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An examination of the influence of August Strindberg upon Eugene O'Neill

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUST STRINDBERG UPON EUGENE O'NEILL

BY

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PREFACE

Eugene O'Neill made no effort to hide the names of those writers and literary works which were important to him, and most of his biographers cite the fact that from the commencement of his playwrighting career O'Neill was influenced by the Swedish writer August Strindberg. O'Neill himself was, in fact, one of the first to call attention to the kinship between his work and that of his "Master." In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he indicated that he was delighted to have an opportunity to discuss the debt American drama owed to the modern drama of Europe, and, in particular, to acknowledge Strindberg's inspiring genius:

> This thought of original inspiration brings me to what is, for me, the greatest happiness this occasion affords me, and that is the opportunity it gives me to acknowledge, with gratitude and pride, to you and to the people of Sweden, the debt my work owes to that great genius of all modern dramatists, your August Strindberg. It was reading his plays when I first started to write back in the winter of 1913-14 that, above all else, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself. If there is anything of lasting worth in my work, it is due to that original impulse from him, which has continued as my inspiration down all the years since then--to the ambition I received then to follow in the footsteps of his genius as worthily as my talent might permit, and with the same integrity

> of purpose.
>
> Of course, it will be no news to you in Sweden that my work owes much to the influence of Strindberg. That influence runs clearly through more than a few of my plays and is plain for everyone to see. Neither will it be news for anyone who has ever known me, for I have always stressed it myself.
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> . . . . . .
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> No, I am only too proud of my debt to Strindberg, only too happy to have this opportunity of proclaiming it to his people. For me, he remains, as Nietzsche remains in his sphere, the Master, still to this day more modern than any of us, still our leader.[1]

Growing out of an interest in O'Neill and in his pivotal position in the history of American drama, this study, then, intends to investigate the manner in which the life and work of August Strindberg influenced the life and work of Eugene O'Neill.

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[1]Eugene O'Neill, "Nobel Prize Address," in American Playwrights on Drama, ed. by Horst Frenz (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), pp. 41-42. First published in The New York Times of December 11, 1936.

CHAPTER I

STRINDBERG AND O'NEILL: THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

Eugene O'Neill turned to the plays of August Strindberg during his confinement at Gaylord Farm, a tuberculosis sanitarium which he had entered on Christmas Eve in 1912. At that time he was already under the influence of one literary work, Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra. It had become his Catechism, and in later years he spoke of it as the one book which ". . . has influenced me more than any book I've ever read."[1] But during his hours of enforced inactivity at Gaylord, he began to read plays, rapidly, one after the other, for it was at Gaylord that O'Neill decided to write: "At last he knew himself and had an identity to create that answered to his deepest needs; he was going to be a playwright."[2] In accordance with this decision, "he determined to so saturate himself in the drama that it would become second

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[1]Quoted in Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York: Dial Publishing Company, 1964), p. 121.

[2]Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Playwright (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), p. 252.

nature for him to think in dialogue, in terms of entrances and exits . . . ."[3] He read Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Hauptmann, and Ibsen, but he was most impressed by the plays of Strindberg, for in them he found ". . . tangible evidence that 'a powerful emotional ecstasy, approaching a kind of frenzy,' could be communicated by a writer."[4] From then on, Nietzsche and Strindberg were the most important gods in his literary pantheon.

It was not only the plays themselves which drew O'Neill to Strindberg, for O'Neill began to feel a strange kinship with the other playwright. He began to identify with Strindberg's life-pattern until "Strindberg was more than a literary kindred spirit to O'Neill; like O'Neill's other literary hero, Nietzsche, he became in some ways a pattern for O'Neill's life."[5] O'Neill's second wife, Agnes Boulton, wrote in her memoir, Part of a Long Story:

> Gene was very impressed by Strindberg's anguished personal life . . . I don't know--but I imagine he had the same feeling of identification with the great tortured Swede up to the time of his own death.[6]

This chapter will present brief biographical sketches of both playwrights, not for the purpose of outlining the

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Gelb, p. 233.

[5]Ibid., p. 234.

[6]Agnes Boulton, Part of a Long Story (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 76.

factual information available concerning these two writers, but, rather, with the intention of emphasizing the many parallels between the lives of the two men. As these parallels unfold, it will be easy to see how O'Neill could have so identified with Strindberg and why Strindberg's plays exerted such a powerful influence upon O'Neill's own writing.

A brief account of Strindberg's life-story is essential to any discussion of his plays because of the highly autobiographical nature of his literary work. His collected works, astonishingly enough, include almost sixty plays as well as more than thirty works of fiction, autobiography, politics, and history, and in each of these works he portrayed some direct aspect of his own personal experience. The Swedish authority Martin Lamm comments as follows:

> When one has limned Strindberg's personality one has already given a descriptive account of his authorship. In world literature there are assuredly very few writers in whom life and literature so wholly intertwine . . . The explanation of the powerful influence that he has exercised both among us and in foreign countries rests in no small degree in his astonishing immediateness.[7]

Strindberg's life is usually characterized by such adjectives as "haunted," "tortured," or "bedevilled." He

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[7]Quoted in Carl Enoch W. L. Dahlstrom's Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism, second ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), pp. 89-90.

was born prematurely and unwanted in Stockholm, Sweden, in January, 1849. His childhood was spent in an overcrowded home, and he suffered from poverty and hunger; but he suffered mentally and spiritually even more acutely as a result of his unhappy and ambivalent relations with his parents. Strindberg alternated between passionately loving and violently hating both his domineering father and his weaker-willed mother, who had once been his father's servant. These childhood experiences formed a pattern for the rest of his life. Robert Brustein comments,

> . . . The struggle in Strindberg's mind between the male and the female, the father and the mother, the aristocrat and the servant, spirit and matter, aggressiveness and passivity, is the conflict which determines the direction of his career.[8]

Strindberg's mother died when he was thirteen; his father remarried soon, but his stepmother ". . . failed completely to understand the boy, who yearned above all else for mother-love."[9] His childhood experiences fostered in him a continuous state of revolt against authority which included a rebellion against the pietistic religious faith of his youth, and it was in this chaotic state of mind that he passed his schooldays and his years at Uppsala University.

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[8]Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 359.

[9]Alrik Gustafson, "The Scandinavian Countries," in A History of Modern Drama, ed. by Barrett H. Clark and George Freedley (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1947), p. 21.

Strindberg's search for a faith to replace the lost one of his youth became a pivotal life-long concern.

> Subsequently he went through a number of phases embracing nearly all attitudes which modern intellectuals have taken up: juvenile radicalism; political disenchantment; hero worship and a fantastic contempt for the herd; preoccupation with science; insanity (if that is an attitude); a literary Catholicism a la Huysmans; and finally one of those Higher Syntheses uniting science and occultism under the banner of Swedenborg. Strindberg lived out all the phases of modern militancy and modern defeatism, political and antipolitical, religious and antireligious.[10]

The years of his late youth and early manhood were devoted to many varied adventures which included periods as a school teacher, medical assistant, and journalist, as well as two short, unsuccessful trials at acting. He associated with a bohemian group of extremist radical intellectual leanings, and alcohol and promiscuity were an integral part of that group's life-style.

He was twenty when he began writing plays. His early "romantic" dramas include The Freethinker (1870), The Outlaw (1871), and Master Olaf (1872), and are filled with evidence of the influence of Schiller's The Robbers and Ibsen's Brand.

In 1877 Strindberg married Siri von Essen; although they were happy for a time, no account of the playwright's

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[10]Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), p. 141.

life can overlook the important fact that "their life was a succession of mutual recriminations and violent quarrels."[11] Much of Strindberg's work, both in prose fiction and in dramatic form, explored the difficulties and frustrations of wedded life. A restless moving from one geographical locale to another in search of peace began in 1876.

During the thirteen years of his first marriage, the transition to Strindberg's "realistic" period occurred. The single most important influence on Strindberg throughout this time was Nietzsche:

> His attraction to Nietzsche is unusually strong--so strong, in fact, that he describes the philosopher's influence on him in the imagery of marriage: "My spirit has received in its uterus a tremendous outpouring of seed from Frederick Nietzsche, so that I feel as full as a pregnant bitch. He was my husband."[12]

A second important influence upon the playwright during this realistic period was the French author Zola, and in these years Strindberg wrote his powerful naturalistic plays, The Father (1887), Miss Julie (1888), and Creditors, which will be examined later in this study.

In 1891 Strindberg and Siri were divorced at last, and from 1892 until 1898 he wrote no further plays. He married (1893) and then separated from (1894) a young

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[11]Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 43.

[12]Brustein, p. 102.

authoress, Frida Uhl. His mental and physical health deteriorated, and the year 1894 marked the beginning of a severe crisis-period. The story of those tormented years is recorded in Strindberg's prose work Inferno, which has been described as "a vivid and merciless self-portrait of a great intellect in the grip of insanity."[13] It was the writing of this book, as well as his studies in Swedenborg, which probably saved him from a complete mental breakdown.

When he began writing plays again, he entered upon the third phase of his dramatic career. Strindberg now created a wholly new dramatic form which was to crucially shape the theatre of the twentieth century, the "expressionism" of Road to Damascus (1898 ff.), A Dream Play (1901), and The Ghost Sonata (1907). These plays show that he had replaced his former naturalism and atheism with "a new concern for the supernatural forces behind material things."[14]

Strindberg was still searching for some semblance of earthly happiness and he entered into a third marriage with Harriet Bosse in 1901. This marriage, too, was a failure, and yet, as late as sometime after 1907, he proposed marriage to a fourth woman. The girl, who was only nineteen, gradually withdrew from the relationship, and he

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[13]Peter Watts, "Introduction," in Three Plays by August Strindberg, trans. by Peter Watts (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Inc., 1958), p. 15.

[14]Brustein, p. 122.

spent the last years of his life largely in seclusion, coming out of retirement only to collaborate with August Falck in the foundation of the experimental theatre which they called The Intimate Theatre. He died in May of 1912; his last months were spent in continuous pain as he suffered from cancer of the stomach.

Summing up Strindberg's life, Allan Lewis writes,

> His was a wild, seething, tortured and oversensitive spirit that, crashing against the rigid conventions of his age, shattered into fragments of disillusionment and suicidal intent . . . and a terrifying despair that sought first in the mystical revelations of Swedenborg, and later in the subconscious depths of his dream world, to find some personal solace and consolation.[15]

John Gassner, however, singles out the reason why Strindberg's chaotic life and his attempts to wring meaning out of his existence are so important:

> It would be difficult to find another modern playwright whose work is so decidedly a projection of his inner reality . . . Strindberg had the power to externalize his inner complications and discharge his unhealthy drives in ways impossible to the insane--that is, in the formal structure of art, in universally applicable penetrations, and in self-criticism. He was, in short, the classic example, along with Dostoevski, of Freud's statement that an artist is a neurotic who cures himself through his work.[16]

Like Strindberg, O'Neill is among the most autobiographical of writers. Louis Sheaffer writes, "In the

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[15]Lewis, pp. 42-43.

[16]John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 178.

history of the theatre perhaps only Strindberg . . . told as much about himself as this lapsed Catholic, who so often stepped into the confessional to write his plays."[17] Later in his book, Sheaffer comments cogently, "Perhaps the most important thing he took from Strindberg was the courage to explore in his writings the darkest corners of his own character."[18]

First and foremost in a consideration of the manner in which Eugene O'Neill's life paralleled Strindberg's stands the fact that O'Neill, too, was born an "unwanted" child, or to use O'Neill's own adjective, a "misbegotten" child. All of O'Neill's biographers place heavy emphasis upon the circumstances that surrounded his birth in October, 1888, and since the production of A Long Day's Journey into Night, the family-facts have become well-known: Eugene O'Neill had been conceived, at his father's urging, as somehow to take the place of his dead brother, Edmund. Both of Eugene's parents, James and Ella, as well as his older brother Jamie, felt responsibility for the death of the infant Edmund, and to make matters worse, Ella had become a dope addict as a result of morphine she had taken following Eugene's difficult birth. In this complex family situation

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[17]Sheaffer, p. 79.

[18]Ibid., p. 254.

we find the "source of the anguish that throbs through so much of [O'Neill's] writings."[19]

O'Neill experienced the same intense ambivalent feelings toward his family members that Strindberg had felt toward his father and mother, and the love-hate relationship which was at the core of the O'Neill's family life forms the substance of A Long Day's Journey into Night. The years of O'Neill's adolesence and young manhood followed a course similar to the one Strindberg had taken as they were devoted to furious rebellion and a restless search for self-identity. Speaking of this period in the playwright's life, Edwin Engel comments:

> To the end of his playwriting career O'Neill continuously drew inspiration from the dozen years beginning about 1900 (when he was twelve) and extending through 1912. He remembered vividly, not dimly, the beginning of his religious apostasy at the turn of the century, the bitterness toward his father and the evidence that intensified it, the discovery of his mother's drug addiction, the depressing spectacle of his older brother's spiritual and physical deterioration, his own chronic drinking, his first mismarriage, his experiences at sea and as a vagrant, his attempted suicide, his work in the theatre, his bout with tuberculosis, his enthusiasm for the philosophy of Nietzsche.[20]

As mentioned above, it was O'Neill's confinement in

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[19]Ibid., p. 4. It is fascinating to read that, after her death, O'Neill likened his mother to the Mummy of Strindberg's Ghost Sonata (Gelb, p. 11).

[20]Edwin A. Engel, "Ideas in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," in Ideas in the Drama, ed. John Gassner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 101.

a tuberculosis sanitarium that called a halt to his chaotic way of life and gave him time for reading and reflection. "O'Neill came to regard his recovery from illness at Gaylord and his simultaneous discovery that he was a dramatist as a kind of rebirth."[21] In dramatic form, O'Neill began his life-long quest for new absolutes to replace the forsaken God of his family's Catholic orthodoxy and to substitute for the love which he felt he had not adequately received from his parents; a check-list of his plays numbers forty-five.[22]

O'Neill's search for love was to involve him, as it had Strindberg, in three marriages[23]--two of which ended in divorce; the third, while it was apparently more satisfying than any Strindberg had known, contained some strange episodes as O'Neill's life neared its end. O'Neill also moved restlessly from "home" to "home" throughout his lifetime.

Just as Strindberg had been instrumental in the development of the Intimate Theatre, so O'Neill became involved with the pioneering little theatre group, The Provincetown Players. At an organizational meeting of the group, "O'Neill approved the name, Provincetown Players, but suggested adding 'The Playwright's Theatre.' . . . No doubt

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[21]Gelb, p. 235.

[22]Ibid., p. 944.

[23]O'Neill's three wives were Kathleen Jenkins, Agnes Boulton, and Carlotta Monterey.

he saw himself as the future Strindberg, and the Playwright's Theatre as America's Intimate Theatre."[24]

O'Neill's years of initial success in the theatre stretch from 1916-1936. The major plays of this period include The Emperor Jones (1920), The Hairy Ape (1921), Desire Under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown (1925), Strange Interlude (1926-27), and Mourning Becomes Electra (1929-31); they are dramas which center "on the dilemma of modern man in a world without God,"[25] and plays in which O'Neill--as the rebellious, romantic hero--tried ". . . to work out his personal difficulties through the medium of his art."[26] O'Neill spoke of his writing as "a suit of armor," and he also spoke of it as his "vacation from living."[27]

From 1936 until his death, O'Neill's critical fortunes declined, but during this period O'Neill continued to write, and, ironically, produced his best works. "Maturing in silence, stimulated only by an obsessive urge to write and a profound artistic honesty, he commenced to write plays which were genuine masterpieces of the modern theatre,"[28]

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[24]Gelb, pp. 315-16.

[25]Brustein, p. 329.

[26]Ibid., p. 326.

[27]Gelb, p. 234; p. 235.

[28]Brustein, p. 323.

including A Long Day's Journey into Night (1939-41) and The Iceman Cometh (1939). Some of these last years of O'Neill's life might be compared with Strindberg's "Inferno" years, although O'Neill probably never came as close to a complete mental breakdown as Strindberg did. O'Neill died, as had Strindberg, after a protracted and painful illness, which had gradually destroyed the motor cells of his cerebrum, in November, 1953.

In a review of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse, Herman Melville wrote, ". . . Genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round."[29] O'Neill experienced this shock of recognition while reading Strindberg's plays: he understood Strindberg's quest for love and peace because he himself was engaged in a similar quest, and he identified with Strindberg's anguished and despairing view of man's existence because O'Neill, too, was in agony over what he called the "tragedy of man." Strindberg was able to influence O'Neill so profoundly because of the strikingly similar nature of their lives and thoughts. Both playwrights were tortured pilgrims, grimly struggling along the road of life in an effort to wrest some type of meaning and some sort of joy from existence, which seemed to them, as it had to Conrad, to

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[29]Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in Vol. I of The Shock of Recognition edited by Edmund Wilson (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1955), p. 199.

have a "heart of darkness." The bulk of this study now turns to an examination of certain specific plays in an effort to show the exact manner in which Strindberg's plays influenced O'Neill's work, and, through him, the course of American drama.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF STRINDBERG'S DRAMATIC METHOD AND EXPRESSIONISTIC TECHNIQUES UPON O'NEILL

In 1931 Eugene O'Neill was involved in a plagarism suit instituted by a woman using the pen-name George Lewys who claimed that O'Neill had stolen the idea for his play Strange Interlude from her novel The Temple of Pallas-Athenae. The case was presided over by John M. Woolsey, the judge who was later to make the decision which lifted the ban on James Joyce's Ulysses. O'Neill, who was in Europe at the time, did not appear in court, but pages from his work diaries as well as testimonies of several witnesses for the defense were presented as evidence that O'Neill knew nothing of Miss Lewys' novel when he penned his play, and the case was dismissed after several days' hearings. One of the most important witnesses for the defense was the eminent critic George Jean Nathan. In his testimony he commented of O'Neill, "If he stems from anyone, he stems from Strindberg."[1] Nathan also informed Judge Woolsey that he did not like all of O'Neill's work. In particular he singled out Welded as

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[1]Gelb, p. 731.

a weak play which seemed to him to be "a ridiculous exaggeration of the Strindberg method."[2] This chapter intends to discuss the manner in which O'Neill's work stemmed from Strindberg's and in which O'Neill, in fact, imitated, exaggerated, and developed Strindberg's dramatic method and techniques. The chapter must begin, therefore, with an examination of some of Strindberg's plays in an effort to outline the dramatic method and intent of the Swedish playwright's work. Three of Strindberg's "naturalistic tragedies," The Father, Miss Julie, and Creditors, as well as his "expressionistic" A Dream Play, have been chosen as representative dramas suitable for this purpose.

"In The Father Strindberg deliberately attempted to write a modern Greek tragedy on a sort of Agamemnon-and-Clytemnestra theme."[3] The play centers around the mounting conflict between a man, the Captain, and his wife, Laura, each of whom is trying to win domination over the other and to gain control of their child. The battle of wills which ensues is "remorseless and uncompromising."[4] Finally Laura plants the suggestion in the Captain's mind that he might not actually be the real father of their child, and he begins

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Brita M. E. Mortensen and Brian W. Downs, Strindberg: An Introduction to His Life and Work (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 108.

[4]Lewis, p. 45. A conscientious attempt has been made to keep plot summary at a minimum and to concentrate upon the characteristic Strindbergian elements of these plays.

to go mad.

> By ruthlessly cutting away all extraneous, unessential matter and focusing sharply on the psychological analysis of the elemental struggle between Laura and the Captain . . . Strindberg achieves the extraordinary power and concentration which have come to be recognized as characteristic of his drama.[5]

The play can be adequately presented only by actors who are able to project great emotional intensity, and, as with many of Strindberg's dramas, well-acted, it can become an "almost unbearable experience, both for the audience and for those taking part."[6]

Strindberg himself wrote of this play, which was his first "naturalistic tragedy":

> The Father is the realization of modern drama, and as such is something very curious. Very curious because the struggle takes place between souls. It is a battle of brains, not a dagger fight or a poisoning with raspberry juice . . . The French are still seeking the formula, but I have found it.[7]

The playwright further explained what he meant by "naturalism":

> Naturalism is not a dramatic method like that of Becque, a simple photography which includes everything, even the speck of dust on the lense of the camera. That is realism; a method lately exalted to art, a tiny art which cannot see the

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[5]Borge Gedson Madsen, Strindberg's Naturalistic Theatre: Its Relation to French Naturalism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 43.

[6]Michael Meyer, trans. and introduction, The Plays of Strindberg, Vol. I (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), p. 9.

[7]Quoted in Eric Bentley's introduction to Elizabeth Sprigge's translations in Six Plays of Strindberg (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), p. v.

> wood for the trees. That is the false naturalism, which believes that art consists simply of sketching a piece of nature in a natural manner; but it is not the true naturalism, which seeks out those points in life where the great conflicts occur, which rejoices in seeing what cannot be seen every day.[8]

Strindberg's dramatic aim was "to find the crisis, the moment of struggle, and to reveal normal experience in its light."[9]

Emile Zola, the leading writer of naturalistic fiction at that time, was highly impressed with The Father, but in an oft-quoted letter to Strindberg, he also expressed some doubts about the play's "naturalism":

> Vous savez peut-etre que je ne suis pas pour l'abstraction. J'aime que les personnages aient un etat civil complete . . . Et votre capitaine qui n'a pas mem de nom, vos autres personnages qui sont presque des etres de raison, ne me donnent pas de la vie la sensation complete que je demande.[10]

Carl Dahlstrom points out in his book Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism that Zola's discontent with The Father comes from the fact that the play already contains elements of the "expressionism" of Strindberg's later work:

> Strindberg's drama The Father is not naturalistic in the sense that the author is making a scientific experiment in drama, nor realistic

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[8]Quoted in Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 109.

[9]Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 109.

[10]Quoted in Dahlstrom, p. 93.

> in the sense that he is reporting what he has observed . . . The play cannot be considered merely as a dramatic portrayal of a woman's success in driving her husband insane by suggestion; it is not just the report of the psychologist. This play presents an elemental struggle of opposites, male and female in their ur-status, that has burned itself into the soul of the dramatist and taken new shape there with new significance. The drama is not therefore "life seen through a temperament," but life flowing through a soul . . . The setting of the drama is not in the milieu of every day life, but in the plane of sleepwalker realism that characterizes expressionistic drama.[11]

Robert Brustein's critical opinions reinforce Dahlstrom's thesis:

> . . . It is incredible that The Father could ever have been taken for a Naturalistic document. It is more like a feverish and violent nightmare-- . . . The setting of A Doll's House . . . is carefully documented . . . but the walls of the Captain's house seem flimsy and penetrable . . . The setting of The Father is less a bourgeois household than an African jungle . . . It is not to Zola's Naturalism that we must turn for precedents, but to works like . . . Shakespeare's Othello-- and to Aeschylean tragedy . . . .[12]

In spite of his misgivings about The Father's "abstractions," Zola urged Strindberg to write a second play for Antoine's Theatre Libre in Paris. That play was Miss Julie. In this play Strindberg more carefully individualized his characters. He wrote a Preface for the play in which he pointed out that he had taken his theme from a true story and gave the hereditary and environmental backgrounds of the

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[11]Dahlstrom, p. 101.

[12]Brustein, pp. 104-107.

main characters. Robert Brustein suggests, however, that although Miss Julie is "undoubtedly the closest thing" to a Naturalistic drama that Strindberg ever wrote, "Strindberg is constitutionally incapable of Naturalist impartiality."[13] Madsen points out that even the supposedly realistic dialogue of the characters seems "heightened," and "exaggerated" and "tends to produce an effect of hyperbole."[14]

The theme of Miss Julie is the same as the theme of The Father--that of a struggle for power combined with sexual battle. The Count's daughter, Miss Julie, and the Count's valet, Jean, "are opposites on all levels save in their animal passion and the drive to dominate."[15] The subject of the play is seduction, but it is difficult to tell whether Jean seduces Julie or vice-versa. The play is short and intense. Strindberg abolished curtain drops and divided the two parts of the play with the entry and departure of a group of dancing peasants. The peasant's entry into the Count's kitchen, the scene of the drama, forces Jean and Julie into Jean's room and the play's climax. In this play Strindberg perfected a "terse, nervous dialogue, less deliberate and more fragmentary than Ibsen's, the shorthand of speech"[16] which is indicative of the characters' tense

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[13] Ibid., pp. 113-14.

[14] Madsen, p. 97.

[15] Lewis, p. 48.

[16] Meyer, p. 10.

state of mind. While Julie had been in control during the first half of the play, Jean's triumph reveals his cruel and arrogant nature. The Count, whose presence is always felt although he never appears on stage, returns home, and Miss Julie realizes she has no choice but suicide. She begs Jean to hypnotize her, and Jean places a razor in her hand. As the curtain falls she leaves for the barn.

This brief summary cannot begin to reveal the thoughts of the main characters which lead to their physical union and to Miss Julie's death. In his Preface Strindberg criticized traditional "theatrical characters" and declared:

> I have drawn my people as split and vacillating, a mixture of the old and the new. . . . What most interests people today is the psychological process.[17]

Both the Preface and the play itself enumerate the multiplicity of motives which drives the characters forward. One critic, Maurice Valency, goes so far as to claim, "Indeed, the characterization in Miss Julie is complex beyond anything so far attempted in modern drama."[18] As in The Father, the play is focused upon a single crucial period in the lives of the characters--a period which lays bare the souls of the main characters. Such a focus clearly reveals Strindberg's basic attitude toward life which he now enunciated in the

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[17]August Strindberg, Preface to Miss Julie, in Meyer, p. 103 and p. 107.

[18]Maurice Valency, The Flower and the Castle: An Introduction to Modern Drama (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 276.

Preface:

> Recently, people complained of my tragedy The Father that it was too tragic--as though tragedies ought to be jolly. One hears pretentious talk about "the joy of life," and theatrical managers feverishly commission farces, as though joy consisted in behaving idiotically and portraying the world as though it were peopled by lunatics with an insatiable passion for dancing. I find "the joy of life" in life's cruel and mighty conflicts; I delight in knowledge and discovery.[19]

The play which followed Miss Julie was based on another of these struggles. The Creditors is another masterpiece of psychological analysis. Its subject is the relationship of a woman, Tekla, with her first and second husbands, Gustav and Adolf, respectively, and life is once again pictured as a battle of wits and wills--a struggle for domination and survival. Gustav desires to be avenged on his former wife and on the man who had robbed him of her and thus submitted him to public humiliation. In a tense dialogue with Adolf, who does not recognize him, Gustav rips the veil from Adolf's eyes and reveals Tekla for the promiscuous, vampire-like creature that she is. She had learned all she could from Gustav and then discarded him; now after seven years of marriage to Adolf, she has sucked all of his energy from him, and is ready to rid herself of him also. Further, the play is a "demonstration of psychic crime,"[20] and reflects Strindberg's interest in the

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[19]Quoted in Meyer, p. 101.

[20]Valency, p. 279.

obsessive power of suggestion. Early in the play Gustav suggests to Adolf that the latter is becoming an epileptic, and at the climax of the drama, when Adolf overhears Tekla agreeing to a rendez-vous with Gustav, he appears, frothing at the mouth, and dies of an epileptic fit. This drama of "spiritual murder" in which the woman is pictured as a "cannibal" who had eaten her husband's soul, his courage, and his learning seemed to Strindberg to be one of the best things he had ever written.[21] Its strength and virtue lie, as they do in The Father and in Miss Julie, in "the intensity of the revealed experience, the unforgettable power of a savage insight into motive and situation."[22]

When Strindberg emerged from his Inferno crisis, however, he renounced many of his former Naturalistic concerns as "contemporary materialistic striving toward faithfulness to reality."[23] Around the turn of the century Strindberg began to find the conventions of Naturalistic drama too restrictive, and he turned to the creation of his symbolic or dream plays. These expressionistic experiments, such as To Damascus, A Dream Play, and The Ghost Sonata, were "to drama what Ulysses was to be to the novel and The Waste Land to poetry,"[24] and the "Author's Note" to

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[21]Strindberg, quoted in Meyer, p. 164; p. 185; p. 165.

[22]Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot, p. 110.

[23]Quoted by Martin Lamm, "Strindberg and the Theatre," The Tulane Drama Review, Vol. VI (November, 1961), p. 132.

[24]Meyer, p. 10.

A Dream Play, which outlined his intent and methods, has become a famous document in the history of the drama:

> In this dream play, as in his former dream play To Damascus, the Author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.
>
> The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter, and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all, that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples and no law. He neither condemns nor acquits, but only relates, and since on the whole, there is more pain than pleasure in the dream, a tone of melancholy, and of compassion for all living things, runs through the swaying narrative.[25]

According to Dahlstrom, these expressionistic techniques were a natural outgrowth of the divisions produced by the breakdown of traditional religious values and the rapid rise of scientific materialism during the nineteenth century.[26] Naturalistic methods were no longer adequately able to express the ever-increasing splits in the personality of modern man. The experiences of A Dream Play are based on actual incidents in Strindberg's life, but they "are ordered by consciousness instead of being presented imitatively according to the arrangement gained through

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[25]Strindberg, quoted in Sprigge, p. 193.

[26]See Dahlstrom's introductory essay, "Origins of Strindberg's Expressionism," pp. vii-xvii.

physical observation."[27]

The purpose of A Dream Play seems to be the unveiling of the mystery of human suffering--an investigation of the problem of evil. The main character is the Daughter of the Hindu-god Indra who comes to earth to investigate the plight of mankind, and she wanders all over the face of the earth in so doing. This limited study cannot begin to discuss each of the myriad kaleidoscopic vignettes through which Strindberg mirrors our "strange world of contradictions," since the play is so lengthy and diverse. (Robert Brustein, for example, must devote eight pages of his chapter on Strindberg to the narrative of A Dream Play.) Suffice it to say that the Daughter finds the world to be "a mad world" where "life together is a torment. One's pleasure is the other's pain."[28] She meets a proliferation of characters in a variety of settings. Dahlstrom comments:

> The characters in A Dream Play have lost all individuality. They are either shadows or else are typified by sex, profession, family, or social status: for example, the Father, Mother, Officer, Portress, Bill-poster, Glazier, Teacher and others. None of the characters, however, is wholly stable. All glide in and out of the dream drama like figures in a vision.
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> . . . . . .
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> There is absolutely no unity of time, no

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[27]Dahlstrom, p. 180.

[28]Strindberg, A Dream Play, in Sprigge, see pp. 216, 220, 226.

> unity of place, and none for action. Once and for all these unities are thrown aside as measurements of physical observation; they are not functional in the life of the unconscious, in dream existence.[29]

Life is revealed as "a disordered and chaotic struggle between opposites,"[30] and the Daughter of Indra's repeated comment, "Mankind is to be pitied," reflects Strindberg's compassion for man in this dilemma.

Strindberg's four "Chamber Plays"--Storm, After the Fire, The Pelican, and The Ghost Sonata--were written in 1907 in anticipation of the opening of the Intimate Theatre. These works elaborated upon both the experimental techniques and the philosophy of A Dream Play and will be examined later in this study. Let us now examine the manner in which Strindberg's dramatic method and techniques influenced Eugene O'Neill.

It appears initially that Strindberg's strongest influence upon O'Neill's plays comes from the misogynous nature of Strindberg's writing. Many of O'Neill's plays portray women who are strikingly similar in nature to Strindberg's Laura and Tekla. For example, one of the first O'Neill plays to be presented by the Provincetown Players in 1916 was Before Breakfast. This one-act monologue, which duplicated Strindberg's style in his one-act monologue

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[29]Dahlstrom, p. 180; p. 181.

[30]Brustein, p. 127.

The Stronger, is delivered by a shrewish wife whose embittered nagging leads to her husband's off-stage suicide. It is worth noting that the husband commits suicide by slitting his throat with a razor--the exact manner of committing suicide that Strindberg had used in Miss Julie!

O'Neill employed this Strindbergian theme of the war between the sexes in play after play. A partial listing of his works which utilized this theme includes "Bread and Butter" (1913), Beyond the Horizon (1918), The First Man (1921), Welded (1922), Desire Under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown (1925), Strange Interlude (1927), Dynamo (1928), Mourning Becomes Electra (1933), Days Without End (1933), and More Stately Mansions (published posthumously). "Marriage in the early O'Neill plays is liable to be a disaster."[31] O'Neill's first full-length play Beyond the Horizon "introduced the American theatre to life, the sad realities of everyday life, and began changing the theatre into one more genuine, more vital, more sensitive to the human condition."[32] It was the story of two brothers who were both in love with the same girl. The three main characters make their decisions--and they make the wrong ones. The brother who loves the sea marries the girl and

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[31]John Henry Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 131.

[32]Sheaffer, p. 418.

remains on the farm; the brother who loved farming sets out to sea, and the married couple at home finds that their marriage has been a mistake. "As a disciple of Strindberg, O'Neill was intent on depicting love as a trap and marriage as a prison, especially for the male."[33] The main character of another early play, The First Man, scornfully declares that most marriages are built upon "rabbit-hutch emotions" and "bread-and-butter passions."[34]

The problems of marriage and the battle for domination between the sexes hold the center of the stage in Welded. George Jean Nathan described this play as an "attempt to duplicate the technic of such a drama as The Father."[35] It presents one critical night in the marriage of Michael and Eleanor Cape and was based on O'Neill's marriage to Agnes Boulton. The Gelbs describe Welded as follows:

> It was an extreme case of the vicious circle: First, his Strindberg-influenced need for a dramatic marriage relationship; then the torment over this self-induced situation; then the necessity to chronicle, in Strindbergian terms, the havoc he had wrought.[36]

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[33]Ibid., p. 420.

[34]Eugene O'Neill, The First Man, in The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Vol. II (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 613.

[35]George Jean Nathan, "Eugene O'Neill," in The World of George Jean Nathan, ed. by Charles Angoff (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952), p. 402.

[36]Gelb, p. 517.

Michael is a sensitive, intelligent playwright while Eleanor has a more pragmatic personality. The drama begins with a loving reunion following a separation which had been caused by Michael's need to be alone to write. Michael soon becomes jealous of visitors Eleanor has had while he was absent and is particularly suspicious about an old friend of hers who happens to drop by. A heated quarrel begins and the dialogue reveals the fact that this is one in a cycle of many such quarrels. Recriminations and accusations build up between them until Michael attempts to choke his wife. They both flee their apartment and each tries to break the other's hold by going to the arms of another--Eleanor to her old friend and Michael to a prostitute. These attempts to dissolve their relationship fail; they both return to their home and "the resolution comes when they both accept marriage as a love-hate relationship."[37] Cape passionately declares:

> And we'll torture and tear, and clutch for each other's souls!--fight--fail and hate again--(he raises his voice in aggressive triumph) but!--fail <u>with pride</u>--with joy![38]

An understanding of the fact that the marriage relationship in <u>Welded</u> is pictured as a love-hate relationship whose love cannot be terminated even when hate is at its highest levels between the two partners and recognition of O'Neill's

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[37]Raleigh, p. 134.

[38]Eugene O'Neill, <u>Welded</u>, <u>The Plays of Eugene O'Neill</u>, Vol. II, p. 488.

intent in Welded, which seems to be not simply to portray the painful complexities of the marriage relationship but also to depict these complexities as passionately and as intensely as possible, leads to a clearer picture of how Strindberg influenced O'Neill. Strindberg influenced O'Neill not primarily because he was "a dramatist of misogyny" but rather because Strindberg had written dramas which conveyed his own attitudes toward male-female relationships so powerfully. It was the Strindberg method or technic that O'Neill sought to emulate.

As one of the three managers for the reorganized Provincetown Players, O'Neill suggested that they open their 1924 season with Strindberg's Ghost Sonata. The pioneering scenic designer Robert Edmund Jones did not approve of the choice--he called it "a horrible play about horrible people"[39]--but O'Neill prevailed and the play was presented. O'Neill wrote an article for the Playbill titled "Strindberg and Our Theatre." In this article he claimed that "Strindberg still remains among the most modern of moderns" because he was "the greatest interpreter in the theatre of the characteristic spiritual conflicts which constitute the drama--the blood--of our lives today."[40]

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[39]Gelb, p. 536.

[40]Eugene O'Neill, "Strindberg and Our Theatre," in O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism, ed. by Oscar Cargill et al. (New York: University Press, 1961), p. 108.

He spoke of Strindberg as a creator of a form of "supernaturalism" which "intensified" dramatic methods and laid bare the unrealized regions of the soul. O'Neill coined a term to describe Strindberg's plays; he called them "behind-life" plays, and it was Strindberg's ability to go beyond the "banality of surfaces" which really appealed so strongly to O'Neill.[41] It was Strindberg the dramatist of intense and devastating dynamic psychological processes that O'Neill revered.

Beneath the cast of characters listed on the Playbill O'Neill had printed Strindberg's sentence concerning the "joy of life" and its relation to life's conflicts (see p. 22, above). As early as 1917 O'Neill had indicated that this view that life was significant because of its struggles was his also:

> The tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. What I am after is to get an audience leaving 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 a struggle.[42]

In his plays, then, O'Neill, like Strindberg, was trying to dramatize these spiritual struggles and to portray the motive forces behind the conflicts. Further, just as Strindberg's milieu had driven him to experimentation with

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[41] Ibid., pp. 108-09.

[42] Eugene O'Neill, quoted in Williams, Modern Tragedy, p. 116.

new techniques in order to express spiritual truths in a world where the belief in a traditional God was dying, so O'Neill imitated these experiments, trying to find techniques which could adequately dramatize the situation of modern man. O'Neill wrote in a letter to George Jean Nathan:

> The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with.[43]

Strindberg had conducted pioneer explorations into the dark corners of the human soul in its "modern" condition; he had excelled "in depicting people driven by love, hatred, jealousy or a combination of all three to that nightmare border country where hysteria abuts on madness,"[44] people who found no outside supernatural forces which could redeem their lives, and people who often discovered that their only peace came in death. It was into this violent and tortured country that O'Neill followed Strindberg.

Seen in this light, the Strindberg-O'Neill theme of the battle between the sexes takes on new dimensions. O'Neill's many plays depciting marriage as a hell on earth were not intended, in particular, to castigate women.

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[43]Eugene O'Neill, quoted by Joseph Wood Krutch in the Krutch edition of Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1932), p. xvii.

[44]Meyer, p. 8.

Instead, he was trying to uncover the "behind-life" reasons for human suffering. O'Neill was seeking answers to questions concerning man's raison d'etre and insights into the compelling forces driving "modern" man. "Strindberg showed him how to dig below the surface of human relationships to the tensions beneath, and above all, how to discard realistic means altogether in order to project the mysterious forces that determine human life."[45] Thus all of O'Neill's plays carried on "a ceaseless dialectic about human affairs,"[46] and, of course, the force that in large measure "makes the world go round"--the love or passions between the sexes--must form a large part of that dialectic.

All of O'Neill's plays mentioned above in connection with his supposed misogyny can better be viewed as dramas dealing with the theme of the suffering and destruction caused by strong irrational passions which produce conflicts of wills. This is why O'Neill's characters are so often "maelstroms of powerful emotions."[47] O'Neill had found intense, complex, and larger-than-life characters in Strindberg's dramatic method which "magnified the psychos"[48] of the personalities he created. Like Strindberg's dramas, O'Neill's own plays

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[45]Doris Alexander, The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. 184.

[46]Raleigh, p. 155.

[47]Ibid., p. 149.

[48]Nathan, p. 402.

were not to be built around plots but around character development. "His characters are, by turns and sometimes simultaneously, monolithic, contradictory, split, fluid, self-contained, and interacting. They are not rationally conceived but felt . . . ."[49] Some good examples of men and women in O'Neill's plays who are representative of O'Neill's ability to create dynamic "modern" characters are Ephraim and Eben Cabot in Desire Under the Elms--a father and his son, both in love with the same young woman--; Nina Leeds in Strange Interlude--a woman whose psychological needs lead her into multiple male relationships in her search for happiness--; and the members of the Mannon family in Mourning Becomes Electra--O'Neill's dramatization of the Orestean theme of Greek tragedy which includes violent murder and suicide. This discussion of human complexity and psychological processes in Strindberg and O'Neill will be carried further later in our study when we examine some of the "late" plays of both writers, but now we turn to a brief examination of the experimental dramatic techniques O'Neill utilized in his attempts to express human depth and complexity. Again he followed Strindberg's lead, and A Dream Play can be seen as the source of most of O'Neill's expressionistic ideas.

The production of The Emperor Jones in November, 1920,

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[49]Raleigh, p. 149.

"virtually introduced expressionism into the American theatre."[50] The play was written in eight shifting scenes, reminiscent of the shifting scenes of A Dream Play, and in it O'Neill experimented with "sustained monologue and the physical presence, on stage, of ghosts that exist only in the fevered imagination of the protagonist."[51] As noted above, Strindberg had previously experimented with both the monologue form (The Stronger) and the obsessive power of suggestion (The Father, Miss Julie, Creditors). The story of Jones' apparition-tormented flight through the jungle which is accompanied and accented by the now-famous drum beats is often called the "play that made O'Neill famous,"[52] and certainly its departure from traditional staging conventions was an integral part of its success.

In 1922 The Hairy Ape opened at the Provincetown Theatre. Alexander Woollcott, in a first-night review, described the work as a "bitter, brutal, wildly fantastic play of nightmare hue and nightmare distortion."[53] O'Neill's opening stage directions for the play include the following

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[50]John Gassner, Eugene O'Neill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1965), p. 16.

[51]Gelb, p. 438.

[52]Frederic I. Carpenter, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 89.

[53]Alexander Woollcott, "The Hairy Ape," in Cargill et al., p. 160.

comment, "The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in this play, should by no means be naturalistic."[54] Other stage directions indicate that churchgoers in the play are to resemble "a procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankensteins in their detached, mechanical unawareness," and O'Neill directs that this anti-naturalism reaches it climax when Yank, the play's protagonist, engages in a fist-fight with one of these churchgoing gentlemen. "He lets drive a terrific swing, his fist landing full on the fat gentleman's face. But the gentleman stands unmoved as if nothing had happened."[55] It is obvious that the play takes place in a nightmare/dream land. As Yank, a coal-stoker on a trans-atlantic liner, searches for a place where he "belongs," the play shifts from scene to scene, beginning in the hold of the liner and ending in the gorilla's cage at the zoo where Yank is crushed to death by the hairy ape. The play is a study of "the psychological implications of the machine age."[56] O'Neill intended Yank as 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

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[54]Eugene O'Neill, The Hairy Ape in Nine Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 39.

[55]Ibid., p. 69; p. 72.

[56]Sophus Keith Winther, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 194.

in a spiritual way,"[57] and he was diasppointed when the public "saw only the baffled stoker, not the symbol."[58]

In Beyond the Horizon O'Neill experimented with symbolic scenery, but again he was misunderstood. In a letter to Barrett Clark, O'Neill complained:

> Why is it, I wonder, that not one other critic has given me credit for a deliberate departure in form in search of a greater flexibility? They have all accused me of bungling through ignorance--whereas, if I had wanted to, I could have laid the whole play in the farm interior, and made it tight as a drum a la Pinero. Then, too, I should imagine the symbolism I intended to convey by the alternating scenes would be apparent even from a glance at the program.[59]

Later O'Neill explained further to an interviewer:

> One scene is out of doors, showing the horizon, suggesting the man's desire and dream. The other is indoors, the horizon gone, suggesting what has come between him and his dream. In that way I tried to get rhythm, the alternation of longing and loss.[60]

O'Neill experimented with masks as a major dramatic effect for the first time in The Great God Brown. "All the leading characters--Brown, Cybel . . ., Dion and Dion's wife, Margaret--use masks to cover their faces when they do not want their souls' secrets revealed, and doff them before those they trust."[61] O'Neill defended the modern

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[57]Quoted in Gassner, p. 19.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Quoted in Gelb, p. 411.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., p. 479.

dramatist's use of masks in a "Memoranda on Masks":

> For I hold more and more surely to the conviction that the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how--with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means--he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us. He must find some method to present this inner drama in his work, or confess himself incapable of portraying one of the most characteristic preoccupations and uniquely significant, spiritual impulses of his time. . . . For what, at bottom, is the new psychological insight into human cause and effect but a study in masks, an exercise in unmasking?[62]

O'Neill's "Dogma for the new masked drama" reads, "One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude bounded by the masks of oneself."[63]

In The Great God Brown O'Neill also created a symbolic figure who appeared again and again in his work--that of Cybel, the philosophical prostitute who represents the earth-mother-goddess. In Dynamo, a play which O'Neill said was to be the first of a trilogy "whose overall title might be God is Dead! Long Live--What?,"[64] the great symbol of the drama was the fantastic and grotesque dynamo itself which is pictured as the Mother-God of the modern age.

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[62]Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks," in Cargill et al., p. 116.

[63]Ibid., p. 117.

[64]Gelb, p. 679.

Further experimentation with the depiction of the modern split-personality took place in Strange Interlude and Days Without End. In the former he used "the Elizabethan device of the 'aside' on a scale never before attempted on the stage,"[65] and in the latter the protagonist is actually divided into two characters, "John," who believes in God and is faithful to his wife, and "Loving," the cynical, adulterous skeptic.

This brief survey of O'Neill's experiments with expressionistic techniques is by no means exhaustive, but it should be sufficient to indicate the manner in which Strindberg's expressionism suggested endless possibilities to O'Neill. Both playwrights felt that the dilemmas of modern man could not be satisfactorily portrayed in depth and with sufficient intensity unless new innovative techniques could be found--techniques which could more adequately reflect the complexity of the modern condition.

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[65]Gassner, p. 28.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF STRINDBERG'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE UPON O'NEILL

Eugene O'Neill once said that of all the plays he had ever read, the one he would most like to have written was Strindberg's Dance of Death.[1] According to John Raleigh, O'Neill's extreme admiration for this play grew out of the fact that when O'Neill looked into Strindberg, "he was, in effect, looking into a mirror."[2] This chapter intends to investigate the influence of Strindberg's philosophy of life upon O'Neill's work. In what ways did O'Neill's ideas concerning the nature of man and the nature of reality mirror Strindberg's? Some of the dramatists' ideas concerning man and his role in the universe have been introduced in the preceding chapter since it was impossible to discuss methods and techniques without mentioning the ideas being dramatized. This chapter begins, however, with an examination of Strindberg's ideas as expressed in two of his last plays,

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[1]Sheaffer, p. 395.

[2]John Henry Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill," Ramparts, II (Spring, 1964), p. 86.

The Dance of Death and The Ghost Sonata, and then proceeds to two of O'Neill's last plays, A Long Day's Journey into Night and The Iceman Cometh, in an attempt to compare the two dramatists' conclusions about the nature of life, love, illusion, death, and reality.

Strindberg wrote The Dance of Death in 1900. The Scandinavian scholar Alrik Gustafson writes of this play, "The Dance of Death is the most hopelessly pessimistic picture of human life that Strindberg ever penned."[3] In this work he took up again characters similar to those he had created in The Father, and the play is another description of the love-hate relationship between man and woman. However, after his inferno-crisis he was able to dramatize "the hostility which accompanies all romantic love . . . with much greater balance, detachment, and cogency."[4] The Dance of Death is not meant as a naturalistic depiction of the battle between the sexes; rather, the play is a blend of mysticism and realism and "constitutes a huge piece of symbolism--. . . the subject of its symbolical interpretation seems to be nothing less than the sum of human interrelationships."[5]

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[3]Gustafson, p. 39.

[4]Brustein, p. 112.

[5]Edwin Bjorkman, "Introduction" to Plays by August Strindberg, trans. Edwin Bjorkman, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), pp. 16-17.

The long play is composed of two parts. It is the story of a Captain and his wife, Alice, who are soon to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. They live an isolated life on a small island nicknamed "Little Hell." Their life together seems to be an aimless, endless round of pettiness, quarreling, hatred, and loathing. "The sex struggle is even sharper than that of The Father, and the battle in the first part of the play is pitched exceedingly high because it is more even between husband and wife."[6] A third character is introduced into this hellish situation, Kurt, the man who had originally introduced the pair. His arrival serves as a catalyst which accentuates and heightens the state of conflict between the Captain and Alice until the two become bestial primitives. Their hateful words and acts are beyond belief. Even they, in their calmer moments, cannot believe they could have acted so inhumanly. For example, once the Captain almost drowned his wife; Kurt questions him about the deed:

KURT: . . . Why did you push her into the water?

CAPTAIN: I don't know. It merely seemed quite natural to me, as she was standing on the pier, that she ought to be in the water.

KURT: Have you never regretted it?

CAPTAIN: Never!

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[6]Dahlstrom, p. 107.

KURT: That's strange!

CAPTAIN: Of course, it is! So strange that I cannot realize that I am the man who has been guilty of such a mean act.[7]

The Captain and Alice are Strindberg's exaggerated picture of the "primitive element" in the human being--"that which bursts out in us in spite of aesthetic, intellectual and emotional refinements."[8] There is, somehow, a demonic element in human nature, an element which is not always under rational control. One of the play's main themes seems to be that man's ungoverned passions are one source of this evil--that human nature is incredibly selfish. Gustafson carries this point even further:

> It is worthy of note that in this domestic tragedy Strindberg finds both man and woman equally guilty, which would seem to suggest that he has finally arrived at the conclusion that woman in herself is not the beginning of evil. Life itself is evil.[9]

Strindberg intended that Part II, which has been criticized as a pointless repetition of Part I, would signify the endless repetition involved, and the "terrifying thing"[10] about Part II actually is that the conflict is endless. Finally, however, the Captain dies, and the couple is liberated

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[7]August Strindberg, The Dance of Death, in Bjorkman, p. 210. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and cited by page number only.

[8]Dahlstrom, p. 110.

[9]Gustafson, p. 40.

[10]Ibid., p. 39.

from its struggle. Peace and quiet come over the household:

> ALICE: . . . But do you notice that there is peace in the house now? The wonderful peace of death. Wonderful as the solemn anxiety that surrounds the coming of a child into the world. (p. 268)

Then suddenly and ironically Alice recalls her husband as he had been in his youth and then remembers her love for him. Martin Lamm comments:

> The final scene [wherein the husband is dead] not only rounds out the drama artistically, but also gives it an infinite perspective. The unceasing, meaningless grim struggle in which the two battle against each other becomes a symbol of life itself.[11]

This interpretation of The Dance of Death indicates that Strindberg's lifetime of personal experiences had confirmed and strengthened him in the view of life he had first enunciated in the Preface to Miss Julie. But he had created Miss Julie as a dramatic case study of a particular type of man and a special kind of woman, whereas the mature Strindberg created the Captain and Alice as representatives of the condition of the entire human race. In Miss Julie conflict was inevitable between certain classes or between the sexes, but in The Dance of Death, life is conflict. No matter who you are or what your station in life, there is no end to this conflict as long as one lives.

One of the best critical essays on Strindberg's

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[11]Quoted in Dahlstrom, p. 111.

philosophy of life is Joseph Wood Krutch's essay "Strindberg and the Irreconcilable Conflict." In this essay Krutch gives ample and convincing evidence from Strindberg's plays to substantiate the thesis that for Strindberg " . . . the problem of the sexes is . . . simply a typical example of all human problems."[12] Krutch's analysis of Strindberg's view of the nature of man is so central to an understanding of the relationship between Strindberg and O'Neill, that its main points must be rehearsed here. According to Krutch, Strindberg views "irreconcilable conflict" as the central fact, not only in the relationship between men and women, but also, by analogy as "the central fact in the whole problem of the good life."[13] This basic idea leads to the following concomitant views: If the central eternal reality is not a community of interests but a conflict of interests, then dissonance rather than harmony is the condition to which the universe naturally tends; therefore, the personal life of a human being can never be a harmony; to be a man at all is to be neurotic, self-destructive, and unhappy; man is torn between irreconcilable impulses and it is the universe itself which puts him on the horns of the dilemma; the only salvation for mankind is a kind of accepted damnation--that life is good because it is painful.[14]

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[12]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Modernism" in Modern Drama (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 25.

[13]Ibid., p. 31.

[14]Ibid., pp. 31, 32, 42, 34, and 39.

Strindberg's lifelong interest in psychological processes had brought him to view man as a victim of his passions and the soul of man as a battleground where reason and passion battled for control. This was also a theme of St. Paul's[15] and of Milton's Paradise Lost, but in each of these cases supernatural aid in the form of God's son offered man some hope. In Strindberg's view there is little hope for either ultimate victory or reconcilation in isolated, "modern" man's battle for self-control.

This despairing view of life was pictured most intensely in the Chamber plays which Strindberg wrote in 1907. The Chamber plays are all preoccupied with death; Strindberg referred to them as his "last sonatas."[16] In these four plays Strindberg tried to create dramas "as suggestive, compelling, and hypnotic as romantic music,"[17] plays which could equal in effect the last sonatas of Beethoven. Evert Sprinchorn details the manner in which Strindberg attempted to achieve such an effect:

> What Strindberg created was a dramatic form in which less attention is paid to preparing

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[15]See, for example, Romans 7:15: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate," or Romans 7:19: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." The New Testament, Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946).

[16]Evert Sprinchorn, "Introduction" in The Chamber Plays by August Strindberg, trans. by Evert Sprinchorn et al. (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1962), p. xv.

[17]Ibid., p. ix.

> for the big scenes and building up suspense and more attention is given to drawing parallels between scenes and characters and to sustaining a mood at almost the same level of intensity throughout. Instead of working backward from the climatic scene . . . Strindberg conceives a symbolic situation and then explores all its possibilities.[18]

In The Ghost Sonata, the third of the Chamber plays, Strindberg dealt with his "firm conviction that we live in a world of madness and delusion (illusion) from which we must fight our way free,"[19] and the play is a "merciless exposure of life's most shameful secrets."[20]

The drama is a compound of dream mood and brutal naturalism. It opens in a realistically drawn Stockholm street setting, but the actions are obviously symbolic. Two of the play's central characters, Hummel, a sinister elderly man, and the Young Student, are in conversation in front of an attractive apartment building, but as the play develops it becomes apparent that "this attractive facade conceals nameless human misery."[21] The house, which at first is taken to be a house of life, is, in reality, a death-house. This death-in-life theme is obvious at tea-time when one of the servants describes the gathering:

> JOHANSSON: Are we going to have a musicale this evening? Or what is the occasion?

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[18]Ibid., pp. x-xi.

[19]Quoted in Meyer, p. 420.

[20]Sprigge, p. 265.

[21]Lamm, p. 133.

> BENGTSSON: Just the ordinary ghost supper, as we call it. They drink tea, without saying a word, or else the Colonel talks all by himself. . . .
>
> JOHANSSON: Why do you call it the ghost supper?
>
> BENGTSSON: They all look like ghosts . . . This has been going on for twenty years--always the same people, always saying the same things. Or else keeping silent to avoid being embarrassed.[22]

Death reigns because inside this house all is sham and deceit, and the Student gradually learns this hard lesson as the action unfolds. He had entered the house, on Hummel's invitation, believing it would be a paradise in which he could live happily married to the Colonel's beautiful daughter. Hummel, the truth-teller, sets out to reveal all the sordid secrets which bind the members of the household together. His ostensible reason for such revelations is that he wants to create a cleaner atmosphere in which his protege, the Student, and the Beautiful Young Lady can begin their married life. But Hummel, too, is unmasked, for it is he, and not the Colonel, who is actually the father of the Beautiful Young Lady. Hummel has been seeking revenge on the Colonel and has been thinking of himself, not the Student, as he acted.

Thus each member of the household is guilty of some secret sin. The family's mother, who has shrivelled into

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[22]August Strindberg, The Ghost Sonata, trans. by Evert Sprinchorn, p. 125. Further quotations from this play will be taken from this translation and will be cited by page number only.

a dried-up Mummy over the years, reveals the manner in which the household is united:

> THE MUMMY: Our crimes and our secrets and our guilt bind us together! We have split up and gone our separate ways an infinite number of times. But we're always drawn back together again . . . . (p. 131)

In the third and final scene or movement, the Young Lady and the Student talk of love. Perhaps this is the force that can overcome the evil and guilt of the world. The Student is determined, however, that this love must be anchored in reality. He will speak only the truth to the one whom he loves:

> STUDENT: Do you know how I am thinking about you now?
>
> YOUNG LADY: You must not tell me or I'll die!
>
> STUDENT: But I must or I'll die! (p. 149)

In spite of these warnings from his beloved, the Student

> reveals his knowledge of what has happened in these past hours; all is decayed and diseased, but keeping silent would only rot the truth . . . The Young Lady, the most beautiful of flowers, is also poisoned and has poisoned him. The fragrance of the room is deadly. There is a curse on all creation.[23]

The Young Lady dies, for "Beauty created out of falsehood will vanish if honesty prevails."[24] The Student's last

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[23]Lewis, pp. 55-56.

[24]Ibid., p. 55.

speech gives Strindberg's final vision of death:

> Your liberator is coming! Welcome, pale and gentle one . . . And you, you beautiful, innocent, lost soul, who suffer for no fault of your own, sleep, sleep a dreamless sleep. And when you wake again . . . may you be greeted by a sun that doesn't scorch, in a home without dust, by friends without faults, and by a love without flaw. (p. 151)

As Allan Lewis comments:

> Strindberg's world is not a pleasant one, but his despair at the triumph of evil does not result in his rejection of man, but in a deep compassion for man, a need to recognize pain and sorrows as the road to salvation.[25]

And, in the final analysis, only death can end the horrors of life.

"Where most people find in Strindberg's writings a nightmarish distortion of man's time on earth, O'Neill found an account of relentless truth."[26] First of all, O'Neill himself "both loved and hated almost everything,"[27] and his plays mirrored this Strindbergian dualistic view of life. John Gassner comments:

> Like his favorite modern playwright, Strindberg, O'Neill made division itself the subject of his plays. In them he tried to master the division he found in human nature and in the human condition, and because this was no easy enterprise, he was doomed to repeat the effort constantly.[28]

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[25] Ibid., p. 58.

[26] Sheaffer, p. 253.

[27] Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill," p. 80.

[28] John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 72.

John Raleigh describes the cosmological principle which underlies all of O'Neill's plays as follows:

> . . . There is in the plays a cosmological principle--and I think O'Neill himself was not fully aware of the ubiquity of his outlook in this respect--underlying everything he wrote, from first to last: the principle of polarity; the universe and human existence conceived of as an endless series of polarities, oppositions, antitheses, antinomies; the world as a kind of perpetual dialectic without synthesis, or the world as a perpetual alternation between opposites, which are both separate and inseparable. . . . In an untutored way, philosophically speaking, O'Neill . . . felt that polarity was the essential design of the world . . . He could never see human experience except in terms of antinomies, alternations, and repetitions.[29]

Raleigh further points out that this governing philosophical "principle of polarity" also often dictates a time-scheme for O'Neill's plays which is based on "the greatest cosmic polarity of all, night and day," as well as "two basic pairs of antithetical settings: sea and land, and city and farm."[30] And Harold Clurman contends that it is O'Neill's dualistic view which creates the drama of his work:

> In this everlasting duality with its equal pressures in several directions lies the brooding power, the emotional grip of O'Neill's work.[31]

O'Neill's "principle of polarity" is clearly evidenced in the divided personalities of the characters in his play

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[29]Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, pp. 3-4, p. 17.

[30]Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[31]Harold Clurman, "Long Day's Journey into Night," in Cargill et al., p. 216.

A Long Day's Journey into Night. It is common knowledge today that A Long Day's Journey into Night is actually the story of O'Neill's own family relationships.[32] But just as the characters in The Dance of Death were created by Strindberg as representative of all mankind, so O'Neill pictured through the microcosm of his own family the macrocosm of the world. "O'Neill has created a personal play which bears on the condition of all mankind; a bourgeois family drama with universal implications."[33]

The play is set in the O'Neill summer home in New London, Connecticut, in 1912, but the characters "could well be living on the moon for all the power that the America of 1912 exercises over them."[34] The setting is actually formed of that same compound of realism and symbolism that was so characteristic of Strindberg's Chamber plays. "Long Day's Journey into Night exists . . . in a split world, so full of gross reality, on the one hand, so ghostly, foggy, nebulous, on the other."[35] The "real" life includes whiskey, cursing, whores, laughter, poetry, card games, arguments, confessions, disease, doctors, drugs, and electric light

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[32]If it were not for Mrs. Carlotta O'Neill's disregard for her husband's expressed wishes, this play would still be unknown. O'Neill had directed that the play remain unpublished until twenty-five years after his death.

[33]Brustein, p. 350.

[34]Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill," p. 77.

[35]Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 151.

bulbs, but by Act IV "the play becomes a ghost story with the drugged Mary . . . fulfilling her husband's grim prophecy of Act III that before the night was out she would be like a 'mad ghost.'"[36]

The same journey through life that took place in A Dream Play, The Dance of Death, and The Ghost Sonata takes place in this drama, too, as the haunted members of the Tyrone family stumble through a long day and on into the night. The foghorn, which had been going all night long on the previous night, and which is heard at regular intervals as evening comes on again, is an ominous reminder of the encroaching fogs which envelop the Tyrone home. The same nightmarish quality that characterized Strindberg's expressionism also exists in this play, as "the fog has blurred all distinctions between night and day and land and sea," and the psychological processes of the play have blurred "the distinctions between the past and the present and the living and the dead."[37]

"The positive excellence of the play consists not in the plot but in the characterization."[38] The family is pictured as "living in a close symbiotic relationship, a single organism with four branches, where a twitch in one creates

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Frederic I. Carpenter, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 159.

a spasm in another."[39] The ambivalent Strindbergian love-hate relationship is evident in almost every line of the drama. As Edmund remarks of his mother, "It's as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us!"[40]

> The four members of the family react to each other with bewildering ambivalence--exposing illusions and sustaining them, striking a blow and hating the hand that strikes.[41]

Since this is a picture of O'Neill's own family, it is easy to see why The Dance of Death had influenced him so powerfully!

Each member of the family makes a psychological journey into the dark night of his soul--"a journey into the hell of truth."[42]

> For the mother, it is a sad journey into the fog of dope and dreams. For Jamie, it is a hopeless journey into the night of cynicism and despair. For the father, it is a tragic journey down the wrong road, away from an earlier triumph . . . .[43]

For the younger son, Edmund, it is a journey winding its way in and out of the tortured night of the others, as well as into his own reality in which "truth and life plague him like a disease."[44] Nightmare loneliness engulfs them all. The chains of self-disgust, guilt, and illusion are as

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[39]Brustein, p. 351.

[40]Eugene O'Neill, A Long Day's Journey into Night (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 139. Further quotations from this play will be cited by page number only.

[41]Brustein, p. 352.

[42]Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 19.

[43]Carpenter, p. 163.

[44]Brustein, p. 354.

binding in this household as they had been among the family members in The Ghost Sonata, and the cries of anguish are tragic echoes of the cries of A Dream Play. In Act IV, when Edmund and his father discuss the fact that the son must enter a tuberculosis sanitarium, the father confesses how he has betrayed himself for monetary gain; Edmund's brother Jamie reveals that jealousy makes him his brother's worst enemy; and Edmund's mother sinks further and further into a drugged dream of her past youthful happiness. The curtain closes on a despairing and deathlike scene; surely "Human beings are to be pitied."[45] A Long Day's Journey into Night exposes "the forces that work both to unite and to tear asunder all human groups,"[46] and says, "human illusions cannot withstand the monstrous invasions of reality."[47] The only moments of peace in the entire play are ones that come when Edmund, who has the makings of a poet in him, describes experiences he has had while walking in the fog or sailing at sea:

> 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 . . . Like a saint's vision of beatitude. Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For

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[45]The refrain from A Dream Play.

[46]Henry Hewes, "A Long Day's Journey into Night," in Cargill et al., p. 218.

[47]Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 154.

> a second you see--and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on toward nowhere for no good reason! . . . It was a great mistake, my being born a man. . . . As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death! (p. 154)

For O'Neill, as for Strindberg, personal interrelationships are so difficult and so destructive that death is the only peaceful experience man can ever really know. Therefore it is not surprising that the play which has been described as O'Neill's "culmination and his demise"[48] is a play about the impending arrival of the Iceman, Death.

The Iceman Cometh is "the most intricately and symbolically coded of all O'Neill's plays,"[49] and in many ways it is the playwright's most bitter and despairing drama, "concerned as it is with murder, suicide, loneliness, guilt, fear of death, the problems of identity, the necessity for illusions, the ambiguities of pity, the nature of 'truth,' and the paradox of commitment."[50] O'Neill himself said of it, "The Iceman is a denial of any other experience of faith in my plays."[51]

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[48]Robert C. Lee, "Evangelism and Anarchy in The Iceman Cometh," Modern Drama, XII (September, 1969), p. 173.

[49]Gelb, p. 831.

[50]Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 161.

[51]Quoted by Croswell Bowen, "The Black Irishman," in Cargill et al., p. 84.

At first glance this play, too, seems to have a most realistic setting. All four acts take place in the backroom and a section of the bar at Harry Hope's saloon which is located on the downtown West Side of New York. Several studies have documented the fact that the locale of the play is taken from O'Neill's own past: Harry Hope's is modelled closely on similar bars which O'Neill had frequented in his youth, such as Jimmy the Priest's and the Hell-Hole. And the year in which the play takes place, 1912, was, in fact, the year when O'Neill attempted suicide in his room at Jimmy the Priest's. But before one has read or seen much of the drama, it becomes obvious that once again O'Neill has combined realism and symbolism in creating the backdrop for his play. One of the main characters, Larry Slade, describes the place:

> What is it? It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Cafe, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller! Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go.[52]

Harry Hope's saloon is another house full of living-dead men, and that the place should be named "Hope's" is clearly ironic. The death-in-life nature of the play is obvious

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[52]Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh, in Twentieth Century Drama, eds. Ruby Cohn and Bernard Dukore (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 422. All further quotations from this play will be cited by page number only and will refer to this edition.

throughout;[53] one of the most deathlike scenes occurs in Act II when a birthday party is given for Hope. The party is described by one of the bartenders as "a funeral" (p. 484), and it is strongly reminiscent of Strindberg's "ghost supper."

The theme of the play is also quite similar to the theme of The Ghost Sonata, for The Iceman Cometh deals with the relation of man's illusions to his life and his death, and one of the central characters of the play is a truth-teller, who, like Strindberg's Student, apparently believes he can save the ones whom he loves from the guilty miseries of life if he can bring them to face the truth about themselves.

The characters of the play were based on personal friends out of O'Neill's past of whom he has remarked, "The people in that saloon were the best friends I've ever known."[54] At the center of the action is Hickey, the truth-teller, who is a salesman of death disguised as a salesman of life. As the play begins, Hickey's arrival is eagerly awaited by the regular habitues of the establishment, for on previous visits, he has lavishly dispensed both free drinks and good cheer. The regular customers of the saloon form a group of the lost and the damned which includes Larry Slade, the old Foolosopher,

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[53]A recent monograph detailing the relationship of death to the setting, the characters, and the action of the play is Winifred Frazer's Love as Death in The Iceman Cometh (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1967).

[54]Quoted by Bowen, in Cargill, p. 82.

who claims he has retired from life; Don Parritt, a young newcomer and former friend of Slade's; and thirteen other down-and-out bedraggled specimens of humanity who represent a cross-section of mankind.

> Because he is universalizing . . . O'Neill has created instead of one antagonist a whole catalogue of them--the deadbeats, alcoholics, pimps, whores, bartenders, and illusionists who inhabit Harry Hope's premises . . . He has drawn them from the humblest condition of life in order to show mankind at the extremity of its fate.[55]

Each member of the group has his secret sorrows and seeks relief from his miserable existence through alcohol; the alcoholic stupor which pervades the play is just another evidence of death's ominous presence. Early in the drama it is established that this group escapes the harshness of reality not only through drunkenness but also through dreams. The characters are all members of the great Tomorrow movement; each man and woman has his "pipe-dream" about what he can and will do tomorrow, and "the sum of these pipe-dreams is meant to represent the total content of human illusion."[56] Political, racial, domestic, status, psychological, intellectual, and philosophical illusions are all represented. Larry Slade's second speech enunciates the philosophy of the group: "To hell with the truth! . . . The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober." (p. 415). And yet, each character is privately

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[55]Brustein, pp. 340-41.

[56]Ibid., p. 341.

aware that he presently lives in a world of shared illusions, and "supposes that when he gets ready he can move again into the world of social respectability and accomplishment."[57]

The play is lengthy (approximately four and one-half hours when produced), and the dialogue often seems repetitious and circular. Several critics have berated the drama on this account, but O'Neill adamantly resisted any attempts to cut the script; he said he intended for a certain point to be repeated eighteen times.[58] Each act is intended, in fact, as "a single variation on the theme of illusion,"[59] and the development of the theme depends on the repetitious correspondences which are established. This study cannot begin to examine each character's illusions, but, in general, what happens when Hickey arrives at Harry Hope's, bringing with him a new "Gospel of Truth" which is to "save" his friends by forcing them to admit their past failures and hidden guilts?

Hickey explains that he has finally "had the guts" to face himself and throw his own "damned lying pipe dreams" overboard; he insists that he is now "at peace" with himself. He offers as proof the fact that he no longer needs any booze to make him happy. Hickey actually preaches an evangelistic

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[57]Tom F. Driver, "On the Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill," in O'Neill, ed. by John Gassner (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 115.

[58]Gelb, p. 864.

[59]Brustein, p. 341.

sermon to his friends in this "Palace of Pipe Dreams":

> Of course, I was only kidding Cora with that stuff about saving you . . . No, I wasn't either. But I didn't mean booze. I meant save you from pipe dreams. I know now, from my experience, they're the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace . . . Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy--honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows. (p. 450)

Then he begins to go from person to person and to verbally attack each individual's private world. He openly discusses the manner in which each man or woman has been pretending to be something other than what he really is. Of course exposing these pretensions is like laying nerve-ends bare. The formerly compatible group becomes sullen and angry; each member of the group begins to vent his self-hatred on the others. For example, the Negro Joe, who has been considered "white" until the advent of Hickey's "truth-campaign," becomes self-conscious about his color:

> Listen to me, you white boys! Don't you get it in your heads I's pretendin' to be what I ain't, or dat I ain't proud to be what I is, get me? Or you and me's going' to have trouble! (p. 462)

As Rocky the barkeep puts it, "Everybody's gettin' a prize grouch on." (p. 457). Hickey suggests that even Larry, who supposedly has retired to the "grandstands" of life and who often comments that all he wants from life is death, is bluffing, and that he actually has a terrible fear of death.

In Act III which takes place on the day after Hickey's arrival (Tomorrow!), each man sets out to do what he has been saying he would do: Hope, who has not set foot out of his

saloon since his wife's death twenty years ago, is to visit some of his old friends; Jimmy Tomorrow is to apply for a job; Cora, a prostitute, and Chuck, her pimp, set off to be married. But, strangely enough, the type of peace and happiness Hickey had predicted for everyone is not apparent. Instead the atmosphere is cold, for, as Larry observes, Hickey has brought Death the Iceman with him (p. 496). Stripped of their illusions, the characters' manner suggests "the last march of the condemned." (p. 499). Cora remarks that Harry and Jimmy "look like dey was going to de electric chair." (p. 498). And matters are only worsened when the characters face reality outside Harry Hope's. Harry cannot bring himself to even cross the street in front of his place; Jimmy does not have the nerve to go to the newspaper to see about a job; Cora and Chuck do not get married. One by one the characters return to the saloon; and now they not only look as if they were dead; they act dead, too. Even the booze has no kick in it!

Hickey is amazed at the failure of his plan, so to explain why he was so sure he could save his friends, he now relates how he had divested himself of his own pipe dreams and found peace. In one of the stage's longest soliloquies the play reaches its climax. Hickey confesses that he has killed his wife. At first he declares that he killed her because he loved her so that he could not bear to see her sorrow any longer over his inability to live up to her dreams of his love and faithfulness. The horrifying truth

that he blurts out, however, is that he actually killed her because of his own guilt feelings which had turned to a burning hatred. Then his confession stopped "with a horrified start, as if shocked out of a nightmare, as if he couldn't believe he heard what he had just said." (p. 524). Hickey finally realizes that his dream of love was as great a pipe dream as any his friends had had, and he lapses into a new illusion, declaring that he must have been insane.

This "insanity pipe dream" releases most of the other characters from the death-grip of the "truth campaign." Booze once again has its old kick and the cameraderie of shared illusions returns. Only two characters have actually been changed by the activities of the past days: Parritt realizes that he has betrayed his mother because he hated her, and he commits suicide; Slade, realizing that the chief illusions of life center around the power of love and the strength of truth, becomes a convert to absolute despair. As he hears Parritt's body fall from an upstairs window, he speaks:

> Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now! (p. 533)

The Iceman Cometh has often been compared to The Wild Duck and The Lower Depths, but the above analysis shows the play's undeniable parallels to the work of Strindberg. Both the drama's consistent preoccupation with death and its manner of laying stark reality bare link The Iceman Cometh to The Dance of Death and the Chamber plays.

Louis Sheaffer records the following conversation between O'Neill and a friend:

> The day that he wrote his Nobel Prize speech, in 1936, he told a friend, Sophus Keith Winther: "I wish immortality were a fact, for then some day I would meet Strindberg." When Winther demurred, "That would scarcely be enough to justify immortality," he was surprised to get a quick, vigorous reply. O'Neill, generally low-voiced and so slow of speech . . . came back instantly with, "It would be enough for me."[60]

Whether or not this meeting of immortals has occurred is, of course, a matter for speculation, but this study has attempted to outline the manner in which a meeting of minds had already taken place between Strindberg and O'Neill. The prevailing dark tones and the similarity of themes between Strindberg's late plays and O'Neill's last work give strong evidence that Strindberg's philosophy of life was influential in the formation of O'Neill's own ideas about life and death.

In A Dream Play the characters are searching for a key to a locked door and it is urgent that the key be found because behind that door one will find the answer to the riddle of the universe. Both Strindberg and O'Neill were as urgently searching for this key. In so doing they created modern tragedies which have been described by Raymond Williams as "private" tragedies--tragedies which mirror the disintegration of public and social values and which leave

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[60]Sheaffer, p. 253.

man, isolated and stripped of any external supports, involved in a personal life and death struggle:

> The storm of living does not have to be raised, by any personal action; it begins when we are born, and our exposure to it is absolute. Death, by contrast, is a kind of achievement, a comparative settlement and peace.[61]

The plays examined in this chapter have shown that these private tragedies are full of bitter despair; life is actually denied, for it is pictured as futile and agonizing since it consists largely of lies and illusions. Mankind is to be pitied, for he can "live" only in a world of dreams. He can never know what is behind the closed door; or, even worse, as A Dream Play states and The Iceman Cometh implies, when the door is opened "Nothing" is revealed. Death is affirmed as the only positive way out of the world's dilemmas and webs of guilt and illusion. Powerful dramatizations of these private visions, such as The Ghost Sonata and The Iceman Cometh, obviously place both Strindberg and O'Neill in that great dark tradition which includes Dostoevsky, Conrad, Baudelaire, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and others. For most of us, these visions are too terrible and too nightmarish to be truly representative of all reality, "but it would be difficult to overemphasize the persistence of this pattern in twentieth century literature"[62] or to deny the existence of irrational evil as a force in life today.

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[61]Williams, Modern Tragedy, p. 106.

[62]Ibid., p. 115.

The journey into the dark night of the soul has been of special concern to many significant modern novelists and poets, including Conrad, Joyce, and Eliot. Among modern dramatists, Strindberg was the first to make that dreadful journey, and his greatest plays stand as witnesses to the terrors that must be faced along the way, as well as guideposts for those twentieth-century playwrights who were later to make that same descent. This study has intended to show just how important those guideposts were to Eugene O'Neill.

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VITA

Mrs. Mary Emily Edwards, nee Parsons, was born in Kansas in 1933. She graduated from Wyandotte High School, Kansas City, Kansas, in 1951, and received the Bachelor of Science degree in English Education, with Senior honors, from Kansas University in 1956. In 1959 she was awarded the Master of Arts degree in Religion from Northwestern University; she has also done graduate work in English at Northwestern University (1961) and at the University of Wisconsin (summer, 1962). During 1959-60 she had a year's study of French language and literature at the University of Strasbourg, France, and a summer session of study at the University of Neuchatel, Switzerland.

Mrs. Edwards has had three years of high-school teaching experience in the field of English. In 1958-59 and in 1960-61 she was a member of the faculty of the Niles Township High School, Skokie, Illinois, and in 1962-63 she taught eleventh-grade English at East High School, Madison, Wisconsin. During her years at Niles Township High School she was a member of an eight-man committee which prepared an English curriculum study guide for the school system, and from 1966-68 she was Associate Editor of The Wesleyan Quarterly Review: A Magazine of Methodist History.

Mrs. Edwards plans to resume her activities as a teacher of English in the near future and hopes to continue her graduate studies and earn a Ph.D. degree in the years ahead.