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## The Philosophy of Eugene O'Neill

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF EUGENE O'NEILL

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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1929

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Eugene O'Neill, the American playwright! That these terms are almost synonymous is the conclusion one is forced to, if, to him, a study of contemporary dramatic criticism of the last fourteen years is any criterion.

Oliver Saylor calls O'Neill "the personal symbol of our awakening American drama" (134:27.) and further substantiates this by declaring that "the variety of his work thus far, the vigor of his imagination, the originality of his technic, the evident growth of both from play to play - all proclaim him the American playwright". (134:28.)

That "Eugene O'Neill has brought to playwriting and artistic integrity and a disciplined craftsmanship that have established playwriting in America among the fine arts", is the opinion of Thomas Dickinson. (51:56.)

Barret H. Clark asserts that "by all odds the most gifted American dramatist we have ever had is Eugene O'Neill", ( 42: 7. ) and George Jean Nathan becomes almost panegyric: "When one speaks of the American drama one says O'Neill, and is done." (113:9).

Mr. Nathan may be partially justified in this broad statement if mere output of plays is any indication of primacy. One of the most remarkable facts about Mr. O'Neill

is his literary fecundity. In the fifteen years from 1914 to 1929 he has written approximately fifty dramas, at least thirty-nine of which have had some sort of production.

These plays are the result of "his desire to express what he knew of life, his philosophy, his aspirations, and his dreams in the form of drama". (42:12.)

Since it is almost axiomatic that the philosophy of any artist is reflected to a certain extent in his art, this monograph is an attempt to trace through a study of the dramatist's plays his changing outlook on life, and to determine, if possible, the philosophy of Eugene O'Neill.

As an approach to the problem, all the available plays of the author have been examined, as have most of the fugitive studies of his works found in magazines.

Not only may a man's philosophy be reflected in his art, but his art may be so autobiographical that a survey of his work would be incomplete without a review of his life. Such is the case with O'Neill, a real child of the theatre. He was born in New York in 1888. He is the son of James O'Neill, the actor of Monte Cristo fame, and Ella Quinlan, characterized as impressively beautiful and extraordinarily devout.

In a letter to Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, O'Neill wrote:

"My first seven years were spent mainly in the larger towns all over the United States - my mother accompanying my father on his road tours in Monte Cristo and repertoire, although she was never an actress and had rather an aversion for the stage in general." ( 42:7. )

After six years of Catholic boarding school life, and four years preparation for college at the Betts Academy at Stamford, Connecticut, he entered Princeton. From this point on he tells us:

"My undergraduate education was confined to a freshman year at Princeton University, Class of 1910. My first job was secretary of a mail order firm in New York. In 1909 I went with a mining engineer on a gold prospecting trip to Spanish Honduras, Central America. At the end of six months I was invalided home- tropical malarial fever - no gold. After that I became assistant manager of a theatrical company touring the East and middle West.

My first voyage to sea followed - sixty-five days on a Norwegian barque, Boston to Buenos Aires. In Argentine I worked at various occupations - in the drafting department of the Westinghouse Electrical Company, in the wool house of a packing plant at La Plata, in the offices of the Singer Sewing Machine Company at Buenos Aires. Followed another voyage at sea, tending mules in a cattle steamer, Buenos Aires to Durban, (South Africa) and return. After that a lengthy period of complete destitution in Buenos Aires - 'on the beach' - terminated by my signing on as ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer bound home for New York. My final experience at sea followed soon after this - able seaman on the American Line, New York, Southampton. The next winter I played a part in my father's vaudeville version of Monte Cristo, touring the Far West. Then I worked as reporter on the New London, Connecticut, Telegraph. My health broke down, my lungs being affected, and I spent six months in a sanitarium thinking it over. It was in this enforced period of reflection that the urge to write first

came to me. The next fall - I was twenty-four - I began my first play The Web. In 1914-1915 I was a student in Professor Baker's English 47 at Harvard. The summer of 1916 I spent at Provincetown. It was during that summer the Provincetown Players, who made the original productions of nearly all my short plays in New York, were first organized. " (124:7. )

From this time on Mr. O'Neill was one of the chief contributors to that group, "the impelling desire of which was to establish a stage where playwrights of sincere, poetic, literary and dramatic purpose could see their plays in action, and superintend their production without submitting to the commercial managers interpretation of public taste. Equally it was to afford an opportunity for actors, producers, scenic and costume designers, to experiment with a stage of extremely simple resources - it being the idea of the "Players" that elaborate settings are unnecessary to bring out the essential qualities of a good play". (161:323.)

The Provincetown Players produced all but one of O'Neill's short plays during the four years from 1916 to 1920. The list includes Thirst (1916), Bound East for Cardiff (1916), Abortion (1916), Fog (1917), The Sniper (1917), Before Breakfast (1916-17), Ele (1917), Moon of the Caribbees (1918), The Rope (1918), Where the Cross is Made (1918), Exorcism (1920), The Emperor Jones (1920), Diff'rent (1920), and in 1922 The Hairy Ape.



From 1920 on Mr. O'Neill has remained the outstanding figure in the American theatre. Since then he has written nine more plays, all of which have been produced. His fame has become international, his leading plays having been produced in Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Dresden, Rome, and London.

Three times he has received the Pulitzer Prize; in 1920 for Beyond the Horizon, in 1922 for Anne Christie, and in 1928 for Strange Interlude and once the medal awarded for artistic achievement by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

At the age of forty-one years O'Neill has become recognized as the pre-eminent American playwright, the master of expressionism of realism, of psychological reaction, of tragedy, and of a new and virile kind of romance". (133:27.)

Though Mr. O'Neill, in common with many another artist, has definitely repudiated his first public volume of plays, our survey would be incomplete unless we included Thirst (1916) as representative of his earliest technic and philosophy. Because of the relative unfamiliarity of these five early one-act plays, a brief synopsis of each will be given.

In the The Web, the first play that was preserved, the scene is "a squalid bedroom on the top floor of a rooming house, in the lower East Side of New York. Rose Thomas, a tubercular prostitute, has a baby whose presence on one fourth of the bed irritates Steve, a "cadet". He tells her: "Git dat kid outa here or I'll put yuh in the cooler sure as hell!". (The web has enmeshed her.) Enraged, she rushes at Steve, who in the ensuing struggle knocks her down. At this moment another man, Tom Moran, a fugitive from justice, rescues her, cowers Steve, and orders him away. Moran gives money to Rose to escape, but Steve, who has been hiding, stretches his hand around the side of the window, kills Moran, throws the gun into the room, and disappears. A moment later the police come, find Rose with the roll of money and the gun on the floor. Rose is taken away. "The First Plain Clothes Man goes over to the bed and cuddles the baby on his lap with elephantine playfulness.

The Child (feebly): 'Maamaaa!

The First Plain Clothes Man:- Mama's gone. I'm your Mama now'".

Thirst portrays three characters, a Gentleman, a Dancer, and a West Indian Mulatto Sailor, marooned on a raft on the still surface of a shark-infested sea. The negro's passivity convinces the Gentleman and the Dancer that he has water. The Dancer offers first her diamond necklace, then herself for a drink, but the negro stolidly denies he has any. The woman insanely dances until she falls dead. The negro, sharpening his knife and glancing at the Dancer says: "We shall eat. We shall drink." The Gentleman, true to his type, horrified, pushes the body off the raft. Infuriated, the negro plunges the knife into his breast. "As he falls backward into the sea one of his clutching hands fastens itself in the neck of the negro's jersey. He plunges in headlong after him.--- The black stain on the water widens. --On the raft a diamond necklace lies glistening in the blazing sunshine."

Recklessness is purely melodramatic. The old triangle plot is brought into service; this time two men and a woman serve. Stripped to essentials we have the engrossed business man returning from a two-week's absence to learn from a jealous maid of his young wife's affair with the chauffeur. The husband, knowing it means death, orders the

chauffeur to drive a machine with a defective steering gear to the village for repairs. During the absence of the chauffeur, the husband tricks his wife into confessing her love for his driver, and promises to release her that she may marry him, just as the dead body of her lover is brought in. The wife, in desperation, rushes upstairs, and shoots herself.

Warnings , a one-act play in two scenes, depicts the hopeless desperation of Knapp, a wireless operator on the S. S. Empress. Though his doctor has warned him that his hearing may desert him at any moment, nevertheless, driven by economic urge he ships, not daring to tell his employers of his impending infirmity. This trip proves to be the fatal one. The ship hits a derelict and is sinking. The knowledge that he has lost the ship for the captain overwhelms Knapp, who in abject despair, shoots himself.

Fog, a branch of the Warnings play, which is the only one of the first group of one-acters that in any way attempts to reach out beyond the bounds of surface realism, incorporates a delicate symplism, embodied in the characters.

These consist of a Poet, a Man of Business, a Polish Peasant Woman, and a Dead Child, survivors from the S.S. Empress. They are discovered drifting helplessly in a dense fog off the Grand Banks of New Foundland. The lowered temperature warns them that they have floated to the edge of an iceberg. The whistle of a steamer revives hope in the Business Man, a hope that is speedily squelched by the Poet's refusal to permit the Business Man to signal the steamer, lest it crash into the iceberg. For the moment it seems as though rescue were impossible; then the fog lifts, and the boat approaches. The officer tells the rescued that it is the voice of the child that has guided the sailors to the life-boats. The Poet answers: "The child has been dead twenty-four hours. He died at dawn yesterday."

Barrett H. Clark has this to say: "We see, - that the play is not conceived as a realistic transcript of life: the Poet is a symbolic embodiment of idealism, and the Business Man is an abstract figure suggesting materialism"- (42:38.)

And again "Fog is a dramatic parable with a sudden flash of beauty at the end." (42:38.)

The weaknesses in these plays are apparent. While O'Neill himself listed Thirst as a tragedy, it, with

the others, falls short of fulfilling the denotative definition which calls for a serious theme, given dignified treatment, usually ending in disaster, to say nothing of the connotative definition given by Masefield who declares that: "Tragedy at its best is a vision of the heart of life. The heart of life can only be laid bare in the agony and exultation of dreadful acts". (103:1.)

These plays are not real tragedy. In each case the struggle is between man and his fate or destiny, never within his own character. We do not see any "agony and exultation of dreadful acts within the heart of life." Rather, there is an absorption with externals, never with souls. In Recklessness there is a faint hint of character struggle, but the elevation and exultation are lacking.

These plays contain a harshness, a fatalistic pessimism which seem to betray, unawares what Robert Lynd calls "mechanical malice on the part of destiny or providence or the playwright." (95:139.).

In the stage directions of The Web we find this: "She (Rose) realized the futility of all protest, the maddening hopelessness of it all" and later on: "She seems to be aware of something in the room which none of the others can see - perhaps the personification of the ironic life

force that has crushed her."

This seems to be representative of O'Neill's earliest philosophy.

A marked absence of plot characterizes the structure of the three sea plays of this group. They are really no more than sketches. In the two others, much more complication is evident. However, it is weak and extremely obvious. The most Mr. Clark will concede for these plays is that "they show a knowledge of the technical side of the theatre, and are potentially dramatic". (42:39.)

Characterization is decidedly weak. We can't feel that these are real people. Rather, they seem abstractions. They lack the qualities that round out character. At the most, only two motives of action are attributed to any one character. The resulting unreality will not permit us to sympathize with them in their perplexities. We may look with interest at their abnormal reactions and behavior, but we are not moved to share their experiences.

In some spots the dialogue is good, but most of it is forced and unnatural. In Thirst the speeches lack the fervor and intensity the situation would seem to demand. Not once is "do not" contracted to don't, yet we know agony and deep emotion tend to terseness in speech. This may

seem a trivial point, yet it slows the action intolerably.

However, paradoxical it may appear, it is the dialogue that reveals the sincerity of the author. The downright earnestness pervading the dialogues gives the plays a significance their stereotyped melodramatic plots could never obtain for them.

In Fog we find only a hint of lyrical qualities in this first group of plays. Some of the Poet's speeches have a slight wistfulness and understanding that give beauty of thought and atmosphere to the play.

"Incredibly bad" is the brief comment with which Oliver Saylor disposes of the "Thirst" volume. (134:32.)

George Pierce Baker is not quite as merciless. He says: "His first volume of one-act plays "Thirst" are melodramatic in a certain overstanding of stage values and a greater feeling for the theatre than for human qualities. Yet there was in them power and promise, if crude." (12:789.)

The Long Voyage Home with its setting in a London seaman's dive, is a sombre episode of the dumb nostalgia of a simple sailor for the mountain farm where he was born. The 'Glencairn' crew have just been paid off.



Olson, the Swede, who has for years planned to go home and start farming, seems to be about to realize his ambition, for he refuses to drink, and squander his money as formerly. Nevertheless, he is persuaded to take a soft drink, which is drugged. He is robbed, and shanghaied on the "worst ship dat sail to sea" as Olson had previously indignantly declared.

A moment later Driscoll appears, and being told that Olson had disappeared with one of the girls, grins, and remarks that it's lucky Olson is sober or he'd be stripped of his last cent. Then he calls for Irish whiskey.

That note of ironic frustration is characteristic of O'Neill.

In the Zone, is another example of suggested tragedy. The Glencairn has just entered the submarine zone at midnight in the year 1915. Smitty is observed behaving suspiciously; the others think he is a German spy, open his trunk, take out what they think may be a bomb, submerge it in water, and then open it, to find only a bunch of letters from Smitty's girl. Smitty enters, and is bound by his companions who read on still, looking for

damaging evidence, and finding none, but incidentally learning the tragedy of Smitty's life. Because he drank, his girl had jilted him, and he had gone to sea.

Smitty writhes in humiliation and anger; the men are abashed, and release him in silence. From the rubber bag a small white object falls and drops noiselessly on the floor. It is, Driscoll tells Davis, "a bit of a dried-up flower, - a rose, maybe. Perhaps it is that final touch which caused the London critic to declare "It is a fair piece of stage craft, but in spite of its rather deliberate cruelty it is at bottom just sentimentality à rebours." (24:407. )

O'Neill himself criticized In the Zone , expressing his impatience with popular approval. He writes in a letter to Barrett H. Clark, who had highly praised it:

"To me it seems the most insignificant of all the plays. It is too facile in its conventional technic, too full of clever theatrical tricks, and its long run as a successful headlines in vaudeville proves conclusively to my mind that there must be 'something rotten in Denmark'. At any rate this play in no way represents the true me or what I desire to express. It is a situation drama lacking all spiritual import - there is no big feeling for life inspiring it.

Given the plot and a moderate ability to characterize any industrious playwright could have reeled it off..... I consider In the Zone a conventional construction of the theatre as it is. (124:7. )

In referring to The Rope Mr. Oliver M. Sayler characterizes it as "a study in the sour and sardonic consequences of greed", (134:33.), a designation which fits it perfectly. In this bitter play we have a representation of hatred and revenge between father and son, father and daughter, brother and sister, brother and brother-in-law, and father-in-law and son-in-law.

Briefly the plot of this hideous story may be summarized as follows: Abraham Bentley, a hard militant, Christian New England miser has hoarded and hidden a treasure of gold pieces which his thieving son and unscrupulous son-in-law try unavailingly to locate. The old man refuses to divulge his hiding place. From this point on chicanery, a maltreated woman and a half-wit child, a mortgaged farm, and desire for revenge rampant in the minds of all form the horrible and grim motif of the story of the rope which the old man had suspended from a rafter in the barn, in hopes that his purloining son would return and hang himself.

Fate ironically frustrates all their revengeful desires by permitting the imbecile child to discover and toss into the sea the much-sought gold pieces.

There is an unnecessary amount of exposition in this play; as a result the movement is slow.

The usual O'Neillian vigor of dialogue is present, and strangely enough Mr. Clark finds a "grim beauty in the history of the characters." He corroborates his opinion by a statement Mr. O'Neill made years later. "There is beauty even in its (life's) ugliness." (42:48.)

To Eugene O'Neill alone belongs the prerogative of having projected the seaman into literature and the theatre. In support of this statement we find: "He is practically our first and only dramatist of the sea. His work, as critics of no less distinction than George Jean Nathan have pointed out, has an authenticity and vigor quite unparalleled by any of our advertized journeymen playwrights of the Broadway school. His plays suggest the work of Joseph Conrad in their marvelous fidelity to seafaring folk, but they are never imitations of the English novels." (107:159.)

Mr. Ernest Boyd in his Portraits Real and Imaginary adds corroborations to this assertion by explaining:

O'Neill has in his blood and in his imagination the roving, restless impulse which drive men to the sea, traps them in their own weakness, tortures them and then lulls them from time to time, but the curious wild poetry of the sea, which is the will-o-wisp after which they grope. These are the men O'Neill describes", (26:73. )and these are the seven men we find in the seven sketches of life on or near the sea, published under the title of the first, "The Moon of the Caribbees".

The Moon of the Caribbees itself, while theatrically the weakest of the group, is saturated with tropic atmosphere and coloring. Not Smitty, the nostalgic British sailor, who steels himself against memories of home by rum, but the spirit of the sea, is in this play, the hero. Mr. O'Neill himself, in a letter to Mr. Clark, explains why to him The Moon works with truth. "In The Moon, posed against a background of that beauty, sad because it is eternal, which is one of the revealing moods of the sea's truth, his (Smitty's) silhouetted gestures of self-pity are reduced to their proper insignificance, his thin whine of weakness is lost in the silence it was mean enough to disturb; we get the perspective to judge him - and the others - and we

and his sentimental posing much more out of harmony with truth, much less in tune with beauty, than the honest vulgarity of his mates." (42:43.)

Because O'Neill has both seen and lived this life before the mast, and because his whole nature is cognizant of the very spirit of these seamen, his interpretation of their moods has authenticity. He interprets for us the inarticulate and unexpressive "mates", those wild, roving, adventurous, pessimistic, disillusioned beings who feel and suffer deeply, but cannot analyze the emotions and moods which enslave them.

These are real people. Benjamin Ceseare, reviewing a recent revival at the Provincetown Playhouse of these four "masterpieces of dramatic art", as he calls them, commands his readers to go join the "audience watch the soul weltering in raw, primitive emotions and see the universal caged beast loose when he takes to drink after coming home.

"In these sea plays we see the beginning of O'Neill. In this special field of evoking fundamental human emotions in creating the drunken filthy, loyal, sailor O'Neill has never bettered himself in his 'higher phases'-----  
"Go down to Macdougall Street and study Yank, Driscoll, Scotty,

Old Tom, Ivan, and the rest in The Moon, In the Zone, Bound East for Cardiff and The Long Voyage Home (the heart breaking pathos and terrible irony of this latter play) and if you do not say these are the most vital, vivid, living creations on the American stage, or on any stage for that matter, then you should attend only doll baby movies!" (181:76.)

In the series of four episodes which make up the Glencairn cycle two characters, Driscoll and Cocky, appear in all four plays, and five others, Olson, Smitty, Paul, Davis, and Ivan are present in three of them.

The Bound East for Cardiff episode is played during "a foggy night on the voyage midway between New York and Cardiff." It is a pathetic episode depicting the tongue-tied friendship between the two bruisers (Yank and Driscoll), that even death cannot loose into words. Yank lies dying in his bunk while the others talk, laugh, and smoke. He takes a turn for the worse, calls Driscoll, rambles on, wishing he and Driscoll had not taken this last trip, and dies.

That intensity of emotion which characterizes O'Neill is here. He has chosen a dramatic moment and presented it with power and simplicity.

Edmund Burke once made the remark: "All men that are ruined are ruined on the side of their natural propensities." So in The Dreamy Kid which Montrose J. Moses says is "an essayal at delineation of negro weakness" (107:158.), we have more than the brief story of a negro gangster and murderer, pursued by the police, who returns to his dying grandmother, and is caught.

The Dreamy Kid displays the weakness, natural to the negro, in his fidelity to the vein of fatal softness, accompanied by a superstitious awe, which impels him to remain at the side of his old mammy, risking certain death rather than the curse of an old negro woman.

Again, an ironic fate decoys an impotent human being to his death.

Before Breakfast is a naturalistic monologue suggestive of Strindberg in its clear-cut and powerful projection of incompatible temperaments. Mrs. Rowland, the materialistic, slatternly wife of Alfred, the poetical, improvident, dreamer, nags him until she hears the drip-drip of something in the bed-room. Alfred has cut his throat.

It is interesting to note in connection with this play that this is the only production in which Eugene



O'Neill ever took any part. In this one would be tempted to call it only a manual role since his only appearance was the projection of his hand around the door to receive the shaving water.

The philosophy revealed in these three plays, The Rope, Before Breakfast, and The Dreamy Kid betrays a growing interest in psychological reactions and mental perplexities. Fate still seems to predominate the lives of men too weak to resist its ironic brutality.

Since O'Neill is not drawing from his own experiences for his characters, they lack some of his former virility and convincingness. In fact, these plays seem rather melodramatic. This lack of complete sincerity precludes the possibility of beauty and lyricism in dialogue.

Because of the great variation in qualities between the "sea plays" and the other three one-act plays we shall treat them as two different groups.

That "the sea lives, not spiritually, but humanly rough in these sea plays" is the opinion of Montrose J. Moses, who further asserts, "There is something outside of faith, something fatalistic in his ironic playing with life and death. The sea has failed to leave O'Neill with any lyric impulses." (107:158).

The structure of the sea plays is not as complicated as that of the Thirst group. In fact, these are hardly more than sketches containing not a small amount of limping action and some conventional motivation. What contributes most to that unified impression so necessary to the perfect one-act play is the emphasis on characterization brought out in virile, racy dialogue. As has been said, "Always O'Neill cuts down to the elemental emotion of his drama. However realistic may be his settings, and to some extent his characters, he is principally concerned with the emotional, the inner life of his dramatis personae." (17:855.)

On the whole, the sea plays are permeated by the author's rather restricted, if intense, outlook on life, and by an impassive, impersonal observance of the grim part played

by fate with the destinies of souls too weak to resist.

Because Mr. O'Neill wished to be represented on the Provincetown Players' opening bill for 1918-19, he contracted a four-act play Gold to one act, which melodramatic expedient he labeled Where the Cross is Made. This will be discussed later in connection with Gold, produced in 1920.

In Ile we have the cruel tragedy of an all absorbing passion for an idea wrecking sanity and happiness. The play opens on the last day of the two year period for which Captain Keeney's whaling crew have signed up. Until now the ship has been ice-bound; no whales have been sighted, the crew are mutinous, and Annie, his wife, is nearly insane from loneliness and monotony. The Captain quells the mutiny, and has just yielded to his wife's entreaties to turn south for home, without his full ship of "ile" just as clear water ahead and whales are sighted. He instantly reverses his decision. His wife succumbs to insanity. Captain Keeney, of Calvinistic conscience, is an unforgettable figure. Driven by that ferocious pride he says to his mate,

"It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern Seas, Tom, but I can't go back to homeport with a measly four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that the truth?"

Annie's wild, pathetic appeal,

"Then do this this once for my sake for God's sake - take me home! It's killing me, this life - the brutality and cold and horror of it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can hear the silence threatening me - day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. (Sobbing). I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid, for the love of God, take me home."

rouses a terrific struggle in her husband's iron spirit, and he assents reluctantly.

"I'll do it, Annie - for your sake - if you say it's needful for you."

This momentary softening renders more ironic his sudden grim reversal of decision the instant he hears that there is a clear passage to the northward. His love for his wife is disregarded.

"And I was going home like a yaller dog" he says derisively to himself. Then turning sternly to his wife, he unconsciously gives voice to the philosophy embodied in that ineffaceable pride that dominates his life:

"Woman, you ain't adoin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em. You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to get the ile, I tell ye."

That O'Neill has acquired the expertness of a practitioner is shown in the swift movement and interaction of the plot, but more so, perhaps, in the emotional intensity

embodied in the terse dialogue. In this play, more than any other of his one-act groups O'Neill has fulfilled the requirements for effective dialogue as set forth by Mr. Gibbs, who states: "The dramatist must always be trying to attain the dramatic mot juste, the word or sentence which is recognized as the all sufficient expression of the one thought worth thinking at the moment. And out of this absence of rhetoric, this utter simplicity and straightforwardness will emanate the atmosphere of the play." (62: 48. )

"If I regard O'Neill correctly, he means that we all dream beyond our power, and that often the bad men, the failures, are those who have dreamed most bravely and passionately." (51:56.)

In Robert Mayo, protagonist and material failure of Beyond the Horizon, we see a sensitive idealistic New Englander who dreamed passionately but lacked the courage to live his dreams.

Robert Mayo has been dominated his entire life by a wanderlust, which is about to be realized as the play opens. He is to sail for the beloved Indies of his imagination on his Uncle Dick's ship. His brother Andrew, born of the soil, exactly an opposite type to Robert, is well satisfied to remain at home and help his father on the farm. The

allure of the "far off and the unknown, the mystery and spell of the East.....the joy of wandering on and on in quest of the secret that is hidden just over the horizon" holds no temptation for Andrew, who however, rejoices in the realization of his brother's dreams.

Ruth Atkins, the neighbor's daughter, whom both brothers have loved, appears to favor Andrew, and the matter is considered closed. Both Robert and Andrew understand and are satisfied.

With the advent of Ruth on the evening before Robert's departure the situation changes. She impulsively rejects Andrew and with a passionate cry implores Rob , "Oh, Rob - don't go away!" The revelation of Ruth's love for him changes Robert's plans. Andrew ships to sea in his stead, and thus each brother has chosen a life pursuit which crosses with his inborn temperament.

Inevitable tragedy results. From this point on we have a relentless portrayal of deterioration and decay. Ruth soon discovers that, after all, it was Andrew she loved, not Robert.

Three years of unsuccessful effort to run the farm pass, and Robert, unhappy, disillusioned and ill, has only his two-year old Mary to comfort him. Andrew returns

home for a visit, but does no more than intensify the situation. Not any of the romance of the sea or foreign ports has touched him, and he further prosaically dispossesses Ruth of any idea she might have had that he still cares for her, with the words : " I want you to believe I put all that silly nonsense back of me a long time ago - and now - it seems - well, as if you'd always been my sister, that's what, Ruth. "

After five years of physical and mental retrogression on the part of Ruth and Robert, Andrew, summoned from New York by Ruth, is amazed and horrified to find evidences of decay and actual poverty in the once fairly prosperous farm. What distresses him most, though, is the condition of Robert, who is in the advanced stages of tuberculosis. The specialist he has brought with him to examine Robert tells him flatly that there is no hope for his brother, and Robert overhears the verdict. He makes one last desperate effort to reach the hilltop, and when Ruth and Andy find him there, he tells them in a voice suddenly vibrant with the joy of hope: " You mustn't feel sorry for me. It's ridiculous! Don't you see, I'm happy at last - because I'm making a start to the far off places - free-free! Freed from the farm - free to wander on and on-

eternally! Even the hills are powerless to shut me in now.' Raising himself on his elbow, his face radiant, he points to the horizon. "Look! Isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices, calling me to come - and this time I'm going - I'm free! It isn't the end. I've won my trip - the right of release - beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad - glad - for my sake! "

So it would seem that his cherished dream has paid for his suffering and disillusionment.

However, the stage production was not played as O'Neill had written it, with the last scene on the hill-top, where is established the real motif of the play, Robert Mayo's aspiration, which as a boy he had dreamed of and as a man given up at the demand of Ruth's desire. The stage presentation closes in the farmhouse, Andrew in his despairing love for his brother denouncing Ruth for not having lied to Andrew that he might die happy in the belief she still loved him.

As in all of O'Neill's, a note of irony pervades Beyond the Horizon. Pierre Loving finds this difference, however: "Previous to Beyond the Horizon the note of irony is superhuman and external to the dynamic will of the character. There is a touch of cold fatalism about it."



In Beyond the Horizon he declares that "the ironic note is made human; it is particularized and given a local temperamental beauty.----The tragic conflict is real and worth while; the exercise of the human will may produce grief, but at least it has an even chance with events." (93:519.)

Beyond the Horizon marks Mr. O'Neill's first conscious deviation from conventional theatric technic. Among the many criticisms leveled at the play that of Mr. Louis V. Defoe seemed the most irritatingly admonitory. He reproves: "His instinct for the theatre has not taught him that the theatre must defer to certain practical demands. He has not yet learned that brevity is a virtue. His technical method, surprisingly effective as it is on one side is arbitrary and wilful, on the other. He will yet discover that, however minutely he aims to analyze his characters, he must respect mechanical necessity, and must not write his plays in what amount to six acts." (48:33.)

This last comment seemed to particularly gall Mr. O'Neill, because, in a rather hurt, naive letter to Mr. Barrett H. Clark he defends himself:

"You remember when you read Beyond, you remarked about its being 'an interesting technical experiment'. Why is it, I wonder, that not one other critic has given me credit for a deliberate departure in form in search of a greater flexibility. They have all accused me of bungling

through ignorance - whereas, if I had wanted to, I could have laid the whole play in the farm interior, and made it tight as a drum, a la Pinero. Then, too, I imagine the symbolism I intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the program. It rather irks my professional pride, you see, to be accused of ignorance of conventional everyday technic. I, a Baker 47 alumnus ---." (42:53.)

The symbolism of the six alternating in-door - out-door scenes was that of a tide-like rhythm in the lives of the characters, and Mr. Clark declares that "even in this first of his long plays O'Neill was striving for new methods of expressing the spiritual impulse within him." (42:52.)

During one of his rare interviews Mr. O'Neill let it be known that he considered The Straw his best piece of work. He classed it as a tragedy of human hope, and further explained: "My whole idea is to show the power of spiritual help, even when the case is hopeless. Human hope is the greatest power in life, and the only thing that defeats death." (44:264.)

The play is intensely autobiographical as the plot reveals.

As Eileen Carmody is entered as a patient at the Hill Farm Tuberculosis Sanitorium she meets Stephen Murray, a young newspaper reporter, who is recovering, and who soon will be dismissed.

At Eileen's suggestion Stephen tries writing short stories which Eileen types, and acts as critic for, despite her modest protest that she is unable to do them justice.

Notwithstanding the anti-Cupid atmosphere encouraged by the staff, this friendship develops into love on Eileen's part, a love to which Stephen remains utterly impervious.

Four months later we find Stephen exulting in the doctor's decision that, as an "arrested case", he may be dismissed to carry on his work of story-writing, in which Eileen has been so inspiring and helpful.

During a midnight rendezvous at the cross-roads Eileen pathetically and desperately declares her love for him, but Stephen cannot reciprocate.

The next day Stephen departs, leaving an Eileen desolated in spirit, and rapidly deteriorating in health, now that hope of Stephen's caring for her is demolished.

Another four months have passed and this time we find Eileen on the isolation porch at the sanitorium, about to be removed to the State Farm to which the incurables, soon to die, are sent for the ostensible purpose of getting more rest and quiet.

Stephen returns for an examination and visit, and before Miss Gilpin, Eileen's nurse can warn him, goes to Eileen. He is horrified at her emaciated appearance and cannot hide his misery and worry at her physical deterioration. With unconscious cruelty he destroys any vestige of hope she might have had by referring to the midnight meeting at the cross-roads and telling her: "Well, I rather thought you wouldn't take it seriously - afterward. You were all up in the air that night."

As he leaves Eileen he meets Miss Gilpin who reveals to him Eileen's real physical and emotional condition and implores Stephen to make Eileen happy the few remaining days of life by declaring his love for her.

Stephen, now fully awake to his unconscious callousness, determines to make complete amends. With pitying tenderness he asks Eileen to marry him. She is raised to a seventh heaven of happiness, and tells him :

"Oh, Stephen, any place in the world would be beautiful to me if you were with me! (His face is hidden in the pillow beside her. She is suddenly startled by a muffled sob - anxiously) Why - Stephen - you're - you're crying!

Murray, (raising his face which is this time alight with a passionate awakening - a revelation): Oh, I do love you, Eileen! I do! I love you, love you!

Eileen, (thrilled by the depth of his present sincerity - but with a teasing laugh): Why, you say that as if you'd just made the discovery, Stephen.

Murray:- Oh, what does it matter, Eileen! I

love you! Oh, what a blind, selfish ass I've been! I  
 love you! You are my life - everything! I love you,  
 Eileen! I do! I do! And we'll be married - (suddenly  
 his face grows frozen with horror as he remembers the  
 doom. For the first time the gray spectre of Death con-  
 fronts him face to face as a menacing reality.)

Eileen, with that intuitive awareness of those  
 near death, senses the truth that she is to die. Again an  
 ironic fate has loaded the dice against two players.

However, in an effort to retrieve her happiness  
 Stephen vehemently denies this, telling her that it is he  
 who has to return to the sanatorium, and that she must look  
 out for him and help him to get well.

Rather doubtful, Eileen has the confirmation of  
 Miss Gilpin, who lies valiantly to confirm Stephen's story.  
 Later Stephen explains his newly realized sincerity to  
 Miss Gilpin, and declares passionately:

"But we'll win together. We can! We must!  
 There are things your doctors cannot value - cannot know  
 the strength of! (Exultantly) I'll make Eileen get well,  
 I tell you! Happiness will cure! Love is stronger than -  
 (He suddenly breaks down before the pitying negation she  
 cannot keep from her eyes. He sinks on a chair, shoulders  
 bowed, face hidden in his hands, with a groan of despair):  
 Oh, why did you give me a hopeless hope?"

Miss Gilpin sounds the change in O'Neill's  
 philosophy in her answer:

"Isn't everything we know just that - when you  
 think of it? (Her face lighting up with a consoling re-  
 velation) But there must be something back of it - some  
 promise of fulfillment - somehow - somewhere - in the spirit  
 of hope."

Ironically enough, to this young couple love is a hopeless hope and so is life, and Stephen voices the demand that an ironic Fate explain why, in the face of a heart breaking realization that love has come too late, hope should still persist.

"How dare you use the word hopeless, as if it were the last! Come now, confess, damn it! There's always hope, isn't there? What do you know? Can you say you know anything?" and though Miss Gilpin assures him she knows nothing, we are left with a feeling that it is an illusion upon which Eileen and Stephen are about to base their lives.

Of course, the point has been made that it is always the pursuit of happiness, the search for the meaning and justification of life that counts more than the attainment of one's desire, so whether or not Eileen lives it is, as Mr. Parker has pointed out, "because dying, Eileen Carmody is brought to the realization that she may vanquish death because she must live the life of her lover. This decision to live may have come too late in her losing battle against death and disease, but it seems to be Mr. O'Neill's great and thrilling point that it does come; and that with this decision his heroine lives, intensely, triumphantly, if only for a few days or a few months."

Eileen is an intense character. She feels deeply, is easily moved, is most sensitive, and one imagines, must have suffered mental anguish after having revealed to Stephen her unrequited love. Stephen is real, in his unconscious indifference, though how he could be unaware of Eileen's love for him is rather puzzling.

As always, O'Neill's minor characters are vividly presented, even though they are types. Perhaps it is the realistic dialogue which accomplishes this.

That O'Neill can rise above this pure realism in speech is evinced in the appealing, spontaneous scene between Stephen and Eileen in the moonlight. Emotion is here intensified with a poignant sincerity and pathos.

Though this paper is not concerned with a balance of merits and defects in any play it is rather interesting to inquire the reason for the failure of The Straw.

From the viewpoint of pure exposition it is excellent, each act being a link that carries on the life story of Eilæen Carmody. The play, it is true, lacks unity of structure, and Mr. O'Neill is rather non-selective of detail. Almost every bit of Eilæen's home life could be omitted, and no violence would be done the play. The somewhat obvious mechanics are balanced by the variety and freedom of

the structure of the play, while its length is compensated for by excellent characterization.

More than one dramatic critic has commented adversely on the setting, that of a tuberculosis sanitorium.

Mr. Macgowan perhaps voices the sentiments of many when he writes:

"The Straw is written, strongly, truly, and its characterization is excellent, but its emotional effect as drama is bound up so closely with its subject, the ravages of tuberculosis, that the individual reaction of reader or critic is unreliable as to its dramatic worth," (96:334.)

And, "save for the illuminating flash that lights up its last act, the play is an ironic picture of the regulation, the standardization, almost the capitalization of the white plague. Mr. O'Neill exposes the life of the heterogeneous victims in a sanitorium in Connecticut." (129:236.)

In a rather general statement Mr. Ernest Boyd makes the reference to the next play under discussion:

"The Emperor Jones reveals Mr. O'Neill as an innovator who has cultivated a new idea and a new form to the contemporary theatre." (27:370.)

Kenneth McGowan, an ardent admirer of O'Neill, is more explicit. In an article entitled Experiment on Broadway, he writes: "This exploration into the racial mind of the negro is so definitely subjective in its materials and so free in form that it is an obvious step toward the



playwright's completely expressionistic drama."(99:175.)

The aim of expressionistic drama is to alienate itself from reality, from the obvious and the natural, and to ally itself with the unreal, the conventional, and the stylistic. Stylization is the degree of creative insight with which the producer has grasped the inner meaning of the play and reflected it in the acting, lighting, and setting so that one mood or tone prevails.

In Emperor Jones that mood is terror. In this psychoanalytic study of atavism we have eight abrupt scenes, each the sublimation of a phase of fear rising from mere bewildered apprehension, to culminate in all-devastating sheer panic - terror.

Emperor Jones is not the only actor in this ironic tragedy of the illusion of fear, which so dominates one negro, symbolic of his race. Each spectator is compelled to enter into the motives of this negro fanfaron, to sympathize, (in its broadest sense) with him, and thus become an actor in the drama. This dramatic triumph has been secured by at least one physical device, the insistent, intensified beat of the tom-tom.

As the play begins, the regular reiterated beating of the tom-tom gives warning that the natives are in conclave in the hills, using voo-doo charms and incantations to work

up their courage to the point of rebelling against their emperor.

This emperor, Brutus Jones, is a genial sophisticated rascal, an ex-Pullman porter and ex-convict, who has established himself as ruler over these African savages.

Up to this time he has passed unharmed among his subjects, due to a self-invented tale that nothing but a silver bullet could kill him.

Though he has exploited the natives to the edge of revolt, his plans are so carefully laid, that, though the ominous reverberations of the tom-tom warn him their fury has broken prematurely, he is not caught unprepared.

He reaches the edge of the forest, a jaunty self-assured adventurer, confident that he knows a trail to safety and freedom through its trackless waste, and further buoyed up by the five lead bullets for his enemies and the one silver one for himself in case - ridiculous thought - he is ever really cornered.

But when, in the mysterious night shadows of the immobile forest, he is unable to locate his cache, his self-possession is a bit shaken.

From this point on a series of dim tableaux objectively depict Jones's spiritual retrogression to Voodooism.

Little Formless Fears emit a "tiny gale of low mocking laugh - ter," and with a yell of terror he dissipates them with his first lead bullet.

In quick succession the series of episodes unfold, each a crisis of fear: first, the Pullman porter he had murdered in a gamblers' quarrel, next the guard of the chain gang, whose brutality goaded him into another slaying. Next he is confronted with the visible hallucination of his negro fears, his racial superstitions. The auction block yields to the galley of a slave-ship, where, as if under some uncanny compulsion, he joins the rhythmic wail of desolation of his own people. Next, most horrifying of all, the Congo Witch Doctor demands that he sacrifice himself to the Congo crocodile. At last, stripped in body and soul of the artificial trappings and veneer of civilization, his silver bullet expended against this last apparition that had so completely and utterly routed his courage and resourcefulness, he ends his tortured, hopeless circle at the very point from which he started, only to find the natives imperturbably waiting to shoot him down with their silver bullets. And so he died, a victim of the superstition he had scorned and despised.

Thus in Emperor Jones a psychological theme is carried to its logical, inevitable, and appointed conclusion. In ironic fate, in this play more humanized and localized, frustrates the protagonist's designs, but the conflict has been more worth while.

Emperor Jones, as the protagonist of this series of episodes, unfolds, not only the concentrated history of one man, but the poignant history chronicle of a whole race.

Emperor Jones is a powerful picture of a subtly drawn character.

The dialogue is forceful, at times humorous, always realistic.

"Here, as in all of O'Neill's work, there is evidence of his dual gift of depicting character in swift, vivid strokes and scenes, and of expressing himself in language that is lyric in its insistence on utterance by the human voice." (134:37.)

Mr. Ludwig Lewisohn attributes the success of Emperor Jones to "its imaginative and formal daring and the exotic elements in its admirable presentation more than to any inner completeness or perfection." (89:902.)

As in Beyond the Horizon and The Straw, we have the motive of illusion dominating Gold. This play, an unfortunate expansion of an earlier one-act play, Where the Cross is Made, "is a study of the effect of the discovery of supposed treasure on a desert island upon the men who found it and an account of the trail of murder and madness which followed." (L89:903. .)

More specifically, the plot of this four-act study of the psychological effect of lust of gold is as follows:

Captain Bartlett and his crew are wrecked on a coral reef in the Malay Archipelago. Dying of thirst and hunger, they find, in the water logged hulk of a Malay war prau, two chests of treasure. The cook and cabin boy pronounce it junk, and are murdered, with the tacit, but unspoken consent of Captain Bartlett.

Rescued, Captain Bartlett fits out a schooner to dig up the treasure which he had ordered hidden in the sand. By a rather theatrical and obvious ruse the Captain is prevented from sailing to recover the gold. From then on it becomes an obsession with him. He has the top floor and roof of his house fitted up as a lookout post, and paces eternally up and down, waiting and watching for the ship that has lain bottom side up, for three years off the Celebes.

Finally, he reveals the secret to his son, and shows him the sample of treasure he brought along. The lad exclaims, in irritated disappointment just as the ship's cook had, "It's dammed brass."

This doesn't alter the Captain's insane delusion, which results in the death of his wife, the unhappiness of his daughter, and the complete demoralization of his son.

There is nothing particularly significant in this melodramatic story, but some critics have read more into it than ~~appears in~~ the superficial, realistic dialogue, and shaky structure would seem to warrant.

"What is finely conceived is the symbolism," declares Mr. Lewisohn. "The treasure is brass. Illusion is illusion. Yet the man who seeks to bring his fellows in contact with reality is killed. They spend the rest of their lives chasing the false treasure, slaying for it, maddened by it. But it remains brass, cheap, but gleaming." Then he adds, rather skeptically, "Only the unpleasant doubt obtrudes itself that perhaps Mr. O'Neill did not mean any such symbolical meaning at all." (89:902.)

Miss Euphemia Wyott, of The Catholic World, is assailed by no such misgivings, and confidently asserts:

"The play may be taken as an allegory satirizing in powerful

fashion the stupidity of those who seek worthless treasure at the ends of the world and ignore the real beauty and value of life as they exist about them." (150:555.)

Pierre Loving seems to have struck more nearly the philosophic note the author intended when he says, "An under current of irony ---- lifts the play above the plane of mere incisive study of the collapse of a fine mind; it envelops the character of Captain Bartlett with the sadness of a futile heroism.....We grow aware by degrees that the plot has been spun in advance by a higher power; the dice are loaded, and the memorable lonely figure is in reality gripping with fate." (93:516.)

It is true that this play marks a complete reversion to the fate domination idea, which O'Neill had seemed to have left behind him. In just so far as this philosophy is untrue to real life, which permits an occasional gleam of hope, so is this play a failure. The audiences seemed to feel this deficiency for it lasted only thirteen days, his first real failure.

Diff'rent, announced by O'Neill as a "daring study of feminine sex psychology," is a play of an unsatisfied ideals.

The central figure, Emma Crosby, repudiates her engagement to the young captain of a whaler, because she hears that during a trip to the South Sea Islands he has fallen an unwilling victim in a hour of folly to one of the native girls. She will live single rather than sacrifice her ideal illusion that Caleb was "different" from other men. As a matter of fact, this is no ideal at all, but sheer finical egoism. Thirty years pass, during which the captain comes and goes on voyages, never omitting to call on Emma between times, nursing his own illusion, which is that time will reconcile Emma to him. Of course, time doesn't, and the same thirty years that leave Caleb a strengthened character have changed maidenly modesty that considered itself too precious to be bestowed on one just like other men to a pitiful spectacle of unashamed pursuit. Benny, Caleb's nephew, a degenerate young craven, with a cynical twisted outlook on life, is the object of Emma's autumnal passion.

In honor of this waster, off-scouring of the World War, Emma refurbishes her parlor, dyes her hair, rouges, and makes many moral adjustments, not the least of which is



her tolerance of Benny's amoral lapses. Ironically enough, she, who thirty years before ruined her life by just one quick credulity, now refuses to believe a single word against this ne'er-do-well.

Threatened with exposure of theft Benny proposes marriage to Emma to save himself. Emma accepts with degrading alacrity.

"Thirty o' the best years of my life flung for a yellow dog like him to feed on. God!" raves Caleb, when he hears the news. In his anger and desperation he talks of murder, then of bribery to force Emma from Benny's clutch, but life is not worth living now, nor is anyone worth sacrificing for, so he goes out, feeling it must be ended.

Bribery meant money, and Benny, in his speculation as to his uncle's seriousness on that point, displays the depths of depravity to Aunt Emma. In a scene of utterly cruel disillusionment, Benny asks her:

"What're you taking it so damned serious for - me asking you to marry me, I mean. I was on'y sort of kiddin' anyway - just so you'd tell him and get his goat right. Say, honest, Aunt Emmer, you didn't believe - you didn't think I was really stuck on you, did you? Why, you're as old as ma is, aint you, Aunt Emmer? And I'll say you look it, too! --- This is what I get for fooling around with an old hen like you that oughta' been planted in the cemetery long ago! Paintin' your mush and dressin' like a kid!"

As in a trance, Emma dismantles the room of its gaudy decorations. Benny returns to tell her Caleb has hung himself and she "moves like a sleepwalker toward the door" murmuring, "Wait, Caleb, I'm going down to the barn" - to put an end to her life.

Mr. Arthur Quinn has said, "Mr. O'Neill is not concerned with "making" any kind of ending. The endings form themselves in his capable hands out of the characters and situations." ( 130:416) While this may be true in the greater number of his plays Diff'rent seems an exception. Two suicides are two too many in this case. Given the characters of Emma and Caleb as they have been presented, and developed, self destruction is not the inevitable way out of their situation. That should be reserved for a real tragedy, which this is not.

Mr. Clark comments on this are pertinent: "In Diff'rent though O'Neill shows both Caleb and Emma driven to extremes, I am neither emotionally not intellectually persuaded that they would commit suicide. There are many who either dare not, or perhaps, do not want to, kill themselves - even though they believe they have nothing more to live for - who go on living in quiet desperation. Caleb and Emma are such. To kill them off at the end is an act of mercy, and O'Neill's mood here was anything but merciful;

he is after truth." (42:7.)

That Mr. O'Neill seems to be "curious, rather than serious" in his search for the truth is the opinion of Mr. Firkin. He found the second act particularly repulsive. "Let me admit frankly at the start that I was unable to view the self abasement of the woman in the second act without a stricture or strangulation in the throat. Mr. O'Neill is rather curious than serious; his second act, though not ethically null, is ethically needless, and his instance is not typical, but extravagant." (58:207.)

Not only is Mr. O'Neill extravagant in his instances, but ~~it is~~ this lavishness of gloom and pessimism which envelops the play keep it from being real tragedy. Too much of any one element twists a play out of harmony and balance, thus depriving it of power and poignancy.

Though the characterization is excellent and vivid, the dialogue simple, truthful, and direct, the structure amazingly concentrated and adequate, nevertheless it is again theme which dominated this drama of depression. In the character of Emma we seem to find an echo of O'Neill's reactions in his quest for truth. Mr. Krutch summarizes them in the following excerpt:

"Her (Emma's) tragic guilt is as definite as that of any Greek hero; it is a sort of inflexibility which will

not permit her to accept things as they are. And her catastrophe grows inevitably and with ironic suitability from this guilt. Having refused a true and generous man, the ignoble compensation which she seeks is snatched from her grasp. He who will not when he may may not when he will!" (82:565.)

The Hairy Ape has the tang of sociological propaganda. We have Yank, the ocean liner stoker, who in his vast strength, feels he makes the world move, confronted for one brief moment by Mildred, a decadent daughter of the class Yank thinks doesn't "belong". Her look of utter aversion and terror and exclamation "The filthy beast!" later translated to him as "Hairy Ape" so shatter Yank's confidence in himself that he leaves his job, determined to seek revenge on the "baggage class" which, he feels, has insulted and degraded him.

He seeks Fifth Avenue that he may meet them. Hurling himself against the marionette automaton parading, he is further enraged and baffled by their indifference, and his effort to be recognized landshim in Blackwells Island.

While he meditates behind the bars he learns of the I.W.W.'s and as soon as he is released volunteers his services to blow up the factory of Mildred's father, symbolic

of the hated high social order.

Believing him a spy, the I.W.W.'s throw him out. Rejected alike by conservatives and radicals, more dazed than ever, with the hated epithet "hairy ape" ever in his consciousness, Yank seeks the Zoo to look upon his counterpart. He confides his trouble to the gorilla, and in a last desperate effort to locate himself somewhere in the social system he releases his prototype that together they may wreak vengeance on an unfriendly world. With unconscious irony the gorilla accepts him in a huge embrace, crushes him, and flings him into the open cage, then saunters off.

Yank staggers to his feet, supports himself by the bars, and dies with his "boots on", still defiant, though frustrated in his final attempt to find his own soul's status in the modern social scheme.

Underlying this "extraordinary blend of weird fantasy and extreme realism, of satire and symbolism" (164:366.) which make up the eight expressionistic scenes of the Hairy Ape is an intellectual concept in which is embodied the philosophic message O'Neill wished to deliver at that particular time.

He has chosen Yank, symbol of primitive and physical strength, and a victim of modern industry as the

protagonist. Through him O'Neill wishes to voice that social rebellion, that sense of buffeted frustration which finds itself helpless in its effort to find a place in the existing social order.

As the play opens we see Yank amid the deafening roar and unbearable heat of the firemen's fore-castle glorying in his physical prowess. In his crude strength he exults in his creation of the energy and speed that drives the ship across the ocean. Over the din he bellows his creed:

"Everything else dat makes de world move, somep'n makes it move. It can't move witout somep'n else, see! Den get down to me. I'm at de bottom, get me! Dere aint nothin' foither. I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de world moves!"

In that tense climatic scene where Yank is brought face to face with the social parasite, Mildred, her horrified reaction to his hairy ape characteristics shatters his joy in his vast strength as well as his confidence as to the utter rightness of his place in the world. His outraged feelings seek revenge, and as he hurls himself against the imperturbable Fifth Avenue church parade of conservatives, symbolic of an impregnable social order which rarely has "disposed of" that which threatens its security, he begins to realize his impotence in his conflict with vague social forces he cannot comprehend.

The I. W.W.'s further convince him of his inability to cope with the social order and he rather pathetically muses:

"I'm a busted Ingersoll, dat's what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now, I ain't steel, and de woild owns me. Aw, hell! I can't see -- it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong!-----Where do I get off at, huh?"

Still in search of an answer, Yank seeks his kin, the real hairy ape. As he stares at the gorilla he painfully voices his groping efforts to locate himself in the scheme of things.

"I ain't on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, taking all de mist punches from bot' of 'em. "

After the released gorilla had crushed him in an ironic death embrace, Yank's bewildered mutter "even him didn't tink I-belonged" mounts to passionate despair as he demands, "Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?"

He answers himself, bitterly,

"In de cage, huh?" and with a last pathetic gesture of bravado in the strident tones of a circus barker, calls Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only - (his voice weakening) one and original - Hairy Ape from de wilds of - (He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering, whimpering wail."

And perhaps, (in O'Neill's own words) the Hairy Ape at last "belongs".

That O'Neill himself regarded The Hairy Ape as purely symbolic is indicated from a letter he wrote to the New York Herald-Tribune.

"The Hairy Ape was propoganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the hermony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle trying to make peace, taking the 'woist punches from bot' of 'em'. This idea was expressed in Yank's speech. The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can't go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to 'belonging' either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong."

Though Mr. O'Neill rather ironically subtitles The Hairy Ape "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life", most of the dramatic critics list it as an expressionistic tragedy.

George Baker tells us that "O'Neill studies relentlessly a suffering mind and finds visualized emotional expression for what is discovered." ( 13 :791.) He evidently feels that the dramatist is sincere in his method of exposition. He explains: "O'Neill becomes an experimentalist in form, even a symbolist at times - not



in order to experiment, not as a follower of any momentary vogue, but because, like any of the great dramatists he has come to feel not what he so easily illustrated in action, but what can at best be only hinted, hinted, suggested, symbolized as ultimately the most discerning, the most honest picturing of the complicated mingling in emotion of heredity, environment, a multiplicity of causes, large and small." (12:792.)

Mr. Macgowan is even more explicit. He is almost diagrammatic:

"The Hairy Ape is expressionistic in form because the author deliberately subordinates plausibility of language or situation to the need of making life clear. The people do not talk or act as they would in real life, because O'Neill wishes to give us things they feel which reach us - either in real life or realism - by faint and illusive indications; these speak out directly in The Hairy Ape. The process of O'Neill is to let Yank shout his fill of boastings in rhythmic slang..... The emotional vigor and truth of this is so striking that many spectators take the four opening scenes for grubby but terrific naturalism and do not notice until Yank gets on Fifth Avenue that the play is written in a vein of extreme exaggeration. Upon Fifth Avenue the thing is clear enough, for here O'Neill exaggerates the exteriors as well as the speech, and sets marionette automatons parading.

"A reader of the text of the play, or an acute observer of the performance will see that O'Neill has succeeded in almost all the scenes in going down beneath the surface essentials of character and presenting those essentials with such truth and vigor that the net result seems the expression of truth." (101:187.)

It is rather interesting to note that until this last year the casual mention of Eugene O'Neill's name almost always called forth the remark "Oh, yes. He wrote Anna Christie."

What is there about this play that seems to make it so unforgettable? Reduced to its simplest elements, it is merely another of the countless variants of that age-old plot, the woman with a past. In this case regeneration follows, and with it, most incredibly for O'Neill, the conventional happy ending, which Oliver Sayler declares is no ending at all, and that what does exist is "merely a play,---reaching an ironic finger into the future, like life."

(134:35.)

Accuracy to life is the basis of O'Neill's appeal. From the instant we see Chris, that drunken old sentimentalist wpll into the dull and sordid saloon of Jimmy-the-Priest, until we leave him gazing out into the night, lost in his sombre preoccupation, muttering, "Only that old devil the sea, the sea - she know", we are face to face with even more than a pungent realism. As Kenneth Macgowan expresses it:

"More than realism, however, something of the inner spirit, the fullness and vitality of life floods to the surface."

(99:5.)

The dull, plodding, sentimental old square-head Chris has kept his daughter Anna on a Minnesota farm to protect her from "the old Davil, sea", his obsession. Her farmer cousins proved more cruelly vindictive than the sea could have ever been, and, after running away from them, she drifts into the world's oldest profession. Sick and destitute, she turns in desperation to Chris, feeling she will find a welcome from him. In this she is right. Her father is overjoyed to have a "nice girl" like Anna to care for. She joins him on the coal barge, not without some misgivings.

About two weeks later she mystifies and alarms Chris as she gazes awestruck into the dense fog and dreamily voices the fulfillment of her atavistic desires.

"Funny! I do feel sort of - nutty tonight. I feel old.....like I'd been a long, long time - out here in the fog. I don't know how to tell you just what I mean. It 's like I'd come home after a long visit away some place. It all seems like I'd been here before lots of times - on boats - in this same fog." She persists perplexedly "But why d'you s'pose I feel so - so - like I'd found something I'd missed and been looking for - s'if this was the right place for me to fit in? And I seem to have forgot - everything that's happened - like it didn't matter no more. And I feel clean, somehow - like you feel just after

you've took a bath. And I feel happy for once - yes, honest! - happier than I even been anywhere before."

Through the enveloping fog an "ahoy" of distress, and with the rescue of the shipwrecked crew and the entrance into their lives of Matt Burke, "the very broth of a boy, boastful, chivalrous, romantic, blasphemous, superstitious" (66:20) the conclusion is inevitable.

As Robert Benchly inimitably puts it, "In the second act we are asked to accept not only love at first sight, but love at practically no sight at all, as the almost simultaneous meeting, courtship, and proposal are carried on in a dense fog at night on the deck of a coal barge." (21:16.)

Matt proceeds to deify Anna, who will not permit it. Before he accepts Matt she tells in a scene of almost unbearable intensity, the story of her life. The remainder of the play is concerned with the reactions of the two men, Chris's maudlin self-pity, the Celt's furious and virtuous single-standard anger, and the ultimate readjustment of their individual theories to their need for love.

But it is left to Anna Christie, ignorant, laconic, almost inarticulate, to voice O'Neill's burning ironies of life. She tells her father, "It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts,

and things happen, and we just get mixed in wrong, that's all."

Again O'Neill has chosen the sea and the men and women of the sea as the symbols of the eternal realities as he finds them. Just as Anna is baffled, yet faces unafraid these eternal realities, the inexplicable inhuman power of nature against man, symbolized in "that old Devil sea" so must we all according to O'Neill match our impotence against these realities. Though we cannot conquer Fate, still the very facing of it may bring out latent qualities of manliness and nobility that will not mean complete spiritual failure.

With almost more than his customary terseness Oliver Saylor dismisses the dramatist's next play The First Man (1922) with two words. "O'Neill's worst". (134:52.), and even Kenneth Macgowan, usually so loyal, is forced to point out that "the psychology and the mechanism by which the husband's objections to fatherhood are established and a climax of action produced at the end of the second act, leave us just another of those forced specimens of surface realism with which the French stage of Pinero and Augustus Thomas are littered." (98:182.)

Mr. Clark is rather paradoxical. He calls it a "less successful effort" and a most ambitious failure" in almost the same breath". ( 4276.) A review of the story may clarify these conflicting opinions.

As a great concession, Curtin Jayson, noted scientist, has obtained permission to take his wife Martha along on a five year expedition which is searching for traces of "The First Man". Two years previous they had lost their daughters, and had determined to have no more children. The Jayson relatives wanted a man child in the family, but Curtis Jayson's work seems the paramount interest of both their lives, but not permanently. On the eve of departure almost Martha announces to Curt that she is going to have a child. His career and life-work threatened, Curt finds himself growing to hate the coming baby.

Martha dies, giving birth to a boy, and in his grief and hatred Curt cannot bear to look at his son. It is only when the light dawns, that his petty scandal-mongering relatives suspect the paternity of his son, accusing his best friend, that he dashes up to see the baby, and in so doing recovers himself and finds in the "First Man" born to the Jayson family a new impetus to live. He returns to address the assembled Jayson relations : "----I'll come back

(the light of an ideal beginning to show in his eyes).

When he's old enough, I'll teach him to know and love a big, free life. Martha used to say that he would take her place in time. Martha shall live again for me and him."

The idea, whether a man and wife can collaborate in their deeper mental interests at the same time they cooperate in love and parenthood, betrays the author's interest in soul relationships. In fact, in his effort to express his psychological interests of the age in dramatic form, O'Neill sacrificed every other factor in the play. His pre-occupation with his idea devitalizes his language, characters, spectacles, movement, and plot. The play becomes little more than an intellectual thesis on "Children versus a Career."

In structure this play attempts to be narrational, but it is loose, disjointed, and diffuse.

On the whole, the characters are shallow weaklings, who do a great deal of artificial, humorless talking, which Mr. Mantle feels "showed Mr. Eugene O'Neill's power in a direction not hitherto very apparent, the ability to give us rapid, clever conversation which in itself satirizes the social values of a decadent patrician class."

(130:20.)

In Welded (1923) which Mr. O'Neill has optimistically labeled "a romance of love and marriage ", he has attempted to show the devastating interaction of a variety of tense love. His thesis is that a happy conjugal existence is only possible where each of the couple struggles to maintain the personality within the love.

What Mr. O'Neill has actually produced is a study of the psychology of love - morbid, garrulous, hectic. Lacking any real dramatic action, it is, in the last analysis, merely an exhibit of emotional instability.

The theme he has chosen is a common favorite with modern French dramatists. It may be interesting to note the curious parallelism in exact repressiveness of title, restless intellectualism of theme and utmost economy of action of Mr. O'Neill's Welded and M. Porto-Riche's Amoureuse.

Just as Porto Riche has eliminated from his plays all elements that do not immediately further or illustrate his central and controlling idea, so has O'Neill raked out of Welded all encumbering, non-essential environment, character, and action. Nothing must deflect the dominant idea from its mark.



Eleanor and Michael, actress and playwright, in the throes of their particular crises, are shown as absorbed in these alone, and are suddenly deprived of all other interests, passions, and hopes. Even though the resulting character is at most two-dimensional, an amazing concentration and tensivity are effected.

Cape and Eleanor in Welded parallel Etienne and Germaine. Etienne cannot send Germaine away. At the door he laments:

"Why have restlessness and jealousy forced me to re-open this door? We have torn at each other like bitter foes, irreparable words have been spoken; I have misunderstood you, you have betrayed me and yet - I am here. It seems as though we were riveted together by all the evil we have done each other, by all the shameful words we have spoken."

"But we shall not be happy," Germaine cries. And all his answer is: "What does it matter?"

Compare this with Welded. Eleanor and Cape, after a violent, jealous quarrel, have each returned, learning that love is stronger than either. Cape declares:

"We can live again." (Exultantly as if testing her!) "But we'll hate!"

Eleanor agrees: "Yes!"

"And we'll torture and tear, and clutch for each other's souls - fight - fail - and hate again ( he raises his voice in aggressive triumph) - But! fail with pride - and joy!"

The play closes on a note of abnormal intensity, which, somehow, does not convince. Nor were the audiences, apparently, convinced of the dramatist's sincerity, or perhaps this presentation of love neurosis was too intellectual and devitalized to maintain their interest, for the play was shortly withdrawn and must be classed with O'Neill's failures.

Conventional dramaturgy seems to have no limitations for Mr. O'Neill if he determines to put upon the stage what he finds vital and interesting in contemporary life.

In one mad taunting epithet "Nigger" flung at her colored husband by his delirious white wife we have concentrated the theme of Mr. O'Neill's next play, All God's Chillun Got Wings. (1924)

In commenting on his choice of theme, Mr. O'Leisohn tells us :

"It is in revealing this dark and secret thing - the immemorial, ineradicable character of race prejudice - that Mr. O'Neill reaches a height hitherto inaccessible to him. The problem he has selected cleaves so near the bone of human life itself that it possesses a transcendent symbolic character. There are not many such themes in this world; this is one of them." (86:664.)

Simply and directly, in an obvious narrative sequence, with crude realism of dialogue and simple violence of action, Mr. O'Neill exhibits a series of scenes from the

the life of black Jim Harris and white Ella Downey. Briefly the story deals with the childhood affection existing between two children, Ella and Jim, who live on the fringe of the black belt. When they reach adolescence Ella scorns her former chum ; but when she is flung aside by her white scoundrel prizefighter, refined, sensitive Jim, who has always loved her, befriends her, and eventually, at her own request, marries her. Ella loves Jim, but feels so keenly her anomalous social position after their return from France that she becomes insane. Her monomania takes the form of a conscious, definite attempt to prevent Jim from passing his bar examination, by demanding all his attention as a nurse. Her object attained, and her tortured self-respect and feeling of racial superiority preserved, her desire to kill Jim passes, and she reverts to the artless friendliness of her school days.

Beneath this surface simplicity exists a psychological subtlety which lifts the play from the level of a rather confused mixture of hapless matrimony, an economic failure, a demimonde, the race problem, poverty and insanity, to the elevated heights of a tragedy capable of exciting pity in the hearts of the spectators.

For it is the spectator who comprehends far better than the inarticulate characters themselves the hopeless struggle which takes place in their minds - a struggle between their own character and forces more powerful and subtle than they. Society, environment, circumstances, and most of all, their own temperaments, all combined against Ella and Jim in their hopeless search for happiness, a search decreed to failure.

Emotionally and intellectually Jim and Ella might argue that no sense of inferiority existed in the one, but deeper than love and reason, instinct, born of habit and tradition, condemned them for their transgression of the taboo.

The feeling of racial inferiority which Jim cannot conquer dooms him to a lonely spiritual existence, the common lot of mankind, according to O'Neill. In Jim's isolation we may trace a reflection of Mr. O'Neill's philosophy as pointed out by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant in a discerning criticism of this devastating drama of miscegenation. She points out :

"Through the beauty and tragedy of a mixed marriage pierces the suggestion of the deeper and more sacrificial aspects of marriage itself - a hint of the torture and bliss that the interweaving of two strands of intense and separate life may bring. Here, more effectively than in Welded, O'Neill, the solitary artist expresses the constant

restless struggle between the separateness of the human soul and its need for fusion and immolation."(138:93.)

Desire Under the Elms (1925). "God's hard and lonesome", believed dour, seventy year old Ephriam Cabot, and based his life on that principle. He was lonesome, too, so he took unto himself a third wife, half his age and attractive, and the incarnation of acquisitiveness.

Awaiting her in her newly-acquired home she finds only Eben, Ephriam's thirty-two year old son by his second wife, whom Eben is convinced his father not only worked to death, but also appropriated the farm which should rightfully belong to him. Naturally, Eben despises this designing interloper.

Abbie, consumed by an overwhelming greed for material possessions, tells her husband that she believes it is still possible to have an heir. Delighted, the old man promises to will the property to the new son. Abbie, deliberately proceeds to seduce Eben, who suddenly discovers that his envenomed hatred has turned to impassioned love. In Abbie, Eben thinks he has found an instrument of revenge for his mother's suffering and death. In his huddled, confused mind Abbie in some way represents both mother and mistress. The child, ostensibly Ephriam's, is born, and

the stark old farmer rejoices temporarily, at least, in one fulfilled desire. But with all her carefully planned machinations Abbie finds herself enmeshed in her own web. She has not counted on the strength of emotion, and she finds her passion has developed into a sincere love which wrecks all her scheming calculations. They can no longer carry on, and Eben tells his father all. Ephriam disillusioned Eben by telling him what was previously the truth, that Abbie had pretended to love him only to deprive him of his inheritance. Eben turns from her in fury and despair, and she, to prove her love for him, smothersthe one thing between them, the child. This only incurs his horror, and while he feels she loves him, his instinctive reaction is to rush to the village and call the sheriff.

Regretting his action almost immediately, he returns, begs her forgiveness, assumes the responsibility for the murder, and joins her in waiting for the officers. The sheriff arrives, Eben surrenders himself as a partner in crime, and happy and exultant in their complete absorption of each other the two go out to their punishment together, leaving gaunt Ephriam granting grudging admiration for his son's courage, and to face his last years in the loneliness he thinks is God's.

That a diversity of opinion existed as to the meaning and value of this naturalistic tragedy of perverted desires is indicated by a review of the contemporary dramatic criticism, ranging from the usual unqualified commendation of Barrett H. Clark to the deepest vilification of Euphemia Wyatt.

Mr. Clark writes; "If ever that disputed passage about Katharsis meant anything it meant it here, for Desire purges the soul, scars, tortures and twists it, only to exalt it in the end. O'Neill has built a shining edifice, an epic drama of the workers of the soil, with ingredients as ugly and as beautiful as can be found in contemporary civilization." (42:89.)

In the same tone we find this comment: "In many ways Desire Under the Elms is in the finest Eugene O'Neill tradition. And then again it isn't. 'Uneven', that's the word. But there are moments, high, bold, relentless moments when this stark New England tragedy is more than you can bear. Life is here, life and irony, and an utter lack of prettification". (61:3.)

The entire play seemed to be more than Miss Wyatt could bear, as her criticism quoted in its entirety proves:

"Like The Hairy Ape, Desire Under the Elms is written in scenes, discursive, short, reiterative. Each character has a characteristic phrase to which his or her lips are moulded. The setting is the exterior of a farmhouse, a lone white farmhouse with a stone wall.

"We are never allowed to forget the loneliness of the stones for we enter the house through the outside clapping, which is removed in sections, and first one, then another of the bedrooms, the kitchen, and the parlor are revealed. The seven Capital Sins are revealed with them. Indeed, they might well be the subtitle. Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth are presented to us in one cubicle after another. They form

the chief topic of conversation, particularly the third.

"The seduction of a stepson, the smothering of a baby, are incidental. All the family - from the two elder brothers with their hoes, the younger brother with his lust, the reptilian third wife with her acquisitive instinct, the Old Man with his bitter industry want the stony farm for themselves. In it is buried their vitality and their ambition. The twin brothers free themselves by running away to "Californi-a" with their father's money. The younger boy is diverted by the diversion of possessing his stepmother. The baby is murdered. There is left only the Old Man, whose mania for agriculture and matrimony has never wavered. Because he has the good taste to prefer the cows to his family's society, he has some of our sympathy.

"O'Neill has admitted these people are only types, but even types, to be dramatic, need some humanity.

"No woman - even the type who can smother her own infant in cold blood can stand up and make a long speech about it. As the speech is written the infanticide is the least unpleasant because it bears no semblance to reality.

"Desire Under the Elms is a tempting subject for a parody, but it has about it such a persistently putrid odor that it inhibits mirth like a channel crossing when one is the actual victim.

"We have heard of the odor of sanctity. We have now suffered the odor of sin." (148:519.)

St. John Ervine declares that "Mr. O'Neill has chosen to present us with men who are almost lower than animals. Here definitely is unredeemed brutishness." (57:58.)

It is hardly fair to close the discussion without presenting Mr. O'Neill's defence for his choice of theme.

In a letter to the Philadelphia Public Ledger, January 22, 1922, two years before the play was produced he answered his critic's inquiries regarding the so-called "unhappy endings" of his plays.



"Sure, I'll write about happiness if I can meet up with that luxury, and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word. What does it mean? Exaltation; an intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming? Well, if it means that - and not a mere smirking contentment with one's lot - I know there is more of it in one real tragedy than in all the happy-ending plays ever written. It's a mere present day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy! The Greeks and the Elizabethans knew better, They felt the tremendous lift to it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty considerations of everyday existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy; all else is unhappy .... I don't love life because it is pretty. Prettiness is only cloths' deep. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in ugliness." (42:87.)

While a hint of the "Oedipus Rex" plot is evident in Desire Under the Elms, nevertheless it has been obviously modified to fit in with the theories of a certain category of modern psychology, in which the spiritual clarity and elevation, so intrinsic a part of Greek drama, are conspicuous for their absence.

In the Greek tragedy the significance of the catastrophe was always intensified by either the overt, or the implied contrast between the creative and destructive forces of life, whereas in Mr. O'Neill's dramas the destructive note alone pervades the play.

In the last act of Desire the Greek formula to certain extent is followed since Abbie and Eben go to their punishment, so Mr. O'Neill would have us understand,

lifted from sordidness through sacrifice.

However, in permitting the emotions, greed and lust, issuing from their environment, to motivate all the characters and cause their downfall Mr. O'Neill lays himself open to the criticism of being a biased interpreter of life.

As a poet and a philosopher he assumes the privilege of interpreting the outward actions by the subjective motives. Apparently he does not feel that life is a struggle between two definitely opposed influences, one degenerative, the other regenerative. He chooses his material from the degrading influences only, a predisposition which automatically bars him as a sane and balanced expositor of life.

"Love is a fountain  
 Forever blooming,  
 Beauty a fountain  
 Forever flowing  
 Upward into the source of sunshine,  
 Upward into the azure blue heaven;  
 One with God but  
 Ever returning  
 To kiss the earth that the flowers may live."

In the lyrical chant which constantly recurs through the combination of poetry, history, and romance which make up Mr. O'Neill's next venture we have embodied the theme of The Fountain.

The story itself is concerned with the almost wholly imaginary legend of the search for the Fountain of Youth by Juan Ponce de Leon, his materialistic failure and spiritual success, which he voices just before he dies when he declares exultantly in comprehension of the song of the fountain:

"I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol! Juan Ponce de Leon is past! He is resolved into the thousand moods of beauty that made up happiness - color of the sunset, of tomorrow's dawn, breath of the great Trade wind - sunlight on grass, an insect's song, the rustle of leaves, an ant's ambitions. I begin to know eternal youth! O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop, my soul!"

Though The Fountain was written in 1921 it was not produced until 1925. During that time the author subjected it to frequent revisions, and presented it finally as a narrative sequence of eleven episodes, chiefly dependent on atmosphere and illusion and less on idea and characterization for its appeal. After a two week's run it was withdrawn for lack of patronage. The audiences found it dull, and the critics were unsparing in their comments.

Mr. Freed attributed its failure partly to Mr. O'Neill's shift of emphasis, becoming more discernible in each new play, from realism to symbolism.

He writes: "O'Neill in stepping from the substantial ground rock of a well-understood realism up to the higher levels of expression has thus inadvertently slipped

in some of the eternal and ever present morasses. There are elements of firmness in his foothold, however, which give assurance of power and stability.....It definitely marks a period of transition from the dramatically striking plays of the slums and the foc'sle plays in which a natural human bestiality appears without apology - toward those in which the mind, soul, spirit, or what not takes the lead." (59:44.)

The Great God Brown (1926)

In this struggle for self-expression of this symbolic drama, the conflict between the soul of the artist and the materialistic ambitions of the Great God Brown is presented for the understanding of the audience. Mr. O'Neill, in presenting the "overtones" as he did, explains his purpose. He says:

"It was far from my idea in writing Brown that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proper proportion the living drama of the recognizable human beings, Dion, Brown, Margaret and Cybel. I meant it always to be mystically within and behind them, giving them a significance beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend. And that is as clearly as I wish an audience to comprehend it. It is Mystery - the mystery anyone man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event or accident - in any life on earth." (42:97-8.)

Almost as though it were an instantaneous assurance to Mr. O'Neill that he had achieved his purpose is the comment of Mr. McGuire, three years later. In part he says:

"Great dramatists as well as poets have the gift of rendering their meaning on two planes: one objective, the writer's intended message; the other subjective - the overtone, the personal message, transcendental enough to mean something different to each reader or listener. O'Neill's rise from promise to fulfillment of his genius has been the story of the development of his dramatic overtones. What reached a high point probably untouched before in American literature except by Whitman, was the semi-mystical presence of universal values in The Great God Brown. Over meaning, which lies fallow in the human heart until impregnated by the touch of awful insight that is genius, rose like a strange, new sun out of that play. Under its spell, puzzling and unknown flowers of thought and feeling were warmed into growth in each individual heart. And people asked one another, "Do you understand it.....do you know what it means?" because they were conscious of vague ineffable truths it had brought to them, and wondered if the same truths had been brought to others." (110:172.)

Dion Anthony's childish experience of having his picture destroyed by his friend Bill Brown resulted in his assuming a protective mask, the Bad Boy Pan, to cover his saint self, while Bill Brown, who was ashamed, developed into good William Brown, a friend. Margaret's vision, which is wholly maternal, sees only the Pan side, and she urges him for herself and the children to sacrifice himself to materialism to the Great God Brown. With Cybel, Mother Earth, Dion can remove the mask, but Brown covets her for himself, just as he does Margaret and everything belonging to Dion. At Dion's death, Brown assumes his mask and is loved by the unknowing Margaret. However, he is cursed, just as Dion has been, by his torn personalities, until he resigns himself to death in Cybel's arms while

she chants:

"Always of the eternal cycle of spring, death, and peace, but always the chalice of life again in the spring again - life again! - summer and fall and earth and peace again!"

The epilogue brings the play around to the full cycle which was begun in the prologue when the Browns, the Antonies, and Margaret were disclosed on the moonlit pier. Now, Margaret, with her three sons is on the same pier with the living memory of Dion and her lost youth, and her eternal passion for motherhood.

In the poignant scene where Brown, like a tired child, resigns himself to die in Cybel's arms, O'Neill voices through them both his interpretation of the meaning of suffering.

Brown asks Cybel:

"What's the prayer you taught me - Our Father - ?  
 Cybel (with calm exultance) Our Father, who art!  
 Brown (taking her tones & exultantly) Who art!  
 Who art! (Suddenly with ecstasy) I know! I have found Him! I hear Him speak! "Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh! Only he that wept can laugh! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears and out of Earth's transfigured birth pain, the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God! (He dies.)

Cybel (gets up and fixes his body on the couch. She bends down and kisses him gently - she straightens up and looks into space - with profound pain) -Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! always, always

forever again! Spring again! life again! - Summer and Fall and earth and peace again! But always, love and conception and birth and pain again - Spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again!

So as Mr. Skinner points out "He (Mr. O'Neill) tells us in his new play that from the tears of earth is born the eternal laughter of Heaven - that resurrection lies beyond death - that man should keep himself forever as a Pilgrim of this earth - that God is."

There is still confusion in his thought for O'Neill feels more acutely than he thinks. But he has definitely come forth from the shadow which fell forbiddenly over his recent work. He is approaching that ecstatic moment when tragedy transmits itself, through song into spiritual comedy ..... In all a most notable play, not for the occasionally preverse and confused dregs of an older O'Neill it contains, but for its latent promise and momentary attainment of lofty vision." (139:384).

Dion, Cybel, Margaret, and Brown are all abstractions to the point of being universal in their connotation. Dion symbolizes poetic pathos. Margaret, the unseeing wife, is realistic up to the taking of Dion's mask from her heart, the real man to her who never recognized his real self the infrequent times she saw it. In that instant she again becomes symbolic.

In referring to the technic employed in this play, Mr. Frederick Donaghey remarks:

"He (Mr. O'Neill) fought hard against all limitations imposed by modern stage craft, and at length broke away in The Great God Brown by harking back to the ancient Greek device of masking the characters, with each mask representing either a trait or a mood. Thus, one of the characters (Dion) in that play had three masks - - - one to show him as he was; one to show him as the world believed him

to be; the third to show him as he wished to have the world think of him.

"Finding the device of the masks awkward, he made another break from restrictions and harked back to the old time "soliloquy" and "aside" of the days before Ibsen and before the telephone permitted a playwright to get ideas across to the audience without "thinking aloud." This third person form of conversation gives a sense of the inner mind being revealed, and expresses the aloofness and separateness of the soul.

"One complete scene is a soliloquy by Brown in which he reveals his subconscious mind."

The Ancient Mariner (1924), Mr. O'Neill's next product is interesting merely as an experiment in the formalization of the stage, almost to the extent of the Japanese No drama. Inasmuch as there are no words of Mr. O'Neill's for the actors to speak, it cannot be in anyway representative of Mr. O'Neill's philosophy.

Marco's Millions. (1927). Against a background of exotic Eastern beauty moves the soul-bound Venetian merchant, Marco Polo, perfect extravert, the symbol of all the getters of Western civilization.

Junior member of the firm of Palo Brothers and Son, Marco reaches the court of the great Kubla Kahn, where with condescending good nature he offers to the improvements civilization on the cultured and sophisticated East.

is given a commission under the emperor and



and grows fat on it.

Kukachin, delicate, sensitive, charming princess, daughter of The Kahn, loves this fourteenth century Babbitt and insists he has a soul. Her father and the court philosopher doubt this, but permit Marco to escort the princess through the kingdom of her future husband.

Marco's soul doesn't materialize; the little princess dies of love, and more pompous, avaricious, and insensible than ever, Marco returns with his millions to Venice and his commonplace Donnata.

An ironic symbolism flashes across the gorgeous tapestry of the eleven narrative episodes that make up this study in contrasts: provincialism with universality, modern practicality with ancient idealism, and common sense with romantic love.

Marco, aggressive, obtuse, pragmatic, baffles the wisdom of the medieval and aristocratic Kahn with his cynical and utilitarian philosophy of action aimed at instant tangible results.

Marco is really a man in search of his own soul. In his inability to recognize it as reflected in the eyes of the Princess lies the tragedy.

Much more pathetic, however, is the Princess's plight. She has discovered, in chasing her illusion,

through her trials with Marco's imperviousness, what love is, and for her, how unattainable. Again we have the O'Neill of tragic frustration.

In the song of the sailors at the harbor of Hormuz and in the sad music of the unrecognized love song of Kukachin surges poignant, touching lyricism.

Regarding the one element which up to this time had been lacking in the dramatist's productions we find the comment:

"Humor has not so far been a strong characteristic of Mr. O'Neill's work, but now the diligent craftsman of the gaunt and melancholy theme emerges as an ironist of entertaining quality. 'Marco Millions' is certainly his most jovial play and the acidity of his satire is warmed by a lively sense of genial ridicule." (177:516.)

Lazarus Laughed (1927), a symbolic mystical interpretation of the earliest history of Christianity, has for its theme the laughter and words of Lazarus: "There is no death! There is only Life! Stars and Dust! Eternal Laughter!"

Mr. O'Neill has conceived Lazarus as growing visibly younger from scene to scene, symbolizing the re-birth motif brought out in Cybel's impassioned chant of the eternal cycle of "spring, death, and peace, but always the chalice of life again in the spring."

Mr. O'Neill selects the brief sentence "Jesus wept" before he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and on that basis his allegorical fable that Christ called Lazarus forth to life, not back from death. With "God's eternal laughter" on his lips he molds the multitude to his own will. He urges them to remember laughter to cast out their fear of death. Particularly he sings to Tiberius, representative of the impulse to accept death in life - resignation; and to Caligula, emblem of destruction, who believes that pain is the only truth humans understand.

His laughter always rouses first anger, then reluctant love. Only while he is preaching and laughing can he convince his hearers that death is an illusion, that life itself is a part of a much larger and happier scheme. Always when he leaves the scene the old fear of death returns.

That Mr. O'Neill was successful in his presentation of this last idea to modern audiences is brought out in a criticism by Mr. Joseph Krutch, who notes:

"This central idea is so effectively bodied forth that it seems true as long as the play endures, and it is meaningful within the framework of the action however little we as individuals maybe called to carry it beyond those limitations." (80:19.)

Mr. Louis Kalonymé paradoxically speaks of Mr. O'Neill's "dithyrambic" Lazarus Laughed, and proceeds to explain his apparent contradiction of terms.

"I have described Lazarus Laughed as being dithyrambic. I have used that Greek word only to indicate the Dionysian impulse in the symbolical figure Lazarus, and also to indicate that O'Neill's play is neither tragedy or comedy. The songs of Lazarus are Dionysian in their ecstasies but not in their sentiment. O'Neill has ~~not~~ written a classic modern play - as modern as the sun. It is a play of our time, one answer to our hopes, discontents, sterilities.

It is a play of our world for our world that O'Neill has written. Out of the New Testament's Lazarus story O'Neill has reconstructed the earliest Christian moment in the decadent worlds of Jerusalem, Greece, and Rome as a mirror of our moment. Lazarus' exhortation to the men of that world to remember laughter - to let the Man in them get drunk on life - is as applicable now as it was then." (74:68.)

In this drama all the characters save Lazarus are masked, and in a comprehensive scheme the seven periods of life are each represented by seven masks portraying general types of character, so there are exactly forty-nine different combinations of Period and Type, embracing all Mankind. In this universality of representation "O'Neill recovers some of the primordial impulses of drama. As a work of creative imagination Lazarus Laughed takes rank with heroic poetry." (9:5.)

Nine years ago, April 11, 1920, to be exact, Mr.

O'Neill made this statement in a letter to the New York Times:

"I dreamed of wedding the theme for a novel to the play form in a way that would still leave the play master of the house. I still dream of it, and when audiences develop four-hour attention, and are able to visualize a whole set from one or two suggestive details, then!"

That enigmatic "then" so full of promise has materialized into "the play that for more than a year has been the most celebrated anywhere in the world," (181:2.)

Strange Interlude. (1928)

Superficially the story is not complicated.

Mr. O'Neill shows us how one woman, neurotic and introverted, draws three men under her spell, until she can say "My three men!...I feel their desires converge in me to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb....The three! husband! lover! father...." She spoke truly. The three are emotionally involved, with her, one, Sam as her husband and the supposed father of her child, Darrel, her lover, the child's real father, and faithful old Charlie, who acts as a proxy father to her, giving her kindness.

Symbolically, the woman stands for Woman, the husband for Boy, satisfying her desire for maternity, Darrell for passion, and Charlie, with his doglike devotion, for Father, who makes no emotional demands.

Nina is in one sense not a character at all. She is an abstraction of the eternal mother. O'Neill would have

us feel that she is like other women, only more so, and that under all surface agitation runs an unswerving indomitable stream of instinctive purpose.

Of the men, her father is out of touch with life-afraid. Charlie is a novelist who never dared to put life on paper. Darrell represents the scientific rationalist who discovers, just as Abbie Putnam did, the age old fact, that rationalism is helpless in the face of emotion.

Just what Mr. O'Neill's purpose in presenting the play <sup>is</sup> we can only conjecture. Does he wish to present a picture of life as seen by the advocates of "new morality" who stop at nothing, feeling the end a wise and valiant life (to their minds) justifies the means; is it satirical? Does the author wish to show human beings wisdom, or lack of it, in interfering in the spiritual life of others?

Or did he merely wish to try out a new convention with which he had experimented before? This brings us to his use of the "over tones".

In the use of the "aside" and soliloquy Mr. O'Neill has only expanded an idea formerly used. In The Great God Brown the mask carried the idea. In Strange Interlude he permits his characters to speak the sub-strata of their thoughts aloud, on the assumption, no doubt, that they

to her girlhood place by marrying the faithful paternal Marsden.

Marsden says, "After all, dear Nina, there was something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and fantastic, the sort of thing that isn't done really.....So let's men and you forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude of trial and preparation in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to blush in peace.

And Nina replies, with a strange smile: "Strange Interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father."

Now whether this last comment which O'Neill has voiced through Nina is used ironically to satirize the arrogance of men in creating God in their own image and likeness or whether it is a forerunner of the theme of his next play Dynamo, which has for its theme the search for the generative life force in machine or matter as typified by the dynamo is a question not to be taken up in this discussion since the author has neither read nor seen the play.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chronological review of Mr. O'Neill's plays, which show a constant growth in profundity, scope, and imagination, we can perceive three periods. To the first, which tends to be romantic and objective, belong the following productions, followed by their date of composition:

Bound East for Cardiff (1914)

Moon of the Caribbees (1916)

The Long Voyage Home (1916)

Ile (1916)

In the Zone (1916)

Where the Cross is Made (1918)

The Rope (1918)

The characters and experiences in these earlier plays were quite wholly in the hands of fate. This is characteristic of Mr. O'Neill, who from the very first has evidenced a belief in "an ironic life force," which resembles the Greek Nemesis or Fate. Man, to Mr. O'Neill, is always the eternal protagonist in the grip of forces greater and more subtle than himself.

The second period is inclined to the naturalistic and autobiographical. In it are included the plays:



Beyond the Horizon (1918)

The Straw (1918)

Gold (1920)

Diff'rent (1920)

Anna Christie (1920)

Welded (1923)

That Mr. O'Neill was losing a little of his harshness was evinced in The Straw, and this quality of mitigation grew, culminating in the so-called happy ending of Anna Christie. Contemporaneous with this tendency was the writing of plays which have been called sordid. Diff'rent (1920), Desire Under the Elms (1924), Beyond the Horizon (1918), for instance, did not contain the fate element of the earlier plays; rather they seem to be groping toward new ideals of tragedy, the frustration of hope against a background of degenerate farm life, and the psycho-analyzation of morbid spiritual states.

In the last period symbolic and subjective material, expressed in deeper, more poetic and philosophic form, displaces the hitherto prevailing naturalism. Emperor Jones (1920), and The Fountain (1921), are not only more richly exotic in setting, but are more highly symbolic than

any of the others except Lazarus Laughed (1926). This latter is interesting in that it is a declaration of his belief. "We should laugh, rather than weep, if we but knew all ", he voices through Lazarus.

The Hairy Ape and The Great God Brown, poles apart as they are in form, language, and characterization, both reveal man's aspirations to identify himself in the scheme of life, nature, God, - call it what you will.

This brings us to the last play to be considered, "Strange Interlude", somewhat of an anomaly with its overtones, a typical device of the new realism which seems to assume that man is honest only in the lowest strata of his mind or soul, his primitive self.

Marsden typifies unresisting acquiescence, a form of life in death for which O'Neill has always voiced his condemnation. To Marsden alone, who dodged life persistently, comes everything. On this note of spiritless resignation, so opposed to the primitive energy that the author admires, the play closes, and we seem to find in the dramatist's philosophy a note of morose resentment at a God who will let the Charley Marsdens of the world have all the luck.

A COMPLETE LIST OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS REVIEWED  
IN THIS THESIS

(Dates indicate year of composition)

- 1913 Thirst  
The Web
- 1914 Recklessness  
Warnings  
Fog  
Bound East for Cardiff
- 1916 Before Breakfast  
Ile  
In the Zone  
The Long Voyage Home  
The Moon of the Caribbees
- 1918 The Rope  
Beyond the Horizon  
The Dreamy Kid  
Where the Cross is Made  
The Straw
- 1920 Gold  
Anna Christie  
The Emperor Jones  
Diff'rent
- 1921 The First Man  
The Fountain  
The Hairy Ape
- 1923 Welded  
Marco Millions  
All God's Chillun Got Wings

- 1924 Desire Under the Elms
- 1926 The Great God Brown
- 1927 Lazarus Laughed
- 1928 Strange Interlude
- 1929 Dynamo

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Saturday Review, CXLII, October 16,1926. p. 443.
169. "Strange Interlude", Saturday  
Review of Literature, IV, March 3,1928, p.641.
170. Donaghey, Frederick, Letter to Miss Dowling , February  
19,1929.



## R E F E R E E S ' R E P O R T S

It is the practice of the Graduate School to have theses read by three referees. If the first two votes are favorable, the third reading is sometimes omitted. The Graduate Council regularly recommends for the degree all students who have a majority of favorable votes.

Students are frequently required to rewrite portions of their theses because of the referees' criticisms. This will explain why references to pages are sometimes inaccurate and why shortcomings concerning which comment is made in the reports are found not to exist.

Judith Reynick: The Philosophy of Eugene O'Neill.

Merits of the Study:

1. Agreeable diction -- a natural and easy manner of expression.
2. Fairly adequate exploration of so-called expert opinion concerning O'Neill's works.
3. Satisfactory knowledge of research technic and an apparent appreciation (superficial in some instances) of O'Neill's dramatic contributions.

Defects:

1. Faulty documentation (due in part to typographical errors in her Manual of Directions).
2. A more exhaustive life history should throw added light upon the playwright's philosophy.
3. Granting that she is dealing with a man whose works are characterized by irony, realism, satire, and mysticism, might not the writer have delved more deeply into what might be termed his "spiritual paradox."

In other words her conclusions seem to be more apparent and agreeable at times than conclusive.

Thesis approved May 10, 1929

Howard E. Egan

The short-comings of this thesis are due to the fact that it confines itself almost entirely to two methods of presentation: summary of plots, and quoting of critical authorities. Too little attempt is made to read the plays carefully, sift their various ideas and motives, and so determine "the philosophy" of Eugene O'Neill which the author makes her objective in her introduction. Consequently, the paper is a series of summarizing episodes; the title becomes a misnomer; and by turning to page 85 one may see at a glance that her study has not provided the writer with sufficient constructive material out of which to present "conclusions" on this dramatist's philosophy. She has read the plays for their "stories," not for their philosophy. I have estimated that, altogether, the thesis does not contain more than eight or ten pages of her own comment and interpretation. In quoting from critics and historians of the drama, she does not co-ordinate her material sufficiently. Many conflicting and contradictory opinions are stated without taking into account the differing viewpoints of the critics. In this respect the paper has too much the appearance of a mosaic of quotations and plot summaries. Plot summaries are not good material for a thesis, unless summarizing is the only available method whereby good analysis may be achieved.

The writer has read her plays with interest, and has worked out the themes of many of them with skill. She has also collected many good items and so made her bibliography very valuable. I have noted a number of slips in spelling in the context. The arrangement of material is good, although lack of transitional passages makes it difficult for the reader to pass from one play to another intelligently and see the connection between the plays which are set side by side. In this respect incoherence results, largely because of the paper's basic fault, described above. Certain plays are handled with skill (Gold, Beyond the Horizon); with others (Strange Interlude, The Great God Brown, etc) enough time has not been taken, and the materialistic character of their philosophy has not been defined with exactness. I would suggest that the later plays (which are more difficult) be restudied, and somewhat more painstaking analyses be made of them here. The Conclusion is too short. It does not give a full summary of the plays' "philosophy," and since the author set out to describe this, any reader will turn to the final section expecting to find a comprehensive outline of O'Neill's ideas and viewpoints, up to the present stage of his career.

This thesis has the merits of being based on a good variety of material, and of taking into account the great quantity of

comment and criticism which has been printed on this dramatist's plays. A greater coherence of presentation, and a more direct analysis of the plays themselves from a Catholic and aesthetic viewpoint are necessary to give the thesis its fullest value.

I pass this thesis (by Judith Reynick) with the suggestion that revision be made along lines described in this criticism.

Morton D. Zabel