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## O'Neill and Nietzsche: The Making of a Playwright and Thinker

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O'NEILL AND NIETZSCHE:  
THE MAKING OF A PLAYWRIGHT AND THINKER

by  
Regina Poulard

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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## PREFACE

Almost all the biographers mention Nietzsche's and Strindberg's influence on O'Neill. However, surprisingly little has been done on Nietzsche and O'Neill. Besides a few articles which note but do not deal exhaustively with the importance of the German philosopher's ideas in the plays of O'Neill, there are two unpublished dissertations which explore Nietzsche's influence on O'Neill. While Esther Judith Olson in her dissertation systematically examines all the plays, she does not show the gradual development of a philosophy of life on the part of O'Neill. Daniel Stein concentrates mostly on The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night and finds the tone of these plays largely pessimistic and nihilistic. Both writers compare Nietzsche's and O'Neill's styles, but neither establishes Nietzsche's influence on O'Neill based on a psychological need. Neither Olson nor Stein shows the gradual development of O'Neill's understanding of Nietzsche and how the experience of Nietzsche helped him in the formation of his own philosophy of life through understanding of self.

I will not discuss similarities in styles, and I totally disagree with Daniel Stein in his interpretation of The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night as pessimistic and nihilistic. The purpose of this study is to show how Nietzsche became the model of O'Neill's life script. Through the experience of Nietzsche in his physical and intellectual life O'Neill gradually developed his own

philosophy of life. In his early creative period he accepted Nietzsche wholeheartedly and gradually developed an understanding of the ideas of the German philosopher. In his middle period O'Neill gradually rejects the major ideas of Thus Spake Zarathustra, culminating in the complete and explicit rejection of Nietzsche in Days Without End, the climax in O'Neill's life script. In the last plays Eugene O'Neill retains only a few minor points of Thus Spake Zarathustra and returns to Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ with its emphasis on charity and self-overcoming, a self-overcoming very different from Nietzsche's. This rejection of Thus Spake Zarathustra makes a more complete understanding of The Birth of Tragedy possible--an understanding that leads to a more effective dramatic structure.

## VITA

The author, Regina Poulard, née Fehrens, was born in Berlin, Germany, on May 21, 1941. There she attended the 9. Grundschule, Kopernikus-Schule, and Beethoven-Schule, from the latter of which she graduated in 1960. Between 1960 and 1962 she attended the Sprachmittler-Schule, a translator and interpreter school, where she studied English and French. In the Fall of 1962, she began her studies at Otterbein College in Ohio. There she majored in English and French and graduated with honors in 1964. Upon receipt of her B. A., she was granted a teaching assistantship at the University of Pittsburgh, where she received her M. A. in 1966. While attending the University of Pittsburgh, she also taught German at the Berlitz School of Languages. From 1966 to the present time, she has been teaching English at Chicago State University. In 1971 she enrolled in the Doctoral Program at Loyola University.

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## CHAPTER I

### O'NEILL AND NIETZSCHE: A LOOK INTO THE MIRROR

But when I looked into the mirror, I cried out, and my heart was shaken: for I did not see myself in it but the grimace and mockery of a devil.

#### Thus Spake Zarathustra

Eugene O'Neill, the father of modern American drama, has been lavishly praised and condemned at the same time, has gone through periods of fame, decline, and revival, but often he has been unfairly treated in both praise and condemnation. In order to come to a just appreciation of his plays, one must take a careful look at the man and his works, for in the case of O'Neill as in the cases of his two spiritual fathers--Friedrich Nietzsche and August Strindberg--his life and plays are inseparable. His plays give expression to psychological crises and show the evolution of a philosophy of life that helped him understand and accept the opposing forces within himself and the disharmonies of twentieth-century life. Simultaneously the search for a philosophy of life that could ideally, if not practically, bring about a reconciliation of the two most prominent forces within himself--love and hate directed toward the same object--also led to the finding of a dramatically sound structure in his plays. However, the cost of coming to terms with himself was high; it meant no less than the



loss of the tension necessary for creation and an escape into physical disability.

In this dissertation I will attempt to show how O'Neill used Nietzsche's philosophy as expressed in The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spake Zarathustra to develop his own philosophy of life. He came into contact with Nietzsche at the time of an emotional crisis and felt tremendously attracted to the German philosopher because he seemed to respond to a psychological need through both his life and philosophy. Although O'Neill apparently did not understand exactly what Nietzsche was saying, in his early period (up to Lazarus Laughed) he accepted particularly Thus Spake Zarathustra in toto, even to the extent of using individual sayings of Zarathustra as germs for the many plots of his plays. After Lazarus Laughed, in which he tried to go beyond Nietzsche by having the overman on earth, O'Neill, in his middle period (up to Days Without End), started to diverge from Nietzsche, notably in his rejection of the idea of the overman. In his final period O'Neill, having gone through the experience of Nietzsche, largely retained and now understood more clearly elements of The Birth of Tragedy. This more complete understanding of The Birth of Tragedy contributed to the greater effectiveness of his later plays in which O'Neill seems to have rejected the more spectacular elements of Nietzsche's philosophy--the overman, the transvaluation of all values, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and amor fati--in favor of man's need for compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and love.

Edwin A. Engel very perceptively observes that adolescence, a

decisive period in everyone's life, was crucially important in Eugene O'Neill's psychological and intellectual make-up. Engel points out that O'Neill throughout his career drew on his experiences of the twelve years between 1900 and 1912.<sup>1</sup> These few years in O'Neill's life are of utmost importance not only because they provide the material for his plays and the psychological tension necessary for creation but also because in these years O'Neill subconsciously wrote the script for the rest of his life.

It is significant that the final year that seemed to be the most important to O'Neill because it provides the setting for his frankly admitted autobiographical play is 1912, the year in which he attempted to commit suicide. For almost all his plays, with the exception of the very early plays which O'Neill did not publish and A Moon for the Misbegotten, which deals, at least on the surface, with Jamie rather than Eugene O'Neill, draw on events or emotions dating from that period. Although at times O'Neill telescopes later problems into his plays, the predominant mood, atmosphere, and frame of mind are taken from these twelve years. It seems as if his attempted suicide marked the end, or actual death, of O'Neill's active emotional life. This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that Long Day's Journey into Night ends before Edmund's (Eugene O'Neill's) admission to the tuberculosis sanatorium and by Edmund's mention of his suicide attempt just before

<sup>1</sup>Edwin A. Engel, "Ideas in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," in Ideas in the Drama, ed. John Gassner (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), p. 101.

the confession of his father, himself, and Jamie. These confessions helped Edmund see the true, tortured souls of his father and brother, and his understanding led through forgiveness, compassion, and love to an affirmative acceptance of reality. This acceptance of reality began to dawn for Edmund at the end of the play. For O'Neill it grew into a new life during his stay at Gaylord Farm, which, as he indicated in a letter to Dr. Lyman, he considered his rebirth: "If, as they say, it is sweet to visit the place one was born in, then it will be doubly sweet for me to visit the place I was reborn in--for my second birth was the only one which had my full approval."<sup>2</sup>

For the remainder of his physical life, starting with his stay at Gaylord Farm, the playwright, who seems to have stopped growing emotionally in 1912, appears to be trying to understand himself through extensions of himself in the major characters of his plays. The life that he had experienced before seems to have been his entire life, and he had to come to terms with it. O'Neill's perception of death which he explained to his second wife, Agnes Boulton, perhaps sheds some light on this problem:

I vaguely remembered coming to, hearing a knocking on the door, then silence. . . . Then a horrible thought came to me--I was dead, of course, and death was nothing but a continuation of life as it had been when one left it! A wheel that turned endlessly round and round back to the same old situation! This was what purgatory was--or was it hell itself?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>O'Neill to Dr. Lyman, quoted in O'Neill by Arthur and Barbara Gelb (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Agnes Boulton, Part of a Long Story (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 202.

In his plays O'Neill turns the "wheel" of his life "round and round to the same old situation," understanding himself a little better with each turn. It appears almost as if O'Neill had pictured himself as the Lazarus of his play, who comes back from the dead to teach man how to live. For it would be a grave mistake, indeed, to consider O'Neill's plays merely as his autobiography. The plays were the means that helped him understand himself and his world. Above all, they helped resolve the conflicts in his mind and, in the words of Frederick I. Carpenter, "stirred his imagination to dramatize the conflicts of all men. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

O'Neill went through his first serious, and perhaps for his career most significant, crisis between 1900 and 1902. In the beginning of 1900, Eugene O'Neill attended Mount St. Vincent, where he took his first communion on May 24. Although he was upset about Jamie, who was not doing as well as had been expected, and his mother, whose health he thought was poor, he did well in school and sought comfort in religion. Arthur and Barbara Gelb are convinced that at the time of his first communion O'Neill had an extremely strong faith in God. His trust in God, he believed, would protect him from all evil.<sup>5</sup> But this peace of mind and religious certainty were not to last long. On October 16, he entered De La Salle Institute in Manhattan. Since the school was close enough to the hotel where his mother had made a more or less permanent home, he was not a boarder but lived at home. When

<sup>4</sup>Frederick I. Carpenter, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 71.

one day he returned to the hotel unexpectedly, he surprised his mother giving herself a morphine injection. Although the young Eugene hardly understood what he had seen, his mother from a feeling of guilt overreacted and accused him of spying on her. After several discussions with his father and brother, O'Neill realized the full import of his discovery and started to understand the bitter pattern of his brother's and father's lives.<sup>6</sup> Back at De La Salle, according to Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill underwent a spiritual crisis. He was still doing well, but beneath the façade of a model student, doubts about the love, justice, and omnipotence of God started to torture him because of his mother's inability to shake her morphine addiction. But afraid of the consequences of his faltering faith, O'Neill prayed for the recovery of his mother and even vowed to become a priest if God would save her. However, at the end of the year which did not promise any improvement in his mother's situation, he abandoned his faith.<sup>7</sup> This loss of faith was the beginning of the playwright's revolt against his parents' values--a revolt that was to intensify with the passing of time.

This time also marked the beginning of O'Neill's life script. Eugene O'Neill indirectly admitted as much to one of his doctors whom he told at the age of sixty that this year was the turning point in his life.<sup>8</sup> According to Eric Berne, a script is "a life plan which

<sup>6</sup>Gelb, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup>Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Playwright (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), pp. 87-88.

<sup>8</sup>Gelb, p. 73.

is formed in early childhood and which goes through various 'rewrites' as the person grows up, with the plot and the ending remaining essentially unchanged."<sup>9</sup> Biologically it is probable that the script writer who generally suffers from emotional and sensory deprivation becomes physically ill since this deprivation "tends to bring about or encourage organic changes. If the reticular activating system of the brain stem is not sufficiently stimulated, degenerative changes in the nerve cells may follow, at least indirectly." Although the physical deterioration of nerve cells may be actually caused by poor nutrition, it is very likely that this poor nutrition is a result of apathy. "Hence a biological chain may be postulated leading from emotional and sensory deprivation through apathy to degenerative changes and death."<sup>10</sup>

The script itself could be said to follow Aristotelian principles of tragedy since it consists of three parts: the prologue, the climax, and the catastrophe. The prologue occurs in childhood, and the protagonists are the two parents of the script writer. The climax occurs at the time in adulthood when the individual fights the script and seems to be able to escape his destiny or catastrophe. The climax "represents the battle between two forces: the script or self destructive tendency, and the wish to avoid the catastrophe. The climax suddenly yields to the catastrophe when the person relaxes his battle

<sup>9</sup>Eric Berne, A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis, 3rd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 371.

<sup>10</sup>Eric Berne, Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 13-14.

against the script and allows his destiny to take its course."<sup>11</sup> Such destructive scripts are called "hamartic" after the flaw of Aristotle's tragic hero, since "persons with tragic scripts also seem to suffer from a basic flaw."<sup>12</sup>

Structural Analysis sees the individual as governed by three ego states, the Parent, the Adult, and the Child.<sup>13</sup> Generally a child is brought up by the Parent in his parents.

In a "hamartia-genic" household, however, it is not the Parent of a father or mother . . . who is in charge of bringing up the offspring, but a pseudo-Parent which is in reality a Child ego state. . . . This Child ego state is basically incapable of performing the necessary functions of a father or mother, and where the Child becomes a pseudo-Parent, the offspring generally develop scripts.<sup>14</sup>

The decision for a script is usually caused by an injunction from the parent of the opposite sex, and the parent of the same sex teaches the individual how to carry out the injunction.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the individual often patterns his life on that of a consciously understood model.<sup>16</sup>

In the case of O'Neill it appears that he was doomed to a script life even before he was born. Ella O'Neill felt extremely guilty about Edmund's death and tried to shift the blame to her husband and children

<sup>11</sup>Claude Steiner, Games Alcoholics Play: The Analysis of Life Scripts (New York: Grove Press, 1971), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Eric Berne, Games People Play, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>14</sup>Steiner, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

by accusing James O'Neill of having made her choose between him and the children and by accusing Jamie of having maliciously and jealously infected Edmund with the measles. Although Eugene was not yet born, he eventually had to share the guilt, which he started to understand between 1900 and 1902, since the guilt-packed atmosphere in the O'Neill household finally convinced him that his birth was the cause of his mother's drug addiction.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout his childhood O'Neill craved for his mother's affection which, because of her addiction, she was not always able to give. At first this need for love could be successfully transferred to his nurse. But when he was seven years old, his father decided that it was time for him to go to school, and the young Eugene O'Neill was sent to Mount St. Vincent, a Catholic boarding school. Although he may not yet have consciously felt rejected, his mother's attitude perhaps already affected him subconsciously. According to the Gelbs, Ella O'Neill felt relieved that the responsibility of caring for her children was taken away from her.<sup>18</sup> An added complication came in the form of James O'Neill's accident. In the midst of the mother's worry about and preoccupation with James O'Neill, the young Eugene had to leave for Mount St. Vincent. In the words of Doris Alexander, "he was taken there and left—a shy, bewildered boy who felt lost and frightened among the strange children and the alien, black-robed women, so terribly unlike

<sup>17</sup>Gelb, op. cit., pp. 53-55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 65.



his beautiful mother."<sup>19</sup> There he was left for days and months, and even at Christmas, when all the other boys and girls left for home, O'Neill because of his father's profession had to stay at Mount St. Vincent.<sup>20</sup> Thus he may already have felt a sense of betrayal on his mother's part, a betrayal caused by his father's wishes and his mother's love for his father. However, at this time any doubt in his mother's love was probably subconscious. But after having found out about his mother's problem, O'Neill could not help but feel consciously rejected since immediately afterwards he was forced to board at De La Salle, to which he had been commuting before. He must at least now, if not before, have clearly understood his mother's injunction, "Don't force me to love you" or "Leave me alone." After struggling with this injunction alone for about two years, he then seems to have looked up to his older brother, whom he idolized, and not his father, whom he regarded as a cause for his mother's injunction. Jamie became the guide to teach him how to carry out this injunction. At the same time the opposing forces of love and hate directed toward his mother and father seem to have developed. O'Neill loved his mother and needed her; yet at the same time he hated her because she was not able to meet this need and made him feel guilty by intimating that his birth was the cause for her addiction. The young Eugene O'Neill loved his father and hated him simultaneously because Ella blamed him for all her problems, a

<sup>19</sup>Doris Alexander, The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

feeling that was transmitted to her children, and because it was his father who had robbed him of his mother's love.

This speculation on the psychological conflicts in O'Neill's early life finds support in a chart that O'Neill once made for himself in an effort to understand his feelings (see p. 12).

In the fall of 1902, after he had lost his faith, O'Neill insisted on being sent to a nonsectarian boarding school without telling his reasons. At first he seems to have kept his rejection of religion a secret, but after one year at Betts Academy, he started to rebel openly.<sup>21</sup> Louis Sheaffer states that "after the loss of faith in his mother and in Catholicism (he tended unconsciously to equate her with Catholicism, just as he equated his father with the Irish), he was launched on a lifelong quest for something to believe in."<sup>22</sup> He read voraciously and attacked all religion and tradition; however, in spite of turning away from Catholicism, he did not become an atheist but an agnostic because, as he once told his friend Weeks, he felt "that there had to be Something, Someone, some Purpose behind his life. The human mind . . . could not comprehend or accept a meaningless infinity without beginning and without end."<sup>23</sup>

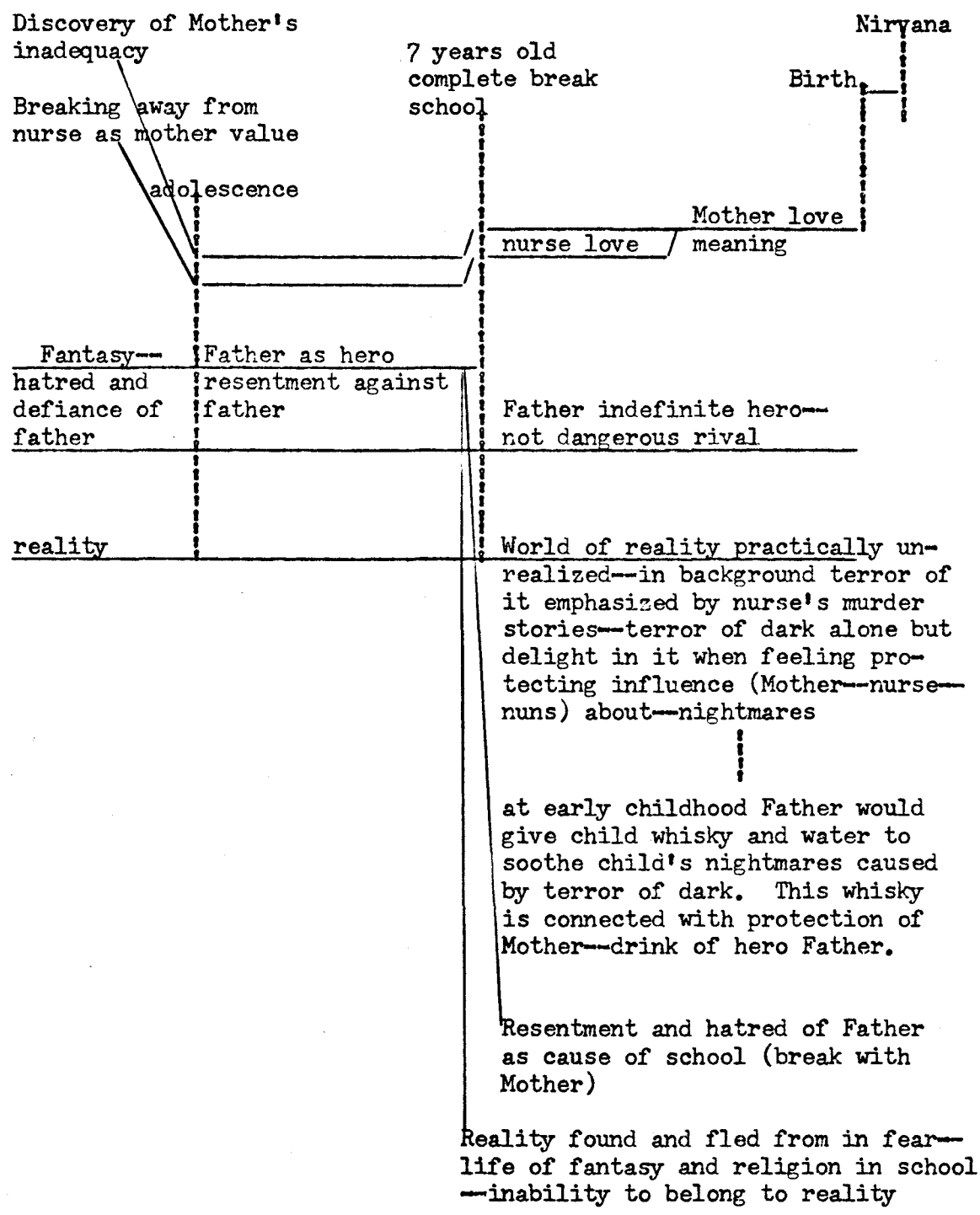
In this frame of mind and in "search for a substitute faith,"<sup>24</sup> O'Neill was introduced to Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra

<sup>21</sup>Sheaffer, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>24</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 75.



O'Neill's Psychological Chart<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Sheaffer, op. cit., p. 506.

at the age of eighteen.<sup>26</sup> This book, because of sensational and therefore attractive slogan-like statements like "God is dead," quickly came to fill the void created by his loss of faith. "Zarathustra," he wrote to Benjamin de Casseres years later, ". . . has influenced me more than any book I've ever read. I ran into it . . . when I was eighteen and I've always possessed a copy since then and every year or so I re-read it and am never disappointed, which is more than I can say of almost any other book."<sup>27</sup> When in 1928 he was asked if he had a literary idol, he responded: "The answer to that is in one word--Nietzsche."<sup>28</sup>

This influence of Nietzsche is quite evident in the life and plays of O'Neill. It seems as if Nietzsche, and to a certain extent Strindberg, became the model on whom O'Neill consciously patterned his creative as well as his physical life. Nietzsche's life, with certain additional aspects of Strindberg's experience, became the life script that O'Neill wrote for himself. The Gelbs point out that throughout his life O'Neill copied and memorized passages from Nietzsche, particularly from Thus Spake Zarathustra, and that he felt very close to the German philosopher.

Many aspects of O'Neill's later life strikingly paralleled those of Nietzsche's. The drooping black mustache O'Neill grew in his late twenties, the solitude in which he spent his last years, the

<sup>26</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>27</sup>O'Neill to de Casseres, quoted in Gelb, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Sheaffer, op. cit., p. 122.

tremendous strain he put on his creative spirit, the somber satisfaction he took in being misunderstood, and the final collapse--all are a mirroring of Nietzsche.<sup>29</sup>

If we look at Nietzsche, the parallels between his life and work and that of O'Neill become even more apparent. William Mackintire Salter says about Nietzsche what could apply equally to O'Neill if we change the word "philosopher" to "playwright."

If I may give in a sentence what seems to me the inmost psychology and driving force of his thinking, it was like this: --Being by nature and by force of early training reverent, finding, however, his religious faith undermined by science and critical reflection, his problem came to be how, consistently with science and the stern facts of life and the world, the old instincts of reverence might still have measurable satisfaction, and life again be lit up with a sense of transcendental things. He was at bottom a religious philosopher--this though the outcome of his thinking is not what would ordinarily be called religious. There is much irony in him, much contempt, but it is because he has an ideal; and his final problem is how some kind of practical approximation to the ideal may be made. He himself says that one who despises is ever one who has not forgotten how to revere.<sup>30</sup>

If we take a look at Nietzsche's career as a philosopher and compare it with O'Neill's career as a playwright, we will find again that except for names and dates the two careers are almost identical:

Nietzsche's intellectual history falls, roughly speaking, into three periods. In the first, he is under the influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner--the influence of the latter might be almost called a spell. It is the time of his discipleship. . . . In the second, he more or less frees himself from these influences. It is the period of his emancipation--and of his coolest and most objective criticism of men and things (including himself). . . . In the third, his positive constructive doctrine more and more appears. The early idealistic instinct reasserts itself, but purified by critical fire. It is the period of independent creation. This division into periods is more or less arbitrary . . . ; some-

<sup>29</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>30</sup>William Mackintire Salter, Nietzsche, the Thinker: A Study (1917; rpt. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1968), p. 12.

thing of each period is in every other; but change, movement, to a greater or less extent, existed in his life, and the "three periods" serve roughly to characterize it.<sup>31</sup>

If we replace "Schopenhauer and Wagner" with "Strindberg and Nietzsche," this passage could have been written about O'Neill. Nietzsche, like O'Neill, "philosophized not primarily for others' sake, but for his own from a sense of intimate need."<sup>32</sup> And "as his motives in philosophizing were personal, so were the results attained--some of them at least: they were for him, helped him to live, whether they were valuable for others or not."<sup>33</sup> If in these two sentences we replace "philosophized" and "philosophizing" with "wrote plays" and "playwriting," we have, I believe, a characteristic description of O'Neill.

O'Neill himself acknowledged his debt to Nietzsche in his Nobel Prize "speech," written in 1936:

No, I am only too proud of my debt to Strindberg [who himself was greatly influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy], only too happy to have this opportunity of proclaiming it to his people. For me, he remains, as Nietzsche remains [my italics], in his sphere, the master, still to this day more modern than any of us, still our leader.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Spake Zarathustra, Nietzsche's most personal and most autobiographical work, became, according to the Gelbs, "Eugene's Catechism. At eighteen he swallowed it whole, just as he had, at eight, absorbed the Catholic Catechism. But, unlike the Catechism, which he kept try-

<sup>31</sup>Salter, p. 31.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>34</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 814.

ing to forget, Zarathustra was permanently digested even though, in his later years, he confessed, 'Spots of its teaching I no longer concede.'<sup>35</sup> Thus Spake Zarathustra became the guide that led O'Neill through his many crises, provided him with ideas and plots for his plays, and finally helped him find his own philosophy of life. The ideal of Zarathustra, the overman, combined O'Neill's, as it did Nietzsche's,

most divergent or even hostile impulses in a powerful focus. The evolutionary biologist exults here side by side with the romantic dreamer and metaphysician. . . . The merciless destroyer and the breaker of values works hand in hand with the stern law-giver; while the laughing Dionysian dancer seems to be on the best of terms with the solemn prophet.<sup>36</sup>

The spirit of reckless rebellion born out of extreme suffering and pain, expressed in Thus Spake Zarathustra, seems to have appealed to the young Eugene O'Neill. Since Thus Spake Zarathustra is as autobiographical as Long Day's Journey into Night, it is not unlikely that O'Neill, impressed by the quality of the work, also turned to the life of Nietzsche--a man who in suffering was very much akin to O'Neill, a man who used his works to combat his pain--and subconsciously patterned his life script after the life of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, however, did not provide the entire life script; it was supplemented by the playwright's second spiritual father, August Strindberg. Since "youngsters choosing a mythical character [or flesh-and-blood person] always elaborate the available material and adapt it

<sup>35</sup>Gelb, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

<sup>36</sup>Janko Lavrin, Nietzsche: An Approach (London: Methuen, 1948), p. 49.

to fit their own circumstances, needs, and information,"<sup>37</sup> it is not difficult to see why O'Neill turned to a more clear-cut model for his love-hate relationship with his parents in August Strindberg. He was impressed with Strindberg's writings as he was with Nietzsche's ideas and therefore seems to have combined the two lives in the model that he followed. Since Strindberg was not in conflict with Nietzsche's teachings, this combination did not pose any problems. Robert Brustein points to some of the more striking parallels between O'Neill and Strindberg:

Like Strindberg, O'Neill was deeply involved with his mother, as an object both of love and hate, and similarly ambivalent towards his father. He was--again like Strindberg--married three times to domineering women, and perpetually rebellious towards authority. O'Neill's relation to his plays, furthermore, is very Strindbergian: he is almost always the hero of his work, trying to work out his personal difficulties through the medium of his art.<sup>38</sup>

From this statement it becomes apparent that what O'Neill was looking for in Strindberg was the Swede's relationship with women since the other aspects of Strindberg could also be found in Nietzsche. Nietzsche then provides the plot for O'Neill's life script while Strindberg helps in the motivation of the characters, which, however, is still subject to and in no way in conflict with the major ideas behind the plot. Thus it is Nietzsche, who had the greatest influence on the destiny of O'Neill as man and artist.

At the age of eighteen, O'Neill accepted Thus Spake Zarathustra

<sup>37</sup>Steiner, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>38</sup>Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), pp. 325-326.



wholeheartedly although he did at first not understand Nietzsche. He developed a complete understanding of the main concepts in Zarathustra, the will to power, the overman, the transvaluation of all values, the eternal recurrence, and amor fati only gradually, if at all. But the reading and re-reading of Nietzsche and O'Neill's trying to come to grips with the philosopher's ideas, expressed in the experimental nature of his plays, served as a catalyst in the development of his own thought.

The obstacles in his understanding of Nietzsche were three-fold. O'Neill had to read an inadequate translation of Thus Spake Zarathustra, which invited not only a misunderstanding of the key-concept, the overman, but also failed to convey the full meaning and all the connotations and nuances of other important terms like Mitleid, which is usually translated as pity. The German word, however, does not have the condescending connotation of the English word but means pity, compassion, sympathy, empathy, a communion of suffering--all in one or separately, depending on the context. O'Neill, perhaps aware of misunderstanding through translation, read Also sprach Zarathustra in the original with the help of a German grammar and dictionary when he was at Harvard.<sup>39</sup> But his limited knowledge of German also prevented him from getting the full meaning of Nietzsche's language. Although on the surface the language of Also sprach Zarathustra seems simple enough, it is in reality very complex. It is true that Nietzsche, in that work

<sup>39</sup>Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays (New York: Dover, 1947), p. 25.

at least, does not write long, complicated sentences. On the contrary, the sentences are very short and concise. It is, however, just this conciseness that poses the problem, for almost every word is packed with meaning. Nietzsche relies on the understanding of connotations and nuances which O'Neill, I do not think, was capable of. The third obstacle in completely understanding and following Nietzsche was O'Neill's particular interest in his plays. Although O'Neill, in his spirit of rebellion against his parents was consciously attracted to the philosopher who preached the death of God, he could not accept Nietzsche's completely atheistic view of the world. As O'Neill himself states, in his plays he was not at all interested in "the relation between man and man" but only in the "relation between man and God."<sup>40</sup> He felt that it was the obligation of the modern playwright to "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 satisfying new One for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."<sup>41</sup> It is this insistence on God, perhaps not the Christian God, certainly not the Roman Catholic God of his childhood, that poses the greatest obstacle in O'Neill's understanding of Nietzsche, who was

<sup>40</sup>Eugene O'Neill, quoted by J. W. Krutch in "Introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill," rpt. in Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, William J. Fisher, eds., O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1961), p. 115.

<sup>41</sup>O'Neill to Nathan, quoted in George Jean Nathan, The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 180.

writing for a world without God.

But Nietzsche was exactly what O'Neill needed to realize that in order to understand the "relation between man and God" man must first have the right "relation between man and man," which must be based on the three essentially Christian virtues of understanding, compassion accompanied by forgiveness, and love---a relation O'Neill developed progressively in his last five plays, A Touch of the Poet, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night, Hughie, and A Moon for the Misbegotten. In these last plays O'Neill found his philosophy of life or view of the world because he had finally understood himself through the constant examination of the past and the help of his wife Carlotta, who was able to give him the love his mother had been incapable of.

Early in life O'Neill had lost his faith and rejected the Christian religion, yet he could never completely abandon the God of his childhood days. In rebellion against the God, who was supposed to be love, who was supposed to be good, just, and omnipotent, he turned to Nietzsche, who announced that God was dead. Although O'Neill had wished to believe with Nietzsche that this old God was dead, he could never completely accept it as a fact. Through his rejection of Christianity---but deep down still believing in the God of his youth---his embracing of the ideas of Nietzsche, and the powerful roots of his native Catholicism, which slowly grew into the undergrowth of Nietzsche, O'Neill gradually developed his individual philosophy of life. The philosophy of life which accepts some of the ideals of Christianity and some of the ideas of Nietzsche is new, fresh, and very alive,

constantly evolving toward a new kind of "religion," the recognition of self and the acceptance of the imperfection of man which can be mitigated only by the adoption of the major Christian virtue--charity. However, the evolution of this philosophy of life in A Moon for the Misbegotten is not complete; logically it would have to lead to O'Neill's re-acceptance of Christianity, in particular Roman Catholicism, even if only in a modified form. In A Moon for the Misbegotten O'Neill stopped with an exposition of the right "relation between man and man;" he never proceeded to an exploration of the "relation between man and God."

All throughout his life O'Neill, although he had rejected his faith early in childhood, was a deeply religious playwright. Richard Dana Skinner calls him "the poet of the individual soul, of its agony, of its evil will, of its pride, and its lusts, of its rare moments of illumination, of its stumblings and gropings in surrounding darkness, and of its superbly romantic quest for deliverance through loving surrender."<sup>42</sup> He wanted to believe in a benign force behind man, and a return to his childhood faith is what O'Neill longed for. He seems to have realized that "the individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world. For this he needs the evidence of inner, transcendent experience which alone can protect him from the other-

<sup>42</sup>Richard Dana Skinner, Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest (1935; rpt. New York: Russell, 1964), p. 10.

wise inevitable submersion in the mass."<sup>43</sup>

The last completed play before the five final plays, Days Without End, seems to indicate that this desire was particularly strong at the end of his middle period. Although Days Without End is certainly not a good play, it is very revealing as to O'Neill's life, feelings, and yearnings. The end of the play, acceptance of formal Roman Catholicism, O'Neill agonized over in numerous revisions. It was a false conclusion, and O'Neill recognized it as such. His wife recalled that he was not sure whether he wanted John Loving to go back to the Church or not. "He finally ended with the man going back to the Church. Later he was furious with himself for having done this. He felt he had ruined the play and that he was a traitor to himself as a writer. He always said the last act was a phony and he never forgave himself for it."<sup>44</sup> But in a comment about the play, O'Neill more or less foreshadowed the ideas of the later plays.

For, after all, this play, like Ah, Wilderness! but in a much deeper sense, is the paying of an old debt on my part--a gesture toward more comprehensive unembittered understanding and inner freedom--the breaking away from an old formula that I had enslaved myself with, and the appreciation that there is their own truth in other formulas, too, and that any life-giving formula is as fit a subject for drama as any other.<sup>45</sup>

It almost seems as if O'Neill recognized his following Nietzsche as the formula to which he had enslaved himself. Was he subconsciously

<sup>43</sup>C. G. Jung, The Undiscovered Self, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: New American Library--Mentor, 1958), p. 34.

<sup>44</sup>Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 764.

<sup>45</sup>Eugene O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, p. 777.

wishing to break the life script he had designed for himself? At the very least he seems to have recognized that ways other than the Nietzschean were possible. Was he thinking of Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ, one of the alternatives that Dion Anthony in The Great God Brown—another crucial transitional play—was at least conscious of, as one of the other life-giving formulas? Whether or not this is so, this comment and the tenor of the play indicate that O'Neill would now follow a different path. They already hint at the acceptance of the spirit behind Christianity without its formal institution in the later plays. Although I have to disagree with many critics who see these last plays as O'Neill's most explicit expression of pessimism and nihilism, I feel that O'Neill came very close to closing the circle of his life. The yearning for the acceptance of God was clearly there. Sister Mary Madeleva, President of St. Mary's College at Notre Dame, Indiana, the school from which Ella O'Neill had graduated, seems to have had a similar reaction after the reading of Long Day's Journey into Night and Days Without End. She indicated in a letter to Croswell Bowen: "I am sure Eugene O'Neill was profoundly Catholic in mind and heart. They [the two plays] are parts of the same story of an extraordinary soul almost childlike in its attempt to spell God with the wrong blocks."<sup>46</sup>

However, these two plays are not only parts of the same story; they are parts of a much longer story, the story or the script of

<sup>46</sup>Sister Mary Madeleva to Croswell Bowen, quoted in Croswell Bowen, The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 239.

O'Neill's life. During the middle period of his career, O'Neill had been trying to move away from Nietzsche. After Lazarus Laughed he seems to have realized that as a playwright he was addressing an audience completely different from Nietzsche's. Nietzsche, at least in Thus Spake Zarathustra, was writing for and to the "higher man," whereas O'Neill in the theater was addressing the common man. The "higher man," the only individual capable of achieving the state of the overman, is an entirely new species of man. He is more different from the common man than the common man is from the ape. Therefore, O'Neill now rejected the concept of the overman and started to engage in different "rewrites" of his script. He still accepted many of Nietzsche's ideas, but he also branched out into other fields, such as psychoanalysis, science, and Greek tragedy. He even went through the motions of returning to his childhood faith and thus through the motions of a complete rejection of Nietzsche in Days Without End, and in his final period he truly rejected many Nietzschean ideas. But the middle period in O'Neill's life represents the rising action leading to the climax in his life script. The early and at first faint rejections of Nietzsche build up into a crescendo in Days Without End. The five plays of his final period represent the falling action, inevitably leading to the catastrophe. These two periods merely represent O'Neill's wish to avoid the catastrophe and his battling against it. But as in all hamartic scripts, although O'Neill seems to have fought bravely and courageously and with the help of Carlotta, his wife, appeared to be on the way to peace of mind

and certainty, the climax had to yield to the catastrophe, his long illness which prevented him from carrying on his work and finally death.

The deep silence and isolation of the last ten years of O'Neill's life after Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, which with their emphasis on charity, their explicit longing for religion, their religious symbolism, and the need and motions of confession seem to indicate a movement toward a re-acceptance of Catholicism, raise at least the question of whether it was only O'Neill's illness that put a stop to his creativity. Could it not be that now that he had resolved his inner conflicts, forgiven the four O'Neills, and relieved his psychological tensions the urge to write had disappeared because the need to understand himself had been met? Could it not be that he was unable to return to his childhood religion as his mother had done at the age of sixty-three, an act that finally freed her of her morphine addiction,<sup>47</sup> because a just and loving God at the time of World War II was unthinkable? Could it not be that the subconscious script--an imitation of Nietzsche's life--prevented him from accepting Christianity and demanded a decade of silence and isolation? Whatever the answer may be, it seems unlikely that his illness alone, although it certainly was an important factor, was the only reason for O'Neill's silence.

Already in 1937, three years after the Broadway performance of Days Without End, when O'Neill was working on the unfinished Cycle

<sup>47</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 407.



plays most of which belong in spirit to the plays written before Days Without End, that is before the apparent though erroneous complete rejection of Nietzsche and his ideas, he began to suffer from a rare disease which in appearance is similar to Parkinson's disease. This disease which is generally regarded as degenerative causes a gradual breakdown of the brain cells which control the coordination between muscles and nerves.<sup>48</sup> This description of O'Neill's disease sounds very similar to probable biological consequences of emotional and sensory deprivation described by Dr. Berne and seems to be at least indirectly caused by the script life he lived. In O'Neill's case there is one more interesting point, namely that "his symptoms varied in their intensity" and that "some of his doctors believed that psychological causes governed the form of this affliction."<sup>49</sup> It almost seems as if O'Neill's struggle against his script and his attempt to rewrite the script aided and maybe even precipitated the inevitable physical consequences of his early reckless life.

In spite of real physical difficulties in writing down his ideas, O'Neill in the summer of 1939 interrupted writing the planned Cycle and started on The Iceman Cometh, which he completed in November.<sup>50</sup> In the summer of the same year, he also started Long Day's Journey into Night.<sup>51</sup> Intermittently he worked on the Cycle, which became

<sup>48</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 831.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 836.

more and more ambitious. In 1941 he finished Long Day's Journey into Night,<sup>52</sup> in which he courageously faced his past and came to understand himself. In the following year he still worked at a rapid pace. He was continuing work at the Cycle, started By Way of Obit,<sup>53</sup> and worked on A Moon for the Misbegotten, which he completed in 1943.<sup>54</sup> Thus in a period of four years, when his health was poor, O'Neill could work on his eleven-play Cycle, a series of one acts, and complete three full-length plays. He worked as if he wanted to prove a statement he had once made: "As long as you have a job on hand that absorbs all your mental energy you haven't much worry to spare over other things."<sup>55</sup> The problem O'Neill now faced was that he did not have a job that absorbed all his mental energy. With Long Day's Journey into Night he had written his Ecce Homo. And once he had been able to give expression to and feel the selfless love and understanding of Josie, Jim Tyrone, and Hogan, he simply had nothing more to add.

An interesting coincidence perhaps is the fact that Walter Kaufmann seems to come to a similar conclusion about Nietzsche's collapse:

The fact remains that his life and work suggest an organic unity, and the claim that he [Nietzsche] was just about to complete his magnum opus when his disease broke out has no plausibility. Rather, one feels that he had been unable to fashion the systematic work that would have carried out his promises; he had taken refuge in writing other works instead--by way of preparing the public--and as long as he still had anything left in himself to say, it appears

<sup>52</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 839-843.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, p. 234.

as if he had been able to ward off the final outbreak of his dread disease. His disease does not seem to have interrupted an otherwise organic development; it gives an appearance of continuity with his active life.<sup>56</sup>

O'Neill intended to make the Cycle his magnum opus, but the Cycle had to do with a spiritual history of the country, not the spiritual history of himself and his family. Therefore he had to interrupt it to write The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten, in which he developed a view of the world based on forgiveness, compassion, and love—a view of the world completely opposite to the theme of the Cycle, self-dispossession through greed and materialism. With the exception of A Touch of the Poet, the Cycle plays do not fit this new philosophy of life. They, as O'Neill told Barrett Clark, go "back to my old vein of ironic tragedy—with, I hope, added psychological depth and insight."<sup>57</sup> Thus it seems at least possible that for O'Neill, who had come to terms with his life, there was no immediate urge to write and that, therefore, he could afford to give up the fight against his disease and with it the fight against the catastrophe of his life script.

Most script writers live rather empty lives. For them, according to Eric Berne,

life is mainly a process of filling in time until the arrival of death . . . with very little choice, if any, of what kind of business one is going to transact during the long wait . . . . For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all

<sup>56</sup>Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, 3rd ed., rev. (New York: Random House--Vintage, 1968), pp. 70-71.

<sup>57</sup>O'Neill to Clark, September 1937, quoted in Clark, op. cit., p. 144.

classification of behavior, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy. But all three of these may be frightening and even perilous to the unprepared. Perhaps they are better off as they are, seeking their solutions in popular techniques of social action, such as "togetherness." This may mean that there is no hope for the human race, but there is hope for individual members of it.<sup>58</sup>

O'Neill was one of those who are not easily frightened, who are willing to accept all dangers, and thus he emancipated the American theater, for, as Frederick I. Carpenter observes, "the very elements of his heritage which most caused his personal tragedy, and set him most apart from the American society about him, paradoxically made his tragedy most American." He goes on to explain that "the typically 'American' experience--as contrasted with the typical experience of the old world--has always been characterized by insecurity and homelessness, isolation, and often alienation."<sup>59</sup>

Although O'Neill was writing about his personal problems, he gave the American theater a place in the world because he could reach the universal truth behind his particular conflicts, which was his main purpose in writing: "And I shall never be influenced by any consideration but one: Is it the truth as I know it--or, better still, feel it? If so, shoot and let the splinters fly wherever they may. If not, not. . . . It is just life that interests me as a thing in itself."<sup>60</sup> In attempting to get at the truth, O'Neill has often been

<sup>58</sup>Berne, Games People Play, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>59</sup>Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

<sup>60</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Barrett H. Clark, An Hour of American Drama (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1930), p. 40.

accused of pessimism and even nihilism. But neither his plays nor his attitude toward life seems to support such a theory. O'Neill himself explained,

I love life. . . . But I don't love life because it is pretty. Prettiness is only clothes-deep. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness. In fact, I deny the ugliness entirely, for its vices are often nobler than its virtues, and nearly always closer to a revelation.<sup>61</sup>

This positive attitude toward life comes across particularly strongly in the last plays in which O'Neill approached the catharthis of Greek tragedy. This was not a sudden development but could be seen throughout his career. Eugene O'Neill, Jr. summed up his father's view of the world when he said, "My father's seemingly tragic view of life covers a deep-seated idealism, a dream of what the world could be 'if only. . . .' My father not only is the most sensitive man I have ever known but also possesses the highest idealism of any man who ever lived."<sup>62</sup>

In the following chapters I will examine the influence of Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra and The Birth of Tragedy on Eugene O'Neill and show how this influence served as a catalyst in the development of O'Neill's philosophy of life. In the discussion of the plays, I will deal with them in chronological order, and I will explain the different Nietzschean concepts when they are first discussed. In these explanations I will limit myself to discussions of

<sup>61</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>62</sup>Eugene O'Neill, Jr., quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. ix.

aspects of The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spake Zarathustra since it is not known whether O'Neill had read any of Nietzsche's other works.

Chapter II examines all plays up to Lazarus Laughed. Special emphasis will be put on The Great God Brown since it is a transitional play and throws additional light on the later plays. In the examination of Nietzschean elements, I will use the concepts of the will to power, the overman, the transvaluation of all values, the eternal recurrence and amor fati. In addition, I will point out any pronouncements of Zarathustra that seem to have formed the basis for plots of plays.

Chapter III discusses all plays between Strange Interlude and Days Without End. In this chapter I will show how O'Neill gradually rejected Nietzschean elements and finally seems to have completely broken away from the philosopher and re-accepted his childhood faith.

Chapter IV discusses the plays between A Touch of the Poet and A Moon for the Misbegotten. I will show how O'Neill combined Nietzschean elements with the three virtues of compassion, forgiveness, and charity, emphasized in Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ, to which O'Neill seems to have returned. O'Neill's experience of Nietzsche led to a more complete understanding of The Birth of Tragedy and a dramatically more effective structure of the last plays.

The ideas of Nietzsche, as O'Neill understood them, have shown O'Neill the way to self-understanding. This coming to awareness of himself the playwright expressed in a large number of plays of varying quality, starting with the early experimental plays in which the-

atrical devices and ideas seem more important than a representation of living human beings on the stage and culminating in the final plays in which the humanity of the characters is triumphant.

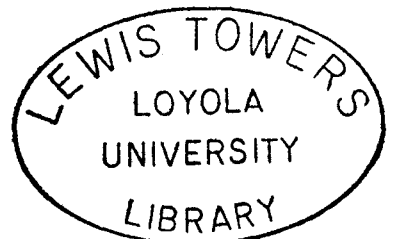
## CHAPTER II

### IN SEARCH OF THE GOD IN MAN

You look up when you long for exaltation. And I  
look down because I am exalted.

#### Thus Spake Zarathustra

The plays of the first phase in O'Neill's career, 1913 - 1925, indicate clearly that Eugene O'Neill was attracted to Nietzsche. In Thus Spake Zarathustra the young playwright found a spirit of revolt akin to his own rebellion against all religious and social values that his parents, particularly his father, held sacred. His revolt against faith, love, honor, and decency, fueled by his brother Jamie, found strong support in Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra. Nietzsche's aggressiveness and hostility against all average normal human values attracted the young Eugene O'Neill to the German philosopher although at the very beginning of his career the American playwright evidently did not understand Nietzsche's main concepts. O'Neill was not familiar enough with the development of Nietzsche's thought to understand the philosopher's most complex work, Thus Spake Zarathustra, which deals with all major aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy but does not explain or elaborate on the ideas. However, it is written in a style that is very appealing, particularly to a disenchanted young man. It lends itself to the lifting of passages that often sound like pro-





voking slogans but should not always be taken at face value because their meaning depends on the larger context.

Eugene O'Neill was initiated into rebellion by his brother Jamie, who taught him to forget the pain caused by his mother's rejection and to express the hatred for his father by plunging himself into a whirlpool of sex and drunkenness. After this initiation O'Neill turned to Nietzsche as a guide and teacher, for in Thus Spake Zarathustra, in the words of Doris Alexander, "he found not only vitriolic words to express his hatred of the conforming herd, but also a rhapsodic vision of human grandeur, a meaningful universe to replace the shattered rubble of his Catholicism."<sup>1</sup> Here he found a voice of authority that he could respect, a voice that advised the same ambivalent feeling of love and hate that he felt himself. He seems to have felt a certain kinship with the speaker of such pronouncements as:

It is not your sin--it is your contentment that cries to heaven; it is your miserliness even in your sin that cries to heaven!<sup>2</sup>

I love those who despise greatly, for they are the ones who revere greatly. . . . (VI, 11)

Escape, my friend, into your loneliness! (VI, 54)

Do I advise chastity? Chastity is a virtue for some but almost a lust for others. (VI, 58)

Truly, such giving love must become a robber of all values: but I call this selfishness healthy, whole, and holy. (VI, 80)

<sup>1</sup>Doris Alexander, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1964), VI, 10. All translations are my own. Hereafter the passages from Thus Spake Zarathustra and The Birth of Tragedy are cited parenthetically.

There is no devil and no hell. Your soul will die faster than your body. (VI, 16)

God is dead; He died of His pity for, compassion, and suffering with man. (VI, 96)

Nietzsche offered more than deadened senses and drunken stupor to escape from the pain caused by the loss of childhood values. He provided O'Neill with an emotional and intellectual crutch at a time of spiritual isolation and terrifying insecurity. Thus Spake Zarathustra offered the young playwright a new way of life, hope in a period of utter hopelessness. According to his second wife, Agnes Boulton O'Neill, "it was a sort of Bible to him. . . ." She goes on to explain that "in those early days in the Village . . . Friedrich Nietzsche . . . moved his emotion rather than his mind. He read the magnificent prose of the great and exciting man over and over again, so that at times it seemed an expression of himself."<sup>3</sup>

In Zarathustra, Nietzsche's spokesman, O'Neill found a model to pattern his life on. He seems to have followed Zarathustra's example in his disillusion with higher education and aimless wanderings around the globe. When Zarathustra speaks about his past experiences, we can almost believe to hear O'Neill:

For this is the truth: I have moved out of the house of the learned ones, and I have shut the door behind me.

For too long my soul has gone hungry at their table; unlike them, I am not trained to seek knowledge as if I were cracking nuts.

I love the freedom and the air above the fresh earth: I would rather sleep on the skins of oxen than on their dignities, honors, and righteousness. (VI, 136)

<sup>3</sup> Boulton, op. cit., p. 61.

Zarathustra's insistence on the individual's responsibility to find his own values in order to come to self-recognition can be found in O'Neill's life and his plays. O'Neill inscribed the following words from "The Spirit of Heaviness" in a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra that he gave to Maibelle Scott in 1912:<sup>4</sup>

Almost in the cradle we are already given heavy words and values: "Good" and "Evil" this dowry is called.

And we--we haul faithfully what we are given on hard shoulders and over rough mountains. And when we sweat, we are told: "Yes, life is hard (heavy) to bear!"

But only man himself is hard (heavy) to bear! For he hauls too many strange things on his shoulders.

But he has discovered himself who says: This is my good and evil: thus he has muted the mole and the dwarf who says: "Good for everyone, evil for everyone." (VI, 214-215)

O'Neill's constant search for security and a sense of belonging is found in a passage from Thus Spake Zarathustra that he had underlined in 1924, when he started to run away from Agnes, his children, and friends:<sup>5</sup>

Ah, which way shall I climb now with my longing! From every mountain I look out for fatherlands and motherlands.

But a home I have found nowhere; I am restless in all cities and towns and leaving at all gates. (VI, 131)

In the exploration of his past through his plays O'Neill seems to have gone along with Zarathustra when the latter says:

I am a wanderer and a mountain climber . . . ; I do not love the plains, and it seems that I cannot sit still for long.

And whatever will yet come to me as fate and experience--it will include wandering and mountain climbing: in the final analysis, one experiences only oneself.

The time when I was still subject to hazards has passed; and what could happen to me now that is not yet my own!

It returns; it is finally coming home--my own self and what-

<sup>4</sup>Gelb, op. cit., p. 209.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 564.

ever of it has been in foreign parts for long and dispersed among all hazards.

And one thing I know: now I stand before my last summit and before that which has been kept for me for the longest time. Oh, I must climb the hardest path! Oh, I started my most lonely wandering! (VI, 167)

Above all, in the devotion to his art--the purpose of his life-- O'Neill followed Zarathustra as he indicated in an inscription on the title page of the first manuscript draft of Mr. Mark Millions:<sup>6</sup> "Do I then strive for happiness? I strive for my work!" (VI, 363).

To O'Neill and many of his contemporaries "Nietzsche offered a religion and an aesthetic, a mythology and a psychology."<sup>7</sup> Thus Spake Zarathustra became O'Neill's Bible. Zarathustra's teachings of the overman, the transvaluation of all values, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and amor fati replaced the doctrines of his lost Catholic faith. The overman became the new God, and Zarathustra was his prophet. In Zarathustra Nietzsche offered an ideal to emulate. By reading Zarathustra's words and trying to follow his example, O'Neill became an artist, found a sense of security and fulfillment, and eventually came to an understanding of himself and the world around him.

One aspect of Thus Spake Zarathustra that seems to have been particularly important to O'Neill in the first period of his career is Nietzsche's analysis of the nature of man. According to Nietzsche, there are three species of man--man, the higher man, and the overman.

<sup>6</sup>John H. Stroupe, "Marco Millions and O'Neill's 'Two-Part Two-Play' Form," Modern Drama, 13, No. 4 (1971), 382.

<sup>7</sup>Engel, "Ideas in the Plays of O'Neill," op. cit., p. 106.

Man is the man of the common herd who more or less conforms to the laws and mores of his society, without asking too many questions. The higher man is the rare individual who creates his own values, is not afraid to say no to society, is willing to suffer in order to fulfill his dream, and strives for the state of the overman. The overman is the final step in the evolution of man--a species that, according to Zarathustra, is not yet possible but for whom the ground must be prepared before it is too late.

Zarathustra describes man as not essentially different from the animal, no matter how advanced or civilized he is. There is merely a difference in degree, not a difference in essence or nature.

Up to now all creatures have created something beyond themselves: and you, do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and go back to the animal rather than overcome man?

What is the ape for man? A laughter or a painful shame. And thus man shall be for the overman: a laughter or a painful shame.

You have made the way from worm to man and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now man is still more ape than any ape. (VI, 8)

Man is a rope, fastened between the animal and the overman, --a rope over an abyss.

A dangerous crossing, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back, a dangerous shivering with fear and standing still.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is a crossing-over and a going-under. (VI, 11)

If you could be at least complete like animals! But the animal has innocence. (VI, 58)

According to this description of man, man's basic problem is that he is incomplete or, in O'Neill's terminology, does not belong. In the solution of this problem, he has three alternatives. He can stay in his precarious position over the abyss and remain as calm and

quiet as possible, conform to the dictates of the majority, and lead a relatively untroubled life. But then he must renounce his individuality and human dignity. He has no freedom of choice or will and merely waits for the natural conclusion of his life. Or, he can try to move away from this precarious position by way of the shorter route and return to the nature of the animal, which, however, because of his loss of innocence is impossible. Or, he can be courageous and attempt to reach the other side of the abyss, the state of the overman. If he chooses the long and dangerous way to the overman, he will probably falter and fall into the abyss, but the important thing is that he tries. It is this trying that makes him different from the animal, gives him a true humanity, and transforms him into the higher man. Only the exceptional individual can attain the truly human state and aspire to the overhuman by transfiguring his physis or nature, and the truly human individual is much more different from the common man than the human, all-too-human individual is from the ape. In order to transfigure his all-too-human nature to the truly human, the exceptional individual uses the will to power.

The will to power is life, the drives and instincts man has in common with all nature, the drive to surpass himself, the drive to evolve. The will to power is inherent in every man. But whereas the common man uses the will to power simply to overcome his neighbor, to become superior to the next man in a materialistic or social sense, the truly human, the exceptional individual uses the will to power to overcome himself, that is, to master himself in such a way that he

evolves into a different species, the higher man. This evolution involves a rejection of all values--religious, moral, and social--and a creation of new values by which the higher man will live. The higher man is not bound by the all-too-human bonds of family. He is not concerned with morality. He is beyond good and evil. He is not bothered by pain and suffering; instead he will use them to achieve his goal through creation. His goal is the state of the overman, an almost God-like state, a state of inexpressible ecstasy and joy, a mystical state of harmony with all nature and the universe, a state that Nietzsche seems to have felt represented by the Greek God Dionysus. When the individual has reached this state of self-mastery, he enjoys every moment of his existence, whether painful or pleasurable, and wishes for its eternal recurrence.

The concept of eternal recurrence means that everything in life goes through cycles and eventually occurs again. It is closely linked with amor fati, the love of fate or the love of one's misfortune. While the common man wants to escape the suffering and misery of his life and creates therefore an eternal life after death into which he can flee, the higher man and the overman wish for the recurrence of every moment of their lives because they love life and have a strong will to power. They see that suffering and pain are just as much of life as joy and happiness, that they are even necessary. These moments of pain are to be enjoyed and wished for just as much as moments of happiness because they are catalysts for creation and total commitment to a goal. Only through complete abandonment into effort

can man forget his pain. Amor fati alone stirs the true will to power into action and thus makes the evolution of man into overman possible.

Between 1913 and 1925 O'Neill explored these three species of man in his plays. However, in the very beginning of his career, roughly between 1913 and 1918, it is quite apparent that he did not yet understand Nietzsche but merely looked to him and others for support of the revolutionary ideas of the avant-garde young Americans--ideas which were directed against everything conventional society stood for. As William Laurence, one of O'Neill's Harvard friends, attests: "Intellectually Eugene was a philosophical anarchist; politically a philosophical socialist."<sup>8</sup> In Nietzsche he seems to have seen at this point only the critic of society and the destroyer of the old values. He does not seem to have realized, for example, that Nietzsche was just as much opposed to socialism as he was to Christianity and materialism, that he was writing for the élite of society. The very first plays of O'Neill express the playwright's disenchantment with his world, a disenchantment that was prevalent at the time, a disenchantment that can be found in Nietzsche as well as a host of other writers of the turn of the century and the early twentieth century.

In the early Thirst, The Web, Warnings, Recklessness (1913),<sup>9</sup> and Abortion (1914), only O'Neill's melodramatic condemnation of the materialistic society and its moral turpitude is in harmony with

<sup>8</sup>William Laurence, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>9</sup>The dates of all the plays are approximate dates of composition as given by Frederick Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 184-185.



Nietzsche's teachings. The characters are conventional types to be found in any naturalistic drama or novel. They are representatives of their respective classes and are trapped by circumstances or the laws of society. Because of its futility, they refuse to put up a fight to assert their individuality.

Although Fog (1913) is another play written in the same vein as the previous ones, it is somewhat more important because for the first time the poet-character appears. In most of O'Neill's plays the poet or the artist is an image of Eugene O'Neill himself through which he is trying to find his identity. The poet's face is described as being "oval with big dark eyes and a black mustache and black hair pushed back from his high forehead,"<sup>10</sup> an almost exact description of O'Neill's own face. Fog is also the first play in which the poet, i. e. the alter ego of O'Neill, voices sentiments other than a condemnation of society that seem to derive clearly from Nietzsche. When he says, "But death was kind to the child,"<sup>11</sup> he seems to echo Zarathustra, who says, "To die is the best thing" (VI, 76). The poet takes up the same thought again when he talks of his (and O'Neill's) attempt at suicide because he felt so "sick and weary of soul and longing for sleep,"<sup>12</sup> when he deploras his "reckless life-saving,"<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Eugene O'Neill, Ten "Lost" Plays (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

when he calls the dead mother "poor happy woman,"<sup>14</sup> and when he envies the dead and prefers to stay with them as Zarathustra did when he first came to teach the overman but the common people did not understand his message.

In Bread and Butter (1914) the Nietzschean influence and at the same time the importance of the autobiographical elements become more perceptible. Here O'Neill deals with the problems of the young artist, son of a typical bourgeois family, who is not appreciated by his family and most of his contemporaries because he does not share their values. It seems almost as if O'Neill thought of Zarathustra's "Look at the good and righteous ones! Whom do they hate most? Him who breaks the tablets of their values, the breaker, the criminal--but he is the creator" (VI, 20), when he created John Brown, another image of himself.

John does not share the values of his family--making a comfortable living, being successful financially and socially by becoming a lawyer; he wants to find and express himself through art: "Art! I am an artist in soul I know. My brain values are Art values. I want to learn how to express in terms of color the dreams in my brain which demand expression."<sup>15</sup> The people around him, however, only think of making money, whether through drawings for magazines or through a prosperous law practice does not really matter. True art they do not

<sup>14</sup>Ten "Lost" Plays, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>15</sup>Eugene O'Neill, "Children of the Sea" and Three Other Unpublished Plays, ed. Jennifer McCabe Atkinson (Washington, D.C.: NCR/Microcard Editions, 1972), p. 19.

understand. Even Maud, the girl he eventually marries, does not understand him or his art although she tries her best to do so. But he loves her, and her insistence, in addition to financial pressures, finally forces him to give up his dream, which results in unhappiness for both of them.

Another important element in the play is the exploration of the marriage of John and Maud. The understanding of the relationship between men and women united through family bonds is one of the major concerns in O'Neill's life and plays. The constant friction and clashes between men and women are almost inevitable if we follow Nietzsche's explanation of the nature of man and the nature of woman --an explanation that O'Neill found effectively dramatized in the life and plays of August Strindberg. According to Nietzsche, the duty of man is to evolve into the higher man and eventually the overman. For that he needs complete freedom. He cannot be tied by family or other responsibilities. Woman is not capable of evolving; however, she can and must give birth to the higher man and even the overman if she truly follows her nature. The wish to create the overman is the only valid reason for a man and a woman to unite in marriage. Zarathustra explains the relationship between man and woman in the following words:

Everything in woman is a riddle, and everything in woman has one solution: that is pregnancy.

Man is a means for woman: the purpose is always the child. But what is woman for man?

The true man wants two things: danger and games. Therefore he wants woman as the most dangerous toy.

Man is to be raised for war and woman for the repose of the warrior: anything else is foolishness.

Fruits that are too sweet--those the warrior does not like. Therefore he likes woman; even the sweetest woman is bitter.

Woman understands children better than man, but man is more childlike than woman.

In the true man a child is hidden: it wants to play. Go to it, women, discover the child in man!

A toy be woman, pure and fine, like a precious stone, shining with the virtues of a world that does not yet exist.

May the ray of a star shine in your love! Your hope be: "May I give birth to the overman!"

In your love be courage! With your love attack him who makes you afraid.

In your love be your honor! Otherwise woman understands little of honor. But this be your honor: always to love more than you are loved, and never to be second.

Man is afraid of woman when she loves: then she makes any sacrifice, and for him everything else is without value.

Man is afraid of woman when she hates: for man at the bottom of his soul is merely bad, but woman is evil.

The happiness of man is: I will. The happiness of woman is: he wills.

"Look, just now the world became perfect!"--thus thinks every woman when she obeys through perfect love.

And a woman must obey and find a depth to his surface. Surface is the woman's soul, a flexible, stormy film on shallow water.

The soul of man, however, is deep; its stream rushes in subterranean caverns: woman intuits its force, but does not comprehend it. (VI, 70-71)

Maud is one of O'Neill's first possessive women who, instead of helping their men to realize their dreams, destroy them. She thinks she understands John and is willing to sacrifice her happiness temporarily to give John a chance to follow his dreams. But when he, after two years, has not become a financial success, she refuses to believe in him any longer and more or less intimates that, if he will not marry her, she will marry his brother Edward. Because of the great value John places on her love, she can force him to return to the common herd where he cannot be fulfilled, where he must realize that he has sacrificed everything--his soul--for nothing. As both of them find out, she does not even love him but regrets having sacrificed to him the

financial security and glamor of political reputation as Edward's wife. When John, like Rowland in Before Breakfast (1916) and O'Neill, does not find the love he needs, there is only one escape, alcohol and whores and finally, when he can no longer bear Maud's love turned to hate, suicide.

The play as such is not important. It is immature, obviously apprentice work, but it does foreshadow some of the conflicts of later plays. The rivalry between John and Edward eventually develops into the rivalry between Robert and Andrew Mayo and Dion Anthony and William Brown. The love-hate relationship between Maud and John is developed further in many succeeding plays, and the Nietzschean elements--the necessity to pursue an impossible goal, the feeling of love and hate toward the same person, the attitude toward women, the rejection of traditional values--begin to point to the conflict of the artist or poet, i. e. O'Neill himself.

Even some of the biographical elements of Long Day's Journey into Night are already seen in this play. There is the strained family relationship caused by the father's miserliness and his system of morality, the inability of the father to understand his children and vice versa. There is the inability to help on the part of the mother. There is the hostility among the brothers, except that what results in Jamie is here split into two separate characters, Edward and Harry. Edward expresses in the beginning of the play his feeling of social inferiority and envy as Jamie does in his reluctance to cut the hedge and, toward the end of the play, his overt hatred for John, as Jamie

does in his confession to Edmund. Harry, on the other hand, represents the other side of Jamie, the drinking and whoring as well as the detrimental influence on Edmund. This play, then, is the first real attempt in which O'Neill is trying to understand himself and his family, in which he is looking for a way to belong but, being unsuccessful, ends up in suicide, an act O'Neill tried to execute himself in 1912. In the later plays the situation of the poet-character is just as hopeless. But there the character can overcome the feeling of self-pity that here drives him to suicide, fight against the odds, continue to follow his dreams, and, although physically defeated, conquer in a feeling of superiority and bliss at the moment of death.

These problems of marriage and individuality are further explored in the Ibsenesque Servitude (1914). Here again we find the autobiographical poet-character. Daniel Roylston is a playwright and novelist. He, like O'Neill, lashes out against conventions and bourgeois morality. He advocates the development of the self--the "liberated" individual--but has to realize in the end that all his idealism is merely a mask for selfishness, not an idealism that will help him surpass himself and strive for something beyond himself.

For the first time O'Neill describes the other type of woman that becomes dominant in the later plays and is perhaps best represented in Nora in A Touch of the Poet and Josie in A Moon for the Misbegotten. When Mrs. Roylston tells Mrs. Frazer that "Love means servitude; my love is my happiness,"<sup>16</sup> she echoes Nietzsche's sentiments

<sup>16</sup>Ten "Lost" Plays, op. cit., p. 270.

and seems to express exactly Nora's and Josie's feelings about the men they love. She represents the qualities O'Neill would come to expect in his wife.

Mrs. Frazer, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. She runs away from her husband because she feels that her marriage stifles the development of her individuality. Although she seems to be lifted right out of Ibsen, she is an extremely important character, for she is the first who consciously attempts to live a life script. She patterns her life on the main character of Roylston's play Sacrifice and tries to live according to Roylston's ideas of self-realization:

I was in love with an ideal--the ideal of self-realization, of the duty of the individual to assert its supremacy and demand the freedom necessary for its development. You had taught me that ideal and it was that which came in conflict with my marriage. I saw I could never hope to grow in the stifling environment of married life--so I broke away.<sup>17</sup>

This problem of self-realization is the concern of many O'Neill characters, of Thus Spake Zarathustra, and of O'Neill himself. O'Neill also has to live a life script in order to come to an understanding of himself and the world around him. Unfortunately for him but fortunately for the American theater, he is not, like Mrs. Frazer, able to break the script only a short time after he wrote it. He and many of his characters have to live their life scripts to the bitter end. The fight against the script gives meaning to O'Neill's life and plays. Mrs. Frazer is very much like O'Neill in her willingness to be guided by others. Her struggle for self-realization ironically shows that

<sup>17</sup>Ten "Lost" Plays, op. cit., pp. 237-238.

Roylston's ideals do not lead her to the identity she seeks but that selfless love will do so. Thus already in this very early play O'Neill more or less charts the way for his spiritual development. After having followed the ideals of Nietzsche and other masters during most of his life, he comes to the conclusion in the last plays that only selfless love can help man find himself and be in harmony with the world.

Another interesting aspect in this play is the character of Roylston, the mask of O'Neill. Like O'Neill, Roylston is a rebellious spirit and an idealist, depends on love of his wife for his peace of mind and security, but deep down is afraid of his rebellion against the conventional morality and believes in the old-fashioned decency and honor that he ridicules in his writings, which shows quite clearly in his leaving the house for the night instead of possibly compromising himself and Mrs. Frazer.

In Children of the Sea (1914), the first draft for Bound East for Cardiff (1914), and The Sniper (1915) O'Neill for the first time attempts to deal with the question that made him and his characters aware of the precariousness of the human condition--the question of the existence and nature of God. The inability of some men to reconcile the nature of God as given by the Church and society with the reality of the world is what causes their sense of not belonging and initiates their rebellion and search for new values. Yank, like O'Neill, is uncertain about God and doubtful about the quality of life after death. He does not believe it to be very different from the present life. Rougon in The Sniper goes even further and almost



agrees with Zarathustra that God is dead. He completely rejects Christianity because he cannot reconcile the nature of God, whom the priest in his prayers addresses as "Almighty God," "Merciful," "Infinite justice," "Infinite love," etc.,<sup>18</sup> with the cruelty of World War I. O'Neill seems to speak through Rougon when the latter spits on the floor and tells the priest, "That for your God who allows such things to happen."<sup>19</sup> Rougon expresses the same, almost childish defiance that the young O'Neill experienced when he realized that his mother could not be cured from her morphine addiction. This defiance and rejection of Christianity appear to have started the playwright's revolt against the values of his parents and society, and it may also have been this inability to reconcile the traditional merciful and loving nature of God with the reality of World War II that prevented him from breaking his life script in the 1940's.

When the Germans invaded Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Loire Valley, where O'Neill had lived for several years with Carlotta, he was extremely depressed. Crosswell Bowen quotes him as saying, "To tell the truth, like anyone else with any imagination I have been absolutely sunk by the world debacle. The cycle is on the shelf and God absolutely knows if I can ever take it up again because I cannot foresee any future in this country of [sic.] anywhere else to when it could spiritually belong."<sup>20</sup> When The Iceman Cometh was in rehearsal, O'Neill

<sup>18</sup> Ten "Lost" Plays, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> O'Neill, quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 267.

attempted to explain his silence and express his own "hopeless hope" of writing again:

I hope to resume writing again as soon as I can . . . but the war has thrown me completely off base and I have to get back to it again. I have to get back to a sense of writing being worthwhile. In fact, I'd have to pretend. . . . Outwardly, I might blame it on the war. . . . But inwardly . . . the war helped me realize that I was putting my faith in the old values and they're gone. [*italics mine*] It's very sad but there are no values to live by today. Anything is permissible if you know the angles.<sup>21</sup>

In the next group of plays--Ille, In the Zone, The Long Voyage Home, The Moon of the Caribbees (1916), The Rope, The Dreamy Kid, and Shell Shock (1918)--O'Neill is concerned with the problems of the common man. He exhibits the animalistic nature of man, his cruelty, greed, and loneliness. One of the more important characters in this group of plays is Smitty of In the Zone and The Moon of the Caribbees. Smitty, an alcoholic, seems to be an early sympathetic representation of Jamie. His problem is the problem of all the Tyrones, of Jamie and Eugene O'Neill; he cannot forget. The beauty of nature and the melancholy singing of the natives bring back memories. Like Jamie, he drinks "to stop thinking."<sup>22</sup> His despair is similar to Jamie's in A Moon for the Misbegotten, but here it is not eased through confession and softened by the understanding, selfless love of Josie. Here it is turned into self-pity and weakness. A kind of peace is found temporarily in alcohol and prostitutes, but it is followed always by a feeling of disgust and self-loathing. Yet, although he is

<sup>21</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>22</sup>Eugene O'Neill, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1951), I, 468.

unhappy, he has resigned himself to his fate. He has no ambitions and dreams. He is an image of what O'Neill might have been if he had continued to follow Jamie's example. Instead, O'Neill found Nietzsche, who taught him to transform pain, suffering, and weakness into joy, laughter, and greatness.

One play in this very early group of plays, Now I Ask You (1917), is a Nietzschean parody. It makes fun of ideas enthusiastically picked up and generally misunderstood by young non-conformists. At the same time it seems to mark the point of O'Neill's gradual understanding of Nietzsche's ideas. Leonora explicitly states her familiarity with Nietzsche when she talks about her painting: "I call it the Great Blond Beast--you know, Nietzsche." "It is the expression of my passion to create something or someone great and noble--the Superman or the work of great art."<sup>23</sup> She refers to the Great Blond Beast again when she tells Tom, "I mean you have all the outward appearance of my ideal of what the Great Blond Beast should look like."<sup>24</sup> Even Mrs. Ashleigh exhibits a Nietzschean spirit when she says, "In some of us it [the wild spirit of youth] becomes tempered to a fine, sane progressive ideal which is of infinite help to the race."<sup>25</sup> Lucy even quotes Nietzsche on the subject of marriage: "What is it Nietzsche says of marriage? 'Ah, the poverty of soul in the twain! Ah, the filth of soul in the twain! Ah, the pitiable self-complacency in the

<sup>23</sup>Children of the Sea, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-123.

twain!"<sup>26</sup> All of these statements represent a distorted view of Nietzsche. They are made in a spirit of rebellion against the conventions of society. They are all made in defense of free love. With this play, O'Neill makes fun of the extremes of Village life and maybe even comments on his own rebellion against his parents. The rebellious characters--Lucy, Gabriel, and Leonora--are exposed as poseurs. They are young, enthusiastic, drawn to new ideas, and full of rebellion against the values of their parents. They are extremely idealistic and romantic and, like Daniel Royston in Servitude, do not perceive that they are merely playing a game.

Now I Ask You is a bad play, but it is O'Neill's acknowledgement of Nietzsche's influence on the spirit of rebellion in Village life. The distortions of Nietzsche show the effect his words and ideas had on the young. They show that he was often invoked without understanding as an authority on rebellion. Nietzsche provided guidance for many young intellectuals and continued to do so for O'Neill throughout the latter's life. At this point, Nietzsche was still an emotional crutch for O'Neill, but this parody of commonly held Nietzschean maxims indicates that O'Neill was beginning to understand the main points of Nietzsche's philosophy.

These first five years of O'Neill's career as a playwright were years of apprenticeship. The plays are immature and show that O'Neill was still trying to master his chosen art. Most of the ideas in these plays are ideas of rebellion of a young man who is still groping in

<sup>26</sup>Children of the Sea, op. cit., p. 128.

the dark. But they are important, for they already give an indication of what O'Neill is going to do in his later plays. As Travis Bogard rightly observes, "in spite of the nonsense of the individual stories, a pattern emerges dimly that was at least the beginning of a philosophical position. Man is caught by something--a force of an as yet unidentifiable nature whose power is absolute."<sup>27</sup>

In the next seven years, O'Neill is gradually defining his philosophical position, which more and more turns away from the nay-saying of naturalism and toward the yea-saying of Nietzsche. He seems to see himself in Zarathustra, and the autobiographical characters--the characters with "a touch of the poet"--seem to be disciples of Zarathustra, who teaches them to overcome their own insignificance and to strive for the overman. They are almost all defeated in their struggle and reach the state of mystical harmony with nature, their one moment of perfect bliss, only at the time of death, but their struggle gives them a human dignity that none of the other characters possess.

In the summer of 1917, O'Neill explained his idea of tragedy and through it the philosophical position that becomes clear in the plays of 1918-1925.

I have an innate feeling of exultance about tragedy. . . . The tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. What I am after is to get an audience to leave the theatre with an exultant feeling from seeing somebody on the stage facing life, fighting the eternal odds, not conquering, but perhaps inevitably being conquered. The individual life is made significant just by the struggle.

<sup>27</sup> Travis Bogard, Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 18.

The struggle of man to dominate life, to assert and insist that life has no meaning outside himself where he comes in conflict with life, which he does at every turn; and his attempt to adapt life to his own needs, in which he doesn't succeed, is what I mean when I say that Man is the hero. If one out of ten thousand can grasp what the author means, if that one can formulate within himself his identity with the person in the play, and at the same time get the emotional thrill of being that person in the play, then the theatre will get back to the fundamental meaning of the drama, which contains something of the religious spirit which the Greeks had--and something of the exultance which is completely lacking in modern life.<sup>28</sup>

At another time O'Neill tried to clarify this statement by saying:

The tragedy of life is what makes it worthwhile. I think that any life which merits living lies in the effort to realize some dream, and the higher that dream is the harder it is to realize. Most decidedly we must all have our dreams. If one hasn't them, one might as well be dead. The only success is failure. Any man who has a big enough dream must be a failure and must accept this as one of the conditions of being alive. If he ever thinks for a moment that he is a success, then he is finished.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, man is trapped by life, and he shows his human dignity only in trying to escape from that trap. In order to do so, he must have a dream that he can follow, a dream that can never be fulfilled, a dream that keeps him fighting against everything that holds him back--self-pity, family, society, nature. Only the fighter really lives. Although his fight is not victorious, although the goal is not achieved, the individual has proven himself as being truly alive, as having struggled bravely, as not having been defeated because his spirit is still alive, because he has a soul. Thus O'Neill's tragedies, although they necessarily have "unhappy" endings,

<sup>28</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., pp. 336-337.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

are not pessimistic--a charge that he frequently tried to defend himself against. As he explains to Mary Clark in 1923, this pessimism is only on the surface:

I know you're impervious to what they are pleased to call my "pessimism." . . . I mean, that you can see behind that superficial aspect of my work to the truth. I'm far from being a pessimist. I see life as a gorgeously-ironical, beautifully-indifferent, splendidly-suffering bit of chaos, the tragedy of which gives Man a tremendous significance, while without his losing fight with fate he would be a tepid, silly animal. I say "losing fight" only symbolically, for the brave individual always wins. Fate can never conquer his--or her--spirit. So you see I'm no pessimist. On the contrary, in spite of my scars, I'm tickled to death with life.<sup>30</sup>

This defiant spirit found a prime example in Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra. Zarathustra is the embodiment of defiance. His dream is to prepare the world for the overman--an impossible dream. He knows that his dream is impossible, but nevertheless he goes on dreaming and fighting for his dream against all odds and dangers. For his dream he is willing to sacrifice all worldly comforts. He is willing, indeed eager, to accept the isolation and alienation, the terrible loneliness that the striving for his dream entails. In spite of his suffering, he has found true happiness--a purpose in life, a sense of belonging.

It seems to me that this affirmative aspect of O'Neill's plays can only be understood through the philosophical background behind it. Only by understanding that the individual is groping for something beyond himself, that his happiness and sense of belonging lie in the striving to overcome himself can we appreciate the courage and human

<sup>30</sup>O'Neill to Mary Clark, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

dignity of O'Neill's characters.

Zarathustra teaches man to say yes to life, but he also warns him of the dangers and suffering involved. In order to say yes to life, man has to make the most of it; he has to evolve; he has to overcome and go beyond himself:

I teach you the overman. Man is something that has to be overcome. (VI, 8)

The overman is the sense of the earth. You will say: the overman be the sense of the earth! (VI, 9)

I love those who do not know how to live unless in going under, for they are the ones who are going beyond. (VI, 11)

I love him whose soul is full to the point of overflowing so that he forgets himself and all things are in him: thus all things become his destruction (going under). (VI, 12)

I tell you: one must still have chaos within oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you still have chaos within you. (VI, 13)

Statements like these help to understand O'Neill's purpose in tragedy. O'Neill believes with Zarathustra that man must try to create beyond himself, that he must be willing to evolve into a new species that is beyond or way above man, the overman. But any such evolution necessitates chaos, confusion, pain, and suffering. However, not everyone is capable of such an evolution, and the majority of men is not willing to undergo such an evolution.

In the next group of plays O'Neill is concerned with the two types of man--the common man and the poet or artist who is able to go beyond the masses. The poet, the autobiographical character, is the only one with the will to evolve, the only one capable of preparing the way for the overman. It is significant that O'Neill chose



himself as the basis for the disciples of Zarathustra. This seems to indicate that, since these characters attempt to live what Zarathustra teaches and pattern their lives after him, O'Neill himself is basing his life on Zarathustra, who is merely a mask for Nietzsche. The poet has a dream for the fulfillment of which he strives with all the will to power he has, but he seems to reach this point only at the moment of death. The common man, on the other hand, does not have a dream that is high enough. He also uses his strong but decadent will to power to reach his goal. In the process of doing so, he loses or kills his soul.

In Beyond the Horizon (1918) O'Neill contrasts these two types of man in Robert and Andrew Mayo. Robert is Zarathustra's disciple, and he is obviously a mask of O'Neill himself. "He is a tall, slender young man of twenty-three. There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin."<sup>31</sup> At the end of the play, he suffers from tuberculosis, which he is trying to persuade himself is pleurisy, two diseases O'Neill had suffered from. His dream is to go beyond the horizon, just as O'Neill wanted to go beyond the theatrical conventions and create a new theater which meets some of man's religious needs as the Greek theater did. Robert Mayo is not satisfied with the narrow life of the farmer or student. He wants to move on, explore and learn through experience, not books, as he tells his brother, "What I want to do now is keep on moving so

<sup>31</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 81.

that I won't take root in any one place."<sup>32</sup> He wants to be a wanderer like Zarathustra; he wants to be free. But he does not really know what exactly he is looking for. He only has a feeling that he is called beyond the horizon by a force that he does not quite understand, that he can explain only in vague terms:

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?<sup>33</sup>

Of course, his brother, a down-to-earth farmer, a practical man governed by common sense, does not understand him, and neither does anyone else in the Mayo family. Robert himself does not understand what he is looking for because he does not understand himself.

Robert's second dream is his love for Ruth Atkins, who thinks she understands his longings but is merely romantically impressed by his poetic words. She tempts him to give up his dream in exchange for the false hope of happiness with her, and Robert is fooling himself when he says, "Oh, Ruth, our love is sweeter than any distant dream!"<sup>34</sup> Instead of trying to overcome himself, he is giving in to the lower, the animal part of himself. He chooses the easy, less painful way--the way of the common herd. But for Robert, who has the potential of the overman, the way of the common herd is not the easy

<sup>32</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 83.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

way; it is bound to be full of suffering and pain, for he momentarily ignores Zarathustra's warning: "Tools and toys are passions and reason: behind them lies the self. The self seeks also with the eyes of the passions; it listens also with the ears of reason. The self always listens and seeks: it compares, overcomes, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the ruler of the I" (VI, 35). Robert Mayo's self is strong; it never lets him forget the other dream and therefore causes constant suffering and pain. When everything goes wrong with the farm, his marriage, his health, he still has his dream, the urge to find himself. The only thing that keeps him on the farm is his little daughter Mary. After her death he is too weak to physically move beyond the horizon, but he has not forgotten. And at the moment of his death, he is again looking at the horizon; he is finally free:

Don't you see I'm happy at last--free--free!--freed from the farm--free to wander on and on--eternally! Look! isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come-- And this time I'm going! It isn't the end. It's a free beginning--the start of my voyage! I've won to my trip--the right of release--beyond the horizon!<sup>35</sup>

All his suffering was worth it; he has finally found what he was looking for, the mystical union with nature. He has overcome himself. He is not afraid of death, for death makes the overcoming, the going under, and the going beyond possible. He has finally found the state of existence he was longing for--to be a part of beauty and all of nature, not merely human society, to be in harmony with his self.

<sup>35</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 167-168.

Andrew, on the other hand, like all the other characters in the play, is a man of the common herd. He cannot see the beauty in nature; he only sees its usefulness. He does not feel the mystery of the East; he only smells its stench. He is practical and has common sense as well as a shrewd business sense and prospers until he starts speculating in wheat. He does not even know that he does not know himself. Robert finally makes him realize that he has spent eight years in running away from himself. At the beginning of the play, he had as much potential to overcome himself as Robert had. But he threw away that chance when he decided to make money and give in to greed. Robert, in his dying moments, points to the plight of Andrew and the common man when he says, "You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. . . . But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray--." <sup>36</sup> Here Robert touches on one of Zarathustra's most important commandments: "To violate the earth is now the most terrible thing" (VI, 9). Andrew has condemned himself, has lost his soul, when he started to gamble with wheat, the thing he once loved to create. By this action he has violated the life principle, and for that he has to suffer much more severely than Robert ever did. Through this action he has lost his soul and with it his humanity while Robert, although he suffered in the worldly sense, has freed his soul from all earthly bonds and is finally in harmony with all of life.

It seems that in this play the striving for something beyond him-

<sup>36</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 161-162.

self, the overman is present in Robert although the will to power is still rather weak. In Andrew the will to power is present, but it is perverted to a will to power over other men, a will to power that instead of making him something overhuman makes him subhuman, almost machine like. Robert made a simple but costly mistake when he thought that the dream of his love for Ruth could surpass his dream to go beyond the horizon, but Andrew committed a crime when he started to speculate in wheat, a crime that dehumanized him, a fact that can be observed in his human relations. He now hates Ruth although once, a long time ago, he had thought he loved her. He still thinks he loves Robert, but most of that seems to be the attempt to keep his memory of their childhood intact.

The symbolism of the scenes reinforces Robert's triumph. The play moves from spring through summer to fall, just as Robert moves from exuberant youth through quiet maturity to death. The seasons seem to stand for the progress of his physical life, for his life as a man. But the hours of the day indicate his spiritual progress. The play starts at sunset as if Robert were going under or setting with the sun. It moves through the hot and stifling noon, symbolic of his suffering and pain, and ends with his death at dawn, just like Thus Spake Zarathustra. His death with the rising sun is symbolic of his going beyond into a new life. Thus on the surface, for the protagonist there is a movement from happiness through suffering to resignation and death, while underneath the surface he moves from insignificance through suffering and pain to triumph. For the

other characters the reverse is the case. On the surface, they are now freed from Robert, the cause of their unhappiness, but underneath the surface they are spiritually dead, and therefore the sunrise is void of meaning; only the fall--the death of their souls--carries a meaning for them as O'Neill seems to indicate in Ruth's final attitude: "She remains silent, gazing at him [Andrew] dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope."<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the Horizon is the first play in which O'Neill portrays the main character--the poet--as striving for the overman. Here the longings of the individual are still vague and ill defined. The protagonist seems to be too weak an individual to be even capable of striving for the highest dream, let alone reaching it at the moment of death. In the following plays these longings become clearer; the will to power, too weak in this play, becomes stronger--until in the last play of this period O'Neill gives us the overman in Lazarus Laughed.

In The Straw (1919) O'Neill appears in the mask of Stephen Murray, a newspaper reporter who aspires to be a writer. He is a disillusioned, bitter young man who longs for love but cannot recognize it when it is offered. The effect of Eileen's love for him, however, is immediate. He is able to create. When Eileen is dying, he finally realizes that she is a part of him and that he needs her love in order to create. For the first time in his life, he is now

<sup>37</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 169.

willing to fight for his dream which is dependent on the life of Eileen. He is determined to win out over all the prognoses forecasting death: "But we'll win together. We can! We must! There are things doctors can't value--can't know the strength of."<sup>38</sup> This something is their love and their will to overcome all odds, even death itself. In their love they are strong; without it they are nothing. Their love can make Stephen the writer he dreams of becoming because Eileen is the ideal Nietzschean woman who is able to penetrate his surface and give him depth. Thus Stephen's fight for their love is at the same time the fight to become the creator who creates beyond himself.

This is the first play in which O'Neill explains the "hopeless hope," the dream for the impossible. As Miss Gilpin says, it is not important whether the dream is fulfilled. It is the dream that is important: "But there must be something back of it--some promise of fulfillment--somehow--somewhere--in the spirit of hope itself."<sup>39</sup>

The spirit of hope, the will to reach the goal, or, in Nietzschean terms, the will to power can lead from sickness to health, from spiritual death to life, from alienation to love. It is significant that in this play Stephen's dream is not a mystical union with nature but a union in love with Eileen. This play, which examines the very beginning of O'Neill's career, already indicates the direction the playwright will take in the last two plays, Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten. There as in The Straw the characters

<sup>38</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 415.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

strive for something that will overcome all misunderstandings, the inability to communicate, the alienation of the modern individual--selfless, self-sacrificing, all-encompassing love.

In The Straw O'Neill temporarily abandoned the striving for the overman in favor of love because in Agnes Boulton he found again his childhood love, the loss of which had driven him into rebellion, cynicism, and indifference as it did Stephen Murray. When O'Neill met Agnes, he saw in her not only his future wife but also his mother, the mother of the child still in him. This becomes clear in a dream he told Agnes:

A dream came back to me that night when I first met you. It was a dream of my childhood--when I had to dream that I was not alone. There was me and one other in this dream. I dreamed it often--and during the day sometimes this other seemed to be with me and then I was a happy little boy.

But this other in my dream . . . --I never quite saw. It was a presence felt that made me complete. In my dream I wanted nothing else--I would not have anyone else! . . . I would have resented anyone else--this other was so much a part of myself. . . . You brought back this dream. No other person ever has. No other person ever will. You were the other in my dream.<sup>40</sup>

In Agnes, O'Neill found the love and support he needed to create just as Stephen Murray finally found them in Eileen Carmody. The will to keep that love undivided for himself, the "hopeless hope," made him confident that he would eventually through hard fighting reach his goal.

In Anna Christie (1920), begun already in 1919 as Chris Christopherson, O'Neill reworks the same problem on a slightly lower level. Instead of the writer Stephen Murray, we have the stoker Mat Burke,

<sup>40</sup>Boulton, op. cit., pp. 67-68.



and instead of the motherly and at the same time virginal figure of Eileen Carmody, we have the hardened prostitute, Anna Christie. In addition to the problem of love, O'Neill explores the problem of the common man trying to hold on to his precarious position over the abyss. Mat Burke and Anna Christie, still young and full of life, are willing to fight for their happiness, while old Chris has resigned himself to his fate.

For Chris there is no hope. He is too tired to put up a fight. He has no will to power or life. He does not know himself and refuses to face his weakness. All his misfortunes he blames on the sea. The sea has claimed all the males in his family. The sea has prevented him from settling on a farm, from leading a quiet and peaceful life. The sea has separated him from his family. Determined not to let the sea ruin his only child, he placed Anna, after the death of her mother, on a farm far away from the sea in the hopes that the distance between the sea and his daughter would diminish its effect and prevent her from being bound to the sea by marrying a sailor.

Since he is not able to realize that it is not the sea that caused all his problems but life--the power that causes birth, growth, decadence, and death in every living thing--or fate, he could not foresee that Anna was just as vulnerable on the farm or in the city as she would have been on the sea. O'Neill, however, makes clear that he does not agree with Chris's interpretation of the sea as the source of all evil, for Anna in the Middle West, in what Chris considers safety, lost her innocence and became a prostitute. Ironically she

feels cleansed by the sea and the fog, the two forces that Chris considers to be the two most threatening and destructive powers. Ironically she feels that she has been redeemed by the sea and her love for Mat Burke and can now make a new start based on the reality of her and Mat Burke's love for each other.

Mat Burke, who is morally not above Anna, condemns her for having been a prostitute although he himself uses prostitutes whenever he comes to port to quiet the animal in himself. Yet he realizes that he loves Anna in spite of what she is, and he is finally willing to marry her and run all the risks that this involves. He has to obey the force that makes him love Anna: "Oh, I'd a right to stay away from you---but I couldn't! I was loving you in spite of it all and wanting to be with you, God forgive me, no matter what you are. I'd go mad if I'd not have you! I'd be killing the world---"<sup>41</sup>

When the play was first performed, it was condemned for its unconvincing happy ending. But to see the ending as happy is to completely misunderstand the meaning of the play as O'Neill himself explained in a letter to the New York Times:

. . . The play has no ending. Three characters have been revealed in all their intrinsic verity, under the acid test of a fateful crisis in their lives. They have solved this crisis for the moment as best they may, in accordance with the will [*italics mine*] that is in each of them. The curtain falls. Behind their lives go on.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, the characters have just had a glimpse at their "hope-

<sup>41</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 76.

<sup>42</sup>O'Neill to New York Times, December 18, 1921, rpt. in Arthur Hopkins Quinn, A History of American Drama: From the Civil War to the Present Day (New York: Harper, 1927), II, 177.

less hope," their love and trust in each other. Now they have to make it work. Here lies the difficulty, and they all realize that--Mat when he says: "We'll be happy now, the two of us, in spite of the devil!"<sup>43</sup> or when he agrees with Chris as the latter says: "It's funny. It's queer, yes--you and me shipping an same boat dat vay. It ain't right. Ay don't know--it's dat funny vay de davil sea do do her vorst dirty tricks, yes. It's so."<sup>44</sup> and Anna when she defiantly tries to disperse the gloom and drinks to the sea: "Here's to the sea, no matter what! Be a game sport and drink to that! Come on!"<sup>45</sup> They need all the will they have; they need the ferocious strength of the will to power to make their newly found love, their redemption, a living reality. Since old Chris has the last word and utters his fears that the sea will again be victorious, O'Neill seems to imply that this wish to make their love a living and lasting reality is another one of those "hopeless hopes." The problem is that Anna and Mat are not apart from the common man; therefore their will to power drives them only to satisfy their all-too-human needs. It will not lead to an understanding and overcoming of themselves but to a blaming of their misfortunes on an abstract power like Chris's "ole davil sea" or Mat Burke's "will of God" rather than their own weakness.

Why then did O'Neill imply an ending that shows forth the helplessness and suffering of man? He partially answered that question

<sup>43</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 76.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

in the letter already quoted:

But looking deep into the hearts of my people, I saw it [a tragic ending] couldn't be done. It would not have been true. They were not that kind. They would act in just the silly, immature, compromising way that I have made them act; and I thought that they would appear to others as they do to me, a bit tragically humorous in their vacillating weakness. But evidently not. Evidently they are all happy--and unconvincing. No wonder! Their groping clutch at happiness is taken as deadly finality.<sup>46</sup>

If we read the play as an attempt on the part of O'Neill to clarify for himself the complexities of Nietzsche's philosophy, this happy misinterpretation is impossible because the characters are not higher men. According to Nietzsche, only the higher man trying to evolve into the overman is capable of true happiness in his striving to become the overman and in his gradual becoming, and only he is capable of true tragedy in his inevitable failure to become the overman. Through the end of the play, which is no end, O'Neill makes clear that he is starting to understand Nietzsche. Anna and Mat, although they are more sincere, more conscious of their real selves than the average human being--Chris and the others--although they are willing to take the risks that their marriage will ensue, are not trying to overcome themselves. They are merely trying to complement each other, to respond to each other's physical and psychological needs. They do not want to create beyond themselves. They are not striving for a "higher love" as Michael Cape and Emma are in Welded and Diff'rent. They are willing to accept each other as they are with all their weaknesses and flaws. Marriage for the higher man is "the will of two

<sup>46</sup>O'Neill to New York Times, op. cit., pp. 177-78.

people to create the one that is more than those who created it" (VI, 73). But that is not what Anna and Mat have in mind. They seem to exemplify more another statement of Zarathustra: "Your love for a woman and a woman's love for a man: if it could only be compassion with suffering and veiled gods! But most of the time two animals recognize each other" (VI, 75). Since Mat and Anna are not exceptional human beings, happiness is not in store for them. Neither are they capable of tragedy because for that also they are not great enough. Because of that they do not have an effective will to power. They have the same kind of will or obsession as Captain Keeney in 'Ile or Captain Bartlett in Gold, a will for gratification of self rather than an overcoming of self.

However, this is only one of two reasons. The other reason is to be found in O'Neill's life. He had just started his life with Agnes Boulton, and in the decision to marry her he had made the same compromise Anna and Mat had made in the play. Mat, although not the typical autobiographical poet-character, is nevertheless an extension of O'Neill, and Anna Christie is an image of Agnes. Agnes was not the ideal combination of mother and virgin that O'Neill was looking for. She had been married before, and she had a child. When O'Neill found that out, he was trying to kill the love he felt for her by seducing her and treating her like a prostitute, a method he used when he tried to kill the love for his mother. Agnes, as is clear in the dream O'Neill told her, was a replacement for his mother, and O'Neill was afraid of being disappointed again. Rather than run the

risk of disappointment, he was willing to insult her and kill his love before it could become too strong as Agnes Boulton records in her biography:

If I had convinced myself that you were nothing to me, if I had felt nothing, I wouldn't have made a fool of myself that night. But I couldn't escape you. I tried to pay no attention to you, to absorb myself with other people.

But you crept into my soul, and at night, alone, I heard your voice and thought of your hands being laid on my forehead. Last night I wanted to seduce you, to possess you. . . . I wanted to consummate the physical act because I thought it would free me from you. I hoped that then you would be just another woman. But I could not bring myself to this low subterfuge. And when I saw you leaving this morning, . . . I hated you with a fierce hatred. You were unattainable--because I saw that, I tried again to hurt you.

I have thought of nothing but you since then--of you and me. Again I've gone down into my private inferno. For all your sweet ways I am not sure of you. How can I be sure of myself when I am not sure of you? I want it to be not you and me, but us, one being not two. I want you to feel that as deeply as I do. And this must be my life--our life--from now on. I will build my house not on sand, but on a rock.<sup>47</sup>

Mrs. Boulton's reconstruction of what O'Neill had told her sounds very much like Mat Burke's justification to himself when he tells Anna that in spite of everything he will marry her. The play could not have an end, neither happy nor tragic, since the drama of O'Neill's life with Agnes had just begun. But its ambiguity and implications of unhappiness already forebode the future as many O'Neill plays tend to do.

In Gold (1920) and Where the Cross Is Made (1918) O'Neill continues to write about the common man and the effect of his will to power, or obsession. These two plays are only variations of 'Ile. Here the will directed toward an unworthy goal--gold, which is not

<sup>47</sup>Boulton, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

even real--drives the obsessed insane. In 'Ile this immensely strong will destroys his wife. In Gold Mrs. Bartlett is trying to redirect the will of her husband by turning it toward God--a necessity for the common man. She wants him to become himself again and take responsibility for the deaths of the cook and boy when she tells him, "You ran away from your own self--the conscience God put in you that you think you can fool with lies."<sup>48</sup> During her life time she does not succeed in making Captain Bartlett confess. But at the end of the play, when his daughter Sue pleads with him to confess for her sake, for her dead mother's sake, and, above all, for the sake of her brother Nat, who shows signs of following his father into insanity, he tells the truth:

No, Nat. That be the lie that the boy and cook had been trying to steal the gold I been tellin' myself ever since. That cook--he said 'twas brass--But I'd been lookin' for ambergris--gold--the whole o' my life--and when we found that chest--I had to believe, I tell ye! I'd been dreamin' o' it all my days! But he said brass and junk, and told the boy--and I give the word to murder 'em both and cover 'em up with sand.<sup>49</sup>

After this confession and after Nat makes sure that the gold indeed is not real, Captain Bartlett "uncover[s] his gray face on which there is now settling an expression of strange peace"<sup>50</sup> and dies, while in Where the Cross Is Made Captain Bartlett dies without having confessed, leaving Nat to dream his father's dream and Sue to despair.

In these two plays O'Neill shows how the greed of the common man

<sup>48</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 652.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 691.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 692.

when he loses or does not heed his faith in God, and with it the system of Christian morality, destroys and injures those around him. Although Christianity, according to O'Neill's understanding of Nietzsche, limits the free development of the individual, in the common man it holds in check the will to power which leads to obsession and destruction. An interesting point in these two plays is the different ending in the later Gold. Some critics, like Richard Dana Skinner, see in it a spiritual development in Captain Bartlett, who at the moment of death confesses his sins and gains a victory over himself. However, Captain Bartlett always knew that the gold was not real, although he could not admit it to himself. When the moment of death arrives and pretense is no longer necessary to give his life some meaning, there is the possibility to escape from the futility of his life, and he can admit to himself and Nat the truth about his life. The peaceful expression on his face merely reflects the relief of not having to continue his meaningless existence.

This difference in the ending of Gold seems to have been dictated by the changed relationship between O'Neill and his father. O'Neill wrote the play in 1920. In August of this year, after a reconciliation with his parents, he watched his father die of cancer, slowly and painfully. According to Doris Alexander, O'Neill finally understood the life of his father, whose last words to him were: "Eugene, I'm going to a better sort of life. This sort of life--here--all froth--no good--rottenness!" These words O'Neill always remembered: "They were written indelibly--seared on my brain--a warning from Beyond to remain



true to the best in me though the heavens fall."<sup>51</sup> The similarities between the father-son relationships and the father's confession in Gold and Long Day's Journey into Night seem to indicate that in Gold O'Neill was trying to express the new understanding of the man who was his father. Like Long Day's Journey into Night, Gold gave O'Neill an opportunity to sort out the feelings for his father, whom he hated and admired at the same time.

In the remaining plays O'Neill continues the examination of man's condition with emphasis on the other two alternatives--regression to the animal and evolution into the overman. In Brutus Jones of The Emperor Jones (1920), O'Neill again portrays man obsessed with pride and greed. We meet the Emperor Jones at the crisis which means the end of his glory, i. e. the point when his will to power or his manhood is being tested. While a strong will to power drives the higher man to evolve and widen the gap between man and ape, the will to power of the common man will do exactly the opposite--force the individual to regress and narrow the gap between man and ape. The latter is what happens in The Emperor Jones, and in this respect the play is a forerunner of The First Man (1921), in which Curtis Jayson is searching for the first man, the link between man and ape, and The Hairy Ape (1921), in which Yank is driven to return to the ape in the zoo.

Generally the play has been interpreted as an exploration of the racial unconscious of Brutus Jones--an interpretation that may

<sup>51</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Alexander, op. cit., p. 285.

have been invited by O'Neill's comment to Arthur Hobson Quinn:

I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind--Fate, God, our biological past [*italics mine*] 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.<sup>52</sup>

The problematic terms are "racial unconscious" and "biological past." If we interpret them as referring to the Negro, we are led astray by the surface narrative and give the play a too limited focus. In terms The First Man, The Hairy Ape, and Nietzsche, "biological past" means the past of all men, i. e. man's descent from the ape. O'Neill's agreement with Nietzsche's idea of the animality of man becomes very clear in an interview with Oliver M. Sayler:

It seems to me that, as far as we can judge, man is much the same creature, with the same primal emotions and motives, the same powers and the same weaknesses, as in the time when the Aryan started toward Europe from the slopes of the Himalayas. He has become better acquainted with those powers and those weaknesses, and he is learning ever so slowly how to control them. The birth-cry of the higher men is almost audible, but they will not come by tinkering with externals or by legislative or social fiat. They will come at the command of the imagination and the will.<sup>53</sup>

The basic idea, then, behind The Emperor Jones is the same as that behind The Hairy Ape, namely the Nietzschean idea that the common man is not very different from the ape. O'Neill makes this quite clear in two comments on The Hairy Ape. He once told Barrett Clark "that The Hairy Ape is a direct descendant of Jones. . . ." <sup>54</sup> At another

<sup>52</sup>O'Neill to Quinn, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>53</sup>O'Neill, quoted by Oliver M. Sayler, Century Magazine, January 1922, rpt. in Cargill, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>54</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Clark, op. cit., p. 83.

time he said in reference to The Hairy Ape: "Its manner is inseparable from its matter, and it found its form as a direct descendant from the Emperor Jones."<sup>55</sup> The only difference between the two plays is that in The Emperor Jones O'Neill is not quite as explicit as in The Hairy Ape. He does not make Brutus Jones regress to the ape but to the primitive man he thought he had conquered. For Jones, however, the primitive natives are not much more than animals, and thus, when he is reduced to their state and conquered by them, he has returned to his animal nature—a fact that is underlined in the physical description of Lem, who "is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage. . . ."<sup>56</sup> Like Yank, Jones cannot return to the animal and live, for both have lost the innocence the animal has.

Throughout the play it is evident that Brutus Jones is different neither from the white man nor the primitive native. This is indicated most obviously by his response to the tom-tom which beats the rhythm of the human heart. "He is a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face—an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect."<sup>57</sup> He is proud, smart, and above all practical. His goal is that of all O'Neill's materialistic characters, to get rich as quickly

<sup>55</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>56</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 202.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

as possible. To reach that goal, he is ruthless, adopts the white man's behavior in as far as it will help, and disregards all moral and religious restrictions. Except for his speech and his appearance, there is nothing--not even the nature of his visions--particularly black about him. To see Brutus Jones as a representative of the black man, rather than man in general, as some critics do, is to see The Emperor Jones as a condemning, racist statement that O'Neill cannot be accused of when we look at his other Negro characters.

Another interesting aspect in the play is O'Neill's comment on religion. For the natives the silver bullet has supernatural powers--powers that are stronger than Jones himself, the most powerful being they ever encountered. For them the silver bullet has almost a God-like quality, a belief that Jones gradually comes to share. The silver bullet, like Zarathustra's God and Jones's crocodile god, is man-made and therefore not more powerful than any other human creation: "Oh, my brothers, the God, whom I created, was man's work and madness, like all gods! Man was he, and only a poor lump of man and me: from my own ashes and glowing coals it came to me, this ghost! Verily, it did not come to me from beyond!" (VI, 31).

This kind of God cannot bring salvation; the only hope for man's salvation lies in himself. Curtis Jayson of The First Man (1921) is trying to find it by searching for the remains of the first man--the immediate link between the ape and man--maybe to find out what an evolution from one species to another involves. In order to succeed, he needs a strong will, encouragement, as well as sympathy from his

wife Martha, with whom he is united in an ideal marriage—the kind of marriage that Emma Crosby desires in Diff'rent (1920) but because of her conventionality, confusion, and frustration does not find. Unlike Emma, Curt and Martha are truly different from the people around them and live by their own values. They are sufficient for each other and happy in their work.

Both are strong individuals, much stronger than Jones, for example. Curtis believes that he is doing something that will benefit all men. His dream, to find traces of the first man, is more important to him than the feelings of his family and even Martha. He has the potential to evolve into a higher man. He possesses the necessary imagination and will; however, he still needs Martha, who is Nietzsche's ideal woman. She is totally devoted to him and encourages and helps him in the pursuit of his dream. This dependence on Martha is what keeps both of them from fulfilling their proper functions and must lead to the tragic end of the play.

The tragedy, or rather the triumph, of Curtis and Martha is inevitable; it is inherent in Nietzsche's philosophy. According to Nietzsche, the function of woman is to bring out the depth in man. Martha has done exactly that for Curt, as he explains to his family:

You people can't have any idea what a help—a chum—she's been. You can't believe that a woman could be—so much that—in a life of that kind, how I've grown to depend on her. The thousand details—she attends to them all. She remembers everything. Why, I'd be lost. I wouldn't know how to start.<sup>58</sup>

Martha takes care of the necessary, though superficial details so that

<sup>58</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 574.

Curtis can concentrate on the essence of his work. He knows and appreciates it but does not understand that as a woman Martha has another function besides responding to every need of her husband--that of a mother. The time has come for Martha to fulfill herself, which, although it is painful, will eventually lead to the fulfillment of Curtis also. True to the character of the Nietzschean woman, Martha has discovered the child in Curtis. She has let him dream. She has let him play and even played along with him. For fifteen years she was a toy for him:

I've spoiled you by giving up my life so completely to yours. You've forgotten I have one. Oh, I don't mean that I was a martyr. I know that in you alone lay my happiness in those years--after the children died. But we are no longer what we were then. We must, both of us, relearn to love and respect what we have become.<sup>59</sup>

The child in Curtis had become her child, and she had become his mother and toy. But now she has to become a real mother again. Curtis has grown beyond the child he was although he still reacts like a child whose favorite toy is taken away from him. Curtis now must learn to be on his own, to accept the terrible loneliness of the higher man, and Martha must be a real mother again, a creator. She tries to explain this need to him:

I've felt myself feeling as if I wasn't complete--with that [Curt's work] alone. . . . Oh, Curt, I wish I could tell you what I feel, make you feel with me the longing for a child. . . . And that's what I want you to do--to reciprocate--to love the creator in me--to desire that I, too, should complete myself with the thing nearest my heart! . . . Suddenly I felt oh, so tired--utterly alone--out of harmony with you--with the earth under me. I became horribly despondent--like an outcast who suddenly real-

<sup>59</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 588.

izes the whole world is alien. And all the wandering about the world and all the romance and excitement I'd enjoyed in it, appeared an aimless, futile business, chasing around in a circle in an effort to avoid touching reality. . . . And such a longing for another child came to me that I began sobbing.<sup>60</sup>

However, Curtis wants to hold back. He does not yet realize that he must be alone if he wants to follow his dream. He has forgotten that pain and suffering are necessary to push him on. He is not yet willing to sacrifice what is most dear to him--Martha's companionship--although he does see the need for it: "But when your only meaning comes as a searcher for knowledge--you can't sacrifice that, Martha. You must sacrifice everything for that or lose all sincerity."<sup>61</sup> This search for knowledge will eventually lead to man's evolution into the overman. Only knowledge will make man recognize himself and thus lead to happiness.

Yes, an attempt was man. Oh, much nonsense and error have become body in us!

We still fight step by step with the giant hazard, and all of mankind has up to this point been ruled by nonsense, without sense.

Knowing, the body purifies itself; tempting with knowledge, it elevates itself; all impulses are holy to the one who becomes aware; the soul of the higher one grows happy. (VI, 82)

This happiness of the higher man is a happiness of the spirit, not the animal comfort of the common man. It is born out of torment and suffering, for "spirit is life that itself cuts into life: by its own torment it increases its own knowledge. . . . And the happiness of the spirit is this: to be anointed and consecrated as a sacrificial

<sup>60</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 584-585.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 580.

animal . . ." (VI, 112). Curtis had to learn this lesson once through the death of his children so that his dream could be born, and at the end of the play, he has to learn it again through Martha's death so that he can push on to the fulfillment of his dream.

Curtis Jayson is a higher man who through suffering is driven by his strong will to power to reach his goal, who in the attempt of realizing his dream is willing to sacrifice everything, even himself and his happiness, who in the end has to go on his search in utter loneliness. Martha is the fit companion for such a man. She is the ideal woman, willing to sacrifice herself to the higher man and his dream and to create with him the one that is greater than both of them. She sees the glory of life, loves every moment of it, even the pain that is necessarily there, and wishes for its eternal recurrence: "Yes, it's been a wonderful, glorious life. I'd live it over again if I could, every single second of it--even the terrible suffering--the children."<sup>62</sup>

In the next play, The Hairy Ape (1921), O'Neill turns to the object of Curt's search--the first man. But he does not have to go to Asia; he finds him right at the waterfront in New York, or--since he is on the ship--anywhere in the world. The surface conflicts between the social classes, between man and machine, between primitive and civilized man have led to various interpretations which, I believe, almost completely ignore O'Neill's purpose. In an interview with Miss Mullet, O'Neill said in 1922:

<sup>62</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 580.



Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But, apparently, very few people get this. They have written, picking out one thing or another in the play and saying "how true" it is. But no one has said, "I am Yank! Yank is my own self!"

Yet that was what I meant him to be. His struggle to "belong," to find the thread that will make him a part of the fabric of Life--we are all struggling to do just that. One idea I had in writing the play was to show that the missing thread, literally "the tie that binds," is our understanding of one another.<sup>63</sup>

He emphasized this idea in a statement made for the New York Herald Tribune:

The Hairy Ape was propoganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the "woist punches from bot' of 'em." This idea was expressed in Yank's speech. The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can't go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to "belonging" either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt "to belong."<sup>64</sup>

If Yank is the representative of every man--educated or not, civilized or not, rich or poor--that is, the same as all the other characters--Long, Paddy, or even Mildred--the same as O'Neill himself, this makes sense in terms of Nietzsche's description of man only. It seems that O'Neill through Yank was trying to express the danger inherent in the nature of man, his incompleteness, his im-

<sup>63</sup>Eugene O'Neill, "They All Have to Come to It--Even Geniuses!" interview with Miss Mullet, The American Magazine (September 1922), quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>64</sup>O'Neill, New York Herald Tribune (November 16, 1924), quoted in Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 84.

perfection--his animal body and his divine spirit--and his fearful hesitating when he becomes aware of his nature. The problem with Yank as a symbol is that O'Neill has dramatized Nietzsche's definition of man a little too literally, making Yank in appearance more like an ape than a man. And this is why the audience cannot see Yank as a symbol. Yank, the stoker, is socially so far beneath the average theater-goer that the latter cannot identify nor really sympathize with Yank. For him, Yank is imprisoned in the bowels of the ship by civilized society, materialism, such rival systems of thinking as Christianity and Marxism, and can react only with violence when he becomes aware of his cage.

A second problem of man is his inability to communicate with other men. In order to make this difficulty quite apparent, O'Neill had to exaggerate the physical difference between such characters as Yank and Mildred. However, the problem does not exist merely between two different social classes but also between such equals as Paddy, Long, and Yank, on the one hand, and Mildred, the officers, and her aunt, on the other. The only means man has at his disposal when he wants to assert himself is power, and it does not matter whether it is the power of physical strength in Yank or the power of money in Mildred. When this power is not sufficient because the two individuals trying to assert themselves have different values and cannot understand each other's systems of power, the only reaction left is the animal's recourse to violence, violence of language in the case of Mildred and physical violence in the case of Yank.

In Yank, O'Neill has found the first man, and he contrasts him with twentieth-century man represented by Mildred, the officers, the people on Fifth Avenue, in the I. W. W. office, etc. Although the difference between them seems to be profound, it is only superficial. Man may have become refined to such an extent that he looks the complete opposite of the first man, but in essence he is still the same. Yank is characterized by physical strength, blackness, dirt, inarticulateness, whereas Mildred, the extreme on the other side, is characterized by physical weakness, whiteness, almost sterile immaculateness, and articulateness, but in essence she is very much like Yank. She also is looking for ways to get out of her prison and to belong, and, like Yank, she does it by going backwards. She tries to find a sense of belonging by going to the socially inferior from whom her family had come up, by finally returning to Yank, the first man, the physically ape-like man, but in vain. Yank returns to the ape itself, also in vain.

Curtis Jayson's or O'Neill's search for the first man was successful. He has found the evolutionary link between ape and man, the link that may help man to become the overman. This link is symbolized by Rodin's statue of The Thinker. Alan Mickle very perceptively observes that Le Penseur is the key to The Hairy Ape.

The beast is becoming man. And his great desires failing to find expression where they used to, turn now in other directions. He would think, but cannot yet do so. He has not yet the necessary command of words. His looking within is as yet only a blind, instinct-directed groping for something, he knows not what. His mind's eye has not yet accustomed itself to the darkness. Le Penseur is primitive man, all swiftness and courage and cunning

and great physical strength.<sup>65</sup>

Le Penseur is also "man waking into consciousness of his life position, bringing himself into perspective. And his eyes opening into the light, blink, suffer."<sup>66</sup> If man will now utilize and develop the faculty to think that makes him different from the ape, he can evolve into the overman. But that demands the same courage, strength, and will that the first man had to use to separate himself from the ape. He has to act alone; he must not and cannot follow the herd. His life is a constant quest for belonging.

Man cannot belong. He has separated himself from the ape, but so far he has completed only the first step. He has dared to start crossing the abyss and will have to seek to belong until he reaches the other side--the overman. Suspended over the abyss, he has three alternatives--to try to retrace his steps as Yank and Brutus Jones do and find that he cannot return, to remain still in stagnation until his natural life is over and try to compensate his feeling of not belonging by gaining power over others as Captains Keeney and Bartlett, Andrew Mayo, and many others do, or to dare to go on crossing the abyss although it is a lonely journey which is full of dangers and may, probably will, lead to his fall into the abyss as Robert Mayo and Curtis Jayson do. In the following plays O'Neill, who has become at least partially aware of his life position, has rejected the first

<sup>65</sup>Alan D. Mickle, Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 43.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

two alternatives; he will now concentrate on the courageous individual who is trying, though often failing, to cross the abyss, to overcome himself and become the overman.

In The Fountain (1921) O'Neill turns to the opposite of the ape-like man, the quester Juan Ponce de Leon, another mask of O'Neill. Like O'Neill, Juan is thirty-one and has a dual personality. "His countenance is haughty, full of a romantic adventurousness and courage; yet he gives the impression of disciplined ability, of confident self-mastery—a romantic dreamer governed by the ambitious thinker in him."<sup>67</sup> In the beginning he is a warrior interested only in the glory of Spain. Unlike the other soldiers, he is not interested in selfish material gains. He fought the Moors bravely and conquered. He gained glory and riches, but these were not his personal aims. He gained glory for Spain. Not willing to rest on his laurels, he wants to join Columbus on his second voyage in search of Cathay, the riches of the East, for the greater glory of Spain. However, as he grows older, he realizes that the glory of Spain is not really what he is after. This goal is not high enough. He dreams of the Fountain of Youth, of everlasting life, and eternal youth becomes the object of his quest in his old age.

In the character of Juan, the warrior and the dreamer, O'Neill again seems to have been influenced by Nietzsche, who characterizes the man in search of the overman in the same opposites.

And if you cannot be saints of knowledge, be at least its

<sup>67</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 377.

warriors. They are companions and precursors of such sainthood.

I see many soldiers: if I could only see many warriors!

You should be such whose eyes always look for an enemy--for your enemy. And with some of you, there is hate at first sight.

You shall seek your enemy; you shall fight your war and for your thoughts! And when your thoughts are defeated, your honesty and integrity shall still shout triumph thereover.

You shall love peace as a means for new wars--and prefer the short to the long peace.

I do not advise you to work but to fight. I do not advise you to peace but to victory. Your work be a fight, your peace a victory!

War and courage have done more great things than love of one's neighbor. Not your compassion and suffering but your courage has saved those in need.

You must have only enemies that are to be hated and no enemies that are to be despised. You must be proud of your enemy: then the successes of your enemy are also your successes.

Your love of life be love of your highest hope: and your highest hope be the highest thought of life!

But you shall let me command you in the highest thought--and that is: man is something that must be overcome. (VI, 49-50)

Juan Ponce de Leon is the warrior who seeks war with worthy enemies. But he has to come to the realization that war alone does not fulfill him. When his love of life, stirred into action by Beatriz, who through her beauty and love gives depth to Juan, seeks more than the glory of Spain, seeks to overcome man--his growing old and dying-- Juan becomes the quester and engages in the search for the overman. He finds the state of the overman and with it a sense of belonging in the vision of Beatriz at the spring when he becomes aware of the eternal recurrence expressed in the fountain song, which Luis, another mask for O'Neill, sang in the beginning of the play:

Love is a flower  
 Forever blooming.  
 Life is a fountain  
 Forever leaping  
 Upward to catch the golden sunlight,  
 Striving to reach the azure heaven;  
 Falling, falling,

Ever returning  
To kiss the earth that the flower may live.<sup>68</sup>

When he first heard the song, Juan could not yet understand its meaning. At that time he was too much a warrior to comprehend that man also needs love and beauty--two aspects that become very important in the last plays--to be a complete man. He is strong, yes. He has an iron will and a strong desire, but his goal is not the impossible; it is the worldly though not selfish goal of winning glory for Spain. He does not have the depth he needs to transcend this dream, to wish for a transformation of the nature of man. Maria de Cordova tries to give Juan this depth by confessing her love for him. But Juan, the warrior, has no use for love. Mockingly echoing Zarathustra's ". . . woman is not yet capable of friendship: she knows only love" (VI, 61), he reproaches her, "Love, love, and always love! Can no other motive exist for you? God pity women!"<sup>69</sup> Juan does not have time for the kind of love Maria feels for him. All his energy is directed toward achieving his goal. He will go on fighting, conquering new worlds for Spain, for "peace means stagnation--a slack ease of cavaliers and songs and faded roses."<sup>70</sup>

After having conquered Porto Rico and not having been able to go on to conquer his dream city of Cathay, Juan is despondent. For twenty years he has lived in peace as governor of Porto Rico. He has

<sup>68</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 384.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid..

indeed stagnated:

It is too late. Cathay is too far. I am too weary. I have fought small things so long that I am small. My spirit has rusted in chains for twenty years. Now it tends to accept them--to gain peace. . . . If I could be once more the man who fought before Granada--! But the fire smolders. It merely warms my will to dream of the past. It no longer catches flame in deeds. (With a desolate smile of self-pity) I begin to dread--another failure. I am too old to find Cathay.<sup>71</sup>

Here Juan becomes aware of his human condition. He does not belong, and he is tempted to turn back to the time when he felt he belonged. At the same time, however, he is vaguely aware of his new dream--to be young again.

In Beatriz, Juan sees Maria again. Her youth and beauty make his old age doubly loathsome, and he asks her, "Give me back--the man your mother knew."<sup>72</sup> She has stirred something in him that her mother was unable to bring to life. This other self is battling with the old self in a similar way as the two selves of Dion Anthony. He has aged greatly, and "beneath the bitter mocking mask there is an expression of deep, hidden conflict and suffering on his face as if he were at war with himself."<sup>73</sup> Juan now is the true warrior, fighting his self, trying to overcome the man in himself, trying to become young again, already recapturing the love of life of his youth--a love that Beatriz has awakened in him:

There is no God but Love--no heaven but youth! . . . A child--yes--for a time--but one morning standing by the fountain she

<sup>71</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 402.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 408.



[Beatriz] was woman. More than a woman! She was the Spirit of Youth, Hope, Ambition, Power to dream and dare! She was all I had lost. She was Love and the Beauty of Love! So I loved her, loved her with all the intensity of youth's first love--when youth was dead.<sup>74</sup>

Beatriz, the innocent child and woman, has finally been able to give Juan the depth that her mother was unable to give him. With it she has given him the strength to overcome all enemies that stand in the way of his goal, and she recognizes the lion in him when she tells him that he is "lion by nature as well as name!"<sup>75</sup> The Great Blond Beast, the will to power, now drives Juan on to reach his goal-- eternal youth. He finds it just before he dies through the vision of Beatriz by the spring. She sings him the variations of the Fountain Song, expressing the eternal recurrence and the omnipotence of nature so that Juan recognizes that all human faiths are equal and must vanish, that only nature is eternal. "What are you, Fountain? That from which all life springs and to which it must return--God."<sup>76</sup> However, only after a gesture of compassion--foreshadowing the important aspect of the last plays--can Juan feel that he is in harmony with nature, that he is a part of the Fountain, of God, and that he belongs:

I see! Fountain Everlasting, time without end! Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring death! All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally! O aspiring fire of life, sweep the dark soul of man! Let us burn in thy unity! . . . O God, Fountain of Eternity, Thou art the All in One in All--the Eternal Becoming which is Beauty.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 422.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 426.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

Hearing the real Beatriz sing the Fountain Song again, after actually seeing the reality of the eternal recurrence in Beatriz' love for his nephew Juan and Juan's love for Beatriz, Ponce de Leon knows that he belongs, that he has crossed the abyss and reached the other side, the overman--a state of perfect harmony with nature in which he will live eternally:

I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become oneself a symbol! Juan Ponce de Leon is past! He is resolved into the thousand moods of beauty that make up happiness--color of the sunset, of tomorrow's dawn, breath of the great Trade wind--sunlight on grass, an insect's song, the rustle of leaves, an ant's ambitions. (In ecstasy) Oh, Luis, I begin to know eternal youth! I have found my Fountain! O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop of my soul!<sup>78</sup>

While Ponce de Leon is the Zarathustrian mask of O'Neill, Luis de Alvarado is another mask, the young Eugene guided by Jamie, longing for his lost faith. Significantly, he is a little older than Juan. O'Neill followed Jamie's example exclusively until he found Nietzsche, who gave him another alternative. Luis is dissipated and given to drink. He is a poet and a dreamer but without a goal. To him Juan can say, "Drink and forget sad nonsense."<sup>79</sup> Like Juan, he has only contempt for the soldiers who are after material gains for themselves. He sings of love, but as Juan points out mockingly, "his only love is his old mother."<sup>80</sup> Like Robert Mayo, he dreams of the beauty and mystery of the East. He dreams of the Fountain of Youth, the dream

<sup>78</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 448.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

Juan takes over after Luis has given up dreaming and has found peace in the Church. In this double mask, O'Neill indicates for the first time his uncertainty about following Nietzsche or returning to the Church, an uncertainty that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Luis, the second alter ego of O'Neill, found in the Church the same feeling of belonging as Juan did in Nature:

What had I done with life?--an aimless, posing rake, neither poet nor soldier without place nor peace! I had no meaning even to myself until God awakened me to His Holy Will. Now I live in truth. You must renounce in order to possess.<sup>81</sup>

In Juan Ponce de Leon's nephew, a third mask of O'Neill, these two personalities are in harmony. Juan, like his uncle, is a true warrior. He is interested only in the glory of Spain. He is, as Beatriz points out, "as you [Ponce de Leon] were in my mother's tales."<sup>82</sup> But like Luis, he carries a lute and sings. And at the end when he sings the Fountain Song with Beatriz, "the chant of the monks swells out, deep and vibrant. For a moment the two strains blend into harmony, fill the air in an all-comprehending hymn of the mystery of life. . . ."<sup>83</sup> He is the warrior and the dreamer, youth and faith. In him these forces are not at war, symbolizing the harmony with nature and God that his uncle and Luis felt at the end of their lives, expressing hope for the future generation.

The future generation consists of Juan and Beatriz, man and woman

<sup>81</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 397-398.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

united in marriage and love, and this is the problem O'Neill returns to in the next group of plays, after having started to explore it already in such plays as Bread and Butter, Beyond the Horizon, Diff'rent, and The First Man. Welded (1922), the first and most blatantly Nietzschean and autobiographical play in this group, was written when his marriage with Agnes Boulton had reached a crisis point. The play examines the disappointment with Agnes, who has not lived up to the Nietzschean ideal of woman.

Michael Cape, a playwright, is the mask of O'Neill. He, like O'Neill when he finished writing the play, is thirty-five. He is

tall and dark. His unusual face is a harrowed battlefield of super-sensitiveness, the features at war with one another--the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist. One feels a powerful imagination tinged with somber sadness--a driving force which can be sympathetic and cruel at the same time. There is something tortured about him--a passionate tension, a self-protecting, arrogant defiance of life and his own weakness, a deep need for love as a faith in which to relax.<sup>84</sup>

He is aware of man's incompleteness. His dream is to become complete, and he seeks this completion in his marriage with Eleanor:

Then let's be proud of our fight! It began with the splitting of a cell a hundred million years ago into you and me, leaving an eternal yearning to become one life again. . . . You and I--year after year--together--forms of our bodies merging into one form; rhythm of our lives beating against each other, forming slowly the one rhythm--the life of Us--created by us!--beyond us, above us!<sup>85</sup>

Through this marriage Michael is trying to purify himself, to overcome the animal or the all-too-human in himself and become a pure species

<sup>84</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 443-444.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

again as he once was in his animal state. In order to reach that goal, he demands that Eleanor live entirely for him, exist only through him. But Eleanor is not a Martha Jayson. She cannot give up her own life to please Michael, and she reproaches him bitterly:

You insist that I have no life at all outside you. Even my work must exist only as an echo of yours. You hate my need of easy, casual associations. You think that weakness. You hate my friends. You're jealous of everything and everybody. . . . You're too severe. Your ideal is too inhuman. Why can't you understand and be generous--be just!<sup>86</sup>

However, Michael is too convinced of the reality of his ideal to descend to his humanity, and when he cannot have his way, both determine to destroy their love through adultery. But at the critical moment both realize that physical love without ideals and feelings for the other is merely an animal need, that by going back to the animal they would not only kill each other's love but also their humanity. They become aware that what they wanted to destroy in themselves does not only tear apart the bond of exaltation and torment that "welds" them together but also destroys their individual dignity, the very thing they were trying to protect by breaking the bond. They find out that life and love mean happiness and suffering, that torment and exaltation are inseparable. They see the truth of Zarathustra's statement on love:

But even your best love is merely an enchanted parable and a painful glow. It is a torch which should give you light to higher ways.

In the future you shall love beyond yourselves! So first learn to love! And for that you had to drink from the bitter chalice of your love.

<sup>86</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 453.

Bitterness is in the chalice of even the best love: thus it makes you long for the overman; thus it makes you thirst, you—the creator! (VI, 75)

After their return to each other, Michael and Eleanor are willing to accept their life together and strive for their ideal although they know that they will fight and even hate again. But the pain they will be inflicting upon each other will eventually lead them to the overcoming of their human state. Michael expresses this knowledge in terms that imply an awareness of the eternal recurrence, amor fati, and the striving for the overhuman: "And we'll torture and tear, and clutch for each other's souls!--fight--fail and hate again--(he raises his voice in aggressive triumph) but!--fail with pride--with joy! . . . Our life is to bear together our burden which is our goal--on and up! Above the world, beyond its vision--our meaning!"<sup>87</sup> And the final image of their union in love in the form of the cross symbolizes the all-giving, all-sacrificing, suffering love as well as the rebirth into something God-like, overhuman--the dual longing of O'Neill.

In the next play of this group, All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923)--on the surface concerned with intermarriage between blacks and whites--O'Neill examines the painful marriage relationship of his parents--Jim and Ella--and dramatizes Nietzsche's description of the transformation of the spirit of man.

Ella O'Neill, like Ella Downey, because of the problems caused by her marriage to the man she loved and without whom she was not able to live, regressed into childhood and was protected and served

<sup>87</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 488.

by James O'Neill. The psychological tension caused by a feeling of guilt for having violated her calling to become a nun, for having been responsible for the death of Edmund because of her desire to be with her husband, and her alienation from her friends combined with physical weakness and pain drove her, under the influence of morphine, back into her childhood world. And James O'Neill, like Jim Harris, never ascended to the top of his profession. Always afraid of poverty, he felt this fear even more after his marriage because he wanted Ella to have whatever she might wish and wasted his talents in the life-long performance of Monte Cristo.

However, the play is more than merely a disguised biography of Ella and James O'Neill. In this play we find the same symbolism of black and white as in The Hairy Ape, the same aspect of blackness as in The Emperor Jones. Jim Harris, who wants to be white and whom Ella calls "the only white man in the world,"<sup>88</sup> is another symbol of the human condition. His blackness, as that of Brutus Jones and Yank is what links him with the animal. His whiteness of soul is what makes him different from the animal, and his wish to be white is his wish to be a harmonious whole, his aspiration toward the overman. As in The Hairy Ape, it is the white girl that gives incentive to the protagonist to find himself. She is the force that makes him aware of his difference and causes his feeling of alienation, but she also shows him the way to overcome this feeling--to belong. It is Mildred, who suggests the beast-like quality in Yank and through her suggestion

<sup>88</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 314.

eventually drives him to seek fellowship among the apes in the zoo, and it is Ella, who shows Jim that, by becoming children, they can eliminate all problems, exclude the adult world, create their own world with their own values. But this return to the peace of childhood is preceded by much suffering and even violence as Zarathustra explains when he talks about the three transformations of the human spirit.

Of three transformations of the spirit I will tell you: how the spirit will become a camel, and the camel a lion and, finally, the lion a child.

There are many heavy and difficult things for the spirit, the strong spirit which is willing to bear, the spirit full of reverence: its strength is the heavy (difficult) and heaviest (most difficult).

What is heavy (difficult)? Thus asks the spirit which is willing to bear. Thus it kneels down like the camel and wants to be well laden.

What is the heaviest (most difficult), you heroes? Thus asks the spirit which is willing to bear, so that I may take it upon myself and rejoice in my strength.

Is it not: to humble oneself in order to hurt one's vanity? To let one's foolishness shine in order to make fun of one's wisdom?

Is it that: To depart from our success when it celebrates victory? To climb high mountains in order to tempt the tempter?

Or is it that: To feed on the acorns and grass of knowledge and to starve one's soul for the sake of truth?

Or is it that: To be sick and to send home the comforters and to be friends with the deaf who never hear what you want?

Or is it that: To go into muddy water when it is the water of truth and not to recoil from cold frogs and hot toads?

Or is it that: To love those who despise us and to stretch out one's hand to the ghost when it wants to make us afraid?

All this, the heaviest (most difficult), the spirit which is willing to bear takes upon itself: like the camel that heavily laden rushes into the desert, it rushes into the desert.

But in the loneliest desert the second transformation occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion; freedom it wants to rob for itself and be master in its own desert.

Here it looks for its last master: it wants to become hostile to him and his last God; it wants to fight for victory with the enormous dragon.

What is this enormous dragon which the spirit does not want



to call master and God any longer? "You shall" is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will."

My brothers, why is the lion needed in the spirit? Is the beast of burden that renounces and is full of reverence not sufficient?

To create new values--that even the lion is not powerful enough to do: but to create freedom for a new creation--that is the power of the lion.

To create freedom and a holy no even in the face of responsibility: for that, my brothers, the lion is needed.

To take the right of new values--that is the most horrible taking for the spirit which is willing to bear and reverent. That truly is robbery and the task of an animal of prey.

As its holiest it once loved the "you shall"; now it must find madness and caprice even in its holiest so that it must rob freedom from its love: the lion is needed for such robbing.

But, tell me, my brothers, what is it that the child can do that the lion was not able to do? Why does the robbing lion have to become a child?

The child is innocence and oblivion, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a holy yes-saying.

Yes, for the game of creation, my brothers, a holy yes-saying is needed: the spirit now wills its will; the one who is lost in the world wins his world. (VI, 25-27)

Jim renounces everything to become Ella's slave. He patiently bears his failures, the hostility of his peers and sister, the isolation and alienation caused by his marriage to Ella, even the hatred and violence of Ella herself. All these hardships only make him fiercer and more determined to reach his impossible goal--to overcome himself by overcoming his species, to become white. He rejects all "you shall nots" put upon him by society and aspires to be a lawyer, marries the white girl, rejects his own family and racial heritage. He seeks freedom for himself and Ella with a fierceness that eliminates all forces that might stand in his way by isolating himself and Ella from the world around him. This freedom Jim sees in his becoming a full-fledged member of the Bar. But that is not really a new value; it is a value by which he will prove himself to society. The true freedom he finds

only when Ella has completely regressed into childhood. Ella's return to childhood innocence and her insistence on his becoming a child again, his joining her in childhood ignorance of all conventions and taboos placed on man by society finally make him see his freedom. As a child he can pretend to be white, and Ella can pretend to be black, instinctively knowing that underneath the color of their skins they are equal. As a child he can create his own world governed by his values. As children Jim and Ella can love each other without thinking of consequences. As children they can be truthful, simple, and tender. This realization causes Jim's ecstasy in the end. By giving in to Ella's wishes, he has not become a slave to her but a free man for the first time in his life. Knowing now that he is free, he can say, "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!"<sup>89</sup> Knowing that he needs Ella as a guide in his return to childhood, he can say, "(still deeply exalted) Honey, Honey, I'll play right to the gates of Heaven with you!"<sup>90</sup> His spirit, with the help of Ella, has gone through the final transformation, and he is now able to cross the abyss, to create his own values. By becoming a child, he has overcome himself and can now go beyond himself. The ending of the play, therefore, is not pessimistic, tragic, or melodramatic as many critics have charged, but, on the contrary, seen in Nietzschean terms, very optimistic, promising, and foreshadowing

<sup>89</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 342.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

the coming of the overman in Lazarus Laughed.

In Desire Under the Elms (1924), the last play of the marriage group, O'Neill again tries to understand himself through the mask of Eben, whose problem, like O'Neill's, is the hatred for his father-- a hatred caused by jealousy and a feeling that Ephraim was responsible for his second wife's death. O'Neill had a very similar relationship with his father. He was jealous of him, for he believed that he had robbed him of his mother's affection, and he felt that because of his miserliness James O'Neill was to blame for his mother's drug addiction. In addition, O'Neill examined his marriage with Agnes in the tense relationship between Ephraim, Abbie, and Eben. He had expected Agnes to be his mother, wife, and mistress--the three simultaneous roles of Abbie. In order to become his mistress, Abbie first is a mother to Eben. When Eben sees Abbie as his mother and is free to love her as a child, he also becomes free to see her as a woman and to love her as a man. Abbie has recognized the child in Eben, has responded to the child's longing and thus has made it possible for him to be a man at the same time. Her motherly affection has transformed or purified the animal lust in both of them into a true love for each other that leads to the creation of the child, the fulfillment of Abbie's womanhood through the true motherhood and a quasi-return to childhood for Eben since the child is described as the exact image of him. In the baby, the child in Eben can live again. At the same time he can live as a man, loving Abbie as a woman. In their love they are happy because they have a sense of belonging; they belong to each other,

and they are in harmony with nature and their human nature. Their animal nature is expressed in the passion of their love, while the part that is above the animal is expressed in their willingness to give to the other without selfishness and ulterior motives, to take responsibility for their actions.

Abbie is also a wife, but the wife of Ephraim, and that is where complications arise. Ephraim is a mask for James O'Neill as well as Eugene O'Neill. Through Abbie, Eben can express his hatred for his father and avenge himself for a real or imagined wrong by cuckolding him, and he can also express his own guilt feelings about his mother's death, or as O'Neill about his mother's drug addiction, through the incest theme. At the same time, however, Ephraim is the creator of the farm out of stones. He has married Abbie not because he loved her but because he needed her to dispell his loneliness which made his work difficult and almost futile. He sees in her a force of nature with which he wants to be united--a force that is also expressed in the farm: "Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t'ye in my lonesomeness."<sup>91</sup> In this respect Abbie is a forerunner of the Earth Mother Cybel. But he does not see in her the woman, the human being. Abbie does not feel love for Ephraim either. She sees in him merely the material value of the farm. This is the same view that Simeon, Peter, and Eben have of the farm. They do not understand that, at least at this point in time, the material value of the farm is unimportant for Ephraim. They do

<sup>91</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 236.

not realize that the farm for Ephraim is creation, his identity, a symbol of belonging because the prosperity of the farm under hostile conditions, symbolized by the stones and walls, proves to the old man that he is in harmony with nature. Abbie's inability to understand Ephraim makes the loneliness only harder to bear, and Ephraim has to escape to the cows because they are the only ones that understand him. Like Zarathustra, who felt lonely and cold after he had met the ugliest man and felt warmth and life again when he came into the vicinity of the cows, and like the voluntary beggar, who finds understanding only among the cows before he meets Zarathustra, Ephraim finds warmth and life and understanding only when he is with his cows. Ephraim, the creator, who is in harmony with nature, who follows one of Zarathustra's important commandments and remains loyal to the earth, is one of the higher men. At seventy-five, he is stronger and can work harder than all the younger men. He can outdance the fiddler and overcome Eben in a fight. He is lonely and hard and misunderstood by all the people around him as well as the critics. His interest in the farm is not caused by greed or a desire for material wealth. He is driven to make the stony fields fruitful even in the face of ridicule from the neighbors. The farm became his life, and when it was threatened and with it his identity and existence, he married Eben's mother, who did not know him any better than his first and third wife or his sons. During his married as well as his single life, he was always lonely because no one understood him. "I lived with the boys. They hated me 'cause I was hard. I hated them 'cause they was soft. They coveted the farm

without knowin' what it meant. It made me bitter 'n wormwood. It aged me--them coveting what I'd made fur mine."<sup>92</sup> He cannot accept his sons as his children and heirs because they only see the monetary value of the farm. They are not able to recognize in it Ephraim's attempt to overcome himself through the creation of life out of stones. They do not see that it is continual creation that matters, not the increasing prosperity. A true son of Ephraim would be the farm as Ephraim is, i. e. would be the pure force of life that is symbolized by the farm. Ephraim exists only in his creation just as O'Neill exists in his plays.

The God of Ephraim is not the puritanical New England God. Ephraim's God, although He is represented in terms that make Him appear to be the Old Testament God, demanding and hard, is nature. During the spring when the new life makes Ephraim feel dead inside, he tells his son, "An' now I'm ridin' out t' learn God's message t' me in the spring, like the prophets done."<sup>93</sup> This message was to marry and through marriage create new Life. He sees Abbie as a symbol of life when he tells her, "Yew air my Rose o' Sharon! Behold, yew air fair; yer eyes air doves; yer lips air like scarlet; yer two breasts air like two fawns; yer navel be like a round goblet; yer belly be like a heap o' wheat. . . ."<sup>94</sup> And he is overjoyed when Abbie tells him that she wants a son from him. This son of his old age, he is convinced, will

<sup>92</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 238.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

be the son who is worthy of the farm. He will raise this son to be like himself. But when he finds out that the baby is dead and was really Eben's son, he starts to understand why he felt so cold in the house, why he had to seek refuge with the cows. For a moment, when his despair and loneliness become too much for him, he is tempted to give up his fight, to leave his loneliness and join Simeon and Peter in California. Realizing that in this plan he has been frustrated by Eben, who had stolen his money and given it to his two brothers, Ephraim is brought back to his senses and accepts his fate. He is now willing to become like his God, "Waal--what d'ye want? God's lonesome, hain't He? God's hard and lonesome!"<sup>95</sup>

Abbie and Eben also reach the point where they are not motivated by common human desires, but only after the child has been killed. The baby died because he was conceived in a moment of animal passion. He was at first a means for gaining possession of the farm and revenge and later on became a possession to Eben. He was not a symbol of life as Ephraim had seen him. He was not born through the desire to create the overhuman and died in Abbie's attempt to prove her all-too-human love for Eben. Abbie and Eben gain the true love that could create the overhuman only at the point of their fall when the sheriff comes to take them to prison. At this point, when Eben admits his guilt and partnership in the murder of the child, when he takes full responsibility for his actions and thus realizes that he has been fighting life, he begins to live as a higher man, something that Ephraim recog-

<sup>95</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 268.

nizes and admires.

In Marco Millions (1924) O'Neill pursues the idea of God that has led to much misunderstanding in Desire Under the Elms. It now becomes quite clear that any God associated with a formal religion--be it Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, or Islam--is ineffective when it comes to the question of life and death and the expression of the immortal soul. According to Nietzsche, all gods are manmade and exist merely as an illusion for the common man. The higher man, however, is self-sufficient and does not have to believe in a creation that only limits his freedom to create his own world. All the major religions in Marco Millions are equal. They meet at a tree sacred to all of them. They are merely disguises for materialism engaged in competition to gain power over other people, but they do not celebrate life. Life ironically comes from the dead Princess Kukachin, who lives in nature, symbolized by the music of the branches and leaves of the tree. She gives the message of life, a message that O'Neill takes up again and elaborates on in the last plays: "Say this, I loved and died. Now I am love, and live and living, have forgotten and loving, can forgive."<sup>6</sup> Kukachin, called the Little Flower, is in harmony with nature. She is life-giving love longing to bear fruit during the summer. But blighted by the inability of the object of her love--Marco Polo--to even perceive the presence of love, she is doomed to die. Prematurely she sings of fall and winter, and prematurely she dies, recognizing the immortality of life, the eternal recurrence and

<sup>6</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 352.



the insignificance of the individual:

I am not.  
 Life is.  
 A cloud hides the sun.  
 A life is lived.  
 The sun shines again.  
 Nothing has changed.  
 Centuries wither into tired dust.  
 A new dew freshens the grass.  
 Somewhere this dream is being dreamed.<sup>97</sup>

Marco Polo represents the opposite. He is alive and apparently successful, but he has no soul. Everything he sees is converted into materialistic values. When he was a child, there still was the possibility that his soul might develop. His affection for Donata, although already tainted by principles of utilitarianism and materialism showed some promise. It led to the creation of a poem which, although it expressed his materialistic leanings, showed that he did have some genuine feelings for Donata, that he was willing to give not merely to sell with a profit, that he was willing to use his time for creation not merely the making of money. But when he denied ever having written that poem after he had used the prostitute, he killed the last remnant of his soul and with it the possibility to even perceive and recognize true, unselfish love. He is cold, unfeeling, interested only in his own material gains. He has had opportunities to nurture his soul if it had not been killed by materialism and its mask, Christianity.

Marco's spiritual hump begins to disgust me. He has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct. We have given him every opportunity to learn. He has memorized everything and learned nothing. He has looked at everything and seen nothing.

<sup>97</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 417.

He has lusted for everything and loved nothing. He is only a shrewd and crafty greed.<sup>98</sup>

But Kukachin, although she loves her grandfather dearly, cannot believe this assessment of Marco Polo. She has to find out for herself that Marco Polo's soul has died irrevocably. To her, life is love and ends when love is not loved. To Marco, life is millions. To Kublai, life is a riddle, but it is immortal:

. . . Be proud of life! Know in your heart that the living of life can be noble! Know that the dying of death can be noble! Be exalted by life! Be inspired by death! Be humbly proud! Be proudly grateful! Be immortal because life is immortal. Contain the harmony of the womb and grow within you! Possess life as a lover--then sleep requited in the arms of death! If you awake, love again! If you sleep on, rest in peace.<sup>99</sup>

Life is magnificent, but it is also full of pain.

This is the paradox that Kublai has to be able to accept. Kublai, the Great Kaan, is called the Son of Heaven and the Lord of Earth, the Ruler over Life and Death, but he must realize that he is merely a man and that the paradox of life can be born only through the presence of love. His love for Kukachin will live on although the Princess is dead, and his love for her and the memory of her love will make life bearable. Marco Polo, on the other hand, who has watched the play, does not understand and will go on living the life of the living dead.

This same theme is picked up again in The Great God Brown (1925). The Marco Polo type is further developed in William Brown, and the problem of Kukachin as well as that of the artist is explored in Dion

<sup>98</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 387.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 435-436.

Anthony, while the function of Kublai is fulfilled by Cybel in a more certain fashion. O'Neill himself explained the main characters in an often quoted letter to the press.

Like Marco Polo, "Brown is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth--a Success--building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life--desire."<sup>100</sup> He is another example of the common man, the man who has not departed from his animal state, the man who cannot understand the higher man, the man who laughs at Zarathustra when he describes the overman and the longing for the overman but desirously listens to him when he describes the last man. He is a further development of Edward Brown and Andrew Mayo.

Dion Anthony, the artist, is another of the many masks of O'Neill, more complex than any of the previous ones. Through Dion Anthony O'Neill attempts to show the two sides of his personality which are expressed by the different aspects of the face and the mask: "The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face--dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life--into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan."<sup>101</sup> Both of these aspects, in the course of the play, develop into extremes, the Saint and Satan. In his explanation of the character, O'Neill emphasizes

<sup>100</sup> O'Neill to the Press, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>101</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 260.

the crucial point in his life--the loss of his faith--a point that he will take up again in the final play of the next period in his career.

Dion Anthony--Dionysus and St. Anthony--the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony--the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion--creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for belief in anything, even Godhead itself.<sup>102</sup>

Dion's tragedy is that he is alone and that there is no one to understand him, least of all his parents. In the description of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony, O'Neill recreates his parents and his feelings about them at the time of his rebellion. There are scorn for the father and deep affection for the mother. She communicates love to Dion although she does not understand him and cannot respond to his needs. The father, on the other hand, is described in terms similar to those used in Long Day's Journey into Night. He is a materialist, proud of his hard work, and concerned about his reputation. In his words we almost seem to hear James Tyrone: "Let him slave like I had to! That'll teach him the value of a dollar! . . . Let him make a man out of himself like I made of myself!"<sup>103</sup> He only sees the masked Dion and has nothing but scorn for him. Unlike Mrs. Anthony, he does not even intuitively feel that there is something beneath the mask.

Dion's problem, however, is not alone that no one understands

<sup>102</sup>O'Neill to the Press, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>103</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 260.

him, but that he does not even understand himself. He knows that there are two sides to his nature, but like O'Neill, he has not yet learned to live with them, which becomes obvious when he takes off his mask and is trying to understand himself:

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? . . . Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched?<sup>104</sup>

The interesting point that this series of questions makes is that neither one of the selves, the face or the mask, is the real self. Both are part of the individual, and both make up the real self, which is split. The dividing question "Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid?" marks the line between the limitations that the face puts on the mask and the limitations that the mask puts on the face. The answer to all these questions, the answer that could fuse the warring selves into a harmonious identity is love--selfless love and compassion, the Christian virtue of charity that becomes the saving agent in the last plays, and Dion realizes that, although he is not able to find such a love: "She loves me! I am not afraid! I am strong! I can love! She protects me! Her arms are softly around me! She is my skin! She is my armor! Now I am born--I--the I!--one and indivisible--I

<sup>104</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 264-265.

who love Margaret! . . . O God, now I believe!"<sup>105</sup>

However, Margaret cannot give him this kind of love. She can only give him a meager substitute. She loves the mask and, although she has seen the face, refuses to even recognize it. Thus throughout his life Dion has to live with this split, which has its effects on both, the face and the mask, as O'Neill explains:

Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the supersensitive painter-poet underneath it but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath but it also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles.<sup>106</sup>

Margaret remains loyal to the mask with all its changes although she does not understand it since she refuses to recognize what is underneath and the face and the mask together constitute an integral whole.

Margaret, according to O'Neill, is his "image of the modern direct descendent of the Marguerite of Faust--the eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race."<sup>107</sup> She loves Dion in her own way and is always loyal to him. However, since she accepts only one half of him--the mask--she can be the mother of his children and lovingly call him her oldest child, but she does not truly

<sup>105</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 266.

<sup>106</sup>O'Neill to the Press, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

recognize the child in him. She cannot give depth to Dion's surface. She cannot love the child underneath the mask and therefore is unable to give Dion what he needs most in order to create. Margaret, unlike the Marguerite of Faust, is not Dion's salvation. For that he has to go to Cybel.

Cybel "is an incarnation of Cybele, the Earth Mother doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws but patronized by her segregators who are thus themselves victims of their laws."<sup>108</sup> She is a prostitute on the surface; underneath she is the eternal feminine, the mother, the creative power in nature, life itself. She has learned to live with her mask, revealing her face to those who are capable of understanding and loving the beauty and power of life---like Dion Anthony---and hiding it from those who recognize only the distortion of the beauty and power of life in materialism---like William Brown. She is the only one who can communicate with the real Dion because she understands both sides of his personality. Her love for Dion is pure and selfless. Its purpose is not money, sex, or pro-creation but giving---giving encouragement, consolation, compassion, motherly protection from the world, the meaning of life and the individual soul. She can tell Dion, "You're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking in your own dark---and you got afraid."<sup>109</sup> She can dispell the fear of himself and death by telling him, "You may be important but your life's

<sup>108</sup>O'Neill to the Press, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>109</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 285.

not. There's millions of it born every second. Life can cost too much even for a sucker to afford it--like everything else. And it's not sacred--only the you inside is. The rest is earth."<sup>110</sup> The body will die, but the soul or Life force in him will go on living. She tells him that his life is merely a game and that it will soon be over but that Life itself will go on.

Dion Anthony now is not afraid of death. As a matter of fact, he is looking forward to it, for when he dies, he can discard his mask and can become one again. More and more frequently he takes off his mask and for a last time shows his face to Margaret and asks forgiveness of her. But Margaret cannot forgive. She fears what she sees and faints. At this point Dion can love her mask--his wife and the mother of his sons--as well as her face--the Margaret he has always loved. When he goes to Brown for the last time, he can confess that, like O'Neill himself, he has been living a script:

Listen! One day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind me when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him! I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Every one called me cry-baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty. And that other boy, secretly felt ashamed but he couldn't acknowledge it; so from that day he instinctively developed into the good friend, the good man, William Brown.<sup>111</sup>

But the mask of Pan was not enough protection. It had to harden and be

<sup>110</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 286.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 295.



reinforced, for "when Pan was forbidden the light and warmth of the sun he grew sensitive and self-conscious and proud and revengeful-- and became Prince of Darkness."<sup>112</sup>

Although this kind of existence has meant torture and suffering, it has also meant life, whereas Brown's "good boy" script has meant a kind of living death: "I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sang and wept! I've been life's lover! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her or she requests you to destroy yourself."<sup>113</sup>

This last--to create life--Dion was not able to do. The conflict between the two selves--the self-destructive mask and the loving but defenseless identity underneath--was too great to be ever reconciled. Both parts had the necessary creative power, but underneath the mask this creative power which was evident in the four-year-old child gradually transformed into all-consuming love, withdrawal from the world, and longing for union with God, while in the mask by complete frustration it was transformed into distorted mockery and self-destructiveness. In spite of his inability to reconcile these two selves, Dion loved life for life's sake, symbolized by his relationship with Cybel, and realizes for a moment, even when he is wearing his mask, that he is love--the one essential for creation. The struggle to reconcile the two warring selves--even though he failed--is what gives Dion Anthony

<sup>112</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 297.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

his stature, his truly human dignity. In the final moment of his life the transvaluation of all values has been completed. The struggle between Good--the Saint underneath the mask--and Evil--the Mephistopheles in the mask--both opposed to the values of society as represented by William Brown, is over. The Saint has returned to childhood innocence and unquestionable belief in the "good God" and man's soul is again worthy of a temple. Dion has completely overcome himself. He no longer needs the protection of the mask because the identity beneath the mask is no longer vulnerable. Now he can affirm life without question and say to Brown with complete sincerity, "May Margaret love you! May you design the Temple of Man's Soul! Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit!"<sup>114</sup> There is no rancor, no resentment. Dion Anthony belongs; he finally is in harmony with the universe. He has, in the moment of his death, approached the state of the overhuman.

However, Brown is still all too human. He does not understand what has happened to Dion. He does not comprehend the overhuman strength of Dion and interprets it as weakness:

So that's the poor weakling you really were! No wonder you hid! And I've always been afraid of you--yes, I'll confess it now, in awe of you. . . . No, not of you! Of this! [the mask] Say what you like, it's strong if it is bad! And this is what Margaret loved, not you! This man!--this man who willed himself to me.<sup>115</sup>

Although Brown is a grown man, he has not really changed from the envious little boy Dion described. Now that there is no apparent punishment, he dares to steal what he has envied Dion for all his life--the

<sup>114</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 299.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

creative force which he sees in the mask. But with the mask he also assumes Dion's life script. O'Neill explains this in the following way:

Brown has always envied the creative life force in Dion--what he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively while in reality he is only stealing that creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration. The devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his Success, William A. Brown, before the world, as well as Dion's mask toward wife and children. Thus Billy Brown becomes not himself to anyone. And thus he partakes of Dion's anguish--more poignantly, for Dion had the Mother, Cybele--and in the end out of this anguish his soul is born, a tortured Christian soul such as the dying Dion's begging for belief, and at last finding it on the lips of Cybel.<sup>116</sup>

Thus William Brown has to undergo the same struggle as Dion Anthony, except that it is much worse. While Dion is split merely in two, William Brown is split in three parts, the third of which he does not know. This third part, completely isolated from Brown himself, is the "germ" Dion described to him: "He's [Brown] piled on layers of protective fat, but vaguely, deeply he feels at his heart the gnawing of a doubt! And I'm interested in that germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in his blood, because it's part of the creative life Brown's stolen from me!"<sup>117</sup> Now that Brown wears Dion's mask, this germ grows. Without Dion he can create designs that are accepted and liked because the creative force is at work and the mask distorts the creation in such a way that the public will accept it. But at the same time he has to go through Dion's agony of living with

<sup>116</sup>O'Neill to the Press, quoted in Quinn, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>117</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 296.

the woman he loves and not being recognized by her. In addition he understands that the identity of William A. Brown that once meant so much to him now means nothing. Only vaguely does the living soul which no one recognizes make itself known. Brown tries to come to terms with this three-part personality when he tells himself:

You're dead, William Brown, dead beyond hope of resurrection!  
It's the Dion you buried in your garden who killed you, not you  
him! It's Margaret's husband who . . . (He laughs harshly)  
Paradise by proxy! Love by mistaken identity! God! (This is  
almost a prayer—then fiercely defiant) But it is paradise! I  
do love!<sup>118</sup>

It is almost as if Dion lives again—the eternal recurrence made visible. The Success William Brown—now merely a dead mask—is a dead as it has always been. The mask of Dion covering an unknown identity is loved by Margaret, and the being underneath again suffers and loves. This stress is too much for Brown, and in a moment of almost insanity he tells Margaret, "See Dion? See Dion? Well, why not? It's an age of miracles. The streets are full of Lazaruses."<sup>119</sup> The dead are alive again and have to go through the same torment, suffering, pain, joy, love, and faith eternally.

When Brown realizes that, he can finally abandon the mask of William A. Brown. The man that never was alive can now be laid to rest permanently, while Dion Brown, as Cybel calls him, returns to Dion's Christian faith and childhood innocence. In the saintlike child there is no doubt; there are only love and a feeling of belonging:

<sup>118</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 305.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

I know! I have found Him! I hear Him speak! "Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh!" Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of the earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God!<sup>120</sup>

Dion Brown, or Man, as Cybel calls him a little later, having overcome himself now accepts joyously the eternal recurrence with its amor fati, and Cybel—or Life—emphasizes the eternity of life when she says:

Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always forever again!--Spring again!--life again! summer and fall and death and peace again!--(With agonized sorrow)--but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again--spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life gain [sic.]!--(Then with agonized exultance)--bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again!<sup>121</sup>

Like Dion, Brown approaches the state of the overman—a perfect harmony with nature, an existence of almost Godlike certainty—at the moment when he is willing to completely renounce himself, when he returns to childhood innocence and does not desire justice but love, when he gets sleepy and Cybel tucks him in.

Dion Brown has failed to the same extent that Dion Anthony had failed before him. He reaches the moment of supreme happiness and fulfillment only at the time of death, but he has achieved a human dignity, born out of suffering and struggle, that William Brown never possessed. And the struggle is going to continue. Dion's and Margaret's sons, at the end of the play, start the whole cycle all over again. The circle of life closes with the words of Margaret—the eternal girl-woman, the preserver of the race: "My lover! My husband!

<sup>120</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 322.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., pp. 322-323.

My boy! You can never die till my heart dies! You will live forever. You are sleeping under my heart! I feel you stirring in your sleep, forever under my heart."<sup>122</sup>

With The Great God Brown O'Neill concludes his exploration into the predicament of man as caused by his unique position in the universe between the animal and God. He follows Nietzsche's view of the human condition and shows that it is impossible for man to return to his former animal state. Man can merely exist, remain in his position over the abyss and keep quiet, trying to do the best with his precarious position without endangering himself. This type of life may lead to material prosperity, surface happiness, and apparent success, as it does in William A. Brown's existence, but it is in reality a living death. Or man can ignore all dangers, look into his own dark, overcome himself and his fears of life and death, become love, and strive for harmony with the life force in the universe. This path is full of perils and tormenting struggle, but it is the only path that gives man dignity; the struggle with himself is what makes man different from the ape. Although man will fail to reach his goal before his physical death, he will be born again, go through the same cycle of pain and suffering and joy and love, each time perhaps coming a little closer to the goal of humanity--the other side of the abyss or the overman. At the same time, however, O'Neill expresses the ambiguity of the endings of The Fountain and Welded and the nature of God in Desire Under the Elms and All God's Chillun Got Wings. It seems as

<sup>122</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 325.

if he could not make up his mind whether to follow Nietzsche's atheism or to return to Christianity. Therefore he merges the two: God, Nature, Life, the Overman--it's all the same; or as Edwin Engel points out, O'Neill replaced Christ with Dionysus.<sup>123</sup>

In Lazarus Laughed (1925) O'Neill leads his exploration of man to its logical conclusion. By making the overman a reality and not a distant goal, he goes beyond Nietzsche. The streets are indeed filled with at least one Lazarus. Dion Brown has come back to life. He laughs the pure laughter of Heaven and tries to transform the laughter of Man. He makes visible the "innumerable dancing gales of flame."

Many critics have seen the close relationship between Thus Spake Zarathustra and Lazarus Laughed. However, since they generally do not see the play as a culmination of O'Neill's gradual understanding of Nietzsche, their interpretations seem to be somewhat misleading. For example, Travis Bogard sees Lazarus as "a Zarathustra-like messiah . . . stripped of Zarathustra's scornful laughter. . . ." <sup>124</sup> The problem here is that Lazarus is the overman and Zarathustra is not. Zarathustra is the prophet of the overman. He is a higher man, but he has not yet reached the state of the overman. He, like Caligula, still longs for the pure laughter which expresses the perfect harmony with nature:

No longer shepherd, no longer man--a being transformed and shining with light that laughed! Never yet did a man on earth laugh as he laughed!

<sup>123</sup> Engel, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>124</sup> Bogard, op. cit., p. 286.

Oh, my brothers, I heard a laughter that was the laughter of no man,--and now I feel a gnawing thirst, a longing that will never be stilled.

My longing for this laughter gnaws on me: oh, how can I bear to live! And how could I bear to die now! (VI, 176)

Zarathustra is still vulnerable to temptations and almost succumbs to the final temptation--his suffering, compassion, and pity with the higher men. In the last lines of Thus Spake Zarathustra, there is the promise that he will become the overman, but this becoming is still in the future. He says, "My suffering and my compassion and pity--what do they matter! Do I then strive for happiness? I strive only for my work!" (VI, 363). And his work is the creation of the overman. "Well then! The lion came; my children are near; Zarathustra has ripened (matured); my hour has come:--This is my morning; my day begins: come up now, come up, you great noon!" (VI, 363). This coming of the great noon is the coming of the overman or Zarathustra's becoming of the overman. Zarathustra then leaves his cave in a state of exaltation, and that is the end of Thus Spake Zarathustra. This is the point where O'Neill begins Lazarus Laughed. Lazarus is Zarathustra, but not the Zarathustra of Thus Spake Zarathustra. He is the Zarathustra, who has left his cave, who is like the glowing dawn in dark mountains, who is the overman. He is a Zarathustra, who was only metaphorically described in Nietzsche's book but who never actually lived. This Zarathustra, who could not even live in a book like Thus Spake Zarathustra, now becomes the protagonist of O'Neill's play, and that is the essential problem of the play as drama. Lazarus, the overman, is more different from man than man is from the ape.



He is a being that does not exist, with whom the audience, therefore, cannot sympathize, let alone identify. He is a living being that is really inexpressible in human terms.

In the description and characterization of Lazarus, O'Neill attempts the impossible and fails. Lazarus, instead of being the realistically indescribable overman, is simply an inversion of man. For him death does not exist. He does not grow older; instead he grows younger. He does not suffer and weep; he only enjoys and laughs. He does not walk; he dances. He does not feel pain. He does not know fear. He has no known human emotions. He does not know passion, compassion, or pity. Neither does he know hate or resentment. He says he loves man, but his love is an overhuman love and therefore incommunicable and unconvincing.

Lazarus is in harmony with the universe, with life, with the earth. His face "is dark-complected, ruddy and brown, the color of rich earth upturned by the plow, calm but furrowed deep with the marks of former suffering endured with a grim fortitude that had never softened into resignation. His forehead is broad and noble, his eyes black and deep-set."<sup>125</sup> He has the dark eyes, the broad and noble forehead of the autobiographical poet-character. Like the poet-character, he has suffered and not given up the fight. He is married to Miriam, a synthesis of Margaret and Cybel. Like Margaret, she is the eternal woman, the preserver of the race, symbolized by the mask. Like Cybel, she is the earth, symbolized by her skin color and the inward gaze of

<sup>125</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 274.

the mask's eyes. Like the Jaysons of The First Man, Miriam and Lazarus lost their children. Like Robert Mayo, Lazarus was a poor farmer. Like Ponce de Leon, Dion Anthony, William Brown, and Eugene O'Neill, he knew "the fill of life and the sorrow of living"<sup>126</sup> and was looking forward to the peace of death. But unlike all the previous characters, he is given the chance to live again or to experience the eternal recurrence. After his death, at the point of which he had presumably reached the state of the overman, he is allowed to live again and teach man that there is only life and death need not be feared.

He explains that at the moment when he was brought back to life, "I heard the heart of Jesus laughing in my heart, 'There is Eternal Life in No,' it said, 'and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes! Death is the fear between!' And my heart reborn to love of life cried 'Yes!' and I laughed in the laughter of God!"<sup>127</sup> Such a statement O'Neill had already tried to make in previous plays, particularly in The Great God Brown. Dion's mask consistently said no to life, but it could not die. It lived on in William Brown and under Margaret's heart. The being between the Saint and the mask and the being beneath the masks of Brown in the end said yes to life and realized that they would live on eternally. But the mask of William Brown, symbolizing the man of the mass who does not dare to say either yes or no because of fear, was irrevocably dead.

<sup>126</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 276.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

When Lazarus, at the moment of his resurrection, at the moment when he like Zarathustra left the cave of the grave of all-too-human existence, said yes to life, he said yes to all of life--love, peace, pleasure as well as pain, suffering, and torment. He seemed to answer the question in Jesus' eyes with his yes. "Then Jesus smiled sadly but with tenderness, as one who from a distance of years of sorrow remembers happiness."<sup>128</sup> Jesus understood Lazarus' yes but did not speak about it before his death. According to Nietzsche, "He died too soon: he himself would have recanted his doctrine if he had lived to my [Zarathustra's] age! He was noble enough to recant!" (VI, 78). With this yes Lazarus accepts life as it is; he is in harmony with nature, symbolized by his laughter which is "so full of a complete acceptance of life, a profound assertion of joy in living, so devoid of all self-consciousness or fear, that it is like a great bird song triumphant in depths of sky, proud, powerful, infectious with love, casting on the listener an enthralling spell."<sup>129</sup> The people, for the moment at least, seem to understand the message of the laughter; they seem to recognize the harmony with nature that it expresses and chant:

Lazarus laughs!  
 Our hearts grow happy!  
 Laughter like music!  
 The wind laughs!  
 The sea laughs!  
 Spring laughs from the earth!

<sup>128</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 277.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., pp. 279-280.

Summer laughs in the air!  
Lazarus laughs!<sup>130</sup>

For a time Lazarus' laughter can reconcile even differences in religious faiths. But the tragedy of man is that he forgets too quickly what this laughter means, as Lazarus tells the common people at the moment of Jesus' death:

You forget the God in you! You wish to forget! Remembrance would imply the high duty to live as a son of God--generously!--with love!--with pride!--with laughter! This is too glorious a victory for you, too terrible a loneliness! Easier to forget, to become only a man, the son of a woman, to hide from life against her breast, to whimper your fear to her resigned heart and be comforted by her resignation! To live by denying life! . . . But the greatness of Saviors is that they may not save! The greatness of Man is that no god can save him--until he becomes a god!<sup>131</sup>

The tragedy of the common man is that he can respond to the harmony with nature in an individual as long as he makes this influence felt. But men do not realize that the true source of harmony--the true source of love and greatness--is within themselves. They are not willing to look at the stars--the everlasting; they prefer to fix their eyes on the ground, on the problems and concerns that are immediate and near. For Lazarus the immediate is only part of the eternal and has to be accepted as joyfully as the eternal. Everything, even death, is an expression of life. Therefore, when his father, mother, and sisters are dead, he can accept their deaths not in the spirit of mourning but in the spirit of joy. Their deaths as well as his death are prom-

<sup>130</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 280.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., pp. 289-290.

ises for a better, more joyful life of man. He affirms that "even the Son of Man must die to show men that Man may live! But there is no death!"<sup>132</sup> For Lazarus it is the acceptance of all of life that makes man a god, and his followers agree and look up to him as a god, but as soon as he leaves them, they forget his laughter, his love, and his affirmation of life and join the masses of man, chanting:

Life is a fearing,  
A long dying,  
From birth to death!  
God is a slayer!  
Life is death!<sup>133</sup>

When Lazarus is taken to Greece, he is thought to be Dionysus— Nietzsche's personification of life and the eternal recurrence. O'Neill describes him as the Dionysus symbolizing life:

His countenance now might well be that of the positive masculine Dionysus, closest to the soil of the Grecian gods, a Son of Man, born a mortal. Not the coarse, drunken Dionysus, nor the effeminate god, but Dionysus in his middle period, more comprehensive in his symbolism, the soul of the recurring seasons, of living and dying as processes in eternal growth, of the wine of life stirring forever in the sap and blood and loam of things.<sup>134</sup>

He is called the "son of the Lightning,"<sup>135</sup> which is very similar to Zarathustra's description of the overman as lightning coming out of a dark cloud. In Rome, his followers kill themselves laughingly. They understand his message, and, still under his influence, they can remember that death does not exist. They welcome death as a bringer

<sup>132</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 293.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

of new life, symbolizing Nietzsche's amor fati and eternal recurrence.

Miriam, at the moment of death, understands Lazarus. The woman of the mask makes room for the Earth Mother underneath, who tells Lazarus in terms reminiscent of Cybel "Yes! There is only life! Lazarus, be not lonely!"<sup>136</sup> This loneliness was the last human element in Lazarus. Miriam's death and affirmation of life have taken the last remnant of man from Lazarus and have made his laughter even purer and more joyful. They have helped him to gain perfection, to recreate the God in himself, the only hope of man as Lazarus tries to explain to Tiberius. The problem of men is that

they evade their fear of death by becoming sick of life that by the time death comes they are too lifeless to fear it! Their disease triumphs over death—a noble victory called resignation! "We are sick," they say, "therefore there is no God in us, therefore there is no God!" Oh, if men would but interpret that first cry of man fresh from the womb as the laughter of one who even then says to his heart, "It is my pride as God to become Man. Then let it be my pride as Man to recreate the God in me!"<sup>137</sup>

Lazarus, in harmony with the universe, has recreated the God in him. The representatives of man—Tiberius, Caligula, and Pompeia—envy his joy and happiness. They have to learn that as long as they place importance on self, they cannot know joy. Only when they are willing to deny their individual selves, as Pompeia and Tiberius do in the end, can they join Lazarus in his pure and joyful laughter, can they join him in voluntary death, can they understand that "men die—but

<sup>136</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 348.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

there is no death for Man!"<sup>138</sup>

With Lazarus Laughed O'Neill temporarily solved the problem of his dual allegiance to the Church and Nietzsche. At the end of the first phase of his career, he accepts Nietzsche's idea of the God-head of man as enthusiastically as he rejects Nietzsche and his philosophy and embraces the Catholic Church in Days Without End at the end of the second phase.

<sup>138</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 366.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM RESIGNATION AND DESPAIR TO FALSE HOPE

Truly, I advise you: go away from me and defend yourselves against Zarathustra! Still better, be ashamed of him! Maybe he lied to you.

#### Thus Spake Zarathustra

In the next phase of his life, 1926-1932, O'Neill seems to have begun the fight against his life script. The ecstasy of Lazarus is merely temporary; the certainty of the God in man dissipates, and Eugene O'Neill is again vacillating between Nietzsche and Roman Catholicism. The plays of his second creative period indicate a gradual disenchantment with Thus Spake Zarathustra, culminating in a violent rejection of all rebellious, including Nietzschean, ideas and an enthusiastic re-acceptance of his childhood faith in Days Without End. The first of Nietzsche's concepts to vanish is that of the overman. The disappearance of this idea and the failure to find another to replace it lead to the playwright's probably bleakest outlook on life in Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra.

After Lazarus Laughed O'Neill seems to have realized that, however appealing the idea of human perfection may be intellectually, dramatically it is unsound. The philosopher can, and indeed must, concern himself with the ideal, but the dramatist has to remain in the realm of the real, or at least the probable. Since the idea of the overman, or the God in man, is comprehensible only to the higher



man, or the élite, it is dramatically not viable and had to be given up. The theater audience is interested in the ordinary man, Nietzsche's man of the common herd, and his struggle, and it is to him that O'Neill turns in the second and third phases of his career.

O'Neill still seems to accept Nietzsche's analysis of the nature of man, but instead of continuing to explore the three alternatives, he now concentrates on the common man who, like Yank, has become aware of not belonging and who, like Anna Christie and Mat Burke, is willing to compromise and hope for the best in the will of God. However, unable to accept the idea of the old Christian God but at the same time agreeing with Nietzsche that the common man has an absolute need for a belief in a supernatural force responsible for life, suffering, joy, and death, if he does not want to be driven to pessimism and nihilism, O'Neill now searches for a substitute for the overman, who had come to replace the Christian God in the plays of the previous period of his career. The plays written between 1926 and 1932, then, are concerned with the search for a God that can satisfy the needs of the all-too-human man.

Significantly enough, the very first play in this period, Strange Interlude (1926), written at the time O'Neill was falling in love with Carlotta Monterey, seeks but fails to find salvation in woman. To Nina Leeds life with its pain and joy makes sense only if it is created and controlled by God the Mother, who by giving birth to life experiences simultaneously extreme pain and joy. At the same time the play foreshadows O'Neill's movement toward an at least temporary

re-acceptance of Christianity in Days Without End, for Nina Leeds is made to realize that her God the Mother is only an illusion and that "our lives are merely dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father!"<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the main character in the play is not the autobiographical poet-character but Nina Leeds, a woman, could possibly mean that O'Neill is continuing to go beyond Nietzsche by showing that even woman, who Nietzsche believes is incapable of striving for the overman, is attempting to engage in the search for some kind of mystical harmony with nature or the state of the overman--an impression that might find support in Nina's concept of God. However, the character of Nina Leeds makes it quite clear that O'Neill agrees with Nietzsche's idea of woman and thus indicates that the playwright has given up the search for the overman. She is the Nietzschean woman par excellence with all her desire for creation and her destructiveness, her love and hate, her good and evil, but not a companion of the higher man. She is a synthesis of all O'Neill's women but does not have the symbolic qualities that make Cybel and Miriam overhuman, almost God-like. Like Ruth Atkins in Beyond the Horizon, Nina Leeds is possessive and destructive in her possessiveness. Like Emma Crosby in Diff'rent and Eleanor Cape in Welded, she wants her man to be different and dreams of the ideal love and marriage relationship. Like Mrs. Roylston in the very early Servitude, she is willing to, and indeed does, sacrifice herself for the happiness of her hus-

<sup>1</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 199.

band. Like Martha Jayson in The First Man, she hopes for fulfillment in a child, and, like Cybel in The Great God Brown, she sees pleasure and pain, birth and death as necessary parts of life. But unlike Cybel and Miriam, she is desperate to believe in an immortal Life Force with which she can be united after death and hopes to find it in her own creation--God the Mother. At the same time Nina Leeds is what O'Neill was searching for and eventually found in Carlotta Monterey--mother, wife, mistress, and nurse.

Nina's ideal is Gordon Shaw. From what we know about him, he might have been able to strive for the state of the overman, but he is dead. Then again, he may have followed Zarathustra's advice and died at the right time. At any rate, his death sets the play in motion, for it is Nina's feeling of guilt for having failed him that constitutes the action of the entire play. Nina spends her whole life atoning for this failure and attempting to make restitution. Outwardly she blames her father for her failure, which forces her into rebellion against all his values of decency and honor as well as religion, while inside herself she knows that she has only herself to blame. Her rebellion, which has the appearance of an attempt at the transvaluation of all values, is a failure and comes too late. At the critical moment--her last time with Gordon--she was too timid to break the tablets of her father's good and evil and therefore failed Gordon by not bringing "depth to his surface" and not creating with him the one that is greater than the two who engaged in the act of creation. She realizes that when she tells her father:

Gordon wanted me! I wanted Gordon! I should have made him take me! I knew he would die and I would have no children, that there would be no big Gordon or little Gordon left to me, that happiness was calling me, never to call again if I refused! Yet I did refuse! I didn't make him take me! I lost him forever! And now I am lonely and not pregnant with anything at all, but--but loathing! . . . Why did I refuse? What was that cowardly something in me that cried, no, you mustn't, what would your father say?<sup>2</sup>

Now that it is too late, Nina is determined to somehow force her way to get what she has irrevocably lost. She shakes off all timidity, breaks the tablets of her father's good and evil in the attempt to find Gordon and make up to him for her weakness in the calculated use of all other men she can lay her hands on. No one man can replace Gordon for her, but she finds him again in the trinity of Sam Evans, Ned Darrell, and Charles Marsden:

My three men! . . . I feel their desires converge in me! . . . to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb . . . and am whole . . . they dissolve in me, their life is my life . . . I am pregnant with the three! . . . husband! . . . lover! . . . father! . . . and the fourth man! . . . little man! . . . little Gordon! . . . he is mine too! . . . that makes it perfect.<sup>3</sup>

In the beginning of the play, Nina Leeds realizes her failure and the cause of it--her inability to break away from her father's principles and follow her own impulses and desires. After the realization that she does not know herself, that she is not her own master, her intense will, reminiscent of the will to power of the higher man, drives her to find her identity, no matter what obstacles have to be overcome or what ideals must be smashed:

No, I'm not myself yet. That's just it. Not all myself. But

<sup>2</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

I've been becoming myself. And I must finish! . . . I must learn to give myself . . . give and give until I can make that gift of myself for a man's happiness without scruple, without fear, without joy except in his joy! When I've accomplished this I'll have<sup>4</sup> found myself, I'll know how to start living my own life again.

In order to do this, driven by her will to power, she rejects all traditional values and becomes the perfect Nietzschean woman who is doomed to imperfection because she lacks the companionship of the higher man. She literally follows Zarathustra's description of woman and becomes the repose of the warriors, not realizing--or more exactly, not wanting to realize--that they are merely soldiers. However, not being able to strive for the overman herself and not encountering a higher man who can give her the security and sense of purpose she seeks, Nina gradually destroys herself and kills any feeling in her. Not being a higher man herself, she is not able to live up to the demands of complete rebellion, but at the same time she is unwilling to give up her rebellious stance. Thus she creates her escape--God the Mother. Like all common men, she cannot recreate the God in herself and has to find one in the world beyond. The idea of this new God is very uncertain in the beginning. Her God the Mother even in her mind is still weaker than the traditional God the Father--her father's God--whose laws she has violated, and she asks Marsden, who believes in her father's values, "So be kind and punish me!"<sup>5</sup> However, gradually Nina's God the Mother grows stronger as more excuses for otherwise immoral acts are needed. But in the end all rebellion

<sup>4</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

collapses, and God the Mother again becomes subject to the whims of the traditional God the Father.

After her rather unsatisfactory interlude with the soldiers, Nina marries the most common and materialistic of her three men because she can "bring a career [in the case of Sam depth is impossible] to his surface."<sup>6</sup> Above all, with the help of Sam she can also fulfill herself and become a mother at last. She feels no love for Sam; in him she merely recognizes in Nietzschean terms the animal that can satisfy her desires—a quality that is emphasized by Mrs. Evans' attitude toward procreation. When, however, it turns out that Sam cannot help her to bear a healthy child—much less Gordon's child—Nina rather unscrupulously turns to the healthiest and strongest male of her acquaintance, Ned Darrell, to play the necessary role in the act of procreation—an act needed for her and Sam's happiness. To Nina the natural father of the child is of no importance since, no matter who he actually is, in her mind he will always be Gordon Shaw, who is dead.

Nina, from now on, sacrifices herself, like the Nietzschean woman, totally to the happiness and needs of her husband. She can even gradually transform her hatred for Sam into a kind of love which is more akin to pity—a virtue, according to Nietzsche, valued only by the common man, a virtue that the higher man has absolutely no use for. True to her nature as a woman, Nina has fallen in love with Ned Darrell, the natural father of her child and Sam's best friend. In

<sup>6</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 46.

the Nietzschean framework a woman is not capable of friendship, only love. However, with the passing of time, neither her husband nor her lover matters. The only one important to her is Gordon. She lives for him alone, in the hope to see in him the return of Gordon Shaw. In love for him, no sacrifice is too great. However, when this love is threatened by Madeline Arnold, she exposes the evil Zarathustra sees in woman's soul by attempting to lie to Madeline about Gordon's sanity and playing with the idea of destroying even Gordon himself by telling him the truth.

In the end Nina Leeds has to realize that her attempt to make up for and find again lost happiness has failed, that her rebellion was futile because it was not genuine, that the traditional values of her father are the true values, and that therefore there is no hope for human happiness:

My having a son was a failure, wasn't it? He couldn't give me happiness. Sons are always their fathers. They pass through the mother to become their father again. The Sons of the Father have all been failures! Failing they died for us, they flew away to other lives, they could not stay with us, they could not give us happiness!<sup>7</sup>

The mother, whom Nina tried to see as God, is merely an adjunct to the father. She may not have been able to give happiness without suffering either, but in her, pain and death would at least have made sense, as Nina explains at the beginning of the play:

We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And

<sup>7</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 199.

we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace!<sup>8</sup>

This idea of God is not only appealing to Nina but also to Marsden, the spokesman for O'Neill. However, even he does not see life that way at the end. The only advice he can give is: "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"<sup>9</sup>--the sterile peace of resignation.

The eternal recurrence is another Nietzschean aspect, besides the will to power, that O'Neill is still attracted to. However, while in the last plays of the previous period he used it as a positive concept affirming life, in the second phase of his career, particularly in the two major plays, Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra, he uses it as a negative concept expressing his pessimistic, almost desperate, outlook on life. In these plays the eternal recurrence means an eternal recurrence of pain and suffering and man's futile attempt to conquer them. The positive aspect of the eternal recurrence is found in Nina's idea of God the Mother. But by rejecting this God and by reinstating God the Father, O'Neill emphasizes the negative recurrence of the action--Gordon's flight to Europe before the beginning of the play, the cause of Nina's unhappiness, and Gordon's flight into marriage at the end of the play, leaving Nina alone again; the

<sup>8</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., I, 42-43.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 199.



father's destructive possessiveness at the beginning of the play and the mother's destructive possessiveness at the end of the play as well as in Marsden's life; Nina's dependence on her father's values before the beginning of the play and Nina's return to them at the end of the play; the helplessness of Nina's father at the beginning of the play and the helplessness of Marsden, the replacement of the father, at the end of the play. The implication thus is that for the common man, i. e. the man of the masses, the futility, pain, and torment of life will continue to recur eternally. It will not lead to a harmony with Nature or Life, as in The Fountain, but to resignation. It is not accompanied by amor fati but a dread of the inevitable fate.

In the next play, Dynamo (1928), O'Neill, unsatisfied with the bleak outlook of Strange Interlude, again tries to find at least some meaning to the pain, suffering, and torment in life--this time not by making womanhood or motherhood alone a religion but by also finding a religious answer in modern science, an idea that Nina had rejected as indifferent. O'Neill now turns to the "electrical display of God the Father" and makes it, the symbol of the overman, the God of Reuben Light.

In a letter to Benjamin De Casseres, O'Neill is quite explicit as to the purpose of this play and the plays written during this period in general. In the letter he expressed his "conviction that Dynamo was one of his best plays, and that it would be the first of a trilogy whose overall title might be God is Dead! Long Live--

What?"<sup>10</sup>

Ramsay Fife, the atheist, considers the traditional God as outmoded; his God is electricity. Reuben Light, the protagonist, is converted to this new God of science after his mother--the only one he really loved, the one person in whom he found a sense of security and belonging--had betrayed him. Mrs. Light, as possessive as Nina Leeds, is jealous of Reuben's girl, Ada Fife, and in the process of fighting to keep him for herself, she loses and partly destroys her son. When Reuben realizes that he cannot even trust his mother, he wants to hate her. Like O'Neill, he does so by rebelling against her and his father's values, particularly their religion and makes God's "arch-enemy Lucifer, the God of Electricity,"<sup>11</sup> his God. However, his rebellion is a step backward in O'Neill's spiritual development. With Dynamo, O'Neill has gone back to the quest plays of his first creative period.

Before he finds his new God, Electricity, Reuben searches everywhere. To him Electricity is life:

Did I tell you that our blood plasm is the same right now as the sea was when life came out of it? We've got the sea in our blood still! It's what makes our hearts live! And it's the sea rising up in clouds, falling on the earth in rain, made that river that drives the turbines that drive Dynamo! The sea makes her heart beat, too!--but the sea is only hydrogen and oxygen and minerals, and they're only atoms, and atoms are only protons and electrons --even our blood and the sea are only electricity in the end! And think of the stars! Driving through space, round and round, just like the electrons in the atoms! But there must be a center

<sup>10</sup>O'Neill to De Casseres, September 15, 1928, paraphrased in Gelb, op. cit., pp. 678-679.

<sup>11</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, III, 437.

around which all this moves, mustn't there? There is in everything else! And that center must be the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity [italics mine], and Dynamo is her divine Image on earth! Her power houses are the new churches! She wants us to realize the secret dwells in her!<sup>12</sup>

For Reuben the God of Electricity is inextricably joined with Nina's God the Mother. In the dynamo Reuben sees the symbol of his dead mother, whom he has forgiven and about whose death he feels extremely guilty. He is trying to return to her, asking her to forgive him. For her forgiveness and love he is willing to make any sacrifice. For her he kills Ada, whom his mother had hated, and then, unable to stand his loneliness any longer, sacrifices himself to the dynamo, "the Divine Image" of "the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity," crying like a child, "I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!"<sup>13</sup> This plea of Reuben sounds very similar to the plea O'Neill made to Carlotta Monterey after he had left his first mother substitute, Agnes Boulton O'Neill. Carlotta Monterey O'Neill recalls that in the time of their courtship O'Neill was attracted to her as a mother:

Well, that's what got me into trouble with O'Neill; my maternal instinct came out--this man must be looked after, I thought. He broke my heart. I couldn't bear that this child I had adopted should have suffered these things [O'Neill's childhood experiences].

One day when he came to tea he had a cold--he always had a cold--and he looked at me with those tragic eyes and said "I need you." He kept saying, "I need you, I need you"--never "I love you, I think you are wonderful"--just "I need you." Sometimes it was a bit frightening. Nobody had ever gritted their teeth

<sup>12</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 477.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 488.

at me that way and said that they needed me. And he did need me, I discovered. He never was in good health, he always had a cold, he wasn't properly fed or anything.<sup>14</sup>

When Reuben kills himself,

there is a flash of bluish light about him and all the lights in the plant dim down until they are almost out and the noise of the dynamo dies until it is the faintest purring hum. Simultaneously Reuben's voice rises in a moan that is a mingling of pain and loving consummation, and this cry dies into a sound that is like the crooning of a baby and merges and is lost in the dynamo's hum.<sup>15</sup>

Reuben, like O'Neill, has finally found the certainty and sense of belonging he had been searching for. He has found it in the life force of the earlier plays, represented by electricity and symbolized by the dynamo, joined with Nina's powerless, but now powerful, God the Mother. He has reached a state of harmony with nature and life reminiscent of that of the earlier characters who were searching for the condition of the overman. In this respect the play marks a step backwards in O'Neill's spiritual development as he himself realized once he had gained some distance from it.

In May 1929, O'Neill admitted that the play was a failure when he told a friend that

Dynamo doesn't count. . . . It was written at a time when I shouldn't have written anything. The whole [Agnes situation-- difficulties in his divorce from his second wife, Agnes Boulton] was hounding me by every mail. I had to drive it out of my head each day before I could write. I was in a continual inward state of bitter fury and resentment. I drove myself to write because I felt it was time I turned out another play. Of course, I was blind to this at the time. . . . I made every fool mistake pos-

<sup>14</sup>Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 623.

<sup>15</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 488.

sible in the Dynamo affair. My brains were woolly with hatred.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter written to Krutch in July 1929, O'Neill even expressed his realization of the meaning of the play in his career as a playwright:

I wish I'd never written it, really--and yet I feel it has its justified place in my work's development. A puzzle. What disappoints me in it is that it marks a standing still, if not a backward move. It wasn't worth my writing and so it never called forth my best. But a good lesson for me! Henceforth unless I've got a theme that demands I step a rung higher to do it, I'm going to mark time and play the country gent until such a theme comes.<sup>17</sup>

Such a theme came with the Electra theme of Mourning Becomes Electra (1929), probably the most pessimistic of all O'Neill's plays. Here the characters search for and fail to find salvation in all-too-human love and understanding. Their individual all-too-human possessiveness and selfishness doom them to failure from the very beginning. For them, as for Nietzsche and O'Neill, God is dead, and they, unlike Nina Leeds and Reuben Light, do not even attempt to create a substitute. They try to rely on their weak, all-too-human strength and are utterly destroyed. Their search does not even lead to resignation. Unlike Nina Leeds and Charles Marsden, they are not permitted "to rot in peace" but are persecuted and hounded by their own and their ancestors' guilt, which cannot be forgiven since there is no God to forgive it.

Already in 1926 O'Neill thought of possibly using the Electra theme:

Modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of

<sup>16</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 690.

<sup>17</sup>O'Neill to Krutch, July 1929, quoted in Gelb, p. 690.

Greek tragedy for its basic theme--the Electra story?--the Medea? Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of the Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed of no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by?<sup>18</sup>

Thus at a time when he was still searching for a God or overman substitute, the idea of a world without any God whatsoever already presented itself as a real possibility to O'Neill.

In Mourning Becomes Electra, as in the other plays of this period, O'Neill describes the tragedy of the common man. In almost all plays, but particularly in Mourning Becomes Electra, he classifies the common man into two groups, the townsfolk, who are types rather than individuals and who are unconscious of not belonging, and the Mannons, who know that they do not belong and who, aware of their weaknesses and limitations, nevertheless, driven by the will to power, engage in the futile search for happiness. While the mass of the common man may be capable of and doomed to suffering, only the individual, represented by the Mannons, is capable of tragedy because of his awareness of his precarious position over the abyss and his futile attempt to get out of it. This awareness is symbolized by the Mannons' mask-like appearance. On the surface, they are the leaders of the town, have reputation and riches and should be relatively happy, but the reality is different. Underneath their mask-like calm and prosperous appearance, they are lonely, lovelorn, and completely incapable of helping themselves and each other because they are all driven by an intense selfishness or will that relies on resentment, revenge, and hate--charac-

<sup>18</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 128-129.

teristics of the Nietzschean common man who insists on righteousness, equality, and justice.

The will cannot will to go back; the loneliest pain of the will is that it cannot break time and the desire of time.

"That which was"---is the name of the stone which it cannot move.

And thus, because of anger and frustration, it moves stones and avenges itself on that which does not feel anger and frustration.

Thus the will, the liberator, became the torturer: it takes revenge on anything that is capable of suffering for not being able to go back.

This, yes, this alone is revenge itself: the anger of the will against time and its "It was."

The spirit of revenge: my friends, that has been man's best effort in thinking; and where there was suffering, there always had to be punishment.

"Punishment," that is what revenge calls itself: with a lie it feigns a good conscience. (VI, 153-154)

If the Mannons could only find a way to unite the mask-like exterior and the real interior, they might be able to find a relative happiness, but all their efforts merely widen the gap.

The one thing that could join the mask with reality is love. The lack of love has made all the Mannons less than human, has made them cold and lonely, has filled them with hatred and revenge, has made them realize that they do not belong. Lavinia accuses her mother of having withheld love from her ever since she was born while Christine accuses Ezra Mannon of having transformed her love into hatred through his coldness and possessive spirit. Brant accuses his father and all the Mannons of having perverted his love into a feeling of resentment and a wish for revenge through the attitude shown toward his mother, while Ezra Mannon accuses Christine of not understanding him and not trying to help him to reach

out and show her his love. And Orin is confused. He is being used by almost everyone as a pawn in this struggle for gaining love. Since the normal channels of love are blocked, the all-too-human need for it of each individual has to find it in unnatural ways. Thus Lavinia turns to her father and he to her, and they almost feel more like man and wife than father and daughter, and Christine turns to Orin until Brant appears on the scene and upsets this precarious balance, since he presents another natural channel for Lavinia and Christine, who in their selfish love for him are willing to sacrifice everything and everyone for their love and selfishness so that in the end the only release is death for Christine and, even worse, life in death for Lavinia. The end of the play seems to answer in the affirmative Ezra Mannon's question: "All victory ends in the defeat of death. That's sure. But does defeat end in the victory of death?"<sup>19</sup> Thus, with Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill has reached the pole opposite from Lazarus Laughed. Man has been defeated, and his defeat is the victory of death. Lavinia is bound "to the Mannon dead,"<sup>20</sup> who have become her God, as O'Neill indicates in an earlier stage direction, where "her eyes [are] unconsciously seeking the Mannon portraits . . . as if they were the visible symbol of her God."<sup>21</sup>

With Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill seems to have renounced all of Zarathustra's teachings, except perhaps the latter's view of

<sup>19</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 48.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 157.



woman and the concept of the will to power. There is no higher man in the play. Ezra Mannon feels that he has been dead all his life, and at the time when he realizes that and is willing to change, he is murdered. Orin is too weak. He is always dependent on Christine or Lavinia and eventually escapes into suicide. Brant, although he represents some hope, since he is not bound by the Mannon way of life which is the inhibiting force on the others, preventing any individual development, is a common man driven by his all-too-human desire for Christine. Both Brant and Orin dream of the blessed isles as a means of escape--the blessed isles which Zarathustra talks about as the resting place of his friends. But while Zarathustra's blessed isles are the ideal place to dream of the overman, the blessed isles of Orin, Brant, and even Lavinia are a place where the individual can escape from the all-too-human suffering. They merely provide satisfaction for all the all-too-human desires for simplicity, love, and peace. They allow Lavinia to forget for a time that she is a Mannon, but Orin cannot forget. They remind him of his love for his mother, the crime he committed against her, and his revenge on Brant for having had the same dream.

None of these characters attempts a transvaluation of values. Every action is justified in terms of the Mannon code, even when that serves merely as an excuse. The real force behind all actions is selfishness and possessiveness, manifestations of the all-too-human will to power. Any motive, no matter how selfish or self-serving, can be made to fit the Mannon code. This becomes particularly clear

in Lavinia's last speech:

Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. 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.<sup>22</sup>

In this last speech of Lavinia's O'Neill also seems to put an end to the idea of eternal recurrence--an idea that was still quite predominant in the action and the characters of the play. The eternal recurrence is emphasized by the physical resemblance of all the Mannons. In Brant Christine seems to see the Ezra Mannon she had loved and agreed to marry. And Christine seems to live again after her death in the person of Lavinia while Ezra Mannon, who had given life to his dead ancestors, reappears in the guilty Orin, who is aware of the eternal recurrence: "Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother? That's the evil destiny out of the past I haven't dared predict! I'm the Mannon you're chained to!"<sup>23</sup> He repeats the same idea when he says: "There are times now when you don't seem to be my sister, nor Mother, but some stranger with the same beautiful hair-- . . . Perhaps you're Marie Brantôme, eh?"<sup>24</sup> and suggests incest with his sister as Marie Brantôme, to start all over again, in a more intense fashion, the cycle of Mannon crime and guilt. Thus

<sup>22</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 178.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

not even death, which everyone in the play hopes to be a release from the suffering of life, brings the desired freedom. Death, like the blessed isles, is an escape, merely an illusion, as Orin makes quite evident by linking it with love, peace, and the blessed islands: "Yes! It's the way to peace--to find her again--my lost island--Death is an Island of Peace, too--Mother will be waiting for me there--"<sup>25</sup> However, Lavinia is determined to stop the eternal recurrence by acting against her womanly nature, by refusing to marry Peter Niles, and by letting the Mannon race die out. She renounces life for herself and is willing, indeed eager, to pay for all the Mannon guilt and thus finally allows the dead to die.

At the conclusion of Mourning Becomes Electra, O'Neill has reached his lowest point and expresses his bleakest view of life. After the renunciation of the Christian God and the overman, who had replaced Him, the only God that is left is Lavinia's God--the Mannon dead--and even He will eventually die. Thus the only future that man can look forward to is death without immortality--extinction into nothingness. The only thing that remains to be done in life is mourning.

Mourning becomes Electra, but O'Neill himself loved life too much to let such a pessimistic and nihilistic conclusion stand for long. During the writing of the play, he had felt the salvific effect of human love and compassion, as he expressed in the dedication to Carlotta:

<sup>25</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., II, 166.

I want these scripts to remind you that I have known your love with my love even when I have seemed not to know; that I have seen it even when I have appeared most blind; that I have felt it warmly around me always--(when in my study in the closing pages of an act!)--sustaining and comforting, as warm, secure sanctuary for the man after the author's despairing solitude and inevitable defeats, a victory of love-in-life--mother and wife and mistress and friend! And collaborator!

Collaborator, I love you.<sup>26</sup>

In 1932 he again started to search for a different alternative, and in the next two plays he seems to have seen it in "a victory of love-in-life."

Not being able to resolve his uncertainties in reference to Days Without End, he interrupted the writing of that play and escaped into a nostalgic view of a romanticized past in Ah, Wilderness! (1932).

His

purpose was to write a play true to the spirit of the American large small-town at the turn of the century. Its quality depended upon atmosphere, sentiment, an exact evocation of the mood of the dead past. To me, the America which was (and is) the real America found its unique expression in such middle-class families as the Millers, among whom so many of my own generation passed from adolescence into manhood.<sup>27</sup>

This was, however, not his only purpose. Ah, Wilderness! also expresses the fulfillment of an impossible dream. "That's the way I would have liked my boyhood to have been,"<sup>28</sup> O'Neill said and added, "The truth is, I had no youth,"<sup>29</sup> echoing Zarathustra's "To redeem the past and to recreate all "It was" into "Thus I wanted it!"--only this I would

<sup>26</sup>Eugene O'Neill, Dedication to Carlotta of Mourning Becomes Electra, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 735.

<sup>27</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, p. 762.

<sup>28</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Carpenter, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>29</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, p. 81.

call redemption!" (VI, 153).

As O'Neill's purpose already indicates, the people in this play again are common people, but in Ah, Wilderness!, unlike Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra, they are not even aware of not belonging. The Millers do not have the problem of the Mannons because their relationship is based on unselfish love and understanding. These two qualities can overcome all problems. They can help Richard Miller through the difficulties of adolescence so that his apparent rebellion in the beginning of the play can remain what it is—a temporary attraction to unconventional and maybe forbidden ideas—and does not become real. In the Miller family, although there are little quarrels now and then, the predominant atmosphere is one of caring and willingness to help. There seems to be an unquestioned faith in the basic goodness of human nature and an implicit trust in the traditional God and the values of conventional society. Even Richard, who plays the rebel, cannot shake off these values as is clearly shown in the scene with the prostitute. He remains loyal to the ideals of decency and honor he has been raised with.

However, at the same time the characters, although appealing because of their relative happiness and simplicity, are less exciting than the searchers of O'Neill's first creative phase and much less intriguing and interesting than those—struggling to find some meaning in life—of the preceding three plays. Mr. Miller, after all, is merely a less successful and less ambitious Sam Evans. The Millers, including Richard, are not capable of greatness. Like Hazel and Peter

Niles, they are not curious or deep enough to ever come in conflict with the existing values. Although O'Neill may have wished his youth to have been like Richard Miller's, the dramatic world must be happy that it was not, for if it had been, O'Neill, who in all of his plays is attempting to come to terms with himself and the world around him, would never have become the playwright who revolutionized the American theater. His art is a reflection of his life, characterized by suffering and torment, by an agonizing over the nature of man and the meaning of life, by a never-ending search for selfless love, compassion, understanding, and forgiveness.

That Ah, Wilderness! was merely an escape into placidity after the nihilism and pessimism of Mourning Becomes Electra becomes abundantly clear in the last play of this phase in O'Neill's creative career, Days Without End (1932). Here the atmosphere is anything but placid; it is charged with insecurity and doubt. The main character, John Loving, recalls the split personality of Dion Anthony. Only here the split is even more definite. John Loving does not merely wear a mask; he actually is two separate identities--John and Loving, who look like identical twins but at the same time show a remarkable dissimilarity, "for Loving's face is a mask whose features reproduce exactly the features of John's face--the death mask of John who has died with a sneer of scornful mockery on his lips."<sup>30</sup> John desperately wants to believe in life, love, and forgiveness, but Loving tries to keep him away from anything but a cynical belief in death. Loving was born

<sup>30</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 493-494.

when John's parents died and he had lost their love. At that time, like O'Neill when he lost his mother's love, "he saw his God as deaf and blind and merciless--a Deity Who returned hate for love and re-  
 venged Himself upon those who trusted Him!"<sup>31</sup> After his mother's death, John Loving "in his awakened pride . . . cursed God and denied Him, and, in revenge, promised his soul to the Devil--on his knees, when everyone thought he was praying!"<sup>32</sup> From that time on John lived under the guidance of Loving, searching for something to replace his lost faith. As Father Baird, his uncle, explains,

First it was Atheism unadorned. Then it was Atheism wedded to Socialism. But Socialism proved too weak-kneed a mate, and the next I heard Atheism was living in free love with Anarchism, with a curse by Nietzsche to bless the union. And then came the Bolshevik dawn, and he greeted that with unholy howls of glee and wrote me he'd found a congenial home at last in the bosom of Karl Marx. He was particularly delighted when he thought they'd abolished love and marriage, and he couldn't contain himself when the news came they'd turned naughty schoolboys and were throwing spitballs at Almighty God and had supplanted Him with the slave-owning State--the most grotesque god that ever came out of Asia! . . . I knew Communism wouldn't hold him long--and it didn't. Soon his letters became full of pessimism, and disgust with all sociological nostrums. Then followed a long silence. And what do you think was his next hiding place? Religion, no less--but as far away as he could run from home--in the defeatist mysticism of the East. First it was China and Lao Tze that fascinated him, but afterwards he ran on to Buddha, and his letters for a time extolled passionless contemplation so passionately that I had a mental view of him regarding his navel frenziedly by the hour and making nothing of it! . . . But the next I knew, he was through with the East. It was not for the Western soul, he decided, and he was running through Greek philosophy and found a brief shelter in Pythagoras and numerology. Then came a letter which revealed him bogged down in evolutionary scientific truth again--a dyed-in-the-wool mechanist. That was the last I heard of his peregrinations . . . until he finally wrote me he was married. That letter was full of more ardent hymns of praise for a mere living

<sup>31</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 511.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

woman than he'd ever written before about any of his great spiritual discoveries. . . . He seems to be fixed in his last religion. I hope so. The only constant faith I've found in him before was his proud belief in himself as a bold Antichrist. . . . Ah, well, it's a rocky road, full of twists and blind alleys, isn't it, Jack--this running away from truth in order to find it? I mean, until the road finally turns back toward home.<sup>33</sup>

John wants to come home. He is afraid that the love between his wife Elsa and him is not strong enough to withstand the confession of his one slip--his adultery with Lucy Hillman, and he knows that if this one stable element in his life--his love for Elsa and her love for him--is lost, he will have no choice but to follow Loving's guidance into nihilism and death. He tries to defy Loving by telling him that the autobiographical hero of his novel "must go on! He must find a faith--somewhere!"<sup>34</sup>

However, Loving puts up a fierce resistance against the religious influence of Father Baird and also blocks any return to former escapes. The cynical and mocking alter ego of John, the autobiographical poet-character, explicitly rejects Nietzsche's ideas, and John does not object: ". . . I'll grant you the pseudo-Nietzschean savior I just evoked out of my past is an equally futile ghost. Even if he came, we'd only send him to the insane asylum for teaching that we should have a nobler aim for our lives than getting all four feet in a trough of swill!"<sup>35</sup> Loving wants to return to the ideas expressed in the conclusion of Mourning Becomes Electra, while John seeks salvation in

<sup>33</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 502-504.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 498.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 543.



love and forgiveness, at first human love and forgiveness and then the love and forgiveness of the Roman Catholic God. In the end Loving is defeated and John, instead of being split into two separate halves, has found his unified identity again and can say in exaltation--an exaltation reminiscent of Lazarus Laughed--"Life laughs with God's love again! Life laughs with love!"<sup>36</sup> John Loving has finally succeeded in finding again the faith he had rejected when, like O'Neill, he had lost the love of his parents. The Christian God again symbolizes Mercy, Goodness, Forgiveness, and Love.

It would be premature to say on the basis of this one play alone, as some critics have done, that O'Neill himself had definitely returned to the Church. What has become clear, however, is that in this second phase of his career O'Neill has re-evaluated his whole-hearted acceptance of Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra and that at least for his purposes in the theater he has found the thoughts of the German philosopher wanting. In effect, however, even in this rejection of Zarathustra's teachings, he followed the advice of the prophet of the overman, who said to his disciples: "You had not yet looked for yourselves: then you found me. . . . Now I ask you to lose me and find yourselves, and only when all of you have renounced me, will I return to you!" (VI, 84). After a brief depression in utter nihilism, O'Neill has after much thought and agony--expressed by the numerous revisions of the ending of Days Without End-- at least temporarily reaccepted his lost childhood faith.

<sup>36</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 567.

In 1945 O'Neill wrote: "The only way to understand Days Without End is in its relationship to Dynamo. Originally these two plays were to be the first and second in a trilogy of 'God plays,' so to speak. Gold was to be the God of the third play."<sup>37</sup> However, we should not be too easily misled into believing that, at the time of the conclusion of the play, O'Neill had realized that the ending was false. His and others' comments of around 1932 indicate that O'Neill was very concerned about the play and that the 1945 comment expresses rather a state of mind forced into pessimism by the events of World War II and his illness--a state of mind formulated after he had stopped writing altogether.

The importance of Days Without End to O'Neill himself is indicated by the fact that after the third draft of the play, he wrote the nostalgic Ah, Wilderness!<sup>38</sup> Although at this time he had not yet made a final decision on the ending of Days Without End, the tone and content of Ah, Wilderness! already indicate his longing and probable direction. On October 29, 1932, O'Neill wrote to Langner, pleading for an extraordinarily careful production of his latest play, Days Without End:

I'm especially anxious to have your sympathetic backing on this particular play, not because it's a tough one to get over and is bound to arouse a lot of antagonism, but because I want to lean over backwards in being fair to it and getting it the best breaks. For, after all, this play, like Ah, Wilderness! but in a much deeper sense, is the paying of an old debt on my part--a gesture toward more comprehensive, unembittered understanding and inner

<sup>37</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Carpenter, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>38</sup>Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 139.

freedom--the breaking away from an old formula that I had enslaved myself with and the appreciation that there is their own truth in other formulas, too, and that any life-giving formula is as fit a subject for drama as any other.<sup>39</sup>

Even in 1934, at the time of the opening of the play, O'Neill seems still to have believed in the truth of the ending of the play. Philip Moeller recorded on January 1, 1934, a conversation he had had on the preceding night with Eugene and Carlotta O'Neill:

She says G. was and is still a Catholic and that she hopes he will return definitely to the faith and that she would gladly go with him, whenever he is ready, but he must not be forced.

There were long disquisitions over the mystic beauty of Catholic faith. He said the end of the play was undoubtedly a wish fulfillment on his part.

He told me about the simple trusting happiness of some of his Catholic relatives. He wants to go that way and find a happiness which apparently he hasn't got and which obviously this perfect marriage doesn't seem to bring him.<sup>40</sup>

George Jean Nathan in Passing Judgments, which was first published in 1935, finds it incredible that O'Neill considers Days Without End "the best play he has ever written!"<sup>41</sup> And Richard Dana Skinner, who wrote a book on O'Neill--Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest--and who knew O'Neill personally, wrote to Father Michael Earls:

I can assure you that the play was written not only with the utmost sincerity but only as a result of a terrific interior and personal struggle on O'Neill's part. It may interest you to know that his wife is working very hard to bring about his definite return to the Catholic Church, as she feels that that is his one salvation.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup>O'Neill to Langner, October 29, 1932, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., pp. 776-777.

<sup>40</sup>Philip Moeller, quoted in Gelb, p. 779.

<sup>41</sup>George Jean Nathan, Passing Judgments (1935; rpt. Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 123.

<sup>42</sup>Skinner to Father Michael Earls, quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 232.

At the same time, however, there were voices, which O'Neill later joined, that asserted the opposite. For example, Father Ford, whom O'Neill had frequently consulted during the writing of the play, was convinced "that O'Neill was a long way from returning to the Church. We discussed certain matters. But you didn't tell Eugene O'Neill anything about philosophy or theology."<sup>43</sup>

Thus the ending of Days Without End, just as the entire play Lazarus Laughed, indicates, as will become clear in the following plays, merely a temporary peace of mind, a dream come true for a very short time. The peace of John Loving, Eugene O'Neill never was to experience. Although he refused to express such thoughts in the plays of the last phase of his career, the fate that was reserved for him, or that maybe he had unconsciously designed for himself, is the fate expressed by Nina Leeds and Charles Marsden in Strange Interlude—"to rot in peace" and "to bleach in peace"—the fate of Lavinia Mannon—to "live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets" and be hounded by them—and the fate Loving predicts for the pseudo-Nietzschean savior—to be locked up and live in silence for the rest of his life, if not in an insane asylum at least incapacitated just as effectively by his illness.

<sup>43</sup>Father Ford, quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 232.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN SEARCH OF MAN'S HUMANITY

Now I ask you to lose me and find yourselves;  
and only when all of you have renounced me,  
will I return to you.

Truly, my brothers, with different eyes will  
I then look for my lost ones; with a different  
love will I then love you.

#### Thus Spake Zarathustra

In the last phase of his creative career, 1933-1943, Eugene O'Neill seems to have realized that the position he had taken in Days Without End was untenable. His total rejection of Thus Spake Zarathustra and his enthusiastic acceptance of his childhood faith merely seem to have represented the climax in the fight against his life script and would have reversed it if the resolution of Days Without End had been true for O'Neill himself. However, O'Neill's destructive script had to proceed to its inevitable catastrophe—a decade of silence and inactivity, ten years of living death. While the re-acceptance of Roman Catholicism may, indeed, have been a true climax in the fight against the script, the repudiation of Thus Spake Zarathustra was an integral part of the script itself. As I already indicated in the previous chapter, O'Neill's discipleship of Nietzsche or Zarathustra demanded a complete re-evaluation of Zarathustra's teachings. Zarathustra expected his followers to renounce him and his teachings

in the effort of finding themselves. Thus the acceptance of Roman Catholicism on the part of John Loving, after the nostalgic dream of an impossible past in Ah, Wilderness!, appears to have been O'Neill's desperate attempt to find at last a permanent sense of belonging. Such an acceptance of faith would close the cycle of his life and lead him back to the security of his early childhood years. Like Cornelius Melody, he was able to give up his assumed but pretentious stance and escape from its loneliness into the fellowship of the other extreme. Melody gave up the lonely play-acting of the gentleman and boisterously joined the fellowship of the "scum," while O'Neill gave up his lonely, godless Nietzschean stance and enthusiastically embraced the comforting fellowship of the Church.

However, gradually O'Neill seems to have realized that Days Without End was an escape. As he himself had already indicated, it was similar to Ah, Wilderness! It was only wish-fulfillment; it was untrue. He felt that with it he had compromised his artistic integrity. He had violated the law he had set up for himself very early in his career--to tell the truth, no matter what the consequences might be. Carlotta O'Neill recalled that even during the time of writing the play O'Neill had not been sure about the ending. Among other things, he had played with the idea of having John Loving commit suicide at the altar but had been persuaded by the Jesuit priests whom he had consulted to give up such a scheme. Later on, after the completion of the play, he was sorry not to have followed his impulses and "felt that he had ruined the play and that he was a traitor to himself as

a writer. He always said the last act was a phony and he never forgave himself for it."<sup>1</sup> The failure of the play and the fact that the Church withheld approval of Days Without End until after O'Neill's death may account for the bitterness implied in Mrs. O'Neill's recollection, a bitterness that is also reflected in a statement she made to Brooks Atkinson. Carlotta O'Neill told him, "My husband was not a religious man," and added, "He had been born a Catholic, naturally. He hadn't anything in his veins but Irish blood of which he was very proud."<sup>2</sup> It did not seem to matter that this remark not only contradicted the tenor of many of the earlier plays but also an explanation in a memorandum on deposit in the Yale Library, in which Mrs. O'Neill said:

He was always a Christian in the real sense even though he never went to church in his adult years. But he practiced Christianity in his living. I never knew such a just, all-understanding, forgiving, kind, good man! And his patience was amazing. But when he was lied to and endlessly imposed upon, he was finished and that was that.<sup>3</sup>

The failure of Days Without End, a play which had meant so much to O'Neill and over the conclusion of which he had agonized, as well as the realization of its falsity, led to years of silence and a re-examination of his and his family's lives, culminating in the autobiographical Long Day's Journey into Night and its coda, A Moon for the Misbegotten.

<sup>1</sup>Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 764.

<sup>2</sup>Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, quoted in Bowen, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

In the plays of his last period, O'Neill continues his examination of the common man. However, now he is not searching for a God outside man; he is looking for something in man himself, a force that provides a sense of belonging and security, and finds it in selfless love, pity, compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. He learns to accept life--the torment and the joy. With Nietzsche, he now can truly say yes to life, all of life, even though it is painful. He now is ready to learn one of Zarathustra's most painful lessons, the lesson taught by the most silent hour: "You still have to become a child and without shame. The pride of youth is still in you: you have become young late in life: but he who wants to become a child must first overcome his youth!" (VI, 162). O'Neill now finds a meaning in life through human charity.

Man's position in the universe is still the same. Man is still as precariously balanced over the abyss as he was in the early and middle plays; he still comes to an awareness of the danger inherent in such a position. However, now he seeks salvation not in the overcoming of self which leads to a transcendence of human nature, nor in resignation or nihilism, but in the overcoming of self as described by Thomas à Kempis in The Imitation of Christ--a work O'Neill had already mentioned in The Great God Brown.

Dion Anthony rejects the "'Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest'" of the New Testament with "Blah! Fixation on old Mama Christianity! You infant blubbing in the dark,



you!"<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he longs for the comfort and rest religion has to offer. But his pride stands in the way. At moments when he takes off his mask, he can pray, "Pride is dead! Blessed are the meek! Blessed are the poor in spirit!"<sup>5</sup> However, when he is constantly misunderstood and hurt, his only defense is ridicule and cynicism. Only when he knows that he is dying, can he consider religion without mockery. Before his last meeting with Margaret, he reads from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis:

"Quickly must thou be gone from hence, see then how matters stand with thee. Ah, fool--learn now to die to the world that thou mayst begin to live with Christ! Do now, beloved, do now all thou canst because thou knowst not when thou shalt die; nor dost thou know what shall befall thee after death. Keep thyself as a pilgrim, and a stranger upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world do not--belong. Keep thy heart free and raised upward to God because thou hast not here a lasting abode. 'Because at what hour you know not the Son of Man will come!'" Amen. (He raises his hand over the mask as if he were blessing it, closes the book and puts it back in his pocket. He raises the mask in his hands and stares at it with a pitying tenderness) Peace, poor tortured one, brave pitiful pride of man, the hour of deliverance comes. Tomorrow we may be with Him in Paradise!<sup>6</sup>

The two sides of Dion's personality--the Nietzschean Dionysus and the Catholic Saint--are not as divergent as they may seem. Both have one very important characteristic in common. Both have to learn to overcome themselves and their human pride. Both must "learn now to die to the world"--the Catholic Saint in order "to live with Christ" and the Nietzschean Dionysus in order to recreate the God in man.

<sup>4</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 269.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

While in the 1920's O'Neill decided to follow the path of the Nietzschean Dionysus, now in the 1930's and 1940's he seems to attempt to go the way of the Catholic Saint. His guide is Thomas à Kempis. O'Neill seems to follow the monk's admonition to imitate Christ, without being able to accept the divinity of Christ. With such a qualification of Thomas à Kempis' teaching O'Neill does not have to go against Nietzsche, who admired the man Jesus but rejected Christ the God. Nietzsche saw in Jesus a man who lived and died in order to show man how to live, and Thomas à Kempis showed man how to imitate the life of Christ. Although Nietzsche certainly did not advocate Jesus' way of life as a pattern to be followed, he admired its nobility. Thus, with his modification of Thomas à Kempis, O'Neill did not have to renounce Nietzsche and could at the same time approach the faith he yearned for. As a matter of fact, O'Neill's peculiar fusion of the teachings of Nietzsche and Thomas à Kempis led him to a true understanding of Nietzsche's affirmation of life and of the philosopher's concept of amor fati. The example of the man Jesus shows a way not to save but to ennoble the all-too-human individual. It gives man a dignity that will not make him a God yet elevates him way above the state of the animal. The way of the Nietzschean Dionysus is possible only for the higher man, whereas the way of the Catholic Saint, as modified by O'Neill, although extremely difficult, is possible for everyman.

The emphasis in the last plays, then, is again on recognition of self and self-overcoming. O'Neill, as he shows in the example of

James Tyrone, now can agree with Thomas à Kempis when the latter says, "He who knows himself well is mean and abject in his own sight, and takes no delight in the vain praise of men."<sup>7</sup> O'Neill appears to learn to appreciate that:

The highest and most profitable learning is this: that a man have a truthful knowledge and a full despising of himself. More not to presume of himself, but always to judge and think well and blessedly of another, is a sign of great wisdom and of great perfection and of singular grace. . . . We are all frail but you shall judge no man more frail than yourself.<sup>8</sup>

This overcoming of self and the knowledge of self will eventually lead to a knowledge of God:

And it should be our daily desire to overcome ourselves, so that we may be made stronger in spirit and go daily from better to better. Every perfection in this life has some imperfection attached to it, and there is no knowledge in this world that is not mixed with some blindness or ignorance. Therefore, a humble knowledge of ourselves is a surer way to God than is the search for depth of learning.<sup>9</sup>

But this overcoming of self is not easy. It implies a clear recognition of self. It implies an awareness of all personal weaknesses and confession of failures. It, like Nietzsche's self-overcoming, demands a clear look into the mirror. However, man's blurred vision encourages his distortion of and blindness to himself. "We can quickly reprove small faults in our neighbors, but we do not see our own faults, which are much greater. We soon feel and deeply ponder on what we suffer

<sup>7</sup> Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, trans. Richard Whitford, ed. Harold C. Gardiner (Garden City, N. Y.: Image Books, 1955), pp. 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

from others but will not consider what others suffer from us."<sup>10</sup> Man's pride and will stand in the way. They are the reason for his failures and torments. "The reason why so many things displease and trouble you is that you are not yet perfectly dead to the world, or fully severed from the love of earthly things and nothing so much defiles the soul as an unclean love for creatures."<sup>11</sup> This was the problem of the Mannons and many others. It also is the problem of many characters in the plays of the last phase. However, while the Mannons did not succeed in finding a remedy, O'Neill now provides one, and that is charity--pity, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and love.

Having rejected the overhuman ideas of Thus Spake Zarathustra--the concepts of the overman, the transvaluation of all values, the eternal recurrence, amor fati, and the will to power--and retaining only individual sayings of Zarathustra, as well as his emphasis on knowledge of self, O'Neill in the plays of his final period seems to succeed in the fusion of the two disparate elements he had attempted to join in The Great God Brown. By merging Dionysus with the Catholic Saint, O'Neill does not go against Nietzsche, but actually follows the philosopher's ideas as expressed in The Birth of Tragedy. At the time of The Great God Brown, this fusion was not successful because O'Neill was still too interested in the Dionysian aspect of Thus Spake Zarathustra. It is the Dionysian element as represented by Zarathustra that stood in the way of his understanding The Birth of Tragedy. The

<sup>10</sup>Thomas à Kempis, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

Dionysian force of Thus Spake Zarathustra is not the same as that of The Birth of Tragedy. According to The Birth of Tragedy, tragedy is possible only through the synthesis of the Dionysian and Apollonian forces of nature. While in The Birth of Tragedy by Dionysian Nietzsche merely meant the destructive drunken frenzy which O'Neill symbolized by Dion's mask in The Great God Brown, in Thus Spake Zarathustra the Dionysian had already evolved into a synthesis of the earlier Dionysian and Apollonian. O'Neill increased his confusion by the complexity and artificiality of the theatrical devices--the masks and transference of personality. However, even at this time the intent seems to have been to create a tragedy patterned after Greek tragedy as described by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy. This intent is evidenced by the fact that O'Neill took a copy of Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy with him when he went to rehearsals of The Great God Brown.<sup>12</sup>

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche describes Greek tragedy as a synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian elements. Neither is superior or inferior to the other. Nietzsche pictures Apollo as the god of the plastic and pictorial arts, a god that exercises restraint, is free of the wilder impulses, and expresses serenity. He stands for self-knowledge and avoids excess of any kind. Apollo gives form to life's impulses and drives. Dionysus, on the other hand, is the life principle. He symbolizes the almost violent coming to life of nature in spring, is free of any restraint, encourages self-abandonment, and is the spirit of music--an art that is more unstructured and formless

<sup>12</sup>Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., p. 5.

than painting and sculpture, at least according to Nietzsche. Both forces are necessary. Without Dionysus, there would be no life. Without Apollo, there would be no control; the various unbridled Dionysian drives and impulses would only lead to eventual destruction. Nietzsche compares the forces represented by Apollo with the illusory world of the dream and the forces represented by Dionysus with the hallucinatory world of intoxication by drink or drugs.

. . . We have considered the Apollonian and its opposite, the Dionysian, as artistic forces which break forth from nature itself without the intermediary of the human artist and in which its artistic impulses are at first and directly satisfied: on the one hand, as the pictorial world of the dream whose perfection exists unrelated to intellectual power or artistic education of the individual; on the other hand, as intoxicated reality which also has no regard for the individual but even attempts to destroy the individual and to redeem him through a feeling of mystical oneness. Faced with these artistic states of nature, every artist is an "imitator" either an Apollonian artist of the dream or a Dionysian artist of drunken frenzy or finally--as, for example, in Greek tragedy--artist of the dream and drunken frenzy at the same time. We have to think of the latter as one who sinks down in Dionysian drunken frenzy and mystical self-abandonment, lonely and apart from the ecstatic choruses, and to whom is now revealed, through Apollonian dream effects, his own state, i. e. his oneness with the essence of the world in a parable-like dream image. (I, 52-53)

In his early period O'Neill does not seem to have been fully able to understand the meaning of this synthesis because he was too interested in Thus Spake Zarathustra--a work that seems to glorify the Dionysian aspect but in reality celebrates the synthesis of the Dionysian and Apollonian forces. Because of this apparently incomplete understanding of The Birth of Tragedy and his admiration for Thus Spake Zarathustra, to O'Neill the Dionysian appears to have been a good and the Apollonian a bad force in nature. Instead of truly fusing

these two forces, he merely seems to have placed them in opposition to each other. These two opposing forces are expressed in the plays by means of two philosophically opposed characters--the materialist or utilitarian and the artist or individualist. We find this opposition of forces, for instance, in Robert and Andrew Mayo, Yank and Mildred, Abbie-Eben and Ephraim Cabot, Dion Anthony and William Brown. In The Great God Brown, however, O'Neill seems to have realized that juxtaposition of these forces does not represent a real synthesis. Therefore, William Brown becomes Dion Brown--a synthesis of the Dionysian force of Thus Spake Zarathustra and that of The Birth of Tragedy. The complexity of the mask scheme and the confusion arising from the transference of personalities increase the ineffectiveness of this synthesis. A true synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian O'Neill does not bring to perfection until he comes to the writing of Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten--two plays that take up again the problem of The Great God Brown.

In the early period O'Neill became more and more the Dionysian artist. His plays were patterned on Thus Spake Zarathustra, a Dionysian dithyramb, not a tragedy, and moved in the direction of the Dionysian dithyramb or Lazarus Laughed.

Not only is the knot between man and man tied again under the spell of the Dionysian; even the alienated, hostile, or subdued nature again celebrates a festival of reconciliation with its prodigal son, man . . . . Now, through the evangel of world harmony, everyone feels not only united, reconciled, welded with his neighbor but even oneness with him, as if the veil of the Maya had been ripped apart and were hanging in rags in front of the secret original One. By singing and dancing, man expresses his membership in a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak and

is about to fly dancing into the air. . . . He feels like a God; he now moves in as enchanted and elevated a state as that in which he had seen the gods move in his dream. (I, 51-52)

By renouncing Zarathustra's major doctrines in his middle period, O'Neill also renounced himself as the Dionysian artist. He now emphasized the stranglehold of the Apollonian restraint of conventional morality in Strange Interlude, the Puritanical code of ethics of the Mannons in Mourning Becomes Electra, and of the Catholic Church in Days Without End. It seems that a true synthesis of the Apollonian and Dionysian became possible only after O'Neill had explored the two forces separately.

After O'Neill had rejected the "higher community" of man of his first period and the restraints of morality and religion of his middle period, a true understanding of The Birth of Tragedy and with it the writing of tragedy became possible. It appears that in this attempt to create true tragedy O'Neill returned to the meaning and intent behind the use of masks in The Great God Brown. O'Neill had finally digested Nietzsche's ideas. He had at first enthusiastically and irrationally accepted them, then rejected and finally evaluated them. After having gone through this long and painful process of acceptance, rejection, and re-evaluation of Nietzsche's ideas, O'Neill now could create a tragedy in which man appears as the Nietzschean ape ennobled by Christ's charity. In other words, through the fusion of Thus Spake Zarathustra and The Imitation of Christ, the synthesis of animal and God, which the Greeks, according to Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy, represented in the satyr--the original chorus--was made possible for



O'Neill.

According to Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy, the satyr symbolizes the longing for the original and natural state of man.

Nature which is unaffected by knowledge, in which the locks of culture have not yet been pried open---this is what the Greek saw in his satyr; therefore the satyr did not yet fall together with the ape. On the contrary: the Greek was used to regard with reverent astonishment the original image of man as the expression of his highest and strongest impulses, as the enthusiastic dreamer who is enchanted by the nearness of God, as the compassionate companion in whom the suffering of God is repeated, as the prophet of wisdom from the deepest bosom of nature, as the symbol of sexual omnipotence of nature. The satyr was an exalted and God-like being. . . . Here the illusion of culture had been erased from from the original image of man; here the real man, the bearded satyr who sang praises to his God, revealed himself. In his presence civilized man shrank to a caricature full of lies. (I, 82-83)

This description of the satyr almost recalls O'Neill's creation Yank, the hairy ape. However, because of Yank's inarticulateness and his exaggerated subhuman nature, because of his expressed membership in the exploited working class, it is difficult to find in him a likeness to God. Yank does not remind as much of man's original state as he does of the ape. While the satyr does not "fall together with the ape," Yank does not seem very far removed from the animal.

The satyr serves Dionysus; he makes up the chorus in Greek tragedy while the tragic hero is a mask for Dionysus himself.

. . . All the famous characters of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus, etc., are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysus. The fact that behind all these masks a God is hidden is the essential reason for the often admired typical "ideality" of those famous characters. . . . The one genuinely real Dionysus appears in a variety of shapes, in the mask of a fighting hero and as it were caught in the net of the individual will. In his speech and actions the now appearing God resembles an erring, striving, suffering individual. The fact that he appears in such epic certainty and distinctness is the effect of Apollo, the interpreter of dreams, who interprets his Dionysian state

to the chorus through that parable-like image. In reality, however, that hero is the suffering Dionysus of the mysteries, the God who in his own person experiences the sufferings of individuation, of whom wonderful myths recount how he as a boy has been torn to pieces by the Titans and in this state is swallowed as Zagreus; thus is indicated that this being torn to pieces, the actual Dionysian suffering, is like a transformation into air, water, earth, and fire, that we should regard the state of individuation as source and original cause of all suffering, as something unimportant in itself. From the smile of this Dionysus the Olympic gods, from his tears men have come to life. In that existence as a God torn to pieces, Dionysus has the double nature of a cruel, wild demon and a mild, serene ruler. The hope of the epopts looked forward to a rebirth of Dionysus which we now have to understand ominously as the end of individuation: to this coming third Dionysus the epopts sang their hymns of praise. And only in this hope is there a ray of joy on the face of the torn world, a world fragmented into individuals. This is represented in the myth of the eternally mourning Demeter, who regains happiness for the first time when she is told that she may again give birth to Dionysus. (I, 97-99)

In The Great God Brown O'Neill, through the use of masks, has tried to make visible "the double nature of a cruel, wild demon and a mild, serene ruler," has attempted to literally show that "the one genuinely real Dionysus appears in a variety of shapes [Anthony and Brown], in the mask of the fighting hero and as it were caught in the net of the individual will." The hope of the epopts, "the rebirth of Dionysus," he seems to have attempted in Lazarus Laughed. The mourning and the joy of Demeter are represented by Margaret, Cybel and Miriam. The failure of these plays as plays lies in O'Neill's inability to express Nietzsche's ideas through real-life characters, i. e. in his failure to create a perfect Apollonian illusion. He relies on a complex mask scheme to convey his meaning and disregards Nietzsche's warning that "as long as the audience must figure out what this or that person signifies, what the presuppositions are for

this or that conflict of impulses and intentions, a total immersion into the suffering and actions of the main characters, the breathless compassion and fear with them are impossible" (I, 113). Only after O'Neill has understood Nietzsche's meaning of mask--the covering of the unseen Dionysian reality by the apparently real physical appearance of the Apollonian illusion--and has completely given up on the theatrical device of the mask of The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed, the aside of Strange Interlude, the mask-like appearance of all the Mannons in Mourning Becomes Electra, or the split character in Days Without End, does he come close to a truly tragic representation of characters and conflicts. In his final period O'Neill has learned to "place, in the first scenes and as it were accidentally, into the hands of the audience all those threads that are necessary for an understanding [of the action]" (I, 114). While in the earlier plays the action often covered a lengthy period of time and O'Neill felt compelled to show the high points of it on stage, in the last plays the action itself is very short--one, at the most, two days--but the audience is, nevertheless, made aware of all the pertinent incidents that determined the conflict and its outcome.

Although O'Neill has learned to create true tragedies which necessarily seem to express a pessimistic philosophy, he has not changed his basically positive view of life. Shortly after the premiere performance of Beyond the Horizon, he said in 1921, "To me, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. . . . It is the meaning of life--and hope. The noblest is eternally the

most tragic."<sup>13</sup> At the end of his creative career, O'Neill has succeeded in dramatizing "the meaning of life--and hope." Contrary to what most critics like to say, the last plays are not an expression of despair and nihilism. They represent O'Neill's recovery from the despair and nihilism of Mourning Becomes Electra. To say, as Maurice M. LaBelle, for example, does, that "a study of the influence of Nietzsche's concepts . . . throws light on many of O'Neill's fundamental ideas, especially the gradual transformation of his optimistic appraisal of life into a pessimism rarely equalled in Western literature"<sup>14</sup> and to equate pessimism with despair means to ignore the cathartic function of tragedy and of O'Neill's final plays. According to Nietzsche, the pessimism of Greek tragedy is softened and actually transformed by a metaphysical consolation. Tragedy celebrates the immortality of life through the destruction of the tragic hero:

Also the Dionysian art wants to convince us of the joy of life: however, we should not look for this joy in the appearances but behind the appearances. We should become aware of how everything that comes into existence must be ready for destruction full of suffering; we are forced to look into the horrors of the individual existence--but should not be paralysed. A metaphysical consolation momentarily tears us away from the activities of the living characters. We are really for a short moment the original being itself and feel its unbounded lust and joy for life; the fight, the torment, the destruction of the appearances now seem necessary in the abundance of innumerable forms of life that are shoving and pushing into life, the boundless fertility of the world will. We are pierced by the raging thorn of these torments at the very moment when we have become, as it were, one with the immeasurable original joy of life and when we in Dionysian rapture

<sup>13</sup>O'Neill, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Maurice M. LaBelle, "Dionysus and Despair: The Influence of Nietzsche upon O'Neill's Drama," Educational Theatre Journal, 25 (1973), 436.

intuitively feel the indestructibility and eternity of this joy. In spite of fear and compassion, we are the happy-living ones, not as individuals, but as the One living being with whose joy in procreation we have been welded together. (I, 138-139)

Nietzsche found this metaphysical consolation "without which the enjoyment of tragedy cannot be explained" most clearly expressed in the ending of Oedipus at Colonus, which "sounds the tone of reconciliation from another world" (I, 144). This metaphysical consolation which sounds more and more clearly in O'Neill's last plays is what transforms the pessimism and even despair of the surface action, or in Nietzschean terms--the appearance, into an affirmation, even celebration, of life. In an interview twelve days after the opening of The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill himself confirmed that he had not become a pessimist or nihilist even though at that time he was aware that he could no longer create: "I'm happier now than I've ever been--I couldn't ever be negative about life. On that score, you've got to decide Yes or No. And I'll always say Yes. Yes, I'm happy."<sup>15</sup>

In 1934 O'Neill began work on a five-play cycle of plays entitled The Calms of Capricorn, in which he planned to trace the history of the Harford family in a manner similar to that of the Mannon family of Mourning Becomes Electra, except that here he would cover more than two generations. Over the years the project of the Cycle grew more and more ambitious until O'Neill thought of including eleven plays under the over-all title of A Tale of Possessors, Self-Dispossessed. He explained the purpose of the Cycle to Langner:

<sup>15</sup>O'Neill, Time (1946), quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 876.

I'm not giving a damn whether the dramatic event of each play has any significance in the growth of the country or not, as long as it is significant in the spiritual and psychological history of the American family in the plays. The Cycle is primarily just that, the history of a family. What larger significance I can give my people as extraordinary examples and symbols in the drama of American possessiveness and materialism is something else again. But I don't want anyone to get the idea that this Cycle is much concerned with what is usually understood by American history, for it isn't. As for economic history--which so many seem to mistake for the only history just now--I am not much interested in economic determinism, but only in the self-determinism of which the economic is one phase, and by no means the most revealing--at least, not to me.<sup>16</sup>

In a letter to Clark, O'Neill is a little more specific as to the spirit of the plays. "There will be nothing of Ah, Wilderness! or Days Without End in this Cycle. They were an interlude. The Cycle goes back to my old vein of ironic tragedy--with, I hope, added psychological depth and insight."<sup>17</sup> In other words, O'Neill now fully recognizes Days Without End as a temporary escape. It seems that the idea behind the Cycle represents a return to the pessimism of Mourning Becomes Electra, which may be an additional reason why O'Neill never finished it. The over-all title almost implies a condemnation of the common man, an idea that is reinforced in another letter to Clark, written about a week after the preceding one:

A true play about the French Revolution ought to make a grand satire on the Russian one. Or . . . a play or novel depicting the history of any religion would apply rationally in the same way. God with a change of whiskers becomes the State--and then there's always a Holy Book--dogmas--heresy trials--an infallible Pope--etc.--etc., until you become sick. It appears we apes always

<sup>16</sup> O'Neill to Langner, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., pp. 804-805.

<sup>17</sup> O'Neill to Clark, September 1937, quoted in Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., pp. 143-144.

climb trees--and fall out of them--with a boringly identical behavior pattern!"<sup>18</sup>

In the last sentence O'Neill clearly echoes Nietzsche's opinion of the common man. The echo grows even louder in the postscript to the same letter. "The last of the above sounds pessimistic--whereas I feel full of hope these days. For, noting the way the world wags, I am sure that Man has definitely decided to destroy himself, and this seems to me the only truly wise decision he has ever made."<sup>19</sup>

However, as it turns out later, this conclusion, like that in Days Without End, is false. It seems to be merely a bitter reaction to the disappointment over Days Without End. The first Cycle play O'Neill worked on is A Touch of the Poet (1935-1939). In it he expresses his realization of the falsity of the conclusion of Days Without End. Nora Melody, like Mary Tyrone, feels guilty about having neglected her duty and love toward the Church in favor of her duty and love toward her husband and family. She constantly wishes that she could go to the priest and confess her sins, but Cornelius Melody, her husband, has only contempt for the Church: "Damn your priests' prating about your sins!"<sup>20</sup> Melody dislikes the Church so much that he even made Nora leave it although it would have eased her conscience if she could have confessed her sins:

<sup>18</sup> O'Neill to Clark, 1937, quoted in Clark, Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene O'Neill, A Touch of the Poet (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), p. 61.

It's because I'm afraid it's God's punishment, all the sorrow and trouble that's come on us, and I have the black torment in my mind that it's the fault of the mortal sin I did with him unmarried, and the promise he made me make to leave the Church that's kept me from ever confessin' to a priest. . . . It would serve Con right if I broke my promise and woke up the priest to hear my confession and give me God's forgiveness that'd bring my soul peace and comfort so I wouldn't feel the three of us were damned.<sup>21</sup>

But that would be a betrayal of her husband, and Nora loves him too much to betray him. Her love, like Elsa's in Days Without End, is the force that makes life bearable and gives meaning to it. In A Touch of the Poet O'Neill, unlike John Loving in Days Without End, has stopped short of finding salvation in religion. Like Loving at the end of his rebellion against God but before his return to Him, O'Neill now sings the praises of mere human love. While the playwright at the beginning of his final period has stopped short of the goal reached at the end of his middle period and, in effect, has gone a step backward, he has neither returned to the Nietzschean overman nor any other "of his great spiritual discoveries" nor to pessimism and nihilism, but to the point John Loving had reached before he returned to the Church—human love and understanding.

Nora's love recalls Mrs. Roylston's love in Servitude. It is the love of the ideal Nietzschean woman. When Sara reproaches her mother for being a slave to Cornelius Melody, Nora tries to explain the meaning of love in terms that almost echo Nietzsche: "I've pride in my love for him! I've loved him since the day I set eyes on him,

<sup>21</sup>A Touch of the Poet, op. cit., p. 138.



and I'll love him till the day I die!"<sup>22</sup> She goes on to explain that true love demands self-sacrifice for the man a woman loves and that it is this sacrifice that makes life worth living:

It's little you know of love, and you never will, for there's the same divil of pride in you that's in him, and it'll kape you from ivir givin' all of yourself, and that's what love is. . . . It's when, if all the fires of hell was between you, you'd walk in them gladly to be with him, and sing with joy at your own burnin', if only his kiss was on your mouth! That's love, and I'm proud I've known the great sorrow and joy of it!<sup>23</sup>

Nora, who has overcome herself through her love, can accept life not in resignation but with joy. She, like the ideal Nietzschean woman, feels honor in her love, obeys, and is happy in her obedience. At the same time she recognizes the child in the man and plays with him, as she explains at the end of the play, "And I'll play any game he likes and give him love in it. Haven't I always? She smiles. Sure, I have not pride at all--except that."<sup>24</sup>

However, since Cornelius Melody is not a higher man, Nora's love does not serve to give "a depth to his surface." It provides the all-too-human comforts Cornelius Melody needs. It is what makes his merely human existence bearable. Nora's love for her husband is not the love for the higher man, but neither is it the only other alternative Nietzsche gives--love for a fellow animal. It is true love for a fellow human being. It is in this selfless love that Nietzsche's concept of the animal nature of the common man and Thomas à Kempis' belief

<sup>22</sup> A Touch of the Poet, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

in the Christian nature of man seem to merge in the mind of O'Neill. It is this selfless love that gives Nora a greatness not reached by any of the other all-too-human individuals. While it is true that her love does not lead her to God but, on the contrary, prevents her from returning to Him, it ennobles her human nature; it leads her as close to living the Christian ideal as that is possible in a godless world. Love makes Nora more than an all-too-human woman who is not very far removed from the animal state. In appearance she fits Nietzsche's description of man--more animal than man. "Yet in spite of her slovenly appearance there is a spirit which shines through and makes her lovable, a simple sweetness and charm, something gentle and sad and, somehow, dauntless."<sup>25</sup> In her love there is a beauty not to be found in the other characters of the play--neither in her physically beautiful daughter Sara nor in the attractive Mrs. Harford. In her love there is great courage. As long as Nora has her love, she can bear anything, even the guilt of having committed a mortal sin. Her love gives her dignity and respect. It is the one stable force in an uncertain world. Nora's love provides Cornelius Melody with a sense of security and belonging in his changing world.

Cornelius Melody lives in a dream world. To himself he is not the poor Irish immigrant innkeeper; he is still Major Cornelius Melody, the hero of Talavera, the gentleman who was born in a castle. And he has the trappings to prove it. There are the beautiful uniform and expensive dueling pistols; there is the splendid thoroughbred mare.

<sup>25</sup>A Touch of the Poet, op. cit., p. 20.

He feels superior to the American gentleman who has risen to his position by means of trade and approves of Simon Harford because on his mother's side young Harford comes "from generations of well-bred gentlefolk."<sup>26</sup> His present financial difficulties are merely temporary and will not prevent him from giving his daughter a dowry that becomes her station:

Your settlement, certainly. You did not think, I hope, that I would give you away without a penny to your name as if you were some poverty-stricken peasant's daughter? Please remember I have my own position to maintain. Of course, it is a bit difficult at present. I am temporarily hard pressed. But perhaps a mortgage on the inn--<sup>27</sup>

Nothing that his daughter Sara--the only realist with enough courage to tell him the truth--tells him, or even shouts at him, can make him face reality. He can look into the mirror all he wants, but all he sees is Major Cornelius Melody striking his Byronic pose. Only after his pride has been humiliated in his failure to seduce Mrs. Harford and his pretended honor has been injured by Harford's attempt to buy him into leaving his part of the country so that Simon would not marry Sara because of the difference in station, only after in a blinding rage the gentleman Major Melody has demeaned himself by fighting and brawling with mere servants, does he come to an awareness of himself:

Bravely done, Major Melody! The Commander of the Forces honors your exceptional gallantry! Like the glorious field of Talavera! Like the charge on the French square! Cursing like a drunken foul-mouthed son of a thieving shebeen keeper who sprang from the filth of a peasant hovel with pigs on the floor--with that

<sup>26</sup> A Touch of the Poet, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

pale Yankee bitch watching from a window, sneering with disgust.<sup>28</sup>

At that moment nobody can reach Cornelius Melody; he is utterly alone, his dream destroyed. In acknowledgement of his self-awareness, Cornelius Melody kills the mare, the living symbol of his dream. With her he kills part of himself. It is at that moment that Nora's help is necessary. Through her love she understands the meaning of Melody's actions even though everyone else thinks he has gone mad. The constancy of her love and understanding makes it possible for him to let the Major die in peace and be the animal he is without shame. Unlike Sara, Nora is not ashamed of him. On the contrary, she is proud of his kiss and his love for her. Nora does not regret the change in Melody's behavior. She neither questions nor reproaches; she simply accepts as natural and inevitable that Cornelius Melody's past is dead and that he joins his "good friends in the bar."<sup>29</sup> She allows him to forget that the Major ever existed. Unlike Sara, she does not attempt to make him feel ashamed in his failure but helps him take pride in his newly found identity. He can now feel "fresh as a man new born"<sup>30</sup> because Nora allows him to believe in his new illusion, that all of the Major was a dream and lies and that Melody has finally found happiness by discarding the Major's aloofness and loneliness and by joining the fellowship of the "scum." Although Cornelius Melody is a failure and deep down in his heart knows he is, he does not have to walk the

<sup>28</sup> A Touch of the Poet, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

Mannon path of escape into death nor Nina Leeds's path into quiet resignation. Because of Nora's love and understanding, because of Nora's compassion that does not deteriorate into pity, because of Nora's ability to forgive his failures, Cornelius Melody is not destroyed but can live and even enjoy life.

The next play in the Cycle, More Stately Mansions (1936-1939), O'Neill did not live to complete. It is the only other play of the Cycle to survive. Although O'Neill did not authorize its publication and it survived destruction by O'Neill's own hands only accidentally, it is very interesting since it throws a clearer light on the intent behind the Cycle than A Touch of the Poet. Donald Gallup, the curator of the O'Neill collection at Yale, points out in the preface to the play, "More Stately Mansions provides . . . a better indication than does A Touch of the Poet of what he [O'Neill] had intended in the Cycle."<sup>31</sup> If this is true, as it appears to be, according to the statements O'Neill himself had made about the Cycle and the overall title, this play raises many questions. Why did O'Neill choose to complete and publish A Touch of the Poet, a play that did not indicate his intentions in the Cycle, a play that did not even figure prominently in the history of the Harford family, whose fortunes he wanted to trace, when a play that did all that was practically finished? Why did O'Neill interrupt the writing of the Cycle plays in 1939 with three plays that continue in the line of A Touch of the Poet and not

<sup>31</sup> Donald Gallup, ed., More Stately Mansions by Eugene O'Neill (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), p. xii.

More Stately Mansions? Why did he start a new series of plays, By Way of Obit, before continuing the work on the Cycle?

More Stately Mansions goes back to the plays of O'Neill's middle period. In structure and in tone, it is very similar to Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra. Unlike the plays of O'Neill's final period in which the playwright almost religiously observes the dramatic unities, More Stately Mansions covers a period of nine years. Its action moves from one location to another, and the function of the division into scenes and acts is mainly to indicate the passing of time and the change in location, while in A Touch of the Poet, as well as the other plays of this period, a separation into scenes is unnecessary and the division into acts serves to mark stages in the action, beginning with the exposition of the proud Irishman and his dream and ending with self-awareness and destruction of the dream. While in A Touch of the Poet the dream has a basis in reality--the past--in More Stately Mansions the basis for the dream in the case of both Deborah and Simon Harford is fantasy and illusion. While in A Touch of the Poet there is a promise of life and sanity at the end, in More Stately Mansions there is a promise of insanity and death.

In More Stately Mansions O'Neill goes back to Charles Marsden of Strange Interlude, who believes that all of man's problems are caused by his possessiveness which seems to be an essential part of human nature. Simon Harford is destroyed by the possessive love of the two women between whom he is caught--his wife and his mother--and his own possessive greed that makes him incapable of true, un-

selfish love and that annihilates utterly the dream of his youth. His dream was that of Rousseau, that all men are naturally good, but at the end of the play he comes to the realization that this dream is false and almost echoes Nietzsche's words when he says:

What is evil is the stupid theory that man is naturally what we call virtuous and good--instead of being what he is, a hog. It is that idealistic fallacy which is responsible for all the confusion in our minds, the conflicts within the self, and for all the confusion in our relationships with one another, within the family particularly, for the blundering of our desires which are disciplined to covet what they don't want and be afraid to crave what they wish for in truth. In a nutshell, all one needs to remember is that good is evil, and evil, good.<sup>32</sup>

Their conflicting possessiveness has not only made them realize their all-too-human nature but has actually reduced each one--Deborah, Sara, and Simon--to a subhuman state. Life has lost all meaning:

Our whole cowardly moral code about murder is but another example of the stupid insane impulsion of man's petty vanity to believe human lives are valuable, and related to some God-inspired meaning. But the obvious fact is that their lives are without any meaning whatever--that human life is a silly disappointment, a liar's promise, a perpetual in-bankruptcy for debts we never contracted, a daily appointment with peace and happiness in which we wait day after day, hoping against hope, and when finally the bride or the bridegroom cometh, we discover we are kissing Death.<sup>33</sup>

Once Simon and Deborah have faced this truth, the truth about themselves, there are only two alternatives--death or insanity. Simon, like O'Neill, also knows the remedy, but it is not to be found or bought at any price: "The kingdom of peace and happiness in your story is love. You dispossessed yourself when you dispossessed me. Since then we have both

<sup>32</sup>More Stately Mansions, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-180.

been condemned to an insatiable greed for substitutes--"<sup>34</sup> Unable to bear the torment any longer, Simon withdraws, in a manner even more horrible than that of Lavinia Mannon, into calculated insanity-- "God, if the reality of dog-eat-dog and lust-devour-love is sane, then what man of honorable mind would not prefer to be considered lunatic! Come, Mother! Let us leave this vile sty of lust and hatred and the wish to murder! Let us escape back into peace--while there is still time!"<sup>35</sup>--the peace of insanity.

Only Sara remains relatively intact. Her mother's selfless love shows itself momentarily and makes her willing to give up everything for Simon's happiness. However, when she realizes that Deborah, totally incapable of love for others, has rejected him, she takes complete possession of him. She now is not only his wife and mistress but also his mother, and Simon is as helpless as a child.

With More Stately Mansions O'Neill renounced not only the formal religion of Days Without End but also the private religion of genuine, selfless human love. As such, the play and the Cycle, whose intention it indicates, would have meant a step backward. But this time O'Neill seems to have heeded the advice he gave himself in the letter to Krutch in July 1929: "Henceforth unless I've got a theme that demands I step a rung higher to do it, I'm going to mark time. . . ." <sup>36</sup> The Cycle, apart from A Touch of the Poet, would have made him go backwards not

<sup>34</sup>More Stately Mansions, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>36</sup>O'Neill to Krutch, July 1929, quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 690.



only as far as ideas are concerned but even in terms of structure.

Instead, O'Neill went forward with The Iceman Cometh (1939). In this play O'Neill takes up again the problem of self-awareness and illusion and elaborates on it more fully than he had done in A Touch of the Poet. Larry, like Nora Melody, realizes that the truth does not necessarily give meaning to life. In the Nietzschean framework only the higher man is able to find and live with the truth, but the common man has to find some kind of illusion that makes him believe that he is different from and better than the animal. It is the illusion or, as O'Neill calls it, the pipe dream that gives meaning to the life of even the lowest of the common men: "To hell with the truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It's irrelevant and immaterial as the lawyers say. The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."<sup>37</sup>

As in A Touch of the Poet, the characters in The Iceman Cometh physically appear to have reached a subhuman state. They have hit the bottom of the social scale. They are all failures. Nevertheless Harry Hope's saloon is a home—a place of relative peace, warmth, and comfort. They are relatively happy because they live in a community of tolerance and acceptance. Each one knows the pipe dream of the other, knows that it is a pipe dream, but lets him keep it and even encourages it because it brings peace. At the beginning of the play, the down-and-outers are in a mood of happy expectancy. They are wait-

<sup>37</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 578.

ing for Hickey, who will provide them with enough to drink to sink into oblivion, to escape even their pipe dreams.

But this time Hickey's annual visit is different. This time he has come to destroy their pipe dreams, to force them to face the reality of their lives. He has come to make them free: "I swear I'd never act like I have if I wasn't absolutely sure it will be worth it to you in the end, after you're rid of the damned guilt that makes you lie to yourselves you're something you're not, and the remorse that nags at you and makes you hide behind lousy pipe dreams about tomorrow."<sup>38</sup> He echoes Zarathustra's words "I am of today and yesterday . . . but there is something in me that is of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the past" (VI, 140). By paraphrasing Zarathustra, O'Neill points to the major difference between his early and his late plays. The protagonists of the early plays used their past and present experiences as incentives to reach a goal in the future. The characters of the last phase, who are living in a godless world without a future, must forget the failures of the past if they want to live in the present. Hickey explains that when he continues, "You'll be in a today where there is no yesterday or tomorrow to worry you. You won't give a damn what you are any more."<sup>39</sup> But the peace that Hickey brings is the peace of resignation or death. He is driven by pity to destroy the pipe dreams, the right kind of pity in the Nietzschean sense. "If you have a suffering friend, be a resting place

<sup>38</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 661.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 661.

to his suffering, but like a hard bed, a camp-bed: thus you will be most useful to him" (VI, 95). Hickey seems to have this advice in mind when he says about his pity for the down-and-outers in Harry Hope's saloon:

It isn't the kind of pity that lets itself off easy by encouraging some poor guy to go on kidding himself with a lie--the kind that leaves the poor slob worse off because it makes him feel guiltier than ever--the kind that makes his lying hopes nag at him and reproach him until he's a rotten skunk in his own eyes. . . . The kind of pity I feel now is after final results that will really save the poor guy and make him contented with what he is, and quit battling himself, and find peace for the rest of his life.<sup>40</sup>

The problem with Hickey's pity is that it is directed toward the common man and that it therefore robs him of his will to power because without a dream there is no goal. Hickey's pity makes the down-and-outers aware of their failures; it makes them conscious of the sordidness of their present condition and its hopelessness, and it does not permit them to return to their illusions or to find new pipe dreams. It demands full self-awareness, which for the inmates of Harry Hope's saloon means death.

One after one Hickey forces the down-and-outers to face up to their pipe dreams, recognize their failures and face the fact that now that "tomorrow" has disappeared there is no meaning in life. They have no past to escape into, no tomorrow to hope for, only the dreary today to exist in. The worst of it all is that after they have faced their own truths not even alcohol can provide an escape into oblivion. The only way out is death until Hickey, who cannot face the reality

<sup>40</sup> The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 641.

of having killed Evelyn out of hate rather than love, escapes into the pipe dream of insanity and thus permits the others to live again in their pipe dreams.

Only Larry Slade has to give up his pipe dream of not caring for and not being affected by life, of waiting for death unafraid. At the end of the play, Larry Slade, who had stepped out of life and watched it pass by, finally enters into it again with understanding, compassion, and love. He can tell Parritt, who is guilt-ridden about having betrayed and hated his mother, to make an end of his life. For Parritt the possibility of a pipe dream does not exist, especially after Hickey's confession. Therefore he turns to Larry and confesses. Larry listens, at first in spite of himself, and bursts out angrily, "Go! Get the hell out of life, God damn you, before I choke it out of you! Go up—!"<sup>41</sup> Finally he responds with genuine compassion; he has heard Parritt's cry for help and suffers with him; he "(pleads distractedly) Go, for the love of Christ, you mad tortured bastard, for your own sake!"<sup>42</sup> (*italics mine*). For the first time in the play, Larry Slade has completely forgotten himself and has taken part in life again. He has become involved without degrading Parritt, for he knows that death is the only possibility for Parritt and seems to agree with Zarathustra that in willing his own death Parritt, for the first time in his life, is a courageous man: "One should not want to act the doctor with incurables; thus teaches Zarathustra—thus you

<sup>41</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, op. cit., III, 72o.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

shall depart! But more courage is needed to make an end than to write a new verse: this all doctors and poets know" (VI, 229). Larry anxiously waits for Parritt's fall from the fire escape because he knows that only death can bring Parritt peace. When he finally hears the thud, he says to himself:

(in a whisper of horrified pity) Poor devil! (A long-forgotten faith returns to him for a moment and he mumbles) God rest his soul in peace. (He opens his eyes--with a bitter self-derision) Ah, the damned pity--the wrong kind, as Hickey said! Be God, there's no hope! I'll never be a success in the grandstand--or anywhere else! Life is too much for me! I'll be a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything till the day I die! (With an intense bitter sincerity) May that day come soon! (He pauses, surprised at himself--then with a sardonic grin) Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now.<sup>43</sup>

Larry is indeed the only convert to death--the death of his pipe dream. But by being a convert to the death of his pipe dream, he is simultaneously a convert to life. Larry is wrong when he says that "there's no hope." There is hope because Larry cares and will continue to care. He alone does not join the others in the celebration of the return of their pipe dreams. He has realized his failures and is strong enough to live with them. It is true that the first action he performed when he re-entered life led to death, but this death meant peace for a tortured fellow man. It also meant acceptance of life for Larry, a first step toward an affirmation of life.

Taken in isolation, The Iceman Cometh has pessimistic, even nihilistic, overtones. Even if we accept that Larry, at the end, has re-entered life, which most critics are not willing to do, this play is

<sup>43</sup>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, III, 726-727.

by no means a celebration of life. The first action of the new life is death. But The Iceman Cometh is not yet a tragedy in the Nietzschean sense. It almost completely lacks the metaphysical consolation which is merely hinted at in Larry's compassion, understanding, and love. The problem of this play, as to a lesser extent of Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, lies in the choice of characters. The Iceman Cometh has no tragic hero, or in Nietzschean terms--no mask of Dionysus. The characters recall Nietzsche's description of the satyr--the Greek chorus--the primitive beginning of tragedy. Larry Slade, although stronger than the others, is not essentially different from them. Therefore, his message to Parritt is that of Silenus, the leader of the satyrs: "The best for you is completely beyond reach--not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. The second-best for you, however, is--to die soon" (I,58). But the satyr is close to Dionysus or life; he serves, loves, and suffers with the deity. He is aware of the torment of life and accepts it because he knows the immeasurable joy of life. At the end of The Iceman Cometh, Larry Slade accepts life, but he does not yet know the joy of it and stops short of affirming, let alone celebrating, it.

In the next play, Long Day's Journey into Night (1940), O'Neill moves closer to an affirmation of life. In this play, the most clearly autobiographical play he ever wrote, Edmund comes to the realization that with understanding, compassion, and forgiveness life can be accepted and will be more bearable. The two things that stand in the way are pride and the wrong kind of pity, the pity Nietzsche condemns be-

cause it only leads to humiliation, shame, resentment, and revenge.

The wrong kind of pity is always the companion of pride. It makes the person who pities feel superior to the person being pitied. It is a selfish act, not a suffering with the other as genuine compassion is. It is not the feeling of Nora Melody, who suffers when others suffer and who only thinks of how to relieve the suffering of others, disregarding all consequences as far as she herself is concerned. The wrong kind of pity is Hickey's pity. His ideas of the "right" and the "wrong" kind of pity are true to Nietzsche's concept of pity. However, Hickey himself is not strong enough to carry these ideas into practice. His "right" kind of pity is a part of his new pipe dream--that he is free and can help others to become so. In reality, however, as Hickey himself comes to admit near the end of the play, he is anything but free. On the contrary, instead of being free from his guilt of having failed Evelyn, he has only increased the force of the stranglehold that this guilt has over him. Therefore, since his "right" kind of pity is not a part of his real self but a part of his illusory self, it, like his freedom, is merely an illusion, a variation of the "wrong" kind of pity. The purpose of Hickey's pity is to boost his ego. When he pities the inmates of Harry Hope's saloon, he feels good because he believes that he has mastered something they have not been able to overcome. To help them overcome their pipe dreams means to prove himself a success. It also means to join again the brotherhood of man which he has left for the loneliness of the messiah. Larry's compassion, on the other hand, means an awareness

of his own failure, means humiliation for himself not Parritt, means peace in death for Parritt but for Larry acceptance of life--the little joy and great agony of it.

The problem of the Tyrones is that they cannot forget. They cannot forget what happened. But above all, they cannot forget themselves and what they have done to each other. They prefer to see the faults in others rather than to look into themselves and "consider what others suffer" from them. Therefore, they torment each other even when they want to help each other. Like Dionysus, they have to suffer the pains of individuation. They are "caught in the net of the individual will," or in psycho-analytical terms, in the net of their individual life scripts. All four of the Tyrones have to live destructive script lives. Their scripts prevent them from reaching out, from giving of themselves what the other needs. The Tyrones, as it were, are living imprisoned in four separate worlds moving on a collision course, constantly colliding with each other.

James Tyrone, who as a young child was indoctrinated with an irrational fear of the poorhouse, throughout his life has put financial security above all else. For the sake of financial security, he has wasted his talents, has lost immense sums of money in unsound get-rich-quick investments, and has begrudged the money he had to spend for the welfare of the people he loves most. Although he has always loved his wife and cannot live without her, he has not been able to give her the attention she needed. Because of the demands of his profession and because of his inordinate fear of poverty, he has been forced to



leave the person he loved most to her own devices most of the time. The maddening truth which James Tyrone eventually has to realize is that, because he wanted to make sure that he and Mary would never have to experience anything close to the extreme poverty his mother had to endure, because he wanted assurance that they could live happily together and that his family would always have what they needed, he destroyed his two most cherished concerns--his acting talent and his wife. More tormenting still, however, is the knowledge that even now that he has reached the point where he can realize his weaknesses and failures, James Tyrone is unable to change. He desperately wants to show his love for his wife and give her the car she desires, but he feels compelled to buy it second-hand because it is a good bargain and then convinces himself that it is really better than a new one. He loves his son Edmund and is deeply concerned when he finds out that Edmund has tuberculosis but cannot get himself to call on a specialist when the cheap family doctor is available or to agree to send his son to an expensive sanatorium when an inexpensive state institution is at his disposal. Like Ezra Mannon, he sincerely loves the people close to him but is unable to communicate that love and thus, through his love, causes his and their destruction.

Mary Tyrone, having lived a very sheltered and religious life during her childhood and adolescent years, is not suited to be an actor's wife and unable to fend for herself. When she was a child, she had a mother who loved her, a father who adored her, and a faith in God that protected her from any evil. Subconsciously sensing this

innate need for protection, she convinced herself that she wanted to become a nun. However, instead she fell in love with James Tyrone, the handsome, fascinating, famous hero of the stage. This love made her happier than anything else in the world, even happier than her love for the Virgin Mary, to whom she had wanted to dedicate her life. But it is also this love that eventually destroys her. At the moment when she fell in love with James Tyrone, she lost her individuality; she felt at one with life and was willing to sacrifice everything she had, her own self, to this force that emanated from the person of James Tyrone. However, such joy could last only for a very short time. Soon she was ensnared in the realities of being a traveling actor's wife. Because she could not live without James, she had given up the security and protection of a permanent home. On the theatrical tours she was left to her own devices because of Tyrone's need to be present at constant rehearsals and performances and because of his need to relax from the strain of his profession in the male companionship and congeniality of the bar-room. Mary's middle-class conditioning and and subconscious aversion to all actors except James made it impossible for her to associate with the theater people, and the constant moving from place to place prevented the development of any kind of friendship with anyone else. Thus she was alone until her first son was born. Now she could transform her need for protection, security, companionship, and love into the need to give protection and love. As long as she could care for her son, she could forget herself. However, when the second son was born, the strain of traveling with an infant

and a small child became prohibitive. She decided to stay behind. Realizing, however, that neither she nor James could live apart from each other for long, she left the children well cared for to join her husband. But when shortly after her departure, the infant Eugene died of measles he had caught from his older brother, Mary's world started to fall apart. The guilt of having failed as a mother became so unbearable that she gradually transformed it into blame for her husband and son--for her husband because he had made her leave the children, for her son because he infected the new baby out of jealousy and thus deliberately caused his death.

James and Mary both realized that their marriage whose purpose it was to make the other happy had failed. Mary suffered because of her guilt and loneliness, and James suffered because of Mary's unhappiness and his inability to give her what she needed. Yet they loved each other. In a desperate attempt to restore their happiness, they decided to have another child in hopes that the new child would replace the dead Eugene and gradually make Mary forget her guilt feelings. But this attempt, desperate as it was, was doomed from the start. Mary wanted the child, yet she was afraid to bear it and bring it into the world. Instead of relieving her guilt feelings, she only added fear. This combination of guilt and fear in Mary, who had never been very strong physically, led to complications in the delivery of the child. To alleviate Mary's physical pains, the doctor prescribed morphine, the side effects of which were not known at that time. Edmund, conceived in the attempt to restore Mary's happiness, born under

the influence of guilt and fear, necessarily became special to both Mary and James Tyrone. He became, as Jamie charges, "Mama's baby, Papa's pet,"<sup>44</sup> which had to have a negative effect on the older Jamie. However, Edmund could neither alleviate the guilt for Eugene's death, nor could he eliminate the fear for his life on the part of his mother. But Mary gradually found out that the medicine she took to eliminate her physical pains also let her escape from her guilt, fear, and loneliness. Slowly she became addicted to the drug. When she finally realized the fact that she could not live without morphine, that now she had absolutely no control over herself, her problems were compounded. She wanted to get off the drug to be herself, and at the same time she wanted the forgetfulness and peace the morphine induced. When in spite of prayers and devotion there was no help, Mary lost the last link with her childhood world--her faith in God--and now needed the drug even more than ever. Again she felt guilty; she felt guilty for having been too weak to endure her pain, for having given in to the temptation of drug-induced forgetfulness and peace. Again this guilt became too much to bear. Again it was transformed into blame--blame for her husband because he had forced her to have another child although she was afraid to have one and did not want it, because he was not willing to spend money on a capable doctor when she needed one, blame for Edmund because his birth caused her morphine addiction.

Mary sees her tormented life as the punishment of God for having

<sup>44</sup>Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey into Night (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1956), p. 165.

broken her promise to become a nun. She blames her love for James Tyrone for all her suffering. Yet her love is the one thing that has remained inviolate throughout her tortured life. She still will not give it up; at the same time she cannot communicate it. An integral part of her love for James is the love she feels for her sons. Also this love is incommunicable. It cannot break the bounds of her "individual self will" to preserve her own world. As in the case of James Tyrone, it is her love that causes her and the others' suffering.

Jamie, like his parents, is imprisoned in the world of his individual nature or script. In early childhood he had his mother all to himself. He lived in a world of love and security. The only person who threatened this world was his father, at whose beck and call his mother would leave him. He felt extremely jealous of his father. When Mary transformed her guilt over Eugene's death into blame for her husband, this feeling, subconsciously communicated to the child, increased Jamie's natural jealousy. With the birth of Edmund, Jamie's problems were compounded. Because of the special attention paid to his younger brother, he felt neglected not only by his mother but also by his father, of whom he was jealous but whom he nevertheless loved. The jealousy of his baby brother was now added to the jealousy of his father. When it became apparent that Mary was addicted and incapable of caring for the children, Jamie, who was at school age, was sent away to school. This was another blow since now he not only felt neglected but actually rejected, particularly by his father, who made all the arrangements and the decision to send him to school. This re-

jection and Mary's blaming of James for her addiction transformed Jamie's already acute jealousy into active hatred for his father, a hatred he expressed through rebellion against all his father's values. Since his father believed in decency, Jamie exhibited an indecent and immoral behavior by turning to alcohol and whores. Since his father believed in hard work and the security of money, Jamie became a loafer who scorned financial security. Since his father believed in God and served Him in his fashion, Jamie denied Him. However, all this rebellion was a cry for love. Jamie, like Mary and James, needed love and wanted to give his love but could not communicate his needs and desires. The only one who was responsive to his needs was Edmund, whom he loved because Edmund fulfilled his need to give and receive love and because his younger brother could be used in his revenge against his parents. Jamie also hated Edmund because he blamed his younger brother, "Mama's baby, Papa's pet," for having robbed him of his parents' love, particularly that of his mother. Jamie himself is aware of his dual feelings for his brother:

I've been rotten bad influence. . . . Did it on purpose to make a bum of you. Or part of me did. A big part. That part that's been dead so long. That hates life. My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at times, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. . . . Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet! . . . But don't get the wrong idea, Kid. I love you more than I hate you. My saying what I'm telling you now proves it. I run the risk you'll hate me--and you're all I've got left. . . . I hate myself. Got to take revenge. On everyone else. Especially you. . . . The dead part of me hopes you won't get well. Maybe he's even glad the game has got Mama again! He wants company, doesn't want to be the only corpse around the house!<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

, When Edmund Tyrone was born into the Tyrone family, he like Oedipus, was doomed; he did not even have a chance. He never knew his mother's pure love, yet he always longed for it. Under his mother's and particularly his brother's influence, he learned to hate his father before he actually came to know him; still, he loved his father in his peculiar Tyrone fashion. Very early in his life he was drawn into his brother's rebellion. He joined Jamie and his mother in blaming James Tyrone for all the family problems. Yet there is something in him that makes him greater than all the rest. Although he genuinely loved his brother, he seems to have realized that dissipation was not a solution to the problems. Although he could not believe in his father's God, he somehow felt that there must be a force that gives meaning to life, that makes all the torment and suffering worth it. He started to look for this force without knowing what it was or where to find it. He left his family for a time to be completely on his own, to find his identity and sense of belonging. He looked for it in books, in traveling the seas, in his own creations when he was writing for the newspaper. He knows that there must be some force that is the cause of all existing joy and pain. Edmund knows because he has had moments of forgetting himself, moments that describe the state of ecstatic harmony with nature that O'Neill had tried to picture in the last plays of his early period:

I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself--actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within

peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself! To God, if you want to put it that way.<sup>46</sup>

These moments are all connected with the sea, which already in the early plays like Anna Christie has a cleansing power, a power that also Nietzsche admires in the sea: "Truly, man is a dirty stream. One will have to be a sea if one wants to welcome a dirty stream without becoming unclean" (VI, 9). But the Tyrones are not seas; even Edmund is not a sea. He has merely had connections with the sea and is therefore more aware of and sensitive to the problems of life.

Edmund, like Oedipus, is doomed to suffer the pains of individuation. He cannot remain in his ecstatic state, as Lazarus could; he has to become Edmund Tyrone again. He again has to suffer and unknowingly and unintentionally inflict suffering on others. However, he is more sensitive, more willing to excuse than to blame the shortcomings of the other than anyone else in the family, and therefore he can listen to the confessions of his father and brother and thus give them a moment of peace. He understands them better after the confessions, and this understanding is the most hopeful sign in the play.

Maybe Edmund, now that he has become aware of the human need for compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and genuine selfless love, can change, can overcome himself after this "long day's journey into night." There will be another morning; maybe the fog will be lifted.

<sup>46</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., p. 153.



At least this is what O'Neill seems to be saying with his dedication to Carlotta on their twelfth wedding anniversary:

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

These twelve years, Beloved One, have been a Journey into Light--into love. You know my gratitude. And my love!<sup>47</sup>

Even in this dedication O'Neill seems to echo Nietzsche's Zarathustra in two important respects. This play, his masterpiece, he has "written in blood and tears." This is the attitude Zarathustra loves: "Of all that is written I only love That which man writes in his own blood. Write in blood: and then you will find out that blood is spirit!" (VI, 41). O'Neill, in writing the play, has forgiven "all the four haunted" O'Neills, his family including himself. In doing so, he again seems to have followed Zarathustra, who says, "And if your friend does you an injury, speak thus: 'I forgive you for what you did to me; but that you did it to yourself--how can I forgive that!' Thus speaks all great love: it overcomes even forgiveness and pity" (VI, 95).

The Tyrones are caught in their own pride. They need love but cannot give without expecting something in return. They are desperate for each other's affections but, like Ezra Mannon, cannot reach out. They hurt each other although they love and forget neither the hurt nor the love. They cannot forget because they cannot forgive them-

<sup>47</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., p. 7.

selves. They try to forgive each other, but the inability to forgive themselves makes them aware of their failings, and their failures stand in the way of selfless love. All they can do is cry out desperately as Mary does, "James! We've loved each other! We always will! Let's remember only that, and not try to understand what we cannot understand, or help things that cannot be helped--the things life has done to us we cannot excuse or explain."<sup>48</sup> The things life has done to them are the things they have done to each other. Because they cannot excuse or explain them, they escape--into alcohol and morphine. But even these escapes are not successful. Even in drunkenness and morphine dreams they are not at peace but seek forgiveness. It is in a state of drunkenness that Edmund tells his father about the brief moments of ecstasy. It is in a state of drunkenness that James Tyrone confesses his failure to Edmund: "That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success in--a great money success--it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune."<sup>49</sup> It is also in a state of drunkenness that Jamie confesses to Edmund that he really hates his brother: "Want to warn you--against me. Mama and Papa are right. I've been rotten bad influence. And worst of it, I did it on purpose."<sup>50</sup> And it is in her dope dream that Mary confesses that it was her neglect of God and the Virgin Mary that had caused her failure as a mother and wife.

<sup>48</sup> Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

Mary Tyrone is not strong enough to be a Nora Melody. Both women feel guilty about their relationship with God, but Nora can forget herself and her guilt in her love for her husband and daughter. Mary, on the other hand, is constantly haunted by her feeling of guilt. This guilt proves to be stronger than her love for husband and sons. What makes the situation worse for her than for Nora is that Nora, although she feels guilty, believes, while Mary has lost all belief and with it her soul. If she could only find her faith again, then she would be able to give herself in love without question. Then she would no longer need the escape that morphine provides, as O'Neill's mother proved at the end of her life.

In Mary's problem the fusion of Thomas à Kempis and Nietzsche becomes clearer than it was in A Touch of the Poet. O'Neill clearly implies that a strong faith in God's love will lead to the overcoming of self in the common man, and the overcoming of self will lead to compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and love without which the all-too-human man is condemned to live in hell. This implication is not only clear in Mary's situation, but it becomes very apparent in the end of the play. At the conclusion of Long Day's Journey into Night, the other three Tyrones for the first time completely forget themselves. When Mary confesses her failure and longings, they look at her, suffer with her, and come to an understanding of her need. At that moment they do not need to escape from themselves and can forget their drinks. At this time they do not turn away from Mary although she is under the influence of morphine, as they have done

all through the play. Now they feel only love for a suffering fellow human being.

The last scene is described in terms that remind us of worship. It is as if Jamie, James, and Edmund experience the vision Mary describes--the vision of the Blessed Virgin blessing her. Mary Tyrone is described in terms that are characteristic of statues of the Virgin Mary. "She wears a sky-blue dressing gown over her nightdress, dainty slippers with pompons on her bare feet. Her face is paler than ever. Her eyes look enormous. They glisten like polished black jewels."<sup>51</sup> At the same time her description recalls Bernadette Soubirou, the young girl who had a vision of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes, who devoted her life to the service of God, and who expressed it in selfless love for others. "The uncanny thing is that her face now appears so youthful. Experience seems ironed out of it. It is a marble mask of girlish innocence, the mouth caught in a shy smile. Her white hair is braided in two pigtails which hang over her breast."<sup>52</sup> If Mary could find what she is looking for--her soul, her faith in God and His Mother--she would be able to overcome herself and her guilt; she would be able to give herself completely in selfless love and make life bearable and meaningful for the others because their ability to overcome themselves and their failures depends on Mary's well-being.

Long Day's Journey into Night is Edmund's "dark night of the soul." The promise of the saints--who have gone through their "dark

<sup>51</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

night of the soul"--that there will be a glorious awakening is the metaphysical consolation which saves the play from expressing a totally pessimistic view of life. If we do not see this metaphysical consolation, we might sum up the play with Maurice M. LaBelle:

The malignant nature of life is shown when Edmund contracts consumption. The fear for her son's health triggers the mother's memory of her father's death by this dreaded disease. Becoming despondent, she seeks solace in morphine. In response, the rest of the family takes to bonded bourbon, which is the catalyst for them to confess the force of the past upon the formation of their lives. Like Lavinia and Larry, they find that there is no escape from yesterday.<sup>53</sup>

However, at least Edmund has become aware and understands the family "curse." He has heard the confessions of his father, brother, and mother and now understands why they act the way they act, why they cannot change their ways, and why they cannot communicate more effectively the love that they do feel for each other and for him. Unlike Lavinia and like Larry, but to a much greater extent, Edmund realizes that life does not have to be a mere waiting for death but that it can be made bearable and even meaningful through understanding, compassion, and love.

The problem in this play, as in all of the late plays, lies in the characterizations. O'Neill does not have any true tragic heroes. In A Touch of the Poet Cornelius Melody is not great enough. His fall, although traumatic for him, is not a real fall. He is the same poor Irish immigrant innkeeper at the beginning that he is at the end. The only change is a change in perception of himself. In The Iceman

<sup>53</sup>LaBelle, op. cit., p. 442.

Cometh the tragic hero is not truly defined and does not really exist. In Long Day's Journey into Night we find the same problem. There are four main characters, and none of them is visibly more heroic than the other. Edmund merely approaches the quality of the tragic hero. He seems to stand out a little more than the others because he is the autobiographical character with "a touch of the poet." He hears the confessions of the others and through them understands his family and himself. He is the only one sensitive and strong enough to look at the reality of life and accept it. He reacts compassionately, even gratefully, to his father's confession, and he hears Jamie's terrible confession, but, although he is shocked and horrified, he does not turn against his brother. He does his utmost to keep as much peace as possible by preventing the worlds of the others from colliding again.

The problem of O'Neill is the same as the problem Nietzsche saw in the development of Greek drama--a development that moved toward the death of tragedy:

. . . We see the force of the un-Dionysian spirit, directed against myth, in action when we look at the increasing and dominating importance of characterization and the psychological refinement in tragedy, beginning with Sophocles. The character is not to be enlarged to the eternal type; on the contrary, he is to appear so real an individual through artificial overtones and nuances and distinctness of all lines that the audience does not feel any longer the myth but the powerful faithfulness to nature and force of imitation of the artist. Also here we see the victory of the appearance over the general and the joy in the individual, as it were, anatomical specimen; we already breathe the air of the theoretical world to which the scientific truth is more important than the artistic reflection of a world rule. The movement in the area of characterization accelerates fast: while Sophocles still paints whole characters and subjects the myth to their skillful revelation, Euripides paints only large

individual character traits which are expressed in violent passions; in the newer Attic comedy there remain only masks with one expression. . . . (I, 143-144)

O'Neill seems to have moved in the opposite direction, from "the newer Attic comedy" with its masks of his earlier plays toward the tragedies of Sophocles. Although he never quite reached the point of Sophoclean tragedy, O'Neill came nearer to it in his last plays than at any other time during his play-writing career. Nietzsche saw the death of tragedy in the disappearance of the metaphysical consolation and its replacement by the deus ex machina. In Long Day's Journey into Night the metaphysical consolation is present in the implications of the religious symbolism, but the tragic hero--if we can call Edmund that--is not destroyed. The play ends at the climax--Edmund's complete understanding of himself and his family--in a moment of stasis. With Long Day's Journey into Night O'Neill shows himself as the Socratic artist who is "fascinated by the Socratic joy in recognition and the illusion to be able to heal the eternal wound of life through awareness" (I, 146).

In Hughie (1941), taken in isolation, O'Neill seems to make a step backward to The Iceman Cometh. However, being the play that follows in order of composition Long Day's Journey into Night, this one-act play is much more than another play on the necessity of illusions. Taken as a part of the continuing struggle that is expressed by O'Neill's plays, it is an answer to the problems presented in Long Day's Journey into Night--an answer that in the long play was merely implied.

In this short play O'Neill again states that the ordinary man cannot live without his illusions. Here the illusions are not shattered by Hickey, the messiah of death, but death itself--the death of Hughie. Through Hughie's death Erie Smith has become aware of the reality of his pitiful existence, an existence he can endure only in a state of drunken stupor. As in The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill emphasizes the need for understanding, forgiveness, and companionship. In the words of Henry Hewes, O'Neill "had come to believe that the interdependence of human beings, even when it is selfishly motivated, contains a divine element of love."<sup>54</sup> The two characters in the play find this love by their ability to overcome themselves, and again their self-overcoming results in compassion, forgiveness, understanding, and love, as well as the reconstruction of the pipe dream. Erie is another failure in life but wants to believe that he is a successful gambler. The death of Hughie, the night clerk of a third-rate hotel in which Erie stays periodically, has unnerved him and made him think about his life and realize his failures. Hughie, toward whom he had felt genuine affection, provided him with the sympathetic audience that the down-and-outers found in Harry Hope's saloon. Hughie accepted Erie as he was, played along with him, and let him keep his pipe dream because Erie helped to while away the dreary hours behind the desk in the hotel, patiently listened to the clerk's stories of domestic squabbles with his family, and gave him something new to think and

<sup>54</sup>Henry Hewes, "Hughie," Saturday Review (October 4, 1958), rpt. in Cargill, op. cit., p. 226.



dream about--success at the races. When Hughie died, there was no one left to listen to and believe in Erie's pipe dream. As a sign of his genuine affection Erie sent a floral arrangement to Hughie's funeral--a gesture of truly selfless love:

Listen, Pal, maybe you guess I was kiddin' about that flower piece for Hughie costing a hundred bucks? Well, I ain't! I didn't give a damn what it cost. It was up to me to give Hughie a big-time send-off, because I knew nobody else would. . . . But I don't win that hundred bucks. I don't win a bet since Hughie was took to the hospital. I had to get down on my knees and beg every guy I know for a sawbuck here and a sawbuck there until I raised it.<sup>55</sup>

Erie is lonely and depressed. He feels sorry for himself and desperately reaches out for some meaningful companionship. He makes his confession to the new night clerk. He talks to him because there is something in the clerk's face that reminds him of Hughie. However, there is no communication between them. Erie is too concerned with feeling sorry for himself, and the night clerk listens to the noises outside indicating the passing of time. The latter starts responding voluntarily only after Erie has told him of his selfless gift of love which he did not make because he expected something in return, but because even in death he wanted to make sure that Hughie kept the one thing that made him happy--his pipe dream--being a horse player and Erie's pal. At first the responses are tentative; they are made out of a sense of duty toward a customer. But gradually they turn into a plea for help. The night clerk, like Erie, is desperate for a pipe dream. His pipe dream is to be a successful gambler like Arnold Roth-

<sup>55</sup>Eugene O'Neill, Hughie (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 33-34.

stein. When Erie has almost given up in his attempt to reach out for love, he hears the cry for help, and "suddenly his face lights up with a saving revelation."<sup>56</sup> He encourages and actually brings to life the night clerk's pipe dream, and by doing so revives his and regains the self-confidence he had lost with Hughie's death. It is Erie's compassion for and understanding of the night clerk that makes him give of himself; it is the ability to forgive the night clerk's slights and inattention that makes Erie capable of understanding and compassion; and it is the narrative of Erie's one success in life—his selfless love for Hughie—that initiates the chain reaction of understanding, compassion, forgiveness, and love. At the end of the play, there is the promise that in spite of their failures Erie and the new night clerk will be able to live happier and less lonely lives because they now have found each other and can willingly give each other what they need—encouragement in and preservation of their pipe dreams. In psycho-analytical terms, they are willing partners in their favorite game.

Erie and the night clerk, like the Tyrones, live script lives. They are too weak to accept the reality of life, but unlike the Tyrones, they are not engaged on a collision course; their worlds are complementary. In this respect Hughie seems to look back to The Iceman Cometh; with its emphasis on mere human love and its effect, however, it also is a clear expression of the implications in Long Day's Journey into Night. Edmund has heard the cries of desperation in the con-

<sup>56</sup>Hughie, op. cit., p. 35.

fessions of his father, brother, and mother; Erie Smith and the night clerk show what can be done to calm such despair.

With A Moon for the Misbegotten (1942) O'Neill has written the coda to his life's work. On the surface he seems to be writing about his brother Jamie, but James Tyrone, Jr. is not only James O'Neill, Jr.; he is also Eugene O'Neill, whom Jamie described in Long Day's Journey into Night in the following way: "Hell, you're more than my brother. I made you! You're my Frankenstein!"<sup>57</sup> While in Long Day's Journey into Night O'Neill wrote about his forgiveness for what his family had done to him, in A Moon for the Misbegotten he expresses his belief that he has been forgiven for what he has done to them. With the knowledge of having been forgiven, his life's work is completed. Like James Tyrone, Jr., he can now leave to die in peace.

With A Moon for the Misbegotten O'Neill returns to and clarifies the fusion of Thomas à Kempis and Nietzsche, begun in The Great God Brown, taken up again in A Touch of the Poet, and elaborated in Long Day's Journey into Night. The characters in this play, as in almost all of the last plays, are all-too-human people described in terms that make them more animals than men. Josie Hogan

is so oversize for a woman that she is almost a freak--five feet in her stockings and weighs around one hundred and eighty. Her sloping shoulders are broad, her chest deep with large firm breasts, her waist wide but slender by contrast with her hips and thighs. She has long smooth arms, immensely strong. . . . The map of Ireland is stamped on her face, with its long upper lip and small nose, thick black eyebrows, black hair as coarse as a horse's mane, freckled, sunburned fair skin, high cheekbones and heavy jaws. . . .

<sup>57</sup>Long Day's Journey into Night, op. cit., p. 164.

Her feet are bare, the soles earth-stained and tough as leather.<sup>58</sup>

Her father is even uglier, if that is possible, and more animal-like.

He has a thick neck, lumpy, sloping shoulders, a barrel-like trunk, stumpy legs, and big feet. His arms are short and muscular, with large hairy hands. His head is round with thinning sandy hair. His face is fat with a snub nose, long upper lip, big mouth, and little blue eyes with bleached lashes and eyebrows that remind one of a white pig's.<sup>59</sup>

Their language fits their almost subhuman physical appearance. They call each other "slut," "cow," "hornet," "buck goat," and other such names. Both depend on their pipe dreams for their happiness--Josie on her pretense of being a whore and being able to have any man she wants and her father on his belief that he is able to trick anybody into giving him whatever he wants. Both know that the pipe dreams are not the truth, but, like the down-and-outers in The Iceman Cometh, they do nothing to make the other realize the truth about him- or herself. Jim Tyrone, the third main character, is a dead man when he first appears. He is taken over from Long Day's Journey into Night. He is even more cynical than he was in the previous play. He knows that he is a failure and has no pipe dream left that could give any meaning to his life. He continues to escape from his life through alcohol and whores, but even drunken stupor does not any longer release him from the loathing he feels for himself. He not only despises himself and his failures but feels guilty about his behavior after his mother's death. He might have been strong enough to bear all his oth-

<sup>58</sup>Eugene O'Neill, A Moon for the Misbegotten (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 3.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

er failures, as he proved during the interval between his father's death and that of his mother, when he was completely off alcohol, but he cannot forgive himself for having failed his mother at the moment of her death and for having shown disrespect to her purity and memory when he accompanied the body on the train across the country, drinking and whoring..

In spite of these characterizations there is something glorious and admirable particularly in Josie. Despite her language and all her protestations to the contrary, she is pure, innocent, and a virgin, not necessarily because that is the way she wants it but rather because she is so ugly that nobody cares for her. She is another Cybel--prostitute and Earth Mother--an even stronger Nora Melody. Like Cybel, she is the personification of life--rough but tender and loving, beauty and stability under an appearance of ugliness and a pretense of fickleness. She is the one character in all of O'Neill's plays who has true mythical dimensions; she is the Earth Mother, the life force, Nina Leeds's God the Mother that will endure everything and through her endurance, her pain and joy, make life meaningful for man. She is an almost literal representation of Nietzsche's satyr, the "compassionate companion in whom the suffering of God is repeated, . . . the prophet of wisdom from the deepest bosom of nature, . . . the symbol of sexual omnipotence of nature."

Josie loves Jim and would not mind marrying him. She knows that the only way to get him to be her husband is to follow her father's scheme and take Jim to bed with her when he is too drunk to resist.

Jim loves Josie because he knows what she really is. He knows that she alone can give him the love he needs and tells her the truth as he sees it when he says, "You're real and healthy and clean and fine and warm and strong and kind---. . . And I love you a lot--in my fashion."<sup>60</sup> Jamie's love is a pure love. Although he is attracted physically to Josie and responds to her kisses with passion, he does not want to consummate the physical act of love because for him that is impure and poisons love. Josie, on the other hand, following her natural instincts, passionately desires Jim. But when she sees his desperate need for a different kind of love, a pure, virginal, maternal love and feels the torture he suffers, she can forget herself and her longings and give unselfishly and joyously the kind of love Jim desires--a love untainted by the animal nature of man. And she asks Jim to forgive her for her selfishness that almost drove him away:

Forgive my selfishness, thinking only of myself. Sure, if there's one thing I owe you tonight, after all my lying and scheming, it's to give you the love you need, and it'll be my pride and joy-- (Forcing a trembling echo of her playful tone) It's easy enough, too, for I have all kinds of love for you--and maybe this is the greatest of all--because it costs so much.<sup>61</sup>

To the selfless Josie Jim Tyrone can confess his terrible guilt, and he can ask her for forgiveness. Josie, after a moment of horror, can assure him of forgiveness and love and give him peace: "I understand now, Jim, darling, and I'm proud you came to me as the one in the world

<sup>60</sup> ▲ Moon for the Misbegotten, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

you know loves you enough to understand and forgive--and I do forgive!"<sup>62</sup>

Jim finally is at peace. He has not come back to life, but he is at peace. He lies in Josie's lap in a position reminiscent of the Pietà and sleeps, free of nightmares and guilt. Josie is waiting for the dawn to wake Jim. It is in this scene that the fusion of Thomas à Kempis and Nietzsche is complete. Josie in the position of the Pietà is sitting, holding Jim in her arms, his head against her breast. His face "looks pale and haggard in the moonlight. Calm with the drained, exhausted peace of death."<sup>63</sup> They remain in this position of the Pietà--symbol of suffering, selfless love, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice. When the sun rises and the eastern sky is glowing in color--symbol of release and complete self-overcoming of Zarathustra--Josie wakes Jim, who feels "sort of at peace with myself and this lousy life--as if all my sins had been forgiven--"<sup>64</sup> Jim goes away a dead man, and Josie's love is still with him. But she understands that their love will never be consummated, that she will never see Jim again. All she can do now is wish that he may die in peace: "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim, darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace."<sup>65</sup>

Although these are the last lines of the play, the end of A Moon for the Misbegotten is not resignation, pessimism, or nihilism, as

<sup>62</sup> A Moon for the Misbegotten, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

most critics have charged, but an affirmation of life, for Josie Hogan lives on, and her selfless love, her ability to put another's need before her desires, gives meaning to life and represents hope for man. The individual, James Tyrone, like Oedipus at Colonus, is waiting for death. Like Oedipus, he goes to his death in a state of peace. He has sinned and suffered. Like Oedipus, he sinned in ignorance and suffered in anguish and rage, and, like the Greek exile, he goes to his death, reconciled with the gods of fate. Through James Tyrone's death comes redemption from the suffering caused by individuation. Life itself, however, represented by Josie, is as strong and as powerful as it was in the beginning of the play.



## CHAPTER V

### SILENCE AND ISOLATION

It merely returns; it finally comes home--  
my own self and that part of it which has  
long been in foreign parts, dispersed among  
things and accidents.

One more thing I know: now I stand before  
my last summit and before that which has  
been spared me for the longest time. Ah,  
I must climb my hardest path! Ah, I began  
my most lonely journey!

#### Thus Spake Zarathustra

A Moon for the Misbegotten is the last play O'Neill ever wrote. Illness, brought on by reckless living in his younger years, struck and completely incapacitated him for the last ten years of his life. However, the nature of the plays of this last phase in O'Neill's career raises the question of whether it was illness alone that stopped the playwright's creativity. His pledge not to write unless he could step a rung higher may have prevented further creative attempts and may have finally forced O'Neill to destroy the Cycle material even though several plays had been practically completed. As More Stately Mansions clearly indicates, the Cycle was a step backward to the resignation of Strange Interlude and the pessimism and nihilism of Mourning Becomes Electra. With the last plays O'Neill came closer to the spirit of Greek tragedy, which he admired, than he had done with

Mourning Becomes Electra, the play in which he consciously attempted to recreate the feeling Greek tragedy conveys. It seems to have been impossible to come any closer to Greek tragedy since, according to Nietzsche, O'Neill's master and teacher to the end, tragedy originated in and was based on myth. Such a myth O'Neill did not have. The Greek mythology had long been dead, and the Christian mythology survived only in the petrified form of Church institutions. A longing for a living Christian mythology is apparent in the last plays in the symbolism of the scenes and in the redemptive quality of the confessions—even though in a religious sense they are not confessions at all. But in a world ravaged by World War II, it seems to have been impossible for O'Neill to reject Zarathustra's "God is dead." At a time when the ideas of the philosopher who said yes to life and who preached self-overcoming and striving for the overman were being used and distorted in order to make them fit all-too-human, even barbaric and subhuman aspirations, it must not have been easy to keep up a belief in mere human decency, honor, and love. Therefore, physical illness may have been a welcome excuse to remain silent.

After A Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, O'Neill had come to terms with his family and himself. Through these two plays he was able to forgive those who hurt him unintentionally and, above all, himself. With Nietzsche he had come to the realization that man has not progressed very far on his way across the abyss between the ape and the overman, that the life of the all-too-human man is brutal and animalistic. But with Thomas à Kempis he found that

understanding, forgiveness, compassion, and selfless love--charity-- give man a truly human dignity.

With A Moon for the Misbegotten O'Neill said his farewell to the theater and the world. O'Neill went into death with James Tyrone, Jr. in his fifty-fifth year. His age at the time when he stopped writing presents another of the many interesting, perhaps coincidental, parallels with Nietzsche's life. The German philosopher died in his fifty-fifth year, ten years after he had been struck by insanity. According to transactional psychology, a script life often has a pre-ordained end. Frequently it is limited to the age of the script model. If it does exceed the life-span of the model, it rarely goes beyond that of the parent of the opposite sex.<sup>1</sup> O'Neill's mother, like O'Neill himself, died at the approximate age of sixty-five. Another, perhaps coincidental, parallel in the lives of O'Neill, who started writing plays in 1913, and Nietzsche is that both men were active in their careers for thirty years and after that time collapsed physically or mentally. Nietzsche spent the last ten years of his physical life in insanity with periodical moments of lucidity during which he continued his work on Ecce Homo. O'Neill spent the ten years between his spiritual death at fifty-five and his physical death at sixty-five in seclusion from which he emerged from time to time and plunged into activity, supervising the production of The Iceman Cometh and the casting of A Moon for the Misbegotten.

<sup>1</sup>Eric Berne, What Do You Say after You Say Hello?--The Psychology of Human Destiny (New York: Bantam, 1973), pp. 188-189.

From his youth O'Neill was caught up in the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. His plays show a gradual understanding of the philosopher's thought, a rejection of some ideas, and a modification of Nietzschean concepts, culminating in the formation of a new, individual philosophy of life. The two books that were essential in O'Neill's becoming a great playwright were The Birth of Tragedy and Thus Spake Zarathustra. They provided the intellectual framework of the plays and through a long period of experimentation with techniques helped O'Neill find a dramatically effective structure in the last plays. However, it must be emphasized that O'Neill's greatest interest lay in the ideas of Thus Spake Zarathustra and The Birth of Tragedy. Although a more complete understanding of The Birth of Tragedy aided in the writing of effectively structured plays, this book does not seem to have provided O'Neill with a dramatic theory. However, it did help him create living characters and focus the action of his plays. An understanding of such terms as "Dionysian," "Apollonian," "the mask of Dionysus" made the use of such theatrical devices as masks, mask-like appearances, asides, split characters, and transfer of personalities unnecessary and allowed O'Neill to express the humanity of his characters and to concentrate on their fate. In the last plays O'Neill's characters have become human beings; they are no longer symbols or types. And the plays of the last phase will make O'Neill remain an important playwright instead of merely an important figure in the history of the American drama.

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

March 17 1974  
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