

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Eugene O'Neill had been highly controversial in life. And more so after death. The essence of the whole disagreement lies in his life-vision.

He has been belittled on many grounds. The apparently positive, even aggressive life-vision of modern America is not echoed in him. He was always critical of America for its greed and penchant for material prosperity. He stated, "We've squandered our souls by trying to possess something outside it."¹ This is an anathema to a modern American and herein lies America's dilemma in accepting O'Neill. His philosophy has been questioned. His language, capacity to produce real-life dialogue, even his theatrical sense have been put to test. "The wet sponge of Eugene O'Neill"², "Trying to like O'Neill"², "A minority report"² were just fore-runners of a long line of harsh criticism. Even when Virginia Floyd tries to reinstate him as "America's only dramatist to be awarded the Nobel Prize . . ." with sympathy from Herman Melville "Let America prize and cherish her writers"³, it may not be exactly the homage he deserves.

What, then, makes Eugene O'Neill still relevant today? O'Neill is being read, translated and produced worldwide. Many critics, even grudgingly, have admitted him as the sole tower of American drama. Recent opinion survey in U. S. A. has placed him among one of the ten most important writers of the twentieth century.

Eugene O'Neill was unparalleled in his conviction. There lies his greatness.

It is not just the achievement but the effort. He ceaselessly questioned, stumbled, bled — but never left the pursuit. Even he did not try to remain impartial or distant from his characters like other great authors. All his heroes were self-portraits. There was no feigning when his heroes betrayed, killed or committed suicide. Everywhere was obvious presence of the playwright himself.

We tried to look at this. It has been already agreed upon that " . . . O'Neill's life and his work are fashioned out of the same fabric."⁴ He was the most autobiographical among the writers. It is also often quoted that he was always "a little in love with death."⁵ His deeply rooted scepticism of all earthly success was manifestation of his death wish. We have tried to show that this death wish was the combined product of his genetic seeding, his family environment and his innate drive. The genetic influence has been elaborately traced to an unusually high incidence of suicides and addictions in the O'Neill-family. The home environment included an insecure Irish heritage, rootless family existence, addicted mother and alienation from the society. We have taken help of Freudian concept to explore his innate death drive too.

Next we went in search of the one-acters. We tried to show that he marvelled at this form. But the success of later full-length plays prevented due recognition from coming to the former. We insist that the one-acters were not just the making of Eugene O'Neill, they reflected the total Eugene O'Neill — his achievements and his short-comings. Many, if not all themes and contents of his later plays were present in seed form in his one-acters. Looking O'Neill through his one-acters is like looking at the universe in a

microsom — it is infinitely little but it is there! The success of The Moon of the Caribbees could only be emulated by The Iceman cometh and The Long Day's Journey Into Night.

Eugene's life-vision has been seen from many angles. To us there has been little direct attention to his death drive that exactly is in the core of all. The Nirvana concept and O'Neill's transcendentalism, his oceanic feeling of dissolving into the sea were actually all expressions of this death drive. By the way O'Neill has taken shape of a conscious mirror which exposes the trifles and inadequacies of human life.