Harriet Thistlethwaite in Prophecy Coles, Siblings Issues 2006

THE REPLACEMENT CHILD AS WRITER

'Do not return. If you can bear to, stay
dead with the dead. The dead have their own tasks.
But help me, if you can without distraction,
As what is farthest sometimes helps: in me.'

(Rilke, from *Requiem for a friend*)

When a sibling dies, the parents and any other child or children in the family will have a devastating loss to contend with, and will in all likelihood have problems with mourning. What happens to an infant who is born into a family where an older sibling has already died and not been mourned? All normal use of projective identification with the family around will bring the infant into contact with the inner dead one, and this likely to become a source of considerable confusion and difficulty in healthy living. For a new-born infant the effect in relation to the grieving mother is particularly devastating.

The term 'replacement child' has been coined to denote a child born after a short time; conceived within six months of the miscarriage or death of the previous infant (Rowe *et al.* 1978) The essential factor is that there has not been sufficient time for the dead child to be mourned, by the mother in particular, so that an unconscious confusion is likely to arise in her mind between the dead and the live child who follows. Moreover she will be unlikely to be able to provide containment for her infant.

The prime consideration of this paper is how the replacement child is affected by the loss, and will be looked at through the material of two writers in particular: most extensively the playwright Eugene O'Neill, and more briefly, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. These were both - in the sense of coming between the mother and her mourning a dead child - replacement children,

There are some interesting and significant psychoanalytic articles already written about the replacement child in clinical work (Cain & Cain 1964, Poznansky 1972, Sabbadini 1988, Etchegoyen 1997). Sabbadini (ibid) says,

‘I cannot say whether such consequences are always pathological but I believe that any child conceived, born and brought up under these circumstances develops serious problems in the area of self-identity and experiences intense difficulties, particularly at the critical separation-identification stage and during adolescence.’ (p.531)

Through the two writers used, I will argue that there are very varying experiences of being a replacement child but some strong resonances towards the dead siblings will be seen to occur in their lives and writing. In addition will be shown something about the ways in which writing functioned in truly sublimatory ways, towards successful ego transformation and integration.

There are a good number of artists in the canon who are known to have been replacement children . Of course, in the days when families produced and inevitably lost several children this is not surprising. Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Stendhal, Goethe, Gorky, Hesse, Dali, for instance,and the list goes on even before we reach those less renowned or still in our own era. Vincent Willem van Gogh, now well studied in psychoanalytic literature, is known to have been a replacement child, who - it is convincingly argued (Lubin 1975, Nagera 1967, Meissner 1992,1993,1994) - despite his art, and his brother’s enormous support, could not survive the devastating results of an exceptionally unfortunate coincidence at birth. He was born on the same birthday a year later to a mother who had not mourned her previous stillborn infant, also named Vincent Willem, and who soon went on to have several more children.

Drawing psychological conclusions from an artist’s work is a tricky business. There has of late been a culture of complaint about the desecration of literary works through attempts to confuse the imaginary aesthetic with biography. It is at worst to confuse the symbol with the symbolised. For this reason the writers chosen are two who knew and stated that they consciously drew from their inner lives for material, and wrote letters and journal entries alongside their creative works which add to our understanding of the interplay of the inner world and its conscious or unconscious use. That both writers lived at a similar time in history, which encompassed the convulsions in Europe around the First World War, is of added interest, but it is not intended to draw much from that or other external themes here. It is the inner world of the child with a dead sibling, specifically that of the replacement child that I wish to pull into focus.

Mourning a child's death

Klein (1940) makes a connection between mourning and the infantile depressive position. She suggests that the loss of a good external object reactivates unconscious anxieties about damage and loss of the good internal object in childhood. Mourning then involves working through both an external and an internal loss, and for that reason is an extremely painful task. She considers that the capacity to mourn in later life and recover is dependent on the resolution of the depressive position in childhood.

The role of mourning is vital to the ego because in the earliest stage after a loss or death, the reality of the loss is denied and parts of the subject are split off and projected into the lost object as a way of trying to hold onto it. The ego is weakened as a consequence. Only through the slow process of true mourning can the subject take back those missing parts and thus restore strength to his or her own ego. On the mourning process Freud (1915) states, 'Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it' (p.245). This letting go of omnipotent control of the object means encountering the infantile feelings of conflict between aggressive and reparative wishes towards the object, and the experience carries intense feelings of guilt, desolation and pain.

For mourning to be successful the reality of the loss has to be accepted. This can only be achieved by a process of differentiating self from object by sorting out what belongs to whom. As a result of this emotional work disowned parts of the self are gradually taken back into the ego. Failing successful mourning, projected parts are never taken back and remain embedded in the object into which they have been projected.

The replacement child

Etcgegoyen (1997) has written about the replacement child syndrome, delving deeply into the difficulties for the mother of mourning a dead child. Also a study by Rowe *et al*. (1978) discovered that where a pregnancy followed too closely – within five months - after a perinatal loss there were significantly more signs of a morbid grief reaction, whereby the reality of the child's loss could not be accepted. A bereavement is difficult to mourn

during a pregnancy, and at such a time the process will be inhibited or incompletely carried out.

Etchegoyen (ibid) writes that the more intense the denial of the loss, the more likely the damaging effects on the replacement, the family and the network. She refers to the literature on the profound effect on the family and its relationships. Lieberman and Black (1987) refer to dysfunctional family patterns of avoidance, idealisation and prolonged grief in reaction to loss. And Lewis (1983) refers to family feuds, depressive anniversary reactions and in some cases provocation of a replacement pregnancy over the next generation.

If a mother is still grieving or depressed while tending a new infant, the infant's own fear of dying is not metabolised through containment by the mother. Indeed it is reintrojected in what Bion (1962) describes as the form of 'nameless dread'. Later grasp of the nature of the lost sibling will perhaps be used consciously to 'patch' the gap but behind that lurks an involvement with death, taken in to primitive depths, which may have life-long effect. The impact of this on the infantile psyche, and the likelihood of a *loss of meaning* is explored in a slightly different way by Andre Green's paper on 'The Dead Mother'(1986).

Sublimation, and working through by writing

In an interview with Meltzer about the experience of viewing a work of art, Adrian Stokes said: 'When a discernment of inner states, however horrific, however dispensible by means of sadistic projection, is stabilised in terms of aesthetic oppositions and balances and other aspects of form, some coordination, some bringing together will have occurred at the expense of denial; and this bringing together will have required at the fount, the shadow of a reconstructed whole-object and part-object whose presence can at least be glimpsed in the very existence of an aesthetic result.' (Meltzer,Williams 1988, p. 217)

The aim for the best of writers, as in the examples to be discussed here, will be by the act of creating to work through internal conflicts and thus arrive successfully at the depressive position. For the audience or readers the work of art ought to then enable them to experience the one or more

identifications they are there drawn into, and through their own inner resonances to understand the deeper issues more completely.

EUGENE O'NEILL

When Eugene O'Neill was diagnosed with tuberculosis in his early twenties, Ella, his mother, who was a morphine addict went into an agitated depression. A nurse was called in, who knew nothing of the addiction, and she described a nightmarish day she spent with the family:

'When she arrived, the three O'Neill men were having a shouting match around the dining table. Ella paced the floor upstairs and moaned, "My son, my son," her long white hair wildly undone, her dark eyes enormous and unfocused. After a time she would collapse and rock back and forth, clutching her knees to her breast or wringing her hands, and grieving for her son. The nurse said that when Ella moaned for "My son, my son," she sometimes meant Eugene and sometimes meant the baby Edmund, who had died twenty-eight years before.' (Black1999,p.128).

To those familiar with O'Neill's late, overtly autobiographical play*, Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956)*,* that scene will sound very familiar. The play's most poignant utterance comes when Jamie quotes, near the end, from Swinburne's *A Leave-taking*:

'yea, though we sang as angels in her ear, she would not hear.'

We then realise that the real failure had been Ella's withdrawal from her two surviving sons into an addictive space.

Early years

Eugene's father, James O'Neill, the son of impoverished Irish immigrants had become a famous actor who in his youth played many great parts, including Shakespeare's but he became especially renowned for his success as the Count of Monte Christo, and was typecast thereafter to a degree that he never successfully played any other role. His handsome successes enabled him, in 1876, to woo and marry the 19-year-old Ella Quinlan, of a somewhat wealthier Irish Catholic background. James's acting career swept Ella away from her bourgeois aspirations, on tour all over the US. As a

dependent girl, but perhaps also because James was known for his seductiveness to women (before marriage he'd had an illegitimate son by an actress, whom he had abandoned), she tended to travel with him. Lonely in hotel rooms in strange places she became very close to her first child, Jamie, born in 1878. Then in 1883 a second boy was born, Edmund. At the age of two, however, whilst the parents were away on tour, Edmund died of measles.

Eugene O'Neill, born two and a half years later, in 1888, can reasonably be called a replacement child in the true sense of being conceived to fill the unmourned loss. Ella's difficulty in mentally processing the loss of her child must have been compounded after the death of her father when she herself was still a child of 16. Evidence from her school-fellows (Black 1999) suggests she had not mourned her father much at the time.

After Edmund died, Ella had a number of self-induced abortions, so it seems clear she did not want another child,who might die, or whom she might fail. She probably did not have the ego strength to mourn Edmund so the abortions may also have been her concrete way of expressing hostility towards him for leaving her, and against her husband for his role in her guilt. This fear of pregnancy would also have been in tune with the attitude of little Jamie who now had his mother to himself more. She no doubt also felt torn about effectively leaving him again. The family story, put about afterwards by Jamie, was that it was James who thought it would be good for her to have another child.

When she finally succeeded in bringing to term the healthy baby, Eugene, accounts have it that she was prescribed morphine for the pain, as was common at the time, and from that day on became addicted. The abusive gestures were now turned against herself, and morphine gave her the resort of a retreat.

In any form of addiction the drug symbolises the ideal object. 'The addict appears to regress to a phase of infancy where the infant uses hallucinatory wish-fulfilment fantasies in dealing with his anxieties.' (Rosenfeld 1965,p.130) This is very apparent in the last act of O'Neill's *Long Days Journey.* Indeed its long day is spent journeying towards this night. Finally, after a heavy dose of the drug, Mary (Ella) loses all track of time, reliving her convent school past and relationship with Mother Elizabeth: "..so sweet and good. A saint on earth." It becomes clear that in her mind Mother

Elizabeth was responsible for suggesting that rather than becoming a nun as she wanted, Mary should spend some time socialising like the other teenage girls, which led to her falling for the pin-up hero, James Tyrone (O'Neill). We begin to see that James had stood in for her beloved lost father. But for her to be in the role of mothering babies was not successfully achieved: having another baby was unbearable to her.

It is recorded (Gelbs,1964) that Ella's immediate reaction to the death of Edmund had been to blame the seven-year-old, Jamie for giving him the illness: so little could the fragile woman bear her own guilt at having been away. In fact it was her mother who was left to care for the boys, and her mother's existence is practically denied. This suggests that Jamie may have already begun to serve a function of taking up the projection of her unwanted parts. In some sense then her addictive solution after another child was born, becomes clearer. For in the addict the drug also appears as a symbol of the split-off bad part of the self. She was probably trying to protect her children from her bad parts.

Moreover, Rosenfeld's (1965) discussion of drug addiction makes a direct link to the dead object. 'The essential factor of the relation of drug addiction to depression is the identification with an ill or dead object. The drug in such cases stands for such an object and the drugging implies a very concrete incorporation of this object. The pharmotoxic effect is used to reinforce the reality both of the introjection of the object and of the identification with it.' (p.131)

This, then was the mother of Eugene's earliest experience. She was in all probability fairly impermeable due to the drug. Addiction is closely allied to manic depression and involves too a deep splitting between idealised and denigrated objects. The nature of the sudden reversals we witness and experience in Eugene's plays would have been the very stuff of his earliest psychic intake. Ella was not able to be the object of trusted dependence; to contain or be consistent.

Also her boundaries would have been unreliable. This failure contributed to Jamie, her first-born's inability - ever - to separate from her, and live adequately on his own. It might be said that the two brothers shared the burden of becoming projectively identified with a dead part of Ella, linked to but not identical with her addicted aspect; the latter O'Neill was to characterise as 'the fog' (see below). Even from early childhood - before the

addiction - Jamie seems to have been symbiotically bound up with his mother, and after discovering her injecting herself in his early teens he immediately became addicted to alcohol. She was too fragile for either of her children to be able to express any negativity toward her, or get her to face any reality, and, with a frequently absent father, in their childhood they were unable to find ways of coping with aggressive and disappointed feelings, Thus they would have resorted to evacuative projective measures, whether involving other people, or, in adolescence, using alcohol itself as the substitute object relationship. These factors also contributed to the two brothers being quite problematically entangled with each other, as was to become clear years later.

When in 1902 Ella made a suicidal bid owing to an inability to get morphine supplies, Eugene was finally told of her addiction by his brother, and also made to feel guilty that the morphine had taken hold from the date of his birth. The shock of traumatic discovery is a continuing theme throughout his plays. At the age of 14 he had effectively been told by his jealous brother, that he was the mother-murderer.

Eugene nevertheless for a time followed and admired Jamie's dissipated ways, and swallowed Jamie's alternative view of their terrible father as having caused all Ella's troubles by forcing her to sacrifice herself for his touring, and to have another child. Eugen's acceptance of this 'grievance' against the father suggests he was defensively iealising his brother. He continued to do so until the early 1920s.

However, at 17 Eugene followed a pattern laid down by his father and got a girl pregnant. He married her in panic, and with James's approval ran off on a long sea voyage. This was a close echo to his father's having abandoned a woman and son years before his own marriage to Ella. After Eugene returned from sea, the guilt about the girl, abandoned child, and the failure of heavy drinking to bury it all, led to severe depression. He made a serious suicide attempt through an overdose of veronal in 1912. It was an episode O'Neill glossed over all his life, but he was only just saved by the timely arrival of a friend.

Meltzer (1973) writes, 'Terror is a paranoid anxiety whose essential quality, paralysis, leaves no avenue of action. The object of terror, being in unconscious phantasy *dead* objects, cannot even be fled from with success. But in psychic reality the vitality of an object, of which it may be robbed,

can also be returned to it, as the soul to the body in theological terms. This can only be accomplished by the reparative capacity of the internal parents and their creative coitus.' (Meltzer 1973, p. 148)

The internalised Ella, carrying one or more unmourned dead objects in her inner world would certainly have added to such a persecution in Eugene, and his guilt about her addictive deadening, as well as all his responsibility for other losses perpetrated through the years of debauchery.

Early plays

The whole terrible episode may have contributed to scaring Eugene unconsciously towards increasing his identification with and sympathy for his maturer father. This link was to open up an internal space that would allow some real creativity. His slowly working at becoming a playwright is multi-determined, though one skein relates to the actor James, and thus to the parental dynamic. The position of playwright symbolically combined omnipotence but also reparation in family terms. And Eugene had good reason to feel some gratitude towards his father by now, since he had supported and tried to help his son throughout all the years of dissipation. Rather than in relations with women and children, with whom he would continue to fail, playwriting was to be Eugene's chosen means to work through pain and back into living. The early plays deal with the terrors and private torments of his adolescence and early adulthood in direct ways, characterised by a talent for rhythm in monologue and dialogue which indicates what a close witness he was of fraught family dynamics, even if the endings were still often abrupt denials of reality.

The unproduced *Shell Shock* for instance. In addition to its WWI theme the play suggests the shock of the discovery of something shameful, similar to Eugene's discovery of his mother's addiction. It is built around a long, melodramatic confession on the part of a guilt-ridden shell-shocked hero which culminates in a primal scream – the result of which is a sudden and complete exorcising of his guilt.

In 1920, another O'Neill one-act play was performed, called *Exorcism.* In it a character decides to end it all by taking an overdose of morphine. When found and saved, by a character, Jimmy, he feels that the demons that had been driving him have been exorcised and he turns to the world with renewed interest. After a brief performance O'Neill cancelled it and

destroyed all the copies of the script. He may have found it too revealing of himself, and knowing his mother's sensitivity too challenging to her and his father. But also he may have understood that its final optimism was too pat. After seeing Hedda Gabler while still in his teens O'Neill became passionate about Ibsen, and he was also much impressed by Strindberg. He had no doubt of his intention to portray true reality and get away from his father's generation of high melodrama on the stage.

In his early twenties, Eugene began to settle as he increased writing. He slowed up on drinking, saw less of Jamie, and married Agnes Boulton, who was from an artistic family and with a literary education. They were to have two children, Shane and Oona.

Stephen Black's biography of O'Neill (1999) tells us that he had a taciturn character, and was hard to read. Though his friends learned to take for granted his poker face and his concealed alertness, his first wife, Agnes never did. 'Eugene for his part, must have realised the effect his silences had on her, but he did not or could not become more open... Both were believers in the mystical rhythms of love. Unable to find ordinary conversation, they were helpless when the mystical tides inscrutably drew them together and then left them to drift amid tense silences and guesswork. Neither could find a basic trust in the constancy of their bond that might have eased the ebb and flow of intimacy.' (p.229-230.) Those silences and guesswork must have been a reflection of Eugene's earliest experiences of his mother. Agnes had abandoned to her parents care a child born in her own teenage years, and Eugene seems to have found in her a wife who took up his projected difficulties with his internal needy mother. In the early years of the marriage they seemed to need to cling closely to one another.

After 1920, when his father died, Eugene wrote a play, *Gold* (1920), about a couple's unending grief over the death of their daughters years before. The father is an anthropologist, Jayson who roams the world in search of a modern Golden Fleece, His wife, Martha accompanies him everywhere and sacrifices everything to his goal. Then Martha finds herself pregnant and is afraid to tell her husband because they'd agreed not to have any more children who might die. She dies in childbirth and Jayson gives his son to an aunt to raise while he sets off on his quest.

This theme illustrates O'Neill, in normally mourning his father, consciously and unconsciously reliving some of the themes of his own childhood. It

indicates his identification with his father, in seeking immortality in his writing 'quest'. It has a wry wit too, using the golden fleece, since his father was known to be miserly. The play shows Eugene can now stand in the position of observer; or that of failed mother, or failed father. But not in that of being a good parent to an alive child. At this same time Eugene and his wife were becoming estranged, and he was on the verge of abandoning his second son, Shane.

Segal (1991) writes of the significance of the symbolic penis as drawing a boundary line against vast amount of projective identification with mother. For Eugene in the overall balance James must have had some function of this kind for Eugene. But it is arguable that he was never a truly internalised good father, if *Long Day's Journey* reflects the inner truth. Jamie was also perhaps a protective buffer against mother, and guilt about this was to plague Eugene after Jamie's death. There is no doubt that Eugene wrote his greatest plays from a predominantly depressive viewpoint. Being in an observing position – literally as audience – he could place his parents and this also enabled him to see the tragically impossible scenarios in which the four of them were entrenched. However, when it came to the responsibility of providing fathering for his sons he failed twice over. Both O'Neill's sons committed suicide years later, Shane after a long period as a drug addict.

In 1922 his mother finally died, of a brain tumour. That very day Eugene was at some event with his old companions the Provincetown Players when a friend accused him of vanity : 'You can't pass a mirror without staring at yourself.' To which Eugene replied, 'I'm just looking to see if I'm alive.' It well may be that the death of his mother pulled him back to an infantile existential anxiety, so deep was his identification with her. Mourning her was for him a terribly obsessive process which involved him in compulsively writing and rewriting her character over the next two decades.

Middle plays

In the middle period of his playwriting O'Neill seems to be conflicted by an uncertainty as to whether his mother's addiction betrayed him or he had betrayed his mother through debauchery. Was it her or was it him? He begins to delve deeper into his guilt.

Ella died shortly before the idea of *Desire Under the Elms* (1925) came to Eugene. Much of the play is about forgiveness and reconciliation but it ends in denying the possibility of either forgiveness or reconciliation. Ephraim (whom O'Neill always said was his most autobiographical self) concludes that a destiny of unbroken loneliness – the loneliness of God himself, he says – is the true "hardness" God requires of man. Here is an indicator of Eugene's super-ego, and it does not seem that this God is very concerned about family relationships. More than that, there seems to lurk a quite defeatist shadow in him.

In *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1923) the character actually named Ella goes through sudden reversals from love to hate and back in a quite mad way, and is at the extreme of all the chaotic reversals of feeling in O'Neill's plays. Obviously Jekyll-Hyde in manner, this Ella is at such a pitch of aggression that she has to be hospitalised, yet her feelings of love and dependency exist alongside the violence expressed in her racist hatred towards her black husband, Jim. The racial tensions are used here to denote a version of Eugene's mother's worst denigration of James O'Neill's impoverished Irish family background. Plays such as these have led commentators to wonder at O'Neill's capacity to get himself through the 'vortex years of his suffering from the mid-20s to mid-30s which make one genuinely marvel at his avoidance of suicide.' (Manheim 1982, p.40).

During this period, his female characters enact the madness O'Neill feared as he tried to deal with his brother Jamie's death. Jamie had given up alcohol after his father died - when he'd finally got his mother to himself - but deliberately drank himself to death within a year of Ella's death. Eugene meanwhile was not able to mourn and sublimate his mother's death either, the way he had done with a creative spurt after the death of his father. Part of the difficulty was that after the death he had discovered the full extent of Jamie's drunken helplessness. It involved a macabre tale featuring a crate of whiskey and a whore, on a train bringing the body of Ella in the baggage car, across the continent to the funeral in New London that neither son attended. These events were to be mercilessly and painfully detailed in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1945). Also revealed were Jamie's attempts to cheat Eugene of a substantial part of the property Ella left in her will. His old idealism about his brother was at once ended, and he had no patience with Jamie's suicidal drinking thereafter.

In some sense his elder brother was the hardest for him to understand, and it

wasn't until the mid-1930s that he began to portray his Jamie self. It is likely he dreaded the guilt of his own part in Jamie too much. Greed was another theme that was to join those in his writings at that point. In effect he was now having to mourn both his mother and his brother. But also Ella's death had clearly revealed the real chasm that lay between the brothers, a chasm symbolised in the lost son, Edmund, and the neediness and guilt that his death had opened up years before in Ella, Jamie and James. And which Eugene had so to speak inherited at birth.

It was a psychic hole that O'Neill's writing had not yet succeeded in either 'patching' (Green, 1986) which perhaps the early writing was an attempt to do, or working through the awful realities for him. Much work lay ahead: his most painfully self-analytical, and also most successful plays: *Mourning Becomes Elektra* (1929-31)*, The Iceman Cometh* (1939)*, Long Day's Journey into Night* (written1939-41), and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943) were still to come. 'Jamie' characters feature powerfully in the final three, particularly - as truly tragic anti-hero - in the last.

A conversation Eugene had, walking in Central Park with his friend and editor Saxe Commins, after Jamie had wired that their mother was dead, was reported later by Commins. At the time O'Neill ran through his family's misfortunes, ending with his brother's, suggesting that 'Jamie was the most unfortunate of them all, for he had scarcely anything to sustain him, nothing except his love for his mother.' (Commins 1986, ref. Black 1999, p.279-80)

After bouts of heavy drinking, and the increasing failure of his marriage, Eugene sought psychotherapeutic help between the years 1922 and 1925. In 1925 he succeeded fairly well in quitting drinking, and smoking. He often talked to doctors about his alcoholism, and read Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and then *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), saying: "Playwrights are either keen analytical psychologists – or they aren't good playwrights. I'm trying to be one.' (Black, 1999, p.321) Never really a Catholic, he also read and was most impressed by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1927), and was teaching himself from the Greek dramas.

The Great God Brown (1925) is in part from O'Neill's reading about Dionysus and Pan – and denied sexuality (*Panik*). In it lies an elegy which must have stood for his mother as perhaps he imagines Jamie saw her, once he had her all to himself. The identification with her girl-doll self is vividly

apparent.

'I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two years I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity.' (p.85)

This somewhat mawkish style obscures the mother and the son, the two are so intertwined. Whereas Jim Tyrone's elegy for his mother written two decades later in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943) allows the listener to know the speaker's pain of remorse as having felt a burden.

'Suffer? Christ, I ought to suffer!…When Mama died, I'd been on the wagon for nearly two years…. She had only me to attend to things for her and take care of her. She'd always hated my drinking. So I quit. It made me happy to do it. For her. Because she was all I had.'

Jim continues, to describe her in death, 'I could hardly recognise her. She looked young and pretty like someone I remembered meeting long ago. Practically a stranger. Cold and indifferent. Not worried about me any more. Free at last. Free from worry. From pain. From me. I stood looking down at her, and something happened to me. I found I couldn't feel anything. I knew I ought to be heartbroken but I couldn't feel anything. I seemed dead, too.' (p.80)

In *The Great God Brown* (1926). O'Neill employs the device of masks – Brown takes up Dion's mask and is possessed by it. This suggests his having taken up his brother's mask, and writing the play enabled Eugene to recover and examine some fragmented images of his brother and try out the hostility behind his idealisation. When Dion dies, Brown remarks: " So that's the poor weakling you really were! No wonder you hid! And I've always been afraid of you – yes, I'll confess it now, in awe of you' (p.99). In Brown Eugene also expresses his envy of his Jamie's adolescent talents and being his mother's preferred child. By killing off Dion he also experiments with

losing the part of himself that deadens with drink.

Since his adolescence, when he had discovered his mother's addiction, Eugene had coped with knowledge of his crime by splitting himself between his Dion (brother murder) self and his Billy (mother murder) self. Also perhaps Eugene had projected his incestuous desire for his mother into Jamie, and by the device of having Brown take up the other's (Dion's) mask of desire he gropes towards this knowledge. In many of his earlier plays he'd used promiscuity in women as another mask. Jamie's promiscuity was certainly always one of his characteristic attacks on Ella's delicate nun-madonna pose.

In *Mourning Becomes Elektra*, written between1929 and 1930 O'Neill created the first character who truly mourns: an alter-ego and sister of Orin (Orestes), Lavinia who – like Eugene at that point – has finally to endure living amongst all her dead . At the opening night Eugene consciously felt depressed and lost at the play leaving him; the first time he acknowledged that his plays were like children, not only causing depression after he'd written them, but further suffering and mourning once they went out on stage to the public.

In that play the sexy suitor, Brant, who turns out to be the son of disgraced Uncle David Mannon and a servant girl, is a reminder that Eugene too had a half brother somewhere: 'Little Alfie' the early son of his father James's affair. Also he may have been exploring the vague future of his own illegitimate son, Eugene junior, who was now a regular house visitor. There is in all likelihood, some split-off identification in Orin, as a son, whose oedipal tragedy was enacted. Orin is driven mad by realising he was not enough to keep mother alive – Jamie's lifelong issue from first Edmund's then their father's death. He is made to express the deepest distaste at her sexual being, the intolerable primal scene lurking for him down that avenue.

However, Eugene himself seems to have begun to introduce a realistic element previously missing in women characters who had been either idealised pure sensitive souls, or denigrated common whores. The women in the play, both Christine and her daughter later, are allowed to be sexual women. The sexuality is symbolised on stage in the sultry red hair they both carry (O'Neil always noticed women's hair), and the revealing green silk dress that recurs throughout. It is explicitly linked to a south sea island fantasy experience associated partly with Brandt, where lust is still somehow

innocently possible. (Was there an apologetic note to O'Neill's mother in that?). This reality may also have come about in connection with his new love, Carlotta Monterey, who became his third wife, and was far more a sophisticated woman of the world than Agnes. Yet, it was a feature of this play that O'Neill never really developed further.

His alterations to Aeschylus' *Orestaia* reflect some of the internal psychic realities that he had to explore. (O'Neill was always more Sophoclean in approach though he most admired Aeschylus.) Thus Orin becomes increasingly mad, and kills himself, as Jamie had done with drink. The one left is Lavinia. In some ways she is reminiscent also of Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, wilfully sacrificing her marriage in order to finally take back guilt after her two brothers' deaths. In O'Neill's play Lavinia acknowledges at last her real role in the mother-murder, and it does not let her go. In reality Eugene now stood carrying terrible guilt and self-hatred at being so unable to take responsibility for his mother's burial and his brother's completely suicidal debauchery. He had become the sole family mourner.

Late plays

Long Day's Journey into Night

Michael Manheim (1982) writes about kinship motifs in O'Neill's plays and his method of creating a rhythm: ' this contrapuntal rhythm of kinship is one in which the initial beat is made up of acid recrimination and lacerating hurt, while the following beat invariably counters the first with split-second forgiveness and total if inevitably short-lived reconciliation.' (p.9)

In the late plays there is still much more recrimination than reconciliation but the bitterness is never unrelieved and the tenderness never illusory. There is far less of the deceit and secrecy that was in the earlier plays. Now O'Neill portrays a kind of stoic heroism in which the hero is the man or woman who can survive an illusionless life.

In *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) as Manheim points out, 'Where there is contact, no matter how painful (and it is usually terribly painful), there is life – and where there is withdrawal there is death.' The dialogue itself becomes not solely a dramatic device but a life-sustaining one. (Manheim 1982, p.11)

Fog is used throughout this play as metaphor for addictive withdrawal and the enveloping barrier to seeing. It may be seen as a 'psychic retreat' such as described by Steiner(1993), and also an indicator of some blocking that destroys meaning, which is infantile in origin. O'Neill often used it from his youthful sea plays on, beginning with a play named *Fog* in 1913-14

In Act One of *Long Day's Journey* (1956) Mary says, thank heavens the fog is gone. She wasn't able to sleep with the foghorn going all night. She likens it to Tyrone's snoring in perhaps the most affectionate of exchanges with her husband, which, inevitably in this play, still contains the element of personal attack.

By Act Three, in which the characters are least connected, the fog has rolled back in again, in early evening. '*A foghorn is heard at regular intervals, moaning like a mournful whale in labour'*. We know then that Mary has given up the fight against her narcotic. The scene notes indicate, '*There is at times an uncanny gay, free youthfulness in her manner, simply and without self-consciousness, the naïve, happy, chattering schoolgirl of her convent days.'* (p. 56)

Mary tells Cathleen she really loves fog. 'It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more.'…

Then…'It's that foghorn I hate. It won't let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back.' (p.57)

After Edmund returns having learnt he has consumption, and has finally lashed out at Mary as a 'dope fiend' she says, 'Why is it fog makes everything sound so sad and lost, I wonder?' (p.72)

Later in talk with his father Edmund says,

'…The fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here. Or any of the other places down the avenue. I couldn't see but a few feet ahead. I didn't meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted – to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself. Out beyond the harbour, where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land. The fog and the sea

seemed part of each other. It was like walking on the bottom of the sea. As if I had drowned long ago. As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost….Don't look at me as if I'd gone nutty. I'm talking sense. Who wants to see life as it is, if they can help it? It's the three Gorgons in one. You look in their faces and turn to stone. Or it's Pan. You see him and you die – that is, inside you – and have to go on living as a ghost.' (p.78-9)

In Act Four, after his father has talked at length of his fears, hopes and dreams, Edmund in a long speech describes moments while being at sea of feeling free and at one with beauty. One time, 'Dreaming, not keeping lookout, feeling alone, and above, and apart, watching the dawn creep like a painted dream over the sky and sea which slept together. Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbour, the joy of belonging to a fulfilment beyond men's lousy, pitiful greedy fears and hopes and dreams!…

'It was a mistake my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea-gull or a fish. As it is I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death.!' (p.94-5)

In the final act the fog appears denser than ever. Everyone is heavily entrapped in their own form of escapism. The play, and the day it records pulls the spectator to feeling the terrible cycle of guilt and blame in a close-knit family. Each one's presence and weakness causing guilt to another; no one with a strong enough inner core to withstand the lure to fall back into what we might see as one of Rosenfeld's (1987) 'mafia gang' traps.

In the last act, Jamie, returning home very drunk, calls his mother a hophead, and Edmund punches him. Then Jamie says: 'I'd begun to hope. If she'd beaten the game, I could too.' (p.100)

In reality Ella, with the help of her strong belief in the Virgin Mary, had given up her addiction in 1914; Jamie never managed more than two years without his.

The theme of personal rejection is most frequent throughout O'Neill's plays, but as time goes on there is usually also some hope. In *Long Day's Journey*

into Night it is felt through the family's helpless love for the mother, and Jamie's confession about his dark ambivalence towards his brother. It is a poignant a reflection that the author represented himself as the dying 'Edmund', as though with his current truer Eugene role in life he may have felt he could hardly be allowed to go on surviving.

O'Neill as writer

Whenever he felt fused with an internal object O'Neill habitually tried to explore that character dramatically. He was working out his own salvation and trying to control the inner tormenting family members. Quite early in his career he was ready to write a confessional play, and to write the demons out. But by the time of the late plays he was working those relationships through internally much more and the strain was telling. In 1934 he suffered a psychotic breakdown brought on by writing *Days Without End* (1933). In that play, which he redrafted many times, he directly tried to confront, and actually bear (instead of escaping through addiction or adultery) the suffering at how his mother had hurt him, his own responsibility in defensively identifying with her, and his retaliatory wishes. From then on his work became much more deeply affecting.

However, it was through his identification with his father that Eugene originally found his playwriting avenue for sublimation. He makes witty use of a pun, twice in the last Act of *Journey*, as father and son, drunk and utterly despondent, play cards, they exchange two lines:

'Whose play is it?'
'Yours, I guess,'

replies Edmund first. The second time they reverse, and the now realistic old actor, Tyrone, is the one to give way (p.87, p.91).

O'Neill also tried hard at writing lyrical poetry at times in his life but found he was no good as something inside sabotaged him. As Edmund, his personification in *Long Day's Journey* he says to his father as they talk about poetry:

'I'm afraid I'm like the guy who is always panhandling for a smoke. He hasn't even got the makings [of a poet]. He's only got the habit. I couldn't

touch what I tried to tell you just now. I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do. I mean if I live. Well, it will be faithful realism at least. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people.' (p.95)

It was a sad link to the severe hand tremor - such a reminder of Ella's giveaway hands - that he'd begun to suffer, which ultimately stopped his writing altogether. Eugene O'Neill survived to the age of 65 but his last marriage was, by more than one account (Black 1999) always fraught with volatility and cruel rows, and living was still bleak for him. There is more of an echo of his mother who'd always felt homeless, in his wry complaint at the end, that he was not only born in a hotel room but was to die in one too.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Background

Rilke was born in Prague in 1875, premature by two months. Both his mother and father had wanted a girl to make up for the loss of a daughter Ismene, who had died at birth the year before. Rene Maria he was named – both female names, the latter since he'd been born on the day of Holy Mary, and his mother was very strongly Catholic. She had married a military man whom she felt was beneath her, and was unrealistic about hardships. Strait-laced and bourgeouis, she also indulged in a sentimental theatricality, idealising her only son as a genius, and treating him as a girl. One day in childhood - according to the mother - Rilke came to her saying 'Ismene stays with her dear mother, Rene is a good-for-nothing, I have sent him away, girls are more affectionate aren't they?' (Graff 1956, p.13)

Rilke early on felt chafed under the artificiality of his mother's airs, and gradually began to realise what a shallowly destructive woman she was. In a poem of 1915 he compares himself to a building which he was laboriously erected stone by stone and his mother whom 'Christ comes to wash every day' insists on tearing it down with selfish unconcern. (Ibid. p.13)

His father, whose pride had been shaken when he was reduced to having to take a post in the service of the railroad was stiffly conventional and a realist: when his son was seven, he sent him to a military academy school

and Rilke was suddenly bereft of all the unreal laudation he'd had at home. His parents were divorced two years later. Throughout his school life in Moravia Rilke was very unhappy and now made additionally claustrophobic by the intense militaristic regime that left him without space to think or write. He was often ill in the infirmary. He wrote that 'It was like being totally submerged for five whole years.' (Prater1986, p.8) All these various childhood experiences would result in the avoidance of impingements becoming a central factor in his psyche for the rest of his life.

He discovered Goethe, and began to write poetry in which lay a deep yearning for some ideal past that he'd missed:

'If there had been someone to show me animals or flowers, or taught me how to be happily alone with a book, what love, what blessing I would have had in my heart for him. Instead of which, I walked myself to a standstill…and passed the time…which I would later find never long enough. Theseus came into the world in an underground chamber, no matter, he came up like a shoot from a plant: but I grew up in absolute nothingness, up towards nothing….' (Prrater 1986, p.15)

Throughout his life he was to love many women, through whom he sought what he'd lacked. But the ideal relationship for him was one in which the couple were able to leave on another alone to be separate beings. He inevitably succumbed to fears that he would be subsumed into nothing with a lover, or that she would require too much from him. Some recurrent images, often quite macabre, were of dolls with fixed smiles, and puppets with only the remotest possibility of movement to match their imagination: symbols of his instinctive rebellion against inauthentic modes of being that he felt intimate relationships made inevitable.

Poetry

Rilke often described himself as a paradox. His predominant pursuit in life was that of writing lyric poetry, but in a world dominated by masculine economic and technical skills. After leaving school he had been enrolled by his father at a commercial academy which he stuck only for a time. It is apt that he was fairly rootless thereafter, and peripatetic in Europe: Vienna, Paris and at last Switzerland.

In his twenties he had an affair with Lou Andreas-Salome who took him on

a visit to Russia, and also introduced him to psychoanalytic ideas. At that time he changed his name to the masculine, Rainer. Lou wrote an account of their relationship, saying ‘every man, no matter when I met him in my life always seems to conceal a brother.’ (Prater 1986, p.39)
Lou interpreted many of his anxieties and confusions. As Rilke put it, scientific psychoanalysis might perhaps banish the demons but would most certainly drive out the angels as well. (Prater 1986, p. 201) In 1912, with Lou’s approval he decided against undergoing analysis, even though he was at his most despairing, and feeling blocked creatively.

Rilke’s faith in life as well as his awareness of death was always strong, and even Schopenhauer’s pessimism was unable to overwhelm him. But the sense of being an orphan was deep-seated and genuine, judging by the various poems evoking the delicate nostalgia of the isolated soul..

He married an artist, Clara Westhoff whom he’d met at the Worpswede artistic colony near Bemen, and they had a daughter, but although he was always scrupulously concerned about their welfare, he ceased to live with them. He was fond of women generally and sympathetic to their artistic frustrations arising out of the requirements of family and society, and he had several other affairs throughout his life, Yet ultimately his need for solitude prevailed, especially during the period when he was writing *The Duino Elegies* (1912-22) and the *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922).

Britton has written extensively on Rilke and his poetry as reflecting his inner world, so it is intended here only to draw from a few of Rilke’s poems to try to give a sense as to some powerful feelings in him that may be seen as arising as a result of his having been a replacement child. Britton sees it thus, ‘the phantasied identity with the dead baby sister had provided him with a location for a part of himself that wanted death, that wanted to live in the perpetual womb of the unborn.’(Britton 1998). The third *Duino Elegy* (1913) certainly delves with an uncanny sense into the vortex of pre-natal origin.

Beginnings and endings were always intertwined in Rilke. There were two women’s deaths who inspired great poetry from him, and I would suggest his mourning words for them are intensified by an early sense of his mother’s early absence through incapacity to mourn and let go. First was his *Requiem* (1909) addressed to and for Paula Becker, a friend of Clara’s at Worpeswede, of whom he’d been very fond. She was an artist who died

young in childbirth, after a marriage of which he disapproved. There's almost an order in this that the dead one does *not* stay around like what had been misplaced reflection in his mother's eyes originally.

'I have my dead, and I have let them go,
and was amazed to see them so contented,
so soon at home in being dead, so cheerful,
so unlike their reputation. Only you
return; brush past me, loiter, try to knock
against something, so that the sound reveals
your presence. Oh don't take from me what I
am slowly learning. I'm sure you have gone astray
if you are moved to homesickness for anything
in this dimension. We transform these Things:
they aren't real, they are only the reflections
upon the polished surface of our being.'

(From *Requiem for a Friend* 1909, transl. Mitchell 1980, p.73)

There was always the presence of absence at the centre of Rilke's life. Absence of a true mother's reverie; presence of something lost to her as well, and also mere narcissistic 'surface' in her.

'You who never arrived
In my arms, Beloved, who were lost
From the start,
I don't even know what songs would please you. I have given up trying
To recognize you in the surging wave of the next
Moment. All the immense
Images in me – the far-off deeply-felt landscape,
Cities, towers, and bridges, and un-
Suspected turns in the path,
And those powerful lands that were once
Pulsating with the life of the gods –
All rise within me to mean
You, who forever elude me.'

(From *You who have never arrived,* 1913, transl. Mitchell 1980 p.131)

It is an absence that gives away the insufficiency in Rilke's self for which he

turns back with yearning. The eighth *Elegy* links to his identification with the leaving Ismene-Eurydice/ Rainer-Orpheus dichotomy, and shows why that myth came to be specially central to his psyche – the *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922, transl. Mitchell 1980) were written, like a gift after the anguish of the *Elegies*, over a few days around the same time.

‘Who has twisted us around like this, so that
no matter what we do, we are in the posture
of someone going away? Just as, upon
the farthest hill, which shows him his whole valley
one last time, he turns, stops, lingers -,
so we live here, forever taking leave.’

(From the eighth *Duino Elegy* transl. Mitchell, 1980 p.193)

In the *Sonnets to Orpheus,* completed five years before he died, he identifies now both with Orpheus in relation to Eurydice; and also Eurydice in relation to Orpheus (who represents the poet). These were inspired after the death of a young woman, Vera Knoop, whom he had barely known, a friend of his daughter. She had shown signs of becoming a great dancer but then fallen terminally ill. The poems perhaps also evoke his inner lost sister, sleeping in him.

‘And it was almost a girl who, stepping from
this single harmony of song and lyre,
appeared to me through her diaphanous form
and made herself a bed inside my ear.

And slept in me. Her sleep was everything:
The awesome trees, the distances I had felt
So deeply that I could touch them, meadows in spring:
All wonders that had ever seized my heart.

She slept the world. Singing god, how was that first
Sleep so perfect that she had no desire
Ever to wake? See: she rose and slept.

Where is her death now? Ah, will you discover
This theme before your song consumes itself?-
Where is she vanishing?.. A girl, almost…’

(*Sonnets to Orpheus, I, 2* transl. Mitchell 1980, p.229)

CONCLUSION

The coming together of two elements: the integration of a lost sibling in the inner world and, the attempt to cope, if not repair the impact of a grieving mother links the two writers that have been discussed here. As Green (1986) points out, 'these sublimations reveal their incapacity to play a stabilising role in the psychic economy, because the subject remains vulnerable on the particular point, which is his love life.' This seems to have been true throughout their lives of both O'Neill and Rilke, neither of whom, being preoccupied with absence in their mothers, had fully resolved Oedipal issues, involving reconciliation to the primal scene.

Eugene O'Neill and his elder brother Jamie jointly carried the burden of the loss of the two-year-old Edmund. Jamie was the greater victim. Eugene was able through his identification his father to use playwriting to separate himself over the years from both mother and then Jamie. Most of the biographies seem to gloss rather easily over the lost child, emphasising much more the mother's addiction, as does O'Neill in his greatest play. But for Jamie the death was fatal, and Eugene paid his price in his relationships with wives and sons. It is significant that Eugene calls himself by the dead brother's name in *Long Day's Journey into Night.* Atonement or integrated hope? For O'Neill it was hard-nosed reality that was the passionate aim and achievement.

It is of course true to say that in assessing material one can find what one is looking for to suit a hypothesis, but Britton's assessment that Rilke was looking for a place to project his desire to return to the womb still leaves room for thinking about how that phantasy arose, and the poetry is presented as suggestion that his consciousness of being a replacement for his dead sister suffused his creative energies. He can certainly be said to have been 'malignantly mirrored' (Britton 1998, p.56) by his mother. This led him to find close relationships taxing, and in the end unsustainable as he felt they falsified his psychic quest. His poetry was his means of self-analysis, and through that he communicates the struggle he suffered to let his dead self go,

symbolically to integrate his early deluded mother and haunting sister, and in the *Sonnets* to find his Orpheus; his inner strength and imagination as poet.

Andre Lussier (1999) writes about 'The Dead Mother', and patients who have not been loved, which I take also to mean being loved in the sense of being contained. 'Not being loved means worthlessness: it leaves the child alone with the thought that it is better not to be alive than not being loved…. With my patients: unable to tolerate the idea of not being loved, they proceeded psychically to replace the actual world (mother) by an imaginary one, thus managing to avoid psychosis.'(p.155).This would perhaps link with Kenneth Wright's (2000) interesting suggestion that the artist always lives on the edge of a no-mother abyss.

Nevertheless in artistic terms both O'Neill and Rilke were successful, in terms of transformation to the depressive position as represented in their work, and in movingly affecting their audiences. The capacity to create artistically can be a crucial means for working through the pain and suffering of a bleak inner world, and it is hoped that these examples have shown this in quite differing ways. The artistic outcomes for O'Neill and Rilke range from tragic through to sublime, but, for both, the work certainly functioned as vital container.

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