



## Religion and Human Behavior in Eugene O'Neill's Plays

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### Abstract

This study highlights role of religion in human behavior with reference to Eugene O'Neill's plays *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. It has been argued that the role of religion in O'Neill's plays is problematic and disrupts normal human behavior and relationships. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, it creates a terrible conflict between religious forces that seek control of human thoughts as well as emotions and desire for liberation from this control. Sexual drives in the play represent individual forces of liberation from authoritarian religious control. The conflict, however, has regressive psychic and emotive effects on the personalities and creates severe psychic and familial disintegration. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill treats this conflict much more subtly, avoiding eroticism as a metaphor of liberation from religious control. The play also dramatizes antithetical processes of adulation and aversion from religion in the familial context in the play. The conclusion has been drawn that the role of religion in O'Neill is thoroughly on the negative side and is free from dynamic role in healthy personality development.

**Key words:** Modern American drama; Religion; Human behavior and personality development

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### INTRODUCTION

Religion in the present global scenario has aroused significant academic interest. Its role in human behavior/ personality, rise in radicalism/extremism and human development has attracted a great deal of critical debate at different forums. The debate has principally been caused by a strong role of religion in causing or accentuating militancy, and armed conflicts for specific economic and political purposes in many parts of the world. Fox (2004) argues that the role of religion in internal conflicts increased manifold during 1950-1996. Most of the intense conflicts, he argues were between different Christian groups. Proctor (2006) on the other hand contends that the role of religion despite its importance in global affairs has not been fully assessed. The overall picture of religion role in human life has not yet matched the strong wave of media treatment and popular interest in religion. The most vocal account of role of religion in global politics and affairs has been that of Huntington's *Clash of Civilization*. Huntington (1996) places religion in the center of inter-civilizational conflicts. He terms religion as the main defining characteristics of civilizations including Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African. His fundamental premise in the book is that "inter-civilizational clashes are usually conflicts "between peoples of different religions". Hunt (2002) argues that "Huntington's interpretation, with its stark and value laden delineation of regions in conflict, commanded considerable attention when it appeared and has won fresh converts in the wake of September 11.

There are, however, contrary opinions on the role of religion in human behavioral disorientation. Some studies put entire emphasis on religion alone in creating strong behavioral disorders, while others are of the opinions that religion can create behavioral disorders if other conditionals like poverty and economic deprivation are also present there. Religion then engenders a particular ideology that fosters behavioral disorders. Khan and Azam

(2008) have referred to this factor in their study. They have attempted to create a proper understanding of terrorism (an offshoot of extremism) and analyze socio-economic, cultural, religious, and psychological dimensions to measure the 'root causes' of terrorism. The results as they argue indicate that while economic factors may incline individuals to join terrorist organizations, the religious factor is most important in influencing an individual's decision. Their survey, they declare found that eighty percent of individual members of these organizations are religiously minded. Thus "a critical factor determining suicide terrorist behavior is arguably loyalty to intimate cohorts of peers, which recruiting organizations often promote through religious communion". Almost all sample respondents, involved in terrorism write Khan and Azam (2008) were unmarried males exposed to fundamentalist teachings along certain determined lines that reject freedom of thinking and engender a belief that life sacrificed for the sake of their religion would bless them with paradise in life after death. Likewise Nagata (2001) discusses the term "fundamentalism" that has assumed such a vitality in international politics and research. She writes, "[U]se of the term fundamentalism has recently undergone metaphorical expansion into other domains and may be applied to extreme forms of nationalism, certain socio-religious movements, and other forms of extremist ideological expression". Nagata (2001) here proposes that most fundamentalisms entail special forms of identity politics, meaning, and labeling, characterized by a quest for certainty, exclusiveness, and unambiguous boundaries, where the "Other" is the enemy demonized. This quest for exclusiveness and demonization of the other could assume destructive form only through religion's discourse of control and indoctrination along specific lines. Frejka and Westoff (2008) have taken role of religion to domestic affairs like reproduction and fertility. They argue that analysing the role of religion and religiousness in engendering higher fertility in USA as compared to Europe. Religion is important in the life of one-half of US women, whereas not even for one of six Europeans. This study highlights the role of religion in human behavior with reference to Eugene O'Neill's plays *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. It has been argued that the role of religion in O'Neill's plays is problematic and disrupts normal human behavior and relationships. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* it creates a terrible conflict between religious forces that seek control of human thoughts as well as emotions and latent desire for liberation from this control. Sexual drives in the play represent individual forces of liberation from authoritarian religious control. The conflict however has regressive psychic and emotive effects on the personality and creates severe psychic and familial disintegration. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill treats this conflict much more subtly avoiding eroticism as a metaphor of liberation from religious control. The play also dramatizes

antithetical processes of adulation and aversion from religion in the familial context in the play.

## 1. RELIGION AND DRAMA

Religion has traditionally enjoyed a significant place in dramatic literature that stretches back to the Greek and the Elizabethans. Historically drama has remained allied with religious beliefs and practices. Tragedy in particular originated in the traditional religious rituals celebrated in honor of god Dionysus (Nietzsche, 2004: 143). But religious implication of Greek tragedy and role that gods played in human life has remained a contentious issue. Greenwood (1936: 31-40) writes that Greek religion had almost nothing to do with "human conduct that (except as regards two or three specific offences, such as murder and incest) it neither told men what is right and wrong, nor offered them effective motives for doing right and avoiding wrong". He finds no ground for signifying religious spirit or religious purpose in Greek tragedy more than "in any of the numerous other activities of public and private life in the city states of Greece" that were "under the patronage of some divine being or other and some form of sacrifice and prayer was a customary part of them all". Gardner (1971: 42) describes Greek civic life as governed by "thoughtful and reverent philosophic agnosticism which seemed to many then to be the goal of humanity's spiritual progress". About the role of religion in Greek tragedy she is of the opinion that in discussing the religious significance of Greek tragedy, "we are safe from fatal confusion of religion with theology that bedevils the discussion of tragedy in Christian Europe" (1971: 42). But there are plays that show these supernatural forces putting human on the earth to great test of his character. In Sophocles plays writes Bowra (Bowra, 1941) the gods take an active, even a decisive part and their will is realized despite human resistance to it. Furthermore, writes Bowra (1941) they may participate directly in the action like Athene or Heracles, or indirectly as through Teiresias in *Antigone* or through oracles which are invariably fulfilled. Dodd's (1951) argument may serve as representative of what has been a widely held point of view on gods' role in human life:

I need hardly say that religion and moral were not initially interdependent, in Greece or elsewhere; they had their separate roots . . . . But sooner or later in most cultures . . . man projects into the cosmos his own nascent demand for social justice; and when from the outer spaces the magnified echo of his own voice returns to him promising punishment for the guilty, he draws from it courage and reassurance.

But the role of gods was not absolutely determinate of their redemption and life hereafter. Being Supernatural, not governed by human laws, and necessities, they revealed themselves in natural forces like storms, lightening, blasts etc and also worked through human nature that compels men to do things against their nature (Gardner, 1971:

51). They are usually swift to reduce man to his place, responding instantly to too much human happiness, or too great success, or too great an achievement (Gardner, 1971: 52). Allied to it was their distress for the wrong committed and will to punish it through such instruments as human passions, disasters, famine, plague, and the ancient powers of Furies meant for punishing the blood shed (Gardner, 1971: 52). The implacable gods could not, however, create human impression of a weak earthly figure fully entrapped in their will and energy and unable to work independently. The strength of these powers would neither reduce them to helpless lot nor take away the human will and intellect to exert itself in hostile circumstances. One particular example is that of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannous*. Goldhill (1992) has analyzed the play in the light of fifth Century Athens development and dissemination of intellectual pursuits that developed a particular human image replete with extraordinary optimism about human potentialities in this world. Intellectual and rational faculties were in particular emphasized. The training offered in linguistics, rhetoric, literary studies was, however, no less significant and was in fact a prelude to life in courts, assembly. But this progress of human intellect, and skills, writes Goldhill also offered possibilities of misuse or transgression, thereby creating the strange and complex paradoxes of human greatness and competence. Both of these in turn authenticate human independence in the course of his life and achievements. Sophocles' *Oedipus* writes Goldhill (1992) epitomizes Athenian enlightenment along with inherent misuse or transgression of these as reflected in intellectual and rhetorical *techné*. Yet Oedipus' sin though committed in absolute ignorance speak of the "outrageous negation of the norms and boundaries of the structure of civilized society" amounting to transgression of the intellectual position that he held. The knowledge that he gains in the process of rational deductions in true spirit of peripeteia results in collapse of the whole civic order that he had built with his intellect and *techné* as well as in his personal ruination, symbolizing "the uncertain sitting of man in the narrative of progress and the acquisition of knowledge that Oedipus' reversal avers (Goldhill, 1992: 200-210). His end in *Oedipus at Colonus* once again testifies the dualistic human position of being an epitome of control, progress and intellect. What is being emphasized here is that human image in response to his sinfulness and transgression is far from dehumanizing. It is a punishment for restoration of human position in the scheme of things.

Renaissance tragedy in England grew in the church in the form of Miracles and Morality plays based on biblical themes for didacticism, observable even in such imaginative works as Marlow's *Dr. Faustus*. Although major dramatist of the age like Shakespeare moved towards greater secularity of his art, but religious concerns are there and emerge significantly in different works. It is to be found for instance in the inculcation of

profound morals and moral truths. Gardner (1971: 71) studies "impressive expression of Christian conceptions" in Shakespeare without explicit concern with the revealed religious truths. No one would deny that the divine figures prominently in the world of for instance *King Lear*. In modern and post modern theatre, role of religion could also be observed. There are plays like Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* where an ascetic hero, Thomas Becket, the play contends that bloodshed/martyrdom of a martyr is the seed of the church. Pizzato (1998) argues that the play reflects Eliot's recognition of modern divine loss dramatized through the chorus of hysterical women who through their poetry "gives birth to the tragic figure of the martyr". On the other hand, post modern dramatists like Artaud, Genet, and Brecht, establish as Pizzato (1998) argues a connectivity between the internal theatre (inner self) and external theatre (stage productions) to substantiate the spiritual loss that inspired various modern/post modern theatre and theory. Artaud's theatre explained in detail is marred by extreme physical violence that "reflects crises of divine emptiness in the universe and of evil forces within the body" (33). Then religion as a powerful force of disruption contributing to human psychopathology emerges strongly in Afro-American dramatists' lives and works. Bower (2003) has analyzed the a wide range of plays of such dramatists as Johnson, Hurston, Childress, Hansbury and Kennedy to establish psychopathology of varying degrees from severe paranoia, and neurosis to neurasthenia, schizophrenia in the light of theoretical and clinical works of R.D. Laing, Tom Lutz, Freud, Kristeva, Foucault, and Lacan. Among other causes she refers repeatedly to the playwrights and their characters' attitude to religion as one important component of her analysis of their psychopathology. The attitude to religion in the playwright and their dramatic figures, she writes is characterized by ambivalence. Religion here in these writers' works is given either the persecutory role or that of desired embrace from the surrounding chaos. Relying on Kristeva exploration of the nature of love and religion in her book *In the beginning was Love* wherein she explains the substitution for the desired father with Christ the father; Bower interprets the position of religion in the lives of black women:

In the incipient stages of the infant's development, here exists the birth of a psychic awareness and identification with the prehistoric father who in Kristeva's words 'possessed the sexual characteristics of both parents'. God becomes our first lover, and his love is enduring with no strings attached. This God/Jesus brings to the black women a substitution, a surrogate for the physical father, who is either absent or, in the case play *Sunday Morning*, lynched. So with this transference from the father to Father . . . women can, and do, survive either by desiring death that will bring a beatific afterlife with God or embracing life with the promise of a Father who will not forsake them — an ironic but practical solution to loss and trauma ( Bower, 2003: 27).

## 2. RELIGION IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S LIFE AND ART

The role of religion in O'Neil's personal life has been analyzed elsewhere (Karim and Butt, 2011a, 1-2). The role that it plays in his life and art appears problematical from diverse angles. The problematical aspect could be identified in the personal life of the artist. His life pattern and ultimate drift towards rejection of faith explain how rigid indoctrination far from creating fidelity to faith accentuates a rebellious response in the form of rejection of faith itself. He was brought up in a Catholic family with focus on specific rigid, administrative and authoritarian lines of control and inhibitions with major focus on sin, punishment and death. Laws of abstinence that extended to all aspect of life were also taught with strictness and rigidity (Shaughnessy, 2000). But this kind of indoctrination had its negative and deterministic effect on the artist's mind. It clashed with the prevalent sordid domestic reality of the mother (Ella Quinlan O'Neill) being addicted to dope. Faith in God and His benevolence proved illusionary in the face of the impending gloom, sickness and aloofness of the mother, and resulted in O'Neill's ultimate desertion of the faith itself as referred elsewhere (Karim and Butt, 2011). *Long Day's Journey into Night* highlights this particular biographical dimension of O'Neill's life. Here Edmund clearly shows his displeasure against faith for the Deity has failed to cure his mother of her sickness: "Edmund (*Bitingly*). Did You Pray for mama? Tyrone. I did. I've prayed to God these many years for her. Edmund. Then Nietzsche must be right. . ."<sup>3</sup>. Quite unlike his elder brother, Eugene turned introvert, "became restless spirit, an individual who is both intimidating and vulnerable. He frightens family and friends because his disaffection is not pretended. He can damn God and religion with a power unknown to those who play alienation" (Shaughnessy, 2000: 13).

### 2.1 Conflict Between Religious Control, Religiosity and Desire for Individual Liberation in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

*Mourning Becomes Electra* dramatizes the role of religion in human behavior. But as stated above the role is problematical, creates conflicts and disrupts normal human behavior and relationships. The conflict in this play is between two opposing forces of religiousness and emotive /psychic propensities. Living in a rigid, authoritarian Puritanical society/culture, the Mannon family in the play has to assume a religious attitude that requires consistent verbal expression as well. But the religious attitude remains peripheral and fails to become a part of their entire inner beings. The emotive inner self reflects their natural self and it desires for greater and

increased liberation from this external controlling force. The religious part of the self always remains an entity regulated and controlled by powerful and domineering culturally conditioned religious forces of Puritanism that demands strict observation of rules and codal regulation. The inner selves, however, have not developed required religiousness to regulate life in terms of these culturally conditioned religious codes and regulations. The inner selves are governed by emotions and desires that are at odd with the superficial/ peripheral religious selves and are always willing to revolt for liberation. In fact greater the force of regulation, higher is the possibility of revolt. Thus control of religion here far from nurturing the healthy personality or behavioral development acts as a force that compels to behave rebelliously for experiencing emotive drives and needs. The revolt however remains problematic throughout the process of conflict and accentuates serious discord in the individual's personality and familial relations. Both struggle to seek control of the individual self in their own ways creating split personalities. Mannon family in the play assumes the symbolic mode of reflecting this complex conflict. Religious thinking in this family remains confined to verbal and communicative levels, while at psychological and emotive levels it remains peripheral as it does not become a part of their true selves and remains effective only in a particular environment where indoctrination, control and regulation govern human action.

Sexuality with blood relation is strictly prohibited in all religions of the world and its violation is a grievous religious offence punishable under the law. Rigid religious control, however, create strong impetus to evade codified roles in the family and urge for extra marital sexual relation in married, unmarried men, women and adolescents. This phenomenon is to be seen in the principal characters effort to liberate her/himself from confined codal roles of mother, daughter and brother in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. This is dramatized through controlling sexuality and sensual urges in three principal characters of Christine, Lavinia and Orin. Thus O'Neill juxtaposes here desire for liberation from codified religious power with sensuous human propensities of love, heterosexual contacts and spirited experience of sexual affiliation. The Mannon family in the play serves as a model of this juxtaposition. From the father's side, the family has acquired rigid Puritanical religious doctrines and thoughts that find strong reflection in Lavinia and Orin's language and communicative patterns. In the first two part of the play, it is Lavinia who reveals rigid Puritanism in her talk of punishment, sin, adultery, duty and matrimonial fidelity in religious terms. Very early in Act I, Lavinia charges Christine (mother) of adultery, and calls her "shameless and evil"<sup>4</sup> for extramarital/

<sup>3</sup>O'Neill, E., 1955. *Long Day's Journey into Night*. New Haven Yale University Press, p 77-78. All subsequent citations from this text have been cited in parenthesis.

adulterous relation with Adam Brant. She thinks of duty that a married woman owes to her husband that Christine has failed to perform: "You don't give one thought to father who is so good who trusts you! Oh, how could you do this to Father? How could you?" (30). Her religiosity emerges strongly in her vehement declaration, "You know you deserve the worst punishment you could get. And father would disown you publicly, no matter how much the scandal cost him!" (32). She would forgive mother only if she promises to be dutiful to father and "make up for the wrong you've done him" (32). The same sense of religious self cries on Christine's death, "it is your justice, Father" (123). Thus fidelity, duty and love combine in her internalized moral self. Her religiosity also demands strong personal amends for the sin her family has committed. Her last act of choosing the punishment for herself reflects this religious desire for the amends: "I'm the last of the Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with dead is worse act of justice than death or prison! . . . I'll live alone with the dead . . . until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! (178)". Orin too represent religious codes of the family. In the last part of the play, *Haunted*, he talks of confession, retribution, and punishment. For instance in desperation he suggests Lavinia, "For the love of god, let's go now and confess and pay the penalty for Mother's murder and find peace together! (165)".

The internalized religiosity, however, does not overwhelm their respective sensual natures or become a part of the natural sensual self. This factor leads to a terrible inner and inter-personal/familial friction. In fact the religiosity reinforces their realization of personal desires that could be forcefully expressed through their erotic feelings and tendencies. One important component of these erotic desires is their propensity towards heterosexual contacts. This desire is apparent in both Christine and Lavinia. They show an amazing propensity for heterosexuality (Karim, 2010a). Christine's desire has its root in the failure to have orgasmic sexual fulfillment through Ezra. She has no hesitation in saying it to Lavinia that she hates Ezra, that leaves Lavinia stunned, and to her horrified expression, Christine says, "That relationship has no meaning between us! You've called me vile and shameless! Well, I want you to know that's what I have felt about myself for over twenty years, giving my body to a man I . . . (32)". She remembers her wedding night as a horrible moment of pure sexuality and lust deprived of real conjugal bliss, and she regards Lavinia as a product of that lust born out of body without real motherly affection. In her first encounter with the husband on his return from the war, she is vehement in revealing her blankness of emotions for the husband:

Do you think you could make me weak – make me forget all these years? Oh no Ezra! It's too late! (Then her voice changes, as if she had suddenly resolved on a course of action, and becomes deliberately taunting). You want the truth? You've guessed it! You've used me, you've given me children, but I've never once been yours! I never could be! And whose fault is it? I loved you when I married you! I wanted to give myself! But you made me so I could not give! You filled me with disgust! (61)".

Her desire for liberation from the assigned roles of a mother and a wife in the prevailing conditions makes her home a sepulcher that she would like to avoid (17). Lack of orgasmic fulfillment is reflected in her adulterous relation with Adam. Her love for Brant finds poetic expression in such words, "He's gentle and tender; he's every thing you've never been. He's what I've longed for all these years with you – a lover! I love him! (61)". Still yearning for more sex, she even carries incestuous desire for Orin. He is her baby, and if he had not gone to war, she would not have turned to Brant, and "when he had gone there was nothing left. But hate and a desire to be revenged – and a longing for love! (32)". She vents her emotions in addressing Orin on his return "...we had a secret little world of our own in the old days, didn't we! ...And that's what your father and Vinnie [Lavinia] could never forgive us! But we shall make that little world of our own again, won't we? (85)", and for Orin she merges into the mysterious imagery of primitive, sin-free islands. Her entire conduct, her hatred against Ezra and her sexual relation with Adam, however, brings her into direct confrontation with religiously motivated Lavinia that would end in her suicide.

Lavinia herself is a very complex personality, terribly split between her peripheral religious self and the inner sensual self. She had her sensual inclinations to both her father and brother, which indicates her determinacy to have liberation from the confined role of daughter and sister. Christine flagrantly charges her of sexual fondness for the father and trying to be the wife of her father. Her interest in Adam Brant also springs largely from his likeness with both her father and Orin absent on account of war. But the conflict between two parts of the self i.e. religious and sensual does not appear so powerfully as long as she remains confined to Mannon ethical and religious codes. Her trip to Islands becomes a major outlet to her sensual natural self that for the first time clearly overwhelms her religiosity. Here she reveals almost unrestrained inclination for heterosexual contacts that even shocks Orin and later on Peter. In fact her visit to Island is a step towards gaining freedom as the islands as Lavinia herself says stand for a world where the native dance "naked and innocent – without the knowledge of sin!" (145) and this pre moral world provide the ground

<sup>4</sup>O'Neill, E., 1982. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. In *The Plays: Eugene O'Neill*, Vol. III. Modern Library (Ed.). New York: Random House Inc, 30. All subsequent citations have been cited in parenthesis.

for nurturance and fulfillment of her natural sensual self. Islands as Orin say “turned out to be Vinnie’s islands not mine” (146). For the first time in a world free from inhibitions, she realizes what love is and what it means to have freedom in choice and realization of desires. To Peter she says:

I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful a good spirit of love coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death ... Oh Peter, hold me close to you! I want to feel love! Love is all beautiful. I never used to know that! I was fool. (She kisses him passionately. He returns it, aroused and at the same time a little shocked by her boldness. She goes on longingly) we’ll be married soon, won’t we? And settle out in the country free from folks and their evil talks. We’ll, make an island for ourselves on land ... (147).

One important factor in realization her sensual self in a free society is related to her very unusual physical and psychological transformation into Christine like appearance. The phenomenon of personality transformation expresses her inner association and more and more affiliation with the sensual self of the mother that Lavinia had previously hated as shameless and evil. Importantly it is visit to the free Islands that is foundational in this transformation as she undergoes the experience of free heterosexual life here. The phenomenon is also a commentary on the effect of religious ideology of inhibitions and punishment on individual’s thinking process and emotive states. What Lavinia experienced at the islands could not be condoned for her religiously regulated life at home, but it clearly tells us that mere indoctrination, strict codal life would not make a person religious in spirit unless the individual regulate his/her inner self with that. Her end that she chooses on her own free will after home coming substantiates the other facet of regulation in human life in a particular environment. As she returns from the trip to the Islands, she remains initially in the same mood of free expression of her sensuous self. She behaves sexually with Peter freely as she had done with naked men of the islands. But her predisposition here in a religiously determined environment is frustrated by the Puritanical Peter who in fact is shocked at her gestures. She had to return to the reality that in this environment it is sinful and therefore punishable under the culturally conditioned religious control. Thoughts of the sin, punishment start resurfacing in her consciousness. It finds reflection in her last verbal encounter with Peter:

Don’t be afraid. I’m not going the way Mother and Orin went. That’s escaping punishment. And there’s no one left to punish me. I’m the last Mannon. I’ve got to punish myself! ... I shall have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I’ll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! (With a strange cruel smile of gloating over the years of self torture) I know they will see to it I live for a long time ... (178).

Each word here in this final dialogue reflects return of

the earlier religiously regulated self internalized religious self with the same stress on punishment, death, justice and sin. Her realization of the natural self appear to be short lived in this society that would not give room to human independence or independent emotive and reflective states. The nature of the punishment is strictly in line with the codal regulation of the Puritanical laws i.e. abstinence from sexuality and all relations involving sexual contacts like marriage. Khan and Azam (Khan and Azam, 2008) as referred above expounds the role of reward after death theory in destructive extremist tendencies in some conditions, here on the contrary the punishment theory urges the concerned to behave abnormally in one way or the other. Lavinia is convinced that her living without pronounced punishment would be inappropriate for the religious codes that she had been propagating early in the play in her encounter with the mother on adultery issue. She therefore chooses to shut herself behind iron doors and abstain from all human relations. What is further apparent in choosing this mode of punishment is that Lavinia being the only surviving member of the Mannon family considers it her responsibility to atone for the sins of the family.

In Orin’s life too, the playwright manifests specific role of peripheral religious regulations in a self destructive mechanism. He has like Lavinia internalized puritanical codes of inhibitions, punishment for sin and regulation of individual life in the light of strict codes. But he carries a spirit that like the mother and sister wants to experience liberation in realization of desires. Here too erotic nature of the desires becomes a metaphor for the liberation from the strict codes. Like Christine, he yearns for experiencing desires in a sin free society. Islands, therefore, in his thought merge into mother figure. On his return from the war, he remembers the happy Islands. His thoughts are clearly mother centric and an association is developed between mother and Islands: “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. ... 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 whole island was you (90)”. And later when Lavinia confides to Orin the real nature of their Father’s death as well that of the relationship between Christine and Brant and their planning of going to the island, Orin retorts, “And my island I told her about. . . which was she and I. . . she wants to go there. . . with him (122)”. It makes him easy to kill Brant and reclaim his lost island. Announcing Brant’s death to his mother, Orin explains: “I heard you planning to go with him to the island I had told you about--our island--that was you and I!(122)”. When she moans with grief on Brant murder, he tells her that he will help her to forget: I’ll make you forget him! I’ll make you happy! We’ll leave Vinnie here and go away on a long voyage to the South Seas (122)”. But, Christine death afterwards shocks him and deprives him of the object of his desire.

He stands unfulfilled and guilt ridden. He tries to displace his erotic interest from mother to sister Lavinia, who becomes a mother to him, nursing him like a sick child to life. But he becomes neurasthenic (Karim, 2010) and regresses rapidly in behavior and physical appearance on his way to death.

## 2.2 Conflict, Adulation and Aversion in *Long Day's Journey into Night*

In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, there is another facet of how religiousness renders human behavior problematical. Here religion does not appear as repressive or punitive force. On the contrary the play highlights a terrible coalition of real living conditions and religiousness to create conflict and opposite trends of adulation of religion or strong aversion from it in the Tyrone family. Parents here glorify faith differently. James (father) is proud of his catholic faith and he looks up worldly failure as the result of dissociation from faith. Thus he admonishes his sons for flouting "the faith you were born and brought upon -- the one true faith of the Catholic Church -- and your denial has brought nothing but self destruction (77)". Both sons react aggressively to this statement (*His two sons stare at him contemptuously. They forget their quarrel and are as one against him on this issue*). Edmund terms Tyrone remarks as "bunk" (77) and Jamie retorts, "We don't pretend, at any rate" (77). In reply to Jamie's sarcastic remarks, "I don't notice you've worn any holes in the knees of your pants going to Mass" (77), Tyrone remarks, "It's true I'm a bad Catholic in the observance, God Forgive me. But I believe!" (77). He also considers Mary's predicament as a result of her forgetting faith, "She hasn't denied her faith, but she's forgotten it, until now there's no strength of the spirit left in her to fight against her curse" (78). Mary's position is, however, different. She is no doubt a religious woman. But like Christine and Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, her religiousness has not taken hold of her inner self. It remains confined to peripheral level of her personality and springs mainly from initial Catholic education and family background. However unlike *Mourning Becomes Electra* where violent and direct expressions of sensual experiences and sensuality govern life pattern of female principal characters, the play downplays direct and violent eroticism as metaphor of human desire for liberation from codified roles. On the contrary, it dramatizes very subtle conflict between Mary's sensual propensities and her religiousness. The conflict leads to a type of her desertion of faith for realizing latent sensuality. Her Catholic education that she received in her adolescence glorified religious ideals and religious characters like Nun over and above real and earthly desires. And she was indoctrinated along these lines in the culture of religiosity and religious education. First indication of this indoctrination is apparent in her reverie regarding her love and marriage with a matinee idol: "I was brought up in a respectable

home and educated in the best convent in the Middle West. Before I met Mr. Tyrone I had hardly knew there was such a thing as theatre. I was very pious girl. I even dreamed of becoming a nun. I've never had the slightest desire to be an actress (102)". But her ancestral catholic training with focus on aversion from worldly pleasures could not become a part of her real emotive self. The indeterminate control of religion on her is apparent in her volcanic romantic inclinations for handsome James, a theatre actor/matinee idol. By all means James stood for gratification of latent sensuality and pleasures that religion and religious education had denied her. O'Neill highlights her response to sensual attraction in one of the most eloquent reverie in the play:

Mary: If you think Mr. Tyrone is handsome now, you should have seen when I first met him. He had the reputation of the best looking man in the country. He was a great matinee idol then, you know. . . . you can imagine how excited I was then, when my father wrote he and James Tyrone had become friends, and I was to meet him when I came home from Easter vacation. He showed the letter to all the girls, and how envious they were! My father took me to see him act first. It was a play about the French Revolution and the leading part was a noble man. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I wept when he was thrown in prison—and then was so mad at myself because I was afraid my eyes and nose would be red. My father had said we'd go backstage to his dressing room right after the play, and so we did. *She gives a little excited, shy laugh.* I was so bashful all I could do was stammer and blush like a little fool (105).

This was her first indication of forgetting "all about becoming a nun or a concert pianist (105)" and deserting faith for the realization of worldly pleasures.

But the post marital real conditions exposed her to the terrible world of pain, death, disease, homelessness and familial discord. Collectively they created a state of deep psychic trauma affecting her thought processes and emotions (Karim, 2010b). She was unable to face reality in the form of death and disease in her marital life as it clashed with her illusionary world of happy church figure of Nun. Obviously her religious education was not tuned to ingrain in her conflicting aspects of real life conditions. It had not established in her possibility of pain and death in life. Therefore with every passing day her pitiable condition continued to worsen. It could be found in such depressive expressions as: ". . . None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever(61)". But the most shocking revelation of her miseries in the past comes when she speaks her heart out in these words:

I was so healthy before Edmund was born. You remember, James. There wasn't a nerve in my body. Even traveling with you season after season, with week after week of one night stands, in trains without Pullmans, in dirty rooms of filthy hotels, eating bad food, bearing children in hotel rooms, I still kept healthy. But bearing Edmund was the last straw. I was so sick afterwards, and that ignorant quack of a cheap hotel doctor -- all he knew I was in pain. It was easy for him to stop the pain

(87).

Morphine, introduced to her accidentally became her necessity that could help her endure the impending crises temporarily. But she also tries to sustain herself through her desperate remembrance of Virgin Mary which signifies her return to her pre-marriage religiosity. Initially she doubts that Virgin Mary would bless her. She tried to pray, but she could not. She had a feeling as if her power for the pray had been snatched away from her:

Mary (Longingly) If I could only find the faith  
 I lost, so I could pray again! (She pauses – then begins to recite  
 the Hail Mary in a flat empty tone).  
 “Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee; blessed art  
 Thou among women”. (Sneeringly)  
 You expect the Blessed Virgin to be fooled by a lying dope fiend  
 reciting words! You can’t hide from her! (107).

But as the painful conditions persist, she is seen desperate to have Virgin’s mercy and forgiveness. Importantly her need for blessings and return to religiosity spring in particular conditions of deep psychic strains. Therefore religion servers here as an abode of joy and happiness from the surrounding depressive crises. Religious education/training on their own would not have pushed her to seek solace in religion at this time had she not suffered terribly from the chaos of the post marital life. It is the depressing condition that compels her to seek solace in religion. She is desperate for forgiveness and redemption:

... some day when the Blessed Virgin Mary forgives me and  
 gives me back the faith in Her Love and pity used to have in my  
 convent days, and I can pray to Her again – when She sees no  
 one in the world can believe in me even for a moment anymore,  
 then She will believer in me, and with her help it will be easy, I  
 will hear myself scream with agony, and at the same time I will  
 laugh because I will be so sure of myself (94).

Religion here becomes an illusionary entity embodying happiness, peace, possibility of forgiveness that Mary needs now. Her condition and desire for forgiveness can also be paralleled with religious fantasies of black Afro American female characters in Johnson Plume and Lynching Plays (2003). Faith in Jesus/God writes Bower (2003), provides substitution for surviving in the trying conditions either by desiring death that will bring a beatific after life with God or embracing life with the promise of a Father who will not forsake them (27). Bower (2003) terms it ironic but practical solution to their loss and trauma. Mary has developed an almost similar stance on religion and her surrounding conditions are not less painful that what Afro American women faced in their context. Hopeless of any improvement in the difficult situations and desirous to have some respite from it, Mary and Afro-American female characters develop fantasies about religion. Mary would not have begged for forgiveness or develop fantasies about it, if she had not suffered indescribably in her post marital life. This factor also highlights a coalition between religious belief and

psychic conditions to create illusionary /dreamy world of what Bower (2003) calls beatific life with God or surviving with the promise of forgiveness for what they have receive here. In any case creating religious fantasy/ illusion is symptomatic of psychic regression under trying conditions. Both sons as referred above have complete aversion to faith and are far away from any affiliation with ancestral Catholic faith. They have no illusions about life and beatific after life with God or forgiveness. Jamie has wasted away his life in whiskey and whoring, while Edmund as referred above (section 3) is a typical atheistical figure who like Nietzsche believes in God being dead. One of his favorite quotes comes from Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “God is dead: of his pity for man hath God died (78)”. Jamie’s prostituting and Edmund’s denial of catholic faith is symptomatic of deep conflict in the family surrounding religion. The reason could be as for Edmund dissatisfaction from religious ideal as it contrasts with the psychic and surrounding conditions or it could lie in lack of parental care as for Jamie since childhood. But whatever the genesis of their aversion from ancestral faith, a contrary trend towards religion is apparent in the family. While father carries strong association with the faith, he was born with; Mary tries to find some respite from the impending crises in religion and prayers. Both sons on the other hand have little interest in religion. This factor accentuates the emergent discord in the family.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that religion is a powerful force in human life, personality and society. O’Neill clearly demonstrates it in his plays. But the role and influence of religion in O’Neill largely remains on the negative side engendering deep psychic conflict in the personality and society through its suppressive discourse of forceful application of codes and regulations. This fact brings religion directly in clash with human will desirous of individual expression and realization of desires. The clash accentuates personality and societal discord as O’Neill dramatizes in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It also highlights that mere indoctrination and enforced application of religious codes fail to create real acceptance at the deeper psychic and emotive levels. Enforced religiosity could go on to create deeper psychic and emotive conflicts with pronounced regressive effect on behavior. Retribution aspect of religion and its treatment in Greek and O’Neill’s tragic art also needs to be touched here. Religion or religious properties of Greek tragedies as referred above (Section 2) do not create an impression of human weakness in the face of hostile and opposing gods or supernatural forces. The strength of these powers would neither reduce man to helpless lot nor take away his will and intellect to exert itself in hostile circumstances. It was O’Neill’s pronounced desire to find approximation of Greek sense of fate in modern psychology in *Mourning*

Becomes Electra. In his work diary maintained for this play, he ponders over a possibility of using "modern approximation of the Greek sense of fate in such a play "for the modern "intelligent audience of today" who has little faith in gods or "supernatural retribution" (Bogard, 1988b: 365). One clear difference that emerges in finding this approximation in the named play is related to the effect of retribution that creates a vast cleavage between the two approaches. Unlike the Greek tragic art, the spectacle of the major characters in plays like *Mourning Becomes Electra* locked in their incestuous/libidinal desires is replete with defeatism, rendering their struggle traumatic and psychopathological. Thus the dynamic role of religion to sustain and inspire heroic struggle is entirely absent from the world of O'Neill.

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