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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

BASIC PHILOSOPHIC THEMES IN THE DRAMA OF EUGENE O'NEILL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

NANCY MAE WARREN

1939

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	i
Chapter One	
The Problem of the Possessive Spirit	1
Chapter Two	
The Problem of the Creative Spirit	24
Chapter Three	
The Problem of Man's Salvation	66
Chapter Four	
Conclusions	82
Bibliography	91

Introduction

Introduction

Eugene O'Neill, as the outstanding contemporary American dramatist, has been in the limelight of the critical world, both professional and lay, because of the content and technique of his plays. The professional critic has had much to say about Eugene O'Neill and dramatic technique. With that we are not concerned. The professional critic, on the other hand, has little to contribute to the understanding of the philosophic themes in Eugene O'Neill's drama.

One of the critical gentry, for example, tells us that O'Neill's "fundamental feeling for the stage... is not that of the artist, but of the melodramatist: the seeker after sensational effect."¹ Several critics suggest that his basic problem is the conflict between good and evil,² but the statement of Halford Luccock is

1. Zabel, Morton Dauwen, editor, Literary Opinion in America, "Eugene O'Neill" by Francis Ferguson, p. 316.
2. Richard Dana Skinner states that the underlying theme of O'Neill's work "is the conflict of good and evil, a picture in objective form of the stretching and tearing of a soul between a will toward the good and an appetite for the revolt of sin. In its deeper sense, it is a quest for a resolution of this conflict and for ultimate peace." Skinner, Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest, pp. 3-4. In the same vein, Trilling states that O'Neill's "quasi-religious function is to affirm that life exists and is somehow good (and that the problem of evil is solved by) the courageous affirmation of life in the face of individual defeat." Trilling, Lionel, "Eugene O'Neill," The New Republic, Sept. 23, 1926.

most representative of the whole of O'Neill criticism. He says: "(O'Neill's) work has the aspect of a dark forest, quite too intricate and obscure to be mapped by any neat set of charts designed to 'explain' his meaning."¹

It is the aim of this paper to point out the major philosophic themes in O'Neill's plays and to show how they are evolved. For this purpose we have turned to the field of analytic psychology of aid in interpretation, finding² in the psychoanalytic concept of libidinal cathexis a basic idea upon which to hinge the analysis of O'Neill's plays.

In order to establish O'Neill's philosophy we raised three questions pertinent to his use of libidinal cathexis as the points of analysis of the plays. These questions, listed in an ascending order of importance, are as follows:

- 1) Are sex problems used merely as action-situations for melodrama?
- 2) Are they used as a means of depicting character and forwarding dramatic action?
- 3) Are they used as a means of expressing philosophic ideas?

1. Luccock, Halford E., Contemporary American Literature and Religion, p. 154
2. By libidinal cathexis we mean the accumulation of psychic energy in the particular channel of the libido. William Healy, Augusta Bronner, Anna Mae Bower, The Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis, p. 8.

The third question, if answered affirmatively, immediately brings in two more questions: in what way is this philosophical expression accomplished? what is its sum and substance?

It is obvious that the first question, Are sex problems used only as melodramatic situations? will be answered as conclusively as may be once the answer to the third question is arrived at.

Similarly the answer to the second question, Are sex problems used as a means of depicting character and of forwarding dramatic action? is also implicit in the answer to the third question; particularly so, since character and dramatic action are, for the dramatist, necessarily means for the expression of ideas, philosophic or otherwise.

Accordingly, this paper may be centered about the third question and by answering it will also answer the other questions that have been postulated.

This can be accomplished through an analysis of O'Neill's use of the following aspects of the problem of libidinal cathexis: the problem of the possessive spirit with its correlative problem of sex antagonism; the problem of the creative spirit; the problem of how man may achieve psychic salvation, that is, satisfactory adjustment to his environment.

Since our concentration is upon these problems, especially insofar as they lend themselves (if at all) to the expression of O'Neill's philosophy (that is, his answer to the questions, 'How can life be justified in terms of existing externalities?' and 'How can life be made livable?'), the following early one-act plays need not be dealt with at all since they embody an experimental striving toward a mature grasp of technique, a striving hardly at all concerned with the expression of ideas:

The Web, 1913
Thirst, 1913
Recklessness, 1914
Warnings, 1914
'Ile, 1916
Bound East for Cardiff, 1916
The Long Voyage Home, 1916
The Moon of the Caribbees, 1916
Where the Cross is Made, 1916
In the Zone, 1917
The Dreamy Kid, 1918
The Rope, 1918

Emperor Jones, 1920, is also considered outside our field of study since it is a theatrical tour de force, with its focus on the occult rather than the libidinal.

A chapter shall be devoted to each of these problems. These three chapters will each have a like development. First, the particular problem will be defined so the reader will understand more clearly its relation to psychoanalysis and its possibilities or impossibilities for dramatic treatment. Second the plays containing some aspect of it will be analyzed. A system of cross-reference

is used which will indicate those plays that are referred to in more than one context; this should be helpful to the reader who is interested in following out this particular line of investigation more thoroughly in any one play.

Third, what are O'Neill's conclusions; does he or does he not offer a suggestion as to how the individual may make a satisfactory adjustment which will overcome the difficulties put upon him by the particular problem, or, in other words, how may life be justified? how may it be made livable?

The fourth chapter will briefly recapitulate the findings of the preceding chapters and thus bring the results of our research more directly to bear upon the central problem of the paper.

A clear understanding of this paper presupposes a general knowledge of the tenets of psychoanalysis. Explanation of highly specialized terms will be given as they appear in the body of the paper. In this connection, the references to the handbook of psychoanalysis, The Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis by Healy, Bronner, and Bower are justified in that this book is a compendium of all the schools of psychoanalytic investigation in a highly condensed form, the use of which eliminates much unnecessary wordage in references.

Chapter One

The Problem of the Possessive Spirit

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The Problem of the Possessive Spirit

This problem has three aspects. The first is made up of the difficulties arising from the possessive spirit of the female and its converse, the desire of men to be possessed as by a mother. This includes among the situations and conflicts to which it is basic the antagonisms of the sexes, especially those having to do with the smothering and limiting possessiveness of the female contrasted to the more or less objective possessiveness of the male. The second is the psychic possession of persons by an exterior force---of which the sea in Anna Christie might be called a classic example. The third is the drive to material possession, more commonly known as greed or cupidity; which for our purposes may be considered to have its root in libidinal cathexis.

The use of these different aspects will be made clear as the plays in which they appear are analyzed.

The smothering possessiveness of the feminine spirit is first used in Before Breakfast (1916). The obvious situation in this play is the common one of a couple, entirely unsuited to each other, who married because of a child conceived out of wedlock. The very brief action is made up of the scolding, abusive harangue of Mrs. Rowland, delivered as a monologue as she prepares breakfast while the husband, unseen, shaves in the bathroom to the rear of the stage. The upshot of the tirade is the husband's suicide by throat-cutting with the razor.

Much of Mrs. Rowland's spitefulness and meanness can be attributed to the fact that she feels her husband has a life which she cannot enter; thus her smothering possessiveness is frustrated. This is shown in her reference to **Helen**, the girl whose letter she had slipped from her husband's pocket and read while he was still asleep.

...I'm not the only one who's got you to thank for being unhappy. There's one other, at least, and she can't hope to marry you now. How about Helen? Yes, I read her letter.... I got a right to. I'm your wife... I know you'd be glad to have me dead and out of your way; then you'd be free to run after all these silly girls that think you're such a wonderful, misunderstood person---this Helen and the others... Who is this Helen, anyway?... I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down... I'm sorry for this Helen, whoever she is. Haven't you got any feelings for other people?¹

Her love is not big enough to permit her to relinquish possession of him even when she knows that freedom will bring him happiness. Even his death causes grief only insofar as she feels that that which she possessed has slipped from her grasp.

Beyond the Horizon (1918) affords another example of the use of this smothering possessiveness of the female. The story of the play is that of two brothers, Robert and Andrew Mayo, and Robert's wife, Ruth. Robert is a dreamer,

-
1. Before Breakfast is a one-act play. Throughout the paper the quotations will be documented directly at their termination by act and scene, or by act only where there are no scene divisions.

a man of unstable will, a seeker after beauty and the mystery of far-off places. Andrew is of the soil, a man of action and quick decision. Ruth is a narrow-minded possessive young girl, jealous of anything which does not bow to her ego.

Robert is planning a three-year voyage with his uncle, while Andrew plans to work on the farm, exulting in his love of the soil. The brothers, however, find their plans suddenly changed when Ruth, on the eve of Robert's departure, tells him of her love, which he returns. Immediately she demands that he stay at home, give up his voyage to take care of her.

You won't go away on the trip, will you, Rob? You'll tell them you can't go on account of me, won't you?... We'll be so happy here together where it's natural and we know things. Please tell me you won't go! (I, i)

At first Robert is content to stay at home, believing that much of his desire for the unknown had been due to his unexpressed love for Ruth.

Perhaps after all Andy was right -- righter than he knew -- when he said I could find all the things I was seeking for here, at home on the farm. I think love must be the secret -- the secret that called to me from the world's rim -- the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me. Oh, Ruth, our love is sweeter than any distant dream. (I, i)

But these dreams of Robert's are not so easily put aside. It is the quality of the dreamer in Robert which had¹ fascinated Ruth, but she is jealous of these dreams. They give him something for which he does not need to depend on her -- so that she cannot completely possess him.

Andrew takes Robert's place on the voyage and stays in Brazil as a grain speculator. The years on the farm are hard for both Ruth and Robert. He falls ill with tuberculosis, and she hardly cares. By this time she hates him and his dreamer's inability to produce. She tells him, finally, since she still is unable to dominate him completely, that she has always loved Andrew and that she hates him. Finally, after Andrew returns, Robert dies, still dreaming of something beyond the horizon.

For our purposes, the interesting facet of the play is O'Neill's use of Ruth's possessiveness as the germ from which is derived the tragedy of the play -- the larger frustration of all three of the main characters.

1. In this relation we have the germ of an often repeated theme of O'Neill's, the possessive spirit of the woman binding and killing the thing it loves. Cf., Before Breakfast, Welded, Mourning Becomes Electra, and Strange Interlude.

The Straw (1918) is the story of two people infected with tuberculosis who meet at a sanitarium. Eileen Carmody falls in love with Stephen Murray, a newspaper man, but he has only friendship for her. As a result of their close companionship and Eileen's encouragement, Murray begins to take an interest in creative writing; Eileen's health improves rapidly. His success at creative writing returns him to a state of mental and physical sufficiency. On the night of his departure, Eileen reveals her love for him -- but he has nothing to give her in return.

Thereafter, Eileen's decline is swift. Murray writes to her occasionally and finally stops entirely. Several months later, he fears the return of the disease and comes back to the sanitarium. A nurse takes it upon herself to tell him about Eileen -- that she has given up hope and will die unless Stephen can rekindle the desire for life by giving her something to live for. Moved by the nurse's story, but still not recognizing how much of his success has been due to Eileen, he goes to her, asks her to marry him.

Possession is here revealed as a source of health and creativeness; this is symbolized by Murray's success at writing and Eileen's improved health under the good stimulus of their close companionship. The breaking of this partnership, this belonging together, brings about Eileen's decline, the return of the disease to Murray. Here O'Neill

is saying by implication that possession can sometimes be a good means to self-realization.

Gold (1920) is marked by the first appearance of the greed motif. In the opening act, the crew of a wrecked whaler, the Sarah Allen, find a chest of gold and jewels, as they suppose, and, crazed by the heat and thirst, murder the cook and ship's boy for declaring the treasure to be but brazen junk. The rest of the play deals with the captain at home. He gradually becomes insane under his guilty secret, causing his wife's death, wrecking the life of his daughter and demoralizing his son. In Gold, O'Neill has isolated greed as an aspect of the spirit of possessiveness and has shown how a life centered here alone degenerates in its void of human qualities --- love, humility and sacrifice.

Anna Christie (1920) deals with the requited love of a sailor for a prostitute. The problem under consideration is involved both in the possession by the sea of the three main characters who both love and fear it and in the parent's unwillingness to see his daughter taken away from him by another man. The three since they belong to the sea are miserable and unhappy when out of its influence. Yet the two men, and Chris especially, are fearful of giving themselves wholly to that which claims them -- a note of reticence found in most of O'Neill's male characters, due perhaps to the underlying fear in the male that in giving himself fully

to any outside force or ideal there is danger of destruction of the male ego.¹ With Anna it is different; she not only knows she belongs, but she feels that she does. She is happy only in belonging completely -- a statement true of most of O'Neill's mature, feminine characters.² The tragedy of Anna's life is that she cannot belong completely to Mat. A part of her pride and self-respect can never be regained, even though the love which Mat has for her helps her nearer the goal of becoming socially accepted. Neither can she possess Mat fully because a part of him is of the sea. So it is that through the love of these two that O'Neill plays once again upon his recurrent theme of possession and belonging.

Diff'rent (1920) is based upon the problem of feminine possessiveness so strong that it refuses to accept the world as it is. In explicit terms, its tragedy arises from a rigid conception of the single standard of sexual ethics so tenacious and inhuman in aspect that it destroys both the woman and the man she loves.³ The woman, Emma, dismisses

1. Cf. Robert and Andrew in Beyond the Horizon, Dion and Billy in The Great God Brown, Loving in Days Without End, Ned in Strange Interlude, Michael in Welded, Marco Polo in Marco Millions, and Stephen Murray in The Straw.
2. Cf. Miriam in Lazarus Laughed, Eileen Carmody in The Straw, Elsa Loving in Days Without End, and Kukachin in Marco Millions.
3. About this play we have the statement: "Let the ideal of chastity repress the vital forces...and from (a) fine girl you will get a filthy harridan. The modern life crushes the affirmative and creative nature of man." Trilling, loc. cit.

her affianced on the eve of their marriage because of a tale she has heard. Later, after thirty years of spinsterhood and of faithfulness on the part of Caleb, the ex-fiancé, she falls in love with Benny, his worthless young nephew. When Caleb finds that she plans to marry Benny he kills himself. This action brings Benny's confession that he wanted Emma only for her money, and Emma, crushed by disgrace and humiliation, follows Caleb in death.

Diff'rent is, then, a study of the distortion that comes to the feminine soul which is denied, and denies, its innate purpose and attempts to succor itself on an abstract ideal contrary to its own nature. Emma has built up an ideal of Caleb endowing him with inhuman virtues of extreme self-control and abstinence in face of great temptation; therefore, she rejects him when she learns of his one breach of the moral code with a native South Sea islander. Every one thinks the story a good joke on Caleb, noted for his continence, a quality the possession of which differentiates him considerably from most of his fellow seamen. Emma's mother begs her to forgive Caleb and to marry him. She says:

It'd be jest like goin' agen an act of Nature for you not to marry him. Ever since you was children you have been livin' side by side, goin' round together, and neither you nor him ever did seem to care for no one else... You' ought to remember all he's been to you and forget this one little wrong he's done. (I)

Emma cannot forgive him, not because she cannot forgive the mistake in itself in other men, but because it makes Caleb into a person no different from the rest.

When Caleb pleads with her to take him back, she says:

...I ain't got any hard feelings against you, Caleb... It ain't plain jealousy---what I feel. It ain't even that I think you've done a terrible wrong. I think I can understand -- and make allowances. I know most any man would do the same, and guess all of 'em I ever met has done it... I guess I've always had the idea that you was -- diff'rent... And you was diff'rent, too! And that was why I loved you. And now you've proved you ain't. And so how can I love you any more?... You've busted something way down inside me -- and I can't love you no more.

(1)

This statement gives the particular and peculiarly dangerous form that Emma's possessiveness has taken; she must have something better than the rest, an incarnation of an ideal. But she does not stop there. Immediately after her break with Caleb, she inveigles him into promising that he will never marry, but will wait even thirty years, if need be, for her to change her mind. Emma is akin to the Ruth of Beyond the Horizon, who also wanted to possess so much that she got nothing.

The deadly frustration that resulted from this extreme of possessiveness is concretely illustrated in Emma's perverse attempt to gain the love of a man young enough to be her son and in Caleb's suicide brought about by her announcement of her marriage with this youth, his dissolute nephew.

As a psychological study, Emma is typical of those women who frustrate their lives by regression to a childish failure to different reality from the ideal, or phantasy, world. It is well to note that throughout O'Neill's plays it is usually his women characters who fail to make the transition from the phantasy world of the child and the adolescent to the world as it is of the mature adult. They rely upon their emotional natures to carry them through life and frequently fail to make satisfactory sublimation of their basic urges when these have been thwarted either through their own mental conflict or environmental circumstance. This play is complete in its expression of the negation and frustration of the feminine essence and the distortion of the masculine by lack of realization of the creative spirit as symbolized in sexual union.

In The First Man (1921), the usual pattern of our problem is reversed in that it is the male who would possess his mate even to the limit of asking for the death of the creation (that is, the child) which would claim any part of her from him. Under a subterfuge of sorts, the anthropologist, Curt Jayson, has gotten his wife to vow never to have any more children as a means of memorializing the two of theirs who had died. This childlessness enabled the wife to accompany him on his long trips of exploration, enabled him to possess her wholly without that diffusion almost always contingent upon the bearing and rearing of

children. His wife's announcement, just as he is preparing for a five-year journey, of the coming of another child shatters his world, but after her death in childhood he is able to make some re-adjustment in his feeling of tenderness for the child and in his defense of it against the charge of being another man's.

Welded (1923) is the story of a married couple held together by a deep attraction and a real admiration for each other, yet kept apart by a fear of losing individuality to the other. Eleanor Owen is an actress; Michael Cape, her husband, a playwright. So intense is their love for each other that each resents its absorption of their individuality. At the height of one of their frequent quarrels they break, each determined to kill his love for the other and so maintain himself as an individual. Eleanor goes to the apartment of John, her manager who would be her lover, but finds she can go no farther. She cannot give herself to this man because of the memory of her love for her husband. Michael picks up the first girl of the streets he sees, and undergoes an experience similar Eleanor's in this girl's rooms. In the end, they both return home, vowing that they will live together in love and unison, each sacrificing something to the other.

At the basis of this situation is the theme that the love which is founded on possession and pride without sacrifice, giving and humility is self-destructive. The break between the two comes because each is unwilling to yield up self-hood to the other; it is only resolved by the discovery that the yielding-up must be mutual.

This selfishness is evidenced in Michael's speech, which could equally well have been put in the mouth of Eleanor:

Every word or action of mine which affects you, you resent. At every turn you feel your individuality invaded -- while at the same time, you're jealous of any separateness in me. You demand more and more while you give less and less. And I have to acquiesce. Have to? Yes, because I can't live without you... You take advantage of it while you despise me for my helplessness.

(I, i)

This cul-de-sac brings Eleanor to lie, saying that she was formerly and still is John's mistress. Michael refuses to believe that she can love anyone else and accuses her of doing it "out of hatred" for him. Both set out to destroy their love, and both finding it an impossibility return to resolve the difficulty with the wisdom gained from the experience.

All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923) is the story of the marriage of a white woman, Ella, and a negro man, Jim. Their love is both tragic and beautiful, but their marriage means madness for her and utter frustration for him.

After Ella is left resourceless when she is abandoned by her 'love 'em and leave 'em' lover by whom she had had an illegitimate child, now dead, Jim offers to take care of her, to marry her if she can bring herself to accept him, after thinking on what it means to marry a negro. Ella decides to marry Jim because as she says,

I'm alone. I've got to be helped. I've
got to help someone -- or it's the end -- one
end or another. (I, iii)

but, in any event, her feeling of racial superiority prevented her belonging to Jim, prevented her achievement of a real adjustment with her environment.

She was, however, possessive of her negro husband to the point where everything he did had to be centered around her. She would not even let him study to realize his ambition, because, if he succeeded, he would be her equal and she would drop in her own estimation. She is the type of child-woman who must be the central figure, perhaps even a she-God from whom all things must come. She is the incarnation of the demonic feminine spirit which demands possession even to the death or ruin of the one (or thing) possessed.

Ella's possessiveness caused Jim to suffer, to suffer with a humility and self-abnegation unparalleled in any other of O'Neill's characters, John Loving of Days Without End being the only possible exception.

The tragedy of Jim is, for O'Neill, not the result of his crossing race lines but because of Ella's possessiveness. All God's Chillun Got Wings, then, affords one more example of O'Neill's implicit indictment of extreme possessiveness.

In Desire Under the Elms, (1924), O'Neill attains perhaps the highest peak in his use of the problem of possession. The drive for material possession and the drive of psychic¹ possession are intertwined, each leading into the other.

His use of the age-old incest motif, intricately related as it is to the Oedipus complex, has a different significance for our problem. We will find that this play presents the larger theme of the quest after the meaning of life in terms of the incest motif as it is worked out through the frustrating demands of the possessive spirit. Each character gives us a variation on the theme of ruin wrought in human life by the individual's full submission to the will to possess.

In Ephraim Cabot, father of Eben, Simeon and Peter, and owner of the farm, originally the property of Eben's mother, the possessive spirit takes the form of greed and self-glorifying pride in ownership. The farm is the symbol

1. Skinner states that O'Neill wrote this play during the period of his poetical development and maturation which is characterized by the psychical bridging of "the difficult gulf between adolescence and maturity." In this manner he explains the theme of this play as an attempt on O'Neill's part to free himself from the protective family ties which guard the individual from the responsibilities and harsh realities of adult life. Skinner, op. cit., p. 143 and p. 228.

of a life lived in solitude and loneliness, lacking the warmth of human love and fellowship because of the very narrowing demands which it made upon his interests and energies. Ephraim does not recognize it as such, but he does feel that desire for possession leads him to a near identification of himself and the farm. He wants no other person to own what has been his.

...if I could, in my dyin' hour, I'd set it
afire and watch it burn -- this house an' every ear
of corn an' every tree down t' the last blade of hay!
I'd sit an' know it was all a-dying with me an' no
one else'd ever own what was mine, what I'd made out
o' nothin' with my own sweat an' blood! (II, i)

The vitiating effect of extreme possessiveness here speaks for itself.

In his will to direct, even dominate, the entire life of his sons we find the transition of desire for possession from inanimate to animate things. Ephraim has kept his two oldest boys cowed in spirit and stunted in ambition by dominating their very thoughts. He has instilled in them his desire for the farm as an object of material possession but not as an inherent part of their beings. Fear is mingled with their desire. With Eben there is more resistance. He, too, desires the farm, even more intensely than his half-brothers, not, however, as material evidence, but as a connecting link between himself and his mother whose early death he believes was caused by his father's hardness of spirit and severe demands upon her physical strength.

Eben could not give full strength to the resistance of his father because of his deep-lying fear of him.

With the third wife, Abbie, Ephraim still makes the demands of full submission to his position as possessor. She has come to his "hum." She is his wife, the new mother to his sons, and the mistress of his household. He fervently desires that she bear a child so that the farm can be inherited by his flesh and blood.

In all his struggle to feel himself fulfilled by complete possession of the people and things about, Ephraim never reaches the place where he is contented. Why? Because, says O'Neill, the spirit of possession kills if allowed to go unchecked. At the end of the play when Abbie and Eben are taken away to prison, the frustration of Ephraim's life is complete: "Lonesomer now than ever it war afore ... hard and lonesome." (III, iv)

Eben's Oedipus complex drives him to seek to avenge his mother's death, which he believed was caused by Ephraim, his father. He feels that by gaining possession of the farm he will displace his father and thereby re-establish his own primary relationship with his mother -- a variation¹ of the incest motif.

1. The incest motif as it comes to us from Greek literature and from psychoanalysis as the Oedipus complex "is libidinal desire taking the form of unconscious desire for sexual satisfaction with the parent of the opposite sex." Healy, Bronner, and Bower, op. cit., p. 148.

With Abbie, his step-mother of his own age, ambivalence¹ of emotion is supreme. He is sensually attracted to her; he recognizes her as a mother-substitute and is revolted by her attraction for him. Eventually with Abbie, his Oedipus urge is realized. He makes her his own, therein displacing his father as real possessor. Even before this union, Eben has attempted to replace his father with an object-choice unrelated to his mother -- Min, the local prostitute who has previously been visited by his father. O'Neill anticipates the final outcome of the play in the following scene between Eben and his brothers after he has returned from Min's house with the news of their father's marriage.

Simeon: Min'd make a true faithful he'pmate!

Eben: What do I care for her 'ceptin' she's round
wa'm? The p'int is she was his'n -- an' now
she b'longs t' me! An' Min ain't sech a bad
un... Wait'll we see this cow the Old Man
hitched t'!

Simeon: Mebbe ye'll try t' make her your'n, too?

Eben: Her -- here -- sleepin' with him -- stealing
my Maw's farm. (I, iii)

The sinful and guilty death which is the outcome of Eben's bitterness though mitigated somewhat by the eventual realness of his love for Abbie strikes once more the note of the danger of too extreme a possessiveness.

-
1. In such cases of love-hate ambivalence the attraction of of the love-object satisfies the libidinal impulses of the individual in a complementary fashion, while the feeling of hate is aroused against the same object in the Ego's struggle for its individuality.

Abbie Putnam as a character study of a woman driven to destruction of self and of the things she loves by the desire for possession is carefully done. In one of her first speeches in the play, Abbie clearly defines her situation. She says:

A woman's got to hev a hum! (I, iv)

The importance of this statement lies in the wealth of meaningful emotions of women associated with the word "home." Abbie looks upon a home as not merely shelter and security in the physical sense, but also as a spiritual anchor. In making a home she realizes the ultimate purpose of her existence -- the creation of a state of reciprocative physical and mental complementation.

It is true that she knew her marriage to the old man could not bring fulfillment, but she sees it as a means of building toward the realization of her desire. The possession of the house and farm is the first of "what was due (her) out of life." It does not take her long to realize that Eben will serve as the means for all further satisfaction. Not content to be only partial possessor, she makes Eben hers, too -- to be more than ever the means of her possessive end. She covers her evil intent by playing upon his love for his mother in telling him that he is avenging her. Her ulterior purpose is fulfilled when he gives her a son to inherit the estate for her at Ephraim's death. In the end,

Abbie, in her desire to possess, has brought about her own destruction and that of the objects she loves --- her child and Eben.

The final note of the possessive spirit is sounded in this play by the sheriff when, upon looking over the farm, he says enviously:

It's a jim-dandy farm, no denyin'. Wished I owned it.
(III, iv)

The Great God Brown (1925) is largely concerned with the problem of the creative spirit but the present problem receives considerable treatment as an aspect of this, its primary theme.

The characters are used as foils for one another. Dion is subjective, sensitive, emotional unstable; Billy is self-assured, callous to a degree, and objectively practical in his associations. Margaret is the symbol of the possessive, maternal female. Cybel is representative of the earth-mother figure, calm, understanding and dispassionate. Each of the characters finds his own personality so restricted by externalities that he is forced to show to his associates a nature greatly foreign to his real one -- thus the use of the masks, representing the diverse personalities. Billy Brown, in the opening scenes of the play, wears no mask because he is the type of individual of normal intelligence, self-assurance, and not too much sensitiveness who can face the

world as it is. Dion, on the other hand, while really being "spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in (his) childlike faith in life," wears as his outward nature a mask, the expression of which is "mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual." It is his defense against the realities which are too much for him to face. Margaret is depicted as an intelligent young girl with a dreamy expression. Cybel has a mask of the prostitute which she wears for the world.

The failure to make satisfactory adjustment to reality causes both Dion and Billy to seek shelter in regression to maternal protection. O'Neill has depicted their regression in terms of contrasting elements of the masculine spirit, the subjective sensitiveness of Dion on the one hand and the objective practicality of Billy Brown on the other. Dion Anthony's whole life is centered around the mother-imago -- in his early relation with his own mother, in his first love for Margaret and, later, in his deep affection and need for Cybel. Since his mother was the only one who, in his childhood, could keep from him the too stark realities, he sought her likeness in all his women associates. After his mother's death he says:

...I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years... until at last I watched her die... And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hand alone caressed without clawing... (I, iii)

Dion transferred his dependence from his mother to his wife, Margaret, who became "three mothers in one," but whose possessive maternalism soon forced him to seek unpossessive motherly protection in Cybel, the prostitute. In his first love for Margaret, Dion felt that he had found the strength and the protection which he needed to face the world. Later, after their marriage, Margaret became more than his protectress; she was like an octopus whose great embracing arms bruised and suffocated him in their hold. Her possessive love forced him more and more into himself until he could not reach out to her, nor she to him.

...We communicate in code -- when neither
has the other's key. (I, i)

This is one of the biggest tragedies which O'Neill presents to us -- the utter lack of sympathetic understanding in the intimacy of deep love. It is a futile striving toward a realization which cannot be achieved and which ultimately destroys those who seek too ardently. Margaret cannot recognize the real Dion beneath the mask of Pan even when he at last, knowing that they must fully realize each other, removes his mask and implores that she see him as he is.

....Behold your man -- the sniveling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave you have so nobly ignored in the father of your sons! Look! (He tears the mask from his face, which is radiant with a great pure love for her and a great sympathy and tenderness) O woman -- my love -- that I have sinned against in my pride and cruelty -- forgive my sins -- forgive my solitude -- forgive my sickness -- forgive me!
(II, ii)

Margaret does not comprehend; she thinks her Dion is dead; and he is, for he is utterly lost to her because she cannot understand. Dion leaves her, fully realizing the futility of this, to him, torturing and painful relationship.

It is only with Cybel, the symbol of the calm, wise, unpossessive earth-mother, that Dion finds peace and comfort. With her he does not need to mask. She knows him for what he is, and she offers him the kind of love he needs -- giving and undemanding. She makes him happy and gives him strength in her unselfish friendship.

The symbolic death of Dion is in part the result of the life-negating effect of Margaret's over-possessiveness. Margaret, the symbol of "the eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race,"¹ finds, in her love for Dion, the gratification of her wifely and maternal instincts in using him as the means to her end. Their marital maladjustment lies in the fact that Margaret made Dion secondary to her role as wife and mother instead of admitting him into full partnership in the creative union. She constantly views him as her boy, her child, forgetting the fact that he is also her lover.

1. Quinn, Arthur H., A History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, Vol. II, p. 192.

Here, once more, O'Neill points out the evil results of extreme possessiveness; with the difference that the man (Dion) first seeks protection as of a mother and then, when this relationship becomes more all-consuming than sheltering, is forced to seek elsewhere a love that will not consume him.

In Strange Interlude (1926), the main focus upon our problem is given in Nina's drive to possession. The daughter of a college professor, she is the unifying character of the play. She loses her fiance, Gordon Shaw, shortly after he goes to war as an aviator. Her puritanical father, motivated as much by his possessiveness of her as by his moralistic sense, has prevented the consummation of their union; this precipitates her decision to compensate by leaving home to become a nurse. She goes to a veteran's hospital where she gives herself to the wounded soldiers -- to give them happiness and in search of satisfaction for her vaguely comprehended, but persistent, libidinal urge. Driven on by this force, her life becomes entangled with the lives of many men, for, for her, no one man is enough. With desires that can never quite be fulfilled, held in check by inhibitions, driven onward by her libido, Nina is the "incarnation of vitality, a creature that is driven to meddle in the lives of others that her own life may be filled to the overflowing".¹

1. Clark, Barrett E., Eugene O'Neill, The Man and His Plays, p. 175.

It is through her thoughts concerning the child that we have one of the clearest statements of the possessive feminine spirit which, as it works through Nina, blights the life of every man intimately associated with her. Nina thinks:

Should I have told (Sam)?...no...my own secret...
tell no one...not even Sam...why haven't I told him?
...it'd do him so much good...he'd feel so proud of
himself...no...I want to keep it just my baby...only
mine as long as I can...well, I do feel happy when
I think...and I love Sam now...in a way...it will be
his baby too. (III)

In the end, Nina, having exhausted her husband, her lover, and her son, not to mention herself, turns at last to "dear old Charlie" -- the type of childish weakness in the male.

In Dynamo (1928) the need of man to be possessed is once again used. Reuben, the principal character, almost completely carries the theme. His impulse is to break his old ties and to leave home -- to give himself over entirely to externals -- springs from his mother's betrayal of him to his stern Puritan father. After a year away from home he returns, a cold, hard, aggressive materialist in all things except his longing to see his mother, who has died meanwhile. The knowledge of his mother's death only intensifies his longing for her. In this situation O'Neill has given us one of the elementary sex relationships based on the Oedipus complex -- the working out of a son's life in terms of mother fixation. Reuben, as a boy and man, never is complete as an individual because of his strong dependence on maternal protection.

In his first relationship with Ada he sees in her a reflection of his mother, supplemented by her objectification of sensuality and external desires. She is the challenge of life to be won and mastered, but he cannot face the challenge, dependent as he is upon his mother. Never, even in his fullest scientific objectivity, does he lose his yearning to be that which he thinks his mother would have him be. We realize, of course, that the secret of life is the dominant theme of this play, but the search is so directed by the mother symbol that failure to recognize the importance of the Oedipus complex here leads to the belief that the play is entirely one of spiritual seeking for a symbol of faith outside man himself as objectified in electricity as God. However, O'Neill's play is not so far removed from commonplace realities as it may seem. Any brief survey of psychoanalytic therapy will reveal countless numbers of cases of men driven toward some vaguely conceived goal by their regressive tendency of infantile orientation to reality in terms of the lack of individual responsibility¹ in maternal protection.

1. In Freudian terminology, this wish is known as the regression to the state of intrauterine existence, at which time the individual is entirely cared for and protected, no demands being made upon his energies.

As the play progresses Reuben's yearning for his mother, for a means of communication with her, becomes an obsession. His knowledge of the unfathomable powers of electrical phenomena leads him to hope that through them he can reach her. He says:

...I'd like to reach her somehow; no one knows what happens after death -- even science doesn't -- there may be some kind of hereafter... Funny, that hunch I got when I was talking to Ada... About praying to electricity, if you knew how...it was like a message... Mother believed what I believed when she died... maybe it came from her... Aw, that's just superstitious junk...but what is it?... Look at how mysterious all this electrical wave stuff is in radio and everything...that's scientific fact... and why couldn't something like that no one understands yet?...between the dead and the living?

(II, ii)

Because of this obsession the identification of the dynamo with his mother is an easy step. The mysterious power of the dynamo is god-like; it is something like the love of a mother,

...a great dark mother!...that's what the dynamo is!

(II, iii)

Then the idea comes to him of praying to the dynamo, to petition forgiveness from his mother, the dynamo. He prays:

Oh, Mother of Life, my mother is dead, she has passed back into you, tell her to forgive me, and to help me find your truth!

(II, iii)

As time goes on the obsession becomes more and more dominant. Reuben feels it necessary to give up his love for Ada because it makes him impure in the sight of his new mother-image, the dynamo. In his search for purity he fears Ada and shuns her; she awakens in him all the old sensual feelings of their first union. This cannot be in view of his mother-fixation because the mother has double hold over him as a symbol of authority and as a love-object. Contact with Ada is a sin against his new love-object. His failure to find satisfaction in his mother worship makes him wonder:

Maybe she feels I haven't killed all desire
for Ada yet?...that I ought to face her and conquer
the flesh once for all... (III, i)

He puts himself to test:

...I'm going to kiss you, Ada -- just once --
only kiss you -- she wants me to -- as a final test
-- to prove I'm purified -- (He looks up at her now
and lurches forward with a moan of passion and takes
her in his arms... He kisses her frantically.)
(III, ii)

He has failed; "he groans and beats his head against the floor."

Mother! ... I've betrayed you...you will never
bless me with the miracle now!...you have shut me
out of your heart forever! (III, iii)

He kills Ada, calling her a harlot, as his own mother had done, and then rushes to the dynamo where he grasps the carbon brushes, short-circuiting the current through his body. "There is a flash of bluish light about him and all

the lights in the plant dim... and the noise of the dynamo dies until it is the faintest purring hum," his voice rising "in a moan that is a mingling of pain and loving consumption." It is like the crooning of a baby as it is drowned in the crescendo of the dynamo's hum.

The character of Reuben is replete in the childish regression to the intrauterine existence, the blissful state of "prenatal existence (that) is normally supremely pleasurable."¹

Reuben's mother, Amelia Light, had sublimated a large² part of her libidinal cathexis in her love for her son -- the object-choice for realization of ambition on the part of many women. Her jealous possessiveness of the boy, however, proves to be her undoing because of the rebellious tendencies of emotional weaning which she arouses in him in his attempt to establish his individual Ego. She is O'Neill's representative of the type of woman whose possessive love is destructive of its object. Hers is too great an emphasis upon the tenacious holding of another individual within the bounds of a selfish emotion. In every instance where an O'Neill character gives way to his possessive drive, the object-choice is either thwarted or destroyed.

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1. Healy, Bronner, Bowers, op. cit., p. 173
 2. supra, Introduction, p. ii.

The problem of the possessive spirit is the central theme of Mourning Becomes Electra (1931). Throughout the play the drive of Lavinia to possess that which her mother, Christine, has is predominant. After she has cost her mother, her lover and her life, she strives to get away from the possessiveness of her brother for whose love she had once been a rival. And since he will not allow her to escape him, she finally drives him to suicide but not before he has left some evidence to poison the mind of the man she was to marry. Lavinia's drive of possessiveness, based on an Electra complex, is clearly sketched in the following dialogue between the two women:

Christine: What a fraud you are, with your talk of your father and duty! Oh, I'm not denying that you want to save his pride - and I know how anxious you are to keep the family from more scandal! But all the same, that's not your real reason for sparing me!

Lavinia: (confused - guiltily) It is!

Christine: You wanted Adam Brant yourself!
(Brant is the mother's lover.)

Lavinia: That's a lie!

Christine: And now you know you can't have him, you're determined that least you can do is take him from me!

Lavinia: No!

Christine: But if you told your father, I'd have to go away with Adam. He'd be mine still. You can't bear that thought, even at the price of my disgrace, can you?

Lavinia: It's your evil mind!

Christine: I know you, Vinnie! I've watched you ever since you were little, trying to do exactly what you're doing now! You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You've always schemed to steal my place!
(Homecoming, II)

O'Neill's use of both the Oedipus and Electra complexes in this play shows the emphasis he is giving to possessiveness since both drives are primarily possessive by nature. To want what someone else has is of the essence of both drives. The central figure, Lavinia, whose love for her father and hatred of her mother carries most of the action throughout the play is completely dominated by the Electra complex. In every action she is seeking to displace her mother in the affections of three men who represent the needs for husband, lover and son. That she does not succeed in displacing those affections, but only wrecks the lives of all concerned, including her own, is the tragedy of the play, a tragedy which has its basis in her over-weening possessiveness.

Days Without End (1933) is the story of a man divided against himself, the two personalities shown as two stage characters -- John, the real self, and Loving, the bitter, derisive, disillusioned self. The other characters are unaware of the two persons; they think it is John speaking in cynicism and disillusionment. At the

end of the play when John surrenders to the love of the Crucified Christ, Loving dies and John becomes a unified personality, John Loving.

His wife, Elsa, is the outstanding O'Neill character for whom complete possession means unlimited freedom. Both in possessing John and in being possessed by him she feels that her aim in life is fulfilled. She, especially, of all the women characters has integrated the four aspects of woman's love --- that which she bears toward father, lover,¹ husband, and child.

To conclude our discussion of O'Neill's use of the problem of the possessive spirit, we shall summarize the points that have been made in the treatments of the plays concerned either partly or almost wholly with this aspect of libidinal cathexis.

We can say with certainty that O'Neill's answer to the question: "Does extreme possessiveness justify life or make it livable?" is emphatically negative.

The outcome of every play analyzed in this chapter with the exception of The Straw, Anna Christie, Welded, and Days Without End is immediately or by implication tragic;

1. Freud, Sigmund, Psychology of Women, pp. 182-183.

and this outcome finds its source, its motivation, as has already been indicated, in the extreme possessiveness of one or more of the characters involved. Only in Gold and in Desire Under the Elms is the drive for material possession at all paramount; the other plays are concerned with possession as a channel for libidinal forces. Even these two plays largely given over to the greed motif are marked by the blighting or ending of the lives of those who are infected with this externalized form of extreme possessiveness.

This series of catastrophes hinging upon extreme possessiveness amount to an indictment of it. O'Neill does not say in any place that it is evil but by demonstrating the evilness of its consequences, he actualizes his belief that this is one behavior-pattern that is not the answer to the question, the opportunity of life but rather its refusal. Now, whether this was or was not a conscious purpose of his in the writing of these plays is a question that is beside the point. Here, in these plays, we have discovered content that is much above the level of the merely sensational; content that it would be impossible to find in shocking or obscene literature whether dramatic or of other kinds. We have already discovered, we believe, the intimate connection between O'Neill's use of sex problems and the action and characters of his plays.

In the four plays, The Straw, Anna Christie, Welded, and Days Without End, we have suggested a positive answer to the question of how life may be justified, how it may be made livable? and this positive answer will be treated more fully later on.

Chapter Two

The Problem of the Creative Spirit

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To common sense, it may seem that the sublimative or secondary channels of libidinal cathexis involved in the problem of the creative spirit are unrelated to sex. While no such gap exists for the psychoanalyst, it is true that instances of this particular problem are more frequent and more obvious in usual life areas that was true of the problem discussed in the preceding chapter. For this reason, by considering this problem, we should come much nearer to ascertaining O'Neill's answer to the age-old question, 'What is the meaning of life?'

This problem involves such sublimative channels as artistic endeavor, child-bearing and rearing which may be considered peripheral to the normal channel for libidinal energy. More covertly sexual is the desire to belong to, to have an identification with, either a group or some natural external force.

The closing of such secondary channels, the frustration of the creative and procreative drives may have as cruel and as blighting an effect on the individual as the direct repression of the libidinal drive itself. The effect of the death of a child, whether caused by the physical incapability of the mother or by artificial means, is an excellent example of the way in which the failure of these less immediate outlets can build up a sense of

incompleteness in the individual thus afflicted. O'Neill uses this symbol of the dead child many times to represent the frustration of the creative spirit.¹

2

The couple in Before Breakfast had married as the result of a child conceived out of wedlock. The still-birth of this child symbolizes both emptiness of the union, more concretely brought to the fore by the bitter recrimination Mrs. Rowland visits upon her husband, and the failure of his creative spirit. The suicide of the husband as a means of escape from the constant and harrowing shrewishness of his wife may be taken as an instance of life's negation by seemingly invincible forces. Hemmed in always by the vocal and consuming possessiveness of his unsympathetic spouse, Alfred, would-be writer though he is, finds himself unable to enjoy or find meaning in life. The suicide, anticipated as it is by the child's death, is a tragedy that has its root in the inability to create.

3

In Beyond the Horizon, the transference of roles between the two brothers at the behest of the girl frustrates the creative element in both. Robert, the dreamer, caught by the fascination of far places, stays at home and becomes a farmer, trying to persuade himself that what he had

1. Cf., the figure of the dead child in The Fog (1914), Before Breakfast (1916), The First Man (1916), Beyond the Horizon (1918), Desire Under the Elms (1924), and Strange Interlude (1926).

2. supra, p. 1

3. supra, p. 2

always been seeking was here close-at-hand, under his doorstep as it were. Andy, the practical man, made to bring life into being from the soil, goes away voyaging to South America in Robert's place. After his return, Robert says to him:

...you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now---...gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray -- So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer to win back ---
(III, i)

The death of Robert and Ruth's child late in the play is another symbol of the deadly effect of this misplacement of the two brothers. Robert's physical failing and final death under the uncongenial burden of farm work has a similar meaning. This psychic and physical ruin is primarily caused by the overweening possessiveness of Ruth; but its secondary root is certainly in the failure of the creative spirit.

1

In The Straw, Stephen Murray's recovery from tuberculosis, incidental to the theme of his relationship with Eileen Carmody, is a result of the pride engendered by his success at creative writing. The return of the disease some months later, when Murray is without the happy

1. supra, p. 5

stimulus and encouragement of his earlier companionship with Eileen, may be considered at least partly caused by a slackening of his creativeness. Here is illustrated the close connection between an individual's successful realization of his creative drive and his well-being.

The major theme of Gold is greed, as we have shown¹ in a preceding chapter. But, by implication, the effects of this servitude to the uncreating and life-negating lust for gold may be attributed to the misdirection of the creative spirit. Dedicated as it is in this play to an end that narrows rather than enlarges the possibilities of life, the ruin and the degeneration of the captain's family are an inevitable result of the captain's misapplication of his creative energies.

²
A major motif in Anna Christie is the sense of belonging to the sea which is shared by all three of the leading characters. The unhappy experiences that had been Anna's prior to the time covered in the play were partly due to her having been torn away from what was her natural element. The suggestion at the end of the action that she, with Mat, will be able to work out a

1. supra, p. 6

2. supra, p. 6

socially acceptable and happy life is made possible by the fact that their home will be on and of the sea, love and fear of which is common to them both. Anna, having thus found her home place, can build a happy life for herself and her sailor lover.

¹
In The First Man, the resolution of the couple to have no more children, partly as a memorial to the two children who had died earlier, and partly to enable the wife to accompany the man on his anthropological expeditions, is finally broken by the wife who tells her husband, as he prepares to go on a five year journey, that she is to have another child. The theme here is the partial acceptance of life in the delayed realization of the creative spirit brought about through the fulfillment of the reproductive urge. The attempted negation of life involved in the vow to revere undimmed the memory of the dead children, symbolizing the frustration of the creative spirit, is thwarted by the necessity of the feminine ideal to satisfy itself in the creation of new life.

But the woman wins out over this negation, largely produced by the possessiveness of her husband, who wants all of her for himself. And though in giving life to her creation, she dies, we may believe that O'Neill wished the living child to stand for the triumph of the creative spirit even in the face of the creator's death.

1. Supra, p. 10

The Hairy Ape (1921) is almost wholly devoted to a study of the frustration of the creative spirit.¹ It is the story of a soul that seeks to escape, or to deny the elan vital, of a soul in conflict with itself and the world about it because it cannot belong.

Yank, at first, is complacent in the knowledge that he furnishes the power which "moves the works." He sees himself as the creative force itself, and glories in this feeling until he is suddenly dispossessed of it by the cries of the upper-class girl, Mildred Douglas, who when she sees him shovelling coal in the stoke-hold is filled with horror and terror.

Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast. (iii)

Her very attitude and appearance upset Yank's complacency and break his pride. After this cataclysmic experience, he tries to "tink." His fellow stokers jibe him about falling in love with the girl from above decks. He mutters:

Love, hell! ... Hate, dat's what I've fallen
in -- hate, get me. (iv)

He cannot understand this feeling of chaos that bedevils him, which has robbed him of his pride in being at the bottom and which makes him belong nowhere.

-
1. It must be understood that the creative spirit does not imply procreation alone. It carries much larger implications of man's ability to make for himself a place in life satisfactory to himself and to the power outside him which drives him on.

Yank does not see in his love and hate for this woman he can never possess the desire and the thwarting of the creative spirit. If we take Yank and Mildred as representatives of the masculine and feminine essences, we can more easily understand Yank's emotional upheaval. In the conflict of the masculine and feminine spirits we can find a partial explanation of Yank's feeling of being adrift, of belonging nowhere. Without the possibility of realization of the fundamental purpose of life he has nothing to live for. The feminine spirit is inaccessible; it can never come into union with his, and his purpose is¹ defeated.

This is basic to Yank's feeling of insecurity as revealed in the scene at the zoo.. Yank feels a kinship with the gorilla and speaks to him:

1. Quinn states that "Yank, the stoker...represents force, which if unguided may wreck the world, but out of which all that is significant must grow... [O'Neill] is showing the struggle of ancient man upward and endeavoring to depict in terms of modern institutions the terrible struggle through which the race went, in beginning the processes of mental growth... Mildred Douglas... stirs in Yank the desire for something of which he had not dreamed." Quinn, op. cit., pp. 183-184. It seems that the interpretation of the "force" and the "something" of which Quinn speaks in terms of libidinal cathexis gives a much more comprehensible picture of this play than does the use of his very vague, ambiguous terms.

It's dis way, what I'm drivin' at... you'se can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh belong and dey don't... But me, -- I ain't got no past to tink in, not nothin' dat's comin', on'y what's now -- and dat don't belong... Yuh can't tink, can yuh? Yuh cain't talk, neider. But I kin make a bluff at talkin' and tinkin' -- a'most get away with it -- a'most! -- and dat's where de joker comes in. I ain't on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, taking all de woist punches from bot' of 'em. (viii)

Yank cannot escape the tragedy of being born a man who can think and feel, but whose thinking and feeling are purposeless.¹ And, in the end, he escapes by entering the cage and being crushed to death by the gorilla.

The play is without a single gleam of hope that this man can ever find himself so as to fulfill his purpose -- the creation of life. Yank's tragedy, based as it is on his failure to find an outlet, to belong, is one of O'Neill's clearest indications of the need of fulfilling the creative drive. It is an implicit protest against any system which makes the lowly worker a nameless cog in the machine.

1. Cf., Skinner, op. cit., p. 112.

The Fountain (1921) hinges on the quest of Juan Ponce de Leon to find out "why have I lived?" As a young man he is the ambitious thinker and hard adventurer, in middle age he is the tolerant thinker, and as an old man he is decidedly the romantic dreamer, seeking to restore his youth through the Spring of Life because love has come to him.

As a youth, Juan is the unwilling recipient of the love of Maria, wife to his friend, Vincente. When Maria, who is older than he, tells him of her love, he asks:

Why must you ruin our rare friendship with a word every minstrel mouths? ...We pretend love alone is why we live... Life is nobler than the weak lies of poets -- or it's nothing. (i)

Later, Juan leaves the Spanish court, comes to the New World, as Governor of Puerto Rico, he is kind to the natives and the advocate of justice. He is restive under the delayed arrival of his patent for exploration, the royal permission he needs to make search for the Fountain of Youth which Nano, a captured Indian, has told him of. Beatriz, daughter of Maria, now ward to Juan, comes from Spain. A rebellion against Juan is quieted only when he tells the soldiers and sailors that they sail on the morrow.

Before leaving, Juan exacts from Beatriz the promise that she will not marry until he returns or she hears of his death -- hopeful that he will come back the double to the young Ponce de Leon whom Beatriz's mother knew -- the strong, courageous, noble man. He goes off to find the "Spirit of Youth, Hope, Ambition, Power to dream and dare."

His voyage is fruitless. Nano betrays him to the Indians who leave him for dead by the spring and then wipe out his followers. He is found and taken to the coast by Luiz, his friend. Beatriz comes to nurse him and brings with her his nephew, the double Juan had hoped to be. It is only when he brings himself to give them his blessing that the full significance of life dawns upon him. He blesses them, sacrificing his own for their happiness. "You of this earth -- love -- hail -- and farewell! Go where Beauty is! Sing!" (xi) Juan listens in ecstasy to the fountain song which has come to mean the end of life for him.

Love is a flower
Forever blooming
Beauty a fountain
Forever flowing
Upward into the source of sunshine,
Upward into the azure heaven;
One with God but
Ever returning
To kiss the earth that the flower may live.

Sex has a very minor role in this play. It is important only as a contributive factor to love between a man and a woman and as a differentiation between the masculine and feminine views of life. For the woman, as Maria so clearly shows, love is the essence of life. For the man, there seem to be greater things until life is gone and with it the realization that it has been empty because it contained no love. It took Juan Ponce de Leon until his death to find that early in life he spurned the one thing that can make life worthwhile -- self-sacrificing love, for man is not sufficient unto himself alone.

The final scene of Welded¹ holds the promise that Eleanor Owen and Michael Cape, its chief figures, have found the means by which they can solve the problem of possessiveness and make their relationship one which fulfills rather than negates life. In a somewhat symbolic sense, this problem of building a successful marriage may be considered a creative one.

As sketched in the previous chapter, the two quarrel over the possessiveness of their love which seems to demand too much of their individuality. They break with one another, and go forth in an attempt to kill their love by provisional unions with other people. This they cannot do; the memory of the other's love holds them back and they return to each other.

1. supra, p. 11

The prostitute Michael had gone to taught him that one must love life in order to find love in life. She tells him:

You better beat it home... Stick to her, see? You'll get over it. You can get used to anything... You'll go back no matter what, and you'll loin to like it... Kiss and make up. Ferget it. It's easy to ferget -- when you got to... (II, ii)

Michael learns

....to love life -- to accept it and be exalted -- that's the one faith left to us. (II, ii)

When he reaches home, he finds his wife there. They vow to "give life to each other" through love, not through hate.

(They stare into each other's eyes. It is as if now by a sudden flash from within they recognized themselves, shorn of all the ideas, attitudes, cheating gestures which constitute vanity of personality. Everything, for this second, becomes simple for them -- serenely unquestionable. It becomes impossible that they should ever deny life, through each other, again.) (III, i)

O'Neill leaves them in the affirmation of life through self-sacrificing love. Thus have the Capes solved the problem of creating, of building a life that is developmental rather than deadening.

1

All God's Chillun Got Wings is a tragedy of frustration for the white woman, Ella. The negro, Jim, suffers to an extent hardly paralleled in any other O'Neill play but his acceptance of the terms of his life, even the

1. supra, p. 12

final insanity of Ella, is in a sense heroic, a successful even though half-defeated meeting of the problem of existence.

The death of Ella's illegitimate child and her unwillingness to have a child by Jim is a clear symbol of the frustration of the creative spirit. Ella had married Jim because as she says,

I'm alone. I've got to be helped. I've got to help someone -- or it's the end -- one end or another. (I, iii)

Ella accepted marriage with Jim as "one end or another." She tried to feel naturally proud of her negro spouse, to accept him as the man who was her husband, but there was a barrier she could not hurdle. As long as she could be with him as a sister with a brother she could bear the stigma of a mixed marriage. She sought release in isolation which made her "more nervous and scary, always imagining things," (II, i) and which gave her no release from social ostracism and no relief from the loss of the feeling of superiority of race.

This failure of Ella's to find an outlet for her energies, or to find a way of accepting the terms of her life with the negro, Jim, is the difficulty which brings about her eventual loss of reason. O'Neill could hardly have found harsher means of demonstrating the vital need of the creative spirit for fulfillment.

1

In Desire Under the Elms, the long servitude of the father, Ephraim, to the acquisition of possessions brings him nothing in the end but lonesomeness. His life is empty because he has never created.

But O'Neill does not close out the character of Eben on the same note of complete frustration. The child Abbie bears him is the realization of his urge to create² even though it is ultimately destroyed. And, moreover, Abbie has become his complement, the being whose vibrations fit into his as do the cogs of a gear --- constantly shifting, yet ever interlocking. His union with Abbie gives him a new attitude toward his father. He is tolerant of him now, passive in his resentment, and secure in the knowledge that he is the real possessor of everything once belonging to his parent. Eben reaches maturity of mind through his emotional independence of his father and his love for Abbie.

There is no condemnation of Eben as a character even though he has committed the heinous sin of adultery in incest; neither is his character condoned. Rather he

1. supra, p. 14

2. We see in the death of this child of selfish love the frustration of the creative spirit through Ego-cathexis where the self represents the direction taken by the entire libidinal energy.

exemplifies what happens when men are bound in hate to a thwarting environment where the only chance for release is through unlawful, sinful channels which bring ruin in their wake unless counteracted by the individual's spiritual regeneration through love and self-sacrifice.

When Eben has sinned the whole gamut of sins, psychologically speaking, his salvation is secured by his final gesture of self-sacrifice in giving his life to Abbie as companion in her guilt. He has loved with a love unconfined by his own Ego, therefore, even though untimely and guilty death is his inferred end, his life has not been empty and useless because he has given of himself to another.

Marco Millions (1925) treats of the problem of the creative spirit in symbolical terms. Marco Polo is the symbol for the man whose potentiality for living a complete life is stunted and finally killed by the devotion of his energies to the materialistic, the life-negating.

His potentiality is indicated by the poem he had written his sweetheart, Donata, as a boy but as he passes through country after country on his way to Cathay, we see this quality of 'soul' slipping more and more into the background.

1

Kukachin, symbol of perfect love as she is, is also representative of the animating element; if Marco had ever seen her for what she was, he would perforce have begun living creatively. Donata, on the other hand, stands for what deadens rather than enlivens; and Marco's faithfulness to her, such as it is, typifies his inability, even his unwillingness to find an outlet for his creative impulses.

The tragedy of Marco Millions is not cataclysmic; the wearing away of what was fine in Marco Polo until he becomes a "smug idol of stuffed self-satisfaction" is gradual. When, in his last look into Kukachin's eyes, he almost forgets himself, he is stopped by overhearing the word---million. This is the end for him as a living person; thereafter he might as well be dead.

O'Neill has laid bare in his treatment of Marco Polo the unloveliness of a person who has thrown away his creative energies, his capacity for unselfish love. And the triumph of Kukachin, built upon the ideal depth and unselfishness of her love, all the more heavily emphasizes Marco's failure, the failure that must be the lot of all those who disregard the creative impulses.

1. Infra, pp. 70-74, for a fuller discussion of this aspect of Kukachin's character.

The main theme of The Great God Brown¹ is given in this statement of Dion's:

I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sung
and wept! I've been life's lover! I've
fulfilled her will and if she's through with
me now it's only because I was too weak to
dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be
her creature, you've got to create her or she
requests you to destroy yourself.

(II, ii)

The failure of each of the characters is the failure to create life while living it. Each character is bound by the force of outward circumstance to fail to find fullest self-expression and self-realization. The conflict between personal desire and external limitations sets up inhibitions and repressions in the individual, which, if they are not satisfactorily assimilated into conscious experience, cause "split personality."

The contrast between Dion, the creator, and Brown, the poseur, is of especial importance to the understanding of O'Neill's treatment of the theme of creativeness. In an article written by O'Neill to explain this play we find the following interpretation of the character conflict, or "conflict of the brothers" between
²
Dion and Brown.

1. supra, p. 19

2. Excerpted from the reprint of the article in Quinn,
op. cit., pp. 192-194.

Dion Anthony -- Dionysus and St. Anthony -- the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity, as represented by St. Anthony -- the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion -- creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality.....

Brown is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth -- a Success -- building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty, and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life-desire.

From this description we can see the deep-lying antagonism of the two men. Brown has always envied the creative force in Anthony -- the thing he himself lacks. His entire life is one of attempted compensation for this lack. Near the close of the play when he steals Dion's Mephistophelian mask, he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively while actually he is only stealing that creative power turned self-destructive by complete frustration. Dion, although possessing the power to create, could never realize it because of the limitations of reality. Constantly seeking the opportunity to realize his creative urge, he tries:

...living and loving and having children --
thinking one was creating before one discovered
one couldn't. (I, i)

Stunted by family relationships and driven by necessity to support his family he drops his painting and turns to architecture in the role of Brown's chief draftsman. Again he meets defeat because Brown takes all the credit

for his designs, destroyed the will to create for the love of creation. Dion explains to Cybel why he turns to drink for escape from his everyday life.

....(Mr. Brown) hands me one mathematically correct barn after another and I doctor them up with cute allurements so that fools will desire to buy, sell, breed, sleep, love, hate, curse and pray in them! I do this with devilish cleverness to their entire delight! Once I dreamed of painting wind on the sea and the skimming flight of cloud shadows over the tops of trees! Now... (II, i)

In discussing the cathedral plans he has drawn for Brown, he accuses him of stealing his creative life from him.

I've been the brains! I've been the design! I've designed even his success -- drunk and laughing at him.. This cathedral is my masterpiece! It will make Brown the most eminent architect in this state of God's Country. I put a lot into it -- what was left of my life! It's one vivid blasphemy from sidewalk to the tips of its spires!... But Mr. Brown has no faith! He couldn't design a cathedral without it looking like the First Supernatural Bank! He believes only in the immortality of the moral belly! From now on, Brown will never design anything. He will devote his life to renovating the house of my Cybel into a home for my Margaret. (II, iii)

Dion goes on to revile Brown for the parasite he is in one of the most bitter passages in all of O'Neill's plays-- a passage full of despair, doubt, and disillusionment. It contains all the rancor, contempt, and pity which O'Neill feels for those who, uncreative in their own right, are so obtuse that they kill the creativeness in others.

It is immaterial whether the person be male or female -- the sin is the frustration of the creative spirit. Margaret is as guilty toward Dion as Brown is, although she kills by possessiveness, not by usurpation. But the end of The Great God Brown, brought about though it is by the thwarting of the creative spirit, is not entirely without hint of salvation. Dying in Cybel's arms, Brown pleads:

I don't want justice. I want love.

and Cybel answers:

There is only love. (IV, iii)

Brown dies as Cybel speaks a requiem, promising life:

Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always, forever again! -- Spring again! -- life again! -- summer and fall and death and peace again! -- but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again -- spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! -- bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again! (IV, iii)

In Lazarus Laughed (1926), Lazarus symbolizes the pleasure-aim working itself out in terms of full self-realization and self-expression and seeking after a complete affirmation of life. In the case of Lazarus, in spite of his repeated proclamation that

There is only life!... There is Eternal Life in No... and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes! Death is the face between!... Death is dead! Fear is no more! There is only life! (I, i)

he negates his words by his own ultimate self-worship and¹ self-sufficiency, forgetful that he is the "man in God" and not the "God in man." The downfall of his philosophy is caused by the frustration of the creative spirit and the inability to conquer loneliness.

Early in the play, before his resurrection, comes the contradiction of his statement that there is no death. His children die, a symbol for the frustration of the creative spirit.

...Of late years his life has been one long misfortune. One after another his children died.

...They were all girls. Lazarus had no luck.

...The last was a boy, the one that died at birth. You are forgetting him.

...Lazarus could never forget. Not only did his son die but Miriam could never bear him more children.

(I, i)

Not only did his children die, but everything he turned his hand to came to naught. Even as the emissary of a new faith in life he failed; men responded briefly while he was there to inspire them, but as soon as he left, they forgot² and their fears returned.

1. The idea of self-worship as indicative of libidinal immaturity is, from the psychoanalytic standpoint, a complicated one. Briefly, it is developed in the following manner: the child, desirous of status as an individual equal to that of the parent of the same sex, attempts to gain his end through identification with that parent, desiring for himself all the rights and privileges of that position. Since these are impossible, he finds refuge in narcissism in which state all activities radiate from the self. Thus, the process is from Oedipus (incestuous) desires to narcissism to intrauterine existence.

2. See the play, I, ii, and IV, ii.

The fears of Lazarus' followers are basic to their loneliness -- their inability to forget themselves and to live "with love! -- with pride! with laughter!" (I, ii) Rather, they live by denying life.

Lazarus himself is tormented by the fear of loneliness when he thinks of Miriam's death. To believe, to be joyous, to live as a son of God is to know a terrible loneliness. Lazarus could never make the complete break from earthly things, especially with his own pride and self-sufficiency, to become wholly one with his God. It is this pride and self-sufficiency which keeps Lazarus from communicating his religious exaltation to his followers; and thus condemns him to the non-fulfillment of his creative drive.

Predominantly, Miriam is the mother-figure mourning the death of her children, the creative aim warped in her as in Lazarus. But she transfers to him her maternal tenderness and solicitude and, in turn, dreads the loneliness which his death would mean for her. She is the symbol of woman as wife and mother of men. Hers is the fate of the wife who cannot grow with her husband, who must yield up physical and intellectual companionship and take over entirely the role of the mother.

In Pompeia's statement that it is her heart that desires a master there is an echo of Kukachin's dream of "a captain of (her) ship on a long voyage in dangerous, enchanted seas." It is the primitive desire of woman for a man to give meaning and direction to her life. It has repeatedly been O'Neill's contention that the feminine spirit, in its role of creation and renewal, if it is not distorted (in which case it destroys) is the perfect complement to the masculine.¹ But Pompeia, demanding to be loved as an end in herself, not as a means to fulfillment, denies her role and thus negates life.

In answer to the fundamental question in the play, to what can man look to give meaning and purpose, peace and security, self-realization and self-fulfillment to this life, O'Neill says:

1. "For the vast majority of men and women, the sex relation is the most profound of human experiences and the most urgent of human problems. The instinctive urge toward self-fulfillment, the primary and unanalyzable sexual impulse, is accompanied in an awakened consciousness by the hunger for intimate companionship... Those of either sex who fail to achieve...an intimate relation with some individual of the opposite sex are felt to have missed their destiny. Biologically..they are eccentric to the scheme of nature. Psychologically ..they are themselves aware of a hiatus in their humanity...

"A man should have learned that he cannot really be a man unless he has a woman to renew him, to give him courage, to restore his faith, and a woman should have learned that she cannot be a woman without a man to give direction to the abundance of her vitality and to insert design into her life." Murray and Young, "Modern Marriage," Forum, Jan., 1929, pp. 22-26.

...There is hope for Man! Love is Man's hope --
love for his life on earth, a noble love above
suspicion and distrust!... dare to love Eternity
without your fear desiring to possess her! Be
brave enough to be possessed! (IV, i)

And yet the play ends on a false note because Lazarus' pride has kept him from "being possessed." All his contacts have been fleeting; there has been only temporary success; there is no true affirmation of life because -- "Men forget."

The creative drive is back of much of the action in Strange Interlude.¹ Sam's lack of the inherent qualities requisite for a man who could give direction and meaning to Nina's life renders her attempt at renunciation for his sake meaningless. Driven as she is to find some means of satisfaction for her libidinal energy which has been doubly thwarted in the loss of her child and in the failure of her relations with her husband, Nina determines to realize her procreative urge with another man. She calculatingly selects Ned Darrell because she knows that she can trust his scientific attitude and that he is unadmittedly attracted to her. Darrell agrees to give her a child "whose life would be a living proof that (Sam's) wife loved him" and which would bring her the self-realization she needed.

1. Supra, p. 23

O'Neill suggests the question of the individual's right to happiness through this situation. Here are two people (and a third is involved), each seeking life in its fullness, each bound through no fault of his own not to reach his goal unless he participates in an act condemned by society. There is, however, no moral problem for either Ned or Nina, for as Ned says:

There can only be guilt when one deliberately neglects one's manifest duty in life. (IV)

Nina's manifest duty, it seems, is to have a child which will witness her love for Sam and which will fulfill her creative role as a woman.

Had O'Neill been content to let Nina have her baby and thereafter perform her duties as wife and mother with no other conflicts, he would have failed to recognize one of the basic laws of human nature. Studies of the sex relationship between men and women reveal that full love frequently follows sexual union, but that it seldom comes when the element of sexual desire is absent. Nina, through her long, not fully completed relationship with Sam, comes to have an affection and maternal tenderness for him, but she never gives him a complete love. In the case of Ned, however, complete love rapidly follows their physical union. Nina is both thrilled and alarmed by the realization of the love between her and Ned.

...then love came to me..in his arms...happiness!
...I hid it from him... I could feel him fighting
with himself...during all those afternoons...our
wonderful afternoons of happiness! (V)

But Nina is destined not to be able to come into the full realization of the feminine with the masculine essence because she cannot belong entirely to Ned as long as there is Sam. Divorce from Sam is impossible since it would defeat the first carefully laid plans of re-enforcing Sam's faith in himself by the child which symbolized Nina's love for him.

Unable to attach herself to either one of the male elements of release, husband or lover, Nina, after the birth of her son, seeks to find through him release for all her vast store of repressions. Her failure in this attempt attests to the need of woman to find three-fold fulfillment as wife, mistress and mother.

¹
In Dynamo, the love of May Fife for Ramsay allows the latter personal freedom in its possession of him. Her love is on a much lower psychological level than that of Amelia Light, being readily satisfied on the infantile basis of gratification of the basic libidinal urges. May Fife, because of her childish Ego, is a symbol of earthy motherhood realizing itself in its own creation -- the child and the happiness of its mate.

1. supra, p. 24

Ramsay Wile has found his answer to the quest for life in the surface representation of the omnipotence of electricity and in the sensual satisfaction found in his marital union.

With Reuben, the tendency for regression into childhood emotionalism plays a large part. His utter refusal to accept the responsibilities of normal adulthood goes so far as the killing of the feminine side, represented by Ada, of his compulsion by the creative spirit. The negation of life is here complete.

¹
In Mourning Becomes Electra, the creative spirit comes out in the desire of four of the characters to live on an island in the South Seas where man is as yet untouched by evil.

Brant the sea-captain has visited this island and his descriptions of the life there make Christine and Lavinia long to live on the "Beautiful Isle." Orin who has read Melville's Typee also longs for such a place.

But Lavinia's possessiveness keeps both Brant and Christine from ever achieving their desire by causing their deaths. And her hatred has so changed Orin that by the time they arrive, he can no longer enjoy the life and forces her to leave just as she neared the achievement of happiness. This is brought out in a reminiscent dialogue between the two after their return:

1. supra, p. 29

Orin: ...We stopped a month. (with resentful bitterness) But they turned out to be Vinnie's islands, not mine. They only made me sick - and the naked women disgusted me. I guess I'm too much of a Manon, after all, to turn into a pagan. But you should have seen Vinnie with the men---!

... ..
Lavinia: (dreamily) I love those islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful - a good spirit - of love - coming out of the land and the sea. It made me forget death. There was no here-after. There was only this world - the warm earth in the moonlight - the trade wind in the coco palms - the surf on the reef - the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart - the natives danced naked and innocent - without knowledge of sin! But what in the world! I'm gabbing on like a regular chatterbox. You must think I've become awfully scatter-brained!

... ..
Orin: I had to get you away from the islands. My brotherly duty! If you'd stayed there much longer --- (He chuckles disagreeably.)
(The Haunted, I, ii)

Orin's last speech reveals the antagonism between the two which prevented their making use of the islands' offering of an opportunity for a fuller life. The shift in Lavinia's speech, which starts with the interjection, 'But what in the world!,' indicates that the freedom she attained there was only partial, only a taste as it were. Her possessiveness, her brother's antagonism have frustrated their attempt to live creatively.

The youthful sweethearts of Ah, Wilderness (1932) have a relationship which, at least in germ, affirms rather than denies life. The girl, Muriel McComber, is not the embodiment of carnal desires to the boy as Ada is to Reuben

in Dynamo; she is not the spider-woman who would kill her mate for her own sustenance. She is a girl who is a friend and comrade as well as a lover, one who will give love and take love, but who will demand no more than she can give. She is the symbol of women, well-rounded in their physical, mental and spiritual natures, who love well because their love is made up of perfectly balanced elements of the mother instincts, the wifely attributes of understanding and sympathy and affection, and the unguarded abandon of willing co-operation in libidinal satisfaction. Richard is a youth, stout of heart and working into surety of purpose, who can face life without shrinking because he is an entity in himself, well adjusted already and capable of further adjustment to the demands that will be made on him. The union of these two, founded as it is in the give-and-take of good fellowship, unity of purpose, and mutual affection and consideration, promises to be one of calm assurance in shouldering the responsibilities of the creative spirit, the force of which they are to realize.

¹
The main theme of Days Without End is the affirmation of life which comes as the result of the individual's faith in love. In this play, love is depicted in many forms. Primarily there is the love of God for man and of man for God. The love between a man and a woman and the compassionate love of one human being for another which Father Baird

1. supra, p. 30

has for John are the two most important types which fuse into the higher love. The love of one human being for another asymptotically approaches divine love, but is never identified with it, because of human limitations.

As Father Baird says:

I'm not doubting your love for her nor hers for you...I am thinking that such love needs the hope and promise of eternity to fulfill itself--- above all, to feel itself secure. Beyond the love for each other should be the love of God, in Whose Love yours may find the triumph over death.

(I)

Only as human love approaches the infinite love of God as the creator and keeper of life can it become fully satisfactory and secure.

Even in this play which is the strongest testimony for life affirmed we have a dim trace of refuge in regression -- a longing for the irresponsible state of complete protection that is the mother's womb. One instance of this comes early in the play in John's failure to proceed on to the end of his novel. He hesitates and tries to return to the emotional security of parental love. The other important statement of it is seen in John's fear of Elsa's death.

...death is what the dead know, the warm, dark womb of Nothingness -- the Dream in which you and Elsa may sleep as one forever, beyond fear of separation.

(IV, i)

However, John and Elsa are strong and mature enough to carry on and win through by facing life's realities with courage and faith. Days Without End is a play of splendid affirmation, "of a man's problems in the full surge of real life."

The need for the fulfillment of the creative spirit is demonstrated in Before Breakfast, Beyond the Horizon, Gold, The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Great God Brown, Strange Interlude, Dynamo, and Mourning Becomes Electra. The tragic outcome of these plays is built, as we have seen, upon the inability of the characters to find an outlet for their creative urges. While it may seem an emphasis on the obvious, these characters meet tragedy either suddenly or more protractedly in a process of slow psychical poisoning because they refuse to accept the realities of human existence and make lives for themselves that further rather than destroy the possibility of growth. Perhaps the most striking instance is Ella, of All God's Chillun Got Wings, who, after long refusing to make the best of her marriage with the negro, Jim, and after selfishly denying him much of life, finally loses her reason. Another is Yank of The Hairy Ape who, feeling that he is neither man nor animal, goes in a blind frenzy of frustration to die in the arms of the ape who seems more his kind than man does.

But in addition to this negative demonstration of what happens when the creative spirit goes unfulfilled, O'Neill has pointed out ways of fulfilling these urges. Kukachin in Marco Millions triumphs over death because of the ideal depth and unselfishness of her love. Old Juan of The Fountain, even as he dies, redeems a life otherwise largely sterile by his final realization of the all-importance of love in life. Similar in import are The Straw, Anna Christie, Welded, Ah, Wilderness, and Days Without End.

Mixed in implication are The First Man, Desire Under the Elms, and Lazarus Laughed. In the first two, fulfillment of the creative spirit is belated and only partial. The creator dies in giving birth to his creation; and Eben faces a death which though guilty affirms life in its sacrifice of his Ego to his love. In the third, Lazarus is passionately aware of the need to love life, to be possessed by it but because of his pride of self-sufficiency, he refuses to give himself up to its possession. The consciousness of his insight turns upon him and he fails to become a creator.

Thus we have seen that O'Neill is deeply convinced of the need of the creative spirit for fulfillment. And that he believes that an accepting love of life and a self-sacrificing love between man and woman afford the best means to this integrally important fulfillment.

Chapter Three

The Problem of Man's Salvation

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The problem of man's salvation, of man's adjustment to his environment, is of the most pressing and constant ones with which we are confronted. Man's achievement of a satisfactory way of life is the chief, though often overlooked, goal of philosophy. While the problem may seem solely ethical, its involvement of the psychological - man's relationship to other men and women, to the esthetic, to the supernatural, or better, the superhuman - extends into all reaches of knowledge. The importance of this problem to the individual and to all humanity is clear; a fact which renders obvious O'Neill's interest in it.

There are, for him, three ways in which adjustment may be attained. These are: through moral re-evaluation, through faith, and through love.

By moral re-evaluation is meant the selection of those behavior patterns which bring satisfying results and the discarding of those, the end-products of which are negating rather than fulfilling. This would include the throwing-out of customary, traditional ways of acting which no longer serve their purpose.

Faith, to O'Neill, is the trust of an individual in a power outside and more than himself, ranging from the vague feeling of something beyond to the definite declaration of faith in a forgiving and loving God.

Love signifies both the fundamental attraction and relationship between the sexes and that sympathetic understanding and tolerant affection which an individual must feel for those around him in order to live life fully. This love is larger than the individual, it includes all humanity in its embrace.

Faith in something beyond man and beyond life is accented in Beyond the Horizon¹. The belief has its basis in the idea that sacrifice is always somehow recompensed. The dreamer, Robert, expressed this faith even as he dies. He says:

(in a voice which is suddenly ringing with the happiness of hope) You mustn't feel sorry for me. Don't you see I'm happy at last---free---free!---freed from the farm---free to wander on and on---eternally! (He raises himself on his elbow, his face radiant, and points to the horizon) Look! Isn't it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come--- (Exultantly) And this time I'm going! It's a free beginning---the start of my voyage! I've won to my trip---the right of release---beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad---glad---for my sake! (III, ii)

He adds the advice to his brother, Andrew:

Ruth has suffered---remember, Andy---only through sacrifice---the secret beyond there---
(III, ii)

Thus Robert, the dreamer, dies exultantly in his complete faith that surely there must be something beyond there to make up for the life that had been so wasted by the

1. supra, p. 2 and p. 35

demanding possessiveness of his wife, Ruth. He also believes that the two he leaves behind will achieve happiness for themselves now that he is gone. But unfortunately this belief is not shared by them; Andrew is bitter, Ruth hopeless. In the end, Robert, though dead, has, because of his dreamer's faith, come closest to happiness.

1

In The Straw, the entire action moves to the climax in which love is shown to be the way by which life may be made livable for both persons affected. This climax is the character change in Stephen Murray brought about by his sudden realization that he does love Eileen, even as he tells her he does. This love changes Stephen from a self-sufficient, self-loving, and largely self-centered man to one who suddenly discovers that there is something else in the world; he weeps:

(Raising his face...alight with a passionate awakening -- a revelation, he cries) Oh, I do love you, Eileen! I do! I love you, love you!
(III)

The effect of the earlier relationship, only companionable, upon the two promises that this discovery of Stephen's will enable them to work out a satisfactory life together.

2

In Anna Christie, Mat sacrifices his pride, affronted by knowledge of Anna's past, to his love for her. His pride was salved to some extent by her assurance that he was the

1. supra, p. 5 and p. 56

2. supra, p. 6 and p. 37

only man she had ever loved; but even so, he forgave her her earlier transgressions against the double standard and re-established their relationship. They planned a future, each in possession of the other, but both belonging to the sea -- the uncertain fate of man. And having this two-fold sense of belonging, their life should be happy, even though Anna can never regain a part of her pride and self-respect and, thus, cannot belong completely to Mat. Founded on sacrifice and on honesty, their love, given its natural element - the sea, should weather any storms that might come its way.

1

In The Fountain, Juan Ponce de Leon, the aged seeker after eternal youth, finds as he is dying that love is the only answer for his quest. His desire for eternal youth is motivated in the first place by his chagrined consciousness of what he had missed as a youth in refusing Maria's love. He longs to remedy his oversight with Beatriz, Maria's daughter, but in the end he discovers that it is too late and all he can do is give his blessing to the love between Beatriz and his nephew. This last act to some extent saves his life from complete waste. Juan's inability to achieve fulfillment, to be sufficient unto himself without love is a concrete demonstration of love's importance.

1. supra, p. 42

For our purposes, the important theme in Marco Millions¹ is love. Only on the surface is it a satirical comedy. Beneath there lies a tragic seeking after a peace-giving beauty which can transform the crude, restless, deadening, terrible elements of life into something more. O'Neill does not tell us what this "something more" is; he indicates that it is necessary by showing that what we have is not enough to give the ultimate peace and satisfaction of a completely integrated personality.

Kukachin, the symbol of tenderness and beauty in love which can attain salvation, stands in contrast to Marco, the masculine spirit distorted and spiritually dwarfed by its submission to greed. Kukachin is a woman who sees encompassing love as the aim and end of life. Love is the source of all that is good; it is unselfish, humble, understanding, and forgiving. It is the soul's reaching out for completion on three levels -- mental, physical, and spiritual. There can be no real love without elements from each of these three categories. In Kukachin's love lies the only hope for Marco's soul. As Chu-Yin says:

...I reasoned, who knows but some day this
Marco may see into her eyes and his soul may
be born --- (II, i)

1. supra, p. 48

No soul is born in Marco and his grossness is complete.

When she finally realizes that, Kukachin accuses him.

There is no soul even in your love, which
is no better than a mating of swine. (II, iii)

His crassness kills her spirit; but she still loves love.

Kukachin's words in the prologue which opens the play give us the full import of her function as the symbol of love:

Say this, I loved and died. Now I am Love,
and live. And Living, have forgotten. And
Loving, can forgive.

The theme of the complementation of the masculine and feminine spirits is here used once again. The eager, humble, tender, self-sacrificing love of Kukachin as representative of feminine love at large is destined to be ever unsatisfied by the half-giving, half-withholding of the masculine spirit. It is imperative for the woman to feel that she belongs to her love-object as well as to know that she possesses it. Kukachin realizes neither. Had her love been no larger, hers would have been the tragic end, not Marco's. But her love, as ideal love, surpasses the psychophysical limitations in the understanding which comes in spiritual beauty.

In opposition, we have the love of Donata, stout and middle-aged, her face unlined and pretty in a "bovine, good-natured way." Her love will be comfortable but not uplifting and stimulating to the soul. Such a love as

Donata's, or Marco's, eventually blights the thing it loves or kills it, smothering it in its own deadening apathy.

The prostitute which O'Neill introduces into the civilization of each country the Polos visit on their way to Cathay is a symbol of the combined elements of man's earthly desires and his life-long search for motherhood in nature.¹ She is the embodiment of one type of feminine love, Kukachin of another, and Donata of the third.

The three types of feminine love which O'Neill so frequently delineates must be combined into one to make for a full emotional, sensual, and intellectual relationship between a man and a woman. Freud says that no marriage "is firmly assured until the woman has succeeded in making her husband (and lover) into her child and in acting the part of a mother towards him."² O'Neill has clearly stated this idea in the chorus of the women attendants when Kukachin is to meet her new lord, Ghazan, Khan of Persia. They chant:

1. This perpetual seeking for maternal protection is explainable in terms of failure to achieve satisfactory displacement and transference which free the individual from emotional dependence on the mother-imago.
2. Freud, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

The lover comes
Who becomes a husband,
Who becomes a son,
Who becomes a father ---
In this contemplation lives the woman.
(II, iii)

Loneliness is another aspect of the problem met in this play. Life is lonely when the individual is unable to feel himself as belonging to or possessed by some object-choice, whether animate or inanimate, to which he can cling and through which he can expend his libidinal or sublimated energies. Kublai Khan says to Kukachin:

...Little Daughter, all rare things are secrets which cannot be revealed to anyone. That is why life must be so lonely. But I love you better than anything on earth. And I know you love me. So perhaps we do not need to understand.
(II, ii)

All-embracing love is the only thing which can remove the feeling of loneliness. The complete fusion of the elements of love is so rare that it is a difficult goal for an individual to attain. Kukachin is asking for this when she says she desires

a captain of my ship on a long voyage
in dangerous, enchanted seas. (II, ii)

There is no one who can fulfill her desire, so she must travel on alone. Thus the characters in Marco Millions, conceived as they are as variations on the theme of love, show, each in his own way, that there must be "something more" than that which man has already attained before he

can find the fullest possible meaning in life. In other words, to keep from a death in life, man must grow and continue to grow.

Man's desire to find meaning in life is the primary¹ problem in The Great God Brown. O'Neill has used Dion's frantic search for peace and contentment in the love of woman as the unconscious direction of his deeper quest for inner harmony which will bring him unity with his God. Dion's chaotic actions are efforts to realize his deep-lying desire to find something to give meaning to his life. He thought he had found it in Margaret's love. He tried again to find it in his painting and architecture, but they turned into blasphemies. The closest he ever came to meaning in life is in his doctrine of "blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit." However, in the continuation of Dion's character in the person of Brown, O'Neill does give us a final note of triumph when Brown dies, saying:

...I Know! I have found Him! I hear Him speak!
'Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh!'
Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of
Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of
Earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man
returns to bless and play again in innumerable
dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God!
(IV, ii)

1. supra, p. 19 and p. 50.

As he has so often done before, O'Neill symbolizes Man's quest for the meaning of life in a power outside himself in terms of a force which is understandable to him -- that of love with its elements of libido, friendly affection, and sympathetic understanding.

1
As we have pointed out in another context, the fundamental question in the play, Lazarus Laughed, is what can man look to as the source of meaning and purpose, peace and security, self-realization and self-fulfillment in this life. In answer, O'Neill, in the person of Lazarus, proclaims that

...there is hope for Man! Love is Man's hope --
love for his life on earth, a noble love above sus-
picion and distrust!... dare to love Eternity without
your fear desiring to possess her! Be brave enough to
be possessed! (IV, i)

We are not to understand from Lazarus' failure that his is a useless formula; it is not the formula that is at fault but Lazarus who is too weak to put it into practice. In spite of his insight, he cannot forget himself and his pride of self-sufficiency long enough to be really at one with life. Although knowing that life must be accepted, he still refuses it. Here O'Neill has once again emphasized with his 'Love is Man's hope' that love is a most valid answer to the question of life.

1. supra, p. 53

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In Dynamo, this speech of Reuben's

I want to face things. I won't be satisfied
now until I've found the truth about everything.
(II, ii)

gives us the motivation for his actions and types the play as one that is concerned at least in part with the finding of answers and of meanings.

As a youth, Reuben lived in fear of his father, the familiar character of the stern father-god of Puritan tradition, and in the protecting love of his mother. His own beliefs are a composite of theirs, "an acceptance of fear and an unquestioning faith in maternal protection." When his mother, moved by jealousy of his love for Ada, betrays him to his father, he loses all faith and finds it imperative to find his own answers. The remainder of the play is made up of Reuben's quest after the riddle of life, a thing which he never finds even in his final attempted union of himself and the great earth-mother in his suicide on the dynamo.

Reuben's choice of electricity, of the dynamo as an objective God-symbol is easily understood; he knows the unfathomable and mysterious power of electricity and the sound of the dynamo is almost always in his ears. His fixation upon his mother, the effects of which we have outlined in some detail in an earlier chapter, is the decisive factor in his regarding the dynamo as a mother-

1. supra, p. 24 and p. 59.

goddess. And his obsessed longing to see his dead mother, to be forgiven by her, brings him in the end to suicide.

In the end, we are apt to feel that a dynamo is hardly powerful and emotional enough as a symbol to satisfy man's desire for a more profound rapport with life. But we cannot seriously believe that O'Neill meant to offer it as such a symbol.¹ What we have here is Reuben's failure to find a life-affirming answer; a failure that was caused by his unwillingness to adjust to life on any but child-like, or rather, fetus-like terms. What O'Neill is pointing out here is that we need to face life as adults, ready to face its defeats, its uncertainties in our own persons; acting thus, it may be required of us to go over the precipice, into the unknown but always should we be courageous, never, in any event, should we whimper and cower back to seek wistfully the cosy, irresponsible and undemanding protection of the womb. If we act as adults, we have a chance to adjust, to find happiness, but cowering back, failing to meet life on its own terms can only mean a death-in-life, a failure like that demonstrated by Reuben's suicide.

1. We feel, as Skinner says, that "the hunger and thirst of O'Neill for some sort of spiritual resolution of the mighty conflict of the soul has a significance which far outweighs the crude and often repellent quality of the symbols used in describing his quest." Skinner, op. cit., p. 219.

1

Days Without End is O'Neill's clearest and most concrete representation of faith in a forgiving and loving God as a solution for the problems of life.

The action of the play reveals the role faith plays as a solution. John is married to Elsa, a woman to whom fidelity in marriage is of prime importance. She left her first husband as soon as she knew of his infidelity. She married John because she thought she had found in him a man to whom marriage is a sacrament as it is to her. Their marriage is model until John, driven by fear of his happiness, tries to make himself independent of their love by killing it through debasement. When Elsa, by means of a novel plot and the story told by her friend, Lucy Hillman, of her own adultery, learns that John has been unfaithful to her, she wills to die, being already ill with influenza. John is panic-stricken at the thought of her death, knowing full well that it means that he will be thrown back onto the long, weary road of doubt and self-torture. He beseeches her forgiveness. He finally goes to a church and there, at the foot of the cross, prays that Elsa will live and forgive him and love him again. He leaves the church as a man whose salvation has been wrought through faith and love. In the play, John's surrender to the love of the Crucified Christ brings about the death of Loving, the second stage character that represents his bitter and

1. supra, p. 30 and p. 62

disillusioned self and with the death of Loving, he becomes a unified, integrated personality, John Loving.

The need for faith is illustrated in Father Baird's speech:

I'm not doubting your love for her nor hers for you... I am thinking that such love needs the hope and promise of eternity to fulfill itself---above all, to feel itself secure. Beyond the love for each other should be the love of God, in Whose Love yours may find the triumph over death. (I)

Thus clearly in Days Without End has O'Neill emphasized faith in a power beyond and above man as perhaps the most all-inclusive instrument with which to discover a fulfilling sufficiency of meaning in life.

Of the three ways of salvation indicated by O'Neill, moral re-evaluation is given the least documentation. Anna Christie is the only play that is concerned with it; and Mat's refusal to abide by the tenets of the double standard is as much or more caused by love than by any sense of the deficiencies or need for revision of this moral code.

The two remaining ways, love and faith, are often intertwined and represented as mutually interdependent. Days Without End, for example, points out that faith in a loving God is a most necessary reinforcement of the love between man and woman and in Lazarus Laughed faith means man's confidence that love of life will bring its own reward.

Faith is of secondary importance to love in Marco Millions, The Straw and The Fountain, plays that place their main dependence upon love. Kukachin's triumph over death, the change wrought in Stephen Murray, and Juan's insufficiency without love all demonstrate love's importance and meaningfulness.

The Great God Brown and Dynamo represent unsuccessful quests after the meaning of life. In the first, the failure is relieved by Brown's dying statement of the vivifying power of suffering, especially as it contrasts to happiness and thus brings man to rejoice in life and the goodness of God. In the second, Reuben's suicide, brought about by his mother-fixation, denotes complete failure. Here, as we have pointed out, O'Neill is saying that we must face life as adults if we are to win through to adjustment and integration of personality; and that regression to childhood is a life-denying escape that cannot encompass anything but our ruin.

As we have seen, for O'Neill faith and love are but opposite sides of the same coin, each valid enough by itself but finding its highest meaning in its realized conjunction with the other. Moral re-evaluation is important only where it must be brought into play as a foundation for faith and love.

We can say with certainty that O'Neill would answer the question, How can life be justified? How can it be made livable? with the phrase, through faith and love. Faith, that is, either in a power beyond man or in the essential goodness of life; and by love meaning not only the fundamental relationship between man and woman but a tolerant and accepting attitude toward all humanity.

Chapter Four

Conclusions

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The purpose of this paper was to determine, if possible, what Eugene O'Neill's philosophy was from studying the ways sex problems were used in his plays.

The questions raised were:

- 1) Are sex problems used as a source of melodramatic action?
- 2) Are they used as a means of depicting character and forwarding dramatic action?
- 3) Are they used as a means of expressing philosophical ideas?

The analysis of the plays under the above premises gives us the following conclusions:

- 1) O'Neill's use of sex problems is far from being merely melodramatic; such problems are basic to the expression of his philosophy.
- 2) Toward the expression of his philosophy, he has selected, consciously or unconsciously, the fundamental experiences of human beings explainable as the elan vital in terms of the libido as harboring the situations which elicit the most direct response. He uses libidinal cathexis as the basis of common understanding compounded of individual and phylogenetic experiences as the nucleus from which he draws the motivation for character-action and as the foundation for the action-situations which give the best opportunity for the presentation of his ideas.
- 2) ✓ O'Neill's philosophy is humanitarian and pragmatic because of his deep sympathy for the individual and because of his rejection of ways of action which prove themselves worthless. Actions or attitudes are rejected when they entail frustration and negation of life, and some other action or attitude is sought which holds greater promise of workability.

- 1
- 4) The definition and clarity with which we have drawn out the ideas in O'Neill's plays by using the tenets of libidinal cathexis should go far to demonstrate the error of those many critics who take the position that the content of the plays is as a "dark forest," filled with meanings that are not to be elucidated or stated.

Inasmuch as plays written from merely sensational motives are hardly burdened with ideas, and inasmuch as character and action are the dramatist's only means of expressing ideas, we focused our attention on the third question since an affirmative answer to it, especially if the ideas expressed were of any profundity, would controvert the charge of sensationalism and would of necessity illustrate the relationship between sex problems and character and action.

To arrive at an answer to this third question, we analyzed O'Neill's use of the following aspects of the problem of libidinal cathexis: the problem of the possessive spirit with its correlative problem of sex antagonism, the problem of the creative spirit, the problem of man's psychic salvation, that is, a satisfactory adjustment and integration of personality.

In the first chapter, devoted to the problem of the possessive spirit, we point out the various manifestations of this problem. Of first importance was feminine possessiveness and its counterpart, man's desire to be possessed as by a mother. This included the antagonism of the sexes,

1. Cf. the reference to Halford Luccock, supra, p. ii.

especially as that antagonism was motivated by the conflict between the smothering subjective possessiveness of the woman and the more or less objective possessiveness of the male. Second came the psychic possession of persons by an exterior force -- as, for example, the sea in Anna Christie. Third was the drive to the possession of material things or greed, which for the psychoanalyst has its basis in libidinal cathexis.

After analyzing the plays concerned with this problem, we discovered that O'Neill had condemned extreme possessiveness by demonstrating that its consequences were in the majority of instances tragic.

Only four of the plays treated were not tragic in outcome; only two of them were concerned with greed, the externalized form of extreme possessiveness; only one with the possession of persons by an exterior force.

Implicit in this condemnation of possessiveness was the suggestion that self-sacrifice offered a much better means to accomplishing an adjustment between individual and individual and between the individual and his environment.

The problem of the creative spirit was the subject of the second chapter. It was defined as consisting of those conflicts, frustrations and inhibitions encountered in such sublimative channels of the libidinal cathexis as artistic

endeavor, childbearing and rearing. Another manifestation, less obviously sexual, was the desire to have an identification with either a group or a natural force.

The effect of the death of a child, whether naturally or artificially caused, was cited as an example of what repression of these secondary channels meant to the individual thus afflicted.

Nine of the plays considered in this chapter embodied a negative demonstration of what happens when the creative spirit goes unfulfilled. The characters of these plays met tragedy as a result of their inability to find an outlet for their creative urges. This tragedy was either catastrophic or gradual; in either case, their refusal to accept the realities of human existence and make lives for themselves that furthered rather than prevented growth was responsible.

Seven plays illustrated, usually by implication, what the reward was for facing the problem of life and dealing with it courageously, creatively.

Three were mixed in meaning -- two of them, while tragic, were relieved by a partial success in realizing the creative impulse. The third was perhaps the most tragic play in the whole chapter, since its chief figure had a keen perception of the need of affirming, of accepting life but was kept by his pride of self-sufficiency

from giving himself up to life; the consciousness of his insight turned upon him and he failed to become a creator.

The content of these plays clearly originated in O'Neill's consciousness of the need of the creative spirit for fulfillment. Also indicated was his belief that an accepting love of life and a self-sacrificing love between man and woman were fundamental to this integrally important fulfillment.

The problem of how man^g may save himself was taken up in the third chapter. It was emphasized that this problem was continually met in life and that finding a solution for it was philosophy's chief goal. It was considered to extend beyond the ethical into all reaches of knowledge. The frequency and human importance of the problem was given as the basis for O'Neill's interest in it.

He had indicated three ways by which adjustment might be made. These were through moral re-evaluation, through faith and through love.

Moral re-evaluation meant making those behavior patterns or ways of thinking habitual that had consummatory consequences and the discarding of those the results of which denied rather than affirmed life. In this throwing-out would be included those traditional and customary way which were no longer efficacious.

Faith was the trust of the individual in a power outside and more than himself, ranging from the vague feeling of something beyond to the definite declaration of faith in a forgiving and loving God.

Love signified both the fundamental relationship between the sexes and that sympathetic understanding and tolerant affection which an individual must feel for those around him if he is to live life fully.

Moral re-evaluation was documented in only one of the plays analyzed in this chapter. And even here, the man's decision not to abide by the tenets of the double standard was much more due to his love than to any sense of the deficiencies or need for revision of this moral code.

Faith was predominant in one play, in which the death of one character was assuaged by his deep confidence in something beyond that would recompense him for all the sacrifices he made in life.

In three plays love was emphasized. The effect its presence or lack had upon the characters involved was a clear demonstration of its importance.

Love and faith were represented as intertwined and mutually interdependent in two plays. In one it was pointed out that faith in a forgiving and loving God heightens and dignifies the love between man and woman

and in the other, faith was man's trust that love of life would bring its own reward.

Two plays involved unsuccessful attempts to discover the meaning of life. In one, the failure was only partial because the man discovered the role of suffering as a contrast to happiness and thus as a means of bringing man to rejoice in life and the goodness of God. In the other, complete failure was the result of the individual's obsessed desire to return to an intrauterine existence. Here O'Neill is saying that we must meet life as adults and that retention of childhood dependence is a denial of life, a hindrance to the development of the individual.

For O'Neill, faith and love are opposite sides of the same coin, each valid enough by itself but finding its highest meaning in its realized conjunction with the other.

Clearly through faith and love would be O'Neill's answer to the question How can life be justified, how can it be made livable?

It seems only too obvious that a writer whose purpose was chiefly melodramatic would be incapable of expressing such an answer to the basic question of man's existence. The content we have discovered in the plays is, likewise, much above the level of the sensational and of such a

quality that it cannot be duplicated in shocking or obscene literature, either dramatic or of other kinds.

As an additional warrant for our conception of O'Neill's high mission as a dramatist, we have his¹ own statement:

Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man; I am only concerned with the relation between God and man.

It should be remembered that O'Neill's conception of God, especially in the later plays, is that the Godhead serves as a symbol for affirming and accepting attitudes toward life, toward the world. This statement, taken in conjunction with the content of the plays, reveals that O'Neill is a modern moralist.

He is modern in that he does not condemn ways of acting as evil in themselves; he only demonstrates the fallacy of such ways by showing their results. He is moralistic in his interest in discovering new and better ways of living; in developing patterns of behavior that enrich and free the individual rather than destroy and imprison him; in discarding, in casting out those ways which are inefficacious.

1. Krutch, Joseph Wood, Introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. xvii.

All in all, we may consider that O'Neill is at least endeavoring to perform the highest function of the artist; he is trying to beat new paths, to discover new meanings in life, to bring new immediacies, new consummations within the reach of man. And we would say, after our study of his works from the standpoint of libidinal cathexis, that his use of psychoanalytic categories has helped rather than hindered him in his attempt to achieve new and unique insights into the problem of life.

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