

EUGENE O'NEILL AND MODERN DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE

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Thesis for M.A. Degree in English

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

- B.H.Clark: Eugene O'Neill: The Man and his Plays. Clark.
London. (Revised ed. 1933.)
- New York Evening Post. N.Y.E.P.
- New York Herald Tribune. N.Y.H.T.
- New York Times. N.Y.T.
- A.H.Quinn: History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present day. Vol.II.London Quinn.
(1937).
- R.D.Skinner: Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest. Skinner.
New York. (1935)
- C.Stratton: Theatron (New York, 1928) p. 186 Stratton.
- Theatre Arts Magazine. New York and London. T.A.M.

TRANSLATIONS.

Titles of French and German plays are quoted in the original, of other foreign plays in the standard English translation.

EDITIONS.

All the plays of O'Neill up to 1934 are accessible in England with the exception of those contained in the volume Thirst and other One-Act Plays (Richard D.Badger, Boston 1914). These are not available at British Museum, Bodleian, Cambridge University Library, American Embassy Library or British Drama League Library.

The Iceman Cometh has not yet been published in England. I have been able to refer to a copy by the courtesy of the American Embassy Library.

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SECTION 1 (a)

Technique. Its Significance and Function.

If jesting Pilate had asked 'What is technique?' instead of 'What is truth?', he might with equal reason have refrained from staying for an answer. For technique, like truth, is many things to many men. To Professor Baker of Harvard it is the dramatist's 'ways, methods and devices for getting his desired ends':⁽¹⁾ to the critic, Georges Polti it is a manipulation of the thirty six dramatic situations:⁽²⁾ to Shaw it is 'the power of conjuring up imaginary people in imaginary places, and finding pretexts for imaginary scenes between them.'⁽³⁾

One man will affirm, as St. John Ervine does throughout How to Write a Play (1928), that the essence of technique is indefinable: another, such as J.H. Lawson, will insist with equal conviction that it can be defined to the last syllable.⁽⁴⁾

It seems easier, then, to begin with what it is not. Certainly it is not what a common criticism often implies it is - the criticism that a dramatist concentrates over much on 'technique'. For technique in that context should be

(1) Dramatic Technique (Boston and New York 1919) p.1.

(2) Les 36 Situations Dramatiques. Edition du Mercure de France, 1895.

(3) Preface to Widowers' Houses (1898)

(4) John Howard Lawson. Theory and Technique of Playwriting (New York 1936)

substituted 'methods and devices'. One must distinguish, as Armand Salacrou does, ⁽¹⁾ between 'maîtrise technique' and 'métier'. The one embraces many functions, the other is generally only a subsidiary function, in which 'C'est le public qui parle tout'. ⁽²⁾

That it is sometimes difficult to make the distinction where drama is concerned, is because of the theatrical foundation on which dramatic art rests. The most austere minded of dramatists, if he is to succeed, must enter into a liaison with that 'noisy, flashy and insolent mistress', as Chekhov called the theatre.

In literature other than dramatic the critical emphasis rests on the harmony between content and form, without relation of the form itself to other criteria. The novelist, for example, is allowed to set up his own standards. We do not condemn Hardy because he fails to conform to the standards of Proust, nor Proust because he does not produce the same effect as Dreiser. There can be no basic norm in novel writing technique because there is a direct transference of content to form.

But in dramatic technique the transference is indirect. The dramatist must face the fact that between theme and the theoretical form in which he envisages it, interposes the theatrical medium, which has a life of its own. It is his

(1) Salacrou. Théâtre II (Paris 1943) 'Note sur le Théâtre' pp. 230-1.

(2) Ibid.

business to take into account the interpretation which actor, scenic artist, electrician and producer may render. He will fail if he does not give them enough to do, or if he expects them to do too much. He must also remember the nature of his public, so different from the reading public. If his approach to his audience is indirect, the effects he creates are, paradoxically, more direct than the effect produced by a work read. In his preface to The Time of Your Life (1939), William Saroyan pointed out that 'a play is not fully created in itself, as a play. It is not an affair finally between--- the writer and the reader. It becomes fully created only through the deliberate cultivated functioning of a considerable number of people...'⁽¹⁾

There must be, then, for the dramatist, some basic form which is determined by physical factors of limitation. To a certain extent the length, the shape and the compression of a play are predetermined by the fact that it is to be played on a stage.

Chekhov, who wrote well in both short story and play form, was aware of the different technique required in both cases. 'In order to write a good play', he said, 'one must have a special talent (one may be an excellent novelist and

(1) Henry James, in 1845, described the 'theatrical public' of London as 'yelling barbarians' when they were presented with something that was not 'perfectly the same as everything else they had ever seen'. Letters of Henry James (London 1920) Vol. I, p. 241.

at the same time write plays like a cobbler).'⁽¹⁾ We do in fact find an 'excellent novelist', Henry James, complaining that 'the whole odiousness of the thing lies in the connection between the drama and the theatre; the one is admirable in its interest and difficulty, the other loathsome in its conditions.'⁽²⁾

James did perceive, however, that drama was an 'exquisite exercise' in its 'all but unconquerable form'. Dramatists who evade the discipline of conditioning plays to the requirements of the theatre forfeit the power which such discipline involves. To take into consideration the 'vulgar populace' who form the audience is not necessarily to be vulgar.⁽³⁾

The dramatist must, of course, regulate his course between the Scylla of closet drama and the Charybdis of mere theatricality. If he has a strong sense for the dramatic moment, the telling curtain, he may be persuaded by the enthusiasm with which most audiences greet such effects into concentrating on them for their own sake. The dramatist has the same sort of power as the orator, and it may go to his head in much the same way.

(1) Life and Letters of Anton Chekhov Ed.S.S.Koteliansky. (London 1925) p.146.
 (2) Letter to William James. 1893. op.cit. p.216.
 (3) Sheridan in the preface to The Rivals (1775) said, 'the scope and immediate object of a play is to please a mixed assembly in representation (whose judgement in the theatre at least is decisive).

Since his medium is so specialised, the dramatist is limited more than other writers in selecting theme. In fact, selection of theme is the first function of dramatic technique. The second is the relation of theme to a potentially suitable form, and the third, the conditioning of that form to the requirements of the theatre.

We will consider these functions in order. W.B. Yeats, writing on dramatic content, said, 'Drama is a means of expression, not a special subject matter, and the dramatist is as free to choose where he has a mind to as the poet of Endymion.'⁽¹⁾ But in practice it will be found that it is not so.

Certain themes, in particular those involving Brunetière's 'Law of conflict', are more obviously adapted to the theatrical medium than others. To hold the concentrated attention of a 'mixed assembly' necessitates in drama a stronger element of 'suspense' than in more leisurely forms. And an exciting conflict whether it be constructed round clash of character, as in Hedda Gabler, or round the 'peripeteia and anagnorisis' of Oedipus Tyrannus or merely round the melodramatic misunderstandings of The Silver King has the best chance of inspiring interest in an audience. Drama of inaction, such as Maeterlinck's, may inspire equal interest when it is

(1) Discoveries, p.91. in The Cutting of an Agate
(London 1919)

treated in such a way that the audience feels that equal suspense is involved. Maeterlinck is a master at evoking that intangible feeling of 'something about to happen': so is Chekhov.

Some themes, on the other hand, do not contain the requisite element of suspense, and it then requires a very great dramatist to give them dramatic expression.⁽¹⁾ It is difficult, for example, to give dramatic expression to a theme dealing with a state of religious beatitude, for in such a theme, reiteration, not development, is involved.

Or it may be that some themes are too vast for compression into the brief space that dramatic form affords. The dramatist attempting to portray a state of chaos, for example, or a comprehensive picture of social life, in the manner of Balzac, will be hampered by the fact that drama requires brevity, clarity and order. The same stricture applies to the leisurely portrayal of character which the novel may effect. Proust and Virginia Woolf may give a more complete and detailed picture of the mind in its day by day progress than the dramatist can do. He must, by selecting high lights, present a less complete but more dramatic portrait.

In relating theme to form the dramatist may think in similar terms as the novelist up to a point. He may first

(1) For a comprehensive discussion of this subject see U.Ellis-Fermor's The Frontiers of Drama (London) 1945.

decide the general form through which his theme is to be expressed. If his content is humorous he may decide to express it through the comedy of manners, or through social comedy or through farce. If it is to be 'like a picture of life',⁽¹⁾ as Ibsen envisaged Ghosts, then he may, like Ibsen, decide on some form of realistic social drama. He must have a clearly defined idea of the general form, otherwise he may, at a later stage, find himself hampered by the dominance of 'situation' in what was to be a study of character, or by the dominance of character in what was intended as a play of action.

It would have been absurd for Chekhov, who believed that dramatic art consisted in the 'setting of a question',⁽²⁾ not in its solution, to have used the rigid structure of Sardou and Dumas fils, with its correctly placed climax, its 'scène a faire', and its mechanical resolution, or for Ibsen, who had so much to say, to have adopted the slight form of Jean Jacques Bernard, where the art consists in saying nothing.

But once he has decided on his general form, the dramatist has then to arrange it 'in such skilfully-devised form and order as shall, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, give the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect, the production of which is

(1) From Ibsen's Workshop Vol.12(2) Trans.A.G.Chater
(London 1912)

(2) op.cit., p.127.

(1)
the one great function of the theatre.

The time element is obviously the most decisive. The dramatist's business is to present salient features as forcefully as possible without resorting to crude device. What he has to say must be said clearly, or, in the case of writers like Bernard, not said, equally clearly. All art is selective, but his must be more selective than most. All art reduces life to varying degrees of unnatural orderliness, which in his case must be compressed to a mathematical pattern.

Form is then subject to conditioning by the time factor and by the need for clarity. Also, it is incumbent on the dramatist to exploit 'illustrative action' which will appeal first to the emotion and through that, if necessary, to the intellect. For when he has this special privilege of addressing a number of living people through the medium of living people, he is neglecting the advantages of his medium if he fails to create from the reciprocity between the two, a living emotion.

Again, theatrical conditions, which vary according to different periods, have their effect upon form. Dramatists writing for the apron stage bare of scenery, had to expend more time over verbal description of scene than need the moderns, for whom 'stage business' in explanatory settings to a great extent replaces speech.

(1) A.W. Pinero: Robert Louis Stevenson the Dramatist
(London 1903) p.7.

In these very limitations lie the dramatist's peculiar advantages. If he fails to recognise them, the famous divorce between drama and theatre is inevitable. The modern movement led by Gordon Craig shows how the fact that several generations of dramatists had failed to consider the full potentialities of the medium, led to a schism between the art of the dramatist and the regisseur. For many years the Soviet theatre had no drama to speak of but a theatre ahead of that in any other country. The medium had revolted and attempted to become absolute.

In this question of conditioning form, an important aspect of technique is the need to distinguish between essential and temporary limitations. The first, we have observed, are, above all, the time factor, the need to hold the attention of a mixed assembly by clarity and order and the physical nature of the medium. Temporary limitations are the conventions imposed by different periods. The great dramatist will recognise these and, if necessary, transcend them.

When Aeschylus introduced the third actor, he was no doubt thought by many to be interfering with an essential limitation which was in fact no more than a tradition. So with the first man to use three acts instead of five, or nine instead of three. Conventions disappear and reappear so frequently that many a dramatist has won fame as an innovator, who is but a restorer. Experiment with conventions may be good if it results in more expressive form; it is bad when it

is an end in itself. It is, after all, only a subsidiary aspect of a subsidiary function of technique.

Sometimes a dramatist will attempt to transcend not only the temporary limitations but the essential also. This is, as will be seen, a special characteristic of modern drama. By attempting to extend to drama the privileges of the other arts, the dramatist generally succeeds in foregoing the peculiar privileges of his own. It is generally found that those who do not kick against inevitable pricks are the greatest. Their energy goes into transforming the good at hand into better, rather than seeking after an unattainable best.

It is clear that the importance of technique in drama can scarcely be over-estimated. A play stands or falls by its success in representation. It may have weak patches, but not too many, for it has to accomplish results in a very short time. The novelist's faults, which may be much more glaring, will be condoned for his good moments. His bad plots may be excused by his brilliant characterisation, or his verbosity by his fanciful imagination. But the dramatist must above all convince immediately. His characters must live and be consistent, his plot must be strong enough to hold a very mixed interest, his dialogue must be pungent. He must be master of 'methods and devices' without appearing to know anything about them. He must be aware of the theatre and yet not too aware of it.

Small wonder that Henry James described dramatic writing as an 'exquisite exercise in its all but unconquerable form'.

With these considerations in mind, we will now proceed to examine their application in modern drama.

The European renaissance in drama began about 1890, and had reached its peak by 1930.

* * *

A glance at the technique of this period reveals the startling catholicity of form. It has become a very Proteus, contracting not only with the rigid formulae of the immediate past, the era of the 'piece bien fait' but even with the more flexible tenets of the other great eras, those of the Greeks and Elizabethans, of Voltaire and Molière.

Never at any other time, in fact, has there been such variety and individuality in form. Within this same half century we find Shaw and Galsworthy retaining realistic structure while Maeterlinck has abandoned it for fairy-tale symbolism; Pirandello playing with plot, and Ibsen exploring it, with tremendous force, to realize the implications of his theme; Yeats returning to ancient formality and writing masked plays for dancers, while Strindberg appears to escape from form altogether, so loose and seemingly inconsequent are the forms he uses. Within the same century two serious dramatists attempt to resist through forms as different as

SECTION 1 (b)

Special Characteristics of Technique in Modern Drama.

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(1)
 are those of Bernard and Claudel. One uses a slight form where all the important values are implied and the visible action rarely moves off the uneventful plane; the other the robust form of rhetorical drama, in which no implication is left to chance, but reiterated to exhaustion. It would be impossible for either of these dramatists to use the other's form. Bernard, preaching the 'art of the unexpressed' would find himself embarrassed by the rich rhetoric of L'Annonce faite a Marie (1913), while Claudel would be cramped beyond measure in the prose dramas, with their almost imperceptible movement, of Martine (1922) or Le Printemps des Autres (1924).

This absolute distinction of form is quite another thing from the distinction of treatment which has been a feature of technique in every age. Indeed, in Greek or Elizabethan drama, originality was largely confined to treatment, since form was accepted for what it was. Experiment with minor conventions, such as Euripides' with the Chorus, never attained the degree achieved by the moderns. In the Elizabethan period the same type of plot, the same elements of horror, ghosts and the rest, were accepted by both Kyd and Shakespeare. The fact that one produced, in these conditions, The Spanish Tragedy and the other Hamlet, is

(1) Claudel's La Jeune Fille Violaine was published in 1901 but his plays did not receive production till much later. Bernard's Le Feu qui Reprend Mal was published in 1921.

the result of difference in treatment, not of difference in form.

It may be argued that the modern search for appropriate form is an indication of weakness, a dissipation of energy. Certainly there is much truth in Henry James' assertion that 'To work successfully beneath a few, grave, rigid laws is always a strong man's highest ideal of success.'⁽¹⁾ The cultivated man, according to W.B. Yeats, 'will not desire a technique that denies or obtrudes his long and noble descent.'⁽²⁾

But even in the greatest plays discords will be struck when theme and form do not totally agree. Shakespeare's impatience with traditional plot manifests itself through the clumsy structure of many of his later plays. In The Winter's Tale especially, discords abound. The theme is the contrast between Leontes' jealous love and the idyllic love of Florizel and Perdita, a theme which demands a plot having great range and flexibility. But the plot which Shakespeare adapted depends essentially on mechanically connected situations. And with these mechanics he is not sufficiently careful. He announces the division between the two parts by prologue, after establishing a perfunctory connection by the shipwreck scene. The connecting agent, Antigonus, is disposed of when his service is done, by means of a peculiarly irresponsible

(1) Paper delivered on Tennyson's Queen Mary (1875)

(2) Discoveries p.92, in The Cutting of an Agate (London 1919)

deus ex machina, the bear. Most of the incident which determines the form is hurried over in this casual fashion. The first climax, in which all the characters except Hermione meet and recognise each other, is presented indirectly, by very uninspired exposition. There are inconsistencies of factual detail throughout, and events are marshalled to a particularly unconvincing resolution.

In fact it is only when theme is dominant, that is, in the portrayal of Leontes' jealousy or in the pastoral scenes, that a sense of harmony is attained. And it must only be an imperfect harmony since the development of the whole is not in keeping with the development of separate parts. The mechanics of situation, because the dramatist has recognised them as inessential to his theme and has taken no pains with them, have obtruded themselves to such an extent that they damage the theme. To recognise the inadequacy of form merely by perfunctory treatment is only to emphasise that inadequacy.

It is evident, then, that conformity to 'a few, grave, rigid laws', when these laws are in fact only conventions, may be prejudicial to the interests of even the greatest dramatists.

In the late nineteenth century the need for escape from traditional 'laws' was particularly pronounced. This was because dramatists such as Sardou, Scribe and their followers had for so long been forcing them to express theatrical situation rather than true theme that the life had gone out of

the form. The conventions appeared in their most mechanical form:- the traditional division into acts, the inevitable misunderstanding, intrigue and geometrical resolution.

Dumas fils, in the Preface to Un Père Prodigue (1868) called for 'le réal dans le fond, le possible dans le fait, l'ingénieux dans le moyen'.

The sum total of these conventions constituted the form most typical of the period. It was a form which sufficed for expression of situation, such as that of The Second Mrs. Tancueray. But for the new themes introduced by Maeterlinck, Chekhov, Strindberg it might or might not suffice. The characteristic of the modern era is the dramatist's acute awareness of this 'might not'.

In the period under discussion, very different themes began to appear. We have observed the diversity of form in this period. It is all the more surprising to find, that there is, if not an unanimity, at least a strong similarity in themes. The principal dramatists of the European renaissance have in common an interest in thought rather than in situation, in the secrets of personality, in the nature of reality and in the subtle overtones in human relationships. Religious themes are prominent in the plays of Claudel, Strindberg and Andreyev. They are interested in action for the sake of its implications rather than for itself. In 1899 W.B. Yeats declared that writers all over Europe were struggling against 'externality'. Declamation was giving way to the

'spiritual and unemphatic'. And so Maeterlinck had
 (1)
 superseded Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

Romance, which had been the mainstay of plays constructed on the Sardou model, shrank into insignificance. Intrigues centring in sex were seen in their proper perspective. Relationships between men and women in plays such as Rosmersholm, Pelléas et Mélisande, The Marrying of Ann Leete became important for their spiritual repercussions.

Maeterlinck, writing in the years immediately preceding 1890, was the prime exponent of 'Mystery', rather than fact.

For him, true drama lay, not in stirring events, but in the simple picture of an old man sitting motionless in the lamplight. Allardyce Nicoll sees this view of tragedy as 'probably the most important piece of creative criticism on the drama that has appeared for the last century.'⁽²⁾ The theme, he observes, is now one of 'inner greatness,' rather than 'the tragedy of blood and of apparent greatness.'

In order to express this theme, Maeterlinck deliberately rejects traditional form, the plot of logically associated events and distinctive characterisation, for a 'drama of inaction', in which very little actually happens, but much is suggested. Plot is diminished to conversations among

(1) The Autumn of the Flesh pp.69-75 in Literary Ideals in Ireland (Dublin, 1899).

(2) An Introduction to Dramatic Theory (London 1923) p.37.

groups of people about action taking place elsewhere, which affects them in some profound, but usually inexplicable manner. It may be an old man, describing to his friends the action perceived through a lighted window, or a group of blind men and women talking in a pine forest. But the action is almost always somewhere else, behind mysteriously locked doors, or in impenetrable darkness. The characters are afraid but cannot voice reasons for their fear. Both action and character are symbolic. The blind grandfather of L'Intruse is the only character with spiritual sight; the dead priest in Les Aveugles is the guide on whom the dead rely. In the longer plays the characters fall into persistently recurring groups of fairy tale types; the frightened princess of La Princesse Maleine and Pelléas et Mélisande, the malignant Queen, who remains an unseen but dreaded presence in La Mort de Tintagiles.

At the same time, another dramatist who was equally concerned with themes of 'inner action', Chekhov, was creating a form as different from the symbolic framework of Maeterlinck as it was from the naturalistic structure of his predecessor, Ostrovsky. Chekhov's was the theme of futility, the hopelessness of aspirations defeated at the start by their very nature. To express this theme he adopts a form which, because it in itself suggests inconclusiveness, bears a most direct relation to the content.

'But we can't do without the theatre!' says Sorin, in The Seagull, (1896). 'No', replies Treplieff, 'But we must have it in a new form'. And Chekhov did give it a new form. For the climax he substitutes the anti-climax, for the mechanical resolution a question mark. Of The Seagull he said:- 'I began it forte and finished pianissimo against all the laws of dramatic art.'⁽¹⁾ The dialogue has an apparent inconsequence: characters pursue individual trains of thought which only occasionally impinge upon each other. So it too suggests the theme. For the futility of these people lies in the fact that in action as in speech they are incapable of understanding one another.

It becomes evident that the dramatists of this period are deliberately seeking out individual forms. Ibsen's development testifies to the same end. When, in the plays written before 1890, he is dealing with spiritual conflicts as in Brand (1865) and Peer Gynt (1867), he adopts a loose and unrestricted form of short scenes, which violates all traditional unities but that of theme. The interest in Peer Gynt lies in the hero's 'hinter life'. And so Ibsen ignores the laws of everyday probability. He presents the study at one time on a realistic plane, at another through symbolic encounters with Trolls and Button-Moulders.

(1) Life and Letters of Anton Chekhov, ed. S.S. Korveliasky (London 1925) p. 232.

But when he turns to the study of character in relation to social values he finds the free form of Peer Gynt no longer suitable. He voluntarily returns to a close traditional structure, in which symbolism plays a strictly functional part, and the law of cause and effect, which is his theme, is translated into terms of cause and effect in plot. The keyword here is 'voluntarily'. He had already shown that he was capable of more than realism and was later to do so again. ⁽¹⁾

The modern search for form could scarcely find better witness than in Strindberg's development from intense naturalism to a form which contained all the germs of Expressionism. In The Father, Miss Julia, Creditors, There are Crimes and Crimes, written between 1887 and 1889, he was already exploring the depths of human consciousness, that 'self obsession' which O'Neill was later to visualise as the first theme of modern drama. ⁽²⁾ But in these plays he did not achieve complete expression. Even the intensified naturalism he was using was inadequate. In There are Crimes and Crimes his theme was the theory that thought is as responsible as deed, a death wish as culpable as an actual murder. To express this theme naturalistically he had been forced to rely on coincidences, of which the most unconvincing

(1) In plays such as The Master Builder (1891) and When the Dead Awaken (1897-9) he returned to the highly symbolic action of the first period.

(2) See below. p. 27 Note (i)

was the death of the child at the very moment when Maurice expressed the death wish. Attention was in this play focussed on the situations by their incredibility in a realistic setting.

When he turned from naturalism to the form of A Dream Play, he was able to give full rein to his conviction that 'Coincidence is law'. He abandoned logical action and presented theme through an apparently haphazard series of impressions, dissolving into one another, and repeating themselves as in a dream. The forms of this period A Dream Play, The Ghost Sonata, The Road to Damascus, are so different from even his own naturalism, and certainly from those of any other contemporary dramatist, that it is justifiable to call them original and individual.

From this survey we may conclude that the chief characteristic of technique in modern drama is the intensely conscious search for appropriate form. It is apparent also that the most prevalent themes are those dealing with 'inner action', with spiritual conflicts, with the mystery of personality.

We will now examine the conventions which the modern dramatist accepts, after a glance at those obtaining in earlier periods.

When drama is great, its conventions will generally arise from the desire to achieve wider implications than the action of the play provides.

In Greek or Elizabethan tragedies, the dramatist was also a poet. He could employ poetic devices, such as the Chorus, soliloquy and imagery. Shakespeare's use of soliloquy in Hamlet interrupts the mechanical working of the plot to express a theme, concerned as much with inner action as Maeterlinck's 'anguish of the unintelligible' or Strindberg's 'hinter life'.

Iterative imagery fulfils a function similar to that of the Greek Chorus. Images of suns, moons, worlds and empires give magnitude to the love of Antony and Cleopatra, and the grotesque images of Measure for Measure emphasise the distortion in the human relationships.

But by the late nineteenth century poetic diction, rhetoric, imagery and most of the poetic conventions had been rejected.⁽¹⁾ There was instead an approximation to the speech of everyday life, which had become more drab and utilitarian, more distrustful of fantasy. Such poetic conventions as were retained, for example the soliloquy, had degenerated into mechanical devices for conveying information. Only occasionally would the dramatist attempt to re-invest it with traditional attributes as, for instance, in Becque's sentimental soliloquies in Les Corbeaux, or the celebrated diatribe of Henry Arthur Jones in The Silver King. On the

(1) Except in closet drama.

whole, he was concerned to use it, and its fellow, the aside, as an expository instrument in as realistic a manner as possible.⁽¹⁾

Hence the dilemma of the dramatists of the Renaissance. W.B. Yeats spoke for them all when he said that the play of modern educated people 'fills one's soul with a sense of commonness...It cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and commonplace... Well bred people, when~~er~~ moved, look silently into the fireplace'.⁽²⁾

And so we come to another prominent feature of this period, the revival of every type of convention that might aid complete expression. Evreinov in the Theatre of the Soul (1914) revives the qualities of the mediaeval morality play under the names of 'rational and emotional entities'. Maeterlinck attempts to restore to soliloquy its introspective quality in La Princesse Maleine. Poetic diction reappears in various forms, either in the rhetorical dramas of Maxwell Anderson or in the blend of formalised and colloquial speech used by T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. The Chorus comes to life again. T.S. Eliot gives it convincing modern form in Family Reunion (1939); Obey, in Le Viol de Lucrece (1939) reduces the number to

(1) For a fuller discussion of the soliloquy in naturalistic drama, see II (c) iii.

(2) Discoveries (1907) pp.88-110 in The Cutting of an Agate (London 1919)

two Recorders, commenting on the action of the play from an infinite distance: Auden in The Ascent of F.6. (1936) puts his Chorus into stage boxes, and calls them Mr. and Mrs. A., representatives of the perplexed and short sighted Man in the Street. All conventions are fair game for the modern dramatist, but he exerts free choice, no longer accepting them as limitations.

The chief contemporary convention, however, is symbolism. For the use of highly formalised diction, rhetoric and imagery is not, however one may deplore the fact, in keeping with the temper of the age. Dramatists such as Stephen Spender who convey political themes through rhetorical verse forms, ⁽¹⁾ risk the loss of complete reciprocity between themselves and their audience.

By using symbolism the dramatist may retain contemporary diction and situation, but invest them with implications greater than themselves. There are two major kinds of symbolism, functional and absolute.

Into the latter class come most of Strindberg's later plays, notably Advent and A Ghost Sonata, where the action is significant only on a symbolic plane. For example, during A Dream Play, Christine the maid sticks paper over the cracks in the wall, crying 'I paste! I paste!' At this the daughter complains that she is suffocating, and the

(1) The Trial of a Judge (1938).

Lawyer urges the maid to continue. This action might possibly seem realistic in a more relevant setting, but in the setting here it cannot be accepted as in any sense realistic. We can only appreciate it at all if we recognise its symbolic meaning. Though apparently inconsequent, the action forwards the theme for it represents the toils in which human beings entrap one another. The suffocation is spiritual, not physical. Functional symbolism, on the other hand, is part of, rather than distinct from, realistic action. Ibsen is the master of this type. The wild duck representing the victim of misdirected idealism is an example, or the rotten ships of Pillars of Society, which not only play a realistic and determining part in the immediate action, but also suggest the general corruption of society which is the theme. So, in parallel fashion, does Chekhov introduce the seagull in the play of that name, or the symbolic action of Uncle Vanya firing at the Professor and missing.

This is the type of symbolism most valid for the modern dramatist who prefers to work within the 'few, grave laws' of Henry James. By these means he is able to retain concentration and achieve wider implications at the same time.

Having observed that the modern dramatist, in his search for appropriate forms, tends to adopt any of the conventions of past eras, or, in particular, the contemporary convention

of symbolism, we may now turn from consideration of the first two functions of technique to the third, the conditioning of form to the needs of the theatre.

One of the outstanding characteristics of modern technique, is in fact, its concentration on this aspect. The more fluid form of modern drama is largely due to the greater potentialities realised in the medium, the theatre. It is demonstrable that much of the rigidity of form in preceding eras was determined by purely physical limitations. So the forms of Greek tragedy, religious in origin, continued, until the time of Euripides, to be shaped by the external facts of the amphitheatre, the mask and the buskin; Elizabethan drama by its apron stage, its lack of scenery, its use of male actors only.

By the end of the nineteenth century great mechanical changes had been effected. Stage settings and lighting had been developed to the degree that made possible an elaborate mise en scène for third rate productions. The proscenium arch and the fourth wall became the new determining features. But of all the aesthetic possibilities in the medium dramatists were but vaguely aware until the voice of the régisseur sounded in 1899, with Adolphe Appia's Die Musik und die Inszenierung and in 1907 with Gordon Craig's Art of the Theatre.

Craig's insistence on these neglected possibilities, on the symbolic value of setting and lighting in themselves,

came as a tremendous impetus to experiment with forms.

We see the immediate result, not merely in the outburst of fantastic experiment with settings, where Andreyev's Life of Man might receive Cubist production, and Twelfth Night put on constructivist apparel,⁽¹⁾ but by the much greater integral part played by symbolic setting, lighting and sound in plays written in the period under discussion. We see now how the modern search for expression was facilitated. Where Shakespeare, in Romeo and Juliet used images of light and darkness, Strindberg, in The Dream Play uses physical contrasts of light and darkness. Pictorial effects tend to replace verbal effects.

The emphasis on visual aspects reached its height during the zenith of Expressionistic technique between 1912 and 1920. Dramatists such as Hasenclever, Toller and Kaiser developed pictorial representation to a degree beyond anything previously known in drama. Never before had settings, lighting and sound played such a significant part.⁽²⁾

Closely connected with Expressionism is what Sheldon Cheney calls 'synthetic drama'. This is a form in which all arts combine in the manner visualised by Wagner. Music, dancing, ballet attitudes, lighting, sound, are all utilised

(1) For a photograph of S.A. Eliot jr.'s Constructivist production of Twelfth Night, complete with horizontal bars and vertical poles, see Stratton p.186.

(2) Expression is discussed in greater detail in II (b)

for the expression of theme. In the heyday of Craig, Meyerhold, Robert Edmond Jones and the rest, the greatest accent was on setting. In 1946 we learn that the musician is the chief entrant into the ranks of those who produce 'synthetic drama'.

Good examples are furnished by Sean O'Casey's Within the Gates (1934) and John Howard Lawson's Processional (1925). In the latter, jazz music is played throughout. Not only does it suggest the theme, the restless uneasiness of the epoch, but it determines the immediate action, affects the mood of the characters and even sets the pace of the dialogue.

Jean Anouilh calls his Le Bal des Voleurs (1932) a 'comédie-ballet.' In the 'troisième tableau', the characters express elation or despair by dancing to appropriate music, and the scene reaches its climax in a passage between Lady Hurf and the voice of a clarinet.

William Saroyan's plays, collected under the title Razzle Dazzle (1945), include, as he says in the Introduction, 'a variety of writings suitable for every possible variation of playing: - ballet, opera, circus, vaudeville, carnival, side-show, burlesque... church or parlour.' The last scene of Subway Circus (1935), a 'vaudeville' obviously deriving from Strindberg's Dream Play, includes scenes which are presented entirely by mime and music. 'Certain parts are pure theatre. The work could be produced as a ballet no doubt. And, on the other hand, it could also be produced as

a play.' He admits that good actors are seldom good dancers, but concludes hopefully, 'A good production of the whole work, while difficult, is not impossible.'

Character, in Saroyan's plays, is generally indicated in terms of music and dance. The old man who is an expert on the bugle in My Heart's in The Highlands (1939) is accepted as a 'great man' by Johnny and his father just because he is an expert on the bugle. When Willie in The Time of Your Life (1939) engages in a game at a marble machine he represents 'Will versus Destiny...the pioneer against the last champion.'

We will now consider the vices attendant on technique in modern drama.

The concentration on themes of 'inner action' has often led to attempts to ignore, or break down, the essential limitations of the theatre. This was a temptation which did not present itself to writers like Clyde Fitch or Pinero, who would not have risked boring an audience by a trilogy as long as The Road to Damascus or by such disconnected, introspective soliloquy as that of Moritz in Wedekind's "Frühlings Erwachen".

But many modern dramatists are so far from being concerned with situation that they tend to force their theme to the front, often by reiterative dialogue, at the expense of illustrative action. This tendency is prominent even in the plays of Shaw, whose delight in argument leads him to some

over-static discussion, in which there is no real development of idea. This is especially true of such a play as Good King Charles Golden Days (1939) or the scene in Hell from Man and Superman (1903) which has been penalised by frequent omission from performance of the play. Pirandello sometimes approaches the verge, with his inconclusive enquiries into the nature of reality, but on the whole he succeeds in relating argument and action. The trait is particularly marked in Claudel's plays, for example in L'Otage (1914). On revision of the text the dramatist altered the conclusive action so drastically that a totally different climax was reached, though in both versions the theme remained the same, being independent of the action. Much of Strindberg's action resolves itself into reiteration of one idea, particularly in the long dialogue between husband and wife in The Dance of Death. In more recent drama the tendency, if anything, increases. It is prominent in most of the drama of propaganda, such as Stephen Spender's Trial of a Judge, Maxwell Anderson's Winterset (1935). Discussion is also the chief factor in almost all Helge Krog's plays. The Sounding Shell (1929) presents a series of viewpoints on the theme of free love which might as easily have taken the form of a debate.

It follows that frequently 'the dramas of the moderns are characterless.' Maeterlinck admitted that the identity

of his speakers was irrelevant; the dialogue could be distributed at random. Pirandello's characters represent merely the different facets of his argument. Lenormand's are personifications of mental aberrations. And Expressionists such as Toller and Andreyev return frankly to 'types' similar to those in medieval moralities.

The replacement of 'outer action' by 'inner action' has led to an increase in the drama of suggestion and impression. For the practice of presenting an unresolved, impressionistic pattern, Strindberg was largely responsible, and to a certain degree, Maeterlinck, in whose case very often there was only too little to suggest. His vision of the silent lamplit scene did much to release drama from the chains of situation, but was a cloudy sort of vision at the best. By employing symbols he could persuade an audience that it had enjoyed a complete experience instead of only an outline. When he did turn to traditional structure, the result was the trite and melodramatic Monna Vanna or the sentimental Soeur Béatrice. Maeterlinck's debt to the regisseur is shown by the fact that the latter only achieved some kind of stature when it was metamorphised by Reinhardt into The Miracle.

Obscurity went further with the German Expressionists. Very often it was, as in Kokschka's Morder Hoffnung der Frauen, an obscurity concealing paucity of theme. Since realistic dialogue and explanation no longer operated, the audience

had to draw its own conclusions from the implications of pictorial presentation. And the implications might be of the slightest.

Freedom of form was responsible for much increasing flabbiness in conception. The loose disconnected form might be ideal for certain themes. Wedekind demonstrated its power in Frühlings Erwachen and Elmer Rice in We, the People.

But on the other hand it encouraged easy fantasy and irrelevance, which only too often, as a character in Saroyan's The Time of Your Life complains, has 'No foundation. All the way down the line.' Saroyan himself says, in the preface to Subway Circus that 'the importance of Subway Circus is most probably that it indicates a direction rather than reaches a destination'. This might be an epitaph on much American drama since 1930. Saroyan, John Dos Passos and to a lesser degree, Thornton Wilder, all present commonplace themes⁽¹⁾ through fragmentary, unrelated forms. Dos Passos' The Garbage Man (1934) is an example of the more pretentious kind of obscure innuendo.

The popularity of plays set in the after world increased steadily from about 1920, another evidence of the

(1) Saroyan's theme is generally the reiteration of the simple statement 'It is better to be a good human being than to be a bad one. It is just naturally better'. (Preface to My Hearts in the Highlands (1939).

movement toward escape from discipline of form. Wedekind's graveyard scene in Frühlings Erwachen was followed by Rice's in The Adding Machine. Molnar's Liliom, with its heavenly police court, set the fashion for dozens of plays in which the after life was presented in terms of the present:- Priestley's Johnson over Jordan (1939), Sutton Vane's Outward Bound (1923), to name only two. Symbolic dream plays flourished: Kaufman and Connelly's Beggars on Horseback (1924) is the type example. Molnar's Liliom is a particularly flagrant example of evasion. When some kind of catastrophe becomes imperative in Liliom's earthly career, he is removed to heaven. From that point on the action is a prolonged anti-climax. In 1930 Armand Salacrou could say with truth, 'cette fantaisie d'hier, comme ce réalisme d'avant hier n'est devenue que fausseté et truquage.'⁽¹⁾

It was probably inevitable that the modern consciousness of form should lead eventually to over-consciousness. The minor playwrights who followed the Renaissance pioneers confined themselves mainly to experiment with minor conventions. Thornton Wilder experiments with lack of scenery and with mime in Our Town, with the extension of action to the auditorium in The Happy Journey from Trenton to Camden, and with 'suspension of disbelief' in The Skin of our Teeth.

(1) 'Note sur le Théâtre' Théâtre II (Paris 1944) p.210.

Experiment with chronological presentation is particularly prevalent. It is generally an adroit method of forcing dramatic irony, little more. (1)

If the modern dramatist tends to imply rather than illustrate, to speak obscurely rather than loud and plain, he is encouraged to do so by the *régisseur*. Gordon Craig, in The Art of the Theatre, emphasises the importance of setting. Its implications should be confused as little as possible by words and action: he would have 'über-marionettes' replace human actors. His ideal at the time was the Munschner Künstler Theatre, where a synthesis of action, words, line, colour and rhythm were achieved under the aegis of one controlling director, who was certainly not the dramatist.

For the purposes of the modern *régisseur*, the less the dramatist says the better. In 1936 Norman Bel Geddes, asked what was the greatest limitation the designer faced in the theatre, replied, 'Perhaps the greatest limitation is the playwright.' ! (2)

It was small wonder that the dramatist became slipshod and obscure when the 'producing artist' was so anxious to carry his burdens for him.

The result of it all only too often was that this intense exploitation of the medium, instead of clarifying

(1) Examples are given in II (c).

(2) T.A.M. Oct. 1936.

expression, rendered it less clear. A paradoxical state ensued, in which the dramatists who were making the most experimental use of visual instruments, such as the mask, must at the same time write long programme notes to explain their use. Dramatic art, through concentrating too heavily on its own peculiar resources, tends in fact to become less self-contained.

Both the credit and the debit side of modern technique have now been examined. It is above all an age of experiment. As Salacrou said, 'C'est le drame de notre époque d'avoir perdu toutes les disciplines. C'est aussi sa grandeur d'avoir a en former de nouvelles.'⁽¹⁾

The most outstanding characteristics are the search for harmony between theme and form, the prevalence of themes concerned with 'inner action' rather than events, and the acute awareness of form as a malleable and individual instrument. With these go the exploitation of the physical medium to an unprecedented degree and all the attendant vices.

Into this restless, troubled and constantly moving pattern O'Neill fits as a key into a cipher. The exact degree of his relationship will be considered in the next section.

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(1) Op. cit. pp.230-1.

SECTION I (c)

General Statement of O'Neill's Relationship.

To follow the course of technique in modern drama seven league boots were needed. While one foot was in France the other would be in Germany, or one in England, the other in Scandinavia. Yet practically all the most striking characteristics of this technique are to be found in one country, in one decade and in the work of one man, Eugene O'Neill. For American drama he is the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the epitome of his age.

The first view of him, as of modern drama in general, reveals the experimenter. It is this view alone which many critics cherish. (1) It seems to them sufficient eulogy to find in the work of one American forms which in Europe were divided amongst dramatists as different as Ibsen, Kaiser, Pirandello, Synge.

Certainly, this aspect of his technique does astonish. It is impossible to lay a finger on one particular form out of all those he uses, and say, 'This is O'Neill'. At one

(1) R. Blankenship, in American Literature (New York, 1931) says '...it is as such an experimenter that he deserves to be best known.' p.715.

moment he is represented by realistic sea plays, reminiscent of Synge (The Moon of the Caribees), at another by highly stylised 'Expressionistic dramas', The Hairy Ape or The Great God Brown. He may express himself through finely proportioned plot, as in Desire under the Elms or Mourning becomes Electra, or he may subordinate plot to the static discussion of theme which characterises Welded. He may overflow into wordy soliloquies and reiterative chants, or he may substitute for the word the silent picture, the evocative sound which only the stage can fully realize. His characters are at one time the inarticulate types of the sea plays or Desire under the Elms, the next the intensely civilized and self-conscious Marsdens and Capes of the later period. He is no easy game for the parodist, for he never presents a sitting target. Like Tamburlaine, his soul wills him to wear himself and never rest.

But though he flit so untiringly from one form to another, it is not with the outward show that his interest lies. He has many weaknesses, but, despite appearances, experiment with form for its own sake is not one of them. Sometimes he may exult a little naively:- 'Then there are other new stunts', ⁽¹⁾ but this is only an intermittent falling from grace. His attitude toward the technician, in the

(1) From letter to B.H.Clark, written after the MS. of Lazarus Laughed was finished, in 1926. Clark. London. p.160.

lowest sense of the word, is expressed in a remark quoted by Clark:⁽¹⁾ 'If I thought there was only one way, I should be following the mechanistic creed, which is the very thing I condemn.' And to A.H. Quinn he wrote:- 'I've tried to make myself a melting pot for all these methods, seeing some virtues for my ends in each of them, and thereby, if there is enough real fire in me, boil down to my own technique.'

'Methods', then, are subordinate to 'ends'; form to theme. So absorbed is he with what he has to say that, as we shall see, in his later plays he tends to forget that it must at all costs be said dramatically. He envisages the possibility of certain themes proving non-dramatic, in his letter on The Great God Brown.⁽²⁾ Behind the human drama, he explains, lies a 'background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man.' And this pattern he can only define as '...Mystery - the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event - or accident - in any life on earth.' Then he states his creed. 'And it is this mystery I want to realize in the theatre. The solution, if there ever be any, will probably have to be produced in a test tube, and turn out to be discouragingly undramatic.' The apprehension of that last line was only too often to be

(1) Op.cit. p.113.

(2) N.Y.E.P. 13th. February, 1926.

confirmed in his later work, where test tubes abound, but the mystery remains elusive.

O'Neill is most representative of his age in the extreme deliberation of his search for the right form to suit his themes. In the type of theme he selects he is scarcely less representative.

He is concerned almost exclusively with themes of 'inner action', with what Maeterlinck called 'the anguish of the unintelligible'. But unlike Maeterlinck he is not content merely to suggest this anguish: he must always attempt to explain. He sees life as 'man's glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him'. It must be tragic because it ends in destruction, but in the tragedy lies the glory. 'The Greek dream in tragedy' he says, 'is the noblest ever'.⁽¹⁾

This was his ideal, but in practice he too often stopped short at a gloomy irony which so many of the moderns, most notably Strindberg, tended to substitute for tragedy. Lack of spiritual orientation was responsible. Because he was so vague about the 'Force' or 'Mystery' behind the lives of his strugglers, there could not be sufficient tragic clarity in their endings. Only when he limited or personified the 'Force' did he achieve the exaltation of true tragedy, after which he sought. In the Moon of the

(1) Quinn, p.199.

Caribees it was the sea, in Desire under the Elms, Nature, in her aspect of 'sinister maternity', in Mourning Becomes Electra, the sins of the fathers which are visited upon the children. In all of these plays he struck the genuine note of tragedy.

But he was hampered as a tragic dramatist by the fact that he could not take his 'Force' on trust: he had to examine its nature. His later plays, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude, Dynamo, Days Without End concentrate on metaphysics at the expense of human drama. The last play is in fact an up-to-date version of the medieval morality.

This direction of interest is in accordance with modern taste. Strindberg, in To Damascus, Andreyev in The Life of Man and He Who Gets Slapped, Claudel in L'Annonce faite a Marie, were all concerned with man in his relation to God, and Strindberg and Andreyev were as equally concerned with the great problem of the nature of God. O'Neill's interest, as Strindberg's, is intensely subjective. If it is true that his interest in character is metaphysical rather than psychological, it is equally true that his interest in religion is directed subjectively rather than objectively. Once again he is extraordinarily typical of his age in his passion for self-examination and analysis. He is forever probing 'that self-obsession which is the particular discount

(1) O'Neill: 'Strindberg and our Theatre' (Reports of the American Theatre No. 3, 1923-4, New York City), quoted in Callaghan, 'The American Theatre', New York, 1925, p. 100.

(1)
we moderns have to pay for the loan of life'.

His characters become increasingly introspective as he progresses. Most often they are 'grotesci', figures presented in one attribute only. Like Strindberg, O'Neill is concerned, not with fully rounded characterisation, but with the working of the mind under high pressure. As early as the first sea plays, in the volume The Moon of the Caribbees and other Plays of the Sea, there is a predominance of characters suffering under mental strain which drives them to unbalanced self-revelation:- The Rope, Where the Cross is Made, Ile. In these plays the revelation of character is effected by powerful, often melodramatic action. Later, action is subordinated to static dissection of personality:- the analytic pas de deux of Welded, the permutations and combinations of The Great God Brown, the long and leisurely self-revelation of Strange Interlude.

In most of O'Neill's plays relationships revolve round the hub of sex, often in its most warped and unlovely aspects. Like Wedekind, he is concerned with the elemental, rather than with the more refined properties of sex. It is important for him, not in a romantic light, but because it involves the great cycle of birth, pain, love and death which man must experience completely to know God. His women are always

(1) O'Neill: 'Strindberg and our Theatre' (Program of Provincetown Theatre No.1. 1923-4. New York City). Quoted in full by T.H.Dickinson in Playwrights of the New American Theatre, New York, 1925. p.100.

conscious that in giving birth they approach divinity: Nina, in Strange Interlude, feels within her a tide of creation which brings her closer to 'God, the Mother': Martha Jayson, in The First Man, risks even her husband's love for the sake of a child. The relationship between woman and lover fuses imperceptibly into that between mother and son. Reuben, in Dynamo, identifies the dynamo with his new God, Electricity and with his dead mother whom he loves with that half sensual passion which Orin feels for Christine in Mourning Becomes Electra.⁽¹⁾ The borderline between love of sex and of parenthood is shadowy, as it is among primitive peoples. In the twilight state between, his characters are most conscious of their relation to God. Relationships such as that of Abbie and Eben in Desire under the Elms, of Jim and Ella in All God's Chillun Got Wings exert the highest degree of pressure on the mind and personality. Under this pressure the mind reveals itself, in a direction generally spiritual. Desire under the Elms ends with Abbie and Eben gazing up at the sky, their faces rapt as if in prayer.

We will now consider how far O'Neill is typical of his period in his treatment of conventions and in the manner in which he conditions form to the peculiar requirements of the theatre.

(1) And, it is implied, Eben for his dead mother, in Desire under the Elms.

His greatest problem, as that of his age, lay with diction. Like Yeats, he was acutely aware of the problem. In a letter to A.H. Quinn⁽¹⁾ he complained that he felt neglected as 'a bit of a poet, who has laboured with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't...' These 'original rhythms of beauty' he did achieve to a remarkable degree in ~~his~~ early plays, where the characters were less introspective, the action simpler. In his treatment of colloquial Irish or American or negro speech rhythms he may have been influenced by Synge, as Andrew Malone suggested,⁽²⁾ but whether consciously or no, he certainly followed Synge's dictum that 'every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or an apple'.

Later, however, the issue became more confused: the emphasis came to rest on content rather than flavour. O'Neill now declared:- 'I want to get down in words what people think and feel without using the simple method of suggestive silences'⁽³⁾. Realistic speech was inadequate for such expression: consequently he turned to energetic experiment with every type of convention which might prove to be adequate.

(1) Quinn. p.199.

(2) Andrew E. Malone:- 'The Plays of Eugene O'Neill' (Dublin Magazine, Vol.7. 1923).

(3) 'Memoranda on Masks'. American Spectator. November, 1932.

So we find him reviving the convention of the Chorus and the soliloquy, rhetorical verse, imagery, means by which dramatists dead and gone had secured their effects. And at the same time he is experimenting with peculiarly modern conventions, symbolism, distorted settings, the use of the mask to indicate changes in personality. He refuses to accept the limitations which Bernard, for example, accepted. The 'art of the unexpressed' is not for him. He must always 'get down in words' the ultimate detail of what his people think and feel.

His tragedy is that he has no real power over words. With simple colloquial rhythms he can be successful, and, on occasions, with the speech of the cultured. He can use imagery, particularly the homely, vivid sort of Desire under the Elms, with great effect. But in his later period a fatal leaning toward elaborate, artificial imagery, toward 'purple patches', swelling rhetoric and lyric interpolations, becomes increasingly dominant. For this form of diction he has no genius whatsoever. It was one of the conventions which had been better left alone.

In his use of imagery and rhetoric O'Neill went, of course, only a small part of the way traversed by dramatists such as Synge, O'Casey, Claudel, Dunsany. He never developed one style to the point where it became an aesthetic idiosyncrasy, because style, for him, was primarily a means to an end. He had set himself so strenuous a task that no one

form could ever offer complete satisfaction.

With the soliloquy and mask he carried experiment to the furthest degree consonant with dramatic effectiveness. He outstripped his German predecessors, Kaiser, Toller and Wedekind, in the audacity of his innovations. The urge to reveal the 'lower depths' drove him as Hera drove Io.

But not only was he aware of the modern dramatist's dilemma in the sphere of diction: he was aware also of his own shortcomings. Of Mourning Becomes Electra he said:- 'It needed great language to lift it beyond itself. I haven't got that. I don't think...that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time. The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's movements, dramatic inarticulations'.⁽¹⁾ At this conclusion he arrived after years of experiment with every type of verbal expression.

We have seen that when words proved inadequate modern dramatists such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, turned eagerly to symbolism. So too, O'Neill. He avoids the absolute symbolism preferred by Strindberg, since he can never be content to leave much to implication. Even functional symbolism, which he uses with great effectiveness and, in general, restraint, he must underline in dialogue and stage directions. At the best he achieves a beautiful and

(1) Quinn, p.258. Letter from O'Neill of 10.2.1932.

forceful accumulation of effect by repetition of the symbolic motif in setting, imagery, sound and incident. Mourning Becomes Electra is his supreme achievement in this genre. But generally the symbolism is confined to the background, most often in the form of setting. The realistic action is kept distinct. Only infrequently does he introduce the action which is at once realistic and symbolic, such as the action centring in the rotten ships in Ibsen's Pillars of Society.

This concentration on setting brings us to consider O'Neill's treatment of the theatre's peculiar resources, the visual and aural elements which condition dramatic form. In this sphere, it is apparent, deficiencies of diction might be supplied: the crooked made straight and the rough places smooth.

O'Neill was not slow to recognise his opportunity. He achieves some of his most forceful effects by presentation rather than description. As long as he is not trying to convey too much, he can make a lucid, vivid and impressive statement by appeal to the eye where appeal to the ear, through speech, might fail. He is master of the silent, expressive tableau - the opening scene of The Emperor Jones for example, with the deserted audience chamber, the scarlet throne, the furtive entrance of the negro woman, or the mute, formalised groups, symbolising Man under three great

X

civilisations, in Marco Millions. The verbosity of the dialogue in Lazarus Laughed contrasts most unfavourably with the pungent suggestions of the lighting. Much more effective than the chanting of the Chorus is the dramatic extinguishing, one by one, of the purple lights in Tiberius' palace as Lazarus approaches. More dramatic than the verse, in Marco Millions, is the stylised grouping of mourners at the funeral of Kukachin.

This talent for stage pictures O'Neill had from the first. It was apparent in the silent, moonlit scene with which The Moon of the Caribbees opened. But under the stimulus of expressionistic theories he developed it to a degree where it enabled him to substitute vision for speech, to externalise the state of the mind through visual implication rather than by getting it down in words. In Where the Cross is Made, for example, he exploits the suggestions of moonlight in a manner very similar to that of Strindberg, in To Damascus. A green glow surges into the room, suggesting to Sue Bartlett only moonlight, to her deranged father and brother, the depths of the sea. This type of presentation is sustained at length with particular skill in The Emperor Jones. Distorted setting, symbolic costume, the mask - to all these Expressionistic instruments O'Neill turned with fervour. The mask, indeed, he exploited to a degree beyond anything that Wedekind or Toller had realised. And he was still

experimenting with mask and vision when Expressionism, as a school, had vanished from the dramatic scene.

Aural effects, O'Neill used with great ingenuity. In the scene already described from Where the Cross is Made, sound played an equally important part. Where Sue heard only the rats, Bartlett and Nat heard the pattering of bare feet, the preliminary to the entrance of the drowned sailors.

Sometimes he concentrated on evolving atmosphere by sound - the melancholy native singing in The Moon of the Caribbees, the quickening tom-tom in The Emperor Jones. Frequently sound was symbolic - the harsh, barking laughter of the sailors in The Hairy Ape, suggesting the age of steel, the singing of 'Shenandoah' at intervals throughout Mourning Becomes Electra. Of the value of silences he was equally aware. He explained to B.H.Clark that in Welded 'the most significant thing in the last act was the silences between the speeches'.⁽¹⁾

One so highly conscious of the potentialities in 'Spectacle' was naturally drawn to the 'synthetic drama' in which the moderns specialised. Marco Millions best represents O'Neill's experimenting in that direction. Music, chanting by choruses, stylised ballet attitudes, lyric verse, dancing, are all combined in a pastiche which B.H.Clark

(1) Clark. p.126.

suggested would be 'a perfect thing of its kind if reduced to 5 or 6 scenes and turned into a dramatic ballet of the Mikado type'.

Such was O'Neill's relationship to the credit side of modern technique. In his faults, as in his virtues, he continues to represent his age.

He is a crusader, and like most crusaders impatient of limitations. His anxiety to transmit his themes frequently annuls his sense of theatrical effectiveness. It leads him on the one hand, to ignore, or attempt to overcome the essential limitations of the theatre, on the other, to exploit resources peculiar to the theatre beyond the point at which they function effectively.

He either forgets that he is writing for the theatre, or he expects the theatre to do too much for him.

To exemplify the first failing. In his later period he tends to minimise illustrative action, that peculiar privilege of the theatre, in favour of sermons and debates. Lazarus Laughed is little more than a long drawn out sermon, which does not even progress from 'Firstly' to 'Secondly'. By supplying Lazarus, the preacher, with an extremely large and colourful congregation, glittering with masks, wigs and brilliant robes, O'Neill placates his theatrical conscience, and persuades himself that that is action, which is in fact only movement.

The kindred failing is that of reiteration and over-emphasis, to which O'Neill is temperamentally

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 prone. After three acts of Lazarus Laughed even the lowest intelligence will have imbibed the doctrine 'there is no death'. Yet, without a development in theme, there are six more acts proclaiming it. So it is with the 'electricity' theme in Dynamo, a play aptly described by G.J.Nathan as 'A Non-conductor'.⁽²⁾

In plays such as Welded, The First Man and Days Without End the theatre becomes a debating school, in which the principal speakers have evidently no notes to consult: they attempt to clarify their opinions by giving them voice. The debates differ from Shaw's in that they are pitched in a much more emotional and subjective key, which largely debars the dramatist from conquering us by wit.

In this type of play character is reduced to a shadow, less substantial even than the 'grotesci' which O'Neill habitually employs. Michael and Eleanor Cape, in Welded, are described at great length in the stage directions, but for all that they never achieve more life than the argument they represent. They are not even symbolic types, such as Yank in The Hairy Ape, Cybel in The Great God Brown, but animated viewpoints only.

This characterlessness is extremely typical of modern tendencies. Shaw has it to a certain extent, Pirandello more

(1) J.H.Lawson sees this tendency as a more or less constant feature of O'Neill's technique, and of the English speaking stage in general. (Theory and Technique of Playwriting. New York, 1936).

(2) American Mercury. March 1929.

so, the dramatists of the later American propaganda school which came in with Clifford Odets, more so again. The dramatist's views, not his characters, are remembered. But O'Neill has no great talent for purely verbal emphasis: consequently plays such as Welded risk the fate of not being remembered at all.

In Strange Interlude and Dynamo O'Neill's dissatisfaction with the traditional theatre led him to attempt a bridge between the theatre and the novel. Here he was not so much ignoring as trying to overcome theatrical limitations. Not only is the acting time of four hours, for which Strange Interlude ran, a strain on an audience, but the action is blunted and slowed down by the long, reflective soliloquies and asides. O'Neill's desire for the scope the novel afforded is further suggested by his increasing predilection for the trilogy form. Mourning Becomes Electra is one, Dynamo was to be the first play of another. In his plans for the future O'Neill told Clark⁽¹⁾ that he was planning nine plays to form a cycle dealing with an American family between 1806 and 1932. He is/sympathy here with Strindberg and Kaiser, who each produced a trilogy, To Damascus and Gas.

In his drift away from his own theatre sense, O'Neill was dominated by his absorption in types of themes which tended to be non-dramatic, either because they were insufficiently assimilated by the dramatist - that of

(1) Clark. p.172.

Dynamo - or because of their own nature. The theme of Lazarus Laughed is that state of religious beatitude which, because it involves no conflict, can only be expressed by reiteration. There can be no true dramatic development with such a theme. In his later plays O'Neill was increasingly concerned with such cosmic beatitudes, seldom successfully.

But he is a man of extremes. Even while he was ignoring the special resources of the theatre, he was at the same time relying too heavily upon them. In his stage directions he lays fantastic demands upon the physical medium. The elms in Desire under the Elms, the laughter in Lazarus Laughed, are asked to convey the impossible. The chorus of forty-nine is not only asked to laugh in unison, a sufficiently difficult task, but to express subtleties varying from 'rhythmic joy in life' to 'high-pitched cruelty'. He over-exploits the mask, demanding from an instrument essentially bold and simple in conception, refinements more appropriate to the most mobile of faces. And so means which should be intensely dramatic take on the flavour of closet drama, because they are over-worked. One is reminded forcibly of his own statement - 'I hardly ever go to the theatre,...because I can always do a better production in my mind.'⁽¹⁾

We have now seen how O'Neill reflects both the virtues and the vices of his age. In certain aspects, however, he stands somewhat apart.

(1) N.Y.H.T. November 10th, 1924.

He can clearly be singled out by his passion for outright statement, which frequently becomes over-statement. Unlike Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Kaiser, Bernard, he is not content to suggest and imply. He must always clinch his points.

With this goes a preference for resolved patterns rather than the disconnected, inconclusive forms first popularised by Strindberg. He is the master of the grand style - at his best with a massive plot which displays the architectural balance of Mourning Becomes Electra. Desire under the Elms, he said, was an attempt 'to give an epic tinge to New England's inhibited life'.⁽¹⁾ And Greek tragedy, as we have seen, he profoundly admired. In fact, he is the epic writer *manqué*, something of 'le grand sauvage' among the legions of the civilised. Sometimes, when strongly influenced by Strindberg, he will restrain his ardour in favour of the 'interested misery' which marks Diff'rent and Welded. But on the whole he prefers an emotional development, a loud and final crescendo. This is in some degree due to an ineradicable streak of melodrama in his genius, a determining influence which will be discussed later.⁽²⁾ Partly to this, partly to his philosophy of life may be attributed his ever recurring climaxes of violent death,

(1) Letter to G.J.Nathan. 26.3.1925. Printed in The Theatre of George Jean Nathan. Isaac Goldberg. New York. 1926.
 (2) Section II (a).

suicide and mental dissolution. His stage, like that in Hamlet, is generally strewn with the corpses of those tried by ordeal. In this his taste does not accord with that of the age, which prefers to leave the hero suspended before a vista of infinite suggestion.

But we have already seen that O'Neill distrusted suggestion. Consequently, he is not guilty of the obscurity to be found in the plays of Strindberg or Wedekind. Nor does he cover up a lack of anything to say with an air of having too much to say, the *modus vivendi* of too many modern dramatists. He can never be accused of paucity of idea, however one may doubt the quality thereof.

To this extent, then, O'Neill parts company with his confreres. But in his concentration on theme, his ceaseless search for appropriate form, his enthusiasms and his over-enthusiasms he is entirely the man of his age. In studying him, one studies his whole generation.

* * *

Read the plays in anthologies, says B.H. Clark in An Hour of American Drama (1) and maintain if you can that during the 18th and 19th centuries there was a single one worth reading or reviving... Those reprinted in his own Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century (2) certainly

(1) Philadelphia, 1922. p.22.
(2) Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1943.

SECTION II (a).

The American Theatre before O'Neill and a Chronological
Survey of his Plays up to 1914.

"I want to be Brunhilde, and I'm only Frou Frou."
(Jinny, in The Girl with the Green Eyes
by Clyde Fitch.)

Fitch's epitaph on Jinny serves equally well as an epitaph on the entire American Theatre before 1918. Content for a long time to be 'only Frou Frou', it found itself unable to escape that rôle when aspiring after Brunhilde.

O'Neill represented the new age in his relation to his own national background just as he did in so many other aspects. He came as a John the Baptist to a wilderness where wild honey was much rarer than in the terrain of the European 'pièce bien faite', rare though it may there have been.

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(1) Philadelphia, 1930. p.22.

(2) Princeton University Press. Princeton, 1943.

represent inspiration at its lowest ebb. By 1870, American drama is generally assumed to have acquired roots in native soil. Before that date it had been unashamedly a transplanted blossom, gathered from the European hothouses.

But even after 1870 American roots continued to put forth much the same kind of blossom as before.

Under the ingenious hand of Augustin Daly the more colourful situations of Sardou and Ohnet flourished anew under titles such as Taming a Butterfly (later, Delmonico's, or Larks up the Hudson, 1871) and What Should She Do? or, Jealousy (1874). Colourful, but not too highly coloured. La Dame aux Camélias and Le Demi-Monde did not find their way in. In fact, Daly adapted only two plays by Dumas fils, L'Etrangère and Denise, in comparison with over a dozen by Sardou and lesser French dramatists. His borrowings were not even from the best that Europe had to offer.

The influence from Germany, ironically enough in the light of later developments, was that of vaudeville. Von Moser's Ultimo, Krieg im Frieden and Harun al Raschid acquire local habitation and name as The Big Bonanza (1875), The Passing Regiment (1881) and An Arabian Night, or, Haroun al Raschid and his Mother-in-Law (1879).

The connection with Europe was not of the highest.

Native melodrama and farce lacked even the finish and adroitness of their European prototypes. In 1875, the year that witnessed Ibsen's Pillars of Society, the popular

success of New York was The Mighty Dollar, a play in four acts by Benjamin E. Woolf. Though distinguished by the presence of a genuine comic villain, Slote, this play in every other way represented the drama of 'situation' at its most mechanical. It tripped airily from one misunderstanding to the next, by way of the usual stepping stones, overheard conversations, intercepted letters and the rest. Phrases such as 'this abode of gilded misery' are common currency. Asides abound. 'But I don't want you to make any use of it' says Slote in Act I, then (aside) 'I'll do that part of it.' Informative soliloquies, with none of the European ingenuity, are used with abandon. Typical is Slote's in Act II - 'No one here? That's good. B.B., Bully boy, by a large majority. I knew I would be too late when I missed that B.B., blamed boat. Missed the boat by one brief minute and missed the fun by a large majority. Had to come by train, found I had left my deadhead ticket at home, and I'm out 40 cents.....' In more introspective vein is Vance's peroration in Act I:- '...Poor girl, how wan and pale she is - her face has not lost its beauty, but she is like the ghost of her former self, as she was when I told her of my love, and believed that I was loved in return. What a fool I am to tear open the old wounds. I will remain here no longer - I dare not trust myself...'

If it did not attain to a high degree of polish, however, the American drama was proudly conscious of its

superiority in morals. The rules were laid down by Bronson Howard, the 'dean of American drama' in The Autobiography of a Play, a paper delivered to the Shakespeare Club of Harvard University ⁽¹⁾ in 1914. In this paper he discussed the three versions of his play The Banker's Daughter (1878), first produced in Chicago in 1873 as Lillian's Last Love and later at the Court Theatre, London, as The Old Love and the New (1879).

In the first version, Lillian, the heroine, died tragically; in the second she was permitted to live. Howard explained the reason for the change thus:- 'In England and America the death of a pure woman on the stage is not satisfactory, except when the play rises to the dignity of tragedy. The death, in an ordinary play, of a woman who is not pure, as in the case of Frou-Frou, is perfectly satisfactory, for the reason that it is inevitable. Human nature always bows gracefully to the inevitable. ⁽²⁾ This 'perfectly satisfactory' is the voice of the 'Dean' indeed! Contrast this with O'Neill's creed, that man is only interesting in his 'glorious self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him'.

Howard's document is an extremely revealing assessment of the relative degrees of 'satisfactoriness.' Mother love,

(1) Dramatic Museum of Columbia University. 1914. 'Papers on Play-making'. II.

(2) p.27.

he suggests, will hold the attention of an audience for a limited time only: the love of the sexes, on the other hand, indefinitely. He argues the Pros and Cons of his tragic climax with an extraordinary mixture of moral responsibility and business-like acumen. Though Lillian has sinned to the extent of marrying without love, involving a sacrifice (1) 'not of one, not of two, but of three lives', yet she has remained 'pure', with the result that 'everyone left the theatre wishing she had lived'. (2) 'Sound logic, based on sound dramatic principle' induced Howard to bow to the public demand. A fresh problem then arose:- 'As Lillian is to live, which of the two men who love her is to die?' It was an axiom of dramatic law, according to Howard, that 'three hearts cannot beat as one'. The hour of Noel Coward and his Private Lives had not yet come. 'It was easy enough to kill either of them, but which? We argued this question for three weeks.'

In the end morality triumphed over romance. The young lover, Routledge, was disposed of by duel, and the husband came into his own. In the first version, Lillian's child, Natalie, had played a vital part in unwittingly saving her mother from dishonour. When the motivation was altered, this

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- (1) Strebellow. Act IV. p.235. in Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1943) ed. B.H. Clark.
- (2) The Autobiography of a Play. For this, and the following quotations see pp.28-35.

incident became superfluous. But Howard, the technician, found it hard to part with so telling a scene. For nineteen rehearsals he attempted to fit the child in somehow. All in vain: 'natural human instinct...got the better of three men trained in dramatic work'. The scene had to go. Natalie was compensated with the next best 'sure fire' situation. She became the traditional Cupid, plying between mother and father:- 'Dear Papa - Mamma wants you very much.'⁽¹⁾ The play ends on a note of romance and respectability which must have edified all concerned.

This was the 'serious' native drama. Howard's plays were all 'satisfactory' in his sense of the word. In Young Mrs. Winthrop (1882) husband and wife are reunited by an adult Cupid, the family lawyer. In Shenandoah (1888) the reconciliation is effected, even more perfunctorily, by letter, but the same inevitable conclusion is voiced by Mrs. Haverhill:- 'We will think no more of the past, except of what was bright in it. Frank's memory, and our own love, will be with us always.'

The dramatists who followed the Dean adhered scrupulously to his instruction:- 'Even if you feel sometimes that your genius...seems hampered by these dramatic laws, resign yourself to them at once, with that simple form of Christian

(1) Act V. Op. Cit. p.255.

resignation etc. etc.' (1)

Writers of comedy and 'domestic melodrama' such as Harrigan, Hoyt, and Herne worked competently within a narrow range, but aspired to nothing great. There was much of this unpretentious material about, the adventure plays of Gillette, for example, whose titles tell all:- Held by the Enemy (1886), Too Much Johnson (1894), Secret Service (1895).

A gleam of poetry, otherwise so conspicuously absent from the drama, flickered through the romances of Belasco and his collaborators. Though primarily a showman, he drew his 'scissors and paste-pot' drama from sources distinguished for a certain exoticism and passion.

His settings alternate between glamorous Arabian Night effects and ridiculously exaggerated realism. Belasco carried the tenets of Stanislavsky to a degree of complete absurdity. In The Heart of Maryland, (1895) for example, the property plot instructs the provision of '...large stone slab, 6 by 2 feet; 2 pieces of lumber, 6 feet long, 2 inches thick,...plenty of sewing materials in work basket, also one very large blue woollen sock, and one partly knitted.. Small bench 12 in. by 18 in., 18 in. high, above gate to orchard.' The brook must have waterlilies in it, and banks must have grass, although they are only perceived in the

(1) The Autobiography of a Play. op.cit. p.14.

background. Even the properties for that fanciful romance, The Darling of the Gods were imported specially from Japan, and the old Dutch furniture for The Return of Peter Grimm was bought two years before the play was finished. On the other hand, the atmosphere of romances such as Madam Butterfly (1900), Du Barry (1901), The Darling of the Gods (1902) and Adrea (1904) is envisaged with a certain careless rapture. The possibilities of suggestive backgrounds are explored. However much they may smack of musical comedy, the elaborate and exotic settings of such a play as Adrea do at least indicate an attempt to establish harmony between form and content. For within their colourful settings the plays are developed colourfully, with less emphasis on mechanical situation than in would-be realistic plays such as The Heart of Maryland.

The very choice of locale suggests, at the worst, escapism; at the best, a feeling for the poetic, a desire to enliven the drabness of mediocre realism. Belasco turns with ardour to willow-pattern Japan, palaces of Chinese mandarins, the opulent boudoirs of the Du Barry and an incredible Arcady of the fifth century.

These settings absolve him from the demands of realism, demands with which the incorrigible melodramatists of the early twentieth century found it hard to comply. The Darling of the Gods, for all its fantastic situations and nomad diction, is more 'all of a piece' than The Heart of Maryland

which, in attempting realism, displays its melodramatic basis.

The very remoteness of the locale enables Belasco to treat his themes with more freedom, to flout the dogmas of conventional morality. A new morality of pathos and sentimentality is established. The heroines of Madam Butterfly, Du Barry, and The Darling of the Gods, though they meet the conventional death of the woman who is not 'pure', are allowed to die on a note of nobility and tragedy. They retain the sympathy of the audience to the end, simply because they have sacrificed everything for love. Madam Butterfly, certainly, since she was 'betrayed', might be considered a 'pure' woman. But Belasco even manages to make out a case for the Du Barry, whom he depicts as a romantic victim of circumstances. That his success with these themes was not merely the ephemeral sort is suggested by the fact that as late as 1932 Margaret Mayorga still considered Madam Butterfly 'the only classic which American drama has so far produced'.⁽¹⁾

Side by side with the 'new realism' of later dramatists, this romantic genre continued till the time when O'Neill⁽²⁾ began writing. We shall see later that it may quite possibly have influenced him at one period.

(1) Margaret M. Mayorga: A Short History of American Drama (New York 1932) p. 214.

(2) II (b) p. 141 ff.

The lesser writers on whom Belasco's mantle fell continued to explore the possibilities in the romantic material he had used. Richard Walton Tully, one of his collaborators, specialised in exotic native backgrounds. His Bird of Paradise (1912) exploited the glamorous settings of Hawaii: his heroine, Luana, combined savage beauty with the distinction of belonging to an ancient line of kings. In The Flame (1916) an uncivilized Mexico was used as a background for the ferocity of native religious rites.

In this play, A.H. Quinn comments, ⁽¹⁾ Tully made effective use of the native tom-tom beat to create an atmosphere of suspense and terror. O'Neill was to repeat this effect in the Emperor Jones.

The romance plays of this period are characterised by a choice of historical, legendary or fanciful material. Settings are as exotic as possible. Booth Tarkington reconstructs a romantic Eighteenth Century England in Monsieur Beaucaire (1901); Edward Knobloch resurrects the Arabian Nights in Kismet (1911); Hazelton and Benrimo, in The Yellow Jacket (1912) turn to the Orient, and indulge their fancy to the uttermost in a fairy tale of the exiled Prince who seeks his throne in the teeth of fiery dragons, wicked stepbrothers and all the usual opposition.

Romances such as these were frequently expressed through

a jiggling kind of verse. Belasco's Adrea aspired to a throbbing, unreal blend of verse and prose: Madam Butterfly exploited the American idea of Japanese-American:- 'How are those health? You sleepin' good? How are that honourable ancestors - are they well?' The choice of a historical or legendary locale seemed sufficient warrant for the use of verse to many dramatists of this period, who had no poetic talent. A.H. Quinn, quoting from Brian Hooker's Mona (1911) in A History of American Drama ⁽¹⁾ says 'A few lines will show its quality'. So they do, but hardly that which he deduced it to be. In fact, the verse is uninspired, and the more irritating because of its pretentiousness. The same, in greater degree, can be said of all Percy Mackaye's romances, which were usually in verse. A typical specimen comes from Jeanne d'Arc:- 'thou darling little town of Domremy Thou winkest with thy lids of vines...'

(2)

Of this period Quinn said 'The romance has taken on a verse form only sporadically and its form is less a matter of importance than its spirit.'

But its form is an indication of the spirit. And the spirit was one of escapism. Dramatists such as Hazelton and Benrimo or Percy MacKaye cannot have imagined that they were poets born, and that they could only express themselves through poetry. Their use of verse was, rather, a

(1) op.cit. p.147.

(2) Ibid. p.150.

manifestation of desire to avoid discipline evidenced equally by their choice of fanciful material and remote settings. It was one way of evading the great contemporary problem of dramatic diction, a problem of which, as we know, O'Neill was acutely aware. When Maxwell Anderson, who had considerably greater poetic talent, turned to verse drama, it is significant that he did not avoid contemporary subject matter. Winterset (1935) was concerned with an acutely topical problem, as was Key Largo (1939), in somewhat less degree.

Having glanced at the remoter background, we may now consider O'Neill's relation to the nearer one. Old and new did indeed join hands at his birth. He who was to found an Olympus was at the same time direct heir to Saturn. In fact, as the son of James O'Neill, he might be said to have been fathered by the essence of the old theatrical traditions. James O'Neill was the then familiar figure of actor-manager, touring the country with the most popular melodramas of the days; often his own adaptations. Typically, again, his greatest personal success was with the celebrated Monte Cristo, an adaptation of the novel by Dumas pere, who was the traditional fount of inspiration for Americans.

O'Neill had his own stake in Monte Cristo. As a boy he played the indispensable part of 'the waves' in the [^]Chateau d'If scene! In this central position the full force

of his father's melodramatic delivery would paralyse his ears. He would hear such inspired dialogue as 'I love you as a brother, but ask not, hope not more, for my heart is given to another'.⁽¹⁾ He would become familiar with the typical 'revenge' plot of melodrama: the long series of intrigues, concealed identities, thrilling escapes and discoveries would unroll before him. Excitement piles on excitement in Monte Cristo, culminating in the duel scene and Edmund Danton's famous 'Three!' The supreme revelation is reserved for the last lines of the play, when Mercedes announces, 'Your prayers have saved your father's life, Albert - you are his son!'

In An Hour of American Drama Clark suggests that the technique of Monte Cristo was unlikely to have affected 'the lad who sneered at its facile tricks'.⁽²⁾ But it is possible to be stung by a mosquito even while denouncing its methods as clumsy. Whether or not he despised melodrama, almost all O'Neill's plays suffer from its defects. Instances of melodramatic diction abound even in as late a play as Strange Interlude, while the incident of the poison bottle placed on Ezra's dead body in Mourning Becomes Electra is a stroke in which Edmund Danton would have delighted.

(1) Mercedes; Act I. Monte Cristo. Version by James O'Neill, based on the MS. by Charles Fechter. Printed in Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century Ed. B.H. Clark. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1943.) (2) p. 39, op. cit

If O'Neill absorbed the tenets of melodrama unconsciously in his boyhood role of 'the waves', he had later opportunity to take more conscious note of them. In 1910, when he was twenty-one, he had travelled as assistant manager to his father's company with the production of The White Sister, in which Viola Allen co-starred with James O'Neill. Two years later he rejoined the company, himself playing a small part in the perennial Monte Cristo. In the New York Times of October 9th., 1931, S.J. Woolf quoted O'Neill on this time:- "We travelled all over the country, appearing twice a day between a trained-horse act and a group of flying acrobats". Of James O'Neill he said, 'I can still see my father, dripping with salt and sawdust, climbing on a stool behind the swinging profile of dashing waves'. To his critical faculty, of course, the glaring faults of that melodrama were only too obvious:- 'It was an artificial age, an age ashamed of its own feelings, and the theatre reflected its thoughts. Virtue always triumphed and vice always got its just deserts.'

But melodrama was in his blood, however vehemently he might disclaim it. Apart from its manifestation in the actual construction of plot, treatment of character and diction, there is a similarity between O'Neill's general method of presentation in his early plays and the method in Monte Cristo. The genesis of the latter play in a novel necessitated a break of eighteen years after Act I, so that conditions might be adjusted for the revenge. O'Neill substitutes Life,

the revenger for Man, the revenger, but he too is addicted to this drastic lapse of time between acts. In Beyond the Horizon, Gold, and Diff'rent eighteen years elapse after the first act: both cause and effect are presented.

Whereas in his later plays such as Mourning Becomes Electra and Days Without End the 'cause' is conveyed through exposition.

But supposing that O'Neill had not been affected a whit by his contact with Monte Cristo, it is still unlikely that he remained unaware of his American background. When he entered Princeton University in 1906, he must have given some ear to the discussions which Clark admits to have raged in collegiate circles about 'the coming dramatists', Fitch, Moody and the rest. Certainly his age, eighteen, pre-supposed susceptibility to contemporary interests and opinion.

In this year of 1906, the plays of the season were:-
The Truth and The Straight Road: Clive Fitch, Clarice: Gillette, Rose of the Rancho: Belasco (based on Juanita by Richard Walton Tully), The Man of the Hour: George Broadhurst, The New York Idea: Langdon Mitchell, The Great Dividè: William Vaughan Moody, Jeanne d'Arc: Percy MacKaye, The Three of Us: Rachel Crothers.

Of these dramatists Belasco and Gillette, whose work has already been described, belonged to the older generation. Rachel Crothers' The Three of Us, Fitch's The Truth and

The Straight Road heralded the new realism. A glance at The Truth suffices to show how unreal that realism was. It was a realism of the surface only; concerned with conventions rather than essentials. By minimising melodramatic situation, and devices such as the soliloquy, Fitch attempted to invest his plays with an air of everyday probability. But because he was dealing only with conventions the artificiality became immediately apparent when once time had robbed them of their 'everyday' quality. The agonies of his Becky in The Truth lack even the art and elegance which glorified Henry Arthur Jones' treatment of a similar theme in The Liars. Comedy, ostensibly of manners, was represented by Langton Mitchell's The New York Idea, and the unpretending mediocre by George Broadhurst's The Man of the Hour.

Percy MacKaye's Jeanne d'Arc demands rather more consideration, since MacKaye took himself and the drama so seriously. His 'folk plays' combine two characteristic trends of the period - toward 'romance' and 'seriousness'. B.H. Clark, in a review of May 8th. 1920 in Arts Gazette (London), quoted MacKaye on his 'ballad play', Washington, the Man who Made Us (1920) which Clark was reviewing. He pointed out that it was designed for the theatre of to-day and tomorrow - 'the distinct signs and characteristics of which have been steadily borne in upon my own experience during the last seven years of experiment and demonstration in the field of community drama!

MacKaye certainly explored the possibilities of theatrical pageantry, but only for surface show. He was far from appreciating the aesthetic potentialities of visual image which the Europeans were to develop. He excelled in theatrical movement, rather than in dramatic action: in manipulation of huge crowds, chorus dancing, ballad singing between acts and so on, It is well to remember that this feature was included in O'Neill's heritage: we find him practicing similar methods, though to a different end, in Lazarus Laughed.

From MacKaye's conception of theme 'high seriousness' was lacking. Like his less ambitious contemporaries he could resist no opportunity of introducing 'human interest' or adroit situations into even the most austere legends. In Jeanne d'Arc for example, he enlivened the first act, in which the voices are heard, by introducing a peasant boy, Colln, who is passionately in love with the Maid. This love interest had to be jettisoned when Joan recognises her destiny and leaves Domremy for Paris. Accordingly a second lover, D'Alençon, was provided. His passion is kept in check only by the prompt intervention of St. Michael, who appears in full view of the audience at every moment of crisis. Nothing is left to chance. If the Maid hears voices, the audience must hear them too. D'Alençon is even made responsible for Joan's renewal of courage as she faces execution, and for the return of her voices. MacKaye had in

mind, one feels, Bronson Howard's dictum that the 'love of the sexes' is a fons irrigata.

This type of entertainment was in effect blood brother to The Darling of the Gods, or any of Belasco's unashamed 'spectacles'. But the fashion had changed, and even dramatists quite unequipped for the task had recognised the importance of being earnest.

No-one could doubt that William Vaughan Moody was as earnest in his intentions as could be desired. In The Great Divide (1909) and The Faith Healer (1909) he was sincerely concerned with real problems. The Great Divide was the talk of the season in that year when O'Neill went up to Princeton. It dealt with the theme of conventional Puritanism which was to occupy O'Neill himself in many of his plays.

But Moody was not qualified to interpret this theme satisfactorily. The Great Divide betrays the cloven hoof of melodrama at every step. Moody insists pathetically that the plot was based on an incident from real life, proving only thereby that real life may make first rate melodrama but poor art. The initial hypothesis in The Great Divide may be a 'probability', but it is certainly an unconvincing one. Out of the three maulers who invade her cabin while she is alone at night, Ruth, the

(1) The original title of the play was The Sabine Women.
 (2) New York, 1945, pp. 437-8.

(1)
 'Sabine Woman', prefers to the attack of all three, a hasty marriage with one, an action in itself which many present-day moralists would uphold. But that she should by instinct choose the only ruffian with finer feelings, that he should immediately respond to her offer of marriage and buy off his fellow-brigands with a nugget of gold, that the two should live together as husband and wife and grow to love one another - this is all melodramatic material, and is developed as such.

Though Moody was considered 'a bit of a revolutionary' at one time, this was merely because the theme of The Great Divide was a trifle risqué. He had certainly not attempted any revolutionary flouting of the laws upheld by Bronson Howard. Nor did any of these 'coming dramatists'. Most of them succeeded in effecting a 'satisfactory' mixture, of moral edification - what Eugene Walter called 'uplift' - and popular appeal. Augustus Thomas, the new Dean of drama, put the case at a somewhat lower level than Howard had done: - 'When you write for the audience you must write for the great average'.

(2)
 In The Print of my Remembrance Thomas reveals the secrets of dramatic technique with considerable naïveté. He affirms without a tremor that most of his plays began in a situation, which first provided a one-act play. He

(1) The original title of the play was The Sabine Woman.
 (2) New York, 1922. pp.437-8.

would then develop the situation into full length form. This is worth comparing with O'Neill's emphatic denial that Gold, a four-act play, was developed from the one-act Where the Cross is Made.

Not only was this Thomas' own method, but he maintained it was that of all dramatists: the playwright 'starts with a dramatic situation which has a possibility in the theatre of some strong effect'. He then proceeds to write round it. This is certainly the effect that Thomas' own plays create, but it is startling to find him making such complacent confession.

He takes it for granted that there exists a mental camaraderie among his brother dramatists, that they all acknowledge the same rules, and work according to the same pattern. Defending Belasco against the charge that The Girl of the Golden West was a reproduction of his own In Mizzoura, he says:- 'When Mr. Belasco wanted to introduce Blanche Bates into a mining camp, a sheriff was the most likely lover, and the most likely rival, in order to establish conflict...would be...a criminal.'

In fact Thomas knew exactly what would be the 'most likely' thing for Belasco to do in any given circumstances, and no doubt Belasco found the workings of Thomas' mind equally familiar.

Both realized that the American audience craved 'piquancy' even in the more serious-minded drama. Popular science

proved a valuable source for situations with a somewhat *recherché* flavour. Thomas describes the genesis of his The Witching Hour (produced 1907) in The Print of my Remembrance. The original idea of a spirit manifesting herself through a perfume lacked sufficient 'grip': so to it was added the theme of mental telepathy. The combination was hoped to be piquant enough for the most jaded palate. But Thomas took care to hold his manuscript in reserve for ten years till the public became familiar with theories of mental telepathy. The dramatist must not have ideas in advance of his audience! Belasco followed the trend with his play on spiritualism, The Return of Peter Grimm (1912). His hero's return from the spirit world provided him with little more than an opportunity to revel in ironic contrasts and in complications of situation, in the happy knowledge that he had an infallible *deus ex machina* at hand. But though the play was no more than the usual sentimental nonsense, the spirit in which he approached it indicates the trend of the period. Margaret Mayorga quotes from the programme note on The Return of Peter Grimm:- 'A conversation with Professor James of Harvard, and the works of Professor Hyslop of the American branch of the London Society of Psychological Research have aided Mr. Belasco'.⁽¹⁾ This was no flight of fantasy, but something very earnest indeed!

(1) Margaret M. Mayorga: A Short History of American Drama.
op.cit. p.219.

Eugene Walter, another dramatist of the 1900s, rose to the fore at once through the 'satisfactoriness' of his particular mixture. He treated a theme of never-failing appeal - the decline and fall of the 'frail' woman. With this subject he was sure of his audience's interest, and of their moral approval provided that his approach was orthodox. That is to say, to quote Shaw, that he followed the 'unwritten but perfectly well understood regulation that members of Mrs. Warren's profession shall be tolerated on the stage only when they are beautiful, exquisitely dressed, and sumptuously lodged and fed; also that they shall at the end of the play, die of consumption to the sympathetic tears of the whole audience, or step into the next room to commit suicide, or at least be turned out by their protectors and passed on to be 'redeemed' by old and faithful lovers...'⁽¹⁾

Shaw wrote this in 1894, and in 1906, the date of Paid in Full, Eugene Walker was still following the ancient formula. In comparison with the orthodoxy of Bronson Howard, however, he was a wild heretic. Howard would never have hesitated for a moment, as he did, over the alternatives of death or compromise for Laura Murdoch in The Easiest Way (1908). Lillian, in The Banker's Daughter, was reprieved only because she was technically 'pure'. Had she been one quarter as impure as Laura, her death

(1) G.B.Shaw: Preface to Mrs. Warren's Profession (1894) Penguin Books Edition (1946) p.184.

would have been inevitable. But even as late as 1908, death, for the erring woman, was still the safest way. A comparison of Walter's light women with O'Neill's squalid prostitutes shows how great a gap the latter dramatist had traversed - greater even than that between Pinero's *Iris* and Shaw's *Mrs. Warren*. Yet Walter expended so much earnestness over his juggling with conventions that it appeared at the time as though he were engaged with essentials. The stage directions for The Easiest Way provide for the last detail, down to the very message on a telegram which is not read out. The height of verissimilitude! Belasco carried out Walter's instructions most scrupulously when he produced the play. He imported the famous 'sordid room', in its entirety, from a cheap theatrical lodging house. Could realism go further?

From the playwrights so far discussed O'Neill inherited certain melodramatic or romantic leanings which he never quite shook off. Traces of Walter's methods appear in his own early 'sordid' plays. But the only dramatist who might have exerted an influence on his serious work was Edward Sheldon, who immediately preceded him.

Sheldon possessed the usual melodramatic and sentimental streak. But he broke new ground with his choice and treatment of theme.

In Salvation Nell (1908), the problem of the prostitute is approached much less conventionally than in Walter's plays.

The ending has inevitability, resulting from sincere & characterisation. The Nigger (1910) deals with a very real and moving theme, the problem of the American negro in a white civilisation. Though Morrow's discovery of his negro blood does faintly recall the situation in Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon (1859), Sheldon does not make the discovery a matter for inevitable death or suicide.

He makes no attempt to minimise the horror which such a discovery, to an inveterate negro contemner, involves, nor does he attempt to evade the issue. Morrow and Georgie are not forced into a conventional reconciliation, which could have no real truth in it. Instead, Morrow accepts his negro blood, and determines to live according to his inheritance. He turns to the waiting crowd, who cheer him because he has subdued the negroes, to tell them that he is himself one of the abhorred race. This is a climax unusually powerful and convincing for the period. The note of real passion which Sheldon occasionally attains, notably in the revelation scene between Georgie and Morrow and in the episode of the lynching, looks ahead to O'Neill. In fact, an abortive theme of The Nigger, the problem of marriage between black and white, O'Neill was to develop in All God's Chillun Got Wings.

The opinion of the conventional critic indicates the degree of Sheldon's difference from his contemporaries. * Margaret Mayorga suggests that The Boss would seem to be

even more revolting to the average mind than The Nigger, for it embodies the suggestion that a worthy result can grow from a bad beginning!

Occasional similarities in setting between Sheldon's and O'Neill's plays stress the connection between the two. The first scene of Salvation Nell is laid in a bar, divided by partition, similar to that in Anna Christie. The High Road (1912) suggests Beyond the Horizon with its outdoor setting in which Alan, the hero, expounds to his beloved theories strikingly like those of Robert Mayo in the later play.

But Sheldon had only one foot out of the bog of melodrama and sentiment. Romance (1914) represents his talent at its lowest ebb. Conventionalism triumphs, after a cheap and tawdry sentiment has had its fling. Chiefly in his attack on the fortress of respectability did he pave the way for O'Neill.

To sum up. The outstanding characteristics of the drama immediately before O'Neill fall into oddly contradictory classes. On the one hand there was a demand for realism. This involved a deliberate attempt to escape from melodramatic situation, characterisation and diction, an attempt only too often unsuccessful. Such realism was only of the surface, but an earnest attention to photographic detail, combined with the inevitable moral 'uplift', gave it a semblance of something more profound.

On the other hand, there were those forms which forsook realism, the romance and fantasy. In the more aspiring, MacKaye's 'folk dramas', for example, history and legend furnished the material. The less ambitious were content with any foreign or fairy tale background which provided a sufficiently romantic setting. In this type of drama, verse tended to replace contemporary diction: colourful spectacle the deliberate drabness of the realists.

Each form partook to a great extent of the other's quality. This was inevitable when dramatists in both classes were obedient to the dictum:- 'When you write for the audience, you must write for the great majority'. And so the realism was flavoured with piquancy and 'strong' situation, the romance rendered homely by familiar motivation and characterisation.

Artificiality was the characteristic common to both classes. There were none of Ibsen's 'master builders' in the field; only a host of builder's labourers, who specialised in jerry built, but pretentious, homes for the people. O'Neill used at first much the same bricks and mortar, but his building imagination was fixed on the highest of high towers.

We will now consider the plays he wrote before going up to Harvard in 1914. After that date the influence of America gave way somewhat to that of Europe.

In 1912, when he first began to write, he was still in close contact with melodrama and 'the road'. Fittingly enough, his primum opus represents his only attempt at writing for the stage of 'the road'. A Wife for Life was the title of a one-act vaudeville, which did not, however, reach production.

According to the chronological list which O'Neill furnished to R.D. Skinner, the five plays in his first published volume, Thirst and Other One Act Plays, were written between 1913 and 1914. The unpublished plays of this year will first be mentioned.

There were two full length plays, Bread and Butter (four acts) and Servitude (three acts). A one-act play, Abortion, was the only one to receive production. O.M. Sayler, in Our American Theatre⁽¹⁾ states that it was produced in 1916 by the Provincetown Players. He does not however include the title in his record of the Players' productions for 1916, which suggests that it must have been a private production only.⁽²⁾ The manuscripts of all these plays were destroyed.

The plays in the Thirst volume were published in 1914, being sponsored financially by James O'Neill. Since only a limited edition was published, and by O'Neill's specific instructions there has been no reprint, these plays are no longer obtainable in the ordinary way.⁽³⁾ B.H. Clark states:-

(1) New York 1923. p.320.

(2) B.H. Clark makes contradictory statements about Abortion. On p.66 of Eugene O'Neill, the Man and his Plays he says that it was destroyed without having been acted, and on p.72 that it was produced in 1916. (3) op.cit. p.67.

'The five plays in the Thirst volume are now definitely repudiated, and will never be reprinted with the author's permission.' Some indication of their quality can be gauged from the criticisms furnished by B.H.Clark, John Mason Brown and Isaac Goldberg.⁽¹⁾

Thirst appears to be a potted 'tragedy of blood', set on a raft in mid-Atlantic, Recklessness a 'revenge' drama, centring in an ingenious revenge taken by a husband on his wife's lover. Reminiscent of Edmund Danton in Monte Cristo is this last.

The Web, written in 1913, deals in more complicated situation. A murder is 'planted' on a prostitute by her jealous protector. She is dragged away to prison, and, in true melodramatic fashion the plain-clothes man ends the scene with these touching lines, addressed to the crying child, 'Mama's gone now. I'm your mama now!' John Mason Brown comments on the accumulation of sordid detail in this play: the miserable room, the empty beer bottle, the prostitute's hacking cough, the rainy night. 'Gawd! What a night! What a chance I got!' are the opening lines of the play. This is the same sort of over-emphatic realism attempted by Eugene Walter in The Easiest Way.

In Warnings O'Neill seems to have attempted more convincing situation. Two scenes are employed, one to show the

(1) B.H.Clark. Op. cit. p.67.
 J.M.Brown. Upstage (New York 1930) pp.61-63.
 I.Goldberg. The Drama of Transition (Cincinnati 1922)pp.459-461.

precipitating cause, the other the result. But Fog is the only play which turns away from realistic form altogether. It is O'Neill's first piece of symbolism: distinct from the fantasies of Belasco and his confrères in its almost medieval didacticism.

Of these plays only Thirst and Fog were produced; the one in 1916, the other in 1917, by the Provincetown Players.

The only play of this period to have survived for the general public is Bound East for Cardiff, written in 1914 and produced in 1916 by the Provincetown Players.

This is the first of O'Neill's plays to stand out clearly from the American scene, and, indeed from his own early work. It is a simple and eloquent study in mood, immensely refreshing after the arid succession of artificial 'situation' plays which form its dramatic background. The focus has changed, and the implications of a situation are seen to be more important than the situation itself. Bound East for Cardiff, being written before O'Neill went up to Harvard and became detached from the American theatre setting, proves that he was sufficiently great to transfigure an old and worn out form into something that was indeed 'comely and reviving'. No wonder that he himself said about it, in the chronological list given to R.D. Skinner, 'Very important from my point of view. In it can be seen, or felt, the germ of the spirit, life-attitude etc., of all my more important future work. It was written before my work under Professor Baker at Harvard'.

SECTION II (b)

Chronological Survey of O'Neill's Plays related to the
Movements which affected them (contd.)

When O'Neill entered Professor's Baker's English 47 class at Harvard in 1914, he had already to his credit a number of short plays which indicated a pressing need for improved technique. On the other hand, the originality of one, Bound East for Cardiff, suggested that standardised instruction would not be likely to further his peculiar genius.

But he entertained at the time what St. John Ervine called 'that pathetic faith which all Americans have in the power of professors to make an author of a man after twenty lessons in the craft of letters'.⁽¹⁾ He even acquiesced, momentarily in Baker's verdict on Bound East for Cardiff,⁽²⁾ that it was not a play at all. Though, as we have seen, he was later to stress its importance as containing the germ of all his future work.

Judging from the plays he wrote during these Harvard days and immediately afterwards, the technical lessons he

(1) Introduction to The Moon of the Caribbees and Six Other Plays of the Sea (London 1923) p.9.

(2) Clark. p.44.

received from Baker exerted a baneful influence on his work. They led him to concentrate on improving the melodramatic forms he already knew rather than seek out new forms more appropriate to the themes he envisaged. On both sides the relationship seems to have been most stimulating from the personal viewpoint. So O'Neill:⁽¹⁾ - 'Yes, I did get a great deal from Baker - personally. He encouraged me, made me feel it was worth while going ahead...'⁽²⁾ And Baker:- 'After all these years my pleasant memory of O'Neill in the work is far more vivid than the memory of the details of that work.'

The 'details of that work' would include such an occupation as 'charting a Gus Thomas play on the blackboard to show how it was built!' Of this O'Neill said:- 'I got up and left the room'.⁽³⁾

The direction of Baker's interests is indicated in his Dramatic Technique.⁽⁴⁾ He spends very little time over selection of theme, or relation of theme to suitable form, the aspect of technique which was to concern O'Neill most deeply. After some tentative statement to the effect that, in modern times, 'nothing human is foreign to the drama', he plunges into the well-worn territory of traditional structure - division into acts, characterisation, rising action, climax and so on.

(1) Clark. p.44.

(2) Ibid. p.45.

(3) Ibid. p.54.

(4) New York and Boston, 1919.

Technique, for Baker, is the dramatist's 'ways, methods and devices for getting his desired ends.' The concentration is on 'methods and devices'.

The effects of this concentration show in the plays O'Neill wrote while at Harvard. They are all unobtainable, most of them having been merely produced in college but never published. The manuscripts were afterwards destroyed. From their titles and descriptions some idea of their quality may be gathered:- The Dear Doctor (one act), The Personal Equation (originally The Second Engineer. Four acts), The Sniper (one act), A Knock at the Door (comedy, one act), Belshazzar (six scenes). The last two were neither printed nor acted. Of the first two a fellow-student wrote, in a letter to Clark, ⁽¹⁾ 'I happen to remember two things he wrote: a one-act farce...which he called The Dear Doctor, and a long play about sea life called The Second Engineer. The first was inconspicuous (I don't know why the title sticks with me) and the latter was laboured and stiff. His worst fault, I think, was an ineptitude at dialogue, except when the speakers were raving, drunk or profane.'

The only play of those written at Harvard to gain a wider public was The Sniper, produced at the Playwright's Theatre, (Macdougall Street, New York) on the 16th. February,

(1) Clark. p.41.

1917. (2) Clark, who claims to have seen the only script in existence, describes (2) it as 'an exciting little scene', 'far better than most of the plays in Thirst.'

Academic instruction had so far resulted in a flow of farce and melodrama. In the year 1916, immediately after O'Neill had left Harvard, the flow continued, though intermingled with better things. The titles of this year's unpublished plays are:- The Movie Man, Now I Ask You, Atrocity, The G.A.M. (3) The first is described as 'one act, comedy', the second as 'three acts, farce-comedy', the third and fourth as 'one act, pantomime' and 'one act, farce-comedy'. Again, the manuscripts were destroyed.

This sporadic outcrop of farce is indicative. It had not been a feature of his writing before the Harvard year, nor was it ever to occur again in his work after 1919. Concentration on 'Methods and devices' had temporarily diverted his genius from its true bent.

It was in his private reading that he found inspiration. Before Harvard, he was already acquainted with Strindberg. (4) Of his reading then he said:- 'I read about everything

(1) Details of first production will in general be given at the end, together with dates of writing and publication. Where they appear significant, however, production dates will also be included in this survey.

(2) Ibid. p.73.

(3) By O.M.Sayler, who gives a complete list of O'Neill's plays, in order of composition (until 1923) in Our American Theatre (New York, 1923) p.320.

(4) Clark. p.41.

I could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans - practically all the classics - and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg.'

Especially Strindberg. This was the influence to be detected in the first of his extant plays, Before Breakfast, written in 1916 and produced by the Playwrights' Theatre in December of that year. It is in one act form, a monologue, bearing a marked resemblance to Strindberg's The Stronger (1890). In Both plays there is one speaking character, whose talk is shaped by the response, or lack of response, from a non-speaking character. In The Stronger the silent character is present during the scene, while the husband in Before Breakfast, never appears. A hand stretched through a doorway is all we see of him. In both plays the silences condition the development, bringing about a moment of revelation and crisis. Successive layers of thought are revealed, like the skins on Peer Gynt's onion. This ingenious method was to be included by Elmer Rice in that 'bag of tricks' The Adding Machine (1923).

O'Neill spent the winter of 1915-16 in Greenwich Village, New York. This was the time when swarms of European artists, escaping from the war, were descending on America. Malcolm Cowley, in After the Genteel Tradition,⁽¹⁾ records

(1) New York, 1936.

(2) London, 1936.

that Greenwich Village in 1916 was full of them. The same year saw the publication of Sherwood Anderson's first novel, and the appearance of James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. New aesthetic standards were beginning to penetrate even to the drama. In 1914 an exhibition of foreign stage designs had been held in New York, and in November 1916 the first volume of Theatre Arts Magazine appeared. The stage was set for the leading dramatist.

For some time, however, O'Neill continued to work with material similar in kind, though infinitely superior in degree to the indigenous melodrama.

First of a series to be published later as The Moon of the Caribbees and Six Other Plays of the Sea came Ile,⁽¹⁾ produced by the Provincetown Players on 30th. November 1917. The circumstances in which this company worked encouraged improvisation and experiment. They may even have helped to create a new technique, as Susan Glaspell suggests in The Road to the Temple,⁽²⁾ a book invaluable for description of these early days.

Ile was followed by In the Zone, produced on 31st. October, 1917, by the Washington Square Players. In diction and general tone this uninspired little play hints faintly at the connection with Synge, which was to show more clearly

(1) Dates of production will be given for these one-act plays, since they help to establish the order of writing.

(2) London, 1926.

in the next sea play, The Long Voyage Home. In the latter, produced on 2nd. November 1917, there is a strong flavour of Synge. There is about the rich, coarse dialogue, the poetic melancholy, that 'joy in common life' which Andrew Malone, in Dublin Magazine, Vol.7, 1923, saw as common to the two dramatists. The resemblance is, of course, emphasised by O'Neill's exploitation of colourful patois, in particular Irish.

The Moon of the Caribbees, though splendidly original in conception, breathes an even stronger air of Irish pathos and poetry. As in Synge's Riders to the Sea (1904) the speech of the common people is fashioned into rich, evocative rhythms: silences speak: a haunting melancholy pervades even the drunken orgy. The play, like the native music with which it ends, is 'the mood of the moonlight made audible'. At this stage of his development O'Neill was very conscious of 'the transfiguring nobility of tragedy...in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives'.⁽¹⁾ He emphasises the fact that Smitty's 'sentimental posing' harmonises less with the night's beauty than the 'honest vulgarity of his mates'. 'The Moon', he wrote to Clark, 'works with truth', the Spirit of the sea - a big thing - is in this latter play the hero'.⁽²⁾

(1) Quinn. p.199.
 (2) Clark. p.80.

Anticipations of The Hairy Ape occur in The Moon.

Driscoll gives the sigh for the days of sailing ships which was to come from Paddy's mouth in the later play, while Cockey does actually address Paddy as 'hairy ape'.

The four sea plays, Buand East for Cardiff, In the Zone, The Long Voyage Home and The Moon of the Caribbees were produced as an entity, entitled S.S.Glencairn by Frank Shay on 14th. August 1924 at the Barnstormers' Barn (Provincetown, Mass.). As O'Neill said, in a letter to the New York Herald Tribune 16th. November, 1924, the identity of the crew welded the whole together, complete though the individual plays were in themselves.

In the summer of 1917 a short story entitled Tomorrow was published in Seven Arts Magazine. In the same year, according to the chronological list furnished by O'Neill to R.D.Skinner⁽¹⁾ he wrote a short story, unpublished, 'about stokers, containing the germ idea of The Hairy Ape.' His inclusion in the list of this story, when he omits detail of all the Harvard plays, even The Sniper, suggests that he was anxious to establish the originality of The Hairy Ape by proving its early conception. For the year 1914-15 he says merely, 'nothing of importance' and for 1915-16, 'nothing'.

1918 was an important year, for it witnessed O'Neill's first full length play, Beyond the Horizon. Before this, however, came The Rope, produced on 26th. April 1918 at the

(1) R.D.Skinner. Eugene O'Neill: a Poet's Quest. (New York, Toronto, 1935) p.viii.

Playwrights' Theatre (Provincetown Players). Here the shadow of Strindberg looms up, showing in the intensity and bleakness of characterisation rather than in situation, which remains melodramatic. The likeness is emphasised by the use of the rope hanging in the barn as central motif. It was to a 'barn' that Julie went out with a knife, to commit suicide, in Strindberg's Miss Julie (1888). And both the rope and barn were to be connected with suicide in O'Neill's next clearly Strindbergian play, Diff'rent.

Of the other one-act plays written in this year, Where the Cross is Made was included in The Moon of the Caribbees volume; The Dreamy Kid was first published separately in Theatre Arts Magazine (New York, January 1920). The former was produced at the Playwrights' Theatre (Provincetown Players) on 22nd. November 1918. Despite all the melodramatic incident and dialogue it contains, it is interesting as a herald of future developments. For the first time O'Neill used the dramatic means described by Aristotle as 'spectacle' to reveal his characters' state of mind. And used it very forcefully, as we shall see later. He was anticipating Kenneth MacGowan's prophecy in The Theatre of Tomorrow that the dramatist of the future would 'think more in terms of color, design, movement, music that he does now, and less in words alone.'⁽¹⁾

The Dreamy Kid, first produced at the Playwrights' Theatre

(1) New York. 1921. p.243.

(Provincetown Players) on 31st. October 1919, is an undistinguished play, interesting, if at all, for its use of aural effects to evoke atmosphere.

Two unpublished one-act plays, Till We Meet and Shell-Shock were written in this year, and the manuscripts subsequently destroyed. Margaret M. Mayorga, in A Short History of American Drama (1) includes in her bibliography of O'Neill's plays an unpublished play entitled Meteor, to which she gives no date. Neither B.H.Clark nor O.M.Sayler (2) mention such a play, and as her bibliography is incomplete in no other respects, - she does not, for example, include Till We Meet or Shell Shock - her reference is unreliable.

The most considerable production for 1918 was Beyond the Horizon, produced at the Morosco Theatre, New York, on 2nd. February 1920. Having by this time decided that the one-act play was an unsatisfactory form, O'Neill turned to the three-act form, and found that even this, limited as it was by 'the rigid hills of modern dramatic technique' (3) was, for him, not satisfactory enough. The professional New York theatre was still not ready for the symbolic change of settings (4) in such a play. As Clarence Stratton pointed out in Theatron,

(1) New York, 1932. p.429.

(2) The complete bibliography of O'Neill's works (until 1931) includes only published writings. It is entitled A Bibliography of the Works of Eugene O'Neill. (New York 1931).

(3) 'A Letter from O'Neill'. New York Times. 11th. April, 1920.

(4) New York 1928 p.124. The Art Theatre production 'framed' the scene against a cyclorama suggesting the horizon.

the realistic approach of producers who laid out lines of stones to mark the wagon road in the outdoor scene, was not equal to O'Neill's demands, which the Art theatres, on the other hand, understood and gratified. O'Neill, the conscious and indefatigable experimenter, had stepped into the arena so far held by the foreign world. Writing of Beyond the Horizon in 1924⁽¹⁾ he said 'I dreamed of wedding the theme for a novel to the play form in a way that would leave the play master of the house. I still dream of it, and when audiences develop four hour attention power and are able to visualise a whole set from suggestive details, then!'

Most of these hopes were, in fact, to be realised, but not, however, in the following year, 1919, when more manuscripts were ruthlessly destroyed. Two one-act plays, Honor among the Bradleys and The Trumpet (comedy) were neither produced nor published. Another, Exorcism, a comedy, was produced at the Playwrights' Theatre (Provincetown Players) on 26th. March, 1920. It appears to hold only retrospective interest: the central motif, escape from disillusion through suicide, was to occupy a prominent place in O'Neill's later philosophy. A longer play of this year, Chris Christopherson (3 acts, 6 scenes), was produced in Atlantic City on 8th. March, 1920. It was, as O'Neill commented in the chronological list furnished to Skinner, 'the play from which Anna Christie developed'.

(1) Ibid. (i) supra.

The play was not published, and the manuscript was later destroyed. No more one-act plays were written after this date.

In the spring of 1919, the final draft of The Straw, begun in 1918, was completed. Had this play been published anonymously, one might have hesitated to ascribe it to O'Neill. Apart from the familiar figure of the rough, blustering Irishman, popularised in the S.S. Glencairn series, there is little of his 'stormy petrel' touch in this conventional piece of theatre. The isolation of character does perhaps faintly anticipate future developments. By setting his action in a sanatorium he subjected his characters to a very specialised type of pressure. In such conditions emotions become intensified, the normal values of life are lost. Strindberg was particularly addicted to this sort of treatment: his plays abound in lunatic asylums or their equivalent. We find the same setting reproduced in Lenormand's Le Lâche (1925), where similar conditions apply.

At the beginning of 1920, O'Neill developed the situation of Where the Cross is Made into the full-length form in which he had originally visualised it. ⁽¹⁾ Gold, produced

(1) O'Neill in a letter of 20th. June 1920 to G.J. Nathan. Printed in Isaac Goldberg's The Theatre of George Jean Nathan. New York, 1926:- 'The idea of Gold was a long play one from its inception. I merely took the last act situation and jammed it into the one-act form because I wanted to be represented at the Provincetown Players' opening bill two seasons ago.'

at the Frazee Theatre, New York, on 1st. June, 1921, was as melodramatic as its predecessor and less interesting technically through omission of the vision scene.

Anna Christie, written in the summer of 1920, was also a reworking of material. That it was close in form to the 'pièce bien faite' is suggested by the controversy over its happy ending in which O'Neill played a verbose and resentful part. One is reminded of the storm in a teacup over Howard's The Banker's Daughter. In fact, Anna Christie looked backwards rather than forwards.

(1)
James Agate, in The Contemporary Theatre, saw it as a jumble of Conrad, Synge, Dumas fils and Huysmans.

O'Neill was not at this time in great sympathy with his American contemporaries. He was unaffected by the example of his fellow Provincetown Player, Susan Glaspell, who practised 'Théâtre de Silence' methods or by the experiments of Alice Gerstenberg and Elmer Rice, though occasional devices used by the latter two were to figure in his later work. He looked ^{not} toward America for inspiration, but toward Europe, and, in particular, to Sweden.

In the autumn of 1920 he wrote two plays in which the old order gave place to the new:- The Emperor Jones and Diff'rent.

Since both plays show such clear sympathy with foreign trends, it will be as well, before discussing them, to consider what those trends were.

(1) London, 1924.

It was indubitably to Strindberg that O'Neill paid his first, and most unremitting, allegiance. In a programme note on The Ghost Sonata, with which the Provincetown Playhouse opened in 1924, he said, '...Strindberg was the precursor of all modernity in our present theater...(and) still remains among the most modern of moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theater of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama - the blood of our lives to-day. ...All that is enduring in what we loosely call 'expressionism' - all that is artistically valid and sound theater - can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg's The Dream Play, There are Crimes and Crimes, The Spook Sonata, etc.'

The American must have been attracted by the Swedish dramatist's ironic and bitter conception of life, which was to some extent his own. Strindberg was concerned almost exclusively with 'characteristic spiritual conflicts.' Human relationships, even in his naturalistic plays such as The Father (1881) or Miss Julie (1888), were important only as a manifestation of spiritual values. In later plays such as A Dream Play (1902) and The Ghost Sonata (1907) realistic relationships were abandoned altogether. The same

(1) O'Neill:- 'Strindberg and our Theater' Program of Provincetown Theatre No.1. 1923-4. (New York City). Quoted in full by T.H.Dickinson in Playwrights of the New American Theatre (New York 1925) pp.100-102.

spiritual values were presented entirely through symbolic action and dialogue. Advent (1899) he actually called 'A Miracle Play'. His characters were frequently religious figures - The Other One, who is also The Franciscan, in Advent, the Confessor in To Damascus III (1904).

O'Neill's interests were similarly directed. In the introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill⁽¹⁾ Joseph Wood Krutch quotes him as saying - 'Most modern men are interested in the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God.' He too had his 'miracle' plays - Lazarus Laughed, and Days Without End, which last he described, in fact, as 'A Modern Miracle Play.'

O'Neill followed Strindberg, who was in his turn influenced by Swedenborg, in his conception of man as a tragic rebel. He attempts to force God to fulfil him, but must in the end humble himself or be eternally damned. The state of self-reliance or of thinking oneself better than others is a sin against God. In Swedenborg's Spiritual Diary⁽²⁾ the punishment of this state is described; how it is 'attended almost with despair of Salvation'⁽³⁾. But because there was escape from it, he perceived that an evil spirit inflicted the punishment, while God inspired a hope of salvation. The

(1) New York. 1932.

(2) London Edition, 1883. Translated by G. Bush, and G. H. Smithson.

(3) Vol. I. p. 23. Entry for 24th. August, 1747.

constant struggle between good and evil spirits visualised by Swedenborg, Strindberg translated into dramatic terms.

Hummel, in The Ghost Sonata, the Tempter in To Damascus III, are positive powers of evil, attempting to draw man from his allegiance to God. O'Neill preferred to depict the struggle as internal, by such means as the mask of The Great God Brown and the 'alter ego' of Days Without End.

In this struggle sexual relationships played a determining part, but not in the romantic aspect, which had for so long, in American drama particularly, been the norm. Both O'Neill and Strindberg saw woman as important only in her relation to man, and then only because man was unable to fulfil himself completely without her. Strindberg's attitude proceeded partly from temperament, partly from acquired philosophies, that of Swedenborg, for example, who maintained throughout his writings, in particular in The Delights of Wisdom concerning Conjugal Love,⁽¹⁾ that man was born into intellect and woman into desire to conjoin herself with that quality in him. The highest form of love was the desire to reunite in one form, as witnessed by the Adam legend. Without conjunction, male or female was 'divided or half a human being'. But only one such reunion was possible. The man who attempted more fell into 'lasciviousness' and would thereby suffer spiritually. Woman was the weaker vessel, and a potential cause of spiritual destruction.

(1) London 1841 Edition. See for example pp.146-158.

Strindberg developed the idea of 'union' with an emphasis on woman as vampire, seeking to fulfil herself rather than conjoin herself with man. This was the ultimate sin. The Tempter, in To Damascus III, exclaims⁽¹⁾ 'You talk of Woman, Always Woman'. To which the Stranger replies 'Yes. Woman. The beginning and the end - for us men anyhow. In relationship to one another they are nothing.' The Daughter of the Gods, in The Dream Play says of Victoria 'what she is to us and others matters nothing to him. And what she is to him, that alone is her real self.'

The relationship between man and woman is at its most complete when it dissolves into the maternal relationship. Man seeks woman as a refuge, a reunion with Nature, who is intermediary to God. In Act II of To Damascus III the Stranger says 'a desire grew in me to fall asleep on a mother's knee, on a tremendous breast where I could bury my tired head.' Of the Confessor in Act III, scene II he demands, 'where are you going?' And in answer to his 'Up' he responds 'And I down; to the earth, the mother with the soft bosom and warm lap.' Immediately afterwards follows the idyllic love scene with the Lady, the most rhapsodic passage in all Strindberg's writings.

(1) Act III, scene II. The scene references from To Damascus refer to the edition published by the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation. (London 1939). References from other plays by Strindberg refer to Edwin Bjornman's translations, published by the Scribner Press (New York 1921).

But the Lady is also the Mother. In the first scene of Act III she had called to the Stranger 'Come back to me, prodigal one, and bury your tired head on my heart, where you rested before ever you saw the light of the sun.' With those words she was transformed from the wife and mistress into a white-robed woman with 'full, maternal bosom'. 'But my mother's dead', the Stranger exclaims, and she replies, 'She was; but the dead are not dead, and maternal love can conquer death.'

This theme O'Neill uses constantly. Eben, in Desire Under the Elms seeks his dead mother in Abbie, his mistress. 'She used to sing for me' he cries and Abbie responds 'I'll sing fur ye. I'll die fur ye'. She promises to kiss him 's'if yew was my son - my boy - sayin' good night t'me', but the kiss turns to one of passion. Her look at him is 'a horrible, frank mixture of lust and mother-love'. The same motif is treated, from different angles, in Dynama and Mourning Becomes Electra.

In The Great God Brown even the symbolic Strindbergian characters figure, Margaret, the 'eternal girl-woman' muses in the prologue, 'Dion is the moon and I'm the sea. I want to feel the moon kissing the sea... (more and more strongly and assertively until at the end she is a wife and mother)... And I'll be Mrs. Dion - Dion's wife - and he'll be my own Dion-my little boy - my baby!' In the Epilogue she calls him 'My lover! My husband! My boy!... I feel you stirring in your

sleep, for ever under my heart.' And Cybel, as her name denotes, is the incarnation of this 'earth love'. When she holds Brown's naked body to her, he cries, 'The earth is warm'. She looks ahead, 'like an idol.' 'Go to sleep, Billy,' she says, and he replies 'Yes, Mother! And when I wake up?' 'The sun will be rising again.'

At its best, then, the relationship between man and woman may lead man to God. But only too often the way lies through thorns. The Stranger, in To Damascus III only comprehends this at the end of a long misery:- 'I kiss your little hand that caressed and scratched me...the little hand that led me into the darkness...and on the long journey to Damascus'.⁽¹⁾

Before this stage is reached, the relationship between Strindberg's men and women is generally one of blended attraction and antagonism. This is because they strive to remain themselves instead of uniting as one: the women, in particular, aspire to dominate where they should submit. - 'Of course' says the Tempter, in Part III, Act II of To Damascus III, 'every healthy man's a woman hater, but can't live without linking himself to his enemy, and so must fight her!'

The fighting stage Strindberg reproduced most faithfully. 'We resemble two drops of water.' says the Stranger

(1) Act III, scene III.

to the Lady, 'that fear to get close together, in case they should cease to become two and become one.' And in the Dance of Death Part I., the most depressing of all his studies of marriage, Alice explains to Kurt 'since then there has not been a day that we didn't try to separate...but we are welded together and cannot get free!'

We shall find this idea recurring frequently in O'Neill's plays. It is most clearly developed in Welded, a play whose theme, and manner of presentation, owes much to The Dance of Death.⁽¹⁾ The very title suggests the play's origin.

O'Neill followed Strindberg in form as in theme. He followed him in his 'super-naturalistic' technique, and in his symbolic, unrealistic technique. Though O'Neill always maintained the hold on realism that Strindberg later rejected, he was at one with the Swedish dramatist in the desire to explore those hidden areas of the mind, of impulse and instinct, which interested them both. And this led them into every kind of experiment with form.

Strindberg demonstrated the inadequacy of traditional realist form in his preface to Miss Julie (1888). Was the stage, he asked, suited to the needs of a reflective, analytic age? And the answer was inevitably - not in its present form. Psychological processes were what interested the modern

(1) See quotation immediately preceding.

audience. The dramatist must, then, attempt to present these processes. Dialogue must depart from the symmetrical and mathematical construction standardised by the French, and follow the irregular pattern of reality. Since the modern audience's capacity for illusion was decreasing, acts must be abolished, and, till concentration⁽¹⁾ improved, rest forms, such as the monologue, pantomime and dance, could be introduced. Musical effects were to be carefully selected, and scenery to borrow the quality of abruptness from impressionistic painting.

When he wrote Miss Julie, however, Strindberg was still in the throes of that 'pottering with stage properties' which he later condemned. Even this reformed naturalism, eventually proved inadequate. Symbolism, and 'what we loosely call expressionism' replaced it, even as, in his philosophy, mysticism replaced scepticism.

The connection of the two has some validity. Swedenborg, whom he followed, had an extraordinarily intense visual imagination. He saw visions constantly, and affirmed that only those led by the senses saw them not. Hell was familiar to him as his own garden, and spirits jostled at every elbow. His conception of the spirit world was vividly pictorial. Conjugal love appeared to him as

(1) Strindberg sighed for an audience capable of watching a play for an entire evening without interval. O'Neill, as we have seen, hoped only for 'four-hour attention power'.

a rainbow, purple changing into white and blue. The lost souls condemned for 'love of self' were in a state of 'charred blackness', the avaricious seemed white to themselves, but stained with black to all others. (1)

Strindberg exploited vision and symbol dramatically. He too had a highly developed sense of colour and design. He had a genius for silent groupings, with significant settings suggesting infinite and sinister possibilities.

In The Thunderstorm (1907), for example, the entire front of a house, and the sidewalk outside, is visible. Silent figures, seen at various points, present ironic contrasts. The four red shades drawn at the windows on one floor glare down balefully at the Master, who, seated in a lighted room below, comments on the mystery of the life behind them. He is later to discover that he knows only too well the people who live behind the shades. The mysterious allure of a lighted or curtained window had already been exploited by Maeterlinck, and was to be a favourite theme with Pirandello.

In The Ghost Sonata a similar setting is used. Hummel and the Student talk on the sidewalk while the Dark Lady stands motionless on the stairs, the White Haired Fiancée gazes in her window mirror, the shades of the Round Drawing Room are raised to reveal the Colonel contemplating his wife's

(1) Spiritual Diary Vol.5. For example, p.176.

statue. We have the last word on the White Haired Fiancée in Hummel's comment 'the only mirror she uses is the window mirror, for there she sees not herself, but the world outside - from two angles; but the world can see her, and she hasn't thought of that...' We never get closer to her character than this.

Attitudes are then important symbolically. The Tempter, in To Damascus III (Act III, scene I) sits in an attitude 'that recalls the classical statue "The Polisher" or "The Slave"'. O'Neill used this idea in The Hairy Ape.

Speech becomes less important than symbolic appearance and action. In The Dream Play the officer appears at regular intervals calling for his beloved, Victoria. The first time he is a young man, radiant in frock coat and tall hat, carrying a bunch of roses. On the next entrance his hair is grey, the roses fallen to pieces. Finally, he enters as an old man, carrying only the stems of the roses. At the end of the play he is back again at the starting point, young, radiant, calling for Victoria. So the life of man goes. The setting in the background emphasises the change. At the beginning there is a green space in the distance, a green linden tree and a blue aconite. When the officer enters with his fallen roses the green has turned to brown, the leaves gone from the linden and the aconite withered. Visual effects of this sort are a substitute for philosophic speeches of traditional drama, such as Jacques' 'Seven Ages of Man'

in As You Like It.

Character, too, is frequently indicated by visual effects. Rudolph, the dyer, in After the Fire (1907) has suffered from the effects of the 'mutual admiration' atmosphere in which he was brought up. The Stranger says to him in Act I 'Why are your hands so black?' and he replies 'Because I handle dyed stuffs all the time'. But he suspects, correctly, the significance of the question, for, like Swedenborg's lost souls, he is black within as well as without. Similarly, in To Damascus III, the Stranger is shown⁽¹⁾ the invalids who have blue clothes and hands cinnabar-red. This, the Confessor explains, is what happens when Aphrodite Urania, the heaven-born, degrades herself to Pandemos, the Venus of the streets.

The very shape of Strindberg's symbolic plays is itself a symbol. In The Dream Play the scenes are indistinct: incidents from one merge into another, as in a dream; at the end all the earlier action is repeated. So the confusion of the dream, which is an image of life, is suggested. To Damascus III begins at a street corner, where the Stranger is waiting for the Post Office to open. In the last scene he is back at the same street corner 'writing in the sand - still.' But because of what he has experienced in the interval he has found courage to enter the Post Office and demand the dreaded

(1) Act III.

letter. And it contains the good news for which he had so long been waiting. The irony of life with a vengeance!

This shaping of form to suggest theme we shall find frequently in O'Neill's plays, notably in The Great God Brown.

Strindberg was responsible for the later popularity of 'monodrama' among the German Expressionists. In To Damascus everything is seen through the eyes of one person, the Stranger. As he views a thing, so it is. This involves considerable distortion of setting, physical attitude and so on, since all things must show as they are reflected in his mind. At one point ~~she~~ the Lady appears young and beautiful again after a period of decay; she explains to him that this is only because his mind invests her with beauty. Her first husband was unable to see her in such a light because he possessed no beauty within himself.

Sometimes a mental conception is presented not through distortion of setting, but through direct vision. At the opening of The Ghost Sonata, the Student talks to the silent Milkmaid, who seems a realistic figure, but whom we later realise to be only an idea in the mind. Visions glide in and out of Advent, representing manifestations of the Judge's inner self. In To Damascus natural objects suddenly become invested with supernatural quality: in the trial scene of Part III, for example, the tree trunk becomes transparent and dissolves into the figure of Eve, mother of creation.

Vision, as a projection of self, was to be a feature of German Expressionism. O'Neill, as we shall see, used it somewhat differently. The measure of difference indicated the point at which his affinity with Strindberg ended.

Not only setting but lighting and sound were exploited for symbolic ends by Strindberg. In A Dream Play, for example, the stage is lit intermittently as if by a lighthouse. The officer speaks in time with the flashes:-
 'Light and dark - light and dark!' The Daughter imitates him - 'Day and night - day and night!...' A merciful Providence seeks to shorten your time of waiting! And that is why the days are flying, pursuing the nights!' In The Thunderstorm the flashes of lightning serve a similar symbolic function.

Music plays an equally significant part. In the 'Fairstrand' scene from A Dream Play, Edith plays down the waltz music to which the revellers are dancing with the notes of Bach's Toccata con Fuga. For a moment the action is interrupted - she dominates the scene. Then, as always, the dancing is resumed, the sacred music forgotten. Throughout the scene explanatory words are unnecessary. Church music sets the key of To Damascus. Chant and response keeps present in the mind the idea of the monastery to which the Stranger must, in the end, return.

It is clear then that what Kenneth Macgowan was only visualising in 1921 - the thinking 'more in terms of colour,

design, movement, music' - had already been achieved by Strindberg as early as 1900.

Labels had to be applied by the schools and their critics which followed him before the new technique came to be officially recognised as 'Expressionism'. But none of the later developments surpassed, or even added considerably to what his genius had already conceived.

The Continental Expressionists, Hasenclever, Kaiser and the rest, reduced Strindberg's splendid disorder to a formula. An intermediary stage was served by the 'neo-realistic' dramas of Leonid Andreyev, a Russian dramatist who had something of Strindberg's fiery and turbulent imagination. His symbolism was clearer, his themes simpler, but he adopted a very similar manner of presentation.

Like Strindberg, and the moderns in general, he was obsessed by the desire to externalise 'states of mind' on the stage. In pursuance of this aim he drew upon his highly developed sense of pictorial values. Inspired fantasy and the grotesque were Andreyev's forte. He exploited to the full the substitution of 'spectacle' for the spoken word. O'Neill does not specifically mention Andreyev in his reading list, but he could scarcely have omitted him from 'all the moderns' - his early symbolic plays were contemporary with Strindberg's latest - and, as we shall see, the technique of the two had much in common.

Andreyev excelled in the use of symbolic light and sound

effects, particularly in contrasts between light and darkness. In The Life of Man (1906), which he described in an after-word as 'my first attempt at a neo-realistic drama', he achieved striking effects by varying the degree of light to suggest and amplify the variation of the action. The first act opens in complete darkness. Gradually a grey light reveals dim, high outlines, and the grey silhouettes of the Old Women, supernatural beings who await the birth of Man. At the moment of birth, light, sound, and the spoken word are woven together into a symbolic pattern. The Being in Grey declares 'Man is born!' Immediately the candle he holds bursts into flame: simultaneously the child's cry is heard. As Man progresses, the candle flame waxes to a brilliant light: then it begins to sink, becomes a feeble flicker, and, as he dies, goes out. 'Darkness is restored. So Man advances 'from his dark beginning...to his dark end.'

Contrasts between light and darkness are exploited even more fully in The Black Maskers (1908). Attention is focussed at the start on Lorenzo's extravagant demands for 'Lights, more lights!' His castle, and even the roadway outside are to blaze to the sky; But this brilliance attracts not only the invited Guests, the Maskers, but also the Black Maskers, sinister creatures whose apparent masks are in reality their faces. Fires and lights are extinguished as these uninvited guests approach. Servants rush in with more torches, and for a time there is a wild battle between light and darkness, in

which Lorenzo exults hysterically. But the darkness wins.

This is symbolism of clear and dramatic order. Lorenzo's song explains it:- 'I lighted up my castle with lights. What has happened to my soul?...The lights go out at the breath of darkness.'

Andreyev's experiments with masks will be considered later in relation to O'Neill's own 'mask' plays. There is certainly much in The Black Maskers that anticipates The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed.

By means of symbolic appearance, gesture and attitude Andreyev was further enabled to substitute the visual aspect of the theatre for the spoken word. In The Life of Man for example, the guests in Act III sit in rigid, formal attitudes suggestive of marionettes. They speak stiffly, without looking at each other. They are, in fact, the symbol of modern society. The Enemies of Man, the envious and the back-biters, are presented even less realistically. Their external appearance reproduces their inner characteristics. So they all, without exception, have depraved faces, low foreheads and monkey-like arms. The musicians, on the other hand, have no existence except through their music. Consequently they all resemble their instruments: the flutist is shaped like a flute and so on.

It became apparent in The Black Maskers that this method of externalising traits of character found logical conclusion in the technique of the medieval morality. The Red Masker,

who wears a snake entwined about her, explains to Lorenzo that she is his heart; the Beautiful Masker is his 'falsehoods', the formless and shapeless throng, his thoughts. The entry of the Grey Creature, as Death, completes the resemblance to Everyman.

Like Strindberg, Andreyev made dramatic use of significant settings and silent figures. In the second scene of The Black Maskers Lorenzo sits in a library covered with great spiders' webs, symbol of the toils in which his soul is caught. The Being in Grey, who speaks only at the beginning and end of The Life of Man, yet dominates the play. Similarly, in the death scene, the very silence of the Sister of Mercy ⁽¹⁾ is in itself a symbol. She sleeps throughout the action, unresponsive to the appeals of the Heirs. But we know thereby as Andreyev pointed out in his after-word, that Mercy exists, even though she never opens her eyes.

It is significant that The Life of Man was one of the first foreign plays of 'neo-realism' to be produced in America. The Washington Square Players, who were to become the Theatre Guild, presented it at the Comedy Theatre, ⁽²⁾ New York, on January 14th., 1917.

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- (1) The Sister of Mercy was not included in the first version of the death scene, which Andreyev re-wrote completely.
 (2) A photograph of this production is reproduced in O.M.Sayler's Our American Theatre, p.119

But in O'Neill's eyes the line of succession from Strindberg to the 'Kaiser's hordes', as G.J.Nathan called the Expressionists, came through Wedekind. While at Hargard, he had toiled ⁽¹⁾ through Nietzsche's Also sprach Zarathustra so that he might be able to master Wedekind in the original.

That O'Neill approached Wedekind by way of Nietzsche suggests that his interest in the dramatist may have been directed much as was his interest in the philosopher. Plays such as "Frühlings Erwachen" (1891) and Erdgeist (1895) seem to have appealed to him for their content rather than for their form.

And in examining the content, we see that many anticipations of O'Neill's subject matter are contained there. Wedekind was concerned with the elemental, passionate relationships which were to concern O'Neill also. Alva, in Act I of Die Büchse der Pandora (1902) says:- 'In order to get back on the trail of a great and powerful art we must be as much as possible among men who've never read a book in their lives, who are moved by the simplest animal instincts in all they do.'⁽²⁾

The sex instinct was that which Wedekind selected for treatment. He depicted its crudest and more physical manifestations, unlike Strindberg, who visualised the war

(1) Clark. p.40.

(2) Quotations from German plays will be given from translations whenever they are available.

of the sexes as primarily a war of nerves. For Wedekind, sex represented Nature at her reddest in tooth and claw. He achieved something of the grand style in his passionate and single-minded repetition of the one theme throughout a succession of swiftly moving and changing scenes. Whether the spotlight turn on Moritz, Melchior, Hansy or Wanda in "Frühlings Erwachen", each is concerned with the same obsessing problem of sex. Effect is accumulated upon effect, resulting in a certain lack of balance and reality, but in a forcefulness akin to Strindberg's, who used similar methods. Wedekind's characters are not complex. They acquire life by reason of the single, consuming passion which they embody. In this O'Neill was to follow him.

In their concentration on the nobility of essentially physical relationships, both Wedekind and O'Neill owed something to Nietzsche. In Zarathustra the ideal relationship between man and woman was declared to be that inspired by the desire to create the 'Übermensch'. Here too occurred the notorious maxim - 'You go to woman? Remember your whip!' The brutal element in Nietzsche is reflected more in Wedekind than in O'Neill. Rodrigo, in Die Buchse der Pandora with his hippopotamus whip two inches thick, the prostitute of Tod und Teufel (1905), with her delight in masochism, represent perverted instincts of a sort more common in German than American literature.

In actual form, Wedekind's plays were nothing like so

revolutionary as Strindberg's. Professor Carl Dahlstrom (1) opines that he stands only on the frontiers of Expressionism. Certainly he does not exploit visual aspects to the degree that Kaiser and Toller were to do. His form resembles that of Strindberg mainly in its looseness, its number (2) of short, swiftly moving scenes, the use of soliloquy and the rapid, sometimes seemingly inconsequent dialogue. Only occasionally does he employ deliberate fantasy to express his theme, as, for example, in the last scene of Frühlings Erwachen when the living boy, the dead one and the nameless Muffled Gentleman converse in the graveyard, (3) or in the Prologue to Erdgeist when the Animal Tamer walks on, to the accompaniment of cymbals and kettledrums, and Lulu, in the rôle of Serpent, is carried from the tent by a stage hand.

The transition from Strindberg to the 'Kaiser's hordes' is marked chiefly by a diminution in passion. Whereas in his plays form had been pressed into the service of content, the position, in the plays of the latter, is only too often reversed.

The movement known in drama as Expressionism is generally held to have been crystallised in Sorge's Der Better

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- (1) Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism, p.44. (University of Michigan Publications. Language and Literature. Vol.7.1930).
 (2) Frühlings Erwachen has 19 scenes, some consisting entirely of soliloquy. The dozen lines spoken by Wandla comprise the sixth scene of Act II.
 (3) This scene was imitated by Elmer Rice in Scene V of The Adding Machine (1923). Zero and Shrdlu rise from their graves and converse with Judy O'Grady and her young man.

(1912), and to have reached its height, in Germany where it began, at about 1920. In 1907, Kokosschka, one of the more esoteric practitioners, had produced Morder Hoffnung der Frauen, but this play was to exert less influence than later works, especially those of Ha sencllever, Toller and Kaiser.

As has been suggested, the theories of the German Expressionists had been anticipated, in practice, by Strindberg, Andreyev and, to some extent, Wedekind. German thoroughness, however, crystallised individual practices into the precepts of a school. It was time for definitions to be established.

The most exhaustive of such definitions are furnished by Professor Dahlstrom in the work already quoted. ⁽¹⁾ He finds the control factors in Expressionism to be:-

- 1) Ausstrahlungen des Ichs, involving Solipsism, objectification of inner experience, struggle of opposites, autobiographical tendency, typification, monologue, the aside.
- 2) The Unconscious. Einfuhlung, intuition, distortion, dream character, pantomime, telegram style.
- 3) Seele. ur - ishness, feeling, ecstasy, Schrei, music.

There are three more of these control factors, but they deal with points such as 'Religion' and 'Worth of Man' which may be assumed to be incidental to Expressionism rather than characteristic of it. Dahlstrom himself admits that the chief characteristic is 'ausstrahlungen des Ichs.'

(1) Op. cit. p.103.

By the time the end of his list is reached it is comprehensive enough to include almost every species of dramatic technique, not merely the peculiar traits of Expressionism. Dramatists of all ages have to a certain degree been concerned with 'objectifying inner experience'. What characterises the Expressionists' attempt is their reliance upon the theatrical medium as an instrument of expression in its own right. What used to be a subordinate function - spectacle - here becomes a chief one. The word 'spectacle', for the purpose of this definition, includes setting, physical appearance and attitude, lighting, sound effects and music.

As a result of this exploitation of Spectacle, the Expressionists were enabled to cut down dialogue to the minimum, to rush from one short scene to the next, to represent inner thought by vision, and generally to maintain a high pitch of speed and tension. They presented, in effect, a series of climaxes and were not concerned with preparation or explanation. Only the moment of greatest intensity was valid.

Dialogue became less important than the implications of sound and visual aspects. What Dahlström calls the 'telegram style' became the mode among the German experimenters. In its rapid urgency, mounting to a nervous climax, it was supposed to represent 'Seele' at its most inspired. Frequently it would end in long soliloquy,

generally in verse, for example that which constitutes the second scene in Act I of Walter Hasenclever's Der Sohn (1916).

The epitome of the telegram style is realised by a later play of Hasenclever, Die Menschen (1919). The second scene of this play is set in a dining room occupied by a Waiter and a Guest. As the stage lightens, the Waiter reads from a newspaper - 'Mord!' Then follows this conversation:-

Waiter: - Mord!

Guest: - Die Beine?

Waiter: - Der Kopf fehlt.

Guest: - Ein Bier!

Waiter: - Lustmord?

Guest: - Belohnung.

Waiter: - Zahlen!

Guest: - Ein Rostbeef.

Waiter: - Ein Mann?

Alexander, who has just entered: - Menschen!

Waiter: - Alexander.

Alexander: - Wo bin Ich?

Waiter: - Verschollen.

The whole play is written in this style, except for occasional passages when 'Seele' breaks out into more sustained rhetoric. This is an extreme example of how the Expressionists saved time over dialogue.

(1) The method was parodied by Alice Gerstenberg in a witty little sketch, He and She (1913).

Hasenclever made frequent use of vision and dream effects. He was adept at blending lighting and sound, sometimes as a substitute for the spoken word. When a character in Act I, scene III of Die Menschen says 'Ich traume', the room grows dark: when the mood changes, it lightens again: in Der Sohn music announces the motif of the scene. With this manipulation of 'spectacle' the Expressionists were at their best. Ernst Toller's Masse Mensch (1919), which Sheldon (1) Cheney described as the 'type-example' of Expressionism, was visualised in terms of balanced masses of light and shade, of silences and sound, which corresponded with the reiterated contrast between the words 'Masse' and 'Mensch'. And this contrast was the theme of the play. To a subject of abstract nature, in which the actors represented types, not individuals, this dramatic use of 'spectacle' was admirably suited. From a more particular human drama it might have distracted attention. In this case it enforced.

Toller excelled in symbolic pictures - the Woman, crouching in a cage, the Sentry, whose face changes into that of the Prisoner. By pictorial, rather than verbal presentation he made his points most dramatically. Such a method does, of course, find logical conclusion in the film, where pictorial effects can be exploited more fully than on the stage. Only when the dramatist still relies on reciprocated emotion between

(1) The Art Theater (New York 1925) p.175.

audience and actors does the stage remain the more appropriate setting.

Toller did rely on this emotion. He 'felt' his theme, and expected his audience to do likewise. Although, in accordance with his instructions, even the realistic scenes which alternated with the dream scenes in Masse Mensch were to partake of a 'dream' quality, the passion in which the play was conceived gives the whole a certain hold on essential reality. In his preface to the play he defended his use of types and abstractions by an appeal to the emotions. The middle classes, he declared, might find the play unreal, but not the working classes, whose problems it presented. Plays of drawing room intrigue were, from their point of view, the 'unreal'.

But though the plays of the German Expressionists were characterised by a concentration on 'Man in Society', not all of them were conceived in the emotional vein which does, on the whole, survive through the abstractions of Masse Mensch. The relation of man to modern mechanised civilisation concerned most of these young Germans. But by concentrating on depicting mechanisation, they only too often achieved no more than that.

In the plays of Georg Kaiser the cold deliberation of Expressionistic formulae is most pronounced. Dahlström classes him together with Wedekind as standing merely on the frontiers of Expressionism. He does not, however, mention

the Gas trilogy, in which his own 'control factors', notably 'ausstrahlungen des ichs' are most clearly apparent.

As far as form goes, Kaiser was highly representative of his school. He used the inevitable succession of swift, short scenes, the 'telegram-style', pantomime, distorted setting, vision, soliloquy and so on. The first scene of Von Morgen bis Mitternacht (1916) is phrased in a series of explosive questions and answers, interspersed with pantomime, not unlike that in Hasenclever's Die Menschen. For speech he would frequently substitute the significant setting. The theme of mechanised civilisation is expressed through, say, the stylised race track, with its animated cartoons in Von Morgen, or the background of geometrically designed flames and factory chimneys, the white room, whose walls are covered with black and white diagrams, in Gas (1918). States of mind are externalised through vision. The Clerk in Gas holds conversation with a Gentleman in White, who is discovered later to be merely an idea: the Cashier in Von Morgen addresses for the length of an entire scene the skeleton shape formed by a tree. Attitude and speech are frequently symbolic; for example, the insistent repetition in Act II of Gas: - 'How are things at your place?' 'Not a finger moving,' or, in the first act of the same play, the Workman's report on the explosion - 'white cat burst - red eyes torn open.'

In form, then, Kaiser's plays seem to represent the

furthest interior, rather than the frontier of Expressionism. But in content they lacked that indefinable 'Seele' which was supposed to drive the Expressionist to the use of taut, explosive and dynamic forms. Sometimes he attempted the type of effect achieved by Toller, for example the roar from the workers at the mass meeting - 'Who?' - and the response {I! ' This recalls the way in which Toller balanced 'Masse' against 'Mensch'. But Kaiser's characters were even more determinedly types than Toller's 'Woman' and 'Husband', so much so that almost all emotional effect is lost.

This use of 'types' is, of course, an inevitable feature of Expressionism. Apart from the fact that the German practitioners were concerned with 'Masse', rather than with 'Mensch' as an individual, their very technique committed them to type characterisation. For as C.K. Munro pointed out, Expressionism involves such an infinite distance between the audience and the action that unless the characters are boldly defined types, the audience will have no co-ordinate of reference. ⁽¹⁾ So we have a host of nameless stock characters in the plays of this period - the Father, Son, Friend, Girl in Hasenclever's Der Sohn, the Unknown, the Sentry, the Woman in Toller's Masse Mensch, the nameless clerks and workmen of Kaiser's plays. All pretence of realism is abandoned

(1) C.K. Munro: Watching a Play, pp. 119-122. (Shute Lectures. Liverpool University 1930-31. Pub. Guernsey C.I. 1933)

(1) by Evreinov and the Capeks, who reduce their characters
 (2) to Rational and Emotional entities or to the actual robots
 which many of Kaiser's characters essentially were.

O'Neill must have been attracted to Expressionism by its emphasis on objectifying inner experience. With the predilection for abstract themes and types, however, he was less in sympathy. The principal difference between his Expressionistic plays and those of the Germans is his greater stress on emotional values and on a realistic basis, which was lacking in theirs.

Though he had more in common with Strindberg, who achieved emotional effects almost despite himself, O'Neill was temperamentally unfitted to appreciate many even of the Swedish dramatist's theories on the subject of emotional value. Strindberg looked forward to the time when feelings would be dispensed with after the final growth of the
 (3) reflective organs. He suggested that pity for his heroine in Miss Julie sprang from weakness: it resulted from failure to resist the fear that the same thing might happen to the spectator. This was a new light on the ancient idea of Katharsis, one which O'Neill did not visualise. For Strindberg the joy of life consisted in 'its violent and
 (4) cruel struggles...in knowing something and learning something.'

(1) Theatre of the Soul (1914).

(2) R.U.R. (1922).

(3) Preface to Miss Julie (1888).

(4) Ibid.

It was at the best a bitter sort of joy. In his novel, The Red Room ⁽¹⁾ one character advises another to 'Start with the conviction that the whole world is a rubbish heap... then...you will never lose an illusion.' But for O'Neill illusions so maintained would not have been worth maintaining. It was by struggling after impossible ideals that man became great. 'The noblest is eternally the most tragic.' ⁽²⁾

Though he turned more toward intellectual theorising in later plays, such as Dynamo, the basis even then was emotional. He was never really in sympathy with aims such as that of Andreyev, who hoped that the drama would one day become 'pan psyche', or of Kaiser, the Denkspieler, who wanted to lead people on, by means of grudging concessions to the lust of the eye, to 'a joyous revelling in thought'. ⁽³⁾ In Wedekind's plays emotion is the destroyer: in Frühlings Erwachen, Erdegeist, Tod und Teufel, suicide and death follow in its wake. For O'Neill, the destroyer is also the redeemer. He can find a solution for his tormented lovers in Welded, when Strindberg, in The Dance of Death, saw the only possible solution in death, which ends all.

But though his ultimate objective differed from theirs, O'Neill was at one with the Expressionists in their attempts to externalise states of mind. Their novel use of spectacle

(1) Authorised translation The Red Room, p.203. Ellie Schleussner. London. 1913.

(2) 'Eugene O'Neill's Credo and his Reasons for his Faith'. New York Tribune. 13th. December 1921. (3) Quoted by A. Eloesser: Modern German Literature London 1933. p.147.

must have been brought forcibly to his notice, for it was this aspect which first enraptured the American 'advance guard.'

Expressionism had originated in painting, and it was fitting that in America the first to visualise the possibilities of the new technique should have been the scenic artists and producers. In 1917, as we have observed, Andreyev's The Life of Man was produced by the Washington Square Players, and in the same year Wedekind's Fruhlings Erwachen was presented in New York. In 1921 Sheldon Cheney was declaring in The Art Theatre ⁽¹⁾ that America had 'more talented stage designers than we can readily make use of... Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel-Geddes, Herman Rosse...' And many another. These enthusiastic young designers were at first obliged to adapt the new methods of production to traditional plays. For instance, in 1921 Arthur Hopkins directed an Expressionistic production of Macbeth with designs by Robert Edmond Jones. ⁽²⁾ Distorted settings were used and the witches wore masks, suggesting abstract qualities. This suggestion was emphasised by three huge silver masks shining out of the complete darkness in which the scene was enshrouded. But alas, O.M. Saylor complained in Our American Theatre, the production was not a success. The old did not take kindly

(1) Op.cit. p.186.

(2) For a photograph of this production see O.M.Saylor: Our American Theatre (New York 1923). p.213.

to the new. Shakespeare did not appear to need the attentions of these young 'helpers and servers'.

O'Neill could scarcely have timed his arrival into the American theatre more appropriately. The trumpets had sounded, and the liberator was awaited.

We may now return to the chronological survey of his plays, beginning where we left off to consider the foreign movements which were to affect them.

The two plays of Autumn 1920, Diff'rent and The Emperor Jones, both display clear signs of foreign influence, from oddly contradictory quarters.

In the first, Diff'rent, O'Neill practised a technique similar to that of Strindberg in his naturalistic period. Of this period O'Neill had said, in the programme note already quoted, 'He carried naturalism to a logical attainment of such poignant intensity that, if the work of any other playwright is to be called 'naturalism', we must classify The Dance of Death as 'super-naturalism' and place it in a class by itself.'

This intensity which O'Neill admired, Strindberg achieved by isolating his characters, subjecting them to strong mental pressure, and then bearing continually upon one theme. The effect is compelling, but somewhat narrower than life.

O'Neill attempted the same effect in Diff'rent. He subdued his normal exuberance in favour of Strindberg's 'interested

misery.' His subject matter too was similar to that in Strindberg's Miss Julie. Both plays were studies of women suffering from the results of thwarted instinct. In the second act, O'Neill portrayed his Emma, with her black-guardly nephew, Benny, in an isolation not unlike that in Miss Julie. All the normal characters of Act I are banished from the scene and the resultant impression, to use Caleb's words, is that 'Folks be all crazy and rotten to the core.' The voice of Strindberg indeed.

There are also resemblances of detail between the two plays. Benny describes with gruesome relish Caleb's suicide 'in the barn' and the play ends with Emma soliloquising, as she walks out of the room. 'Wait, Caleb'. I'm going down to the barn!' In Miss Julie, too, the locale of the heroine's suicide was 'the barn', to which she walked out, with a knife, at the end of the scene. In conjunction with the similarity of subject matter and treatment, the resemblance emphasises O'Neill's debt, at this time, to Strindberg, the naturalist.

It should be observed that in Diff'rent begins O'Neill's obsession with the theme of 'Puritanism'. New England was to be the setting, as it is here, for many of his later plays. Francis Ferguson, in The Hound and Horn III January 1930, suggests that O'Neill belongs to the 1912 Renaissance, along with Mencken, Dreiser, Anderson and the rest of the anti-Puritans. Certainly the Puritan conflict over natural

instincts supplies him with the starting point for several of his tragedies, notably in Mourning Becomes Electra.

The Emperor Jones might be classed as the first of O'Neill's Expressionistic dramas, though it was not as close to German Expressionism as the later The Hairy Ape. O'Neill defended the originality of both plays in a letter to B.H.Clark: - ⁽¹⁾ 'the first Expressionistic play that I ever saw was Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, produced in New York in 1922, after I'd written both The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. I had read From Morn to Midnight before The Hairy Ape was written, but not before the idea for it was planned. The point is that The Hairy Ape is a direct descendant of Jones, written long before I had ever heard of Expressionism, and its form needs no explanation but this. As a matter of fact, I did not think much of Morn to Midnight, and still don't. It is too easy. It would not have influenced me.'

This merely confirms what the preceding study of foreign movements suggested - that O'Neill was in greater sympathy with the founder of the school, Strindberg, than with the school itself. It is significant that he found Kaiser's play 'too easy'.

The Emperor Jones, though it displays all the chief characteristics with which Dahlstrom labelled Expressionism -

(1) Clark. p.114.

"Ausstrahlungen des Ichs, Einfühlung and so on - is conceived in an emotional key foreign to his 'type examples'. The visions, which represent the negro's private and racial memories, are not introduced until a realistic atmosphere of terror has been well established. The distortion of setting is no more than one can credibly accept. In fact, episodes such as the appearance of the galley slaves from out of the blackness recall rather Strindberg's treatment of vision than Kaiser's unrealistic abstractions. There is a certain resemblance to Von Morgen Bis Mitternacht, in the gradual disintegration of character which takes place in both the Emperor and the Cashier. Both move in a direction away from civilisation to a less restrained, primitive state. As Clara Blackburn pointed out, in American Literature,⁽¹⁾ the one sees his vision in the jungle, the other in a snowfield. The difference lies in the preparation. Kaiser's vision is shown without warning or explanation, O'Neill's comes as an inevitable outcome of emotion. Nevertheless, in the swiftly changing scenes, the distortion of setting and the long monologue which constitutes the greater part of the play, the form of The Emperor Jones is clearly in accordance with the general practice of Expressionism.

At the beginning of 1921 O'Neill wrote The First Man, a play which recalls Andreyev's The Life of Man in its

(1) 'Continental Influences on Eugene O'Neill's Expressionistic Dramas'. American Literature Vol.13. 1941-42. pp.109-133.

treatment of the central situation, the birth of the child. O'Neill's theme was different, and his treatment realistic but he used a similar grouping of character. As in the Russian play, the relatives gather together and gossip in one room while the birth takes place in another. In each case the woman's extreme agony is stressed by the gossips, and, after the birth, the husband is recalled to her side because of her dangerous condition. The 'neo realistic' technique of Andreyev may not have affected The First Man, which was indeed maintained on a strenuously realistic plane, but aspects of it were to figure in O'Neill's later plays.

In the spring of this year the first draft of The Fountain was written, and, in the autumn, The Hairy Ape, completed within three weeks.

The Hairy Ape approaches nearer the Expressionistic plays of the Germans than anything O'Neill ever wrote. The emotional basis of The Emperor Jones was largely abandoned. For the individual was substituted the type, the mechanised chorus, the parades of animated marionettes. The favourite German theme - man in relation to mechanised civilisation - was treated, and the settings were distorted to suggest this mechanisation. (1) Soliloquy and monologue figure as in the

(1) Clara Blackburn (op.cit.) compares the scenes in the ship's hold with the scene in which the Daughter meets the Coal Heavers in Strindberg's A Dream Play.

German plays: the last scene, in which Yank addresses the gorilla, bears a marked resemblance to the snowfield monologue in Von Morgen bis Mitternacht, already mentioned. Sound effects are used symbolically; the noise of the sailors' laughter suggests the harshness of a phonograph: the men bark out steely choruses, echoing Yank's words. All the sounds, in fact, suggest the idea 'Steel', round which the early scenes revolve. In these ship scenes the telegram style alternates with the long reflective speeches of Paddy and Yank. The dialogue of the prison scene is pungent, explosive, in the manner of Hasenclever.

The Hairy Ape has much more in common with, say, Masse Mensch, than with The Emperor Jones. Yet we do not find O'Neill defending his use of abstractions and types as Toller did. Instead, at the very moment when he has committed himself to the 'infinite distance' of Expressionism, he writes, ⁽¹⁾ 'I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters. When it sees 'A Man' and 'A Woman' just abstractions, it loses the human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonists of the play...the character of Yank remains a man and everyone recognises him as such.'

But, as C.K. Munro showed clearly in his discussion of

(1) 'Eugene O'Neill talks of his own Plays and Others.'
N.Y.H.T. 16th. November, 1924.

(1)
 'distance' in drama, remoteness of action and realistic character do not go together. The audience must have a co-ordinate of reference. If the action does not provide it, the characterisation must. The Hairy Ape was dramatically effective partly because the hero was in fact the necessary 'type', partly because O'Neill stopped short of the German Expressionists' extreme limit of impersonality. In occasional scenes, such as the encounter in the I.W.W. Office, he returned to a familiar realism, and narrowed the distance of the action.

On the whole, despite O'Neill's defence of the play's originality, The Hairy Ape displays his technique at its most imitative. The nearest he ever came to repeating it was in occasional scenes from Marco Millions and in Lazarus Laughed, plays conceived in a very different spirit, as far as theme was concerned. That he did not develop the method of The Hairy Ape in later plays confirms that it was written under an influence which was to prove transient.

In the summer of 1922 O'Neill completed the final draft of The Fountain, a play which was not produced until 10th. December 1925 at the Greenwich Village Theatre, and published in 1926. Since, according to G.J.Nathan in American Mercury (February 1926) the final form of the play was affected by its four years in the hands of producers, The Fountain will be considered as having been completed in 1925, and will be examined at that stage of the survey.

(1) Op. cit.

The next play, Welded, begun in the same year, 1922, and finished at the beginning of 1923, carried the Strindbergian 'super naturalism' of The First Man to much greater extremes. We have already observed that in theme, situation, dialogue and even title, Welded owed a clear debt to Strindberg's The Dance of Death. The two acts in which Michael and Eleanor sit down and discuss the problems of their marriage correspond with similar passages between the Captain and Alice in Strindberg's play. When they attempt to break away from each other, in the scenes with Darnton and the Woman, they continue to repeat their problems, in the same way that Alice and the Captain, in turn, unburden themselves to Kurt.

The undoubted Strindbergian element in Welded aroused the ire of G.J.Nathan, who saw it as entirely pernicious. In the action brought against O'Neill by Miss Lewys⁽¹⁾ in 1931, Nathan, giving evidence, could not refrain from interrupting his testimony to draw attention to the baleful effect of Strindberg on O'Neill's technique! On this same occasion Nathan testified that O'Neill, in 1923, had notes for 32 unwritten plays in his literary journal, one of which was supposed to be the outline for Strange Interlude. The fecundity of O'Neill's imagination, suggested by the existence of this early journal, was still as great in 1934, when he was conceiving the idea of a cycle of nine plays, to be his

(1) see p. 151

(1)
Big Grand Opus!

In the autumn of 1923, All God's Chillun Got Wings was written. In this play O'Neill achieved a much more individual form than in the derivative naturalism of The First Man or the derivative Expressionism of The Hairy Ape. After his experiment in Welded with the 'discussion play', he returned to a form in which the process, or plot, expressed the theme. His creative energy was better employed in forming plot than dialogue, and the result was at once more dramatic and more convincing. Expressionistic effects he now reduced to the background, in a manner which he was to perfect and make his own. All God's Chillun is an interesting blend of old and new. On occasions the dialogue is melodramatic, even the old ranting soliloquy is used. Yet the Expressionistic distortion of setting, the grey light which magnifies the Congo Mask, the lines of black and white faces between which Jim and Ella pass after their wedding - this is the new technique. (2)
The lighting effects in the scenes of Ella's madness are, in fact, similar to those in Andreyev's Life of Man.

Some idea of the infinite distance which already lay between O'Neill and his predecessors may be gathered by comparing All God's Chillun not merely with Boucicault's

(1) Clark. p.172.

(2) Clara Blackburn in her study of O'Neill's Expressionistic plays (op. cit.) does not include All God's Chillun Got Wings. The Expressionist element is none the less very marked.

The Octoroon, which was, after all, unashamed melodrama, but with a comparatively modern play, The Nigger, by Edward Sheldon. Both O'Neill and Sheldon dealt with the problem of the negro in a white civilisation. But Sheldon abandoned the problem at the stage where O'Neill began, that is at the stage where it became profound.

Though the social issue did, of course, affect the relationship between Jim and Ella, O'Neill was concerned primarily with their relationship as individuals. As in earlier plays, he is anxious to exert the highest possible degree of pressure on his characters: this the racial conflict accomplishes vividly and dramatically. Richard Dana Skinner, who treats O'Neill's development from the viewpoint of spiritual progress⁽¹⁾ considers the division into black and white as symbolising the same division between the masculine and feminine principles which had been the theme of Welded. All God's Chillun he classes under the sub-heading 'Abasement', Welded as 'Divided Self'.

Desire under the Elms, written in the spring of 1924, reverts to traditional structure - division into acts, comparative unity of time, strict unity of place and generally realistic treatment.

(1) Op.cit. The plays from Desire under the Elms to Mourning Becomes Electra he classes under the heading 'Regression'. The 'continuous poetic progression,' he says, in his preface, 'is far more important than the dramatic merits of the individual plays.'

The greater concentration thereby achieved accords well with his purpose, which was, as he expressed it to G.J. Nathan, to 'give an epic tinge to New England's inhibited life.'⁽¹⁾ He was at this time looking towards the Greeks. In the same letter to Nathan he affirmed that 'the poetical (in the broadest and deepest sense) vision, illuminating even the most sordid and mean blind alleys is...my concern and justification as a dramatist.'

The exaltation of a tragic Katharsis was what he attempted in Desire under the Elms. Writing in defence of his tragic endings he had said:- 'But happiness is a word. What does it mean? Exaltation; and intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming?...there is more of it in real tragedy than in all the happy-ending plays ever written. It's mere present-day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy. The Greeks and the Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift to it.'⁽²⁾

A pungent description of the effect of Katharsis - the 'tremendous lift to it.' O'Neill must have been aware that he had not achieved this 'lift' in the 'interested misery' of plays such as Diff'rent. Passion and poetry were required, and also a sense of some spiritual significance greater than the physical happenings themselves.

(1) Letter of 26th. March 1925. Printed in I. Goldberg's Theatre of George Jean Nathan (New York) 1926. p.158.

(2) Quoted in Clark. p.133.

Passion O'Neill attained. Whether it was of too carnal a nature for the outcome to be described as tragic is a debatable point. Abbie and Eben are depicted as elemental, lustful creatures, cruder even than the sex-dominated characters in Wedekind's plays. But O'Neill showed judgment in preferring to attempt a tragic Katharsis through simple types such as these. When characters become over-introspective the force of tragedy is lost.

And the fact that the tragedy in Desire under the Elms resulted from the cruder manifestations of sex does not necessarily affect its validity. Indeed, in his very choice of this primitive aspect O'Neill was attempting to realise the spiritual significance which Greek tragedy, by its religious nature, automatically possessed. For Zeus, the omnipotent, O'Neill substituted Nature, red in tooth and claw, Nature, the giver of lust, who was also the universal mother, Nature the creator of all things. Abbie, the primitive woman, lusting after a home, a child, a lover who will be the father of that child, is worshipping Nature in everything she does. So it is with Eben, whose passionate love for his dead mother is a symbol of man's deep-rooted desire to be at one with the earth, the eternal mother. Cabot, the vehement Puritan, does, it is true, practise an orthodox religion. But even he personifies his God in natural things—the sky, the earth, above all the farm. 'When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew... God's in the stones!'

By every means in his power O'Neill emphasises the dominant force of Nature - by the symbolic elms, which lean over the house in an attitude at once protective and possessive, by the remarks of the characters themselves, and by the imagery with which the dialogue is strewn. In this imagery he achieved the note of poetry which was so often lacking from his plays, and without which supreme tragedy is not possible. ⁽¹⁾ O'Neill was always at his best with the strong coarse speech employed by characters such as these primitive New Englanders: he possessed genius for raising the normally inarticulate to a powerful poetic level.

It is clear that in his concentration on unity, his efforts to achieve a substitute for the Greek conception of 'Fate' and his employment of a poetic device, imagery, O'Neill was in this play looking toward the Greeks, and, in some measure, to the Elizabethans. Certainly his mood was far removed from the ironic pessimism of the moderns.

Strindbergian influence is still apparent, however. As we have already observed, Eben's passion for Abbie is reminiscent of the feeling between the Lady and the Stranger in To Damascus III. Eben is haunted by his dead mother's spirit, as are so many of Strindberg's heroes. The association of that spirit with the 'parlour' recalls the

(1) Maxwell Anderson believed Shaw, Synge and O'Neill to be less great than playwrights of the past because they were not poets. His inclusion of Synge in the list makes one suppose that by 'poet' he meant a playwright who wrote in verse form. O'Neill is, in fact, the poet of prose.

'room' motif which recurs frequently in Strindberg's symbolic plays. In The Ghost Sonata there is a special significance in the 'hyacinth room' and the 'Round Drawing-room'. In To Damascus I it is the 'Rose' room, which fills the Lady and the Stranger with inexplicable horror.

With The Ghost Sonata, Desire under the Elms is specially connected by the similarity in setting. Rooms on various levels, and the sidewalk outside, are visible in the first part of Strindberg's play: when the interior is displayed several parts of the house can be seen simultaneously. O'Neill used a cross section setting: ⁽¹⁾ the whole interior of the farmhouse, upstairs and downstairs, was visible. In this way, while maintaining unity of place, he was able to stress the ironic contrasts of the action. While Eben and Abbie can be seen bending over the cradle of their child in one room, Cabot is visible in the porch, musing over the unnatural atmosphere which he instinctively divines, but does not comprehend. The Ghost Sonata must have been in O'Neill's mind at the time, for in 1924 he collaborated with Kenneth MacGowan and Robert Edmond Jones in a production of the play by the re-organised Provincetown Players, a production followed by A Dream Play in 1926.

(1) A similar 'up and down' setting had been used by Lewis Beach in The Clod, produced by the Washington Square Players at the Bandbox Theatre, New York, on January 10th., 1916.

On April 6th. 1924 O'Neill's dramatisation of Coleridge's poem was produced at the Provincetown Playhouse. The Ancient Mariner was not published, but according to B.H.Clark it was notable for the use of the mask as a feature of production. He quotes ⁽¹⁾ James Light, one of the producers, as saying of this device, 'We are trying to use it to show the eyes of tragedy and the face of exaltation.'

From this O'Neill turned to a more ambitious technique in Marco Millions. As early as 1923 QM.Sayler had included this play under the title of Marco Polo in the list of O'Neill's works printed in Our American Theatre. ⁽²⁾ It was there marked 'uncompleted'. By the summer of 1924 the play was finished in its original form, which O'Neill described in the list furnished to R.D.Skinner as 'two part, two play form, each play short full-length'. The final draft was not arrived at until 1925, and the play not produced till 1927, when it had the distinction of being the first of O'Neill's plays to be presented by the Theatre Guild. Like The Fountain, Marco Millions suffered from too much revision, both before and during its sojourn with the producers.

We will consider the two plays, The Fountain and Marco Millions together, since one was completed and the other produced in the same year. The two have much in common.

(1) Clark, p.141.

(2) op.cit.

Both were re-written and adjusted to the taste of producers in a manner unusual with O'Neill's plays and both belonged to the same genre, the verse romance.

Though Marco Millions is distinguished by occasional passages of imaginative beauty, alternating with lively satire, both this play and The Fountain recall the American theatrical romance already discussed. There is a three-fold connection; the type of locale, the highly coloured, fanciful situations and the employment of verse.

In The Fountain the settings are deliberately exotic - first the 'Moorish courts and palaces' of Granada under Spanish rule, then the newly discovered America, with its rebellious Indians, ancient legends and magic springs of youth.

Marco Millions is set more sumptuously. In the earlier play the crowd on Columbus' ship had shouted when America came into view - 'Cathay. Cipango. Is it Cathay? Where are the golden cities?...The Indies!...Marco Polo's land!' Throughout the play the vision of Cathay is kept in the forefront. In Scene VI Juan insists that the home of Nano, the Indian, is Cathay itself:- 'There are great walled cities with roofs of gold inland to the West. Is not that Marco Polo's land beyond all doubt?' The mob sing as they prepare for the expedition:-

'The Cities of Gold
In far Cathay -
Their great Khan is old,
And his wealth untold.'

It was then not surprising that in the next romance, the

setting should be the glamorous Orient itself. Marco Polo travels from a fairy tale Venice the road to an even more fairy tale Xanadu. He passes through a succession of elaborate backgrounds, symbolising the three great Eastern civilisations, till the epitome of romantic fancy is achieved in the Great Wall of China and the magnificent court of Kublai Khan himself. This affection for Oriental settings we have already observed in earlier American romances, notably in Hazelton and Benrimo's Yellow Jacket and Belasco's Daughter of the Gods.

Secondly, the romantic conception and treatment of both plays does not display O'Neill at his best. He is master of the grand style rather than the fanciful. Juan's search for the fountain of youth in The Fountain is in a sense symbolic, but it is translated into terms of treasure hunting, tortured Indians and dream allegory, that recalls the child-like element in his theatrical background. The scene in which the visions appear from the fountain, merging into the figure of Beatrice, comes of fancy rather than imagination. The visions no longer represent projections of the mind as they did in The Emperor Jones. They enact an allegorical pantomime in a manner not unlike that dear to Percy MacKay, for example in the first scene of Jeanne d'Arc, when the Ladies of Lorraine appear from the bushes. The supernatural elements in Marco Millions smack still more strongly of pantomime such as Aladdin. For the magic lamp is substituted the magic crystal, through

which Kublai and Chu Yin gaze at the scene enacted on Marco's return to Venice. The various feats of magic performed by the Djin in Aladdin are represented here by equally fantastic occurrences. In the Prologue the dead body of Kukachin comes to life and murmurs a message to be taken to Venice. This scene is inessential to the rest of the play: one feels that it has been included merely for its own sake, a pretty piece of 'atmosphere'.

Thirdly, in both plays we find O'Neill using for the first time chanted refrains in verse. This verse is cast in would-be lyric form and is highly pretentious in substance. Together with this goes the increase in 'fine writing' which was to be a feature of many later plays. The whole of The Fountain is written in a laboured, flowery rhetoric. Marco Millions has its moments of genuine rhythmic prose beauty, but the diction is more often artificial and uninspired.

The verse proper in The Fountain is confined to song, but it constitutes verse rather than music because of the vital significance attached to the words. In Marco Millions the Chorus, which was to be more fully developed in later plays, makes its first appearance; to this Chorus, and to Kukachin, symbol of Beauty, is entrusted the majority of the verse chants. These lyrics never rise above the level of the following

examples:-

'Love is a flower
 For ever blooming
 Life is a fountain
 For ever leaping
 Upward to catch the golden sunlight
 Upward to reach the azure heaven.'

When Jean Catel, writing in Mercure de France March 1st. 1937, called O'Neill 'avant tout, poète' it can scarcely have been to this manifestation of poetic power that he was referring.

The Fountain and Marco Millions are linked together, and with later plays, by the instructions for the use of masks which figure here for the first time. ⁽¹⁾ The question of the mask will be discussed more fully later: ⁽²⁾ here it is sufficient to observe that in The Fountain the countenance of Death, in the vision scene, is a 'pale mask': in Marco Millions the Chorus of mourners for Kukachin, nine in number, wear male and female masks of grief. The young boys and girls who follow have faces set in mask-like expressions.

From The Fountain onwards O'Neill's plays look rather to each other than to external sources. A device, a phrase or an incident that plays a minor part in one will be developed to an elaborate degree in perhaps two or three successive plays. We have already seen how The Fountain anticipates Marco Millions, which in its turn, in its use of Chorus, masks and chanting, anticipates Lazarus Laughed. In later plays the continuity becomes even more marked. The central theme and situation of Dynamo is developed from a single image in Strange Interlude.

The Great God Brown, written in the first part of 1925, comes between the final draft of Marco Millions and half of

(1) The masks in The Hairy Ape and The Ancient Mariner were a feature of production only.

(2) II (c) (iii).

the first draft of Lazarus Laughed. It displays clear evidence of its antecedents and anticipations of its successor.

The chanting in Marco Millions is here developed into a flowing rhythmic prose: the diction is elaborate, and replete with imagery. In this case, however, the nature of the theme lends conviction to the verbal expression of it.

The use of the mask in The Great God Brown, though forecast very faintly in Marco Millions, suggests a connection more with Expressionistic plays such as Andreyev's The Black Maskers or Toller's Masse Mensch. Situation and phrasing sometimes recall Luigi Chiarelli's La Maschere e il Volto (1) (1924). In fact, the idea of 'unrealistic truth wearing the mask of lying reality' as O'Neill said later of Mourning Becomes Electra, is akin to that developed in more than one play by another renowned Italian, Luigi Pirandello.

The specific use to which O'Neill put the mask appears highly individual. It is rather in its accent on 'presentation' as opposed to 'explanation' that The Great God Brown represents Expressionism. Also, the form of the play, in which the last scene repeats the setting, the situation and even the dialogue of the first, recalls similarly shaped plays of Strindberg - A Dream Play and To Damascus.

In the spring of 1926 followed the final draft of

(1) Translated by C.B.Fernald in 1927 as The Mask & the Face.

Lazarus Laughed, completed, as O'Neill comments, 'except for some cutting and condensation in 1927.'⁽¹⁾ The play was not produced until 9th. April, 1928, and even then not in New York, but by the more enterprising Pasadena Community Playhouse in California.

Anticipations of this play were, as we have seen, contained in Marco Millions. The development of the mask in Lazarus followed directly from that play, rather than from The Great God Brown, where it was used differently. Moreover, Lazarus Laughed belongs essentially to the same genre as both Marco Millions and The Fountain. In it, as in the others, 'spectacle' is exploited to the ends of display, rather than to the Expressionistic ends of 'objectifying inner experience.' There are vast Crowds, Choruses, a profusion of sumptuous settings, brilliant robes, wigs and so on. The amount of movement, chanting and dancing in which these crowds indulge does not serve to translate the theme into action. Consequently it is closely allied to that delight in spectacle for its own sake which was a prominent feature of such earlier romances as Belasco's Adrea.

The chanted refrains in Lazarus Laughed are a clear development of those in Marco Millions. The same insistent repetition of short lines is used in both. The

(1) Skinner. p.ix.

verse in the later play, however, is reinforced by rhythmic cadences of laughter as well as of prose. The whole technique of Lazarus is more elaborate.

The use of laughter is certainly a revival of Expressionistic devices. But nevertheless, it is forced to define the whole play as Expressionistic. This Clara Blackburn does, ⁽¹⁾ by applying Dahlström's control factors. She finds in the play 'typification, struggle of opposites, ecstasy and lyricism', together with other minor factors which stamp it as Expressionistic.

But the use of 'types' here recalls rather the Greek Chorus than the modern German development of it. Even the number of O'Neill's Chorus, forty-nine, is near the traditional Greek fifty. In the same way the masks, reinforced as they are by characteristic costumes and wigs, are reminiscent of the 'type' masks of the Greeks. The division into age groups and character groups stresses the similarity.

The Greek element in Lazarus Laughed is, in fact, very strong. The third act is set in a moonlit square in Athens, where Lazarus is acclaimed as the reincarnation of Dionysus by a crowd wearing the traditional goat skins and daubed with wine lees. Throughout the play Lazarus is referred to at intervals in connection with the Greek divinity.

(1) Op.Cit. p.126.

The Greek motif was prepared for in The Great God Brown. The hero of that play, Dion Anthony, combined within his nature the characteristics of Dionysus and St. Anthony. He refers constantly to the pagan gods, Pan, Silenus, Bacchus. A description of Brown suggests that his face, in outline, resembles 'a Roman consul on a Greek coin'. The conclusive link is supplied in Brown's speech at the beginning of Act IV;- 'It's an age of miracles - The streets are full of Lazaruses.

With the next play, Strange Interlude, begun in the summer of 1926 and finished a year later, O'Neill abandoned temporarily his preoccupation with Greek themes and technique.

The characterisation in this play is developed along lines more reminiscent of Wedekind. As has already been suggested, Nina with her three lovers, recalls, particularly in Act VI, the predatory Lulu of Erdegeist. Both women are totally unscrupulous, passionate, intent on achieving sensual happiness. Like Darrell in Strange Interlude Wedekind's male characters, though superior intellectually to the woman, are conscious of the infinite natural superiority with which her physical perfection invests her.

The technique in Strange Interlude has something in common with Wedekind's rambling style, but more with the technique of the novel. O'Neill developed, now, the 'aside' to unprecedented limits. He used it for the same object after which the contemporary novel sought, to reveal the

'stream of consciousness'. Even the manner of delivery suggests the modern novelist's methods. It varies between a staccato, apparently disconnected series of utterances and a highly artificial, patterned, rhythmic prose. It is worth comparing a typical example of this prose, spoken by Nina in Strange Interlude with an extract from James Joyce's Ulysses.⁽¹⁾ Nina reflects:- 'I am living a dream within the great dream of the tide...breathing in the tide I dream and breathe back my dream into the tide...suspended in the movement of the tide. I feel life move in me, suspended in me...' Stephen Dedalus, in Ulysses, thinks:- 'sigh of leaves and waves, waiting, awaiting the fullness of their times... To no end gathered; vainly then released, forth flowing, wending back: loom of the moon...Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust.'

Of all the 'stream of consciousness' novels, Ulysses was in fact brought most forcibly to the attention of the American public by the court case⁽²⁾ over the rights of serial publication, held in New York in December 1920. Fourteen episodes had already been serialized before the court ordered discontinuation. Discussion over the case must have run high in the artistic and literary circles, such as those frequented by Robert Edmond Jones and Kenneth MacGowan, with which O'Neill was at the time familiar. In the

(1) Act 5.
 (2) *Sumner v. James Joyce*.

very year 1927, when O'Neill was re-drafting Strange Interlude, the novel was again brought into prominence by the publicity accorded to it by the international petition made on behalf of James Joyce against the pirating of the rights. Signatures to this petition included names of dramatists as familiar to O'Neill as Kaiser, Pirandello, Pinero, Yeats and Maeterlinck and of Americans as distinguished as Sherwood Anderson and Thornton Wilder.

The connection between Strange Interlude and, if not Ulysses, at least the technique of the novel, was unpleasantly emphasised by the charge of plagiarism brought against O'Neill in 1931 by Miss Georges Lewys.⁽¹⁾ Claiming that the play was based on her novel, The Temple of Pallas Athene, Miss Lewys accused the publishers, Boni and Liveright, for whom she had been a reader, of having suggested to O'Neill that he might use her book as a basis for a play. When asked to produce examples of verbatim similarity, Miss Lewys was unable to cite more than occasional phrases such as 'He's a weakling' which, as the Judge pointed out, were common property. But the plot of the novel, as she recounted it, certainly bore a strong resemblance to that of Strange Interlude. The case was dismissed, but that it should ever have been brought does suggest that O'Neill was

(1) See accounts in The New York Times, March 12th., 13th., 14th., 17th. and April 23rd.

influenced by the technique of the novel at this time. The similarity between the plot of Strange Interlude and that of her novel might not have come to Miss Lewys' notice had he not been adopting a device which was so reminiscent of the novelist's method.

The same technique was pursued in Dynamo, written during the spring and summer of 1928. This play was in effect an expansion of a metaphor used by Nina in Strange Interlude, the suggestion that life was a strange interlude in 'the electrical display of God the Father'.⁽¹⁾ In the same act Darrell had commented mockingly - 'A scientist doesn't believe in ghosts. But perhaps we'll become part of cosmic positive and negative electric charges and meet again.'

The theory brought forward in jest in that play became the very-much-in-earnest theme of the next. Dynamo develops the idea of electricity as the new religion.

In a letter to G.J.Nathan O'Neill explained that it was to be 'the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it - the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one...'⁽²⁾

The other two plays of the trilogy were to be Without Ending of Days and It Cannot be Mad. The former seems to

(1) Act 9.

(2) Clark, pp.165-166.

have appeared in the form of Days Without End, O'Neill's last play (to date). The theme of Dynamo, the 'sickness of to-day', was pursued. But B.H. Clark states that O'Neill decided not to complete the two plays that were to form, with Dynamo, a trilogy.⁽¹⁾ This must have gladdened the heart of at least one member of the Theatre Guild audience, who, after seeing that company's production^{of} Dynamo, wrote and threatened to withdraw his subscription if the rest^{of} the trilogy were produced.⁽²⁾

Several critics have pointed out that this proposed trilogy of O'Neill's recalls Kaiser's Gas trilogy, the first part of which was written in 1918, the second in 1920. Predilection for the trilogy form was not confined to Kaiser, however. Strindberg's To Damascus suggests a more likely basis for O'Neill's idea, since in that trilogy the emphasis rests more specifically on religion, the Church and God.

Traces of Strindbergian influence, already assimilated in an earlier play, Desire under the Elms, may further be detected in the 'up and down' setting, which is here elaborated to the extent of including two houses. Again there recurs the confusion between sensual and maternal love, and the motif of the dead mother's spirit.

In the next play, Mourning Becomes Electra, O'Neill looked definitely toward the Greeks. His starting point

(1) Clark, pp.167-168. This was written before O'Neill's last play, Days Without End, appeared.

(2) W.P. Eaton: The Theatre Guild (New York 1929) p.119.

was the idea of Fate, which we have already seen him attempting to interpret in terms of Nature in Desire under the Elms. He now asked himself 'Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into (such) a play, which an intelligent audience of to-day, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution could accept and be moved by.' This was the very problem of Desire and of many earlier plays but O'Neill was now envisaging the nature of that problem more clearly.

His notes on the play, in which the above quotation occurs, were published in the New York Herald Tribune November 8th., 1931 under the title 'O'Neill's Own Story of Electra in the Making'. They reveal his intense awareness of the difficulties besetting the modern who attempts tragedy, and, at the same time, his own ingenuity in overcoming these difficulties.

As early as 1926 he conceived the idea of a 'Modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek drama for its basic theme - the Electra story - the Medea[?] By November 1928 he had decided on 'the Electra story' and was reflecting 'Give modern Electra figure in play tragic ending worthy of her character. In Greek story she peters out into undramatic married banality...Why should Furies have let Electra escape unpunished?'

The satisfactory re-interpretation of this theme was to occupy him for the next two years. The play was not finished until 1931.

He stated the exact nature of his debt to the Greeks in a letter to A.H. Quinn:-⁽¹⁾ 'The Trilogy of Aeschylus was what I had in mind. As for individual characters, I did not consciously follow any one of the Greek dramatists. On the contrary, I tried my best to forget all about their differing Electras, etc. All I wanted to borrow was the theme-pattern of Aeschylus (and the old legends) and to reinterpret it in modern psychological terms with Fate and the Furies working from within the individual soul.'

Frederick Brie, in his article 'Eugene O'Neill als nach Folger der Griechen'⁽²⁾ bases his comparisons on Sophocles' version of the legend. Brie could not have read O'Neill's statement, since the edition of Quinn's History in which it was quoted was not published till 1937, but by his own account he was familiar with O'Neill's notes, where the connection with Aeschylus is made clear. Brie is correct, however, in his surmise that O'Neill was brought into contact with the Greeks by his desire for a 'great' form. He achieved a miracle of architectural balance in Mourning Becomes Electra, Within the massive limits of the trilogy he maintained an astonishing degree of concentration, in part due to the symbolic unity of place. The Greek influence, when directed toward 'theme pattern' worked for the best with O'Neill. It prevented him from dissipating his powers in an orgy of experimental tricks and devices.

(1) Quinn. p.255. (2) Germanisch-Romanischen Monatsschrift 21, 46-49. Heidelberg. January-February 1933.

Certainly some of the means by which he achieved the sense of Fate were Expressionistic, but they were no longer obtrusive. They do not justify Brie in describing the whole play as an 'Expressionistic problem piece'. Clara Blackburn does not consider it appropriate for inclusion in her list of O'Neill's Expressionistic dramas.

Again, as in Desire under the Elms, O'Neill found he could best acquire Greek proportions in a New England setting. New England, at the time of the Civil War, he found, by a process of elimination to be the only possible background. The Greek idea of Fate could be replaced by the Puritan belief in sexual continence, and in the punishment reserved for transgressors.

If any other influence manifests itself in Mourning it is, oddly enough, that of melodrama. Situation and dialogue is often conceived in the old histrionic manner. Indeed, Robert Benchley, in a frivolous article in The New Yorker, visualised the spirit of James O'Neill, as Monte Cristo, standing in the wings during the performance.

In the spring and summer of 1932 O'Neill wrote the first and second drafts of Days Without End, a play which was to receive a considerable amount of revision. This work was interrupted, in September, by the writing of Ah, Wilderness!

It is said that the idea for Ah, Wilderness! came to O'Neill in a dream, a dream which one might be tempted to interpret, as he once jokingly interpreted Beyond the Horizon,

as a manifestation of a deep-seated frustration. For here the pleasant, sentimental spirit of the 'average' American theatre re-asserts itself. Never before had O'Neill written anything so homely.

The New England setting, scene of so many repressions and perversions in earlier plays, now becomes the background for a comedy of family life. The grim Puritan characters of Diff'rent and Desire under the Elms are softened into faded, but likeable, spinsters, nostalgic, but normal drunks. There is a lightening of touch all round. The rebellious hero is no longer a tragic figure, but a romantic adolescent, only half understood, but indulged by kindly parents. His outburst against conventionalism remains in the class characterised by the old tag 'Boston folks is full of notions'. His encounter with the inevitable prostitute merely grazes the surface of his imagination and the quarrel with his beloved is proved to have been much ado about nothing. Hedda Gabler turns out to be 'just out of those books he's been reading.' Finally, all's well that ends well. The seal of approval was set on the play by George M. Cohan's consent to play in it. O'Neill and the 'wholesome' American theatre had joined hands.

It was with Ah, Wilderness! that Richard D. Skinner saw the beginning of what he called 'Emergence'. But though he gives it much importance, Ah, Wilderness! can scarcely be considered as more than a diversion, or possibly, following

as it did on the heels of Mourning Becomes Electra, a momentary reaction.

That it was only momentary is proved by the tone of O'Neill's next and last play (to date). In that autumn in which Ah, Wilderness! was written he returned to Days Without End (the third draft). In 1932, the fourth and final draft was completed.

In this play the implications of several earlier ones are taken up. The closest connection is with The Great God Brown. The theme there had been the conflict between contradictory aspects of man's nature. These aspects had been represented by two individual men, Brown and Dion Anthony, and by the masks which they both wore. Dion Anthony's mask at first represented the Dionysus element in his nature. Later Dionysus changed into Mephistopheles, under the pressure of conventional morality. When Brown adopted the dead Anthony's mask, it was this Mephistopheles with whom he had to contend. The death struggle which ensued occupied the latter part of the play.

In Days Without End O'Neill returned to the same theme, but gave it simpler form. For the two men and their masks he substituted one man and his personified 'alter ego', again a Mephistophelean figure. The device recalls, out of the immediate past, Evreinov's Theatre of the Soul ⁽¹⁾ (1914),

(1) Parodied by Ralph Roeder in Another Interior, 'a gastronomical pantomime'. Produced by the Washington Square Players, 19th. February 1915.

in which the struggle between man's warring instincts had been represented by personified Rational and Emotional Entities. But this was in turn merely a revival of the medieval morality.

(2)
 Clara Blackburn connects Days Without End with Franz Werfel's Spiegel Mensch (1920). In that trilogy Werfel had depicted the conflict between man's higher and lower self by a similar device. In his play the personified 'lower self'⁽²⁾ sprang from a mirror. 'Du! Du bist mein Feind!', Thamal cries to this Spiegel Mensch in Act I. After a conflict in which a death wish, similar to that in Strindberg's There are Crimes and Crimes, is precipitated by the 'lower self', Thamal conquers. In the last part, 'Fenster', the Spiegel Mensch returns into the mirror.

There is considerable likeness here, but quite possibly only accidental. The theme was one which had occupied O'Neill at least since the writing of The Great God Brown in 1925. Since he did not adopt Werfel's method then, assuming that he was familiar with his play, it seems more reasonable to suppose that he developed the idea from his own experience. The Expressionistic practice of 'externalising' inner thoughts led easily to the technique of the medieval morality, as we have already observed in Andreyev's The Black Maskers.

(1) Op.cit.

(2) cf. 'Now he looks in the mirror! Now he sees his face!' of Dion's speech in The Great God Brown Act II, Scene IV.

If he was looking toward Europe at all, it was, above all, to Goethe. Writing in The American Spectator ⁽¹⁾ November 1932, he said, in an article entitled 'Memoranda on Masks':- 'Consider Goethe's Faust, which psychologically speaking, should be the closest to us of all the classics. In producing this play I would have Mephistopheles wear the Mephistophelian mask of the face of Faust...Mephistopheles and Faust are one and the same - are Faust.'

The death wish cast by Loving on Elsa may correspond with that in Spiegel Mensch or that in There are Crimes and Crimes. ⁽²⁾ There are points of resemblance between Days Without End and Strindberg's To Damascus which suggest that Strindberg may have been in his mind at this time. In the final scene of Part III the Prior describes the career of Father Ulrich:- And so Father Ulrich, who never wanted to be behind the times, became a materialist and an enemy of Christianity. In 1810 he became a hypnotist, in 1880 a theosophist, and in 1890 he wanted to shoot himself! '...You see, he wanted to know, but he failed! And therefore he now believes.'

Compare this with Father Baird's account of John's career:- 'First it was Atheism unadorned. Then it was Atheism wedded to socialism...the next I knew...he was running through Greek philosophy and found a brief shelter in Pythagoras and numerology...'

(1) Vol.I, No.1. p.3.

(2) In Act 5 of Strange Interlude Darrell, reading Nina's thoughts reflects 'There's a death wish..things have gone pretty far'.

In both instances the circumstances are remarkably similar: the priest talks to the sceptic hero who is, despite himself, about to be converted. Both the Stranger in To Damascus and John in Days Without End have been running away from their fate. Strindberg visualises his hero's journey as the 'road to Damascus': O'Neill as a 'rocky road full of twists and blind alleys.' It is that traversed by the 'fondest, blindest, weakest' in Francis Thompson's The Hound of Heaven.

In both plays the hero battles with an evil spirit, in To Damascus actually called the Tempter. He is^a thoroughly Mephistophelean figure and very conscious of it: in Act II of Part III he says to the Stranger, 'Well? What shall we do? Call for wine - and a woman? No! That's too old a trick, as old as Doctor Faust! Bon! We moderns are in search of mental dissipation...' Only when the Stranger has entered the monastery door does he admit his defeat, with a 'Farewell', just as O'Neill's Mephistopheles is finally vanquished in the church.

It is clear that, whatever his sources, O'Neill was thinking in very subjective fashion in Days Without End. As in Mourning Becomes Electra his subject matter is tightly compressed into a restrained and complex form. At this stage he is relying less on outward devices than on the implications contained in the arrangement of the action. In fact his development has also been progress.

In his plans for future work he seems to be turning toward American subject matter and to an even more massive form than the trilogy. According to B.H.Clark,⁽¹⁾ his intention was to use the 'most dramatic episodes of his life in a cycle of nine separate plays, to be acted on nine successive nights; together they will form a sort of dramatic autobiography, something in the style of War and Peace or Jean Christophe'. Clark wonders whether this was to be the 'Big Grand Opus' of which O'Neill spoke to G.J.Nathan and Benjamin de Casseres, 'There will be many plays in it', he said, 'and it will have greater scope than any novel I know of. Its form will be altogether its own - a lineal descendant of Strange Interlude.'

(2)

In Twentieth Century Authors the commentary on O'Neill ended with a statement that he had been working since 1935 on a cycle of nine plays to be entitled A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed. The subject was to be the story of an American family from 1775 to 1932. Of this cycle, four plays were supposed then (1942) to be already finished, but they were not to be produced until the cycle was complete. This was hoped to be in 1944.

The hope was not realised, nor has the cycle yet appeared.

(1) Clark, p.172.

(2) S.J.Kunitz and H.Haycraft: Twentieth Century Authors, New York (1942) supersedes Living Authors (1931) and Authors Today and Yesterday (1933).

(1)

Burns Mantle, in Contemporary American Playwrights also refers to a cycle, which he describes as dealing with the Oregon country and an American family from 1806 to 1932. He states that the cycle is to consist of eight plays.

Whatever the exact detail may be, O'Neill is evidently no less ambitious for the future than he has been in the past. What direction his technique may take is unpredictable. It is certain only that his aims grow loftier rather than narrower. More and more he appears like the epic writer manqué: the contrast between his dramatic sense and his impatience with the limitations of drama grows steadily more marked.

* * *

There is no real contradiction in these apparently contradictory statements. When conjunction they announce a maxim which great drama at all times has illustrated, that the highest action springs from character, but that character is best displayed through action.

O'Neill, unlike most modern dramatists, was at home with the passionate and lofty sort of action which is, in itself,

(1) New York, 1940. In his first plays action predominated. At first it rested insufficiently developed characterization, but later he began to master the correct proportions.

(1) With the distinguished exceptions of Bound East for Cardiff and The Rock of the Marquises.

SECTION II (c)

Aspects of O'Neill's Technique.

(1) Conduct of Plot. General Chronological Development.

'Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery.'
(Aristotle. Poetics.)

'The dramatist who hangs his characters to his plot, instead of hanging his plot to his characters, is guilty of cardinal sin.'
(Galsworthy. Inn of Tranquillity.)

There is no real contradiction in these apparently contradictory statements. Taken ⁱⁿ conjunction they announce a maxim which great drama at all times has illustrated, that the highest action springs from character, but that character is best displayed through action.

O'Neill, unlike many modern dramatists, was at home with the passionate and lofty sort of action which is, in itself, half way to tragedy. In his first plays action predominated. At first it rested ^{on} insufficiently developed characterisation, (1) but later he began to master the correct proportions.

(1) With the distinguished exceptions of Bound East for Cardiff and The Moon of the Caribbees.

All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire under the Elms represent the peak of his early achievements. Action and character⁽¹⁾, in these plays, are superbly interdependent.

But in his middle period,⁽²⁾ as he became increasingly interested in introspective character and abstract theme, simple action seemed inadequate. And so he moved toward digression, static discussion and involved indirect presentation. Of the plays written in this period, Lazarus Laughed (1926) best represents Galsworthy's definition of 'bad plot', 'a row of stakes with a character impaled on each.'⁽³⁾

In his last three plays he returned to action. But it was now an action enriched by the means of revealing character which, after a long process of trial and error, he had learnt to subdue to discreet proportions.

His development, in fact, was one of true progress.

We will now consider plot, which is the process by which the action is organised. There are three major kinds, simple, complex and digressive. Each kind may, of course, pass imperceptibly into the other, and some plots may contain the differing characteristics of all three.

(1) Galsworthy, in The Inn of Tranquillity (London 1912) p.193 defined the 'good plot' as 'the sure edifice which slowly arises out of the interplay of circumstance on temperament and temperament on life.'

(2) Beginning with Marco Millions (1924) and ending with Dynamo (1928).

(3) Op.cit. p.194.

Simple plot is a direct presentation of events in the order of their happening. One continuous action only is presented: there are no sub-plots. In this kind there is the minimum ⁽¹⁾ of exposition - that is, the revelation of action taking place out of view of the audience and the maximum of illustration. Modern expressionistic plays, for example, rely upon presentation by illustration almost as much as did the mimes in which drama originated.

The medieval miracle play represents the simple plot at its most naive. In the Brome play of Abraham and Isaac there is no attempt at significant arrangement. Events progress in due order from the angel's announcement to Abraham's departure with Isaac. The episodic chronicle play follows a similar straightforward pattern. ⁽²⁾

The simple plot in modern drama results inevitably from more sophisticated treatment. ⁽³⁾ But it is still possible to distinguish between it and the complex. Galsworthy's Loyalties provides a fine example of the simple plot at its most skilful. Events are all connected by a single thread:

- (1) Exposition will in general be confined to information necessary for an understanding of events. When the dramatist becomes more self-conscious he adopts the 'edging it in' method derided by Sheridan in The Critic. Maeterlink, in Monna Vanna was still using it.
- (2) Marlowe's Tamburlaine represents the same form on a grand scale. The play's greatness rises here from the spirit in which events are presented.
- (3) William Saroyan, in the preface to Love's Old Sweet Song, called it a 'simple play' then added 'the play is simultaneously naive and sophisticated..I must assume that naiveté and sophistication are simultaneous in everybody.' Preface published in The Time of Your Life (London 1932).

they progress directly. A certain amount of suspense is evoked by the uncertainty over Dancy's innocence, but only enough to hold the interest. (1)

Exposition in this play is so unobtrusive as to seem non-existent. The only reminiscences of the 'confidante in white linen' method occur in Act II, Scene II, when Margaret and Lady Adela discuss Dancy's past.

The use of the simple plot in modern drama is much more frequent than one would suppose. It represents a reaction against the mechanical complications of the 'pièce bien faite'. The modern version of the chronicle play employs a 'cinema' technique of swiftly changing short scenes. We the People by Elmer Rice has 20 scenes, set among different strata of society. The contrasts thereby effected achieve a powerful effect of irony, but it is an irony of theme, not an engineered device. William Saroyan, in plays such as My Heart's in The Highlands, deliberately seeks after simplicity.

In the complex plot several different things, or all of them together, may happen. Firstly the dramatist begins to heighten the emotion by effects such as peripeteia, anagnorisis, and, in particular, dramatic irony and suspense. Dramatic irony, which consists in the audience, and possibly some of the characters, knowing something of which other

(1) The true climax is not in Act IV, when his guilt is made clear, but in the first scene, when his friends' reactions are presented.

characters are ignorant, usually involves a high degree of
 (1)
 suspense.

In melodrama, where the action springs not from characterisation but from a formula, the dramatist uses dramatic irony and suspense mechanically. They become his surest cards for holding attention, but they do not reflect any idea of greater irony implicit in the theme itself. Circumstance is allowed to force the issue.

When the dramatist sets with deliberation about creating these effects, it follows that he must be making a greater attempt at significant arrangement than the simple plot displays.

The actual organisation of events may become sufficiently important to suggest the theme by its very shape. So the inconclusive endings in Chekhov's plays, in The Three Sisters, and The Cherry Orchard, for example, suggest the
 (2)
 inconclusiveness of life which is his theme. Sometimes the ordering of the action may in itself be a work of art: a beautiful and architectural balance which satisfies the
 (3)
 desire for 'an action complete in itself'. This above all

(1) Dramatic irony and suspense combine in the scene from King Lear when Lear prepares to leave Goneril's home for Regan's. The audience knows what sort of reception awaits him there, and feels trepidation about the outcome.

(2) The design in Jean Jacques Bernard's plays helps to convey a theme which is never actually voiced. Martine is a good example of significant arrangement replacing the traditional idea of plot.

(3) Elizabeth Drew in Discovering Drama (London 1937) p.28, says 'a finely proportioned plot impresses itself unconsciously as a feeling of the artist's command of his material.' But she does not think O'Neill achieves this effect.

the Greeks achieved. Modern dramatists are not in general equipped for the task. Only occasionally, as in T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral or Claudel's L'Otage, do we find satisfying completeness.

In the complex plot the importance of exposition increases. Very often it becomes no longer a means of conveying information, but an integral part of the structure. Through it, character or theme is gradually revealed even while the action develops. Supreme examples of inverted exposition occur in Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus and Ibsen's Rosmersholm. The determining action of the play lies in the past: as the present action proceeds it gradually involves further revelation of that past, reaching a point where the present action is drastically affected.

An involved structure of this sort is the prerogative of the mature craftsman. It satisfies the precepts of both Aristotle and Galsworthy to the completest degree.

The complex plot often involves experiment with the order of events. This is particularly true of the modern period where dramatists lacking in the divine fire seek after dramatic effect in easy suspense and irony.

One of the easiest ways of achieving irony is to begin at the end and work backwards. The audience is then conscious throughout the play of what the end is to be. Kaufmann and Hart's Merrily We Roll Along (1934) begins with the hero as a

cynical, middle-aged man, and then reverses its steps until he is shown as an idealistic young student.

Similarly in Peter Ustinov's Banbury Nose the decline of a military family is presented in reverse. Neither of these stories would have been particularly distinguished if presented in the usual way. They owed their effectiveness to the dramatist's juggling powers.

Equally popular with the modern dramatist is the 'flash back' method, typified in Edward Sheldon's Romance. The action begins and ends at the same point: in the interval a slice of past history is presented. Again, easy dramatic irony is achieved.

A dozen variations have been played on this theme.

In Odets' ⁽¹⁾ Waiting for Lefty the action flashed backward and forward in search not so much of dramatic irony as illustration of theme. The method is more complicated in Kjeld Abell's Anna Sophie Hedwig (1939) where the action gradually recedes in a series of 'flash backs', each retrogression coming nearer to the essential reality. The dream play, so popular with the moderns, generally involves a supposedly symbolic jumbling of events past, present and future.

(1) Hasenclever's impressionistic plays provide an example of the extreme to which this method could go. Strindberg's dream plays, too, have an involved order of events, but the significance of the arrangement is clearer.

Arrangement of events may result either from supreme artistry, or from adroit juggling capacity.

The same distinction applies to indirect presentation, which is another outstanding characteristic of the complex plot. Without interrupting continuous presentation of events the dramatist will attempt to heighten their implications by various means, which vary according to the temper of the age. In poetic drama imagery will be the principal means. Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra furnishes a supreme example.

In less eloquent ages, such as the present, verbal devices are subordinate to visual. Symbolism and Expressionism are the modern dramatist's favourite substitutes for imagery. Symbolism is an universal method, to be found at once in a strictly realistic play such as Pillars of Society and in a highly fanciful play like O'Casey's Within the Gates. The modern concentration on significant setting, lighting, sound effects and all the visual aspects of drama, comes within this category.

Complex plot may involve the conducting of several actions. In plays centring in mechanical intrigue, the use of sub-plots is particularly prominent.

Finally, there is the digressive plot. In this kind, the action is interrupted for substantial periods in order that character or theme or both may be revealed. In Greek drama interruptions of this sort were effected principally by the Chorus, in Elizabethan drama by the soliloquy. As

drama became more realistic it eschewed any form of obvious interruption. The disappearance of the soliloquy from plays influenced by Ibsen's technique bears witness to the change. Only as freer forms came in did devices such as the Chorus, the annotator, the soliloquy, return to their own.

O'Neill's plots show an interesting development. At first he uses the simple plot almost exclusively. He maintains the utmost directness of presentation, avoids exposition and attempts little significant arrangement. Dramatic irony springs rather from his ironic conception of life than from deliberate devising. When he does manipulate circumstance to create ironic effects he does it, at first, brutally, achieving the most forced and painful kind.

Gradually these first, simple plots begin to border on the complex, mainly in the increasing tendency toward indirect presentation. The arrangement of events is still straightforward: only in The Emperor Jones, of these first plays, is there any complexity in the ordering of the action.

Then, corresponding with the change in his selection of character,⁽¹⁾ comes the middle period, when the digressive plot is uppermost. Indirect presentation becomes increasingly prominent. Gradually the present action becomes less vital, until, in Strange Interlude and Dynamo, the

(1) See II (c) ii.

interruptions constitute the greater part of the play: almost all the important action is reported. Non-dramatic elements threaten to dominate. Finally, in his last plays he returns to the complex plot in its most difficult form, that is, the form in which indirect presentation and interruption are rendered less obstrusive by being woven into the developing action. The dramatist's powers go into the organisation of events. In plays such as Mourning Becomes Electra and Days Without End exposition and action are blended in such a manner that an illusion of uninterrupted progress is effected. The devices used in his middle period are reduced to a minimum, and the theme is conveyed through the implications of action. In both plays a balanced and rounded form is achieved, the 'finely proportioned plot' which gives fullest aesthetic satisfaction.⁽¹⁾

In his very first published plays, Thirst and the others, he seems to have maintained extreme directness of presentation. In one, Warnings, he avoided exposition by employing two separate scenes, a serious division for the

(1) J.H.Lawson observes the same development, but he interprets it according to his social preoccupations. In The Theory and Technique of Playwriting (New York 1936) p.120 he says: 'the adoption of a freer technique was the result of a rebellion against his environment which led him to mysticism - which in turn brought him back to a ponderous but conventional technique.'

one-act form. This structure anticipated the episodic plot of later plays. The plot of Fog is more complex, not in arrangement of events, but in the introduction of indirect presentation. Here is O'Neill's first use of symbolism, and also perhaps, if one can judge from the extracts quoted by S. K. Winther⁽¹⁾ of digressive discussion which does not forward the action.

It is with Bound East for Cardiff that we have the first example of simple plot at its finest. Events are presented in straightforward order. There is scarcely any dramatic suspense. We know at the beginning, from the talk of the sailors, and from the Captain, that Yank is going to die. At the end he dies. Nor is there that emphasis on dramatic irony which O'Neill was later to develop.⁽²⁾ In fact, all that is fine in this plot comes from elements inherent in the events but above them, from the poetry and pathos which the circumstances evoke. How far this simplicity was removed from the contemporary 'juggling' plot is evidenced by Professor Baker's opinion that Bound East was not a play at all.

The Moon of the Caribbees, though four years later than Bound East is very close to it in treatment. This

(1) Eugene O'Neill, a Critical Study (New York 1934) pp. 187-188.
 (2) The irony is one of theme. Yank dies at the time when he has just resolved to leave the sea for a life on land.

play is a still greater tour de force of simplicity. There is even less apparent arrangement of event than in the former play, where the comradeship of the sailors was deliberately contrasted with the terrified loneliness of Yank. Here suspense and dramatic irony have been reduced to the minimum degree consonant with dramatic effectiveness. The action is set on a ship's deck, where sailors await the nocturnal visit of negro women who are going to smuggle rum aboard. The women arrive, the rum is distributed and the sailors disperse to drink and amuse themselves with the women. Only one intimate relation is at all developed - Smithy's talk with the Donkey man and his repulsion of the negro girl's advances. Apart from this, the action is all general. There is a fight, a man is knifed, the negro women are dismissed, and normal life on the ship is taken up again where it left off. The pathos lies in the very fact that this action is so entirely characteristic. Lack of objective comment makes it more forceful.

Before considering the other sea plays we should mention Before Breakfast (1916), a one-act play, which is something of a 'sport' for this period. The play is a monologue. The plot is complex, in the sense that it depends on the interaction of event and exposition. Most of the determining action lies in the past and is related, obliquely, by the woman. As in her anger she reveals to her unseen husband

what she knows about his love affair with a girl of his own class, she drives him to a point of desperation where he commits suicide, the only significant action of the play. This type of plot O'Neill was to develop in later plays.

Dramatic suspense is very strong. The idea of suicide is first brought forward when the husband cuts himself while shaving. We learn, from Mrs. Rowland's comments that he is very pale, gazing into the mirror, his hand shaking. From that moment the tension is increased. As she continues to rant at him, a second groan is heard, whose significance the audience must immediately grasp. Dramatic irony is thus lent to her irritated reactions which increase the final horror of the discovery.

The plots of the sea plays are very much simpler than this. In the Zone represents the simple plot at its worst. Events are marshalled according to a mechanical formula, rather than springing from characterisation. The easy suspense which depends simply on 'how things will turn out' is evoked. The sailors' suspicions are proved false. Smithy's precious box contains love letters, not secret documents, and so the reversal which constitutes the climax is achieved on a note of pathos and sentiment.

O'Neill was himself ashamed of In the Zone. He wrote to B.H.Clark ⁽¹⁾ that it was 'the least significant of all the

(1) Clark, p.6.

plays. It is too facile in conventional technique, too full of clever theatrical tricks...a situation drama lacking in all spiritual import...a conventional construction of the theatre as it is.'⁽¹⁾

Ile and The Long Voyage Home show the simple plot at a higher level, but more forced than in The Moon of the Caribbees. Dramatic irony is particularly strained in The Long Voyage Home. This is because O'Neill is attempting to deal with a wide theme, the theme of 'destructive illusion', through too narrow a form. The one-act play does not give sufficient room for development: consequently the theme appears too dependent on coincidence. Olsen and his friends must choose the very moment to walk into the public house when the publican is planning to shanghai a seaman for the 'Amindra', the 'worst ship that sail to sea'. And of all the sailors, Olsen, who has determined to leave the sea for ever, must be the chosen victim. While he reminisces over the joys of home life, his doom is prepared. The irony of the situation is painful, as irony dependent to such a degree on coincidence always is. It is over-emphasised by the declamation against the Amindra put into his mouth just before the blow falls. This crude method

(1) To G.J.Nathan he described In the Zone as 'vaudeville grand guignolism', adding 'but I am out of that zone now, never to return.' (Goldberg's) Letter of 20th. June 1920. Printed in I. Goldberg's The Theatre of George Jean Nathan (New York 1926).

is worth comparing with a later plot, Desire Under the Elms, where the ironic peripeteia has its root in the characters' own actions.

Coincidence plays a less obtrusive part in Ile, but there is still over-emphasis. In so short a space it is too much of a good thing to have both Captain Keeney and his wife suffering from the results of following destructive illusions.

This lack of restraint is more pronounced in The Rope and Where The Cross is Made. In the first the irony resulting from coincidental situation is engineered even more mechanically than in The Long Voyage Home. The rope which crazy old Abraham Bentley hangs in his barn, his son, Luke, sees only as the old man's diabolical invention to persuade him into suicide. But the child, Mary, swinging on the rope, discovers thereby the gold which was hidden on the beam above. And for this gold Luke and his brother-in-law are desperately searching. Even while they are torturing the old man for the secret of the hiding place, the child is amusing herself by 'skipping' the gold coins into the sea, an occupation which Luke himself had taught her only half an hour before. Though strained, the irony of this situation is less painful than in the sea play because the circumstances themselves are so improbable.

Where the Cross is Made is distinguished for skilful

use of indirect presentation.⁽¹⁾ Otherwise it is a commonplace plot, relying on melodramatic situation. O'Neill called it⁽²⁾ 'great fun to write, theatrically very thrilling, an amusing experiment in treating the audience as insane'.

The Dreamy Kid is another example of the simple plot at its most commonplace.

O'Neill had by now realised the inadequacy of the one-act form. In a letter to The New York Herald Tribune November 16th., 1924 he said: 'I am no longer interested in the one-act play. It is an unsatisfactory form.'

In his first full length play, Beyond the Horizon he continued to use the simple plot, but attempted indirect presentation by means of significant arrangement. The pattern of alternating interior and exterior scenes was intended as symbolic, but only provoked from critics such as St. John Ervine a kindly comment 'one of his long plays...occupies six acts when three would do.'⁽³⁾

In other respects extreme directness of presentation was maintained at the expense of unity of time. The action was presented in episodic manner, with considerable lapses of time between the acts. Here we see clearly O'Neill's

- (1) Distorted setting and vision. Discussed in II (c) iii.
 (2) In a letter quoted by G.J.Nathan in Intimate Notebooks (New York 1932) quoted in Clark p.85.
 (3) Introduction to The Moon of the Caribbees (London 1923) p.10. O'Neill stoutly defended his symbolism in a letter quoted by Clark. See II (c) iii.

preference for beginning at the beginning and presenting each moment of crisis, even if far separated in time.

This plot too rests on a basis of irony, but an irony arising from characterisation rather than coincidence.

O'Neill explained the motivation in a letter of 11th. April, 1920 to The New York Times. Robert Mayo deliberately throws away his 'distinctive dream', his longing for the far horizon in return for a 'nice little poetical craving - the romance of sex - ' He brings his fate on himself. The irony is emphasised when Andrew, the practical brother, takes the opportunity which Robert rejects. To him the life on the farm means more than the 'wanderlust'. He perceives only a 'stench' in the places which Robert imagined as full of 'wonder and mystery.'

Each brother then has followed the wrong star, and both end in disaster. Andrew takes to gambling in wheat, the thing he used to create. As Robert says, 'there's spiritual significance in that.' Robert, worn out by the uncongenial toil of the farm, dies, still hoping for his horizon. Ruth, who found that she had married the wrong man, is left with nothing.

If anything there is too much misery in this climax: O'Neill was still making his points over emphatically.

In the following plays, The Straw and Anna Christie simple plots follow a theatrical formula. Direct presentation

is strictly maintained in the former even to the extent of contrasting Eileen's home with the sanatorium setting by presenting them both, rather than by relying on exposition. The visual aspect of environment is important to O'Neill.

Anna Christie shows how, already, simple action was beginning to prove insufficient for O'Neill's demands. He attempted to convey much more through the events of the play than appeared in presentation. The plot does in fact border on the complex in its suggestions of symbolism, but the suggestion was not sufficiently developed to raise the action above the commonplace.

What he intended the events to convey was the 'sincerity of life pent up in the trappings of the theatre.'⁽¹⁾ What resulted was in fact the trappings only - an 'H.A. Jones' compromise.' To G.J. Nathan he explained that the happy ending was merely 'the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause', that he had once intended Comma as a title. The debate over this famous 'happy ending' seems to have touched him very closely, probably because he himself suspected the inherent artificiality of the contributory events. In a letter to The New York Times of 18th. December 1921, he defended it hotly,

(1) Letter to G.J. Nathan, 1921. Printed by I. Goldberg, op. cit.

pointing out that it was not really a happy ending at all, but an anticlimax.⁽¹⁾ But the trouble lay really with the events themselves. He was mistakenly following the traditional formula of the 'repentant courtesan' by allowing Anna to angle for Burke's forgiveness when it had already been indicated in the first part that he had nothing to forgive, for she had remained essentially pure through all her experiences.

The next play, Gold, was not, as O'Neill hastened to explain, an expansion of Where the Cross is Made - It was the full-length form in which he had originally visualised the earlier play. Gold emphasises O'Neill's preference at that time for direct and straightforward presentation. Now that he had more room in which to develop his story he immediately spread out, replaced exposition, inevitable in the one-act play, by direct presentation of all the moments of crisis. He begins at the beginning, with the desert island and then leaps sixteen years to show the effect that time has wrought on Bartlett. It is a cumbersome method, reminiscent of the chronicle play: the changes of scene are not sufficiently rapid to constitute a new technique. The fact that the action centres in 'hidden treasure', desert

(1) '...Some stickler for dramatic technique may object to the anticlimax in the last act...'

islands, ghosts of murdered men and so on does not help. (1)

Though he uses the same technique in Diff'rent, the result is more forceful because only two scenes are contrasted. The irony of the situation in Act II is brought home forcefully immediately the curtain rises and the bedizened Emma is revealed in her 'up to date' parlour. Diff'rent, as St. John Ervine pointed out, 'has no middle.'⁽²⁾ At the end of Act I we leave Emma resolving, in a mood of pious fanaticism, never to marry, and Caleb, with patient fanaticism, to wait till she relents. In Act II, twenty years later, Emma is found infatuated with the blackguardly Benny and Caleb still waiting. Dramatic irony is strong when Caleb enters, still unaware of Emma's degradation. As he comes slowly to realise the truth, suspense rises. The play ends with a bang, in a double suicide.

Of all the plays so far discussed, only Before Breakfast was completed by reason of the ordering of events. With The Emperor Jones came O'Neill's supreme achievement in this genre.

The play has eight scenes, of which the first and last present events directly, through realistic action and

(1) The 'gold' for which Bartlett seeks does, of course, represent the usual illusion, the 'horizon'. But it was not a well-chosen symbol, having too many connections with melodrama.

(2) Op.cit. p.10.

characterisation. Scene I sets out all the exposition necessary for the significance of the following scenes to be appreciated. This exposition is brilliantly managed. In the conversation between the 'Emperor' and Smithers we learn the precipitating circumstances - the natives' rebellion - and the past events which led up to the Emperor's present position.

He is then detached from the realistic background, isolated in the forest, and subjected to the pressure of a dominant emotion, fear. When, under that pressure, his character disintegrates and visions of his past appear to him, we realise the value of the initial exposition. For now no words are necessary. What has already been hinted at can be presented, very dramatically, by silent pantomime.

Throughout the six scenes of 'vision' a connection with the realistic basis is maintained, firstly by the negro's terrified soliloquies, secondly by the noise of the tom-tom which sounds throughout the play. This last is a particularly ingenious device. Not only does its gradual acceleration of speed and sound heighten the negro's panic, but it keeps in the background the idea of the realistic plot, to which the action returns in the end.

The real complexity of the plot lies in the ordering of events, a complexity unusual in O'Neill's plays. He uses a double time process. As the outer action, represented by the acceleration of the tom tom beats, progresses, the

inner action, represented by the visions, retrogresses. This method is very much more subtle than that of the 'flash back' technique,⁽¹⁾ where the outer action is held up to allow an artificial recapitulation. Here the two time processes are inextricably linked together. The tom tom increases the negro's panic and this inevitably drives him further back into primitive racial memories.

This plot, again, is conceived in terms of O'Neill's customary irony. In Scene I, Jones derides the natives' superstitions. He laughs at the idea of the 'silver' bullet with which he tricked them. But, in the end, it is in fact by a silver bullet that he dies. The negroes' incantations, which he had derided, entrap him. His panic brings him in a circle, till he returns to the spot in the forest where he went in and where they await him.

The plot is also complex in its use of indirect presentation.⁽²⁾ But the significant arrangement represents the real advance in technique.

The preceding experiment seems to have affected the realistic structure to which he returned in The First Man. This is the plot simple again, though touched by elements of plot digressive in the frequent substitution of argument for characteristic action.

(1) For example, Edward Sheldon's Romance.

(2) Visions and distorted setting. See II (c) iii.

The First Man contains one of O'Neill's few attempts at sub-plot. The entrance of Lily Jayson in Act II introduces the theme of The Jayson family's suspicions of Martha and Bigelow. This theme runs parallel to the end of the act with the major theme, Martha's relations with her husband; But it seemed that O'Neill was not capable of running two plots together. He is essentially single minded in his approach to any theme. One of the two was fated to go.

Oddly enough, it was the major theme that disappeared. From Act III onwards the Jayson family hold the stage. The problem of Martha's relations with Curtis is abruptly terminated by the birth of the child and her death. From the last act she is altogether missing.

Unfortunately the sub-plot represented merely a typical melodramatic misunderstanding, which was bound to be cleared up eventually. The major plot, on the other hand, was concerned with a serious theme, the problem of conflicting individualities in marriage. O'Neill's first interest lay with this theme, as evidenced by his return to the same problem in Welded. Possibly he felt it too nearly, had not sufficiently assimilated it. Whatever the reason the fact remains that an interesting theme, set out in argument only in Act I, was never translated into action, but substituted by a chain of mechanical complications, having only the most perfunctory relationship.

The next play, The Hairy Ape, was complex by reason of the tremendous increase in indirect presentation, a fact which will be considered in the appropriate section. The actual ordering of events is much more straightforward than in The Emperor Jones.

The episodic pattern of earlier plays O'Neill now developed more deliberately. He used a sequence of short scenes, bound together only by unity of theme.

The first two scenes reveal the contrasting backgrounds of Yank's life in the stokehole and Mildred's life on the upper deck - the contrast between physical energy without intellect and intellect without physical energy. The relationship is narrowed to a more particular one by a further ironic contrast. Yank affirms exultantly that he belongs to the world of steel; Mildred, daughter of a steel manufacturer, is sardonically aware that she is a waste product in the process by which that steel is organised.

When the two come into contact, extremes meet. Mildred's reaction of horror arouses in Yank resentment which induces his first attempts to 'tink'. Though Mildred now disappears from the action, she has served her purpose. Stung by combined resentment and bewilderment, Yank sets out to revenge himself on her and on her world. The episodic presentation of the scenes which follow conforms to a rigid law of cause and effect.

Yank's questioning leads him first to the heart of 'the other world', Fifth Avenue, thence, following his violent outbreak, to prison, and then to the I.W.W. office in search of revenge. The inmates of all these worlds reject him. He discovers that he does not 'belong' anywhere, and in the end turns, in ironic self-mockery, to the gorilla's cage.

Though the succession of short scenes at first sight apparently disconnected, recalls Expressionistic plays such as Fruhlings Erwachen, Masse Mensch or Von Morgen bis Mitternacht, events are in fact more intimately related in O'Neill's play. They are shaped by his customary irony. Yank thinks he 'belongs', he is at the heart of the world. He fiercely resents the appellation 'hairy ape' applied to him by Paddy. But in the end, having discovered that he does not 'belong' anywhere, he voluntarily seeks to fraternise with that same hairy ape. His wanderings, like those of the Emperor Jones, have taken him in a circle.

The plot of The Fountain resembles in shape that of The Hairy Ape. It is again a simple plot, presented in the episodic manner to which O'Neill was becoming increasingly addicted. The Emperor Jones had eight scenes, The Hairy Ape eight; now, The Fountain, eleven.

Juan's search for the fountain of youth replaces Yank's search to 'belong'. The motivation in this play

is conventional and highly sentimental, and the irony is of the most obvious sort. When we see Juan spurning Maria's love in the first scene, mocking at mythical fountains, placing his military ambition before everything, it is quite evident that Fate will bring about an ironic peripeteia. Twenty years elapse, and it is so. Middle aged, embittered, he seeks the mythical land of Cathay, no longer as empire, but for the fountain of youth he had once despised. Again the irony is over-emphasised. Love conquers him in the person of Beatriz, daughter of the woman to whom he had made known his youthful views. Since the events are motivated so feebly, the episodic form shows at its flabbiest.

This flabbiness is emphasised by the digressive element, herald of future developments. In Scene 10 the continuous presentation is interrupted by an excursion into allegory. As Juan lies wounded in the forest, a magic fountain springs out of thin air. Within its waters visions appear, preaching a silent message. Beatriz is one: her voice, singing a symbolic refrain, is heard at intervals throughout the scene. Beside him, while the allegory is enacted, stands the silent figure of Death.

Unlike the introduction of visions in The Emperor Jones, the action is suspended for this artificial interlude. It is then taken up again at the point where it left

off, the moral having been preached, and the hero enlightened as to the meaning of life. The didactic note here sounded makes ominous prophecy, unfortunately to be fulfilled.

In Welded came the first partial fulfillment. O'Neill used here a complex plot which, because the action was more concentrated, relied on exposition to a greater degree than in earlier plays. Indirect presentation is represented by a mystic kind of symbolism.

The most striking feature of Welded is the diminution in representative action, the increase in discussion. This had also been the tone of The First Man, and since O'Neill was now treating the same theme again, the inference is that he had not sufficiently assimilated it.

In the earlier play, as we have seen, he evaded the issue. This time he attempted a solution, but a solution of 'words, words, words!'

In Act I, Michael and Eleanor, a pair of egotistic individualists, discuss the problem of their married life. They love each other in a passionate possessive fashion but dread the loss of their separate individualities. The discussion reaches a climax when Michael's attempt at love-making is interrupted by the arrival of Darnton. When Eleanor opens the door to him it represents her attempt at asserting her individuality. Thus the only decisive action of the first act is a symbolic one.

In the next act both Michael and Eleanor attempt to

escape from this mutual dependence. At this point the theme takes a momentary lurch into action. But the action is essentially only another attempt to evade the issue. In Act III they return to the position of Act I. Neither has been able to break away, but each has learnt, in a mystic fashion, that their love at least enables them. They then return to discussion. Finally Eleanor makes a second attempt to leave. But she discovers, when she goes to the door, that it opens inwards, and she must stay. So the second climax is achieved on a symbolic plane.

Such a wordy and abstract solution is not satisfying. There is an irritating sense of anticlimax about this continuous reiteration in dialogue of a theme which is as consistently evaded in action.

The weakness of the action is only emphasised by the over-subtle detail of the stage directions, and the reliance on 'pregnant silences.' O'Neill complained to B.H.Clark⁽¹⁾ that 'The actors did about as well as they could, but the whole point of the play was lost. The most significant thing in the last act was the silences between the speeches. What was actually spoken should have served to a great extent just to punctuate the meaningful pauses. The actors didn't get that.'

And even if they had, one feels, the audience would not.

(1) Clark. p.126.

From this intractable material O'Neill turned again to the plot of action.

The next two plays, All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire Under the Elms present action of significant and illuminating order.

The first, All God's Chillun, has an essentially simple plot, rendered complex to a certain extent by the use of indirect presentation - symbolic and distorted settings, sound effects and so on. This is a good example of indirect presentation being kept in its place: it is just sufficiently in evidence to enrich the implications of the action. The idea of the great cleavage between black and white, which partly determines the course of events is kept in the background. The ordering of events follows the simple straightforward pattern to which we have become accustomed in O'Neill's plots. The episodic method of The Hairy Ape and The Fountain is pursued in Part I. Against a symbolic background the human drama is shown at its moments of crisis. Fourteen years are covered. Jim and Ella are seen playing together as children, then as adolescents, then as adults.. The action is rooted in irony. In fact it comprises a series of ironic peripeteia. First their relationship is one of childish affection. Then Ella learns to despise negroes: Jim is humiliated. In the next scene she herself has been broken and humiliated by a white man. She turns to Jim for rescue. Part I ends

with their wedding. These reversals of position are all the result of changes in character, and not at all dependent on coincidental situation. Nor is the irony strained to conform with theme, as in The Hairy Ape.

In Part II, which is devoted to a study of their married relationship, unity of place is retained and the action is much more concentrated. In lesser degree it anticipates the similar concentration in Mourning Becomes Electra.

Within one plot O'Neill has thus demonstrated his mastery of both the episodic and concentrated form.

He improved upon his success with the latter in the next play, Desire under the Elms.

Here we have an example of the simple plot on a grand scale. Events progress without reversion but they are ordered into a rounded and satisfying pattern. There is no inconclusiveness in this climax. The characters are left, not in the vacuum of Welded, but in a mood of tragic exultation, going to their doom which is also their glory.

Indirect presentation is slight and unobtrusive: that it consists mainly in imagery suggests an affinity with traditional forms, born out by the shaping of the plot.

By retaining unity of place throughout, O'Neill succeeded in maintaining a high degree of concentration. This involved him however in more exposition than he was accustomed to use. He dealt with it clumsily. In an attempt to make it realistic he spread it out over three

scenes and entrusted it to Eben's two brothers who evidently represented the traditional 'confidante in white linen' since they were despatched to California as soon as the action proper began.

Once it had begun, however, it was developed economically and forcefully. Dramatic suspense runs high. At the end of each part, Abbie and Eben are left in a position of tension: first as enemies, secondly as secret lovers, finally as declared lovers preparing for death.

The plot centres round ironic peripeteia, as in the first part of All God's Chillun Got Wings. In this play, however, the irony progresses with still greater inevitability: it is the basis of the whole development, a Sophoclean force.

Character is destiny. Abbie is prepared to sacrifice Eben and Cabot to her desire for possession, but even as she pursues her desire, its nature changes. She loves Eben whom she had intended to use for her own ends. By the time her child is born it means less to her than her lover. But Cabot, to whom she had revealed her longing for a child to inherit the land, makes Eben acquainted with that first desire. And so Eben turns on Abbie and repudiates their love, thinking she has tricked him. Thus the tragic climax is precipitated, brought about by the characters' own actions.

Had he continued along these lines, O'Neill might have accomplished much. But instead he turned to more indirect and digressive methods. Even in Desire Under the Elms there

had been a tendency, in the occasional soliloquies, to a clogging of action. This tendency was to develop alarmingly.

With Marco Millions begins the period in which digressive plots, and those relying on indirect presentation, predominate. Marco Millions itself has a very digressive, episodic plot, complex in the weakest sense of the word. That is to say, that it relies on juggled events ⁽¹⁾ and on more fantastic forms of indirect presentation.

The plot is episodic, but given unity by the fact that it portrays a psychological development. It does, however, fall into two distinct parts more than previous plots of the same sort had done. The episodes centring round Kublai and Kukachin are generally set against those in which Marco is concerned, almost to the extent of forming a sub-plot, though the two touch at various points.

Marco Millions is not, of course, meant to be taken as seriously as earlier plays. The epilogue, in which Marco, sitting in the audience, gets up with an air of boredom and leaves the theatre, indicates the spirit of satiric fancy in which the play was conceived. What is significant about it, however, is the increasing element of interruption. The Chorus is now used for the first time. As it happens, these interruptions generally hold up that action which is

(1) The prologue, which presents an episode appropriate to the latter half of the play, serves no legitimate function. It merely anticipates the latter action to no purpose.

of serious nature - Kukackin's voyage with Marco and the funeral scene: they are to be taken seriously, and may be judged seriously.

The plot of The Great God Brown is at once digressive and highly complex. The use of the mask in this play chiefly affects revelation of character. But it also affects the conduct of plot, in that indirect presentation almost entirely replaces direct presentation.

This is particularly true of the second part, which begins with Dion's death. Symbolism is no longer kept in the background but interwoven with the action. Such an incident as, for example, the carrying of Brown's mask by the Committeemen as though it were a dead body can only be regarded as a significant event if its symbolic meaning is grasped. Again, it is evident that Margaret does not really take Brown for Dion simply because he wears his clothes and mask. The real truth is that Dion was merely a facet of Brown, which has died but which he attempts to keep alive artificially. And so on, with the entire action of the play.

At this stage, when O'Neill has, for the first time, quite abandoned direct presentation, it is ironical to find him proclaiming 'It was far from my idea in writing Brown that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of man should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proportion the living drama of the recognisable human

beings.'⁽¹⁾ The 'background' pattern may in the first part have been indeed 'background', but it soon took possession of the action. This was not necessarily a bad thing, except that O'Neill is the sort of dramatist who excels with living people and real action. His genius for evoking powerful emotional effects - rare with the moderns - is wasted on abstractions. He must have realised this himself, judging from his constant defence of the human aspects of even his most highly symbolic plays.⁽²⁾

The symbolism of The Great God Brown is reinforced by imagery, more prominent, because less realistic, than in Desire Under the Elms. The action is held up for long intervals by soliloquising. But though digressive, the plot is not episodic in the sense that it presents a series of events not intimately connected. Certainly the concentration of Desire under the Elms has been replaced by successive scenes of presentation, widely separated in time and place. But now, for the first time, events are ordered into a pattern which in itself suggests the theme.⁽³⁾ It is a circular pattern, repeating the motif

(1) O'Neill in letter to N.Y.E.P. 13th. February, 1926.
'Eugene O'Neill writes about his latest play, The Great God Brown.'

(2) See p.132 for his remarks on The Hairy Ape.

(3) The Emperor Jones, the only earlier example of complicated ordering of events, did not do this.

in Cybel's ⁽¹⁾ speech - the eternal recurrence of spring and birth. The play opens with a Prologue set on a moonlit pier. A dance is in progress. The young people come out into the moonlight with their parents, who ponder over their careers and reflect wistfully on their own youth. The epilogue repeats this setting, situation and mood, only now the youthful Margaret of the Prologue is herself a Mother, reminiscing to her three sons.

Even the ordering of events, then, is symbolic. O'Neill is beginning to appreciate the beauty of expressive patterns.

In Lazarus Laughed, as we have observed, comes the supreme example of 'bad plot'. The 'stakes' to which the characters are impaled, are stakes not of 'situation' but of 'theme'. The substitution of discussion for action, which we saw in plays such as Welded and The First Man, has here reached its climax.

The discussion is not even as satisfying as it was there, since it is conducted on a much more abstract level. Causal reality is subordinate to spatial reality. All that is significant is conveyed through indirect presentation, largely through the divine laughter proceeding from Lazarus. Visual aspects such as the mask do not affect the action in the same way as in The Great God Brown, since it is no longer dependent on them. But again, as in

(1) Act IV, scene II ' - Spring again! life again! Summer and autumn and death and peace again!...'

Welded, the significance of the play is entrusted to the physical interpretation of the actors. This time an even more difficult task is laid upon them, as we shall see. (1)

The plot is complex in the sense that it relies heavily on indirect presentation, but simple in regard to the ordering of events. Now the chronicle form is even more apparent than in earlier plays, since the scenes are linked entirely by abstract theme. There is no personal connection between Bethany of the first scene, Athens, Rome and Tiberius' palace at Capua in following scenes. They are not even linked by the fact of representing the principal character's psychological progress. Lazarus' presence gives a certain unity, but he is a semi-divine figure who remains almost entirely untouched by circumstances. Consequently each scene merely repeats the statement of the preceding one in a different environment.

The action is unsatisfying in that it makes no real progress. Lazarus' earthly career has an appearance of movement. From the simple home at Bethany, after the resurrection, he advances through Greece and Rome attracting huge crowds and momentary following wherever he goes. He comes into contact with Caligula, who both fears and loves him, and finally to Tiberius' palace at Capua, where the

(1) II (c) iii. A reminiscence of Hamlet. The identical is explained by the similarity in form and treatment between the two plays.

debauched Emperor demands from him the secret of his
 (1)
 eternal youth. But no true development is possible,
 since Lazarus remains an unearthly figure, who has already
 attained the highest good and can only reiterate it for
 scene after scene.

Up to the scene in Tiberius' palace there has been
 no tangible human drama to speak of. Emphasised by the
 'type' mask the characters play out an abstract and symbolic
 action, representing Man in his response to religion, not
 people in their response to an inspired individual. The
 focus narrows momentarily in the palace scene, when
 Tiberius' mistress, Pompeia, in a mood of sudden passion
 for Lazarus, brings about Miriam's death. This is the one
 occasion when Lazarus displays any human emotion. But his
 momentary lamentation is replaced by the divine joy which
 has characterised him throughout the play, and which never
 again forsakes him. Even as he burns in the arena his
 laughter rises from the flames.

So unreal an action as this even O'Neill could not
 defend as 'human'. His talent for powerful and moving
 action was quite wasted.

The plots of the next two plays, Strange Interlude
 and Dynamo, represent the furthest limit consonant with

(1) A situation reminiscent of The Fountain. The likeness
 is emphasised by the similarity in form and treatment
 between the two plays.

dramatic effectiveness to which the digressive plot could go. The 'stream of consciousness', conveyed through the aside, interrupts the action proper to an unprecedented degree, particularly in Strange Interlude.

Never in any earlier play has exposition played so important a part. O'Neill takes five people and studies them in relation to each other and to their own past lives. He cannot begin at the beginning with each one, as is his usual wont. Instead he conveys their thoughts through the aside. Since the 'stream of consciousness' has a tendency to burrow back into the past, the interest lies almost entirely in reported action.

The beginning of each act is occupied for a considerable period with the relation of what occurred between acts. And that is, in fact, almost all the determining action. The event which exercises more influence than any other is Gordon Shaw's death, and that took place before the play begins. We never see Gordon, but his presence dominates the play. The gradual revelation of what his death has involved occupies the greater part of Act I. The only significant action of this act is Nina's break with her father, her resolution to leave home. Similarly in Act II the only action is Evans' tentative proposal for Nina's hand to Marsden. But the related action is much more important. Between the acts Nina's father had died, Nina had indulged in her promiscuous relations with the patients in the

hospital, Darrell and she had grown to know one another, Evans had reached the stage of wanting to marry her. By the time Act III is reached, so much significant action has taken place out of view that O'Neill has to help out the 'aside' with the old device of the letter, in which Nina reports past events to Darrell.

This method continues till the end. Nina and Marsden reach a climax which promises frankly to be no more than a protracted orgy of reminiscing over a past which has had its strongest existence in their thoughts. Act VIII is possibly the most dramatic of all the acts, in that the conflict between Nina and Madeline, Nina and Darrell is actually presented. The action is manipulated with great skill. It is unfortunate that the events have a melodramatic cast. The Evans family secret, which has haunted the action throughout, constitutes an unconvincing keystone for so elaborate a structure.

For certainly the irony of this play is a little forced, to accord with O'Neill's increasingly ironic view of life. The relation between Nina and Darrell, like that between Jim and Ella in Part I of All God's Chillun Got Wings is a series of ironic peripeteia. First Darrell is the aloof and imperturbable scientist, prescribing dispassionately for Nina and the ineffectual Evans, for whom he has a contemptuous affection. Then, after she has tempted him into sexual relations, he develops a passion for her which

he attempts to check by leaving for Europe. Nina is left frustrated and resentful. Evens, thinking the coming child to be his, grows more self-confident. When Darrell returns, still prey to passion, he is degraded to the status of Nina's slave. Their relations are completely reversed. Evans has now become the complacent and condescending father of a child whom Darrell cannot acknowledge as his. Finally, in the last two acts, a partial status quo is restored. Nina, fiercely jealous for her son, is again the nerve-wracked creature of Act I : Darrell again the impartial observer.

The irony of the whole action is perceived by Darrell, who declares bitterly in Act 7: 'the huge joke has dawned on me...Sam is the only normal one!...we lunatics...Nina and I!...have made a sane life for him out of our madness! ' To a great extent this irony does result from character. Nina, in her unscrupulous search for happiness, fashions her own disaster by attempting to retain husband, lover and son. In so doing she loses both son and lover. But coincidence plays too large a part. It was at the best an 'unconvincing probability' that Nina, who married Sam to regain her health and sanity in motherhood, should discover that she had married into a family tainted with madness, and that a child by Sam was out of the question. The situation has an air of being manufactured to emphasise one of the major themes of the play - that interference in other people's lives is the

great sin. Darrell, in encouraging this marriage, and later in condoning the 'guinea pig' experiment, brought about his own and Nina's destruction.

The digressive plot refigures in Dynamo, where, again, the 'stream of consciousness' holds up the action to an excessive degree. Indirect presentation, in the form of symbolic settings and incident, is more prominent in this play.

Like Lazarus Laughed the plot of Dynamo is essentially a row of stakes, but this time the characters are impaled alive. In Lazarus they had no life to begin with.

The asides are less dramatic than in Strange Interlude because they contain less exposition of significant action and more reflection on the religious problem around which the play is constructed. If Strange Interlude began in the idea of a character, Dynamo began in the idea of an idea - the theme of electricity and God the Mother, which ran as an undercurrent through Strange Interlude. The action is all ordered to conform with this idea. What could have been an emotional conflict similar to that in Desire under the Elms became inextricably confused with a religious theory.

The result is that the motivation appears confused. This is unusual in O'Neill's plays, where the plots are generally constructed round a clear cut issue. B.H. Clark goes so far as to suggest that Ada's murder, which seems to him insufficiently motivated, is a situation 'planted' for

(1)
the next play in the trilogy.

If Reuben had murdered Ada simply as a sacrifice to his new god, Electricity, the situation would certainly seem 'planted', since the need for chastity in this religion is not clearly reasoned. But in fact Reuben's worship of the dynamo is identified with his love for his mother. The dynamo is to him God the Mother: Mrs. Fife represents the personified conception. It is by way of his mother's spirit that all the messages of Dynamo are brought to him. This explains the 'chastity' motif. For his mother, while alive, loved him with the jealous passion that Nina felt for Gordon in Strange Interlude. She had hated Ada because he loved her, and had gone to the utmost lengths to destroy their relationship. When she was dead, Reuben's remorse resurrected her possessive jealousy, and in his desire to return to the protective womb of her love, symbolised by the dynamo, he is prepared to sacrifice Ada. For he knows that his mother will not otherwise accept him.

O'Neill attempts to make the situation clear in stage directions.
(2)
Reuben's asides during the murder scene are

(1) Clark, p.167: 'Up to the last part of the final act, O'Neill carries through a straightforward plot, and then he evidently 'plants' a situation as an emplacement for the next play. I am not certain just why Reuben considers Ada a necessary obstacle...'

(2) In Act III, scene III for example, it is described as his 'Dynamo-Mother'. In the last scene, as Reuben dies, his voice 'rises in a moan that is a mingling of pain & loving consummation and dies...into a sound that is like the crowing of a baby.'

addressed directly to his mother, the symbol of the dynamo rejected.

But there is too much reliance on symbols and stage directions. Inanimate objects are now expected to convey what 'laughter' and 'pregnant silences' did in earlier plays.

The action itself is developed spasmodically. There is too much distracting movement, particularly in Act I when there is a constant popping in and out of houses and gardens. The theme has not been thoroughly assimilated. That so much emphatic emotion goes into the stage directions stresses the weakness of the action. An idea of their crude turgidity may be gathered from an examination of G.J.Nathan's complete list from Act I, quoted in American Mercury March 1929.

From this plot, more complicated than complex, it is a relief to turn to the superb complexity of Mourning Becomes Electra.

This play furnishes a supreme example of craftsmanship going into the whole ordering of the action. The plot is that 'finely proportioned' sort which is satisfying in itself. The 'theme pattern' which as we have observed he borrowed from Aeschylus provided him with an austere and nobly proportioned form. Within this form he arranged his scenes to fall into a balanced and symbolic pattern. In his notes⁽¹⁾ he contemplates 'Pattern of exterior and interior

(1) Op.cit.

scenes, beginning and ending with exterior in each play - with the one ship scene at the center of the second play (this, center of whole work) emphasising sea background of family and symbolic motive of sea as means of escape and release.'

It is apparent from this note that symbolism was to play an important part. In fact, O'Neill had never used functional symbolism so effectively. He reinforced his theme dramatically by symbolic costume, setting, music, and by imagistic symbolism. Expressionist methods entered in the family resemblance among the living Mannons and the symbolic portraits. All this was necessary to achieve 'added depth and scope'. Again and again his notes complain to the effect 'not enough sense of fate', 'use every means to get added depth and scope...must get more distance and perspective.'

All the methods he did use enriched the action tremendously, helped to state the theme in the most dramatic possible way. But the difference between this and previous indirect presentation lies in its unobtrusiveness. Though the symbolism and imagery give extra dimension to the action, an understanding of their full significance is not essential for appreciation of that action. What he had tried to do in The Great God Brown - to maintain 'the living drama of the recognisable human beings' - he here achieved. The discipline of 'theme pattern' to which he had subjected himself, corrected the tendency toward over-mechanical

devices which had been weakening the action in earlier plays. It is significant to find him in his notes considering the possibility of using 'half masks' and 'Interlude' technique, and then, after a long struggle with the latter, rejecting both completely.

Mourning Becomes Electra affords a particularly good opportunity of studying O'Neill's technique, in that we can see how he alters and re-shapes a traditional legend.

His problem was to reinterpret the Greek conceptions of Fate and the Furies - 'working from within the individual soul'. And this he achieved, partly by indirect presentation, partly by the interpolations of a modernised Chorus, but chiefly through the alteration in motivation.

The Chorus plays a minor but effective part. By committing himself to a realistic psychological drama O'Neill forfeited the privilege of using a far-sighted Chorus, who would stress the greater significance of the action as did the Greek Chorus. ⁽¹⁾ The prophecies of Cassandra, through which Aeschylus achieved the tremendous sense of doom in the Agamemnon, were also denied him.

O'Neill's Chorus plays a much more limited part. All that the envious, go@sipping little groups who appear at

(1) The Chorus in the Agamemnon continually stress the fact that 'the unrighteous action Breeds true to its kind'.
(Translation by Louis MacNeice, London 1936.)

the beginning of each Part can do is to drop hints which indicate the position and the background of the Mannons.

They suggest the Mannon 'hubris' which tempts disaster,⁽¹⁾ and on one occasion actually voice the 'Fate' motif.

More important is the part played by Seth, the old retainer, whose knowledge of the past enables him to extend Cassandra-like warnings to Lavinia, and on occasion to state openly⁽²⁾ that there is a doom on the Mannon house.

The hints of the Chorus are helped out by the occasional intuition which descends on the Mannons themselves. The more uncontrolled characters, Christine and Orin, are peculiarly susceptible to this sense of premonition. Orin's overwrought state, carefully established by realistic means, gains credence for his prophetic vision.⁽³⁾

The way in which Louis MacNeice described the theme of the Agamemnon serves perfectly for a description of O'Neill's

(1) For example:

Part I. Louisa:- 'The Mannons got skeletons in their cupboards same as others. Worse ones!'

Part II. Mrs. Hill:- 'You've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall, and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride.'

Part II. Borden:- 'It's queer. It's like fate.'

(2) Seth. III(i) 'There's been evil in that house since it was first built in hate.'

III(iv) 'Don't you try to live here, Vinny. Don't go in there, Vinny.'

(3) I(iii) Ezra. '...But he got brain fever from the shock... Nerves...He's always been restless.'

II(i) Orin:- 'I've been off my head so long, everything has seemed queer since I came back to earth.'

conception: - 'The family is physically and therefore morally a unit: the same blood runs in all, and through it descends an inherited responsibility which limits, without wholly destroying, the power of choice in each. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children, so the children are the victims of circumstance. But the children, because they are of the same blood, are tempted to sin in their turn.'

Again, as in Strange Interlude, the determining action lies in the past. But this time it is related by exposition skilfully interwoven with the presented action. In Part I, Act I we learn about Lavinia's relationship with Brant even while Seth hints at his identity - a hint which introduces memories of past action. This interweaving of past and present exposition continues throughout. No opportunity is neglected for emphasising the motif - 'I see the dead are killing one who lives.'

O'Neill had to alter his motivation completely. Once the murder of Agamemnon was accomplished the rest of the Greek trilogy dealt with technical problems for which a modern dramatist had no equivalent. Orestes, in The Libation Bearers felt no real hesitation over the murder of Clytemnestra. He was upheld by the oracle, and he waited only for the final sanction of the gods. In the Eumenides the interest centred in the conflict of the lower law, which looked only to the dead, with the higher law of Athena which looked to circumstance. Again, O'Neill had no equivalent.

Consequently he constructed the motivation around a theme he had often used before. Christine's hatred of Ezra is attributed to a deeper cause than the circumstances seem to provide. They are divided because they stand in the opposite camps of 'Puritanism' and 'Paganism'. They represent the eternal New England conflict between suppression of natural instinct and acceptance of it. It is the conflict of Diff'rent and Desire under the Elms again.

And as in Desire under the Elms there joins with it the theme of the son's unnaturally fierce love for his mother. Orin longs to escape from the suppression in which he has been brought up. He hates his father, the Puritan incarnate, and identifies the desired 'joy in life' with his mother. Lavinia, on the other hand, because she is jealous of her mother's over-abundant vitality, has directed all her affection to her father and modelled herself on him.

Having established this motivation, O'Neill can now translate the plot of The Libation Bearers into a conflict between mother and daughter for Orin's allegiance. The one tempts him with the promise of Pagan joys, the other appeals to the Puritan in him. Unlike Orestes, Orin feels no desire to avenge his father, whom he had regarded as a rival in his mother's love. ⁽¹⁾ When he does undertake the revenge,

(1) II(22) Orin:- 'I won't pretend to you I'm sorry he's dead. Oh, Mother, it's going to be wonderful from now on! We'll get Vinnie to marry Peter, and there will be just you and I!'
Christine:- 'He loves me! He hated his father! He's glad he's dead!'

it is in a fit of jealous rage against Brant for having been his mother's lover. Lavinia trades on his emotion under pretence of exacting justice. For her the revenge is not complete until Christine, heart-broken at Brant's death, commits suicide. But for Orin his mother's death is a catastrophe.

He is seized by immediate remorse. And thus O'Neill is enabled to translate the theme of the 'Furies' into modern terms. Orin reproaches himself more bitterly than the shrieking Erinyes could have done. His remorse is softened, for a time only, by the antidote of 'Justice' which Lavinia constantly offers. ⁽¹⁾ Then the supreme stroke is effected. Lavinia, released from Puritanism by her mother's death, abandons herself to physical passion. She seeks to evade the consequences of the murder, and to marry her lover. Orin realizes that he has been her catspaw. Resentment joins ⁽²⁾ with remorse. When she refuses to accept his 'Confess and atone to the full extent of the law' he takes the way out which she puts before him, suicide. A harder fate is reserved

(1) III (i) Scene II. Lavinia:- 'It was an act of justice!... your feeling of being responsible for her death was only your morbid imagination.'

(2) III (ii) Orin:- 'You know damned well that behind all your pretence about Mother's murder being an act of justice was your jealous hatred'.

for Lavinia, whom O'Neill will not allow to relapse into 'undramatic married banality'. After attempting to escape into marriage, she realises that the dead hand will always be between. With desperate stoicism she resolves that the curse on the Mannons will end with her. She steps into the doomed house, to shut herself up alone with the dead and let them 'haunt and hound her to the end of her days.'

The action in 'The Haunted' is magnificently concentrated. The scene changes from one gloomy room in the Mannon house to another, as Lavinia and Orin tear themselves to pieces, executing their own hounding.

The sense of doom achieved in this part, more than in either of the preceding is due to O'Neill's incredibly skillful arrangement. Both children have grown to resemble their parents to such a degree that Orin, with crazy intuition, apprehends that the precipitating action is to be played (1) over again. Situation, even actual dialogue repeats itself. Orin is partly himself, partly his father: he transfers to Lavinia the incestuous love he felt for his mother. (2) Action even further in the past is recalled by Orin's realisation that Lavinia has hair like Marie Brantome, the

(1) III (ii) Orin:- 'Ghosts! You never seemed so much like ~~your~~ Mother as you did just then.'

Lavinia:- 'Something made me say that to you - against my will - something rose up in me - like an evil spirit.'

(2) III (ii) Orin:- 'Can't you see I'm now in Father's place, and you're Mother?'

nurse girl over whom the conflict among the Mannons had started. Past and present are brilliantly fused in this last Part, yet the realistic presentation is maintained throughout.

Mourning Becomes Electra is the first example of a plot more complex than The Great God Brown expressed as clearly and as vividly as the simple plot of Desire under the Elms. Indirect presentation is reduced to its least obtrusive and least mechanical form. The strength lies in the ordering of the action. The value of self-discipline, involved in submitting to an austere pattern, is demonstrated.

Mourning Becomes Electra succeeds in suggesting eternity - though this time of crime and punishment - much more successfully than did the free form of Lazarus Laughed, where no rules were observed.

In Ah, Wilderness!, which followed, O'Neill relapsed into the simple plot, presented episodically. Most of the action is set in the Miller home, but it is twice transferred to scenes only connected with the main scene by the unifying presence of Richard.⁽¹⁾

The sub-plot is allowed to develop to an unusual extent. The relations between Sid and Aunt Lily become at one point, in the supper scene, at least as interesting as those between Richard and Muriel. The Miller family has a

(1) Act III, Scene I. The bar scene.
Act IV, Scene II. The beach scene.

life of its own. Humorous incidents such as the conspiracy over the blue fish are developed for the sake of their own comic value. In fact, the interest is not constantly brought to bear on one theme. Intensity is replaced by leisurely and indulgent representation of human foibles.

From the humorous and sentimental climax of Ah, Wilderness! O'Neill returned to more serious material. The plot of Days Without End was more complex than anything he had previously attempted. The complexity lies in the ordering of events and, in particular, in the use of inverted exposition similar to that in Rosmersholm.

The theme is essentially that of The Great God Brown, but the action is no longer dependent on symbolic devices. The mask is replaced by a personified 'other self'. Though the conversation between the man and his 'daemon' constitutes an interruption of action, in that it represents the 'stream of consciousness', the effect created is of continuous presentation. Dialogue, even with a personified attribute, always seems less static than soliloquy.

Just as the action is more clearly presented than in The Great God Brown, so is the problem. The issue is clear cut. The conflict lies between Faust and Mephistopheles, who are 'one and the same - are Faust'.

To grasp the full significance of the play's pattern, it is essential to realise that here O'Neill was continuing to develop the 'Fate' theme of Mourning Becomes Electra. But

this time there is no opportunity for a critic such as Charmian von Wiegand to complain 'more normal alternatives of action were open to all the characters than the ones they chose...or which their author chose for them.'⁽¹⁾

For O'Neill shows the alternatives clearly. Two ways of action are open to the hero all through the play. John, the good self, plans one issue; Loving, the evil self, the other. The ultimate outcome is envisaged from the viewpoint of both 'selves' at the beginning,⁽²⁾ and is kept in sight throughout. O'Neill emphasises his hero's full choice. From the doom of the Mannons, Lavinia and Orin, paralysed by the past within them, had been unable to escape. But if John chooses the worse alternative he will clearly be a 'self damned fool'. Father Baird says: 'There is a fate in this story, Jack - the fate of the will of God made manifest to you through the secret longing of your own heart for faith.'

The interest is maintained by a peculiar mixture of classical and romantic suspense. Romantic suspense entails that the audience must not know what is going to happen next, and in this play we do know almost exactly what will happen.⁽³⁾ Through the 'novel' which John is writing, the action of each

(1) Article on Mourning Becomes Electra. New Theatre. September, 1935.

(2) Act I. Loving:- 'Why not have the wife die? It would be interesting to work out your hero's answer to his problem if his wife died.'

(3) In Act I he says of this novel: 'I'm doing it to try and explain to myself, as well as to her.'

scene is stated in the preceding one. We know that events are likely to follow a certain course, for example that John's secret will be revealed to Elsa, and that she will fall ill. But we have always before us the alternatives which the hero may adopt in the given circumstances. He may either justify his betrayal of Elsa or beg her forgiveness, but he must inevitably come to the point of making the choice.

Each of the first acts reveals a major crisis in John's past life and looks ahead to the action of the next. In Act I John describes to Father Baird Part I of his novel which 'concerns my hero's boyhood here in New York up to the age of fifteen.' The revelation effected by the novel is amplified by the conversation among John, Eliot and Baird, which fills in 'my hero's manhood up to the time he finds love'. Through this exposition the nature of the inner action is made clear. The boyhood crisis over religious faith was the event which precipitated the conflict between John and Loving, the crisis now to be resolved.

Act I looks ahead to Elsa's illness, to take effect in Act III, and, more immediately to John's intrigue with Lucy Hillman, which is partly to be revealed in Act II.

The second Act opens with Lucy's arrival in the Loving home. She reveals to Elsa the circumstances of her 'dip into adultery', concealing from her the fact that John was the man. So the third part of John's novel, 'the hero's

terrible sin' is related, from an outside viewpoint.

Dramatic irony is keen in this scene. Act I had given the audience to understand that a relationship existed between Lucy and John. The description Lucy gives of the man in the case confirms that suspicion. Elsa's horrified reaction to Lucy's infidelity, her idealistic declarations on the sanctity of marriage, prepare the suspense for the next Act.

The short scene between John and Lucy at the end of this act suggests that confession has become inevitable, though John still does not know that Lucy has made part confession to Elsa.

Act III opens on a note of high tension. There is keen dramatic irony in the state of half-knowledge which exists all round. Baird has recognised the novel as autobiographical, from the boyhood events, but he knows nothing of later developments. Elsa thinks it fiction: she persuades John to continue with its relation. As he begins to describe the affair with Lucy, Baird immediately knows that it is his own affair. Elsa only gradually realises it, as she recognises the circumstances described by Lucy in the previous act. She voices the irony of the situation:-
'So it was you who told on yourself. Rather a joke on you, isn't it?'

Exposition of the past ends at this point. John has already outlined the future up to the point where the wife

dies. Now Elsa, in obedience to the death wish, goes out into the rainy night and catches pneumonia. While this action develops, John visualises, in conversation with Baird, the final conflict, when the choice between faith and annihilation will be presented to his hero.

Act IV, the 'End of the End,' leads up to this conflict. Loving's version of the plot has so far been accomplished. Elsa lies dying, and John can no longer procrastinate. When he resolves to set out for the church, where he had planned the final encounter, Loving begins to weaken, and Elsa cries out that she will forgive. The victory is already half over before the 'great temptation scene' is enacted. John brings himself to forgive God for the death of his parents, even as Elsa has forgiven him. And this ensures God's forgiveness of him also. Loving is defeated and dies. When Baird enters the church to announce that Elsa will live, he finds only 'John Loving'.

A more involved structure than this is hard to imagine. The measure of O'Neill's development may be seen in that the elaboration is no longer one of surface devices and indirect presentation but of arrangement. He has come a long way from the simple plot of The Moon of the Caribbees.

It is clear then that O'Neill's true genius is for powerful action, rather than for discussion and digression. He prefers single action, which concentrates on one theme only, and by presenting it simply he can achieve very fine

results. But there is greater power in the finely proportioned plots at which he eventually arrived. The plots of Mourning Becomes Electra and Days Without End have depths within depths, all enriching the theme. When effects spring from arrangement of action they may not be so startling but are more permanently impressive than effects arising from surface presentation. In Lazarus Laughed, for example, the emphasis on outward show merely serves to cover up the weakness of the action.

In constructing plot O'Neill showed that he was a true craftsman: he deliberately set out to master the more difficult tools of his trade, and mastered them with a high degree of success.

* * *

(1) W. B. Yeats, in an essay, "The World's Whirl," (1914) printed out that "whirlwind is particularly apt" "somewhat alone," "it is a drawing of the breaking of the ether that suggests the whirlwind."

ASPECTS OF O'NEILL'S TECHNIQUE (Contd.)

II (c) ii. Selection, grouping and revelation of character.

'Most modern men are interested in the relation between man and man. But that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God.'

O'Neill's early conception of God was of an implacable and ironic Life Force. The highest relation that man could attain with such a Deity was that achieved by Prometheus with the gods of Olympus. It was essentially a tragic relation, a 'glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, a mere infinitesimal incident in its expression.'

His equipment in the unequal conflict was his 'unconquerable will...and courage never to submit or yield.' O'Neill's tragic heroes are all imbued with this spirit: (1) in fact, it is generally their only attribute. They are all, like Emma Crosby, 'diff'rent'. They pursue their ideal in the face of all opposition, and at the cost of

(1) W.B.Yeats, in an essay, 'The Tragic Theatre', (1910) pointed out that 'character is continuously present in comedy alone...tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man.'

happiness. It may be the most intangible vision, such as Robert Mayo's dream of the horizon, or it may be the sordid quest of gold in which Captain Bartlett engages. But, whether it is in itself a noble or ignoble illusion, the men who pursue it acquire more stature than their fellows. They have greatness born of the intenser state in which they live. O'Neill contrasts these Titans with the more ordinary people about them, who compromise with the Force. Peter and Hazel, the only normal characters in Mourning Becomes Electra, he calls 'the untroubled'. To be untroubled might mean to be happier but such happiness O'Neill despises. The 'troubled' have at least given battle to the Force, and proved their right to be called man, not animal. Emma, in Diff'rent, shows how the ideal may become the ridiculous, but for all the ignominy of her relations with Benny, there comes at the end a return to her first pride of spirit. She is permitted to finish, not as a figure of fun, but as a figure of tragedy.

The treatment of character changes after Desire under
 (1)
the Elms. Until then the heroes are mostly single-minded men of action, little concerned with the right or wrong of their determination to get the biggest bag of ile, or to own a 'hum' or to attain the far horizon. But later, they begin to look

(1) This change was anticipated in Welded, and, to a lesser degree, in The Hairy Ape.

into themselves rather than into the horizon. As O'Neill said of man in The Hairy Ape, 'The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself.'⁽¹⁾ The characters of this second period, Dion Anthony, John Loving, fight within themselves a battle between the 'unconquerable will' and a strange new humility. Like Strindberg, O'Neill came to see the pride which he had formerly admired as a Mephistopheles. In his last play, Days Without End, he personifies the attribute and shows it finally defeated, because it is incapable of begging forgiveness. Dion Anthony, Brown, Loving, Orin Mannon, all find salvation because they learn to forgive and to submit themselves. Dion kisses his enemy's feet, Orin confesses his mother's right to her love, Loving forgives God the death of his parents. These characters are still 'diff'rent' however. They are contrasted favourably with men such as Brown, complacent in his 'layers of protective fat.' Their greatness now lies, not in their singleminded intensity but in the 'germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in their blood.'

There is a general increase in introspective characters in this second period, characters who brood over their desires instead of putting them into action, as the Bartletts and Keeneys did. The question mark wriggles too

(1) N.Y.H.T. November 16th., 1924.

insistently. Marsden is the epitome of this type. He can do nothing to achieve his desire actively. When gratification comes, there are no desires left to gratify:- 'God bless dear old Charlie...who, passed beyond desire, has all the luck to last! ' Strange Interlude is, in fact, the high water mark of introspection. None of the characters achieves greatness, as Dion Anthony did. Darrell, who has the greatest potentialities, ends completely disillusioned:- 'Oh, God, so deaf and dumb and blind!...teach me to be resigned to be an atom! ' To this has come man's 'glorious self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him.'

The illusion-driven characters are generally men. Women scarcely figure at all in the first plays, and when they do they are important only in their relation to man. (1) As we have already observed, O'Neill's conception of woman is almost identical with Strindberg's except that he sees them less often as 'vampires', more often as the 'white dove with whom the startled eagle finds sanctuary.' (2)

The men of the first period were great because they challenged the creative Force, and so themselves became creators. In the second period, the creative man - Dion Anthony, the artist, Cape, the writer - is contrasted with

(1) The prostitutes in The Long Voyage Home, Mrs. Keeney in Ile.

(2) The Stranger in To Damascus III, Act III, Scene III.

the uncreative Browns and Darntons. Women, however, are the great creators, because, not only do they produce new life, but in them man finds his easiest way to God. Woman, as mother, becomes identified with Nature herself. Margaret, in The Great God Brown, Nina, in Strange Interlude, express their feeling of being one with the stream of life - 'my child moving in my life...my life moving in my child... the world is, whole and perfect...all things are each other... life is...and the is is beyond reason...questions die in the silence of this peace...' O'Neill's is an anthropomorphic religion. When man becomes woman's lover and the father of her child, he becomes also her son, and through her finds his way back to the womb of Life in which he began. Eben, Orin, Mannon, Reuben Light, all seek their mother in their mistress or their mistress in their mother. The incest theme does not, for O'Neill, represent perversion, but a fundamental and symbolic longing to be one with the tide of life, a longing which his maternal women satisfy by bearing children and playing mother to their lovers. Even Nina, the individualist, relents toward Sam when she thinks of him as 'poor Sammy!...poor little boy!...poor little boy!'

These maternal women O'Neill visualises as necessary to man, and yet dangerous for him. For, like the symbolic elms in Desire under the Elms, they are at once protective and possessive. They must own all of a man, his soul as well as his desire. And so, though Dion Anthony loves his wife, he

seeks to escape her, because she would protect him from the creative element in himself. And the creative element in man is almost inevitably destructive.

O'Neill finds his symbol for the divine love of Nature, which protects without seeking to possess, which accepts life completely because it knows itself part of the eternal stream, in the figure of the prostitute. This figure develops from the crude harlots of the sea plays, through the intermediate stage of Welded, into the Cybel of The Great God Brown, who is a clear symbol of Mother Earth. These women do not attempt to explain. They accept. They have few illusions. As Strindberg said, in To Damascus,⁽¹⁾ 'Only whores are honest, and therefore cynical.' They know, without having reasoned, the answer to the problem over which men destroy themselves. 'You got to laugh, ain't you?' says the Woman in Welded, 'Sure! You got to loin to like it!' 'That's it!' replies Cape, 'That goes deeper than wisdom.'

Women, for O'Neill, are then much more sympathetic than for Strindberg. This applies more to the later women than the first, as we shall see. At first he has not identified them so completely with the creative element in Nature. They play a destructive part by seeking to follow illusions of their own, instead of accepting their birth-right. Mrs. Keeney, in Ile, Ruth, in Beyond the Horizon, Abbie, in Desire under the Elms, contribute to the disaster of the men because they

(1) Act III, scene III.

enmesh them in their own illusions. Even the prostitutes of the early plays are destructive. O'Neill's totally unsympathetic women are always childless or sterile. Mrs. Rowland, in Before Breakfast, loses her child: so does Ruth, in Beyond the Horizon. Ella, in All God's Chillun Got Wings, refuses to have a child; Eleanor Cape, in Welded, is without one.

Having observed the chief features of O'Neill's characterisation, we may now look more closely at the individual plays. They fall naturally for consideration into the two categories already observed.

In the first, the plays up to Desire under the Elms, the grouping of character is very clear-cut. The Promethean figure is contrasted with a background of the 'untroubled', who cannot understand him. O'Neill preferred at this time to depict the lower classes, the less articulate who were also the most vital physically. He sought the 'transfiguring nobility of tragedy...' in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives.⁽¹⁾ To a certain extent, almost all the early characters are 'grotesci'. They live by the right of their one outstanding attribute, which is generally pride.

In the plays contained in the Thirst volume the stock type seems to have predominated - injured husband, consumptive prostitute and so on. The sailors in the S.S. Glencairn series are little more than this. We find Driscoll, the traditional

(1) Quinn, p.199.

blustering Irishman, Cocky, reminiscent of Shaw's cowardly and boastful Cockneys, the frank, good-natured Swede. These characters have their illusions, however. Yank dreams of 'a farm with a house of your own with cows and pigs and chickens' in place of that 'hell av a life, the sea.' But the illusion has not yet developed to the point where it is a driving madness. Smitty merely indulges in nostalgic grumbling. Yank and Driscoll 'pipe dream', Olson sets calmly about his resolve to return to the long-sought farm.

Character in these plays is presented simply, corresponding with the simple action. The only women are prostitutes of the coarsest type, the negro women in The Moon of the Caribbees, Freda and Kate in the Long Voyage Home.

In Ile, The Rope, and Where the Cross is Made the illusion-driven character is dominant. In the last two he is shown when the strength of the illusion has already driven him mad, and he is consequently less a figure of tragedy than of melodrama. Captain Keeney in Ile is a better illustration. We can see in him the predecessor of many later characters. Pride obsesses him. He has 'got to git the ile...in spite of all hell'. The motive is low - fear of the Homeport skippers 'making fun of him' - but he is an

impressive character in his strength,⁽¹⁾ witnessed to by his treatment of the mutiny, and the Mate's respect for him.

The presence of Mrs. Keeney reveals his human side and tenderer feelings. He almost yields to her persuasions to turn back, but the news that the ice has broken is too much for his fanatic ambition. He expresses a sentiment which was to be one of O'Neill's major themes, 'Woman, you ain't a doin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em'. Mrs. Keeney has in fact invited her fate by following an illusion of her own. She had dreamed of the 'fine, free life on the sea', and she found 'ice and cold - and brutality'.

The Keeneys are shown up against a background of sane, practical characters, the Mate, the Steward, the sailors. They express the ordinary man's viewpoint - 'Did ye ever hear of a man who wasn't crazy do the things he does?'

In Where the Cross is Made a similar background is provided. This play is particularly interesting in the use of vision to represent the characters' state of mind.

But in The Rope there is no such contrast, and the characterisation suffers thereby. Abraham Bentley, with his illusion about the rope, is senile; his son, Luke, weak and cunning; Annie a termagant; her husband a more brutal version

(1) W.B. Yeats, in Discoveries (1906), writing of personality, said: 'the hero of a play...will display the greatest volume of personal energy, and this energy must seem to come out of the body as out of the mind.'

of Luke. Even the child is lifeless and stupid. Such general degradation, to no very clear purpose, is a little unconvincing.

We now see the female characters beginning to develop. Before Breakfast (1916) had been a study in feminine personality. Mrs. Rowland was the destructive woman, who desired to possess without love. She despised her husband's 'silly poetry and stories', his 'fine poetic talk'. Significantly, the child of this marriage had died.

This character is developed more fully in Ruth of Beyond the Horizon. Attracted by Robert's romantic aspect, as Mrs. Rowland had been by the 'fine poetic talk', she mistakes a purely surface attraction for love. This O'Neill regards as a criminal fault in woman. He punishes it here, as in Before Breakfast, by turning the lively, self-willed Ruth of Act I into a disillusioned, fretful woman: she is described in Act III as having 'the stony lack of expression of one to whom nothing more can ever happen.'

The selection of character in this play is rather too eclectic. Robert Mayo represents the epitome of all illusion seekers. Characteristically he does not even know what he seeks: his ideal is never more concrete than '...the beauty of the far off and unknown...the joy of wandering on and on in quest of the secret, which is hidden just over there, beyond the horizon.' O'Neill described the birth of this character in a letter to The New York Times of April 11th. 1920.

He developed the character, he said, from the figure of a sailor, ⁽¹⁾ nostalgic for life on a farm, into a 'more intellectual, civilised type', possessed by a weakened 'intangible wanderlust.' This wanderlust he would reject for 'almost any nice little poetical craving.' The dream would continue to haunt him, but he would never be able to put it into action.

Robert's tragedy is, then, rather different from that of the other illusion-driven characters. It arises from his voluntary rejection of the illusion. He is contrasted with his practical brother, Andrew, who goes to sea in his place, and is thereby led into speculation in Wheat Pits, which represents betrayal against his natural farmer's instincts. Whether these characters follow an illusion or reject it, the result is the same - they are 'damned if they do and damned if they don't.'

The grouping grows eclectic after Act I. In that act, Robert's intensity had been set in relief by the background of his family - practical, sane, good-humoured people, of the type later epitomised in Ah, Wilderness! But after Act I the grouping is similar to that in The Rope. The sane, ⁽²⁾ balanced characters disappear. Mrs. Mayo is metamorphosed into an ineffectual discontented shadow, and Ruth's mother, a

(1) And who, O'Neill realised, would never have stayed on a farm.

(2) Scott, who is unchanged, appears only for a fleeting moment in Act II, Scene IV.

particularly dreary 'Mrs. Gummidge' is introduced for the first time. Robert is ill, frustrated and generally unhappy. When Andrew reappears he has hardened, become more materialistic. Before Act III the only lively character, the child Mary, dies. This deterioration of character all round is intended, of course, to illustrate the destructive power of the 'romantic ideal'. But the case is overstated. In consequence the deterioration of Robert and Ruth, which one would otherwise have accepted in the circumstances, appears unreal.

After The Straw, in which the characterisation was stereotyped,⁽¹⁾ O'Neill attempted in Gold, a full-length portrait of Bartlett, whom he had sketched in Where the Cross is Made. When the character is more fully developed we see that he is a second Captain Keeney. His strength of character is revealed by the way in which his men defer to him and rely on him in emergency. His actions in the shipwreck scene show him to be hard to the point of brutality, but on the whole just and honest, a man to be admired. As with Keeney his tender side is revealed through the way in which he talks of his wife and children. The coveted gold at first means to him 'carriages and silks...for Sue and the boy'. He will give up whaling and go to 'meetin'' on Sundays as his wife had begged him.

But later the gold becomes an end in itself, for which he sacrifices his wife and his own sanity and happiness. He

(1) The Blustering Irishman reappears in Eileen's father. Eileen herself is a model of patient virtue, rather larger than life.

is an example of the man with a tragic flaw, his obstinacy, set in the circumstances which aggravate it.

In Anna Christie the 'gold' which represented Bartlett's 'horizon' was replaced by the now familiar idealisation of the land, as contrasted with the sea. Chris, the barge captain, has a hatred of the sea which has become an obsession. His feeling is partly expressed through ineffectual grumbling and cursing - 'dat ole devil, sea' - but more dramatically by his attempts to prevent his daughter from marrying Burke, the man of the sea.

The strength of his illusion is demonstrated largely by events which have occurred in the past, related by Anna. His vague sentiment for the coveted life on a farm was responsible for her tragedy. This brings home to us more forcibly than mad ravings the terrible power of the 'romantic ideal.'

But O'Neill's interests were divided between the two characters, Chris and Anna; to have concentrated on Chris would have involved showing a much more degraded Anna, in order that the father might be brought face to face with the full horror of his doings. Whereas, after she has revealed the truth, Chris becomes a subordinate figure. The interest is concentrated on Anna's relations with Burke.

In fact, O'Neill did not intend to prove his point this time by exaggerating the effect of an illusion upon its victim. He had another part for Anna to play. She was to be the first of a long line of prostitutes, who were not merely prostitutes,

but symbols. She is like Strindberg's whores, honest but cynical, abused by man but essentially virtuous. Her very description anticipates future characters - tall, blonde, handsome in a 'Viking-daughter fashion'. Marthy, the good-natured slut, represents the same type at a more mature stage, owning still fewer illusions, but 'not such a bad lot', after all.

In Diff'rent comes the first full-length picture of the woman who, like earlier men, pursues a remote and abstract ideal which destroys her.

Emma is like Bartlett and Keeney, a harder, more intense character than those around her. She is contrasted, in Act I, with a family of practical realists, the 'untroubled'. Her mother has not the slightest understanding of her 'high fangled notions': her brother, Jack, resents her 'queerness'. These people have all learned to compromise. Mrs. Crosby points out that her own marriage has been happy, even though her husband 'never was no saint'. 'What do you want to marry anyhow - ' demands the brother, '- a man or a sky pilot?' And Harriet puts the case for all women, 'A girl'd never git married hereabouts if she expected too much.'

Against this background of coarse, disillusioned tolerance, Emma's demand for ideal chastity has a heroic, if fanatic, quality. Again, as in Gold, the chastity is only a symbol. Emma's insistence that Caleb should be 'diff'rent' is a manifestation of her proud spirit, her refusal to be

merely one of the herd, following herd instincts.

That the ideal in this case was a patently false one does not alter the fact that Emma belongs to the class of tragic heroes. Her tragedy is in fact greater than Bartlett's, for the celibacy to which she condemns herself makes of her in the end a living contradiction of the ideal.

She becomes a ridiculous hag, raddling her cheeks in an attempt to regain youth. The ironic metamorphosis is emphasised by the grouping of characters in Act II. As in Beyond the Horizon, the normal, good-natured types disappear. (1) They are replaced by the unpleasant figure of Benny, Emma's nephew, in whom all the various qualities of coarseness, materialism, compromise, which were distributed in the previous act, are combined and exaggerated. That Emma should have set up this ruffian as her idol, indicates, without need of comment, the drastic change in her.

The Emperor Jones is the first of many single studies of individuals, presented in a changing series of scenes. Since in many cases the environment is distorted to represent the characters' mental conceptions, these studies often resemble the monodramas of Strindberg and Kaiser.

(1) Harriet, during her brief appearance, is seen to have developed into an irritated, shrewish woman. Her face has a 'fretful, continuously irritated expression'. Again O'Neill shows the cleft stick. The result of compromising may be no better than that of following the ideal.

The method of revealing character in The Emperor Jones - through soliloquy lasting for six scenes, and through visionary projections of the mind - seems at first glance startling. But in fact all the important revelation is contained in the first scene. During the conversation with Smithers Jones reveals, by characteristic action and dialogue, the principal traits in his character.

We see he is again the proud, vital character of the sort which makes tragic heroes. Jones' ambitions are on a more practical level, and he is contrasted only with a very poor specimen of 'white trash'. But he is just as conscious as was Emma of his 'diff'rence'.

He is a boaster, exulting in the daring of his past crimes, and in his superior cunning:- 'I kin outguess, outrun, outfight an' outplay de whole lot of dem'. He has the vices which attend pride. When Smithers taunts him he crows him with an arrogance which we realise has been used to bully and exploit the natives.

At the same time he has a shrewd cunning, foreign to Emma or Robert Mayo:- 'For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor.' 'I ain't no fool' he tells Smithers, 'I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't.'

Despite this mixture of arrogance and cunning which makes up his nature, there is a certain grandeur about him, a bold vitality which sets him above Smithers, the coward, just as the earlier heroes were marked out from their fellows.

He is capable of facing consequences. Once he realises the Emperor's game is up he immediately adjusts himself to circumstances, wringing from Smithers the tribute:-

'Blimey, but you're a cool bird and no mistake.' He can look forward to death with a heroic stoicism:- 'Dis baby plays out his string to de end, and when he quits, he quits wid a bang de way he ought.'

The vision scenes merely show this character breaking down under pressure of fear. Five layers of consciousness are removed, and, behold, he is one with the natives he had derided! His innate superstition comes to the fore, his pride goes, and at last he is left with only his most primitive instincts.

These scenes do not teach us anything new about Jones: they merely emphasise the racial characteristics which were hinted at in Scene I. In fact, his character is not developed, but analysed into its component parts. It is a brilliant study in retrogression.

The First Man heralds a different sort of character, the introspective types of the second category who seek to know themselves rather than the far horizon.

Curtis and Martha Jayson are the vanguard of the intellectuals with whom O'Neill was later to be concerned. Curtis is the creative man, seeking his expression in archaeological research. Martha attempts to be the creative woman by having a child. But O'Neill is so interested in the problem of what happens when the two

desires clash, that he neglects to develop the characters at all. In Act I, they are little more than mouthpieces for the dramatist's views.

After Act II, as we have seen, they vanish from the scene,⁽¹⁾ and are replaced by the Jayson family. This suffices to show how much less forceful these new characters are than those previously discussed. Emma would never have consented to be so blotted out.

The Hairy Ape includes both old and new. Yank is essentially the logical conclusion of the Bartletts and Keeneys. From the character presented only in one characteristic to the 'type' proper is but a step. O'Neill was working with old material: it was easier for him than for critics to believe that 'the character of Yank remains a man.'⁽²⁾

For Yank is Brutus Jones all over again:- 'I'm de end! I'm de start! I start sompin' and de woild moves!' He is at first all brute strength and magnificent self-confidence. Then he becomes shaken out of his self-satisfaction. The 'germ of insecurity' is planted in his blood. Paddy's longing for the 'fine, beautiful ships' of the sailing days, which he had once dismissed as a 'dope dream' he begins to comprehend:- 'Sure, I seen de sun come up...Sure, it was

(1) Martha is not seen at all after Act II. Curtis reappears, but only as the conventional figure of bereaved husband, hating the child who has killed his wife.

(2) N.Y.H.T. November 16th., 1924.

great stuff. I got it aw right - what Paddy said about dat being de right dope - on'y I couldn't get in it, see?' His attempt to 'get in it' looks forward to the self-tormented characters of later plays.

But at the same time he is a 'symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature...and has not yet acquired a spiritual way.'⁽¹⁾ His symbolic aspect is emphasised by the background of marionettes against which he is set. The sailors in the first three scenes are no more than voices, echoing his words in a metallic cacophany - 'Think, Love, Law, God'. Their 'hard, barking laughter' is the voice of steel. Only Long and Paddy have any individuality. The Fifth Avenue parade is frankly unreal, and in the prison scene the 'voices' of the prisoners' chorus echo from out of symbolic darkness. With such a background it is not possible that Yank should seem a realistic 'man'. O'Neill only thinks that it is so, because the character is so near in kind to the earlier single-minded heroes.

If Yank partly anticipates the characters whose struggle is 'with themselves', Mildred is an even clearer anticipation. She is the first of the self-analytic Capes and Marsdens, watching her own reactions with dispassionate interest, too self-conscious to take any decisive action, 'bored by her own anaemia'. She realizes her own futility - 'I'm a waste

(1) O'Neill. N.Y.H.T. 16. 11. 1924.

product in the Bessemer process.' But the revelation of her character is not thoroughly convincing, since it proceeds through artificial dialogue with the Aunt, a type which O'Neill had not yet mastered. He was more successful with Yank's Bowery patois than with the repartee of 'polite society.'

Juan in The Fountain is a conventionalised, romantic version of Yank, seeking for the 'fountain of youth' instead of 'to belong'. He too stands half way between the single-minded man with the *idée fixe* and the complex man, obsessed with study of himself. R.D. Skinner contrasts him with Yank, calling him an 'ambitious thinker'.⁽¹⁾ But his search for the fountain is only the usual idealistic exercise.

The complex man comes into his own in Welded. As we have seen, O'Neill was following Strindberg closely in his treatment of Michael and Eleanor Cape who fight between their love, 'an eternal longing to become one life again' and their desire to preserve their separate individualities. Yet these two also resemble earlier characters. They too are 'diff'rent': their marriage must be 'hard, difficult, guarded from the commonplace.' But unlike Emma, who could not find words to explain what she meant by 'diff'rent', they are only too aware of the nature of their problem, and of the conflict within themselves. They thrive on 'high

(1) Skinner. p.121.

fangled notions.' 'I hate myself for loving him', cries Eleanor and 'I hate him because I love him.'

The description of Eleanor and Michael suggests future developments. She has 'passionate blue grey eyes' and a 'high forehead': he has 'the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist.' His manner is 'extraordinarily nervous and self-conscious'. He is uneasy, 'always watching himself. There is something tortured about him.'

The two are studied in isolation. Darnton only interrupts them for a moment in Act I: in Act III they are entirely alone. In Act II, however, they are contrasted with two different types.

Darnton is a clear forecast of later types. He is the uncreative man envying the creative:- 'I've always envied Michael', he says. The relation between Michael, Darnton and Eleanor anticipates that between Dion, Brown and Margaret in The Great God Brown. He has, too, something of Marsden in him. He has allowed Eleanor to humiliate him and his love: he would have been her 'poorest slave', and though he desires her - 'Perhaps deep down, I'm glad - 'Glad at escaping the necessity to create, that is. 'After all', he concludes, with a forced joking tone, 'friendship is sounder, saner - more in the picture for my type, eh?'

The Woman in Act II, scene II is clearly a symbolic figure. Cape tells her, 'You're a symbol of love revenging

itself upon itself.' But she is more than this. Though completely non-intellectual, she has the pride of one who lives honestly according to her lights. She refuses to 'take nothin' for nothin'.' Though cynical about men, she accepts them as she accepts life:- 'You got to laugh ain't you? Sure! You got to loin to like it.'

In All God's Chillun Got Wings, the humble, patient aspect of man, prefigured in Darnton, comes to full growth in Jim.

Jim and Ella are each other's complements. He has spiritual strength. She has physical confidence. His physical inferiority is symbolised by his colour; her spiritual inferiority by her degradation at the hands of a bully and a pimp.

Jim's humility strives with the intellectual ambition which goads him to rise above his blackness. He promises to be Ella's 'black slave': he will lie at her feet like a dog that loves her. But for a time he still attempts to develop in himself by way of intellect the confidence which she automatically possesses, in her sense of racial superiority. Ella, obsessed by this desire of black to become white, goes mad. She wants him as her slave, not her superior, and she knows that if he acquires the confidence which intellectual success will give him, he immediately becomes her superior. For in spiritual strength he is already that. The conflict ends in Jim submitting himself. He becomes her playmate, 'blacking his face' to pretend he is white: her 'kind old Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years'. The self-abasement

which Jim achieves was to be repeated, after long conflict, in later heroes. 'Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness,' he cries at the end, 'Forgive me, God, for blaspheming you!'

In the first part Jim and Ella are contrasted with a group of symbolic whites and blacks. The whites, Shorty and Mick, are the physically confident and spiritually degraded. The negro, Joe, represents the satisfaction of bāack with itself. 'Is you a nigger, Nigger?' he demands of Jim and when he replies 'Yes, I'm a nigger! We're both niggers', relaxes into a relieved contentment.

In the second Part, after a scene in which Ella is contrasted with fully rounded characters - his mother and Hattie - they are studied in severe isolation. But it is an isolation more satisfactory than that in Welded or The First Man since the character has already been shown clearly through the characteristic action of early scenes.

In this Part, O'Neill develops the method of revealing character prefigured in Where the Cross is Made. The state of Ella's mind is shown by distorted setting and by obsessed monologue.

In Desire under the Elms the simple, single-minded character is dominant for the last time, before the introspective type takes the stage.

Abbie, Eben and Cabot are all intense, vital characters, driven by the same urge, which actuated Keeney and Jones.

The passion this time is to own the farm. It is a more symbolic passion than were earlier ones, for the farm clearly implies a feeling of creation, a nearness to Nature, which brings man closer to God.

Cabot is the supreme example of man's glorious struggle to 'make the Force express him', and of man's pride. He invests God with his own qualities of hardness and persistence: he is immeasurably greater than any of his neighbours, and even his own family: 'Will ye ever know me,' he asks Abbie, 'r will any man 'r woman?' 'No. I calc'late 't wa'nt t'be'. He rejoices in his strength, which is 'ten times as strong and fifty times as hard as Eben.' Like Brutus Jones he 'can outrun, outshoot and outguess his fellows, can turn fields of stones into a 'jim dandy farm' where weaker spirits go West to make easy gold, and now lie under ground' fur follerin' arter an easy God'. 'God hain't easy.' Cabot is harder than Bartlett, more immovable than Keeney. But he is a creator, making 'thin's grow out o' nothin'.' Even his loneliness seems to him to bring him nearer to God. At the end, when the son who was to inherit the farm is dead, Abbie and Eben on their way to execution, he reminds himself, 'God's lonesome, hain't He? God's hard and lonesome.'

Cabot's character is brought out very clearly before he appears by the conversation between Eben and his brothers. We learn how he slaved Eben's mother to death in the service of the farm, and how he now slaves his sons. Simeon puts his

finger on the 'diff'rence' in Cabot:- 'It's somethin' - drivin' him - t'drive us.' The attitude of the guests at the christening is equally indicative. They are too much in awe of him to disobey his least command, but they resent his arrogance intensely. When he finishes his war dance, with his shouts 'Look at me!...Beatin' the young 'uns like I allus done', they look at him coldly and express their feelings in malicious innuendos about his child.

Cabot's iron determination is matched by Abbie's. She is the epitome of the possessive woman. First she must own a 'zhum': then she must secure the farm for a child of her own: then she must possess Eben. She is entirely single-minded. Whatever the desire of the moment she must follow it. When she desires the farm she will exploit Eben. When she desires Eben she will sacrifice even her own child. She finds it easy to give Eben both sexual love and the maternal love he requires, for maternal love involves possession. She is a natural woman, following her instincts at the expense of society.

Of the three, Eben is the most complex figure. He anticipates future characters rather than representing, as Cabot does, the epitome of those who have gone before. We have already seen how his relation with Abbie was compounded of lust and an adolescent longing to return to the comfort of the womb. All his dealings are actuated by the desire to revenge his dead mother. Even when he has taken the prostitute, Min, he exults, 'She may have been his'n...but she's mine now!'

And his affection for his child is mingled with resentment.

'I don't like having to let on what's mine is his'n.'

These characters are all physically vital, active types. They have an 'unsettled, untamed, desperate quality', which gives them stature greater than that of the average.

In Marco Millions the simple men of action have lost this heroic quality. They are shrewd, practical, coarse, without a spark of imagination or of daring. They have been degraded to offer contrast with the self-analytical characters who, from this stage onwards, become the centre of attention.

The Polo brothers and their 'millions' are set against the figures of reflective Beauty, Kukachin, and intellect, Kublai, who orders his actions according to the precepts of divine philosophy, Chu-Yin. Marco, the materialist, has brief moments of imagination, when he composes a poem to Donata, when he looks into Kukachin's eyes on the last day of the voyage or when he admits that Nature is wonderful. But he is quite incapable of appreciating Chu-Yin's comment that what can be proven cannot be true. He grows coarser and more cynical as he matures. The psychological development is dramatically and forcefully presented by his differing reactions to the symbolic groups of the Eastern civilisations. In scene III, when his relatives settle down to relate dubious stories with the Ali brothers, Marco wanders round the little groups in an endeavour to be friendly: in Scene V he makes only a cursory circuit of the silent figures: he is the

first to lead the anecdotes. As the wonder and mystery of the East were represented by a 'stench' to Andrew Mayo, to Marco it means 'millions upon millions upon millions of worms'. He is, to use his own words, 'an ordinary man...a man of affairs used to dealing in the hard facts of life.'

In Marco Millions, Big Business was triumphant. Marco ended as complacently as he began. But in The Great God Brown Marco develops into Brown, a character who combines the former's shrewdness, practical ability and commonsense, with a secret sense that all this is not enough. Like Darnton, in Welded, he is uncreative, the sterile envying the creative. Dion explains 'that germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in his blood' as 'part of the creative life Brown's stolen from me'. 'But to be neither creature nor creator', he taunts Brown, 'To be unloved by Life'. 'It isn't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her, or she requests you to destroy yourself.'

Dion Anthony, as O'Neill has explained, represents the combined characteristics of Dionysius and St. Anthony. He is the culmination of the conflict implied in Michael Cape's 'dreamy eyes', which contrast with the nose and mouth of a sensualist.' O'Neill has become so interested in this conflict that he finds realistic action and dialogue no longer capable of conveying it. Dion's character is revealed now through the masks, which he wears according to his mood and which he addresses in soliloquy.

The hero is no longer inarticulate. Dion understands his own problem and voices it. In the Prologue he asks himself, 'Why am I afraid of love, I who love love?.... why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity?...Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armour...?' This is the St. Anthony speaking. The Dionysian element adds, 'Or rather, Old Graybeard, why the devil was I ever born at all?' Later he explains to Brown that when a boyhood incident upset his faith in God, he 'designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God'. He adopted the mask of 'Pan', but Pan, forbidden the light and warmth of the sun, grew into Mephistopheles.

This Mephistopheles, as we have already suggested, represents above all Pride, that attribute which gave tragic stature to earlier heroes. It does still give external stature to Dion. Margaret loves him only for his mask, Brown envies him it because 'it's strong if it is bad! But Dion himself realises its inefficacy. When he wears his mask he cries 'Pride! Pride without which the Gods are worms!' But as the mask slips from his face - 'Pride is dying! Pride is dead! Blessed are the meek! Blessed are the poor in spirit!' And when he dies, he kisses Brown's feet, saying 'May Margaret love you! May you design the temple of Man's Soul!'

Dion is the first of O'Neill's painfully introspective

characters. Cybel tells him: '...You were brave enough to go looking into your own dark - and you got afraid.' And with him begins O'Neill's search to find the most effective means of dramatising introspection. The divided personality, represented by the man and his mask, is one of the more forthright methods.

Brown's character is revealed more slowly and more subtly. At first he appears above all the 'good sport', manfully swearing to remain Margaret's best friend when she rejects him for Dion, telling Dion to 'go in and win'. He is modest about his later achievements, helps Margaret out without bombast. Then in Act II, Scene I he begins to appear in a different light. From the conversation between Dion and Cybel we learn that Cybel is his mistress, Dion says, 'He feels I have no right to love. He'd like to steal it as he steals my ideas - complacently - righteously'. When Brown appears and questions Cybel's supposed sister about Dion we see more clearly the envy which is tearing him. 'What is it that makes Dion so attractive to women - especially certain types of women...?' To Cybel's 'He's alive!' he responds 'Well, don't you think I'm alive too?' In Act II, scene II his envy, covered up at first by a pretence of camaraderie and practical commonsense, is finally acknowledged when he puts on the dead Dion's mask.

After this the revelation of his character proceeds along more obvious lines. He fights Dion's fight with the masks, though his is more involved, for he struggles with

three personalities - the Mephistophelean element, which gradually gets more uncontrolled, the Brown element which is no longer natural to him, but a mask presented to the commonsense world, and a new self, 'sick, ghastly, tortured.' 'Why am I not strong enough to perish', this new self demands, 'or blind enough to be content?' Finally he arrives at the same conclusion as Dion. Made humble by suffering he accepts death, murmuring as he dies, 'I don't want justice. I want love.'

The name of this 'self' as Cybel tells the police captain is 'Man.'

Though the conflict in Brown and Dion is symbolic of an universal conflict, they are presented as concrete individual figures.

The women approach nearer abstract symbolism. Margaret, as we have already observed, ⁽¹⁾ is the maternal woman who plays mother even to her lover. O'Neill describes her as 'the descendant of the Marguerite of Faust - the eternal girl-woman...properly oblivious to everything but the means to the end of maintaining the race.' ⁽²⁾ She has a possessive pride in Dion, as in her 'three strong sons' but she does not know him. When he takes off the mask she shrinks back in horror. To her 'virtuous simplicity of

(1) See p. 101.

(2) N.Y.E.P. February 13th., 1926.

instinct' masculine vitality is the 'means to the end.' She cannot admire a St. Anthony.

Cybel, on the other hand, accepts Dion unmasked, just as she accepts Brown, all men, and all life. She is the development of the prostitute in Welded, but much more conscious of what her instinct apprehends. It is she who comforts Billy with 'there is only love'; it is she who pronounces the epitaph 'Always spring comes again bearing life!'

She has been able to keep her real virtue because she 'gave them a Tart. They understood her and knew their parts and acted naturally.' She knows that love is 'just one of a lot of things you do to keep life living.' The symbolism of this character is clearly revealed, not only by her name, but by the stage directions which describe her as chewing gum like a sacred cow, possessing the 'deep, objective calm of an idol', 'like an unmoved idol of Mother Earth.' Dion recognises her quality, 'Miss Earth' he calls her, 'old Sacred Cow.'

In Lazarus SLaughed symbolism triumphed. O'Neill never again got so far away from vital, living characters.

Lazarus has Cybel's 'detached serenity', but he is even less human than she, for not only is he freed from the fear of death, but his relationships with other human beings are on an entirely abstract basis. Miriam, his wife, is a less vivid Margaret. She, like all the characters except

Lazarus, wears a mask in which her eyes are turned down, dreaming 'on the child forever in memory at her breast'. She is simply Woman, just as Lazarus is simply a mouthpiece pronouncing 'There is no death'.

There is no pretence at realist revelation of character. Throughout the play, Lazarus is haloed in light. As he progresses he grows steadily younger and nearer in appearance to the Greek Dionysus 'in his middle period, more comprehensive in his symbolism, the soul of the recurring seasons...'. Miriam, wearing black throughout, grows older, till at the end she appears like his mother. It is the relation of Margaret to Dion again, only presented abstractly. Miriam cannot share Lazarus' laughter because her heart is dead still, with the old human Lazarus in Bethany. But she regards his laughter as 'my son, my little boy.'

Lazarus and Miriam are presented against a background of masked 'types'. In each scene, whether the racial basis be Jew or Greek or Roman, their characteristics are the same. The crowds always fall into seven age groups, ranging from Boyhood (or Girlhood) to Old Age. Each period is represented by seven characteristics, such as the Self-Tortured, Introspective type, the Proud, Self Reliant, the Simple, Ignorant and so on. In each crowd there are forty-nine different combinations of period and type. Each type has 'a distinct predominant colour for its costumes.' The Chorus, of seven, varies according to the temper of the scene.

In the Jewish scene they are old men of the Sorrowful, Resigned type: in the Greek, young men in the Proud, Self-Reliant group. In the first scene O'Neill gives specific instructions as to the distribution of dialogue: the Happy Youth will murmur 'It is a holy light. It came from Jesus.' But later in the Greek and Roman scenes, the dialogue becomes less eclectically distributed. It is scattered merely amongst First Greek, Fourth Greek and Seventh Greek, nor is it particularly indicative of character, since the remarks which open each scene primarily convey exposition. The crowds never achieve any sort of life. Once Lazarus has appeared, they join the Chorus in the generalised chanting which dominates all the action, and in the symbolic laughter. Even Lazarus' family are simply embodied characteristics. Martha is the housewife, Mary the 'nervous and highly strung.' Like the rest of the family, and the Crowds of this scene, they fall into further categories by grouping themselves as Nazarenes or Orthodox. These 'types' only take action when conflict over abstractions arises.

The only characters with any individuality are Caligula, Tiberius and Pompeia, who wear half masks only. They are like Dion in The Great God Brown, divided personalities, self-tortured. The mask on the upper half of the face denotes what their character has become through indulgence, the mouth and chin beneath, the 'inner self'. The conflict in every case is that between Mephistopheles and Faust. Caligula

wears a purple mask which accentuates a bulging forehead, a bulbous, sensual nose: his skin below the mask is pallidly anaemic, his mouth soft and childish. His conflict is between his cruelty, and his capacity for love. Fear of death, which is the attribute of all the characters, is in him developed to a degree of obsession where he insists that there 'must be death' - for others, that is; only by killing is he able to live. Tiberius seeks the secret of youth, so Caligula thinks, because the 'old lecher' desires only its sensual pleasures. But to Lazarus he confesses that he leathes lust and longs for purity. Pompeia demands that Lazarus shall be tortured because he will not love her as a woman, only as 'Woman'. But in the end she leaps into the fire to die with him.

The issue is, in fact, so clear-cut in each case that it begins to appear unreal by the time that the second conversion, say, has been shown.

O'Neill was not at his best with these mechanical abstractions. The characterisation and grouping recalls Toller's Masse Mensch, particularly in the scene when Pompeia begs for Lazarus' love - 'I want ^{you} to know my love, to give me back love for me - me, a woman', not Woman, women! Do I love Man, men? I hate men! I love you! '

How drastically O'Neill's conception of the heroic figure has altered is shown clearly in Lazarus Laughed. The increasing accent on humility and submission had already

begun in The Great God Brown, but here it is at its height. In the first period the great man had been he who exerted his individuality, who tried to 'make the Force express him.' Now Lazarus denounces 'that immortal ego-hood, the holy lantern behind which cringed our Fear of the Dark.' Man must will his own annihilation, give back the gift of life 'to become again the essence of the giver.' Now indeed O'Neill is depicting 'Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character.'⁽¹⁾

Yet oddly enough, after this excursion into generalities, O'Neill returned, in Strange Interlude, to a detailed study of individual characteristics. Rather than the single figure, presented against a contrasting background, he now developed the group of idiosyncratic personalities, each affecting the other.

He chose to reveal character now through dissection of unspoken thought, rather than through characteristic action and dialogue. The five 'guinea pigs' in Strange Interlude reveal themselves directly to the audience, through the aside. 'I want to get down in words what people think and feel' said O'Neill, 'without using the simple method of suggestive silences.' And in this play he went the most direct way about it.

(1) Quim, p.199.

The grouping of character is significant. Women had been gradually coming to play a more important part in the plays of O'Neill's second period, but always subordinate to that of the men. Now the woman is the central figure. The men are studied in their relation to her.

Nina is the Erdgeist triumphant. She compensates the instincts thwarted in her relations with her dead lover by giving herself to wounded soldiers, though she cheats herself for a time into believing that she does it for their sake. She cannot endure to be 'Gordon's silly virgin', nor, after she has found out the Evans' secret, can she give up her longing for a child. 'I want to be happy!' she thinks, '...it's my right...and my duty!' Like Margaret, in The Great God Brown she loves men who 'are alive', are strong and vital; Darrell's hands, she thinks, are 'strong.... not like Sam's...yielding fingers that let you fall back into yourself.' Gordon, the athlete, the hero, is the ideal who haunts all her later relations. She loves Darrell because he is detached, cold and master of himself. When they become lovers she is unscrupulous in her resolve to own him. 'My child wants its father', she declares implacably, and, again, 'I'm going to be happy...There's no use thinking of others'. Once Darrell had shown weakness in returning to her, she gloats over her victory, 'He loves me!.... he's mine...he'll never dare leave me again!' Marsden

senses her thoughts:- 'She loves his love for her...She's cruelly confident...I know her cruelty.' At the end of Act VI Nina voices, in the aside, her sense of power and fulfillment. 'My three men!...I feel their desires converge in me!...to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb...I am pregnant with the three!...husband...lover...father!' Her arrogant femininity never reaches a higher peak than this. Like Lulu in Erdgeist she does not need to fight for admiration and worship. The three men, so completely different, are entirely subject to her physical charms.

But unlike Wedekind's Lulu, Nina is not merely the sensual woman par excellence, but the fiercely possessive mother. Her femininity despises Sam because he is weak, but her maternal instinct refuses to let her destroy him. In Act II when she is about to reveal her child's parentage to him she thinks: 'I can't say that to him...poor Sammy...poor little boy'. '...one gives birth to little boys...one doesn't drive them mad and kill them'...

Her love for her son becomes jealous obsession. She has a lust to possess even fierier than Abbie's in Desire under the Elms. Maternity means more to her than sexual love...these men make me sick!...the wife and mistress in me has been killed by them! ...thank God I am only a mother now!...' In bearing a child, as we have seen, she felt herself at one with Nature and life. Marsden, in Act VI says of her 'she has strange devious intuitions that tap the

hidden springs of life...dark intermingling currents that become the one stream of desire.' She herself has her own conception of life, 'as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother'. Sex and birth and pain then all take on a religious quality.

To this dominant and mystic femininity the men are all subservient. Marsden feels that 'with regard to Nina, my life is queerly identified with Sam's and Darrell's. '

Evans is the Great God Brought down again. But his progress follows a reverse direction. He begins as a self-depreciating timid character, a worshipper of athletic heroes. Like Jim with Ella he asks for nothing but the right to take care of Nina. Then he develops slowly into the complacent, confident business man. His character is largely revealed through the thoughts of the others. 'But you're getting too strong, Sam' thinks Nina, and Marsden reflects 'What a changed Sam! I preferred him the old way...futile, but he had a sensitive quality...now he's hardened...'

Darrell's development follows the opposite course. At first impersonal, self-confident, he condemns with scientific dispassion, Nina's search for happiness - 'Have I ever been happy?...this talk of happiness seems to me extraneous'. Then his detachment deserts him. Nina humiliates and abases him, but he clings to her for what love she gives him.

How far from the illusion-driven characters we have now come may be inferred from Darrell's scornful speech: 'Romantic imagination! It has ruined more lives than all the diseases!'

Nina's relation to Darrell is shown to be simply that of a lover, to Sam partly of wife, partly mother. With Marsden a curious relationship exists. As in Desire under the Elms the suggestion of incest enters. Her father had been passionately jealous of Gordon, as Nina was later to be of Madeline. When he is dead she thinks '...my father... whose passion created me - who began me - he is ended. There is only his end living...It lives now to draw nearer me, to draw me nearer...'

Throughout the play she tends to identify Marsden, 'dear old Charlie', with her father. At the end of Scene II they both slip into the father-daughter relation. 'Thank-you, Father', she says, and he, 'She's had a hard day of it, poor child', looking down 'very paternally.' When she receives an inkling of his passion for her, she thinks 'what a sickening idea...it seems incestuous, somehow'. And in the end they take up a relation similar to that between Jim and Ella. In the quiet evening, passed beyond desire, they resolve to 'forget the whole distressing episode' of the past and 'to be home again at last.'

But though Charlie may represent only her father to Nina, he is much more than that to himself. In fact, he is

one of O'Neill's most complex characters. He is the self-divided type - Dion Anthony, Caligula - developed much further, so that he is not merely two men but several. He contrasts effectively with the other characters in Strange Interlude who are essentially simple, if troubled types.

Self-analysis could scarcely go further. Like Dion, he recognises his own plight but can do nothing about. His first experience of sex, in the 'house of cheap vice' has poisoned his attitude toward even his relation with Nina. The passion he senses between her and Darrell seems to him like a brutal, hairy hand, red and raw. He cannot even bring himself to propose to her at the very end, when desire is past. When she asks him, he thinks 'I could never have said it, never!'

His thoughts incessantly contradict each other. 'I do not lust for her,' he thinks and then, 'What!...platonic heroes at my age! - do I believe a word of that?...Damned coward and weakling.' He is an intellectual, afraid to put life even into his books. Yet he has a keener intuition and critical faculty than any of the others. He understands Sam's 'adolescent mind', Nina's cruelty, Darrell's gradual degradation. But all this avails him nothing because of his self division. 'Not to be afraid of one's own shadow!' he reflects, 'That must be the highest happiness of heaven!'

His relation with his mother, a passionate, dependent affection, anticipates the relation between hero and mother in

the next play. Dynamo restores the male element to supremacy. Reuben Light is the focal centre around whom the three women, his mother, his mistress and Mrs. Fife revolve.

Mrs. Light is Nina, the fiercely possessive mother, over again. But this time she is dismissed after the first act in order that she may become identified with Reuben's new religion. Never before had O'Neill identified sexual and spiritual relationships so completely.

Mrs. Light's jealousy of Ada is translated into terms of religion, sacrifice and the ideal of chastity which the Dynamo Mother demands from her acolytes. Reuben seeks his mother as Eben did. But he is less adult even than Eben, for, in order to reach her forgiveness he is prepared to sacrifice his mistress. The water rushing over the dam suggests to him not merely the sea, the source of all life, but also 'some-one singing me to sleep - my mother - when I was a kid...' The symbol of the maternal woman, outlined in The Great God Brown and Dynamo has at last come to be openly acknowledged as a deity, 'a great dark mother!...that's what the dynamo is!... that's what life is!'

Mrs. Fife represents the living, personified dynamo 'big and warm...she really makes you think of a dynamo somehow'. Her presence seems somewhat superfluous: she serves merely to emphasise the connection between the maternal woman and the new religion.

Revelation of character proceeds by the same means, as in Strange Interlude. There is less general need for the aside, however. Mr. and Mrs. Fife and Ada are not sufficiently complex to require extraordinary means of revelation, and Reuben, when he becomes obsessed, expresses himself freely in conversation with Mrs. Fife. Mr. and Mrs. Light are rather more complex. Light is the hard, bullying father, Cabot's type, but a coward at heart. Mrs. Light defends Reuben against his father where abstractions are concerned, but succumbs to unashamed jealousy over 'girls'.

There is no heroic material here. Nor is there even the introspective man who seeks to know himself and so to achieve God. Reuben has clearly Sam Evans' 'adolescent mind', turned in less normal direction. In this play the suggestion of incest is more distasteful than in any other, because it involves Reuben's brutality toward Ada. For once, O'Neill's characters seem little more than 'ignoble and debased.'

Mourning becomes Electra restores the heroic type. Again a group of characters is studied in relation to one another - the five Mannons, mother and father, son and daughter, and Brant, the lover.

The characterisation is faintly symbolic in that Ezra, Orin and Lavinia, at first, represent the fixed traits of Puritanism; Christine and Brant, Paganism. But apart from symbolic and expressionistic touches in their physical appearance the characters of the Mannons is revealed

realistically, through characteristic action and dialogue.

Their names are an approximation to their Greek originals, but as O'Neill said in his notes:—⁽¹⁾ 'use characteristic names with some similarity to Greek ones - for main characters at least - but don't strain after this and make it a stunt - no real importance.'⁽²⁾

Attention is focussed almost entirely on the Mannons. The Chorus, already discussed, is too slight to form a contrasting background, while Seth is purely the traditional retainer, the voice of doom incarnate. Neither makes more than short appearances, generally at the beginning of each Part.

The only balanced, normal characters, with whom the wild Mannons contrast are Peter and Hazel, who are in love with Lavinia and Orin. They represent the concentration of all the normal qualities in previous plays. O'Neill says: 'Peter and Hazel should be almost characterless - they are the untroubled.'

Apart from the contrast which these two furnish throughout, the tragic characters of the Mannons stand alone. In the first Part, Christine and Brant, the Pagans, are set against Lavinia and Ezra, the Puritans. The second shows Orin

(1) N.Y.H.T. November 8th., 1931. This reference applies to all following notes by O'Neill on Mourning.

(2) Orin is a common New England name. It occurs in Owen Davis' Icebound (1923). Another character in this play is named 'Emma'.

standing half way between Christine and Lavinia. In the last, attention is focussed entirely on Orin and Lavinia, in whom the traits of their parents repeat themselves.

Christine and Brant are the simplest characters. Brant is a 'darned romantic-looking cuss' who talks a romantic, novelette prose. 'Aye! And they live in as near the Garden of Paradise before sin was discovered as you'll find on this earth!' Like Eben he is actuated by desire to revenge his dead mother. He sees her in Christine, just as she sees Orin in him.

In this play, in fact, the relation between mother and son, father and daughter is more than ever before identified with that between lover and mistress. Accentuated dramatically by the family resemblance, it is the motif which directs all the action. This is of course O'Neill's method of re-interpreting the Greek Legend in psychological terms, but it is also a culmination of earlier characteristics.

Christine and Orin have 'a secret little world' of their own. When he talks to her of the island whose sand was like her skin and waves her voice, Christine with 'agonising tenderness' cries 'If you only hadn't let them take you from me!' She is another version of Nina, hating Lavinia because she is born of her 'disgust' for Ezra, loving Orin because 'he seemed my child, only mine.' She is equally unscrupulous in disposing of the man she hates and scheming for complete possession of the man she loves.

In Ezra, O'Neill shows the pathos of the Puritan, who

has given himself to repression, trying to recover life. 'Death' he says 'made me think of life. Before that life had only made me think of death!' He has brooded over the barrier between Christing and himself without being able to reach it, for 'something keeps me sitting numb in my own heart.'⁽¹⁾

In Orin and Lavinia the characteristics of both mother and father are reproduced. Orin has inherited Christine's restlessness, her craving for 'the blessed Isles'. But he lacks strength - either her kind, or Ezra's upright inexorability. His chin is 'a refined, weakened version of the dead man's'. His only way of escaping the Mannon Puritanism is through his mother, whom he loves with a degree of passion not found in any of the earlier plays. That the filial relation really is fused with the sexual is proved in the last part when, seeing Christine reappearing in Lavinia, he proposes to his sister an incestuous relationship. Like Ezra, he is unable to escape his inheritance.

Of all the characters, Lavinia is the only one with sufficient strength to throw off the weight of Puritan repression. She too feels strange instincts. Christine accuses her of 'trying to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin!' To which Lavinia replies, 'It's you who have stolen all love from me since the time I was born!

(1) To the town folk he is 'cold blooded and uppish! The Chantyman, in II(IV) reflects. '...I know he didn't have no heart in him! Open him up an' you'd find a dried turnip!

Brand she had unconsciously loved for his Mannon appearance which recalled her father. Later, however, when the paganism of 'the islands' sets her free, she does escape temporarily from the over-close relation which forces the Mannons to find love in each other. She seeks 'simple normal things', the 'friendship and love' of Hazel and Peter, the untroubled. But always at the bottom of her new grace, gentleness, vitality, is the cold streak inherited from Ezra, that which enabled her to insist 'It is your justice, Father!' when Christine committed suicide, and which restrains Orin from yielding to his desire for confession. Again O'Neill shows the pathos of the Puritan attempting Paganism. Lavinia expands under Peter's admiration for her new prettiness. 'I was dead then', she says of her past. Orin seems to her 'a regular bigoted Mannon', for he has already relapsed into his Father's son.

She is less farsighted than Orin in her refusal to see that 'Perpetual night - darkness of death in life' is the 'fitting habitat for guilt' and that only by atoning for the murder can they find peace. 'You'll find Lavinia Mannon harder to break than me', Orin cries to the family portraits. But she is stronger than he when she does accept it. Orin takes the easier way of suicide. But Lavinia sees that this is 'escaping punishment'. She resolves that the curse will end with her. 'I'm the last Mannon,' she cries to Seth, 'I've got to punish myself.' She has the courage which Orin lacked,

to step into the Mannon house and let the dead hound her to her own death. This was indeed 'a tragic ending worthy of character.'

The characters in Mourning Becomes Electra have that same reliance on themselves which the first idealists had. Lavinia's despairing stoicism represents the furthest limit to which man's self-reliance and self punishment can go. Artificial light, as Orin says, is more appropriate to them than God's light. The lamp which burns in the haunted study is a symbol of the Mannons' own lives: -'man's feeble striving to understand himself, to exist for himself in the darkness.'

The next play, Ah, Wilderness! has significant characterisation. The intense, illusion-driven characters of the first period, the 'troubled', the 'diff'rent', are here reduced to kindly, tolerant shadows. O'Neill could never have shown a New England family in such a light at the time when he was writing Diff'rent or Desire under the Elms. The nearest he got to it was with the Jayson family, but they were a poor-spirited, malicious crowd, actuated by strait-laced notions of conventional morality, combining with personal greed.

Ah, Wilderness! gives us a very different family picture. Richard is the Robert Mayo of the piece, the 'eternal romantic idealist who is in all of us.'⁽¹⁾ But this

(1) N.Y.H.T. December 12th. 1921. O'Neill describes Diff'rent as 'a tale of the eternal romantic idealist who is in all of us - the eternally defeated one.'

time he is not 'the eternally defeated one'. His love affair, which is his illusion, prospers, after a momentary setback which does no more than lead him to an evening's dissipation, a few kisses from a prostitute, and a headache.

For the first time the hero who is 'diff'rent' is indulged and, to a certain extent, understood by his family. The affection between father and son, rather than between son and mother is, as R.D. Skinner pointed out, ⁽¹⁾ a significant change of grouping.

In fact the kindly, understanding father is a new figure on O'Neill's stage, after the stern Cabots and flinty Lights. The mother, too, has become gentle and less fiercely possessive. A faint gleam of the old unyielding spirit flickers in the Puritan figure of McComber. But his function is reduced to disapproval of others' exuberance. As for the fanatic Emma, she has become the Aunt Lily, a softened version of the spinster with high-fangled notions.

From this mellow characterisation, O'Neill returned to more earnest study of divided personality. His John Loving is Dion Anthony again, fighting between the pride and humility in his nature. His pride, in the shape of his own twin, wearing a death mask set in mockery, stands beside him, prompting his lower thoughts and actions. Occasionally other

(1) Act III.

characters sense his presence. Lucy, confessing to Elsa in Act II, says, 'you'll think I'm crazy,...but it was as if he was no longer there. It was another man, a stranger whose eyes were hateful and frightening!' The priest is most aware of it - 'one may not give one's soul to the devil of hate - and remain for ever scatheless'⁽¹⁾, he says. And while Elsa lies dying he begs: 'I implore you to cast that evil from your soul'.

The pride in John, which is now shown clearly as Mephistopheles, is matched by Elsa's pride. If John were to be unfaithful to her, she tells Lucy, she would die, for the 'ideal' of their marriage would be destroyed. This is the voice of Emma again. And Lucy's comment might be O'Neill's.- 'Ah, yes, the ideal! I heard a little talk about that once, too.'

But this time the lesson is forgiveness. Lucy, who accepts her husband's infidelities, whose mother, like Mrs. Crosby, told her she was a fool to expect too much - 'men were like that' - is now a less contemptible figure than she appeared in the early plays of illusion. For O'Neill has finished with the heroism of self-reliance. John can only become a 'whole man', his true self, by accepting all God gives; by forgiving the death of his parents and by crying

(1) Loving wills death as the only sensible happy end to his story. c.f. Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust: 'This universe, this gross creation that fights against annihilation.'

at the foot of the cross: 'I surrender all to Thee....

I bless! I love!'

The religious element is now his salvation, as it was Reuben's destruction. For religion is no longer represented by the maternal symbol but by the Priest. The grouping is traditional - hero, demon, priest. It is significant that John does not brood over the death of a mother only, but of both parents. And the desire for annihilation, for 'the warm dark womb of nothingness', which earlier heroes had sought through their mothers, is now attributed to the devil's prompting. Even the 'romantic ideal' is completely rejected. 'On to Hercules!', John's cry of stoic heroism is derided by Loving as 'absolutely meaningless.' John must surrender himself to God to become whole, there is no other way.

The change in O'Neill's conception of the heroic character is startling. He begins by exalting 'the eternal romantic idealist who is in all of us - the eternally defeated one.' Then these intense single-minded characters give way to the introspective, self-tortured kind. In this period he experiments incessantly with new ways of revealing character, finding characteristic action and dialogue insufficient. Finally the self-reliant pride, which he had formerly shown as destructive but heroic, becomes a Mephistophelean quality. Lucifer, the son of morning, is no longer the hero of the story. The integrated characters of the

last period, Lazarus and John Loving, repudiate their individuality and seek to be united with 'Life! Eternity! Stars and dust! God's Eternal Laughter! '

In fact, they have become an 'infinitesimal' part of the expression of the Force, having learnt the folly of seeking to make it express them. Sic transit gloria mundi.

* * *

SECTION II (c) iii.

Departures from Direct Presentation.

"The man who pursues the mere attainable should be sentenced to get it - and keep it."

(O'Neill in the New York Herald Tribune, December 1921)

The mere attainable. There we have the explanation of O'Neill's greatness and his weakness, the brilliance of his achievements and the badness of his failures. He is like the 'high man' in Browning's poem, aiming at millions and missing units by the way. But his millions are worth having, and even his misses are generally more valuable than the hits of the 'low man'.

On the whole, his experiments fall into two major categories. In the first come those devices which interrupt direct presentations; soliloquy, chorus, and so on: in the second those which stand in the background and reinforce the action, such as symbolism and imagery. The first type constitutes an interruption, the second is a form of indirect presentation.

O'Neill experiments with equal ardour in both directions. He may confine himself to restrained, symbolic overtones,

as in Mourning Becomes Electra, or he may hold up the action with unprecedented audacity by the soliloquy of Strange Interlude. Both methods have a meed of success, but on the whole he is best advised when he limits himself to reinforcing rather than interrupting continuous dramatic presentation; in fact, when he is content to imply rather than speak outright. For, like Christopher Robin, once he has started he 'can't possibly stop.' A new means to dramatic articulation affects him like a new toy: he must try it in all possible positions. And the more fantastically he tries it out, the less effectively does the toy fulfil its function.

In a letter of 11.4.1920 to The New York Times, he complained, half humorously, of the 'rigid hills of modern dramatic technique' which confronted him in writing Beyond the Horizon. But he is at his best as a hill climber. When the country becomes too flat, he tends to meander.

Let us first examine the flat lands of the soliloquy and chorus. And since the soliloquy represents his most discursive meandering, we shall follow its course in detail.

To consider the function of soliloquy most fruitfully it is advisable to adopt some such definition as this. Soliloquy is an instance of talking to oneself or of uttering one's thoughts aloud, regardless of the presence or absence of others. It is therefore a break in continuous dramatic presentation. It follows that the proportion of soliloquy to dialogue must be small, or it is no longer a break, also that

it must have some standard to break from. That is to say, the production must not be so highly stylised that one type of technique becomes either meaningless or indistinguishable from the rest of the material.

Knowing that in his later plays the soliloquy was to flout definition, it is startling to see how straight a path it follows at first. When O'Neill was concerned with escaping from the artificial melodrama of his predecessors. The most artificial thing in that melodrama had been the soliloquy which had conveyed, in one breath, confession, revelation, information and explanation. (1) Information, however, was generally the chief ingredient, though it would receive emotional flavouring according to the dramatist's taste. A typical specimen is that in Bartley Campbell's My Partner, (2) a play which survived as a stock favourite well into the 1920's. Josiah Scraggs, left alone at the beginning of Act I, proceeds to state his villainous intentions:- '...How I hate him and his pretty brats! The love I bare their mother has lain in my

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- (1) Even in the days when the soliloquy was being accepted in serious drama without demur, that is, in Elizabethan England, there had still been two distinct types. Both are to be found in Shakespeare - the higher type, which is devoted to revelation of unspoken thought, such as the soliloquies of Hamlet, and the lower type which conveys information crudely, such as the speech beginning 'He cannot live, I hope; and must not die' in Richard III, Act I.
- (2) First produced Union Square Theatre, New York, in 1879. Printed in B.H.Clark's Favourite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century, Princeton University Press, 1943.

heart all these years until it has turned to poison, for she was the cause of all - she rejected me for him years and years ago - and he was rich then and I was poor. But since he has grown poorer and poorer and I richer and richer, and when I've broken his heart, and can lie down on his pauper grave and beat upon it with my bag of shining gold, then I'll feel my triumph is complete - complete.'

As realism came in, with the Fitch and Moody school, soliloquy might have been expected to go out. But it was bred in the bone. Fitch, who sought pathetically after realism, could not afford to discard the artificial soliloquy, which was so useful for conveying information. Instead, he attempted to give it a more realistic cast by breaking it up with characteristic action, helping it out with letter reading and telephone conversations. ⁽¹⁾ So Becky, in The Truth (1907), after indulging in an unashamedly melodramatic outburst when she is left alone in Act II:- 'He's begun to distrust me already. Dear God in Heaven, if I ever get out of this I'll never tell another lie so long as I live' - turns for support to the telephone, which gives her good opportunity for further revelation, and to the old device of reading out her letter as she writes - 'If this note reaches you in time' and so on.

(1) The letter-reading convention was popular with dramatists such as Dumas fils. See, for example, Un Père Prodigue (1859) Acts I, sc.III., II. sc.II.

There was, in fact, no truly serious American drama before O'Neill to afford representative examples of the soliloquy in naturalistic setting. We have to turn abroad for fair standards of comparison.

(1)
The great master of realism, Ibsen, refrained from using soliloquy at all in his social plays. Peer Gynt had already shown that he could use it, but in plays such as An Enemy of the People and Pillars of Society he was concerned with working out themes of cause and effect in action. The individual was studied in relation to society. And he demonstrated his aesthetic integrity by limiting expression to what could be conveyed through realistic dialogue and action only. (2)

Another dramatist of the period, Björnson, did, however, retain the device in his naturalistic plays. That it was a dangerous practice is evidenced by a glance at the great diversity in quality of these soliloquies.

Sometimes he does achieve the true effect of 'unspoken thought'. This effect can only be gained on a level of extended consciousness of the sort which ensures, even to-day, the acceptance of the best Elizabethan soliloquies as entirely convincing.

In Act III, scene III of Paul Lange and Tora Parsberg (1898), a play singularly free from soliloquy, Paul's

(1) Not, of course, a master of realism only.

(2) The plays of Galsworthy, another scrupulous realist, are also free from soliloquy.

impassioned utterances with which the scene opens are convincing because they follow on from the wave of emotion in the previous scene, and still maintain the same heightened consciousness. 'How she spoke the words "afterwards", "afterwards", "Au revoir, Paul Lange!" I have awakened to a new morning, I stand in the full glow of life...But what must she really think? Not to-day, but the next day?' The soliloquy rolls on in heroic, and yet credible, vein.

The same conviction, though on a less powerful note, is achieved ⁽¹⁾ by Tjaelde's soliloquy in Act III of The Bankrupt (1875). To Tjaelde, torn between his desire to go and to stay, all the external things he sees suggest his dilemma:- 'What a beautiful day! - but not for me. My horse! No, I ~~danen~~'t look at it...' And so on.

But when Björnson, like Fitch, attempts to lend the soliloquy realism by interspersing it with supporting action, conviction diminishes. When Halvdan, in Act III of The Editor (1874) makes remarks such as 'But this is not to-day's paper, it is dated for tomorrow! How can Eyje have got hold of it?' attention is drawn to the fact that it is not realistic to talk aloud while alone at all. Such soliloquy becomes a hybrid, one foot on sea, and one on shore. It is not even frankly melodramatic as many of Björnson's soliloquies, in fact, are. For example in Act III of The Editor, the Editor

(1) And also ~~also~~ by Riis's introspective soliloquy which constitutes the opening scene of Act II of "The New System" (1879).

announces that he is determined to prove a villain, much in the manner of Richard III:- "Well, even if it ruins me, I shall go on. They shall find out what I can do...I shall pursue my end through all chances...and I shall crush them, crush them...".

This last would strike us as comparatively convincing in the typical American drama of 1974. But in a naturalistic drama of merit it sounded a false note. In fact it seems clear that only unspoken thought, which is clearly that, conceived on a level of heightened consciousness, can be acceptable in a naturalistic setting. Even then the atmosphere must be well prepared, the characterisation convincing, or it will fail.

O'Neill was instinctively aware of this. In his realistic period he takes care, if he ever uses soliloquy, to motivate it convincingly. In the one-act sea plays it does not figure at all. Action, of a sort, is all in all. In fact, of all the plays in the volume The Moon of the Caribbees soliloquising is permitted only to old Bentley, in The Rope. And this is credible since it is never more than the mutterings of crazy old age. Indifferent to whether he is alone or being addressed by his daughter, he launches curses and fiery biblical texts into the air, revealing thereby his character but concerned not at all with forwarding information. The same type of soliloquy is permitted to Bartlett in Gold. On the first occasion, in Act I, he is on the brink of madness, on the

second, in Act II, well over the brink.

The raving of madness is, from a psychological view-⁽¹⁾ point, the nearest to realism that any soliloquy can get. O'Neill prefers to out and out raving, however, the rather more orderly and accordingly less realistic, utterances of an overwrought, but not completely unbalanced mind. He gains credibility for such soliloquy by expending it on inanimate objects which the mind has inverted with a certain "totem-like"⁽²⁾ quality. Ella, in All God's Chillun, reveals her thought to the Congo mask as though to an inimical demon; Eben, in Desire Under the Elms,⁽³⁾ apostrophises the sky almost in the manner of prayer; Chris, in Anna Christie,⁽⁴⁾ vituperates the "Ole devil, sea", without caring whether he is alone or in company.

O'Neill shows discrimination in permitting to certain peculiar or racial types what he refuses to the ordinary white character. The negro, for instance, is known to be an unselfconscious talker. And so, in the realistic The Dreamy Kid, there is, for the one-act form, a high proportion of soliloquy. Admittedly it is not all equally realistic. Even though

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- (1) The Elizabethans exploited this state to the full. Hieronimo's soliloquy in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, or those of Lear and Ophelia, are examples that leap to mind.
- (2) Act II, sc.I. Ella is not yet unbalanced, as she becomes later. That she really does regard the mask as a supernatural force is suggested in the stage directions. When speaking to it she "forces a mocking tone".
- (3) Part I. Sc.IV.
- (4) Acts II and III.

O'Neill insists, in stage directions, that Dreamy is speaking "gloomily to himself", there is a strong flavour of the good old informative aside in lines such as:- "Aint't no good. Dey dassent do nothin'" - "but I hatter git her outa dis so somehow". Nevertheless even such mutterings have more realism than those of a white man could have had.

In The Emperor Jones O'Neill exploited more fully the characteristics of the negro. Soliloquy from the "Emperor" constitutes the entire second scene of the play. Never once does it strike a jarring or artificial note. O'Neill's virtuosity shines clear. He breaks it up more credibly than in previously quoted examples, with characteristic action, gives it variety by change of mood and uses as a ground throughout that jocular haranguing of self which is typical of the negro. Later, when the visions are introduced, soliloquy proper gives place to a form of monologue.⁽¹⁾

But in between visitations the soliloquy continues, maintained on a note of rising hysteria that corresponds perfectly with the retrogression of the mind. Stage directions stress the realism. In Scene II Jones 'grumbles in a loud tone to cover up a growing uneasiness'; in Scene IV he is still 'trying to talk himself into confidence'.

The unselfconsciousness of the negro is traditionally matched by that of the drunk. That O'Neill did not exploit

(1) See p. 282.

more fully the characteristics of the latter state is attributable in his early days to his growing distaste for the farcical elements in melodrama. The drunken man has ancient connections with farce. When he did, later, permit himself to introduce a drunken soliloquy in Mourning Becomes Electra ("The Hunted" Act IV), he achieved a fine effect of tragi-comedy, rare with him. Even in the chantyman's maudlin mutterings sound intimations of the wider theme - 'Where am I? What the hell difference is it? There's plenty o' fresh air and the moon for a glim.' This is the voice of freedom, the voice which, through Brant, calls to the Mannons, but they cannot come.

So far we have seen that O'Neill allowed to his madmen, his obsessed and other extraordinary types, a smattering of soliloquy, never too coherent to become non-realistic. To ordinary sane characters he permitted no more than odd lines, usually ejaculatory, such as Curtis Jayson's 'Oh Martha, Martha! Martha, darling!' in Act III of The First Man, or the lines with which Part II scene IV of Desire Under the Elms close. Cabot ruminates outside the house. 'Soft headed like his Maw. Dead spit'n image. No hope in him' (he spits contemptuously). 'A born fool (then matter-of-factly) Waal - I'm gittin' peckish'. This is close in kind to Halvdan's soliloquy in Act III of The Editor. Suspension of disbelief wavers.

But by far the greater part of O'Neill's realistic soliloquies come into a border-line category, somewhere between soliloquy and monologue. This type, when skilfully maintained as in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape is the most convincing method of revealing thought realistically.

In The Emperor Jones, for instance, the fugitive 'Emperor' is the only character to speak for the length of six scenes. About half his talk is frankly soliloquy, maintained by realistic means, as already indicated. But when he begins to address the visions which appear before his terrified eyes, a suggestion of monologue is introduced. And this helps to relieve the strain of the long talking aloud to himself. Whether he is really engaged in monologue or soliloquy depends upon whether the visions are considered as external ghosts or as mental projections. They represent his personal and racial memories, stirred up by his terror. In Scene IV he tells himself, 'Day was all in yo' head' and if it is so, all the remarks made to the visions are as much soliloquy as those made before they appear. But there is a slight touch of the 'Ghost' about them. In Scene III the vision of the murdered negro, Jeff, is discovered to the audience before Jones actually enters the scene, a point favouring the 'ghost' rather than the 'projection' theory. A great deal depends on the substantiality accorded the visions by scenic artists and

producer. (1)

The distinction is only important in that it reveals the skill with which O'Neill justifies his negro's talking aloud. Whether technically soliloquy or monologue it is essentially realistic, since it clearly indicates the disintegration of the mind under pressure of fear.

The last scene of The Hairy Ape is also, in effect, one long soliloquy, and again it is given a semblance of monologue. This time the silent listener is no insubstantial spirit, but an extremely substantial gorilla, on which Yank has come to look as his spiritual brother. He recognises the animal's attitudes and gestures which have often been his also: recognition spurs him on to increasingly bitter diatribe. In fact, the gorilla provides more response, by way of growling and gesture, than the unseen husband did in Before Breakfast, which was undoubtedly monologue. When the beast swells out his chest and beats on it with his fists, Yank replies, 'Sure, I get yuh, yuh challenge de whole woild, huh? Yuh got what I was sayin' even if yuh muffed de woids. (Then bitterness creeping in). And why wouldn't yuh get me? Ain't we both members of de same club - de Hairy Apes?'

(1) The same question arises in Georg Kaiser's Von Morgen Bis Mitternacht. In scene III the clerk addresses the skeleton shape formed by a tree which his overwrought mind credits with some kind of being. In the Theatre Guild Production of this play on 21st. 5. 1922 the shape was suggested by Linnebach projector (see W.P.Eaton: The Theatre Guild. N.Y. 1922. p.64.)

When he begins to turn away from realism O'Neill brings in this suggestion of monologue in more conventional manner. Cabot, in Desire Under the Elms, addresses first Abbie, whom he supposes to be lying beside him, then the apparently sleeping baby. In reality he is alone: Abbie is downstairs in the kitchen: the baby is dead. This is an old trick. In the same play, and in the later Mourning Becomes Electra he employs an equally familiar device, apostrophe of the dead. Eben, in Part II, Scene II, cries out to his dead mother; Christine and Lavinia, on various occasions in the latter play, address themselves to the spirit of Eyra. (1) More artificial still is the practice of forcing soliloquy into a technical setting of monologue through remarks shouted after characters leaving the scene. Examples of this type occur, significantly, in plays which hover between realism and formalism, All God's Chillun Got Wings, Desire under the Elms and Mourning Becomes Electra. (2) In the first, Tim's shout after Hattie merely emphasises what has gone before in dialogue. But in the latter two the remarks are, in reality, revelation of thought. When Christine gloats - 'You'll never dare to leave me now, Adam - for your ships or your sea or your naked Island girls - when I grow old and ugly' - she does not for a moment intend him to hear, although she

(1) 'Haunted', Act III. 'Homecoming', Act IV.

(2) All God's Chillun. Act II. Sc. II. Desire. Part III. Sc. II. Mourning. 'Homecoming' acts II, III.

{speaks to his retreating figure'.

Very good reason is shown for O'Neill's usually wide-awake attitude to the realistic soliloquy when we consider his occasional noddings, noddings serious for professedly realistic plays. Anna Christie, a play distinguished for a first act of realistic virtuosity, includes this soliloquy, from Nat Burke:- 'Yerra, Nat Burke, 'tis a great jackass you've become, and what's got into you at all, at all?... (He sees Anna's bag). What's this? It's hers. She's not gone! But where is she? Ashore? What would she be doing ashore in this rotten night?...' Shades of The Count of Monte Cristo! (1)

Even more incongruous, in comparison with realistically maintained soliloquies in the same play, is Ella's peroration in Act II, scene II of All God's Chillun Got Wings. Looking out of the window of the negro home she reflects aloud:- 'All black! Every one of them! No, there's one. Why, it's Shorty! (She throws the window open and calls) Shorty!... Say! Say! I wonder? - No, he didn't hear you. Yes, he did, too! He must have. I yelled so loud you could hear me in Jersey...' - And so on.

This is a sad falling off from the brilliant treatment of soliloquy in The Emperor Jones. Yet, artificial though it is, its length and nature indicate that O'Neill was already feeling

(1) Compare this with Denver's soliloquy after the murder in H.A. Jones' The Silver King (1882). 'My God! I've murdered him. No! No!' etc.

for some freer form which would enable him to reveal unspoken thought. In Ella's diatribe against the Congo mask he had emphasised the essential realism through visual implication. But he had not yet arrived at the conviction that an acknowledged convention between dramatist and audience, however stylised, may create an impression of realism much greater than that aroused by surface credibility. (1)

In a few of the soliloquies from The Hairy Ape and Desire under the Elms he had begun tacitly to accept this convention, even while he was still trying to make his realistic soliloquies appear not/at all. In Scene VII of The Hairy Ape Yank sits in the street, after he has been thrown out of the I.W.W. office, in as near to the attitude of Rodin's Thinker as he can get in his position. He then proceeds to reflect aloud in the manner of Hamlet - 'Dis ting's in your inside, but it ain't your belly...It's way down - at de bottom. Yuh can't grab it and yuh can't stop it. It moves, and everything moves. It stops and de whole world stops.'

(1) Allardyce Nicoll in A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama 1850-1900 (C.U.P.1946), p.201. quotes Shaw as saying in that the characters in Too True to be Good speak 'what/real in life they could never bring themselves to say, even if they understood themselves clearly enough - thus combining the extreme of unnaturalness with the deepest attainable naturalness.'

It is impossible to accept this as the sort of comment any man would, in real life, make aloud, least of all an illiterate, inarticulate type like Yank. But the speech expresses a theme which has been continually emphasised throughout the play by the settings, the non-realistic Chorus and the realistic dialogue. Feeling has been worked to such a pitch that Yank's impassioned outburst is not only acceptable but convincing. O'Neill is now working in the familiar Shakespearian tradition.

In Desire under the Elms the characters are equally inarticulate by nature, and the soliloquies equally of poetic order, though this time romantic rather than philosophic. Again the whole mood of the play, the height at which the action is conducted, excuses them. Eben, at a moment of emotional crisis, muses aloud:- 'Waal - tha's a star an' somewhar's they's him, an' here's me, an' thar's Min up the road - in the same night. What if I does kiss her? She's like t'night, she's soft 'n wa'm, her eyes kin wink like a star...' Later Cabot, sensing the thunderous atmosphere that hangs over the christening, voices his uneasiness - 'Even the music can't drive it out - somethin' - ye kin feel it droppin' off the elums, climbin' up the roof, sneakin' down the chimney, pokin' in the corners...They's no peace in houses, they's no rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye...' (Part III, Scene I).

Having developed a taste for the traditional soliloquy,

he indulged it even further in The Fountain.⁽¹⁾ But there, by placing it in a setting of supposedly appropriate historical romance, it lost the conviction with which the profound emotion of the earlier plays had invested it. Now it was indeed seen to be artificial convention. Juan soliloquises in coherent and deliberate metaphor - 'Time tarnishes even the pure, difficult things with common weakness.' He strikes a note which reminds us forcibly of a criticism of O'Neill entitled - 'Eugene O'Neill and the Highbrow Melodrama.'⁽²⁾ The Fountain tries very hard to be highbrow and is as persistently melodramatic.

The first phase of the soliloquy ends with The Hairy Ape (1921). The second begins with Welded (1923). Realistic soliloquy now proves insufficient, for O'Neill is becoming increasingly obsessed with the desire to 'get down in words what people think and feel without using the simple method of suggestive silences.'

In Welded he glances at a method which had been used before by other dramatists but not with quite the same deliberation. In Act III of The Editor Björnson had introduced the technique of cross conversation, that is, the type of conversation in which each character pursues his own train

(1) The high proportion of soliloquy in The Fountain is not representative, since the play is outside O'Neill's normal range.

(2) H.G. Kemelman. In The Bookman. LXXV. Sept. 1932.

(1)

of thought, without regard to the remarks of the others.

Pirandello gives specific instructions for it in Each in His Own Way (1924). In Act II ⁽²⁾ he says, 'They all fall silent, each absorbed in his own thoughts. The following lines will be pronounced at intervals between pauses, as though each were talking to himself.'

For O'Neill this technique was to prove of vital importance. In Act I of Welded he instructs that Michael and Eleanor 'Staré straight ahead and remain motionless. They speak ostensibly to the other but showing by their tone it is thinking aloud to oneself.' This is an anticipation of Strange Interlude, though the contrast between 'unspoken thought' and dialogue is not yet made sufficiently forceful. This is partly because both characters are thinking along the same lines and both are extremely eloquent types who have not hesitated to express very similar thoughts in the preceding dialogue. But even though the thought does not differ so much in quality from the ordinary dialogue, there is still a clear transition from the one to the other when the thinking is over.

(1) Chekhov is a master of this type of conversation, though he introduces it less as a deliberate device than O'Neill. See, in particular, the first Act of The Cherry Orchard.

After O'Neill, Sean O'Casey uses it slightly, and for purposes of comic irony, in Act II of The Plough and the Stars (1926). Clifford Odets adapts it to his theme, the disintegration of modern society, in Awake & Sing (1933). In the first act of this play Moe and Myron talk past each other at emotional extremes - one in despair, the other in rapture.

(2) p.67 in A. Livingstone's translation of Each in His Own Way and Two Other Plays (London, 1923). The conversation goes in a manner very similar to that in Welded, though not at such length.

The 'thinking aloud' goes like this.

Cape:- More and more frequently there's always some knock on the door, some reminder of the life outside which calls you away from me.

Eleanor:- It is so beautiful - and then - suddenly I'm being crushed. I feel a cruel presence in you.

Cape:- I've grown inward into our life, but you keep trying to escape.....

Eleanor:- Why is it I can never know you? I love you - and you're strange.

Then suddenly, after a long look at each other, they return to direct address.

Cape:- Strange that Darnton should pop in on us suddenly like that.

Eleanor:- I don't see anything strange about it.

It is clear, even without the stage directions, that one type of utterance is thought, the other speech.

From this small beginning O'Neill went on to greater things. When he next employed cross conversation in The Great God Brown, he stressed the fact that it was indeed thought by means of the mask. In the Prologue the mask worn by Margaret not only symbolises '~~her~~ Girlhood' but serves as a device to reveal hidden thought. When Margaret removes her mask she is able to indulge her secret musing, unheard by Brown, who is proposing to her. When he cries 'Margaret!' she murmurs 'Dion is so wonderful!' When he begs:- 'Can't you love me?

Won't you marry me; after college' - she pursues her thoughts, 'The one time he kissed me - I can't forget it! He was only joking - but I felt - and he saw and just laughed.'

The wearing of the mask enables soliloquy to be pursued freely in the presence of others. Margaret is in the physical presence of Brown, but she is spiritually alone. Her 'thinking aloud' in his presence is much more convincing than the talking of Ella while alone, in All God's Chillun, because the latter we are asked to accept as realistic taking aloud, the former we know to be unspoken thought, which a formal convention allows us to hear. The suspension of disbelief is always easier the clearer it is made that we are intruding on 'unspoken thought'.

O'Neill approached this question of 'unspoken thought' with the greatest deliberation. It was a problem which occupied him throughout his career. He said of the mask - 'I hold more and more surely to the conviction that the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how - with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means - he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind (1) which the problems of psychology continue to disclose to us.

This profound hidden conflict was what he had attempted to portray in Ella's soliloquy in All God's Chillun. But the

(1) Eugene O'Neill:- 'Memoranda on Masks' (American Spectator Nov. 1932).

effect was infinitely more convincing in The Great God Brown when any attempt at realistic justification had been abandoned. In place of Ella's unlikely argument aloud with herself, like Denver in H.A. Jones' The Silver King, we now have ⁽¹⁾ Brown conducting argument with the mask, which we know to symbolise a part of his own nature. It is as though we viewed a cross-section of the mind. 'I stole your place out of love for her', he cries to his other self, 'and she'll understand and forgive and love me, and you'll be forgotten! Ha! (Again he bends down to the mask as if listening - torturedly) What's that? She'll never see? She'll never understand? You lie, devil!'

But though the mask clarified, it did at the same time, simply because it was a mechanical instrument, set limitations on the use of soliloquy. And so, when he returned ⁽²⁾ to his preoccupation with unspoken thought in Strange Interlude, O'Neill abandoned it for a more flexible device.

He now developed the implications of the scene previously quoted from Welded. The characters in Strange Interlude speak their thoughts aloud, but by their attitude show that

(1) Act III. Sc. II. This soliloquy constitutes the entire scene.

(2) In Marco Millions and Lazarus Laughed, written before Strange Interlude there was no true development of the soliloquy since both plays were fantasies in which conventions lost meaning. Juan's address to the visions in Scene 10 is monologue, not soliloquy, since the visions are allegorical.

they do not hear each other's thinking. Unlike the conversation in Welded, however, thought and dialogue are now placed in juxtaposition. To have emphasised the distinction by the mask would have been clumsy in the extreme. Instead, it is done by freezing the other characters at the moment when any of them utters his thoughts. ⁽¹⁾ The thought over, they return to the dialogue at the point where it was interrupted.

This method was not new. It had been used by Elmer Rice in The Adding Machine (1923) for the length of one scene. With his customary ingenuity Rice had sustained the conversation between Daisy Devore and Zero on a highly dramatic level, largely by exploiting the somewhat obvious irony of contrast between thought and word. Rice himself had been anticipated by Alice Gerstenberg, in whose one-act play, Overtones (1913), the thought with which the dialogue was interspersed proceeded from personified 'other selves' standing behind the speaking characters. Overtones was actually coupled with Strange Interlude by O'Neill's attorney, Weinberger, ⁽²⁾ in the case of Lewys versus O'Neill in 1931. Refuting the charge of plagiarism brought by Miss Lewys in

(1) According to definition 'spoken thought' following on dialogue in the presence of others should be regarded as an 'aside', and so we will call it to distinguish it from the soliloquies proper such as that at the beginning of Act II. In reality, however, all the 'asides' are essentially soliloquy.

(2) See above. p. 151.

connection with Strange Interlude, Weinberger asked whether she were aware that the idea of using asides had been employed in Overtones, produced by the Washington Square Players in 1913. To which Miss Lewys replied, it appeared O'Neill was even less original than she had imagined.

In the mind that sets store by novelty O'Neill must have suffered from this comparison. But he himself would be the last to entertain a new technique simply because it was new. The previous experimenters with the 'aside' device, Rice and Alice Gerstenberg, had merely played with it, one in a play distinguished chiefly for slickness and variety of 'novelties', the other in a slight little piece of uninspired content. Neither had developed the potentialities of the method any further, because neither had very much to say.

O'Neill, as we know, had always plenty, if not too much, to say. What had been to them an opportunity for technical virtuosity was to him the long-sought opportunity for revelation of secret thought. The fact that he over-exploited the aside in Strange Interlude, until at times it became non-dramatic, merely proves that it was content, not form, that occupied his first thoughts. Rice did not make such a mistake in The Adding Machine because his content was much more easily disposed of.

The distinction between thought and speech O'Neill stresses, in print, by using small type for the former, and, in stage directions, by prefacing soliloquy or aside with an instruction

such as 'Thinking' or 'Thinking, oblivious to this remark'. In quality the thought generally follows, as far as is consonant with dramatic clarity, the spasmodic, seemingly inconsequent association of ideas which is supposed to reflect the 'stream of consciousness'. Marsden, for example, runs on from thought to thought:- 'When she has a child I know I can entirely accept...forget I have lost her...lost her?...silly ass!...how can you lose what you never possessed.. except in dreams!...Round and round...thoughts...damn pests! '

This manner of delivery is not always maintained. As in the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and the American, William Faulkner, it alternates with a highly formalised, patterned prose. Nina's thoughts, in particular, frequently take a very literary turn:- 'Charlie sits beside the fierce river, immaculately timid, cool and clothed, watching the burning, frozen, naked swimmers drown at last.'

Occasionally a particularly sensitive character, such as Marsden, will guess another's thought ⁽¹⁾ and almost answer it. And sometimes thought 'comes through' into dialogue. Nina, the outspoken, frequently gives herself away. When she does, it evokes such comment as that of her father in Act I:- 'You hear her, Charlie? She's a sick girl! '

(1) In the scene already mentioned from Each in his Own Way, the stage directions instruct the First Friend to reply 'as though he were reading Francesco Savio's thoughts'.

This setting of thought against dialogue is potentially an intensely dramatic method. It affords unique opportunity for creating ironic contrasts. O'Neill, a devotee of irony, does, as one might imagine, exploit lavishly the contradiction between the wingèd word and the wingless. He secures his best effects with characters like Marsden and Leeds, who have their thoughts well under control. In fact, the thought which dominates Marsden throughout, his love for Nina, is never realised by the others ⁽¹⁾ until it is admitted at the end. In the first act, the conversation between Marsden and Leeds affords an excellent example of the value of the method. When the 'asides' are removed, the conversation goes like this:-

Marsden:- Just what do you mean by changed, Professor? Before I left she seemed to be coming out of that horrible numbed calm.

Leeds:- Yes. She has played a lot of golf and tennis this summer, motored around with her friends and even danced a good deal, and she eats with a ravenous appetite.

Marsden:- But that sounds splendid. When I left she wouldn't see anyone or go anywhere.

Leeds:- Well, now she's gone to the opposite extreme, sees everyone, bores, fools, as if she'd lost all sense of discrimination or wish to discriminate, and she talks interminably, Charlie, intentional nonsense, one would say. Refuses to be serious, jeers at everything.

MARSDEN:- Oh, that's all undoubtedly part of the effort she's making to forget.

(1) Not fully by Nina, who realises only his dog-like devotion, not his warped passion.

Leeds:- Yes.

Marsden:- No girl could forget Gordon in a hurry, especially after the shock of his tragic death.

Leeds:- I realise that.

From this practical, colourless conversation, entirely typical of such reserved types of men, not even the true story, let alone the character of the speakers, emerges. But when the asidés are inserted, both the story and the speakers come to life.

Marsden:-horrible numbed calm. / The morning news of Gordon's death came...her face like grey putty...beauty gone...no face can afford intense grief...it's only later when sorrow...

Leeds:-and she eats with a ravenous appetite. Breakfast...dreamed of Gordon...what a look of hate for me in her eyes!...

Marsden:-see anyone or go anywhere. / Wandering from room to room...her thin body and pale face...gutted, love-abandoned eyes.

Leeds:-Yes. / Shall I tell him?...no...it might sound silly...but it's so terrible to be alone in this...if Nina's mother had lived.... my wife...dead!....and for a time I actually felt released...wife!...helpmate!....now I need help...no use!....she's gone.

Marsden:-the shock of his tragic death. / Good little man...he looks worried...always fussing about something...he must get on Nina's nerves.

And so it goes on.

But not all the time is the abundance of aside and soliloquy justified as it was in the instance quoted. Only too often O'Neill misuses the device. He treats it loosely,

(1)
including in it quantities of information or mere anticipation of action, which could have been conveyed much more neatly through dialogue, tone or gesture. For example, in Act I he expends an aside on suggesting an emotion, which the ensuing dialogue could easily have implied. Leeds suggests leaving Nina alone with Marsden. What the latter thinks is - 'Well, but hold on...I'm sure Nina would rather -'. The tone in which he uttered the remark could have brought out quite well the feeling in the aside.

Mrs. Evans' asides, in Act III, are as J.H.Lawson pointed out, (2) particularly unjustifiable. She is the type of woman whose characteristic taciturnity might well have justified the need for 'unspoken thought', but theory is belied by her practice of indulging freely and frankly in conversation with Nina on the same topics of which she thinks. There is no reason for the plethora of asides in the scene between her and Nina other than the ancient melodramatic one; they convey information with excessive thoroughness, (3) whet the interest and prepare for the coming climax.

Typical is Mrs. Evans' 'Got to start in to tell her - got to!' and 'If only she isn't going to have a baby...if only she doesn't care so much about having one...I got to have it out

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- (1) For example, Evans' aside in Act II. 'Won't tell him I tried for flying service...wanted to get in Gordon's outfit.. couldn't make the physical exam...'
 (2) Theory and Technique of Playwriting, New York 1936. p.137.
 (3) Inevitably they also blunt the action by anticipating it too thoroughly.

with her...got to!...no other way...in mercy...in justice'...

It is ironical that O'Neill should have been brought to this at ~~the~~ moment when, having eschewed the realistic soliloquy, he might seem also to have eschewed the melodrama which so easily followed in its train. But the fact is that in his early plays he was so conscious of the melodramatic bogie that he succeeded, for the most part, in avoiding it. In emancipating himself, he fell victim. Despite the much greater surface daring of the method in Strange Interlude, his treatment of the soliloquy in The Emperor Jones was in fact far more revolutionary.

The misuse of the convention went even further in the next play, Dynamo. In the soliloquies were included all manner of trivial comments, whose triteness was emphasised by the disjointed nature of the action. (1)

The spotlight moves rapidly from Mrs. Fife, reflecting at her window, to Mrs. Light, declaiming in the garden:-
'I can't see them...they're hiding somewhere...she'll be kissing him...supposing anyone should see me!...oh, I don't know what to do!' - and thence to Mr. Fife, announcing solemnly - 'That was him I heard passing. I'll wait here and watch the fun.' However hopefully O'Neill may print such remarks in small type, the effect on the audience must be not unlike that produced by the asides in melodramas such as

(1) Discussed in II(c) (i) p. 206.

Henry Arthur Jones' The Silver King - 'Ah, there you are, my fine fellow. I think my plan's working pretty well', or 'Now, Nellie Hathaway, I think I'll show you that you made a slight mistake when you threw me over and married Wilfred Denver.'⁽¹⁾

O'Neill intended to repeat his technique of 'Interludism'⁽²⁾ in Mourning Becomes Electra. In his notes on the writing of this play, published in The New York Herald Tribune,⁽³⁾ comes the comment - 'will write second draft using half-masks and an 'Interlude' technique (combination 'Lazarus' and 'Interlude' and see what can be gotten out of that. But after finishing the draft in this manner, he came to the conclusion that:- 'asides now seem entirely unnecessary - don't reveal anything about the characters I can't bring out quite naturally in their talk or when alone.' How unfortunate that his re-reading of much of Strange Interlude did not bring him to the same conclusion! But it took him a long time to arrive at this end. He began notes on Mourning in 1926, and was actually drafting and re-drafting it from 1928-1931.

(1) The longer asides in Dynamo are more prolix in the English (second) version than in the American (third) version. For example the English version has 'the temptation of her body' in place of the American 'her body' (Act II.sc.I.)

(2) So called by himself, in a letter to the Board of Managers (Theatre Guild). Quoted by J.N.Brown: Upstage (New York 1930).

(3) 'O'Neill's Own Story of 'Electra' in the Making.'
8th. November, 1931

Even after rejecting the asides, he still clung for a time to the soliloquies. From the notes it appears that they were to follow the rhythmic patterns of Nina's more elaborate soliloquies in Strange Interlude. In the entry for 20th. July 1930 he exclaims 'Start re-writing - stylizing soliloquies - think I have hit on right rhythm of prose - monotonous, simple words driving insistence - tom-tom from 'Jones' in thought repetition'. But his critical instinct had now come to the fore. The soliloquies, he decided on the 20th. September, were holding up the action: they 'break rhythm, clog flow of dramatic development.' In fact 'they must come out'. And out they came.

All but a few, that is, and the pity is that they did not go too. The result of pondering over this vexed question for so long seems to have shaken his hold on both realistic and formalised types of soliloquy. In Mourning Becomes Electra there is an extraordinarily heterogeneous mixture, very few of the soliloquies being successfully maintained on the plane he attempted. They are most successful when of traditional poetic order, similar to those quoted from Desire Under the Elms. A good example is Orin's address to his dead father in Act III of 'The Hunted' - '...Death sits so naturally on you; Death becomes the Mannons! You were always like the statue of an eminent dead man....'⁽¹⁾

(1) There is also an element of monologue in this passage, since it is addressed to another person, even though he may be dead.

In the frequent apostrophe of the family portraits a more realistic note enters, for the portraits are not merely portraits - they are the threatening eye of the accumulated family conscience. The guilt-stricken Mannons see them in this light: towards the end of the trilogy, in the eyes of Orin particularly, they take on the attributes of the Euménides themselves. Lavinia addresses them, in 'The Haunted' (Act I scene II) as if they were indeed her ancestors standing alive before her. 'Why do you look at me like that? I've done my duty by you! That's finished and forgotten! ' And again in Act III:- 'But I've finished with you for ever now, do you hear? I'm Mother's daughter - not one of you! I'll live in spite of you! '

But it must be admitted that the great bulk of the soliloquies in this play are like the worst of Anna Christie. O'Neill said in his notes for 27th. March 1930 - 'In my scrawny first draft bare melodrama of plot runs away with my content ...this must be corrected in second draft.' But the bare melodrama of the soliloquies escaped uncorrected. Lavinia is one of the worst culprits. When she is left alone she is prone to burst out with hysterical assertions to the effect that she can't bear it and she won't. Christine is similarly affected. She manages to combine emotion with information ⁽¹⁾ in utterances such as 'I've got to see Adam!'

(1) The only deliberately informative soliloquy O'Neill ever used occurs in this play at the beginning of Act IV. It is justified, however, by the fact that the speaker, Seth, represents the Chorus.

I've got to warn him! ', the magnificently melodramatic line with which Act II of 'The Haunted' ends. Lest the women should be thought to have the prerogative we may draw a final illustration from a speech of Brant's. As he paces alone the deck of his ship he declaims:- 'So it's goodbye to you, "Flying Trades!" And you're right! I wasn't man enough for you! '

In Ah, Wilderness! (September 1932), O'Neill employed the soliloquy proper for the last time. Then, in keeping with the relaxed atmosphere of the whole play, melodrama triumphed. Richard is allowed to sit down on the beach and soliloquise for half a scene in the grand manner. Yet this unlikely procedure does not jar as much as did the informative asides of Strange Interlude. The quality is so entirely what one would have expected from this romantic adolescent - grandiloquent phrasing, epigrams and lofty quotations - an elaborating of the shorter asides and soliloquies which he had uttered throughout the play. Deliberately villainous, these, in the manner of the wicked sheriff:- 'I'll show her she can't treat me the way she's done! I'll show them all!' (1)

But this was all light-hearted. When O'Neill next turned to serious revelation of unspoken thought in Days Without End,

(1) Act II. Also, in Act I:- 'The little coward! I hate her! She can't treat me like that! I'll show her! '

he abandoned soliloquy proper for its equivalent, conversation between the hero and his personified 'alter ego'. When John, the good self, and Loving, the evil self, hold argument, all their remarks in reality proceed from the same man, John Loving. Once the convention of the personified 'Mephistopheles' has been accepted, this convention produces an effect of greater realism than the mask in The Great God Brown or the soliloquy in Strange Interlude. At the end of his experimenting O'Neill had arrived at a tradition so old that it seemed new again. ⁽¹⁾ Thus experimenters are constantly reminded that all novelty is but oblivion.

The progress of the soliloquy in O'Neill's plays might well serve as example for the general development of his technique. Beginning in as realistic a manner as possible, it proceeded to shake off one restraint after another, until it finally attained complete liberty. But within that liberty lurked dissolution. While he was still trying to justify the soliloquy by realistic action and characterisation O'Neill achieved his most striking effects. To make soliloquy appear convincing in a grimly realistic play such as Desire Under the Elms was indeed a triumph.

The asides of Strange Interlude and Dynamo, on the other hand, diminished in effectiveness as the novelty wore off.

(1) Compare with the argument between Studious Desire and Sensual Appetite in John Rastell's Interlude of the Four Elements (1517) (Included in A.W. Pollard's English Miracle Plays (Oxford 1927)).

They served a certain valid purpose in revealing that which could not otherwise have been revealed so thoroughly. But they revealed it too often and for too long.

When unspoken thought vied to such an unprecedented extent with dialogue, any weakness in that thought forced itself to attention. And weakness, often triteness, was inevitable in soliloquy which attempted to follow the leisurely course of everyday thought. It could not constantly maintain the high emotional level possible to the occasional soliloquy. In the best of the Elizabethan soliloquies, for instance, the concentration of feeling is so great that we willingly suspend disbelief and would do so for longer, if required. In the Strange Interlude soliloquies, because the same degree of concentration is not attempted, the form seems too elaborate for the content, and suspension of disbelief can only be intermittent.

In fact, where the soliloquy is concerned, the value of Henry James' 'few, grave laws' is most clearly apparent.

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We will now consider O'Neill's use of indirect presentation. His experiments are of two main kinds - with Expressionism and symbolism.

Of all his Expressionist experiments, he himself stressed most the value of the mask, as we have seen in the study of soliloquy. It represented for him a function which had not

been fully exploited by the German Expressionists. He saw its potentialities for revealing 'those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the problems of psychology (1) continue to disclose to us.'

In plays such as Toller's Masse Mensch the mask had been a feature of production, rather than an inextricable part of the action. Scenic artists and producers welcomed the opportunity for experiment which the 'type' character offered. In the Volksbuhne production of Masse Mensch Toller's vision of the Prisoner whose face changed into that of the sentry was effected by the use of masks. But no 'profound hidden conflicts' were illustrated by this means.

Andreyev, in The Black Maskers, (2) went further than the Germans with allegorical use of masks. He exploited the idea of contrast between mask and face, between what is and what seems to be. 'Mine being the only real face, I am the only person about whom there can be no mistake,' Lorenzo affirms to his masked guests in Act I. By the last act he had realised his error. The face is itself a mask. 'Take off your masks', he shouts to the unmasked servants, who gaze at him uncomprehendingly. Only the jester obeys him. He sheds his false gaiety, the mask, and relapses into sad gravity,

(1) 'Memoranda on Masks' (op.cit.)

(2) In Act V of The Life of Man (original version) the drunkards have faces that resemble masks. Some have large noses, others are noseless. The effect is of grotesque parody.

(1)
the face.

Andreyev did not, however, develop the idea of removeable masks. His people are either masked or unmasked consistently throughout. Nevertheless his use of masks is closer to O'Neill's later use in The Great God Brown than was that of Expressionists such as Toller and Kaiser.

W.B.Yeats was the only other dramatist of repute making conspicuous use of the mask before 1920. And his aim was exactly the opposite of O'Neill's. He sought to restore to drama its formalism, to words their 'ancient sovereignty'.⁽²⁾ He sought the impersonality of Japanese Noh plays such as the Kakitsubata, where Priest, Chorus and Spirit of the Iris have no more personal identity than air. 'In neglecting character', he says of the Japanese, 'which seems to us essential in drama... they have made possible a hundred lovely intricacies.'⁽³⁾ In his own masked plays there is no attempt to reveal 'profound hidden conflicts'. In At the Hawk's Well (1916) and The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919) musicians with faces 'made up to resemble masks' pace the stage in formal procession, interposing themselves between the audience and the action. Yeats wanted to escape from commonplace humanity. He said, in the article already

(1) In Chiarelli's The Mask and the Face a similar idea was expressed through realistic action. It is made clear that Mario acts as he does to 'save his face' or, as his friend tells him, 'to keep the mask on the face of your vanity.'

(2) In an essay, The Theatre(1899)he said,'The Theatre began in ritual & it cannot come to its greatness again without restoring words to their ancient sovereignty.'

quoted, 'The mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player the fine invention of a sculptor.'

The mask found its way into America by a different road. Scenic artists, experimenters like Norman Bel Geddes and Robert Edmond Jones were the first to pounce on it. Masks became a startling new feature in décor. They figured in a Greenwich Village Follies' production of 1920,⁽¹⁾ and we have already observed the silver masks which enlivened the 1921 production of Macbeth.

Jones, who was responsible for that tour de force, first introduced masks into a production of one of O'Neill's plays. Together with Throckmorton, he produced The Hairy Ape in 1922, giving stylised masks to the Fifth Avenue procession. He had no more instruction for this than a hint in stage directions. The 'gaudy marionettes' who constituted the procession 'had something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein in their detached, mechanical awareness.'

Kenneth MacGowan, with whom O'Neill and Jones were associated in the Strindberg productions of 1924 and 1926, was another enthusiast for masks. He was joint author of a book, Masks and Demons⁽²⁾ which contained, among impressive photographs of modern stage masks, many startling reproductions of religious masks from the Congo. And it is this type of mask with which we find O'Neill making his first experiments.

{1} Production by John Murray Anderson and Margaret Severn.

{2} Masks and Demons (London 1929) K. MacGowan and Herman Rosse.

In 1923 he wrote All God's Chillun Got Wings, in which figured a 'Negro primitive mask from the Congo'. This mask is treated Expressionistically, to represent a direct picture of Ella's obsession. The distortion of the room and the grey light which 'picks out the mask' accentuates the diabolical quality which the incongruous surroundings give it. As the room shrinks, the ceiling becomes lower, the mask seems abnormally large. This, we understand, expresses the unnatural dominance which hatred of the negro race has gained over Ella's mind. 'What're you grinning about, you dirty nigger, ?' she demands of the mask, 'Why don't you let Jim alone? Black! Black!...You've poisoned me!'

Thus not only is her obsession shown pictorially, but the malignant quality of the mask, which she addresses as an inimical demon, lends countenance to her crazy soliloquies. In the end she plunges a knife into it, explaining that she had to kill or be killed. By this means the wider implications of her relationship with Jim are stressed.

When the mask next made an appearance it was, as in The Hairy Ape, a feature of production. James Light, one of the producers of The Ancient Mariner (1924) explained the use of masks in this play:- 'We are trying to use it to show the eyes of tragedy and the face of exaltation.'⁽¹⁾ This was an instance of the production deciding all. Apparently the

(1) Clark, p.141.

result was not satisfactory enough to warrant the publishing of the play.

In Marco Millions O'Neill gave his first instructions in stage directions for the wearing of the mask. The funeral procession in the last scene is composed of nine musicians, in bright red robes, and nine singers, five men and four women. The latter wear either a male or a female 'mask of grief', whose significance is emphasised by their black, white-edged robes. The troupe of young boys and girls, similarly dressed, who follow wear, instead of an actual mask, a 'fixed expression of bewildered, uncomprehending grief that is like a mask.'

(1)

This is traditional, rather than experimental, usage. But O'Neill was not the man to remain content with an exciting instrument such as the mask simply in the function it had served for others. In The Great God Brown he put it to more original use. Kenneth MacGowan, an authority on the subject, declared in a programme note to the play, 'So far as I know, O'Neill's play is the first in which masks have ever been used to dramatise changes and conflict in character.'

(2)

O'Neill, as we have seen, selected characters in whom two apparently contradictory facets alternated. Dion's face represents the St. Anthony in him, his mask, the Pan element, which develops into the Mephistophelean. His face

(1) It was to be developed in Lazarus Laughed.

(2) Quoted in Clark. p.142.

is 'dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike religious faith in life.' The mask is a 'fixed forcing' of this face into 'the expression of a mocking, restless, defiant, gaily scoffing and sensual young Pan.' Later this expression changes into 'a diabolical Mephistophelean cruelty and irony, while his face grows 'gentler, more spiritual, more saint-like and ascetic than ever before.'

When inner conflict rages between these characteristics, O'Neill is able to depict it pictorially. Dion kneels and prays 'with an ascetic fervour':- 'Into thy hands, O Lord...' Then his mood changes. He claps on his mask and laughs harshly, 'To fall asleep and know you'll never never be called to get on with the job of existence again!' This appreciation of his own predicament can be conveyed by having him lift his mask and address it, 'Peace, poor tortured one, brave pitiful pride of man...' And the fact that Margaret loves only the vital, Pan element, not the whole man, can be expressed with vivid brevity. When the man himself lies dying she does not see him, but only the Mephistophelean mask, which she picks up and mourns, over. When Dion bids for her understanding, and removes the mask, she shrinks back in horror:- 'I can't bear it! You're like a ghost! You're dead!' This Expressionistic method of presentation rather than explanation, saves a whole world of unconvincing reiteration that realistic dialogue might have involved.

In the case of Cybel and Margaret, the mask fulfills the function which we commonly describe as 'presenting a mask to the world.' Dion's Pan mask was essentially a part of his nature. But Cybel puts on her mask for convenience. 'Well, if you simply got to be a regular sport like all the other visiting sports, I s'pose I got to play with you', she tells Dion, as she puts on a mask which is 'the rouged and eye-blackened countenance of the hardened prostitute.'

Dion can recognise Cybel, the Earth Mother, both with and without her mask, but Brown takes her for her own sister when he surprises her without it. Similarly, Margaret is known to her sons only in her mask of 'a pretty young matron who...acknowledges no wound to the world'. When they see her real face, they stare at her as if at a stranger:- 'We heard someone yell. It sounded like Mother.' 'No,' says their father, 'It was this lady - my wife.'

The economy of the method is apparent.

It is not always so lucid, however. There is inconsistency in the use of Margaret's mask. In the Prologue she wears, not a front to present to the world, but 'an exact, almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of a girl instead of the individual Margaret.' Whether an audience would appreciate so fine a distinction is extremely doubtful. O'Neill recognised the weakness afterwards when writing about Lazarus Laughed:- 'In Brown I couldn't know beforehand how the scheme would

work out. They were too realistic there, and sitting way back in the theatre you couldn't be sure if the actors had on masks or not.⁽¹⁾

Then again, when Brown adopts Dion's Mephistophelean mask, the action becomes, as we have seen, too dependent on an understanding of the mask's significance. The symbolism becomes highly involved at this point. Brown and Dion are, we realise, the same - 'brothers, I guess, somehow'- as Cybel puts it. In order to show the conflict within Brown after Dion's death, O'Neill has to employ alternation between his face, which has become 'tortured and distorted' and two masks, that of the old Brown and 'the demon of Dion's mask'. In Act IV, Scene I, the constant changing of masks becomes obtrusive. Brown begins in the mask of Dion, with Brown's mask resting beside him. Then his own face is revealed, only for a moment before Margaret enters. Exit Brown carrying both masks. He returns in the Brown mask. After a brief conversation he excuses himself, reappears as Dion. The Committee enters; disappearance of Dion, returning as Brown. Finally, he effects another quick change into Dion's mask and departs, leaving behind him Brown's mask to represent a corpse. These changes are all significant, but there are too many of them. Attention is focussed on the mechanics of the device, and the essential meaning is obscured rather than clarified.

(1) Clark. pp.159-160.

O'Neill never abandons an instrument until he has tested it to the utmost degree. In Lazarus Laughed he developed the idea of the 'abstract quality', what he had already hinted at in Margaret's first mask. But that tenuous suggestion, he realised, was insufficient. 'I should have had them (the masks) twice as large - and conventionalised them', he says, 'So the audience could get the idea at once.'

Lazarus Laughed seemed to him to accomplish the purpose:-

'all the characters wear masks. And here I've used them right. I believe I've managed the problem of big crowds better than crowds are usually worked in plays...My Jews all wear Jewish masks, and it's the same with the Greeks and Romans. I think I've suggested the presence and characteristics of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers.'⁽¹⁾

In fact, Bigger and Better masks! But they were now used for the traditional purpose of suggesting 'type' characteristics, rather than for the unusual purpose of The Great God Brown.⁽²⁾ As Allardyce Nicoll said of the Greek mask, his new version was meant to give 'typical expression in more easily visible form.'

But it is exceedingly doubtful whether half the 'typical expression' in Lazarus Laughed would be easily recognisable, or even recognisable at all. O'Neill's customary lack of

(1) Ibid. (supra). p.314 (i)

(2) Development of the Theatre (London 1937) p.40. (Revised version).

restraint has again betrayed him. Though he had, in theory, grasped the idea that the mask should be large, bold and clear, not expected to express too great subtlety, he confounded himself in practice by offering too much of a good thing.

The Greeks, one remembers, did not mask their chorus. But O'Neill masks not only his Chorus of seven, in masks double the size of the others, but every one of his crowd of forty-nine. As if this were not sufficiently distracting, he masks them in accordance with a complicated scheme of permutations and combinations, revolving round seven periods of life and seven types of character. ⁽¹⁾ These vast crowds appear in each scene. Although the masking is consistent and should be, in theory, lucid, there is far too much of it. To appreciate all these discriminations, an audience would have to concentrate on the crowds and ignore the chief characters.

A more serious error is the stress which O'Neill lays on finer points, of a sort which can be grasped in reading, but are too subtle to be conveyed through an instrument which is not subtle, the mask. This is his besetting sin.

The distinction between some of the types and age groups is scarcely sharp enough. When they are all engaged in amorphous chanting it is doubtful whether we could distinguish,

(1) For fuller discussion of these groups see II (c) ii.

merely from the mask, between 'Maturity' and 'Middle Age' or between the 'Self-Tortured', 'Introspective' and 'Sorrowful, Resigned'.

A still more shadowy distinction is that between Miriam's mask, which suggests a statue of Woman⁽¹⁾ and her mouth, which is 'sensitive and sad, smiling in self-forgetful love.' For all this contrast is worth, Miriam might as well be wearing a full mask. As for the fuller implications of the mask, they are never likely to get beyond the stage directions. It is meant to suggest her 'eternal acceptance of the compulsion of motherhood, the inevitable cycle of love into pain...' and so forth.

Half way between the crowds with their full masks and Lazarus with none, come the characters with half masks. Miriam's has already been described. Lazarus, according to stage directions in the standard edition,⁽²⁾ wears no mask because he is 'freed from the fear of death.' The half mask might, then, be thought to represent an intermediate stage between the crowds' craven fear and his supreme lack of it. But instead it is used with purpose similar to that in The Great God Brown. It indicates the difference between the character's real self and what he has become. Caligula's mask has already

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- (1) Miriam's eyes, gazing downwards at her imagined child, recall the mask of Christ in the Musée de Cluny, Paris, with its closed eyelids.
- (2) When the first act was published in American Caravan, the stage directions read simply 'Lazarus wears no mask'.

been described. Pompeia's dissipated mask 'of lust and perverted passion' contradicts 'a gentle girlish mouth... set in an expression of agonised self-loathing and weariness of spirit.'

But, though he exploits the dramatic potentialities in these contrasts, O'Neill still makes impossible demands. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the audience would appreciate the 'appalling morbid significance' of Caligula's mouth when contrasted with his mask. Again, the female 'crowd' masks in the palace scenes are supposed to have a 'bold, masculine expression', while the male have 'the stamp of effeminate corruption'. Whether this effect of 'sex corrupted and warped' would materialise is doubtful, particularly when the women wear men's clothes and wigs, the men women's clothes with anklets, bracelets and necklaces and female wigs of curled wire. We are never likely to distinguish between the men and the women, particularly as none of this crowd speaks except in chorus.

Not only does he expect too much from the mask, but he sometimes forgets that he has committed himself to it at all. He tries to make the best of two worlds. Even when he had shrouded Tiberius in a mask, he will still indulge in such hopeful stage directions as 'Tiberius looks---sombrely contemptuous and threatening', or 'Tiberius (standing) - in a sinister cold rage...'

Remembering that O'Neill was thinking of his audience

(4) (contd.) turns pale and stiffens: it presents the appearance of 'a frightful, laughing mask'. (Act I.)

when he enlarged the mask, it is a little ironic to find B.H. Clark defending what he admits to be the 'impracticalities' of Lazarus Laughed with, 'There is so much in Lazarus Laughed that can only be blunted and vulgarised by taking it into the playhouse, that he may be content to leave it, as Hardy left The Dynasts, for production in the "Theatre of the mind." (1) Certainly this play leaves O'Neill in a paradoxical position. He has realised the dramatic potentialities of the mask and has exploited them. But he has gone too far, and laid too heavy demands (2) on an instrument essentially simple and forthright. And even while he is expecting the mask to convey too much he shows that he doubts its power to do so by expanding the stage directions to enormous length and entrusting to them all the real subtleties of the play. The stage directions are much more interesting than the text. At this point an earlier statement of O'Neill's comes to mind:- 'I hardly ever go to the theatre...because I can always do a better production in my mind.' (3)

In Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill rejected the 'half mask' of Lazarus Laughed, which he had at first contemplated using, in favour of a 'mask-like look' (4) similar to that

(1) Clark. p.161.

(2) For a photograph of the masked Crowds in the Pasadena Playhouse production of the play see Stratton p.272. The subtleties of the stage directions seem not to have been realised, if one may judge from a reproduction.

(3) New York Herald Tribune. 10th. November, 1924.

(4) Andreyev, in The Black Maskers, exploited the possibilities of mask-like expression. Lorenzo tries to prove, by smiling, that he is not wearing a mask, but his face (contd. above)

envisaged in Marco Millions. 'That's the Mannon look', says Seth in the first scene, 'They all has it...they don't want folk to guess their secrets.' He himself wears the same 'life-like' mask, the result of his long service with the repressed and reticent Mannons. This expression is possible only when the faces are in repose. It is most effective in moments of silent, stylised grouping. When Christine stands behind Lavinia, who sits on the steps in the third act of The Hunted, the uncanny resemblance between their faces is accentuated. The family portraits wear the same 'mask-like' look. Thus the inescapable doom of the Mannons is printed on all their faces.

A similar 'frozen' mask is used in Days Without End. Just as Dion's Pan mask was a 'fixed forcing of his own face', so is the mask worn by the detached personality, Loving, a 'death mask of a John who has died with a sneer of scornful mockery on his lips'. In this instance O'Neill makes no attempt to force impossible expressions from the masked face. Loving remains the same throughout. He represents an unchanging characteristic - scornful pride.

These last two experiments were both practicable and effective. Until then the mask's progress had resembled that of a Frankenstein, which grew till it threatened to devour its master.

Expressionistic Settings And Sound Effects.

Like Strindberg, O'Neill had a vivid sense of pictorial and sound values. Even his early realistic plays, The Moon of the Caribbees, for example, had excelled in silent, expressive pictures, in sounds such as melancholy singing, which suggested the theme.

He was well equipped for the Expressionist endeavour to externalise states of mind through stage pictures and sound. His feeling for colour and light, song and setting, proves him a dramatist of the theatre, not merely 'of the mind', even in such plays as Lazarus Laughed.

His first Expressionist experiment with setting occurred in Where the Cross is Made, a play whose likeness to Strindberg's To Damascus ⁽¹⁾ we have already observed. The important difference is that in O'Neill's play, the visions, the ghosts of the drowned sailors, do not appear until the emotional atmosphere has been prepared to receive them. As Bartlett and Nat grow wilder, a 'dense green glow...as of great depths of the sea faintly penetrated by light' floods into the room. 'Deep under the sea!' cries Nat, 'I've been drowned for years.' From this stage onwards all natural things take on the quality with which the crazed minds invest them. And this quality is actually presented to the audience. The slamming of the door, which Bartlett and Nat hear, we

(1) A likeness confined to the vision scene.

also hear, though Sue explains that it is only a shutter in the wind. When the tension is at its highest the sailors glide into the room. Their flesh 'has the suggestion of decomposition' in the green light: their bodies 'sway rhythmically as if to the pulse of the sea.'

When once the Doctor arrives, with his flash, the green light secedes to moonlight and the noise of sea and wind, which had ceased during the vision scene, recommences. This is a good example of how O'Neill could project in terms of vivid 'spectacle' the picture of a mind.

In The Emperor Jones we realise, even more clearly, his talent for making the audience feel what the obsessed character feels. When, in the first scene of Kaiser's Gas, the Gentleman in White enters and converses with the Clerk, the picture presented is an intellectual one. We are not aware of its emotional significance until later, when the Clerk explains 'I saw Horror, saw it bodily.'⁽¹⁾

But in O'Neill's play everyone is aware of what Brutus Jones is feeling. Given a forest setting by night, the ominous tom-tom beat sounding throughout and the negro's increasingly terrified soliloquies, what follows is

(1) The vision of the milkmaid, which appears to the Student in The Ghost Sonata is introduced in the same way. She appears in the first scene before any preparation has been made for her.

(1) (contd.) 'a wild seething of mocking, menacing hands.' McCranie soliloquises like Jones:--'O Lawd, I goin' crazy, dat's what.' He swings a fence rail in an attempt to strike the 'hants' just as Jones tries to swing an imaginary shovel.

psychologically inevitable. Panic, as most people will recognise from their own experience, plays strange tricks on the eyes.

In the second scene a road glimmers through the dark forest in unreal fashion. Then it disappears and the forest closes in. As Jones wanders through the blackness, natural shapes begin to suggest to him sinister memories. In Scene IV a dead tree stump, in the middle of a circular clearing enclosed by trees, has the appearance of an auction block, which is for Jones an ancient racial memory. In Scene V a space encircled with creepers looks like the hold of an 'ancient vessel'.

Appropriate visions appear in each setting. While the forest is still a dark mass, the visions are shadowy. Little Formless Fears detach themselves from the darkness. Then both setting and vision become more detailed. The dicing negro, Jeff, appears, and the convict gang, memories of Jones' immediate past. He begins to take part in the silent pantomime they enact. First he joins in the convicts' mechanical movements up to the point where the overseer threatens him; then he is sold as a slave on the auction block. He rows with the slaves in the galley, he even takes active part in the worship of the Crocodile God, to whom the Witch Doctor attempts to sacrifice him.

(1) Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom (1924) has a vision scene (VI) almost identical with O'Neill's. Abraham McCranie sees 'Hants' who present silent tableaux of incidents from the past, receding gradually further back. Even the setting has similar distortion. The tree branches become (contd.above)

In all these actions, as in a dream, he is unable to take the decisive action of striking the overseer, of resisting the plantation owners, or of refusing to approach the crocodile. He has to disperse the visions by reassuring himself with the sound of a pistol shot.

This brilliant blending of setting and vision was to a certain extent dependent on the interpretation of the régisseur. Later, O'Neill was to leave more and more to that obliging personage.

In his next Expressionistic play, The Hairy Ape, he abandoned the emotional basis of The Emperor Jones for an intellectual distortion of setting. The first scene in the stokers' fore-castle suggests the dramatist's view rather than the characters'. Stage directions demand that no attempt be made at naturalism: the effect must be cramped, cage-like: the ceiling crushed down on the men's heads, accentuating their stooping posture, their similarity to 'Neanderthal Man'. Like the Enemies of Man in Andreyev's The Black Maskers, they all look alike, hairy chested, with long arms hanging like an ape's.

This is how O'Neill visualises them, not how Yank, the principal character, sees them. All effects contribute to suggest the symbolic dominance of steel. The sailors echo Yank's words in a barking chorus, 'as if their throats were phonograph horns.' In the stokehole the sound of shovels on coal has a mechanical regulated rhythm. The furnace doors give a brazen clang as they are slammed shut.

Yank, in Scene IV, sits in an attitude that recalls Rodin's 'Thinker', suggesting again the dramatist's intellectual conception of the characters. This is the type of distortion employed by Elmer Rice in The Adding Machine. In Scene I columns of figures cover the wall paper in Zero's bedroom, suggesting, not that Zero was obsessed by columns of figures in the way that Bartlett was obsessed by the sea, but that this was how the dramatist visualised his type of mind.

O'Neill brings the implication of the cage like settings into dialogue when Paddy talks of being 'caged in by steel from a sight of sky like bloody apes in the zoo'.⁽¹⁾ And the phrase 'hairy ape' is in Yank's mind for the rest of the play.

But this still does not imply that when he adopts the attitude of Rodin's 'Thinker' again in Scene VII he is taking up the position deliberately. The attitude represents O'Neill's view of him as a symbol of 'man who has lost his old harmony with nature.'

The marionette parade in Scene V is the most purely Expressionist scene O'Neill ever attempted. Again, it is his own intellectual conception which is expressed, though this time Yank partly shares his vision. The wares in the shop

(1) The resemblance to apes is stressed in the stokehole scene when the men appear silhouetted in 'the crouching inhuman attitude of chained gorillas'. In the prison scene (VI) the resemblance to cages is still more marked. Only harsh barking voices are heard, and the rattling of bars.

windows appear to us as they seem to him: we are aware first of the enormous tags, with prices flashed in intermittent electric lights, that hang on the jewels and furs. When the Fifth Avenue procession appears, Yank's impression of their actions is presented literally. They rush to the shop windows and exclaim in an affected chorus 'Monkey fur!' They are oblivious to anything that does not cause them social inconvenience. To Yank's enraged shouts of 'Pigs! Tarts! Bitches!' they reply with an affected 'I beg your pardon.' When he drives his fist into the fat gentleman's face, he makes the same mechanical reply. But once the gentleman realises that Yank has made him lose his bus, he screams for a policeman. This incident recalls that in the fourth scene of Rice's The Adding Machine, where the Jury remain absolutely impassive throughout Zero's defence, but at the moment when he entreats them to put themselves in his place, come to life with a start, and with one voice cry 'guilty'. The Fifth Avenue marionettes do not even notice Yank when he is being clubbed by a fantastic platoon of policemen.

The Hairy Ape represents O'Neill's only excursion into purely intellectual distortion of setting. In All Gods Chillun Got Wings the intellectual distortion is only a background for a realistic drama. In the first tenement scene the two streets, which form a background to the children's play, are contrasted in Expressionistic manner. In one street the faces are all white, in the other, black. From each

street proceeds a song, followed by laughter, both distinctive in racial quality. Then there is a silence, before the children begin to speak. This setting is repeated in the next scene, but the change in mood of the realistic action, which is much less carefree and innocent than in the previous scene, is emphasised by the change in the quality of the sound. The street noises have become more mechanical, the songs from black and white streets reproduce each other's wistful mood. Five years later, when the human drama has entered on its most disillusioned, degraded stage, the street noises are more intermittent and weary. Yawning replaces the laughter of previous scenes: both the white tenor and the Negro voice sound maudlin. Only two people, one white, one black, cross the stage, instead of the previous numbers. The general effect is of sad lassitude, fitting the mood of Shorty and Ella.

Scene IV is nearer to The Hairy Ape. The drawn shades on the tenement windows suggest a callous brutal stare, emphasised by the dull green shades on the narrow church windows. There is the sound of a melancholy negro song; stillness; then one single metallic clang from the church bell. Immediately people rush from the two tenements to form lines on either side of the church gate - one white, one black. They stare at each other in hatred. Jim and Ella appear from the church, he dressed in black, she in white. Their progress through the divided lines is an agony which

symbolises the agonies involved in marriage between black and white. The silent action in this scene is presented in non-realistic fashion, but Jim's remarks, when he encourages Ella, are realistic. ⁽¹⁾ The value of the background is apparent: it gives wider implications to a narrow human drama.

Stage directions are becoming increasingly subtle. O'Neill describes the sound which the church door makes as it slams behind them as 'the wooden lips of an idol that has spat them out.'

In Part II the setting is at first shown realistically, so that later, when Ella's mind begins to distort it, the contrast will be clear. The quality which the room takes on for her is presented directly. In Scene II the walls look shrunken, the ceiling lowered, so that the Congo mask seems unnaturally large. In Scene III this effect is exaggerated still further. The ceiling barely clears the people's heads, the furniture and the characters seem enormously magnified. The vague grey light which picks out the Congo mask is reminiscent of the grey light which revealed the outlines of the room in Andreyev's The Life of Man. This is clearly the picture of an obsessed mind, just as the forest shapes in The Emperor Jones were the picture of a terrified mind.

In fact two kinds of Expressionistic settings are used in this play. In Part I the effect is like that in The Hairy Ape,

(1) Although they are pitched in hysterical vein.

though confined strictly to background. In Part II it is nearer to The Emperor Jones. The first is intellectual, the second emotional.

In later plays O'Neill turned rather toward functional symbolism than to Expressionism, with the exception of his use of the mask, already discussed. Lazarus Laughed is the last play to contain a large proportion of Expressionistic effects.

When they are confined to lighting, background setting and movement, they are extremely forceful. The windows of 'The House of Laughter' shine with brilliant candle light, giving 'a throbbing, star-like effect'. To the music which comes from the house the crowd without sway stiffly, 'compelled against their wills.' Even when they are denouncing 'this abomination' they cannot restrain their jerking bodies and spasmodic laughter. Both Orthodox and Nazarenes are compelled into mechanical dancing movement, a 'grotesque sort of marionette's country dance', a parody of the inspired dancing and singing in which Lazarus' followers indulge throughout the play. When Lazarus appears they are frozen in distorted postures 'like figures in a frieze'. Even the Centurion and Roman Soldiers who appear later are forced into a clumsy dance. As soon as Lazarus leaves the scene, music and voices cease. There is a moment of intense silence. The lights, which have been growing dim, go out.

By these means, the contrast between the joy preached by Lazarus and the dullness of human frailty is sharply emphasised.

Light, sound, music and movement have been woven into an expressive pattern.

The contrast continues throughout the play. Caligula, in particular, is depicted in attitudes reminiscent of The Hairy Ape. He gives crazy leaps into the air, capers like 'a grotesque cripple', squats beside Lazarus' chariot and stares up at him 'in the attitude of a chained monkey'. Miriam's attitudes are frequently expressive of the theme. In Act II, scene II her black figure with arms raised in grief forms the shape of a cross.

It may be remarked here that the shape of a cross occurs frequently in O'Neill's plays. Welded ends with Michael and Eleanor standing embraced together with their arms stretched out so that 'they form together one cross'. In Days Without End a triple cross is formed. In front of the Cross in the church John Loving stands with his arms stretched up so that he resembles a cross himself. At his feet lies the dead body of Loving in a similar position.

Lighting is used most forcefully in Act III, the scene outside Tiberius' palace. The atmosphere of vice within is conveyed by a sound of drunken clamour and high-pitched laughter, emphasised by the crimson-purple glow in the palace windows. When the door is opened a stream of reddish light floods out in which black figures are silhouetted. As soon as Lazarus approaches the palace, the lights in the windows go out one by one.

The dissipation within is conveyed through an elaboration on the colour motif in the windows.⁽¹⁾ Everything is purple and red, the robes and wigs of the crowd, the crimson-purple lamp shades, the masks worn by Pompeia and Tiberius. The whole scene is a direct picture of Tiberius' character. The 'imperial blood in his veins had been sickened by age and debauchery.'

The attributes of Lazarus and Miriam are conveyed Expressionistically. As we have seen, he grows younger while she grows older. She wears black throughout; her hair becomes white. She is 'a figure of a sad, resigned mother of the dead.'

These pictorial and sound effects are so brilliant that half the value of the play is wasted if it is not presented in a theatre. Yet the demands placed on the producer are so heavy that it very seldom receives production. And in many instances O'Neill stretched the function of his Expressionist devices beyond legitimate limit. The part played by the laughter⁽²⁾ is the most flagrant example. This alone is good reason why, despite its brilliant use of spectacle, the play seldom achieves the stage.

From the physical powers of the actor O'Neill demanded now not merely the difficult, as in Welded,⁽³⁾ but the impossible.

- (1) The colour effects in Lazarus recall similar usage by Strindberg.
- (2) Lazarus' laughter was anticipated by that in Marco Millions, which proceeded from the dead Kukachin in the prologue. The leaves echo her tender laughter, of an intoxicating supernatural quality.
- (3) See II (c) (1) A halo lights up Kukachin's face when she speaks.

The crowd might find it difficult even to laugh rhythmically in chorus - in 'a great, full-throated paean'. But it is beyond possibility that Lazarus should laugh 'low and tenderly...at first, but gradually gaining in volume, becoming more and more intense and insistent, finally ending up on a triumphant, blood-stirring call to that ultimate attainment in which all prepossession with self is lost in an ecstatic affirmation of life.'

O'Neill has now indeed reached the paradoxical position where, by exploiting theatrical instruments beyond their capacity, he is no longer writing for the theatre.

Expressionistic effects are much more subdued in Mourning Becomes Electra. We have already observed that the mask is here used in its least mechanical form. It emphasises the physical resemblance among the Mannons, an Expressionistic means of implying the family curse in which they are all entangled. Aeschylus could reiterate the relationship by means of the Chorus. O'Neill had to find a modern equivalent. He reflects in his notes; 'work out this symbol of family resemblance and identification.' He worked it out Expressionistically. The family is inextricably bound together, consequently he makes them all look exactly alike. Lavinia is so like Christine in facial appearance, with the same 'strange, beautiful hair', that when she adopts her mother's manner and colour, she is mistaken for her by Peter. 'Vinnie!' he stammers, 'I - I thought you were - ! I can't realize it's you! You've grown so like your - ! ' And so Lavinia herself

(2)(contd.) mourns at the bier of the dead Lorenzo, while the other Lorenzo stands beside it.

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is the avenging ghost who haunts Orin. The resemblance is extended to the family portraits. When Brant sees Ezra's portrait he says to Christine, 'It would be damned queer if you fell in love with me because I recalled Ezra Mannon to you!' And Orin, when he looks down on the murdered Brant, sees there both his father and himself, and his own fate. (1)

The resemblance is emphasised by the stylised attitudes in which O'Neill groups his characters. In I (III) for example, Brant unconsciously adopts a position similar to Ezra's in the portrait which hangs above. In the third act a triple resemblance is struck. Orin stands at the head of his father's bier and below Ezra's portrait. So his face compares both with that in the portrait and with 'the mask-like face...austere in death, like the carven face of a statue.' (2)

From O'Neill's bold and striking use of Expressionist effects, we now turn to his experiments with symbolism.

The titles of O'Neill's plays are in themselves almost always symbolic - Fog, Bound East For Cardiff, Desire under the Elms, The Fountain. That O'Neill took some pains with them is suggested in his notes for Mourning Becomes Electra:-

'Title - Mourning Becomes Electra - that is, in old sense of word - it befits - it becomes Electra to mourn - it is her fate - also in the usual sense (made ironic here) mourning,

(1)'This is like my dream, I've killed him over and over. He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide.' (II iv.)

(2) This particular attitude is strikingly reminiscent of a similar moment in Andreyev's The Black Maskers, when Francesca
(contd. above)

black, is becoming to her - it is the only colour that becomes her destiny.' Nomenclature also is frequently symbolic, as we have observed. Writing of the 'mystical pattern' in The Great God Brown O'Neill said:- 'I had hoped the names chosen for my people would give a strong hint of this.'⁽¹⁾

When we examine content we find that symbolism plays a slight part in the first plays, being confined generally to setting. Gradually it becomes more important, until, in a play such as Mourning Becomes Electra, the symbolism includes setting, sound, incident and imagery. O'Neill uses symbolism of the functional sort. He prefers to maintain a realistic action, heightened by symbolic implications, rather than indulge in action which is purely symbolic.

We will first consider setting, incident, music and sound, then imagery and imagistic symbolism.

O'Neill constantly uses the sea as a symbol. In the first plays, sea fog represents the helpless bewilderment in which his characters struggle. Fog, the first of these, is a piece of consistent symbolism. The principal characters, Poet and Business Man, engage in a conflict over their right to call for help at the risk of wrecking the ship, which is clearly a conflict between idealism and materialism.

Such abstract symbolism was not the right genre for O'Neill, however. In later plays he retains the symbol of fog,

(1) N.Y.E.P. February 13th., 1926.

but introduces it realistically into a realistic action.

'If this fog keeps up, I'm tellin' ye, we'll no be in Cardiff for a week or more', says Scotty in Bound East for Cardiff. Yank, who is never to reach Cardiff alive, imagines the fog to be penetrating the forecastle:-

'Everything looks misty'. This play, like the earlier Fog,⁽¹⁾ ends on a conventionally mystic note. 'A pretty lady dressed in black,' Yank gasps the moment before he dies. We shall see that the use of symbolism occasionally leads O'Neill to indulge in mysticism even in realistic plays. The combination here is stressed by the cry 'the fog's lifted',⁽²⁾ immediately after Yank has seen his 'pretty lady'.

To Anna, in Anna Christie, the fog represents escape from the life on land which had disillusioned her. 'It's so - funny and still', she explains to Chris, 'I feel as if I was - out of things altogether'. The sea is now coming to be connected with the feminine principle of maternity. It brings 'Pandemos, the Venus of the streets' back to Nature. 'It makes me feel clean out her - 's if I'd taken a bath,' Anna cries.

In Beyond the Horizon sea and land are both symbols, one of illusion, the mystery of the horizon, the other of practical compromise.

(1) In Fog the rescue party was guided to the shipwrecked people by the voice of a child who had been dead for 24 hours.

(2) The idea of the fog is emphasised by the mournful note of the fog horn, which sounds at intervals through the play.

As we have seen, O'Neill made here his first attempt to shape the play into a symbolic pattern. When defending himself against charges of clumsiness, he said: 'I imagine the symbolism I intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the programme'.⁽¹⁾

But the implication was not made sufficiently forceful.

In Welded the symbolism is again connected with mysticism. The stairway in Act I represents the passion which welds Michael and Eleanor together. The door represents their way of release to separate individualities. Cape leads Eleanor to the stairway; she is about to succumb when a knock sounds at the door, and, with 'a sort of gasp of relief' she hesitates between going toward the door and following him up the stairway. The hesitation is prolonged while he entreats her not to answer. She 'stops irresolutely like a hypnotised person torn by two conflicting suggestions.' In the end she opens the door. The importance given to this action, stressed by the recriminations which follow, indicates its symbolic quality.

In Act II, though it is not explicitly stated, the conversation between Darnton and Eleanor makes it clear that she can prove her emancipation only by climbing his staircase. 'You must do it alone', Darnton says. When her foot is on the bottom stair, Eleanor stops. 'I swear I saw him -

(1) Clark, p.91.

standing at the head of the stairs waiting for me.' She is unable to climb the stairs until she has reaffirmed her love for Michael: then the 'angel with a flaming sword' vanished. The symbolic nature of the stairway is even clearer here, although the dialogue is maintained realistically, as in the previous scene. The symbolism is indicated by the importance given to an otherwise commonplace action.

Finally in Act III, as Eleanor is about to leave Cape, she stops with her hand on the door knob. Then, knocking on the door, she listens for a moment and says 'in a queer, faraway voice', 'No. Never again. "Come out"'. Turning to Cape 'with a strange smile', she tells him, 'It opens inward.' This simple statement has evidently tremendous symbolic value, for it 'makes everything simple for them', 'serenely unquestionable'. On a note of exultant resolution the play ends.

This type of hazily symbolic incident is not common in O'Neill's plays. Welded was, of course, written under strong Strindbergian influence.

After this, O'Neill began to concentrate more on symbolic settings and silent groupings. The setting of Desire under the Elms is an example of symbolism which does not get far beyond stage directions. It is clear that the elms represent the implacable Fate which drives on the action. By their appearance they may convey a certain amount of O'Neill's intention. As they bend over the house, their trailing branches over the roof, they may well seem 'to protect and at the

the same time subdued.' But their full significance will scarcely be perceived by an audience:- 'there is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption... they develop from their intimate contact with ^{the} life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house, they are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on the roof.

In Marco Millions symbolic settings are brought more deliberately into the action. The Buddhist, Christian and Pagan in the Prologue are characters symbolising eternal and international commercialism, a role taken over later by the Polo brothers and the merchants they encounter on their journey. This commercialism is contrasted with three great Eastern civilisations, which O'Neill symbolises, very effectively, by silent characteristic groups. The grouping is the same in each scene; only the national character changes.

In the first scene a Mahometan ruler sits on a throne before a mosque. On his right stands a warrior, on his left a priest, and his wives crouch at his feet. The effect of the background is of gorgeous splendour. Forming a semi-circle with the throne are groups representing the ages of man - a mother nursing a baby, two children playing, a young couple embracing, a middle aged couple, an aged couple, a coffin. These figures remain silent and unresponsive throughout the scene.

In the second scene the locale is Indian: a Buddhist

temple replaces the mosque, a gigantic Buddha looms behind the ruler's throne. The centre of the piece is a snake charmer playing a gourd. The characteristics of the following scene are Mongolian. The great wall of China forms a background. A small idol made of felt and cloth replaces the Buddha, a Minstrel the Snake Charmer.

Not only are the settings symbolic, but the action in each scene follows the same symbolic pattern. Though Marco's attitude becomes more cynical each time, the same incidents occur in order. First he reacts to the local characteristics; then Maffeo and Nicolo read from a thirteenth century Baedeker. Rival merchants, whose nationality accords with the setting, enter in each scene and exchange anecdotes with the elder Polos, while Marco makes a circuit of the silent groups. The Prostitute follows, with her advances to Marco. Each scene ⁽¹⁾ ends with a religious exhortation from the rival merchants, followed by the Polo's practical comments.

The symbolism in these scenes, if obvious, is clear and dramatic. O'Neill gets some of his best effects with significant groups and attitudes. Act III scene I presents a satirically symbolic picture of materialism. When Marco's guests sit down at table they disappear behind piles of food. Only voices are heard coming from behind the piles, and then a clamour of knives and forks, which drowns all Marco's speech, except the one word 'Millions'.

(1) Act I, scene V continues the action concerning the Polos and Kublai Khan.

In The Great God Brown symbolic settings are again exploited.

In the Prologue, and in the scenes in the Anthony home, rail and benches are arranged to suggest a 'court room effect'. When Dion steps forward to soliloquise, while his parents discuss his career, his hand rests on the rail 'like a prisoner at the bar.' Throughout the play, painted backdrops distil the essence of the atmosphere in which the characters live. The Dion Anthonys', in their home, move against a backdrop of 'intolerable lifeless realistic detail': Brown, in his office, against a drop painted with 'over meticulous representation of detail'. When Dion nears death, that same backdrop becomes black; through the window are seen 'black houses across the way'.

In Cybel's parlour the backdrop represents her symbolic attributes, clearly implied in her name. When she is young, the background is 'a blurred impression of a fallow field in early spring.' Seven years later, Nature's maturity is implied in the brilliant wallpaper, on which 'crimson and purple flowers and fruits tumble over one another in a riotously profane lack of design'.

These settings were effective, lucid and not over-subtle. It was unfortunate that the action did not, as we have already seen, maintain an equal degree of clarity. The Great God Brown represents the nearest to absolute symbolism, like that of Strindberg in The Ghost Sonata, that O'Neill ever approached.

Where all semblance of realism was abandoned, in Lazarus Laughed, functional symbolism would have had no value, and in fact it was not used. Strange Interlude was concerned with statement rather than implication, but there is faint symbolism in the last act, when Marsden in his black mourning suit, standing in the autumn garden, hands a rose to Madeline with the comment, 'Hail, Love, we who have died, salute you'.

The symbolism in Dynamo does not keep to the background, but obtrudes itself into the realistic action. The lightning, (1) responsible for so much of the development of Act I, represents Light's 'Lord God of Righteous Vengeance'. Later, for Reuben, it comes to suggest his new god, Electricity. And of this the dynamo is the symbol. Though the action and dialogue make clear the obvious function of the dynamo, too much description of its significance goes into stage directions. This criticism applies to most of the Power house settings, reminding us of the similar error in Lazarus Laughed. The oil switches in the galleries are supposed to suggest 'Hindu idols tortured into scientific supplications', the dynamo itself a 'massive female idol', the exciter set 'like a head with blank oblong eyes above a gross rounded torso'.

Sound is cleverly exploited in Dynamo. In Act III, scene III the rushing water from the dam mingles with the

(1) cf. Strindberg's The Thunderstorm.

metallic purr of the dynamos: the blend of the two symbolises the god of Reuben's imagination - Electricity, whose heart-beats lie in the sea.

In such an unrealistic play as Dynamo, however, symbolism cannot have great value.

O'Neill's supreme and final achievement with true functional symbolism was in Mourning Becomes Electra. We have already observed the significance of the title, and the pattern of the play. ⁽¹⁾

The white Greek front of the Mannon house, symbolising a spurious love of beauty, contrasts with the grey stone walls of the house proper, representing the real Mannon characteristic, Puritanism. O'Neill stresses the contrast by employing a curtain on which the house, as seen from the street, is painted. The curtain reveals the grounds which surround the house, the orchards, greenhouse, drive, and so on. ⁽²⁾ This is one of the means by which O'Neill hoped to 'get more perspective'.

The symbolism in this play is all strictly functional. O'Neill stresses the fact that the Greek temple type of house is historically appropriate. He says, 'Choose Greek temple front type - rare in first half nineteenth century...not forced Greek similarity'. But though realistically acceptable, the white temple portico stuck on the grey house is equally ^a symbol of the conflict between Paganism and

(1) See II (c) (i)

(2) A similar curtain was used by Sean O'Casey for Within the Gates (1932) He admitted his debt to O'Neill in Foreword.

Puritanism which is the central theme. Stage directions point the contrast:- 'the temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its sombre grey ugliness'. (I.(i)). In the first scene Christine repeats the gist of this comment in dialogue. ⁽¹⁾ She connects the house with Puritanism and death: to her it is 'a tomb'. ⁽²⁾ In fact, the characteristics of the different Mannons are partly shown through their attitude to the house. Lavinia at first resents her mother's antagonism but in the last scene, when she has realised all it involves, she herself refers to it as 'a temple of Hate and Death'. The flowers and the shutters play an equally significant part. Open shutters and flowers symbolise Paganism: closed shutters and indifference to flowers Puritanism. Christine, to Seth's annoyance, is always picking flowers. She is first seen on her way to gather lilac; she says of the bunch with which she returns, 'I felt our tomb needed a little brightening'. During this act, while Christine and Brant are dominant, the shutters remain open. As soon as Ezra returns from the war, they close. Orin brings into dialogue the significance of this symbol. He asks, after the murder of Brant, (II(v)) 'Why are the shutters still closed? Father has gone. We ought to let in the moonlight.' In the last part, 'The Haunted'

(1) 'Pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan grey ugliness'.

(2) Orin, in II(ii) declares that the house is 'like a tomb'.

the shutters are at first closed, but in the final scene, when Lavinia is trying to shake off the Mannon curse, they stand wide open, with the sunlight streaming in. The change in Lavinia is emphasised by this means. Seth says of her, 'There she be, picking my flowers again. Like her Maw used to - on'y wuss. She's got every room in the house full of 'em already.'

And when Lavinia accepts her fate, giving up her struggle for natural life and love, the surrender can be shown with symbolic pungency. 'I'll have the shutters nailed close', she says, 'so no sunlight can ever get in.' As she walks grimly into the doomed house, the only sound heard is the closing of the shutters. Her last words are, 'And tell Hannah to throw out the flowers.'

Symbolic costume and attitude are used with equal force. Throughout the first two Parts Lavinia, still in the grip of the Mannon Puritanism, wears a plain black gown: Christine, the Pagan, wears green satin which emphasises the copper colour of her hair. In 'The Haunted', Lavinia's change of heart can then be shown by having her adopt her mother's green, which accentuates her physical similarity to the dead woman. Dramatic irony is strong when her fate leads her back to the symbolic mourning even while she is about to make her most uncontrolled bid for love and freedom. The Mannons have already recalimed her.

(1)

The 'ramrod' Mannon bearing serves the same function

(1) Sean O'Casey uses a very similar device in Within the Gates. Of his two Park Attendants, one has a stiff right leg, the other a stiff left leg.

as the mourning. It too symbolises Puritan repression. In Ezra a rigid, military attitude is unvarying. He stands in 'stiff-posed attitudes that suggest the statues of military heroes'. When Orin first appears, half Mannon and half Christine's son as he is, his bearing alternates between 'marked slouchiness' and self-conscious stiffness. Later, when he repudiates Christine, his bearing grows more mechanically wooden. In 'The Haunted' (Act I scene II) Lavinia cries out in vexation, 'Don't stand like a ramrod... and... carry yourself like a tin soldier'. She herself moves with square-shouldered stiffness in the days when she wears mourning; she puts on Christine's feline grace when she puts on her nature.

This is true functional symbolism, for, while suggesting the theme as we have seen, it is acceptable realistically. Stiff bearing is a military trait appropriate to the soldierly Mannons. Particularly is it appropriate to Ezra and Orin, who have just returned from the war.

The inevitability of the doom is expressed dramatically when the Mannon physical characteristics descend on the rebellious victims. In 'The Haunted' Act III, for example, Lavinia defies the family portraits, crying 'I'm mother's daughter, not one of you!' On those very words she squares her shoulders with the old military movement 'copied from her father', 'as if by the very act of disowning the Mannons she had returned to the fold.'

These portraits which, as we have seen, enforce the Mannon resemblance, symbolise the accumulation of family conscience pressing on its descendants. All the Mannons address them as though they were alive. ⁽¹⁾ When Orin becomes obsessed by remorse in 'The Haunted' he invests them with the attributes of the Eumenides. 'She isn't anywhere', he cries to Lavinia in the second scene of Act I. 'It's only they - ⁽²⁾ (Points to the portraits) They're everywhere!....' So O'Neill is able to achieve something of the Greek sense of Fate.

Symbolic music runs through the length of the trilogy. The refrain 'Shenandoah' is particularly well chosen: it is appropriate both to the realistic action, centring in Brant's relation to the sea, and the symbolic action, the desire for escape. O'Neill's notes contain the comment, 'Shenandoah - use this more - as a sort of theme song - its simple sad rhythm of hopeless sea longing particularly significant - even the stupid words have striking meaning in relation to tragic events in the play.'

The 'stupid words' are actually brought into the dialogue in the final scene. When Seth sings 'Oh Shenandoah, I can't get near you. Way-ay, I'm bound away', Lavinia says bitterly,

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- (1) I (ii) Lavinia addresses Ezra's portrait with a protective gesture - 'Poor Father'. Christine tells the portrait, 'You can thank Vinnie, Ezra!' And later, 'No! I've been afraid of you long enough, Ezra!'
- (2) In Act III he says, 'You'll find Lavinia Mannon harder to break than me. You'll have to haunt & hound her for a lifetime.'

'I'm not bound away, not now, Seth. I'm bound here - to the Mannon dead.'

In the first part each exterior scene is prefaced by Seth's voice singing Shenandoah. From Act I of 'The Hunted', also an exterior scene, the refrain is omitted: this is the occasion of Ezra's funeral. Instead it is sung in Act IV both by a distant voice drifting from a ship and by the drunken chantyman. The tune of 'Hanging Johnny' also sung by the latter, has a crude significance in relation to Brant's position at the time. ⁽¹⁾ 'Stop that damned dirge' he exclaims. In Act V Seth's voice takes up the refrain again, prefacing Christine's death, as that of the previous scene had prefaced Brant's.

In Act I of 'The Haunted' a snatch sung by the drunken chantyman is taken up by Silva, reminding us of the sinister occasion on which it was last heard. Again probability is maintained, since Silva is ^a fishing captain, a man of the sea.

The symbolism in Mourning Becomes Electra is dramatic, clear and evocative, but never unduly obtrusive. It represents the peak of O'Neill's achievements in this genre.

(1) They say I hanged my mother,
 Away - ay - i - oh!
 They say I hanged my mother,
 Oh, hang, boys, hang!

Imagery and Imagistic Symbolism.

When he began to feel the bonds of realism too tight, O'Neill turned among other things to the traditional convention of imagery. We have seen that in the sea plays he exploited the poetry of vital speech rhythms, Irish in particular. From prose, such as that of Yank in Bound East for Cardiff or Paddy in The Hairy Ape, he distilled a melancholy beauty. The Irish passages may be reminiscent of Synge:- 'Oh, the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them. Brave men they was, and bold men surely'.⁽¹⁾ But with American he achieved equally fine results:- 'Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me. Aw, hell! I can't see - it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong! Say youse up dere, Man in de Moon, yuh look so wise, gimme de answer, huh?'⁽²⁾

But though this type of poetic phrasing achieved effects appropriate to indirect presentation, O'Neill did not introduce the image proper until as late as Desire under the Elms. In this play, the image of 'gold' which had figured in the play of that name in a purely material connection,⁽³⁾ now appears prominently as a symbol of the easy ideal. In the first scene, Simeon recalls that his dead wife had hair

(1) Paddy in The Hairy Ape, scene I.

(2) Ibid. Scene VIII.

(3) Although the gold was essentially a symbol of the 'horizon'.

'yaller like gold.' This to Peter suggests - 'They's gold in the West'. 'In the sky?' asks Simeon. 'Gold in the sky - in the West - Golden Gate - California! - Golden West! - fields of gold!' In scene II Simeon describes Cabot's departure:- '...it was spring an' May an' sunset, an' gold in the West...' The sun always suggests the idea of gold. 'Gold's i' the East now,' says Simeon in Scene IV as the brothers gaze up at the morning sky. Cabot sees the image, which to them represents joy and freedom, in a different light. To him it is 'the sinful easy gold.' With the gold is contrasted the image of 'stones'. This represents the hard ideal. For Cabot, God lives in the stones. When Simeon and Eben depart, they express themselves in vivid metaphor - 'The halter's broke...the stone walls air crumblin' and tumblin'.' 'Here its stones atop o' stones...making stone walls for him to fence us in!' When Cabot finds land with 'nary a stone', God's voice says 'This hain't wuth nothin' t'me. Git ye back t'hum.' The soil in this land was 'black an' rich as gold.' This is a significant simile. It proves that the quality in common was symbolic rather than physical. In fact the whole contrast between 'stones' and 'gold' represents O'Neill's first use of imagistic symbolism.

Together with this theme runs a current of iterative imagery which keeps clearly in view the idea of Nature, the dominant force in the play. Cabot has 'snake's eyes', a 'mule's grin': he is 'damned like an old bare hickory tree'.

Eben describes Min in terms of natural phenomena, 'her eyes kin wink like a star...she smells like a wa'm ploughed field.' Expressing his feeling for Abbie he says, 'I'd as soon pet a skunk or kiss a snake.' When Abbie asks, 'Did ye believe I loved ye - afore he come?' he replies, 'Ay - eh - like a dumb ox! '

Because he is using crude, vital images, natural to people living so near the soil, O'Neill is eminently successful with the imagery in Desire under the Elms.

In later plays the imagery becomes at once more elaborate and more artificial. In fanciful romances such as Marco Millions the images are strained and they do not produce the same forceful effect. 'You have been a golden bird singing beside a black river,' Kublai tells Kukachin, and the Chorus, in the final scene, compares her with the traditional poetic images of Spring, flowers, birds - 'She was the song of songs, the perfume of perfumes, the perfect one!' At the same time occasional pungent metaphors occur. Marco is 'a shrewd and crafty greed'. Chu-Yin says 'Contentment is a warm sty for the eaters and sleepers! '

But there is not in Marco Millions the continuously significant imagery of the previous play.

The Great God Brown introduces a fresh image, the moon and the sea. This is again symbolic. The play begins and ends with moonlight. Brown's mother, in the Prologue, recalls nostalgically 'I once went moonlight bathing in June when

I was a girl...but the moonlight was so warm and beautiful in those days.' Margaret, in the Epilogue, repeats almost identical words. 'It was so warm and beautiful in those days.'

The moon and the sea symbolise the masculine and feminine elements. Margaret reflects, 'Dion is the moon and I'm the sea. I want to feel the moon kissing the sea.' When Margaret fails to recognise him without his mask, Dion cries: 'It's the moon - the crazy moon - the monkey in the moon - playing jokes on us!' And in the Epilogue 'the moon rests in the sea.'

Apart from this imagistic symbolism, The Great God Brown is studded with imagery of a sort similar to that in Marco Millions, though more forceful and evocative. The idea of the earth, represented in the flesh by Cybel, is suggested in dialogue also. Dion tells her 'your hand is a cool mud poultice on the sting of thought!' When Brown asks for her she says, 'Cybel's gone out to dig in the earth and pray.' And Brown himself is 'one of God's mud pies.'

Occasional images are frequently developed at length, somewhat artificially. Dion describes his relation to his mother in terms of a child and her doll - 'I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her.'

One of the final images in The Great God Brown was to be developed in the next play, Lazarus Laughed, in terms of symbolic sound. As Brown dies, he cries, 'Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of heaven sows earth with a rain

of tears, and out of 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!'

Already in The Great God Brown the imagery was becoming so verbose that it almost constituted an interruption rather than indirect presentation. In Lazarus Laughed it is still more so. The imagery in this play is not important, because it merely states in fanciful terms what is reiterated to exhaustion in dialogue, and embodied in the laughter.

In Strange Interlude and Dynamo, the characters express themselves so freely in thought that the need of imagery to imply the theme is no longer valid. When Marsden in Strange Interlude reflects to Nina, 'scent of her hair...like a dreamy tune', he does not leave it at that, but goes on to explain the association to himself, 'dreamy!...there's the rub'... all dreams with me!' Marsden and Nina are the only characters to think in images of a highly artificial and literary kind. Marsden's are more pungent, as becomes a writer. He visualises a harlot's eyes 'like patent leather buttons in a saucer of blue milk'. In the last scene he reflects: 'my life is cool green shade...my life gathers roses, coolly crimson, in sheltered gardens...'

Nina thinks in even more elaborate images, expressed through rhythmic prose. Her father's voice seems 'like a fatiguing dying tune...words arising from the tomb of a soul in puffs of ashes.' No continuous idea runs through her imagery: sometimes it is mere 'fine writing'. She describes

the apple trees to Darrell - 'like brides just tripping out of church with the bridggroom, Spring, by the arm.'

Dynamo is, as we have said, a visual projection of an image used by Nina. Again the characters are so verbose that imagery becomes merely a decoration. Most of it is directed toward the theme of electricity which is presented clearly enough in dialogue and pictorially. Reuben thinks of electricity in terms of the sea and of maternal qualities. The dynamo is a 'great, dark mother'. The stars drive in space 'like the electrons of an atom.' The gallery switches are 'like the arms of a devil fish.'

It was not till Mourning Becomes Electra that imagery became of real value again. For now the action was realistic, as in Desire under the Elms. The characters were less articulate, less conscious of their thoughts than in the immediately preceeding plays. The theme, the conflict of Puritanism and Paganism, was to be kept in the background. Consequently imagery served an important purpose in suggesting the theme. A chain of imagistic symbolism runs all the way through the play. The idea of Puritanism is represented by the image of 'statue'. Ezra tells Christine 'Something keeps me sitting numb in my own heart - like a statue of a dead man in a town square'.(I.iii.) When Orin looks down at his father's dead body he repeats almost the identical words, 'You were always like the statue of an eminent dead man - sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town

square - looking over the shoulder of life without a sign of recognition - cutting it dead for the impropriety of living.' (II.iii.) The emphasis on 'town square' suggests the Mannon social position, which is a controlling factor in their self-repression. They must always retain social prestige, and so they wear a mask.

Paganism is represented by the 'Blessed Isles'. Islands had already been connected with natural love and life in Diff'rent when Caleb attempted to explain to Emma, 'I wish you could see them islands, Emmer...then you might see...Everything is diff'rent down there...it's purty there all the time - and down there you notice it and you git feelin' - diff'rent. And them native women - they're diff'rent.'

The islands image is introduced with equal realism in Mourning Becomes Electra. Brant, the romantic clipper captain, has in his wandering come to look on the 'Blessed Isles' as the nearest thing to the 'Garden of Paradise'. The natives of these islands have learnt the secret of happiness, because 'they had never heard that love can be a sin.'

This idea of the pagan Islands is used to indicate the streak of paganism which each of the Mannons has in his nature. The image is introduced inobtrusively and naturally. Ezra has only a faint vision of 'some island' where he and Christine might be alone a while. 'I'm sick of death,' he says, 'I want life!' (II.iii.)

Christine longs passionately for the islands. Brant's ship

is the symbol of the way to them. 'We'll be happy - once we're safe on your Blessed Islands!' But her only hope of reaching them is through her lover: his death sends her back to the doomed house.

For Orin, too, joy of life is associated only with another human being, his mother. His 'island' is Christine. Dreaming of Islands read of in a book he says, 'I only felt you all around me, The breaking of the waves was your voice...The whole island was you'. (II.iii.) His jealousy of Brant is intensified by the island motif:- 'And my island I told her about - which was she and I - she wants to go there - with him!' His jealous passion for his mother is thus made clear. When the Mannon Puritanism reclaims him, after his mother's death, he explains his relapse in terms of the 'islands':- 'But they turned out to be Vinnie's islands, not mine. I guess I'm too much of a Mannon, after all, to turn into a pagan.' Only when he subdues his jealousy and acknowledges his mother's right to love, does he obtain his Island of Peace.'

The island symbol is most important to Lavinia. The struggle between her desire for freedom and her jealous hatred of Christine is emphasised in the first act by the conversation with Brant. At first, it is implied, she was interested in Brant's tales of the islands. But once she knows his relationship to the Mannon family and his intrigue with Christine, she rejects all his stories as 'cheap, romantic lies.'

Her changed attitude toward the islands in the last part symbolises the change in her whole philosophy of life. 'It made me forget death', she says to Peter (II.II.Sc.ii.), 'There was something there mysterious and beautiful - a good spirit - of love - coming out of the land and sea.'

Only Orin and Lavinia ever reach the islands, and Orin is by that time unable to appreciate them. Their voyage has its basis in the realistic plot, but its implications are clear. Lavinia's happiness, based on the secret of the islands, is short lived, and inevitably it is they that bring her to grief. For when she realises that the dead hand is inescapable, that she must accept her fate, she alienates Peter by lying to him about her relations with 'that native'. And so by the islands she perishes.

This imagery is extremely effective; never obtrusive, never out of place in the realistic action, but at the same time distilling the theme into the plot. O'Neill approached it with deliberation. 'Develop South Sea Island motive', he says in his notes, '- it's appeal for them all in various aspects - release, peace, security, beauty, freedom of conscience, sinlessness etc. - longing for the primitive - and mother symbol...make this Island theme recurrent motive.'

This was the last time O'Neill was to achieve such fine imagery. Days Without End is too didactic to have time for the poetic image. Occasional isolated instances figure. Death is a 'warm dark womb of nothingness'. The attempt to escape God is a 'rocky road, full of twists and blind alleys'.

The last phrase recalls The Great God Brown just as the final image of the play is evidently looking back to Lazarus Laughed:- 'Life laughs with God's love again. Life laughs with love.'

This study of indirect presentation has revealed that O'Neill is most successful with effects that reinforce the action but are confined to a subsidiary function. His best effects are generally achieved when the foreground action is realistic. He then limits himself to symbolism, imagery, and background Expressionistic effects which are the more forceful for being restrained. When his action is so unreal that he no longer needs to convey his theme through the more subtle aspects of symbolic setting, imagistic symbol and so on, he employs all the instruments of indirect presentation too lavishly, so destroying their force. The imagery in The Great God Brown is not as evocative as in Desire under the Elms or Mourning Becomes Electra. The symbolic setting and incident in Welded, because it is substituted for realistic action, is less satisfactory than the Expressionistic background of a play with strong foreground action, All God's Chillun Got Wings.

But on the whole O'Neill is highly successful with indirect presentation. It relieves him of the necessity to find 'powerful language', with which he has only intermittent success. It utilises his sense of dramatic movement, colour, lighting and grouping. It reveals him as a master of modern conventions, just as he can be, on occasion, of traditional.

SECTION II (d).

Relation between Form and Content.

'There is nothing predetermined about form. The end is all.'
(O'Neill. Quoted by Baker.)

In this statement O'Neill declares himself the true child of his age. We have already seen how Strindberg, Ibsen, Kaiser and countless other European dramatists had experimented in fashioning form to express themes for which traditional form proved inadequate. Such individual patterns resulted that by 1920 it was not possible to think of 'modern drama' as a single genre possessing one outstanding characteristic. If it had a salient characteristic, it was diversity.

O'Neill was heart and soul with the Europeans in his determination to bend form to his own purposes. The lengths to which this determination led him are surprising for one who had naturally so strong a sense of dramatic effect. In his later plays he was willing to sacrifice even that to his enthusiasm for expressing ideas and theories. Whether they were likely to be well received or understood in the form in which he presented them seemed scarcely to matter.

Like Strindberg, O'Neill at first sought the ideal form through naturalism and found it inadequate. Like Strindberg, he then turned to free forms in which symbolism and fantasy predominated. But unlike Strindberg, he returned voluntarily to a form which would in his earlier days have cramped him - a form in which he set up for himself the 'few grave laws' which were to give him his fullest freedom.

We have seen how successful O'Neill could be with simple forms such as those of Bound East for Cardiff and The Moon of the Caribbees. In these plays the theme was stated obliquely. He came closer to the 'art of the unexpressed' at this time than at any other.

But he could not maintain this simplicity at great length. Nor, even in his other one-act plays, was he able to attain it. For already there was growing in him an anxiety to express his theme with more emphasis. In this first period the dominating theme is the 'destructive illusion', man's struggle against the gods.

A theme of this nature, for a temperament as sceptical as O'Neill's then was, necessarily involved irony. He tended at first to use it in its lowest form, the irony which was dependent on coincidence. No doubt the example of melodrama, which relied on forced devices such as coincidence and misunderstanding, had been unconsciously assimilated by him. The effect shows in plays such as Ile, The Long Voyage Home, The Rope. Although O'Neill was in fact constructing the

incidents round a central theme of ironic reversal, he relied so heavily on the factor of coincidence that it appeared as though the incidents came first. Situation dominated, and the theme survived only in crude form.

The narrowness of the one-act form was partly responsible for this effect. In the longer plays he minimised the importance of coincidence by presenting both cause and effect. He was not yet sufficiently master of form to do this and at the same time maintain concentrated action. Plays such as Beyond the Horizon, Gold, and Diff'rent show plainly enough the beginnings and the end of the destructive illusion, but they have to defy all unities to do so. In these plays the irony is forced not so much in the situations but in the grouping of character, as we have observed. The thesis tendency in O'Neill is quite clear, even at this stage. He wants to show that 'Romantic imagination has ruined more lives than all the diseases', and he will forfeit a sense of inevitability to do so. Because of this he fails to prove the rider to his thesis, the idea that in man's self-destruction lies his glory. Tragedy cannot be achieved by way of 'The dirty trick.'

It is apparent that he did, if subconsciously, realise this failing. For he attempts to give extra dimension to the plays of this period by various devices, which do not quite come off. We find him explaining and defending his themes

(1)
 at this time. A glance at the programme, he complains, should have made clear the symbolism intended in the pattern of Beyond the Horizon. Anna Christie he defends against the charge of sentimentality which does so obviously apply. The ending is not an ending, he insists. 'Behind the curtain their lives go on! The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten.' (2)

In fact, he has to work very hard to persuade himself, and his critics, that situation has not over-ridden theme in these plays. For that is what has happened. Gold produces the effect of melodrama even though it treats of one of O'Neill's Titan heroes who are intended for tragedy. The component parts are too mechanical. Such a creaking structure is really beyond oiling.

It is a relief when he turns to the free forms which had already been adopted in Europe. In his first experiments O'Neill achieved a very satisfactory relation between theme and form, because he was still close enough to the old forms to have retained their basis of emotion and action. The Emperor Jones is a supreme example of harmonious

(1) In Diff'rent he had to explain that the theme was not merely the sordid tale of perversion which it appeared, but 'a tale of the eternal romantic idealist which is in all of us'. (N.Y.H.T. 13. 12. 1921.)

(2) Letter to G.J.Nathan. See p. 181.

relationship. Action is still dominant but it has been released from coincidental situation. Emotion is the driving force, but its manifestations are shown in less stereotyped form. A high degree of concentration is achieved in this play. The sprawling effect of the earlier ones has gone, even though at first glance the form seems looser.

Theoretically theme and form should agree completely in The Hairy Ape, where a symbolic theory is expressed through intellectual symbols. That the harmony seems less complete than in The Emperor Jones is due to the fact that O'Neill is working out of his range. The form is not maintained on the same level throughout. The realism of the scene in the I.W.W. office, contrasting as it does with the Impressionist presentation of stokehole and Fifth Avenue, reminds us that O'Neill is primarily an emotional dramatist. His insistence that 'Yank remains a man' and that 'presentation by abstractions does not work' indicates some confusion in his own mind about this new form he had adopted.

If there was an unhappy relationship between theme and form in the first plays, that in The First Man and Welded is extremely uneasy. Here O'Neill has ⁽¹⁾ abandoned 'situation' which had been his earlier bane, but he has not retained the emotional basis. Consequently the 'thesis' element, which had in plays like Gold and The Rope been obscured by melodramatic

(1) In the part of The First Man which treated a serious theme.

incident, now stood forth naked. And because it had not O'Neill's heart behind it, but only incompletely assimilated theories, it seemed even less realistic. In Welded the form is insufficiently resolved. The action is not strong enough to support the occasional mysticism.

This fault is rectified in the next plays, All God's Chillun Got Wings and Desire Under the Elms, where the relation between theme and form is seen at its best. The passion in which the action is conceived is sufficiently strong to support the mental projection⁽¹⁾ in the former and the mysticism⁽²⁾ in the latter. Desire Under the Elms, in particular, attains the exaltation of real tragedy because for a forced irony is substituted a more elevated conflict of character and circumstance.

After this the period of O'Neill's most unrestrained experiment with form begins. We now find exactly the reverse of the early relationship between theme and form. Whereas in Beyond the Horizon he had to point out that symbolism was intended, in The Great God Brown he had to explain that a human drama was intended, that the symbolism was in the background.

(1) The mental projection is achieved by the distorted setting which represents Ella's obsession.

(2) Mysticism is introduced in the motif of the dead mother's spirit.

A paradoxical state prevailed. The more freedom form was given the less it was able to convey without explanation from the dramatist. To the plays of this period, Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed and Dynamo belong the elaborate and lengthy stage directions, the explanatory programme notes, the letters to papers emphasising no longer the significance of situation but the significance of theme:

He had come into dangerous country, seeking the 'essence' of things instead of the things themselves, the 'Mystery - the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event - or accident - in any life on earth!' Themes which depend on essences tend to be non-dramatic. Certainly in Lazarus Laughed the theme was so vast and generalised that it refused dramatic interpretation. O'Neill now made no attempt to render it in terms of human lives, but in a form equally inchoate. If a theoretical harmony resulted, its effect was certainly not dramatic.

The forms of this period have an air of hysteria, of constant reiteration, of impossible demands in stage directions. 'Life is!' Kukachin insists in Marco Millions, and 'Death is!', the Chorus cries in Lazarus Laughed. Everything is, but nothing does.

The changed nature of his theme inevitably led O'Neill into this type of form. In Dynamo he attempted to make the religious theme dependent on the human drama, but the result was complete confusion. In this play the relationship between

theme and form was so strained that neither theme nor situation were fully realised.

Strange Interlude, though again a static form whose length placed great demands on concentration, ⁽¹⁾ achieved a more satisfactory relationship. For here O'Neill returned to a less rarefied ether. He abandoned the 'relation between man and God' for the 'relation between man and man.' The religious theory, of God the Father versus God the Mother, remains subordinate to the physical problems of the human protagonists.

The theme is, in fact, nearer to that of the first plays: man's stubborn search for a goal that an ironic Force denies him. Nina determines to be happy at all costs. 'Being happy', as Mrs. Evans affirms, 'that's the nearest we can ever come to knowing what's good.' In the last act Darrell tells her bitterly, 'I've heard that cry for happiness before, Nina.' It has, in fact, robbed them all of happiness. Coupled with this is the theme that interference in others' lives is a major crime. Nina's father, who interposed between her and Gordon, was responsible for the precipitating circumstances of the play. Darrell plays the part of a God in ordaining Nina's marriage, and is struck by his own thunderbolt.

The irony which is inevitably involved in such a theme brings O'Neill on to ground where he can achieve dramatic

(1) Its playing time is four hours. So O'Neill had achieved what he visualised in 1920, when writing to the New York Times.

reversals and contrasts. Consequently Strange Interlude is more forceful than most of the plays which had gone before. Lazarus Laughed had been quite lacking in irony because the motivation was on so vast a scale. But whether the form of Strange Interlude is perfectly fitted to the theme is another matter. A theme involving so much dramatic reversal and movement, is rather held up by the digressive form into which it is cast. The asides tend to blunt the effect of action which could very often have spoken for itself.

In Mourning Becomes Electra theme and form were more balanced than they had been since Desire Under the Elms. This play marks O'Neill's return to a much more disciplined structure. He imposed certain clear standards for himself. He was over two years in attaining the correct form, in comparison with the three weeks spent on The Hairy Ape.

Much more is left to implication in Mourning Becomes Electra - more than had been since The Moon of the Caribbees - but this time the implications are contained in the symbolism. We have already seen how the very shape of the play helped to convey the theme - the conflict between Puritan and Pagan. The Mannon house dominated the play. Its brooding appearance without, the brooding family portraits within, both enclosed in the Mannon mask, convey in themselves the idea of Fate which is reiterated by the Chorus.

Although O'Neill was portraying here a bitter stoicism in the face of an inescapable fate, rather than a conflict

which ennobles, he did come very close to tragedy. The force against which Lavinia and Orin strive is more acceptable than the mocking laughter of God the Father in Strange Interlude. This time the force is within the characters themselves and in their family past.

In the sentimental comedy of Ah, Wilderness!, the form was less rigidly disciplined, but since the theme too was less intense the relationship remained easy.

Days Without End represents O'Neill's most ambitious attempt to imply his theme through the actual pattern of his form. The way in which the inverted exposition reveals the cause, and anticipates the effect of the hero's inner conflict is a masterly arrangement. Concentration is intensified rather than weakened by disclosures of the determining past. In Strange Interlude the exposition had been less skilfully bound up with the developing action.

Here too O'Neill succeeds in superimposing the religious theme on an emotional basis. The 'thesis' element is still strong but because he has confined himself to so close a pattern it is not allowed to replace action, as it did in Lazarus Laughed.

In the restrained forms of Mourning Becomes Electra and Days Without End O'Neill disciplined himself to such an end that he had much more real freedom for concentrating on treatment. The result justified him.

It is clear that O'Neill's theory about form did not always

work for the best. Dramatists such as Chekhov and Strindberg who had decided that 'there is nothing predetermined about form' had, in seeking out new ones, struck out a line of their own to which most of their plays had conformed. They found a form which suited them and retained it. O'Neill had more trouble in finding his, and some of the transitional stages were less satisfactory even than traditional forms might have been. He wasted a good deal of energy on the search, and even at the end it seems doubtful whether he had found the form which suited him best. Days Without End cannot be regarded as the culmination of a consistent line of development. In its introduction of yet another device, the personified 'other self' it suggests perhaps the beginning of future developments, rather than the end of those which had gone before.

The search for new forms was, then, not altogether satisfactory, though it achieved occasional brilliant results. It was responsible for failures that might not otherwise have been, but it did in the end lead to an enriched form which expressed his theme more completely than traditional form had done. By these works is he justified.

* * *

SECTION III.

Placing of O'Neill as a Technician.

In assessing O'Neill's achievements, his experiments first demand attention.

He brought into American drama a freshness, a dissatisfaction with conventional forms, which, though it did not always work for his own good, was valuable in showing that form could be a more individual and expressive thing than it had hitherto been. He set up a higher ideal than had existed in American drama at any time. Even his failures stimulated because they failed by reason of their over-great ambition. He showed that it was possible to succeed by supreme simplicity as in The Moon of the Caribbees or by the ingenious Expressionism of The Emperor Jones or by a form approaching epic structure in Mourning Becomes Electra.

Secondly he exploited the potentialities of the medium so brilliantly that he achieved in the highest degree a marriage between 'drama' and the 'theatre'. His use of vision, mask, setting and sound to convey theme was true to the essential characteristics of drama. He may have been betrayed into occasional theatricality by his inherited tendency toward melodrama but he never used theatrical devices simply to create

theatrical effects.

He worked with line, colour, rhythm and music to create a form which was a synthesis of all these, and thereby to convey his theme more forcefully.

This aspect of his technique had a profound effect on American drama. Technicians such as Rice, his senior contemporary, who might claim to have anticipated his virtuosity⁽¹⁾ exerted less influence because their aim was so much more mechanical. J.H. Lawson's exploitation of the theatrical medium in Roger Bloomer (1923) and Processional (1925) owes much to O'Neill's example, and Paul Green was undoubtedly indebted to him. We have seen how his picture of the negro mind, in Abraham's Bosom, was conveyed through vision and distorted setting almost identical with that in The Emperor Jones. And, outside America, the Irish dramatist, Sean O'Casey, owes a greater debt to O'Neill, in the use of symbolic settings, attitudes, grouping and so on, than that which he specifically acknowledges, the curtain for Within the Gates. The whole treatment of this last play recalls Mourning Becomes Electra, just as the chorus, dancing and singing in Purple Dust, resembles the technique of Lazarus Laughed.

These are the more obvious connections. O'Casey's development was so like that of O'Neill that we suspect a connection immediately. He too progressed from a realism in Juno and the Paycock, very similar to the realism of

(1) As we have seen, The Adding Machine (1923) contained anticipations of some of O'Neill's methods.

The Moon of the Caribbees, to a highly symbolic form that relied heavily on theatrical resources to produce its effects. In the case of later American dramatists the resemblance to O'Neill is not so marked. Thornton Wilder's experiments with bare stages, mime, extension of action to the auditorium, play with conventions rather than exploit the medium in a new way for the purposes of theme.

The greatest thing that O'Neill did for the American Theatre was to present it with powerful themes, with ideas, with natural contours in a scene of geometrical angles. He introduced the theatre to life. His may have been a biased view, sometimes a morbid view even, but at least it was alive. And at times it was great. He achieved the finer passion which arose from concern with essentials. His themes were conceived intensely, and when he succeeded in expressing them through the intense, powerful action in which he excelled, he came nearer to real tragedy than any American dramatist has done since. Before him American drama had been timid. (1)

'I am a truer lover than that', O'Neill said once of life, 'I love it naked.'

O'Neill, with his intense New Englanders, his 'glorious self-destructive' struggles, broke entirely new ground for American drama. Indeed, his particular blend of religious questioning, theorising and elemental passion was distinctive

(1) Clark. p.132.

even in the European field. We have seen how his emphasis on emotion was foreign to the work of most of the European Expressionists. Only Wedekind anticipated that tremendous vitality which gave dimension to the sexual relationships between O'Neill's men and women. But Wedekind did not attribute to sex the spiritual significance with which O'Neill invested it.

Nor has any later American dramatist achieved that distinction. Certainly we find a change in the general tone of later themes. Even commonplace playwrights such as Owen Davies turned from the old ground, represented in his case by Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model to the new naturalism in a play appropriately named Icebound (1923).

In selection of theme, Wilder and Saroyan may have owed something to O'Neill's consistent portrayal of the soul of man. Only they express it differently, through simple, everyday action, symbolising the 'eternal verities'. Both dramatists, Wilder in particular, lack O'Neill's passion, and both are much addicted to a complacent justification of the ordinary man, the Great God Brown of O'Neill's imagination. The attitude toward the simple people of Our Town and The Time of Your Life is an attitude quite foreign to O'Neill, who would have considered them the 'untroubled', the 'characterless'. But in their respect for themes dealing with the simple, eternal things of life, their line of descent is obvious.

In comparison with so many later American dramatists another of O'Neill's achievements comes to mind, his progressive development. His experiments did not end in sterility but in greater richness. Elmer Rice on the other hand degenerated steadily, with only intermittent flashes of technical virtuosity. Even Clifford Odets, who, in a different way, came nearer than anyone to O'Neill's powerful themes, followed a downward course from his brilliant beginning with Waiting for Lefty (1935) and Awake and Sing (1935). Golden Boy (1937) was a much more commonplace form, constructed round stereotyped intrigue.

O'Neill's failures, as we have observed, are as striking as his achievements.

They are almost invariably due to his insistence on going out of his range, on refusing to recognise his own limitations, for example, that the debating style does not become him or that he is not at his best with mystic generalities, such as those which obscure The Great God Brown and deaden Lazarus Laughed. In his insistence on freedom to range where he will, he frequently adopts forms which are quite outside his range, such as the pseudo-historical romance of The Fountain or the stilted discussion of Welded. He will use symbolic 'types' instead of the passionate living people, the self-tortured men, the prostitutes, the possessive mothers who convey his symbolism much more completely.

Lack of restraint constantly betrays him. He will demand more of the medium than it can give and is so led, paradoxically, into the realms of closet drama. Lazarus Laughed, as we have seen, made brilliant use of some theatrical instruments but at the same time demanded so much of others that the whole was invalidated as a play of the 'theatre'. His excessive reliance on stage directions, significant silences and so on, contradicts his genius for making stage pictures convey his meaning for him.

He is guilty of too much reiteration and over-emphasis. Even when he adopts the mask in The Great God Brown he must encroach on its function by verbose repetition of the theme in dialogue. It takes an effort for him to restrain his tendency to preach, and to let his symbolism or Expressionistic setting speak for itself. When he does so, in the first part of All God's Chillun Got Wings, for example, we realise how much greater he would have been had he not fallen into the habit of protesting too much.

His failure to achieve great tragedy is in part due to his lack of 'great language', a lack intensified by his tendency to go out of his range. We have seen that with colloquial, vigorous speech, he achieved poetic effects, but when he was dealing with more civilised people, the melodramatic streak in his dialogue came to the fore. It was this lack of language that prompted most of his experiments, and yet, even then he had to reinforce his symbols by speech.

Most of the technique which outgoes his is, as one might have expected, the kind which relies on implication rather than statement. He could not have imitated the skill of his contemporary, Susan Glaspell who, practising the 'art of the unexpressed', presented in Bernice (1920) a study dealing with a character who never appeared. He was incapable of accepting Jean Jacque's Bernard's theory, 'La logique du théâtre n'admet pas les sentiments que la situation n'impose pas. Et si la situation les impose, il n'y a pas besoin de les exprimer.'⁽¹⁾ It would indeed have been better for him if he had practised more in accordance with the precept 'Un sentiment commenté perd de sa force.'

The delicate allusive technique of Chekhov, followed in America by Clifford Odets, was also beyond him. The apparent inconsequence of dialogue, the inconclusive endings of The Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard were quite foreign to his declamatory, reiterative style. Nor did he ever attempt the absolute symbolism practised by Strindberg. Dream plays, with their inconsequence and purposeful vagueness, are not within his scope.

We have now considered O'Neill's achievements and the reasons for his failures, the influence of his technique on later dramatists and the occasional technique which outgoes his.

(1) J.J. Bernard, Chimère (Paris May 1922) quoted in Avant-Propos to Théâtre (Paris 1925) p.1.

The impression that remains most permanently is of his strength. It is a strength springing with the ardour of the experimenter. When he exerts it to discipline experiment, to restrain form, to fashion a technique which combines both literature and the best of the theatre, it is then that he attains greatness. For the results he achieved at such times he will always be remembered. It is then that he represents modern drama at its best.

1913				A Wife for Life ^x
1914				Spread and Butler
1914				Survivance
1914				Abertick
1914		1914		The Web ^x (Gogham Press)
1914		1914		Recklessness ^x
1914		1914		Warnings ^x (Gogham Press)
1914	1917	*	* 1914 *	Fog ^x
1914	1915		1914	Thirst ^x
1915	1915			The Dear Doctor ^x
1915				The Personal Equation
1915	1917			The Sniper ^x
1915				A Knock at the Door ^x
1915				Bolshaxur
1914	1916		1916	Sound East for Cardiff ^x
				(Frank Gray)
	1916		1916	Before Breakfast ^x (")
1916				The Movie Man ^x
1916				Now I Ask You
1916				Atrocity ^x
1916				The G.A.E. ^x
1916	1917		1917	The Long Voyage Home ^x
				(Start Set N.Y.)
1917	1917		1918	He ^x (")
1917	1918		1918	The Moon of the Caribbees
				(Start Set N.Y.)
1918	1918		1918	Where the Cross is Made ^x
	1918		1918	The Rope ^x
1917	1917		1918	In the Zone ^x
1919				Will We Meet ^x
				Shell-Shock ^x
				Honor among the Bradleys
				The Trumpet ^x
	1918			Earls-Christopherson

x indicates One-act Plays.

LIST OF O'NEILL'S PLAYS.

Date of Writing.	Date of First Production.	Date of First Publication.	Title. (First published Boni and Liveright, N.Y., except where otherwise stated)
1912			A Wife for Life ^x
1914			Bread and Butter
1914			Servitude
1914			Abortion
1913		1914	The Web ^x (Gorham Press)
1914		1914	Recklessness " }
1914		1914	Warnings ^x (Gorham Press)
1914	1917	1914	Fog ^x (")
1914	1916	1914	Thirst ^x (")
1915	1915		The Dear Doctor ^x
1915			The Personal Equation
1915	1917		The Sniper ^x
1915			A Knock at the Door ^x
1915			Belshazzar
1914	1916	1916	Bound East for Cardiff ^x (Frank Shay)
"	1916	1916	Before Breakfast ^x (")
1916			The Movie Man ^x
1916			Now I ask You
1916			Atrocity ^x
1916			The G.A.M. ^x
1916	1917	1917	The Long Voyage Home ^x (Smart Set N.Y.)
1917	1917	1918	Ile ^x (")
1917	1918	1918	The Moon of the Caribbees ^x (Smart Set N.Y.)
1918	1918	1919	Where the Cross is Made ^x
"	1918	1919	The Rope ^x
1917	1917	1919	In the Zone ^x
1919			Till We Meet ^x
"			Shell-Shock ^x
"			Honor among the Bradleys ^x
"			The Trumpet ^x
"	1920		Chris Christopherson

x indicates One-act Plays.

Date of Writing.	Date of First Production.	Date of First Publication.	Title.
1919	1920		Exorcism ^x
1918	1919	1920	The Dreamy Kid ^x (T.A.M.)
1918	1920	1920	Beyond the Horizon.
1920	1920	1921	The Emperor Jones(T.A.M.)
1918	1921	1921	The Straw
1920	1920	1921	Diff'rent.
1920	1921	1921	Gold.
1920	1921	1922	Anna Christie
1921	1922	1922	The First Man
1921	1922	1922	The Hairy Ape.
1923	1924	1924	All God's Chillun Got Wings
1923	1924	1924	Welded
1924	1924		The Ancient Mariner
1924	1924	1924	Desire Under the Elms (Complete Works Vol. II)
1922	1925	1926	The Fountain
1925	1926	1926	The Great God Brown
1926	1928	1927	Lazarus Laughed
1924-5	1925	1927	Marco Millions
1927	1928	1928	Strange Interlude
1928	1929	1929	Dynamo
1929-31	1931	1932	Mourning Becomes Electra
1932	1933	1933	Ab! Wilderness!
1933	1934	1933	Days Without End
1939	1946	1946	The Iceman Cometh (Random House)
	1947		A Moon for the Mis- begotten.

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APPENDIX I.

Plays since Days Without End.

Of the 'Big Grand Opus' promised by O'Neill in 1933 only two plays have so far materialised. The first, The Iceman Cometh, was written in 1939, copyright, as an unpublished work, in 1940, by Random House, New York, copyright in 1946, and produced by the Theatre Guild, New York, on 9. 10. 1946. For the second, A Moon for the Misbegotten, no record of publication is held at the Embassy Library. It was banned in Detroit for obscene language in February, 1947. This may be the play to which The Manchester Guardian referred on 9th. January, 1947, when they reported the theft of an unpublished manuscript of O'Neill's.

The Iceman Cometh is not of the cycle of nine plays which O'Neill has been writing on the career of an American family. Harry Taylor, in New Theatre 1946, stated that two plays, thought to be part of that cycle, were to be produced within the following year. The fourth play in the cycle, he added, was to be entitled The Long Day's Voyage into Night. With O'Neill's permission, he prints

a quotation from the play, which indicates the central motif:-

The 'Protagonist' says:- 'It was a great mistake my being born a man, I would have been more successful as a seagull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not want and is not really wanted, who never can belong, who must always be a little in love with death.'

According to a statement made by O'Neill for the New York papers, this play is not yet to be published: it is to remain in a vault for twenty-five years.

The Iceman Cometh.

This is a play in four acts, requiring five hours' playing time. In genre it is closest to Strange Interlude. The characters engage in long speeches, sometimes addressed to each other other, sometimes, like Larry, 'more aloud to himself than to them'. Half way through Act I the pipe dreamers reflect aloud 'dreamily' over their 'tomorrows'. Jimmy in Act IV speaks in 'precise mechanical tones', looking straight ahead, then breaking down like a mechanical doll. Throughout the play Larry addresses the pipe dreamers at intervals, in 'a comically intense crazy whisper'. No distinction is made in print between conversation and soliloquy, and the soliloquies are not phrased in the 'stream of consciousness' manner of Strange Interlude. They are plain, clear statements.

The theme is treated with equal clarity, in fact with over-emphasis. It is a lecture on 'illusion' in four parts. Paddy's 'dope dream' in The Hairy Ape is now the 'pipe dream' by which all the disreputable parasites living in Harry Hope's 'Bedrock Bar' exist: Larry states the theme clearly at the beginning:- 'The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten lot of us, drunk or sober.'

Act I reveals, by rather stiff exposition, the nature of each pipe dream. The characters under discussion sleep in a drunken stupor, waking only to mutter over their illusions. Suspense in this act is maintained by the mystery centring in Parritt, and the preparation for Hickey's arrival.

Hickey is a second Gregers Werle. He has had 'guts to face myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that'd been making me miserable'. He tries to convert the others to 'the old dope of honesty' - instead of 'kidding themselves with a lie'.

The result is the same as in The Wild Duck. Acts II and III show the attempts to translate the ideal into action. Some, like Harry Hope and Jimmy Tomorrow, are too weak to realise their dreams of 'walking the ward' or of getting the job. Having had the comfort of anticipation removed, they become sullen, resentful. Some, like Rocky, the pimp, and the whores, Margie and Pearl, accept their true status instead of

clinging to the illusion that they are 'tarts' in the mere friendly relation with a bartender who has 'a reglar job'. They immediately become brutalised. Chuck and Cora realise the falsity of their illusion about marriage between a drunk and a whore, but - 'it was fun, kinda, me and Cora kiddin' ourselves'. There is a degeneration of character all round.

Hickey exhorts them to be happy exactly in the manner of Gregers Werle:- 'You've got the game of life licked, don' you see that?' But he himself, in this last act, has to confess how he rid himself of pipe dreams by killing his wife. The hints at this climax lent suspense to the earlier acts. Hickey's joke about his wife and the iceman was his own pipe dream. He told lewd jokes about her in an attempt to forget her oppressive goodness, which he had so often betrayed. Like John, in Days Without End, he is persuaded by his lower self into killing the woman whom he loves with his higher self.

In telling his story he comes to realise his obsession:- 'You know I must have been insane, don't you, Governor?' Hope returns to the pipe dreamers. They pretend to have recognised his insanity, to have 'kidded him along and humoured him'. Their illusions are restored. They can go on living as before.

Hickey is arrested and led away. His preaching has effected two things. Parritt, the young traitor to the

'Movement' had been trying to hide the real truth from Larry, his mother's old love, all through the play. At the end he confesses that he deliberately betrayed his mother out of hate. With his suicide the play ends, and with Larry's realisation that his own pipe dream, the 'waiting for the Big Sleep', has at last become reality.

There are no elaborate stage directions in this play. The setting is a double room bar set similar to that in Anna Christie and Ah, Wilderness! Except for occasional stylised attitudes, such as the group of 'wax figures, carrying out mechanically the motions of getting drunk' (Act IV), and the delivery of soliloquy already observed, the presentation is realistic.

The implications of the theme are conveyed by symbolism. The Iceman represents both the idea of the popular joke, cuckoldry, which is Hickey's pipe dream, and Death, to whom he gives his wife. Hickey's profession is symbolic. He is a salesman, and this time, as Hugo says, 'He vuz selling death to me, that crazy salesman.' The drunken sleeping, into which the characters relapse at different times, indicates the degree of their slavery to illusions. Hugo sleeps almost all the time.

There are many echoes of earlier characterisation in this play. Joe, the nigger, pathetically trying to be 'a white guy', recalls Jim in All God's Chillun Got Wings, Jimmy Tomorrow is a more elaborate version of Smitty in the

S.S.Glencairn plays. They are all 'has-beens', looking back nostalgically to a past which memory has transfigured into a lying dream. They remain disintegrated to the end. Only Parritt is strong enough to take action, and that is only the easy way of suicide, which Orin took in Mourning Becomes Electra.

The play is a retrogression from Days Without End, both in theme and in form, which has returned to the sprawling, digressive structure of Strange Interlude. The speeches are more didactic, particularly Larry's in Act I. The characters, though the coarse, animal types with which O'Neill excels, are merely walking exponents of the illusion theme. There is far too much reiteration of the theme. In fact, the whole structure is a disappointment after the complex economy of Days Without End. The return to the locale and general types of his early plays is the redeeming feature which gives vitality to the action.

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