



Navigating The Depths: The Structurality Of Space In Eugene O'Neill's Dramatic And Cinematic Universe

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Eugene O'Neill's plays have been adapted for the big screen, highlighting the interactions between his theatrical legacy and American culture. It looks at O'Neill's impact on the development of cinematic techniques, the historical background of his work, and the cultural value of his dramas. A critical evaluation of Sidney Lumet's *The Iceman Cometh* (1960), television production and *The Hairy Ape* (1944) is used as a case study to demonstrate how well O'Neill's stagecraft was adapted for the big screen. The essay also explores O'Neill's own opinions regarding his plays' adaptations, contrasting his disapproval of the first movie adaptations with his admiration for John Ford's interpretation in *The Long Voyage Home* (1944). Through an examination of the performative aesthetics maintained in the adaptations, this research illuminates the relationship between household, horizon and theatrical settings as well as the ways in which O'Neill's work speaks to larger themes in American culture. The purpose of the article is to advance knowledge of O'Neill's ongoing influence on theatre and film.

Keywords: American Drama, Stage-to-Screen Adaptation, Performative Aesthetics, Theatricality, Space

Introduction

Kurt Eisen, while identifying the potentiality of Eugene O'Neill's cinematic capabilities has rightly mentioned, "The legacy of O'Neill on the screen has become essential to understanding the sustained patterns of his art and how it corresponds to more general patterns within American culture" (Eisen, 116). He has further pointed out the playwright's negative perception towards some of the early adaptations of his plays and goes on to praise Sidney Lumet's television production of *Iceman Cometh* (1960) for its ability to employ a wide variety of techniques that capture the performative aesthetics of the stage. The television preserved and connected the domestic and the stage, within a continuum.

There are many ways that the theatre and movie theatre spaces differ from one another. Patron (2022) draws attention to the differences in how people perceive time and space—theatre emphasizing the present, while cinema frequently depicts past events. Arisoy (2021) delves deeper into this, highlighting how space functions in movies as a tool for constructing meaning and how that meaning is related to the ideology of the picture. By addressing the function of the movie theatre as a setting that is constantly created and reconstructed by viewers, Ravazzoli (2016) brings a sociological perspective. Issacharoff (1981) explores the intricacies of spatial relations in drama, specifically in the context of theatre, where the interplay of visible and invisible places on stage is essential in generating dramatic tension. The combined findings of these research highlight the subtle distinctions between how theatre and film use and perceive space.

In his study Friedman observes that NT Live production of "Coriolanus" by Josie Rourke combines theater, film, and television, resulting in a postmodern parody rather than a brand-new artistic medium (2016). Its shot selection and editing are reminiscent of television, yet it has a theatrical text focus and convention. Though it lacks the co-presence of the theatre and the cutting-edge effects of film, the cinematic experience is nevertheless reproduced using large-screen projections and spectator gaze control. Media classification is further challenged by NT Live's incapacity to air on television. Not only can this Tim van Someren-directed

cinemacast be viewed as an alternative to live theatre, but also as a synthesis of Shakespeare's historical adaptations.

The Duchess of Malfi, Webster's 2014 television adaptation, provides a new perspective on reimagining classic plays (Aebischer, 2016). It embraces a distinct "Jacobean" aesthetic, departing from Shakespearean conventions. The small theater of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, along with Webster's unique dramaturgy and the medium of television, create a more disjointed and gloomier viewing experience. Through the use of visually "sinister" techniques, altered verse delivery, and disruption of the narrative flow, this approach challenges the conventions of typical Shakespearean interpretations. It calls into question the standardization of Shakespearean features in theatrical transmission and pushes for a more comprehensive understanding of the merits of Jacobean drama, which in turn stimulates a re-evaluation of adaption traditions.

In contrast to the simpler, language-mediated space in narrative, the study emphasizes the intricacy of space in drama. It emphasizes that although a play needs to be at a physical location, space must be conceptualized in a variety of ways, taking into account both the visible (on stage) and the invisible (off stage). Centuries of artistic debate have been driven by this paradox. It is important to understand that space in theatre is more than just a set; it is a dynamic, multifaceted element that both shapes and is shaped by the performance, affecting both the play's dramatic tension and the audience's experience. In the study, a more thorough examination of space as a dynamic aspect in theatrical performance is advocated.

The study performed by Ksenia Kisselincheva explores how German Expressionist playwrights like Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, as well as August Strindberg's "The Road to Damascus," influenced Eugene O'Neill's use of expressionism in "The Emperor Jones" and "The Hairy Ape." (2020) It also highlights the influence of filmmakers like Lang, Wiene, and Murnau's German Expressionistic filmmaking. O'Neill's plays from the 1920s were greatly influenced by these avant-garde movements, combining theatrical and cinematic techniques to produce a unique narrative structure that embodies the Expressionist ethos, according to the analysis, which also uncovers stylistic and thematic links.

"The Emperor Jones" and "The Hairy Ape" by Eugene O'Neill are essential readings for anyone interested in learning about expressionism in American theatre (Roy, 2018). These plays are mirror images of one another, with recurring themes and archetypal symbolism that analyse human nature. Through a sombre, expressionistic lens, they portray a journey of self-discovery that questions both personal identity and social norms. The plays are important because of the way they creatively employ expressionistic devices to produce a fresh kind of storytelling that both critiques and reflects society. The plays end without societal transformation, highlighting the individual's fight against chaos, despite the terrible travels of the heroes. Because of this methodical approach to the human condition, O'Neill's works are essential reading for anybody studying theatre expressionism.

Eugene O'Neill's engagement with cinema, though less direct than his contemporaries, offers a profound commentary on modernity (Bahroun & Schaber, 2021). His photoplays, particularly of "The Hairy Ape" and "Desire Under the Elms", stand as testament to his visionary integration of theatrical and cinematic techniques. These works, unfulfilled in film, nonetheless showcase O'Neill's innovative approach to dramaturgy, transforming static stage directions into dynamic visual narratives. His theoretical exploration of modern existence through images not only redefined the boundaries of playwriting but also anticipated the convergence of different art forms in the pursuit of expressing the human condition. O'Neill's legacy, therefore, lies not in the realized, but in the boundless potential of the unrealized, echoing the very essence of modernist aspiration.

Eugene O'Neill's relationship with Hollywood was transactional, unlike his peers Shaw and Williams (Mandal & Sisk, 2014). His detachment from the film adaptations of his plays didn't diminish his influence on the evolving art of cinema. During a time of cinematic expansion and innovation in America, O'Neill's dramatic works paralleled the film industry's exploration of new techniques. This paper posits that O'Neill's dramatic evolution, marked by form and idea experimentation, mirrored and even challenged the burgeoning film medium, contributing to the breaking of theatrical stereotypes and enriching the narrative arts without directly engaging in film production.

Cinema and Movie adaptations have a social and cultural role to play when it comes to its narrative structure. Adaptations like Olivier's "Hamlet" and various "Pride and Prejudice" versions underscore the role of artistic reinterpretation in shaping cultural identity (Nicklas & Lindner, 2012). This volume examines adaptation as a key cultural force, analysing its artistic, genre, marketing, and political dimensions across different eras and mediums. Early adaptations were more than just reinterpretation of the written works, they were to be produced in unity with the stage productions. A cinema creates its own space and interpretations as it deals with different set of techniques and practices separate from theatre productions. Now, cinema also has a unique combination of narration and action, becoming a site of assemblage. An action dominates a Play and Novels are known for their narrative capabilities and cinema brings the major characteristics of both the medium by appropriating them accordingly.

The growth of Cinema and Psychoanalysis in the previous century have complemented each other. "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Play of Shadows" delves into the intersection of psychoanalysis and film, examining how both fields interpret dreams, desires, and illusions. It scrutinizes the foundational texts of psychoanalytic film theory and proposes a significant reassessment of its underlying principles (Lebeau, 2001).

The introduction of psychoanalysis in everyday art, found its way into the development of cinema and provide a depth in representation of reality on the screen. The diversification of cinematic art would have been impossible without psychological reinterpretation of the psyche.

The significance of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" lies in its intricate narrative structure, which echoes the cinematic method of layering views and images. Like a camera's focus in a movie, the novella's framing technique—stories inside stories—creates a feeling of closeness with its protagonist, Marlow. This arrangement highlights the enduring allure of darkness for humans and the value of storytelling in helping us comprehend the world. Comparable to Coppola's "Apocalypse Now," Conrad's work demonstrates the eternal quality of stories and their capacity to unite us across many media and historical periods.

There are many different theoretical stances and cultural factors at work in the complicated interaction that exists between cinema, interpretation, and adaptation. In her work, Jain explores the relationships between cultures and media in film adaptations, emphasizing the scholarly side of film studies (Mandal, 2020). According to Hendrykowski (2013), it is more fruitful to see the original and its adaptation as connected cultural texts rather than as separate concepts of "fidelity" in film adaptation. Źłószarz draws attention to the ideological and commercial components of cinema adaptation, arguing that it is a commodification of reading that is influenced by audience expectations and socioeconomic factors (Śłószarz, 2013). Krysiak contends that film adaptations are original interpretations that have the power to improve the source material rather than merely being translations of literature, which further convolves the matter (Krysiak, 2014).

A masterpiece that captures the fusion of multiple artistic styles and the development of modern drama is Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape." Its humorous aspects subvert conventional storylines, and its aesthetic decisions combine naturalism and expressionism. The play highlights a complicated conversation between development and tradition through its engagement with Italian futurism and its critique of such avant-garde groups. O'Neill democratizes the representation of the human predicament by using Yank, a marginalized individual, to represent humanity, departing from the aristocratic protagonists of classical Greek tragedies.

The film adaptation of *The Hairy Ape* (1944) and *Iceman Cometh* (1960) are exploration of both physical and psychological spaces in O'Neill's plays, as well as the dynamic and recurrent nature of his characters' inner lives and maritime settings. It also hints at the analysis of character interactions and the impact of structured spaces on individual development within the plays. The use of "Navigating the Depths" suggests a deep dive into the complex layers of O'Neill's work, resonating with the maritime themes and the profound psychological explorations characteristic of his drama.

Conclusion

Early cinema relied heavily on the classic plays, novel and theatrical productions for material as it provided a readymade story for production. O'Neill's dramatic style and tragic consciousness have had a lasting influence on Chinese drama, and his works have also contributed to cultural and creative contacts between the United States and China (Li, 2010). In addition, O'Neill's screenwriting endeavors, namely his investigation of the "little cinema" movement, demonstrate his fascination with the possibility of using film as a platform for his artistic and experimental endeavors (Schaber, 2022). The last point is that O'Neill's interest in Chinese Taoism, which is demonstrated in plays like "Marco Millions" and "The Fountain," has influenced the intellectual and spiritual aspects of film (Xian-ju, 2014).

Eugene O'Neill has had a significant influence on film through both his experimental screenplay associated with the "little cinema" movement and his Expressionist-influenced plays such as "The Emperor Jones." His artistic creations, which represent personal experiences, are as deep and emotionally poignant as film narratives. O'Neill's Catholic background permeates his narrative ethos, giving his characters and plots a deep moral component that enhances them even though it isn't directly visual. His creative path demonstrates a mutually beneficial relationship with film, where he both influences and is influenced by the changing cinematic language.

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