



Chapter I

Greek Tragedy:

Its Structure, Elements, and Influence on O'Neill

Ancient Greek civilization has long been considered the primary literary source of Western civilization. Therefore, it is not surprising that Greek tragedy has long influenced Western tragedy. Many later writers and playwrights of various nationalities have attempted to adapt Greek tragedies to their own times such as the adaptations of Sophocles' Oedipus by English dramatists Dryden and Lee as well as French dramatist Voltaire (Oedipe); the adaptation of Sophocles' Electra by Latin dramatist Atilius; the adaptation of Aeschylus' Oresteia by Voltaire (Oreste); the adaptations of Euripides' Medea by Roman dramatist Seneca, French dramatist Corneille, German dramatist Grillpazer and English dramatist Glover; and the adaptations of Euripides' Hippolytus by Seneca (Phaedra) and French dramatist Racine (Phedre). This influence has not diminished with the passage of time, as is clearly seen in the works of Eugene O'Neill, one of the most famous modern American dramatists. O'Neill, in composing his tragedies, utilizes several of the elements and devices of the early Greek tragedies, most particularly in his plays Desire Under the Elms, Lazarus Laughed, and Mourning Becomes Electra.

However, before discussing the influence of Greek tragedy on O'Neill's works, it is first necessary to understand Greek tragedy, itself. Historically, Greek tragedy can be traced back to the fifth century B.C., with the extant tragedies of Aeschylus, one of the three great Greek tragedians. Unfortunately, no one wrote about tragedy in terms of analysis and criticism until the third century B.C., when Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) wrote the first major treatise on the nature of tragedy, called Peri Poiétikēs, ("On Poetry"), more popularly known as the Poetics.

In his Poetics, Aristotle investigated several of the tragedies of his time and found that tragedies were usually created in trilogies, a tragedy composed of three separate but interrelated tragedies followed by a satyr-play. Although the endings of the first two plays in a trilogy lead naturally into the plays that follow them, each of them is a self-contained dramatic unit. Any of the plays in the trilogy can be presented independent of the others without too much loss of understanding, but the meaning and dramatic effect of the works is enhanced by the production or reading of them as a group. However, only one complete trilogy has survived, Aeschylus' Oresteia, which consists of three tragedies entitled Agamemnon, Choephoroe or The Libation Bearers, and Eumenides, followed by a satyr-play, now lost, entitled Proteus. O'Neill, in creating one of his

great plays, follows the concept of the Greek trilogy, reflected in Aeschylus's Oresteia, closely.

Structurally, a tragedy, as discussed by Aristotle in his Poetics, includes the following parts, which O'Neill, himself, tried to follow: "Prologue, Episode, Exode, and choral portion, distinguished into Parode, and Stasimon; these two are common to all tragedies, . . ." ¹ The prologue, which is the introductory scene of the play, usually includes either an acted scene or an expository speech that precedes the first entrance of the chorus, and this prologue may be in the form of a monologue or a dialogue. In Sophocles' Oedipus the King, for instance, it constitutes dialogues between Oedipus and the Priest, and between Oedipus and Creon. The action also begins in this section with the arrival of Creon. The prologue in most of Aeschylus' and Euripides' tragedies, however, is an expository speech presented by a character such as the Watchman in Agamemnon or the Nurse in Medea. In this part, the background of the story is established. Nevertheless, some plays, like Aeschylus' The Suppliants and Persians, have no

¹Aristotle, On Poetics, trans. Ingram Bywater, in The Work of Aristotle, Vol. 2, ed. Robert Maynard (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 687. All future references to the work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

introductory scene at all, but begin instead with the parodos or the parode. Therefore, the parodos, the chorus' entrance song before they take part in an action, is probably the original tragic opening which usually gives the background of the play and bears some relation to the main theme of the play.

The next section is termed an "episode." It is the beginning of the action and provides for the complication of the plot. Following the episode is another complete choral song, the first "stasimon," after which another episode takes place. So "an Episode [is] all that comes in between the choral songs. . . ." (On Poetics, Chapt. 12, p. 687). In other words, the "stasima" or the choral songs interrupting the dramatic action mark off the tragedy into "chapters" or "acts" in modern terms. The number of these chapters of action varies from play to play. There are six such chapters in Oedipus the King: the prologue, four episodes and the final section or exodos. Most of Aeschylus' plays, however, have five chapters of action, because, as Philip Whaley Harsh points out, "[e]ventually, it became customary . . . to limit the number to five--the origin of the later rule of five acts."²

²Philip Whaley Harsh, A Handbook of Classic Drama (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), p. 14.

The last part of tragedy is the "exodos." It contains all the action subsequent to the last stasimon and often concludes with the chorus singing as they march off. There is also one especially noteworthy characteristic feature of the exodos, the messenger's speech--though this may occur in earlier sections of the play.

The messenger in Greek tragedy first appears in the Persians of Aeschylus, where he describes the battle of Salamis. Such an event obviously must, in any theatre, be described rather than acted. In the final scene of Oedipus the King, a messenger enters and recounts what has happened "off stage," Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding. This action is described rather than enacted because it was a fixed custom of Greek drama that no deed of violence could be enacted on the stage, although the results of the violence might be shown, such as the bodies of the dead, or, in this case, Oedipus' blindness. The audience knows of the incident by means of a messenger's announcement or another character's revelation. In Agamemnon, the murder of Agamemnon is revealed by Cassandra's foreknowledge:

See there, see there! Keep from his mate the bull.
Caught in the folded web's
entanglement she pinions him and with the black horn
strikes. And he crumples in the watered bath.

Guide, I tell you, and death there is the caldron
wrought.³

and by the murderess' own revelation: "That man is Agamemnon/ My husband; he is dead, the work of this right hand/ that struck in strength of righteousness" (Agamemnon, ll. 1404-1406). Additionally, Agamemnon's cry heard from behind the stage also reveals what has happened to him without need of stage presentation. The difficulty of changing scenes in the Greek theatre, the limited number of actors, the simplicity of presentation in an open theatre without a curtain and frequently the need for supernatural phenomena in the legends dramatized made the messenger's speech an extremely important technical device.

The "unities" represent another important feature of Greek tragedy. In the Poetics, Aristotle explains that "[t]ragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that" (On Poetics, Chapt. 5, p. 683). In keeping with this convention, Aristotle praises Sophocles' Oedipus the

³Aeschylus, Agamemnon, trans. Richard Lattimore, in The Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. 1 : Aeschylus, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), ll. 1125-29, p. 70. All future references to the work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

King, the action in which is confined to one place and takes place within one day. However, later critics, such as John Dryden, reinterpreted Aristotle's view of the unity of time and added the unity of place. About the unity of time, Dryden says:

The unity of time [the Greeks] comprehend in twenty-four hours, the compass of a natural day, or as near as it can be contrived; and the reason of it is obvious to everyone--that the time of the feigned action, or fable of the play, should be proportioned as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is represented: since, therefore, all plays are acted on the theatre in a space of time much within the compass of twenty-four hours, that play is to be thought the nearest imitation of nature, whose plot or action is confined within that time; . . . "4

Regarding the unity of place, Dryden says that the ancients believed that the scene ought to be the same from the beginning to the end of the play for it is performed on the stage, which is only one and the same place. Thus, "it is unnatural to conceive it many, and those far distant from one another."⁵

⁴John Dryden, An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hargard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 232.

⁵Ibid.

Tragic setting, however, varies from play to play according to the story. It may be before the temple of Apollo at Delphi as in Aeschylus' Eumenides, in a rustic landscape as in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, in front of the tomb of Agamemnon as in Aeschylus' The Libation Bearers, or in front of a farmhouse in the countryside on the borders of Argos as in Euripides' Electra. Nevertheless, a tragedy normally takes place before a palace in Greece, such as the palace of Argos in Agamemnon or the palace of Thebes in Oedipus the King. Habitually, this setting, as Dryden has mentioned, remains until the end of the play. Perhaps, the presence of the chorus accounts for the usual limitation of the action to one place because it is obvious that if a group of citizens of Thebes are continuously present on the stage, the scene cannot suddenly become Corinth or any other distant place. However, these two unities, the unity of time and that of place, are not established rules of tragedy. Some Greek tragedies reflect passage of time or change of scene. In the Eumenides of Aeschylus, for instance, the play opens with two scenes at Delphi, but afterward the Furies or the chorus of the play leave the stage in pursuit of Orestes. Then, Orestes enters the scene, which is now Athens. Thus, a period of time has elapsed, as Harsh explains:

The necessity of allowing intervals for the passage of time during the action is often avoided in Greek tragedy by a device which may be termed double

chronology. It was a well established rule even in the time of Aeschylus!⁶

Normally, the action which occurs "on stage" often begins about dawn and is completed by dusk or before. The action which is supposed to happen "off stage" is treated freely while a chorus song is being sung. Thus, the Agamemnon of Aeschylus opens before dawn on the night when Troy is captured but Agamemnon returns from Troy on the morning of the same day. Once more, in The Suppliants of Euripides, Theseus leaves Eleusis to go to Thebes with his soldiers and fights with the Thebans. After a choral song of about thirty-six lines, a messenger enters and declares the victory of Theseus over the Thebans. By the use of such double chronology, the Greek dramatists avoided some of the difficulties existing in carrying out the unities of time and place.

Another device which the Greek dramatists employed with regard to the unity of place was the throwing of the palace or temple doors wide open when they wanted to portray an interior scene. In the Agamemnon, after the off-stage murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra, Clytemnestra opens the palace doors to disclose what is inside, the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Furthermore, if there was anything which could not conveniently be portrayed on stage, another device, the

⁶Harsh, p. 27.

messenger's speech, would be used to relate such events to the chorus and the audience. In following the Greek tragic tradition of the unities of time and place, O'Neill tries to confine his plays to one place and one day, and in so doing, he employs the so-called double chronology and other Greek tragic devices concerning time and place in his plays.

Apart from the structure and the unities of time and place, Aristotle acknowledged that the chorus was the typical Greek theatric "character" and the most important element of the play because Greek tragedy was derived from "dithyramb," a ritual hymn sung by a chorus at the festivals of Dionysus, recounting the god's story or honoring him. Therefore, Greek tragedy initially was nothing more than a solemn act of religious worship with no actors at all. The chorus provided the only personages on the stage and acted as a collective body, whose function was to sing hymns. However, when one member of the chorus, the leader or the "koryphaos," was separated from the rest, a dialogue between the leader and the chorus began. After that, the first actor was introduced, and then the second and the third, namely the "protagonist," "deuteragonist" and "tritagonist," respectively. The limited number of actors explains why there were no more than three speaking characters on the stage together at any one time.

The chorus, when they enter the stage during the parodos, remain there until the end of the play. However, in a few plays, the chorus leave the stage and re-enter. In Eumenides, the chorus of the Furies leave the scene at Delphi in pursuit of Orestes and re-enter when the scene changes to Athens. Another example is Sophocles' Ajax. As soon as Tecmessa hears from Teucer's messenger that Ajax should not have gone off alone, for his death has been prophesied for that very day, she arranges for the chorus to search for him:

Alas, friends, stand between me and my doom!
 Hurry, some of you, and bring Teucer quickly
 The rest divide--let one group search the eastward
 And one the westward bendings of the shore,
 To trace his dangerous path.⁷

Usually, the function of the chorus was to sing and dance the choral songs which divided the acts of tragedy. However, Aristotle wrote: "The Chorus . . . should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and take a share in the action. . . ." (On Poetics, Chapt. 12, p. 691). Therefore, they serve not only as a naturalistic stage crowd but

⁷Sophocles, Ajax, trans, John Moor, in The Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. 2 : Sophocles, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, -1959), ll. 802-812, p. 243.

[a]t times [their leader] might take part in spoken interchange with the actors. At times, also, one or more of the actors might chant responsively with the chorus.⁸

In Aeschylus' The Suppliants and Eumenides, the chorus take a large part in the direct action of the plays and may be considered the principal actors. They even play an important role in the final scene of the Agamemnon, in which they are not far from involving themselves in a fight with Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. In the The Libation Bearers, the chorus are obviously hostile to Clytemnestra and help Electra and Orestes deceive her. Moreover, they also encourage Cilissa, Clytemnestra's nurse, to change Clytemnestra's message to Aegisthus.

The Greek tragic chorus' first function in the play is to give the background of what has happened before the play opens. In Agamemnon, the chorus consists of the old men of Argive who were left behind. They recount what happened to Agamemnon during his journey to Troy, the cause of the war, and its result. The chorus may also provide a tragic atmosphere as seen in the Agamemnon. They create a mood of foreboding, expressing doubts about what is to come, the punishment of Agamemnon, by

⁸Alexander W. Allison, Arthur J. Carr, and Arthur M. Eastman, "Introduction," in Masterpieces of the Drama (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. 1.

concluding after they recount the story of the Trojan war that

[t]he gods fail not to mar
 those who have killed many.
 The black Furies stalking the man
 fortunate beyond all right
 wrench back again the set of his life
 and drop him to darkness. Then among
 the ciphers there is no more comfort
 in power. And the vaunt of high glory
 is bitterness; for God's thunderbolts
 crash on the towering mountains.
 Let me attain no envied wealth,
 let me not plunder cities,
 neither be taken in turn, and face
 life in the power of another.

(Agamemnon, ll. 461-474)

In the The Libation Bearers, after listening to Electra and Orestes' prayer to Zeus for justice for their dead father, the chorus mourns apprehensively: "My flesh crawls as I listen to them pray./ The day of doom has waited long./ They call for it. It may come."⁹

⁹ Aeschylus, The Libation Bearers, trans. Richard Lattimore, in The Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. 1: Aeschylus, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), ll. 463-465, p. 109.

Apart from providing background, the chorus gives the protagonist sage counsel and warnings. In the Agamemnon, the chorus warns Agamemnon of the danger of Clytemnestra's hypocritically warm welcome, and they also warns Clytemnestra of the future: "Oh, can Orestes live, be somewhere in sunlight still?/ Shall fate grown gracious ever bring him back again/ in strength of hand to overwhelm these murderers?" (Agamemnon, ll. 1646-48).

The ancient view of the chorus' function is well summarized in Horace's Ars Poetica:

The Chorus must back the good and give sage counsel; must control the passionate and cherish those that fear to do evil; it must praise the thrifty meal, the blessings of justice, the laws, and Peace with her unbarred gate. It will respect confidences and implore heaven that prosperity may revisit the miserable and quit the proud.¹⁰

There are other characters, however, who function like the chorus, such as the foreseers, Cassandra and Teiresias. Like the chorus, they recount the background of the play. Cassandra, in the Agamemnon, recounts the whole story of the curse of the house of Atreus, the

¹⁰Edward Henry Blakeney, ed., Horace on the Art of Poetry, quoted in Clifford Leech, "The Chorus and the Unities," in Tragedy (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 71.

murders of Agamemnon and herself, and the coming of Orestes to avenge his father's and her death. These aspects of the chorus and its function in Greek tragedy are also adopted by O'Neill in his plays.

The final elements of Greek tragedy that need to be reviewed before a thorough analysis of O'Neill's work can be carried out are those of characterization and plot as well as the theme they unfold. It is worthwhile to know that in the ancient Greek plays all the characters, together with the chorus, were played by men. In performing a play, they "wore masks accentuating the dominant traits of the characters they portrayed and high-soled boots that increased their stature."¹¹ This is because, in the fifth century B.C., there were only one to three actors in a play. Using masks could help the actor perform a number of roles, even that of the female. The continuous presence of the chorus between the exit and re-entrance of the actor provided the actor with time to change masks and costumes.

Masks were also used to reveal the wearer's role in the play. Usually, the characters of tragedy fell into types, such as the old king, like Creon in the Medea; the courageous young king, like Oedipus in Oedipus the King; the old nurse as in the Medea and the

¹¹ Alexander, p. 1.

Hippolytus, and many others. The masks and costumes of these typical characters were so conventionalized that the audience could easily recognize them. O'Neill also uses masks in several of his plays, although usually they are masks of a more abstract nature.

Another important element of characterization in Greek tragedy, which is also found in O'Neill's tragedies, is that of the tragic hero. In the Poetics, Aristotle relates that the tragic hero must not be "a good man," by which he means a man so ideal in character as not to seem human, for the change of fortune from prosperity to adversity of such a character will move neither pity nor fear. Nor must he be "an extremely bad man" (On Poetics, Chapt. 13, p. 687) since the change of fortune from adversity to prosperity is the most untragic movement and "neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear."¹² On the contrary, he must be of "the intermediate kind of personage, a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, [what Aristotle calls "hamartia"], of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and

¹²Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher, in The Idea of Tragedy, ed. Carl Benson and Taylor Littleton (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966), p. 6.

prosperity. . . ." (On Poetics, Chapt. 13, p. 687). Thus, the hero of Greek tragedy is normally a king or prince, either by right of birth or through conquest or usurpation. Greek tragedy says nothing about the common man. Even the antagonists come from the nobility, like Aegisthus in the Oresteia.

Saying that the hero's misfortune is "brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment" (On Poetics, Chapt. 13, p. 687) implies that, on the one hand, "he has himself contributed to his own downfall; . . ." ¹³ On the other hand, his error is a mere mistake and not the result of his vice. Agamemnon, as a tragic hero, is a good man; he obeys the gods and loves his daughter. However, when faced with conflicting sacred obligations to his family and to his army, he chooses to sacrifice his daughter in order to save his army. In so doing, he arouses great anger in Clytemnestra, his wife, who finally kills him to avenge her daughter's death.

Nevertheless, the word "hamartia," as Schreiber points out, "is one of the most controversial points in the interpretation of the Poetics." ¹⁴ In their preface to

¹³S. M. Schreiber, "Notes on Aristotle's Poetics," in An Introduction to Literary Criticism (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), p. 154.

¹⁴Ibid.

Bywater's translation, Butcher and Gilbert Murray admit that its primary meaning was really a mistake, but they add a secondary meaning, "an error of 'moral' judgment, a sin, the mistake of an otherwise good man who, on one occasion, chooses evil instead of good."¹⁵ Furthermore, in his translation, Butcher also adds a third meaning, a defect of character, what he calls a "fatal flaw" or "frailty" from which all consequent errors spring. This "fatal flaw," traditionally called "tragic flaw," as suggested by Aristotle, usually is that of pride. However, this meaning seems inadequate. In Oedipus the King, for instance, it is not the hero's own tragic flaw that causes his doom, although the poet, himself, tries to suggest that the cause of Oedipus' downfall is his need to know that which is beyond human knowledge. On the contrary, his doom was predestined. However, William Arrowsmith writes in his "The Criticism of Greek Tragedy" that

if he has a "hamartia," it is not sin or flaw but the ungovernable tragic ignorance of all men; we do not know who we are nor who fathered us but go, blinded by

¹⁵Ibid.

life and hope, toward a wisdom bitter at the gates of hell.¹⁶

Schreiber seems to have a similar idea. He says Oedipus' faults are moral faults,

but the "hamartia" which brings about his downfall is not these faults but one specific mistake as to the facts of the situation. Oedipus could not know that the old man he killed was his father or the woman he married was his mother, but it was these mistakes, and not a moral fault, which caused his tragedy.¹⁷

After a study of Oedipus the King, it is obvious that the cause of Oedipus' doom is neither an error in judgment nor a tragic flaw but is, instead, the result of fate, predestined by gods. Oedipus' fate, as the story tells, was predestined by Apollo before Oedipus was born. And as time goes by, the oracle is accomplished. He does kill his own father and marry his own mother and then he becomes the king of Thebes. When the Thebans suffer a fatal famine, the only way to solve the problem is the punishment of the murderer who killed the late king of Thebes. Oedipus, as the king of the city, is

¹⁶William Arrowsmith, "The Criticism of Greek Tragedy," in Tragedy: Vision and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), p. 266.

¹⁷Schreiber, p. 155.

responsible for solving the problem, which is also a part of the oracle. Although he has choices, to continue searching for the murderer or to let the famine continue, both choices, for him, will end in doom. That is to say, he is fated to choose one and whichever choice he makes will result in somewhat similar consequences. Thus, fate is the real cause of Oedipus' downfall, not an error in judgment or a tragic flaw in his character.

Similarly, Agamemnon's downfall is caused not by his own flaw but by necessity which brings about his doom. In the Agamemnon, in keeping with Zeus' will, Agamemnon has to fight against the Trojans, but, unfortunately, when he gathers his forces at Aulis, the goddess Artemis makes the wind stop blowing until Iphigeneia, Agamemnon's daughter, is sacrificed to appease her anger and to avenge the death of her sacred hare and her unborn young killed by Zeus' two eagles. Agamemnon, thus, is faced with a terrible dilemma for he cannot reject Zeus' command nor ignore Artemis' anger, but he also knows from the start that whichever decision he makes will be considered sinful. At this point, Agamemnon, like Oedipus, is fated to choose between one of two equally fatal choices and what he chooses is to sacrifice his daughter. Consequently, he suffers mentally and meets his doom at the hands of Clytemnestra, his wife. Thus, in Greek tragedy, generally the hero or the protagonist is faced with a terrible dilemma caught

between two fatal alternatives, and the theme of Greek tragedy is "the very inner conflict and mental suffering, the war of passions, of good and evil in the hero's soul."¹⁸ Such dilemmas and themes are also apparent in O'Neill's tragedies.

Although in Greek tragedy, the protagonist is usually male, there are some tragedies where the protagonists are women. And usually these women are considered evil except for Antigone, who possesses characteristics equal to those of a tragic hero. However, a woman protagonist who is evil in character does not have to choose between the two fatal alternatives of the tragic hero. In the Medea, for example, Medea immediately decides to punish her husband, Jason, by killing his wife-to-be as well as her own children by Jason. She does this solely because she wants to punish Jason as severely as possible. Electra, too, rashly decides to avenge her father's death and encourages her brother, Orestes, to help her achieve her goal, thus involving not only herself, but her sibling as well in her gruesome plan to murder both her mother and her great-cousin. It is this peculiar treatment of female protagonists in Greek tragedy that O'Neill selects for further development in his own tragedies.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 66.

With regard to plot, Greek tragedy deals with the change in the hero's fortunes, which involves either reversal ("peripeteia") or discovery ("anagnorisis") or both, which also appear in some of O'Neill's tragedies. By "peripeteia," Aristotle means the "tragic effect of human effort producing exactly the opposite result to its intention."¹⁹ Thus, the messenger from Corinth tries to cheer Oedipus and to remove his fear of marrying his mother, but by revealing who Oedipus really is, he produces exactly the opposite result. In the case of Agamemnon, he, as a victorious hero, is expected to be honored after returning from the war; instead, he is killed unheroically by his own wife. Likewise, Pentheus, the King of Thebes in The Bacchae, plans to hunt the god Dionysus--the stranger who stirs his peaceful city; instead, he himself becomes the hunted and is humiliated by the god. Furthermore, he is horribly and unheroically dismembered by possessed women among whom are his own mother and his own aunts. Worst of all, his body is "scattered in shreds, dismembered/ throughout the forest,

¹⁹ Frank Laurence Lucus, Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's "Poetics" (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), p. 113.

no two pieces in a single place."²⁰ Peripeteia in Greek tragedy can be the change from fortune to misery or the reverse as in the downfall of Oedipus in Oedipus the King or his restoration to the favor of the gods in Oedipus at Colonus, but, usually, the change is from fortune to misery.

By "discovery," Aristotle means "a change from ignorance to knowledge. . ." (On Poetics, Chapt. 11, p. 687). It can be the recognition of person, things, or facts. Mainly, most of the discoveries in Greek tragedies are of persons, such as Oedipus' discovery of his own identity or Electra's of Orestes. These discoveries can be achieved by means of birthmarks, tokens, or process of reasoning. However, of all discoveries, according to Aristotle, "the best is that which arises from the incidents themselves, where the startling discovery is made by natural means,"²¹ such as that in Sophocles'

²⁰ Euripides, The Bacchae, trans. William Arrowsmith, in The Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. 4: Euripides, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), ll. 1229-1221, p. 597.

²¹ Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher, in The Idea of Tragedy, ed. Carl Benson and Taylor Littleton (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1966), p. 9.

Oedipus the King. There are also the recognitions of facts as in Agave's case in The Bacchae. At first, she thinks that the head she is holding is a lion's. However, after Cadmus' attempt to help her recover from Dionysus' possession by asking her questions, she realizes that the head she is holding is her own son's head which she herself has torn from his body.

In addition to the element of discovery, Greek tragedy was built around certain plots which were supposed to be historical or legendary, like the Agamemnon, which was derived from the legend of the curse of the house of Atreus, a legend well known to the Greek audience; or The Bacchae which was the legend about the coming of the god Dionysus or Bacchus, bringing with him his new but rather queer creed to Greece and about his punishment of those who opposed him. Usually, Greek tragedies are about murder, again as in the Agamemnon, which ends with Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. However, some tragedies do not end with the hero's death, as in Sophocles' Oedipus the King and Aeschylus' the Eumenides. Generally, the murders taking place in Greek tragedy are those among people in the same family whether the murder of son by mother as in Euripides' Medea and The Bacchae, mother by son as in Aeschylus' The Libation Bearers, father by son as in Sophocles' Oedipus the King, husband by wife as in Aeschylus' Agamemnon, or brother by brother as in Sophocles' Antigone. The action

of murder may be a conscious, premeditated act as in Medea's murder of her children in Euripides' Medea or Orestes's murder of his mother in Aeschylus' The Libation Bearers; or it may be committed in ignorance, with the tie of kinship or friendship discovered afterwards as happens with Oedipus in Sophocles' Oedipus the King. But whether it is premeditated or not, the act of murder is almost always committed by one family member against another, and it is this element of the Greek tragic plot that O'Neill also weaves throughout his own tragedies.

Greek drama, as mentioned earlier, developed from religious worship, and the most important religious belief of the ancient Greeks was that concerning the role of destiny or fate in men's lives. Generally, destiny appears as an abstract power or force, with undefined purpose, known as "necessity." In Greek philosophy, destiny is something mysterious as well as inevitable. A human being is not completely in control of his own life. Almost everything in his life has been predestined by the gods. Man appears in Greek tragedy as but a plaything of the Gods, subject to their least whim or fancy.

In Greek tragedy, destiny reveals itself in many ways, above all in the form of oracles. In the case of oracles, destiny may be revealed by means of a deity. It can be announced directly by a deity or through dreams. In Oedipus the King, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi reveals that Oedipus is predestined to kill his father and marry

his mother. In the Agamemnon, Cassandra's fate is also predestined; Apollo reveals that she will be killed when she arrives at the house of Atreus. In The Libation Bearers, Clytemnestra's fate is disclosed in her dream. The dream in this case comes from Agamemnon, who, after death, is in some measure treated as a deity. Another form of revelation is through prophets and soothsayers, such as Teiresias and Calchas. However, perhaps the most striking revelation is that provided by the omen, in which destiny is revealed by accident. In the Agamemnon, we see that the chorus tries to stop Cassandra from naming Agamemnon as a murder victim, for the mere naming of the person in such a case is sufficient to cause his doom. However, the wheels of destiny can also be set in motion by man. That is it can be aroused by human will through a curse, as seen in the trilogy of Oresteia where Thyestes' curse becomes a part of destiny itself and works from generation to generation.

Moreover, the idea of destiny also combines with the notion of moral retribution, of which there are two distinct concepts in Greek philosophy. The first concept of moral retribution is that of "nemesis" which is a reaction against excess of any kind.

Gods, according to Greek philosophy, are not perfect beings. They can be happy, sad, angry, or irrational, but above all, they are jealous, vengeful gods. In one legend, Polycrate died simply because he

was too prosperous. His prosperity aroused the jealousy of the gods, who then punished him with death. In the Hippolytus, the hero of the same name refuses to worship Aphrodite, maintaining the virtue of temperance. Therefore, Aphrodite, in an act of revenge, brings about his death. The other concept of moral retribution is that which identifies the governing power of the universe with justice. In Greek tragedy, justice is one of the most important elements. When man commits sin, he will not be left unpunished, for justice must be done. This notion of justice is well described by the chorus in Aeschylus' the The Libation Bearers:

Almighty Destiny, by the will
of Zeus let these things
be done, in the turning of Justice.
For the word of hatred spoken, let hate
be a word fulfilled. The spirit of Right
cries out aloud and extracts atonement
due: blood stroke for the stroke of blood
shall be paid. Who acts, shall endure.

(The Libation Bearers, ll. 306-313)

Therefore, Clytemnestra avenges her daughter's death by slaying Agamemnon, and Orestes avenges his father's death by murdering Clytemnestra in return; and in O'Neill's tragedies, the Greek notions of destiny and moral retribution are revived to lend intricacy to plot development.

These various elements of Greek tragedy--the structure, the chorus, the unities of time and place, the plot, the theme, and the characteristics of the tragic hero--have had, as has been pointed out, a major influence on the work of Eugene O'Neill. In Now I Ask You (1917), Marco Millions (1923-1925) and The Great God Brown (1925), O'Neill makes use of the Greek prologue and epilogue. In A Touch of the Poet (1935-1942), Long Day's Journey into Night (1939-1941) and A Moon for the Misbegotten (1941-1943), he utilizes the Aristotelean unities of time and place. In The Hairy Ape (1921), The Ancient Mariner (1923) and Days Without End (1931-1933), O'Neill employs the Greek chorus, and in The Web (1913), Diff'rent (1920), The Fountain (1921-1922), The Hairy Ape, The Great God Brown, and Days Without End, among others, he uses the Greek mask for either decorative or psychological purposes. These features of Greek tragedy as well as others, however, are more fully utilized in Desire Under the Elms, Lazarus Laughed, and Mourning Becomes Electra. In Desire Under the Elms, he was influenced by the Hippolytus and the Medea, while in Lazarus Laughed he makes use of ancient masks and the chorus. However, it is in writing Mourning Becomes Electra that he follows very closely the general outlines of the Aeschylean trilogy, the Oresteia, through the transferral of plots from Greek tragedy to the modern surroundings of New England in the years 1856-1866. Furthermore, like Greek tragedy, this particular play is

also written in a trilogy, composed of three separate but interrelated tragedies, entitled Homecoming, which closely parallels the Agamemnon, The Hunted, and The Haunted. All of these tragedies reflect O'Neill's fascination with the Greek tragic tradition and his capacity for building upon that tradition in an effort to reflect modern times.



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