The Color of "Tragedy" in Eugene O'Neill's Tragedies of Color: A Study of The Emperor Jones, All God's Chillun Got Wings, and The Hairy Ape

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Although much of our understanding of drama revolves around the Greek concepts of Tragedy and Comedy and their varying proportion according to our conflictingly interpreted experiences, the debate about what Aristotle could give and what he knowingly or unknowingly withheld in the light of his universally accepted definition of Tragedy is still the hottest point of discussion among the literary circles. Aristotle defines:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and certain in magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play, in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions (In Dukore 36).

We know for certain that Aristotle's Poetics focuses on Tragedy to the neglect of Comedy. But anyhow, Aristotle's classic vision of Tragedy has passed the test of

time for what he described to be "tragic." Whether Aristotle knew that like life itself its dramatic "imitation" is bound to change and, therefore, by no means may become a standard scale for measuring the phenomenal happenings of the future lives, today our hawking and, at times, haunting sensibility deduces that the absence of kings and queens raises enough controversy about the idea of "fall" in Tragedy. If fall is the yardstick to determine the depth of the tragic, Adam can be termed as the first king, and perhaps Eve too, and then comes the later configuration of human hierarchies and the related idiosyncrasies based on it, the Great Chain of Beings and the Chain of great monarchs.

With reference to the Great Chain of Beings, Aristotle and his society had its own value judgments that were quite relevant and true to the mythopoeic politics of the "polis" of his time. The idea of Tragedy as an "imitation in verse of characters of a higher type" (Dukore 35) against Comedy as an imitation of lower species who "wandered from village to village" (Dukore 33) seems enough to draw distinctions between a monarch and an ordinary being, for the advantage of one over the other. As a whole, Tragedy developed as a social/ cultural construct and was based on the dominance of the powerful. Somehow, the idea of distinction leads to the ideology of difference. It is at this point of difference between the monarch and the ordinary being that we can question Aristotle's primary human concerns because such a difference also implies discrimination in modern and contemporary times. In Race and Slavery in the Middle East, Bernard Lewis refers to Aristotle's clear-cut pronouncement that certain races, particularly the black race, are doomed to slavery (53), and perhaps may fall completely out of the scope of his concept of Tragedy. The statement may definitely sound to the modern common man an idea constructed on certain chain

of imitation that promotes the hierarchy of complexions or what Winthrop Jordan terms in White Over Black as the "Great Chain of Color" (254-5).

Like Leonardo da Vinci and Newton in our times, in his times and in his own way Aristotle was well aware that color white is the simplest of all the elemental colors and that color black is mostly representative of darkness, and therefore the absence of all colors and light.[i] The archetypal "scopic drive" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 28) of color white to be a source of light and color black to be the sign of darkness, death, and deprivation helped human sensibility build metaphors based on ontological diversities which further lead to the formation of stereotypical iconography based on "epidermal schema" (Fanon qtd. in Bhabha, "The Other Question" 30).

Adam's fall was something to do with human exposure to darkness, suffering and deprivation. If Adam was not a king then any king's, queen's, or prince's and princess' fall, with all its associated repercussions; is meant to remind us of the first human fall from light to darkness. The gravity of the first fall heightens the foundational significance for human tragic affairs, but then after experiencing the first fall and our first banishment from heavens how do the imitated banishment of the commoners from the sublime realms of Tragedy and nobility sound? Is it not another tragic fall, another experience into alienation and distance? For a modern common man this ambivalence about the undetermined status of fall, tragic or pathetic, has paved ground for thinking if Tragedy and the idea about human fall were an experience about losing ranks, losing souls, or losing magnanimity attached to the enlightening effects of Highness/ high-ness. From the perspective of a racist society, a common mind may wonder if the tragic fall

is above all about losing one's position in the Great Chain of Beings and the Great Chain of Colors, and therefore one's social status due to the darker skin!

Along with Aristotle's duly attested and tested concept of Tragedy, modern man has mainly inherited the dilemma of been pronounced an outcast from the sphere of Tragedy, bereft of any noble position, reinforcing a long-term alienation of the common man from the kingdom of civilization. Aristotle succeeded in imitating the idea of human fall and handed it over to us with an ironic dimension by absenting us from his domain of Tragedy and the tragic fall. Of course, the effect magnified in terms of time; the remoter and more distant we drew from the mainstream of Aristotelian concept of tragic fall the more we grew skeptic about the genuineness of our everyday stumbling and wrecking experiences. Regarding the true spirit of Tragedy, probably we are bound to be Aristotle's audience, always to be the pitiable onlookers, awe-inspired, "wandering" as well as wondering if our actions would ever get acknowledged for the noble camp of Tragedy. It is when we the modern wondering common beings realize that the real Tragedy of our life lies in our banishment form the grandeur of stage that we can understand the irony of Aristotle's successful transformation of our fall into a solely pathetic fall. But at least, we all agree that a "fall" is there. Tragic or pathetic, we are still in a deciding phase. God banished human beings, and human beings in "imitation" banished fellow men on grounds of some preconceived notions of superiority and inferiority of race, class, or color, but life banishes none on such grounds. The metaphysical politics of heavens was contextualized into the hierarchical politics of the earth and its resulting aesthetics, but the politics of being thrown out of the Eden of "magnitude" could not throw us out of the precincts of our own existence.

Even today, Aristotle's Poetics reminds us of our alienated and doubly fallen status, but the loss of kings, if it was to add to the loss of Tragedy as well, demanded a re-interpretation of our fallen status in the light of modern sensibility. A trajectory of the dramatists who attempted to describe Comedy indirectly helped determine the scope of modern Tragedy, tragic pleasure, and its moral purpose. In the modern times August Strindberg, Arthur Miller, Friedreich Nietzsche, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and many other dramatists felt the growing need for finding an answer to the problem of the modern man's tragic position:

> ...Since the question of being on the way up or the way down the social ladder, of being on the top or on the bottom, superior or inferior, man or woman, is, has been, and will be of perennial interest. When I took this theme from real life...I thought it would be a suitable subject for a tragedy, since it still strikes us as tragic to see a happily favored individual go down in defeat, and even more to see an entire family line die out (Arthur Miller in Dukore 564).

The American dramatist Arthur Miller further revolutionizes the position of modern man's tragic self in a straight forward manner: "I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" (Dukore 894). However, it was Nietzsche who moderately traced the essentially musical and poetic connections between modern man's tragic depth and that of the Greek gods (Dukore 820-27). The title of Nietzsche's work The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music implies

the fundamental relationship in Nietzsche's theory between tragedy and music. Nietzsche's theory uses Dionysian spirit of music and not the Apollonian one to revive the decaying myth of the Greek gods. Dionysis, being the first dramatic protagonist, represents modern man's mourning of the tragic deposition, raising protests even in terms of modern psychology. The psycho-musical and psycho-mythical modification in Nietzsche's concept of Tragedy heightens the tragic effect of the modern man's conflicted being between a destined defeat and his own futile efforts to overcome this destiny. In Eugene O'Neill's Tragic Vision, C. P. Sinha explains: "Modern man's tragic struggle begins in his mind when he realizes his inability to perceive what lies beyond him" (12).

In terms of modern human tragedy, most of O'Neill's tragic vision takes into consideration Nietzsche's interpretation of the modern Tragedy in terms of Freud's modern psychology and its adherence to the explanations of ancient Greek masters. O'Neill however added his own illusionary dimensions to the conflicting human struggle in the context of Jungian collective and racial unconscious. O'Neill's early plays with their themes of race prejudice and power politics are definitely rooted in the expressionistic experimentation, but they are also an effort to locate a definition for his vision of the modern man's tragic fall on the ground of social difference: "Like the great tragic writers of the past, O'Neill is concerned with those sorrows of our proud and angry dust, which are from eternity and shall not fail" (Krutch 286). Like most of the modern dramatists, O'Neill seems to be dealing with after the fall situation of human beings, which more often magnifies the vanity of their dreamy aspirations and their frequently overweening excesses to regain the lost status. His early plays melodramatically yet tragically and as Krutch puts it lacking

in "the poet's gift for splendid utterance" (288) color the surroundings in the plays with the darkness of "defeat" within. It is the color of the mood of his protagonists and other characters that determines the mood of O'Neill's plays.

With reference to moods and their colors in O'Neill's plays, in The Emperor Jones (EJ) (1920), The Hairy Ape (HA) (1922), and All God' Chillun Got Wings (AGC)[ii] it is the blackness within the deprived souls and the most common fallen beings that colors the environment, transforming it into an objective construct. Like Fanon, O'Neill seems to be recognizing that: "Blackness [is] at the heart of oppression." Tragedy, of course, oppresses human beings by belittling their will to survive against gods and odds. One can sense that in taking up the most down-trodden, exploited, and the acclaimed Black outcasts of 1920s as his protagonists in these plays, O'Neill, the white tragedian, was going even a step ahead to what Strindberg or Miller had termed to be the tragic in their own times and from their own perspectives. In taking up the neglected most as the protagonists of his plays, the parameters of O'Neill's dramatic imitation defines a larger humanitarian scope for his tragic vision, encompassing, at the same time, the essential gravity of the first fall. Due to his choice for Black protagonists during the Harlem political activism of 1920s and his representation of the black experience in a white America, O'Neill the white playwright wins a seminal significance among the black dramatists.[iii]

In EJ and AGC, it is due to the colors of racial difference and in HA it is mainly due the darkness of class deprivation and social status that we are made to realize the archetypal and the stereotypical foundations of human tragic oppression. The presence of the black protagonists as well as the blackness of their experience in deprivation

instead of "the black as buffoon" (Long 66) adds to O'Neill's definition of the human tragic fall and its associated sense of growing dissociation. Although the plays deal with the blackness of human fall and failure, O'Neill's most daring contribution in EJ and AGC is an oxymoronic juxtaposition of the epidermal schema of colors white and black and its politics to surface the darkness of black deeds behind the whiteness of skin and the whiteness of soul concealed under the blackness of skin. In raising the issue of slavery and its far reaching social and psychological effects in terms of the historical neglect of Black race from the mainstream dominant white culture O'Neill adds a dimension of color to his tragic vision about the ordinary beings and their vain aspirations for kingly dreams. Jones, a black Pullman porter, dreamed to be an Emperor but could never become one in real sense due to the claustrophobic hold of fears that generate in him racial discrimination and slavery. These fears aggravate to the extent of a climactic depression due to Jones' sense of guilt for overreaching certain social limits.

In EJ and AGC, slavery as "social death" and birth as "natal alienation"[iv] foreground the tragic significance of the black experience in America during 1920s. In Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Travis Bogard comments with reference to American Tragedy: "an ordinary American could become a subject of pathetic concern and on occasion could rise to the height of a tragic figure" (134). The black pathetic experience that covers the blackness of human oppression is raised to the tragic level by O'Neill through color combinations and color contrasts in all the three so-called color tragedies, EJ, AGC, and HA. One may question whether O'Neill and his experimental, expressionistic, and symbolic use of skin color and the color of human moods was really an effort to assign some color to human suffering in these plays. Was human suffering and the tragic a

"black" experience for him at that time? And, above all, whether this tragic manifestation of color proves these masterpieces to be a modern Tragedy at all?

In positioning the black people at the center of the tragic experience and by adding shades of race, color, and class discrimination as the determining factors for human tragic fall, O'Neill focuses on the ever present defiant human pride or "hubris" to control the uncontrollable and the forbidden. It emerges as an almost revolting effort to break the chains of containment and confinement. In the plays under discussion, the idea of "hubris" and "hamartia" has been objectified through frequent use of color classification in terms of race and class difference. Jones in EJ, Yank in HA, and Jim as well as Ella in AGC, like the original tragic heroes Adam and Eve, may be termed as the modern Dionysian protagonists who try to break the chains of discrimination and difference, emphasizing on the blackness of their skin as well as that of their experience. In these tragedies of color, O'Neill seems to be locating color black for human suffering and tragedy. Although written strictly within the context of "color-line" and its "passing," the color barriers and the limits of American-ness to portray race or class struggle in EJ, HA, and AGC do not delimit O'Neill's efforts to project a more universal concept of human tragic fall through color and its symbolic connotations.[v]

Within the context of O'Neill's vision of Tragedy, the metaphor of black mask hiding under the stereotypical apprehensions of Negro and darkness of his skin raises moral issues posed by the presence of slavery and its legacy. On grounds of the symbolic interpretation of colors black and white, the immense impact of O'Neill's dramatic theory and its treatment through dramaturgical and technical experimentation in light and shade wins a universal

acknowledgement for the themes of oppression and coercion. By the end of 19th century when color was freed from its traditional connotative values and was lent a newer and deeper intensity, that was fundamental to Expressionism,[vi] O'Neill's experimentation in theatrical techniques helped him imbue profundity of metaphysical perception to the human tragic alienation for quest of identity and spirituality. During the America of 1920s, O'Neill's foremost concern develops upon pointing out racial slavery as a lacuna, darkness at the heart of American Democracy.

With reference to American racial, colonial, and democratic conflicts during 1920s, EJ with its journey into the darker self appears as the dramatized version of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The colonial Congo adventure against the "whited Sepulchre" in Heart of Darkness finds a new location for the racial exploitation, a white palace of the Emperor on an unknown West Indian island which looks like a "bleedin' tomb" (1032). The whiteness and its associated sense of enlightenment in the opening scene gradually transforms into blackness and an associated sense of the tragic towards the last scene of the play. Brutus Jones, the black protagonist, has fled to the tropical island after killing a white man in the States. His own despotic arrogance over the natives adds to his sense of guilt and alienation till the time he escapes into the jungle where the primitive terror and superstitious fear of immeasurable darkness trap him to death. An escape from the blackness of slavish experience turns into a darker experience of greed, loot, and power hunger, ending up in an overwhelming sense of primeval nightmarish force:

> The forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes

> accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence. (1044)

Added to this terrifying effect is the drumbeat that is synonymous to heartbeat of a conquering darkness. Color vibrates or Color contrasts add to the poetic effect of the tragic fall of a black protagonist who becomes the means for dramatizing layers of a "dark lyricism" (Sheaffer 30). Quite ironically, the controversy over casting of Charles Gilpin as Brutus Jones for the play's first premier proved that an American black during 1920s was only a step short of his African ancestors. Brutus, with his touch of idealism for namesake, has an element of pride like Caesar or Lear, but he is also exposed to the callousness of fate like Oedipus because he attempts to break the circle of his inherited position. His peeling off his blue uniform bit by bit from his black body and finally throwing away his shoes: "better off widout dem" (1052) is symbolic of self-awareness that comes by tearing off his pride. But the process of growth and self-identification leaves him to stumble through the Darwinian stages of helplessness in the dense jungle of guilt.

EI is not only a story of a Negro and his sense of guilt but also a concentrated, psychological study of the racial fear in America during 1920s. It unfolds a version of history, a Jungian dramatization of race problem, the archetypal experience of the collective racial unconscious. In the play, color black is the dominant color for slavish experience

connected to social death, but it also is the color of dark and despotic deeds done by white or black races and mobilizes the dramatic action of the play around the notion of tragic human fall. Almost all the scenes in the play take place on a pitch-dark night or at the twilight of dusk and dawn. This intensifies the magical and macabre impact of human dark experience. The black skin, the dark forest, and the ominous night against the whiteness of the first scene are the supporting images that magnify black as the color of coercion and diabolic deeds. In the initial setting, the scarlet in the white palace reminds one of the crimson of the house of Atreus in Agamemnon that juxtaposes quite ironically the imperialistic connotations of white palace to amplify at the same time the "bleedin" as well as a bloody effect of Jones' fatal ambitions; his desire to cross the historical and racial constraints. The heaviness of Jones' oppression and the tragedy of his fall under the atmospheric pressure of guilt, his self-presentation as a silent subject most of the time in the later part of the play, represent the black man's smoldering protest and hatred for the white man's exploitation of the black race over history.

In the play, whenever Jones talks about the white people he spills out his long contained anger through the rowdiness of a pseudo-imperialist discourse: "Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, is you forgettin'?" (1034). Even later, while killing the guard he pronounces: "I kills you, you white debil" (1051). Jones' anger and pride as a ruler, "I ... use my brains!" (1043), is also turned against the people of his own race, the "common bush niggers" (1041) and all the "dat black trash" (1043). Anger against his own race is anger against his own coward self: "Git in, nigger! What you skeered at?" (1046). In scene viii, the final grin of Smithers, the white man, is highly ironical against Jones' single action of shuddering with

terror. The scene is the most powerful depiction of human expression of grief and melancholy attached to suffering through fatal defeat. A surreal projection of the Manichean cult and the externalization of the historical record of black deeds of the white man in shape of Jones' dead black body and the darkness of the forest loom together with the thumping of tom-tom. The image repeats and intensifies psychological effects of the Congo crisis. The dark lyricism of black hearts mystifies the extreme sense of human alienation at the time when race and class segregation was an institutionalized fact in the American society.

Like Kurtz's death in Heart of Darkness, that changes Marlow to a somber sage, the monstrous magnanimity of Jones' death concentrates the effect of the common being's tragic fall. The claustrophobic threat caused by the reduction of space, the folding of jungle walls, and the "white man's" inevitable "burden" ironically compresses Jones back into the stages of his pre-historic self. Jones "passes," but from an ambitious Emperor to an employed slave, what remains near the end is Smithers' mocking remarks: "Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty?" (1061). Jones' death is tragic as it announces a heightened sense of individual alienation as well as the death of a marginalized culture. In his book American Drama of the Twentieth Century, Gerald M. Berkowitz explains:

> Jones fall ... is a metaphor for the inability of any man to escape the limits imposed on him by the human condition. The expressionistic devices O'Neill employs make us experience this fall from within the character, and thus recognize a common truth, rather than

> allowing us the luxury of distance and dissociation (34).

The Congo crisis, the "Black Belt" (304), and its extensive historical effects in terms of psychological and social alienation have also been projected through the dramatic depiction of the Congo mask in AGC: "He won't pass, you wait and see. Not in thousand years" (304). While facing the Congo mask on the wall and predicting Jim's failure in the examination, Ella's collective unconscious expresses not only educational and academic inferiority of the black race but also symbolically alludes at the Harlem notion of "passing" blackness for whiteness: "Pass? Pass? ... Jim Crow Harris ... Member of the Bar!" (313). Skin color as a sign of identification, superiority or inferiority, and as a status symbol is used to define American social values of virtue, intelligence, and knowledge. Africa and the related primitive blackness of the Congo mask can never "pass" into whiteness and therefore the whole symbolic presentation of color and race difference raises the issue whether assimilation and miscegenation of white and black is possible. In "O'Neill and the Racial Myths," Peter J. Gillett claims that through his sympathetic and imaginative presentation of the black American's blackness and making them a "subjective phenomenon," O'Neill has developed courage and insight to represent white American response to blackness as "diseased and degraded."

In AGC, the illusionary effects of miscegenation between the white men and the black women is tested on the brink of extreme distrust that overwhelms both sides at the time of institutionalized segregation. In Eugene O'Neill: The Man and his Plays, Barrett Clark comments about O'Neill's choice of themes and explains that O'Neill used a situation so poignant and so tragically beautiful that few otherwise

competent critics could see in it a work of art (95). In "O'Neill and the Racial Myths," Gillett also looks at AGC as a study of the prevalent attitude among white Americans toward black Americans and terms the play as "a tragedy of love and marriage." Ella's hallucinatory stabbing of the black mask with a knife, and Hattie's disapproval of her brother's white choice stand for the binary opposite attitudes. These extreme reactions pacify only when Ella's loving-self searches for the white in Jim, "you are the whitest of the white" (304), or when Jim pronounces his "black slave" love for Ella, a near neurotic submission, "All love is white" (293).

As a Tragedy and in terms of human tragic vision, AGC implies that during 1920s both black and white races had to pay a price for an ideal human marriage, otherwise the tragedy of breaking the chains of cultural and racial barriers will fall heavy on them. If "[Uncle] Jim [Crow]" (280 and 315) attempts to overcome racial prejudices and societal pressures, he is to face opposition not only from the white population but also from the people of his own community, his sister Hattie and his friend Joe: "Does you deny you's a nigger?" (285). If Ella crosses the borders of white civilization, she will be confounded by the dilemma of spinning between her original black self and her social white being. She will be divided in her choice, between the darker primeval and elemental forces of her individuality and the material privileges of her social position. Ultimately her community declares Ella an outcast. At various junctures in the play, Ella's position sounds more tragic because of her sheer sense of isolation and fall from her social climate on the basis of her race, class, and gender. Her fall due to sexual exploitation, her revolutionary choice of marrying a black man, and her ending-up as a mad woman represent the blackness of forces and the powerful hold of external

pressures and their stereotypical cultural divisions that limit and belittle any revolting being who wills to face the darkness of the social odds.

The darkness of the social barriers that transforms into the blackness of human tragic fall from a status/ position is the central theme of HA as well. Despite the fact that HA is subtitled as "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life" (119), the play exposes the calamity of human tragic-comic misfortune. In HA, O'Neill co-mingles Darwinian, Freudian, and Marxist concepts to juxtapose the dominant Capitalist class and the whiteness of its dresses with the ape-like nakedness and poverty-stricken blackness of the working class stokers covered with coal dust:

> Black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea, smudging the decks -- the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking -- wid divil a sight of sun or breath of clean air -- choking our lungs wid coal dust -- breaking our backs and hearts in the hell of the stokehole -- feeding the bloody furnace -- feeding our life along wid the coal, I'm thinking -- caged in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the Zoo! (127).

Mildred Douglas, the white daughter of the white capitalist steel-mill-owner, is dressed in all white. She romanticizes the blackness of smoke: "How the black smoke swirls back against the sky! Is it not beautiful?" (130). Her fascination for color black is soon vanished when she visits the stokehole and faces the harsh reality of Yank's pride and power. She screams: "Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!" (137). The deadly union of stokers as slaves and their rhythmic shoveling reminds of drums and music of

plantation slavery era in America and around. The intended color and dress symbolism of scene V, with the men in top hats and tails and the over-dressed and over embellished women allude to categorizations of distinction and difference made out of Great Chain of Beings. Yank's exposure to New York City is an attempt to locate his position, his point of belonging within the hierarchical order of human civilization and social values. Gorilla as Yank's double and cage as the double of stokehole specify human evolutionary connection with primeval forces of the animal world. Like Yank human beings would always struggle to fight against the stereotypical divisions based on biology, zoology, materialism, spiritualism, the heavenly banishment, the social alienation, distance, and divorce from the circles of refinement.

From complains against God to struggle against Greek gods, from fight against dehumanizing social surroundings to confrontation with one's own psychological being, human fall from all these different hierarchical rungs are doomed to restore lost positions. The scope of human struggle in O'Neill's plays expands the horizon of O'Neill's tragic vision from the cosmic, macro, and metaphysical truth to the very foundational, micro human reality. This eternal oscillation of human spirit between the sense of belonging and the sense of alienation along with the illusionary junctions and temporary jumps for determining the scope of dreamy desires to rise high to the cherished goals of success describes the dramatic realm of O'Neill's tragic vision. O'Neill's exploitation of color and its light and shade articulate a concrete space for projecting the claustrophobic effects of human state of mind. The ordinariness of his protagonists forms a link between the psychological coherence and verbal construction to reinforce the concept of modern Tragedy in our minds. O'Neill's color techniques

reveal his humanitarian approach in terms of his concern for the down trodden black people and the blackness of their tragic experience. Although wrapped in illusion, the dramatic use of color effects provides O'Neill with personal and dramatic means to launch a protest against discrimination, social injustice, oppression, and other surrounding forces that could be the cause human fall.

Our journey from Aristotelian definition of Tragedy to the modern and then to O'Neill's descriptions of the tragic experience is in itself a black experience based on the tragic realization that man is the loser despite all his efforts to win back the lost domains. But then among the human beings it is the increase of distance and association on grounds of social differences that helps aggravate the darkness of individual defeat. O'Neill, however, wins the ground of expressing his tributes of human potential in the face of human nihilistic existence. Despite the fact that O'Neill's Expressionism cannot be termed as a drama of protest in the pure ideological terms as German theatrical Expressionism was, Nietzschean, Freudian, Jungian, and Strindbergian influences paved a ground for O'Neill to explore and glorify individual freedom and psychological emancipation from the social dictates of cultural dominance. O'Neill acknowledged human nobility and grandeur and knew, like Krutch, that the "tragic spirit is always sustained by the conviction that to be a man is a terrible privilege, but a privilege nevertheless. O'Neill has always tended to vacillate between the two convictions..." (289). Protest through theatre and freedom from the theatrical realism of his times was rooted in the protest against restrictions of systems of life.[vii] Along with functioning as a source of his tragic protest, the use of light and shade and the political aesthetics of color and conviction by O'Neill add a meaningful tone to define his form of Tragedy.

Notes:

[1] For a detailed study of color and its cultural/ historical significance, see Faber Birren, Color and Human Response. Birren refers to the ancient, modern and scientific study of color with reference to Egyptian, Greek and later civilizations. John Hope Franklin in his book Color and Race refers to the symbols that are commonly attached with color black: woe, gloom, darkness, dread, death, terror, horror, wickedness, curse, mourning, and mortification and associates white with triumph, light, innocence, joy, divine, truth, modestly, femininity, and delicacy (119)

[2] All the references to primary texts are taken from Eugene O'Neil: Complete Plays, Vols. 1 and 2. New York: The Library of America, 1988, 1029-1062, 119-196-, 277-316.

[3] For details on subject, see Leslie Catherine Sanders, The Development of Black Theatre in America: From Shadows to Selves and Frederick W. Bond, The Negro and the Drama, Chpt. V.

[4] Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study: Patterns deals with the psychology and psychological effects of slavery as a social institution being one of the most extreme forms of domination. The author describes domination both in individual and social capacity and attributes the slave's powerlessness as a social death due to his natal alienation Slaves, he argues, are deprived of the right to belong the means to intensify the profundity of the tragic experience of inability to "belong".

[5] The Harlem vocabulary for shades of pigmentation was highly nuance, and the color scale for the black population

ranged from the light skinned "high yaller" and "olive" to the middle ranges of skin color "high brown" and "low brown," and then further to the dark skinned "blue" and damn therefore to be elevated in social status. During the Harlem this was a social dilemma and a psychological frustration for African Americans. The movement of black pride and black power were just a reaction to white supremacy and an attempt to restore black self-esteem. For a detailed survey of the color scale, consult Steven Watson, The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African – American Culture, 1920-1930.

[6] With reference to drama, Expression becomes a form that articulates ideas and emotions not normally expressed in the given situation. Words as colors and colors as expression set a field for Eugene O'Neill's indulgent experimentation during 1920s by contrasting an oxymoronic use of color-vocabulary, particularly shades black and white. Blackness and its symbolic projection through the color of Negro's skin and his experience of slavish suffering became a means for O'Neill to dramatize the verbal and psychological coherence of the tragic vision, and therefore, to transform the innermost fears and complexes of his protagonists into some hallucinatory outer realities.

[7] For a detailed study of Dramatic Expression as a source of protest and O'Neill's use of this technique, consult J.L. Styan. Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, vol.3

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