

Expressionism in Eugene O'Neill

by

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Expressionism in Eugene O'Neill

I Development of Expressionism as a Dramatic Art

Since the dramatic instinct is one of man's most dominant characteristics, his interest in the development of dramatic art has lasted through all the ages of which we have written testimony. The production of plays, of any type, had, therefore, to reflect man's appraisal of given circumstances and his deductions thereof. In this way came the first division of plays; they were either tragedies or comedies according to the viewpoint of the author. If life were a sublime struggle, the plays were lofty in tone; if life were a ridiculous, amusing experience, the plays were crude, sometimes coarse, and often exaggerated beyond mere buffoonery.. In many case, tragedy was to provoke pity and comedy, laughter.

Because any artistic form, as a type, is soon exhausted, these primary divisions were subordinated again and again, particularly the tragic. The two great periods of the drama, the Greek and the Renaissance, give ample proof of this. Aeschylus (525-456)^{B.C.}, for example, gave a far greater intensity and a far profounder meaning to the term religion than any of his predecessors. His

themes were the sadness of human lot, the power and mysterious dealings of the gods, their terrible and inscrutable wrath and jealousy, and their certain vengeance upon sinners. Moreover, there is a recurrent note of fear in his view of man's destiny. His trilogy on Orestes is built around these themes. Sophocles (495-406)^{B.C.} is distinguished from other tragic poets by his greater concentration. His outstanding characteristic is the union of strict symmetry with freedom and variety. King Oedipus is his supreme height of dramatic concentration and tragic intensity. Euripides (480-406)^{B.C.} is virtually the founder of the romantic drama because his was a splendid effort to maintain the place of tragedy in the spiritual life of Athens by modifying its interests in the sense which his own generation required. Although in his work there is an obvious lack of harmony between matter and form, Alcestis marks the movement from the purely Hellenic drama to the romantic. The Elizabethans, in turn, minimized the ceremonies and symbolism of the purification of the soul, in preference to the natural man. They never once sought the saintly ascetic as possible dramatic material. According to Mark Harris,¹

"In Elizabethan drama the fatal conflict, in every instance, lies between the magnitude of the attempt, with

1 The Case for Tragedy P. 112

its audacity of means, and the curbing weaknesses and limitations of the flesh." Although Shakespeare represents the highest development of Renaissance individualism, in both Shakespeare and Marlowe there is the common interest in the personality of the individual; their great men were great sinners, and their normal virtues were greatly magnified.

With the accumulating complexities of civilization came the drama of the romanticist, drama pointing to and proving that emotion transcends the intellect. Opposition to this theory developed and with it, the realistic drama, fathered by Ibsen, contending that, on the stage, life should be portrayed as life is lived with all its sufferings, all its misunderstandings, and all its struggles. Strindberg, on the other hand, believed that drama could be carried beyond the representation of external fact; therefore his plays are created almost entirely out of the inner life. This was naturalism. Beyond Strindberg was Maeterlink, who represented symbolism, a stage of intensity beyond naturalism. Symbolism denied matter entirely in behalf of verity. Thus do we arrive at a further subdivision, expressionism, which is the personification and analysis of abstract elements in the life of man. only the protagonist exists.

II Nature and Theory of Expressionism

Expressionism as a definition in connection with art probably dates from 1901 when it was first applied to the paintings of Matisse. In the ensuing years, it was also used in connection with Picasso and Kandisky, but not until the years between 1910 and 1920 was there any dramatic significance given to the term. Even then, there was no particular classification made for it, and no critical literature appeared until after 1920.

This critical literature seems to be very meagre. Ernest Boyd, in his chapter Expressionism without Tears in Studies from Ten Literatures makes this statement: "In Germany there is, of course, an already voluminous literature of Expressionism, almost entirely untranslated and for the most part unintelligible. The art of concise self-expression does not appear to be a virtue of the theorists of Expressionism." In all the English and American documents examined in connection with this thesis, the term is very loosely referred to and in very few cases is there any attempt made to qualify and analyze the elements of this movement.

Expressionism is based upon the theory that the subjective and the objective are, or at least, are

comparable with poles. Now, since neither pole represents a complete entity in itself, the fulfilment of the powers of each is to be found halfway between the two. So in man. He consists of ego. The world to him is objective reality. This reality, brought to and translated by his ego, is, in the fullest sense, Expressionism. That being the case, ego and the world are one, and the universe exists only as a world of projected ego. The expressionist, then, must search within the chaos of his own ego for a true interpretation and significance of life.

The result of this examination of the inner self in many cases develops distortion which is perfectly natural. No psychic experience is completely translatable, for one may refer to and experience an object without reproducing it. Pfister¹ remarks: "The neurotically bound must put his own hating and loving, his own disruption or weakness into other people, even into the universe itself. This finds expression in the fact that he links on to any other persons he chooses, uncritically, the historical features of images which haunt him. Thus, the subjective artist, and to a certain degree every artist must be subjective, creates the world according to his own image."

1 Pfister, Oskar Expressionism in Art--Its Psychological and Biological Basis P.50

Because the expressionist wants to reproduce the intrinsic meaning of things, his creative effort must be aimed at the depths of life because these depths represent his own psychic complex, the incommensurable world which comprises the Inner Self. His intuition is the chief element in this search, for reality can only be comprehended through intuition. Reality, as reported through the senses, is incomplete until it becomes part of the inner experience, and it is in this translation that the intuition is called upon to function.

Nor is the expressionist desirous of escape from this world of reality, nor from man's relationship to life;--his aim is the sublimation of these factors in search for an essential reality in the universe which, being but a projection of the ego, must lie within himself. In this search, man is no longer a social unit; he is the essence of all that is human. Thus, he is no longer an individual but a type, representing all men, all humanity in his quest of essential reality and his objective experiences provide merely the stimulus for the inner self.

The expressionist is concerned with but one thing at a time, apart from all possible relations that may exist with other things, and in his desire to fix a pure,

absolute being, he appeals to logic rather than psychology. His is a cry for new spiritual concepts. Not for him are the institutionalized creeds, hampered by heavy, conventional bonds; his is the desire for the realization of God, and for the God in self. He believes man is ^{a vain} ~~a~~ ~~geni~~ in search of his own soul, and in revolt against the passivity which has made him a mere tool of his own work. Moreover, he needs must have a restatement of values in all our relationships in order that their essence provide him with something durable, something to satisfy the inner yearning for a truer spiritual significance to life. If experience were to remain only contact with realities, we should develop no more than habitual responses which would mean that life would become a mere maintenance of existence.

Because expressionism seeks to project inner experience rather than observed reality, there is a primitive quality about it; man is in an original state; he is not so much the savage as the thinker. If he is pursued and defeated by powers or forces, as in ancient, classical drama, interest is aroused, not so much in the pursuit and defeat as in his attempt to grasp the heart of reality from the manifestations of his complex being.

In this attempt to reduce chaos by snatching some one thing out of it, the typical plays an important part;

it carries in it the idea of the dynamic state of ru^oction. There is, for example, the struggle of man and woman—opposite sex poles. Within them is every element that is within every man and woman—hate, love, jealousy, envy and so forth. So too with the struggle of father and son, the old generation and the new, the intellectual and bourgeoisie, the liberal and the conservative; they are at once attracted to and repelled by each other, and the drama lies in the ru^oction, or vacillation between them.

Pfister claims that expressionism has floundered into introversion^o. Be that as it may, it is an art that borders on the pathological realm of dream and hallucination, and as such, may be traced in part to the individualism of Nietzsche; to the intuitive philosophy of Bergson; to the philosophy of the unconscious of Hartmann; and to the scientific studies of the unconscious by Freud.¹

1 Dahlström, Carl E. W. L., Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism p. 8

III Expressionism in O'Neill's Dramas

Much has been said and written about Eugene O'Neill in the last fourteen years. Many have been the critics who have acclaimed him, and just as many have damned him. But one fact is obvious--he is not a figure to be ignored. Of the twenty-six odd plays which he has written, most of them have been thoroughly analysed for dramatic technique, innovations, character portrayal, poetry, and philosophy. Whoever the critic he has, in every instance, found sufficient material with which to concern himself.

Since this thesis treats of the subject, expressionism, only the plays that show particular expressionistic qualities are included. They are as follows: The Emperor Jones, 1920; Anna Christie, 1921; The Hairy Ape, 1922; Desire Under the Elms, 1924; The Great God Brown, 1926; Lazarus Laughed, 1927; Strange Interlude, 1927; Dynamo, 1929; Mourning Becomes Electra, 1931.

The Emperor Jones

With the production of The Emperor Jones in 1920, O'Neill departed from the conventional dramatic form of so many acts divided into scenes to produce an episode of one act divided into eight scenes. The play is expressionistic (with the exception of Scene I) because the other scenes consist of the dramatization or the projection of the shadows of Brutus Jones' ego. What polarization there is is to be found in the struggle of the member of an inferior race not to succumb to weaknesses against which even a weak member of a superior race would be proof; for example, Smithers, the thieving, ferret-like Cockney, though surrounded with all the voodoo of the jungle remains unaffected, while it is inevitable that Jones, the ex-pullman porter, must die.

When Jones begins his flight through the jungle, he is armed with a revolver bearing five lead bullets and a sixth made of silver. He cannot be killed except with this bullet, according to him. "When de time comes I kills myself wid it. I tell's 'em dat's 'cause I'm de on'y man in de world big enuff to git me. No use'n deir tryin !" His confidence in himself is complete, but with the beating of the tom-toms, atavistic chords of memory are reawakened.

The action in the interval between Jones' depar-

ture from the palace and his death consists of reality which has become inner experience. The first incident is the introduction of the Little Formless Fears in Scene II. Jones addresses them: "What's dat? Who's dar? What is you? Git away from me befo' I shoots you up!" He fires his revolver and its sound partially quiets his nerves; but the incident marks the beginning of the growth of terror in which Jones relives all the evil he has ever done or experienced.

The next scene reenacts the murder, during a crap game, of Jeff, a pullman porter. The emperor, unable to believe that he had not previously killed him with a razor, shoots the second bullet to rid himself of this spectre. Scene IV continues the chronicle of evil with the episode of the chain gang in which Jones, incensed against the guard, raises his shovel to split the man's head open; but finding his hands empty, he cries despairingly: "Whar's my shovel? Gimme a shovel, one o' you, for God's sake! I kills you, you white debil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!" With that the third bullet is fired. The fourth and fifth are expended on an auctioneer and a planter whom Jones believes are selling him back into the bonds of slavery. This occurs in Scene V. In Scenes VI and VII the complete disintegration of the man who was the empe-

ror takes place. He is praying wildly to his god and at the same time, swaying back and forth to the rhythm of the tom-toms. The dominating, contemptuous ruler of bush-niggers has become one with them, shackled again by racial bonds which supplant the veneer of white civilization he had previously possessed.

To kill effectively the Brutus Jones who had exploited them, his former subjects moulded silver bullets from coins, and with them, the emperor, as Smithers says, "died in the 'eight o' style any'ow!"

Thus is the tragedy of Jones to be found within the man himself. Racial inability to overcome certain defects of character brought about his downfall. This is essentially expressionistic because it represents the dynamic action between primitive forces and civilization.

While the play is complete in itself, it is not to be numbered among the best of the O'Neill productions because it lacks harmony of theme. Great drama is the combination of themes and The Emperor Jones, because it has but one, cannot be classified among the major productions of the author. However, its very oneness, its reiteration of the single motive, makes it important as a minor production.

Anna Christie

This play was formerly presented as Chris or Chris Christopherson, but it was refused by Atlantic City au-

diences; rewritten, it combined the stories of Chris and his daughter, Anna. The story had its source in a character whom O'Neill met at Jimmy the Priest's in New York in 1911. "I had Chris Christopherson as a room-mate. He had sailed the sea until he was sick of the mention of it. But it was the only work he knew. At the time he was my room-mate he was out of work, wouldn't go to sea and spent the time guzzling whiskey and razzing the sea. In time he got a coal barge to captain. One Christmas Eve he got terribly drunk and tottered away about two o'clock in the morning for his barge. The next morning he was found frozen on a cake of ice between the piles and the deck. In trying to board the barge he stumbled on the plank and fell over."¹

Although this is one of the most popular of O'Neill's dramas, it has more technical flaws than most. The outstanding criticism to be made of it is true of many other plays of the author; he begins with one theme, in this case, old Chris, and is unable to follow it to a logical conclusion. In Anna Christie, this is obvious when, after the entrance of Anna, Chris and Marthy, who had dominated Act I, became minor characters; and Anna's romance and past career absorb the action of the next three acts.

1 Barrett Clark, Eugene O'Neill, Quoted from the New York Times, Dec. 21, 1927. P. 62

The plot is based on the regeneration of a prostitute whose life has been wrecked by the good intentions of her coal-barge man father, Chris. Feeling that the "ole devil sea" had been the cause of his misfortunes, he had sent Anna, when she was five years old, to the farm of relatives in Minnesota. There, according to her story, a cousin had betrayed her. She then went to St. Paul, and became a nurse girl. As she says to Marthy, "I didn't go wrong in one jump. Bein' a nurse girl was just what finished me. Takin' care of other people's kids, always listenin' to their bawling and crying, caged in, when you're only a kid yourself and want to get out and see things! At last I got the chance--to get into that house. And you bet your life I took it!"

The action of the play opens in Johnny the Priest's saloon in New York City with Chris telling, with great pride, the story of his Anna's safety and well-being on a farm away from the sea. Shortly after this conversation, Chris leaves the stage and Anna enters. The two women talk, Anna discovering her father is a coal-barge man instead of a janitor, and Marthy discovering that Anna's career as a nurse girl is only part of her story. Anna does not want to live on a coal barge, but there being no alternative, she goes aboard with Chris and the sea begins its influence on her life. In the moods of the sea she finds a peace which had never before been hers.

The arrival of the shipwrecked stoker, Mat Burke, brings romance, and from this point on, the action is concerned with the fury of human passions. Chris' crazed paternity would protect Anna from waterfront life and stokers as he knew them. The maniac passion of Burke would enshrine the Anna of the first meeting and damn to a thousand Irish hells the Anna who reveals her past in the memorable Act III. And Anna herself, like the proverbial ~~blissom~~, once she is away from her ~~maternal~~ past, loses most of her cynical hardness and softens in the sunlight of Mat's love and the enigmatic peace of the sea. So much for the plot.

The expressionistic qualities are few but obvious. There is contrapuntal dialogue, particularly between Mat and Anna; he speaks with colorful, Irish extravagance of God's truth, of his great first love, and of the powerful, primitive strength of himself; she, of her desire to have him believe that his love and the sea have wrought a complete change in her. Moreover, the characters, with the exception of Anna, are typified and universalized, not moulded into individuals acting under particular circumstances. Chris is a drunken sentimentalist, damning the sea which he loves. Mat is primitive man--extreme in his passions. Anna, according to Francis Hackett, is a hoax.¹ "Being what she was, she could not have pictorialized her-

1 New Republic, Nov. 30, 1920.

self as she did.¹ In addition to the contrapuntal dialogue and the typification of character there is some dream element in the personification of the sea. This is felt throughout, especially in Chris' too often reiterated "Ole devil sea." In this imprecation there is also some degree of distortion, for the bargeman refuses to admit that the sea has had anything but a malignant influence on his own life as well as that of his family.

While this play is neither tragedy nor comedy, although it has some of the qualities of both, it has such definite expressionistic elements that it cannot be overlooked as an example of the type of play which led up to The Great God Brown and Strange Interlude.

The Hairy Ape

Exclusive of the sociological problem involved, The Hairy Ape is expressionistic because Yank, once denied the assurance of objective reality, seeks within himself some explanation of why he is a hairy ape.

Like the Emperor Jones, this play is divided into eight scenes, and the motivation of the action is to be found in the end of Paddy's long speech in Scene I when

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1. There is considerable truth in this for the character of Anna is inconsistent. O'Neill presents her as a street-walker at first, and then has a great love purge her soul. The difficulty in accepting this lies in the fact that the soul purging is unnecessary, for the characterization of Anna is no more or less than that of a normal, good girl.

he cries out against Yank's assertion that being a stoker was a man's job, "Is it one wid this you'd be, Yank--- black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea, smudging the decks--the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking--wid divil a sight of sun or a breath of clean air--choking our lungs wid coal dust--breaking our backs and hearts in the hell of the stokehole--feeding the bloody furnace--feeding our lives along wid the coal, I'm thinking--caged in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the Zoo!" Yank's replies: "I'm at de bottom, get me! Dere ain't nothin' foither. I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de world moves! It--dat's me!--de new dat's moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh bear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel--steel-steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it!"

So, in the process of reducing the world to the terms of his own ego, Yank succeeds in convincing the crew of the stoke hole that they "belong" to a code that demands muscles and strength in its men. Nothing else matters since the universe, according to his picture, is purely force and ~~he~~ between the power of force and the result of it,

stands Yank, the maker.

Mildred Douglas, in Scene II is introduced merely to provide the counter picture to Yank in Scene I. She is the result of the wealth produced by her father's laborers, and instead of belonging to any particular class of society, she must investigate what makes the machinery of her wealth move. The officers of the ship, under protest, take her to the stokehole where the men, under the leadership of Yank, curse and work like slaves under the spell of a whip. The girl overcome with horror and loathing at the sight, whimpers, "Filthy beast" and faints.

Yank, in considering this apparition which he just thought was a ghost, retreats within himself, 'Tryin' to tink'. The problem does not make sense to him and his attempt at reflection is confused with Paddy's accusation that the incident was a case of love at first sight, and Lang's insistence that such 'hinsults' were not in the ships articles and that they had a case to take to law. But Yank's bewilderment dismisses these avenues of escape. He continues to ask, "Say, who is dat skoit, huh? What is she? What's she come from? Who made her? Who gave her de noive to look at me like dat? Dis ting's got my goat right. I don't get her. She's new to me. What does a skoit like her mean, huh? She don't belong, get me!"

In expressionism, if a man is pursued and defeated

by powers or forces, and the interest lies not so much in the pursuit and defeat as in his attempt to grasp the heart of reality from the manifestations of his complex being, the defeat of Yank in the next four scenes is clearly understandable. His world of steel and smoke, and strength and work is himself. With the coming of Mildred, who represents another world of values, he is forced to project himself beyond the bars of steel; and the struggle to find within himself some answer as to where both he and she belonged, brought him nothing but bewilderment. So, he goes to Fifth Avenue to seek a solution, but its bland indifference produces more confusion. When he tries to exert his great strength, his only certainty, he becomes entangled with the law and is sent to Blackwell's Island for thirty days. There, the enigma of the hairy ape becomes more perplexing; Yank finds his own steel made into a cage for him, exactly as if he were an animal in a zoo.

The reading of a newspaper article on the I.W.W. gives him his first opportunity to recover in some measure the assurance in himself which he had lost. It promised direct action, and through it, he could, perhaps, restore his shattered ego. But in the office of the I.W.W. he is once again baffled and thwarted for the secretary calls him a brainless ape and has him thrown out.

All the power, force, and import of the play is concentrated in Scene VIII, which takes place in the monkey house

of the zoo. Yank, unable to achieve any concept of the society to which Mildred belongs, attempts to go backward. O'Neill says of him, "He is a symbol of a man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way." Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the 'woist punches from bot' of 'em'. But even here, the ape refuses him recognition, and enraged at his intrusion, murders him with a hug that crushes his ribs. As the body slips in a heap, even the monkeys 'set up a chattering, whimpering wail.' And perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs."

On this note of uncertainty, the play closes. Whether Yank is a symbol of what civilization has neglected in its attempts at self-cultivation or whether he is merely a stoker remains with the reader or the audience of the play. Obviously, O'Neill believes him to be a symbol.

Technically, the play is developed along the same lines as The Emperor Jones; only the protagonist exists. However, in The Hairy Ape begins the (first) attempt to mask the characters to show inner states. While the masks themselves are not utilized, in Scene II when the crowd emerges from the church, it is, "A procession of gaudy marionettes with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein's in their detached, mechanical awareness." This would seem a foreshadowing of The Great God Brown, O'Neill's first play

in which masks are used throughout.

Desire Under the Elms

Ephraim Cabot, a New England farmer, believes in the principle, "God is hard." Therefore, the conclusion he draws from this principle is, "I am hard." He has just married his third wife, Abbie Putnam, a woman of about thirty-five who seeks possession of a home. In the Cabot house, under the elms, she finds Simeon and Peter, sons of Ephraim's first marriage, and Eben, son of the second. Eben, who believes his father has illegally kept the farm from him, hates the intrusion of a step-mother, Abbie, to insure ownership of the farm for herself, tells Ephraim she could still have a child by him. She then proceeds in her seduction of Eben; but instead of using him as she had planned, she falls in love with him. Their child is born which Ephraim thinks is his. When Eben in a fit of anger claims fatherhood, Ephraim retaliates with the information that Abbie had only been making sure of the property. Eben's rage will not permit him to listen to the girl's protestations of love. She, thinking that all would have been well if the child had never been born, kills it. Eben, horrified, tells the police who appear and take both Abbie, and Eben, the accomplice. That is the plot, in brief.

Almost every element in the play is expressionistic, the characters particularly. In Ephraim there is the type of ego which allies itself with God and which cannot under-

stand softness or kindness in human nature. His speech to Abbie contains the essence of the man: "I could o' been a rich man--but somethin' in me fit me an' fit me--the voice o' God sayin': 'This hain't wuth nothin' t' Ms. Git ye back t' hum!' I got afeard o' that voice an' I lit out back t' hum here, leavin' my claim an' crops t' whoever'd a mind t' take 'em. Ay-eh. I actooly give up what was rightful mine! God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones."

Abbie is the result of sex repression. She is crafty and animal-like until she finds she is at cross purposes with herself; then she becomes a tragic figure. The dialogue between her and Eben after the murder sounds a note of redemption.

Eben. Fergive me!

Abbie. (happily) Eben! (She kisses him and pulls his head over against her breast.

Eben. I love ye! Fergive me!

Abbie. (ecstatically) I'd fergive ye all the sins in hell fur sayin' that. (She kisses his head, pressing it to her with a fierce passion of possession.)

Essentially the son of Ephraim, Eben is of the earth. Ephraim's attitude, "God is hard, therefore I am hard," becomes in the son, "My father is hard, and my hate shall kill him." The boy, wretched because of denied mother love, lives in protracted and elemental fury against the power of his father. His love for Abbie was an emotion which developed from a mother-fixation and it found complete release

only when the opportunity came to do penance for his sins. Both he and Abbie, in their mutual acceptance of the punishment for their sin, found a light which was not of the granite and soil which had nurtured them.

These three, and Simeon and Peter, are distinctly primitive. They are motivated by elemental passions, and the struggle between Ephraim and Abbie, between Abbie and Eben, between Eben and Ephraim, is the struggle of polarized sex. Since each is a type rather than an individual, each represents a chaos of love or hate as it exists in all men and in all women. Therefore, the characters could as well be indicated by father, woman, and son, as by Ephraim, Abbie, and Eben. But such as the characterization is, it also presents material for dramatic criticism. Granted the expressionistic purpose behind them, they represent something more than human ego; they are perverted, arid, stunted in the process of healthy growth, and left with the most degrading of vices, incontinent lust. Their defeat is spiritual because they are themselves more or less wormeaten and therefore can achieve no oneness with themselves or with the world.

Since the expressionist desires to reshape reality until the art form emerges from the nature form, this reduction of the human soul into one dominating passion is clearly understood. Each must typify inner experience to the exclusion of everything else. That the inner experience, in this case should be confined to terms of desire is the interpretation

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of O'Neill of the quality that dominates most men.

Desire Under the Elms is considered the bleakest of all the O'Neill tragedies up to 1924, but tragic though the theme and outcome may be, nevertheless, there are too many technical flaws in its construction for it to be considered among the author's great plays. The tragedy is too persistent and the element of inevitability is almost too inevitable. Because O'Neill feels that hardness is man's heritage from nature, he must transfer this idea to the play and consider that the same hardness from nature is at one with man's loneliness with God. The whole play is intolerably tense because of its limitations. It is aimed at the destruction caused by the restraint of physical passion, and its tenseness develops from the limitations of the experiences of the characters involved. Also, there are too many conflicting motives within the play to allow any one of them normal development. These themes are frustrated mother love, stolen gold, paternal and filial jealousy and hate, desire for possession, and sexual passion.

Had O'Neill continued to write in the vein of Desire Under the Elms, serious consideration would have to be given to Pfister's contention, "Expressionism has floundered into introversion."¹ It would seem that the statement is true of Desire Under the Elms, but O'Neill himself has said, a propos² of his theme:

1 Pfister, Oskar, Expressionism in Art. P. 269
2 Philadelphia Public Ledger, Jan. 22, 1922.

"Sure I'll write about happiness if I can happen to meet up with that luxury, and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word. What does it mean? Exaltation--an intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming? Well, if it means that--and not ~~men~~ ^{man} smirking contentment with one's lot--I know there is more of it in one 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. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty considerations of every day existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy; all else is unhappy. . . . I don't love life because it's pretty. Prettiness is only clothes-deep. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness."

The Great God Brown

Probably no play produced on an American stage has ever aroused as much controversy as The Great God Brown. Besides the problem of masks, and it is essentially a tragedy of masks, there is the ever current question, What does it mean? O'Neill himself had to furnish an explanation, contrary to all laws of the stage. Following are excerpts:

1 Clark, Barrett, Eugene O'Neill P. 95

"When an open-faced avowal by the play itself of the abstract theme underlying it is made impossible by the very nature of the hidden theme, then perhaps it is justifiable for the author to confess the mystical pattern which manifests itself as an overtone in The Great God Brown, dimly behind and beyond the words and actions of the characters .

"I had hoped the names chosen for my people would give a strong hint of this. Dion Anthony--Dionysus and St. Anthony--the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony--the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion--creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive.

"Margaret is my image of the modern Christ descendant of the Marguerite of Faust--the eternal girl-woman.

"Cybel is an incarnation of Cybele, the Earth Mother doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws.

"Brown is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth--a success-building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless.

"Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the supersensi-

tive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as an artist. It is as Mephistopheles he falls stricken at Brown's feet after having condemned Brown to destruction by willing him his mask, but, this mask falling off as he dies, it is the Saint who kisses Brown's feet in abject contrition and pleads as a little boy to a big brother to tell him a prayer.

"Brown has always envied the creative life force in Dion--what he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively, while in reality he is only stealing that creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration.

"I meant it (this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man) always to be mystically within and behind them, giving them a significance beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend."

Here, with a vengeance, is Pfister's "subjective presentation accompanied by total or almost total extinction of nature to the point of unrecognizability or by suppression of all external reality."¹

In Dion's exchange with his Earth Mother, Cybel:

You're strong. You always give. You've given my weakness strength to live.

Cybel. You're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark--and you got afraid. (After a pause) I don't blame your being jealous of Mr. Brown sometimes. I'm jealous of

your wife, even though I know you do love her.

Dion. (slowly) I love Margaret. I don't know who my wife is.

Cybel. (after a pause--with a queer broken laugh) Oh, God, sometimes the truth hits me such a sock between the eyes I can see the stars!--and then I'm so damn sorry for the lot of you, every damn mother's son-of-a-gun of you, that I'd like to run out naked into the street and love the whole mob to death like I was bringing you all a brand of dope that'd make you forget everything that ever was fer good! But they wouldn't see me, any more than they see each other. And they keep right on moving along and dying without my help any way.

Dion. (sadly) You've given me strength to die.

Cybel. You may be important but your life's not. There's millions of it born every second. Life can cost too much even for a sucker to afford it--like everything else. And it's not sacred--only the you inside is. The rest is earth.

Thus the struggle of Dion, the genius, the devil, the saint. His wife by law, Margaret, is a mere fixture in the play, an instrument upon which the philistine Billy Brown must wreck himself because he has absorbed all that was Dion except his creative genius. Dion, knowing he is to encounter death (apparently there is no such thing as dying) goes to Brown's home for one last gesture of contempt for Brown's materialism.

Dion. (with a harsh laugh) O perfect Brown! Never mind! I'll make him look in my mirror yet--and drown in it! (He pours out another big drink)

Brown. (rather tauntingly) Go easy. I don't want your corpse on my hands.

Dion. But I do. (He drinks). Brown will still need me--

to reassure him he's alive! I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sang and wept! I've been life's lover! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be her creature; you've got to create her as she requests you to destroy yourself.

So Dion dies, and Brown accepts the mask of Dion, and Margaret and Cybel accept Brown as Dion in Dion's mask and when the Brown who has become Dion creates an architectural monstrosity which the critics acclaim as art, the Brown who has become Dion dies of the same self-torture that had killed Dion, and Brown who is no longer Dion goes home with Margaret who calls him Dion because at last, she has found a husband whom she can understand and love.

A completely expressionistic drama, therefore, is The Great God Brown. Its release of the egos, its contrapuntal dialogue, its dramatization of emotional rather than mental values, prove this. But whether it is a great expressionistic play is another matter entirely. The use of the masks confuses the issue, but it would seem that O'Neill, in experimenting with dramatic forms, chooses to represent dual and triple egos, exemplified in masks rather than to work with the straight dialogue that would obviously hamper such technique. Interest, therefore, is deflected from the play itself to the form of the play. However, despite the claims that it is "the most subtly beautiful work O'Neill has ever written" and that is "not a compla-

cent satire on Philistinism but a passionate attempt to expound the mystery of the artist's maladjustment and of that peppetual tendency of his to slide into the mud while aspiring toward the stars,"² as long as the artist does not succeed in his medium and has to explain what cannot be intuitively perceived, that his sufferings have universal significance, he has failed the first conception of art.

Lazarus Laughed

Lazarus Laughed, which is based on the verse in Psalm II: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh," may be included among the expressionistic dramas of O'Neill because it embodies the expressionistic idea that if one can see God face to face one is God.

In this play, as in the Biblical account, Lazarus has arisen from the dead. From the Beyond, he brings back the word, "There is no death. All death is man's invention. So laugh!" And the chorus answers:

"Laugh! Laugh!
Fear is no more!
There is no death!
There is only life!
There is only laughter!"

After the resurrection, the spirit of Lazarus at once frightens and emotionally arouses those who have come to witness the miracle. Tiberius Caesar summons him to Athens because he, too, desires to know about the world beyond. The journey of Lazarus and ^{Miriam} ~~Miriam~~ is one of constant repiti-

2. Young, Stark, Nation, February 10, 1926

fition of the miracle of Lazarus' power to make people believe, "There is only life." In Athens he is met by Gaius Caligula, the madman, who, with Pompeia, the passionate courtesan, eventually believes but not before Lazarus has been put to many tests. Miriam must die from poisoned fruit; Lazarus must bring her to life again; and Lazarus, because he has usurped the power of Tiberius, must burn at the stake. But neither Tiberius nor Caligula nor Pompeia is able to overcome the laughter at life, the laughter without violence, without mirth, contempt or ridicule, a laughter of pure joy and understanding--the laughter of God. Pompeia goes to the flames to join Lazarus; Tiberius "stands on the raised dais laughing great shouts of clear, fearless laughter"; Caligula kills Tiberius and is himself redeemed: "I laugh, Lazarus! No more! I will remember! I will! All the same, I killed him and I proved there is death! (Immediately overcome by remorse, groveling and beating himself) Fool! Madman! Forgive me, Lazarus! Men forget!"

Here, as in The Great God Brown, the device of the masks is put to use. The principals, Tiberius, Caligula, Miriam, and Pompeia use half-masks; Lazarus needs none because he is completely released from fear of death. In this as in The Great God Brown, the mask becomes the ego, which varies according to the emotion of the character depicted.

For the most part the masks of the chorus are hideous, grotesque, and horrifying.

Since the expense involved in producing this play is so great, there seems to have been only one major production which was given at the Pasadena Playhouse April 9, 1928. It was not acclaimed as the usual offering of Eugene O'Neill; it was hailed as an achievement of the ideal of opera without being an opera. For the songs which follow every inflection and every speech, one Arthur Alexander wrote some outstanding music which revealed, vivified, and intensified the mood and meaning of the play.

Although the play, as a closet drama, is chiefly important for its use of masks, it follows an interesting pattern of an emotion, laughter, through scene after scene of climactic crises, not by any change in its original simplicity, but by the ever-widening vistas of its meaning.

Strange Interlude

No other drama has ever told with such clarity the thoughts of people as they spoke and hoped and acted as Strange Interlude. O'Neill's characteristic intensity again burrows beneath the maze of the subconscious and seeks to give voice to the conflict of the inner life.

Through the efforts of her father, Nina Leeds has been denied love. Gordon Shaw, her fiance, has been killed in France, and Nina, seeking in some way to make restitution for what they have both lost, goes to a soldier's hospital

and gives herself to those whom she feels need her. In order to have a baby, she agrees to marry Sam Evans, a wholesome type who had idolized Gordon Shaw. Sam's mother warns her of insanity in the family. (An abortion is performed and Nina is again without an outlet for pent-up emotions. An affair develops between her and Dr. Edmund Darrell, and from a biological mating to produce a healthy child, a consuming passion arises. Sam, who has deteriorated from Nina's lack of interest, given the impetus of fatherhood, becomes a successful business man. Darrell, unable to stand the strain of his friendship for Sam and his love for Nina flees to Europe, leaving the Evanses to Charles Marsden, an ineffectual novelist who has loved Nina all his life. After a dissolute year abroad, Darrell returns to find Nina, Charlie, Sam, and the baby together. Nina utters the thought uppermost in the minds of all:

"Yes, you're here, Charlie--always! And you, Sam-- and Ned! Sit down, all of you! Make yourselves at home! You are my three men! This is your home with me! Sssh! I thought I heard the baby. You must all sit down and be very quiet. You must not wake our baby."

By all laws of dramatic technique, the play should have ended at this point in Act Six with Nina the proud and happy woman in possession of three men, Charlie, Sam, and Ned; with Sam, content with his success in business and in his affection for Nina and Ned; with Charlie, liberated by his mo-

ther's death; with Ned, in a measure restored at the sight of Nina and with courage enough not to disrupt the idyll. But because the bitter end has too many possibilities to be avoided, O'Neill must complete the clinical psychology of his characters. In Act Seven, eleven years later, Darrell again returns. The child has grown into a fine boy who has a curious antipathy for his "Uncle" Ned. For his father, Sam, he has an almost dog-like devotion; for old, ladylike Charlie, tolerance. Act Eight, again eleven years later, continues the cycle. The boy, Gordon, the hero of a race, has grown up in the tradition of athletic prowess foisted upon him by Sam and Nina. Nina is again the Nina of Act IV, "neurotic, passionately exhibited, and torn." Sam is still Sam, "logically developed by ten years of continued success," and Darrell has recaptured the detached scientific attitude he had before Nina absorbed his life. Sam, fanatically eager for Gordon to win the race, is disgusted with Nina's lack of interest; Nina is reliving the "might-have-beens" of the past; Darrell is studying Nina when she demands:

"You must tell him, Ned! For my sake! Because I love you! Because you remember our afternoons--our mad happiness! Because you love me!

Darrell. (beaten--dazedly) Yes--what must I do?--meddle again?.....No, Nina,--sorry--but I can't help you. I told you I'd never meddle again with human lives! Besides

I'm quite sure Gordon isn't my son, if the real deep core of the truth were known! I was only a body to you. Your first Gordon used to come back to life. I was never more to you than a substitute for your dead lover! Gordon is really Gordon's son! So you see I'd be telling Sam a lie if I boasted that I---And I'm a man of honor! I've proved that at least!"

But Nina must circumvent this Madeline who is to marry her son. She tries to tell the girl the insanity story which had been told to her, but Darrell interferes. Charlie, avid for some key to this enigma which has been eluding him all his life, listens, knowing finally what he has felt all the while. Meanwhile, Gordon has won his race, and Sam has collapsed on the deck and died, of high blood pressure, probably.

Act Nine completes the cycle. Darrell asks Nina to marry him because Gordon expected him to; she refuses him for Charlie because he will let her rot away in peace. Gordon flies off with Madeline and Nina and Marsden are left.

Nina. "Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God, the Father. (Resting her head on his shoulder) You're so restful, Charlie. I feel as if I were a girl again and you were my father and the Charlie of those days made into one. I wonder is our old garden the same? We'll pick flowers together in the aging afternoons of spring and summer, won't we? It will be a comfort to get home--to be old and to be home again at last--to be in love with peace together--to love each other's peace--to sleep with peace together--!--to die in peace! I'm so contentedly weary with life."

Here then is the perfect katharsis which is the aim of the expressionist--the world within the ego--the denial of objective reality for subjective, for Strange Interlude is written entirely between the lines; the external action is of small

matter. O'Neill puts the emphasis upon the woman, the introverted and unstable woman who has, nevertheless, an almost Circean power over her three men. Broadly speaking, Nina represents Woman; Sam is the boy who satisfies her maternal instincts; Darrell is the passionate lover; Charlie is the Father who is both selfish and sentimental. With all, the struggle is for possession--polarized sex--but Nina is the only one to emerge without loss, since, in a sense, her loss of Gordon Shaw was compensated with the lives of Charlie, Sam, and Ned.

As for the dual dialogue of the play, critics have waged war over it; some claim that it is a development of the aside and the soliloquy, but O'Neill himself furnishes the explanation: "As for Strange Interlude, that is an attempt at the new masked psychological drama without masks--a successful attempt, perhaps in so far as it concerns only surfaces and their immediate sub-surfaces, but not where, occasionally, it tries to probe deeper."

Dynamo

"Dynamo is a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American (and not only American) soul right now. It is really 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 for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with.

It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer.....The other two plays will be Without Ending of Days and It Cannot Be Mad.¹ Such is O'Neill's statement of the purpose of Dynamo.

The Reverend Hutchins Light, who believes himself to be the voice of God's will, and his wife, Amelia, a worldly, cynical woman, have brought up their son Reuben in a religion of fear and hatred. He is interested in Ada, the daughter of an atheistic neighbor, Ramsay Fife. The action of the play follows the subsequent physical and mental corruption of Reuben through the sex of Ada, through the heresies of her father, and through his own conviction that there is no God but Electricity. From the moment of his liberation from the tyranny of his father's God of fear and hatred in Act One, his religion becomes a religion of science. In Act Two, the adolescent Reuben has become a man, sure of himself and of his emancipation. Ada is useful for his physical needs; other than that, his life is absorbed in the dynamo which he serves. In Act Three, the dynamo has succeeded in eliminating everything from Reuben's life except his service as an acolyte. He attempts to explain to Mrs. Fife:

1. Boyd, Ernest, "Eugene O'Neill and Others", Bookman, April, 1929.

".....But there must be a center around which everything moves, musn't there? There is in everything else! And that center must be the Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity, and Dynamo is her Divine Image on earth! Her power houses are the new churches! She wants us to realize the secret dwells in her! She wants some one man to love her purely and when she finds him worthy she will love him and give him the secret of truth and he will become the new saviour who will bring happiness and peace to men! And I'm going to be that savior----."

Since the miracle is to happen that night, no one must enter to desecrate the temple. Ada appears, but the dynamo continues its measured purr and Reuben accepts her as a sign. Ada, from her love of Reuben, says she is willing to believe in the divinity of electricity, and Reuben, overcome by ecstasy and desire, takes her in his arms. The last scene completes the sacrifice. Reuben, horrified at his profanation of the altar, kills Ada, and is killed by the live wires which he grasps. The dynamo continues to hum in its mysterious, inscrutable fashion.

There are certain themes in Dynamo that reoccur in other plays, themes that have a powerful fascination for O'Neill. There is the problem of mother-fixation for Reuben. Eben, in Desire Under the Elms, was faced with the same thing. She alleviates the necessity of Reuben even as Eben finds comfort in Abbie Putnam. Too, there is the Earth Mother. In Dynamo she is Mrs. Fife; in The Great God

Brown she is Cybel; both are maternal creatures, physical beings who are not tortured with problems of living; they are content merely to live.

Dynamo can be included in the category of expressionistic plays because, like Lazarus Laughed, it is an attempt on the part of man to see God face to face. The purpose of the play is the purpose of the spirit, and it embodies the age-old cry of man to God for some recognition of him and his concerns that there be an understanding between them. But the conflict goes beyond the problem of religion and attempts some analysis of personality and science which results in an unintelligible theme that lacks validity. Man's destiny cannot be worked out according to psychological or scientific formulas; they are only pieces of the pattern of life.

Mourning Becomes Electra

"Once a House has suffered the shock of
a great god's wrath

The curse pursues its children even to
the very last." ----Aeschylus.

Such is the fate O'Neill visits upon the House of Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, a trilogy in three parts: Homecoming, The Hunted, The Haunted. Homecoming presents the characters of the play, each of whom is a type rather than an individual. While their faces are not masked, nevertheless, they portray the passions that absorb them to the exclusion of everything else. Christine Mannon's face gives the impression "of being not living flesh but a wonderfully life-like

pale mask." Ames, the curious townsman says of it, "Secret lookin'----'s if it was a mask she'd put on. That's the Mannon look. They all has it. They grow it on their wives." He might well have added, "their daughters, too," for Lavinia, the child of Christine and Ezra, also has the appearance of wearing a mask.

The action begins the spring of 1865. The Civil War is over and Ezra Mannon is expected home. Christine and Winnie, who hate each other with undisguised venom, compromise on the subject of Adam Brant, Christine's lover, who is also connected with the skeleton in the House of Mannon since he is the child of the Canuck nurse girl who had first been seduced then married by David Mannon. To save her father shame and to gain ascendancy over Christine, Lavinia agrees not to speak of the affair provided Christine agrees never to see Brant again. Ezra returns to be greeted passionately by Winnie and coolly by Christine. The carnage of war has penetrated even his armor. He would tear down the barriers that have always existed between him and Christine, but she, who cannot forget the horror of her marriage night and honeymoon, refuses to listen to him. At daybreak, Mannon is seized with a heart attack. Christine gives him medicine which she knows is poisonous and he dies gasping, "She's guilty--not medicine."

The Hunted follows the events of Homecoming. Orin, who is Christine's son even as Lavinia is Ezra's daughter, re-

turns from the war. Christine and Lavinia battle for supremacy in his affections. Lavinia, to prove that Adam Brant has been her mother's lover, forces Orin to go with her to Boston where Christine is to meet Brant on his boat to arrange their escape from the bondage of the Mannons. Christine has a presentiment that some evil is about to overtake them. No sooner is she gone than Adam steps out to the deck where Orin shoots and kills ^{him} ~~them~~. The next night, Christine, still haunted by her fears and afraid to be alone in the Mannon house, remains upon the veranda. Lavinia and Orin return and show her the Boston papers with the account of Brant's death. Christine enters the house, goes to the study and commits suicide.

Part Three of the trilogy, the Haunted, completes the horror of the Mannon saga. In the interval between the acts Lavinia has taken Orin on a trip to the South Sea Islands. She enters the scene an entirely different person. She has developed and acquired the beauty of her mother; she even affects her mother's costumes. Orin has grown a beard and is terribly emaciated, corpse-like, almost, which accentuates his likeness to his father. Lavinia protests love for Peter Niles, a neighbor to whom she had heretofore offered little encouragement. Orin has always loved Hazel, Peter's sister, because she represents a purity, an element almost unknown in the Mannon character. Orin, convinced there is a criminal strain in the family, begins to write its history. The pat-

tern works itself out. Lavinia is the epitome of all the worst traits in the family. To prevent her carrying the taint into another generation, he agrees to destroy the manuscript if she will agree not to marry Peter. Fear compels her to give assent. But Orin, who has begun to realize the tragedy of his mother's life with his father and her love for Adam Brant, wishes her forgiveness so he too goes to the study and again the shot of a revolver is heard. Lavinia still dreams of escape and wants Peter to marry her that very night, but he demurs; Orin has not yet been buried. Lavinia, hysterical, bereft of any reason, admits an affair with an islander while on the journey. Peter leaves, and Lavinia is left to enter the house alone.

Seth. "Don't go in there, Vinnie!"

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

So the door of the house closes behind her.

The expressionistic device of calling the world the projection of the ego and of sanctioning the element of distortion is as obvious in Mourning Becomes Electra as it is in The Great God Brown. Christina, crying out from the chaos within herself, says to Hazel:

"I was like you once—long ago—before—If I could only have stayed as I was then! Why can't all of us remain innocent and loving and trusting? But God won't leave us alone. He twists and wrings and tortures our lives with others' lives until—we poison each other to death!"

And Orin to the dead body of his father:

"Who are you? Another corpse! You and I have seen fields and hillsides sown with them—and they meant nothing!—nothing but a dirty joke life plays on life! Death sits so naturally on you! Death becomes the Mannon! You were always like a statue of an eminent dead man—sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town square—looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition—cutting it dead for the impropriety of living."

The characters themselves are more abstract than life;—the fact that each specializes in some emotion which becomes a mask for the face tends to give a tense, strained atmosphere to the play. No one of them is natural (with the exception of Hazel and Peter who are not Mannons), and nothing has the power to stir them except their own wills. The pola-

rization here differs somewhat from O'Neill's other plays. It includes not only the usual man and woman, mother and son, father and daughter sex struggles, but also the struggle with "the Hannon dead" who, like Caesar, are greater dead than alive.

Despite the fact that O'Neill has tortured his situation until it is abnormal, Mourning Becomes Electra is the most organic of any of his plays. The themes of hatred, incestuous love, and adamant justice resolve themselves into the theme of terror which is personified in Lavinia who must retire into her own soul in order to find sanctuary.

Henry ^{Sidel} ~~Sidell~~ Canby has said of Electra, "It is a notable play if not a great tragedy." His opinion seems to be justified because, the trilogy, although immensely absorbing, inspires horror rather than pity. One grants the tragedy of perverse love within a family, but one does not accept a complete tragic development based upon an abnormal instance.

IV. Conclusion

Since it is true that the directive forces of man are within himself, his art, therefore, cannot be studied as a unit apart from his whole life experience. That O'Neill's achievements are the result of his training and background cannot be doubted. Every play can be traced to a meeting, to an experience, or to a contact developed through his travels and environment.

The son of James O'Neill, the actor, and Ella Quinlan, a pious, beautiful, convent-bred girl, was born October 16, 1888, in the Barrett House, on Broadway at 43rd Street, New York City. The first seven years of his life were spent on theatrical tours with his father who was playing in Monte Cristo. The next six years he attended Catholic boarding schools and in 1902 entered Betts Academy at Stamford. After graduation he enrolled at Princeton and remained there one year. He then became secretary of a mail order house in New York, but the firm went out of business not long after.

In 1909 he married Kathleen Jenkins of New York. To this marriage, a son, Eugene, was born. The union lasted until 1912 when a divorce was granted. Early in the year 1910 he prospected for gold in Honduras and some of the material for his early plays was gathered there.

He later returned to the states and joined his father's company as associate manager. This ceased to interest him after three months so he embarked on his first sea voyage

which landed him in Buenos Aires "after sixty-five days on a Norwegian barque." He worked at various jobs there, but was either fired or walked out from each of them. Then his "days on the beach" began---days and nights of waterfront life, dives, liquor, and enough work to keep him supplied with money for his immediate needs.

His next sea trip took him to Durban, South Africa, but he returned to Buenos Aires, completely destitute until 1911 when he signed as ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer, bound for New York. There his life was a repetition of Buenos Aires except that his home was "Jimmy the Priest's", a notorious water front dive. He got another job as able seaman on the American liner 'New York' and made a voyage to Southampton, returning on the 'Philadelphia.' Shortly after this last voyage, he won a sum of money, gambling, and as a result of a party which he organized to celebrate his wealth, he found himself in New Orleans, broke. Although his father happened to be playing there in Monte Cristo, he offered no assistance and the alternatives were hitch hiking back to New York or joining the troupe. He chose the latter and for fifteen months toured the Far West.

Returning to New London, he became a reporter on the Telegraph, but in December, four months later, tuberculosis had made such inroads on his health that he became a patient in a sanitorium at Wallingford, Connecticut. The

rest improved his physical condition, and mentally, he was thinking things over, digesting the experiences of his wanderings. After five months in the sanatorium he was discharged and for the next year lived with an English family near Long Island Sound, reading, resting, exercising and writing. He had made up his mind to write plays and in fifteen or sixteen months' time, he wrote eleven one-act plays, two long ones, and some verse.

In the fall of 1914 he went to Harvard to study under Professor George P. Baker in the famous 47 playwriting class. This experience profited him little except for the encouragement and friendship of Professor Baker himself.

1915-16 found him in Greenwich Village where he spent his time with such congenial companions as he could find; but the summer of 1916 proved a turning point in his life. Bound East for Cardiff was produced at The Wharf Theater in Provincetown where he met the important figures in the new dramatic movement, "those who led the revolt against the worn-out traditions, the commercial theatre, the tawdry artificialities of the stage."¹

During the next four years, with the exception of one, O'Neill's plays were produced at the Playwright Theatre, on Macdougall Street, in New York, which had been taken over by the Provincetown Players after their summer season. George Jean Nathan and H.L. Mencken were the first to recognize his genius by publishing in The Smart Set three of his plays,

The Long Voyage Home, Ile, and The Moon of the Caribbees.

Since 1920, O'Neill has occupied the center of the American stage unchallenged. The Pulitzer Prize was awarded to him in 1920 for Beyond the Horizon; in 1922 for Anna Christie; and in 1928 for Strange Interlude. In addition he has received a medal from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for artistic achievement. Nevertheless, he is almost a legendary figure in the theatrical world, preferring retirement to the clamor of people and cities. Provincetown knew him as the lonely dweller on the sand dunes. After his divorce in 1929 from Agnes Boulton, he married Carlotta Monterey and with her, went to France to seek seclusion and privacy within an old chateau. Now they are living on an island off the coast of Georgia, in a house especially constructed to give O'Neill the atmosphere in which he prefers to work.

The technical innovations he has chosen to introduce in his plays have produced some rather startling results. The first of these was the mask. Says O'Neill, "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 which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us."

1. Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks," American Spectator, November, 1932

He advocates them especially for mobs, for masks, far better than faces, can give some indication of mob psychology. He also believes that more general use of them would improve acting for more attention would have to be given to the carriage and to the gestures of the body whereas now, animation is confined almost entirely to the face. But he does admit that masks require, in principals, great language to speak, and despite his original plans for Electra, he was forced to be content with "mask-like faces" since there is "realistic insistence in the New England mind, coupled with inarticulateness."

The introduction of the speech of the alter-ego in Strange Interlude in addition to the time it took to perform the nine acts, raised vital problems in relation to the future of the American drama that have not as yet been settled for no other playwright has had the temerity to ask an audience to come to a theatre at five o'clock and sit through half a play, to leave for an hour for supper, and to return to witness certain psychological phenomena under given conditions.

But the use of the alter-ego remains the most interesting experiment. In The Great God Brown the change was effected with the change of masks by the principals; in Strange Interlude it became a change of voice to a key that was slightly monotonous; in his latest play, Days Without End the character of John Loving is developed by two actors, one with and one without a mask. Both are present on the stage

2. Hardy's Dynasts and Shaw's Back to Methuselah, both extremely long plays, have not been produced in this country as yet.

throughout the play and each complements the conversation of the other.

It would seem that these asides (I know of no other term by which to call them) are merely an effort of the author's to create an effective departure from the ordinary surface semblances of living, for he feels that audiences go to the theatre to satiate their spiritual hunger and to participate more fully in imaginative interpretations of life.

There is no question of O'Neill's greatness, but it is a greatness that relies not in any controlling idea but in the fact that each of his plays is an experience of unusual, even extraordinary intensity. He is strong, unescapable, formidable; and if his world is rather dreadful, it is still his world, and he has peopled it with types that will not soon be forgotten. Yet, his greatness is not of the first rank. He has too many limitations. In spite of his power to create atmosphere, to generate a mood, his studies of humanity are not those of a humanitarian; they are more a conscious effort to diagnose the demoralizing forces within humanity. His is a morbid curiosity; his interest lies in the social rather than the personal problems of life.

Always he protests the inevitability of fate; yet, the protests are unimpassioned; they are cold, calculating, analytical. His strength, Colossus-like as it is, has no lea-

ven of sweetness, no respect for the essential god-like spirit of man. He has, apparently been deprived of complete vision in regard to the general nature of things. Having been caught in a maelstrom of elemental conflicts, he is submerged in them completely. He has dramatized all the powerful currents to which he has been a victim at one time or another; but even as no torrent is ever continuously a torrent, and no whirlpool is in its source and ultimate end a whirlpool, so must O'Neill eventually emerge with some clearer conception of the function of man and the universe.

Pfister argues, ¹ F.... Repelled from the external world through bitter experiences, the cognitive subject hides itself away in its own inner world and magnifies itself to the power of a world creator. The immense self-conceit of the expressionistic artist is not vanity but a psychologically well-founded experience, indeed a necessary means to escape the collapse of the lonely personality denuded of all reality. But this paranoian autism has to be paid for with bitter martyrdom." The expressionist's failure to produce a valuable art form is his failure to recognize that each art can only achieve perfection within given limits. Music is the perfect expressionistic art, but music can be comprehended through the senses. Expressionism in painting is possible because a painting can produce a definite impressionism of oneness; but in drama, where action, dialogue, and charac-

ter must be as definite as purpose, how can the dramatist succeed without producing the atmosphere of a psychological clinic? And that is precisely what O'Neill has done... His first period, in which he produced his memorable sea plays, is better than his second period of expressionistic drama because he worked with the things he knew intimately, rough men, rough talk, rough life. When his curiosity led him to retrace his steps into the realm of his own ego, he found himself challenged and vanquished by forces beyond his control. Like Dion Anthony in The Great God Brown, he has, one feels, "LOOKed into his own dark and is afraid."

Addenda

The case of Eugene O'Neill's life in relation to his dramatic output offers considerable room for speculation. The biographical material has, so far, been scanty. The outstanding facts are that he is the son of a beautiful, convent-bred girl, and a clever, fascinating actor-father. His boyhood was spent in the atmosphere of theatrical troupes. At an early age he went to sea and became a derelict, a beach comber. His first plays had to do with the sea, and seamen. Then he turned within himself to study certain psychological upheavals. He has been married three times and twice divorced. Outstanding characteristics of his plays are the recurrent theme of mother-fixation, religious groping, and sex inhibitions. His last two plays are significant in that In Wilderness attempts to portray some of the simplicity of his early home life, and Days without End to justify his return to the Catholic faith. Therefore, it is possible that his storm and stress period (which in Desire Under the Elms probed the Oedipus complex and sex; in The Great God Brown fulminated against the struggles of a creative artist in a materialistic world governed by his Earth-Mother Cybel, and his girl wife Margaret; in Lazarus Laughed strove for a practicable religion for mankind; in Strange Interlude endeavored to find harmony between man's need of woman and

woman herself; in Dynamo formulated a mechanistic religion; in Mourning Becomes Electra traces the tragedy of incestuous love) is the result of his Catholic upbringing and his subsequent return to the fold, his two disastrous marriages, and his very intensive, almost idolatrous love for his mother who was an alien figure in his father's world.

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