THE VISION OF WOMAN

IN THE

PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

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Except where acknowledgement is made, this thesis is my own work.

(Rabia Abbas)
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I would like to thank for their patience all those who have been associated with this enterprise. In this regard I wish to thank my mother and father in particular. I am grateful to Dr L. Dobrez for his supervision of my work, and to Mr F. H. Langman for his help. I wish to add a special thanks to Dr J. C. Eade for his advice on style. I would also like to thank the staff of the Australian National University Library. Finally, I am indebted to my family and friends for their much-needed love and support during the writing of this thesis.
Quotations from O'Neill's plays are not referred to by their act and scene numbers. Instead, quotations from the three-volume edition of O'Neill's works, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, are referred to by volume and page number, and quotations from plays not included in this edition are identified by the play's title and the page on which the quotation occurs. Apart from the italicization of titles and foreign words, stage directions quoted in the thesis are also italicized. Finally, American spellings in the quotations from O'Neill's plays and from secondary sources have been retained.
The phrase "vision of woman" refers primarily to O'Neill's view of the mother, or maternal woman, as the source of comfort, forgiveness, redemption, and peace. Woman is seen as a symbol of the peace and unity that O'Neill longed for in a chaotic and divided world. This gives woman a position of singular importance in O'Neill's work, for the desire for peace is the driving force behind his protagonists' actions. It is the longing for peace, moreover, that underlies the central theme that runs through O'Neill's drama: the need to belong.

Despite a general awareness of the significance of woman's role in O'Neill, the close link that exists between O'Neill's central theme of "belonging" and his vision of woman, and the manner in which this link affected O'Neill's drama, has not been given sufficient critical attention. It is the intention of this thesis to analyse the basis for the importance of woman in O'Neill, as well as the manner in which this importance manifests itself in the plays, seeing the link between theme and woman as central to the whole discussion.

This thesis, then, attempts both to demonstrate and to analyse the power of O'Neill's vision of woman. The first three chapters, dealing with aesthetics, psychology, and religion, examine the relationship between O'Neill's view of woman and his conception of life and art. Chapter (vi)
four analyses the manner in which O'Neill's habit of seeing the maternal redemptive woman as an ideal figure affected the dramatization of the women in his plays. And finally, chapter five traces the development of woman's symbolic function to its final culmination in the late plays.
To analyse the vision of woman in O'Neill is, in one sense, to study the obvious, for the importance of woman's role has been acknowledged by most critics of his work. But despite a general awareness of the importance of the women in the plays, the close link that exists between O'Neill's central theme of "belonging"\(^1\) and his vision of woman, and the manner in which this link has affected O'Neill's drama, has not been given sufficient attention. It is the intention of this thesis to analyse the basis for the importance of woman in O'Neill, as well as the manner in which this importance manifests itself in the plays, seeing the link between theme and woman as central to the whole discussion.

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"Belonging" for O'Neill was associated with the need to establish a right relationship between man and the

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universe. In other words, it signified the need to find faith, security, harmony: the niche wherein man could be one with the universe rather than in opposition to it. He saw man as a lost and alienated being in a disordered and divided world, who needed to be a part of something outside himself in order to attain a sense of order, harmony and equilibrium. O'Neill expresses this belief in many ways: it manifests itself in the atavistic journey of the protagonist in The Emperor Jones and in Yank's attempt in The Hairy Ape to rediscover his sense of identity; it is seen in the desire of Robert Mayo to go beyond the horizon and in the yearning of Dion Anthony to attain an awareness of infinity; Nina Leed's longing for a maternal theism, as well as the need of the characters in the late plays to reach out beyond the loneliness and despair of the self to make contact with others, indicates the need to belong. In much of O'Neill's work man's dilemma is a consequence of his having lost an awareness of his place in the natural cycle of things (O'Neill's version of the fall from paradise). Consequently, belonging can signify an association with the natural forces of the land and sea.

However, the expression by O'Neill's protagonists of what he sees as a universal need does not always result in fulfilment. In fact the success of his characters in fulfilling their need to belong is often of a limited and ambiguous nature, for O'Neill's inherently nihilistic attitude to life led him to believe that the denial of human hopes and needs was the inevitable consequence of
existence. Within this context woman is seen both as a manifestation of the outside force which man yearns to align himself with, and as a source of peace and comfort when all else has failed. Woman in her role as mother is both a symbol of all that man longs for, and also his one real hope of realizing that longing.

O'Neill's view of woman as a symbol of peace indicates the general nature of his response to woman. He sees her as different from man in a way that enables him to invest her with an intensification of what he sees as innately feminine qualities, and with qualities that are both other than, and more than, human. Simone de Beauvoir points out that man sees woman as "the essential Other, because woman is the material representation of alterity". It is because O'Neill sees woman as other than man that he dramatizes Beatriz as the spirit of the fountain of youth in The Fountain, and invests Cybel in The Great God Brown with the divine qualities of an Earth Mother. This tendency manifests itself in even his earliest work, for the Polish peasant woman in Fog is seen as more than just a mother; she represents the power and beauty of selfless love.

While every woman in his plays is created as a believable human being within the dramatic action, O'Neill's vision of woman contains within itself symbolic associations that cause many of his women characters to stand out as something more than human. O'Neill himself provides an

indirect explanation for this. In writing *The Great God Brown* he intended there to be a "mystical pattern which manifests itself as an overtone ... dimly behind and beyond the words and actions of the characters".\(^1\) The protagonists in the play are meant to be seen as "recognizable human beings", with the "mystery" of life being projected "mystically within and beyond them, giving them a significance beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend".\(^2\) In a manner similar to this O'Neill uses many of his women characters to project conceptions that go beyond their basic roles as female characters in a play. This projection may be overtly symbolic, as in the obvious case of Cybel in *The Great God Brown*, or it may be implicitly conveyed through the attitude of the other characters towards her, as in the case of Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Yet O'Neill's dramatization of woman in this manner does not imply a single, unified view of woman in his plays. Although his portrayal of woman is dominated and influenced by a single image--that of the ideal woman who incorporates within herself all the positive values of the mother--the vision of woman that emerges from his work is of a dual nature. This duality is related to O'Neill's total outlook on life, for as John Henry Raleigh points

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out, O'Neill's view of the world was one based upon "the principle of polarity; the universe and human existence conceived of as an endless series of polarities, oppositions, antitheses, antinomies". ¹ Raleigh is correct in finding a pervasive duality in O'Neill's work, and his definition of polarity as involving the idea of "opposites, which are both separate and inseparable"² clearly defines the image of woman in the plays. Woman is seen as both positive and negative, as preserver and destroyer, as man's redeemer and the agent of his destruction.

In any attempt to understand and to interpret the vision of woman in O'Neill, the relationship between the playwright and his art must be considered. Two related factors make this necessary. Firstly, the obsessive nature of O'Neill's preoccupation with his work; and secondly, the awareness that so much of O'Neill's writing consists of an attempt to understand himself and his relationship with those close to him. Consequently some knowledge of the reasons that led O'Neill to write is required. O'Neill was the most subjective of writers, and for him writing served a particular need. That need was, to use Doris Falk's words, the desire "to express and to assuage the lifelong torment of a mind in conflict".³ This is the basic impulse that underlies all O'Neill's

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work, and it gives shape to the vision of woman in the plays. At one level this can be seen as a purely psychological concern: the working out of neurotic attachments and obsessions through the medium of art. But at another, higher, level O'Neill's expression of subjective needs through art led to the transmutation of personal desire into images and ideas of universal significance and great dramatic power. In terms of the role of woman in the plays this led, above all, to the creation of the figure of the maternal redeemer.

O'Neill's decision to become a writer came after an early life marked by insecurity, rebellion, and aimlessness. The most significant events of these early years were his discovery of his mother's drug addiction and his decision to abandon the Catholic faith. It seems very likely that O'Neill's religious rebellion was associated with his discovery of his mother's addiction. There is some disagreement among O'Neill's biographers as to the cause of Ella O'Neill's addiction to morphine, but O'Neill undoubtedly felt that he was in some way responsible for his mother's predicament. The aimlessness of the years that followed led ultimately to an attempt at suicide, and finally to O'Neill's being

diagnosed as tubercular. It was while undergoing treatment for his illness that O'Neill decided to devote himself to writing drama.

Describing the manner in which he became a playwright, O'Neill said:

If I hadn't had an attack of tuberculosis, if I hadn't been forced to look at myself, while I was in the sanatorium, harder than I had ever done before, I might never have become a playwright.¹

The importance of O'Neill's illness in his decision to become a writer cannot be discounted, for, as O'Neill himself said, it was then that he first seriously took stock of his life and decided between a life of aimless dilettantism and a life of purpose. However, Philip Weissman puts forward an illuminating hypothesis, stating:

O'Neill sees himself emerging as a dramatist as a result of a contemplated decision during a contemplative period. We prefer to see the playwright born as a result of a dynamic psychic conflict rearranging itself into physical illness and creative sublimations.²

In emphasizing the "dynamic psychic conflict" prior to and resulting in O'Neill's illness, Weissman implies that O'Neill's creative urge can be seen as the resolution of a deep conflict rather than merely as an adjustment to new circumstances. In fact, Weissman states earlier that:


His becoming a writer was evidently psychically more complicated than the mere decision to become one. It was more complicated than transforming an active physical life into an active mental life, although the latter contains a plausible piece of total truth.¹

Although Weissman does not mention it, preferring to relate the psychic complexity of O'Neill's decision to write to his troubled relationship with his family, it would seem that the complex nature of O'Neill's creative urge is ultimately based upon its being the channelling of forces that may otherwise have led him to self-destruction.

In later years, O'Neill made light of his suicide attempt, describing it in a farcical manner. A more revealing attitude is found in his play Exorcism, which Bogard sees as direct autobiography.² Although the play was destroyed by O'Neill after production, Alexander Woollcott's review describes the plot in some detail. It concerns a young man who so despises his wealthy family that he leaves home and promptly begins a downward slide in life. He is "down in the dregs of existence ... equally revolted by the character of his life and by the prospect of a surrendering, prodigal-son return".³ The hero tries suicide, and surviving, finds nothing changed but himself.

¹. Ibid., 446.


O'Neill's ultimate judgement was that to survive such an action was like being reborn. This attitude seems a likely one for O'Neill to have adopted in retrospect, especially since his illness and decision to write followed soon after his attempt at suicide. Yet the pattern of his life leading to this attempt was such as to suggest that had he not been forced to a reappraisal of his life through illness, he might have repeated the pattern in its entirety with the ultimate fatal consequence.

Writing, then, was O'Neill's whole life. His widow remarked that "He died ... when he could no longer work. He died spiritually. And it was just a matter of dragging a poor diseased body along for a few more years until it too died".¹

The compulsive urge that underlay O'Neill's writing, and the importance that it assumed in his life, were readily admitted by the playwright. He stated: "I kept on writing ... because I had such a love of it. I was highly introspective, intensely nervous and self-conscious. ... When I was writing I was alive".² He reiterated this statement in various forms throughout his life, commenting on one occasion:

Keep on writing, no matter what! That's the most important thing. As long as you


² Croswell Bowen, "The Black Irishman", PM, 3 Nov. 1946; rptd in Cargill, O'Neill and His Plays, p.71.
Writing served rather a paradoxical function for O'Neill. It shielded him from the world both in the sense that it gave him a reason to justify (and practise) his reclusive tendency, and it absorbed all his mental energy, thus enabling him to withdraw from life. Yet in another sense it was this very withdrawal that permitted him to concentrate totally on the problems of self and inner conflict that he was not prepared to face on a personal, day to day level. In other words, it was only through art that O'Neill was able to face the problems that obsessed him.

Although it is unlikely that O'Neill began his life as a dramatist with any conscious intention of discovering himself through his work, that is, in effect, what occurred. Drama for O'Neill became a voyage of self-discovery which culminated in the intensely self-revelatory *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the play in which he was finally able to face his past and to come to a compassionate understanding of every member of his family, including himself. It was as if O'Neill had to return to the past in order to come to terms with it.

Indeed, Engel argues that O'Neill never left the past, and, in a sense, he never did, for the self he was attempting to comprehend had been so intensely affected by the experiences of his early life that those events

became the central focus of his whole attitude to existence. 1 Although it would be rash to over-emphasize the factual aspect of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the play functions as an extremely valuable indication of O'Neill's personal attitude towards the facts of his life. Through *Long Day's Journey Into Night* the emotional facts of O'Neill's life are revealed.

Within this context, the central source of the importance of woman in O'Neill becomes clear, for the main focus of O'Neill's response is upon the female protagonist of the play: his mother. It is in Mary Tyrone and her relationship to the men in the play that O'Neill crystallizes the deep longing for maternal succour that plays so important a role in the formulation of his vision of woman. It is also in relation to Mary that O'Neill dramatizes an intense feeling of insecurity and utter desolation, for the whole weight of Edmund Tyrone's first awareness of chaos rests upon his discovery of his mother's drug addiction. Describing the horror of this experience he cries, "God! It made everything in life seem rotten!". 2 This leads to a paradoxical situation, for Mary is the cause of the family's insecurity, yet it is she who also has the potential to bring the sense of order and hope that the

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men long for. Although much is said of James' responsibility for the family's predicament, it is Mary's condition that both mirrors and perpetuates their present state.

Mary's immense power rests upon her symbolic and spiritual significance: as the mother, she functions as the central symbol of home in the play. The men see their desires for life and their faith in the future in terms of Mary; they long for her to be whole, as their sense of integrity depends upon her well-being. But the reality of the situation belies this longing, for Mary is actually the clearest indication of the family's rootlessness. Thus Mary has a dual function, for she is as much a symbol of homelessness, of a lack of security and a denial of hope, as of home.

Mary, therefore, has the potential both to redeem and to destroy, but her duality extends beyond her symbolic significance, and is reflected in her character as well. Every facet of her personality is a combination of opposites, making her stubborn, spiteful and malevolent as well as forgiving and loving, innocent as well as knowing, a child as well as a woman, pious and believing as well as despairing, pure and chaste as well as a "dope fiend". She is, ultimately, as the autobiographical nature of her role and the collection of qualities she embodies suggest, the source of O'Neill's vision of woman.

Although critical opinion has acknowledged the force of woman's role in O'Neill's drama, in the major critical works it has always been seen from the perspective of some
other predominating preoccupation. In general, O'Neill's critics have remarked upon aspects of O'Neill's dramatization of woman that are both valid and pertinent to this thesis, but there has been no attempt to analyse the plays with the role of woman as the prime focus of attention. A brief survey of critical opinion will make this clear.

Both Edwin Engel and Doris Falk point out what is an essential consideration in any analysis of woman's role in O'Neill: the psychological power of presenting the mother as a symbol of peace and harmony. Falk comments: "The ideal mother for whom all men long still exists in human consciousness, still represents peace, freedom, and spontaneous love." But this observation forms a subsidiary aspect of both studies: Falk includes it within the larger framework of a psychological analysis of O'Neill's plays, and in Engel's work it forms one part of his concern with what he sees as O'Neill's central theme—the struggle between life and death.

The earliest study to recognize the power of woman, R. D. Skinner's *Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest*, acknowledges the existence and importance of the masculine and feminine instincts in O'Neill's work. Skinner remarks upon the presence in O'Neill of "the feminine idea, the power that can suffocate or cure, destroy or create". But Skinner's observation is made within the context of a religious study of the plays. Robert Heilman, analysing

the melodramatic nature of O'Neill's drama, points out O'Neill's fascination with "the coalescence of the maternal, filial, and erotic, as experienced by the woman or as sought by the man".¹ In a general survey of O'Neill's work Clifford Leech offers an extreme view of the dominating power of woman, seeing Anna Christie, Ruth Mayo, Eileen Carmody, Emma Crosby, and Martha Jayson as women who compel men to do their will.² In a slightly different vein, Robert Brustein sees O'Neill's dramatization of women as demonstrating the weaker aspects of his work, remarking upon O'Neill's "puerile sentimentalization of whores, his Romantic idealization of chaste women".³

Despite the varied critical commentary on the women in O'Neill's plays, little or no attention has been paid to the notion of the vision of woman as a dominant idea in its own right, one that exerts an influence through the whole of O'Neill's canon. Although inherently a nihilist who despaired of existence, O'Neill required some absolute idea or image on which to focus. In his world the maternal redeemer functions as that ideal image, for within this concept is contained the feeling of harmony, unity, and wholeness that O'Neill saw as essential to his view of the world as it ought to be. The power of this image is indicated not only by its association with the

central theme of belonging, but also through its link with O'Neill's tragic vision, his longing for death, and his transcendental and religious concerns.

Raleigh hints at the integral role of woman in O'Neill, remarking that:

At the center of most of O'Neill's plays is the male-female relationship, considered from every conceivable angle or level, from the grossly animal, not to mention commercial (the woman as object), to a sacramental concept of marriage (the woman as idea). ¹

However, R. D. Skinner, and one of the more recent critics of O'Neill's work, Travis Bogard, come closest to an awareness of the nature of woman's role and her power in the plays. In referring to the "feminine idea" that has the capacity to destroy or create, Skinner postulates a notion somewhat similar to the vision of woman put forward in this study. Yet Skinner does not indicate an awareness of the full importance of this idea, perhaps because his primary concern is to show the evolution of O'Neill's religious consciousness, with its ultimate acceptance of Catholicism in Days Without End. Bogard emphasizes the importance of the dichotomy between male and female (particularly the contrast between the concepts of male and female deity), and explores in depth the notion of woman as creator and destroyer. Discussing woman's role, he expresses ideas which are extremely important to a study of the vision of woman in O'Neill, stating that:

O'Neill combines the woman's predatory nature with another quality that makes

¹. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 98.
her supremely desirable: she becomes the object, in part, of the poet's quest. She is not only the destroying wife, but also the mother, in whose love the poet seeks to find forgetfulness, and the sense of home and unity with nature.¹

The relevance of Bogard's observation to this analysis is clear, for it is O'Neill's depiction of woman as the focus of his protagonists' yearnings, and the symbolic implications of this role, that give woman such importance in his work.

This thesis, then, attempts both to demonstrate and to analyse the power of O'Neill's vision of woman. The first three chapters, dealing with aesthetics, psychology, and religion, examine the relationship between O'Neill's view of woman and his conception of life and art. Chapter four analyses the manner in which O'Neill's habit of seeing the maternal redemptive woman as an ideal figure affected the dramatization of the women in his plays. And finally, chapter five traces the development of woman's symbolic function through to its final culmination in the late plays.

The relationship between O'Neill's aesthetic and his vision of woman is complex and multi-faceted, and in order to understand the nature of this relationship it is necessary to analyse his aesthetic in some detail. In fact the emphasis of this chapter will be upon an explication of O'Neill's theory of art, for although the importance given to woman (and in particular to the beneficent maternal redeemer) by O'Neill was rooted in his personal fears and longings, the manner in which she is dramatized is modulated by the basic tenets of his aesthetic. Moreover, the ideas which inform O'Neill's aesthetic underlie the analysis of the vision of woman in the chapters to follow.

O'Neill did not formally articulate a comprehensive theory of his art, but it is possible to gain some idea of his beliefs from various statements made by him in letters, articles, and interviews, as well as by considering the evidence of his plays. What is termed O'Neill's "aesthetic" implies his metaphysic, his philosophy, and his religion, as much as his theory of art. It is difficult to separate these aspects of O'Neill's thought, but for the purpose of this discussion they are important only insofar as they contribute to his aesthetic per se.

Rose Pfeffer says of Nietzsche that his "concepts of art are aesthetic only on the surface; in their essential
qualities they are metaphysical". O'Neill's attitude is similar to Nietzsche's, for in the final analysis he sees art as concerned with the essence of being. For him the function of art is to reveal the inner reality of phenomena and existence, and it is this that constitutes the truth of life. Again, like Nietzsche, O'Neill's aesthetic is one that concerns itself exclusively with tragedy, for "the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life--and the hope." This statement helps to reveal the basis of O'Neill's emphasis upon tragedy, for the relationship that exists between his view of life and of art rests upon his pervasively tragic vision. It was natural for O'Neill to be drawn to tragedy as a form of artistic expression. His desire to understand and to find meaning in the lives both of himself and of those close to him came nearest to realization in a genre that inherently strove towards a comprehension of the more puzzling and confusing aspects of man's existence. The playwright's tragic aesthetic is one that does not attempt to find order in the world, which it accepts as irrational and chaotic, but tries to grasp the force behind the irrationality and disorder of existence. Thus O'Neill's metaphysical concern manifests itself in his endorsement of the tragic ethos as an experience of life and as a form of art. It also is the basis for his faith in the third tenet of his aesthetic: the value and truth of emotion. The validity of emotion is based upon


its primordial origin, the fact that it rises from the deepest recesses of man's being, making it more "true" than surface activities such as thinking. According to O'Neill, "Truth usually goes deep. So it reaches you through your emotions".¹

SECTION I

This section is concerned with analyzing O'Neill's concept of tragedy, and elaborates upon his espousal of the tragic experience as a mode of coming to terms with the problem of suffering and the fact of death. There has been extensive discussion of Nietzsche's influence upon O'Neill's thought,² but an understanding of O'Neill's concept of tragedy entails a fuller analysis of his divergence from and modification of many of Nietzsche's ideas. Consequently the notions put forward in Thus Spoke Zarathustra and The Birth of Tragedy must be dealt with at length. The section concludes by pointing out the integral role that

¹ Quoted in Mary B. Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene O'Neill", American Magazine, 94 (Nov. 1922), 34.

woman plays within O'Neill's attempt to resolve the dilemma that results from his inherent dualism; specifically, from his inability to resolve the tension between the longing for harmony and order, and the reality of suffering and chaos.

It is clear that Nietzsche was a major influence upon O'Neill's thought. Indeed some critics go so far as to state that "it is doubtful whether any other major American writer has embraced Nietzsche with quite the same ardor as did O'Neill";¹ and, that "Nietzsche exerted a stronger and more lasting influence over O'Neill than over any other British or American writer".² O'Neill first encountered the work of Nietzsche at the age of eighteen, when he discovered Thus Spoke Zarathustra. He remarked that it "influenced me more than any other book I've ever read.... every year or so I reread it and am never disappointed, which is more than I can say of almost any other book. (That is, never disappointed in it as a work of art. Spots of its teaching I no longer concede.)".³ O'Neill's rejection, in maturity, of some of the ideas contained in Thus Spoke Zarathustra indicates the nature of its influence upon him. The book served as a catalyst that opened new worlds to the young O'Neill; but while retaining admiration for the brilliance

of its ideas and for its apocalyptic quality, he was unable to maintain a belief in many of the notions it put forward. The whole force of the book is based upon a desire to affirm existence in this world, rather than attempting to give life meaning by relying upon the assurance of a better life elsewhere. Thus Spoke Zarathustra declares the death of God and then proceeds to show how despair at this revelation can be avoided. Nietzsche's solution is to make man a potential god and to declare heaven on earth. The concepts of "amor fati", "eternal recurrence" and "yea-saying" all emphatically deal with the acceptance of life on earth as it is, with all its pain and suffering, and the idea of the "superman", or "overman", indicates Nietzsche's hope that man will rise above his short-comings. O'Neill's work, like Nietzsche's, attempts to deal with the problems of existence in a Godless, meaningless world. This shared concern reflects the religious nature of their respective sensibilities, as well as the religious motivation that underlies their work. O'Neill intensely desired to affirm existence in this world, and his adoption of Nietzsche's Zarathustrian notions is an indication of this desire. He gave some emphasis to the tenets of Thus Spoke Zarathustra in the plays from The Fountain to Lazarus Laughed (that is, between 1921-26), but the notions of "amor fati", "eternal recurrence", "yea-saying" and the "superman" seem to be only tenuously connected with the main line of O'Neill's thought, and O'Neill discarded them after 1926. Whereas Nietzsche's work, commencing with The Birth of Tragedy, came to emphasize affirmation of existence on earth more and more as a solution
to man's existential dilemma, O'Neill's drama looked increasingly to a solution outside life. O'Neill's comment on the influence of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was made in 1927, soon after writing his most Zarathustrian play, *Lazarus Laughed*. Thus at a time when it would seem that his allegiance to Nietzsche's Zarathustrian perspective was strongest, O'Neill had diverged from its tenets.

Nietzsche's subtlest and most pervasive influence upon O'Neill lay in confirming and enhancing his tragic attitude to life, and for this the ideas presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* were crucial. One of the profoundest effects of Nietzsche's first book was to emphasize the metaphysical aspect of tragic drama, to expand the scope of the experience of tragedy beyond the aesthetic as it is ordinarily conceived, so that art itself becomes a metaphysical activity. The boundaries between art and life are eradicated so that the experience of tragic drama becomes a distillation of the very essence of life itself. Michael Anderson points out that *The Birth of Tragedy* stresses "the importance of tragedy--tragedy not as a literary form, but as an existential experience".¹ The vital fact to note is the stress that Nietzsche places upon the importance of tragedy both as an experience of life and as a form of art.

The tragic, according to Nietzsche, implies a dialectical process that involves destruction and creation, and he sees this process as necessary both to art and to nature. The interpenetration of life and art as Nietzsche sees it is

expressed concisely in one of the most famous statements in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified".\(^1\) Nietzsche sees aesthetics as having no goal outside itself, and there is a similar non-purposive impulse underlying the pattern and flux of nature. There is an inner rightness about the natural process of destruction and creation: it possesses a validity born of necessity.

Nietzsche sees a similar process leading to the birth of Greek tragedy. He differentiates between two impulses in art: the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The former is exemplified by a frenzied ecstatic urge to break forms and distinctions, the latter is associated with order, control, form. These impulses can be likened to the destructive and the creative aspects of nature. The two tendencies run parallel to each other and are antagonistic until, "by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic 'will,' they appear coupled with each other", and ultimately generate "an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art -- Attic tragedy".\(^2\)

The relationship between art and nature is therefore one that is based upon a common pattern of conflict between two antagonistic but necessarily conjoined forces.

Suffering is an unforgoable consequence of the antagonism between the two forces of nature. Moreover, the inevitability of the natural process of creation and destruction presupposes

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2. Ibid., p.33.
the inevitability of suffering. Since Nietzsche's philosophy assumes that there is no meaning beyond life itself, the problem of suffering is thus of crucial importance. Rose Pfeffer points out that Nietzsche defines the tragic spirit as "pessimism and its overcoming".\(^1\) In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche outlines what he termed in his Preface of 1886 (*Attempt at a Self-Criticism*) a "pessimism of strength".\(^2\) Such a pessimism involves looking directly "into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature",\(^3\) but rather than being overwhelmed by the immensity and immanence of conflict and pain, and consequently lapsing into nihilism or a denial of life, suffering is accepted as necessary, and furthermore as an expression of the beauty of life. The clearest evidence for Nietzsche of the creation of beauty from pain is Greek tragedy itself. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy is one that assumes not only the inevitability but also the necessity of suffering. A tragic attitude involves accepting the necessity of suffering, of facing it squarely and triumphing over it, of seeing that "life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable."\(^4\) By adopting a tragic attitude to life we recognize that:

all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence -- yet [we do not] become rigid with fear .... [for] the struggle, the pain the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, in view of the excess of countless forms of existence which force

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3. Ibid., p.59.
4. Ibid.
and push one another into life, in view of the exuberant fertility of the universal will.¹

It is not surprising that O'Neill found Nietzsche's tragic philosophy of "pessimism and its overcoming" crucial to his own tragic view of life, for the problem of pain is extremely important to the playwright, not least because his tragic vision is closely linked with the basic impulse that led him to write: his desire to understand and come to terms with his own pain and suffering. This is not to say that O'Neill adopted every aspect of Nietzsche's concept, but it is necessary to keep note of Nietzsche's formulations while analysing O'Neill's tragic philosophy. According to O'Neill's view, the tension underlying tragedy is based upon the absolute antithesis between life and death. This in itself indicates a difference of approach from Nietzsche. The process of creation and destruction essential to Nietzsche's conception is one involved with the idea of activity and flux, of perpetual becoming within a single state of being: the inner essence of the Dionysiac vision is an apprehension of the basic unity of natural processes. But the tension between life and death is based on the antithesis between the two disparate states of being and non-being. Thus O'Neill's conception of the tragic rests upon an awareness of a vast gap between life and death. All of O'Neill's work reflects the belief that peace and tranquillity are the attributes of death whereas life is associated with pain and suffering. The tragedy of O'Neill's protagonists lies in their attempts to achieve in life the peace that only death can provide.

¹. Ibid., p.104.
evident in his work, O'Neill deeply desired to affirm and give meaning to life; in fact his work can be seen as an attempt at affirmation. Like Nietzsche, O'Neill was confronted with the problem of suffering. But the question was complicated for him because his inherent dualism led him to see pain as the opposite of joy, whereas Nietzsche saw them as inextricably linked. Faced with the inevitability of suffering, O'Neill's solution, like Nietzsche's, is to assert the necessity of pain. But where Nietzsche's manner of solving the dilemma was to embrace life as it is, suffering and all, and even to exult in pain and conflict, O'Neill posits pain as a necessary adjunct to aspiration. This constitutes a radical difference in attitude. Nietzsche's conception is one that encompasses all aspects of disorder and disharmony, including the notion of suffering as an atonement for intransigence, as the necessary price to be paid for desiring more than life will easily give. But O'Neill cannot account for suffering except in terms of cause and effect: pain only has meaning as a result of striving for ends beyond the reach of ordinary life. Whereas Nietzsche is able to see suffering as an end in itself, for O'Neill it cannot be justified in terms of itself.

O'Neill's most detailed exposition of his concept of tragedy was given in an interview in 1922:

But tragedy, I think, has the meaning the Greeks gave it. To them it brought exaltation, an urge toward life and ever more life. It roused them to deeper spiritual understandings and released them from the petty greeds of everyday existence. When they saw a tragedy on the stage they felt their own hopeless hopes ennobled in art.... any victory we may win is
never the one we dreamed of winning.
The point is that life in itself is
nothing. It is the dream that keeps
us fighting, willing--living!
Achievement, in the narrow sense
of possession, is a stale finale.
The dreams that can be completely
realized are not worth dreaming.
The higher the dream, the more impos-
sible it is to realize it fully.... A
man wills his own defeat when he
pursues the unattainable. But his
struggle is his success! He is an
example of the spiritual significance
which life attains when it aims high
enough, when the individual fights
all the hostile forces within and
without himself to achieve a future
of nobler values.

Such a figure is necessarily tragic.
But to me he is not depressing; he is
exhilarating! 1

Clearly the idea of aspiration is very important to
O'Neill's concept of tragedy, but his insistence on inevi-
table failure as the measure of worth of a dream is revealing,
for it indicates a vital difference between Nietzsche and
O'Neill as to the consequence of struggle. Nietzsche,
despite his ability to accept the inherent value of pain,
could see the possibility of success following struggle.
Discussing the Prometheus myth, which he considers arche-
typal and "profoundly tragic", 2 Nietzsche sees the tragedy
of the human situation to lie in the "irresolvable contra-
diction" 3 that exists between man's desire for knowledge
and wisdom and the reluctance of fate and the gods to concede
to him the wisdom he desires:

1. Quoted in Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene
O'Neill", 118-120.
3. Ibid., p.71.
The best and highest possession mankind can acquire is obtained by sacrilege and must be paid for with consequences that involve the whole flood of sufferings and sorrows with which the offended divinities have to afflict the nobly aspiring race of men.¹

Aspiration, then, results in struggle and suffering, but it is the price paid for the attainment of wisdom. Prometheus atones for his "superior wisdom" with "eternal suffering".²

O'Neill's concept of aspiration, on the contrary, (both as revealed by interviews and letters, and as presented in his plays), embraces a desire for that which is clearly unattainable. It was O'Neill's basically dualistic perspective, the fact that he saw existence as an antithesis between the chaos and disharmony of life and the peace of death that led him to the belief that it is impossible to attain in life the one desire that all his protagonists have in common——the desire for a life of harmony and peace. In formulating his idea of the "hopeless hope" O'Neill was re-articulating one of the basic assumptions of tragedy: the value of man's desire to attain something above himself. But O'Neill's particular interpretation of this notion is based upon a simple psychological truth, that "any victory we may win is never the one we dreamed of winning". He utilizes this simple truism to endorse his belief that there is a total discrepancy between reality and the dream. O'Neill repeatedly emphasized this discrepancy: in a letter he remarked that, the "failure to realize our dreams is the inexorable fate

¹. Ibid., p.71.
². Ibid., p.70.
alloted to us". Speaking of "the tragedy of life",
O'Neill reiterated this belief, stating that:

any life which merits living lies
in the effort to realize some dream
.... Most decidedly we must all have
our dreams. If one hasn't them, one
might as well be dead. The only
success is in failure. Any man who
has a big enough dream must be a
failure and must accept this as one of
the conditions of being alive.

Despite this belief, the essence of O'Neill's tragic
vision is found, as Törnqvist points out, "in the postulate
that the goal of life is to acquire spiritual nobility".
O'Neill refers repeatedly to the exultance of tragedy,
seeing Greek and Elizabethan tragedy as the model for his
own tragic drama. In a manner similar to Nietzsche's
idea of strong and weak pessimism, O'Neill differentiates
between "a skin deep optimism and another higher optimism, not
skin deep, which is usually confounded with pessimism".
O'Neill's notion of the higher optimism is based upon his
belief that the "noblest is eternally the most tragic".

His conception of the tragic as it applies to the protagonists
of his plays is very Nietzschean on the surface. He states

1. Letter to John Peter Toohey, 5 Nov. 1919; quoted in
Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Playwright, p.465.
2. Quoted in Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York:
3. Egil Törnqvist, A Drama of Souls: Studies in O'Neill's
Super-naturalistic Technique (New Haven: Princeton
4. Article in the New York Tribune, 13 Feb. 1921; rptd in
Cargill, O'Neill and His Plays, p.104.
5. Ibid.
that:

I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind -- (Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it -- Mystery certainly) -- and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression.¹

On another occasion O'Neill remarked that:

The struggle of man to dominate life, to assert and insist that life has no meaning outside himself where he comes in conflict with life, which he does at every turn; and his attempt to adapt life to his own needs, in which he doesn't succeed, is what I mean when I say that Man is the hero.²

The ideas contained in these remarks are a combination of the Dionysian perspective of The Birth of Tragedy with its emphasis upon the life force that underlies all, and the concept of the overman that is developed in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Again, O'Neill makes man's struggle to assert himself all-important. He emphatically endorses strife, conflict and pain as essential to man's attempt to attain a stature and dignity that will raise him above the level of a mere animal. Yet he is equally emphatic in insisting that the struggle can never be successful. He sees tragedy in man's heroically persisting despite his awareness that he can never succeed. In heralding the approach of "a future of nobler values" that will result from man's tragic persistence in attempting to realize himself, O'Neill sounds a distinctly Zarathustrian

note. Nietzsche also insists upon failure as a factor essential to his concept of the overman, for "The higher its type, the more rarely a thing succeeds", yet he goes on to assert, "How much is still possible!" The difference between their attitude to failure is that Nietzsche's is based upon a notion of progress while O'Neill's is static. Nietzsche's concept of the overman entails a process from which a superior type of human being will ensue, so that struggle does eventually result in success. (This does not signify an end to pain and conflict, for the overman must still battle with failure.) Despite O'Neill's assertion that a future of nobler values will follow upon man's tragic struggle, the success of his protagonists is limited to their coming to an awareness of meaning that seems to satisfy only themselves. Robert Mayo's affirmation at the end of Beyond the Horizon is a case in point. Dying of tuberculosis after spending a life of drudgery on the farm while longing to be away at sea, Robert finds the justification for his life of struggle and pain in its having earned him "the right of release--beyond the horizon!" He whispers cryptically, "only through sacrifice--the secret beyond there--".

The meaning to be drawn from this statement is that the secret of life can only be known through struggle and pain in this existence. The two people listening to Robert, his wife and brother, do not seem to understand. Moreover, the final stage directions with which the play ends

2. Ibid., p.407.
negate any feeling of exaltation. Ruth's response to Andrew Mayo's hesitant optimism is to remain "silent, gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope" (III, 169). The play's conclusion can hardly be considered an affirmation of man's struggle on earth.¹

A similar ambivalence between affirmation and negation is evident in a later play, The Straw. It is in this work that the phrase, "hopeless hope" first occurs. The hero, Stephen Murray, is desperately trying to convince himself that his love will help cure the heroine, who is dying of tuberculosis. He realizes with despair that it is a "hopeless hope" (III, 415). By way of consolation he is told that, "Isn't all life just that--when you think of it?.... But there must be something back of it--some promise of fulfillment--somehow--somewhere--in the spirit of hope itself" (ibid.). The ending of the play has been considered to contain "ambiguous optimism",² but the inherent message is one of pessimism. O'Neill, elaborating on the message of The Straw, is aware of this. He states, "we know deep down in our souls that, logically, each one of our lives is a hopeless hope .... Yet we know that without hope there is

¹ Tiusanen remarks that, "O'Neill, with his expert knowledge of tuberculosis, must have been aware that its victims, especially in advanced stages, have an inclination to see queer, often happy visions.... Robert Mayo dies as he lived, as a dreamer. The end is a matter of logic, not of religion; of physiology, not of metaphysics. The tone is of tragic irony, not of affirmation". Timo Tiusanen, O'Neill's Scenic Images (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp.77-78.

² Bogard, Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p.113.
no life, and so we go on pursuing our dream to the last
gasp, convinced in spite of our reason that there must be
some spiritual meaning behind our hope which in some
'greener land' will prove it was all justified. O'Neill feels that this indicates "the significance of human hope", but there is a quality of desperation about such a message, it is the "straw" that is clung to in order to give life some meaning. It cannot be considered an affirmation of life in the fullest, Nietzschean sense. Yet the aspirations of O'Neill's tragic protagonists hinge upon this belief, and in his statements on tragedy this concept forms the basis of his notion of struggle and affirmation.

There is a difference of emphasis in the idea of the hopeless hope as it applies to O'Neill's dramatic work and to his statements on tragedy. In theory the playwright is able to build upon the notion an edifice of affirmation and in doing so he is following Nietzsche's example, for the negative pessimism inherent in the concept of the hopeless hope is similar to Nietzsche's notion of utter nihilism. Whereas the philosopher is able to build a philosophy of affirmation upon a basis of utter nihilism, O'Neill's attempt to build a drama of affirmation on the same basis is unsuccessful. Edwin Engel's conclusion is that O'Neill was preoccupied with "the maintenance of an equilibrium between life-sickness and death-fear". But O'Neill's

2. Ibid., p.465.
desire for affirmation is motivated not so much by death-fear as by the deep desire to find a solution other than death to the problems of life. His endorsement of the Greek principles of tragedy—or what he and Nietzsche considered these principles to be—is impelled by an intense desire to affirm life. One of the reasons why tragic drama appealed to O'Neill was because it seemed to offer the only type of affirmation possible in a meaningless world. Chaos and disharmony were realities to O'Neill, and Greek tragedy and Nietzsche's philosophy together seemed to offer the only possible meaning to this reality, as neither the philosophy nor the drama denied pain. Rather, they saw the answer as somehow involved with pain. It was not fear of death that prompted O'Neill's desire to affirm life—for death appealed intensely to him—but a feeling that there might be more to existence, a solution other than death. The uncertainty of O'Neill's tone, the fact that he was able to affirm life in theory but was unable to convey that affirmation convincingly in the practice of his drama, is due more to the fight against death-longing than to that against death-fear.

*Days Without End*, a play which concludes upon an ecstatically affirmative note, offers a clear example of this attitude. The despairing, mocking side of John Loving's personality views death as the ultimate solution to the problems of existence, but John shies away from death. Elaborating on the plot of his novel, which mirrors the events of his own life, he speaks of the "horror of death" and "dread of life" (III, 535) which afflicted his protagonist. John's dilemma arises from his distrust of life, and like his
protagonist, he is "always grasping at some absurd new faith to find an excuse for going on" (III, 535). Ultimately John takes a Kierkegaardian leap into faith in a beneficent God, exclaiming "Love lives forever! Death is dead!" and "Life laughs with God's love again! Life laughs with love!" (III, 567). The play's inability to dramatize this belief convincingly is hampered not only by the bathetic quality of these lines but also by the strain of nihilism that marks the work. Loving's comments run through the play like a deadly refrain. He speaks of "the one beautiful, comforting truth of life: that death is final release, the warm, dark peace of annihilation" (III, 534). He interrupts John on another occasion to state that, "Freedom was merely our romantic delusion. We know better now. We know we are all the slaves of meaningless chance ..." (III, 542). Loving speaks of the futility of believing in "man's duty to go on for Life's sake", for, "all it means is to go on like an animal in dumb obedience to the law of the blind stupidity of life that it must live at all costs! But where will you go--except to death?". But, he adds, "Death is not the dying. Dying is life, its last revenge upon itself.... death is what the dead know, the warm, dark womb of Nothingness ..." (III, 561-562). The allure of death is a recurring theme throughout the work.

But apart from Loving's support of death, O'Neill's handling of the idea of death in the play militates against viewing it in negative terms. John Loving is obsessed by death. He has contemplated suicide in the past and is again tempted to take this course of action by Loving;
moreover, his apostasy dates from the time of his parents' death, and he is fascinated by the idea of resolving the plot of his novel by the death of the heroine. Yet death remains a horror to him, even when he is in complete despair. But John's dread of death is not merely a natural response to the fear of annihilation and cannot be taken as evidence of a similar attitude on the part of O'Neill, for it functions as a mark of God's favour so to speak. The play's central conflict is a tension between the two aspects of John Loving's personality, in which Loving is the negative side whom John must resist in order to find the truth of God's love. Loving is death's advocate, and John's ability to fight the temptation of suicide is the key to the core of faith, of belief in God, that remains in him. In fact, Loving's view of death as the right alternative to a meaningless life is set against John's hope in an answer beyond death. John is ultimately converted to a belief in the existence of a kind God and a world hereafter that counteracts Loving's vision of a meaningless world. But despite the introduction of the supernatural (Elsa Loving's miraculous recovery after John resolves to go to church), the presence of the benign Father Baird, and the death of Loving, John's rediscovery of faith remains unconvincing. John's leap into faith is the acquisition, as Trilling says, of the "peace of the absolute" at the cost of "blindness to the actual". The actual in Days Without End remains Loving's vision of a meaningless world in which death is a positive solution. The

only real evidence offered for the presence of God is John's final exclamatory effusion. Thus in the resolution of the tension between the two sides of John Loving's personality, it is Loving's view of the world and death that prevails.

Ultimately, the answer to the question of Nietzsche's ability to evolve a pattern of meaning from nihilism in contrast to O'Neill's inability to do so, must lie in the fact that Nietzsche is, as Kaufmann contends, a "dialectical monist", whereas O'Neill is a dualist. Nietzsche's philosophy rests upon a belief in a metaphysical monism. For him, "any duality has [finally] to be explained in terms of a single force". The two principles of his metaphysics, the Dionysian and Apollinian, are therefore manifestations of such a single force -- the will to power -- and Nietzsche is able to fuse the two to form a dialectical unity. In this way his interpretation of existence takes into account both its positive and its negative aspects, and finds them equally necessary. His philosophy of affirmation is built upon this necessity. O'Neill's awareness, however, of the antithesis between the negative qualities of life and the positive qualities of death is too final and complete for him to arrive at a conclusive affirmation of life. Life and death are for him two absolute and separate states of being.

The truth of this statement becomes particularly evident if the plays of O'Neill's mid-period are examined. The

2. Ibid., p.209.
works which deal most explicitly with the problem of life
affirmation are *The Fountain*, *The Great God Brown* and
*Lazarus Laughed*. All three plays arrive at an affirmation
of existence through the endorsement of a belief in the cycli-
cal process of nature. Yet O'Neill's adaptation of the
Nietzschean notion of eternal recurrence provides the clearest
example of his dualistic view-point. For Nietzsche, eternal
recurrence signified "that all the events of history are
destined to be re-enacted, precisely as they first occurred,
in the same order and sequence"\(^1\) eternally. For O'Neill
the concept meant, "the cyclical regeneration of the biologi-
cal abstraction Man".\(^2\) Whereas Nietzsche's view is one that
constitutes a total, uncompromising acceptance of life and
of the self as a part of that life, O'Neill's conception is
one which sees life as a continuing phenomenon in which the
self, once absorbed into the cycle, plays no conscious part.
Thus O'Neill effectively retains his belief in the anti-
thesis between life and death, for his version of eternal
recurrence is one in which the dichotomy between being and
non-being remains.

O'Neill is unable to completely accept life, and he is
unable to arrive at any real justification of suffering and
pain. The anguish of his protagonists reflects O'Neill's
dilemma, for their quest stems from their desire to give some
meaning to their existence, to find their source of being
and place in the world, and to justify the conditions under

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1. Cyrus Day, "Amor Fati: O'Neill's Lazarus as Superman and
Savior", 301.
2. Ibid.
which they exist. It is a quest made with the knowledge that no possible confirmation of value can be made, except one, inherent in the nature of the search. This lies in elevating the search itself—in the form of aspiration—to the level of a positive value; but the worth and significance of an aspiration lies in its unattainability. Within this world of unattainable aspirations, one of chaos, mystery and endless polarity, peace becomes an intensely desirable goal—an avenue of fulfilment in a world that in its very nature denies the possibility of such a consummation.

In the scope of O'Neill's vision woman is seen either as the destroyer of aspiration—thus exemplifying the world's injustice—or as a symbol of that peace for which humanity longs.

It is as a symbol of peace that woman is vital to O'Neill's tragic vision, for as such she functions both as the goal of aspiration and as a refuge from pain and suffering. Thus she operates at both the ideal and the real level, and this in itself gives the maternal redeemer a unique position within the framework of O'Neill's ideas, for it makes her the link between the chaos of this world and the harmony of the ideal. This in effect signifies that woman is the one connection between the antithetical poles of O'Neill's conception of existence. The basis for this development lies in the concept of peace as it is presented in O'Neill's work. O'Neill's utilization of the concept reflects the tension that is inherent in his theory of tragedy, given the conflict between life-affirmation and life-denial. The desire for peace is the consequence of O'Neill's
inability to successfully come to terms with the essential meaninglessness of the world. Although O'Neill attempts to affirm life by endorsing the inherent dignity and value of struggle and suffering, an antithetical impulse—the wish for peace—is so intrinsic a part of his thought that its integration into his theory of tragedy is inevitable. O'Neill attempts to justify pain by elevating struggle and suffering to the level of a tragic action; in a similar manner the desire for peace—which is essentially a move away from the world—is integrated into O'Neill's tragic ethos by being made the ultimate goal of all struggle and aspiration. (In doing this O'Neill follows Nietzsche's manner of transforming necessity into a positive value.) By positing the desire for peace as the final goal of all aspiration O'Neill elevates the normal human desire for comfort and security in the face of uncertainty and suffering to the level of a transcendent value. This action is motivated by the knowledge that true peace is unattainable within the world as it is, yet the need for solace within the world remains. By choosing the figure of the maternal redeemer as the central symbol of peace in his work O'Neill responded to a deep-seated personal need, which was the desire to find peace and comfort within the arms of a maternal figure.

The maternal woman is the one source, either potential or actual, of comfort, solace, and security in O'Neill's plays. Woman's capacity to give comfort arises in part from the traditional association of the mother with love and self-abnegation, but her role as symbol of peace within the world is also based upon her intuitive awareness of the rhythms
of life. It is this quality of awareness that enables her to accept life as it is for she perceives the cyclic pattern that underlies the outward flux and uncertainty of nature. Acceptance is the key to her strength, and the factor that sets her apart from the tortured protagonists of the plays whose predicament arises precisely from their inability to accept life as it is. It is the maternal woman's ability to accept that enables her to respond with compassion and sympathy to the demands of O'Neill's protagonists.

The two women who epitomize the qualities of the maternal redeemer are Cybel in *The Great God Brown* and Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Cybel is the quintessential Earth Mother who comforts Dion Anthony. Whereas Dion's wife, Margaret, is incapable of comprehending the true Dion and the force and extent of his agony, and in fact recoils in horror when Dion attempts to unmask himself, Cybel both perceives and accepts the man behind the mask. Dion derives comfort and strength not from a conscious acknowledgement of Cybel's philosophy of life--crystallized in her remark "Life's all right, if you let it alone" (III, 280)--but from the all-encompassing quality of her love that enables her to accept him completely. Cybel perceives the suffering that results from Dion's struggle to remain true to the power of creativity in him rather than succumbing to the easy life of materialistic success, but her intuition enables her to look further and see that his predicament rises from even deeper causes. As she says, "You're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark--and you got afraid" (III, 285). Cybel provides
a refuge into which Dion can retreat from a world that misunderstands him. Like Cybel, Josie is able to bring peace to Jamie Tyrone in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* because of her capacity to accept, to receive in a spirit of forgiveness and compassion Jamie's tale of disgust and revulsion. Dion says to Cybel, "You're strong. You always give. You've given my weakness strength to live" (III, 285). It is the feeling of solace that Dion derives from Cybel that sustains him through the rigours of living and struggling and suffering. Dion also remarks that "You've given me strength to die" (III, 286). Josie performs a similar function for Jamie. The strength imparted to the protagonists is based upon the women's capacity to absolve them of feelings of guilt and self-revulsion and so enable them to die in peace. Thus in a world in which disintegration and pain are inherent realities, an intimation of the peace that lies beyond struggle can be found in the compassion and selfless love of the maternal woman.

Although the maternal woman's love enables O'Neill's protagonists to in some way come to terms with the world, the desire for peace in the mother's arms is (as the next chapter will argue) essentially a desire for self-extinction and oblivion. Thus on one level the quality of peace associated with the maternal woman results in an acceptance of the world, but on another level it signifies an escape from the world.

The two plays that offer a clear illustration of this relationship are *Dynamo* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. In
a general sense the focus of all O'Neill's protagonists is centred upon the struggle for an unattainable peace, but in these works the mother is made the direct focus of the protagonist's aspiration. Reuben Light in *Dynamo* renounces his faith in Christian religion and in God the Father, and avows an empirical faith in the power of electricity. Christianity in his mind is associated with his weak, spiteful father and his mother's betrayal of him to his father. Yet he is unable to maintain his tough, scientific stance, for he is plagued with guilt and remorse at his treatment of his mother. Ultimately the dynamo, which he had taken to symbolise the force of electricity, comes to signify the beneficent power of the mother. Reuben's actions are then all centred upon obtaining his mother's forgiveness through the intercession of the dynamo. Thus he sees the dynamo, a symbol of the mother, as containing the power to bring him relief from his pain. The impossibility of his attaining his heart's desire is indicated by his self-immolation upon the dynamo. Peace is ultimately the property of death.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Orin Mannon's fate is a repetition of Reuben's. His feelings of guilt at having driven his mother to suicide lead him to kill himself, and he feels he will find her and peace through this act. Orin's death means a return to the peace of the mother. Yet all the Mannons long for a sense of order and harmony, a quiescence which for them is symbolised in the lure of the South Sea Islands. Like the dynamo, these islands are a symbol of the mother. It is Orin who most clearly articulates this link
when he tells Christine Mannon that, "those Islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security.... The whole island was you" (II, 90). The actions of all the Mannons are motivated by a desire to reach these islands of peace, and thus in this play woman as symbol of peace becomes the direct focus of their aspiration and struggle.

Implicit within the islands' attraction for the Mannons is the idea of immersion, of a merging with this symbol of the mother in which individual identity is totally submerged. The impulse towards self-surrender is an extremely important aspect of O'Neill's work and it relates to the third, and perhaps most basic tenet of his aesthetic: his implicit faith in the value and truth of emotion.

SECTION II

This section attempts to analyse the various aspects of O'Neill's theory of emotion and the relationship of woman to this concept. Part (i) deals briefly with the historical context which led to the emphasis upon the emotional and the irrational in much of early twentieth-century American literature, and suggests a parallel exists between O'Neill's theory of emotion and Bergson's concept of intuition. Woman is seen to be the embodiment of the qualities associated by O'Neill with his idea of emotion; and Bergson's analysis of the intuitive process describes clearly the manner in which woman performs her intuitive function in O'Neill's work. Part (ii) points out that
emotion as an intuitive process forms the core of O'Neill's idea of the tragic experience, and illustrates how O'Neill's ideas in this respect are closely related to Nietzsche's Dionysian perspective in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Moreover, O'Neill's theory of emotional involvement, a crucial aspect of his belief in the role of theatre as the source of emotional and spiritual upliftment, is modelled upon Nietzsche's hypothesis. It is suggested that a parallel exists between the impulse to self-surrender that marks the relationship between the protagonist and the maternal woman in many of the plays, and O'Neill's emphasis upon the emotional involvement of the audience in the action in his approach to the theatre.

(i)

Although O'Neill's predilection for emotion is based primarily on his own temperament, in positing emotion as the basis for his theory of drama he was also a child of his age. The early twentieth century saw the growth of what has somewhat disparagingly been termed "The Cult of The Irrational". The emphasis on the mythic, the primeval, the primitive and the psychological in the literature of the time indicates the establishment of the belief that truth lies not in the intellectual processes of the mind and in reason, but in the emotions and instincts. Analysing the American literature of the early twentieth century, Commager states that "The sources of the new irrationality were largely modern and exclusively European", and proceeds to list the French Symbolist poets, Bergson, Gide, Proust, Freud, Jung,

2. Ibid., p.121.
and "the philosophers, poets, and novelists from the British Isles" and "the Irish experimentalists",¹ as mainly responsible for the spread of irrationalism in America. Engel is undoubtedly on sounder ground in implying that the twentieth-century emphasis on emotions and instincts had its roots in the growth of romanticism from the late eighteenth century onwards, and that the attitudes of the early part of the twentieth century had evolved through a lengthy period of time.² He points out that the positive response to the mythic and pagan, so important to later theories of drama, first manifested itself in America in the nineteenth century in such figures as Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman. O'Neill's theory and practice of drama, rather than indicating a break from tradition, grows from the sources put forward by Commager, as well as from the romantic conceptions and philosophies, and the various approaches to tragedy put forward in the preceding century, especially from 1872 onwards.

Nietzsche published The Birth of Tragedy in 1872, and it revolutionized attitudes towards Greek tragedy. The classical notion of control and moderation that had till then prevailed as being the essence of the Greek spirit was upturned, and the barbaric, irrational aspect of the Greek character was revealed. Nietzsche's purpose was not to denigrate the intellect but to point out that the Greek genius (as well as Greek life) had a passionate, darker side which had to be acknowledged in order to fully appreciate the quality and force of Greek tragedy. Yet by formulating

¹. Ibid., p.122.
². Engel, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, pp.75-76.
the antithetical notions of Apollo and Dionysus, Nietzsche emphasized and affirmed the dichotomy of emotion and intellect that is so prominent a feature of early twentieth century attitudes.

Contrary to Commager's view, O'Neill does not reject reason outright. Although his work juxtaposes emotion and intellect, with the former being viewed as the positive force, O'Neill's essential attitude is one that sees the intellect as irrelevant to the basic and vital issues of existence. The strain of anti-intellectualism that runs through O'Neill's thought and work is based upon his belief in the unchangeability of human nature; and the concomitant disregard for social and political issues, and an equally emphatic concern with the eternal verities, is an inevitable outgrowth of this attitude. Man, according to O'Neill, "is much the same creature, with the same primal emotions and ambitions and motives, the same powers and the same weaknesses, as in the time when the Aryan race started toward Europe from the slopes of the Himalayas." This being the case, O'Neill's faith in emotion arises from its being one of the enduring aspects of human nature. He states that:

our emotions are a better guide than our thoughts. Our emotions are instinctive. They are the result not only of our individual experiences but of the experiences of the whole human race, back through all the ages.


They are the deep undercurrent, whereas our thoughts are often only the small individual surface reactions. Truth usually goes deep. So it reaches you through your emotions.¹

At first glance, O'Neill's way of thinking seems to indicate a vitalistic Bergsonian philosophy, and the points of similarity are many: the refutation of the intellect's capability to discern the soul of man and the mystery of life, the emphasis upon the nebulousness of this soul, or sense of life, and the dichotomization of emotion and intellect. But despite the obvious similarities, their basic philosophical premises differ. This difference springs from the deeply personal nature of O'Neill's dramatic motivation. The intense subjectivity of O'Neill's drama, its association with his personal predicament, leads to its being involved with human salvation. Bergson's vitalistic impulse, although focussed on man, goes beyond humanity to involve the whole world. It is a practical philosophy of action (to use Bertrand Russell's distinctions),² whereas O'Neill's is a philosophy of feeling in which the impetus to happiness plays a primary role. Nevertheless, there is a strong parallel between O'Neill's belief in emotion and Bergson's philosophy of intuition.³

¹. Quoted in Mullett, "The Extraordinary Story of Eugene O'Neill", 34.


³. Although Bergson's concept of the élan vital was a contributing factor to the emphasis on the irrational that pervades twentieth-century literature, there is no evidence of O'Neill's having read either An Introduction to Metaphysics or Creative Evolution. According to the Gelbs, O'Neill did read Laughter; see O'Neill, p.600.
For Bergson the term "intuition" implied the ability to pierce through the multiplicity of phenomena to the heart of an object and to see it whole. O'Neill's concept of emotion implies a similar process. Like Bergson's belief in intuition, O'Neill's faith in emotion is one that finds its base in instinct. Emotion for him signifies a combination of feeling and intuition that radically differs from the logical processes of the intellect. O'Neill objected to the processes of the intellect because he felt that reason has the deceptive ability of seeming to explain phenomena while actually eluding the vital heart of the matter. For O'Neill an intellectual response to life is utterly misconceived, for it reduces phenomena to logical concepts and thus obstructs a true apprehension of the mystery of life. As Michael Cape in *Welded* remarks, "Thinking explains. It eliminates the unexplainable--by which we live" (II, 481). O'Neill repeatedly stated that his plays were attempts to dramatize the mystery that lies under the surface of life. In a letter to Barrett Clark he expressed a desire to "explain the nature of my feeling for the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays".\(^1\) On another occasion O'Neill stated that it was "the mystery that anyone man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event",\(^2\) that he wished to realize in the theatre. The irrelevance of the intellect to this process is succinctly stated by him: "Reason has no business in the

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theatre anyway, any more than it has in a church. They are both either below—or above it".¹

This remark implies that the intellect does have some value but it is a value alien to the dramatist's concerns. Bergson reflects a similar attitude, for he believes that the intellect has a purpose in relation to the material, external aspect of life, but that it is unable to discern the vital impulse that lies beneath the surface. He objected to the divisive quality of the intellect, the fact that it separates and labels phenomena, rather than perceiving their inner value. He saw the purpose of philosophy to be, "the search for a unique intuition from which we can descend with equal ease to different concepts, because we are placed above the divisions of the schools".² In a similar manner O'Neill sees it as the purpose of imaginative creative drama not to portray external superficialities, but to penetrate the surface of existence in order to perceive the truth that lies beneath.

The antipathy of both O'Neill and Bergson to conceptual analysis is evident from the manner in which they describe the inner reality that they seek. Bergson describes the élan vital only in metaphorical terms, while O'Neill refers to his conception of the inner impulse of existence as "mystery" and does not elaborate further. This vagueness is not due to obtuseness on the part of O'Neill and Bergson, but arises from the nature of their approach. The very fact that the élan or mystery can only be apprehended intuitively

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inhibits a conceptual clarification. The emotive or intuitive approach is the only mode whereby perception of the inner pulse of life can be achieved.

In O'Neill's work woman is the embodiment of the qualities he associated with his concept of emotion. This is not a novel attitude, for the female principle has traditionally represented the irrational and the emotive. Woman's identification with nature and natural processes, her very immanence, divorce her from association with the intellect and rationality, both of which are inimical to any perception of inner truth.

O'Neill objected to the rational faculty as he felt it had validity only in relation to outward materiality. In his work rational perception is inevitably associated with material gain and a selfish egotism. An extreme example of this is Simon Harford in *More Stately Mansions*, who abandons what he considers to be his irrational faith in the innate goodness of man, and gives up his plans of writing a book urging a return to a Rousseau-inspired conception of nature, to devote himself to business. Implicit within his action is the belief that he is now in contact with the real and the actual. The consequence of his decision is that he is transformed into a ruthless egotist who will stop at nothing to gain what he wishes to possess. The transformation that occurs in Sara, his wife, is even more telling. Sara's association with natural processes is made manifest through her motherhood. When she first appears she is six months pregnant, and although O'Neill portrays her as having always been somewhat ambitious and grasping (this is
confirmed by her characterization in an earlier play of the cycle, *A Touch of the Poet*, motherhood has a positive effect on her. The stage directions indicate this, for her eyes are described as "laughing, and fondly maternal. She exudes an atmosphere of self-confident loving happiness and contentment".¹ As it does for Nina in *Strange Interlude*, maternity for Sara results in a contentment that springs from an identification with the inner rhythm of life.² The change in Sara when she abandons her role as mother to become her husband's business partner is even more dramatic than Simon's. She is described in detail in O'Neill's stage directions:

*Her body has grown strikingly voluptuous and provocatively female. She is dressed extravagantly in flamboyant clothes. Her face has a bloated, dissipated look, with dark shadows under her eyes. Her mouth seems larger, its full lips redder, its stubborn character become repugently sensual, ruthlessly cruel and greedy. Her eyes have hardened, grown cunning and unscrupulous. Her manner varies between an almost masculine curt abruptness and brutal frankness, plainly an imitation and distortion of Simon's professional manner, and a calculating feminine seductiveness.*³

Thus a deviation from the emotions has even more drastic consequences for woman than for man because of her inherent association with the intuitive and emotional.

Bergson's manner of describing intuition illustrates


2. Deborah Harford's assumption of her role as grandmother, a symbolic motherhood, has a similar effect on her. She is transformed from a prematurely old woman into a "youthful grandmother" and there is "something of repose and contentment in her expression, something of an inner security and harmony". Ibid., p.99.

3. Ibid., p.138.
perfectly the intuitive capacity of woman in O'Neill's work. Intuition is used by Bergson as a means of "placing oneself within the object itself"\(^1\) in order truly to grasp its essence, and he sees intuitive knowledge as that "which installs itself in that which is moving and adopts the very life of things". According to him, "This intuition attains the absolute".\(^2\) The importance of woman to O'Neill's belief in emotion and intuition is based upon biological circumstance. Because of her procreative ability, woman has the capacity to be one with the natural principle of the universe. As an active agent in the flux of nature woman is a part of the "very life of things", so to speak, and as such she is better able to perceive the inner reality of existence than man. This is not to say that the male protagonists of O'Neill's plays are unable to attain a perception of the inner rhythm of life. Lazarus is an obvious example to the contrary. But Lazarus has undergone an extraordinary experience in that he has returned from the dead, and has become the god that he exhorts his followers to find in themselves. What characterizes the perceptions of O'Neill's more human protagonists is their fitful and fleeting nature. Juan and Dion Brown both die soon after becoming aware of the cyclical unity of life, and Edmund Tyrone is able only momentarily to achieve a sense of pantheistic oneness with nature. It is the women in O'Neill's plays who are able to accommodate an awareness of inner reality with a continuing existence on earth, and this arises from their association

with nature.

The identification of woman with nature is directly dramatized in *Desire Under the Elms*. Abbie Putnam is shown to be sensuously aware of the life around her on the farm. She says to Eben:

Hain't the sun strong an' hot?  
Ye kin feel it burnin' into the earth
--Nature--makin' thin's grow--
bigger'n'bigger--burnin' inside ye
--makin' ye want t'grow--into somethin'
else--till ye're jined with it--an' it's
your'n--but it owns ye, too--an' makes
ye grow bigger--like a tree--like them
elums--.

(I, 229)

However, the maternal women in O'Neill's plays are not always so explicitly associated with nature, but the idea that their wisdom, sympathy and perception arises from their capacity for motherhood is always conveyed, with varying degrees of subtlety. In *Lazarus Laughed* only Miriam, Lazarus' wife, is unaffected by Lazarus' message of laughter, for her compassion and love enable her to perceive the suffering that follows in the wake of Lazarus' gospel. The mask she wears in the play is "that of a statue of Woman, [with] her eternal acceptance of the compulsion of motherhood, the inevitable cycle of love into pain into joy and new love into separation and pain again and the loneliness of age" (I, 274). Miriam's strength lies in her capacity for love, and this is true also of Mrs. Roylston in *Servitude*, Martha Jayson in *The First Man*, Nora Melody in *A Touch of the Poet*, and Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*.

Clearly the intuitive woman occupies a significant position within the plays--this in itself is an indication of the importance of the intuitive capacity in O'Neill's
thought. The prime example of the innate wisdom of woman is Cybel in *The Great God Brown* in whom the ability of woman to perceive inner reality is raised to the level of godhead. Not only is Cybel a central symbol within the play, but she occupies a unique position in being one of the major symbols of the power of woman in O'Neill's work. Cybel's intuitive capacity is emphasized by making her a bovine, earth mother figure. The stage directions describe her as:

> strong, calm, sensual ..., her figure
> full-breasted and wide-hipped, her movements slow and solidly languorous
> like an animal's, her large eyes
> dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts. She chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end.

(III, 278)

Unlike Cybel, who possesses an innate wisdom, Nina Leeds in *Strange Interlude* comes to an awareness of the inner essence of reality when she becomes pregnant. But there is a sinister quality to Nina's perception: "she has strange devious intuitions that tap the hidden currents of life" (I, 135), as Charles Marsden points out. Although maternity is not always portrayed in a kindly light in O'Neill's work, the maternal woman—whether hers is a symbolic or actual motherhood—contains within herself the ability to perceive the deep and hidden truths of existence. This perception is dissociated from intellectual ability, as Mrs Fife in *Dynamo* demonstrates. She is a rather naïve and silly woman, but she has an empathy with the natural rhythms of existence. Reuben Light is amazed by her instantaneous comprehension of the meaning of the dynamo "singing all the time about everything in the world!"
The irreconcilability of reason and intuition is graphically depicted in *The Great God Brown*. Like Simon Harford, William Brown is a success in worldly terms. He has followed the reasoned and sensible plan of his father that he become an architect, and has never bothered to question the meaning and value of his actions, assuming their logicality to have an implicit value. For O'Neill, Brown is "a Success—building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial pre-ordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life-desire". In contrast to Brown, Dion Anthony has not followed the logical path to success, preferring to seek self-fulfilment through painting. He questions the rational approach to life (an approach that is based upon a recognition of outward materiality and reality), but he is a victim of his society, and therefore his perception of the truth is both confused and frustrated. Only Cybel, the earth mother, has a proper awareness of the inner impulse of life. She lives in harmony with the rhythms of nature and therefore is a part of nature, and consequently she perceives that the secret of life is to accept life. Aware of her part in the cycle of existence, she knows that the meaning of the endless circle of creation and destruction is found in itself. The discrepancy between Cybel's truth and Brown's mode of perception is illustrated by the fact that in Brown's world Cybel has to wear the mask of the prostitute, for her earth mother role is incomprehensible to the prevailing order. Brown must abandon the

values of rationality (symbolized in his tearing up of the plans for the city capital) before he can perceive Cybel's truth.

If Cybel dramatizes O'Neill's faith in emotion by her embodiment of the intuitive process, Beatriz in The Fountain has a similar function, but as the vehicle through which Juan Ponce de Leon attains a perception of the inner reality of phenomena. After fruitlessly searching for the fabled fountain of youth Juan finally comes to an awareness of the true meaning of existence through a vision he has of Beatriz. It is Beatriz's voice singing and her appearance as the spirit of the fountain that make Juan realize that life and death, age and youth are all a part of the cycle of life, they are all a part of "The Eternal Becoming which is Beauty!" (I, 442). It is a flash of perception achieved through the vision of a woman—and totally divorced from the laws of reason—that brings Juan to an awareness of true reality.

(ii)

O'Neill's belief that true reality lies beneath the surface reality of existence, and his faith in emotion as a mode of apprehending this reality is an integral aspect of his aesthetic. Emotion as an intuitive process is a concept that extends beyond the dramatization of it in his women characters. Indeed it forms the core of his notion of the tragic experience. O'Neill's ideas in relation to the link between emotion and tragedy bear a remarkable resemblance to the Dionysiac concepts postulated by Nietzsche in The Birth of Tragedy, and the evidence of the dramatist's work indicates that of all the philosopher's theories O'Neill
was most deeply affected by Nietzsche's Dionysian perspective.¹

Juan's experience by the spring in The Fountain is a reflection of the Dionysian experience: his perception of the truth involves his losing all sense of selfhood in an ecstatic affirmation of the unity that underlies the outward flux of nature. He cries out exultantly, "All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally! O aspir ing fire of life, sweep the dark soul of man! Let us burn in thy unity!" (I, 442). Juan's loss of a sense of self is an essential prerequisite to his attaining a perception of the harmony of existence, the assumption being that man can only be in harmony with nature when he is one with it.

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche declared the "mystery doctrine of tragedy" to be:

the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness.²

The antithesis between individuation and unity, and the belief in the power of art not only to confront us with the truth, but to help us experience that truth, are notions that are central to O'Neill's concept of drama. The Birth of Tragedy stresses the importance of the Dionysian experience not only within the drama itself, but as a part of the experience of the spectator. The drama affects the spectator so as to make him surrender his individuality and become a part of the

1. Hinden remarks that, "it was the Dionysian framework of The Birth of Tragedy that spoke most directly to [O'Neill's] own emotional needs". See Hinden, "The Birth of Tragedy and The Great God Brown", 133.

action, so that "the state and society and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature". ¹

O'Neill, describing his vision of the theatre, postulates a process analogous to Nietzsche's. Accordingly, within O'Neill's conception of the theatre the audience is no longer a mere spectator, but participates in the dramatic process. This is evident from a series of notes published in *The American Spectator* between November 1932 and January 1933. Although these notes are overmuch concerned with the prospects of using masks onstage, the purpose underlying the masked drama relates to O'Neill's preoccupation with discovering and dramatizing the truth that lies beneath the surface of phenomena. Presenting his case for a "non-realistic imaginative theatre", O'Neill states:

> I am hoping for added imaginative scope for the audience, a chance for a public I know is growing yearly more numerous and more hungry in its spiritual need to participate in imaginative interpretations of life rather than merely identify itself with faithful surface resemblances of living.²

The idea of "participation" and of "imaginative interpretation" establishes a link between audience and stage that emphasizes the involvement of the spectators with the events onstage, an involvement that brings them face to face with the deeper, primal processes of life in an attempt to perceive a profounder reality. Several years earlier,

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discussing *Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill mentioned his desire for "a theatre of the imagination unbounded and one in which the audience especially might participate more vitally and fully". He deplored the division between stage and spectator, stating that "The whole environment of the piece--stage and auditorium, actors and spectators--should be emotionally charged",¹ and this, to O'Neill, depended upon an active participation by the audience.

O'Neill's emphasis upon the identification of the audience with the action rests upon his belief in the theatre as:

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a Temple where the religion of
a poetical interpretation and
symbolical celebration of life
is communicated to human beings,
starved in spirit by their soul-
stifling daily struggle to exist
as masks among the masks of
living!²
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O'Neill, then, saw the theatre as a means of alleviating the problems of existence in a disordered and meaningless world. Drama fills the void left by the death of God, for the audience attains spiritual fulfilment by perceiving ultimate reality through participation in the dramatic process.³

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³. Apart from the very important influence of Nietzsche's Dionysian doctrine, there was a general trend among the groups O'Neill associated with in the earlier part of his career of returning to a theatre of ritual in which the religious and spiritual nature of drama was emphasized. Sheldon Cheney, George Cram Cook, and particularly Kenneth MacGowan, were all influential in helping mould O'Neill's concept of the theatre. For a good discussion of these influences upon O'Neill, see Bogard, *Contour in Time*, pp.66-75, 170-183; and Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*, pp.63-95.
The sense of alienation and spiritual dislocation that is the mark of the O'Neill protagonist is a reflection not only of O'Neill's own spiritual state, but of what O'Neill perceived to be the dilemma of humanity at large. The protagonist attempts to discover the clue to life's mystery, he searches for a way to become whole. In *The Fountain* the sense of incompleteness is conveyed by Juan Ponce de Leon's search for the fountain of youth—the consequence of his awareness that life has passed without his having achieved the glory he aspired to in his younger days. His discovery in a moment of Dionysian ecstasy of the consequence of his yearning for youth and the unity of all within nature depends, as mentioned earlier, upon his losing his sense of self. However, the audience's ability to respond to Juan's experience depends upon a similar involvement by them in the action whereby they lose all sense of self, and through their emotional involvement are able to participate in Juan's new awareness. The experience in the theatre is one that reflects the experience of O'Neill's protagonists, for O'Neill wished to effect a revelation of the truth at two levels: within the play itself, and between the audience and the stage.¹ There is an attempt to create a sense of Dionysian ecstasy within the audience by involving it in the revelation of truth onstage.

The longing of O'Neill's protagonists for wholeness is resolved in various ways, many of which, unlike Juan's

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¹ It must be emphasized that O'Neill wrote both for the theatre and for the reader. Although the reader's experience cannot be the same as the experience of the audience in the theatre, O'Neill felt that the reader's experience could be even more effective than the theatrical experience. See Törnqvist, *A Drama of Souls*, pp.24-26.
experience, are not obviously Dionysian in implication. Nonetheless, the loss of selfhood is an important aspect of the character's new awareness in these plays. Robert Mayo's discovery of the need for sacrifice to perceive the truth beyond the horizon, and Jim Harris' ability to overcome his sense of bewilderment at life in grovelling self-abnegation to the needs of his insane wife in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, are just two examples of this tendency in O'Neill.

O'Neill depends, therefore, upon the idea of merger as a mode of perceiving the truth both within the plays and in his approach to the audience. The impulse to self-surrender is also the factor that underlies the longing for the mother in O'Neill's work. In fact, it is the concept of merger, and the ecstasy inherent in the union of man and nature, that is a part of the attraction of the maternal woman in the plays. The fulfilment of the desire to achieve peace in the arms of the mother can result in an experience that is Dionysian in all its aspects, as Dion Brown's discovery of both peace and truth in the arms of Cybel indicates. The yearning of the O'Neill protagonist for the mother is one that is based, moreover, upon the desire to attain a sense of peace and fulfilment, to obtain some relief from the rigours of existence. O'Neill's view of the theatre is one that fulfils a similar role for the audience. A parallel can therefore be drawn between O'Neill's approach to the stage and his approach towards dramatizing the maternal woman in the plays. Just as the audience attains fulfilment through an emotional involvement in the
action, so the O'Neill protagonist comes to feel a sense of peace through his emotional empathy with the maternal woman.

This parallel manifests itself very strongly in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. In fact, the power of emotion to effect a sense of fulfilment plays a more important role in the late than in the earlier works. As O'Neill's vision darkened, the prospect of achieving Dionysian ecstasy became a remote possibility, but O'Neill retained faith in emotion both as a force within the plays themselves, and as a mode of involving the spectator or reader in the action. Although the late works are radically different in form and treatment to the extravaganzas and expressionistic experiments written between 1920 and 1933, *The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* compel an emotional involvement and elicit a response far deeper than earlier works such as *The Great God Brown* or *Strange Interlude*. Despite their nihilism they assert the need for compassion and love between human beings, and this message depends for its force upon the power of emotion. This suggests that although O'Neill abandoned the more conspicuous tenets of the "imaginative" theatre, his basic concept of theatre remained essentially the same throughout his career.

*A Moon for the Misbegotten* is structured around the central scene in which Jamie Tyrone receives absolution from Josie Hogan under the light of a full moon. It is a scene that comes close to being mawkishly sentimental, but this is prevented by the intensity of the emotion with which it is dramatized. The theatrical devices and drama of *The Fountain* that add to the emotional impact of Juan's perception
of infinity are not present in this work, nor is there the high drama of the penultimate scene of *The Great God Brown* in which Dion Brown is shot and lies dying in the arms of Cybel. This is replaced by the emotional intensity of the relationships between the characters, and it is the tension of these relationships that "emotionally charge" the atmosphere. The force of the scene depends upon the need of human beings for each other, and upon the evocative nature of the moonlight. It is the power of the emotions that Josie feels for him that enables Jamie to shed his reservations about confessing his tale of grief and self-disgust. Conversely, Josie overcomes her revulsion at Jamie's tale because of her love for him. In a similar manner the audience is able to sympathize with Jamie, and can accept him rather than being repelled by him through its emotional involvement with the action. This involvement is intensified because O'Neill dramatizes a very basic human need in the longing of Jamie to confess and receive comfort in the arms of a protective maternal woman. Jamie's confession, his ability to lose his self-reservations through Josie's love brings him a peace that enables him to die without remorse or guilt. As he puts it, he feels "Sort of at peace with myself and this lousy life—as if all my sins had been forgiven". As an expression of his new-found feeling Jamie discovers that, despite his experience to the contrary, there is beauty in the world, symbolized in the beauty of the dawn. Similarly the audience's involvement

enables it not only to feel compassion for a seemingly depraved human being, but helps it to realize that despite the essential meaninglessness of the world there is both beauty and value in the relationship of human beings with each other.

The power and emotional impact of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* rest upon O'Neill's skill in using the archetypal associations of the mother to evoke a suitable response in his audience. However, his decision to dramatize a maternal, redemptive woman in the play is prompted not so much by a disinterested recognition of the emotive appeal of such a figure as by his own longing for the love and peace associated with the mother. Again, in a wider context, it is O'Neill's own personal response to the idea of the maternal redeemer that accounts for the integral role this figure plays in his aesthetic, although the vitalistic philosophical concepts prevalent in the early part of the century would have encouraged the association of woman with the emotive, the intuitive and the irrational.

The link between O'Neill's vision of woman and his aesthetic gives some indication of the vital nature of woman's role in O'Neill's drama. But in order to understand the basic reason for the importance given to the maternal redeemer throughout O'Neill's work, and for the persistent manifestation of the longing for the love and peace of the mother, the archetypal significance of the mother needs to be examined in some detail. This is done in the chapter that follows, which suggests that the power of the maternal
redeemer stems from the relationship that exists between the longing for the mother and the desire for death.
CHAPTER TWO

THE JUNGIAN HYPOTHESIS

The psychological aspect of O'Neill's drama has been given attention by the critics almost from the time when O'Neill's plays were first produced publicly. This was inevitable for two reasons. The general interest in psychology that had been growing since the introduction of psychoanalysis to America in 1909 manifested itself strongly in the drama of the 1920's; Sievers remarks that, "the period of the twenties in American drama must be called The Psychoanalytic Era". In this context it is not surprising that O'Neill's plays were often judged from a psychoanalytically slanted point of view. Moreover, O'Neill's concern with dramatizing the inner motivations of his characters, his stress upon the hidden forces of the psyche in his work, coincided with and was quickened by the interests and concerns of psychology. O'Neill's propensity to utilize themes that were basic to psychoanalytic study, particularly the Oedipus complex, as well as the Electra complex, led to his being considered the leading Freudian dramatist of the 1920's--the period when the major part of his drama was written and produced.

O'Neill did feel that the role of the drama in the twentieth century was to "express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us", and he saw this "inner drama"

as "one of the most characteristic preoccupations and uniquely significant, spiritual impulses" of the time. Yet he denied being overly influenced by contemporary psychological concepts, stating that:

There is no conscious use of psychoanalytical material in any of my plays. All of them could easily be written by a dramatist who had never heard of the Freudian theory and was simply guided by an intuitive psychological insight into human beings and their life-impulsions that is as old as Greek drama. It is true that I am enough of a student of modern psychology to be fairly familiar with the Freudian implications inherent in the actions of some of my characters while I was portraying them; but this was always an afterthought and never consciously was I for a moment influenced to shape my material along the lines of any psychological theory. It was my dramatic instinct and my personal experience with human life that alone guided me.

This statement indicates that O'Neill saw in the findings of psychoanalysis further evidence for the truths he sought to express in drama. The psychoanalytical theories of Freud and others provided a fresh insight into human motivation, and served as a confirmation, and perhaps elaboration of ideas already developed in literature and drama.

O'Neill thought of playwrights as "intuitively

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keen analytical psychologists". This is confirmed in his own case by the findings of Doris Falk and Philip Weissman. Falk reveals O'Neill's anticipation of the findings of the neo-Freudians Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, and Weissman points out that O'Neill was an extremely perceptive amateur psychologist, remarking that his work embodies an "amazing amount of psychoanalytic insight, often related to his own specific conflicts". But Weissman continues: "In his attempts to understand himself, his insight is mundane. It is only in his created characters that he approximates exquisite psychoanalytic elaborations of personality structure".

O'Neill admitted having read Freud's Totem and Taboo and Beyond the Pleasure Principle. He also read Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, and possibly other works as well. Despite a fairly extensive reading of the works of Freud, O'Neill asserted that it was Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious that interested him the most, for "Some of his suggestions I find extraordinarily illuminating in the light of my own experience with hidden

4. Ibid., 451.
5. Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Artist, pp.244-245.
human motives". Yet in keeping with his tendency to deny the direct influence of psychoanalysis upon his work, he went on to state: "But as far as influence on my work goes, he [Jung] has had none compared to what psychological writers of the past like Dostoevski, etc., have had".

O'Neill was over-emphatic in his denial of psychological influence upon his work, but his attitude is justified to a certain extent. His innate psychological acuity points out the dangers of ascribing too much influence to the concepts of psychology, and justifies his belief that critics "read too damn much Freud into stuff that could well have been written exactly as it is before psychoanalysis was ever heard of". O'Neill's work can be interpreted in the light of Freudian and Jungian concepts, but this in itself does not point to a direct derivation of such ideas from formal psychology. The repeated use of the Oedipus complex in the plays can easily be considered an indication of Freud's influence upon O'Neill's work; yet the persistence of the Oedipal theme in his drama suggests that O'Neill's preoccupation with the complex was not based upon a facile adoption of Freudian theory. It is more reasonable to associate the manifestation of the complex with the extremely subjective nature of O'Neill's work. Viewed in such a manner, it becomes obvious that O'Neill's dramatization of the Oedipal pattern of relationships springs from his personal experience. Weissman's reading

2. Letter to Barrett Clark, 6 June 1931; quoted in Sheaffer O'Neill: Son and Artist, p.382.
3. Ibid.
of the Oedipal conflict in *Desire Under the Elms* as unconscious autobiography helps to substantiate this suggestion,¹ and his analysis is applicable to other of O'Neill's works as well. Dion Anthony, Gordon Evans, Reuben Light, Orin Mannon, Jamie and Edmund Tyrone all display a similar attitude to their parents as Eben Cabot, for they love and long for their mothers and hate and resent their fathers.

Nonetheless, O'Neill's protestations must be treated with some reservation. It would have been virtually impossible for a writer concerned with the inner motivations of character and the hidden truths of existence as O'Neill was to ignore psychoanalysis at a time when the ideas of Freud and Jung had gained immense prominence. O'Neill himself is careful to point out that he may have been unconsciously influenced by psychoanalytic notions. It is significant that in both letters in which O'Neill disclaimed the influence of psychoanalysis he qualified his disavowal in relation to Jung. Not only did he find Jung extraordinarily illuminating in relation to his own experience of human motivation, but he stated that if he had been influenced unconsciously at all, it was by Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*.² O'Neill's response to Jung was based upon a general affinity in outlook, for Jung not only emphasized the spiritual and mystical aspect of the psyche, but he felt that the irrational side of human nature served an important function and was to be understood and accepted.

rather than eliminated. Moreover, Jung placed great importance upon the symbolic role of the mother in his psychology. O'Neill's acknowledgement of the relevance of Jung's thought to his own perception of human nature, as well as the evidence of the plays, suggests that Jung's ideas, particularly in relation to the significance of the mother, served as a confirmation of O'Neill's own response to woman. O'Neill did not derive his notion of the power of the mother from Jung: it was the consequence of his own experience and needs; but Jung's approach is one that provides a systematic explanation for what was an intuitive response on the part of O'Neill.

The relationship between Jung and O'Neill becomes clear in analyzing O'Neill's dramatization of the Oedipus complex. A Freudian interpretation of the longing for the mother as it manifests itself in O'Neill's drama distorts the emotional and symbolic perspective of the plays, for it sees the desire for the mother in terms of a sexual longing. Such an interpretation reduces mother-longing to a narrow formula that does not adequately account for the force and importance of this desire in O'Neill's work. A Jungian interpretation is more helpful in conveying the significance of the Oedipus theme in O'Neill, as Jung's notion of incest connotes a longing for a childlike state of unconsciousness of self.

This analysis is not an attempt to postulate a parallelism between Jung and O'Neill. Rather, the importance of Jung to this discussion lies in his ability
to illuminate the relationship between the longing for the love and peace of the mother (the most important aspect of O'Neill's vision of woman), and the longing for death that underlies the central theme of O'Neill's work (the desire to belong, to discover a sense of harmony, peace and order). O'Neill's desire for oblivion stemmed from his belief that it was impossible to find order in this world; belonging was ultimately the property of death. The importance of the mother arises from her not only being the sole source of comfort in this world, but her also being a manifestation of O'Neill's desire for extinction. It is here that Jung's ideas are helpful for he sees the desire for the mother as essentially the wish to lose consciousness of the self, and this, both in Jung and in O'Neill, is the equivalent of extinction itself. It must be emphasized that Jung's ideas are not presented here as incontrovertible absolutes, but (given O'Neill's own acknowledgement of his sympathy with Jung's concepts) as a means of understanding and explaining the importance of the theme of mother-longing in O'Neill's drama.

It was in *Psychology of the Unconscious* that Jung formulated his approach to the Oedipus complex. Rather than viewing the desire for the mother in terms of an exclusive sexual rivalry with the father, Jung sees mother-longing as a wish to be unconscious of the world. Inherent within this hypothesis is an interpretation of the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness which is vital to the formulation of O'Neill's image of the maternal woman. Discussing the symbolism of Longfellow's
poem Hiawatha, Jung states that the daily cycle of the sun symbolizes the life-cycle of man's psyche. He must be quoted at length, for the passage is strikingly relevant to the pattern of mother-longing established in O'Neill's plays:

The sun, victoriously arising, tears itself away from the embrace and clasp, from the enveloping womb of the sea, and sinks again into the maternal sea, into night, the all-enveloping and the all-reproducing, leaving behind it the heights of midday and all its glorious works. This image was the first, and was profoundly entitled to become the symbolic carrier of human destiny; in the morning of life man painfully tears himself loose from the mother, from the domestic hearth, to rise through battle to his heights. Not seeing his worst enemy in front of him, but bearing him within himself as a deadly longing for the depths within, for drowning in his own source, for becoming absorbed into the mother, his life is a constant struggle with death, a violent and transitory delivery from the always lurking night. This death is no external enemy, but a deep personal longing for quiet and for the profound peace of non-existence, for a dreamless sleep in the ebb and flow of the sea of life. Even in his highest endeavour for harmony and equilibrium, for philosophic depths and artistic enthusiasm, he seeks death, immobility, satiety and rest.... If he is to live he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past, in order to rise to his own heights.1

Jung's intention was to delineate a process common to all men, but O'Neill's intense involvement in dramatizing this struggle gave his depiction of it a very personal quality. Writing served a dual purpose for O'Neill,

functioning both as an escape from life and as a mode of coming to terms with existence; and viewed as a whole, O'Neill's plays can be seen as dramatizing a battle to assert the value of living and struggling. The plays attempt, in short, to affirm life. The impulse towards affirming life that runs through O'Neill's drama stems from the very subjective nature of his work, for the desire to justify and give meaning to his own existence was the impelling force behind his artistic endeavour. Like O'Neill, the protagonists of his plays attempt to affirm their existence, and like O'Neill again, theirs is a personal quest in the deepest sense of the word, for they are ultimately only concerned with their own salvation, with an attempt to acknowledge the value of their own existence. In pointing out the inward nature of the dramatic conflict in O'Neill's work, Doris Falk touches upon the essential reason for the self-involvement that manifests itself in O'Neill's protagonists. She remarks that:

O'Neill is chiefly concerned with the resolution of inner conflicts; with the search for a philosophy which can give order and meaning to such inevitable conflict.... the chief conflict, the real action in the plays, takes place within the mind of the protagonist.¹

Since the core of the action is situated within the minds of the protagonists, the awareness and concern which would otherwise be focussed on the outside world is turned inward upon the self. The intense self-absorption and self-consciousness of O'Neill's protagonists is crystallized in Dion Anthony's cry:

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colours of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid?... Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched?... Or, rather, Old Graybeard, why the devil was I born at all?

It can be seen that self-consciousness and life-weariness are associated with one another. In fact, it is the intense quality of self-consciousness that forms the basis for the weariness with life. The O'Neill protagonist longs for a state where he can lose consciousness of his agonizing sensitivity, of his awareness of self. It is here that a problem arises as the pain of being a conscious, aware human being prompts both the drive to justify the existence of the self, and the longing to lose awareness of the self. This is true of Dion who wishes to assert the value of his own existence, and who sees this as being done through a creative love of life. As he says:

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

(III, 296)

Yet the anguish of being a sensitive aware person causes Dion to long for a state of being in which the sense of

separateness, of doubt and despair, is lost. This is expressed in his desire to achieve a Dionysian state of ecstasy in which the self is dissolved within a larger, harmonious, whole. As Dion's case indicates, the tension between self-assertion and self-negation is rooted in the dilemma of self-awareness.

Jung's analysis and definition of consciousness and unconsciousness highlights Dion's dilemma. For Jung, consciousness in the true sense consists of an awareness of duality and divisiveness, and most importantly, of self-consciousness. As he states: "It is only the adult human being who can have doubts about himself and be at variance with himself."¹ In defining his concept of consciousness Jung sets consciousness against instinct, for "It is just man's turning away from instinct--his opposing himself to instinct--that creates consciousness".² His emphasis upon the necessity of an awareness of self and of duality to full consciousness leads Jung to consider childhood to be an essentially unconscious period, and dependence upon the parents extends even to the psyche: "It is as though [the child] were not yet completely born, but were still enclosed in the psychic atmosphere of its parents".³ Problems at this stage do not result in self-divisiveness, and according to Jung problems, divisiveness, tension, duality, are inevitably required in order to achieve "a state of wider and higher

2. Ibid., p.388.
3. Ibid., p.391.
consciousness". Yet there exists a desire to cling to the childhood level of consciousness, a resistance to the fateful forces in and around us which would involve us in the world. Something in us wishes to remain a child, to be unconscious or, at most, conscious only of the ego ....

The point to note is that Jung considers unconsciousness to be centred upon an unawareness of the self. It is consciousness of the self, the sense of an existence separate from the world around us that brings us face to face with duality and divisiveness.

Despite his endorsement of strife and conflict as an essential aspect of life, and his view of himself as having been "life's lover", Dion's deepest impulse is a yearning for oblivion. He does not wish to face life and to come to terms with it, but desires instead to escape it; he wishes to deny both self and duality, and the oblivion that is promised in the arms of the mother is a mode of release from the tension and strife of existence. In the presence of Cybel, the Earth Mother, Dion can become a child again. He momentarily loses his sense of alienation and separation, for he returns to a childhood level of consciousness. In the scenes between Cybel and Dion it is Cybel's strength and power that prevails: Dion depends upon her like a child. Although Dion is unable to reach the heights of Dionysian ecstasy that he aspires to, by turning to Cybel he re-enters a world where his role is little more than to

1. Ibid., p.393.
2. Ibid.
be, for Cybel represents the world of instinct that is
the opposite of the world of consciousness.

In *Psychology of the Unconscious* the resistance to
an involvement with the world is based upon "a deep
personal longing for quiet and for the profound peace of
non-existence", and Jung equates this with the desire to
"become absorbed in the mother". It can be seen,
therefore, that the longing for the mother is associated
with the desire to cease existing as a separate, aware
being, and in terms of the tension between consciousness
and unconsciousness this is the equivalent of non-existence.
Moreover, Jung goes further and relates the mother to the
process of birth and death. He states that "the mother is
the first world of the child and the last world of the
adult". Amplified, this remark not only links the mother
with the whole natural cycle of birth and death, and posits
her as the beginning and the end, but it also implicitly
affirms a link between the unconsciousness of the child
and the final unconsciousness of death. The force of this
link and its association with the mother gains emphasis
when considered in relation to the life-cycle of man's
consciousness elaborated earlier from *Psychology of the
Unconscious*. It can be seen that according to this view
consciousness exists as a brief period between the
unconsciousness of birth and childhood, and the final
unconsciousness of death.

1. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*,
It is clear that Cybel's role in *The Great God Brown* is similar to the role ascribed to the mother by Jung. She represents for Dion the unconscious harmony of childhood; and later she is associated with the final harmony of death. Although Dion longs for death there remains within him a fear of oblivion. As he says with horror, "Nothing! To feel one's life blown out like the flame of a cheap match ... !" (III, 286). It is Cybel who comforts him by telling him: "There, don't be scared. It's born in the blood. When the time comes, you'll find it easy" (*ibid.*). The ambivalence of Dion's attitude towards death and his continuing relationship with Cybel suggests that the comfort and freedom from self that Dion derives from the presence of Cybel is a sublimation of his longing for extinction.

The elaboration of Jung's ideas so far has been to suggest the association of the desire for the mother with the desire for non-existence. In *Psychology of the Unconscious* incest is a symbol of rebirth but this does not conflict with the above association. Jung states that:

> the fundamental basis of the 'incestuous' desire does not aim at cohabitation, but at the special thought of becoming a child again, of turning back to the parent's protection, of coming into the mother once more in order to be born again.

However, the desire for rebirth postulated by Jung does not signify a wish to exist in a different world from the present one. Rebirth is generally assumed to infer a situation whereby the conscious self is transported into a harmonious

world; but Jung argues that such harmony can only be
attained through a loss of self-awareness. The lure of
childhood resides in the nature of the "unconscious,
instinctive happenings which permit the child to live as
an appendage of his parents, unconscious of himself", in
a world of instinctive acquiescence to desires and "the
harmony of animal nature". Thus, effectively, the
desire for rebirth is another manifestation of the longing
for unconsciousness of the self.

As Jung's statement relating to the life-cycle of
the psyche attests, the unconscious exerts a magnetic
pull upon the mind. The whole implication of the passage
is that the movement towards consciousness is an extraordinary
occurrence that is strongly resisted by the mind. In Symbols
of Transformation, the revised version of Psychology of the
Unconscious, Jung elaborates upon the relationship
between the mother and the unconscious. The longing for the
mother cannot be underestimated, "for whoever sunders himself
from the mother longs to get back to the mother". In
Dynamo after Reuben breaks all the ties that bind him to
his home he still longs to regain the peace that he knew
in the arms of his mother. The sound of rushing water
is like music to him, and reminds him of the peace of the
mother. He says:

> It's as if that sound was cool water
> washing over my body!--washing all
> dirt and sin away! Like someone
> singing me to sleep--my mother--when
> I was a kid--calling me back to

1. Ibid., p.147.
somewhere far off where I’d been
once long ago and known peace!
(He sighs with longing, his body
suddenly gone limp and weary.)

(III, 476)

Although Reuben attempts to adopt an empirical, scientific
view of the world, he is unable to dispel the deep longing
within him to return to the mother. He finally achieves
his desire in his suicide upon the dynamo. The unequivocally
positive nature of this act is indicated by the stage
directions, which mention that Reuben’s voice

rises in a moan that is a mingling
of pain and loving consummation,
and this cry dies into a sound
that is like the crooning of a baby
and merges and is lost in the dynamo’s
hum.

(III, 488)

Throughout O’Neill’s work the longing for the mother is
a manifestation of the desire for extinction, and this is
always dramatized in a positive manner.

Although Jung believes that the longing for the
mother is an inevitable part of existence, the manner in
which it manifests itself is crucial, for it can take
positive or negative form. In contrast to O’Neill’s way
of thinking, the desire to return to a childhood state of
dependence and unconsciousness is clearly considered a
regressive step by Jung. The mind’s manner of dealing with
this problem is to compensate for the child’s relationship
with the mother through various manifestations of the mother
archetype.

The concepts of the collective unconscious and of
the archetypes are among Jung’s major contributions to
psychology. The collective unconscious is a substratum of the mind that is common to all humanity, and the archetypes are the contents of the collective unconscious transformed into symbols when perceived consciously. Jung postulates the mother as a prime force among the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Just as the longing for the mother can take either positive or negative form, so the maternal archetype has both good and evil aspects. The qualities associated with the positive side of the maternal archetype include

- maternal solicitude and sympathy;
- the magic authority of the female;
- the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason;
- any helpful instinct or impulse;
- all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility.¹

But on the negative side the maternal archetype signifies "the abyss ... anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate".² The ambivalence of the concept is combined in the idea of "the loving and terrible mother".³ The mother archetype can manifest itself as "the supreme goal",⁴ a mode of adopting oneself to conscious existence by establishing a forward looking perspective, as through religion (where, for example, the maternal archetype appears as "Mother Church"). But Jung also warns that the desire to retreat and evade reality, to go back to the original state of harmony and security

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
embodied in the relationship between mother and child can be so strong that it threatens the adjustment to reality and consciousness; in this case the maternal archetype appears as "the most frightful danger--the 'Terrible Mother'". Thus the longing for the mother has two closely associated but distinct meanings for Jung. The desire for harmony, peace and security is essential to both, but one meaning is negative in that it signifies a desire for virtual non-existence, while the other leads to an acceptance of life and consciousness.

The evidence of O'Neill's plays and his notes to the plays points to a knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of the maternal archetype. Despite his intense desire for the love and forgiveness of his mother, Reuben Light says of the dynamo, his surrogate mother:

> there used to be times when I was scared here too--when all these switches and busses and wires seemed like the arms of a devil fish--stretching out to suck me in--.

(III, 484)

Although it is difficult to determine just how far O'Neill borrowed from Jung in formulating his awareness of the two sides of the longing for the mother, the similarity in their approach is remarkable. In his notes for *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill states that the South Sea Islands are a mother symbol, and signify "release, peace, security, beauty, freedom of conscience, sinlessness, etc. ... yearning for pre-natal non-competitive freedom from fear ...".

1. Ibid.
The islands are therefore a symbolic manifestation of the mother archetype couched in terms that are very similar to those used by Jung: "There shall be no more sins, no repression, no disharmony with one's self, no guilt, no fear of death and no pain of separation more!" Again, while agonizing over the plot of *Days Without End*, O'Neill makes what Falk rightly interprets as a Jungian analysis of the hero:

Mother worship, repressed and turned morbid, ends by becoming Death-love and longing--thus it is a statue of Virgin and child, identification of mother and Elsa with Her, himself with child, longing for reunion with them through Mother Goddess that really drives him to suicide before statue of Virgin ....

Despite O'Neill's knowledge of the positive and negative sides of the longing for the mother, in his work he persisted in interpreting the longing for extinction as a positive action. Reuben's temporary fear of the dynamo does not prevent O'Neill from dramatizing his suicide as an act of loving consummation. Thus O'Neill's dramatization of the longing for the mother diverges from certain aspects of Jungian theory. However, an analysis of this divergence makes clearer the nature of O'Neill's attitude to the maternal woman. The attraction of the mother in O'Neill is based upon her symbolic value as the embodiment of unconscionssness and oblivion, and the desire to be unconscious of the world and of the self is central to her dramatization.

If the attitude to unconsciousness and extinction that

emerges in O'Neill's drama is traced in relation to the life-cycle of the psyche that Jung describes in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, a revealing pattern emerges. Such an approach is justified on the basis of the subjectivity of O'Neill's work, for the response to life of his protagonists is essentially O'Neill's own. From the earliest plays, like *Fog*, the O'Neill hero has to combat the "deadly longing for the depths within". In accordance with Jung's belief that if man is to live "he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past, in order to rise to his own heights", there is an attempt to affirm life in the yeasaying plays of O'Neill's middle period, such as *The Fountain* and *Lazarus Laughed*. But O'Neill ultimately faced his truth. For him the longing for oblivion was not deadly but a relief from the vicissitudes of life and self-consciousness, and his later plays clearly dramatize this attitude. Despite a struggle, O'Neill was unable to rid himself of a "deep personal longing for quiet and for the profound peace of non-existence", and he viewed this longing in a positive manner. The vision of the mother in the plays was inevitably coloured by O'Neill's attitude. Thus the annihilatory aspect of the maternal woman, what Jung would categorize as the "Terrible Mother", for O'Neill signified part of the solicitude and quality of caring of the positive aspect of the mother.

The association of the positive image of the mother with death was established at the beginning of O'Neill's dramatic career. Bogard states that the figure of the mother is first realized in *Bound East for Cardiff*, in
Yank's vision of a "pretty lady dressed in black". He suggests this symbolizes the sea "mourning like a mother for its children in pain". But the image of the mother first occurs in *Fog*, in the figure of a Polish peasant woman; and the image is further emphasized there by her cradling a child in her arms.

Both of these works are concerned with death, but their situations differ, for *Fog* deals with a man who wishes to die but is compelled to live, whereas *Bound East for Cardiff* is concerned with a man who is dying but fears death. In each case the figure of the mother plays a crucial role in clarifying the protagonist's attitude to life and to death.

The hero's attitude in *Fog* is the first instance of a way of thinking that recurs throughout O'Neill's work. The main character in the play, a poet, has a death wish. This is prompted in part by his intense sensitivity to the suffering of others, but is due basically to a weariness with life. He sees death as "a blessing", a "fine sleep", and "the only way out" as he is "sick and weary of soul and longing for sleep". Although he finally resolves against suicide, his rescue at the end of the play finds him "drawn and melancholy as if he were uncertain of the outcome of

2. Ibid. It is worth noting that an earlier draft of the play was entitled *Children of the Sea*.
4. Ibid., p.94.
The positive power of maternity is established in *Fog* through the poet's recounting the love the Polish peasant woman felt for her son. It is the force of the mother's feeling for the child that prompts the poet to abandon his intention to go down with the ship in order to rescue them, for he decides that the woman "was so happy in her love for her child that it would be wrong to let her die". He also declares to the businessman who is in the lifeboat with him that he has resolved against suicide because all that has happened to him is an omen of future happiness.

But the poet is unable to dispel his longing for death, and this is illustrated by his action at the play's end. Rather than boarding the ship that has rescued them, he decides to stay in the lifeboat with the dead mother and child. The stage directions state that he "is sitting opposite the two rigid figures, looking at their still white faces with eyes full of a great longing". If the visual possibilities of the stage directions are examined, a picture can be formed that directly relates to the desire for oblivion in the arms of the mother. The poet is gazing at death, longing to be received in its arms, and death is presented in the figure of the mother and child. This theme reaches its culmination in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; and the image hinted at in *Fog* is realized completely in this play with Josie, massive and still, cradling the inert

Jamie in the moonlight. What is in the later play a poignant and memorable image is depicted in Fog in a somewhat crude and graphic manner. But the importance of this image in Fog lies in associating the desire for oblivion with the mother.

In Bound East for Cardiff the protagonist, Yank, lies dying, regretting unfulfilled dreams, frightened of the loneliness of death and the price to be paid for unexpiated sin. There is a hint of life-weariness in Yank as well, revealed by his remark: "I know whatever it is what comes after it can't be no worser 'n this" (I, 486). The play can be considered one man's response to the fact of dying. Faced with death, Yank's first reaction is one of fear. His fear of death is prompted partly by his having killed a man in a fight, but the crux of it is that death must be faced alone. He cries out towards the end: "It's hard to ship on this voyage I'm goin' on--alone!" (I, 489). Almost immediately after this Yank sees a vision of "a pretty lady dressed in black" (ibid.), and he dies. The vision conveys the meaning, as Bogard suggests, that "the sea is ultimately kind, that it receives its own gently and that it mourns for them".1 This is confirmed in the action by the sudden lifting of the fog after Yank's death. By presenting death in such a form O'Neill conveys the notion that it is not an experience to be dreaded, nor is it fearsome or horrifying. The horrors of death's loneliness,

then, are mitigated for Yank by the vision of the pretty lady.

O'Neill himself stated that "the germ of the spirit, life-attitude, etc., of all my more important future work" was to be found in *Bound East for Cardiff*. This includes the conception of the mother as the source of comforting oblivion. By symbolizing death in the form of a woman O'Neill was crystallizing an attitude that was to grow in importance in his work, for he was to repeatedly associate the positive image of woman with the positive power of death. Of course, this concept is presented in an incipient form in this play, but the strength of this idea so early in his career is indicated by its occurrence in two works so close together in time. There are striking similarities between the Polish peasant woman in *Fog* and the lady in *Bound East for Cardiff*. The latter is a mother in mourning for her child, and the former symbolically conveys the same idea. The peasant woman seems to be an apparition like Yank's vision, for she is enveloped in fog for half the play, and her existence is indicated by the references of the poet and businessman to her. When she is revealed as the fog clears she retains an unreal quality in her silence and stillness. Yet the essential similarity between the women remains their symbolic value whereby the image of the maternal woman, the "Good Mother" with its associations of comfort, security and harmony, is merged with the idea of non-existence, of death.

O'Neill, referring to *Mourning Becomes Electra*, spoke of "the life and death impulses that drive the characters on to their fates". Life and death are ambiguous terms in the play, the motivating force behind the characters' actions being the desire for a manner of existence in which awareness of self plays no part. O'Neill recognized the psychological implications of such a tendency, as is revealed in his working notes for the play, where he states that the quality of freedom represented by the South Sea Islands is associated with the longing for the mother. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is particularly relevant to the argument of this chapter because of the explicit manner in which it dramatizes the whole process of mother-longing. There was critical objection to O'Neill's supposedly precise use of psychoanalytical notions in the play, but O'Neill countered such criticism by stating that:

> the interpretations I suggest are such as might have occurred to any author in any time with a deep curiosity about the underlying motives that actuate human interrelationships in the family. In short, I think I know enough about men and women to have written *Mourning Become Electra* almost exactly as it is if I had never heard of Freud of Jung or the others.

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1. "Second Thoughts", *The American Spectator*, Dec. 1932; rptd in Cargill, *O'Neill and His Plays*, p.120.
This statement must be treated with some caution since O'Neill was, to a degree, influenced by the concepts of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, his first note for the play is worth attention. In this note O'Neill asks:

Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into ... a play, which an intelligent audience of today, possessed of no belief in gods or supernatural retribution, could accept and be moved by?¹

O'Neill's question suggests that it is his anxiousness to present a psychological equivalent of fate that produces the play's over-schematized pattern, not a dependence upon the ideas of psychoanalysis.

_Mourning Becomes Electra_ is a play in which all the main characters wish desperately to live, but being imprisoned in the bonds of self-awareness they find that life is an agony rather than the joy they desire it to be. The Mannons are aware of their predicament, but they ascribe their malaise to their Puritan heritage. For the Mannons the pagan life of the South Sea Islands where man is one with his surroundings represents life as it truly should be. In _Mourning Becomes Electra_, as in _The Great God Brown_ and _Desire Under the Elms_, the pagan is brought into contrast with the puritan, but here pagan and puritan relate not so much to theological concepts, as to differing states of mind. Paganism connotes for O'Neill a Dionysian state of joy in being part of nature, and an unthinking acceptance of life as it is. Puritanism, on the other hand,

¹. "Working Notes and Extracts from a Fragmentary Work Diary", in _European Theories of the Drama_, ed. Clark, p.530.
represents an exaggerated consciousness of selfhood: it deliberately attempts to separate man from the rest of nature.

The distortion of attitude produced by this Puritan consciousness is articulated by Ezra Mannon upon his return home from the war: he perceives that for the Mannons "Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born" (II, 54). For O'Neill, since Puritanism inculcates a strong feeling of separateness, it also breeds a feeling of alienation, so that death ultimately seems to have more meaning than life. The blurring of the distinctions between life and death and the manner in which the terms are freely interchanged in the play demonstrates O'Neill's attitude. Death for Ezra loses the awesome meaning it has for a Puritan because he is faced with it on a mass scale. He says:

It was seeing death all the time in this war got me to thinking these things. Death was so common it didn't mean anything. That freed me to think of life.... Death made me think of life. Before that life had only made me think of death!

(II, 53)

But later, when Ezra pleads with Christine to go away with him to some island on the other side of the world and he cries, "I'm sick of death! I want life!" (II, 56), death is not only associated with the facts of war but also with puritan self-awareness.

Similarly, it is war that divests Orin of his awe of death: he sees it then as "a dirty joke life plays on life!" (II, 93-94). For Orin, as for Ezra, the accepted
distinction between life and death comes to have no significance. Orin begins with a clear-cut conception of the meaning of living and dying, for he is repelled by the carnage of battle and looks instead to the life-giving qualities of the islands he reads about in Melville's *Typee*. But when he is faced with the situation that prevails at his home there is a change in his attitude to existence. He finds that he is mistaken in thinking that home will be an escape from death. Here what confronts him is not only the death of his father, but, more importantly, that of his dream of peace. His despairing cry, "I should never have come back to life--from my island of peace!" (II, 101), indicates that he has recognized that an existence lacking peace and harmony is a living death. Christine Mannon reflects a similar belief. Her response to Lavinia's statement that she can still live, despite Brants's murder, is to glare at her "as if this were the last insult", and to reply to her "with strident mockery" (II, 123). Christine had hoped to escape the bonds of Puritanical self-awareness with the help of Brant. She cannot resume her old relationship with Orin which had provided her with a refuge from the Mannon's rigid view of the world, and she is aware that Brant's death dooms her to a life of guilt and frustration. Through suicide Christine escapes a living death.

The Mannon's consciousness of self is manifested in their heightened sense of guilt, frustration and sin. This is a logical extention of an exaggerated self-awareness,
for a feeling of separateness from the rest of life results in a distortion of values, and rather than functioning in accordance with the rhythms of life, the self is set against nature. It is this sense of separateness that turns Ezra's love to lust in the eyes of Christine, and leads Lavinia to see herself as the arbiter of justice.

Life as it should be is defined by the Mannons as a state of innocence and love, with a falling of the barriers between man and man, and man and nature. Essentially the Mannons desire a life without conflict, duality and divisiveness; they long not only to be rid of guilt and sin, but to lose all sense of awareness and identity. "Peace" is the key word in their conception of the South Sea Islands, and it epitomizes the central meaning that the Islands have for them. It is on the islands across the sea that the Mannons hope to escape the conflicts and frustrations of life and find peace.

Yet the peace of the Islands is only a reflection of the peace of the mother, who is the focus of the protagonists' longings. Engel points out that "In Electra, the Mother is the primordial image, an archetypal experience shared by all of the Mannons".¹ This experience had been realized for the Mannons in the figure of Marie Brantôme, the mother of Adam Brant and the surrogate mother of Ezra Mannon. She is described as having been "frisky and full of life--with something free and wild about her like an animile" (II, 44).

She epitomizes the qualities of love and freedom that the Mannons notably lack. More importantly, the memory of Marie recalls for Adam and Ezra, as do the childhood memories of Christine for Orin, the sense of unselfconscious harmony enjoyed in the protection of mother love. O'Neill in his notes to the play expressed a desire to assert a "strange, hidden psychic identity" between the women in the play, and there is a deliberate association of Christine and Lavinia with Marie, a link dramatized through their sharing a common characteristic in the strange beauty of their hair. Marie, moreover, is linked with the sea as well as the islands; she functions in the play as the archetypal image of the mother. Although Lavinia and Christine, like the men, long for the peace and harmony represented by the South Sea Islands, they are, by the very fact of their womanhood, associated with the harmony of the mother. Adam Brant makes clear the nature of the link that binds the three women in his words to Lavinia:

You're so like your mother in some ways. Your face is the dead image of hers. And look at your hair. You won't meet hair like yours and hers again in a month of Sundays. I only know of one other woman who had it. You'll think it strange when I tell you. It was my mother....

(dropping his voice to a reverent, hushed tone) Yes, she had beautiful hair like your mother's, that hung down to her knees, and big, deep, sad eyes that were blue as the Caribbean Sea!2

(II, 22)


The longing for the mother is the prime motive in the actions of the protagonists of *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Even Lavinia's fierce attachment to her father and her endorsement of the values of duty and revenge can be seen to stem from her being deprived of the love of the mother, her actions being the consequence of an inverted mother-longing. It is precisely because Lavinia has been denied her mother's love that she, in retaliation, identifies herself with her father. There is an almost palpable hostility and tension between Christine and Lavinia, and the intensity of this feeling emanates primarily from Lavinia for it is she who has suffered from being denied Christine's love. As she tells Christine upon being accused of attempting to usurp her place: "No! It's you who have stolen all love from me since I was born!" (II, 33).

The desire for the mother is emphatically not a sexual desire. To be sure, the love of Ezra Mannon and Adam Brant for Christine does contain a sexual element, but sex is not the most important factor in their response to her. It is Christine's resemblance to the mother, Marie Brantôme, that attracts the two men to her, and they associate her with the peace and harmony they enjoyed in the protection of Marie's love. The force of the men's feeling for Christine arises from their desire to lose all sense of self and gain peace. Sex, then, becomes one element within a larger desire for harmony and peace. In fact, as Lavinia's experience of the Islands illustrates, sexual love, free of inhibition and shame, is both a
symbol and outcome of a state of unselfconsciousness.

That sexual possession is not the basis of the desire for the mother is further emphasized in the case of Orin. Orin is attracted to Lavinia because the trip to the Islands helps her to shed her Mannon rigidity, and transforms her into the image of her mother, Christine. But there is a deliberate dichotomy between the sexual nature of Orin's desire for Lavinia and the relationship he had with Christine. Although the scenes between Orin and Christine in the play are overshadowed by the fact that Christine has transferred her attention to Adam Brant, there still exists an innocence and trust between them that indicates the nature of their previous relationship. There is a marked difference between the boyish, childlike reaction of Orin to Christine's maternal solicitude and the manner in which he responds to Lavinia. The latter is described in unequivocally negative terms. Staring at Lavinia "a distorted look of desire comes over his face", to which she reacts with "horrified repulsion" (II, 165). Orin's incestuous longing for Lavinia epitomizes the whole "death-in-life"1 philosophy of the Mannons: it is both a consequence and a manifestation of evil. Orin himself describes his feelings for Lavinia as:

the love of guilt for guilt which breeds more guilt--until you get so deep at the bottom of hell there is no lower you can sink and you rest there in peace!

(II, 160)

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In contrast to the guilt and suffering that his desire for Lavinia evokes in him, Orin's relationship with Christine brought him a sense of peace and security. Thus a purely sexual incestuous desire is very remote from the longing for the love and peace of the mother.¹

This fact becomes clear in analysing the role of the South Sea Islands in Mourning Becomes Electra. O'Neill explicitly stated in his notes to the play that the Islands were to represent the "yearning for pre-natal non-competitive freedom from fear". It is obvious from the protagonists' response to the Islands that they regard them as a symbol of the mother, and as such as a symbol of freedom from self and consciousness. In fact the meaning of the Islands for the protagonists closely resembles the significance of the pre-conscious state in Erich Neumann's The Origins and History of Consciousness. Neumann's work is based upon Jungian psychology and it traces the growth of human consciousness through the analysis of myth. Neumann postulates that:

The ascent towards consciousness is the "unnatural" thing in nature; it is specific of the species Man, who on that account has justly styled himself Homo sapiens. The struggle between the specifically human and the universally natural constitutes the history of man's conscious development.²

It is precisely this struggle that the Mannons are going

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through, for they desire to discard that aspect of themselves that gives them their human identity: their selfhood.

Neumann's thesis is that the "evolution of consciousness by stages is as much a collective human phenomenon as a particular individual phenomenon",¹ and it is on this basis that he analyses the growth of human consciousness by an examination of the myths of humanity. A mythological examination of the growth of consciousness is particularly suitable, as the nature of myth necessarily leads to a symbolic interpretation; and only symbol can make intelligible what is unknown and beyond the grasp of consciousness. Neumann uses the symbol of the "uroburos" to convey the quality of being that constitutes an existence without consciousness of the self, or "ego" as he terms it. The uroburos is the symbol within which all contradictions are reconciled; it is self-contained perfection. It "functions as a transpersonal factor that was there as a psychic state of being before the formation of an ego",² and the beginning of ego consciousness remains under the domination of the uroburos. Neumann, equating the experiences of the embryonic ego with those of earliest man, sees man at this stage as:

Enfolded and upborn by great Mother Nature .... Nothing is himself; everything is world. The world shelters and nourishes him, while he scarcely wills and acts at all. Doing nothing, lying inert in the unconscious, merely being there in the inexhaustible twilit world, all needs

¹. Ibid., p.xx.
². Ibid., p.12.
effortlessly supplied by the great nourisher--such is that early, beatific state.\textsuperscript{1}

Adam Brant, describing the islander's existence, remarks that, "they live in as near the Garden of Paradise before sin was discovered as you'll find on this earth!" (II, 24) and it is clear that the existence of the natives of the South Sea Islands is conceived of as being similar to Neumann's description of a uroboric existence. Brant goes on to say that:

Unless you've seen it, you can't picture the green beauty of their land set in the blue of the sea! The clouds like down on the mountain tops, the sun drowsing in your blood, and always the surf on the barrier reef singing a croon in your ears like a lullaby! (II, 24)

The islanders in their paradisal abode exemplify existence as it truly should be.

Although the uroburos contains within itself all opposites including male and female, Neumann emphasizes that the unconscious and infantile stage of the development of human consciousness is dominated by the mother, and the desire to shed one's selfhood he terms "uroboric incest". Like Jung, Neumann emphatically asserts that incest is to be understood "symbolically, not concretistically and sexually".\textsuperscript{2} Neumann states that "In uroboric incest, the emphasis upon pleasure and love is in no sense active, it is more a desire to be dissolved and absorbed; passively one lets oneself be taken, sinks into the pleroma, melts

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Ibid., p.15.]
  \item[Ibid., p.16.]
\end{itemize}
away in the ocean of pleasure—*Liebestod*. Neumann's definition of uroboric incest describes vividly the nature of the Mannons' longing for the islands and for the mother and the state of being they wish to attain. Orin Mannon exemplifies most clearly this quality of incestuous desire.

In a sense, before the war, Orin enjoyed a uroboric relationship with his mother, for he and Christine had a secret world of their own, to which the password was "No Mannons allowed" (II, 85). These words indicate the nature of this relationship, for to exclude the Mannons was to exclude a sense of self-awareness and guilt. It is the war that is Orin's birth into the world of reality, and he comes to a traumatic and painful awareness of himself, an experience so intense that his self is mirrored in the men he kills in battle; it is a self that plagues him in his dreams. In this period of suffering, of newly awakened self-awareness, Orin dreams of returning to the love and security of his mother. When he reads Melville's *Typee* the South Sea Islands come to signify the lost world of peace that he enjoyed with Christine. The nature of his desire for Christine is obvious from his description of the hallucinations that he experienced while he was wounded. He says:

"Those Islands came to mean everything that wasn't war, everything that was peace and warmth and security. I used to dream I was there. And later on all the time I was out of my head I seemed really to be there. There was no one there but you and me. And yet I never saw you, that's the funny part."

felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same colour as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you.

(II, 90)

Orin wishes to regain the uroboric sense of self-containedness and self-unawareness, to dissolve all semblance of consciousness. He returns from the war with the hope of recreating this world of bliss, only to find a chaotic situation prevailing, for his mother has not only abandoned him but has taken a lover. Orin then realizes that there is no hope for peace from the self that is plaguing him; and his sense of guilt and self-awareness is intensified after Christine's suicide, for he considers himself to blame. Even a journey to the yearned-for South Sea Islands cannot ease his suffering.

Orin finally comes to realize that life itself offers no solution to the problems he faces. There is only one way out of his dilemma, and that is through death. "Yes!", he states, "It's the way to peace--to find her again--my lost island--Death is an Island of Peace, too--Mother will be waiting for me there--" (II, 166). Orin's realization is in accord with Neumann's belief that "always over uroboric incest there stand the insignia of death, signifying final dissolution in union with the Mother". Orin's suicide is therefore a literal enactment of the symbolic and psychological implications of the longing for the mother.

1. Ibid.
The experience of the Mannons suggests that the sense of unselfconscious harmony that makes life worth living is both difficult to achieve and impossible to maintain. In fact life can be seen as death and death as life, in the sense that only death is able to provide the peace so intensely longed for in life. However, the attraction of death does not stem from its association with the idea of rebirth into a better world; instead, death's allure resides in its being an escape from life and self-awareness. The ultimate condemnation of existence is provided by Lavinia's final action. Aware that a life of harmony is not her destiny and aware also of the need for expiation, Lavinia does not take the path chosen by her mother and brother; instead she condemns herself to living. As she says: "It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born!" (II, 178).

Engel rightly says of Mourning Becomes Electra: "it reconciles not to life but to death". Engel's criticism is meant negatively, for he is judging the work in terms of its value as tragedy. If, however, the play is considered as a means of ascertaining O'Neill's attitude to existence, the relationship between the peace of the mother and the peace of oblivion is a significant indication of O'Neill's positive response to death, given the undercurrent of life-weariness that runs through all of O'Neill's drama. Conversely, this same link between the longing for the mother and the longing for death explains the importance of woman's role as a symbol of peace and harmony.

But the mother is not only a symbol of the yearning for oblivion, for she also plays a central role in O'Neill's search for religious faith. This aspect of O'Neill's vision of woman is discussed in the next chapter.
In a letter to George Jean Nathan O'Neill declared that the central problem of the modern age was:

the death of the old God and the 
failure of science and materialism 
to give any satisfactory new one 
for the surviving primitive religious 
instinct to find a meaning for life 
in, and to comfort its fears of death 
with.¹

This statement reveals O'Neill's belief in faith as a "phenomenon of this world, the expression of a universal psychological need",² for the importance of religion is not based upon its supernatural validity, but is seen to lie in its ability to give meaning to life and to comfort the fears that accompany an awareness of mortality. In its essentials, the need for faith that O'Neill dramatized in his plays is very similar to his conception of the "hopeless hope", for the value of either lies not in its truth, but in its capacity to give meaning and dignity to the human condition. However, the religious nature of O'Neill's work depends not only on the search for faith: another equally important element is the desire to dramatize the "impelling, inscrutable forces behind life".³ All O'Neill's work displays the impulse to pin-point the core of being. This ontological concern does not necessarily

coincide with the search for faith, for it is based upon the urge to in some way discover and give expression to the truth that underlies the surface of life.

O'Neill was deeply committed both to the need to discover the truth and to a belief in the vital necessity of faith, and his manner of resolving the almost inevitable tension between faith and truth in his work led him not only to "encompass more of life than most American writers of his time but, almost alone among them, [to try] to solve it". Lionel Trilling elaborates this point in the following terms:

He is always moving toward the finality which philosophy sometimes, and religion always, promises. Life and death, good and evil, spirit and flesh, male and female, the all and the one, Anthony and Dionysus--O'Neill's is a world of these antithetical absolutes such as religion rather than philosophy conceives, a world of pluses and minuses; and his literary effort is an algebraic attempt to solve the equations.2

Thus O'Neill's innate dualism did not prevent him from attempting to discover a synthesis in which the dualities he perceived would be resolved.

Although O'Neill rejected formal religion in his youth, the intensely religious nature of his temperament caused him to continuously search for new avenues of belief in his plays. Bowen describes the type of the "Black Irishman"


2. Ibid.
to which fraternity O'Neill belonged. He is brooding and solitary, "an Irishman who has lost his Faith and who spends his life searching for the meaning of life, for a philosophy in which he can believe again as fervently as he once believed in the simple answers of the Catholic Catechism".¹ O'Neill's own spiritual crisis occurred when the doubts he had previously entertained about the existence of a benevolent God were confirmed by his discovery of his mother's drug addiction.² In Days Without End, O'Neill's last play of religious inquiry and his only work in which meaning is discovered to reside in the Catholic faith, his protagonist undergoes a similar crisis. John Loving's faith in a kind God is shattered at the age of fifteen when, despite all his prayers, both his parents die in an influenza epidemic:

He abased and humbled himself before the Cross--and, in reward for his sickening humiliation, saw that no miracle would happen.... He saw his God as deaf and blind and merciless--a Deity Who returned hate for love and revenged Himself upon those who trusted Him!³

Despite his denial of God, John Loving's search for faith continues until he returns to the deity of his youth and childhood. Similarly, O'Neill's quest for religious meaning continued, although it did not ultimately lead to a return to the Catholic Church.

O'Neill's work presents a variety of approaches to the problem of faith, yet beneath the various statements of his plays the suspicion persists that "we are all the slaves of meaningless chance" (III, 542), in a universe without God. O'Neill remained a nihilist throughout his career, but this did not prevent him from attempting to discover an alternative to nihilism. His work affirms the belief that "The fundamental conflict fought out in the fiction and drama of our age is not between man and society but between nihilism and the nostalgia for the absolute".\(^1\) O'Neill's attempts to counter his nihilistic impulse led him to search for an absolute with which to replace the old deity, but the consequence of such an exploration was often negative. The tension between his desire to discover the essential truth of existence and his need for faith manifests itself in his fear of the existence of an indifferent God. Driven to despair by the stupidity of events, Kublai Kaan in Marco Millions cries out: "My hideous suspicion is that God is only an infinite, insane energy which creates and destroys without other purpose than to pass eternity in avoiding thought" (II, 426).

The concept of a malign, or at best indifferent, deity is one that is presented in O'Neill's first play, The Web, when Rose Thomas, desolated by circumstance, cries out against an indifferent God. The idea of such a deity recurs in All God's Chillun Got Wings, Desire Under the Elms, Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, Mourning Becomes

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Electra, and Days Without End. Yet prior to the writing of All God's Chillun Got Wings, Juan Ponce de Leon in The Fountain asserts a pantheistic faith in the cyclic process of nature, and sees man as an integral part of that cycle. This sense of pantheistic affirmation occurs in many different forms in O'Neill's work. In his early sea plays, which are not involved with any specific ideological or theological exploration, the view of man as part of the natural cycle is implicit. As O'Neill moved from the one-act form to plays of greater complexity, and as his preoccupations in his work became more diverse, the assertions of pantheistic affirmation became overt, a part of the ideological standpoint of a play rather than an implicit assumption. Apart from The Fountain, both The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed offer a pantheistic affirmation of existence. O'Neill retained a sympathy for a pantheistic interpretation of the world throughout his career. The attraction of pantheism lay in its assumption of godhead being immanent within the world itself. It presented an ordered and harmonious view of the world without assuming the existence of a transcendent force as the cause behind all phenomena, for pantheism sees cause and effect as the same.

But the idea of a cruel or indifferent God, and the perception of infinity within a pantheistic affirmation of existence are only two possible answers to the spectre of nihilism for O'Neill. The third, and most important, is the conception of maternal godhead. The power of God the Mother lies in the fact that she combines O'Neill's pantheistic inclinations with a fulfilment of his own emotional and
psychological needs. It is the procreativity of the maternal deity that aligns her with the forces of nature. Just as in pantheism the creative principle is immanent in the universe, so in O'Neill's conception of maternal godhead there is no separation between God and the world, for the mother is part of the creative principle of the world. Whereas O'Neill's male God is characterized by his transcendence, his very separateness from man, God the Mother is characterized by her very immanence, her identification with man and nature. The humanity of the maternal deity gives the concept of maternal theism a validity and force in O'Neill's work that his other approaches to the quest for faith and truth do not have. O'Neill's pervasively nihilistic outlook was such that any sense of a pattern or order within the universe had to accommodate the essential bleakness of his vision. Although O'Neill longed to believe in a transcendent, benign, and loving God whose presence indicated that the purpose and meaning of existence was ultimately good, he felt that given the nature of the world, such a deity could not exist. The force of female divinity lies in the fact that it comes to terms with O'Neill's innately nihilistic outlook. In fact, even in his late plays, after O'Neill had rejected the hope of faith in a theistic order, the maternal values of compassion and love retain meaning and worth in an essentially meaningless world.

In positing a maternal theism O'Neill wished to establish an order in consonance with his own emotional and psychological needs. O'Neill's faith in the mother is totally subjective in that it springs from his own needs and longings, but rather than such a faith being illogical
or irrational, O'Neill is able to present a convincing case for maternal theism as a universal concept. It is an order in which the values of compassion and love are paramount, but which does not deny the reality of pain. It attempts to give meaning to pain and suffering in a manner that differs from the explanation offered by revealed religion. Christianity perceives earthly existence as a vale of tears and sorrow which is a preparation for another life of ecstatic bliss where suffering is non-existent. Thus pain is justified in terms of the supernatural. But O'Neill's conception of maternal godhead is an attempt to explain pain in terms of itself, for in a world ruled by God the Mother, pain is seen as part of the human condition. Nina Leeds' much-quoted remark from Strange Interlude clearly illustrates O'Neill's viewpoint:

We should have imagined life as created in the birth-pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood again, peace of Her peace!... Now wouldn't that be more logical and satisfying than having God a male whose chest thunders with egotism and is too hard for tired heads and thoroughly comfortless?

(I, 42-43)

The above quotation introduces another aspect of O'Neill's religious quest: the tension between the male and the female concepts of deity. In Desire Under the Elms the idea of a hard, indifferent God is set against the notion of a being who is warm and benign. This dualism
takes the form of a sexual polarity between the male and female principles. Ephraim Cabot's god, God the Father, is "hard, not easy!" (I, 237), while the power that rules the life of his son Eben is that of the mother, who is kind and good, warm and soft. This tension between God the Father and God the Mother manifests itself in the majority of O'Neill's dramas in which religious exploration occurs. It is found, in varying degrees of intensity, in *The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude, Dynamo, Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *Days Without End*. The conflict upon which this tension is based is that between authoritarian and humanistic values. While the paternal deity in O'Neill's work is hard and exact, vengeful and egotistical, demanding complete submission, or at best is totally indifferent to humanity's plight, the maternal deity is portrayed as being the spirit of all-encompassing, unconditional love.

As Nina's yearning for a maternal deity implies, the Mother God's appeal is based partly on the fact that she, like mankind, is a victim of the universe, whereas the paternal deity's power lies in his reflection of the world's cruelty. In fact, there is an inherent paradox within O'Neill's theology. The evidence of the plays suggests that a transcendent being is necessarily a negative force, for a benign deity can only be so insofar as it reflects human suffering. By suffering like humanity the benign deity becomes, like the rest of mankind, a victim—the victim of a force outside itself. O'Neill attempts to correct this situation by postulating a religion of
acceptance: the God as victim accepts the natural cycle, and in this way each human being has the potential of becoming a god. The two prime examples of this approach in O'Neill's work are Lazarus and Cybel. Yet of the two, Cybel is the more appealing for not only does she present a philosophy of complete acceptance as Lazarus does, she also contains within herself the maternal values of compassion, tenderness, and selfless love. Although Lazarus preaches a philosophy of love it is so diffuse and impersonal that it can have no personal meaning for the individual. The play concludes with the phrase "Men forget!" (I, 371) uttered by Lazarus' murderer, Caligula, and Lazarus' philosophy of love and acceptance proves to be evanescent. Lazarus is a revolutionary who attempts to change humanity's perception of the world; although Cybel does express the desire to make humanity perceive the truth, she is content to dispense comfort to those who come to her. Her compassion cannot change the human situation, but it does give immediate comfort. The maternal values prove ultimately to be the only values that are pertinent to the human situation.

As Cybel's example indicates, for O'Neill's conception of God the Mother the notion of divinity is not the most important factor; in fact it plays a relatively minor part. When Nina contemplates the notion of God created in the female image what really concerns her are the values associated with the mother rather than the idea of divinity itself. Again, Lazarus Laughed offers a clear illustration of the difference between the idea of godhead and the
supreme value of the ideas associated with the mother. Lazarus is dramatized as a divine figure. He has been through the terror of death and returned to preach the message of a total acceptance of life. The quality of divinity about him is emphasized by the stage directions which describe him as growing younger and younger as the work progresses, and of having an aura about him. In contrast to Lazarus, his wife Miriam grows older with the passage of time, and she is not affected by his message of laughter. Yet it is Lazarus, rather than Miriam, who fails to move us. *Lazarus Laughed* is, as Cyrus Day argues, a play about an idea, and Lazarus, being the dramatization of an idea, is not portrayed convincingly as a human being. It is Miriam who truly epitomizes the qualities of compassion and love. She follows Lazarus uncomplainingly in his journey across the Roman Empire, and her intuitive perception enables her to see Lazarus' end. Although she is unaffected by Lazarus' message she does not fear death itself. As she says:

I begin to feel horror gnawing at my breast. I begin to know the torture of the fear of death, Lazarus--not of my death but of yours--not the passing of your man's body but of the going away from me of your laughter which is to me as my son, my little boy!

(1, 330)

Miriam is the symbolic mother of all those who die and suffer in the play, and although Lazarus' message fades away, Miriam's pity and compassion and love prove both necessary and enduring.

The contrast between Lazarus' essential coldness of character and the warmth and compassion displayed by Miriam is reflected—though in a somewhat stronger vein—in Nina's contrasting the egotistical hardness of a male God with the love of God the Mother. When Nina refers to the logic of a world ruled by maternal values she pin-points the basis of the Mother God's appeal, because O'Neill's concept of maternal theism does not run counter to his nihilistic impulse. Just as existentialism begins with a nihilistic stance in that it assumes the world to have no meaning other than that which man gives to it, so the philosophical assumption underlying O'Neill's maternal theism is the assertion of human values, the attempt to understand the world in its own terms rather than in relation to some supernatural agency. O'Neill's conception of paternal deity is that of an omniscient, omnipotent being who is separate and different from humanity. O'Neill struggled to find faith in such a God, but it ran counter to all his attitudes, instincts and feelings. There is, in his portrayal of God the Father, an implicit rejection of male godhead. In fact, it can be argued that in Desire Under the Elms, Strange Interlude, The Great God Brown, Dynamo, and Mourning Becomes Electra, there is an explicit attempt to deny the validity of paternal theism. Within these plays the power of God the Father manifests itself in ways that distort and ruin the lives of the protagonists, for he rules by fear rather than love. Reuben Light's defiance of the male God's power in Dynamo takes the form of his crying out, "There is no God! No God but Electricity! I'll never be
scared again!" (III, 453), and it is the ultimate act of 
rebellion. Yet this action does not bring Reuben peace: 
he is only at peace with himself in the presence of the 
motherly Mrs. Fife. Like Reuben, the protagonists in 
*Desire Under the Elms*, *Strange Interlude*, *The Great God 
Brown*, and *Mourning Becomes Electra* achieve a sense of 
contentment and peace only when the maternal values are 
in the ascendant, and the notably unconvincing quality of 
*Dynamo* and *Days Without End* is due to O'Neill's attempting 
in both works to go beyond the simple maternal theism that 
he really longed for.

It is in *Desire Under the Elms* that the concept of 
maternal godhead is presented for the first time and the 
positive nature of the maternal values is asserted. It is 
also in this work that the tension between the male and 
female principles first manifests itself. There is no 
explicit reference to this tension in the play but the 
reality of this conflict is established at the beginning 
of the work. The description of the farmhouse mentions 
"two enormous elms" that bend over the farmhouse and "appear 
to protect and at the same time subdue" (I, 202). Protection 
and subjugation are the key phrases in this description 
for they indicate the ambivalence in the projection of the 
maternal qualities that this play conveys. The elms have 
"a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous 
absorption" (*ibid.*). The physical presence of the elms is 
an important indication of the dominance of the maternal 
values over the paternal.

*Desire Under the Elms* has been considered a revenge
melodrama, and it is clear that the theme of vengeance predominates. Accordingly, the protagonists dramatize the less admirable side of human nature. It is therefore not surprising that it is the negative aspect of the female principle that plays such a major part in this work. The spirit of Eben Cabot's dead mother broods over the house and seeks and achieves vengeance for the wrongs done to her by her husband Ephraim. Greed and resentment motivates the actions of all the protagonists, and the stage directions and dialogue are full of words such as "vindictive", "spite" and "hatred".

But despite the sinister presence of the elms and the predominant themes of vengeance and possession, in the first two scenes of the play it is the warmth and goodness of the female principle that is contrasted with the hardness and ruthless, driving nature of God the Father. The paternal deity is associated with the stones that make up the farm: "Here--it's stones atop o' the ground ... year atop o' year ... makin' stone walls fur him to fence us in!" (I, 204). The feeling of his sons for Ephraim is encapsulated in Eben's remark: "Honor thy father!... I pray he's died!" (I, 205). In contrast, his description of his mother is full of love and regret. The response of the three Cabot sons to the women, Jenn (Simeon's dead wife), and Eben's mother, is one of love. The latter woman epitomizes selflessness, meekness, warmth, and gentleness. Eben's

2. Ibid., p. 82.
description of Min, the prostitute, is also one that enforces the notion of female warmth. Min is said to be, "like t'night, she's soft'n'wa'm, she smells like a wa'm plowed field ...(I, 211). The last simile is important for it associates woman with the warmth and power of the soil. The relationship between the maternal principle and the power of the soil is further enhanced by Ephraim's remark to Abbie: "Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew" (I, 236). Yet the power that resides in Abbie is an ambivalent one, for if the greed she displays for possessing the farm is characteristic of the paternal deity, there is also a quality about her of "sinister maternity". Like the elms that brood over the farmhouse and seem to envelop it within the entrails of their drooping branches, Abbie is repeatedly referred to as attempting to "swaller" up the farm (I, 229, 240, 255).

Despite the theme of vengeance and the notion of sinister maternity, the positive maternal values of love and self-sacrifice ultimately prevail. Although the relationship of Abbie and Eben is at first motivated by greed and lust, it is through the mother that the lovers come to a right relationship with the world, accepting love and not greed as the principle by which to live. But some critics believe that it is God the Father who finally prevails, having vanquished the maternal principle.¹ Although at the play's end Ephraim re-affirms the strength and validity

of his belief in a hard God, his attitude and actions through the work indicate that he is not content in his faith in a ruthless and egotistical deity. In his long monologue in which Ephraim tells Abbie of his life in the service of God the Father, the recurring phrases are "hard" and "lonesome" (I, 236-238). The latter phrase is significant for it indicates the emptiness that lies at the core of his belief: faith in a hard God is not totally satisfying. This faith has enabled Ephraim to create a farm out of hard and hostile ground but it does not assuage the need for companionship and love. In his loneliness Ephraim takes a wife but, as he says, "She was a good woman.... She never knewed me. She helped but she never knowed what she was helpin'. I was allus lonesome" (I, 237). With his second wife the situation is the same: "She never knewed me nor nothin'. It was lonesomer 'n hell with her" (ibid.). Ephraim is even lonelier with a wife for his women cannot understand his faith. Abbie too is uncomprehending.

Bogard argues that in succumbing to his need for love Ephraim is whoring after a false God, God the Mother, and it is this that causes his predicament.¹ Yet it seems more logical to see Ephraim's predicament to be the result of his faith in God the Father than the consequence of an act of apostasy. Loneliness is the direct result of his faith in a hard God. Bogard further argues that Ephraim is driven from the house after complaining about the eerie atmosphere within (the spirit of the avenging mother), because he

¹ Bogard, Contour in Time, p.222.
"cannot live in the alien God's service" and becomes "an apostate cast into darkness". Yet if Ephraim is driven from the house, it is only to go to the barn to be with the cows he loves. In this play the cows are seen as a positive symbol of maternity. They bring peace to Ephraim, they are"restful" and "warm" (I, 238). If hardness and loneliness are the attributes of paternal deity, warmth, and love, and a sense of peace are the consequence of faith in God the Mother. When Ephraim states that he can talk to the cows because they understand him and can bring him peace he sets a pattern that repeats itself through the theological and non-theological plays alike. Dion Anthony finds peace and love in the arms of the bovine earth mother Cybel in The Great God Brown; Nina dreams of such peace in Strange Interlude; like Dion, Reuben Light derives comfort and love from the cow-like Mrs. Fife; and Jamie Tyrone is given love and solace by the large and loving Josie Hogan in A Moon for the Misbegotten. When Ephraim decides to burn the farm after discovering the truth of the relationship between Abbie and Eben, he first sets the cows and other animals free. Rather than seeing Ephraim as an apostate in his desire for warmth and peace, Desire Under the Elms asserts that the power of the maternal principle resides precisely in the human need for love and compassion and warmth, and that these are the supreme values.

1. Ibid.

2. Winther takes a different view; he states that the cows are "close to nature. They have accepted God as a stone". See Winther, "Desire Under the Elms: A Modern Tragedy", 331.
After the ugliness of human vindictiveness and greed that is dramatized through much of the play, the lovers' final action is a tribute to the power of love. Eben and Abbie acknowledge both their guilt and their love, and it is the latter that gives them the assurance to be able to face their fate with calm and dignity. The victory of love is clearly an assertion of the worth and power of the maternal deity, and an indication of the latter's triumph over God the Father.¹

There is, apart from the dichotomy between loneliness and love, another aspect to the tension between the maternal and paternal principles. This is the polarity between matter and spirit. In Desire Under the Elms this polarity defines itself as the possessiveness that is associated with God the Father and the love that is associated with the mother. In presenting the rocks on the farm as a symbol of the paternal principle and the fertility of the soil as a symbol of the mother the dichotomy between matter and spirit is further emphasized, for the male God is identified with the stones, with the actuality of the land itself, while the mother is associated with a more ineffable quality, that of the procreative force within the soil. It is not difficult to see where O'Neill's sympathies lie, for if Abbie and Eben lose the battle to gain possession of the farm they triumph in spirit, leaving the land itself in the possession of Ephraim in his loneliness.

Implicit within the presentation of the maternal deity in *Desire Under the Elms* is the notion of a Dionysian acceptance and celebration of nature. This is a manifestation of the link between O'Neill's conception of maternal theism and his pantheism. This association is first suggested in *Bound East for Cardiff*, for the "pretty lady" symbolizes the maternal force of the sea. The connection between the female principle and nature again presents itself in *The Fountain* in Beatriz's association with the fountain of life. In *The Great God Brown* Cybel is directly portrayed as a goddess of the earth who utters the pantheistic paean to nature at the play's end; and in *Dynamo* Reuben sees the mother-dynamo as part of the natural cycle that begins with the sea. There runs through all of O'Neill's work the dream of redemption through nature, and this desire is often associated with the sea. In *The Hairy Ape* Paddy recalls the time when man was in harmony with his surroundings: "'Twas them days men belonged to ships, not now. 'Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one" (III, 214). It is a yearning for a return to this state that impels the quest of O'Neill's protagonists in the plays that follow. Edmund's experiences upon the ocean recounted in *Long Day's Journey into Night* indicate that this sense of harmony can be regained, but only momentarily. Edmund states:

> I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern with the water foaming into spume under me, the masts with every sail white in the moonlight, towering high

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above me. I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to life itself! To God, if you want to put it that way.¹

Edmund describes his revelation as being

Like a saint's vision of beatitude.
Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand.
For a second you see—and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning!²

Thus infinity can be perceived and experienced but only for a brief moment.

Yet the dream of harmony is a theme that is not peculiar only to O'Neill, for the concept of America as the land of redemption, the place where "every man had transcended the human condition to achieve perfect freedom in harmony with redemptive nature",³ is a central preoccupation within American literature as a whole. Consequently the American writer "must be a metaphysician and theologian. He must always begin with the question: Is it possible

². Ibid., p.135.
that Americans are exempt from the human condition?"  

In 1946, discussing his cycle of plays entitled *A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*, O'Neill remarked that he considered that America

instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure ... because it was given everything, more than any other country. Though moving as rapidly as it has, it hasn't acquired any real roots. Its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it, too.... We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'  

Here O'Neill encapsulates his attitude to the American dream and its relationship with his theological inquiry, for his remark indicates the dual aspect of the dream and his response to it. Carpenter points out that although the idea of a land of harmony has figured in the human imagination since the beginning, it was only with the discovery of America that the dream became localized in reality, and the "local and temporal application of an essentially universal and eternal ideal has raised problems".  

The major problem lies in the variance between the actual and the ideal. On the one hand the dream, being a dream, remains an essentially unrealizable ideal. On the other, its projection upon an actual environment implies its realization. As Carpenter perceptively points out, the

1. *Ibid.*, p.5. Although Noble refers specifically to the American novelist, his point can be extended to include O'Neill and American writers in general. 
inevitable distorting effect of reality upon the dream in
its pristine form led O'Neill to reject the actual in favour
of the ideal. Carpenter elaborates:

Imagining only absolute freedom,
O'Neill's romantics have rejected
all partial freedoms. And imagining
the perfect brotherhood of man, they
have rejected actual democracy. In
the end, because they have instinctively
recognized the impossibility of
their romantic absolutes, they have
lost faith in the future. And their
failure has led them to deny the
American faith.¹

Yet O'Neill's moral absolutism is not based completely
upon romantic hyperbole, for his strongest criticism is
reserved for the materialistic aspect of the realization
of the dream of perfection. Apart from the absolute
dichotomy of the real and the ideal, even the application
of the dream can be divided into two: between the view
of America as the democratic, classless society of peace
and brotherhood, and in contrast to this, the view of
America as the land of opportunity where any man can
succeed. Even in the time of the Puritans there was moral
confusion over this issue, for the idea of material wealth
being a sign of God's favour led to the conclusion that
"the acquisition of wealth [was] a 'good work' in itself".²

It is because O'Neill regarded this materialistic rationalization as a total distortion of the dream of harmony that
he rejected it completely. O'Neill's critique of the
materialistic ethic is an essential aspect of his religious
inquiry, for it represents a complete negation of his

¹ Ibid., p.134.
² Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of
American Literary Thought (1952; 2nd edn, N.Y.: Appleton-
Century-Crofts, 1967), p.44.
conception of religious experience, which he saw as being achieved in becoming one with the rhythm of nature.

In *Marco Millions* O'Neill satirizes the American business mentality, and contrasts the soulless profit-making mentality of Marco with the desire of Kublai Kaan to discover the infinite. The Kaan's last words are a severe indictment of the materialistic ethic: "The Word became their flesh, they say. Now all is flesh! And can their flesh become the Word again?" (II, 432).

Yet the most telling and poignant dramatization of O'Neill's criticism of materialism occurs in *The Great God Brown*, in which the religion of God the Mother is offered as the right alternative to the materialistic ethic. The businessman William Brown is set against the artist Dion Anthony, but the dichotomy between spirit and matter is only one aspect of this play. *The Great God Brown* is the most interesting of O'Neill's theological works because it concerns itself with every aspect of his religious inquiry. It comes closer to a dramatic realization of the search for religious experience than the other overtly theological dramas. Although it is a deeply confused and flawed play, within it can be sensed a groping towards the infinite, towards the essence of life, the core of being. *Lazarus Laughed* and *Days Without End* are too closely concerned with particular ideological preoccupations to achieve any meaningful realization of religious experience. *Days Without End* portrays the search of a man for faith, and although the documentation of the many drafts of the play
is evidence enough of the emotional turmoil the work caused O'Neill, it is unconvincing in its dramatization. There is a thin but decisive line that separates The Great God Brown from Days Without End: whereas the former deals with the search for the infinite, the latter is concerned with the search for faith.

Specifically, The Great God Brown presents several approaches to life: materialism, Christianity, pantheistic paganism, and a maternal theism. Each involves a different conception of value. The materialist ethos is one in which Mammon reigns, and the principles of acquisitiveness, smugness and short sightedness are paramount. Christianity prompts an attitude of denial based upon the belief that true value lies in another world. Paganism in the guise of a Dionysian acceptance of the totality of existence comes to terms with the creative and spiritual aspect of human nature, but it is the idea of maternal godhead that is able to combine the message of love and compassion inherent in Christianity with an acceptance of life itself.

Dion Anthony's life is centred upon the quest for wholeness. O'Neill says of Dion that he is a combination of Dionysus and Saint Anthony: "the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity". Although Dion is aware of the ecstasy of a Dionysian mode of existence, he is denied the ability to live such a life. This inability

is caused partly by the society around him and partly by the fact of his own nature. He strives to achieve a right relationship with the world but it is a losing battle. Having failed to achieve wholeness through his relationship with Margaret as she refuses to see the true man behind his mask, he attempts to achieve it through art. Dion views art as a mode of understanding and realizing infinity, but infinity eludes him. His search for the infinite finally leads him to Christianity.

Throughout *The Great God Brown* the New Testament is either considered seriously and with a sense of longing for the compassion and love it represents, and for a vision of order and harmony that fulfils a deep human need, or it is mocked and derided. When Dion opens the New Testament he reads, "'Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest'", and he whispers longingly "I will come--but where are you, Savior?" (III, 269). But he suddenly assumes a contemptuous tone, saying: "Blah! Fixation on old Mama Christianity! You infant blubbering in the dark, you!" (*ibid.*). But despite Dion's contempt he has uttered a truth, for O'Neill sees man's condition in the modern world as similar to a child crying in the dark, having lost direction. Christ's role is that of the mother, for he will give rest. Dion's attitude towards Christ is ambiguous, for his longing for Christ's peace is counteracted by a resentment based upon Christ's association with the institution of the Church. Although it is not explicitly stated, the play assumes a link to exist between the materialist bourgeois ethic and Christianity. When
materialism is god a limited and questionable morality is the outcome; one in which appearances are paramount. In his explanation of the play O'Neill indicts morality as such, seeing it as the product of the life-denying spirit of Christianity.

It is this morality that has transformed Cybel, the Earth Mother Goddess of antiquity, into a prostitute. O'Neill describes Cybel as

an incarnation of Cybele, the Earth Mother doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws, but patronized by her segregators, who are thus themselves the first victims of their laws.¹

If not a pariah, Dion is separated from his fellow men by his rejection of their values. Thus Cybel and Dion share a common bond in their divergence from the norms of a materialistic-Christian society. Like Dion, Cybel wears a mask, that of a "rouged and eye-blackened countenance of a hardened prostitute" (III, 279). But her own face is

fresh and healthy, her figure full-breasted and wide-hipped, her movements slow and solidly languorous like an animal's, her large eyes dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts.

(III, 278)

The description of the Goddess Cybele given in The Oxford Classical Dictionary clearly indicates the symbolic value that is to be associated with Cybel:

The queen or mistress of her people, Cybele was responsible for their well-being in all respects; primarily she is a goddess of fertility, but also

¹ Ibid., pp.104-105.
cures (and sends) disease, gives oracles, and ... protects her people in war. The goddess of mountains ... she is also mistress of wild nature .... Ecstatic states inducing prophetic rapture and insensibility to pain were characteristic of her workship ...

A belief in immortality was perhaps part of the cult from early times, and the after-life may at first have been thought of as a reunion with Mother Earth.¹

This description validates O'Neill's dramatization of Cybel as the source of Dionysian wisdom in the play. Cybel's philosophy is one of acceptance; unlike Dion, who battles with life, she believes that, "Life's all right, if you let it alone" (III, 280). This remark does not imply indifference, rather it indicates that every part of life--loving, winning, dying--should be accepted naturally.

But there is also another aspect to Cybel: she resolves in her person the tension that exists in Dion Anthony between his longing for Dionysian ecstasy and union with the infinite, and his desire for comfort and compassion. At their first meeting when Cybel gently puts her hand on Dion's forehead he murmurs, "'And He laid his hands on them and healed them!" (III, 278). Cybel fulfils Christ's function, for she represents the love and compassion that Dion finds in Christ without an association with the institution of Christianity. O'Neill draws a deliberate parallel between Christ and Cybel. Like Christ on the Cross who despaired at being forsaken by God, Cybel, despite her philosophy of acceptance, has

doubts as to the meaning of life. Having apprehended the imminent demise of Dion she says, "What's the good of bearing children? What's the use of giving birth to death?" (III, 288). Like Cybel, Christ is a victim of the world's cruelty. Moreover, it is not Christ's divinity that appeals to Dion but his humanity, which is reflected not only in his suffering but in his awareness of the human need for love, compassion and tenderness. In fact, the appeal of Christ rests upon his reflection of the qualities associated with God the Mother.

Dion mocks the Gospels because they preach the antithesis of the Dionysian approach to existence. The nature of his mockery can be gauged from the following quotation: "Blessed are the pitiful Sister! I'm broke—but you will be rewarded in Heaven!" (III, 279). It is through Cybel's love that the dual persona of Dion Anthony and William Brown achieves a synthesis between Christian humility and resignation and Dionysian pride and acceptance. Engel rightly asserts that it is Cybel's love that enables the embittered and cynical Dion to gain "courage and strength, the capacity to forgive, to love, to remove his cruel and mocking mask". 1 When Dion dies in Brown's arms he has accepted the philosophy of love. The final awareness of truth is left for Brown to achieve.

For Dion, Brown typifies the distorted values of a materialistic society as he mockingly points out in another

of his modifications of the Gospels: "Hate them! Fear thy neighbour as thyself! That's the leaden rule for the safe and sane!" (III, 294). It was Brown who as a child made Dion aware of evil and injustice and who disproved the existence of a kind and loving God. Brown sees Cybel as a material gain whereas Dion senses her sacral power; but after acquiring Dion's mask and with it the suffering that plagued him, Brown too is able to gain comfort and love in Cybel's arms.

Dion Brown after the "murder" of Brown becomes a symbol of humanity longing for faith. Naked except for a cloth around his loins, "His eyes, his arms, his whole body strain upward, his muscles writhe with his lips as they pray silently in their agonized supplication" (III, 319). He cries out:

Mercy, Compassionate Savior of Man!
Out of my depths I cry to you!
Mercy on thy poor clod, thy clod
of unhallowed earth, thy clay, the
Great God Brown! Mercy Savior!

( Ibid.)

Receiving no response to his plea he says with "mocking despair":

Bah! I am sorry, little children,
but your kingdom is empty. God
has become disgusted and moved
away to some far ecstatic star where
life is a dancing flame! We must
die without him.

( Ibid.)

It is at this moment that Cybel appears. Her presence instantly brings Dion Brown peace. Like Dion, Brown is able to remove his mask and receive comfort in Cybel's arms. Dying, he realizes her association with the earth. Brown
rejects the God of vengeance and Cybel affirms that there is only love. He then dies after having ecstatically perceived the truth of existence through the calm assurance of Cybel: that man is a part of the natural cycle and that suffering and joy are an inevitable part of that cycle. Cybel completes Brown's perception by affirming and celebrating the cyclic nature of existence.

Thus at the play's end it is the religion of God the Mother that prevails. The existence of a vengeful deity is denied, and the values of a materialistic society are rejected. Through her compassion Cybel not only offers a refuge from the rigours of a materialistic-Christian society, but her affirmation of a Dionysian acceptance of life presents an alternative to the materialistic ethic.

In *Strange Interlude*, despite Nina's longing for a world ruled by the values of God the Mother, it is the paternal deity who triumphs. But it is a hollow victory: just as Ephraim Cabot's faith results in his loneliness, so the rule of God the Father in this play results in exhaustion and defeat for Nina. Life becomes merely a strange dark interlude "in the electrical display of God the Father!" (I, 199). Even prior to her articulating her longing for the order of a maternal deity Nina acknowledges the strength of the male God: "But the God of Gods--the Boss--has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural" (I, 42). She attempts to imitate the indifference of God but succumbs to the desire to find happiness. She discovers a temporary happiness when
pregnant, for then, like the maternal deity she longs for, she is in tune with the rhythms of nature; but she is too much a child of the paternal deity for this happiness to last. Only when Nina has totally exhausted herself in the battle for happiness, and her "account with God the Father is settled" (1, 165), can she acquiesce in his power.

After The Great God Brown had been produced O'Neill stated that his intention in the play had been misunderstood, for the underlying abstract theme was not intended to overshadow "the living drama of the recognizable human beings". He voiced a similar complaint about Dynamo, completed three years later. According to O'Neill his concern in the play was mainly psychological, although its basic theme dealt with "the general spiritual futility of the substitute-God search". Despite this remark the play remains confusing and ambiguous.

Dynamo, like The Great God Brown, presents several approaches to meaning: the Calvinistic Christianity of Reuben's father, the total atheism of Ramsay Fife, the pantheistic intuitions of Mrs Fife, and the materialistic inclinations of Reuben's mother. The concept of a Mother God plays a vital role in Dynamo, but the significance of the maternal values of compassion, love and forgiveness is undercut by the play's theological and psychological

3. Bogard points out that the early scenariar, iosis of Dynamo laid greater emphasis upon the dichotomy of matter and spirit. Ibid., p.318.
complications. At the psychological level the work deals with Reuben's attempt to atone for his behaviour towards his mother; at the theological level it deals with the consequences of existence in a godless world. Both concerns ultimately focus upon the dynamo, and the play's confusion arises from O'Neill's attempt to invest the dynamo with too many meanings.

In rejecting his father's Christianity Reuben repudiates formal authoritarian religion, and in rejecting God and Satan he denies the old norms of good and evil. To his mind religion, particularly Christianity, rather than being a perception of the truth, is an accumulation of superstitions and a mode of denying reality. Reuben perceives a universe in which amoral scientism reigns. He loses his fear of lightning and his embarrassment towards sex; both become natural occurrences. Reuben's atheism catalyzes his curiosity: he says, "I want to face things. I won't ever be satisfied now until I've found the truth about everything" (III, 469). As there is no omniscient being from whom existence derives, the truth is to be gleaned from natural phenomena. Reuben's readings in the sciences lead him to believe that the ultimate driving force is electricity: "What the fool preachers call God is in electricity somewhere" (III, 458). He goes on to say: "Did you ever watch dynamos? What I mean is in them--somehow" (ibid.).

But Reuben's awareness of the force of the dynamo extends beyond purely scientific perception. With the help of Mrs Fife he attains a mystical awareness of the godhead...
inherent in the dynamo, "singing all the time about everything in the world" (III, 458). O'Neill's awareness of the divinity inherent in electricity is first manifested in *Strange Interlude* where it is the weapon of God the Father. Within the psychological drama of *Dynamo* electricity is again associated with the vengeance of the paternal deity, but Reuben's rejection of Christianity divests electricity of its link with God the Father so that it is viewed as a force in itself. The situation soon changes, for Reuben's longing to gain the forgiveness of his mother (who died broken-hearted after he left home) prompts Reuben to invest both electricity and the dynamo with maternal qualities.

Reuben's perception of the divine nature of the dynamo leads him to fashion his own theology which is an attempt to make a religion out of science, but it is also an attempt on the part of O'Neill to explicate his belief in the relationship between the maternal principle and the cycle of nature. Reuben's cosmology is a microcosmic and macrocosmic analysis of the universe that sees electricity as the central force of creation, and which integrates man into the natural cycle. In expounding his scientific view of the world Reuben is unwilling to attribute the universe to random chance. He feels that, "there must be a center around which all this moves, mustn't there? There is in everything else!" (III, 477). He sees the "Great Mother of Eternal Life, Electricity" as that centre, and the dynamo as "her Divine Image on earth!" (*ibid.*). The dynamo therefore becomes an image of God the Mother, but one which does not conform to the basic impulse that made a maternal
theism so appealing to O'Neill. Rather than espousing a simple faith which asserts the need for love and compassion and an acceptance of the natural cycle of life, Reuben associates God the Mother with a form of worship that is linked with belief in a paternal deity. Reuben feels that the dynamo

Wants some one man to love her purely and when she finds him worthy she will love him and give him the secret of truth and he will become the new saviour who will bring happiness and peace to men! (III, 477)

The perversion of Reuben's approach becomes clear when he begins to quote from the Bible in a manner similar to his father: he has become as bigoted and self righteous as the most fervent Christian. However, despite his elaborately constructed theology Reuben longs most for the love and forgiveness of his mother. Unable to live up to his own conception of the truth Reuben finally kills himself upon the dynamo. Whereas he had previously wanted to face the truth he now dies crying:

I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! (III, 488)

In terms of the psychological aspect of the play Reuben achieves his heart's desire, for through his death he returns to the mother. But the play's end also affirms the futility of the search for a substitute God, for not only does this search drive Reuben to madness but it brings him full circle to the endorsement of a view of the world that is very similar in form to the religion that he first
rejected. Consequently the psychological and theological concerns of Dynamo negate each other, giving the play a confused and ambiguous end.

O'Neill derived his notion of the dynamo as the central force of existence from the chapter entitled "The Dynamo and the Virgin" in Henry Adams' The Education of Henry Adams. Apart from his indebtedness to Adams for this idea there is a remarkable similarity in outlook between Adams and O'Neill. As Raleigh points out, "Adams, intellectually, and O'Neill, dramatically, were searching for the center, the nexus, of the modern world."¹ The desire to discover the force behind life powered the quest of both men, and chaos and multiplicity were realities of which both were painfully aware. But the most important similarity between Adams and O'Neill was their choice of woman as the focal centre of an ordered view of the world. Unlike O'Neill though, Adams' approach to the relationship between the dynamo and woman is unambiguous, for he does not attempt to invest the dynamo with maternal qualities. Instead, the dynamo is seen as the modern manifestation of a force that was once the property of woman.

There is, in Adams' description of a world ruled by woman, a feeling similar to that evoked by Nina imagining a world ruled by God the Mother. As Adams says:

She did not think of her universe as a raft to which the limpets stuck for life in the surge of a supersensual chaos; she conceived herself and her family as the centre and flower of an

ordered universe which she knew to be unity because she had made it after the image of her own fecundity; and this creation of hers was surrounded by beauties and perfections which she knew to be real because she herself had imagined them.  

But the appeal of woman extends beyond the vision of a world of harmony made in her image. Like O'Neill, the attraction of woman for Adams is based primarily upon the compassion and love associated with her, and the fact that she too is a victim of the caprices of life. As he states in a poem:

For centuries I brought you all my cares,
And vexed you with the murmurs of a child;
You heard the tedious burden of my prayers;
You could not grant them, but at least you smiled.

For both O'Neill and Adams the supremacy of a maternal theism is based upon the belief that the values associated with woman are in consonance with the cycle of nature, and represent an order that is able to fulfil humanity's need for harmony. Adams' view was that man had moved from a world in which unity had been achieved through the power of woman to a new order based upon the pure force of energy. His conception of a world in which the dynamo is the focus of meaning is a bleak one precisely because the dynamo lacks the qualities of the mother. Whereas Adams perceives the dynamo and woman as two separate entities joined by the common bond of the energy that gives them their power, the confusion of Dynamo arises from O'Neill's attempt to invest


the dynamo with the force of the mother, as well as to
dramatize it as the symbol of the new force of science which
cannot fulfil the human need for faith and truth.

Although *Days Without End* was originally intended
to be a part of the trilogy of which *Dynamo* was the first
part, in its final form the work denies the death of God,
for the protagonist celebrates his rediscovery of Christ.
The play is a contrived and unconvincing piece, but the
many drafts that O'Neill wrote indicate its importance to
him and the problems it caused him. At first O'Neill
planned to end the work in a manner similar to *Dynamo*. The
protagonist's yearning to be reunited with his mother was
to lead him to suicide before a statue of the Virgin.
O'Neill ultimately decided to end the play on a conventional
note, showing the return of John Loving to Christianity.
But the deity that John Loving returns to is not God the
Father, but Christ as God. This is an important difference,
for the appeal of Christ in this play, as in *The Great God
Brown*, depends upon the qualities he shares with the
maternal deity. An early note to the play helps to
substantiate this notion, for in it O'Neill states that
the protagonist does not

\begin{quote}
arrive at faith in the supernatural
--what does come to him in the
Church is a sudden mark [? ] of
identity, brotherhood with Christ,
the man, this Son of Man crucified
heroically on the Cross of Life ....
\end{quote}

1. Quoted in Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension*,
p.150. Falk gives a detailed analysis of the evolution
of *Days Without End*, see pp.150-152.
In other words, Christ's attraction lies in his human qualities and the fact that he shares human suffering.

In the end O'Neill rejected this conclusion, preferring to dramatize John Loving's acceptance of faith in a supernatural deity. However, the God he returns to retains the attributes of God the Mother, being a God of love, compassion and forgiveness--the "Lord of Love" (III, 566). The play explicitly rejects the God of vengeance and cruelty, God the Father.

_Days Without End_ was O'Neill's last attempt to resolve the dilemma of a world without God. The works that follow concern themselves with the relationship that he had first rejected as a subject for his drama--the relationship between man and man. The world of _The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night_ and _A Moon for the Misbegotten_ is one in which positive value is to be found only in reaching out from the isolation of the self and making contact with other human beings. Compassion, love and understanding play a vital part within such contact. Although the concept of a maternal deity is absent from these plays, in _A Moon for the Misbegotten_ there is a deliberate attempt to create a mythic, almost divine personification of the power of love--and specifically a maternal, non-sexual love--in the figure of Josie Hogan. And O'Neill's desire to apotheosize Josie attests to the enduring nature of the appeal for him of God the Mother.

There is, however, another aspect to O'Neill's response to woman which is the direct antithesis of his
concept of maternal godhead. Whereas God the Mother epitomizes all the positive qualities of woman, the plays also dramatize a view of women that encompasses the other extreme. This will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF WOMAN

The previous chapters of this thesis have been devoted to an analysis of the positive nature of woman as it manifests itself in O'Neill's drama. Yet there is a darker side to O'Neill's conception of woman that stems from the longing for the love and the peace of the mother. The very strength of this desire and the dependence and need that it implies results in an ambivalence of attitude whereby the mother becomes both the object of longing and the object of fear.

C.G. Jung in discussing the mother archetype deals with this response by formulating the notion of "the loving and the terrible mother." But, as chapter two of this thesis suggests, the annihilatory aspect of the mother (what Jung would term "the terrible mother" because of her association with the desire to regress to a state of unconsciousness and virtual non-existence) is not a negative factor in O'Neill's work, for death and unconsciousness are viewed by him in a positive light. Thus an understanding of the negative aspect of woman in O'Neill cannot be obtained simply by reference to the ideas of analytical psychology.

The crucial factor to note in analysing the destructive power of woman in O'Neill's work is the notion of omnipotence and control. The longing for the mother who brings expiation and peace is so powerful an urge, and so much value is attached to the comfort to be obtained in the mother's arms,

that it brings in its train a variety of fears that arise from the suspicion that the love and comfort that is longed for may not be forthcoming. It is woman's capacity to bring peace that gives her the potential to inflict pain, and the fact that she has this power signifies an ability to control and manipulate the situation as she wishes. This is made poignantly clear in the case of Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. If Josie had reacted with horror to his tale of degradation and despair Jamie Tyrone would have been utterly destroyed. Instead, Josie masters her revulsion and gives Jamie the love, comfort and forgiveness that he so desperately needs. Josie sacrifices her own needs for the sake of the man she loves, and this element of sacrifice is vital to O'Neill's conception of the redemptive maternal woman.

Yet in a sense the choice between self-sacrifice and self-interest is an illusory one, for O'Neill portrays fulfilment as a consequence of sacrifice on the part of woman. It is through choosing to deny herself that the maternal woman finds herself and gains fulfilment. Thus in placing her own needs above those of the male protagonists, woman denies her own true nature. Moreover, she is acting upon a false assumption of what her needs really are. This is clearly illustrated in one of O'Neill's earliest works, *Servitude*. Ethel Frazer leaves her husband because she feels she has not realized her full potential as an individual. Drawn to the playwright David Royleston who through his work has made her aware of her "bondage", Mrs Frazer finds that he is an idol with feet of clay, for the basis of his
success is his self-effacing wife. Alice Roylston is among the earliest of O'Neill's maternal figures who finds complete fulfilment in devoting herself entirely to the needs of her husband. The story of her life with her husband, which she recounts to Mrs. Frazer, is one of total self-abnegation. Mrs. Roylston's example leads a repentant and chastened Mrs. Frazer to return to her husband. The play's attitude to the role of woman can be gained from its concluding lines:

Roylston: Don't you know it was your duty to claim your right as an individual to shake off the shackles my insufferable egotism had forced upon you? Don't you understand that you have stifled your own longings, given up your own happiness that I might feel self-satisfied.

Mrs. Roylston: (Interrupting him—softly and tenderly) That was my happiness. (He bends down and kisses her reverently)

Although this early play is somewhat simplistic and naïve in its assumptions and in its mode of dramatizing them, a similar contrast is set up between self-sacrificing and self-interested women in O'Neill's later work. In A Touch of the Poet it is Nora Melody who despite the humiliation and hurt she suffers at the hands of her husband rejoices in subjugating herself to his every need. Like Alice Roylston, she takes pride in the strength of her love for her husband for it gives her a sense of identity and security. It is a well-founded sense of security for the

play makes it clear that Con Melody, despite his gentlemanly airs, is truly dependent upon his wife, and never more so than at the end of the work when he returns from his confrontation with the Harfords a humiliated and broken man. Nora's daughter Sara is ashamed and angered by her mother's perpetual subjugation of herself to the needs of her father (for Sara, like Ethel Frazer, attempts to assert her own identity), but she ultimately concedes the rightness of her mother's attitude when she herself finds love.

The examples of Alice Roylston and Nora Melody attest to the importance to O'Neill of the role of woman as nurturer. Their example, as well as Josie Hogan's, also indicates how much more is expected from the women in O'Neill's plays than from the male protagonists. It is woman who must fulfil the male's need for love, comfort, forgiveness, harmony and peace; in short, she must fulfil his need to belong. The deepest fear of O'Neill's protagonists is that of never regaining or attaining the state of peace and harmony that is symbolized by the love of the mother. In More Stately Mansions, for example, Simon Harford ascribes the whole pattern of his life's suffering to the day when his mother locked him out of her life. Dion Anthony's words in The Great God Brown describing his mother's death are an eloquent statement of the significance of the loss of the mother in O'Neill's work:

she played mother and child with me for many years ... until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like
a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity; so I shrank away, back into life, with naked nerves jumping like fleas ....

Within O'Neill's work the loss of the mother is an occurrence for which there can be no real compensation, for this loss epitomizes the essential plight of man as a homeless, faithless, meaningless creature in a world without meaning.

Yet the yearning for the mother leads not only to a fear of being abandoned and ignored, but also to a sense of resentment that is based upon the dependence on the mother, and a fear of being overwhelmed and possessed that stems paradoxically from the desire to lose the self in her love. This ambivalence is illustrated very clearly in Dynamo. Reuben Light, because of his deep longing to regain the love and comfort he knew with his mother, himself invests the dynamo with a maternal and sacred value, yet he cannot help fearing it as well, seeing it as a "devil fish" (II, 484) with arms stretching out to suck him in.

However, the fear of being overwhelmed by the power of woman does not prevent many of O'Neill's male characters from possessing a singleminded and self-centred desire to

have the love of the maternal woman for themselves alone. When this is not possible suffering and disaster follows. Thus the love of the maternal woman can be transformed into a destructive force through the self-centredness of the protagonist. In *The First Man* Curtis Jayson suffers and makes his wife suffer as well because of his stubbornness in refusing to have children. Jayson uses the excuse of wanting to keep the memory of their dead children alive, but he actually wishes to remain the focus of Martha Jayson's devotion and attention. Martha has, like Alice Roylston and Nora Melody, devoted herself entirely to the needs of her husband. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* one of the more significant departures from the Oresteian trilogy is Orin Mannon's decision to kill Adam Brant rather than his mother Christine. Orin is more outraged by his mother's infidelity to himself than by her murder of his father, for he wishes to retain Christine's love for himself alone. Knowledge of his father's death brings upon Orin a mood of philosophical reverie, but his awareness of not being the central focus of his mother's life reduces him to despair.

The analysis so far suggests that the role of woman in O'Neill's work is defined in terms of the needs of the protagonists. Consequently the destructive capacity of woman manifests itself when she attempts to assert her own identity and her own needs. Although the desire of the women to assert themselves is generally not intended to be an act of deliberate malice or cruelty, the protagonists of O'Neill's plays interpret such an action in a negative manner. Martha
Jayson's desire for a child is not prompted by a wish to hurt her husband but by a need to fulfil a deep desire within her, yet Jayson persists in seeing it as an act of betrayal on her part.

O'Neill's tendency to portray the women in his plays generally in relation to the needs of his male characters does not mean that he has no perception of the desires of a woman, or no awareness of her reality as a character in her own right. (In fact Martha Jayson is dramatized in a sympathetic light and it is Curtis Jayson who is seen to be selfish and self-centred.) However, he subordinates such considerations to the notion of the woman as mother, the provider of comfort and peace, and he tends to judge the women in his plays in terms of this ideal. This leads to a curious ambivalence in O'Neill's treatment of his female characters. By focussing so much importance upon the need for the love and peace of the mother O'Neill gives the maternal woman a special significance--she acquires an extra-human dimension. (It is therefore not surprising that Cybel, a central symbol of the beneficent mother, is portrayed as a goddess.) Yet her power is directly related to the requirements of the male characters: she is the object upon whom they focus their longings, and her role and character are determined by their needs.

That O'Neill was aware of the demands that he made of his women characters can be seen from his dramatization of Anna Christie. Although the play attempts to show that the characters are all victims of life and fate (symbolized
by the fog that Christopherson keeps referring to), Anna's predicament also arises from her being the victim of men. She is sent to St. Paul by her father because he does not wish to assume the responsibility for her upbringing, and she becomes a prostitute after being seduced by one of her cousins. To her all men are the same for they both victimize and idealize women. The attitude of both Chris and Matt Burke to Anna becomes evident in the climactic third act of *Anna Christie*, for in their quarrel they both reveal how they persist in seeing Anna in terms of their own desires, conceptions and fears. Absorbed in their own egotism and selfishness--characteristics that are very strong in both men--they fail to acknowledge Anna's own needs. As she says: "You're just like the rest of them--you two! Gawd, you'd think I was a piece of furniture!" (III, 56).

In Anna's anger and in her knowledge of what the men's response will be when she tells them the truth about herself O'Neill indicates that he was aware of a woman's plight in being seen by men--including himself--as "other" than themselves, as separate beings who bear the burden of perfection that they themselves lack yet long for.

*Anna Christie* indicates O'Neill's awareness of the devastating effects of idealizing women, but despite this awareness and despite his insight into female character, O'Neill continued to judge the women in his plays by the criterion of the ideal mother. The consequence of this attitude is that women who do not sacrifice their needs for their men are generally seen as selfish, demanding, and vindictive. In two of O'Neill's earlier works,
Before Breakfast and Beyond the Horizon (both of which were written before Anna Christie), the women do not fulfil their maternal role. The female characters in both plays are more concerned with their own feelings and needs than those of their husbands, and berate and victimize the men for not fulfilling their desires. Before Breakfast offers a more extreme example of this type of relationship. The play consists of a monologue by a weak and spiteful woman nagging her silent husband (who remains unseen), and the final outcome of her nagging is his suicide. Like Mrs. Rowland in Before Breakfast, Ruth Mayo in Beyond the Horizon is depicted as a bitter, spiteful woman. Rather than helping her husband in running their farm, she taunts and derides him for his inability to manage it properly. Although it would be incorrect to see Robert Mayo's predicament solely as the consequence of Ruth's behaviour (this work, like Anna Christie, reflects O'Neill's tendency to see all his characters as the victims of life and fate), his hapless victimization by wife and mother-in-law intensifies his misery.

In these two plays O'Neill's sympathy is clearly with the beleaguered male, yet in other dramatizations of marriage O'Neill was able to give a more sympathetic interpretation to women who do not fulfil their nurturing role, or who try to assert their own identity and needs. Despite this, the controlling vision within such plays remains the male need for the support and love of a self-sacrificing woman. Welded provides a good example of O'Neill's tendency to focus upon the masculine viewpoint, for although O'Neill
is critical of Michael Cape's attitude, and although he is sympathetic to Eleanor Cape's predicament, ultimately Cape's desires prevail. Like Anna Christie's response to the egotistical behaviour of her father and lover, Eleanor reacts to her husband's treatment and expectations of her with an assertion of her own independence, identity and needs. Eleanor differs from Mrs. Rowland and Ruth Mayo in that her actions are not prompted by vindictiveness or spite; rather, she feels hemmed in by the demands that Cape makes of her. Michael Cape's concept of marriage is one which requires the total devotion of man and wife to each other. As he says: "We swore to have a true sacrament--or nothing! Our marriage must be a consummation demanding and combining the best in each of us!" (II, 448). The demands upon Eleanor are far greater than those made upon her husband, for it is Cape who defines the nature of their relationship and who wants her to be completely absorbed in it to the exclusion of all else. Although Eleanor loves Cape and has agreed to his concept of marriage, she resents having to submit herself wholly to him. She begins to feel crushed, and says:

I feel a cruel presence in you paralyzing me, creeping over my body, possessing it so it's no longer my body--then grasping at some last inmost thing which makes me me--my soul--demanding to have that, too! I have to rebel with all my strength--seize any pretext!

(II, 453)

Her final plea is: "Haven't I a right to myself as you have to yourself?" (ibid.).
Cape's obsessive desire for the complete attention of his wife is indicated by the manner in which he resents her being diverted by the knock at the door at a time when he expects her to be totally absorbed in their passion for each other. Moreover, Eleanor's evident relief at the distraction offered by the knock at the door—O'Neill states that Eleanor's "body reacts as if she were throwing off a load" (II, 449)—suggests how Cape's demands are stifling her.

On the surface Welded is the dramatization of the conflicts that occur in the relationship between a man and woman of an equally strong-minded and intelligent nature. At a deeper level the play attempts to deal with the yearning for a mystical union with that which is outside the self—the yearning of man and woman to become one. At both levels it is an attempt to dramatize a relationship between equals. This in itself makes the play unusual, for O'Neill's objectification of women—his tendency to see them either as healing, redemptive beings or as forces for destruction—precluded his dramatizing them in an equal relationship with men. Welded ultimately conforms to this tendency in O'Neill, for although it attempts to show Eleanor and Michael Cape both coming to a new awareness of their marriage, one in which they will accept each other's individuality and equality, the relationship is not an equal one. It still conforms to what is Michael's rather than Eleanor's notion of marriage: it is still his viewpoint that prevails. Moreover, the play's resolution suggests that another dimension has been added to their
marriage, one in which Eleanor fulfils a maternal role. Eleanor comes to a realization of the truth of her relationship with Cape through the arousal of her maternal instinct. O'Neill describes her new awareness in terms of an "awakening to maternity" (II, 488).

The implication of the analysis so far is that the dualism of the redemptive woman and the destructive woman is not one that posits active good against active evil. O'Neill generally does not see women as inherently evil—even the vindictiveness of Mrs. Rowland and Ruth Mayo, and the malevolence of Ella Downey in All God's Chillun Got Wings (who deliberately sets out to make her husband fail his law exams, and succeeds in her plan), stems from forces outside themselves of which they are the victims. But there are exceptions to this assumption, as in Lazarus Laughed where the positive maternal qualities of Lazarus' wife Miriam present a sharp contrast to the evil nature of Tiberius Caesar's mother, Livia. Unlike Livia who uses her son as a pawn in her struggle for power, Deborah Harford in More Stately Mansions ultimately sacrifices her sanity for the sake of her son, Simon. But her prior rejection of him during his childhood was a deliberate act of malice. As she says:

You were such a stubborn greedy little boy. I could feel your grasping fingers groping towards every secret, private corner of my soul.¹

Deborah expresses her sorrow at having hurt Simon, but it is done "with an obviously fake air of contrition thinly masking a cruel satisfaction". ¹

The idea of a malevolent maternity is first put forward in *Desire Under the Elms*. Although the play ultimately asserts the beneficent nature of maternal values, there lingers over the work an aura of menace and vengefulness that is symbolized by the huge elm trees brooding over the farmhouse. The longing for the mother and the fear of her power is encapsulated in the description of the elms which are said to both protect and subdue.

Eben Cabot's attitude towards his dead mother is that of one possessed. He holds fiercely to himself the idea of a woman wronged whom he must avenge. Yet Eben's awareness of his mother's spirit is no delusive fancy, for other characters in the play are aware of the presence of what is defined vaguely as "somethin'" in the air—both Ephraim and Abbie also feel this presence. The force of this spirit drives Ephraim to sleep in the barn with the benevolently maternal cows, and it is finally subdued by the coming together of Eben and Abbie in the parlour. The parlour was Eben's mother's special room, and one where her presence is clearly felt by the lovers before they consummate their passion for each other. The concept of maternal possession is therefore not the product of a character's delusions, rather it is presented as part of the play's reality. The spirit of Eben's mother is that of wronged

¹. Ibid.
maternity, and it is a force that can destroy.

Yet the destruction wrought reflects the ambivalence inherent in the longing for the mother. The scene in the parlour where Eben and Abbie finally consummate their passion for each other is the culmination of the mother's successful campaign to avenge herself for the injustices done to her by Ephraim Cabot. This action leads to the lovers' ultimate destruction, but a love also flowers between them that enables them to transcend their tragic circumstances. As the previous chapter suggests, the love symbolized in the positive aspect of the maternal woman is responsible for the lovers' acquisition of tragic dignity and responsibility—the maternal spirit of vengeance and possession is transformed into the spirit of love and benevolence. As Eben says: "Maw's gone back t'her grave. She kin sleep now" (I, 245).

The ability of the mother to possess and destroy is illustrated most explicitly in Lazarus Laughed. The notion of dominance is the most striking feature of Tiberius Caesar's monologue in which he traces his life and relationship with his mother. Livia's love of power and control was so intense that, as Tiberius Caesar says, he had only to deprive her of her power to bring about her death. For Livia her son was no more than a means to an end, he was her "weapon" (I, 355) in the battle for control of the Roman Empire. Rather than giving her love selflessly to Tiberius Caesar, Livia made him feel "in the proud questioning of her scornful eyes, that to win her mother love I must become
Caesar" (1, 355). The consequence of Livia's total self-absorption is the creation of a bloodthirsty tyrant who causes suffering and suffers most intensely himself. Livia's power to terrorize Caesar was so strong that he did not attend her funeral for fear that "her closed eyes might open and look at me!" (ibid.). Livia is an extreme example of the destructive power of woman, but even she inspires love in her son. Tiberius Caesar passionately declares his still intense hatred for Livia, yet he longs for youth, for then, as he says, he could "play again about her feet with the love I felt for her before I learned to read her eyes!" (ibid.).

In the play written directly after Lazarus Laughed O'Neill attempted to dramatize the various stages in the life of a woman. Strange Interlude deals with the life of Nina Leeds from the age of twenty to the age of forty-five. The form of the play attempts to combine "the theme for a novel to the play form in a way that would still leave the play master of the house". The most striking manifestation of O'Neill's attempt to weld the two genres of the novel and the drama is the extensive use of stream of consciousness thought asides throughout the play. The purpose of this device is to expose the inner emotional life of the characters. Nina Leeds is the central character of the work, the pivot around whom the plot revolves, and therefore it is not surprising that her emotions and feelings

receive the most thorough analysis and dramatization. Although every character is dramatized both inwardly and outwardly, Nina's responses serve as the central focus of the play.

The depiction of Nina is essentially negative. This is, in a sense, surprising, for the fact that Nina's actions and attitudes form the central focus of Strange Interlude seemingly would have led O'Neill to portray her in a more sympathetic manner, especially as he had the capacity to understand a woman's thoughts and needs. However, Nina's case illustrates O'Neill's tendency to perceive the desires of a woman in negative terms, when those desires are divorced from a consideration of the requirements of the male characters. Nina Leeds aspirations are in the main seen as totally selfish.

Ironically, the conflict with which the play commences is due to Nina's not having consummated her relationship with her fiancé Gordon Shaw, later killed in the first World War. It is this decision not to give herself that ultimately transforms Nina into one who selfishly feeds on those who depend on her. Nina's attempt to compensate for the non-consummation of her relationship with her fiancé leads her to a reckless promiscuity. When this course of action brings no satisfaction or fulfilment she looks for another mode whereby she can give of herself. In fact, the whole emphasis of the early part of Strange Interlude is upon the notion of giving. Nina says:
What use is my life to me or anyone? But I must make it of use--by giving it! (*Fiercely*) I must learn to give myself ... give and give until I can make that gift of myself for a man's happiness without scruple, without fear, without joy except in his joy! When I've accomplished this I'll have found myself, I'll know how to start in living my own life again!

(I, 18)

Nina's words express O'Neill's conception of the role and value of the maternal woman. Although Nina is referring specifically to a sexual giving of herself, implicit within this statement is the idea that a woman's life can attain true fulfilment and meaning only when she devotes herself completely to the needs of a man. Nina strives towards becoming such a woman but the combination of her own nature and circumstance counteracts this impulse. Giving herself to the men in the hospital where she goes to nurse does not lessen her grief for the loss of her fiancé. Nina herself then realizes what might cure her. As she states: "I want children. I must become a mother so I can give myself" (I, 46). Yet fate in the form of hereditary insanity in her husband's family prevents the fulfilment of Nina's desire for a child. Nina's one act of genuine unselfishness is to stay with Sam Evans after the discovery of insanity in his family.

While she is pregnant with Sam's child Nina is a contented woman and a loving enough wife. The shock of having to abort the child she so desperately desires begins the transformation of Nina from a victim of fate to a predatory, demanding woman. Yet this particular occurrence
seems to be an inadequate basis for the dramatic change in Nina's character. Admittedly Nina displays from the beginning an innate strength and ability to get her own way that is evident in the opening scene of the play, but in the scenes that follow she is portrayed as a somewhat hapless victim of fate. Her relative helplessness is indicated by her dependence upon the advice of others. Nina obeys her father in not consummating her relationship with Gordon Shaw. She then heeds the advice of Ned Darrell and Charles Marsden and marries Sam Evans. Aware of the terrible consequences that might follow if she has Evans' child, she acts on the urging of his mother and has an abortion. She again follows Mrs. Evans' advice in finding another man by whom she can have a healthy child.

The change in Nina can be attributed partly to a remark of Mrs. Evans, who articulates what can be seen as the basic motivating force of Nina's actions. Mrs. Evans says:

> Being happy, that's the nearest we can ever come to knowing what's good! Being happy, that's good! The rest is just talk!

(I, 64)

Nina is obsessed with the notion of achieving happiness. But if she first sees happiness in terms of giving herself, later she sees it in terms of taking for herself. The desire for happiness becomes an obsessive force that justifies every action on her part, even the most morally questionable. However, Nina's wish for happiness finds its source not only in the particular nature of her personality and in the
circumstances of her life, but also in the ideological standpoint of the play, which is essentially Schopenhaueran. It is this factor, as well as O'Neill's inherently ambivalent attitude towards women, that accounts for the change in Nina's character.

Doris Alexander has convincingly demonstrated the influence of Schopenhauer upon *Strange Interlude*. Schopenhauer argues that all life is impelled by what he terms "the will to live", which is the Ding an sich, the reality behind phenomena. But despite the will being "metaphysically fundamental", it is "ethically evil"², so that willing and desire—which are manifestations of the will to live--cannot bring happiness. Happiness, according to Schopenhauer, can only be achieved by divorcing the self from all willing and desire. Alexander traces the pattern of Schopenhaueran thought in *Strange Interlude* and points out that the exhausted and sterile Nina of the work's end is consistent with Schopenhauer's notion that only denial of the will can bring peace and true happiness. But prior to her union with Marsden Nina is portrayed as the main embodiment of the will to live and as such her actions demonstrate both the futility of attempting to attain happiness through desiring and willing, and the irresistible force of the will.

There is a parallel between Schopenhauer's thesis and O'Neill's conception of the maternal woman, and it is

one that perhaps led O'Neill to utilize Schopenhauer's thought as the philosophical basis for *Strange Interlude*. Just as Schopenhauer regards willing and desire as evil and maintains that the path to peace lies in renunciation, so O'Neill sees woman achieving fulfilment in self-abnegation and sacrifice, for willing and desire are negative concepts when associated with the maternal woman. Schopenhauer asserts that it is the chimera of happiness which keeps individuals striving and struggling to fulfil the demands of the will to live, and its purpose is the perpetuation of the species. Nina's obsessive concern with achieving happiness, her intense desire to have a child is therefore a direct manifestation of the will to live within her. When Nina persuades Ned Darrell to father her child she is obeying the dictates of the will, and as such, is, like Darrell and the rest of humanity, the instrument of a purpose beyond her individual self.

But it is impossible to look upon Nina as merely a helpless victim. The avidity with which she seizes upon Mrs. Evans' advice to be happy, and her actions thereafter, belie such an evaluation of her. At this point it is worth considering another likely influence upon *Strange Interlude*, namely Shaw's *Man and Superman*. In this play, which was influenced by Schopenhauer, Shaw postulates the notion

1. Louis Sheaffer sees Shaw as an apparent influence upon *Strange Interlude*; see Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p.240. Although no systematic study has been made of Shaw's influence upon the play in the manner of Alexander's study of the influence of Schopenhauer, the internal evidence within *Strange Interlude* itself, as well as O'Neill's extensive reading of Shaw in his youth, suggests that the parallels between the two plays are more than coincidental.
of the "Life Force", which is similar to the will to live.¹ But although Shaw sees men and women equally obedient to the dictates of the Life Force, he differentiates the purpose of male from female. Don Juan states in the play:

Sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement.
Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way.²

Shaw's approach is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, whereas O'Neill's attitude is intense and serious, but both see woman as a predatory creature whose victim is man. The manner in which Nina ensnares Ned Darrell to achieve her purpose indicates that O'Neill perceived her as just such a predatory being.

But Nina is more than a hybrid creation of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the drama of Shaw. In devising the character of Nina, O'Neill utilized the ideas of Schopenhauer and Shaw only insofar as they related to and enhanced his own response to woman. Accordingly, Nina's possessiveness and desire to control the men in her life extends far beyond the necessities of reproduction. In fact, Nina becomes more calculating and relentless in her actions after becoming a mother. Her possessiveness and power are at their apex when her motherhood is emphasized;

1. There is a major difference between the will to live and the Life Force. Shaw ascribes a teleological purpose to his concept, but Schopenhauer assumes no progress forward, for the will to live operates on the basis of a cyclical repetition. The thought of Strange Interlude reflects Schopenhauer's approach.

in fact, in the central scene of the play when Nina is surrounded by all her men the basis of her strength is clearly seen to lie in her maternity.

The real change in Nina's character occurs after she is pregnant with Darrell's child. It is then that she proposes leaving Sam Evans, an action which she had previously considered dishonourable. Nina's description bears out the change in her:

* A great change is noticeable in her face and bearing. She is again the pregnant woman of Act Three but this time there is a triumphant strength about her expression, a ruthless self-confidence in her eyes.  

(I, 90)

Nina lures Ned Darrell into fathering her child, but this action is merely a preliminary to the manifesto she articulates after she is pregnant. Using Mrs. Evans' maxim as her justification, she states that:

*I'm going to be happy! I've lost everything in life so far because I didn't have the courage to take it—and I've hurt everyone around me. There's no use trying to think of others. One human being can't think of another. It's impossible.*  

(I, 103-104)

This statement is far removed from Nina's earlier desire to give of herself, and from O'Neill's conception of the redemptive mother. It is as if Nina's impending maternity triggers off the possessive, acquisitive, manipulative side of her nature.
Nina is, clearly, a dramatization of O'Neill's ambivalent attitude towards woman, but more specifically she dramatizes his ambivalent response to the mother. This ambivalence manifests itself in the difference that exists in Strange Interlude between the ideal of God the Mother and the actual dramatization of motherhood in the figure of Nina. Nina herself longs for a world ruled by maternal values. In contemplating the notion of a maternal deity Nina is aware of the sympathy and compassion that is associated with the mother. According to her, the perverted nature of life is due to the existence of a paternal deity, whereas a theism based upon maternal values would be consonant with the needs of humanity. Pregnancy and motherhood finally bring Nina the sense of peace that she longs for, and this feeling springs from her being in accord with the natural rhythm of the world, the rhythm of God the Mother. Nina then goes so far as to equate herself with maternal godhead, stating: "I am a mother ... God is a Mother ... " (I, 92).

There is, however, a difference between Nina's description of the benefits of maternal deity and her own behaviour after she is pregnant. Her transformation does not make her appreciably kinder to the men in her life. In fact, it is when she is at peace with herself that Nina is most ruthless.

In contrast to this view, Travis Bogard believes that when Nina is filled with a profound peace herself, "The men surrounding her are happy in her contentment".  

Undoubtedly Bogard is correct in pointing out that the men have no life except in terms of their relationship with Nina, but it is questionable whether they always reflect her contentment. While pregnant with Darrell's child, Nina expresses in an aside the feeling of deep calm that pervades her being; this, however, does not prevent her from behaving in a cruelly contemptuous manner towards her husband, Sam Evans. Evans, unable to sense Nina's feeling of peace, is aware only of her feeling of indifference towards him, and her attitude of bored contempt does nothing to alleviate the misery he feels at not being able to give her a child. Later, while still wrapped in the feeling of peace engendered by her impending motherhood, Nina attempts to persuade Darrell that she should divorce Evans and marry him. Darrell's response is one of a fear of being overwhelmed. He thinks: "Look out! ... there it is! ... marry! ... own me! ... ruin my career! ...").

It is likely that Bogard is referring to the next act of the play when he asserts that the men reflect Nina's feeling of peace. In this act Nina is surrounded by the four males in her life, and is at the zenith of her power. Yet the sense of contentment and fulfilment that the men gain from Nina is not as strong as the feeling of power than emanates from her. Whereas previously Nina's control over the men was not complete, she now reigns supreme, and the mark of her power is possession. In fact, the peace that the men feel in Nina's presence depends upon their submitting themselves totally to her domination, and this has consequences for them that are far from positive.
Although Nina does not marry Darrell, she possesses him completely nonetheless. Any attempt by him to escape is crushed by her, as when she breaks his engagement to another woman. Later, despite her earlier desire to leave her husband, she refuses Darrell's plea to leave Evans, but ultimately she has neither her child's nor her lover's welfare at heart. Nina is aware that she will not have to sacrifice anything, as Darrell will remain her lover despite his protestations to the contrary. She is also well aware of her ability to control Charles Marsden; and Evans has always submitted to her desires. Surrounded by her three men, with her baby close by, Nina's mood is of "a strange unnatural elation", combined with a "triumphant possession" (I, 133). The devouring, possessive nature of Nina's power is made clear from her thoughts:

My three men! ... I feel their desires converge in me! ... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb ... and am whole ... they dissolve in me, their life is my life ... I am pregnant with the three! ... husband! ... lover! ... father! ... and the fourth man! ... little man! ... little Gordon! ... he is mine too! ... that makes it perfect! ... (I, 135)

The feeling of fulfilment that results from her possessive control does not last, either for Nina or for the men. But this does not lessen her desire to interfere with and to control the lives of others. Nina's maternal possessiveness almost succeeds in destroying her son's life, for she jealously attempts to break off his engagement. This is her last act of possession before she sinks into
the afternoon of her life with Charles Marsden. It is only when Nina relinquishes her role as a woman and becomes a child again that she loses both her desire and her power to dominate and control.

*Strange Interlude* dramatizes O'Neill's fear of the devouring nature of woman. But despite the fact that Nina's power is essentially negative (in that she binds the men to herself for her own ends), there is very little conflict between the sexes. This is due to Nina's being the central focus of the play: the men only exist in relation to her, and are defined in terms of this relationship.

The situation differs, however, in *More Stately Mansions*. This is O'Neill's most Strindbergian play in its dramatization of the love-hate symbiosis that forms the core of the relationship between male and female. But whereas Strindberg focussed his attention primarily on the conflict that occurs between men and women in marriage, seeing it as a microcosm that reflects the basic irreconcilability of the sexes, marriage is almost incidental to the conflict in *More Stately Mansions*. O'Neill concentrates on the conflict between the sexes per se, a tension which in this work is marked by need in the male and by disdain in the female.

This points to another difference between the two plays, for if *Strange Interlude* is preoccupied with the concept of possession (the power of woman to possess a man and to feed upon him), in *More Stately Mansions* it is the theme of dispossession that predominates. In the latter
work man's fear of woman's indifference, his fear of her ability to survive without him despite his need for her, forms the basis of her power to destroy him. The play is part of the historical cycle, *A Tale of Possessors, Self-Dispossessed*, in which O'Neill intended to deal with the spiritual dispossession of America. However, despite his avowed socio-historical concern, O'Neill focusses his attention primarily on the emotional plane of the work; his main preoccupation in *More Stately Mansions* is with the consequence of being dispossessed by the mother. Simon Harford, speaking to Deborah, states that: "You once drove me out, and all that has happened since began", and it is clear that Simon's response to Deborah and Sara is profoundly affected by his memory of first being abandoned by Deborah.

Woman is obviously the villain in *More Stately Mansions*, yet the line between female oppressor and male victim is not as clear as it may seem. If the women manipulate Simon to their own ends, he himself does not hesitate to use equally devious and unscrupulous methods to gain control of them. In fact, it is Simon's ability to counteract the machinations of the women that generates much of the conflict in the play, for unlike the men in *Strange Interlude*, he is not a completely passive instrument in the hands of Deborah and Sara. The pattern of conflict is one in which the women, having each tried to possess Simon exclusively, decide then to dispossess him, for in forging an alliance between themselves they no longer need

him. It is Simon who then takes advantage of the underlying distrust between Deborah and Sara to destroy their relationship.

The whole play is steeped in an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion that stems from the protagonists' distrust of each other. This feeling reaches a climax in the scene where Simon, having successfully caused a rift between Deborah and Sara, discovers that his action does not bring him the peace that he longs for. Instead, it brings to the surface and exacerbates the underlying resentments of the three characters. It is this scene more than any other that reveals the fascination and dread with which Simon views the two women, for in the tense atmosphere that prevails they assume a unity in his eyes that gives them an overwhelming power. Reacting to the women's feeling of hatred towards him, Simon says:

But it has become dark in here and Mother and Sara have vanished--Mother took her hand and led her back--as if she opened a door into the past in whose darkness they vanished to reappear as one woman--a woman recalling Mother but a strange woman--unreal, a ghost inhumanly removed from living, beautiful and coldly remote and proud--with a smile deliberately amused by its own indifference--because she no longer wants me--has taken all she needed--I have served my purpose--she has ruthlessly got rid of me--she is free--and I am left lost in myself, with nothing!1

1. Ibid., p. 126.
As the focus of this statement reveals, Simon's real preoccupation is with Deborah rather than with Sara. The play is primarily a battle between mother and son, and Simon's longing to regain his mother's love is stressed by his obsession with Deborah's summerhouse and the fairytale he associates with it. For Simon the fairytale and the summerhouse become a symbol of his own dispossession by his mother. This association is not surprising, for Deborah used the fairytale as a means of freeing herself from Simon when he was a child, and the memory of this event still traumatizes him. Describing his feelings, Simon remarks:

I have never forgotten the anguished sense of being suddenly betrayed, of being wounded and deserted and left alone in a life in which there was no security or faith or love but only danger and suspicion and devouring greed!¹

The basic desire underlying all Simon's actions is the wish to return to the love he enjoyed prior to Deborah's rejection of him. Simon's Rousseau-inspired dreams, his marriage to Sara, his career as a businessman—all lead finally to the climactic confrontation between mother and son in which Simon insists that Deborah open the door of the summerhouse to him. This door is transformed by Simon into the door to the lost kingdom in the fairytale. He tells Deborah:

Your opening it will be the necessary physical act by which your mind wills

¹. Ibid., p.179.
to take me back into your love, and become again the mother who loved me alone, whom I alone loved!1

It is Simon's inability to forget his past that causes him to react so strongly to the women's disposssession of him, and to work so avidly towards disuniting them. For Simon the women's friendship signifies his own abandonment, making him no more than an "unwanted son, a discarded lover, an outcast without meaning or function", who serves only as a "domestic slave whose greed can be used to bring in money to support woman!".2 He believes that by separating the women he will gain the comfort and peace of his mother's love as well as the satisfaction of possessing a wife and mistress. Instead, his action exacerbates the sense of inner division that has plagued him ever since Deborah and Sara made peace with each other, and leads him to the brink of madness.

Although Deborah has intentionally cultivated an indifference to Simon and resists his attempt to return to the past, she desires to control him nonetheless. Sara demonstrates a similar wish to possess Simon. The battle between the two women reaches a climax in the last act of the play, where Simon--already half mad from his attempts to separate the women--becomes finally a clinging child, and leaves the women to struggle for possession of him. The conflict is resolved through a combination of rivalry and self-sacrifice; Deborah gives herself up to madness in order to prove her greater love for her son, leaving

1. Ibid., p.178.
2. Ibid., p.79.
Simon in the care of Sara, who decides to relinquish her dreams of grandeur to devote herself to Simon's happiness. Simon thus achieves his heart's desire, for Sara takes it upon herself to become the mother he has always yearned for.

The women's sacrifice may perhaps be viewed as a positive action, but there is no doubt that O'Neill intended woman to be seen as a negative force in the play. From the start Deborah is associated with the image of the wicked old witch, and Sara is shown to be greedy and scheming. Moreover, Deborah is responsible for Simon's basic sense of insecurity, and Sara is guilty of encouraging his materialistic and acquisitive instincts. Yet in the final analysis it is difficult to see the women as responsible for Simon's fate, for life is the real villain in *More Stately Mansions*, and the women are as much the victims of existence as Simon. Neither woman is in control of her own destiny, for not only do both women succumb to Simon's machinations, but Deborah, frightened of life yet yearning to live, also wages a constant battle against madness, and Sara becomes a helpless pawn in Simon's dream of power.

Simon's wish to return to a time "beyond separations" is effectively a desire to withdraw from life, an escape

1. Bogard outlines in detail the role of the women in *A Tale of Possessors, Self-Dispossessed*, and remarks that: "The theme is clear; the cycle was to show woman as destroyer". See Bogard, *Contour in Time*, p.406.

that seems entirely justified given the portrayal of human nature in the play. Greed, jealousy, fear and hatred are the emotions that predominate in the relationships between the characters, and although Simon's description of life as "this vile sty of lust and hatred and the wish to murder!"\(^1\) is somewhat melodramatic, it is a valid account of the play's dramatization of existence. No alternative is offered to the terrible nature of reality except a retreat into madness. Furthermore, Sara's exultance in vowing to recreate an idyllic existence for Simon is far from cheering, given the circumstances that have led to this resolve: the reduction of Simon to a helpless, babbling child, and the insanity of Deborah.

Thus it is life that is the ultimate victor in the battle between the sexes. But although the women, like Simon, are the victims of existence, they do have a real power. The crucial factor that defines the relationship between the sexes in this play is Simon's complete emotional dependence upon the women. When apart, the women too have a need of Simon, but united they can exist independently of him, sharing between themselves all that they need. As Deborah says to Sara:

\[\text{think of how simply contented we could be alone together with our children-- grandmother and mother, mother and daughter, sister and sister, one woman and another, with the way so clear before us, the meaning of life so happily implicit, the feeling of living life so deeply sure of itself, not needing thought, beyond all torturing}\]

\(^1\) Ibid.
doubt, the passive 'yes' welcoming the peaceful procession of demanding days!1

In contrast, Simon alone is emotionally empty, working for a material success that is meaningless to him without the support of both his mother and his wife. Because of Simon's helplessness in the face of Deborah's and Sara's strength, the responsibility for his well-being again, as in so many of O'Neill's plays, rests with the women.

_More Stately Mansions_ makes a confused and complex statement about the relationship between the sexes. The work has a hysterical tone that manifests itself in the melodramatic declamations of the characters, the perpetual shifting of alliances, and the preoccupation with murder and madness. The play lays a far greater emphasis upon the conflict between the sexes than most of the works that precede it, and it dramatizes the conflict more extravagantly. Much of the play's confusion and melodrama can be attributed to its unrevised state. Yet the work's convolutions and excesses are deliberate in part, for O'Neill employs them to convey a sense of the irresolvable tension between the sexes. The battle between man and woman is the means whereby O'Neill expresses his attitude to life, for the absurdity and horror that manifests itself in the relationships of the characters is a reflection and a confirmation of the absurdity and horror of existence.2


2. The play's hysteria and intense disgust with life can be seen as a rather frenetic dramatization of the quieter (and more convincing) nihilism of _The Iceman Cometh_--the first work O'Neill wrote after beginning the cycle of history plays.
The response to woman in More Stately Mansions is consistent with O'Neill's general attitude to women throughout his drama. The work confirms once again the importance of the mother in O'Neill. It is the yearning for the mother that precipitates the conflict in the play, and that gives the women their capacity to destroy. However, there is a more emphatic ambivalence in the portrayal of Deborah and Sara than is seen in the dramatization of most of O'Neill's women. Deborah, as the mother, holds the key to the kingdom of peace and happiness, but she is also the wicked old witch of the fairytale. In a similar manner Sara is both a loving wife and a scheming, greedy, harlot. The women together are momentarily a source of comfort, only to turn into harpies intent on nothing but Simon's destruction.

An examination of O'Neill's canon reveals that there is a progressive growth in the power of woman through the plays. This evolution is the concern of the following chapter, but its relevance to the present discussion lies in the fact that the growth in power manifests itself in the negative as well as the positive aspect of O'Neill's vision of woman. Nina Leeds and Deborah Harford are much more daunting (and complex) figures than Ruth Mayo in Beyond the Horizon, or Ella Downey in All God's Chillun Got Wings, or Emma Crosby in Diff'rent. But the most insidious and subtle manifestation of woman's capacity to destroy occurs in The Iceman Cometh. Evelyn Hickman is a meek, loving and forgiving woman, yet she engenders a hatred and guilt in her husband so intense that he finally murders her. Chapter five examines the role of Evelyn in detail.
Between 1939 and 1943 O'Neill wrote *The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. Of these works the former two are regarded as O'Neill's masterpieces and among the greatest dramas of the twentieth century. The previous two decades had demonstrated that O'Neill was a courageous and imaginative playwright, but the works written then lack the cohesion, the quality of completeness and the mastery of tone, mood, structure and ideas that mark his last three dramas.

To see the late plays as the culmination of O'Neill's drama implies a progressive development through the works. Although it is impossible to discern a clearly defined linear development through the plays, an evolutionary progression, albeit an erratic one, does occur. This evolution manifests itself in O'Neill's dramatization of his women as well as in the formal aspects of his playwriting technique and the treatment of his themes. In the late works O'Neill is able to combine the role of woman as symbol, the focus of man's longing for peace and harmony, with a perceptive and compassionate portrayal of her as a character within the plays. But most importantly, the late plays are

1. There is a detailed analysis of the evolution of the form and language of O'Neill's drama in John Henry Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp.171-238. Raleigh detects in O'Neill "a continuous and chartable evolution which is to culminate in plays that are remarkable for the compressed unity and explosive power of their structure and for the appropriateness and verisimilitude of their language" (p.171).
a conclusive illustration of the power of woman in O'Neill's work--there is an evolution in the significance of the role of woman, for the image and idea of woman acquires a resonance and subtlety not to be found in the earlier works. *Long Day's Journey Into Night, The Iceman Cometh* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* are all basically nihilistic in attitude, yet they assume that whatever meaning or value is to be found in existence is discovered in human relationships, and particularly within the love of woman.

The skill with which O'Neill dramatizes the women in his late plays is a reflection of his artistic maturity as a whole. Therefore a brief analysis of the evolution of O'Neill's work as a whole is valuable to an understanding of the evolution in O'Neill's dramatization of woman.

It is impossible to pin-point the exact cause that led to the creation of great rather than merely good drama, but some facts help at least partially to explain the change.

There is in the late works a return to the naturalistic style that O'Neill had employed in his early work. He had abandoned this mode when he assumed the role of artist as redeemer and prophet, and began writing in an expressionistic manner that seemed more suited to his artistic aspirations at the time. Despite the boldness of his dramatic experiments there is in the works of the twenties and thirties a quality of self-consciousness, for O'Neill became too consciously concerned with his role as an artist and dramatist. In conceiving his messianic notion of the role of the dramatist O'Neill assumed that it was necessary to find an answer to
what he perceived to be the central dilemma of the twentieth century—the death of God. The major works of the twenties and thirties are in various ways all concerned with finding a solution to the problem of existence in a godless world. By the time O'Neill wrote his late works he had come to the conclusion that no ultimate significance could be ascribed to existence. O'Neill finally acknowledged the inherent nihilism that he had attempted to deny in the more ambitious works of his middle period.

If an ultimate purpose can be ascribed to a writer's work then clearly O'Neill fulfilled his in writing his last plays. O'Neill's creativity was impelled primarily by his desire to come to terms with his self and his beginnings—it was this that first gave him the impetus to write. In his late works O'Neill returned to his past.

Self-comprehension and self-analysis are the primary compulsions behind his work, but it is not surprising that O'Neill was unable to write directly about his beginnings until he had been a dramatist for over twenty years, for the self-revelations of Long Day's Journey Into Night are of an extremely traumatic nature. The writing of this play was an act of expiation and exorcism—O'Neill himself said that it was a "play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood".1 Neither The Iceman Cometh nor A Moon for the Misbegotten are directly autobiographical, but both deal with an aspect of O'Neill's past. The former is set in an

environment O'Neill became familiar with and in which he lived a few months prior to the events of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The latter was written in memory of his brother Jamie. These two works form a type of prologue and epilogue to *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and the manner in which the three plays follow each other in time makes it possible to see them forming a trilogy.

Although it took two decades for O'Neill to come to terms with his past, his autobiographical tendency manifests itself throughout his work. An obvious example of his obsession with self are the numerous instances in which the main protagonist of a play resembles O'Neill both in appearance and general attitude. O'Neill's autobiographical impulse went so far as to include in *Welded* a thinly veiled account of his relationship with his second wife. Yet the tone of this play is shrill and hysterical and exhibits none of the qualities of the late autobiographical works. The great difference in quality stems from the fact that in *Welded* O'Neill is dealing with contemporary events. The situation dramatized in this play was too close to O'Neill at the time of its composition for him to view it with any sense of perspective. Raleigh justly remarks of O'Neill that in his great work "art was memory".¹ O'Neill himself commented:

> I do not think that you can write anything of value or understanding about the present. You can only write about life if it is far enough in the past. The present is too mixed up with superficial values; you can't know which thing is

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¹ Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, p. 84.
important and which is not. The past which I have chosen is one I knew.  

Autobiography and memory are not to be confused in O'Neill's work. It was not enough for O'Neill to write about himself: it was in dramatizing the events of his past that he was able to create works of controlled power.

There is one final factor that should be considered in attempting to understand what led to the creation of O'Neill's great works. The six years that separate the completion of *Days Without End* in 1933 from the composition of *The Iceman Cometh* in 1939 invite the assumption that the late plays' isolation in time contributes to their quality. However, in 1934 O'Neill began his most ambitious project, a cycle of history plays that was to deal with the spiritual dispossession of America. He was absorbed in the writing of the cycle both prior to and during the composition of the three late plays. No final evaluation of the cycle can be made as it remained unfinished and O'Neill destroyed the manuscripts. But the one published play of the cycle, *A Touch of the Poet*, and the unrevised version of *More Stately Mansions* indicate that it is unlikely the cycle would have equalled the artistic achievement of the late works. The scope and purpose of the cycle (which was to consist of nine to eleven separate works) reveals

that O'Neill had not entirely divested himself of his messianic conception of art, and there is a shrillness about his treatment of his subject in *More Stately Mansions* that is more reminiscent of *Welded* than of the late plays. However, the view of life underlying the cycle and the late plays is essentially similar. Although in the cycle O'Neill retained his notion of the messianic role of the artist, he no longer felt it necessary to provide a sustaining, positive view of existence. O'Neill's inherent nihilism reveals itself as much in *A Touch of the Poet* and *More Stately Mansions* as in the late plays.

The question then arises as to what induced O'Neill in the midst of writing his historical cycle suddenly to turn to his own past. It seems likely that O'Neill's increasing disillusionment with world events (the Great Depression and the impending World War), as well as the problems that the cycle was causing him, led him to turn inwards to his own memories. Despite the length of *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* there is a spareness and simplicity about the three late memory plays that is strikingly different from the extravagant nature of the dramas of O'Neill's middle period, and even the cycle. O'Neill utilizes a simple naturalistic style and does not attempt to span vast tracts of time and space as he did in earlier plays like *The Fountain, Marco Millions, Lazarus Laughed* and *Strange Interlude*. Although the quality of the late works is due to the coalescence of many

factors, the deciding factor may be that all three works, and particularly *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, were written from O'Neill's need to exorcise his past. It is as if the chaos in the world around him led O'Neill to discard all pretensions so that the compulsion of each work itself seems to dictate its form and meaning.

The power of woman in the late plays rests primarily upon her role as a symbol. This, of course, is not surprising, since the importance of the vision of woman in O'Neill's thought stems from her role as a symbol of peace, harmony and love. However, the late plays mark an evolution in her symbolic role. Where the symbolic role of woman in many of the earlier works tends to be static and naive, in O'Neill's late plays the presentation of woman reverberates with connotations that grow in significance as each play progresses to its climax and dénouement. E.K. Brown furnishes the terms "expanding" and "fixed" symbols to describe these two different uses of symbols. The latter refers to a symbol that develops through a work and which has more than a single, fixed meaning, whereas the former refers to a symbol which remains a static conception. Brown himself states:

The expanding symbol is a device far more appropriate for rendering an emotion, an idea, that by its largeness or subtlety cannot become wholly explicit. The fixed symbol is almost entirely repetition; the expanding symbol is repetition balanced by variation, and that variation is in progressively deepening disclosure.1

The expanding symbol slowly and unevenly "accretes meaning from the succession of contexts in which it occurs". Implicit within this description is the notion of evolution. Although Brown is referring to the growth of a symbol within a single work, the evolution of woman's symbolic role in O'Neill's drama occurs at two levels: both within particular plays and progressively through his canon.

There is, in the earlier works, a fixed and explicit relationship between woman and her symbolic meaning. At one level woman is overtly presented as a symbol per se. For example, the woman in Fog represents the oppressed poor and the singular purity of selfless maternal love, just as the pretty lady in Bound East for Cardiff is associated with death and the ocean. Cybel in The Great God Brown is, as O'Neill himself stated, directly presented as "an incarnation of Cybele, the Earth Mother doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws". Conversely, the dynamo in Dynamo is a maternal symbol, as are the islands in Mourning Becomes Electra. It is not until the late plays that the fixed and explicit nature of woman as a symbol gives way to a more subtle integration of this role into her dramatization as a character. Moreover, this symbolic function progressively grows in significance through its relationship to structure and theme. Yet despite the fixed nature of the symbology within the earlier works the metaphorical significance of woman accumulates

meaning from its manifestation within the context of each particular work. This progress is not a smooth one, but follows Brown's pattern of "repetition followed by variation".

It will be necessary to analyze and illustrate this pattern in order to trace the development of woman's symbolic function to its final flowering in the late plays. The manner in which the symbol of woman "accretes meaning from a succession of contexts" and as a result grows in significance can be discerned in even the earliest of O'Neill's plays. Fog and Bound East for Cardiff were written within a short time of each other, and the symbolic function of woman plays a considerable part in both, yet there is a subtlety in the handling of the metaphorical value of woman in the latter play that is noticeably lacking in the earlier work.

Like her counterparts in later works, the peasant woman in Fog is the symbol of complete and selfless love. But there is an element of didacticism in the play, it is a propaganda piece in which the figure of the poor peasant woman also stands as a symbol of the oppressed poor of the world. At this level the two main characters in the play have a symbolic meaning as well, for the poet represents the spiritual and humane values while the businessman is characterized as the representative of the materialistic, acquisitive ethos of business. As their descriptions suggest--"A Poet, A Man of Business, A Polish Peasant Woman"--all three are basically types, and prophetically

indicate the three main configurations of value that preoccupied O'Neill. Yet the intense engagement of O'Neill with the dichotomy between matter and spirit, which culminates in *The Great God Brown*, did not evolve to become the focus of all meaning and value in the manner that woman's symbolic function grows in significance to its final crystallization in the late plays. In the final works the dilemma of matter versus spirit is irrelevant, for O'Neill abandoned all attempts to solve the riddle of existence and concerned himself instead with dramatizing the perplexities of human relationships by concentrating on the relationship that obsessed him most: that with his own past. Within this context he sees love and compassion as the primary virtues, and it is woman who epitomizes such qualities. Thus of the three symbolic types that *Fog* prefigures, only the values inherent in O'Neill's conceptualization of woman endure. All values but love are rendered meaningless.  

The peasant woman in *Fog* is presented unambiguously as a mother with a child to whom she is devoted. Her function in this simple one-act play is that of a foil to the poet and the businessman. The woman serves as an index to their characters, for their respective responses to her plight reveal their inner nature. The purely symbolic

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1. Despite O'Neill's concern with the duality of spirit and matter in his cycle of historical plays, in the works of the cycle, as in the late dramas, the only positive value that survives is love. In *A Touch of the Poet* Nora's love is ultimately the only source of confirmation that the work offers. *More Stately Mansions* does emphasize woman's destructive capacity, but the play's final image is of Sara comforting Simon Harford. She will, in her love for him, be his source of comfort and strength.
nature of the woman's function is emphasized by the fact that she is not dramatically realized as a character, but is a silent figure in the mist who is then discovered to have died the night before.

In *Bound East for Cardiff* the conceptual nature of woman's symbolic value is further emphasized, for the "pretty lady dressed in black" does not appear at all: she is a hallucination within the dying sailor's mind. However, Yank's vision of the lady has a symbolic significance that outweighs the evanescent nature of her role in the play. She is a symbol of both the ocean and of death, and the implication of Yank's vision is that the sea is kind to those who are its children (the play's original title was *Children of the Sea*), and that death is an event that is not to be feared. Furthermore, the play suggests that peace and belonging are the fate of those who submit to the natural forces around them.

Viewed from the perspective of O'Neill's work as a whole, the symbol of the pretty lady carries within itself intimations of O'Neill's later assumption that self-surrender within the arms of a compassionate and loving maternal figure is the one hope for happiness that man has in this world.

3. *Ibid.*, pp.42-43. However, Bogard is correct in suggesting that O'Neill was "probably not entirely conscious of the implications of his play".
The positive maternal qualities of woman are the basis for her symbolic power, yet the various negative portrayals of women in O'Neill's work have their own symbolic significance. Although twenty years separate the writing of the two plays, a parallel exists between the dramatization of Mildred Douglas in *The Hairy Ape* and Deborah Harford in *A Touch of the Poet*. The situation in both works is similar, for in each case a man with a certain conception of himself loses his sense of identity in the face of a woman's fear or scorn. Both Deborah and Mildred are representatives of a decadent aristocracy of wealth and privilege, and are pale, delicate women dressed in white at the time of their encounter with the protagonist of each play. The scene in *The Hairy Ape* is intensely dramatic as Mildred Douglas, dressed in pure white, enters the stokehole of the ship to encounter the ape-like Yank, grimy with coal dust. Mildred's revulsion and fear at the sight of Yank results in the disintegration of his identity. In *A Touch of the Poet* Cornelius Melody's encounter is not dramatized, but its description is similar to the scene in *The Hairy Ape*. Melody, dishevelled from his fight with her servants, sees Deborah looking down upon him, cool and immaculate. This is the ultimate humiliation for Melody, to be seen divested of his aristocratic pretensions, "with that pale Yankee bitch watching from a window, sneering with disgust."

Mildred Douglas and Deborah Harford have an explicit

symbolic significance: as members of a privileged class they represent a reality or plane of existence that differs sharply from that of the protagonists. Yet this is the more superficial aspect of the women's symbolic value and it serves as the justification for their respective responses to Yank and Melody. It is their response itself that touches something deep in each man. As Yank asserts: "Dis ting's in your inside" (III, 250). The reaction of the protagonists gives the women their symbolic power, for the fear and revulsion of Mildred and the scorn of Deborah unleash a response in the two men that makes them question their very identity.

The explicit use of woman as a symbol manifests itself in Welded in which O'Neill creates a figure who is a forerunner of Cybel, the philosopher-prostitute of The Great God Brown. The work is concerned with the attempt of Michael Cape to find in marriage a form of religious ecstasy that requires a devotion from his wife impossible to obtain. When Cape leaves home, disappointed and angry, he encounters a prostitute who is not named but who is referred to simply as Woman. There is nothing subtle in her portrayal. Cape both articulates her symbolic role and responds to her in her function as symbol. Given the sacramental notion of marriage that he entertains, it is not surprising that Cape sees the prostitute as having the power to kill love, for she represents sex at its most basic level. Cape says to her:

You're a symbol. You're all the tortures man inflicts on woman--and you're the revenge of woman!
You're love revenging itself upon itself! You're the suicide of love--of my love--of all love since the world began!

(II, 475)

If the prostitute represents the death of love, she also possesses the ability to bring peace, (or so it seems to Michael), for to kill love is also to end the pain that is associated with loving. Cape sees the woman as the representation of abstract concepts until she, in her hurt and pride, reveals her humanity. O'Neill is able to integrate an awareness of the woman's humanity with her role as a symbol. Having accepted her individuality, Michael learns from her the secret of life, which consists of acceptance. As the woman states: "You got to loin to like it!" (II, 478).

This remark is the core of Cybel's philosophy also, but in his dramatization of her O'Neill creates a symbol of wider significance. At a superficial level Cybel's role is no more complex than that of the woman in Welded, for like the woman she also functions primarily--and almost exclusively--as a symbol. But she plays a part in a far more ambitious work than Welded, and this contributes to the greater complexity of her symbolic value. *The Great God Brown* is a dramatization of man's search for the infinite, set within the context of an inquiry into the values that operate within society. Cybel is a representation of what O'Neill saw as the right way of life: an acceptance and celebration of the cycle of nature and of man's part in the cycle. Cybel's
acceptance of existence arises from her association with nature. She is an Earth Mother, the representative of a divinity that is denied and derided in a world whose laws are a distortion of the truth. Cybel has the ability to bring peace and comfort, but only to those who have the sensitivity and perception to see behind her mask and grasp the truth of her identity.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra* woman's role as a symbol is presented in a somewhat schematic manner, but there is, nonetheless, also a subtlety in the way the symbol is integrated into the play's total meaning. This subtlety manifests itself in the manner in which O'Neill dramatizes the idea of woman as a symbol of freedom, peace, harmony and love at several different levels in the work. Behind the actual female protagonists of the play there hovers the shadowy figure of Marie Brantôme, who represents an existence of harmony and freedom far removed from the guilt-ridden and unhappy lives of the Mannons. (Because of her suffering at the hands of the Mannons, Marie is also a symbol of their guilt.) Marie is the archetypal mother and as such is a symbol for the Mannons of the love and peace that they long for. She is, moreover, associated with the South Sea Islands which in turn function as a symbol of the mother. Although Lavinia and Christine Mannon desire peace as much as the male characters, by deliberately associating the two women with Marie, O'Neill indicates that they too have the potential to bring peace and comfort.
Thus woman is presented as a symbol at three different levels in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The islands, however, are the primary focus of the characters' longing for harmony and peace. In *Dynamo*, the work written prior to *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the dynamo comes to represent the love and peace of the mother. In both plays, therefore, an object other than woman is used to represent the values that O'Neill saw as inhering in the mother. The relative complexity of the symbolism in *Mourning Becomes Electra* becomes clear when it is compared with the manner in which the dynamo is used as a symbol in the earlier play.

In *Dynamo* Reuben Light fixes both his desire for expiation for the suffering he caused his dead mother, and his need for faith, on the dynamo, which comes to represent the source of life to him. Having abandoned Christianity Reuben adopts a hard-headed empiricism which views electricity as the source of all being. He employs a somewhat circuitous logic which reduces all matter and life to electrical charges, and his version of Genesis culminates in seeing the dynamo as the centre of all being. As the source of creation the dynamo becomes a mother, and the focus of Reuben's longing for peace and forgiveness. In a manner similar to Michael Cape's categorization of the prostitute, Reuben directly and unambiguously defines the symbolic nature of the dynamo: "a great, dark mother! ... that's what the dynamo is!" (III, 474). The explicit nature of the symbology in this
play is further emphasized by Reuben's final action, when he flings himself upon the dynamo, thus enacting and fulfilling, in a rather startling manner, his longing to return to his source--to the mother.

Whereas in Dynamo the object itself is seen as somehow containing the source of life, in Mourning Becomes Electra a parallel relationship is set up between the fulfilment of mother love and the fulfilment of existence on the islands. The desire of the characters to attain peace and freedom is contained within a desire to journey across the ocean to the South Sea Islands. The association between the positive maternal values and the symbol which represents these values is also made explicit in this play. Discovering that he has lost the love of his mother, Orin Mannon refers to her as his "lost island" (II, 101). But the islands are not presented as a visual image in the manner of the dynamo, which dominates the stage in the later half of Dynamo. Instead, the island motif is woven into the thread of the dialogue in the trilogy, and the evocative nature of their description, and the poignancy that results from the knowledge that none of the characters will achieve the fulfilment symbolized by the island life, gives this symbol a quality that the symbolization of the dynamo lacks.

The manner in which O'Neill handles the island symbol in Mourning Becomes Electra is a previsioning of the manner in which the symbol of woman is dramatized in The Iceman Cometh. The power of the maternal symbol
in *Mourning Becomes Electra* depends upon more than the dramatization of characters in the play, for it derives much of its effectiveness from an idea that the protagonists have of the fulfilling nature of life on the South Sea Islands. In *The Iceman Cometh* another step is taken, for the significance of woman depends entirely on the memories of the men, as the two major female figures do not appear at all. Memory is the tool that creates Evelyn Hickman and Rosa Parritt, the women who exercise such tremendous power over the play's action.

The late works are all "memory plays".¹ They not only draw on O'Neill's personal history, but the characters themselves are obsessed with their own past. There is a lyric quality about the late plays, and much of this arises from the poignancy with which the past is both recalled and recreated, particularly in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Raleigh has perceptively pointed out the manner in which the relative lack of action in the works, the stasis of the present, is counteracted by the dynamic quality with which the past is revealed.² But despite the emphasis upon the past, all three plays are structured so as to move towards a major climax in which past and present are interfused. Woman, especially in her symbolic role, has a vital part to play in the structure of these works of memory. Yet, as the following analysis of the

late plays suggests, her importance is not confined merely to their form, but is integrally related to their thematic preoccupations. Indeed, the incorporation of all value (or its denial) in the figure of woman is the primary basis for her significance in the last works, whether she counters or whether she reinforces their inherent nihilism.

The Iceman Cometh is the bleakest of O'Neill's plays, and the emphatic absurdity of existence is dramatized most tellingly in the relationship of Evelyn and Hickey. Evelyn Hickman has an immense capacity to love and to forgive, and as such represents O'Neill's ideal of womanhood. Yet Hickey comes to hate her, and his hatred is the result precisely of Evelyn's saintly qualities. As he says: "There's a limit to the guilt you can feel and the forgiveness and the pity you can take!" (III, 715). This, of course, is the dramatization of a common human trait: to feel guilt and discomfort in the face of another's understanding of one's misdemeanours, for a kindly reaction only exacerbates one's feelings of guilt. In the context of O'Neill's vision of woman this psychological truth takes on a particular significance, for Hickey's reaction to Evelyn's love is one that negates the value of O'Neill's ideal of the compassionate, redemptive woman. Throughout O'Neill's work the figure of the loving and all-forgiving woman is seen as a symbol of the peace and fulfilment that either eludes his protagonists, or is achieved only temporarily by them. Hickey is among the few characters in O'Neill's drama who actually marries a woman in whom all the ideal qualities are evident. Yet his life is one of
suffering, and his love turns to hate. Much of the bleakness of *The Iceman Cometh* arises from the vision of woman that it projects. O'Neill deliberately inverts his ideal concept of woman, and in doing so emphasizes the nihilism of the play.

The importance of the symbolic function of woman in *The Iceman Cometh* is integrally related to the play's central theme, articulated by Larry Slade at the start of the work:

> the truth has no bearing on anything.... The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober.  

(III, 578)

Although the dichotomy between illusion and reality is made obvious from the beginning of the play, it is depicted mainly in terms of the relationship between dreams and the truth. The deeper implication of this duality, namely that nothing is what it seems to be and all is meaningless, only becomes clear after Hickey's confession and the revelations of Don Parritt.

The inhabitants of Harry Hope's bar desire only to find peace. These men are the failures of life, the dregs of society. Again, it is Larry as the philosopher-spokesman of the work who furnishes a description of their situation. The bar is "the last harbor" (III, 587); there is no fear of failure because there is no possibility of going down further, but the men "keep up the appearances of life by a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays"
and tomorrows" (111,587). There is a tacit agreement between the residents and the frequenters of Hope's place whereby they all, despite their awareness of the futility of the others' dreams (and a lurking suspicion that their own dreams are equally suspect), acquiesce to maintain the validity of each others' past histories and plans for the future. Yet the hopelessness of the situation of all is made clear within the play, for the majority of the men survive only through the soporific effect of alcohol, and every one of the characters needs his or her particular illusion to maintain any semblance of dignity.

The men in Harry Hope's bar are not only refugees from life itself, but from women in particular. Their fear of women is an indication of their fear of life. Although the personalities of Evelyn Hickman and Rosa Parritt are radically different, as symbols the women are associated with the complex obligations to living from which the men are trying to escape. A striking aspect of the relationships that exist in the bar is their lack of intensity. There is a tolerant, familiar affection between the inhabitants and frequenters of Hope's establishment, but it is far removed from the quality of feeling that is associated with the relationship of Evelyn and Hickey, and Don Parritt and his mother.¹ The men seek escape from all the complexities of life, including the problems of

¹. The only heterosexual relationship in the play--between Chuck Morello and Cora--is notable for its lack of passion.
loving. Hickey makes this clear in a comment made while narrating the tribulations of his life with Evelyn. Describing the bar, he says:

I'd get thinking how peaceful it was here, sitting around with the old gang, getting drunk and forgetting love, joking and laughing and singing and swapping lies.

(III, 715)

Love is associated with woman, and all the more important characters in The Iceman Cometh have a woman in their past. Jimmy Tomorrow had a wife, Marjorie, whose adultery ostensibly led him to drink; Larry Slade was the lover of Rosa Parritt, and Harry Hope is a widower who claims it was his grief for his wife Bessie that made him lose all ambition, and that has prevented him from stepping out of his establishment for the past twenty years.

Through the use of the symbol of woman the concept of love is shown to be hollow and meaningless. Love is actually hatred (or becomes so) in the relationship of Evelyn and Hickey; but marriage is not the only relationship that fosters such feeling. It is hatred that causes Don Parriott to betray his mother Rosa. The relationship between mother and son forms a dramatic antithesis to that between Evelyn and Hickey. If Evelyn destroys a man through loving him, Parriott's hatred of his mother arises from her indifference to him. Rosa is among those of O'Neill's women who destroy because they are not willing to sacrifice their own needs for the sake of others. In fact Rosa goes to the other extreme, for she uses people for
her own ends. There is a deliberate interweaving of the confession of Hickey and the revelations of Don Parritt, thus emphasizing the essential meaninglessness of existence, for love and indifference are seen as equally destructive. Nothing is what it seems to be.

Although love and indifference both ultimately result in destruction, it is love that is the prime focus of O'Neill's attention in the play; presented as the supreme illusion, love functions as the primary vehicle through which O'Neill exposes the true nature of illusion and reality. It is this factor that gives such importance to the women who occur in the pasts of Hickey, Larry, Parritt, Hope, and Cameron, for it is through the relationships of these men with their women that O'Neill conveys his belief in the illusory nature of love. The non-appearance of the women does not lessen their significance, for it is their association with the idea of love and with the pasts of the men that gives them their dramatic power. This significance is conveyed through the women's symbolic role in the work, and the manner in which this role is integrated into the play's structure.

It was mentioned earlier that an expanding symbol is one that yields its meaning slowly, through a combination

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1. See Winifred Dusenbury Frazer, Love as Death in The Iceman Cometh: A Modern Treatment of an Ancient Theme (Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 1967). Frazer believes that O'Neill "sees the grotesque ambiguity in the fact that love ... which alone perhaps can save man from death, actually results in man's destruction" (p.3). The critic finds the major theme of the play to be "that belief in love is the greatest of man's illusions" (p.4).
of repetition and variation. In *The Iceman Cometh* the roles of Bessie Hope, Marjorie Cameron, Rosa Parritt and Evelyn Hickman combine to function as a single expanding symbol. The women together are associated with love, with the past, with life as it is lived outside the confines of Hope's refuge-like bar. They are, ultimately, a symbol of the reality that the men cannot bear to face. Yet the meaning of the symbol is not made explicit immediately; each woman's story contributes to a cumulative process, one culminating in the story of Evelyn in which the full meaning of the symbol is at last revealed.

The play is a meticulously orchestrated piece in which themes and ideas are interwoven through a series of repetitions and ever-widening disclosures that comes to a climax in Hickey's long monologue. In the carefully-wrought structure of *The Iceman Cometh* the symbol of woman is an integral part of the pattern that binds the work together. The growth of the symbol is effected through a movement from illusion to reality: all four women play a part in a pattern of revelation that proceeds from deception to truth, from the men's pretence of love to their admission of indifference or hate. (This process not only reveals the characters of the women, but also discloses the true natures of the men.)

The first woman referred to in the play is Rosa Parritt, whose character is immediately revealed in her son's remark, "There's nothing soft or sentimental about Mother" (III, 589). As the play progresses more and more
is said about Rosa's nature; she is shown to be a selfish, self-centred, domineering and dedicated woman whose life is totally absorbed by her political ideology; she is an anarchist who so loves freedom that being imprisoned is a living death, yet her desire to dominate those around her is an attempt to deny their freedom. These aspects of Rosa's character are gradually revealed in a series of exchanges between Parritt and Larry Slade. A pattern is established for these exchanges in which Parritt moves from one palpably false justification for betraying his mother to another, and verges on the brink of a confession that Larry refuses to hear. It is only after Hickey has told of his murder of Evelyn that Parritt confesses the truth regarding his feelings for Rosa.

In Harry Hope's case the truth about his marriage is established at the start of the play. Although Hope himself sentimentalizes his time with his wife, seeing her as the reason for his ambition and the cause of his present seclusion, Larry reveals that "By all accounts, Bessie nagged the hell out of him" (III, 603). The manner in which Bessie's personality is revealed is in accord with the general tendency of the characters to acquiesce in maintaining each other's illusions. All know about her character, yet they humour Hope in his constant sentimentalization of her memory, until, under pressure from Hickey, he finally admits the truth: that Bessie was a nagging bitch.

Like Hope, Jimmy Cameron maintains a view of his time with his wife that is more romantic than real, and
which is deflated by Hickey's revelation of the true nature of their relationship. Although there are only two references to Marjorie Cameron, the movement is again from a character's denial of the truth to his recognition of it.

Evelyn is the most important of the four women who together constitute the symbol of woman. There is an obvious contrast between her and the three other women, which springs initially from the mystery that surrounds her in the early part of the play. This mystery is engendered by her dubious association with the iceman and with death, and it is augmented by Hickey's gradual and reluctant disclosures about her that occur at significant points in the play. Hickey's remarks further magnify the contrast between Evelyn and the others. Rosa is never described as other than selfish and egotistical, Bessie is clearly a nagging bitch, and Maggie is an adulteress. But contrary to the general assumption of Evelyn's unfaithfulness (based upon Hickey's allusions on his previous visits to her liaison with the iceman), Hickey reveals that Evelyn was a loving woman whose sole preoccupation in life was his welfare and happiness.

Evelyn differs from the other women also in the manner in which she intrigues the inhabitants of Hope's bar. No such curiosity is expressed about Marjorie Cameron or Rosa Parritt, and Bessie Hope's personality and her relationship with Hope are well known. The characters are consumed by an avid desire to know more about Evelyn,
for they sense a connection between Hickey's present strange behaviour and his relationship with his wife. It is in response to a rising crescendo of taunts and queries that Hickey divulges the fact of Evelyn's death at the end of act two. Again, at the end of the third act, in response to Larry's insistent questioning, Hickey reveals that Evelyn was murdered. However, when Hickey finally relates the whole story of Evelyn it is in the face of the characters' indifference, for having experienced the shattering of their own illusions, they wish only to get drunk in peace. But now Hickey is driven to speak about Evelyn in order to convince himself of the rightness of his actions.

Evelyn is the seemingly perfect wife. She has a fierce loyalty and pride in her husband and is completely devoted to him. Her capacity to love and forgive is immense: Hickey's drunkenness, his long periods away from home, his unfaithfulness with prostitutes, even the venereal disease he contracts, do not make her complain. Yet her very virtues are what cause Hickey to feel an intense guilt, one that is further exacerbated by her insistent belief that he will change his ways. Finally, aware that he will not be able to reform himself to suit her desires, Hickey kills Evelyn to prevent her suffering further disillusionment. But in confessing this to the congregation at Hope's bar he unconsciously reveals his true motive--the deep hatred and resentment he felt for Evelyn and her dream of his reformation. His angry outcry, "Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!" (III,
716), reverberates through the play and dispels any sense of value or meaning, for love is revealed to be hate.

Although the other women are called bitches from the start, no such reference is made to Evelyn until Hickey's confession. Parritt, reacting to the presence of the whores, exclaims in the first act: "I hate every bitch that ever lived!" (III, 615), and it is clear that he is referring not only to the prostitutes but to women in general and to his mother in particular. In the next act Ed Mosher describes his sister Bessie Hope as being not merely a bitch but a "God-damned bitch" (III, 651), an expletive that is modified to "nagging bitch" (III, 692) by her husband in the following act, after his illusions are shattered. It is later, in the fourth act, that Hickey finally gives vent to the hatred he has suppressed and calls Evelyn a bitch. Hickey's remark is followed soon after by Parritt's confession, in which he refers to Rosa as a "damned old bitch" (III, 720). The phrase "bitch" is thus associated with an acknowledgement of the truth by Hope, Hickey and Parritt, and it effectively creates a link between the women, emphasizing their unity as a symbol and their power in the play. But it is in Hickey's case that the use of the phrase has the most dramatic effect. The immediate impact of Hickey's statement springs from the startling contrast it presents between the nature of Evelyn's behaviour and the response it elicits from Hickey, as well as from the manner in which it highlights the divergence between Hickey's self-proclaimed reasons for killing Evelyn and his actual motivation. Yet the
ultimate force of Hickey's exclamation stems from its equation of Evelyn with the other women, implying that a woman who loves and forgives is no less a bitch than the woman who is unfaithful, or who nags, or who is selfish and self-centred.

It is at this point that the central nature of Evelyn's role becomes clear, for it is she who most emphatically conveys the sense both of love's destructiveness and of its ultimate meaninglessness. Evelyn is able to convey this meaning because O'Neill inverts both the concept of love and his ideal concept of woman, or rather the inversion of love is accomplished through O'Neill's inversion of his ideal concept of woman: as the embodiment of love, Evelyn brings nothing but death, destruction and guilt. This inversion is of significance not only in relation to *The Iceman Cometh* but in relation to O'Neill's vision of woman as a whole.

Although from the start *The Iceman Cometh* asserts the essential meaninglessness of existence, the value of love itself is not seriously questioned. Neither Hope's relationship with his wife nor Parritt's hostility towards his mother are substantial proof of love's destructiveness, for the two men's feelings towards their women seem a not surprising consequence of Bessie Hope's nagging nature and Rosa Parritt's selfishness and egotism. The dramatic effect of Evelyn's story stems precisely from the fact that it seems to defy logic. Relating the details of his life with Evelyn, Hickey remarks:
I suppose you think I'm a liar, that no woman could have stood all she stood and still loved me so much— that it isn't human for any woman to be so pitying and forgiving. Well, I'm not lying, and if you'd ever seen her, you'd realize I wasn't. It was written all over her face, sweetness and love and pity and forgiveness. (III, 714)

Although these words of Hickey's show Evelyn to possess a saintlike capacity to love and forgive, they also indicate the means whereby O'Neill undermines her positive qualities. By referring to her almost inhuman goodness Hickey provides a clue to O'Neill's technique. O'Neill makes Evelyn a destructive rather than a redemptive figure through a combination of emphasis and exaggeration. There is a subtle shift in emphasis that transforms Evelyn from a saintly figure to a relentlessly "good" woman, who through her unbending rectitude engenders guilt and hatred in Hickey's heart. This shift is indicative of O'Neill's state of mind while working on The Iceman Cometh, for the playwright's extreme nihilistic bias at the time led him to make Evelyn a caricature of what she is ostensibly meant to symbolize. Although she is moulded on the lines of O'Neill's ideal of womanhood, in Evelyn the positive qualities of love and forgiveness and selflessness become a weapon with which she fights the battle to maintain her dream of Hickey's perfectibility. There is a stubbornness about her and a sense of conscience that recall O'Neill's earlier dramatizations of Emma Crosby in Diff'rent and of Mrs. Bartlett in Gold. Hickey's desperation in the face of her inviolable belief in him is easy to understand. As he remarks: "If she only hadn't been so damn good—
she'd been the same kind of wife I was a husband" (III, 713-714).

Yet Evelyn's goodness as such, is not the real cause of her destructiveness. Instead, her capacity to inflict suffering stems from her inability (or refusal) to perceive the truth about Hickey. Whereas women like Cybel in *The Great God Brown*, Nora in *A Touch of the Poet*, and Josie in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* can see their men for what they are and accept them nonetheless, Evelyn lacks the understanding and the wisdom to do the same. Her forgiveness of Hickey's errant behaviour depends upon her belief that he will change his ways. Thus love and forgiveness become a form of mental blackmail, and rather than bringing peace, they cause guilt and anguish. In effect, love destroys because it demands too much.

The demanding nature of her love for Hickey, and her lack of understanding and wisdom, suggest that Evelyn is more like Rosa and the other women than it first seems. The other women's behaviour, although seemingly very different to Evelyn's, also stems from an inability or a refusal to understand and to accept their men. Essentially, all four women show a basic indifference to the needs of their men. Moreover, they demand of the men, implicitly in the name of love, more than the men find it possible to give them. Apart from Evelyn's desire that Hickey become a model husband, Bessie attempts to instil into Hope a political ambition that he lacks, Rosa requires an acquiescence to her own freedom that Larry and Parritt find
impossible, and Marjorie demands an attention from Cameron that he can only give to alcohol. The relationships of all four women suggest, in varying degrees of intensity, the demanding and destructive nature of love. It is the relationship between Evelyn and Hickey, however, that conveys most emphatically the truth of this message.

Evelyn's importance in *The Iceman Cometh* springs from the fact that she unifies the play both structurally and thematically. Evelyn's story is the focal point of the play's structure, bringing to a climax and resolving its various preoccupations and tensions. In purely dramatic terms it is Hickey's discovery of the truth of his feelings for Evelyn, and his subsequent retreat into illusion, that crystallize the play's message: that man cannot face reality but must live life under the cover of illusion. However, it is in the figure of Evelyn that O'Neill presents his most eloquent statement regarding the nature of illusion and reality, and the essential absurdity and meaninglessness of existence.

In herself Evelyn embodies a paradox, for although she is purportedly the symbol of all that Hickey and the other men value, her love brings nothing but suffering and destruction. This absurdity is compounded by the fact that she herself is as deluded as the characters in Hope's bar. But whereas the men are able to regain their illusions after unwillingly facing the truth, Evelyn never perceives reality and is, instead, destroyed by her illusion.
The symbolic role of woman has an important visual dimension in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* that is lacking in *The Iceman Cometh*. In fact the images of Mary Tyrone standing drugged under the brilliant lights of the chandelier with her old wedding gown in her hand, and of Josie Hogan holding and comforting Jamie Tyrone in the moonlight, are vital both to the theatrical impact of the plays and to their thematic concerns.

*Long Day's Journey Into Night* is essentially a naturalistic play, but one which is nonetheless dense with symbols that convey their meaning implicitly through their part in the action. Much of this symbolism is associated with nature—the fog, the ocean, and the foghorn on the bay, each have their significance—but Mary is the central symbol of the work. The peripatetic existence of the men results in their investing Mary with the qualities of home, and their feelings of security and hope rest upon her well-being. Although Mary is a symbol, this is implicit within her dramatization as a convincing human being. The focus upon Mary of the others' attention is dramatically justifiable in ordinary human terms, for it is based upon her husband's and her sons' fear of her relapsing into her addiction to morphine.

As the title of the play suggests, Mary's symbolic function is associated with the passage of time from day to night, and also with the change in the weather from sunlight to fog. With the coming of night Mary sinks deeper and
deeper into the detachment induced by morphine, and when she finally appears at the end of the work, with her wedding gown in her hand, looking like a young girl with a future of hope ahead of her, it is clear to the men that their dream of change, in which the past would be obliterated, is never to be.

The vision of Mary, a symbol of lost hope and of the constant presence of the past, gives way in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* to the more positive picture of Josie Hogan in the moonlight. The image of Josie comforting Jamie Tyrone in the light of the moon is the culmination of all the positive maternal figures dramatized by O'Neill. Like Mary, Josie's symbolic power is implicit within her reality as a human being. Whereas Cybel in her capacity as Earth Mother gives peace and comfort impartially and dispassionately, it takes a great effort on Josie's part to make the sacrifice of giving up her wishes for the man she loves. She is repelled and horrified by Jamie Tyrone's confession, but overcomes her feelings in order to bring him the peace he longs for. The play is not only a requiem for James Tyrone, but for his mother, who in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* was left standing in a bewildered, drug-induced haze. Josie, in her role as maternal comforter, fulfills Mary's role as mother.
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