

The Multilayer Diversity of Soliloquy in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*

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I. Introduction

Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1928) is a highly regarded and an extremely valuable work written in the latter part of his life. The play was written in the 1920s when the American economy was flourishing and millions of Americans were captured by materialism and prosperity. It was the time when America seemed to have found the secret of "eternal prosperity." When the play was first performed in 1928, however, the dark shadow of the great depression was approaching. In other words, while there was enjoyment at the affluence the booming economy brought, there were also shadows instilling fear and anxiety in the populace. Eugene O'Neill's intuitive instinct and deep insight had enabled him to perceive the underlying social issues of what the people sensed in their psyche. He tried to express their trepidation through his literary talents, viewing their inner mind as a *Strange Interlude*.

Strange Interlude, which inherits the social and psychological expressionism exemplified in *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), was written as one of his experimental plays that further developed the expressionistic technique. The play was completed in 1923, but was revised up until its premier in 1928. He continued developing his expressionistic technique in *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), in which he explored the depths of Freudian psychoanalysis

All the quotes (lines) used in this thesis is cited from *Strange Interlude*, compiled in *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931* (The Library of America, 1988).

and Jungian archetypal psychology. In *The Great God Brown* (1926), he went one step further in examining the psychoanalytical expressionism used in *Desire Under the Elms*. Based on Freudian and Jungian theories, he applied the concept of the “mask” to reflect the topographic psyche of human emotions deep inside the characters. However, his intent of using the mask was not simply to reveal inner struggles deep within the human psyche, but to symbolize the conflict between the conscious and subconscious.

O’Neill attempted to explore the deep underlying psychology of the multilayer dual structure of conscious and subconscious from the viewpoints of conflict and synthesis.¹ He employed the mask not only as a tool to symbolize the characters’ transient images but as the embodiment of a deep underlying layer of subconscious (life cycle). Jung emphasized that the present moment (now) in a life cycle is the time when a life form fully combusts the energy.² In this sense, he viewed the life cycle in a positive manner.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on life philosophy than on the logical reasoning prominent in the arguments used by other philosophers. He explained that delusion constitutes the center of life and that art is a transcendental illusion, imagination, fallacy, interpretation or embellishment. Although he expounded the concept of life philosophy, he emphasized the negativity of transcendental illusion.³ Later Nietzsche explained that human regression is realized as the positivity of life based on transcendental illusion (Apollo and transcendentalism) and eternal recurrence (conflict and reconciliation with Dionysus).⁴

O’Neill had created the stage called an “interlude” to play out the life of the main character, Nina, where he denied her ego and tried to revive the art of tragedy through the shadow of death—the key

1 Thesis “Conflict and Union in *Desire Under the Elms*” Studies in The Humanities 89, (The Journal of the Senshu University Research Society, 2011) p.83-100.

2 C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. XIII, Alchemical Studies*, ed. Herbert Read et al. pp. 21–28.

Refer to Levinson D.J., *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*, (NewYork: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978).

3 Georg Picht, *Nietzsche* (Germany:Klett-Cotta, 1988) p. 170.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

factor in the development of the story—and tried to realize the process of self realization through self positivity.⁵

In my previous thesis entitled “Eugene O’Neill’s *The Great God Brown*, Dualism of the Mask,”⁶ I pointed out the insistent dualism of O’Neill’s masks that seem to align the internal “self” of the characters with presence and truth. In this thesis, however, I will try to analyze and define the multilateral pluralism found in O’Neill’s use of the technique of soliloquy in *Strange Interlude*.

II. The Significance of Interlude

In the play, “interlude” signifies and structures a shape (or format). In other words, O’Neill explores the inner human mind in depth and to realize the manifestation of true ego, he uses the ancient methods of “soliloquy” and “aside,” which he refers to as “Interludism.”⁷

Aside from dialogue, the internal thoughts of the characters are revealed to the audience in the form of soliloquy. O’Neill uses this technique to express not only the characters’ conscious mind but also the voice of their subconscious deep in their psyche, the Jungian way of expressionism, which is completely different from the ancient stage technique.

The soliloquy below is a good example of the Jungian expressionism. The author uses the technique of “Aside” to express the internal thoughts of Charles Marsden when he was asked by Sam Evans to convey his love towards Nina.

Marsden

He thinks he means that...pure love!...it’s easy to talk...he doesn’t know life... but he might be good for Nina... if she were married to

5 Hayao Kawai, 「無意識の構造」(The Structure of Subconscious) (Chukoshinsho, 1993) pp. 144–153.

6 Thesis “Eugene O’Neill’s *The Great God Brown*, Dualism of the Mask, Studies in the Humanities 91, (The Journal of the Senshu University Research Society, 2012) pp. 75–93.

7 Eugene O’Neill, translated by Soji Inoue *Strange Interlude* (Iwanami Shoten, 1939) p. 330.

this simpleton would she be faithful?...and then I?...what a vile thought!...I don't mean that!...You see, there's really nothing I can do about it. If Nina will, she will—and if she won't, she won't. But I can wish you good luck.

(First Part Act Two)

There is a similarity between *Strange Interlude* and *The Great God Brown* in that O'Neill uses the device of a mask in both. In *Strange Interlude*, however, he uses the technique of “thought asides” and exemplifies the dualism of the mental and physical life of the characters. The main character, Nina, is pretending in her life, always acting even to herself, showing her on-the-surface life in both artificial and superficial manner. She admits this fact in the following lines when she talks with Sam Evans about marriage: “Yes, it would be a career for me to bring a career to his surface. I would be busy—surface life—no more depths, please God!”⁸ On the surface, she acts as the character she has created, demonstrating her untrue self to others, and she lives her life in pretense to fulfill her inner greed for earthly desires. O'Neill uses the phrases “playing the game”⁹ and “playing the part”¹⁰ to imply dual meanings: to act proudly in a forthright manner yet on the surface pretending to be diligently obedient. Toshio Kimura considers that O'Neill failed in his attempts to imply dual meaning through using phrases that signify “inner life” and “extrinsic life.”¹¹ But did O'Neill really fail? As I mentioned in my previous thesis “Eugene O'Neill's *The Great God Brown*: Dualism of the Mask”, O'Neill's intention for using masks was to represent the conflict between the conscious and subconscious.¹² O'Neill attempted to express the multilayer structure of conscious, subconscious and

8 Eugene O'Neill, *Strange Interlude*, compiled in *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920–1931* (The Library of America, 1988) p. 673.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 697.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 679.

11 Toshio Kimura 「Eugene O'Neill の *Strange Interlude* について—主としてその題名に関して—」 (Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*—On Title) *Doshisha America Kenkyu* 22 (Doshisha America Kenkyujo, 1986) p. 7

12 Thesis “Eugene O'Neill's *The Great God Brown*, Dualism of the Mask, op. cit. pp. 75–93.

super conscious expounded by Freud, Jung and Nietzsche primarily through dualism of the mask the characters wore. He did not use the technique of aside to illustrate the dualism of inner life and extrinsic life in parallel. Instead, O'Neill applied soliloquy to represent the dualism of fake obedience on the surface and a straightforward and honest way of living. In other words, the phrases "playing the game" and "playing the part" signify the dualism that exists in the characters' lines. In order to express the implications of dualism, O'Neill wrote the soliloquy to reveal the deformed personality of the characters and express their inner thoughts. Nina mentions, "Life is just a long drawn out lie with a sniffing sigh at the end!"¹³ She implies that the cycle of life is a soliloquy of lies, but at the same time, it is a monologue that reflects the truth. In the human life cycle there are seven stages of development: Boyhood, Youth, Young Manhood, Manhood, Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age.¹⁴ Monologues in the play correspond to these seven stages, all of which reflect the dualism. O'Neill describes these stages through the life of Nina: each stage reflects the role of a woman, but at the same time, these roles represent seven types of person. Nina mentions in her next lines, "at forty a woman has finished living . . . life passes by her . . . she rots away in peace!"¹⁵ During the 25 years between being 20 and 45, Nina played all the femininity roles a woman can play: she was once an innocent girl; she fell in love and got married but failed; she was a prostitute, a good wife as well as an obsessed woman, a mother and a widow. Depending on her role, her lines hold different meanings, signifying multilateral implications. In other words, the soliloquy of Nina is created from the multilayer structure of her life cycle. O'Neill tries to express all these different aspects of Nina through her lines and soliloquies from a pluralistic viewpoint.

In this respect, Nina represents the archetypal woman. On the other hand, the men involved with Nina are: the hero, Gordon Shaw; the artist, Charles Marsden; the scientist, Edmund Darrel; the entre-

13 Eugene O'Neill, *Strange Interlude*, *op. cit.*, p. 668.

14 Stevens A, translated by Akira Suzuki Jung (Kodansha Sensho Mechie 42, 1995) p. 31.

15 Eugene O'Neill, *Strange Interlude*, *op. cit.*, p. 759.

preneur Sam Evans; her father who opposed her marriage; her son who resisted and left her; and anonymous wounded soldiers; all of these men are different representations of archetypal man.

III. The Multilayer Structure of Soliloquy

What does “Interlude” in *Strange Interlude* signify? It is not just the interlude between past and future. It is the interlude of eternal recurrence, one of the ingenious and original innovations characterizing O’Neill’s experimental plays. In other words, an interlude is not just time out for a short break, but the underlying meaning of the term is deep and significant: it reflects the entire drama while the story in fact appears to be about “regular things.” Rather than simply using monologue to reveal the character’s inner mind, O’Neill uses soliloquy to express the depth of the philosophical concepts residing deep in the mind of the characters. In *Strange Interlude*, he further develops the dualism of the mask he used in *The Great God Brown*. His experiments with other plays enabled him to accumulate his expertise as a powerful playwright to revise *Strange Interlude* as the most remarkable and noteworthy play that evolved to be the most profound innovative version of *The Great God Brown*.

Professor Leeds, the father of the main character, Nina in *Strange Interlude*, was against her engagement to Gordon Shaw, who was the Jungian “Great Father” to her. Gordon dies in World War I and Nina develops an Electra complex. She tries to overcome this inner conflict by becoming Mother God, Mother Earth, or in Jungian terms, the Great Mother, at which point she appears on the stage of *Strange Interlude*. In other words, *Strange Interlude* is the stage where Nina transmutes into the Great Mother. The play features the process of her evolution.

In O’Neill’s plays, the techniques he uses to express the psychological depths are vital tools. In *The Great God Brown* he uses the mask to present psychological and philosophical theories, in *Strange Interlude* he uses “soliloquy.”

O’Neill intelligently experiments with adopting Freudian

psychoanalysis in various scenes in *Strange Interlude*, as he does in other plays. The Jungian concepts of collective unconscious¹⁶ and archetypal psychoanalysis¹⁷ also appear. They are not simply adopted, however. These theories and concepts are interwoven intelligently into the story and thus are expanded into higher levels.

O'Neill also adopted the theory of the super conscious of eternal recurrence, advocated by Nietzsche, through the life cycle to evolve self-conscious from ego. The tragedy of *Strange Interlude* develops in eternal recurrence, and the topic of "life and death"¹⁸ featured in the drama contributes to O'Neill's intention to flush the characters with life through the harmonious fusion of their internal conflicts, thereby opening the way to "happiness and peace."¹⁹ The use of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's philosophies in O'Neill's plays was something new. His experiments enabled him to innovate this new dramatical technique.²⁰ He realized that with Nietzsche's philosophy, the tragedies and malicious evil minds hidden in the darkness of the characters of *Strange Interlude* could not advance forward, and therefore he used the theory of "perfect peace and serene happiness" expounded by Schopenhauer to achieve his intention.

The quest of Eugene O'Neill in search of the root of happiness reflects his background. The phrase that best describe his background may seem irrelevant but he was once called as "Famous Playwright in Alcohol Adversity,"²¹ a phrase disseminated by the psychiatrists. The fact that he himself opened the way to develop this technique new and innovative to modern theater reflects the new light of hope in his life, which enabled him to break new ground. He raised the level of American Drama to world class and for his contributions he was

16 C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. XI, Psychology and Religion*, ed. Herbert Read et al. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1958) p. 345.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 345.

18 Hayao Kawai, *op. cit.*, p. 81-84.

19 Schopenhauer, translated by Hideo Akiyama "Complete Works of Schopenhauer Vol 14" (Hakusuisha, 1996) p. 207.

20 Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time* (Oxford University Press, 1972) p. 303.

21 Ikuo Yonekura, 「嗜癖者の病跡学的研究-Eugene O'Neill について(その1)」(History of addiction—On Eugene O'Neill vol 1) (Japan Pathography Journal) No 6 1973 pp. 6-10 Japan Pathography Discussion Group.

awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His contribution to the treatment of psychotic disorders for alcoholic patients is well known.²² O'Neill was himself an alcoholic who developed anancastia, an obsession where someone feels forced to act or think against her or his will, and at one time he underwent treatment with Freudian psychoanalysis. His experience is engraved at the core of his plays. In earlier plays, he adopted Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian psychoanalytical theories separately, attributing psychoanalytical elements to the personalities of the characters. In *Strange Interlude*, however, O'Neill not only combined and interwove these two giants of concepts, he even went beyond his use of Nietzsche's philosophy in *The Great God Brown* to adopt Schopenhauer's theory to overcome the hurdles in his characters' lives and open up the way to achieving happiness and peace.

O'Neill uses soliloquy as a lever to enable the characters to self-adjust to the conflicting dualism of lies and truth. The multilayer structure of the soliloquy he uses can be illustrated through an analysis of Nina's love life. In this aspect, the life cycle of Nina, who played all the roles a woman can experience, is encapsulated and developed on the stage.

I have analyzed each layer of the structure of soliloquy to examine the technique O'Neill employs. I will start with the development of the story with many different types of personalities in this long play of 2 Parts and 9 Acts, in which the true nature of the characters are revealed. The story progresses centering on the involvement of six characters with Nina, namely Prof. Leeds (Nina's father), Dr. Edmund Darrell (Nina's lover), Sam Evans (her husband), Charles Marsden (guardian since her childhood), Gordon Evans (her son), and Gordon Shaw (her fiancé who died in the war). It is Nina's involvement with Prof. Leeds that highlights the Freudian psychoanalytical aspect more than any other. An Electra complex exists between the two characters, as evidenced by the conflict that exists between them as a result of Prof. Leeds' opposition to her marriage to Gordon Shaw, who represents the Great Father, but died in the war.

²² *Ibid.*

PROFESSOR LEEDS

She'll be right in. She said she wanted to finish thinking something out—You'll find Nina changed, Charlie, greatly changed! (*He sighs—thinking with a trace of guilty alarm*)

The first thing she said at breakfast . . . “I dreamed of Gordon” . . . as if she wanted to taunt me! . . . how absurd! . . . her eyes positively glared! . . .

(*suddenly blurting out resentfully*) She dreams about Gordon.

MARSDEN (*looking at him with amused surprise*) Well, I'd hardly call that a change, would you?

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*thinking, oblivious to this remark*)

But I must constantly bear in mind that she's not herself . . . that she's a sick girl . . .

MARSDEN (*thinking*)

The morning news of Gordon's death came . . . her face like gray putty . . . beauty gone . . . no face can afford intense grief . . . it's only later when sorrow . . .

(*with concern*) Just what do you mean by changed, Professor? Before I left she seemed to be coming out of that horrible numbed calm.

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*slowly and carefully*) Yes, she has played a lot of golf and tennis this summer, motored around with her friends, and even danced a good deal. And she eats with a ravenous appetite. (*thinking frightenedly*)

Breakfast . . . “dreamed of Gordon” . . . what a look of hate for me in her eyes! . . .

MARSDEN

But that sounds splendid! When I left she wouldn't see anyone or go anywhere. (*thinking pityingly*)

Wandering from room to room . . . her thin body and pale lost

(144)

face . . . gutted, love-abandoned eyes! . . .

PROFESSOR LEEDS

Well, now she's gone to the opposite extreme!
Sees everyone—bores, fools—as if she'd lost all discrimination or
wish to discriminate. And she talks interminably, Charlie—
intentional nonsense, one would say! Refuses to be serious! Jeers
at everything!

(First Part Act one)

Nina's confrontation with Madeline Arnold, the new lover of her son Gordon Evans, who resembles Gordon Shaw the symbol of the Great Father, is the next struggle Nina faces. Gordon is leaving her because of Madeline and Nina's conflict with her.

NINA (*sternly—grabbing her by the wrist*) No, now! Do you promise?

MADELINE (*with helpless annoyance*) Yes, Mrs. Evans.

NINA (*sternly*) For the sake of your future happiness and my son's I've got to speak! Your engagement forces me to! You've probably wondered why I objected. It's because the marriage is impossible. You can't marry Gordon! I speak as your friend! You must break your engagement with him at once!

MADELINE (*cannot believe her ears—suddenly panic-stricken*)
But why—why?

(Second Part Act Eight)

The second point I would like to note is the importance of the following lines where Prof. Leeds talks to Marsden. These words reflect Jungian psychoanalysis (subconscious layer, a ghost).

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*heatedly*) Don't misunderstand me, Charlie!
I'd be the first to acknowledge—(*a bit pathetically*) It isn't Gordon,

Charlie. It's his memory, his ghost, you might call it, haunting Nina, whose influence I have come to dread because of the terrible change in her attitude toward me. (*His face twitches as if he were on the verge of tears—he thinks desperately*)

I've got to tell him . . . he will see that I acted for the best . . . that I was justified. . . .

(*He hesitates—then blurts out*) It may sound incredible, but Nina has begun to act as if she hated me!

(First Part Act One)

A similar case of using Jungian psychology can be found in the next scene where Nina tries to leave the house to work as a nurse at the sanatorium for wounded soldiers. She faces another conflict with her father, Prof. Leeds, who opposes her plan when he hears of it. However, Nina convinces him to let her do it. In the following lines, she explains that it is her duty to pay back (an act of reparation).²³

NINA (*slowly and strangely*) I'm not sick. I'm too well. But they are sick and I must give my health to help them to live on, and to live on myself. (*with a sudden intensity in her tone*) I must pay for my cowardly treachery to Gordon! You should understand this, Father, you who—(*She swallows hard, catching her breath. Thinking desperately*)

I'm beginning to tell him! . . . I mustn't! . . . he's my father! . . .

PROFESSOR LEEDS (*in a panic of guilty fear, but defiantly*) What do you mean? I am afraid you're not responsible for what you're saying.

NINA (*again with the strange intensity*) I must pay! It's my plain duty! Gordon is dead! What use is my life to me or anyone?

23 C.G. Jung, translated by Yoshitaka Takahashi and others, "Psychological Typology II Jung Collection 2" 『心理学的類型II ユングコレクション2』(Jinbunshoin 1987) pp. 203–205.

But I must make it of use—by giving it! (*fiercely*) I must learn to give myself, do you hear—give and give until I can make that gift of myself for a man's happiness without scruple, without fear, without joy except in his joy! When I've accomplished this I'll have found myself, I'll know how to start in living my own life again! (*appealing to them with a desperate impatience*) Don't you see? In the name of the commonest decency and honor, I owe it to Gordon!

(First Part Act One)

Darrell, watching Nina suffering from reproaching herself for not getting married to Gordon and from paying back her debts she owes to Gordon, points out in the following lines.

DARRELL (*thinking*)

How much need I tell him? . . . can't tell him the raw truth about her promiscuity . . . he isn't built to face reality . . . no writer is outside of his books . . . have to tone it down for him . . . but not too much! . . .

Nina has been giving way more and more to a morbid longing for martyrdom. The reason for it is obvious. Gordon went away without—well, let's say marrying her. The war killed him. She was left suspended. Then she began to blame herself and to want to sacrifice herself and at the same time give happiness to various fellow war-victims by pretending to love them. It's a pretty idea but it hasn't worked out. Nina's a bad actress. She hasn't convinced the men of her love—or herself of her good intentions. And each experience of this kind has only left her more a prey to a guilty conscience than before and more determined to punish herself!

(First Part Act Two)

It is evident from the next lines that the character Gordon who represents Great Father to Nina, how much he meant to her. She herself admits the gravity of his existence in her mind.

NINA (*with a sad little laugh*) God knows, Charlie! Perhaps I knew at the time but I've forgotten. It's all mixed up. There was a desire to be kind. But it's horribly hard to give anything, and frightful to receive! And to give love—oneself—not in this world! And men are difficult to please, Charlie. I seemed to feel Gordon standing against a wall with eyes bandaged and these men were a firing squad whose eyes were also bandaged—and only I could see! No, I was the blindest! I would not see! I knew it was a stupid, morbid business, that I was more maimed than they were, really, that the war had blown my heart and insides out! And I knew too that I was torturing these tortured men, morbidly super-sensitive already, that they loathed the cruel mockery of my gift! Yet I kept on, from one to one, like a stupid, driven animal until one night not long ago I had a dream of Gordon diving down out of the sky in flames and he looked at me with such sad burning eyes, and all my poor maimed men, too, seemed staring out of his eyes with a burning pain, and I woke up crying, my own eyes burning. Then I saw what a fool I'd been—a guilty fool! So be kind and punish me!

(First Part Act Two)

Nina as the Great Mother mentions the following through Marsden.

MARSDEN (*glancing furtively over his shoulder at Nina—broodingly thinking*)

She's the old queer Nina now . . . the Nina I could never fathom . . . her three men! . . . and we are! . . . I? . . . yes, more deeply than either of the others since I serve for nothing . . . a queer kind of love, maybe . . . I am not ordinary! . . . our child . . . what could she mean by that? . . . child of us three? . . . on the surface, that's insane . . . but I felt when she said it there was something in it . . . she has strange devious intuitions that tap the hidden currents of life . . . dark intermingling currents that become the one stream of desire . . . I feel, with regard to Nina, my life queerly identified with Sam's and Darrell's . . . her child is the child of our three loves for her . . .

(148)

I would like to believe that . . . I would like to be her husband in a sense . . . and the father of a child, after my fashion . . . I could forgive her everything . . . permit everything . . .

(determinedly)

And I do forgive! . . . and I will not meddle hereafter more than is necessary to guard her happiness, and Sam's and our baby's . . . as for Darrell, I am no longer jealous of him . . . she is only using his love for her own happiness . . . he can never take her away from me! . . .

NINA *(more and more strangely triumphant)*

My three men! . . . I feel their desires converge in me! . . . to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb . . . and am whole . . . they dissolve in me, their life is my life . . . I am pregnant with the three! . . . husband! . . . lover! . . . father! . . . and the fourth man! . . . little man! . . . little Gordon! . . . he is mine too! . . . that makes it perfect! . . .

(Second Part Act Six)

The third point I want to stress is that through Freudian “conflict” and Jungian “compensation,” self-establishment is achieved as self-realization of the ego, and this signifies the union of Freud and Jung’s theories in the play. The following lines from Nina about Charles Marsden are the evidence of this unification.

NINA *(looking at him—pityingly—thinking)*

What does he always want of me? . . . me? . . . I am the only one who senses his deep hurt . . . I feel how life has wounded him . . . is that partly my fault, too? . . . I have wounded everyone . . . poor Charlie, what can I do for you? . . . if giving myself to you would bring you a moment’s happiness, could I? . . . the idea used to be revolting . . . now, nothing about love seems important enough to be revolting . . . poor Charlie, he only thinks he ought to desire me! . . . dear Charlie, what a perfect lover he would make for one’s old age! . . . what a perfect lover when one was past passion! . . .

(Second Part Act Seven)

Similarly, the following lines of Darrell and Marsden show the unification was successful.

DARRELL (*examining Nina critically—thinking*)

She's gotten into a fine neurotic state . . . reminds me of
when I first knew her . . .

(*then exultantly*)

Thank God, I can watch her objectively again . . . these last
three years away have finally done it . . . complete cure! . . .

(*then remorsefully*)

Poor Nina! . . . we're all deserting her . . .

(*then glancing at Marsden—with a trace of a sneer*)

Even Marsden seems to have left her for the dead! . . .

(Second Part Act Eight)

MARSDEN (*thinking baffledly*)

Wrong again! . . . he isn't lying . . . but I feel he's hiding
something . . . why does he speak so resentfully of Gordon's
memory? . . . why do I sympathize? . . . I can quite appreciate your
feeling about Gordon. I wouldn't care to share with a ghost-lover
myself. That species of dead is so invulnerably alive! Even a doctor
couldn't kill one, eh? Gordon is too egregious for a ghost.
That was the way Nina's father felt about him, too.

(First Part Act Two)

The fourth point concerns O'Neill's view on Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and reincarnation, as is clearly exemplified in the following lines from Nina.

NINA

Yes, he's dead—my father—whose passion created me—who began
me—he is ended. There is only his end living—his death. It lives
now to draw nearer me, to draw me nearer, to become my end!

.....

(150)

Nina

.....

We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace!

(First Part Act Two)

O'Neill intelligently evolves Schopenhaur's theory of happiness and peace from the contradiction of eternal recurrence through the story using the characters as evidenced from these lines. In other words, he uses these philosophies to open the road to happiness and peace for the characters. The following lines from Marsden and Nina explain this in detail.

MARSDEN (*looking at them—gaily mocking—thinking*)

Once I'd have felt jealous . . . cheated . . . swindled by God out of joy! . . . I would have thought bitterly, "The Gordons have all the luck!" . . . but now I know that dear old Charlie . . . yes, poor dear old Charlie!—passed beyond desire, has all the luck at last! . . .

(*then matter-of-factly*)

But I'll have to interrupt their biological preparations . . . there are many things still to be done this evening . . . Age's terms of peace, after the long interlude of war with life, have still to be concluded . . .

.....

Nina

. . . I am sad but there's comfort in the thought that now I am free at last to rot away in peace . . . I'll go and live in Father's old home . . . Sam bought that back . . . I suppose he left it to me . . .

(Second Part Act Nine)

Nina' words below also signify this.

NINA (*looking at Marsden with a strange yearning*)

Peace! . . . yes . . . that is all I desire . . . I can no longer imagine happiness . . . Charlie has found peace . . . he will be tender . . . as my father was when I was a girl . . . when I could imagine happiness . . .

(*with a girlish coquettishness and embarrassment—making way for him on the bench beside her—strangely*) Ned's just proposed to me. I refused him, Charlie. I don't love him any more.

.....

NINA (*sadly smiling*) You, Charlie, I suppose. I have always loved your love for me. (*She kisses him—wistfully*) Will you let me rot away in peace?

(Second Part Act Nine)

In the above lines, Nina mentions about death and reincarnation for the sake of happiness and peace.

Finally, at the conclusion of *Strange Interlude*, Marsden states that it is through the cycle of eternal recurrence that we advance towards peace.

MARSDEN (*paternally—in her father's tone*) You had best forget the whole affair of your association with the Gordons. After all, dear Nina, there was something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and fantastic, the sort of thing that isn't done, really, in our afternoons. So let's you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude, of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace.

(Second Part Act Nine)

Conclusion

In *Strange Interlude*, O'Neill places the characters that represent multilayer pluralism on the stage in an "interlude," in a play that

reflects the uncertainty and hopelessness of the American people in the 1920s.

Sam Evans as the honest and modest pragmatist who represents the people at that time and the contrasting personality of Edmund Darrell who chooses a completely different way of living and who represents the shadow of subconscious are intelligently positioned on the stage. O'Neill describes the tragedy of "death and reincarnation" played out in *Strange Interlude* from an objective viewpoint and uses the technique of soliloquy to present the depth of the human subconscious. The character Charles Marsden, who had attained the higher life status of the super conscious, beyond the subconscious, is not the central character. On the other hand, the author created the main character, Nina, the daughter of Prof. Leeds as the central figure on the stage. Nina evolves Electra Complex against her father who opposed her marriage with Gordon Shaw, her lover, her man. She feels that because she earnestly obeyed her father, Gordon died in the war. Later, as the tragic heroine, she suffers a deep-rooted conflict with her father. She decides to nurse wounded soldiers to compensate for her past deeds. After marrying Sam, she next plays the role of a treacherous, evil woman who bears the son of Darrell, after knowing the Evans curse of insanity, Sam had inherited.

She names her son Gordon in memory of her former fiancé, Gordon Shaw, who represents the Great Father. Nina overcomes the conflict with her father, reflecting Freudian psychoanalysis, and continues to compensate for her love, which represents Jungian theory. She then plays the part of the Dark Mother, as expounded by Jung, who aborts her child with Sam and child of Darrell. But when her son, Gordon Evans, grows up and suspects her affair with Darrell, her conflict with Darrell develops and he finally leaves her. When her son competes in a boat race, her husband Sam dies from cerebral apoplexy. Her son then leaves with his girlfriend. Left alone in solitude, Nina suffers deep pain and agony, wishing to die and to reborn (reincarnation) but finally finds the path to happiness and peace with Marsden.

By using the technique of soliloquy, O'Neill shows the process of her pluralism, ending with her on the road to happiness and peace.

Finally then, Nina herself shows that she is close to being the Great Mother.

The three-dimensional multilayer structure of this play consists of the streams from conscious to subconscious and to super conscious, tragedy during the interlude, and happiness and peace signifying death and reincarnation.

Let's look at the pluralism found in the soliloquy of Nina. The behaviors of the main character are revealed through the monologues. The tormented personalities of this character seem to be contradictory, but each of them constitutes Nina, and they offer evidence of the pluralism of her character. In other words, *Strange Interlude* denotes the triviality of life while also conveying passion for life as well as the struggles of life. This "interlude" play, however, also represents not only compassion for the extreme pursuit of intense happiness and the process of self-realization, but also the process of amalgamation of a demon. Nina wears the superficial mask of another person in her outer life, and ironically is controlled by the mask which forces her to wander in lonely solitude. Moreover, her inner life is persecuted and libeled by her own mask and cleverly reflects O'Neill's intent to express the pluralism of the character.²⁴ The mask also signifies her fallacious self, while at the same time reveals her true self. O'Neill uses the dualistic mask technique to present the complexity of Nina's pluralistic personality, evidenced through her behavior, and this is communicated to the audience through soliloquy. The story of *Strange Interlude* highlights the significance of multilayer pluralism in the modern world and in this sense the play is a true masterpiece.

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24 Cargill, Oscar, et al. eds. *O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism*, (New York University Press, 1961) p. 117.

The Multilayer Diversity of Soliloquy in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*

Kumi Ohno

What does “Interlude” in *Strange Interlude* signify? This is the question I have posed to analyze the depth of this play that it is not just the interlude between past and future. It is the interlude of eternal recurrence, one of the ingenious and original innovations characterizing O'Neill's experimental plays.

O'Neill intelligently experiments with adopting Freudian psychoanalysis in various scenes in *Strange Interlude*, as he does in other plays. The Jungian concepts of collective unconscious and archetypal psychoanalysis also appear. They are not simply adopted, however. These theories and concepts are interwoven intelligently into the story and thus are expanded into higher levels.

O'Neill also adopted the theory of the super conscious of eternal recurrence, advocated by Nietzsche, through the life cycle to evolve self-conscious from ego. The tragedy of *Strange Interlude* develops in eternal recurrence, and the topic of “life and death” featured in the drama contributes to O'Neill's intention to flush the characters with life through the harmonious fusion of their internal conflicts, thereby opening the way to “happiness and peace.” The use of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer's philosophies in O'Neill's plays was something new. His experiments enabled him to innovate this new dramatical technique.