint! Goodbye!
>
> SIMEON. Ye old blood-sucker! Goodbye. (O'Neill, Desire 22)

The hatred stems from Ephraim's cruel and harsh behavior toward his sons, but it also stems from Ephraim's disregard for his sons' individual aspirations and (materialistic) dreams. For Simeon and Peter, the Gold Rush is the best, if not the only, way of becoming financially independent. Grueling physical labor yields no results for them, especially when they have to perform physical labor on their father's farm. If they want to succeed in the world, and be independent, they must escape the farm, which for them represent an enclosing space where the stone walls stand for jail bars. Naturally, their tyrannical father cannot grasp their wish for individual success. When Simeon and Peter tell him that they are leaving the farm and going West, all Ephraim can say is, "Lust fur gold – fur the sinful, easy gold o' California-a! It's made ye mad!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 22). O'Neill must have gone back though his own life and reflected his relationship with his father, which was not altogether loving. James O'Neill was a self-made man. When the O'Neills came to America from Ireland in 1850, James slowly made an actor of himself (Dowling 27). Even though he had not been trained, he became a Shakespearean actor and then turned to more lucrative melodramatic role – the count of Monte Cristo – which brought him fame and money (Dowling 28–32). His two sons, Eugene and Jim, could not follow in his footsteps, even though James had Eugene act in *Monte Cristo* (Dowling 82). This only worsened the son-father relationship. After

one performance, James allegedly told Eugene "I am not satisfied with your performance, sir" and Eugene replied "I am not satisfied with your play, sir" (qtd. in Dowling 84). Simeon, Peter and Eben behave similarly as younger O'Neill behaved with his father. Similarly to O'Neill, these characters try to find some space where they can be independent agents of their lives; they desire a space to call their own, which is the ultimate goal of the American dream (Nikčević 62). In the playtext of *Mourning*, we can also see parallels in the James-Eugene and Ezra-Orin relationships. Like James O'Neill, Ezra Mannon has made himself the hero of his success story. Even though the Mannons operated a successful shipping business before Ezra was even born, he did not rely solely on the family business for financial security. Instead, he successfully participated in communally significant and respected lines of work and professions as a soldier, judge and mayor. However, his insistence that Orin follows the same path and somehow proves himself as a man capable to provide for his family only further degrades their relationship. Conversely, Orin shares O'Neill's hatred of materialistic gain and sees nothing valuable in it. He is wholeheartedly preoccupied with emotional relationships with those around him, especially after the horrors of the Civil War.

Adam Brant is another character from *Mourning* who not only seeks revenge on the Mannons, he also tries to be a self-made man. As already discussed, Adam, like Simeon and Peter, went to California for the Gold Rush. However, his true goal is to be a captain of his own ship even though "[t]here is little of the obvious ship captain about him" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 907). Another character who wants to be an active agent in the success myth through the possession of a property is *Desire*'s Eben. Eben believes his mother's farm belongs to him by right, which, by that logic then, transforms Ephraim from a father figure to an enemy who usurps a space which is not his. But, as we shall see in the last sub-section of Chapter 4.4., both Adam and Eben can never achieve their desire to possess something that belongs to them, something they can call their own, and this is the reality of the myth in O'Neill's view.

### 4.4.2. The Myth of the Self-made Woman

The myths of the self-made man and the self-made woman, in their hegemonic construction, cannot be analyzed on equal plain. As Paul writes:

> […] there seem to be crucial points in which the female success myth departs from the hegemonic male one, to which it appears to be connected asymmetrically and in

> complementary fashion. For one thing, self-made women are not part of the foundational narrative of self-making, and even more recent female exemplars often follow a skewed logic that tends to define female success not in terms of work as productivity, but more often in terms of the kind of work that goes into maintaining and improving one's physical attractiveness. Thus, we may well speak of the prototype of the self-made woman as being shaped somewhat paradoxically by a process of 'othering.' (Paul 398)

With regards to O'Neill and his representation of female characters in many of his plays, including *Desire* and *Mourning*, scholars and critics do not have a uniform opinion, and some of them, such as John Diggins or Rafael Ibe Santos, even suggest that O'Neill himself was not quite sure about women's roles in his plays. Some critics, most notably Judith Barlow, view O'Neill's female characters as stereotypical or even as negative representations of women (often influenced by Freudian thought, or Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean chauvinism) who do not depict active agents in the American society but consuming or exploitative subjects (165–68; Hartman 361; Dowling 265). Whatever the case may be, Barlow brings up a crucial point when she discusses "O'Neill's fascination with the maternal female," claiming it "[…] was as much a part of the cultural and religious air he breathed as it was of the troubled family into which he was born" (169).

Indeed, as Felicia Londré discusses, American plays of the 1920s were mostly interested in the topic of money, but also in the roles women played in a society (71–2). This was the period when the nineteenth Amendment was ratified (which finally allowed women a right to vote),[36] the Roaring Twenties, together with feminist movements, sparked interest in redefining women's roles and place,[37] feminism was gaining ground in larger metropolitan cities across America (Londré 71; Diggins 158). O'Neill in effect reflected the ongoing discussions of many marginalized groups in various plays, including women. Like many women during O'Neill's time, his female characters

[36] Prior to that, as Paul suggests, women were allowed to vote in certain local elections at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in New England region (222).

[37] As Paul relates in her book, even though a marketing ploy, the Miss America pageant first appeared in 1921, and in a significant part shattered the nineteenth-century perception of women as constantly having to appear prudish. Simultaneously, however, it further denigrated women to merely bodies which could be looked at and judged (Paul 400). In its inception, the pageant created the 'Cinderella myth' whereby honest physical labor remained in the male sphere while body-fascination and beauty standards were ascribed to female sphere: "[h]ard at work in her clogs, Cinderella was ignored. Transformed by her satins and slippers, she conquered the world" (Freedman qtd. in Paul 401).

"[…] are locked in a battle between themselves and their societies […]" (Tarish et al. 623). In the context of *Desire* and *Mourning* and the temporal dimension of the nineteenth century, O'Neill's major female characters are never adherents to societal norms and standards of behavior as ascribed to them by the hegemonic power-structures. They are often makers of their own life-choices, and even though some argue that deterministic quality of O'Neill's plays does not allow his female characters to succeed in their intentions, the same applies to his male characters; they all share similar fate. It should also be mentioned that O'Neill did not conceive his (female) characters in a vacuum. Prior to his memorable female characters such as Abbie, Christine and Lavinia, other playwrights and writers (not to mention non-fictional feminist texts) already started to discuss and critique sexist and stereotypical representations of women and the marriage as an institution, most prominently Henrik Ibsen in *A Doll's House* (1879), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Edit Wharton in *House of Mirth* (1905) (Paul 399). In terms of the plays by American women which came before O'Neill's *Mourning* and *Desire*, and which discussed the same issues, the most significant ones include Rachel Crothers's *A Man's World* (1909/10), *He and She* (1920), *Nice People* (1921) and *Mary the Third* (1923); Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), *Woman's Honor* (1918), *Inheritors* (1921), and *The Verge* (1922), to name only a few.[38]

Even when O'Neill's plays are somewhat limited in their formalistic dimension, such as *Desire* and *Mourning* which rely on an already-existing Greek model, O'Neill more often than not subverted important individual characteristics to better reflect and then subvert the reality of either the nineteenth- or twentieth-century America. Nowhere is this better seen than in his characterization of major female personae. Where the ancient Greek female characters from selected tragedies affirm the hegemonic, male-dominated discourse, O'Neill's female characters fight such forces. In *Hippolytus*, Queen Phaedra falls in love with Hippolytus not because of her own device, but because Aphrodite had willed it: "[…] as she saw [Hippolytus], her heart was torn / With great love, *by the working of my will*" (Euripides 14, added emphasis). Therefore, Phaedra in a sense has no other choice but to feel some desire for her stepson, and she despises herself for that throughout the play. On the other hand, her counterpart in *Desire*, Abbie, gives in to her own desire for both the farm and for Eben (Hippolytus). O'Neill's suggestion in this regard might have

[38] For a detailed analysis of feminist themes in the twentieth-century American drama by women playwrights, see Friedman, "Feminism as Theme in Twentieth-Century American Women's Drama."

been that such drives are natural. As Abbie tells Eben: "Ye ben fightin' yer nature ever since the day I come – tryin' t' tell yerself I hain't purty t' ye" (O'Neill, *Desire* 26).

Aeschylus's *Oresteia* likewise exudes patriarchal and gender-biased discourse (even more so than *Hippolytus*), whereby more than one female character espouses the hegemonic mantra of male-dominated discourse. The fact that Agamemnon is murdered *is* a matter of concern, but not as important a matter as is the fact that it was Clytaemestra [*sic.*] – a woman, his wife and mother to his children – who had done the deed.[39] Cassandra, a Trojan priestess proclaims at one point: "[…] this is daring when the female shall strike down the male" (Aeschylus 74); and Athene, who serves as a goddess-judge in the trial of Orestes says: "[…] but for marriage, I am always for the male with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side" (Aeschylus 161). More importantly, however, is that male characters are relegated and gendered as female precisely because of their lack of 'masculine' courage. Such relegation is always viewed as a basis for shame. In *Oresteia,* Aegisthus and Clytaemestra [*sic.*] plot to kill Agamemnon but it is Clytaemestra [*sic.*] who murders her husband instead of Aegisthus as he did not muster the courage to kill the former himself. Orestes's comment on the entire situation projects image of emasculated Aegisthus, as follows: "the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned / of men […] must / go subject to this brace of women [Clytaemestra [*sic.*] and Aegisthus]; since his heart / is female" (Aeschylus 104). In O'Neill's *Mourning*, Christine is always represented as the main agent of Ezra's death: she is the one who devises a successful plan to poison Ezra when Adam could not; she tells Adam how and where to procure the poison; and ultimately, she is the one who poisons Ezra. Moreover, her deeds are never gender-specified and shamed as being done by a woman or that her method of poisoning Ezra was overtly feminine and therefore not 'honorable.'

Most importantly, however, is O'Neill's relegation of hero roles in *Mourning*. The main hero of the play is not Orin (Orestes) but his sister Lavinia (Electra). This reversal in the roles, combined with the tragic quality of Lavinia's character seems to, according to Aurélie Sanchez, "symbolize a new, American tragic identity in the making" (3–4). In that sense, America as a nation shares Lavinia's tragic fate. By situating Lavinia as the main protagonist/antagonist who

[39] Such behavior was looked down upon in ancient Greece, which was reflected in tragedies: "As regards characters, four things should be aimed at – first and foremost, that they be good. […] there is a good woman and good slave, even if the first of these is an inferior class, the other wholly paltry. The second aim is appropriateness: there is courage of character, but it is inappropriate for a woman to be courageous or clever in this way" (Aristotle 79).

tries to avenge her father, which naturally means punishing her mother,[40] O'Neill (in)directly incorporates Electra complex (and in turn Oedipus complex with Orin and Christine) (Miller 106). However, before accusing Lavinia of having some subconscious fascination for and/or attraction toward her father, it should be mentioned that the real reason behind Lavinia's revenge has more to do with the emotional relationship she shared (or did not share) with Adam and Christine. In that sense then, Lavinia's insistence on avenging her father serves as a cover. The truth of the matter is that Lavinia has strong (unreturned) feelings for Adam, while he has feelings for Christine. This is evident in a few moments in the play. For instance, Christine reveals the true intention behind Lavinia's vengeful behavior in the following dialogue:

> CHRISTINE. […] What a fraud you are, with your talk of your father and your duty! Oh, I'm not denying you want to save his pride – and I know how anxious you are to keep the family from more scandal! But all the same, that's not your real reason for sparing me!
>
> LAVINIA. (*Confused – guiltily*) It is!
>
> CHRISTINE. You wanted Adam Brant yourself!
>
> LAVINIA. That's a lie!
>
> CHRISTINE. And now you know you can't have him, you're determined that at least you'll take him from me! (O'Neill, *Mourning* 918)

Moreover, Lavinia's hatred of Christine has more to do with Christine's disregard for Lavinia rather than Lavinia's desire to replace her mother's role because of Ezra. In one scene where Lavinia and Christine discuss their mother-daughter relationship, Lavinia states: "So I was born of your disgust! I've always guessed that, Mother – ever since I was little – when I used to come to you – with love – but you would always push me away!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 917). What comes to the fore in these quotes is Lavinia's deeper psychological dimension. Instead of coloring Lavinia as merely a character embodying Electra complex, these brief lines of monologues and dialogues offer arguments to construct Lavinia as a person deprived of motherly love – love which she so desired – and as a young woman whose mother has yet again taken *her* place with Adam

[40] This is similar to *Oresteia* as Electra also desires to punish her mother and by so doing avenge her father. But whereas Electra relies on Orestes to avenge their father alone, *Mourning*'s Lavinia acts as the main agent of revenge who does not rely on, but goats Orin into being an accomplice in her revenge.

Brant. Slowly but surely, Lavinia, just like Abbie in *Desire*, grows into a character who is willing to manipulate those around her, especially other male characters (Robinson 108–9). Throughout the play, Lavinia controls Orin until he reaches his breaking point; when she sees that her own life is at stake because of Orin's mental state, she ensnares Orin into doing something she cannot:

> LAVINIA. (*Her control snapping – turning on him now in a burst of frantic hatred and rage*) I hate you! I wish you were dead! You're too vile to live! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward!
>
> ORIN. (*Starts back as if he'd been struck, the tortured mad look on his face changing to a stricken terrified expression*) Vinnie!
>
> LAVINIA. I mean it! I mean it! (*She breaks down and sobs hysterically*)
>
> ORIN. […] Another act of justice, eh? You want to drive me to suicide as I drove Mother! An eye for an eye, is that it? […] Yes! That would be justice – now you are Mother! She is speaking now through you! […] (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1042)

Just as some male characters (*Desire*'s Eben for instance) try to escape the seemingly parallel process of identification with their fathers but never can,[41] the same ultimately happens with the female characters. No matter how hard she tries, Lavinia ultimately starts to resemble her mother (physically/psychologically/metaphorically).

### 4.4.3. The Desire to Possess

In *Desire* and *Mourning*, O'Neill represents the unhealthy dose of materialistic fascination of his own time through strong desire to possess. In his discussion about *Desire,* Jeff Kennedy has termed this desire as specifically "American desire to possess" (95–6). The desire of possession mostly revolves around private property, but in few other cases that desire transcends the materialistic quality as certain characters develop desires for other forms of possession, particularly the possession of freedom, including sexual kind. The desire to possess is in that sense not limited to either male or female characters and, most importantly, it is always tied with American individualistic strivings of certain characters to place themselves at the center of their

[41] Throughout the play, Simeon, Peter and Abbie tell both Eben and Ephraim that they are the "spitting image" of one another, but the two men adamantly refuse to accept such notions. This introduces possible Freudian influences of father-son rivalry of the Oedipus complex.

individual narratives. Such a representation is necessarily tied to a form of self-worship (Ibe Santos 112). As Ibe Santos states about American individualism: "[…] wealth or possessions are worshiped and the self is enshrined as the new god. This is consistent with the Lockean principles that underpin American individualism […]" (112). Ultimately, every major character in both plays, be they male or female, exude the same desire. In that sense, every major character in *Desire* and *Mourning* belong to Freud's two kinds of desire which, as Sean Nixon writes, include: "a desire to *have* the other person (which [Freud] calls object cathexis) and a desire to *be* the other person (identification)" (317). More importantly, however, is the reason behind various characters' desires to possess other spaces and people, or to take their place (to be them). Eben's desire to possess is directed by his hatred toward his father. Eben's goal is to have everything his father has or had had. The farm is only one example of this desire. But another example is Minnie. After Simeon and Peter inform Eben that Ephraim had also slept with Minnie, Eben becomes enraged. When he returns from Minnie the next morning, he tells his brothers: "Yes, sirree! I tuk her. She may've been his'n – an' your'n too – but she's mine now!"; and when the brothers jokingly ask if he fell in love with her, Eben states, "What do I care fur her – 'ceptin' she's round an' wa'm? The p'int is she was his'n – an' now she b'longs t' me!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 14). What is evident is that Minnie, and more specifically, her body, becomes a means for Eben to somehow challenge his father's tyranny over Eben's entire life. Minnie, as merely one female character who, it should be mentioned, never represents herself either verbally or physically on the stage, is brought down to the level of a body which can serve as a tool in Eben's revenge. Abbie, on the other hand, is a female character who completely dismantles Eben's dreams of ever owning the farm. Her desire to possess a space of her own means she is willing to assert herself as the farm-owner through her marriage with Ephraim, and she is not afraid to verbally assert her claim: "Hum! (*Her eyes gloating on the house […]*) It's purty – purty! I can't b'lieve it's r'ally mine … (*With the conqueror's conscious superiority*) I'll go in an' look at *my* house" (O'Neill, *Desire* 20–1). Eben is also described with the same possessing quality towards the farm. When Simeon and Peter sell their rights to the farm to Eben, he goes outside of the house and "[…] *stops by the gate and stares around him with glowing, possessive eyes. He takes in the whole farm with his embracing glance of desire*" (O'Neill, *Desire* 16). This debased form of desire to possess a property which is the ultimate goal of the American dream and individual freedom dates back to the first European settlers, but as John Diggins suggests: "in O'Neill's plays, property becomes either a matter of

deprivation or desperation" (16; Greenblatt, *Possessions* 121). In their quest to secure the property for themselves, Abbie and Eben share one common obstacle to the realization of their possessive desires – Ephraim. At one point, Abbie asks Ephraim: "So ye're plannin' t' leave the farm t' Eben, air ye?" to which Ephraim replies: "Leave…? (*Then with resentful obstinacy*.) I hain't a-givin' it t' no one!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 29). At that point, Abbie starts to plot, and she has at her disposal something Eben does not – if she cannot secure the farm for herself through marriage alone, she can most certainly procure it by providing a male heir to Ephraim and the farm:

> ABBIE. (*Suddenly*) Mebbe the Lord'll give us a son.
>
> CABOT. (*Turns and stares at her eagerly*) Ye mean – a son – t' me 'n' yew?
>
> […]
>
> ABBIE. […] I want a son now.
>
> CABOT. […] They hain't nothin' I wouldn't do fur ye then, Abbie. Ye'd hev on'y t' ask it – anythin' ye'd a mind t' –
>
> ABBIE. (*Interrupting*) Would ye will the farm t' me then – t' me an' it? (O'Neill, *Desire* 31–2)

Similarly to how the "oppressing" elms possess feminine qualities, Abbie also becomes associated with the farm in Ephraim's eyes: "Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t' ye in my lonesomeness. […] Me an' the farm has got t' beget a son!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 32). In this game of marriage, Ephraim sees Abbie as merely a body which can procure a male heir to the farm and nothing else. Likewise, Abbie also views Ephraim as her means of possessing the farm as a space she can call her own, and in turn, that space provides her with the freedom few women could experience in the nineteenth century. Contextualizing this desire to possess within the myths of the self-made man and self-made woman, whereas Simeon and Peter can leave everything and travel West as agents in individual success myth, Abbie (as any woman of the time) has a limited choice. She cannot travel West in search of gold, and instead, she travels East, to New England. The farm for Abbie is not only a space which offers some form of freedom and emancipation, but also a space where she (like her male counterparts) can escape her past life and the hardships she has lived through. We get a glimpse of that life when Abbie opens up to Eben and provides him and the audience with information on her background:

ABBIE. (*Calmly*) If cussin' me does ye good, cuss all ye've a mind t'. I'm all prepared t' hae ye agin me – at fust. I don't blame ye nuther. I'd feel the same at any stranger comin' t' take my Maw's place. (*He shudders. She is watching him carefully*.) Yew must've cared a lot fur yewr Maw, didn't ye? *My Maw died afore I'd growed*. I don't remember her none. (*A pause*.) But yew won't hate me long, Eben. I'm not the wust in the world – an yew an' me've got a lot in common. I kin tell that by lookin' at ye. Waal – I've had a hard life, too – oceans o' trouble an' nuthin' but wuk fur reward. *I was a' orphan early an' had t' wuk fur others in others' hums. Then I married, an' he turned out a drunken spreer an' so he had to wuk fur others an' me too agen in others' hums, an' the baby died, an' my husband got sick an' died too*, an' I was glad, sayin' now I'm free fur once, on'y I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' wuk agen in others' hums, doin others' wuk in others' hums till I'd most give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum, an' then your Paw come – (O'Neill, *Desire* 24, added emphasis)

When Abbie states that Eben and she have a lot in common, she most certainly refers to the miserable condition in which they have been placed where neither possesses freedom from oppressive hegemonic forces. But Abbie's oppression operates on a more systemic and larger level precisely because she is a woman living in the nineteenth-century America, where one, and most direct form, of hegemonic oppression comes from her husband. When he finally died, Abbie naively thought she could have her freedom. What she realized quickly, however, is that the larger societal and cultural systems do not allow such forms of freedom to women, especially economically deprived women. Consequently, her only option is to either occupy spaces which are not hers ("others' hums") or to procure her own space, and she can do so predominantly through marriage. What we see in Abbie's case then is the character supposedly reaffirming the systemic limitation of the nineteenth-century America for her own gain. If she cannot (or is not allowed to) procure a space where she can experience the full freedom – the kind of freedom which is allowed to men of that and O'Neill's time – then she has to exploit the existing sexist and oppressive systems to her own gain. Therefore, whereas the myth of the self-made woman suggests women's passive and 'consuming' roles, or the roles by which women exist only to support their male counterparts' desires and endeavors, in O'Neill's plays, we see a complete subversion of the said

myth and all those systems which created and supported such ideological narratives. Given the fact that Eben is a nineteenth-century American man who cannot procure a land of his own and be his own master, it is safe to assume he views himself as, to use Nikčević's term, "a loser." As Nikčević suggests: "[…] it is also often the case that the loser feels like a stranger in the environment in which he has lived all his life. Thus, drama becomes a way of discovering or self-acknowledging one's own status of a loser through two variants. In the first, the loser thinks he deserves more than the environment he lives in provides to him; in the second, he realizes he has failed despite following the instructions of the American Dream […]"[42] (36). Eben resembles 'the loser' who thinks he deserves more than he currently has, but he himself and the larger community recognize him as a loser precisely because of the gendered, male-centered, ideological representation of men-as-property-owners, which translates to men-as-owners-of-their-destiny. Eben does not want to work on a farm which does not belong to him,[43] and he certainly does not want to work for a woman-as-property-owner. This is not to say that Eben has not been forced to perform tasks which hegemonic orders relegate to the female sphere. Indeed, Eben could only then experience his mother's hardships: "It was on'y arter she died I come to think o' it. Me cookin' – doin' her work – that made me know her, suffer her sufferin' she'd come back t' help – come back t' bile potatoes – come back t' fry bacon […]" (O'Neill, *Desire* 10).

Another form of freedom that appeared in various feminist debates was sexual freedom for women, which coalesced with the flapper sub-culture (Streissguth 43; Zeitz).[44] Indeed, O'Neill himself had sexual relations with Louise Bryant, a playwright who wrote for Provincetown Players during the same time O'Neill was with the group, while he was still in an active relationship with Beatrice Ashe (Dowling 143). Before that, he had fathered his first son with Kathleen Jenkins, before they were legally married – showing disregard for strict cultural codes of conduct which limited such situations from happening before marriage (Dowling 53). The repressive normative limitations which were placed on women's bodies had been contested since the latter half of the

[42] "[...] isto je tako čest slučaj da se *loser* osjeća strancem u sredini u kojoj je cijeli život živio. Tako drama postaje put otkrivanja ili priznavanja samom sebi vlastitog *loserstva* u dvije varijante. U prvoj *loser* misli da zaslužuje više nego što mu okolina u kojoj živi pruža, u drugoj vidi da unatoč postupanju po uputama *American Dreama* nije uspio [...]" (translated by E.M.).

[43] As he says at one point: "I'll milk my durn fingers off fur cows o' mine!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 16).

[44] It should be mentioned that the striving for sexual freedom was not considered the main preoccupation for feminists and the suffrage movement in the US (at least during the first-wave), and that the hedonistic aspects of the flapper sub-culture, rather than political and economic freedoms, were often presented (usually by male authors) as the sole aim of feminists' strivings for equality. For further reading see Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s."

nineteenth century with the "New Woman" imagery, as well as during the 1920s, embodied by the flapper imagery (Dicker 26–7; Patterson 16; Raub 112). One of the most significant activists of the early twentieth century was Emma Goldman who discussed the need for women's sexual freedom (Hemmings 44; Dicker 64). However, O'Neill's 'radicality' in his representation of sexual freedom is best seen in the initial reception of *Desire*. After the play's performance in Los Angeles, the cast was arrested and put on trial, where they had to perform scenes deemed explicit and inappropriate. Dowling offers a glimpse of the entire episode and O'Neill's view on the entire situation:

> [Officer Taylor who had attended the performance] then testified in court, "I was painfully shocked, I blushed" during the scene in which Abbie Putnam is wearing a full-length flannel nightgown. […] After the judge ordered the cast to perform scenes in the courtroom, the actors were released from custody. "The injustice of Justine," O'Neill said, "it's big. It's fundamental. Too much can't be said about the farcicality of man-made laws." (Dowling 300)

As discussed in the sub-section 4.4.2. above, Abbie views the physical attraction between her and her step-son Eben as something natural, something that is perhaps bound to happen when two young people live under oppressive conditions where they cannot find any other solace but in each other. Even though Eben tries to fight his urges, Abbie's philosophy is to give in to the yearning. In the *scène à faire* where Eben and Abbie kiss, Eben quickly moves away, to which Abbie replies: "Ye shouldn't, Eben – ye shouldn't – I'd make ye happy!". A few lines later, she becomes more direct: "I hain't a mite afeerd. Ye want me, don't ye? Yes ye do! An yer Paw's son'll never kill what he wants! Look at yer eyes! They's lust fur me in 'em, burnin' 'em up!" (O'Neill, *Desire* 35, 36). It is through these scenes that we understand what Matthew Conlin meant when he stated that *Desire* "is a powerful play of sex-repression and sex-satisfaction" (235). However, it is in *Mourning* that O'Neill explored the topic of sexual freedom on a larger scale, where the desire to possess (male) bodies is more apparent. The most significant example is Christine's and Adam's love affair which sets the entire tragedy in motion.[45] Christine's desire of Adam is directly contrasted with her hatred of her husband: "You've [Lavinia] called me vile and shameless! Well, I want you to know that's what I've felt about myself for over twenty years

[45] If we do not consider the deterministic quality of the play with regards to previous generations' sins.

giving my body to a man I –" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 916). Whereas Lavinia, and the entire society for that matter, view Christine as vile precisely because she has broken her marital obligations and participated in a love affair, Christine herself turns the entire argument on its head and suggests that she felt vile during all those years when she *had adhered* to her marital duties and lived with a man whom she has hated. Paradoxically, the community as well as her daughter do not blame the patriarch for his detachment and for creating a marriage without any form of emotional love. Without Orin for comfort, Christine turned to Adam, who, unlike Ezra, showed her affection and admiration (O'Neill, *Mourning* 917–8). When Lavinia cannot have Adam, or depending on the line of analysis, her father, she turns elsewhere. When in the third and last part of *Mourning* Orin and Lavinia return from their voyage from China and the Islands which they visit on the way back, Orin confronts Lavinia about her growing desire for other men: "[…] do you remember the first mate, Wilkins, on the voyage to Frisco? Oh, I know you thought I was in a stupor of grief – but I wasn't blind! I saw how you wanted him!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1030). And Orin continues to accuse Lavinia of improper conduct once they were on the islands:

> ORIN. […] What a paradise the Islands were for you, eh? All those handsome men staring at you and your strange beautiful hair! It was then you finally became pretty – like Mother! You knew they all desired you, didn't you? It filled you with pride! Especially Avahanni! You watched him stare at your body through your clothes, stripping you naked! And you wanted him!
>
> LAVINIA. No!
>
> ORIN. Don't lie! (*He accuses her with fierce jealousy*.) What did you do with him the night I was sick and you went to watch their shameless dance? Something happened between you! I saw your face when you came back and stood with him in front of our hut! (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1030–1031)

Even though Lavinia assures Orin that nothing happened between her and Avahanni except for a kiss, she later reveals to Peter, who was supposed to marry her shortly after, that, "Orin suspected I'd lusted with him! And I had! […] Why shouldn't I? I wanted him! I wanted to learn love from him – love that wasn't a sin! And I did, I tell you! He had me! I was his fancy woman!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1052). Peter, as a representative of the hegemonic male-centered order which privileges not just the male gender, but also his own white race over others, can only utter that

Lavinia is "bad at heart" and that he hopes she will be punished (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1052–1053). What Orin's and Peter's discourse shows is that Christine's and especially Lavinia's line of conduct of following their own feelings even if they go against systemic and institutionalized normative behavior is not acceptable. They seem to suggest that as women, Christine and Lavinia should know their place and not transgress the established rules that regulate their desires. Throughout the play, many characters, most especially Christine, are described as wearing masks because of their seemingly unmoving and emotionless expressions, which ties the play with ancient Greek drama conventions as well as the strict physical and emotional Puritan credo. Once they surrender to their passions, they are discarded and ostracized. But they refuse any such notion. This is seen in Lavinia's response to Orin: "I'm not your property! I have a right to love!" (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1031).

Ultimately, O'Neill's take on the myths such as the myth of the self-made man and self-made woman, suggests that any effort to follow the success myth and the pursuit of (material) possession of any form necessarily must fail. As O'Neill once stated: "[…] a man wills his own defeat when he pursues the unattainable. But his struggle is his success! … Such a figure is necessarily tragic" (O'Neill qtd. in Dowling 11). Eben and Abbie lose their farm and, what is more, Ephraim himself frees the cows and intends to burn the farm to the ground; Simeon and Peter are likely to fail in their endeavor in the West; Lavinia tries to possess and control men around her but she ultimately fails. Another reason why Lavinia cannot succeed is not only because of the Puritan perception of desire-as-sin, but also because of those characters that haunt the space, which is expressed through Lavinia's *hamartia*:

> Can't you forget sin and see that all love is beautiful! (*She kisses him with desperate passion.*) Kiss me! Hold me close! Want me! Want me so much you'd murder anyone to have me! I did that – for you! Take me in this house of the dead and love me! Our love will drive the dead away! It will shame them back into death! (*At the topmost pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment*) Want me! Take me, Adam! (*She is brought back to herself with a start by this name escaping her – bewilderedly, laughing idiotically.*) Adam? Why did I call you Adam? I never even heard that name before – outside of the Bible! (*Then suddenly with a hopeless, dead finality*) Always the dead between! It's no good trying any more! (O'Neill, *Mourning* 1052)

Lavinia's insistence on love and its all-encompassing beauty falls on deaf ears by Peter, Puritans and all of America which is, like the Mannons, haunted by its past (Stafford 550). Even at the onset of the twentieth century, racial and gender chauvinism of the hegemonic power-structures was the reality of the modern America.

**5. Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to explore and present various influences which affected O'Neill's dramatic scope at large, and his two plays *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* specifically. Those influences vary from cultural to biographical and can be traced as both overt and covert 'breadcrumbs' which O'Neill sprinkled throughout the two plays in question. Most importantly, however, this thesis was interested in O'Neill's representation of American Foundational myths which had originated with the first European settlers in what became the US. More specifically, the thesis focused on the agrarian myth; the myth of the Promised Land; the myth of the American West (Frontier myth) and; the myths of the self-made man and the self-made woman. These Foundational myths bear both political and religious undertones but they have operated, ultimately, as ideological symbology which has been passed down, through different representational modes and systems, from the first European colonial settlers to the present times.

Therefore, the thesis used the phrase "O'Neill's mythopoesis" primarily because of O'Neill's interest and preoccupation with certain American Foundational myths (mentioned in the previous paragraph), but also because the dramatist explored certain ancient Greek sources as ur-texts for *Desire* and *Mourning*. An examination of O'Neill's mythopoesis, that is his process of myth-creation, therefore, must incorporate looking into ancient European mythology that he transposed to a more familiar geo-temporal dimension, which his largely-American audience could, at some level at least, relate to. O'Neill likewise combined those ancient myths with modern American myths which circulated in a myriad of forms in countless cultural texts during O'Neill's time (as they did before him and as they have done after him). Lastly, *O'Neill's* myth-making reflects his insistence of constantly subverting American Foundational myths which then certainly unearths their ideological dimension. As this thesis presented, O'Neill publicly criticized the ideological notions of the American dream with its emphasis on material success and the same criticism can be traced in his dramatic *oeuvre*.

The agrarian myth is one of the oldest Foundational myths which presents a farmland as an autonomous and an almost sovereign space where farmer-as-king rules. Such spaces, therefore,

are fixed, marked and their farmers are uncontested owners of their private properties. Moreover, the mythological/ideological imagery depicts these farmlands as utopian places where the patriarch-farmer, together with his family, plows the arable soil and reaps the benefits of his labor. O'Neill's Cabot farm from *Desire*, which is located in New England, is the antithesis of such an ideological visual representation. The Cabot farm is a gloomy and enclosed space; the house is in disrepair and two large elms cast an 'oppressive' shadow over its roof. Additionally, *Desire*'s various characters constantly feel some other-worldly presence over the entire farmland. More importantly, the hero of O'Neill's agrarian myth is certainly not an uncontested farmer-as-king, as Ephraim's legal/moral grounds for owning the farm are constantly questioned by different characters, particularly by his son Eben. Such son-father rivalry over a territory, especially when combined with Eben's love for his deceased mother and later his step-mother, introduces strong Freudian/Oedipal themes and issues. By comparison, O'Neill moves away from the farm imagery in *Mourning* and represents a town mansion where the Mannon family lives. However, the same oppressive quality of the property, as well as the sinful past of the previous generations, haunt the space which the present Mannons occupy. These two respective properties (the one in *Desire* and the other in *Mourning*) are never autonomous spaces insofar as they are constantly being fought over, and where temporal dimension remains unfixed.

Another Foundational myth, rooted in religious discourse of the first Puritan settlers, is the myth of the Promised Land. One of the ways the first Puritans in the New World dealt with the harrowing conditions that awaited them on the American shores was to repurpose their personal and communal hardships in the New World into a religious narrative of America's Christian origins. In that sense, New England first, and larger America later, became the Promised Land of Biblical proportions. Such a visual representation brings with itself a utopian quality to a certain extent – on the fundamental level, it is a haven for the chosen people, and as such, it is a safe and sacred space. O'Neill, on the other hand, presented his New England in particular and larger America in general as an oppressive and sinful land. Numerous characters, such as Simeon and Peter from *Desire* or Adam, Christine and Orin from *Mourning*, try to escape its grip. Another way O'Neill subverted the myth of the Promised Land in *Mourning* is through the discussions about the Civil War. If America/New England were truly the Promised Land – a haven and a sacred space – how can there be any form of bloodshed on its soil, especially the bloodshed of the fellow-countrymen and women? If Aeschylus's *Oresteia* incorporates the discourse about the Trojan War

in order to present the victorious Agamemnon who finally returns home a hero, O'Neill's discourse about the Civil War is much more pessimistic. Religious representatives in the form of prophets are always part of the religious narratives relating Biblical promised lands, and O'Neill's 'flawed' and sinful 'Promised Land' incorporates subverted prophetic voice through Ephraim Cabot who represents Puritan non-conformist philosophy. Moreover, certain characters, such as Eben, Christine, and Lavinia, completely refuse to abide by the dogmatic principles of Puritan/religious system of belief.

The myth of the American West has served American domestic and foreign policy as an ample driving force in the never-ending expansionistic ambitions of the US for centuries. The West – the frontier – thus stands for a specific ideological goal rather than a specific location. In his recent book entitled *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*, Greg Grandin argues that the frontier, in that sense, stands for any form of American expansion and all the manifold forms of its expansionistic methods, which includes for instance the Vietnam War and every other military intervention. In *Desire* and *Mourning*, the American West stands as yet another Promised Land with strong capitalistic undercurrents, which is expressed through distorted drive for materialistic goals and easy money. This is best seen in the characters of Simeon and Peter who dream of going to California and experiencing the Gold Rush for themselves. Instead of spending their lives on an oppressive farm, enclosed by stone walls, the two brothers want to participate as agents of their individualisms and gain financial security through highly unreliable sources which California gold-mines in reality were. Moreover, the American West was borne out of the male-dominated and male-centered modes of discourse and representations. As such, the western frontier is a space where men could try their luck, whereas women, such as Abbie, have more luck in New England.

Finally, O'Neill's critique of American individualism as expressed through the image of the self-made man directly relates to the skewed desire for materialistic possessions. What O'Neill ultimately shows, through *Desire* and *Mourning*, is that any such desire rooted in greed fails in the end. No matter how hard he tries, Eben ultimately cannot become the sole owner of the private property that is the Cabot farm. All those characters that do possess some property, like Ephraim does, in the end realize the futility of any form of materialistic possession. O'Neill seems to suggest that any effort which the myth of the self-made man propagates, which necessarily includes unyielding participation in the race to the top, is an ideological construct that has no basis in reality

for the large majority of ordinary people. On the other hand, the myth of the self-made woman propagated the subservient role of women who had to rely on their patriarchal masters for any form of comfort or success. Such a myth also incorporated all too familiar gender-biased imagery which served as the set of normative rules women were supposed to adhere to in their everyday lives. Such imagery dictated how women were to behave, dress, talk and alike. O'Neill subverted such imagery and represented his female characters as relentless fighters for their individual success stories. This is best seen in the characters of Abbie and Christine. Female characters additionally shatter the gender-biased stereotypical representations through their discourse of sexual freedom. Here again, Abbie, together with Lavinia (and Christine), serve as suitable examples. In the end, O'Neill's subverted myths must have a tragic ending for every major character, which brings a dose of reality in the American mythological/ideological discourse.

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