

P R E F A C E

Eugene O'Neill is undoubtedly one of the foremost figures in the long history of world drama. Particularly in the growth and development of modern American drama, O'Neill's contribution is remarkable, something virtually unparalleled. Among his various splendid qualities as a Playwright of modern times, the one which strikes the notice of the readers and critics, is his very fascinating art of character - drawing. This very art assumes an importance through its different stages of growth and development and can be followed best by an intensive and careful study of some of the plays, because in the small compass of the present dissertation it is impossible to handle and do proper justice to the whole lot of O'Neill's vast amount of dramatic creations.

As America's foremost playwright, Eugene O'Neill did a great deal to establish the modes of the modern theatre in the United States. His work illustrates, therefore, some of the main trends in modern American drama. One of its most striking features is the combination of deliberately drab prose realism and of boldly inventive expressionistic technique. It is as though Henrik Ibsen and Berthold Brecht had come together in the same person. When O'Neill began to write, American drama still had to make for itself the discoveries that Ibsen had indicated a whole generation previously.

The stature of Eugene O'Neill casts a long shadow on the American theatre. To find fault with O'Neill is to find fault with the entire American stage; to find merit in him is to find worth in its striving or straining towards significant drama. It is

possible to single out American playwrights endowed with greater refinement and facility than can be attributed to him but none who made a comparable impression on the twentieth century. Chiefly as a result of his persistent efforts after 1915, the American drama actually made contributions to world theatre - that could be considered significantly modern.

Among the many striking features of O'Neill's dramatic art, perhaps the most important and striking is his art of drawing male and female characters. His art of characterization, taken in its entirety, is something on which a vast critical work could be written. In the present dissertation, which, I must confess, is not perhaps so erudite, attempts have been made to study this art in relation to the best known characters of men and women who have been almost universally acclaimed by readers of O'Neill's plays. In this connection, I should say, that my choice of O'Neill's men and women are expressly my personal choice, and does not mean in the least to interfere and clash with the choice of any particular individual reader or critic; but I have attempted to go according to the usual choice about them as found among the general run of O'Neill's readers.

O'Neill's art of characterization is inseparable from his vision of life. And because he experimented with one dramatic form after another for projecting his view, his art of characterization varied in every stage of his development. He was disgusted with those who tended to label him either as a naturalist or a pessimist or romanticist.

However, for the sake of convenience we may study O'Neill's art of characterization under different titles signifying the theme and technique of the plays he wrote in different periods. In his early plays one may detect his melodrama and hence his characters are realistic and melodramatic, particularly in The Straw, Anna Christie, Diff'rent and The First Man. In the next phase of his dramatic career O'Neill wrote symbolic plays in which, instead of resorting to depicting a crowd, he began to create representative individuals, concepts turned into characters; characters, tragic protagonists especially, are symbols of dream and illusion, courage and fortitude, higher ideals, poetic sensibility, rebellion, struggle against an alien world.

In characterization, O'Neill prefers to follow a pattern. His characters are not necessarily stereotypes, but he is at some pains from early in his career to make it apparent that each is but an instrument in the revelation of his theme. At first he frequently describes the 'humour' or manner of a character by the figurative suggestion of a mask. Later, each character is equipped with an actual mask, which he dons or doffs to indicate his inner nature, his attitude and his emotion.

O'Neill thought of himself as a writer of "Ironic Tragedy", and a note of deep pessimism prevails in his work. His plays are attempts to explain human suffering and, somehow, to justify it. In his view, man is ultimately a free and responsible

agent who brings most of his grief upon himself through his own action.

His view of the human dilemma suggests that of Sartrean existentialism. Man is in actuality free from all outside authority in the determination of his fate. He is also the lonely bearer of a terrifying responsibility for himself and the race. He has nothing on which to lean for support but himself, nothing to blame for his failures but himself. Human life has no intrinsic meaning or order except the meaning that man projects upon it. He must create his own values and impose upon his universe whatever significance and whatever moral order he expects to adopt as a basis for an ethical code.

O'Neill's characters move in a world of dark and sinister forces. His characters rebel against the despotism of facts as these facts move slowly and inexorably to engulf and destroy their hopes and their happiness. It is their defiant struggle against these facts that lends dignity to their lives and it is at this point that their universality becomes apparent. The development of characters in O'Neill's dramas is always typical and in a sense universal in that it is the common lot of man to feel the heavy power of those circumstances over which he has no control and against which his spirit rebels in bitterness and pain.

Although physically the female characters present no such uniformity as is found in the male characters, never-the-less

they are emotionally all of a piece. Almost all are sexually abnormal; rare is the character who is not either a prostitute or a wanton or a nymphomaniac. The female characters in Thirst, the heroine in The Mob, the female characters in The Long Voyage Home, all women in Moon of The Caribbees, both the female characters in Jane Christie, the women in Walden, Cybel in The Great God Brown, Pompeia in Leslie's Laughed - all are prostitutes.

There are also a number of wantons, sexual delinquents who have managed to maintain their amateur standing. In this class would be included Abbie Putnam, the heroine in Desire Under the Elm and Christine Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electric. As for Nina, the leading figure in Strange Interlude, she is the best classified as nymphomaniac.

In the present dissertation an attempt has been made to study and scrutinise the very stirring human drama concerning some memorable men and women who flock some of the major dramatic works of O'Neill in the different stages of his dramatic career. From among the writer's numerous plays only some particular ones have been chosen for our present study with an eye to the points of their special attraction to the reader. They stand out as giving us some unforgettable depictions of human character in the background of twentieth century America, and the very modern world itself, so to say, taken in its entirety.

The present dissertation is intended to be my Thesis for the Degree of Ph.D. in English of the University of North Bengal.

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I had the advantage of working for the thesis under the supervision of Dr. G.S. Banerjee, Reader in English, North Bengal University. I had also the advantage of utilising the huge amount of critical materials available on O'Neill in both the University Library and in the excellent library of American Studies Research Centre at Hyderabad. Equally helpful was the assistance received from American Center Library at Calcutta. The photographs of O'Neill and his parents as given with this dissertation were very kindly supplied by ASRC, Hyderabad and American Centre Library at Calcutta. I am exceedingly thankful to them for this act of kindness.

During the last fifty years much has been written by critics on O'Neill's artistic genius from various viewpoints. Hence it may appear that my study of O'Neill from a particular point of view, namely his art of drawing the male and female characters in his drama, has been rather an assimilation of the immense amount of critical views on the subject of present study. Yet an attempt has been made to make an assessment of O'Neill's characters from the little originality of understanding that I may be expected to possess. I believe that my present work, on ultimate judgement, will not appear to be so useless as to deserve to be thrown into the garbage-dump.

It is an almost impossible task for any student of O'Neill's plays to handle the vast number of all the plays of the dramatist and write in full details about the innumerable characters, male and female, major and minor, who appear in those writings. Thus for the sake of convenience, and in order to make

the present dissertation compact and useful, I have attempted to concentrate on a number of major plays of O'Neill that have been read and enjoyed universally. These plays and the characters appearing in them, have been discussed elaborately in the body of the present dissertation. Still my study may not be complete in all details and for that I must express my possible shortcomings. It is in the hands of my learned Examiners that a sympathetic evaluation of the present work may gracefully be done. I acknowledge whole-heartedly the all out assistance that I received on the subject of the present study from all the conceivable academic sources.

In this connection, I must not forget to mention my indebtedness and gratefulness to all those who stood by me always during my study of O'Neill with their sincere inspiration, care and assistance. Among such people mention must be made of my parents, my wife, my uncle, my younger brother and sister, my personal friends and professional colleagues.