

Eugene O’Neill’s *The Straw* as an Unexpressionist Play: An Expressionist Study of the Concepts of Forlornness, Communication, and Revivification

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ABSTRACT

*O’Neill’s fascination with the morbid lacerations of life somehow finds voice in almost all his plays. This could certainly be traced to his discomposed life of dolefulness which decidedly is the mainspring of his great competence in representing the trials and tribulations of men from new directions. His early play, *The Straw* (1919), despite its dramatic and intellectual appeal, unfortunately, has not been subject of much study by scholars. In this play, the amalgamation of the heroine Eileen with the insecure patterns of life and her appalling quarantine force her into the slough of despond with which she has to fight with all available resources. O’Neill’s remarkable power of character drawing takes us into Eileen’s world of anguish so that the voiceless cry may find room for expression in a mechanized age. Expressionism is verily traceable in the play but not in the conventional sense. Consequently, this study is expected to delve into the disoriented personality of Eileen, whose isolation stymies a gratifying communication with the world around her, from expressionist bedrock in order to bring to surface the long lost hope of the disconsolate individual. In addition, the paper will also essay to lay stress on the concept of revival from an expressionist perspective through which man can attain placidity and order in a mind-blowing disorderly world.*

Keywords: O’Neill; expressionism; forlornness; communication; revival

INTRODUCTION

Some distances apart from the silence of doom, one starts to discern the glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel for the disillusioned modern man. This stranded individual is taken by surprise when he chances upon the brutal apathy of the world on every side of him. He sets about to call into question the eligibility of modern precepts of progress and fulfilment from the perspective of one who is immensely haunted by the upshot. Isolation, as a conjoined consequence of this phenomenon, eclipses the expiring luminosity of his prospects, and the natural buoyancy for amelioration is lost sight of only to give way to more estrangement from society. Yet, regardless of all the downheartedness and all the misfortunes, an unacknowledged and unprecedented hope dimly lightens the duskiness of his heart by virtue of an assured promise of transformation. This prophet voice is taken to be the voice of God. In expressionist studies, the deadlock of life is perceived as too potent a force; as a result, man ends up in appreciating his own inner vitality as insubstantial to tackle the plight. He searches for a medium to obliterate the impediment, and his retreat is to the warm cuddle of God and morality which gradually purge him of his amoral and egoistic view of things.

The 20th century man found himself too monopolized by machines and mechanical life to be able to express him properly. He was smitten amidst the ravenous forces which spurred him to turn a blind eye to the truth of his essence. This fact, naturally, did not advance disregarded by the literary men of the day. As a matter of fact, they were heart and soul crestfallen by these facts and procured a soothing solace in nothing but their pens. Laden with the insupportable weight of the lassitude, expressionism was born out of two hostile parents. The term was first applied to painting and was coined by the French painter Julien-Auguste Hervé in 1901. At the beginning, it was exclusively used to discriminate between the impressionist painting and the more vigorous individualism of Van Gogh and Matisse. While the impressionist aspired to depict external reality, the expressionist sought to generate arrestingly his inner idea or vision of reality. To the expressionist, it was unintelligible to display an imitation of extrinsic world; therefore, he deprecated and eschewed any realistic style. Soon, expressionism ran across other forms of art, namely music, architecture, poetry and fiction; yet, it was with drama that expressionism detected a close affinity. This was ascribable to the fact that the realistic stage of the period was adjudged unduly incompetent in standing for the underlying layers of man's life, and expressionism provided the means for theatre to manifest life in a tremendously personal, idiosyncratic manner, where the form of the play expressed its content. This exclusively subjective theatre was approvingly appealing to some dramatists, and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, the father of expressionism, wrote plays in which he injected his own eccentric soul, his inward self on the stage to take a step away from the external realism and to set off to the core of soul to bring to life the interior truth unhampered by the proprieties of stage.

It seems safe to claim that no school of thought or literature dies out even if it is curtailed or diminished in the aspirations of a definite period. Each school influences the upcoming school in its range or in its objectives. For instance, this could be generalized to the counterblast of the early 20th century against the realistic dogmatism of the 19th century, which induced rewarding results of techniques such as stream of consciousness or internal monologue in fiction and other insights into the prevailing worldview. It is for the most part agreed that expressionism was burgeoning in the first three decades of the 20th century and was extinct in 1930s via the animosity of Nazism in Germany. Nevertheless, this extirpation was by no means an 'end' to expressionism, as in 1945 Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* overtly complies with the tenets of expressionism and is, indeed, viewed as an expressionist play. We can further touch the corresponding issue in the postmodern era in the achievements of Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) or *Endgame* (1957), and in the later parts of the 20th century and the earlier part of the 21st century in the drama of Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Sam Shepard. In the contemporary era, one appears to come into direct contact with the same bizarre controversies that the early 20th century man felt and suffered through; thus, perhaps the current literature is even under more strain to enunciate the inhibited conflicts of individuals, and maybe everything is set for expressionism to be brought into play once more.

Eugene O'Neill's *The Straw* certainly cannot be labelled as an expressionist play, nor could one stumble upon expressionist dramatic techniques in it. The contention made in this article apropos of *The Straw* being an expressionist play is inferred from O'Neill's veiled observance of expressionism as a method for the forthright observation of the cryptic and covert self which suffers an unimaginably excruciating ordeal owing to the dearth of tenderness and love in the modern world. O'Neill is thoroughly *au fait* with the fact that it is due to isolation that Eileen is driven into both physical and spiritual breakdown. With this perspective taken into a close consideration, this study is produced to scrutinize the recondite

sway of O’Neillian expressionism in *The Straw* and study O’Neill’s obsession with both disenchantment and hope as the driving forces of individual’s consciousness.

ARGUMENT

O’Neill was many things in general and nothing in particular. His adherence to the acute realism of Schopenhauer, his predilection for naturalism through Zola, his absorption in aestheticism through Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Swinburne, and, the last but not the least, his momentous staunchness through Strindberg to expressionism all bespeak of his multifaceted and somehow paradoxical character. Every modern dramatic style –realism, naturalism, romanticism, symbolism, expressionism —is epitomized in his work, as well as most of the dramatic types from the Stygian naturalistic tragedy of *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) and the historical romance of *The Fountain* (1925) to social satire in *Marco Millions* (1928) and folk comedy in *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933). Yet, in defiance of this complexity, we unearth in O’Neill a unanimous voice which gives life to a story, a story of the irritating dramas of men through the copious adversities that befall them in their spiky path of higher realizations. His wide reading does not make him fickle and wavering; conversely, the tone of conviction runs in his works to the loftiest measure. He is assured that under the demoralizing circumstances of the modern age, the individual or, in general, the human civilization is compelled to endure the slings and arrows of industrialization and mechanization.

In addition, we cannot exert ourselves to brush aside his dramatic conquests. He gave a Continental cast to the American stage in his restive exploration of new dramatic techniques. He was the pioneer of all great American playwrights. Nevertheless, if he was the initiator of no school and was not emulated, it was in part on account of the fact that his styles were too much personal, subjective and too manifold to be mirrored, in part because they were themselves obtained from European authors whose legacy had never been much at home in the theatres of England and America.

Characters O’Neill introduces are intensely penetrated sufferers who are ensnared between two forces: inner self and outside force. To O’Neill, this ‘self’ is the end result of the unrelenting ascendancy of both nature and society. Hence, there could be an aura of determinism immanent in his works which ushers his characters to their doom. Notwithstanding such a dire reality, he is convinced that they can defy these forces and get the worst of the battle with grandeur and sublimity. The point should also be held in mind that although their catastrophe is looming on the horizon, their consciousnesses are not entirely racked by it and their souls are not crushed to pieces. Out of tragedies are revived the tenderest sentiments, and out of isolation these individuals learn to lean on each other devotedly and communicatively. In *The Straw*, for instance, it is discernible how both Eileen and Murray, led by interior and exterior forces, elect to hold on to one another in the time of need. It is as a consequence of their mutual self-sacrifices that both find “a kind of salvation” (Ranald 2007, p. 90). O’Neill’s creations nurture the position of recalcitrance against barrenness and dreariness so as to foster as much mastery as they can over their challenges. They are cognizant that it is the fate of unrivalled souls to grapple with the ineluctable; therefore, they cling to the opinion that they should advance in their paths of adversity with a *sui generis* serenity, anticipating the arrival of a more majestic future. This is not just veracious in his drama. Indeed, O’Neill’s own agitated life assisted him to act as a responsive and tender-hearted companion to traverse with his creations to the heart of the abyss to come up against the demon and stand against it. Thus, by reading O’Neill, we begin to appreciate a fretful soul on the lookout for rectification, and that not just a private one, in lieu, an

enhancement which is a long-awaited aspiration to decrease the unpalatable grief of others as well. His characters status quo is one of poignancy and chagrin, as they are, according to Diggins (2007), “lonely, in need of pity and the protection of identity, and fearful of the religious reminder of death and damnation” (p. 3). They are enmeshed in predicaments of quandary and indecisiveness and, concurrently, cannot tangle with the present plights. This is the case with Eileen and Murray in their unacknowledged affection towards one another. Some hurdles bring their genuine rumination to a standstill, and they feel impelled to contend with them as if no other alternative was within reach. Diggins believes that, “with few exceptions, such as perhaps Anna Christie, none of O’Neill’s characters are capable of so deciding” (Diggins 2007, p. 4).

Expressionism supervened as a riposte to the reticence, smugness, and affliction that frequented the thoroughfare of modern man’s psyche. Expressionist authors distorted objective hallmarks of the sensory world employing symbolism and dream-like elements in their *oeuvres*, illustrating alienating and often emotionally overwhelmed sensibilities. Its cardinal platform for self-expression was literature and, particularly, drama. In literature, under the influences of Nietzsche in his philosophic prose poem *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1885), we witness the scepticism shrouded in expressionist works. Dostoevsky’s psychological fiction likewise had a major impression. We should not also leave out of consideration the influences of French Symbolist poets such as Rimbaud and Baudelaire, whose quixotic poems exploring pitch-black and ecstatic landscapes paved the path for expressionist playwrights in their crusades of introducing a lugubrious and macabre stage. Throughout the latter works of Strindberg, a sense of repudiation of his erstwhile schools of thought is unquestionably perceived. In the late 1890s and 1900s we can discern his detachment from realism and naturalism and his conspicuous ingress to the world of expressionism. It is routinely impugned whether he was genuinely the one who devised the movement in drama or not, but it will be worthwhile if we hold in mind that his plays in this time span ensured the future of the movement. Plays like the trilogy *To Damascus* (1898-1904), *A Dream Play* (1901), *The Spook Sonata* (1907), and *The Great Highway* (1909) were the beating hearts of the movement and it is subsequent to these plays that Georg Kaiser and Ernest Toller strengthened the backbone and augmented the calibre of the movement. However, it could be argued that none of the playwrights who succeeded Strindberg denoted the phenomenally dramatic transcendence of his plays. They hindered emotion by being abstract, fantastic, and enigmatic, and they did not engender any strenuously prominent sway in their abstract themes by their disjointedness and intricacy. It looks to be the case that it was solely O’Neill who turned out to be the pertinent apprentice to Strindberg. Three of his plays are specifically expressionistic both in content and form: *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), and *The Great God Brown* (1926). Categorically, shadows of expressionist doctrine spread a sweeping command over O’Neill’s works that even those of his plays (like *The Straw*) which could not be classified as expressionist dramas are under its collateral auspices.

An expressionist dramatist makes every effort to work his way into the vaneer of reality and to fathom the anguish a soul endures. He passes over the so-called objectivity displayed objectively in favour of a meticulous subjectivity. For Dickinson, the expressionist dramatist aspires to “treat subjective reality as if it were objective, giving it speech and action, but always under the convention that what is spoken and done is to represent the inner and not the outer life” (Grande 1948, pp. 12-13). Hence, the gravity assigned to the delineation of inner reality is not a plain antipathy to realism; rather, it emanates from the conjecture that the inward truth is much more seminal than a sheer *idée fixe* with the facade which does not do justice to the true state of affairs. An expressionist puts to use all his

efforts to give an account of the unbridled subconscious of the bedevilled individual. In a period when man regards himself as enfeebled to communicate competently with his fellow humans, and suffers, at the same time, under the load of forlornness and detachment, the magnitude of expression becomes pivotal. That is why; we notice the atrocious predicament of characters in Strindberg's *A Dream Play* who gravely struggle to make their efficient presence known to others. Consequently, the responsibility of an expressionist dramatist is to present his emotions in terms of either nature or abstraction and create a subjective world of his own, instead of representing the effect of nature upon himself. This is beyond doubt compatible with the fundamental doctrine of expressionists which encourages them to flee from the clamour of the crowd and muse over their alienation and express their disheartened state in the form of art.

In O'Neill's *The Straw* characters chase their own goals without bothering at all if those of others are fulfilled or not. This is verily an attribute of the modern, corporeal man reproved by O'Neill. He argues that people are expected to watch each other's back and act as shoulders to cry on, while, on the contrary, they are disclosed as too drowned in their own never-ending striving towards aspirations that the solitary tears, or in terms of Tennyson's poem *The Princess*, the idle tears of the struggling individuals (Tennyson 2013), remorselessly go on unheeded. In such a world, morality and love have no authority, and the summit of fulfilment is devoid of divine qualities. *The Straw*, like other plays of O'Neill, depicts a world where dignity and honour are misapprehended, and where the scenario is turned against those whose hearts are replete with fondness and goodwill towards others, people who may no longer find any space for expressing the highest ideals of humanity. Woman in this play is barbarically disowned to leave room for the roaming of the malignant man, be it father, or fiancé. At the end of Scene I in Act I, Nicholis, who has of late become cognizant of the fact that Eileen's illness is highly contagious, intends to avoid her presence. This incident compels the utmost despair of Eileen:

EILEEN. (*sadly*). I'll miss the kids so much. Taking care of them has meant so much to me since mother died. (*With a half-sob she suddenly throws her arms about his neck and hides her face on his shoulder. He shudders and fights against an impulse to push her away.*) But I'll miss you most of all, Fred. (*She lifts her lips towards his, expecting a kiss. He seems about to kiss her—then averts his face with a shrinking movement, pretending he hasn't seen. Eileen's eyes grow wide with horror. She throws herself back into her chair, staring accusingly at Nicholls. She speaks chokingly.*) Fred! Why—why didn't you kiss—what is it? Are you—afraid? (*With a moaning sound.*) Oooh (2013, p. 24)!

According to O'Neill, woman is so filled with gentleness towards those who are closely associated with her that this tenderness leads her to pay little or no regard to herself for the sake of their felicity. Thus, in *The Straw* (1919), alongside, for instance, *Now I Ask you* (1916), and *The First Man* (1921), "the woman is expected to sacrifice herself for the career of her beloved" (Ranald 2007, p. 90). In *The Straw*, Eileen is characterized as a prey of masculine tyranny and therefore has ample incentive to be heavy-hearted without respite. Lalbakhsh (2012) examine Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and reveal the self-ensnarement of Sue who, as a failure in the Foucauldian model of individuality, cannot move beyond the predefined norms within the much normalized system. In the same way, Eileen does not (or cannot) free herself from the fetters that frustrate her effective movement. She seeks repose under the shelter of love, and, when she does not catch sight of it there, she gets sick and tired of the fallacy of hopefulness. She could certainly be taken as an instance of an expressionist individual in the sense that she struggles to communicate her misery which, startlingly, exposes itself in her infirmity. Even in this critical condition, those who are expected to come into a close touch of reality distract themselves and pretend the propensity of affection and

support. At the beginning of the play, Dr. Gaynor protests against the cold-blooded reaction of Bill Carmody to the ill health of his daughter, Eileen:

GAYNOR. No, your kind never realises things till the crash comes—usually when it's too late. She kept on doing her work, I suppose—taking care of her brothers and sisters, washing, cooking, sweeping, looking after your comfort—worn out—when she should have been in bed (2013, p. 12).

From its very beginning, expressionist drama was a dramatization of the subconscious or a kind of scripted dream (like *A Dream Play*). Through this, the old rational development of the well-made plot was approximately lost. In addition to becoming formless, the play received its inner unity through the solitary vision of the playwright. Nonetheless, the expressionists interest in subjectivity led them to formulate peculiar dramaturgical techniques that distorted reality and assembled an abundance of images and symbols. This was most methodically put into practice in the arrangement of the setting by the author. Thus, to implement the aim of subjectivity, first of all, there was circumvention from the conventional arrangement of the set; to explain more clearly, the atmosphere was frequently made surreal and nightmarish, and this was attained through shadowy, unrealistic lightening and other visual distortions. The effect of this bizarre setting was enhanced by arranging pauses or silence of unanticipated length in the midst of dialogues or monologues. Under the present circumstances, settings were not now, as formerly, presented in the detailed fashion of the realistic drama. To prolong the process of dissent against the dogmatism of former realism, simplification was accentuated, and images were intended to have a more symbolical than a simply photographic character. In this light, O'Neill's *The Straw* seems to be profiting, at least, from the symbolical imagery and the simplification of the typical expressionist drama.

Moreover, the structure of the play was split into a lot of episodic scenes through which a fast and film-like sequence was realized. In spite of this speed, which clearly was a sign of a distorted consciousness, a sense of coherence was conserved by the connecting facet of dreamlike construct. This episodic technique, however, is not at all used by O'Neill in the construction of the play, as everything moves on smoothly without the slightest distortion of the realistic scenery. Read from this aspect, *The Straw* is a more proper example of realistic, and not expressionist, drama.

In expressionist drama, characters were stripped of their individuality and were displayed commonly as types. This was in part the effort of the dramatist to reveal man, regardless of his distinct identity, as an individual who shares identical preoccupations with others. This was an essay to represent social groups with particular hallmarks and was often accomplished in an unreal, exaggerated manner. Apart from the unreality and the exaggerated form of characterization, which are not used by O'Neill, characters of *The Straw* are apparently the representatives of either majorities or minorities in the modern society. In this play, O'Neill stresses the essential loneliness of individuals (Eileen and Murray) in a capitalistic era in which people as a whole cannot express their individuality satisfactorily.

As it was pointed above, O'Neill's *The Straw* could not be deemed as an expressionist drama. This seems to be affirming the obvious, but by reflecting upon the inner psychology of the play, this initial idea may be disapproved. O'Neill's early familiarity with the works of Strindberg spread an extensive ascendancy over his appreciation of what stage was and what it was meant to do. As an attentive and voracious reader, he devoured all Strindberg's twenty-four plays dating from his Romantic and naturalistic drama, to the period of spiritual plays of the last period of his life which were principally expressionist. This widely paradoxical cycle of career enchanted O'Neill and served him as a source of inspiration to grasp from Strindberg the end and the responsibility of stage towards the public. A sufferer and brooding confessor, Strindberg was to him more than a master—a gifted psychologist and a zealous

playwright. He praised Strindberg in a program note for the Provincetown Players' production of *The Spook Sonata*:

Strindberg knew and suffered with our struggle years before many of us were born. He expressed it by intensifying the method of his time and by foreshadowing both in content and forms the methods to come. All that is enduring in what we loosely call "Expressionism" - all that is artistically valid and sound theater - can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg's *The Dream Play*, *There Are Crimes and Crimes*, *The Spook Sonata*, etc. (qtd. in Törnqvist 2000, p. 27)

As a result, it is intelligible to contend that O'Neill was a true Strindbergian playwright. In addition, this elucidates the point earlier made that all of his plays, more or less, have the colour of expressionism, the school of the elder master. O'Neill's *The Straw* is expressionist in the way that it carries with itself the purport of the expressionist drama; that is to mean, despite its realistic structure, plot, characterization, and setting, the theme is expressionist: the essential isolation of the paralyzed modern individual who struggles to win the sensitive attitude of those around her. Put differently, to lead a normal life amidst the disturbing realities is what his heroine aims at. Whether in his plays the forlorn characters finally and happily find contentment may need more investigation to the heart of the matter; yet, one could claim that in the course of his plays they are unwillingly pushed to their limits. While discussing the sign of the tragic sublime in O'Neill's drama, Wing - Chi Ki (2009) concludes: "O'Neillian theatre addresses the problem of existence in the capitalistic Man. The lethal, symptomatic *jouissance* enlivens the subject, then reduces it to a state of deadly inertia, and calmly sends the subject to the realm of the living dead" (p. 203). To O'Neill, the expression of quashed voices is in the apex of its import. His plays, which all show traces of his own troubled life, are intended to bring men out of their shells to dispense an opportunity of self-expression to them. Eileen is in some ways O'Neill himself; horrendous illness, and ineluctable loneliness were the unfailing companions of his earlier life. Therefore, we can very easily perceive his revolt against the logic of the modern world. Eileen is an expressionist character in the sense that she seeks the outburst of her emotions in the appropriate situation. She does not merely stand back and gaze at the disheartening incidents going by; rather, she dwells upon the roots and the results with the conclusion that others could not be leant on, and that it is her own woe-stricken self she must fall back on. She is endowed the spirit of expressionism by O'Neill in a heterodox and idiosyncratic style. She is not equivalent to the outlandish characters of *To Damascus* and *A Dream Play*, acting within spectacular circumstances. She is a normal individual resembling ordinary, everyday people. She keeps within the bonds of popular position, yet, goes beyond the commonplace to express her inevitable dungeon in the most striking manner. We could detect in her, as in other creations of O'Neill, a universal voice that digs through the shackles of language to liberate itself from the disgruntled silence. In the course of the play, we could distinguish how language, in the larger sense, does not appear to be the correct and the ultimate medium to give tongue to inner conflicts. In one occasion Eileen is powerless to expose her real feelings as to the tyranny of her father, and in another occasion she is restless to pour out her gentle sentiments to Murray. This contradictory miasma plays a significant role in O'Neill's play and gives way to a silence/discourse duality. Language for O'Neill, in Gagnon's view, becomes "a life-lie, often hiding behind a figurative or even literal mask" (2003, p. 40). This state-of-the-art version of expressionism, devoid of the prevalent settings, characterization, and plot formation of expressionism, equips O'Neill to go a step further, and that successfully, from his idols to act as the spokesperson of all isolated individuals. Put differently, expressionism for O'Neill is "a means of universalizing human experience" (Walker 2005, p. 153).

Bill Carmody is an alcoholic whose myopia precludes him from feeling for her daughter. He is unrelentingly calculative concerning the money he should spend on her daughter's health. His calculating disposition, also shared by Fred Nicholis, Eileen's fiancé, culminates in harrowing experiences for Eileen and ushers her to inescapable dolefulness. They encroach upon her security with their egoism, leading and leaving her to her imminent doom. They never happen to come close to appreciating her unpretentious ardour by retaining a heart lacerating distance from her. Upon her admission to hospital, Eileen is in a state of nervous anticipation about the state of affairs at home. She wishes to write a letter to Mrs. Brennan, but the idea, alongside her fragile heart, is callously crushed by Carmody:

EILEEN. (*helplessly*). Never mind telling her, then. I'll write to her.
CARMODY. You'd better not. Leave her alone. She'll not wish you mixin' in with her work and tellin' her how to do it.
EILEEN. (*aghast*). Her work! (*She seems at the end of her tether— wrung too dry for any further emotion. She kisses her father at the door with indifference and speaks calmly.*) Good-bye, father.
CARMODY. (*in a whining tone of injury*). A cold kiss! And never a small tear out of her! Is your heart a stone? (*Drunken tears well from his eyes and he blubbers.*) And your own father going back to a lone house with a stranger in it!
EILEEN. (*wearily, in a dead voice*). You'll miss your train, father.
CARMODY. (*raging in a second*). I'm off, then! Come on, Fred. It's no welcome we have with her here in this place—and a great curse on this day I brought her to it! (*He stamps out.*) (2013 p. 35).

It is noticeable that Eileen is confronted by an unendurable woe. She forlornly struggles to make herself comprehended to her father, something which further originates from the fact that gratifying communication in the tumultuous plight of modern world is simply unfeasible. This concern became a *cause célèbre* among the expressionists, and, to this group, O'Neill was no exception. This roadblock or avalanche provoked them to excoriate the hallucination of fruitful interaction in the modern era. Fast transportation, easy communication through telegraph and telephone occasioned more distances among men, and expressionists were convinced by then the rustic life of the past had been more constructive in tackling the question of communication. In the strictest sense of the word, this communication was all that expressionists yearned for, and they declared every other thing could be classified under its heading. As a result, *The Straw* could be deemed as an early venture of O'Neill in the genre of expressionism in order to picture the growing distance among the intellectual animals. This isolation is, of course, no alienated theme in O'Neill's drama. After *The Straw*, with such works as *Desire under the Elms* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Strange Interlude* (1928), and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), he repeatedly complains of the loneliness of man in a purely mundane world. Gupta (2001) expounds on O'Neill's characters in these plays:

Owing to their mental conflict and insecurity, they struggle hard to get a place either in society or in the heart of some specific person. But their ill-luck stands like rock in their way, and isolates them from one another (p. 62).

In her relationship with Murray, Eileen cannot put her feelings into words. She conjectures that, owing to her incurable illness, he will never accept her. This inferiority complex only exacerbates her state of health, as she becomes submissively susceptible to what fate has ordained. This viewpoint finds expression upon the occasion of being weighed by the officials of the sanatorium. She is of the opinion that Murray, by acquiring weight, will desert her, and she will no longer be blessed with the congenial society of her love. However,

despite the desperation and urgency of the condition, she cannot expose her affection because of her psychological disturbance:

EILEEN. (*slowly*). Then—if you gain to-day—
MURRAY. He'll let me go. Yes, I know he will. I'm going to insist on it.
EILEEN. Then—you'll leave—?
MURRAY. Right away. The minute I can get packed.
EILEEN. (*trying to force a smile*). Oh, I'm so glad—for your sake; but—I'm selfish—
it'll be so lonely here without you (2013 p. 50).

When the revelation is eventually made to Murray, there are some signs that love will fruit on his side as well. However, this does not follow, and Murray leaves the sanatorium after he restores his health. Eileen is crushed to see her love rejected, and her health is deteriorated day by day, which irrefutably substantiates how the door is shut to her only remaining hope. She feels spurned by everybody and the harbinger of doom is incontestably observable to her now. For her, the demand for spiritual revivification is at its zenith, but the actual signs of resurrection are not satisfactory. After some time, Murray comes back finding her on her deathbed which reveals the truth to him that there is also love on his side, something which was intangible to him till then. This induces him to query the nurse's disclosure that nothing can save Eileen now, maintaining that the power of love is stronger than medical calculations: "But we'll win together. We can! We must! There are things your doctors cannot value—cannot know the strength of" (2013, p. 105)! This could also be taken as a fundamental point in expressionist studies. With the presence of love anything is possible. People are empowered to bring uncertainties to their knees in order to wage war against the origins of their misfortunes while shielding each other in the time of need. It is the contagious disease of isolation or the alleged self-containment that turns Milton's Eden to Dante's Inferno. Therefore, it is adequately discernible to detect O'Neill's attempt at reviving a heavenly worldview regarding the ills of solitude which, to him, contaminate the very existence of man.

The ungovernable state Eileen lives through eventually culminates in pure love. Her tuberculosis serves as a driving force in her acquaintance with Stephen Murray in the sanatorium, which gradually assists them in forming a love-oriented interaction. She lends a helping hand to him to write stories, and he, in turn, becomes a sympathetic companion to her. As a result, one could infer that the sanatorium has some symbolic significance. Expressionist dramatists averred that the use of physical symbols would grant them the opportunity to enunciate ideas by and in the stage with a compelling vigour. O'Neill was also cognizant that by utilizing symbols he would be able to manifest his innermost intentions. The point should also be taken into account that in a period of his life O'Neill passed some time in a sanatorium while he was afflicted by tuberculosis. In this sense, this personal ordeal equipped him to write with more composure and confidence. Thus, it is possible to observe that *The Straw's* sanatorium could be taken as the symbol of a means for genuine relationship, reviving vigour, optimism, etc. Since, after a physical and spiritual breakaway from her family, Eileen by degrees starts to appreciate the presence of her understanding friend Murray in the sanatorium. Through this perspective, it is in accordance with reason, then, to state that it is an atmosphere of fresh breathing love an expressionist eagerly waits for and receives with open arms. The alight fire of expectancy makes the union sweeter, as the gentle sentiment is augmented with the agreeable distance. Be that as it may, sometimes one finds himself in a state of ambivalence and instability in coming across the abstruse will of reality as to the present and the future. He realizes he has no alternative but to ask: How long will it take to occur? Does it even stand to reason to wait at all? Under the desperate circumstances of the present, he is likely to conclude that he can do nothing but wait, and this

patience is inconceivable when there is no hope of modification or revival of appealing moments. Nevertheless, it makes sense in the miasmatic world of desolation and mechanical relationships to ardently look ahead to witness the emergence of better days, and this is what both O'Neill and Eileen do.

Eileen is an unswerving lover. She does not give the green light to her dejection to take charge of her emotions in a way which will prompt her to disregard her noble feelings towards Murray. For her, it is an unimpaired fidelity to the most virtuous motives and actions that are of the paramount consequence, and, in her most isolated world, she remains staunch to them no matter what outcome will come out of them. The only thing that matters to her is that her love will be reciprocated by Murray. This acquired, she feels an empowering joy rising in her heart which transcends the boundaries of illness and hopelessness. We could touch Eileen's inner strength when she is assured of Murray's love:

MURRAY. (*his voice trembling*). And you'll marry me, Eileen?

EILEEN. (*a shadow of doubt crossing her face momentarily*). Are you sure—you want me, Stephen?

MURRAY. (*a lump in his throat—huskily*). Yes. I do want you, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*happily*). Then I will—after I'm well again, of course. (*She kisses him.*)

MURRAY. (*chokingly*). That won't be long now, Eileen.

EILEEN. (*joyously*). No—not long—now that I'm happy for once in my life. I'll surprise you, Stephen, the way I'll pick up and grow fat and healthy. You won't know me in a month. How can you ever love such a skinny homely thing as I am now! (*With a laugh.*) I couldn't if I was a man—love such a fright (2013, p. 101).

This inner strength is, indeed, a part of the nature of O'Neill's characters that do not let the irksome realities dominate their better instincts. They are unflappable in confronting their nightmares, while they resolutely bear the trials of reality by moving forward with a hope full of certitude. This resistance and optimism is recognized in the world of expressionism. In the wretched world they present, expressionists still find some kind of desirable harmony which holds out the hope of uprightness and belief. To them, the present world is overflowing with non-heroical heroism as depicted by Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* or sheer annihilation as represented by *The Wasteland*, but this incontestable doom is no reason not to fight the dark forces back into their wretched pits and bring out the moral man vanquishing in the end. Expressionists stand against causes of dubiety in order to help men restore order unto the chaos. As an expressionist, O'Neill holds on to the same precept. His quest for resolution of the moral conflicts of the modern man in a material world reaches its peak. His sceptical view of man does not rule out his profound conformity to morality and religion, and this finds expression in his unflinching revolt on modernity. He adheres to the notion that it is taking distance from religion that has resulted in the spiritual bankruptcy of the new man, and what that holds the power to alleviate the misery of this man is a reunion with religious doctrines. We can encounter the strong current of mysticism in his plays and his persistent quest for spiritual tranquillity amidst the harrowing realities of modern life. Based on the commentary of Karim and Butt (2011), O'Neill's art is "a clear instance of the gravity of the impending spiritual and ethical crises" (p. 1). Accordingly, he deems his way divergent from that of other playwrights of his day by enunciating that, "most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all; I am interested only in the relation between man and God" (Grande 1948, p. 35). This indicates that O'Neill is assured a mere material relationship with others will not bring forth a perennial and worthwhile result. It is the amiable society of God that can relieve man of his sufferings and guide him to his proper destination.

CONCLUSION

From the expressionist bedrock, modern life is contaminated with numerous contagious ills. Expressionism advances inexorably to initiate organization on the unorganized, or, in a sense, the tumultuous modern society under whose injudicious assessments man is reckoned solely as a worldly, insatiable beast. Expressionism was a mutiny against the interminable supremacy of the machine-driven epoch in the early stages of 20th century and ventured to engender a true to life rendering of the mania afflicting the spiritual sanity of the era. Ergo, expressionists analysed in their works the callousness of machines which singled out the credulousness of man and which uprooted him from his spiritual self. This repugnance found its more proper utterance in drama, and dramatists such as Strindberg, Kaiser, Toller, O'Neill, Rice, and O'Casey perused the bedlam of logical cogitation. For them, a distinctive fervour toward inner hostilities was avowed, through which, they set themselves apart from the superficial realism to enter the realms of the interior so as to commiserate with the lonely man shackled in the fetters of non-belonging. They upheld the notion that it was the psychological complexes that drove men to their limits, and it was high time everybody had given more rumination over the despondent soul. For these trenchant playwrights, the ostentatious world of outside was no reason that its initiators were also safe and sound. Thus, they distorted the former practices of stage construct and gave it an unrealistic, dream-like shroud to make the befitting bridges between the interior and the exterior, presenting a fastidious illustration of the world as they saw it. To sum up the foregoing, it is indispensable to remark that expressionism was not an endeavour to abscond from verisimilitude; indeed, it held close ties with reality, but not external, rather, internal reality.

O'Neill's purely subjective attitude toward society and nature has designated him, presumably, as the most original playwright in the American stage. His plays are outer responses to his disconcerted, perturbed soul; while, at the same time, his characters are the proxies of subdued voices who seek the expression of their beings in the slightest of rooms. O'Neill's drama seeks to extricate man from the bonds of seclusion, self-containment, dismay, etc. to open the portals of future and assuage the sense of ennui and lethargy. O'Neill, as extrapolated by Ranald, "saw the theatre as an enlightening, quasi-religious experience, a place where serious matters were to be dramatized, and audiences would empathize with the intensely human problems put before them" (2007, p. 84). In *The Straw*, as in his other plays, O'Neill lends dignity to self-esteem and the merit of communication with those whom one could establish a love-oriented relationship. Eileen ultimately emerges victorious in her antagonism towards the incontrovertible solitariness by standing tenacious upon her moral, human integrity which, indeed, renders the otherwise as somehow impossible. *The Straw* is not an expressionist play in the customary meaning of the term. The spectacular settings, episodic scenes, and extreme subjectivity all pre-eminent qualities of the expressionist drama are rare in the play; nevertheless, there is some kind of a ruling impression in the play that bestows upon it the inner, inherent quintessence of expressionism. Accordingly, they are: the delineation of the inner truth of the individual, symbolism, revolt against logical and realistic motives, insufferable solitude among relatives and friends, furnishing the individual to communicate his/her true self to others despite the calculative boundaries of modern world, and, indubitably, revitalization of the sanguine man by emancipating him from the utter havoc of mechanization and urbanization. In conclusion, the present study was meant to fulfil the study of the aforementioned qualities in the play by according to them an expressionist twist, thereby visualizing the coveted idyll of all expressionists, including O'Neill.

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