

Adriana Bulz  
University of Bucharest

**NEOCLASSICISM AS NEGATED ALTERITY: PETRU COMARNESCU'S  
READING OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S DRAMA THROUGH THE GRID OF  
KALOKAGATHON**

**Abstract:** *Given his background in aesthetics, as proved by his doctoral dissertation on the subject of "the good and the beautiful", Kalokagathon (1946), Petru Comarnescu was able to resonate on a deep level with the understanding of fate in Eugene O'Neill's dramas, whose heroes are doomed as dreamers and yet refuse to forego their dreams, the intangibility of one's ideal giving the measure of individual greatness. For Comarnescu, the idea of self-building is similar to the making of a work of art, both constructs tending towards harmonious unity, to be achieved through the joint effort of imagination and reason. The paper deals with the Romanian critic's subjective response to O'Neill's work; it is an analysis from the perspective of reception theory, in which the critic under discussion is understood as a subjectively creative reader. Wolfgang Iser and Norman Holland are two reception critics whose terminology I find useful for the present discussion. My aim is to show that Comarnescu's reading of O'Neill was an instance of subjective identification or negated alterity, a mapping of the critic's ideas onto the artistic universe of the playwright. The similarity of opinions underlined by a common theme for both writer and critic – namely an ethics of identity that could be termed neo-classical – favored this superimposition. Their shared humanistic perspective on life and art was close to the ancient Greeks' conception of destiny, as mirrored in the logic of tragedy. Through this analysis I aim to point out the originality of Comarnescu's viewpoint regarding O'Neill's dramas and also to explain his critical fixation with the American playwright, by exposing their 'elective' intellectual 'affinities'.*