THE ENDURING O'NEILL: THE EARLY PLAYS

The Preview Issue of The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter published four discussions of "Which Plays Will Survive," which had been presented at the O'Neill seminar at the Modern Language Association Convention a year before. Most of these were by younger scholars who had little good to say about the early plays—those written before 1935. Now Frederick Wilkins has offered me the opportunity to make rebuttal. For I believe that many of these early plays will survive—indeed many have already been revived many times—and that some will continue to rank very high.

Scholars sometimes forget that a generation gap exists in literature as in life. The judgments of one generation are often reversed by the next. When American Literature was first taught sixty years ago, Longfellow and Whittier were major figures, Emily Dickinson was a minor poet and Melville was briefly mentioned. Yet every generation continues to judge the past in the conviction that its judgments will be final. Now, none of O'Neill's early plays makes even the next-to-top rating in John Raleigh's six categories of excellence, while Virginia Floyd judges that, "with
the exception of Desire Under the Elms, they can be classified as mediocre, indifferent, and really awful." --Well, I disagree.

About 1930 Mr. Leon Miralas directed a production of The Great God Brown in Buenos Aires. Recently he wrote an introduction to the Spanish translation of my Twayne book on O'Neill (Buenos Aires, 1972). But he took a strenuous exception to my judgment that Long Day's Journey was O'Neill's most perfect play. Not so, he objected, Desire Under the Elms remained the best. And I suspect that many voices out of the past, if they could still be heard, would echo his protest. In moods of nostalgia I would agree--the very perfection of Long Day's Journey, which in part derives from the author's disinvolve from his material, sometimes creates a feeling of coldness. Some of the early plays had more of the throbbing pulse of life in them.

Take my own experience with Desire. When I first saw the play I identified strongly with young Eben Cabot, and hated his stubborn, selfish father with a purple passion. (Incidentally, young Perry Miller acted as one of the chorus of townspeople in the first New York production.) Later after rereading the play, and especially after studying Emerson, I realized that Ephraim Cabot was also an embodiment of "The New England Mind" in action--a farmer in the company of Emerson's "Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Merriam, Flint." Now I believe that Ephraim Cabot is the most interesting and the most powerful character created by O'Neill--infinitely more interesting, of course, than the moon-calf Eben, more real than any of his contemporaries, and finally a kind of incarnation of the old Puritan God.

Negatively, I find Doris Falk's charge that Desire suffers from the bar-sinister of melodramatic ancestry beside the point. Melodrama is the raw material of myth, (and also of opera), and some of O'Neill's best plays achieve greatness by means of what Mary McCarthy (in criticizing A Moon for the Misbegotten) calls their "mythic powers." When O'Neill attempted to create pure myth, as in The Fountain, he failed; when he sought consciously to adapt ancient myth, as in Mourning Becomes Electra, he seems contrived; but when he allowed the actual materials of his Irish and New England origins to create their own myths, he sometimes achieved greatness.

One difficulty which tradition-minded critics, such as Eric Bentley and Doris Falk, find in O'Neill stems, I think, from a dislike, and perhaps fear, of the irrational and the unconventional. When O'Neill transmutes melodrama into myth, they imagine a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. If they had been writing in 1605, they might have labeled Hamlet a melodramatic ghost story. I do not mean to compare Desire with Hamlet, but the creative process by which melodrama may be transmuted into tragic myth is the same in each.
Or take a less successful play of the early period, Strange Interlude. From the beginning, Interlude has labored under the obvious faults of extreme length, dubious psychology, and Freudian jargon--faults which time has only emphasized. Moreover, it too derived from a contemporary melodrama, which later resulted in an abortive lawsuit charging plagiarism. But in 1929 it overcame these faults to achieve an incredible success in the theatre. And this success, I believe, also derived from its transmutation of melodrama into myth. Nina's invocation of "God the Mother," and the utterly unrealistic scene in which she addresses, in turn, "my three men," appeals to an imagination beyond reason. To speak autobiographically, that scene moved me more profoundly than any other which I have witnessed in a lifetime of theatre-going. And so, beyond reason, I believe that Strange Interlude also will survive.

To go back to the beginning, in 1923 and 1924 when O'Neill's early plays were achieving prominence I was writing drama reviews for the Harvard Crimson. I do not remember reviewing any of O'Neill's plays, but I do remember seeing them, and I particularly remember my absorption in a performance of Beyond the Horizon. But most significant was my feeling of identification with the audience as we emerged from the theatre after that performance, walking in a kind of trance, and wondering how anything like this could ever have happened in America. It was an almost religious experience of being born again--a renaissance of the theatre in the new world.

It may be a waste of time to construct a hierarchy of O'Neill's plays, because different plays will survive for different reasons. By the formal standards of traditional criticism, Desire may rank with Long Day's Journey, and certainly with A Moon for the Misbegotten. Emperor Jones remains perfect in its own way, as Hughie is today. Ah, Wilderness and Anna Christie survive on their own terms. But the final greatness of O'Neill's plays lies, I think, in their dramatization of the irrational elements of human nature--a dramatization successfully realized (but not successfully formalized) in Strange Interlude, and achieving final, formal perfection in The Iceman Cometh.

--Frederic I. Carpenter
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"C. W. D's" AT TAO HOUSE

"I want a house," Mrs. Eugene O'Neill told her architect, "That has room for eight thousand books and three hundred pairs of shoes."

She spoke of the projected home to be set on one hundred and sixty acres in the hills on the west side of the San Ramon Valley above the town of Danville. Here, she and her husband planned to build a luxurious retreat where the playwright could
work undisturbed on the massive dramas he had in plan. It was to be called "Tao House"--the name, reflective of O'Neill's interest in oriental philosophy, means "The Way," the right way of life--and while the exterior conformed to the Spanish style of architecture of much California building, inside the rooms were to be decorated in the oriental manner. The walls were to be stark white, the doors lacquer red, and the rooms were to be furnished expensively with the finest oriental furniture available from Gump's in San Francisco.

When it was completed late in 1937 it proved to be a home of great elegance, yet one which achieved its effectiveness by simple means. It was set low in the hills and preserved as much of the natural landscape as was possible for an eighteen room dwelling. Its entrance through a thick gate on which were fixed the Chinese symbols for "Tao" led into a bright, walled courtyard, around a large lawn surrounded by orange trees. Inside, the house was dark, for all its white paint. The thick basaltite bricks that formed the walls cloistered its inhabitants. Windows were small for the size of the rooms and screened in such a way that a subaqueous light was filtered in and reflected through the rooms by dark mirrors. The "views," so beloved of most California architecture, were deliberately rejected, including a magnificent panorama of Mount Diablo looming above the walnut orchards. To see this sight, one had to move outside, but it is notable that each of the main rooms and all the bedrooms open out onto a deck or terrace or balcony where the light and the ingratiating countryside can be enjoyed.

O'Neill was to live at Tao House only until 1944, a little over six years. In 1937, he was at the height of his powers. The sum of his work to that year had gained for him the Nobel Prize, and his plays, both in performance and book form, were best-sellers. More important, he had in plan the great cycle of eleven plays on American historical material which he proposed to call *A Tale of the Possessors, Self-dispossessed*. Turning in his mind as well was a series of works that were to be both historical and autobiographical, telling his own story and that of his family in thin dramatic disguises.

His journals record the uninterrupted periods of intense work. At the end of each month, there appears the cryptic notation "c.w.d. 30" which means that he had 30 consecutive "creative working days." Virtually the only breaks were the periods enforced on him by illness. His sickness grew increasingly severe and the tremor in his hands increased until he was unable to write at all, yet in the six-year period he finished *A Touch of the Poet* and drafts, now destroyed, of several others of the cycle, including the unfinished but surviving script of *More Stately Mansions*. The cycle plan was nearly as arduous to write as the plays themselves, involving as it did endless readjustments and revisions as his sense of the whole changed with time. Scenarios alone ran
His illness, complicated by the deprivations of war—servants, transportation—finally made living at Tao House impossible. The O'Neill family sold the house and the furniture and moved to New York City. The new owners renamed the holding "Corduroy Hills," and changed the style of the house to French provincial. They increased the land to a thousand acres, and turned O'Neill's retreat into a full-scale working ranch. When they in turn moved away, much of the acreage was sold to the county and became part of the Las Trampas Wilderness area, with the result that Tao House has remained protected from encroaching developments in the isolation which it has always had.

The decision of the National and State governments to aid interested citizens in the San Ramon Valley to purchase the house and hold it, as a National Historic Site, as a memorial to the playwright has turned the house back toward its original "way." Both the state and the national bills have specified that it shall become a center for the performing arts. Thus, in addition to the many problems of renovation and restoration, the board of directors of "The Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House" has been concerned to develop a program which will prove of use to both professional and amateur performing artists.

To aid in developing a program which will be truly responsive to the needs of these artists, a wide variety of persons connected with performing arts in the Bay Area and from elsewhere have been invited by ones and twos to walk through the house and its grounds and to suggest possible uses for the facility. The ideas so far gathered have ranged from the simple to the highly developed, from the contemplative to the most aggressively performance-oriented. What has been interesting and moving is the response all visitors have had to the potential of the house and grounds as a place in which serious work can be carried on. Although most traces of O'Neill's residence have disappeared in time, something of his creative energy still remains to be tapped. It should not be long until there can again be totalled the number of "c.w.d's" spent at Tao House.

--Travis Bogard


There have been numerous requests for copies of the papers presented at last December's MLA discussion of the topic described
above. My original intention in attempting to explore the "behind life" forces that predominate in O'Neill and his work was to examine the playwright's Irish Catholicism and Puritanism, but the scope was broadened to include his mysticism and humanism. O'Neill was a religious playwright. His concern was not the relation between man and man but the relation between God and man and, it should be added, between man and his divided soul, searching, as was the playwright himself, for a faith to make it whole.

O'Neill felt that God had failed him somehow because his mother failed him, his father failed him, and so he turns to man, knowing, however, that man is not enough. O'Neill's Celtic temperament led him to think in symbols and, in his search for greater meaning, to mysticism. Using intuition coupled with philosophical inquiry in the search for truth, Catholicism takes, for example, the Oedipus complex and gives it concrete form and universal figures: the Mother and Son, the Virgin versus Christ. The Oedipus complex raises Mary to a deity. In so many of his plays, O'Neill sought the perfect woman, the saving figure, and usually found it, or a close approximation of it, in the virgin-mother figure.

In the early Puritan play, Desire Under the Elms, the Oedipal complex makes its first obvious appearance within the context of Freudianism. Eben can make love to Abbie only when she assumes the mother role. In his last, and significantly most Irish play, A Moon for the Misbegotten, O'Neill clothes the basic Oedipal relationship with all the trappings of Christianity. When the guilt-ridden Jim Tyrone seeks forgiveness for desecrating his mother's memory, he turns to Josie who holds him in her arms throughout the long night in a manner suggesting the Pieta. The would-be mistress makes what is for her the supreme sacrifice and accepts the role of priestess-mother. Jim Tyrone finds salvation not through nineteenth century Catholicism, God the Father, but through a blend of humanism and Christianity, God the Mother. God, sin, and regeneration are the essentials of any Catholic and Puritan point of view.

Perhaps in A Moon for the Misbegotten, more than in any of his other plays, O'Neill combines the four aspects discussed at this MLA session; Irish Catholicism, Puritanism, Humanism, and Mysticism. O'Neill stated that he wanted to see the "transfiguring nobility of tragedy in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives," adding that "here is where I am a most confirmed mystic, for I am always trying to interpret life in terms of lives, never just in terms of character. I am always acutely conscious of the force behind—fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it—mystery certainly." And just here is where O'Neill's Irishness asserts itself, for the Irish are always seeking answers to the mystery of life.

In his paper, "Irish Catholicism in O'Neill's Later Plays," John Henry Raleigh shows how profoundly O'Neill's early Catholic
indoctrination affected his most autobiographical work—the later plays. The result of the emphasis on sin and redemption in Catholicism is the arousal of strong guilt feelings and the need to confess and be forgiven. Yet "O'Neill in his darkest moods thought that nobody, even God, could be forgiven, that there can be no forgiveness and that guilt is an infinite regression into which one sinks and sinks."

The gallery of sinners who inhabit the guilt-ridden world O'Neill creates for them often reveal a strong urge to confess, "and occasionally they are accorded a kind of secular absolution." This occurs even in early plays like All God's Chillun Got Wings, Mourning Becomes Electra, and Strange Interlude. "But it is in the last plays that a secular version of the confessional—contrition, confession, and a hoped-for absolution—appears more clearly and pervasively."

Professor Raleigh notes that in the last act of The Iceman Cometh there are "two simultaneous, contrapuntal confessions going on: Hickey's and Parritt's; the one public, the other private." There is almost the equivalent to the history of the development of the confessional itself in these two confessions, as the "archaic echoes in Hickey's public confession" relate to a time in the early days of the Catholic Church before confidentiality was enjoined, when the notion prevailed that "the sins of one member infect the whole body and that society itself must deal with the transgressor and his transgressions. One could say that Hickey's public confession disinfects the congregation at Harry Hope's saloon which he had infected in act one of the play. Hickey's confession deals with two of the sins that the early Church thought so abominable that it would not grant absolution for them: adultery and murder. Hickey's confession embodies the three principal means that the word 'confession' has historically encompassed. First, it is a confession in the legal sense: that is, an admission of a crime and with two policemen listening to it. Second, it is a confession in the more philosophical sense of that word à la St. Augustine and Rousseau: that is, a confession of a belief of some kind. In Hickey's case the belief is a series of negatives: the fallacy of pipe dreams, the inability of humans to endure endless guilt, and finally, and most terribly, his sudden revelation to himself at the end of his confession that he really hated his wife. Third, it is a confession in the moral or Catholic sense, detailing the wrongs over a great number of years he had done to his wife; all of his mortal sins served up in a rush and capped by a homicide."

Parritt's brief, oracular confession to Slade, "who will observe the seal of the confessional and never reveal to anyone else what Parritt had told him," is viewed as counterpointing Hickey's. Like Hickey, Parritt's "supposed love for his mother was only a mask for hatred. He demands from his secular confessor penance equal to, or worse than, that of Hickey, who is going to the electric chair."
Slade finally awards him the most terrible sentence of all: suicide. There is even a curious ancient reverberation in this grim demise of Parritt, for in the early days of public penance the penances exacted were sometimes so severe that some penitents committed suicide to escape those exactions.

Professor Raleigh states that Long Day's Journey into Night was "O'Neill's own act of confession." He finds, in that play, "one ardent Catholic, Mary Tyrone; one conventional believer, James Tyrone; one skeptic, Edmund; and one nihilist, Jamie. The psychology of the confessional appears only at the extremes of the spectrum—in the believer and the nihilist. The only confession is delivered by Jamie when he tells his brother of a secret and lethal desire to make his brother a failure like himself."

As Professor Raleigh notes, Mary Tyrone's dilemma is that of "the true believer. She cannot make an act of perfect contrition because she knows it would be a lie." Mary Tyrone never prays to God but makes several futile attempts to pray to the Blessed Virgin who of all the saints "had the greatest intercessory power with the Lord. By a strange and happy irony, so rare in the world of the O'Neill's, the mythical Virgin Mary did finally intercede for the real Mary-Ella O'Neill, who did overcome her morphine addiction by a self-imposed sojourn in a convent."

It is in O'Neill's last play, A Moon for the Misbegotten, that Professor Raleigh finds the "purest example of the confessional mold," because it is devoted to a "vicarious absolution of a dead person who was the greatest, as well as the most guilt-ridden, sinner O'Neill had known, his brother Jamie. Moreover, the central action of the play constitutes a main confession which would have been accorded some sanction by the Church itself."

There is a historical tradition in the Catholic Church that, under certain circumstances, a confession such as Jim Tyrone's to Josie, a lay person, would be regarded as efficacious. "While a layman cannot absolve, this defect is supplied by God." Josie assumes the role of priestess to the penitent Jim Tyrone, "who confesses his deepest guilt. In the morning both feel that a genuine confession has been effected. To her father she gives an explicitly theological version of this miracle in the night. 'It was a damned soul coming to me in the moonlight to confess and be forgiven and find peace for a night.' Jim Tyrone feels 'sort of at peace' with himself as if all his 'sins had been forgiven."

Jim Tyrone's confession would have to be considered "devotional" rather than "sacramental." However, "if St. Thomas Aquinas were correct, God Himself would have intervened and granted absolution finally to the most turbulent of the turbulent O'Neill's, to the one who must have been the most unquiet in his grave, but who, because of his brother's act of forgiveness, would now stir no more." In closing, Professor Raleigh suggests that a more appropriate title for O'Neill's last play might be The Last Confession.
In his paper, "'Stones Atop Old Stones': The Pressure of Puritanism in O'Neill's New England Plays," Frederick Wilkins traces the decline of the original ideals of the seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay colonists, and the effects of that decline as they are dramatized by O'Neill. In his opening remarks, Professor Wilkins discusses the early ideals fostered by Governor John Winthrop who "stressed the Puritans' covenant with God in 1630 and their positive mission to establish a new Israel, a community founded on love, humility, cooperation, and absolute fidelity and devotion to God above self." The Governor's warning was "echoed repeatedly in the next thirty years, suggesting how fearful colony leaders were of a descent into the forbidden lust for physical pleasures and material rewards." But the warnings went unheeded. "Matter accumulated: witness the wealth of the Harford and Mannon dynasties. And as materialism grew and spirit evaporated, the latter was replaced by a rigid, cold code of standardized, repressive behavior--which may have been exaggerated by popularizers of history since then, but the actuality was there."

Professor Wilkins cites examples from O'Neill's plays that demonstrate how the ideals mentioned in Governor Winthrop's sermon had been violated. "Humility had turned to pride: witness Captain Keeney in Ile. Love had turned to hate or lust: witness Ephraim Cabot or Lavinia's hate for Christine. Selflessness had turned to fevered, selfish acquisitiveness: witness the Harford enterprise in More Stately Mansions. Cooperation had turned to contentiousness: witness the family dissolution of the Mannons. Piety had turned to morality, which was really a prudery stultifying to life and feeling and sensibility: witness Emma Crosby in Diff'rent." It is not the ideals of early seventeenth century Puritans that O'Neill attacks in his plays but "the distorted moral and social dictates that replaced those ideals when Puritan theology was abandoned and was reduced to the hypocritical curses of stony patriarchs like Ephraim Cabot. O'Neill's real enemy was small 'p' puritanism--all the anti-Dionysian elements that were there in posse from the start but grew obsessively large later."

Examples are given to illustrate O'Neill's attempt to trace the decline of Puritanism. It is there in his early play Diff'rent, which Kenneth Macgowan considered "a vigorous and healthful attack upon the Puritanism that eats away so much of the creative happiness of life." Even if Emma Crosby is "not motivated theologically, by some desire to wed one of the 'elect,' her obvious loathing of sex, and the resultant rejection of Caleb Williams, does seem to be a small 'p' puritanical aversion, a fear of life, that O'Neill in his working notes for Mourning Becomes Electra called 'the Puritan sense of guilt turning love to lust.'"

O'Neill's New England Puritans and their descendants, Reuben Light, Ephraim Cabot, and Deborah Hardord, all display obsession, fanaticism and even, in some cases, madness. As Professor Wilkins
points out, Dynamo, which O'Neill called "a study of the sickness of today," illustrates that much of the sickness is the result of Puritanism having reached a dead end. Reverend Light's harsh Calvinistic fundamentalism has not only failed to offer any positive, life-enhancing values to his son Reuben, but is also something he himself can no longer fully believe in. For all his dogmatic assertiveness, Light is an interesting study of the latter day Puritans' decline of assurance in the faith of their fathers."

Professor Wilkins compares the "stone father versus rebellious son antagonism" in Desire Under the Elms to the father-son relationship of Rev. Light, "who projects a God in his own hard image," and Reuben, "who outgrows his father's fundamentalism and searches, though unsuccessfully, for a substitute." Desire Under the Elms and Mourning Becomes Electra are "the two documents for an understanding of O'Neill's attitudes towards the Puritan heritage in New England, a dying, love-denying, hard and icy heritage.... Death 'becomes' the Mannons, rich, exclusive scions of Anglo-Protestant ascendancy, because their faith is love- and therefore life-denying. The Mannons are bound—that key word in 'Shenandoah'—bound as if in the hands of an angry God whose covenant with their ancestors had been perverted. We can feel sorry for the last of the Mannons, Lavinia and Orin, but Lavinia sheds her Puritan inhibitions too late, and both seem compelled to act out again the sins of the fathers and mothers. The Mannons, no longer capable of productive love, are death-obsessed."

Like O'Neill, Professor Wilkins uses stone imagery to convey the hardness of heart of the New England Puritans. He sees in Ephraim Cabot a rocky man created by the rocky New England soil and creating, in turn, a rocky God and life. Ephraim "claims to have grown hard in the service of a hard God, but actually he had projected his own hardness onto his conception of the deity. His hypocrisy is the result of an attempted denial of the very potent life force within himself. He is not a God-fearing Calvinist but a lecher and a miser with a Biblical footnote to defend his every misdeed....

"There are two uses of stones: (1) to build—a church upon a rock, or a farm wall, or a stone mansion like the Mannons; and (2) to crush. The tragedy of Puritanism in America, as O'Neill portrays it, is that the first use was replaced by the second. While the first Massachusetts Bay Puritans took the stones of the wilderness to build God's model community, their descendants used a stony, constricting morality to crush the natural instincts of themselves and their successors." The tragic effects of Puritanism are illustrated in the last scene of Desire Under the Elms in the doomed Abbie and Eben, "victims of puritanical repression, who free themselves from their sordid surroundings and from the Puritans' conception of sin," and in Ephraim, "left lonesomer than ever in his life of solitariness and sterility, unaware to the end of the great guilt that is his. As in every O'Neill play where Puritanism is dominant, the only hope seems to lie in rejecting it, and that hope is dim indeed." In her paper, "O'Neill the Humanist,"
Esther M. Jackson, Professor of Theatre and Drama at the University of Wisconsin, Madison focuses on another aspect of O'Neill's search for a basis for religious faith: his interest in a "humanism" appropriate to the interpretation of his search for meaning in modern American life. Professor Jackson's paper will appear in the next issue, so a summary is omitted in this report. Ed]

O'Neill stated: "Where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself---as a bit of a poet who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't." Albert Bermel, in his paper, "Theatre Poetry and Mysticism in O'Neill," discusses two kinds of non-verbal poetry in Long Day's Journey into Night. First, there is the "aligning of the characters singly and together for a mystical union of sorts, and second, the influence of the setting on the characters and the audience." He says that the mystical yearnings of O'Neill's characters "appear more obtrusive in certain earlier plays such as The Hairy Ape, but most obviously in the plays that are considered inferior and are often critically dismissed, such as Welded, The First Man, The Fountain, Lazarus Laughed and Days Without End."

Professor Bermel defines two kinds of mystical unity or oneness: "the first comes from perceiving everything---the universe, matter, and non-matter---as a great unity; the second comes from meditating on the self and finding there the core of the mystical sensation, viewing the self as macrocosm and as microcosm." He finds such a "longing for a mystical union, for a oneness with whatever lies beyond the self," in each of the characters in Long Day's Journey into Night and in Yank, who in The Hairy Ape tries "in his inarticulate fashion to define this yearning when he sensed that in some indefinable way he did not belong. At first he felt that he was part of the machine that fed the ship and part of the machine that was the city, but gradually he came to see himself as an outcast, unwanted and scorned by the passersby on Fifth Avenue, by the IWW, by his fellow workers, even finally by the animal kingdom." At the end of the play, after Yank has died in the gorilla's cage, the stage directions indicate that "perhaps at last the hairy ape belongs." He "can belong only by being dead."

The retreat of the four Tyrones to a world of "hard liquor and drugs, the two traditional American mind-freezers," is viewed by Professor Bermel as a quest for mystical unity and "the next best thing to a mystical experience." He describes Mary's yearning as a nostalgic escape into "a past that never quite was, when she had the love of her parents, or at least her father's, a sheltering home, the convent, her music. She still longs for a home in which she will belong, as opposed to this temporary one where she is only a summer visitor.... Morphine gives her that sense of belonging. It wipes out not only the pain of the present, but the present itself. Her nostalgic retreat is merely a substitute for a mystical experience. When Mary comes out of it, she will know, not the mystic's exaltation, but a terrible psychic hangover."
Edmund seeks a release from the pain of the present and the fear of the future through alcohol, but he had experienced "a state of mystical oneness with nature when he was at sea." Professor Bermel says that, "unlike the great religious mystics, Edmund recounts his visions in images of nature—the waves, the spray, the sky, the gulls, whereas the mystics speak of the wholeness in emptiness, a fulfillment in the void, a totally abstract realization. Edmund may have run off to sea seeking such a oneness. Back in Connecticut, he has a similar experience while walking in the fog."

Like his wife and son, James Tyrone seeks oblivion from the present. "He drinks in order to escape, and he escapes from Mary and the house in order to drink, but he speaks little of his other mystical adventures as an actor. For him the theatre proved a refuge from penury. In it, playing great heroes, he became one with his audience. Tyrone is two of O'Neill's favorite characters types blended: the artist and the businessman. The theatre enabled him to insulate himself doubly from the past. Away from the theatre, he too, like his wife, feels an irrevocable loss."

Jamie, perhaps the most doomed and tragic of the four Tyrones, "has no refuge on the order of his parents and brother. He drinks to obliterate his awareness of himself as a child murderer and a worthless, hopeless human being. He rises, if he is lucky and gets really 'blotto,' into the stratosphere of other men's poetry as a defense of his own unhappiness and pessimism. He feels trapped like the inhabitants of the saloon in The Iceman Cometh."

Professor Bermel sees the three Tyrone men in the last act of the play tending towards some kind of family reconciliation brought about by mutual understanding, honesty, and forgiveness. Mary, however, is still a point of contention that separates them. "O'Neill walks right away from anything like a conventional ending by destroying the truce, let alone the hope of sleep or of a drunken, oblivious mutuality, when he brings her down among them and plunges them into despair."

Setting is the second main poetic element in the play. Although the living room is just an ordinary room, Professor Bermel sees it altered during the action of the play by the "incidents of life from without and within, by the gradual darkening outside, and then the encroachment of the fog." The fog, drifting in through cracks and doors, forming little indoor clouds, "turns the land into something like a seascape." The summer house is compared to a fog-bound ship, and the Tryones are described as drifting "on the surface waters of this night and the undertow of all their yesterdays. They are at the mercy of their collective fate which lies many fathoms deep in the remote past." The image of the household as a ship "suggests four people who from time to time drift into their private mystical reveries. They are separated by lighting or by barriers of darkness. They try to form a group, but their preoccupations keep them apart from one another."
In his closing remarks, Professor Bermel suggests that the four Tyrones could be viewed as "four larger figures: Mary the Mother, God the Father, Christ the Son, and Judas the unfortunate; or as Adam, Eve, Abel, and Cain; or even Zeus, Hera, Apollo and Dionysus. The setting and atmosphere could be assisted by masks and other devices, depending on the courage or recklessness of the director. Two sets of four masks or makeup designs, one based on Mary's features, the other on Tyrone's, very much like the makeup bequeathed from Mourning Becomes Electra, would provoke a series of fresh responses from the audience. So would unnatural, dreamlike or trancelike gestures or motions which tell of the alternating impulses of attraction and repulsion among the four characters. Perhaps someone has further stylistic suggestions; the more the better, for the sake of O'Neill's future."

Discussants for the session were Louis Sheaffer and Leonard Chabrowe. After his evaluation of the papers presented, Mr. Chabrowe discussed the religious characteristics in O'Neill's work, stating that he was first and foremost a playwright rather than a philosopher. According to Mr. Chabrowe, O'Neill "used philosophical content and religious questions as material the way an artist does to create a special kind of experience in the theatre for the audience. He was a religious playwright not merely because he was interested in religious questions, but also because he wanted to provide the audience with the experience of communion. That is where the intense need for communion that has been associated with him as a boy is revealed in his work. He wants the audience to have that same experience of communion. He orders his material to lead to a specific dramatic climax. He uses all kinds of theatrical devices--rhythmic devices in his dialogue, sound effects, visual effects--all aimed at bringing the audience to a certain state of feeling. All the philosophical and esthetic questions that come up in a discussion of O'Neill's work are there because he felt they were necessary for this one, single, devouring esthetic purpose that he had from the very beginning. O'Neill has such appeal because he touches upon the same religious need in all of us."

The quest that O'Neill pursued, that so many of his characters pursued, was a religious one, for some "behind life" force that would give life meaning. Like most of O'Neill's characters, all men are isolated outcasts of one kind or another, gathered in Harry Hope's saloon, clinging to that final dream down there at the bottom of the bottle. O'Neill stated that "only through the unattainable does man achieve a hope worth living and dying for and so attain himself. He with a spiritual guerdon of a hope in hopelessness is nearest to the stars and the rainbow's foot." O'Neill's plays provide us with the hope that the final dream may be realized. Like his protagonist in Lazarus Laughed, O'Neill in his work brings the world a message from beyond: "There is no death, only God's eternal laughter." And even the non-believer can enjoy that.

--Virginia Floyd
RESPONSE TO THE PREVIEW ISSUE: A LETTER.

January 31, 1977

Dear Professor Wilkins:

The first issue of The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter was handed me today by a colleague; enclosed is my subscription. Best wishes for success in stimulating the exchange of ideas.

As a theatre historian and O'Neill enthusiast, I am particularly eager to see an upsurge in theatrical thinking, coupled with action centered on O'Neill. More of his plays need testing on stage in more imaginative ways than has been, or is being, done. You need not apologize; your fourth question ("Are there plays, denigrated and disregarded before, that might now be stageworthy because of technical advances since the time of their first production?") is relevant not despite but because of its practicality—and my response is emphatically YES! Moreover, I believe that our thinking and imagination have changed and may do as much to enable new production concepts as does technology. I also believe that organized attempts are needed to encourage several, very different, productions of what Professor Jackson quite correctly labels "a group of works which strike us today as essentially unfinished" in order to begin doing justice to O'Neill, and to the American theatre, past and present.

Too long have "scripts" been treated as finished works of literature—in reality they are to the finished product what a blueprint is to a work of architecture. That writers occasionally transcend requirements of their craft (play-W-R-I-G-H-T, not play-W-R-I-T-E, I regularly have to remind my students) should not determine the standard by which we measure the other efforts.

I have little patience with the tired myth that there was no American theatre prior to O'Neill. No wonder, his early experiments and even some of his mature works are misunderstood and vilified (and I include Professor Floyd's "mediocre, indifferent, and really awful" in that) if only the "Irish-Catholic heritage" and the "New England environment" are allowed as formative forces. Since O'Neill was "dragged up" (Yank's words) onstage, his plays cannot be understood without reference to that stage, no matter how vulgar, cliche-ridden, un-literary, and money-grabbing: it was alive, it spanned the continent, it packed them in, its practitioners were not on the unemployment rolls and—-it handed O'Neill every cheap and highfalutin' trick in the book. Only God creates out of nothing; artists create out of the particular debris they know. In O'Neill's case that included the American theatre as he knew it, hated it, loved it, and lived it.

As a student of the Provincetown Players, I discover repeatedly how certain bad plays provide structural or thematic elements
for O'Neill. A systematic search of the plays that comprised the theatrical repertory to which O'Neill was exposed as a child and as a young adult would add numerous examples; nor does that detract from the dramatist's originality: Shakespeare, Molière, Shaw, Brecht and many others have shaped the dregs of other writers into masterpieces.

The kind of ranking Professor Raleigh engages in, while it may stimulate discussion, is potentially very dangerous if not done thoroughly. Numerous plays on both ends of the spectrum, as well as in the middle, have been omitted. Arbitrarily so, or by conscious selection process? What standard was used? His "real clunkers" will compare favorably with The Movie Man and Abortion, or with such one-acts as Thirst and The Sniper. On the other hand, to entirely ignore Strange Interlude, Mourning Becomes Electra, and such one-acts as Bound East for Cardiff, The Moon of the Caribbees and The Rope is a crime. Nor are other plays justifiably excluded.

Any ranking should be done with reference to theatrical standards which include, but are not restricted to, verbal expression. The unfinished scripts cry out for production; scholarship can and should explore O'Neill's hints for production that have hitherto been misunderstood, or not even deciphered.

--Robert K. Sarlos

O'NEILL IN HUNGARY: A LETTER.

January 9, 1977

Dear Professor Wilkins:

At the MLA Annual Convention held in New York on December 26-29, I read the Preview Issue of The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter. I am delighted with the plan to establish a Newsletter in which O'Neillians "of academe" and "of the proscenium" will have a chance to exchange their views on an American dramatist of international standing.

Since O'Neill's dramatic scope is truly universal, it is little wonder that O'Neill scholarship also has an international character. There is a great deal of interest in O'Neill in Hungary, too. His greatest plays (The Emperor Jones, Desire Under the Elms, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, A Moon for the Misbegotten, A Touch of the Poet, and More Stately Mansions) have been translated into Hungarian. Among the one-act plays, the early Movie Man and the late Hughie can be read in Hungarian. There are plans for further translations as well. Most of these dramas are often played on the Hungarian stage with considerable success. A monograph entitled Eugene O'Neill, written in Hungarian by the dramaturge of the Hungarian National Theatre, Andras Benedek, both indicated and increased O'Neill's popularity.
I started my O'Neillian research at Harvard University in 1970, when I was granted a ten month fellowship by the International Research and Exchange Board. My special interest lay in the lyric aspect of the O'Neill canon, and I published a book, *A költeszet valósága* (The Reality of Poetry) at the end of 1975 (Budapest: The Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), in which O'Neill plays a major role. Divided into sections devoted to the treatment of the poetic attitude, emotion, imagination, the lyric expression of space and time, poetic imagery and the lyric role of the acoustic plane (onomatopoeia, rhythm, and rhyme), the book elaborates on G. Lukács' definition of poetry; analyses poems and poetic genres; examines the penetration of poetry into fiction (chiefly in Joyce); and scrutinizes the synthesis of poetry and drama in the plays of O'Neill. The word synthesis has been emphasized, since, I think, although in some plays such as The Fountain, or Marco Millions, or even Lazarus Laughed, poetry prevails, in the majority of his dramas, and certainly in the great plays of his late period, O'Neill succeeded in integrating his poetic impulses into a dramatically explosive pattern. Whereas in the modern theatre lyricism, not infrequently, would seem to dissolve the drama, as is so often the case in Maeterlinck's works, in O'Neill's best plays a veritable fusion takes place. His plays bear out the validity of Hegel's view that the drama is a synthesis of fiction and poetry. (It need hardly be pointed out that, for Hegel, a synthesis is anything but a mechanical addition, and that the Hegelian concept presupposes the emergence of a new quality.)

Having been awarded another 10 month fellowship by the American Council of Learned Societies, I continue my O'Neill studies, this time at the University of California, in Berkeley. I plan to write a monograph on O'Neill, laying a special stress on possible reasons for the extraordinary creative outburst in the field of the drama in the United States at the time and since World War I. I also wish to probe into the epic aspect of O'Neill's art (he certainly was a touch of the narrator, too), and hope to discuss in detail the relationship between the European drama and O'Neill. By way of a treble reference to O'Neill, Dreiser (symbolizing in this instance a number of American novelists) and Nietzsche, the provisional title of my envisaged book is *The Birth of the American Tragedy*.

If I add to this that O'Neill (along with Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee) is an important part of the American Studies Program in Hungarian universities, I may have suggested the high esteem he is held in—in various domains of the Hungarian cultural scene.

--Peter Egri
NOTES ON PRODUCTIONS, PUBLICATIONS, DISSERTATIONS, ETC.

1. The team of Jason Robards and Jose Quintero will soon bring new life to another O'Neill masterwork, A Touch of the Poet, which will arrive on Broadway in late December 1977, or early January 1978, after runs in Toronto (opening on September 18) and the Kennedy Center in Washington (opening on November 7). Elliott Martin will produce. Considering past Robards-Quintero collaborations—The Iceman Cometh (1946), Long Day's Journey (1956), Hughie (1958 and 1976) and Moon for the Misbegotten (1973)—one may hazard the optimistic guess that the Broadway Melody of 1978 et seq. will be Cornelius!

2. Liv Ullmann, star of the Quintero-directed production of Anna Christie at New York's Imperial Theatre, discussed the playwright in "Liv Ullmann's Love Affair with Eugene O'Neill," an interview with Robert Berkvist in the Sunday, April 10 issue of The New York Times (Section II, pp. 1, 9). "O'Neill," she said, "speaks in capital letters and isn't afraid to do so. I think that quality is what made him more loved at times in Scandinavia than in his own country. I also think we Scandinavians accept symbols more readily, the elemental things which were so large in his work. In this country people seem to be more afraid of the . . . blood emotions." As for Anna Christie, she finds that it is not the old-fashioned piece she'd originally thought it to be, but a "very modern play," one of the few "that give women's liberation such a wonderful . . . celebration." She compares Anna to Josie in Moon for the Misbegotten and to Nora in Ibsen's A Doll's House; discusses the play's ending; and concludes that "so much of everything that is O'Neill is in this play." The interview merits the attention of O'Neillians.

3. The Massachusetts Center Repertory Company will mount a new production of Long Day's Journey Into Night at the Shubert Theatre in Boston (May 3-15). James and Mary Tyrone will be played by Jose Ferrer and Kate Reid, and the play will be directed by Michael Kahn. For information, call 617-426-3664.

4. Leonard Chabrowe's recent book, Ritual and Pathos: The Theater of O'Neill (Bucknell U. Press, 1976), has received considerable critical attention and praise. Concerned that we have come only to a marginal understanding of "precisely how O'Neill achieved what he did in the theater, just what aesthetic workings he laid into his plays and why," Mr. Chabrowe has produced a study that "focuses directly on O'Neill as a craftsman. It both illuminates and evaluates his attempts to restore to the theater its ancient religious function and to create a modern form of tragedy." This is Albert Bermel's response to the book: "It's a most salutary and refreshing antidote to the laboriously philosophical and biographical treatments of O'Neill's work. Pray God, some day people will realize that in discussing literature and the arts aesthetics comes before philosophy, is the content and most of the meaning; if this does happen your book will have made a valuable contribution.... I particularly like your ingenious chapter on Iceman and the section on Desire Under the Elms. You schematize them rather heavily, but this is really Imaginative criticism."
5. The Gunthrie Theatre of Minneapolis will include a production of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* in its 1977 repertory season. The play is scheduled to open on June 8, and the production will be reviewed for the Newsletter by Paul D. Voelker.

6. Professor Lennart Josephson of Stockholm, Sweden, all of whose valuable essays on O'Neill have been published in Swedish hitherto, hopes to publish an English-language book on O'Neill next year.


8. Other recent publications on O'Neill (summaries of which will appear in the next issue):


9. Doctoral dissertations on O'Neill.


10. Cornelia Otis Skinner's new book, *Life With Lindsay and Crouse*, tells the interesting story of the O'Neills' affectionate relationship with Russell Crouse, who helped them through marital difficulties, went to many hockey matches with the
playwright, was one of the few persons whom Carlotta permitted to visit her ailing husband at the Shelton Hotel on Bay State Road in Boston, and who hosted a party at which O'Neill sang from memory a surprisingly large number of Irving Berlin songs—seated at the piano beside his accompanist, the composer.

11. That America's greatest playwright still stalks the American stage is hardly to be denied. And it would be no surprise if his ongoing influence were political as well as artistic. But the name of one current political luminary makes the dramatist's political presence seem even more formidable than it actually is. Witness the headline of the January 28, 1977 issue of The Boston Herald American: "O'NEILL CHASTISES CARTER"!

PERSONS REPRESENTED IN THIS ISSUE.

TRAVIS BOGARD, Professor of Dramatic Art, University of California at Berkeley, and author of Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (Oxford), is the director of educational and artistic programs at Tao House. He asks that readers who may have ideas for programs that might be conducted in the facility communicate them to him in care of The Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House, P.O. Box 402, Danville, CA 94526. His essay in this issue is reprinted by permission of the author and San Francisco Theatre Magazine, where it first appeared.

FREDERIC I. CARPENTER, of the Department of English, University of California at Berkeley, is the author of Eugene O'Neill (Twayne) and many other works on American and English literature, including studies of Robinson Jeffers and Emerson.

PETER EGRI, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Budapest, is, as his letter indicates, working on a monograph on O'Neill. At the 1977 MLA Convention in Chicago in December, he will be speaking on "The Uses of the Short Story in Chekhov's and O'Neill's Plays."

VIRGINIA FLOYD, Professor of English at Bryant College, will direct a seminar on "A European Perspective of O'Neill" at the MLA's 1977 Convention in Chicago next December. Her panelists will be Peter Egri, Clifford Leech, Tom Olsson and Timo Tiusanen.

ROBERT K. SARLOS, Professor of Dramatic Art, University of California at Davis, has recently completed an article on the Provincetown Players (pre-1923) as a forerunner of theatre collective and their connections with ideas then current in spiritual history, and is presently at work on a book—tentatively titled, The Provincetown Republic: Theatre Community.

SPEAKERS QUOTED IN VIRGINIA FLOYD'S REPORT:

ALBERT BERMEL, Professor of Theatre and Drama, Lehman College, is a drama critic and the author of Contradictory Characters (Dutton), and the 1974-75 winner of the George Jean Nathan
Award for drama criticism.

LEONARD CHABROWE, critic and playwright, has written articles for The Kenyon Review, Dissent, Commonweal, and The Columbia Forum. His recent book, Ritual and Pathos: The Theater of O'Neill (Bucknell U. Press), has been praised by O'Neill's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, Louis Sheaffer, as "a notable and provocative addition to the canon of O'Neill criticism."

JOHN HENRY RALEIGH, Professor of English, University of California, Berkeley, is author of The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (S. Illinois U. Press) and Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Iceman Cometh." (Prentice-Hall).

FREDERICK C. WILKINS, Professor of English, Suffolk University, Boston, is the perpetrator and editor of The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter.

EDITOR'S AFTERWORD

Spatial restrictions prevent me from commenting, in synthesizing summary, on the contents of this issue. They even keep me from offering more than cursory gratitude to those who have had sufficient early faith in this venture to contribute to it so quickly and so valuably, both as subscribers and as correspondents. The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter can be what it is designed to be--a vehicle for the sharing of information, both practical and theoretical, both academic and theatrical, by all who have an interest in the life and works of O'Neill--only if many individuals submit the news and insights that it is the Newsletter's raison d'etre to convey. So I offer sincere thanks to those who have already written, and pen a few guidelines for others who may be wondering what kinds of material are sought.

1. Letters of response to items in previous issues. While it is not the Newsletter's specific role to stir up controversy, the airing of conflicting opinions cannot but be healthful. If you take issue with what is said herein, for instance, respond. Offer amplification, refutation--whatever! Professor Sarlos' letter is a lively example of such a response, as is Professor Carpenter's essay. The editor welcomes more, and asks correspondents to indicate whether their words are or are not for publication.

2. Brief essays on biographical, textual, contextual, interpretational and theatrical subjects. The list could easily be expanded. The only restriction is length: try to limit all submissions to 750 words or less. The editor will bend the rule when it is necessary, but it is not feasible to overbend if the subscription fee is to remain modest.
3. Notes of interest. This is the largest area, and the most difficult to describe summarily, but here are a few of the many possibilities. If you know of or are involved in the production of an O'Neill play, let the editor know about it as far in advance as possible, so nearby aficionados can be alerted. If you have attended a production, share with others the insights that it provided, whether your response be positive or negative. If an essay of yours is being published in another journal, or if you are completing a dissertation on O'Neill, send details and an abstract (approx. 250 words) to the Newsletter. Additional suggestions appeared on the first page of the Preview Issue.

It is a delight to see that the Newsletter is now off and running. It is your help—as correspondents and as seekers-out of new subscribers (e.g., does your library subscribe?)—that will keep it jogging smoothly!

IN THE NEXT ISSUE . . .

* Micheal O hAodha on O'Neill and the Irish.
* George H. Quinby on O'Neill in Iran.
* Esther M. Jackson on O'Neill the Humanist.
* Frank R. Cunningham on an MLA Convention seminar.
* News, reviews, and letters — which all are invited to submit.

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