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### The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter, vol.3, no.1, 1979

Eugene O'Neill Society

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# The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter

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May, 1979

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## EDITOR'S FORWARD

I am delighted to begin the Newsletter's junior year with four most perceptive essays. Patrick Bowles' study of the "existential resonances" in The Hairy Ape illuminates both playwright and protagonist and clarifies the play's position in the vast web of Western philosophy and literature. (Its length necessitates reduced typeface, but most of the responders to my query in the last issue approved of smaller print--as long as the diminution is not excessive.) Winifred Frazer offers persuasive evidence for attributing "The 'American Sovereign'" to O'Neill, thus moving back the date of his first publication from 1912 to 1911. Frank Cunningham's account of O'Neill's adaptation of The Ancient Mariner for the stage constitutes a strong argument for placing him in the Romantic camp--a valuable corrective to the popular view of O'Neill as poet of gloom unreliev'd. And Halina Filipowicz-Findlay, in her survey of O'Neill productions in Poland, offers an insightful analysis of why the critical reception there has been slow and not always favorable. In short, a propitious start for Volume III. I welcome, and am eager to receive, comparable submissions for future issues, and I wish you all a Happy Spring!

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Recently in this journal, Virginia Floyd has illuminatingly addressed the quest for selfhood in The Hairy Ape, while Michael Hinden has convincingly related the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy expounded by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy to Yank's quest for individuation; but neither critic pursues the symbolic implications of Yank's position between man and ape.<sup>6</sup> More appropriate here, perhaps, is Nietzsche's famous definition of man as a tightrope between animal and superman, "a tightrope stretched over an abyss." For Nietzsche, man is constantly striving to become either a subrational or a transrational being, a fact upon which Kierkegaard erected a monumental psychology of existence in The Concept of Dread. Man can experience Angst, or dread, wrote Kierkegaard, "precisely for the reason that by nature the beast is not qualified by spirit." For if man "were a beast or an angel," said Kierkegaard, "he would not be able to be in dread. Since he is a synthesis he can be in dread...man himself produces dread." Caught in the middle, man is necessarily unhappy, burdened by that Self which Delmore Schwartz memorialized as "the heavy bear" and "a dog named ego," because, as Kierkegaard says, "the spirit cannot do away with itself," and "neither can it sink down into the vegetative life." In Kierkegaardian terms, Yank has made the "qualitative leap" to human existence, but just barely. More recently, theologian Karl Barth echoes both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard when he writes: "Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth."

The Hairy Ape was written five years before O'Neill's famous letter to George Jean Nathan in which, speaking of Dynamo, he suggested that one subject--the death of God--must loom "behind all the little subjects" of any serious writer's work. Yet The Hairy Ape, which contains, in Yank, O'Neill's first fully formulated definition of the self, also has this subject at its center, and has much more in common with the nihilistic visions of The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night than with, say, a more optimistic play like Days Without End. O'Neill's false start on the journey to Rome. For although Yank in his final speech defines himself according to the categories of existentialism, O'Neill's attitude here is much closer to Nietzsche's than to that of Kierkegaard and Barth, for both of whom, as for Pascal, there is a possible exit from the existential cul-de-sac they describe; the leap of faith, a leap which the disappearance of God has made virtually impossible for most twentieth-century men, just as the modern technological world itself makes impossible that pastoral dream symbolized by Donatello in the nineteenth century, and poignantly articulated by both Paddy and Yank in The Hairy Ape.

know it. But me, I belong wit 'em--but I don't, see? Dey don't belong wit me, dat's what. Get me? Tinkin' is hard--(He passes one hand across his forehead with a painful gesture)...It's dis way, what I'm drivin' at. Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh belong and dey don't. Den yuh kin laugh at 'em, see? Yuh're de champ of de world. But me--I ain't got no past to tink in, nor nothin' dat's comin', on'y what's now--and dat don't belong. Sure, you're de best off. Yuh can't tink, can yuh? Yuh can't talk neider. But I kin make a bluff at talkin' and tinkin'--a'most git away wit it--a'most!--and dat's where de joker comes in. (He laughs) I ain't on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' all de woist punches from bot' of 'em. Maybe dat's what dey call hell, huh? But you, yuh're at de bottom. You belong! Sure! Yuh're de on'y one in de world dat does, yuh lucky stiff! (The gorilla growls proudly) And dat's why dey gotta put yuh in a cage, see? (The gorilla roars angrily) Sure! Yuh get me. It beats it when you try to tink it or talk it--it's way down deep--behind--you 'n' me we feel it. Sure! Bot' members of dis club!"

The comparison is illuminating: Hawthorne's Donatello is one of the greatest of the many literary symbols included in the utopian mythology of ideality or perfection, a lexicon containing Christ, the uroboros, the centaur, the sphinx, the hermaphrodite, and the mandala--to name but a few--all of which embody in peaceful co-existence the antithetical dyads of which all men are made. Yank, on the other hand, belongs to the dysutopian mythology of incompleteness, and as such is related to other members of the menagerie of the modern self such as Schwartz's dog and bear, Rodin's The Thinker, that fantastic tragicomic creature of the Dr. Doolittle books, the Pushmi-pullu, and the ape-men of Kubrick's 2001 Space Odyssey, all of whom represent in varying degrees--and perhaps Yank most of all--the tragedy of the inalterably between, or what Paul Ricoeur, defining the archetypal symbol in Freud and Philosophy, calls "the pathos of self-reflection." The hero of O'Neill's existential zoo story is as contemporary and, in many ways, as sophisticated an embodiment of the modern malaise as the characters of Sartre or Hemingway or Kosinski, and, the obvious flaws of the play of which he is a part notwithstanding, he may well be the most successfully realized metaphorical character functioning as a symbol of the self in twentieth-century American literature, even as the hero of The Marble Faun seems to embody more concisely than any other character the nineteenth-century American self; they are objective correlatives, respectively, for existential dread and transcendental monism.

There are few O'Neill plays in which a map of Eden is not located somewhere in the text. The Hairy Ape is one of those few. In a world without God, and therefore without the possibility of Being, men join with objects in uttering "...the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves," as Wallace Stevens wrote in "The Course of a Particular." Deeper than any economic or historical crisis with which man might be confronted, O'Neill seems to suggest, is the existential problem of living in a godless, meaningless world. Shortly before he dies, as the result of having been crushed by his ape companion, Yank cries out: "Even him didn't tink I belonged. (Then, with sudden passionate despair) Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?" This is surely one of the most anguished and moving cries in literature since King Lear, a literary correlate to Edvard Munch's disturbing painting The Scream. Furthermore, when we recall Santayana's observation that "oaths are the fossils of piety," the utterance becomes even more poignant, since it is both an oath and an appeal. Even after he has been "freed" from his stokehole, Yank remains encaged within the prison of the Self, unable to effect his own transcendence, precisely because he can achieve neither the stupefied mindlessness of a "perambulating vegetable" (the phrase is Christopher Fry's) nor the dazed omniscience of the anemic angel. An existential Everyman, cursed with the birthright of between-ness, he remains spreadeagled between ape and essence.

--Patrick Bowles

pp. 4-7; Michael Hinden, "Ironic Use of Myth in The Hairy Ape" (January, 1978), pp. 2-4. Yank's symbolic status is touched upon also by Bernard Baum, "The Tempest and The Hairy Ape: The Literary Incarnation of Mythos," Modern Language Quarterly 14 (September, 1953), 258-273; and by Margaret Gump, "From Ape to Man and From Man to Ape," Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly 4 (1957), 177-185.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Floyd, "The Search for Self in The Hairy Ape: An Exercise in Futility?" (January, 1978),

Emma Goldman through her new magazine Mother Earth." In Ah, Wilderness! set in 1906, young Richard is accused of talking like Emma Goldman in his defamatory sentiments about the Fourth of July and the "land of the free" where "the wage slave [is] ground under the heel of the capitalist class." The poems acknowledged by O'Neill which appeared in radical publications had, like the election theme of "The 'American Sovereign,'" political content in accord with the times: "Fratricide" (New York Call, May 17, 1914) protested America's sending troops of "the poor who must obey" against the revolution in Mexico to help "the plutocrats extend their sway." In "Submarine" (The Masses, February, 1917) the "soul" of the poet will hide under the water to sink the "galleons of commerce/Wallowing with obese assurance."

Internal evidence that "The 'American Sovereign'" is the work of O'Neill is first of all in the subtitle. "With apologies to..." or even "W.A. to..." is a frequent heading with him. For example, "The Shut-Eye Candidate" (New London Telegraph, October 3, 1912), also a political satire, is subheaded "(W.A. to Rudyard Kipling)" and condemns the candidates who shut their eyes to the source of their contributions.

Sez the wily campaign manager  
To the Corporations' man,  
"Our candidate has gone dead broke  
So help him if you can."

"The Long Tale," written "(With apologies to R.K.)" (November 5, 1912), begins, "There's a speech within the hall, echoes back from wall to wall," and continues satirizing the voters who "sit so patient" listening to the "old spell binders" talk of "robber trusts" and "tariff high and low"--a close parallel to the situation of the "Old party rallies" where the youthful "American Sovereign" "heard great argument." In "The Waterways Convention," written "With apologies to Hiawatha" (August 26, 1912), Big Bill Taftus, "faint hope of the Grand Old Party," comes to the New London convention not because of waterways, but "With an eye for snaring voters." In the years 1911-12 O'Neill was obviously exposed to campaign oratory, which he happily parodies through poetry he had admired at a younger age. His radical proclivities at the time no doubt also made him aware of such a muckraker as Lincoln Steffens, who declared at a town meeting in Greenwich, Connecticut, in December, 1910: "American sovereignty has passed from our political establishment to the national organization of money, credit, and centralized business" (Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Politics, 1913)--thus perhaps the quotation marks in the title of the parody.

In meter, rhyme, and language, the anonymous poem closely parodies first stanza 29, then 27 and 28 of the Rubaiyat. Having come "Into this Universe, and Why not knowing," the poet did "eagerly frequent/Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument," but he comes out "by the same door where in I went." Fitzgerald's metaphysical malaise the parodist translates into political satire, using language--"Robber Tariff," "the Trusts," "ill-paid labor," "party rallies," "Working Class," and "dough"--common to O'Neill at the time.

I believe, therefore, that "The 'American Sovereign'" is the poem by O'Neill which according to Jessica Rippin appeared in Mother Earth. (Examination of all the anonymous poems which appeared in the ten years

The Ancient Mariner was presented as the third bill of the 1923-1924 season at Provincetown, beginning its three-week run on April 6, 1924. O'Neill directed that masks were to be used; their designer, James Light, noted in the playbill, "The mask cannot represent life; but it can be used, as we are trying to use it, to show the eyes of tragedy, and the face of exaltation."<sup>4</sup> Throughout his stage directions, O'Neill makes extensive use of the mask to emphasize the Mariner's change in character from death-bringer to organicist. An examination of these stage directions for the physical production of the pageant-play reveals how he structured and shaped Coleridge's poem so as to render more dramatically visible his Romantic themes.

The play opens with the Mariner in front of a large screen to indicate a house, on which the shadows of the wedding guests are seen. The Mariner is depicted as "a prophet out of the Bible with the body and dress of a sailor"; his hands are raised up to the sky and his lips move in prayer. True to the opening lines of the poem, the Mariner is dramatized as rejecting the first two wedding guests, who have "mask-like faces of smug, complacent dullness, and walk like marionettes." Instead, he grabs the Third Wedding Guest by the shoulders, for the young man is described as "naturally alive--a human being." Thus even in the opening section, O'Neill reveals a thorough grasp of the direction of Coleridge's work as he directs the Mariner to scorn the mechanistic man and cleave to the organic humanist. Significantly, the Mariner stands upon the top step of the porch as he begins to tell his tale, for O'Neill realizes that the old man has come to a fulfilling ending in his quest for the meaningful life.

As the Mariner begins to speak, the Chorus appears from stage left: six sailors who all wear the masks of drowned men. At the first appearance of the albatross, the sailors sing a "hymn to a sort of chanty rhythm." O'Neill emphasizes the importance of the albatross as a symbol of affirmation and peace in the next sequence when the Mariner confesses to the Wedding Guest that he shot the albatross: "The corpse of the albatross is laid out on a bier by the mast, a mystic light proceeding from it." Here O'Neill shows his accurate grasp of the significance Coleridge attaches to the albatross' murder: that the act effectively severs the Mariner from the organic universe and renders him subject only to the misery congruent to his self-enforced alienation from the natural order, the vital process of Nature.

After the ship becomes becalmed, O'Neill describes the sun as "copper" in color, blazing down like a mechanical thing upon the old man's moral desert. The Chorus stares accusingly at the Mariner, and upon a screen at the back of the stage, O'Neill directs "deathfires" to dance on sky and sea. An apparition rises beside the ship, and O'Neill underscores the guilt of the life-killer in the following stage-direction: "The Spirit points accusingly at the albatross, then to the Mariner--then makes a gesture of command. The Chorus rise as one and hang the albatross about his neck." The Chorus then retreats from the Mariner "as if he were a leper."

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<sup>4</sup>Gallup, p. 61.

words later in life should stand as the conclusion to these remarks on the genesis of his Romanticism: "We should feel exalted to think that there is something--some vital, unquenchable flame in man which makes him triumph over his miseries, over life itself.... A man wills his own defeat when he pursues the unattainable. But his struggle is his success! ... Such a figure is necessarily tragic. But to me he is not depressing, he is exhilarating!"<sup>7</sup>

--Frank R. Cunningham

#### O'NEILL'S PLAYS IN POLAND

Although theatre historians in Poland have long considered Eugene O'Neill one of the foremost playwrights of the twentieth century, Polish theatres have been very slow in introducing his plays to their audiences. This reluctance stems from a number of stereotypes. As Elżbieta Żmudzka suggests, "We, the Poles, cannot play Americans because this peculiar blend of lyricism, psychological defenselessness and brutality, typical of O'Neill's characters, for example, is alien to the Polish national temperament" (*Teatr*, 1976/24). [The number following the year of publication in every parenthetical citation is that of the issue in which the quoted material appears. --Ed.] Another stereotype is based on the belief that O'Neill's plays are, as Eugeniusz K. Wawrzyniak maintains, "cultural documents" which cannot be fully comprehended outside the United States (*Teatr*, 1977/22). Hence Jerzy S. Sito argues that the psychological motivation of O'Neill's characters, formed by the Protestant ethic, "is difficult to understand by someone whose sensibilities have been shaped by the Catholic tradition" (*Teatr*, 1963/7).

There have also been other reasons. Some Polish critics find O'Neill's formal experimentation naive and outdated. Others attack the shallowness and triviality of his psychological observation. To Bohdan Drozdowski, for example, such plays as Long Day's Journey into Night are a perfect example of, to use his term, "grandma's theatre" which "does not enrich much our knowledge of human nature" (*Teatr*, 1972/20). Ludwik Flaszen, literary advisor of the avant-garde Laboratory Theatre in Wrocław, wonders in his review of A Moon for the Misbegotten "why Polish theatres must import bad plays from overseas." He goes on to say: "With a little effort, similar plays, boring and talky, pompous and sentimental, can be found closer to home" (*Echo Krakowa*, 1961/45). Zygmunt Greń believes that A Moon for the Misbegotten is so "shallow" and "banal" that it should be played only as a parody (*Życie Literackie*, 1961/7). And Michał Misiorny points out that the character of Abbie in Desire Under the Elms is built from all the possible clichés about so-called femininity (*Teatr*, 1974/24).

Although critics such as Żmudzka, Sito, Wojciech Natanson and Irena Kellner recognize "the tremendous psychological depth" of O'Neill's characters and admire the playwright for having created "such excellent roles" for actors and actresses, Drozdowski's and Flaszen's statements are quite symptomatic (Kellner in *Teatr*, 1963/17). Predominantly poetic and non-realistic in form, Polish theatre has been traditionally and chiefly

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<sup>7</sup>Scheaffer, p. 419.

cast included such outstanding Polish actors as Gustaw Holoubek, Zbigniew Zapasiewicz and Andrzej Szczepkowski.

O'Neill's plays have also been broadcast on the Polish Radio and on TV Theatre. On 28 November 1961 the Radio Theatre aired an adaptation of Long Day's Journey. In the fall of 1971, the TV Theatre showed A Moon for the Misbegotten, and in the spring of 1978, Long Day's Journey was presented.

Among the thirty post-war productions of O'Neill's plays (including radio and TV), none was a theatrical hit. The premiere of The Iceman Cometh and the TV presentation of Long Day's Journey had very good reviews, but most productions have been quite mediocre, with directors and actors desperately struggling with O'Neill's text. And the Polish premiere of Mourning Becomes Electra was so unsuccessful that no other theatre has dared to stage it. Yet, in spite of these failures and many critics' reservations, the O'Neill repertory in Poland continues to be dominated by three of his best-known psychological dramas: Desire Under the Elms, A Moon for the Misbegotten and Long Day's Journey into Night (twenty-four productions out of thirty). Polish acting companies seem to be attracted to O'Neill's "excellent roles," but they do not quite know how to play them. At the same time, no one has attempted to stage O'Neill's non-conventional works such as The Great God Brown or Lazarus Laughed, although excellent translations by Maciej Słomczyński are available. Unlike the plays of Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, O'Neill's work is still largely terra incognita to Polish theatregoers.

--Halina Filipowicz-Findlay

#### THE BIRTH OF THE EUGENE O'NEILL SOCIETY

What could serve more effectively to "promote the study of the life and works of Eugene O'Neill and the drama and theatre for which his work was in large part the instigator and model"<sup>1</sup> than an international organization, combining in its membership representatives of the academic and theatrical communities and the wider realm of dedicated "fans," whose united efforts might foster O'Neill-related activities in areas of promotion, publication and production? Since the question is voiced in this journal, it is naturally rhetorical. And it was because of the widespread agreement with its subtext that such an organization has indeed been created. At 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, December 30, 1978, in Room 504 of the New York Hilton Hotel, twenty-four theatre and academic professionals met for the purpose of formally establishing a Eugene O'Neill Society.

After a general discussion of two proposed sets of by-laws, offered by Horst Frenz and Virginia Floyd, it was agreed that final by-laws would have to wait until a later time, but that two pieces of important initial business could be transacted immediately: the incorporation of the Society, and the election of a pro tem set of officers and Board of Directors, which group might subsequently compose a series of statements about

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<sup>1</sup>Travis Bogard, in Draft I of the by-laws for the Eugene O'Neill Society, February 1979.

with all the previously existing bodies and sites related to O'Neill (Tao House, the Provincetown Playhouse, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and Monte Cristo Cottage, The Newsletter, and the Theatre Committee for Eugene O'Neill).

The Newsletter looks forward to an intimate and mutually-supportive affiliation with the Society, the first blossoming of which will be a regular Society column, providing official notices, business transacted, etc., in all future issues. For the present, suffice it to salute the nascent Eugene O'Neill Society and wish it (in the words of James O'Neill, Sr.'s favorite Crocker House toast) "sunny days and starry nights!"

#### SALLIES AND RIPOSTES: A NEW NEWSLETTER SERIES.

[I find that I'm always gathering short quotations and passages--snippets from here and there, many of them about O'Neill--that I have no particular need for, but that arrested my attention for a moment for one reason or another: their verbal felicity, or insight, or wit, or sheer oddity, or whatever. Perhaps, I felt, they might be worth sharing with others, for use or at least for amusement. So, in the season appropriate to housecleaning, I clear the current file and offer herewith a few, to start the ball rolling, with the hope that others will send in what they have snipped, making the series much richer than it is this time. All I ask is that contributors include documentation, if it's available, for all the items they add to the series. --Ed.]

1. "When I played Mary Tyrone,...I read quite a lot about the O'Neill family, since it is such an autobiographical play. And a doctor friend got me a very good monograph on morphine addiction, which gave me the most marvelous insight into why a woman like Mary Tyrone needed the drug. It opened an enormous door to her psyche, which I felt was that of an adolescent unable to become a mature woman."  
--Constance Cummings, New York Times (Sunday, January 28, 1979), Section II, pp. 3, 28.
2. "I'd love to have done one good drama, a really serious play--Mourning Becomes Electra, for instance, or Long Day's Journey into Night. I know I could do those parts, but they would never be offered to me. Maybe it's too late for all that." --Claudette Colbert, New York Times (Sunday, December 3, 1978), Section II, p. 38.
3. "You either believe art or you don't. It's hard to believe Eugene O'Neill's The Great God Brown, but you believe Long Day's Journey into Night more than you believe most of your own life." --Jack Kroll, Newsweek (March 12, 1979), p. 103.
4. "O'Neill was always verbally and visually sensitive about his settings. His explanatory crude line drawings for the scenes of The Emperor Jones reveal his understanding of design and the significance of setting as symbolic background for dramatic action."  
--Donald Oenslager, The Theatre of Donald Oenslager (Wesleyan University Press, 1978).
5. "I'm not really familiar with much of American theatre, but I don't like Arthur Miller at all, because he is old-fashioned, conventional,

the canvas draped to represent the jungle in the original production. But even under such conditions, I found the play moving. I learned, when Bowdoin produced it in '37 (with a faculty cast--the dream figures in masks--supporting two black students), that the lighting and the tempo of the drums were the trickiest element in the show, though the scenery and costuming helped considerably. This arena production failed to follow O'Neill's specific and meticulous directions for the drum, rising to an impassioned beat on each blackout; and the lighting had its lapses. But I admired the ambition of the director in trying to do it without scenery in cramped confines with the audience on top of the action. It's a play that really needs a proscenium and aesthetic distance. At the climax, with the appearance of the crocodile god and witch doctor, most of the illusion of the Emperor's final panic was lost. Still, it's good to know that current students have a chance to see the play."

2. Le Roy Robinson's "John Howard Lawson's Unpublished Nirvana," in Keiei to Keizai ("Management and Economy," a publication of the Economics Department of Nagasaki University, Vol. 57-3, No. 148, March, 1978, pp. 59-83), is the first full descriptive summary of the Lawson play to be published and is based upon Lawson's manuscript, copyrighted August, 1925, which he permitted Mr. Robinson, a teacher of Basic English Conversation in Nagasaki University's Economics Department, to read. The summary reveals remarkable parallels with O'Neill's thought in the 20's, and especially with Dynamo.

As Mr. Robinson notes on p. 80, the publication will "make it possible for historians of American drama to...relate Nirvana to other dramas by other American playwrights of the period, e.g., to O'Neill's Dynamo." Noting that others (Barrett Clark, et al.) have cited the parallels between Dynamo and Kaiser's Gas, and that O'Neill's own claim was that "the 'origin' of Dynamo was in his observation of a dynamo generating electricity," Robinson points out (on the basis of a discussion with Lawson on April 9, 1964) that "O'Neill saw Nirvana in performance and read it in March, 1926," and he stresses (on pp. 80-81) remarkable similarities between the themes, characters and situations in the two plays. "O'Neill's concept of electricity in Dynamo," for example, "is directly related to Lawson's similar conception in Nirvana." "In 'Literary Ancestry of Dynamo' (New York Herald-Tribune, January 16, 1928, p. 18) Richard Watts, Jr. mentions as 'literary ancestors' Henry Adams, Mary Shelley (Frankenstein), Samuel Butler (Erewhon), Karel Kapek (R.U.R.), Dudley Murphy (Ballet Mecanique, a film) and its 'most direct and recent predecessor, John Howard Lawson.'" O'Neill scholars will want to avail themselves of this most helpful summary of Nirvana.

[Mr. Robinson will share with Newsletter readers some comments on O'Neill from John Howard Lawson's unpublished autobiography in the next issue. --Ed.]

3. Frederick John's "The Day George M. Cohan Came Home to Podunk," printed in Yankee during the month marking the 100th anniversary of Cohan's birth, is a nostalgic piece that may be peripheral to O'Neill studies but is irresistible. Excerpts follow.

"He arrived in the afternoon, ahead of his company of twenty players. 'It's great to be home again,' he said. 'I've knocked around everywhere, but there's no place like the place I grew up.' At the time, the town had a population of 3, 013, but it was estimated that more than 10,000 people were there that day. It was a chilly day, and Cohan kept the collar of his coat up about his ears, and his hat drawn low on his forehead.

"'If you can't quite see me because of my coat collar, I apologize,' he informed one and all. 'I don't want to catch cold and be hoarse tonight--I've got some singing to do.' [He concluded the night's performance with a medley of his songs, ending with "Over There."]

"He was great that night. Even without scenery, even with a severe case of stage fright, he captured his audience with his performance. 'He made his audience smile,' wrote a visiting drama critic, 'and he moved them to secret tears. He kept them enthralled for two hours.' They cheered and stamped their feet--the old town hall really rocked that night.

"During the early morning hours, Cohan strolled through the town with his old friend Murt Howard. 'Wouldn't it be wonderful, Murt,' he said, 'if we were boys again playing baseball over in Podunk. To be a boy again, Murt, to do it all over again--if only we could!'"

[Reprinted with permission from the July, 1978, issue of Yankee magazine, published by Yankee, Inc., Dublin, NH 03444. Thanks to John Henry Raleigh for bringing it to our attention. --Ed.]

4. Andrew Porter, "Island Emperor," The New Yorker (March 5, 1979), pp. 115-117. A review of the February production in Detroit, by the Michigan Opera Theatre, of the 1932 one-act opera The Emperor Jones by Louis Gruenberg, Porter's essay is interesting as a history of the opera and as an assessment of its merits and weaknesses, among the latter being the fact that the persistent drumbeat, which one might expect to be the most effective element of a musical adaptation, actually "loses some of its force when it is but one element of a musical score." Of particular interest, however, are Mr. Porter's comments about the play on which the opera is based. Like James Earl Jones in a recorded discussion of the play, he cites the telltale "yet" in O'Neill's initial description of Jones's features as one evidence of an "offensive" racism in the play's language and attitude. But Porter is willing to accept the language "as authentic to its period."

However, he finds it "harder to accept the play as the Sophoclean tragedy [Olin] Downes deemed it to be [in his New York Times review of the first Metropolitan Opera Company production of The Emperor Jones in 1933]. Brutus Jones is no Macbeth. His ambition has been to get rich at his fellow-blacks' expense, bank his money abroad, and escape when his subjects will suffer his despotism no longer. In America, he has picked up enough white-man smartness to know how to exploit the credulous West Indians. Suffering and retribution following on commercial sharp practice can provide a moral spectacle,

adaptation," in which "the play is opened out to a variety of realistic details" without losing "the essence of O'Neill."

William Henry, 3d, reviewing the production in The Boston Globe (December 6, 1978, pp. 25-30), saw the connection with standard television material ("Mourning Becomes Electra is soap opera without shame, a sexy Gothic by America's one undisputed master playwright"), and he shared O'Connor's approval of the leading performers, adding Roberts Blossom, whose Seth "persuades us to believe one of the essential tenets of tragedy, that all the members of a household share the same personality, the same destructive arrogance." And he liked the enhancement of Maurice Jarre's musical score, that "makes the sprawling, secluded Greek revival (naturally) mansion seem foreboding from the first glimpse." But he finally seconded O'Connor's view that the play is "difficult and flawed," and particularly so on television: "for all its strengths, Mourning Becomes Electra doesn't quite work. We expect naturalism from television. We expect agony to be accompanied by shouting and tears. The tempered menace of the Mannons, their quiet, almost unspoken evil, is finally too poetic for a domestic art."

Lea Frank's contention, in the aforementioned New York Times article, that the trilogy "is rarely produced on the stage" moved James P. Pettegrove to respond in a letter (printed in the December 24 issue) that proves once again that Europe has been kinder to O'Neill than his own countrymen: "according to data collected by the Mykenae Publishing House of Darmstadt, West Germany, 'Mourning Becomes Electra was produced in 59 German, Austrian and Swiss cities between 1955 and 1975.'" Nor was the American television mounting the play's first: "In the fall of 1970, a TV version was broadcast over West German stations on two successive evenings, lasting an hour and a half each time." [Any reader familiar with that earlier adaptation is invited to submit a description and evaluation. A comparative study should prove fascinating. And readers' reactions to the 1978 mini-series will also be appreciated. --Ed.]

#### NEWS, NOTES AND QUERIES.

1. The February 1979 issue of English Journal featured the results of a survey of English teachers that had been conducted via its September 1978 issue and the Kansas City convention of NCTE. The results of the survey, entitled "English Teachers' Literary Favorites," may startle devotees of O'Neill. Or they may not: your reactions will be welcome.

The survey was in two parts: personal favorites and teaching favorites. In the modern drama category, Miller's Death of a Salesman led both lists. Williams was in second place, A Streetcar Named Desire being the second personal favorite, and The Glass Menagerie tying with Miller's The Crucible as the second teaching favorite. Then came O'Neill--but only in the "personal favorite" race, where Long Day's Journey finished third. (Wilder's Our Town was in that spot among teaching favorites.) The fourth-place teaching favorite was Shaw's Pygmalion, with Glass Menagerie and Our Town tying for

knew him; and a possible revival of the James O'Neill vehicle, The Count of Monte Cristo. Also discussed at the committee's founding meeting, last December 14 at the Princeton Club, was Mr. Papp's plan to commission a playwright to compose an O'Neill evening including material from the playwright's letters and poetry.

A hearty welcome to the Theatre Committee for Eugene O'Neill! Your activities will be followed with interest by Newsletter readers.

[The above information was compiled from reports in the New York Times (December 22, 1978, p. C3) and the Theatre Communications Group Newsletter (February, 1979, p. 2).]

3. Virginia Floyd moderated a special session on O'Neill as part of the MLA's 1978 Annual Convention, in the New York Hilton's Grand Ballroom East on December 29, 1978. The session, which attracted over 2,000 spectators and was described by MLA official Elaine Reed as "the most successful event at the MLA that anyone can remember," was entitled "A Consideration of the Late Plays: Long Day's Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten." The session's format was as described on pp. 3-4 of the January issue of the Newsletter, except that sections 1-4 of Part II were omitted, no scenes were performed, Paul Voelker served as m.c. for the Arvin Brown-Geraldine Fitzgerald discussion of Mary Tyrone, and there proved not to be enough time for an extended interchange of ideas and insights among scholars, theatre professionals and audience. But those in attendance found the event to be of great interest--especially the surprise appearance of Ingrid Bergman, a more than worthy replacement for some other performers who were indisposed.

Travis Bogard spoke personally and descriptively of Tao House and what it must have meant to O'Neill. Despite its dark interior--dark, that is, in terms of light, not of color--it never has an aura of the haunted, not even on a stormy night when the house is empty. He described the general effect as one of "a subaqueous world where light is a part of the silence." It gives one a feeling of protectedness: not just warmth, but something more "concerned." The creation of Tao was the creation of a "caretaker house," an architectural extension of Carlotta Monterey O'Neill.

Tom Olsson of the Royal Dramatic in Stockholm provided a historical account of the negotiations between that theatre's director in the 1950's, Karl Ragnar Gierow, and O'Neill's widow that preceded the world premieres of Long Day's Journey in 1956 and the other posthumous plays of the "treasure-house" that the dramatist had bequeathed to the Royal Dramatic. He cited a letter, recently found there, by Elizabeth Scott, who had rehearsed as Josie Hogan. And he quoted Gierow: "To us, O'Neill is not just a good playwright, but something very rare-- a real dramatist; [one with] deeper understanding of human nature, its passions and its conflicts."

John Henry Raleigh showed that not only personal, autobiographical memories but also racial or cultural memory is at work in Moon for the Misbegotten, making it, even more than A Touch of the Poet, the most Irish of O'Neill's plays. Josie, "probably the most admirable character her creator ever conceived," suggests the fabled warrior-women of the Celtic race and, in her role as confessor, the Virgin Queen as well. Phil, her father, is a reflection of the playwright's Irish patriotism, while also being "a kind of final tribute" to James O'Neill, Sr.: "If the major impulse behind A Moon for the Misbegotten

## 4. RECENT O'NEILL PRODUCTIONS.

Ah, Wilderness!, dir. Edward Cornell. Arena Stage, Washington, DC, December 1, 1978 - January 7, 1979.

The Emperor Jones, dir. Peter Honchaurk. Masque and Gown of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, February, 1979. (See review in this issue.)

Hughie, dir. Frank Girardeau. No Smoking Playhouse, 354 West 45th Street, NYC, December, 1978.

The Iceman Cometh, dir. Davey Marlin-Jones. Loretto-Hilton Theatre, St. Louis, October 13 - November 11, 1978. [Attention, score-keepers: this production was also listed in the last issue. It is repeated because the director's name had not then been known to the editor, and because Joe Pollack reviewed it in the December, 1978 issue of the New York Theatre Review, p. 37. Pollack praised the power and "extremely savage overtones, bordering on active sadism" of Robert Darnell's Hickey, and approved of the "proper mixture of whine and bluster, accented with a bit of brogue" of Don Perkins' Harry Hope. But he was critical of the heavy editing of the text, which omitted too much exposition; and of Karen Connolly's set, which "was simply too clean and organized for the saloon it was supposed to represent." --Ed.]

In the Zone and The Long Voyage Home, dir. Norman Morrow. Spectrum, 277 Park Avenue South, NYC. In repertory, Spring 1979.

Long Day's Journey into Night, dir. Bradford Wallace. Asolo State Theater, Sarasota, Florida, April 6-July 12, 1979.

The Long Voyage Home (four sea plays), dir. Bill Bryden. National Theatre (Cottesloe), London, February 20 - March 17, 1979.

Mourning Becomes Electra, dir. Nick Havinga. Five-part PBS "Great Performances" mini-series, December 1978. (See report in this issue.)

A Touch of the Poet, dir. Richard Hornby. The University of Calgary, Canada, February 7-11, 1979. (The University's Drama Department sponsored the event, which included a lecture, "Eugene O'Neill: The House on Pequot Avenue," delivered by New York critic Norman Nadel. The Department's core seminar, required of all Drama majors, included a study unit on O'Neill connected with the production.)

## 5. RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS.

Peter Egri, "Eugene O'Neill: The Iceman Cometh. An Epic Tragic-comedy of Illusion and Reality," Hungarian Studies in English XI (1978), 95-105. [Professor Egri's admirable study examines the "epic aspect" and "novelistic features" of the play; compares it with its short-story source, "Tomorrow," and with two dramatic influences on it--Ibsen's The Wild Duck and Gorky's The Lower Depths; and analyzes the characters' pipe dreams, especially that of Hickey, who proves to be the character "most imbued with illusions," and whose attempt "to annihilate tension between

## Part III: Performers on O'Neill.

Ingrid Bergman, "A Meeting with O'Neill."

"Reflections on Long Day's Journey into Night," by Florence Eldridge ("First Curtain Call for Mary Tyrone"), Arvin Brown ("Staging O'Neill's 'Simple Play'"), and Geraldine Fitzgerald ("A New Look at Mary Tyrone: Another Neurotic Electra").

6. The December 6, 1978, performance of Ah, Wilderness!, directed by Allan Fletcher at the American Conservatory Theatre of San Francisco, was videotaped for inclusion in the Theatre on Film and Tape Collection of the New York Public Library's theatre archives at Lincoln Center. The aim of the collection, begun in 1970 and already containing more than 100 "study prints" of theatrical productions, is to establish "a permanent visual record for research and study purposes of plays and musicals in their ultimate creative form, alive and on stage." The 1975 production of the same play, directed by Arvin Brown at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre, is also in the collection, which restricts replay for two years after taping and then makes the tapes available "to qualified theatre researchers, students and professionals" by written application. Persons interested in the project should write to Betty Corwin, Project Director, Theatre on Film and Tape Collection, Library and Museum of the Performing Arts, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, 111 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10023.
  
7. The Milwaukee Repertory Theater Company's half-hour television special, O'Neill: Two Families, which was seen in fourteen U.S. cities during the Company's Spring 1978 tour of Ah, Wilderness! and Long Day's Journey, is now available on 3/4" videocassette for use by O'Neill scholars and educational institutions. The production was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the videocassette is priced at \$80 per copy. The following is an MRTC description of the tape.
 

"O'Neill: Two Families is a unique exploration of [O'Neill's] early life. Filmed on location in New London, Connecticut, and in Milwaukee, it traces the MRTC's discovery of the nature of O'Neill as the Company prepares and presents fully-staged productions of his most autobiographical works, Long Day's Journey into Night and Ah, Wilderness! Set in the same New London cottage, both plays are drawn from the events of a single summer during the boyhood of Eugene O'Neill.

"By contrasting scenes from [both works], O'Neill: Two Families identifies key ideas which thread through numerous O'Neill plays. Once identified, these ideas are brought sharply into focus by interweaving a narrative of the playwright's own observations, combined with extensive use of historical photographs and present-day footage of the New London cottage and its environs, and scenes from both productions performed by members of the MRTC."

For more information, contact John Carter, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, 929 N. Water Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202. Tel. 414-273-7121.
  
8. Magee Hickey's misleadingly-titled UPI interview with Virginia Floyd, "New O'Neill Plays Found" (printed in The Boston Globe on January 4, 1979), describes the wealth of new material, if not "plays," now available to Professor Floyd as "the only scholar in the world allowed to study O'Neill's notebooks and sketches, which were bequeathed to Yale University after his death." Currently immersed in the Yale

## EDITOR'S AFTERWORD

Actually two "words"--one a request for submissions, pictorial as well as verbal; the other an advance notice of a forthcoming increase in the Newsletter's subscription price.

Having received no photographs or drawings that would reproduce effectively, I must defer the inclusion of more illustrations until the next issue, by which time I hope readers will have submitted more material from which to choose. I also beseech readers to contribute short pieces as well as essays--notes, queries, responses, reports of productions and publications and work in progress, and memorable bon mots for the new "Sallies and Ripostes" section that began in the present issue. I hope that teachers will respond to a request that I voiced earlier herein and share with other educators their experiences, good and bad, in teaching specific plays by O'Neill. And I urge theatre professionals to describe their experiences in mounting O'Neill productions--a service that will be of value to their colleagues and to academics as well. O'Neill's admirers are legion, and the Newsletter is dedicated to serving as their vehicle of expression and communication. Without them, it would indeed be a "diminished thing." I offer this as a word--not to the wise, for surely wisdom is an attribute of all O'Neillians--but to the willing.

Plans are afoot for additional enhancement of the Newsletter's format. (The fact that the current issue comes to you unbent is a first step in that direction.) These plans, plus increases in production costs, necessitate an increase in the annual subscription fee starting with the next issue. Beginning in September, only one-year subscriptions will be accepted, and the annual fee will be \$6 for individual subscribers and \$10 for library and institutional subscriptions. (Naturally individuals and institutions who extend their subscriptions before September, or who have already done so, will not be billed for the additional amount.) So I offer this chance for subscribers to renew now, at the current rate, for one or more years. If the traditional box at the right has a red X in it, your subscription concludes with this issue. Anyone desirous of initiating or elongating a subscription at the current rates should use the order blank below, or a photocopy or equivalent thereof. We welcome comments and suggestions on the reverse of the blank or in an accompanying letter.

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