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The use of obsessions and delusions as a tragic device in the major plays of Eugene O'Neill

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THE USE OF OBSESSIONS AND DELUSIONS,
AS A TRAGIC DEVICE IN THE MAJOR PLAYS
OF EUGENE O'NEILL

By
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Stockton

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CHAPTER I

This introductory chapter contains definitions of obsessions and delusions, and examines the validity of these ideas as tragic devices. It discusses obsessions from the point of view of Freud and Jung.

CHAPTER I

"True tragedy may be defined as a dramatic work in which the outward failure of the principal personage is compensated for by the dignity and greatness of his characters."¹ Thus Joseph Wood Krutch gives in simple terms a yardstick with which to measure the plays of our greatest American playwright and tragedian, Eugene O'Neill. After reading the works of O'Neill, and a number of criticisms, one begins wondering what was the dramatist's main device for working up a situation great enough to be worthy of the name "tragedy". It seemed that his principal method was to endow a main character with an obsession or delusion about which that character had feelings passionate beyond his control. Webster defines "obsession" in this way: "The persistent and disturbing intrusion of, or anxious and inescapable preoccupation with, an idea or emotion; also, the emotion or idea." A "delusion" is "a persistent error of perception occasioned by false belief or mental derangement; customary or fixed misconception." He defines "device" as "that which is devised or formed by design; tool, instrument, invention, project, scheme,"² etc. A re-statement of the

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. xxi

² Webster's New International Dictionary, etc. 2nd ed.

title of this thesis, in the light of these definitions, would be: O'Neill uses the instrument of inescapable preoccupation with an idea or emotion or fixed misconception to raise the characters of his plays to truly tragic heights.

It is well known that the tragic playwright of today is faced with a great problem because, in comparison with other ages, the spirit of the times does not exalt the greatness of individuals. Man is considered to have a common ancestor with the monkey, whom he has laughed at and scorned since the beginning of his consciousness; the world is an infinitely small part of the universe, and man's advent upon it is comparatively recent. Once people believed that the earth was at the center of the universe and that everything had been made for man - man, whom God had created in His image. The old concept was thrilling, for it made even a small man look big, and a great man was almost a god. The literary reflection of this all-importance of man reached its peak in the tragedies of Christopher Marlowe, in whose plays the protagonist is majestically glorified. Dr. Faustus, Tamburlaine, the Jew of Malta, Edward II - these characters are more brilliant than Sirius in a moonless sky, and this was possible because of the assumption that man was God's image.

The modern writer of tragedy, on the other hand, must exalt to greatness man who is now conceived to be as futile as a fly buzzing against the window-pane; and whereas once the tragic act was death, now it is more often the torture of living. Here is Joseph Wood Krutch's differentiation between ancient and modern tragedy:

Modern "tragedy" ...differed from classical tragedy in that it dealt, not with something which comes to an end, but with something that goes on.³

It is up to the dramatist, in this case O'Neill, to accomplish his difficult business as best he can, and his success cannot be told in our generation. But at least we can examine how he tries to go about it. Krutch suggests that O'Neill's work has been made clearer by an understanding of Freudian psychology:

And if religion - the belief in a supernatural power capable of investing them [man's feelings] with meaning - has decayed, then man must discover some attitude toward himself capable of investing them once more with the dignity he has lost. Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra are essentially efforts to do just that - to achieve the self-justifying grandeur of tragedy without having recourse to any conceptions, religious or otherwise, which the mind of man cannot sincerely entertain. In both, the intellectual framework is supplied by Freudian psychology. All that happens is capable of being interpreted in terms of "complexes", "repressions", and "fixations", but there could, nevertheless, be no error more fundamental than the error of assuming that the ultimate purpose of the plays is to illustrate the all-sufficient adequacy of any such interpretation.⁴

The modern writer, then, sensitive to the religious unbelief of his day, cannot look toward a great external God because he is a product of his times, and his times say "No". Since he cannot depend

3

Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. xviii

4

Ibid.

upon an outside power to dignify his feelings and visions, he must try to find strength from within, and raise himself by his own effort. This is a nearly impossible task for most of us, but finding strength from within is a task with which men throughout the ages have been concerned. Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung have attempted to deal with it through psycho-analysis. Both men have had individual ideas about how to proceed, but they have agreed upon the necessity for discovering and understanding the psychic activity of the unconscious.

In order to clarify what I shall say later about the obsessions and delusions of Eugene O'Neill's characters, I would like now to discuss briefly the parts of these two men's theories of the unconscious that seem related to the subject of my thesis.

Freud made famous (or notorious) the word "repression", which he explained in this way:

Let us keep to a simple example, in which a particular impulse had arisen in the subject's mind but was opposed by other powerful tendencies. We should have expected the mental conflict which now arose to take the following course: The two dynamic quantities - for our present purposes let us call them "the instinct" and "the resistance" - would struggle with each other for some time in the fullest light of consciousness, until the instinct was repudiated and the charge of energy (somewhat analogous to an electric charge) withdrawn from it. This would have been the normal solution. In a neurosis, however, (for reasons which were still unknown) the conflict found a different outcome. The ego drew back, as it were, after the first shock of its conflict with the objectionable impulse; it debarred the impulse from access to consciousness and to direct motor discharge, but at the same time the impulse retained its full charge of energy. I named this process repression; it was a novelty, and nothing like it had ever before been recognized in mental life...⁶

6

Sigmund Freud, Autobiography, pp. 53-54

He believed that most of what is repressed is sexual, and the repression started when the person was an infant. He believed that the unconscious mind is made up entirely of personal repressions which, however, often use a universal symbolism for their expression, and which are often the same in very different people. One of the most common repressions is the Oedipus complex started in infancy when the baby wishes to continue unity with the mother who feeds and cares for him, and resents the father or siblings because they interfere in his relationship with the mother. The dreams of many persons have shown this universal symbolism; to give several examples: a house often means a whole person (the idea of the "whole" is contrasted with the idea that in dreams the opposing attitudes of one person are often personified by two or more people) - again, the patient's father and mother are often king and queen, provided the patient's attitude toward them is reverent; and there are many other symbols, many of a sexual nature.⁷ Freud envisaged the images of the unconscious exclusively as images from personal life, and thereby he denied religion and philosophy the right to exist except as illusions because they assume that there are laws in nature that are larger than one's personal life. He writes:

In The Future of an Illusion I expressed an essentially negative value of religion. Later I found a formula which did better justice to it: while granting that its power lies in the truth it contains, I showed that truth was not a material but an historical truth.⁸

7

Sigmund Freud, General Introduction to Psycho-analysis, p. 125.

8

Autobiography, pp. 149-150.

In other words, the desire of all races and nations and peoples to believe in a God who has a personal interest in mankind he dismissed as an outgrown tradition. Freud's former pupil, Carl G. Jung, broke with his teacher by asking how this desire for religion had happened to exist in the first place.

What Freud called the "unconscious" Jung called the "personal" or "superficial" unconscious, and this he differentiated from the "collective" or "universal" unconscious:

We have to differentiate between a personal unconscious and impersonal or super-personal unconscious. We speak of the latter also as the collective unconscious, because it is apart from the personal and quite universal. For its contents can be found in all minds, and this is obviously not the case with personal contents.

The primordial images are the deepest, the most ancient and the most universal thoughts of humanity. They are as much feelings as thoughts, and have indeed an individual, independent existence, somewhat like that of the "partial souls" which we can easily discern in all those philosophical or gnostic systems which base themselves upon the apperception of the unconscious as the source of knowledge...I have often been asked whence come these archetypes or primordial images (the eidola of Plato). It seems to me that their origin can be explained in no other way than by regarding them as the deposits of the oft-repeated experiences of humanity. A common, yet, at the same time, most impressive experience is the daily apparent movement of the sun. We certainly cannot discover anything about it in the unconscious, in so far as the physical processes known to us are concerned, but we do find the sun myth there in all its innumerable modifications. It is this myth that forms the sun archetype, and not the physical process...The archetype is a disposition to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical conceptions... 10

9

Carl G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, pp. 255-282

10

Carl G. Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, pp. 67-69,
Footnote p. 71

In other words, according to Jung, there are in each person's unconscious two types of image, the first of which expresses the personal desires or repressions, the second of which expresses the psychic experiences of all the human race regardless of color, time of existence or cultural background. These primordial images often determine a man's feelings and actions whether or not he realizes it. That these images occasionally rise up and overwhelm his conscious mind is proved by certain types of mental wanderings that cannot be explained by the idea of repressions. Another example of the archetypal image is the anima, the eternal feminine in the man, who represents at various times all phases of all the experiences that man has had with woman. Jung explains the presence of the feminine in man biologically as well as psychologically:

Either sex is inhabited by the opposite sex to a certain degree, for biologically speaking, it is only the greater number of masculine or feminine genes that tips the scale in favor of the masculine or feminine sex. [In the case of a man] the smaller number of feminine genes forms a feminine character that usually remains unconscious because of its inferiority, yet always begins to function overtly when the specific masculinity has been damaged, as, for instance, by castration or through the exhaustion of old age.

With the archetype of the anima we enter the realm of the gods or of metaphysics, for everything in which the anima appears takes on the quality of...becoming...unconditional, dangerous, taboo, magical. The anima is the serpent in the paradise of the harmless man with good resolutions and still better intentions. It affords the most convincing foundation for the prejudice against dealing with the unconscious, according to which moral inhibitions will be destroyed and forces let loose that had better been left in the unconscious. For life in itself is not something good; it is more than that, it is also evil. In that the anima wishes life it wishes good and bad.¹¹

The "animus" is the eternal masculine in the woman, and corresponds, therefore, to the man's "anima". There are many other archetypes beside these, for example, that of the Wise Father, which, according to Jung, is the archetype on which the western world has for centuries based its belief in God.¹²

In other societies the several archetypes have been made concrete in the several gods and goddesses.

At first glance it may seem to the uninitiated quite a step from the discussion of tragic greatness in the obsessions and delusions of Eugene O'Neill's tragic figures to psycho-analysis, but the more thoughtful of the critics, such as Joseph Wood Krutch^{12a}, Barrett Clark,^{12b} and Richard Dana Skinner,^{12c} as well as the psychologist Kimball Young,^{12d} seem to feel that O'Neill is a subjective writer and consequently the distance is not so great. The main problem of this chapter is to discover how the characters of the plays were able to achieve greatness when the attitude of our reasoned science is that man's feelings and thoughts count as a mere shadow on water. I believe

12

Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 140-141

12a

Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, p. 79

12b

Clark, Eugene O'Neill, p. 1

12c

Skinner, Eugene O'Neill, p. 1-2

12d

Young, Personality and Problems of Adjustment, p. 177

that O'Neill was able to make his characters great because he was able to identify them with the universal symbolism of Freud's personal unconscious and the primordial images of Jung's collective unconscious. The characters, then, are not only torn by the emotions that have produced conflicts in the hearts of men since their beginning, but many of the characters themselves do, in some degree at least, embody the primeval images that sleep behind the consciousness of every human being. Of course if they were nothing but primeval images they would be too unbalanced, but nevertheless the obsession or delusion method is the method by which the playwright achieved what he did in tragic build-up. I do not imagine that O'Neill was fully aware of this reasoning, but I do think he used it, because even when a man's traditional religion has gone he still must find something to believe in that is stronger than the conscious will and mind, in order to demonstrate the grandeur of man's life. I do not mean that O'Neill is an atheist. He is definitely a mystic, but one who cannot believe in the traditional God. To George Jean Nathan, O'Neill once wrote:

The playwright of today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it - the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays and novels, or he is scribbling around the surface of things. 13

The sensitivity of an artist often makes him the prophet for the new era or the spokesman for his own times. He is comparable to the medium who seems to be in contact with both our world and the world unseen and can relay messages back and forth. O'Neill is concerned not with the relations among men, but with the relation between God and man, the great moral issues. A man must feel that his life has significance in the universe.¹⁴

"But where I feel myself most neglected," writes O'Neill, "is just where I set most store by myself - as a bit of a poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't - Jones, Ape, God's Chillun, Desire, etc. - and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives. And just here is where I am a most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always, always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just in terms of character. I am always acutely conscious of the Force behind - (Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it - Mystery, certainly) - and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible - or can be - to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage. Of course, this is very much a dream, but where the theatre is concerned, one must have a dream, and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever!"¹⁵

¹⁴ Krutch's introduction to Eugene O'Neill's Nine Plays, p. xvi

¹⁵ Arthur Hobson Quinn, The History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present. II, 199

If we ask why O'Neill admires Greek tragedy so passionately - it is doubtful if O'Neill ever did anything without doing it passionately - the answer may be found in two principal reasons: first, its vigor, beauty and majesty of conception; and second, a cause of which he might not himself be more than half aware, and which the writer will attempt to explain below.

Many of the ancient myths that were translated into the dramas of the Golden Age of Greece, Freud and Jung have discovered to be concrete pictures of the inner processes of the integration of man's individual personality. By this is meant that certain ancient stories arose and retained their appeal because the psyche thought in terms of their inner significance, whether or not the unsophisticated person realized it. Archaic man had and still has a way of putting into concrete forms and images the different good and evil aspects of his inherent personality. Interpreted psychologically, the ancient and lovely tale of Beauty and the Beast means this: when one accepts the fact that somewhere within one both beauty and ugliness exist and must be recognized and reckoned with in order that the individual may achieve balance and unity within himself, then, and then only will he be capable of producing true beauty in his outer life, i.e., the ugly Beast, no longer fearsome because understood, will be changed to a Prince Charming. In the same way the incest theme in mythology is taken to mean psychologically that the individual who is trying to free himself of the spiritual domination in his adult life of his family - or better, - parents - has regressed to a psychological dependence upon them. One of the interesting things about

the sequence of O'Neill's work is that immediately after he wrote his great trilogy Mourning Becomes Electra in which he used the theme of incest employed in the Greek myth of the House of Atreus, he wrote Ah, Wilderness! a charming comedy of family life, in which a mother was a mother and not a spider that drew all into her net, and a father could be friends with his son. "Ah, Wilderness! ...marked an end to that terrible fear which had made every symbol of youth appear like some hideous monster," writes Richard Dana Skinner.¹⁶ It is well known that artists are more sensitive than ordinary people, not only to the outer world, but to the inner; and many of these ancient myths apparently expressed, just as dreams express to ordinary people, the visions of the artist's unconscious - the inner struggle of the man trying to free himself from the mystery and terror and grandeur of the primordial figures in the unconscious. It is the intensity of the battle against these awful figures, these figures which obsess him, that gives O'Neill's writings their force, their depth, their passion, their validity.

But a character who attaches importance to something that is generally conceded valueless, as does Chris, in Anna Christie, is under a delusion. He makes a laughing stock of himself, and is therefore not a tragic figure.

16

Richard Dana Skinner, Eugene O'Neill, A Poet's Quest, p. 227

So far, I have attempted to prove that Eugene O'Neill's general idea of obsessions is valid dramatically because everyone, in greater or lesser degree, is subject to fixed ideas. At the same time, however, many ideas and feelings that are universal are not simple enough to be comprehensible to mankind in general, and an analysis of obsessions may be too much for the public to understand. ~~A work of art must be understood; the characters must be human beings one can sympathize with.~~ If, beside that, they are victims of a fixed idea that has psychological validity they are potentially great tragedy characters. It is the tragedian's difficult task to endow the character with a strong enough motive to account for the disaster, and yet to maintain the psychological balance that will make the character and the play ring true.

To summarize, the main problem of the modern tragedian is to give his characters sufficient grandeur against a background of futility, and this O'Neill does by making them be governed by an overwhelming obsession or delusion. The psychological bases of the obsessions are largely explicable by the concepts of the unconscious mind as postulated by Freud and Jung. Possibly one reason for O'Neill's interest in Greek drama is that many of the problems it stated have a universal inner meaning, such as the Oedipus complex, to which Freud gave its modern interpretation. Delusions are not valid tragic material.

The problem of this paper is to discover what obsessions and delusions O'Neill uses, their bases in psychology, and whether or not the characters are enough like human beings to be understood by mankind in general and "through pity and fear effect (ing) the proper purgation of

these emotions".¹⁷

The major plays of Eugene O'Neill have been divided into three psychological types: the first type we shall call the statement-of-the-problem plays; the second, the simple anima plays; the third, the complex anima plays. These terms and divisions will be explained as we proceed.

17

Smith and Parks, The Great Critics, p. 9

THE STATEMENT - OF - THE - PROBLEM PLAYS

THE SEA PLAYS

The sea is the embodiment of the idea of the unconscious in the human psyche.¹ Psycho-analysts cannot say why it is that the human mind seems to adopt the sea as the visual symbol of the unconscious processes, except that the constant churning of the dark waters, the growth of unknown organisms, the impenetrability of the ever-changing depths suggest the mystery of what lies behind the conscious mind. Freud and Jung would consider it no mere accident that a man as sensitive as O'Neill should become a sailor and later write of the sea. O'Neill is a subjective writer and evidently felt the need of discovering and working through what was in his unconscious mind in order to achieve a realization of himself.² The physical presence of the sea no doubt acted as the lowest common denominator between himself and his unconscious mind. O'Neill, whether he knew it or not, was seized with the desire to go back to the very beginnings of his conscious life in order that he might learn to understand himself.

In his early on-act plays of the sea, O'Neill, distrustful of himself, stuck to realism, and some people prefer these plays to the

1 Webster's New International Dictionary, Sec. Ed. 1938 defines psyche: "The human soul...the mental life of an individual, comprising intellectual, emotional and impulsive activities and predispositions; the self".

2 Richard Dana Skinner, A Poet's Quest, p. 9

more allegorical ones of his later years. The first group of plays to be discussed are The Moon of the Caribbees, Bound Fast for Cardiff, The Long Voyage Home, and In the Zone. These four plays use many of the same characters over and over again, and are generally classed as the four plays of the British tramp steamer "Glencairn". In these plays O'Neill treated a number of different themes that are more or less continuous but that rise and fall like waves. For this reason the writer is discussing these four plays at once. The strongest and most recurrent idea is that once a man goes to sea it is next to impossible for him to get away from it. In other words, a man who lives on the bare threshold of conscious life nearly always is unable to direct his life because he does not know that many of his activities result from his unconscious attitudes. The seamen of the "Glencairn" are shown to be simple, naive men, good and bad, who cannot arrange their lives or even control their actions to any considerable extent. They are tossed about by fate as a boat is tossed on the rough ocean. For example, there was Smitty, a young man from the upper classes, who was powerless against the drinking that ruined his life; or there was Ollie, who always meant to save his money and go home to his family. In psychological terms Smitty was the sensitive, weak character that wanted his mind to slip back into the unconsciousness that the sea implies, in order that he might evade the pain and responsibility of his behavior. Since all human beings try to forget what is painful to remember - whether or not they are conscious of so doing - this dramatic device seems plausible and real. Moreover, the idea is even very hackneyed, and this is all the better because if an idea is not accepted by

all the world as a probability, it lacks universality from the point of view of dramatic appeal. It is the artist's job to endow an old situation with new vigor by making the characters seem alive.

The other sailors on board the "Glencairn" were less articulate than Smitty, less intelligent, less cultivated; but their yearning to see into the meaning of life was just as strong, and they were just as helpless against fate. Yank, Driscoll, and Ollie yearned to settle down somewhere and be farmers.

YANK: Sea-farin' is all right when you're young and don't care, but we ain't chickens no more, and somehow, I dunno, this last year has seemed rotten, and I've had a hunch I'd quit - with you, of course - and we'd save our coin, and go to Canada or Argentine or someplace and git a farm, just a small one, just enough to live on. I never told you this, 'cause I thought you'd laugh at me.

DR. DRISCOLL: (Enthusiastically) Laugh at you, is ut? When I'm havin' the same thoughts myself, toime afther toime. It's a grand idea and we'll be doin' ut sure if you'll stop your crazy notions - about - about being' so sick."³

But it was always too late.

This yearning for the soil must strike a sympathetic note in the audience because psychologically the earth means "mother earth", and man has always received nourishment from the earth, and nourishment means security. Since every human being longs for security, this obsession of

the sailors is based in a psychological truth again so obvious as to be banal. The banality of the psychological truth, however, increases the possibility of effective artistic creation. That the sailors were never able to become farmers - Yank because he died; Ollie because he was kidnapped - makes concrete the ideas that human beings never find the security they are hunting for, and that life is always incomplete. These men had wonderful dreams of what they wanted to do but they never got around to fulfilling them; postponement meant never.

These are the main obsessions of the "Glencairn" plays. The pre-occupation with the sea as an arbitrary fate is the one that recurs most often in O'Neill's early works. Of course there are more ideas than this expressed - fear and shame were strong motives for behavior in In the Zone; Yank wondered about God in Bound East for Cardiff, and there are others. But they do not rise to the intensity of obsessions.

In the play Ile Captain Keeney of the whaling vessel Atlantic Queen was obsessed with the idea of returning to Homeport with his usual number of barrels filled with whale oil. Unavailing were the threats of the crew and the approaching nervous collapse of his wife.

The mate of the Atlantic Queen says to Keeney:

But Mrs. Keeney, sir - seems like she ain't jest satisfied up here, ailin' like - what with the cold an' the ice an' all.

KEENEY. (His face clouding - rebukingly but not severely) That's my business, Mr. Slocum. I'll thank you to steer a clear course o' that...The ice'll break up soon to no'th'ard. I could see it startin' today. And when it goes and we git some sun Annie'll perk up. (Another pause - then he burst forth) It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barrel if ile. I'd die fust. I ain't

I ain't never come back home in all my days
without a full ship. Ain't that truth?

MATE. Yes, sir; but this voyage you been ice-
bound, and -

KEENEY. (Scornfully) And d'you s'pose any of
'em would believe that - any o' them skipper I've
beaten voyage after voyage? Can't you hear 'em
laughin' and sneerin' - Tibbets 'n' Harris 'n'
Simms and the rest - and all o' Homeport makin'
fun o' me? "Dave Keeney what boasts he's the
best whalin' skipper out of Homeport coming back
with a measly four hundred barrel of ile? (The
thought of this drives him into a frenzy, and he
smashes his fist down on the marble top of the
sideboard.) Hell! I got to git the ile, I tell
you. How could I figger on this ice? It's never
been so bad before in the thirty year I been
acomin' here. And now it's breaking up. In a
couple o' days it'll be all gone. And they's
whale here, plenty of 'em. I got to git the ile!
I got to git it in spite of all hell, and by God,
I ain't agoin home till I do git it!⁴

O'Neill described here the tragedy of a false pride that swept away
every humane or tender feeling. It was one of his favorite subjects,
as we shall see later. In this play, more than in the others so far
discussed, there was a sense of conscious choice, because Captain
Keeney, though a hard man, never seemed "psychopathic" like so many
of O'Neill's characters such as Nat Bartlett or Grandfather Bently,
for instance, and one felt that he was actually capable of making up
his own mind rather than being ridden by a fickle fate. Although the
evil forces within him finally won, one was never sure until the very
end that they would. Again, as in the "Glencairn" plays, the hero was

not able to get away from the sea (the unconscious part of the human psyche), but was always struggling against it and consequently evil befell.

BEYOND THE HORIZON

The tragedy of the Mayo brothers was that they never found themselves. Impractical, dreamy Robert ruined his life trying to be a farmer when he had no ability or taste for farming, and sturdy, unimaginative Andrew wound up speculating in the wheat he had once loved to grow. Robert, on his death-bed, had the insight to see into their failures. He and Andrew are talking:

ANDREW. I'm proud enough of the first four years. It's after that I'm not boasting of. I took to speculating.

ROBERT. In wheat?

ANDREW. Yes.

ROBERT. And you made money - gambling?

ANDREW. Yes.

ROBERT...I've been wondering what the great change was in you...You, - a farmer - to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy...I'm a failure, and Ruth's another - but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on God. But you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now - ...My brain is muddled. But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray - So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer to win back - ...It's no use. I can't say it.¹

¹
The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, III, 161-162

The root of these failures lay in the brothers' love for Ruth Atkins. Ruth and Andrew were well-suited - both loved the farm and both were practical people; but Ruth married Robert because he was somehow more romantic, more exciting. This marriage brought misery because it cut off Robert's chance of going to sea and sent Andrew off in Robert's stead. The sea seemed to call to Robert in some mysterious, yearning way - he felt he would learn wisdom from it.

Supposing I was to tell you that it's just beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I've read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on - in quest of the secret which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? Suppose I told you that was the one and only reason for my going? 2

In other words, Robert wanted to discover what was in his psyche - again O'Neill used the symbol of the sea for the unconscious. He wanted to see the East because the East represents to the man of the western world the land of the occult, the mystical; and learning to understand the psyche is a mystical process, and this process is understood in the East. Robert's experiences away from a sheltering home would have tested him, showed him his true worth and given him an idea of what kind of work he was best fitted for. But he was

prevented from developing any further by his anima (Ruth) which enslaved him, and not until his death-bed did he perceive the first step toward self-liberation:

...Do you know, Ruth, what I've been dreaming back there in the dark?...I was planning our future when I get well...After all, why shouldn't we have a future? We're young yet. If we can only shake off the curse of this farm! It's the farm that's ruined our lives, damn it! And now that Andy's coming back - I'm going to sink my foolish pride, Ruth! I'll borrow the money from him to give us a good start in the city. We'll go where people live instead of stagnating, and start all over again...I won't be the failure there that I've been here, Ruth. You won't need to be ashamed of me there. I'll prove to you the reading I've done can be put to some use... I'll write, or something of that sort. ...I've always wanted to write...You'll want to do that, won't you Ruth?³

A man cannot develop to his greatest power unless he realizes and accepts and dominates the feminine side of his nature. Robert did not get the idea of taking Ruth to the city where he felt he could be a success until hope was gone - that is, their child had died - and Robert himself was half dead. Like the other characters of these early plays, he struggled all his life in ignorance, and only at the end began to stumble onto the truth that might have set him free.

3

Ibid., pp. 148-149

Beyond the Horizon is obviously an early play. It is not technically smooth like O'Neill's later ones, and sometimes Robert's speeches make him sound a little priggish, although the total effect is not priggish. The total effect is one of dignified, true tragedy, the tragedy of one who is caught in Fate's trap and dies trying to escape.

ANNA CHRISTIE

Anna Christie is not a real tragedy because it ends happily in spite of the grumblings of old Chris, Anna's father. It is a realistic play, in comparison with O'Neill's later plays, which are usually subjective and mystic. Chris's superstitious belief in the sea as a sort of fascinating god of evil had the effect of denying free will to Chris.

CHRIS...Ay don't know, Anna, why Ay never come home Sveden in old year. Ay want come home end of every voyage. Ay vant see your mo'der, your two bro'der before dey vas drowned, you ven you vas born - but - Ay - don't go. Ay sign on oder ships - go South America, go Australia, go China, go every port all over world many times - but Ay never go aboard ship sail for Sveden. Ven Ay gat money for pay passage home as passenger den... Ay forgat and Ay spend all money. Ven Ay tank again, it's too late. Ay don't know why but dat's vay with most sailor fallar, Anna. Dat ole devil sea make dem crazy fools with her dirty tricks. It's so.

ANNA...Then you think the sea's to blame for everything, eh? Well, you're still workin' on it, ain't you, spite of all you used to write me about hating it.¹

Moreover, Chris believed - or said he believed - that this god of evil must be appeased by sacrifice. He maintained that it was for this reason he broke his oath never to go to sea again after his wife died. He felt that if he let the sea wreak its worst on him maybe it would spare Anna further suffering.

1

Anna Christie, Modern Library Edition, pp. 90-91

CHRIS (after a hesitating pause): Ay'm shipping away on sea again, Anna.

ANNA (astounded): You're what?

CHRIS: Ay sign on steamer sail tomorrow. Ay gat my ole yob - bo'sun. Ay tank dat's best tang for you. Ay only bring you bad luck, Ay tank. Ay make your mo'der's life sorry. Ay don't want make yours dat way, but Ay do yust same. Dat ole-davil, sea, she make me yonah man ain't no good for nobody. And Ay tank now it ain't no use fight with sea. No man dat live going to beat her, py yingo!

ANNA...So that's how you've fixed me, is it?

CHRIS: Yes, Ay tank if dat ole-davil gat me back she leave you alone den.²

The fact that Chris was not in his right mind weakened the play. Anna forgave him for what he had done to her on the basis of his delusion. Chris had let the fears of the unconscious mind assume domination over the conscious. However, unless the playwright shows his audience how the disaster occurred, such a character commands no special sympathy. The classic example of having the loss of one's mind come as the climax to a series of catastrophes is, of course, Ophelia, but even so, many people feel that she is one of the less attractive of Shakespeare's heroines.

From the point of view of Freud and Jung this delusion of the malevolent power of the sea (the unconscious) has several implications. The unconscious is not malevolent in itself, but it demands

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Ibid., p. 159

above all that it live, and like all life, it has the capacity for both good and evil. If it cannot find a good outlet for the expression of its life, it will use a bad one. Consequently if one lives exclusively in the conscious mind the outlet will be bad; but, on the other hand, if one lives enslaved by unconscious moods that is bad too. Emma, the heroine of Different, illustrates the first type of person, and old Chris illustrates the second. Only by the acceptance of the unconscious moods modified by the conscious mind, and the admission of the good and evil within one's self can one achieve balance.

Many critics agree that a large number of O'Neill's characters are not complete human beings, and they imply that they are facets of O'Neill's own psychology.

His particular mode of characterization does not leave an impression of solidity, and in general his concern is not to project a fully imagined and created world, an independent, self-sufficient, opaque, three dimensional affair in which solid, fully existing men and women move about. Seldom does he give us that...complete illusion of actuality which distinguishes the first act of Anna Christie...³

"I see Gene," said one of his friends, "In each new play that, like Lazarus, marks a turning-point, surrounded by a crowd of O'Neill's who represent the skins and the personalities he has shed." Shed on his road to salvation, he might have said. For it is salvation the playwright is ever seeking...⁴

³
T. K. Whipple, Spokesmen, p. 236

⁴
Elizabeth Shipley Sergeant, Fire Under the Andes, p. 83

This Irish-American mystic, with his strange duality of being, has made his plays a projection of his struggles with the unmanageable universe.⁵

Jung maintained that the artist, being an ultra-sensitive person, lives in much closer contact with his unconscious than most of us do, and that some of the artist's images are the images of the unconscious in more or less modified form. If they were too unmodified they might make interesting psychology but they would be poor art.¹¹

It is the writer's opinion that O'Neill's conception of Chris as a tragic figure was poor art. Although fear of the unconscious is a psychologically sound idea, the visible personification of the devil by the sea becomes somewhat ludicrous. However, Chris's delusion, though a dramatic weakness, does not spoil the play. Anna's disillusion, her eagerness for life, her heroic love, her ignorance, insight, desperation and courage make the audience thrill unforgettably with the throb of pity and fear.

5

Carl J. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 177

THE EMPEROR JONES

When the play opened Jones was convinced that his intelligence and conscious will controlled his life and made it successful, and he refused to credit the past or the unconscious life within him with any influence:

JONES (condescendingly): No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another. You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o' no kind feelin's dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you - and most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter - and I was wu'th money to you, dat's de reason.

SMITHERS: Well, blimey, I give yer a start, didn't I - when no one else would. I wasn't afraid to 'ire yer like the rest was - ' count of the story about your breakin' jail back in the States.

JONES: No, you didn't have no s'cuse to look down on me fo' dat. You been in jail you'self more'n once.

SMITHERS: (furiously): It's a lie!...Garn! Who told yer that fairy tale?

JONES: Dey's some tings I ain't got to be tole. I kin see 'em in folk's eyes...Yes, you sho' give me a start. And it didn't take long from dat time to git dese fool, woods' niggers right where I wanted dem...From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some! ¹

Jones lived solely in his mind, so he thought. However, as the play progressed Jones became obsessed by a fear of death that brought in its wake the regression of the psyche - that is, a change from his

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The Emperor Jones, Modern Library, pp. 11-12

conscious understanding of himself as an individual to his unconscious acceptance of himself in an archaic, communal state of society where there would be but little individuation.² The first images that fear brought back were the images of Freud's personal unconscious - the Little Formless Fears; Jeff, whom Jones had murdered in a crap game; the Negro chain gang, and the prison guard. But the later images, those of the slave auction, the Negroes swaying to the roll of the boat at sea, and lastly, the primitive witch-doctor and the crocodile god - these were not personal experiences, but experiences common to the Negro race from the dawn of the process of development of individuality. In other words, Brutus Jones's fear returned him by successive stages to the superstitious and ignorant emotional state of the communal savage. The Witch-doctor wanted Jones to make the blood sacrifice to a god of evil, the crocodile. Science has shown us that the age of reptiles was an age of low intellectual development in the history of vertebrate life, and cold-blooded animals are the lowest of the vertebrates. Consequently this worship of such a creature implies that human development was at its least conscious state; that persons in constant fear of everything in nature do not think much for themselves, but think and act as a community. We speak nowadays of "mob psychology" and we recognize its limitations, but in primitive societies there is no "day after" in which each person can think

²Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 227

things over for himself. Communal actions and beliefs rule his life.³ It was to this abject state of mind that Jones regressed.

(The WITCH-DOCTOR sways, stamping with his foot, his bone rattle clicking the time. His voice rises and falls in a weird, monotonous croon, without articulate word divisions. Gradually his dance becomes clearly one of a narrative in pantomime, his croon is an incantation, a charm to allay the fierceness of some implacable deity demanding sacrifice... JONES has become completely hypnotized. His voice joins in the incantation, in the cries, he beats time with his hands and sways his body to and fro from the waist. Finally... a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased... Jones seems to sense... it is he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically.)

Mercy, Oh, Lawd! Mercy on dis po' sinner.

(...A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon Jones. He stares into them fascinatedly. The WITCH-DOCTOR prances up to him, touches him with his wand, motions with hideous command toward the waiting monster. JONES squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually.)⁴

The cause of Brutus Jone's destruction was the evil within himself.⁵ This is a very old idea. It is the "tragic flaw" of Aristotle, it is the "original sin" of Catholic theology. With these authorities

³
Ibid., pp. 143-174

⁴
Ibid., pp. 52-53

⁵
Ibid., Introduction, p. xi

modern psychologists believe that it was not only Jones's bad conscience over the murders he had committed that caused his demoralization; it was as well his refusal to admit that his whole life was not based on intellect. Pure intellect cannot resolve the unknowable in life, and punishment descends on those who act as though it can.

It is also interesting to notice the setting of this play; it is an island over which Jones at first believe he had complete control. Around the island lies the eternal ocean. The island can be taken to mean Jones's conscious mind, which is surrounded by the unconscious.

The Emperor Jones has received universal acclaim. Apparently this intense fear that sweeps away the ability of a person to act as an individual is an emotion so common to mankind, so close to the margin of awareness, and so powerful in its effect as to be unforgettable. To be thrust back into a communal emotional state is therefore a universal experience near enough to everyone to have artistic value.

THE HAIRY APE

The obsession in this play was Yank's desire to "belong," to feel himself to be a cog in the forces that move the world. At first he was content because he identified himself with his job as stoker. The furnaces produced the heat and power that made the engines move:

YANK: Hey, youse guys! Say, listen to me - wait a moment - I gotta talk, see. I belong and he don't. He's dead but I'm livin'. Listen to me! Sure I'm part of de engines! Why de hell not? Dey move, don't dey? Dey're speed, ain't dey? Dey smash trou, don't dey? Twenty-five knots a hour! Dat's goin' some! Dat's new stuff! Dat belongs! But him, he's too old. He gets dizzy. Say, listen. All dat crazy tripe about nights and days; all dat tripe about suns and winds, fresh air and de rest of it - Aw hell, dat's all a dope dream!... He's old and don't belong no more. But me, I'm young! I'm in de pink! I move with it! It, get me! I mean de ting dat's de guts of all dis. It ploughs trou all de tripe he's been sayin'... It, get me! De engines and de coal and de smoke and all de rest of it! He can't breathe and swallow coal dust, but I can, see? Dat's fresh air for me! Dat's food for me! I'm new, get me? Hell in de stokehole? Sure! It takes a man to work in hell. Hell, sure, dat's my fav'rite climate. I eat it up! I git fat on it! It's me that makes it hot! It's me makes it roar! It's me makes it move! Sure, on'y for me everyting stops.¹

Yank could see in a concrete way the results of his work, but this

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Eugene O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, Modern Library Ed., pp. 197-198

marvelous vision of his self-importance vanished at the sight of Mildred Douglas's horror when she saw him in the stoke-hole. To Yank Mildred in her white dress was like a spectre from another world. Immediately after seeing her he said:

She was all white. I tought she was a ghost.
Sure.²

And later when he was in jail:

Her hands - dey was skinny and white like dey wasn't real but painted on somep'n. Dere was a million miles from me to her - twenty-five knots a hour. She was like some dead ting de cat brung in. Sure, dat's what. She didn't belong. She belonged in de window of a toy store, or on de top of a garbage can, see!³

Many critics have thought that this was a "social action" play because Yank was from a low social class and Mildred was one of the decayed rich; moreover, there is a great deal of talk about how the rich people ignore the poor, and Yank at one time tried to join the I. W. W. But this theory I feel can be disregarded because Yank continually disclaimed interest in social reforms as such, although he was anxious to revenge himself on Mildred, or, failing that, her people, because she had looked on Yank as if he were a hairy ape. Long said to Yank:

Ain't that why I brought yer up 'ere - to show yer? Yer been lookin' at this 'ere 'ole affair wrong. Yer been actin' and talkin' 's if it was all a bleedin' personal matter

²
Ibid., p. 220

³
Ibid., p. 239

between yer and that bloody cow. I wants to convince yer she was on'y a representative of 'er classs. I wants to awaken yer bloody classs consciousness. Then yer'll see it's 'er classs yer've got to fight, not 'er alone. There's a 'ole mob of 'em like 'er, Gawd blind 'em.⁴

The reason that Mildred made such an impression on Yank was simply that to him she was a ghost - she was his anima, a term that was explained in the first chapter. If he had ever come to know her for the superficial pallid personality that she was, he would probably have been able to laugh off her indifference, even if her father did own the steel mills that manufactured the engines Yank stoked. After all, he must have known that someone made them. But it wasn't simply that, for Yank, Mildred appeared suddenly from nowhere; she was young, lovely dressed in white, the traditional color of both ghosts and purity, and during that one brief instant he identified her with the feminine side of his psyche. The ordinary result of this identification would have been love at first sight, but Mildred was too plainly horrified by Yank's brutality, and consequently Yank's love turned to hate. Paddy said:

Sure, I know what's the matter. 'Tis aisy to see. He's fallen in love, I'm telling you...

YANK: Love, hell! Hate, dat's what. I've fallen in hate, get me?

4

Ibid., p. 228

PADDY: (Philosophically) 'Twould take a wise man to tell one from the other...⁵

All the explanations of Mildred's presence in the stoke-hole which the men gave Yank afterward did not change in the least his basic attitude toward her; they simply added concrete details to make the story more interesting.

The reason that Yank could not feel that he "belonged" anywhere after the Mildred episode was that up until that moment he had never felt the need of anything more than his own masculine physical strength. That had put him where he was - the bully and head of a group of stokers, and he gloried in his work and his physical superiority. He had completely disregarded the unconscious or feminine side of his nature, which he felt unconsciously was personified by Mildred. The psyche will not let one do that without causing the individual trouble. Yank's tragedy was that he could not assimilate the feminine side of his nature, nor could he escape from it once he had felt it. He was incapable of feeling an unselfish love for anyone. He had never known or loved any woman well enough to endow her with his anima, and so reach a compromise with everyone's unfathomable longing for the perfect mate. Even his mother had meant nothing to him:

Choich, huh? I useter go to choich onct - sure-when I was a kid. Me old man and woman, dey made me. Dey never went demselves, dough. Always got too big a head on Sunday mornin' dat was dem...Dey was scrappers for fair, bot' of dem. On Satiday nights when dey bot' got a skinful dey could put up a bout oughter been staged at de

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Ibid., p. 217

Garden. When dey got trough dere wasn't a chair or table wit a leg under it. Or else dey bot' jumped on me for somep'n! Dat was where I loined to take punishment...I'm a chip offen de old block, get me?

LONG: Did yer old man follow the sea?

YANK: Naw. Worked along shore. I runned away when me old lady croaked wit de tremens...⁶

Yank and Jones were similar characters because each represented man at his most masculine, man who had banked on his muscle or his clever brain to solve everything, and when they found that muscle and brain were powerless to give them understanding or courage they were as little children in the dark.

6

Ibid., pp. 226-227

MARCO MILLIONS

"You are as lovely as the gold in the sun,"¹ wrote Marco Polo of his sweetheart Donata. This was Marco's greatest compliment - to compare a person with gold. Actually he did not believe Donata was as valuable as gold because he left her for fifteen years, but he never left off making money. He preferred her to everyone else, however, and expected her to remain true to him while he was away, which she was apparently dull enough to do. He possessed to a high degree all the traits that are generally considered to be masculine: energy, love of adventure and visible accomplishment, desire for power and money, physical beauty, passion, and valor. Although his methods were ruthless, one couldn't help liking him because of his enormous naivete - he was not consciously mean; it was all a business proposition to him. Life was the business of making money. As Marco and the princess were about to set forth on the voyage to Persia he said to Chu-Yin:

Well, cargo's all aboard, before schedule, too.
We killed six slaves, but, by God, we did it!
And look at the crowd we've drawn, thanks to my
band!

CHU-YIN: (disgustedly): They would have come
without noise. They love their princess.

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. 224

MARCO: (cynically): Maybe, but they love their sleep too. I know 'em!²

Kukachin, the princess, was his opposite. Neither had ever been poor, but making money held no interest for her. She was all tenderness, sympathy, understanding, love. She possessed all the traits that are generally considered feminine as well as a painful courage that enabled her to hide her suffering and submit to fate.

KUKACHIN: My thoughts in this autumn are lonely and sad,
 A chill wind from the mountain blows in the garden.
 The sky is gray, a snowflake falls, the last chrysanthemum
 Withers beside the deserted summer-house.
 I walk along the path in which weeds have grown.
 My heart is bitter and tears blur my eyes.
 I grieve for the days when we lingered together
 In this same garden, along these paths between flowers.
 In the spring we sang of love and laughed with youth
 But now we are parted by many leagues and years, 3
 And I weep that never again shall I see your face.

Kublai Kaan and his advisor Chu-Yin were men old in practical experience and the wisdom of insight. The Kaan knew how to rule a kingdom as well as love his grand-daughter for the sweet and beautiful spirit she possessed. This is his farewell speech to her as she lay dead in her casket:

I think you are hiding your eyes, Kukachin. You are a little girl again. You are playing hide and seek. You are pretending. Did we not once play such games together, you and I? You have

2
 Ibid., p. 269

3
 Ibid., p. 248

made your face still, you have made your face cold, You have set your lips in a smile so remote - you are even pretending that you are dead!...Let us stop playing! It is time you were asleep. Open your eyes and laugh! Laugh now that the game is over. Take the blindfold from my dim eyes. Whisper your secret in my ear. I - I am dead and you are living! Weep for me, Kukachin - so, Little Flower - you have come back - they could not keep you - you were too homesick - you wanted to return - to gladden my last days - I bid you welcome home, Little Flower! I bid you welcome home!⁴

Kublai Kaan appreciated human individuality wherever it appeared: he is the archetype of the Wise Father.

The conflict of Marco Millions is more a statement than a conflict: Large areas of the human spirit die if they receive no sustenance. Kakachin, who may be said to represent Marco Polo's feminine side, died when he was unable to appreciate her worth.

To the author's way of thinking, the strung-out structure of the play dulls the effectiveness of O'Neill's message, but the message itself is very clear: when a human being allows himself to be ruled solely by an overwhelming greed for money he will become blind to all else. O'Neill's epilogue implies that America today is suffering from this very thing.

4

Ibid., p. 303

LAZARUS LAUGHED

This is a very abstract play with no real conflict, because Lazarus was always playing the Deus Ex Machina. The ideas O'Neill expressed relate to the immortality of the soul, and of Man, the species. Lazarus realized when he died the first time that when one feels fear it means that one does not accept life as it actually is. He decided that fear was responsible for the evil in the world. When one has fully accepted life, fear is dead. The person who is unafraid has the gift of youth; he who never can forget the fears of the past and future grows old.

Lazarus was not an ordinary man - he was not even a hero: he was a trapeze artist, and the sky was the limit. He swung from one dizzy height to another, and scarcely touched the earth even at his wife's death. Here is his speech of farewell to her:

That much remained hidden in me of the sad old Lazarus who died of self-pity - his loneliness! Lonely no more! Man's loneliness is but his fear of life! Lonely no more! Millions of laughing stars there are around me.' And laughing dust, born once of woman on this earth, now freed to dance! New stars are born of dust eternally! The old, grown mellow with God, burst into flaming seed! The fields of infinite space are sown - and grass for sheep springs up on the hills of the earth! But there is no death, nor fear, nor loneliness! There is only God's eternal laughter! His laughter flows into the lonely heart! ¹

¹
Ibid., p. 456-457

The question is, does it? It seems to the author that a man whose wife has just been poisoned would be more likely to recall the sweet intimacies of their love than he would be to contemplate the somewhat chilly "fields of infinite space". Philosophical concepts and poetic language do not console; sympathy consoles, and warmth, and human love. When one compares this speech with the old Kaan's farewell to Kukachin it is easy to see that Lazarus's very perfectionism lacked the spiritual radiance of the wise old man who had not forgotten what it was to suffer. The trouble with Lazarus was that he had forgotten the failures of his old life, and his laughter had become impersonal. He believed that individual life meant nothing, and this philosophy is neither comforting nor intuitively plausible. He was untouched by the terrible catastrophies that overtook him and his neighbors. He was not human.

His wife, Meriam, was human. She suffered. In fact she suffered so much she seemed to have assumed Lazarus's share. She never laughed - she seemed to see through all of Lazarus's fanfare, and while he made the crowd laugh even in death, she wept, remembering their mourning relatives. Her farewell speeches to Lazarus are touching in their revelations of the tenderness, the little touches of pride, the simplicity of her character, and the deep love she bore her husband. After she bit into the poisoned peach her mind wandered until she died:

Say what you like, it is much better I should go home first, Lazarus. We have been away so long, there will be so much to attend to about the house. And all the children will be waiting. You would be as helpless as a child, Lazarus.

Between you and the children, things would soon be in a fine state!...No, No! You cannot help me, dearest one. You are only in my way. No, I will make the fire. When you laid it the last time, we all had to run for our lives, choking, the smoke poured from the windows, the neighbours thought the house was burning! You are so impractical. The neighbors all get the best of you. Money slips through your fingers. If it were not for me - But, dearest husband, why do you take it so to heart? Why do you feel guilty because you are not like other men? That is why I love you so much. Is it a sin to be born a dreamer? But God, He must be a dreamer too, or how would we be on earth? Do not keep saying to yourself so bitterly, you are a failure in life! Do not sit brooding on the hilltop in the evening like a black figure of Job against the sky! Even if God has taken our little ones - yes, in spite of sorrow - have you not a good home I make for you, and a wife who loves you? Be grateful, then - for me! Smile, my sad one! Laugh a little once in a while! Come home, bringing me laughter of the wind from the hills!²

Lazarus Laughed is more like a pageant than a play. The masks, the similarity of the shifting scenes, the lack of conflict - these are more picturesque than dramatic, though the play does keep one's interest. Psychologically O'Neill got off on the wrong foot: he deceived himself into thinking that he had found Salvation and

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Ibid., pp. 454-455.

need look no farther. He was like a bird that has flown too high. O'Neill was dominated by certain philosophical ideas that he wished to convey to the public, and he simply made his hero his mouth-piece. An author's delusions are not dramatic, they are dull. When an author sees through the delusions of his characters he has taken the first step toward real drama.

THE COMPLEX ANIMA PLAYS

ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS

Because Jim Harris, the Negro, loved Ella Downey, a white girl, he devoted his life to proving that he was as able and intelligent as any white man living. But he was so paralyzed, so obsessed with the idea of his inferiority that he always failed in his studies. Moreover, Ella, whose mind was unhinged by the social disgrace of her marriage, did everything she could to contribute to his failure, and finally regressed to the mental attitude of a child who depended upon her "old kind Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years."¹ Jim, in his self-abasement, accepted even this with the sweetness of a great character:

ELLA: And you'll never, never, never, never leave me, Jim?

JIM: Never, Honey.

ELLA: 'Cause you're all I've got in the world - and I love you, Jim...

JIM: (Suddenly throws himself on his knees and raises his shining eyes, his transfigured face): Forgive me, God - and make me worthy. Now I see your light again! Now I hear your Voice! (He begins to weep in an ecstasy of religious humility) Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You! Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away!

ELLA: (jumping to her feet - excitedly): Don't cry, Jim! You mustn't cry! I've got only a little time left and I want to play. Don't be old Uncle Jim now. Be my little boy, Jim.

¹

Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. 132

Come and play!

JIM (still deeply exalted): Honey, Honey, I'll play right up to the gates of heaven with you!²

Although this play has been greatly reviled because the ideas of inter-racial marriage and the superiority of the Negro are not popular, nevertheless it is to the writer one of the most moving of all O'Neill's plays because the characters are more lovable and consequently one's sympathy is more closely enlisted. Jim Harris is a truly heroic figure, intensely sensitive, aware of the significance of his acts, loving and patient with his wife-child even when she threatened to kill him or rejoiced at his failures; and able to face the reality he hated - his black skin. Jim is talking to Joe, another Negro:

JIM (dully): I'm your friend, Joe.

JOE: No, you isn't! I ain't no fren o' yours! I don't even know who you is! What's all dis schoolin' you doin'? What's all dis dressin' up and graduatin' and sayin' you gwine study be a lawyer? What's all dis fakin' and pretendin' and swelin' out grand and talkin' soft and perlite? What's all dis denyin' you's a nigger - an' wid de white boys listernin' to you say it! Is you aimin' to buy white wid you' ol' man's dough like Mickey say? What is you? (In a rage at the other's silence) You don't talk? Den I takes it out o' you' hide. Tell me befo' I wrecks yo' face in! Is you a nigger or

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Ibid., pp. 132-133

isn't you?...Is you a nigger, Nigger? Nigger,
is you a nigger?

JIM:...Yes, I'm a nigger. We're both niggers.³

Ella was a sympathetic character to the reader because she really loved Jim even though she was not able to accept the reality of their racial difference. This refusal to accept the responsibility for her actions made her become as a child. Ella is staring at a Negro primitive mask from the Congo:

I'll give you the laugh, wait and see!...
He thought I was asleep. He called, Ella,
Ella, - but I kept my eyes shut, I pretended
to snore. I fooled him good...This is the
first time he's dared to leave me alone for
months and months. I've been wanting to
talk to you every day but this is the only
chance- ...What're you grinning about, you
dirty nigger, you? How dare you grin at
me? I guess you forget what you are! That's
always the way. Be kind to you, treat you
decent, and in a second you've got a swelled
head, you think you're somebody, you're all
over the place putting on airs; why it's got
so I can't even walk down the street without
seeing niggers, niggers everywhere. Hanging
around, grinning, grinning - going to school -
pretending they're white - taking examinations -
...that's where he's gone - down to the mailbox
- to see if there's a letter from the board -
telling him - ...but why is he so long? Jim!
...Maybe he's passed!...No! No! He can't.' I'd
kill him! I'd kill myself! (threatening the
Congo mask) It's you who're to blame for this!
Yes, you! Oh, I'm on to you! ..But why do you
want to do this to us? What have I ever done
wrong to you? What have you got against me? I

3

Ibid., pp. 101-102

married you, didn't I? Why don't you let Jim alone? Why don't you let him be happy as he is - with me? Why don't you let me be happy? He's white, isn't he - the whitest man that ever lived? Where do you come in to interfere? Black! Black! Black as dirt! You've poisoned me! I can't wash myself clean! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! Why don't you let Jim and I be happy?⁴

The psychological explanation of this play of inter-racial marriage and abject self-abasement is as hard to realize in one's own life as this play is for the public to accept. It is this: Within a man (or woman) are both the masculine and feminine principles, and in the man, of course, the masculine predominates. The feminine cannot be ignored, however, although it is secondary and inferior. If the inferior feminine principle in the man (or the inferior masculine principle in the woman) is ignored, it makes the man (or woman) do many foolish, childish, and arbitrary things, because this opposing principle expresses life in any way possible. When this opposing principle is acknowledged and accepted with all its arbitrariness and child-like irresponsibility by the major masculine (or feminine) principle, then it can be dealt with, because one will be more likely to recognize it when it appears. All God's Chillun Got Wings is written, like the other plays, from the masculine point of view. The man, represented by Jim Harris, is learning to accept the childishness and irresponsibility that

4

Ibid., p. 129

he has come to recognize within himself, and the recognition of it makes him humble in the extreme - too humble, but that is brave person's first natural reaction to the realization of his own imperfections. Ella Downey represents a man's anima in its under-developed state. O'Neill made Jim Harris black because the black people of our country came over as slaves, and many of them are just beginning to emerge now from the slavery of ignorance and poverty. Man (Jim Harris) in accepting as his responsibility the irresponsibility of his anima, (Ella) will emerge from the slavery of an unconscious, unaware mode of living such as was described in the sea plays where all the characters were tossed about by fate. If a man understands himself he will be able to make his own decisions.

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

Desire Under the Elms is an arresting title, and the first problem is to see what it means. In the introduction to the play O'Neill described the elms in this way:

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. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of the man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively 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.¹

As one read the play one realized that everything Eben did, except at the very end, was in relation to his dead mother, with whom he identified himself frequently:

I'm Maw - every drop o' blood!²

he said, and hated his father for working her to death. The elms, then, were visible symbols of the fact that his mother's anima image protected and enslaved him. It protected him because his mother had shown him the only love he had ever known, and it enslaved him because he was unable to do anything without feeling that he must give an account of himself

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. 136

² Ibid., p. 141

to his mother. Mother-love which protects too much reduces the child to spiritual impotency, and at the same time, by its pretense of absolute authority, it looses desires that the irresponsible child does not attempt to overcome. This was seen clearly in Eben's theft of his father's money and his relations with Min, the village prostitute.

Summed up, the title means that too much parental authority leads the child to take out his individuality in brutality. How clearly we see this in Nazi Germany today! O'Neill states that man cannot free himself from this domination without terrible sacrifice. When Abbie killed her and Eben's baby she killed the visible sign of their new life of love and hope, and when Eben turned against her for the crime she had committed for his sake he still had not realized his position of responsibility toward the woman he thought he loved. In the end, however, when they were waiting for the sheriff, he finally perceived the truth:

EBEN: I'm as guilty as yew be! He was the child o' our sin.

ABBIE:...I don't repent that sin! I hain't askin' God t' fergive that!

EBEN: Nor me - but it led up t' the other - an' the murder ye did, ye did 'count o' me - an' it's my murder, too, I'll tell the Sheriff - an' if ye deny it, I'll say we planned it t'gether - an' they'll all b'lieve me, fur they suspicion everythin' we've done, an' it'll seem likely an' true to 'em. An' it is true - way down. I did help ye - somehow.

ABBIE:...No! I don't want yew to suffer!

EBEN: I go t' pay fur my part of the sin! An' I'd suffer wuss leavin' ye, goin' West, thinkin' o' ye day an' night, being out when yew was in - ...'r bein' alive when yew was dead...I want t' share with ye, Abbie - prison 'r death 'r Hell 'r anythin'...If I'm sharin' with ye, I won't feel lonesome, leastways.

The extremity of the situation forced Eben to maturity. Absolute despair, symbolized by the death of the baby and the imprisonment of Abbie, made him forget his mother, brought him to the bed-rock of his own character, forced him to see himself objectively for the first time, and take the responsibility of his actions.

The minor theme of the play deals with the problem of a person who tried to force his life to follow some certain pattern of the conscious mind and will, regardless of what his feelings actually are. With Ephraim Cabot, the old father, the feeling side, synonymous with the feminine side of his nature, was almost entirely lacking, and consequently he kept taking new wives in the unconscious hope that each time his wife could be his feminine side, but because he had almost no feelings himself he could not draw out those of his wives and he became lonelier than ever.

All the time I kept gittin' lonesomer. I tuk a wife. She bore Simon an' Peter. She was a good woman. She wuked hard. We was married twenty year. She never knowed me. She helped but she never knowed what she was helpin'. I was allus lonesome. She died. After that it wasn't so lonesome fur a spell...I lost count o' the years. I had no time t' fool away countin'

'em. Sim an' Peter helped. The farm growed. It was all mine! When I thought o' that I didn't feel lonesome... But ye can't hitch yer mind t' one thing night and day. I tuk another wife - Eben's Maw. Her folks was contestin' me at law over my deeds t' the farm - my farm! That's why Eben keeps a-talkin' his fool talk o' this bein' his Maw's farm. She bore Eben. She was purty - but soft. She tried t' be hard. She couldn't. She never knowed me nor nothin'. It was lonesomer'n hell with her.⁴

Cabot in his old age had found no warmth to sustain him except the physical warmth of the cattle in the barn.

At first Abbie was also an example of a person who had not taken her feelings into consideration and consequently had become hard and greedy. She changed, however, when she allowed the feminine side of her nature to come to life through her love for Eben.

The love - not to say greedy desire - to possess the land is the desire we all feel for security. This thwarted, reckless determination on the part of Cabot, Abbie and Eben each to keep the land for himself only, is, along with Eben's fixed ideas about his mother, the motivating force of the play.

"God's hard," said old Cabot again and again. To Cabot God was hard in the amount of physical labor he required done, but the task of spiritual evolution he set before Abbie and Eben was still more terrible,

⁴

Ibid., pp. 172-173

and yet they were able to confront their fate with the dignity of
greatness - a tribute to the artistry of Eugene O'Neill.

THE GREAT GOD BROWN

The Great God Brown is best likened to a dream in which the several characters portray the several facets of a man's nature. William Brown was the common-place, unimaginative, practical facet, and Dion Anthony was the intuitive, artistic, highly-strung spiritual facet inhibited by its need for protection from life's hurts, and assuming a mask of dissipation and mockery. Both sides of this man loved Margaret, an anima figure whose possessiveness neither could cope with because it made her blind to their real selves. Dion compromised by making her love his mask, but Billy had to steal the mask to consummate his love. The facet represented by Billy Brown was obsessed with the desire to take over everything that belonged to the facet represented by Dion Anthony because Anthony possessed a passion for life that made him a creator, whereas Brown was only a copier. What Anthony touched became beautiful; what Brown touched became common-place, yet Anthony needed Brown's adaptability to the practical side of life as much as Brown needed Anthony's imagination and insight. An illustration of the difference between the two can be seen in their relation to Cybel. Brown gave money for the use and support of Cybel's body, and Anthony uncovered the soul she could not have had without a body. Brown is speaking to Cybel, whom he thinks is Cybel's sister because her mask is off:

CYBEL: Dion came to see me.

BROWN: (relieved) So that's what he's up to, is it? (then with a pitying sigh) Poor Margaret!

(Then with playful reproof) You really shouldn't encourage him. He's married and got three big sons.

CYBEL: And you haven't.

BROWN: (stung) No, I'm not married.

CYBEL: He and I were friends.

BROWN: Yes, I can imagine how the platonic must appeal to Dion's pure, innocent type! It's no good your kidding me about Dion. We've been friends since we were kids. I know him in and out. I've always stood up for him whatever he's done - so you can be perfectly frank. I only spoke as I did on account of Margaret - his wife - it's pretty tough on her.

CYBEL: You love his wife.

BROWN: (scandalized) What? What are talking about? (then uncertainly) Don't be a fool! (A pause - then as if impelled by an intense curiosity) So Dion is your lover, eh? That's very interesting... Sit down. Let's talk... Tell me - I've always been curious - what is it that makes Dion so attractive to women - especially certain types of women, if you'll pardon me? He always has been and yet I never could see exactly what they saw in him. Is it his looks - or because he poses as artistic and temperamental - or because he's so wild - or just what is it?

CYBEL: He's alive!

BROWN: (suddenly takes one of her hands and kisses it - insinuatingly) Well, don't you think I'm alive, too? (Eagerly) Listen. Would you consider giving up Dion - and letting me take care of you under a similar arrangement to the one I've made with Cybel? I like you, you can see that. I won't bother you much - I'm much too busy - you can do what you like - lead your own life - except for seeing him. (He stops. A pause. She

stares ahead unmoved as if she hadn't heard. He pleads) Well - what do you say? Please do!

CYBEL: (her voice very weary) Cybel said to tell you she'd be back next week, Mr. Brown.

BROWN: (with queer agony) You mean you won't? don't be so cruel!! I love you! At least - I'll give you anything you ask! Please promise me you won't see Dion Anthony again!¹

Or, again, Dion and Brown speak:

DION: Why has he never been able to love - since my Margaret? Why has he never married? Why has he tried to steal Cybel, as he once tried to steal Margaret? Isn't it out of revenge - and envy?

BROWN:...Rot! I wanted Cybel, and I bought her!

DION: Brown bought her for me! She has loved me more than he will ever know!

BROWN: You lie!....I'll throw her back on the street!

DION: To me! To her fellow creature! Why hasn't Brown had children - he who loves children - he who loves my children - he who envies me my children?

BROWN: I'm not ashamed to envy you them!

DION: They like Brown, too - as a friend - as an equal - as Margaret has always liked him -

BROWN:...And as I've liked her!

DION: How many million times Brown has thought how much better for her it would have been if she'd chosen him instead!

BROWN:...You lie!...All right! If you force me to say it, I do love Margaret! I always have

¹
Eugene O'Neill, The Great God Brown, Boni & Liveright, 1926, pp. 52-53

loved her and you've always known I did!

DION: ...No! That is merely the appearance, not the truth! Brown loves me! He loves me because I have always possessed the power he needed for love, because I am love!²

In The Great God Brown we have a variation on the OEdipus Complex theme, which usually is interpreted to mean that a person cannot arrive at spiritual maturity until he is able to cast off the fetters of a possessive or parental love and knows himself unafraid to show himself as he really is to those whom he loves. We have all heard boys and girls wonder if they "made the right impression" on members of the opposite sex. Of course they want to please, to be popular. The unconscious method of most is to try to pose as the anima or animus that is lurking in the hinterland of the prospective mate's psyche, because only by embodying this image to a certain extent can one endow one's self with the magic, mysterious power of love. Mature love does not disregard the anima or animus image; it combines it with the reality. Dion Anthony loved the real Margaret, but he could not escape from her motherly possessiveness. Margaret loved her idea of what Dion was - that is, her own animus image. She considered him her child as well as her lover and husband, and this stifled him.

2

Ibid., p. 64

MARGARET: I wish you'd try to take more interest in the children, Dion...Play with them. You're a bigger kid than they are - underneath.

DION: ...Underneath - I'm becoming downright infantile! "Suffer these little one!"

MARGARET: (keeping to her certainty) You're my oldest.

DION: (with mocking appreciation) She puts the Kingdom of Heaven in its place!³

When Dion was a child he endowed his mother with his mother-sweet-heart image:

And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair.⁴

The obsession or tragic flaw in Dion's character was fear. He hated to be hurt, and he knew that if he showed Margaret his true self he might lose her. Fear subjected Dion Anthony's will and he was never able to escape.

³ Ibid., p. 28

⁴ Ibid., p. 44

This play is difficult to analyze. This analysis indicates at least that *The Great God Brown* is a subjective play. Perhaps one clue is in Margaret's speeches at the beginning and the end of the play:

Dion is the moon and I'm the sea. I want to feel
the moon kissing the sea. I want Dion to leave the
sky to me. I want the tides of my blood to leave
my heart and follow him!⁵

So again we come back to the sea, the unconscious life of the psyche. As long as a man is content to let the unconscious side of him - represented in this case by the anima, Margaret - remain unconscious, he courts disaster. If a man is forced to assume a character that is not really his - Margaret thinks of her lover as the moon, and what is more enchantingly lovely, mysterious, and unreal than the moon? - again he courts disaster. But whether or not this explanation of the play is a true one, Dion Anthony and William Brown certainly found disaster.

5

Ibid., p. 24

STRANGE INTERLUDE

There is no spiritual evolution in this play, but rather a sequence of events after which no one changed in any way except that passion finally burned itself out. Everyone understood what was going on except Sam, whose credulity was incredible, but all let fate follow its course. For this reason the various conflicts seemed more like bickerings and Marsden's marriage to Nina at the end about as compelling as drawing a valentine in the sand. The tone of this play was one of impassioned frustration, and the characters never achieved the dignity that would have come from accepting and acting on reality. They sometimes rebuked themselves for the trouble they were in, but they always rebuked each other as well. Nina rebuked her father for breaking off her marriage with Gordon Shaw:

NINA: Don't lie any more, Father! Today I've made up my mind to face things. I know now why Gordon suddenly dropped all idea of marriage before he left, how unfair to me he suddenly decided it would be! Unfair to me! Oh, that's humorous! To think I might have had happiness, Gordon, and now Gordon's child - ...You told him it'd be unfair, you put him on his honor, didn't you?

PROFESSOR LEEDS: ...Yes, I did it for your sake, Nina.

NINA: ...It's too late for lies!

PROFESSOR LEEDS: ...Let us say then that I persuaded myself it was for your sake. That may be true.¹

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, pp 502, 503

Nina and Darrell rebuked each other for their waning,

nagging love:

DARRELL: If he their son realized how little you love me any more, he wouldn't bother! To hate me so much

NINA:...Oh, Ned, do shut up! I can't stand hearing those same old reproaches I've heard a thousand times before! I can't bear to hear myself making the same old bitter counter-accusations. And then there'll be the same old terrible scene of hate and you'll run away - it used to be to drink and women, now it's to the Station. Or I'll send you away, and then after a time I'll call you back, because I'll have gotten so lonely again living this lonely lie of my life, with no one to speak to except Sam's business friends and their deadly wives...Or else you'll get lonely in your lie a little before I do and come back again of your own desire! And then we'll kiss and cry and love each other again!

DARRELL:...Or I might cheat myself into believing I'd fallen in love with some nice girl and get myself engaged to be married again as I did once before! And then you'd be jealous again and have to find some way of getting me to break it off!

NINA:...Yes - I suppose the thought of a wife taking you away from me would be too much - again! ...Oh, Ned, when are we ever going to learn something about each other? We act like such brainless fools - with our love. It's always so wonderful when you first come back, but you always stay too long - or I always keep you too long! You never leave before we've come to the ugly bitter stage when we blame each other! 2

Everyone edged away from psychic responsibilities except Sam, who was too stupid to realize there were any.

In Strange Interlude O'Neill was looking for the perfect

woman, the woman that could respond to every mood of the man - the mood of fatherhood, the mood of the young lover of dreams and mist, the mood of unvarnished physical desire, the passionate mood of the mature lover, the mood of friendliness, the tender boyhood mood of faith in motherhood. A man's anima assumes all these different facets at various times. O'Neill embodied man's different moods by the several men in the play, but Nina was the only woman, and she was supposed to fulfill all their desires, but aside from this fulfillment she had no individuality, except possessiveness. The men achieved a certain convincing individuality and consequent reality, but Nina did not: like Lazarus, she flew too high. If one is everything one cannot be something. She was not a person, she was a fairly complete description of the anima image. One of the peculiarities of the anima image is its possessiveness. Its power is the power of the supernatural over the ignorant - it is not ruled by the logic of the conscious mind, and the conscious mind is absolutely ignorant of its existence until its manifestations occur. But its manifestations do not give much of a hint as to the real nature of the anima; therefore the conscious mind is mystified and consequently attracted. Mystery is a great part of the attractiveness of the anima images. The anima image is not dramatic because its complexity is too confusing and it lacks individuality. Moreover, the image has no sex morality, and the variety and promiscuity and final loss of interest in sex on Nina's part is not congenial or comprehensible to the public. It naturally feels that it should sympathize with the heroine, but how can it when the heroine is so

little moved by ideas of right and wrong?

"In that the anima wishes life it wishes good and bad"

...wrote Jung,³ and that describes Nina.

The title Strange Interlude seems to mean the era of possible reproduction in a woman's life. It is explained in this

way:

MARSDIN: ...You had best forget the whole affair of your association with the Gordons. After all, dear Nina, there was something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and fantastic, the sort of thing that isn't done, really, in our afternoons. So let's you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude, of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace.

NINA: ...Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father!⁴

The implication of the play as a whole is that a woman is alive during this period, and awakening or going to sleep during the rest of her life. This is only partially true in human experience, and the assumption of its complete truth seems silly to a modern society in which the appreciation of culture and heritage is one of the chief functions of persons of or beyond middle life.⁵

³ Carl G. Jung, Integration of Personality, p. 77

⁴ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. 681

⁵ Carl G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 126

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

"For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me"¹

The Mannon house was a house of hate. It was built in hate by Grandfather Mannon; Christine conceived her children in hate; she turned to her husband's cousin as a lover out of spite for her husband, whom she later murdered; Captain Brant was murdered by Orin, insanely jealous of his mother's lover; Orin's desire to woo his sister was fed by his horrible sense of guilt, and the mother and son's murders and suicides were spurred on by Vinnie's jealousy of her mother. Vinnie, hard, embittered, resolute, speaks to Seth, the gardener, at the end of the trilogy of plays:

LAVINIA: ...Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die! ...I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born!

SETH: ...Ayeh. And I ain't heard a word you've been sayin', Vinnie..Left my clippers around somewheres.

¹
Exodus, 20, 5

LAVINNIA: ... You go now and close the shutters and nail them tight.

SETH: Aye.

LAVINNIA: And tell Hannah to throw out all the flowers.²

Jealous possessiveness of each member of the family

~~for those of the opposite sex was the driving force.~~

LAVINNIA: (in an anguish of jealous hatred) I hate you! You steal even Father's love from me again! You stole all love from me when I was born! ... Oh, Mother! Why have you done this to me? What harm had I done you? ... Father, how can you love that shameless harlot? ... I can't bear it! I won't! It's my duty to tell him about her! I will! Father! Father!³

All the members of the same sex looked alike, even Adam Brant General Mannon's cousin, and the men all looked like all the Mannon portraits hanging on the walls. Orin said to Lavinia as he stared at the body of Captain Brant:

By God, he does look like Father!

LAVINNIA: ... No, come along!

ORIN: (as if talking to himself) This is like my dream. I've killed him before - over and over... Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own? ... He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide! ... If I had been he (Brant) I would have done what he did! I would have loved her as he loved her - and killed Father too - for her sake! ... It's queer! It's a rotten dirty

²

Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, pp. 866-867

³

Ibid., p. 741

joke on someone!⁴

Later Orin commented on Lavinia's resemblance to their mother:

You don't know how like Mother you've become, Vinnie. I don't mean only how pretty you've gotten -...I mean the change in your soul, too. I've watched it ever since we sailed for the East. Little by little it grew like Mother's soul - ~~as if you were stealing hers - as if her~~ death had set you free - to become her.⁵

This ingrown life, visible to outsiders as well as to those who look deeper, is an expression of the incest theme. This theme implies an unconscious domination over the characters by their animas - Orin, for instance, by the anima-mother figure (his own picture of his mother, not his mother as she really was), and Lavinia by the animus-father figure. It was the general confusion with the external resemblances that caused the trouble, because internally the characters were not the same. In this trilogy of plays there were two chances for hope: when Ezra Mannon returned from the war he tried to get Christine to love him as she once had, but she could only remember her long years of hate and bitterness. Hazel and Peter were the other chance - they wanted to marry Orin and Vinnie, but Orin and Vinnie were too full of jealous love for their parents, until it was too late. Ezra Mannon had grown more-mellow with suffering and age, and Peter and Hazel offered sweet and sincere love, but Vinnie and Christine were deaf, and Orin was weak.

4

Ibid., 802-803

As in so many of O'Neill's plays, the characters talk about a place that is far away where all is peace and sunshine. In Mourning Becomes Electra it is an island in the Pacific; in others it is golden California, or a cattle ranch in the Argentine, or a ship at sea. Always there is the yearning for a better life, an easier life, a purer, freer existence.

This trilogy of plays, a modern version of the House of Atreus, is not a pretty story. Moreover, most families are not psychopathic, even though most of us have felt, a few times in our lives at least, some of the pent-up hate and love and fear and passion that O'Neill herein described. It is well known that fathers are often partial to their daughters and mothers to their sons, but people don't think much about unless some visible calamity ensues. This play should not be regarded in the light of typical American family life of today. Ah, Wilderness, the charming comedy which followed it, is typical American family life. Mourning Becomes Electra is symptomatic of our age rather than typical of our life. That is one reason it will never be very popular - there is too much horror in it and, although the characterizations are superb, the characters are too queer, too unlovable, for ordinary consumption.

O'Neill, like many artists, has constantly indicated to the American people that its life is too external, too unconscious. Americans are expert business men, big manufacturers, efficient farmers, pleasure seekers and hard workers, but spiritually they are as undeveloped

and unacquainted with the great truths of life as the Mannons, who were such rich, important people in their little New England that no one dared investigate their strange goings-on. If this seems far-fetched let us recall the psychological meaning of the incest theme again: the child who is in love with its parent is trying to escape from the reality of adult life back into childhood when the parent took all the responsibilities of support and love. This kind of childish love is also a form of self-glorification because the child identifies itself to a great degree with the beloved parent. There is nothing wrong with this when the child is young; it is in the fact the desirable pattern of behavior. The harm comes when the child has matured physically but is still in a childish psychological state, such as O'Neill believes the American people to be in. They tend to identify their inner life with their amazing mechanical achievements without being able to perceive that the two are separate. Mourning Becomes Electra is horrible, but it also has movement, power, force. So, O'Neill would say, has American life.

CONCLUSION

"Has there ever been any incest in your family?" one is tempted to ask after the first perusal of Eugene O'Neill's plays. O'Neill's plays are naked, intense, full of prostitution, incest, murder. The public has been shocked. It hates and fears inter-racial marriage, and prefers to be unaware of the cruelty of lust. Many of O'Neill's characters are psychoopathic, such as those in Mourning Becomes Electra and Strange Interlude. Critics account for this by saying that his characters are phases of himself, but the public does not care about that: it says the immorality is disgusting and it has never met anyone like Lavinia Mannon except behind bars. It says O'Neill talks in riddles, as in The Great God Brown, and that he tries to explain the inexplicable, as in Lazarus Laughed. And the public prefers varnish sex ...so O'Neill has raised a storm.

It is a storm of international magnitude. The intensity of his conflicts, the stimulating, high quality of his ideas, his stirring characterizations, and his never-to-be-defeated-in-spite-of-all-hell philosophy have forced the western world to consider him one of its greatest contemporary writers. Of less importance, but of great interest, is his introduction of many technical innovations to modern drama, such as the dual personalities in The Great God Brown and Days Without End, the masked symbolic characters in Marco Millions and Lazarus

Laughed, and the asides in Strange Interlude. In the realm of invention as well as insight O'Neill has set almost no limitations on the theatre - he has experimented with tightly woven plots, as in Beyond the Horizon and Anna Christie, as well as loose-jointed ones, as in The Fountain. He has set no time-limit on the plays, as is borne out by the length of Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra: in short, he has been as daring technically as he has been intellectually.

His principal weakness is that many of his plays seem too specialized - by this is meant that while O'Neill's introspection may be somewhat comprehensible to others like himself, the general public is not like him, and cannot understand or sympathize sufficiently with people like the Mannons to make Mourning Becomes Electra a play of universal appeal. The same is true of Dion Anthony and Bill Brown in The Great God Brown. These characters, although compelling because of the terrific impact of their feelings are outside the experience of the average theatre-goer. Of course it is not being suggested that a playwright write down to the mentality of an audience, as so many actually do; on the contrary, the audience must rise to tragic heights with the tragedian and "through pity and fear effect (ing) the proper purgation of these emotions".¹ But to do this the audience must thoroughly understand, and it cannot always understand O'Neill. Understanding both by the audience and the characters in the play is essential in

tragedy - the strength of poor, weak, haunted Orin in Mourning Becomes Electra lies largely in this. Another weakness of the psychopathic characters is that often they are so dreadful it is hard to pity them. They rise like vampires, taking possession of all they encounter; they have no pathetically human, endearing traits, no sweetness. King Lear was ruthless and terrible in his pride, but his need for love was a need that every human being is conscious of. Nina Leeds talked all the time about what she called love, but real love is based on reality - an appreciation for another person's character rather than an automatic geyser of father-love, romantic-love, friendship, passion, and mother-love. She could not see that love cannot be tabulated in this way, and that most love contains some of all these things.

Of course, this specialization is not true of all his plays. The one-act sea plays, Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, All God's Chillun Got Wings, and Desire Under the Elms are the most notable exceptions. In all of O'Neill's works, even in dramatically less effective plays like Walded and Dynamo and The First Man, one senses O'Neill's passionate, uncompromising will to give the best that is in him of ideas, poetry, understanding.

From a psychologist's point of view O'Neill has written three types of play, all of which over-lap to some extent. The first type deals with an unconscious searching for what is beyond the surface. The characters sense dimly that there is something beside the fact of miserable existence, but they do not know what it is and are too bound

by circumstances and ignorance to do more than fumble and wonder. The characters of these plays are often the dregs of society - prostitutes, sailors, Negroes, poor white trash. Whether or not they are the lowest social class (the Bartletts in Gold and Where the Cross is Made, Captain and Mrs. Keeney in Ile and the Mayes in Beyond the Horizon are not), they face the most hopeless point in their lives and grope to find or do something that will pull them out of the predicament. The predicament may be the fear of death, the loss of mind, or the agony of living on and on - in any case it is the rock-bottom of spiritual and often physical existence, and, except in Anna Christie, the characters never find their way back, or perhaps one should say, ahead, and their spirits die in anguish though usually with the courage that gives these characters true tragic height. They are lost and they know it, but they fight to the end.

These plays are those in which the sea usually dominates the atmosphere, and the best of them are the S. S. Glencairn plays, Ile, Anna Christie, and Beyond the Horizon.

For want of a better title let us call type two the "simple anima" plays. The third type deals also with the anima image, but it attempts to break it down into its component parts. These "simple anima" plays are those in which the lack of recognition of the

anima is the cause of the tragedy. These plays are The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, and Marco Millions. In these plays the main character is a man who is abysmally foolish, unaware even of the possibility of wisdom, and the characteristic of these heroes is total masculinity. They are simple, husky, boastful, greedy brutes with no softening virtues, no insight, incapable of loving anything but themselves. This brought physical destruction to Jones and Yank, but to Marco, more sophisticated, less imaginative, it brought gold galore and death to that undiscovered spiritual side of his nature represented by Kukachin. The message behind these plays is that unless one takes into consideration the minor as well as the major side of one's nature, the psyche will make trouble or one will be as a mere clod of earth. Getting gold or power, or being tough is not enough to make one find his real place in the world.

Lazarus Laughed is difficult to classify but I think it also belongs in class two because the hero, Lazarus, thought he had found all the answers. That O'Neill also thought he had is the difficulty here, because O'Neill, losing his artistic perspective, identified himself too closely with the hero and made the hero a mere mouth-piece rather than a human being. It is true that Lazarus was supposed to possess those feminine virtues of tenderness and understanding that Yank, Jones, and Marco were without, but actually his display of them was unconvincing. Consequently, with his delusions about death, fear, and laughter, it seemed most suitable to classify him here.

The "complex anima" type includes the rest of the plays discussed in this thesis: All God's Chillun Got Wings, Desire Under the Elms, The Great God Brown, Strange Interlude, and Mourning Becomes Electra. This third psychological type of play illustrates the different types of anima image and the effect of each upon the man whose anima images they are. Since O'Neill is a man, naturally the images of his unconscious are dominated by the feminine side of his nature. All God's Chillun Got Wings states the dawn of the realization of the feminine side of the masculine psyche. The man suddenly realizes that there is a softer side of his nature and he is over-humbled by it. Because this softer side has never been developed it has many aspects of childishness - and that is the theme of the play. Another phase of the anima is that of the sinister protective mother, and from this over-protection one must break away in order to become an individual - the theme of Desire Under the Elms. But Man has many moods, and what is the relation of the anima to them? What is the effect of the anima upon man? Possession - and that is the theme of The Great God Brown and Strange Interlude. What will the effects of this possession be? Look for the answer in the awful tragedy of Mourning Becomes Electra.

It is to be seen from the study of Skinner's chronological table of Eugene O'Neill's works² that these three psychological types

2

See Appendix

types of drama are in almost perfect chronological development. The minor works of O'Neill not discussed in this paper also follow the same general order.

It is not O'Neill's personal development, however, that is of paramount importance to the public; it is his message to the world. It is well-known that an artist, often without being aware of it, sums up moral and psychological attitudes of the age in which he lives. He does this all the more when he is determined to set down only his deepest and most sincere feelings. These feelings are naturally expressions against the philosophies of the day which run counter to what he senses are the great truths. O'Neill has been trying to discover what his soul is made of, and his personal discoveries happen to coincide with many of the teachings of Freud and Jung in regard to what is wrong with our society in general.

The first psychological type of play indicates that our western civilization is filled with men who go on doing what they started to do without considering the significance of their actions until fate has decided the course of their lives. They are too weak and unknowing to act when it would seem possible, and when they repent and sometimes understand a little it is too late. This is part of the tragedy of the extrovert. The world, then, is too concerned with day-to-day accomplishment to seek wisdom, but a few people are occasionally made aware of the lack of it.

The second important criticism O'Neill levels at society is its pride in the exclusively manly virtues, virtues that, undiluted, bring on self-destruction. O'Neill is perhaps referring to our national pride in our corner on the world's gold supply, our sky-scrapers, our oil-fields, our marvelous inventions, our swash-buckling self-confidence that could burst like a bubble if the right pin pricked it.

The third message O'Neill brings is that until society realizes that there is an inner life that must be satisfied we will continue to destroy ourselves. There are different kinds of destruction - the physical destruction of war and murder, and the psychological destruction of disregard for artistic creation. There are many different phases of the inner life to learn about and accept, and there are no short-cuts or easy answers to the growth toward spiritual maturity in the western world.

The problem of this thesis was to discover whether or not the use of obsessions and delusions as a tragic device was valid dramatically. The plays have been examined and the obsessions and delusions discussed. The conclusion was that delusions such as Chris and Lazarus had were not valid, but that some of the obsessions were. Those that were valid were so on two accounts. First, an obsession is something that must be perceived and overcome. Those characters which struggled to overcome the influences which, willy-nilly, were shaping their lives, assumed grandeur in the struggle. They were fighting something that

was bigger than their conscious selves, and they put their utmost strength into the battle. Second, an obsession being in itself stronger than the conscious will and mind, raises the character, whether he be good or evil, to gigantic heights, the heights necessary for tragedy. The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape typify this, as does Shakespeare's Richard III. The obsessions that were invalid dramatically were those of the psychopathic characters such as Orin, Lavinia, and Nina Leeds.

The statements in this thesis are, of course, highly controversial, and the author makes no claim to have discovered the exclusive truth. Any remark on psychology is at least as indicative of the author's make-up as it is of the subject's. Therefore it is to be hoped that the readers of this paper, whether or not they sympathize with the point of view, will at least find it stimulating.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE O'NEILL PLAYS¹

1913-1914	Fall and Winter	The five one-act plays in <u>Thirst</u>
1914	Spring	"Bound East for Cardiff" (Very important from my point of view. In it can be seen, or felt, the germ of the spirit, life-attitude, etc., of all my more important future work. It was written before my work under Prof. Baker at Harvard.)
1914-1915	Fall and Winter	Nothing of importance
1915-1916		Nothing
1916	Summer	Start of the Provincetown Players - wrote "Before Breakfast"
1917	Winter, at Provincetown	Wrote "In the Zone" - "Ile" - "The Long Voyage Home" - "Moon of the Caribbees"
1917	Summer	A short story (never published) about stokers containing the germ idea of "The Hairy Ape" - also an outline of the idea for "Beyond the Horizon"

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Furnished by Eugene O'Neill to Richard Dana Skinner for his book entitled Eugene O'Neill, A Poet's Quest, p. viii-x.

1918	Winter	"The Rope" - "Beyond the Horizon"
	Summer	"The Dreamy Kid" - "Where the Cross is Made"
	Fall	First draft of "The Straw"
1919	Winter	"Chris" - never published, although produced by George Tyler outside of New York. This was the play from which "Anna Christie" developed.
1920	Spring	Final draft of "The Straw"
	Winter	"Gold"
	Summer	"Anna Christie"
1921	Fall	"Emperor Jones" and "Diff'rent"
	Winter	"The First Man"
	Spring and Summer	First draft of "The Fountain"
1922	Late Fall	"The Hairy Ape" (written in three weeks)
	Summer	Final draft of "The Fountain"
	Fall	One half of "Welded"
1923	Winter	Finished "Welded"
	Summer	Outline and one scene of "Marco Millions"
	Fall	"All God's Chillun Got Wings"
1924	Winter and Spring	"Desire Under the Elms"
	Summer	Finished Marco Millions in its original two-part two-play form, each play short full length.

1925	Winter	Final draft of "Marco Millions", condensed into one play. "The Great God Brown"
	Fall	Half of first draft of "Lazarus Laughed"
1926	Winter and Spring	Final draft of "Lazarus Laughed" - except for some cutting and con- densing in 1927
	Spring and Summer	First half of "Strange Interlude"
1927	Winter, Spring and Summer	Final draft of "Strange Interlude"
1928	Spring and Summer	"Dynamo"
1929 to 1931		"Mourning Becomes Electra"
1932	Spring and Summer	"First and second drafts of "Days Without End"
	September	"Ah, Wilderness"
	Fall	Third draft of "Days Without End"
1933		Final fourth draft of "Days Without End"

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