Chapter Four

Racialized Demarcation of Desire and Traumatized Humanity:

All God's Chillun Got Wings

In *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1923), Eugene O'Neill presents a psychosomatic case of race relations in an interracial marriage to show how ethnic biases devastate individuals, Black or White, stuck in the social convolutions. This play is a continuation of O'Neill's scrutiny of Harlem Renaissance values in light of which he chronicles blacks' constant struggle towards the quest for success and recognition in America. After migrating to North with a view to changing their plights to fit into the American structure, the blacks gradually became aware that as Africans and also as Americans, they were in fact fighting both physical and psychic wars of which Du Bois had spoken at the turn of twentieth century. Abe in *The Dreamy Kid* shows this tangle in physical terms symbolized by his two stretched out hands at play's end where one hand grasps the "old Negro," Mammy who is about to pass out, and the other hand grips a firearm like a "New Negro"; and Jones in *The Emperor Jones* projects this conflict in psychic terms as we see his kleptomaniac American self panics and is overcome by his African past. However, starting with *The Dreamy Kid* through *The Emperor Jones* to *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill explicitly forwards how, in the process of assimilation, black family's core values would be on the wane in the wave of American culture, and particularly, individualism (Holton; Diggins 142-44). Jim in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* is a complicated black portrait entangled in the cobweb of the white American values, internalized racism, and love for a white woman. In total contrast to Jones' portrayal with Machiavellian civic

virtues of deceit, fear, and double crossing, O'Neill bestows upon Jim in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* all the aspects of American idealism, the derivatives from Calvinist doctrinaires of industry, honesty, and simplicity; yet Jim's tragedy is inherent in Jones' one—not only for outwardly sharing a skin color that always leaves both as secondary human beings under an American setting, but also for carrying an embedded psyche which prompted both to go out and "buy white" since an American black is usually driven by a "sense of always looking at [his] self through the eyes of others, of measuring [his] soul by the tape of a [white] world" (Du Bois 2).

O'Neill, in his first notation for *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, penned a two-line entry in his 1921-31 notebook of ideas for future dramas: "Play of Johnny T.—negro who married white woman—base play on his experience as I have seen it intimately—but no reproduction, see it only as man's" (Floyd *O'Neill at Work* 53). O'Neill's nondiscriminatory attitude towards people of all races helped him to have an open mind, to travel around and study other peoples' conditions, and while doing so, he was able to understand and appreciate their problems, and at the same time, enhance his knowledge of the human conditions: "O'Neill had a remarkable aptitude for making friends among men of all social levels and interests. He was a man genuinely liked. Even today he is remembered by casual laborers who worked for him on his California ranch, by Herbert Freeman, his chauffeur for many years, and by those who knew him in more fully professional ways as someone who met them as equals and treated them fairly and with reliable friendship" (Commins xii-xiv).

Written in late 1923 and first published in *The American Mercury* in February 1924, *All God's Chillun Got Wings* premiered on 15 May 1924 at the Provincetown Playhouse, and although closed in June, it reopened at the Greenwich Village Theatre on 18 August to run until 10 October 1924 (Floyd *The Plays* 257). The title of the

play was derived from an old Negro Spiritual: "When I get to Heav'n/ Gonna put on my wings/ Gonna fly all over God's Heav'n. I Got wings/ You got wings/ All God's chillun got wings" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 536)? While commenting on the title of this play, CWE Bigsby forwards, "it is only in heaven that freedom can be a reality—hence Jim's reversion to a simplistic faith at the end of the play. In this world such freedom is not so readily available" (60). In fact, the sort of freedom Jim is searching for, though, is the basic freedom that all God's children are supposed to have in this world. In American scenario, however, for a black to possess such a thought of "freedom" was usually considered an "undesirable desire" by Carla Kaplan simply because it meant "to challenge the status quo" (158).

Anathema of Miscegenation and the American Backdrop

Cross-racial desire, however, was not altogether an off-putting phenomenon in the US literary arena at the turn of the turbulent twenties of twentieth century. Wallace Stevens, in his "Sunday Morning" published in *Harmonium* in 1923, shows a young lady idly whiling away in her lawn chair and pleasantly having "complacencies of the peignoir" as she gulps down oranges (1-2). While daydreaming, she comes across the following figures that cause her erotic hang over:

> Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
> Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
> Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
> Not as a god, but as a god might be,
> Naked among them, like a savage source.
> Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,

Out of their blood, returning to the sky; (91-97)

The anonymous woman in the poem could well be picturing primitives, since the term "savage" carries a nuance of blackness brought home by Stevens' image of the "chant" arising from their "blood." This, under a civilized setting, a white lady's drawing upon the "savage source," not only informs the readers of the conceited hedonism of the woman, but also emphasizes the fact of scandalous "miscegenative" desires that she carries within. Acclaimed Harlem novelist Nella Larsen's protagonists in her two novels, Helga in *Quicksand* (1928) and Clare in *Passing* (1929), are similar images of people intending to cross racial borders through interracial desire (Magill 1-2). Carla Kaplan, while elaborating on the motive behind Jazz Age writers' forging plots of intercultural fantasies, delineates: "By recuperating romance, telling stories about who was and was not desirable and why, modernists were able to participate in complex on-going cultural debates about citizenship, identity, and race" (146-47). O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* stands apart from 1920's typical texts such as Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) or Edith Hull's *The Sheik* (1921), where male protagonists freely take on the characteristics of the racial Other as a way of boosting white manhood, the trend which Eric Lott remarks as "racial cross-dressing" (241). Hence, O'Neill declines to weave a plot of false miscegenation, and instead he complexly portrays interracial desire and its social consequences while he also critiques white supremacy.

O'Neill's white heroine Ella Downey and her black husband Jim Harris in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* trespass the color-line in reality by being "miscegenative," and thus tried to attain the "undesirable desire" which Kaplan considers a "guilty pleasure" (146). In the play, the sense of "guilty pleasure" is instilled into the couple mainly through their foils who marshal the duo towards racial commitments by

denouncing their boundary hopping. An era earmarked in history for extreme racial violence, the notorious second decade of twentieth century was soaked radically into racial debates by two leading White and Black supremacist writers: Lothrop Stoddard and Alain Locke. Hence in O'Neill's play, Lothrop Stoddard's professed obligation of "racial duty" to keep the "Negro" in its "place" was called into action by both Mickey and Shorty, Ella's white foils in the play, whose racist values and attitudes make direct impact on Ella's conjugal life. Echoing another white supremacist writer Madison Grant, Stoddard expressed his fear in 1920 saying "the white world today stands at the crossroads of life and death" (252) due to the infiltration of "aliens" and the rise of colored "hordes," signaling America's "greatest curse" (xxiii). On the other hand, Hattie, black Jim's sister cum foil, is a prime example of what Locke insisted on: the need for "group sense" (95), "secondary race consciousness" (96), and "race pride" (97) among Blacks. Proud of her ethnic origin, black art and artists, Hattie tries her level best to make Jim conform to his racial responsibilities and carry out works that would uplift their race. The relationship between Ella Downey and Jim Harris in the play, therefore, stands as microcosm of a nation ideologically divided over the issues of "citizenship, identity, and race" where O'Neill wide opens his critique of the racialized demarcation of desire that pervaded the Jazz Age ideals.

Historically, no play in the last century (not even those dealing with taboo subjects like gay or lesbian marriages)[1] drew such an intensity of national outcry, denunciations, death-threats, and fear of violent protests like *All God's Chillun Got Wings* did, and all this had taken place well before the play was produced. This play took quite a considerable number of the American people by storm and seemed to have touched the very fabric of American social institutions because it dealt with a hypersensitive subject—miscegenation. Quite unlike his Irish predecessor Dion

Boucicault and his contemporary Edward Sheldon, both of whom had political biases in dealing with the theme of interracial marriage on stage (Richards 444-447; Hart 539 and 685; Wilmeth and Miller 345), in writing the play, O'Neill, was very direct and bold in treating the subject matter. Travis Bogard reiterates this very fact that a few plays before O'Neill's occasioned such controversy and aroused public outcry but not as extensive and intense as *All God's Chillun Got Wings*:

> In its time it could be seriously compared only to Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859) and Edward Sheldon's *The Nigger* (1909), but neither older play explored its subjects so directly nor so truthfully … [O'Neill] saw, rightly, that the social and personal problems were deeply interwoven, and that to project the complexity of his subject he needed more than reportage. He set himself to develop a story and characters that would be both real, in short, "super-natural." (193)

Kenneth McGowan, one of O'Neill's close friends and highly influential theater critic of the time, further attested the play's pre-production controversy as he commented, "It is no risk at all to say that *All God's Chillun* received more negative publicity before production than any play in the history of the theatre, possibly of the world" (qtd. in Gelbs *O'Neill* 551). In fact, many who denounced the play had never read it; they just heard that the play dealt with the issue of miscegenation, and that in the course of the play, the white heroine (Mary Blair casting as Ella) kissed the hand of her black husband (Paul Robeson playing Jim's role). The excessive aspersion cast on this play in the media, was according to O'Neill, "[came] from people who have not read a line of the play," and hence he reacted by saying "Prejudice born of an entire ignorance of the subject is the last word in injustice and absurdity" (Sheaffer *Son and Playwright* 138).

However, *All God's Chillun Got Wings* is usually regarded as a thematic sequel to O'Neill's autobiographical play *Welded* (1923) where another type of contradictory relationship between the main characters is seen to have existed (Floyd 258-59). Here both Michael and Eleanor love each other deeply, yet they are divided by a profound sense of alienation which prevents their happiness, and one of such obstacles is an Eliotian modern predicament of communicative lapse: "They act for the moment like two persons of different races, deeply in love, but separated by a barrier of language" (Bogard 191). Whereas language or the lack of communication undercuts and destroys the relationship between the two central characters in *Welded*, racial disparity and intolerance wreck the bond and marriage of Jim Harris and Ella Downey, the two central characters of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. This might have been the reason behind O'Neill's claim that "the racial factor is incidental; the play is a character study of two human beings" (Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 135).

In her essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, Margaret Loftus Ranald writes that O'Neill's plays, dealing with the racial themes in *The Dreamy Kid* or *The Emperor Jones* in the early 1920s, were acceptable and getting mixed beg of reactions tilted more towards "positive[s]" until *All God's Chillun Got Wings* "met trouble" for harboring "an interracial marriage [which] was still an anathema to the theatrical establishment" ("The Early Plays" 63-64). Indeed, a forerunner of racial justice who used stage as the medium for searching racial equity, Bogard views, "what [O'Neill] has accomplished is, for 1924, a bold treatment of the social and personal problems that emerge from an interracial marriage" (193). Miscegenation, the theme hitherto unexplored tangibly by any dramatist so forth, has been a subject that smacks of suspicion, violent outbursts of anger, denunciation, and bitter resentment in the United States. To venture to treat this sensitive subject, even

in an implied way in the 1920s, therefore, was as dangerous as it was imprudently asking for trouble. Margaret Ranald, in her *The Eugene O'Neill Companion*, views that this taboo had been dragging along as the racial issue of miscegenation persisted even in the mid-1980s which made it challenging to stage the play: "Obviously, the play was far ahead of its time in choosing to deal with the theme of interracial marriage, and to some extent the social situation still militates against the play's revival" (19).

It is on record that in American history, interracial marriage between a black and a white has always been an outrageous issue that over the years bothered even its presidents; for example, Abraham Lincoln had to abandon the idea of fancying a black lady for espousing, and Thomas Jefferson's white descendents were haunted for being propagated by this one of America's Founding Fathers who also housed a teenaged slave girl named Sally Hemings. During World War I, New York's cultural-intellectual hub of Greenwich Village saw some liberal acts of miscegenation arousing public controversies: the champion heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson's marriage to a white woman, and the well-known explorer Clearance King's marrying a black woman. Johnson's wife committed suicide after undergoing public humiliation, and King was committed to keeping the marriage a secret. Hence these incidents suggest how, even worse than today's uproar regarding gay/lesbian marriage, miscegenation irked wrath and hatred from common American people. During the early 1920s, progressive Greenwich Village intellectual like Randolph Bourne or the Black Renaissance leaders were tightlipped about subjects like racial assimilation or marriages between blacks and whites (Diggins 149).

When a reader browses through various historical facts on records on ethnic evolution in the United States, s/he can easily detect that close relationship between

white and the black was forbidden *de jure* up until 1960. Therefore, where segregation was *de facto*, one can straightforwardly perceive the public's reaction and bitter condemnation against *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, a play which by its treatment seemed to favor or countenance miscegenation. The restriction of intimate contact between white and black was enforced because of the danger of "polluting" or "adulterating" the "white breed." There was every reason for the white man to carry this fear with him as a historian views, "whites and blacks were always in close proximity in colonial America, both in areas where white women were plentiful and in areas where they were scarce. The proximity led to widespread sexual contact, although it rarely involved intermarriage" (Nash 285). This fear of racial intermixture was so intense in colonial America that laws and punishments were enacted against those who would violate them. In 1662, for instance, Virginia passed a law imposing a fine for fornication between white and black partners. Later "an unambiguous" law appeared on the books of some states that expressed public aversion and condemnation against any interracial marriage. This type of marriage was declared banned in Virginia in 1691, in Massachusetts in 1705, in Maryland in 1715, and thereafter in Delaware, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, and Georgia (Nash 287).

By the time O'Neill began to write some of his early plays—1914 and through the early 1920s, i.e. before and immediately after World War I—the fear of miscegenation occupied the minds of many white Americans because of the influx of white and other immigrants to the country. Consequently, many Americans reacted with hostility and inhospitality towards immigrants in an attempt to discourage more arrival:

> In the midst of the apparently peaceful pre-war years, when the dominant attitude toward immigrants was one of patronizing uplift, racial fear was present beneath the surface. One of the curious racial panics that mar the American record of assimilation was to reach its peak between 1917 and the early twenties. When racial fear was mixed with sexual uneasiness, cultural civil war seemed to come a little closer … Birth control for immigrants was urged as methods of preserving the race, and yet condemned as breaches of sexual morality. (May 347)

On the other hand, although it was easy to formulate and enforce laws on the book, it was not easy to regulate and control intimate relationships of love or sexual desires. Thus Gary Nash in his *Red, White and Black: The People of Early America* views that as black population was rising fast, the lawmakers soon figured out that since they were unable to check biology, they should work towards keeping the legitimate offspring of leading group pure-bred or untainted by promulgating laws to bar interracial marriage (287).

In the backdrop of suspicion, trepidation and fear about miscegenation and sexual promiscuities, especially between whites and blacks, O'Neill wrote *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and what eventually the playwright set out to do in this play was more than to thrash out the issue of interracial marriage. Albeit he was exasperated by the amount of vituperation, finger-pointing, and excoriation hurled towards him, O'Neill claimed that he was just writing about two human beings who loved each other and tried to have a long and lasting relationship, but could not succeed on account of society's implanted racial intolerance, injustice, and taboos. O'Neill rationalized his stand that he was aiming high to show that Ella, the white wife of Jim, could not fathom "their 'togetherness—the Oneness of Mankind'" as she was

"hemmed by inhibitions" and hence was overpowered by "her inherited racial prejudice" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 535). According to the playwright, "Prejudices racial, social, religious … will exist until we understand the Oneness of mankind. Life is hard and bitter enough without, in addition, burdening ourselves with prejudices" (qtd. in Gelbs 536). As a proponent of racial justice to whom prejudice of all and every kind was *bête-noires*, O'Neill, through this play, pushed forward the basic truth under its mere coating of racial intermarriage.

Autobiographical and Historical Implications

All God's Chillun Got Wings has multifarious authorial dimensions among which personal facts and historical events give important leads for a better appreciation of playwright's brainwave behind conceiving the theme of racial dichotomies in marriage. Of late, O'Neill lost all his family members—his brother recently died, one year after his mother's death, and three years after his father's; hence O'Neill, a very "subjective" playwright, might have felt free to dramatize family history, and particularly the "black-white" marriage relationship[2] on stage (Berlin 2 and 46-48). In fact, this play is seen as playwright's first autobiographical venture to focus on the tragic and tumultuous relationship between his father and mother whose names (Jim and Ella) are not in any way disguised in the play (Gelbs *O'Neill* 534-35 and *Life with Monte Cristo* 70-71; Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 118; Manheim *New Language of Kinship* 30-34). According to major critics and biographers, there are many parallels between Jim Harris and Ella Downey to James O'Neill and Ellen Quinlan: Ellen Quinlan's perception that she married beneath her and that she was socially ostracized for marrying an actor, her wish to stay away from

people, and her drug addiction to help her retreat to girlhood, etc. match with Ella Downey's disposition of superiority over her husband, her ignominy and reticence for marrying a black, her willingness to be left alone, and her ultimate mental illness that withdraws her into childhood. Likewise, James O'Neill, the American rags to riches success story who had high ambition to be a Shakespearean actor since he could act the part of *Othello* better than Edwin Booth, sacrificed the part to take on money-making machine *The Count of Monte Christo* mainly to satisfy his wife's needs, much like Jim Harris who lifts himself from awful conditions to venture to pass the Bar exams but flunks at the utter satisfaction of his wife—both blacks, the Irish and the African, sacrificed their talents and ambitions, and hence prostituted themselves for their wives' whims.

Although both James O'Neill and Ella Quinlan were Irish immigrants, there were many disparities between them and some of these precipitated an unhappy marital union throughout their life. Like James and Mary in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Jim and Ella marry out of frantic need and cling to each other, although none of them can give the other pleasure, let alone peace. Both Sheaffer and Berlin remarkably evoke *Othello* by cogitating that since James O'Neill often quoted this Shakespearean family tragedy in real life, he perhaps "unconsciously felt a kinship with the blackmoor" because Desdemona was "attracted to the Moor by the romance of his strange and dangerous past" (Sheaffer 118; Berlin 47). As seen in both these autobiographical plays, Ella Quinlan in real life looked down on her husband since she was from upper-class and because her husband had poor parentage and little education:

> James made his escape from poverty as a young man as a young man when he entered one of the favorite Irish professions: The Theatre.

> Although Ella had married an actor, she never quite overcame the belief that theatrical people were dissolute and not respectable. … As an actor's wife, she was no longer welcome in the homes of girls she had known at St. Mary's. 'She was deeply hurt,' O'Neill later recalled, 'that girls from wealthy families she had known in school dropped her after she married my father.' (Shannon 261-62)

However, they loved each other dearly like Jim and Ella of the play although they had love-hate relationship. Importantly, the husbands conceded to the fact that they married above their class where both adored the wives. But it was the society in which they lived that made them conscious and resentful of their disparity: the class-conscious capitalist Yankee New Londoners ostracized and snubbed O'Neills which the playwright could never forget (Diggins 139), the vivid account of which is chronicled in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, much as the racist New York ghetto people stigmatized the couple in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*.

In this play, although the white Ella comes from a poor family and is not quite educated whereas the black Jim is from a wealthy family and better qualified academically, she assumes and asserts authority over him because of her supposedly "superior" color. Engel views, "Despite the desperate situation from which Jim had rescued her; despite her fatuity; despite her realization that Jim is the 'only white nab in the world' … she is compelled to assert her superiority to the Negro. Racial pride is the only means available to her by which her egotistic will to power can express itself" (121). Nevertheless, both of them love each other in spite of their racial differences, but neither can exercise this love nor may live comfortably because of society's deep aversion to and proscription of this sort of relationship. Because Ella Quinlan O'Neill could "never entirely [overcome] her sense of being an outsider,"

and since her alienation resulted from the unremitting cynicisms from her former friends and snobbish Yankee New Londoners, she took refuge inside the "locked door" in morphine (Gelbs *Life with Monte Christo* 71-73). Ella in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Mary in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and the mother of Dion Anthony, O'Neill's own portrait in *The Great God Brown* written two years after *All God's Chillun*, correspond to a common type of perturbed mother figure who cannot be followed behind the "locked door." This nonetheless is reminiscent of August Strindberg's Mummy in *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), the Colonel's wife, who says: "I live mostly in the cupboard to avoid seeing and being seen" (1.2.287). This image got embedded into O'Neill's mind perhaps for getting too much engrossed in Strindberg whom he many a time proclaimed to be his artistic mentor; yet in reality he found this has become an undeniable truth as O'Neill once confided to one of his close friends that like Strindberg's Mummy, his mother Ella had troubling "intervals during which she kept to a room from which she seldom ventured." According to Gelbs, O'Neill, throughout his career, kept on staging his parents in many guises as lovers "communicating in code, neither able to find the other's key" (71).

Ella Downey in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* consequently becomes mentally too disturbed to the extent that her bearings with reality fall apart. Like her counterpart Mary in *Long Day's journey into Night* who appears at play's end as "*so youthful*" where "*experience seems ironed out of it*" that would enable her to relapse into the "*mask of girlish innocence*" (4.823), Ella abandons her adulthood only to regress into childhood. This she does with a view to reenacting "the only period in which schizophrenia of race had been imperative—childhood. The adult world must be rejected … Career must be abandoned in favor of a pre-lapsarian world" (Bigsby 59). Ella tells Jim at the end of the play:

> Everything'll be alright now. (*Chattering along*) I'll be just your little girl, Jim—and you'll be my little boy—just as we used to be, remember, when we were beaux; and I'll put shoe blacking on my face and pretend I'm black and can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to do. (2.3.315)

What indeed O'Neill in part deals with in *All God's Chillun* is the turbulent marriage of his parents, a tragic wedlock that shattered the harmony of their home and happiness of their children, and according to Virginia Floyd, "Ella O'Neill always viewed herself as superior to her husband intellectually, morally, and socially. She bitterly resented being ostracized by New Londoners and attributed her alienation and loneliness to her husband's inferior social position and his profession. Just as Jim relinquished his deep-seated goal to become a lawyer for Ella, James O'Neill apparently sacrificed his dream of sustaining his reputation as a Shakespearean actor to satisfy his wife's needs" (*The Plays* 269).

Besides, through *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill further exhorted his stand as a dramatist who was against "discrimination of any kind" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 886), and to show his vociferousness for this cause he did not even shy away from portraying his own Irish clan as a racist group in multiethnic America. In fact, some of the serious attacks targeted at O'Neill for writing this drama came from many Irish Americans who regarded the playwright as a disgrace to their race. These Irish Americans were disappointed for two reasons: firstly, that the playwright was advocating interracial marriage, and secondly, that he insulted the Irish for perpetrating racial intolerance and discrimination. This is due to the fact that Ella Downey in this play is of Irish extraction. Although O'Neill has often had defended his fellow Irishmen that he loved dearly, gave them "compassionate treatment"

(Diggins 139), levied "a deep knowledge of tragedy" on them in his plays (Shaughnessy "faithful realism" 159), and took "clannish pride" in his "Celtic roots" (Diggins 12; Shaughnessy 154) as an Irishman,[3] yet this could not stop him from exposing their faults as a race.

Thus, through this play, O'Neill expresses his shock and revulsion towards the Irish immigrants and their descendents who were sufferers and victims of ethnic segregation and discrimination in the hands of the Americans, and later inflicted the same racial treatment towards the blacks by becoming racists and victimizers themselves. While commenting on O'Neill's unequivocal perception and delineation of the history of the Irish in America on this issue of ethnic strife, John Raleigh declares that:

> In the plays as a whole, O'Neill does not let his Irishmen go scot free, nor are they idealized. Ella Downey, the white heroine of *All God's Chillun Got Wings* … is the most racially prejudiced person in the play; in fact, the villain of the play, if it can be said to have one. As her name indicates, she is of Irish extraction, and she thus constitutes O'Neill's reminder that the discriminated-against Irish were as racially intolerant, sometimes more so, than their oppressors. (106)

As evidence shows, from the time they arrived in the New World, Irish immigrants in the East did not get along well either with the Yankee New Englanders in particular or with the local colored people in general. While their problem with the Anglo-Saxon Protestants was an age old discord that began in the British Isles owing to religious and political differences, the antagonism between them and the blacks was caused by economic survival. When the Irish came to America, they were given few or no opportunities for white collar jobs but only menial jobs, and hence African Americans

who occupied these low jobs saw the Irish immigrants as a threat to their survival and financial security. In many eastern cities, before the Civil War, blacks were beaten up by Irish dockworkers as potential strikebreakers. During the Civil War years, in 1863, as draft riots engulfed the New York City, more than a hundred people including many blacks were killed, and in follow-up violence triggering from the overture of Conscription Act of 1863 which allowed the downtrodden exemption from the draft with a payment of $300 each, many blacks were lynched, sexually mutilated, drowned, and their houses burnt down by the Irish hooligans. In the postbellum era of late nineteenth century, the influential political ring Tammany Hall banned the presence of any black Americans in it (Diggins 139).

In the antebellum South, the Irish were usually dubbed as "Irish niggers" where they were provided usually with low and replaceable jobs at cut-rate conditions, and specifically the ones which were considered dangerous by Southern white overlords to be carried out by the homegrown black "property" (Roediger 88-90). In fact, Frederick Olmsted, a nineteenth century observer, in recounting the standing that African Americans had over the Irish, says that the Irishmen carried hod for colored masons in the South. He further points out, "Negroes were considered to be worth more than 'Paddies,' and therefore needed to be spared from the most unhealthful and dangerous tasks" (Wittke 125).

Naturally, under these torrid conditions of survival, a severe competition between the blacks and the Irish wedged about where the latter seemed to have won in the long run banking upon their white skin color, language (with brogue off),[4] and the English way of life led in the United Kingdom that lent them good civic sense of laws, customs, etc. (Shaughnessy 154-55). Drawing out the on-going resentment and hatred in those days between the Irish and the Black, Carl Wittke writes:

> The Irishman's contempt for the Negro, the fear of his competition in the labor market, and the Negro's reciprocal contempt and hatred of the Irish, help explain why Irish immigrants had no traffic with … the newly formed Republican Party. As early as May 11, 1850, the New York *Tribune* had commented on the strange phenomenon that the Irish, having escaped so recently themselves 'from a galling, degrading bondage,' should vote against all proposals to give greater rights to Negroes and should come to the polls on election day shouting, 'Down with the Nagurs! Let them go back to Africa, where they belong.' (125)

On the other hand, it was attested that the Blacks were the first to call the Irish "White niggers" or "white buckra;" "My master is a great tyrant," a black slave is supposed to have commented in 1850, "he treats me badly as if I was a common Irishman" (Gibson 15). In Philadelphia where antagonism between the Irish and the Black was intense, to be called an "Irishman" had come to be almost as big an insult as to be called a "nigger" (Gibson 125; O'Toole).

Diggins views that it was "unusual" for an Irishman to "identify" these accurate historical facts which would create uneasiness and bad feeling towards the people of his race particularly by depicting a racist Irishwoman in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* who is hysterically jealous about the success of her black husband. Further, the play conjures up the past hatred which existed between the races, in a way symbolized by the Ella-Hattie conflict. Yet, according to Diggins, O'Neill's "compassionate treatment of African Americans tells us more about the need of a writer to transcend his background than express it (139)." William Shannon nonetheless observes that O'Neill was merely depicting the "truth" as a true artist

should be, and thus he ought not to be misunderstood for this: “Those who thought him anti-Irish did not comprehend that for an artist telling the truth is the highest act of love (264).” The play stages the neighborhood in the lower part of Manhattan which is an impoverished ghetto, occupied by Blacks and poor Irishmen; hence the neighborhood was a breeding source for ill feeling and racial intolerance.

O’Neill, however, conceived the idea of this play in connection with an event that took place in 1912 when he was a reporter in New London. It so happened that while he was closely attending the day’s news, a front page story in the nation’s press told of the suicide of Mrs. Jack Johnson, the White wife of Jack Johnson, a Black hero who from 1908 to 1915 was the heavyweight “Champion of the World.” In boxing and overall sports arena Johnson commanded respect and fame. Besides, he was a media celebrity and tycoon, and to further enhance his image and clout so to speak, he married a white woman, Etta. Since Etta could not deal with the snowballing hatred, alienation, and barrage of denunciations from both blacks and whites in the society, she committed suicide. A few weeks before this act she confessed how it had become quite unbearable for her to live through the appalling situation after wedding a black person: “I am a white woman, and am tired of being a social outcast. I deserve all of my misery for marrying a black man. Even the Negroes don’t respect me; they hate me. I intend to end it all.” Minutes before she killed herself, Mrs. Johnson summoned her two black maids, asked them to join her in prayer, and with an arm about each knelt at her bedside; as she arose, Etta, pressing her hands to her face, said: “God pity a poor woman who is lonely” (Sheaffer *Son and Playwright* 119)!

Irrefutably, in each of these occasions examined above, in the marriage of the playwright’s parents—James O’Neill and Ella Quinlan, in Jack Johnson and Etta, and thereby in Jim Harris and Ella Downey in the play, there existed genuine love and

deeply committed relationships between couples. But it was the oppressive and uncompromising attitudes of the society which destroyed each of these relationships and eventually turned love into bitter resentment, unfathomable regret, and abysmal hatred. As these people violated the society's long-established code and its entrenched conventional standards of human relationships, they pay the astringent price for their true love and boldness, and are destroyed psychologically, and in some cases, morally too. Therefore, in dealing with the wretched situation of the two central characters of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill endeavors to make us understand that the ensuing problem of Jim and Ella is not created by them. According to Sophus Winther, a noted O'Neill critic and biographer,

> The love of Ella, the white girl, and Jim, the Negro, is genuine, but in the end it is destroyed, or it destroys them. The social pressure of a society that cannot overcome its racial prejudice makes Jim a failure and drives Ella to insanity. It may well be argued that the Black needs economic security, but beyond that, then what? Jim tried it and failed. He failed because the social system denied him something that he wanted more than wages and votes, it denied him the right to belong. (200)

That Jim and Ella are unable to coexist harmoniously and with mutual appreciation for each other is not of their making. After all, before their marriage they knew each other's ethnic identities and hues obviously; it is rather society's attitude, its racial intolerance, and innate prejudice which devastate their innocent love and mental sanity.

Innocence Marred by Experience: Color-Struck of Ghetto and Church

An important factor about O'Neill's black plays is that here his protagonists are usually caught up in the economic ghettos of New York city only to undergo soul-searching revelation by coming into contacts with the inhumanity, the indifference, and the oppressive urban conditions. The playwright focused his attention on the rootless blacks in abject poverty as in cases of Dreamy or Jones and without job opportunities like Jim in this play who are always on the run either escaping the color-prejudiced law or society. *All God's Chillun Got Wings* takes place in a racially mixed neighborhood where though blacks and whites are victims of the same fate, they cannot get along well with each other because of the endemic assumption of this color phobia. O'Neill disliked the ever-changing "scene and personality of the New York City" for he felt it cold, desire-prone, filled with rat-race mania, and lacked love, the setting he used in many of his dramas and showed it as "alien to the human spirit, oppressive overwhelming" (Sheaffer 120).

When the play opens, there are street noises coming from the two different and divided sections occupied by Whites on one hand, and the Blacks on the other. From the very beginning, through his stage description, O'Neill brings home to the audience the physical and psychological division and disparity existing between whites and blacks which would culminate further with the progression of the play. The Division Street is portrayed in the following way:

> *In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black … People pass, black and white, the Negroes frankly participants in the spirits of spring, the white laughing constrainedly, awkward in natural emotion. Their words are lost. One hears only their laughter. It expresses the difference in race*. (1.1.279)

Notably, whenever O'Neill dramatizes the Irish-Yankee or Black-White conflict, he uses "two old myths" (Tiusanen 175) that leave the victimized or the oppressed class (Irish and Black) head and shoulders above their counterparts: "The captive race, the people in bondage, are really superior, both inwardly and outwardly: they have 'soul' and they have superior physical beauty and vitality … while their captors are gross materialists, and usually decadent as well" (Raleigh 106). While comparing whites and blacks in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill gives a place of pride to the blacks because they eschew superficiality and pretense in their behavior: they respond joyously to life unlike whites who are sapped off spontaneity with a laugh that reverberates "*constrainedly, awkwardly in natural emotion*." In this first scene of pre-lapsarian incorruptibility, black and white children play marbles together; they fight, laugh, and call each other names without showing any inherent malice or any inclination to bigotry or disdain.

The presence of children at the very outset of the play gives a significant overtone in Wordsworthian cadence implying that since children live close to nature, they have no pretenses, no biases, and no vindictive disposition. Left alone in their innocence as they continue to grow, they can live harmoniously and appreciatively with each other regardless of color or position, as long as there is love. It is only when they come in contact with their parents and family, the foremost ingredient of society of the adult world, that they inherit prejudices, racial discrimination, or superiority complex. According to Maya Koreneva, O'Neill incorporated this children's scene at play's start to impart a "moral statement" to the audience by projecting a contrast between the "ideal" and the "reality": "The scene takes place before their 'fall,' before they join a society governed by prejudices. They are not aware yet of the ways with which one can humiliate the other by insulting his racial pride" (151).

Among the eight children playing marbles in this poor section of lower Manhattan are Jim Harris and Ella Downey who, by special association and understanding, develop a liking for each other. Their friendliness and attachment becomes so discernibly eye-catching that other playmates begin to taunt them: "*The six start off together. Then they notice that Jim and Ella are hesitating, standing awkwardly and slyly together. They turn to mock*" (1.1.280). This teasing by the other six children is too much for Ella, and as she begins to weep, Jim comes forward to save her from further blushes and to send the six on the heels:

> JIM—(*suddenly rushing at them, with clenched fists, furiously*) Shut yo' moufs! I kin lick de hull of you! (*They all run away, laughing, shouting, and jeering, quite triumphant now that they have made him, too, lose his temper. He comes back to Ella, and stands beside her sheepishly*) (1.1.281)

This incident, nonetheless, serves as the play's exposition since it is really a befitting premonition of the agonies, humiliations, and setbacks Jim and Ella will encounter in the next sixteen years of their lives. Even now as children the kids' remarks warrant that they are on the way of getting involved in society's dreadful racial matrix: both white and black kids, Mickey and Joe, disapprovingly call Jim "Jim Crow" and all little girls "shame" Ella for forging an interracial tie with black Jim Harris. Their love is already under attack by the playmates, and interestingly, the most eloquent condemnation of the relationship between Jim and Ella came from a colored girl whose statement signals the society's stand against such kinship, as she charges Ella: "Cant' you find nuffin' better'n him, Ella? Look at the big feet he got" (1.1.280)!

Ella Downey's moniker in the play is "Painty face" because of her beautiful pink and white complexion; but interestingly enough, she does not like the color as

she wishes she were black. She tells Jim, "Let's you and me swap. I'd like to be black" (1.1.281). Showing the same frame of mind, Jim Harris detests his blackness and wishes he were white to the extent that he starts to take chalk and water upon the joking instruction of a local barber to achieve the outcome. He tells Ella: "You know what, Ella? Since I been tuckin' yo' books to school and back, I been drinkin' lots o' chalk 'n' water tree times a day. Dat Tom, de barber, he tole me dat make me white, if I drink enough. (*Pleadingly*) Does I look whiter" (1.1.281)? Each of these two wants to assume the color of the other—in Ella's case it is "blackface" and in Jim's case it is "whiteface." Such acts of "racial cross-dressing" (Lott 242-43), the singular aspiration to possess the other's color and the appreciation of each other's skin should eliminate any feeling of inferiority complex since each possesses what the other admires. Indeed, if one admires and wants to possess what the other has, and the other in return admires and wants to possess what one has, there should be then no room for the either of the two to feel inferior; in fact, such persons can live comfortably and without any feeling of disdain towards each other. Unfortunately, this cannot be the case between Jim and Ella since they have to live in the midst of a larger society which instills into their consciousness the superiority or inferiority of their origin and of their color.

Although the reality of their ethnic origin and their physical appearance have not yet started to take toll on them by breeding major phobia and fret, Jim Harris, nonetheless, is very obsessed about his black pigmentation. When Ella declares to him: "I wish I was black like you," Jim, in a "*sort of shrinking*" state, shrugs off the idea cautioning her, "Dey'd call you Crow, den—or Chocolate—or Smoke … Dey'd call you nigger sometimes, too" (1.1.281). According to Edwin Engel:

> The protagonist's losing battle with fate begins in childhood, that period in which the emotional difficulties of the adult are said to have their genesis, and ends after some seventeen years. By the end of the first scene the source of Jim Harris' anguish is clearly indicated by his reaction to the fact of racial differences … Jim already suffers from a feeling of inferiority, having endured, as even a very young Negro must, the derision of the whites, for he had shrunk from the appellations "Crow," "Chocolate," "Smoke," "Nigger" … Nine years hence, in the second scene the effect of his early sense of inferiority is apparent in his quiet manner, his *queerly baffled, sensitive face* and, above all, in his determination to succeed in a white man's profession. (Engel 117-18)

The ingrained concern regarding black pigmentation has haunted Jim from childhood.

In scene two, a time span of nine years has passed and although the stage direction reads "*Nothing has changed much … One street is still all white, the other all black*" (1.2.283), O'Neill here in this scene shows how the psychology of the children, who played happily and innocently before, has changed radically. The New York ghetto of this Lower Manhattan is now seriously affected and infected by "racism" which, according to Shaughnessy, is "America's most lethal virus" ("faithful realism" 153), and O'Neill here demonstrates its destructive influence on society: "The sickness is general throughout the neighborhood, which has itself become an incubator of the virus. The culture itself is infected" (Shaughnessy *Catholic Sensibility* 88).

While the neighborhood embraced blessings of modernism with "*electricity having taken the place of horse and steam*," the senior tenement citizens now flood

the "*fire escapes"* which, as stage direction reads, are "*laden with drooping human beings*" replacing the beauty of black and white kids' playing marbles nine years ago in street corners or alleyways—indicating a moral relapse from Edenic innocence. The ambivalence is further amplified through O'Neill's extraordinary incorporation of background music: "*From the street of the whites the high-pitched nasal tenor sings: "Gee, I Wish That I Had a Girl," and the Negro replies with "All I Got Was Sympathy*" (1.2.283). Chothia views, not only that the music that reverberates in the air from the white section is different from the one coming from the black section, and that each group goes its own way, but also that the attitudes and languages of the teens now carry "a new polarity" marking the conundrum and complexities of racism against which Ella, and particularly Jim, would pit himself (72-73).

Ella is a grown up of seventeen now, and although she is of poor parentage, she has been made conscious of the prosaic fact that she possesses a superior color, a thought-pattern inhibited as a byproduct of scientific racism propelled by Darwinism, as opposed to all black children. Although she preferred Jim Harris to other black or white boys as a kid, in her teens now she despises Jim and keeps only to her "kind." In place of Jim, her once confidant and protector, there is now white Mickey, the seducer, the swaggering, arrogant prize fighter, who declares to Jim that Ella now "hates de sight of a coon" (1.2.286). Mickey, who once played with Jim, is now resentful of Jim's presumptuousness to cross racial boundary by taking descent education and by insinuating himself into the company of whites, for Mickey thinks, like any other racist white, that Jim should be better off with other Joe-like blacks who hang around with the gangs on the streets instead of venturing into the white world, as he says to him:

> Stay where yeh belong, see! Yer old man made coin at the truckin' game and yuh're tryin' to buy yerself white—graduatin' and law … Don't de gang all train wit' Joe dere and lots of others? But what yuh're tryin' to buy white and it won't git yuh no place, see! (1.2.286)

Like Mickey, Ella has internalized racism to the core of her belief system, and hence shows racial bias. She now resents the fact that Jim is graduating. Thus, Jim's only hope and confidence—the friendship forged with the childhood sweetheart, is now shattered; Ella says to him:

> You and me've got nothing in common any more … You are certainly forgetting your place … I've got lots of friends among my own—kind, I can tell you. (*exasperatedly*) You make me sick! Go to the devil! (1.2.287)

Mickey's and Ella's remarks on Jim are telltale examples as to how the white society instills discriminating and narrow-minded values into the young members of its race so that the idea of white superiority is viciously kept internalized in them. In fact, what Jim even now in his late teen fails to realize that Ella, who played and hobnobbed with him while they were children, is no more in the state of innocence, and worse, has already been "infected" by the contagion of bigotry, racial intolerance, and superiority complex, so entrenched and perpetuated in her white folks. Jim has rested his hope on their past relationship, thinking that Ella would be the same shy, innocent, loving girl who had declared to him nine years ago, "I'm your girl." Indeed, Jim still holds this statement as the gospel truth. Thus, in response to Mickey's statement that Ella now "hates the sight of a coon," he, "*in agony*," answers back, "I—I know—but once she didn't mind—we were kids together—" (1.2.286). According to Bigsby, O'Neill here "dramatizes for the first time the dilemma of the

Negro desperately anxious to escape the limitations of race but held back both by the bitterness of those around him and by seemingly eradicable prejudice rooted in the distant past." He recognizes that the "central conflict" of the play is taking place "between Jim's wishful humanitarianism and the active commitment of those around him" (117-18).

Jim's good self is paid dividend in the following scene taking place another five years later as he rescues a crushed and burned Ella, and proposes to marry her. Here it is evident that with Jim Harris, Ella was not only fully safe and protected but also was made to feel important and appreciated. By her white boyfriend Mickey, on the contrary, she was not only seduced, impregnated, and delivered a baby who later died, but she was also dumped and deserted. Her bitter experience and eventual fall-out has taught her a simple truth of life: that a white man as Mickey may be evil and vicious inside, while a black man like Jim may be an angel inside—"the whitest of the white." Ella now tells her fellow whites that Jim is her only friend in the world, "The only white man in the world! Kind and white. You're all black—black to the heart" (1.3.291). Ella's such comment goes hand in glove with the common racist adage that good blacks are white inside. The humanity of Jim, however, his loving, virtuous, and caring disposition toward Ella who refuses to appreciate them in course of the play because Jim is black, makes this play a tragedy.

Ella Downey, however, needs Jim Harris. Having compared two worlds, the white man's world represented by Mickey, Shorty, and their counterparts, and the black man's world represented by Jim, she opts for the latter only because she has been disappointed and destroyed by her own people. Ella wears her inside out to Jim in her utter frustration: "You're so much better than they are in every other way … You've been the only one in the world who's stood by me—the only understanding

person—and all after the rotten way I used to treat you … I'm alone. I've got to be helped. I've got to help someone—or it's the end—one end or another" (1.3.293-94).

Ella's such agonies of existential drifts, emanating both from physical and psychological turmoil, strikes Jim in such an hour when Jim himself was utterly frustrated due to continuous flunking in the Bar exams, passing which would enable him to be in white man's shoes. Upon Ella's declaration of reciprocal help ("to be helped" and "got to help someone"), he felt sort of subsidized by generosity of a white woman. Thus he got completely taken in to further avow to "serve" her, lie at her feet "like a dog," to "kneel" before her, and to become her "slave" (1.3.294)—a straightjacket from the memory lane of *The Emperor Jones* where white wannabe Brutus Jones played white trick resulting in the bush niggers' "kneelin' down and bumpin' deir heads on de ground" to him. This composure of Jim's enslavement and kneeling will linger until the play closes since, like Brutus Jones, he is also blinded by the lightning of "de white quality" and construes whiteness as an indicator of success where marrying Ella, like access to Bar, would play a second fiddle towards achieving his distinct social standing.

Taking place five years later, in this third scene of the play, "*Nothing has changed*," but the racially divided slum is now dull and gloomy where no music is playing except for drunken nasal tenor or "*wails*" coming from the white street which is replied with "*maudlin*" (1.3.289) voice from the black street. During this five-year period, the racial tension has exacerbated instead of easing. Jim, an ambitious "*studious-looking*" intelligent African American feels himself "branded" for he cannot help saying, "We're never free—except to do what we have to do" since the land of equal opportunity is continuously stigmatizing him as "Jim Crow" or "A

nigger" (1.3.292-93), etc., and would be ostracizing his intended wife for valuing his "kind and white" inner worth (1.3.291).

Because the spirit of bigotry and racial intolerance is unremittingly entrenched in the world of Jim and Ella which gives no sign of improvement, they decide to take refuge abroad, in France perhaps, "where a man is a man—where it don't make that difference—where people are kind and wise to see the soul under skins" (1.3.294). This comment by Jim Harris may be construed as O'Neill's understanding of the American attitude, applicable either to blacks and of course to early immigrants. Because he and his parents were victims of discrimination and social injustice, O'Neill knew the agony and frustration that haunts an alienated man. In almost all of O'Neill's history plays, "the rhythm of the races" serves as "one of primary polarities" where the playwright portrays the Irish-Yankee and the Black-White cultural conflicts in New York City. The reason behind O'Neill's such projection of cultural clashes was, as mentioned before, his family's victimization by the "wealthy and long-established Protestants" in New London who had "anti-Irish prejudice," and because James O'Neill was an actor, the family "suffered under a double onus" (Raleigh 100-101). Like Jim Harris, the playwright left America with Carlotta for France where finally he married her as his third wife on 22 July 1929. They spent about three years here in harmony and self-fulfillment before they returned to New York on 17 May 1931 (Floyd *The Plays* xiii). Jim Harris takes the same course by leaving America for France: "Earlier in the play, after his wedding, Jim hoped to live among those who followed the Biblical percepts encouraging universal love and brotherhood. To find people that take 'count of soul,' he knew he had to leave America, to go sailing to 'the other side where Christ was born'" (Floyd 268).

Other than the racial intolerance existing in the New York ghetto of blacks and whites, O'Neill, in the next important scene, considered most stunning scenic image of the play (Tiusanen 175)—closer to German dramatist Kaiser's technique of social commentary using expressionistic imagery with economized dialogue (Berlin 49-50), deals with another intricate issue—the Church's stand on this racial problem and the attitude of Churchgoers. O'Neill instills in his audience's mind a catastrophic foreboding when the scene starts with the sketch of the Church and its adjacent tenements:

> *The buildings have a stern, forbidding look. All the shades on the windows are drawn down, giving an effect of staring, brutal eyes that pry callously at human beings without acknowledging them. Even the two tall, narrow church windows on either sides of the arched door are blanked with dull green shades*. (1.4.294-95)

Like a Shakespearean tragic implication of some menacingly foul or evil proceeding in the offing, the "*sunny morning*" atmosphere is "*unusually*" calm "*as if it were waiting, holding its breath*." A black tenor sings a note comprising of three stanzas where each part is a progression towards the circularity of fatefulness: the first stanza "*with a contended, childlike melancholy*" stresses on "Feels like a mourning dove," the second "*with a dreamy, boyish exultance*" on "Feel like an eagle in the air," and the third one "*with a brooding, earthbound sorrow*" on "Wish that I'd never been born" (1.4.295). As the music subsides and calmness prevails once again, like the Shakespearean sound of the bell signaling Macbeth to act upon to murder Duncan, the "*one startling, metallic clang of the church-bell*" here signals people to form two racial lines to act out hostility of its worst visual kind. O'Neill's condemnation of the church's indifference, its tacit disapproval of racial discrimination, and the

hypocritical life of church adherents in the world of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and possibly of the world, are adumbrated as his description shows:

> *As if it were a signal, people—men, women, children—pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenement to the left, blacks from the one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side if the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes. The halves of the big church door swing open and Jim and Ella step out from the darkness within into the sunlight. The doors slam behind them like wooden lips of an idol that has spat them out. .... All the hostile eyes are now concentrated on them. They become aware of the two lines through which they must pass; they hesitate and tremble; then stand there staring back at the people as fixed and immovable as they are*. (1.4.295-96)

As in *The Dreamy Kid* O'Neill showed the law enforcing agencies as propagator of institutional racism that came down heavily on the blacks through physical assault, killing, driving African American teens out from the ghetto, etc., so in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, he further shows how the Church in America also showed similar hatred towards this race to the extent of making them pariah and psychologically bogged down. What the playwright is insinuating here is that racial intolerance and discrimination are also practiced in church and its church attendants, or Christians who are supposed to foster love, racial justice, and brotherhood as admonished by their founder Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the silence and irresponsibility of the church ministers, who see their loyals distance themselves from those who are not of their kind, makes them suspect of implicitly endorsing racism, segregation, and discrimination. James Dittes, in his seminal work, *Bias and the Pious: The*

Relationship between Prejudice and Religion, comments about prejudice in churches in the following way:

> Not only is racial prejudice especially incongruous in the church, the uncomfortable but well established fact is that there is more racial prejudice in the church than outside of it. Racial prejudice—and all of the states of mind going with racial prejudice—is more likely to be found among churchgoers than among people who are not churchgoers. That has been the consistent finding of researchers who have studied this question over many years in this country and others. (50)

O'Neill's description of the new couples' coming out of the church as the door bangs close behind them "*like wooden lies of an idol that has spat them out*" obviously shows how the religion, be it professed from Mother Church or taught by later protesters of Vatican like Luther, Calvin or Zwingli, has utterly failed to inseminate the core belief of Jesus: "Institutional Christianity thus offers no encouragement or even protection to the young couple; instead, it joins in the larger society's hatred and distrust of those who cross racial lines" (Robinson). As for O'Neill's attitude towards the church and the hypocritical behavior of its members, Sophus Winther delineates that O'Neill has no quarrel with Jesus as a social teacher; in fact, what "O'Neill does quarrel with is the idea of a professed religion that on Sunday preaches one thing … a Sunday religion which on Monday is translated into the doctrine of rugged individualism … O'Neill does not deny Jesus as much as he denies what tradition has made out of his teaching" (57-58).

As a "Black Irishman" and thus an ex-Catholic, O'Neill grew up in an immigrant American family of "cradle Catholics" where its "ethos" and "sensibilities"

(Diggins 186; Shaughnessy *Catholic Sensibility* 13) eventually frustrated him since he found it difficult to eke out any transcendental truth from the American culture which itself preferred practical results to gospel truths. O'Neill once wrote in despair: "Success is still our only real living religion" (qtd. in Diggins 186). In his family play *Long Day's Journey into Nigh*t, when Tyrone charges his sons Jamie and Edmund saying, "your denial has brought nothing but self-destruction," simultaneously the comment serves for one big irony in the play and professes O'Neill's view of religion *per se*. James Tyrone, who now at the fag end of his life is considering himself a failure and wondering what he actually wanted in life, embraced "success" as the "only living religion" that brought "self-destruction" in life—an image completely conforming to O'Neill's running criticism in dramatic canon. Although he himself confesses to be "a bad Catholic," James brags about conceiving "one true faith of the Catholic Church" and when Jamie retorts by questioning James' stand as an observant Catholic, he concedes that even though he has never been such but prayed at home "every night and morning." As Edmund asks, to test the result of Tyrone's lifelong faith, whether he ever prayed for their mother, Tyrone replied to have "prayed to God these many years for her." Then Edmund, the Eugene O'Neill replica, caps it all by saying: "Then Nietzsche must be right. (*He quotes from Thus Spake Zarathustra*.) 'God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died'" (2.2.759).

As an "ambivalent modernist," O'Neill "could not come to terms with the death of God" (Shaughnessy 41) discourse and this is reflected in some of his dramas: in *The Emperor Jones* the Baptist religion cannot fathom the crux of Jones' problem; Yank's faith on steel cannot be overwhelmed by Jehovah or Fifth Avenue marionettes' Bibles in *The Hairy Ape*; Calvinist hard god betrays Cabot in *Desire under the Elms*; and in *The Great God Brown*, Dion Anthony's austere religious part

torments him from within and from without. O'Neill's protagonists are constantly in fight with fate and flight from God, and as it happens in other plays, so in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Christianity as a social body and breeder or promoter of values utterly fails. Shaughnessy notes that the church "shown and symbolized in the background" of the play carries no potency since it neither provides any "balm to soften human conflicts" nor constitutes any "ameliorating factor in race relations." Almost redundant, "It offers no civilizing influence, nor does it effectively instruct the faithful in how to treat one another with respect. The Christian law of love seems altogether irrelevant in the lives of 'all God's chillun'" (89-90).

The fourteen years timeline covered in these four scenes of act one in which O'Neill uses various visual-aural expressionistic devices to hammer down the polarity of the physical-psychological demarcation between the black and the white races, nothing canvasses the racial antagonism to such an extent as the looks in the eyes of newlyweds Jim and Ella when they are "*spat out*" of the indifferent church to the street of New York only to be choked by the hostile eyes of censorious ghetto crowd of children, adults, and olds. Both Jim's and Ella's sense of being out of the frying pan and into the fire is minutely sketched in the stage description:

> *She cannot take her eyes off the eyes of the people; she is unable to move. He sees this and, keeping the same profound, affectionate kindness, he points upward in the sky, and gradually persuades her eyes to look up.* (1.4.296)

As they walk out of the church they become more disillusioned than ever when they meet the furious and intimidating eyes of the commoners that carry the row spite and disapproval directed against them. Normally one would expect that even if the outside secular world of New York City was antagonistic and apathetic to Jim-Ella marriage,

the Christian community to which they belong would come forward and endorse the relationship as acceptable and ask all to show harmony and compassionate understanding towards the couple. Exactly contrary to this viewpoint of Christian ethos of love and fellow-feeling, Christianity acted upon crowd-sentiments. Christianity and its agents exhibited its chauvinism and antipathy to the couple for crossing the racial boundary. Left alone and high and dry and passing through the racially divided two lines of white and black hostile eyes of New York City street of the twenties (which in today's circumstances seem unthinkable), the couple had no other option and nowhere to turn to except to their Creator and each other. Hence Jim reassures his wife that there is nothing "unjust" about their marriage even though there is seeming inequality on earth, in heaven everyone is equal. His claim implies the fact that in heaven it is not the color or the appearance that counts, rather the disposition of the soul, and for their present existence, he plans to runaway from this godforsaken slum life—a constant leitmotif for O'Neill's black protagonists—submerged and eddied into racial segregation and bigotry, to the land where Christian ethics and love prevail like gospel truth:

> There's no unjust about it. We're all the same—equally just—under the sky—under the sun—under God—sailing over the sea—to the other side of the world—the side where Christ was born—the kind side that takes count of the soul—over the sea—the sea's blue, too—. Let's not be late—let's get the steamer! (*They have reached the curve now, passed the lines of people. She is looking up to the sky with an expression of trancelike calm and peace. He is on the verge of collapse, his face twitching, his eyes staring.*) (1.4.296)

Timo Tiusanen comments that through this "fluctuating monologue," Jim Harris "fills the rest of the image and gives the theme of the play in a nutshell" (176). However, what critics failed to recognize over the years, well detected perhaps for the first time by Martha Gilman Bower in her paper titled "*All God's Chillun*: Religion and 'Painty Faces' versus NAACP and the Provincetown Players," is that here "O'Neill punctuates [Jim's] satiric wedding scene with Jim's satiric fantasy—"we are all the same"" (Bower). Quite agreeing with her viewpoint, it can be further added that O'Neill dramatizes two salient truths with this "satiric fantasy": firstly, he shows through the couple's return in the next act that such idea of equity is merely a pipedream in the then worldview (yet based on this sort of life-lie majority characters of his canon survive); and secondly, as a "Black Irishman" O'Neill debunks the institution of church and Christianity as a whole as one highly controversial orb governed by the power-game of politics and corruption. Nonetheless, O'Neill's challenging role as an initiator of the "racial integration on American stage" with his introduction of the plays *The Dreamy Kid* and *The Emperor Jones* (Londre 509),[5] pitched a new dimension here in *All God's Chillun* where the protagonist seriously claims equity in marriage, status and role in American public spheres of neighborhood, church and employment (Bar) although in every step of his journey he is thwarted by the superimposed codes of white dominance.

Cultures at War: Buying "the Whitest," Checking the "Nigger"

The economic ghettos of Manhattan where the characters in the play, whites and blacks, live are financially crippled. In a place where poverty and lack of job opportunities exist, there are bitter tensions, recriminations, and resentments not only

against the government but also against the other ethnic group as if they were the cause of the other's sufferings and deprivation, resulting in each ethnic group's nursing grievances against the other. Although this sense of economic survival against odds was dealt explicitly in *The Dreamy Kid* and implicitly in *The Emperor Jones* through respective title characters, Jim in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* has a different problem altogether. As the stage description in 2.1 shows, his flat is "*of the better sort*," its furniture, although shows a "*queer clash*" between the old and the new, are "*ornate*" and "*give evidence of taste*." His parents are well off and particularly the "*heavy gold frame*," hung in one of the walls of the parlor that shows his father's portrait as "*an elderly Negro with able, shrewd face but dressed in outlandish lodge regalia, a get-up adorned with medals, sashes, a cocked hat with frills*" (2.1.297), calls into mind the similar get-up of the charismatic Marcus Garvey or Brutus Jones. Jim's African American friend, the street gang leader Joe, once in hindsight mentioned to Jim: "yo' old man and mine work on de docks togidder befo' Yo' old man gits his own truckin' business … yo' ol' man swallers his nickels, mine ol' man buys him beer wid dem and swallers dat—dat's the only diff'rence" (1.2.288). This view is further stamped by the white prizefighter Mickey as and when he cautions Jim: "De trouble wit' you is … Yer old man made coin at de truckin' game and yuh're tryin' to buy yourself white" (1.2.286). All these suggest that, fair or foul ways, late Mr. Harris accrued a significant amount of wealth during his life time through business, and later we are told by Mrs. Harris that the money is stashed in the bank for children's education and other purposes. Besides, Jim's sister, Hattie, has finished college and lately entered postgraduate study, and at the same time, she is teaching in a "private school endowed by some wealthy members of [their] race" (2.1.302).

Hence money is not the issue here for Jim that was for ghetto hailers or runaway felons Dreamy and Jones previously; rather it is the social recognition, his vying for status to be assimilated into the mainstream Americanism that characterizes the crisis of the black intellectual Jim. Jim's overriding avidity, his lifelong obsession and aspiration is to "belong," to be accepted in the "white man's world." As a kid, upon Tom the barber's advice, he attempted to change his black pigmentation to white by taking considerable amount of chalk and water but could not achieve the intended result. When Ella asked him, "Why do you want to be white?" his answer was: "Because—just because—I lak dat better" (1.1.282). Nine years henceforth and now graduating, Jim is equally taunted, harassed , and vilified for not being a member of the black street gang and for trying to "buy white" (1.2.286 and 288) instead. When Mickey insults and threatens him by saying "Stay where yeh belong" (286) and not dare reaching out for Ella, and when even Ella dismisses him by saying "I've got lots of friends among my own—kind … You're certainly forgetting your place" (287), Jim is devastated. An outrageous Joe then charges Jim by saying, "Is you a nigger, Nigger? Nigger, is you a nigger?" Jim, having been ruined, and with a blank stare in front of him, replies twice likewise: "Yes. I'm a nigger. We're both niggers. … We are both niggers" (1.2.288-89). This could have been the end of the portrayal of an American Black's perpetual fight with the "double consciousness" defined by Du Bois; yet as Pfister explains that O'Neill started fusing contemporary "depth psychology" into his "work" in the mid-twenties (xxi-xxii and 2-8), hence Jim's problem reaches a new dimension of psychology that conforms to psychological realism (Berlin 50; Shaughnessy 92; Diggins 152) showing deep probing into the divided self of Jim.

Another five years later, Jim opens up to Ella, now cast off by Mickey, that he wants to be a lawyer to avoid being "branded" as a colored man, and adds that he needs to be a "a Member of the Bar right now … more than anyone ever needed anything" and that he "need[s] it to live" (1.3.292-93). Indeed, his feeling of being "branded" or stigmatized as a black stems from his childhood fear of being insultingly called a "Crow," "Chocolate," "Smoke," or "nigger" that gave him a "*shrinking*" (1.1.281) standing in white-dominated society even as an adolescent. Hence, his inclination towards the white color is due to the fact that he badly wants to get out of the embarrassment of being a substandard human being, i.e., an African American, and to raise his personality, potentiality, and status. Thus he attempts to become a lawyer, to put on the garb of a white man, and at the same time, marry a white woman so that he can replenish his standing to finally "belong." When Ella expresses her likeness for him, he spells out his vision towards love and life: "All love is white. I've always loved you (*this with the deepest humility*)" (1.3.293).

To come closer to the white society, the "superior" race, Jim begs Ella to become his wife as he thinks by marrying a white woman he will then be accepted. Like Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, his trouble is not chiefly the "economic" but is rather "to belong." Since he has a means of living as a middleclass black, his is "not a problem of physical starvation but of psychological persecution. This persecution leads Jim to feel that only through marrying a white girl can he win the position in life that he craves and that is necessary to his happiness" (Winther 200).

It is clear from the play that Jim needs Ella in order to compensate for his inferiority complex, to counterbalance the "inferior" color of his skin: "So powerful are the myths of color that Jim is unable to deal with the effortless superiority of whites, internalizing their values and unconsciously accepting their assertions of his

inadequacy" (Bigsby 58). To achieve his objective, Jim is willing to be Ella's "slave," to suffer humiliation, to want nothing in return for his services to the ex-prizefighter's mistress and a discarded prostitute; prostrating himself before Ella, he begs her:

> I don't ask you to love me—I don't want nothing—only to wait—to be near you, to keep harm away—to lie at your feet like a dog that loves you—to kneel by your bed like a nurse that watches over your sleeping … To give my life and my blood and all the strength that's in me to give you peace and joy—to become your slave!—Yes … your black slave that adores you as sacred. (1.3.294)

While this statement, which smacks of self-abnegation and even masochism, is very offensive to the black race, a reader can see through the crack that Jim is also trying to serve himself: to be transformed, to get away from his "kind" by "buying white."

This, nonetheless, has a historical bearing through which Jim's longing for class-accession journey can be better perceived. In the mid-twenties, according to black historian Nathan Huggins, Black middle and higher classes showed interest and inclination towards the white ways of life standards: "Regrettably, affluent blacks tended to identify with the white culture" (203-04). He further quotes Langston Hughes's words from the latter's article "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" to illuminate the all-swallowing tendency of the well-off blacks: "In the North, they go to white theaters and white movies … [adopt] Nordic manners, Nordic faces, Nordic art (if any), and an Episcopal heaven" (Huggins 204). The tendency of the "Nordicized Negro" (Huggins 204) and their "buying into 'Nordic fallacy'" (Bower) has also been thoroughly touched upon in African American sociologist and author Edward Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957) where he "accused the middle-class black America of imitating white America in almost every aspect of the black

America's existence" (Gill). Jim, therefore, as a middleclass Northern African American of the mid-twenties, completely fits into this frame. Urged on by Ella to become "the whitest of the white" (2.1.304), Jim relentlessly vies for the white brand of success in life, to "pass" in the law exam and become a Member of the Bar, and even when his attempt is thwarted, he diminutively accepts the fate thumpingly bestowed upon him by the "superior" white race. Even though condemned and slouched by Ella as "dirty nigger," (2.2.308) "Nigger," (2.2.311) etc., and even though his century-long racial symbol of identity and pride, the Congo mask, is pierced and stabbed in disdain by the "white devil woman" (2.3.313) Ella, he cantankerously recoils before her to conform to the stereotype role of the ever-obedient black that she anticipates of him—to be a "worthy" Jim Crow or Uncle Jim (2.3.315). These instances of unremitting letdowns in life, like his nonstop flunking in the law exams, go far to prove right a critic's view that he has "internalized white America's deprecatory attitudes towards blacks" (Bernstein).

Thomas Pawley showed his astonishment at Jim's such resolve or "motivation," if any, and he depreciates Jim's debasing himself even after receiving Ella's "denigrating treatment;" and he goes on to opine: "In my view the suggestion by the playwright that a black male could be so completely obsessed in his love for a white woman strains credulity—unless he is in fact neurotic" (77). Nonetheless, whether Jim is neurotic or not is a secondary issue, but what must be comprehended here is that his obsession toward Ella which has originated from his obsession towards anything or everything white—education, profession, love, etc.—govern his value system, silhouetted against white standards. If seen from this perspective, his love for Ella in no way "strains credulity." Also, it should be borne into mind that Jim is a victim of "cultural racism," which after the departure of "institutional racism" has

been haunting the blacks and other immigrant groups since the black codes and Jim Crow laws subsided. As the white-dominated America "disbars" the inferior races "from accesses to jobs, neighborhoods, clubs, etc.," this "cultural racism" overtakes and becomes "interiorized by the members of the oppressed races," and particularly by the blacks, which leaves a "damaging" influence upon them (During 165). As a result of this "damaging" impact, they may become or act "neurotic." O'Neill, through this play, projects the excruciating effects of all types of racism—scientific, structural, institutional, and cultural—on Blacks in the US, often considered by critics "much ahead of its time" (Berlin 54).

When slavery was abolished in the United States, slaves, as it were, acquired citizenship rights and were free to move anywhere without being hounded. Although the fact that the slave was free could not be understood by some white folks; what was difficult to erase from their minds was that the slave or his descendants, could claim equality with his white master, let alone attempt to marry his white daughter. This attitude of inequity, or master-servant relationship, is perpetuated in America, though, perhaps, unconsciously from one generation to the other, making it difficult for the Black to realize his full dignity or to be able to marry a white if she falls in love with him. O'Neill here "denounces the fundamental injustice of the social order" and shows how Dreamy's, Jones', and Jim's "main source of tragedy" lies in the fact that the society demands that they "must remain pariahs or outcast forever" (Koreneva 150-51).

Jim's tragedy, in *All God's Chillun*, however, poses a triple jeopardy: for he is a black, wishes to cross racial boundary by absorbing the values of white society, and falls for an incompetent white woman who is unable to reciprocate (Diggins 152). Thus, Ella is an added weak link to Jim's by-default or already existing problem of

"double self" (Du Bois 3). However, Ella is an inferior person among her white friends: she is not well educated, and worse still, her reputation has been seriously damaged by her Blanche-like life led in promiscuity. Always maintaining a double-standard, "she loves Jim for what he is but despises him for what he wants to be" (Diggins 152). The matter that works as a "lightening rod" for provoking the racial rift between the couple is Jim's relentless attempts to "pass" the bar examination, "to prove that intellectually and emotionally, he is (in Ella's words) "the whitest of the white"… [t]he possibility that Jim might "pass" intellectually, and thus, by implication, surpass his own wife, is what makes Ella hysterical" (Pfister 135). Even though Jim has rescued her from dire straits and although she finds inside him the real whiteness, she nonetheless is "compelled to assert her superiority to the Negro" for she is driven by the "racial pride' and "egotistic will" which demand her to put on a fake mask when she finds herself espoused by an African American, roofed under a well-to-do dwelling, and absolutely depending upon the members of "a seemingly inferior race" (Engel 121).

However, as the couple leaves the racist society to break free from the clutches of structural and institutional racism—the Manhattan neighborhood and the church, Ella is yet to confront the ghost of cultural racism that has been staying at her bosom like a clandestine virus, looking for a suitable place and time to attack the host's immune system. Initially in France, according to Jim, everything seemed alright and they thought they would live happily ever-after: "Ella liked everything a lot. She went out with French folks and got so she could talk it a little—and I learned it—a little. We were having a right nice time. I never thought then we'd ever want to come back here" (2.1.299). This good feeling, however, is to last for only one year. The problem of racial bias, especially if the idea was instilled or internalized into the person's

consciousness in his or her early years of discernment, is that it becomes inveterate and the hatred or aversion becomes instinctive and can surface at the slightest provocation. Because she has overturned an established order of things by marrying a black man, Ella carries the guilt complex with her wherever she goes. Even in France where, we are told, she is enjoying the freedom to be herself, she becomes apprehensive of what she has done. Wherever she goes she feels that everybody is out there watching and denouncing her action, hence her happiness abroad is short-lived.

Ella's suspicion and fear have become pathological and no amount of preaching from her husband can convince her. Jim tells Hattie, after just one year in France, "Ella didn't want to see nobody … she never did get to wanting to go out any place again. She got to saying she felt she'd be sure to run into someone she knew—from over here … She got to avoiding the French folks the same as if they were Americans and I couldn't get it out of her mind. She lived in the house and got paler and paler, and more and more nervous and scarey, always imagining things—until I got to imagining things, too" (2.1.300). Likewise, her guilt complex grows from bad to worse after returning to America from France. Jim apprises the audience of their objective and reason behind returning as he envisions that from then on they would "brave" the world by freeing themselves from the guilt complex and hence shake off the unrest and inequality with "confidence." He declares that they will "be really free inside and able then to go anywhere and live in peace and equality with [themselves] and the world without any guilty uncomfortable feeling coming up to rile [them]" (2.1.301). But the scene's end shows that Ella is far from being "free inside." When she looks down at the street and "*throws the window open and calls*" Shorty passing her house, i.e., Jim the black man's house, white Shorty does not pay heed at all. Out of disgust and guilt complex, she becomes schizophrenic and her split mentality in

divided self, locked in high-pitched altercation, looks out for answers as to why a mere "pimp" or "dope-peddler" like Shorty did not want to socialize with her:

> He didn't want to hear you! He didn't want to let anyone know he knew you! Why don't you acknowledge it? What are you lying about? I'm not! … D'you mean to say he'd have the nerve to hear me call him and then deliberately—? Yes, I man to say it! I do say it! And it's true, and you know it, and you might as well be honest for a change and admit it! He heard you and he didn't want to hear you! He doesn't want to know you anymore. No, not even hi! He's afraid it'd get him in wrong with the old gang. Why? You know well enough! Because you married a—a—a—well, I won't say it, but you know without my mentioning names! (*Ella springs to her feet in horror and shakes off her obsession with a frantic effort*.) Stop! (2.1.305)

Ella loves Jim, and while hanging out with her white boyfriends, she has discovered to her shock and disappointment that none of them could excel Jim in probity, compassion, and understanding. A few weeks before their marriage she told Jim: "You've been white to me" and that she liked him "better than anyone else in the world" (1.3.293). Anyone who follows the rhythm of these expressions can extrapolate from them that, provided with society's support and indifference, these two lovers would have led normal and happy marital relations without any biased apprehension of their different pigmentations. Although the "rhythm of kinship is convincingly brought into being" beginning with their childhood flings and later reciprocal announcement of love, "that rhythm is overwhelmed by forces the characters cannot control" (Manheim *New Language* 9). Therefore, much as Ella loves Jim and seems to appreciate his extraordinary good qualities and devotion to

her, she cannot get over with the prosaic fact that Jim is of dissimilar genus, different from her, that he is black. This blackness, this seeming stigma, this dragon of revulsion, is so overwhelming to her that many a time in her moments of neurotic fits and ambivalent comportments her hatred overpowers her love, and hence a critic observes: "The repulsion which Jim Harris provokes in Ella Downey and which supplants the attraction which first actuates them is partly caused by racism, but it is no less powerful because of that" (Nethercot 265).

Because of her disgust towards the color Jim represents she can hardly exercise love albeit she stays romantically alert, and hence both of them are doomed to live as brother and sister: "Jim's neurosis and Ella's insanity are both expressions of regressive wish that unconsciously seeks to avoid the taboo of mixed blood and its painful ambivalence. Born as they are, they cannot have a harmonious adult sexual relationship between them" (Raghavaharyulu 54). She, in her neurotic fits sometimes, perhaps when the thought of making love crosses her mind, raves at him shouting "Black! Black!" She accuses Jim saying "her skin [is] turning black—that [Jim] had poisoned her" (2.2.308).

This frustration of love aggravates Ella's psychological breakdown. This period of insanity, as O'Neill devised it, leads to as well as brings out the worse part of Ella—jealousy towards Jim and his race. Unable to offer or boast about anything to her credit, except, of course, her white color, Ella is fearful and jealous to be supplanted by Jim, and hence she does not want him to pass the law examination. Her jealousy towards Jim and his successful sister Hattie makes her a schizophrenic, and she cannot help despising the household black cultural and historical symbols representing racial pride and success: the "Congo mask" thus appears to her as "ugly" and "stupid" (2.1.303), and Jim's father's portrait as "circus horse" and "ignorant"

(2.1.304). Clearly showing the "symptom of infection," Ella now becomes the mother host of the "cultural sickness" (Shaughnessy 91). She will love Jim as long as he remains her devoted servant, like the antebellum stereotypes created by her ancestors in the like of black "Uncle" who served the white masters with life and "play[ed]" with the white kids "for years and years." She thus asks Jim, "I'll be a little girl—and you'll be old Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years—Will you play that" (2.2.310)?

She must fight, therefore, to prevent Jim from advancing, from succeeding in the examination. Previously she told Hattie: "Jim's not going to take any more examinations! I won't let him (2.1.303)!" In the same scene, standing in front of the Congo mask, she reassures the African cultural insignia, a source of black's inspiration: "He won't pass, you wait and see. Not in a thousand years (2.1.304)!" When Jim is in study, she noiselessly, in bare feet tiptoes behind him with an intension to murder him because she cannot bear the sight of Jim's working hard to fare well in the exams least it would pave the way for the invisible man Jim's prosperity and social recognition as a successful American—the privilege which is held and enjoyed by the people of her race. The stage description brings to mind Lady Macbeth-like mania of somnambulism as Ella advances:

> *Ella enters noiselessly through the portieres. She wears a red dressing-gown over her night-dress but is in her bare feet. She has a carving-knife in her right hand. Her eyes fasten on Jim with a murderous mania. She creeps up behind him. Suddenly he senses something and turns. As he sees her he gives a cry, jumping up and catching her wrist. She stands fixed, her eyes growing bewildered and frightened*. (2.2.310)

Indeed, both Lady Macbeth and Ella suffer from the same neurotic disease as a result of which they walk in their sleep where the dagger imagery pervades. Their highly ambitious husbands are advised by the doctors that the mental illness is hardly curable. But most importantly, their mental insanity stemmed from a common motif—the guilt complex—in Lady Macbeth's case, her insinuation or brainwave to murder King Duncan who was her father's look-alike; and in Ella's case, her marriage to the invisible man Jim, for which her alter-ego is constantly fighting and divided within itself, since with this bondage she is disbanded from her skin-alikes.

In Ella's estimation, Jim must be held down so that he remains where he belongs: "Blacks must remain suppressed and must assume inferior stereotyped roles or face the possibility of white violence to remind them of their 'place'" (Floyd 266). Ella's dogged determination to prevent her "inferior" husband from advancing higher than she or any of her kind is revealed during her one of her paranoid feats:

> I wouldn't let you sleep. I couldn't let you. I kept thinking if he sleeps good then he'll pass be sure to study good and then he'll pass—and the devil'll win … That was why I carried that knife around … one reason—to keep you from studying and sleeping by scaring you … I prayed and prayed. When you were taking the examinations and I was alone with the nurse, I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep but I was praying with all my might: O God, don't let Jim pass! (2.3.314)

Since Jim Harris and his people have been branded by the society as the inferior race, Jim's success and achievement, as per Ella's understanding, would tend to challenge that perpetuated myth of the black's incapacity to make intellectual advancement. But ironically, Jim's academic success, specially should he pass the bar examination, would seem a rebuke Ella's own inferior position, hence she is very jealous and

resentful of seeing Jim, Hattie, or any black climbing the intellectual ladder reserved only for whites. Addressing the Congo mask hanging on the wall, an emblem of the Black struggle and potential, Ella blurts out:

> How dare you grin at me? I guess you forget what you are! That's always the way. Be kind to you, treat you descent, and in a second you've got a swelled head, you think you're somebody, you're all over the place putting on airs; why it's got so I can't even walk down the street without seeing niggers, niggers everywhere. Hanging around, grinning, grinning—going to school—pretending they're white—taking examinations … Black! Black! Black as dirt! You've poisoned me! I can't wash myself clean! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! (2.3.312)

In her last phobic monologue of the play, Ella here shows total disdain and hatred towards Jim and his race. Contemporary Black critic Peter Gillett, while commenting on this boldly provocative statement of the schizophrenic Ella, harshly concludes in his article that Ella's determination to keep Jim from succeeding implies that "there can be no settled love between whites and blacks except a perverted love purchased by one partner's abrogation of his freedom and human dignity." He adds, "It implies that the white race in its attitudes to black people, is insane beyond cure,—wanting on principle to permit their advancement toward freedom, forced by its own sick nature to stifle them" (115-16). Tellingly, Gillett's comment seems pretty generic since Ella Downey in *All God's Chillun* does not speak for all whites anymore than Harris speaks for the blacks. In fact, it must be remembered that Ella's neurosis is caused by a strong clash of opposites within her psychic: i.e., the love she has for Jim because of his good qualities on the one hand, and the aversion she has to Jim's blackness, a pigmentation she cannot tolerate on the other. Thus the drama of Jim and Ella

becomes a symbolic study of the conflict between black and white, and through this "symbolism of the story" O'Neill tries to address "the wider ethnic concern" (Bogard 98) of his days.

In fact, the tragedy of the race relations particularly depicted through Jim-Ella relationship is imbued with the proclivity of, as many O'Neill critics and cultural studies analysts view today, both characters' internalizing the ideas of racial inferiority and superiority at the same time (During 163-65; Pfister 131-36; Floyd 268; Manheim 34; Shaughnessy 152-53; Holton; O'Toole; Diggins 150; Bernstein). Throughout the play both characters act out the roles that a racist American society has given to them. However, the play's resolution, in common terms, suggests that only by regressing into childhood Ella can accept Jim as he is and play freely with him without eliciting the suspicion and hatred of the society. As long as they remain in the child-like state, there is love, harmony, and unbiased relationship. In truth, "Ella wants to have Jim only as a child again—in the innocence and freedom from creative obligations of the days when they were just little Jim Crow and Painty Face … She wants the negro only as a little slave boy—the playmate—or in the image of the harmless 'Uncle Jim' with whom she lived for a year abroad before liking turned to love—and hate" (Skinner 137). In other words, in such a racially intolerant society, the only opportunity for blacks and whites to mix freely and even hold hands is when they are children.

Likewise, Jim's trauma of madness stems from the irreconcilable conflict between his American self and his African heritage. Jim's failure to become a lawyer, however, does more than solidify his racial identity. It emasculates him as well. He cannot provide for his wife, and he sees his failure as an inability to make Ella proud. He has not become the man he wanted to be and now can only serve as Ella's

playmate. She says, “I’ll be just your little girl, Jim—and you’ll be my little boy.” Jim responds by falling to his knees and begging God for forgiveness; He asks God, “[M]ake me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away!” Jim’s last attempt to regain his manhood will come in fatherhood, though the play suggests that he is doomed to failure. As he prays, Ella asks, “Be my little boy, Jim. Pretend you’re Painty Face and I’m Jim Crow. Come and play” (2.3.315). Jim becomes either an old man or a young boy, but Ella cannot see him as equal. She must hierarchize their relationship, placing Jim into the acceptable roles of pappy or playmate. Though he will try to be a father to their child, he will still face an atmosphere of racial hatred that will keep him and his child from achieving equality. Ultimately, Ella and Jim cannot escape the racism that their relationship stands against, and the anxiety caused by constant social pressure directed against them ends with Ella dying and Jim reverting to an infantile state.

Whiteness Eroding Black Identity: “Nigger, is you a nigger?”

While examining Jim-Ella relationship, the audience members sometimes get perplexed to see a well-educated and adroit middleclass Black with good intellectual acumen digesting without remorse the ill-treatment of a promiscuous, racist, and jealous Ella. It seems that through Jim’s kowtowing, obsequious, and sycophantic attitudes towards Ella, O’Neill has really exaggerated the slavish disposition of Jim Harris toward his white wife Ella. As referred to the relationships at the beginning of this chapter—Johnson-Ella and James-Ellen—which might have inspired the plot of *All God’s Chillun*, the findings of O’Neill biographers show that neither Johnson nor James O’Neill stooped so low to the extent of cowering before the superior partner

(White Etta or Convent girl Ellen) and promising to be her "slave who regards her as sacred." The point, it can be argued, O'Neill is making here is that when a Black American marries a White American woman, he, for the most part, is perpetuating his slavery because he will be serving her and trying to please her even to the extent of sacrificing his peace of mind and his dignity. O'Neill seems to show that if and as long as blacks consider that they are conditioned to regarding whites as their superiors instead of equals, such interracial union would breed conflicts and misunderstanding resulting in tragedy.

Nonetheless, such preconception of black Jim Harris who thinks he is to "serve" his white spouse as a "slave" leads us to the socio-historical fact-analysis as to why whiteness is so overwhelmingly an idol to him that he is constantly brewing it up into his love, profession, and overall, his life. According to John Patrick Diggins, "'whiteness' is a constructed phenomenon" where, based on the color of one's skin, "attitudes towards one's racial identity have been devised so that in moments of historical conflict whites can see themselves in safe opposition to others" (150). Simon During contends, taking lead from Darwin's theory of species-formation, that upon successful manipulation and maneuvering of the Darwinian discourse, the whites legitimized "the domination of the globe" since by employing this "scientific racism" they easily "fulfilled particular ideological needs in the age of imperialism." He further adds that scientific racism "also allowed the whites to continue to dominate African Americans in the America where, even after the end of slavery, a whole set of Jim Crow 'race laws' were established to prevent blacks participating fully in society, politics and economy" which later bred and gave rise to the worst cult of racism, the "cultural racism," that "formally [disbarred blacks] from jobs, neighborhood, clubs, etc" (163-65). Thus it can easily be construed that whiteness was used as a ploy to

impose superiority, domination, and oppression on the non-white races to check their advances in the past globally, and hence for a black American like Jim it was not surprising to see that he adhered to or internalized the notion of white supremacy into his value system.

It now leads to one of the focal points of the play: does O'Neill endorse or counter the idea of white socio-cultural supremacy? The answer is that in his plays O'Neill tries to prove the notion of white superiority as a mere fabrication which he counterattacks by drawing counter-images. As mentioned earlier, black Hattie is a counter-image of white Ella in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. Also, if we explore O'Neill's take on this question of supremacy, we will find that once, having been asked by a persistent reporter whether white race was superior to the black race, he had the following declaration to make:

> Spiritually speaking there is no superiority between races. We're just a little ahead mentally as a race, though not as individuals … To me every human being is a special case, with his own special set of values. True, often those values are just a variant of values shared in common by a great group of people. But it is the manner in which those values have acted on the individual and his reactions to them which makes of him a special case. (qtd. in Gelbs *O'Neill* 552-53)

This statement of the playwright is indeed crucial as it reveals his stand on racial issue which lends optimum credibility and support to this paper. Also, if we look at O'Neill's works where the idea of whiteness is at loggerheads with the opposite set of values, we can join voices with Normand Berlin who assumes that "white is not a positive idea in O'Neill" (48), particularly if we take into account the portraits and personas of white Smithers in *The Emperor Jones*, white Mildred in *The Hairy Ape*,

and emblematic as haunted, the white hall of austere Calvinism in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

These are sufficient testimonies to corroborate the idea that O'Neill did not try to promote white-as-better race theory through his works and speeches, and through Jim Harris in *All God's Chillun*, he actually denounces the slavish disposition of the protagonist as utterly disgusting and preposterous. He does this mainly through a black progressive young woman, Hattie, and a member of a black street gang, Joe. Both Hattie and Joe initially detected the malfunction in Jim's system by posing the inquiry that reverberates throughout the play as Jim follows the white trails of will-o'-the-wisp: "Is you nigger, Nigger? Nigger, is you a nigger" (1.2.288)? Although Jim's answer was positive, yet throughout the whole play he fails to prove this. On the other hand, it was Hattie who kept her head high and became a successful careerist as an "American" and as a "Negro," where not compromising with her African identity and heritage, she found an incredible means not to be "torn asunder" or be undone by Du Boisian prophecy of an American black's "double consciousness." In fact, Joe in the first act and Hattie in the second act of the play expose the folly of Jim and both challenge him to face reality, to be himself in Emersonian or Nietzschian terms, and to appreciate his Blackness and his race. Their reactions, against Jim's avidity and obsession to "buy white," are perhaps O'Neill's advice, too, for during his life, he ridiculed those who tried or struggled to be "what they are not."

Earlier in the play, Joe observes Jim's proclivity to insinuate himself into the white man's society. While Joe's vituperation seems to have an undertone of envy and jealousy (Holton), the play's end confirms that like Hattie, his scrutiny of Jim is right. He lashes out his verbal attack towards Jim by addressing the latter as a "nigger" with

a view to "[stirring Jim's] psycho-social feelings and awareness" (Bernstein) and to reminding him of the appellation that he is living in denial with himself:

> Listen to me, nigger: I got a heap to whisper in yo' ear! Who is you, anyhow? Who does you think you is? What's all dis fakin' an' pretendin' and swellin' out grand an' talkin' perlite? What's all dis denyin' you's a nigger—an' wid de white boys listenin' to you say it! Is you aimin' to but white wid yo' ol' man's dough like Mickey say? What is you … Is you a nigger, Nigger? Nigger, is you a nigger? (1.2.288)

What is remarkable is this encounter is that as soon as Jim affirms that he is "a nigger" like Joe, Joe's rage wilts at once as he offers Jim a cigarette and lights it for him. Then, with a keen satisfaction, as if nothing has gone wrong, he asks Jim: "Man, why didn't you 'splain dat in de fust place?" Thus pretense has given way to reality. Jim's studying to any standard and to any far or his goal and plan for future is neither a problem for Joe nor a concern of playwright as long as he maintains his identity as a Black, and be proud of it. The simple admission of Jim to Joe, his fellow African American, that "we're both niggers," for example, cools the bitterness and violent disposition of Joe, because with it the whole smokescreen which Jim built around himself disappears immediately. Joe no longer resents even Jim's education as his next question shows: "Time you was graduatin', ain't it (1.2.289)?" Joe's annoyance and his confrontation with Jim echoes O'Neill's impatience with people like Jim who want to jump out of their skin with the help of "dough" or money. Skinner views: "In all of O'Neill's writing, there are few scenes as utterly revealing of the true nature of one of the poet's major problems—the difficulty of facing the reality of one's soul and of accepting it" (134).

O'Neill, one would suspect, endorses the philosophy of Hattie Harris, the defiant, proud, courageous, and successful Black woman. Considered by a critic "an anomaly in O'Neill's universe" mainly due to her noncommittal gender stereotype for she is "*dressed severely, mannishly*" (Barlow 165-66); yet according to Margaret Ranald, Hattie, having "discovered Africa and her own negritude" in Mother America, "will make her own way in the world while asserting her blackness, even though it costs her her femininity" (*O'Neill Companion* 20). She elicits audience's admiration and respect not only for her "*high-strung, defiant face—an intelligent head showing both power and courage*" (2.1.297), but also for her sense of pride as a member of Black race, opposed to her weak brother who is a shame to their race. Jim can offer no hope for the Black race apart from admonishing them to remain in perpetual servitude to the white man and to define themselves in white man's fictive terms as he tells his sister, "I can do anything for her! I'm all she's got in the world! I've got to prove I can be all to her! I've got to prove worthy! I've got to prove she can be proud of me! I've got to prove I'm the whitest of the white (2.2.309)!" Hattie, on the other hand, is proud of her blackness, her heritage, and her first take on Jim-Ella marriage is an absolute repetition of Lady Macbeth's guilt-ridden remark after King Duncan's murder, "What's done is done" (2.1.297) implying (in both cases) that the stain on reality caused by the injudicious action of recent past would beckon some tough state of affairs to negotiate with. She feels that to fight for equality and racial justice one has to be in the American society to do it instead of running away as Jim and Ella have done. She thus accuses her brother of running away and hence giving up his fight (2.1.298). Her advice in plain terms to Jim, coated as playwright's strong appeal to the Black race, is "be strong enough to conquer all prejudice"; she further adds, "We don't deserve happiness till we've fought the fight of our race and won it"

(2.1.299). This nonetheless is quite a reminder of the dogged determination expressed in Tennyson's "Ulysses."

Hattie still has "held to Core values" of ethnicity and family (Holton), and is highly educated in a male dominated white society. More importantly, she knows what to do with her degree. Unlike Hansberry's Beneatha in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) who is not yet sure whether to stay in America or to act by Asagai's proposal to go back to Africa (following passé Gurveyan motto), Hattie has dedicated herself to improving the image and standard of her black brothers and sisters by teaching in a "private school endowed by some wealthy members of [her] race" (2.1.302). O'Neill shows her as an image of counterculture: she finds in the Congo mask a "religious" spirit that breeds positive upward drive and deciphers its worth by thumping it over to Ella who is xenophobic and disrespectful to this artifact. Hattie says to Ella, "it's beautifully made, a work of Art by a real artist—as real in his way as your Michael Angelo. (*forces Ella to take it*) Here. Just notice the craftsmanship." When Ella announces that she is "not going to [let Jim] take any more examinations," she wears the inside out of Ella by "*bursting forth*": "There's white justice!—their fear for their superiority (2.1.303)!" Though not liked very much by Jim and Ella for her outspoken demeanor, Hattie, nevertheless, offers help to Ella in sickbed and gives advice to Jim to go on with his law study as she says, "Our race needs man like you to come to the front and help" (2.1.301). She cannot bear the sight of her bother's shattered marriage, failed education, and psychological trauma resulting from his too much obsession in Ella. She gives vent to her feelings by saying, "I'm afraid—afraid of myself—afraid sometime I'll kill her dead to set you free! (*She loses control and begins to cry*)" (2.2.308).

Hattie's character traits—her pride in her origin, her blackness, black art and artists, her determination to fight prejudice and injustice until Black race is recognized and accepted as White's equal partner and contender, her perseverance to enhance the image of her younger generation through education, her core family values of compassion and understanding, etc.—are found in some later female portraits in African American theater. Black female protagonists like Beneatha in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), Julia in Childress' *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* (1972), and also to some extent, a changed Berniece at the end of Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1987) are reminiscent of Hattie. But O'Neill staged a flamboyant, proud, sure-of-herself careerist Hattie in such a time (early twenties) when Afrocentrism stood synonymous to savagism and under such a condition when interracial marriage was a far cry from reality.[6] Thus, against the white portrait of paranoid and overtly racist Ella, O'Neill stages a countercultural image of Black dignity in Hattie which according to Floyd carried "a message for blacks." Floyd views, "he encouraged them not to lose their racial identity in great white Mother America" (268). While the play depicts an appalling state of structural racism in American culture, it however suggests a possibility of black success not through separatism but through assimilation and total staving off of the internalization of racist beliefs.

The Return to Innocence

In the last scene of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, the gradually increasing phobia of racism is integrated with the claustrophobic imagery of the walls shrinking in over the heads of the characters, keeping pace with the growing ambivalent feelings

among them. As Jim goes downstairs to check the mailbox where his examination result is to arrive, Ella is praying for the "good" news of Jim's failure. Jim's sense of being an outsider, a non-participator in the American setting has become a true fact—as Brutus Jones' "de white quality talk" proved to be a deceit or a lie at the end other than a success-shaper of life, so Jim's dream of becoming "the whitest of the white" has turned out to be a life-lie. While in search of status and recognition, Jim is left with an insane wife and numerous failed attempts at law-career. Jim thus takes his frustration out on the racist society and the unconcerned God; when a schizophrenic Ella inquires whether he has passed or failed seeing the letter from board of examiners in his hand, he, with a tone of "*mocking grief*" and a subject matter blasphemous, speaks out:

> Pass? Me? Jim Crow Harris? Nigger Jim Harris—become a full-fledged Member of the Bar! Why the mere notion of it is enough to kill you with laughing! It'd be against all natural laws, all human right and justice. It'd be miraculous, there'd be earthquakes and catastrophes, the seven Plagues'd come again and locusts'd devour all the money in the banks, the second Flood'd come roaring and Noah'd fall overboard, the sun'd drop out of the sky like ripe fig, and the Devil'd perform miracles, and God'd be tipped head first right out of the Judgment seat! (2.3.313)

Happy to find Jim groveling like this, Ella, "*with a cry of joy*," trashes Jim's law books, leads him to a toast of dance, stabs the African mask—the only remaining symbol of Jim's pride. She now claims "the devil's dead." She admits that she intentionally distracted him from his study and sleep, and scared him with a knife so that he could not concentrate enough to "pass." She now feels guilty, and wonders

whether or not God would forgive her for destroying Jim. In the process, she makes Jim produce another blasphemous statement, second in a row, imbued with accusation against God for creating such warped human lives on earth: "Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive—Himself" (2.3.314). With these words, spoken as though by a "Black Irishmen," O'Neill here, through Jim, holds God responsible for causing human failure since certain things or forces are always out of an individual's capacity. He once wrote to Arthur Hobson Quinn that "Fate, God, our biological past creating our present," etc. are obviously "mystery" to human beings on which none has any control (Bogard and Bryer 195). Besides *All God's Chillun*, the same view is also reflected in *Long Day's Journey into Night* where Mary Tyrone says, "None of us can help the things life has done to us."

Jim lays bare before Ella, with such emotional intensity that his "*words fail and he is beyond tears*," that everything he did in life, was solely for her: "I wanted to prove to you—to myself—to become a full-fledged Member—so you could be proud" (2.3.314-15). Ella now has become his "little girl" who urges Jim to play the color game of role reversal—Jim as Painty Face and she as Jim Crow—completely regressing into childhood and plunging into the Edenic emotional state, similar to the opening scene of the play. She "*kisses his hand as a child might, tenderly and gratefully*," and confesses to him: "you're all I've got in the world—and I love you, Jim" (315). Much like Eva in George Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) who tells "I'm going before long" (2.2.409), Ella here says she has "got only a little time left" (2.3.315). While Eva wants to utilize this time in convincing her father St. Clare to "promise" that he would set Uncle Tom and all slaves free after her death, Ella in *All God's Chillun* wants to make use of this time by playing black and white game with

Jim. O'Neill knew that St. Clare could not keep his "promise" in his lifetime, and writing sixty years later as a "Black Irishman," he now questions the ethical standing of God and Christianity. The play concludes with Jim's apologies to God for blaspheming Him, and with his rushed-in promise emanating from "*an ecstasy of religious humility*," to "play right up to the gates of Heaven" with Ella (2.3.315).

Edward Shaughnessy considers this resolution "quite effecting" and adds that "the power and clarity of O'Neill's endings, not always given due credit, are often quite stunning" (92-93). James Robinson sees this as "desperate act of a neurotic" (Jim), and considers such curtain closure as a pungent criticism on "Christianity itself." He adds, "The white man has always found the Christian virtues of humility, passive obedience, and acceptance of suffering to be convenient instruments for persuading the black to accept his oppression. Jim, in accepting his final role as a slave to a white woman, appropriately calls God to justify his position to himself" (Robinson). Barrett Clark, Michael Hinden, and Michael Manheim find similarities between the endings of *All God's Chillun* and *Desire under the Elms* implying that instead of the gallows where Eben and Abbie are heading to, Jim and Ella are just step away from the sickbay (Clark 99; Manheim *Language of Kinship* 35; Hinden "Transitional Nature" 4-5). Edwin Engel, much like Bogard and Gillette afterwards, sees in the ending an "irony of the situation," as he says O'Neill seems to infer that "the implication of madness is a qualification for admission to heaven" (126) which is quite similar in artistic sense what Hinden also commented, "It would seem that instead of sacrificing the character to the mask (as in *The Emperor Jones*), O'Neill here sacrifices the mask to the character" (5). Critics like Francis Ferguson and Frederic Carpenter are reluctant to call it a tragedy for they think the play lacks Aristotelian flavor (Cargill 275; Carpenter 104). While Normand Berlin bemoans that

Jim's and Ella's status at the end are in no way near comparable to Othello-Desdemona or Macbeth-Lady Macbeth tragic statures even though Jim and Ella had similar moments of psychological depths (48-55), contemporary modernist TS Eliot had a different view altogether. According to Eliot, the ending is "magnificent" and O'Neill "got hold of a strong point" while dealing with Shakespearean conflict-within-family situation. According to Eliot, "[O'Neill] not only understands one aspect of the 'negro problem,' but he succeeds in giving this problem universality, in implying a wider application. In this respect, he is more successful than the author of *Othello*, for O'Neill had finally arrived at the universal problem of differences which create a mixture of admiration, love, and contempt, with the consequent tension. At the same time, he has never deviated from the exact portrayal of a possible negro" (qtd. in Cargill 168-69).

However, Joe Weixlmann, while comparing Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* with *All God's Chillun*, writes that O'Neill's drama "crumbles at the end" since he feels it is unimaginable that "Jim, a would be lawyer … would be willing to play 'Uncle Jim,' 'Little boy,' and 'Painty Face' for a white woman who is luxuriating in the fact that her husband has just failed his bar exams" (35). For Margaret L Ranald, "the conclusion … appear[s] racist" ("The Early Plays" 64), and John Patrick Diggins ponders whether the ending promotes "a Nietzschean morality tale of self-deception" since "O'Neill shows Jim accepting the comforting illusions of Christianity at the same time that he is deceived by the wiles of a woman" (155). Diggins' view obviously echoes decades long perception of O'Neill's lifelong non-adherence to scriptural faith, his Nietzschean proclivities, and his inclination towards Strindbergian attitudes towards women. Yet most critics implicitly or explicitly agree on one point that Jim and Ella could not fit into American society as a black man and

a white woman in matrimony since racism overpowered their relationship, and thus they had no alternative other than moving out to a sanitarium somewhere on a magic mountain with a one way ticket and play as god's chillun eternally, stripping off their adulthood once and for all.

Love in the Time of KKK

All God's Chillun depicts an interracial marriage the staging of which resulted in nationwide controversies, outcries, recriminations, and even life-threats to its author and his family members. Although the play, according to many critics, had a poor production record initially, it was made famous all over the United States because of the protests and demonstrations it generated. When the reports of the forthcoming production of the play were published, with Paul Robeson casting as Jim Harris, it caused a storm of protest from the segregationists of 1920s in the forms of newspaper articles, warnings, and campaigns by public figures. For instance, Augustus Thomas, the then influential playwright of the commercial theater (the mercantile values of which O'Neill disliked), campaigned against the play and the playwright claiming in *The Brooklyn Eagle* that the play showed, in his words, "a tendency to break down social barriers which are better left untouched" (qtd. in Frenz 42; Gelbs *O'Neill* 548). *The Telegraph* reported, "scores of Negroes have become subscribers . . . It is now certain that the Provincetown Theater will not be large enough to accommodate the Negroes who will flock there" (Sheaffer 136). Also, Heywood Broun, an acclaimed reviewer, wrote in *The New York World* on the following day of the play's first production that the play gave "to a first rate Negro a third rate white woman" (Manheim 64; Ranald 64). These comments might have

prompted O'Neill to say in a letter written after a decade to one of his Provincetown colleagues that "all the pseudo-liberal moderns" threw "their narrow guts away in a gush of hysterical, bigoted bilge, thinly concealed as objective criticism" (Bogard and Bryer 429). Furthermore, George Jean Nathan reports how "New York Moralmorons" and drama critics were incensed with indignation because O'Neill showed a white woman kissing "a Negro's hand," and the American Legion, founded immediately after World War I, reacted vehemently as it considered the play subversive of "one hundred percent American patriotism" (Nathan 78-79). Louis Sheaffer recounts how the newspaper *American* summoned to the witness stand the many voices of reaction and repressions as adverse pressure continued to mount from women's organizations, church groups, the Catholic groups, etc. passing condemnatory resolutions. On 12 March 1924, John Sumner of the "Society of for the Prevention of Vice" declared the play "might easily lead to racial riots and disorder, and if there is any such possibility, police powers can be exercised." The following day an anonymous clergyman wrote, "There is no good or uplifting thought in the play. It should be condemned by every clean-thinking man and woman in the city" (Sheaffer 136). The Mayor of New York whom O'Neill mentioned as the "chief botherer" (Bogard and Bryer 187) initiated an interdict to issue the permit required to enable the children to act in the first scene of the play on the pretext that it would violate child labor statute. New York Police tried to stop the play because they sensed riots might ensue in case the play shows black and white children are playing together, and as a result, upon O'Neill's advice, the Director had to read out the lines from the play's first scene (Diggins 149-50).

Black critics also joined voices against the play and the playwright since they regarded Jim's obsession for poor, not so educated and debauched white girl as monumental insult to the race. Black theater historian James Weldon Johnson said,

"O'Neill … made the white girl who was willing to marry the black student, and whom he is glad to get, about as lost as he could well make her" (qtd. in Isaacs 78). Sheaffer also describes how the leading Black paper *Chicago Defender* and Reverend A Clayton Powell of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church also were highly critical of the play (138). Even recent critics, in their reviews, view that O'Neill, through *All God's Chillun*, was merely broadening the stereotype cliché already existing in the writings by white authors (Gillett 115; Holton).

However, the playwright came under the most serious and obnoxious criticism as well as life-threats from the insurgent group called Ku Klux Klan. In the last and the current decades, academics and numerous O'Neill scholars started laying too much emphasis on this issue, perhaps after seeing growing global terrorism and threats in and against the United States. They applaud the way O'Neill dared and braved against all the odds and life-threats to his family members and was adamant to stage the play. As already written in the introductory chapter, the Ku Klux Klan was a violently racist and nativist force formed after the end of the American Civil War which got revived in the 1920s with a new level of strength and radical fanaticism. KKK's philosophy was that of defending the values of "one hundred percent Americanism" and the supremacy of the Caucasian race—"Consciousness of oneself as a native born, white, protestant American was not only the major bond of cohesion, it was a call to action" (Chalmers 282). Above all, KKK maintained that the Blacks were to be kept in their proper place and if they made any attempts to demand equal rights, they should be seriously dealt with. Thus when playbills appeared in press and other social circles, the KKK, with nearly five million racist white subscribers in its group, and hence a force to be reckoned with, threatened to kill the playwright unless the production was called off (Sheaffer 140; Floyd 257; Pfister 123; Black 301;

Diggins 149). Every day O'Neill's mailbox was flooded with letters from various hate groups including the notorious KKK. Louis Sheaffer, Joel Pfister, and Stephen Black include in their respective books the account given by the playwright's friend Jimmy Light when the latter saw O'Neill, after reading a letter from Grand Kleagle of the Georgia chapter of KKK threatening to kill his son Shane, replied writing in big letters: "Go fuck yourself" and instantly remailed it to Georgia (Sheaffer 140; Pfister 123; Black 301). O'Neill wrote one of his friends how the infuriated Irish Catholics "threatened to pull [his] ears off" for being "a disgrace to their race and religion" and the "Nordic Kluxers" hated him suspecting that he had "Negro blood, or else was a Jewish pervert masquerading under a Christian name in order to do subversive propaganda for the Pope" (Clark 95)! However, everything went smoothly to the disappointment of the KKK and others opposing the play as nothing happened on the first night of play's production; thanks to the New York riot police force who were stationed at the theater to stop the show in case the unlicensed children should attempt to play their scene—and to step in if anyone tried to throw a bomb (Gelbs 553-554).

A notable exception to all these complaints and denunciations was W E B Du Bois as he was pleased seeing that O'Neill portrayed truth in his art without dissimulation. Earlier Du Bois had appealed to his people to appreciate the truth embodied in art, and warned them against unnecessary fears and alarm whenever any white artist attempted to paint Blacks. He sympathized with O'Neill and encouraged him to continue displaying life on the stage as it was lived in American society, as he commented on the playwright and the play, "Eugene O'Neill is bursting through. He has my sympathy, for his soul must be lame with the blows rained upon us. But it is work that must be done" (qtd. in Duberman 65-66; Sheaffer 138). Du Bois' perspicuity and balanced judgment are worthy of note here. He was able to decipher,

understand, and appreciate O'Neill's efforts and good intensions to address the problem of blacks in America (that he himself also tried to project through his writings and speeches) more than any Black critics, the point which a good number of blacks even presently fail to take into account.

The negative criticisms, lampoons, threats, and accusations directed against the playwright because of choosing a subject matter that involves an interracial love even before the play was mounted for production underscores the deplorable image of the Black. It shows the deeply entrenched racial intolerance in the United States of 1920s, and the inveterate antipathetic feelings and aversions against the Black man. It seemed that love and marriage was legislated through unwritten law to be taking place between people of the same race promulgated chiefly by the KKK group with terror acts and threats. The public reactions also proved the serious risks O'Neill was taking to arouse the consciousness of his people about racial injustice, challenging them to deal with this gnawing issue, and teaching them the simple aesthetic truth that "Humanity, like morality, cannot be legislated." Indeed, through *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill "wished to show whites how their discrimination and oppression affect and even destroy the lives of others" (Floyd 268). The racial bias is strongly dealt against in the play when Ella declares to white Shorty that Jim is "the only white man in the world." When Shorty and other white kids mock her for loving a "nigger" like Jim, she retorts by dubbing Jim as "Kind and white" and labeling all of them as "black—black to the heart" (1.3.291). O'Neill here not only hints out that inner worth and quality of an individual is more important than the outer skin color but also underlines the fact that love can transcend racial barriers and differences in social spheres if and when people are let live without imposed injunctions on their psyches.

In response to all criticism, accusations, and condemnations, on 18 March 1924, two months before the play was launched on stage, O'Neill sent to press a statement explaining that the play is "primarily a study of the two principal characters, their tragic struggle for happiness" and that it is not intended at all "to stir up racial feeling," as he says, "I hate it." O'Neill further claims that *All God's Chillun*, "on the contrary, will help toward a more sympathetic understanding between the races, through the sense of mutual tragedy involved" (Gelbs 550; Sheaffer 138-39). It shows that O'Neill was aiming high with this play; he was not shooting himself to fame by enacting on stage a taboo-subject but was focusing on to show how the effects of cultural, institutional, and scientific racism, bred over the years in incubators from generation to generation in America, left people's mind, white or black alike, psychologically dysfunctional.

In fact, starting with the color game the kids were playing, O'Neill shows through Jim and Ella how the notion of biological or scientific superiority gave the fortunate white kids an exceptional advantage—whereas Ella is trying to be black just for a play thing, Jim wants to be white out of fear of being castigated all his life for being one subhuman "chocolate," "smoke," "nigger," and "Jim Crow." Gradually O'Neill lays bare the effects of institutional racism where Harris family is fallen apart as a consequence of Jim's marriage to a white woman Ella who cannot stand the sight and personality of Jim's black sister Hattie and who in reprisal wrecks havoc on Jim's life as she holds him back from flourishing, least she would lose her racial supremacy. The economic ghetto, on the one hand, showed fierce attitudes towards the couple, making them pariahs for which they had to leave the country, and the church on the

other hand, endorsed popular sentiments instead of Christian principles, aborting them through its doors. When they came back from abroad, the neighborhood still maintained the same indifferent attitudes towards them as Ella's childhood friend now seems not to know her at all and Jim's access to Bar employment is deemed to be impossible. This leads to the worst part of their alienation which makes them suffer from mental trauma. As they have internalized the society-imposed roles and culturally defined codes, the superior Ella now stabs and pierces through the black cultural symbol of Congo mask and the inferior Jim concentrates on serving her even if it means to die with her. Ella becomes schizophrenic, thinks she was poisoned by Jim through the act of sexual intercourse when they were abroad, and hence, is conditioned to be admitted to a sanitarium.

O'Neill's play suggests that a multiracial society is impossible with the existing "structural" racism in the forms of "visible and invisible [race] violence" (Galtung) in America and particularly with the internalization of racist beliefs by its black and white communities. Jim is like O'Neill's other African American leads who "succumb to racial psychological fate" suggesting that "social forces, not an atavistic black psychological self, crush the efforts of blacks to succeed" (Pfister 136). O'Neill's multiculturalism appears to be a pipedream impossible to reach, a romance destined to burn only so long as its participants gaze at the sky and avoid seeing the realities of the earth (Magill 8). The resulting madness that the couple is left at curtain closure seems to corroborate what Michel Foucault quotes of Maurice Blanchot in his *Madness and Civilization*: "Nature caused us all to be born equal; if fate is pleased to disturb the plan of the general law, it is our responsibility to correct its caprice, and to repair our attention the usurpations of the stronger" (268). O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* examines the race-relations of 1920s in New York's Harlem to depict how

tension, ill-feelings, and frustration in romance stifled lives of blacks and whites alike. Yet under the play's veiled satire and subtle tone of nihilism, he ventured to draw upon racial inequity primarily to debunk the white American psyche on stage in such a time when black race's dream of justice under democracy and hope of assimilation into mainstream was a far cry from reality.

All God's Chillun Got Wings goes beyond showing a mere tussle of identities between a black and a white and forges a scenario of coexistence between them to shed light on the ever-visible dark spots of American racism which thwarts and perverts human relations based on love and fellow feeling. The playwright, through the opening and the last scenes of the play, emphasizes how the color prejudice, a wrong perception ingrained into people's psyches, can jeopardize lives. The regression scene proves how modern America was unable to overcome the antebellum chauvinism about the blacks. The world of Jim and Ella is still fighting the same ghost as the world of Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The couple in *All God's Chillun* would obviously agree at play's end, as they return to the state of innocence through infantile regression, with a remorseful Eva when she said, "I had rather be in heaven! There are a great many things here that make me sad—that seem dreadful to me" (2.2.410). Both in the beginning and in the end, O'Neill shows his characters—children or acting as if children—busy playfully in changing their pigmentation as though it is a child's play thing, a mere color as-you-like game. Thus, he infers, much like Vaughn, Wordsworth or Blake, it is the adult world, tainted by prejudice and injustice, which makes impossible "the Oneness of mankind" (Gelbs 535). A playwright who believed "there is no superiority between races," O'Neill, in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, lends gravity to the African American's fate where the Du Boisian "double self" of American-versus-Black in Jim culminates into a trauma of psychosomatic disorder of

sanity-versus-insanity. O'Neill's clarion call seems double-edged here in this play: to white Americans for a change in its consciousness that judges a person by the color of his skin, rather than by what he is; and to black Americans to keep their own identity and cultural pride intact instead of shirking it which would help them earn recognition in true sense of the word.

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[1] It must be borne in mind that miscegenation was as much of a taboo subject in the United States in 1920s as the gay marriage has been in 1960s and onwards. The genre "Gay and Lesbian Drama" was initiated by Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934) and entered into the mainstream of theater and film with Mart Cowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968) which depicted the pleasures and pains as well as the humor and pathos of gay life in the United States. In the following year, after the police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, a gay bar, the Gay Liberation Movement gathered high momentum. Sternlicht 22; Abbotson 3 and 99.

[2] Normand Berlin here digs out O'Neill's own "family situations" and tags Ella-Jim marriage relationship in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* with Shakespeare's Othello-Desdemona, drawing upon ontological, sociological, and psychological perspectives between the two playwrights, particularly taking into account that Shakespeare was treated as a "family member" in the O'Neill household where James O'Neill used to recite monologues from *Othello* and be appreciated by his sons. According to Berlin, Shakespeare's four great tragedies dealing with "family and the values connected with the idea of family" made serious impact upon O'Neill. Among many of Berlin's explanations and findings gathered, while teaching both these playwrights at the University of Massachusetts for nearly two decades, involves his amazing elaboration of the common marriage-motif of Desdemona's and Ella's inclination towards black husbands. According to him, the answer lies in Yank's words in the sexually charged scene right before Mildred's arrival in *The Hairy Ape* where her fainting at the savage sight of Yank symbolizes Yank's "making violent love" in her unconscious mind who, like both Desdemona and Ella, shows "an unconscious yearning for the primitive." Michael Hinden in his article "The transitional nature of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*" termed Jim-Ella relationship as "an extension of the relationship between Yank and Mildred left undeveloped in *The Hairy Ape*" (1-2). However, the usage of "primitive" in the canvas is seen common with many a modernist of different forms of art and literature which has been discussed in one endnote of the previous chapter of this dissertation; yet Berlin's theorizing the fact by bringing Shakespearean perception of family tragedies obviously gives some food for thought since the idea of the pagan primitiveness did not have much bearing with the Shakespearean family plays if compared with "Black Irishman" O'Neill's. Berlin *O'Neill's Shakespeare* 45-55.

[3] Both Diggins and Pfister draw out the fact that O'Neill, as a playwright, felt proud of his Irish lineage and time and again reminded his friends that in Gaelic the name O'Neill stood for "champion." So strident, sentimental, and conscious of his "'clannish pride' of the Irish," O'Neill once refuted his son Eugene Jr.'s claim through a letter written on 7 May 1945 that the latter's stepbrother Shane, son of the playwright and Agnes Boulton, had none of the Irish features, past or pride (Bogard and Bryer 569; Diggins 11-12). Pfister further mentions that O'Neill's father spurned the theater people's advice that he should change his Irish name to be a famous and celebrated actor in America (Pfister 26). Fintan O'Toole goes far to claim: "Having begun as an American playwright, O'Neill had become, in the end an Irish one"; the

instances of which is seen in his last (Irish) plays: in *Long Day's Journey into Night* the bookcase comprises of, among other books, "several histories of Ireland" which have been "read and reread" (1.717); later in the play James Tyrone admonishes his son Jamie, "And keep your dirty tongue off Ireland! You are a fine one to sneer, with the map of it on your face" (2.2.761)! Similarly, in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* the stage direction, while describing Josie Hogan, reads, "The map of Ireland is stamped on her face" (1.857). Fintan O'Toole views that Ireland in O'Neill's last plays was found "a fact not of geography, but of biology" where the playwright on various occasions "used the image of the island transformed into feature of personal physiognomy, as inescapable and as personal as a nose or mouth" (O'Toole).

[4] In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, James Tyrone mentions how hard he tried to lose the brogue to hit the jackpot of success: "I was wild with ambition … I educated myself. I got rid of an Irish brogue you could cut with an knife" (4.809); like Tyrone, another Irish character, Con Melody in *A Touch of the Poet*, considers stripping off the brogue as a benchmark for success for Irish in America.

[5] Theater historian Felicia Hardison Londre claims that O'Neill expanded the avenues of mainstream theater, particularly with *The Emperor Jones* (1920) that "broke new ground … by featuring a black character as protagonist." He emphasizes O'Neill's "insistence that a black character be found to play the title role" instead of using white actor in blackface which historically "initiated the racial integration of the American stage." I would disagree with Londre in this point since as per the production histories particularly noted by O'Neill's biographers, scholars, and critics, namely Bogard, Sheaffer, Gelbs, Pfister, Manheim, and Diggins among others, *The Dreamy Kid* (1919) "initiated" such "integration." The "Chronology" sections of all three volumes of O'Neill's plays published by The Library of America in 1988 contain a common line about the production history of *The Dreamy Kid*: "Provincetown players stage *The Dreamy Kid*, October 31, will all-black cast (one of the first productions by a white theater company to cast black actors in black roles)" (*Complete Plays* Vol.1 1069; Vol.2 1061; Vol.3 975). Londre *The History of World Theater: From the English Restoration to the Present* 509.

[6] Interracial marriage was such an anathema even in the post Civil Rights era that when in 1973 ABC Network nationally televised Alice Childress's *Wedding Band* with a candid treatment of the love between a black woman Julia and a white man Herman, it raised uproar and controversy throughout America. The play is set in 1918's South Carolina. Other than the interracial marriage and the couples' becoming outlawed in the neighborhood because of their ten-year affair's culmination into marriage, Martha Gilman Bower detects striking similarity between the dramatic monologues of Julia at the scene in which Herman dies and Jim at the end of wedding scene where both "turn to God out of guilt and desperation." Bower "*All God's Chillun*: Religion and 'Painty Faces' versus the NAACP and the Provincetown Players." *Laconics* l (2006): n. pag. Web. 19 July 2007.