CHAPTER II

DEATH WISH

DIGGING THE ROOTS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

Now more than ever seems it rich to die
To cease upon the midnight with no pain
In such an ecstasy.

Jamie quotes Keats in A Moon for the Misbegotten.

Death is indeed eternally accepted as a dreadful event. And no thought perhaps weakens man's mind so much as does the contemplation of death. However the nineteenth century brought to the fore Freudian concept of death drive (or more simply the death wish) by which every living being has a tendency to destroy itself. It arose strong ethical and emotional reactions, both against and in favour, throughout the world. The death-fever is still on. This chapter will study the background of Eugene O'Neill's life leading to his obsession with death.

Sigmund Freud described the death drive first in **Beyond the Pleasure Principle** (1920). He postulated that the death instinct is a biological drive to return to the inorganic – the organism reacting to any distrubance to the status quo. The life instinct aims at combining elements into bigger units; it aims at life and propagation. The death instinct, on the contrary, aims at destructuralisation, dissolution and death.

Birth confronts us with the experience of needs. There can be two reactions to this experience, both of which are invariably present in us, although one may dominate the other. One, to seek satisfaction for the needs; and the other, to annihilate the need itself. The first drive is life promoting leading to object seeking, love and eventually object concern. The other drive is destructive. To annihilate the need it fully expresses in annihilating the perceiving and experiencing self as well as anything that is perceived.

The organism may try to defend itself against death drive by deflecting

it to other objects — so that it becomes an aggression. But destructiveness to objects and to self may be very intimately combined — hardly distinguishable from one another. Freud was of the opinion that the death instinct mostly operates silently within the body, seldom with pure manifestations. And libidinisation and sexualisation are invariably manifestations of the death drive. As we may see later both in the life of Eugene and his elder brother Jamie, a continuous pursuit of sexual experiences may be the mask. Here the libido is used to cover up sadism and masochism. The conscious, sensuous pleasure masks the deeper pleasure in inflicting pain and destruction upon others as well as upon the self.

There is also a hidden pleasure in seeking, getting or inflicting pain. In the psychological conflict of life and death drive, there is always the question of triumph — who wins? In enjoying pain the death drive seems to assure itself of triumph over the life-force. Also like any other drive, the death drive seeks satisfaction. And satisfaction of the death drive, short of death, should be in pain.

Eugene O'Neill felt through his life being " . . . in love with death"[1]. However, death drive has assumed other shapes. Consciously or unconsciously the sameness or oneness with mother earth or vast ocean is one such idealised expression of the death drive. The "Nirvana" principle too, beneath its apparent search for constancy actually idealises the death by its rejection of any distrubance that is life. This is how Eugene O'Neill felt of

the ocean (through Edmund Tyron in **Long Day's Journey Into Night**) : "I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it and for a moment I lost myself — actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of man, to life itself !"[2]

The role of the external world in structuring a personality, however has also been recognised by the psychologists. The innate drive is always moulded by environmental factors. A significant factor at the early stage of development is the unfolding of the infant-mother relationship.

Infancy presages a basic trust when the mother's concern for the baby communicates to the later a growing sense of faith and assurance. As the baby feels repeatedly that it is loved, cared, fed, clothed — it gradually begins to like the world as a friendly dependable place. If the reverse happens, i.e. if the baby is unfortunately rarely picked up, seldom attended to while crying, or not fed while hungry — the baby develops a "basic distrust" of a cruel world. Only attending to physical needs even is not enough. If the baby feels that it is not loved or wanted, this harsh experience is carried out to the future man making him apprehensive, fearful, even selfish and hostile to others. This has relevance to Eugene's child' ›od.

Then comes the question of identity — what kind of a person one likes

to be. The primary model is selected from the parent of the same sex — usually a girl plays the role of a mother in her little playhouse, equally good or grudging, and the boy that of a father, equally generous or miser. In this mimicry is involved the psychology of the would be mother or father. Confusion of identity occurs if the primary model is felt unwanted or altogether lacking. A boy child whose father is perenninally out, idealises woman power due to the pervading female dominance in the household. Frequently such a boy feels shaky as a male and comes out as an unconfident man always seeking the confident mother role among the female partners. We may see later how this insecurity and the fantasy of mother power (with its invariable libidinisation) haunted Eugene O'Neill throughout his life. His writings bear testimony to that.

Further this discussion needs a reference to God as perceived by Eugene O'Neill. He came of an Irish Catholic family. Catholicism is not a mere individual perception, but a cultural belief. It starts teaching about God long before any active conscious mind develops. Man's hopes, fears and aspirations centre round his belief in that unseen force called God. Gradually the conscious mind of man notices the sharp contradiction between the harsh reality on the one hand and the presence of a benevolent God on the other.

The young Eugene O'Neill had the spiritual crisis early following the illness of his mother and the knowledge of her addiction. Here is how he dramatized his crisis in **Days Without End** in the story of John Loving:

JOHN. Then his mother . . . was taken ill. And the horrible fear came to him that she might die, too.

LOVING. It drove the young idiot into a panic of superstitious remorse. . . .

JOHN. But he still trusted in His Love. . . .

LOVING. So the poor fool prayed and prayed and vowed his life to piety and good works! . . . if his mother were . .

JOHN. His mother died. And in a frenzy of insane grief —

LOVING. No! In his awakened pride he cursed his God and denied Him, and in revenge, promised his soul to the Devil — on his knees, when everyone thought he was praying![3]

Carlotta Monterey, Eugene O'Neill's third wife described him as "a black Irishman, a rough, tough black Irishman"[4] whereby hinting at that he lost faith in God. But Eugene O'Neill never became truly an atheist. The puritanism of Catholic indoctrination was always deep in him. He never could conquer the secret dread of doing penance for one's sins. Rather his guilt feeling for his apparent loss of faith further fuelled his death wish. Death wish has been a continuity in all his plays. In this dissertation we have studied primarily the one-acters against this background :

"Death is final release, the warm, dark, peace of annihilation."[5] (John Loving in Day's Without End).

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In **The Lay of the Singer's Fall** (1912) an immature work of Eugene O'Nill, the playwright had unlocked his heart :

Till the Devil murmured with sneering breath,
'what think you the blind skies hide?
There is nothing sure after death but death :'
— And the soul of the Singer died —

And the lips of the Singer were flecked with red
And torn with a bitter cry,
' When Truth and Love and God are dead
it is time, full time, to die!'
And the Devil in triumph chuckled low,
'There is always suicide,
It's the only logical think I know'.
And the life of the Singer died.[6]

Eugene O'Neill has often been charged by critics with exploiting murder, suicide, violence and insanity. Insanity figures in a number of his plays. In **Ile** a whaling captain's wife is driven mad by her isolated life in Arctic waters. In **where the Cross is Made**, a short play and **Gold**, a full-length treatment of the same story, a sea captain with the guilt of murder becomes hopelessly obsessed with a dream of buried treasure. In **Strange Interlude** the heroine resorts to adultery to have a child on learning of hereditary insanity in her

husband's family. In **The Iceman Cometh** a man who has slain his wife is on the verge of lunacy. In **More Stately Mansions** a fastidious soul at odds with reality ends in self-willed madness, while her son, who is at war with himself, narrowly escapes her fate. In **All God's Chillun Got Wings** a young wife breaks down and imagines herself a child again. Arthur H. Nethercot in his article, "Madness in the plays of Eugene O'Neill" had observed that O'Neill's interest in the subject of madness might have been personal. He actually advocated that O'Neill might have been a borderline madman (159-60).

If we look into O'Neill's family, this tendency of self destruction is seen rooted in the genes. Death wish in Eugene O'Neill was a part of the family history. Ella O'Neill was herself addicted to morphine and attempted suicide once in the foggy summer night of 1903 in New London. "It was right after that", O'Neill recollects through Edmund in **Long Day's Journey Into Night**, ". . . Papa and Jamie decided they couldn't hide it from me any more. Jamie told me. I called him a liar; I tried to punch him in the nose. But I knew he wasn't lying. . . . God, it made everything in life seem rotten!".[7] Eugene O'Neill tried his own part by taking veronal tablets in a cubicle in the hotel 'Jimmy the priest's" in 1912 to end his life. That episode has been drawn by him later (through Michael Cape, a playwright, in **welded**)—" from now on Hell is my home!. . . . There's no freedom — while I live . . . Then, why —?. . . An end of loathing — no wounds, no memories — sleep!"[8]

The immediate precipitating stress for the suicidal attempt was his experience of first marriage. He seduced Kathleen Jenkins to marry him and

had a baby when he was only twenty one years old. His escapism got better of him and he tried to shake off the responsibilities. He was married on October 2, 1909 and sailed alone to Hondurus soon on October 16, 1909 in a gold search expedition. After being sent back from Honduras due to malaria, he was again on board of the ship "Charles Racin" bound for Buenos Aires. Kathleen with her son was left behind. Kathleen's family was generous in ultimately accepting the divorce without seeking alimony or support for the child. But Eugene had to take part in an arranged show of adultery in a brothel to get the divorce, as this was the only basis for divorce in New York State that time. In his own peculiar way of seeing life, he felt himself humiliated and degraded and tried suicide.

They had a son by this time, Eugene O'Neill Jr. The playwright had no touch with his son right from latter's birth (except a fragmentary visit when the baby was asleep in his cradle). Eugene O'Neill, Jr. became a brilliant classical scholar later. Then true to genesis, he committed suicide on Sept. 25, 1950 slashing his wrists. Eugene O'Neill's second son Shane was picked up on a dope charge in 1948 and from that time on was known as an incurable addict. Shane too followed the fate of committing suicide on June, 22, 1977.

Now we will proceed to study the life of Eugene O'Neill to see how the blend of genetic seeding, the innate drive and the environmental upbringing went a long way in surfacing death wish throughout his works till **The Iceman Cometh**.

Early in 1885 Mrs. Mary Ellen O'Neill (Ella) was on tour with her actor husband James O'Neill in the West leaving her sons with her mother in their New York apartment. There she got the news that her six years old first son Jamie had contracted measles. One year old infant, Edmund too had been infected with it. Ella packed off immediately but, before she could leave, a telegram reached there with the death news of Edmund.

Ella was psychologically very upset following this incident. So, in 1987, Mr. James O'Neill took his wife to a grand tour in Europe, hoping that this tour would improve upon her chronic low spirit. On returning home Ella learned the news of the bereavement of her dearest mother Mrs. Bridget Quinlan in her absence.

Mr. James O'Neill, always out on tour with his theatre company, thought of another child to keep Ella busy, a way to remain oblivious of the sad memory of losses. Ella with great objection to her husband's suggestion at last yielded to his wish with the hope that her next child might be a girl.

During pregnancy, some doctors prescribed her morphine probably to allay her anxiety, fear and loneliness. Ella continued to take it on her own being pleased with its miraculous effect and eventually turned into an addict. Here is an account of the matter in **Long Day's Journey Into Night** — "I was so healthy before Edmund was born. . . . But bearing Edmund was the last straw....[Significantly in the play Eugene takes the name of the dead brother, Edmund]...It was n't until after Edmund was born that I had a single

grey hair. Then it began to turn white".[9] "He has never been happy,...I was afraid all the time I carried Edmund. I knew something terrible would happen."[10]

Ella under the spell of morphine, could hardly look after the baby. So, the responsibility of bringing up the baby fell on a hired nurse, an English woman called Sarah Jane Bucknell Sandy.

Eugene was found to be a child prone to nervousness; always getting upset and frightened by nothing at all; terrified of the dark unless his mother (by which he meant Sarah) was close by. Few drops of whisky mixed with water was administered to this boy by his father as an anecdote.

James O'Neill was touring perennially and soon after this birth the family grouped together to carry on their life on wheels. Along with the actor, the whole family trouped and traversed. The baby grew up in this rootless existence — always changing places, and persons. The father too was changing. James O'Neill had a busy schedule. The baby saw him everyday in different dresses as different persons. We can contemplate that some of the mannerisms of the different personalities he acted were even reflected in daily family life of actor James O'Neill while further confusing the baby. Born in the Barrett House, a hotel at the north-east corner of 43rd street and Broadway, Eugene O'Neill exclaimed before his death, "I knew it. Born in Goddam hotel room and dying in a hotel room!"[11]

Sarah Jane Bucknell Sandy, Eugene's substitute mother, had her own

share of grievances against life. She was the oldest of four children of a hard – pressed family bearing the burden of the whole family from an early age. As a result, while other members of her family grew to attain sociable positions, she lived throughout the life of a governess. She was a perfect governess, however, and genuinely devoted herself to the child. But she had a taste for the macabre and the supernatural. An interviewer of O'Neill had expressed, "she had a penchant for horrible tales whether culled from the newspapers or her imagination, and for hours she would regale little Eugene with the sordid episodes, from the latest murder to the furthest terror that her whimsy could contrive. To supplement this the nurse would often take little Eugene to ghastly museums where were displayed the wax effigies of criminals and malformed dumies."[12]

O'Neill's own account in his notes, "Mother love — meaning — Nurse love — world of reality practically unrealised — in background–terror of it emphasised by the nurse's murder stories — terror of dark alone but delight in it when feeling protecting influence (Mother – Nurse – Nuns) about."[13]

Mother Ella was always elusive, and at times stranger under the spell of morphine. The child worshipped his mother, but a distant mother to whom he stretched his arms in vain. Immediate protecting influence was Sarah Sandy — affectionate, able, confident. Sarah planted in him the fantasy of mother power (including her voluminous physique) and also the notion that the world is a terrible place. She stayed with the O'Neills for seven years, the first

formative seven years of Eugene O'Neill. Her influence over Eugene O'Neill can be understood from a later life incident when the playwright directed actress Cybel playing the Mother Earth role in **The Great God Brown** that she should gain weight by several pounds before the stage show.

Whenever Eugene tried to escape from the horror of reality, subconsciously he searched for this mother figure. Firm and sturdy Sarah loomed larger in the light of Ella's short-comings — even the child felt the real mother too frail, too out of touch to cling to or to depend.

Here is **The Great God Brown** — (— Cybel takes off her mask and sits down by Brown's head. He makes an effort to raise himself toward her and she helps him, throwing her kimono over his bare body, drawing his head on to her shoulder).

BROWN. (Snuggling against her — gratefully) The earth is worm.

CYBEL. (Soothingly, looking before her like an idol) Ssshh!

Go, to sleep, Billy.

BROWN. Yes, mother.[14]

One may note the other side of the same coin in **The Iceman Cometh**:

PARRITT. . . . I've never been any good at deciding things. . . . you remember what mother's like, Larry. She makes all the decisions. She's always decided what I must do. She does n't like anyone to be free but herself. [15]

So, this was the account of Eugene's childhood. Next we may examine Jamie's (Eugene's elder brother) influence on him. This relation was more complex and more enduring.

Jami (James O'Neill, Jr.) never could free himself from the oedipus complex. His mother Ella was the only woman he could love in his life. So the attitude towards his father was an irreconcilable hostility. Of course, Ella herself played a big part in this. Always trying to identify herself with virgin Mary (she wanted to be a nun initially — and in **Long Day's Journey Into Night**, O'Neill calls her "Mary" rather than "Ella"), she nurtured a feeling of guilt related to sex. Naturally it was projected upon her husband. Her illness, her drug addiction might have a subconscious motive to keep herself free from sexual obligations. Also to justify, she played the role of a neglected housewife. She accused James O'Neill, Sr. in all possible ways — miser; not devoted to family; worst still, causing her drug addiction by calling a cheap quack (instead of a competent doctor to attend her in her third child birth), who gave her mophine. Probably this obsession with virginity prompted her to hope for a girl child through whom she could relieve her early years. James O'Neill, in turn, was a considerate and affectionate man. Probably too affectionate to resist any temparamental outburst of Ella O'Neill. And Ella could successfully implant her misgivings against her husband into her sons' minds.

Here is Mary Tyrone in **Long Day's Journey Into Night** : "I know

why he wants you sent to a sanatorium. To take you from me! He's always tried to do that. He's been jealous of everyone of my babies! He kept finding ways to make me leave them. . . ."[16]

James' rebellion against his father shattered every dream that his father dreamt of him. He was generously gifted by nature — personable, quick-witted, brilliant academic performance in the Notre Dame and afterwards at St. John's Preparatory School — but himself deliberately spoilt it all. He started drinking and womanizing very early, became a regular visitor to the brothels. He was expelled from St. John's school in December, 1899, only a few months before he was to become a graduate. His father tried everything for him to make a good living and eventually he failed. At last James O'Neill Sr. installed him in the theatre. Ironically enough he showed some aptitude for acting, won cordial words from the reviewers initially. In **The Travelling Salesman** independently acting out of his father's towering presence he had consistent good performance. But then, the animosity towards his father took better of him and he used to spoil the performances not only of his own but also of his father and co-actors. He used to come to the stage drunk; sometimes wearing " . . . tights without undergarments, leaving his genitals clearly defined".[17] Above all, always belittling James Sr's achievements — "You call that work?"[18] May be, there was an undercurrent of sympathy in all these from his mother. The father, as usual, was always a bewildered visitor.

James Tyron exclaims in the final moment of **Long day's Journey**

Into Night as Jamie lies drunk and unconscious in front of him :

"A sweet spectacle for me! My first–born, who I hoped would bear my name in honor and dignity, who showed such brilliant promise!"[19]

Jamie's revenge on his father did not end with his own destruction. He had to corrupt Eugene too. He once remarked, "Gene learned sin more easily than other people. I made it easy for him."[20] He showed Eugene the path to alcohol and the path to brothels too. He took Eugene first to a whorehouse in New York, still immature for the experience. Not content with these, Jamie had to incite the rebellion in Eugene against his father.

Actually it may be seen as Jamie's revenge on Eugene too; his incestuous desire towards his mother could not bear any rival. Any other male member of the family became a subject of attack. There could be an earthly reason as well. It can be summerised as follows :–

Jamie imparted his measles to infant Edmund. Edmund died. Ella and James tried for another baby, to make up for the loss. Eugene's birth led Ella to morphine addiction. Ella was doomed for life. Jamie could never forget his role in initiating the whole event. To get out of it, he projected his guilt feeling on Eugene as his birth was the instant inciting factor. Eugene, again, was an easy prey. He never could free himself from this guilt complex, — fears about his mother; fears that his family secret might anytime be exposed to the neighbour; and further he was haunted by the feeling that his mother's

lapses might overpower him anyday.

This is what Eugene O'Neill conceived of Jamie's motive later in **Long Day's Journey Into Night** :

"My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at time, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobs they really are. . . . wanted you to fail. . . .I made you! You're my Frankenstein!"[21]

In numerous autobiographical characters O'Neill recreated Jamie and himself. It may be very difficult to determine everytime which portrait represents himself and which one Jamie's.

Generally Eugene got the innocent look of a poet and Jamie that of a destructive cynic. This could well be a projection. As we discussed earlier, the death wish can take many forms. When it was an escapism — return to mother earth or belonging to the vast ocean — it was the innocent poet that Eugene created from his depth be it Robert Mayo in **Beyond the Horizon** or Edmund Tyron in **Long Day's Journey Into Night**. Let us note the feature of Robert in **Beyond the Horizon** :

"Robert Mayo is discovered sitting on the fence. He is tall, slender young man of twenty three. There is a touch of poet about him expressed in

his high forehead and wide dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin, — turns his head toward the horizon, gazing out over the fields and hills. His lips move as if he were reciting something to himself."[22]

In the end Robert exclaims :

"I'm happy at last — free – free! — freed from the farm — free to wander on and on — eternally ! . . . Is n't it beautiful beyond the hills? . . . I've own to my trip — the right of release — beyond the horizon!"[23]

When the death wish was expressed in a manner of destruction, it was frequently projected on Jamie. The audience also fell prey to this. Both the command of O'Neill on his medium and the myth surrounding his family autobiography make the audience believe that whenever Andrew comes as ". . . opposite type to Robert . . . "[24] — it must be Jamie. But the creator lives in every character of his creation. At the most the external appearance may be that of Jamie's to produce the counter-effect. Andrew is " . . . handsome in a large-featured manly fashion. . . . "[25] But, then, who is Reuben Light in Dynamo? He is seventeen, tall and thin. His eyes are large, shy and sensitive. His mouth is like his father's. His Jaw is stubborn, his thick hair curly and reddish – blond. He speaks timidly and hesitatingly, . . ." [26]

This stubborn jaw is a hint that Reuben has the capacity to seduce and kill his girl friend Ada at the end. To some it may be a departure from the

innocent Eugene portrait. But this is what Carlotta Monterey, Eugene's third wife reminisces about him, "He was a simple man. . . . He was the most stubborn man I've ever known."[27] And Louis Sheaffer's description of young O'Neill almost approaches to that of Reuben Light, "In one respect his appearance was deceptive. Though he was everything he seemed – shy, apprehensive on approach, tremblingly sensitive to the world — he had a streak of stubborness that partook of both his father's peasant durability and his mother's inflexible nature."[28]

So Eugene O'Neill was living both the lives — or dying both the deaths — in his creation. This Jamie was almost his double identity. As Travis Bogard rightly points out, it is very difficult to categorise, "which is the self? which is the double?"[29] Eugene might have a subconscious feeling that the destructive element in him was Jamie's creation. And a guilt feeling might be in work too. So the negative role was frequently projected on Jamie but this was mere a projection. The division between the two identities was also much superfluous. Eben Cabot in **Desire Under The Elms**, Reuben Light in **Dynamo** or Orin Mannon in **Mourining Becomes Electra** frequently appreared as condensation of Jamie and Eugene together.

Projection of identity had other faces too. In **Long Day's Journey Into Night** Jamie exclaims of his mother, "I'd never dreamed before that any woman but whores took dope:"[30] This was the mother-whore infatuation which led Jamie to womanizing with "Fat-violet" in the local brothel. Almost as a sequel, Jamie appears in **A Moon for the Misbegotten** searching for a kind

of mother-whore, and ultimately is satisfied by giant Josie Hogan. Biographical evidence of real Jamie's behaviour after his mother's death gives credence to this story. But who created Cybel, the "full-breasted and wide-hipped"[31] giant prostitute cum mother earth in **The Great God Brown**? Whose is the gratification when Eugene observes of Josie Hogan "There is passion in her kiss but it is a tender, protective maternal passion, which he responds to with an instant greatful yielding".[32] Do not those feminine figures conform to Sarah Sandy? Eugene O'Neill himself longed for the mother throughout his life in his bedmates — he called Carlotta "Mamma" — but in the play projected this longing in Jamie. Eugene might have some inhibition in facing the truth — this weakness was betrayd repeatedly — might be due to the virgin-Mary guilt complex about the sex imparted from Ella. In **Long Day's Journey Into Night** (committed to truth), he omits his marriage and divorce to Kathleen Jenkins. And **In A Moon for the Misbegotten** Josie Hogan pretends to be a whore, but is really a virgin! What real Jamie was in life is not important – he definitely had an overt Oedipal drive – but this is Eugene's search for the mother-whore reflected in Jamie's characterisation.

Here a little elaboration on Oedipus-drive may be relevant, which, according to Freud, develops during the third to the fifth years in the children of both sexes. In this situation the child's libido is directed towards the parent of the opposite sex. The other parent is seen as a rival and feelings of hostility engendered. The child anticipates retaliation because of its own aggressive feelings and in boys they take the form of a castration complex. Freud regarded

the Oedipus situation as being prepotent in the development of character and personality and also for later neurosis and symptom formation.

Freud had been part of O'Neill's knowledge since the early days of Provincetown Players, when Cook and his wife Susan Glaspell had written a satire on the pretensions of Freudian cultists, called **Suppressed Desires**. But there was direct involvement too. In 1926, he had taken part as a subject in Dr. G.V. Hamilton's research into marital problems and at the conclusion had received a brief "Psychoanalytic" counselling from Hamilton. The sessions were conducted for six weeks in the traditional manner of Freudian analysis, with the patient on a black leather couch. Although the principal matter of concern was to put an end to O'Neill's excessive drinking, O'Neill told Macgowan that he was suffering from an Oedipus Complex.[33] The Freudian world was professionally opened to him through Hamilton.

Hamilton's survey, **A Research in Marriage** was published in 1929, the year O'Neill began serious work on **Morning Becomes Electra**. Perhaps more readily available to him, was a popular book derived from the same series of interviews and written, in collaboration with Hamilton, by Kenneth Macgowan, who like O'Neill had offered himself as a subject for the interviews. **What is Wrong With the Marriage** also published in 1929, was essentially Macgowan's book. In a preface, Hamilton acknowledges that Macgowan had made himself a member of the research team and that he had contributed greatly to the analysis of the materials for their human rather than for their criminal value.

Chapter IX of Macgowan's book is titled "Oedipus Rex"; Chapter X is "The Tragedy fo Electra". Macgowan defines the Oedipus Complex in these terms:

"You get a mother complex, in most cases, because your mother loved your father too little and loved you too much. It was as though she said at your birth : 'I don't love my husband, so I'm going to concentrate all my affection on this man-child of mine'. . . . The kind of mother who creates this complex — which Freud named for the Greek King Oedipus who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother — not only develops too great a love for her in her son. She goes on cultivating this abnormal fervor, and dominating his life . . . so tenaciously that often he cannot look on any other woman with longing — or at any rate with enough longing to make him break his chains."[34]

We can assume, these helped O'Neill in shaping the Electra drama and by the way, making him more aware of his own Oedipal drive. Libidinisation is an invariable accompaniment of death drive. But also the suppressed catholic faith in Eugene didn't allow him to face it straight.

So up till now we have witnessed the sordid scenario : mother, a woman with guilt and drug-addiction; father having rootless existence in his profession as well as in family; and elder brother, a confirmed cynic with a very strong

love-hate relationship towards Eugene. Such a dismal state of things went a long way in breeding despair and darkness.

If we move from the immediate environment to the big outer world, the same saga continues but with a difference. After all life is a mixed affair for all with joy, sorrow, gain and pain making a checkerboard pattern. But the inner death drive and the aggression always made Eugene bring out the worst in every circumstance. If it was not there, he invented it and then romanticised it. The following account will bear testimony to this.

Agnes Boultion O'Neill, second wife of Eugene O'Neill wonders in his **Part of a Long Story** (1958): "what made you what you are, what were the hidden stigmata that had wounded you and at times bled with drops of bitterness!"[35] Louis Sheaffer reports, "Many persons, among them Hamilton Basso, would be struck by the piercing sadness of his large dark eyes.[36] Basso was reminded of the legend "that the people of Ravenna always gave Dante a wide berth when they passed him on the street. The Ravenesse, among whom Dante spent his last years, felt that the poet's burning, baleful eyes had actually looked upon the horrors of hell and that his dark complexion was the result of his being scorched in its sulphurous overheated atmosphere. That's the way I sometimes feel about O'Neill".[37]

It's not that Eugene grew up perpetually unhappy. There were good times. James O'Neill, Sr. was always a caring father. He never failed to spend money for his family. Ella was always expensively dressed. Eugene and Jamie

in their extreme rebellion continued to subsist on regular flow of cash from James. Reading books, wandering across the wharf, the waters of the Thames, thrilling events of the Boat Day — all brought sweet moments for him. How does then one justify — "It was a great mistake, my being born a man. . . . I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong. . . . "[38]

The deeper discontent, however, cannot be overlooked. More than the father's profession, the rootlessness was ingrained in the Irish heritage. Immigrants are always insecure. Back home, the Irish were perpetually under the English oppression. In America too, they faced poverty, prejudice and discrimation. This sense of insecurity led James O'Neill, Sr. in a constant groping for financial stability. This sense of not "belonging" to a society where he actually is, haunted Eugene throughout his life. Eugene O'Neill could never forgive the provincialism of New London he experienced. The Irish family was never accepted by the puritan New Londoners. Particularly because James did not follow other Irishmen to settle in east New London, he bought a home on Pequet Avenue within snobbish wealthy Americans themselves. That James O'Neill was invited to join the leading citizen's club, The Thames Club could not mark the general hatred towards the Irish — "It was n't a friendly town".[39]

One must also accept the reality that the total family sensed failure in life. This penetrated deeply into the subconscious state of Eugene. Ella O'Neill

thought that she had spoilt her life — no, it was James O'Neill who spoiled her – probably she could have blossomed into something else – a nun perhaps. James O'Neill always thought that he had spoilt his promise as an actor – no, it was the popularity of **Count of Monte Cristo** drama that spoiled – he " . . . could have been a great Shakespearean actor. . . . "[40] The degree of self-deception is notable. Failure itself may be excusable, but not the excuses. Thus the 'hopeless hope' took off.

His schooling, Louis Sheaffer describes as "Eugene in Exile". But life at the school St. Aloysius was like as in most other Catholic schools. Eugene had plenty of leisures to lose himself in day dreams and reading. Ella used to visit him at times. Eugene himself never communicated with others. Even later when he had enough school mates to overcome the lonely child existence, he sat along the side-lines of fun. Arthur Walter, an instructor wildly liked by youngsters in Betts Academy later, found difficult to draw Eugene out. "He was a fine student when he wanted to be' ",[41] and he did well at school. That he felt "abandoned and unloved", was the glimpse of the inner death drive. He was always looking beyond the horizon out somewhere. The monotony and disciplined routine of a school was a direct antithesis to his escapism. Whatever outer event we may account for his growing rebellion, it had its roots within. While law is life, lawlessness is Eugene O'Neill. He started drinking and going to whore-house from his fifteenth year. He was dropped from Princetown College in 1907 and his academic carrier thus came to an end.

Eugene had his own versions too. Life was "burdensome" at St. Aloysius, "pallid and futile" at Betts Academy. And "Princeton was all play and no work". "Why can't our education respond logically to our needs?"[42] This was the projection of the guilt feeling. Perhaps he came nearer to the truth when he told "I am perhaps excusing myself for the way I loafed and fooled and got as much fun and as little work as I could. . . ."[43]. He even despised other boys who took active interest in the proceedings of the school. He thought them "immature", "stupid" and lacking the conviction or courage to rebel against these mindless monotony. Eugene was thus following the shadows of dissatisfaction of Ella and James O'Neill. Envy was the natural outcome.

His behaviour with girls always followed a pattern. We would discuss it later. Meanwhile, what did he actually see in life? Admittedly, he saw the dregs. And dregs were always there. Eugene searched it out and felt homely there. He could not tolerate successful people. Outer success was in his perception marker of inner bankruptsy. "The people who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle-classers"[44]. Anybody having enough money was a subject of attack. Even his father's success as Count of Monte Cristo was "easy". Failures were his favourites.

So, it would not be surprising that he tried to romanticise the dreg throughout and made it look bleaker. In October 1909. Eugene went to Honduras as member of a gold searching team in the sands of the river Rio Seale. Life was tough there for all but this was what he wrote on Christmas

Day to his parents, " . . . I give it as my fixed belief that God got his inspiration for Hell after creating Honduras."[45]

His own account of his first sea-voyage on the ship 'Charles Racine' to Buenos Aires bears further testimony to this false romanticisation : "I struck up one day by the wharf in Boston with a bunch of sailors. . . . they took me that afternoon to the captain. Signed up, and the next thing we were off".[46] The facts are that he was never a member of the racine crew nor the whole thing happened so automatically. It was arranged and a paid voyage by James O'Neill, Sr. — part of the plan to keep Eugene separated from his wife Kathleen — and an agreement was made by the father with the captain of the ship.

After coming back from Buenos Aires, Eugene used to stay in a hotel in New York locally known as "Jimmy the Priest's" after the name of its proprietor. Eugene's later account about it was : "The house was almost coming down".[47] While biographer Louis Sheaffer reports, "he was dramatizing. Far from ever collapsing, the building . . . was afterward occupied for nearly a half century by a ship's chandler".[48] Louis Sheaffer contends, "O'Neill started for the bottom under the illusion that he was simply living life to the fullest; instead as one riddled with guilt feelings and unknowingly bent on punishing himself, he was responding to one of the strongest drives in his unconsciou".[49] This punishing himself almost reached a state of masochism at times. His drinking orgies was part of it. He deliberately banished himself

from Christmas gala; instead, swam with apparent delight in icy waters and perpetually fancied the facts to present himself in an unfavourable light. Even in his tuberculous pleurisy, it seemed to his nurse Olive Evans that a part of him enjoyed the illness. This was the pleasure in pain.

We can compare Eugene O'Neill with others in literature who were prone to dregs. Their work make us realise that how we see the things is no less important than what we see. Eugene's favourite Jack London was one of them. Maxim Gorky can be referred to in greater detail in this connextion. Being orphaned at an early age Gorky had to go to the streets before he was eleven. Gorky did all jobs to get himself fed; experienced much brutality of the pre-revolution Russia and became a tramp. While Eugene took veronal tablets in Jan. 1912 for suicide in Jimmy the Priest's saloon, Gorky was more violent. He shot himself damaging permanently his lungs. Even in 1906 in U.S.A. Gorky was thrown out of hotels. He was angry; at times bitter (hence, the penname Gorky - 'the bitter'), — but never lost faith in life and mankind. In **The Lower Depth**, Luke brings the message "The earth itself is a pilgrim in the heavens".[50] For God, — "If you believe in Him, He exists. If you don't He doesn't."[51] And lastly "everybody lives for something better to come. That's why we have to be considerate."[52] "I feel full of hope these days", writes Eugene O'Neill to his biographer Barrett H. Clark, "for noting the way world wags, I am sure that man has definitely decided to destroy himself, and this seems to be the only truly wise decision he has ever made."[53]

Eugene's temperamental outbursts also need to be noted, not everytime under the spell of a liquor. He used to be seized by uncontrollable fury at times. This was the death drive deflected into aggression. Later Agnes Boulton faced "some sudden and rather dreadful outbursts of violence, and others of bitter nastiness. . . ." [54] So the hell Eugene saw was more inside him than outside. The spectre of death loomed large in his dark eyes. He had to keep *himself constantly tortured and haunted. Only the fuel of self destruction* could bring his creativity into light. "He had a compulsive need at times to descend into a private hell of his own makings",[55] Louis Sheaffer observes. His death drive had to be satisfied by keeping the wounds fresh.

His behaviour with girls now may be looked upon.

In **Servitude** written in 1914, wife of the novelist-playwright David Roylstone reacts to her husband's affair with other women : —

"I have loved him, loved him, loved him with all my heart and soul. . . I have been happy in serving him, happy in the knowledge that I have had my little part in helping him to success, happy to be able to shield and protect him."[56]

In A Touch of the Poet written in 1937 Nora Melody declares about her husband's womanising and neglect upon her —

"I've pride in my love for him! ! I've loved since the day I set eyes on him, and I'll love him till the day

I die !. . . . It's when, if all the fires of hell was
between you, you'd walk in them gladly to be with him,
and sing with joy at your own burnin', . . . That's love. . . ."[57]

There is a gap of thirty three years between the two works. However the women talk almost in the same vein while forwarding Eugene O'Neill's concept for an ideal wife.

But Eugene O'Neill was only expressing his inner craving. He was demanding devotion and total sacrifice of the self from his wife; while being conscious of his own infidelity. He further stressed that she should remain supremely with this servitude and never stand in her husband's frolicking.

Eugene O'Neill throughout his life pursued the Oedipus drive through sex. Sex in life was necessary. It gave him the satisfaction of unifying with mother Ella. But he also wanted the wife to be Sarah Sandy, to shelter him from the terrible world. Olive Evans, his nurse during home treatment of tuberculosis, had rightly suspected that he was actually ". . . in love with love".[58] The girls were merely the substitutes.

From Kathleen Jenkins to Maibelle Scott, Beatrice Ashe (in between he tried ineffectually to seduce his landlord's daughter Jessica Rippin), Agnes Boulton, Carlotta Monterey — Eugene always seduced the girls for sex; but could tolerate it no more when he had enough of it. He left Kathleen when he had a son. Courtship with Maibelle ended because she refused to sleep with

him. Beatrice was mature enough to observe — "He was always talking about having his head on my breast – that's why, I suppose, I never married him. I felt that he wanted someone to baby him, . . . But I also felt that he would have wanted to possess me, that he wouldn't have let me belong to myself."[59]

Fortunately or not, it happened to Agnes Boulton, " . . . to be alone with me — that was what he wanted. . . ."[60] It turned out to be more. Agnes was almost held a captive. Eugene felt free to make prolonged visits to different women, but any similar gesture from Agnes openly led Eugene to forcibly draw her out and even to hit her. In **Welded** Michale Cape the playwright husband (a self-portrait) demands that his wife, an actress " . . . to have a true sacrament. . . ." " . . . together - forms of our bodies merging into one form;"[61] In The First Man Curtis Jayson (again a self-portrait) expects his wife, Martha to sacrifice herself to the worship of her husband; and if she is pregnant, she must abort at his command to live " . . .the old, free life together".[62] Hence, leaving Agnes with son and daughter, Eugene one day absconded with Carlotta in 1928 the way he had earlier done (1910) to Kathleen.

And there was always the projection of guilt. Kathleen got her share of being drawn in black by the playwright in **Bread and Butter** and **Before Breakfast** where a self-centered wife destroys her artist – husband. (Also the maid servant in **Long Day's Journey Into Night** was named Cathleen). Agnes was decried openly by Eugene O'Neill in his letters to his friends

(Kenneth Macgowan, the drama critic was one of them). In his private notebook as 'Play of Divorced Wife' (1928), Eugene draws that the wife walks out leaving her husband and children ". . . 'father has told them what mother has done' "[63]

Further we may recall the episode of Louise Bryant in Provincetown. In his first one-acter that he rejected later **A Wife for A Life** Jack, the young miner in Arizona desert is in love with his old partner's wife. Eugene too fell desperately in love (in his own style) with Louis Bryant while she was engaged with Jack Reed, the famous war correspondent, who wrote **Ten Days That Shook The World** on the civil war in Mexico. Jack was O'Neill's very close. Not that he didn't feel ashamed to betray his own conscience. But he was helpless. The passion was too powerful to suppress. Friends noted, it was the resemblance of Louise to Agnes Boulton that drew him to the latter, when Louise finally accompanied Reed to Russia.

Eugene O'Neill's later years have been termed by many as Carlotta's years. He married Carlotta Monterey, the actress known more for her beauty rather than her acting, in 1929. Their first acquaintance was through the staging of **The Hairy Ape** where Carlotta played the role of Mildred, the daughter of a millionaire and ship magnet. Carlotta also had three marriages before and was living single that time. Agnes Boulton and Eugene O'Neill were never well mated. Carlotta was found to be a complete contrast to Agnes. She

knew how to live as he wanted to live. He demanded and got isolated by Carlotta's loving care from the world - his past and even from his friends. Carlotta made herself nurse, companion, house keeper, secretary and anything what Eugene looked for. As rooted in his nature Carlotta had to play the mother's role too.

In 1931 O'Neill returned to New York to attend the rehearshal of **Mourning Becomes Electra.** Eugene was a celebrity by this time. Ironically the suicide of Carlotta's previous husband Ralph Barton coincided with the event. He shot himself after writing a letter that Carlotta was a person who could have saved him. So the dead was still catching them; if not Eugene's then at least Carlotta's.

Eugene tried to get his old life buried. He started his play based on his marriage to Carlotta which, critics pointed, was no better than **Dynamo** based on his marriage to Agnes. **Days Without End** conveyed a feeling of futility. It was not for lack of effort that he failed. The play underwent several drafts and rewrittings befor the final form. But he was going against his nature only to please Carlotta. The failure was disastrous.

In September, 1932 a frustrated O'Neill completed the sketch of a new play on paper in a single day. It was his blind urge for an escape. **Ah, Wilderness**! was labelled as a comedy by some, though maney critics suspected its true significance. it was an aberration from O'Neill's style but this could have been a deliberate show than real.

In 1936, O'Neill had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He could not make the trip to Sweden. Appendicitis, neuritis, kidney trouble – all were comming in succession. Then started an uncontrolllable tremor traced to the days of his past alcoholism. Ten weeks in hospital and two operations could not make him fully recover.

The second World War was in the making. Social values were changing rapidly. People wanted to voice their own resentments against the State and the System. Eugene had little to offer them. He was deeply embedded in his personal anguish and expressing it though his plays. He was being aloof and forgotten. He had spun himself a cocoon inside which he lived. The outer world became as irrelevant to him as he was to the media that time.

He struggled grimly. The only thing he could do throughout his life was writing; but now the tremor of his hands even made that task almost impossible. Doctors called his illness Perkinsons disease, incurable and progressive. His writing became almost wavering lines and it was left for Carlotta to decipher them.

The tragedy of the O'Neills continued in the next generation. His daughter Oona, then eighteen, married Charlie Chaplin who was fifty six and not liked by many for his public scandals. His son Eugene Jr. adopted a bohemian life style with drinking spree much like his father. He married twice and divorced twice. Another son Shane got arrested for possession of drugs while living in slum condition. To cap it all Shane's only baby died of

suffocation in his bed within few months of his birth.

O'Neill found no outlet for his pent up bitterness and ultimately it was projected to Carlotta. Probably he also felt frustrated for not being able to translate into writing the drama which always dominated his thought. By 1943, when he was completing **A Moon for the Misbegotten**, there were times when he could not grasp a pencil. His mammoth project of producing a whole cycle of generations of an Irish immigrant family settling in America had to be given up half way. His relation to Carlotta came to the brink of separation.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill died on November 27, 1953. He was sixty five. But actually he gave up living long before. It was stated that he found no ultimate answer for his quest. He himself said that he hoped to be a failure. Success was an attribute to mediocrity for him. The bleak pessimism of his last two plays — **The Iceman Cometh** and **Long Days Journey Into Night** did not find favour with the critics. They even questioned his dialogue and his dramatic sense. He was held guilty of shallow melodrama and inordinate length. His denunciation of material prosperity too, was pointed by some, lacked depth. What he denounced was what he actually envied, grabbed greedily when it came, and loathed in others. He was also blamed of pretension with unsuccessful attempts in **Great God Brown** and **Lazarus Laughed** to deliberate philosophical discourse. But O'Neill stood there alone — obsessed with his saga of rootlessness and loss of faith. One may say he only survived

to tell his tale of "hopeless hope". Louis Sheaffer reports, shortly before his death in a Boston hotel, he emerged from a semistupor, struggled up on his elbows, and cried "Born in a goddam hotel room and dying in a hotel room!"[64] It was true in more ways than one. He had never been at home in life. His homecoming was completed at death.

Lastly, we may probe the effect and significance of the sea in Eugene O'Neill. The sea has figured prominently throughout Eugene O'Neill's work. In 1927 he started in his note book sketch of a future work titled **The Sea - Mother's Son**. It was supposed to be an autobiographical work which he ultimately could not accomplish. Over half of O'Neill's dramas nineteen short and seven long plays, were written before 1920; and twelve of them were related to the sea. O'Neill lived by the sea in New London, Provincetown, and also in the later period of life (Tao House).

The Sea, Mother and Death all coalesced with each other in his work. Here is Reuben Light in **Dynamo**

" . . . I've come to know about her --- how all things end up in her! ---- We've got the sea in our blood still!. . . . there must be a center around which all this moves, mustn't there? There is in everything else! And that center must be the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity, and Dynamo is her Divine Image on earth!. . . . She wants some one man to love her purely

and when she finds him worthy she will love him and give him the secret of truth. . . . I know the miracle will happen to me tonight . . . I had a message from my mother last night. I woke up and saw her standing beside my bed. . . . I know she came from the spirit of the Great Mother into which she passed when she died to tell me she had at last found me worthy of her love."[65]

We can reexamine some fragments of this talk, which evince how the death drive and mother fantasy are being interlaced with death. Unconsciously Reuben Light Prophesies that all things end up in her; and "spirit of the Great Mother into which" his own mother could only pass "when she died". He has brought the sea too, the inorganic. Reuben will also have to die to get at the truth; he has got the "message". But something more "She wants some one man to love her purely." Clearly The Great Mother will not tolerate any other love. Reuben will have to kill his love Ada before his own death. He fires Ada and then exclaims "Mother! . . . where are you? . . . I did it for your sake! . . . Why don't you call to me? . . . don't leave me alone!"[66] And finally "(pleading to the dynamo like a little boy) I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again!"[67]

The sea and its children repeatedly appeared in his plays – from the early one-acters to later full-length masterpieces. He "maternalizes" the sea. Virginia Floyd observes, " . . . making it mysterious, dark and demanding. . . ."[68]

This is a possessive mother who kills her unfaithful children. But she is

the ultimate goal too. To belong to her is the final attainment. Sea becomes Mother-Death. Thomas Mann feels :--- "the eyes that rest on the wide ocean and are soothed by the sight of its waves — are those that are already wearied by looking too deeply into the solemn perplexities of life."[69]

Edmund Tyrone exclaims in Long Day's Journey Into Night :

"I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself - actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, because white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity. . . . "[70]

Now we almost circle back to our point of origin. This was the oceanic feeling, the wish to return to the inorganic. The ideal way to end one's life, Eugene felt, was to swim out until one grew tired and finally went under! Let's consider this with Jack London. As Martin Eden (1967) tries to commit suicide by drowning, he automatically starts to swim. He ceased swimming, but the moment he felt water was rising above his mouth his hands struck out sharply with a lifting movement. As he drowns, he feels a tearing pain in his chest. "The hurt was not death, was the thought that oscillated through his reeling consciousness. . . . It was life . . . the pangs of life, this awful suffocating feeling; it was the last blow life could deal him."[71]

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