Expressionism in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill

Luke Maurelius Grande

Loyola University Chicago

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EXPRESSIONISM IN THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

Brother Luke Maurelius Grande

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose in this thesis is to point out the expressionism in Eugene O'Neill's plays up to 1938. The fact that he has used expressionistic techniques has been recognized by every dramatic critic, but the extent to which he has used them and the varying degree in which he has employed them in specific plays have never been comprehensively treated.

Before studying his plays for examples of expressionism, certain terms must be adequately defined, particularly expressionism, of which Clayton Meeker Hamilton says:

Within the last year or two 1924, I have read in several reviews of the current theatre a word that I do not understand -- the word "expressionism." Since all art is a form of expression I cannot understand how any one particular method of art can be any more expressionistic than any other method.

I have never used the term "expressionism" in my writing or my conversation, because I do not know the meaning of it; and I have never found anybody else who knows what it means. Yet the word is frequently employed by various professional writers, who don't know what they mean by it. Apparently they use it because it sounds impressive. Perhaps, if they are paid by the word, they even charge extra for it.

This castigation may be warranted; but I shall try to show that, by whatever name you wish to call it, there is a certain mode of drama that may be called expressionism. Other dramatic terms will be reviewed briefly. For this review I shall lean heavily upon recognized dramatic critics in order to dispense with preliminaries as quickly as possible. A summary of expressionism's history in the drama completes the first chapter.

The second chapter reviews expressionism, what it is and what it is not (Realism, Naturalism, Romanticism, Symbolism), followed by the chief technical devices by which this mode of drama is characterized. In the third chapter I shall point out O'Neill's purposes in drama and the general use he makes of expressionistic devices. In the final chapter I shall consider the techniques of expressionism as they are applied to the specific and individual plays of O'Neill.

O'Neill is eclectic and has employed all methods and all combinations of methods. To show his use of one of these methods (which, incidentally, he has used to a great extent) is the aim of this thesis.
"Do you really attach much value to categories? I, for my part, believe that the dramatic categories are elastic, and that they must accommodate themselves to the literary facts — not vice versa," said Hendrik Ibsen. ¹ Yes, there is a great value in categories. The student of literature must go on defining and cataloguing if he wishes to have any communication of ideas.

There may be a hundred different writers using the words "realistic," "expressionistic," etc., and all may have different meanings in their minds. I am not interested in all these definitions. I will give the definition which is generally accepted and use it as my yard stick in measuring the various dramatic works under consideration in this thesis.

First of all basic definitions must be that of "drama." "A clue to the essential elements of drama is furnished by the first clause of the most famous of all definitions of tragedy, Aristotle's 'Tragedy is an imitation of an action.' "² Evidently we may take this to mean

representation of action. In other words, drama is not actual life, but a representation of life.

So far this definition would not exclude the art of the novel, painting or sculpture. Archibald Henderson completes the definition by stating that it is "any presentation of human life by human interpreters on a stage in a theater before a representative audience." 3

One of the essentials of drama apparent in Aristotle's definition is action. Therefore, the chief elements may be summed up as representation, impersonation by a human interpreter, and action.

Having defined drama, we must consider in what forms we see it.

If anyone is going to be bold enough to classify plays at all today, he might as well say at the very beginning that terms like "tragedy," "comedy," "farce," and "melodrama" are after all only labels academically pasted onto stories which creative writers contrive for the stage because they have a story they must tell. 4

These are the four basic "academic labels" with which we classify the drama according to its form. What of the many other forms? Millett accounts for them when he says:

There is a difficulty which arises in a study of dramatic forms. This is the multiplicity of minor varieties, like chronicle plays, heroic plays, tragi-comedies, burlesques, problem plays, and various combinations of the standard forms.

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The forms differ in purpose and method. The minor forms of drama belong to the study of particular periods of dramatic history and not to a general introductory survey of dramatic forms. These minor forms rise out of a peculiar interest which has dominated certain audiences and led to the development of a play which appeals to this interest. Generally the interest has died out after a generation or so and the type of play has disappeared with it. 5

Thus the Polonius-like lists of dramatic forms may be eliminated for the present.

The subject of a drama may be chosen from life on any level or on any plane of fantasy or imagination. This subject may be worked out through action and characters which may be dynamic, static, or passive.

In presenting character and action a drama may, and usually does, involve the technical elements of plot, setting, and dialogue.

When studying the drama we may consider it as a type of literature. As a literary type it may be studied "in its genre: tragedy, comedy, melodrama, and farce; in its aesthetic modes: classical, romantic; realistic, etc.; in its technical elements: plot, character, dialogue, and setting." 6

The drama is here considered from the viewpoint of the aesthetic mode. It is, therefore, important to understand what is meant by the term "mode." The source of the meaning of a play, that is, the


6 Ibid., p. 4.
source of its values, "is the attitude of the poet or dramatist himself; the meaning is the consequence of the impact of a particular personality upon a chosen subject." 7 The dramatic expression of the "impact of a subject upon a particular personality" is the mode of the dramatist.

The major difference between modern and earlier forms of tragedy is a difference of tone, arising from the dramatic modes -- classical, romantic, realistic, etc. Of almost equal importance as the dramatic form into which the playwright moulds his subject is the feeling-tone with which he attempts to invest his treatment of the subject. This tone, to be sure, is in some respects closely related to the form which he chooses, but it is also dependent in part upon the playwright's personal response to the subject, in part upon the taste of the time, and in part upon the view of life held by the dramatist, which is sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, in his rendition of the theme. It is obvious that the same material for drama, the same plot, may be regarded romantically or cynically, seriously or trivially. 8

From this explanation it is apparent that the aesthetic mode is not necessarily connected with the form (tragic, comic, etc.,) and may thus be considered apart from it. It is practically impossible to isolate the various elements that go into the making of a drama, I realize, for they are interdependent. There could be no dramatic mode if there were no form, but for purposes of study these elements may be analysed separately.

7 Ibid., p. 126.
8 Ibid., p. 177.
In this study we will not discuss the play as a form (for this approach see Millett's book, cited in these pages) but as an example of one of the aesthetic modes, expressionism, and the technical element to which such a mode gives rise.

The link between a subject the dramatist wishes to present and the mode in which he wishes to present it is dramatic method, which includes every means of expression which the artist can command to deepen and widen his implications; every device he uses to make his aim more fully conscious and more finely discriminated. 9

The whole body of means and devices to which a writer has recourse in order to project his subject concretely on a stage is called technique. Too often, however, technique is considered as synonymous with the term dramatic mode, whereas it is merely the concrete expression of that mode.

By studying the technique that is used in the development of a drama one may deduce the mode in which the drama was conceived.

Having reviewed the terms form, drama, mode, and technique, I shall present a brief outline of the principal exponents of the mode which we shall consider in this thesis. In the following chapter I shall define in detail the mode and techniques of the expressionists.

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As an unconscious striving to reach beyond the limits of Realism, expressionism's beginnings may be traced back almost eighty years in the work of some of Europe's most renowned realists.

The two greatest figures in the modern theater give the same demonstration of the limitations of Realism and turn in the same fashion away from actuality and towards an intense spiritual vitality. Both Ibsen and Strindberg come out of Romanticism into Realism and pass on into a Symbolism that is far on the way toward expressionism. 10

One of the aims of the expressionists is to present character subjectively. We are asked to regard the persons on the stage, not only with our own eyes, but through their own emotional nature. Yet there is nothing revolutionary in this point of view.

It may be that Hedda Gabler as lived by Hedda will differ considerably from Hedda Gabler as observed by Ibsen; but we know that a dramatist's greatest efforts are always reinforced by subjective feeling. 11

It is impossible for a writer to keep his subjective feelings out of what he writes altogether. What distinguishes the expressionist from others is the degree to which his feelings affect the objective presentation technically on the stage.

Expressionism has been used loosely to comprise all the rebels from realism which are characterized by "a crystallization of the subconscious, the telling of a story by the representation of actuating

10 Kenneth Macgowan, Continental Drama (New York, 1922), p. 27.

11 Ashley Dukes, The Youngest Drama (Chicago, 1924), p. 133.
motives on varying planes of consciousness rather than by the mere narration of the outcome of those motives. 12

Kenneth Macgowan describes the hazy emergence of expressionism:

Expressionism entered the theatre before it knew itself as expressionism. The term is a convenient blanket designed to cover all those methods in modern painting which substitute formal expression of the artist's emotion for a representation of the object that may have aroused it. It includes cubism, vorticism, and those portions of futurism and post-impressionism which do not aim too directly at representation. In the older forms of painting the object of the artist was usually either representation or else the expression of an emotion caused by the object represented. In expressionism the subjective attitude of the artist entered a little more consciously and fully into the work. 13

There has always been an intimate nexus between painting and drama. What expressionism summed up in art, it likewise summed up in the drama. Nevertheless, while expressionism appears to cover a multitude of dramatic modes which are represented by a trend toward the emotional-crisis play as against the thought play, toward intensity of feeling as against likeness to outward life and truthfulness of detail, toward looseness of technique as against formula, it is also strictly defined as a distinct mode 14 characterized by an effort to record what seems

to be the words, acts, and thoughts of the subconscious soul, presented by means of concrete symbols, aided by scenery or lighting.  

Thus we see that expressionism was not merely a new technique, but a new mode of looking at life and presenting reality, which resulted in new techniques. It was not merely an effort to arouse an emotion in the audience "which should find expression in the word, 'How strange!'" but which "after all, may be the more difficult task, to elicit the exclamation, 'How true!'"  

This mode called expressionism gained its first adherents among the German Sturm-und-Drang movement. The expressionistic movement of Germany is directly associated with the work of Wedeking. It also has its associations with the grotesque movement of Italy. The German expressionists began by seeking to do away entirely with the old "enclosed art forms with their cut-and-dried symbols."  

But it was Strindberg who set down the credo of the expressionists:  

Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and Space do not exist; on an insignificant groundwork of reality imagination spins and
weaves new patterns: a mixture of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations. The characters are split, doubled and multiplied: they evaporate and are condensed, are diffused and concentrated. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all. 18

Not only did he set down their principles but he illustrated them in The Dream Play, The Great Highway, and The Spook Sonata. Strindberg failed to become a complete master of expressionism before his mental crisis sent him to the sanatorium. Nevertheless, one cannot minimize the value of these symbolic works. They provide a surrealistic experience that reveals the soul and opens windows in it without quite communicating with the mind. They make Strindberg the fore­runner of the expressionistic stage, which widened dramatic horizons without exactly littering the stage with masterpieces. 19

Most of the expressionists who followed Strindberg's lead failed to unify their plays. They prevented emotion by being abstract, fantastic, and puzzling, and they prevented any strongly unifying effect from their abstract themes by their incoherence and obscurity.

Kenneth Macgowan, while granting these followers technically a greater vigor than Strindberg, objects to their morbid subject matter (which, though not essential, is, unfortunately, characteristic of many expressionists) when he states:

18 Alan Reynolds Thompson, Anatomy of the Drama (Berkeley, California, 1942), p. 185.

The bizarre morbidity, the nauseating sexuality, the lack of any trace of joy or beauty, which characterized the work of most of those who labeled themselves expressionists in Germany, match Strindberg at his unhappiest, while the vigor with which they drive their ideas forth in speech far outdoes him. 20

The expressionists’ pessimism reached beyond Germany in the work of the Brothers Capek. Stirred by the German movement in 1921, Karel Capek wrote a memorable play in R.U.R. The Insect Comedy, or the World We Live In, written in collaboration with his brother Josef, must be listed among the most successful of Central European expressionistic dramas. Unfortunately, pessimism was the dominant note of those expressionists who revealed any maturity as artists.

Back in Germany, expressionism continued to be represented by the playwrights Kaiser and Toller, and the plays The Mass Man and The Machine Wreckers. In Italy, Pirandello was enlisted in the cause of the expressionists (though he may be classified as an expressionist only in the loosest of meanings). 21

Expressionism, with its technique of dissociated scenes and its exploration of the unconscious, made a few invasions into the French theatre. Unfortunately, the efforts of its chief exponent, Lenorman, to externalize the unconscious merely "outlined the dynamics of human


21 Gassner, op. cit., p. 490.
character instead of filling the stage with living personalities. 22

The first Broadway production applying the principles of expressionism to its staging was the production of Macbeth by Arthur Hopkins in the spring of 1921, with settings by Robert Edmond Jones. 23 Probably the most completely expressionistic drama to be staged to date by an American is Elmer Rice's astonishing play The Adding Machine.

The expressionistic productions, scenically far superior to the Broadway level at that time, were given by the Provincetown Players to O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. 24

Having described in summary form the common terms which shall frequently be employed during the course of this work, the particular phase of dramaturgy to be studied in this thesis (from the wide field of dramatic studies that may be developed), and the origins of this mode of drama in dramatic history, I shall, in the next chapter, describe in detail the characteristics of expressionism, the manner in which it differs from other modes of drama, and the techniques which are employed by its exponents.

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22 Ibid., p. 419.

23 Macgowan, The Theatre of Tomorrow, p. 118.

CHAPTER II

EXPRESSIONISM AND ITS TECHNIQUES

Expressionism is a mode of drama resulting from an attitude of mind of the dramatist. This attitude in turn gives rise to many technical innovations. Expressionism is not merely a name for a certain type of theatrical machinery. This mode of drama and its mechanical devices in presentation come to be considered, erroneously, as synonymous. ¹

The dramatist is trying to penetrate the surface of reality, to penetrate man's soul. It is not an attempt to escape from reality, but from external life. Pirandello, one of Italy's greatest experimentalists, expressed the attitude of all expressionists when he said that

art has tremendously circumscribed its own powers in comparison with life by insisting upon an "idiotic verisimilitude" which is in no true sense a reflection of life. It closed the door to the absurdities of life, to its crazy irrelevancies. Once truly represented in a work of art these irrelevancies cease to be absurd; they become the very stuff of truth. ²

The irrelevancies of the dream and psychic world are often more real than the elaborately contrived plots of a "Real" world of a Maxim Gorki.

The dramatist who employs expressionism distrusts objective appearances objectively displayed and seeks to "treat subjective reality

¹ Ashley Dukes, op. cit., p. 31.
² Dickenson, An Outline of Contemporary Drama, p. 271.
as if it were objective, giving it speech and action, but always under the
convention that what is spoken and done is to represent the inner and not
the outer life. 3

It is an attempt to present the emotion of the artist in terms
of either nature or abstract form instead of showing the effect of nature
upon the artist. "It must use nature or man as the medium of expression,
but it subdues the appearance of the natural world to the inner reality
of the emotion which it wishes to make clear to us." 4

Expressionism called for the presentation of inner states rather
than outer reality, as well as for the distortion of the latter by the
inner eye. This type of drama was at first so subjective and its
themes so morbid that it was looked upon as something of an aesthetic
hoax.

Even the more objective approach called for styliza-
tion of one kind or another and frequently strove to
represent the anarchic state of the world by a corres-
ponding anarchy of rapidly shifting, elusive scenes, by
an alternation of fantasy and reality, and by characters
who are fantastic either in themselves or in their
visions or moods. 5

I think the best summation of its purposes is given by
Sheldon Cheney:

3 Dickenson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre, p. 311.
4 Macgowan, The Theatre of Tomorrow, p. 254.
5 Gassner, op. cit., p. 485.
Expressionism in the larger art sense, means expression of the artist's emotion rather than depiction of the object exciting it; means emphasis on "form" rather than on observed fact, escape from the limitation of what can be seen with the eye; means intensification, not portrayal of life; means presentative as against representative production, with consequent shift of emphasis (in the theatre) to creative use of the characteristic means of the stage art, to movement, color, lighting, acting, as well as words and their "meaning"; means usually the violation of actuality, the piling up of emotionally effective incident.

While reflecting a high purpose in its basic theory, "the technical changes have been confusing." 7 Such plays depend for their major effectiveness upon the frank use of artifices." 8 Some of these artifices may be justified for their expressiveness even if they do not give the illusion of reality (factual concreteness); but some of the dramatists carried the expressionistic convention to an unintelligible extreme.

They abandoned all pretense of literal representation in favor of a symbolism sometimes borrowed from the dream world, "sometimes, it would appear, merely at random from the whole mixed tradition of allegorical representation including the political cartoon and comic strip." 9

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6 The Theatre, p. 512.

7 Kenneth Macgowan, Continental Stagecraft, p. 21.

8 Alan Reynolds Thompson, op. cit., p. 112.

9 Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama since 1918 (New York, 1939), p. 239.
Such a drama is not a closely knit fabric. In a number of plays of this type there is not even a consistent symbolism. "The part of the playwright is but functional. He employs the play as an expression of a thousand tangled motives on many planes of reality and dream. Certainly it is not his business to warp his material into a consistent pattern." 10

The play can be of any length, from a fragment to a trilogy. It may be built up in action or simply in an aggregation of scenes. It may deal with many aspects, phases, planes of the same action.

Strindberg justifies some of these by calling them dream plays. But it would be false to his conception of the world to suppose that he interprets the term "dream" narrowly. These dreams are not the dreams of sleep. They are the waking dreams of life released from the bonds of simplifying thought and revealed in all their tangled richness and ridiculous profusion. 11

Summed up, the expressionist attempts to express his emotion through pictorial means independent of the physical reality of the object pictures, or its spiritual impression.

Having explained what expressionism is, I shall try to make clear what expressionism is not. In this rather negative explanation, I am particularly interested in showing its distinction from the two principal modes of drama, realism and romanticism.

The expressionist movement arose as a kind of protest against the mutual exclusiveness of romanticism and realism. It was an attempt


11 Loc. cit.
to discover a technique and a method which would express what the dramatist conceived the inner reality of his drama to be better than any of the older dramatic modes were capable of doing. It was a protest, on the one hand, against the sentimental unrealities of romanticism, and, on the other, against the tendency of realism (or naturalism) to content itself with a scrupulous representation of the surfaces of life, the speech-habits, manners, emotions, and ideas of one or another class in society.

To the expressionist, romanticism seemed to substitute falsifications for faithful interpretation of human experience; realism seemed to miss the inner psychological realities through its preoccupation with the accurate reproduction of surfaces.

More narrowly, expressionism reveals the influences on the drama of the contemporary preoccupation with the rich and complex, conscious and subconscious experience of modern personalities, and at the same time betrays the impatience of dramatist and producer with the limitations of late nineteenth-century naturalistic staging, and an eagerness to exploit to the full the tremendous resources of modern theatrical mechanics and lighting, and to project through vigorously imaginative means the philosophical or psychical concepts of an experimental drama. 12

"Realism," as it is used in common dramatic parlance, "may be termed the drama of immediate actuality." 13 True realism would include such a drama as the expressionists would produce. Archibald Henderson


13 The Changing Drama, p. 84.
in defining realism has likewise defined expressionism, showing the kindship between true realism and this experimental drama. "Realism is seeing in such a manner that the thing seen is perceived by the audience just as the dramatist saw it." 14 Add a clause indicating the abstraction of the thing seen and the definition fits the expressionistic drama. A difference does exist between the realistic drama, meaning naturalism, and the expressionistic; but not between it and true realism.

The expressionist is not satisfied with the repetition of surface naturalism, the clever imitation of the obvious, the pre-possessions of the propagandist, all characteristic of realism .... In their stead, we shall demand spiritual realism. 15

The realists have a weakness for asking questions about life. The expressionists have a preference for answering them. The difference is fundamental. It is the difference between the study of a phenomenon and the presentation of an idea. The realists are interested in ideas only insofar as they produce phenomena, and the expressionists are interested in phenomena only insofar as they interpret thought. Hence "an expressionist play appears distorted, overwrought, neurotic, or even insane to the mind of the realist ... just as the early paintings of the impressionists appeared grotesque and meaningless to the untrained eye of the spectator." 16

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14 Ibid., p. 87.
15 Sayler, op. cit., p. 204.
16 Dukes, op. cit., pp. 120-1.
Inner truth is so much more important than actuality that the expressionist drama will not bother itself to achieve both, and if one must infringe on the other — which must happen in almost every case — then it chooses quickly and fearlessly the inner truth. 17

Kenneth Macgowan's remark that "Realism has moments of clarity; expressionism is murky," 18 might be countered by Edsmith's comment on the value of realism's clarity: "The world is here; it would be absurd to repeat it." 19

"The difference between realism and naturalism is one of degree, and not of kind. The naturalist is the variety of realist who accepts without qualification, all the implications of the scientific view of life," says Fred Millett. 20 Consequently, as realism differs from expressionism, naturalism differs from expressionism — the difference is merely one of degree.

Naturalism began by representing outer reality photographically; expressionism sought to represent inner reality. The earlier naturalist wanted to show

a man of flesh and bones on the stage, taken from reality, scientifically analyzed, and without one lie. The expressionist tried to show man's thoughts on the stage, in accordance with the modern psychology that emphasizes the instinctive urges which motivate them, and their flowing incoherence. 21

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17 Macgowan, Continental Stagecraft, p. 6.
18 Ibid., p. 4.
19 Macgowan, The Theatre of Tomorrow, p. 255.
21 Thompson, op. cit., p. 344.
Romanticism in the main tends to be idealistic and optimistic and liberal. It sees life in general as glamorous, exciting, and admirable. It has been said by numerous writers that in romanticism the element of emotion takes precedence over the element of reason and the passion for fidelity to fact. "The romanticist prizes above all else the existence and the creation of a particular kind of beauty, a beauty which, as Pater said, is mingled with strangeness." 22

The expressionists, on the contrary, are never trying to escape from this world or from reality, but merely from surface reality to the inner reality, even if that inner reality is unpleasant to behold.

In symbolic dramas we are conscious of a deeper meaning half hidden behind the external manifestation of the life on the stage. We can speculate on the hidden meaning if we will. The dramas of Maeterlinck are "played in a Beyond, which lies behind doors, windows, curtains, walls and which we must penetrate if we are to grasp or even vaguely feel the significance of the play." 23 But the Theatre of expressionism has nothing whatever to do with things as the physical eye sees them. It does not seek the illusion of reality at all. It is not interested in the picture-puzzle technique of symbolism ("See what the meanings of my symbols are, and seek the meaning beyond them").

22 Millett, op. cit., p. 139.

demands no speculation as to whether a crooked stick is intended to be a tree or a gallows or a cross. It is interested only in presenting sensibly and concretely the abstract reality that is present to the mind of the playwright. 24

While expressionistic drama has furnished some powerful technical effects, the expressionistic dramatists have not found material quite to justify some of the grotesque effects they manage to concoct. Usually the ideas which these dramatists attempt to convey have already been treated effectively in the older, recognized modes. Furthermore, the minimization of the elements of characterization and plot narrows the appeal of the expressionistic drama.

The expressionist has helped to break down the rather artificial boundaries between the modes and has encouraged experimentation. Expressionism has freed the dramatist from the rather hampering limitations of pure romanticism or pure realism. 25

Here we are not particularly interested in debating the relative merits of the various modes of drama, but in establishing clearly the principles and uniqueness of a mode of drama which, because it is seldom presented in an unmixed form, is not clearly recognized or understood.

Having summarized the theory of expressionism and its variance from other dramatic attitudes, we must take a look at the techniques which

characterize this attitude. Once these techniques have been described, we may study dramas of O'Neill and see in his works the various techniques which have come to be associated with the expressionistic drama.

Expressionism presents its ideas in color and light, detached evocative words, gestures, masks, less of character drawing and more of the embodiment of abstract passions, characters depicted as larger than life. In scenic setting the stage is not like a picture puzzle with the essential elements withheld until the meaning of the play is disclosed as a whole. Such a play in such a theatre might consist of a few hundred scattered words and page on page of stage directions.

In all this the theatre will leave a good deal to the imagination of the spectator. The expressionist is interested, not in carrying over an emotional reaction from the stage to the audience, but in "compelling the audience subjectively to create its own emotional reactions under the stimulus of significant suggestion." 26

The term expressionism loosely covers a great variety of technical experiments and varies among such styles as allegory, satire, fantasy, tragedy, and farce, so that no simple formula will adequately fit it. But one fact seems of paramount importance, and that is its effort to represent concretely on the stage what happens inside a character's mind. To do this the expressionists revived traditional

26 Sayler, op. cit., p. 159.
devices and developed new ones. They revived asides and soliloquies, for example, but with the difference that theirs are usually incoherent like actual thought. The soliloquy was nothing new but it was used in startling fashion to indicate mental states. "Again the expressionists reverted to the technique of the moralities by personifying abstractions in order to express their own revolutionary attitudes." 27

What specific techniques did the expressionists employ in method, subject matter, plot structure, characterization, and setting?

The method of expressionism is based upon appeals of sensation rather than formalized reason. "Expressionism, sometimes held to be a pursuit of the extravagant, is, in fact, the result of the application of sincerity to the treatment of emotional materials." 28

Materials which were formerly treated from the outside are now treated from the inside. That which was objective becomes subjective. It is the business of drama to get under the surface, where we find layer after layer of reality.

The artists began seeking out the expedients of the past art of the theatre: the choruses, masks, puppets, dances, and harlequinades of yesterday. 29

27 Thompson, op. cit., p. 343.
28 Dickenson, Playwrights of the New American Drama, p. 104.
29 Loc. cit.
Thomas Dickenson summarizes the subject matter of the expressionist under three headings:

1. Atavistic race strains; the hidden factors of heredity.

2. The duality or multiplicity of life as between illusion and reality, or various planes of illusion and reality.

3. The disposition to summarize the world of appearance into expressive categories, representing the application of man's systems to natural phenomena. 30

What of the plot structure of an expressionistic drama? It is usually a plotless narrative; events are related to each other only through the fact of their occurrence in consecutive time. The formula for a plotless narrative would go something like this: this happened, and then something else happened, etc., etc.; but never: this happened so this happened, etc. The interest aroused by the narrative without plot is an interest in separate events building up or piling up emotion upon emotion. 31

Once interest is aroused in these events the interest tends to become cumulative; the dramatist can count on a more or less steady rise of interest as the play moves to its crises, climax, and solution. In other words, interest takes on the added intensity of suspense.

The expressionist in opening this drama of events plunges the audience in medias res. There has developed a great sensitivity in both

30 Ibid., p. 106.
31 Millett, op. cit., p. 179.
modern audiences and playwrights to artificial exposition in drama, and in consequence the emphasis is on the least ostentatious and unelaborate means of conveying the necessary information to the audience. The expressionist is inclined to throw the burden of interpretation on the audience, to plunge it into the midst of a situation, and to allow the audience to make what can be made of it.

After the exposition, the complications that arise in the expressionists' dramas are very different from those in a play of external plot and action. They are events and ideas and emotions in the pre-history of these characters, not apparent at the opening of the play. 32

Though the story may follow a general plot pattern, the motives that actuate the characters are often unexplained (as in reality) and their actions are in consequence startling, unexpected, and, at times, rather violent. 33

One technique, common to all dramatists, but often invoked by the expressionist, is the use of the denouement as the dramatic recall. Dramatic recall points back to the objects, circumstances, or motifs which have been prepared for by the process of foreshadowing.

Thus, while in general the plot is much less restricted in form and development, the expressionist can find certain parallels with other

32 Ibid., p. 191.
33 Thompson, op. cit., p. 343.
modes of dramatic plot-building.

Another characteristic is the use of short scenes. Some expressionistic devices used by Americans, as I pointed out in the first chapter, were borrowed directly from the German expressionists. The American expressionists adapted the technique of short scenes and sharp, detached episodes to make more flexible the older three-act form into which plays were well set at the turn of the century. As a result of this change, the scenic designer assumes a role of new importance, his work having to be considered almost always in the final estimate. 34

In the average play the characters reveal themselves to you, as people do in life, by what they do and say, and occasionally you can be sure what is really taking place within them. Modern psychology teaches us that much of the time we cannot know what actually is going on within ourselves. Expressionism projects on the stage and places its chief emphasis on the inner workings of the characters. The objective acts of the characters, the story such acts make, are of less interest. "It demands of its practitioners both insight and technical inventiveness of a high order, if it is to result in anything more than freakishness, and it puts new strains upon both producer and scenic artist." 35


35 Ibid., p. 323.
Characters are often represented as types in order to emphasize their typicalness, but in being so represented lose so much individuality as to lose their real meaning. Characters are sometimes almost abstract terms. In Rice's The Adding Machine, characters do not have even names, but numbers. "Again, the unreality of characters is suggested, as in The Hairy Ape, by their wearing masks and jittering in doll-like or puppet-like movements." 36

One advantage of such characters is that the author who employs them simplifies a great deal of the work of motivation.

The audience is in a state of faith in which it is willing to assume that in a character of a certain type certain motives will predominate. The availability of a nexus of motives in well-established type-characters is certainly one of the reasons for the appeal of type-characters to a dramatist. 37

In discussing character portrayal some of the chief technical marks of expressionism must be discussed. The language, dialogue, and monologue (soliloquy) take on a new function, becoming the audibly sensible expression of the subconscious; masks serve to visualize the interior, hidden, or real character; such a technique also places a new responsibility upon the actor.

The expressionist dramas are as free in speech as they are in idea. It is a freedom that often makes a harmonious wedding of end and means.

36 Millett, op. cit., p. 167.
37 Ibid., p. 217.
Sometimes, as in plays of Der Sturm group, the language is so completely free from the bonds of actuality that it approaches the onomatopoetic verse of Mallarme.

In Eugene O'Neill's distinguished piece of expressionism, The Hairy Ape, the speech which is realistic and characteristic in idiom is developed in idea, intensity, and length of utterance clean past the possibilities of the people of the play. 38

It is the paradox of the theater that an art that depends upon speech should in its higher reaches rapidly be tending beyond the confines of speech. 39

Are such characters to address us directly or indirectly? Are the words they speak to be intelligible to the other persons on the stage or only to the mind of the listener? We know that thoughts (which the expressionist is trying to interpret) are not always intelligible in everyday life.

Thoughts have no necessary common currency. In two peoples' minds there may be a parallelism of thoughts that will never meet or will never be mutually understood. They underlie the conventions of speech and the illusions of action; they are the hidden springs of personal being. If they be once revealed, the ordinary dramatic dialogue of mutual understanding, question and answer, retort and rejoinder must go by the board; and in its place we have a dramatic dialogue where the characters speak, as it were, past each other and address themselves only to the comprehension of the audience. 40

38 Macgowan, Continental Stagecraft, p. 29.


40 Dukes, op. cit., p. 134.
The dialogue tends either toward a telegraphic style of exclamations and cries, or toward extended soliloquies like those in Strange Interlude. This type of dialogue reveals much in the nature and motives of the major figures of the drama.

The telegraphic tone and style, apparently intended to give the impression that everything except the absolute essentials of human speech has been pared away. The sentence disappears and phrases or iterated words serve for communication. 41

Expressionism encourages the freest possible handling of speech. In the same play we are likely to find sudden and sometimes inexplicable shifts from verse to prose, from objective realism to highly subjective monologue, from conventional realistic dialogue to monosyllabic utterances.

The monologue also has been revived by the expressionists who are greatly assisted thereby in projecting subconscious or semi-conscious material. The expressionistic monologue is more broken up, incoherent, and illogical than the traditional type. The source in life of this convenient device is obvious since what has come to be called in recent times the "interior monologue" or stream of consciousness in which observation, perception, sensation, feeling, emotions, and ideas are all involved, is an omnipresent phenomenon in the experience of any normally self-observant person. 42

Another elaborate and much discussed technical device which is closely allied to the "interior monologue" is that of masks which "allows

41 Millett, op. cit., p. 167.
42 Ibid., p. 211.
the chief personages to wear masks representing their public selves and to remove them when they soliloquize their secret thought." 43

The use of masks or stylized make-up does not mean a surrender of the deepest expressiveness. It may be a more direct and economical means of expressing the truths that lie beyond representation. 44

Such devices as the monologue affect the actor, banishing representational acting and putting in its place a presentational ensemble, fusing it with all the elements that go into the making of a play. The expressionist wants to "draw the actor and the spectator out of the picture frame and seat. They think that a new sort of theater might have something to do with it." 45

Thus by a fusing of new speech, mask, and acting technique, the expressionist seeks to give a new insight into human character.

The last technical innovation to be considered here deals with the expressionists' employment of setting. Shakespeare can be acted on a bare platform; Shaw can be acted in conventional realistic sets; but to act expressionistic dramas successfully the modern scene designer must cooperate with the electrician, and all elements must be carefully coordinated by a guiding director. In this type of play writing there is a definite challenge to the theatre artists. He has many pitfalls as well as opportunities.

43 Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama since 1918, p. 90.
44 Dickenson, Playwrights of the New American Drama, p. 317.
45 Macgowan, Continental Stagecraft, p. 158.
There is a danger in expressionism: the subjective projection of a character's inner being too often means the projection of chaos — and in the constant use of this method, with its quickly shifting scenes, the author may easily lose track of his spire of meaning and end in dramatizing fog. 46

Such techniques, if carried too far, tend to distract audiences. If this happens, the effect achieved is a mere trick and defeats the avowed purpose of the expressionist.

There is a tendency in most cases to minimize setting until it indicates only the absolute essentials of form and feature. A room may be indicated by a chair or two, or a jungle, by an unrealistic tree. The strain that the rapid succession of scenes imposes upon the mechanism of the stage explains part of this simplification, but, at least from the playwright's point of view, such simplification would seem to be an attempt by omission to stress the essential, or to give the play the atmosphere of abstraction.

The desire of the expressionistic playwright to objectify as tellingly as possible complex psychological states, particularly of an abnormal sort, has driven him to utilize stage-devices akin in their super-rationality to the devices of romantic staging, but dependent on the elaborate mechanical resources of the modern theater for realization. 47

Setting does not remain unchanged through orderly constructed acts, but shifts frequently as in dreams. This is sometimes called "cinema

46 Eaton, op. cit., p. 325.

47 Millett, op. cit., p. 167.
technique." Distortions and deformations of visual and auditory images are resorted to in order to show reality as seen through the mind affected by emotion or bias (and every mind is thus affected to a greater or lesser degree). Scenery acts — actually moves, changes, and takes part in the action of the play.

Carried to its logical conclusion this means the elimination of the actor as the primary factor in the theatre. This is the accusation made against the newer designers in all their work. 48

We have an audience which is to feel an emotion that is present not in the objects per se, but in the creative mind of the dramatist and, through him, in the mind of the actor and the artist. It is the business of the stage designer to express this emotion by shaping these objects upon the stage into significant forms. 49

At first this process was not crystalized as expressionism, but was known under a number of names such as cubism, futurism, or post-impressionism. Its first attempt at application was in the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow on Christmas Day, 1914. 50

Gordon Craig and Sam Hume were two foremost designers in theatrical expressionism. They tended toward a use of abstract shapes and non-representative objects and design to express mood and atmosphere. They introduced new conventional forms and structures upon the stage in place

48 Macgowan, The Theatre of Tomorrow, p. 121.

49 Ibid., p. 114.

50 Loc. cit.
of the conventional forms of backdrop and wings or the solid illusionist setting. They began painting and building forms which have been called cubist and futurist, but which are merely the best of expressionistic settings.

Robert Edmund Jones made new invasions in expressionistic design with his use of light, which he treated as a part of his design and not as proceeding from a natural source. He simply omits the source altogether.

This is a return to a fundamental attitude forgotten by the theatre in its years of realism and its seeking after illusion. It means the "treating of the actor and the things about him as actual materials to call up emotions, not as things suggesting and representing other things." 51

Outlines in this chapter were: the definition of expressionism (a comparison of it with other dramatic modes), and a review of the techniques which characterize it. These techniques concerned method, subject matter, plot, characterization, and setting.

Having considered the expressionistic mode and its techniques in general, let us go on to consider O'Neill's use of them.

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51 Ibid., p. 146.
CHAPTER III

EUGENE O'NEILL AND EXPRESSIONISM

Already there is a mountainous pyramid of printed comment about
O'Neill's plays, and he is the first playwright seriously discussed in
books having to do with the American Theater. He has been called a
genius by some critics and by others an apostle of melodramatic theatrica-
lity. (There will always be the professional debunking Kemelmans to say,
"I think the value of his experimentation is greatly over-rated." 2)

One set of readers will maintain him to be a realist, taking their
cue from Diff'rent, a drama in which New England seafaring folk speak
their accustomed tongue and few details of portraiture are spared.

He is clearly an emotional playwright, others will say, urging
the case of The Straw, where the love for each other of two consumptives
is handled with true pathos. If The Emperor Jones be taken as the test,
he is surely an expressionist. Anna Christie seems to show romantic
possibilities, and The Hairy Ape bites as deep as any satire. 3

1 David Karsner, Sixteen Authors to One (New York, 1928), p. 108.


3 Dukes, op. cit., p. 70.
I shall try not to fall into the error of stating that O'Neill, because he wrote The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape, is an expressionist. But once we have examined his purposes, it is easy to see why he may be claimed by this school of dramatists, even though he may never have consciously adopted their methods. In many of his plays his purposes are closely allied to the purposes of the expressionists. In realizing his dramatic ideas he employed many techniques which the expressionists had made their trademark.

What were O'Neill's purposes? As early as 1923 he had publicly issued his artistic manifesto:

I intend to use whatever I can make my own, to write about anything under the sun in any manner that fits the subject. And I shall never be influenced by any consideration but one: Is it the truth as I know it — or, better still, feel it ... It is just life that interests me as a thing in itself. 4

He is above all else the poet of the individual soul, torn and warped, perhaps, by the surrounding mass currents — but still at least vaguely the master of its individual choice. What particularly did he mean by "life"?

Deeply troubled by the ancient riddle of good and evil, and vexed by the problem of Man's place in the universe, his mixed inheritance, his evil deeds, his capacity for struggle, O'Neill once remarked to Barrett Clark, "Too many playwrights are intent upon writing about people instead

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of life."  It would make little difference to O'Neill if he found himself in the stokehole of a steamship, or on the battlements of Troy, for the same foibles, energies, ideals, struggles are to be found in the peoples of all times and places. O'Neill, trying to make a play out of the contest between vice and virtue for the soul of man, was embarked on a problem that Shakespeare had to face. Date and setting meant little to O'Neill.

He himself says:

Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God.

He was concerned with "the relation of man to God," that is to say, with the relation of man to something, whether that something is the universe itself, or the laws that govern man's own nature, independent of local or temporary condition. He realized also that tragedy is essentially a story of some calamity growing out of that relationship, and that it differs from the story of any failure involving merely human relationships by virtue of two facts: on the one hand, it involves a good deal more; on the other, the characters take on a dignity they would not otherwise have.

6 O'Hara, op. cit., p. 2.
7 Walter Prichard Eaton, Drama in England, pp. 46-47.
8 Flexner, op. cit., p. 195.
9 Krutch, American Drama since 1918, p. 104.
O'Neill has used the theatre increasingly as a forum from which to consider man's relation to the universe. Most of his plays are cast in the form of a question, a search: how can man find fulfillment in sexual love, in the pursuit of wealth, in the face of racial barriers, or the indifference of our society to art?

He says:

It is rather amusing to me to see how seriously people take politics and social questions and how much they expect of them. Life as a whole is changed very little, if at all, as a result of their course.

Tinkering with externals, legislation, and social fiat do not change anything. They will come at the command of the imagination and the will. 10

What he was intensely interested in was the eternal, unchangeable struggles of the soul.

To George Jean Nathan, O'Neill once wrote:

The playwright of today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it — the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving of primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is scribbling around the surface of things. 11

10 Sayler, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

11 Krutch, op. cit., p. 93.
He did not want to scribble around the surface of things. He was always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just in terms of characters. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him, instead of being an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible — or can be — to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their annobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage.

Of course, this is very much of a dream, but where the theatre is concerned, one must have a dream, and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever. 12

In a letter to his friend Barrett H. Clark, he reiterates the same idea:

Perhaps I can explain the nature of my feelings for the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at, at work in my plays. 13

It is not surprising, therefore, that this playwright who was so interested in the spiritual struggles of man should have resorted to objectifying them.

Whether warrantedly or not, Sheldon Cheney eulogises him as


America's one internationally known playwright, significant for his achievement in lifting American drama out of a purely provincial or reflective activity (as viewed from Europe), and as the one English writing dramatist who has made Expressionism a broadly successful mode. 14

Later in his career O'Neill was to defend boldly the use of expressionism, when he stated:

It is only by means of some form of "supernaturalism" that we may express in the theater what we comprehend intuitively of that self-obsession which is the particular discount we moderns have to pay for the loan of life. The old "naturalism" — or "realism," if you prefer, (I would to God some genius were gigantic enough to define clearly the separateness of these terms once and for all!) — no longer applies. It represents our fathers' daring aspirations toward self-recognition by holding the family kodak up to ill-nature.

But to us their old audacity is a plague, we have taken too many snapshots of each other in every graceless position. We have endured too much from the banality of surfaces. 15

This sounds like something directly out of the mouth of a most confirmed expressionist. O'Neill's art has always been restless; his hand has always dug beneath the surface to the subconscious yearnings and reactions, and he has sought to utter the unexpressed thought of our inner life in conflict. One of the most interesting things about his work is his effort to find new ways of expressing the unexpressed inward desires.

15 Clark, op. cit., p. 75.
"In an effort to make his characters reveal themselves, he has experimented with masks to represent psychological states; he has written dialogue sub rosa, sotto voce, as a means of indicating double mental states." 16

This is really the ultimate O'Neill, the drama which he has been approaching since his early play *Fog*. Though O'Neill has said that he has finished with the naturalistic theatre, in a sense he has never in realism sought anything but "a symbol; never in a concrete hero failed to shadow Man, the eternal protagonist, in the grip of natural forces greater than himself." 17

Expressionism is the negation of representation (which O'Neill was so dissatisfied with), that is, of surfaces. The old Romanticism, the old Naturalism, it seems, are no longer sufficient to convey the complexities of modern life. It is the business of the expressionist to portray what O'Neill calls the "behind-life."

What O'Neill is seeking is what every serious artist has always sought, a more effective means of expressing life. The point is not: Is or is not expressionistic drama an unusual form? but: What virtue does it possess? The plays have shown the way toward a freer development of subject matter than there was possible in the theatre of the past, and it


is only reasonable that such freedom should appeal to O'Neill. 18

Eleanor Flexner says that O'Neill "has shown himself unable to
draw an iota of assurance of positivism out of anything but an emotional
conviction" and that "O'Neill is touched with the death he delights in
depicting." 19 These are far from enthusiastic encomiums, but they point
out the subjectivity (which is an outstanding characteristic of the
expressionist) in the plays of O'Neill.

Her first charge may be true. Whether or not he has chosen
worth-while subjects or psychological states to dramatize will not be con-
sidered. As Felix Schelling says, "Whether I like a given subject or not
is one sort of a question; whether, the subject granted, the work upon it
is well done, is quite another." 20

Not only is O'Neill's general purpose nearly synonymous with
that of the expressionist, but even in the specific plots there is a
great similarity. In O'Neill the action consists almost entirely of an
analysis of the obsessed and even insane minds of the characters in his
plays. "Insanity is to be found in most of his plays and in many cases
the entire structure of the play is based on some mad obsession of one of
the characters." 21

19 Flexner, op. cit., p. 155.
20 Felix E. Schelling, Appraisements & Asperities (Philadelphia,
1922), p. 146.
His themes have at the same time been extraordinarily diverse. But neither the variety of themes nor the restless experimentation with forms and unusual technical devices is the consequence of a mere technician trying his powers. On the contrary, "an intense, almost pathological introverted personality obsessed with what is really a single idea, seems to be seizing, one after another upon themes or forms of expression and then dropping them after more or less prolonged experimentation." 22

Inasmuch as the description of the heroes of O'Neill's plays fit him, and inasmuch as several of the plays are autobiographical, it is reasonable to suppose that all the heroes are projections of O'Neill's personality. Even Jim Harris in All God's Chillun Got Wings is O'Neill in black-face. Ludwig Lewisohn puts it bluntly, "he might easily have followed the precedent set by the writers of paper-covered boys' books in naming his plays thus: Eugene O'Neill, the Boy Architect; Eugene on a New England Farm; Eugene in Harlem." 23

Despite the exaggeration, it seems plain that the history of O'Neill's development is the history of a persistent, if fumbling, attempt to objectify his emotions, accompanied by a hope that this or that opening suggested by some current intellectual fashion would provide the opportunity

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for which he felt the need. This is one of the chief characteristics of the expressionists.

In every speech that O'Neill writes, one is conscious of O'Neill writing. 24 His illness from tuberculosis (for a synopsis of O'Neill's life see Mantle 25) after his wanderings over the face of the earth had brought him face to face with the terror of death and, in turn, raised the difficult problem of the meaning of life which became in his case something more than an academic question. His private disturbances also forced upon him an interest in sexual psychology and an inner stress which the American theatre had conventionally evaded. During his convalescence he read not only the classic dramatists but Ibsen, Wedekind, and Strindberg — "especially Strindberg," as he later confessed.

"O'Neill's representation of split personalities of The Great God Brown and Days Without End recalls the Scandinavian master's expressionist style, just as his use of masks harks back to the Greeks," says John Gassner. 26 Understanding the interests O'Neill had and his acquaintance with Strindberg, it is not unreasonable for a student of O'Neill of suspect that he drew heavily upon Strindberg's expressionism — another reason to believe that O'Neill consciously used expressionistic techniques in his work.

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26 Masters of the Drama (New York, 1940), p. 646.
Walter Prichard Eaton also mentions Strindberg in relation to Eugene O'Neill: "He [O'Neill] has been peculiarly sensitive to the many influences in the air of the modern world, from his earliest days when he read Strindberg avidly." 27

His closest friend, Barrett H. Clark, places Strindberg among the three influences on O'Neill when he says:

Nietzsche, Strindberg, and Wedekind — particularly the first two — have been among the most powerful influences at work on Eugene O'Neill. He too had felt the futility of trying to express in the old forms the multifariousness of modern life. 28

Note that two of these writers have been associated and, in fact, been singled out as the chief exponents of expressionism. O'Neill, lest he appear to be a mere imitator, has defended himself from the charge (and it may seem that "he protesteth too much"):

The first Expressionistic play I ever saw was Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, produced in New York in 1922, after I'd written both The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. I had read From Morn to Midnight before The Hairy Ape was written but not before the idea for it was planned. The point is that The Hairy Ape is a direct descendant of Jones written long before I had ever heard of Expressionism, and its form needs no explanation but this. As a matter of fact, I did not think much of Morn to Midnight, and still don't. It is too easy. It would not have influenced me. 29

27 Drama in England, p. 332.


29 Ibid., pp. 71-72.
However, one who has studied his life must be a bit suspicious of his plea of complete originality. In The Emperor Jones he had abandoned both the outer form and the pseudo-naturalism of his more conventional plays. He had found his form and method, and his failure to cultivate it exclusively from that moment may be accounted for (as he claims) by his isolation from the central movements in European literature in which many American writers live. He may have felt himself "engaged in an unheard-of experiment; he was, in fact, an expressionist of the most approved and, undoubtedly, of the nobler sort." 30

If Kaiser did not influence O'Neill, it may be said fairly that Strindberg had "exercised a dominating influence on O'Neill's art and outlook. Strindberg had a marked effect on his technique and on the content and inclination of his mind." 31

Dickenson compares O'Neill with Strindberg as follows:

Though touched with the wand of the expressionist, O'Neill differs from many of them in that he is absolutely sincere. He cares nothing for shocks or paradoxes. In honesty of conviction he is comparable to Strindberg while avoiding his mental extravagances. 32

O'Neill says of Strindberg:

In creating a modern theater which we hope will liberate for significant expression a fresh elation and joy in experimental production it is the most apt symbol of


our good intentions that we start with a play by August Strindberg: for Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theater.

Strindberg still remains among the most modern of moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theater of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama — the blood of our lives today.

It is only by means of some form of "supernaturalism" that we may express to the theater what we comprehend intuitively of that self-obsession which is the particular discount we moderns have to pay for the loan on life. The old "naturalism" — or "realism" if you prefer, no longer applied... We have endured too much from the banality of surfaces.

Strindberg knew and suffered with our struggle before many of us were born. He expresses it by intensifying the methods to come. All that is enduring in what we loosely call "expressionism" — all that is artistically valid and sound theater — can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg. 33

This quotation by O'Neill upon the opening of the Provincetown Playhouse with The Spook Sonata in 1923 is of great importance in understanding O'Neill's theories of theatre and their sources. It is a summation of all that has been said up to now of the influence of the expressionists, and particularly Strindberg, upon O'Neill.

This theory was carried into action in The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, and Lazarus Laughed when he threw off the chains of imitation of the naturalists and widened the expressiveness of the American stage. He did this with violence, speed and piled-up emotion rather than with

33 Ibid., pp. 100-1.
serenity and depths; he broke over the old rigidities of the well-made play, without suggesting a new play-structure, utilizing a form rather jerky and unfinished; but he moved his audience with a new thrill, a new theatrical directness. 34

The O'Neill who has not been content with external portraiture has used the x-ray machine as well as a painter's brush, and it is this method that has caused grave difficulties. In true expressionistic style he became accustomed to turning his characters into attributes and neuroses. Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra, for example, is for the most part a fixation.

For closer inspection he has also divided personality (as in the case of Dion and Anthony in The Great God Brown, and John and Loving in Days Without End); his method of characterization has consequently become a demonstration of ideas about character instead of individualization (which is one of the dangers in the expressionistic techniques). Sometimes his people have been symbols rather than identifiable persons.

Invariably by action and other kinds of visualization he succeeds in externalizing inner stresses, calling attention to them, and discharging them theatrically. 35

35 Gassner, op. cit., p. 644.
He shows us man as undergoing an inner defeat. For the defeat his protagonists suffer is spiritual; they end in a spiritual frustration, a spiritual failure. 36

It is the old battle with the physical limitation of his medium carried to a larger field. Absorbed in this he has made terrific demands, as have all expressionistic writers, upon the theatre, and has taken the consequences. He has abolished intermissions, used masks, and held an audience through its dinner time for an afternoon and an evening. 37

Great dramatists, as well as poets, have the gift of rendering their meaning on two planes: one objective, the other subjective. "O'Neill's rise has been the story of the development of his dramatic overtones." 38 It is precisely O'Neill's urge to go beyond the mere photography of the "surface of things" — though he proved himself an excellent photographer in the early plays — that enabled him to leave the commonplace theatre of his youth. Having, unlike Shaw, little concern for the dynamics of society, he could satisfy his aim of doing "big work" only by expressing inner conflicts.

"Always the interest is focused on the mental process of the victim, and ordinarily the destructive force itself is an inner one: the mind goes to pieces because of its own inner conflict." 39 He does not

39 Whipple, op. cit., p. 234.
concern himself much with accidents and details; in his indifference to
appearances, and his eagerness to go below to the primary motives, he
neglects the minutiae which lend verisimilitude to a portrait.

Because O'Neill's whole interest is centered on
the essential springs of action, his people are likely
to appear elementary — I think the truer word is
elemental. They are manifestations of such primal
forces as hate and fear and cupidity and sexual desire.
They are stripped of all save the one or two vital
energies of the moment, and if they seem at times
unduly simple and rudimentary or even abstract, this
bareness may be more than compensated for by a gain
in strength. 40

O'Neill has the gift of reaching to the emotional and moral
inwardness of life without any relation to specific events or times or
people. "His plays are like parables, the representation in outer and
objective form of certain elemental and inner struggles." 41 Time and
again critics point to O'Neill's objective and sensible projection of the
inward struggles which have been his and which are interpreted presenta-
tionally through his characters.

O'Neill, though imitating the expressionist in part, has de-
veloped new expressionistic devices. "He has not only written good plays;
he has created new patterns of drama, and he has dealt both thoughtfully
and imaginatively with fundamental ideas." 42


42 "Nobel Prize goes to Eugene O'Neill," Christian Century,
November, 1931, p. 939.
All through his plays, descriptions and directions are strewn
for the actors who are to interpret his plays. A new emphasis on and
greater demands of the actors was typical of the expressionists; for
example: "Old Cabot turns green," "tears stream down the cheeks of
Nukachin." But actors cannot weep at will or turn green with anything
more than a metaphorical manner. Lazarus Laughed makes super-human
exactions upon the chief actor, and Strange Interlude is probably the
hardest task ever assigned a group of players. 43

He has always dealt in characters of one syllable, stressing
one or two traits, expressing the simplest of emotions, "requiring the
actor's presence to fill in the outlines." 44 Even the most concrete
of O'Neill's personages were only secondarily, and for the sake of con-
venience, men and women specifically of a yesterday or a today and
dressed in the mental or physical costumes of their period. Essentially
they were all naked souls.

Each of his later plays is a morality, if not an allegory. He
seems to want to reemphasize meanings throughout the play. "He used all
manner of devices to emphasize meaning: masks and masklike make-up,
symbolic costumes and groupings of actors, symbolic stage sets and

Monthly, November, 1931, p. 1548.

44 T. K. Whipple, "Tragedy of Eugene O'Neill," New Republic,
January 21, 1925, p. 223.
formalized plots." \(^{45}\)

His is the type of mind which begins with an abstract theme and works toward the concrete embodiment; that is, he first conceives his plays in the form of abstract propositions. His people alone are not enough interest to carry the play; in fact, in and of themselves, apart from what happens to them, they would cause us little concern or curiosity. O'Neill's tendency has always been away from the actual toward the concretion of the abstract and schematic. Even in The Hairy Ape, Yank remains more of a symbol than a person.

It seems as though O'Neill felt more at home with symbols than with people. One reason why he was the first American playwright to join the anti-realistic reaction of expressionism may be that the newer technique offered him a line of less resistance than the old, in that it freed him from the necessity of trying to transform his forces into concrete individuals, and gave him a chance to solve many of his problems, as in All God's Chillun, by means of devices which are rather mechanical. His plays have tended more and more to work themselves out like the equations of physics. \(^{46}\)

T. K. Whipple has noted this same characteristic: "Seldom does he seek to give us the complete illusion of actuality. O'Neill has the type of mind, an expressionist's, which begins with an abstract theme and works from that to the concrete." \(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) Alan Reynolds Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 391-2.


Into the inner depths of the individual he continued to delve. In the early play *Welded*, O'Neill when describing Michael Cape is not describing an individual face, but one which embodies all the characteristics of a type, and has very nearly the abstraction of a symbol. The use of the term "masklike" is indicative; it recurs frequently in his later plays, and leads naturally to one of the most typical techniques of the expressionist -- the use of masks themselves, with their emphasis on the abstraction and stylization of qualities instead of the direct human presentation of these qualities. 48

O'Neill once stated that he would like to produce most of his plays with masked actors. 49 The masks in *The Great God Brown*, the aside in *Strange Interlude* and *Dynamo*, and the dual personality of John Loving in *Days Without End* are mechanical means for externalizing his proneness to introspection and discursiveness. This tendency was first evident in *The First Man*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *All God's Chill- lun*. 50

The use of masks to O'Neill was more than just a stage trick, more even than "a screen interposed between the crucial self and the bleary popular eye." 51 It represented an "integral part of his

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48 Flexner, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
50 Flexner, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
characters. For, as he once said, the world is not only blind to Dion, the man beneath the mask, but it also condemns the mask of Pan." 52 He wishes to present to the eye of the audience a concrete conception of the inner man, which the audience would otherwise be able to see vaguely or, perhaps, not at all.

Accompanying the expressionistic device of the mask is the vocalization of the unspoken and the subconscious. 53 To call these speeches through which O'Neill's characters express their hidden selves "asides," is to give a wrong impression of their import. The purpose of the "aside," virtually abandoned by modern drama, was to withhold from other characters factual information upon which the "plot" hinged. On the other hand, the soliloquy, as used by Shakespeare, is related in spirit and psychological content to O'Neill's technique of the spoken self-revelation. 54

O'Neill has analyzed his use of expressionistic language in all his plays when he states of Desire Under the Elms:

I never intended that the language of that play should be a record of what the characters actually said. I wanted to express what they felt subconsciously. 55

52 Elizabeth Sergeant, "O'Neill: the man with the mask," p. 94.
53 Elizabeth Drew, op. cit., p. 129.
54 Mrs. Anita (Cahn) Block, op. cit., p. 163.
55 Krasner, op. cit., p. 120.
Thanks to the use of the aside, which enables O'Neill to dramatize an incident on several planes simultaneously, there are scenes of truly extraordinary significance and power. In such scenes he achieves his purpose of unraveling the intricacies of human motivation.

When a character is speaking his thoughts, all actors on the stage are motionless. The awkward effect of the old aside is entirely absent. The audience easily accepts the convention that the other characters do not hear. It seems as if we were seeing with absolute accuracy the thoughts of the character.

The dialogue makes the desired impression of external illusion. The monologues or asides cast an artistic spell because they contain the illuminating truth. The thoughts are the inner reality of each character. They come in quick, short phrases like flashes of light that reveal the personality behind the false shell which protects it from mortal view.

Thus expressionism lent itself to a dramatist who in all of his plays was interested in the spiritual struggles of man. All of his plays could be called studies in the mind. Beyond the Horizon deals with a weak romantic who takes refuge from reality in daydreams and finally dies of consumption. Gold is a melodrama about an insane delusion. Different is the case history of a victim of sex repression. The Hairy Ape, "by expressionistic methods borrowed from Strindberg and the Germans, describes a character who, if he is not merely a symbol, is indeed apelike in

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56 Donald Clive Stuart, op. cit., p. 648.
his mentality, and who develops from incipient to raving madness." 57 The First Man turns out to be a study of an emotional fixation. Welded depicts two "egotistic introverts tortured by the inevitable conflicts between their passion and their uncontrolled temperament." 58 Lust and greed fanned into madness are the materials of Desire Under the Elms. The Great God Brown, beneath its elaborate expressionistic machinery, is about a split personality. The Fountain is the story of an obsession. The plot of Strange Interlude is a case history developed along Freudian lines. Lazarus in Lazarus Laughed is not really a human being but merely He-Who-Laugh-At-Death. Dynamo is another study of mania, this time religious. Mourning Becomes Electra is another Freudian study. Days Without End is the story of The Hound of Heaven.

Ashley Dukes believes that there is a unity in all of these plays, "that a single motive lies behind them. It may roughly be summed up in a word as the motive of illusion — the study of that infinite capacity of self-deception in man." 59

By means of drama he makes these inner struggles objective. He creates. He "projects from his inner being to an outer form of expression." 60 Such devices as asides and masks are, in part, attempts to

57 Thompson, op. cit., p. 303.
58 Ibid., p. 304.
60 R. D. Skinner, op. cit., p. 67.
achieve deeper psychological reality by dramatic means.

In each play "fantasy and imagination are mingled with uncom-
promising realism, and in all Eugene O'Neill deals, not chiefly with the
external life of his characters, but principally with their souls." 61

O'Neill has been accused of many faults. S. Young says, "About
him adjectives and lying anecdotes fill the air, and the word great has been
scattered about like stage money.... But the most significant thing that
can be said about Mr. O'Neill's plays is that his qualities are fundamen-
tal theatre." 62

Doubtless early familiarity with popular drama has had something
to do with his revolt against convention and his shrewd theatrical sense
of how even his most eccentric innovations would work out on the stage.
O'Neill admits the effect of his early acquaintance with the theatre
when he said:

The characters in Anna Christie were people I had
known years before. I never liked it as well as some
of my other plays. In telling the story I deliberately
employed all the Broadway tricks which I had learned in
my stage training. Using the same technique, and with
my own experience as a basis, I could turn out dozens
of plays like Anna Christie, but never cared to try.
It is too easy. 63

61 E. A. Baughan, op. cit., p. 853.
63 Krasner, op. cit., p. 120.
O'Neill becomes an experimentalist in form, not in order to experiment, but because "what can at best be symbolized is ultimately the most discerning, the most honest picturing of the complicated mingling in human emotions of heredity, environment, a multiplicity of causes large and small." 64

Not only has O'Neill tried to encompass more of life than most American writers of his time but, almost alone among them, he has persistently tried to solve it. When we understand this we understand that his stage devices are no fortuitous technique; his masks and abstractions, his double personalities, his drum beats and engine rhythms are the integral and necessary expression of his temper of mind and the task it set itself.

In such plays as The Hairy Ape, Lazarus Laughed, and The Great God Brown, where he is explaining the world in parable, symbol, and myth, O'Neill is most creative. Great inscrutable forces are his interest. Life and death, good and evil, spirit and flesh, male and female, the all and the one — O'Neill's is a world of these antithetical absolutes and his literary effort is an algebraic attempt to solve the equation. 65


CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF EIGHT PLAYS

A few of O'Neill's plays show evidence throughout of an expressionist at work; others of his mature works are illumined here and there by the devices of expressionism. Four plays utilize these techniques consistently: The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, The Great God Brown, and Lazarus Laughed, particularly the first two plays named. The latter two have elements of symbolism mixed with a predominantly expressionistic mode.

Four other plays, although expressionistic in conception, make use of only one or two of expressionism's devices; and in two plays, O'Neill resorts to its methods only on occasion.

The Emperor Jones will be examined first, since it is the first highly expressionistic piece O'Neill produced. The Hairy Ape comes next chronologically. The Fountain will then be considered, despite the fact that only one scene is expressionistic, because the conception (in all three plays it is the mind of the main character that we actually see) is similar to that of the previously mentioned plays.

For the same reason (similarity of conception) Dynamo might be placed next; but I wish to consider its use of the expressionistic psychological soliloquy in conjunction with that of Strange Interlude.

The conception, although expressionistic, of The Great God Brown differs in that we here view the inner lives of several individuals, not
just one as we do in the first three plays.

Strange Interlude, the sixth play to be discussed, reveals a multiplicity of inner conflicts but employs only one expressionistic device, the soliloquy. Dynamo follows. It partakes of the characteristics of both Strange Interlude and the first three mentioned dramas.

Lazarus Laughed, though apparently similar to The Great God Brown in method and undoubtedly expressionistic in some of its characteristics, borders on symbolism (mood) more than any of the previously considered dramas.

Days Without End, related to Lazarus Laughed in its study of the soul in search of faith, was the last play of O'Neill written before his retirement in 1936, and fittingly is considered last, since in some respects it was considered (erroneously, if we can take The Iceman Cometh of 1946 as a statement of O'Neill's present position) the final answer to the restless questioning that had been apparent in all his previous plays.

Even before The Emperor Jones, signs of coming expressionism are evident in some of his earlier and one-act plays. Fog is the earliest of the O'Neill plays to show the artist's attempt to reach out beyond the limits of literal surface realism -- or rather, the first to carry out successfully the particular kind of super-realism he was later to use so effectively.

The scene is in the lifeboat of a passenger steamer drifting helplessly off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. A dense fog lies heavily upon the still sea. The characters are a Poet, a Man of Business, a
Polish Peasant Woman, a Dead Child, Sailors, and an Officer. In the boat are the poet, the business man, the woman, and her dead child.

They drift up to the edge of an iceberg, waiting for help. They hear a steamer whistle but the Poet prevents the Business Man from calling, in order to save the steamer from running into the iceberg. We see, by this time, that the play is not conceived as a realistic transcript of life: The Poet is an embodiment of idealism, and the Business Man an abstract figure suggesting materialism. For the moment it looks as though all were lost. The fog lifts and the boat approaches. The sailors have been guided in their direction by the voice of the dead child.

Clark says, "It is a dramatic parable with a sudden flash of beauty at the end. Technically it foreshadows the expressionistic scenes of The Hairy Ape." ¹

Trilling points out that it was typically O'Neill, not only in technique but in subject. "It was a crude sketch of the moral world that O'Neill was to exploit later." ²

A second play to foreshadow (by its interest in the inner conflicts which were to blossom forth in Strange Interlude, Dynamo, and Days Without End) an expressionistic technique was Welded. The play is not intended as surface realism; it is an attempt to strip away all the

encumbering nonessentials, to reveal directly two souls at war with each other. The plot is direct and impersonal, the language as analytical as the psychological soliloquies of Strange Interlude. Though the earlier characters did not have the reality or depth of the later, they were exploited in much the same manner, though without the mature use of soliloquy.

If Strange Interlude and Days Without End had their antecedents, even more evidently is Where the Cross Is Made a foreshadowing of The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape, the tenth scene of The Fountain, and the last scene of Dynamo. In Where the Cross Is Made, which was eventually rounded out to a full three acts, we see the phantoms which have their only reality in the minds of the mad sea captain, Bartlett, and his insane son. We have here the nightmare effect, (characteristic of expressionism) which O'Neill was to develop later. We see the return of the dead crew of Bartlett's Mary Ann. It is significant that only Nat and his father see the vision, Sue being sane. We see the drowned sailors through the eyes of the insane:

(The forms of Silas Horne, Cates, and Jimmy Kanaka rise noiselessly into the room from the stairs. The last two carry heavy inlaid chests. Horne is a parrot-nosed angular old man. Jimmy wears ... only a breech cloth. Cates is ... dressed in ... a shredded white sailor's blouse, stained with iron-rust. All are in their bare feet. Water drips from their soaked and rotten clothes. Their hair is matted, intertwined with slimy strands of sea-weed. Their eyes, as they glide silently into the room, stare frightfully wide at nothing. Their flesh in the green light has the suggestion of decomposition. Their bodies sway limply,
nervelessly, rhythmically as if to the pulse of long swells of the deep sea.)

In analysing these plays I have followed the general plan of pointing out expressionistic views of conception, method, subject matter, character portrayal, and setting that are apparent from readings of these plays.

In some of the discussions, references to one or more of these elements are omitted since they are not expressionistic; on the other hand, in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* each element, since it is evidently expressionistic, is discussed in detail. In no two plays does there seem to be a perfect similarity of elements. While analysis of each play is based upon the same plan, each varies as to length of analysis, content, and outline.

*The Emperor Jones*

Though some of O'Neill's earlier plays reveal expressionistic tendencies, it was not until 1920 that the eldritch theatre piece, *The Emperor Jones*, appeared. Learned critics debate hotly the comparative quantity and quality of expressionism in this play and *The Hairy Ape*. If *The Emperor Jones* was not expressionism full-blown, it was definitely in the stages of flowering. All its scenes, with the exception of the

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first and last, are definite forerunners of The Hairy Ape, The Great God Brown, etc.

This is the story of the American Negro. Here O'Neill recreates the tragic history of a race by exhibiting the race-memories of one of its individuals made sentient through terror. O'Neill's purpose already is "to let a character reveal his unconscious self." 4

It is a drama of the mind crumpled by fear, the "inescapable working of racial heritage under the pressure of fear." 5

Under the icy hand of immense terror Jones gradually strips off the outward trappings of his artificial station and goes through a merciless disintegration of pride and ultimately becomes as a mere child who has overheard in a dark room horrible tales of the clotted history of his race. Fear is a great solvent. Fear has the power to waylay all false and lordly vanities and self persuasions. Under its transforming touch all men are instinctively forced back to childlike levels. 6

In successive scenes of nightmare delusion Jones relives the various stages through which his people have passed. Barrett H. Clark says: "It [The Emperor Jones] is one of his more or less fantastic plays, like The Hairy Ape, in which he employs a sort of symbolism called expressionism....It is certain that it is a distinguished example of a highly imaginative type of play." 7

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6 W. P. Eaton, "O'Neill new risen attic stream?" American Scholar, p. 308.

Probably the most glowing review of the play is that given by Walter Prichard Eaton:

The Emperor Jones departs radically from realistic forms, which makes demands on the producer and scene designer, and puts the burden of acting almost entirely on Jones himself. This play is perhaps O'Neill's most perfect longer work, technically considered. It has no excesses, it is completely unified, it moves forward to a foreordained conclusion, rounding the circle.

Sayler also describes the play as, "expressionism -- eight tense staccato scenes, each concerned with the sublimation of a mood, a mental state, rather than with the narration of an episode." 9

The last six scenes of which he speaks show Jones in the jungle, pursued by fear. They are more than six stages of his flight. They are six progressive stages of his rising terror. They are expressionistic rather than realistic, each one a vision his brain conjures up as terror more and more overwhelms him, each one a vision going farther back into his racial past, to the slave market, the slave ship, and then the black superstition of the African jungle.

Only Jones speaks in these scenes -- a long monologue. The designer and producer must help to establish the illusion of terror stricken visions by scenery, light, action, and groupings.

What is real besides Jones himself is only the incessant, nerve-rasping throb of the distant drums, rallying his foes against him.

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9 M. Oliver Sayler, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
the final terror, he comes out of the bush at the very point he entered, where his wise foes are waiting to shoot him down.

The throb of the drums adds to the mood of impending doom. Every element of the play is calculated to make clear a picture of a primitive mind driven back by terror from its proud eminence, self assumed, to its grim racial childhood and to death.

Atavism in various phases was a subject frequently developed in expressionistic plays. The method was also clearly expressionistic, the presentation concretely of phenomena twisted by a mind under the influence of passion. In the six scenes which form Brutus Jones' nightmare of wandering we are not presented with objective events but with the delusions of his fear-obsessed mind. "What he thinks, we see." 10

The spectator himself must through empathy become an actor in the drama. It is the old test of subjectivity; unless we are Jones, the drama fails. But we are Jones, and we look through the eyes of this negro swashbuckler, who is hunted by the "bush niggers" he has ruled and despised.

"Placing his audience directly within the consciousness of this American Negro, O'Neill enables us, with an inner vision, to understand his racial history," says Anita Block. 11


The plot concerns a Pullman porter who flees from the police to a small island in the West Indies and there, by the practice of wiles learned in white civilization, makes himself emperor. The day of reckoning approaches. Jones flees to the forest where he has hidden provisions and money for his journey. Somehow he loses his path.

Frantic at having lost his way, he becomes aware of black, shapeless figures creeping toward him, their low, mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves." These are the Little Formless Fears that are attacking him, and with a yell of terror Jones shoots at them. Then he sees before him the image of Jeff, his fellow Pullman porter whom he had killed. Shouting in rage Jones again shoots. Now he notices a road along which marches a familiar chain gang. Hypnotized, Jones joins it. Soon the phantom Prison Guard lashes him with his whip. Jones fires his revolver at him and flees.

He reaches a clearing, and is paralyzed with horror to find himself surrounded by men and women in the costumes of the prewar South. They are examining batches of slaves presented to them by the Auctioneer who orders Jones to the auction block. Jones fires again twice.

In the moonlight he imagines he sees two rows of black galley-slaves, swaying to and fro as though in a moving ship. Jones joins them, finally running from them deeper into the forest.

Jones is now confronted by the congo Witch Doctor, who calls on him to offer himself as a sacrifice to a crocodile god. Jones uses his last and silver bullet against the crocodile.
The drama closes with shots in the distance; the scene is the edge of the forest. Jones is carried in dead. In his terror he had circled to his starting point.

The first scene, in the palace, is pure realism with a blend of prophetic forboding and introduction of minutiae which are dramatically recalled through the six scenes of fantasy.

Jones is a tragic figure. His outward failure is compensated for by the dignity and greatness of his character. His actions are big, even his evil ones. He tells Smithers:

Dere's little stealin' like you does and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks. 12

His tragedy is the tragedy of Othello; they were both men of too great an imagination. His success was "playin' out my bluff." 13 But Fear called his bluff.

Foreshadowing of his death by the silver bullet is admirably done in the first scene when Jones casually remarks, "Five lead an' dis silver baby at de last. Don't she shine pretty," 14 and "She's my


13 Loc. cit.

14 Loc. cit.
In the last scene Lem says, "My mens dey got un rabbit's foot." 15 "My mens dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him." 16 Even Smithers admits Jones' greatness when he says, "Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!" 17

The exposition is laid down clearly in the opening scene, unlike most expressionistic dramas, but from that time on the play is a piling up of emotion, typical of expressionistic techniques.

Brutus' mental disintegration begins almost from the rising of the curtain. The crisis has occurred. His subjects have abandoned him. He is still, for the present, able to retain the veneer of civilized superiority, voicing his feelings for the "low-flung wood's niggers!" 18 He is contained and arrogant.

Three-thuty. Sundown's at six-thuty or dere-abouts. (Puts his watch back with cool confidence) I got plenty o' time to make it easy. 19

Let dem try deir heathen tricks. De Baptist Church done pertect me and land dem all in hell. 20

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15 Ibid., p. 10.
16 Ibid., p. 34.
17 Ibid., p. 35.
18 Ibid., p. 12.
19 Ibid., p. 13.
20 Ibid., p. 15.
Yet even in the first scene fear has opened the door.

(From the distant hills comes the first faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat — 72 to the minute — and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play.)

(Jones starts at the sound. A strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens....) 21

The drum-beats of approaching disaster symbolized something physical which hounded the fleeing Jones. O'Neill explains the genesis of the drum-beat dominated play:

One day I was reading of the religion feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there: how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heart-beat of every one present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. This was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theater? The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras. 22

Dickenson speaks glowingly of this technique, as of the use of phantoms.

Seldom have the instrumentalities of the theatre been employed so effectively for terror, and to deepen the knowledge of the hidden traits of primitive man. The use of the reverberating drum to imply the deeper rhythms of life from which the Emperor was seeking to

21 Ibid., p. 114.

22 Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: the man and his plays, p. 57.
escape by his trickery of civilization; a rhythm that was to swallow him up as the tide laps the sand, is one of the creative achievements of the modern theatre. Let no one dismiss it as a mere stunt. 23

"From the beginning to end, the audience hears the sound of tom-toms. And the rhythm acts as powerfully on the audience as it does on Jones in the play." 24

The next six scenes are monologues which describe the successive mental states which fear and hunger induce in Jones. Speech is limited to Jones' monologue of rising terror. Much of its effectiveness lies in the stage picture of pantomime. There is no orderly structure of acts building to a climax; instead, its whole duration is one drawn-out climax, due to the use of the tom-toms.

The turning point which leads to Jones' inevitable destruction is his failure to find the hidden cache he had prepared for his escape.

Ain't heah! Gorry, is I in de right place or isn't I...Is I lost de place? Must have! But how dat happen when I was followin' de trail across de plain in broad daylight...How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remebers one?...Nigger, is you gone crazy mad?...(He stares at the plain behind him apprehensively, his hand on his revolver.) 25

The soliloquies, or monologues, are expressionistic devices for furnishing the audience sensibly (audibly) with the inner thoughts of

Jones. They are in character but are certainly not meant to be naturalistic mumblings of the negro fugitive to himself. They are heightened emotionally by a more than surface translation of Jones' verbalisms.

The first of the visibly expressionistic devices, which must have burdened the producer in attempting to carry out, (a difficulty inherent in the plastic staging of most expressionistic dramas) was the concrete presentation of the Little Formless Fears.

They creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing, and sinking prone again. 26

In the second monologue the beating of the tom-tom has become quicker and louder as the nightmare Pullman porter whom Jones had murdered appears to the audience.

He is throwing a pair of dice on the ground before him, picking them up, shaking them, casting them out with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton. 27

The mechanization of characters, typical of the distortion producing devices of the expressionist, appears for the first time.

Interior disintegration is indicated in the course of this

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26 Ibid., p. 19.

27 Ibid., p. 21.
monologue when Jones, losing his braggadocio, says, "Majesty! Der ain't much majesty 'bout dis baby now," 28 and

(Starting toward the other, forgetful for a moment of his surroundings and really believing it is a living man that he sees — in a tone of happy relief) Jeff! I'se sho' glad to see you! Dey tol' me you done died from dat razor cut I gives you. 29

After Jones has realized the vision is not real and has wasted another of his bullets, Jeff disappears. Jones' mental balance has been restored. But Fear, which remains, is indicated by his words, "Dey's gittin' near! Dey's comin' fast! And heah I is shootin' shots to let 'em know jes' whar I is! Oh, Gorry, I'se got to run." 30

Scene Four in setting calls for a road which "glimmers ghastly and unreal. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose." 31

The hysteria of Jones has increased. "I'm meltin' wid heat! Runnin' and runnin' an' runnin! Damn dis heah coat!" 32 His mind is powerless against his fear and again his ghosts appear, this time as a

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28 Ibid., p. 22.
29 Loc. cit.
30 Loc. cit.
31 Ibid., p. 23.
32 Loc. cit.
negro chain gang. "Their movements, like those of Jeff in the preceding scene, are those of automatons — rigid, slow, and mechanical." 33 Jones joins the line and, after being struck by his guard turns upon this figment of his imagination.

(They stand fixed in motionless attitudes their eyes on the ground. The guard seems to wait expectantly, his back turned to the attacker. Jones bellows with baffled, terrified rage, tugging frantically at his revolver.)

I kills you, you white debil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!

(He frees the revolver and fires point blank at the guard's back. Instantly the walls of the forest close in from both sides, the road and the figures of the convict gang are blotted out in an enshrouding darkness.) 34

Note the rising terror in the opening of Jones' fifth scene:

"Oh, Lawd, Lawd! OH, Lawd, Lawd! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer, I'se a po' sinner, a po' sinner! I knows I done wrong, I knows it!" 35

In long stage directions O'Neill describes the pantomime of the slave auction. (Again "there is something stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish about their movements." 36) Jones, imagining (reverting to

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33 Ibid., p. 24.
34 Ibid., p. 25.
36 Ibid., p. 27.
just one more step) that he is being sold at auction, saves himself by firing on the auctioneer. "As if this were a signal the walls of the forest fold in." 37 And again plastic scenery must find a way of visualizing the end of this nightmare scene.

In next to the last scene which visualizes Jones' fear-obsessed brain, he imagines himself among the naked, rowing ship-slaves. As they sway

a low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom-tom in the distance, to a long, tremulous wail of despair that reaches a certain pitch, unbearably acute, then falls by slow gradations of tone into silence and is taken up again. 38

The light fades and Jones scrambles away.

In the last of Jones' nightmare scenes the monologue presents the epitome of fear; in conjunction with the monologue is presented probably the most expressionistic setting and characterization in the entire play as Jones becomes the victim in a primitive sacrifice to a reptile god. This scene represents the complete mental disintegration through fear of the once fearless and godlike Jones.

Almost super-human feats of acting, as well as of staging, designing, and manipulation, are required by the stage directions.

37 Ibid., p. 28.
38 Ibid., p. 29.
(Crawling away from the altar, he [Jones] cowers close to the ground, his face hidden, his shoulders heaving with sobs of hysterical fright....He flees, he is pursued by devils, he hides, he flees again. Ever wilder and wilder becomes the flight, nearer and nearer draws the pursuing evil, more and more the spirit of terror gains possession of him....Jones has become completely hypnotized....Finally the theme of the pantomime halts on a howl of despair, and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice....Jones seems to sense the meaning of this....) 39

With his last bullet, Jones frees himself of this apparition and lies whimpering with fear as the curtain falls.

With Jones grovelling on the ground, the scene shifts to the edge of the forest, the tom-toms loud and continuous as the heart-beat of Jones. This is the only expressionistic device employed in the last scene.

John Gassner sums the play up:

It was a tour de force by virtue of its cumulative excitations, its amplification of the one act form in eight short scenes, and its singular evocation of anxiety and terror; a psychological study was inherent in the account of Emperor Jones' atavistic fears; and a social panorama was provided by Jones' recapitulation of the experiences and sufferings of his race. 40

What we have seen are not mere phantoms, moreover. "They are reality to Jones, they are Jones." 41

39 Ibid., pp. 31-32.


In virtually every aspect, *The Emperor Jones* is expressionistic as can be seen from the analysis and example given here:

In method, it was visual and audible presentation of the mind of Jones obsessed by fear, a presentation on two planes of reality: actual and psychic.

In subject, it dealt with atavism in the negro race, a common theme in expressionistic drama.

In plot, it depended for effect upon incident and intensification rather than logical development; exposition was brief, and complication negligent.

In character, it relied upon the psychological soliloquy, the stylization of characters as seen by Jones, and presentational acting on the part of the actor who portrayed Jones.

Setting required ingenuity, speed, and precision, without which the mood, the complete impact desired by O'Neill, would have been impossible.
The Hairy Ape

Only twelve months after The Emperor Jones, appeared what some critics consider O'Neill's most expressionistic drama, The Hairy Ape. Again O'Neill is interested in evolutionary man. He is not in the least concerned with the social problems of Yank. He is really not concerned with Yank at all. His interest is with the inner conflicts of man "midway between the hairy ape he has left behind him and the evolving human race to which he is not yet conscious that he belongs." 42

O'Neill is explicit in explaining his theme.

The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony 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. 43

The moral of the play involves not merely an attack upon capitalism. The world which it presents is a world disordered because its inhabitants have lost touch with things larger than themselves at the very moment when they thought they had not so much lost touch with as conquered them. Here those things are symbolized rather vaguely, perhaps, by the sea.


ships have rendered themselves independent of it but the result is that the seaman is brutalized while the passenger has become trivial. 

It is the tragedy of vision thwarted by ignorance. Yank is a symbol of those dreams of usefulness and power, which may glorify a sub-stratum of society and which are blasted by bewildering contact with the social set-up as a whole. Unfortunately, as O'Neill stated:

The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol and the symbol makes the play 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. 

His method is not that of a realist but of a poet striving for short cuts of expression, new dramatic devices, which will release the imagination as the older verse drama used to do. The play is modern in purpose, modern in experimental technique, but in a sense is reaching back from realism toward something very old — the spiritual vision and fervor of the past.

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44 Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama since 1918 (New York, 1939), p. 89.
46 Frank O'Hara, op. cit., p. 243.
"The action of the drama is transferred from the outer world into the consciousness of Yank. He sets forth to avenge himself, and from this moment on we no longer see our world but his;" 47 (the fragile, sinister dolls on Fifth Avenue, the cage in prison, the IWW, the gorilla in the zoo who is not his brother but his enemy and conqueror.) "O'Neill ... studies relentlessly a suffering mind and finds visualized emotional expression for what is discovered." 48

What was unquestionably effective in the play, and assumed tremendous proportions at the time of the original production because of its novelty, was O'Neill's use of the stark and brutal. He employed realistic material in settings, language, and character, in an unrealistic, highly imaginative manner; and the hurly-burly, the dirt and noise, the fantastic violence of the stage picture with its steel bastions and flaming open furnaces, and its sense of frantic, agonizing toil opened new vistas in the theatre. 49

All of these criticisms point toward a definitely expressionistic type of drama. From the very title (A comedy of Ancient and Modern life) the audience expects more than a mere naturalistic case history.

The plot concerns a super-stoker, Yank, who discovers his shortcomings from a chance meeting with one of the passengers, cultured and wealthy Mildred. He has hitherto considered himself the Atlas of the


world, but stung by Mildred's revulsion at his grimy appearance he throws up his job and goes forth to find a place where he can belong, as well as to avenge himself on those who have destroyed his self-confidence by their superiority.

But Yank, the half-brute, cannot belong, and even his fellow-workers of the IWW, who are comparatively educated and realistically purposeful, will have none of him or of his plan to blow up the factories. His attempt to avenge himself on the rich also failing, he seeks the companionship of a gorilla in the zoo and discovers that he does not belong to the brute world either when the beast crushes him to death. In this schematic tragedy of the half-man, O'Neill dramatized, as it were, the theory of evolution. "His nightmarish exploration of the unfamiliar world of a metropolis is a series of discoveries which leave him crushed by the realization that he does not belong to anything." 50

As in The Emperor Jones

the actual sequence of occurrences is devoid of what we call complication. Moreover, the effect of consecutive action is minimized by the representation of the high points of the plot in abrupt scenes which seem adaptations of the technique of expressionism. 51

50 Joseph Wood Krutch, op. cit., p. 88.

The effect produced is the result of a piling up of incident as seen through the eyes of Yank. Young says of the plot: "He [O'Neill] has control of a flow of compelling emotion and a strange quivering intensity that is not equalled in recent English drama." 52

The last five scenes are ominous, nightmar events crowded into a fantastic picture of despair. They reveal his hurt, bewildered, furious effort to get even. The buffetings which the unruffled world deals him in his pursuit of this revenge are all pictured in "short, stabbing scenes so distorted and so fantastic that it takes on the bad dream accent and aspect of an ugly fable." 53

In this play the author has frankly gone beyond the limits of a personal complication and has made his play out of generalized actions and characters. The Hairy Ape is shaped like a man but is more than a man. Like sculptors' figures of Death and The Thinker, he is modeled after a man, but he transcends man....Such a play as this has many of the qualities of allegory. Each character, each action carries a general meaning. 54

Except for one isolated scene and for a chorus of stokers, the play is practically a monologue. In place of realism we have here, slowly increasing in intensity, a method of speech and action which converts Yank himself into a kind of mouthpiece for the submerged toilers of the world,

and the other stokers into a chorus which has only a mass individuality. "Their speech and laughter are 'stylized,' as the technical phrase has it, cut to a pattern that we may be helped to accept them as a mass." 55

Yank's rough, coarse language comes out in short sentences, with reiterated phrases. By the time the second scene in the forecastle is reached — Scene Four of the play — the men often not only speak together, but all repeat the same word, in chorus.

Perhaps O'Neill did not do this consciously, however, since he states:

I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters. When it sees "A Man" and "A Woman" — just abstractions, it loses the human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonist of the play. The character of Yank remains a man and every one recognizes him as such. 56

But Barrett H. Clark comments:

I think O'Neill is mistaken in believing that Yank "remains a man." He has human attributes, but "he is a symbol...." At least I feel this to be true in the case of Yank. He is supernatural, more or less an abstraction, an idea. 57

The men and women of fashion are made, by masks or heavy make-up, as alike as so many mechanical dolls, "because to Yank they are all alike—

merely a useless class, who have no real existence for him — and yet so real that when he hits one, he bounces off. The final scene of the play in the gorilla cage is sheer symbolism. 58

On a Sunday morning on Fifth Avenue, Yank seeks to assuage the wound in his soul which self-doubt has inflicted, by behaving like a hooligan among the church crowd, bumping viciously into the men and insulting the women. "A simpering superiority was rendered by putting the actors into masks. It was sound psychologically and interpreted the characters through Yank's impassioned delirium." 59

O'Neill gives the keynote of the entire drama with his first stage directions. They require expert staging.

A confused, inchoate uproar swelling into a sort of unity, a meaning — the bewildered, furious, baffled defiance of a beast in a cage ....

The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel....The ceiling crushes down....They cannot stand upright. 60

The dream world is called upon to contribute irrational elements capable of intensifying the atmosphere of the play which would otherwise fall flat. Jones and Throckmorton designed the forecastle bunks and prison cell in distorted perspective. 61

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The symbolism of the characters is immediately apparent. "The men themselves should resemble these pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at." 62 Yank is "...broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest...their most highly developed individual." 63

An intensity of language which is by no means naturalistic accompanies their appearance. Their make-up is stylized. "His face is extremely monkey-like with all the sad, patient pathos of that animal in his small eyes." 64 And four times in the course of the first act the chorus of the crew is directed: "The chorused word has a brazen metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns. It is followed by a general uproar of hard barking laughter." 65

The monologues of Yank are the voice of the entire crew. They are colloquial, realistic, crude, often vulgar, but with an articulateness, a certain verbosity, an intensity which is hardly in character if it is to be considered as realistic interpretation. For example:

Shut up, yuh lousy boob! Where d'you get dat tripe? Home, hell! I'll make a home for yuh! I'll knock yuh dead. Home! T'hell wit home! Where d'you get dat tripe? Dis is home, see? What d'you want wit Home? I runned away from mine when I was a kid. On'y too glad to beat it, dat was me. Home was lickings for me, dat's all. But yuh can bet hour shoit no one ain't never licked me since! Wanter try it, any of youse?

63 Ibid., p. 40.
64 Ibid., p. 42.
65 Ibid., p. 42.
Huh! I guess not. Goils waitin' for you, huh? Aw, hell! Dat's all tripe. Dey don't wait for no one. Dey'd double-cross yuh for a nickel. Dey're all tarts, get me? Treat 'em rough, dat's me. To hell wit 'em. Tarts, dat's what, de whole bunch of 'em. 66

There is an eloquence, a passion in all of Yank's long monologues. 67

This same quality is apparent in the monologues of Paddy, who represents the soul which has found his place in life -- but too late to break from the circle of gorillas.

Nights when the foam of the wake would be flaming wid fire, when the sky'd be blazing and winking wid stars. Or the full of the moon maybe. Then you'd see her driving through the gray night, her sails stretching aloft all silver and white, not a sound on the deck, the lot of us dreaming dreams, till you'd believe 'twas no real ship at all you was on but a ghost ship....

Is it one wid this you'd be, Yank -- black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea, smudging the decks -- the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking -- wid divil a sight of sun or a breath of clean air -- choking our lungs wid coal dust -- breaking our backs and hearts in the hell of the stokehole -- feeding the bloody furnace -- feeding our lives along wid the coal, I'm thinking -- caged in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the Zoo! 68

The scene closes with the second striking, or expressionistic feature, of the chorus -- again indicating their symbolism:

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66 Ibid., p. 43.

67 Ibid., p. 44.

68 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
Eight bells sound, muffled, vibrating through the steel walls as if some enormous brazen gong were imbedded in the heart of the ship. All the men jump up mechanically, file through the door silently close upon each other's heels in what is very like a prisoner's lock-step...)

After presenting Yank, O'Neill presents the symbol of brittle, hollow man, refined away to a dead calx, in the person of Mildred. Stylization again appears. She is described as an "artificial" figure, "inert and disharmonious...looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived, so that she is the expression not of its life energy but merely of the artificialities that energy had won of itself in the spending." 70

This anemia of character is indicated both in stage directions and speech throughout the second scene. "Mildred. (in a passionless tone) ...I'm afraid I have neither the vitality nor integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born" 71 and "I inherit the acquired trait of the by-product, wealth, but none of the energy, none of the strength of the steel that made it." 72

Having presented the extremes in the human evolution, O'Neill brings them together in the third scene. The nightmare quality of this scene has been increased. The crew shovels "with a strange, awkward,

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69 Ibid., p. 49.
70 Ibid., p. 50.
71 Ibid., p. 51.
72 Ibid., p. 52.
swinging rhythm." As in *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill once again uses sound to intensify the action.

There is a tumult of noise -- the brazen clang of the furnace doors as they are flung open or slammed shut, the grating teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal. This clash of sound stuns one's ears with its rending dissonance. But there is order in it, rhythm, a mechanical regulated recurrence, a tempo. And rising above all, the monotonous throbbing beat of the engines. 73

Their mechanical actions are accompanied by Yank's mechanical "chanting formula of the gallery gods at the six-day bike race," 74 which is broken into by the "inexorable Whistle." In a fit of insane anger Yank "blinks upward through the murk trying to find the owner of the Whistle, he brandishes his shovel murderously over his head in one hand, pounding on his chest, gorilla-like, with the other, shouting." 75 Unknown to him Mildred is standing watching. Here O'Neill requires super-human acting on the part of Mildred:

...during his speech she has listened, paralyzed with horror, terror, her whole personality crushed, beaten in, collapsed, by the terrific impact of this unknown, abysmal brutality, naked and shameless. 76

Act Four is plainly the mind of Yank audibly sensible in a long monologue punctuated by the chorus of sailors who repeat his last word:

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73 Ibid., p. 55.
74 Ibid., p. 56.
75 Ibid., p. 58.
76 Ibid.
Dimly Yank sees that he has in some way been humiliated and resolves to have his revenge. Now as the play develops it grows more and more fantastic, leaving realism behind and adopting the devices which German expressionism had made familiar, and which O'Neill had employed in the first two plays discussed.

Everything is presented, not as it is, but as it would seem to the by now disordered mind of Yank. Fifth Avenue, a region of shops displaying articles of fantastic luxury, bearing price cards marked with astronomical figures, is inhabited by a race of frock-coated robots incapable of becoming aware of even his physical existence.

The procession on Fifth Avenue confused quite a few. It appeared to them out of the picture of realistic life. To O'Neill it was only an experiment differing not in kind, but in degree, for the entire play was a picture of Yank's struggle upward toward a spiritual growth.

This is complete expressionism. The entire scene and, in fact, the last four scenes with the exception of the IWW are seen through the eyes of Yank. He attacks the crowd returning from church.

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77 Ibid., pp. 60, 61, 62.
78 Ibid., pp. 63-64.
79 Krutch, op. cit., p. 88.
(The crowd from church enter from the right, sauntering slowly and affectedly, their heads held stiffly up, looking neither to right nor left, talking in toneless, simpering voices. The women are rouged, calcimined, dyed, overdressed to the nth degree. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein's in their detached, mechanical unawareness.)

Yank's monologue is an audible expression of his actually unvoiced hatred. Without seeming to see him, they make wide detours to avoid the spot where he stands.... The Lady Stalks by without a look, without a change of pace.... He turns in a rage on the men, bumping viciously into them but not jarring them the least bit. Rather it is he who recoils after each collision.... He lets drive a terrific swing, his fist landing full on the fat gentleman's face. But the gentleman stands unmoved as if nothing had happened.

The scene ends as Yank is hauled off to jail for disturbing the peace. The prison scene is also distorted through the mind of Yank, with the cells extending back until they "disappear in the dark background as if they ran on, numberless into infinity."

He sees his imprisonment as a conspiracy of the Steel Trust to cage him for Mildred: "Sure -- her old man -- president of de Steel

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80 Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 69.
81 Ibid., p. 70.
82 Ibid., pp. 70-72.
83 Ibid., p. 72.
Trust — makes half de steel in de world — steel — where I tought I belonged — drivin' trou — movin' — in dat — to make her — and cage me in for her to spit on! 84 The intensity of his feeling is indicated when he grabs the bars of the cell in a position "like a monkey's, he gives a great wrench backwards. The bar bends like a licorice stick under his tremendous strength." 85

Scene Seven relies more on naturalistic interpretation than any other scene in the play. By the contrast of its "cheap, banal, commonplace and unmysterious" 86 with the insane vagaries of Yank, O'Neill succeeded better in indicating Yank's progressive madness. 87 The scene ends with a typically expressionistic monologue. 88

The last scene, with its symbolism akin to The Emperor Jones, is the monkey house at the Zoo. In one cage crouches a gorilla. Yank comes in hope that in the brute world to which he has been relegated by the world of men, he may find a welcome. The long monologue addressed to the gorilla measures Yank's inner confusion and the fullness of O'Neill's expressionism. The setting is conceived expressionistically.

84 Ibid., p. 77.
85 Loc. cit.
86 Ibid., p. 78.
87 Ibid., pp. 80, 82.
88 Ibid., p. 83.
"One spot of clear gray light falls on the front of one cage. . . . On the cage a sign from which the word "gorilla" stands out." 89 For the remainder of the play Yank, in monologue, puzzles out his position in the scheme of life until, feeling that he is a brother of the gorilla, Yank releases the gorilla.

(With a spring he wraps his huge arms around Yank in a murderous hug. There is a crackling snap of crushed ribs — a gasping cry, still mocking, from Yank). . . . Even him didn't think I belonged. . . . (He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs.) 90

Again, to a great extent, O'Neill has employed expressionistic devices. In conception the entire piece is meant to be molded by the mind of Yank. Clearest in its concretion of the abstract are Scenes Five and Eight — by the action, setting, dialogue, and action.

There is virtually no exposition (the audience is plunged in medias res) and after the presentation of character, no complication. The climax of Scene Eight, after a mounting accumulation of incident and progression of emotional intensity, is followed immediately, as in The Emperor Jones, by the rapid conclusion or denouement.

Characters from the beginning are stylized in make-up, action, and dialogue — Yank, the Crew, Mildred, and the Capitalists.

Finally, throughout the play, but particularly in Scenes Five and Eight, setting is distorted and symbolic of what Yank sees.

89 Ibid., p. 84.
90 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
The Fountain

The Fountain is not expressionistic except for Scene Ten, which is very evidently so — from setting to character portrayal. The story is that of Juan Ponce de Leon and his pursuit of the Fountain of Youth. In his last years he is obsessed with a desire to recapture the love which he had not claimed in his youth. With the appearance of Beatriz, the daughter of the noblewoman who had loved him, he is inspired to seek the Fountain, regain his lost youth, and return to win her love. All his life had been spent in a vague yearning, so dear to hearts of so many O'Neill creations, for a faith. The Fountain is the symbol of that faith.

Nano, the Indian guide, who has been tortured into acting as a guide to Juan and his men, is actually leading them to destruction. In order to trap Juan, Nano leads him to a pond deep in the forest where the Indians lie in wait to slay him.

In the closing seconds of this scene, the ninth, Juan has drunk of the water, realizes the perfidy of Nano, and is left dying by the Indians who have leapt upon him.

In Scene Ten, which occurs "some hours later," we see the phantoms of Juan's mind as he is apparently dying. The whole scene, as in The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, and the closing scene of Dynamo, is one long soliloquy uttered by the dying Juan. At the very outset of the scene, as he is praying for the miracle of youth, the vision, the setting takes on the color of his crazed mind.
(But even as he speaks a strange unearthly light begins to flood down upon a spot on the edge of the clearing on the right....

Beneath the growing light a form takes shape — a tall woman's figure, like a piece of ancient sculpture, shrouded in long draperies of a blue that is almost black. The face is a pale mask with features indistinguishable save for the eyes that stare straight ahead with a stony penetration that sees through and beyond things. Her arms are rigid at her sides, the palms of the hands turned outward.) 91

This figure is death as imagined in the mind of Juan. Springing up in the midst of the unearthly light the Fountain of Youth seems to appear.

...the same mystical light floods down slowly about the spring, which is transformed into a gigantic fountain, whose waters, arched with rainbows, seem to join earth and sky, forming a shimmering veil, which hides the background of forest. The form of Beatriz appears within as if rising from the spring. She dances in ecstasy — the personified spirit of the fountain. 92

Then follow in rapid succession four visions. The first is of four figures: a Chinese (who had first made known the existence of the Fountain to mankind), the Moor (who was murdered in the first scene, after having sung the song of the Fountain), Nano (the Indian guide who had betrayed Juan and his followers), and Luis (Juan's friend who had become a Dominican). All four join hands, uniting the world from East to West in

91 The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 438.

92 Ibid., p. 439.
the belief in the Fountain. All four are actually conjured by Juan out of his past history. As they vanish he hears the voice of Beatriz singing the song of the Fountain:

Life is a field
Forever growing
Beauty a fountain
Forever flowing
Upward beyond the source of sunshine
Upward beyond the azure heaven,
Born of God but
Ever returning
To merge with earth that the field may live. 93

In the second vision, Juan sees the same four figures appear and disappear successively in the midst of the Fountain. First the Chinese poet, "robed as a Buddhist priest," then the Moorish minstrel, "dressed as a priest of Islam," then the Medicine man, "decked out in all the paint and regalia of his office," and lastly Luis "the Dominican monk of the present." 94

O'Neill intends these two visions to mean that "All faiths -- they vanish -- are one and equal -- within -- What are you, Fountain? That from which all life springs and to which it must return -- God!" 95

In the third vision an old woman appears who at the touch of his hand becomes Beatriz. Juan suddenly realizes this. "Beatriz! Age --

93 Ibid., p. 440.
94 Ibid., p. 441.
95 Ibid., p. 441.
In the fourth vision the figure of Death vanishes into the fountain to materialize again within the fountain but this time there is no mask, the face is that of Beatriz, her form grown tall, majestic, vibrant with power. Her arms are raised above her head. Her whole body soars upward. A radiant, dancing fire, proceeding from the source of the fountain, floods over and envelops her until her figure is like the heart of its flame.

Juan realizes now the meaning of true Youth -- the eternity of God and the eternal youth of the soul in God.

I see! Fountain Everlasting, time without end! Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring Death!

All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally! O aspiring fire of life, sweep the dark soul of man! Let us burn in thy unity!

O God, Fountain of Eternity, Thou art the All in One, the One in All -- the Eternal Becoming which is Beauty!

What Juan has experienced is not a miracle but the logical solution to his search for Youth which he has discovered in his long years of search. The years of his life have culminated in this syllogistic vision, which his mind has attained.

96 Ibid., p. 442.
97 Loc. cit.
98 Loc. cit.
He has discovered that the Fountain, Youth, is God, that in God we find our eternity.

This concrete dramatization of the workings of the mind of Juan Ponce de Leon, by means of setting, masks, and soliloquy is expressionistic, although in no other scene throughout the rest of the entire play does O'Neill use any one of the expressionistic devices.
The Great God Brown

In The Great God Brown, Eugene O'Neill has endeavored to project the complex and dual natures of a great number of characters. While succeeding in part, he too often becomes confusing in both method and plot. Criticism of the play ranges all the way from the most glowing encomiums to the most bitter castigations. One critic praises it:

What reached a high point probably untouched before in American literature was the semi-mystical presence of universal values in The Great God Brown. The objective purpose of the dramatist was diminishing, and his presentation of the dark and intangible truths known subtly to every heart, was usurping its place. Over-meaning rose like a strange new sun out of that play. 99

Another critic describes it as "the worst play of O'Neill to date. The design is once more to transcend, to Go Beyond...But the result is uneasily that of a Model-T Euripides." 100 And another which seems to be the most honest criticism of the play:

The Great God Brown is too overburdened with meaning to be clear either to spectator or reader without elucidation. We have a right to demand that a work of art be self-contained. Dramatic art is the richest of all arts. A dramatist ought not to be forced to rely upon printed explanations or synopses of scenes in order to communicate completely his ideas to an intelligent audience.


The use of masks in The Great God Brown was enlightening and baffling by turns. The blurring of symbolism and reality was often troublesome. When a man is dead can you steal his mask which represents his personality? Certainly, because he may be only symbolistically dead. But if Dion Anthony is symbolistically dead why does Brown fear the police?

Are they symbols? No. The spectator is willing to play any game, to pretend anything the dramatist requests in order to penetrate the mystery of life and the enigma of personality. But The Great God Brown befogs the brain and then asks the brain to function. 101

However, the play is not so murky as to be completely mystifying. The story tells of Dion Anthony and William Brown, both in love with Margaret. She chooses Dion, but she never knows his real self, which he conceals behind a mask in her presence. Torn by inner conflicts, Dion drinks heavily. At Margaret's plea, Brown, now a rising architect, gives Dion a job; Dion supplies the creative, imaginative elements in Brown's work. Dion begins visiting a prostitute, Cybel, with whom he has a purely platonic relationship, because she alone understands him. He dies, willing his mask to Brown, who buries Dion's body in the garden and uses the mask to take Dion's place with Margaret without her discovering the substitution. But Brown inherits Dion's inner conflicts along with his mask, and succumbs to them just as Dion did. The police discover Brown's own discarded mask, and believe that Brown has been murdered. They kill Brown in the belief that he was an unknown accomplice of Dion's in murdering Brown.

101 Donald Clive Stuart, Development of Dramatic Art, p. 647.
Juggling masks in a furor of melodramatic complication when Brown assumes Dion's personality, O'Neill failed to develop a coherent story. He paid the penalty for trying to make a play perform the dual functions of an expressionist drama and a Dostoevsky novel. 102

The confusion of method is clearly one of the reasons for the breakdown of the play, which begins in the first scene of Act Three. Up to this point O'Neill has employed a consistent and rather simple use of expressionism. In two of the previous plays the expressionism consisted in the concretion of events through the mind of one individual (Brutus Jones in the one, and Yank in the other). In The Great God Brown the interior lives of four main characters are revealed — two of which (Dion and Billy) change complexly and two (Margaret and Cybel) more or less static and simple. To add to the confusion, there is a strongly symbolic element to each character, a broader problem of conflict than that between the individuals as individuals.

He [O'Neill] has written a symbolic dramatization of human psychology, a philosophic poem that is also tensely dramatic. His characters are both symbols and persons. Some of O'Neill's traits are obvious in The Great God Brown — his tendency to symbolize, and his preference for the elemental and abstract have been given free rein. 103

E. S. Sergeant says, with an irony which she never intended, "Here the world of dreams and the world of reality are one." 104

Though the conception of this play is completely expressionistic, O'Neill does not employ all the devices of expressionism. In plot there is a definite attempt at logical development -- with a detailed exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and denouement -- which we have seen is not characteristic of the "pile-up" plot of the expressionist. The settings are not expressionistically conceived. The theme is very definitely an interior struggle, the drama of two planes, the interior rather than the external plot -- that, in short, of the expressionist.

It is with expressionistic devices of presenting character -- dialogue and masks in particular -- that O'Neill's method becomes plain. It is only to be expected that unreal and exaggerated characters will talk in an unreal and exaggerated fashion.

The diction in O'Neill is just as grandiose and extravagant and unreal as the characters who use it. It is a rare O'Neill hero who does not stop the action of the play now and again to deliver a long metaphysical address on the meaning of his existence and it is a rare O'Neill prostitute who does not get off some good things on Life and Man and Love -- in capitals.

The Great God Brown offers many good examples of grandiose, pseudo-poetic diction; speeches where a needle of thought is hidden in a haystack of verbiage.105

The mask was used to make obvious to the audience the difference between the true nature of an individual and the more or less artificial self which one presents to the world. "O'Neill made use of masks to

symbolize the real and the assumed natures of his characters." 106 The leading characters use masks as a defense mechanism for hiding from the world their true selves, as well as to indicate changes going on in their personalities. "They furnished O'Neill, determined to present in terms of the theatre the inner conflicts of the individual, a necessary experiment that resulted in the clear technique of the utterance of hidden thoughts and emotions he later used in Strange Interlude." 107

O'Neill tells us that the mask-face represents a struggle between two personalities, that his face expresses one tendency and his mask another. The mask does not represent a mere exterior shell — but one of two vital selves. Unfortunately, we tend to accept the real face as the vital man, and the mask, a mere crust, rather than two equi-important selves. 108 In fact, in the last scene we are unconvincingly asked to accept an empty mask as a substitute for a human being.

Since this is a play of four individuals I shall consider the use of expressionism in presenting the separate individuals rather than analyzing all four in the ordinary development of the play.

The story in main part is the realization of the inner torment of the artist Dion Anthony, whose extreme sensitivity in a materialistic world makes a neurotic and drunkard of him. "His mother-fixation is only


one factor in his bedevilment; he is, as his name (Dionysius St. Anthony) implies, the artist who is torn between pagan sensuousness and the flesh-denying Christian conscience that he imbibed in childhood. 109

O'Neill expatiates:

Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the super-sensitive painter-poet underneath it but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath it but also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint, while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles. It is as Mephistopheles that he falls stricken at Brown's feet after having condemned Brown to destruction by willing him his mask, it is the Saint who kisses Brown's feet in abject contrition and pleads as a little boy to a big brother to tell him a prayer. 110

Dion can find nothing in modern life to satisfy his spirit.

Even the best of his companions are too concerned with their small safe aims to be aware that they are related to something larger than themselves. Even Margaret, his future wife, is so alarmed by the sight of his real face that he resumes his mask and vows that she will never again see him as he really is.

The fear of solitude, of the isolation of self which overtakes us even in the midst of crowds of friends, has haunted O'Neill as it

109 Gassner, op. cit., p. 653.

110 Eleanor Flexner, American Playwrights, p. 163.
haunts every artist. In The Great God Brown O'Neill traces it back to "psychological causation: the young boy, his trust overthrown and his sensitivity bruised, puts on a mask, an armor of self protection." 111

The mask is fixed, forcing his own face — dark, spiritual, poetic, passionate, supersensitive — into the expression of a mocking, reckless, scoffing, and sensual young Pan.

The audience is to understand that Dion is playing a certain part; he covers his face with an actual mask made to express that part. "These masks are nearly static: To be sure they change as time goes on but they change merely in the intensity of certain qualities. Dion's mask throughout the play is the same face, grown more ruthless, more bitter, or more mocking." 112

His whole personality is revealed in his first appearance on the stage. 113 The very first words are indicative of the super-realism in every speech he utters throughout the play:

Dion. (mockingly — to the air) This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father. 114

His thoughts are revealed in monologue from the very beginning. The brief monologue in the first scene presents his case in miniature —

111 Ibid., p. 170.
113 Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 310.
114 Loc. cit.
the contradiction of spirit and flesh, artist and saint in the same nature.

(His real face is revealed in the bright moonlight, shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep sadness.)

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or be touched. 115

When he seeks understanding in Margaret (represented by the removal of his mask of Pan), she is frightened and cannot understand. He is destined to struggle alone.

Seven years later "the mask has changed. It is older, more defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean. It has already begun to show the ravages of dissipation." 116 His real self is asking "Where are you, Savior?" but the mocking mask "tosses the Testament aside contemptuously." 117 Although he has married Margaret he is still alone. He soliloquizes: "We communi-

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115 Ibid., p. 315.
116 Ibid., p. 320.
117 Ibid., p. 321.
cate in code — when neither has the other's key!" and "I love Margaret! Her blindness surpasseth understanding! — or is it pity?" 118

Dion's real self finds understanding in Cybel (Mother Earth):

Dion. You're lost in blind alleys...But you're strong. Let's be friends.

Cybel. And never nothing more?

Dion. Let's say, never anything less! 119

He failed to find either in his mother 120 or Margaret ("I don't know who my wife is.") surcease from his loneliness.

By Act Two, Scene One, "his face is that of an ascetic, a martyr, furrowed by pain and self-torture, yet lighted from within by a spiritual calm and human kindliness." 121 In the next scene the development of his spirit is indicated by his own face which "is gentler, more spiritual, more saint-like than ever before." 122 His final revelation to Margaret precedes his death:

I'm lonely! I'm frightened!...No! I'm a man! Behold your man — the sniveling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave you have so nobly ignored in the father of your sons! 123

118 Ibid., p. 322.
119 Ibid., p. 331.
120 Ibid., p. 333.
121 Ibid., p. 335.
122 Ibid., p. 341.
123 Ibid., p. 343.
The ravages of conflict and approaching death are evident in his features as Dion reveals the origin of the conflict within him. When he had been a child, a playmate had spoiled a drawing he had made, so he protected himself from further cruelty by fashioning the mask of the Bad Boy Pan. What life Brown has in him is the life of Dion. With Dion's death, Brown dies — but Dion leaves his mask to Brown who is finally destroyed by it as Dion had been.

Brown in the first part of the play is not masked, for he lives his mask. He refuses to recognize the existence of his other more vital self. "When he is forced to look at himself in the mirror which Dion holds up to him, the real self leaps into active existence and destroys the carefully built manikin. Thereafter the Brown of former years is a consciously put on mask. 124

O'Neill describes Brown as envious of

the creative force in Dion which he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively while in reality he is only stealing the creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration. This devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him. It enters him, rending him apart, torturing him and transfiguring him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his Success, Wm. A. Brown, before the world, as well as Dion's mask toward wife and children. Thus Billy Brown becomes not himself to anyone. And thus he partakes of Dion's anguish — and in the end out of this anguish his soul is born, a tortured Christian

124 G. Auschutz, op. cit., p. 201.
soul such as the dying Dion's, begging for relief, and at last finding it on the lips of Cybel.  

It is Cybel who reveals to Brown that he is dead. When he puts on the mask of Dion, Brown is born, and from now on he must wear the mask of success. 

It is at this point that consistency in the expressionistic use of masks bogs down — unless we now accept the mask of Dion as being actually the real Brown — a projection of his real self, which covers "a suffering face that is ravaged and haggard, his own face tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion's mask." 

Act Three, Scene Two, is a monologue by Brown in which the real Brown in conflict with Dion's mask is projected audibly and visually. The fusion of the two, as indicated by the closing lines, is obscure. In the closing scene, Brown too finds himself in the arms of Mother Earth, Cybel. "The earth is warm," he whispers as, reciting the Our Father as Dion had done, he dies. 

The mask of Margaret shows the development of the Wife and Mother. She is probably the simplest of the four characters. She wears a mask to all but Dion's false self; she retreats from the fullness of his real self but is happy in his superficial love. She is actually incapable

125 Flexner, op. cit., p. 163.  
127 Ibid., p. 357.  
128 Ibid., p. 374.
of understanding Dion's other self.

After her marriage

her face is concealed behind the mask of the pretty young matron, still hardly a woman, who cultivates a naively innocent and bravely hopeful attitude toward things and acknowledges no wound to the world. 129

The rest of the play is merely the portrayal of this development of a nature summed up in her outburst of fulfillment, "You're mine! You're my long-lost lover, and my big boy too!" 130 and ending as the proud, indulgent Mother. "There is about her manner and voice the sad but contented feeling of one who knows her life-purpose well accomplished but is at the same time a bit empty and comfortless with the finality of it. She is wrapped in a gray cloak." 131

Cybel, like Margaret, is a simple character, but more intensely symbolic. It is clear that she is Understanding Mother Earth. Dion calls her "Miss Earth." 132 O'Neill describes her as "an unmoved idol of Mother Earth." 133 Dion on his death bed bids her farewell: "Bye-bye, Mother Earth!" 134 Brown on his death bed says: "Thank you, Mother." 135

129 Ibid., p. 325.
130 Ibid., p. 361.
131 Ibid., p. 376.
132 Ibid., p. 330.
133 Ibid., p. 335.
134 Ibid., p. 339.
135 Ibid., p. 374.
Cybel's mask is thrust upon her by society. The prostitute must be loud and coarse and vulgar or society would lose its sense of superiority. She must conform to the conventional idea. She is an example of one who lives serenely her own life behind her mask. Her mask is "the rouged and eye-blackened countenance of the hardened prostitute." 136 She is strength; nature understanding the complexities of the poet-saint in Man.

The method of presenting this problem of the poet-saint was conceived expressionistically; that is, as a projection of the interior struggles of characters. O'Neill accomplished what he set out to do to a certain extent despite frantic changes and exchanges of masks, and the rather confusing psychological projections of the characters' respective psyches.

Aside from the methods of expressionism which reveal character through mask and monologue, there are no other evident devices of expressionism, except that the whole work was written with a view to reveal what the interior action of the story was, rather than any exterior action. The exterior action was merely a stage upon which the deeper workings of the soul would strut the boards of life.

136 Ibid., p. 330.
Strange Interlude

This play is discussed at this point, first, since it seems to be the culmination of the psychological soliloquies which O'Neill used in The Hairy Ape, The Emperor Jones, and The Great God Brown. Secondly, the character of Margaret of the latter play is developed in that of Nina Leeds in Strange Interlude.

While George Jean Nathan calls the use of the monologue a "beautiful thing far from the routine swamps of Broadway," he is not absolutely correct, since in all of the aforementioned plays similar experiments were going on. It is plain to see that the audible projection of the inner personality was far from novel in the work of O'Neill.

What emphasizes this technique in this particular drama is that in all the previous dramas the soliloquy was wedded with other characteristic devices of expressionism to portray concretely the interior life of its subjects. In Strange Interlude, however, there are none of the other characteristic devices such as the pile-up plot, plastic scenery, or masking which we have seen O'Neill combining with the audible expressionistic technique.

Heavy and, in fact, exclusive emphasis on this one expressionistic technique gives to the entire piece an air of novelty, which is in truth lacking. Though only one technique of expressionism is used the

play is completely expressionistic in conception. The play is carried out on two planes of reality — traditional to certain forms of expressionism. But whether unusual or not it is true that it was the sensation of its season, "an incisive and intimately revealing history of thirty eventful years in the lives of unhappy mortals seeking happiness and satisfaction in living." 138

The title means "life," for Nina says, "Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father." 139 O'Neill has not tried to solve the mystery of life or to paint a whole world. He has taken four people when life really begins for them; and he shows how they lived for years externally and in their own secret selves, what they said, what they did, what they hoped. Other dramas have done as much; but no drama except Strange Interlude has ever told us clearly what people thought as they spoke and hoped and acted.

The story concerns Nina Leeds who is mourning the death of a lover whom the objections of her father prevented her from marrying before he went to the World War. Both she and her father at least half realize that his efforts had been at bottom due to a jealousy which is interpreted in Freudian terms. Nina, feeling that a certain failure of firmness in


herself as well as the treachery of her father has deprived her of the normal fulfillment of life, finally agrees to marry a pleasant unimaginative suitor. But it is soon evident that he is no substitute for the now completely idealized lost lover, and when she learns from her husband's mother that insanity in the mother's family makes it prudent that she should destroy the child which she is carrying, Nina rebels against what she regards as a second frustration and defeat.

After a time she takes Ned Darrell as a lover, but attempts to dismiss him after he has become the father of a son whom her husband believes his. Nina comes to feel that the loss of her first love in the War meant the loss of all possibility of real happiness, and whether this is actually true or whether the loss has become merely the excuse, she now attempts to compensate for the feeling of emptiness by refusing to let go of what she does not deeply want.

She absorbs the lives, not only of her lover and her husband, but also of "poor old Charlie," the timid bachelor "uncle" who has renounced all life of his own in favor of literature and a hopeless affection which he lavishes on Nina.

To this statement there is no real solution. In time, the husband dies; all passion in the relation between Nina and her lover, Darrell subsides; and her son, named Gordon after her first lover, flies away to a life of his own. Nina, all passion spent, sinks resignedly back upon the affection she can continue to receive from her former lover and from "poor old Charlie."
With a certain insight into the depths of character, and a capacity for mirroring complex and unrelated emotions with the simplicity necessary to make them glow for the audience, O'Neill proceeds to show us how an introverted and masterful woman can draw three men under her spell. His purpose was "to explore imaginatively a chain of events in which a few people exhibit to us their thoughts and motives over a long period of years." 140

He does this by representing the two planes of consciousness in two planes of dialogue, "the upper dialogue, so casual, almost static, and underneath, the infinite mobility of that complex, ever-shifting underthought." 141

There is actually little conflict in the external plot for "the antagonist is an inner compulsion, the emotions of the characters: a purely subjective factor." 142

It is the frustration in the life of Nina that is presented. Although the interior lives of Marsden and Darrell are presented with the same technique that is used to present hers, they hinge upon the inner compulsion of Nina's Freudian frustrations. We get an explanation of actions and motives, and we lose the sense of bald reality; characters

take on a symbolic significance, each lover of Nina symbolizing, as it were, some trait possessed by her ideal mate, to whom her whole being had gone out.

Granted that the play is a development of the subconscious, is the play expressionistic? A. E. Philipps says:

From Medea to Nina, this never-ending reincarnation of the eternal feminine -- what is she? She is himself. He dips into his own ingenious plethora and believes that he has expressed a woman. What he has actually done is to reveal the particular depths of his own nature. 143

But whether it is O'Neill's subconscious -- or Nina's or Marsden's or Darrell's, it is definitely the presentation concretely of the abstract. In what manner is it concrete?

A dramatist cannot reveal by realistic dialogue the subconsciousness of his characters, since it is not known to them; and he can reveal only so much as they consciously think either by the aid of skillful actors or the device of thinking out loud. Here he falls back upon the soliloquy, a device of language, and has no trouble at all in making clear to his audiences both the surface aspects and the underlying natures of his people.

O'Neill has abandoned the use of masks which were rather confusing, but the purpose here is the same.

We have seen in other dramas hidden motives behind spoken words. We have tuned our ears to the Chekhovian silence and to the Maeterlinckian dialogue of the second degree. But in Strange Interlude each character speaks his inmost thoughts in a monologue or an aside. And this is a clear distinction that should be made. The soliloquy in Strange Interlude is not so much related to the older conventions of the drama as to the stream-of-consciousness technique of Strindberg's expressionist plays and James Joyce's Ulysses.

And this, too, was a notable innovation since in using this device with lucidity he was the first to "make full use in the drama of that introspection without which it would be impossible to imagine the existence of a large part of modern literature." 145

These asides were delivered "in a stylized monotone while other characters on the stage remain immobile; has its origin in his desire to convey more of the obscurely mixed workings of our minds on the stage than have ever been displayed before." 146

Each character used two different types of expression. One is the everyday speech of human intercourse where we carry on the necessary business of life, curbing our ego, adjusting ourself to the external world. The other is the speech revealing the true ego, whose desires and motives must be kept hidden because of those "curbs of civilization" which Freud found everywhere thwarting the ego - satisfaction of the individual. These hidden thoughts of the characters, inaudible of course to their fellow men are meant only for the audience. 147

It was as if the outer action were for a time suspended and an inner action revealed. Instead of resulting in confusion of the audiences, this device pleased and thrilled. The drama seemed to take on a new dimension. This technique, as we can see primarily, is expressionistic—and since the primary purpose of this thesis is to present expressionist techniques in O'Neill's dramas it would be both impossible and unnecessary to give an analysis of the use of the expressionistic soliloquy throughout the play. A brief example is presented here.

Perhaps the most impressive scenes in the play are the first, in which Charlie, surrounded by his books, analyzes his renunciation of life, and that in which Nina, seated with her husband, her lover, and "poor old Charlie" contemplates "my three men." Both these scenes are static; they are concerned with being rather than with becoming.

In this last extraordinary scene O'Neill uses his technique for expression of hidden thoughts not only with intense dramatic effectiveness but also with great insight. What every woman desires is perfect mating: to find united in one man passion, friendship, and protection. This consummation which Nina was convinced she would have realized in Gordon, the dead lover, she now gathers for herself out of three men. And out of these three male elements grows the ultimate female completion: to be the mother of a child.

As the Second part, Act six, opens

Evans is sitting by the table at left, glancing through a newspaper at headlines and reading an article here and there. Nina is in the chair at center, knitting a tiny
sweater. Marsden is sitting on the sofa at right, holding a book which he pretends to be looking through, but glancing wonderingly at Evans and Nina. 148

As they are seated staring before them, Nina's first soliloquy begins. Like actual thought, the ideas are fragmentary and elusive and digressive. During the course of the act the thoughts of the other characters are presented similarly.

Nina. (thinking)
I wonder if there's a draft in the baby's room?...maybe I'd better close the window?...oh, I guess it's all right...he needs lots of fresh air...little Gordon...he does remind me of Gordon...something in his eyes...my romantic imagination?...Ned said that...why hasn't Ned ever written?...it's better he hasn't...how he made me suffer!...but I forgive him...he gave me my baby...the baby certainly doesn't look like him...everyone says he looks like Sam...how absurd!...but Sam makes a wonderful father...he's become a new man in the past year...and I've helped him...he asks me about everything...I have a genuine respect for him now...I can give myself without repulsion...I am making him happy...I've written his mother I'm making him happy...I was proud to be able to write her that...how queerly things work out!...all for the best...and I don't feel wicked...I feel good. 149

This first speech reveals the relationship with Sam as spouse. Her fidelity and respect toward him are mirrored further, "Dear Sam...I can't quite believe in this self-confident business man yet...but I have to admit he's proved it...how he's slaved!...for me and my baby!..." 150

149 Ibid., pp. 592-3.
150 Ibid., p. 594.
In fact, her previous immunity to the goodness of Sam has so radically been altered that she can now say with marital comfort, "Thank God for Sammy!...I know he's mine...no jealousy...no fear...no pain...I've found peace." 151

Yet she is unwilling to give up the satisfaction of the relationship with her lover -- for she would still remain frustrated, a paramour without the assuringly paternal affection of Charlie or the comforting faithfulness of wedded love.

Her conclusion is:

Ned doesn't care for children...I know what you're hoping, Ned...but if you think I'm going to take Sam's baby from him, you're mistaken!...or if you think I'll run away with you and leave my baby...

I couldn't find a better husband than Sam...and I couldn't find a better lover than Ned...I need them both to be happy... 152

Her need of Charlie Marsden is likewise presented to us through her psychological musings. She must retain his homage and still manage to keep her relationship with Ned Darrell secret. "I must be terribly careful of Charlie!..." 153 and "I must win Charlie over again...I don't feel safe..." 154 she reiterates.

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151 Ibid., p. 597.
152 Ibid., p. 609.
153 Ibid., p. 598.
154 Ibid., p. 599.
She herself recognizes the filial character of their relationship, looking upon any other as "incestuous." And Charlie, in a dim way recognizes, if he does not accept, the position in which she has placed him.

Nina. ...I'll pick out a wife for you — guaranteed to suit! She must be at least ten years older than you, large and matronly and placid, and a wonderful cook and housekeeper —

Marsden. (sharply) Don't be stupid! (Thinking angrily) She picks someone beyond the age...she never imagines sex could enter into it!...

But it is in her attitude toward Ned that her feelings are made plainest; Ned who had given her the child she was unable to have by Sam Evans.

Nina. ...my lover!...oh, pain again!...why?...I don't love him now...be careful!...Charlie's staring at me...

...Oh, Ned, why haven't you written?...stop it!...what a fool I am...Ned's dead for me!...

During this scene she is awaiting Ned's return after a period of absence in which he has been "unfaithful" to her.

Nina. He has forgotten me...if he did come, he'd probably avoid me...

Ned asked about my baby!...if he came back he'd come to see his baby!...

155 Ibid., p. 600.
156 Ibid., p. 595.
157 Ibid., p. 597.
158 Ibid., p. 599.
And when he does come, O'Neill details for us the thoughts of both in the moment of hesitation before they are reconciled. She wants this third man's love but only illicitly. "Oh, Ned, I do love you!...you can be my lover!...we won't hurt Sam!...he'll never know!..." 159

The culmination of the scene is the final triumph of Nina:

My three men!...I feel their desires converge in me!...to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb...and am whole...they dissolve in me, their life is my life...I am pregnant with the three!...husband!...lover!...father!...and the fourth man!...little man!...little Gordon!...he is mine too!...that makes it perfect!...

(With an extravagant suppressed exultance)
Why I should be the proudest woman on earth!...I should be the happiest woman in the world!
(Then suppressing an outbreak of hysterical triumphant laughter only by a tremendous effort)
Ha-ha...only I better knock wood...
(She raps with both knuckles in a fierce tattoo on the table)
before God the Father hears my happiness!... 160

True, this play may be Freudian; true, it may be false in its acceptance of animalism; true, it may be too long and too wordy -- but O'Neill has managed to add a new dimension to the drama, the portrayal of the inner life of human beings concretely through audible means.

This is expressionism.

159 Ibid., p. 609.
160 Ibid., p. 616.
Dynamo was technically a near relative of Strange Interlude. In it O'Neill uses the psychological soliloquy exactly as he had done in presenting Nina Leeds, Ned Darrell, and Charlie Marsden. Since this type of soliloquy enters into the discussions of Lazarus Laughed and Strange Interlude, it will not be considered in this section beyond indications of where such soliloquies occur in this play.

Again the lives of individuals are presented on two planes by the use of inner and external dialogue. It was again the audibly sensible interior life appearing parallel to the external self.

Philosophically the play was pretentious. O'Neill announced it as the first of three plays dealing with modern man in search of God, "probing human reaction in the universal quest for a completely satisfying religious faith." 161

In this first of the projected trilogy O'Neill probed into the failure of science to find a meaning in life and a substitute for faith in a personal God and a personal immortality.

He shows how the faith of an adolescent boy in the Protestant God of his fathers is shattered at the same moment of emotional upheaval in which he loses his faith in his adored mother and in the girl whom he invested with all his erotic idealism. The groping boy soon finds in

the Dynamo a substitute for the Protestant God of his fathers who has betrayed him. He now worships the purring, powerful dynamo as an idol. In order to prove to his Dynamo-God that he will never fail it, Reuben kills the girl with whom he is in love. Maddened by remorse and pleading for release for his tortured spirit, he throws his arms about the dynamo and meets death at the hands of his new God.

Science has no answer for man seeking to solve the riddle of life and can only bring spiritual destruction. This is again the presentation of an inner struggle, as is the case in all expressionistic plays. However, it is not only in theme and conception that the drama is expressionistic. The characters, particularly Reuben Light, the hero, are abstractions demonstrating on a stage the search of man for God.

The theme, conception, and method (abstracts presented by projection of the interior in soliloquy), are expressionistic. Beyond these three elements, which are similar to those of Strange Interlude, there is a hint at the use of plastic scenery, a distortion through the mind of Reuben Light. This is notable in only one setting, that of the Dynamo itself.

To Reuben, the Dynamo "has come to seem the altar of the god Electricity." 162 This mental cast impresses itself visibly upon the concrete stage structure of the Dynamo, which is described as "huge and

162 Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama since 1918, p. 89.
black, with something of a massive female idol about it, the exciter set on the main structure like a head with blank, oblong eyes above a gross, rounded torso." 163 Directions for stage design are further detailed in Act three, Scene two:

The oil switches, with their spindly steel legs, their square criss-crossed steel bodies (the containers inside looking like bellies), their six arms stretching upward, seem like queer Hindu idols tortured into scientific supplications. 164

This distortion of setting to mold itself into the mental state of the protagonist is the most expressionistic device in the entire play. Even that, of course, is not as clearly expressionistic as the sets for The Hairy Ape.

This drama, like Strange Interlude, is a combination of realism, symbolism, and expressionism. It would be impossible, as in Strange Interlude, to determine the exact quantity and quality of the devices of each mode employed in this play, but it is plain that its conception and theme are common to many expressionists. The use of the psychological soliloquies 165 and the plastic scenery of the Dynamo set are definitely expressionistic.

163 The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 473.

164 Ibid., p. 483.

165 Ibid., ending of Act two, Scene two, pp. 471-2; all of Act two, Scene three, pp. 473-5; Act three, Scene one, pp. 476-7; all of the last scene, pp. 486-9.
Lazarus Laughed

Is Lazarus Laughed symbolism or expressionism? Since, as I have frequently stated, O'Neill's reason for use of any particular mode is merely better to express his idea and not to demonstrate the use of that mode, he often mingles elements of realism, symbolism, and expressionism in the same drama. Lazarus Laughed is such a drama.

The penetration of the surface in this play is, however, more than a mere creation of a mood (which basically is the method of symbolism). It is the projection (by use of masks, stylization of acting through chorus, and super-realistm of dialogue and soliloquy) of an abstract thesis upon the stage in sensible terms. This might be considered as expressionism-with-a-difference.

So far we have considered expressionism as it is used to present the mind of an individual (Jones and Yank) or of individuals (The Great God Brown). In this drama we have plainly the mind of the playwright — characters are the concretion of what he has in his mind. It is plainly a schematic presentation of a problem in abstraction that has occurred to the mind of O'Neill. "We are in a spiritual world of abstract ideas personified by human beings, light, form, color, and sound." 166

What is this problem? That of life and death and hereafter. How does O'Neill solve the problem? He does not. The conclusion of the thesis is: Death is dead! Fear no more! There is only life! There is only laughter! Such is the message that Lazarus brings back from the grave and tries to teach men — but men forget.

It is difficult to believe that O'Neill could spend the time and energy that this play must have required and be insincere in his thesis. But the conclusion must be that, despite his frequent repetitions of "Laugh," it is difficult to see about what his followers have to laugh. Enthusiasts try to see the Christian belief in future existence, but such a belief is entirely lacking — it is a false, naturalistic hereafter he describes.

It cannot be the Christian belief in personal immortality. The resurrection of Lazarus would give ground for such a view were it not obvious that O'Neill has taken over the Christian history merely as a starting point for his non-Christian allegory. It is non-Christian in its concept of immortality; it is non-Christian in its morality. The hero is not humble, but arrogant. For him, men are not evil until they are redeemed by the grace of God, but they are innately good and are perverted simply by fear (a variation on Rousseau, who thought that men were innately good and were perverted simply by social laws and restraints). Lazarus thus incites men, not to love one another because they are children of God, but to love passionately and instinctively. To be freed
from the fear of death means for those who come under Lazarus' spell to go mad with delight in death. (To the Christian it means living on earth according to the Golden Rule, to suffer in meekness and to forgive evil.) Lazarus makes people laugh with exultation at the prospect of personal annihilation. He cries:

Once as the squirming specks we crept from the tides of the sea! Once as quivering flecks of rhythm we beat down the sun. Now we reenter the sun! Cast aside is out pitiable pretense, our immortal egohood, the holy lantern behind which cringed our Fear of the Dark....We will to die! 167

O'Neill here tries to pull himself out of humanity by rhapsodizing over the fact that physically we are a part of evolutionary nature. It must be intoxication of some sort or another to roar with glee at the necessity of abandoning all hope of immortality beyond the immortality of the electrons that we are composed of.

Physically we are made of stardust, which will go on dancing eternally. Apparently we should be delighted at the prospect of dissolving our living complexity back into it. But whether or not this thesis be true, his development is expressionistic. "Masks and crowds are employed to show us the message of Lazarus to the world. There is no blurring of the spiritual with the real because there is no touch of realism in the whole drama." 168


168 Donald Clive Stuart, op. cit., p. 647.
We see that, as in The Great God Brown, the chief expressionistic devices are the masks, stylization of action, and psychosic-dialogue. As in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape (unlike The Great God Brown), "there is little pretense of dramatic structure; each episode is detached, except for the unifying thread of the prophet martyr's gospel, and the progression towards tragedy (or triumph)." 169 This plot structure and scene arrangement is characteristic of most expressionistic dramas; for example, The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape.

The setting is not noticeably expressionistic, except for some startling directions such as, "It is a clear, bright night, the sky sparkling with stars;" 170 the indication in Scene Two of Act One of silhouetted dancers, "Whirling swiftly by the windows;" 171 a night "thick and oppressive." 172 These demands for mood translated into concrete stage design are typical of the feats often required by dramatists using expressionistic techniques which depend heavily upon such settings.

Though O'Neill did not go into detailed description of distorted setting, it is difficult to see how the unrealistic, much be-masked characters could be conceived of in any other. It is the highly specialized masking of his choruses, crowds, and main characters that decide the

171 Ibid., p. 390.
172 Ibid., p. 420.
success or failure of the presentation of O'Neill's ideas in this play. Only Lazarus is unmasked, and he is thus shown "visibly free from the illusions of Mortality." 173 Every other character is masked. The complex masking of the chorus is stated at the beginning of the play:

(All of these people are masked in accordance with the following scheme: There are seven periods of life shown: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned. Thus in each crowd (this includes among the men the Seven Guests who are composed of one male of each period-type as period one -- type one, period two -- type two, and so on up to period seven -- type seven) there are forty-nine different combinations of period and type. Each type has a distinct predominant color for its costumes which varies in kind according to its period. The masks of the Chorus of Old Men are double the size of the others. They are all seven in the Sorrowful, Resigned type of Old Age. 174

O'Neill uses masks here for two reasons. The first is merely to distinguish diversified human types and their degrees of physical maturity. The second, however, is one of inner revelation. All wear masks to hide their constant fear of death; that is, all except Lazarus. Or as Elizabeth Sergeant says, "Here the mask enables the artist not only

to separate but to salvage the dual nature of man." 175

As the play progresses the inner and external nature of groups is indicated by the maskings. For example, the inner character of Lazarus' followers are presented sensibly by the masks:

These Followers of Lazarus, forty-nine in number, composed about equally of both sexes, wear a mask, that, while recognizably Jewish, is a Lazarus mask, resembling him in its expression of fearless faith in life, the mouth shaped by laughter. The Chorus of Followers, seven in number, all men, have identical masks of double size, as above. The Period of all these masks is anywhere between Youth and Manhood (or Womanhood). 176

In Act Two, Scene One, the mask of the Greeks following an equally elaborate arrangement are all of the "Proud, Self-Reliant type, in the period of Young Manhood." 177

The new Greek followers are described similarly:

This Chorus wears, in double size, the laughing mask of Lazarus' followers in the same Period and Type as in the preceding scene, except that here the mask of each member of the Chorus has a different racial basis — Egyptian, Syrian, Cappadocian, Lydian, Phrygian, Cilician, Parthian. The followers are costumed and masked as in the preceding scene, seven Types in seven Periods, except that, as in the Chorus racially there are many nations represented. 178

175 Elizabeth Sergeant, Fire Under the Andes, p. 102.
176 Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 393.
177 Ibid., p. 406.
178 Ibid., p. 414.
Act Two, Scene Two, presents the dual character of the Roman senate:

...masked in the Roman mask, refined in them by nobility of blood but at the same time with strength degenerated, corrupted by tyranny and debauchery to an exhausted cynicism. The three periods of Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age are represented in the types of the Self-Tortured, Introspective; Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Cruel, Revengeful; and the Resigned, Sorrowful. 179

And the chorus of Legionaries are masked similarly. 180

The most expressionistic group in the entire play is that of the Roman crowd and chorus. The masks represent the most debauched and degenerated types in ghastly purple wigs and masks. Plainly we see the inner corruption of the court figures.

By Act Four, even O'Neill is getting a bit bored with these elaborate schemes, however, and they are kept at a minimum (since he obviously realized that, even for the sake of getting across an obscure idea, too much is too much).

These groups are effective since expressionistically "the rhythmical repetitions and symmetrical groupings of the choruses materialize ethical sympathies and antagonisms. The theme is stated repeatedly: there is no death." 181

The chorus and crowd become more effective with the accompaniment of choral chanting and action. Often their chanting becomes Greek-like

179 Ibid., p. 420.
180 Ibid., p. 429.
181 Thompson, op. cit., p. 310.
in its antiphony as in the last minutes of Act one, Scene one:

Crowd: Laugh! Laugh! Fear is no more! There is no death!

Chorus: Laugh! Laugh! There is only life! There is only laughter! Fear is no more! Death is dead!

Crowd: (in rhythmic echo) Laugh! Laugh! Death is dead! There is only laughter! 182

Such choral effects, illustrating the symbolic character of the groups, as did the psychological soliloquies, are presented throughout the play. Examples are found in the chorus, 183 the senate, 184 the followers of Lazarus, 185 the chorus of legionaries, 186 the chorus of the guard, 187 and the crowd throughout the play.

The choruses are echoes of and comments on the dialogue of the main characters, who reiterate the three words: death, life, and laughter. But all this repetition begins to pall. What O'Neill has lengthened out to eight scenes might have been done effectively in one, since his repetition does not pile-up but weighs down the thesis.

183 Ibid., p. 402.
184 Ibid., p. 423.
185 Ibid., pp. 426-9.
186 Ibid., p. 431.
187 Ibid., pp. 442, 445.
In acting, the element of stylization (as in every other expressionistic drama) is again noticeable. The chorus' actions are merely a number of formations and dances to accompany the imaginative dialogue and masks. The stylization of both sound and movement is evident throughout the play. An example is given here:

Then they again begin to feel impelled by the rhythm and laughter, their feet move, their bodies sway. Their lips quiver, their mouths open as if to laugh. Their Chorus of Old Men are the first to be affected. It is as if this reaction were transmitted through the Chorus to the crowd. 188

And as in so many of O'Neill's expressionistic plays the grotesque again appears -- the distortion of motion of the nightmare world:

Apparent first in this Chorus, a queer excitement begins to pervade this mob. They begin to weave in and out, clasping each other's hands now and then, moving mechanically in jerky steps to the music in a grotesque sort of marionette's country dance....

They crowd toward the gateway, their arms stretched out as if demanding Lazarus for a sacrificial victim. Meanwhile they never cease to hop up and down, to mill around, to twist their bodies toward and away from each other in bestial parody of the dance of the Followers. 189

These choral movements appear again and again. 190 Again, their movements take on the nightmare quality: "Their dance is faltering and

188 Ibid., p. 394.
189 Ibid., p. 395.
190 Ibid., pp. 398, 401-2, 411-13, 414, 419, 477.
slow now." 191 Even the chorus of the Senate is required to chant "wearily, as if under a boring compulsion." 192 These same directions are reiterated. 193

Thus we see the chorus masked, vocally choral, and stylized — all indicative of inner states.

These same characteristics are apparent in the portrayal of Miriam and Caligula, the two most significant characters besides Lazarus himself. Neither can laugh with Lazarus — in fact, they are the only two who do not fall under his spell.

Caligula cannot laugh with Lazarus over the death of death, for Caligula would otherwise have no hope for power as a future Caesar. He says, "You have murdered my only friend, Lazarus! Death would have been my slave when I am Caesar. He would have been my jester and made me laugh at fear." 194 Caligula is actually in living torment from fear of his own life being taken, yet his ambition forces him to wish for power to wield over life and death, even if it must jeopardize his own life. As Lazarus tells him, "You delight in believing evil of yourself, Caligula." 195

191 Ibid., p. 403.
192 Ibid., p. 421.
193 Ibid., p. 423.
194 Ibid., p. 416.
195 Ibid., p. 439.
Miriam, Lazarus' wife, cannot laugh because, as she says, "My heart remains a little dead with Lazarus in Bethany. The miracle could not revive all his old husband's life in my wife's heart." 196 And she knows "the torture of the fear of death — not of my death but of yours, Lazarus — not the passing of your man's body but the going away from me of your laughter which is to me as my son, my little boy!" 197

Even the sensual Pompeia can pity Miriam's inability to laugh with Lazarus. She says, "Oh, how his soothing gray words must have pecked at the wound in your heart like doves with bloody beaks." 198

In the course of the play Lazarus becomes younger. At the opening he is about fifty years of age. In the second act he seems ten years younger, in the prime of life. In the next he now looks less than thirty-five. Then progressively he seems no more than thirty, no more than twenty-five, like a young son. Miriam, on the other hand, ages rapidly from the opening scene where she appears to be a woman of about thirty-five. Next she appears about forty, then as a woman over forty-five, her hair gray, her shoulders bowed. In the last scene her hair is almost white.

196 Ibid., p. 438.
197 Ibid., p. 439.
198 Ibid., p. 474.
While Miriam's inner self is sensible to us primarily through mask, both stylization of acting and expressionistic soliloquies reveal the nature of Caligula. His mask accentuates

his bulging, prematurely wrinkled forehead, his hollow temples and his bulbous, sensual nose. His large troubled eyes, of a glazed greenish-blue, glare out with a shifty feverish suspicion at everyone. Below his mask his own skin is of an anaemic transparent pallor. Above it, his hair is the curly blond hair of a child of six or seven. His mouth also is childish, the red lips soft and feminine in outline. Their expression is spoiled, petulant and self-obsessed, weak but domineering. In combination with the rest of the face there is an appalling morbid significance to his mouth. One feels that its boyish cruelty, encouraged as a manly attribute in the coarse brutality of camps, has long ago become naively insensitive to any human suffering but its own. 199

To represent the evil passion in him he is directed to give "a crazy leap in the air and begin to dance grotesquely and chant in a thick voice." 200 He "cuts a hopping caper like some grotesque cripple which takes him to the side of Lazarus' chariot where he squats on his hams and, stretching out his hand, fingers Lazarus' robe inquisitively and stares up into his face in the attitude of a chained monkey." 201

Added to masks and action are the closing soliloquies of Caligula, in which he assures himself that there is death — and in his

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199 Ibid., p. 467.

200 Ibid., p. 416.

201 Ibid., p. 413.
belief he has "killed laughter." In the end Lazarus alone is unmasked. He alone need not wear a false face, hiding fear of death, for he has conquered death. What he appears, he is.

As in The Emperor Jones, a heroic task is assigned the actor of this part or, in fact, of any of the minor parts -- including the choral groups. The presentational acting requires more than personal impersonation of a character in a play. It demands that the actor blend himself into the spirit of the production -- into the scenery, lighting, and characterizations surrounding him. Often he is given merely the vaguest outlines of action and acting; it is up to him to fill in the portrayal.

What directions the actor is given are often so difficult to carry out that it is difficult to see how anyone but the most extraordinary actor could fill the role. For example, Lazarus must say the word yes "with a wonderful exultant acceptance in it!" He is required to cultivate a laugh so full of a complete acceptance of life, a profound assertion of joy in living, so devoid of all self-consciousness or fear, that it is like a great bird song triumphant in depths of sky, proud and powerful, infectious with love, casting on the listener an enthralling spell. The crowd in the room are caught by it.

202 Ibid., p. 382.
203 Ibid., p. 386.
204 Ibid., p. 388.
On Miriam's death impossible feats of implication are asked of the actor:

He touches one hand on her breast, as if he were taking an oath of life on her heart, looks upward and laughs, his voice ringing more and more with a terrible unbearable power and beauty that beats those in the room into an abject submissive panic. 205

The play is confusing, yet even without appreciating the nuances of plot and character development, it is clear that what O'Neill has done is to populate the stage with concretions of the abstract in order to detail to us visually and audibly a problem in his own mind — the problem of fear of death overcome by a higher faith in continued existence.

To a Catholic, the intricate expressionistic paraphernalia and myriads of theatrical devices seem wasted energy — yet, perhaps, to O'Neill, and to some members of his audience, it may have been the necessary step before he attained the Christian concept which appears in Days Without End.

205 Ibid., p. 457.
Days Without End

Days Without End was the last play O'Neill wrote before he went into the long seclusion which ended in 1945 with the production of The Iceman Cometh. In Days Without End he was still interested in the effects he could produce by the use of asides and masks.

This time, however, the split personality of the hero, part skeptic, part wistful believer, is played by two actors: John's thoughts are uttered by his cynical, destructive half, Loving. His two conflicting selves are shown on the stage as two separate characters. Loving, the God-denying self, pessimistic and destructive, invisible to the other characters in the play, is visible to the audience and gives utterance to the evil philosophy by means of which he is determined to prevent the noble self, John, from realizing his "yearning" to go back to his old Catholic faith.

The use of two actors to represent the split personality of one character did away with the sometimes confusing "lapses" of time of Strange Interlude, The Great God Brown, and Dynamo, during which the dual personalities revealed their inner selves.

This presentation visually and audibly of such a dual personality is more closely expressionistic than the exclusive use of masks. But in this play O'Neill adds to the multiplying of character the device of masks as well. "For Loving's face is a mask whose features reproduce exactly the features of John's face — the death mask of a John who has
died with a sneer of scornful mockery on his lips." 206

We see John Loving's inner conflict in the dialogue between John and Loving. Loving's Mephistophelian function is to reiterate, "There is nothing — nothing to hope for, nothing to fear — neither devils nor gods — nothing at all!" 207 while John is struggling to return to his boyhood faith.

Recourse to masks and soliloquies is correlated with the technical device of co-ordinating the narration of a fiction story, which John says he is writing, with the actual lives of immediate characters. This is possibly the weakest device O'Neill uses in this play since it relies on never-ending talk to present the exposition. O'Neill does not fool the audience by employing it — it is obviously artificial.

The theme from the beginning is very evidently The Hound of Heaven in drama — and hardly needs Father Baird's underlining of the fact by his quoting:

Ah fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom Thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me. 208

The beginning of John's spiritual wanderings is recounted in third person by John Loving, who is supposedly giving an outline for the plot of the book he is writing.

207 Ibid., p. 495.
208 Ibid., p. 508.
John. He was an only child. His father was a fine man. The boy adored him. And he adored his mother even more. She was a wonderful woman, a perfect type of our old beautiful ideal of wife and mother.

John. But he was too sure in his faith. He grew up as devout as his parents.

Loving. And then when he was fifteen, all these pious illusions of his were destroyed forever! Both his parents were killed!

John. That is, they died during a flu epidemic in which they contracted pneumonia -- and he was left alone -- without love. First, his father died. The boy had prayed with perfect faith that his father's life might be spared.

Loving. But his father died! And the poor simpleton's naive faith was a bit shaken, and a sinful doubt concerning the Divine Love assailed him!

John. Then his mother, worn out by nursing his father and by her grief, was taken ill. And the horrible fear came to him that she might die, too.

Loving. It drove the young idiot into a panic of superstitious remorse. He imagined her sickness was a terrible warning to him, a punishment for the doubt inspired in him by his father's death. So the poor fool prayed and prayed and vowed his life to piety and good works! He abased and humbled himself before the Cross -- and, in reward for his sickening humiliation, saw that no miracle would happen.

John. His mother died. And, in a frenzy of insane grief --

Loving. No! In his awakened pride he cursed his God and denied Him, and, in revenge, promised his soul to the Devil -- on his knees, when everyone thought he was praying! 209

209 Ibid., pp. 509-11.
Father Baird has already recounted John's spiritual wanderings from the time he was fifteen from Atheism to Socialism, from Socialism to Communism, from Communism to Lao Tze, from here to Buddhism, to Greek philosophy, to mechanism, and finally finding a haven in Elsa, his wife. Father Baird concludes, "He seems to be fixed in his last religion. I hope so...Ah well, it's a rocky road, full of twists and blind alleys, isn't it, Jack -- this running away from truth in order to find it? I mean, until the road finally turns back home." 210

In the course of the play the failure of this last stronghold is revealed as well. John, having married Elsa and being devotedly in love with her, is nevertheless led into a betrayal of that love by the false Loving. Elsa, hearing a confession of John's faithlessness, falls into an illness.

After John Loving's destructive self has brought his wife to the point of death by a combination of his unchastity and his unconscious death-wish, the crisis of the play is reached, and the priest says to John: "Human science has done all it can to save her. Her life is in the hands of God now." 211 It is then that John, still mocked by his doubting self, Loving, staggers to the crucifix and, after a final struggle, proclaims that the Cross has conquered. At this, Loving falls

210 Ibid., p. 504.

211 Ibid., p. 559.
dead, for with his return to Catholicism, John Loving, no longer a divided soul, is finally at peace.

The complete play, except for the last scene, is one long wordy exposition of John Loving's spiritual wanderings. It is in this last scene that the final struggle between John Loving's soul and his evil genius is presented most effectively.

We see the contention of good and evil in his soul.

Loving. You fool! There is nothing but hatred!

John. No! There was love! The Cross!

Loving. The symbol of hate and derision!

John. No! Of love! Mercy! Forgive!

Loving. Fool! Grovel on your knees! It is useless! To pray one must believe!

John. I have come back to Thee!

Loving. Words! There is nothing!

John. Let me believe in Thy love again!

Loving. Silence! But behind it I hear mocking laughter!

John. O Son of Man, I am Thou and Thou art I! Why hast Thou forsaken me? O Brother Who lived and loved and suffered and died with us, Who knowest the tortured hearts of men, canst Thou not forgive — now — when I surrender all to Thee — when I have forgiven Thee — the love that Thou once took from me!

John. Ah! Thou hast heard me at last. Thou hast not forsaken me! Thou hast always loved me! I am forgiven! I can forgive myself — through Thee! I can believe!

212 Ibid., pp. 564-5.
Visually the evil in John is overcome when Loving stumbles from beneath the Cross, "sags and collapses... as if from a mortal blow.... His legs crumple under him, he slumps to his knees beside John, as if some invisible force crushed him down." 213

He slumps forward to the floor and rolls over on his back, dead, his head beneath the foot of the Cross, his arms outflung so that his body forms another cross. John rises from his knees and stands, with arms stretched up and out, so that he, too, is like a cross. While this is happening the light of the dawn on the stained-glass windows swiftly rises to a brilliant intensity of crimson and green and gold, as if the sun had risen. The gray walls of the church, particularly the wall where the Cross is, and the face of the Christ shine with this radiance.

(John Loving -- he, who had been only John -- remains standing with his arms stretched up to the Cross, an expression of mystic exaltation on his face. The corpse of Loving lies at the foot of the Cross, like a cured cripple's testimonial offering in a shrine.) 214

The last words of John Loving are reminiscent of Lazarus Laughed, only this time they have an orthodox and Catholic meaning: "I know! Love lives forever! Death is dead! Ssshh! Listen! Do you hear? Life laughs with God's love again! Life laughs wit' th Love!" 215

This was the last of the trilogy O'Neill had proposed at the beginning of Dynamo -- it is the final attainment of a personal God by Man. Again we see the inner struggle, the searching of the soul projected

213 Ibid., p. 566.
214 Loc. cit.
215 Ibid., p. 567.
visually and audibly before the audience — visibly by the use of mask and multiple personality, audibly by the use of the inner dialogue.

It is with expressionistic presentation of character, as in Strange Interlude, the opening scenes of *Dynamo*; The Great God Brown, that we are here interested. It is reality of character on the double plane. Setting and plot development remain traditional and realistic, uncharacteristic of expressionistic method.
CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis the author set out to show Eugene O'Neill's use of expressionism in drama. He presented an analysis of expressionism in the conception of the drama, in subject matter and method, in staging and settings, and devices for presenting character — acting, masking, and dialogue.

In order to begin such an analysis it was necessary, first of all, to define certain common dramatic terms and in particular the term expressionism — showing its uniqueness in the sphere of drama. Having laid down a standard with which to evaluate the work of O'Neill as an expressionist, the author proceeded in the third chapter to show the suitability of expressionism to O'Neill's purposes and, in fact, his actual use of it. This use of expressionism extends from subject matter to method, including the various devices of expressionism.

In the last chapter, the author analysed the eight plays of O'Neill that show elements of expressionism. He corroborated his findings in the opinions of recognized critics.

These findings, which constitute the results of the definite research involved in the thesis, may be summarized as follows.

In all eight of the dramas there was one common element, an element of first importance, since all of the others are derivations of it. This was the conception of the drama. In each, O'Neill saw his
struggle as an internal one, a conflict of soul or of mind. The stage for this problem was, in some cases, one soul and, in others, many souls; but always O'Neill was projecting this inner scene before the audience audibly and visually. In *The Emperor Jones*, the struggle was between Jones' civilized personality and his race heritage; in *The Hairy Ape*, it was Yank versus his atavistic tendencies; in *The Fountain*, it was Ponce de Leon against his inherent idealism; in *The Great God Brown*, the struggle involved is the poet-saint personality; in *Strange Interlude*, the three-fold Freudian war in the personality of Nina Leeds; in *Dynamo*, the conflict was religion versus paganism in the soul of Reuben Light; in *Lazarus Laughed*, the death-fear versus joy in the lives of all Mankind; and in *Days Without End*, Christ versus the devil in the soul of John Loving. In none of these conflicts was O'Neill interested primarily in so-called actuality. In reality, yes; actuality, no. Such a conception of drama is expressionistic.

From this expressionistic conception O'Neill drew much of his subject matter and method. Although any subject may be presented in the expressionistic mode, certain subjects and themes have been peculiar to the expressionist and lend themselves to his method. O'Neill frequently deals with these themes. Two of his dramas are concerned with aspects of atavism (*The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*); three of them (*The Great God Brown*, *Strange Interlude*, *Days Without End*) explore dual personalities. *Lazarus Laughed* is primarily symbolic in its theme. *Dynamo* and *The Fountain*, while being studies of the soul, are not especially expressionistic in subject matter.
This expressionistic subject matter is developed in the expressionistic plot. Such plot is based upon intensification of emotion (called the pile-up plot), rather than the logical development of action from exposition, through complication, and turnings point to the denouement. The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, and Lazarus Laughed are the only dramas of O'Neill which adhere to the expressionistic dicta regarding plot. The other five dramas are developed usually with heightening of emotion, but dependent primarily upon logical development of action.

The method of presenting the subject matter of these eight dramas is expressionistic either in whole or in part. This method is to project a conflict of soul visually and audibly upon the stage before an audience. The Fountain does so in only one scene; The Emperor Jones, in all but two of eight scenes; and the other six dramas do so, with more or less intensity as the case may be, throughout the entire drama.

This method gives rise to devices of setting and character for presenting the themes. In setting, an expressionistic drama demands plastic scenery. Such scenery is called for by O'Neill in five of the eight dramas studied in this thesis. The six nightmare scenes in The Emperor Jones require plastic scenery; all of the scenes in The Hairy Ape are seen through the eyes of Yank (requiring plastic, or emotionalized, scenery); all of Lazarus Laughed is expressionistic; the tenth scene of The Fountain (the fountain as seen through the eyes of Ponce de Leon); and the dynamo set (as seen through the eyes of Reuben Light). The other three dramas Strange Interlude, Days Without End, The Great God Brown
can be successfully produced with representational backgrounds.

It is in the devices of characterization that the method of expressionism is most clearly discernable. These devices are principally three: the use of masks or stylized make-ups, the psychological, or interior, soliloquies; and presentational acting, stylization and non-representation.

Masks are employed in five of these plays. In The Hairy Ape the masks visualize the characters, other than Yank, as he sees them. Masks indicate the dual personalities of the characters in Days Without End, Lazarus Laughter, Strange Interlude, and The Great God Brown.

Psychological soliloquies make apparent the hidden motives and mental processes of characters in five of the plays. The Emperor Jones is virtually one extended monologue voicing the mental disintegration of Brutus Jones; Yank's soliloquies in The Hairy Ape voice his confusion with regard to his place in the scheme of life. All the characters in Dynamo, Strange Interlude, and The Great God Brown voice their secret desires and motives by means of the soliloquy. Lazarus Laughter employs an emotionally heightened, poetic dialogue; but in its poetic quality it resembles the monologue, soliloquies, and dialogues previously mentioned. Days Without End uses the device of an unheard conversation (between the two tendencies of John Loving's personality). All of these voices of the interior are variations of the expressionistic device for making the mental processes audible.
Presentational acting is strikingly necessary in *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *Lazarus Laughed*. It may be used to a lesser extent in some of the other dramas. It is characterized usually by stylized movement and choral formations.

The conclusion, as hinted in the introduction, must be that since Eugene O'Neill is eclectic in his methods, there are many instances of expressionistic tendencies, whether he was conscious of them or not, in the eight dramas under consideration. Naturally, since the author was unable to present an analysis of the use of the other dramatic modes by O'Neill and stressed only those characteristics that are expressionistic, it might appear that the objective was to prove O'Neill to be a pure expressionist. Such was not the purpose. The aim was rather to show that O'Neill has used to a great extent methods that may be called expressionistic.

Other writers have mentioned expressionistic tendencies of O'Neill which appeared in *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones*, but nowhere before has this writer found a complete analysis of expressionism in his other plays. The author here has not attempted to establish a strictly new thesis concerning the works of O'Neill, but has intensified and added to an accepted but unproved judgment of it.
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The thesis submitted by Brother Luke Maurelius Grande has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

January 25, 1949

Date

Signature of Adviser