

24-26 June 2022

Oslo, Norway

## Eugene O'Neill, Jonathan Culler, and Freudian Criticism

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### ABSTRACT

Eugene O'Neill's distinctive view of tragedy as a combination of sorrow and joy, love and hate, struggles and reconciliation relate to his reflection on his familial relationships. Drawing upon Jonathan Culler's theory of intertextuality, this article explores why O'Neill rejects Freudian criticism of his works, especially *Desire Under the Elms*, and how his life experiences affect the play's textual interrelation with its pretexts. The expressionistic scenes in O'Neill's vernacular play articulate tragic intertextuality by juxtaposing and counterpointing archetypal representations of human sufferings and the playwright's contemplation overwhelmed with personal grief. A reinvestigation of O'Neill's recollection of his family love-hate complications helps clarify how his characterization of Eben Cabot reshapes references to the Freudian figuration of Oedipal sentiments. The biographical approach to the playwright's troubled life observes one of Jonathan Culler's concepts of intertextual hermeneutics. O'Neill's characterization of Eben Cabot demonstrates that, while the heterogeneity of references to literary pretexts enriches a literary work's ideological complexity, "the author's personal or historical circumstances" (Culler, *Literary Theory* 67) also serves as a notion vital to the hermeneutic reworking of intertextual dialogue.

**Keywords:** Eugene O'Neill; Sigmund Freud; Jonathan Culler; intertextuality; *Desire Under the Elms*