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1977

### The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter, vol.1, no.2, 1977

Eugene O'Neill Society

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# The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter

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Editor: Frederick Wilkins  
Suffolk University, Boston

Vol. I, No. 2  
September, 1977

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## O'NEILL THE HUMANIST

It was the American philosopher William James who described religion as a "man's total reaction upon life." Such total reactions, he observed, differ from casual responses, for to get at them, "we must go behind the foreground of existence and reach down to the curious sense of the whole residual cosmos as an everlasting presence." Thus, James wrote, religion is the completest of all answers to the question: "What is the character of this universe in which we dwell?"

James's definition is particularly useful in efforts to define the nature of the religious motive in the dramas of Eugene O'Neill. For O'Neill's dramas, from early plays such as Thirst (1913-14) to late works such as The Iceman Cometh (1939) and A Long Day's Journey into Night (1940-41), record stages in the evolution of the playwright's vision of the theological universe in which modern man lives. (Dates given indicate approximate time of writing.)

O'Neill acknowledged this religious motive as the organizing theme of his work, observing that while other modern playwrights appeared to be absorbed in the relationship between man and man, he was interested only in the relationship between man and God. But if the primary motive of O'Neill's career as a dramatist was indeed theological in nature, the playwright's treatment of religious themes remained unorthodox. This unorthodoxy, which Professor Robert Brustein styles "revolt," seems not so much to have signified O'Neill's rejection of religion as it mirrored his anguish at his own inability to confirm or deny the existence of God.

Actually, it can be claimed that O'Neill was, throughout his life, engaged in a search for a way of verifying the existence of an eternal principle in human experience. His approach to the problem had significant correspondences to those of modern humanists, both religious and secular. Like the "New Humanists" of his time, the playwright saw the rise of faith in science as a challenge, not only to traditional systems of value, but to the very humanity of man.

Plays such as Strange Interlude treat what New Humanists such as Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More interpreted as the essential dilemma of modern man--a crisis of faith. Others of O'Neill's dramas explore the range of New Humanist themes. The affirmation of man's humanity as the primary motive in history is a theme in both The Fountain and Marco Millions. The Hairy Ape examines the role of nature in the determination of human identity; while Dynamo is concerned with the need to humanize science and technology. Ah, Wilderness! celebrates an enlightened rationalism as the primary instrument of decision in a humane society; while the "cycle plays" are concerned with the individual American's responsibility to make ethical use of his political, social, and moral freedom.

At least two plays treat major variations in the attitudes of the New Humanists toward religion. Days Without End reflects a rather conventional view of salvation, while Lazarus Laughed translates what the New Humanists regarded as man's constant yearning for the assurance of eternal life into a secular symbolism.

While there is, to my knowledge, no evidence that O'Neill was influenced directly by the writings of the New Humanists, it is clear that he shared many of their primary concerns. Moreover, he reflected, on occasion, differences of perspective within their circle. Thus, it is that Days Without End (1931-34) interprets a humanism which is Christian in tone. Its resolution conforms to the notion of "true humanism" espoused by Americans such as Paul Elmer More and Europeans such as Jacques Maritain. John-Loving finds his humanity in willing submission to God.

On other occasions, O'Neill's perspective paralleled those of rationalistic humanists. Like Irving Babbitt, he attempted to translate essentially religious concepts into a secular language. If Mourning Becomes Electra uses Freudian language to symbolize the concept of transgression, Dynamo attempts to translate the notion of temptation into a technological symbolism; while the late work A Moon for the Misbegotten offers a secular variation on the theme of divine grace.

Like the New Humanists, O'Neill appears to have regarded American democracy as the expression of a new theological situation, one which requires not only a reconsideration of the nature of man's responsibility for man but also a reappraisal of the role of God in human affairs. Perhaps the principal factor distinguishing the brand of humanism which emerged in his dramas from those varieties which had appeared in the works of European playwrights of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the extent of the moral freedom he attributed to man. O'Neill conceived such freedom in terms which were virtually absolute. Moreover, he attributed this freedom to men and women of differing races, classes, ages, regions, and occupations.

But O'Neill was concerned with more than the mere fact of freedom. Like humanists such as Babbitt, he was to ask a second question: What is the nature of moral responsibility in a universe where man is indeed free? He appears to have begun by interpreting the problem in personal terms. Personal responsibility is a theme in the early play Thirst (1913-14), where a gentleman, a dancer, and a West Indian sailor contemplate the implications of moral freedom, as they drift on a raft surrounded by sharks. In the same way, his treatment of responsibility in others of his early plays, including Bound East for Cardiff (1914), The Hairy Ape (1917), and Beyond the Horizon (1917-18), seems personal in tone.

Gradually, the challenge of freedom in the universe of O'Neill's description seems to have developed beyond the possibility of solution by means of personal morality. Rather, the playwright seems to have come to the conclusion that the appropriate exercise of moral freedom in a democratic society requires a pattern of shared belief.

In this search for a basis for a community of belief, O'Neill again reflected a major preoccupation of American humanists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Walt Whitman, recognizing the need for such a sense of community in a multicultural society, had in the nineteenth century called for the formulation of an ecumenical faith accessible, open, and usable by all members of the society. One way of interpreting O'Neill's experimental works is as an attempt to follow Whitman's mandate to let religion enter into a "new literature." In plays such as Marco Millions (1923-25), All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923), Strange Interlude (1926-27), and

Dynamo (1928), he engaged upon the creation of a new iconography--a system of signs, images, and symbols expressive of the relationship between man and God in the New World.

These works are, however, more than linguistic in their interests. For in them O'Neill attempted both to reveal the theological challenge embodied in modern American life and to formulate a tentative mode of response. There emerges in plays such as Lazarus Laughed (1925-26) a secularized theology, which synthesizes perspectives drawn not only from Greek, Judaic, and Christian religions, but also from tenets of belief codified by the sciences and social sciences. Lazarus Laughed remains the most evident of his theatrical failures. Unfortunately, neither O'Neill's skill as a writer nor his sophistication as a thinker was equal to the task of rendering his humanistic theology in dramatic form. However, his notion of an ecumenical faith, supportive of the ideals of democracy, was not to be lost in theatrical history. It was to re-emerge in both American theology and American drama in the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

If Ah, Wilderness! marks the high point of O'Neill's optimism about the potential for the achievement of humanistic goals in modern American experience, The Iceman Cometh appears to represent the depth of his pessimism. This work, like Long Day's Journey into Night, is an American interpretation of what critics such as Joseph Wood Krutch have described as a "tragic humanism."

Although these late plays did succeed in revealing the contour of the universe in which modern man lives, they also exposed the failures of their protagonists to achieve humanistic goals. Through Hickey, Larry, and Parritt of The Iceman Cometh and the tragic Tyrones of A Long Day's Journey into Night, O'Neill interpreted what he was finally to concede as humanism's limitations as a religion. They do not, however, seem to indicate his total rejection of humanism as a social philosophy. Rather, these late plays suggest O'Neill's final acceptance of a tragic view of experience.

O'Neill's "tragic humanism" reaffirms the classical proposition that man's condition precludes forever the full realization of his ideals. It is, however, the individual's response to the tragic fact of his limitation that remains not only the measure of man's nobility but also of his humanity.

--Esther M. Jackson

#### O'NEILL AND GEORGE PIERCE BAKER

[Professor Paul D. Voelker has devoted considerable energy during the last three years to a refutation of the traditional assertion that Professor Baker's influence on his greatest playwrighting student was either nonexistent or negative. Two major documents have resulted: a doctoral dissertation, "The Early Plays of Eugene

O'Neill, 1913-1915" (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974); and a recent essay, "Eugene O'Neill and George Pierce Baker: a Reconsideration" (American Literature, May 1977). The following are Professor Voelker's abstracts of (A) the recent essay and (B) the dissertation. The latter originally appeared in Dissertation Abstracts; the non-chronological presentation is the responsibility of the editor; and the hope is that readers will respond and join in the discussion.--Ed.]

A. Eugene O'Neill's year of study with Prof. George Pierce Baker has been a subject of interest among O'Neillians for virtually as long as O'Neill's plays have been; yet from the 1920's to the present decade, a great deal of the discussion on this topic has been concerned with minimizing Baker's influence, even to characterizing it as very negative. The strongest, the most detailed, and the most recent criticism of Baker has appeared in Travis Bogard's Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 48-62. According to Bogard, as a result of Baker's influence, O'Neill turned away from the "techniques, characters and themes he had begun to explore" at home in New London and, under Baker, wrote some of his very worst plays; also as a result of Baker, O'Neill further turned away from "all human necessities--self-exploration above all--that had caused him initially to write" (p. 62). Prof. Bogard's book generally and his view of Baker in particular have been well received by reviewers. Yet, an analysis of Bogard's argument and a consideration of all the evidence suggests that his view should not yet be taken as definitive. The nature of his argument and the evidence both leave room for a more positive view of Baker's influence. In fact, it is possible to conclude--after a study of the actual chronology of O'Neill's career, of his unpublished letters from Harvard to Beatrice Ashe, of Baker's own views of the drama as revealed in Dramatic Technique (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), and of the surviving plays which O'Neill actually wrote in Baker's class--that a truer picture of Baker's influence on O'Neill may be exactly the opposite of that painted by Prof. Bogard.

B. Between 1913 and 1915, O'Neill wrote some sixteen plays without having any produced. Thirteen have survived--ten one-acts and three long plays. A detailed analysis, based on the application of a critical schema derived from O'Neill's public and private communications of the 1920's and 1930's, makes it possible to discern O'Neill's development as a dramatist, both in terms of theme and technique, during the preproduction phase of his career. The application of certain biographical materials sheds further light on the work of this frequently autobiographical playwright, but the single most important critical observation is that from the beginning O'Neill perceived his artistic medium as a combination of the literary and the theatric; dialogue and stage directions are both important. Before this period was over, O'Neill would combine all his media into several effective one-acts, including Thirst, Warnings, Children of the Sea, Abortion, and The Sniper.

O'Neill's first work was a one-act entitled A Wife for a Life. In the next several months he wrote five more--The Web, Thirst, Recklessness, Warnings, and Fog. (Thirst and Fog were in the expressionistic mode; the rest were realistic.) Along with A Wife, The Web and Thirst revealed O'Neill's interest in both metaphysical and social themes. A Wife was too short to legitimately develop the theme of fate; The Web was flawed by a split between metaphysical and social underpinnings, though the latter were dominant. In Thirst, O'Neill successfully integrated the two by creating an ambiguous metaphysical context for his social action. In his next two plays, Recklessness and Warnings, metaphysical concerns were excluded, as O'Neill explored two different social strata, those of the rich and the working class, respectively. Then in Fog, O'Neill explored by means of his first "self-portrait" the possible implications of his commitment to social plays and arrived at an ambiguous conclusion which foreshadowed his turning away from plays like The Web and Warnings. He then completed his first long play, Bread and Butter, containing his second "self-portrait." Here, O'Neill explored the responsibilities of the individual to himself and to others, showing by negative example the need for the individual (particularly the artist) to possess the requisite strength of will to prevail against adverse influences.

Shortly after this, O'Neill completed two more one-acts, Children of the Sea (the first version of Bound East for Cardiff) and Abortion, each of which reflected his new objective attitude toward the downtrodden even as it demonstrated O'Neill's greater skill at characterization. In the summer of 1914, he wrote two comic plays--The Movie Man, a one-act satire; and Servitude, his second long play. The former revealed that O'Neill's objective view of lower-class characters was accompanied by a scepticism regarding those who professed to work toward the improvement of the plight of the poor. The latter, containing his third "self-portrait" painted in a sceptical light, revealed why: the self-doubt revealed in Fog had turned into a scepticism regarding his own motives.

In the fall of 1915, O'Neill went to Harvard to study under George Pierce Baker. Two plays survive--The Sniper, in one act; and The Personal Equation, an unfinished long play. The results, by nature of their continuity with O'Neill's previous work, suggest that Baker's influence on O'Neill was not negative and may have been salutary. At the end of Baker's course, O'Neill was on the verge of completing a four-act play with three characters endowed with considerable psychological depth and tragic potential. Throughout this period, O'Neill shows increased competence in the use of the various theatrical media--setting, lighting, sound effects, blocking--and in plot structure, pacing, and rhythm.

--Paul D. Voelker

CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO O'NEILL'S PLAYS. Summary of papers presented at a special session on the above subject at the December, 1976 MLA Convention in New York City.

Before an audience of approximately forty persons, the O'Neill Seminar devoted to the topic, "Critical and Theoretical Approaches to the Plays" concentrated upon psychological, philosophical, and genre approaches to three of O'Neill's works: More Stately Mansions, Marco Millions, and Desire Under the Elms. Joseph Petite, of Kansas State University, presented a cogently argued paper entitled "The Paradox of Power in More Stately Mansions" in which he departed from the religious thrust of much O'Neill criticism toward a humanistically oriented, Adlerian approach to themes of possessiveness and security in the canon. Admitting some formal inadequacies in the structure of More Stately Mansions, Mr. Petite contended that "though the play is generally regarded as a criticism of an acquisitive society, no one has noticed that O'Neill was interested in more than mere covetousness. He was using the desire to possess as a symptom of a deeper psychological problem--the obsessive need for security. In More Stately Mansions possession, whether sexual or financial, is a way of establishing control over others before being controlled by them, and the purpose of this control is to ameliorate feelings of powerlessness and insecurity. But the paradox of power is that the more one dominates, the less he is secure."

Frank R. Cunningham's paper, "Continuities of Romantic Myth in Marco Millions," examined the central Romantic myths used by O'Neill in the major early plays: dynamic organicism, compensation, the cyclical nature of existence, the creative imagination as the basic process of Romantic affirmation, and man's quest from a static mechanism to recognition of the existence of an organic universe. Adapted from his book-in-progress, Eugene O'Neill and the Romantic Tradition, Mr. Cunningham's paper attempted to combine a sociological study of O'Neill's satiric use of the character of Marco as an indictment of an excessively acquisitive American society of the 1920's, with a philosophically-based approach examining O'Neill's celebration of Kaan as Marco's Romantic opposite, a man who can affirm a universe that he perceives as potentially purposive and responsive to man's needs. Mr. Cunningham contended that "like Coleridge's Mariner, Kublai has discovered that there is a meaning in life's sombre mysteries in the dynamic organicism implicit in the mystery.... Scorning what O'Neill himself termed the "death-in-life" that so much of humanity settles for, Kublai strives toward self-realization, toward some tentative communion between ego and the larger world of nature."

Mara Lemanis's paper, "Desire Under the Elms and Tragic Form: A Study of Misalliance," employed the genre approach in taking issue with the near-unanimous critical acceptance of Desire as a major play in O'Neill's canon. Ms. Lemanis, a free-lance writer and editor who lives in San Francisco, carefully distinguished between true tragedy and the melodramatic "disaster drama," claiming that Desire did not deserve its position in the former camp. Ms. Lemanis contended that

readers should focus upon the dialogue and actions surrounding Abbie's murder of her child, "since this is the pivotal act identifying her supposed tragic impetus, and leading to the resolution by which Abbie's and Eben's transfiguration occurs." Finding Abbie's actions having "no room for anguish or struggle over choice," she concluded that Abbie's "'tragic recognition' consists merely of expressing remorse for the act after its execution, and acquiescing to the justice of punishment, but we are presented with an awareness so confined in its conception of the dignity and value of life, that it easily falls within the range of a mechanism or reflex posited in her conscience from outside." It was Ms. Lemanis's view that Abbie acts "out of expediency, not necessity," and that "security-seeking is a very human predicament evoking pathos, but it is far from the maturity of a stout crisis worthy of tragic delineation." Nor did Ms. Lemanis find existential dignity within the actions of Eben and Abbie: "Their defiance never shapes and forces their being into that greater existential quotient which comes from plumbing the division between the assertive self and the indifferent universe with an act that challenges one's fate and societal and universal laws in such a way that one's own life becomes . . . resonant with a profounder sense of the power of its being." She concluded that Abbie and Eben's love is not challenge enough for their fate: "their love closes them in upon their own small world; it does not extend them outward in confrontation with a larger universe."

Seminar coordinator Charles R. Lyons, of Stanford University, then delivered an ample summation of the major arguments presented in the participants' papers, and he and his fellow coordinator Mr. Cunningham then responded to such points of discussion as theatrical and visual approaches toward presentation on the stage of the key theoretical/literary points raised by the papers; the aesthetic worth of Marco Millions and More Stately Mansions as measured against O'Neill's total artistic output; and a final brief presentation, by Professor Esther Jackson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, of a "Proposal for an O'Neill Theatre and Institute." (Professor Jackson invites responses, ideas, and initiatives concerning this proposal.)

--Frank R. Cunningham

AN OPEN LETTER TO JOHN HENRY RALEIGH

dear JHR--

I'm writing in public, as it were, to ask you some public questions. First about your review of my book, Ritual and Pathos--the Theater of O'Neill, and then, further along the same path, about the nature of O'Neill criticism generally.

About your review in American Literature (March 1977, p. 132), how could a man of your fine understanding--it grieves me to ask this--have understood me so crudely? Was it a case of careless

reading or, as I suspect, an inner resistance to what I was saying?

You see, you failed to get what I was saying straight. In fact, you failed to get my main point at all, which is perhaps why you casually disparaged the book as "traversing some familiar territory," as being another of those "studies of influences," even though from an angle of its own.

My main point, or thesis if you like, is not that the "ritual elements in O'Neill were what constituted his power." That's only part of my thesis, and to make it out to be the whole thing is to make the whole thing seem of little consequence. After all, even if ritual elements were the source of O'Neill's power--or "much of O'Neill's power," as you rather grudgingly admit--so what? Power of what kind, toward what end? Unless that larger concern is dealt with, the point about ritual is of limited value and easily dismissed as "trying to explain too much with too little."

But the book does deal with that larger concern. My thesis goes beyond ritual, and also beyond pathos, to the religious experience O'Neill meant his plays to give audiences in the theater. His power, especially when he was complete master of it, was the power to evoke religious emotions. And ritual was the chief technical means of his mastery. I said it clearly and often enough. How could you fail to take it in?

If you had taken it in, you would also have taken in my point about The Iceman being a reworking of Lazarus. You would have seen that I did come to terms with the fundamental disparity between the two plays. Precisely because Lazarus was "a failure of dialogue," as you put it, O'Neill cast the same materials in a more contemporary idiom. The Iceman was to be sure a triumph of dialogue, but by the same token it was a triumph of the ritual elements that, however unwieldy in Lazarus, were necessary for providing a celebratory experience in the theater. And Nietzsche did have something to do with that, though Buddha didn't. I never said or implied that Buddha did.

Further, if you had taken in my main point, you would probably have understood better what I meant by tragic pathos. I defined it more than once as a feeling of suffering on the part of the audience, not mere pity for suffering. And I described the tragic effect more than once as a communal release of that feeling, i.e., as a religious sharing of suffering that was also an overcoming. Long Day's Journey, depending on the production, evokes such a feeling of suffering, and it does this despite its comic moments. Or it does this partly by way of its comic moments, which help set up the tragic effect.

Other aspects of your review call for rebuttal, but let me just ask you again--how could you understand me so crudely? Strange to say, I don't think the answer lies with you alone. I

think it lies with O'Neill scholars, with American drama and literature scholars all over the place, and with the nature of O'Neill criticism generally. I think it lies with the literary prejudices that have been dominant in the country since the thirties, if not before--prejudices that confine O'Neill's achievement to the bounds of realism with its social emphasis.

How else explain that Ritual and Pathos, certainly a provocative book, took twelve years to get published? How else explain such a wide resistance to the evidence that O'Neill pursued a religious aesthetic? How else explain such a stubborn refusal to accept an emphasis on the dynamics of his plays in the theater? How else explain such a deep distrust of the "European and Oriental thinkers and avatars," as you derogatorily call them, the metaphysical or at least cultural philosophers and the religious figures who so clearly helped shape, directly and indirectly, O'Neill's vision and purpose?

But must we really stick to American traditions as the only ones suitable for us, to social realities as the only realities? Must we really be so provincial and so earthbound?

Yours,

Leonard Chabrowe

#### O'NEILL IN IRAN

When I arrived in Tehran in the fall of '56 as a Smith-Mundt lecturer on American drama at the University, I was asked to present lectures on the leading U.S. playwrights, as well as organize a dramatic club. For the latter I suggested a production of Sidney Howard's Yellow Jack since American doctors were at the time involved in fighting certain contagious diseases. However, Dr. Siassi, the distinguished head of the School of Letters, doubted that a Persian audience could accept a play dealing with disease as dramatic; so we substituted Billy Budd, recently a success in the U.S., on which Louis Coxé, my colleague in the Bowdoin English Department, had collaborated and which had the advantage of requiring an entirely male cast. (Actresses in Iran at that time were suspect!)

The play was shown with some success early in '57, but the University authorities were embarrassed when the press hailed it as an attack on authority. I was considered politically subversive! For a second production Dr. Siassi accepted Behrman's Second Man, a high comedy requiring a cast of two men and two women. I was fortunate in having four skilled actors who fitted the parts and took it to Isphahan for a tryout during the No Ruz (New Year) vacation, starting the 21st of March. It was enthusiastically received, and the local theatre director congratulated me on having introduced kissing on his stage. When we returned to Tehran, I was asked to redirect the play to cover the kisses and to remove

the ingenue from an actor's lap to the arm of his chair. Not wishing to be considered sexually subversive, I did so, despite the public objection of the company.

Meanwhile, my lectures had proceeded from Uncle Tom's Cabin through contemporary plays, among which those of O'Neill were most popular. I was asked, following the tryout of Second Man in Isphahan, to lecture on O'Neill at Abadan. Two young Iranians approached me after the lecture for permission to use it as an introduction to their translation of the S.S. Glencairn one-acts into Farsi.

When I returned to Tehran as a Fulbright lecturer in '62, I was delighted to see a performance at the Armenian theatre of O'Neill's Ile, with excellent design by Arbe Ovanessian. I'd been reading the Arthur and Barbara Gelb biography of O'Neill and proposed directing three of his autobiographical plays: Ah, Wilderness! with a cast of University students, supplemented by older actors from my earlier visit, at the University's Fine Arts Theatre; Long Day's Journey into Night with a cast of American and English actors in English, alternating with a cast of my former students in Farsi, at the newly completed Iran-America Theatre; followed by The Straw with a cast of young professionals from Dr. Vala's theatre school, also at the Iran-America building at Jalallabad, halfway up the hill to Shimran.

Ah, Wilderness! is of course the boyhood Eugene wished he'd had, but it is laid at his boyhood home, as is Long Day's Journey. My former interpreter Bijan Mofid translated the play into Farsi and played the father, and one of my less inhibited former actresses the prostitute. For scenery, we used screens which could be reversed for the barroom scene, and we actually located a player piano. I switched from lobsters to chickens after finding what it would cost to fly the former from Istanbul, and an overturned rowboat in a blue spot did nicely for the beach scene.

On the day of the scheduled opening, to which many notables had been invited, I dropped in on my friend and strong supporter, Dean Ali Kani, to make sure that all was ready. While talking with him, I saw a battalion of rod-carrying men, dressed as peasants, invading the campus. The University students had recently demonstrated against the Shah, and this group hunted down every student in sight. Our opening had to be postponed but eventually was well received for several performances.

For Long Day's Journey, which we hoped to troupe outside of Tehran, Arbe Ovanessian designed a splendid setting which could be folded for touring. The translation into Farsi was done by a young poet, after a competition judged by three previous translators of O'Neill. The English-speaking cast were all amateurs. Many of the audience--especially Iranians wishing to test their English--came to the alternating English performances during the week's run. With identically cut texts, the English version ran three hours--the Farsi

four hours! Iranian actors love to milk a script for all that's in it.

For The Straw, which I'd tried to do in '57 but had had to abandon when my two leading actors came down with the Asiatic flu, I had former student Gorgin in the lead role and was offered the actress originally in the opposite part in '57, but she had rounded out so lushly (perhaps as a result of becoming a movie star) that she couldn't play a dying consumptive. We found another girl, used the translation originally done by Dr. Vala, and three fine sets were supplied by his designer. In the final week of rehearsal, I stepped in front of a car on the main street of Tehran and broke an arm. Dr. Vala refused to finish the rehearsals, to my great sorrow, and the play wasn't shown.

The actors very much enjoyed rehearsing the three shows. They were a bit troubled at the humor of Ah, Wilderness! They had so different an attitude toward their parents that it was difficult for them to understand the basic father-son relationship or to appreciate the father's attempt to explain the "facts of life" to his son. But they enjoyed the drunken uncle fully, as well as the references to the father's considering food he'd been eating for some years poisonous. So far as I could see, the attitudes of small sisters to older brothers are universal. They were completely mystified by Richard's inability to make the most of the prostitute in the bar, but the love scene on the beach appeared to ring a bell.

In Long Day's Journey, the mother's retirement into a drug-induced world of fantasy (or earlier happiness) was readily understood, but they never got used to the steady drinking of the three men, though they accepted and seemed to enjoy, rather than be shocked by, the older brother's return from the whorehouse. I could never be sure that his admission of wanting to bring his kid brother down to his level had the same force that it has for most of us.

The Straw was more difficult in casting and blocking, but they played it at a better pace and (since the Iranians' favorite show is Camille) followed the tubercular tragedy to the heroine's death with complete understanding. The love scene at the cross-roads--in some ways reminiscent of the shore scene in Ah, Wilderness!--reached a splendid climax.

Since I can't read Farsi, I've little knowledge of what Iranian critics thought of my productions of O'Neill. From what I could learn, they treated the two that were shown with considerable respect, placing most of their attention on performers and productions rather than on the scripts. In '57, when my lecture on O'Neill had been picked up for the introduction to their translation of the early one-acts, they were uncertain of his reputation. (Of course, those sea-going plays were quite foreign to Iranians, who have only recently developed a Navy and merchant marine.) By '63 O'Neill had become a great name there.

--George H. Quinby

O'NEILL AND THE ANATOMY OF THE STAGE IRISHMAN

James O'Neill, the father of the playwright, was well acquainted not only with the romantic melodramas of Dion Boucicault which gave the stage Irishman a new lease on life on the American stage in the latter half of the 19th century; but he was very much aware of the new dramatic movement in Ireland which had been founded in the early years of this century in an effort to counteract the stage-Irish image. He was a close friend of the impresario George Tyler, who was mainly responsible for the first Abbey Theatre tour of the United States in 1911. James O'Neill's proud boast was that he was born in the Marble city--Kilkenny--which, when in his cups, he was inclined to confuse with the aria from The Bohemian Girl--"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls."

Eugene O'Neill, because of his father's associations with Tyler, had free passes to all the Abbey performances. He had never set foot in Ireland; as a seaman on the S.S. New York he had visited Cobh (then Queenstown), but shore-leave had been cancelled. The Abbey plays, he later recalled, came as a revelation:

It was seeing the Irish players that gave me a glimpse of my opportunity. I went to see everything they did. I thought then and I still think that they demonstrate the possibilities of naturalistic acting better than any other company.

He was particularly impressed by Synge's Riders to the Sea; and a few years later he began to write short plays based on his own seafaring experiences which were produced by the Provincetown Players, one of the first Little Theatres which grew out of the Abbey Theatre's first American tour.

His own attempts to write dialogue in the manner and style of Synge were no great improvement on the blather and blarney of the Boucicault period. Matt Burke, the Irish sailor in Anna Christie, speaks a spurious Synge-Song which is less acceptable to Irish ears than the brogues and bulls of "Conn the Shaughraun" and "Myles na Coppaleen."

O'Neill's masterly portrayals of his own family in Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten are the obverse of the Stage-Irish currency. The brimming bonhomie and humour of Irish melodrama give place to a more sombre picture of unrealized hopes and disillusion. It is as if he were trying to exorcise a family ghost. His ambivalent feelings about his own parents are rooted in their Irish past. The penny-pinching stinginess and peasant cunning of James Tyrone in Long Day's Journey is seen as a traumatic legacy of the Irish Potato Famine of 1848. He remains one of the shanty Irish who, according to O'Neill, never quite succeed in "wiping the bog off their face."

On the other hand, the mother, Mary Quinlivan Tryone, is a victim of the narrow convent-bred pietosity of the lace-curtain Irish, the shabby genteel bourgeois who were despised by the shanty Irish for their sycophantic attempts to ape their Yankee betters. In turn the lace curtain Irish were contemptuous of the shanty Irish who so often got in the way of their social and political ambitions.

In twenty-five O'Neill plays, some forty characters meet violent deaths and as many more endure a living death under the influence of drink or drugs. The grimmer aspects of the stage-Irishman are reflected in A Touch of the Poet and in certain parts of The Iceman Cometh. There is the recurring conflict between life and the dream, between present misery and the land of youth beyond the horizon. It is a constant theme in Irish drama and literature.

--Micheal O hAodha

#### NEWS, REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS

1. The nationally acclaimed Milwaukee Repertory Theater Company's 1977-78 season will provide theatergoers in nine states with a unique and exciting opportunity to compare O'Neill's comic and tragic treatments of his own youth. In November, the Company will present, in revolving repertory, productions of Ah, Wilderness! and Long Day's Journey into Night, with the same actors playing the corresponding roles in the two plays. Afterward, from January 23 through March 5, 1978, the productions will tour, as a package, through the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. Sponsoring groups will receive, in advance of the productions themselves, an invaluable multi-media kit of educational resource materials. Some open dates remain, and groups interested in hosting the O'Neillian duo should quickly contact Sara O'Connor, the MRC's Managing Director, at 929 North Water Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202. Or call the Company's tour-information hotline: (414) 289-9467. This praiseworthy project will receive full coverage in a future issue of the Newsletter.
2. There's little doubt that it was Annie rather than Anna that was the box-office champ of the '76-'77 Broadway season. Still, the Quintero-directed production of Anna Christie, starring Liv Ullmann, received creditable notices and far outlasted its originally-scheduled closing date. Though the play itself received few words of praise, Ms. Ullmann's performance in the title role won many affirmative responses and perceptive reactions from critics in New York and elsewhere. (A survey of critical reactions to play and production will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter.) One critic, Brendan Gill ("Mal de Mer," The New Yorker, April 25, 1977, p. 92), paused in his generally unfavorable review to speak

more generally about the playwright, in words to which O'Neillians may wish to respond:

On three or four occasions in his long career, O'Neill managed to marry strong emotions to a dramatic construction and utterance worthy of them; more often, he was simply a second-rate writer with delusions of literary grandeur. It is a constant embarrassment to observe the disparity between the effort it has cost O'Neill to grapple with an idea and the intrinsic merit of that idea. Again and again, he proves as brave and dogged in pursuit of a commonplace as if it were a Bengal tiger, and once he has captured the poor, toothless tabby nothing will do but that he repeat the laborious act of capture several times; the result is that at the end of an evening of O'Neill we tend to feel battered instead of purged, leaving the theatre with the impression not so much that we have been run through by a rapier as that we have been run over by a bus.... Long Day's Journey Into Night is one of the greatest plays written in my lifetime, but it is the mighty exception among O'Neill's works; everything else he wrote lies far down the slope from it and in its shadow.

3. James A. Robinson's essay, "O'Neill's Grotesque Dancers" (Modern Drama, December 1976, pp. 341-349), should be of value to anyone studying or staging plays of O'Neill in which dance or stage movement is emphasized. After suggesting the influences on O'Neill's use of stage movement for thematic effect (Nietzsche, Kenneth Macgowan, Max Reinhardt, Gordon Craig and German expressionism), Robinson demonstrates the relevance of such movement to O'Neill's "major themes of the irrational, alienation, and the tragicomic condition of mankind." He studies the use of grotesque and distorted dance in The Emperor Jones, Desire Under the Elms and The Great God Brown; and the meaning of the automation effects in The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape and Lazarus Laughed. Many of the effects, he shows, underscore themes of psychological and social determinism; while the more mechanical movements are shown to have even broader implications.
4. Egil Törnqvist, in "Miss Julie and O'Neill" (Modern Drama, December 1976, pp. 351-364), begins with O'Neill's own acknowledgement of his debt to Strindberg in the 1936 Nobel Prize speech and elsewhere, and shows, in greater depth and detail than has ever been done in the past, the specific influences of the great Swedist dramatist on his American protégé--not just in the post-Inferno plays, but especially in Miss Julie, both the play itself and the author's foreword. Mr. Törnqvist provides valuable analyses of the echoes (and more) of Miss Julie in Recklessness, Bound East for Cardiff, Diff'rent, Before Breakfast, The Emperor Jones and Mourning Becomes Electra. In addition to social and psychological parallels, he delineates numerous "similarities between Strindberg's and O'Neill's concept of fate, between their dramatic technique

and their use of symbolism," showing conclusively the great extent to which O'Neill is Strindberg's "true disciple."

5. Lucina P. Gabbard's "At the Zoo: From O'Neill to Albee" (*Modern Drama*, December 1976, pp. 365-374), begins by citing the many similarities between O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (1921) and Albee's The Zoo Story (1958), such as the alienation and "relatively suicidal" drives of the protagonists (Yank and Jerry); the comparable conformity and indifference of the antagonists (Peter in The Zoo Story; both Mildred Douglas and the Fifth Avenue crowd in The Hairy Ape); and both playwrights' use of "the same metaphor: man imprisoned within himself equals an animal caged at the zoo." (It's even the same zoo!) Then Ms. Gabbard reveals the extent to which "differences in the plays' content and form highlight developments in American drama and its milieu during the intervening thirty-six years." Among the social changes that a comparison of the two plays reveals are the greater proximity of social classes in the 1950's, a "progressive loss of creative energy," and "the increasingly suicidal nature of modern man and society." (Jerry, for instance, while more aware than O'Neill's Yank, is also less vital and more consciously suicidal.) In form, the two plays reveal the shift in American drama from expressionism to absurdism above a continually realistic base (Ms. Gabbard shows how this shift suggests a decline in optimism), and a movement from "tragic pattern" to "ironic mode."
6. Two special sessions on O'Neill will be featured at the 1977 MLA Convention in Chicago next December. One, on "Critical Approaches to O'Neill's Later Plays (after 1931)," is described in the passage on Frank R. Cunningham in the "Persons Represented" section of this issue. The other, chaired by Virginia Floyd, will concern "A European Perspective of O'Neill." Here is a tentative list of speakers and topics: Timo Tiusanen ("O'Neill's Significance: A Scandinavian and European View"), Tom Olsson ("The O'Neill Tradition at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm"), Clifford Leech ("O'Neill in England, from Anna Christie to The Iceman"), and Peter Egri ("The Uses of the Short Story in the Plays of Chekhov and O'Neill"). For further information, contact Dr. Floyd at Bryant College, Smithfield, Rhode Island 02917. The content of both special sessions will be summarized in the May 1978 issue of the Newsletter.
7. The centerpiece--not centerfold--of the January 1978 issue of the Newsletter will be The Hairy Ape. Essays by Ann D. Hughes (on Biblical allusions in the play) and Michael Hinden (on the Nietzschean aspects of the play's treatment of the myth of Dionysus) have been received, and the editor welcomes additional brief submissions about the play--comments, queries, reviews, whatever. Naturally, contributions on any subject, literary or theatrical, that is of interest to O'Neillians

will be received with gratitude--especially succinct contributions! (A number of kinds of material that the editor is particularly anxious to receive are described on pages 20-21 of the May issue.) The deadline for the January issue is Friday, November 18.

#### PERSONS REPRESENTED IN THIS ISSUE

LEONARD CHABROWE, critic, novelist and playwright, has written articles for The Kenyon Review, Dissent, Commonweal, and The Columbia Forum. His most recent books are the critical study, Ritual and Pathos: The Theater of O'Neill (Bucknell U. Press, 1976), and a novella, The Same Thing Happening Over and Over (The Smith/Horizon, 1976).

FRANK R. CUNNINGHAM, Professor of English at San José State University and currently Senior Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature at the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland, will co-chair a special session on "Critical Approaches to O'Neill's Later Plays (after 1931)" at the 1977 MLA Convention in Chicago next December. His co-coordinator will be Professor Letitia Dace of John Jay College, CUNY. Interested O'Neillians should see last February's MLA Newsletter for further details.

ESTHER M. JACKSON, Professor of Theatre and Drama at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is the author of The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. Her experiences as literary adviser to Mme. Birgit Culberg's television ballet, "The Dreamer," based on A Touch of the Poet, will be described in a forthcoming issue of the Newsletter. Her paper on "O'Neill the Humanist" was delivered at the 1976 MLA Convention in New York City.

MICHEAL O HAODHA, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Dublin's Abbey Theatre, which he accompanied to the United States and Canada during its 1976 tour, has long been active as playwright and producer in the stage and radio drama of Ireland. He is the author of The Abbey--Then and Now (1969) and Theatre in Ireland (1974). The latter was published in the U.S. by Rowman and Littlefield, and in England by Blackwell, Oxford.

GEORGE H. "PAT" QUINBY studied under George Pierce Baker at Yale, and was stage manager for Grand Hotel and Double Door in New York City before returning to his alma mater, Bowdoin College, in 1934, where he was director of dramatics until 1966 and taught playwriting until 1969. While an undergraduate at Bowdoin, he won a contest with a speech on O'Neill's early plays and received a congratulatory letter from O'Neill, which he treasures. His O'Neill productions at Bowdoin included Bound East for Cardiff, Long Day's Journey, The Straw, The Emperor Jones and Ah, Wilderness! He followed O'Neill to sea as a merchant seaman in '25-'26.

PAUL D. VOELKER, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin Center, Marshfield, is the author of "The Early Plays of Eugene O'Neill, 1913-1915," the doctoral dissertation synopsized in this issue of the Newsletter. His review of the Guthrie Theatre production of A Moon for the Misbegotten will appear in a forthcoming issue.

#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON O'NEILL

Adler, Thomas P. "'Through a Glass Darkly': O'Neill's Esthetic Theory as Seen Through His Writer Characters." Arizona Quarterly (Summer 1976), pp. 171-183.

Blesch, Edwin J. "O'Neill's Hughie: A Misconceived Experiment?" Nassau Review, 2, no. 5 (1974), 1-8.

Coakley, James. "More More on O'Neill." Michigan Quarterly Review (Fall 1976), pp. 467-472.

Fiet, Lowell A. "O'Neill's Modification of Traditional American Themes in A Touch of The Poet." Educational Theatre Journal (December 1975), pp. 508-515.

Going, William T. "Eugene O'Neill, American." Papers on Language and Literature (Fall 1976), pp. 384-401.

Griffin, Ernest, ed. Eugene O'Neill: A Collection of Criticism. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

Levitt, H.N. "Comedy in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill." Players (February-March 1976), pp. 92-95.

Miller, Jordan. "The Other O'Neill." In The Twenties, ed. Warren French (Deland, Florida: Everett Edwards, 1975), pp. 455-473.

Scheller, Bernhard. "O'Neill und die Rezeption spätburgerlich-kritischer Dramatik." Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 23, no. 4 (1975), 314-321.

Stroupe, John H. "The Abandonment of Ritual: Jean Anouilh and Eugene O'Neill." Renascence (Spring 1976), pp. 147-154.

--from Charles A. Carpenter, "Modern Drama Studies: An Annual Bibliography," Modern Drama (June 1977).

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THE EUGENE O'NEILL NEWSLETTER is published three times a year--in January, May and September. The subscription price is \$3.00 per year for individuals, and \$5.00 per year for library and institutional subscriptions. A subscription will commence with the issue following receipt of the subscription fee and this form or a facsimile thereof. Back issues (including the January 1977 preview), when available, may be purchased for \$1.50 each. A renewal form will accompany a subscriber's third issue. Make checks payable to THE EUGENE O'NEILL NEWSLETTER, and send to the address on the reverse side of this page. Please prepay new subscriptions.

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