Form in selected plays of Eugene O'Neill.

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FORM IN SELECTED PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

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This thesis will attempt to deal with Eugene O'Neill as a craftsman, a builder of plays. The form of his works, not the content, will be the focus. However, in this examination of form and structure, some intrusion of content will be necessary since the two aspects are interdependent. If interpretations are implied, they will be included only in so far as they dominate some structural factor.

This thesis looks at some representative plays of O'Neill to discover what stylistic and structural traits have been dominant and what trends, if any, have appeared in his structural techniques. The plays chosen include works from the second decade of the century through the years preceding his death in 1953. They have varied. As an experimental playwright, O'Neill tried many different structural patterns and devices in his attempts to find effective new means for conveying the drama of modern America. But despite O'Neill's freedom and willingness to experiment, certain characteristics emerge repeatedly in his works.

O'Neill did strive to discover the substance and the form for modern tragedy. In rejecting nineteenth century methods, he adopted the realistic approach to character representation and wrote with frankness and sympathetic concern. Although his convictions were constantly changing he was searching diligently for some ultimate meaning for man's suffering and for some method by which he could convey that significance effectively in the drama. O'Neill was not
striving for novelty of theatrical effect but for deeper understanding and communication. Thus his experimentation in form arises out of his thematic concerns.

O'Neill's works seem to fall into three groups: the short plays of the early period, notably The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape, the highly experimental and varied plays of the prolific middle period exemplified by Desire Under the Elms, Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra, and the more conventionally structured plays of the years preceding his death, notably The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night. The second period seems to develop naturally out of the first, but the major break in output occurred between the second and third periods. From increasingly radical experimentation O'Neill turned back to surface adherence to popular current dramatic form and structure.
INTRODUCTION

While critical research on O'Neill is still a relatively fresh field, scholars have produced various studies of his work. However, they have dealt mainly with the psychological and philosophical implications of the plays, with meaning rather than form. Histories of American dramaturgy, such as Krutch's *The American Drama Since 1918*, Dickinson's *Playwrights of the New American Theatre*, and Quinn's *A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day*, contain chapters about O'Neill's development, his contributions, and his place in American drama. Books and articles, such as Barrett H. Clark's *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays*, revealed the facts of his life and the corresponding dates of composition and production. Attempts have been made to show O'Neill as a philosopher seeking to understand the relationship between man and the world about him. Various writers have pointed out the influence of Nietzsche, Freud, Jung and the ancient Greek playwrights. The spirit of the times, the mass confusion and searching of the 1920's and 1930's of O'Neill's own life, beliefs, and interpretations, and his constantly varying philosophical attitudes have all been documented. His works have been analyzed according to subject, philosophy, character and general development in Richard Dana Skinner's *Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest*, Sophus K. Winther's *Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study*, and Edwin A. Engel's *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*. He has been compared with the ancients and the moderns. He has been praised and condemned. His language has been criticized as pedestrian, unpoetic, inadequate,
and often as detrimental to his tragic vision. He has been called a
writer of melodrama rather than of tragedy. Studies have emphasized
the fact that his tragedy deals with the psychological analysis of
man in relation to himself, his heredity, and his environment. Analyses
reveal his works as studies of dream versus reality, man versus society,
and man versus himself. The mass of studies generally shows his
development as a thinker and a revealer of his thoughts through some
systemized series of plays.

In a recent interpretative study of O'Neill's plays Doris V.
Falk points out very carefully the underlying tensions within man
which, in the light of psychoanalytical studies, cause him to bring
about his own destruction. Basically Falk analyzes the opposing self-
estimates of the O'Neill characters which create for them unsolvable
frustrations.

Because O'Neill never used the same combination of subjects
nor exactly the same characters, each play has been treated in a manner
somewhat different from the others. Nevertheless, one can note certain
trends in thinking among these many efforts toward creating drama.
Always, one senses—even in the one comedy, Ah, Wilderness—the
playwright's search for an understanding of human nature. Generally
there appears a sympathetic concern for the failures of men and women.
Frequently one can infer that O'Neill is complaining about certain
factors that create suffering for some kinds of human beings.

The plays included in this particular study were chosen as
examples which would indicate several elements within O'Neill's
development as a dramatist. An analysis of these dramas—The Emperor
Jones, The Hairy Ape, Desire under the Elms, Strange Interlude.
The techniques O'Neill used to produce such emotionally intense drama.

This study will investigate O'Neill's works primarily from the point of view of discovering what tragedy really meant to him and analyzing how he depicted dramatically his tragic visions of life. Dramatic criticism is generally held to involve three processes: a discovery of what the playwright is trying to say, a discovery of the method used—in this case the form and structure—and, finally, an evaluation of his efforts. What O'Neill has endeavored to express has frequently been discussed. Explication of the respective forms and structures with which he dramatized his ideas has not yet been fully clarified and is the subject of this study.

For the purposes of this study form can be interpreted to mean the particular way of being that gives the play its nature or character and the combination of qualities making the play what it is—its style. Structure is defined as the arrangement or interrelation of all the parts of a whole—its construction. These explanations and the Aristotelian qualitative components of tragedy—plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle—serve as the bases for analyzing the stylistic and structural composition of the O'Neill plays chosen here.

Although the seven plays will be discussed in the chronological order of their writing and consequently will be examined somewhat according to the ideas of the playwright which varied from year to year, the major emphasis will be directed toward analyzing how the ideas are presented in certain forms and structures, rather than toward
any particular development of the playwright that might be specifically related to periods of time.
THE EARLY YEARS

O'Neill's first plays were one act dramas in which the characters usually talked about themselves and their pasts, revealing more and more of their motivations and hidden desires, and finally uncovering some irony in their present situation. Irony, rather than conflict, was the central factor and there was little, if any, plot. O'Neill's interest had not become concentrated in the struggles within the individual souls. The strongest points of these plays are their atmosphere and irony.

In Abortion a college hero is revealed to be a scoundrel and a coward; in A Wife for Life old friends turn out to be unknown rivals for the love of the same woman. More specifically in Ile, a brave captain is the victim of fear of failure. As Captain Keeney states:

You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to get to the ile, I tell ye. (p. 550).

Within these attempts to explain himself lies the essential key to gaining an understanding of Captain Keeney, the protagonist of Ile.

The action, as it is drawn forward with the power of the protagonist's will, carries with it a feeling of impending disaster. Out of this particular kind of irony and anxiety the playwright, even in this early period of his writing, evokes the kind of sympathy which becomes the substance of many of the later dramas. The fear for the welfare of the romantic individual incapable of adjusting satisfactorily to the cruelties of life is transmitted into a peculiar sort of pathos akin to sentimentality. By concentrating on pathetic appearance and
heightening the effect with music, O'Neill presents the pity for the unfortunate individual seemingly the victim of circumstance. Captain Keeney also has the intense feeling that can be transmitted despite the restrictions of realistic diction.

The play demonstrates O'Neill's ability to achieve suspense, to produce sentimental pity, and to convey the irony and conflict between a brave sea captain and his fear of failure. It serves thus as an implication of the types of characters that will inhabit the dramatic worlds of his later creations and the kind of tragic powers that he will continually present.

Even O'Neill's first three-act play, Servitude, is simply a doubling of this self-revelation and irony formula. In this play a woman and a man learn by discussion with each other and with their respective husband and wife what love is and how fully they have been loved without having realized it. The superficial writer is forced to admit that his unpretentious wife knows more about love and sacrifice than he. The woman who came for the writer's advice realizes that she has left her husband on the inspiration of a false guide. The play is structurally an extension of the one-act play. It is composed mainly of exposition leading up to a self-recognition and climax. The change is merely an acceptance and a new appreciation of the status quo. Here, in Servitude, can be found the beginnings of plot. But the first real departure in structure is found in The Emperor Jones.

The Emperor Jones

The gradual disintegration of Jones in The Emperor Jones is logical and well motivated. The Emperor Jones expresses a social
philosophy. To read or to see the play is to be taken in with the
dramatic effects, with the monologue, but more with the playwright's
stand against the materialism which leads to social injustices in
general, and specifically in this play, to the mistreatment of the
American Negro.

In The Emperor Jones O'Neill portrays Brutus Jones as a
Negro who has absorbed the evil traits of white men. Jones finally
meets with downfall as he becomes a victim of his own terror and of
a return to the primitive characteristics of his race, in which he
felt the subservience of a black slave to a white overseer and in
which he reverted to the tribal savagery of his ancestry. Also, he
had been guilty of rising against and murdering a white man. As
Engel explains, Jones "is the victim of biological, social, and
psychological forces. . . . The concept of atavism has not been
discarded. . . ."21

The Emperor Jones, with varying inflections in Jones'
voice, indicating swagger, fear, reassurance, awe, confusion, and
dejection, the revolver shots at the end of scenes, the murmuring
of the swaying group in scene vi, and the increasing throb of the
tom-tom corresponding to Jones' heart beat which finally dies away
to silence, is an experiment in the expressive pattern of sound.
The insistent beat of the tom-tom, symbolizing the rhythm of the
primitive life of Jones, and his gradual succumbing to that rhythm,
constitute the main elements of the play.

Although it is only slightly longer than a one-act play
and is cut into eight scenes, The Emperor Jones has remarkable
unity of structure. The first and last scenes serve as a framework
for the normal world or the realistic limit for the expressionistic and frenzied internal drama. All of the scenes are short; only the first scene seems longer than the others. Acting becomes an unusually important variable in the length of time required and the resulting emphasis given to each of the internal scenes since they are primarily scenes of motion and spectacle rather than of dialogue. The first scene is tied to the forest scenes by the introduction of the tom-tom beat about five minutes before the end of the scene, and by Smither's forewarning about the possibility of meeting ghosts in the woods. However, the real plot, the disintegration of Jones, does not begin until scene ii at the edge of the forest where the first blow is dealt to his self-confidence. The beat continues into the final scene as a tie between the interior and exterior dramas.

The plot of the central scenes presents simultaneously the moral disintegration of Jones and the psychological and ethnic bases for this disintegration. The technique of flashback, used extensively in fiction and motion pictures more-so than stage productions, is here combined with the central figure's loss of control of his destiny and the symbolic loss of the trappings of his superimposed civilized role. Initially "The Little Formless Fears" of scene ii set the trend. The series of brief, abrupt visions in the forest reveal first the actual and later the symbolic reasons for the uncontrollable terror which cripples Jones. In scenes iii and iv, Jones re-enacts the two murders he has committed. Scene v and vi unite Jones with his race and its slavery, from which he must struggle to escape. The earlier two scenes may be considered individual exposition and the latter two, racial exposition. In scene vii, having lost most of his regal
uniform, Jones is confronted with his own evil in the form of the
crocodile and the representative of his ethnic background, the witch
doctor. Jones uses his last silver bullet to shoot this image of evil,
but he is no longer capable of running away. His actions have stopped,
and his terror has reached the same pitch as the "throb" of the nearing
tom-tom. He has lost both means of escape—the trail through the forest
and the silver bullet. From this point, his capture is inevitable.
The internal plot of Jones is finished. The eerie moonlight and the
black shadows of the threatening forest in the background accompany
the increasing fear of Jones. In scene iv, the dark walls of the
forest, on each side of a wide dirt road, seem to close in, leaving
only dense blackness, into the depths of which the terror stricken
Jones plunges. The plot of the natives of the village and their hunt,
represented in the internal scenes only by the tom-tom beat, resumes
and is quickly completed.

The plot of The Emperor Jones follows a steady development
on three interwoven levels: the search of the natives, the progress
of Jones' flight, and the past as presented in the visions in the forest.

Though unseen, the natives move steadily toward their goal
of killing Jones. Their progress is indicated by the increasing rate
of the tom-tom beat:

It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to
normal pulse beat—72 to the minute—and
continues at a gradually accelerating rate
from this point to the very end of the play.
(p. 14).

This beat also becomes louder, hence nearer. It does stop before the
end of the final scene, however. Only when Jones has been shot, and
the hunt ends does the tom-tom cease abruptly.
The acceleration of the beat corresponds to the deceleration of Jones' flight and the increase in his terror. As he becomes more terrified, his physical strength and his confidence give way to weakness, and at the end of scene vii he lies whimpering and exhausted. O'Neill uses movement, as well as sight and sound, to reveal what words cannot. The pattern of each internal scene is the entrance of Jones, the appearance of the vision, and Jones' hasty departure. Each attempt at flight is met by a more terrifying vision until, in a frenzy, Jones' circular attempts at flight only reflect the confusion in his own mind. In the end terror and his own evil have conquered his strength.

Thirdly, the progression of the flashbacks is shown in their increasing abstraction. From the specific murders to the ritualistic appearance of evil, the visions become more and more primitive and less related to the simple facts out of Jones' past. The murder and convict scenes are from Jones' physical past:

(As if there were a shovel in his hands he goes through weary, mechanical gestures of digging up dirt. . . . Suddenly the Guard approaches him angrily, threateningly. He raises his whip and lashes Jones viciously across the shoulders with it. Jones winces with pain and cowers abjectly. The Guard turns his back on him and walks away contemptuously. Instantly Jones straightens up. With arms upraised as if his shovel were a club in his hands he springs murderously at the unsuspecting Guard. In the act of crashing down his shovel on the white man's skull, Jones suddenly becomes aware that his hands are empty. He cries despairingly). (p. 25).

The witch doctor and crocodile scenes are an abstraction of the evil that is in Jones' soul.

(. . . The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased. The Witch Doctor

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points with his wand to the sacred tree, 
to the river below, to the atlas, and 
finally to Jones with a ferocious command, 
It is he who must offer himself for 
sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly 
to the ground, moaning hysterically.) (p. 32).

His confronting the monster of evil coincides with his exhaustion in 
the climatic scene, scene viii. Death follows quickly.

While the pace of the play is set mechanically by the device 
of the tom-tom beat, and while the terror and exhaustion of Jones 
increases, each of the forest scenes has its own pattern of emotional 
development. Their pattern is to open in a relatively low pitch, 
but higher than the first and last scenes. O'Neill's purpose is to 
let a character reveal his unconscious self, although he accomplishes 
this here with far less subtlety and through a different technique 
from that which he would imploy later.

Entering the forest, Jones makes for the spot where he has 
hidden food; but it is not there. Frantic at having lost his way, he 
becomes aware of black, shapeless figures creeping toward him, their 
"low, mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves" (p. 20). These are 
the Little Formless Fears that are attacking him, and with a yell of 
terror Jones shoots at them. They scurry away, but in the silence, 
hearing nothing but the "quickened throb of the tom-tom" (p. 20), 
Jones realizes his error in having given his pursuers a clue to his 
whereabouts and he plunges more deeply into the forest. The appearance 
of the vision causes increased intensity which reaches a peak as the 
bullet is fired to blot out the vision. The exception to this pattern 
is in scene vi in which Jones runs from the slave ship without firing 
the gun. No specific enemy can be identified here; he is running from
his own people. Each time a new scene begins, his despair is at a new low which dictates the low emotional point of the scene. Then the pattern repeats itself. While the action of the visionary figures is not always rapid or violent, the succession of scenes is rapid, and little or no preparation is given before each vision. The time lapses between visions are indicated only by the changes in Jones' physical and emotional condition.

Under the influence of excitement, physical exertion and the threatening sound of the tom-tom Jones loses his head. The veneer of half-civilization falls from him; he becomes a frightened primitive man again who turns toward his doom instead of away from it. O'Neill uncovers Jones' subconscious being layer by layer. His technique becomes expressionistic. As George E. Wellwarth states:

Expressionism is an imposition on the outside world of the describer's concept of it. It is thus a subjective account of a subjective perception. Indeed, reality per se has no meaning for the expressionist. Everything in his act is 'expressed,' that is to say, brought forth from within himself. Expressionism is perhaps the most completely self-centered art form ever evolved. The expressionistic writer takes the whole human race and the entire cosmos as his province, but he shows it to us as it is seen through the eyes of one character, invariably an alter ego for himself.  

With all the action projected in Jones' mind, O'Neill can then combine a somewhat realistic plot with characters, language and action that suggest a particular concept or concepts about the problems of humanity in general. It is a technique to which he has frequently returned.  

The first and last scenes of The Emperor Jones represent the
normal mood of the forest environment. They are at a conversational level, devoid of powerful emotion. The audience does not identify with the cause of the natives in their hunt. In the forest scenes, the mood changes gradually into a more and more intense mixture of dread, fear, terror and despair. The final scene shifts back into the normal atmosphere of the jungle—savage but not overpowering. Even the shooting of Jones seems anticlimatic. The success of the hunt is less important because we know that it is inevitable. The shooting of Jones inspires in Lem, his hunter, a "grin of satisfaction" (p. 34), and on seeing the body brought out of the forest, "great satisfaction" (p. 34). But Lem's quiet confidence takes the edge off any triumph he may feel. The frenzy of the internal scenes has been dissipated; the pressure of development in pace and mood has been released.

The Emperor Jones is a well-integrated rapidly moving play, repetitive only in the form of the forest scenes and presenting a growing revelation of the forces at work inside the central figure. It builds strongly toward a scene of recognition of evil, then lapses back into a short obligatory scene. In its unity, especially in the internal forest scenes, it is closely allied to the one-act play. But it also has strong similarities to the play which followed it by a year and a half The Hairy Ape.

The Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape is a dramatic portrayal of a man who cannot find his proper place in the world. The play concerns the psychological impact of one incident upon Yank, a ship's stoker, a man whose simplicity,
low intelligence, and manner suggest the animalistic; yet, a man who is still a man with feelings and emotions. A terrified girl calls him a beast, and this experience initiates a period of angry and confused thinking that ends in a frantic search for his particular niche as a human being.

The vivid impression of Yank as an individual dominates the play; however, in the problems and conflicts of Yank, there is a universal quality. There necessarily must be something wrong with a 'society that cannot absorb' its Yanks, because with all of their brutelike qualities, come a kindness and a potential goodness, and more important, a right and a need to belong. This involves more than just a criticism of society. None of the characters in the play is happy: neither the wealthy, discontented Mildred, nor the preaching Long, both of whom set the philosophical tone of the play—a tone of pessimism. The world is an unhappy place in which man constantly seeks unsuccessfully to belong. There is only the "perhaps" with which O'Neill ends the play: Yank "slips in a heap on the floor and dies. And, perhaps the hairy ape at last belongs" (p. 88).

The Hairy Ape repeats the eight-scene division pattern of The Emperor Jones, but its over-all length is closer to that of the conventional three-act play. One of the most radically experimental of O'Neill's plays, he attempts to broaden the possibilities of the theatre by leaving the realistic manner for the expressionistic. Both The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape depict the retrogressive movement of the main character. Both are imaginatively framed in scenes of pictorial contrast that show the originality of O'Neill's mind and his talent for creating unusual imagery in theatrical terms.
As Clark notes, the characters are not individuals but symbols; the acting evolves not from life but from ideas, and the speech is secondary to the very striking pantomime and to the highly emotive sound effects which are part of every production.24

The first two scenes of the play establish the status and attitudes of Yank and Mildred. Both feel a need to belong. Beginning in scene iii, the incidents of the plot run thus; Mildred visits the stokehole and calls Yank a beast, Yank realizes the nature of the insult and decides to seek revenge, he attempts revenge on Fifth Avenue, he realizes his real status while in jail, he tries unsuccessfully to join the I.W.W. and he is killed at the zoo. The incident of Mildred's visit to the stokehole agitates a doubt already troubling Yank--something is wrong with his role. He has been trying to "tink" (p. 58). This agitation is shown first in Yank's loud affirmation of his belonging, of his importance in running the ship as compared to Mildred's status as baggage. Second, he determines to prove his own dignity by returning her insult. His failure at this attempt generates more thinking, the end of which constitutes the climax and turning point of the play.

In scene vi, Yank recognizes that his strength, which he has been calling "steel," is puny compared to the strength of the controllers of the making of steel. He determines to destroy the Steel Trust, with which he has also identified Mildred. His purpose turns from returning a single insult to the destruction of the more general and powerful, if more abstract forces which have caged him. From this point, Yank like the hero of a Elizabethan revenge tragedy is so intent upon revenge that he is willing to risk even his life.
But Yank is not allowed to succeed. His attempt to use the I.W.W. as a means of destruction causes his ejection from the union hall, and his final attempt to belong as in the past brings him death. The essence of the plot, then, lies in the struggling mind of Yank, a searching, fumbling mind inadequate for handling the overpowering doubts and problems aroused by the insult to his human quality. Indeed, the nature of the insult itself is vague to Yank, and it becomes confused with his present doubt, his wish to prove that he belongs and is important. This increasing doubt and bewilderment are more effective because of Yank's limited intelligence, his "flaw." Simply, the plot follows the agitation and confirmation of doubt, attempted revenge, and resignation. Except for Mildred's role in bringing the doubt to the surface, no other character can be said to interact with Yank in the plot. Because the plot is centered in his mind, the scenes of emphasis must be scenes of thought, recognition and decision. Motion is secondary. Each event is given meaning only by the subsequent monologue in which Yank interprets it.

Scene i may be called the "drink, don't think" scene; confused thinking is the norm of Yank's environment. Scene ii is a parallel background scene for Mildred. This second scene is of questionable dramatic value since Mildred is not further developed and since her effect on Yank is all that is necessary from her role. We could be made to understand who and what she is by the discussion of the men in the following scene when they talk about the insult with Yank. The given discussion would need only slight elaboration to include all of the relevant information from the expository scene. Scene iii presents the insult. The amount of dialogue is minimal, but the
routine of stoking is given time as a demonstration of the servile lives to which Yank and the other men are bound. In scene iv, Yank describes exactly what we have just seen in the previous scene; he goes over it in his mind and decides that "she done me doit" (p. 65). This decision is the first step in the action, yet it comes in the fourth of eight scenes. Considering the overlapping elements in the second, third, and fourth scenes, the first half of the play, as Falk points out, seems redundant and slow in getting under way. This tendency to linger over exposition and delay the beginning of the action will be found again in O'Neill's work.

The second half of The Hairy Ape takes place on land and consists of Yank's attempts at revenge and his realization of impotence. The first attempt is followed by meditation and a development of both confusion and insight. After having tried to insult the "Mildreds" of Fifth Avenue, Yank sees that the cage which holds him is a product of Mildred's father and the Steel Trust, and it is they and not Yank who are "steel." Yank's only course, now, is to destroy "steel" with "fire" (p. 77). He changes his role from that of the positive, driving steel to negative, destructive fire. This is the high point of emotional intensity for Yank. So intense is his anger that he is able to bend the steel bars of the jail (p. 77). The guard observes, "On'y a bug is strong enough for dat" (p. 78). Scene vii, the resolution, presents Yank in a fumbling attempt to carry out his destructive purpose by joining the I.W.W. and his subsequent meditation on the uselessness of his effort. He reaches the resigned conclusion: "I'm a busted Ingersoll, dat's what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me" (p. 83). This is substantially
the conclusion reached in the prison scene; only his emotion has shifted. He asks, "Where do I get off at, huh?" (p. 83). This repetition helps to emphasize the cycle of human life. This bringing the play round full circle suggests what Friedrich Hebbel, in My Views on the Drama, wrote:

... The content of life is inexhaustible and art as a medium is limited. Life knows no conclusion; the thread upon which it spins out phenomena is infinite. Art, on the other hand, must make an end, it must, as far as possible, tie the thread into a circle.27

It is this "tying the thread into a circle" which is characteristic of O'Neill's technique. He leaves the impression of the endlessness of life.

Not the least value of scene viii is its bizarre quality. Yank thinks that he has come home to the jungle. He says to the gorilla: "Ain't we both members of de same club--de Hairy Apes?" (p. 85). Speaking of the beauty of the natural world, Yank believes that the gorilla can dream of the primeval forest to which he belongs and civilization does not. Because the gorilla is part of the natural world, Yank decides to give the animal a chance to return to freedom. He takes a jimmy and opens the door. When the animal has scrambled out, Yank offers him his hand; but the beast wraps its huge arms around Yank, crushes his ribs and drops him. Then, as if considering the action, it lifts him, throws him in the cage, shuts the door, and shuffles away. Yank despairs that even the animal felt that he did not belong. Grabbing the bars, he painfully pulls himself to his feet, and in his dying, mocking laughter comments that he is in the cage. He barks to the world, "Ladies and gents, step forward and
take a slant at de one and only--one and original--Hairy Ape from de wilds of--" (p. 87). Slipping to the floor, he dies. The monkeys begin to chatter and whimper. "And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs" (p. 88). Yank has retreated to nature and it too has denied him. The only real escape is death. The intensity of this scene is low, the mood conversational; the pace suggests a sure, slow, quiet coming of a welcome death after a difficult struggle.

The progression of The Hairy Ape is not the smooth, continuous development found in The Emperor Jones. Scenes i and ii, and most of scene iii, are expositions of the attitudes present in Yank and Mildred. After the initial incident of the insult, the generating circumstance, the play moves forward to the first meditation and decision of Yank in scene iv. Following this slow beginning, however, the play progresses to more revealing, conflict-filled scenes. The sudden shifts in locale between scenes add a sense of artificial progress in Yank's quest for "belonging." The last two scenes are somewhat repetitious in that no new attitude or realization develops, but the gorilla interview lifts the existing attitude into a different setting and adds a dimension to the symbolism.

Timing is also irregular in The Hairy Ape. The pace seems slow during the meditative monologues of Yank, as indeed it must be if these are to be speeches of emphasis. When Yank attempts to interact with others, the pace speeds up. Scene ii presenting Mildred with her aunt is filled with quick and brittle dialogue. The bunkroom, Fifth Avenue, and I.W.W. scenes are at middle range pace; each has minor internal variations. On the other hand, the scenes of Yank's meditations are slowly developed by the unsure efforts of his mind. They are full
of short, fumbling, searching phrases. The most crucial speech of this kind is his jail speech of sudden rage and realization, an outburst of anger after the hesitant milling over the newspaper:

(He shakes the bars of his cell door till the whole tier trembles. . . .) He made dis—dis cage! Steel! It don't belong, dat's what! . . . I'll be fire—under de heap—fire dat never goes out—hot as hell—breakin' out in de night—(p. 77).

One fourth of the play follows this climactic scene. In the last section, the pace becomes slower, almost weary, as Yank's energy is spent. His monologue at the end of scene vii has a tone of resignation, and the last is full of dashes, supposedly pauses, in which Yank collects his thoughts. The death of Yank is quiet, as opposed to his violent life, for he makes no struggle. Life is pressed rather than torn out of him.

Mood inversely follows pace in The Hairy Ape; that is, as the pace slows the mood becomes more intense. It is during the long, meditative speeches of Yank that the depth of his and the play's conflict is revealed. Another aspect of changing mood is found in the changing settings. Each setting carries its own mood which reinforces the power and significance of the particular incidents of the scene, or the mental attitudes of the scene. The setting of the climactic scene, for example, is a steel cage which confines the hero. At the same time, it is a cell for thinking comparable to a monk's chamber. Other men are removed, their voices coming from the dark. The mood is strongly foreboding and prepares us for the climactic rage of Yank, his self-realization and change.
The Hairy Ape is, however, primarily an intellectual play, a play of ideas, and at no time is its emotional content as strong as that of The Emperor Jones. Yank's rage is dulled by impotence and doubt, and he is angry too often. He protests so much that the effectiveness of his protests is weakened. As his strength gradually decreases, so does the excitement of the play. The first scenes in the ship are full of noise and life; the last scenes show the hero fading into resignation and death.

The Hairy Ape is unified more by its ideas and its central figure than by dramatic structure. It changes location unpredictably and moves in an uneven, unpatterned pace. The plot, which is scant, takes place in the mind of the hero, and the incidents of action are part of the plot only as they arouse changes in the mind. The fluctuations in emotional intensity are governed by the mental development of Yank, also, and are de-emphasized in favor of symbolic expression.

With regard to dramatic structure and style, O'Neill demonstrates within the play how expressionistic factors can produce and clarify a vision of a predicament and give it some sense of universality. At the same time he reveals the difficulties involved in making the symbolic figures also believable individuals. Technically he employs some interesting, though obvious, methods. His use of time of day to suggest Yank's state of mind—night for despair and twilight for death—and the continual references in language and settings to steel, cage, beast, and hairy ape do emphasize and clarify his intentions. The language discloses a certain power in the combination of realism and symbolism. It presents the savor of brute man and at the same time a rather poetic suggestion of an underlying meaning. Especially with
the choruses and the rhythmic sounds. O'Neill magnifies and amplifies the moods and ideas. One special example occurs when Yank has been abandoned by society and the sound of the patrol wagon is heard.

The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape are dramas in which the action occurs mainly within the individual souls of the protagonists. In the longer works that followed these two, O'Neill attempted to combine the two chief motifs we have noticed so far. He showed the conflicts between an individual and his surroundings as well as those within the individual souls, and he studied the interaction of the two.
THE MIDDLE YEARS

Two years after *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill completed *Desire under the Elms* and therein demonstrated his ability to construct a plot of external rather than internal conflicts. Self-revelation was subordinated to opposing forces within a family. The play combines all the themes O'Neill was to use again: hatred for the father, love for the mother, connivance of brothers against authority, and manipulation of man to satisfy woman's need for children and security.

In his attempt to present both the inner and the outer person on stage, O'Neill has experimented with masks in *The Great God Brown* and in *Lazarus Laughed*. O'Neill has also gone on to experiment in the use of sound, light, group movement, the pause, and audible thinking as means of holding a play together and of gaining a fuller expression of its inner meaning or mood.

*Desire under the Elms*

Conventional in its total length, *Desire under the Elms* is divided into three parts, corresponding to the modern act divisions. But each part is further divided into four short scenes. The tendency toward choppiness inherent in this twelve-scene arrangement is partially counteracted by the unifying use of one setting, few major characters, and repeated patterns in each part. For example, the time pattern is similar in each part. The opening scene is set in the late afternoon or early evening, around sunset. The second and third scenes carry the action into the night. The fourth scene of each part starts just
after sunrise. The time lapse between Part I and II is about two months; between Parts II and III it is about ten months. The longest scene, about twice as long as any other scene, is the fourth scene of Part I in which the brothers leave for California and Abbie arrives with Ephraim at the farm. This scene is important both in exposition and in emotional content, for in it alone all of the many conflicting forces and desires meet and are expressed. It divides itself naturally into two sections, the first showing the jubilant departure of the brothers and the second presenting Abbie's first meeting with Eben.

As a whole, the first part is valuable to the total play mainly as exposition, setting the mood of the farm and giving the background of the characters. As in *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill gives ample time for full development of the dominating attitudes and their causes before starting the action. Simeon and Peter play no significant part in the action of the main plot, yet they are generously described before their departure in the fourth scene of Part I. Only one important factor in the motivation of Eben is reported in Part I: the legal basis for Eben's claim to the farm through his mother. The brothers serve as sounding boards for Eben in discussion of his mother, so that later references to her and her parlor will have significance. Their discussion of Ephraim's personality is made superfluous by that character's strong delineation once he appears. But in giving more than a third of the play to exposition and establishing motivations, O'Neill has made possible the rapid unelaborated references to the past in the briefer, more active scenes of Part II and III.

Although Barrett H. Clark has suggested that the first three scenes of the play seem irrelevant to the whole drama, O'Neill presents
within these scenes his symbols of the hold that earth and sensuality have over the brothers. He suggests the fact that all men are subject in similar fashion to the demands and rewards of earth and nature. Within these first scenes, O'Neill is trying to accomplish several goals: to establish elements of rustic New England dialect and religious background; to show a kinship between the brothers and the soil; to suggest that the play will concern the appreciation of nature; to indicate that the language and consequently the final import of the drama will involve symbolism and thus to imply the need for looking beyond physical representation for further meaning; and, finally, to indicate an unrest, a dissatisfaction with farm burdens, that is contrasted with the romantic escape offered by the West.

The second part of *Desire under the Elms* holds the beginning of the main action. It stands not so much with one generating incident as with the emergence and recognition of the conflicting desires resulting from the relationship of Eben with Abbie. In the first scene, it is her argument with Eben that causes Abbie to promise Ephraim a son. She is spiteful. In describing her former life to Eben, Abbie illustrates the handling of exposition through retrospect, a technique used often in O'Neill's realistic plays. Abbie's recounting of the past is natural because it seems to be incidental. The same is true of the elder Cabot's description of his life in scene i of Part II; outside the house on a warm afternoon, he speaks to his wife, as he looks up at the sky:

... I'd like t' own my place up thar.  
(A pause) ... I'm gittin' ripe on the bough. (A pause. She stares at him mystified. He goes on) It's allus lonesome cold in the house--even when it's bilin' hot outside. ... It's
O'Neill combines in dialogue and setting elements of symbolism and realism. As he explained:

I never intended that the language of the play should be a record of what the characters actually said. I wanted to express what they felt subconsciously. And I was trying to write a synthetic dialogue which should be, in a way, the distilled essence of New England. The farmhouse plays an actual part in the drama; the elm too: they might almost be given in the list of characters.31

Desire under the Elms illustrates particularly well the use of repeated phrases and sentences to bind the play more closely.

In scene i, Eben Cabot looks down the farm road at sundown, and then at the sky:

God! Purty! (p. 137).

When the two brothers enter, they speak, grudgingly, of the beauty which they see:

Simeon. Purty.
Peter. Ay-eh. . . . They's gold in the West, Sim. (p. 138).

Later as they go into the house, in reply to Eben's summons to the meal, both Peter and Simeon say, "Ay-eh," and Eben looks again at the sunset (p. 139).

Sun's downin' purty. (p. 139).

The two brothers, in chorus, reply:

Ay-eh. They's gold in the West. (p. 139).

In scene iv, the next morning, as Peter and Simeon leave the house, they again look up at the sky:

Peter. Purty!
Simeon. Ay-eh. Gold's t' the East now.
Peter.  Sun's startin' with us fur the Golden West.  (p. 152).

When Abbie, the young bride of the elder Cabot, arrives, she also looks about, speaking with more animation than the men:

... It's purty--purty!  (p. 155).

The elder Cabot, in speaking with his wife, suddenly pauses and stares dumbly at the sky:

Purty, hain't it?  (p. 166).

And when he meets his son at dawn outside the farmhouse, he again says:

Purty, hain't it?  (p. 181).

As he looks with a vague, puzzled expression at the sky.  In the final scene of the last part, this pattern is completed as Eben, pointing to the sunrise, says to Abbie, as they start for prison:

... Sun's a-rizin'.  Purty, hain't it?  (p. 205).

The pathetically inarticulate reaction of these five people to the beauty of nature, with which they feel some sort of union, comes through repetition of Purty, Ay--eh, and They's gold in the West. These repeated references pull the play together.  This repetition helps to emphasize the cycle of life, thus bringing the play round full circle.

Part III, like the second part, starts with a strong scene. The party for the new son is in progress.  Here for the first time, breaking the mood, is a group of characters who are mere onlookers, irrelevant to the plot but used for color and for emphasizing the irony of Ephraim's supposed fatherhood.  Just as the use of blacks and grays preceding dawn at the beginning of the play assisted in transferring the main emotions of the play to the audience, the
lighthearted drunkeness and double-entendres of the guests serve to reinforce the guilts and ironies of the Cabot family.

In scene i of Part III, as Abbie and Eben stand beside the cradle of their child, the elder Cabot, outside at the gate, vaguely senses something out of harmony with himself:

Even the music can't drive it out—something! Ye kin feel it droppin' off the elums, climbin' up the roof.
. . . They's no peace in houses, they's no rest livin' with folks. Somethin's always livin' with ye.
(With a deep sigh) I'll go t' the barn an' rest a spell. (p. 189).

This suggestion of the device of "audible thinking," used to a much greater extent in Strange Interlude, expressed the feeling of unrest and confusion resulting from an instinctive sense of love between Eben and Abbie. In the last scene of the play this pattern is completed, as Cabot hears Abbie's confession:

. . . I felt they was somethin' onnatural--somewhars--the house got so lonesome--an' cold--drivin' me down t' the barn--t' the beasts o' the fields. . . . Ay--eh, I must've suspicioned--somethin'. Ye didn't fool me--not altogether, leastways--I'm too old a bird--growin' ripe on the bough. . . . (p. 201).

Thus an old man, feeling instinctively the presence of a force opposed to him, expresses at intervals his reaction to this unseen antagonism, repeated references to which unite the play.

The central plot and subplots are drawn together by a common theme of desire, which also sets the dominant mood of the play. The feeling of desperate striving and longing gives a tragic tone to even the scenes of joy and celebration, and this feeling foreshadows the mournful ending. The mood falls into a pattern of suppression of
desire followed by sudden violent outbursts. As the violence subsides, the mood returns to the peace of restraint.

The play breaks logically into three segments, which O'Neill designates as three parts. Out of the suspense in the first comes Eben's dislike of Abbie, which prompts the curiosity about Abbie's possible success with him. Out of Abbie's plan and the love between the two comes the final reversal which produces the final suspense. As the second evolves from the first and the third from the second, O'Neill achieves a sense of unity while continually developing the underlying tensions within the play.

Out of the suffering in each characterization O'Neill develops the action, rather than concentrating on developing what can be categorized as a pity for hopeless situations. Eben's agony creates his dislike for Abbie. His physical need overcomes this antipathy. Abbie's cravings produce the seduction. Ephraim turns to the farm animals and the barn. Then, the intense emotional reaction to the baby's murder produces the final incidents. Abbie is stunned by her own violence. Ephraim and Eben are appalled. Yet, O'Neill creates such fury in the conflicts that pity does not become the dominant emotion. Pity is certainly there, but it is subordinated to the suspense about what will happen next.

O'Neill's setting achieves two goals. First the house, with the elms and land, suggests the two desires that dominate the play. Second, the house consolidates the action, since in the single setting with removable walls for each room the movement can flow from one portion to another. In addition, the various rooms and the land lend probability to the action and show the conflicting elements within the people. The kitchen emphasizes the need for food; the land and the
complete house suggest the character's acquisitive nature; and finally, the bedroom and the parlor represent their sexual desires. As O'Neill has stated, the setting becomes an integral part of the action and a means to revealing the underlying concepts.

The play finally achieves a greater tragic import than any of the previous attempts. Although not a tragedy in the manner of the classical examples, it does produce internal and external conflicts of will which culminate in catastrophe. O'Neill creates individuals not extraordinarily noble but bent upon achieving their desires to the extent that they produce fearful actions and evoke a rather awesome response to the violence of their deeds.

Strange Interlude

In his attempt to present both the inner and the outer person on the stage, O'Neill adopted the technique of dialogue-monologue. The most ambitious play of this sort is Strange Interlude. Abandoning conventional theatrical limitations, O'Neill presents nine acts of intricate involvements and minute examinations. Engel states that:

Strange Interlude reveals his 'ambition to achieve size.' A realistic play, Interlude exemplifies that 'special sort of naturalism which develops into the mythical.' The pagan myth has been abandoned; the new myth is more conspicuously permeated by psychological tendency.

It cannot be said that the transmutation of a theory into a work of art has been quite successful in this play, which shows the emotional life of a woman loving six men: her father, her youthful fiancé, her fatherly friend, her husband, her lover, and her son. The story of Nina Leeds reveals the fact that the psycho-analytical interpretation
of a person's behavior makes a poor centre of a drama. It deprives her of her personality, and turns her into a formidable automation, the intricacy of whose reactions is interesting until their monotony becomes apparent. All the artistry of O'Neill cannot hide the faults inherent in the plan of this play. The most striking innovation in Strange Interlude is the development of the old "aside" into an instrument that permits the dramatist to show a person's thoughts and his social mask side by side. The price O'Neill has to pay for this advantage is a dangerous slowing down of the speed of the scenes.

The thought-speeches greatly affect the structure of the play as a whole, as can be seen by reading the play without them. They not only lengthen it and seem to delay the action at certain points; but they also tend to repeat what will be shown by action and regular dialogue. These thought-speeches are used, illegitimately perhaps, to summarize a completed conversation. In Act I Charlie thinks aloud, after listening to Nina argue with her father about giving and forgiving. "In short, forgive us our possessing as we forgive those who possessed before us" (p. 503). Or, they are used to tell the obvious, as when Evans arrives in Act II. Marsden thinks, "This is certainly no giant intellect . . . overgrown boy . . . likeable quality though . . ." (p. 511). If that likeable quality shows in Evans so strongly that Marsden could spot it immediately, we need not be told that it is there. Again, in Act III, young Gordon tells the audience his thoughts about destroying the birthday gift, but Darrell had predicted aloud, a few minutes before, exactly what Gordon would think. During long thought sequences, such as that ending Act VI, the pace of the action must slow to almost a complete
halt, giving the impression of a tableau. Since only one character 
can speak at a time, thoughts which would normally be simultaneous 
must be spoken consecutively. It would seem, then, that these thought- 
speeches decrease subtlety and spontaneity and slow the pace without 
adding depth to either the characters or the themes. No moods, passions, 
motivations or relationships have been presented in *Strange Interlude* 
that could not have been conveyed as well with the conventional 
dialogue--plus--occasional--monologue method and adequate acting or 
perceptive reading. The plot, the basic and complex relationships 
of the characters are all maintained when the play is read without 
its thought-speech passages.

In attempting to categorize the play, John Corbin states 
that "*Strange Interlude* is primarily not life in the living but a 
new tract on the new psychology." Francis R. Bellamy considers 
it as "a psychological novel put upon the stage. A vision as close 
to the complete truth of life as any artists has ever drawn." 
Brooks Atkinson comments that "nine acts anatomize the motives and 
the malignant consequences of a scientific adultery." These 
critics imply that the technique served as a means of greater 
understanding.

The plot follows Nina in and out of the complicated web of 
love, desire, pity, and duty which gradually ensnares and then 
gradually releases her. Only Nina knows all of the ramifications 
of her complex relationships with the several men in her life: 
Charlie, who replaces her father; Ned, her lover; Sam, her husband; 
and Gordon, her son, who replaces the dead hero Gordon. Nina is 
able to manipulate these men for her own needs and to aid one another,
but this power brings her no happiness or peace. At the same time, she must give a part of herself to each of them, except Charlie. He offers and finally gives Nina the peace that none of the others has been able to provide. At the death of Sam, Nina is free, and she resigns her claims and duties to all other men to "rot away" (p. 679) with Charlie.

Throughout its lengthy development, the structure comes closer to the discussiveness of a novel than the compactness of a play. In presenting decades in the lives of a group of characters, Strange Interlude lacks a single climactic point or any immediately defined and resolved conflict. The conflicts here are many and they are resolved not in a single action but in several. The play becomes narrative, ponderous, and diffuse.

O'Neill offers no final solution or understanding. He is simply condemning the character's particular situation. He does not reveal any comprehensive solution. Because he has revolted against accepted practices of Christianity and because his own philosophy has not provided an adequate replacement, he can find no final meaning for the play or for life. Having discarded hope for positive approaches, O'Neill now reverts to a rather morbid view of life.

As Engel states:

In 1927, 'much possessed by death,' he wrote Lazarus Laughed, wherein he evaded the inevitable and terrifying eventuality by per-fervidly denying its existence, followed, in the same year by Strange Interlude, where he resumed once again his digging 'at the roots of the sickness of today'--indicating not only that science and materialism failed 'to give any satisfying new God for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in,' but that, after
all, 'its fears of death' had not been comforted. Where he had denied death, he came to deny life as well. Caught between a contempt for life and a dread of death, he found a modus operandi in anesthesia.

In *Strange Interlude*, according to Winther:

Bitter experience has taught Mrs. Evans that faith in Christianity was no solution to the problems that are fundamentally biological. . . . O'Neill does not use Christianity as a solution to tragedy, because he has no faith in it as a solution to life's complex problems in this modern world. . . .

In the drama O'Neill can consequently reject what American religions have advocated and, in his own opinion, produced. He cannot, however, offer any stable substitute.

He refuses his audience the comfortable satisfaction that arises out of finality. He sees life as an everchanging struggle, and in his plays there is always a world of complex and unresolved behavior that carries on beyond the ending. . . . Life is an unceasing stream of experience.

He seems only to be able to blame society and God for what happens.

As Atkinson notes:

In the blind pursuit of personal happiness the characters, treading a woeful measure, beseech us to pity them for their self-invited mistakes. Now, to blame God for purely human blunders is begging the question, or else it is immature philosophy.

Atkinson's comment suggests O'Neill's continual problem--limited perspective. O'Neill becomes so concerned with showing individual instances that the suffering serves primarily to indicate particulars rather than universals.

O'Neill is obviously more concerned with representing the
inner workings of his characters' minds. Therefore, in addition to the dialogue, he allows the individuals to speak their thoughts. The streams of consciousness are interspersed throughout the regular dialogue. There can be no doubt, then, about what any character is feeling and thinking. His spoken thoughts reveal both his motivations and his intended actions. Unfortunately this technique produces a particular kind of repetition. The character thinks; then he speaks and acts. This particular method is followed throughout the play, and as Atkinson explains, these voiced thoughts serve several purposes: exposition, contrast, speculation, specific reaction, and elaboration of ideas. They vary in length, frequency, and importance. Some are exceedingly lengthy, and Atkinson is justified in arguing that they "seldom throw essential light" on the affairs and they nearly always "impede dramatic action." To indicate the pattern of thinking, O'Neill has written in broken phrases and uses an excessive amount of repetition. Consequently, the writing becomes monotonous and tedious.

Although the thought-speeches ultimately harm the play, his experimentation is interesting in that it shows O'Neill's continuing attempt to dramatize internal and external conflicts. Experiments like the thought-speeches, though they fail, are efforts to find new ways to externalize the inner conflicts of the characters.

The play is unified by two basic elements: character and the actual nature of thought. The drama takes four characters through the cycles of change, centering them in the study of Nina. The technique of emphasizing vocalized thinking from the opening revelations spoken by Charlie Marsden throughout the play until Charlie's final
expression of his feeling serves to draw all the portions of the
drama together artistically. Not only are these passages linked by
literary style, but also they help to clarify the idea that everyone
is involved in the central character development. The probabilities
that the characters will behave as they later do are more easily and
clearly established by means of this technique than by using only
dialogue. Since each person clarifies his reactions and intentions,
what he later does is more plausible.

The dominating structural factors, then, in Strange Interlude
are the extended plot presented in separated incidents and the use
of secondary speeches to present the thought of each character.
Both of the factors tend to slow the pace and feeling of progress and
to blunt the effects of the high points of emotional content and
strong mood. The diffuse and complex plot suggests the structure
of a novel rather than the compact unified structure of a play.

Mourning Becomes Electra

When O'Neill composed the trilogy Mourning Becomes Electra,
he rejected the audible thinking technique of Strange Interlude.
Mourning Becomes Electra has much more power over our feelings
than Strange Interlude. The psycho-analytical dissolution of the
characters is less complete than in the case of Nina Leeds; the
characters do not so much as give the impression of being puppets
going through movements dictated by a complicated machinery of
inhibitions, fixations, compensations, etc. It is the definite
historical setting that lends them reality, along with the spectator's
recollection of their Greek prototypes.
O'Neill is apparently striving in the creation of *Mourning Becomes Electra* to present a tragic action in which the emphasis, in Aristotelian preference, is placed on the whole plot, rather than on any of the five component elements: character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle. Clark cites O'Neill's plan to create a "modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy." According to Engel, O'Neill proposed to "develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols." In particular, he has chosen to take the legend of the curse upon the house of Atreus as the basis for a family tragedy set in the period immediately following the Civil War.

As O'Neill realized, his first problem was the substitution of psychological motivation for a Greek sense of fate in a play for a modern audience which possessed no standard belief in gods and moral retribution. Aeschylus had written for an audience that accepted certain moral, religious, and political dogmas and that had a general understanding of the current legends; therefore, he did not have to establish any premises. A modern writer, however, must clarify the hypotheses upon which he is building the tragic action.

O'Neill's characters are victims of heredity and environment. O'Neill's deterministic philosophy means essentially that the characters are products of their genes and their surroundings and that they do not have the power to overcome these effects. Ezra, Christine, Adam, Lavinia, and Orin are forced to make their decisions according to their innate characteristics and the existing circumstances. As each of them explains, he has been driven to the particular action. For the Greek conception of fate in which the gods controlled the
destiny of man, O'Neill has substituted psychological determinism. Qrin, for instance, is driven by a raging jealousy, stemming from an incestuous love for his mother and is plagued by a Puritan conscience. Abe Mannon suffers from sexual frustration because his Puritan sense of guilt has turned love into lust. "Love, jealousy, hate and a puritanic conscience were the moving factors that laid the foundations for the tragic end of the Mannon Family. The motivating forces are inward psychological, complex, but not supernatural."47

O'Neill apparently believed that his interpretations of fate were developments of the changes originated by Euripides. O'Neill commented that this Greek tragedian "completely shifted the tragic situation from a conflict between man and the divine laws of the universe to man's inner soul."48

The first and last plays, Homecoming and The Haunted, contain four acts each, and the second play, The Hunted, has five acts. By the end of the 1920's and the beginning of the 1930's, the four-act structure had become usual with O'Neill. The opening act of each play of the trilogy takes place in front of the Mannon house. The house is a large stone building resembling a Greek temple, fronted by a wooden portico with six tall columns. "The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its somber gray ugliness" (p. 687). Christine particularly resents what it implies:

... Each time I come back after being away it appears more like a sepulchre! The 'whited' one of the Bible--pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan gray ugliness! It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity--as a temple for his hatred. ..." (p. 699).

Later scenes move inside to the various rooms, all stark and bare,
and then outside again. This pattern of exterior and interior scenes, beginning and ending with exterior in each play—with the one ship scene at the center of the second play (this, the center of the whole work) emphasizes the sea background of the family and the sea as a symbol of escape and release.

The trilogy begins in the spring of 1865, just at the end of the Civil War. In Homecoming, Acts I and II, and Acts III and IV take place on two evenings separated by about a week. The Hunted opens two days after the end of the first play and its first three acts occur on the same evening. The major break in time continuity is the year that passes while Lavinia and Orin make their trip to the islands. The South Sea Islands appeal to them because they symbolize release, peace, security and freedom of conscience. The four acts of The Haunted are spread over a little more than a month after they return from the islands. All scenes except the final act of the last play are set in late evening or night, emphasizing the dark moods of the family. These time intervals and evening scenes are strikingly similar to those used in Desire under the Elms, creating similar, unifying effects. Both plays show a delayed outcome of early actions with a long interval before the last part.

O'Neill carefully exposes with the three plays the dire results of puritanic restraints on life and love. The action stemming from the family conflicts implies that whenever a group of people subjects itself to the kinds of restriction implicit in Puritanism the people must live under a continual threat of impending and increasing disaster. Out of his representation of the torments of the five major characters, the playwright produces a dread for
what they will do to each as results of their particular suffering and a sympathetic concern for the victims caught in the predicaments.

In order to show how the conflicting desires of natural love and unnatural repression affect the family, O'Neill goes beyond the essentially realistic representation. He accentuates certain character similarities as a means of emphasizing the conflicting forces. All of the Mannons are marked by the mask-like quality of the face in repose. When the characters are beset by the Mannon repression, this mask-like quality is especially apparent and they walk with a strange, wooden gait. The Mannon men are particularly similar in appearance. The element of sensuality is suggested by the beautiful, luxuriant hair of the women. Both Marie Brantome and Christine Hamel have represented the manner in which sensual desire has been perverted by the Mannons. Lavinia reflects both phases. When she is dominated by the Puritan heritage, she has the mask-like expression and walks woodenly. When she is filled with sensuality, she is glowingly beautiful.

Other notes of symbolism continually accentuate the struggle. The house itself suggests Puritan repression, with its mask-like quality and somber appearance. The pictures all show ancestors with the mask-like characteristic. The study reflects the sense of justice and retribution. The recurrent music emphasizes the frustrated longing for a happy life. The sea suggests the means for escape; the islands are the romantic release from restriction. The home represents restraining bonds. The greens of Christine's costume suggest her natural desires. When Lavinia abandons the black of the Mannon repression, she dons the green. After rejecting
the chance for sensual experience, she returns to the black. Orin's wearing black indicates that he has lost all opportunity for love.

The action is apparently designed to create intense degrees of fearful suspense. Each play is carefully constructed so that a particular catastrophe is the culmination of the suffering and the decisions. Consequently the kind of fear developed in every instance is an almost melodramatic dread of an impending death.

In *Homecoming* Lavinia's determined vengeance and Christine's scheme for escape become joint forces in increasing the dread that Ezra will die. O'Neill demonstrates his ability as a dramatist by showing these two women powerfully working against each other. Yet, whereas he has developed the action essentially out of the characters in the first three acts, he tends to emphasize the visual and vocal effects in the last acts to the point that the emotional response is more nearly akin to melodrama than to tragedy. The final concern, so carefully increased, is more for the fulfillment of the poisoning than for the welfare of Ezra. He has been introduced so late that the reader's sympathies have primarily been given to Lavinia and Christine. He becomes essentially the object of their strife. Because his error has not been represented nor clearly defined, the violent actions seems at first to be only Christine's fatal error. When Lavinia is seen in anguish by her father, it also becomes apparent that the fault actually lies with her.

The second play is concerned largely with the sense of impending doom for Adam and Christine. Again, since Adam is a minor figure, the greater fear is finally directed towards what will happen to Christine. This time there is a melodramatic sense
of punishment. Because Adam and Christine have killed Ezra, they must
die. The suspense is created largely because of Orin's vacillating
between believing his mother and his sister. Two scenes become
essentially melodramatic by evoking suspense through visual effects.
The first is the scene in the room where Ezra's corpse is seen. The
placing of the pill box on his chest and the waiting for Christine's
reaction are purely melodramatic devices. Probably the most intense
suspense, however, is developed when, in the shadows at the wharf,
Lavinia and Orin spy on the lovers. The final scene of the play is
more nearly an approach to tragedy. Christine's error has been
dramatized, and she has become somewhat pathetic in her dread. Her
reactions to Orin's bitter news reveal that she is preparing a final
decisive move, and O'Neill does accomplish the suicide offstage.

The final play appears first to work towards Orin's suicide.
There is continually an alternate concern about whether or not he
will reveal the truth of the crime. Finally it becomes clear that
the whole unifying dread concerns Lavinia's crucial decision about
her own happiness. The conflict develops suspense as Orin tries to
give Hazel his work and as Lavinia attempts to maintain control over
him. His own developing insanity keeps the focus primarily on what
he will do. Only when Lavinia is desperately beseeching Peter for
happiness does the emphasis finally go to her fundamental problem.

In each play the fear aroused is terminated. Ezra is
killed. Adam and Christine meet their deaths. Orin dies and Lavinia
secludes herself. Yet O'Neill achieves a sense of continuity by
creating another fear the moment one is resolved. Not until the door
is finally closed does the whole action lose its dominant element of dread.

Regardless of what may be said about the melodramatic techniques, it must be admitted that all of the plays demonstrate the powerful suspense that O'Neill is capable of creating. The power is such that the methods do not become particularly questionable until after the action has been completed.

O'Neill achieves unification among the three plays by having each crime motivate another. Secondly, all of the action centers in the one family and around one central character. Finally, the action of the second play grows out of the first; that of the third, out of the second.

In each play the plot is complex. The decision stemming from the suffering produces a reversal. Lavinia's plan to thwart Christine produces the catastrophic counteraction. The scheme to punish her mother is changed by Christine's escape through death. Her hope for freedom by encouraging Orin's suicide leads only to her self-denial.

Despite the obviousness of some of the methods, the probabilities are generally established that certain actions will occur. Essentially Atkinson is justified in saying that "this is an organic play in which story rises out of character and character rises out of story and each episode is foreshadowed by what precedes it."
THE LATER YEARS

After completing Days Without End in 1934, O'Neill entered a period of more than a decade during which he gave the public no new works. If we inquire into the differences between O'Neill's experimental and his final period, we notice a change in his attitude towards the performance and the publication of his plays. As a glance at a list of composition and publication dates shows, he was no longer as eager to test his plays before his readers (or spectators) as he had formerly been. The main reason for this new attitude was not failing health, and most certainly not declining power, but rather a new quality and direction in his creative activity itself. O'Neill was planning an interlocking series of dramas, each to be complete in itself yet related to the others in general mood and philosophy. This idea prevented him from ever feeling that he had completed his most important plan.

The later years produced in O'Neill a new interest in autobiographical material. The philosophy of the plays suggests the condition of O'Neill's personal life. In his middle period, he had usually invented his plots, or based them on facts not directly connected with his own life. In fact, Barrett H. Clark reports that a few years before 1936 O'Neill told him:

All the most dramatic episodes of my life I have so far kept out of my plays, and most of the things I have seen happen to other people. I've hardly begun to work up all this material, but I'm saving up a lot of it for one thing in particular, a cycle of plays.
I hope to do some day. There'll be nine separate plays, to be acted on nine successive nights; together they will form a sort of dramatic autobiography, something in the style of War and Peace or Jean-Christophe.51

The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night are universally judged to be O'Neill's finest plays. Their author considered them the best plays he had ever composed.52 On March 27, 1941, he wrote to Barrett H. Clark: "Regarding work, I've finished two plays outside the cycle in the past two years, and I'm enthusiastic about them. Both will rank among the few very best things I've ever done, I know."53 Clark also quotes from a letter written in early September of 1943:

When, in addition, I consider The Iceman Cometh, most of which was written after war started in '39, and Long Day's Journey into Night, written the following year—(these two plays give me greater satisfaction than any other two I've ever done). . . .54

In these two plays he musters the required interest and nerve to yield up the secrets he had so carefully hidden for many years. O'Neill is no longer preoccupied with presenting a lifetime of struggle. Gone are the time lapses of months and years between acts. The new ingredients are the highly focused conflict, the single central climax and change. Symbolic devices are more conventionally integrated into the structure of the play, not superimposed as they sometimes were in the early and middle-years.

The Iceman Cometh

The Iceman Cometh is remarkable for the depth of its gloom, its forbidding atmosphere, plot and characters as well as for the
detached, objective way in which O'Neill creates his underworld, and peoples it with a crowd of drunkards and outcasts from society.

The plot is based upon two reversals of action. Out of Hickey's suffering has come a violent action and the feeling that he has found the secret to happiness. Yet, when he forces the others to face reality, each meets personal defeat. The second reversal comes with Hickey's hint of insanity. Grasping at this suggestion, the characters pretend that Hickey is really mad and return to their escapes. Thus, they make two discoveries; the first is forced upon them, and the second is eagerly sought. The Iceman Cometh is the tragic story of people who have already made their mistakes and who are attempting to live out their days without any return to reality. Only Hickey and Parritt can escape by means of death.

O'Neill creates the action by fundamentally painting these people sympathetically in their mutual attempt to cling to their last desperate hopes. He develops the drama in such a manner that they are most pathetic as the protagonist threatens to destroy the only aspect of their lives which enable them to consider themselves as individuals.

The four acts of The Iceman Cometh cover little more than forty-eight hours in contrast to the long time spans in earlier plays. O'Neill also promotes unity by setting all four acts in the bar and backroom--really one large room--of Harry Hope's hotel. The play concentrates on a central action. The conflict of the drama emerges out of the attempt of Hickey, the salesman, to justify his own action, murder, by changing the attitudes of Harry Hope and his group of followers. Finding his methods unsuccessful, Hickey must reveal his
own internal conflict of guilt and relief at the murder of his wife. The revelation frees the inmates of Harry Hope's hotel, allowing them to return to the comfort of their illusions, illusions that correspond the masks of some of the earlier plays. In both time and plot, then, The Iceman Cometh is a more cohesive play than those discussed in the preceding chapter.

O'Neill establishes the mood of the play by carefully opening the action with an assemblage of lost souls in the barroom: Larry, Hugo, Joe Mott, Wetjoen, Jimmy Tomorrow, Lewis, Hope, McGloin, Mosher, and Willie Oban. As Rocky gives Larry, considered the philosopher of the place, a drink, Larry voices the general disillusionment. He takes a drink, promises to pay tomorrow and expresses his bitterness.

. . . To hell with the truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It's irrelevant and immaterial, as the lawyers say. The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober. And that's enough philosophic wisdom to give you for one drink of rot-gut (pp. 9-10).

Larry and his friends, according to his estimation, belong to the race of the disinherited, doomed from birth. Each character has made some mistake in his life and has never recovered from the repercussions. Rather, he has disintegrated to the point of some last virtually impossible dream of personal rehabilitation.

The whole drama develops in a fundamentally realistic style. O'Neill concentrates on dialogue rather than on action in order to reveal the psychological factors which have produced suffering. Thereby he can evoke certain types of fear and pity.

O'Neill has given ample scope to his exposition. One
after another of his human wrecks is presented so skillfully for our inspection that our interest never wavers. And very soon the suspense which has kept Harry's company out of bed during the whole night seizes the reader and spectator. They expect a common friend of theirs: Hickey, the hardware salesman, who visits the house with great regularity twice a year to indulge his bibulous habits in congenial surroundings. He is praised as a fine sociable being, an admirable drinker and giver of drinks. But this time the great man has kept the company waiting far too long. They are in a depressed state. Moreover, when he finally arrives, he is no longer the same man they knew and expected. As the act ends, the group is reassuring itself that nothing has really changed; the forced quality of their laughter shows the uneasy mood, which is carried forward into Act II.

Hickey, as a devoted friend, prepares a birthday party for Harry. But he accompanies his gifts with words that deprive the whiskey and wine of all their flavor and render them incapable of producing a satisfactory state of intoxication. He wants to drag his friends out of the clutches of their illusions, their "pipe dreams." The inmates are forced to give up their swaggering talk to realize and admit that they always were, and still are, weak and good-for-nothing cowards, completely lacking the energy for a new start. Hickey's power over their minds is considerable. He can draw upon an almost unlimited fund of prestige. As a successful travelling salesman he has developed his gift of persuasion to the utmost, a gift inherited from his father, who, being a preacher, understood the fine art of selling "nothing for something" (p. 232), as Hickey puts it. He has a jovial, backslapping manner affected by many salesmen when they wish to convert the common
man to something or other, but he does not exaggerate it. He tries
very hard to radiate a catching optimism; having performed the most
difficult of all operations on himself by killing his own illusions
and dreams, he enjoys a kind of feverish happiness and a heady sense
of freedom and has even forgotten his craving for liquor. He praises
his new condition enthusiastically, but the drunkards upon whom he
wants to bestow his optimism are terribly disappointed. They listen
reluctantly to his exhortations and curse him as soon as he turns his
back. The crew becomes nervous and quarrelsome. Nevertheless, he
succeeds in mesmerizing them into a temporary fit of activity. He
asks them to really do the things they keep harping on. He is certain
all their attempts will fail, but this is just the medicine he wants
them to accept because it will give them his own sense of freedom and
happiness. Hickey exhorts his friends to be glad that they are no
longer plagued by pipe dreams, but already he senses that he has
injured rather than helped them. He feels compelled to apologize and
explain; his guilt has become too heavy to bear in silence and he
finally confesses to his wife's murder. Finally, as Hickey is taken
away by the police, he gives the others the key to recovering their
lost peace. He says that he, Hickey, has been insane. Ironically,
as Doris Falk states, this plea for insanity at the time of the murder
is an attempt on Hickey's part to find escape by means of the pipe
dream. The others continue to insist on his insanity, because the
belief offers them the opportunity to return to their own illusions.
Only Larry has been forced to touch reality through Parritt's suicide.
Hearing Parritt's body fall, Larry becomes fully converted to what was
only his pose before, the wish for death.
O'Neill has combined the three developments—Hickey's tragedy, Parritt's tragedy, and the group tragedy—to form one plot. The major interest throughout is the facing of the truth. Actually everyone in the play undergoes the test. Only Larry can meet it satisfactorily.

The key to the action, of course, is Hickey, who serves as the major manipulator, and who, as Engel remarks, is a new type of O'Neill character. He is not essentially a dreamer. Primarily he is a ne'er-do-well with an extremely persuasive manner. His problem, resolved before the enactment of the drama, has been accepting someone else's vision. Therefore, he has known only frustration. Ironically he has believed that his violent action has given him freedom, but, as Larry explains, Hickey will be freed only in death.

The play refutes any positive approach to life. As Larry, O'Neill's spokesman, realizes without an escape life is only pure torture.

In order to dramatize this realization O'Neill has utilized fundamentally realistic methods. Thereby he can make the individuals seem plausible and capable of producing a certain kind of pity. Apparently from memories of his early days, he vividly describes the disintegration and squalor of the saloon. The people are so clearly characterized that he seems to have known them or their type.

By making the language seem natural, he achieves an atmosphere of reality and makes the suffering of the characters particularly poignant. Sometimes the speeches are long and involved, especially those of Hickey. In the case of every individual the dialogue tends toward one of O'Neill's favorite technique's—self-revelation or self-analysis. He adds comments from others to clarify each personal case history. Consequently, the conversations are devised more often for
revealing the past of the individuals than for advancing the action. He weaves together the various accounts to form one prevailing mood of despondency. Only Hickey's persuasive speeches and Larry's demands to Parritt serve to motivate people to action. Even then the reactions involve so many discussions and countermoves that action is always subordinate to dialogue. Thus O'Neill establishes as the general characteristic of the people the fact that they have gone beyond positive action. They can only talk.

From the very beginning of the play O'Neill has demonstrated his ability to create a particular kind of uneasiness. It remains a means by which O'Neill can suggest that everything is not as it should be and therefore that something must occur in an attempt to change the situation. As the various characters are shown in their respective states of disillusionment, despair, and frustration, O'Neill is indicating not only a discontent with the predicaments of these characters but also with the corresponding situations of people in real life that he has known. In fact, the play is developed so that other fears are resolved, but this particular emotional response is left virtually unchanged.

In order to heighten the over-all feeling of despair, the playwright does use certain other elements of fear. There are many moments of suspense and curiosity about the individual actions of Hickey and Parritt. In either case O'Neill develops an increasing concern about the nature of the individual problem and about the possible outcome. The reactions to what may be the outcome of the lives of these two tormented characters persistently provokes concern until each conflict has been resolved.
The major line of suspenseful curiosity, however, certainly arises from the conflict between Hickey and the residents of the saloon. The general fear produced, particularly by the characters themselves, is that no one will be able to withstand Hickey's proposed test. This emotional reaction is gradually increased until each person has tried and failed. Then there remains an uneasy feeling about what the characters can possibly do when their last hopes have been so cruelly destroyed.

Actually O'Neill varies and combines his three lines of interest to the extent that one of these particular fears is always present within the course of the represented action. Certainly the fears regarding Hickey and Parritt are completely resolved, but O'Neill's reaction to the plight of these people remains.

Long Day's Journey into Night
The action of both The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night takes place in the year 1912, the most critical year in O'Neill's own life, when he almost lost himself in the aimless and dissolute ways into which he had slipped because, among other reasons, he was disgusted by his father's easy and enervating career in the commercial theatre. Long Day's Journey into Night resembles very closely his own personal and painful experience. Here, his parents, his brother, and his own former self are the prototypes of the four characters, whose complicated relationships, constantly vacillating between love and hate, are depicted with a passion for truth. No wonder that O'Neill hesitated before he made these pages known to the public, and even wished Long Day's Journey into Night to remain unpublished until twenty-five years after his death.

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Although the time and setting of the play are confined to one day and one room, there is no single, unifying conflict in the drama. The conflicts are many; the parents and their two sons clash with one another, struggle against internal weaknesses and try desperately to free themselves from the destructive effects of the past. They alternately accuse and forgive each other, deny and confess their individual faults. Their alliances shift as the issues change. But if the unifying structural pattern cannot be found in these vacillations, it lies perhaps in the progress of the day, this eventful day which wears away the veneer of family togetherness and shows these four people being subjected to blows to which they can only submit. Orville Prescott states that, "In a somewhat repetitious but none the less intense and powerful fashion each member of the family is exposed in all his fearful weakness and all the destructive influence he exerts on others."\(^{58}\)

In dramatizing this composite study of distress and pain, O'Neill endeavors, first, to produce some understanding of the background underlying the formulation of each character's difficulties and the development of the peculiar family relationship. Second, O'Neill discloses throughout the play the various factors which hold the family together and enable them to withstand the intensive torment.

Although the general action is developed by the mother's definite return to narcotic addiction and by the verification of Edmund's illness, the plot consists fundamentally of extended analyses of the four personalities; and as George Williamson mentions, rather than an individual protagonist, the family itself becomes the motivating force of the action.\(^{59}\) Each member contributes his self-blame and
self-justification as means for developing the family story. Neither a
dramatization of an idea nor a portrayal of a character's fundamental
error, Long Day's Journey into Night is simply the personal tragedy
of one specific family.

The time limitation creates a certain difficulty. Since
O'Neill's purpose is primarily exposition of background causes for
suffering, he must attempt to collect the events of previous years
into one particular day. O'Neill's method is to have the characters
reiterate from time to time the previous experiences which have
significantly influenced their lives.

In representing the setting O'Neill, as in The Iceman Cometh,
has returned more completely to the realm of realism. In either play
the environment helps to explain the relationships of the characters.
In this play one of the most important factors in developing the
frustrations is the lack of a consistently stable home life. As the
mother comments during the course of the play, it is the only home
that the family has known; throughout the theatrical touring season
the Tyr ones live in second-rate hotels, but during the summer in this
house the family achieves some approach to normal residential life.
Although the summer establishment provides them a house, it does not
insure them local friends or a sense of belonging. In the manner of
summer visitors they are set apart from the regular residents. In
addition, the father is viewed by the real estate agent as an easy
prospect, and the mother is considered an oddity by the town pharmacist.

For the purpose of reproducing the living room, the essential
elements of the setting include windows overlooking the front lawn and
the harbor and furnishings that establish the era and the locale.
O'Neill employs only a few elements apart from the actual setting to create a specific suggestion of mood. As the Tyrones wail their frustrated complaints about their lost pursuits of happiness in the unfathomable mystery of life, so the foghorn lifts its mournful voice to echo the disillusionment. According to Doris Falk, the fog is indicative of man's searching attempt to lose his identity; the foghorn calls him back to painful realization of his existence.\textsuperscript{60} In the last act the electric lights serve to reveal a particular element of the father's characterization.

Probably the most fascinating characteristic of the whole drama is the manner in which the Tyrones alternately torment and sustain one another. The forces of jealousy, disappointment, dislike, and love are continually frustrating each member of the family. Even more than developing suspense or pity, O'Neill seems to have been concerned with re-creating this curious family relationship.

Realism in \textit{Long Day's Journey into Night} permits the strict economy of classical tragedy. The play observes the unity of place and does so without any loss to the playwright's imaginative freedom. The time when O'Neill wrote straggling biographical plays like \textit{Strange Interlude} is definitely past. The economic use of situations and actions is possible because every element of this kind is highly charged with multiple meaning. The language is supplemented by impressive visual symbols: Mary Tyrone, in her skyblue dressing-down, gliding into the room where her husband and sons, reeking of whiskey, are quarrelling, making confessions, getting reconciled, and quarrelling again. These images are not easily forgotten, for they are compact symbols of O'Neill's characters.
Certainly the major power of the play consists of the pathetic pity developed for these four people in their individual and mutual disintegration, torn apart by resentments and animosities and bound together by love. According to Belaire, each has sunk to a low level in some sort of escape from reality—the mother through narcotics and the three men through alcohol.

An important dramatic element of the story . . . is the cohesive effect of family love in holding all the members together as a unit. This quality runs through the play like a recurring theme despite the alcoholic habits of the father and elder son and the tendency of Edmund in the same direction.

Despite personal antipathies and aversions, each is linked solidly with the other three. Each gropes with the others towards some form of happiness and meaning for life. Everyone understands to some degree the personal torture the others are undergoing. Each Tyrone tries somehow to help the other three but succeeds only in suffering some sympathetic understanding.

O'Neill develops the various sympathetic reactions essentially by means of character, diction, and spectacle. Most important, each person appears pitiful in everything he says or does. Everyone seems basically defeated from the very opening of the drama.

The language consists of elaborate self-analyses and dialogues designed to evoke sympathy, both in conflicts and in alliances. In every instance the vocal expressions disclose suffering and the reasons for suffering; ". . . the dialogue reveals characters through a series of accusations, self-blame and self-justification." Although frequently repeating ideas and elements of family history, the conversations continually explain the relationships of each character with the others.
and with himself. Frequently the long speeches, essentially soliloquies, are extraordinarily revealing. The fourth act, especially, is designed to produce pity through self-revelation.

The setting serves primarily to reproduce an element of the family background. The particular failings of the summer home provide everyone with reasons for explaining his own problems. Not only does the setting provoke expression of the various difficulties but it also serves as a link of mutual love. The scenes themselves are designed to reveal the character relationships and the various underlying factors. Almost completely realistic in his writing, O'Neill utilizes the wedding dress as a special symbol. It points up the pathos of her choosing marriage instead of the other possible means to happiness—being a concert pianist and being a nun. Its beauty suggests the benevolence of her father and the miserliness of her husband. Finally, as the father holds it, the dress suggests how empty the marriage of lost hopes has become.

Despite its extensive length, the play produces a definite sense of dramatic unity. O'Neill continually establishes the probabilities that certain actions will occur and that the characters will behave according to their innate qualities and past experience. Essentially, all of the incidents develop from the characteristics of the Tyrones and their responses to each other.

But what can come of the mutual and individual suffering? Is there any particularly important dramatic significance? Williamson asserts:

It is the human compassion of the drama that raises it from something autobiographical into something universal. It raises it from the ingrown pessimism of much contemporary
drama into an unfolding of love and understanding. The final stark, almost unbearable hopelessness dissolves all conflicting emotions of hate in a catharsis of compassion.
CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has looked at some representative plays of Eugene O'Neill to discover what structural and stylistic traits have been dominant and what trends, if any, have appeared in his structural techniques. The plays chosen have included works from the second decade of the century through the years preceding his death in 1953. They have been varied. As an experimental playwright, O'Neill tried many different structural patterns and devices in his attempts to find effective new means for conveying the drama of modern America. But despite O'Neill's freedom and willingness to experiment, certain characteristics emerge repeatedly in his works.

Since O'Neill wrote intellectual as opposed to popular plays, structure was subordinate to content. As pointed out by Doris Falk, a dominant aim underlying the creation of O'Neill's drama is self-revelation. The motivation for the development of the action is some individual's search to clarify the mystery that constitutes his nature. The tragedy, finally is the failure that concludes the effort. The plot became the servant of character revelation and philosophy. Devices were imposed with the intent to further clarify motivation and to portray inner personality. O'Neill was not striving for novelty of theatrical effect but for deeper understanding and communication. Therefore, one of the most obvious and consistent structural factors in his plays is the preponderance of exposition over action. Attention is focused on "why" rather than "what" or "how." This emphasis in content is translated into a peculiar effect in structure. As we
have seen, the entire first act and much of the second act in plays such as *Desire under the Elms*, *Strange Interlude* and *The Iceman Cometh* are often devoted to exposition. Central characters discuss their individual pasts at length, explaining their attitudes and hopes or revealing their illusions. Thus the past shapes the present, so that action in the present is meaningful only as a product of the past.

Naturally, a play structured around talking about the past becomes relatively motionless. This fault is found in many of the early one-act plays where the characters simply talk and talk until some irony is revealed. The problem of the past is approached directly in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, where it is depicted in symbolic scenes. Jones' racial and individual background is re-enacted by visions in the forest. In *The Hairy Ape*, Yank's search for belonging leads him to try to rejoin the past. Conventional through lengthy exposition is used in *Desire under the Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and the two major plays of the late period. *Strange Interlude* shows an attempt to depict rather than report the background of the characters. We actually follow each figure through most of his adult life.

Emphasis on the past tends to dilute the action of the present. As we have observed, O'Neill does not always build up to or stress a definite climactic incident. Especially in *Strange Interlude* and in *Long Day's Journey into Night* it is difficult to isolate an incident which could be called the climax. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* there are many scenes of powerful emotion and change, and any climax is thus de-emphasized by lack of contrast. Generally, the lengthy exposition at the beginning of the play is detrimental if it delays the start of the action or makes the total length of the play

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uncomfortable or tedious to the audience, as it is in Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra.

Some specific traits of structure and form have resulted from this disproportionate allocation of time to exposition over action. First, O'Neill has a tendency to use four-act or four-part division, one more act than the conventional modern play. The extra section is given over to exposition so that action may start to build at the end of the second rather than the first section. Desire under the Elms is a good example of this. Second, since he was trying to include more and more complex and intricate expository detail, O'Neill experimented with a variety of devices for conveying this information. The visions of The Emperor Jones, the thought-speeches of Strange Interlude, the double person of Days without End, and the masks of The Great God Brown and the mask-like faces of Mourning Becomes Electra are attempts to find a suitable vehicle for exposing the inner person. In the plays of the late period, O'Neill no longer uses such devices. A third trait is found in those plays of the middle period where the exposition is presented as action—the novelistic play. They employ long lapses of time between acts. Months and sometimes years pass between acts of Strange Interlude, The Great God Brown, Mourning Becomes Electra, and Marco Millions.

When conflicts are not internal, they are usually interwoven among the members of a close group, often a family. The development of the group reveals the genesis and growth of the conflict. Thus an extended time period becomes necessary for full understanding of the conflict. But again we find a change in the major late plays, The
Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night are all limited to short periods of time.

Thus O'Neill's works seem to fall into three groups: the short plays of the early period through The Hairy Ape, the highly experimental and varied plays of the prolific middle period, and the more conventionally structured plays of the years preceding his death. The second period seems to develop naturally out of the first, but the major break in output occurred between the second and third periods. From increasingly radical experimentation O'Neill turned back to surface adherence to popular current dramatic form and structure. It is interesting to observe that one of his last published plays, Hughie, is a one-act play of character revelation not unlike the early one-act plays in structure. Is it possible that O'Neill found none of his experimental devices totally satisfactory? Or did his growing skill free him from dependence on artificial means of character exposition? It is undoubtedly unfortunate that the third period of his writing did not continue longer and give us more plays to enjoy and to help clarify the answers to these questions.
NOTES


18 O'Neill, Lost Plays, pp. 145-156.


20 O'Neill, Lost Plays, pp. 71-144.

21 Engel, p. 117.


23 For example, in The Hairy Ape and All God's Children Got Wings.

24 Clark, p. 84.

25 Falk, p. 133.

26 For example, in Strange Interlude and Desire under the Elms.


29 O'Neill, Nine Plays, pp. 379-481.

30 Clark, p. 99.

31 David Karsner, Sixteen Authors to One (New York: Lewis Copeland, 1928), p. 120.

32 Karsner, p. 120.

33 Engel, p. 199.

34 John Corbin, "O'Neill and Aeschylus," The Saturday Review of Literature, 8 (1932), 694.

35 Francis R. Ballamy, "Lights Down," The Outlook, 148 (1928), 304.


37 Engel, pp. 228-229.

38 Winther, pp. 69-70.

39 Winther, p. 148.


Clark, p. 28.

Engel, p. 249.


Clark, p. 28.

Winther, p. 178.

Winther, p. 179.

Winther, p. 184.


Clark, p. 7.

Clark, p. 145.

Clark, p. 147.

Clark, p. 162.

Falk, p. 160.

Engel, p. 291.


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64 Belaire, p. 12.


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