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Tanner, Hazel Alexander

Boston University

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Submitted by
Hazel Alexander Tanner
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1923
EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL:
THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

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EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL:

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS.

In the past decade there have been many changes in the field of literature, but none is greater than that which has taken place in drama. Out of the romance and melodrama have developed plays of realism and expressionism. In America, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill is the supremely great exemplar of the new theory. Three years ago Eugene O'Neill was practically unknown as a dramatist, except to a small group of Provincetown players in a makeshift theater in Greenwich Village; upon Broadway, and to the great world outside he was not even a name.

There is a close kinship between O'Neill the playwright and O'Neill the man, and to know the man is to understand his works the more clearly. For out of the life he has lived, and the philosophy he has gained from it he draws many of the characters, scenes, and ideas for his plays, and even, when he goes to his imagination for the raw material, his checkered experiences on sea and land invariably color it. In his work there is no deliberate challenge to find out what he is like, no conscious bait for the busy-body. This is another way of saying that he is an artist, and that there is nothing of a propagandist in him, no desire to stimulate interest in his dogmas and theories or in himself as a guaranty of further attention to those theories.

O'Neill's life has been composed of just those struggles, and he has overridden just those obstacles, in just those ways that, we like to think, are characteristic of our continent. The old Barrett House at Forty-third Street and Broadway was his birthplace thirty-four years ago, and from Gotham he was carried to the four winds of the country by his father, the late James
O'Neill, who was then at the height of his fame in Monte Cristo. Private schools prepared him for Princeton, but because of trouble with the authorities he left college, and began the vagabond life that led him far beyond the horizon.

Nineteen-year old Eugene O'Neill did not want to live an ordinary life. As for studies, the only one that interested him was "the study of mankind", which is man himself. He had no ambitions, not even any dreams for his future. All he cared about was to live, and his idea of living was to wander.

He took a position with a mail order firm on lower Broadway, where he became a boon comrade of Benjamin Tucker who was an anarchist. He next felt the call of the wild to go to Honduras in search of gold; here he was a victim of fever. After his return to the states he was made assistant manager to Viola Allen in "The White Sister". About this time he read Conrad's, "The Nigger and the Narcissus", and he immediately shipped on a Norwegian bark for Buenos Ayres. The Argentine capital held him in exile a year and one-half in service to Westinghouse, Swift and Singer. A voyage to Durban, South America, was his next move, and he finally returned to New York on a British tramp steamer. He shipped from New York many times after this as an able seaman on the American line.

Further adventures on land as denizen of the dock, friend of the gambler and Tammany ward heeler, actor and newspaper reporter, culminated in an attack of tuberculosis and incidentally in setting to paper his first crude dramatic experiments "Thirst and Other Plays" published at his father's expense in 1914. The following winter he was at Harvard taking work with Professor Baker, and from that time on, his work as a dramatist and playwright has grown.
To-day, in the old coast guard station at Peaked Hill Bar, on the ocean across the sand dunes from the village of Provincetown, Massachusetts, while his young son Shane plays on the beach, and Agnes Boulton, his wife, writes short stories, he sits listening to the eternal tale of the surf he loves, and moulds in the form of plays the struggles of men and women he has known, and of those from other times whom his experience has taught him to understand. Under the shelter of a dune in some secluded cove he lies dreaming like a primitive man, and whether the sea is fine or not, he is off alone in his kayak over the waves, a startling visitor sometimes to the deep sea fishermen, who are too much astounded at the apparition to heed his plea for a sample of their catch. Life is simple at Peaked Hill Bar.

His early life of adventure crammed into a few aimless, wild, carousing, feverish years has left its record stamped relentlessly on O'Neill's face, his manner, and his mind. The nature of that record reveals a personality immune to the usual results of such advantages. There is no slackening of the inner fire, no flabbiness of the muscle or of mental fiber. He has caught himself and found himself in time, and the same boundless energy which carried him across the conventional borders of living, instead of being scattered and wasted is now concentrated on the single task of expressing himself through the medium of the theater.

Tall and trim of frame, with eyes that pierce when they look up, and with a countenance that takes nothing in life for granted, he presents a singularly intense and reticent figure. Life has given him poise, and a severe judgment, with a corresponding deliberateness of mental process and speech.
O'Neill entered the stage by the "side door of the one-act play". Some of his earlier plays were incredibly bad. If he had written nothing better than "The Fog" and "Thirst" his name would be known only in amateur theatrical circles. But in association with "The Provincetown Players", and the Washington Square Players, he struck his pace, and the seven sketches of life and sea published under the title of "The Moon of the Caribees" fore-shadow the longer and more sustained work that has followed.

With Richard Bennett's production of "Beyond The Horizon" in February of 1920, the playwright came professionally of age, and "Emperor Jones" and "Different" were given by the Provincetown Players in Provincetown, and later they were taken to Macdougall Street in New York for larger audiences. These were followed by "Gold" which neither added to, nor detracted from his success; then came "Anna Christie" and "The Straw" which have been successful as performances. All these plays are the logical outcome of a mind that has known life bitterly, but not long enough to be cowed by it or to become sentimental over it. Call this cynical if you like, but there is nothing of the cheap striving for effects which is usually associated with cynicism. It is possible that greater maturity will temper his harshness without relaxing his honesty and conviction.

Here is a young man who has had a most unusual and picturesque experience. It would seem that all heroes who run away to sea escape the humdrum of sedate and proper living. But in this adventure O'Neill could not have filled his mental notebook with more graphic color of life in the rough than he
did in his capacity as ordinary seaman in the forecastle of a British tramp steamer, or as an able seaman on an American passenger line. He returned home in such a condition that it was necessary for him to remain in a sanatorium in New London, Connecticut, for the winter. He still was untamed, but not robust in health. In his mind he had all the tragic color which afterwards came out in his first volume of one-act plays, entitled "The Moon of the Caribees".

In most of his works the motion of the sea enters - shipwrecks, icebergs, the tremor of wireless, uncouth deck, the rush of water, the cruelty of wind, and the calm of the sun and starlight. There is something outside of faith, something fatalistic in his ironic playing with life and death. It is the working of mere chance that starts the tragedy of his play "Beyond The Horizon". When he wrote this, which was his first long play presented, the public suddenly awoke to the fact that here was a man who not only had a great message to give to the world, but one who also had a new manner in which to give it.

In the one-act plays published in "The Moon of the Caribees", one is reminded of the pencil sketches the artist makes before he sets to work with oil and canvas. They may be valued more highly as time goes by. The heart of his early work is a series of episodes in the life on sea and land of the motley crew of a British tramp steamer, "Glencairn". Scotch, Irish, Swede, Russian, Yank, and Briton all rub shoulders and match their wit and profanity on deck, in forecastle and in sea-port dive. These are men the playwright knew in his own years before the mast; he has drawn them with swift, sure strokes. To meet them on the printed page is to catch only a fleeting glimpse of them.
O'Neill's instinct for the theater is unmistakable here, for these men and women become vivid selves only when embodied on the stage. And when they are so embodied, the comparative lack of plot or story is forgotten in the realization that these outcasts have known close contact with some profound moment of life.

"Beyond The Horizon" bears the marks of immaturity and early composition. It is too long by one-fourth or one-fifth, and has to be compressed that much in a performance. One critic says, "It is broken up in too many scenes, ... two for each of the three acts, for the most effective interpretation by our clumsy contemporary stage machinery. It is needlessly disregardful of the practical limitations of the theater, too, in demanding realistic outdoor settings that the designer cannot make elusive, and its psychology is marred by the presence of a youngster who spoke the language of a four-year old, at least. But despite these flaws it is sound and convincing drama, and a play that cuts home to the primal facts of life and stirs the tragic emotion like no American contribution to the theater since 'The Easiest Way' ". The award to its author of the Pulitzer prize for 1920 was frank and prompt recognition of its merit.

In "Different" Mr. O'Neill has done both a greater and a lesser piece of work than in "Beyond The Horizon"; lesser in the extent of his canvas and in the restricted significance of his psychological problem; greater in the concentration in its inherent difficulties, in its disturbingly frank and realistic speech, and in the same keen searching insight into human emotions as applied to the more elusive and unusual character and situation. Among his varied talents O'Neill has proved that he possesses a
mastery of miniature, for "Different" is unquestionably the most expert, is not the most powerful and moving example of realistic drama, that we have produced in this country.

Mr. Sayler on one occasion asked Mr. O'Neill what the theater meant to him and life. Mr. O'Neill replied, "The theater to me is life - the substance and interpretation of life. Life is a struggle; often, if not usually, an unsuccessful struggle, for most of us have something within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire. And as we progress we are always seeing farther than we can reach. I suppose that is one reason why I have come to feel so indifferent toward political and social movements of all kinds. Time was when I was an active socialist, and after that a philosophical anarchist. But to-day I can't feel anything like that matters. It is rather amusing to me to see how seriously some people take politics and social questions, and how much they expect of them. Life as a whole is changed very little, if at all, as a result of their course. It seems to me that as far as we can judge, man is much the same creature with the same primal emotions, ambitions and motives, the same weaknesses as at the time when the Aryan race started toward Europe from the slopes of the Himalayas. He has become better acquainted with those powers and those weaknesses, and he is learning ever so slowly how to control them. The birth-cry of the higher men is almost audible, but they will not come by tinkering with externals, they will come at the command of the imagination and will."

In his early play "Where The Cross Is Made", we have a fantastic study of an old sea captain, who, marooned on a tropic
isle, finds what he thinks is a treasure. He sends his comrades back to rescue it, and goes mad waiting for their return. Since there is too much antecedent action to be explained for it to be arranged in a one-act form, O'Neill expanded his material into a full length play, with the play opening on an island, where the first scene is laid. The second and third scenes are laid at his home before the voyage is made. In the last scene Captain Bartlett is in his house peering out in his madness trying to see the "Sarah Allen". In this play one recognizes the result of his travels in Central America when he was a victim of fever.

"Ile" is one of the most compelling of his short plays, because the conflict rises from the inevitableness of character. In Captain Kenney we see a sharp portrait of a simple rugged type of man who is possessed with an unwavering singleness of idea - fidelity to his chosen calling. He is swayed for a moment by the pleadings of his half-crazed wife. She goes mad, and he suffers intensely. Yet when the mate announces a school of whales ahead, he chokes back his emotions, masters himself, and goes on deck to direct the catch. Fidelity to himself, fidelity to the thing which is greater than himself, because it absorbs his whole being, is the bone and sinew of Captain Kenney's character. In the bleak white stillness of the ice field his wife loses her mind, but this is now beyond repair and duty lies ahead. While the situation is simple, it is intensely dramatic.

"Beyond The Horizon" is a tragedy of two brothers, who are as different as night from day. Robert and Andy Mayo were born on a little hill-side farm. The one is a dreamer who yearns for the high road and the open sea; whose mind and body alike
demand a wanderer's life, and, as the play begins, he is on the eve of departure for a three years' cruise on a tramp steamer. Andy, on the other hand, is a loving sun of the soil, sure to wither if uprooted from it, yet by the trick of fate - as it happens the sudden warm confession of a neighbor's daughter - it is the wanderer who is tethered to the farm, and the farmer who goes to sea. There then unfolds the tragedy of two men dragging out lives not in harmony with what they are. The characters in this play are more real and significant than in his first one-act play. Its dramatic force and vitality are extraordinary. It seems a living, growing thing. Behind the writing of such a play as "Beyond the Horizon" there is an interesting biography. What keeps this play from first rank is its lack of spiritual determination. Otherwise one critic says, "We are not far wrong in pronouncing it the one great tragedy thus far written in American drama". O'Neill does not relent one bit in arranging the crushing demands of farm life on the dreamy poetic nature of the hero. Here is the story of two brothers; the one looking toward the horizon; the other looking toward home. The poetic lad marries the wrong girl and stays at home, the matter-of-fact brother ships to sea. The farm runs down; the marriage goes to seed; dreams become sordid realities, while death, consumption and domestic unhappiness are relentless in their progress.

"Beyond The Horizon" won the Pulitzer prize in 1920 as the best piece of work in drama for that year. Whether he deals with sea or land O'Neill is bitter. He did not go to sea for the light hope of adventure; his plays are very taut in their dealings
with life. The sea has failed to leave O'Neill with any lyrical impulses, and when he writes of land he is just as joyless and relentless.

In "Different" we see Emma, a young girl in a seaport town, who learns that Caleb, her betrothed lover, has sinned in a foreign port on a single occasion under peculiar extenuations. She breaks the engagement, and he waits thirty years for its renewal. In the second act, Emma, who is now about fifty years old, has redecorated her house, has enlivened her dress, painted her face and dyed her hair to captivate a young fellow who was unborn in the first act. Finally she is deceived by the young man. Left alone she tears the new hung curtains and pictures from the wall. In the last act Caleb offers Emma his hand. Upon learning of her engagement to his nephew, he goes to the barn and hangs himself. When Emma is told of this she also goes to the barn and hangs herself so that she can join the lover of her youth. In this play O'Neill touches on fidelity to duty and temperamental displacement. There is a touch of cold fatalism about it.

In his later plays the tragic conflict is real and worth while. The exercise of human will may produce grief, but at least it has an even chance with events. O'Neill's vision of life is relentless, and it is this that probably moved him to introduce the tuberculosis element in "The Straw". The central figure is Eileen Carmody, a girl of eighteen years, who is on the very threshold of life. Until the illuminating flash that lights up the last act, the play is for the most part an ironic picture of the white plague. The scene is laid in a sanatorium in Connecticut. Dying Eileen Carmody is brought to the belated realization that she
may vanquish death because she must live to save the life of her lover. This decision to live may have come too late in her losing battle against death and disease, but it seems to be Mr. O'Neill's great and thrilling point that it does come, and that with this decision his heroine lives, lives intensely, triumphantly, if only for a few days or a few moments. The smouldering fires of love and romance blaze up in the last final moments of this play. Mr. O'Neill feels that "The Straw" is his best piece of work. He describes it as a tragedy of "human hope". "My whole idea", he says, "is to show the power of spiritual help, even when a case is hopeless. Human hope is the greatest power in, and the only thing that defeats, death."

"The Hairy Ape" is momentous in its vision, strength and truth. There is something hard in its quality, but it is the hardness of the earth's rocks; there is something of violence, but it is the violence of intolerable suffering. Yank is a boss stoker on a transatlantic liner from New York to Liverpool. He is a giant, growling, blaspheming and tyrannizing over his mates in the stoke hole. He is a part of steel, since steel is the bone and sinew of the great boat. In the second act we see Mildred Douglas, a spoiled and silly parasite of a girl, who wants to do slumming. The engineer agrees to take her to the stoke hole. As they enter, Yank is infuriated and is cursing and threatening. She is terrified, and exclaims, "Oh, the filthy beast!" Yank takes this as an open insult and wants to kill Mildred. In the next scene we see Yank in New York waylaying people. He is arrested and placed in jail, which he feels to be a cage. In twilight of the next night Yank is in the Zoo, where he opens a gorilla's cage. Yank finds the gorilla stronger, wilder, more
primordial than himself, and he learns that he is not his brother but his enemy and conqueror. In this play, O'Neill returns to his true and necessary dramatic practice. Never has his naturalism been so authentic or so massive as in the scene in the fireman's forecastle and the stoke hole of the American steamer. The speech of Yank is here, and remains to the end, an unrivaled transcript of all American idiom. The action of the drama is transferred from the outer world to consciousness of Yank. The man's dumb and germinal soul has been sustained by the feeling that he furnishes with his muscle the ultimate power that makes the great ship go. He didn't envy the rich on the promenade deck. They were baggage; he "belonged". The girl's cry makes the foundation of his life crumble. He is a slave, a horror, a "hairy ape". To her and her kind he is not necessary; he is not human. The tragedy is the tragedy of a proletarian soul. No talk about class-consciousness can help Yank. He is torn out of the world that he himself has sustained. He is lost wondering between man and beast. No touch of beauty or charm ever hides the moments of failure in this work. The "Hairy Ape" is a drama momentous in its vision, strength and truth.

"Emperor Jones" is hailed by some critics as the most promising play which comes to us from the most promising playwright in America. It is an extraordinary dramatic study of panic fear. The idea around which the play was built shows the fact that the exemplar of an inferior race will succumb to weaknesses against even a weak member of a superior race. Emperor Jones is an American negro who is ex-convict and a refugee from justice. When the play opens he is Emperor on a West Indian island, a position which he
won by a process untainted with legality or honor. He is biding
his time waiting until he has squeezed his superstitious followers
dry. When that moment occurs he is expecting to prescribe for
himself a very sudden change of climate. He miscalculates his
time of grace, for, when he comes on the stage, he learns from his
side partner in evil, Smith, a cockney beach-comber, that his
followers have fled to the hills, whence the tom-toms call them to
war. But his plans for escape have been well laid. With bravado
based upon his conscious superiority to the rabble which he has
betrayed, and trusting to the fact that the tribesmen believed him
invulnerable save from a silver bullet, he departs for the coast.

The next scene finds him at the edge of the forest at
night fall. He has traversed the great plain, and has come to the
place where his cache of food was hidden. It has disappeared, and
his bravado begins to slip from him. The great forest which he
has entered takes hold of his spirits. The brittle armor of the
theology of his childhood disappears, and leaves him at heart a
primitive savage, as superstitious as the wild pursuers whose drums
continually throb through the forest aisle. The story of his
progress through the forest is told in seven scenes. As the terror
grows upon him he sees apparitions among the trees - the form of a
fellow-gambler he has slain, the figure of a prison guard he has
murdered, a slave auction and himself upon the block, a slave ship
America bound, an African witch-doctor, and his god. As each
apparition appears he fires a shot from his revolver, until at last
there remains only the silver bullet which he has saved for his own
destruction, if worst comes to worst. This shot, too, he expends,
and at last his pursuers trap him close by the very point from which
he started the night before. He falls, slain by the silver bullet which has been cast to encompass his end. During this lonely, famished, foot sore and racking night, he has seen vision after vision of his own life. Africa has bared to him her primeval secret.

The intellectual, like the corporal venture of the man has been stripped away, and the powerful, resolute, formidable man has been uncoiled layer by layer until nothing is left but the hysterical and crouching savage. This play takes depth and dignity from the moral which Mr. O'Neill conveys with force but reticence. It is because Jones holds nothing but riot in his soul that he is given over to Mado and Mahee. Godless in fortune he recurs in adversity to belief, but the only spiritual or spiritistic power to whose help he can turn is a power shaped in the image of his own cannibal ideals. His greed has played upon other men's fears, and in the hour of his destitution and necessity, the only divinity that can take form is a greed that plays upon his own soul. In writing his earlier plays O'Neill has put a wide space between himself and the drama, but in "Emperor Jones" he proves he can widen the interval. In his earlier dramas he dispenses with conflict; in "Emperor Jones" he puts by that for the older, simpler and broader requisite of the drama, interaction. Even though he is writing a grim tragedy of negro weakness, he shows his capability in handling humor, which is part of character. The psychology of crime is externalized in the succeeding scenes, but in the end the negro shoots himself. Here is a novelty worked up to a high tension of a psychological truth. He has created a big thing in a small compass. We see the quality of the imagination of a new virile kind of romance which has grown to a ruling place among O'Neill's several styles of expression. Here too, as in his realism, the issue is tragic, but with a profounder pity,
sympathy, and admiration for the struggle against fate.

The Provincetown Players put "Emperor Jones" on for the first time in their little theater. This proved very unsatisfactory, because the theater was too small to accommodate the crowd. It was then moved to an up-town theater in New York where it became the dramatic sensation of the year. This is the second time Mr. O'Neill has done with his plays what the average theatrical man said could not be done, because the public would refuse to accept it, and each time he has been successful.

The quality that differentiates the dramatist from the playwright is not that of technical ability. The dramatist is confronted with the complex and difficult task of recreating anew the very structure of the drama in this effort to impress upon us his vision of reality, his new scale of values. O'Neill is such a dramatist - with imperfections and defects perhaps - but a dramatist struggling to express his vision in a medium that presents at every moment difficulties and complexities. Our deepest interest in these plays is aroused not so much by their vigor, which is theatrical, as by the opportunity they afford of watching a dramatist at work - a man in the process of growth and development. The vision O'Neill has of the world is not an ordinary one. It lifts him above the ordinary dramatist, whose intuitions concerning the world are those of a prosperous restaurateur. Sometimes he has so much to convey that his work, which is his vehicle, groans under the load. Each of his plays has a supreme merit of arousing our interest in his next one, since we anticipate a greater mastery of his medium, a fresher recreation of structure, a more dynamic unity of matter and form.

In "Anna Christie" he seems to have come in closer contact
with his problem, and to have attained a greater intensity of vision. Yet we are apt to be caught and fascinated by the color and picturesqueness of his dialogue, for he has the power of saturating us with the foggy atmosphere of the coal barge on the waterfront, and the saloon on shore where the first scene is laid. In the characters of Old Chris, Anna and Mat Burke we see portraits painted from real life. These figures of the sea and underworld, dirty, drunken and disreputable as he portrays them, are put into the play because O'Neill saw in them the great fundamental realities of his world. To this world we are more or less aliens, but nevertheless we must face it unflinchingly. He seems to imply that it is useless to patch together makeshift shelter in any futile attempt to shut out the ruthless universe, even cowardly not to measure one's strength against these stern realities.

For Eugene O'Neill the sea is the constant symbol of these eternal realities, the inhuman power of nature against which men and women must measure their puny strength. The ending, happy or unhappy, has nothing to do with the case provided men and women shed their pettiness, dishonesty and fatuity in the conflict. In the play Anna Christie has been sent to an isolated farm in Minnesota to be saved from the devastating influence of what Old Chris, her father, calls "that old devil sea". She comes back to him soiled, crushed, escaping from the unspeakable pit of prostitution into which she has fallen, far from the sea. It is the loneliness, the detached majority of the sea, that awakens in Anna the courage to fling into the unwilling ears of her father and lover the story of her degradation. The scene of this stinging revelation was built up with increasing centripetal power. We seem to be carried into the maelstrom of its significance. It has been said...
that this scene marks one of the most excellent moments yet achieved by O'Neill.

What makes him both fascinating and amusing is his audacious use of all this material to produce what he wants, pathos and romance within the theater. Anna meets her father in the saloon of Johnny-the-Priest near the waterfront in New York City. She braces herself with whisky and pours out her story to Martha Owen, an old prostitute, before Old Chris arrives. Anna has been in the prison hospital. She is weak, disillusioned, suspicious, but young and naive. Old Chris is hungry for her; he meets her shyly and kindly. She stands off at first, then comes to him tentatively as she begins to thaw. Both of them have a roughness that is so desirable in simple people. Anna Christie, still an innocent young girl to her father, goes with him to gladden his heart on the coal barge. There she finds in the clean place of the wide sky and water, that the sea is in her blood as in the blood of all Scandinavians. She finds that a coal barge is not black with coal dust, and that even a barge goes away from the shore.

But her "rest cure" in the Provincetown fog is broken, when a boat from the open sea full of wrecked sailors comes alongside, and out of the fog, limp and staggering, come the survivors of "old devil sea". One of them is an Irish stoker, the breath of a boy, boastful, chivalrous, romantic, blasphemous and superstitious. He is very pathetic and very resourcefully handled. In the first ten minutes of his rescue, alone with Anna Christie on that part of the barge which is set like an alcove, with a long bench in it, and with one solitary lamp glimmering around them through the fog, the big Irishman falls in love with her, especially after she knocks him down. He says everything that he ought to say as
a romantic Irishman, and at this point Old Chris, madly jealous of the "Irish swine", comes out into the picture. Mat Burke, the noisy and elegant stoker, comes to Boston with a barge and defies the father to keep him from marrying Anna. In the midst of their primitive fight, when the father tries to pull a knife, Anna arrives and sees the situation. She loves Mat Burke, but she does not think she is good enough to marry him. Trying to be truthful she is enraged at her false position and maddened by the obstinate conflicting passions of her lover and father. She shoves both wrangling men from her in the little cabin and screams out her own story of what she really is. The men recoil; each goes his own way to get drunk. Mat beats up any innocent bystander with whom he comes in contact in an effort to forget his black shame and broken heart. Anna buys a ticket for New York that night, but decides to remain on the barge until morning. She keeps looking and watching for Burke to return. When he does, it is in a drunken condition. One reason for his returning is to tell her that he is leaving to go back to sea. Fate has decreed that Mat and Chris are to be on the same boat.

Anna says to old Chris, "Don't bawl about it, there ain't nothing to forgive anyway. It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen and we just get mixed up wrong, that's all." In the end Anna is forgiven by both men and her marriage to Mat is forecasted.

"Anna Christie", like the "Hairy Ape", is a grim picture of grim life, a slap in the face to people accustomed to the conventions of society and the traditions of the theater. Yet thousands of people went to see both plays — and applauded
enthusiastically when their faces were metaphorically slapped. It was not the slap itself that got this reaction; it was the thing, the force itself, the meaning behind the blow. O'Neill says of this, "The people sat there and listened to ideas absolutely opposed to their ordinary habits of thought and applauded these ideas, because they had been appealed to through their emotions, and our emotions are a better guide than our thoughts, because our emotions are instinctive. They are the result not only of our individual experiences, but of the experiences of the whole human race back through the ages. They are deep undercurrents, whereas our thoughts are often only the small individual surface reactions. Truth usually goes deep, so it reaches you through your emotions."

The Columbia School of Journalism awarded O'Neill a prize for "Anna Christie" as the best original American play performed in New York which has best represented the educational value and power of the stage in raising the standard of good morals, good taste, and good manners. O'Neill has courage and sincerity but he does not use it to preach a hidebound creed. Instead of telling us what we ought to do, he shows us human beings living in an environment that is absolutely strange to the average person: a negro, crazed by superstitious terror, a girl, drinking in a waterfront dive, a stoker shoveling coal in the furnace-room of an ocean steamer - queer people with whom we might think we had nothing in common. But O'Neill puts these queer people before us and shows them groping through the very same spiritual problems we know to be our own. He strives to give us a better understanding of ourselves and of one another.

Eugene O'Neill is one of the younger American dramatists
to use the one-act play which is rapidly increasing in excellence.

Somehow the one-act play is related to the times by reason of its
sharpness and quickness. We have created it; it has been quickened
by our violent impulses. It has responded to our restlessness with
an incisiveness which has immediately bitten into our sympathies
and impressed itself on our imaginations in short time. In its
content the one-act play deals with a single episode. It has unity
of time, place and manner as rigid as that in Greek drama. "Emperor
Jones" is a remarkable one-act play told in seven scenes. They are
a panoramic successiveness of strange adventures, and their intensi-
ification of the same mood overcomes what might have been in less
skillful hands a diffuseness of impressions. It is in this play
we see how magnificently he handles the new type of drama "expression-
ism", in which he attempts to express the Emperor's emotions
through pictorial means independent of the physical reality of the
object pictured.

Eugene O'Neill in an interview with Mary Mullett says, "I
had spent a good deal of my time down on the waterfront when I
should have been studying bobbins and needles. Now I went there
again like a boy let out of school. In New York, I lived at
'Jimmy the Priest's', a waterfront dive, with a back room where you
could sleep with your head on the table if you bought a schooner
of beer. 'Jimmy the Priest's' place is the original saloon in
'Anna Christie'. And an old sailor whom I knew there is the
original 'Chris', the father in the play. Take the fo'c'sle
scenes in the 'Hairy Ape'; people think I am giving an exact
picture of the reality, they don't understand that the play is
expressionistic. Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is
every human being. But, apparently very few people seem to get
this, they have written picking out one thing or another in the
and saying 'how true' it is. But no one has said, 'I am Yank! Yank is myself.' Yet that is what I meant him to be. His struggle to 'belong', to find the thread that will make him part of the fabric of life - we are all struggling to do just that. One idea I had in writing this play was to show that the missing thread, is the understanding of one another. In the scene where the bell rings for the stokers to go on duty, you remember they all stand up, come to attention, then go out in a lock-step file. Some people even think that is an actual custom aboard ship. But it is only symbolical of the regimentation of men who are the slaves of machinery. In a larger sense it applies to all of us, because we are all more or less slaves of convention, or of discipline. The whole play is expressionistic. The coal shoveling in the furnace room for instance. Stokers do not really shovel coal that way. But it is done in the play in order to contribute to the rhythm. For rhythm is a powerful factor in making anything expressive. People do not know how sensitive they are to rhythm. You can actually produce and control emotions by that means alone. In 'Beyond The Horizon' there are three acts of two scenes each. One scene is out of doors showing the horizon, suggesting the man's desire and dream. The other is indoors, the horizon gone, suggesting what has come between him and his dreams. In that way I tried to get rhythm, the alternation of longing and loss. It is often easier to express ideas through such means than through words or mere copies of real actions. Sometimes I try and do it one way, sometimes another. A man's work is in danger of deteriorating when he thinks he has found the one best formula for doing it. If he thinks that, he is likely to feel that all he needs is to merely
go on repeating himself. So long as a person is searching for better ways of doing things he is safe. People talk of the tragedy in my plays, and call it 'sordid', 'depressing' and 'pessimistic' - the words usually applied to anything of a tragic nature. But tragedy, I think, has the meaning the Greeks gave it. To them it brought exaltation, an urge toward life and ever more life. It roused them to deeper spiritual understandings and released them from the petty greed of every-day existence. When they saw a tragedy on the stage, they felt their own hopeless hopes ennobled in art. Because any victory we may win is never the one we dreamed of winning. The point is that life in itself is nothing. It is a dream that keeps us fighting, willing - living! The dreams that can be completely realized are not worth dreaming. The higher the dream the more impossible it is to realize it fully. But you would not say, since this is true, that we should dream only of easily attained ideals. A man wills his own defeat when he pursues the unattainable. But his struggle is his success. He is an example of spiritual significance which life attains when it aims high enough, when the individual fights all the hostile forces within and without himself to achieve a future of nobler values. Such a figure is necessarily tragic. He may be a failure in our materialistic sense. His treasures are in other kingdoms. If a person is to get the meaning of life, he must 'learn to like' the facts about himself - ugly as they may seem to his sentimental vanity - before he can lay hold on the truth behind the facts, and that truth is never ugly."

The following clipping taken from the New York Tribune shows how Europe is accepting this young American dramatist.
"The first volume of O'Neill's plays published in England containing 'The Straw', 'Different' and 'Emperor Jones' evoked critical applause. When the Everyman's Theater produced 'In the Zone', one of his early one-act plays, last year in London, someone tried to de-Americanize him by telling that he is an Irishman. 'Moscow Art Theater Players' when asked what American author's work they would like to see performed replied 'O'Neill's.' It is rumored that the Moscow Art Theater Players may do some of O'Neill's plays, perhaps 'The Hairy Ape'.

The best way of indicating O'Neill's hold on European interest is to enumerate the places in which his plays will be presented this spring. In London, 'Anna Christie', 'Hairy Ape', 'Emperor Jones' and 'Beyond The Horizon'. In Dublin, 'Different' will be produced by Lennox Robinson, author of 'The White Headed Boy', at Abbey Theater. In Paris 'Hairy Ape', 'Emperor Jones', 'First Man', and 'Beyond The Horizon' are to be performed." The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded its annual gold medal for drama to Eugene O'Neill.

And what of this young author who fulfills all our measurements of genius - who at the age of thirty-four looks upon life with a deep-seeing eye, and peoples his plays with those who yearn, and those who strive, the lusty and the weak, from many ranks and stations - in brief, who has sounded the depths of both the theater and the world. It is gratifying to know that success cannot touch him, and that American literature will be enriched by much sincere work from this interpreter who sees man as "an alien to the earth beneath his feet and who has not yet pierced the skies above his head". It is too early to place O'Neill as a playwright and as an artist. He has little more than begun his career, but
he seems to have begun at a point beyond where many others have left off. Whether he can sustain the pace he has set for himself and develop it with the variety and perplexity demanded by the day in which he lives is a question for time to answer. After all O'Neill is roundly and soundly an American, the product of our life, thought and civilization.
Beyond the Horizon
Anna Christie
Hairy Ape
Emperor Jones
First Man
The Moon of the Caribees
Different
The Straw

Theater Arts Magazine - January 1921
Current Opinion - January 1921
Critical Outlook - January 1921
Different Criticisms - O.W.Firkin's Reviews
Emperor Jones Criticism - O.W.Firkin's Reviews - December 1920
Eugene O'Neill as a dramatist - W.P.Baton - Theater Arts
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Current Opinion - January 1922 - June 1922
Criticism of Anna Christie - F.Hackett - New Republic - Nov.1921
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Moderwell - The Theater of To-day