
At the Discourse-Myth interface: A Corpus-based Analysis of *Mourning Becomes Electra*

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Abstract

The Electra-myth as a dramatic theme has an outstanding expressive capacity. The aim of this paper is to scrutinize the interplay between myth and discourse in O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*. In so doing, Corpus Linguistics is the research method adopted in this study. Keyword in Context (KWIC), frequency and collocation are three techniques provided by the software AntConc 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018) and applied for data analysis. The interrelationships among characters, which are verbally portrayed as a linguistic manifestation of the Greek myth in discourse, are depicted through these tools. The untypical mother-daughter relationship has its atypical father-daughter/mother-son counterparts that portray a tragic atmosphere shadowed by the gloomy scent of the Electra-myth. Discursive practices serve as linguistic realizations that bridge the gap between the mythical and the real. Results highlight the effective role played by corpus-based studies to underpin modern discourse analysis.

Keywords: Corpus Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, KWIC, Frequency, Collocation

على محك الخطاب والأسطورة: تحليل يستند إلى علم لغة المتون لثلاثية الحداد يليق باليكترا

نجوى يونس

ملخص

تتميز أسطورة اليكترا كموضوع درامي بقدرة تعبيرية خاصة. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة التفاعل بين الأسطورة والخطاب في ثلاثية أونيل Mourning Becomes Electra، من خلال استخدام أدوات علم اللغة القائم على المتون: الكلمة الرئيسية في السياق (KWIC) ، ومعدل التكرار والمتصاحبات اللغوية وهي ثلاثة تقنيات يوفرها البرنامج AntConc 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018) وتطبيقها على تحليل البيانات. إن وصف العلاقات بين الشخصيات ، والتي يتم تصويرها لفظيا باعتبارها مظهرا لغويا للأسطورة اليونانية في الخطاب ، يتم من خلال هذه الأدوات. حيث تظهر العلاقة غير المعتادة بين الأم والابنة و نظيرتها غير التقليدية من الأب والابنة / الأم والإبن ، والتي تصور جواً مأساوياً مظللاً برائحة أسطورة إكترا. تعتبر الممارسات النصية بمثابة تمثيل لغوي يجسر الفجوة بين الأسطورية والواقعية. تسلط النتائج الضوء على الدور الفعال الذي تلعبه الدراسات القائمة على المتون في دعم التحليل الحديث للخطاب.

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1. Introduction

Between what is mythical and what is real, there lies lots of discursive practices. Ancient Greeks thought of myth as an “assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed” (Lincoln, 1999, p.17). Myth, according to Roland Barthes, “is a type of speech”; it is “a system of communication,” “a mode of signification” but one to which we must “assign ... historical limits, conditions of use,” and to which we must “reintroduce society.” “It is not,” he adds, “defined by the object of its message, but by the way it utters this message [for] myth is a type of speech” (Barthes, 1972, p. 109, emphasis in the original). Terry Eagleton (1991) argues that people in positions of power use myth as a rhetorically persuasive device: that power in and of itself fosters beliefs and practices that then become standardized. In like manner, this is what Cassirer (1946, p. 14-15) refers to as '[t]his insight into the determining and discriminating function, which myth as well as language performs in the mental construction of our world of "things". This contradicts the view of Max Müller that ‘*Mythology, which was the bane of the ancient world, is in truth a disease of language*’ (Müller 1885, p. 12).

Interweaving the structure of myth, language and music is pivotal in the thought of some philosophers of language such as Lévi-Strauss (1955). He holds the view that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragment. Lévi-Strauss (1955, p. 435) defines the myth as ‘consisting of all its versions’. For him, ‘a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such’. The Freudian use of

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the Oedipus myth is the example Lévi-Strauss offers to prove his point.

This paper purports to speculate the linguistic interrelationships that mingle discourse with myth. O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* is based on a well-known Greek myth, and the playwright asserts the obvious similarity. The legend of Electra, the devoted daughter whose only goal in life was to avenge her father's cruel homicide on his murderers - her mother Clytemnestra and the latter's paramour - and who succeeded in doing so with the aid of her brother Orestes, has fascinated many writers from antiquity to the present day and provided them with a literary subject.

Mourning Becomes Electra, in particular, has the privilege of being one of the most important works in the repertoire of O'Neill. It was in his maturational stage that the Nobel Prize owner wrote this play. Thus, it reveals many characteristics of his discourse. The trilogy is divided into three parts, each having its own title: *Homecoming*, *The Hunted*, and *The Haunted*. Designed as a trilogy, this allows for the precise and extensive analysis of the theme(s) of the play throughout character development and the evaluation of events through a considerable amount of interaction. This also allows for the accurate investigation of the relationship between the characters as revealed in the play.

O'Neill has made use of a theatrical device which was the main stylistic characteristic of ancient Greek dramaturgy in general: the element of chorus. In the beginning of each of the three plays O'Neill presents a group of townspeople who comment on the incidents of the previous scene, in the same way the ancient chorus did between the episodes. The first play, 'Homecoming', starts with a group of intruders, secretly brought to the grounds of the Mannon

residence by Seth, the housekeeper, with whom they are acquainted: 'These last three are types of townfolk rather than individuals, a chorus representing the town come to look and listen and spy on the rich and exclusive Mannons.' (p.17). It is significant and certainly points to Greek drama that it is through this chorus that the Mannons, the protagonists, are presented to the audience. O'Neill may also have wanted to emphasize the similarity to Greek drama as he himself refers to the group of townspeople as chorus. Similarly, in the beginning of 'The Hunted', a group of people returning from Ezra Mannon's funeral, give us information about the state Christine Mannon is in before we actually see her:

These people - the Bardens, Hills and his wife and Doctor Blake - are as

were the Ames of Act One of 'Homecoming', types of townfolk, a chorus representing as those others had, but in a different stratum of society, the town as a human background for the drama of the Mannons. (p.117)

The following questions are attempted to be answered in this paper:

1. How do discursive practices give the spell of 'myth' in *Mourning Becomes Electra*?
2. How are characters interactions linguistically portrayed to serve both the mythical and the real?
3. To what extent a corpus-based analysis helps reveal the discourse-myth interface?

The design of the paper goes in the following fashion: § 2 is a background in which *Mourning Becomes Electra* is introduced as a discursive exploitation of Greek mythology. In § 3, the research method is explained, and corpus-based tools are presented. The analysis of data as well as the results are discussed in § 4. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research are summarized in § 5.

2. Background

The study tackles the linguistic manifestation of myth in discourse from a corpus perspective. Discourse analysis in general has typically been a qualitative endeavor, with studies focusing on only a few texts. In contrast, a corpus-based approach requires analysis of a well-designed ‘representative’ collection of texts of a particular genre. Being encoded electronically, these texts allow for more complex and generalizable research findings, revealing linguistic patterns and frequency information that would otherwise be too labour intensive to uncover by hand (Baker, 2008). Corpus-based discourse analysis depends on both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Even with a corpus-based approach, one or more linguistic type in each text is first identified and tagged individually by the researchers making qualitative judgments about the communicative purposes of the different parts of a text; and even once quantitative data are run, the results must still be interpreted functionally. ‘Association patterns represent quantitative relations, measuring the extent to which features and variants are associated with contextual factors. However, functional [qualitative] interpretation is also an essential step in any corpus-based analysis’ (Biber et al., 1998: 4). Three corpus-based tools are utilized in this study through applying AntConc 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018): *Keyword in Context (KWIC)*, *Frequency*, and *Collocation*.

2.1. Keyword in Context (KWIC)

In *A Glossary of Corpus Linguistics* (2006), Baker et al. define Keyword in Context (KWIC) as "a list of all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus" (pp.42-43). According to Biber (2011), "[k]eyword analysis attempts to identify the individual words that characterize a literary work: words that are statistically more likely to occur in the target corpus than in the comparison corpus"(p.16). Besides Culpeper

(2009) refers to this kind of statistics as it is meant to identify the keywords, and is often combined with a kind of cut-off, to avoid the identification of rarely mentioned words. For Baker et al. (2006), "[k]eywords reveal words which may not be hugely frequent but are definitely statistically salient in some way" (p.3). Keyword analysis is the words that are more frequent within the main corpus when compared to a second corpus, if it exists, which often functions within the study as "reference corpora", and is often dealt with as a representative of "standard language" with the same qualification of the main corpora.

2.2. Frequency

Frequency lists within the corpus analysis, as postulated by Flowerdew (2012), is very useful in the "preliminary stages of analysis as they provide a good starting point for more detailed investigation into the grammatical or content words in a text" (p.10). For instance, word frequency lists at the beginning of the analysis of the most frequent 25 words within the main corpus; compared with the least 25 words in a word frequency list reveals the main theme and the priorities of the main corpus writer. At this point, Flowerdew (2012) emphasizes the importance of the size of the corpus to generate frequency data. He suggests that within long texts about half of the words will occur once. Consequently, to reach valid results, "then a corpus needs to contain many million words in order to generate a sufficient number of occurrences of the different uses on which to base descriptive statements."(pp. 10-11).

From the viewpoint of Baker et al. (2006), frequency is one of the most central concepts underpinning the analysis of corpora. However, its importance to this field of research has resulted in one of the most oft-heard misconceptions of corpus linguistics – that it is 'only' a quantitative

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methodology, leading to a list of objections: frequencies can be reductive and generalizing, they can oversimplify and their focus on comparing differences can obscure more interesting interpretations of data. (p.47) it is postulated that language is a list of choices. Stubbs (1996) holds the view that, concerning the choice of words, "[n]o terms are neutral. Choice of words expresses an ideological position"(p.107). There is a tension between two points of view, which is very abundant in analyzing literature. This means that when writers always use one word over another, this reveals intentions and views and typically defines the kind of writing. This also shows the importance of having lexical analysis for the most frequent words, in which the importance of denotation and connotation is clear.

2.3 Collocation

Baker (2006) refers to the notion of collocations as, “[a]ll words co-occur with each other to some degree. However, when a word regularly appears near another word, and the relationship is statistically significant in some way, then such co-occurrences are referred to as collocates and the phenomenon of certain words frequently occurring next to or near each other is collocation. ”(p.95). Similarly, Stubbs (1996) comments on the idea of collocations saying, "Words occur in characteristic collocations, which show the association and connotations they have, and therefore the assumptions they embody" (p.172).

Collocations, therefore, indicate a relationship in one way or another, but within the actual work of the analysis. Through corpus analysis, concordance has to be carried out first in order to identify how the relationship of words is identified and manifested in a language. Baker (2010), then, refers to a

condition that has to be clarified in the mind of the researcher through the analysis, which is "If two words collocate, then they have a tendency to occur near or next to each other in naturally occurring language use" (p.24).

Collocation is viewed as a tool provided by the AntConc 3.5.7 software to facilitate the analysis. "Collocation", according to Biber (2011), means 'the way in which particular words are associated with each other, as shown empirically by their tendency to co-occur more frequently than would be expected by chance' (p.18). Baker and McEnery (2015) offer a full definition identifying the term collocation pointing that "Collocation involves the identification of words which tend to occur near or next to each other a great deal, much more than would be expected if all the words in a corpus were ordered in a random jumble" (p. 3).

The concept 'semantic prosody' is a rather recent concept that ascribes its parentage to corpus linguistics and its fatherhood to John Sinclair in the University of Birmingham. It refers to the shades of meaning or semantic aura related to the choice of a certain lexical item rather than another (Louw, 1993, Sinclair, 1996, Stubbs, 1996, Partington, 1998, Hunston and Francis, 2000). It reflects the Firthian tradition that lexical items are habitually associated with particular connotations.

3. Research Method

The researcher adopts both the quantitative and the qualitative methods to corpus studies to scrutinize the discourse-myth interplay in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Electronically stored, the original script is downloaded from *Project Gutenberg* (www.gutenberg.org) in a plain text format.

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Antconc 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018) is the concordancing tool used for generating KWIC (key word in context), frequency and collocation. Keyness is examined against COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American) as a reference corpus.

These three techniques are applied to four types of interaction, reflecting the relationships between the main characters. These interactions can be subsumed under the following headings:

- a. *mother-daughter interaction*
- b. *husband-wife interaction*
- c. *mother-son interaction*
- d. *father-daughter interaction*

4. Results and Discussion

Under the umbrella tenets of Corpus Linguistics, the interrelation between discourse and myth is depicted through the tools: Keyword in context (KWIC), depicted through the tools: Keyword in context (KWIC), Frequency, and Collocation.

4.1. KWIC

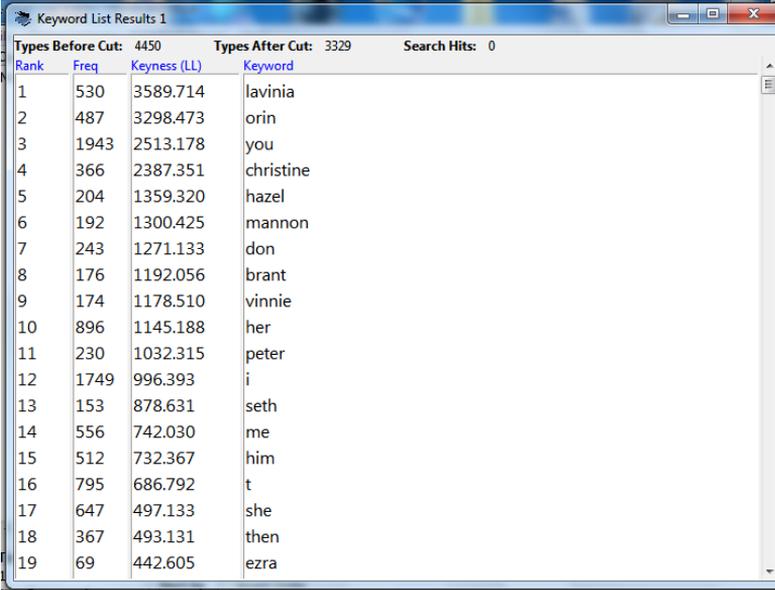
Key word in context (KWIC) is a corpus-based technique which identifies important words, or most frequently used words, in a given corpus as compared against a benchmark corpus. By using specific statistics for keyword analysis, a number of keywords that tend to occur more frequently in a target corpus when compared with its relative frequency in a reference corpus (Scott, 2010; Scott & Tribble, 2006) can be automatically identified. Keyness in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is examined against the backcloth of the reference corpus COCA (Corpus of

Contemporary American), and automatically generated using Antconc 3.4.

'Keyness' is a matter of being statistically unusual relative to some norm (Culpeper 2009, p.34). In the generated table of keyness in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, it is observed that keywords here relate to the text's 'aboutness'. 'Lavinia', 'Orin' and 'Christine' are the most key words in the text. The relationship among characters, especially these three, is the 'key' or the clue to the general theme of the play. The pronoun 'you' is also significant as it indicates the accusing tone prevailing all through the play.

The interactions among family members are analysed regarding the relationship among characters. Four types of interactions are detected and observed in the light of Table 1.

Table 1: Keyness in *Mourning Becomes Electra*



Rank	Freq	Keyness (LL)	Keyword
1	530	3589.714	lavinia
2	487	3298.473	orin
3	1943	2513.178	you
4	366	2387.351	christine
5	204	1359.320	hazel
6	192	1300.425	mannon
7	243	1271.133	don
8	176	1192.056	brant
9	174	1178.510	vinnie
10	896	1145.188	her
11	230	1032.315	peter
12	1749	996.393	i
13	153	878.631	seth
14	556	742.030	me
15	512	732.367	him
16	795	686.792	t
17	647	497.133	she
18	367	493.131	then
19	69	442.605	ezra

4.1.a. Mother-daughter interaction

The interaction between Christine and Lavinia, her daughter, is characterized by a significant use of challenging moves by the two participants. Features of typical mother-daughter discourse, such as agreement, compliments, and obedience do not occur. On the contrary, power asymmetry is reversed where the daughter assumes a higher conversational role than the mother. This is signified in a range of linguistic forms, such as the recurrent use of challenging moves and acts of accusation which are current in Christine-Lavinia discourse. In addition, there is a clear lack of conversational support as revealed by the continuous reciprocal acts of accusation throughout the interaction in the whole play.

Most of the interaction is dominated by the daughter and not by the mother. Lavinia is a conversant who initiates the exchanges, who speaks first and who speaks most. She is the dominant participant. Lavinia uses rhetorical questions (e.g. ‘has it been hard for you?’) and deprives her mother of her turn by providing a comment immediately after posing the question (e.g. ‘I’d never guess it’).

4.1.b. Husband-wife interaction

This type of interaction asserts the alienation that Ezra Mannon feels at home. It denotes also the dominance of Christine over her husband. This is articulated in her challenges with her husband which are characterized by challenging moves, acts of elicitation and directives. When Christine threatens Ezra that she will leave him, he does not hesitate to apologize. Nevertheless, she does not pay his apology any attention. Christine uses warnings in her interaction with her husband. She says to him:

- *Ezra, if you are going to say stupid things, I'll go in my own room.* (p. 100)

In the following interaction we find that more acts of elicitation are made by Ezra while Christine only replies with short sentences. This happens during Christine's deep thinking to kill Ezra. Her mind is occupied with the idea of getting rid of him so she is not an active participant during their conversation. She just keeps the passive side. This indicates her evasive and cunning character.

4.1.c. Mother-son interaction

The relationship between Orin and his mother Christine is typically a mother-son relationship. Their interactions usually have the characteristic that Orin usually supports his mother's moves. Even when he attempts some elicitation acts, they are only out of jealousy. One gets the impression that Orin suffers from Oedipus Complex. He kills his mother's lover because he thought that she 'betrayed' him. Most interactions illustrate how Orin is under his mother's thumb even though he has become a grown-up person.

Orin tries to express his deep love and jealousy to his mother. The mother tries to gain the son to her side. She easily persuades him that he is her only baby to make him forget all about Adam Brant, her lover. Orin's moves turn out very soon to be all supports of his mother's. It's Christine, the mother, who has power and dominance over her son. The son also madly loves his mother to the extent that he kills Adam Brant. When his mother commits suicide as a result, he also kills himself after suffering madness.

4.1.d. Father-daughter interaction

The relationship between Lavinia and her father, Ezra Mannon, is the same as that between Orin and his mother, Christine. Lavinia loves her father madly and she is jealous of her mother. She seems to suffer from Electra Complex, hence the title of the play. The interactions between Lavinia and her father are a few because Mannon is killed at the end of Part One of the trilogy. He appears only in two scenes in the play. However, the following interaction shows how far Lavinia's exchange structure with her father expresses her excessive love and blind obedience.

4.2. Frequency

The linguistic preference of choosing more lexical items than others in discourse reveals a lot about the author's world view. Since the Electra-myth is highly manifested in this trilogy through the family interrelationships, frequency is best examined in terms that insinuate or suggest the distribution of power among characters. Terms of address have an interpretive power in the analysis of interactions in dramatic discourse. They signify dominance, intimacy, solidarity, power, formality and politeness. According to a number of sociolinguists (Murphy 2010), mutual first name indicates equality and familiarity, whereas the use of first name without reciprocity is a heavy marker of power. 'Terms of address' in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a technique that can be used effectively to indicate different relationships within the same family.

Table 2: Frequency of Address Terms in *Mourning Becomes Electra*

Address Term	Homecoming	The Hunted	The Haunted
Ezra	37	23	8
Christine	53	36	0
Lavinia	47	50	30
Orin	25	123	95
Vinnie	49	57	67
Father	57	32	8
Mother	9	49	30
Dear	1	10	2
Darling	0	1	0
My boy	0	2	0
My baby	0	2	0
Young lady	2	0	0

Concordance hits of address terms in each part of *Mourning Becomes Electra* by AntConc 3.4.4

Concerning the aspects of terms of address, the analysis of the play is divided into four types of interaction, representing the different character-relationships in the play. The data are semi-automatically filtered so that figures match each section.

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Table 3: Relation between type of interaction and frequency in Mourning Becomes Electra (divided by parts)

Interaction	Homecoming		The Hunted		The Haunted	
Mother-daughter	Vinnie	3	Vinnie	58	Vinnie	67
	Mother	1	Mother	34	Mother	47
	Lavinia	-	Lavinia	50	Lavinia	29
	Dear	-	Dear	6	Dear	3
Husband-wife	Ezra	9	-----		-----	
	Christine	13	-----		-----	
	Dear	-	-----		-----	
Mother-son	Orin	25	Orin	123	Orin	114
	Mother	58	Mother	49	Mother	105
	My boy	-	My boy	3	My boy	-
	My baby	7	My baby	5	My baby	-
Father-daughter	Vinnie	49	-----		-----	
	Father	84	-----		-----	
	Lavinia	108	-----		-----	
	Young lady	2	-----		-----	

4.2.a. mother-daughter interaction

Despite the tense relationship and the mutual hatred between Lavinia and her mother, Christine, yet Christine always uses Lavinia’s nickname while addressing her. For example:

Christine: *Do you think I'll give you the satisfaction of seeing me grieve? Oh, no, Vinnie! You'll never have the chance to gloat!*

Christine never uses first name when she talks to Lavinia. She also never uses terms of endearment such as 'dear' and 'darling' which she uses frequently when she addresses her son, Orin. The use of the nickname here has the function of trying to be sweet with the enemy.

On the other hand, looking at the terms of address which Lavinia uses to address her mother, we find that she uses the term 'mother' in some exchanges. However, Lavinia uses very abusive and rude words to address her mother. This is unlike the system of address terms usually found in mother/daughter interaction. The following is an example:

Lavinia: *Stop lying, I tell you! I went upstairs! I -----*

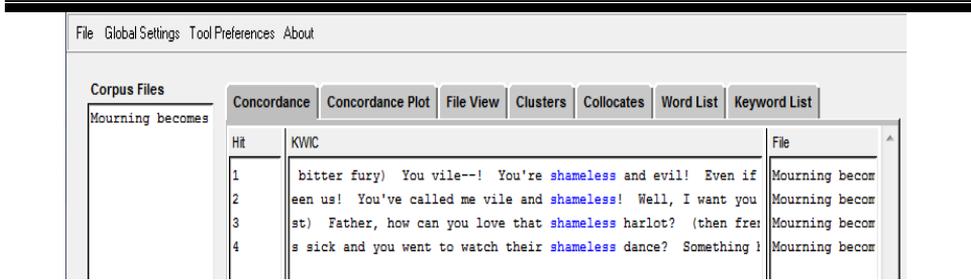
You vile -----! You're shameless and evil! Even if you are my mother, I say it!

Christine: *I – I knew you hated me, Vinnie ---- but not as bitterly as that!*

(pp. 54-55)

Lavinia refers to her mother as 'shameless' four times, as illustrated in the following screenshot.

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4.2. b. Husband-wife interaction

The interaction between Christine and her husband, Ezra Mannon, is characterized by the use of mutual first name. Nevertheless, Christine uses first name more than her husband (69 hits for Ezra, as opposed to). This indicates her dominance over him. Terms of endearment do not appear in the interaction between Christine and Ezra Mannon, which proves the lack of emotion between them, especially on Christine's side:

Mannon: *I've dreamed of coming home to you, Christine!*

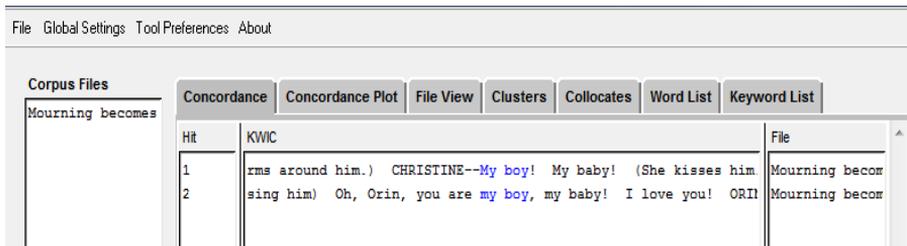
Christine: *I'm tired, Ezra.*
(p. 90)

Christine: *Don't talk, Ezra.*
(p. 91)

Christine: *Ezra, please.*
(p. 94)

4.2.c. Mother-son interaction

Orin is the only person in the family that receives a large number of endearment terms. Christine never addresses neither her daughter, nor her husband by any of these terms. The term ‘dear’, ‘darling’, ‘my boy’ and ‘my baby’ are used in the play by Christine to address her son, Orin:



The screenshot shows a software interface with a menu bar (File, Global Settings, Tool Preferences, About) and a toolbar with buttons for Concordance, Concordance Plot, File View, Clusters, Collocates, Word List, and Keyword List. A search box on the left contains the text 'Mourning becomes'. The main area displays a table with three columns: Hit, KWIC, and File. Two hits are visible:

Hit	KWIC	File
1	rms around him.) CHRISTINE--My boy! My baby! (She kisses him	Mourning becom
2	sing him) Oh, Orin, you are my boy, my baby! I love you! ORII	Mourning becom

This sheds light on the kind of relationship between Orin and his mother. Throughout the trilogy, there are some hints that Orin suffers from Oedipus complex. The way his mother addresses him and the way she talks to him recalls to our memory the famous novel *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence where the mother treats her sons as her lovers. Examples from the play illustrate this point:

Orin: *Mother!*

Christine: *My boy! My boy!*
(p. 128)

Christine: *I? Different? I don't think so, dear....*
(p. 128)

You poor darling, how you must have suffered?
Come on in, dear. It's chilly. Your poor head -----
(p. 128)

4.2.d. Father-daughter interaction

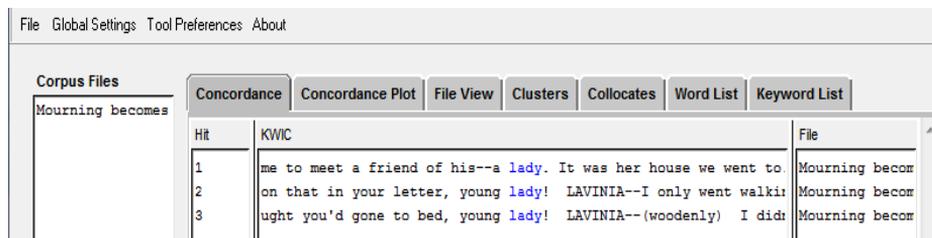
There is mutual love between the father and his daughter as revealed in the terms of address used in their interactions. In spite of the fact that there are very few interactions between Ezra Mannon and his daughter, Lavinia, the terms of address express this. Mannon uses the nickname to address his daughter:

Mannon: *It must be your bedtime, Vinnie.*
(p. 87)

Moreover, the father uses the term 'young lady' to address his daughter:

Mannon: *I notice you didn't mention that in your letter, young lady!* (p. 86)

This term has only two occurrences by Mannon and is not used by any other character.



The screenshot shows a software interface for text analysis. At the top, there are menu options: File, Global Settings, Tool Preferences, and About. Below this is a section for 'Corpus Files' with a list containing 'Mourning becomes'. A set of tabs is visible: Concordance (selected), Concordance Plot, File View, Clusters, Collocates, Word List, and Keyword List. The main area displays a concordance table with three columns: Hit, KWIC, and File. The table contains three rows of search results for the term 'lady'.

Hit	KWIC	File
1	me to meet a friend of his--a lady. It was her house we went to.	Mourning becom
2	on that in your letter, young lady! LAVINIA--I only went walki	Mourning becom
3	ught you'd gone to bed, young lady! LAVINIA--(woodenly) I didi	Mourning becom

However, terms of endearment are not used between the father and his daughter. This does not deny that fact that Lavinia loves her father so excessively that she suffers from Electra complex.

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It may pinpoint her psychological introvert nature as introduced in the Greek myth. She has emotional restrictions that hinder the expression of her emotions. However, she refers to him by the term 'Father' 57 times in the *Homecoming*, compared to only 9 times for the term 'mother'.

The screenshot displays the 'Concordance' tab of the Discourse-Myth interface. The search term 'Father' has been entered, resulting in 97 hits. The interface shows a list of concordance hits with columns for 'Hit', 'KWIC', and 'File'. The text is displayed in a monospaced font, with the search term 'Father' highlighted in blue. Below the concordance list, there are controls for search options (Words, Case, Regex), search window size (set to 50), and a 'Kwic Sort' section with checkboxes for Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. The 'Total No.' of hits is 1, and there are buttons for 'Start', 'Stop', and 'Sort'.

Hit	KWIC	File
1	e? LAVINIA--Of course not. Father would have let us know. PE:	Mourning becom
2	er. I've got to stay home. Father needs me. PETER--He's got :	Mourning becom
3	he news, I suppose? It means Father will be home soon! CHRISTII	Mourning becom
4	NIA--(startled--agitatedly) Father? No! It can't be! (then :	Mourning becom
5	girl who was taking care of Father's little sister who died, ar	Mourning becom
6	then with intensity) I love Father better than anyone in the w	Mourning becom
7	Everybody knows I take after Father! BRANT--(brought back with	Mourning becom
8	ly) You dare say that about Father! If he were here-- BRANT--	Mourning becom
9	nly your means of revenge on Father, is that it? BRANT--(stunne	Mourning becom
10	ing gesture. LAVINIA--Poor Father! (She hears a noise in the	Mourning becom
11	rait--quietly) Because it's Father's room. CHRISTINE--(starts,	Mourning becom
12	ou don't give one thought to Father--who is so good--who trusts	Mourning becom
13	Oh, how could you do this to Father? How could you? CHRISTINE:	Mourning becom
14	ou--then you've always hated Father? CHRISTINE--(bitterly) No	Mourning becom
15	You're only his revenge on Father! Do you know who he really	Mourning becom
16	nishment you could get. And Father would disown you publicly, :	Mourning becom
17	n't for your sake. It's for Father's. He hasn't been well late	Mourning becom
18	mise to be a dutiful wife to Father and make up for the wrong y	Mourning becom
19	Th--(sigh) Not for long! Father would use all his influence	Mourning becom

4.3. Collocation

O'Neill made use of motifs based on Greek myth that may be traced throughout the whole trilogy. The most

important of these is the concept of *fate* and *destiny*. The lexical item 'fate' occurs 29 times as 'type', and 40 times as 'token'. With this considerably frequent occurrence, it collocates with negative semantic prosodies of words like: 'tactlessly, forced, breaks'.

The screenshot shows a software interface with a menu bar (File, Global Settings, Tool Preferences, Help) and several tabs (Concordance, Concordance Plot, File View, Clusters/N-Grams, Collocates, Word List, Keyword List). The 'Collocates' tab is active, displaying a table of results for the search term 'fate'. The table has columns for Rank, Freq, Freq(L), Freq(R), Stat, and Collocate. Below the table are search options (Words, Case, Regex), window span settings, and sorting options.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	2	1	1	14.85747	tactlessly
2	1	1	0	13.85747	foretell
3	1	0	1	12.85747	store
4	1	0	1	11.85747	everett
5	1	0	1	10.27251	forced
6	1	0	1	10.27251	breaks
7	1	1	0	10.05012	able
8	1	1	0	9.85747	maybe
9	1	0	1	9.46515	hills
10	1	0	1	9.05012	mrs
11	1	1	0	8.90327	queer
12	1	1	0	8.33391	some
13	1	0	1	8.21361	remember
14	1	0	1	8.12955	his

The lexical item 'destiny' is lower in frequency than 'fate' (14 types, 20 tokens), however it collocates, not only with negative semantic prosodies, but with family members (mother and Mannon) as well. The lexical item 'death' as a pivotal concept in both the Electra myth and the trilogy has the highest frequency (275 type, 670 token). The collocates concomitant with the word 'death' are very revealing.

At the Discourse–Myth interface: A Corpus–based Analysis of Mourning Becomes Electra

Concordance | Concordance Plot | File View | Clusters/N-Grams | Collocates | Word List | Keyword List

Total No. of Collocate Types: 14 Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 20

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	0	1	12.85747	lives
2	2	2	0	12.15703	evil
3	2	1	1	11.46515	past
4	1	0	1	9.90327	our
5	1	0	1	9.33391	thought
6	1	0	1	9.07611	behind
7	1	1	0	7.30288	mother
8	1	1	0	7.27251	mannon
9	1	0	1	7.15703	out
10	4	3	1	5.79475	the
11	1	1	0	5.77001	that
12	1	1	0	5.41660	s
13	2	0	2	5.08516	i
14	1	0	1	4.90910	of

Search Term: Words Case Regex Advanced

Window Span: Same From... 5L To... 5R

Min. Collocate Frequency: 1

Search Term: destiny

Start Stop Sort

Sort by: Invert Order Sort by Stat

Clone Results

Concordance | Concordance Plot | File View | Clusters/N-Grams | Collocates | Word List | Keyword List

Total No. of Collocate Types: 285 Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 670

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	1	0	9.79138	whitewashed
2	1	0	1	9.79138	topmost
3	1	1	0	9.79138	stealing
4	1	0	1	9.79138	solemnly
5	1	0	1	9.79138	shudders
6	1	1	0	9.79138	scrupulous
7	1	1	0	9.79138	sabbaths
8	1	1	0	9.79138	remote
9	1	0	1	9.79138	prison
10	1	1	0	9.79138	perpetual
11	1	1	0	9.79138	meditated
12	1	0	1	9.79138	loss
13	1	1	0	9.79138	interruption
14	1	1	0	9.79138	household

Search Term: Words Case Regex Advanced

Window Span: Same From... 5L To... 5R

Min. Collocate Frequency: 1

Search Term: death

Start Stop Sort

Sort by: Invert Order Sort by Stat

Clone Results

4.3.a. Mother-daughter interaction

Lavinia, or Electra in the Greek Myth, has a very tense relation with her mother. Thus, as the collocates of the word daughter show, no words of positive connotations are

used. Since a word is known by the company it keeps, as the Neo-Firthians postulate, the word daughter has gained negative semantic prosody from collocates such as ‘widow’ and ‘confronting’.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	0	1	11.10258	wavering
2	1	1	0	11.10258	usual
3	1	0	1	11.10258	relationship
4	1	1	0	11.10258	flashes
5	1	0	1	11.10258	confronting
6	1	0	1	11.10258	builder
7	1	1	0	10.10258	widow
8	1	0	1	10.10258	spare
9	1	1	0	10.10258	revelling
10	1	0	1	10.10258	desired
11	1	0	1	10.10258	coddling
12	3	0	3	9.68755	rolling
13	3	0	3	9.68755	river
14	1	0	1	9.51762	regards

4.3.b. Husband-wife interaction

Though it lacks any endearment or feelings of love, the relationship between Ezra Mannon and his wife Christine is characterized by cunning and cheating on her part, as a feature of the Electra-myth. The collocates of the word 'husband' reflect this through the negative semantic prosodies pertained to it.

At the Discourse–Myth interface: A Corpus–based Analysis of Mourning Becomes Electra

The screenshot shows the Discourse-Myth interface with a search for the term 'husband'. The interface includes a menu bar (File, Global Settings, Tool Preferences, Help), a 'Corpus Files' list on the left, and a main window with tabs for Concordance, Concordance Plot, File View, Clusters/N-Grams, Collocates, Word List, and Keyword List. The 'Collocates' tab is active, displaying a table of collocates for the search term 'husband'.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	1	0	13.05012	compliments
2	1	0	1	12.05012	gallant
3	1	0	1	9.72819	abe
4	2	0	2	9.34968	portrait
5	1	0	1	9.24276	seemed
6	1	1	0	9.14323	whisper
7	1	0	1	9.14323	become
8	1	0	1	8.96265	minnie
9	1	0	1	8.65780	killed
10	1	0	1	8.65780	hills
11	1	1	0	8.40626	listen
12	1	0	1	8.24276	mrs
13	1	0	1	8.09592	queer
14	2	1	1	8.09592	old

Below the table, there are search controls: 'Search Term' (husband), 'Words' (checked), 'Case' (unchecked), 'Regex' (unchecked), 'Window Span' (Same), 'From...' (5L), 'To...' (5R), 'Min. Collocate Frequency' (1), and buttons for 'Start', 'Stop', 'Sort', and 'Clone Results'.

4.3.c. Mother-son interaction

Indicative as it seems to be, the collocates of the word ‘mother’ characterize the relationship between Orin and his mother Christine.

The screenshot shows a concordance tool interface with the following data:

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	1	0	8.30288	whirls
2	1	1	0	8.30288	wash
3	1	1	0	8.30288	threat
4	1	0	1	8.30288	thousand
5	1	1	0	8.30288	sworn
6	1	0	1	8.30288	supported
7	1	0	1	8.30288	stumbles
8	1	0	1	8.30288	strolls
9	1	0	1	8.30288	starving
10	1	1	0	8.30288	squabble
11	1	1	0	8.30288	spot
12	1	1	0	8.30288	size
13	1	0	1	8.30288	sidelong
14	1	1	0	8.30288	scirled

Search Term: mother
 Total No. of Collocate Types: 571
 Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 1880

As for the collocates of the word ‘son’, they almost all express dependency and cowardice: ‘servant’, ‘infantry’, ‘cowardly’, etc.

The screenshot shows a concordance tool interface with the following data:

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	1	0	11.95058	cheap
2	3	0	3	11.21361	nurse
3	2	0	2	10.95058	servant
4	1	0	1	10.95058	infantry
5	1	1	0	10.95058	cowardly
6	2	2	0	10.36562	xf
7	3	2	1	10.36562	marie
8	1	0	1	10.36562	lieutenant
9	1	1	0	9.95058	wonderful
10	1	1	0	9.95058	whose
11	1	0	1	9.95058	warningly
12	1	0	1	9.95058	canuck
13	1	0	1	9.36562	fighting
14	1	1	0	9.36562	claret

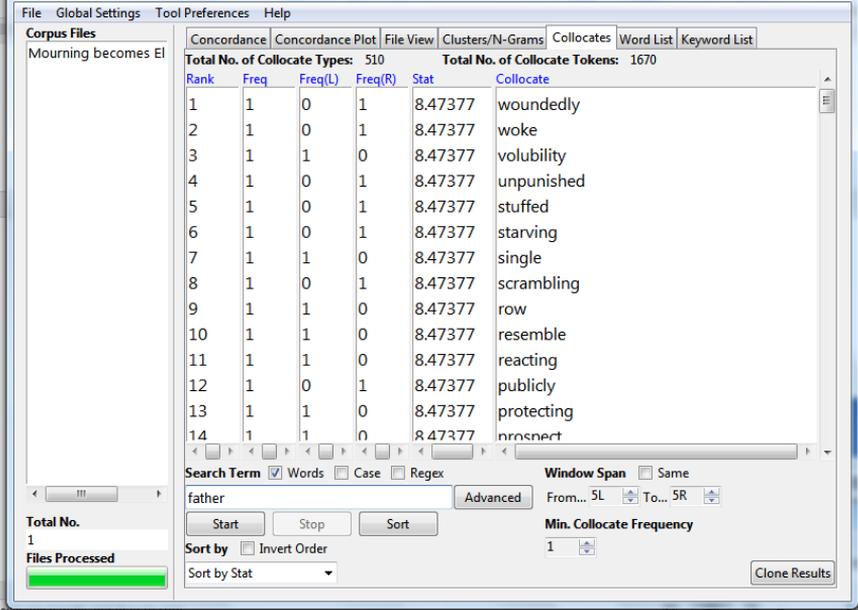
Search Term: son
 Total No. of Collocate Types: 83
 Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 150

4.3.d. father-daughter interaction

As miserable as the life and death of Mannon, the collocates of the lexical item 'father' are gloomy and

At the Discourse–Myth interface: A Corpus–based Analysis of Mourning Becomes Electra

clumsy. Words like ‘woundedly’, ‘starving’, ‘single’ give negative connotations as results show. O’Neill condenses the connotational representations of the Electra Myth through the shades of meaning surrounding the word ‘father’.



The screenshot shows the Discourse-Myth interface with a concordance search for the word 'father'. The search results are displayed in a table with the following columns: Rank, Freq, Freq(L), Freq(R), Stat, and Collocate. The search term is 'father', and the window span is set to 5L (left) and 5R (right). The minimum collocate frequency is set to 1. The results show 14 collocate types and 1670 tokens.

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	0	1	8.47377	woundedly
2	1	0	1	8.47377	woke
3	1	1	0	8.47377	volubility
4	1	0	1	8.47377	unpunished
5	1	0	1	8.47377	stuffed
6	1	0	1	8.47377	starving
7	1	1	0	8.47377	single
8	1	0	1	8.47377	scrambling
9	1	1	0	8.47377	row
10	1	1	0	8.47377	resemble
11	1	1	0	8.47377	reacting
12	1	0	1	8.47377	publicly
13	1	1	0	8.47377	protecting
14	1	1	0	8.47377	nnrsnert

5. Findings and Conclusion

Through a corpus-based analysis, the language of O’Neill’s trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* has been scrutinized with a view to depicting how what is mythical is correlated with what is real through discursive practices. Keyness, or Keyword in Context (KWIC) has been examined against the reference corpus COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American) to highlight the most significantly used words in the play. This reveals the major thematic lexical items that bring the Electra-myth into reality. *Frequency* is another technique used to shed light on the

discursive preferences suggested by the playwright to perpetuate the shades of meaning concomitant with the Electra-myth. The third technique is *collocation* or the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items within the text. Negative semantic prosodies coloured all four family interactions in the trilogy as they mirror the tragic incidents of the myth.

The analysis of mother-daughter interaction, for instance, gives a glimpse of the tense relationship between Lavinia and her mother, Christine Mannon, that is characterized by mutual hatred, disrespect and enmity. This untypical mother-daughter relationship has its atypical father-daughter/ mother-son counterparts that portray a tragic atmosphere shadowed by the gloomy scent of the Electra-myth. Discursive practices serve as linguistic realizations that bridge the gap between the mythical and the real.

This paper is an attempt to trace the linguistic features that construct the interplay between discourse and myth. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of corpus analysis are used as tools for analysis. The techniques suggested are keyword in context (KWIC), frequency and collocation. They have been applied to four types of interaction identified in the play: a) mother-daughter interaction; b) husband-wife interaction; c) mother-son interaction, and d) father-daughter interaction. These techniques have been useful tools for the linguistic interpretation of the play, i.e. how the talks of the characters in the play are true reflections of the way(s) they feel towards one another. Consequently, the analysis eventually sheds light on O'Neill's view of the nature of human relationships as treated dramatically throughout the play and as mirroring the Greek myth.

In an attempt to answer the research questions, the discursive practices that give the spell of 'myth' are examined in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. These are manifested in the configuration of linguistic units that both formally and functionally bring to mind the ancient Greek Electra myth. Characters interactions are linguistically portrayed to serve both the *mythical* and the *real*.

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Though the theme of the trilogy is plotted under the hood of the mythical, the real is crystal clear in the modern realistic stream of events. Corpus-based analysis has been used to reveal the discourse-myth interface.

Intertwining linguistic analysis with cultural studies on the discursive level serves a multiplicity of implications. Trapping heaven and earth in a cage of form, to quote McLeish, is exactly what writers do. As linguists, we carry the burden of scrutinizing this cage to see what is kept beyond it. Linguistic tools are adapted to depict how the universe is wrapped through the writer's viewpoint to reshape reality.

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