

THE PLAYS

SOME IMPORTANT THEMES AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

1) The sense of belonging.

Everybody wishes to have his place in the world, to be accepted as a member of society. The sense of belonging makes man feel secure while the lack of it makes him feel out of place, unwanted, alone and insecure. This sense of belonging is less noticeable in Europe than in America. The United States is a comparatively new country whose population is composed of people from all parts of Europe and the world. It is a great pool in which a new government, a new democracy and a new sentiment have been developed. Americans feel sharply the importance of the sense of belonging. They want to feel at home and it is very easy to understand why each group clings tenaciously to its own character. The first thing to be established is their place in society, their sense of security; the lack of which means loneliness. It must have been abject misery for a man like Eugene O'Neill to feel apart and out of place in his own home. In addition to his hyper-sensitive nature he also had every reason to feel the lack of this sense of belonging. So in O'Neill's plays it is not difficult to find the theme of man's agonizing loneliness, the sense of defeat, the lack of security, his identification with nature, his searching and yearning for the sense of belonging and place in society and of being doomed or cursed to remain alone, above and

apart, always a stranger who never feels at home nor wanted.

The Hairy Ape reveals clearly O'Neill's lack of the sense of belonging even to the point of identifying himself with the principal character. Yank Smith, the stoker, at first is quite satisfied with his job, he feels he is the one who controls the main engine and makes it run:

...dat's my fav'rite climate. I eat it up! I git fat on it... It's me makes it hot! It's me makes it roar! It's me makes it move! ...I'm steel-steel-steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it... (Scene I, ll. 290—, "The Hairy Ape").

The stoker symbolizes the man of our era, the worker dependent on the machine. But his pride of being "the muscles in the steel" lasts as long as he is not aware of another class of people—the capitalists. The first sight of an aristocratic woman down in the stokehole while he is behaving like an animal—half naked and busying himself in order to feed the furnace with the coal, swearing all the time—shatters all his old belief of harmony with nature.

The contrast between them shocks Yank, he sees her "...like a white apparition in the full light from the open furnace doors..." At first it occurs to him that she is a ghost. She represents the other world unknown to him. Her expression makes Yank feel insulted, in some unknown fashion, in the very heart of his pride. His firm belief of belonging to the stokehole wavers. Even though he tries to convince himself that he is superior, saying:

---I'll show her I'm better'n her, if she on'y knew it. I belong and she don't, see! I move and she's dead! Twenty-five knots a hour, dat's me! Dat carries her but I make dat. She's on'y baggage--- (Scene IV)

It is no use because he can not forget that to another human being he is just a horrible and disgusting beast. Yank begins his desperate search for his place in society—on Fifth Avenue, in the city prison, in the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) and at the zoo; everywhere he goes he receives the same thing—"punches". It is the symbol of the rebuffs every man suffers in a universe where he finds himself an alien. His attempt "to belong" is also his struggle with himself and with his own fate.

Eugene O'Neill himself told a friend, Elizabeth Sergeant, that The Hairy Ape was an "unconscious autobiography".⁵⁹ He illuminated the play by his own increasing sense of not belonging in a hostile, materialistic world. The outline of the play is based on ^{an} incident which had been in O'Neill's mind for some time when his seaman friend Driscoll, who was a stoker and was always proud of his animal superiority and was in complete harmony with his limited conception of the universe, killed himself by jumping overboard from a liner. O'Neill had brooded over the reason of his suicide and later came to the conclusion that his sense of belonging and pride of his strength and capacity must have been shattered. O'Neill chose Yank Smith, a powerful and illiterate stoker who scorns religion, home, bourgeois standards, everything but his satisfaction in his brute labor, to represent mankind's frustration in a scientific and industrial age.

The German playwright, Gerhart Hauptmann, once said

in an interview in Berlin with the "New York Herald Tribune":
"The Hairy Ape is one of the really great social plays of our time".⁶⁰ Hence one can not overlook the personal and psychological problems. O'Neill pointed out in an interview with a staff member of the "New York Herald Tribune," March 16, 1924:

The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, --- The subject here is --- man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt "to belong".⁶¹

O'Neill himself tried to find where he belonged; he used his plays as vehicles to convey his tragic conception of life. The manner in which Yank Smith goes back to primitive life--the ape--and finds that he does not belong there either, was ironical. Even the ape which Yank addresses as "brother" and hopes to be welcomed, rejects him. Through Yank, O'Neill voiced his own belief that in life he did not belong anywhere. Yank's last words are his own: "I'm trou. Even him didn't tink I belonged,--- Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?" (Scene VIII).

This suggests that a human being can not find communion with god or beast, and perhaps it is only in death that there is any hope of belonging. Any victory man might wring from life is an ironic one. O'Neill himself said

about Yank in an interview with Miss Mullet of "The American Magazine":

...Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But, apparently, very few people get this. ...His struggle to 'belong', to find the thread that will make him a part of the fabric of Life—we are all struggling to do just that. One idea I had in writing this play was to show that the missing thread, literally 'the tie that binds', is our understanding of one another.⁶²

Pressed to state his "fundamental scheme of life; a creed, a philosophy", he replied:

---tragedy, I think, has the meaning the Greeks gave it. To them it brought exaltation, an urge toward life and ever more life. It roused them to deeper spiritual understandings and released them from the petty greeds of everyday existence. When they saw a tragedy on the stage they felt their own hopeless hopes ennobled in art.⁶³

From his early sea plays such as The Moon of the Caribbees one still finds this sense clearly in his identification with nature. The play breaks away from dramatic conventions by having no plot at all; it is a vivid description of pure poetic mood.

✓ The identification with nature is also found in Long Day's Journey Into Night O'Neill expressed his own yearning to find harmony with nature.

Edmund Tyrone, the younger brother in this play, in whom O'Neill portrayed himself, said:

---I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I

belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of man, to Life itself! To God, ... Then another time, ...when I was lookout on the crow's nest in the dawn watch. A calm sea, that time. ... No sound of man ... Dreaming, ...feeling alone, and above, and apart, ... Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams! ... For a second you see...and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! ...then...you are alone, lost in the fog again, ... (Act IV, Scene I, "Long Day's Journey Into Night").

✓ O'Neill thought it was a mistake that he had been born a human being. He wondered if he should not have been born a fish or possibly a seagull. This is expressed in Long Day's Journey Into Night, and also in The Great God Brown where Dion Antony, in his lowest moment, asks himself "...why the devil was I ever born at all?" (Prologue)

Also contributing to the sense of insecurity in his mind were his unhappy school days, his refusal to receive Communion, his loss of faith in God and his suspension from Princeton University. His heavy drinking reflected his unsettled state of mind and his feeling of insecurity. His shyness was caused by the feeling that he was different from others. The best example for this can be seen in the principal character of The Great God Brown, Dion Antony. Dion has to wear a mask of a sensual and mocking young Pan he creates to protect his spiritual and hyper-sensitive inner self from the outside world. The real personality he hides behind the mask is shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep

sadness and suffering bewilderment. His difference from other ordinary people makes him afraid, as he expresses:

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? ... Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? ... Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched? (Prologue to "The Great God Brown").

Dion's loneliness and his feeling out of place makes him feel like a stranger in the modern civilization. The other important play which reflects clearly the author's subconscious self is Beyond the Horizon. The play was written at the time when his beloved mistress—Louise Bryant—left for Moscow with her husband John Reed, who was also his close friend. He was made miserable (and hurt) by her departure which was a great loss to him. Somehow the two protagonists in the play, Andrew and Robert Mayo, represented John Reed and himself. Andrew is a practical, and down-to-earth farmer while Robert is a dreamer and romantic poet who longs to take a journey by sea in search of "The secret which is hidden beyond the horizon". But the girl, Ruth, who is expected to marry Andrew and stay at the farm, decides that she loves Robert and makes him change his plan and stay home with her while his brother

Andrew takes his place by going to sea. Robert tries to console and convince himself that "...love must have been the secret—the secret that called to me from over the world's rim—the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me" (Act I, Scene I.) Robert's destiny is confined to a place and a task that are not his. It suggests that Eugene O'Neill was thinking about how John Reed had deprived him of his own right by taking Louise Bryant from him.

O'Neill also intended to portray the life of a dreamer who pursues his vision all over the world, apparently without success or a single completed deed in his life. At the same time O'Neill wanted to show through Robert his own dream and desire for a wandering life, a thing intangible but real and precious beyond compare, which he had made his own. But the technical difficulty of doing this proved enormous and led to something grimmer:⁶⁴ the tragedy of a man who looks over the horizon, who longs with his whole soul to depart on the quest but is doomed to die as a failure. O'Neill seemed to suggest that people always live by cherishing a precious but unattainable dream.

It is apparent that in this play there is also the antagonism between father and son which reflects O'Neill's own relationship with his father and also between himself and his three children.

His other plays like The Emperor Jones and The

Iceman Cometh show traces of the sense of not belonging. The main motivation of the central character in The Emperor Jones, Brutus Jones, a negro pullman porter and a murderer, is the lack of security and the sense of not belonging that drives him out of America to seek adventure in the West Indies. And for The Iceman Cometh —the cause of all the down-and-outers' pipe dreams and the way they stick together came from a lack of the sense of belonging.

2) His preoccupation with the past

Eugene O'Neill was preoccupied with his own past because of his feeling of certain guilt. Originally it stemmed from his conviction that his birth was not desired, therefore causing at least some unhappiness to his parents. He believed, from his early boyhood, that his mother felt despair over the fact of his birth. He was not to escape his share of his mother's guilt any more than his brother or father. The sense of guilt was also heightened by his hyper-sensitive nature and shadowed his whole life. It was in his subconscious mind all the time, the root deriving from his obsession that his birth was the reason for his mother's addiction to morphine.

Somehow this sense of guilt was his heritage; it was practically born in him. O'Neill belonged to Irish stock which believed in the doctrine of original sin and he was brought up to believe that a curse rests on all mankind. It is like the feeling of doom and the furies in the Greek sense. James O'Neill was a temperamental actor and his wife suffered in bringing O'Neill into the world.



O'Neill inherited the temperament and the suffering of his parents. Also the environment in which he grew up was not the right one for a child. He was subject to black moods of despair.

The preordained fate or the sense of doom or curse which those of Irish stock believe in is a pessimistic one contrary to the Buddhist doctrine of Karma. That is to say, when disaster comes, Buddhists are apt to be consoled by the inevitability which is implicit in the doctrine of Karma, while the Irish sense of doom turns the believers to despair.

✓ O'Neill adopted the idea of Greek tragedy that the future is predestined, that the curse was on his family and that it was doomed. His Long Day's Journey Into Night reveals bluntly this fact. It is a very intimate play. The sense of forgiveness and understanding which pervades it makes the play great. The reason for his attempt to expose his own family was expressed in a statement concerning life:

I love life. But I don't love life because it is pretty. ...I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness. In fact, I deny the ugliness entirely, for its vices are often nobler than its virtues, and nearly always closer to a revelation. ⁶⁵

If a person is to get at the meaning of life, he must learn to like the facts about himself—ugly as they may seem to his sentimental vanity—before he can lay hold on the truth behind the facts; and the truth is never ugly. ⁶⁶

The four haunted Tyrones in the play are his parents —James and Ella O'Neill, his brother Jamie and Eugène himself.

James Tyrone, like James O'Neill, comes from a very poor and superstitious Irish family, and believes that consumption is fatal. He is haunted by the threat of the poor house and cannot get away from the feeling of insecurity and poverty. Even after becoming a famous actor James Tyrone cannot help being very careful with his money. His sons think him very stingy and blame him for the harsh life they lead.

The tragedy of the family is not the lack of love but the inability to communicate their love that keeps each one of them alone and apart. All of them seem capable of feeling deep love. There is a kind of grudge or antagonism that urges them to torture each other and later regret it.

Mary Tyrone cannot accept the reality of life. She comes from a well-to-do family and wished to be a ~~nun~~ or a concert pianist. She wants to have a peaceful domestic life, but when she marries an actor she has to travel and cannot have a regular life which was the kind of life to which she was accustomed in her youth. She retreats into a dream world—her dope dream. She is with the rest of the family only in person, not in spirit.

Jamie, partly because of the accusation his mother makes against him and partly because of his feeling of guilt

that he caused the death of his baby brother, is torn between love and hatred for his younger brother Edmund. He introduces Edmund to all kinds of vices on the pretext that he does not want him to be a book-worm, but confesses when he is drunk that he does not want Edmund to be better than him.

Edmund Tyrone was the portrait O'Neill gave himself. Edmund became lonely because his mother did not want him. This was the cause of his heavy drinking.

The four members of the family are linked together by love, though a hopeless kind of love. They torment each other, following the 'love-hate' theory expounded by Strindberg. The family is haunted by a curse which prevented them from being happy.

This play indicates O'Neill's preoccupation with the past. Firstly, the name 'Edmund' which he chose for the character representing himself was the name of James O'Neill's second son who was born in 1884 and died of measles a year later. Eugene O'Neill believed with some resentment that he was born to take the place of Edmund. Another indication is Edmund's references to his experiences at sea, which can be easily recognized as O'Neill's own experiences and his impressions when he was a sailor. Yet another point is James O'Neill's belief that consumption is fatal and what Eugene O'Neill could never completely forgive his father was

James' asking the doctor's reassurance before consenting to Eugene's return to the family.⁶⁷ The theme of consumption figures largely in the play. The antagonism between father and son in the play shows clearly what had occupied O'Neill's mind when he wrote this play.

Carlotta, his third wife, said about this play:

O'Neill explained to me then that he had to write this play---because it was a thing that haunted him and he had to forgive whatever caused this in them [his mother and father and brother] and in himself--- I think he felt freer---it was his way of making peace with his family, and himself.⁶⁸

It is possible that because of the sordidly candid details Eugene O'Neill made in the revelation of his family secrets, especially his mother's addiction to drugs, that drove him to live a life of a guilt-ridden person and inspired him to create the character of Don Parritt in The Iceman Cometh. Parritt is a sadist, a young fellow who has sold his mother's life and anarchist movement to the police just because he hates her, and convinces himself that he did it just for the sake of money which he could spend on a whore. He is followed by his guilty conscience; he wants punishment which the law will not inflict on him. He has to take his own life as a self-punishment. He says: "It's worse if you kill someone and they have to go on living. I'd be glad of the chair! ... It's square me with myself". (Act IV).

His mother whom he betrays is put in prison which for

her is a living death, because her anarchist movement which was her pipe dream is destroyed. He feels much more guilty than the salesman Hickey who kills his wife and later allows himself to be led away by the detectives without any hesitation. What Parritt does is worse than murder, because his mother loves freedom and he puts her in jail instead. So Parritt cannot deceive himself that she finds peace or forgets what her son has done to her. There is no doubt that the character of Don Parritt is a symbolic representation of O'Neill himself; he was steeped in his own sense of guilt and betrayal, again linking him with the past.

All the characters in this play are like the living—dead whose present and future never exist but who live in the past and in their pipe dreams. To O'Neill "Life in itself is nothing." It was only the dream that kept man "fighting, willing—living"⁶⁹ He believed that people must have pipe dreams because it means the only hope that keeps them alive until death comes.

To O'Neill revenge is:

The subconscious motive for the individual's behavior with the rest of society. Revulsion drives a man to tell others of his sins ... It is the Furies within us that seek to destroy us.⁷⁰

He went on to express his idea concerning The Iceman Cometh in the following words: "In all my plays sin is punished and redemption takes place ... vice and virtue cannot live side by side ..."⁷¹

Hickey, the salesman, is driven into murdering his wife, Evelyn, by the sense of guilt that she makes him feel. She always believes that he will never do wicked things again, she never complains even though he brings venereal disease upon her. This makes him feel rotten and humiliated. In the last act Hickey describes the reason for his crime: "All I made her suffer, and all the guilt she made me feel, and how I hated myself" (Act IV).

The more she is good to him the more he hates himself for the wrong he has done her.

His guilty conscience keeps on piling up. He begins to hate her pipe dream which is merely her faith in Hickey, saying:

I couldn't forgive her for forgiving me. I even caught myself hating her for making me hate myself so much. There's a limit to the guilt you can feel and the forgiveness and the pity you can take! You have to begin blaming someone else, too ... (Act IV).

Agnes, O'Neill's second wife whom he deserted, saw evidence of another force in the play, namely the kind of love shown by Hickey's wife contains a mixture of understanding and forgiveness which in excess, can make a man feel suffocated and later drives him into destroying that kind of affection.⁷²

There is a parallel in that O'Neill himself caused unhappiness and suffering to both of his former wives—Agnes and Kathleen—which made him feel as if he were being

hounded by the Furies, another case of the past catching up with him.

The theme of self-punishment as the result of a guilty conscience occurred prominently in his most important play based on Greek mythology, Mourning Becomes Electra. One is left with the feeling that the characters in the play, especially the members of the Mannon family, are not free from their guilt begotten in the past.

O'Neill also wanted to convey the sense of Greek tragedy to a modern audience, so he adapted the Electra myth into a modern tragedy. Instead of explaining that man is a victim of fate or "harmatia", he tried to clarify it by using psychological analysis.

In one of his innumerable attempts to explain and justify the form of expression to which he irrevocably committed himself in the summer of 1917, he said:

I have an innate feeling of exultance about tragedy. The tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. What I am after is to get an audience to leave the theatre with an exultant feeling from seeing somebody on the stage facing life, fighting against the eternal odds, not conquering, but perhaps inevitably being conquered. The individual life is made significant just by the struggle.⁷³

The play can also be termed a conflict between puritanism, represented by Lavinia Mannon, and earthy love, represented by her mother, Christine Mannon. Like Agamemnon, Ezra Mannon comes home victorious, in the first part of the trilogy, to find doom threatening his house. He can sense

his own death and says: "...It's something uneasy troubling my mind—as if something in me was listening, watching, waiting for something to happen..."(Act IV "Homecoming").

It might be that his wife's infidelity and her plot to kill him play unconsciously on his nerves. O'Neill also attempted a psychological explanation of Christine's resentment against her husband, namely her disillusionment on her wedding night and the inability of Ezra to reconcile her romantic love with reality. It is understandable that she turns her devotion to Orin, her son, and later to Adam Brant, her lover. The son, having an Oedipus complex, loves Christine and becomes his father's rival.

The second part of Mourning Becomes Electra, which is called "The Hunted", shows how Lavinia uses her brother's affection for Christine and his jealousy of the lover, Adam Brant, as means to destroy both Christine and Adam, in order to avenge her father's murder.

The third part of the trilogy, "the Haunted", deals with the inevitable retribution that comes to Orin and Lavinia. Here O'Neill expressed his conception of man being born in sin which he has to expiate. Man cannot escape from his past and is always haunted by it. The two characters, after their headlong flight, have to come back to be punished. Lavinia at first hopes that she can escape the past and take refuge in marriage but in the end she finds out that she is not allowed to be happy; she must be punished for the death of

her mother. Orin shifts the love he had for his mother to Lavinia, and later decides that the best way of self-punishment is to commit suicide.

In the last part of the trilogy, Orin is sharply aware of the predestination that runs through his family when he says to Lavinia :

Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother? That's the evil destiny out of the past I have n't dared predict! I'm the Mannon you're chained to! ... (Act II. "The Haunted")

Orin realizes that neither of them is free to love, he says :

... The only love I can know now is the love of guilt for guilt which breeds more guilt—until you get so deep at the bottom of hell there is no lower you can sink and you rest there in peace! (Act III. "The Haunted")

Lavinia at last yields to the fact that she is not to escape her share of the guilt. She condemns herself to the worst kind of punishment—to live among the dead.

O'Neill's own idea of self-punishment and his pre-occupation with the past are also expressed through the characterisation of Nina Leeds, the heroine of Strange Interlude. Nina is haunted forever by the past in the form of her lover's ghost. Her guilty conscience, for not being able to give herself to him on the last night before he went away to his death, haunts her and drives her to punish herself by sacrificing her body to wounded war veterans. After finding out that this kind of self-

destruction cannot cure her she is more determined than ever to punish herself by marrying a man she does not love. She hopes to regain her sense of security and contentment from life through his love and her own motherhood. Each step she takes leads to another disaster.

In The Emperor Jones, the principal character, Brutus Jones is trapped by the crimes he has committed in the past. It comes back to him as a series of apparitions to haunt and follow him in every step he takes. He can not escape or get rid of it no matter how far he flies into the dark forest.

Another way in which O'Neill expressed his guilty conscience is to put the blame on other factors. This is shown in Anna Christie. The father, Chris Christopherson, tries to diminish his sense of guilt in deserting his wife and daughter by saying that the devil sea kept on calling him back against his will.

In A Moon for the Misbegotten, the guilt-ridden hero succeeds in destroying himself by losing the will to live; he drinks in order to "blank out" so that his guilty conscience could not grip his heart. Even the true and selfless love of a woman could not save him from the state of spiritual crumbling. The wrong he has done to his mother keeps on haunting him: "There is no present or future—only the past happening over and over again—now. You can't get away from it..." (Act III).

O'Neill expressed his own feeling when he looked at his mother in her casket. The undertaker had made up Ella in such a way that he could not reconcile the face with his mother's; his feeling was of one of bewilderment and self-pity, as James Tyrone, Jr. in the play says:

---I can never forget—the undertakers, and her body in a coffin with her face made up--- She looked young and pretty like someone I remembered meeting long ago. Practically a stranger. To whom I was a stranger. Cold and indifferent---(Act III).

When James Tyrone, Jr., finds he can no longer get drunk in order to escape his past and has to confront with reality, he comes to seek consolation in Josie's love, yearns to be reassured that he is forgiven because Josie is like his mother—simple—kind and pure at heart. And for a night, through her love, he can find peace. But even Josie realizes that he is really 'dead' inside—beyond resurrection and can only wish him to have his wish and die in his sleep soon—to rest in forgiveness and peace. There is nothing more she can do about it.

It is the same with Cornelius Melody in A Touch of the Poet who clings desperately to his glorious past, and when he is forced to face reality, commits spiritual suicide.

3) The Women in his plays

The women in O'Neill's plays are rather weakly drawn in comparison with his male characters. This is due to his own experiences in life with certain types of women. In the earlier part of his life, O'Neill for the most part felt at ease with only the lower-class type of women because at that time he was acquainted only with this type, so he did not have much opportunity to make a thorough study of women in general.

One type frequently portrayed by O'Neill is the "Bad Woman" or prostitute whom he romanticized beyond reality. Anna Christie presents a touching but almost conventional love story written in a naturalistic style which on the surface one might mistake for a romantic play of the sea with almost a happy ending, with a former prostitute as heroine. To the average reader, Anna appears pathetic; O'Neill made his audience feel that she is not altogether responsible for her bad name. She is as good as any other woman and is a victim of circumstances. Anna herself accepts the decree of fate and does not blame her father or anybody else, telling her father:

Don't bawl about it. There ain't nothing to forgive, any way. It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we yust get mixed in wrong, that's all" (Act. IV).

She is the only one who knows exactly what she wants,



and one is left with the feeling that she will get it. Her love for a stoker, Mat Burke, makes her decide to reveal the truth about her past no matter what will happen. The motive behind her confession is honesty.

The three tarts in The Iceman Cometh are almost of the same type as Anna—kind at heart, honest and understanding.

Both Margie and Pearl, the two younger ones, are sentimental, good-natured and contented with life, their attitude toward the pimp, Rocky, is like that of two affectionate sisters toward a bullying brother whom they like to spoil.

The third girl, Cora, shows that inspite of her hard life she can sympathize with others. She is the one who cries when she hears Hickey's heart broken story. And in answer to Hickey's remark about the whores who are able to listen to men's dirty jokes and can laugh with them—she utters her true feeling: "Jees, all de lousy jokes I've had to listen and pretend was funny !" (Act IV)

Another example is the character of Cybel in The Great God Brown . O'Neill described her as "an unmoved idol of Mother-Earth". Cybel is an understanding female a man would like to turn to in times of despair. Dion Antony finds his wife's loyalty and virtue inadequate and unsatisfying because she loves only his mask and could not accept his real self; he turns to seek consolation and understanding in Cybel. She is the only one who can see through his mask that he is pure

and spiritual and sad, and that he has to hide behind his mask to protect himself from the cruelty of the world. In assuming the meaning of life she says "When you got to love to live it's hard to love living" (Act I, Scene III). She thinks that man is her child and is very sad when she knows Dion is going to die. She asks wonderingly: "What's the good of bearing children? What's the use of giving birth to death?" (Act II, Scene I)

This tendency may be the result of the fact that O'Neill himself usually associated with lower-class women who were not entirely bad or at least were kind to him. O'Neill found them to be capable of showing loyalty, kindness and even love to someone who is nice to them. It is natural that O'Neill's shyness, politeness, sensitivity and helplessness were very touching and appealing to women in general. And to women of the profession he never showed any kind of contempt nor inflicted an insult on them as other men usually do; that is why he always received the best from them. O'Neill was worldly in experience, yet naive in its application to his own life; he could also be touchingly helpless and a victim of self-pity, and this naturally appealed to a woman's maternal instinct. This explains why he hardly ever saw the worse side of these women.

The second type of female characters in O'Neill's plays are either too good or too bad to be true. Evelyn, the

wife of the salesman—Theodore Hickman (Hickey) in The Iceman Cometh —is too good, too sympathetic and too full of forgiveness that she humiliates her own husband and makes him hate himself so much that he decides to kill her. She clings to her firm faith that Hickey will reform and will never do any of the bad things again. Every time he comes to her full of remorse for having yielded to temptation while he has been away from her, she assures him that "--- it's the last time --- You'll never do it again" (Act IV). His self-loathing, in the end, turns him against her. Evelyn has too much sweetness, love, pity and forgiveness, so that she is not convincing or true to life.

Josie Hogan in A Moon for the Misbegotten, a New London farmer's daughter, is typical of O'Neill's female characters. She is the symbol of Mother-Earth, strong, big, peaceful and capable of giving comfort to men just the same as Cybel in The Great God Brown. Josie is conscious of her unattractiveness and makes fun of herself. She, like Abbie Putnum in Desire Under the Elms, and like Sara Melody in A Touch of the Poet, sets out to seduce the man she wants primarily for materialistic reasons; but at the end these three women find themselves trapped by their own emotions, and are overwhelmed by their selfless love.

Josie, with her fierce, possessive and maternal

tenderness, is determined to find out why the man she loves (Jim Tyrone) "--- acts like he's hard and shameless to get back at life when it's tormenting him" (Act I), and gives him all her love and sympathy, hoping to help him regain his will to live. But when it is clear that even her true love cannot save him, she wants him to forget what has happened between them so that he will not be ashamed that he wants her love only to comfort his own sorrow over the past. She is proud of it and does not mind even to be forgotten afterward. Unlike Abbie Putnum, Josie is not beautiful but "more powerful than any but an exceptionally strong man, able to do the manual labor of two ordinary men. But there is no mannish quality about her. She is all woman". (Act I). Abbie is

buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality--- unsettled, untamed, desperate quality--- (Part I : Scene IV)

Abbie uses her beauty as a ladder to reach her goal, firstly to own the farm and secondly to own Eben. The main motive that drives her to marry the old man Ephraim Cabot is greed. She is seductive and cunning, uses her maternal instinct to win the love of her impulsive step-son. In Desire Under the Elms O'Neill's Oedipus complex is clearly shown. Dr. Hamilton, a psychoanalyst who thoroughly psychoanalyzed O'Neill, said "---Gene told me he had no trouble understanding that he hated and loved his father, and that he was suffering from an

Oedipus complex"⁷⁴

Abbie, who is lustful and calculating, approaches Eben through his melancholic love for his dead mother. This is realistic because young Eben defies his father and thinks that Ephraim had cheated his mother and slaved her to death. To Eben something should be done to take revenge for her. Abbie then shows him she understands his love for his mother and promises to take his mother's place and be everything his mother was to him; she even tells him that his mother's ghost wants him to love her because it will be a vengeance on Ephraim.

In another play, The Straw, O'Neill drew a portrait of a woman who lives only for others. Eileen Carmody, the heroine of the play, works so hard in order to keep house for her father and little brothers and sisters that she contracts tuberculosis. Again, at the sanitarium, she goes out of her way to help, and encourage the man she loves to become a writer. She puts all her faith and happiness in love alone, and when her selfless love is not returned she loses the will to live. O'Neill idealized this kind of women to the point that it becomes unconvincing.

Another important type of female character in O'Neill's work is the introspective type. This is exemplified by Emma Crosby in Diff'rent. One may term the play a definite study

of a woman's psychology. Emma is more or less like Lavinia Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra. She has a conventional code of love. She and Lavinia somehow represent the puritan frigidity; they try to suppress their sexual instincts so that when they can no longer do so their own passions destroy them. Emma has a firm belief that her fiancé should be different from other men and should do no wrong. After finding out that he is by no means different, she rejects him and remains unmarried until she is an old maid of fifty years old. Then she could not help making a fool of herself by falling in love with a twenty-year-old boy. Grief-stricken on finding out that the boy is only after her money and making her the laughing-stock of the village, she decides to hang herself.

Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra represents the same kind of stern puritanical woman who scorns the emotional love of her mother. After finding out about her mother's love-affair with Adam, she threatens Christine urging her to give him up saying - "I'd like to see you punished for your wickedness !--- It's for Father's (sake) --- It's my first duty to protect him from you !" (Act II—Homecoming)

When Christine suggests that she should marry Peter, Lavinia answers "You needn't hope to get rid of me that way. I'm not marrying anyone. I've got my duty to Father" (Act III—Homecoming). After some time Lavinia's pent-up emotion is let loose, it drives her into nymphomania. Her mother Christine,

on the contrary, is full of earthy love, sinful and sensuous. She cares only for her lover, defying Lavinia's threats, saying :

--- if you told your father, I'd have to go away with Adam. He'd be mine still --- Suppose I go off openly with Adam ! --- And what if I were disgraced myself ? I'd have the man I love, at least ! (Act II---Homecoming)

In declaring her love for Adam Christine says "--- I loved you too much. I wanted you every possible moment we could steal ! --- I prayed that he (Ezra Mannon) should be killed in the war ---" Christine persuades Adam to cooperate in her plan to murder Ezra. But her motive in pursuing her love is different from Abbie Putnum's; she does not go after money or fame but after freedom to maintain the new love she has just discovered.

The guilt-ridden Nina Leeds, the heroine of Strange Interlude, is a fascinating she-devil. O'Neill bestowed on her all that is both purest and blackest in Woman's soul. At first she is an innocent lover of a football hero, Gordon Shaw, and lets him go to World War I to die without possessing her. Later she becomes a guilt-obsessed fiancée who seeks to punish herself by sacrificing her body to any maimed soldiers who need her. All along she is an antagonistic daughter who blames her father for being the cause of her guilty conscience. After realizing that this kind of self-destruction can not cure her, she decides to take another step---by marrying a young man, Sam Evans, in order to have a baby. She believes that through

motherhood she can regain her measure of contentment from life. She becomes an unbelievably self-sacrificing wife to Sam who needs her. The next moment the same Nina can turn into a murderess. She has to get rid of her unborn baby, which is her only salvation and only means to enable her to love Sam, because she finds out that there is insanity in his family. Still she cannot leave him for feeling responsible that it might drive him into madness. His mother suggests that it is necessary for her to have another baby by some other man since it is the only way to give him self-confidence. Nina felt trapped again; she could not leave him and at the same time has to pretend to love him inspite of herself. The feeling of guilt in the form of Gordon keeps on haunting her. The next step Nina takes is becoming an ardent mistress to Dr. Edmund Darrell in order to present Sam with the baby they both long for; she finds herself loving and wanting to monopolize Darrell. To Darrell she plays the part of a tantalizing lover under whose spell Darrell is condemned to live. Later she becomes a possessive mother who hates her son's girl. She expresses her egoism by saying: "I couldn't find a better husband than Sam --- and I couldn't find a better lover than Ned ... I need them both to be happy". (Part II, Act VI).

Here again the son's resentment towards his real father is the reflection of O'Neill's own grudge against his father. It is the general theme that runs through almost every one of his plays.

4) Greed

O'Neill's personal opinion of Greed is that it is a destructive force, leading to man's downfall. The theme of greed as appears in his work is a kind of reflection of his father's desperation to earn "good money" even though it meant that he must sell his dramatic ability by playing the same role more than five thousand times (5678 times as Monte Cristo). James O'Neill's betrayal of his artistic ideal for the sake of money had a tremendous effect on Eugene O'Neill and confirmed his conviction of the danger of greed. So it is understandable that greed is one of the early themes that came to be adopted by him.

Ile is his earliest play where the main motive of the protagonist, Captain Keeney, is greed. It also shows a conflict of human emotions. The captain of the steam whaler refuses to turn for home, after spending two years in the Arctic ocean with only a "measly four hundred barrel of ile". His crazy vanity makes him torture his wife into madness; he is determined to fill the ship with "ile" before taking her home.

In another play, The Rope, O'Neill portrayed a miserly farmer, Abraham Bentley, who hides his gold pieces from his wife and son. Greed to own the hidden money drives

his son, his daughter and her husband to plot against him. The ironic twist comes when the innocent grandchild of the farmer finds the hidden treasure by chance and throws all the gold coins one by one into the ocean as a childish game.

O'Neill also showed how the pursuit of a phantom treasure by man can drive him into insanity, in the play Where the Cross is Made, which later was expanded into the full-length play Gold. Captain Bartlett's shipwreck on a desert island leads him to discover a chestful of trinkets that he believes to be genuine treasure. The captain determines, after his rescue and arrival home, to go back for the treasure. He mortgages his house and builds a ship, sends the three crewmen who were with him on the island to fetch the treasure. The ship is wrecked again but the captain, who cannot accept the fact, goes on waiting for their return. His son, driven also by greed, gives another man \$ 2000 to take the captain to a sanitarium. But at the end the son inherits the father's madness and begins to have the same hallucination, seeing the ghost ship and its crew. He also determines to set out and seek for the treasure.

Greed also hastens The Emperor Jones to his end. His greed for money and power makes him extort all he can from the foolish and superstitious natives of an island in the West Indies, who are his "subjects", until they can not

stand it anymore. Brutus Jones says "It don't git me nothin' to do missionary work for de Baptist Church. I'se after de coin, an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for 'de time bein'". (Scene I). The natives revolt and in the end shoot him.

The theme of greed is most prominent in Desire Under the Elms . In this play greed is the elemental characteristic. Abbie Putnum, a thirty-five-year-old woman marries Ephraim Cabot, a man of seventy-five, for the sake of his farm and home. His two greedy elder sons are so eager to inherit the farm that they wish their father's death or even to have him declared insane by the court. There is again the antagonism between father and son which is an obsession with Eugene O'Neill. The father is a miser in the eyes of his sons and especially the youngest--Eben. He thinks Ephraim had caused his mother's premature death from overwork. The father intends to spite the sons by marrying again and tells them he will live for another twenty-five years. The two elder sons give up waiting for their share of the farm, start out to search for gold in California. Eben then buys from them their share of the farm for three hundred dollars, and makes the two elder brothers sign the agreement giving the farm to him alone. Eben's hatred for his father makes him want to possess everything belonging to

Ephraim, not only the farm but also his wife. He feels that his father is an enemy who had robbed his mother of her farm and also robbed him of a mother. He blames his elder brothers for failing to come to his mother's defense,—it might be that this is similar to O'Neill's own sense of guilt in being unable to help his mother out of the position in which she was trapped. The other thing worth noticing is that Simeon, one of the elder brothers in the play, reminisces about how at the age of twenty-one he had lost a wife named Jenn. Jenkins was the maiden name of O'Neill's first wife when he was about the same age. The fact that Eben and Abbie kill their baby also reflects O'Neill's rejection of his own son.

The greed that possesses Abbie's heart, makes her, (When she hears that Ephraim is thinking kindly about Eben) say that Eben desires her, in order to turn the father against the son. She wants him to change his mind about leaving Eben the farm. The main motives of the play seem to be selfishness, greed and lust. Ephraim at first intends to leave the farm to his son only because it will make him feel that the farm is still his own after his death because a son is his own flesh and blood. And it is also the desire to possess the property that urges Abbie to have a son of her own—thus leading to adultery.

5) Violence and death

O'Neill's attitude regarding violence and death can be summed up in his own words—written to Mary Clark, his Gaylord nurse, in 1923:

I know you're impervious to what they are pleased to call my 'pessimism', I mean, that you can see behind that superficial aspect of my work to the truth. I'm far from being a pessimist. I see life as a gorgeously—ironical, beautifully—indifferent, splendidly—suffering bit of chaos, the tragedy of which gives Man a tremendous significance, while without his losing fight with fate he would be a tepid, silly animal. I say 'losing fight' only symbolically, for the brave individual always wins. Fate can never conquer his—or her—spirit. So you see I'm no pessimist. On the contrary, in spite of my scars, I'm tickled to death with life" 75

In fact, O'Neill himself lived in violent surroundings so that it became very much a part of his life, especially in the days of his sea wandering. He saw much violence and sudden death then. These colorful years crammed his mind with scenes of a raw, strange ugliness and passion. He also used to see his mother running and screaming in the street, driven half out of her mind by her craving for morphine.

Once a friend named Norman Winston said about O'Neill :

Gene was interested in hearing about other people's suffering—not for the personal anecdote, but because the individual's story represented suffering in general 76

One may see clearly that in twenty-five of his forty-four published plays a total of forty characters suffer violent or unnatural deaths. A psychiatrist, Dr. Hamilton, after six weeks of analysing him, came to the conclusion that he had a "death wish". 77

Once when he was questioned by the former city editor of the "New London Telegraph", Malcolm Mollan, who was assigned to interview O'Neill for the article entitled "Why does a man write plays with tragic endings?" O'Neill said:

A soul is being born, and when a soul enters, tragedy enters with it ... I love life ... I love human beings as individuals ... I can always understand and not judge them ... To me there are no good people or bad people, just people. The same with deeds. 'Good' and 'evil' are stupidities, ... I am a dramatist, that is the answer. What I see everywhere in life is drama--human beings in conflict with other human beings, with themselves, with fate... I just set down what I feel in terms of life and let the facts speak whatever language they may to my audience. It is just life that interests me as a thing in itself. The why and wherefore. I haven't attempted to touch on yet 78

✓ O'Neill's preoccupation with death started early in the plays written in 1913 such as Bound East for Cardiff, his first major one-act play.

The principal character named Yank is seriously injured in an accident on board a tramp steamer bound for Cardiff. He lies dying in his bunk. He has but a forlorn hope to receive

medical treatment when the ship arrives at Cardiff. Since there is no one on the ship who can save his life he dies on the way. Before doing so, he talks reminiscently to his best friend about old times—and how empty and tough a sailor's life is :

This sailor life ain't much to cry about leavin'—just one ship after another, hard work, small pay, and bum grub; and when we git into port just a drunk endin' up in a fight, and all your money gone, and then ship away again. Never meetin' no nice people; never gittin' outa sailor-town, hardly, in any port; travelin' all over the world and never seein' none of it; without no one to care whether your're alive or dead. (With a bitter smile). There ain't much in all that that'd make yuh sorry to lose it, Drisc.

↳ To O'Neill the dark implacable sea is the symbol of the cruel, relentless 'force' that controls man's destiny.

Another of his early plays which ends in violence is The Moon of the Caribbees. Although this play is mainly a poetic description of a group of lonely seamen who dance, sing and court women under a West Indian moon, at the end, in a drunken riot, one of the sailors is stabbed.

In The Emperor Jones, Brutus Jones is chased into the dark forest and, when too exhausted to run for his life anymore, is shot by a native of the island he used to rule.

Yank, in The Hairy Ape, meets his death in the zoo where he comes to look for a comrade and receives a deadly hug from the big gorilla which he addresses as "brother"

in a friendly, confidential tone.

In Diff'rent both of the protagonists—Emma Crosby and Caleb Williams—hang themselves because of their disillusionment.

Reuben Light, the hero in Dynamo , shoots his girl Ada and plunges down to be killed in his "Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity" because he wants to punish Ada for distracting him from his objective in life and to be purified and be worthy for his mother's love again.

In Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill presented the audience with the theme of violence and death in full force. It begins with a wife poisoning her husband out of hatred, and also for the sake of her lover. The daughter, in order to take revenge on her own mother, persuades her brother to kill the mother's lover. This leads to the suicide of the mother. The son, who is guilt-ridden and suffering from his perverted passion for his sister, shoots himself in the end, leaving his sister to face her own punishment in leading a death-like existence with haunting memories of the past.

O'Neill's attitude toward death and the meaningless lives of the down-and-outers whose only hope is to rot away in peace, is presented in one of his later plays The Iceman Cometh . The bums in Harry Hope's saloon lead

their sort of living-death existences by holding to their pipe dreams. When everyone in the saloon is forced by Hickey to give up his dream, he loses the last hold on life; facing disillusionment is unbearable and there is no hope left. They can not even get drunk, the "kick" goes out of the liquor. This is similar to the case of Jim Tyrone in 'A Moon for the Misbegotten and Cornelius Melody in A Touch of the Poet . They both are dead inside when they find they can no longer go on pretending.

The other death in The Iceman Cometh is the suicide of young Don Parritt who is pursued by his own guilty conscience in betraying his mother. He comes to Harry Hope's saloon to be judged for his treachery by Larry Slade, his mother's former lover. The relationship between Larry Slade and Don Parritt symbolized the one between Terry Carlin, O'Neill's close friend who was a habitue of the Hell Hole, and Louis Holliday, O'Neill's friend who committed suicide by taking heroin given him by Terry Carlin.⁷⁹ In the play Larry falls into the role of Parritt's executioner in the sense that he endorses Parritt's decision to jump down the fire escape. O'Neill described the death which happens off-stage as "...From outside the window comes the sound of something hurtling down, followed by a muffled, crunching thud". (Act IV

"The Iceman Cometh").

Another off-stage suicide also appeared in Before Breakfast when Alfred Rowland, a sensitive husband, cut himself with a razor. O'Neill simply described the death in this manner: "(There is a stifled groan of pain from the next room). Did you cut yourself again? [his nagging wife asks him.] ...There ! you've overturned the water all over everything ...I can hear it dripping on the floor."

Larry Slade in The Iceman Cometh also leads a "living-death" existence, he has no future and wishes to die but does not have enough courage to kill himself.

He says

I'm afraid to live, am I ? —and even more afraid
to die ! So I sit here, with my pride drowned
on the bottom of a bottle, keeping drunk so I
won't see myself shaking in my britches with fright,
or hear myself whining and praying --- let me live
a little longer --- let me still clutch greedily to
my yellow heart this sweet treasure, this jewel
beyond price, the dirty, stinking bit of withered
old flesh which is my beautiful little life !
(Act III)

He is the one, who in the end succeeds in facing the reality that his life is empty and he sincerely wishes that death will come soon. Larry can be compared with Billy Brown in The Great God Brown. Billy, after stealing his friend's creative power, is punished by having to live with self-loathing and life-hatred. He is not strong enough to die

nor blind enough to be content with the kind of life he is leading--the life that is not his own because he wears the mask of somebody's else. To Dion Antony's wife, he has to put on Dion's mask and to his staff and friends he has to wear the mask of Billy Brown (Act IV Scene I). He finally meets his death by receiving a volley of shots from the police.

There is even the destruction of a baby before birth. In The Strange Interlude Nina's unborn child is destroyed by an illegal abortion for fear of the child inheriting the insanity in her husband's blood. In Desire Under the Elms Abbie Putnum kills her baby boy at the age of fifteen days by smothering him with a pillow to prove her true love to Eben, to show that nothing else, not even their own baby could come between their love.

O'Neill's absorption with death was observed by his friend ~~whom~~ he often met at the Hell Hole during 1917-1918, Miss Dorothy Day, whose opinion of O'Neill was:

Gene was single-minded in his objective,....
Nothing could distract him. Nothing could
devour him. In that sense, there was a kind
of purity in him. He was not attracted to evil,
but to darkness. He was absorbed by death and
darkness.⁸⁰