1972

Eugene O'Neill's Use of Symbolism in Eight Major Experimental Plays

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EUGENE O'NEILL'S USE OF SYMBOLISM
IN EIGHT MAJOR EXPERIMENTAL PLAYS

by
F. Jay Butler

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Loyola University of Chicago 1972

Doctoral committee:
Associate Professor Paul A. Hummert, Chairman
Associate Professor Thomas R. Gorman
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PREFACE

In spite of the fact that there is no comprehensive work on O'Neill's use of symbolism, the following have been helpful in this study of O'Neill's use of symbolism. Of particular value in assessing O'Neill's life and in a general interpretation of the plays are such works as Croswell Bowen, The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill; Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretative Study of the Plays. A monumental biography is that of Arthur and Barbara Gelb, Eugene O'Neill. Its only fault is that it is not documented, although they have indicated that there will be a documented edition in the future. Well documented and the best is the first of a promised two-volume work, Louis Sheaffer's Eugene O'Neill: Son and Playwright.

In studying imagery, Johann Bachofen, Myth, Religion, and Mother Rights; Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature; Carl Jung, Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformation and Symbolism of the Libido; Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art; Bernice Stote, Myth and Symbol; and Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo were of much value.

Before continuing, I wish to thank the members of my doctoral committee: Associate Professor Thomas R. Gorman, Assistant Professor William R. Hiebel, and in particular its chairman, Associate Professor Paul A. Hummert.
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The recipient of one Nobel prize and four Pulitzer prizes, the immediate subject of innumerable literary studies, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill has justifiably assumed the indisputable honor of America's greatest dramatist. Primarily because of his experiments in both the composition and the production of the drama, it can truly be said that with him the American theatre came of age. In so far as his art was concerned O'Neill was a very fortunate man. At the time that he was beginning to express himself in the dramatic medium, as early as 1915, there were in the offering two theatrical groups who were interested in experimental drama. They were the Provincetown Players and later the Greenwich Village Players, and they were to be responsible for giving O'Neill an opportunity for experimenting in the writing of the drama and in its staging in a way that no other dramatist before him had had. O'Neill was adamant when anyone questioned his sense and feeling for the drama, and he took full advantage of these opportunities to create experimentally. Restless and sometimes reckless, he proceeded from experiment to experiment, and each play was very much a projection of an original mind.

Some of these creations were to be powerful and successful such as Strange Interlude, others were to be powerful and not so successful such as The Hairy Ape, and some were to be powerful and completely unsuccessful such as The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed; but none were to be repeated in the same way. It was, however, O'Neill's determination and his
Imaginative dramatic ability that permitted him to express the tragic vision of his dramatic principle. He was to reiterate many times that he was acutely conscious of the force behind Life -- Fate, God, our biological past -- all contributing to the present. Behind this Mystery lay the eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. This to him was a subject worth writing about, and it was possible to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols which might to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on stage.

That he was eminently successful in expressing his concepts of the drama is evidenced by the numerous studies devoted to him and his works. It was because of these very innovations and experiments in the drama that his plays were either lauded or rejected in his own lifetime, and it was also because of the drama of his own personal life that the critics of the plays have had great difficulty in separating O'Neill the Man from O'Neill the Myth; and both from the plays themselves. For example, it is a fact and it is important to note that O'Neill's personal life extended -- whatever the degree -- into his drama. All of his biographers and

many of the critics of his plays point out that O'Neill's
association with his family resulted in one of the most
psychically disturbed and complex human beings that one is
able to encounter outside The House of Atreus and The House
of Thebes. As a man he was unable to reconcile the destructive
emotions of his family ties, loyalties, loves, and hates with
the intellectual ideals and principles of the dramatist. In
this sense O'Neill's life can positively be characterized
as the curse of the misbegotten. From the early plays O'Neill's
family appear undisguised -- Ella and Jim Downey in All God's
Chillun Got Wings to his completely autobiographical master-
piece Long Day's Journey into Night.

The significance of these facts is important because
they have essentially determined the direction of O'Neill
criticism. Hailed as a theatrical innovator in his own day,
in later years his plays were often rejected because of these
very innovations as being topical and even gimmicky. The re-
sult has been that until the late nineteen fifties and sixties
criticism of the plays along with any attempts at evaluation
has been often subjective and at best uneven. It should be
noted and emphasized, however, at this point that there is
still much disagreement about the literary value of the plays
as individual works of art and about the creative ability of
the author. In all probability it is the deliberate ambiva-
ience and complexity of both ideas and structure in these
highly experimental plays that is responsible for their power
and fascination for each new generation.
Among the earliest of the O'Neill critics to recognize something of the ambivalent nature of the plays was Barrett H. Clark. In his brief and very personal Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays he does not let his friendship for O'Neill the man interfere with his criticism of O'Neill the dramatist and with the plays. He recognizes O'Neill as the greatest American dramatist, and he sees the plays as an expression of one whose own suffering and agony in living are carried over into the plays. Unfortunately he did not have a chance to know O'Neill's very last plays. This same thesis is expressed in an even more critical book by Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretative Study of the Plays. Her analysis of the plays is based essentially on the psychology of Freud and Jung. According to her theory O'Neill was attempting in his plays to explain human suffering and to justify the ways of God or Fate to Man. She sees in O'Neill's characters Man fated very much in the sense of Greek tragedy, but Man also as ultimately a free and responsible agent who brings most of his grief upon him through pride. Hers was a pioneer study that was to initiate innumerable analyses of the Influence of Nietzsche, Freud, and Jung on the tragedies.

This same theme was expanded by Croswell Bowen in


The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill. The very title is indicative of a concept of life that O'Neill was to express many times both publicly to his friends and intrinsically in his plays: Yank says in The Hairy Ape that his only crime was being born, all four characters in Long Day's Journey into Night reflect the same belief, and his last great play he even entitled A Moon for the Misbegotten. Bowen's major thesis was that like the fated houses in Greek drama O'Neill's family likewise was doomed to bring tragedy and destruction to one another, a theme Bowen feels is expressed in most of the plays. The best and most complete biographical study was done in 1962 by Arthur and Barbara Gelb, entitled O'Neill, a simple enough title and the only word that O'Neill wanted written on his tombstone. It is the most factual account of his life, indeed a monument to the man, and it contains thorough and perceptive discussions of the plays themselves. In 1964 Frederic Carpenter published Eugene O'Neill, a study in much the same vein as those of Falk and Bowen. He views the characters in the plays as psychological -- conscious or unconscious -- projections of O'Neill and his family. In his belief O'Neill began early in his life to search for the meaning in life -- the search for the dream beyond the horizon that he was to find only after a long day's


Journey into night. Carpenter notes very clearly, however, that when dramatic artistry demanded it, as it did in the play *Long Day's Journey into Night* and as it had in no previous play, O'Neill could be very objective. The idea is, and Mr. Carpenter should have noted it, that O'Neill was the consummate artist even if at the same time he was his own psychiatrist or confessor.

The first major critic to remove O'Neill from the plays -- which is to discuss the plays as works of art that fail or succeed on their own merits -- is John Henry Raleigh who in 1965 presented a very fine evaluation of O'Neill's art, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill.* It should be noted, however, that Raleigh, as do all of the critics, recognizes the role that O'Neill's personal life played in the dramas he wrote: the emotions of hate, love, jealousy, and bitterness toward his father, mother, and brother, and his attempts to rationalize such feelings in his drama required a continual and courageous struggle. The most interesting and valuable aspect of Raleigh's book is his study of O'Neill's method of structuring his plays. For example, one aspect that O'Neill uses in structuring his plays is that of contrast, and one way of achieving this contrast is through imagery. In *The Hairy Ape* Yank is incapable of rationalizing; yet he is equated always with Rodin's *The Thinker.* Yank is at home in the hull of the stoker at sea, but on land he is misplaced and unable to function. In *All God's Chillun Got Wings* white Ella is con-

trasted with black Jim Downey, and they even try to exchange
roles. Mary Tyrone's journey from day (rational, aware) into
night (dope, oblivion) is also a journey into the hell of
truth. In essence Raleigh sees in O'Neill's plays a pattern
consisting in one part of repetition not only of themes, but
also what Timo Tiusanen in O'Neill's Scenic Images would call
image clusters: memory, the past, contrasted with the pre­
sent; color, black-white; land-sea; night-day; and so on.
Tiusanen points out that O'Neill's images are repeated in the
plays. O'Neill's use of the mask is a case in point. In
All God's Chilkun Got Wings the Congo mask is used to remind
Jim Downey of his blackness and his racial heritage. In The
Great God Brown the mask is used to hide the inner feelings
of the characters in much the same way that they wear clothes
to cover their nakedness. The mask in Mourning Becomes Electra
is used to indicate the separation of the members of the
Mannon family as well as to indicate the fated isolation of
the family itself.

It has been essentially then only in the last de­
cade that the very best O'Neill criticism has been written.
Probably time and distance are responsible for permitting a
more objective study of the plays as tragic drama. Much of
the "shock" associated with the innovative interior monologues
in Strange Interlude and the sheer, overpowering length of
Mourning Becomes Electra has dissipated. On the other hand,
it is perhaps a tribute to O'Neill's contribution to the stage

Timo Tiusanen, O'Neill's Scenic Images (Princeton,
and modern drama that we hardly blink at the length of his plays in viewing the scope of his dramatic achievement. Just what that achievement was is still being determined and evaluated as evidenced by the current interest in both him and his plays. Louis Sheaffer recently published an excellent first volume of a projected work of perhaps several volumes.9 Of the critically sound works listed above it is interesting to note that three discuss the plays as Freudian and Jungian, and only two discuss in any depth his method of structuring the play and his use of imagery. Not one discusses the kind of symbolism or the way he experiments with its usage in his plays. O'Neill himself said that it was through symbols that he expressed his tragic vision.10 Certainly symbolism is one important device he used in his experimental dramas and therefore a necessary aspect of his dramatic technique. He used symbolism to extend the boundary, the scope, and the meaning in his plays beyond the limits of mere straightforward realism. Symbolism permitted him to depart from orderly, logical language to a psychological sequence of imaginative language, at the same time remaining true to his characters on a realistic level. The symbol as O'Neill used it functions as an agent of poetic and dramatic intensification to universalize his themes. "Any form of realistic technique was for O'Neill simply a means of working out the plot. It was but a means

to an end and that end was symbolic representation. The next step was to select the particular type of symbolism to be used in that particular play. It was the crucial problem for O'Neill in any play. He needed a wider field and the deeper meanings that some form of symbolism would give him."

A study of dramatic influences on O'Neill's use of symbolism in his experimental plays would be of great help in evaluating the plays, but unfortunately no such study has been done. Undoubtedly as Barrett H. Clark points out the three most important influences on O'Neill were Nietzsche, Strindberg, and Wedekind among European philosophers and playwrights. O'Neill was to say many times that his undisputed master was Strindberg, a point that he reiterated and emphasized strongly in his Nobel prize acceptance speech. Too he must have known the symbolist poets, because Jamie Tyrone quotes from them, notably Baudelaire, in Long Day's Journey into Night. The extent of his reading is again suggested in Long Day's Journey into Night (even though the purpose of such a description is ironic) when O'Neill in the stage directions lists in the library such novelists as Balzac, Zola, Stendhal; and such philosophers and sociologists as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, Kropotkin, Max Stirner; and such poets as Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and Kipling. In that this play is essentially autobiographical, these must have been the works in the O'Neill library. Another


12 Clark, p. 84.
important influence was that of Freud and Jung, and curiously enough O'Neill does not include their names in his reading list. Freud's study of dreams and his Totem and Taboo are primary studies in symbolism. That O'Neill knew them is amply pointed out by the plays and by their critics, and he himself underwent extensive psychiatric analysis.13

Symbolism then is one important aspect in the study of the O'Neill play, for O'Neill himself emphasized many times that it was the symbolism in his plays that mattered because he had more to say than could be said in the plain, unshaded word. Because there has been no in-depth study of O'Neill's use of symbolism it is the purpose of this paper to examine that symbolism in eight of his major experimental plays. In that symbolism is only one aspect of the plays, this study is intended as an initial, pioneer, and exploratory one limited in scope to these eight plays: The Hairy Ape (1921), All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923), Desire Under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown (1925), Strange Interlude (1926-27), Mourning Becomes Electra (1929-1931), The Iceman Cometh (1939), and Long Day's Journey Into Night (1939-41). This choice of plays is not totally arbitrary for two reasons: because after studying the O'Neill canon these seem to be the plays in which he used symbols most experimentally, and secondly these plays cover his whole career of writing.

There are three basic areas in each play in which O'Neill used symbolism experimentally: setting, character,
and plot. There is no particular significance in the order of listing these three categories because any one of them might be the particular area in which O'Neill is experimenting in any particular play, and because he had the ability as a great dramatist to so completely integrate the three categories. For example, in *Mourning Becomes Electra* O'Neill is decidedly concerned with the use of the Atreus legend in Greek literature as the basis for constructing the plot of his own modern day myth or legend of the House of Mammon. *The Great God Brown* is O'Neill's experiment with facial masks to reveal the inner or psychological nature of his characters; hence the mask is an absolutely integral part of the setting, and at the same time it is a device for revealing character. Indeed O'Neill's use of masks could constitute a separate category of symbolic study. *Long Day's Journey into Night* is essentially a memory play, and hence there is very little action or plot. The emphasis is on the character of the four members of the Tyrone family.

O'Neill wrote for the reader as well as for the stage and consequently used images both in dialogue and extensive stage directions that would be dramatically and theatrically effective. His use of stage directions alone could produce a separate symbolic study. Therefore interpretation of the plays depends to a large degree on a careful analysis of the imagery in the stage directions: character descriptions, stage design, lighting, costuming, make-up, props, and other technical devices. So important did he consider these stage directions that they often form a significant portion of the
written play.

It is, however, in the three basic areas of setting, character, and plot that O'Neill uses his symbols to emphasize similar themes, ideas, philosophies, character traits, or for introducing entirely new concepts. There are certain major symbols in these three areas that function as psychological transference revealing O'Neill's own concepts of the human/God relationship and the ambiguous situations in which he has artistically placed his characters to have them solve or not solve certain problems: For example, is man free or determined? Can he really separate the world of reality from the world of illusion? Should he exert himself by action or should he remain inactive? Some of these major symbols are Belonging-Security, Race, Family, Love-Hate, Self-destruction-rebirth, House-Home, Alcohol, Drugs, Fog, Woman (Mother, Sister, Prostitute), Sea, Sea vs. Land, Religion, Place-Setting-Geography, Names, Masks, Sun, Sunlight, Moon, Foghorn, Trees, Fences, Gates, Stairs, Horizons, Ships, Black, White, Songs (the use of which alone would constitute a fascinating study), Poetry, and Titles of Plays.

In each of the eight plays O'Neill is experimenting with symbolism and new dramatic forms. The experimental method that O'Neill uses in The Hairy Ape he called supernaturalism, by which he meant a combination of naturalism and expressionism. The symbolic expressionistic devices he uses are the masks in the New York Fifth Avenue scene and the Zoo scene in which Yank is subsumed into the gorilla. The method of All God's Chillun Got Wings is realistic with
overtones of romanticism in the love plot. The most striking symbolic devices that he experiments with are the contrast of color -- Black and White and the thirteen songs used to further plot and develop character. Desire under the Elms is a return to almost pure naturalism with a New England setting of decaying Puritanism against which O'Neill experiments with plot and character based on the Greek tragedies of Medea and Hippolytus. The symbolic device that O'Neill experiments with in one of his most symbolic expressionistic plays, The Great God Brown, is the mask, used to create a new depth in the psychological dimensions of character. In Strange Interlude O'Neill experiments with the psychology of probing to find the identity of one character in particular, Nina Leeds. For the first time O'Neill uses the interior monologue to reveal the depths of character, and the presentation of Nina's case history requires a playing time of six or seven hours. Mourning Becomes Electra deals experimentally with Greek legend and myth, especially in terms of the Greek conventions of plot and character, in creating a modern Oresteia. The major symbols used in this play are Seth Beckwith as the Greek Chorus, the chanty "Shenandoah" as a dramatic refrain paralleling the action of the play, and the blessed isles as a symbol of the freedom that they are all seeking. In his most naturalistic play The Iceman Cometh O'Neill uses the symbolic device of grouping his characters into three concentric circles in which he proceeds to show their effects on one another in their own
group and eventually their effects on the other groups. In a play of "faithful realism," Long Day's Journey into Night, O'Neill draws almost totally from family relationships as he had never done before to symbolize dramatically and tragically the chaotic effects of their lives on one another.
MAN IN A CAGE

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

In a very strong and convincing analysis of The Hairy Ape, John H. Raleigh presents Robert Smith as an Everyman. However, as one who falls — or perhaps more accurately is catapulted — from innocent certainty to complex incertitudes, he is best known as Yank, who as the play puts it, falls from belonging "to not belonging." Such a fall is capable of precipitating the ultimate in frustration and humiliation. In a more nebulous discussion Robert Andreach suggests that Yank may well be O'Neill's representation of Dante's fall or descent into the Inferno. Through his fall Yank develops a consciousness of alienation not from just belonging, but also from something higher than himself. O'Neill himself says that Yank is a symbol of man who has fallen from his old harmony with nature and is not able to rise to or acquire a new harmony of the spirit.

In this sense The Hairy Ape has been assumed by critics as being anything from a purely social study of Mankind

1O'Neill, in O'Neill and His Plays, p. 110.

2Raleigh, p. 169.


4O'Neill, in O'Neill and His Plays, p. 111.
in his political state to a detailed (though somewhat muddled) representation of Man in a state of moral anarchy. On the other hand, there are those critics who refuse to see the play other than as a caricature of some Freudian character who is somewhere on the scale of a low calibre of evolution, one caught somewhere between Hercules and Ceteban.  

In making these assumptions, there have been countless references to both general and specific symbols, but there has been no attempt to study them as any kind of cohesive force that would enhance whatever is the ultimate significance of the play. Such a symbolic study of the play reveals these symbols operating in at least three major areas: Setting; Characterizations both in the personal and human sense as well as in the general or institutional sense; and Themes as beliefs, concepts, and doctrines. Such a division is merely suggestive and descriptive, certainly not categorical because one realizes that these symbols may operate simultaneously in a multi-dimensional manner, architectually, perceptually, and conceptually and that they may be accompanied and supported by myriad minor or lesser symbols.

By deliberately choosing a symbolic setting, O'Neill is able to illustrate the subtle interplay between external influences and the inner experiences of his characters. These experiences may be conscious or unconscious, but they do compel his material to assume certain forms.  

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6Ibid., p. 133.
Hairy Ape demanded eight scenes in which Yank's fall can be effectively achieved. In seven of these scenes Yank is the focal character; and in Scene ii, the only one in which he does not physically appear, his pervading presence is so strong in the sense of anticipating his subsequent meeting with Mildred Douglas in the stokehole that he really dominates this scene too.

Thus in every scene the background is of the utmost importance in supporting both the realistic and the symbolic significance of the characters and their actions. So significant is this setting and so intensely did O'Neill determine to achieve it, that he often strained the limits and abilities of both the physical stage and the actors on it. It is then understandable that in many of his plays the stage directions make up about half the written form of the play.

Scene I of The Hairy Ape is the fireman's forecastle of a transatlantic liner one hour from New York on the voyage across. The room is small, cramped, and low ceilinged. It is lined with steel bunks from floor to ceiling; and with their supports and benches, the whole symbolizes a cage. The ceiling crushes down on a room filled with long-armed, fierce-eyed men. Cursing, laughing, singing, and shouting their sounds swell into a unified meaning of bewildered, furious, and baffled beasts in a cage. O'Neill makes it clear in the stage directions that the whole scene is anything but

7 Gelb, p. 495.
naturalistic, and that all civilized races are represented here. They are all alike except for slight differences in physiognomy. In the foreground is Yank, broader, fiercer, more powerful and truculent, and more sure of himself than all the rest. The other men both fear and begrudge him; yet at the same time they realize he represents to them an expression of their own selves as well as their most highly developed individual.

The complete effect of the scene is to depict a cramped space in the bowels of a ship where men are imprisoned in white steel. This setting illuminates six important symbols that are going to be illustrated and developed in the course of this particular scene as well as in subsequent action in the play. First of all, the theme of the play is introduced. At this point not even the title suggests the full symbolic significance of this theme; however, it is clear that the play is going to be about human beings represented by Yank trapped like apes in the bowels of a stoke-hole. Secondly, they are caught and imprisoned in a symbolic cage -- the Human Condition -- that crushes in about them as they rage and sputter their beast strengths in frustrated misunderstanding. The third symbol is the men themselves: apes. Black and white becomes the fourth symbol. The setting at this point does not suggest even a remote significance of these

8The Hairy Ape in The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, 3 vols., n. ed. (New York: Random House, 1967), III, 207. All future references will be listed as Plays, unless otherwise indicated.

9Ibid., p. 207.
colors; but O'Neill refers to white steel, white races, black coal, and coal darkened men. However, a bit later in the scene he repeats these images in describing the sails of ships in a former time as being all silver and white, white mountains as contrasted with the present ship whose black smoke smudges the decks and sea, and black coal dust choking the white and pure spirit out of men; making them appear as black, hairy apes. Steel -- a symbol of power of the Machine Age -- is the fifth symbol, and according to its increasing functions, the most important in the scene. Finally, pervading the whole is the feeling that the stokehole is a symbolic hell into which these apemen are intermittently cast, emerging and egressing like automatons and alternately sensing a kind of unfathomable freedom as they form a symbolic Greek Chorus singing their chanties and gluttoning themselves with memory-deadening alcohol.

Scene I opens with the men as a Chorus symbolically illustrating the lives of seasoned mariners. Clearly their superior and unaware of the clamor, Yank emerges from their midst and threateningly demands obedience (silence) and service (drink) from his fellows. He shows utter contempt for Paddy's chanty "Whiskey Johnny," a symbol of an older romantic life at sea. Anyone Yank declares who sees beauty and romance in a former life at sea is dead. Likewise the home, a kind of hell in which his parents continually fought, and the stokehole are synonymous; and all women are tarts.

When advised that their fates are determined by the

10_10Plays, III, 210._
"damned Capitalist class," Yank responds, "Aw nix on dat Salvation Army-Socialist bull." Anyone who attempts to shake Yank into thought meets with the rejoinder that he is yellow and does not belong. Yank sees himself as the "ting dat's de guts of all dis." He is what makes iron into steel. "Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel -- . . ." At the end of the scene Yank is the symbol of brute man so low on the scale of evolution that he can only conceive of himself as belonging in the purely physical sense. Anything that encroaches upon those sensations doesn't belong, is yellow, or makes him sick.

In contrast to Yank is Paddy, a frequently drunk and wizened old Irishman whose name through its sound and supported by his function in the play symbolizes the past. To the crew he is Caruso Pat (Pat-past), always good for a laugh and a song; but to O'Neill he is the wise old Harp with a pathetic animal fear in his eyes. Only he can sing the sea chanty "Whiskey Johnny," which in its tribute to a real alliance between man and the sea has now become a symbol of the dichotomy of the relationship of the men listening at this moment and their relationship with the sea. Spurned and cajoled by the crew now led by Yank, Paddy can still in his melancholy voice full of old sorrow, recount those days of "fine beautiful ships," "fine strong men," "brave men," "bold men," "free men," who were "sons of the sea." In those days a ship was part

11 Plays, 111, 212.
12 Ibid., p. 216.
of the sea, and a man was a part of the ship, and the sea
joined them all together and made one. But now men are "caged
in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the
Zoo!"14 The symbolic theme emerges, and one is reminded of
the other cages in which Yank will find himself in his fall
into not belonging: Fifth Avenue, jail, the I.W.W., and
finally the Zoo. However, Paddy can retreat into his world
of drinking and thinking and dreaming dreams as he sings the
chanty "Miller of Dee." The contrast is complete: Paddy has
a past if no future, but Yank has neither. He is left always
trying to think.15

The real thinker, however, is Long whose name symbo-
izes a longing for the future, the self-styled anarchist who
harangues his Comrades as living and dying in this hell, the
stokehole. "All men is born free and equal?" He blames the
capitalists for their plight. The one time that he appears in
the scene Yank shouts him down as not belonging and yellow.
Yank remains essentially unpenetrated by dreams or reality.

At the conclusion of the scene Yank's concept of
himself is that of a leader of brute force; he can not think
conceptually beyond the hellhole boiler. He symbolizes man
as he first rises from the muck; he is the symbol of the
lowest man in a Machine Age cage.16 Paddy symbolizes an
attempt to lift man from this fallen man-made state into a

14Plays, III, 214.
16Richard Dana Skinner, Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's
more spiritual one. And Long symbolizes some kind of potential change through violently disrupting the present order.

The catalytic action for the motivation in the whole play occurs in Scenes ii and iii. The stage directions indicate that the ship is two days out to sea, time enough to give the impression of the beautiful and vivid life of the sea. The deck is flooded with sunshine and all things seem in harmony. One is now reminded of Paddy's lyric about the relationship of ships, men, the white mountains and the sea; when suddenly the harmony is disrupted by two figures, Mildred Douglas and her aunt who exists primarily as a means of introducing Mildred.

Pale, anemic, nervous, bored, pretty in a superior and disdainful way, Mildred appears almost as a ghost in white. Immediately her character is revealed when she fails to see the sun and feel the warmth from the sun. Instead she sees only the black smoke as it swirls against the sky. She is rich; her father owns the Douglas steel companies and even the shipping line. But Mildred is a throwback sired and damned by gold, by the greed for material wealth. O'Neill states in the stage directions that she purrs, scratches, tears, kills, and gorges herself in an attempt to find happiness. She calls herself a caged leopard whose spots (greed) make him conspicuous, in the same way that the coal smudges (spots) make Yank and the other apes conspicuous in the cage.

17 Skinner, p. 108.

18 Plays, III, 220.
created by society. Mildred can, like the leopard, change her spots at will to get what she wants. Her father's gold has placed her in a money-cage that is just as destructive as Yank's cage. Going into the stokehole and insisting on wearing a white dress, she is told by her aunt that she will find it hot enough where she is going. "Do you mean hell?" she answers; and calling her aunt an old hag, she slaps her violently across the face and begins her descent.

In the stoke hole the men, stripped to the waist, and looking neither to the left nor to the right, shovel coal into the great furnaces with a "strange, awkward, swinging rhythm." From these fiery round holes in the back a flood of terrific light and heat pours full upon the men who are out-lined in silhouette in the crouching, inhuman attitude of chained gorillas. There is just enough light from one over-hanging electric bulb to throw a little light through the murky air that is laden with coal dust. Amidst the leaping flames in the furnaces and the throbbing beat of the engines, can be heard the grating, teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal.\(^{19}\)

Again one becomes aware of black and white and shadow and sea and sunshine as major contrasts. The men have become even more inhuman, gorilla-like; and for the first time is introduced the animal imagery of grating, teeth-grinding that will steadily increase throughout the play. Even as Yank appears looking upward through the murk, he is described as pounding on his chest gorilla-like. Unaware that Mildred

\(^{19}\)Plays, III, 223.
is behind him, he swings around toward her with a snarling, murderous growl, crouching to spring, his lips drawn back over his teeth, his small eyes gleaming ferociously. Mildred sees his gorilla face and cries, "Oh, the filthy beast!" Yank roars, "God damn yuh!" and flings his shovel at the closing door. This scene too like all of the others ends in violence; and if Yank could not be moved by Paddy or Long, he is now moved by a leopard.

The firemen's forecastle is again the setting for the fourth scene. The men have just come off duty and washed, but their faces still carry the black of the coal dust contrasting against their shining bodies. In their midst is Yank, "a blackened, brooding figure." He is seated forward on a bench in the exact attitude of Rodin's "The Thinker." And when one remembers that Rodin had Dante in mind when he conceived the statue and that in the Divine Comedy "The Thinker" crowns the gates of hell, Yank's symbolic function of acting without being able to think begins to become more salient.

The men, again speaking as a chorus, are criticizing Yank because of his actions in the hole and because he now will neither eat nor wash. They speak in a brazen, metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns. This phrase is to be repeated some dozen times until its symbolic meaning of men functioning as unoiled machines fairly jumps from the turn table. The men in their goading of Yank go on and on in a monotonous, irritating manner in the same high-

20_Plays, III, 226._

21Andreach, pp. 53-55._
pitched tinny quality of harps. Paddy accuses Yank of
falling in love with Mildred, and the Chorus responds with
voices like phonograph horns, barking in laughter. The men
have become wolves in pursuit of their victim. Yank cries
out in fury and anger, "Love, Hell! Hate, dat's what. I've
fallen in hate, get me?"

In his limited consciousness
Paddy is trying to make Yank realize that love and hate are
somehow mixed up in his blind rage against the "white quane."
The Chorus is in the background growling and roaring, and Long
seizes this moment to harangue the already inflamed men.
They are being exhibited like monkeys, and their lot is the
fault of the bloody Capitalists, symbolized by Mildred Douglas,
who own all of them as slaves.

For the first time in the play Yank's superiority
is penetrated. Blinking bewilderingly, he asks Long if "all
dat is straight goods?"

Long says that their case is so
strong that they can go to law. But Yank rejects that idea
too: to hell with the law. Long is shouted down by barking
laughter, having failed again in his role of anarchist; and
Paddy continues as though he had not been interrupted. In
this cage is a queerer kind of baboon than any to be found
in darkest Africa. When Mildred looked at Yank it was as
if she had seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo. It
is at this point that the symbolic role of Yank as ape begins
to intensify. Growling with rage, Yank for the second time
in the play is forced to ask a question: Did she really call

22 "Plays, I, 228.

23 Ibid., p. 228.
him an ape? He is unaware that her descent into the stoke-hole is her symbolic search for her origins (her forebears had been no different from Yank in that they had begun in the stokehole prior to becoming ship builders). O'Neill is paralleling Mildred Douglas' -- whose name means black stream -- attempt to find where she belongs with Yank's final scene in the gorilla cage.

At last the hide of the hairy ape has been penetrated. As symbolic catalyst Mildred as the leopard has struck, and the smell of blood is maddening. Now the symbolic meaning of the Chorus' accusation early in the scene that not washing "makes spots on you -- like a leopard" becomes clear. The spots referred to here are obviously those caused by black coal dust. Yet at the same time they function symbolically because Mildred as a symbolic Capitalist leopard is the cause of Yank's refusing to wash or to eat because she made him aware of his own brute nature and she has made him see that he does not belong in the world of the stoke-hole nor in her white, high society one. The white images also become clearer as they variously suggest that the Mildred Douglases of this world are dead (stiffs -- ghosts, not real, vital persons) and even the live ones who are walking around wrapped in their white shrouds are pale and anemic human.

25 Ibid., p. 371.
26 Plays, III, 227.
beings, imprisoned by and suffering from the effects of materialism. Such implications become even more meaningful when the function of white is contrasted with black, which now suggests power and strength because of its function both in "making the ship go" and in the process of making steel. One may see now more clearly how the symbols functioning simultaneously in a multi-dimensional manner converge and coalesce into the concept of the relationship of Yank, the black ape, and the white world of steel outside.

This merging of images to suggest meaning and significance is nowhere better illustrated than in Scene v. In his search "to fix" Mildred Douglas, Yank is propelled by Long into the fashionable fifties of Fifth Avenue in New York. It is a fine Sunday morning and a flood of mellowed, tempered sunshine washes the wide well cared for street. A jeweler and a furrier establishment are on the corner of the street. The windows of the jewelry store are gaudy with glittering diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls that are fashioned into ornate tiaras, crowns, necklaces, and collars. Form each piece hangs an enormous tag from which a dollar sign and numerals are attached in intermittent electric lights which wink out the incredible prices. In the furrier's all varieties of opulent splendor shine forth washed in artificial light. In both, the air is of supreme wealth displayed in a tantalizing manner, but through it all is the effect of magnificence cheapened by grotesque commercialism. They loom in complete contrast and disharmony with the sunshine and light on the street itself.
Swaggering up the street come Yank and Long. Long
is dressed in shore clothes and wears a black tie, while Yank
is still wearing his dirty dungarees with a black fireman's
cap. He has not shaved for days, and the black coal dust
sticks around the eyes of both like makeup.

Long's ulterior motive for bringing Yank here be-
comes apparent in his opening speech when he tells Yank that
they are trespassers on the private lane of the rich: Pro-
letarians, keep off the grass. Yank replies that he sees no
grass, and rather thinks it clean enough to eat an egg off.
It must keep the white wings busy cleaning it, and finally
he wants to know where all the white-collar stiffs are. Again
one notes the contrasting colors of Yank's blackness, and
particularly the stiffs in a new commercial-white context.
Long replies that they are in church asking Jesus to give them
more money. This reference to church awakens some deep memory
in Yank, and for the only time in the play he tells something
about his past, a past that can be summed up by his remarking
that he was dragged up on a Brooklyn waterfront.

At last Long reveals his real reason for bringing
Yank here, and with that revelation his role in the play be-
comes significant. He says bitterly to Yank, "I wants to con-
vince yer she was on'y a representative of 'er clarss. I
wants to awaken yer bloody clarss consciousness. Then Yer'll
see its 'er clarss yer've got to fight, not 'er alone."27 To
make his point Long says that the cost of one of the baubles
from the jewelers would feed a family for a whole year. Yank

27 Plays, III, 235.
tells him to cut the sob stuff before he starts passing out the hat. Once again Long fails to convince and Yank refuses to sympathize or to identify with the hungry masses.

Bitterly, Long goes on to say that Mildred's class slaughters poor harmless animals just to keep their noses warm. Yank now notices the price of two thousand dollars on a monkey fur, and for the third time he is propelled into asking the question, "is dat straight goods -- monkey fur?" Long answers that it is straight enough and adds that they bloody well would not pay that "for a 'airy ape's skin."

Sensing the skin in the window as a personal insult, Yank turns pale with rage, and a new dimension of the ape symbol of outrage at being exploited or destroyed is revealed. Seeing Yank's violent reaction, Long remonstrates that they must impress their demands through peaceful means -- the votes of the on-marching proletarians. Yank rejects this idea too: "Votes is a joke, see."

At the moment they are interrupted by the crowd sauntering slowly out of the church. Long advises Yank just to look at them with contempt, no violence, whereupon Yank tells Long to get out of his sight because he is yellow. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, and spats. They saunter slowly and affectedly, their heads held stiffly up, looking neither to right nor left, talking in toneless, simpering voices. They form a procession of gaudy marionettes,

28 Plays, 111, 236.
29 Ibid., p. 236.
yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankensteins in their detached mechanical awareness.

To achieve this effect O'Neill introduced for the first time masks in the symbolic sense of the Greek theatre. Yank stands menacingly in the middle of the sidewalk, but the people make wide detours to avoid the spot where he is standing. They do not even see him. Yank deliberately bumps into a top-hatted gentleman and asks him threateningly if he owns the earth. Long is frightened and tells Yank to keep his mouth shut, whereupon Yank tells him viciously to "go tell it to Sweeney." One can note the irony of the situation particularly in light of the T. S. Eliot poems in which Sweeney appears as a half-comical, half-threatening character of the sensual and brutish aspects of modern society. This scene reveals that in the minds of white Capitalists the Yanks do not even exist. Long slinks off, having failed in his temptations, yelling to Yank that whatever happens, "yer can't blame me."

Yank tries vainly to insult the men and women. They ignore him when he says they don't belong. But he does belong; and as he looks about him at a building being constructed, he says that he is the steel. People can only live inside, but he is "in it." Interrupted by one of the women screaming over the monkey fur, symbolic of mistaken values, Yank becomes even more enraged, and seeing them dressed all in white he is reminded of his revenge on Mildred, and they

30 Gelb, p. 495.
31 Plays, III, 237.
have all become now white-faced tarts calling him a hairy ape. He leaps to the lamp post on the corner and tries to pull it up to use as a club. He then smashes a gentleman in the face. The man remains unmoved and calls the police. The scene ends as Yank is fallen upon from all sides and is clubbed to the pavement. The crowd at the window has not moved or noticed the disturbance.

The sixth scene occurs on the night of the following day in the prison on Blackwells Island. The cells extend back diagonally from front to rear, looking as though they run on, numberless into infinity. A single electric bulb lights the interior. Yank appears again in the attitude of "The Thinker," his face covered with black and blue bruises and a bloody bandage wrapped around his head. A sound of barking laughter is heard in the background as Yank reaches out and rattles the bars. "Steel, Dis Is de Zoo, huh?" he cries out. "I musta been dreamin'. I fough' I was in a cage in the Zoo." For the first time steel has a different significance for Yank; the cell has become his symbolic cage in the Zoo. Now he senses some direct connection between steel and his imprisonment in an unfeeling world, and he announces defiantly to the other prisoners that he is a hairy ape.

Yank's vows of revenge are interrupted by a voice in the next cell reading from a smuggled-in newspaper a speech made by Senator Queen. As the speech is continued, it appears that Senator Queen is anything but honourable and

32plays, Ill, 240.
that his function is a symbolic one in that it will have some
direct bearing on the now self-acknowledged Hairy Ape. Func-
tioning in the same symbolic sense of the Greek Chorus as the
stokehole crew, the voice reads: "There is a menace existing
in this country today which threatens the vitals of our fair
Republic -- as foul a menace against the very lifeblood of
the American Eagle as was the foul conspiracy of Cataline
against the eagles of ancient Rome!" This fiendish ulcer
on the fair body of Democracy turns out to be the l.W.W.
They plot with one hand and dynamite with the other, so they
must be destroyed. If permitted to go on, God's master-
piece, Man, would soon degenerate back to the ape.

Yank, again sitting in the attitude of "The Thinker,"
hears the word ape, and it prompts him to react. Reaching
out for the paper and painfully trying to read it, he suddenly
realizes that the steel in which he thought he belonged has
now imprisoned him for Mildred to spit on. Cages, cells, locks,
bolts, bars -- they are what steel means. So now steel "don't
belong." Declaring that he will be fire that melts it, he
seizes one bar with both hands and puts his feet up against
the others so that he symbolically becomes a monkey. The
scene ends with Yank's being smashed with the water hose.

The l.W.W. local near the waterfront is the setting
for the seventh scene about a month later. Yank saunters into
the room declaring that he has come to join. But yet when
asked his name he can not remember and says he will have to
think. Yank thinks that the organization is secret and that

33plays, ill, 242.
Its intent is to change society's unequal conditions not by legitimate, direct action, but rather with dynamite. Now Yank can identify only with utter violence, for the symbolic blow that has been struck him by Mildred Douglas will lead to his destruction. In his attempt to belong, Yank has left the natural setting of the stokehole only to find himself in the cage of civilized society. So frustrated has Yank become that he even thinks of himself as an ape, and in that name will effect his frustrated and sadly misdirected revenge.

The I.W.W. secretary suggests that Yank is a spy from the government. Then concluding that Yank is too dumb even for that, the secretary, himself a symbol of misguided motivation, calls Yank a brainless ape and has him thrown bodily growling, bewildered, and fighting into the street. He assumes the position of Rodin's statue once again and sits brooding that he was once steel and owned the world. He can only conclude that now he is no longer steel and the world owns him. "Aw, hell! I can't see -- it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong."34 His darkness is indeed the dark night of the soul that is reflected in the bitter, mocking face that he turns upward toward the moon gibbering like an ape.

A policeman comes up and tells Yank to move along or else. Yank replies that they can only put him in a cage, the charge being that he was born. To Yank's question of where he can go from here, the policeman replies that he can go to hell.

The final scene occurs the next day.

34Plays, 111, 250.
in the monkey house of the Zoo. The other cages are vague and shrouded in shadow, but on one cage the word gorilla stands out. The gigantic animal himself is seen squatting on his haunches in much the same attitude as "The Thinker." Suggesting to the gorilla that they are both members of the Hairy Ape club, Yank becomes painfully aware that the gorilla is what Mildred saw when she looked at him. But what Mildred did not realize was that he was in a cage too, even worse than that of the gorilla's.

However, as usual, pure concepts are impossible for Yank, and he grows confused. Finding it impossible to pursue his brief and limited insight, he begins to explain to the gorilla where he has spent the night. He had been warming a bench down on the Battery where he saw the sun come up all pink and green. He saw the skyscrapers and the ships sailing in from all over the earth, and they were steel too. "Sure it was great stuff. I got it aw right -- what Paddy said about dat being de'right dope -- on'y I couldn't get in it, see? I couldn't belong in dat. It was over my head." "Tinkin" is hard for Yank as he concludes that he "ain't on oith and he ain't in heaven. I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' all de woist punches from bot' of 'em."35 With that conclusion Yank opens the cage door.

As the gorilla crushes the life out of him the symbolic transference is complete: Yank has now become the Man in a Cage. His death at the hands of the ape symbolizes man's

35Plays, 111, 252-253.
inability to return to a state of former innocence represented by his "belonging." O'Neill himself said that The Hairy Ape 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. This is the symbol of man in a purely proletarian state, that is, a state before politics has entered in as was suggested by Julius Babb. Politics may begin the struggle of factions and interests, but at every point in the play O'Neill has rejected traditional institutions of Religion (Fifth Avenue scene), and Capitalism (Mildred Douglas and the monied society she represents) as a remedy to the ills of mankind. The Hairy Ape as the symbol of Modern Man to O'Neill was a symbol of the brute force that continues to be brutalized by machinery and industry. For him there is no hope, no salvation; he is essentially still an ape dominated by steel. He deludes himself in thinking that he is part and master of the Machine Age, when in reality he is its slave.


FLIGHT FROM PREJUDICE

These prejudices will exist until we understand the Oneness of Mankind.

In a letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, O'Neill stated as clearly as he was ever able to explain just what it was he had attempted to do in The Hairy Ape and in All God's Chillun Got Wings: he wanted to present the transfiguring nobility of tragedy in as near the Greek sense as one could grasp it, "in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives."

He went on to say that he was a confirmed mystic in that he always was trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. Acutely conscious of the Force behind -- Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, O'Neill believed strongly that the glory of Man lies in his self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression.2

So whatever the ambiguities are in interpreting and evaluating All God's Chillun Got Wings -- ranging from suggestions that the play is at least an unconscious attempt on O'Neill's part to depict the mutually self-destructive acts in the lives of his own mother and father3 to the absurd suggestion that the play is merely a study of racism4 we at

1Gelb, p. 536.
2O'Neill in O'Neill and His Plays, p. 125.
3Gelb, p. 534.
4Ibid., p. 556.
least must study the play knowing that O'Neill conceived it in the nature of Greek tragedy. Specifically in answer to the latter charge, O'Neill stated emphatically that anyone who read it with intelligence would know that it is "never a race problem" play, and that its intention was confined to portraying the special lives of individual human beings. The play then is primarily a study of the two principal characters in a tragic struggle for happiness.5

In no previous play had O'Neill relied so dramatically on the function of setting to support the thesis of the play. It is true that in The Emperor Jones O'Neill had utilized the setting of the Congo as perhaps a symbol of the dark side of the heart just as Conrad had done in The Heart of Darkness. He even used masks in the play; but their use was essentially more realistic than the use of the masks in the Fifth Avenue scene in The Hairy Ape. In All God's Chillun Got Wings O'Neill succeeded better than in any other of his previous plays in achieving a union of symbolic background supporting the dramatic actions in the play and of his characters, both of which merge in the thesis of his tragedy. In fact, Richard Dana Skinner goes so far as to suggest that any universality in the play is achieved only when we accept both the characters and the setting as symbols.6

The play spotlights certain dramatic events in the lives of Jim Harris, a Negro, and Ella Downey, a White, over

5Gelb, p. 550.
6Skinner, p. 131.
some seventeen years in their lives from childhood friends to mutually destructive adults as husband and wife. These events, often themselves symbolic, are portrayed against a carefully worked out symbolic background. Walter Raleigh has suggested that the method of structuring these events is rhythmic. If he means that O'Neill's method is one of contrast and irony, of carefully and meticulously balancing of both physical and spiritual details, of the uncontrollable influences on involving people in one another's destinies, then his term is valid. To this degree, even the physical structure is rhythmically structured and balanced. The play is divided into two acts, the first composed of four scenes and the second of three. The setting of the first scene is a corner in lower New York in a late afternoon in spring. The second scene, though nine years later, is set in late evening of spring, and the third five years later in a night in spring. The fourth occurs some two weeks later in front of a church in the morning. The First scene of Act II occurs in the flat of Mrs. Harris on a morning two years later, Scene II is the same at twilight some months later, and Scene III a night some months later.

At this point one is forced to become aware of the treatment of place and time, although their full symbolic function becomes known only within the dramatic spotlighting of the events as they occur in the play. The action of these scenes occurs outside, beginning in the afternoon and pro-

7 Raleigh, p. 110.
gressing through evening, night, and then into morning. The scenes of Act II occur inside, and the action progresses from morning to twilight to night. In the first, time and place become symbols of freedom and the rites of spring illustrated in the marble game on the streets, symbols of growing awareness and evaluations of acceptances and rejections culminating in the marriage of Jim and Ella in the morning, a symbol of hope and happiness. But place has changed in the second part and time is reversed. The inside has become a prison in which Ella and Jim in time will destroy each other utterly.

There are at least three other important symbols functioning as part of the physical setting: songs, color, and the Congo mask. O'Neill uses thirteen songs to symbolize the contrasts among Blacks and Whites, their biological and primitive inheritances, and acquired prejudices and bigotries. O'Neill uses these songs as the primary means of narrative support by paraphrasing, contrasting, and juxtaposing the action of the characters in the play with the actions, moods and emotions of the characters represented in the lyrics. This symbolic use of songs functions as a Chorus in that O'Neill uses it to foreshadow, to interpret, to evaluate and to summarize the actions of the characters as well as to predict their eventual destinies. His symphonic play on color ranges from careful equations of Blacks with Whites as symbolic equals to derogatory vulgarisms of Chocolate drop, Coon, Jim Crow, Paintyface, and White. All of the differences and similarities between Blacks and Whites conglomerate and fused
in the first two symbols are telescoped into the Congo mask as significant of the struggles and rivalry innate in the ethnic origin and human progression introduced first at the beginning of Act II, and brutally and horribly climaxed with Ella's stabbing it on the table in the last scene of the play.

O'Neill drew his title for the play from an old Negro spiritual entitled "Heav'n, Heav'n," which contains within it the phrase "All God's Chillum Got Wings," that broods either ironically or not over the whole play. His use of setting, as well as his whole expressionistic method, is exemplified in the very first scene of the play. It is a corner in lower New York just at the point where the black and white communities meet. Sharply divided on one street are the four-story tenements of the whites. On the sidewalk engaged in a game of marbles are eight children, four boys and four girls. Two of each sex are white and two are black. Their descriptions are given carefully in terms of color. The Blacks and Whites are separated distinctly by those nebulous, hidden qualities that sometimes rather arbitrarily (here theatrically as symbols of each race) separate the two races: the "naturally" constrained and awkward laughter of the whites with "the Negroes frankly participating in the rites of spring." This difference is further highlighted by the Whites' singing "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" in high-pitched nasal voices contrasted with the Blacks' singing "


9 Ibid.
Guess I'll have to Telegraph My Baby. It would appear that the interpretation and association of these songs in O'Neill's mind are distinctly symbolic with race: the former significant of the frivolity and artificiality of the whites who have placed their women in expensive trappings to be admired and courted at a distance contrasted with the shiftlessness, unconcern, and natural freedom of the Negro who telephones his mistress for money to come back to her, but she refuses and all he got was sympathy.

Against the background the children are playing the game of marbles. Ella sits at Jim's elbow and he is winning when darkness brings a halt to the playing. Both Ella and Jim are taunted by the others as sweethearts, and at the beginning of this action Jim's protective nature, as well as his dissatisfaction in color, is clearly stated. He has been eating chalk in hopes of becoming white. However, Joe ironically foreshadows the tragedy of Ella and Jim's marriage when he shouts, "Will Painty Face let you hold her doll, boy?" But Ella declares that she would like to be black, and they agree to be sweethearts. As twilight falls on the scene an organ grinder comes down the street playing "Annie Rooney." The irony of the situation is again found in the method of contrast. Annie Rooney and hence Ella symbolize all the nice little girls with pleasant smiles and winning ways. Yet with the organ grinder is the association

10 All American Song Book.
11 Gelb, p. 303.
of shiftlessness, uncleanness; and most certainly he would have had a monkey on his back.

Nine years have passed until the next scene. It is still a spring evening on the same corner just one hour later than the time of the ending of scene one. The same black and white divisions are noted, but little has changed. Only the street noises are more mechanically rhythmical; however, the ensuing action does indicate change in the human individual, with perhaps the suggestion that with age one loses a kind of natural freedom that is replaced with learned opinions. From the street of the whites "Gee, I wish I Had a Girl" is sung with the same high-pitched nasal tenor. It is answered from the black street with "All I Got Was Sympathy."

The previous marble players have now grown up, Joe, Shorty, and Mickey into bums and hoodlums; Jim into "a quiet-mannered Negro boy with a queerly baffled, sensitive face," and Ella into a tarty little bigot. It is graduation night, and after having once failed Jim is going to be graduated along with Ella and begin his study of the law. Jim's immediate confrontation with Mickey, now a prizefighter, concerns Mickey's shabby and immoral treatment of Ella, over whom Jim still exerts a protective attitude. Thus Jim has remained through the years faithful to Ella, and O'Neill's dramatic use of the songs becomes clear: The wish for a girl

13 *All American Song Book.*
14 ibid.
to cheer him up because he is alone and awfully lonesome is powerfully contrasted with the sympathy which he did not even get from Ella, who comes on to the scene and cruelly replies to Jim's question -- Do you hate Negroes? -- that he certainly must be forgetting his place.16

This scene depicts the cruelest of plays on color differences to be found in the play because Ella denies Jim, and Joe brutally by physical force makes him admit that he is a nigger. The color black which to Jim has symbolized failure is even more agonizingly imprinted upon his psyche as Mickey screams at him angrily and scathingly that he cannot buy white at any price. As the scene ends with Jim's defeated acceptance that he is a nigger, he is beginning to be aware of his own tragedy in the discrepancy between God's promise of equal justice and the impossibility of its fulfillment.17 The same organ grinder appears and plays "Bon-bon Buddie the Chocolate Drop."18 The words of the song paraphrase Jim's inability to be compatible with one of his own kind and therefore symbolize the unbreachable chasms that exist within the race.

It is still spring five years later, the same corner, and not much has changed. The arc light now, however, reveals faces with a favorless cruelty as it had begun slightly to do in the preceding scene. The noises on the streets have

16Plays, 11, 310.
17Engel, p. 120.
18Songs for Everybody.
become more intermittent and dulled. Now they even have the quality of fatigue. Even the people on the street appear to be tired. Notably now there is no laughter from either street. The tenor from the white street wails in a voice more nasal and drunken than before in a falsetto "When I Lost You." The answer comes from the Negro street singing in a maudlin voice "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee." The two songs evoke the changes that have occurred in the characters. The first song symbolizes on the surface Jim's loss of Ella: "I lost the gladness that turned into sadness/ When I lost you." Because when he appears now he is still intelligent, quietly dressed, with the same quietly baffled face. The reverse, however, is true because Jim's loss has somehow strengthened his moral fiber even though life still baffles him. O'Neill's contrast is the degeneration in the natures of the others. Shorty has become a pimp and a gangster, Mickey has become involved in the syndicate, and Ella has become a prostitute and has born Mickey's now dead baby. Like the people waiting for the "Robert E. Lee," they are symbolically shuffling along toward their trip down the river of destiny.

That trip culminates in a meeting with Ella and Mickey's despicable emissary, Shorty, who offers her a job in his stable of prostitutes after reviling and berating her for her friendship with Jim Harris. Ella replies that Jim

19*Over 1000 Songs*, 2 vols. (Privately printed in a limited edition for professional musicians), songs alphabetized, Vol. II.

20*Over 1000 Songs*, Vol. I.
Harris is the only white man in the world. He is kind and white, and Mickey and Shorty are all black, black to the heart. The color symbols have now been completely reversed in Ella's mind. The money which Shorty brings to her as one last communication from Mickey she flings disdainfully into the hat of the Salvation Army band which is playing and singing "Till We Meet at Jesus' Feet." At this point the still baffled Jim finds Ella, who tells him that she is now free of Mickey. His reply to her is that people are never free -- except to do what they have to do. The symbolic meaning of the song emerges in that the song is concerned with two people parting with the wish that God protect them till they meet again. Ella departs from her past, but not really; and the irony of the song is that God should be with Ella and Jim as their protector now that they are about to begin their journey together. They declare their love, and at the same time that Jim reveals that he has flunked the bar examination again, he declares that all love is white. The organ grinder appears on the corner playing "Annie Laurie," a symbol of the final relationship that must remain between Ella and Jim. The song states that Bonnie Annie Laurie promised to love truly, and in return for this love the lover

21Plays, 11, 314.
23Plays, 11, 315.
24Ibid., p. 317.
25All American Song Book.
would "lay me down and dee." At the selfsame moment Jim is vowing to Ella that he will give his life to help her; that is what he has been living for. He would be the black slave that would worship her as sacred.

The setting of the next scene in which Ella and Jim are married while the song "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" echoes over the whole ceremony is one of the two most powerful of the play, and it brings to a climax the first events of the drama. The church sits back from the sidewalk in a yard enclosed by a rusty iron railing with a gate at the center. The buildings on each side of the church are stern and forbidding with drawn shades that give the effect of stern and brutal eyes staring callously at human beings without acknowledging them. This setting symbolizes the attitudes of humanity toward them and the treatment that they will be given now that they have chosen to violate the conventions of society.

The structure of the whole play, the tragic consequences of doomed relationships, and the thesis of the play are symbolized in the song that pours from the black street. A Negro tenor sings in a voice of shadowy richness the first stanza with a contented, childlike melancholy

Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,
I feel like a mourning dove.
Feel like a mourning dove.

The second stanza is sung with a dreamy, boyish exultance.

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,
Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,
Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,
I feel like an eagle in the air.
Feel like an eagle in the air.
And the third stanza is sung with a brooding, earthbound sorrow.

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,
Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,
Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

I wish that I'd never been born.

Indeed the profound prophetic nature of the song is further intensified as the dark wooden doors of the church open like the lips of an idol that is spitting them from the darkness within to the sunlight without. The church symbolizes now one of man's most highly developed and humane institutions that can not harbor or protect or even unify its own. As a pagan idol in the most primitive state of man's existence it is dark and helpless; it can only cast out into the sunlight. It can only offer a light ray of hope at some time in the future for the two who have come to its altar to ask for succor. That this hope is futile is clearly registered by the metallic clang of the churchbell and by the manner in which the Blacks and the Whites, now symbols of two distinct, proud, and inimical races arrange themselves into two distinct "racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter, hostile eyes."27

Having been spat out of the inner darkness of the Idol-church, Ella dressed in white and Jim in black, they stand in the sunlight, shrinking and confused. All of the hostile eyes bore into them as they stand in trembling silence, immobile.

Sunlight as the symbol of hope in a hostile world

26 plays, 11, 319.
27 ibid., p. 319.
fades away as the organ grinder appears playing "Old Black Joe." The song is a lament of the passing of old times, loves, friends, by one who is soon to die. As such it should symbolize Ella and Jim's passing from an unhappy past into a happy one. But again O'Neill's ironical method of effective contrast is evident because "the gentle voices calling" them are stilled by one final clang of the church bell "insistently dismissing them." The scene ends with Jim's exultant uplifting of his spirits to the sun, the sky, the blue as their symbol of Hope. Jim attempts to quote the biblical verses of the rain's falling on the just and the unjust, but once again he is confused and baffled. Ella in a trance-like expression and Jim twitching, his eyes staring, about to collapse, leave.

That the world too has spat them out is seen in the opening of the next act. It is set two years later in the parlor of Jim's mother and sister Hattie. The room is a symbol of that strange mixture of taste representing race that O'Neill associated with the black race; in other words it is the heart of the black world which has nourished Jim and Hattie. In the divergent qualities of appointments can be seen the contrast of primitive race pride and acquired assimilation of white influence. In fact, everything in the room clashes. The new furniture is cheaply ornate, naively, childishly gaudy; but the new pieces give evidence of a taste that is diametrically opposed in its somberness and severeness.

28. All American Song Book.
The portrait of an elderly Negro with an able, shrewd face hangs in a heavy gold frame. However, it is only a colored photograph. The figure is dressed in outlandish lodge regalia, a getup adorned with medals, sashes, and a cocked hat with frills. The whole effect is as absurd to contemplate as one of Napoleon's Marshals in full uniform.  

The whole effect of the scene is spotlighted in Mickey's earlier reference to the Black's trying to buy White: it is impossible, and the results are disastrous because they are irreconcilable opposites. In complete contrast to the portrait is a Negro primitive mask from the Congo. It is a grotesque face which inspires obscure, dim connotations. On the other hand, it is conceived in a truly religious spirit and beautifully executed. It dominates the room by its diabolical quality, a symbol of the racial past of the Negro as well as a symbol of human antagonism. As a symbol of the black religion as contrasted with the white, it too must fall as exemplified in its symbolic stabbing in the last scene.  

Mrs. Harris and Hattie are discovered awaiting the return of Jim and Ella from Europe. Because of her attitude toward and ability to understand the fact that Blacks and Whites can not mix and that it is just as difficult for one

29 Plays, 11, 322.
30 Carpenter, p. 105.
race as for another, Mrs. Harris functions as a symbol of the older generation that had learned to live as a black in a world dominated by whites — living within the system rather than living to oppose it. Through her wisdom to understand, though not necessarily to accept that system, she has been hurt but she has not been crushed by the prejudices that now motivate Hattie. Hattie symbolizes the new Pride of the black race: "We don't deserve happiness till we've fought the fight of our race and won it!" With this attitude and a mood resentful of her feelings toward the miscegenous marriage, she greets Jim, who tells her and his mother that Ella is not well.

Ella appears pale and shaken and suffering, hollow-eyed and sick; a symbolic contrast from Bonnie Annie Laurie to black as dark, ugly, and vile. Even in her weakening condition she appears tolerant of her surroundings, and she smiles in such a naturally superior manner that she infuriates Hattie. Suddenly seeing the black mask, Ella screams. Scornfully Hattie explains that it is a mask that used to be worn by her people in religious ceremonies in Africa. But even more important, it is a work of a real artist, as much so as that of Michaelangelo. She has purposefully given it to Jim as a wedding present to symbolize the residue of pride that the individual inherits from the significant memories

33 Plays, II, 324.
34 Ibid., p. 328.
of the human race. To Hattie Ella replies that it is ugly
and stupid, like some kid’s game, making faces. Subconsciously
it symbolizes all the blackness which she hates, and she
slaps it contemptuously, saying that she will give it the
laugh; and in the same breath she states that she will not
let Jim take any more examinations, which if he should pass
would be a symbol not only of his already established moral,
but also of his intellectual superiority.

The whole scene is brought into dramatic focus as
Ella stares in this order at the portrait, at the mask, at
the furniture, and finally at Jim. She seems to fight some
heavy weight in her mind: and now we know that the weight
is Jim now seen as an integral part of the whole room. Jim
is crying, and Ella kneels at his feet and tells him that
he is the whitest of the white. Left momentarily alone, Ella
moves toward the portrait and with a sneer says, "It’s his
Old Man -- all dolled up like a circus horse! Well, they
can’t help it. It’s in the blood, I suppose. They’re igno-
rorant, that’s all there is to it." Then she moves to the
mask and mockingly says that Jim will not pass, not in a
thousand years because they are all black. Seeing herself
as inferior, she assumes an attitude of indifferent superiority

35Sievers, p. 105.
36Carpenter, p. 105.
37Plays, 11, 329.
38Ibid., p. 330.
and becomes malicious and envious.\textsuperscript{39} Being white has now definitely become the symbol of unhappiness and weakness.\textsuperscript{40} Her prejudice symbolizes those whites who want to reduce Jim to a menial status.\textsuperscript{41}

It is now evening some six months later, and the walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering emphasizing symbolically that it is race that is crushing them. Jim sits surrounded by piles of law books. He is duly repeating sentences from Blackstone, sweating profusely; but the words are stale and have no meaning. His eyes now have an uneasy, haunted look, and he stares about him in agony. Hattie comes in gravely concerned over Jim's health which is being destroyed by his constant caring for the now deranged Ella. When he refuses to listen to her, in her agitation Hattie calls him a traitor to his race. But Jim explains that Ella's fear of Black is not deep down in her, but rather deep down in her people. "Let her call me Nigger! Let her call me the whitest of the white! I'm all she's got in the world, ain't I? She's all I've got! You with your fool talk of the black race and the white race! Where does the human race get a chance to come in?"\textsuperscript{42}

Ushering the confused Hattie out of the door, Jim

\textsuperscript{39}Engel, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{40}Raleigh, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{41}Leech, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{42}Plays, 11, 336.
sits back down to recite the meaningless lines from Blackstone. At this moment Jim's earlier explanation of why he can not pass the examinations when he knows more than anyone else in the class becomes clear: he can not pass because he is black and black to him is the symbol of all the old inequalities, prejudices, and indignities. Still determined in a defeatist kind of way, he is interrupted by Ella in a red dressing gown and bare feet brandishing a carving knife with which she tries to murder him. She has regressed in her insanity to the state where she can kill what she hates. At the same time she is a child again and Jim is the Uncle Jim of Huckleberry Finn at the same time that he is alternately a dirty nigger and Jim. Their self-imposed isolation which will lead to destruction is now symbolized by the shrunken room and the domination of the mask and the portrait.

It is spring some six months later and the sun has just gone down. It is clear that the symbolic use of spring is to suggest birth, a new life, and happiness; but the irony is that it does not. And time now has passed from morning to twilight to night: the end has come and life is over. The even more shrunken room that is just large enough to hold the two has become their tomb. The furniture, the portrait, and the mask have become enormously magnified. Ella enters in the now tattered red dressing gown, glowing with a mad energy and raging with an insane mockery.

Confronting the mask, she sees in it all of her uncontrollable prejudices and hatred for BlacK. To it she has transferred all of her unbearable associations with Jim:
color, sexual fears, bar examinations. Screaming, she asks what the mask has against her, why it will not let her be happy. After all, she did marry it, and at this point the mask becomes a symbol of the whole black race that has poisoned her and from whose Blackness she can not wash herself clean.

Jim enters holding the letter which has crushed him into numbness: he has failed again in the white man's world. Through his use of symbolic narrative O'Neill for the first time in the play presents Jim realizing that he is a member of the black race when Jim bursts into "rich Negro laughter" when Ella asks him if he had passed. Mockingly he answers that to pass would have been a fracturing of all natural law, an infraction against all human right and justice. He continues blasphemously that the devil -- symbolized by the Congo Mask -- could perform miracles and God would be tipped head first right out of the judgment seat. This continued symbolic narrative further emphasizes Jim's acceptance of his negritude and an awareness of the religious and cultural heritage of his race. Jim's ironical statement reversing the symbolic roles of God and the Devil symbolizes the refusal of the white God to permit justice by permitting him to pass the bar examination and become an advocate of white secular justice. With a wild cry of joy Ella pushes all the law books crashing to the floor. In a wild and ritualistic dance she moves in front of the mask and screaming that she

has given it the laugh, she plunges the knife down through it and pins it to the table. By the act of stabbing it and pinning the Congo Mask to the table, Ella is symbolically emasculating the negro race and denying it its creative vitality. At the same time, she is destroying her husband Jim who has just admitted his racial heritage. In a terrible roar with fists clenched above his head he calls her a white devil woman, and he too has been forced into a primitive murderous state. Ella's scream stops him, and she tells him, "it's all right, Jim! It's dead. The devil's dead. See! It couldn't live -- unless you passed. If you'd passed it would have lived in you."

The symbolic significance of the scene is in the black soul straining to be white and the white soul wishing that it were black too, then dreading beyond all else that that black soul might become white and equal.

In a child-like way Ella asks if God will forgive her for what she had done to him. Jim answers: "Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive -- Himself." But Jim too must recognize that man is as a whole less good than he imagines himself to be. He listens to her entreaties that they become children again and change colors, he using chalk and she shoe blacking (and the

44Ibid., p. 340.
45Skinner, p. 136.
46Plays, 11, 341.
play has come full circle from the first scene when Jim is first seen eating the chalk.

At last recognizing his responsibilities for the choices that he has made, though still perhaps baffled in understanding the consequences of those choices, Jim in a feeling of exaltation throws himself down on his knees and raises his shining eyes, his face transfigured. Weeping in an ecstasy of religious humility, he cries: "Forgive me, God -- and make me worthy ... Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You! Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away." Jim is somehow vaguely aware that we carry our past with us, to wit, the primitive and inferior man, so still in his mystic ecstasy he can say that he will play with Ella right up to the gates of Heaven.

Indeed Jim has attempted to do just that -- to play with Ella right up to God's Heav'n. But he has also learned something about life -- all men and women are not God's chillun and they all most certainly do not possess the symbolic wings of the song. In Jim's moment of symbolic exaltation he accepts tragedy as man's lot and his battle with Fate as the only ennobling act permitted him. Jim Harris has become a symbol of all man's greatest virtues: a willingness to face the future with hope. So finally one is reminded of another exalting thought in the song and Jim's deserving of it: when he gets to Heav'n he can put on wings and fly all over God's Heav'n.

48 Plays, II, 342.
49 Jung, p. 93.
It's poetical vision illuminating even the most sordid and mean blind alleys of life -- that is my justification as a dramatist!

When O'Neill began to write Desire Under the Elms in 1924, he already had completed four major plays that were innovations in method and form: Beyond the Horizon, The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, and All God's Chillun Got Wings. In all four his treatment of symbolism had been effective, logical, and often brilliant; however, it was to be in Desire Under the Elms that he was to create for the first time a tragedy whose characters and themes are so complemented on both the realistic and symbolic levels that the result is "one of the great plays in American literature."\(^2\)

Pushing beyond the human conflicts that he had presented in his lyrical symbolic romance wherein he had experimented with symbolic narrative-plot and song, he moved next toward an even more profound study of universal relationships among man and woman and God. The play is a tremendous advance over his previous full-length plays. This play combines all of the facets and elements of the creative artistry of O'Neill: "The crude elemental passions of people who harbor the seeds


of their own destruction,"³ the brilliant psychological insight into the love-hate relationship between husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother, the great cosmic loneliness of man, the extent of God's cruelty and hardness, and the torture of accepting one's fate.

Just as O'Neill had been concerned with family conflicts of his own in All God's Chillun Got Wings, so is he even more concerned with them in Desire Under the Elms. As a result, the play has been analyzed again and again in psychoanalytic terms. It is true that O'Neill did give full vent to his tortured feelings in the play and that in many aspects it is an unconscious autobiography,⁴ because it is a fact that Ella O'Neill, his mother, had been dead for only two years and Jamie, the alcoholic brother, had died just before the actual writing of the play. Consequently, even though O'Neill had been considering this theme for a long time, his thoughts concerning the outrageous suffering of his mother at the cruel hands of both James, his father, and Jamie must have been intensified at the very time that he was writing the play.

However, regarding the charges of those who saw profound Freudian influences in the play, O'Neill dismissed them by saying that whatever of Freudianism there was in the play, it must have walked right in through his subconscious.⁵ And

³Gelb, p. 538.


⁵Gelb, p. 577.
that is probably precisely what did happen, because Freud had already published his *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which he discussed the relationship of dreams as an extension of the conscious to the subconscious world of sexual reality; and *Totem and Taboo* in which he hypothesized the instinctive male drives of the sons to displace the father and usurp his rights.

Both theories were the subject of cocktail conversation, and O'Neill certainly knew them. As a matter of fact, he was probably unaware of the autobiographical significance of the play when he once related to Walter Huston that he dreamed the whole play one night.\(^6\) There is no doubt that these psychic insights are more profoundly studied in *Desire Under the Elms* than they are in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. But more important is the fact that in *Desire Under the Elms* O'Neill turned for the first time to Greek tragedy and mythology for theme, subject matter, and character. From his reading of the *Medea* and *Hippolytus* of Euripides\(^7\) came the suggestion of incest and infanticide. The concept of the family curse he got from the Houses of Atreus and Thebes, and his knowledge and feeling of the individual's struggle with God came from an absorbing interest in Greek tragedy and his own personal struggle.

These ideas, then, O'Neill actively, effectively, and profoundly brought to the composition of *Desire Under the Elms*.

\(^6\)Gelb, p. 539.

\(^7\)Skinner, p. 144.
Elms, and to no small degree do they account for the generally classical method of the play and add to the mythical qualities of its protagonist Ephraim Cabot. The themes of the tragedy are firmly rooted in and supported by O'Neill's most penetrating use of symbolism in any play up to this time. Attesting to the quality and accuracy of the symbols in supporting the plot of the play are the questions that are raised by individuals and left for humanity to answer. Life may be a tragedy and the test is living it in an attempt to find its meaning, sometimes at the risk of utter destruction, sometimes with the hopes of mystic fulfillment.

For a setting in which to develop his story, O'Neill chose as he had done before and was to do many times again in the future a New England in 1850. To his own sensitive associations with nature he added those acquired ones of a New England "suffering under the yoke of extreme Calvinism, to which he attributed characteristics of passion, violence, sadism, and Transcendentalism." Such a scene seemed quite fitting in which to unravel the themes of his plays: variations on the word desire.

Now, however, O'Neill is able to make the characters a part of the land and the land an almost living organic entity, both naturally inseparable; whereas in Beyond the Horizon, in a similar setting, the characters seem essentially to dwell on the land and not in it. This failure in Beyond the Horizon probably accounts for the innovative but often weak attempt to use locale symbolically by alternating the

8Downer, p. 69.
scenes in and out of doors. Essentially the themes of *Desire Under the Elms* spring out of the ground, or at least out of the individual's need to own and be a part of the earth — the earth symbolically suggesting that man is a steward, not the owner of the earth. And as William Faulkner also suggests in *The Bear*, any violation of that stewardship nature will not tolerate.

O'Neill's development of setting suggests his meanings. There are symbolic nuances which support the different levels of reality. The action of the play takes place inside and outside of the Ephraim Cabot house that is the focal point of the whole little New England farm. As O'Neill depicts the house and the farm particularly, he is carefully revealing their meanings and associations in the mind of each character. At the same time he is enriching the significance of both the inhabitants on the farm and the land itself by minutely laying the foundation of the play's symbolic structure. O'Neill's method is classical. In the opening scenes of Part One he introduces the characters, implying through both what they say and do that there is some emotional and physical crisis about to begin in their lives.

The house itself is one of the central symbols in the play. To the south it faces a stone wall with a wooden gate, both of whose symbolic significance increases as the themes are developed. The house is in fair condition but in need of paint. Its walls are sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. On each side of the house are two enormous elms that bend their trailing branches over the roof.
subduing and protecting it. In their aspect there is a sinister maternity, a crushing, jealous absorption. O'Neill says that from their intimate contact with life in the house they have developed an appalling humaneness. Over the house they brood oppressively like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof. The front wall has two windows in the upper story and two on the ground floor. The upper two are the bedrooms of Ephraim Cabot the father and his three sons Simeon, Peter, and Eben. On the ground floor to the left is the kitchen, and on the right is a parlor whose shades are always drawn down.9

The play opens on an evening in early spring with the three men alone on the farm because Ephraim has been called out "t'learn God's message time in the spring, like the prophets done."10 Eben appears first, coming out of the house, and looking up into the sky. This action is to be repeated by every character in the play many times, and to each character it symbolizes something different. Eben is described as an animal in a cage trapped but inwardly subdued. To him the stars symbolize freedom and beauty: "God! Purty!" he says as he looks up. He says later in the scene that he is farsighted when he is the first to see his father returning, in contrast with Ephraim who he says when Ephraim looks up he can't see a thing he is so nearsighted. The symbolic irony is that neither can really see the crisis Fate is developing

9Plays, 1, 202.
around them.

Simeon, thirty-nine, and Peter, thirty-seven, are returning from plowing the fields. They are larger than their twenty-five year old step-brother, fleshier, more bovine. Their shoulders stoop from years of toiling in the hard fields, and they clump along heavily in their clumsy thick-soled boots caked with earth. Their clothes and body are stained with earth and they smell of the soil. Almost with the same impulse they lean on their hoes and stare "dumbly up at the sky." The action reveals that they have been dreaming of running off to California gold fields in order to escape from a tyrannical father and a farm and fences that have imprisoned them and which they will never own. To them the sun and stars in the sky symbolize the gold in some remote place to which they want romantically to escape. Peter capsules their feelings when he says, "Here it's stones atop o' the ground -- stones atop o' stones -- makin' stone walls -- year atop o' year -- him 'n' yew 'n' me 'n' then Eben -- making stone walls fur him to fence us in!" At the end of the scene they will remove the gate from the fence and sail it free down some river.

However, Simeon and Peter are little more than animals, bovine and dumb, despairingly afraid of their father, symbols of what the land that is hard can do to those who

11plays, I, 204.
12ibid., p. 204.
13ibid., p. 221.
are not so strong as the Promethean Ephraim. They have tragically little understanding of human relationships in spite of exposure. Even their names are symbolic of stone (strength, Christ's church, two of a kind), but they have been ground to dust. When they tell the protesting Eben that he is the "dead spit an' image" of his father, they are unaware of the significance of what they are saying. On the other hand, Eben's reply to his brother's comment about the land is more perceptive and shows that there is something about him that is lacking in them: "An' makin' walls -- stone atop o' stone -- makin' walls till yer heart's a stone ye heft up out o' the way o' growth onto a stone wall t' wall in yer heart!" Perhaps Simeon and Peter recognize that strength (or weakness) in Eben when they tell Ephraim that "he'll eat ye yet, old man."

Eben has built a wall around his heart, but it is a wall of hatred for a father whom he blames for having stolen his mother's farm and causing her early death through unbearable work. Because the mother is the primordial symbol of fecundity and maternity, her image makes the greatest impression on Eben. As his imagined love for his mother grows out

14Raleigh, p. 255.
16Plays, 1, 211.
17Ibid., p. 209.
18Ibid., p. 222.
19Engel, p. 129.
of natural proportion, so increases the hatred that he has toward his father. Eben says that his mother "can't find it natural sleepin' and restin' in peace. She can't git used t' bein' free -- even in her grave." Her presence is about the house, and even Ephraim feels it and leaves for sanctuary in the barn with his cows.

Thus Eben's love for the land is bound inextricably with the love for his mother, and the elms that hover protectingly and at the same time destructively over the house much like the Pyncheon Elms symbolize the spirit of the dead woman. She won't let him be free. In his own way, then, Eben's love for the land is very different from that of his brothers. He will go to any lengths to insure that birthright. Now that Simeon and Peter have become "lilies o' the field" Eben is even more insistent that for the proffered three hundred dollars stolen from Ephraim's cache to each of them they sign the paper giving up their rights to the farm in the same manner that Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Gold now symbolizes revenge and greed on the parts of Eben, Simeon, and Peter.

Eben goes off to the barn to milk his cows in his barn on his farm assured that the knowledge of Ephraim's new bride will frighten them into signing the paper at once. They go outside to the gate after Eben's proposal and look up at the sky with numbed appreciation. As the sun comes up, Simeon

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20 Plays, 1, 209.
21 Ibid., p. 216.
22 Genesis, 25.33.
says that the "gold's in the East now." He is referring both to the sun and Eben's gold. He stamps his foot on the earth and addresses it desperately: " -- ye've thirty year o' me buried in ye -- spread out over ye -- blood an' bone an' sweat -- rotted away -- fertilizin' ye -- richin' yer soul -- prime manure, but God, that's what I been t' ye!" And so they had.

Eben rushes in from the barn and cows and "the hosses, an' pigs, an' chickens" that still don't know him but that know Simeon and Peter like "brothers" with the news that Ephraim and his new bride are coming up the hill. They sign the paper and go to the fence and take the gate off its hinges, "harby bolishin' shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates, and leaving that stinkin' old rock-pile of a farm" to anybody that wants it. Eben is looking on the whole scene with his face lifted up to the sky. It is lighted by a shaft of sunlight and it has on it the expression of a trance. His lips move. They each have their desires.

At last Ephraim Cabot with his bride appears. He is a prideful seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it had been hewn out of a boulder; yet there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its strength. Small and close together, his eyes are extremely nearsighted; and he is continually blinking to focus on objects. At the sight of him Simeon and Peter congeal into statues. Asked why they

23 Plays, 1, 218.
are not at work, they reply that they are on the way to the gold fields of California. Jeeringly they tell Ephraim he should put his bride in with the other sows. Angered by their antics, Ephraim tells them that their lust for easy gold is sinful and he curses them. As they go off singing Peter and Simeon pick up stones and fling them at the house and symbolically at their father. They strike the window of the parlor which had not been opened since Eben's Maw had died, and the crashing glass rips down the shade.

Abby Putnam Cabot at last can move into the house and claim it as her own. She looks calculatingly at the aroused Eben, but under this glance is her desire dimly awakened. Eben calls her a harlot as she seductively runs her hand on his arm while he stands stupidly as if hypnotized. Biblical Ephraim is shouting in the background, "Lord God o' Hosts, smite the undutiful sons with Thy wust cuss!" He then calls upon the "God o' the old, God o' the lonesome" to come to his aid. He moves off to the barn to tend the stock with Ephraim contemptuously muttering that he is worth ten of Eben, who will never be more than half a man. The irony of that statement will return to Ephraim in the coming months as O'Neill expands the themes of his story. As new emotions are discovered new desires are aroused. Eben becomes for Abby the prize bull as their physical attraction increases. Attempting to force her attentions on Eben, Abby tells him that he can't go against nature. "Hain't the sun

24Plays, 1, 227.
strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it burnin' into the earth --
Nature -- makin' ye want t' grow -- into somethin' else --
till yer're jined with it -- an' it's yer'n -- but it owns
ye, too -- an' makes ye grow bigger -- like a tree -- like
them elums --"n25

What Abby says is filled with symbolic foreshadowing because in the end what she says is precisely what de-
velops. Her statements are intended to be provocative, but
even she is unaware of her overtones. Ephraim has declared
that Eben will always be only half man, but to Abby he al-
ready has become the bull. She sees the son strong and hot
with desire. If she is even slightly an early earth mother,
then the sun may burn into her; and if one of Nature's func-
tions is to encourage reproduction, then she will grow big-
ger with Eben's child. They do find real love, as the mys-
tical ending might indicate, when they are joined together.
The elms then symbolize the maternal Abby as well as the
spirit of Eben's mother.

As Eben leaves, Ephraim comes up from the barn. He
looks at the sky and comments on how "purty" it is, to which
Abby replies that she sees nothing. Whether she is unable to
see anything pretty or still angry with Eben's repulsion, she
asks Ephraim sarcastically if he aims to buy up over the farm
too. Ephraim replies that what he sees is the sky and that
it feels like a warm place up there. He is getting old and
ripe on the bough, and it is always so cold and lonesome in

25Plays, 1, 229.
the house. But it is warm down in the barn, nice smelling; and the cows understand him. He feels secure and comfortable with them and the barn. They symbolize a masculine world in which no demands can be made of him.

The idea of providing a son and heir for Ephraim becomes uppermost in Abby's mind in order to insure her hold on the land, even at the very moment that he is trying to explain something of himself to her. In the most incredible and in one of the most dramatically provocative scenes in the play Ephraim and Abby are seen in their bedroom just shortly after he has called her his Rose O'Sharon and his Rachel and they have both prayed for a son. In the adjoining room is Eben. O'Neill has synchronized in almost ballet fashion the movements of Eben's and Abby's desire for each other as they strain and writhe in lust for each other. Because it has been so long since Ephraim has expressed his real feelings, he begins to speak in such a halting though moving manner that one realizes that O'Neill intended through his choice of the name Ephraim that he would have liked his protagonist to be fruitful and or even twice fruitful and without the intervention of Fate, the father of great tribes. 26

"Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t' ye in my lonesomeness. Me and the farm has got t' begat a son!" 27 Abby replies that he is getting


27 Plays, 1, 236.
things mixed up. She is right, but Ephraim's words reveal what the farm symbolizes to him -- wife and mother of his children, his whole life, and his future through his children. Ephraim goes on to say that not only Abby, but also no other man or woman will ever know him. Fifty years ago he had come to this farm, and people had laughed at him when he took it. They could not know that when a man can make corn sprout out of stones that he had God living in him. The others could not survive because they were not strong enough, for after all God is not easy. Once forty-eight years ago he had given in to weakness: he went West and found prairies of rich land, black and rich as gold without stones. To Ephraim that land symbolized the easy way of life, and he heard a voice telling him to go back home because the easy way meant nothing to Him.

So Ephraim returned, and in those walls one can see the years of his life. To him they symbolize God's hardness and his own obedience to a life that has grown lonelier as the years passed. Long after the death of his first wife he had married Eben's mother because her family was contesting the deeds to his farm. With her he was more lonesome than ever, and after sixteen years she died. His sons he hated because they coveted the farm without knowing what it meant. Now Abby too is unable to understand. So saying that the house is cold and uneasy with "thin's poking about in the dark -- in the corners," he returns to the security and warmth of the barn and the cows. He can talk to the cows;

28 Plays, 1, 238.
they know the farm and him and they give him peace.

The contrast between the symbols of the house and the barn is firmly established, because it is the house that drives Ephraim to the barn and thus allows Abby's triumphal seduction of Eben. That seduction Abby insists must take place in the parlor because "that's one room hain't mine yet, but it's a-goin' t' be tonight."29 The parlor is the symbolic tomb in which the family have been interred alive as well as it is the tomb of the dead. Abby insisted that Eben come to her in that room. O'Neill carefully makes it clear that Eben dresses in the same clothes that he had probably worn to his mother's funeral. He comes, however, in his bare feet, a symbol of his animal instincts in succumbing to lust.

Abby tells him that there was something in the room when she first came in, and Eben tells her quite factually that it was his Maw. Eben's Maw still bears a grudge against Ephraim. Wild with passion, Abby throws her arms around Eben with a "horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love."30 She says she will kiss him pure the same as if he were her little boy. Some kind of symbolic transference takes place as Abby's will displaces the spirit of Eben's Maw; and crying vengeance of God on all of them, she completes the seduction.

At dawn Eben walks out of the house around to the gate just as Abby flings open the parlor shutters and stands with her hair tumbling in disarray from the night's loving.

29Plays, 1, 240.
30Ibid., p. 243.
Just as Abby's hair symbolizes her fruition as a woman in all her victorious and crowning glory, the gate now is a symbol of Eben's freedom. His face wears instead of its trapped animal fear a bold and confident expression. Abby says that during the night they made the parlor their room: "We give it life -- our lovin' did." The "it" is, however, another fine example of symbolic foreshadowing.

Eben thinks that his Maw has gone back to the grave to rest in peace. At just that moment Ephraim walks up staring vaguely at the sky. Eben asks his father if he is star-gazing in the daylight, and he replies as usual, "Purtie, hain't it?" "How do ye know? Them eyes o' your'n can't see that fur," Eben replies. Ephraim thinks Eben has been stealing liquor from him and is surprised to hear Eben say that his Maw had gone back to her grave during the night. She can rest at last. Ephraim replies that he rested well down with the cows that know how to sleep and are teaching him. Eben ends the conversation by saying that they must get to work since he is the prize rooster of that roost. One is reminded of Simeon's charge that one day Eben would eat his father alive. And O'Neill certainly knew the Freudian symbolic significance of that.

A few months later the "it" of the parlor has become a reality. Everyone at the party celebrating the child's birth except Ephraim knows that the child belongs to Eben.

31 plays, 1, 245.
32 ibid., p. 245.
Just as Ephraim is about to make a fool of himself in a wild dance done only to put down the other dancers, the Fiddler tells Ephraim that he certainly is the spryest seventy-six that he had ever seen. "Now if ye'd on'y good eyesight." The gossip continues in that vein until the exhausted Ephraim goes outside for air. Thinking that he might be listening at the door, they open it and a noise as of dead leaves in the wind comes out of the room. Ephraim has been the monkey on Eben's string, and the noise heard is a symbol of death. Now Ephraim leans on the gate which has become a symbol of his own imprisonment. In confusion he looks about him and says, "Even the music can't drive it out -- somethin'. Ye can feel it droppin' off the elums, climbin' up the roof, sneakin' down the chimney, pokin' the corners! They's no peace in houses, they's nor rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye." Perhaps the "somethin'" is the symbol of his own guilt feelings as much as it is now the symbol of incest. As usual, his retreat is to the barn.

The gate again is introduced as a restricting force as Eben leans against it in mortal anguish over not being able to claim his parentage. He gazes up at the sky not as he has done before as a symbol of gold, happiness, and freedom, but with an expression of dumb and bewildering pain. His desire to claim the child just as his desire to claim the farm is denied again. Coming from the barn Ephraim walks toward Eben,

33Plays, 1, 250.
34Ibid., p. 253.
his eyes no longer looking skyward, but looking wearily on the ground. His symbolic sky is no longer "purty." They begin to argue over Eben's claim to the farm. In his rage Ephraim charges Eben with being blind, as blind as a mole underground; and images of their ability to see what is going on are reversed. As have all of the characters throughout the play, they curse each other in purely animal terms, just as they are constantly described by O'Neill in the same manner: a born donkey, a skunk, a dog, a calf, a rooster, a goat, critters, etc. Ephraim taunts Eben with the revelation that Abby wanted to have a baby to keep Eben from getting the land, and her desires have been fulfilled. As they fight, Ephraim presses Eben against the stone wall and begins to choke him. The wall momentarily symbolizes an execution one, as earlier it had symbolized life.

Caught at last inextricably in the trap of their desires, Eben threatens escape to "gold -- Golden Gate -- gold sun -- fields o' gold in the West." In her desire to hold him Abby commits the horrible crime of infanticide, and in so doing seals their doom. What Ephraim had heard poking around the house was deceit and unfilled desires. Ephraim's face hardens into a stony mask, both a symbol of his own weakness, the inability to show humanity, and his determination still to be like a stone, a rock of judgment. He comes around to the gate and stares up at the sky at the same time.

35 Plays, 1, 262.
36 Ibid., p. 264.
that his stony control relaxes. The sky is still a symbol
of something that is warm and pretty because he murmurs the
moving lament that he will be lonesomer than ever. So he
turned the stock free and the cows. In freeing them he thought
he was freeing himself. He would set fire to the house and
barn and watch them burn while Eben's Maw would be left to
haunt the ashes. To California he would go, and with his
true sons Simeon and Peter they would find Solomon's Mines.
His desires are thwarted when he finds his gold missing, and
he slumps on the floor like a dead fish. Gold in the form of
desires has ruined them all. Simeon and Peter coveted the
farm which was a kind of gold, but thwarted in that desire,
they used the hidden horde of Ephraim to get to the easy gold
of California. Even Eben's Maw and her family had desired
the farm, so Ephraim had prostituted himself in a marriage
that brought undesirable ends. Eben claimed the farm as his
natural birthright, and he stole and committed incest to
achieve his desires. Abby prostituted herself for a home, and
to achieve complete possession of it, she used her lust to
father an heir.

In her desire to prove her love for Eben she kills
her child. Their final acceptance of their fate and Eben's
insistence on sharing whatever that destiny might be are
never quite grounded in reality. O'Neill is still perhaps
justified in his choice of having Abby and Eben walk out of
the door with the sheriff to that destiny with their heads
held high. They come once more to the gate, and walking
hand in hand they look up at the sunrise. Their faces are
rapt, strangely aloof, and devout. Their attitudes are very reminiscent of Jim Harris in All God's Chillun Got Wings. They all have about them that mystic quality that will perhaps enable them to come to grips with Fate.

It is, however, Ephraim who is the really subtle and fascinating character in the play. In him is all the strength and hardness of the Old Testament Jehovah. Ephraim says that God is the stones and he is in the stones. Yet he seems at times more sinner than saint. He has fought to own the earth and in turn he is possessed by it. He seems at times such as his calling to go out like the prophets in the spring to be a hypocrite. Yet O'Neill refuses to be specific on this point because Ephraim seems to act from what he thinks are moral motives. He is more powerful than any about him, and like strong men he has a certain glory and pride in that power. Freud makes it clear in Totem and Taboo that at the same time the son hated the father he admired and loved him. And Eben did love Ephraim. Every character in the play says that he is the "spitin' image" of his father. However, like the stones Ephraim is indestructible. In the end he denies that Eben stole the gold; rather God gave it to Simeon and Peter to test him. Ephraim says finally that he hears God's voice again telling him to be hard and stay on the farm. After all, God is hard and lonesome too. He lifts his stony face and walks grimly toward the barn.

In this play for the first time O'Neill has used his symbols of gold, the house, the barn, desire, stones, fences, the gate, the elms, the sky, and the farm as a com-
pletely integral part of the narrative and character development of the story. The symbols never intrude on the reality of the story, and they are consistent in spite of the fact that at times their meanings do change in the minds of the characters. It may seem at first that O'Neill overuses and overburdens the two symbols of gold and animals. It is a fact that there are literally dozens of references to each in the play. Perhaps a more careful masking of their uses at times, as he is able to mask meaning in later plays, would have pleased more subtle readers. However strong and obvious the symbols may appear, one must remember that it would take strong images to create one of the strongest characters in American drama, Ephraim Cabot.
AN EXERCISE IN UNMASKING

One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself.

In *Desire Under the Elms* O'Neill through his characters brilliantly and convincingly showed that tragedy is based on certain emotional and moral responses to life. Its effects are inseparable from the scope of human destiny, a mimesis, that suggests conviction by its general truths. In this respect O'Neill's primary dramatic interest always lay in his desire to present the tragedy of life, not in teaching some social doctrine. Nonetheless, in developing his tragic themes he could hardly avoid examining social structure.

However, it was the inner structure of the human being that O'Neill in 1926 was most interested in showing. It was possible to study these forces only through a conscious and studied use of symbolism that would be designed to extend the scope and meaning of the play beyond the limited boundaries of straightforward realism. Based on his experience in writing previous plays, O'Neill knew that symbolic setting could give greater flexibility and could increase the imaginative quality of drama. He knew that human beings were not always free agents, and so he developed his characters in what is perhaps his most symbolic play *The Great God Brown* against a

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background of social and biological forces. In the play O'Neill does remain true to the real world and character of his people; yet at the same time he suggests those strange warnings, Intuitions, and fantastic ideas that play on the periphery of consciousness or lie buried in the subconscious.

The complex nature of these themes is suggested by their diverse interpretations. Eugene Waith sees the basic theme of the play as a conflict between man's aspirations, religious and artistic, and the doctrine of success as understood in a materialistic society. Alan Downer calls it O'Neill's most difficult and obscure play because he is trying to invoke the mystery of the whole existence, spiritual and material, to present not a key to the mystery, but the mystery itself. The play is an allegory, argues Robert Berkelman, that traces through life in the twentieth century an Everyman. Edwin Engel says that the theme of the play is the Christian renunciation of fanaticism, bigotry, and cruelty that have a devastating effect on the creative life of man, a theme similar to what John Lawson calls an attempt to show the background pattern of the conflicting tides of men.


4Downer, p. 96.


6Engel, p. 152.

When Thomas McDonnell says the play is a circumlocution in masked symbolism of the full dramatic encounter toward which the tensions of the psyche were irresistibly working, he is psychologically explaining Richard Skinner's suggestion that the play is a yearning for maternal protection against the real world and John Raleigh's that it is a study in male and female polar relationships. An analysis of the symbols in the play reveals all these interpretations and more.

One may see then why Downer and H. Steinhauer see great difficulty in the attitudes of the play. One reason for such suggested difficulties is the method O'Neill chose to present his ideas and the source of these ideas. O'Neill had been interested in the philosophy of Nietzsche since his student days, and that gradual acceptance of Nietzschean theory concerning man's relationship with God, the nature of the Godhead, the nature of pain, and the role of good and evil in the world had brought him into great conflict with his Catholic upbringing, its later rejection, and his painful search all his life to find salvation by again finding Catholicism. This painful search is an important theme in the play. O'Neill's interest in and study of Freudian theory was strongly evident in Desire Under the Elms when he dramatically and tragically utilized sexuality as the primary motive

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9 Skinner, p. 167.
10 Raleigh, p. 118.
that brought about the destruction of the characters. In The Great God Brown Freud's presence is still felt, but that of Jung pervades the whole play.

Some brief reference to Jung's theory of introverts and extroverts is a necessity in the understanding of the character of Dion Anthony and William Brown in the play. In introversion the cause is a turning inward of the libido whereby interest does not move toward the object but recedes from the subject. The individual may appear different in social situations than he actually is in his animus. Through his more or less complete identification with the attitude of the moment, he at least deceives others, and also often himself, as to his real character. He puts on a mask, which he knows corresponds with his conscious intentions, while it also meets with the requirements and opinions of his environment, so that first one motive and then another is in the ascendant. The mask, namely the ad hoc adopted attitude, is called the persona, which was the same designation given to the mask worn by the actors of antiquity. In the extrovert there is a tendency toward a one-sidedness of attitude caused by the controlling power of the objective factor in the course of psychic events. The extroverted type is constantly tempted to give himself away in favor of the object, and to assimilate his subject to the object. The unconscious claims of the extroverted type have an essentially primitive, infantile, and egotistical character.


12 Ibid., pp. 412-518.
The importance of O'Neill's dramatic use of Jungian theory becomes apparent with a study of the characters in the play. Dion Anthony is a symbol of the introvert and William Brown of the extrovert. There seems no doubt that the play concerns man's attempts to reconcile his limitations with his ambitions all the while that he is attempting to pursue his search for the Godhead -- male or female. It is little wonder at O'Neill's dilemma when he learns from Jung that the Godhead is essentially feminine.13

To dramatize his concept then of divided man -- or man divided within himself -- O'Neill once again was willing to experiment boldly within the theater. He fitted his characters with symbolic masks of their personalities that they take on and off at will in the most complex fashions. O'Neill knew of course the use of the mask in the Greek theater just as he knew of Gordon Craig's successful use of it. Actually O'Neill, Kenneth Macgowan, and Robert E. Jones had used masks at Provincetown in staging The Spook Sonata. The Fifth Avenue scene in The Hairy Ape had been done with masks, and a masked chorus of six old sailors appeared as drowned men pantomiming the story in O'Neill's version of S. T. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner in 1924.14 He used masks for Death in the delusions of Juan Ponce de Leon in The Fountain, and in All God's Chil-

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13 Sievers, p. 133.

14 Gelb, p. 546.
In short, O'Neill knew the limited uses to which masks had been put in the drama, but dramatic inventiveness is O'Neill's claim to fame. He envisioned the mask as a means of getting at the inner reality of character. The Great God Brown then is a movement toward discovery, revelation, or both -- it is a movement of characters toward discovery of whatever position they must take toward the fundamental problems of existence.

O'Neill believed that while man lived he was always on trial and that much of his suffering was due to his own will toward self-torture. Just how much of this thought was subscribed to the Nietzschean-Jungian thesis is immaterial; from the artistic point of view he used it imaginatively to create four major characters who in The Great God Brown would themselves become almost pure symbols and whose symbolic actions would illustrate the myriad themes involved with birth, life, and death: Dion Anthony, William A. Brown, Margaret, and Cybel.

Using setting in a symbolic manner more delicately than he ever had before to illustrate his major themes, O'Neill in four acts (eleven scenes), a prologue, and an epilogue delineates some eighteen years in the lives of his characters. In the Prologue Billy Brown and Dion Anthony appear with their parents (who never wear masks), celebrating their graduation from high school, along with Margaret with whom both boys are in love. The scene is a casino on the ocean in a night in

15Engel, p. 155.
June. The stage setting for this scene is that of a square with one side open to the audience. On either side are Billy's mother sitting on a bench and his father standing. Billy (unmasked) stands facing them "like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge." The square is a symbolic court in which value judgments are being made. Mr. Brown, a victim of materialistic ambitions for himself and his son symbolizes all fathers caught up in a materialistic world as he lectures Billy about going to college to study architecture so that he can return to the contracting business owned by him and his partner Mr. Anthony. The decision is rendered and the judgment made. Billy will go to college and like the all-American, dutiful son he will be molded in the image of his middle-class, materialistic father and spend the rest of his life trying to find his identity. Mrs. Brown is a symbol of all meek and shadowy wives transferring affections to a son instead of to a too busy husband. She sits in the pale moonlight reminiscing, thinking how much colder the nights are now than they used to be. Moonlight and lapping waves symbolize memory to her, and her judgment is that somehow life has failed her. This courtroom setting and some kind of judgment will be repeated in every scene in the play.

As the Browns move off stage a completely balanced scene begins as Dion Anthony appears with his mother and father. They differ in many respects from the Browns; yet in others they could be the same characters. Dion moves in restless,
nervous movements and his face is masked -- the first stage prop mask in the play. The mask is a "fixed forcing of his own face -- dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life -- into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan." 17 Dion too says that Mr. Anthony is his father and that he only imagines he is God the Father. His future too is on trial as he stands mockingly confronting his father the judge. Mr. Anthony symbolizes all fathers who have made their own way up the hard road of knocks and insist that their children do likewise. It is only when Mrs. Anthony tells him that Billy is going to college to study architecture that he in his jealous and competitive spirit insists that Dion will go and become a better architect than Billy Brown. Realizing that his desire to paint can never be fulfilled, Dion thanks his father "for the opportunity to create myself -- in my mother's image, so she may feel her life comfortably concluded." 18 Mrs. Anthony is lying to herself when she says he will make a wonderful architect because he paints such splendid pictures. Mrs. Anthony reminisces that the moonlight used to be warmer and June is now cold. They stare dumbly at him; there can never be any communication in a world in which artistic creativity is denied.

Resenting what his parents symbolize, Dion ironically

17 Plays, III, 260.
18 Ibid., p. 261.
says that he is their "identical" son. Laughing with abandon, he cuts a grotesque caper suggesting that they play hide and seek. "Seek the monkey in the moon." The symbolic theme is stated: people play hide and seek with one another's lives and the grotesque image of the moon is an image of himself. He says to Margaret at the end of the Prologue: "Watch the monkey in the moon! See him dance! His tale is a piece of string that was left when he broke loose from Jehovah and ran away to join Charley Darwin's circus."20

Billy Brown (unmasked) appears with Margaret. As she enters she is wearing a mask that is an exact almost transparent reproduction of her own features, "but giving her the abstract quality of a Girl instead of the individual, Margaret."21 She looks up at the moon that symbolizes Dion to her and takes off her mask. She speaks only of Dion, of how beautifully he writes poetry and plays, and how well he sings and dances. Rejecting Billy's declarations of love, she puts on her mask and goes to the dock. She says that Dion is the moon and that she is the sea. "I want to feel the moon kissing the sea. I want Dion to leave the sky to me. I want the tides of my blood to leave my heart and follow him."22

She envisions herself as Dion's wife, but she sees him only as her little boy, her baby.

19 plays, III, 262.
20 Ibid., p. 268.
21 Ibid., p. 262.
22 Ibid., p. 264.
As Billy leaves, Dion enters and flings himself on a bench and slowly takes off his mask. His real face is revealed in the moonlight, shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep sadness. Having removed the mask that symbolized the face he showed to the world, he is now able to speak from the depths of his being. "Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? 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?"23 Billy approaches him to tell him about Margaret's feelings. Envious and always in awe of Dion, Billy good-naturedly congratulates Dion; but Dion replies that if Billy could really know Dion he would despise him. (When that final recognition occurs in Act II, when Billy sees the face of the dying Dion, it turns out Dion's prediction was correct.)

Margaret appears with her mask in her hand, but when she sees Dion unmasked she screams and puts on her mask: she can not bear to look on Dion's face. A dark cloud passes over the moon as in despair Dion says, "Cover your nakedness! Learn to lie."24 Quietly and bitterly he puts on his mask and tells Margaret that he will never let her see his real face again. He does not.

Seven years later, married to Margaret and with three children Dion is seen reading from the New Testament, his mask

23Plays, III, 264-265.
24Ibid., p. 267.
hanging on his chest. As indicated by O'Neill, the living room is typical of one that all Margarets would decorate. Dion's real face has aged greatly, grown more strained and tortured, but at the same time, in some way, more selfless and ascetic, more fixed in its resolute withdrawal from life. The mask too has changed: it is older, more defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean. Already it has begun to show the ravages of dissipation. These changes are reflected in the words he reads from the Bible. "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest." 25 He stares before him and says that he is willing to come but he can't find the Savior. Religion too has failed to sustain him during these seven years in which his parents have died, he has sold the business to Brown, he has become an alcoholic, and a gambler. When he replaces the mask as Margaret comes in, he mockingly can say to hell with old Mama Christianity. Margaret has made Dion even more helpless than her child, and as they speak to each other in the third person it becomes apparent just how far apart they have become. "I love Margaret, I don't know who my wife is." 26 "I'm a lonely man," he says, "I can't go back! I have conceived myself," 27 as he said in the Prologue.

Having failed as a father, husband, and artist Dion humiliatedly accepts work in Brown's thriving architectural

25plays, I II, 269.
26ibid., p. 286.
27ibid., p. 292.
firm, a symbol of all his worldly success and a symbol of Dion's failure. Asking Brown if he could work at his father's old desk, he says he would like to sit where his father spun what he had spent. The poignancy of the symbolic search for the father is very moving as Dion (without mask) says what aliens they were to each other. When his father lay dead he looked at his face and wondered where he had met that man before. It must have been only at the second of his concep-tion, because after that they grew hostile with concealed shame. Nor could he know his mother. He remembered her as a sweet, strange girl with affectionate and bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explana-tion.

I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity; so I shrank away, back into life, with naked nerves jumping like fleas, and in due course of nature another girl called me her boy in the moon and married me and became three mothers in one person, while I got paint on my paws in an endeavor to see God! But that ancient Humorist had given me weak eyes, so now I'll have to fore-swear my quest for Him and go in for the Omni-present Successful Serious One, the Great God Mr. Brown, instead.28

However, Dion does not give up the quest during the next seven years in which he has become a successful draftst-
man. He is dying physically of acute alcoholism at the same
time that he is becoming more spiritual and ascetic. He can
now read from Thomas A. Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* like a
priest offering up prayers for the dying. The essence of
what he reads is how to give up the world by dying so that
one can learn to live with Christ. Just as his real face be-
comes more symbolically saintlike, his mask takes on a terrible
deathlike intensity, its mocking irony becoming cruelly malign-
ant so as to give the appearance of a real demon, a sym-
mbolic Mephistopheles.

With destructive malevolence Dion can accuse Brown
of stealing away his creative life. "One day when I was four
years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a pic-
ture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with
a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried."29
Dion had loved and trusted Billy completely, and suddenly
through Billy's action the good God had been disproved and
the evil and injustice of man was born. Dion became silent
for life and developed the mask of Pan in which to live and
rebel against the other boy's God and protect himself from
His cruelty. When Pan as a symbol of free and uninhibited
creativity was forbidden "the light and warmth of the sun," he
grew sensitive and self-conscious and proud and revenge-
ful -- and became the symbol of the Prince of Darkness.

Confronting Brown with these accusations, he tells
Brown to look into the mirror. When he does, Brown sees the

29Plays, 111, 295.
masked face of Dion. As Dion dies he tells Brown: "I'm done. My heart, not Brown -- my last will and testament! I leave Dion Anthony to William Brown -- for him to love and obey -- for him to become me." As he is dying his mask falls off and his face is that of a Christian martyr. He begins to pray: Our Father who art in Heaven ... Brown can now see Dion's real face and he despises it.

Perhaps Dion's final unmasking as Richard Sogliuzzo suggests symbolizes the fall of modern man pleading weakly for an intense belief in anything. Dion's very name suggests his complexity as a symbol. As Dionysus he is a symbol of man's understanding that he is part of nature and nature is part of him. The god who is dismembered and reborn triumphantly is a projection of the world in which man's life is fragmentary, alienated on the surface. Only at supreme moments does he feel the painful joy of reintegration with nature. As O'Neill said in a letter to the Evening Post, Dion Anthony represents Dionysus and St. Anthony, the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting an eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony. The whole struggle results in this modern day in mutual exhaustion -- creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan into a Mephistopheles mocking

30 Plays, 111, 299.

himself in order to feel alive. Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith, now must plead weakly for an intense belief in anything, even the Godhead itself.\textsuperscript{32} O'Neill makes it quite clear that he intended Dion Anthony as a symbol representing the perpetual conflict between a pagan acceptance of life and Christian masochism, the whole struggle resulting in exhaustion and frustration.

For love of Margaret and perhaps hatred of Dion, William A. Brown puts on the mask of Dion Anthony -- for the first time in the play Brown puts on a mask: symbolically not his own. In so doing he becomes symbolically the alter ego of Dion; and as his own face reveals when he removes the mask of Dion, he is tortured and driven by the demon of Dion's mask. In assuming the role of husband-father to Margaret and her three boys, William A. Brown is a success, and at last he has achieved revenge on Dion for an unconscious hatred that Brown had always harbored. Forced into the role of the all-American materialistically successful boy by his family, Billy Brown envies Dion's Pan, his creative abilities and Margaret -- in short, Dion's talent and life. As a successful materialist William A. Brown thinks that he can buy anything from creature comforts to love. As a matter of fact, he has bought love from the prostitute Cybel -- Dion's only friend -- for some fourteen years.

As conflicting personalities Brown is not aware that in putting on the mask of Dion Anthony he is assuming the

\textsuperscript{32}Engel, p. 154.
responsibilities of the agonies of Dion-artist-Pan's dark night of the soul. In that he can never admit his guilt in destroying Dion's picture in the sand -- and hence symbolically the artistic creative ability of man -- he must become goodman Brown.33 Yet wearing Dion's mask now he becomes Pan and cavorts grotesquely like a goat as he laughingly mocks those material things which he had formerly worshipped. Without the mask, however, his face has become sick, ghastly, hollow-cheeked, tortured, and feverish; Dion's demon has subjected him to Mephistophelean horror. In tragical irony Brown says to his draftsmen: "This is Daddy's bedtime secret for today: Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue."34

Just as Dion at the point of death becomes more St. Anthony than he did Dionysus, so does Brown find some salvation from the tragedy of living. Having been accused of the murder of Dion Anthony, Brown is suffering the agonies of the damned. Naked except for a white cloth around his loins he cries to heaven for mercy; he receives only a bullet from the police. Cybel has come too late to warn him. In her embrace Brown dies as he finds God the Father. When the police ask Cybel whom they have shot, her reply is Man.

O'Neill said of Brown in the same Post letter that Brown symbolized the visionless demigod of our new materialistic

33Skinner, p. 71.
34Plays, 111, 318.
myth -- a success -- building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves. He was a by-product forced aside into slack waters by deep maincurrents of life-desire. Brown certainly had always envied the creative life force in Dion -- what he himself lacks. He steals Dion's mask -- which to him symbolizes the creative life -- but he is really stealing that creative power which has been made destructive by frustration. He is destroyed because he is forced to wear the mask of his own Success, William A. Brown, toward the world as well as the mask of Dion to his wife and children. He thus becomes not himself to anyone.

When Margaret appeared for the first time in the Prologue she was wearing a mask that is an almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of Girl. Throughout the play her mask changes very little until the end when it gradually assumes a quality of false happiness after the Dion-Brown transference at which point she wrongly thinks that she has at last achieved her goals in life: children and a successful husband. Skinner thinks of her as a symbol of possession, Frederic Carpenter sees her as Margaret in Faust, and Engel suggests that she is the eternal girl-woman. She symbolizes all of these and more. Perhaps even more strongly she is a symbol of Woman who

35Skinner, p. 177.
36Carpenter, p. 112.
37Engel, p. 158.
with a kind of virtuous simplicity of instinct is oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race. To achieve these ends she will destroy anyone and anything that threatens her. She marries Dion fully aware that forcing him to conform to the convention of marriage and duty will destroy him. She is a liar both to herself and to others. The mask that she shows to the world indicates that Dion is a good painter, and adoring father; and she refuses to acknowledge the existence of Cybel, the prostitute who had spiritually sustained Dion for the last years of his life.

The Epilogue is an exact duplication of the Prologue, and in it Margaret appears four years later after the death of Dion and murder of Brown wearing the symbolic mask of the proud Mother. She has metamorphosed into a duplication of Mrs. Anthony and Mrs. Brown in the first scene. Even her dialogue is a repetition: the June nights are colder now than they used to be when she went swimming in the moonlight. She looks up at the moon, still a symbol of Dion, with a wistful, resigned sweetness. She says that she is the same Margaret: there seems to have been little self-discovery and revelation in her life with Dion or with Brown. The same moon rests in the same sea, and she still wants the moon to leave the sky for her; it did and she destroyed its light. Dion will sleep in the tides of her heart forever as her husband, lover, child.

Margaret's counterpart or alter ego is Cybel. Seven years after his marriage Dion finds himself awakening from a hard drunk in the parlor of a strong, calm, sensual blonde
girl of about twenty. She is healthy, full-breasted, wide-hipped; and her movements are slow and languorous like those of an animal. Her eyes are dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts. She chews gum like a sacred cow and time with her is eternal. Neither she nor Dion wears a mask when they are together.

With her mask on Cybel becomes the rouged and eye-blackened, hardened prostitute that is reflected in her surroundings. Again O'Neill has used the physical setting to complement symbolically both character and theme. In the parlor are a nickel player-piano, a dirty gilt secondhand sofa, a baldspotted crimson plush chair. The wall paper is cheap and old with a design resembling a fallow field in the spring. There is a cheap alarm clock on top of the piano, a constant reminder of her trade.

Without her mask Cybel symbolizes the Mother of Gods and the Asiatic goddess of fertility. O'Neill all too frequently refers to her as Mother Earth, sacred cow, and Mother. She is also a symbol of pure paganism that is natural, instinctive, and naive; and at the same time she is a symbol of regeneration. Dion can talk only to her without his mask; and their conversation symbolizes the most profound level of human understanding, the first step toward spiritual fulfillment.38 Their talks of love, life, and death suggest that lives go on in cyclic processes; and Margaret's soliloquy at the end of the play when she says that after a thousand lives

38 Sogliuzzo, p. 225.
one's eyes begin to open suggests a similar thing.

As the great spiritual Mother it is Cybel who symbolically tucks Dion into bed for his last sleep in the same way that the dying Brown can nestle in her arms as he too calls her Mother. At the moment of Brown's death she stands like an "idol of Earth" stating the essential meaning of the play: "Always spring comes again bearing life . . . summer, fall and death and peace again! -- But always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again -- spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again."

In an essay of unmasking inner realities O'Neill has symbolically demonstrated the potential polarities -- extrovert and introvert -- with all Dion-Browns and Margaret-Cybels. Most important he has manifested the necessity in Every Man to unmask himself and others -- though often the unmasking produces tragic results of self-revelation.

39 Plays, 111, 323.

40 Ibid., p. 322.
COSMIC RHYTHMS

Yes, our lives are merely strange interludes in the electrical display of God the Father!

O'Neill's chief purpose in this play Strange Interlude was to get beneath the surface of things and to probe and expose the depths of his characters. Realism as a mere vehicle in such an attempt had never completely satisfied him. When he began to write this play he had seen a great deal of life, and he knew a great deal about people that he could not express solely through realism. As Kenneth MacGowan said, it was O'Neill's obsessing problem as an artist to drag these deeper meanings out of the souls of his characters and put them freely and clearly on the stage.2

O'Neill's experiments with the use of dialogue as symbolic expression that ultimately led to the use of the interior monologue in Strange Interlude began with the first of his sea plays, "Bound East for Cardiff." He began to work on the problem of presenting on stage more of a man's inner consciousness than man could ordinarily reveal. In "Bound East for Cardiff," O'Neill's method was to present his protagonist Yank as he lay dying. Thus in his delirium he relives and reveals much of his life through flashbacks presented in a kind of monologue. In "The Emperor Jones,"

1Plays, I, 199.
2Miller, p. 450.
O'Neill had to find a way to express the justification for a man's fleeing through the jungle in an attempt to save his life coming face to face with images symbolic of his whole race. These terrible visions are realized when O'Neill has Brutus Jones, Negro, relive the terrors that must have passed through the minds of his ancestors in their first encounter with the slave ships as well as their whole history of Congo Voodoo. The method used here is both an oral and a visual one.3

In order to permit Yank Smith, the stoker on a ship, to reveal his philosophy of brute labor and mechanics, O'Neill resorted wholly to symbolic expressionism in The Hairy Ape. Drunk or highly agitated, Yank is able to express his feeling of not belonging by talking to himself. But as MacGowan points out, there was never the conflict of the speech of one man against another or the thought of one man against another.4 The next major step in revealing the symbolic inner character appears in "Welded." Here O'Neill has two characters sitting side by side facing the audience. They stare straight ahead and ostensibly speak to each other, but they show by their tone that it is a thinking aloud to oneself. Neither appears to hear what the other has said, but the audience has.5 The use of masks, soliloquy, and the third person in The Great God Brown enabled O'Neill to reveal

3Tiusanem, p. 208.
4Miller, p. 451.
5Plays, 11, 452.
different facets of the mind that he had not been able to reveal before.

The next step was *Strange Interlude* in which he was to give us a new kind of symbolism by means of the asides or interior monologues. By means of conventional dialogue O'Neill gives us the realistic aspects of his characters as well as the outward realistic talk they use. Then, between every pair or group of speeches he probed into the minds of his characters and had them reveal symbolically to the audience through interior monologues what their characters really were or what they really thought. O'Neill himself said of the method that it was "an attempt at a new masked psychological drama without masks." A new and exciting kind of dialogue developed, because it was more than soliloquy and it more than revealed the thoughts of the characters who spoke it.

In order to reveal the character's inner thoughts in his struggle with Fate, O'Neill uses the interior monologue to symbolize the subconscious or suppressed, hence the real, nature of the person. This revelation is the subconscious thoughts of the character that he did not even know existed. But when these thoughts are revealed, by transferring subconscious thoughts into expression, they express the psychological impact of these feelings for the first time, both to the characters and to the audience. The device of

6Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p. 260.

7Engel, p. 224.
interior dialogue has seven symbolic functional uses: exposition, often through the character's stream of consciousness; the introduction of a character; to develop plot; to indicate some conflict between a character's spoken words and his thoughts; to indicate fluctuations within the mind of the speaker; to show conflicts between love and hate; and to make statements to be heard only by the audience.

These multiple uses of the interior monologue function essentially to reveal the inner being, the real person, a symbol of which the outer self can be only a partial reflection. This statement can be made about any one of the nine characters and can be illustrated in any scene in the play; therefore the experiment with a new dialogue of the unconscious. Essentially, however, O'Neill's dramatic method of using symbolism remained the same as in previous plays: setting and character within this play indicate an emphasis on the symbolic function of dialogue in revealing the deeper feelings that the characters uttering them without stage masks could either understand or not understand.

O'Neill is meticulous in the structuring of his play. There are nine acts and nine characters that symbolize the nine months of pregnancy of the protagonist Nina Leeds. This pregnancy is the focal point of the whole play. Nina dominates each act and the lives of three men, Charles Marsden, Edmund Darrell, and Sam Evans. Nina's relationship with these three men reveals symbolically her search

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for Man as father, lover, husband and child. Each act is virtually the same length, and the method of structuring within each act is identical. As each of the nine scenes opens a character appears engaged in an interior monologue indicating some inner or external problem that seems somehow solvable. However, by the end of that act Fate has intervened and the problem has become even more complex. Such precise treatment of structure O'Neill contrasts with the chaos in the character's life symbolizing the futility of man's attempt to interfere with his Fate. The first character to appear in the first act of the play is Charles Marsden. By means of O'Neill's usual long stage directions and the interior monologues a great deal is revealed of the inner nature of Marsden that would not be revealed without them. Marsden enters the empty study of Professor Henry Leeds, who is a professor of classical literature at a small New England university. The stage directions and the realistic (outer) dialogue suggest that Marsden is a meticulous man, weak musculously, a distinctly Anglicized New England gentleman with some indefinable feminine quality about him. However, the inner monologue reveals through the character's stream of consciousness a great deal of the symbolic (inner) Marsden, at the same time that it relates the exposition of the first act.

He looks around and reflects upon the Professor and the study which he calls the Sanctum Sanctorum. In the inner dialogue he goes on to say how perfectly it is the Professor's unique haven. The Professor lives in the past; he hasn't
changed or added a book in years. In effect, Marsden says of Professor Leeds that he is a prim New Englander meeting the Greeks. This room reveals Leeds' inner character when later on in the plot it is revealed that he is a snob concerning the family of his daughter Nina's fiance. He is a very selfish man who would go to any lengths to keep his daughter from marriage and at home with him and who was even relieved at his wife's death.

The monologue not only serves then to reveal something about the Professor, but also it introduces Charles Marsden's inner feelings about his own life and the reasons for his being what he is. Marsden had first come into Professor Leeds' study with his father when the boy was only six years old. He and his father never really knew each other: what son ever really can he laments? The stage directions reveal that he is now a thirty-five year old writer who has just returned from three months in Europe. The interior monologue reveals that he is a man bewildered by the memory of his bewildered suffering at the death of his father, a memory brought back now that he is standing in Professor Leeds', his surrogate father's, study. In this way is made clear the relationship of Professor Leeds and Charles Marsden, father image, teacher, friend.

The conflicts within Marsden's mind are brought out when he says that he will not go to Europe again. As a writer he had gone there to write about the tragic aftermath of World War I. It was a task too great for him. Now walking about the room and reflecting on the town that lies so quietly and where
...its people walk about so circumspectly in the afternoons, he realizes that the town is really unaware of the chaos that had resulted from the war in Europe. To them it had been only a gentle interlude that they questioned in their lives. This is the first reference in the play to the title of the tragedy. What Marsden does not realize is that the interlude in the lives of the characters involved in the play will certainly not be gentle and incidental, but rather an interlude in which chaotic upheavals will occur in their lives.

What Marsden does recognize somewhat perceptively, however, is that he was not the writer capable of comprehending and profoundly writing about real situations such as the war and real people in depth: he concludes that his novels are merely an excuse for weaving amusing words and hardly of cosmic importance.

The fluctuations within his mind appear immediately. He says that there is a public to cherish his novels and that at least he is not one of those modern "sex-yahoos." He interrupts himself to say that he will begin writing tomorrow. Sometime he would like to use the Professor in a novel -- and his aggressive wife who used to boss him. But now it is Nina who bosses him just as she has also bossed Marsden. With that memory he recalls Gordon Shaw's being shot down just two days before the armistice. He wonders why he has never been in love with Nina and why his mother was so jealous of his concern for Nina in the morbid state in which she has fallen agonizing over the fact that she did not give herself to Gordon on that last night before he left for the war and
blaming the outworn code of honor that her father had used to persuade Gordon not to marry her.

As Marsden's interior monologue continues he reveals that his sex life is "life among the phantoms." His conflicts between love and hate have been implied earlier between himself and his mother and his father and they, especially his possessive mother, partly are to blame for Marsden's being able to say that such digging now on his part really gets one nowhere -- so sex can go to the Devil -- most people who are always concerned with it are enuchs "parading with the phallus." The stage directions show that Marsden's face is filled with pain and disgust, but the interior monologue continues to reveal the source of the conflict. At sixteen his pride in his manhood permitted him to be goaded into having sex with a crude Italian prostitute. For a dollar he had proved his manhood and shamed and dirtied sex for all time. He felt that he had defiled himself and his mother forever. His interior monologue ends as he tries to dismiss the incident from his mind as one experienced by any boy. Hence Marsden's interior monologue has served to introduce four characters -- Professor Leeds, Nina, Gordon Shaw, and Charles Marsden himself. At the same time it has functioned as a movement forward by introducing some of the themes that will be developed in the play: Professor Leeds' relationship to his symbolic study and his relationship toward Nina and his role in preventing her marriage; Nina's present morbid feelings of guilt; Marsden's relationship with his father and later with his mother and the incident with the prostitute
that probably has prevented him from falling sexually in love with Nina. More importantly, the interior monologue is heard only by the audience, and the audience is better able to see the symbolic inner being of the character as contrasted with what he says in the realistic dialogue.

In *Strange Interlude* there are six different stage sets, and two of them have important symbolic functions in supporting two of the pivotal themes of the play. In the first act O'Neill describes in detail by means of stage directions and interior monologues the study of Professor Henry Leeds. Professor Leeds is a teacher of Latin and Greek. His library reflects his philosophy of living: the walls are lined from floor to ceiling with glassed-in book shelves filled with old and rare volumes of the ancient classics in the original Greek and Latin. Many of them are first editions, and the most modern of them are by Thackeray. The room is a fortress against the present and a symbol of one who enjoys the safety of living in the past. From the security of such a vantage point Professor Leeds looks on the world with a superiority suggesting disdain, pity, and even amusement.9

The study then is a symbol of a theory of life that has over the years moulded the life of his daughter Nina.10 Nina has always wanted to be close to her father, but she was never allowed to touch anything, not even could she touch her father in his escape from reality.11 From her father Nina

9*Plays*, I, 3-4.
10*Winther, Eugene O'Neill*, p. 33.
11*Plays*, I, 27.
learned all about honor, morality: she learned to expect the ideal, not the reality around her. So when she learns that it was her father who had appealed to the honor of her fiance Gordon Shaw not to marry her or to have sex with her on their last night together before he goes off as a pilot in World War I she is infuriated. When Gordon Shaw was shot down in flames to a fiery death, all men symbolically died for Nina. It is then with Nina's blaming her father for this death and her revenge on him that she begins in guilt and hatred a search to find expiation. This tragic symbolic search (a search disproving everything that her father had taught her) is one of the important themes of the play.

In Act II, one year later, Nina has returned from having completed nurse's training, to the study of her father who now lies dead upstairs. O'Neill's description of the study strongly suggests an even closer parallel of Professor Leeds and the room. All of the shades the color of pale skin are drawn, and the windows suggest lifeless closed eyes that make the room even more withdrawn from life than before. The search has made Nina even more bitter. During the year she had given herself indiscriminately to any man to whom she thought she could bring a moment's happiness. "Lie" and "Life" are very much the same she realizes, and all her father's honor and morality have failed to sustain her.

12 Plays, 1, 27.
13 Ibid., p. 24.
14 Ibid., p. 40.
Some fourteen months later the setting of Act IV is again the Professor's study. Nina in this time has married Sam Evans. Unsuccessful because of his inability to write good advertisement brought about by Nina's not loving him, Sam sits in the Professor's old chair. The room now reflects chaos. Professor Leeds' ghost still lingers about the room as symbols of the books that are now gray with dust and blurred in their cases. The table at which Sam is working has become "neurotic," and also as a symbol of the Professor, will not tolerate on its top the mass of treatises dealing with how to improve the mind and how to be a success. Such crass material is mixed with the Professor's books. They are helter skelter and they have no meaning.  

The effect is as if the whole meaning of the Professor's life had been completely destroyed.

This is the last scene in the play in which the study is used for a setting. However, attesting to its importance as a symbolic function, it is used in the final act, nine, as a means of returning Nina to her past, of completing her search, and of assuring her some peace in her final declining years. Twenty years or so have elapsed.

On the day of Sam's funeral Nina feels that her search is over. She can be free to go back and live in her father's old home and rot in peace.  

With Charles Marsden her life-long friend and confidant, now shortly to be her husband, she thinks that she can go back to the old days when

15 [plays, 1, 66.]

16 [bid., p. 191.]
she was a girl, when she was happy before she fell in love with Gordon Shaw and "all this tangled mess of love and hate and pain and birth began!"

The other setting that is used symbolically is that of the home of Nina's husband Sam Evans. It is located in upper state New York, and Nina sees it on her first visit there with Sam. The house has the semblance of one of those attempts at Victorian grandeur, many large disproportionate rooms, porches, lightning rods, gingerbread: it is almost a mockery of the beautiful apple orchards surrounding it. Nina's home had been a symbol of ancient human values — morality and sobriety. Sam's home by means of its inhabitants symbolizes the destruction that was brought about by a too ardent belief in the wages of sin. The setting is the dining room of the house on the morning after Nina and Sam accompanied by Charles Marsden had arrived. The room is ugly. The straightbacked chairs are placed at intervals against the walls, as unbending as any Puritan that had lived here. No sunlight can enter the room, so it is dark and sickly just like its inhabitants.

Nina feels that there is something wrong with its Psyche: it had lost its soul and grown resigned to doing without it. The night before she had lain awake finding it difficult to breathe. It was as if all the life in the air had long since been "exhausted in keeping the dying living a little longer." Nina's feelings about the house are sub-

17 Plays, 1, 49.
stantiated by the revelations about its inhabitants that Mrs. Evans gives her. The house has no soul because of a curse on the Evanses: insanity. Sam's great grandfather, grandmother, and father had died in an asylum. Upstairs even now and unknown to Sam -- as the whole past is -- is an aunt who is insane. During all these years Mrs. Evans has kept from Sam all of this knowledge. Sam's father went mad when Sam was eight, and all the time she had kept Sam in boarding school so that he would not know.

Mrs. Evans thinks that Nina loves her son. It is imperative then that in order to maintain Sam's sanity she must not have a child fathered by him. It had been Mrs. Evans' Puritanical fear of the wrath of God that had prevented her from getting somebody else to sire a healthy baby. When Nina tells her that she does not believe in God the Father, Mrs. Evans says that she does not either, not anymore. She plants the idea of getting somebody else to sire her baby in Nina's mind. "Being happy, that's the nearest we can ever come to knowing what's good." 18 The rest is just talk.

Mrs. Evans does not know that Nina has married Sam only to have a baby. Now Nina must abort, and once again she must lose her soul as she had when Gordon died. The Evans house actually had symbolically claimed another victim. So Nina's search for a father of the child she must have becomes another of the play's themes.

Nina Leeds dominates every one of the nine acts in

18 Plays, 1, 64.
the play, and in so doing, one must be cogently aware of her surname. In seeking revenge on her father and in her determination to have a child she will lead all of the other characters along with her in her search to recapture Gordon Shaw, who now has come to symbolize all men who have been in some way denied happiness because of some futile and wornout idea of honor and morality such as that in which Professor Leeds believed, just as she now thinks of herself as every woman who has denied happiness to the man she loved because of some false sense of honor. After much suffering, both she and Mrs. Evans can conclude that God has not done much to reward them for goodness: instead it appears that he has punished them for loving too much. In this respect Strange Interlude is a morality play or at least a modern myth.

O'Neill was a widely read man, and he gave serious attention to the titles of all of his plays, most of them reflecting in some manner the subjects they treated. He was acutely aware of the twenties as an interlude of the misdirected energies of the Lost Generation. It was also an interlude of brilliant futility and confusion as one sees it depicted in such novels as The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises. The interlude signalized the loss of an age of traditional faith that paralleled in much the same way the loss of an age of traditional faith that paralleled in much the

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19 Plays, 1, 64.
20 Carpenter, p. 122.
21 Gelb, p. 119.
same way the loss of faith in old morality symbolized both by the function of a code of honor to Professor Leeds and a decaying destructive Puritanism as wrongly practiced by Mrs. Evans. Both Nina and Charles Marsden will attempt to define the interlude in their own lives and in those about them.

Nina Leeds then is the central figure in this drama. She must be all things -- mother, mistress, wife -- to all men -- father, lover, husband -- the various functions of the male species as symbolized respectively by Professor Leeds and Charles Marsden; Edmund Darrell and Gordon Shaw; and Sam Evans and young Gordon.

Nina blames her father for the cause of all her unhappiness, and this blame is extended even to God the Father because, being male, he would permit such suffering in this world. If God had been a woman she would have been more pitying of people. "The mistake began when God was created in a male image... That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth... Now wouldn't that be more logical and satisfying than having God a male whose chest thunders with egotism and is too hard for tired heads and thoroughly comfortless?" Subconsciously then Nina will attempt to dominate and control the lives of the men in her

22Plays, 1, 42-43.
life because only in making herself a kind of god can she account for the pain in her life.

Her own father's chest was too hard for her to rest comfortably and securely on, and so even as a child Charles Marsden became her substitute or symbolic father, particularly after she had banished Professor Leeds from her life because he had denied her womanly fulfillment as the wife of Gordon Shaw. When she returns home for her father's funeral experiencing great remorse for her sexual promiscuity and still searching for some way to know her father, she collapses on Marsden's lap and buries her face on his shoulder just as she had done as a little girl.23 She is transported with ecstasy, but immediately she wants Marsden to punish her for having been such a bad girl with the soldiers at the convalescent hospital. "I've got to be punished, Charlie, out of mercy for me, so I can forgive myself!"24

Marsden is unable to punish Nina; instead he advises her to marry young Sam Evans, at the advise of Nina's doctor. Nina says that she does not love Sam, and that Marsden sounds just like her father. It is true, because Professor Leeds had advised poorly in persuading Gordon not to marry Nina: Marsden's advice will prove equally disastrous because there is insanity in the family and Sam can not give her a healthy child. The conversation ends as Nina drops off to sleep saying, "Thank you, Father, You've been so kind. You've let me off too easily."25

23 plays, 1, 43.
24 ibid., p. 44.
25 ibid., p. 46.
Throughout the play it is Charles Marsden who is Nina's confidant-confessor, playing the role of "good ole uncle Charlie," or "Father." It is he who is concerned with Nina's well being in the different stages of her interlude with Sam Evans, her husband; Edmund Darrell, her lover (a symbolic Gordon Shaw); and with Gordon Shaw Evans, her son by Edmund Darrell; and Gordon's fiancee Madeline Arnold. So completely does he become the symbolic father that even his manner and speech become duplications of Professor Leeds. When the two are writing the biography of Gordon Shaw (and the reason particularly for Professor Leeds' disapproval) Marsden can say that ". . . Nina writes of Gordon as if he had been a demi-god when actually he came from the commonest stock." 26 And seeing Sam writing advertisements in Professor Leeds' study he can become squeamish as he moves in the same manner to the exact spots that Leeds had occupied: the tomb had been desecrated. 27

Nina's search to find peace and to find her symbolic father is terminated when she and Charles Marsden decide to marry after her husband's death and her son's engagement to be married to Madeline Arnold. They will be married in the afternoon in a chapel covered with ivy "symbolical of the peace we have found." 28 The cycle will be completed when Marsden becomes her Father-husband and she can return to being a little girl again. To Marsden she says, "Gordon is dead,

26 Plays, I, 75.
27 Ibid., p. 74.
28 Ibid., p. 197.
Father." Marsden tells her that they will go to her father's house to live because the memory of his mother and of his sister Jane still lingers in his home. "So let's you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude, of trial and separation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace."30

In the same manner that Nina finds in Marsden the father-husband that she had failed to realize in Henry Leeds and Sam Evans, Marsden finds in Nina the vicarious mother-wife that demanded only spiritual love. Charles Marsden's aversion to sex is caused by his prudish mother and his horrible experience with the prostitute. As a result his Psyche is shattered, and though he would like to love fully and completely, he can only sublimate. When he thinks of Nina sexually his thoughts converge upon him with aversion: he hates Nina for her affairs with other men --- she is "the dirty little trollop."31 Yet he always thinks of her as a sex object, but in his guilt he wants to run home to mother.

To Edmund Darrell, Marsden is "an old maid who seduces himself in his novels."32 To both Sam and Nina he is Uncle Charlie who is always about and under foot. To himself he is one "born afraid ... afraid of myself... I'm neither hated nor loved ... I'm liked."33 He summarizes

29 Plays, I, 199.
30 Ibid., p. 199.
31 Ibid., p. 45.
32 Ibid., p. 76.
33 Ibid., p. 120.
his own flaw when he says, "Not to be afraid of one's shadow! ... that must be the highest happiness of heaven! ..."

Yet in the end he does have Nina as a symbolic mother-wife with no fear of their having to have a sexual relationship. In their declining years they can find peace. However, Nina's final words in the play are "Thank you, Father -- have I been wicked? -- you're so good -- dear old Charlie!" Marsden is momentarily angry but concludes with a happy smile, "No, God bless dear old Charlie ... who, passed beyond desire, has all the luck at last."

Nina has not been able to find any solace from her guilt feelings about Gordon Shaw. If she had given herself to him she might at least have his child. So it is in such a mood of despair that her doctor Edmund Darrell persuade her that she ought to get married and have a child, the one act that will save her from insanity. Nina needs someone to father her child, and for that reason only she agrees to Sam Evans' proposal of marriage. To her Sam himself is no more than a symbolic baby whom she can mother until she has her own child. However, Nina's search to find happiness or at least some useful function in life is once again destroyed when she learns that having a baby by Sam would be disastrous. Yet she fully recognizes that Sam will always be her baby and that his happiness, success, and even his life will depend on the sacrifice that she must make: denying herself children, in other words, her own happiness.

34Plays, 1, 121.
Denied, then, her role of motherhood and blaming God the Father for making this mess and for her unhappiness,\textsuperscript{35} Nina remembers the advice that Sam's mother gave her: to go out and pick a healthy male to breed with.\textsuperscript{36} The solution to this quest or problem comes with a visit by Edmund Darrell. In a voice dull and monotonous and recalling the tone of Mrs. Evans, Nina tells Darrell the whole story of her abortion. Then with faces resembling masks and reverting to third person in their conversation, symbolic of the disinterested and scientific manner in which Nina's child will be fathered, they discuss the possibility of Darrell's functioning in this capacity. Nina is reluctant to participate in such an adulterous act, but Darrell convinces her that they must have minds that are scientific and superior to the moral scruples that cause so much human blundering and misfortune.

With the fulfillment of their decision Nina assumes the role of mistress and Darrell that of her lover, neither realizing that their act is going to cause both of them a life of unhappiness. In effect, Nina has been punished by attempting to have a baby by religion and by science. However there is a brief moment of happiness in her pregnancy and Nina can equate herself with God the Mother. "... I feel life move within me, suspended in me... no whys matter... there is no why... I am a mother... God is a Mother."\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35}Plays, I, 82.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 63.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 92.
That happiness is to be short lived: they fall in love and Darrell runs away from Nina because he knows that her love will destroy him. Nina in turn prays: "O Mother God, please let me hate him!"38

She can not succeed, however, in hating him. He will run away from her only to return again and again. His career as a promising great scientist is literally destroyed and he deteriorates physically as a symbol of the destructive forces of Nina's possession. Nina blooms in the prospects of motherhood and because she has all three of her men around her. The extent to which their lives are involved is dramatically expressed by Nina when she says that "you're here, Charlie -- always! and you, Sam -- and Ned! Sit down, all of you! Make yourselves at home! You are my three men! This is your home with me! You must all sit down and be very quiet. You must not wake our baby."39 What Nina says is symbolically true because in her son Gordon Evans, Nina realizes fulfillment with Gordon Shaw through a kind of immaculate conception. Gordon Evans is symbolically then the son of Gordon Shaw: by looking exactly like the elder Gordon, by acting just like him, and by following exactly in his footsteps. Darrell tells Nina that he is sure that Gordon is not his son. "I was only a body to you. Your first Gordon used to come back to life. I was never more to you than a substitute for your dead lover! Gordon is really Gordon's son!"40

38 plays, l, 108.
39 ibid., p. 133.
40 ibid., p. 174.
Nina again is right in her statement: they are her three men. Charles Marsden senses all of their relationships more deeply than the others. "... her three men! ... and we are! ... I? ... yes, more deeply than either of the others. ..."

In the bloom of her fulfillment Marsden is able to see in Nina strange and devious intuitions that tap the hidden currents of life, dark intermingling currents that become "the one stream of desire." "I feel, with regard to Nina, my life queerly identified with Sam's and Darrell's... her child is the child of our three loves for her." 42

Speaking as a symbol of the triumphant Life Force Nina says: "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!..."

The role that each man played symbolically in her life Nina emphatically makes as she says good night to them and leaves the room to go to bed. She kisses Sam affectionately on the cheek as she would a big brother or child. Marsden she kisses dutifully on the cheek much as she would her father. She kisses Darrell lovingly on the lips as she would her lover.

41Plays, 1, 134.
42Ibid., p. 135.
43Ibid., p. 135.
At the end of the play Charles Marsden concludes in attempting to comfort Nina that she must forget the Gordons and the whole distressing episode in which they have been involved: "regard it as an interlude, of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace." Nina can see their lives merely as strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father. The symbolical meaning of her statement is that at the end of the life cycle of woman the Father God triumphs over the Mother God. Nina still blames her father for the whole strange interlude in which their lives have become so intricately entangled, but at last after much pain and suffering she is able to forgive him. "And I forgive you, Father. It was all your fault in the beginning, wasn't it? You mustn't ever meddle with human lives again." In the end all of these people try to find peace and forgetfulness or some kind of mystic release from the hostile realities of life. "We'll pick flowers together in the aging afternoons of spring and summer, won't we? It will be a comfort to get home -- to be old and to be home again at last -- to be in love with peace together..."46

The interior monologue -- a psychological mask -- has been effectively used by O'Neill in this play to expose the inner and external lives of his characters, to develop

44 Plays, I, 199.
46 Ibid., p. 180.
plot, and ultimately to contrast the basic themes of the play, especially in revealing Nina's symbolic love-hate relationships with the men in her life. O'Neill succeeded in revealing the psyches of his characters through this function of dialogue as effectively as he had done with the use of the stage mask in earlier plays.
All victory ends in the defeat of death.\(^1\)

The same method of interlude technique that O'Neill had used in *Strange Interlude* he had decided to use in *Mourning Becomes Electra* as early as October of 1929, "after much searching for new ways and means and styles."\(^2\) The basic conception for his main characters was established and in spite of the play's classical derivation was to reveal the emotional fabric of the O'Neill family.

Just when O'Neill first became acquainted with the Electra plays is not known. The fact is, however, that the idea for *Electra* had been incubating in his mind for several years; and as Arthur and Barbara Gelb point out, O'Neill's emotional life during the late twenties was seething with such passion, frustration, guilt, mourning, and retribution that he felt himself ready to treat such themes in a drama on a grand scale.\(^3\)

The tragic theme of the ill-fated House of Atreus O'Neill began to fit into his own specific frame of reference sometime in May of 1929 when he was living with his second wife at the Château de Plessis at St. Antoine du Rocher, about twenty-five miles from Tours. O'Neill was experiencing

\(^1\) Plays, 11, 48.
\(^2\) Gelb, p. 722.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 698.
the greatest of physical pain with his teeth and he was feeling great remorse over the relationship with his second wife Agnes Boulton and a kind of fear for the future happiness with his present wife Carlotta Monterey O'Neill. To add to the gloom, the season was nasty and the château a little overwhelming to a man who had never known such splendor. In his conception of the trilogy Lavinia would symbolize in many ways O'Neill himself as she lost in quick succession her father, mother, and brother in the same order that he had lost his own family. In fact, Lavinia says at the end of the play that she will lock herself away from the world and bind herself to the Mannon dead. So too O'Neill felt himself bound to and haunted by his own dead. Very shortly after Jamie, his brother's, death he was heard to cry out that he was the last of the O'Neills.4

Ordinarily O'Neill was a quick and facile writer (although a careful rewriter too),5 but the time and effort that went into the Electra trilogy as he originally entitled the piece were the greatest and strongest that he had ever expended on any play. Although there is no reason to trace the evolution of Mourning Becomes Electra,6 it is pertinent to note some of the stages of its development in that they indicate the agonies that O'Neill was undergoing in solving the problems of setting, plot, and particularly character. Most

4Gelb, p. 721.

5He wrote The Hairy Ape in three weeks.

of the correspondence and conversation during this period show him as "feeling more than a little washed up," "working so damned hard and steadily," and agonizing over the souls of his characters." Working assiduously as he did, the scenario for "Homecoming" was ready on 20 June 1929, "The Hunted" on 11 July, and in August "The Haunted." By 21 February 1930 he had decided on the final title of his play, Mourning Becomes Electra, and had finished the first draft. The most meaningful flaw of this draft was that the role of Adam Brant, the Aegisthus counterpart in the Greek trilogy, was hackneyed and thin. On 11 July 1930 the second draft was completed, and of this work he said that it was "about three months of the most concentrated work that he had ever done." By this time he had decided that the dialogue was not to be "interludian" and that the characters would definitely not wear stage masks.

"There are plays," he said, "of direct passion and intensity, and involved, inhibited cerebrations don't belong in them. I monkeyed around with schemes for dialogue and ideas for production until my head ached -- but the story I had to tell made all such stuff seem futile and I finally settled down to the direct and least noticeable way, and I find I can get everything said about these characters' souls, hearts and loins that can be said." He had, however, decided on a more formalized and stylized structure utilizing a shipboard scene at the center of the work to symbolize escape and release conveyed by the sea. In addition he would use as an underlying theme repeated

7Miller, p. 69.

8The day on which it was completed is not clear.

9Gelb, p. 723.
references to the South Sea Islands as a symbol of the
Mannons' yearning for the primitive mother symbol. He would
also introduce the poignant theme of the chanty "Shenandoah"
as a symbol of thwarted hopes and desires. In the third draft
that appeared on 16 September he had eliminated all the asides,
most of the stylized soliloquies, and almost all the masks.
The major changes in the fourth draft of 19 October were the
conversion of stylized soliloquy into straightforward dialogue,
and the elimination of all masks except those passions
displayed through facial expressions. Throughout all the ver-
sions Lavinia became more the center of the third play "The
Haunted," rather than following the Greek version in which
Orin, the counterpart of Orestes, is pursued to his fate and
rescued finally by Athena. The fifth and final version ap­
peared on 26 March 1930. Apparently the only other major
change was to appear in April when he changed scenes one and
two of Act I of "The Hunted" to Acts I and II. According
to actors he rewrote up to the opening night.

O'Neill's making Lavinia the central character in
the play is itself an interesting fact. In the spring of 1926
O'Neill had indicated that he wanted to create a modern psycho-
logical drama rooted in Greek legend, and he weighed the ad­
vantages of up-dating the Electra or the Medea tragedy. He
wondered if it were possible to achieve any modern approxi-
mation of the Greek sense of fate into such a play in a time
when an audience did not believe in divine retribution or

No production script is available.
From such a statement as this, there seems no doubt of his intentions. O'Neill was following Aristotle's advice that the best tragedies were founded on the story of the fates of a few houses in successive generations such as Oedipus and Orestes, rather than on the fates of individuals because he rejected the Medea idea and decided on the Electra. O'Neill knew that the incidents and plot are the end of all tragedy, and that the end is the chief thing of all. He was also aware that the best tragedy should be arranged not on a simple, but on a complex plan. In this instance most critics would agree that O'Neill was eminently successful. However, this complex plan was achieved by basing his plot on Aeschylus' trilogy. O'Neill was dissatisfied with the treatment of Electra by both Aeschylus and Sophocles. So by making Lavinia the central character in the play, O'Neill followed Euripides' treatment of Electra, thereby perfecting his plot and permitting him to complete the symbolic theme in which the children are subsumed into the roles of the parents: just as the O'Neill children are subsumed into the roles of their parents.

The "Agamemnon" and "Homecoming" are concerned with situations that are alike. In Aeschylus' play Agamemnon returns home from the Trojan war to a wife who has been...
unfaithful to him. Her lover is Aegisthus, Agamemnon's own cousin. Clytemnestra murders him because he has sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia, because she loves Aegisthus, and because he has brought home a concubine. In the O'Neil play Ezra Mannon returns from the Civil war to his unfaithful wife Christine. She is having an affair with Captain Adam Brant, who is Ezra's cousin. Because she loves Brant and has always hated her husband, she kills Ezra.

Neither Electra nor Orestes has a place in the Greek play, and Orestes is scarcely mentioned; he is no more than an ominous note in a speech of Cassandra's and in one of the choral chants. In omitting Cassandra and Choruses (which will be discussed later), and in not using any parallel to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, O'Neil had to introduce some material to substitute for those in the old story. And so to launch his bombardment symbolically against the House of Atreus he gave to Lavinia the combined symbolic and dramatic functions of the prophetess, the avenger, Orestes, and the Choruses. 15 No longer is Orestes the primary symbolic instrument of vengeance. It is Lavinia who learns the story of the feud between Ezra's grandfather Abe and his brother David. Because she is the product of combined hatred of her parents and their parents in turn, she can not rest until she has pursued the guilty to their final punishment. She will become God the judge and executioner. Just as in the Greek legend, one is never permitted to forget that because of the first sin of Thyestes and Atreus the gods have decreed and sought retribution and suffering from the guilty.

15 Engel, p. 247.
Orestes and Electra are introduced in the second play of the Greek trilogy, "The Libation-Bearers." However, the role of Electra diminishes as Orestes undertakes to pursue his mother and her lover. Having consulted the Delphic Oracle and having been told to punish the lovers, Orestes quickly kills them. Immediately he is pursued by the Furies and is driven mad. The events in O'Neill's second play, "The Haunted," fairly well parallel the events in the Greek play.

It is with the third play that O'Neill confronted a really serious problem. No twentieth century audience would have accepted or perhaps even have understood the philosophical nature of a man hounded by the Furies. Nor would such an audience have accepted the artificial manner in which Orestes is finally absolved of guilt only after the intervention of Athena. The conclusion of the play is really a glorification of Athens more than it is a logical solution to the crime of matricide justified or not justified under any circumstances. The point is that Aeschylus has sidestepped the issue and there is consequently a flaw in the plot.

In "The Haunted" O'Neill shifts all emphasis of his tragedy to Lavinia. She and Orin have just returned from a year's trip taken for the purpose of assuaging her grief and particularly that of Orin. Orin continues completely to deteriorate mentally to the extent that he must threaten Lavinia with exposure concerning their horrible crimes if she leaves him to marry Peter Niles. Lavinia forces Orin to suicide and moves into the Mannon house to stay forever.
This then is the plot line of O'Neill's play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and in writing it as he did he was attempting to write a play that would be real and acceptable to a modern audience and at the same time permit him to combine reality with the symbolic overtones in both his structuring of the play and in the creation of character. 16

By this time O'Neill had reached a pinnacle in his ability to blend his setting and his themes. There are several sets of symbols that he used in structuring his setting and they support and fuse into one another brilliantly. The most striking and important symbol of the play is Mannon house itself. Even the action of the scenes themselves alternate within and without the house, beginning on the exterior in Act I of "Homecoming" and moving inside in Act IV of "The Haunted." This is the house that was built by Abe Mannon, whose very name and whose actions come to symbolize Mammon or materialism, when he forced his brother David and Marie Brantôme to flee. Marie Brantôme was a beautiful Canuck nurse who had come to the Mannon house to nurse a sick child. David Mannon fell in love with her and so did Abe. However, using the excuse that she is beneath them morally Abe in his jealousy and vengeance forces his brother to sell his share of the business and drives them out of the house.17 Subsequently through their appearance and in their actions all of the women who come to Mannon house will symbolically become Marie

16 Skineer, p. 219.
17 Plays, 11, 25.
Brantôme just as all of the Mannons symbolically become old Abe Mannon.

As a result it had become a house where no love could dwell. It was a big white Puritan house with great white columns whose shadows cast black bars on the gray walls behind them. To Christine Mannon it is a tomb to which she must return and can not even brighten with flowers from the greenhouse. In Act I of "The Hunted" it becomes a strange white mask in the moonlight, the inside of which houses the murdered body of Ezra Mannon now lying in state. There is rotting in the walls, and in the late afternoon when the sun is setting the windows take on a smouldering stare as of brooding and revengeful eyes. To Lavinia it becomes the Temple of Hate and Death where there can be no rest and in which she will shut herself away from the world of the outside and the living.

The strict Puritan code, then, by which the Mannons pretended to live and which they demanded in others is reflected in the house as the epitome of corruption. It is a house that denied love. Even to Ezra Mannon it was a white temple of death, a charnel house reminding him of the early white-washed Puritan church that he had attended as a boy in which he was taught that life began with dying, that even the

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18Plays, 11, 135.
19Ibid., p. 169.
20Ibid., p. 171.
21Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p. 50.
purpose of life was death. This house was a perversion of the Greek temple whose symbol was life, and it housed unnatural passions that were fatally directed in such a way as to wreak ultimate destruction on all its inmates: David Mannon's suicide, Ezra's refusing Marie money and her subsequent starving to death, Ezra's murder by Christine, Adam Brant's murder by Orin and Lavinia, Christine's suicide, and Lavinia's doom to live alone in the house without love. Such a house was indeed a Puritan temple that wore a white mask to hide its black interior.

To one side of this house stood a tall pine tree with a black, greenish trunk. It is the sun shining through the boughs in the late afternoon or the moonlight at night that causes the shadows on the house symbolizing prison. The crimson of the sun shining on the windows in the first act of "Homecoming" symbolizes the ensuing death of Ezra Mannon in the same way that it does the spiritual death of Lavinia at the end of the play when she enters it for the last time. Moonlight functions in a similar way. It symbolizes shadows, the defeat of hope, ghosts, despair. It intensifies the eerie masklike quality of the house, and Christine says that she hates moonlight because it makes everything so haunted.

The green of the grass, the green of the pine trunk, and the green shutters of the house were a line that bound the house and its inhabitants to the destructive qualities of

22 Plays, II, 54.
23 Ibid., p. 73.
Nature. When Christine first appears in the play with the flowers in her hands, she is wearing green just as Lavinia in symbolically usurping her mother's role after her fling in the islands sheds her severe black for her mother's green dress. Lest this green line symbolize complete and utter destruction of man by his fatalistic passions, O'Neill has broken or at least weakened it by planting huge lilac bushes on one side. Every character in the play at one time or another moves behind or in front of these flowers. These lilac leaves symbolize hearts, and they are among the earliest blooming of flowers. The irony of this recognition is that the action of these scenes occurs in April and early spring, the season symbolizing ritualistic birth. Even the flowers that Christine is holding when she first is seen she has picked for Adam Brant, and they therefore symbolize natural love.\(^2^4\) The natives that Lavinia abandoned herself to in natural love wore flowers in their hair,\(^2^5\) and upon her return when she is attempting to seduce Peter Niles she wants the house filled with flowers.\(^2^6\) Lavinia's last words in the play are to tell Hannah "to throw out all the flowers." The Mannon heart is not strong enough for love, and the end is death.

The interior of the house differs little in effect from the outside. In the six scenes that take place inside

\(^{2^4}\) Plays, 11, 17.
\(^{2^5}\) Ibid., p. 154.
\(^{2^6}\) Ibid., p. 170.
the house, one is permitted to visit Ezra Mannon's study, his bedroom, and sitting room. Ezra's study is the scene of Lavinia's confrontation with Christine in which she accuses her mother of having an affair with Adam Brant. Lavinia has chosen well because the whole room is a symbol of her father and the whole Mannon line. The walls are plain plaster of a dull gray with a flat white trim. Among the portraits on the wall is one of Ezra Mannon in his black judge's robes, his face a semblance of the masklike faces of Lavinia, Christine, and the outside portico. The stiff, austere atmosphere of the room contrasts dramatically and symbolically with the sun that begins golden but with the intensity of the argument between the two turns crimson and somber indicating the approaching murder. The sitting room of the house is composed of straight severe lines with heavy detail. On the walls hang portraits of family ancestors, one of which is a grim-visaged minister of the witchburning era. There are also pictures of Ezra's grandfather and father. The bedroom presents the same somberness, not a room for light and love. The rooms change their features according to the nature of the action as the play progresses. As Ezra lies in state in his study he has become more like the portraits on the walls, and Orin has become even more his father in the flickering candlelight. 27

When Orin and Lavinia return from their year's trip to the Mannon sitting room, it is even more a room of ghosts and shadows. It has a dead appearance and the portraits stare

27 Plays, II, 93.
even more forbiddingly. Lavinia has become even more the mask of her mother. The living and the dead wear the same masks. Thus the mask functions as a symbol conjoining the past, the house, and its inhabitants.

This mask is a fascinating study, for at one time or another every character in the play except Hazel and Peter wears one. Seth Beckwith, the first character to appear in the play is described as having a gaunt face that in repose gives one the strange impression of a life-like mask. Seth's mask is set in a grim expression, shrewd, and humorous. His wife Louisa, though not described as having a masklike face, is shown to be "of a similar scandalbearing type; her tongue is sharpened by malice." Her cousin Minnie is also a "type," an eager gossip. O'Neill states plainly in the stage directions that these are types of townfolk rather than individuals. When Christine Mannon appears with her strangely beautiful hair and dressed in green, one is struck at once by a face which is "but a wonderfully life-like pale mask." This mask is to change drastically according to her adulterous conduct and Lavinia's disclosure and demand for retribution. When Christine learns of Orin and Lavinia's murdering Brant, she at first moans. But then the horror in her eyes dies into blankness and her face becomes a tragic death mask that she wears inside the house to shoot herself.

28 Plays, 11, 139.
29 Ibid., p. 6.
30 Ibid., p. 9.
31 Ibid., p. 122.
Lavinia looks very much like her mother, yet thinner, much less a woman. Dressed severely in black, she "carries herself with a wooden, squareshouldered, military bearing. Above all one is struck by the same strange life-like mask impression her face gives."\(^{32}\) When she blackmails her mother into giving up Adam Brant, Lavinia's face becomes a sinister evil mask.\(^{33}\) This is the manner in which she will appear until she returns from the tour of the South Sea Islands with Orin. Her brief blossoming as a woman in the islands is short-lived because of Orin's incestuous attitude toward her and his threat to reveal their secret. In the end the fates force her into this mask and wooden bearing as she reverts to her former self and marches woodenly into the house. Adam Brant has the same "life-like mask rather than living flesh." Ezra Mannon has the same "masklike look of the others," but more "pronounced in him than in the others." Orin Mannon "has the same lifelike mask quality" of Ezra and Adam, both of whom he resembles.

Only Peter and Hazel Niles do not have the masklike faces of the other characters, and the reason that they do not is that they are not subject to the Mannon curse. Neither do the townspeople wear masks, but as will be pointed out shortly, their recognition stems from still another function in the drama.

Another important set of symbols can be recognized

\(^{32}\)_{\text{Plays, 11, 10.}}

\(^{33}\)_{\text{Ibid., p. 35.}}
In the chanties, the sea, and the romantic islands; and these symbols function to support and enhance the thematic development of the complex plot of the play. In the very first scene of the play a band is heard at a distance playing "John Brown's Body." This melody would appear innocent enough if one were not to remember that John Brown was a runaway slave who was martyred during the Civil War. His truth is marching on. The irony of the situation is that the Mannons in their own way are prisoners who must die because of certain truths that are forced upon them, or that they bring upon themselves: Ezra's and Orin's comprehension of war and death and Ezra's realization of his love for Christine. Ezra saw war as a symbol of glory and by forcing Orin to share that view he destroyed his son. Too late Ezra learned that love was giving and not always taking. In any case, the pall of death and foreboding is symbolized by the song.

This song is interrupted by Seth Beckwith's singing the chanty "Shenandoah." Perhaps the words of the song apart from this play have very little meaning; however, a careful study of the words reveals that they are uttered by one who is away or lost and longs for the romantic vision of the Shenandoah River. That longing is to be denied, however, for the speaker is "bound away across the wide Missouri." It is important to note that the chanty ends with just this one refrain. But the theme of the song is clearly stated symbolically as it relates to the Mannons: the romantic vision of love can not be realized. Very clearly the song symbolically underscores the frustrated attempts of this
family to find any meaningful relationships that would save them.

The tune does not appear again until the opening scene of Act IV of "The Hunted," but one can be sure that the "rolling river" has kept on seeking the sea in much the same way that the Mannons are being propelled toward their destinies. In this scene Adam Brant is aboard his vessel in the Boston Harbor when he hears the chantyman singing the same verse of "Shenandoah." However, this time the singer adds a new line of a different verse: "Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter. . . ." One is reminded of the events that have occurred up to this point and he asks himself if it is really love for Christine-Lavinia (the mother-daughter) that has brought on and will continue to bring on these terrible calamities.

The chantyman interrupts this mournful song with another chanty "A Bottle o'Wine." The next song occurs in the same scene, but after the conversation between Adam Brant and the chantyman. This time he sings "Hanging Johnny." The first verse states that the speaker "hanks for money," and the second one says he "hanged his mother." These lines suggest several possible symbolic meanings: Adam himself was partly responsible for his mother's and his father's deaths, the one because he ran away to sea and the other because he refused to forgive. Because of his part in the crime, Adam has "hanged" himself, or upon discovery he will be hanged as an accomplice of Christine's in murdering Ezra. An even more complicated suggestion is the refusal of Ezra to aid
Marie Brantôme.

At the same time that these chanties are being sung, Orin and Lavinia are hiding in the shadows of Adam's boat overhearing Christine warning Adam that Lavinia has discovered their crime and at the same time declaring her love for Adam. When Christine leaves Orin kills Adam, a crime for which he might also be hanged. At the same time that he kills Adam he kills Christine's love, and he symbolically hangs his mother. For as Christine goes into the house to shoot herself Seth's voice is heard in the drive singing another verse of "Shenandoah": "She's far across the stormy water/ Way-ay, I'm bound away --".

In the first act of "The Haunted" Lavinia and Orin have not returned from their trip, and some drunken men and Seth are outside the Mannon house participating in Seth's bet that no one of them would be able to spend a night in the house. Joe Silva breaks into "A Bottle o' Beer," repeating the lines sung by the chantyman in "The Hunted." The symbolic meaning of the lines is now clearly related to the theme: the townspeople are in a "drunken" stupor and can not really see what has gone on in the Mannon household; or if they can see, it is with a blurred vision.

The last reference to the Shenandoah symbol occurs in the very last scene of the play. Seth appears, just after Lavinia has renounced the world to do penance for the family crimes, singing "Oh, Shenandoah, I can't get near you/ay-ay, I'm bound away --." From the first to the last scene of the play, this symbol has now moved full circle. This symbolic
use of song becomes even more significant when it is related to the symbols of the sea and the islands, but its full significance does not occur until one realizes why the singers can never go beyond the few lines they sing. A following verse states, "Oh Shenandoah, I'll not deceive you./Way, hey, we're bound away across the wide Missouri." The romantic vision for the Mannons does not exist, and they (like "we" in the song) must be forever frustrated and loveless.

The sea and island symbols fuse in that both represent security and escape from the Mannon curse. Most of the characters seek the peace of these islands in their own ways. David Mannon tried to find these enchanted islands when he attempted to run away with Marie Brantôme; but because the curse on the House of Mannon was partly on his head, he could not escape. Their son Adam tried to find these islands as a boy when he ran away alone to sea — they were his blessed islands. With Christine Mannon these islands were an escape from Ezra and Lavinia and their crime, but the curse was on them too. Even Ezra tried to find his islands. Orin and Lavinia tried to find these islands together, and it was there that Lavinia blossomed into a woman. The relationship of this symbol to the theme of the play is nowhere more dramatically or graphically delineated than the scene between Orin

34 Plays, 11, 33-34.  
35 Ibid., p. 112.  
36 Ibid., p. 39 and p. 121.  
37 Ibid., p. 145.
and Christine in Act II of "The Haunted." Orin asks his mother if she has read a book called Typee about the South Sea Islands. Someone had given him the book and he had re-read it until it "finally came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and tranquility." Later on in the delirium brought on by his head wound, Orin was in those islands and Christine had become "the waves breaking around him, the sky her eyes, the warm sand her skin. The whole island was you——" But nobody was able to find the island in the sea that was a symbol of the Mannon wealth and power. Only Orin seemed to realize that death was the only island of peace, and in his ultimate mental breakdown he was able to find the island of peace and death with his mother.

In O'Neill's masterful symbolic handling of the Chorus he has combined its function also with the brilliant revelation of the character of Seth Beckwith. Seth has been the Mannon handy man for years, and as such he is really a part of the family: he is in many ways its Teiresias for it is he who is able to really see what the family is. According to biblical meaning the word "Seth" is he who is glorified among men. In a sense he is because he is highly respected by Lavinia (The Mannons) and at the same time he is the leader

38 Plays, 11, 89.
39 Ibid., p. 90.
40 Ibid., p. 101.
41 Ibid., p. 166.
of his village cronies—hence his surname—always at the beck and call of the Mannons and his friends the townspeople. Seth appears dramatically in the first scene of "Homecoming" as the guide who is showing his friends about the grounds of the Mannon estate. On the realistic level Seth is the family gardener who is taking his friends on an interesting tour wherein he gives the exposition concerning the Mannon background. However, on the symbolic level Seth is the leader of the group who together make up the counterpart of the Greek Chorus. O'Neill does not use the Chorus as Aeschylus did to imitate the lyrical and ritual pattern of Greek life, but even more effectively than the Greek Chorus was often used, to intensify his theme.43

O'Neill's New England Chorus stands aloof, suspicious, and unmoved by the fates of the Mannons. Yet it is through this Chorus that the exposition is handled. It is against Seth that much of the action of the play is buffeted, particularly that action of a revelatory and motivating kind between him and Lavinia. For example, it is Seth who propels Lavinia in the direction of Adam Brant's identity. He had seen in Adam's face the face (and perhaps the fate) of all Mannons. Seth then moves into the background to emerge again in Act III of the same play. This time Seth in his drunken state hammers home to Lavinia the details of the family curse, so that Ezra's homecoming is even more prepared for.

Act I of "The Hunted" opens in much the same way as

the "Homecoming." However, Seth remains in the background as the mourners emerge from the Mannon house where Ezra lies a corpse. At this point O'Neill even calls them a Chorus, and it is from their conversations that the audience learns of the events that have just transpired: that Lavinia is a "foreign" woman, that she does not weep, and that love killed Ezra. The opening of Act IV of the same play is handled similarly. Only this time the Chorus has taken the form of a sailor, a chantyman, who sings the symbolic ballads about death and the sea. In this treatment O'Neill again emphasizes this theme by use of symbols, in this case the sea.

The Chorus again functions dramatically at the beginning of "The Haunted" when Seth emerges as the leader of several drinking companions, one of whom he has dared to spend some time alone in the deserted, haunted Mannon house. They are interrupted by the arrival of Peter and Hazel announcing the arrival of Orin and Lavinia from the islands. That Seth is able to move back and forth as the symbolic leader of the Chorus to a real character attests to O'Neill's complete discipline of his material in this section.

Seth appears for the last time as a character and as representative of the Chorus in the beginning of the last act of "The Haunted." Interestingly enough, the characters in the play have now been reduced to him and Lavinia. As a friend and servant, he begs Lavinia not to go inside the house; as the Chorus, he says he "ain't heard a word you've been sayin', Vinnie."
However, one gets the feeling that Seth as an old man of seventy-five has known all of the Mannons from Abraham the first patriarch of the Jews on a symbolic level who became involved with Hagar -- perhaps the Marie Brantôme of the tragedy -- whose warped sense of love and aggression brought down the curse upon the Mannons, to Lavinia who must live out the curse in solitude, and has heard everything that they have said. The curse is passed on to Abraham's son Ezra. The name means "he who helps," and in the bible he is a diligent lawyer-judge greatly respected by the people. The name is ironically used in the first instance because Ezra refused to help Marie Brantôme and thus gave Adam Brant his nephew motivation for revenging the deaths of his mother and father.

In the second instance Ezra Mannon is presented as a former judge made wealthy by the sea (shipbuilding which will ultimately destroy him symbolically through Adam Brant, who seeks the Happy Isles) and now a general returning home from the Civil War which was selected by O'Neill as the time of his play because it was a "mask of time and space." Before going to the war Ezra a man deeply rooted in the New England tradition of stern self-repression, had guilt feelings over sex, a fact that accounted for his animal lusting for

44 Hastings, p. 5.
46 Hastings, p. 253.
47 Sievers, p. 122.
Christine, and any natural romantic expression. He returns from the war trying to shake off the Puritan background only to find that his lustiness has perverted Christine's romantic love for him into loathing. She has sublimated her love for Ezra to her son Orin, and when he was taken from her, to Adam Brant.

Adam symbolizes the Adam of the biblical story, and his name means "Man." When he runs away to sea he finds for a few years in the South Sea Islands the innocent garden of Eden. His last name means "easy on ships," and being a lover of them he had to leave his "Blessed Isles." He learned of his mother's death which had been brought about by revenge, and the curse passed on to Adam. He must now seek vengeance. This vengeance leads to an illicit love affair with his cousin's wife Christine Mannon. They try to find the happy isles together, but the murder of Ezra seals their doom.

Orin and Lavinia murder Adam and the curse passes on to them. "Orin" means "the last of its kind;" his name appears only once in the Old Testament as the son of a king. When Orin enters the play in "The Hunted," he enters from the pine grove; and in ancient pagan symbolism the pine

48 Sievers, p. 122.
50 Hastings, p. ii.
51 Tornquist, p. 369.
52 Hastings, p. 432.
53 Plays, 11, 73.
and the pine cone were symbols of the phallus and hence reproduction. O'Neill reverses the symbol of the pine because Orin in the play is depicted as a weak character, who will not reproduce his own kind. His perverted love for his mother and his inability to understand his father along with his experiences with death in the war lead him to want only peace and escape. The symbol of his escape is Typee and the enchanted isles with first his mother in dreams and with Lavinia after Christine's suicide. He can only briefly endure the agony of his guilt any more than he can attempt to follow in his father's footsteps to become a Mannon, his father himself: the recourse is a mental breakdown during which time he expresses incestuous advances toward Lavinia.

In turn Lavinia, who has been subsumed into the role of her mother, goads Orin into suicide, not before, however, Orin has conjured up his mother in his fantasy world in which the both of them can now find peace in death in the islands. But it was not so easy with Christine Ell, the daughter of a New York physician, to find these islands when she married romantically a symbol of Puritan aristocracy. Instead she came into a house of ghosts and shadows, a house whose ancestors were witch hunters and whose inability to express natural love led to their destruction. Christine was always the outsider to be used like a prostitute on her wedding night; hence her inability to love the results of that night — Lavinia Mannon who was every inch her father's daughter and

to remind Christine forever of a perverted Puritan animal lust. In being used so, Christine became the symbolic prostitute created in the image of the original Marie Brantôme on whom the Mannons looked as immoral: the same luxurious golden hair, voluptuous body, aliveness in a house of the dead. The love she could not give a husband and daughter she gave too strongly to Orin, a love with which Orin could not cope, and along with the Mannon curse, helped to destroy him. In a sense Christine symbolizes a kind of female martyr who believed in sexuality as a natural expression of love; and she was crucified by perverted Puritanism in Ezra, who had become for her the symbol of death.

Lavinia was the last and strongest of the Mannons, and it was she who must make expiation for the crimes of all the Mannons and end the curse. When Lavinia first appears in "Homecoming," she is in all physical appearances an inferior replica of her mother. It is as though she has tried to deny any relationship at all with Christine, because she is dressed severely in black, her hair pulled tightly back on her head. She is thinner than her mother, and she walks with a strange wooden gait. Symbolically she is her father's son instead of Orin because she has his same bearing, walks with his military air, and barks out his same commands. She seems to deliberately deny any natural characteristic that would be an asset to her as a real woman.

From the very beginning it is apparent that Christine

55Play, 11, 10.
and Lavinia antagonize each other, and this antagonism grows into the bitterest hatred when Lavinia learns that Christine has played her for a fool in suggesting that Adam play up to her when he comes to visit so that Lavinia will not guess the real truth. Lavinia becomes the avenging daughter too much in love with her father, a sinister avenging mask, when she threatens Christine with exposure. Her bearing is the same even when she discovers Christine in the act of murdering her father: she only grows more sinister, cold. Her tragic flaw of hubris is in full operation, and her only recourse is to persuade Orin to kill their mother's lover. The more intensely Lavinia hates her mother the more she symbolically becomes her mother until after Christine's death she returns from the islands appearing precisely as Christine did in the first scene of the play: a voluptuous woman. She has psychologically and symbolically subsumed the character of her mother, perhaps subconsciously desiring to become her father's wife at last.

It has been Lavinia's escape to the Eden of Adam Brant and her experiencing of innocent and natural love that have at last made her a woman: she had danced freely with and had loved the natives there. But Orin was still too much of a Puritan, a Mannon, and guilty to let them remain there, so they return to the Mannon death house. So complete has been the change in Lavinia that she wants to marry Peter Niles immediately, and she all but seduces him. However, Orin, in his mental state, wants Lavinia incestuously as he had wanted his mother; so he threatens to expose them. Lavinia now

56 Plays, 11, 16.
becomes the pursued in the same way that she had been the pursuer in "The Hunted." In her horror at Orin's physical overtures toward her (much as her mother had at Ezra's) Lavinia tells him he is vile and insane and would kill himself if he were not a coward: he does. Catching Seth's words from "Shenandoah" she smiles grimly and says that she is not bound away, that she is bound here to the Mannon dead. Her name means "to wash or purify," and that is exactly what she must do when she walks woodenly into the house and closes the door.
ILLUSION AND REALITY

The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober.1

Most of the critics who have written or talked about The Iceman Cometh which O'Neill wrote in 1939 and saw produced for the first time in 1946 agree on several important aspects of the play: It is one of O'Neill's masterpieces and one of the most impressive plays in the twentieth century.2 Donald Parritt the young betrayer-murderer and Larry Slade the "old foolosopher" are in many respects a symbolic representation of O'Neill himself.3 In fact, O'Neill related to Croswell Bowen that in writing the play he "felt as though he had locked himself in with his memories."4 And finally that the play is some kind of parable or morality on the destiny of man and the human condition.5

On the other hand, there seems to be little agreement on the kind of play that it is or the method that he used in its construction. Tiusanem is of the opinion that

1Plays, III, 578.


3Gelb, p. 833.

4Ibid., p. 833.

5Rosamond Gilder, "Each in His Own Way," Theatre Arts, 30 (December 1946), p. 684.
O'Neill had left behind him all of the abstract Freudian elements that he had utilized in previous plays, notably in *Strange Interlude, Mourning Becomes Electra, and The Great God Brown*. The fact is that O'Neill earlier had written his only short story, "Tomorrow," and a one act play "Exorcism," which he used as the basic thesis for *The Iceman Cometh*. O'Neill himself had tried to commit suicide in 1912, and this death wish is consciously displayed not only in these two works, but also in twenty-five of his forty-four published plays, in which a total of forty characters suffer unnatural or violent deaths.7

Sievers disagrees considerably with this concept of the play and argues that it is only after 1927 that O'Neill wrote his most mature Freudian plays using both Freud's and Jung's psychological symbols to interpret his characters. Sievers makes his argument effective by suggesting that among the psychoanalytic leit-motifs which are found in all O'Neill's works are those which derive from Jung and include the concept of the mask, the function of women as wife, mother, and prostitute. From Freud he notes particularly the theme of sexual denial and frustration, the discrepancy between the ego ideal and outer reality; the compulsion to degrade love, guilt feelings about religion, and death wishes.8

Several other critics see many of these same concepts

6Tiusanem, p. 264.
7Gelb, p. 189.
8Gilder, p. 684.
developed in the play. Even if they do not agree with the fact that O'Neill was deliberately distinguishing between the two schools of psychology, they seem to feel that he has subconsciously written about man's search for reality, identity, and redemption. In this search for identity or the difference between illusion and reality Waith sees the action of the play as a giant wave which in a period of two days advances and retreats symbolizing the attempts on the parts of the characters to go out in search of themselves and to return with some knowledge of reality. Waith's metaphor is an apt one when he suggests that the play opens in a torpor of drunken sleep; as it gathers force the human derelicts that have been inhabiting Harry Hope's bar are impelled toward action. But at the end most of them are slipping back into drunken stupor, with possibly only two or three flung free of the wave.

Robert Brustein points out that at no time in his previous writing had O'Neill as suffering artist become so completely identified with structural art. In a perceptive, though at times seemingly contradictory essay, he contends that O'Neill had discarded and left behind forever such symbolic devices as the mask, split characters, and Choruses. Yet shortly afterward Brustein speaks of each

9Gilder, p. 684.
10Waith, p. 38.
12Brustein, p. 338.
of the character’s illusions as symbolizing a larger failure. This failure is the impossibility of salvation in a world without God. Brustein discusses this theme by saying that the protagonist of the play, Larry Slade, "has adopted a mask of total alienation. For him the essence of mankind is excrement, and life on earth is doomed."14

The characters in the play are degraded rather than corrupt Vivian Hopkins contends, and she sees the play as a symbolic one emphasizing spiritual values.15 Sophus Winther agrees with this interpretation in saying that the characters are symbols of all that is meaningful in the life of man.16 Robert C. Wright even suggests that the play deals specifically with the Christian myth of religion and particularly with the role of the Iceman as a secular saviour.17 Harry Walton too sees the play as a symbolic one in which the characters have fallen to the depth, the bottom of the sea. They are children in a Christian world where they have become afraid to think and entertain themselves with their illusions, their pipe dreams. They wear the masks of their illusions -- self-delusions -- to cover their own failures in a world that

13Brustein, p. 342.

14Ibid., p. 342.


has become hostile to them.\textsuperscript{18}

No doubt, the play contains all of these ideas, for certainly one measure of its value is that so many readers have seen these related themes, and more. O'Neill had become the consummate artist; however, his method of developing symbolically setting, plot, and character remains essentially the same. The only difference between the use of symbolism of setting or character from this play or another one is one of degree. That is, in \textit{The Iceman Cometh}, O'Neill has placed more emphasis on his characters as symbols than on setting or plot. Most decidedly he is still brilliantly using the dramatic device of the mask, though now it is seen more in the actions and language of the characters than it is in asides or stage directions which have been cut to a minimum. The characters are revealed largely through Freudian symbols expressing their functions in the play as well as O'Neill's own attitude about escape from reality into a world of illusions from which redemption is either destructive or impossible: Donald Parritt discovers reality and commits suicide, and Larry Slade realizes his illusions and in the end is awaiting death. Even the Chorus is still there as the different characters arouse from their drunken stupor or emerge briefly from the illusory world to call one another names or to comment on the pipe dreams which they see in others but never see in themselves.

In 1911 and 1912 O'Neill spent some six months at a bar called Jimmy-the-Preist's. He paid three dollars a month to live in this three-story, vermin infested establishment among every conceivable kind of person, sailors, stevedores, Wobblies, prostitutes, and other assorted down-and-outers. Anyone who could not afford the price of a bed could for a nickel schooner of beer sleep with his head on the table. The proprietor of the saloon had earned his nickname because he looked more like an ascetic than he did a saloonkeeper. O'Neill became one of these people, and with them he sank as low as any human being can and still escape to survive in the real world. His sense of "belonging" with these derelicts was shattered when his sense of "security at the bottom of the sea" was jolted one day when he heard about the suicide of a sailor named Driscoll, who had epitomized "the very acme of belonging" when they had been friends earlier at Jimmy-the-Preist's. O'Neill brooded about this incident for a long time, because he could not understand Driscoll as the type that would just give up. Brooding, in and out of one drunken stupor, obtaining money for the drink in any way possible, ultimately he concluded that one way out was suicide.

In such a setting as this O'Neill placed the action of The Iceman Cometh, Harry Hope's bar in 1912. The saloon is a symbol of the world of illusions. Larry Slade, one of

19 Gelb, pp. 161-162.
20 Ibid., p. 171.
21 Day, p. 5.
the long time inmates of the saloon, explains to the intruder Don Parritt that it's the No Chance Saloon. It's the Bedrock Bar, the End of the Line Cafe, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller. In his sardonic, philosophical manner he continues and at the same time relates the plot of the play. "Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they are going next, because there is no farther they can go. It's a comfort to them. Although even here they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows, as you'll see for yourself if you stay here long."

The setting for the revelation of these pipe dreams is the back room and bar of this Raines-Law hotel. During all four acts of the play both the backroom and a portion of the bar are always visible, with only a black curtain on the right wall separating the two. The squalor, dirt, and filth of the place emphasize and symbolize the depths to which their pipe dreams have brought them. Even the clothes and personal appearances of most of them reflect this same state of degradation. It is however with the arrangement of the tables and chairs in the backroom that O'Neill so ably controls the action on stage and can utilize that action to reveal the nature of his characters and at the same time use them as Chorus to comment on one another.

There are three rows of tables with four chairs at

22Plays, 111, 587.
each of the first two front and five at the third, a total of thirteen. This arrangement enables O'Neill to introduce the twelve male characters that inhabit the upper rooms of the hotel. It is also O'Neill's way of developing the first of his four cycles of symbolic action which constitute the plot of the story at the same time that it permits him to introduce the characters themselves. These twelve characters along with the three prostitutes symbolize a kind of cross section of humanity. It is early in the morning after a long night of drinking, and the characters asleep at various tables in the room begin to wake up. It is primarily through the philosopher Larry Slade and the night bartender Rocky Pioggi that we begin to see the individual characters as they wake up, ask for a drink, and fall asleep again. They have stayed up all night waiting for Hickey, who came secretly twice a year to the bar, so that anybody who knew him would not see him going on a big drunk and associating with these kinds of people. He was a traveling salesman and a great storyteller and kidder: "... some kidder! Remember how he woiks up dat gag about his wife, when he's cockeyed, cryin' over her picture and den springin' it on yuh all of a sudden dat he left her in de hay wid de iceman." O'Neill has immediately succeeded in introducing the derelicts, but also has set in motion the symbolic arrival of the iceman bringing death to Harry Hope's birthday party. The illusion in which each of the characters lives is now revealed, and the cycle of the action ends as the prostitute Cora comes in saying that she has seen Hickey on his way over: "He was standin' dere. We said, 'Welcome to our city, De gang
is expectin's yuh wid deir tongues hangin' out a yard long.' And I kidded him, 'How's de iceman, Hickey? How's he doin' at your house?' He laughs and says, 'Fine.' And he says, 'Tell de gang I'll be along in a minute. I'm just finishin' figurin' out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace.'" 23

The second cycle of the action begins in Act II. The tables have been pushed together to form one long banquet table in preparation to celebrate Harry's birthday. Instead of the accustomed hilarity, a mood of darkness, despair, and fear has surrounded them like a pall. For some mysterious reason that they can not fathom Hickey has approached each one of them during the night saying that he is bringing them the message of salvation. Instead he brings them anger that soon turns into fear, because his message of salvation forces them to admit their pipe dreams and shatters their masks of delusion. In a comically intense and crazy tone Larry says, "Be God, it's a second feast of Belshazzar, with Hickey to do the writing on the wall." 24 As people drawn together because they shared the common disease of self-delusion, they have now split apart, have become bitterly inimical of one another and only too eager to pour salt on the others' wounds. Hickey admits that he had been "sicking some of you on to nag each other. . . . I knew when I cam here I wouldn't be able to be with you very long." 25

23 Plays, III, 617.
24 Ibid., p. 644.
25 Ibid., pp. 660-661.
The tables have been separated and the chairs arranged as they were in Act I as the third cycle begins. Their pipe dreams gone, and faced with a shattering reality, the characters now run pathetically in whatever direction their dreams of Tomorrow take them. "You're rid of all that nagging dream stuff now. You know you can't believe it any more," says Hickey.26 However, as they each fail miserably in facing their reality, they crawl back to the saloon with the look and feel of death all about them. Hugo Kalmar tells Harry that he feels as though he is dying. He is so crazy drunk that he wants to sleep. "But I can't sleep here with you. You look dead."27 It is the peace of death that Hickey has brought to all of them and he can't understand why killing their nagging pipe dreams has not brought them peace and happiness.

The chairs and the tables in the fourth act are arranged against the curtain separating the back room and the bar in much the same way as Leonardo da Vinci arranged the figures in the "Last Supper." It is this particular arrangement of the chairs along with other biblical symbols that figure largely in Cyrus Day's interpretation of Hickey in the role of Christ meeting with his disciples for the last time,28 an interpretation which Tiusanem, at least in part attempts to refute.29 Assembled again as a group, they are

26 *Plays*, I, I, 690.
28 *Day*, p. 281.
29 Tiusanem, p. 282.
mainly defeated, they are viciously cruel to one another, they are suicidal, and they can't get drunk. In their attacks on one another they reveal their own personal weaknesses and the real reasons for their being at Harry Hope's End of the Line Saloon. Faced with the reality of their pasts and the destruction of their pipe dreams, there can be no tomorrow. Only when they convince themselves that Hickey was a madman who murdered his wife can they as a Chorus gradually resume their former ways symbolically as expressed in the song that each of them is singing at the end.

Although the setting of O'Neill's play is 1912, the characters are all living in the past. They average in age from the early fifties to the sixties, and O'Neill carefully connects each character to some particular event in his past that is associated with what that character is trying to hide from himself in the form of self-delusion as well as from the other characters. The characters all share a collective nostalgia; however, it would be over-simplification to suggest that they are special cases of over-simplification with the past just because they are down-and-outers. They are rather victims of a past over which they have had little or no control, and O'Neill presents each character as symbolically representing that force in his past (weakness) that brought him to his present state of dereliction currently symbolized by Harry Hope's saloon.

In the same way that O'Neill presents the plot of

30Raleigh, p. 72.
his play in four symbolic cycles, he presents his characters and suggests their real symbolic function in three concentric circles. In this way he can control the movement of character and show the relationships among them both in their own privately deluded world and in the world of delusion of those about them. As the characters are presented they are given at least two roles and two masks.\footnote{Tiusanem, p. 265.}

The characters in the outer circle function essentially collectively as a Chorus to comment on the action of the play and individually as symbols to keep the cyclic movement of the play in focus. To this group belong Hugo Kalmar, Ed Mosher, Pat McGloin, Cecil Lewis, Piet Wetjoeen, James Cameron (Jimmy Tomorrow), Willie Oban, Joe Mott, Rocky Pioggi, Chuck Morello, and Harry Hope. Belonging with this group, but not living in the hotel, are the three prostitutes Pearl, Margie, and Cora, who come and go at will. Larry Slade, the ambivalent spokesman in the play, and Don Parritt compose the inner circle. Theodore Hickman, the seller of hardware inhabits the inmost circle.

In the first act of the play each of the persons is introduced and his symbolic function suggested, a function that is gradually developed in the succeeding three acts. At no time at all does O'Neill permit one to forget that his setting is biblical: the physical arrangement of the setting always suggests the image of the Last Supper in every scene.\footnote{Wright, p. 6.}
and the second act shows the tables and chairs arranged with
the characters very closely resembling the last night that
Christ spent with his twelve disciples. The characters them-
selves are shown waiting anxiously in the saloon for the ar-
rival of Hickey, the symbolic Christ or Bridegroom or as the
title of the play suggests, The Iceman.33

From their drunken all-night vigil awaiting Hickey's
arrival, the characters begin slowly to awaken from the depths
of their drunken sea wearing the masks that they use to hide
from themselves and from the world. Most of the characters
are paired into tension groups whose nagging of one another
will furnish the revelations of their pasts and at the same
time will reveal their roles in whatever is involved in the
reason for Hickey's actions when he does arrive, thus causing
the play to move forward specifically by the commentary fur-
nished by the play's two confidantes, Larry Slade and Rocky.
As a group these derelicts symbolize the melting pot of man's
dereliction.34

The first to emerge from his drunken torpor is Hugo
Kalmar, a man in his late fifties, and meticulously though
shabbily dressed. There is a foreign atmosphere about him,
and he has "the stamp of an alien radical,"35 the symbol of
the Anarchist portrayed in newspaper cartoons. When he
rouses himself laboriously he declares in a guttural style,

34Tiusanem, p. 266.
35plays, III, 574.
"The days grow hot, O Babylon! Tis cool beneath the willow trees." At this point Hugo’s meaning is not clear, but obviously this meaning must be related to both the joke that Hickey always tells upon his arrival about leaving his wife with the Iceman, as well as to the saloon and its inhabitants. Having fallen off again, he does not awake until the birthday party in Act II. As they raise their glasses in a champagne toast to Harry, Hugo again says that "ve vill trink wine beneath the willow trees." Hickey the Iceman says that the wine will be vinegar, and as Hugo passes out this time it is as though he were hiding. Immediately Larry reveals the secret of Hugo’s Yesterday by stripping from him the mask hiding the fact that Hugo had spent ten years rotting in prison for his faith. He had previously been a publisher of radical magazines, and presumably was imprisoned for his political activities. It is however in the third act that he reveals the nature of his real desires when Hickey has forced him along with all of the others to give up their pipe dreams, their Tomorrows. This time he angrily awakens when Chuck and Joe are about to murder each other for the same reason (exposing their real selves, feelings). He calls Hickey a "Got-tamned liar! Just because he wants his champagne properly iced does not prove he wants to be an aristocrat." However, in the next breath he exposes his real pipe dream, his desire for Tomorrow. "I love only the proletariat! I will lead them!

36plays, Ill, 592.
37Ibid., p. 640.
I will be like a gott to them! They will be my slaves." 38 He stops himself with a kind of dumb amazement and says to Larry that he is talking drunken foolishness. But he really was revealing his real self, because at the end of the same act, angered by what Hickey has forced upon him, he says he will drink champagne and the slaves will ice it properly. "Gottamned Hickey! When I lead the jackass mob to the sack of Babylon, I will make them hang him to a lamppost the first one!" 39

Again, at the end of the play when all of the characters have resumed their pipe dreams, Hugo is damning capitalism and calling the bourgeois stupid monkeys. He breaks into a verse of the French Revolutionary song, "Carmagnole," and the play ends with "The days grow hot, O Babylon." It is then through the character of Hugo that O'Neill symbolically relates Hugo's function with the biblical symbolism that he feels the reader must feel. Hugo symbolizes the kind of sin for which Babylon was noted, greed and power. The saloon, a symbolic Babylon, recalls this biblical story, and Hickey in one sense has come in the figure of a kind of symbolical Daniel to warn the people of imminent destruction. (Rev. 14.8). As the Iceman or Bridegroom the title symbolizes the coming of some kind of symbolic savior.

Two other characters functioning as tension characters in much the same manner as Hugo are Piet Wetjoen, the

38 Plays, Ill, 672.
39 Ibid., p. 601.
Boer, and Cecil Lewis, the Captain. Wetjoen, a man in his early fifties, is slovenly in dress and habits, but even still suggests a powerful and muscular Dutchman. He sits hunched forward with his hands propping up his head. Lewis is as English as "Yorkshire pudding," a former army officer, who sits with his head resting on his shirt and coat which he has removed in order to display an old battle scar on his shoulder. In that they are both old military types O'Neill can use them to reveal the secret of their Yesterdays and destroy each other's pipe dream as they move in their own small circle within the larger one. They can thus act as part of the Chorus and add movement and momentum to the forward moving action.

They had fought against each other in the Boer war, and now they can joke about wishing that they had shot each other. In effect, they can hide behind the mask of their own Yesterdays. At the same time that they banter with each other, they can act with the others too in such a way as to relate the three circles. With Hope they can joke about paying up their bills or getting out Tomorrow. They reveal their pipe dreams of going home, Lewis to an estate in England that is in the process of being settled; and Wetjoen accompanying him and staying as long as he likes on the way to his home in Cape Town. To Lewis England is April, the time that they will go; and to Wetjoen home is symbolized by the Veldt, space where one can be free. For neither would there be any need for booze. But under Hickey's influence they begin to badger each other.

\[40\text{Plays, III, 605.}\]
at the birthday party in Act II, and by the end of the act as a part of the Chorus they are cursing Hickey in unison. The next morning after the party they come down determined to leave to get jobs that will provide money for the passage home. As they stand confronting each other pretending to wait to say good-bye to Hope, but afraid to take the first step, they literally strip from each other the mask of their self-delusion as they destroy even their pipe dreams. Lewis can never go home because he had stolen regiment money and had used it for gambling. Wetjoen had been a coward in the war and his family had disowned him. At the end, having recaptured their pipe dreams, as part of the Chorus Lewis sings, "The Old Kent Road," symbolic of the bravado of military life; and Wetjoen sings "Waiting at the Church," an old nostalgic song symbolizing the sentimentalism of Yesterday.

Ed Mosher and Pat McGloin form another tension group. McGloin had been a policeman during the Tammany graft period, and his face reflects a former brutality and greediness that whiskey has melted down into a kind of parasitic characterlessness. He sits slumped in his chair with his head hanging sideways on one shoulder. Ed Mosher looks like an elderly edition of the village fat boy. He has always been indolent, a grafter, a con man. Having been in the circus, he wears flashy clothes, baudy rings, and a heavy brass watch chain with no watch. He is as slovenly as McGloin and he sits with his head thrown back and his big mouth gaping open.

41Plays, Ill, 176-177.
Larry Slade says that Mosher and McGloin are old pals of Harry Hope's long ago when Harry was a jitney Tammany politician, and they have become Harry's lifetime guests. Mosher is Harry's brother-in-law and had actually been a police lieutenant back in the flush times of graft when anything went. But he got too greedy, was caught, and was thrown off the force.

It is through Mosher that Harry Hope's wife Bessie is introduced into the narrative. She has been dead for twenty years and he remembers her as a good sister to him. During these twenty years Mosher has been staying with Harry, and Harry has never once during that time left the saloon. Mosher's reminiscing about Bessie reminds him of his pipe dream: Tomorrow he is going back to the circus. Willie Oban, a one-time student of law at Harvard, taunts McGloin by saying that everybody knew about not only his being involved in "the take," but also about his father. And Harry says that Bessie indeed could not tolerate her brother: "That Pat McGloin is the biggest drunken grafter that ever disgraced the police force and I hope they send him to Sing Sing for life." The characters can see the self-delusions hiding behind the masks of the others, but not one is willing to see his own self-delusion. This constant nagging of one another and mutual torment adds additional action and another dimension of feeling to the drama. After such taunting, McGloin is crushed: He will have his case reopened because he was never

42*Plays*, III, 607.

43Ibid., p. 606.
proved guilty. His pipe dream was that he "took the fall for ones higher up," and when he is exonerated he will get his old job back. 44

However, after Hickey's arrival for the birthday party, he has forced them to give up their delusions. They turn in their keys and turn viciously on each other. McGloin would rather sleep in the gutter than spend one more night under the same roof with that "loon" Hickey and that "lying circus grifter." 45 But they fail to realize their pipe dreams and return to the saloon. It is only when they realize that Hickey is mad that they regain the Dream: for McGloin it was not the right time to get reinstated, and for Mosher the circus is having bad times. They join in the Chorus at the end, McGloin singing "Tammany," which is a mild satire on Tammany Hall; and Mosher singing "Break the News to Mother," a sentimental war song relating the brave deeds of a dead hero.

Tammany destroyed McGloin, and Mosher was anything but heroic.

Among the most pathetic derelicts existing in this mire was Joe Mott. A Negro drunk disowned by his own kind, and secretly disliked by some of those in the group, he is an anomaly symbolizing his race. He is about fifty years old, flashily dressed in clothes that were at one time sporty, and on his brown-skinned face he carries a scar symbolic of the belligerence of his race. He is sleeping as his head nods up and down. Sleepily he wakes up to ask Rocky the bartender


45 *The Fool of Fox Hill* by Edward K. Valentine, 1938, p. 86.
for some booze, anybody's, he doesn't care whose. He had been dreaming of Hickey's arrival, his drummer's jokes, and a bankroll that will keep all of them drunk for two weeks. It is Joe who introduces one of the outsiders of the group into the play, one who is to play an important part in the drama and particularly in the life of Larry Slade: "Say, Larry, how 'bout dat young guy, Parrit, came back to look you up last night and rented a room?" In this manner O'Neill linked the characters within circles, and Joe will become the butt of the displeasure of many of them.

Larry shortly reveals that Joe had a Yesterday in the same flush period as that of Mosher, McGloin, and Harry: he ran a colored gambling house and was one hell of a sport. Wetjoen calls Joe a nigger, and Lewis apologizes by saying that Joe is the whitest colored man that he had ever known, a slur even worse than the first one. Joe's instant violent anger turns to a good-natured grin. Nobody in the old days would have dared to call him a nigger because he was the tough leader of the Dirty Half-Dozen Gang. His Yesterday was the ownership of the only Negro gambling house in the city. Everybody in those days said Joe was alright: "You're alright, Joe, because you are white."

After Hickey's arrival, however, Joe is completely

46 ibid., p. 583.
47 ibid., p. 505.
48 ibid., p. 598.
49 ibid., p. 599.
50 ibid., p. 600.
changed. His pacifism has turned into belligerence. In an aggressive tone he declares that he will not drink with Hickey ever again. "Listen to me, you white boys! Don't you get it into your heads I's pretendin' to be what I ain't, or dat I ain't proud to be what I is, get me? Or you and me's going to have trouble." This is the mask that Joe wears to cover his self-delusion. He is viciously replied to by Margie, one of the three prostitutes: "What a noive! just because we act nice to him, he gets a swelled nut! If dat ain't a coon all over!" And her boyfriend, Chuck, says that he will "moider de nigger." This action is a prelude to the brutal fight that occurs between Joe and Chuck in the third act after Hickey has driven all of them into a frenzy. Now, to Chuck Joe is a black bastard, to Rocky he is a "doity nigger"; and to Joe all of them are white sons of bitches. Joe throws his key down on the bar and says that he is finished with this dump for keeps. He is leaving to join his own people because he is sick and tired of messing around with white men. He gulps down his whiskey and defiantly throws the glass on the floor. His pipe dream is now revealed. He comes back drunk because he didn't have enough guts to stick up some one, so he started panhandling drinks in some joint. His excuse is that he wasn't fool enough to get mixed up in some crap game, "not while Hickey's around. Crazy people puts a jinx on you."
In the end he sings with the Chorus his song, "All I Got Was Sympathy," a lyric about a Negro in trouble telegraphing his baby for help; but all he got was sympathy.

James Cameron, Jimmy Tomorrow, symbolizes the Tomorrows that all of the characters are waiting for. A one-time Boer correspondent, he is now in his fifties, fat like a bloodhound with jowls, still with an intelligent glint in his eye. At the same time he is much like a Victorian old maid. He sleeps with his chin on his chest and his hands folded in his lap. He awakens with a maudlin speech to the bickering Lewis and Wetjoen that the Boer War is over, that each had played fairly and had played the game until the better man won and then they shook hands: they are all brothers now under the flag on which the sun never sets.

Then with tears in his eyes he quotes with great sentiment: "Ship me somewhere east of Suez --.

In the next instant he says, "Tomorrow, yes. It's high time I straightened out and got down to business again." Immediately he falls back into drunken sleep and begins to talk about no more loafing around, sprucing himself up, and having a well-groomed appearance. Still dreaming he says that he won't go for the interview with his old paper because when he was out two or three years ago he met an old friend who told him if he would wait a while before making application that he could demand a great deal more than his old salary had paid him for report-

55 _Plays_, III, 599.
56 _Ibid._, p. 600.
ing. Hope looks at this moment at Jimmy and says that "Poor Jimmy is off on his pipe dream again." 57

Hickey is relentless; he collars Jimmy and tells him that he can know no peace until he has got his old job again, and he cannot put it off until tomorrow. At the birthday party Jimmy is plainly drunk, but it has no effect on him. Beneath his pathetic assumption of gentlemanly poise he is frightened and shrinking. Jimmy has pretended beneath his mask that when he returned to Cape Town after the war that he had discovered his wife with another man and that he had subsequently taken to booze. Hickey interrupts and tells Jimmy that all of them know that Jimmy was already drinking before he came back and "found her in the hay with a staff officer." The real fact is that Jimmy was glad she left him because he was sick of "her hating him for getting drunk." 58 The self-delusion is stripped away, and Jimmy stares at him strickenly.

In the third act, Jimmy is trying to leave, but before he goes he tries to sneak Larry's drink. Hickey sees him just as he is about to down it and stops him, whereupon Jimmy throws the drink in Hickey's face. "You dirty swine!" 59 he says and dashes from the room. Having failed in attaining his Tomorrow Jimmy returned and now has a face that looks embalmed. He admits that he was always a drunkard and that

57 Plays, III, 604.
58 Ibid., p. 657.
59 Ibid., p. 686.
he was fired because of it. He has nothing left now; the raw hurt is laid bare. And with the Chorus he sings "A Wee Dock and Doris," symbolizing no harbor and no love.

The person most chronically addicted to alcohol and the one whose nervous system is all but destroyed is Willie Oban, a brilliant drop-out from the Harvard School of Law whose father had died in prison. His faded blond looks are in keeping with his scarecrow appearance, and his clothes look like dirty blotting paper. His shoes are wrecks and they are falling apart; he wears no socks and his bare feet show through the holes that he has tried to lace with twine and wire. He sits with his arm hanging down and his head resting on the table, now and then twitching and muttering in his sleep.60 He is the symbol of the lost son who is searching for the father that he both loves and hates, and his every utterance and action is one of anguish and torment. As he is jolted back to life twitching and mumbling, his first words are, "It's a lie! Papa! Papa!"61 Rocky and Larry are the only ones now awake, and as they see Willie in the worst state that he has ever been in they remark that he is the lucky one among them because he hasn't much further to go. From them comes the information that Willie's father was a gangster who had made a fortune from the bucketshop game before the cops caught him. In his twitching dream, as if in response to the accusation, Willie yells, "It's a God-damned lie! Oh,

60 [Plays, III, 577.]
61 [Ibid., p. 580.]
Papa! Jesus! Willie awakes again, now drunk from the huge drink that he had swallowed and tells about his life. His father had forced him to go to Harvard against his will in an attempt to appease his own conscience, to add some class to the family, and to have a lawyer close at hand. It was not long that he was there before everyone knew who his father was, and he was brutally taunted. However, in bitterness, defiance, and shame he discovered the loophole of whiskey and through it escaped his father's jurisdiction. Abruptly he says that he wishes Hickey, the Great Salesman, or Death (an intuitive statement that they are one) would come. He then bangs on the table with his knuckles and sings a dirty version of "Sailor Lad." Ironically he concludes by saying that now a "good woman enters our mariner's life." This is obviously a satirical remark on the prostitute in the song, but at the same time it introduces the theme of the symbolic levels on which the women both in and out of the play will contribute to the structure of the drama.

The next time Willie speaks is after the arrival of the peacegiving Hickey. They are all at the birthday party and when Willie is offered a drink he refuses it because he is tapering off. His pipe dream is revealed when he says that Hickey has lent him the money to buy back his clothes so that he can go down to the D. A.'s office and ask for a job. For after all, the D. A. and his father were

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62 *Plays*, 111, 581.
friends, and his father certainly had been guilty of no crime. The next morning he comes down dressed, but his face is sick and his nerves are in a shocking state of shakes. He eyes the bottle on the bar and says that he didn't come down just because he needed booze. His legs are shaking so badly that he says that he will sit down and wait for a few minutes. Immediately he spies the young outsider Parritt who has come to find Larry, and he offers his legal services to Parritt. Parritt answers that he doesn't need a lawyer because the cops are not after him. We find of course that they are. Hickey enters the bar, and in great trepidation Willie glances at him, jumps from his chair, and leaves, only to return in the end utterly defeated. But in chorus with the others in the end after Hickey has left he sings again the "Sailor Lad."

The two bartenders are Rocky Pioggi and Chuck Morello and they symbolize the low Italian's association with crime during this period. Both are of Italian extraction, Rocky swarthy and beady-eyed; and Chuck thick-necked and barrel-chested, swarthy, and dressed in the manner of a sport. As outsiders they are free to come and go at will, but because of their frequenting the hole, their lives have become involved with the inhabitants of the Bottom of the Sea Saloon. They both, however, have their pipe dreams or self-delusions that are shattered upon Hickey's arrival. Rocky is a fairly goodnatured guy who pretends that just because he keeps the job of bartender that he is not a pimp with the two prostitutes Pearl and Margie in his stable. Chuck and Cora, also a prostitute, plan to marry and move to a farm in the country. His pipe
dream is that Tomorrow they are going to marry and the fact that Cora was a prostitute wouldn't bother him so long as she didn't run around with other guys after their marriage. With the coming of the peacemaker they are forced to give up these delusions, and former friends become the bitterest of enemies. Rocky is forced to admit that he is a pimp, and Chuck is forced to see that he can not marry because of Cora's past: he even becomes Cora's pimp. With their delusions returned to them, in the end they can sing as a part of the Chorus. Rocky sings "You Beautiful Doll," symbolic of his two hookers' returning to their former profession; and Chuck sings "The Curse of an Aching Heart," symbolizing the kind of romantic slob he was and what he might have had if he had not been what he was and Cora had not been a whore.

The three girls symbolize the typical streetwalkers who appear in the outer circle of the play. Pearl and Margie work as a pair, are close friends, and dress like the whores they are. Pearl is Italian and Margie is of mixed blood. But as always when O'Neill is describing this type of woman, they are plump, pretty, lazy, good-natured, and contented with life.64 Cora is a thin peroxide blonde, older than Pearl and Margie, her face showing the wear and tear of her trade, but still showing a doll-like prettiness.65 They too move freely back and forth because they are not prisoners of the saloon. However, each has her pipe dream: Pearl and Margie

64Plays, I, 611.
65Ibid., p. 615.
are not in Rockey's stable; they are tarts but certainly not whores. Cora is a prostitute, but that profession will end when she marries Chuck and moves to the country. These dreams are destroyed when Hickey arrives to save them. Pearl and Margie fight with Rockey because he calls them whores. Cora and Chuck fight and don't get married, and they all become enemies and fight with one another. The peace that Hickey has brought them is hate and anger not to be assuaged until they too join the Chorus in the end. Cora sings "The Oceana Roll," the title of which is symbolic of her profession. Pearl and Margie sing "Everybody's Doing it," the title of which along with that of Cora's symbolizes a return to the trade.

There are three other women who do not appear in the play, but whose characters are important to the plot of the play. Rosa Parritt, the mother of Don Parritt, has long been the leader of a Leftist movement, and as such she is a symbol of the liberated woman anarchist whose pipe dream was to lead the proletariat to victory. A former mistress of Larry Slade, who had left the movement years before, Rosa had made no secret to her son that many men were her lovers. In his eyes she was a whore. He sold her out to the police, and she now lies rotting in jail. It is from this act that Parritt is running in his search to find Larry Slade.

For twenty years Harry Hope has not ventured outside The End of the Line Saloon, not since the funeral of his wife Bessie. For love of her because she was such a good woman, he has given up his political career. And to her brother
Mosher she was always good and kind, and she even treated McGloin with mild toleration. The truth was that she was a nagging shrew that despised her brother and nagged the hell out of Harry. In fact, she is the symbol of the Xantippes of the world.

The mysterious figure that moves like a pall over the entire play, however, is Theodore Hickman's wife Evelyn. Always Hickman comes to Harry's boisterously joking that he had left his wife home in bed with the iceman. This was an allusion to the vulgar joke, and it usually brought down the house. This time Hickey comes with no mentioning of Evelyn at all. Her fate is gradually woven into the plot as Hickey reveals that she is first dead, later that she has been murdered, and finally that it was he who had shot her. He had killed her because of her pipe dream which was also her symbolic function in the play, that she could reform him, and forgive him again and again for all of the terrible things that he had done to her, even the syphilis she had contracted from him. To Hickey she was not a wife but rather the symbolic forgiving and everloving mother. He shot her because he couldn't take her forgiving him any more.

Harry Hope is the proprietor of this run-down gin house, the remnant and symbol of a one-time petty politician that has grown out of favor after the city was rid of the Tammany Hall crowd. A friendly and good natured drunk he surily and gruffly houses the others who are always going to

66plays, 111, 603.
pay up tomorrow or be tossed out. He banter and jokes freely with all of them, teasing them that they will get nothing else to drink until they pay up, and in the next instant setting the drinks on the house. He is now sixty and awaiting the arrival of Hickey who comes every year to celebrate Hope's birthday. Rattling about like a bag of bones, he hides behind a truculent manner that does not fool anyone, not even his pretending that he is deaf. But now he sits at the table with the others waiting for twelve o'clock. Awakened by Willie Oban's nightmare about his father, Hope peers over one eye of his twisted dime store glasses and tells Rocky to give Willie a drink so that they can get some rest. Gruffly he banter with Rocky about cheating him at the cash register; he is going to fire him and Chuck because nobody ever made a sucker out of him. With that pronouncement he falls asleep, only to be immediately rudely awakened by the screams of Willie in a state of delirium tremens. Angrily he shouts that there will be no more drinks on the house until hell freezes over. No one believes Hope, and all of them begin to slash one another about their pasts. Hope announces that he had good friends in high up places that he could go visit now if he wanted to. Tomorrow he might do just that. When Larry Slade tells him he won't, he answers by saying that Larry is the old wise guy philosopher that he is going to toss out Tomorrow. And when Margie, Pearl, and Cora come in he remarks that he bets Bessie is turning over in her grave,
but he consoles himself that at least he won't let them use his rooms for their trade.

Then suddenly Hickey appears announcing that he has come to bring them peace and an end to their pipe dreams. He taunts Hope, who has not been out of the saloon for the past twenty years into declaring that Tomorrow he will walk around the ward. Hope, like all the others, hates Hickey, and that hatred Hope turns on all the others in the bitterest of name calling. At the birthday party Hickey suggests that Hope didn't really love Bessie at all, and Hope turns on him with "you son of a bitch frying-pan-peddling bastard! I'll show you!" Later Hickey is still goading Hope, who pretends that the reason he has not gone out is that he has rheumatism, a fact which everybody knows. Terrified, he forces himself to go out the door and hesitantly down the street; but immediately he comes running back in crying that a car had almost run him down: it simply was unsafe to be on the streets. He grabs the bottle, slops down a drink and pours another. In his fright and anger he tells Hickey to shut his big mouth because he is a worse gabber than that "nagging bitch, Bessie was." The dream at last is gone: he has no political friends and he hated Bessie. All he wants now is to pass out drunk and have a little peace, but the liquor has no effect on him or on the others, and his face is the mask of death. It is Hope who interprets Hickey's remarks about killing his wife

68 plays, 111, 660.

69 ibid., p. 692.
Evelyn as insanity, and so all of them can return to their old delusions. Hope says he still has friends at the Hall and he joins the Chorus singing "She's the Sunshine of Paradise Alley," obviously a symbolic reference to Bessie in whose love he is now safe again.

The inner circle of the play consists of two characters whose lives are ambiguously intertwined, Larry Slade and Donald Parritt. Larry Slade is a man of sixty, white haired, and so filled with vermin that his long hairy hands are always methodically scratching. Yet he has the meditative face of the mystic and the tongue of sardonic humor. Throughout the play it is he who is able to see the self-delusions in all the other characters, and it is he who is the spokesman in relating the exposition concerning the background of all the characters. It is he who, for example, can even sardonically point out to Harry Hope that he never loved his wife Bessie because she was such a nagging bitch. Everyone in the play naturally accepts what Larry says because they all have grown accustomed to his bitter mumblings, and yet all of them respect him for his superior wisdom and particularly for the great pity that he always displays. To all of them Larry is the old priest, the Old Wise Guy, Old Cemetery, and the Old Foolosopher. All of these epithets fit him because

70 Plays, 111, 574.
71 Ibid., p. 638.
72 Ibid., p. 639.
73 Ibid., p. 578.
he seems to know intuitively about people and things that will happen. It is he who alone is awake at the beginning of the play and he introduces the play's theme and the nature of the characters. He will be glad to pay up Tomorrow, "and I know my fellow inmates will promise to do the same. They've all a touching credulity concerning tomorrows. It'll be a great day for them, tomorrow -- the Feast of All Fools, with bands playing! Their ships will come in, loaded to the gunwales with cancelled regrets and promises fulfilled and clean slates and new leases!" 74

It is the life of a pipe dream that gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of them he says, drunk or sober. Herein lies the genesis of his own pipe dream or self-delusion, one that is perhaps more serious than the pipe dreams of the others because Larry says that he has no pipe dream at all. Formerly he had been a member of an anarchist group that believed in equality for all, but he became disillusioned and left the Movement and came to Harry Hope's Last Resort Saloon where he took a seat in the grandstand of philosophical detachment where he could observe the foolishness of others. It becomes clear however that the real reason that he left the Movement was that he had fallen in love with Rosa Parritt, one of the leaders of the organization; and he could not bear her sleeping freely with other men. Now his only wish is to die; this is his pipe dream for Tomorrow, because he is a coward.

74 Plays, 111, 578.
That pipe dream and his past will gradually be discovered through the arrival of Donald Parritt, who has come to Harry's to find Larry. Larry denies any knowledge of Parritt, but Parritt's persistence forces him into recognition. Afraid of what Parritt has come to tell him, Larry tries not to listen. But as they all sit waiting for Hickey, Parritt begins to unfold a bizarre story that begins with his hating all women because they are whores. This is a sore reminder to Larry of the past.

It is only Parritt who does not believe in Hickey—perhaps because he is an outsider—but even he fears Hickey's message of peace. At the same time there seems to be some kind of bond between Parritt and Hickey, one that Larry and Hickey recognize, but one that Parritt refuses to see. Hickey seemed to recognize Parritt on his arrival: "I know damned well I recognized something about you. We're members of the same lodge—in some way." 75 Hickey says that he is glad that Parritt has come because Parritt can help him wake Larry up to the real truth—"I don't even like the guy, or the feeling that there is something between us." 76 Later on in the third act Parritt expresses a growing fear of Hickey, "especially since he told us his wife was dead. It's that queer feeling he gives me that I'm mixed up with him some way." 77

75 Plays, III, 624.
76 Ibid., p. 643.
77 Ibid., p. 666.
Larry's fear of Parritt becomes clearer at the birthday party, the second feast of Belshazzar, when Hickey tells Larry that Parritt has come to him because Larry has to punish him, so that he could forgive himself. Hickey also tells Parritt that he thinks Larry is getting wise to himself and in the end Parritt can rely on him for help. Again forcing himself on Larry, Parritt tells him that he knows the real reason that Larry walked out on the Movement: Rosa was unfaithful to him. In a way Parritt says Larry is his father, and in act three Parritt says, "... if the truth were known, you were my father." However, the two quarrel violently under the influence of Hickey.

The birthday party turned out to be a wake, and the next morning one of reckoning. Parritt now confesses that he sold out his mother, but he insists that his betrayal was solely to get money because he had got stuck on a whore (the reason for his having said earlier he hated all women). As punishment for his crime Parritt suggests that he will jump off the fire escape, but Larry again denies him and says that he still loves Rosa. At this point Larry can stand no more. Even though bitterly angry with Hickey and having sworn that he would have no more drinks on him, he tells Rocky to set them up. He will get blind to the world even if it were the Iceman of Death treating. But Hickey is not yet finished with his message of peace. He says to Larry, "Yes,

78[plays, I, 667.]
79[ibid., p. 680.]
Larry, you've got to settle with him. I'm leaving you entirely in his hands. He'll do as good a job as I could at making you give up that old grandstand bluff."

Larry is forced at last to face reality; he must become the executioner of his own son. Parritt's pipe dream must now be destroyed: he admits that the reason he betrayed his mother was not for the money, but because he hated her for being a whore. In the end Larry sits stonily looking ahead as he hears the crash of Parritt's body as it hits the ground. With an intense, bitter sincerity he begs for death: "Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now!"

Theodore Hickman, the Iceman who cometh, and the most symbolic character in the play, occupies the inmost circle. It is his appearance to celebrate Harry Hope's birthday at twelve o'clock that night that all of the characters in various stages of drunken despondency have been waiting up to see. He does not arrive until ten o'clock, and all of the characters are anxious that this time he isn't coming. But this time he arrives not the jokester laughing about leaving his wife home in bed with the Iceman, but with a new message: I'm just finishin' figurin' out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace." He still has all the mannerisms of the symbolical salesman, an easy flow of glib speech, persuasive

80 Plays, III, 689.
81 Ibid., p. 727.
82 Ibid., p. 617.
convincingness, an efficient business-like approach, and talent for kidding. From the moment he enters he dominates the play, and the last act is virtually a solo performance. The change in him is immediate from the moment that he refuses to take a drink with them and says that he is going upstairs to rest for a couple of hours. They want to think at first that he is kidding them, but as Hickey begins to speak directly to the pipe dream or self-delusion of each individual, uneasiness gives way to fear. He has given up his pipe dream: "Well, I finally had the guts to face myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that's been making me miserable, and do what I had to do for the happiness of all concerned -- and then all at once I found I was at peace with myself and I didn't need booze anymore." He tells them that he has left Evelyn, his wife, at home alone in the bedroom, this time not joking, and that he has been walking around trying to think up a way to save them from their pipe dreams. He is able even to recognize in Donald Parritt, a stranger, the need to be saved, and in some intuitive way he seems actually to know Parritt.

Hickey particularly directs his attack at Larry Slade because he will be the most difficult to redeem. It is for this reason that he elicits the aid of Parritt to pursue and taunt and force Larry into self-recognition. The others present no real problems; for example, shortly he has Pearl and Margie admitting that they are whores, Rocky that

83 Plays, III, 621.
he is a pimp, Harry that he had no political friends, and that he hated his wife. In short the whole birthday party is a complete fiasco ending with everyone trying to escape from Hickey. It is indeed, as Larry says, the second feast of Belshazzar with Hickey doing the writing on the wall. No one escapes Hickey's message of peace, and the next morning, the time of the third act, Hickey is down to goad all of them into the action of facing their pipe dreams. Under Hickey's message of peace he has succeeded in making all of them the bitterest of enemies, and they resort to putting names to the self-delusion of one another in a manner like rubbing salt into wounds. Their frightened and pitiful attempts to face their realities end in such abject defeat that as human beings they are shattered as symbolized by their complete inability to get drunk no matter how much booze they pour down. Hickey's peace has turned into a furor and they turn on him in rage, goading him about his wife's being in bed with the Iceman. They are stunned to be told that Evelyn is dead.

Hickey knew that they would all fail to face their self-delusions. He tells Rocky when he sees Harry Hope coming back to the saloon: "Of course, he's coming back. So are all the others. By tonight they'll all be here again. You dumbbell, that's the whole point!" That "whole point" which critics have overlooked or ignored is explained by Hickey himself in the whole of the last act when he talks about his past life and particularly reveals his motivation for having

84plays, 111, 688.
come as a salesman. This revelation is also his pipe dream. Hickey had been born the son of a Hoosier preacher of hell fire and brimstone. In return for whose message he bilked the suckers of all their money. Hickey himself became a pool hall bum, friendly with all the traveling salesmen coming to town and frequenting the local brothel. He married Evelyn, the richest girl in town, whose pipe dream was to reform him. However, Hickey continued to be a scoundrel, even giving Evelyn syphilis. Yet always she forgave him until finally he could not stand her forgiveness any more. He shot her to free her and himself only to find in the telling of the story that he really shot her because he hated her: "Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!"85

Hickey came to the End of the Line Saloon to seek revenge for the deficiencies in his own nature by vicariously transferring his guilt (or at least forcing them to share that guilt) to the derelicts living there. He knew that they would not be able to look into the mirror of reality, and there was a diabolical glee in his watching them destroy themselves. "It was like a game, sizing people up quick, spotting what their pet pipe dreams were, and then kidding 'em along that line, pretending you believed what they wanted to believe about themselves. Then they liked you, they trusted you, they wanted to buy something to show their gratitude."86 What they bought was fear, desperation, and death, as they

85. Plays, I11, 716.
86. Ibid., p. 711.
unmasked their self-delusions. As a Chorus chanting with equal glee they watch the police take Hickey away.

The Iceman Cometh then is a play about illusions and reality. These illusions are a composite of what each character in the play symbolizes individually and what they as a whole group symbolize collectively. In presenting his play as some kind of parable on the destiny of man, O'Neill has clothed his figures in all kinds of biblical imagery to such an extent that no one reading the play could be unaware that he is not making symbolic parallels. Hickey's ambivalent character symbolizes and suggests the secular saviour Freud who came to make man see the illusions of his life and at the same time the saviour Christ who came to save man from his sins through his own sacrifice. Twelve times in the play there are specific allusions to Hickey as Christ. He comes on the scene for the midnight party, he has but a short time in which to complete his work, he has come to save them and bring them peace, there is a light about his eyes, he refers to his friends as "Brother," and he is shortly going to go on a long trip. He is also the son of a minister, and even his name means "divine gift." Nor can one overlook the scenic arrangements symbolizing the Last Supper that Christ had with his disciples (the twelve men in the saloon) and more than all, the biblical images surrounding Parritt as the betrayer Judas: he has come from a long way off (California/

87 Matthew, 27.5

Judea), he has betrayed his mother, he fell from a high place (Judas hanged himself and Parritt fell from the fire escape).

Even the women are clothed with the same overtones. They symbolize not only the Marys in the Christian image, but also Woman as O'Neill saw her. He makes them symbols of the blessed Virgin by giving them names: Bessie, the diminutive of Elizabeth, was a kinswoman of Mary; Cora (Corinna) means "maiden"; Margie (Margaret) means "pearl"; Rosa is a great symbol in Catholic art for Mary; and Evelyn means "little Eve," and Eve is a type of Mary traditionally called the New Eve. As different aspects of Woman, Evelyn in her loving and forgiving relationship with Hickey symbolizes the mother role; Bessie symbolizes the role of wife, and Pearl, Margie, and Cora symbolize the earth mother through their roles as prostitutes; and Rosa symbolizes the female struggling to be free of any male dominance. In every respect they collectively symbolize (and as so support the Christ-disciples imagery) Mary the Spiritual Mother and Eve the Physical Mother.

Hickey comes then not as the Bridegroom of Christ, a symbol of man's hope for redemption, victory over death, and hope of salvation in a world to come, but rather as the Iceman,

89 Loughead, p. 221.
90 Ibid., p. 225.
91 Ibid., p. 241.
92 Andreach, p. 95.
a symbol of Death. He spreads not love but hate, and by so doing O'Neill suggests that religion is an illusion just as Freud said that it was; yet at the same time man can not live without illusions. Each of the characters is his own story and together they make up one big story, symbolized by Larry at the end of the play: All men wait for him, but only those who have shed their ultimate illusions are aware that the final end and realized meaning of their lives is death.
MEMORY AS HISTORY: A JOURNEY INTO HELL

I give you the original of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play — write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones. ¹

It took O'Neill over two years to complete Long Day's Journey Into Night. He worked on it mornings, afternoons, and evenings; and often he emerged from his study with eyes red from weeping. He explained to his wife Carlotta that he had to write the play because it was a thing that had haunted him all his life and he had to forgive his family and himself. ² He had to tell the world the truth as artistically as he could about a heritage that compelled him to go back in time to his family roots. To Arthur Hobson Guinn many years before beginning Long Day's Journey Into Night he wrote that he was "acutely conscious of the force behind life -- Fate, God, our biological past creating our present." ³ Long Day's Journey Into Night even more than all his other plays draws from the past in becoming "a play of old sorrow written in tears and blood,"

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 7. The collected edition used above was published prior to the first publication of Long Day's Journey into Night. Succeeding references to this play will be indicated by Long Day.

² Gelb, pp. 6-7.

³ Ibid., p. 4.
brutally revealing through symbols of setting, plot, and character the forces that shaped him, an evaluation of his tragic vision, and some explanation of his failures as a human being.

For O'Neill the present was a cauldron in which the past always bubbled. To understand, then, what he was he had to examine that past, however painful it might be. Always he was torn between love for a father he admired for such traits as having been a self-made, successful man, a good provider, even tender at times, devoted completely to his wife Ella; yet a man complex in that he was willing to sacrifice his artistic talents in playing Shakespeare for the wealth he was assured of by playing the role of Edmond Dantes in The Count of Monte Cristo, a man obsessed by property, a proud and usually practical man who could not comprehend that his sons Jamie and Eugene did not think alike nor did they even like their father. O'Neill hated his mother for being a drug addict, and yet such ambivalent feelings were couched in guilt and shame, because it was his own birth that had been so excruciatingly difficult and painful to Ella that had precipitated her use of huge doses of morphine that led to her addiction. Jamie was always jealous of Ella's favoritism toward Eugene, and she blamed him cruelly for having exposed her baby Edmond to a fatal attack of measles by deliberately coming into the baby's room. Jamie became a drunk and the object of his father's venom.

The method that O'Neill uses in examining these complex and ambivalent relationships is Sophoclean, that is,
moving back and forth from the present to the past by means of highly functional and controlled dialogue; and the impact of the play is to be found in its psychological revelation. For example, the characters protect one another by stopping and interrupting in mid sentence any reference to a subject that will cause pain to the other at the beginning of the play; but as the play progresses the interruptions cease and the subject that was shunned because it brought such painful memories of the past now is revealed in all its brutal cruelty. This method of examining his characters is even more meaningful in that the characters are suffering from psychological and spiritual defects rather than sociological and biological ones. It is precisely this method of character development that makes the play one of the most profound, most human plays in world drama.

In Long Day's Journey into Night O'Neill returns like Ella and Jim Downey in All God's Chillun Got Wings, Margaret Anthony Brown in The Great God Brown, Nina Leeds in Strange Interlude, Lavinia Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, and most of the characters in The Iceman Cometh into the house of the past for punishment in the hope that through such penance redemption would come. This house is filled with characters tortured as any in Dante's "Inferno" or as dismal and desolate as any in Eliot's Wasteland. This journey backward is a kind


of self-directed psychoanalysis; and as the title indicates would imply some kind of progress. Ironically it is a progress backward into the past: into fog for Mary, into cynicism and alcohol for Jamie, down the wrong road for James, and beyond night for Edmund.

O'Neill chose as the setting for the haunted heroes of *Long Day's Journey into Night* the summer home of the Tyrone family. In this his most autobiographical play he made little attempt to disguise the source of his characters or their actions, chiefly memory, which comprise whatever plot the play has and at the same time functions to reveal them as people. It is this fact that has caused many critics such as David Dash to view the play as a kind of pitiless exposure of heartbreak house. However, it is this same kind of time treatment, as Tom Driver points out, that Sophocles used in *Oedipus Rex*. Redford is critically sound when he suggests that one should judge the play as art. What is important is not the source, but rather the use of the materials.

This house James O'Neill had bought for his family as a place to escape the summer heat of New York. It was the only home that the family knew during the years in which

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7Raleigh, p. 83.


James was professionally acting, and the family spent many times there together. To each member of the O'Neill family this house had especial meaning. To James it was a symbol of his success and achievement, to Ella it was a poorly constructed and ill-appointed house and therefore a source of shame, to Jamie it was a retreat from his binges in New York, and to Eugene it had multiple significances: it was a reminder of his father's miserliness, his mother's shame, the sea that he loved, and a reminder throughout his life of an unhappy home (the reason he was always so interested in houses as homes).

To O'Neill, then, it was a house of memories to which he could return in the symbolic journey for identity and expiation. In the play the house functions symbolically in relationship to the actions of the characters as well as to his method of revealing them. It is a large house with a porch surrounding a large part of it. Its gently sloping lawn fronts the sea, which always to O'Neill symbolized poetic aspirations and fulfilled desires as in the character of Edmund he explains in the lyrical passages in the fourth act.

As the play opens on an August morning about 8:30 in 1912, Mary and James Tyrone (symbolic of his real parents Mary Ella and James O'Neill) are just coming from breakfast into the living room which will be the background of all the action in the play. To the right is a formal parlor that is never occupied. It is stiff and formal, and as it fronts the house it is a symbol of the mask that the house wears just as it is
the symbol of the mask that the Tyrones try to present to the outside world. It in the final scene of the play will be a symbol of Mary Tyrone's regression into the memory of the past when she is heard playing the piano in a girlish, awkward manner after having reverted to adolescence through the journey of dope. To the left is a dark, windowless back parlor that is never used except as a passage to the dining room. This room is to be equated with the symbol of fog into which Mary passes just as she passes through the dark parlor to escape from the accusing eyes and accusations of her family. On one wall stands a book shelf with a picture of Shakespeare above it containing works by Balzac, Zola, Stendhal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Engels, Kropotkin, Ibsen, Strindberg, Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde, and Ernest Dowson. On the other wall are sets of Dumas, Hugo, Charles Lever, Gibbon, histories of Ireland, and three sets of Shakespeare. These books are always in view throughout the play and they symbolize the eternal battle between Edmund Tyrone (Eugene O'Neill) and his father James Tyrone (James O'Neill). To James Tyrone these books represent anarchism, the road down which he thinks Edmund is traveling, and in both the first and fourth acts this theme is the predominant cause of the quarrels between him and his father. At the same time these books represent a difference in values, they also represent the theme gradually developed of one's being always trapped by the past no matter what he tries to be in the present as Mary poignantly cries out at her husband when he accuses her of dope addiction.11

11Long Day, p. 87.
Both the upper rooms of the house and the outside never appear on stage, but they too have their symbolic functions. When Mary leaves her room and goes into the spare bedroom as she has done before when taking dope, Jim immediately suspects her of resuming the habit. He is right, because it is to that room that she escapes into the darkness of drugs at the same time that the fog is gradually blowing in from the sea. As the fog moves in from the sea gradually enshrouding the house, Mary can be heard wandering around in the darkness upstairs as she slowly moves into the fog of the past. Fog and the foghorn are an important part of the setting of the play, and from the first to the last play it has always been to O'Neill a symbol of man's inability to know himself, or other men, or his destiny.12

Fog and the foghorn are referred to some nineteen times in the play, and always at some critical moment in the lives of the characters. Even the division of the play into four acts supports this most symbolic function of the fog as both theme and setting. Act I occurs early on a bright sunny morning, and Mary and James look cheerful as they come in. Mary looks out of the window toward the sea and says that she is glad that the fog has gone.13 All of the family appear fairly amicable toward one another. Toward the end of the act, they begin to prick the skin with mild accusations and reminders of the past. When James prepares to go out to cut

12Falk, p. 181.
the hedge he tells Mary that it appears as if the day is going
to be clear and sunny, but she replies that they must take
advantage of the sunshine because the fog always comes back.14

As the second act opens it is about a quarter of one,
and no light is coming into the room. The day has grown sultry
and there is a faint haziness in the air. Mary comes down-
stairs after a restless morning, looks out of the window and
sees the fog beginning to come in.15 She begs them not to
leave her because she will be left all alone.

By half past six in the evening, the time of the
third act, the fog has rolled in from the Sound and hangs
like a white curtain outside the windows. Waiting the re-
turn of James and the boys from town, Mary in her aloneness
has bribed Cathleen the Irish maid with a drink to stay in
the sitting room to talk with her. A foghorn moans in the
distance. Mary says that it is the foghorn that she hates
because it "won't let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and
warning you, and calling you back."16 The fog she now loves
because it hides a person from the world and the world from
a person. "How thick the fog is. I can't see the road. All
the people in the world could pass by and I would never know.
I wish it was always that way. It's getting dark already.
It will soon be night, thank goodness."17 The fog now is

14Long Day, p. 42.
15Ibid., p. 82.
16Ibid., p. 99.
17Ibid., p. 102.
symbolically inseparable from her drug escape from reality.

Once more the foghorn sounds from the bay and is followed by a chorus of bells, muffled by the fog from the craft anchored in the harbor. Mary does not hear; only her hands flutter at the sound. The symbolic leit-motif of the horn followed by the warning chorus of the ships' bells emerges indicative of the family fate, sounding whenever that fate asserts itself: Mary's fate and its effect on the members of the family are inevitable. Edmund returns with the dreadful news from Dr. Hardy that he has tuberculosis to find his mother beyond approach. In a mixture of rage, hate, and love he condemns her bitterly: "It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother." The pin pricks of the first act have now become sabres gouging and twisting in the flesh. Mary goes to the window where the foghorn is moaning and the bells are crying.

As the curtain rises on the final act the foghorn is heard, and the fog hangs denser than ever about the house. James staggers in drunk to find that Edmund has turned on all the lights. In horror, he declares that everything is too bright (he lives in the fog too), and that they will drive him to the poorhouse yet. Whereupon he goes about turning off all the lights. In the most poetic passages in the play (and there are many) Edmund attempts to explain something of what he really is and feels inside to his father and thus ultimately suggests the complete symbol of the fog. "The
fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here. Or any of the other places down the avenue. I couldn't see but a few feet ahead. I didn't meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted -- to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself. Out beyond the harbor, where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land. The fog and the sea seemed part of each other. It was like walking on the bottom of the sea. As if I had drowned long ago. As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost. 19

As they sit hearing the fog drip from the eaves, Mary is upstairs pacing the floor in the darkest of all fogs brought on by her attempt to hide from a world in which she could not function and from things with which she could not cope. In the midst of all this darkness it looks as though Jamie (symbolic of O'Neill's brother Jamie) must be right when he says that there "ought to be a lighthouse out there" 20 -- somewhere.

The attempts of four highly complex characters to find their ways out of this fog and to gain some insight of what they are is the essential plot of the play. The dichotomy of the relationship of the Tyrone family is that they are alienated from one another through feelings of guilt, shame,

20Ibid., p. 155.
love, and hate; and yet at the same time they are so closely bound together that a twitch in the nerves of one causes a spasm in the other. In the first scene the five major themes of the play are stated explicitly and the structure of the play is the development of these themes in terms of how they affect the characters: Mary's illness and the concern with her dope addiction, the relationship between James Tyrone and his sons Jamie and Edmund, James' parsimony, his fanatical need to own property, and Edmund's illness. As Waith points out in his very excellent article, the development of these themes is wave-like; however, they are wave-like in quite a different way from The Iceman Cometh where O'Neill was dealing largely with social forces that to some degree determine the lives of men. In Long Day's Journey into Night social forces if they exist at all are nonessential. Certainly James' concern for owning property is a symbol of his basic insecurity and at the same time is an example of his concern for a kind of basic social equality. And Mary's pointing out that the house is rather second-class and that the Packard automobile with the second-rate chauffeur is symbolic of her own shame for having married socially her inferior. O'Neill, however, in this play is concerned with such problems as are the subject of Greek tragedy where man is pitted face to face with guilty-innocent humanity on a purely personal level. All of the terrible things that the family do to one another are presented in a relentless but passionate honesty.

21 Waith, p. 39.
Each of the characters is borne toward his final destination by a series of impulsions between which he may seem to drift in a contrary direction. The rhythm of the play is one of movement that is regularly interrupted and regularly resumed. It is Mary's backward movement into drug addiction that is the dominating factor that precipitates the action of the play. It is the stages of regression into the fog of drug addiction that form the structure of the play. Jamie suspects at the end of the first act that she has begun to take "the poison" again because he has heard her walking in the spare room during the night. By the end of the first scene of Act II James is convinced that she has resumed the habit. The second scene of the act is concerned with her going to town to get more "medicine." The third act is dominated by her. Already drifting in the fog of dope and essentially remote from reality, she reveals her feelings toward her family. The act ends as she goes upstairs to take more dope.

In Act IV she has made her long day's journey through the fog to the adolescence of her girlhood in a convent where she had wanted to become either a nun or a concert pianist. The state of Mary's addiction precipitates a crisis in the family that is augmented by the news of Edmund's illness with tuberculosis. Each of the characters as he reacts to emotional stresses comes to some recognition of his own aims and motives. To James and Jamie this recognition comes in terms of a confession of defeat as humiliating as that of Hickey or Larry. For Edmund alone the darkness of night into which they are all
traveling is relieved by sparks of remembered hope.\footnote{Waith, p. 40.}

The final scene is a series of epiphanies in which the characters goad themselves finally into telling one another the truth. James must face the fact that he is the cause of Mary's addiction, because in his miserliness he brought in a quack doctor when Mary was giving birth to Edmund. His actions have also alienated the affections of his sons. Jamie will always be a drunk nagged and supported by his father. Only for Edmund has the long day's journey into night brought understanding and hope. He now can see the nature of his father's greed, his mother's addiction, and Jamie's jealousy of him.

It is Mary's recurring illness of dope addiction that provides the spring board for the immediate action precipitating the situation that exists at the beginning of \textit{Long Day's Journey into Night}. As the play opens Mary has just begun her journey back into the night of drug addiction. The fog that will hide her from her real self is the symbolical means by which all of the characters will be able to move freely from the present into the past in order to find some rationale for their being. O'Neill knew as well as Proust and Joyce that all art essentially was memory,\footnote{Raleigh, p. 84.} and this is the device of moving back and forth from the past to the present that he used in permitting the characters a kind of self-psychoanalysis as they attempted to purge themselves of their feelings.
of hate-love, guilt, and shame.

Mary Tyrone at age fifty-four, as Raleigh suggests, is a symbol of the idealistic, neurotic, religious Irish Catholic woman who has married socially her inferior. Still a strikingly good-looking woman, she appears displaying three obvious characteristics that are symbolic of her life. Her hair is pure white, her hands are never still and always carefully hidden, and she is extremely nervous. Despite all of these however she still has the appealing simple and unaffected charm of a shy convent girl. She appears first on the arm of her husband James as they are coming into the sitting room from breakfast. This closeness is a symbol of their love and happiness, but as Mary begins to succumb to more and more dope they grow further and further apart. Never again in the play are they physically close together. Mary’s agitation becomes immediately noticeable when she begins to chide James for his speculation in land. This abrasiveness becomes clearer as Mary gradually reveals her resentment toward James because he has never provided her with a proper home. The house that they are living in "has never been a home and it never will be." To her a home was a symbol of security, a tie to the past, a memory of the life that she had led with her father. And as she sinks more and more into the fog of addiction she becomes more and more bitter and accusing. She concludes that if Jamie had been brought up in a real home he would not

24 Raleigh, p. 580.
be the profligate he is now. Later on in the third act, which is essentially one long monologue in which Mary reveals her past, she sees the house only as a place to which the men of the family, especially James, will return when they are too drunk to stand up at the bar and have another drink.

In this third act Mary tells Cathleen the maid the story of her life. As a young girl in convent school she had wanted either to become a nun or a concert pianist. Instead she had fallen in love with and married James Tyrone, who in a sense rather physically assaulted her eternal virtue. Truly for thirty-six years she had loved him and he had been utterly devoted to her. Yet she could not forget that he was an actor in a socially unaccepted profession, nor could she forgive him for insisting that she go along with him on his tours. It was on just such a tour that she joined him when her young son Eugene (symbolic of O'Neill's brother Edmond) was exposed to the measles by Jamie and died. For the rest of her life she blames herself for the child's death, Jamie for exposing him, and James for insisting that she join him. For this reason she fought having Edmund because in her naivite she believed that God had punished her with the child's death for not being a fit mother. It is understandable that looking into the past forces Mary into some way of forgetting. At the same time it is also a means of rejecting the present such as the reality of Edmund's tuberculosis. Everything for which she had romanticized as a child, or as a young girl,

26Long Day, p. 81.
had been denied her or twisted by fate in some cruel manner. She nervously fingers her hair, which in her youth had been red-gold and abundant, a symbol of her aliveness and femininity just as it had been for Christine Mannon. However, with the birth of Edmund it had begun to turn snow white, and now it is one symbolic aspect of her helplessness and her failure as a mother. Her fingers are cruelly crippled with rheumatism, fingers that Sister Elizabeth had once told her were the fingers of a concert pianist. She is now wracked with nervousness, an old woman who can never find her glasses and who must therefore remain ever in the dark. To look for her glasses she uses as an excuse to go upstairs for more dope, and she descends only once more in the play. The dope "kills the pain. You can go back until at last you are beyond its reach. Only the past when you were happy is real." 27

James begs Mary to forget the past, but she cannot. "Why? How can I? the past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us." 28 In the soul-chilling climax of the play which Tiusanem calls the greatest tragedy in the history of American theatre and one of the greatest in western theatre, 29 Mary finally descends the stair and moves into the front parlor. She is heard playing Chopin with a forgetful, stiff-fingered groping as if a schoolgirl were awkwardly practicing for the

28 Ibid., p. 87.
29 Tiusanem, p. 297.
first time. Her white hair is braided into two pigtails, and her face is the marble mask of girlish innocence. She is dragging behind her an old-fashioned wedding gown trimmed with duchesse lace. She had found it in an old trunk, but she doesn't remember now why she wanted it because she is going to be a nun. When James tries to touch her she shies away, again a symbolic movement indicating his assault on her innocence as well as her regression into the past. "What is it I'm looking for?" she says. "I know it's something I lost." She pauses and a look of uneasiness comes over her, and she brushes her hand over her face as though brushing cobwebs from her brain. "That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time."31

James Tyrone's greed indirectly causes or extends the psychological wound already inflicted on Mary, when in his penuriousness he actually has her attended by an inferior physician. It was this doctor who gave her large doses of morphine when Edmund was born, and she blamed him always for causing her hair to turn white and also partially for being the reason for her pain, just as she blamed James for bringing a cheap doctor when a really good one would have saved her life rather than making her a slave to morphine. James' greed then is the symbolic key to the disintegration apparent in himself.


31 Ibid., p. 176.
and each member of the family.\textsuperscript{32}

As a man, James is ambitious, fearless in most instances, and a driving father. At the same time he is a kind, loving, devoted husband to Mary; yet at the same time he cannot fathom her resenting his crudeness, his being an actor, his proselitizing, his thinking that people really accepted him in the town when actually they did not. He is the symbol of the black Irishman\textsuperscript{33} who still has about him the smell and love of the land, the insecurity of not owning property, full of vitality, and penuriousness. However, he too is caught up in the fog, and the only way out of it for him is to cling to the aggressive and domineering image of himself. As Falk points out, this belief is really a mask that covers no face at all.\textsuperscript{34} Yet it is often only the most sensitive extremists like James who ever see the truth or realize that their real self has been lost, even though they are powerless to prevent their own destruction. The nature of this realization is to come in his soul-bearing confession to Edmund in the fourth act.

As a symbol of the misunderstood father by his sons and the insensitive husband to a somewhat social-minded and neurotic wife, James appears first in the role of the husband delighted to have his wife back at home from the sanitarium to


\textsuperscript{33}Raleigh, p. 590.

\textsuperscript{34}Falk, p. 155.
which she had gone for the "cure." He exudes the little boy's happiness that Mary has returned home to the family, and he reflects the naive view that she will remain with them cured. The ambivalence and complexity of his character appears in his distrust of his sons' "cooking up some new scheme to touch the Old Man." On the other hand, he is gleeful when he learns that the boys were relating a particularly amusing incident concerning the manner in which an Irish tenant on James' farm had turned the tables on a Standard Oil tycoon when the Standard man accused him of letting his hogs trespass on his property. Only one Irishman could see the joke played by another Irishman in such high good humor, and when Edmund tells his father that only an Irishman could enjoy the victory of a poor man over the monopoly of Standard Oil, James takes the offensive and tells his son to "keep your damned Socialist anarchist sentiments out of my affairs!" This attack on his son is the first indication of the animosity, misunderstanding, and guilt that exist between father and sons, in this case, particularly Edmund.

It is however Jamie's immediate attack on his father's miserliness for sending Edmund to Dr. Hardy -- considered a quack -- that precipitates the first real bloodletting in the play. They all suspect that Edmund has tuberculosis, and Jamie argues that if his father had sent Edmund to a real

35 *Long Day*, p. 15.
36 Ibid., p. 23.
37 Ibid., p. 25.
doctor in the first place that Edmund might never have got sick. James refuses to listen and to admit the accusation as he turns the argument on Jamie by accusing him of being a drunk and a whoremonger.\textsuperscript{38} The argument is stilled only by turning to another one: the possibility of Mary's return to dope. Jamie has heard her wandering about the spare room during the night, but again James refuses to harken to the truth.

This escape from the truth is symbolized in the play by fog that surrounds all of them and by the alcohol that fills the men. Just as Mary is able to reveal the past in the fog of drugs, so in alcohol we see the core of the characters of the men -- the sense of failure used to reveal inner conflicts, the subconscious revelations.\textsuperscript{39} The conflict between Jamie and his father reaches a climax when Jamie accuses him of sending Edmund to a quack doctor and to the state farm where he will certainly die just to save a buck. James quickly turns the attack on Jamie by accusing him of having no ambition, of corrupting Edmund, and of being completely financially dependent on him. Jamie retorts that he would never have turned out the way he did if James had not forced him to go on the stage against his will.

James simply does not understand how his family can be what they are, and in his frustration and anger he can

\textsuperscript{38}Long Day, p. 31.

become very cruel. All of the characters strike out in the same way, wounding so deeply that there can never be any healing and the pain is unbearable. Then they shrink back and feel deep sorrow for what they could not help doing. James is cruel when he accuses Edmund of being an atheist and flouting the Catholic church. To James the church was a symbol of the one true faith, and his sons' denial of it had brought them nothing but self-destruction. He was also insensitive in not providing a real home for his family, nor would he pay the wages to get even decent summer help. Mary says that he has lived too long in second-rate hotels to understand what a home is. He wouldn't know how to feel at home in a real one, and yet he did want a home. He is even proud of having the shabby place they live in. But life has made all of them what they are. "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." James, like the others, is afraid of life, and the gloomy tone that surrounds them is due to the fact that they are life deniers. That is, they are afraid of life and the death wish is ubiquitous. James is afraid of life and he hates it, so he tries to find escape or temporary forgetfulness by hiding at the bottom of a bottle. But alcohol is only an

40 Long Day, p. 77.
41 Ibid., p. 61.
opiate and doesn't really assuage the pain, nor does it free them from themselves. In a way it is merely a means of escape that takes them even further into the past that never really existed or a future that never will be realized. As a result James can accuse Edmund of being the cause of his mother's addiction: "if you hadn't been born she'd never ---" And he stops midway in his accusation, realizing the cruelty of his words and the anguish and pain he is causing Edmund. The point is that the damage is done, and James' only recourse is the bottle.

It is in the last act that James reveals the real nature of his character, and it is a revelation that is both complex and poignant. At times a character may be despicable for what he does, and may deserve whatever anger he provokes. With the understanding of why that character is what he is, that anger dissipates just as it does when James tells his story to Edmund. His mother had been forsaken in America, a foreign land, by her Irish husband and left with four small children. James was the oldest left at home, and at ten he was forced to become the man of the house, working in freezing cold factories in winter and in roasting heat in the summer for fifty cents a week to help support his family. His mother washed and scrubbed floors for some wealthy Yank; yet there was never money enough for food. The one great fear that his mother had, as brave and strong as she was, was that she would

42 Whitman, p. 168.
43 Long Day, p. 142.
get sick and die in the poor house. Money then became a symbol to him of material security, and it had ruined his life. As a promising young Shakespearean actor he had been greatly commended for his roles of Brutus and Cassius with Edwin Booth -- he gave up his ambitions in order to make a quick fortune when he bought the rights to *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Acting the role of Edmond Dantes had brought him a fortune of forty thousand a year and had made him a rich man, but it had cost him his soul. "What the hell was it I wanted to buy, I wonder, that was worth --" I'd be willing to have no home but the poorhouse in my old age if I could look back now on having been the fine artist I might have been." But the past is gone, and James is what he is: a miser and always a stranger to his wife and sons. The bitter irony of his character seems to be summarized when he says to Edmund at the end of his epiphany, "The glare from those extra lights hurts my eyes. You don't mind if I turn them out, do you: We don't need them, and there's no use making the Electric Company rich." Jamie is perhaps the saddest character in the play because he is so much a victim of life. As the older of the two sons he has seen the disintegration of whatever family life there had been when his mother began to take dope. In many ways he is the outsider because he is despised largely by his father because he did or could not follow in his father's

44 *Long Day*, p. 150.


46 Ibid., p. 151.
footsteps in the theatre, and being forced onto the stage that pained him so he had found an antidote in alcohol and women. Blamed also by his mother for the death of his younger brother Eugene, he could feel only guilt; and Mary made no secret that Edmund was her favorite. Still he as well as Edmund had to undergo that symbolic search to find the father even if it meant pain and self-destruction. It is he then that acts as a catalyst for the others. He rebukes his father for not obtaining the best medical treatment for Edmund and thereby forces James into feeling guilty for his miserliness and lack of concern for his son's health. It is he who notices first that his mother is back on drugs, and when he apprises James and Edmund of that fact both of them bitterly attack him because they do not want to face the truth. His love is too painful for him to bear, and so vicariously it is he who must confront his father most directly for being the cause of what they all have become. His great compassion for humanity emerges when he returns in the fourth act from having accompanied Edmund to the doctor's office and stumbles drunkenly in from the fog. His first words symbolize the situation of the whole family. "The front steps tried to trample on me. Took advantage of the fog to waylay me. Ought to be a lighthouse out there. Dark in here, too." Symbolically he is saying that there is nothing outside of the house or themselves to give new direction to their lives, and inside they will always remain darkly strangers. He has just come from a house of

prostitution where he had made love to Fat Violet who was about to be fired because she was too ugly and was not bringing in any business. He had felt sorry for her in a way that he had not with harlots before in much the same way that O'Neill had always looked on them. "Harlots and Hunted have pleasure of their own to give. The vulgar herd can never understand."48

In his final epiphany Jamie relates his feelings to Edmund. Cruelly he asks Edmund, "Where's the hophead? Gone to sleep?"49 Edmund curses him and bodily attacks him. Miserably Jamie says that he had that coming to him. No longer able to forgive her for what she has done to him, he now hates her. "I suppose I can't forgive her -- yet. It meant so much. I'd begun to hope, if she'd beaten the game, I could, too."50 So he too is now lost forever in the fog of alcohol. Confession is not complete until he tells Edmund that he really had introduced him to women and liquor purposefully to corrupt him because he felt jealousy and hatred toward him. He hates Edmund because his birth started Mary on dope. At the same time he loves his brother, he tells him not to trust him even when Edmund gets back from the sanitarium. Edmund must not die on him because Edmund is all he has left. He recites sardonically from Rosetti: "Look in my face. My name is Might-Have-Been;/ I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell."51

It is Edmund Tyrone alone who in *A Long Day's Journey*

Into Night who, like Eugene O'Neill in real life, emerges from the fog with some hope of survival. He can survive because his sickness is physical. Though his moral nature may be somewhat warped, it is fundamentally sound; whereas, the sickness in the others is moral in that they have lost the capacity to love and the will to act. Edmund has within him a warmth and potentiality that the other characters do not have. His capacity to love has not yet been tapped or tested, and where there is love there is light that will direct him out of the fog. Like his name sake in King Lear he too is an outcast. He suffers much as the others do, but he is the only creator among them -- he writes -- and only he is really alive. He becomes concerned with order and justice as symbolized in the books that he reads. And in the end he has become absorbed completely with the processes of nature, especially those of the sea where nature and the unconscious become symbolically one.

In physical appearance Edmund is a composite of both his mother and his father. Both of them symbolize the persons that he is trying to find, and in the end he will find them only in terms of himself. Whereas Jamie looks precisely like his father whom he idolized and who rejected him, Edmund is very much like his mother in his hands with exceptionally long fingers. He even has her nervous sensibility, but his nose and his face in profile are his father's. Like most boys


53 Falk, p. 185.
subconsciously searching for the father image, the route most often taken is through the mother; and Edmund is much closer to his mother than he is to his father. In the beginning he blames James for all of the family's ills. And it is only through much painful soul-searching and hurt to one another that he comes to some understanding of the family relationship, particularly an understanding of his father.

It is Mary's recurring addiction and Edmund's tuberculosis that trigger the action in the play. Mary refuses to recognize Edmund's serious illness and finds relief in drugs; Jamie and James must face the reality of the situation and each in his own way copes with it. It is the manner in which they cope with these two problems that takes them back and forth from the present to the past. Edmund did not know for a long time about his mother's illness, and when he found out about it he blamed his father, and the love-hate relationship began. Edmund sensed his father's miserliness more than he actually observed it, because as far as he was concerned the house they lived in, the people they knew, the car they drove, and the people his father was friends with were adequate -- or if he did know it did not matter to him. It was more in philosophical concept that he came to blows with his father. The difference in their beliefs was made immediate in the arrangement and type of books noted in the living room. Edmund had discovered early that the way to agitate his father the quickest and the most was through attacking the Irish, Catholicism, or Shakespeare (who James avowed was Irish).
Yet Edmund too must share the guilt because his mother accuses him directly of being the cause of her sickness. She turns on him with a hard, accusing antagonism—almost a revengeful enmity. "I never knew what rheumatism was before you were born!" Edmund reminds her of her attempted suicide, and he also tells her that he must go to a sanitarium in order to hurt her as she has just hurt him. "It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother." Her cutting reply is that she hopes sometime she will take an overdose. Again it is their too deep love that causes them to wound so irrevocably.

In the fourth act Edmund and James sit in the dim light playing casino listening to Mary's mad walking upstairs and waiting for the drunken Jamie to come back from the village. James has revealed his life and feelings to Edmund, and because it is a time for self-confession, Edmund now attempts to tell his father something about his own self. But confession does not come until after great pain; James accuses Edmund of being the cause of his mother's habit, and Edmund retaliates that the whole town will know what a miser he is if he sends him to the state farm. As they sit playing cards, getting drunk and confessing, and listening to Mary Edmund says: "Yes, she moves above and beyond us, a ghost haunting the past, and here we sit pretending to forget, but straining our ears listening for the slightest sound, hearing the fog drip from the eaves.

55 Ibid., p. 120.
like the uneven tick of a rundown clock, crazy clock -- or like the dreary tears of a trollop spattering in a puddle of stale beer on a honky-tonk table top!" 

He then tries to explain to his father the nature of his search that has taken him to many places and how on the sea he had found peace. The sky and sea slept together. "Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond man's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams! And several other times in my life when I was swimming far out, or lying alone on a beach." It was a mistake his being born a man. "I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death." Still in all of this, he at last comes to some understanding of his father and the other members of his family. Moved, he stares at his father: "I'm glad you've told me this, Papa. I know you a lot better now." 

In the end, then, the characters have reached the end of their struggle toward honesty, and what they have found is hopeless resignation, helpless love, and longing for death.

56 *Long Day*, p. 152.
57 ibid., p. 153.
59 ibid., p. 151.
Man can live by illusions O'Neill says and he can live by faith -- which is probably the same thing -- but ultimately neither is any good. The characters realize that their own actions are at least partially responsible for making them what they are. The play is a play of character involving a progressive and thorough revelation of moral character, brought on and controlled by thought, and made apparent in itself and in feeling and action. The three masks that Mary wears -- the mask of conflict between temptation and resistance, the mask between the drugged and normal state, and the mask of adolescence and old age -- are finally stripped away; and the two masks of love and hate that the others wear are torn away to reveal the naked, tortured selves. They learn that to know the truth (divine or personal) is to know or learn compassion which is the only force that can mitigate the horrors of existence in this world. Justice itself is compassion, and compassion can be had only through understanding. This tragic journey that led to understanding and forgiveness is the one that O'Neill wrote and the one that he lived in all its unresolved agony. The salvation of the play lies in Edmund's survival to live to become the great artist Eugene O'Neill. It could well be O'Neill speaking when Jamie at the end of the play quotes Swinburne's "A Leave-Taking."

"Let us rise up and part; she will not know. Let us go seaward as the great winds go, Full of bloom and sand and foam; what help is here? There is no help, for all these things are so, And all the world is bitter as a tear. And how these things are, though ye strove to show, She would know."
"Let us go hence, my song; she will not hear.
Let us go hence together without fear;
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
And over all old things and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me as we love her.
Yea though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear."
CONCLUSION

To O'Neill tragedy had the meaning the Greeks gave it, and it was their classic example that he tried to follow. He believed with the Greeks that tragedy always brought exaltation, an urge toward life. The spectacle of a performed tragedy roused men to spiritual understandings and released them from the petty greeds of everyday existence. Any victory that man could wring from life was an ironic one, because Fate ultimately triumphs. It was only the dream that kept man fighting, willing, living.

O'Neill's philosophy of life and his own family relations he adapted dramatically in his tragedies. He believed that the tragedy of life is what makes it worthwhile. Any life that merited living lies in the effort to realize some dream and the higher that dream is the harder it is to realize. Life to him was a gorgeously-ironical, beautifully-indifferent, splendidly-suffering bit of chaos, the tragedy of which gives Man a tremendous significance. Without his losing fight with Fate he would be a tepid, silly animal.

Part consciously and part unconsciously O'Neill in his own life and in his drama was tracing the tragic path of his family cycle. This cycle he studied and dramatized through symbols in each play. In the early plays O'Neill had cloaked the members of his family in guises which he symbolized in such plays as Yank in _The Hairy Ape_, Jim and Ella Downey in _All God's Chillun Got Wings_, Eben Cabot in _Desire under the Elms_, Dion Anthony in _The Great God Brown_, Nina Leeds in
Strange Interlude, Lavinia Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, Larry Slade and Donald Parritt in The Iceman Cometh. At last like Lavinia Mannon O'Neill had brought himself to face his dead. He in his last major play faced them head on, not bothering to alter any autobiographical details, except for the sake of dramatic intensity. Long Day's Journey into Night was the final play in which O'Neill wrote himself as a leading character (this time undisguised except for the name); Edmund Tyrone became the last in O'Neill's long gallery of conscious and unconscious self-portraits.

In each of these eight plays O'Neill is experimenting with symbolism or new dramatic forms. The problem concerning O'Neill in The Hairy Ape was how to define the role of soul-destroying materialism in the modern world and the way man went about confronting that materialism. It is an intellectual concept, then, that underlies The Hairy Ape. Apparently O'Neill felt that realism was an insufficient means of presenting his concept dramatically. He decided on a form that he called super-naturalism. By this he seems to have meant a combination of naturalism and expressionism, because for the first time he used effectively a highly stylized, symbolic setting in which he presents Yank Smith as an Everyman deterministically caught somewhere between primitive and intellectual man on the scale of man's social evolution. Yank is forced into an awareness that he is a misfit as a stoker and that he cannot function in the materialistic world symbolized by the mannequins in the Fifth Avenue scene. The naturalistic aspects of the play show that man is destroyed by naturalistic forces.
in this case by materialism. The experimental devices that he uses, however, are in the symbolic expressionism he uses in two scenes in the play: the Fifth Avenue scene in which the rich pictured as mannequins and wearing masks can not even see Yank physically or be aware of his humanistic presence among them; and the final scene in the zoo when Yank enters the gorilla’s cage and symbolically tries to change places with him, only to be crushed by the gorilla that he both physically and mentally resembles.

All God’s Chillun Got Wings is the first attempt by an American author to show through plot and character the impossibility of two members of different races to find reason and compatibility in a marriage predictably doomed and disapproved of by both races. The symbolic device that O'Neill experiments with largely in this play is color -- Black and White -- both in the setting and in the characters. The method of the play is here essentially realistic; however, romantic overtones permeate all of the actions: namely overtones emanating from the love affair between Jim and Ella Downey. The contrasting of the Blacks and Whites in both their ideas and their actions is achieved essentially through the symbolic settings and songs that suggest both social disapproval and the inner weakness of Jim and Ella that lead to their destruction. Hence O'Neill uses experimentally a symbolic setting against which to tell a romantic love story. The most striking symbols that he uses in the play to contrast the differences between Black and White are the thirteen
songs equally divided among the Blacks and Whites and used to emphasize the action of the plot and the nature of the character. Whatever ambiguities and complexities O'Neill intended to convey through his symbols, he certainly in the play makes it clear that it is not a play about miscegenation.

O'Neill next decided to experiment with a play dealing with symbolic tragedies of a personal and intimate nature. For his plot he turned to Greek Tragedy to dramatize the themes of infanticide in Medea and incest in Hippolytus. Returning in this play, Desire under the Elms, to the method of almost pure naturalism, O'Neill sets his characters in a New England suffering the last vestiges of a decaying Puritanism. This too was an innovative idea in American drama. In the plot of Desire under the Elms, O'Neill did rely on many of the incidents of the Greek myths, but as an experimenter he was not always satisfied with the way they met their ends. It is clear that he was not trying to domesticate Greek tragedy, and this is the reason why the play refused to judge. Therein lies much of its greatness. His symbols are essentially revealed in the background props of the setting; however, this time the setting is not the stylized, expressionistic ones that he had used in the two scenes of The Hairy Ape and in the whole of All God's Chillun Got Wings. They are primarily the house and the elms that droop over it like the bodies of women, the barn, the gate, the stones, the fences. In effect O'Neill returns to the naturalistic style to give expression to this elemental tragedy.
The symbolic device that O'Neill experiments with in one of the most symbolic expressionistic plays is that of the mask. As a student of Greek drama he knew that Greek dramatists had used masks to emphasize character traits or particular motifs, and he had used them himself in *The Emperor Jones* and in *The Ancient Mariner*. And in *The Hairy Ape* he had used a kind of painted-on mask (gauze, putty, make-up) to symbolize the artificial faces of society. Intrigued with creating new psychological dimensions of character, he wrote one of his most perplexing studies of man's attempt to be both himself and at the same time all things, the great god brown. No doubt, *The Great God Brown* is a play that is concerned with studying opposing character types; however, the problem expands. Are they conflicting aspects between opposing characters, or are they conflicts within one person? There is no one answer, but the mask is the prime symbol in this play by which the individual can reveal by taking off his mask or hide by putting it on his real self in a world in which the spirit of creativity is subverted by materialism. He probes so deep into the beings of characters through the use of this symbolic device that it is indeed difficult to determine in the end if Dion Anthony and William Brown are opposite characters or manifestations of the split personality of one.

Many of O'Neill's earlier plays had been characterized by a kind of tragic exaltation. At least there was some virtue to suffering, and man's very endurance attested to his
dignity in his quest to find his dream. At the end of All God's Chillun Got Wings Jim Downey remains constant, faithful, and protective of his insane wife Ella who has done little but demean him. O'Neill can have Jim look at her with a rapt, worshipping expression and say that he will play with her right on up to the gates of heaven. Even the two lovers in Desire under the Elms, having committed incest and infanticide, can walk out of the house to their doom, looking up at the sun, hand in hand, with a rapt and devout expression on their faces.

With Strange Interlude the dream of earthly bliss comes to an end. Man (in this case Nina Leeds the protagonist of the play) is forced into the realization that the world of moral idealism into which he has been educated does not correspond to the world of experience. Through nine acts and over a period of twenty-five years the characters, and Nina in particular, grope for some new concept of morality that will give meaning to their lives. The sheer length of the play was overwhelming in that the American audience had experienced nothing like it before: a playing of about six or seven hours divided into a matinee with a break for dinner, and continuing on into the evening. Even those who didn't like the play were stunned by the experimental aspect of it. It is more probable that O'Neill's experimenting in this play was greatly influenced by the naturalistic-realistic-psychological novel. However, just as he had used the mask in The Great God Brown so effectively to hide or reveal the
introverted aspects of personality, he experimented with a new form of dialogue in *Strange Interlude*. He realized that the use of the mask in its dramatic functions had its limitations. He called this new use of language the interior monologue. By means of this type of interior dialogue, which actually was a more complex use of the psychological mask O'Neill was able to create Nina Leeds as a kind of twentieth century Everywoman struggling in a world whose values she finds obsolete. She aptly symbolizes Jung's concept that God is a woman dealing with man on three symbolic levels: husband, lover, and father.

Intrigued always with family relationships especially in the drama and feeling the acute sense of failure and guilt in his own, O'Neill began to think more and more about a subject that had interested him for a long time and one surprisingly neglected by other American dramatists, the tragedy of the curse on the House of Atreus. O'Neill knew that it would be difficult for a modern audience to accept the Greek concept of Fate. As he began to experiment with various Greek tragic themes, it finally became clear to him that the Aeschylean trilogy would be his basis for creating its counterpart in the American theatre. It was he said the play up to this time that had given him the most difficulty in writing. He worked on the play for three years, and from the very beginning two major problems confronted him: In terms of plot how closely should he follow Aeschylus? Who was to be the real tragic protagonist in the play? It is necessary to follow
the experiments along these two lines in order to comprehend the magnitude and complexity of what was ultimately to evolve into *Mourning Becomes Electra*, his modern *Oresteia*.

For *Mourning Becomes Electra* is no ordinary play. The way in which O'Neill followed the Greek pattern of tragedy in essentials and the major changes that he was to make notably in his choice of heroine and in the third play of the trilogy, "The Haunted," are notable examples of his experimenting with the drama. Each character in the O'Neill play is a symbol in the modern world of his counterpart in the *Agamemnon* tragedy -- a tragedy symbolizing self-destruction as well as the destruction of the family heritage by means of the uncontrollable passions of hate, love, and jealousy. In addition to his experimenting with plot and character, he was to employ three notable symbols in much the same way as the conventions of Greek tragedy were used. The first is Seth Beckwith as the leader of the Chorus. The second is the use of the sea chanty "Shenandoah" as a haunting refrain paralleling the action throughout the play. The blessed isles of the South Seas is the third, a symbol of the freedom that they are all seeking.

In writing *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill began to experiment in more depth with his own personal experiences as the subject for a new drama. All of his biographers and most of the critics of his works sound one similar note: O'Neill was always writing about himself and his family. No doubt he did, but in this play as in no one before he was able to objectify
those experiences and create his most startling naturalistic
play. In creating the plot and the characters he drew from
his early personal experiences during the Jimmy-the-Priest
years, his own alcoholism, the derelict living of himself and
others, and even his own attempted suicide. At no time in the
play (perhaps he had or had not in others depending on which
critics one believes) does he attempt to obscure or reveal
the identities of the characters that symbolize various qua-
lities of human degeneracy. The setting in which these cha-
acters are placed is a dramatically stylized one obviously
arranged for some symbolic purpose. Even the number and names
of the characters must convey some symbolic meaning. O'Neill
places them in a saloon-rooming house of the gin mill variety
in the west side of New York. However the most experimental
symbolic device that O'Neill uses in this play is the way he
groups related characters into each of three concentric circles
and proceeds to show their effects on one another in their own
group and ultimately their effects on the other groups. Into
their midst comes a salesman — symbolic of some form of saviour
who forces them to peal away from their flesh the skin of their
illusions with painful and shattering results not often seen
in the theatre.

O'Neill said that in writing *Long Day's Journey Into
Night* he came face to face with all his old ghosts: symbols
of his personal and family tragedy. Such a reconciliation
could have come about only through a kind of penetrating self-
analysis, and this is indeed the subject of the play in a way
that it had not been the subject of any other. This play seems the most autobiographical; yet a study of the play reveals that it is first of all a work of art in which the artist is always in control. It is remarkable that so successful a play contained little action and none of the violence that audiences had come to expect from an O'Neill play. In fact O'Neill returned to the simplest form of Greek tragedy. Even though it is a very long play he has compressed the psychological history of his whole family into a single day. His method is Sophoclean; as his characters attempt to move forward through the action of the play, they move backward in time by means of dialogue to expose their most painful memories. Consequently O'Neill is able to delineate the malevolent forces in the lives of the Tyrone-O'Neill family. In the play the Tyrone family symbolizes on a tragic level the destruction of the O'Neill family. The excellence of the play then is its characterization. It was only because O'Neill was not completely the characters he created that he was able to envision their tragedies. Each character symbolized a part of him. Yet he was able to hold in equilibrium within himself the various passions which ultimately destroyed his characters. The usual O'Neill symbols are still there: the house, time, fog, night, sea, liquor. But never in any play had O'Neill so ably and brilliantly blended the plot, setting, and characters as he did in this one. In writing the play O'Neill no doubt chose passions within himself which represented the phantoms and ghosts in his own family. O'Neill himself
says at the end of the play that whatever it is, it is faith­ful realism. By exposing these passions in dramatic form he accomplished his own purgation. Reliving the past, he effected his own catharsis. Through his use of symbolic transference perhaps he, as Hamlet suggests, was able to end the problem by taking up arms against it.


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The dissertation submitted by F. Jay Butler has been read and approved by members of the Department of English. The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

18 December 1972

Signature of Adviser