Chapter II

PLOT SUMMARY OF O'NEILL'S IMPORTANT PLAYS

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During his long and extraordinarily successful career as a dramatic artist, O'Neill came to be the celebrated writer of quite a good number of plays on the merit of which not only did he win the Nobel Prize, but which also made him perhaps one of the greatest figures in the history of dramatic art in the annals of theatre from its very inception uptil our present times. It may be said without the least exaggeration that he can be bracketted with Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw as a dramatic artist and experimentationist. It is of course, true that such a formidable achievement he did not attain in a single day, but through long years of attempts. As such, many of his dramas have enjoyed tremendous popularity with the readers and the theatre-goers. The result of this was the very formidable monolith on which his reputation rests. As with Shakespeare, some of whose dramatic writings enjoy more popularity than the others, with O'Neill also some particular plays written by him enjoy more popularity than the others. We propose to discuss below a number of such universally popular plays of O'Neill which have justly earned for him the enormous - fame and repute that he is likely to enjoy ever afterwards. There has been an attempt to furnish below some sort of plot summary of some of the best known, read, enjoyed and discussed

dramas of O'Neill. On these plays, much critical discussion has come from O'Neill's Critics. Any reader of O'Neill will amply understand that to discuss all his plays in all their elaborate details by a single person is a veritable impossibility. Therefore, we have attempted to pin our concentration upon the best known dramas of O'Neill that have given rise to varied critical discussions on his dramatic art. It may legitimately be expected that the plot outlines of the dramas will help the reader to follow the critical discussions, made occasionally later on, more conveniently and effectively.

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O'Neill started with one-act plays - the first being <u>Bound East for Cardiff</u>, and others to follow were <u>Thirst</u>, <u>Before Breakfast</u>, <u>Fog</u>, <u>The Sniper</u>, <u>In the Zone</u>, <u>The Long Voyage Home</u>, <u>Ile</u>, <u>The Rope</u>, <u>Where the Cross is Made</u>, <u>The Moon of the Caribbees</u> and <u>The Dreamy Kid</u>. Let us summarise the plot of the best known of his dramas, taken together, and as a whole lot.

A. <u>BEYOND THE HORIZON (1920)</u>

His first full-length play was <u>Beyond the Horizon</u> (1920). We reproduce the story of this play in the words of Alexander Woolcot : "<u>Beyond the Horizon</u> unfolds the tragedy of a young,

farm-born dreamer, (Robert Mayo) whose romantic mind and frail body yearn for the open sea, the Swarming ports of the mysterious East, the beckoning world beyond the line of hills which shut the acres in his home. By all that is in him he is destined for a wanderer's life, but Fate, in a wanton mood, tethers him to this little hill cupped farm and watches cooly the misery and decay this means for all this house. You meet him first at this cross-roads of his life and see him take the wrong turning. To him on the night before he is to set sail for a three year's cruise around the world, comes love in the form of a neighbour's daughter whom he and all his people had thought marked rather for his brother. Blinded by the flame kindled in that movement of her confession, he lightly forgoes all thought of the world beyond the horizon, plans to settle at once farm with his jubilant bride, and watches serenely enough while his heart - wrenched brother (Andrew) sets forth on the cruise that was to be his - the bluff unromantic brother who, irony of ironies, is a true son of the soil, born to do nothing but work its fields and sure to wither if uprooted.

Then you follow through the years the decay of that household, the tragedy of the misfit. You see the waning of love, the birth of disappointment, the corrosion of poverty and spite and disease. You watch the romance burn itself out to an ugly cinder. You see the woman grow drab and dull and sullen, and you see the man, wasted by the consumption that in another life might have been avoided, crawl at last out of the

hated house to die on the road he should have travelled, straining his eyes towards the hills he never crossed."

Beyond the Horizon established once for all the reputation of O'Neill as a great American dramatist. This is a realistic play. It deals grimly not only with the life of the farmer but ends on a note of complete and unrelieved frustration. A few months after this play appeared, O'Neill received the Pulitzer Prize, the highest American Prize for literature. At that time he was so badly off that he told his friends afterwards, "when my wife wired me the news, I thought it meant may be some wooden medal or other, until a friend told me it was a thousand dollars. Then I came to, and paid off some of my worst debts."

Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon* is a significant and interesting play. The play deserves a plan among the note-worthy achievements of American dramatists. It is frankly and uncompromisingly a tragedy. A happy ending would be unthinkable, but O'Neill has gone a little way toward an opposite extreme and insisted on polishing off his play with certain tragic happenings which are not quite relevant to his theme.

The story concerns two farm boys, Robert and Andrew, closely knit though widely varying in type. Robert longs to be free of the grind of the farm and to find adventure and release in the far-off places. Incidentally, his health has not been good, so his family agrees when he accepts the invitation of a

sea-faring uncle to take a long voyage around the world on a sailing craft. The very day before his departure he finds that he is loved by the daughter of the neighbouring farmer. He had thought about her romantically, but reservedly, since he believed that she cared for his brother. Her sudden confession that he is the one she loves sweeps him off his feet momentarily, and he decides to stay on the farm. The brother, chagrined to find himself not favoured, takes his place on the voyage.

The girl and the boy marry and he makes a fearful mess of farming. And he finds that he has made a mess of life as well, for the girl discovers that, after all, it was the competent Andrew when she loved all the time. In a bitter scene she upbrails him with his weakness and tells him that when Andrew returns he can take to the road if he chooses and let Andrew run the farm. On his return, however, Andrew soon shows that he is entirely cured of his youthful love, and in a single day he is off again to seize a business opportunity in the Argentine. The luckless couple muddle along on the farm and things go from bad to worse, until in the last act Robert dies of consumption and finds his chance at last to escape from the little valley and go to the far places.

Of course, the fundamental tragedy of the play lies in the fate of the incompetent dreamer forced to battle with the land for a living against every inclination and ability. His disease and death are entirely fortuitous and indeed they lessen the poignancy of his fate, which would have had more force of

fear and pity if the author had left him still engaged in his hopeless and thankless task of keeping on and on in the dreary grind. The hero is much too deliberate in dying and the last act is further marred by the addition of a scene which is unnecessary and which compels a wait at a time when the tension is seriously impaired by the fall of the curtain.

O'Neill begins crudely but honestly and frankly with a scene in which two of his characters sit down and tell the audience the things they need to know, but after this preliminary scene the play gathers pace and power, and until the final act it is a magnificent piece of work, a play in which the happenings are of compelling interest and more than that, a play in which the point of view of everyone concerned is concisely and clearly set forth in terms of drama. He had an extra-ordinary ability to write true and absorbing dialogue, and he did it nicely in Beyond the Horizon. His characters talk like real people and yet the process of selection has been so shrewd that there is none of the deadening dullness of the merely literal and photographic. The power of the play is tremendous, and there is no sense of author's arbitrarily moving powers about into implausible situations to thrill an audience.

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B. ANNA CHRISTIE (1920)

Anna Christie which was at first titled "Chris Christophersen" begins in "Johnny - the - Priest's" when Chris meets again the daughter whom he has long neglected. He was convinced that it would be good for her to be brought up for inland, with relatives. But she has been through a cycle that began with seduction by a son of the house and has ended with prostitution. After an illness she has decided to seek out her father, who, easily despatching the kindly Marthy Owen who has lived with him, gives her hospitality on the coal-barge whose captain he is. Anna rejoices in the quietness of sea. Chris, knowing nothing of her story, finds with her the sense of home he has longed for. But one day out of the fog there comes to their barge the shipwrecked Mat Burke, an Irish Stoker, and quickly there is love between him and Anna. Chris wants her to marry a landsman, so that "dat Ole davil, Sea" shall not afflict her. Anna refuses Mat's proposal, and tells her story only when she loses patience with the two men. They are horrified, and go off to get drunk. But both return, and Mat is still willing to marry her, though still oppressed by the magnitude of his disappointment. In their disillusion Mat and Chris have signed on to make a sea-voyage, and find they will travel on the same ship. There is peace among them, but it is an uneasy, disappointed peace. Chris has lost Anna to the sea; Mat, has lost his simple vision of a virgin Anna; Anna makes terms with a reality. It is splendidly ironic that Mat makes Anna swear, on a cross given him by his mother, that she will always be

faithful to him, and then, when she does so, he sees that the Oath can mean nothing to him because Anna is not a Catholic. The desperate search for a sanction, for a supernatural guarantee, is indicative of a never fully quenchable suspicion. The play ends with Anna trying to bring her man to simple good humour, but the last word is with Chris :

Chris (looking out into the night - lost in his sombre preoccupation - shakes his head and mutters). Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you was going, no. Only dat Ole davil, sea-She knows ! (The two stare at him. From the harbour comes the muffled, mournful wail of steamer's whistles).

O'Neill, in a letter to George Jean Nathan, insisted on the indeterminateness of the ending. He had thought, he said, of calling the play _Comma_. "And the sea ",he said, "outside - life - waits." Chris and Mat will go away, and we do not know if either will come back.

O'Neill was fully aware of that there was a "Theatrical" quality in the play, an exaggeration of speech and action that ran counter to actuality. He justified it by saying that "dumb people" of Anna's sort are driven to "the language and gestures of the heroics in the novels and movies they are familiar with." But it is not Anna who strikes the most "theatrical" note here. Mat is a simple-stage-Irishman, genial and absurd and - in language and gesture - false. Chris is monotonously, given to referring

to "dat ole davil, Sea" and in general talks a stage-dialect. In fact, Anna is the real person amongst them.

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C. THE EMPEROR JONES (1920)

The Emperor Jones marks a progress in O'Neill's art. In this play he discarded any attempt at arrangement into acts, and dealt with the theme progressively in eight scenes. He also defied the old theatrical rule against monologue and created a moving and enthralling drama which is largely carried on by the utterances of one character. For this central character he chose no usual hero; but a Negro pullman car porter, who had had to leave the United States on account of his crimes, which include murder. The nature of this man is established in the first scene, laid in the audience chamber of the "Emperor Jones," on a west Indian Island, "not yet self-determined by white mariners." The conversation between Jones, who has won his imperial dignity by his cleverness in imposing upon the natives, and a low-caste British trader, Smithers, is carried on in that natural manner of which O'Neill is a master. Instinctive dislike to both men comes first and then a gradual dawning of respect for the ability and courage of Jones, who, single-handed holds the island in his grip. He has won his position by an unscrupulous employment of the devices he has learned "On de Pullman Ca's listenin' to be white quality talk." To these he has added his own contribution, a skilful playing upon the

superstitious fears of the negroes. He has taken advantage of the fact that when one of his enemies shot at him the bullet missed fire, and he has told them that nothing but a silver bullet can kill him. When Smithers remarks that this is luck, Jones answers : "I got brains and I uses' em quick. Dat aint' luck." But Smithers has news for him. His time has come; the negroes have deserted the Emperor. And then "from the distant hills comes the faint steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat - seventy two to the minute-and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play." This device, not unknown to the theatre has probably never elsewhere been used so effectively. It is a unifying force and it accentuates the needed mood in both character and audience, for it goes back to the primitive expression of emotion, the accentuated rhythm of the earliest race. Jones wins our admiration by his quick decision to leave and by his courage in going out by the front entrance : "De Emperor Jones leaves de way he comes, and dat black trash don't dare stop him." From the second to the seventh scene we watch the fight of the Emperor through the "brooding implacable silence" of the forest on the other side of which his safety and the gold he has deposited in the foreign bank. In each scene he encounters phantoms deepening in intensity and mystery and receding from the present into the prenatal stages of his being. In scene two, they are the "little formless fears" of his imagination. He dispels them with a shot from his revolver,

loaded with five lead bullets and one of silver which he is keeping for himself if he is caught. In scene three, he sees Jeff, the negro porter he had killed in a quarrel, and he talks to him as he does to himself, in the natural monologue of a negro under the stress of emotion, until the shot dispels the vision again. In scene four, the murder of the white convict guard is re-enacted, and agin the tension is increased. Tattered and worn he stumbles, in the fifth scene, to a clearing, where he sees the vision of a slave auction in the fifties, and is himself sold as a slave. Then comes the apparition of the slave ship, with the negroes' slow rhythmic motion like the roll of a vessel which he is forced to join. The seventh scene takes him back to congo, to a dance of sacrifice and death, led by the witch Doctor, who after raising the pitch of the scene to an almost unbearable note in intensity, summons the crocodile god from the river, and motions Jones to become the needed sacrifice. Jones has been hypnotised but he calls on the Lord and thinks of his one remaining silver bullet. He shoots the crocodile and fall on the ground.

For the last scene we return to the edge of the forest where Jones had entered it. The negroes have simply waited for him, knowing he would make a circle in the woods. The tom-tom beats remorselessly and in the conversation between Lem, their leader, and Smithers, we learn that they have moulded silver bullets to break the charm. Four shots are heard and the body of the Emperor is brought in. Smithers has already pronounced

his funeral oration : "E's a better man than the lot of you put together. L'ates the sigh of him but I'll say that for 'im."

It is a fine thing for the dramatic art when a creative master shatters its conventions and thereby makes for freedom. O'Neill went back to a freer form; he defied the ordinary rules of technique, but he did not violate the fundamental laws of drama. He kept the unity of time. He violated the unity of place, but he substituted it by a higher unity-that of impression. The Emperor Jones is a drama of human fear; the emotion of terror is a binding force that fuses the scenes into an unforgettable picture of a human soul fighting his own evil deeds, the cruel fate of his forefathers, the ignorance of centuries. Variety, too, is, secured by the varying shades in the intensity of terror, and here in lies the originality of the whole conception of the play.

The Emperor Jones made O'Neill's position secure. After its run on Macdougal Street, it went uptown and was taken on tour. The chief role has been interpreted by negroes like Rutherford Mayul; in Dublin, it never failed to impress an audience. For notwithstanding the crimes of the Emperor, there is something royal in his nature, something pitiful in his hopeless struggle against fate, which elicits our sympathy.

Various critics have occasionally commented on certain similarities in the works of Eugene O'Neill and the German dramatist, George Kaiser. Some have assumed or at least implied that The Emperor Jones was influenced by From Morn to Midnight

(Von morgens lies mitternachts) : Others simply accepted O'Neill's denial that he had known Kaiser's work prior to the Newyork production of From Morn to Midnight in 1922 which he attended after he had already completed The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape (a direct descendant of Jones). O'Neill even maintained that The Emperor Jones was written long before he had ever heard of Expressionism.

A brief summary of The Emperor Jones and From Morn to Midnight reveals certain external similarities. In Kaiser's play a self-deluded cashier in a small German city absconds with a large sums of money and rushes off in a frantic search for a new life. In a stale of wild insanity he throws off all inhibitions of civilized man, the distorted visions of his subconscious are projected on the stage. His attempt to find something of value for which to exchange his fortune and his life ends in suicide. On the other hand, in the American play The Emperor Jones the black Brutus Jones, an expell man porter, murderer and escaped convict, exploits the superstitious natives on an island in the West Indies. He faces a rebellion and has to cross the island jungle to escape to safety. The steady drumbeat of his pursuers produces in his distraught mind various hallucinations and his past appears before him in a series of dreamlike scenes. Unable to free himself from the power of these apparitions, he is finally killed by the natives who have been waiting for him.

However, in both the plays as quoted above, otherwise ordinary human beings, a middle-aged cashier and a pullman porter,

become emperors and each in his own way strives for self-fulfilment in an artificial exaltation. Both, however, have come to terms with themselves when the outward glory fades : Jones as the visions of the past close in an inn in the jungle; the cashier as he makes his confession in the salvation Army Hall. Yet there is a difference, Jones is merely a victim who is hunted down by his past. In contrast, the cashier remains the pursuer until the end.

O'Neill began writing The Emperor Jones in the middle of September, and completed it on October 2, 1920. It is conceivable that O'Neill prior to the writing of that play might have had access to Dukes's translation of From Morn to Midnight. The German edition of the play had appeared four years earlier (1916), but there is little evidence that the American playwright knew enough German to read the original. It is more probable that he heard a great deal about the German dramatist and his work in his frequent gatherings with fellow artists, for the striking stage innovations and new plays of Post-war Germany were much discussed by the circle of friends around O'Neill.

The principal means of characterization in the plays of O'Neill (of this period) is the interior monologue of greatest interest, perhaps, is its structure in The Emperor Jones, for it provides an understanding of the main principles of this kind of monologue in O'Neill's drama-principles the playwright was to use in all the later works. As a matter of fact, the whole play except the opening scene, which is an extensive exposition and its

final episode (an epilogue) - unfolds as a continuous interior monologue of the protagonist who declared himself the emperor of an island and later tried to escape the punishment that the islanders who rebelled had in store for him. Its consecutive episodes represent stages of disintegration of Jones' consciousness. Though the core of the play's action is precisely the attempt to escape it, his inner voice convinces Jones that the revenge for the cruelty with which he ruled over the island is inevitable. This arouses Jones's fear, enhanced by expectation of pumi hment for crimes he had committed earlier. The inner consciousness of his own, guilt turns his escape into a race inside the vicious circle, at the end of which the day of reckoning awaits him.

The American playwright, O'Neill was occupied with his "Expressionistic" plays, he seems to have been concerned that his critics might throw some doubt on his originality. He voiced his differences with the German Expressionists on the matter of characterisation, he believed that dramatic characters had to have some individual identity and their action should at least partially be explained in terms of this identity. Yet it is difficult to find such characterization in the stokers or the figures on Fifth Avenue or even in Yank himself. Brutus Jones and Reuben Light are symbols rather than men, Mildred Douglas in <u>The Hairy Ape,</u> the cockney trader Smithers in <u>The Emperor Jones,</u> and the minor roles in <u>Dynamo</u> are types rather than fully developed characters. Another reason for O'Neill's reluctance to acknowledge

Kaiser's importance for his work may well have been his admiration for the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg, whose writings he praised frequently and publically and whose "Supernaturalism" he appreciated highly.

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D. THE HAIRY APE (1922)

A far more important play of 1922, The Hairy Ape was immediately termed expressionistic, although O'Neill denied any direct influence from the expressionism of German writers like Kaiser, whose Morn to Midnight was offered in New York the same year. Expressionism may be defined in simple terms as an attempt to portray inner reality in non-realistic terms by the use of abstraction, symbols, and distortion. This method, "The shorthand of expressionism", as Kenneth Macgowan called it, was an excellent medium for satire and social comment and at the same time offered an excellent opportunity for imaginative stage designs and production. It was employed more affectively by other American dramatists and more thoroughly by O'Neill himself in The Great God Brown and later plays. The Hairy Ape, tolerably clear in its symbolism, relates in a series of short scenes the story of a man who (in the world of O'Neill) loses his old harmony with nature. Yank, a stoker on a transalantic liner, has always gloried in his work and in his brute strength until he is startled and infuriated when Mildred Douglas, the spoiled daughter of a millionaire, visits the stoke-hold. Driven to thought and

unable to rationalise his place in the scheme of things. Yank is obsessed by the idea that he "doesn't belong." He is clapped into jail for starting a riot on Fifth Avenue, and he is even thrown out of the I.W.W. as an unwelcome intruder. Finally he attempts to shake hands with a gorilla at the Zoo but is crushed to death by the animal.

The Hairy Ape (1922) takes a further step into expressionism, both in technique and in its disgust at modern humanity. The lower classes in it are hairy apes, the upper classes mere marionettes. Like Toller and Kaiser, O'Neill finds no glory in industrial labour but, unlike them, he cannot see a way back to nature. Yank, the hero, is a stoker who does not feel that he "belongs" anywhere in modern society. He ends by envying the gorila in the zoo, who is unable to think and is content with what he is. He opens the door of the cage and is hugged to death by the animal, which then (only an O'Neill ape could act with such proper symbolism) throws his body into the cage, closes the door and shuffles off. 'And, perhaps the Hairy Ape at last belongs' is O'Neill's final comment.

It is hard to believe that even in his bleakest moments O'Neill meant the full implications of this story. It gives, instead, the impression that his symbolism has run away with him. Early in the play Yank's fury and self doubt are first aroused when a beautiful, rich woman describes him as a 'hairy ape,' and the end is merely this idea carried to its logical conclusion, regardless of any sort of reality. There is evidence of similar

empty intellectualism throughout the play. Yank, for instance, is frequently discovered in the position of Rodin's The Thinker. This is an example of the type of theatrical short-hand which O'Neill was later to use extensively in the form of psychological catch-phrases; but at least it has, to begin with, a clear and ironical meaning, since Yank's troubles started when he tried to think about himself. But then, to one's amazement, one discovers the gorilla in the Zoo in the same position, whereas the whole symbolic point about this creature is that he does not think (Yank says this), but merely belongs. The meaning of the Rodin theme troubles to the ground.

The production of The Hairy Ape proceeded without Jig cook. O'Neill was soon involved in a new controversy, because some critics interpreted the play in a manner he never intended. The audience could not overlook the fact that this play represented an unusual treatment of the evolution theory : Yank's obsessive search for the place in which he belongs leads him to gorilla's cage. At first Yank seems convincing in his strength, his healthy animal physique, his brutal and successful claim to leadership of the other stokers. But his size and self confidence are not what they seem. His philosophy is that men like him have mastered the world because they control machines and thus keep the world running, but it is reiterated so often that it looses all credibility for an audience of non-stokers. It is one of the lies lived by many of O'Neill's characters, and it collapses within seconds when Mildred Douglas, the daughter of a steel magnate, appears in the story stokehold, unreal in her

white dress, and faints at the sight of Yank, black with coal dust and dripping with sweat.

Everything Yank believes is shattered, and his anger drives him to New York, to show Fifth Avenue society who belongs and who doesn't. But he cannot make contact with Fifth Avenue society. Their anonymous faces pass by like masks; these people are as incomprehensible to him in their invulnerability as spineless rubber puppets. The scene presents a situation typical of German Expressionist drama of the first two decades of the twentieth century. The alienation of the central figure in a dehumanized, hostile world. Yank's fear of not belonging drives him on, and he tries to enlist the help of the Industrial Workers of the world. They can not understand him and throw him out. In the final scene, as he wanders through the zoo, he tries to communicate with a caged gorilla. Yank sees in the gorilla a kindred spirit - an unwanted uncultured brute : "Ain't we both members of de same club-de Hairy Apes?" yet when he frees the gorilla, he is killed by his fellow "hairy ape." Yank's self-respect and sense of identity had been obliterated by his exposure to Mildred, a member of a cultured elite, to which Yank could never belong. But neither does he belong on the animal level of existence, free from conscience, self-awareness, social distinction, and feelings of inferiority. Just as he longed for acceptance in the human world, he now longs for the same in the naive innocence of the animal world. He is caught between the two worlds, aware of both, but belonging to neither.

"I ain't on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' all de woist punches from bot' of'em. May be dat's what dey call hell, huh?" Yank becomes a symbol of the human condition : the fusion of human and subhuman, alone in an estranged world of indifference.

The Hairy Ape had been received with reserved applause but as with Anna Christie several critics, among them Heywood Broun, misinterpreted it and mistook the play for propaganda for the Industrial workers of the world. Once again O'Neill felt obliged to answer his critics pointing out that The Hairy Ape was propaganda only in the sense that it symbolised man's loss of his old harmony with nature. "The struggle used to be with the gods", he said "but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong" [1]

Inevitably some critics accused him of plagiarism or pointed to the influence of other writers. The Hairy Ape was said to show an undeniable parallel with G. Kaiser's The Coral and with the Gas trilogy as a whole; and indeed the confrontation and contrasting of rich and poor in the third act of The Hairy Ape is very similar to that in the Second act of The Coral. As has been pointed out O'Neill was familiar with Kaiser's plays but whether the similarities are accidental or not, the two writers were dealing with quite different problems. Yank, the central figure in The Hairy Ape (like Reuben Light in the later Dynamo), is not a victim of the machine

1 Horst Frez : Eugene O'Neill, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.; N.Y. 1971, p.40.

like the factory hands in *Gas*. He is not a representative of the working class; he stands for man who in losing his relationship to God has lost his sense of belonging.

The Hairy Ape continued its run at the plymouth Theater after a change of cast (first production on 17 April, 1922). Mary Blair, who created the role of Mildred Douglas, was replaced by Carlotta Monterey. O'Neill's encounters with this beautiful actress were brief and not particularly friendly. He returned to provincetown soon after the opening, little suspecting the role she was to play in his life.

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E. ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS (1924)

This is the play in which a negro marries a white girl and is unhappy. O'Neill has taken a theme and illustrated it with seven scenes depicting as many stages in the progress of the miscegenetic romance. "All God's Chillun" is exposition rather than drama most of the time. It has its dramatic moments in the second act, but O'Neill can be heard explaining and expounding throughout the evening. It is sharp and pertinent analysis of the question of inter-marriage between whites and blacks, its psychology is good, if palpable; it is more didactic than O'Neill has ever before attempted to be.

Negro and white children play on the streets in the first scene, and there is no race prejudice to be discovered in their attitudes toward each other. Two of them are seen growing up in the following scenes, a coloured boy and a white girl, and prejudice grows along with a sharp consciousness of it in the minds of the two. The girl is a worthless girl, the boy an ambitious youth, she is cast aside by a prize-fighter and, being alone in the world, is grateful to the negro for his adoration and marries him in order to have some one to love her sincerely. But she is white and he black, and neither they nor those they live among can forget it. Furthermore, she cannot blind herself to the fact that, save for her colour, which gives her a sense of superiority, she is inferior to him. So all his ambitions to grow into a man of importance are thorns to her and she thwarts them as best she can. He tries to pass an examination that will admit him to the Bar and she gloats when he fails. By this time she has lost her sanity and, little shallow, good-for-nothing that she is, she brings the play to a close by shrieking at him the word "Nigger." That, to her mind, sums up her feeling toward him, despite the fact that she loves him and is grateful.

Bamber Gascoigne thinks that the play is about the way the racial problem oppresses a mixed couple, the wife white and the husband black, until she is driven insane and drags him back to a state resembling childhood - the only level on which they had ever been able properly to meet. Some of the

scenes take place on the corner between a white street and a negro street. The New York set had on one side houses drawn with them black background. In the photograph this looks both magnificent and significant, but the actors are hardly distinguishable in front of it. The people have been lost in the idea.

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F. DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS (1924)

The next important play of O'Neill is Desire Under the Elms, which marked the highest point of his development as a tragic writer. Giving the story of this play, Percy Hammond says that it is in 1850 on a New England farm and old Ephraim cabot, as long as his hostile acres, is bringing home a bride his third, two sons by his first wife, foreseeing their inheritance, start for the gold fields of California, leaving Eben their handsome stepbrother to face his new mother. She is an old New Englander, a combination of hot blood and cold heart. Casting her inscrutable eyes on Eben's pleasing person, she devises a means to be happy though married.

Aided by her step-son's hatred for his grim father, she seduces the boy, and as a consequence of that misbehaviour has a child by him. Later in the play, when life, as O'Neill sees it, domes to grips with life, she murders the babe, thinking to please the irresolute Eben. The action at first horrifies him, and he gives her upto the constables. However,

Eben tells the sheriff that he, too, is responsible and will share the punishment. For once Ephraim is impressed.

This latest blow has discouraged the old man, and he decides to abandon the unrewarding life and join his other sons in California. He looks for his hoarded money, but that, of course, is gone. Bitterly confirmed in his belief that man was not meant for a life of ease, he consoles himself with his new conclusion that, like God, man was meant to be lonely.

The origins of Desire Under the Elms stretch to Euripides' Hippolytus, the tragedy of phaedra's doomed love for her stepson. The murder of the baby has parallels Euripides' Medea. Like his great Grek predecessor, O'Neill sees in the story the disasters wrought by uncontrolled passions, but he brings to his play an awareness of modern psychology and a preoccupation with the American conflict between two gods.

Euripides bases his tragedy on a struggle between Aphrodite and Artemis, goddesses of love and chastity. O'Neill turns to Freud for his explanations. Abbie's love for Eben is an unstable mixture of maternal protectiveness and unrestrained sexuality, and the latter wins out and in the murder of the baby as well as in the seduction of Eben. The youngman is almost a textbook demonstration of the Oedipus complex. He is competing with his father for his mother's love and for masculine dominance. After a night with Men, he returns triumphantly to announce that she is his, no longer his father's when Abbie

seduces him, it is in his mother's parlor while, she plays the mother's role. Hope for his father's death runs in Eben's mind throughout the play. Only when he can accept his relationship with Abbie as a mutual love can he also accept some responsibility for his actions.

While these psychological elements were strikingly novel when the play appeared in 1924, they now seen less significant than the contrast between Ephraim's puritanical, Old Testament philosophy and the lovers' discovery of a less abrasive belief. The play owes much of its power to the unresolved tension between the playwright's assertion that Eben and Abbie are redeemed and transfigured by love and self-sacrifice, and his allegance to Ephraim's grimmer view that the world is a harsh and lonely place. Though Eben is meant to be the tragic hero who is more likely to be remembered as he stenchily goes about remaking his world, bereft of wife or child or hope. Similar ironies surround the dramatization of other desires, for property, for security, for peace. In each instance, the ending points toward a rejection of worldly, material greed and to an uplifting spiritual view, while the dark tone of the play as a whole throws doubt on optimistic conclusions.

Desire Under the Elms is the most enduring of O'Neill's non-autobiographical plays. The struggle with the father is a pattern borrowed from the author's own life, appearing in play after play, rising to the surface most honestly in Long Day's Journey into Night. From the start Desire Under the Elms was

described as sordid and sensational, condemned for its crude and clumsy plot maneuverings and dully repetitious dialogue, and ridiculed as a sophomoric attempt to give tragic stature to lumpish bestial characters. Yet it has never failed to grip audiences, and more than forty years of disparagement have left it unmanaged. Despite, or perhaps because of all crudities, O'Neill somehow created a dramatic metaphor that is for greater than the sum of its parts. The persistence of Critical discussion is itself a sign of the Play's vitality. Many of the author's works that raised fewer critical problems have been nearly forgotten. Another sign of its vitality is the eagerness with which performers approach the three major roles, for each is profoundly challenging and satisfying.

The fusion of the archetype with the particular, unsuccessfully attempted in Welded, is splendidly achieved in Desire Under the Elms. Here we have the sense of place that O'Neill conveyed in the S.S. Glencarin plays and in Beyond the Horizon and Anna Christie, but for more vividly and intimately than before; we have characters whose past is as complicated as Anna's or as Michael's and Eleanor's in Welded, but the new figures come fully alive unhindred by the sense of a theatrical stereotype; and we have also a rigorous economy and the idea of a recurrent pattern in human relationships.

The setting is a farm in New England in 1850. The Exterior is always visible and upto four rooms of the interior

can be simultaneously displayed. Thus the alteration between interior and exterior that marked Beyond the Horizon is replaced by a continuing duality throughout the action ! we are conscious both of the domestic lives of the characters and of the farm which is the framework of their lives and a consuming object of their desire. The notion of a frame is visually represented by the overhanging trues :

" Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof - they appear to protect and at the same time subdue; there is a sinister maternity in their aspect a crushing jealous absorption, when the wind does not keep them astir, they develop from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appaling humaneness. They brood appressively over the house, they are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles."

But it is not merely nature and a particular story farmland that is thus symbolised : the maternal trees represent also the secret dominance of the female in the action; the dead second wife of Ephraim cabot, worked to exhaustion by her husband, is yet powerful, in the life of her son Eben; Ephraim's third wife Abbie is strong enough to destroy Ephraim and Eben and the child that is born to Eben and herself. In this respect Desire Under the Elms has the kind of generalising quality that

O'Neill had cultivated in the expressionist plays, and this is reinforced by the echoes of the _Hippolytus_, the _Oedipus Rex_ and the _Medea_ : Abbie is her stepson's seducer and the murderers of her child; Eben's love for Abbie is in part a love for the mother whose place she has taken.

When the play begins, Ephraim, aged seventy-five, has been gone from the farm for two months. His three sons - Simeon and Peter by his first wife and Eben by his Second - have long known his tyranny, as he has forced them to work alongside him in making an efficient farm from stony soil. Eben is full of hatred as he longs to take revenge for his mother's family had a claim when the news is brought that Ephraim has married again and that he and the new wife will arrive soon. Eben persuades his half-brothers to sign a paper relinquishing to him their eventual shares in the farm, and pays them for this with three hundred dollars belonging to Ephraim, whose hiding-place in the house Eben knew from his mother. Simeon and Peter set out for the gold-fields of California, exchanging final words of abuse with their father as he arrives at the moment of their going. The stage is thus cleared for the multiple oppositions of Ephraim, Eben and the new wife Abbie. She is aged thirty five; she is pretty; she has married Ephraim for security. She will be mistress of a farm--house, not simply during Ephraim's remaining years, but for the rest of her life. There is, O'Neill makes plain a strong determination in her : "Abbie is thirtyfive, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty, but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a

hard determination in her eyes and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desparate quality which is so apparent in Eben."

Abbie wishes to establish good relations with Eben, for she wants to dominate the household and not to risk losing the farm when Ephraim dies, but soon she has a further motive for attempting to cure Eben of his resentment that she has taken his mother's place. Ephraim will leave the farm to her if she gives him a son. So she determines to have a son, and Eben must be its father. But the pursuit of Eben that she engages in is not simply caused by her desire for security. She has strong sexual feelings, and the young Eben arouses them. And she is teh years older than Eben, she has taken his mother's place in the house : there is in her attitude to him a manifestation of the maternal element in her which was thwarted when her child died. This three-strinded web of desire is further complicated by the slow development in his of a "normal" love of a woman for a man. Slowly she breaks down Eben's resistance, and they become lovers in the parlour which was Eben's mother's special room and which has not been used since her death. In this setting Eben thinks of and sorrows for, his mother. Abbie asserts that his mother blesses their union, and this is no pretence : in his mother's room, this "new Maw" can identify herself with the dead woman, can love this lost son as a mother would, can love him, too, as a lover.

After their night together, Eben leaves Abbie and meets his father, whoever ill at ease in the house - has been sleeping

in the barn. Eben's jocularity ... is near-hysterical :

EBEN........Waal.............Ye better get t' work.

CABOT......(grimly amused). Air ...

yew bossin' me, ye calf ?

EBEN......(beginning to laugh). Ah-eh !

I'm bossin' yew ? Ha-ha-ha? see how ye like it? Ha- ha- ha ?

I'm the prize rooster O' this roost... Ha-ha-ha? (He goes off toward the barn laughing).

We have seen that the achievement of a satisfactory dramatic dialogue was something that did not come easily to O'Neill. He could run into inflated platitude as early as Servitude; it was still with him in Welded. The cockney language of the trader Smithers in The Emperor Jones is altogether inert and is a serious blemish on the play. The speech of Jones there and of Yank in The Hairy Ape is only acceptable as an economical symbol of semi articulateness in a type-character : these plays are not given any energy through the words spoken. "Above all, we have found O'Neill incapable of even versimilitude in middle-class language, as in The First Man and Welded. In Desire Under the Elms he needed a speech that was fitting for the complex and powerfully imagined characters, a speech that would not gainsay the vitality of the earth that the characters came from and wrestled with. And indeed the play is successful here as in so many other plays. He went to a remote farm-land : a sense of difference from the language of the twentieth century town was

acceptable. And he used characters from whom words would not come fluently, who would rely on gesture and truncated utterance to convey their wants and directives."[2]

* * *

G. THE GREAT GOD BROWN (1926)

With The Great God Brown, produced on January 23, 1926, at the Greenwich village theatre, symbolism became triumphant. In the concrete play, there are four characters : Dion Anthony, an artist, Billy Brown, a successful architect and builder, Margaret Anthony, the wife of Dion, whom Billy has always loved, and cybel, a prostitute. From the beginning of the play, at the dance after their graduation from school, Dion wears a mask, that of a handsome mocking sensualist to conceal his real nature, too, sensitive to stand the misunderstanding of the world. Margaret loves him as his mask reveals him the poet and brilliant dreamer, and she, without ever understanding him, bears him children, mothers him and protects his reputation from the world. She even pretends to herself that he does not visit cybel, the prostitute. She is loyal, as Dion says, to her vanity. Cybel sees Dion without his mask; she takes off hers in his presence, and their scenes together contain some of the most striking lines in the play such as her words to him, "(Stroking his hair

2 Clifford Leech : Eugene O'Neill, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1963, p.55.

maternally) You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark and you got afraid." But even more powerful is the scene in which Dion reveals to Brown his inner nature. "I've been life's lover ! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It is n't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her or she requests you to destroy yourself."

It is the cry of the creative artist again, and the bitter words with which Dion tells Brown that life has really passed him by, though the world thinks him a success, are terrible in their truth. Dion dies leaving Brown his mask. Brown takes it and Margaret thinks he is Dion. It is a revenge which no one but O'Neill would have conceived. The struggle between the dual natures in Brown now tears him in pieces as it has rended Dion. With one mask on he is Brown the successful architect, but hard pressed by the loss of Dion who has been the genius of the firm. With the other mask on he is Dion, "in paradise by proxy ", pursued by God and by himself, till he can stand the torture no longer and welcomes the shot of the police who believe he is the murderer of Brown. Cybel comes to warn him of the pursuit and he dies in her arms. "I don't want justice ", he begs : "I want love." "There is only love ", she answers. And after Brown has died with the "Our Father, who Art" upon his lips she bursts forthwith the requiem :

"Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again always always forever again ! —Spring ! —life again ! —Summer

and fall and death and peace again ! — (with agonized sorrow) — but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again — spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again ! (then with agonized exultance) — bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again ! (She stands like an idol of Earth, her eyes staring out over the world."

It is this speech and the heart - broken cry of Margaret, "My lover, my husband and my boy!" that remain most vividly from the performance of the play. Notwithstanding the novelty of the masks, the audience quickly responded to their symbolism and the concrete tragedy, with its final note of exaltation, held the theatre spell-bound for months.'

Commenting on the The Great God Brown J.W.Krutch says that this play should have removed any lingering doubt of the fact that O'Neill's concern was not with either the literal accidents of contemporary life or the local problems of our day. Here the use of masks emphasised that the dramatic personal were not to be taken as simple individuals and the contemporary aspects of the struggle between a genius and a 'success', were subordinated to the symbolic presentation of an eternal story of aspirations and frustration. Despite the author's own published explanation, it remains the most puzzling of all his plays, but in the half-despairing, half-exultant cry of its hero, "I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sung and wept ", is suggested O'Neill's central theme - the effort to transform into some peace-giving beauty the crude and obvious fact that life is vivid and restless

and exciting and terrible. He is not concerned with saying that it is. He is concerned with the effort to get beyond that fact.

On the surface, The Great God Brown is a tragedy of love. Billy Brown loves Margaret. She, however, loves Dion Anthony, and marries him. It is Mr. O'Neill's contention that she loves not the real Dion Anthony, a sensitive, bruised being, but a distorted image of Dion, a mocking, cynical surface appearance represented by Dion's mask. Beyond these simple facts, the substance of The Great God Brown rests within the various personalities that come and go by clapping on or removing the masks. Only one of these personalities remains virtually constant the mask of Dion that Margaret marries, and that she loves even when ultimately Billy Brown wears it once in the prologue Dion removes it in the ecstasy of passion; but Margaret recoils. She does not recognise him not trust him again until he wears the appearance to which she is attached. Once long, after their marriage Dion reveals his true self to her hungrily. But Margaret draws back affrighted. She never sees him unmasked again. Only a prostitute, the symbol of Mother Earth, sees Dion unmasked and keeps unmasked herself in his presence.

In the larger sphere of form The Great God Brown is a work of art, with a beginning, a middle and an end, with character development, and with a penetrating criticism of life. By predicting the tragedy with a prologue that introduces the parents of the main characters, and by appending to it an epilogue that

reveals Margaret as a middle-aged woman and her three boys now grown to maturity, Mr. O'Neill gives his play the sweep of universality and the continuity of successive generations. Nor is the play itself the chronicle of three individuals. In the concluding act, when Billy Brown has breathed his last, an investigating policeman demands the victim's name. "Man", says cybel conclusively. And "How d'yeh spell it ?" the policeman demands as the final words of the play. For Mr. O'Neill does not write in one key. In the dialogue, as well as in the characterization, he modulates his theme freely. From passages of winged poetry he shifts quickly to mordant irony; from the abstract he passes to the concrete without missing a beat. And the implications of The Great God Brown carry us far afield among the cruelest uncertainties of a pleading, skeptical mind. Obscure or clear, The Great God Brown is packed with memorable substance.

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H. LAZARUS LAUGHED (1927)

In his next play Lazarus Laughed, O'Neill gave an expression of his philosophy of life and death. Commenting on this play B.H.Clark has observed in the book, Eugene O'Neill - the Man and his Plays that Lazarus Laughed is first of all the exposition of a philosophy of life and death. Here we are concerned more with the idea than with the characters. Lazarus has risen from the tomb and after Jesus departed he began to

laugh 'softly like a man in love with God ', walking abroad from that time on, preaching his doctrine that 'Death is the fear between.' The chorus chant :

> Laugh ! Laugh
>
> There is only life !
>
> There is only laughter !
>
> Fear is no more !
>
> Death is dead.

Fortified by his faith, Lazarus fears nothing as he tests its validity by setting himself against those who fear life in fearing death. He even attempts to convert the Emperor Tiberius. The materialistic Philosophy of the Roman cannot resist ecstatic Lazarus, and even though Tiberius orders him killed, the prophet of eternal life is triumphant. At the end Caligula, the scoffer, the degenerate heir of Tiberius, is almost won over to the new faith, and as the curtain falls, he cries out 'Fool! Madam ! Forgive me, Lazarus ! '

Lazarus Laughed is a hymn to life, a cry of triumph shouted in the face of those Christians who look upon existence as a vale of tears, the petty egotists, who expect an ever-lasting happiness in heaven because they lack the courage to be content on earth. O'Neill's conception of immortality, though not new, is a happy and courageous one. He resents the impudent insult to life's nobility which gibbers "I, this Jew, this Roman... must survive in my pettiness for ever ! In the mouth of Lazarus

who possesses a will to live not for his own sake but for all men, he has put words that express the essence of this philosophy : 'Believe! What if you are a man and men are despicable ? Men are also unimportant ! Men Pass ! Like rain into the sea ! The sea remains ! Men remain ! Man slowly rises from the past of the race of men that was his tomb of death. For Man death is not ! Man, son of God's Laughter, is ."

* * *

I. STRANGE INTERLUDE (1928)

The next important play of O'Neill is Strange Interlude. Commenting on this play B.H.Clark remarks that Strange Interlude carries four characters through their chief emotional crises during twenty seven or eight years. Nina Leeds, daughter of a College Professor, loses her fiance shortly after he goes to war to be an aviator. Her puritanical father has prevented the consummation of their union, which precipitates her decision to leave home. At first she becomes a nurse, then she seeks other outlets for her more or less imperfectly adjusted desires and aspirations. As she enters the main action of the play, she has already begun to take on the appearance and characteristics of woman with a capital W - to symbolise the Earth Spirit; she is mother, wife, mistress, adultress, materialist, idealist. Into her life are woven strands from the lives of many men :

of Gordon (a romantic memory of an ideal); of the patient mother-ridden Charles Marsden; of Sam, her husband; of Edmund Darrell, her lover, and later of her son Gordon. For this woman no man is enough. This epic creature, endowed with an inordinate thirst for life, takes on the proportions of a super woman. With dream that can never quite be fulfilled, held in check by inhibitions, forced onward by appetites, she is the incarnation of vitality, a creature that is driven to meddle in the lives of others in order that her own life may be filled to overflowing. No one is a match for her; nothing asserts her progress, nothing but old age. At last she is defeated by time and by that very spirit of youth(in the person of her son) that urged her on to rebel when she was young. The boy Gordon, and the girl, he is determined to marry, leave her even as she had left her helpless father.

Strange Interlude is a long psychological study of a woman, using a modern version of soliloquy to express inner life. In this connection Allardyce Nicoll says that Once more a novel theatrical device is introduced into Strange Interlude(1928), a drama made extraordinarily long by its somewhat tedious and fundamentally undramatic elaboration of the quite worthy convention of the aside into a pretentious artistic instrument. The story of this play is, in the main, concerned with the heroine, Nina Leeds, who, having lost in the war the one man who might have satisfied her whole nature, drifts from male to male. Finally we find her with her three lovers- her husband, Sam,

Dr. Darrell, by whom she has had a son, and Charles Marsden, a novelist who tends to look on her as though she were his mother. It is all very psycho-analytical and very subtle and very long.

It is an advantage to abandon strict chronology in order to bring together the two plays in which O'Neill most ambitiously and most successfully attempted the writing of modern tragedy. It is evident from several of his statements in the mid-nineteen-twenties that the desire to do this was strongly on him. In the unpublished version of his forward to The Great God Brown, he asserted that the theatre should give us what the Church no longer gives us - a meaning. In brief it should return to the spirit of Greek grandeur. And if we have no Gods, or heroes to portray we have the subconscious the mother of all gods and heroes.

In Strange Interlude the fact that Nina, in marrying Sam, should find she has married into a family with a taint of insanity, should thus find not a refuge, as she had hoped, but a starting-point for further intrigue, is not dictated by her unconscious : it is, if we like to put it that way, bad luck. It is also something appropriate for her in that it images the way in which, for any human being, the doors continually close as the years pass. But it would be making something altogether malign of the unconscious to suggest that she chose Sam as her husband because, unconsciously, she knew, he would bring further disaster. The position here is that, as in Hamlet and in Oedipus,

the dramatist recognises that the particular incident may seem, and be arbitrary, but will - at least in retrospect - image what we commonly perceive in our lives. The doors do close, the refuge is open to the winds, the thing chosen has always some toxic quality.

" Strange Interlude is O'Neill's longest play, and that is partly because the action has continually to freeze while the character or characters concerned speak what is deepest within them. We have seen that for a moment he came near to the Strange Interlude technique in Welded. That was an unsatisfactory play, but it did show an attempt to combine the generalising pattern of the expressionist plays with the particulars of individual human beings, and it did hint that the difficulties of Michael and Eleanor were outside the range of the rational and the controllable. Now he sets out to deal with a group of people who are sharply aware and therefore in a better position than most to realise the limits of what they can know, to glimpse the pattern of things of which they can not be more than a triumphant because conscious, part. But "cannot be more" is important : none of the characters in the play is fully aware, fully capable of apprehending the pattern of things. Nina Leeds and Edmund Darrell and Charles Marsden achieve, from time to time, their glimpses - but that is much more than nothing; it validates their claim to be tragic."[3]

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3 Clifford Leech : Eugene O'Neill, Grove Press, Inc.,New York, 1963, p.77.

In his earlier plays O'Neill had frequently used an extended time-scheme, but in Strange Interlude the slow passage of time becomes a dominant factor as never before. And it is a time almost wholly freed from the particular references of an outside world. The action begins soon after Gordon shaw, the fiance of Miss Leeds, has been killed in the First world war. It continues for twenty-five years - that is to a point well beyond the date at which the play was written what happened in the world at large in the nineteen-twenties is of no moment to the play : we are concerned only with the time - process as a general influence on the lives of the characters. The play consists of two parts. The First part, is in five acts, covers only three years; the second part in four acts takes as more, then twenty-two years forwards, eleven years separating Acts VI and VII, ten years separating Acts VII and VIII. Part I gives us the gradual establishment of a stable situation; Part II shows us the tolerable anguish that the passing years bring to it.

Though it is the longest of O'Neill's plays, Strange Interlude is one of the most economical. It has only eight characters. The nine acts have only six settings, and after Act II the action is wholly in New York city or State. The limiting effect thus secured brings into prominence the idea of the interacting group.

The action of Strange Interlude is complicated and original as never before in O'Neill. His earlier plays conformed in their planning to one or another set pattern. In Beyond the

Horizon and Different everything depended on the working-out of a simple contrast. In Gold, Anna Christie, The Straw, The First Man - despite the range of their quality - the basis is a theatrical stereotype. In the expressionist plays the action is a convenient means of demonstrating the particular social problem in hand.

O'Neill has worked out his action as a novelist commonly does, holding the reader's or spectator's interest partly through the arbitrary element in the details of the action. And to do this he had to have a story which was markedly and individual one. This kind of drama runs the risk of appearing amorphous entirely arbitrary in its conduct. It is to O'Neill's credit that Strange Interlude preserves the authority associated with an action that develops by "probability or Necessity." There is a feeling that in its main outlines the pattern had to be as it is.

* * *

J. MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA (1931)

The next important play of O'Neill is Mourning Becomes Electra. Giving the story of this play, John Hutchens says that in the three plays of this trilogy - Home-coming, The Hunted and The Haunted O'Neill has gone back to one of the world's greatest stories, the Electra ... choosing from the various Greek versions such points of analogy and departure as serve best

a horrific murder story... The still with which he has adapted from the Greek pattern, redirecting its suspense to that of the inner movement of the trilogy, is apparent in a quick synopsis. The House of Arteus is the House of Mannon, the time is April, 1865, when Lee's surrender is as yet an unconfirmed rumous. The first scene of the first play is the exterior of the Mannon house, its Doric columns rising in reminiscent austerity. The family awaits the return from the war of Brigadier-General Ezra Mannon, the Agamemnon of the play, who had won fame in the Mexican War, becomes rich in the shipping trade, been the mayor of the small New England town in which he lived, and won further glory in the Civil War. The return of his son, Orin (Orestes), is also imminent. The first scene is compact in exposition. Christine Mannon (Clytemnestra), wife of Ezra, and their daughter Lavinia (Electra) are at sword's point of mutual hatred and suspicion. Lavinia is in love with a sea captain, Adam Brant (the Aegisthus), an illegitimate son of great uncle by a French servant girl. She discovers that her mother has been having an affair with Brant, has been seeing him at intervals in New York, whither she has been going on some pretext. She acquaints her mother with her knowledge of the affair, makes her promise to see no more of Brant, and together the two women await the return of Ezra. If a hurried interview with the captain, Christine, has plotted the murder of Mannon, which takes place on the night of his home coming a week later. By telling him of her affair with Brant she brings on one of the heart-attacks to which he is subject, then gives him poison instead of medicine; a fact which Lavinia

ascertaining as she breaks into the room and hears her father accuse her mother.

With the return of Orin two days later, there begins a struggle between two women to dominate him, ending in victory for Lavania when she takes him to Brant's ship at Boston wharf and, from the deck above, they look down into the cabin and see Christine with her lover. When she has left him, Orin murders Brant, the brother and sister return to their home and confront their mother with the fact of Brant's death upon which she commits suicide and brings the trilogy to its climax at the end of the second play. Thereafter O'Neill's invention is more or less free of its Greek background. The furies that haunt Orin consist not only of an active madness of blood-guilt for the death of his mother, but also the transition of his fixation for her into an incestuous passion for Lavinia, of which his sudden awareness is provocation for his suicide. She, who had 'tried to become the wife of her father and mother of Orin', has grown recognizably into a likeness of her mother; Orin's and her own knowledge of this, their mutual guilt and twisted relationships are the culmination of the theme which has flared fitfully throughout the play; that the dead shall come back to haunt and pillery the living, that hereditary and crime shall be expiated only as Lavinia expiates them when she forsakes her own future, bars the house and retires into it for ever."

<u>In Mourning Becomes Electra</u> (1931), O'Neill tried to write a version of the Orestes story which would be as relevant to the twentieth century as Aeschylus's <u>Oresteia</u> was to Athens.

His method was to transplant the story to New England at the time of the Civil War, and to give sexual motivation to every twist of the plot. His result was merely to belittle his archetypes. Where Clytaemnestra had exulted with a fierce magnificence in her murder of Agamemnon, Christine Mannon's murder of Ezra is a sordid boudoir affair which is brought to light only when Lavinia (the Electra of the story) accidentally finds a box of poisonous pills. Orin Mannon (Orestes) takes time, after murdering Brant (Aegisthus), to fabricate evidence which makes the deed look like the work of thieves. O'Neill has taken out the Furies and brought in the police.

The sexual motivations might possibly succeed if O'Neill used them less openly or carried them less far. As with his other ideas, from the hairy ape to the masks of The Great God Brown, he goes to extremes. The Mannon troubles revolve round three incestuous attractions inside the family; father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister. Leaving aside homosexuality, the canon is complete. Lavinia's emotional involvements, if one separates them from the mesh of the play, turn out to be as follows : she hates her mother, loves her father, loves her brother, loves Brant, her mother's lover, and in moments of confusion sees her brother as Brant and herself as her mother and therefore hates her father and desires his death, as her mother did. Even so, all this might be tolerable if O'Neill had merely left it implicit. Instead he makes the characters themselves express it. So Christine says to her daughter :

"You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You've always schemed to steal my place." Christine admits that she fell in love with Brant only because he reminded her of her son, and Orin admits that he flirted with a girl only so as to make his mother jealous. It is this pat admission of their Freudian impulses which makes these characters ludicrous. Once again O'Neill is signposting, using a modern shorthand, writing from outside. In several scenes the authentic O'Neill style, the dramatic muscularity of the first scene of _The Emperor Jones_, begins to reappear; but it is soon swamped again by the ideas. A character in _Strange Interlude_ said that 'Herr Freud' had 'a lot to account for' not the least of which is this period of Eugene O'Neill's work. Looking back over the plays, with all the men putting their heads in their mistresses' laps and calling them mother, one can validly wish that the characters would stop behaving, within their given framework, with such predictable conventionality. _Mourning Becomes Electra_ failed to be a monument, but it did in a sense become a tomb for the O'Neill of this period.

Mourning Becomes Electra, perhaps O'Neill's most secular play, is also his least symbolic work to date. Such symbols as exist in the play, the house, for example, or the portraits, or the flowers, are all related to the human beings at the central focus. Now, none of the conflict between character and symbol that be set many of the minor works and such major plays as _Strange Interlude_ enters to plague this

study of crime and retribution. There are no ambiguities; nothing is vague or suggested. The characters are drawn precisely their story fully told, and they move toward a comprehensible and convincing destiny. Thus O'Neill, returned to his point of origin to the realistic theatre, from when with the single exception of _Days without End_, he never again departed.

In _Mourning Becomes Electra_ Mr. O'Neill comes now into the full stretch of clear narrative design. He discovers that in expressive pattern his the possibility of all t hat parallels life, a form on which fall infinite shadings and details, as the light with its inexhaustible nuances and elements appears on a wall. He has come to what is so rare in Northern art, an understanding of the depth and subtlety that lie in repetition and variation on the same design.

Mourning Becomes Electra is, of course, not one play but three and is subtitled _A Trilogy_. Until shortly before its final production, O'Neill hoped to have the three plays produced on successive nights; but practical considerations prevailed, and the thirteen acts of the trilogy were produced together, following the marathon course of _Strange Interlude_. And this was both practical and artistic - the three plays had been planned and completed as a whole. In the first two, O'Neill consciously translated classical myth into modern psychological terms; in the third, he created his own myth. The first to follow the Greek pattern move closely, whereas the third departs

from it to describe - a modern 'Electra', whether one likes the first two plays best, because "O'Neill was never more fully an artist than in filling out this pattern to the limit of its possibilities as melodrama; or whether and prefers the "superb conclusion, completely his own," is a matter of taste.

However, in form, Mourning Becomes Electra is as sternly restrained as O'Neill's earlier work was effusive, using soliloquy occasionally and making use of the portraits of ancestors on the walls to symbolise the oppressive power of the super-ego, the life-denying sterility of the Puritan conscience. If O'Neill had told his story with a greater command of poetic language and variation from the oppressive manochrome of morbidity (which Greeks achieved through spectacle, dance, and the lyric chorus), there would be no doubt that Mourning Becomes Electra belongs with the Greeks, Shakespeare and Goethe. Even with its shortcomings, it is probably one of the two most important tragedies written in America.

* * *

X. Ah, Wilderness ! (1933)

Edmund M.Gagey thinks that Ah, Wilderness ! is a homely, bourgeois comedy of the American large small-town at the turn of the century, with a charming dedication to George Jean Nathan who also, once upon a time, in peg-top trousers went the pace that kills along the road to ruin. The protagonist here is really

the entire family, typical American and upper middle-class, with the kindly father, the adolescent child, the maiden aunt, the family drunkard, and so on. All are depicted graphically with the faithfulness of portaits in a family album. What plot there is concerns Richard, the adolescent boy, who has been reading radical literature and sending erotic poety to his high-school sweetheart. When he is reprimanded by the family and - as he thinks - spurned by Muriel, he seizes the opportunity to get even by making an assignation with a "College tart." The only damage he suffers is intoxication, but when he finally reels home reciting poetry the household is plunged into consternation. The next day Nat Miller, the father, stammers out some advice on the facts of life to Richard, who is later brought back to bliss when he makes up with Muriel. The portrayal of young love is pleasant and humorous, and the entire production - excellently acted and directed - earned a deserved success.

O'Neill said that the idea for Ah, Wilderness !(1933) came to him in a dream. Certainly the play, his only comedy, is very much an idyllic dream, O'Neill's version of a youth he never had. It contrasts sharply with Long Day's Journey into Night, in which the author faced fully the painful truths of his family. In the earlier play, he chose only a few element of his own past, combined them with details drawn from the lives of friends and neighbors, and placed them in a familiar story of troubled adolescence.

Richard Miller shares with the young O'Neill a taste

for writers who speak of rebellion. Unlike the O'Neills, however, the Millers are a warm, protective family in which radicalism is tempered by love and theatrical posturing is corrected by understanding and healthy laughter. It is significant that in the first production the role of Nat Miller was played by George M.Cohan, whose own fame rested on his projecting a spirit of sunny patriotism and optimism.

O'Neill called his play a comedy of recollection, and its nostalgic tone gives it its character. All the scenes, whether comic or Sentimental, are tinged with a longing for a simpler, purer time. Of all O'Neill's plays, Ah, Wilderness ! has been the most popular with amateur groups, high schools, and community theatres, appealing on a level similar to that of I Remember Mama or Life with Father. Only when we know O'Neill's other work do we sense that Ah, Wilderness ! is not so much recollection as wishful fantasy.

* * *

L. THE ICEMAN COMETH (WR. 1939, PROD. 1946)

Commenting on this play B.H.Clark has observed that the scene of The Iceman Cometh is the 'back room and section of the Bar of Harry Hope's saloon' in the year 1912, a low dive patronised by a strange assortment of bums, male and female, most of them hopeless wrecks who find in the liquor generously

furnished them by the easy going proprietor an escape from the realities of a world in which they no longer have a place. Here are the damaged souls who in their day have sought success, honour and glory - a Boer War general, a British captain, a disillusioned anarchist, a Harvard Law School graduate, Negro gambler, a circus man, bar-keepers, Street-walkers, a youth who has betrayed his mother and the political cause that was her life. Each of these down-and-outs tries in his lurid moments to explain himself, to account for his failure, or deny it, and each is driven ultimately to forget or ignore it. Each, too, manages to sustain himself by creating some kind of illusion, some brand of besoothed pipe-dreams. As the play opens they are anxiously awaiting the arrival of Hickey, former friend and companion of them all, a salesman who turns up periodically to give them a party. Hickey turns up on schedule and provides lavish entertainment; but he also provides, what they had not expected and certainly never wanted, a long lecture on the evils of pipe-dreaming. He has himself stopped drinking, and he claims that he has at last faced reality; not otherwise, he tells them, they can win happiness. He persuades each of his friends to begin a new 'life of peace and contentment where no pipe-dreaming can ever nag at you again.' Having as he thinks, found salvation for himself, he will not rest until he has sold it to others. They must rid themselves of the 'damned guilt that makes you lie to yourself you're something you're not.' There is something in Hickey's eloquence that forces each sorry wreck to sober up long

enough to make himself presentable, and start forth to do today what has for years been put off till tomorrow. But each in turn comes back to the saloon miserable, disillusioned, facing an intolerable reality. Hickey's solution does not work, for instead of bringing peace and happiness it plunges each of its victims still deeper into his will of misery. But Hickey has not despaired; he will tell his friends how he had found the light, and he tells them the story of his life and how the light came to him. But he reveals more than he had intended, uncovers depths he had hardly understood himself, and his companions see that he too had his pipe-dreams. He who had found happiness in the love of his wife, has killed her in order to save her from himself. 'The last night', he confesses, 'I'd driven myself crying to figure some way out for her.' But there was only one way. 'So I killed her .... I saw I'd always known that was the only possible way to give her peace and free her from the misery of loving me.' In an access of fear, momentarily terrified by the revelation of himself that has come from his deep probing, he denies for a second what he has just confessed : "You know I must have been insane ? ...."

But there is no way out. 'Who the hell cares?' asks Hope, and as Hickey is taken off by the police, Hope eagerly accepts explanation that everything Hickey told them, as well as attempt to reform them, took shape in the mind of a lunatic. And the bums start drinking again, discovering at first that the whisky has no effect on them, but as Hickey's 'crazy' notions

recede into the background the liquor begins to exercise its potent magic. Hickey has done what he had to do, and the wrecks he thought he was keeping return to their pipe-dreams, all but the anarchist and the youth who betrayed his mother. For them there remains only self-destruction, the quick kind, a little, more violent and sudden that the death awaiting the others.

In The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill combines many of the thematic lines of the play. The Iceman is the source of Hickey's jokes in which his own philandering is unconsciously transferred to his wife. The iceman is also death, in the person of Hickey, who not only has murdered Evelyn but whose message is one of self-destruction, for without illusion there can be no life. The author's use of "cometh" gives the title a Biblical sound, suggesting revelation and salvation, which Hickey claims to bring. Thus, the ribald and apocalyptic are ironically blended in the title as well as in the work itself.

Like so many of O'Neill's later plays, The Iceman Cometh (1939; produced 1946) is an attempt to deal with the author's own past. Harry Hope's is modelled in part on Jimmy-the-Priest's, a waterfront saloon where O'Neill lived for a while when he returned from sea. Another model was the Hell Hole, a Greenwich Village speak easy where O'Neill sought refuge in drinking bouts through much of the twenties, even after he was successful. Here he also, at one point, tried to take his own life. In both places, O'Neill came to understand the defensive behaviour of the [illegible]

he so vividly recreated in his play. In _The Iceman Cometh_ as in _Long Day's Journey into Night_ he dealt sympathetically with those damaged spirits who can survive only by clinging to illusions.

O'Neill was aware of the parallels between his play and Gorki's _The Lower Depths_ (1902). In both, a "savior" presents himself to a group of derelicts, bringing the message of truth, which becomes a burden rather than a release. In each, the messenger is revealed as a fraud, and most of the characters return to their dreams, though at least one is destroyed by the knowledge of his own worthlessness. Like _The Lower Depths_, _The Iceman Cometh_ is a masterwork of naturalistic staging, demanding a scrupulous reproduction of its grimy setting and minute attention to the behaviour and speech of the characters. The intensity of O'Neill's involvement, the thoroughly American context, and the richness of detail and thematic variation make it much more than an echo of Gorki's play. Where Gorki draws on Russian piety and mysticism, O'Neill discovers profound parallels between American commercialism and philosophy; Gorki's saintlike wanderer becomes O'Neill's salesman of salvation.

Like most of O'Neill's plays, _The Iceman Cometh_ has been disparaged as well as praised. Its staggering length and its repetitiousness have been attacked. Eric Bentley says that it can be shortened with little loss of effect or meaning. More serious is the question of how persuasively the author has developed

his theme. Are these derelicts and their half-crazed visitor representative of the human condition ? There are many ironic parallels here to Christ and His disciples (particularly to the Last Supper) as well as pagan, Dionysiac echoes. But the very accuracy of the author's portrayal puts his ugly, self-destructive characters at a distance both from their great counterparts and from the audience. It has also been pointed out that by withholding the truth about Hickey's actions, O'Neill creates a powerful melodramatic effect, but this deprives the earlier acts of the complexity they need. Thus, the overall pessimism of the play is not as fully universalized as O'Neill intended, and the world outside Harry Hope's back-room is relatively untouched by the demonic forces Hickey releases.

Paradoxically, these very objections themselves are a testament to the stature and scope of the play. No other American playwright has attempted so much and achieved so much. O'Neill measured himself against the great novelists as well as against the great dramatists, and like Melville, he pushed at the limits of form and of his own abilities. The result transcended the rough, unbalanced works he produced.

In this play, The Iceman Cometh O'Neill reverted once more to the Past, to his New York days at Jimmy the priest's. The action takes place in a shabby saloon somewhere in midtown New York in the year 1912. In this gloomy atmosphere, O'Neill assembles a group of seedy characters most of whom have given up any occupation they ever had and abandoned

themselves to drink and their wishful illusions. Like Ebsen especially in his The Wild Duck O'Neill presents the human condition as such that man cannot live without changing to some illusions or 'life-lie'. About a dozen of his characters are sprawled out on the iron chairs of asleep with their hands on the grimy tables. From time to time they ask the proprietor, an equally sorry character named Harry Hope, to stand them a drink. They are all waiting for Hickey, a hardware salesman who drops in once a year to celebrate Harry's birthday. But the Hickey who shows up this time is not the familiar old joker who regales them with lusty stories of his wife and the iceman. He is as friendly as ever, but he is sober, and he has come with a purpose : to get them to see the light, to free themselves from their illusions.

Much in The Iceman Cometh derives from O'Neill's own experience at Jimmy the priest's dive on the New York water front, where a friend of his once committed suicide. Its similarity to Gorki's The Lower Depths is probably not coincidental, for O'Neill once said of this play that it "is really move wonderful propaganda for the submerged than any other play ever written, simply because it contains no propaganda, but rather shows humanity as it is - truth, in terms of human life." Yet the two plays present this truth in different ways.

O'Neill's characters are not social outsiders proudly and deliberately avenging themselves on a social system they hate, but rather victims of their inherently human vulnerability to life lies. This four-act play again combines symbolic and realistic

elements. The language is realistic, sometimes brutal. The characterization is superb. Unlike most of O'Neill's other plays *The Iceman Cometh* is not very experimental, unless the Ibsen-like tendency of concealing the motives of a central character until the end of the play can be called an experiment. In O'Neill's case, this delayed exposition requires that the audience in spite of the extra--ordinary length of the play, reinterpret Hickey's words and actions in the light of the final disclosure.

In *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill rejected the Pseudo-Greek classicism of *Mourning Becomes Electra.* At the heart of his play, there is neither the conflict between divine will and human happiness, nor the tragic flaw of the dramatic hero, but rather the paradox of the human condition in which dream is reality and reality dream, in which despair becomes hope and hope despair. Man is too frail to withstand the stark truth of reality and must, in order to survive, renounce it in favour of self-delusion. As Larry Slade, one of Harry Hope's roomers, says :

"To hell with the truth ! As the history of the world proves the truth has no bearing on anything. It's irrelevant and immaterial as the lawyers say. The life of a pipe-dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."

Although *The Iceman Cometh* is perhaps too deliberately eschatological, too determined to avoid the superficial, O'Neill at least attempts to confront fundamental problems of human existence to present in dramatic terms a tragic vision of life. In an article in *Life* of 2 December, 1946, it was suggested that two conclusions

can be drawn from this play : that great tragedy contradicts the spirit of American democracy and that it is incompatible with the American belief in progress. This raises the question whether tragic greatness is possible in America, whether consciousness of evil, fear and insecurity can be meaningfully treated, and whether such meaningful artistic treatment can help man attain new dignity. The Iceman Cometh gives a negative answer but Long Day's Journey into Night will show that this dignity is not unattainable - even in America.

Even in the second half of the twentieth century, performances of O'Neill's work have continued to raise new questions concerning America's greatest dramatist, new world drama, and even modern drama as a whole. After his early successes he was recognized as a great talent, and it was assumed that he would go on to become a master. But his development as a dramatist was not dictated by any logic deducible from the development of modern drama.

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M. LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT (WR. 1941, PROD. 1956)

It is an autobiographical play dealing with O'Neill's life in the year 1912. It was written in 1941, and posthumously produced and published in 1956. The story of the play runs like this : recently released from an institution as cured of 'her drug addiction' Mary Tyrone, a handsome, nervous woman, is in August 1912, once again at her summer home with her husband James, and

aging former matinee idol, and their sons, Jamie, at 33 a hard--drinking, cynical Broadway hanger-on, and Edmund, a sickly morbid intellectual. Mary's appearance, and detached conversation soon make clear that she is not cured, and as the men drink heavily to escape reality, she nostalgically revives past dreams or becoming a nun or a concert pianist, and seems an innocent girl again. But she also reveals that her addiction began when her miserly husband chose a quack doctor who treated her with morphine after her sickness in giving birth to Edmund. Like his mother, Edmund wants to 'be alone.... in another world .... where life can hide from itself.' Life her too, he shows both love and hate for his family as he confronts his limited future as a consumptive, realizing that his father will send him to the cheapest State sanitarium, since he is expected to die. A similar ambivalence is exhibited by the debauched Jamie, who drunkenly tells Edmund how much he loves him and yet how much he hates him as responsible for their mother's addiction. As James curses the sad spectacle, Mary appears : trailing her wedding gown, utterly immersed in the happier past. Realizing that she is forever lost to them and that their fates are intimately bound with hers, they impassively contemplate their own destruction.

O'Neill began work on Long Day's Journey into Night just as he was completing The Iceman Cometh, his fullest exploration of the theme of necessary self-delusion. In his study of the Tyrone family, he again showed how the weak and insecure could find refuge in alcohol, drugs, and pipe-dreams, but he also asserted the strength of young Edmund, who could face the truth about his

family and himself and transmute their pain into poetry. The play itself is the fullest affirmation of that strength, for its final effect is neither gloom nor escape, but rather a sense of purification akin to Aristotle's catharsis of pity and terror.

Long Day's Journey into Night is basically simple in form. There is no attempt to experiment with symbols, classical parallels, masks, inner voices. There is almost nothing one can call a plot, only a series of incidents which prompt the characters to dig or retreat into their pasts, while one, Edmund, can begin to come to terms with the future. Much of the force of the play derives from the sense that artifice has been abandoned in favour of naked truth. A closer look, however, shows that the years of experimentation has served O'Neill well.

The Tyrones wear masks, speak in many voices, and there is not one moment of the ostensibly rambling dialogue that is not rich in overtones. Slowly and with what almost seems like a disregard for theatrical excitement, O'Neill's characters grow to dominate the audience's consciousness and achieve a tragic substance. While we are always aware of the author telling his story, we do not experience the play as an explanation but as a re-enactment of an archetypal situation that transcends the author's own life. By focussing on the reality of a personal crisis, O'Neill gives a far truer sense of the mingled hatreds and loves that a family can sustain then he was ever able to do when he drew upon the neat patterning of Freudian or Jungian theory. Finally, by using the remembered speech of his own family - with its repetitions

and outdated slang - he achieves a richness and correctness of expression he was never able to find when he delibertately strove for eloquence.

O'Neill's reputation went into decline during the late thirties, following the unsuccessful _Days Without End_ (1934). The first production, in 1946, of _The Iceman Cometh_, a play out of tune with the immediate postwar world, did little to reawaken interest in an ostensibly dated, overpraised writer. Then, in May of 1956, a powerful revival of _The Iceman Cometh_ created a new interest in the playwright, and the opening, six months later, of _Long Day's Journey into Night_ at once marked O'Neill as America's foremost dramatist.

O'Neill's effort in the American theatre has been a wide-ranging one. Like Faulkner, if, he had not written so much and attempted so many different things, he would perhaps have not written his masterpieces. We may charge him with awkwardness, with lack of proportion, with a too sprawling ambition, with a failure to see the clear line between melodrama and tragedy, with lapses into uncomfortable sentimentality, with an incapacity to see and apply the point of technical experiments. We can never charge him with frivolity, with sheer imitation, with shallowness, with aimless theatricality.

O'Neill was engaged throughout his career in a challenging of the meanings and satisfactions of life itself. He offered answers gropingly and tentatively, never simply committing himself to any one course. O'Neill, like Faulkner,

James and Melville, spoke the American idiom with depth and involvement. He engaged with life. Like Faulkner and Hemingway O'Neill deemphasized mind, for he felt and apprehended better than he could think. His dramatic efforts were never the result of simple personal statement or apologia; personal, understanding yes, an understanding that in its depth and honesty transcended autobiography and became tragedy, that is, became an account of the human passage through life. Long Day's Journey more than any play of O'Neill's crystallized his power, written, as it was, as he said, "in tears and blood."

Long Day's Journey was published posthumously. It was written close to the end of his career, is plainly autobiographical, and was not intended for publication during his lifetime. It is perhaps all the more remarkable, then, that it is dramaturgically one of the tightest of his plays. It is not so loose and rambling, so verbose, as The Iceman Cometh, written for production. Long Day's Journey is neoclassically conventional : One setting, one compact period of time. We concentrate on the four members of the Tyrone family. The cook is never seen, reminding us, hauntingly, of the vampirish cook in Strindberg's The Ghost Sonata. A sense of doom pervades the action; symbols emerge the fog that enshrouds the landscape, the lust for land, for rootedness of the father; the mother's nostalgic return to her wedding gown : the consumption eating up Edmund.

In Long Day's Journey, the characters, confronted with themselves, with each other, begin the sustained attempt to define

and characterize themselves, with excruciating self-honesty. The dope addiction of the mother, the alcoholism of the father and his two sons, heighten and justify the tortures they visit on one another. In the final act, which vacillates between macabre humor and grotesque tragedy, all four characters have long ago left the territory of sobriety : they live in memory, they live in their desires, they live him the baring of lusts, weaknesses, jealousies and affections. Ephraim cabot's hardness put off his sons; they leave for the softness of California. Here, at last, the harsh landscape softened by time and a conspiratorial sharing of the analgesia of alcohol and dope, father, mother and sons talk out their careers as mortal men and as family personages : we see James Tyrone alone and as a husband and father; we see the brothers isolated and then intertwined only the mother floats away, out of the family. The cruelty of the blunt speeches and confessionals is a tenderness of final intimacy, the compassion of the surgeon, the forced assumption of ultimate and necessary honesty.

It is James Tyrone, the father, who carries the greatest guilt, the greatest responsibility, the greatest burden of "tragic flaw." His miserliness, his compulsive real estate purchases, have become lustful, an energy directed toward a form of material immortality, a desperateness in trying to wipe out the insecurity of his awful childhood when he became the head of a family at the age of ten. He knows all this, he says all this, and yet he can not for all his normal human affection, satisfy the needs of simple mortality, the needs, first, of his wife, then of his son,

for decent medical attention. He is as willful as Lear in railing against reality. Death or disease or dope addiction can not become as compelling for him as the threat of poverty, of landlessness. Real estate - as distinguished, possibly, from nonreal possessions : love, familial ties wipes out the terrors of the past. At the same time, much like Ephraim Cabot, he keeps his sons in a tyrannically filial subjection, gaining identity thus as father and as man.

The mother has perhaps least force symbolically; she wanders about the edge of the action energizing it, drawing love and attention, but asserting only an ancient identity. She was once beloved, wife, mother, she has no present, no future, only bare moments of contact with the immediate, and she seeks her final refuge in an escape into the past. But she does establish and integrate the familial structure.

"I meant it as a tribute to your love and tenderness ", O'Neill wrote in dedicating the play to his wife--- "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 favour haunted Tyrones."[4]

Whatever the anguish at the source of Long Day Journey into Night, the destination of the journey is finally the calm and

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4 Morris Freedman : American Drama in Social Context, Southern Illinois University, April 6, 1971, p.27.

peace of the acceptance, that comes with soul-deep understanding. The conclusion of the play is infused with the wisdom of Oedipus at Colonus; of Lear sheltering the dying Cordelia and accepting life as it is, including death; of fathers and sons, of brothers of human beings, reconciled to their mortal limitations but modestly, quietly, sadly celebrating these.

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N. A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN (WR. 1943, PROD. 1957, PUB.1958)

The play was written in 1943, but was published in 1958. The play begins as farce and ends as tragedy. It is a love story dealing with a lusty Irishfarm girl, Josie Hogan, who has none of the obvious trappings of conventional beauty, and an attractive but disillusioned and dissipated man, James Tyrone Jr., who falls in love with her, and parts soon after. It is an autobiographical play. James Tyrone Jr., is no one else but O'Neill's elder brother.

A Moon for the Misbegotten is another of Eugene O'Neill's dark and brooding contemplations of tormented souls. It suffers from his characteristic failings of excessive length and insufficient eloquence, but, whatever its incidental weaknesses may be, it is a moving, beautiful and shattering play. It is a remarkable tribute to a playwright when the only possible current rivals to one of his dramas are a couple of his other works, and A Moon for the Misbegotten must inescapably be compared to

Long Day's Journey Into Night and The Iceman Cometh. There is no way of avoiding, or reason for denying, that his final play is the least satisfying of the three. In it, their faults unquestionably bulk larger. But this has little to do with the fact that, after A Moon for the Misbegotten has managed its occasionally tedious beginning, it is overwhelming.

The chief comparison, of course, must be to Long Day's Journey. Since one of the trio of central characters in the drama is the James Tyrone Jr., who is the sad dissolute older brother of the author in the autobiographical play. Here he is some years older and has been driven farther along his alcoholic path by the death of his mother. A bitter and deeply tormented man, who longs for his own death, he has fallen in love with a great bulk of a woman, but both of them realise that he is already a corpse and no romance is possible.

O'Neill's plays have a manner of smoldering slowly and then bursting into dramatic flames, and here the smoldering takes much longer and the flames are less frequent. Once they have arrived, they are tremendous, but the unfortunate part of the periods of marking time between outbursts of fine is that they make the dramatist's known weakness, the inability of his prose style to rise to the heights of his imaginative lyric conceptions, too evident. So A Moon for the Misbegotten has its languors. They seem unimportant, though, when the high points are reached.

Although there are two minor characters in the play, it is chiefly concerned with three figures, and they are studied with superb insight and compassion. They are, in addition to the doomed Tyrone, the giant of a woman, who pretends that she is a wanton because she wants to conceal her innocence and goodness, and her old Irish father, who is capable of any guile to protect his land and his daughter. Even O'Neill has written few more moving scenes than the climatic one between the girl and the drunken James, and it is unforgettable in its power and pity. _A Moon for The Misbegotten_ is further proof that Eugene O'Neill was one of the titans of the theatre.