

## Repression, Neurosis and Anxiety: The Triad of Psychic Alienation in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore repression, neurosis and anxiety as unconscious stimuli of behavioral alienation in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. It concentrates on the fragmentation of the American society by dint of depicting disillusion and disappointment embedded in the family disintegration. Another gap which the study attempts to fill is the application of Sigmund Freud's concepts of repression, neurosis and anxiety. They will be utilized to discover the influence of the unconscious mind as an impetus of the characters' alienation. The characters unconsciously repress their negative experiences. When such experiences are triggered, the characters become neurotic. Therefore, neurosis will be argued as a transitional psychic phase which shapes conscious anxiety. As such, this study, through using Freud's arguments, will identify anxiety as the final abnormal behavioral phase of the characters' psychic alienation. Thus, the characters' alienated behaviors are ultimately formed by accumulation of repressed erotic desires depicted in the play.

**Keywords:** Alienation, Anxiety, Neurosis, Psychoanalysis, Repression.

### I. Introduction

Eugene O'Neill stamped a great reputation on its history by examining contemporary themes and existing problems, especially the alienation of the modern man. In the modern epoch, alienation refers to the state of tragedy founded in human culture and literature. It is the same for those people who are alienated not only from their life but also from their society. Recently, modern life has undergone a sequence of changes, which have led to main modifications in the relations between human activities and society, these changes have significantly affected on the individual's activity as a motivator, so that being the important reason to disrupt the relationship between the individual and his/her milieu. As a result, the gap of communication becomes wider day after day. Individuals unconsciously come to live in alienation as a result of a discontinuity between the individuals and their goals (Saleem, 2014).

This study, therefore, will deal with alienation as reflected in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. This idea is discussed by many philosophers and psychologists. Most of them described the concept of alienation as a mental state. In psychology, modern man has recently become very weak to be alienated; similarly, people have become estranged, or alienated, from their fellow human beings, and they began to practice alienation from the world in which they live (Abu Jweid, 2016). This includes a scene with people struggling against each other in an attempt to build their individual dreams at the expense of the other. They are depicted by the author as characters that hold on tenaciously to the ideology passed down from their forefathers to them, which represents America as a democratic land of opportunities, with boundless hopes, but also reflect a side which results from people focusing on their wishes and try to gain it by different ways.

This study will tackle alienation and its pertinent psychic drives in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. It will analyze the play from a psychoanalytic perspective. Repression, neurosis and anxiety are going to be the main issues that will be highlighted in the course of the analysis. In this regard, the play's main female character, Nina, is going to be accentuated because she represents the psychic complexities depicted in the play. Here, the psychoanalytic features will

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be tackled in the light of Freudian argumentations about repression, neurosis and anxiety as critical concepts. Therefore, the emphasis will be on the interpretations of repression, neurosis and anxiety. The whole study, with few exceptions, will rely on the notions of repression, neurosis and anxiety in an analytical manner by discussing relevant quotations from the play. Furthermore, there will be some references to psychoanalytic critics' arguments, including Freud's own concepts.

## II. Literature Review

O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* is approached from different critical perspectives. In "Mothers in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*," Asim Karim and Nasim Butt (2011b) study the development of personality and the relationship between mother and child to accentuate the oedipal complexity dynamism in the play. They apply psychoanalysis to interpret the personality characteristics of O'Neill's biographical traits in the plot. The study also tackles the "subjective experiences" depicted in the play. These experiences are analyzed by following two psychoanalytic perspectives. They are Freudian and Kleinian perspectives; and they are utilized to explore the pessimistic (sadist and depressive) visions adjusted into his artistic drama. They assert that O'Neill, as a dramatic artist, has some insights in his play. This insight is carried out in the "division" between him and his mother. The implied version of the author (O'Neill) in the play is the desiring subject that yearns to have the desired object (mother). The desiring subject craves for possessing the desired object, but it could not. From this perspective; the desiring subject loses the desired object. It becomes a victim of anguish and loss; and the absence of the desired object the fundamental impulse of the feeling of loss and despondency.

Karim and Butt (2011a), in "Ethical Crises in O'Neill's Modern Theatre: Some Dimensions" maintain that the play depicts the critical stages of morality deterioration. It is characterized by moral and spiritual crises. They assert that there the nature of this ethical crisis has been rarely approached in the play. They (2011a) study the ethical problem in relation to O'Neill's tragic scenes, but it is completely different from the conventions of tragedy as a literary genre. They (2011a) attempt to discover the implications of the multiple perspectives on the ethical crisis in the light of the kind of tragedy used by O'Neill. The literary circumference of O'Neill's tragedy, according to Karim and Butt (2011a), is the modern theatre. The theme of the ethical crisis strongly relates to the movement of "anti-Americanism" that had been dominant in O'Neill's diverse public atmosphere. They, consequently, study the ethical crisis by approaching the literary and figurative appropriation of modern theater and O'Neill's drama in general.

Matthew Lug (2014) scrutinizes the historical background of O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. He (2014) asserts that the play was during an age of formidable changes in the twentieth century. These changes are accompanying by some intellectual movements, such as expressionism, naturalism and symbolism that influenced the dramatic style of many American writers. O'Neill, argues Lug (2014), is one of those dramatists who tried their hands to cope with these tremendous intellectual transformations. O'Neill, among many dramatic figures, was immensely interested in their social affairs spoiled by political, social and economic dilemmas. He uses his play to represent the plight of "modern man" in the environment of various revolutionary developments.

My study, however, will differ from these studies by applying the concept of alienation repression, neurosis and anxiety. These concepts have been scarcely applied to O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. The application of these concepts will unravel the study's main argument i.e., the characters tend become prone to alienation and become psychically anxious since they suffer from the sequences of family fragmentation and difficulties of life. These events left their apparent impacts upon the characters' individuality. They do not find any outlet for their psychic complications. Therefore, they tend to be alienated, which is an indication of their psychic problems. Alienation will be interpreted by analyzing the characters' tendency to be detached from other people of the same society or family.

The study will mainly depend on Freud's arguments about anxiety and how it negatively affects the people's personalities. Accordingly, the study focuses on the characters' anxious feelings and behaviors in the play. The scrutiny of their personalities will be further elaborated by applying other psychoanalytic concepts. These concepts will be specifically neurosis, neurosis and repression. They will be utilized to accentuate process of alienation and anxiety in

the play. These concepts have been rarely applied to explicate the notions of alienation and anxiety. Consequently, anxiety will be interpreted as the main cause of alienation. The concept of neurosis will also be applied to analyze the characters' abnormal behaviors. Such behaviors are going to be interpreted as psychic factors of alienation. The abnormal behaviors come in the form of emotional disorders that have been hardly applied to analyze the play's characters.

### III. Analysis and Discussion

O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* is an avant-garde modern drama. O'Neill experiments with the dramatic structure of the play by the use of nine acts and a story of contemporary quasi-real events. Furthermore, it provides a panoramic view of family problems that stormed in the early twentieth century. It conveys O'Neill's minute details of the American society at the verge of family disintegration. The plot's events and accidents represent the real life outside the dramatic text. O'Neill projects his critical visions regarding his society in the dramatic fabric of the play. Being so, it holds the authorial dramatic conceptualization of society in a universal context. That is, the plot appeals to the common sense of family relations as well as their complex problems. It is a dramatic representation of how the American family was greatly influenced by social problems in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, it provides a unique recount of family disintegration in the American society. The plot is obviously experimental. It comprises several soliloquies in which the characters speak directly to the audience. Their speech is the manifestation of their inner thoughts per se. They utter their inner thoughts to tell the audience about their feelings, attitudes and psychic motives. As such, this experimental utilization of soliloquy exemplifies O'Neill's erudite dramatic skill. This is because he delivers his messages through the characters' soliloquies. These characters are used as tools of explaining the reality of the text.

O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, therefore, carries out his dramatic savvy. It refers to his great writing potential. This is due to the fact that he has some genuine conceptualization of the American society and its relative issues and he treats them in an exalted dramatic piece. In this sense, it goes along with the most notable changes in the very impression of the American life. Here, it represents a dramatic stereotype of both dramatic experimentation and the thematic subjectivity. O'Neill's exquisite style conveys the play's events in a simple manner. Therefore, the play's plot is of paramount importance for understanding its major events.

The plot focuses mainly on the life of Nina Leeds. She is the daughter of the professor Henry Leeds. At the beginning of the play, she appears sad and caught in emotional ordeal due to the loss of her beloved fiancé, Gordon Shaw, who was killed during World War I. The death of Gordon happened before they could saturate their love passion. The novelist, Charlie Marsden, comes as suitor. He proposes marriage, but Nina refuses the proposal. She, after that, goes on several nasty sexual affairs. She finally decides to marry Sam Evans; a naïve man of good nature. Sam's family inherited a malicious disease that is conveyed to posterity. The disease is insanity that is inherited from one generation to another. The secret of the disease is only kept by Sam's mother. As time passes, Nina knows the reality of the disease. She gets upset. She begins to find a solution to her dilemma because she knows well the child is very important for her life with Sam. As such, she resorts to some tactics to have a child.

Nina aborts the child. Then, she decides to have an illegitimate sexual affair with Ned Darrell who works as a physician. In so doing, she beguiles Sam making him to think that the fetus will be his offspring. However, Nina's plan gets hindered. Her relation with Ned intensifies because they fall in love with each other; and their passion gets greater. Nina gives birth to a male child. The child is called Gordon Evans. Nina's secret affairs with Ned remain for twenty years. The baby grows up; and he and his father, Sam, still do not know their true parental kinship relation. At the end of the play, Sam suddenly develops a fatal stroke. He shortly dies of the stroke. He dies without knowing the secret of his son. Consequently, Nina becomes a widow. She has the opportunity to marry her lover Ned. However, she rejects her marriage to him. Instead, she decides to marry her previous suitor, Charlie Marsden who feels lucky that he could marry her after long suffering. Yet, this experience left its apparent impact upon her psyche since she unconsciously represses it.

Repression is one of the most foundational concepts in Freudian notions of psychoanalysis. There are several concepts that indicate the presence of negative repression in persons' psyches. Yet, the concept of memory is one of the most recurrently mentioned concepts used by Freud. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud (1895) contends that memory and repression connects persons with their previous tragic remembrances that make them psychically upset. People with negatively severe memories are prone to traumatic reactions. Yet, repression is considered the premise for the traumatic memory. When traumatic persons trigger back their tragic experiences, they develop nostalgic recalling of the past. At this point, the undesired problems buried in the unconscious mind try come on the surface making persons psychically disordered. As a response, traumatic persons remember their good relations with people whom they once loved. In essence, Freud (1895) alludes to the presence of failure in the lives of traumatic persons (p.9). As such, both failure and traumatic memory co-exist on the ground of repressing the negative remembrances of the past. As a result, persons tend to recall back their positive moments before traumatic accidents (Abu Jweid, Termizi and Majeed, 2015). In this respect, the relationship between memory and repression is concomitant i.e., the belong to the same psychic attributes; Richard McNally (2012) writes: "the theory of repression holds that some traumatic experiences are so painful to remember that the person who has experienced them pushes the memory out of consciousness, and into some dark inaccessible corner of the mind" (p.1).

The same psychological experience is evident in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. Nina, who is the female protagonist, becomes behaving in a strange way. This is because she lost her fiancé, Gordon, in the war. Her whimsical behavior is attributed her traumatic shock when she hears about his death. In the onset of the play, her father Professor Leeds describes her agitated psychological state. The reason of her unstable behaviors is ascribed to the loss of Gordon. She seems to bemoan the loss of her fiancé in the war. In some cases, neurosis emerges as a sequence of war experiences. These experiences influence both who participated in the war or persons who lost their relatives in war. Ferenc Erős (2017) explains this in a scientific manner; whereby "the problem of war neurosis has remained a central problem of the more traditional psycho-sciences" (p.55). When Professor Leeds asked that he is the cause of her psychological misery, he rebuffs this claim. In the quotation below, he explains the causes of her psychological deterioration:

Professor Leeds (*startled*) Yes. That's exactly it. She knows in some queer way. And she acts toward me exactly as if she thought I had deliberately destroyed her happiness, that I had hoped for Gordon's death and been secretly overjoyed when the news came! (*His voice is shaking with emotion.*) And there you have it, Charlie the whole absurd mess! (*thinking with a strident accusation*) And it's true, you contemptible ... !  
(*then miserably defending himself*) (p.11)

O'Neill, in this regard, precisely depicts her unstable personality through her father's words. Yet, the father is suspected by the other people as the cause of her misery. He says that she destroyed herself by remembering her lover. She does not accept his death in the war. For this reason, she becomes abnormal. To use Freud's terms, she keeps recalling her lover. His death is a tragic event happened in the past. Consequently, she becomes abnormal. Therefore, the father is not responsible for her state. Again, in the light of Freud's (1895) argumentation, she represses the death of Gordon. In this way, she performs "deliberate repression form consciousness" (p.99). However, when she recalls him, she gradually becomes abnormal. She also begins to react abnormally towards her father. Such reaction embodies her inner psychic state that is severely influenced by the recent tragic events in her life.

Freud (1895), furthermore, concentrates on the accidents that affect the psyche peculiarities of people. He (1895) says that the tragic accidents might cause new psychic complications. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1913) claims that the latent cause of traumatic symptoms, therefore, is the accidents that results in a loss of a beloved person (p.56). After this accident, people become to repress the sequences of those accidents. Notwithstanding, the most dangerous traumatic moment springs out when persons remember the accidents (Freud, 1895, p.12). In *Strange Interlude*, Nina becomes confused. Professor Leeds talks about her psychological confusion. When he justifies the present state of her behaviors, he says that she is deeply influenced by the death of Gordon. Being so, she could not distinguish between the "real" and the "unreal" in her life. This confusion is associated with an accident. That is, the death of her lover.

Professor Leeds says that “she [Nina] knows she has no real grounds, but in the present state of her mind the real and the unreal become confused” (p.11).

The death of Gordon, accordingly, exemplifies the reason of Nina’s behavioral abnormality. Freud (1895) argues that the traumatic persons’ behaviors change a lot. This change is brought about the tragic accident that makes them traumatic. Professor Leeds also becomes psychically agitated when he is suspected by his daughter. She thinks that he is responsible for Gordon’s death. When Professors Leeds and Charlie sit together, Nina comes in with new queer behaviors. Her father gets surprised by the way she talks to them as she speaks her first words: “I have made my mind, father” (p.12). Then, the father’s response describes her psychological state as she spoke her words; and he gets distracted: “[*thinking distractedly*] What does she mean? ... oh, God help me! ...” (p.12). In essence, he asks Charlie about her. In turn, Charlie becomes troubled. O’Neill portrays his response as troubled while he is thinking about her behavior: “[*troubled thinking*] She has changed ... what has happened? ...” (p.12). Charlie’s answer indicates that she has greatly changed. But her change is associated with the death Gordon. As a result, she has changed to the worst. She suffers from psychological retardation when she loses her fiancé. In the light of Freud’s (1915) arguments, she is affected by a tragic accident that makes her change (p.6). This change holds some affinity trauma because she remembers her fiancé and becomes abnormal. Trauma, simultaneously, is symptom of psychic repression (Welz, 2016. p.104).

Behavioral abnormality, according to Freud (1895), is the key factors of repression. When traumatic persons repress their experiences caused by tragic accidents they become abnormal (p.54). When persons maintain repressing their experiences, they tend to reprimand the other people around them. In *Strange Interlude*, Nina similarly reprimands her father. She does not trust him anymore. She did not use to be so unkind to him like that. But she becomes a bit tough when she believes that he sent Gordon for war; which implicitly means that he had sent him to death. The father notices her cold reaction towards him; and he accuses her of being rude with him:

Professor Leeds (*thinking distractedly*) That look in her eyes! ... hate! ... (*with a silly giggle*) Really, Nina, you’re absolutely rude! What has Charlie done?

Nina (*in her cool tone*) Why, nothing. Nothing at all. (*She goes to him with a detached, friendly manner.*) Did I seem rude, Charlie? I didn’t mean to be (*She kisses him with a cool, friendly smile.*) Welcome home. (*thinking wearily*) What has Charlie done? ... nothing ... and never will ... Charlie sits beside the fierce river, immaculately timid, cool and clothed, watching the burning, frozen naked swimmers drown at last. ... (p.13)

Both Nina and her father are not at ease with each other. They do not appreciate their kinship relations. In fact, Nina’s negative psychic state causes this family detachment. They are detached by the death of Gordon; or as Freud (1895) puts it simply, they have tragic experiences that influence persons’ psyches (p.54). The development of Nina’s psychic complication is due to the loss of Gordon who is her sexual companion. This is because the “sexual companion” is an integral token of “physical necessity” (Pundir, 2016, p.71). She asks Charlie if she is really rude. But he tries to calm her down saying that she is nice. But the father insists that she behaves rudely. However, she is surprised at his attitude. Consequently, she becomes tired and decides go out: “Nina (*thinking wearily*) The fathers laugh at little daughter Nina ... I must get away! ... nice Charlie doggy ... faithful ... fetch and carry ... bark softly in books at the deep night. ...” (p.13).

The relationship between Professor Leeds and his daughter intensifies. They get more disintegrated than before. In fact, Nina becomes the subject of psychological complication. This is due to the fact that she become as a victim of Gordon’s death. To connect this to Freud’s arguments, he tends to describe the accidents as the objects and persons who are influenced by these accidents as subjects. For this reason, the death of Gordon is the object of Nina’s plight. She, therefore, is the subject that receives the influence of the accident. In this case, her change, as noticed by her father and Charlie, comes out of this experience. Charlie, who has just come from Europe and survived death, tries to

settle down the tense relationship between the father and his daughter. Professor Leeds says that Charlie came from war and she must welcome him instead of making fuss. She, in turn, says coming from war is not something worth acclaiming since the war has ended. Therefore, there is no need for celebrating coming from Europe where war is no more active: "Nina (*slowly, coolly and reflectively*) Well, the war is over. Coming back safe from Europe isn't such an unusual feat now, is it?" (13). This apathetic psychic state exemplifies her repressed feelings and desires for Gordon.

Nina's agitated psychic state does not only relate to the death of Gordon, but also to sexual repression. She is gradually getting worse. As such, she becomes abnormal. In this regard, Freud (1895) contends that psychic abnormality is caused by repressing sexual tendencies. As such, sexual repression yields in anxious behaviors (p.80). In psychoanalysis, the non-obtainable sexual acts are considered "sexual identity conflicts" (Biran, 2016, p.223). In like manner, Nina longs for sexual passion with Gordon but in vain. He, in turn, represents the lack of sexual liaisons desired by Nina. She could not be happy with him as they used to be since he is dead. Before she leaves, she speaks in front of her father and Charlie about her affectionate longing for Gordon:

Nina (*thinking*) Talking! ... his voice like a fatiguing dying tune droned on a beggar's organ ... his words arising from the tomb of a soul in puffs of ashes ...

(*torturedly*)

Ashes! ... oh, Gordon, my dear one! ... oh, lips on my lips, oh, strong arms around me, oh, spirit so brave and generous and gay! ... ashes dissolving into mud! ... mud and ashes! ... that's all! ... gone! ... gone forever from me! ... (p.40)

In this case, Nina seems to be tortured by the loss of Gordon. This is the moment of Nina sexual attributes. Her repression is triggered twice. The first one, when she meets Charlie. Consequently, she remembers the death of Gordon. The second one, she develops sexual need for him because she loved him before he goes to war and dies there. She is moved by his death that exemplifies the undesired experience in her life. The following life conveys her tormented psyche: "Nina (*thinking torturedly*) Gordon darling, I must go away where I can think of you in silence! ... (*She turns on her father, her voice trembling with the effort to keep it in control icily*) It's no use talking, Father. I have reflected and I am going!" (16).

The relationship between sex and repression is contiguous in the psychological interpretation of persons' sexual problems. In "Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality," Roy Baumeister and Jean Twenge (2002) study the feminist dimensions of female sexuality. They (2002) argue that female sexuality has several conceptual aspects. One of these aspects is "sexual deception" that formulates the psychic restrains (p.166). In addition, they (2002) approach the concept of repression in terms of sexual deception i.e., both repressed sexual desires and "sexual morality" have concomitant implications. To explain, females tend to repress their sexual desires in order to avoid moral complications prevalent in their society. The result is that, the suppression of female sexuality is caused by the fathers' avoidance of their daughters' predilection to sexual experiences (p.178). In *Strange Interlude*, similarly, Nina represses her sexual desires for Gordon. But she could not saturate her sexual needs. She gets angry when she remembers him. Therefore, she tells her father that she will work at the sanitarium with Gordon's friend: "there's a doctor I know at a sanitarium for crippled soldiers a friend of Gordon's. I wrote to him and he answered that he'll gladly arrange it" (p.16).

As previously mentioned, neurosis is a psychic disorder that comes after repression according to Freud's arguments. It is the authentic manifestation of desired needs that could not get out of the personality's psychological demarcations. The result of such repression leads to neurosis as an abnormal behavior. Therefore, neurosis comes after repression since persons recall their past tragic experiences.

Psychic persons tend to be abnormal. This is because they suffer from certain psychological complications and they could not get rid of them. They unconsciously repress their desired wishes in their psyches without recognizing the

influence of such repression on their behaviors. This abnormal reaction comes in the form of neurotic reactions. The other people could easily notice their neurotic responses. In "From Sensorimotor Inhibition to Freudian Repression: Insights from Psychosis Applied to Neurosis," Ariane Bazan (2012) contends that neurosis is a psychic disorder that comes after repression. Consequently, neurotic persons begin to think or behave in a strange way (p.6).

In *Strange Interlude*, Nina suffers from neurotic psychic state. She is deeply moved by the death of Gordon. She begins to think strangely. At this stage, her psychic neurosis begins to take a physical shape. When she marries Sam, she could not forget Gordon. This remembrance triggers back her passionate experience with Gordon whom she could not obtain. This is due to her lack of sexual relation with Gordon. By time, she becomes immensely affected by the need for him; the following quote describes her psychic state:

Nina (*getting up thinking with a strange, strident, wild passion*) I hear the Father laughing! ... O Mother God, protect my son! ... let Gordon fly to you in heaven! ... quick, Gordon! ... love is the Father's lightning! ... Madeline will bring you down in flames! ... I hear His screaming laughter! ... fly back to me! ... (pp.157-58)

*(She is looking desperately up into the sky as if some race of life and death were happening there for her.)*

Nina, here, seems to be very neurotic. There are several indications of her neurotic state. The first of this indication is her strange way of thinking as depicted by O'Neill. *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices*, Freud (1907) says that thinking of past sexual experience comprises neurosis as a psychic disorder. He (1907) describes this experience as a "mixture of sexual components" needed by neurotic persons (p.8). Nina, similarly, undergoes the same experience. She longs for sexual relation with Gordon, but she fails. Triggering repressed sexual desires is a feature of "conflicts concerning sexual desires and defense against this inner conflict" that comes out as neurosis (Verhaeghe and Vanheule, 2016, p.496). Being so, Nina tries to have another way of making sex, especially with a husband. She gets up abruptly with whimsical passion. Such passion is devastated by the loss of Gordon. She seems to be living in a death-life experience since she looks at the sky. Here, she behaves in a neurotic way. Therefore, her looking at the sky is one other indication of her neurotic state. She lives a disturbed life. Then, she hysterically repeats the name of Gordon in the course of that situation. Though she means her fiancé, she utters the name of her son. In this way, she tries to hide her neurotic state because persons with neurosis attempt to resist "neurosis to be treated and to be made invisible" (Vanier, 2016, p.59). Evans, on the other hand, notices her neurotic behaviors. He does not know the real cause of her psychic bereavement. Therefore, Evans tries to soothe her because is tortured by her thoughts:

Nina (*torturedly trying incoherently to force out a last despairing protest*) No! not yours! mine! and Gordon's! Gordon is Gordon's! he was my Gordon! his Gordon is mine! (p.158)

Evans (*soothingly, humoring her kissing her again*) Of course he's yours, dear and a dead ringer for Gordon Shaw, too! Gordon's body! Gordon's spirit! Your body and spirit, too, Nina! He's not like me, lucky for him! I'm a poor boob! I never could row worth a damn! (*He suddenly staggers as if he were very drunk, leaning on Marsden then gives a gasp and collapses inertly to the deck, lying on his back.*) (p.158)

Nina's neurotic conditions appear on her behavioral reactions. Such reactions are pure physical manifestations since they appear on her body movements. Freud (1895), in *Studies of Hysteria*, argues that the abnormal behaviors are "factors" of hysteric neurosis (p.19). He (1895) maintains that persons tend to repress their negative experiences in the unconscious mind. After a short period, the repressed desires "emerge" out in the form of neurosis. At this stage, Freud (1895) reinforces his arguments about the existence of repression before neurosis. Repression, in this case, influences the physical appearances which become neurotic (p.20). Persons with neurosis, says Freud, begin to behave in a hysteric manner, like laughing in a strange way (p.27). In other ways, neurosis comes out of "stressors"; i.e., some other persons might cause neurotic responses (Rofé, 2013, p.834). Nina's neurotic state has some psychic affinity to Freud's arguments. She develops some schizophrenic feelings, such as pity and happiness as she interacts with other

people, especially her son:

Nina (*piteously hysterically*) For God's sake, Gordon! What would your father say? You don't know what you're doing! You're hitting your father! (168)

Then, she laughs hysterically as she speaks:

Nina (*laughing hysterically thinking*) I told him he hit his father ... but he can't understand me! ... why, of course he can't! ... how could he? ... (169)

These discrepant feelings are psychic factors of her neurotic psyche. Most importantly, she always gets neurotic as she remembers her dead fiancé, Gordon. Even when she speaks to her son, she immediately remembers Gordon. This is due to the fact that her son's name is also Gordon. However, remembering Gordon does not only cause her neurotic behaviors, but also it stirs her repressed sexual desire. She longed for making love with Gordon, but she could not achieve her wish. Derek Hook (2003), in "Fanon and the Psychoanalysis of Racism," focuses on the presence of neurosis in the repressed sexual desires. Hook (2003) describes the sexual desires as "instincts" in persons' psyches. As such, he (2003) claims that neurosis is an "emotional disorder, [it] manifests at the level of personality, which stems from the conflict between a fundamental (often instinctual) impulse or wish and the need to repress this instinct" (p.116). In the same way, the cause of Nina's neurotic behaviors relates to her repressed sexual "instinct." Her father reprimands her when she does not show any respect for him. But she alludes to the loss of Gordon. She says that she and Gordon extremely wanted each other, but they could not make any emotional liaison. This means that she represses her sexual desire for him and she could not let it out. Consequently, she became "fierce" and tough with her father; and this is a true manifestation of neurosis:

Nina (*without looking at him, her eyes on her father's intensely*) Gordon wanted me! I wanted Gordon! I should have made him take me! I knew he would die and I would have no children, that there would be no big Gordon or little Gordon left to me, that happiness was calling me, never to call again if I refused! And yet I did refuse! I didn't make him take me! I lost him forever! And now I am lonely and not pregnant with anything at all, but--but loathing! (*She hurls this last at her father fiercely*) Why did I refuse? What was that cowardly something in me that cried, no, you mustn't, what would your father say? (p.18)

The absence of Gordon is the impetus of Nina's neurotic behavior. To connect this to Freud (1895), the neurotic reactions come out from "a complete absence of the sexual element" (p.93). Persons with neurotic symptoms strive for "sexual sensibility" to compensate the lost object of their repressed sexual "needs" (p.118). As a result, these persons become "capable of coping with sexual experiences" that they struggled to obtain in the past. In his practical attempt to discover the latent causes of neurotic behaviors, Freud (1895) speaks with some women who prove to be suffering from the same problem by the same factors. Yet, my focus here is to use Freud's theoretical conclusions about the inherent causes of neurosis as a psychic disorder. Freud (1895) always tends to use the word "derives" interchangeably with the word "causes" to sustain his theoretical discussion of neurosis. For this reason, he (1895) contends that the neurotic reactions are "physical disturbances" that appear after the absence of the sexual element. Correspondingly, the sexual element, in *Strange Interlude*, is Gordon. His death during the war embodies the absence of his sexual significance in the life of Nina. Therefore, she accuses her father, Professor Leeds, of being an obstacle in front of her marriage to Gordon. She believes that she must pay the debt. This is to make sexual affairs with persons other than Gordon. Notwithstanding, she will do it with persons because he is absent. Hence, she could not "give" her body to Gordon; and, instead, it will give it to someone else. In so doing, she believes that she pays the debt for Gordon:

Nina (*sadly*) Oh, I forgive you. But do you understand now that I must somehow find a way to give myself to Gordon still, that I must pay my debt and learn to forgive myself? (p.19)

Nina's turbulent psyche, in the light of Freud's (1895) words, is a symptom of physical disturbances. She loses



control over her sexual desires due to the absence of the desired sexual “element,” namely Gordon. She tries to cope with new sexual experiences. In the course of the play’s plot, the other new sexual experiences begin with the soldiers at the sanitarium. She leaves for the sanitarium, but she changes a lot. At the beginning of act two, she is described as older and she seems to be more tired than before. But the cause of her tiredness is her “hidden” experiences at the sanitarium. To some extent, she appears guilty and not convinced with her sordid affairs at the sanitarium:

Nina (*comes in and stands just inside the doorway. She is dressed in a nurse’s uniform with cap, a raglan coat over it. She appears older than in the previous scene, her face is pale and much thinner, her cheek bones stand out, her mouth is taut in hard lines of a cynical scorn. Her eyes try to armor her wounded spirit with a defensive stare of disillusionment. Her training has also tended to coarsen her fiber a trifle, to make her insensitive to suffering, to give her the nurse’s professionally callous attitude. In her fight to regain control of her nerves she has over-striven after the cool and efficient poise, but she is really in a more highly strung, disorganized state than ever, although she is now more capable of suppressing and concealing it. She remains strikingly handsome and her physical appeal is enhanced by her pallor and the mysterious suggestion about her of hidden experience. She stares at Marsden blankly and speaks in queer flat tones.*) (p.24)

This introductory scene tells us about Nina’s radical change. She physically changed. Charlie Marsden is completely surprised at her deteriorating state. He had not ever seen her like that. She has done immoral affairs with the soldiers at the sanitarium which makes her not depressed. This makes her change a lot. The reason for doing such affairs is that she sought to saturate her repressed sexual desires with soldiers who substitute the absence of Gordon; or the “sexual element” in her life. This is due to the fact that neurosis is “the source of conflict and of repression” (Meganck, 2017, p.4). But she failed. As a sequence, she became neurotic as she gets confused and behaves in an abnormal manner. Charlie Marsden notices her strange way of looking at the room around her:

Nina (*in same tones*) It’s too bad. I brought Doctor Darrell. I thought there might be a chance. (*She pauses and looks about the room thinking confusedly*)....

(*She looks around and then up and down.*) (24)

Nina’s strange behavior arises after the loss of her true sexual “object” i.e., Gordon. Freud (1895) maintains that neurotic behaviors entail “hallucinatory confusion” (p.223). The symptomatic features of neurosis involve “a permanent state of confusion” (p.233). In this regard, Freud (1895) refers to the state of confusion as “psychosis.” In essence, the concepts of neurosis and confusion are inextricable in psychoanalysis (Ferenczi, 2009, p.2). This is due to the fact that neurosis refers to the disturbances of physical behaviors (p.2). Nina’s confusion is blatant. She does not know whether her home is her father’s home or not. Then, she begins to shake her head in an unusual way: “His home ... my home ... he was my father ... he’s dead ... (*She shakes her head.*)” (p.24). Here, we could infer Nina’s neurotic behavior that appears after the loss of Gordon. However, this behavior does not come immediately; it becomes more evident when she compensates Gordon’s absence through making sexual affairs with the sanitarium’s soldiers. She suffers from confusion neurosis; because neurosis produces confusion psychic patterns, such as anxiety (Maxwell, 2005, p.31).

Anxiety is the ultimate phase of neurosis. Like neurosis, it is a psychic disorder that appears on the persons’ physical behavioral attitudes. However, it appears in both the physical and emotional attitudes. In “On the Physical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena,” Freud (1893) claims that the concept of anxiety is an “illness” that appears on persons’ emotional reactions, especially when they are provoked by certain repressed feelings (p.7). Furthermore, Freud (1894), in *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence*, associates the presence of anxiety with emotional pain. Therefore, pain is one psychic aspect of anxiety which appears on the emotional responses of persons. It is considered as an anxious reaction to some negative drives surrounding neurotic persons (p.13). Anxious persons appear painful because

they suffer from negative experience they had once undergone. In *Strange Interlude*, similarly, Nina is painful. She is a victim of a negative experience. She bemoans her husband:

Nina (*stares down at Evans slowly, as if trying to bring her mind back to him*) My husband? (*suddenly with a cry of pain, sinks on her knees beside the body*) Sam! (158)

Nina is severely overwhelmed by pain. She promises her husband to give him a child. However, she will give him the child at the expense of her body. She will make him happy by giving him this child. In essence, she suffers from painful experience. She leads a life full of anguish and pain. In "Depression and Anxiety in Pain," Adam Woo (2010) claims that pain is a psychological factor that manifests in psychological moods and emotions to "determine pain experience" of anxious persons (p.8). Equivalently, the case of Nina corresponds to this psychological state. She now lives in a very difficult life with her husband. She suffers deeply as she lives in psychological depression. Being so, depression is considered as another indication of anxiety. Therefore, the psychological triad of anxiety is depression, pain and anxiety (Santos et al., 2014, p.96). Nina's pain is depicted as "anguish" in the play. She faces difficult life situations that make her live in anguish:

Nina (*in dull anguish*) Save again? (*then lovingly, kissing Evans' face*) Dear husband, you have tried to make me happy, I will give you my happiness again! I will give you Gordon to give to Madeline! (159)

Nina's pain is a peculiarity of anxiety. She begins to behave hysterically. She also shows great pain. She cries at her child because he does not know his true parentage; and he always suspects her. In fact, there is a guilty tone in her speech when she speaks to her son. This illegitimate child is born from her sexual predilection to Ned Darrell. As a result, she does not want to see Ned forever because he is the cause of her psychic retardation. Her son, Gordon, attempts to calm her down. But she bursts in anxious behaviors. She laughs and thinks in a strange way. To her grief, she feels sorry for her son who is deprived of his parents. He supports her in her psychic dilemma. Yet, for him, she seems extremely anxious:

Nina (*thinking in desperate hysterical anguish*) Oh, I wish Ned would go away and stay away forever! ... I can't bear to watch him suffer any more! ... it's too frightful! ... yes, God the Father, I hear you laughing ... you see the joke ... I'm laughing too ... it's all so crazy, isn't it? ...

(*laughing hysterically*) Oh, Ned! Poor Ned! You were born unlucky!

Gordon (*making her sit down again soothing her*) Mother! Stop laughing! Please! It's all right all right between us! I've apologized! (*as she has grown calmer*) And now I want to say what I was going to say. (169)

In psychoanalysis, the concept of anxiety is classified within the broad sense of the theory of effects. That is, repressed personal feelings are inhibited in the unconscious mind, then, they come on the emotional surface (Abu Jweid and Termizi, 2015). In this regard, persons with repressed feelings become prone to psychic behavioral disorders as they undergo severe emotional experiences. In the long run, their unconscious mind controls their feelings and behaviors. In this way, the concept of anxiety becomes an apparent tool of understanding the psychic conflicts between the conscious and the unconscious minds. This psychological duality controls persons' behaviors to a great extent. Here, the functional model of the human mind regarding the concept of anxiety provides obtrusive examples about how persons behave according to their repressed feelings. Freud (1893) tends to nominate this psychic stage as neurotic anxiety because the concept of anxiety is the culmination of behavioral neurosis. But anxiety, in this sense, originates in the unsatisfactory sexual practices which had been repressed in the unconscious mind and did not find any proper pleasurable outlet. In *Strange Interlude*, Ned Darrell gives a vivid picture of how Nina represses her affectionate emotion towards her dead lover, Gordon. But the reality of her love is bitter. In Freud's (1893) words, she did not have a satisfactory love affair with the "object"; i.e., Gordon. Consequently, she fails to satisfy other men with sex as well.

The symptoms of her anxiety appear in her need to punish herself because she feels guilty about making love with men at the sanitarium before she marries Sam. This is because her true love is Gordon, and she could not cherish her love for him after his death. As such, she becomes severely anxious. Ned Darrell describes her anxious state in the following quote:

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! (p.32)

The relationship between anxiety and sex is firm. The sexual reactions are often controlled by some buried desires that are not released out of the unconscious mind. Persons tend to find proper outlets for their repressed sexual desires. However, the satisfaction of such repressed feelings could contradict with the fact that they might have immoral affairs with other people. Consequently, they avoid moral dilemmas by having legitimate sexual relations. One of these relations is marriage (Freud, 1895, p.3). In *Strange Interlude*, Ned Darrell and Charlie speak about Nina's anxious psyche. She became worse than before. They could infer her anxiety by her anxious reactions. They try to find suitable solutions to her psychic complex. Therefore, Charlie suggests that she could marry Sam so as to be more stable and calm. In the course of the play, she seems to love Sam, but not to that degree of her love to Gordon. Consequently, she needs to marry him to satisfy her sexual void left by the death of Gordon; and because she is still influenced by his love.

Darrell Yes, Evans. He's in love with her. And it's one of those unselfish loves you read about. And she is fond of him. In a maternal way, of course—but that's just what she needs now, someone she cares about to mother and boss and keep her occupied. And still more important, this would give her a chance to have children. She's got to find normal outlets for her craving for sacrifice. She needs normal love objects for the emotional life Gordon's death blocked up in her. Now marrying Sam ought to do the trick. Ought to. Naturally, no one can say for certain. But I think his unselfish love, combined with her real liking for him, will gradually give her back a sense of security and a feeling of being worth something to life again, and once she's got that, she'll be saved! .... Doesn't that seem good sense to you? (34).

Ned Darrell knows well Nina's psychic state. She suffers from a psychic void left by the absence of Gordon. Ned Darrell guesses that Nina needs love. But this time she will not have sordid sexual relations, like those she had does with the soldiers. Therefore, she resorts to marriage as a moral way of having chaste affair. Accordingly, she implores Charlie to help her to have a chaste relation with a man. She wants to be kind and gentle. Yet, she feels guilty that she will have an affair with a man other than Gordon. She feels that he haunts her everywhere. Then, she confesses that her affairs with men are "morbid" and immoral as they contradict with her will to have a good relation with a man. She dreams about Gordon who comes as if to reprimand her for having sordid affairs with the injured soldiers:

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! (40)

At the end of the play, Nina behaves in a strange way. Sometimes she smiles, other times she falls into bitter sadness, while other times she suffers from psychic anguish. All these discrepant feelings are feature of her disturbed psyche. Freud (1895) describes the contradictory feelings as indications of the anxious psyche. He (1895) relates such feelings to the uncontrolled anxious behaviors: "pathological depression and anxiety-states" (p.188). As such, Nina describes her life as a "strange interlude" that is full of tragic incidents that influenced her psyche. These incidents make her psychically weary:

NINA (*with a strange smile*) Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father! (*resting her head on his shoulder*) You're so restful, Charlie. I feel as if I were a girl again and you were my father and the Charlie of those days made into one. I wonder is our old garden the same? We'll pick flowers together in the aging afternoons of spring and summer, won't we? It will be a comfort to get home to be old and to be home again at last to be in love with peace together to love each other's peace to sleep with peace together! (*she kisses him then shuts her eyes with a deep sigh of requited weariness*) to die in peace! I'm so contentedly weary with life! (p.173)

Nina, here, is utterly anxious. There are several clues for her anxiety. Her neurotic and contradictory reactions represent the level of her psychic alienation. She feels guilty that she has committed non-marital sexual affairs that are repressed and then triggered in the conscious mind. The result is that she becomes alienated from her society. She does not recognize her abnormal behaviors. These behaviors are the manifestations of alienation per se. this is due to the fact that alienation appears on the conscious behaviors and noticed by others. Thus, the anxiety phase develops when it is accompanied by both repressed sexual desires for her dead fiancé Gordon; and her immoral sexual affairs with Ned. Such experience entails anxiety; or as John Keefe et al. (2014) put it as follows: "anxiety symptoms are often assumed to originate from relationship experiences in which certain feelings or wishes were experienced by the patient as painful, dangerous, or unacceptable (e.g., feelings of loss or abandonment, a wish to express anger or assert oneself)" and the anxious "patient learns to disavow these intense, negative feelings and desires, avoids their experiences, and develops anxiety symptoms" that lead to psychic alienation (p.310).

#### IV. Conclusion

This study analyzed O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. The discussion has focused on three psychoanalytic elements, namely, repression, neurosis and anxiety. The significance of these elements lies in their importance to understanding the play's protagonist's psychic complexities. The protagonist, Nina, appears normal at the onset of the play. However, she becomes psychically disordered when she encounters bitter experiences in her life. She first is affected by a shock caused by the death of her fiancé, Gordon. This incident is repressed in her unconscious mind. Therefore, Nina kept her sexual desires without any proper outlet. Consequently, she begins to seek for pleasurable outlet of her repressed sexual desires caused by the absence of her lost lover. As a result, she embarks sordid sexual affairs with the men. The discussion has identified these sexual affairs as appropriate exits for Nina's unsatisfied sexual desires. Notwithstanding, the discussion has described this sexual discontentment as a way of repression. Nina represses her tragic experience in order to get rid of her sad memories.

The process of forgetting the dead fiancé and making love with the soldiers at the sanitarium has been interpreted as a way of neglecting the tragic psychic void left by the death of Gordon. The analysis has found that Nina's repressed desires could not be satisfied by Gordon. Therefore, she tries to find other ways of having sex at the expense of immoral behaviors. In essence, this act drastically influences her personality. She becomes abnormally alienated. The discussion of her marriage, therefore, has revealed her predilection to have chaste love affairs. However, she develops

another psychic shock when she discovers her husband malicious heredity disease that might run through her posterity. The analysis of this shock has emphasized the trigger of the unconscious memories as Nina repeatedly remembers Gordon. Then, she becomes affectingly close to Ned. The interpretation of her sexual tendency to Ned has explored her neurotic behaviors. Such behaviors are indications of her neurotic state that precedes her anxiety.

Nina's anxiety, then, has been examined by the discrepant feelings. When she feels guilty, she also feels that she is torn between strange contradictory feelings, such as joy, sadness, confusion and so forth. Such feelings have been analyzed in terms of Freud's conceptualization of the anxiety that develops out of the concept of neurosis. At this point, Nina's anxiety appears more obvious as she hates her lover Ned. Furthermore, it appears when she remembers her father and husband. Again, she feels guilty for having non-marital sexual affairs. This gloomy feeling intensifies her psychic alienation. She becomes prone to living alone. Her life of loneliness, or alienation, makes her feel like living in "strange interlude"; a life that is full of negative personal experiences. In this sense, the analysis has found that anxiety overwhelms Nina's personality because she previously repressed her sexual desires that make her alienated. Thus, she develops whimsical discrepant feelings; and she becomes psychically abnormal and prone to live in gloomy alienation.

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## الكبت، العصاب والقلق: ثلاثية الاغتراب السلوكي في مسرحية فاصل غريب (لاوجين أونيل)

هالة الظفيري\*

### ملخص

ترمي هذه الدراسة إلى اكتشاف الكبت، العصاب والقلق كمحفزات الاغتراب السلوكي في مسرحية فاصل غريب لاوجين أونيل. تركز الدراسة على قضية التشرد في المجتمع الأمريكي بسبب الاغتراب السلوكي الذي يتناوله المؤلف عن طريق أبرز مظاهر التحرر من الوهم وخيبة الأمل كسمات طاغية على مظاهر التفكك العائلي. وفي هذا الصدد، تستخدم الدراسة مفاهيم الكبت، العصاب والقلق لسيغمود فرويد لتحليل دوافع الوعي والأوعي التي تتحكم بسلوك شخص المسرحية. إذ يقوم الشخص بکبت تجارب مريرة تؤدي في نهاية المطاف الى نزوعهم إلى العزلة التي هي بدورها جوهر الاغتراب السلوكي الذي يتشكل عبر تراكم لكبت الرغبات الشهوانية الموصوفة في خضم مشاهد المسرحية.

الكلمات الدالة: الاغتراب السلوكي، القلق، العصاب، التحليل النفسي، الكبت.

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