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## **Anti-Capitalist Reverberations in Eugene O'Neill's Dramas**

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Marxism is a system of economic, social, and political philosophy based on ideas, which view social change in term of economic factors. Marxists believe that the transition from capitalism to socialism is a predictable part of human society's development. As Marx believed that when computerization and mechanization take place, then the workers are less needed, and therefore they get lower wages. This reason directs the society to split into two classes: the capitalists who own the factories with the machines, and the proletarians, who own nothing and become poorer and poorer.

Like Karl Marx, Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), an American dramatist suggested that the upper classes unknowingly generate their own gravediggers. Marx also believed in the notion that there was a give-and-take relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeois, in which the worker produced for the benefit of the owner, but the owner gave the wage earner identity and, value through his work. Marx would also suggest that the worker would not be able to produce anything without the raw materials provided to him by the owner. The owner owned all of the laborers' hourly production, all the resources used in production, and therefore was the sole beneficiary of the finished product.

Though O'Neill was not a political writer, but he was affected by the ideological reverberations that rattled the world during his lifetime, most of which were based on or in reaction to, the writings of Karl Marx. As a young man, O'Neill traveled in the leftist circles, read the works of radical thinkers. In various letters and communications with friends and associates, O'Neill often expressed his disappointments with his society for its failure to live up to its potential, a failure he attributed to the spiritual and moral price of the hegemony of materialistic values in a capitalistic society. This theme is almost apparent in all the plays of O'Neill. In his plays, he tried to represent the pathetic condition of the proletariat class, which is the victim of capitalism.

Eugene O'Neill stood as a keen critic of capitalist culture and its ideology. He characterized those at the top and bottom of the economic heap, and examined the ways in which the capitalistic ideals not only fail to fulfil their promises but also contribute to the decay of personal values. He worked as a critic of capitalism and classicism and implied how aimless and fruitless the proletariat's efforts are in resisting and undermining the predominant classes. He revealed how organized religion functions to prevent recognition of oppressive forces utilized by the bourgeoisie.

The miserable condition of the proletariat happens as the result of economic recessions; these recessions result because the working class is unable to obtain the full product of their labors and the ruling capitalists do not consume all of the surplus value. A proletariat or socialist revolution must occur, as Marx believed, where the state (the means by which the ruling class forcibly maintains rule over the other classes) is under the dictatorship of the proletariat. As communism develops from socialism, but there is a difference between the slogan of socialism and communism. As it is mentioned in the socialist slogan that gives work to a worker according to his ability and gives salary according to his work (labor). On the other hand, the communist slogan says that gives work according to the ability of a worker, but gives salary according to his needs.

O'Neill's tremendous success as a dramatist depends largely upon the fact that he tried to criticize the modern social order that is based on the rotten system of capitalism. He talked about social injustice, which affects the lives of the poor. They have no chance to develop. They are naturally sick and weak from underfeeding, transplanted to the stinking room of a tenement or the filthy hovel of a mining village. For a period, a man may be satisfied with or even proud of his place in such a materialistic society. However, the failure of normal individuality as a self-sufficient human being will surely destroy man's spiritual world.

O'Neill in his plays focused upon that fact of a society, which is negative in itself, which prevents every attempt to get pleasure and peace, which gives importance only to sorrow, pain and misery as a good in itself, worst of all supports and rewards everything that is corrupted and destructive, criticizing beauty, welfare and cheerfulness as a crime. O'Neill's interpretation of the world is harsh and dreadful. It might be called unbalanced or monstrous.

It is clear from his plays that his heroes are neither kings nor princes, nor great military generals. They are all ordinary men and women, suffering and drawn-trodden. They are all drawn from the humblest ranks of society. His characters are the outcasts of society, because their souls try to rise against limitations imposed upon them by their own weaknesses or by the society. All his characters try to look beyond the horizon towards unknown possibilities. He had depicted in his plays that how innocent people become corrupt for the reason of corrupt economic capitalistic system. His characters burn with longing for an idealized future composed of equal parts of material success and personal freedom, but repeatedly they fall back to earth, pulled by the tendrils of family and the insatiability of desire.

O'Neill saw it as his mission to expose the false idols of twentieth century: romantic love, male superiority, white supremacy, free enterprise and even the masculine deity. In every instance, he called his audiences to sobriety, to awaken from their pipe dreams and face with courage the heart of darkness. He wanted to awake the people from the illusions or webs, which are woven by the capitalistic society. From his social dramas, it is clear that O'Neill was a

radical and forward-looking dramatist. He was in the favor of poor and working class. He wanted to improve the destiny of the poor people and their condition. He had tried to describe the poor condition of proletariat and the rotten system of capitalism. This is what he had depicted in his plays.

He knew that because of capitalism, the people tried to escape from the reality of life. Some of his characters try to hide their identity under an illusion. They do not like to see the reality of present society, which is destructive in itself. He had not only shown the rotten system of capitalism through his social dramas, but also the degradation of family values through his family plays. It was his life experience, which inspired him to write family dramas. He had tried to represent that in this modern materialistic society, the father thinks that he has fulfilled his duties while he scatters his children everywhere. When children grow up, they leave home, starting family of their own, and finally living apart from the family support.

O'Neill argued that the dominant of his society, i.e. Capitalism, legitimated all tyrannical processes within its realm of authority. This domination reacts against the militant resistance either by the intense punishment or by keeping it marginal. He had tried to explain the complex mental disturbance of modern man in his dramatic works. In his dramas, the conflict exists among human species. He was against the traditional dramatists who wanted to represent the tragic faith of those who are not in harmony with God or with universe, and the harsh condition of those who are not in harmony with other human beings.

The exploitation of the individual worker and the unequal distribution of wealth in the late nineteenth century were, for O'Neill, the unavoidable products of unchecked capitalism. During the early years of O'Neill's career as a dramatist, from the early 1910s and into the 1920s, he saw the utopian goals of anarchism as a possible answer to the dangerous consequences of unchecked capitalism. Among his many friends at the Hell-Hole was Terry Carlin, who was an anarchist. O'Neill and Carlin had the same taste for the poor-working class. O'Neill learnt from Carlin that by the abolishment of capitalism there would be relief.

Capitalism and its values focus on material possession. In this society, the poor man strives to be richer, and a powerless man looks for power. Many of these people, however, do not have access to these goals, and so to be one of the few taking the limited seats of wealth and power they compete. These kinds of people are those who rely on 'The American Dream'. While capitalism promotes the belief that this dream is achievable, it is more often than not, a literal dream, and leaves its pursuers poor and weak. This keeps the working class powerless and propagates the capitalist values. Capitalism with the help of 'The American Dream' creates a fantasy world for its pursuers. Many people in this position only perceive themselves to be succeeding but in reality, they are failing at achieving what they most desire.

A society, which is dominated by the machines and capitalists, a group of people, become the radical socialists. The so-called socialists attack at the corrupt system of the capitalistic society and try to improve the economic and political condition of the working class. O'Neill once remarked that his radical activist friends were at war with society while his quarrel was with God.

It is only capitalism, which gives birth to hypocrisy, avarice, craftiness and deceitfulness. There is no distinction between crime and justice, stately and base, and between noble and ignoble. A person who is free in spending money not earned by himself, lived on that money which is earned by the poor.

Property is the main root cause of all-evils, which worsen man. It creates an atmosphere of fears, anxieties, cares, worries, uncertainty and insecurity in the minds of both the poor and the rich. It gives more chances to the materialistic society to become stronger. In this materialistic society, every form of violence is present and the supreme law of love has lost its place. This property is responsible to remove balance from the society. Both the rich and the poor have become materialistic in the race to win luxuries of life through the wicked and criminal ways.

O'Neill also talked about belongingness. The workers, who move from their birthplace to another unknown place for work, face the problem of where to belong. They are also called refugees. There are millions of men and women, who have grown up in the faith that they belonged, they are a necessary and respected part of a social order, but they have lived to find out that they are nothing of the kind. They walk up and down the world looking for work and turn away with a brutal world. As they stand in thousands of bread lines to receive not much better than slap; as they shiver from cold, and see their loved ones die from want, consoled only by the fact that they, too, will soon be dead, they come to the realization that they do not belong. They can see an abundance of food, clothing and shelter lavishly wasted on every hand, but nothing is offered to them. They taste only the rotten food, because of a system, which does not or cannot change its ideals. They stand on the sidewalks of the world, desolate, abandoned, even hated and despised for being something that does not ask to be.

O'Neill saw no salvation for modern man, a brute who continues to be brutalized by machinery and industry. If man is, still an ape he has also become a machine. He, in self-delusion, thinks that elemental primitive force that he has converted into steel can be an adequate end in itself. He enjoys a false sense of belonging to something, of being a part of steel and of machinery, whereas he is actually their slave. The brute mind is incapable of comprehending socialist doctrine. Man is bound to be torn by the inner chaos and ultimately disintegrate.

He exposed how the brutalizing effect of materialistic and competitive society makes

man's condition hopeless. He had been attempting in all his plays to analyze, whether the poignant sorrows of humanity can be justified and if so, in what terms. He endeavoured to interpret life and life is suffering both teleological and non-teleological to overcome, to justify, suffering or sympathizing with the human predicament in the cosmos or in the seemingly apparent chaotic state of things in the world.

From the Marxist perspective, the whole condition of workers is shaped towards the production of goods. Those who hold the means of production take hold of the upper levels, while the laborers fill the bottom. Eugene O'Neill's dramas are noted in social change. He was a dramatist of protest. The importance of O'Neill as a social critic lies in the fact that he emphasized the psychological aspect of the modern social order. He pointed out the disease of greedy society. He did not merely stress upon the fact that the workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but showed how in modern machine made world they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being that comes from doing something that seems important and necessary. Man's work is a necessary part of his personality, it is an extension of his ego; it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and as far as it does, it leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfied misfit.

The protest against injustice as O'Neill revealed in his social dramas laid the hope for a corruption free world. Sophus Keith Winther says in Eugene O'Neill A Critical Study:

O'Neill's tremendous success as a dramatist depends to a great extent upon the fact that he has had something to say about the modern social order that has been worth saying. His technique and his form have been admirable vehicles for an interpretation of the conflict which arises out of the circumstances of the world. (186)

All of O'Neill's reports on the future of humanity show intense pessimism. O'Neill told to his friend Barrett Clark that, "Man has definitely decided to destroy himself, and this seems to me the only truly wise decision he has ever made" (Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays 145). In 1946, O'Neill expressed his attitude towards the future of humanity:

If the human race is so damned stupid that in two thousand years it hasn't had brains enough to appreciate that the secret of happiness is contained in one simple sentence which you'd think any grammar school kid could understand and apply, then it's time we dumped it down the nearest drain and let the ants have a chance. (Eugene O'Neill as Social Critic 360)

The main trend in Eugene O'Neill's social criticism is not positive. He criticized the Capitalistic state, but saw no hope for man in any other kind of a state. Whatever hope he saw for man lies in individuals who can have the courage to have their own souls. Many individuals, however, he

saw as hopelessly dehumanized, and O'Neill's heroes who are searching for new values are not fully-grown, tormented, and doomed. Many of O'Neill's really pleasant characters are his conventional, unthinking bourgeois, for at least each of them are capable of affection for others, and have some kind of social ethic in personal relationships, however, ruthless they may be in pursuit of their highest value-money. However, they are noticeably empty souls. All his characters are caught in a meshing of three drives-the need for love, the will to power, and the desire for beauty.

O'Neill satirized the modern civilization; he was more concerned with the higher and deeper forces that govern life. He believed that modern man has lost his faith in God. He knew that the inner conflict, of the modern man, is responsible for his behavior. He wanted to aware people through his works. He protested against the social evils throughout his works. It seems that his aim was to knock at the psychological aspect of human beings so that people will realize about their rights and freedom.

In the eyes of O'Neill, the mechanized industrial development of the materialistic society distorted man's spirit and divorced man from the qualities of humanity. As a modern tragedian, O'Neill expressed his doubt about the mechanized society and tried to show the uncomfortable condition of modern man. He attempted to show that man trapped in a web of circumstances, a web that is not of his own weaving but of materialistic society.

As in his play, *Marco Millions* O'Neill concentrated not on the problems of every human being but on an ironic portrait of the capitalistic class and its polluted structure of trade through a typical specimen, Marco Polo. O'Neill created a character in Marco who is at once the idealist poet/materialist businessman and the missionary imperialist, thus linking the lessening of Marco's artistic and spiritual nature by his earthly and commercial mentality to the idea of the weakened American dream.

In *Marco Millions*, O'Neill not only satirized western hegemony and American business and politics; he also expressed his bitter view of the American character as well. O'Neill's disillusionment with an American, he felt, had sold its soul or material ownerships, remained strong throughout his life. Speaking to the press in 1946, he said, "I fell, in a sense, that America is the greatest failure in history [...] we've squandered our soul by trying to possess something outside it. We talk about the American Dream [...] but what is that dream, but the dream of material things?" (Bowen 313). In *Marco Millions*, he suggested less a transition from idealism to materialism than a transformation: an internal, more dangerous form of corruption.

O'Neill depicted how Marco began his career as a normal child with an idealistic attitude towards life. He was romantic in love, sensitive to beauty, generous in his relations to other people, and non-materialistic. However, under the guidance of his uncle and father, he gradually

lost the mild sweetness of his character and assumed the character of the stereotyped businessman.

Through the characters of the Polos, he contrasted with expert craftsmanship the acquisitive urge in the west, its stress on the welter of mass and the quantity of volume, as opposed to the serene gravity, the dignity and infinite wisdom of the orient. O'Neill satirized the mythical not the ethical, basis of all religions by showing that the devotees, priests and dervishes, who worship at different shrines, trust in the similar general myths; and yet Confucians, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Christians and Taoists all claim supremacy of their own beliefs, not recognizing their origin from a common progenitor in comparative mythology.

Through this play, O'Neill designed Marco's program as a mayor of Yang-Chau. To Kublai Kaan, Marco boasts of the "unprecedented amount" of taxes he has "sweated out" of the local citizens, and explains how he has done it, "I found out the great majority in Yang-Chau couldn't afford luxuries. The tax wasn't enough to make it pay! I crossed it off and I wrote on the statute books a law that hits every man's pocket equally, be he beggar or banker!" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill 392).

In Marco Millions, O'Neill added to his criticism of the state, a criticism of the relations between states. Perhaps the most appalling aspect of Marco's program is his formula for international relations. He told the Kaan how to gain peace, to end war: "There's only one workable way and that's to conquer everybody else in the world so they'll never dare fight you again!" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill 394). In addition, Marco's last words in the play are "Millions! ... millions! ...millions!" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill 432). From his last words, it is clear that he has totally become a materialistic.

O'Neill satirized the stupidity of the worshippers of Mammon. He brilliantly portrayed the blunted sensibilities, the spiritual hump, as he termed it, of young Marco, the man of action, and kinetic energy, the idol of material efficiency, who had no more the rarefied and delicate poetic instinct to perceive a Cathaian Princess yearns for him. O'Neill was constantly poking fun at American philistinism, American money-grubbing and money wallowing. He had made of Marco an arrogant idol of overstuffed self-sufficiency, whose ideals are tinged with a metallic luster and resounds with a metallic clang.

The world of O'Neill is a world of bitter struggle and tragic lives, but to those who accept its reality, it is a world rich in experience, adventure and daring, where men and women demand that life will give them some positive value. In spite of destruction, which stalks on every highway in the world of O'Neill, as it also does in the world of the Greek tragedy, it is still a good world to live in, because it is a world where brave, charming, complex and interesting men

and women are present at every turn. It can be rightly said that, for O'Neill life does not end, one experience is but the birth of another. As it is said that O'Neill:

He fights against meanness and disillusionment of the bursts of passionate detestation of society, goes to extremes, used to believe there could be transition, almost bloodless, to ideal society because of man's essential goodness, but now he says there must be complete destruction first, past must be wiped out- those who resist must die, etc., - but then he sinks into exhausted depression, he feels he used to love man but now he despises him, and that is wrong, is a fault in him. (Floyd, Eugene O'Neill 306)

It can be said that O'Neill presented his own reaction to the modern state through his characters that man is owned and controlled by the men who own the steel. He represented his attitude towards the modern society by representing the days before society, which became industrialized. He represented his radical thoughts towards the rotten structure of society that the workers must be educated to know about the economic structure of society. So that they will know that, the basic evil is capitalism. His plays show that a balance can only come in the society if every man and woman, the rich and the poor have the equal rights and freedom. If people have good education and deserved jobs, then they can understand what is right or wrong for them and for their society.

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