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Eugene O'Neill as a playwright

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EUGENE O'NEILL AS A PLAYWRIGHT
by
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INTRODUCTION

It is only natural that one whose chief hobby for many years has been theatre-going should be interested in Eugene O'Neill. No other American playwright has been so much discussed by the discriminating play-goer and critic alike.

When it becomes necessary for this writer to spend many hours in the preparation of a thesis, no subject presents itself as more worth the effort than Eugene O'Neill, because of the light that the study will throw on an understanding not only of his work but of the American theatre.

The writer wishes to discover Mr. O'Neill's intentions, and then to follow the development both in his aims and his skill in accomplishment.

Many people have questioned his sincerity and accused him of exhibitionism; personally, this writer has confidence in Mr. O'Neill's integrity and feels that whatever unusual devices he has employed spring from an ardent search after the best methods of revealing truth.

An examination of his life for influences and preparation, a search in such books as are available for the sources of his material, philosophy, and technique are important. Reading of numerous criticisms, and then a sifting of "pros" and "cons" give the writer a basis from which to trace growth of ideas and technique, with particular emphasis on the relative success with which special devices are used.
II

BIOGRAPHY
II

BIOGRAPHY

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born October 16, 1888 in the Barrett House, now the Hotel Cadillac, on Broadway at 43rd Street, New York. He is the son of James O'Neill and Ella Quinlan. His father was a talented actor, popular from coast to coast. His mother was a quiet woman, not an actress. According to George Jean Nathan, whose mother went to the same convent in Cleveland, she was strikingly beautiful and very pious. Eugene O'Neill claims she was a fine pianist, and that it was from his mother that he inherited his liking for good music. The father was a handsome man, a really imposing figure in the American theatre, and a finer actor than has been generally recognized, because of his long association with "The Count of Monte Cristo." This play was yearly such a tremendous financial success that he couldn't resist the temptation to continue with it. Perhaps we may be grateful to him, since the fortune accumulated thus has made it possible for Eugene O'Neill to be rather independent of pecuniary interests, and do the best work regardless of possible box office receipts. James O'Neill regretted later that he had thus limited his artistic achievement.

Barrett Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.15.
"Yet he played his hundreds of parts on the stage when to do so meant not to serve the metropolis alone but the length and breadth of the country."2

Booth once said that O'Neill could play Othello better than Booth himself, and at one time O'Neill alternated with him. Young Eugene O'Neill held the script while his father was perfecting his performance of Macbeth.

Eugene's early years were spent on the road since his mother accompanied his father always. What the influence of these two people was on the life of the child can at present only be surmised.

"From his father Eugene O'Neill has that Celtic strain in him from which has come a large share of the creative dramatic imagination of the English speaking stage in the last century."3

Ah Wilderness bears evidence that the father pictured there as compassionate if not wholly understanding must be the shadow of his own parent.

Eugene had a Scotch nurse who until he was seven regaled him with horrible tales, with "sordid episodes, from the latest murder to the farthest terror that her whimsy could contrive."4 She was neither unkind nor cruel, according to her charge.

He went first to a boarding school with Sisters of Charity, who were succeeded by Christian Brothers.

Apparently he was a child apart. Mrs. Elizabeth S.

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Thomas H. Dickinson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre

3 Ibid, p.57.
4 Clark Barrett, p.16.
Sergeant says:

"Lately I saw O'Neill reading the early volumes of Proust. They called up for him in halting reminiscence a supersensitive little boy of six, a slight, straight figure, with enormous brown eyes which reflect shy adoration. O'Neill has acute memories of the outbursts of hysterical loneliness that overtook him on every return to rigid exile. Gazing afar upon a stage where an heroic figure strutted, toward a lovely distant mother to whom he stretched his arms in vain, he conceived the world in which he was at the mercy of his affections as disastrous, and began to create, in fancy, a consoling substitute. No doubt we see an ideal shadow of this fantasy world in such plays as The Fountain, in the Chinese scenes in Marco Millions." 5

That picture is interesting to those who find in O'Neill something a little abnormal and overstrained. She is the only writer who makes the point and she affirms it is his remembrance.

Gene O'Neill had a beloved brother, Jim, ten years his senior. According to Miss Sergeant,

"Jim symbolized hard-boiled masculinity and stimulated his revolt against 'the old man.' Jim was an actor. He loved wine, women, and song; he was socially successful and had graces his brother tried to emulate. Jim taught his brother all he knew of worldliness." 6

After four years in Hotts Academy at Stamford, Eugene finally matriculated at Princeton, though by June he was suspended for "general hell-raising." He might have returned after a year, but he was through with college.

5  E. S. Sergeant, "New Republic", March 26, 1927, p.92.
6  Ibid., p.92.
For a little while, until it failed, he was Secretary of a mail-order house dealing in cheap jewelry. Meanwhile in 1909 he married Kathleen Jenkins of New York, and the following year a son was born. The marriage, characterized as "a mistake" ended by divorce in 1912. One dislikes writing such bare details when obviously this experience must have left its mark on the man; but no data is available and one is left with interesting possibilities to develop in his own imagination.

A gold prospecting trip in Honduras in 1909 was followed by the job of assistant manager of a company of "The White Sister" in which his father was touring with Viola Allen. This did not enlist his interest, and presently he took to the sea, probably as an avenue of escape, from "the successful stage of the paternal autocrat."7 This voyage of sixty-five days on a Norwegian barque took him to Buenos Aires. He worked first for the Westinghouse Company, then for Swift at La Plata, and finally for the Singer Company in Buenos Aires again. He either walked out or was discharged from all these jobs. He preferred wandering around the water-front, making friends with stevedores, sailors, and outcasts. He worked only when it was necessary, in order to pay for board, room, and liquor, and on occasion entertainment.

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7 E. S. Sergeant, "New Republic", March 26, 1927, p.92.
In the evenings he used to go to the Sailor's Opera, "a large cafe to which all seamen automatically went. There the seamen yarnd of adventures in strange seas, boasted of their exploits to pretty ladies, drank, played cards, fought and wallowed."

The motion pictures at Barracas, a suburb of Buenos Aires, said O'Neill as follows:

"The motion pictures at Barracas were mighty rough stuff. Nothing was left to the imagination. Every form of perversity was enacted, and of course, sailors flocked to them. But save for the usual exceptions, they were not vicious men. They were in the main honest, good-natured, unheroically courageous men trying to pass the time pleasantly."

Presently he was "tending mules on a cattle steamer, Buenos Aires to Durban, Africa, and return." There followed the lengthy period of complete destitution....

on the beach, terminated by his signing as ordinary seaman on a British tramp steamer bound home for New York.

He says:

"In New York, I lived at Jimmy the Priest's, a waterfront dive, with a backroom where you could sleep with your head on the table if you bought a schooner of beer. Jimmy the Priest's certainly was a hell-hole....It was awful. The house was almost coming down and the principal house wreckers were vermin. I was absolutely down, financially, those days, and you can get an idea of the kind of room I had when I tell you that the rent was three dollars a month. One room-mate of mine jumped out the window."  

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8 Harrett H. Clark, Quotations from O'Neill, p.19.
9 Ibid., p.21.
10 Ibid., p.21.
11 Ibid., p.24.
"Jimmy the Priest's" was the original for 'Johnny the Priest's' which is the saloon setting for the first act of Anna Christie.

O'Neill went on to say,

"Again I hung around the waterfront for a while. There, as at Buenos Aires, I picked up an occasional job. I shipped on the American liner, New York, as an able seaman. I made the voyage to Southampton... and came back on the Philadelphia."

Shortly thereafter, he was an unexpected winner at cards, and following the consequent gay party, he came to consciousness on a through train bound for New Orleans. Here his father was playing Monte Christo and Eugene was offered a part. When the elder O'Neill complained of his acting, he declared it was a "wonder that in such a show anyone could do anything at all and get away with it." Already he was reacting unfavorably to the hollowness of the romance and the sentimentality of such plays as Monte Christo.

At the close of the season, the O'Neill family returned to their summer home in New London.

There in August, O'Neill began work as a cub reporter. He did regular reporting and contributed verse to a "colyum" about twice a week for nearly six months. His friendship with his boss, Frederick P. Latimer, meant much to him.

This Judge has said:

13Ibid., p.24.
"As we used to talk together and argue our different philosophies, I thought he was the most stubborn and irreconcilable social rebel I had ever met. We appreciated each other's sympathies, but to each, in the moralities and religious thought and political notions, the other was 'all wet.'

"He was the cub reporter and the four things about him that impressed me at once were his modesty, his native gentlemanliness, his wonderful eyes and his literary style. From flashes in the quality of the stuff he gave the paper, and the poems and play-manuscripts, I was so struck that I told his father Eugene did not merely have talent, but a very high order of genius. My notion at the time was that he would eventually abandon the poetic medium and become a novelist.

"His health was precarious, so much so that he had to quit work and betake himself to the out-of-doors, where I was often with him, especially on the water. He's always been fond of that. He was at one time in love with a very sweet young lady quite opposed to his radical ways of looking at things, and they were in the throes of breaking apart. He was adrift in mind and spirit, and the body was threatened. I was sorry for him, and sorry again because a good many of his local acquaintances were of a mildly Bohemian sort.... There was something in Eugene at that time, an innate nobility which inspires and drives a man against whatever hindrance to be himself, however Heaven or Hell conspires to rob him of that birthright.

"Emphatically he was 'different.' I thought it astonishing how keen was his wit, what a complete iconoclast he was, how richly he sympathized with the victims of man-made distress, how his imagination was running high as the festering skies above Ye Ancient Mariner; his descriptions strong and his spirit hot to produce something worth while for the sake of its own value and in utter scorn of its commercial value or conventional fame.

"I wouldn't call Eugene a misanthrope by any means, even if he is certainly no Will Rogers. If
he could only be in one of two places in a town, the church or the jail—I know where I would find him!"14

These remarks of Judge Latimer are exceedingly illuminating in regard to the young O'Neill, provided they are not after thoughts, developed as the playwright himself grew.

In December 1912, his health broke. His life had been very irregular, and his nervous system, never too strong, had been seriously taxed by a great deal of hard drinking. He had a touch of tuberculosis and was ordered to Gaylord Farm at Wallingford, Connecticut. The Straw gives some indications of his feelings at that time.

The five months at Gaylord marked a turning-point in his life.

"It was at Gaylord that my mind got the chance to establish itself, to digest and evaluate the impressions of many past years in which one experience had crowded on another with never a second's reflection. At Gaylord I really thought about my life for the first time, about past and future. Undoubtedly, the inactivity forced upon me by the life at the san forced me to mental activity, especially as I had always been high-strung and nervous temperamentally."15

In the spring when his father's season opened, he went to live with the Rippins, an English family. Here he stayed for over a year, reading, resting, exercising and writing.

14 Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p. 28.
15 Ibid., p. 28.
The youth who entered Gaylord and the man who left it were two different things. The first was a wild boy who, according to Mr. Clark, "loved life in the raw, whose restlessness and curiosity drove him away from family and friends in search of strange countries and strange men." Somehow the explanation of those first years doesn't seem that simple. Certainly he had come to know something of men, and in the misfits and underworld, he evidently found what he needed, something consoling. Evidently from a child, he had felt a misfit in his own world.

From now on, he took tremendous care of his health and worked steadily with a vast amount of self-discipline. Swimming was his chief form of exercise. Every day during that winter he went in the Sound. Harry Kemp, an associate at Provincetown, is authority for his doing the Crawl as if born to it, often going out to the point. In his Eskimo kayah, he'd round the point in the roughest weather.

That winter during recuperation he read extensively. Miss Sergeant assures us that he read not once, but every summer in his father's house in New London, the fifty volumes of Dumas, the complete works of Victor Hugo, and Charles Lever, the Irish romancer. To the pleasure of James O'Neill, who used to harp on the glorious deeds of Shana, the Proud, and the other O'Neills, he was also an avid reader of Irish history. The romantic poetry of Scott he loved at a very
early age and was a fiend on Byron; reciting *Childe Harold* interminably. He absorbed Dickens and Kipling and somewhat later, Jack London and Conrad and conceived the idea of becoming himself a Conrad hero, a "super tramp." At eighteen, spurred by Benjamin Tucker, the famous philosophical anarchist, a thinker, who has greatly influenced his "inner self", he had read Nietzsche. O'Neill also brushed up his school German to understand Wedekind and his method.

During that winter at the Rippins, O'Neill says he read nearly all the time when he was not exercising or writing.

"I read about everything I could lay my hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans, practically all the classics, and of course, all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg."16

When he started to write, he was already familiar with the theatre. Upon quitting the sea, he had had experience with his father's company, and by using his father's name, he could obtain passes everywhere, which had familiarized him with recent drama. When he went to Professor Baker at Harvard the following year for further technical advice, he has this to say as to what he got out of the course:

"Not much out of the actual class-work itself. Necessarily, most of what Baker had to teach the beginners about the theatre as a physical medium was old stuff to me. I did get a great deal from Baker personally. He encouraged me,

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made me feel it was worth my while going ahead."

Professor Baker's own words, written in a letter to Mr. Clark (January, 1926) are worth quoting:

"When O'Neill was working with me, he showed me by the end of the year that he already knew how to write well in the one-act form, but he could not manage the longer forms. I was very eager that he should return for a second year of work in these longer forms, but did not know till later that, though equally eager, his means at the moment made this impossible. O'Neill when with me, worked steadily and with increasing effectiveness. He seemed absorbedly interested in what he was trying to do. Because of his wider experience of life, he seemed a good deal older than most men in the course, although not really so in years. He seemed a little aloof, though I never found him so personally. This, I think, came quite as much from a certain awe of him in his fellow students because of his wider experience, as from any holding apart by him. 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."17

Following the winter of 1915-16, spent with congenial spirits in Greenwich village, among radicals of the labor movement, and the true villagers, Negroes and Italians, O'Neill went to Provincetown, where he made the acquaintance of the group later organized as the Provincetown Players. Some of the names are well known: George Crane Cook, Susan Glaspell, Frank Shay, Frederick Burt, Mary Heaton Vorse, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Harry Kemp, E. J. Pallantine, Keith Boyce, and Hutchens Hapgood. Cook was the leader who suggested writing their own plays and putting them on, a whole community working together, developing unsuspecting

17Farrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.38
talents.

O'Neill has this to say of Cook:

"Always enthusiastic, vital, impatient with everything that smacked of falsity or compromise, he represented the spirit of revolt against the old worn-out traditions, the commercial theater, the tawdry artificialities of the stage. I owe a tremendous lot to the Players—they encouraged me to write, and produced all my early and many of my later plays."

Season after season he was allowed to use the theatre and the subscription audience quite as he wished for an experimental laboratory so that the opportunities thus presented made it possible for him to appear presently on Broadway with the kind of plays that he has written.

That first summer season Bound East for Cardiff and Thirst were both produced.

Even before his association with the Provincetown Players, Eugene O'Neill had published a thin book: Thirst, and Other One-Act Plays by Eugene G. O'Neill. The publication costs had been borne by his father. James O'Neill tried to prevent Eugene's having anything to do with the theatre; it is even said that he kept him penniless and practically a prisoner to bring him to terms. The son realized that his father couldn't see why he should write the kind of plays he did, since there was no market for them.

In 1916 Frank Shay published in his Provincetown Plays O'Neill's Before Breakfast and Bound East for Cardiff.

Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.43.
In 1917 and 1918 he reached a larger public through
THE SMART SET which published The Long Voyage Home, Ile,
and The Moon of the Caribbees. In April 1919, O'Neill
wrote,

"My debt of gratitude to both Nathan and
Hansken is great. From the first time they
read two of my sea plays, they have given me
many a boost in spirit by their fair criticism
and words of encouragement."19

It was later through the interest and enthusiasm
of Nathan that Beyond the Horizon and Gold were brought to
the attention of John D. Williams, and he was instrumental
in selling Anna Christie and The Fountain.

Since the production of Beyond the Horizon in 1920,
his place in the professional theatre has been assured.
The facts of his life from that time on are scant and not
particularly illuminating.

From 1923 to 1927 he was connected with Kenneth MacGowan
and Robert Edmond Jones in the management of the Greenwich
Village Theatre, and for a short time after the reorganiza-
tion of the Provincetown group, he was one of its associate
directors.

In 1918 he married Agnes Boulton. There are two
children. For two or three years he spent much of the
time at Brook Farm near Ridgefield, Connecticut. For some
summers he lived at Peaked Hill, a lonely made-over life-

19 Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.55.
saving station near Provincetown, but from 1925 to 1927, he lived most of the time in a house at Payet East, Bermuda.

He has been a tremendous worker, spending half of the day in writing and the other half in out-door physical exercise. Twenty odd plays of major importance on Broadway since Beyond the Horizon have been a result. Early in 1928 he went to Europe and then to the Far East. Several months later he took a chateau near Tours in France. While in Europe he was divorced, then married to Carlotta Monterey. They returned to America in the fall of 1931. Most of their time since has been spent in their new home on an island off the coast of Georgia.
III

SOURCES OF PLAYS
III

SOURCES OF HIS PLAYS

Material

Wherever he had sailed, there he found waiting for him the germ of a character, the plot of a play, a legend.\(^1\)

Everyone he came in contact with was swept into his mind. In an interview he said:

"Many of the characters in my plays were suggested to me by people in real life, especially the sea characters."\(^2\)

All his dramas are based to a certain extent upon actual happenings, or upon happenings in close relation to these.\(^3\)

Arthur Hopkins said the year he produced *The Hairy Ape* and after a peek into O'Neill's notebook, that he was convinced if "the playwright wrote steadily for the ten years next following, he would not be able to fill in all the plots or make use of half the ideas for plays and the development of plays of which he had made note."\(^4\)

These ideas either became insistent in their demand for expression or they lie quietly germinating in O'Neill's mind. A glance at the sources of his first two successful long plays will serve to illustrate the way he uses material.

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\(^4\) Ibid., p. 19.
He writes:

"I think the real life experience from which the idea of Beyond the Horizon sprang was this: On the British transatlantic steamer on which I made a voyage as ordinary seaman, Buenos Aires to New York, there was a Norwegian A.R., and we became quite good friends. The great sorrow and mistake of his life, he used to grumble, was that as a boy he had left the small paternal farm to run away to sea. He had been at sea twenty years, and had never gone home once in that time..... Yet he cursed the sea and the life it had led him--affectionately. He loved to hold forth on what a fool he had been to leave the farm. There was the life for you....at exactly the right moment.....he turned up in my memory. I thought, 'What if he had stayed on the farm, with his instincts? What would have happened? But I realized at once he never would have stayed!......It amused him to pretend he craved the farm. He was too harmonious a creature of the God of Things as They Are....And from that point I started to think of a more intellectual, civilized type from the standpoint of the above-mentioned God--a man who would have my Norwegian's unborn craving for the sea's unrest, only in him it would be conscious, too conscious, intellectually diluted into a vague, intangible wanderlust. His powers of resistance, both moral and physical, would also be correspondingly watered. He would throw away his instinctive dream and accept the thralldom of the farm for--why, for almost any nice little poetical craving--the romance of sex, say."5

This is the plot of the play. Robert Mayo, on the eve of fulfilling his dream of taking a long sea voyage with his uncle, believes he is in love with his brother's sweetheart. Ruth impulsively throws Andrew over and he takes the voyage instead of Robert who settles down to farm life and marriage, in neither of which is he successful. Ruth becomes convinced that she should have married Andrew, but when

he returns all are disillusioned. Ruth realizes she does not love Andrew. Robert finds his brother is not a romantic figure but an ordinary, unimaginative materialist, who has not profited by his opportunity. Robert is ill with tuberculosis and we watch both his mental and physical deterioration. Each character is obsessed with the futile desire for what he cannot have.

O'Neill has told the story of the origin of *The Emperor Jones* in an interview:

"The idea for 'The Emperor Jones' came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story current in Haiti concerning the late President Sam. This was the effect that Sam had said they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one.... This notion struck me, and I made a note of the story. About six months later I got the idea of the woods, but I couldn't see how it could be done on the stage, and I passed it up again. A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there; how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heartbeat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theater? The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras."

Rufus Jones, one-time Pullman porter, had murdered a couple of men, but contrived to escape. As the play opens, by dint of certain opportunistic philosophy, he has learned of American white man and his superficial civilized

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*New York World, November 19, 1924.*
training, he has risen in two years to be Emperor Jones over a native population. Finally they revolt since he bleeds them to death, and he starts to follow out his well-planned escape. He reaches the forest he must cross, as night comes on, only to find his hidden food has been stolen. He plunges into the forest, but the sound of the voodoo drums added to hunger and fatigue induce a state of panic, in the midst of which he reverts towards the primitive negro type. He becomes lost, goes around in a circle, and when he returns to his starting point, is an easy victim to the silver bullet he had claimed was the only thing that would kill him.

These two illustrations show how the elements of O'Neill's experience become combined and transformed into interesting and compelling stories.
2.

Sources of his Philosophy

Though the source of his material is largely his experience, the sources from which his philosophical ideas spring are not so clear.

Apparently Eugene O'Neill has always walked alone. While very young he suffered from this isolation and tried to avoid it by romantic adventure, modelled perhaps on his Conrad heroes. Quite unconsciously he was groping for a meaning in life; like Sénèque he was "seeking all that had edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand, all that heightens the emotions by contest, all that stings into life the sense of tragedy." 7

Yet his contact with the crude realities of life, even the pleasures of common men in their frightful vulgarity must have beaten heavily on his sensitive nerves. A knowledge of pain enveloped him and out of that pain and pity may have sprung a sense of beauty, which could see aspiration even in mangled and stunted souls. Perhaps the sea itself gave to his imagination a sense of the magnitude of life.

World wandering means not alone meeting with strangers; it means meeting with yourself. It means loneliness, the opportunity to test one's soul. Then following this ex-

7 Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.8.
perience at sea had come six months of sickness, face to face with death.

Up to this time this boy had sought a romantic escape from life that was commonplace, and traditions that were generally accepted about him. Even his dissipation was a negative revolt against the same thing. For a long while his writings were negative revolts too.

As a New England boy, he must have felt the influence of romantic ideals, Puritanism with its absolute standards of right and wrong, organized church with its contradiction of creed and practice. In spite of his criticism of these tendencies, he has never freed himself from the weaknesses which he fights so valiantly. His youthful experience had taught him the fallacy of romanticism, this attempt to escape life as it is.

"Critical thought in the modern world has been a relentless enemy of the romantic ideal." No single idea has made so deep and abiding an impression on the mind of O'Neill as that of the destructive power of the romantic ideal, or the power of illusion to lead men to deny the reality which lies about him at every hand, and in the strength of his denial to create a world of fantastic dreams as a substitute for reality. He saw this everywhere in the common life about him; he recognized the symptoms

S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p.3.
in himself. A glance at literature of modern times emphasizes the prominence of this theme of rebellion. From Hardy, Gorky, Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann and Anatole France to Anderson and Dreiser in this country, the voice of modern literature has been a voice of splendid and vitriolic defiance of conventional standards and dogmas. O'Neill belongs in the tradition.

Another phase of this spirit of protest finds its vent in an outspoken condemnation of the Puritan ideal. Puritanism, as it emphasizes the value of self-abnegation, is distasteful to him.

"Puritanism inhibits, forbids, denies; and inhibition and denial lead to fear, prejudice, and narrow hatred, thwarted personality, and a beggar's attitude at the door of life."  

O'Neill's admiration for Nietzsche has probably strengthened his belief that at present Puritanism is putting a blight upon our lives with its negative philosophy. Puritanism in its emphasis on the life hereafter has destroyed life here. Zarathustra said, "There are the terrible ones who carry about in themselves the beast of prey, and have no choice except lusts or self-laceration."

And further about those who carry the "beasts of prey":

"There are the spiritually consumptive ones: hardly are they born when they begin to die, and long for doctrines of lassitude and renunciation."

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9 S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p.44.
"They would fain be dead, and we should approve of their wish! Let us beware of awakening those dead ones, and of damming those living coffins!" (Zarathustra, Mod. Lib. ed. p.60.)

General Mannon expresses a similar thought in

Mourning Becomes Electra:

"The Mannonos went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. That white meeting-house. It stuck in my mind--clean-scrubbed and whitewashed--a temple of death! But in this war I've seen too many white walls scattered with blood that counted no more than dirty water. I've seen dead men scattered about, no more important than rubbish to be got rid of. That made the white meeting-house seem meaningless--making so much solemn fuss over death!"

Along with his criticism of Puritanism goes a criticism of the church which on Sunday preaches "One thing thou lackest: go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure: and come follow me;" a Sunday religion which on Monday is translated into the doctrine of rugged individualism, a doctrine which holds that profits made through buying cheap and selling dear is the severe end of salvation. This theme which is present more by implication than in fact in earlier plays grows to real tragic proportions in Mourning Becomes Electra.

Eugene O'Neill belongs in the liberal tradition of the last fifty years. Like Shaw, Ibsen, Strindberg, Gorky, Hauptmann (in his youth) and Andreyev, O'Neill is a rebel against the Puritan way of life; but also like the best
dramatists and thinkers of modern times his rebellion is 
made vital by the conception of a new life--vigorous, 
healthy and nobly self-sufficient. He sees the possibility 
of a new world in which men will recognize their human 
limitations, their partly animal nature, "abandon all 
yearning for supernatural attributes, and embrace the 
brief span of life on this earth as good in itself. With 
one gesture, they will throw away the curse of self-inflict-
ed pain, and affirm a new world of joy in all things human." 10

There is in O'Neill as in Nietzsche an almost savage 
will to power, a will to live life to its fullest with all 
its tragedy and sorrow. This is an affirmation of life 
even in the face of death. Character after character shows 
this defiance of an affirmative philosophy. From Robert in 
Beyond the Horizon through Dion in The Great God Brown to 
Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra, they are all rebels 
against the cruel tyranny of false ideals. The most joyous 
affirmer of life is Lazarus. His is a ravenous defence of 
life, it would seem. How far O'Neill's extensive knowledge 
of Greek drama has influenced him in this direction is not 
clear. He believes men must regain joy in living as an 
end in itself. This moment is life; this we have; what 
we have not is a figment of the imagination.

In O'Neill's plays the "good" is never a fixed quantity to which an action may be referred, measured and evaluated. The "good" is relative to each new situation.

"He holds that the conception of the good may be and is a guide to choice, but it is not a final goal or standard by which all actions may be judged. He goes even further in that he condemns a fixed standard as destructive of life, holding that in the last analysis it will lead to false pride, arrogant and cruel behavior, hypocrisy and a destructive fanaticism. ... O'Neill belongs in theory as well as in fact to the new world that was born in the days of the industrial revolution and this new world has through the development of experimental methods in the natural and the social sciences arrived at new concepts of what is good and what is evil, just as surely as it has arrived at a new conception of the heritage of man and the age and structure of the world in which he lives. O'Neill belongs in a critical tradition that began with Ibsen and Strindberg.... In contrast to Ibsen who often gives the impression that there is a right way of settling life's problems, O'Neill is inclined to skepticism. He is more clearly a product of the modern complex and as such sees the essence of life as a continual change, growth. ... O'Neill looks upon evolution as change, change which will bring new social orders and new ethical problems. ... All action leads to new complications and presumably to new solutions. ... A relative standard of ethics implies a kinship with determinism." 11

O'Neill emphasizes heredity and environment as the great forces which hold man in their grasp. Man may will, desire, have good intentions and noble aspirations, but if these forces that control his destiny are adverse, his dreams will come to nothing. Ibsen's Ghosts is a forerunner with which O'Neill was familiar.

3.

**Technique**

The "big subject" of man's relation to the apparently meaningless world that modern science has revealed has always been O'Neill's problem.\(^{12}\) His effort has been to transform into some "necce-giving beauty the crude and obvious fact that life is vivid and restless and exciting and terrible."\(^{13}\) O'Neill has been quoted as saying, "Most modern plays are concerned with 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."\(^{14}\)

In a letter quoted in the "Intimate Notebooks" by George Jean Nathan, O'Neill elaborated that idea:

"The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays and novels, or he is simply scribbling around the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer."\(^{15}\)

It is true that in all his plays there has been a theme and that in the development of that theme he used at first a selective realism to create the atmosphere of the desired mood. But even in the earliest plays there

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\(^{12}\) S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p.262.

\(^{13}\) D.W. Krutch, Nine Plays, Introduction, p.xvi.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p.xvii.

\(^{15}\) George Jean Nathan, Intimate Notebooks.
was a slight use of Symbolism, done with care and designed to extend the scope and meaning of the play beyond the limited boundary of straightforward realism. In the early plays he was careful to satisfy his audience by a suggestion of reality in combination with the symbolism. In Anna Christie, "dat ole devil, sea" helps to shape the course of the drama. Chris Christopherson speaks the final words:

"Fog, fog, fog, "I abloody time.
You can' t see where you was going,
No. Only dat ole devil, sea--she knows."

The use of fog to connote a confused state of mind is trite. O'Neill had used it before in Fog and in the Glencairn group. At least an audience always understands. But that the sea is an immensity standing for life itself is dimly grasped even by people who do not go into the theatre looking for symbolism. As a matter of fact, every good play is symbolism to some extent. The major persons in Anna Christie interpret universal points of view while they are speaking for themselves in the play.

By 1924 O'Neill expressed himself in no uncertain terms as to the limitations of such plays:

"Naturalism is too easy. It would be a perfect cinch to go on writing 'Anna Christie' all my life. I could always be sure of the rent then.... But I don't choose to write 'Anna Christies'...... because the naturalistic play doesn't interest me any more, never did interest me much."16

16 Louis Kantor, New York Times, May 11, 1924, Sec. 9, p. 5.
"It crams the expression of the truth. It crams the development of the theme—which is life."\textsuperscript{17}

"You can say nothing at all of our lives since 1914 through the naturalistic play. The naturalistic play is really less natural than a romantic or an expressionistic play. That is, showing a lot of human beings on a stage and letting them say the identical things in a theatre they would say in a drawing room or a saloon does not necessarily make for naturalness. It's what those men and women do not say that usually is most interesting.

"Then I don't think it is the aim of the dramatist to be 'true to life,' but to be true to himself, to his vision, which may be life treated as a fairy tale or as a dream. Conceive of life as a huge mass of clay and the dramatist scooping up some of it, creating certain forms with his imagination and art, and then calling on his fellows and saying to them, 'Here you are as godlike beings! It is difficult to do that through the naturalistic form.

"The dramatist does not present life, but interprets it within the limitations of his vision, else he's no better than a camera, plus a dictograph. The dramatist works just as Beethoven did, employing every sound in existence, molding tones, giving them color, new meaning, thus creating music. Well, when a dramatist interprets the world, and thus creates his own world, he uses the human soul, all life if you like, as a keyboard. He is the creator of this world and like all creators absolute boss. If he isn't a sound creative architect, his structure crumbles.

"What is the theatre for if not to show man's struggle, whether he is black, green, orange, or white, to conquer life; his effort to give it meaning. Doesn't that struggle, that endless effort to conquer life, show that man loves life? It may conquer him, else he would have stopped struggling 10,000 years ago."\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} H.I. Brock, \textit{New York Times Magazine} (Section), Jan. 15, 1928, pp. 9 and 21.
\textsuperscript{18} Louis Kantor, \textit{New York Times}, May 11, 1924, Sec. 9, p. 5.
The quotation is a long one; but when an author goes to such pains to explain what he thinks and attempts to do, he should gain an ear. His purpose becomes clearer to the person who reads all his published comments.

If O'Neill is to have a life beyond the entertainment of his audience of today, it will be partially due to the fact that he was as much concerned with "the universal problem of man and his universe" as he was about the dramatization of a particular situation.

Once the author's purpose becomes clear, it is easy to see why he should have sought everywhere for suggestions of various techniques that might express the struggles in which his characters become involved.

Now O'Neill never admired Ibsen to the extent he did Strindberg; yet Ibsen is a forerunner in the use of the very combination which O'Neill has used with increasing emphasis. His indebtedness to Strindberg he frankly acknowledges in a statement at the opening of the Provincetown Playhouse:

"Strindberg still remains among the most modern of the moderns, the greatest interpreter in the theatre of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama, the life-blood of our lives today....It is only by means of some form of super-naturalism that we may express to the theatre what we comprehend intuitively of that self-obsession which is the particular discount we moderns have to pay for the loan of life. The old

19 S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill.
'Naturalism' or 'realism' if you prefer, no longer applies......We have endured too much of the banality of surfaces.

"Strindberg knew and suffered from our struggle before many of us were born. He expresses it by intensifying the method of his time and by foreshadowing both in content and form the methods to come. All that is enduring in what we loosely call 'expressionism,' all that is artistically valid and sound theatre, can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg's 'The Dream Play,' 'There Are Crimes and Crimes,' 'The Spook Sonata,' etc."20

"Supernaturalism," "spiritual conflicts," "self-obsession"---these are terms that characterize most completely the best work of both dramatists. In the preface to The Dream Play Strindberg says frankly in explanation of his plot, "Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist." Here is a definite attempt to escape from the "banality of surfaces" which O'Neill condemns. These devices first used by Strindberg then taken up by Wedekind were later popularized by several young Germans under the name of Expressionism. An adequate definition for our purpose here was set down by Professor E.F. Hanch in The Drama, January 1, 1926, in an article entitled "Expressionism in Modern Germany":

"In the dramas of the expressionists elaborate characterization gives way to incarnation of the compelling demonic essence of the ego. States and processes of the mind and of the emotions, complexes of the ego, become corporeal and literally articulate. Facts, not merely incidental persons with incidental names,

talk in embodied form. Forces that war within
the ego assumes visible shape and the stage
becomes the progressively changing state of mind.

"To the expressionists belongs a large share
of the credit for having restored the word to its
rights in the drama; the word, not as a petrified
symbol, but as a living organism. The medium of
expression in literature is the word as in
sculpture it is stone or bronze. We see in the
expressionists a willed return to poetry, to exalt­
ed poetic dynamic use of language. Verisimilitude
in dialogue goes by the board, metrical poetry
alternates with poetic prose, explosive ejaculations
with long soliloquies; you may even find an aside
here and there."

Barrett Clark has checked very carefully on the
statement made by O'Neill that he wrote Jones long before
he had ever heard of Expressionism and The Hairy Ape is
a direct descendent of Jones. 21 There is no need to assume
that he copied the expressionists, any more than that they
copied each other. They just agree on certain purposes
and the technique naturally develops out of the thought.
Much of this dramatic technique seems to have grown out
of the ideas set in motion by Nietzsche, Freud, Jung,
and others who have influenced not only experts but the
popular thought as well. In any case, O'Neill isn't striv­
ing to be novel; he wishes to express his idea in the most
effective way possible. Like the Expressionists, he wishes
to get under the surface to reveal the soul.

21 Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays,
p. 125.
The fact that most of Strindberg's work preceded that of Freud is an added evidence of his genius. Today the terms "subconscious," "complex," inhibition," "suppressed desire" are commonplace words. We know the bearing that seemingly forgotten experiences may have on later conduct and all of us have heard the way in which dreams, hypnotic states, or strong emotional strain may reveal these submerged mental conditions. The strange muddled structure of The Dream Play, with its employment of the dream as a means of laying bare the inner desires and emotions of the characters, foreshadows strikingly such passages as the Fifth Avenue scene in The Hairy Ape, and the wedding scene in All God's Chillun Got Wings.

To him, mere fidelity to the surface of life was not enough. He realized that much of our strongest emotion is not articulate, and that surface action and speech conceals frequently powerful feeling. The Stronger illustrates the point. First and most obvious, there is the unreality of having Mlle. Y. remain silent under the intense emotion of the entire act; second, no married woman would in real life lay bare her heart with such lack of reserve to the woman who loves and is loved by her husband. What the dramatist is concerned with here is the realistic revelation of emotion. So long as he shows his characters as they actually feel, he is little con-
cerned with showing them as they would probably speak in real life. This method appears to be the outstanding characteristic of the "expressionism" of Eugene O'Neill. We would justify his technique in The Great God Brown and Strange Interlude by such argument.

His speech technique and ability to telescope long periods of action into the length of an evening's performance are other features he shares with the expressionists.

Since mention has been made of Freud and his contribution to modern thought, this point is as good as any to introduce remarks made by O'Neill in a letter on October 13, 1929:

"There is no conscious use of psychoanalytical material in any of my plays. All of them could easily be written by a dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life impulses that is as old as Greek drama. It is true that I am enough of a student of modern psychology to be fairly familiar with the Freudian implications inherent in the actions of my characters while I was portraying them; but this was always an afterthought and never consciously was I for a moment influenced to shape my material along the lines of psychological theory. It was my own personal experience with human life that guided me........ The 'unconscious' influence stuff strikes me as extremely suspicious! I would say that what has influenced my plays the most is my knowledge of the drama of all time--particularly the Greek tragedy--and not any books of psychology.

"I am familiar with Behavioristic theory, too, and if one were to go digging for it in my plays, I'm
sure a lot of conclusive examples of its influence could be detected particularly, I imagine, from those plays that were written before I'd ever heard of Behaviorism. I was writing plays a long time before I knew anything of psychoanalysis."22

This comment was written after the creation of Strange Interlude, but before Mourning Becomes Electra. The latter play accepts modern psychology as an explanation of the conduct of the characters; however, it does not require the knowledge of a student of the subject.

Though the asides, soliloquies and masks may be somewhat expressionistic, their use is very much older than our modern theatre. The masks were frequent in Japanese drama, and extensively used in the Greek drama. The soliloquy and asides were used by the Elizabethans, though not to the lengths seized upon by O'Neill. Since then there have been seasons when these devices have seemed useful; O'Neill has experimented with them in greater quantity.

It is perfectly possible to trace the devices which have helped to make O'Neill interesting to modern audiences back to other successful users; Mr. O'Neill is making no claim to originality in these respects. He is merely looking for the method best suited to the theme and material.

IV

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

OF HIS PLAYS
IV

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION OF HIS PLAYS

Eugene O'Neill's work resists classification. One might say that his earliest work was romantic, that with his starting longer plays like *Beyond the Horizon*, he turned realistic, then became increasingly symbolical with plays like *The Fountain* and *Lazarus Laughed*. Yet his very early sea plays had very realistic elements: the language often violent, the sordid details; and much symbolism was already present. Note the title of his first play ever to be produced: *Bound East for Cardiff*—another way of saying "Going West" which implies death. There are strong romantic elements in his realistic plays. In the first place, the play is always built on a theme. In *Beyond the Horizon* it was human futility as revealed in our tendency to desire those things which we cannot have. In *The Straw* again, human futility; two young people face to face with death have faith in love and life, yet both, as the symbolical title suggests, are "hopeless hopes." Beyond the obvious symbolism of the titles, there is the symbolism implied in *Beyond the Horizon* of a division of each act into two scenes, one set within the farm house and the other without. This division suggests a tide-like rhythm in the lives of the
characters, the urge toward what is beyond the horizon alternating with acceptance of the life at hand. In the symbolical plays, however, there is a faithfulness to life, but the reality toward which the author strives is spiritual more than material. The characters are men and women belonging to our own day. They speak as we do. Yet there is in them and about them a significance surpassing not only that of the ordinary individual but also that of ordinary poetical portrayals of such individuals. Lest we now feel ready to call him a symbolist, he has reverted in his most recent play, Ah Wilderness, to a purely realistic technique.

This paper is not concerned with the technique employed in his realistic plays, except as it is unusual and not strictly true to type.

Let us first examine the group of one-act sea plays, which because of their very simplicity would demand no unusual technique, and see if there are traces of peculiarities. The tales have the savor of the ocean and the crude vigor of sea-going men. The characters were his shipmates; the incidents were taken from the tense, raw, salty human things that happened on board tramps. All the plays of this group are placed on the

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1 Anna Foster Chapin, "Enter Eugene O'Neill," The Mentor, June 1921, p.35.
sea, or near the sea. At least four of them, Moon of the Caribbees, Bound East for Cardiff, The Long Voyage Home and In the Zone are placed on the same boat, SS. Glencairn. In the forecastle or on the deck there gathers "a motley group, the tag-ends of humanity swept up from the seven seas and the seven sea-faring nations." Though each may be played separately, there is a cumulative effect produced by all four, due to the fact that the same men, clearly differentiated, appear in each. They do not develop, but they are revealed more completely through four different views.

"Each play needs the other to make it as true to life and as effective, as drama or as a picture of the fo'c'stle."2

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V

ONE-ACT PLAYS
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ONE-ACT PLAYS

The one-act play is the simplest of dramatic forms. It deals with a tabloid situation, a single phase or aspect of action. There is no variation of space or time. As a rule, the action is compressed within a period between the rising and the falling of the curtain. During six years of intense labor, O'Neill did not succeed in breaking through the narrow limitations of the one-act form. Within it he achieved unquestionably superb effects. When the subject matter, the emotional approach and the medium of expression blend so completely as they do, for instance in The Long Voyage Home, the result is a dramatic form of tremendous intensity.

"The sharp, savage, ruthless demands of such brief plays suited brilliantly the crude and remorseless sea stuff he wrought into them. He was, in a sense, a vivid reporter at work on the stage, and these rigorous accounts brought him the fruits of careful and sensitive observation. They sufficed for the factual explorations he was making into the affairs of the world and as photographic exhibits in his evidence they were somber, powerful, and unmistakably individual. As a restless, querulous investigator O'Neill had to push his inquiry through the obvious barrier of simple events and into a wider and more responsible field of interpretation."3

1Thomas H. Dickinson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre, p.64.
2Ibid., p.64.
3Literary Review, April 10, 1926.
He wished to depict the dim, groping struggle of the submerged type, the underprivileged people he knew so well, "types of the inarticulate, inexpressive mass, that feel deeply and suffer, but cannot analyze for themselves or express to their environment, the emotions under whose lash they are driven." Sentiment of a rather obvious sort, and soft-heartedness, and piety and romance are in the make-up of such men as Smitty and Cockey and nearly all the other characters.

Through all these plays runs the general theme that society doesn't give these men a chance at much of a life.

Behind each is a more specific theme: Moon of the Caribbees, the yearning of rough, work-worn men for beauty and joy, distorted to drunkenness and bestiality; The Long Voyage Home, the dumb nostalgia of a simple sailor before the mast for the mountain farm where he was born; Bound East for Cardiff, the tongue-tied friendship between two bruisers of the forecastle that even death cannot loose into words; In the Zone, the deterioration in men that fear can cause—all done with simplicity and directness.

"The same balance, the absorption, and blending of all factors in the theme, the rigorous independence of artistry that mark the later

5 Ibid., p. 2.
O'Neill are found here."

One of the problems of any dramatist is the seizing of the attention of an audience at the use of the curtain, since that audience is only partially attentive because of late arrivals and conversations interrupted. From the outset, O'Neill has been skillful.

He has realized the importance of setting to catch the eye. It was just chance that his sea plays had exotic settings, which had the charm of novelty. Moon of the Caribbees is on the deck. On the left two of the derrick booms of the foremost jut out at an angle of forty-five degrees, black against the sky. In the rear the dark outline of the port bulwark is sharply defined against a distant strip of coral beach, white in the moonlight, fringed with coco-palms whose tops rise clear of the horizon, etc. The mood of the summer sea, the intoxication of the warm southern moon, of sounds and smells and rhythms are themselves factors in the play. A negro chant comes over the water.

Bound East for Cardiff shows an irregular-shaped compartment, the sides of which almost meet at the far end of the triangle. Sleeping bunks about six feet long, ranged three deep with a space of three feet separating the upper from the lower are built against the sides.

C.T.H. Dickinson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre, p. 73.
On the right above the bunks three or four portholes can be seen. The details of seamen's belongings are present. At regular intervals of a minute or so, the blast of the steamer's whistle can be heard in the fog, disturbing the flow of reminiscence among four or five sailors. Paul is playing the accordion.

The opening is frequently made effective by significant pantomime. In the Zone requires that portholes be blackened at night for fear of submarines. As curtain rises, Smith rolls out of bunk, observes other sailors asleep, and pulls out his suitcase. Davis appears carrying a coffee pot and withdraws a little to watch suspiciously. Smithy removes a box, which he hides under his mattress, then climbs in bed. Ile, another one-act play, has just such an effective bit of pantomime. The steward enters to clear the table, glancing above to the place where the sound of footsteps comes from, then tiptoes to door right and listens. A moment later he is alarmed by the entrance of the ship's boy who asks him if he is afraid the old man is coming. He goes on to say the old man notices little of what is going on, for his eyes are riveted on the north, where possibly the ice may break up. These bits of pantomime are not only useful in concentrating attention, but they are significant in the plot development.
O'Neill has always been sensitive to the potency of pure sound on the stage. He used with dramatic effect Rose's coughing as she is led away in The Web, and the falling raindrops. In Warnings there was the whining of the wireless, and in Fog the steamer whistles and the dripping water of the icebergs. In Moon of the Caribbees there was the sailors' singing of shanties and the instruments strumming on shore. These particular sounds are used to create atmosphere, and intensify the emotional effect, but frequently sound is significant in the plot development. The darkly chant mentioned above in Moon of the Caribbees makes all the men restless as is indicated by the opening conversation when the men say it sounds as though they were burying somebody. The song breaks through at crucial moments later after Paddy's knifing and the fight of the men, also after the colored women have been put off. The song contributes to the "nerves" which bring about the catastrophe. The fog horn in Bound East for Cardiff disturbs the men because of the constant reminder of their danger, and its regularity has the insistence of fate. The dying man is helpless before it, and also before the snoring of his shipmates that come off watch and must rest between duties. The sounds emphasize his loneliness.
Mr. O'Neill is gifted with an excellent ear for rhythm and, somehow, he has learned a great deal about the effects of rhythm on the emotions of the listeners. "He writes with a curious kind of eloquence. He gives you the impression that he is faithfully repeating the actual speech of the fo'c'sle that he has observed; yet there is an emotional pulsation in his style that is not present in the daily speech of the denizens of waterfront saloons. It is the pulsation which communicates itself, by contagion, to the audience and arouses an emotional response that would not be developed merely by the meaning of the lines."7

You pause to listen to his fo'c'sle talking when ordinarily you would pass by such a group on a wharf without taking interest. Just listen to the dying Yank:

"This sailor life ain't much to cry about leavin', just one ship after another, hard work, small pay, and bum grub; and when we git into port, just a drunk endin' up in a fight, and all your money gone, and then ship away again. Never meetin' no nice people; never gittin' outsailor-town, hardly, in any port; travelin' all over the world and never seein' none of it: without no one to care whether you're alive or dead. There ain't much in all that that'd make yuh sorry to lose it, Drisc."

Very likely it is his sense of literary style that accounts for his fondness for obscene phrases and profane ejaculations, more than any wish to shock people. He delights in the sounds of the words, no doubt. His sailors would call his heroine a bitch rather than a wanton. Mr. O'Neill has sensed the distinction in the

sound. Listen to Cocky:

"Makin' love to me, she was! It's Gawd's truth! A bloomin' nigger! Greased all over with coconut oil, she was. Gawd blimy, I couldn't stand 'er. Bloody old cow!"

Again Driscoll in the Long Voyage Home is colorful:

"Shut up, Yeane, and don't be makin' that squalin'. If ye cud see your ugly face, wid the big red nose av ye all screwed up in a knot, ye'd never shed a tear the rest av your loife. (Roaring into song). To hell wid Ulster! An I'll strip to any man in the city av London won't drink to that toast."

The little plays throb with emotion. For these sailor folk he has the keenest sympathy; and his treatment of them illuminate their hopes and despairs beyond anything seen on our stage.

Symbolism is present to a certain extent even in the early drama. Note the titles with the satirical touch so prevalent later. Moon of the Caribbeans suggests a beauty and harmony in nature which throws into dreadful contrast their lack in the human life depicted. The Long Voyage Home is indeed long, since landsmen can prey on the weakness in the sailor to keep him broke; hence it is never "home" but always another voyage.

Mr. Dickinson has this to say about O'Neill's use of the sea as a symbol:

"On land we cannot see humanity for the people. On sea we gain perspective and poise and background. The sea is, then, the most tangible,
the most accessible of the immensities. It is a symbol of all the other immensities within the heart of man and beyond his reach."8

Atkinson says:

"The heavy brooding maleness of the crew of SS. Glencairn communicates the spirit of 'that old devil Sea.' more pungently than the phrase he created in Anna Christie."9

The plays in the Glencairn group are among the best written in English.

"Within a short compass they achieve emotional effects of great intensity. The emotion arises from no single dominating source in the characters or circumstances but from a blending of factors."10

Finally, O'Neill himself felt he must have a more complex vehicle.

"It is an unsatisfactory form--cannot go far enough. It is a fine vehicle for something poetical, for something spiritual in feeling that cannot be carried through a longer play."11

10 T.H. Dickinson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre, p.73.
VI

FULL EVENING PLAYS
VI
FULL EVENING PLAYS

"The playwright set himself against the notion that any particular 'don't' has any necessary binding force. If it is in the way of the line of action he has selected, he goes ahead nevertheless. If the thing works, all right. If not, he will try something else next time."

He has met with the same criticism often that the Elizabethans did—that one can't use a stage for a king's palace one minute and the deck of a ship the next. Ever since he started to write long plays he has shown the greatest freedom in act and scene division, depending generally on the places needed and the length or gaps of time to be suggested.

_Beyond the Horizon_ had three acts, each divided into two scenes as already indicated. Many critics felt that he was clumsy in the arrangement, missing altogether what he considered the obvious symbolism in such alternation. At first the play was tremendously long, due largely to natural exuberance of thought, but subsequently was reduced one-fifth. The play was given the Pulitzer Prize probably because of the fact that it was "the most consistently sustained serious play yet written by an American."  

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2 B. H. Clark, _Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays_, p. 98.
Mr. Clark feels that because of this fact it was over-
praised, since he sees the hand of the dramatist too
much in evidence. O'Neill pauses too often to direct
our attention to what he is doing.

Mr. Goldberg has a similar opinion; he feels that
Andrew, each time that he comes on a visit to the old
farm, wishes to return at once to his distant business,
the reason for his impatience being more the playwright's
than the character's.

Mr. Eaton, on the other hand, says it is a fine
play, neither written nor built; it is an organic
growth from within. The play has a remarkable quality
of giving an impression of the passage of time, the slow
attrition of years.

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4 Theatre Arts Monthly, October, 1920.
5 T. H. Dickinson, Playwrights of the New American Theatre,
The Straw

The Straw comes next with three acts, two of them subdivided into two scenes. The technique is conventional.

The play is a love story about an Irish girl who meets a young newspaper man in a tuberculosis sanatorium. In a few months Stephen is able to return to his work, which rapidly removes him farther from Eileen, who wishes to live just for him. When she loses his love, as is rather evident when he returns for a visit, she loses courage. To save her, Stephen makes a brave pretense, offers her a "straw" of hope.

All but the first scene takes place in and about the sanatorium, and the setting perhaps hindered the audience from getting a normal point of view. Perhaps the play was too painful; it was not successful.
The Emperor Jones

Right in the midst of the production of several fairly naturalistic plays comes The Emperor Jones. The story has already been told. This play is really an extension of his one-act technique, and is almost a dramatic monologue, since each scene is monologue except the short final scene and the first scene, which is long because of the exposition and is in dialogue between two people. The six other scenes are pictures of Jones as he circles through the forest, impelled by his fears. For the kind of play it is, it is almost flawless; but further criticism will be withheld until the discussion of the special technique involved.
**Gold**

*Gold*, a play in four acts, comes next.

Captain Bartlett, cast ashore on a desert island, is party to the murder of two of his crew. He has discovered what he believes to be gold; and beside himself with thirst and suspicion, permits the killing. The remainder are rescued and return to California, where we find that six months later Bartlett has fitted out another ship in order to return for his treasure. His wife is ill. She suspects the truth and tries to bring a confession. The son, Nat, learning of the gold, is seized with the same desire as that of his father. The sick wife is forced to christen the ship. Meanwhile, two companions urge Drew, engaged to Bartlett's daughter, to command the ship in Bartlett's interest; they make off with the ship.

A year later the schooner has been lost, and the Captain, now completely out of his mind, is pursued by phantoms of his victims and the belief that the schooner is on the point of returning laden with gold. His wife is dead, and Nat is mad too. At the end he produces a sample of the "gold" he has kept by him, and Nat in a lucid moment realizes it is worthless. Of course, the captain has half realized the truth all along, but he dies when he is no longer sustained by the illusion.
Once again as in Beyond the Horizon, the playwright shows his character deluded by a romantic illusion. In Gold it is a dream of treasure; in The Straw, a dream of love; in The Emperor Jones, a delusion of power. In later plays, Ponce de Leon is in quest of love and fame, Marco Polo after power, Lazarus after a solution of the problem of everlasting life, and Reuben Light in Dynamo after a satisfying religion.

The failing which is characteristic of the author when he is not at his best, and which has been suggested before is in evidence here.

"Time and again his characters stop to tell us what they are doing and why, instead of going ahead and doing it." 6

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Anna Christie

Anna Christie was the outgrowth of an earlier play, Chris Christopherson. It contains four acts. It is distinctly on the realistic tradition—of course, a selective realism. Mr. Lewisohn criticizes the playwright for a "supposed obligation to certain tricks of coincidence, suspense, and sharpened conflict." Mr. O'Neill himself scorns stage tricks and likes to condemn certain plays of his like Anna Christie for their "trickiness." Yet "men of the theatre feel that he owes something of that same fine technique which enables him to put even symbolic drama across the footlights as a box office success—owes something also of his grasp of pause, of climax, of the capacities of the actor's breath, to his lifelong familiarity with Monte Christo." The author's hand is most in evidence in Anna Christie where Anna's future lover, though he has been five days adrift with his ship-wrecked companions, rowing them to safety, must begin to make love to her as soon as he has been picked out of the water. The happy ending, too, has been criticized as a reversal of the situation. Mr. O'Neill will have more to say about that.

The narrative is closely woven; the dialogue is pungent, giving reality to the life portrayed. Anna

7Ludwig Lewisohn, Development of Eugene O'Neill, p. 350.
8E.S. Sarceant, New Republic, March 26, 1927, p. 93.
Christie had been left on a farm by her father Chris since he felt that life at sea would only bring evil to her, and it is not till several months after her arrival at Jimmy the Priest's that he learns that the family on the farm had practically forced her into the life of a prostitute. She is apparently not vicious nor has she really loved any man; so after the sea has done its work of regeneration, Anna is ready for a "pure" love with her sailor hero. Their love story develops rapidly into something like romance out of a basically sordid situation. Then comes her confession and the man's instinctive rebellion, which, after a prolonged drunk, he overcomes, since he realizes his need of her.

"One of the tests of an author's technique is exemplified by the imaginary world which lies beyond the endings of his plays.......With skill and artistic justice O'Neill makes his ending consistent with the world he has revealed in his plays."9

In the case of Anna Christie many critics have denied this faithfulness. O'Neill has this to say on the subject:

"From the middle of that third act I feel the play ought to be dominated by the woman's psychology. And I have a conviction that with dumb people of her sort, unable to voice strong, strange feelings, the emotions can find outlet only through the language and gestures of the heroics in the novels and movies they are

9S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p.274.
familiar with—that is, that in moments of great stress life comes melodrama. Anna forced herself on me, middle of third act, at her most theatrical. In real life I felt she would unconsciously be compelled through sheer inarticulateness, to the usual 'big scene' and wait hopefully for her happy ending. And as she is the only one of the three who knows exactly what she wants she would get it. And the sea outside—life—waits. The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten. Of course, this sincerity of life bent up in the trappings of theatre is impossible to project clearly, I guess. Yet it is queerly fascinating to me because I believe it's a new, true angle…… My ending seems to have a false definiteness about it that is misleading—a happy-ever-after which I did not intend. I relied on the father's last speech of superstitious uncertainty to let my theme flow through and on. It does not do this rightly. I now have the stoker not entirely convinced by the oath of a non-Catholic, although he is forced by his great want to accept her in spite of this. In short, all of them at the end have a vague foreboding that, although they have their moment, the decision still rests with the sea which has achieved the conquest of Anna."10

Diff'rent

Mr. Clark is also unconvinced that the ending of Diff'rent is true. He feels that Emma and Caleb are not the kind that would commit suicide, that they would continue to live on even in their bitter disillusionment. O'Neill is sure that the action at the end is right.

"Given Caleb and Emma the end is clearly inevitable. The youthful Emma refuses to accept the compromise of a human being for her dream Caleb. (She had thought him 'diff'rent' and broken her engagement when she learns of an affair with a native woman on one of his sea voyages. As the years go by, she lives alone with her dream lover, the real Caleb fading into a friend. But suddenly she realizes youth is gone and the possibility of her dream lover for evermore. She snatches after him in a panic--and gets Benny. (He is the nephew of Caleb, twenty-five years younger than Emma but willing to marry her for money until Caleb buys him off). She must recreate her god in this lump of mud. When it finally is brought home to her that mud is mud, she cries after the real Caleb, seeing him now for the first time. But he is gone. There is nothing for her to do but follow him. As for Caleb, he dies because it is not in him to compromise. He belongs to the old iron school of Nantucket-New Bedford whalemen whose slogan was 'a dead whale or a stove boat.' Diff'rent has the virtue of sincerity: It is the truth, the inevitable truth, of the lives of the people in it as I see and know them.

"Some critics have said that Emma would not do this thing, would undoubtedly do that other. By Emma they must mean 'a woman! But Emma is Emma. She is universal only in the sense that she reacts definitely to a definite sex suppression as every woman might. Let the captious
be sure they know their Emma as well as I do before they tell me how she would act.

The play is written in two acts with a lapse of thirty years between them. Mr. Goldberg complains that you get only the outer ends of the psychological contrast, and that "the missing act, the one he did not write, was precisely that in which some hint of the process which changed the woman from a prim Sunday school mistress to a silly flapper of fifty should be presented." The quotation from O'Neill answers the charge, it seems. After all, the process is obvious. The question that this writer raises is whether Emma didn't change too far to the other extreme. At least, the stage directions for Emma's appearance seem needlessly extreme, to the point of absurdity. The dialogue by which O'Neill shows Emma leading up to the topic of sex and the behavior of French girls with the soldiers is brilliantly developed.

"Eugene O'Neill's Credo."
The First Man

The First Man is a realistic play in four acts, dealing with a romantic idealist who in pursuit of the romantic gave up a career as mining engineer for geology which was eventually given up for anthropology—"the last romance of all." It seems that Curt and Martha had lost their two children from pneumonia. They swore they'd "never have children again—to steal away their memory." Each started wandering in the interests of his career. Now on the eve of another expedition Martha announces that she is expecting a baby and can't go. Curt's world is "blown to bits." He selfishly concentrates on his own disappointment. Tragedy follows rapidly in the death of his wife. His dreams are ruined momentarily, but almost immediately are given a new impetus by identification of himself with something outside himself, his wish to raise his baby to love a big, free life, above the pettiness of his family and their suspicions.

There is far too much discussion of abstract ideas, an overworking of the theme of false illusions, a too frequent meddling with his characters. The play is disappointing.
The Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape was an outgrowth of The Emperor Jones and like it is an extension of the one-act technique. It is written in eight short scenes all developing out of one situation. It begins in the stoke-hold of a trans-Atlantic steamer, where Yank then "belongs," since as stoker he feels he is the "works" that makes the thing go; the wealthy passengers above are supercargo. Into that hold comes a daughter of a steel magnate and at sight of Yank she almost faints and shrinks from him as a hairy ape. He is furious, but begins to doubt his own security. He sets out to revenge himself on this girl who treats him like an animal, but quickly finds that he doesn't "belong" to her class. They just don't see him. Even the I.W.W. think him too dangerous to belong. The last scene is in the Zoo where Yank is killed by the gorilla he frees. Even the ape does not accept him. Perhaps in death he at last belongs.

The novelty, the irony, the underlying idea,—all helped to make it successful. The technique is somewhat expressionistic; hence a later section will treat it in more detail.

Except for an isolated scene and for a chorus of stokers, the play is practically a monologue.
**Welded**

*Welded* is written in three acts with the second act divided into two scenes. The whole thing takes place in twenty-four hours. The first and last acts take place in the home of Michael and Elinor and are in the form of dialogue between these two with the rest of the world shut out. The middle act is divided into two scenes in which each tries to kill his love for the other: Michael by seeking out a prostitute and Elinor by seeking a former admirer of whom Michael is jealous. Both fail to carry out their intention.

"The play is the most compact, the most deliberated and exclusively intellectual of all the plays."12

It is the story of a man and his wife, tortured by their love for each other and a passion for self-torture. Michael is jealous of Elinor's supposed affection for John; she is jealous of his work as a playwright. They come to the conclusion that they are indissolubly "welded," but that they can maintain their own integrity in spite of the effort of each to possess the other's soul somewhat selfishly. The play was not a success, due largely to O'Neill's expecting too much of the actors. His special device in this play deserves later comment.

All God's Chillun Got Wings

All God's Chillun Got Wings is written in two acts, the first one in four scenes and the second in three. The play covers about seventeen years, during which time Elsie and Jim have grown from little children to young people about twenty-five years old. The main break comes between their marriage and flight to Europe and their return to New York two years later. The scenes show a lapse of time from that of several weeks to nine years. Any attempt to telescope the action into a lesser number of scenes would have been unfortunate for the development of the theme.

"It is not quite so consistently well written or attractive as The Ha'rey Ane or The Emperor Jones; it has its harsh notes and its raw excrescences. But then it is perhaps more satisfactory in showing two equally solid characters in collision instead of only one character wrestling with himself."13

The play presents without any argument a series of scenes in the life of a white woman married to a negro with what seems to be the most fragmentary realism.

Krutck goes on to say:

"There is crude actuality of dialogue, simple violence of action, and obvious narrative sequence of short scenes; but simplicity and directness are only half the secret.... The essence of the tragedy, however brutal the external events may be, lies not in the events but in the struggle which goes on within the

13 New Republic, May 28, 1924.
minds of the protagonists, between their own characters and forces stronger than they.... He has sheared away everything except the relation between his two central characters, and, in doing so, he has gained intensity. 14

Ella and Jim do love each other; but years of inherited prejudice and hatred have left their mark. Jim confesses his mental inferiority by his attitude toward law examinations which he continually strives with no success to pass. Ella resents his efforts and ambition and secretly wishes him not to pass, since in him she shows her fear of the Negro's attempt to stand equal with the white man. She goes crazy and at one time tries to kill her husband, whose heart she almost breaks by crying out "nigger." Most of the time she is rather simple and reverts to their childhood relationship. Jim accepts his "failure," and is able to thank God for the "child you send me for the woman you take away."

The Fountain

The Fountain is a highly romantic play, at times overlapping with fantasy. There are eleven scenes divided into three parts. The play covers upwards of twenty-five years of the life of Juan Ponce de Leon in his life-long task of hunting the actual Fountain of Youth. The pursuit becomes a sort of mania. As rationally conceived the pursuit was a failure; but through the effort Juan learned that "there is no gold but love." He could not become young again in the sense that he had expected, but "I shall know eternal becoming--eternal youth." The effort itself is worthwhile.

The play was a failure. For one thing, the lapses between scenes were too long: the actors apparently were untrained in romantic acting. The play in conception was a poem of exaltation, but in spite of beauty in certain scenes, it was not spontaneous. It calls almost for verse; O'Neill is not yet a master of felicitous language.

15 B.H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Works, p.154.
Desire Under the Elms

This play is a tragedy in three parts with four scenes in each. Attention should be drawn to the increasing number of scenes. The first part is concerned with the home-coming of the new wife; the second with the love affair of the wife with her step-son; the third, with the tragedy following the birth of the baby.

Ephraim Cabot is a hard man who has killed off two wives through hard work and little understanding. He has been hated by his three sons, two of whom clear out, having accomplished their purpose of exposition, shortly after the opening with the arrival of the new stepmother. Eben, a child of the second wife, whom his father believes soft, but who is in reality a chip off the old block in his capacity for hatred and sex gratification opposes his new step-mother because he sees through her wish to get possession of the farm which he feels is his by right from his mother's family. To make her position secure, she plans to have a son who shall inherit the property. She seduces Eben to be the father, but in the process falls desperately in love with him and he with her. A child is born. Finally, Eben bursts out with the truth before Ephraim, who then tells Eben that Abbie only used him so that she could secure the property. Enraged Eben denounces her, and plans to
leave. Beside herself at the thought of losing her lover, she kills the baby who stands between them.

Horrified at her act, Eben reveals the truth to the sheriff, but later returns to Abbie to share with her the responsibility. They are oblivious to everything in their situation now but their love.

"The coarse ugly stuff of the plot is transmuted by O'Neill's imagination into great and powerful beauty, and what might have been a crude newspaper item becomes high tragedy." In the scenes where Abbie realizes she has started forces she can't control, O'Neill is at his best. There is no "theater." The drama pushes on relentlessly to its conclusion.

Joseph Wood Krutch says:

"Desire Under the Elms first revealed clearly the kind of artistic problem with which O'Neill's genius was destined to grapple. Outwardly this play is concerned with certain violent events in the life of a family of puritan New Englanders. Outwardly, it is realistic, if heightened, study of the manners, morals, and psychological processes of a definite society. But it is impossible not to realize that O'Neill is here interested less in New England as such than in an aspect of the eternal tragedy of man and his passions. He chose that particular time and particular place partly because he knew something about them, partly because the stern repression of New England customs made the kind of explosion with which he proposed to deal particularly picturesque and particularly violent; but chiefly because it is necessary to give every dramatic story some local habitation and a name."
In his youth O'Neill had assumed that the fiercest passions were to be found where life was most uncontrolled. He sought among sea-faring men. Later he learned where spirits have no suitable outlet, "they explode with the greatest spiritual violence." 18

"Greed, desire, the tyranny of the soil, the ghosts of the dead and the ferocity of the living, youth and age, child-birth and infanticide, charge the play in every scene with wrath and brutality. There is no flinching. It is a natural tragedy." 19

There are a few commonplace bits of plot that might well have been omitted: the stealing of the hoarded money, the appearance of the sheriff, the repetitious use of several of the speeches. The play is, nevertheless, firmly constructed, unified by Abbie's determination chiefly.

Criticism has been made that there are too many motives, that this, as other plays of O'Neill is too crowded with incident, 20 that as Joseph W. Krutch says, "the imagination of the spectator refuses sometimes to leap with the author's quickly from tense moment to tense moment, or to accept violence piled so unremittingly upon violence; but impetuosity is an essential part of his nature and not likely ever to be subdued." 21

The tragedy shows growth over preceding ones in that there is less of pathos and more of passion. There is a greater inevitability about it.

At this point it is interesting to note O'Neill's idea of tragic characters:

"Tragic characters are driven by the mad strength that is in them to violent conclusions. Ephraim Cabot goes passionately on to a merciless decision as a result of the flaming will of his own character." 22

Probably nowhere else except in Strange Interlude has he created so many vital distinct individuals; nowhere else have the relationships been conveyed with such truth and subtlety.

By moments there is great and unique dramatic power. The play is stark and simple tragedy. There is a difficulty with the revelation of a Greek tragic theme in New England--that is the matter of language.

"The New England dialect is not a noble form of human speech.......It has no resources of eloquence within itself; it is sparse, mean, homely, in its association comic." 23

The criticism is true of Desire Under the Elms and noticeable particularly in the theatre. Mourning Becomes Electra displays the same short-coming, nor is O'Neill himself entirely to blame for the inadequacy. Part of the blame falls on the native tongue.

The play was tremendously successful. Barrett Clark says, "No play of O'Neill's has ever moved me as profoundly as this one."24

24 Barrett W. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p. 149.
The Great God Brown

The Great God Brown is written with a prologue, from acts divided into eleven scenes, and an epilogue. The playwright becomes increasingly complex. The play covers roughly twenty or twenty-five years, and shows scenes in various parts of the one town. The external action is very slight since the emphasis is entirely on the change in the three chief characters during their lives. Since the play is entirely symbolical, most of the discussion will be withheld until later. It is the most difficult, I understand, of all O'Neill's plays; even after a performance in the theatre and several readings, parts still remain ambiguous.

Brown and Anthony are schoolmates, in love with the same girl, Margaret, who, for her part, loves Dion. Anthony as she sees him superficially, though she never understands the real man even after marriage. He is an artist, but fails to achieve his desires. He takes to drinking and the companionship of a prostitute. Brown is a so-called success though utterly uncreative. He takes Anthony in his employ to help Margaret. Anthony's designs bring much business for the firm, but he is ever dissatisfied. He finally dies. So far it is understandable. Brown takes Dion's place with Margaret, but finally he, too, in attempt-
ing to create becomes doubtful of himself and knows frustration as Anthony had. He, too, dies. There is much more to be said in the next section.
Marco Millions

Marco Millions was at first intended for production on two successive nights but was finally condensed to one long night. It contains a prologue, an epilogue, and three acts divided into eleven scenes. It covers a wide area from Venice to the Zanadu of Kublai Khan, and certainly a period of the years. The play is not at all realistic; there is no attempt to recreate a past period, since obviously the drama satirizes the weaknesses of western civilization in our own time. Marco Polo is shown pursuing his career, from a nice young boy with youth's idealism to a hard-headed business man.

"The beauty and romance, the serenity and skepticism of an age-old civilization have no effect whatever on him."20

Marco, who is a junior member of the firm of Polo, Brothers and Son, goes by various stages, to the court of the great Khan, and there somewhat to the amusement of the philosophic emperor, attempts with smug good humor to confer upon these eastern people the benefits of civilization. He invents a debased paper currency, becomes supreme ruler of the Mystic Knights of Confucius, which he has founded, and finally, as a parting gift, explains how they may use gunpowder—hitherto wasted as

20B.H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p.169.
fireworks--for the more desirable purpose of blowing one another up.

The Theatre Guild's production was lavish with beautiful costuming and scenery, but with long waits between the numerous scenes, the play seemed a bit thin. A revolving stage, so that there need be no lowering of the curtain between most scenes would speed the action, so that attention would not wander. Even at that, an audience will invariably break into conversation in the gaps and the thread of thought and mood is continually being broken. That mood cannot easily be recreated in the space of a single short scene.
Strange Interlude

The first thing to note about **Strange Interlude** is that it takes from 5:30 until after eleven to run, except for eighty minutes' intermission for dinner. This break comes after the fifth of the nine scenes. It has been tremendously successful, and probably not because of the novel technique involved, nor because it is considered risqué by many, but because of the author's great art in revealing human thought and feeling.

The story is simple enough and could have been told in half the space had that been his interest. Nina Leeds, daughter of a college professor, loses her fiancé shortly after he goes to war as an aviator. Her father, somewhat selfishly and somewhat puritanically, had prevented the consummation of their union. The realization of this fact dawns on her and causes her to leave home to become a nurse. She is actually in search of her own satisfaction, though she thinks that she must do for other men what she had refused Gordon. She becomes very unhappy and in the emergency is induced to marry Sam and have children. The knowledge which is not shared by her husband that there is insanity in his family causes her to give up the idea of having children by him. She induces the doctor, Edmund Darrell, to become the father...
of her eugenic baby; in the process they become lovers. Sam becomes a success, since he gains confidence in himself. Nino is a sort of super woman who overcomes each situation in order that she may not be defeated. Old age only defeats her when her son leaves her and she has to fall back on the devoted friend she has always called "Uncle Charlie." For this woman no one man is enough, and she meddles in the lives of all these men that her own life may be filled to overflowing.

The technique is different, not in kind, so much as in quantity but further comment will be made.
Lazarus Laughed

Lazarus Laughed is in four acts, divided into eight scenes, the scenes taking Lazarus in triumph from Palestine, where he has risen from the tomb, to Greece and on to Rome, where he preaches his doctrine that there is no death—"Death is the fear between." All those near to him have gone through the experience known as death but he believes even when Tiberius has him killed. The scoffer, Caligula, heir to Tiberius, is almost won over to the new philosophy.

"Laugh! Laugh! There is only life! There is only laughter! Fear is no more! Death is dead!"

Caligula and Tiberius feel that they get their power through men's fear, particularly of death. Lazarus brings new hope and courage.

O'Neill has not been content to state; he hammers away until the most stupid can see what he is driving at. There is little development in the play; hence much cutting of Lazarus's lines and those of the chorus would improve the play. The characters, even Lazarus, seem abstractions. He does not seem quite real, though the idea that absorbs him is alive.
Dynamo

_Dynamo_ is in three acts, the first containing four scenes and the second and third, three each. It is the story of Reuben Light who loses faith in the old God of dogma as preached by his father and leaves home. He gains a new faith in the image of an electric dynamo, when a prodigal, he returns to his home town and is given work in a power house by his neighbor, the father of a girl who loves him. In the last scene we are shown his prayers and invocations to this mechanical monster, and the way in which he is torn between this dedication to service, on the one hand, and the earthly love of his sweetheart on the other. She is sacrificed by him, and later he throws himself upon the dynamo and is killed.

"The play is almost completely without shading. The emotional din is overpowering. Nature and witch of _play_ is indicated by stage directions; 'arguing tormentedly within himself', with 'angry self-contempt', 'furiously clenching his fist', 'his eyes lighting up with savage relish', etc."26

There are upwards of three hundred in the first act; other acts are similar. There is a note of "swollen emotion and indignant vociferation that made _Welded_ ineffective and occasionally even absurd, and that robbed Desire Under the Elms of the slow, smoke-curling force which is drama's most vital attribute. In place of smooth per-

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susiveness there is a shillelagh label-tugging and coat-tail pulling." 27

A couple of passages may illustrate the point:

"Your Jehovah might aim a thunderbolt at me but Lucifer would deflect it on to you--and he's the better electrical expert of the two, being more modern in his methods than your God."

"Did you ever watch dynamos? What I mean is in them! They stand for it the same way the old stone statues stood for Gods, but the dynamos are living and the statues were only dead stone. Dead stones? Stones are atoms and atoms are alive! Those old gods were Electricity in the end, too!"

Up to the last part of the final act, O'Neill carries through a straightforward plot. At this point it is not clear why Reuben considers Ada a necessary obstacle in the way of his embracing a new religion, or why the dynamo so jealously prevents his union with the girl. 28 He seems to kill Ada without sufficient reason.

Dynamo was to be the first of a trilogy, and whether Days Without End as finally conceived, was a sequel, I am not sure. Except that both deal with religion, the plays seem very unlike.

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Mourning Becomes Electra

Mourning Becomes Electra received more enthusiasm and unqualified praise than any other new play produced in recent years, and that in spite of the fact that it is a fourteen-act trilogy, playing from 5:30 until 11:30 with an hour off for dinner. It is the most ambitious play ever attempted by an American. The length of the play itself is for the most part organic with both its meaning and its effect. 29

The story itself follows the Greek play up to the middle of the third division in the play, and here the incest motive, the death of Orin, and "the transference of the whole situation and dramatic conclusion to the sister depart from Greek......

"The blood motive of the lover, Adam Brant's relation to the family, is an addition. The resemblance motive among Brant, Mannon and Orin is new. For creates the gray forms at the back, invisible at first to all but himself, are the Erinnyes, the Furies who will avenge the crime he has committed within his own blood......For Orin Mannon there comes the sudden form of his desire: incest: the realization and admission of what it has all been about all along, his feelings toward his father, toward his mother, toward Brant, toward Lavinia. This recognition of his obsession is his avenging Erinnyes. In this detail alone might rest the argument that Eugene O'Neill, placing a Greek theme in the middle of the last century, has written the most modern of all his plays."30

30 Ibid., p.352.
In this play O'Neill has reconceived the old doctrine of Fate in terms of modern biology and psychology. Here no mortal has offended deity; a New England Puritan has broken the moral code of his time and people in seducing a woman whom his brother desires. The elder brother casts him off and ruins him. The son of the victim determines to avenge himself on the living Mannons but falls a victim to his own passion since he falls in love with the wife he had meant to shame. Lavinia (Electra) discovers the secret, forces her brother to shoot Brant and drives her mother to suicide. Her brother Orin (Orestes) first goes mad and then kills himself. She had thought to live peace but the manner of her brother's death prevents her from marrying the man she once loved.

Death is too easy a solution. According to O'Neill,

"Lavinia Mannon seals herself up in a house of doom because she is too overwhelmingly powerful to submit to compromise."\footnote{31}

This is the most organic ending O'Neill has reached thus far.

There has been some criticism of the play because of its psychological undercurrent, but Joseph Wood Krutch has made an adequate defense. The critic writes as follows:

\footnote{32} Montrose J. Moses, The North American Review, Dec. 1933,
"The play contains no exposition of any intellectual theory, and if it is understandable in terms of certain hypotheses which have become a part of our mental equipment, I cannot see that there is anything strange or unfortunate in the fact. O'Neill, is concerned with events which might occur in ancient Greece or in modern New England, but while the motives behind such deeds are quasi-normal in one society they are less so in another, and the problem is merely the problem of understanding the people who commit them. We understand in terms of current conceptions, and there is no more reason for objecting to the fact that this play implies psychoanalysis than there would be for objecting to the Greek tragedy because it implies the Greek religion. An audience must comprehend in the terms with which it is familiar, and the modern audience is familiar with Freudian terms."38

So brief a survey can give scant indication of the direct speeches and actions which give meaning to the scenes, nor does it convey the power and direct arrangement of some of them, for example, the brother and sister at Brant's cabin, where the mere visual elements convey as much as the words. The suspense in this play is classic, since it does not depend on wondering how things will turn out.

"In the classic form, where the outcome is already known, lies the highest order of suspense. Knowing how things will end, you are free to watch what qualities and what light will appear in their progression toward their due and necessary finish."34

The action is rapid and absorbing; the tension sustained and the construction logical. Two quotations in regard to the technical excellence are rather typical.

"O'Neill's trilogy is a "tearless tragedy, remote, detached, august, artfully shaped, cunningly devised, skillfully related and magnificently conceived."35

"I have been deeply impressed by the relentless flow of action and the beautiful simplicity with which the mills of circumstance grind down the Nannon soul to the fine dust of passive resistance.......After five hours at Mourning Becomes Electra, one feels there is no more skillful playwright at work today than Eugene O'Neill."36

Yet there are two outstanding weaknesses in this writer's view. One is that the play is conceived only indirectly with life as most of us see and feel it. The case of the Nannon is far too special to move us much; the tragic development rests on abnormal characteristics. The same limitation exists in Strange Interlude though this play had more power to move one in the theatre. After the audience had waited and suffered with Nina Leeds, they must have felt a little resentful that they had been taken advantage of by a cunning dramatist, for she is a far too neurotic person to have universal significance. O'Neill would not agree with this point of view.

35 S. H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays, p. 195.
The other criticism is more a point of technique. Aeschylus in looking to Homer for material had also modelled his language of tragedy upon "the solemnity of the Homeric verse."37 St. John Ervine goes so far as to say of this O'Neill play, "there is not one speech that is memorable or quickened by the fire that burns in every poet's heart."38 Perhaps that is an extreme judgment; yet in the theatre one is constantly aware that the language is inadequate, even commonplace, compared with the splendid conception of the whole, and the size of the passions revealed.

Joseph Wood Krutch says O'Neill's language "weighs him down for the very reason that he is modern."39 What an indictment of our times! It seems rather that O'Neill at present has not mastered a tongue suitable to tragedy, or else the characters are too selfish and the life pictured too cramped to call forth heroic utterance.

One will notice that the novel devices have disappeared for the time being; but O'Neill's notebook shows clearly the steps by which after experiment, they were eliminated. That interesting evidence of his manner of writing properly belongs in a later section.

37 R. Wm. Posegate, "Greek Drama," p. 584.
38 St. John Ervine, Living Age, May 1932, p. 276.
In *Days Without End* the leading character is an amateur novelist telling the story of a forthcoming book in which are to be disclosed his spiritual conflicts during a lifetime. In all four acts, the last two of which are divided into two scenes each, John is heard describing his plot and his characters, a procedure apt to be boresome, but in this case interesting because of the suspense created, since it is clear that he does not know quite how to end the book. The action is brief, two days probably, but the antecedent action as revealed in the book contains the necessary beginning, when John loses faith in a God of love after his parents' death. The plot is so entirely symbolical that the narrative can hardly be told apart from the devices used. To many critics this constitutes a distinct backsliding after the firm narrative pattern in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

John turns to all sorts of theories, such as atheism, socialism, bolshevism; he becomes a Nietzschean, a follower of Buddha, an Anti-Christ, etc., but each in turn proves unsatisfying. During all these years, John has denied himself Love, but finally, turns to it and marries. The old distrust of love and life persists.
He tries to kill love and its grip on him by unfaithfulness to his wife, and later his negative side desires her death. When she discovers this, she exposes herself to a frightful storm since she does not wish to live. In this emergency, the doubter needs more strength than he can muster, and he turns again to a God of Love. His wife recovers when she sees that he does not hate their love.

There has been much criticism of the play on the grounds that John's conversion, which is handled in a rather spectacular way before the cross in a church, is not convincing. Like many of Mr. O'Neill's plays, the curtain does not end the conflict. John's victory over his skeptical nature is only temporary; that nature may reassert itself so that the struggle continues.

Bruce Atkinson asserts that the characters lack humanity, that there is no genuine flow of affection between them. I think the technique involved would tend to give this impression.

O'Neill tells his story as though he was making unsifted notes in a diary.

"His style lacks completely the fire or lyricism that might lift a miracle play, for so O'Neill names it, into the realm of the spirit. Some of the writing is maudlin. Nor is there any suggestion of the nervous drive with which he can usually give his thoughts stature." 41

41 Ibid.
"The dialogue is perfunctory. Much of it is a literal transcript of abstract arguments; some of it is preaching and sounds as if he were trying to convince himself. It is dry and bookish."42

Once again that inadequacy of language prevents the play from exerting the moving power the conception warrants.

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Ah Wilderness

In 1932, August, the central idea came to him just after he had finished the first draft of Days Without End, and inside of six weeks he had finished the first draft of Ah Wilderness. It was the easiest of all his plays to write. He is averse to admitting how much the comedy amuses him.

The story is briefly this. In 1906 Richard Miller is enjoying his first love. He is reading Ibsen and Khayam--hence the title--and life is "Ah Wilderness." The girl is forbidden to see him again because some of the quotations from Swinburne he has written her have completely shocked her father. The boy feels frightfully abused; in this crisis an older boy urges him to go along to a shady resort. Young Richard gets no fun out of even the prospects; he has no desire to repeat the experience. The family are frightfully upset, but it seems to me in the theatre that there is too little conflict. The boy is surrounded by so much love, he can't go far astray; he is bound to come out all right. The real moment of the play comes when Nat Miller talks to his son of the dangers facing him; its beauty lies in what is left unsaid.
O'Neill builds up the scene so that the "thought that hides behind the spoken word is natural and clear. All the inarticulate affection that holds us together is shown in the interview."43

George M. Cohan's comment on the play is interesting, since he shared the honors with O'Neill in creating the character of Nat.

"Sure, it's a good play. The lines don't say anything, you know. It's not in the lines. But all the time O'Neill is pushing it at you, and you always know what he's got in mind......O'Neill's regular."44

In that comment there is an indication of the difficulties of acting in his plays sometimes.

It is not his most ambitious play, but it is certainly his most attractive. All the characters are diverting; at least, two of them are admirable and lovable.

"Sources are closer to life than the tortured characters of Mourning Becomes Electra. His mood is mature and forgiving." Now it is possible to sit down informally with Mr. O'Neill and to like the people of whom he speaks and the gentle kindly tolerance of his memories."45

He has given distinction to a rather commonplace legend by the sincerity of his emotion. He not only likes the people, but he understands them; and particularly in the last scene between father and son has he caught all the love, yet all the difficulty of contact which often

43E.V. Wyatt, Catholic World, November 1933, p. 215.
exists. "His recognition of the tortures of adolescence and the petty despair of small-town life, bring him closer to most of us than any of his other plays." 46

The technique involved is that realism which was used successfully in his earlier plays—yet a softened realism. There are no unusual devices except one long soliloquy.

The play is in four acts. Act III has two scenes; Act IV, four. With the exception of once, all are at the Miller house. The action is within two days. The whole thing is very natural, not pushed at all. There is the same loose structure of earlier plays. None of the scenes are burdened with complex emotions; they are all very evident and clear. Nearly all the scenes are overwritten a little. 47 The characters are often made to linger to no purpose. The first scene, which is very long, is fairly heavy sledding. There is the possibility that the actors were responsible. Mr. Cohen, particularly, tends to get tedious to many in the audience. He loiters a little too much over his pantomime, which at any particular moment is "pat" and expressive; but in large doses slows the play.

Stark Young, however, lays the blame at O'Neill's door:

"The limitation is a shortage in his word gift, and more than that in a highly lively speech rhythm. It cuts down the vibration and so lessens the sense of lively texture. Quicker speech in the actors might help."\(^{48}\)

There is an intensity of feeling, a certain simple tenderness that impresses us in spite of prose that is none too distinctive.

There is a sympathetic humor which is the essence of comedy in the play. Part of the humor rebounds from the costumes of 1906. Part of the humor comes from the "intellectual timidities that we persuade ourselves were typical of that day."\(^{49}\) There is a thread of humor in the problems of the Miller children and in all the little wrangling that breaks out now and then with a familiar touch. The stuffy settings contribute; their very drabness points up the romance at work. Here the comedy is direct, only mildly satirical, if at all.

O'Neill's use of comedy previously has been quite different. He has used it to express the irony and tragedy of life. It does not provide a relief from the tragic intensity, it does not contradict the theme. The Emperor Jones seems almost a comedy as Jones starts to talk; his antics seem almost funny. But as he sinks further and further into his own past and the rest of his


race, any tendency to laughter changes to pity, perhaps
even terror. **Gold, All God's Chillun Got Wings, Desire**
**Under the Elms** show the same characteristics. The humor
is too grim to cause mirth when the situation is com-pre-
hended. The tragic note becomes heightened. "Ah
**Wilderness stands as a strange interlude in the midst
of a world of tragedy.**"50 It indicates his versatility,
his ability to write comedy, his continued power in the
realistic field which first interested a wide public;
but it contributes little to his interpretation of a
modern world.

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VII
SPECIAL DEVICES
IN THE
LONGER PLAYS
VII

SPECIAL DEVICES IN THE LONGER PLAYS

O'Neill's Intention

One of the reasons why O'Neill has been an interesting playwright whose every play has piqued the curiosity is that he has set forth to find new ways for expressing the "unexpressed inward desire," or subtlest shades of meaning. He said in a Philadelphia Public Ledger interview in 1923:

"I intend to use whatever I can make my own, to write about anything under the sun in any manner that fits the subject. And I shall never be influenced by any consideration but one: Is it the truth as I know it—or, better still, feel it? If so, shoot, and let the splinters fly wherever they may. If not, not. This sounds brave and bold—but it isn't. It simply means that I want to do what gives me pleasure and worth in my own eyes...." 2

He is always striving to show his characters and to develop his situations in the most emphatic way possible, to dig down as deep into their souls as he can, and exhibit what he believes is important. 3 There is no one way of doing this. Each new play brings into being its own "specially articulated structure." 4

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4. Ibid., p. 123.
The conviction of O'Neill is inescapable. He is still convinced that there is nothing that cannot be done on the stage. The process is to determine what you want to do and then find the means.
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Symbolical Settings

As time has gone on, the tendency to make settings symbolical which we noticed first in Beyond the Horizon, when by alternating an inside with an outside scene in each act he tried to suggest the conflict between the fixed prison and the yearning for freedom, has increased. The use of these symbolical settings "gives him greater flexibility and increases the imaginative quality so that he can push the play out beyond the limitations of the boards on which it is acted."\(^5\) The author's intention in The Emperor Jones is clear because of the directions at the beginning of each scene.

"In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility to form a background throwing into relief its brooding implacable silence.\(^6\)"

Scene four has this:

"A wide dirt road runs diagonally from right front, to left rear. Rising sheer on both sides the forest walls it in. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose."

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\(^{5}\) S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p. 264.

\(^{6}\) Eugene O'Neill, The Emperor Jones.
It is true that most of an audience might miss the symbolism and yet be affected emotionally by the gloom of the setting which together with other devices creates a mood which helps to carry the theme.

The Hairy Ape in one scene shows the promenade deck. O'Neill says:

"The impression to be conveyed by this scene is one of the beautiful, vivid life of the sea all about. In the midst of this, two incongruous, artificial figures, inert and disharmonious, (Mildred and her aunt), the older like a gray lump of dough touched up with rouge, the younger looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived, so that she is the impression not of its life energy but merely of the artificialities that energy had won for itself in the spending."

Scene five carries out the same idea:

"A corner of Fifth Avenue in the Fifties. A general atmosphere of clean, wide street. In the rear, the show windows of two shops, a jewelry establishment on the corner, a furrier's next to it. The jeweler's window is studded with glittering diamonds, etc....From each piece hangs an enormous tag from which a dollar sign and numerals in intermittent electric lights wink out the incredible prices. The same in the furrier's.....The general effect is of a background of magnificence cheapened and made grotesque by commercialism, a background in tawdry disharmony with the clear light and sunshine of the street itself."

Scene six carries another idea:

"A row of cells in the prison on Blackwell's Island. The cells extend back diagonally from right to left rear. They do not stop, but disappear in the dark background as if they ran on, numberless, into infinity. One electric bulb from
the low ceiling of the narrow corridor sheds its light through the heavy steel bars of the cell at the extreme front and reveals part of the interior. Yank can be seen within, crouched on the edge of his cot in the attitude of Rodin's 'The Thinker.'

The steel cage is symbolic of the position of Yank. He is just beginning to realize that, whereas he had thought of himself as "steel", the power that made "the works go," actually the power was in the hands of those who profited from the making of steel (and what steel stands for) in the exploitation of thousands such as Yank. There are other examples in this play, but let us move on to All God's Chillun Got Wings. When the curtains part, the scene revealed is of three narrow streets that converge, suggesting the struggle of race conflicts that are centered in this little corner of the world. The idea is intensified by the grouping of the actors.

"In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black."

Next it becomes apparent that the conflict involves the sexes:

"On the sidewalk are eight children, four boys and four girls. Two of each sex are white, two black."

By thus formalizing his set and the position of the characters, he has told the audience the theme before a word is spoken.
"He has also generalized the particular, giving scope and significance to the drama, beyond that which attaches to the individuals directly involved in the play. The movement of the people, the different quality of the laughter, and the spectacle as a whole with its attendant pantomime, typical of his method, all contribute to the meaning and understanding of the play."

Desire Under the Elms calls for a house facing front to a stone wall. Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms, trailing their branches down over the roof appear to protect and at the same time subdue.

"The elms are suggestive of New England and their subduing influence is New England puritanism which O'Neill inveighs against in this play as in so many others: Strange Interlude and Electra. The stones of the wall are suggestive of the New England sternness and hardness, as one of the brothers says 'making stone walls--year atop o' year--him 'n 'yew 'n me 'n then Eben--makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in.'"

The waste of energy and the spiritual limitations implied by stone walls is tremendous. The interior of the parlor gives a similar impression: "a grim, repressed room like a tomb in which the family has been interred alive."

One could go on with examples, but another from Mourning Becomes Electra will show that more recent plays show the same tendency. This quotation is from the O'Neill notebook used in connection with the

'\textit{S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p. 255.}'}
preparation.

"Pattern of exterior and interior scenes, beginning and ending with exterior in each play, with the one ship scene at the center of the play (this, center of whole work) emphasizing sea background of family and symbolic motive of sea as means of escape and release."8

This is a description of the exterior:

"Behind the driveway the white Grecian temple portico with its six columns extends across the stage:.....The white columns cast black bars of shadow on the gray walls behind them. The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its somber ugliness."9

This house has been "built by Atreus' hatred" (Abe Mannon) and a "psychological fate" hovers over the family living there.10

Sometimes the settings are subjective, as it were, distorted by the point of view of the characters, a viewpoint which the audience is made to share. This might easily be true of the forest scenes in The Emperor Jones but is quite definitely true of The Hairy Ape. O'Neill says at the beginning of this play:

"The treatment of this scene, or any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. The lines of bunks,

9 Eugene O'Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra.
10 S.K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill, p. 265
the uprights supporting them, cross each other like the steel framework of a cage. The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads. They cannot stand upright."

The men are to resemble pictures of the Neanderthal Man, and though all the civilized white races are represented, yet those men are practically alike. The effect of that opening picture is really tremendous.

All God's Chillun Got Wings shows a church in which Jim is being married to Ella.

"On each side of the yard are tenements. All the shades of the windows are drawn down, giving an effect of staring, brutal eyes that dry callously at human beings without acknowledging them. The district is unusually still... The silence is broken by one startling, metallic clang of the church-bell. As if it were a signal, people pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenement to the left, blacks from one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes. The halves of the big church door swing open and Jim and Ella step out."

One has to see the play to realize the ordeal it is for these two people to run the gauntlet of those eyes, before they can reach the street.

There was some thought of distorting the buildings and lines in the scene, but the idea was given up fortunately. This distortion is used in Jim's apartment six months after they have returned from Europe: the walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait (of Jim's father in
colorful Negro regalia) and the mask (used in African rituals) look unnaturally large and domineering. The scene is indicating Ella's increasing fear of the negro.

This technique, as well as that which we shall next consider, is reminiscent of what is called Expressionism, for want of a better name, popularized a decade ago by several young Germans.

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E.F. Hauck, *The Drama*, January 1, 1926.
Emperor Jones is an unobtrusive symbol of man's vain boast of power. The play represents the breakdown of a negroid mentality under the stress of fear and fatigue. While it is probably true that a black man will succumb to weaknesses against which even a weak member of the white race may be proof, O'Neill's recording of the "negro inflation by power and deflation by mortal fear gives an image of all human regression."12

The theme suggested the form which is practically monodrama. All of the other characters are scarcely more than ghosts that flit in and out of the consciousness of the Emperor. In flight from a revolution, the black monarch enters the forest which takes hold of his spirit. The thin armor of the Baptist theology of his childhood deserts him. He succumbs first to personal and then to racial terrors and what he thinks we see in six brief scenes—the images of trainmen and prison guard whom he had murdered, and after them, as he plunges deeper into the forest, the visible hallucinations of his inherited fears: the auction block, the slaveship, the

priests of voodoo on the Congo banks. Each time a scene is enacted, the surge of the Emperor's speech in monologue makes these pictures live for us as they do for him. The technique "achieves a complete identification of the auditor with the actor and presents surrounding reality not as it appears to those outside the action, but in subjective terms of the actor's self." To further indicate the stripping away of intellectual power in the man, the trappings of emperor one by one have slipped away, until in the end, he is the hysterical, primitive and half naked savage, which his superstitious pursuers are. It is a masterly presentation of the degenerative process of fear. If the play is not "comparable to the best of the later plays, it is because in the last analysis it deals with obvious forces in an obvious way. It is not built upon harmonies but on a single theme, directly stated and reiterated a little monotonously. The play reveals itself at once, not indirectly, insinuatingly, suggestively."

The Hairy Ape shows the individual thwarted in his groping for social significance. The play has characteristics in common with the Expressionists beyond the settings already referred to, for instance, the articulate-ness arbitrarily conferred upon the inarticulate hero.
For minutes at a time his voice rings out in a lyrical expression of pride. A brief quotation can scarcely suggest the impression:

"Everyting else dat makes de wold move, somen'n makes it move. It can't move without a somen'n else, see? Den yuh get down to me. I'm at all bottom, get me! Dere ain't nothin' further.....I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somen'n and de wold moves! .......... Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! and I'm steel--steel--steel!"

To him in the stoke-hole comes a numbered member of the class that doesn't "belong." She is appalled at the spectacle of the "hairy ape." His faith starts to crumble: a new note of bluster enters in. He seeks revenge on her and her class.

The scenes that follow represent not reality but the way the world looks to Yank and the audience becomes identified with his point of view.

The first scene on Fifth Avenue and most effective perhaps uses masked men and women, moving automatically like so many puppets. Yank hurst himself upon these people but does not jar them the least bit; rather it is he who recoils after each collision. Their detached, mechanical unawareness enrages him, but he does not count. As far as he is concerned, they are inhuman. The device is successful in getting the idea over.

The jail setting which follows reveals Yank trying
to think things out. A voice from one of the cells
is reading from the newspaper a recent senatorial tirade
against the I.W.W. The idea grows in Yank's mind that
he can associate with this group since their enemy is
the same and their method wrecking, such as he can share.
The ideas that are shaping his thought are made evident
to the audience by that disembodied voice. Meanwhile,
the question is suggested to us that perhaps we are
not worth all the fuss and circumstance of existence if
we breed such as Yank. For as Yank rages on about the
steel that such as he makes only to be caged in by it
and spat upon, he assumes the attitude of an ape tearing
at his bars. The thought is held out to us that the
animal will reclaim us if we do not order life more
humanly.

At twilight next evening, he confronts the gorilla
in its cage at the zoo, chums with his "kin" in his
growing effort to find a place for himself, releases the
beast who crushes him to death for thanks. "And perhaps,"
in O'Neill's words, "the Hairy Ape at last belongs."

The technique has been admirable for getting the
theme across. Like Hasenclever and other Expressionists,
O'Neill had felt the necessity for new forms with which
to express the complexity of modern life, but unlike them\footnote{B. H. Clark, \textit{Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His Plays}, p.129.}
he based his work on human character—not the type or abstraction.

The Hairy Ape seems an exception. Instead of intensifying a particular man, he has symbolized him in Yank.

The Hairy Ape, he has said,

"......... was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal, and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the 'woist punches from bot of 'em! This idea was expressed in Yank's speech. The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can't go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to 'belonging' either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but now it is with himself, his own past, his attempt 'to belong.'"\(^\text{16}\)

Later on in the same article, he had said:

"I, personally, do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through character. When it sees 'A Man' and 'A Woman' just abstractions, it loses the human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonist of the play......the character of Yank remains a man and everyone recognizes him as such."\(^\text{17}\)

O'Neill has support in this latter assertion. Brooks Atkinson says,

"O'Neill is a poet at heart, and he has a rare genius for interpreting characters as symbols."

\(^\text{16}\) New York Herald Tribune, November 16, 1924.
\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.
In The Hairy Ape, Yank is no less a character in his own right because he speaks for an entire social group or for all mankind at times.\textsuperscript{18}

It seems likely that when an author deliberately sets out to use Yank to typify man, he necessarily minimizes the human elements in his story. He might have been treated like Ephraim in Desire Under the Elms, as a man from whose character we are allowed to generalize, but he is not so treated. It is for this reason that The Hairy Ape, for all its fascination, "remains a rather cold bit of dramatized philosophy."\textsuperscript{19}

There are three other plays I should like to mention with supernatural elements: the first is Gold. In the last act of this otherwise realistic play, the Captain has gone quite mad, pursued by phantoms of his victims and the belief that his schooner is on the point of returning. Eventually his vision becomes visible to the audience just before his death. The sailors bring in the chest of gold. This scene seems not to belong in this play at all, since right until the end the Captain is treated realistically, though the failure of the play goes far deeper.

In The Fountain there is a similar scene, just one in a highly romantic but not otherwise supernatural play.

\textsuperscript{19}R. H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, The Man and His Plays, p. 131.
This play is almost the only one in which the author deals in a direct way with beauty. Usually one gets his search for beauty in a scene conspicuous for its absence. In spite of the poetic conception, the play is apt to be diffuse and hang heavily on the scene designer.

"Six preliminary scenes weave the medieval beauty of those times into a tapestry of all the theatre arts." 20

The rest shows him pursuing his dream, but finding something different from his desire. Nothing so stirs the emotions in the whole play as the eerie scene in which are blended lighting and screening and figures into a luminous stage picture, which gives visual and oral form to the conception of life which comes to Juan when, wounded and faint, he lies in the woods before the fountain. A figure which Juan assumes is death comes to meet him. In his extremity he calls on Beatriz who means Youth and Beauty to him. Her voice is heard chanting the oft recurring tune with these words:

"Love is a flower
Forever blooming,
Life is a fountain
Forever leaping
Upward to catch the golden sunlight
Upward to reach the azure heaven
Falling, falling,
Ever returning,
To kiss the earth that the flower may live."

The fountain springs into life with her form at its center. Presently in answer to his plea, "What is left when Death makes the hand powerless?" several figures appear: first, the "Chinese poet, now robed as a Buddhist priest; then the Moorish minstrel, dressed as a priest of Islam; then the Medicine Man as he was in scene eight; lastly Lius, the Dominican Monk of the present. Each one carries the symbol of his religion before him. They appear clearly for a moment, then fade from sight, seeming to dissolve in the fountain. Juan has stared at them with straining eyes—in a bewildered voice. "All faiths—these vanish—are one and equal—within—. What are you Fountain? That from which all life springs and to which it must return—God!"

A voice of Beatriz is heard singing, "Death is a mist, veiling sunrise."

Presently as he helps an old boy to fill her bowl at the fountain, her mask of age disappears. She is Beatriz: "Age, Youth. They are the same rhythm of eternal life!"

Gradually light creeps into his soul and he cries the affirmation later preached by Lazarus:

"Death is no more. . . O God, Fountain of Eternity, Thou art the All in one, the One in All, the Eternal Becoming which is Beauty!"

Eugene O'Neill, The Fountain.
The scene calls for verse though there is a lyrical
eccstasy present even in the broken prose.

"Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring
Death! All is within! All things dissolve, flow
on eternally! O aspiring fire of life, sweep
the dark soul of man! Let us burn in thy
unity."

This passage seems good to me though often "there is some-
thing labored in his purple patches."22

Could the whole drama have approached the pitch of
this scene, it would have stirred the emotions and given
spark to the imagination.

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Soliloquies and Asides

Beginning with the very striking examples in The Emperor Jones, O'Neill has not hesitated to use the soliloquy. During six scenes the Emperor talks in monologue, revealing to the audience whatever comes into his consciousness. The fact that he is a fairly primitive simple person makes the method very appropriate; and as already indicated in connection with expressionism the technique serves its purpose almost perfectly.

There is a further taste of this technique in Welded in Act I. Michael and Eleanor sit side by side facing the audience and really say their thoughts out loud. A few lines will suggest its use. Eleanor, allowing the knock of the door to interrupt the moment of intense passion, Cane says:

"There's always some knock at the door, some reminder of the life outside which calls you away from me, Eleanor. It's so beautiful, and then suddenly I'm being crushed. I feel a cruel presence in you paralyzing me, creeping over my body, possessing it so it's no longer my body--then grasping at some last inmost thing which makes me--me--my soul--demanding to have that too! I have to rebel with all my strength--seize any pretext! Just now at the foot of the stairs--that knock on the door was liberation. (In anguish) And yet I love you! It's because I love you! If I'm destroyed, what is left to love you, what is left for you to love?"
The scene proceeds like two streams of emotion flowing parallel, each a comment on the other. In an interview in 1924, Mr. O'Neill has this to say:

"The principal reason why my Welded was misunderstood by some was that I erred when I conceived the dialogue against a naturalistic setting. My notion was to have a man and woman, lovers and married, enact their spiritual struggle to possess one another. I wanted to give the impression of the world shut out, just of two human beings struggling to break through an inner darkness.

"But the sets were so 'natural' that they inevitably conjured up all the unimportant paraphernalia of living, daily existence, and stand between the life of my characters and the lives in the audience."24

The play was unsuccessful; yet the bit of aside technique seems to have served its purpose well. It is quite impossible really to separate one bit of technique from all the rest which makes up the whole, and say definitely what that bit contributes or fails to contribute.

The Hairy Ape makes use of the soliloquy technique especially in the jail. It matters not that Yank is heard by other prisoners; he is thinking out loud, and almost for the first time, about his position in the world. He doesn't care whether anybody hears, nor is he talking to anybody. When Yank finds himself booted from the I.W.W. he falls to musing on the fact that he has lost the sense

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24 Lewis Kantor, New York Times, May 11, 1924, Sec.9, p.5.
of "belonging," of being necessary. He thinks out loud. It fits in with the whole conception.

"All God's Chillun Got Wings" has two rather long soliloquies, both spoken by Ella, the first when she is wounded by Shorty's failure to speak to her, when we can see that her mind is starting to crack, and the other when, quite mad, she addresses the Congo mask. Such a use would be quite natural even in a realistic play. The situation completely justified its use.

In Strange Interlude both the soliloquy and the aside run through the entire play. There is no attempt made to have them seem natural; they are forced upon you as a stage convention which you must accept. Strange to say, in a very few minutes, you are quite used to the asides that accompany most of the remarks; you accept them as if you had been accustomed to them for a long time.

In Strange Interlude Mr. O'Neill seems to have attempted the breadth of a novel. Through the years there has been an increasing tendency to telescope longer and longer periods into the one evening and production. Now he attempts to give us twenty-five years in the love experiences of one woman and the four men who are closest to her. He tries to tell us all about them; in
order to do this he takes all the time he needs, double
the usual length allowed for a stage play.

There are things in the development of the theme
of a drama for the audience, in the revelation of the
characters and the springs of action, the dramatic
dialogue proper fails to convey. This is so true, says
O'Neill, that the dramatist, in order to make the idea
plain, must often have the actors say things which no-
body would really say in the indicated circumstances.²⁵ He
has done it himself.

"We all go about the world putting a false
face on ourselves; for our protection, be-
cause we are shy; for our profit, because
if people guess what we want they may not let
us have it; for our covering, because we are
ashamed. Inside somewhere is ourself, and
that self peeks out every little while--once
in a while bursts out.

"With modern psychology, psychopathy,
if you choose, as an aid, why not extend this
method, apply it scientifically to the whole
structure of the drama, so that behind the
curtain of dialogue, which is the accented
material of dramatic presentation, the actors
shall reveal themselves as they are by speak-
ing out their true thoughts to the audience as
they go along--letting the audience into the
inner process of the drama."²⁶

An attempt has been made to express directly to the
audience the unspoken thoughts of the character, to show
us not only their conscious behavior but the actual nat-

²⁶ Ibid.
tern of their subconscious lives. Mr. O'Neill objects to the criticism that a man's subconscious thoughts would not be "so articulate, so lacking in irrelevancies, so neglectful of the realization that one's reaction may be in visual images, even in sound or smell, rather than in carefully ordered sentences." O'Neill points out that his expression of the subconscious is intended as no more realistic in form than in his spoken language.

"Discarding the irrelevancies and the lack of articulateness, he endeavors to express the inner feelings dramatically and honestly rather than with a mere regard for the technical form they take, whether in sound, or sight, or feeling." 29

There seems to be no doubt that much of the material spoken would have been more effective had it been suggested through pantomime. Sometimes by putting fancies into words, they rob impending action of its vividness. For example, the significance of the blow that little Gordon gives his father in the seventh act would be far more eloquent and just as revealing, if the various preliminary "asides" had not been leading up to it. Sometimes the asides provide exposition; at other times contrast, speculation, specific emotion or elaboration. They vary in length, character, frequency, and importance all through the drama.

29 Ibid.
Mr. Atkinson questions the quality of the asides. He says:

"After listening to Maraden's mental patter and Nina's dime-novel, staccato phrases, one begins to doubt whether this is what they think after all, and to inquire impertinently, 'Yes, but what do you really think?'"30

It seems true that about a third of the asides might have been omitted. Had he omitted these portions, however, he would have destroyed the consistency of his style in using the double voice throughout; and one reason why the audience so readily accepts a technique, so obviously artificial, is that the ear becomes accustomed to the more or less regular alternation.

Of course, the device is only justified if it creates effects that could not otherwise be secured. Critics have varied widely and violently in their opinions. The very ferocity of the discussion gives evidence of the immense vitality within the play itself. It is difficult to see how there can be an answer unless somebody writes the thing once using another technique, much on the idea of duplicate bridge. Certainly nobody else has been induced to create another play using the same technique.

The idea that the play would be equally effective without the asides seems absurd to O'Neill:

"Without the audible expression of the characters' thoughts the tremendous scene at the beginning of the second section, when Nina and her four lovers sit around the table and consider their respective fates would be meaningless, and the exposition in the first act without effect. The only episode in the play that might not be seriously hurt by loss of the new soliloquies would be the act in which the mother tells Nina of madness in her husband's family."

"If O'Neill's soliloquies might be cut out as largely superfluous and interruptive of his play's action, so might Shakespeare's... Read almost anyone of his plays even Hamlet with the soliloquies and asides deleted."

If the audience comes away from Strange Interlude gorged with drama, this is the reason. They have taken down a play with all its text and all its notes in one great swallow. One begins to long after a while for the highly charged line that in the great dramatists said so much and yet left so much to the imagination. Then, too, the author has a tendency to be anticlimactic. Having raised the drama to the point of emotional tension very marked at the end of Act six, he lets the emotional effects disintegrate. The play is not nearly so moving from then on.

What O'Neill lacks painfully is a sense of proportion.

"He lays about him so violently and ruthlessly that the particular, becoming the whole, loses the true significance it has in his own scheme of things. In consequence, the skeptical

33 Oliver H. Saylor, The Saturday Review of Literature, p. 590.
play. The other can say not 'This is not true,' but 'What of it?' and 'This is your problem, not mine.'

When all is said and done, Nina is too special a case, her problems do not sufficiently touch our own. When an audience has been torn with sympathy for five hours, they may well feel that the author has taken a mean advantage of them in beseeching us to pity characters for self-invited mistakes made in the pursuit of personal happiness. The fact that the audience can be so moved, in spite of what their later judgment of the play may be, attests to the validity of the technique, as well as to conspicuous divination of motives which the author possesses.

Oliver M. Saylor, The Saturday Review of Literature, p. 590.
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Masks

As early as The Hairy Ape Mr. O'Neill started his experimentation with masks. In the Fifth Avenue scene, masks help to give the remote inhuman note to the parade of church-goers, already suggested by the mechanized walks, the unseen eyes, and bodies on which Yank's abuse makes no impression. As already stated, the scene is not realistic, since the audience sees the group as it seems to Yank. This use of the mask is not in line with its later development.

In All God's Chillun Got Wings, he uses a Negro primitive mask from the Congo, beautifully done in a truly religious spirit, as a symbol to Ella of the Negro's aspiration to equal the white race. The mask seems to dominate the apartinent. She hates and fears it, as she hates the thing it stands for to her. When Jim fails in his her examination, she feels she has helped to kill the thing that stood between them when she runs the carving knife through the mask. Ella, in her crazed condition, cannot separate the symbol from the thing itself. This use of the mask is particularly effective here, though O'Neill has not repeated the experiment.

In The Ancient Mariner produced in the same year,
The mask is used on the faces of the actors. In the Provincetown Playbill, James Licht, one of the producers, writes:

"We are using masks in The Ancient Mariner for this reason: that we wish to project certain dramatic motifs through that spiritual atmosphere which the mask peculiarly gives .... We are trying to use it to show the eyes of tragedy and the face of exaltation."

The play is not in print in the Boston libraries, so that no comment is possible on the success of the device.

The next year, in The Great God Brown, the mask becomes an important factor. Here O'Neill turns from the externals of his material to the inner meaning; he masks most of the characters in the false face of their worldly pretense, and unmasks them again to reveal the lurking tragedy of their souls. In the course of the play, both the mask and the soul undergo marked changes.

In the program notes, Kenneth MacGowan says:

"So far as I know, O'Neill's play is the first in which masks have ever been used to dramatize changes and conflicts in character."

He uses them as a "means of dramatizing a transfer of personality from one man to another." This writer and other more competent critics feel that "the assumption of one personality by another made the rest of the drama frankly incomprehensible."

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O'Neill felt the need of explanation for he supplied the papers with one which I shall quote:

"I realize that when a playwright takes to explaining he thereby automatically places himself 'in the dock.' But where an open-faced avowal by the play itself of the abstract theme underlying it is made impossible by the very nature of that 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 Mephistophiles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even God-head itself. (In the play it is Cybele, the pagan Earth Mother, who makes the assertion with authority: 'Our Father, Who Art' to the dying Brown, as it is she who tries to inspire Dion Anthony with her certainty in life for its own sake.)

"Cybele is an incarnation of Cybele, the Earth Mother doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws, but patronized by her segregators, who are thus themselves the first victims of their laws.

"Brown is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth--a Success--building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life--desire."
"Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the super-sensitive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath, but it also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Nephistopheles. It is as Nephistopheles 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.Nisses 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 Nephistopheles 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. This devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him. It enters him, rending him asper, torturing and transfiguring him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his Success, William A. Brown, before the world, as well as Dion's mask toward wife and children. Thus Shilly Brown becomes not himself to anyone. And thus he uptakes of Dion's anguish—more poignantly, for Dion has the Mother, Cybele, and in the end out of this anguish his soul is born, a tortured Christian soul such as the dying Dion's, begging for relief, and at the last find it on the lips of Cybel.

"And now for an explanation regarding this explanation. It is far from my idea in writing Brown that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of men should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proportion the living drama of the recognizable human being, Dion, Brown, Margaret, and Cybele. I meant it 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. And that is as clearly as I wish an audience to comprehend it. It is mystery— the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event, or accident in an life on earth. 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."

Despite this statement, the play remains the most puzzling of all his productions. It is clear that the "contemporary aspects of the struggle between a genius and a success" were subordinated to the symbolistic presentation of an eternal story of aspiration and frustration....In the half-despairing, half exultant cry of its hero—"I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sung and wept" is suggested O'Neill's central theme—the effort to transform into some peace-giving beauty the crude and obvious fact that life is vivid and restless and exciting and terrible, is apparent. He is not concerned with effort to get beyond the fact."37

In spite of the fact that most of the audiences must have watched and felt, not understood, the play ran nearly a year.

Mr. Anderson in The Literary Review is of the opinion that the convention of masks "is justified by some of the most poignant moments in the theatre."38

37Nine Plays, Introduction, p. xvi.
Brooks Atkinson is of a similar opinion:

"Through the elementary changes from mask to plain features we can follow Mr. O'Neill's thought without difficulty and appreciate the extraordinary refinement of emotion achieved by the device. To watch Dion Anthony alone, unmasked, at his orisons, reading 'Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest,' and whispering reverentialy, 'I will come but where are you Saviour?' and then to see him clad on his mask protectingly at the approach of his wife is to share the pity of that contrast. In a derisive tone he says to his wife, 'Blessed are the mask for they shall inherit graves! Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they are blind! The following scene between Dion and Cybel, the symbol of Lother Earth is likewise a fragile discrimination of fragile emotions."39

Mr. Atkinson agrees with other critics that after the transfer of personality, the play becomes hard to follow and tests the credulity excessively. Notice should be taken that the masks do not add to the confusion, but help to give it whatever meaning it does have for the audience. It seems impossible to suggest a better technique for the moment.

At the same time, there were mechanical difficulties. The actor's chin moving against the rubber of the mask resulted in an expression very suggestive of a goldfish "gaping against its bowl of glass."40 The voices were made monotonous. Then too the movement of removing, then replacing the mask was always seen by the audience and fascinated the eye. O'Neill himself felt that he was

40 John Corbin, The Saturday Review of Literature, April 30, 1926.
only partially successful in spite of commercial success.\footnote{41}
The masks were crude and clumsy he felt. They were too small. The subtle changes in Dion's mask couldn't carry very far into the orchestra, let alone into the balcony.

There remained always in the minds of many spectators a maladjustment between the reality of the person playing the role and the artificiality of the false face.

The very realistic settings, too, conflicted possibly with the use of the masks. Probably costumes and stage settings should be as strange and unnatural as the masks are themselves. Irving Pickel out in California using "abstract" masks seems to have had remarkable results with "Brown."\footnote{42}

Shortly after the manuscript of \textit{Lazarus Laughed} was finished (in 1926), O'Neill said to Barrett Clark that he thought it was the "most successful thing I ever did." He went on to say:

"I think I've got it just right. It's in seven scenes, and all the characters wear masks. And here I've used them right. In 'Brown' I couldn't know beforehand how the scheme would work out. They were too realistic there, and sitting my back in the theater you couldn't be sure if the actors had on masks or not. I should have had them twice as large--and conventionalized them so the audience could get the idea at once. In 'Lazarus' I believe I've managed the problem of big crowds better than crowds are usually worked into plays. It's never quite right. My Jews all wear Jewish masks, and it's the same with the Greeks and Romans. I think I've suc-

gested the presence and characteristics of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers."43

Whether intended as Greek or Roman a crowd of stage supers is ordinarily likely to look nothing but Americans, while by the use of masks it is possible to achieve the appearance of various nationalities.44 Likewise the muffled voices coming through the masks aid in providing the sound of a mob in action.

"O'Neill's supposed stage eccentricities should not conceal from anyone that everything he does is guided by an amazingly sure sense of the theatre."45

The play has been so expensive to produce that it has been given but one production at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, where it quite took its audience by storm. Three hundred masks alone were called for. This is the way O'Neill worked out the first scene:

"All of these people (49 in number) are masked in accordance with the following scheme: There are seven periods of life shown: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned....The masks of the chorus of Old Men are double the size of the others....Lazarus, freed now from the fear of death, wears no mask........

43 B.H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, the Man and His 'Plays,' p. 181.
45 Ibid.
All the masks of these Jews of the first two scenes of the play are pronouncedly Semitic."

All of these must be changed in the Greek and Roman periods. The other principle players wear half-masks. Not only does this bumbolism become complex in itself, but as the play develops, "it is apparent that the combination of these various types and others that follow creates intricate group symbols that offer an interpretation of life-forces at war in the history of our whole Western culture. The play becomes a symbolic interpretation of life in words, in action, in pictorial effect, and in pantomime. This marks the extreme of O'Neill's symbolism, and perhaps it indicates the use of the symbols beyond their effectiveness for drama." 46

Doubtless much of the symbolism could be entirely lost on the audience without the performance ceasing to be effective. Very elaborate music, sympathetic with the idea, was added, dancing and rhythmic movement helped to give meaning to the chanting of the choruses; setting, lighting and costuming were all carefully worked out, until the production took on many elements of gorgeous pageantry. Lazarus Laughed is first of all the exposition of a philosophy of life and death. Here we have to do more particularly with the idea than with the characters

who work it out. Masks fit into the conception perfectly.

In Days Without End Mr. O'Neill used the mask for psychological characterization, "the field for which he believes it is best fitted in the modern world." John Loring is split into two beings--John, whose impulses are spontaneous and good; and Loring, who represents the evil of doubt. The negative self is made very hideous, his face disfigured by painted furrows and a half mask.

He hovers close to John throughout, and mimics his every gesture and pose. The physical presence of the "other self" is grimly effective especially in the first scene, and in fact, wherever John Loring is alone on the stage, for it helps to give a finely drawn picture of the struggle between the noble and base. Mr. Atkinson concedes that "the mask technique is no gratuitous experiment but an integral part of an introspective play." "Mr. O'Neill has succeeded in his newest experiment." 

The play was not a success with the public. As already stated, the truth of the conversion has been much doubted. Possibly the mask technique is effective as indicated above, but actually gets in the way when John's wife is on the stage. Of course, the other characters do not see Loring, but the audience is continually

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fascinated by his wraith-like presence. He gets between the characters, in more than a psychological sense. Some- how, the characters do not have flesh and blood. Their relationship is too remote. The audience fails to be stirred, even though intellectually they do grasp the idea in this play. The technique does lend itself to clarity.

That Eugene O'Neill is sincere in his use of unusual technique is evidenced by his notes on *Mourning Becomes Electra*; these notes give an indication of the way in which he approaches his play. Thus in Note #5 is this statement:

"Modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy for its basic theme—the Electra story?—the Medea? Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by?

"Note No. 2 written two years later refers to broadening the implications of the original Electra theme, making it include 'most comprehensive, intense basic human relationships—can easily be widened in scope to include all others.'

When it comes to the actual writing of the play he says in Note No. 9:

"Mourning Becomes Electra—technique—for first draft use comparatively straight realism—this first draft only for the purpose of getting

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plot material into definite form--then lay aside for a period and later decide how to go on to final version--what departures necessary--whether to use masks, soliloquies, asides, etc."

Later he considers various types, even going so far as to work some of them into the play, and later discarding them as unsuitable for the Electra theme. His first draft contains "not enough sense of fate hovering over characters--a psychological fate."

A few lines further is this note:

"Use every means to gain added depth and scope--can always cut what is unnecessary afterwards--will write second draft using half masks and an 'interlude' technique (combination of 'Lazarus' and 'Interlude') and see what can be gained out of that--think these will aid me to get just the right effect--must get more distance and perspective--more sense of fate--more sense of the unusual behind what we call reality which is the real reality! the unrealistic truth wearing the mask of lying reality, that is the right feeling for this trilogy, if I can only catch it!"

In the final version, no unusual device was used, just the "life-like mask impression" of the Kannon features. Since the production, however, he has confessed a desire to see the play with every character wearing a mask.

On January 7, 1934, Mr. O'Neill gave an interview in which he stated that if he had his life to lead over again, he would make still greater use of masks. In

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52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
The Emperor Jones he would mask the figures in Jones' flight through the forest. "Masks would dramatically stress their phantasmal quality," he says, "contrasted with the unmasked Jones. They would intensify the supernatural menace of the tom toms and give the play a more complete and vivid expression." In *The Hairy Ape* he feels now that the theme of the play could have been emphasized to great advantage had all the characters encountered by Yank after he began to think, worn masks. In *All God's Chillun Got Wings* he would mask all but the seven principal characters, because they are a part of the expressionistic background against which the tragedy itself is outlined. In *Marco Millions* he would mask all the characters of the East.

"Masks are obviously not for plays conceived in merely realistic terms. But for the plays which the new developments in psychology are bound to bring to the stage, if playwrights are to accept the challenge of these new developments, masks will be the greatest possible aid. For 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 the profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the problems of psychology continues to disclose to us.

"The dramatist must find some method of presenting this inner drama or he must confess himself incapable of portraying one of the most significant spiritual impulses of his time..."

"A new and truer characterization is at the playwright's command. He has an opportunity now to present a drama of souls, the adventure of 'free wills' with the masks that govern them and constitute their fates. For what is the new psychological insight into human cause and effect but a study of masks? We may believe that the attempted unmasking is successful or we may believe that it has only created for itself new masks. What is important is that the insight has uncovered the mask and brought it to the attention of intelligent people as a symbol of inner reality.

"The mask is dramatic in itself. At its best, I believe it is more subtly, imaginately dramatic than any actor's face can be........ But the actor need not fear them. They can give him new personalities and around them can be built an entire new school of acting. They need not extinguish the actor. They did not extinguish the Greek actor."57

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VIII
AN ESTIMATE
OF
EUGENE O'NEILL
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AN ESTIMATE OF O'NEILL

In making any estimate of Eugene O'Neill as a playwright, we must bear in mind always that a play is written not to be read, primarily, but to be acted. Granted that with the play, any man can make his own theatre, the play reaches its full stature only on the stage in the presence of an audience. Judgment of the playwright's work should be made in the theatre and not in the library.

O'Neill realizes that the stage is really a synchronization of arts: that designer, director and actor guided by the playwright play a high part in the success. His is the spirit which conceives; then he leaves it to the technical crews to get these effects or to approximate them. There is nothing impossible about his stage directions; they supply effective clues for these artists to use and they provide a challenge for all that the artists know. Where they have had genius comparable to his own, the union has had great results; unfortunately, production has not measured up to his original conception sometimes.

Eugene O'Neill appeared in the American Theatre at precisely the moment when the stranglehold of the
old theatre was released by the insistent blows of insurgents and experimenters. Fortunately, he had a small theatre in which he might work without sacrificing his vision and where his individuality was fostered. Later both Arthur Hopkins and the Theatre Guild furnished remarkable understanding and co-operation.

He has known his back stage since very early childhood. One of the reasons why he does not go to the theatre is that he sees the wheels going round and wears himself out doing everybody's work in his mind as he watches.

No one in our theatre has had more power in evoking atmosphere. His imagination has ranged from the mystic inspiration of the high seas to the "soul destroying penury" of New England hills, from the opulent splendours of great cities to the peace of the Caribbean islands in moonlight. His settings by well chosen details have created a mood which significant pantomime and effective sound have only intensified. He has always had a sense of the value of pure sound in the theatre, and by way of contrast the effectiveness of pause. He has recognized the importance of timing, of varieties of speech rhythms, of the possibilities of the actor's breath, of a hundred

things that his audience does not consciously grasp.

Even when with daring he uses unusual devices to an extent never tried before, he succeeds in being theatrically effective. He has been so intent on his emotional purpose that he has driven forward to a given end with unchained intensity.

There has been a rare integrity in all his work, an integrity which lies in being true to his emotional instincts of the moment. Even when we are not at all touched by the feeling itself or the idea presented, we are stabbed to our depth by the importance of this feeling to him; and we are with him not because of what he says but because saying it means so much to him.  

"The sense of some individual poignancy--whose stress and pressure has evolved these scenes--runs along side the agreement or disagreement which the play arouses as it proceeds."  

There is a tremendous fury about everything he writes to which one cannot remain insensible.

The task of the dramatist is to put some character under the pressure of a great crisis, and under that pressure to explore his inward self. He must show the character in his crisis reacting upon his environment and upon the persons in it. The character may react in hatred or in love, in selfishness or sacrifice, in

4Ibid.
courage or in cowardice, but he must react in some way. He must see it through and the dramatist must make the audience feel that the reaction of the character is convincing and inevitable. O'Neill is a master in this art of disclosure. No other playwright of modern times has developed a greater intensity of power in the crises which he contrives for his characters. No other so reveals the souls of men and women naked and stripped of pretense. He has given us stark and desperate revelations of weakness, fear, cruelty, self-sility, lust, bitterness, revolt of spirit, ten:derness, understanding, love, and a passion of ideal beauty.

Mourning Becomes Electra exhibits the strength of O'Neill at the same time that it suggests his weaknesses. Henry Seidel Canby has this to say:

"After five hours at Mourning Becomes Electra one feels that there is no more splendid playwright at work today than Eugene O'Neill."

"One must be impressed by its brilliant and imaginative dialogue, the relentless flow of action, and the simplicity with which the mills of circumstance grind down the human soul to the fine dust of passive resistance. The subtlety with which the tragic relationships change and renew, son taking the role of father, daughter assuming the soul as well as the visible shape of mother is worthy of the highest praise. It is a notable play, if not a great tragedy."
"And yet to sit through a performance of "Bourne Becomes Electra" is to realize, in spite of attention never for a moment relaxed, how purely intellectual are the materials of the play. All watchers are tense and excited; none of them seems to be moved to an emotional sense except by the broadly human Captain Brant. There are no thrills of sympathy, none of the spiritual exaltation that waits upon tragedy. And the reasons are to be found, I think, in the fact that the important characters are all selfish. Nothing outside of their own will stirs them. The high tension hate which makes the drama move is sprung not from fate or inevitable human circumstances but of those complexities of incestuous desire which make the Mannon family a thing apart. Without those special passions the family could never have brought about such catastrophes. The Greeks who wrote the Electra tragedies would have drawn back, I think, from such a dependence upon special circumstance; they would not have rested a tragic development upon an abnormal instance. They were sounder dramatists than Eugene O'Neill."

The warped mind, the unbalanced imagination, the characters sick from their own complexities, attract him as if he were an intern in a hospital and "then his innate romanticism clothes them in morbid terrors and gives them strange and baleful worlds to play in, which are too like our own to be laughed at yet too strained, too tense, too highly specialized, to be altogether convincing."

The relation of his characters to their surroundings largely depends upon the dramatist's own view of the world and his philosophy of life.

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7 Ibid.
A spirit of revolt against society showed early in O'Neill's life. During impressionable years, he was a constant companion of the lower strata of society. His resentment deepened as he contemplated abnormal conditions and social injustices because he saw what such inequalities did to the spirits of men. Almost from the start the important conflicts of his plays have not been with outside forces, but against the frustration within. There has been a duality in his characters—a struggle between God's man and the skeptic; but the skeptic has too often won.

Possibly O'Neill indicates a change of heart in the recent Days Without End. In this play John and Loring are one. The conflict is a struggle between John Loring's faith in God and his faith in himself. In the play, God is Love and John has denied himself Love. He has given himself over to hatred of love, which has led to fear of life, a longing for death. In an attempt to give meaning to life without love, he pursues various theories: he becomes (as O'Neill has) in turn an atheist, a socialist, an anarchist, a Nietzschean, a bolshevist, a Marxi-an, a devotee of "the defeatist mysticism of the East", a follower of Lao Tze and of Buddha, a Pythagorean, and an Anti-Christ. All prove empty to one who recognizes
his own deep yearnings for perfection. Finally, his wanderings lead him back to love represented by John Loring's wife. The Tempter leads John to commit adultery and then tries to convince him that he desires the death of his wife, so that it will become clear that he has lost his last opportunity to find a meaning in life. The desire for his wife's death will be only his own death-longing. From this dilemma he is rescued by a revived faith which leads him to a position of humble prostration before the cross of the crucified Jesus with the demonic power represented by Loring's lain. Love becomes once more his true guide. He cries with Lazarus, "Life laughs with God's love again! Life laughs with love!"

The great religions of the world—Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan, Buddhist, have this much in common:

"A faith that there is in the universe a creative power which a man may grasp and by the help of which he may transform the chaos of life to order, its darkness to light, its ugliness to beauty. Religion at its best helps men grasp that power."

with religious faith the artist sees the sacredness of life. His understanding is deepened; his sympathy broadened. Religion sends him to the struggle against the difficulties of life with "a happy heart and a feeling

of fellowship with the good and the great who have gone before him." 9

If Eugene O'Neill can grasp that faith, it can change him from a master craftsman in the construction of powerful dramas to a great artist enshrined in the hearts of a grateful people, to whom he has helped to give vision.

IX

SUMMARY
IX
SUMMARY

By way of summary, let me say that this paper contains, first, a statement of purpose, which is to discover Mr. O'Neill's intention then to trace his development in skill as a playwright as his aim grows.

Section Two

Section two contains a biographical sketch which tends to establish the fact that Eugene O'Neill came of stock favorable to the creation of a playwright. As a boy, he became familiar with the romantic theatre with which his father was associated and against which he was to rebel. The biography also shows his revolt from society, and his flight to sea. Subsequent illness forced on him a knowledge of himself. A vast amount of reading fed his mind until in his early twenties he had embarked on a career of writing.

The opportunity for experimentation offered by the provincetown group must not be overlooked.

Section Three

Section three shows how his life experiences were largely the source of the material of his plays.

His ideas about life, especially his realization of the duality in puritanism and romanticism, and his accept-
ance of a relative standard of evil and a deterministic outlook were gained largely by too close association with the seamy side of life at sea and in waterfront resorts of the underworld. Then, too, there was much that was unlovely in the New England life about him in Connecticut, which he felt was due to mistaken romantic ideals and puritanism. His familiarity with writers of revolt literature merely strengthened a tendency already present. Jung and Nietzsche, among others, left their mark. But his philosophy is not altogether one of negative revolt; he has a positive contribution to make in his love of life and his zest for the battle. Even while Anna Christie was playing successfully, O'Neill turned from the naturalistic play because "it cramps the expression of truth...It cramps the development of the theme--which is life."\(^1\)

"It's what men and women do not say that is usually most interesting.

"The aim of the dramatist is to be true to himself, to his vision, which may be life treated as a fairy tale or as a dream. The dramatist does not present life, but interprets it within the limitations of his vision."\(^2\)

His technique was influenced largely by Strindberg along so-called expressionistic lines; yet a thorough-going knowledge of Greek drama along with an instinctive

\(^2\) Ibid.
absorption of what was effective in the contemporary American theatre contributed to his power.

Section Four

Section four sets forth that Eugene O'Neill's plays resist classification. Although the one-act plays are largely romantic, there are realistic and symbolical elements present. His first longer plays display a selective realism; yet the romantic attitude and bits of symbolism are always present. His more mature plays are increasingly symbolic up to a certain point; yet the people are recognizably real people.

Section Five

Section five deals with the one-act plays. Even in these small plays there is a general theme developed, that society doesn't give the seamen of his stories much of a chance. Each play has a specific theme in addition.

Already some of the skills which have made Eugene O'Neill famous are evident. First, there is the ability to capture the audience's attention instantly by significant pantomime and by exotic settings which, however, suit the theme. At this time he has an appreciation of the potency of pure sound, not only to create atmosphere but actually to develop plot. The emotional effect of rhythm in the speech of his fo'c's'le folk is instinctively used. Symbolism which pushes the scene out beyond the
limits of the stage is present. The theatrical elements are blended so that emotional effects of great intensity result.

After six years he feels the necessity of a more complex form.

Section Six

Section six takes up the full evening plays in the order of their production. The story of each is told and critical comment is made on points of interest, except special devices which section seven discusses in detail.

The earlier plays are largely realistic: Beyond the Horizon, The Straw, Anna Christie, Gold, The First Man; yet symbolism is present, as suggested by at least four of these titles. Right in the midst of these come two expressionistic plays; and from then on the Symbolism increases in a general upward line until it reaches the point at which it may be considered impractical, even in Lazarus Laughed.

All of the plays have an underlying theme. The ease with which these themes can be stated and the universality of their appeal adds strength to the playwright's appeal. The magnitude of his attempts, the size even of his failures increase our respect for the author.

The beginnings of plays have captured the attention
of the audience at once. The endings have been indefinite sometimes, the action carrying over into possibilities beyond the last curtain. Particularly is this true of Anna Christie. On rare occasions they have not satisfied as in Different. In the early plays there is sometimes too much meddling in the character's action. At moments this is noticeable in Beyond the Horizon and Anna Christie but it may have been largely responsible for the failure of such plays as Gold and The First Man. Too much discussion of abstract ideas mars the plays.

In the early realistic plays the plot is loosely woven, but a height of firm narrative pattern is reached in Mourning Becomes Electra. Generally, the action has been rapid and absorbing; in Electra it has great power and directness. Great skill is shown in the arrangement of the scenes. In his best plays tension is sustained throughout; often the suspense is classic since interest centers on the means to an end already foreseen. O'Neill has shown the greatest freedom in act and scene division, reaching by gradual steps the extreme of fourteen acts in Mourning Becomes Electra. Two plays at least cover twenty-five years: The Great God Brown and Strange Interlude. The latter requires the scope of novel technique; yet the time is telescoped into an evening's entertainment.
real gentle humor, the sympathetic humor that we can feel towards the truly likeable characters concerned: and that is the essence of comedy.

**Section Seven**

Part seven is concerned with the unusual devices that O'Neill has employed for expressing the "unexpressive inward desire."

The use of symbolical settings gives greater freedom and pushes the play out beyond the restrictions of the boards on which it is acted. Symbolism may be missed; and yet the scenes affect the audience emotionally so that, in combination with other devices, a mood is created which helps to carry the theme. The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings, Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra -- all provide excellent examples of this imaginative quality which seizes attention immediately and will not let an audience go untouched.

The theme of The Emperor Jones, Negro inflation by power and deflation by fear, lends itself to expressionistic treatment. All of the characters are scarcely more than ghosts that move in and out of the consciousness of Jones, the scenes are practically monologues. In this play as well as in much of The Hairy Ape the form "achieves a complete identification of the auditor..."
with the actor and presents surrounding reality not as it appears to those outside the action, but in subjective terms of the actor's self." Similar devices in Gold and The Fountain do not fit into the whole conception as well.

As early as The Emperor Jones O'Neill uses the soliloquy successfully in connection with expressionistic technique. In Welded against a naturalistic setting, he is not so fortunate. The bits on The Hairy Ape and All God's Chillun Got Wings are acceptable. The playwright reaches the climax in this method in The Strange Interlude. Behind a curtain of dialogue the characters continue to reveal their real thoughts throughout the play. The majority of critical opinion seems to be that, to an astounding degree, the device serves the author's purpose of revealing motives.

In three plays particularly, the mask is used: The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed and Days Without End. In the first play the mask is used with some success to dramatize changes and conflicts in character; at the moment when it is used to dramatize a transfer of personality from one man to another, the play becomes obscure. In Lazarus Laughed, the hundreds of masks contribute to an effective pageant, but it is questionable whether sym-

bolism hasn't been carried too far for the theatre. In *Days Without End* the idea of a masked figure to represent the skeptical side of a character's nature is effective in revealing the psychology of the individual, but the figure does get between the central character and others in the play and saps their life blood.

There is little doubt that O'Neill is partial to the mask technique. He sees no better way of expressing the deep conflicts of the mind which modern psychology continues to disclose to us. In fact, he believes that modern psychology is a study of masks with which people hide their souls.

**Section Eight**

Section eight reaches the conclusion that Mr. O'Neill is singularly successful in the theatre because he makes all the arts connected with the stage serve his purpose. He has a tremendous vitality which springs from the importance of his feelings to him, so that he drives forward with great intensity toward a given end even when his emotional instincts of the moment have called for unusual devices.

From the first, the important struggles of his plays have been within the characters themselves; and none of the other playwrights in the contemporary American theatre have had his power of revealing the souls of men.
and women in their crises.

Because of Mr. O'Neill's own attitude toward life, there has been a duality in his characters; and in the conflicts between the doubter and the man of faith, the skeptic has too frequently won. *Days Without End* gives promise of a revived faith in the playwright, which will help him to find a way out of his confusion of thought to order and beauty.

When that end is achieved, he will not merely excite his audiences through his great skill as a craftsman, but move and cleanse them with a great pity for characters whose problems are much like their own.
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<td>Nathan, George J.</td>
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<td>Nethercot, Arthur H.</td>
<td>&quot;O'Neill on Freudianism.&quot;</td>
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<td>Sayler, Oliver H.</td>
<td>&quot;The Play of the Week.&quot;</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Euphemia V.R.</td>
<td>&quot;A Great American Comedy.&quot;</td>
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