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THE EUGENE O'NEILL NEWSLETTER

Editor: Frederick Wilkins
Suffolk University, Boston

Preview Issue
January, 1977

A WELCOME AND A RAISON D'ETRE

Welcome all! THE EUGENE O'NEILL NEWSLETTER is a response to the opinion of many scholars that a journal devoted to Eugene O'Neill is badly needed. Surely America's greatest dramatist deserves the honor that has been granted many of his literary inferiors: a regular publication devoted solely to him and his work. Not a pudgy review or quarterly, for there are already many sources for publishing more sizable essays and monographs; but a newsletter, in which those far-flung articles can be summarized, in which forthcoming O'Neill productions and books can be announced (and previous ones reviewed), and in which the O'Neillians of academe can share news and insights with O'Neillians of the proscenium.

The NEWSLETTER will appear thrice yearly--in January, May and September--and the deadline for submissions will be the first day of the month preceding each issue (i.e., December 1, April 1, and August 1). Subscription information appears on the last page of this issue, and everyone--subscriber or not--is invited to offer material for future issues: brief articles about the life and works of O'Neill; abstracts of articles published elsewhere and of books relevant to O'Neill studies; reports on O'Neill dissertations-in-progress; news of forthcoming productions of the plays, and reviews of previous productions; requests for assistance or information; letters in reply to material in previous issues of the NEWSLETTER. In short, anything of general interest to scholars, performers and admirers of Eugene O'Neill. Submissions should be free of excess documentation (where possible, include source information in parentheses in the text itself), and the editor reserves the right to abbreviate if space limitations require. Correspondence and books for review should be sent to the editor. The editor recommends that unsolicited submissions not exceed 500 words in length without prior agreement.

THE CONTENT OF THIS ISSUE

The thinking that led to the creation of this journal began at a panel discussion on O'Neill, directed by the editor, at the convention of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco on December 27, 1975. The content of that discussion--slightly revised by the participants for publication--is offered herein as a kickoff, both for the NEWSLETTER and for future discussion. Readers' responses are welcome.

THE ENDURING O'NEILL: WHICH PLAYS WILL SURVIVE?

A Panel Discussion, December 27, 1975

Participants:

JOHN HENRY RALEIGH, Professor of English, University of California at Berkeley; author of The Plays of Eugene O'Neill; and editor of Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Iceman Cometh."

DORIS FALK, Professor Emeritus of English, Douglass College, Rutgers University; author of Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretive Study of the Plays.

VIRGINIA FLOYD, Professor of English, Bryant College; author of O'Neill's New England Cycle--The Yankee Puritan and New England Irish Catholic Elements in Five Autobiographical Plays.

ESTHER M. JACKSON, Professor of Theatre and Drama, University of Wisconsin, Madison; author of The Broken World of Tennessee Williams; and literary adviser to Mme. Birgit Culberg's television ballet, "The Dreamer," based on A Touch of the Poet.

FREDERICK C. WILKINS, Professor of English, Suffolk University; editor of The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter, and director of the panel discussion.

INTRODUCTION BY FREDERICK WILKINS

An O'Neill revival is upon us, a revival whose genesis was doubtless the emergence of A Moon for the Misbegotten as a viable play and a major item in the O'Neill canon. But recent revivals of All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Hairy Ape, and Dynamo suggest that the renaissance will extend well beyond the top of the O'Neillian iceberg. So it seems an appropriate time for O'Neill scholars to gather and attempt to determine which of the plays now seem the casualties of time; and which plays have the ingredients necessary for survival; and what former casualties might be resuscitated; and, in all cases, why.

Eugene O'Neill was unquestionably prolific, awesomely eclectic, and undeniably erratic. It does seem to be agreed by all that his work was uneven in quality and was, in Jordan Y. Miller's words, "constantly fluctuating between monumental achievement and abysmal failure"--with particularly tricky ground in between: those works

faintly praised as "flawed masterpieces" or regretfully dismissed as "superb failures."

So it is my hope that we can dust off the monuments and see them clear, asking whether they still fit their pedestals. (This was a question that worried Walter Kerr at the 1975 New York revival of Ah, Wilderness! He called it "a play we have trusted" but found himself "gradually forced to own up to misgivings that won't and don't go away.") Besides reassessing the monuments, we should also cast backward glances at the failures, asking whether they still deserve denigration. And we should walk the wilderness between, seeing what is salvageable and what is irretrievable, discerning what Travis Bogard, in the introduction to Contour in Time, calls "the inevitable inroads of time on the work of a major dramatist"--inroads that can of course lead to resurrection for individual works as well as demise.

I begin our session with two hopes. The first is that our focus will be as theatrical as it is literary, because O'Neill's power is so often para- or extra-literary. When Walter Prichard Eaton reviewed The Hairy Ape in 1922, he described the play as "something so profoundly theatrical that it cannot be expressed or even intimated in a printed text." And Tom Driver, a half-century later in Romantic Quest and Modern Query, says that O'Neill "is by no means a great literary figure; but as a considerable talent of the theater, his position is secure." Such comments are certainly open to debate, but their implications are valid: it might be limiting ourselves too much to examine O'Neill's work from a solely literary standpoint.

My second hope is that we will go beyond the big five, or the big eight, in the canon. I feel that what Brendan Gill wrote about Philip Barry in a September 1975 issue of The New Yorker is at least as true of O'Neill: "the so-called flops are in certain respects more worth examining than the hits."

The "worth" I wish us to focus on is theatrical worth and viability, and not the fascinating but peripheral values of such matters as biographical illumination. (Days Without End has tremendous biographical significance, as Professor Raleigh has admirably demonstrated. But as an autonomous artifact, it offers little.)

These are the questions I hope we'll be pondering. What are the plays of Eugene O'Neill that will and/or should last in the forum for which they were intended, the theatre? Those in which he is most introspective and gratifies his autobiographical impulse? those in which he is most the social critic? those in which he is most the cosmic questioner? or those in which some balance of these three roles is achieved? Is it those plays in which he is most the experimenter, seeking new ways to externalize the interior conflicts he was determined to present? Or those in which he is most the traditionalist, spinning out variations on the themes and forms of melodrama? Is it those plays which are most expansive (in size of cast and chronological sweep)? Or those which are most compressed (in time, space, action and personnel)? Is it those plays in which he ponders "the one eternal tragedy of Man" and, in Bernard De Voto's phrase, "dives into the infinite"? Or

those in which he gives something more specific and substantial--and local--to the airy nothingness of abstract speculation? Is it the plays about Life? or the plays about lives? The early or the late? The short or the long? (The questions could easily extend "beyond the horizon"!))

And one last question, of a more practical sort but still relevant: Are there plays, denegated and disregarded before, that might now be stageworthy because of technical advances since the time of their first production? For instance, if we can now, through sound effects, sophisticated lighting and film, provide the crowds in Lazarus Laughed; the visions in The Fountain; the orgiastic electrification in Dynamo; the isolating pinpoint spots in Welded; the filmic element that O'Neill felt was essential for Hughie to be totally successful in a theatre: if we can provide them, then are those plays now more capable and worthy of revival? and survival?

These are a few of the questions that may or may not prove to be usable today. I don't wish to predetermine the course of our discussion; and it is indeed likely that we will answer few or even none of these questions directly; but I think that our findings will suggest possible answers.

One thing is certain: we cannot expect unanimity. Not yet, at least, if ever. We are still too close to O'Neill and his age (our age) to assess him with the requisite distance or perspective. Besides, any playwright about whom there is no debate is as dead as the society the debate doesn't occur in! Nevertheless, our communal conclusions today may make a contribution to the ongoing discussion; perhaps, considering the expertise of the panel members, a significant contribution indeed.

JOHN HENRY RALEIGH

When Professor Wilkins asked me to join this program, which was to try to suggest ways of ranking O'Neill's plays, and then asked all participants to suggest some way of going about it, I suggested four categories: real clunks, so-so kind of plays, good plays and great plays. But I have since refined my categories; there are now six. Here are the six, beginning with the worst and working up to the best, with about three plays representative of each group.

1. Real clunkers. (The First Man, 1921; Welded, 1922-23; Days Without End, 1932-33.)

I think they are real clunkers because the characterization is either weak, on the one hand, or is sort of nakedly autobiographical, as it is in Welded and Days Without End. Welded obviously is about O'Neill and Agnes Boulton. Days Without End is some kind of inner struggle he must have had when he dreamed or fantasized about going back to Catholicism. The First Man is, among other

bad things, O'Neill's imitation of middle-class dialogue, in which it has always seemed to me that he is at his very worst.

2. So-so's. (Beyond the Horizon, 1918; The Straw, 1918-19; Diff'rent, 1920.)

The Straw, for example, has some good points along with a lot of crudities as well. In my estimation of the play, the good thing about it is the terrible pathos that he generates about his poor, doomed heroine. The language here is not distinguished in any way, but I think that the play has power insofar as the terrible things that happen to this quite innocent young lady are shown clearly and without any kind of sentimentality either.

3. Interesting weirdos. (The Great God Brown, 1925; Lazarus Laughed, 1925-26; Dynamo, 1928.)

These are the plays that were engendered when O'Neill released the wild side of his imagination, which was quite powerful, and he came up with extremely interesting conceptions which actually didn't work out in the plays themselves. Lazarus especially seems to me, in conception, to have a very profound and certainly ver far-reaching theme; and it probably has never been properly staged. As Professor Wilkins suggests, maybe with the medium of movies or television it could be done.

4. Good plays. (Anna Christie, 1920; The Emperor Jones, 1920; The Hairy Ape, 1921; Desire Under the Elms, 1924; Ah, Wilderness! 1932.)

These are very clever, very well done. Some of them have extraordinarily impressive stage effects, especially The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. The characters are strong; the dialogue doesn't have the banality of, say, The First Man, Welded, or Days Without End. They are, above all, good theatre; they can be staged effectively and of course have been many times.

5. Near-greats. (A Touch of the Poet, 1935-42; A Moon for the Misbegotten, 1943.)

The dialogue is just right. Irishness, drunkenness, and human frustration are the themes, which the author knew so well. Our inability to forgive ourselves is at the heart of each. They lack only the spaciousness and the endless resonances of the great plays.

6. The great plays. (The Iceman Cometh, 1939; Long Day's Journey Into Night, 1939-41; and Hughie, 1941-42.)

Everything is right: dialogue, characters, setting. In their length they suggest the endlessness of human guilt and suffering. But there is unique counterpoint; an intermittent vein of wild comedy. This combination is the quintessential O'Neill.

Finally, some words about Hughie. It is certainly one of the great one-act plays in western culture, eminently comparable to Chekhov or Strindberg, and in a way one of the most interesting one-act plays ever written, when one considers the marvelous use

of Broadway argot that Erie talks, and then the inner thoughts of the desk man, which have a real literary distinction. Verbally, I think Hughie is one of the best things O'Neill ever did.

DORIS FALK

I am not going to go down the line of the plays. I agree to a great extent with Professor Raleigh's categories, although I didn't have quite that many categories to start with. But I'm really more interested in the problems and the reasons why we're having this meeting, and why we can look at each other's faces and see some disagreement. There is--no kidding--a problem about O'Neill; and part of that problem--and I find this in myself--is that most of us here wear two hats at least. One of those is that of the scholar, who is searching for the figure in the carpet in O'Neill's work. To find that figure, you deal with the whole canon; you see what the application of the play is to O'Neill himself; you have all of the scholarly paraphernalia surrounding it. But the play takes on a totally different significance for you when you suddenly go to the theatre and see it there--especially if, like me, you're not what's known as a "theatre person." My experience has been very limited with actual stage production. So I'm an audience that is an amateur when it comes to appreciating pieces of theatre, although I was at one time a professional when it came to analyzing.

Since the days when I perpetrated that study (Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension), I've had a lot of second thoughts about O'Neill, not in contradiction to what I'd said at that time, but simply on a different level. At that time I was fascinated with the psychological patterns, the intrapsychic struggles within O'Neill--all the masks: who is behind which mask?--and the pattern did fit very neatly into a lot of things O'Neill himself didn't understand about his characters. But later than that I began to be very much bothered by the fact that there are some things in O'Neill that I just don't like when I see the plays on the stage. I felt overwhelmed by his cry of pain and anguish in those characters, but I felt considerably underwhelmed by the banality of his conceptions. (I'm afraid I have to disagree over the profundity of Lazarus Laughed.)

The question of O'Neill's unassimilated Nietzsche bothers me. He rewrites The Birth of Tragedy and Zarathustra over and over again. I think that one of the things it boils down to for me is whether a play is fully dramatized or not. In all his plays where the epiphany, or the insight, comes in the form of a vision--of a fountain, or of a long sermon, or of some other kind of exposition (which O'Neill knew he was accused of writing)--these things seem to me symptomatic of a half-formed work of art: a conception or symbol which has not been fully solidified.

As this bothered me, I began to do a little research into some of the negative aspects and then to try to find out how they got there. And I remembered that what O'Neill had said, over and over again, was that in some of his plays the comedy breaks up and the tragedy comes on. (According to O'Neill, this is what happens in Iceman.) But O'Neill's background in the theatre--which

Professor Raleigh has shown so clearly in connection with Monte Cristo and his ambivalent feelings towards his father's melodrama--has a close relationship, I think, to this notion of comedy suddenly turning into tragedy. Because, when you come right down to it, one of the things O'Neill was saying is that any situation which appears comic when objectively viewed, becomes tragic if you put yourself in the position of the characters, if you are subjectively identified with them. Now this could make Mickey Mouse into a tragic hero, you know, when the cat grabs him. He might even be responsible for his own fate. This is sort of a "Death of Comedy" if you begin identifying with every clown that comes along. And O'Neill knew this so well.

Desire Under the Elms has never been a favorite play with me. And I felt that maybe I was right when I found out, as Professor Bogard showed, that O'Neill was heavily indebted to T. C. Murray's Birthright. And I had dug up on my own that he had also taken a hokey by-gosh melodrama called The Old Homestead that played everywhere his own parents played and whose author was a friend of his father, and he had twisted that around in order to emphasize various kinds of blasphemies. He had inverted the action. This was a sentimental picture of life under the elms--yes, it's even under the elms!--in Swansea, New Hampshire. And the main character is one Josh Whitcomb. And this is one of the things that bothered me; finding over and over again that this sort of thing happened.

O'Neill himself said, "My early experience with the theatre through my father made me revolt against it. As a boy I saw so much of the old ranting artificial romantic stage stuff that I always had a certain contempt for the theatre." We might add that he also had a certain contempt for his audience--and that's us--because he felt that he was playing not just to the masses but was aiming for the intelligentsia, for people that he thought could understand what he was doing. But at the same time, this ambivalence was operating in which he tried to pull the wool over our eyes whenever he could. He even said, when he was talking to George Jean Nathan about Where the Cross is Made, that this was an "amusing experiment in treating the audience as insane." Somewhere else he calls us "suckers," and you know his attitude toward the "damned human race."

In Moon for the Misbegotten, for example. I have to agree with Eric Bentley. (You may see that I'm heavily influenced by Eric Bentley. I'm still trying to like O'Neill, I really am!) But he's right when he calls that play O'Neill's Pietá. But the worst part of it is, O'Neill at the stage in his life was almost paralyzed intellectually. He was never very strong on imagination, when it came to imagining new plots and such, and so he went back to some of the oldest stuff he could find. I once heard a farmer in upstate New York playing a song called, "A mother was chasing her boy 'round the room, / She was chasing her boy with a broom." I've forgotten how the rest of it goes; but this, he told me, came out of vaudeville. Well, there's old Josie, chasing her boy 'round the room with that broomstick when the play opens. The structure is there. The pathos of course comes in, later

on, but to think that O'Neill would use the oldest of all the melodramatic tricks! that to save the old homestead, the farmer will catch the landlord seducing the farmer's daughter, and blackmail the landlord into a shotgun wedding with said daughter, thus acquiring old homestead and son-in-law. Now this is pure camp. He even has Hogan say, "Sometimes an old trick is best; because it's so ancient, no one would suspect you'd try it."

O'Neill's aim--not always, but often enough--was to put one over on us, to pass off hardware (and that's minstrel show slang for counterfeit money; that's why Hickey is a hardware salesman) for the real thing.

Some of the plays fail for me because, as I said, they resort to philosophizing. But others annoy me because O'Neill seems to assume that, like Dion Anthony's customers, I will fail to see this grinning, ironic Silenus under the mask, not of a building facade but of tragedy. But that Silenus is there. All you have to do is know who is the real spokesman in Mourning Becomes Electra. It's Seth. And many of those names are simply puns on sexual aspects of human life.

When I am in the study, as a scholar, I understand the self-destructive conflicts which underlay so much of O'Neill's negativism, and I understand his need to veil it in hidden jokes and puns and carefully researched Biblical blasphemies (you should look up all those names in Desire Under the Elms), and his need to cover his disgust with sex by pretending that it was the fault of the Puritans. But in the theatre I'm looking for something different: I want to see a whole, an organic whole, a fully dramatized unit independent of the canon, and independent of old jokes turned inside out, and independent of cram courses in certain German and oriental philosophers.

For me, the plays most complete in themselves are probably The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey. They do not seem to me pretentious; they do not patronize me; they do not manufacture Dionysian myths of tragic affirmation or eternal recurrence; and their excessive length and repetition can be overcome by skillful direction and acting.

To speak more positively, you have to admire O'Neill's sheer drive and energy and what Bentley called his "vastness of intent." He did think big. But I've been trying to come to terms with this for quite a while. And maybe I can cause a little discomfort here if I say that, for me, one of the most useful comparisons to O'Neill, who was after all our first American dramatist, and still maybe our most important, is with our first American novelist, Fenimore Cooper. Both men are widely supposed to mirror important aspects of American culture, and so they do. Both of them had vast intentions; they wanted to do the entire panorama of American culture. Both of them turned some of their own problems and inner conflicts and hatreds on the greed of the so-called "meek" by reviling American civilization because it's uncivilized. (Of course O'Neill tried to portray it on a panoramic scale in A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed.) And both of them had a tin ear.

The trouble with evaluating O'Neill's work is that we have to have the double view of the plays, from both the library and the stage. And this is complicated by (a) O'Neill's double view of his material (he didn't always respect what he was writing about), and (b) his double view of the audience. With one part of himself he sincerely believed that the clown wears a tragic mask behind his comic one, and that there is no more classic agon than the inner cry of the dimwit or the drunk or the fat girl. On the other hand, the clowns in the audience are just that, especially if they can't see the kitsch behind the craft.

The most recent O'Neill I've seen on the stage was Ah, Wilderness! and I loved it (never mind Walter Kerr). I think I liked it because O'Neill treated honestly sentimental and nostalgic materials with humorous objectivity. He did not strip Richard Miller to the soul in order to show us that he's really the same suffering boy-man who, from Beyond the Horizon to More Stately Mansions, had been looking for a woman who is part mother, part virgin sweetheart, and part whore. (The first two parts, of course, are what give the whore the heart of gold.) It wasn't until we got home from the theatre that I recognized this particular Richard. I discovered once again what I had forgotten, which was that George M. Cohan, who played the first Nat Miller, had said that O'Neill knew all the old circus jokes, and that Ah, Wilderness! was full of old vaudeville gags that "had been done over and over again." I'd forgotten too that Cohan had been roundly scolded by O'Neill when he ad-libbed the part of the father so as to outshine that of the son.

Well, all that's history and strictly for the library. In the theatre the play is great. But some of these days I'm going to research those old jokes Cohan talked about, if a bright graduate student hasn't already done it. In any case, I'd like to know what they are. Usually they're pretty funny, you know. Like the one about the iceman.

VIRGINIA FLOYD

Tennessee Williams stated that O'Neill gave birth to the American theatre and died for it. There was no American theatre before O'Neill. He won his reputation twice: once for the plays of his early period, beginning in 1920 with Beyond the Horizon and ending in 1934 with Days Without End; and later in the 1950's, after his death, with the later plays. To determine which plays are viable today on page and on stage, one must look at the distinguishing characteristics of the plays of both periods.

The plays of the early period were purely experimental, and with the exception of Desire Under the Elms, they can be classified as mediocre, indifferent, and really awful. It is ironic that the plays that won him highest praise in his own lifetime were the flawed plays of this early period: Mourning Becomes Electra, Ah, Wilderness!, Strange Interlude and Desire Under the Elms. In 1932, George Jean Nathan called O'Neill "the most important dramatist in the present English-speaking

world." If O'Neill had never written another play after 1934, his early works would be relegated to library shelves and classrooms, produced occasionally, and remembered only for what they contributed to the development of the American theatre. After 1934 there was silence: twelve years of theatrical silence. Yet in those years, from 1935 to 1943, O'Neill wrote his finest plays.

Critics questioned the vast difference between the mediocrity of the early plays and the greatness of the last plays and found a twofold cause: the playwright's new purpose and vision. He took what was for him a long-delayed, courageous action: he looked inward, into his own tormented soul, and back, tracing and recording the conflicts in his own tragic life and that of his family. O'Neill's ability to transfigure his own life into drama produced his greatest plays. As early as 1928, O'Neill promised and projected the grand opus of his life, the autobiographical Sea-Mother's Son. In the 1930's he abandoned this work to begin a historical cycle of a supposedly imaginary Irish family, A Tale of Possessors, Self-Dispossessed. Only two plays of this cycle survive: A Touch of the Poet and the unfinished More Stately Mansions. The survival and value of these plays can be ascribed to their highly autobiographical nature. With these two plays and the last two plays of the canon, Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, O'Neill unconsciously completed an autobiographical New England cycle. Because of their similarities, these plays form a natural group. The setting of each is the closed Yankee New England environment. The semi-autobiographical characters of the first two plays, the struggling Irish Melodys of the nineteenth century, are replaced in the later plays by their twentieth-century descendants, the totally autobiographical Tyrone-O'Neills. Similar themes also link these plays: the parent-child conflict, the loss of faith, and the Irish-Yankee struggle.

I believe two forces contributed to the formation of O'Neill, the man and playwright: his Irish-Catholic heritage and his New England environment. He was obsessed by his Irish heritage and told his son Eugene in 1946, "One thing that explains more than anything about me is the fact that I'm Irish, and strangely enough it is something that all writers who have attempted to explain me and my work have overlooked." The same year, during rehearsals of The Iceman Cometh, in his last big news conference, he said he regarded his home as New England, and added that "the battle of moral forces in the New England scene is what I feel closest to as an artist."

This battle of moral forces, particularly the Irish-Yankee conflict and its effect on an Irish family, inspired him to write his four late New England plays. He viewed the conflict objectively in the supposedly historical plays, A Touch of the Poet and More Stately Mansions. A Touch of the Poet is not a great play; it is a good play. However, as John O'Connor stated, "What is merely good in O'Neill has a way of making the competition look rather mediocre." In reviewing the 1974 production of this play, Clive Barnes noted, "It was once acceptable, if not fashionable, gently to decry Poet along with most other plays of O'Neill's early and middle periods. This play, written in 1935, now stands as one of the major American plays of its decade."

More Stately Mansions, written just after Poet and during the same period that produced his greatest works--The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten-- is a remarkably bad play. In Mansions, the least autobiographical play of the later period, O'Neill turns his vision outward and attacks the greedy accumulators of wealth, those who would sacrifice the touch of the poet for material benefits. Even with Jose Quintero directing the 1967 American production, the play was a failure. Walter Kerr called More Stately Mansions "a born ruin, a great architectural emptiness derived from slaved-over blueprints." Written and revised during the time he produced his greatest works, the play can be used as a means to appraise O'Neill's work more realistically for it provides us with an insight into what he was attempting to do in his vast historical cycle.

Not until he abandoned all pretense to writing about an imaginary Irish family, the Melodys, and wrote of his own family did he create his greatest work, Long Day's Journey into Night. Edwin Engel calls this O'Neill's "most religious play and his most genuine tragedy." O'Neill's lifelong religious quest, finally admitted here, and his despair of ever finding the peace he so desperately sought, provide the tragic tension of the play. In 1912 O'Neill was not the atheist he depicted himself to be in the play. Beatrice Ashe Maher, who knew him at this time and nearly married him, told me he was "a very religious person. He was always talking to God as we walked. To him religion was a personal thing. One day I wanted him to come into church to see the beautiful window John D. Rockefeller had donated, but he said simply, 'I don't want to get religion now.'"

"Now" seemed to come nearly thirty years later as he wrote his last two plays. One wonders how closely O'Neill's desires approximated Mary Tyrone's when she says in the play, "If only I could find the faith I lost, so I could pray again! I can't have lost it forever. I would die if I thought that. Because then there would be no hope."

The inner conflict of the Tyrone-O'Neill family--loss of faith and blind attempts to fill the gap with drugs, drink and sex--reveals the important role faith did play in the lives of the playwright and his family. The Irish had fought so desperately to retain their faith during the centuries of English domination that losing it was like losing a part of their very being. In Long Day's Journey into Night there is no hope--only the despair of the long, soul-searching night. The various methods of escape pursued by each of the characters provide only a temporary refuge from the reality of life. In spite of seemingly overwhelming weaknesses, each character possesses an inner strength. Yet one knows when the curtain drops that life will not correct the errors of the past, alter the present, or improve the future for any one of the four haunted and tormented Tyrones. In depicting their despair, O'Neill communicates the plight of modern man. In no other American play do we find such agonizing alienation as that found in the last scene which reveals each Tyrone locked in his own private hell of loneliness, yet reaching out in anguish for the love and understanding of the others. The scene strikes a chilling, responsive chord in all men, and it is this universal appeal that lifts the play to the level of a masterpiece.

While Long Day's Journey into Night depicts the dark of night of despair into which the soul is plunged when robbed of faith, A Moon for the Misbegotten, its sequel and the last play O'Neill wrote, shows the journey of the soul into light and regeneration. A Moon for the Misbegotten is a play about hope, redemption, and the power of love. I believe that it will eventually be accepted as one of O'Neill's great plays and will rank with Long Day's Journey into Night and The Iceman Cometh. Ineffective staging of its first productions led critics and audiences to reject the play. The 1947 pre-Broadway tour was unsuccessful, and the play did not receive the critical acclaim it deserved until the Circle-in-the-Square staged it in 1968 and 1973. When the play was produced the way O'Neill had written it, it was a tremendous success. In reviewing the 1973 version, Walter Kerr called it "a beautiful play--possibly O'Neill's best." Arthur Gelb stated that it was better in some ways than Long Day's Journey into Night and "that it has yet to be acknowledged as the soaring masterpiece it is."

What made the playwright's last autobiographical plays great was the intensity of his personal emotion. In these plays he revealed not only the anguish, old sorrows and guilty obsessions of the four O'Neills, but the cause of them--their spiritual rootlessness. O'Neill quite simply was in quest of God--a forgiving, loving God Who would give his tormented soul the peace it longed for. The late plays and a few of the earlier ones provided us with much evidence of this quest. The last play of O'Neill's early period, Days Without End, and the final play of his late period, A Moon for the Misbegotten, reveal his own inner spiritual need. Days Without End marks the playwright's first attempt to make the journey back to the faith; A Moon for the Misbegotten depicts his last attempt in his work. The guilt-ridden Jim Tyrone, like John Loving, a renegade Catholic, is haunted by the dogma of his Irish-Catholic youth and believes that only confession can bring him peace. Jim's confession and the absolution of the mother figure, Josie, do bring him the peace he seeks. In her last speech of the play, the last words O'Neill was to write, Josie says to the departing Tyrone, "May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace." In the end, a suffering soul is redeemed. This was a type of wish fulfillment on the part of the playwright.

I believe O'Neill achieved two kinds of redemption: the first was a spiritual one wrought by the sufferings of his anguished, tormented soul; the second was a literary and theatrical one wrought by the greatness of his last plays. While O'Neill's language falters at times, especially in the early plays, the message is there--an arrow straight to the heart--for audiences and readers alike. The themes and their appeals are universal: the constant struggle against alienation; the essential loneliness of man; ethnic discrimination and the attempt to belong; the sense of desolation without faith--the despair of living in a world without God, love, and trust in life; the disillusionment

with family--the constant conflicts within the family; the concept that only illusions can make existence endurable. Flawed as the entire canon is, flawed as he was in character--Phoenix-like, O'Neill lives on. His spirit and his works will not only endure, they will prevail.

ESTHER M. JACKSON

Trying to assess the prospect for permanent value in the plays of Eugene O'Neill presents the kind of dilemma that must have confronted critics in those periods in which other theatrical innovators lived and worked. For like Euripides, Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Strindberg, O'Neill was a theatrical innovator, the interpreter of a singular vision of reality. The dynamic quality of that vision seems virtually to preclude the division of his work into discrete units. Rather, his plays appear to exist as figures in a single dramatic form of great complexity.

Eugene O'Neill was a poet, both as original and as flawed as Walt Whitman. Like that of Whitman, his work reflects many limitations. Certainly, he was not so skilled a builder of play structures as George Bernard Shaw. Nor was he able to shape language of the poetic quality apparent in the works of Bertolt Brecht. He was not so systematic a thinker as Luigi Pirandello or Jean Giraudoux. Today, however, it would appear that he may have excelled his distinguished contemporaries in the power of his interpretations of the issue which has dominated the history of the twentieth century: What are the psychological, social, intellectual, moral, and theological implications of personal freedom?

In the main, O'Neill's European contemporaries were absorbed in the interpretation of conditions associated with the sociopolitical history of the nineteenth century. O'Neill, on the other hand, was concerned with the future of Western man, particularly, with the impact of "democratic" freedom on human character. If his dramas recapitulate aspects of the political, social, economic, intellectual, and moral history of America of the nineteenth century, they offer a startling pre-vision of the kinds of characters, conflicts, ideas, passions, and settings which would emerge more clearly during the last half of the twentieth century, not only in the drama, but in life itself.

It is in a group of works which strike us today as essentially unfinished that O'Neill's most compelling visions of the present and future appear. Plays such as The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun, The Great God Brown, Marco Millions, Lazarus Laughed, and Dynamo are fragmentary images of realities which are still taking shape in the public mind.

Although O'Neill's limitations as a dramatist can be traced, in part, to the inadequacies of his technique as a writer, they also reflect problems of a more general nature. Unlike

European dramatists who worked within established social, intellectual, cultural, and linguistic traditions, O'Neill, as innovator, was compelled to assume a major responsibility for the translation of emerging American values into the popular language of the stage. He was required not merely to imitate the reality of American experience, but actually to assist in defining it. He was what Professor John Gassner has described as a "geographer" of the landscape of the American mind.

O'Neill extended the ground of meaning explored by European and American writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He sought to discover a basis for tragic heroism in the lives of those men and women whom Walt Whitman had described as "common." His search for tragic meaning in the democratic setting was to provide the playwright with a continuing challenge. It was only occasionally that he was able to create dramatic forms fully expressive of the tragic sense he attributed to American character.

O'Neill's contribution to the history of Western theatre must be judged in terms of two major criteria: (1) the quality of his dramatic imagination; that is, of his vision of reality, and (2) his ability to translate that vision into the language of theatre. Today, nearly a quarter-century after the playwright's death, more than a half-century since the beginning of his career as a dramatist, and almost a century since his birth, the exceptional quality of his dramatic imagination is generally acknowledged by directors, designers, and performers throughout Western theatre.

Many critics believe, however, that he was less successful in meeting the second criterion, that of translating his dynamic vision of reality into effective theatrical forms. Significantly, the works which are most often deemed "likely to endure" are those which make use of European stage forms. Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, Ah, Wilderness!, A Moon for the Misbegotten, A Touch of the Poet, and even A Long Day's Journey Into Night can be described as adaptations of traditional forms of tragedy, comedy, and tragicomedy.

It is, however, not in these more conventional plays but in his "difficult" works that the nature of his contribution to American drama is most clearly evident.

These experimental works introduced concepts of character, action, dialogue, and setting which would find extended development in the American theatre of the forties, fifties, and sixties. Like the plays of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Edward Albee, they are essentially scenarios, requiring exposition in a textural language composed of techniques and materials drawn not only from the drama, but also from poetry, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture, and film.

Unfortunately, the American art of the mise-en-scène was not to mature until the last years of O'Neill's life. Consequently, the majority of his works did not have the advantage of developing through the complex production process which would enhance the theatricality of the plays of Williams, Miller, and Albee.

Which of the dramas of Eugene O'Neill will endure? The question is a difficult one. Certainly plays such as Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, Ah, Wilderness!, A Moon for the Misbegotten, A Touch of the Poet, and A Long Day's Journey Into Night seem likely to retain interest for audiences in America and abroad.

The future of many of O'Neill's innovative works is less certain. For plays such as Thirst, The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, Strange Interlude, Dynamo, and Marco Millions--while possessing strong dramatic values--require skilled interpretation in a production language of exceptional complexity. Not only do these problematic texts require congruent modes of acting, directing, and design, they are dependent, for their interpretation in the theatre, on a highly sophisticated use of theatrical technology.

At this point, two of O'Neill's most innovative dramas seem likely to remain in production. In The Iceman Cometh and Hughie, the playwright seems finally to have created dramatic forms expressive of his unique visions of the human condition. It may well be that these two plays will prove the measure of his original contribution, not only to the history of the American theatre but to the development of the modern drama.

