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Puritan Values as 'Force Behind' in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

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Eugene O'Neill portrays Puritan values of the Mannon family inherited from their family past. Since Puritan values of the Mannons suppress the normal way of life and love, they retain only rigidity, without the charity which is the core element of the teaching of Christianity. With Puritan repression and its dissociation from the vital spring of life, the Puritan Mannons live in a world drained of life and in a world of hypocrisy between outer beauty and inner ugliness. Ironically, they think more of death itself, neglecting to feel the vitality of life. Working as a fate, Puritan values of the Mannon as 'Force Behind' in O'Neill's own term are the cause of suffering and destruction of the Mannons throughout the whole play. The mask-like house and faces are effectively used as a dramatic technique to express the distorted Puritan values.

[Puritanism/Puritan oppression/mask-like quality/Force Behind, 청교도주의/청교도적 억압/ 가면 같은 특성/ 배후의 힘]

Ⅰ. INTRODUCTION

Eugene O'Neill, before he became a playwright, experienced the American theater in the second half of the nineteenth century through his own father, one

of the most famous actors in his early career, who surrendered his hailed dramatic talent to financial security. This experience made young O'Neill feel 'a sort of contempt for the conventional theater' and made him 'revolt against it.' O'Neill spoke of why he was unable to content himself with the old conventional theater. He especially showed his antipathy against superficial realism of the conventional theater, saying that "we have endured too much from the banality of surfaces" (Tornqvist, p. 32). This means that O'Neill had a great concern with what underlies the fleeting phenomena of life. Unlike the old conventional plays that described surface reality, the plays O'Neill tried to write are about behind-life. O'Neill's interest in behind-life is again shown in his second wife, Agnes Boulton's account that "there was always in him [O'Neill] a persistent sense of the reality that lies beyond what it is, what seems to be" (Pommer, p. 27). In the letter written in 1925 to Arthur Hobson Quinn, O'Neill himself speaks of the reality of behind-life as 'Force Behind' which controls man's life within or without himself:

> ... to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives... I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind—Fate, God, our biological past creating our present. (Cargil, p. 125)

As shown in the above-mentioned letter, the goal the playwright set for himself is to recreate the Greek spirit in modern life. *Mourning Becomes Electra* was conceived in O'Neill's pursuit of the Greek spirit in modern life. In 1926 O'Neill asked himself if he could "get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed of no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by" (Alexander, p. 923). In 1929 when he started to write his work, the affirmative answer was given in what finally became *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Since O'Neill regards that his modern audience have no profound belief in gods or supernatural things as the Greeks did, he substitutes the workings of fate in the human psyche for the gods and divine oracles in Greek tragedy. In the play the workings of fate is dramatized through the Puritan values which have repressive and destructive influences on the member of the Mannon family.[1] The present study will examine *Mourning Becomes Electra* with the main focus on Puritan values as an obsessive and destructive force in the

minds of the characters.

II. PURITANISM

Puritanism, whether it is a religious sect or a moral code, has often offered subject matter to American literature. Especially Puritanism of New England in the nineteenth century has revealed its oppressive and destructive effects on the normal life and love of characters in novels and dramas. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter* Nathaniel Hawthorne depicted Puritan hypocrisy through Dimmesdale, the Puritan minister who was involved in liason with Hester Prynne. In his New England plays, Eugene O'Neill also described the oppressive and destructive influences of Puritanism. *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* show that the main characters of both plays are conditioned in part by harmful effects of Puritanism.

Between 1620 and 1630 the Puritans arrived in America in order to avoid the persecution from the Church of England under the Elizabethan reign. They dreamed of establishing a religious Utopia and theocracy ruled by churchmen under the direct authority of God. Afterwards, the Puritans' thoughts based on Calvinism changed and declined, although their influence is still alive. Puritanism as a religion means that "extreme type of Calvinism in the Churches of New England from 1620 to the opening of the nineteenth century" (Blankenship, p. 52). However, it is a moral code growing out of the early Calvinism that Puritanism has had most enduring influence in American life.[2] Puritanism as a dominant moral code has four main parts: election, bondage of the will, perseverance of the saints and total depravity (Blankenship, pp. 55-56). Election means that who will be saved or damned are predetermined and that all the

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1) In the sense that both playwrights Sam Shepard and O'Neill deal with the destruction of a family, they have much in common in thematic matter: "In *True West* hostile brothers to themselves, irresponsible father and indifferent mother to their family shows the decline of family ties and destruction of family." (Kim, p. 150)

2) In this play, since it is beyond the aim of this study to examine Puritanism as a religious sect, and since O'Neill does not depict Puritanism as a religious sect, it is necessary to examine moral aspects of Puritanism.

actions are also predetermined. This doctrine has a tendency to lead Puritans to regard oppression and injustice as inevitable occurrences rather than wrongs that may be abolished. The next point has close similarity to the former. Bondage of the will means that man is not free to make any choice whatever in determining his action. For the liberal Puritans this belief can generate the image of man as a squirrel in a cage. There are many examples of portraying man in a cage in American drama. The third point, perseverance of the saints, signifies that the elect who are chosen to be saved can endure in their righteousness in spite of every trick of evil. This belief offered some solace to early Puritans in the bleak and inhospitable New England environment. The last point, total depravity, implies all men are totally and hopelessly wicked. This indicates the sinfulness of man through the fall of Adam and the inability of man to work out his own salvation.

Critics have indicated that Puritanism works like fate in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Doris M. Alexander points out that Puritan conscience is used to express the working of psychological fate in the play (p. 923). C. W. E. Bigsby also indicates Puritanism operates as fate saying that the self-destructive power of the furies in Greek Theatre is transmuted into a Calvinist conscience (p. 80). In dramatizing Puritanism as fate, O'Neill has a negative point of view about Puritanism. This originates from O'Neill's attempts to dramatize Puritan beliefs that man is totally depraved and finally punished in the place of Greek beliefs of crime and retribution. O'Neill regards Puritanism as being oppressive and subsequently destructive in normal life and love. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, once man gets depraved, then eternal curses follow without the possibility of salvation. Such O'Neill's ideas are explicitly shown in his notes for the play.

> New England background best possible dramatically for Greek plot of crime and retribution, chain of fate—puritan conviction of man to sin and punishment. (Alexander, p. 923)

New England, as the setting for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, characterized by low hills and narrow valleys, lies at the northern tip of the coastal plain. The natural setting has much to do with Puritanism. As Thomas Porter indicates, people in that region live in a world drained of life without vitality:

> This locale [New England]—in literary convention at least—is rugged, cold, sea-bound. The thin-soiled, rock-strewn countryside with small, barren mountain-ranges and rivers running down to the gray Atlantic creates an atmosphere of severity, inflexibility, firmness. The people are like the landscape—tight, thrifty, joyless, merchant-class Puritan, descendants of Anglo-Saxon nonconformists. (Porter, p. 32)

Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards indicate Puritanism in New England declined in the nineteenth century because of numerous complex reasons such as the enlightenment, and many unchurched colonists. They point out a few destructive effects of Puritanism on the actual life. During the change and decline of early Puritanism, its insistence on the complete depravity and helplessness of man, and its emphasis on constant soul-searching made the simple and earnest people experience a state of neuroticism, despite its intention as a safeguard against moral degradation. Moreover, to those who thought they were the elect, Puritanism implanted exaggerated self-righteousness and pride (Horton and Edwards, pp. 47-50).

To O'Neill, Puritan repression brings upon man a state of "spiritual death," as Leonard Chabrowe indicates (p. 156). By Puritan repression and its overdeveloped sense of guilt in *Mourning Becomes Electra,* sex and all things related to it are considered shameful, thus love loses "its redemptive and creative aspects," as Bigsby points out (p. 80). As a result of them, the Puritans come to live in a world drained of life and in a world of incongruity between outer reality and inner barrenness. As Robert F. Whitman succinctly states, the repression, spiritual death and dissociation from the vital springs of life, as a part of modern man's inheritance, are developed further in *Mourning Becomes Electra*(p. 156).

Thus, in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, distorted Puritan values which over-repress the vital springs of life are effectively expressed through the dramatic setting of the mask-like house. Puritan hypocrisy and incongruity between interior and exterior are symbolized by the mask-like house. Besides, Puritan hypocrisy and incongruity are superbly shown by the contrasted colors between white and black of the setting:

> It is shortly before sunset and the soft light of the declining sun shines directly on the front of the house, shimmering in a luminous mist on the white portico and the gray

> stone wall behind, intensifying the whiteness of the columns, the somber grayness of the wall, the green of the open shutters, the green of the lawn and shrubbery, the black and green of the pine tree. The white columns cast black bars of shadow on the gray wall behind them. The windows of the lower floor reflect the sun's congruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its somber gray ugliness.[3] (p. 459)

Christine's speech clearly reveals the Puritan hypocrisy brooding over the house by comparing it to the whited sepulchre that "looks handsome on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of corruption" (Mattew 23: 27).

> Each time I come after being away it appears more like a sepulchre! The "whited" one of the Bible-pagan temple front stuck like a mask on puritan gray ugliness! It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity as a temple for his hatred. (p. 469)

The meaning of the mask-like house is well shown in Abe's intention that the house with the Greek front was built to hide inner defects. Abe's brother, David falls in love with Marie Brantome, a French Canuck nurse from the low class of society, and has to marry her because he get her with child. David and Marie are expelled from the house seemingly because they disgrace the Mannons' honor. The real reason for their eviction derives from Abe's jealousy and hatred toward them. Although Abe also feels love for Marie, his love is repressed by Puritan sense of guilt. Consequently Abe's love emerges as austere jealousy and hatred. After that, Abe pulls the house down and builds a new one because he does not want to live in the house disgraced by David and Marie. In that way, the house is built on jealousy, hatred, and exploitation and the external temple-like beauty of the house functions as a mask to hide inner defects.

The mask-like house is deliberately designed to suit O'Neill's own "unreal realism." O'Neill defines this new mode in his note to the play that "Mannon drama takes place on a plane where outer reality is a mask of true fated reality - unreal realism" (Bogard, p. 339). With such a mode, O'Neill creates an outer reality that is realistic in every detail but also functions as a mask of the true

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3) Eugene O'Neill, p. 459. Further references from the text will be indicated only with page numbers.

inner reality of the Mannons.

Along with the mask-like house, the mask-like face is constantly referred to in the stage directions. According to Bogard, O'Neill asserts that he can find that 'make-up' can achieve the effect he wants (p. 338). Through the mask as a dramatic device is changed into the mask-like face by using make-up, the concept of the mask is continued in the sense that the mask-like face, like the real mask, expresses "those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us" (Cargil and others, p. 116). As found in the mask-like house, the mask-like face also shows a sense of the "unreal behind what we call reality which is the real reality!—the unrealistic truth wearing the mask of lying reality" (Bigsby, p. 80).

Though the mask-like quality of the faces and house, what strikes our attention is a sense of fate which continuously controls the lives of the Mannons. In connection with the fact that all the Mannons have the same mask-like face, the mask-like quaility is an expression of "shared fate" (Bigsby, p. 80). Besides, the mask-like quality is also the "denial of change and of living flux of experience" in the sense that the mask-like face keeps its own look without any change, unlike living faces in our daily life (Bigsby, p. 80). Thus, distorted Puritan values are effectively dramatized by the mask-like face and house as dramatic devices, and what is more, distorted Puritan values themselves have a mask-like quality. Concerning this, Whitman clearly points out what distorted Puritan values mean.

> The malevolent spell of the Mannons drives all vitality and reality inwards upon itself, leaving only the appearance of life. (p. 156)

In relation to a whited sepulchre as a symbol of the Mannons' house, death is ubiquitous in this play. By and large, the death described in this play has two aspects which both effectively reveal the malignant power of fate as well as a tragic mood. These two aspects are psychological death in the heart of the characters and physical deaths like suicide and murder which occur in this play. In addition to the actual occurrence of physical death, the Mannons are obsessed by death itself. The fact that their house is called "tomb" (p. 469) shows they always think of death. On the night when Ezra Mannon returns from the Civil War, he clearly reveals the Mannons' way of thinking.

> MANNON: It was seeing death all the time in this war got me to think these things. Death was so common, it didn't anything. That freed me to think of life. Queer, isn't it? Death made me think of life. Before that life had only made me think of death!
> CHRISTINE: Why are you talking about death?
> MANNON: That's always been the Mannons' way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbath and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. . . . How in hell people ever got such notions! That white meeting-house. It stuck in my mind—clean-scrubbed and white-washed—a temple of death! (p. 501)

According to Chabrowe, Puritanism in *Mounring Becomes Electra* plays an "Oedipal role" and symbolizes "death," while the escape from Puritanism to Blessed Isles symbolizes life (p. 122). His view is effectively applicable in discussing physical death as well as psychological death. Puritanism, playing the Oedipal role, demands the repression of what is sexual or what are life instincts, while it encourages the dominance of the ego and death instincts. By Puritan values, sex and all things related to it are considered lustful and shameful. On the other hand, the Puritan point of view of the ego and death instinct makes the person feel guilty and restrains the sexual (Chabrowe, p. 110). This explication offers good reason for the cause of Ezra's death and for Christine's poisoning him.

Ezra can be thought of as the typical Puritan elect. With inheritance from his forefather's property, Ezra makes much money by shipping and acquires a stately house. Ezra becomes a major, a judge, and even a mayor like his forefathers shown in the portraits. A stately house, great wealth, and high social position demonstrate Puritan virtues like sincerity and industry. All these are representations of a typical Puritan heritage of outward appearance. In spite of his outstanding ability and fame, Ezra, on the day of his victorious return, shows "a mannerism of standing and sitting in stiff, posed attitudes that suggest the statues of military heroes" (p. 495). Besides, his face is much "lined and lean and the hair and beard are grizzled" (p. 495). These reveal the shadow of death in his tired and old face rather than a victorious general's face like that of Agamemnon in Oresteia. In addition, Ezra apathetically says, "all victory ends in the defeat and death" despite his triumphal return (p. 496).

Contrary to Ezra who deeply sinks into the world of death and Puritanism, Christine has strong longing toward life as is shown by her appearance. She has "a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a flowing animal grace" (p. 462). Accordingly, she feels disgust at the Puritan love of Ezra, and bitterly mocks Lavinia.

> What are you moongazing at? Puritan maidens shouldn't peer too inquisitively into spring! Isn't beauty an abomination and love a vile thing? (p. 494)

On the night of his death, Ezra confesses his secret feeling of love for Christine and attempts a new start unlike the past years. In spite of Ezra's earnest longing to restore lost love, his love is rejected, and he is poisoned to death by Christine. Ezra's death comes from "the destructive effects of Puritanism on love and marital adjustments" as indicated by Alexander (p. 925). According to Frederic I Carpenter, this is "only a Puritan failure to satisfy his wife in their love relationship" (p. 130). While Christine is disgusted with Ezra's Puritan way of love on their wedding day, Ezra does not understand and ignores the Christine's difficulty in her sense of loss from sending their son to the war. There has always been "some barrier" between Ezra and Christine. Feeling the barrier between himself and his wife, Ezra buries himself in Puritan authority by taking a position as a major, a judge, and a mayor. Ironically all these increasingly make Christine withdraw from Ezra and feel lonely in her life. Finally, Ezra is poisoned to death by Christine who longs to escape from a world of death like Puritanism to Adam Brant's "gentle and tender" love (p. 508).

Lavinia, in her own words, is "half Mannon" (p. 584) which means that one half of her is under the influence of the Puritan Mannon and the other half is under the influence of something else. What "half Mannon" means is that the self of Lavinia is divided into two parts and two parts are conflicting themselves within her mind. In relation to Lavinia's conflicts, two critics' views are helpful for their assortment. Egil Tornqvist indicates that the major conflict of the play consists of "green paganism and gray Puritanism" (p. 62). Similarly. Manheim points out two rival forces are "two family strains the Mannon and the non Mannon in this play" (p. 77). Thus, the conflicts of Lavinia can be explained as conflicts between Puritan Abe Mannon vs. pagan Marie Brantome

before the action of the play begins, conflicits between Puritan Ezra vs. pagan Christine in the first part, conflicts between Puritan Orin, Lavinia (half Mannon) vs. pagan Christine, Brant (half Mannon) in the second part, and conflicts between Puritan Orin vs. pagan Lavinia (half Mannon).

This binary assortment seems to be schematic, but O'Neill is very skillful in that the repeated conflicts and their resulting defeats strengthen the feeling that the characters are cursed and fated. Above all, the reason why the conflicts of Lavinia are important lies not in the same repeated pattern of conflicts themselves, but the conspicuous size of conflicts and their inevitable defeat. From Part One, Lavinia has the buds of conflicts as shown by her appearance. Though Lavinia resembles her mother, her resemblance to her mother is concealed by the Mannons' mask-like faces.

> She is twenty-three but looks considerably older. Tall like her mother, her body is thin, flat-breasted and angular, and its unattractiveness is accentuated by her plain black dress. Her movements are stiff and she carries herself with a wooden, square-shouldered, military bearing. She has a flat dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like a officer giving orders... Above all, one is struck by the same strange, life-like mask impression her face gives in repose... She wears her hair pulled tightly back, as if to conceal its natural curliness, and there is not a touch of feminine allurement to her severely plain get-up. (p. 463)

In Part One and Two, Lavinia faithfully follows the Mannons strain characterized by Puritan hypocrisy between inner defects and outer beauty, and the cold-hearted Puritan law of crime and punishment. Like the Mannons' house which is built on hatred, Lavinia as a faithful Mannon denies life and love as is shown in her own words, "I don't know anything about love! I don't want to know anything. I hate love" (p. 466)! Lavinia, as a careful watcher, discloses the truth of the suspicious relation between Christine and Brant and the identity of Brant. Lavinia herself trails after Christine to New York to discover her mother's adultery. As a rational manipulator, Lavinia persuades Orin to believe her by letting him follow Christine to the ship where Brant is waiting for Christine and thus allowing him to overhear them. What is more, Lavinia controls furious Orin not to make mistakes in murdering Brant, as already explained. Obsessed by her father's Puritan law of crime and punishment,

Lavinia feels no guilt at her own crime by justifying it as justice. In the scene where Orin informs Christine of the death of Brant, Lavinia, indifferent to Christine's agony sternly speaks, "He paid the just penalty for his crime. It was the only way true justice could be done." (p. 562) Even when her mother Christine takes her own life, Lavinia just stammers at the sharp report of a pistol and then speaks without any trace of pity, "It is justice! It is your justice, Father." (p. 563)

In Part Three, after the murder of Brant and the suicide of Christine the spirit of cruel Puritan law in the Mannons seems to be temporarily satisfied. The outer appearance of Lavinia apparently changes from father's to mother's. Her body, formerly so thin and undeveloped, fills out and her movements lose their square-shouldered stiffness.

> She seems a mature woman, sure of her feminine attractiveness. Her brown-gold hair is arranged as her mother's had been... The movement of her body now have the feminine grace her mother's had possessed. (p. 578)

Lavinia as half Mannon thinks, "I've done my duty" (p. 578), thus, she wants to "begin new life" (p. 579). The suicide of Christine makes Orin feel a sense of guilt from his Oedipal love and makes Lavinia feel a sense of release by her justification from Puritan law of crime and punishment. Similarly, the experience of the trip to the South Sea islands gives Orin "Puritanical disapproval" (Falk, p. 134), but gives Lavinia a sense of freedom. In Orin's case, his "regular bigoted Mannon" (p. 584) does not allow him to enjoy the trip to the pagan islands. Clearly different from the first part where she hates love, Lavinia becomes idealistically aware of the significance of love and life, and wants to love Peter, who has expressed his affection for Lavinia.

> LAVINIA: I loved those islands. They finished setting me free.
> There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world.
> PETER: Gosh no! I'm glad you've grown that way! You never used to say a word unless you had to!
> LAVINIA: I want to feel love! Love is all beautiful! I never used to know that! I was a fool!... We'll be married soon, won't we, and settle out in country away from folks

> and their evil talk. We'll make an island for ourselves on land, and we'll have children and love them and teach them to love life so that they can never be possessed by hate and death! (p. 585)

In spite of Lavinia's desperate effort to get out of her father's Puritan conscience and reach for life and love, the existence of Orin ascertains that the ghost of her father is inescapably effectual. When Lavinia kisses Peter with an expression of gratefulness, Orin expresses "jealous rage" which reflects Puritan hypocrisy between inner jealous revenge and outer justice. Such a kind of repetition offers an echoing effect of the association between past events and present and generates a sense of inevitability. At the same scene Orin's lines are effective in showing his stricken mind through the contradiction between jealous rage and a forced smile.

> LAVINIA: Bless you, Peter (She kisses him. As she does so, Hazel and Orin appear in the doorway at rear. . . . Orin starts as if he'd been struck. He glares at them with jealous rage and clenches his fists as if he were going to attack them.)
> LAVINA: Orin!
> ORIN: Don't be solemn-Fuss Buzzer! I was only trying to scare you for a joke! (Turning to Peter and holding out his hand, his smile becoming ghastly) I suppose congratulations are in order. I - I'm glad. (p. 586)

Orin's obsession with a sense of guilt from his mother's suicide drives him toward madness. At Orin's incestuous approach to Lavinia, Lavinia cries out, "I hate you! I wish you were dead! You're too vile to live! You'd kill yourself if you weren't a coward" (p. 601). Confronting his own twisted nature and his guilt, Orin takes Lavinia's words as "another act of justice" which means the cruel Puritan law of crime and punishment. As to Lavinia's hateful words, Falk indicates that "the Puritan conscience (or super ego or father god) from which she [Lavinia] has found the release in identification with the mother, now asserts itself" (p. 134). Falk's view means that the influence of distorted Puritan values reappears.

The conflict between Puritan spiritual death and escape from it is expressed by Lavinia in more intensified form than any other's. At the scene of Orin's suicide, Lavinia's desperate effort to get out of Puritan spiritual death to the world of peace and love is well shown.

> LAVINIA: Nothing matters but love, does it? That must come first! No price is too great, is it? or for peace! One must have peace-one is too weak to forget-no one has the right to keep anyone from peace!
> PETER: He's a damned fool to monkey with a pistol-in his state.
> shall I get it away from him?
> LAVINIA: Peter-once we're married and have a home with a garden and trees! we'll be so happy! I love everything that grows simply-up toward the sun-everything that's straight and strong! I hate what's warped and twists and eats into itself and dies for a lifetime in shadow. (p. 603)

In spite of Lavinia's will to free herself from the ghost of her father and Orin, and her defiant shouting at the portraits of her ancestors that "I'm Mother's daughter—not of you!...," the antagonistic power to Lavinia's will operates strongly. The feminine Lavinia now "squares her shoulders, with a return of the abrupt military movement copied from her father which she had of old—as if by the very act of disowning the Mannons she had returned to the gold-and marches stiffly from the room" (p. 603).

The last Act of Part Three is full of repetition which turns the action of the play toward the destruction of Lavinia. The repetition is expressed through such conspicuous visual devices as setting, clothes, a book, and face as well as action. When Lavinia appears in front of the same mask-like house, she is again in black, and the mask-like face of Lavinia seems intensified with a stony emotionless expression. What is worse, Hazel, who has been mourning for the suicide of Orin, recalls Lavinia from Orin's book about the family history of the Mannons. The book is originally intended to prevent Lavinia's marriage to Adam Brant by Orin's jealous rage. Hazel also reminds Lavinia that Lavinia is still a Mannon which she is so anxious to forget and escape. Finally, Lavinia realizes the dead are alive, thus she desperately laments in half-monologue, "The Dead! Why can't the dead die" (p. 608)!

Though the antagonistic power to Lavinia's will to escape is strongly revealed, Lavinia makes one more desperate effort to reach out from behind her mask of death toward life. Trying to overcome Peter's uneasiness over Orin's book, Lavinia kisses him passionately, and in her excitement, she calls him "Adam" (p. 610). The name of Adam derives originally from the Bible, and

Lavinia's calling him Adam is from her unconscious past experience. The dead, Adam Brant whom Lavinia exactd jealous revenge on, reappears. This slip of the tongue makes her realize that for her, the dead will never die, and that she must not marry Peter.

Thus, Lavinia's last hope to escape from the Puritan heritage of the Mannons toward life and love by marriage with Peter is baffled. The rational Lavinia realizes how strong the influences of distorted Puritan values inherited from her grand father are. Lavinia acknowledges she cannot free herself from the destructive effects of distorted Puritan values. In the Mannon family there is no one left to punish Lavinia according to the cruel Puritan law. In addition, she does not want to take her own life as Orin and Christine did, because she thinks suicide is "escaping punishment" (p. 612).

Thus, facing and accepting her situation without illusion, she decides to punish herself by entering the house, shutting out light and life and live in darkness and totally alone. This exaggerated self-righteousness drives them to be obsessed with the cold-hearted Puritan law of crime and punishment, which causes final destruction of the Mannons.

> I'm not bound away—not now, Seth. I'm bound here—to the Mannon dead... I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die. (p. 612)

Lavinia's final act is strong enough to elicit the tragic effect. The tragic effect of the Mannons' fate has come from the struggle itself rather than the inevitable defeat. Lavinia has dreamt to forget the Mannon house and all that ever happened in it to such a degree that "the portraits of the Mannons will rot in the walls and the ghosts will fade back into death" (p. 606). Yet now, acknowledging that she cannot escape the trap of fate and also realizing her share of responsibility, Lavinia enters the Mannon house to face the ghosts of the past who continuously exert destructive effects on her.

As to this last scene, most critics agree that it is an effective ending.[4] Though the defeat is inevitable, it is not a helpless defeat in that Lavinia shows

her own strong will more than at any other time. In relation to Lavinia's life as a form of death, Roger Asselineau higly praises, "here is a bloodless death, a death in life more cruel than real death - a moral suicide full of austere grandeur and no less tragic than the ostentatious death of a Greek or Elizabethan hero" (p. 144).

III. CONCLUSIONS

Though the characters in the play have strong ties to New England Puritanism, there is no apparent reference to God and church except Rev. Hills who appears just after the funeral of Ezra. In that sense, Puritanism means not a religion, but a way of living or thinking in the nineteenth century seen through the lens of the twentieth century of the playwright.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* the struggle of the Mannons against 'Force Behind' takes the form of inner struggle between man and himself. In this play the characters' psychological world is much more substantially depicted than their social or political world, though the dramatic setting is staged on New England in 1885-1866, just after the Civil War. The characters in the play are driven by their passion, haunted by the events of the past, and victimized by their own psyches.[5] In that sense, the force controlling their lives can be thought of as psychological fate, and Puritan values can be labeled as psychological one. Such psychological world shown by the Mannons is the products derived from the historical decline of Puritanism in America.

Puritanism, despite its progressive and affirmative roles since the early colonial period of America, is often portrayed as the source of human suffering

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4) Berlin indicates, "Lavinia's final act is the memorable culmination of all her action in the three plays," and adds, "O'Neill never gave any play of Twenties or Thirties a better ending" (p. 111, p. 116). Carpenter also points out, "at the end the modern heroine regains her humanity by undertaking a tragedy greater than that of her characters" (p. 131). Voglino's view appears to be a consensus of opinion: "in sharp contrast to the plays that precede it, the ending of *Mourning Becomes Electra* has been almost universally praised" (p. 66).

5) O'Neill shares the psychological aspects in a similar way with Tennessee Williams who is also "remarkable for the psychological description of his characters" (Park, p. 250).

in Eugene O'Neill's New England plays. Instead of focusing on the positive aspects of Puritanism, O'Neill dramatized his protest against the repressive nature of Puritanism, which resulted in abnormal suppression, depravity, hypocrisy, and crass materialism. Konick appropriately sums up the characteristics of Puritanism: O'Neill's "Puritanism is portrayed as critical, loveless, joyless, and eternally frigid" (p. 14). O'Neill's attitude toward Puritanism is clearly shown in the dramatic devises like the mask-like house and mask-like faces. The mask-like quality of the Mannons between outer beauty and inner ugliness is devised to protest against hypocritical Puritanism. Especially the mask-like faces reveals the characters in the play live in a hypocritical world, and their self is divided. Such distorted Puritan values shown by the Mannons are the sickness of modern society which O'Neill himself diagnoses. As the playwright indicates, they can be thought to be derived from "the death of the Old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new One" (Cargil, p. 115).

O'Neill shows the influences of distorted Puritan values on the Mannon family generation after generation. The Mannons are caught in the trap of an over-developed sense of guilt and the cruel Puritan law of crime and punishment. Throughout the whole play, the cold-hearted Puritan values functions as a fate, or 'Force behind' in O'Neill's term which overwhelms the Mannons.

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예시언어(Examples in): English
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