

The Effect of Dramatic Concept in the Non-realistic
Plays of Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder

by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Both Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder reacted against the naturalism of turn-of-the-century drama, believing that non-realistic methods could be more effectively used to present the truth. Influenced by recent experiments in Europe, and deriving inspiration from Greek, Elizabethan and Oriental models, the playwrights searched for novel techniques to wake up the audience and shake it into awareness of man's universal and contemporary situation. This study of twenty-six plays considers the success of these devices.

A discussion of the structure of the plays in Chapter Two explores O'Neill's use of compression, parallels, and repetition to give the plays rhythm and force and his selection of episodes which give heightened significance to the action which is often played out against a large background. Similarly Wilder's concentration on symbolic moments, the deliberately jerky movement of many plays and the telescoping of time give his characters and action a cosmological and metaphysical framework.

In Chapter Three a study is made of the effect of characters who are seen by the authors as only part of the whole play, and are often used to illustrate only one or two human traits. Representational and cliché characters, personalities from history and myth, the personification of animals and places,

and characters who address the audience strengthen Wilder's reminder to us that a play is a piece of fiction. O'Neill's development of the mask is traced with its various purposes of showing inner personality, conflict within the characters, lack of individuality, and for its sheer dramatic power.

Chapters Four and Five analyse the dramatists' use of sound and visual effects. Although aware that great language was not possible in the early twentieth century, O'Neill relies heavily on rhythm, silence and pauses, the use of speech sounds, laughter, music and sound effects to give emotional impact to the action. The asides of Strange Interlude were a unique experiment which allowed layers of conflicting emotions to be shown. Wilder's monologues and casual speech, lightened by humour and platitudes, make his philosophical concerns more palatable to the audience. Both authors were aware that stage-positioning, movement, sets, mime, dance, frozen posture, colour, lighting and costume could disencumber the dialogue, focus our attention and create atmosphere.

The last Chapter attempts to assess what the playwrights achieved with their experiments, both in terms of their success in performance and reading, and in terms of the influence exerted on a later generation of writers. American drama owes a significant debt to both authors for liberating it from a stale realistic tradition.

CHAPTER 1

TRUTH FROM MAKE-BELIEVE

Writing against the background of representational accuracy in theatre established by Ibsen, Shaw and other playwrights of the turn of the century, Eugene O'Neill and, to some extent, Thornton Wilder found a large audience of critics and theatre-goers who judged the success of their plays according to criteria established by more naturalistic performances. Although both dramatists argued that the precedents for unrealistic performance were numerous, referring to Greek, Elizabethan and Noh drama in their defence, it is hardly surprising that both playwrights also appeared quite content to follow more recent conventions such as O'Neill's continued use of what Georg Fuchs describes as the "peep-show"¹ illusory proscenium arch stage, leaving it for others later in the century to re-introduce the possibilities offered by thrust and circular stages. On the other hand reaction against more recent trends sometimes plunged the playwrights into troubled waters. O'Neill's defiant embrace of the mask technique in The Great God Brown for example, resulted in a confusing play.

Nonetheless, O'Neill and Wilder's most valuable contribution to the drama was to question the recent concept that the function of plays was to present a world of "make-believe". On the contrary they saw that the very opposite, "a disengagement from belief"² to use Susanne Langer's term, a disengagement which liberated the audience from relating in a very practical way to the object, lay at the heart of aesthetic experience. What Schiller called "Schein"³ and Jung referred to as "semblance"⁴ may be as vivid as reality, and can in fact present the illusion of reality more effectively than an imitation of reality itself. As the painter Constable wrote:

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1. Georg Fuchs, The Revolution in the Theatre: Conclusions Concerning the Munich Artists' Theatre, condensed and adapted by Constance Conner Kuhn, New York, 1959, p. 20.
 2. Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form, New York, 1953, p. 49.
 3. Ibid., p. 49.
 4. Ibid., p. 48.

"The art pleases by reminding, not by deceiving."¹

Of all the arts, the representation which is theatre has particular problems in attempting to mimic the real world. Gordon Craig, whose ideas significantly influenced the young O'Neill, mocked the unnaturalness of witnessing contemporary performances, his complaints ranging from the experience of actually going to the theatre:

"Is it not unnatural for us to wait till night to enjoy an art?

Is it not unnatural to sit two and a half long hours on one seat – a ticketed seat, a numbered seat, crushed in on all sides by strangers?"²

to objections about the performance itself:

"The rouge is not dabbed on artificially as a frank artifice – it pretends to be natural nowadays.

How great a fault!"³

Similar dissatisfaction was common in the early twentieth century. Anselm Feuerbach said:

"I hate the modern theatre because I have sharp eyes and cannot be fooled by pasteboard and cosmetics. I despise the absurdity of its decor."⁴

Nor were these critics any happier with the use of real nature on stage, realising that this would paradoxically appear uninteresting and even untrue. Sarcey declared in 1916:

"I hold that reality if presented on stage truthfully would appear false to the monster with the thousand heads which we call the public."⁵

"The perfection of naturalism by mechanical means has developed the peep show ad absurdum", wrote Georg Fuchs, adding an interesting prediction:

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1. E.H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Representation, New York, 1960, p. 38.
 2. Gordon E. Craig, The Theatre Advancing, New York, 1963, p. 42.
 3. Ibid., p. 43.
 4. Fuchs, p. 25.
 5. Allardyce Nicoll, The Theory of Drama, London, 1937, p. 27.

"The conventional theatre itself has proved to us that we are encumbered with an apparatus that prohibits all healthy growth. This whole sham world of cardboard, twine, canvas, and gilt is ripe for destruction."¹

These reactions to the staging of the time were in fact no different from Coleridge's realisation a century earlier:

"The true stage-illusion in this and in all other things consists – not in the mind's judging it to be a forest, but in its remission of the judgement that it is not a forest For not only are we never absolutely deluded, or anything like it, but the attempt to cause the highest delusion possible to beings in their senses sitting in a theatre, is a gross fault, incident only to low minds, which, feeling that they cannot affect the heart or head permanently, endeavour to call forth the momentary affections."²

Neither O'Neill nor Wilder was interested in deluding an audience; both wanted something more than "momentary affections."

As American writers, both had a barren national tradition on which to draw. Although popular with a largely indiscriminating audience, American theatre had sprung, as James Rosenberg puts it, "full-blown from the brow of British drama at a time when the British drama was at its lowest ebb in history".³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century the stage was dominated by melodramas, many of them either imported or imitative of British models, in spite of some previous attempts by American authors to produce a more native drama based on folk heroes like Rip Van Winkle. Theatrical performance was distinguished by the use of the new box-set, spectacular stage effects (helped by the new possibilities of gas and later electrical stage lighting), and the emergence of the dominating actor or actor-director who became the idol of the day. O'Neill himself grew up with such a pot-boiler, his father James having already

1. Fuchs, p. 37.

2. Nicoll, p. 35.

3. James Rosenberg, "European Influences", Stratford Upon Avon Studies 10: American Theatre, London, 1967, p. 53.

performed the role of Edmond Dantes in The Count of Monte Cristo five years before Eugene was born. Consciously the playwright rejected the romanticism of the play and all it stood for which Raleigh sums up as "melodrama, sentiment, easy popularity, stage tricks, cardboard characters [and] stale rhetoric"¹; unconsciously, as many critics point out, O'Neill's own plays are full of such effects, combined with more searching themes perhaps, but certainly these devices are used for their dramatic impact.

The reaction to this facile drama when it came at the turn of the century originated in unexpected sources: Scandinavia and Russia. Although realistic plays like Ibsen's A Doll's House or Chekhov's Cherry Orchard at first glance appear to have little relevance to the non-realistic O'Neill and Wilder plays, their general influence lies at the heart of the new direction in American drama. Ibsen almost single-handedly helped the theatre break free of the domination of the "well-made" play and once again posed the problem which had been asked by the greatest playwrights of previous ages concerning the complex and troubled relationship of man with his environment. In spite of their controversial themes, his plays were presented without much difficulty in the United States, partly because of the absence of an effective censorship in the country, and partly because of the enthusiasm shown by Scandinavian immigrants. The new subtlety of Chekhov's dialogue and characterisation had a direct influence on both American and European drama, but it was the new style of acting developed by Stanislavsky to interpret these new characters which became the emotion-centred naturalistic Bible of performers in the States. As it became apparent that the stage now contained rounded, subtle characters with scenery which by contrast was crying out for attention, new designers like the Swiss artist Adolphe Appia experimented with sets and lighting which were simple but expressive environments for the characters. Gordon Craig, whose writings had a considerable influence on O'Neill, was even more ardent in his desire for scenic simplicity. There appears to be no direct evidence that he influenced Wilder, but certainly the scenic designer and the dramatist were at one in their belief that the solid

1. John H. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1965, p. 180.

architecture of the theatre hindered development in drama. Both too were attracted by the apparent simplicity and ritual of theatre in the Far East.

But it was the non-realistic dramatists of Europe who had the most obvious influence on early O'Neill and on Wilder. Expressionism originated in Germany partly as a reaction to the earlier naturalism, and resulted in the plays of Wedekind and Kaiser, but it was introduced to O'Neill through the plays of August Strindberg, to whom the American always felt he owed a particular debt because ^{they} opened his eyes to the possibilities of a new kind of drama. O'Neill acknowledged his debt to Strindberg who "carried Naturalism to a logical attainment of such poignant intensity that, . . . we must classify a play like The Dance of Death as 'super-naturalism' . . ." ¹. Like his predecessor, O'Neill was impatient with a realism which showed only the obvious and the mundane:

"The old 'naturalism' – or 'realism' if you prefer . . . no longer applies. It represents our Fathers having aspirations toward self-recognition by holding the family kodak up to ill-nature. But to us their old audacity is blague; we have taken too many snap-shots of each other in every graceless position; we have endured too much from the banality of surfaces. We are ashamed of having peeked through so many keyholes, squinting always at heavy, uninspired bodies – the fat facts – with not a nude spirit among them . . ." ².

Like Strindberg, O'Neill wanted to cut below the surface and from this contemporary of Ibsen's O'Neill learned that new non-realistic stage techniques could be used to convey the new meaning.

A similar dissatisfaction with on-stage realism which hindered truth from being presented lay at the heart of Thornton Wilder's experiments. "I began writing one-act plays", he said, "that tried to capture not verisimilitude but reality." ³ Again like O'Neill,

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1. Eugene O'Neill, "Strindberg and Our Theatre", in O'Neill and His Plays, edited by Oscar Cargil, N. Bryllion Fagin and William J. Fisher, New York, 1964, p. 108.
 2. Ibid., pp. 108–109.
 3. Thornton Wilder, Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Matchmaker, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 11.

Wilder's most immediate inspiration came from Europe. He spent between 1928 and 1930 touring Europe with his sister Isabel, studying stage technique which included the work of Max Reinhardt whose concepts of ensemble acting and modern direction, which encouraged all the theatrical elements to work together, influenced O'Neill as well. In Berlin Wilder saw Bertolt Brecht's plays and later he attempted a collaboration with Brecht on an English adaptation of Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan. In direct contradiction to Stanislavsky's "method" acting, Brecht had developed his theory of alienation aimed at destroying theatrical illusion by various technical methods and thus preventing the audience from becoming emotionally involved in the play. Douglas Wixson argues convincingly that after this period in Europe a radical change took place in Wilder's writing which included many of the rules for epic theatre "including the shattering of dramatic illusion, the conscious role-taking of the actor, the symbolic use of stage properties . . . , the tendency to use parable as a basis of the narrative, the didactic intent, and the episodic structure".¹ The importance Wilder placed on actions being given greater significance through the use of a non-illusory device may well be a reflection of Brecht's dictum that the alienation of "part of the action brings it forward in all its importance, makes it remarkable".²

Nonetheless, we would be doing Wilder a disservice to overstress the Brechtian influence. Certain techniques such as changes in role, the symbolism of stage properties and the didactic purpose are already apparent in the plays contained in the volume The Angel that Troubled the Waters, such as "Proserpina and the Devil". And as Francis Fergusson points out, Wilder's philosophy "is at the opposite pole from Brecht's"³, Wilder's concern being with great old traditional ideas, and a theatre almost devoid of conflict. Burbank claims that Wilder was influenced by Strindberg when he saw his plays in

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1. Douglas Charles Wixson, "The Dramatic Techniques of Thornton Wilder and Bertolt Brecht: A Study in Comparison", Modern Drama, Vol. 15, 1972, p. 124.
 2. Bertolt Brecht, "A Model for Epic Theatre", translated by Eric Bentley, Sewanee Review, July-September, 1949, p. 433.
 3. Francis Fergusson, "Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder and Eliot", Sewanee Review, Vol. 64, Fall, 1956, p. 553.

Germany in 1930¹ but his claim that the results of this can be seen in The Angel plays² can hardly be true as these plays were written before the European trip. Certainly Wilder himself saw his inspiration as having a much earlier derivation, arising from Greek, Elizabethan and Oriental drama. His modest statement about his own style: "I am not an innovator, but a rediscoverer of forgotten goods and I hope a remover of obtrusive bric-a-brac"³, should probably be combined with the more generous statement he made about Gertrude Stein: "... a creative metaphysician [and artist] must always invent his own terms".⁴

The non-realistic plays of both O'Neill and Wilder are, of course, only a part of their total work. In the case of O'Neill many would claim that they are a relatively unimportant part of his total output. His very earliest plays, published under the title Thirst in 1914 and Bound East for Cardiff (1916), were written before he entered G.P. Baker's play-writing course at Harvard. Remote, sardonic and determined to write his own plays not Baker's⁵, the young man nevertheless showed a grasp of the theatre and gained an understanding of dramatic history.⁶ To this he added his own experience of life: an intense childhood spent touring with his heavily drinking actor-father – his drug-taking Catholic mother; a few months spent at Princeton before he was suspended; a variety of jobs including gold-prospecting in Honduras, acting as an ordinary seaman all over the world; acting in and managing his father's company and a spell in a sanatorium. Married three times and, by all accounts, an uninterested father, O'Neill's personal life appeared as dramatic as his public one and it is hardly surprising that critics have pointed to the strongly autobiographical element in his works, especially the final plays.

1. Rex Burbank, Thornton Wilder, New York, 1961, p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 27.

3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 14.

4. Thornton Wilder, introduction to The Geographical History of America; or, The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind, Gertrude Stein, New York, 1936.

5. Jean Gould, Modern American Playwrights, New York, 1966, p. 67.

6. Clifford Leech, O'Neill, London, 1963, p. 10.

At twenty-eight O'Neill was "discovered" by the Provincetown Players and it was in this highly productive period that the first of the non-realistic plays were written. Although some of the earlier plays anticipate his illusionist devices, Before Breakfast for example relying on one character, it is the longer plays which will form the basis of the present discussion: The Emperor Jones (written in 1920); The Hairy Ape (1920); The Great God Brown (1926); Marco Millions (1928); Lazarus Laughed (1928); Strange Interlude (1928); Dynamo (1929) and Days Without End (1934). Because of the limitations of space, certain plays which contain only one or two non-realistic techniques have been omitted such as All God's Chillun Got Wings with its expresionistic set and symbolic mask and The Fountain with its masked figure.

The plays chosen may not be as famous, popular or well-regarded as The Iceman Cometh, A Moon for the Misbegotten or Long Day's Journey into Night, but they make a most interesting study of the thinking of the young playwright and they incorporate some elements which, totally new to the American drama, helped form the basis of later plays by other writers.

By contrast Thornton Niven Wilder's life is apparently unadventurous and stable. But, like O'Neill, his early life, as Burbank¹ suggests, had a continued influence upon his work and these influences were similar to those on O'Neill: a religious family background, an education which emphasized the classical works of literature and widespread travel. There, however, the biographical similarities end. Nine years younger than O'Neill, Wilder graduated from Yale and Princeton and became a teacher and lecturer. Throughout his life, unwilling to reveal personal details but always willing to talk about his works and the theories which lay behind them, Wilder became a respected figure in the avant-garde world of literature, even though his output, compared with O'Neill's, is relatively small. His non-realistic plays were written throughout his career, interspersed with novels and a few realistic dramas as well. This discussion will concentrate on the most obviously illusionist plays of The Angel that Troubled the Waters, namely "Nascuntur Poetae . . .", "Proserpina and the Devil", "Childe Roland to the Dark

1. Burbank, p. 21.

Tower Came", "Centaur", "Leviathan", "And the Sea Shall Give Up its Dead", "Now the Servant's Name was Malchus", "Mozart and the Grey Steward", "Hast Thou Considered My Servant Job?", "The Flight into Egypt" and "The Angel that Troubled the Waters", most of which were written between the time Wilder was sixteen years of age and when he had his first job as a French teacher after graduating, although they were not published until 1928. The three one-act plays published in 1931, The Long Christmas Dinner, The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden and Pullman Car "Hiawatha", will be included as they show important developments in his technique. Finally the three-act Our Town (1935) and The Skin of Our Teeth (1942) reveal Wilder at the height of his skill. As Lucrece (1933) is based on Andre Obey's play Le Viol de Lucrece, it will not form a major part of the present discussion, and it was thought that The Matchmaker contained insufficient non-realistic devices to be considered relevant to this topic. Both Our Century (1947) and "Childhood" (1960) are short plays containing many of the devices used in the earlier major dramas; again restrictions of space suggest that a most suitable course is to refer to these plays to support general comments rather than attempting to deal with both in detail.

In the plays chosen as well as from the authors' comments we see that both dramatists had as their most important aim the desire to manipulate techniques, to use non-realistic devices for the simple paradoxical purpose of thus presenting the truth. The essence of what they hoped to do was no different from any other playwright's intention. The meaning of illusory forms is basic to drama, as Langer identifies in her three stages in the abstraction of form from actuality: "first, the establishment of a realm of illusion by estrangement from actuality; second, the manipulation of the illusion; third, the emergence of 'transparency', that is 'insight into the reality to be expressed' "¹. Certainly the final stage is identical to O'Neill's and Wilder's purpose. All audiences and readers enter into the make-believe of theatre, suspending their disbelief of the impossible and the irrational which all dramatists must use. The basic queries of this

1. B. Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis, New York, 1970, p. 31.

discussion are, however, how effectively O'Neill and Wilder did establish illusion by using unfamiliar techniques and how far they deliberately destroyed the illusion they had established.

The various other aims which underlay the manipulation of these techniques and the success which they achieved will be explored in the following chapters. However, there is one basic principle which is so important in both authors' thinking that it should be outlined here: the desire to wake up the audience and shake it into a new awareness. Again and again the dramatists and critics of the twentieth century had urged writers to free themselves of the constraints and taint of earlier drama and to startle their audiences into new realisations. Brecht, believing that the new scientific age needed a new theatre to represent our reality, cried out against an inadequate realistic, cardboard world which lulled people into staring rather than seeing, and listening rather than hearing. He wanted his theatre of Alienation to allow us to recognise its subject, but at the same time to make it seem unfamiliar. The theatre, he wrote in his "A Short Organum for the Theatre", must "amaze its public, and it achieves this by a technique of making the familiar seem strange".¹ Antonin Artaud believed that the twentieth century had lost the idea of theatre which had turned into mere diversion: "... it is certain we need above all a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart".² Baensch in an article written in 1923 said that "the function of art is not to give the percipient any kind of pleasure, however noble, but to acquaint him with something he has not known before".³

This aim lay behind all of O'Neill's experiments. Supremely conscious that the age had its unique problems, and that it lacked adequate language and significant symbols to express this, O'Neill's intention was nothing less than to formulate new methods to help audiences become aware of early twentieth century forces. His letter to George Jean Nathan regarding Dynamo explained his aim as being to:

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1. Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in Playwrights on Playwriting: The Meaning and Making of Modern Drama from Ibsen to Ionesco, edited by Toby Cole, New York, 1960, p. 89.
 2. Antonin Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, translated by Mary Caroline Richards, New York, 1958, p. 84.
 3. Langer, p. 19.

" . . . dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it - the death of the old God and 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. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays . . . " ¹

Not only was this to be a "big work", O'Neill did not flinch from using the most unusual and sometimes uncomfortable methods in his new approach. Audiences, according to Shaw, whose Quintessence of Ibsenism O'Neill was familiar with, would be held by an interesting play even if the play was full of long speeches and lasted more than two hours. In 1923 when Shaw was working on the lengthy Back to Methuselah, O'Neill had started the nine-act Strange Interlude:

"I will not 'stay put' ", he told Nathan, "in any comfortable niche and play the leave-well-enough-alone game. God stiffen it, I am young yet and I mean to grow! And in this faith I live: That if I have the 'guts' to ignore the megaphone men and what goes with them, to follow the dream and live for that alone, then my real significant bit of truth, and the ability to express it, will be conquered in time - not tomorrow nor the next day nor any near, easily-attained period, but after the struggle has been long enough and hard enough to merit victory." ²

Wilder was not quite so defiant, but he too felt that he had something important to say and was looking for new methods which would stimulate his audiences. He was aware that the structure of a work of art would carry the creator's intention and although, in the case of a play, the dramatist would be absent, nonetheless the author's statement should be clear to the audience "in the unfolding of the idea through the

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1. Robert F. Whitman, "O'Neill's Search for a Language of the Theatre", in O'Neill, A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by John Gassner, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 142.
 2. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, New York, 1962, p. 429.

selection of episodes and speeches".¹ Wilder believed that there was an important distinction to be drawn between the novel and the play. Because a novel takes place in the past and events are usually narrated by one person, the novelist can interfere by supplying further facts, pointing the moral and emphasising the significance of the action. By contrast a play takes place in the present and "visibly represents pure existing".² What it gains through increased vitality it loses through the absence of a narrator. Wilder, however, wishing to have the best of both worlds, used both conventions by introducing a narrator in the form of a Stage Manager or character who stood back from the play and instructed (albeit gently) the audience.

Asked in 1957 about the purpose of drama, Wilder replied that most dramatists wanted to teach: "... all the greatest dramatists, except the greatest one, have precisely employed the stage to convey a moral or religious point of view concerning the action The Greek tragic poets wrote for edification, admonition, and even for our political education. The comic tradition in the theatre carries the intention of exposing folly and curbing excess".³ Nonetheless, Wilder admitted with humour in the same interview that his own didactic intentions were stronger than he would have wished, although his struggle with this resulted in such over-compensation that readers had found Our Town both a comfort and too hard to endure: "I've spent a large part of life trying to sit on [the didactic element], to keep it down. The pages and pages I've had to tear up. I think the struggle with it may have brought a certain kind of objectivity into my work". Certainly the characters and events of Our Town seem to be viewed as through a telescope, but the message is given to us by the Stage Manager clearly and forcibly. We know we are looking at a make-believe world, but, by making us aware of what we are doing, the author hoped we would also see the truth that lies within it.

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1. Thornton Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting", in Perspectives on Drama, edited by James Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver, New York, 1968, p. 13.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Richard H. Goldstone, "The Art of Fiction: Thornton Wilder", Paris Review, Vol. 15, Winter 1956, pp. 46-7.

CHAPTER 2

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAYS

The Emperor Jones, the first of O'Neill's non-realistic plays, is a masterpiece of powerful compression. A short play of eight scenes, it builds an atmosphere of terror that explodes with the revolver shot which, at the end of the seventh scene, destroys Jones. O'Neill revelled in the non-illusory nature of this play, most of it a monodrama which projects Jones' inner anxiety through action like the personification of The Little Formless Fears that creep onto the stage in Act Two: "If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again"¹, and the racial memory of Negro slave transportation on board ships as Jones regresses through the past sufferings of his race. Jones, or more accurately, the thoughts in Jones' mind, have become a symbol for the American Negroes' experience, but more significantly the action of the play touches on more archetypal fears of man's loneliness and terror as he is gradually stripped of the superficial trappings of society.

The play is organised as carefully as any well-made realistic play, with the non-realistic devices adding an extra dimension. In a detailed description of the first scene Tornqvist argues that the opening pages embody the story of the play. Thus in the same way that Jones is later confronted with two hostile forces in the forest, so the woman is caught between Jones the feared black man and Smithers, the feared white man. There are other significant parallels between the woman and Jones: both wear similarly coloured clothes and handkerchiefs, she hesitates before leaving the palace as he hesitates before entering the forest, both are brought to a cowering position and both finally appeal to a higher authority. Tornqvist's argument is persuasive; nonetheless these are mere suggestions which serve to heighten

1. Eugene O'Neill, Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, Desire Under the Elms, Bristol, 1960, p. 114.

the following action without our probably even being conscious of the parallels. Virgil Geddes' complaint that the rest of the play is merely repetitive fails to acknowledge the growth of the play:

"The first scene is excellent and opens dramatic rhythms, but the play does not continue to open; rather it closes in, and repeats through seven more scenes what was adequately conveyed in the first scene."¹

A similar objection is voiced by Louis Sheaffer:

"If the play has a fault, it is predictability: once Jones has fired at the Little Formless Fears, vague creatures writhing up from the ground, the pattern is set, the course of the story is evident."²

Predictability as such, as the author of Oedipus Rex knew, never ruined a play. On the contrary, the predictability (and after all, although we feel Jones is doomed, the actual method of his destruction still carries some element of surprise), helps give the play its remarkably intense atmosphere. O'Neill employs a number of effects which contribute to the development of the play. The actual space is viewed as through a camera lens, each scene focussing on more specific detail. The first scene of the Emperor's palace is "spacious" and "high-ceilinged"³, the room bare and whitewashed with the hills still safely in the distance. Scene Two takes place at the end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The following scenes are set in the Forest with the massed blackness of the trees behind, the stage representing an ever smaller area as the forest walls begin to shrink, and the limbs of the trees meet to form a low ceiling about five feet from the ground and the ropes of creepers reach upward "to entwine the tree trunks".⁴ Scene Seven presents only the foot of a gigantic tree. It is interesting to note that in spite of the above instructions in the play, Jig Cook who

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1. Virgil Geddes, The Melodramadness of Eugene O'Neill, Brookfield, 1934, p. 20.
 2. Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill, Son and Artist, London, 1973, p. 30.
 3. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 97.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

constructed the dome set for the first performance of the play by the Provincetown Players said: "There is to be no argument about this. I've had enough from everybody. The Emperor has got to have a dome. You see, Edna, it begins . . . thick forest at first . . . steadily thinned out . . . scene after scene . . . to pure space".¹ This conclusion seems to contradict the growing claustrophobic atmosphere reflected not only in the use of space but the movement from sunlight to nightfall and the eerie moon-light.

Nonetheless, the point of the organisation of the play is that O'Neill used true episodic structure to reflect his theme of the regression through fear to the primitive state. Travis Bogard sees a number of parallels between The Emperor Jones and Peer Gynt, both plays dealing with fugitives, both ex-"Emperors", whose flights lead them to face various Fears and eventually result in the discovery of their own emptiness. The monologue, the symbol of the silver bullet which acts as talisman, even the episodic structure of the play all owe a debt to Ibsen's play. Nonetheless, The Emperor Jones is an original work, "the first major drama of the new American theatre"² which achieves a concentration of dramatic power through the manipulation of the underlying effects of tom-tom, light, space and time on the expanding vision of fear. The theory of drama which Virgil Geddes tries to impose on O'Neill's plays: (" . . . but few of his plays reveal any imagination as to the subtler possibilities of the dramatic form . . . One idea is not enough for a play. A drama is the play of several ideas, facts, theories of thought and emotion. Again and again he fastens on one idea and drives it home with unmerciful din and repetition"³), simply crumbles into insignificance when one considers that even if The Emperor Jones breaks rules, it nonetheless works powerfully in the theatre.

Similar complaints, that O'Neill was writing outlines without giving body to his plays, that the technique overwhelmed the substance, were levelled at most of the

1. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 31.

2. Travis Bogard, Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, New York, 1972, p. 137.

3. Geddes, p. 13.

non-realistic dramas. Dynamo, almost the last of O'Neill's experimental plays, was the target for Virgil Geddes' similar complaints: "Thunder, dynamo and man himself roar melodramatically . . . through the shopworn dialogue . . . In the fullest definition, Dynamo is a romantic outline. The details on which the main labour is spent would occupy barely a corner in a play of warm blood".¹ But the point is that O'Neill did not intend to write a play of warm blood. Selecting various details such as the dynamo itself which broods like a pagan idol over the last act, O'Neill wanted to shock his audience into a recognition of the new god of technology of the day. The power house assumes enormous symbolic proportions, ("the Great Mother - big and warm"² , a "Hindu idol"³, an instrument of Lucifer, "the God of Electricity"⁴, and the forces of the id) all of which dwarf the human characters, especially the main one, Reuben, who becomes a little boy before this massive symbol. Barrett Clark's comment about Dynamo: ("Judged as it must finally be judged, as a work of art, it fails because it remains at best little more than the skeleton of a magnificent effort, like the bare outlines of the two houses in the stage setting"⁵), falls into the same trap of using criteria of art and attempting to force the definition on the play rather than recognising that O'Neill deliberately spent most of his effort on certain significant details. If the play's structure is to be criticised perhaps it should be for the rather lengthy build-up of the first two acts which establish rather insistently what motivates the characters in the preceding year and a half through the conflict between the two houses and the soliloquies which reveal the conflict within the characters' own minds. At this stage the symbolism of thunder and lightning are still realistic effects setting the atmosphere for realistic dramatic action. Thus there are two areas where we are uneasy in our response to Dynamo, firstly with the emotional tensions of the first two acts

1. Ibid., p. 24.

2. Eugene O'Neill, The Great God Brown and the Fountain, The Dreamy Kid, Before Breakfast, together with Lazarus Laughed and Dynamo, London, 1960, p. 83.

3. Ibid., p. 93.

4. Ibid., p. 28.

5. Barrett Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays, New York, 1947, p. 122.

which prepare us for an earlier climax, and secondly with the rather abrupt movement from realism to symbolism between the second and third acts.

Dynamo may have escaped most critics' charge that it was too long but other plays have fared less well, predictably Strange Interlude and Lazarus Laughed. Strangely, Marco Millions is attacked by Barrett Clark: "I believe that if it had been reduced to five or six scenes, acted on a revolving stage without intermission and turned into a dramatic ballet with dancing, music, pantomime and dialogue, it would have been a perfect thing of its kind".¹ One wonders what Clark thought "its kind" was. Classified by Travis Bogard together with The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape and Lazarus Laughed as "a journey play, told in a number of scenes and centring on the travels of its hero"², this picaresque play centres on Marco's spiritual degeneration, from being a sensitive youth who wrote poetry inspired by love, to ending up a crass middle-aged burgher concerned only with making money. Behind his development we see the constant, wise Kublai with his delicate daughter Little Flower who finally dies for love, but whose glass coffin we see in the Prologue so that the play has actually followed a cyclic pattern, ending where it began. Unlike the wandering picaresque novels, this play is finely wrought with its stylized duplicates and parallels. Although it was originally written as two full-length plays to be performed consecutively, O'Neill did in fact condense it.

In 1932, H. G. Kemelman launched an attack on O'Neill's plays, claiming: "O'Neill's plot structure reveals a total lack of dramatic sense".³ Like Barrett Clark, he goes on to pontificate: "The drama, because of its temporal and mechanical limitations, is a medium for the expression of swift, forceful, and animated action. In O'Neill the action consists almost entirely of a lumbering analysis of the obsessed and even insane minds of the characters in his plays." The sheer dramatic impact and powerful action of The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape make nonsense of his claim that O'Neill lacked dramatic sense, and suggest that the length and organisation of the

1. Ibid., p. 110.

2. Bogard, Contour, p. 256.

3. H. G. Kemelman, "Eugene O'Neill and the Highbrow Melodrama", Bookman, Vol. 75, September 1932, p. 487.

longer plays were deliberate experiments in a new form. Oddly enough the monologues of Strange Interlude represent a move in the opposite direction from the symbolic expressionism of the earlier plays. O'Neill still wanted to project characters' thoughts but, instead of relying on more visual methods of personifying fears, allowing the set to represent thoughts and atmosphere, and simply permitting the actors' facial expressions to convey inner feelings, he now put into words the underlying motivation of his characters. The most obvious result of this was that the play was very long. Critics were upset but George Jean Nathan had fun defending O'Neill: "A certain critic finds that his netherlands become weary after sitting out the play and hence confounds his netherland with his cerebrum which, in his case is largely indistinguishable from it. Art is thus estimated not in terms of mental pleasure but of physical comfort . . ."¹ But the second result was that O'Neill frequently lost what he had originally sought through his representational plays: an invitation to the audience to imaginatively participate. By giving his viewers too much information he lost their interest, and critic after critic complains that the lack of compression leads to anti-climax, and grumbles that half the asides could have been cut without damaging the play. The novel-like development which O'Neill was after was simply too much with all the other visual clues and oral interpretations provided for the audience. Significantly Strange Interlude seems to fare better with readers than with audiences. When O'Neill introduced the device again in his next play, Dynamo, it was used far less frequently.

Lazarus Laughed, O'Neill's grandiose play "for an Imaginative Theatre" which even the author described as being "damned far from any category. It has no plot of any sort as one knows plot"², inevitably brought out the critics' objections about poor organisation. Clark again: "Like most converts to a new idea, O'Neill is not content to state, he must reiterate and hammer away until the densest listener understands what he is driving at. Half the choruses of Lazarus should be cut, and a great many of

1. George Jean Nathan, "The Case of O'Neill", American Mercury, Vol. 13, April 1928, p. 502.

2. Bogard, Contour, p. 280.

Lazarus' lines; there is little development in the play, which is over-written; in spots it is even somewhat bombastic".¹ The word "understands" is probably the key to the misinterpretation of Clark and his fellow critics. Macgowan, in his Continental Stagecraft, had described the first attempts to escape from realistic theatre as "gargantuan"². Reinhardt and MacKaye had conceived a magnificent theatre summed up in Gordon Craig's vision:

"I see a great building to seat many thousands of people. At one end rises a platform of heroic size on which figures of a heroic mold shall move. The scene shall be such as the world shows us, not as our own particular little street shows us. The movements of these scenes shall be noble and great: all shall be illuminated by a light such as the spheres give us, not such as the footlights give us, but such as we dream of."³

This was the vision which lay behind Lazarus. O'Neill did not want a rational, logical play; the very basis of the story, the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection, is irrational, and O'Neill wanted the joy and intensity of the main character's emotions to permeate the play. The chants of the chorus are not intended to inform the audience or advance the action; rather they are to reinforce the atmosphere in the same way that Lazarus' laughter and motif – "There is no death" – are part of a ritual which emphasizes O'Neill's dramatic meaning. The broad strokes with which the characters are painted, the repetition and the sound are all designed to provoke a deeper, unconscious response as O'Neill suggested in an enthusiastic letter to Macgowan after he wrote the play in 1926:

"... I know of no-one who can play 'Lazarus' at all – the lead, I mean. Who can we get to laugh as one would laugh who had completely lost, even from the depths of the unconscious, all traces of

1. Clark, pp. 118–119.

2. Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmond Jones, Continental Stagecraft, London, 1923, p. 160.

3. Ibid.

the Fear of Death?"¹

O'Neill may have challenged traditional playing time with Strange Interlude, but more often he accepted the conventional framework and developed his own time schemes within this. The earliest plays are short, The Emperor Jones covering a mere twelve to fourteen hours, and The Hairy Ape seven weeks. The middle period of O'Neill's non-realistic writing saw generally increased time spans with The Great God Brown (eighteen years), Marco Millions (twenty-three years) and Strange Interlude (twenty-seven years), although Dynamo (nineteen months) returned to the shorter period which O'Neill condensed even further in his later plays. This analysis of chronological time, however, gives no sense of the feeling of time conveyed within the plays. Often the plays are detached from settings in time and space, the sinister limbo of The Emperor Jones for example, providing a backdrop for flashed scenes set in different periods such as the Negroes in the chain-gang or the auctioneer and slaves in the 1850s. This pattern is common in O'Neill's non-realistic plays, the larger over-all time span giving way to smaller cycles and incidents which are given heightened significance because of their vast background. In Strange Interlude, for example, the interlude itself stretches over a couple of decades, but as the characters steadily age (not strictly realistically as Bogard points out) certain moments are selected and presented to us. What is unusual about these moments is that many are expanded, so that a monologue which represents a few seconds of thought is isolated and held against the background of twenty-seven years. The effect achieved in Moeller's production where action was frozen during the asides was of "eddy moments in time, small pools of feeling set out of the main current of narrative in an extraordinary counterpoint of movement and stasis, of time and timelessness, of sound and silence".²

In the end the moments filled with emotion are as unimportant as the total span, which is dismissed by Nina at the end as nothing more than a strange dark interlude.

1. Bogard, Contour, p. 280.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

The timeless quality of many of O'Neill's plays (The Hairy Ape for example, which in spite of some critics' belief that it has a strong contemporary social message, is subtitled "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life") is helped by the smaller cycles of the day, especially the night, and of the seasons which control the atmosphere. The Great God Brown, starts with a moonlight setting and finishes at dusk, most of the intervening scenes being set at night or at dusk so that the strange, moonlit atmosphere dominates the eighteen years. Most of the acts of Strange Interlude are set in late summer or fall, many in the late afternoon or evening. Lazarus Laughed is very carefully organized, starting at twilight, progressing through late evening, night, midnight, two in the morning and dawn. As the climax approaches, the time lapses between the scenes shorten, the divisions between early scenes involving months passing but the scenes in acts three and four taking place "a few days later", "immediately after", "a while after", and finally, "dawn of the same night".¹ O'Neill had used a similar speeding up process in Dynamo, early gaps involving the passing of years but the division in the last act between Scenes One and Two involving no time lapse at all.

The use of counterpoint time sequences is reflected in other aspects of the structure of the plays. Like many other O'Neill dramas, The Hairy Ape is built on a contrast of the broad, universal picture and the specific, compressed moment which takes on symbolic qualities. Deliberately O'Neill asks for generalized backgrounds, the cells of the prison "disappear in the dark background as if they ran on, numberless, into infinity".² The men in the stokehole are identically Neanderthal, all civilized white races represented, but "except for the slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, eyes, all these men are alike".³ The rhythmic mechanical recurrence of the throbbing beat of the engines, the background chorus of voices, the procession of gaudy marionettes all suggest the ongoing nature of the suffocating situation in which Yank finds himself. This large background is contrasted with the compressed images, the cramped

1. O'Neill, Brown, p. 7.

2. Eugene O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings, London, 1960, p. 172.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

space in the bowels of the ship with a ceiling which "crushes down upon men's heads"¹; Mildred Douglas, incongruous and artificial against the background of the vivid life of the sea, trapped by her own wealth, bored by her own anaemia, the gorilla in its cage in the last scene, Yank himself, representing the most highly developed individual in the stokehole, symbolically crushed throughout the play and finally crushed to death by the gorilla.

The contrasts here are examples of a number of polarities within the play: the commercial, artificial city where people are mechanized compared with life abroad the sailing ships where men were at one with the sun and the wind; the rich bored Mildred painted and dressed in white contrasted with the powerful, animal-like Yank covered in coal dust; the romantic past which Paddy remembers contrasted with the depressing present. Similar antitheses appear in most of the O'Neill plays: male and female in Strange Interlude (Bogard even suggests that the four men really represent partial aspects of a whole male personality²); two different types of female in Dynamo – the murmuring, soft, motherly, protective, sentimental and the coarse, vituperative and clanging; the two different aspects of one character in The Great God Brown, one outgoing, handsome, likeable, successful and assured, the other "dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately super-sensitive".³ Lazarus Laughed is actually built on the paradox of death leading to life, the main character growing progressively younger during the play.

O'Neill employed these contrasts for more than theatrical effect. Sometimes, of course, the use of extreme opposites enabled O'Neill to show dramatically that one was good and the other evil, that one way was desirable compared to its opposite. This is true of Paddy's sea compared with the modern stokehole life, and illustrates the goodness of Lazarus compared with the barbarity of Caligula. The use of contrasts enables O'Neill to give the impression that he is covering a vast spectrum of life and death, that he is exploring emotions ranging from extreme joy to equally extreme

1. Ibid.

2. Bogard, Contour, p. 304.

3. O'Neill, Brown, p. 11.

despair and that he is looking broadly at different kinds of characters and different aspects of individuals. The difference between characters such as Yank and Mildred also gives the necessary conflict to the drama: Yank's dissatisfaction with his life is realized only when he comes into contrast with his opposite.

Interestingly the characters are more than opposites, they are also, sometimes, strikingly similar. Both Yank and Mildred, proud representatives of their kind, fail to belong. Both attempt to resolve their alienation by "going back", Mildred to the stokehole of her grandfather's ship, Yank to the zoo and the gorilla. Both fail. Further similarities, as Tornqvist has pointed out, are even more subtle. Mildred is identified with a leopard which has been removed from the jungle¹: the leopard image is transferred visually to Yank when his fellow stokers admonish him to wash off the dirt or it will make spots on him like a leopard, something he neglects to do. When removed from his jungle of the stokehole, his "spots" make him conspicuous as Mildred had predicted.

Similar parallels are seen in other plays. We have already discussed the similarity between Jones and the Negress in the first scene of the Emperor Jones. There are also points of comparison between the black Jones and the white Smithers, both being motivated by baser urges under a thin veneer of civilization. The duplicates and parallel scenes of Marco Millions have a similar social theme. Marco carries handbags "which curiously resemble modern sample cases"². The universal application of the theme not only to us but to all people is stressed further by the repetition of setting. Scene four, for example, is an "exact duplicate of the last except that here the locale is Indian"³, with all the action being repeated in mime. These parallel characters and situations then partly give dramatic unity to the plays, (a similar effect often being achieved by the structure of dramas such as The Great God Brown where beginnings and endings form parallels), but more importantly, they stress how we are

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1. Egil Tornqvist, A Drama of Souls: Studies in O'Neill's Super-Naturalistic Technique, Uppsala, 1968, p. 220.
 2. Eugene O'Neill, Marco Millions, London, 1930, p. 228.
 3. Ibid., p. 234.

all linked and caught in the same situation. The details which show differences, furthermore, become more significant.

"Rhythm", according to John Henry Raleigh¹, was one of the key words in O'Neill's vocabulary by which he generally meant the alternation of scene and mood, the transition from one emotional climate to another, temporal duration, and verbal repetition. Verbal repetition of key words or phrases such as "laugh" in Lazarus Laughed, repetition of sound such as the background tom-tom of The Great God Brown, of incident and staging as we have seen in Marco Millions gave order to the plays as well as stressing significant action. Some critics felt that O'Neill overdid his repetition. Hildegard Hawthorne, for example, an early reviewer of The Hairy Ape, wrote:

"The repetition of bits of stage direction also becomes wearisome. Seven or eight times we are told, in identical words, 'Repeating the words after him as one with cynical mockery - (here a word, law, love, God etc.) - the word has a brazen metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns. It is followed by a chorus of hard, barking laughter'. Three times on a single page of this is too much for endurance, and is certainly too much for effect."²

What may appear wearisome on the page, however, may appear effective on the stage. Horst Frenz, although critical of O'Neill's "repetitiousness and prolixity"³, does concede that "This is more apparent when one reads the plays, and if the tempo of the performance is at certain times stepped up, as it was in Heinz Hilpert's production of Strange Interlude in Berlin in 1929, the repetitiousness can produce an effectively persistent rhythm".⁴ Rhythm, order, a sense of aesthetic completeness are all important results of these reiterations, especially when viewed against the broader

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1. John Henry Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill and the Escape from the Chateau d'If", in O'Neill, ed. Gassner, p. 17.
 2. Hildegard Hawthorne, "The Art of Eugene O'Neill", New York Times, August 13, 1922, p. 7.
 3. Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill", New York, 1971, p. 56.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

contrasts and polarities of the plays. Furthermore, as Raleigh points out, the repeated incantations give human experience in most of the plays "an almost ritualistic flavour, as if explosive and anarchistic emotional forces unleashed could somehow be ordered and controlled by repeated incantations".¹ Finally the use of certain motifs affects the audiences emotionally. Objections that repetitions are superfluous ignore one of O'Neill's basic purposes which Tornqvist and Doris Alexander agree is "to affect his audience emotionally, to speak directly to the unconscious".²

O'Neill has come in for extensive criticism for the endings of his plays. Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, for example, claimed that the ending of The Emperor Jones was "too direct, too simple, too expected; it is a little disappointing to a European with his complex background to see the arrow strike the target toward which he has watched it speeding all the while".³ One wonders what other ending the play could have had; the force which sweeps one along is so great that a certain ending is inevitable from the start and surely dissatisfaction would have come from a "happy" ending.

Artificially happy endings are the complaint of H. G. Kemelman⁴. In an odd argument he accuses Lazarus Laughed and The Great God Brown of ending happily in spite of the deaths of the main characters. The final scenes arouse in fact far more complex emotions than this. The re-establishment of ordinary life in Brown not only completes the play aesthetically by suggesting a return to the beginning (and here we must disagree with Gabriel Gilbert that the epilogue is merely "a sentimental and dissolving repetition"⁵) but is also to some extent cathartic, a relief after the storm and suffering preceding it. Lazarus, of course, has to be killed to prove that death can be overcome, but the last depressing lines of the play are given to Caligula: "Forgive me,

1. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 176.

2. Tornqvist, A Drama of Souls, p. 193.

3. Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, "Eugene O'Neill", in Theatre in the Twentieth Century, edited by Robert W. Corrigan, New York, 1961, p. 130.

4. Kemelman, p. 490.

5. Gabriel W. Gilbert, "The Great God Brown", in O'Neill and His Plays, eds. Cargill et al, p. 176.

Lazarus! Men forget!"¹ There is a similar cathartic effect in Strange Interlude which Kemelman downgrades as a conventional melodrama with the lovers "living happily ever after".² This ending is one of O'Neill's most satisfying, the last act being pervaded by the mood of late afternoon of a day in early fall where Nina finally finds the peace with Marsden which she lost when Gordon appeared, and admits that the afternoons with Darrell and all that followed merely formed a strange interlude in life. The title has already alerted us to the possible conclusion.

Yet other critics urge O'Neill to melodramatic endings by wanting on-stage deaths. Heywood Broun writes: "We cannot understand just why he has allowed the Emperor to die to the sound of off-stage shots. It is our idea that he should have come crawling to the spot where he meets his death and that the natives should be molding silver bullets there and waiting without so much as stretching out a finger for him".³ But the play intended to show that it was Jones' archetypal fears which were responsible for his destruction, not the Negroes. An on-stage death would have been simply too dramatic and would have overwhelmed the significance of this point. The same is true of Lazarus Laughed: a realistic death performed in full view of the audience would have destroyed the mystical triumph of a death which was not a death. Kenneth Macgowan wrote of the Provincetown Players' production of Jones that the denouement, with its off-stage death, had a "true and untheatrical power".⁴

A death which we do witness is Yank's in The Hairy Ape. O'Neill had problems deciding how this play should end; originally he planned to return Yank to the stokehole where his failure to belong would leave him alienated. As Bogard points out, "Such an ending would have thrown the play inevitably back into the realistic context of the first four scenes, bringing the same sense of return to normalcy after a strange

1. O'Neill, Brown, p. 150.

2. Ibid.

3. Heywood Broun, "The Emperor Jones", in O'Neill and His Plays, eds. Cargill et al, p. 146.

4. Kenneth Macgowan, "The Emperor Jones", Theatre Arts Anthology, edited by Rosamond Gilder, Hermine Rich Isaacs, Robert MacGregor, Edward Reed, New York, 1950, p. 592.

psychic voyage that the final scene of The Emperor Jones achieves".¹ This would simply not have suited the expressionistic mode of the play. Oscar Cargill believes that the actual ending which O'Neill finally wrote was ludicrous: "Apparently no-one has had the courage to say that the very conception of Yank shaking hands with the gorilla, and then, crushed and dying from the animal's embrace, addressing the audience as a circus barker . . . is hopelessly absurd. The curtain saves the play from laughter".² Yet Yank's grim humour is a characteristic throughout the play and Cargill himself is still evaluating the play from a realistic point of view. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the ending is slightly uncomfortable, partly because the symbolic significance of the gorilla, found in the same attitude as Rodin's "Thinker" is unclear. Nor could it be assured that the audience would recognize the final meaning of Yank's death which is contained in O'Neill's final stage instruction but is not translated into action: "And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs".³ Bogard suggests, however, that the very ambiguity of the ending is what O'Neill aimed to achieve, as the playwright wrote in a letter to Theresa Helburn:

" . . I think we are all a bit sick of answers that don't answer. The Hairy Ape, at least faces the simple truth that, being what we are, and with any significant spiritual change for the better in us probably ten thousand years away, there just is no answer . . ." ⁴

Again in Marco Millions the death of Kukachin is a point of contention. H. G. Kemelman, apparently forgetting that the play commences with her death, and that the following action which traces developments starting twenty-three years earlier is perceived with our knowledge of the eventual outcome, writes: "The death of the princess is in no way necessary to the completion of the plot. It is literary 'lagniappe' which spoils the play but wrings another tear from the audience".⁵

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1. Bogard, Contour, p. 244.
 2. Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America: Ideas on the March, New York, 1941, p. 338.
 3. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 189.
 4. Bogard, Contour, p. 251.
 5. Kemelman, p. 488.

The real ending of the play is, however, the inventive Epilogue where Marco Polo is illuminated by the house lights sitting in the front row of the auditorium. Unaware of the unusual he walks without self-consciousness to the lobby and "stolid with the dignity of one who is sure of his place in the world"¹ he drives off in a luxurious limousine. As Edwin Engel points out there is a bitter irony here: the thirteenth century merchant who can destroy something as lovely as the Chinese princess is still with us, still confident that his materialistic values will be triumphant. The satirical comment is perhaps even more subtle. The barrier between proscenium arch and auditorium has been broken, and by seating Marco Polo among the audience O'Neill may well have been suggesting that we all have some of his values within us.

O'Neill struggled with the ending of Days Without End, changing it with each version of the play. According to Sheaffer, in the first draft the hero killed himself; "in the next one, without accepting Christ as the Son of God, he saw Him as a symbol of suffering humanity; in yet another, when the hero's wife died, he ended cursing God".² His final decision, the hero finally turning to God and his wife recovering, pleased neither the critics nor the author himself. O'Neill told friends that he regarded it as false to himself and declared that he intended to revise it, a task he never actually attempted. John Raleigh describes the ending as "wildly improbable"³, while Doris Falk regards it as inconsistent and melodramatic: "John's return to the faith constitutes a withdrawal from life, and no amount of protestation in the form of stage symbolism nor of exclamatory affirmation can convince us otherwise".⁴ And yet, although one is hesitant about disagreeing with two such distinguished critics and with the author himself, especially as the play is one which promotes feelings of uneasiness in the reader, the ending can be defended. Jung expressed the view on many occasions that religion can help unify the divided and therefore disintegrated

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1. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 304.
 2. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 410.
 3. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 137.
 4. Doris Falk, "The Way Out: The Many Endings of Days Without End", in Cargil et al, p. 421.

personality. "Man", he writes, "has always stood in need of the spiritual help which each individual's own religion held out to him. The opening up of the unconscious" (which we can translate as the artificial division between John and Loving) "always means the outbreak of intense spiritual suffering" (with which the bulk of the play is concerned). If the individual comes to some kind of self-realization, uniting the unconscious and conscious forces, he may regard the crisis which has precipitated the healing as a religious experience: "It is as though, at the culmination of the illness, the destructive powers were converted into healing forces. This is brought about by the fact that the archetypes come to independent life and serve as spiritual guides for the personality, thus supplanting the inadequate ego with its futile willing and striving. As the religious-minded person would say: guidance has come from God".¹ O'Neill, the former Catholic, may not have been happy with this ending and we may have been so dissatisfied with the "purring"² Father Baird and his prodigal son as to wish destruction on all of the characters, but in terms of human development the ending is perfectly probable.

1. C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, London, 1973, pp. 278-9.

2. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 137.

As already mentioned in the first chapter, Thornton Wilder used the structure of his plays to present his ideas. Aware that the present tense of a play ("On the stage it is always now: the personages are standing on that razor-edge, between the past and the future, which is the essential character of conscious being; the words are arising to their lips in immediate spontaneity"¹), gave tension and a sense of destiny to all drama, Wilder in many cases avoided the more obvious conflict designed to arouse the audience's interest. Yet the fascination he managed to provoke is reflected in Edward Sheldon's letter after Wilder had read him Our Town:

"You broke every rule. There is no suspense, no relationship between the acts, no progress; but every seven minutes – no, every five minutes – you've supplied a new thing – some novelty – in the proceedings, which is at once a pleasure in the experience, and, at the same time, a contribution to the content of the play. Most plays progress in time, but here is progression in depth."²

The lack of traditional plot is seen in Wilder's first attempt at playwriting, the vignettes collected under the title of The Angel That Troubled the Waters. Possibly influenced by Strindberg's belief that every beginner should write one good scene rather than attempt a full length play³, Wilder wrote a series of playlets which were supposed to last three minutes and which he claimed "satisfied my passion for compression".⁴ This concentration on a moment, on a significant episode was continued in the later plays, movement often being in jerks rather than through smooth development. Brecht urged that the episodes should be knotted together in such a way that the knots were easily noticed. Wilder obviously agreed with this, interposing Stage Managers and breaking the action through various alienation techniques (techniques which he was using even before he met Brecht), introducing sudden

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1. Goldstone, p. 46.
 2. Eric Wollencott Barnes, the Man Who Lived Twice: The Biography of Edward Sheldon, New York, 1956, p. 220.
 3. August Strindberg, "On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre", in Playwrights on Playwriting: The Meaning and Making of Modern Drama from Ibsen to Ionesco, edited by Toby Cole, New York, 1960, p. 17.
 4. Thornton Wilder, The Angel That Troubled the Waters and Other Plays, London, 1928, p. vii.

changes between the real and the surreal, for example in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and "Mozart and The Grey Steward" where a place or character suddenly represents Death.

Nonetheless, what really concerned Wilder was the cyclic nature of the universe and the similarity of people's reactions and emotions throughout time, a theme which is reflected in the governing unifying effects which provide the background to the episodes. Pullman Car "Hiawatha", for example, may be broken by the Stage Manager's interruptions, and the focus moves onto different compartments, but it is linked by the journey of the train, the passage through life. The trivial concerns of most of the characters are related to a larger cosmological and metaphysical framework through the introduction of characters representing the hours, the planets and the Archangels.

Our Town, jumping from the scenes of two junior high school students making a commitment to one another, to their wedding day, to Emily's death in three consecutive acts, all orchestrated by the Stage Manager, is nonetheless carefully linked, the three acts of the play representing Daily Life, Love and Marriage, and Death. Going about their ordinary lives, the characters make constant reference to birth and death, to life and marriage. The birth and death polarity is most obvious when Emily dies in childbirth, but there have been many references before this to both states: Dr. Gibbs has delivered twins at the beginning of the play; a number of babies have begun "talking regular sentences"¹ according to the Stage Manager at the beginning of act Two; even the chickens' need for incubators is mentioned; on the other hand Doc Gibbs' death is referred to in Act One as is Joe Crowell's. Even Professor Willard's mention of fossils reminds us of death. Helmut Papajewski² points to an interesting development in terms of the theme of communication and separation. In Act One the Gibbs and Webbs live separate, self-contained lives, their houses symbolized by separate tables and chairs, but in Act Two they are linked by the wedding of their children, the aisle leading to the altar symbolizing their bond. But

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 50.

2. Helmut Papajewski, Thornton Wilder, New York, 1968, pp. 102-3.

death causes separation in the third Act where the rows of chairs indicating graves dominate one side of the stage. The theme is further emphasized by having the hymn with its significant title "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds" played or sung four times.

Yet another thread which runs through the play and connects the episodes, placing the ordinary characters and events in the broader perspective pointed to in Jane Crofut's envelope where she is placed in a universal context, is the simple bond of friendship and routine of family life which takes on greater significance in Acts Two and Three and becomes, according to Rex Burbank, an objective correlative "for humanistic and theological perspectives"¹, the love and marriage of George and Emily symbolizing "the universal rite uniting nature's physical and spiritual forces; and, in Act Three, Emily's death and brief return [representing] the apotheosis of life in its spiritual essence".² With all these links and references, the last act, to be played according to Wilder "without lugubriousness"³ is expected, and it is difficult to agree with John Mason Brown that "this last act, which has death as its subject, has always been a disappointment. Its chill is inescapable; its words too colloquial; its ideas too small".⁴ For most of us, the microcosmic simplicity of the understated characters and statements gives an extra, personal quality to the broader symbolism.

Wilder spoke warmly in an introduction to Sophocles' Oedipus the King of the triumph of the play's construction and the masterly combination of "large-scale draughtsmanship and specific detail".⁵ It is a description which could fit The Skin of our Teeth. Apparently disjointed, especially in time, the play is bound firstly by the Antrobus family itself in its struggle against nature and moral order and the evil within man and members of the family, and by the circular form of the play which has Sabina, once again the maid, telling the audience at the end:

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1. Burbank, p. 92.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 74.
 4. John Mason Brown, "Wilder: 'Our Town' ", Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 32, August 6th, 1949, p. 34.
 5. Thornton Wilder, introduction to Oedipus the King, Sophocles, New York, 1955, p. 560.

"This is where you came in. We have to go on for ages and ages yet.

You go home.

The end of this play isn't written yet".¹

Man's struggle continues beyond the bounds of the play but presumably with a mixture of moral fibre and luck he will continue to scrape through. Joseph J. Firebaugh regards it as Wilder's gravest fault that there is a lack of narrative movement and his books and plays often end where they began. But that is exactly Wilder's point. Mankind has faced the Ice Age, Flood and War during the play, as well as innate evil. But Antrobus has learned how to survive as he tells his wife: "We've come a long way. We've learned. We're learning."² He will presumably continue to learn.

The significant details in Wilder's plays are given further illumination by the author's manipulation of time spans. His so-called Three-Minute plays already show the playwright's remarkable ability to create a whole world that fills the present and yet ranges broadly in time. "Hast Thou Considered My Servant Job?" for example, allows thirty-three years to pass on the first page and then moves into eternity at the end as Judas and Satan "mount upward to their due place and Satan remains to this day, uncomprehending, upon the pavement of Hell".³ The little marionette play, "Proserpina and the Devil" manages to create a reverberating quality as a number of different periods are suggested in the scene. Set in Venice in 1640, the underworld of the play within a play contains the remnants of characters from Greece, the Middle Ages and the commedia dell'arte, while Proserpina's acceptance of the pomegranate leads to "an odd recollection of the Garden of Eden".⁴ The time sequence in "Mozart and the Grey Steward" is broken by the composer's dream which foreshadows his death.

The desire to compress a number of eras into one, and to move from one period of time out into infinity was then already apparent in The Angel plays, so that

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 178.

2. Ibid., p. 176.

3. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 94.

4. Ibid., p. 11.

the development in Wilder's one-act plays is a natural flow-on from this rather than the abrupt change Goldstein claims ("The difference . . . is more than striking. It suggests that Wilder had suddenly obtained an altogether new insight into dramatic method."¹)

Nonetheless, these longer plays allowed for a different kind of development. The Long Christmas Dinner is unusual in that, rather than presenting episodes, it drifts, in its thirty minutes or so running time, through ninety years. Illustrating Wilder's belief that everything that happened might happen anywhere, and will happen again, the representatives of mankind in this play emerge as kinds of people rather than unique personalities, miming the eating of Christmas dinner, repeating variations on the same conversation, and inevitably moving on through the black velvet portal. There are no interruptions to this stream; the rapid passage of time is suggested by the characters aging (Genevieve "puts on a shawl and sits up more straightly. The corners of her mouth become fixed. She becomes a forthright and slightly disillusioned spinster"²) by newly born characters entering, and the dying leaving.

Although Our Town is set very precisely in Grover's Corners in 1901-13, the memory sequence returning to 1899, the time suggested by the play is independent of calendars. To some extent we feel that the play covers a day, beginning just before dawn, with the morning star very bright, Act Two taking place in the morning and the rainy afternoon-evening of the third act concluding at eleven with the stars appearing again. Over and beyond this, however, a much broader time span is covered. The very choice of the early twentieth century allowed the play to be sufficiently distant to be free of contemporary associations. In the final scene, particularly, it could be any year, as even the usual clues of dress which stamp a period are deliberately vague. The mourners are under umbrellas and can only be seen indistinctly. Emily appears in a "white dress. Her hair is down her back and tied by a white ribbon like a little girl."³ The dead, presumably, are equally stylistically dressed, probably in black.

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1. Malcolm L. Goldstein, The Art of Thornton Wilder, Lincoln, 1965, p. 75.
 2. Thornton Wilder, The Long Christmas Dinner, London, 1933, p. 19.
 3. Thornton Wilder, Our Town, p. 80.

It is interesting to note that when Our Town was made into a film in 1939, Wilder was happy to change the setting to 1919-1923 which was still safely distant but had the advantage that it would close out "those horse-and-buggy pre-automobile days which may have been a part of the much-discussed 'nostalgia' which people found in the play".¹

But above all Wilder wanted to illustrate through his homely characters that the human mind wishes to move beyond the limits of self and develop a sense of all periods of time, that Americans are disconnected, "exposed to all place and all time"², and that the individual's "loneliness is enhanced by his consciousness"³ of the vastness around him. Furthermore, nothing is unique. Part of Wilder's technique to suggest this timelessness is to focus on events which are part of a recurrent cycle. George and Emily's wedding, as the Stage Manager points out, represents all weddings. There are furthermore witnesses to the marriage - "the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them".⁴ Emily's twelfth birthday similarly achieves heightened significance through our double awareness as the young woman relives a day of her youth and realizes the isolation of human beings.

Movement backwards and forwards, beyond the boundaries of the time span of the play, similarly suggests the eternal. Professor Willard explains that Grover's Corners lies on "some of the oldest land in the world".⁵ The characters who interrupt the play from the auditorium, Mr. and Mrs. Webb's address to the audience, the Stage Manager lounging against the proscenium arch viewing the audience, all bring the play to the present day. At the end the Stage Manager tells us to go home and get a good rest, but the suggestion is that the action of the play will continue when the people of the town wake up tomorrow. Thus the picture-postcard town has moved beyond its frame of the eternal present to eternity.

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1. Thornton Wilder and Sol Lesser, "Our Town - from Stage to Screen", Theatre Arts, November 1940, p. 364.
 2. Thornton Wilder, "Toward an American Language", Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 190, July 1952, p. 32.
 3. Thornton Wilder, "The American Loneliness", Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 190, August 1952, p. 68.
 4. Wilder, Our Town, p. 68.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Even more dramatic telescoping of time occurs in The Skin of Our Teeth where the unity of time is replaced by a unity of situation. Mr. Antrobus, typical American, excellent husband and father, and a pillar of the church, has invented the wheel and discovered the alphabet. The Ice Age and the Great Flood provide the backdrop to the first two acts. The time span is breath-taking. With mythical overtones Sabina reports that Antrobus "was once a gardener, but left that situation under circumstances that have been variously reported".¹ His son Henry "can hit anything from a bird to an older brother." Apart from these and other references to the Old Testament, the play presents the great philosophers Spinoza, Plato and Aristotle as the hours of the night. The foreshortening of time, the mythical allusions, the breaking of the action when Sabina addresses the audience, all point to the astronomical significance of what is happening to this average American family, these representatives of mankind.

Paradoxically we feel when we read these experimental, innovative plays, that the author was nonetheless a traditionalist. To some extent this impression is given by the compression and simplification in the plays and the unifying elements which Wilder derived from Greek and other early periods of drama. The moments which are caught in the Angel plays almost always observe the three unities. In "Léviathan", for example, the moment of death is represented, interestingly, in "Mid-Mediterranean".² There are no extraneous concerns; the setting does not change. In both "Centaur" and "Proserpina and the Devil" Wilder presents the stage within a stage (a device we could see as being the forerunner to the stage in front of the auditorium with its real audience of the three-act plays), a clever convention which allows two worlds to be presented at the same time, in "Proserpina" those of puppets and manipulators. The possibility of maintaining the unities and yet going beyond them is also seen in the one-act plays. In The Long Christmas Dinner the ninety years are traversed with a sense that this is one dinner, a family ritual which continues while only the faces change. Both Pullman Car "Hiawatha" and The Happy Journey are played against an

1. Ibid., p. 98

2. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 59.

imagined backdrop of passing scenery (with a touch of the "revolving cyclorama"¹ Wilder wanted in "The Flight into Egypt") but unity of place is maintained by focussing on the characters in the vehicles. Similarly Our Town is a masterpiece of apparent unity, constructed in a trilogy form and, according to Arthur Ballett, concerned, like its Greek predecessors, with the one theme "the great and continuing cycle of life; out of life comes death and from death comes life".² Apparently set in one day against a simplified stage setting, the play is further unified by the Stage Manager whom Ballett describes as a chorus figure of the play who explains, interprets, fills in and establishes the background for each episode: "The stage manager represents the observing community; he is biased, sympathetic, informed, and concerned".³ His presence allows for the play to be further compressed as he interprets predictable scenes and interposes like Sabina does in the next play. At the end of Act Two, for example, the wedding service is held as a silent tableau as the Stage Manager muses on what will follow: "The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will -".⁴ His thoughts spoken in front of the arrested scene provide the link with the following Act.

It was even more important in The Skin of Our Teeth to unify this play which ranged from the ice age to the present. It too is in a trilogy form, the acts dealing respectively with the Ice Age, the Flood and War. There is, however, the important difference that in the first two acts the catastrophes are imminent whereas the third act begins after the war has ended. The family above all is the central focus. In spite of the introduction of many other characters ranging from a dinosaur to refugees and to Conveeners, it is with the Antrobuses that we begin and finish our experiences. There are other links as well deriving from the characters. The Announcer places the action at the beginning of the first two acts by showing slides. A rather helpless Stage

1. Ibid., p. 97.

2. Arthur H. Ballett, "In Our Living and in Our Dying", English Journal, Vol. 45, May 1956, p. 245.

3. Ibid., p. 246.

4. Wilder, Our Town, p. 73.

Manager has to appear on the occasions when the action gets out of hand. And of course it is Sabina's flustered "Oh, oh, oh. Six o'clock and the master not home yet"¹, which starts and finishes the action of the play. Other repeated actions help give a ritualized flavour to the play: the recitations from Genesis; the singing at the end of Act One; the chanting from the Bingo Parlour at the end of Act Two; and the statements from the philosophers given twice during Act Three. Even the scenery plays its part. The flats which represent the walls of the Antrobus home in Act One are revealed leaning helter-skelter against one another at the opening of Act Three and are replaced correctly by the family as they pick up the threads. In each act the family has been faced with an enormous challenge, has wavered and doubted, and finally has shown the fortitude to continue, thus getting through by the skin of its teeth.

A number of critics have denied that Wilder's plays contain any conflict, seeing a gentle, homely development rather than crisis or contrast. Francis Fergusson, for example, believes that Wilder tries to take a stance above all parties, preaching the "timeless validity of certain great old traditional ideas, . . . his theatre is almost devoid of conflict, wooing its audience with flattery".² Robert W. Corrigan points to the lack of drama in all Wilder's works which he feels is the reason that the plays "are usually called 'hymns', 'odes', 'songs', and so on, and most critics feel that there isn't much conflict in their plots".³ Presumably what these critics had in mind was the open confrontation between characters resulting in an intense emotional atmosphere of the kind we experience say, in the meeting of Yank, the Hairy Ape, with Mildred. But Wilder's confrontations are more subtle without losing any of the intensity. As Wilder knew very well, drama, set in the eternal present, was inevitably based on a rising tension, where every action, every look, every intimation became charged with significance and, as Susanne Langer puts it:

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 90 and p. 178.

2. Fergusson, "Three Allegorists", p. 553.

3. Robert W. Corrigan, "Thornton Wilder and the Tragic Sense of Life", Educational Theatre Journal, Vol. 13, October 1961, p. 170

"Even before one has any idea of what the conflict is to be . . . one feels the tension developing. This tension between past and future, the theatrical 'present moment', is what gives to acts, situations, and even such constituent elements as gestures and attitudes and tones, the peculiar intensity known as 'dramatic quality'."¹

A background suspense, then, is there all the time. But Wilder also juxtaposes, again and again, conflicting forces, opposite points of view, the detailed against the generalized picture. This last combination W. T. Scott describes as the counter-motion of "the little wheel to a big wheel" which makes us simultaneously "aware of what is momentary and what is eternal". It creates a kind of poetry which results "from the juxtaposition of the points of view, human and superhuman, which combine, of course, to a fourth dimension".² It is this juxtaposition which some critics have tended to ignore, seeing only the small, everyday events without recognizing the bigger wheel which sometimes opposes it. Gerald Weales is only half right when he describes Our Town as "anti-theatrical; instead of enlarging a moment until it bursts, throwing its significance into the audience, it cherishes the small and the everyday (whether it be cooking breakfast or dying). If the perspective is long enough, the individual and the general become one".³ Emily, returning to her twelfth birthday from the grave relives the small, ordinary moments but her point of view is now from the timeless world of the dead. The moment is in fact enlarged until it bursts, Emily in agony cries out that she can bear to see no more, and all the ordinary events of the morning are put into a sudden new perspective as she asks the Stage Manager through her tears: "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? - every, every minute?"⁴

This use of contrasting specific detail and cosmic awareness was already

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1. Langer, p. 308.
 2. Winfield Townley Scott, "Our Town and the Golden Veil", Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. 29, January 1953, p. 109.
 3. Gerald Weales, "Unfashionable Optimist", Commonweal, Vol. 67, February 7th, 1958, p. 487.
 4. Wilder, Our Town, p. 89.

apparent in The Angel plays, often being used for ironic effect. Proserpina's death is caused by "a matter of pins and hooks-and-eyes"¹, in "Centaur's", Shelley's concern with poetry, philosophy and miracles is pitted against Hilda's practical fussing with a wicker settee. Christ, viewing the world from heaven teaches Malchus with his narrow, humble attitudes ("I wasn't even the High Priest's servant; I only held his horse every now and then. And . . . I used to steal a little"²) about what is important and what is insignificant. The question of whether anybody would like cranberry sauce with his Christmas dinner, the reading of advertisements on passing billboards, Lower Five wanting a glass of water in her compartment are all played out against the large cycles of birth and life and death.

George D. Stephens rather overstates the argument that Our Town is a sentimental myth of the beautiful people of the beautiful village:

"The picture of Grover's Corners and its people is highly selective: omitted are mean, sordid, cruel, generally unpleasant details. These are wholesome, pleasant, average or normal 'good' people; and wholesome, pleasant, average or normal, 'good' things (including death) happen to them. There are, as Frank Whiting points out, no neurotics, gangsters, or sexually frustrated people; deleted, in fact, are sex (except the romantic variety), violence, cruelty, poverty."³

This is not entirely true. Emily's death in childbirth, George sinking despairingly to his knees then falling full length over Emily's grave and mention of the war which uselessly killed Joe Crowell in France, remind us of man's suffering. In his opening speech the Stage Manager acknowledges the social stratification of Grover's Corners, the Polish Town with some Canuck families living across the railway tracks. The character Simon Stimson is, however, Wilder's most important hint that unpleasant and unfortunate events do occur. Stephens unfairly dismisses him as "the town problem . . . [who]

1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 78.

3. George D. Stephens, "Our Town - Great American Tragedy?", Modern Drama, February 1, 1959, p. 258.

finally kills himself [and] is treated with admirable (and therefore sentimental because it is unconvincing) understanding and tolerance by his fellow citizens".¹ His tragedy is not the main concern of the play, nonetheless he appears in each act. The "understanding of tolerance" of the townspeople is voiced by the gossiping Mrs. Soames: "Naturally I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, but now we're alone - really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town! . . . To have the organist of a church drink and drunk year after year".²

Eventually this man whom Dr. Gibbs describes as not made for small-town life hangs himself in the attic and bitterly condemns those still living as being ignorant and blind. The conflict between Stimson and the others is delicately handled, but it would be doing Wilder an injustice to ignore it.

The conflict between good and evil is even more obvious in The Skin of Our Teeth. Mrs. Antrobus, fine wife and mother, fights for the home and decency. Her maid Sabina, however, represents the weaker, evil side of woman. She not only gives up when things become difficult but is variously Lilith, the Semitic "evil, wifely spirit"³, the seductress of Antrobus and the camp follower. Gladys the virtuous daughter does well at school, can recite Genesis and appears in Act Three with her baby, obviously about to follow in the footsteps of her mother. On the other hand her brother Henry, stamped with the mark of Cain, who hits Negroes, becomes a general in the army and who wants to destroy ideas by burning books, is the enemy. Not only are these characters presented as opposites, there is dualism within the characters. Mrs. Antrobus who possesses the knowledge of what it is to be a woman nonetheless, in her desire to preserve the family, refuses to allow the refugees into her home, declaring that she doesn't care if they perish. Antrobus, the law-abiding father whose courage finally saves the human race, nonetheless pinches the maid in dark corridors and, towards the end, admits to the emptiness and evil within himself. War, refugees

1. Ibid., pp. 262-3.

2. Wilder, Our Town, p. 44.

3. Burbank, p. 106.

who are accustomed to being hungry, the cynical jeers of the Fortune Teller, and natural disasters all add to the dramatic quality of The Skin of Our Teeth by giving it an extra dimension of eternal evil waiting for its opportunity to oppose and destroy what is good.

CHAPTER 3

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS

To O'Neill the characters of a play were part of a whole. This does not mean that they were not important; the very titles of most of the early non-realistic plays show how each drama was concerned with the fate of an individual. But other elements, such as the settings for example, were also equally significant aspects of the total production. As a result, O'Neill's characters did not lose importance, but they did lose complexity. On the whole, the playwright was not concerned with analysing an intricate personality, rather he was interested in isolating certain features and watching what happened to a character apparently dominated by these attributes. To this end he quite ruthlessly simplified his characters, even going to the extreme ends of splitting personalities into two to illustrate the polarization that can occur within an individual. Sometimes this represented a schematic presentation of the division between the conscious and unconscious motivations which had been outlined by Freud and Jung. Inevitably, however, it led to criticism. Many early reviewers objected to the directness and obviousness of these simplified characters. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, comparing O'Neill's plays with those of Shakespeare, Strindberg and Ibsen, objected to the characters' predictability:

"Much of what they say seems too openly and frankly sincere, and consequently lacking in the element of wonder and surprise."¹

Brustein believed that the stereotyped O'Neill hero, always described as "dark", "spiritual", "poetic" and "suffering", was the result of the author "rushing his current problems onto the stage before they had had a chance to cool"², and H. G. Kemelman thought that this lack of complexity resulted from the heroes being emanations of O'Neill's personality.³ Perhaps what they were really uneasy about was the new style

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1. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Eugene O'Neill" in Theatre in the Twentieth Century, edited by Robert W. Corrigan, New York, 1961, p. 127.
 2. Robert Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Theatre, London, 1970, pp. 326-7.
 3. Kemelman, p. 485.

of non-realistic characterisation which O'Neill was attempting rather than the type of personalities he had created. John Gassner understood what O'Neill was trying to do and defended his unitized characters which, he claimed, were successful on-stage:

"His accomplishment may often be irritatingly bald or schematic, but it has exerted a rare fascination . . . Possibly, the individual's 'unconscious' or simply his vaguely sensed self also recognizes itself in O'Neill's tormented half-personalities, so that the playgoer's recognition of their reality is not in the final analysis cerebral."¹

Because the characters were simplified, and their words and actions were limited to reveal one particular trait, O'Neill felt obliged to help his actors interpret their roles with detailed stage instructions, some of which it would have been simply impossible for an actor to fulfil. Marsden, at the beginning of Strange Interlude for example, is described as having a "face too long for its width, his nose is high and narrow, his forehead broad, his mild blue eyes those of a dreamy self-analyst, his thin lips ironical and a bit sad".² "Some writers", according to Peter Brook, "attempt to nail down their meaning and intentions in stage directions and explanations, yet we cannot help being struck by the fact that the best dramatists explain themselves the least."³ Susanne Langer and Clayton Hamilton describe stage instructions which deal with physical attributes and characters' motions and postures as "literary treatments of the story" which "though interesting to the reader, are of no avail whatsoever to the actor"⁴ while Bonamy Dobree makes a direct attack on O'Neill:

"It may be that Mr. O'Neill himself feels this: his elaborate descriptions of his personages, not of their external characteristics but of their interior make-up, and in such a way as to be utterly unrealizable on the stage, seem to show that he does not think they explain themselves

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1. John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, New York, 1954, p. 644.
 2. Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, edited by Joseph Wood Krutch, New York, 1932, p. 486.
 3. Peter Brook, The Empty Space, London, 1968, p. 15.
 4. Langer, p. 315.

in action."¹

To some extent this is of course true, but really Dobree's attack is against the new drama with its characters stripped to bare essentials, and the lack of detail within the action of the play which would help the traditional actor fill in any missing characteristics. O'Neill's suggestions on physical appearance can of course be partly helped by stage make-up, but more importantly they give the actor vital clues as to the type of character he must represent. Stanislavsky, one feels, would have approved. O'Neill himself explained why he gave so many instructions, describing how once a play was finished "it begins to go from you. No matter how good the production is, or how able the actors, something is lost – your own vision of the play, the way you saw it in your imagination . . . The playwright comes to depend on the physical presence of the actors to fill out their characters for him, instead of writing his characters into the script. Whether my plays are good or bad – though I hope some of them are good – I've tried to do that anyway. I've always tried to write my characters out".²

The simple directness of the characters has led to another interesting debate: whether or not they are mere puppets lacking motivation and will-power, simply dependent on the flux of human relations or outside forces to move them. Samuel Barron, for instance, denied that The Emperor Jones was a drama of subjective motivation: "The play is really a presentation of objective results. From the very first symbol that O'Neill uses, the 'Little Formless Fears' of Scene Two, which actually announces the theme of the play proper, to the very last, we are shown theatrically the results of Jones' mental breakdown".³ This statement represents a confusion between what is objectively experienced by the audience and by Jones himself. The Little Formless Fears are, of course, projections of Jones' unconscious mind and as

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1. Bonamy Dobree, "The Plays of Eugene O'Neill", Southern Review, Vol. 2, Winter 1936-37, p. 437.
 2. Hamilton Basso, "The Tragic Sense", New Yorker, Vol. 24, March 13, 1948, p. 44 and p. 46.
 3. Samuel Barron, "The Dying Theatre", Harper's, Vol. 172, December 1935, p. 111.

such must be viewed as inner forces which influence Jones' actions. Similarly the racial archetypes which we see on-stage later are really in Jones' mind so that we do see more than results; we in fact experience all Jones' unconscious motivations.

Yank, the extravert of The Hairy Ape, however, battles not so much with himself as with the world in which he finds himself. Unfairly described by Kemelman as "a puppet responding to O'Neill's tugs at the strings"¹, Yank in fact emerges as a fiery creature struggling in vain to assert his own importance and strength. If he is manipulated, it is not by O'Neill but by the society which surrounds him, a point which is stressed when we meet the automata on Fifth Avenue; they may belong to a different class, but they are as trapped as Yank is. Leon Edel describes the play as an attempt to "dramatize a consciousness struggling to penetrate a world beyond its reach" but regards it as weakened by the inadequacy of the main character:

"A dramatist more aware than O'Neill of social conflict, would have selected an intelligence capable of perceiving the issues, at first dimly, and later more clearly, and would thus have built a stronger and truer play."²

(It seems particularly ironic in the light of this statement that Hildegard Hawthorne can complain that Yank holds forth "like a College professor".³) But O'Neill wasn't writing about a man, a human being named Yank caught by forces he could not understand. The comment by Mordecai Gorelik that "O'Neill's whole career has been built on the conception that tragedy is due to an inherited weakness of the will"⁴, on the other hand, ignores the fact that outside forces are capable of destroying the strength and vitality of this man whose brute power incorporates a forceful will.

To talk about will in relation to Lazarus is, however, irrelevant. Gorelik, continuing the argument stated above, writes cynically of O'Neill: "What has the

1. Kemelman, p. 490.

2. Leon Edel, "Eugene O'Neill: The Face and the Mask", University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. 7, October 1937, pp. 23-24.

3. Hawthorne, p. 1.

4. Mordecai Gorelik, New Theatres for Old, New York, 1955, p. 230.

playwright seen from where he stands? What has he to tell his millions of fellow Americans whose frustrations have haunted him? We ask in vain. We must expect nothing more than his mood".¹ But this is precisely the point. Lazarus has transcended the will and the need for logical disputation. He is not even destroyed in the end like Yank, rising above the death which Tiberius has ordered. In a way Lazarus, the character who has transcended death, is a metaphysical force rather than a character.

In a slightly different way the characters of Strange Interlude, especially Nina, may also be viewed as forces rather than people, drifting through the currents of life. John Lawson points out that the main character shows no will-power:

"Nina lives in an emotional trance; she never chooses or refuses; her 'ruthless' self-confidence does not involve any choice of conduct; it is her way of justifying her pursuit of emotional excitement which leads her to accept every sensation which is offered."²

This may be rather over-stating the case; Nina does make decisions, deciding for example, to have a child by Darrell, but nonetheless the overall impression we are left with is of Nina giving herself without emotion or consciousness to the men because the war had blown her heart and insides out. She remains, as Travis Bogard writes, "strangely faceless".³ This is partly due to the fact that Nina does not make the moral choices which would encourage the audience to evaluate her, but it is also a result of the way in which we view Nina. The monologues help us to get under her skin, to feel with her and drift with her rather than regarding her from the outside. The four men eddying around her similarly reinforce the idea of flux and continual movement rather than choice and will-power. But again it would be irrelevant to condemn these characters as being mere toys in the hands of the author; as John Mason Brown writes, one of the strengths of the play is O'Neill's ability to allow the flux to affect character and situation:

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1. Ibid., p. 234.
 2. John Howard Lawson, "Eugene O'Neill", in O'Neill: A Collection, ed. Gassner, p. 46.
 3. Bogard, Contours, p. 305.

"He has refused to allow his characters to be those mere puppets, moving in deep-cut grooves, that are usually passed off as flesh and blood people in the theatre. He has not allowed them to stand in any one simple and clearly defined relationship - static, branded, changeless types - throughout his play. Instead, and here lies his finest innovation, he has shown them in those subtle shifts in relationship, in which no-one is confined to being a husband, 'a lover' or 'an admirer' merely because he established himself in that category on his first entrance."¹

O'Neill's simplified, representational types have led to yet another debate, the question of how far his characters are real people and how far they are symbolic. This in turn has led to a number of assumptions which are not always supported by the plays, such as the belief that it is dramatically more desirable to experience a rounded character than a stylized one, and the claim that a realistic character cannot also function as a symbol. Which effects can in fact be achieved, can be most clearly seen in the character Yank in The Hairy Ape. Given a slightly different play, with realistic settings and a less stylized chorus, it would not be difficult to regard Yank as a very human character. He speaks the kind of language, complete with water-front New York accent, we would expect from a stoker. His character is a mixture of swarthy aggression and impulsiveness and of good-natured willingness to protect Long and avoid an unnecessary fight with the drunken Paddy. His reaction to Mildred, a combination of bewilderment, rage and insulted pride, is totally believable as is his later musing:

"But, Christ, she was funny lookin' ! Did yuh pipe her hands? White and skinny. Yuh could see de bones trough 'em . . . I could a-took her wit dat, wit' just my little finger even, and broke her in two."²

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1. John Mason Brown, "Intermission: Broadway in Review", Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 12, April 1928, p. 240.
 2. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 163.

Even Yank's longest speeches, a similar muddle of pride, platitudes and insecurity, are those of a real human being. Our assessment of Yank, is however, more profound. For a start he is placed in a play where the author has instructed: "The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic".¹ The commonly named Robert Smith, significantly nicknamed "Yank" is the most highly developed individual among a group of Neanderthal men, the stokers who themselves represent "all the civilized white races".² It is Yank, the leader of these men, who shocks Mildred when she descends into the hell of the stokehole, and it is Yank who dares to leave and seek the place where he belongs. The symbolism becomes most obvious in the last scene. The Hairy Ape recognizes his similarity to the trapped gorilla – "I was in a cage, too"³ – while realizing that his alienation from the more natural state which Paddy had spoken of so fervently in the first scene, has put him in a state somewhere between heaven and earth: "I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, taking all de woist punches from bot' of 'em. Maybe dat's what dey call Hell, huh?"⁴ In this final speech it becomes clear that Yank is more than a representative of his class; he stands for all mankind which is out of tune with the natural world, Mildred as much as his fellows. Man is a brute "who continues – redundantly – to be brutalized by machinery and industry"⁵ or a Caliban in the middle stage of civilization "scarcely beast, in that [he] is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that [he] is not yet wholly guided by reason".⁶ The gorilla furthermore, can escape from the cage, but the man can only escape through death.

O'Neill has succeeded then, in drawing a believable character who was nonetheless a symbol. Unfortunately a few critics missed the human qualities of Yank,

1. Ibid., p. 137.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 187.

4. Ibid., p. 188.

5. Engel, p. 55.

6. Bernard Baum, "The Tempest and The Hairy Ape: The Literary Incarnation of Mythos", Modern Language Quarterly, Vol. 14, September 1953, p. 273.

seeing the play as "dramatized philosophy rather than a persuasive drama involving credible, individual human characters"¹ and viewing Yank himself as a character who never becomes rounded because "the author's conscious message gets entangled with the principal character's dialogue"², or as a lifeless megaphone because O'Neill had abandoned "his interest in character altogether and attempt[ed] to enunciate general ideas".³ According to the playwright himself the recognition of Yank as one of us is basic to the play:

"Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But, apparently very few people get this. They have written, picking out one thing or another in the play and saying 'how true' it is. But no-one has said, 'I am Yank! Yank is my own self!' "⁴

One can only hope that in more recent times, now that we are more willing to see ourselves in Willy Loman and are more conscious of the alienation of man from nature, this comment no longer applies. Strangely, in an early interview about his play, O'Neill commented on the opposite problem, of audiences, presumably accustomed to a more realistic theatre, missing the symbolism of Yank:

"The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way . . . The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play."⁵

Perhaps many Americans in the twenties were simply not aware that the inhuman, mechanised robot world in which Yank found himself was beginning to exercise its power beyond the stokehole.

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1. Crosswell Bowen, The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill, New York, 1959, p. 137.
 2. Geddes, p. 10.
 3. Francis Fergusson, "Melodramatist" in Cargill et al, p. 277.
 4. Bowen, p. 142.
 5. Eugene O'Neill, "O'Neill Talks About His Plays" in Cargill et al, p. 110.

In some ways Nina Leeds too must fulfil both criteria, of being both a recognizable woman and of having symbolic attributes if Strange Interlude is to be seen as anything more than a psychological drama. A few critics have condemned O'Neill for creating an unreal heroine. In a large generalization Virgil Geddes claims that "Woman in the plays of Eugene O'Neill is largely in the primitive and therefore symbolic stage".¹ Presumably he meant that O'Neill's females are mere figures of the author's unconscious mind, projections of the mother figure or the anima. This argument was taken a step further by Leon Edel who believed that the characters of Strange Interlude were not selected from the world of O'Neill's experience, but came from his readings in psychology and were therefore "just so many dramatized case-histories from Havelock Ellis or Sigmund Freud" the effect being "elusive and unreal".² (The implied criticism of Ellis and Freud here suggests that the psychologists have reported unreal happenings.) The first actress who portrayed Nina, Lynn Fontanne, came to hate the lengthy part and developed a dislike of the character. In a very unsympathetic statement she maintained that Nina "gave herself to those soldiers because she wanted to. She liked a lot of sex. She didn't feel sorry for them. I didn't ever feel O'Neill made her a tragic figure. I don't think he knew the first thing about women".³ Various assumptions underlie these statements: the belief that a symbolic character is not worth presenting on stage, a conclusion about the sexual nature of Nina which is simply not supported by the play, and, most significantly, a failure to look at the woman whom O'Neill is actually presenting. Certainly Nina represents different aspects of the female; she is a kind of Everywoman who stands for the daughter, the wife, the mistress and the mother, responding to the men around her. The inner stresses, externalized in The Emperor Jones through characters like the Little Formless Fears, are here presented to us through the monologues. But Nina is drawn more fully than a representational type would have been. The very fact that we enter so fully into her secret world through

1. Geddes, p. 41.

2. Edel, p. 31.

3. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 275.

the spoken thoughts makes us a part of her, even if she does remain faceless. Her growth too from the ardent girl to the resigned and accepting woman at the end of her life is so thoroughly portrayed that we, in a sense, develop with her. A sense of realism is also given to Nina's character by her external relations with others, for example in the scene which Walter Eaton points to between Nina and Sam's mother where emotions are roused to a high pitch "even for O'Neill, and the enormous success of the play on stage is prima facie evidence that the dramatic verities have not been violated".¹ The characterisation of Nina Leeds then has succeeded in the way that O'Neill hoped to portray Yank. We believe in her, feel with her and, at the same time, stand back and see that she speaks for more than herself; the carefully selected details which go to make up the different aspects of Nina unite to make her something more than a catalogue of elements.

By contrast Lazarus, in the earlier O'Neill play, the man who has defied death, who grows progressively younger as the play develops, is a totally unrealistic character. His extreme goodness, even in the face of danger and evil and his speech usually addressed to an audience, and almost always made up of generalities and abstract nouns:

"Why are your eyes always either fixed on the ground in weariness of thought, or watching one another with suspicion? Throw your gaze upward! To Eternal Life! To the fearless and deathless! The everlasting! To the stars!"²,

remove Lazarus from the common-place world. We are not asked to identify with this man whose all-consuming laugh marks him as one who has transcended mortality and has the life force within him: "He begins to laugh, softly at first – a laugh so full of a complete acceptance of life, a profound assertion of joy in living, so devoid of all self-consciousness or fear, that it is like a great bird song triumphant in depths of sky,

1. Walter Prichard Eaton, The Drama in English, New York, 1930, p. 340.

2. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 33.

proud and powerful, infectious with love, casting on the listener an enthralling spell".¹

Complaints that this symbolic character is unreal are therefore somewhat beside the point. Cyrus Day's objection, for example, that "Lazarus is colourless as well as static. He has no personal traits of any distinctive kind; he is not, in fact, a recognizable human being. He is a symbol, an abstraction, a mere mouthpiece - and an inarticulate one at that - for O'Neill's ideas",² or Geddes' claim that the ritual of the play has "thrown a blanket over the flesh and blood of his people"³ are complaints which should be levelled at a different kind of play. Detail suggesting a more mundane kind of life or pointing to weakness and vulnerability of character may be appropriate for Yank and Nina who to some extent represent us, but Lazarus symbolizes something super-human.

Similarly it would be inappropriate for the antagonists in the play to be totally realistic. Although the characters like Miriam may be recognizable as inadequate human beings, the opposing evil characters must also be enlarged. Caligula, brutal and selfish, is described again and again as less than human, as a primate: "His body is bony and angular, almost malformed with wide, powerful shoulders and long arms and hands, and short, skinny, hairy legs like an ape's"⁴, and "... he squats on his hams and, stretching out his hand, fingers Lazarus' robe inquisitively and stares up into his face in the attitude of a chained monkey".⁵ As a symbol of evil Caligula is a spokesman, as is Yank in The Hairy Ape, for the Roman mob which is itself generalized, and whose sneering laughter and awkward, automaton-like dancing contrasts with the joy and graceful dancing patterns of Lazarus' followers. The elaborate classification of the forty-nine members of the chorus into types denoting the seven periods of life and the seven types of character may not have been absolutely clear to the audience, but their symbolic quality was in keeping with the play as a whole, and must certainly have suggested that all mankind was represented.

1. Ibid., p. 19.

2. Cyrus Day, "Amor Fati: O'Neill's Lazarus as Superman and Saviour", in O'Neill: A Collection, ed. Gassner, p. 81.

3. Geddes, p. 27.

4. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 45.

5. Ibid., p. 59.

The device which O'Neill used most enthusiastically to help the characterisation in most of his early plays, was the mask. Influenced by Kenneth Macgowan's belief that masks had always been used by dramatists as a way of getting at a character's "inner reality"¹ and by Gordon Craig's injunction that the human face ^{was} "worthless"² because it provided six hundred expressions, fleeting and realistic rather than artistic, and perhaps even remembering his father's love of burnt cork which James O'Neill had said: "furnishes a kind of mask which does not entirely obliterate the player, but does disguise him sufficiently to give that little flavor of romance and impersonality which is so essential"³ together with the other disguises of The Count of Monte Cristo, O'Neill used the device for different purposes in various plays. In his "Memoranda on Masks" the playwright reviewed the major effects of masks, the main values of which he saw as being "psychological, mystical, and abstract".⁴ The dramatist, son of the actor, wrote:

"Looked at from even the most practical standpoint of the practicing playwright, the mask is dramatic in itself, has always been dramatic in itself, is a proven weapon of attack. At its best, it is more subtly, imaginatively, suggestively dramatic than any actor's face can ever be."⁵

O'Neill believed that the dramatic clarity of a mask could show with great economy of means "those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us"⁶, by using the mask to reflect the persona which would contrast with the underlying personality. O'Neill went further in "Second Thoughts" by saying that he could have used masks more extensively in some of his plays, particularly with the minor characters, to stress the phantasmal quality of the figures

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1. Eugene M. Waith, "Eugene O'Neill: An Exercise in Unmasking", in O'Neill: A Collection, ed. Gassner, p. 30.
 2. Craig, p. 120.
 3. Doris Alexander, The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill, New York, 1962, pp. 65-6.
 4. Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks" in Cargil et al, p. 117.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Ibid., p. 116.

seen by Jones in his flight through the forest, to increase the strangeness and alienation felt by Yank in his encounters with even familiar faces, and to dramatically convey the inability of East and West to communicate in Marco Millions by masking all the people of the East. In "A Dramatist's Notebook" he remarked that masking had improved the quality of the acting in his plays. The "Memoranda", published in 1932, was in fact written six years after O'Neill's last play with masks, and in 1944 he referred disparagingly to the device as the "obscuring overload of masked pageantry"¹ in Lazarus. Nonetheless the innovative use he made of the technique, designed to awaken the audience to his new theatre and to provide symbolic suggestions not possible through other methods, deserves closer study. It is worthwhile noting that the usual limitations of the technique, narrowing the actor to the injunction of the mask, were overcome to some extent by O'Neill's use of different masks through the play, the employment of two characters to represent one person, and the introduction of half-masks which allowed the real personality to be shown by the lower part of the face.

For a writer as convinced as O'Neill was, that the external features gave significant clues to the character's inner life, it is hardly surprising that mask-like devices hinting at certain qualities were introduced into the earliest plays, even before the mask itself was used. Thus in The Emperor Jones the Little Formless Fears, black and shapeless, distinguished only by their glittering little eyes, achieve that supernatural quality O'Neill mentioned in his Memoranda. Both the belles and dandies with something "stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish about their movements"² and the Witch-doctor, stained all over a bright red, convey the impersonality O'Neill later sought to achieve with his masked crowds. (Interestingly in this play, an exercise in unmasking like so many O'Neill dramas, Jones' face becomes more "masked" as the play progresses, so that in the last scene in which he appears "the expression of his face is fixed and stony, his eyes have an obsessed glare"³ and he moves with strange

1. Engel, p. 92.

2. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 123.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

deliberation. Jones has lost the individuality which made him "Emperor".) By accident, however, it was in The Hairy Ape that the masking device was actually used for the first time. Here too there are different mask-like techniques, the brazen, metallic quality of the men's voices, the stokers jumping up mechanically and filing silently through the door. The Fifth Avenue crowd are still actually described in the stage instructions only as "A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankensteins in their detached, mechanical movements"¹, but when Blanche Hays, the play's designer, suggested using masks in the original production (which she had more authentically done with the witch doctor's traditional tribal mask in Jones) O'Neill was delighted.

The first play to use masks extensively and in a schematized way, however, was The Great God Brown. Moving beyond the traditional purpose of the device which was to reflect the dominant character trait, O'Neill employed the masks to show the internal division within a personality. Dion and Brown should probably be regarded as one person. They are, according to the text, like brothers, close enough in age to be thought of as twins, a comment Brown himself makes. If they are regarded as the two sides of the one personality, Brown's love-hate relationship with his inner spiritual being, which the successful businessman has suppressed, and the adoption of Dion's mask in an attempt to change his outer personality become much clearer. It is otherwise very difficult to believe that the adoption of another human being's facade could possibly deceive wife and family. Dion is further divided into two personalities, the masked Pan who changes from the mocking, sensual young man into the defiant and finally, cruel and ironical, failure and the unmasked loving, selfless ascetic underlying the Mephistophelean facade. Brown, consumed with jealousy, destroys Dion and assumes his mask, thinking that he will thus gain Margaret. Ironically, his assumption of the mask leads in turn to his own death. One of the major functions of the masking therefore was to express the tension existing within a human being

1. Ibid., p. 169.

between the two conflicting forces which O'Neill described as the Dionysian "creative joy in life for life's sake" and "Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself".¹ Secondly the mask came to stand for the social self, Jung's "persona". It is only with Cybel that Dion can remove his mask; even in front of his wife he is forced to assume his persona:

"(He springs toward her with outstretched arms, [his mask in his hand] but she shrinks away with a frightened shriek and hastily puts on her mask. Dion starts back. She speaks coldly and angrily.) Who are you? Why are you calling me? I don't know you!"²

Finally, when Brown attempts to assume Dion's personality by adopting his mask, we see the ego, successful, worldly, but spiritually empty, attempting in vain to reach the more poetic side of his nature. When he dies, Cybel gives his name as "man" and there is a suggestion that his final words show an acceptance and understanding which he has previously denied, of his own mysticism, and that he has finally become a total, unified person. Overall O'Neill seems to be attempting a combined illustration of Freudian theory³, a kind of picture of Dorian Gray (a work with which we know the young O'Neill was very impressed), and a depiction of an individual who has failed to reach Jungian individuation or self-realization as he has constructed a persona with which he attempts to identify in vain and which can result only in what Jung calls "soullessness".⁴

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1. Whitman, p. 11.
 2. O'Neill, Brown, p. 22.
 3. It would probably not be too forced to apply Freud's definitions of the id, ego and super-ego, the components of the total personality, to Dion-Brown. The id, personified by the Dionysian creative joy in Dion is the force which is not governed by laws of reason or logic but driven rather to obtain satisfaction for instinctual needs, and like the character, is impulsive, asocial and pleasure-loving, full of imagination and dreams. Brown, the ego, is governed by a reality principle, capable of interacting successfully with the environment. The masked side of Dion, which becomes the fixed forcing of his own face could be seen as the super-ego which controls and regulates the forces of the id, the product of socialization in childhood, in the case of Dion probably moulded when young Billy destroyed the picture in the sand.
 4. C. G. Jung, The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung, edited by Violet Staub de Laszlo, New York, 1959p. 163.

The masking device is, however, beset with problems. Audiences assumed, for example, that the real face was covered by a false one or that one was right and the other wrong, instead of realizing that the conflict was between two equally vital selves. The conflict itself became polarized between the personality represented by the face and the one represented by the mask without hinting at the variations of suffering and indecision later achieved through the interior monologues of Strange Interlude. O'Neill himself admitted that in production the shifts from mask to face were not always immediately visible to the audience, and therefore they suggested a superficiality he did not intend. There was too the technical problem that actors had to put on their own masks so that it was not always clear whether they were being consciously adopted or forced on by society. Confusion resulted from the mask seeming to become a character in its own right when it was taken from one character by another and later when the mask of William Brown was carried on as if it were a body. This confusion is reflected in the critics' lack of understanding when Geddes, for instance, dismisses the play as "a falling back on old morality concepts"¹ and Ilse Brugger refers to the close connection between the mask and death.²

It would seem, therefore, that the scheme was too complex to be successfully carried out, or perhaps that psychological personality theories were too new or too difficult to be adequately represented by the device. O'Neill nonetheless remained positive about the play, remarking in 1942:

"... I still consider this play one of the most interesting and moving I have written. It has its faults, of course, but for me, at least, it does succeed in conveying a sense of the tragic mystery drama of Life revealed through the lives in the plays."³

On-stage the play has had mixed receptions; some reviewers dismissing the play's appeal as mere theatricality and trickery. Nonetheless, the play had reasonable runs

1. Geddes, p. 22.

2. Ilse Brugger, "Verwendung und Bedeutung der Maske bei O'Neill", Die Neueren Sprachen, 6, April 1957, p. 162.

3. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 171.

and the author was sufficiently enamoured of the technique to use it again in Lazarus Laughed.

In Lazarus, however, the scheme was used for different effects. Determined to create an imaginative, large drama, O'Neill translated Macgowan's demand for "power, intensity and dignity"¹ into a chorus typifying the seven periods of life through masks: "Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle age, Maturity and Old Age" and seven general types of character which Cargill² wrongly believes derives from Jung's Psychological Types. Jung's eight personality types bear little relation in fact to O'Neill's seven: "The Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned".³ Where masks had not suited the more domestic The Great God Brown (and it is interesting to note that the use of "abstract" masks seems to have achieved "remarkable results"⁴ for this play when it was later produced, although this contradicts the specific instructions O'Neill gave for their individualization), they appear to have better suited the broad classification of humanity required in Lazarus. Apart from achieving the sense of "impersonal, collective mob psychology"⁵, O'Neill hoped to "preserve the different crowds of another time and country from the blighting illusion-shattering recognitions by an audience".⁶ By contrast Lazarus himself stands out as the only unmasked figure in the play, the fearless, strong, unpretentious and in a sense, hated character. Caligula, Tiberius and Pompeia are the successors to Dion, Pompeia for example wearing: "a half-mask on the upper part of her face, olive-coloured with the red of blood smouldering though, with great, dark, cruel eyes -- a dissipated mask of intense

1. Bogard, Contours, p. 267.

2. Oscar Cargill, "Fusion Point of Jung and Nietzsche", in Cargill et al, p. 410.

3. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, pp. 9-10.

4. "O'Neill Stirs the Gods of the Drama", The New York Times Magazine, January 15, 1928, p. 9.

5. O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks", p. 120.

6. Ibid.

beauty of lust and perverted passion. Beneath the mask, her own complexion is pale, her gentle, girlish mouth is set in an expression of agonized self-loathing and weariness of spirit".¹ O'Neill is again using masks to express the inner conflict of his characters but here the scheme is simplified: there are no changes of mask; the mask reflects the outer, false, perverted self while the face shows the inner, true personality. All in all the masking of Lazarus seems to have been more appropriate to the play and to have added an extra dimension to this unrealistic drama.

O'Neill's final use of the mask came in Days Without End where the omnipresent alter-ego Loving wears a "mask whose features reproduce exactly the features of John's face - the death-mask of John who has died with a sneer of scornful mockery on his lips"². Once again O'Neill was using the mask for its psychological significance, the personality split between John and Loving being finally healed with the destruction of Loving, a result of John's mystical conversion. Presumably too a certain dramatic power was achieved by the visual impact of a death-mask, but unfortunately the device fell into many of the same traps of those of Brown: the inappropriateness of a mask in an otherwise basically realistic play; the lack of subtle variations which were hindered by the dichotomy of face and mask; and the sheer obviousness of the scheme.

1. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 99.

2. O'Neill, Days Without End, p. 8.

Like O'Neill, Wilder regarded the characters in his plays as part of the total work. One of the fundamental conditions of the drama, he believed, was that "The theatre is an art which reposes upon the work of many collaborators"¹, a fact which gave great strength to the play. And the chief of these collaborators he believed, were the actors. Trusting his actors to interpret the spirit of his characters, Wilder wrote that "Characterization in a play is like a blank cheque which the dramatist accords to the actor for him to fill in – not entirely blank, for a number of indications of individuality are already there, but to a far less definite and absolute degree than in the novel".² At its most obvious, the invitation to participate in a joint activity is seen in the State Manager's introduction to Our Town:

"This play is called Our Town. It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A. . . . (or: produced by A. . . .; directed by B. . . .). In it you will see Miss C. . . .; Miss D. . . .; Miss E. . . .; and Mr. F. . . .; Mr. G. . . .; Mr. H. . . .; and many others."³

We know that much of the success of Sabina's direct addresses to the audience in the first performance came from the fact that she was being played by the beloved Tallulah Bankhead, while Hallo, Dolly! the musical version of The Matchmaker which Wilder had approved, allowed a certain freedom of interpretation to its star, Carol Channing. The "blank cheque" meant that many of Wilder's characters are very lightly sketched, with just a few details to guide producers and actors. In some cases, such as the Stage Managers of most plays, there are virtually no clues for the actor beyond an indication that delivery should be relaxed and informal. Certainly there are no descriptions of physical attributes, age or social standing.

There are, however, other, more important reasons for the simplicity of Wilder's characters (and by "simplicity" we do not suggest that the characters are unreal). The

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1. Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting", p. 5.
 2. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
 3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 21.

earliest plays already show the author's love of one or two details to depict characters who, because they are so easily recognizable, do not overwhelm the drama and can be used for symbolic purposes. In "Nascuntur Poetae . . . ", set in a painting, one of the three characters is only described as "The Woman in Deep Red"¹ which also serves as her name. Hepzibah the donkey in "The Flight Into Egypt" takes on the character of a garrulous woman, whose babbling nonsense adds to the humour of the play but stresses the theme that the foolish and insignificant have their part to play in the universe, a theme Wilder was to develop in later plays. Symbolic qualities are given to the Grey Steward, the messenger of death in "Mozart and the Grey Steward". According to Papajewski his symbolic attributes are the: "gray color, the handkerchief that is meant to keep away the odor of decomposition, and the reference to an undertaker, here made with a touch of irony".² His symbolic function is more important than his character.

Types, or cliché characters are introduced in the one-act plays, the fore-runners of Wilder's later characters who are introduced in The Skin of Our Teeth for example as: "Enter Mrs. Antrobus, a mother".³ The shortness of these plays, however, does not allow for the relative complexity of a Mrs. Antrobus. With twenty-eight characters in Hiawatha, they must be established quickly. Named after their compartments they are classified at the beginning: "Lower One: a maiden lady. Lower Three: a middle-aged doctor", and they predictably fulfil our expectations, the doctor ("... reading aloud to himself from a medical journal the most hair-raising material, every now and then punctuating his reading with an interrogative) So?"⁴ (This is another example of actors and producers co-operating with the author by finding the hair-raising material.) The characters themselves are as insignificant as Hepzibah the donkey, but like her they have their parts to play. As the play progresses, the train and its passengers are fitted into a broader context, first of all with the

1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 4.

2. Papajewski, p. 135.

3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 102.

4. Thornton Wilder, Pullman Car "Hiawatha", London, 1931, p. 3.

appearance of the Field, a Tramp and Parkersburg, Ohio, and then with the Hours and the Planets. The dead Harriet, in a speech which anticipates Emily's, bursts into fierce tears and expresses her shame:

"I haven't done anything, I haven't done anything with my life. Worse than that! Worse than that, I was angry and sullen. I never realized anything."¹

Wilder's "de-individualization"² of his characters to the point where we can recognize them but also realize the triviality of their concerns, allows an allegory to emerge. "The sense of many voices" is, according to Bogard, "half heard at a distance, joining in a chorus somehow relevant to man's destiny, somehow in harmony with the singing planets and with a vast but living immensity. In the end, the train does not click along tracks to a purely local destination. It becomes part of the entire westering turn of the earth, part of the movement of life in space."³ This simplification of character, different from O'Neill's, is achieved through presentation of a number of typical details which give the impression of rounded personalities; O'Neill's more expressionistic characters are dominated by a limited number of traits and are, as a consequence, more distorted.

A similar pattern is seen in Our Town. The American crowd, made up of one and one and one, is condensed here to a few typical individuals going about their ordinary lives, defined by their status of mother, doctor, editor, following through the cycles of birth, marriage and death, each believing that the daily rituals are all there is. It is only in death that they realize what Wilder had already used as his theme in "And the Sea Shall Give Up Its Dead", that human aspiration is futile and the loss of identity after death is necessary to allow for identification with something greater. The trivial concerns of the characters in the first two acts where stringing beans becomes as important as the wedding whose predictable ritual is cleverly drowned out by Mrs.

1. Ibid., p. 13.
2. Burbank, p. 69.
3. Travis Bogard, "The Comedy of Thornton Wilder", in Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism, edited by Travis Bogard and William I Oliver, New York, 1968, p. 362.

Soames' "Perfectly lovely wedding! Loveliest wedding I ever saw. Oh, I do love a good wedding, don't you? Doesn't she make a lovely bride?"¹ not only allows the members of the audience to recognize themselves in the play but prepares us for the realization in the third act that individual identity is insignificant and fleeting in comparison with the "something way down deep that's eternal about every human being".²

Nonetheless, it is rather too easy to fall into the trap of believing that Wilder's characters are more simplified and generalized than is the case. Emily, for example is carefully balanced between bossiness and naivety. When Sol Lesser, who made the screen version of the play suggested that Emily be shown to have been over-impatient with her rather slow-witted husband, Wilder rejected the idea in a letter:

"It makes Emily into a school-marm 'improving' superior person. The traits that you point out are in her character, her 'good in classes', her desire 'to make speeches all her life' - but I put them in there to prevent her being pure-village-girl-sweet-ingenue. But push them a few inches further and she becomes priggish."³

Emily then, has a certain complexity and roundness although she is also, to some extent, Wilder's mouthpiece. According to Goldstein, Emily and George as allegorical figures in the milk-bar scene, represent nothing less than "the deadly sins of gluttony, sloth, and avarice"⁴, but the reality of her character is still such that we can agree with Wilder: "we know a lot about her and I think we love her".⁵

Comparing Wilder and Brecht, D. C. Wixson has also tended to over-stress the simplification of Wilder's characters: "Characterization is reduced to a minimum . . . In order that the audience give their full attention to the lessons of the play it is important that their sympathies not be engaged".⁶ On the contrary, Wilder wanted us to love

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1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 72.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
 3. Wilder and Lesser, pp. 369-70.
 4. Goldstein, p. 103.
 5. Barnes, p. 220.
 6. Wixson, p. 113.

Emily, warned that Ma Kirby in The Happy Journey should be played realistically, and that her "humour, strength and humanity constitute the unifying element throughout"¹, and painted the archetypal mother, Mrs. Antrobus, with great affection. Even the Dinosaur of The Skin of Our Teeth can elicit a sympathetic murmur from the audience as it is sent out into the cold by Antrobus to its eventual destruction. Wilder has given us just enough details to recognize these characters as real without sentimentalizing them. Antrobus, for example, Adam, creator of the wheel and the alphabet, leader of the human race in its struggle to survive, nonetheless cannot prevent every muscle going tight every time he passes a policeman. The detail is a delightful one as we recognize a very human response. But it also prepares us for his later admission as Antrobus the actor of the shared guilt he feels with his son. To have explored his reaction to policemen further, however, as Edmund Wilson would have Wilder do², would simply destroy the balance the author has maintained in his protagonist.

Defending imaginative narration, Wilder once wrote:

"Its justification lies in the fact that the communication of ideas from one mind to another inevitably reaches the point where exposition passes into illustration, into parable, metaphor, allegory and myth."³

We have already seen how his plays achieved these qualities through the use of general, typical characters, but Wilder used yet another device to heighten the significance of his ordinary people living apparently ordinary lives; many of his characters themselves derive from history and myth, or represent places and animals. The non-realistic plays in The Angel volume contain an amazing array of such characters: Childe Roland; Shelley and Ibsen; Gertruda, Empress of Newfoundland; Gabriel, Christ and Malchus; Mozart and Constanze; Satan; Mary and Joseph and a donkey. Even the landscape plays a part in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came":

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1. Thornton Wilder, The Happy Journey, London, 1934, p. 24.
 2. Edmund Wilson, "The Antrobuses and the Earwickers", The Nation, Vol. 116, January 30, 1943, p. 168.
 3. Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting", p. 13.

"The landscape laughs, then falls suddenly silent."¹ In these plays which Wilder said "satisfied my passion for compression"² the characters allow the author to write with a kind of shorthand. We know what to expect of the characters; we learn quickly in which situation they find themselves. Thus Mozart's poverty, the request for a requiem and his imminent death are not really the point of the play; these merely fulfil our expectations. Rather what Wilder's Mozart learns, and what we learn with him namely that great art, which is synonymous with love, gives hope to the world, gains greater significance. Sometimes of course, Wilder gains effects by reversing our expectations: Christ refers to himself as "ridiculous"³ and says wryly that the Bible "isn't always true about me, either".⁴ Humour and a certain shock result from seeing the donkey which speaks like a gossiping philosopher. On the other hand the sudden realization that death has been personified as the girls in the tower in "Childe Roland" allows death to be seriously portrayed as dark and unlovely on the outside but desirable to those who are ready for it. Never far away is Wilder's theme of the cyclic nature of the universe. Ibsen and Shelley in "Centaur's" admit that poems drift about waiting to be caught and written down, and that certain poems therefore have the same meaning. This idea of continuity is further developed in "Proserpina" as Papajewski explains: "... the Pluto of antiquity finds his continuation in the medieval Satan, and Styx and Acheron become the Lake of wrath of the Bible. From this turmoil one can also discern the theme of Adam and Eve's Original Sin: Proserpina's spouse, who represents Satan, persuades her to eat the apple (here it is an orange)".⁵ The parallels here and the combination of symbolic puppets with seventeenth century Venetian manipulators who nonetheless use contemporary American slang ("The First Manipulator [behind the scenes]: Let go them strings."⁶) suggests that all time is represented at once in this

1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 47.

2. Ibid., p. vii.

3. Ibid., p. 77.

4. Ibid.

5. Papajewski, p. 128.

6. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 9.

little play. In 1928 Wilder admitted that he had been too bookish and reliant on real historical characters in his novels; presumably he felt similarly about the Angel plays because he became less reliant on such characters in later plays.

Sheer fantasy is used in Pullman Car "Hiawatha". When the Stage Manager claps his hands various characters recite set pieces in Sunday School entertainment voices. Grovers Comers, a Field in shirt-sleeves, the Tramp travelling under the train who sings "On the Road to Mandalay", Parkersburg, Ohio, urging that alcohol be given up, the ghost of a German railway worker and the watchman in the tower all give their various mottos. As the Stage Manager explains, they represent the Minutes and are gossips. They are followed by the Hours which are the philosophers Plato and Epictetus and by Saint Augustine and the Years which are theologians and make the music of the spheres. Significantly combined with this, the passengers on the train make a "thinking" murmur and the characters repeat their mottos. This orchestration, conducted by the Stage Manager, of the universe working in harmony, beautifully illustrates Wilder's theme of the importance of each individual within the total scheme.

The masque-like qualities of this one-act play are repeated but also supplemented by more serious and at times sinister qualities in The Skin of Our Teeth. Biblical allusions abound. Adam, Eve, Lillith and Cain, Noah's flood, all suggest a multifarious view of man who emerges as selfish, lustful and evil but with enough good and strength within him to survive. Again Wilder is using the allusions as a shorthand to conjure up various connotations in the audience's mind. In this play he shows a particular fondness for reversing and understating the significance of historical, biblical and mythological characters. Homer, Moses and the muses (described by a disgusted Mrs. Antrobus as "a singing troupe"¹) turn up as "typical elderly out-of-works from the streets of New York today".² The words of the philosophers in this play are spoken by the coloured wardrobe mistress and maid, and by the captain of the ushers in the theatre. These very ordinary people, Wilder is saying, also have access to the great

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 119.

2. Ibid.

thoughts of the world. Earlier in the play the presence of the affectionate dinosaur and mammoth added humour but also, by reminding us that this was an unrealistic play, directed our attention to the more serious thoughts in the play; these creatures after all did not survive, even by the skin of their teeth.

This gentle nudging to remind the audience they are watching a work of fiction occurs again and again during the action of Wilder's plays. Unhappy with the traditional box-set stage which soothed and stifled the audience, Wilder sought to write plays which theatre-goers would be obliged to take seriously and against whose probings they could not shield themselves. Thus the illusion of the proscenium arch is destroyed by the Stage Manager leaning against it in Our Town, characters addressing the audience in Hiawatha, Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth, by ushers passing up chairs from the aisles in Skin, and by actors planted in the auditorium asking questions about Grover's Corners. Identification with on-stage characters is further prevented by the Stage Manager taking different parts in Our Town, by the backstage crew participating in Skin, by the enactment of a game which is a dream in "Childhood" and by three points of view of the Century association being presented by the sons, the new member and the wives in Our Century. Above all this alienation was designed to make the audience aware of the ideas underlying the action. Like Brecht, Wilder wanted his audiences to be detached, and to respond as adults by thinking about what was being said. The character instructing us may be wise, like the Stage Manager who strolls to the centrefront of the stage and musingly addresses the audience on the significance of weddings, or it may be the fluttery Sabina telling the audience "Now that you audience are listening to this, too, I understand it a little better".¹ Alienation techniques of this kind, however, are ambivalent in effect. On the one hand the sharpened awareness of the division between stage and auditorium may shock the audience into withdrawal and result in reflection on the ideas being presented, but on the other hand the asides and soliloquies and the introduction of animals as characters,

1. Ibid., p. 105.

imply a complicity between actor and audience, especially when they are introduced with the wry good humour so common to Wilder which may in fact lead to a greater sense of intimacy and warmth. There is a certain feeling that we are being teased when Sabina complains that the silly play she has been obliged to act in is so unlike the plays we used to have, "good entertainment with a message you can take home with you",¹ or when she refuses to play a certain scene "Because there are some lines in that scene that would hurt some people's feelings and I don't think the theatre is a place where people's feelings ought to be hurt".² Through this teasing, however, Wilder has made a serious point, won the affection of the audience, and managed to take a short cut out of playing a predictable scene.

Brecht used masks so that one actor could play different roles. In a way the three characters Sabina, Miss Somerset and Miss Fairweather, or the four roles the Stage Manager is called on to perform in Our Town, achieve a similar effect. The role-playing becomes even more complex when Henry steps back into the role of the actor playing Henry yet identifies with his part:

"In this scene it's as though I were back in High School again. It's like I had some big emptiness inside me – the emptiness of being hated and blocked at every turn. And the emptiness fills up with the one thought that you have to strike and fight and kill."³

Still another dimension is given when a popular actor is interpreting a role as Travis Bogard describes:

"Thus, when Miss Bankhead read the line 'The Ten Commandments, faugh!' and added in a throaty aside what was evidently a deep personal conviction, 'That's the worst line I ever had to say on any stage!' the Bankhead personality broke through layers of Fairweather and Sabina with an effect reminiscent of Hogarth's drawings of false

1. Ibid., p. 102.

2. Ibid., pp. 144–145.

3. Ibid., p. 172.

perspective."¹

Illusion and reality had merged.

The various Stage Managers play an important part in strengthening the alienation and making the audience aware of the ideas in the drama, but they also serve other functions in the plays. As links with the audience, characters who can explain, describe, fill in detail and help mould our point of view, they are the device Wilder has used to overcome the usual limitations of drama. Their function, in fact, is the same as that of a narrator of prose. Their predecessors were probably the Greek chorus which could interpret and comment on the action, but the power most of them have to arrange the action takes them beyond the chorus and suggests that they really represent the author himself. In Hiawatha, for example, the Stage Manager becomes a kind of master of ceremonies, organizing his actors, reading their lines, telling the characters when it is time to come on, and conducting the orchestra of actors. He is the one who explains the significance of the Hours and Years. Goldstein has aptly described him as a "circus ringmaster".² Brecht's dictum that the actor "need not pretend that the events taking place on the stage have never been rehearsed, and are now happening for the first and only time",³ is charmingly interpreted when the Stage Manager shoos away the over-keen Planets.

In Our Town the Stage Manager fulfils yet another of Brecht's beliefs:

"It should be apparent all through his performance that 'even at the start and in the middle he knows how it ends' and he must 'thus maintain a calm independence throughout' ".⁴

Their pipe-smoking narrator casually leans against the proscenium arch. Wilder doesn't explain from what period he comes, yet his overall knowledge of the play which enables him to point forward to what happens to certain characters in the future beyond the play, the feeling that most of the action of the play is placed in the

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1. Bogard, "The Comedy of Thornton Wilder", pp. 367-8.
 2. Goldstein, p. 80.
 3. Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", p. 91.
 4. Ibid.

comfortable past, and the fact that he is a link with the present audience, suggest that he is a contemporary character, or at least a timeless omniscient narrator. Sometimes he enters the play to act a part as the clergyman at the wedding for example, but it is probably going too far to claim that he is "himself in the world of Grover's Corners".¹

This would destroy the distancing of the play. His relaxed commentary helps establish the gentle atmosphere of the play and distances the agony. An unobtrusive philosopher, he muses on the nature of life and death, fulfilling his didactic function tactfully. He helps too with the organization of the play. Not everything need be enacted; a few words from the narrator fill in events and allow time to move rapidly either forward or backward. The curtain and blackouts need not be used to interrupt the flow; the audience returning to their seats at the beginning of Act Two find him standing in his accustomed place watching their return. He has become a kind of father-figure watching over not only the actors whom he thanks after a number of scenes, but over the audience as well. "You get a good rest, too", he says at the end of the play as he winds his watch, "Good night."² His ability to connect the real and unreal world in this way is summed up in a comment about the play Our Town in Act One: "So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us."³

By contrast there is no one narrator who has overall control in The Skin of Our Teeth. Mr. Fitzpatrick the Stage Manager, usually appears when things are going awry, but his urging that Sabina make something up when an entrance cue is missed is unsuccessful. At the beginning of the first two acts an Announcer gives background information but plays no further part in the drama. Sabina herself repeatedly drops out of character to address the audience and comment on the significance or what she sees as silliness of the play. As the maid she also gives us background information such as her run-down on the Antrobus family. But even when she steps out of

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1. Papajewski, p. 98.
 2. Wilder, Our Town, p. 91.
 3. Ibid., p. 41.

character, she is close to Sabina, longing for a simple, straight-forward plot, unhappy with what she perceives as the immorality of one scene, flustered when things go wrong. Unlike the previous narrators too she is always dressed in the costume of the scene so that she never quite emerges as a character set apart from the play. The effects of this play are therefore different from the previous two. Although Sabina provides a running commentary on certain thoughts in the play, and it is significantly she who mentions the survival of the human race in various tight squeezes by the skin of its teeth on three occasions, we are nonetheless also critical of her. She becomes, as Antrobus describes her, "The voice of the people in their confusion and their need".¹ Whereas Our Town was viewed from a comfortable distance, the question of whether the characters will survive yet another disaster becomes far more real in this more direct play. After all, the Mammoth and the Dinosaur and the pleasure-seeking Conveeners do not survive. Nor are we sure how far we should trust the Fortune Teller who prophesies "Rain Rain Rain" even if she also says "Again there'll be the narrow escape".² After all Antrobus himself loses the will to go on at the end of Act Three. Interestingly this play was written according to the author on the eve of America's entrance to the war "under strong emotion" and "mostly comes alive under conditions of crisis"³ such as in shattered Germany after the war. The final words of the play are Sabina's, but unlike the reassuring Stage Manager of Our Town, her message is that the problems will continue: "The end of this play isn't written yet."⁴

1. Ibid., p. 176.

2. Ibid., p. 135.

3. Ibid., p. 13.

4. Ibid., p. 177.

CHAPTER 4

THE EFFECTS OF WHAT WE HEAR

Aristotle believed that drama required embellished language containing the elements of rhythm, harmony and song. O'Neill, torn between creating characters who belonged to the prosaic America of the early twentieth century with their relatively monosyllabic, flat speech patterns and his desire to experiment with plays which seemed to demand a less naturalistic delivery, wavered in his use of language between realism and such non-realistic speech as the lengthy soliloquies of Strange Interlude. Writing about Mourning Becomes Electra, he expressed his dissatisfaction with modern language as a basis for his plays:

"It needed great language to lift it beyond itself. I haven't got that. And, by way of self-consolation, I don't think, from the evidence of all that is being written today, that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, faithless rhythm of our time. The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's moving, dramatic inarticulations!"¹

His uneasiness has been shared by many critics who have claimed that American writers lack the skill of maintaining the tautness demanded by stage conversation and constantly push it into "revelation, argumentation, confession".² On the other hand, the intonation, the pauses, the dashes and exclamation points which may be glossed over in silent reading can come alive in the theatre, as a number of American playwrights have claimed defiantly. Elmer Rice, for example, held that "words are not even necessary for the creation and communication of drama"³ while Tennessee Williams defended "the incontinent blaze of a live theatre meant for seeing and feeling".⁴ O'Neill's dialogue, easily mocked for its dependence on exclamations,

1. Eugene O'Neill, "Language in a Faithless Age: A Letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn", in O'Neill and His Plays edited by Cargill et al, p. 463.

2. Beckerman, p. 124.

3. Brustein, p. 170.

4. Ibid.

repetition, and semi-literate phrases, appears to have such power in the theatre where the language becomes part, as O'Neill wished, of the total dramatic experience. Bogard, comparing the black Irish O'Neill with G.B. Shaw, writes: "... in the theatre they create a dialogue entirely appropriate to the tone, texture and meaning of what they present, and it is speech that cannot be entirely evaluated on the page."¹

The other major question which arises in a discussion of O'Neill's language is how far it is in fact non-realistic, and how well the dialogue suits the otherwise expressionistic plays. Signi Falk, for example, presuming that O'Neill wanted realistic dialogue in the early plays, attacks him for failing to allow characters to speak for themselves by obtruding his own thoughts and feelings, and allowing himself "to repeat over and again certain general speech habits that have little relation to natural speech".² In particular he isolates The Emperor Jones where O'Neill "forgot or ignored the distinctive idiom and speech of the Negro, his natural and so often very fresh use of imagery. He resorted to certain literary conventions of uneducated speech, such as dropped consonants, substitution of d's for th's, and typical errors in usage".³ As a symbol of his race, and of mankind generally, it is entirely appropriate that Jones, especially as the play progresses, should lack distinctive features. Nor does the statement do justice to the subtle development of dialogue within the play. The confident slangy dialogue of the first scene:

("You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho' ! De fuss and glory part of it, dat's only to turn de heads o' de low-flung bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits de money. [With a grin] De long green, dat's me every time! "⁴)

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1. Travis Bogard, Richard Moony, Walter J. Meserve, The Revels History of Drama in English, Volume 8: American Drama, London, 1977, p. 309.
 2. Signi Falk, "Dialogue in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill", Modern Drama, December 1960, p. 315.
 3. Ibid.
 4. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 101.

gives way to the short, repetitive exclamations in the monologue of Scene Five: "Lawd, I done wrong! I knows it! I'se sorry! Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po' sinner!"¹ By Scene Seven, Jones' speech is reduced to an incoherent mumble and he finally joins in the incantations and cries of the Witch-doctor. Speech, the reflection of Jones' veneer of civilization, has been lost.

Yank in The Hairy Ape, however, goes to his death talking as volubly as he spoke at the beginning. Macgowan and Jones wrote that O'Neill struck a happy medium here "with speech which is realistic and characteristic in idiom but which is developed in idea, intensity and length of utterance clear past the possibilities of the people of the play".² In fact, Yank is usually given some realistic motivation for his speeches. By nature he is loquacious, his lengthy addresses to the men are justified by the whisky and by the fact that he is their leader. The final speech, an outpouring of his thoughts, is no more unrealistic than any soliloquy. Travis Bogard argues that this play fails to move "behind life" through expressionist means for two reasons: "... the characters are so primitive that they are in appearance what they are in essence ... [and] O'Neill's technical skill in depicting Yank and his crew is superb realism, ... even Yank's long monologues emerge convincingly from situation and character."³ Nonetheless we have O'Neill's stage instruction that the scenes should not be treated realistically, and while Yank may emerge as both symbol and man, the brazen metallic quality of the stokers' voices is more likely to suggest the background chorus of the representative types the author wanted:

"VOICES: Don't be cracking your head wid ut, Yank

You gat headache, py yingo!

One thing about it - it rhymes with drink!

Ha, ha, ha!

Drink don't think!

1. Ibid., p. 122.

2. Macgowan and Jones, p. 28.

3. Bogard, Contour, p. 247.

Drink, don't think!

Drink, don't think!"¹

Similarly the language of the Fifth Avenue Crowd may in itself be quite realistic:

"VOICES: Dear Doctor Caiaphas! He is so sincere!

What was the sermon? I dozed off.

About the radicals, my dear – and the false doctrines
that are being preached.

We must organize a hundred per cent American bazaar",²

but the overdressed marionettes who deliver it are not, and O'Neill instructs that the lines be delivered "in toneless, simpering voices".³ The exaggerated effect here may work best in the theatre.

Of all O'Neill's devices, the asides of Strange Interlude are the most obviously anti-illusionist. Yet they have their origins in more realistic plays. Strindberg urged that monologue, condemned by realists as unnatural, can nonetheless be used to advantage "if one provides motives for it [and] makes it natural",⁴ and this O'Neill was at pains to do in the earliest of his plays. Thus The Emperor Jones is basically a monologue, but one motivated by the terror of the jungle and fear of capture. The declarations of The Hairy Ape, quite unfairly described by Louis Baurly as a loud and vehement "substitute for drama"⁵ have, as we have seen, a realistic basis. But there is not as Kenneth Macgowan points out, "the contrast and conflict of the speech of one man against his thought, and the thought of one man against the thought of another".⁶ This was to be the great innovation of The Great God Brown. By splitting the human mind into two and allowing a masked and naked face to speak different thoughts, O'Neill showed the contradictions within the personality. Technically,

1. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 140.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

4. Strindberg, "On Modern Drama", p. 179.

5. Louis Baurly, "Mr. O'Neill's New Plays", The Freeman, May 3, 1922, p. 185.

6. Kenneth Macgowan, "The O'Neill Soliloquy", in Cargill et al, p. 451.

however, the device led to problems which were not always overcome. As D. Kaucher points out, it was not always possible to tell when a character was supposed to be heard by the others on stage. For example, in the Prologue, Dion says mockingly to the air: "This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father."¹ But the astral address is overheard by his father who stares at him and responds with "angry bewilderment".² Nonetheless, O'Neill's bold dismissal of plausible explanations finally launched him into the world of expressionism.

The asides were perfected in Strange Interlude. Easy to distinguish when reading because of the smaller print, these interior monologues spoken by the same character, without masks, posed a slight production problem. A number of accounts claim that the director of the first production, Philip Moeller, was inspired by the stopping of a train he was travelling in to freeze the action of the play while a thought was being expressed, but Winifred L. Dusenbury points out that O'Neill had already suggested a similar idea in the 1924 stage instructions for Welded:

"They stare straight ahead and remain motionless. They speak ostensibly one to the other, but showing by their tone it is a thinking aloud to oneself, and neither appears to hear what the other has said."³

Whatever the source of the idea, the method appears to have worked well, audiences adapting quickly to the convention which was helped by a slight pause before asides were spoken, with the thought-speech, according to Walter Eaton, often taking on "a strange, eerie quality".⁴ Lynn Fontanne claimed that she surreptitiously cut many lines because the stopping of the action and delivery of an aside would have been ridiculous:

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1. O'Neill, Brown, p. 12.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Winifred L. Dusenbury, "Strange Interlude - Then and Now", Players Magazine, Vol. 41, April 1965, p. 175.
 4. Walter Prichard Eaton, The Theatre Guild: The First Ten Years, New York, 1971.

"I remember a passionate love scene with Ned [Darrell] and we were sporting about quite vigorously and then I was supposed to be thinking a lot of thoughts at the same time and the action was supposed to stop and we had to freeze while I was speaking my unconscious thoughts. Well, the audience would have just laughed out loud at me if I had done it. You can't stop in the middle and have a brain wave."¹

Miss Fontanne's actions may have justified O'Neill's distrust of actors, but although there is some evidence that one of the reasons for including asides was to "limit the risk of misinterpretation on the part of the actors"², the method obviously was designed for more serious purposes.

At its most basic, the technique allows for simple exposition. Marsden's opening soliloquy informs us not only of external facts such as Gordon's death but also tells us of his obsession with his mother and feelings of sexual impotence. With the entrance of Nina the asides allow us a full view of the characters' opinions of each other:

"NINA (thinking wearily)

The fathers laugh at little daughter Nina . . . I must get away! . . . nice Charlie doggy . . . faithful . . . fetch and carry . . . bark softly in books at the deep night . . ."³

Nina's comment on the end of the war allowing safe return from Europe draws the bitter reflection from Marsden: "A taunt . . . I didn't fight . . . physically unfit . . . not like Gordon . . . Gordon in flames . . ."⁴, but his spoken words by contrast are uttered in a joking tone: "Little you know the deadly risks I run, Nina! If you'd eaten some of the food they gave me on my renovated transport, you'd shower me with congratulations!"⁵ The asides then build up with a certain tension, existing as

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1. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 275.
 2. Tornqvist, p. 207.
 3. O'Neill, Nine Plays, p. 496.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. *Ibid.*

they so often do in contrast to the spoken word and allowing the baser feelings of the characters to emerge. A number of critics believe that the statement of such thoughts has taken away from the subtlety which would have resulted from more suggestion and that by knowing too much we lose a sense of surprise or suspense. But at the end of Act One Nina talks about "the lies in the sounds called words".¹ Most obviously she is referring to the situations where dialogue does not accord with the thoughts which characters express. But the significance of this statement extends further. The words, even of the soliloquies, do not always convey the character's true motivations; they express only the conscious thoughts, not the unconscious ones. Yet the paradoxical achievement of O'Neill in this play is to inform us, through using the asides which express the thoughts of what lies beyond the verbalization. Thus the playwright has given us three levels of meaning. Tornqvist gives us the example of Marsden, worried about his mother's health, assuring Evans that she is still under sixty-five. The speech is followed, however, by an afterthought in which Marsden reproaches himself for lying about her age in which he says that he must be on edge. "Marsden's lie is clearly not intended for Evans; it is meant for himself."² It is these layers of conflicting emotions which give the sense of foreboding to the play and it is within these contrasts that the true interest of the drama lies. To claim, as some early critics did, that the asides and soliloquies are superfluous and interruptive of the play's action is to miss the point of this psychological, novel-like play.

The device was used once more in Dynamo to show the conflict in Reuben Light, torn between a longing for the traditional values of his parents, materialistic values and a mystical fascination for the god of electricity. At its best, the interior monologues and ordinary dialogue of Reuben and the other characters interweave like musical themes, helped by a multiple set where characters could pursue their own thoughts, oblivious of the others, but O'Neill later realized the device was "mistakenly used"³ with less reason than in Strange Interlude. Eventually the technique was

1. Ibid., p. 522.

2. Tornqvist, p. 208.

3. Roy S. Waldau, Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild, 1928-1939, Cleveland, 1972, p. 50.

developed more fully by film-makers and O'Neill abandoned it in his plays.

In Days Without End he returned to the use of two characters and masks to express the internal conflict, with one innovation: the novel which John is writing. The recounting of its story weaves through the first three acts, serving the double purpose of explaining the hero's past, and, by predicting the future, driving John's wife, Elsa, who is recovering from Influenza, out into the pouring rain. There the influence of the story stops, however. While the hero returns to God, as John does in the last scene, it is not in death that the real husband and wife are reconciled as in the book because Elsa recovers. It may have been this discrepancy in the ending which upset so many reviewers.

O'Neill's poetic diction has received scant attention from the critics who tend to dismiss his language as either "grandiose and extravagant and unreal", and "pseudo-poetic"¹, or barren, flat and repetitive. Certainly O'Neill was capable of using different styles to reflect his characters. In a thorough analysis of some of the language of Ape, Tornqvist shows how the fusion of realistic and stylized diction mirrors the individual-symbol combination in the play. He treats Paddy's long speech recalling the era of sailing ships as a prose poem, noting the rhythm, use of repetition, alliteration, aural rhyme and imagery, all of which harmoniously balance the subject matter of the dream:

"Brave men they was, and bold men surely!

We'd be sailing out, bound down round the Horn maybe.

We'd be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze,

singing a chanty song wld no care to it."²

The passage is beautiful, but it is not inappropriate in the play, containing as it does, Paddy's Irish intonations. By contrast Yank's following speech seems even more hard-boiled:

1. Kemelman, p. 486.

2. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 43.

"Say, listen to me – wait a moment – I gotta talk, see. I belong and he don't. He's dead but I'm livin'. Listen to me! Sure I'm part of de engines! Why de hell not! Dey move, don't dey? Dey've speed, ain't dey? Dey smash trou don't dey? Twenty-five knots a' hour! Dat's going some!"¹

Here too there are rhythms and movement, especially in the build-up to a crescendo of the last six sentences, but the man who identifies with the engines speaks like a machine. The rhythms are abrupt; virtually every word is stressed. The sentences are mere phrases, spat out, made up of monosyllabic words. Soft fricatives are replaced by plosives and the New York gutter slang, presumably delivered in a nasal accent gives the effect of a dissonance only we are as yet aware of but which Yank will realize when it dawns on him that he does not, in fact, belong.

The same contrast in language is apparent in Brown. Dion, the poet, explains in a moving, gentle speech his relations with his parents, particularly his father:

"I'd like to sit where he spun what I have spent. What aliens we were to each other! When he lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met that man before. Only at the second of my conception. After that, we grew hostile with concealed shame."²

The soft, questioning "w" sounds, the longer, unbroken sentences, the personal detail, contrast with the hard, sharp exclamations of the mocking, masked Dion speaking directly afterwards:

"I am thy shorn, bald, nude sheep! Lead on, Almighty Brown, thou kindly Light!"³

One device it is very easy to miss in reading O'Neill's plays is his use of silence and pauses. In the scene where Brown, also posing as Dion, presents his plan to the

1. Ibid., p. 145.

2. O'Neill, Brown, p. 45.

3. Ibid., p. 46.

Committee, and the body is found, the dialogue reaches a frenzy of excitement. But interspersed are a number of dramatic pauses which a producer would have to observe to be true to the rhythm of the play. Thus the announcement that Brown is dead is followed by a "pause of silence"¹. The pause allows the news to sink in, but it also allows the audience to reflect on what the news means to the individuals on-stage and gives heightened drama to the moment, especially as so many characters are on-stage. Then there are shouts from the draughtsman and the committee, which acts in this scene as a kind of chorus. They then all run off and leave Margaret "stunned with horror". The successive noise-silence-noise-silence has been reinforced by the crowd-individual antithesis, and is further strengthened by the contrast between stillness and the quick prancing movements of Brown. This use of pause for emphasis at a psychological point, especially after a crescendo of sound is frequently used by O'Neill. As Kaucher points out, the drums, gongs and flutes of Act I, vi of Marco Millions are followed by a "sudden dead silence"², this being our first view of the throne room of the Great Kaan. The pause is also used in this play to communicate something more than mere words could convey. "Smile with infinite silence upon our speech"³, says Kublai to the dead Kukachin.

Up to this point the use of sound and stillness can still be regarded as fairly realistic; it is in Lazarus Laughed that O'Neill breaks through the barriers and exploits the emotional power of sound without attempting plausibility. Laughter itself becomes a symbol of the joy of living, devoid of self-consciousness and fear, triumphant and infectious. O'Neill's stage instructions describe it as "a great bird song"⁴ which, even when Lazarus is dying "rises and is lost in the sky like the flight of his soul back into the womb of Infinity".⁵ This laughter which O'Neill explained as the "triumphant Yes to

1. Ibid., p. 101.

2. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 241.

3. Kaucher, p. 136.

4. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 19.

5. Ibid., p. 150.

life in its entirety and its eternity"¹ and as an affirmation of God, is more than a reflection of mere joy. Heard also at moments of tragedy, it represents the transcendence over suffering. By contrast, those like Caligula who live by pain and cruelty can only laugh "gratingly"² or whimper or, finally, weep. The crowd barks, crows like roosters, howls and hoots in every conceivable manner in contrast to the gay, loving, musical laughter of Lazarus and his followers. Any actor who accepts this role has enormous demands placed on him to interpret the subtleties of Lazarus' laughter, but he is helped by the other sounds of the play. For example, at the climax, where Lazarus is about to be thrown into the flames, the chorus asks "in a great pleading echo"³ what is beyond. Lazarus answers lovingly and with exaltation, bursting forth into laughter "in its highest pitch of ecstatic summons to the feast and sacrifice of Life, the Eternal!"⁴ but the chorus also picks up the laughter as they pour down the banked walls of the amphitheatre, moving into the patterns of a dance, and beginning to chant, as Tiberius too joins in the laughter. Lazarus' voice has acted as the solo instrument which preceded the orchestra. The emotional impression probably given in production would be of his laugh being amplified and being transmitted through all the characters. With something as infectious as laughter, it is difficult to believe that the joy would not spread through the audience as well. The simple lines of the chorus:

"Laugh! Laugh!

We are the stars!

We are dust!

We are gods!

We are laughter",⁵

kept basic, as Bogard suggests, to allow the forty-nine members of the chorus, masked

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1. Tornqvist, p. 167.
 2. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 130.
 3. Ibid., p. 145.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.

so that articulation would be blurred, to be able to speak distinctly. The simple repetitive chants would have the effect, however, of the kind one sees at rallies and football matches. An emotional conviction, the feeling of participating at a ritual was what O'Neill sought to achieve. This persuasive use of sound, orchestrated so that individual voices were augmented and emphasized by the massed chorus and by the use of instruments and thunder is effectively contrasted by silence. So, for example, the chorus of Lazarus' followers falter in their defiance of death when they view the bodies of Martha and Mary. Their voices grow hesitant and faint, the music stops and "There is a second of complete, death-like silence. The mourning folk in the foreground are frozen figures of grief".¹ The silence is followed by a short scene of growing terror and wailing and this, the first act, without the dominant white figure of Lazarus, ends on a despairing note which is not only a contrast to the later scenes of joy, but suggests the final misery of a remorseful Caligula in the last act.

Aware from the beginning of his play-writing career of the power of music to evoke emotions, O'Neill uses refrains from songs and snatches of music to convey atmosphere and underline a point that is being made. In the first scene of Ape, the confused singing, shouting, cursing and laughing of the opening becomes the unified chant on whisky which is led by Paddy. The key line, referring to the destructiveness of drink, is picked up afterwards by the refrain of men's speaking voices: "Drink, don't think"². Both activities, by implication, are dangerous; thinking about his situation finally leads to Yank's death. Similarly Paddy's last song in the scene:

"I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me"³,

suggests the theme of the play, that man no longer belongs.

Sweet, sad music is used to reflect Kukachin throughout Marco Millions. In the prologue the sound comes from the tree above her coffin "as if the leaves were tiny

1. Ibid., p. 42.

2. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 140.

3. Ibid., p. 146.

harps strummed by the wind"¹, and the dead princess speaks with a voice which is "more musical than a human voice"². In Act Two the melancholy notes of a flute reflect the low voice of Kukachin reciting poetry. Her death is signified by women's mourning voices, silence, a slow, deep-toned bell, a wailing lament, and faint funeral music. By contrast Marco's hearty, strident character is emphasized by music from full Chinese and Tartar bands which "crashes up to a tremendous blaring crescendo of drums, gongs, and the piercing, shrilling of flutes".³ His triumphant return to Venice, the scene which precedes the mourning for Kukachin in Kublai's palace, is heralded by a blaring, triumphant march.

As well as using music to heighten the atmosphere, O'Neill placed great importance on sound effects, an attitude which he explained shortly before Dynamo went into rehearsal:

"I cannot stress too emphatically the importance of starting early in rehearsals to get these effects exactly right. It must be realized that these are not incidental noises but significant dramatic overtones that are an integral part of that composition in the theatre which is the whole play."⁴

Later in the same memorandum he claimed, "... I always wrote primarily by ear for the ear".⁵ Although O'Neill felt the production of Jones never illustrated what the script called for, sound effects being relegated to the background, this play nonetheless illustrates well the power of sound effects. Jones' revolver, a symbol of both civilization and superstition, punctuates Jones' monologue which in itself becomes a kind of sound effect, an incoherent mumble, and the continuing, underlying thump of the tom-tom. These down-beats, adopted by O'Neill after he read about religious

1. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 216.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 241.

4. Lee Simenson, The Stage is Set, New York, 1963, p. 117.

5. Ibid.

feasts in the Congo which were backed by a drum starting at a normal pulse beat and which were "slowly accelerated until the heart beat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of a drum"¹, contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the play. Given a plausible explanation of the blacks holding a war dance, the persistence even in intervals between scenes, and the gradually increasing tempo of the beat underlined the growing terror of the main character. As A.B. Walkley wrote in the London Times in 1925:

"Of course your nerves are affected. You throb responsive to the drum. You have a feeling of tense expectation. Finally you are exasperated and yearn only for relief from the persistent agonizing sound. It is a nightmare."²

The combination of this continual thump, the contrasting shrill cries or shots from a revolver, and the silent, mimed scenes, presumably even more sinister with the drum beats behind, helped the play become more than a rational experience, and showed O'Neill's thorough grasp of theatricality.

Metallic roars, the clang of furnace doors, the "grating, teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel"³, the crunching coal, shrill whistles and the brazen, metallic quality of the men's voices dominate the first scenes of Ape. Yank himself mingles his voice with this uproar, defiantly claiming that he is part of the engines, and steel. But the irony that he is trapped in this hell is reinforced by the sound effects. In the first scene the lines of bunks "cross each other like the steel framework of a cage".⁴ Yank's claim that he is steel is followed by him pounding his fist against the steel bunks, which the frenzied stokers repeat. In Scene Six Yank has learned that he is not steel: "Sure - her old man - President of de Steel Trust - makes half de steel in de world - steel - where I tought I belonged . . ."⁵ and shakes the bars of his cell door so that

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1. Bowen, p. 131.
 2. Sheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 34.
 3. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 154.
 4. Ibid., p. 137.
 5. Ibid., p. 177.

the whole tier trembles. Finally Yank learns that he was in a cage too, and ironically, trying to free the caged gorilla, is killed and thrown back into it by the animal. As always, O'Neill relies on contrast for effect; the uproar and harsh clanging of the stokehole is exaggerated by the gentle memory of Paddy and his drowsy humming to himself.

Finally Dynamo shows what can be achieved when sound effects are used to enhance meaning. The thunder, wind and rain of the early scenes act as hints of what is to come, but it is in the third last scene that we come face to face with the idol itself:

"The air is full of sound, a soft overtone of rushing water from the rushing water of the dam and the river bed below, penetrated dominantly by the harsh, throaty, metallic purr of the dynamo."¹

Presumably as Reuben comes closer to the heart of the engines in the next scenes, the purr must increase in volume. On one level the sound effects are totally realistic. Simenson, the play's designer, felt on reading the descriptions that the effect was strained and incredible, but followed O'Neill's urgings and visited an actual power plant. His experience there moved him to write:

"Re-reading O'Neill's script, I seemed to understand for the first time the myth of Prometheus the fire-bringer. I understood why primitive peoples had cringed in terror before thunderbolts and erected altars to invisible gods."²

This effect, aroused by the real power-house, he sought to achieve in O'Neill's play, great trouble being taken to avoid the artificial sound effects of the time, by constructing special devices. Again O'Neill used the human voice in counterpoint with the sound effects. Reuben kneels before the dynamo and cries out with a note of despair, Mrs. Fife hums to herself, giving herself up to the spell of the hypnotic,

1. O'Neill, Dynamo, p. 80.

2. Lee Simenson, "A Memo from O'Neill on the Sound Effects for Dynamo", in Cargill et al, p. 457.

metallic purr of the machine, and finally "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".¹ It is hardly surprising that many critics regarded the effects of Dynamo as the best part of the play.

1. O'Neill, Dynamo, p. 101.

Writing about Our Town, Friedrich Duerrenmatt makes the interesting comment that the monologues represent "an advance of the word in the theatre, the attempt of the word to reconquer territory lost a long time ago".¹ Thus gaps are filled, information is given, atmosphere is established not by pause or scenery or action, but by a direct address to the audience. The very first experiment with the monologue came, strangely, from "Centaur", a play which was probably never intended for performance. At the beginning Wilder takes pains to build up the soothing atmosphere of an audience settling in to see The Master Builder:

"Presently the lights are lowered to a coloured darkness, and the warm glow of the footlights begins again the ancient magic."²

But the play never begins. Instead Wilder destroys the illusion by introducing the earnest young Shelley who awkwardly explains that he really wrote Ibsen's play. "Centaur" is really made up of a number of direct addresses to the audience, interspersed with a little argument between the two authors. Hilda, the actress in The Master Builder, hurries on to explain what is happening and reminds Shelley to tell the audience about the poem he was about to write when he died. If "Centaur" were produced, doubtless the chats with the audience would make the philosophy of the play more attractive and more acceptable. Shelley's earnest explanation to us that he was about to write a poem which Ibsen later put into words, is given life when Ibsen stamps his feet and crossly claims it as his own. The poet's exalted beliefs couched in fairly exalted language, ("It is a truth that Plato would have understood that the mere language, the words of a masterpiece, are the least of its offerings, Nay, in the world we have come into now, the languages of the planets have no value; but the impulse, the idea of Comus is a miracle, even in heaven"³), are tempered by his contemporary references to the early twentieth century life of the audience, to machines and telephones and the First World War.

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1. Friedrich Duerrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre", in Theatre in the Twentieth Century, edited by Corrigan, p. 62.
 2. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 53.
 3. Ibid., p. 56.

The Stage Manager of The Happy Journey, present throughout the play, but used only to withdraw properties and to read in for minor, invisible characters, is allowed to smoke, read a newspaper or eat an apple through the course of the play, but should "never be obtrusive nor distract the attention of the audience from the central action"¹, but in Hiawatha we meet for the first time a Stage Manager who fills in with language what other playwrights would have used scenes and scenery to describe. Caught marking chalk lines on the floor of the stage at the rise of the curtain, he fills us in about the arrangements on the train, the berths being represented only by chairs. As has been discussed earlier, he cuts scenes, calls actors and explains the significance of the car's situation. Although obviously in control, little else emerges of his character. His language is straight-forward prose made up largely of direct informative sentences:

"The berths are full . . . The berths are already made up. It is half-past nine. Most of the passengers are in bed . . . They are dropping their shoes on to the floor . . ." ²

His direct explanations to the audience make no reference to us.

By contrast Our Town's Stage Manager addresses the audience directly on a number of occasions: "The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go - doesn't it"³, "There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery"⁴, "Nice town, y'know what I mean?"⁵ Language is being used here to break the barriers between audience and auditorium. At interval we are told: "That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke."⁶ The colloquial phrases and the easy grammar help establish a comfortable link with the "folks" out front. Some of the more serious concerns of the play are

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1. Wilder, The Happy Journey, p. 24.
 2. Wilder, Pullman Car 'Hiawatha', p. 1.
 3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 23.
 4. Ibid., p. 22.
 5. Ibid., p. 23.
 6. Ibid., p. 49.

thus gently and casually introduced. "I want you to try and remember what it was like to have been very young"¹ he tells us when discussing how people come to spend a lifetime together.

A.R. Fulton suggests that "the entire play might be considered a monologue – the monologue of the Stage Manager, illustrated by the acting of other characters and even by the Stage Manager himself"² (although we must disagree with his following statement that "Asides are spoken in the arbitrarily unrealistic manner of those in Strange Interlude"; on the contrary, in O'Neill's play we eavesdrop, but in Wilder's we are invited to share by a very real Stage Manager). The monodrama does allow the Stage Manager to play other parts, act scenes, distort time and space and broaden the significance of the action while maintaining a strong sense of unity within the play.

Wilder's ability to capture the rhythms of every-day speech, to give his characters language which was simple and authentic but nonetheless had the power to convey emotion and significance beyond itself, has been much praised. His success with the written word, however, as we can see from The Angel plays, had to be developed. At its worst, his early style tended to be precious and quaint, loaded with uncomfortable images and esoteric references. "Listen to that wind", says the Woman in the Chlamys. "It is the great fan of time that whirls on the soul for a season."³ Nonetheless, the plays are also full of examples of the kind of writing which Wilder was to make distinctively his own. Humour punctures discussions which are becoming too elevated. Brigomeide's musing about the soul is followed by the entrance of the Leviathan with its down-to-earth complaint: "It is terrible here, lady. These spices have made the streams unendurable".⁴ Hepzibah, in her speech the predecessor of Sabina, gossips with chatty familiarity, although her last line is profound:

1. Ibid., p. 60.

2. A.R. Fulton, "Expressionism – Twenty Years After", Sewanee Review, Vol. 52, Summer 1944, p. 411.

3. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 6.

4. Ibid., p. 63.

"I always say to the girls: Girls, even in faith we are supposed to use our reason. No-one is intended to swallow hook, line and sinker, as the saying is. Now take these children that Herod is killing . . . Why is the little boy in your arms being saved while the others must perish?"¹

In the same play we have examples of Wilder's use of repetition:

"OUR LADY: Hepzibah, we shall really have to beat you if you stop so often. Hepzibah, don't you remember me? Don't you remember how you fell on your knees in the stable? Don't you remember my child?"²

The rhythm and balance this gives one speech is used for the whole of "Childe Roland" where "Open the door" becomes a motif, spoken six times by Roland in the four pages, and providing the climax when Roland says: "Open the door, Death!"³ Rex Burbank points to two further stylistic devices in these plays which were to become characteristic of Wilder's writing, namely the short sentence and the aphorism. We see in "Nascuntur Poetae . . ." how short sentences give the effect of inevitability:

"THE WOMAN IN DEEP RED:

Too late. Too late. You had no choice in this. You must bow your head.

THE BOY: I am trembling. My knees are hot with tears."⁴

Wilder's passion for compression, reflected in the three-minute plays is further reflected in the simple, short sentences, which nonetheless contain moving and profound thoughts. On his own admission, never far from being a school-master, Wilder uses the aphorism "usually in the lines of characters of authority or wisdom [to make] a succinct theme-statement which follows or precedes dramatic illustration or spoken elaboration".⁵ Ever original, however, Wilder is just as likely to change the saying

1. Ibid., p. 98.

2. Ibid., p. 99.

3. Ibid., p. 50.

4. Ibid., p. 5.

5. Burbank, p. 29.

slightly, so that its freshness has shock value. At the end of "Mozart" the Grey Steward says: "Know henceforth that only he who has kissed the leper can enter the kingdom of art"¹. Our expectations are sufficiently thwarted to make us look again, and yet the basic idea of the saying is still there. After all, Wilder did call literature "the orchestration of platitudes".²

Colloquial, realistic and austere, the speech of The Happy Journey reflects the simple, straight-forward, typical American family who speak it. As with "Childhood", the rhythms take us back into our own pasts:

"MA (with almost grim humour). No, I can make wishes without waiting for no star. And I can tell my wishes right out loud too. Do you want to hear them?

CAROLINE (resignedly) No, Ma, we know 'm already. We've heard 'm. (She hangs her head affectedly on her left shoulder and says with unmalicious mimicry:) You want me to be a good girl and you want Arthur to be honest-in-word-and-deed.

MA (majestically): Yes. So mind yourself."³

It is impossible not to feel a chord of response in sympathy with this unaffected, honest dialogue. But Wilder warned in his notes that in spite of the simplicity of the language, the production itself should stimulate the imagination and be implied and suggestive. "Childhood", after all, although much of it is a game, refers to illness and death, and the pain of not being loved. These are also in the background of The Happy Journey: the car has to stop to let a funeral go by, Beulah's baby has died at birth, and Beulah herself has been very ill. As Malcolm Goldstein points out, the growing sense of warmth generated by the simplicity of the dialogue reaches its peak with Beulah's whispered question to her father as her eyes fill with tears: "Are you glad I'm still

1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 87.

2. David P. Edgell, "Thornton Wilder Revisited", Cairo Studies in English, Vol. 2, 1960, p. 51.

3. Wilder, The Happy Journey, p. 19.

alive, Pa?"¹ "Into this line, composed of some of the homeliest words in the language, Wilder packs three of man's basic feelings: the desire for love, the fear of rejection, and the fear of death."²

As Mr. Webb tells the audience, Grover's Corners is a very ordinary town with very ordinary, even dull inhabitants. There is little differentiation in the characters' speech. Editor Webb himself speaks a colloquial English:

"Well, I dunno . . . I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find."³

The folk of the town have very mundane conversations about the weather and homework. Platitudes and banal statements are common in the dialogue:

"DR. GIBBS: They'll have a lot of troubles, I suppose, but that's none of our business. Everyone has a right to their own troubles."⁴

Or, by contrast, at the wedding, Mrs. Soames:

"Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding. I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say: happiness, that's the great thing! The important thing is to be happy."⁵

The first thing Wilder has achieved with this is to make the characters recognizable. But to say as Francis Fergusson does that the effect of this language is "embarrassingly stale and pathetic" or that the characters become "sentimental stereotypes of village folksiness"⁶ is to miss the true purpose of using such particular, easy speech filled with ordinary thoughts. The truisms, like those quoted above, do in

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1. Ibid., p. 21.
 2. Goldstein, p. 82.
 3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 35.
 4. Ibid., p. 55.
 5. Ibid., p. 73.
 6. Fergusson, "Three Allegorists", p. 558.

fact conjure up a significance perhaps normally lost through their over-use, because of the alienation techniques Wilder employs to make us reflect on them. There is too a particular poignancy gained by the mundane language, as there is a parallel feeling of tragedy gained by Emily simply revisiting the normal every-day events of her twelfth birthday. "Ma", says George as he is about to walk down the aisle to be married, "I don't want to grow old. Why's everybody pushing me so?"¹ For a moment time has stopped; George the boy is about to turn into George the man and a vision of middle age, old age and death is contained in the simple question. An agonizing truth lies behind the unaffected words. Emily bids farewell to the beautiful world which is "too wonderful for anybody to realize"² by saying goodbye to the most every-day objects:

"Goodbye to clocks ticking . . . and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up."³

The cliché and platitude are taken a step further in The Skin of Our Teeth to add to the humour which is such an important part of this play. A rather pompous Announcer explains that the Antrobus' house is "a commodious seven-room house, conveniently situated near a public school, a Methodist church, and a fire-house; it is right handy to an A. and P."⁴ Sabina, straw-blonde, over-rouged, fussily wielding a feather-duster tells us "It's simply freezing; the dogs are sticking to the sidewalks . . . The whole world's at sixes and sevens . . ."⁵

The maxims of the play have their serious purpose in this work too (after all the play's title is itself a cliché), but the explanations are also left to Aristotle, Spinoza and the Old Testament, with a little help from Ivy, the maid. This combination of the down-to-earth and the philosophical achieves Wilder's usual purpose of giving

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1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 70.
 2. Ibid., p. 89.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Wilder, The Skin of Our Teeth, p. 98.
 5. Ibid., p. 99.

universal significance to his ordinary characters' lives.

The incongruity of Mr. Antrobus, excellent husband and father and pillar of the church shouting at his wife behind the locked door "She – bitch of a goat's gizzard, I'll break every bone in your body. Let me in or I'll tear the whole house down"¹, the satirical comment from the Fortune Teller: "There are too many people in the world as it is. Everybody's in the way, except one's self"², the unconscious parody from the Announcer of man's achievements: "Credit has been paid to him for many useful enterprises including the introduction of the lever, of the wheel and the brewing of beer . . . [and to his wife] for many practical suggestions, including the hem, the gore, and the gusset; and the novelty of the year – frying in oil"³, all serve to involve the audience through laughter and to make more accessible the exalted theme of man's destiny.

In this play, which unlike the homogeneous population of Our Town, includes various representatives of mankind, characters are given more distinctive speech. The Fortune Teller, for example, with her "Kecks" and "Aljahs" speaks with a certain poetic rhythm:

"They're coming – the Antrobuses. Keck. Your hope. Your despair.
Your selves."⁴

The falling cadence of the last three sentences echoes her disgust. Gladys, who can reel off facts for the asking, speaks her sentences like one word. In response to her father's question about the size of the ocean she says:

"Papa, you're teasing me. It's-three-hundred and sixty million
square-miles-and-it-covers-three-fourths-of-the-earth's-surface-and-
its-deepest-place-is-five-and-a-half-miles-deep-and-its-average-depth-
is-twelve-thousand-feet."⁵

1. Ibid., p. 112.

2. Ibid., p. 136.

3. Ibid., pp. 127-8.

4. Ibid., p. 136.

5. Ibid., p. 141.

Like so many other characters, however, her speech changes in the play. Gladys, in the final act is, after all, the young mother. Sabina's shrill "Oh, oh, oh. Six o'clock and the master not home yet . . . " ¹ is different from the seductive Miss Fairweather's "Go away, boys, go away . . . Why Mr. Simpson. How dare you!!" ² Homer and Moses are so clearly distinguished by language that they actually speak ancient Greek and Hebrew. In fact, their lines are the first words of the Iliad and Genesis, but, as most of the audience would be unaware of this, their voices become sound effects, part of the pattern of this little scene. Left alone on stage the refugees whisper both Homer and Moses' name, to which the characters respond, after a chord or two is struck on a guitar. Homer's "my story is of an angry man: the bitter hatred of Achilles, prince of the house of Peleus, which brought terrible trouble on the Achaeans", an appropriate sentiment at the time of the coming Ice-Age, is spoken gently and reflectively. By contrast Genesis is recited dramatically, the little scene reaching its climax, with the refugees murmuring "Yes, yes". ³ The mood is broken abruptly by the entrance of the family with the sandwiches. A few minutes later, however, it is picked up again when the Judge softly asks about Mrs. Antrobus' sons:

"[MRS. ANTROBUS rises in blind suffering; she walks towards the footlights.]

MRS. ANTROBUS [in a low voice]: Abel, Abel my son, my son, Abel,
my son, Abel, Abel, my son.

[The REFUGEES move with few steps towards her as though in comfort, murmuring words in Greek, Hebrew, German, et cetera] " ⁴

This short sequence, containing nothing more than a kind of chant from Mrs. Antrobus and indistinguishable sounds from the others, creates a moving moment. Characteristically Wilder explodes it with a piercing shriek from Sabina.

1. Ibid., p. 178.

2. Ibid., p. 134.

3. Ibid., p. 120.

4. Ibid., p. 122.

At the end of the act, family and refugees unite in a sound sequence orchestrated by Mr. Antrobus as he instructs Henry to recite his tables and Gladys to learn the beginning of the Bible while in the background "Jingle Bells" is being sung softly by the guests. Civilization with both its profound and popular aspects, is being preserved. The audience is surrounded by sound as Sabina sends the Ushers in to the auditorium and at the back "the sound of chairs being ripped up can be heard".¹

In Act Two as well, Wilder uses the human voice as a sound effect, combining it with other sounds which have a realistic basis, but which contribute to the feeling of impending doom. The applause and cries from an unseen, careless audience, the hidden Bingo Caller and chorus, the Fortune Teller's mechanical predictions "Bright's disease! Your partner's deceiving you in that Kansas City deal. You'll have six grandchildren. Avoid high places"² and the jeering of the Conveeners: "The croaking raven. Old dust and ashes. Rags, bottles, sacks"³ give a kind of anonymous underlying note of seedy exhilaration which suggests that all will end in destruction. Distant rolls of thunder, gradually grow louder, and this act too, ends on a vocal climax, the Fortune Teller dominating the stage while the Conveeners do a serpentine dance around her, their jeers mingling with her sneering response and the unperturbed voice from the Bingo parlour.

Brecht, writing on effects in his "Organum", urged that "music must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into an unthinking slavery".⁴ In his use of sound, Wilder sometimes followed this dictum. The Telegraph Boy sings his telegram to Mrs. Antrobus in a predictable way. What makes the scene unlikely, however, is the soulful howling of the Dinosaur and Mammoth who join in. The sheer obviousness of the sound effects in Our Town which are heard on cue would similarly cause amusement in the audience. The Stage Manager announces

1. Ibid., p. 126.

2. Ibid., p. 133.

3. Ibid., p. 135.

4. Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", p. 102.

"The time is just before dawn"¹ and a rooster crows. Shorty Hawkins, he tells us, is getting ready to flag the 5.45 for Boston and a train whistle is promptly heard. After the wedding ceremony he announces "Well, let's have Mendelssohn's Wedding March!"² and, of course, we do. But Wilder also introduces sound more subtly. Crickets singing, the organ playing Handel's "Largo" and church bells are all background noises designed to enhance the atmosphere. Even the songs of the play, "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds" and "Love Divine" are used as a background accompaniment for the action, although the former, sung during the shared colloquy between young Emily and George about their homework and later at their wedding, takes on an ironic significance when it is finally sung by the mourners at Emily's funeral as dead Emily gazes across to her family and friends and says: "I feel as though I knew them last a thousand years ago."³

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 21.

2. Ibid., p. 73.

3. Ibid., p. 81.

CHAPTER 5

THE EFFECTS OF WHAT WE SEE

As Nina tells Marsden in Strange Interlude, the mere use of the sounds called words is inadequate to convey the truth. O'Neill devised a number of techniques to overcome the limitations of conventional dialogue, but his plays also rely heavily on a traditional dramatic device, the use of movement, mime and dance. Strindberg himself argued the case for mime, explaining that it could replace unnatural monologues, but whereas O'Neill employed movement to convey information realistically, he also made use of more stylized gestures to convey meaning and to jolt the audience with unfamiliar sights.

Sometimes the movements and the tableaux are, above all, dramatic. Memories of a production of Lazarus would probably be dominated by the vision of the majestic, white-robed main figure on his raised platform surrounded by the dancing crowds and laughing triumphantly; Yank behind the bars of the gorilla cage facing the audience, gradually slipping in a heap on the floor and dying, could be an unforgettable last view of Ape. But O'Neill also used his action to help give depth to the play. In Jones, for example, much of the significance of action and meaning comes from the movement. The play significantly starts with mime rather than sound, the Negro woman speaking across the stage, unaware that Smithers is watching her suspiciously. We have time to absorb the visual information from set, character and situation and to become aware of the atmosphere of guilt, suspicion and fear which dominates the drama. When Smithers grabs her, the play explodes into dramatic dialogue and violent physical action, the woman sinking to the ground and embracing his knees in frantic terror, Smithers raising his whip threateningly. By contrast the following scene is almost static, with Jones sitting on his throne with easy dignity. This false, careless superiority makes the crouched fleeing of the later scenes more dramatic, Jones gradually sinking lower throughout the play, at first throwing himself on the ground, then slinking cautiously, throwing himself on his knees, raising his clasped hands to the sky and pleading in a

movement reminiscent of the old woman's supplication, then flinging himself full length, face downward on the ground, and, in his final scene, squirming along on his belly.

The projected fears, none of whom speak a recognizable language, become successively more and more distinct and individualized. His first projection, the black squirming Little Formless Fears which manage to surround him and are reaching up when he shoots them, are shapeless, with only glittering eyes that can be distinguished. Jeff the Pullman porter, a ghost from Jones' past, is recognizable, but throws his dice "with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton".¹ Similarly the Prison Guard and his convicts, and the Auctioneers and Planters, are unreal and rigid in their movements. Sound is deliberately cut, the Prison Guard cracking his whip noiselessly, the belles and dandies chatting in dumb show. The artificial, marionettish quality of this movement gives way to the slow sway of Negroes on board ship in the next scene of the slaves "sitting in crumpled, despairing attitudes".² This mimed scene is more realistic than the earlier ones and our sympathy is obviously meant to be aroused. Finally the Congo witch doctor is painted as an individual. His songs and dance are weird, but O'Neill places no limitations on the flexibility of his movements as he narrates in pantomime the story of Jones' flight. The final moments of Jones' life are conveyed almost entirely through mime, Jones managing only a handful of exclamations which punctuate what must be a most powerful scene, the movement being aided by the incantations, tom-tom and final revolver shot.

Something of the same quality is captured in Ape. Again movement is allied with sound to create dramatic theatrical moments. The men of the first scene, forced to stoop so that they resemble Neanderthal Man, with hairy chests, long powerful arms and over-developed back and shoulder muscles, open the play, passing bottles from hand to hand, with two men about to have a fight providing a "confused, inchoate uproar".³ Visually the opening of this scene provides a contrast with its ending,

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1. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 116.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
 3. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Ape, p. 137.

the men reduced to docile machines as they "jump up mechanically, file through the door silently close upon each other's heels in what is very like a prisoner's lockstep".¹ Extra significance is also given by implied contrast with the seething humanity of the stokehole to the opening of Scene Two where the two, incongruous figures of Mildred and her aunt, isolated against a background of the vivid life of the sea, stress the women's disharmony with nature. The same point is emphasised with the stiffly affected church crowd on Fifth Avenue. At the end of the second act which involves the meeting between Mildred and Yank, the actions and reactions are made almost entirely through movement. Their horror at seeing each other, she paralysed by his naked, shameless brutality, he turned to stone by the white apparition, is conveyed by a shocked pause which is followed by her faint and Yank's bewildered fury as he hurls his shovel at the bulkhead. Speech could have added nothing to this scene.

In this play O'Neill also attempts to convey the idea of Yank caught between a natural life and a civilized state, through visual means. Again and again he stresses how the stokers are like hairy apes and monkeys, caught in cages. Yank for example, in the prison cell, seizes one bar with both hands and puts his two feet up against the others "so that his position is parallel to the floor like a monkey's".² Yet the immediate cause of Yank's dissatisfaction is that he can think, and just before he jumps onto the bars he is seen "in the attitude of Rodin's 'The Thinker' ".³ The visual symbolism becomes a little unclear in the last scene, however, where the gorilla is seen squatting in the same attitude as the statue.

This visual identification of a character with an animal or another character is used again in Brown. Dion, the young Pan, "cuts a grotesque caper, like a harlequin"⁴ in front of his parents. Brown, having adopted Dion's mask in Act Four "leaps grotesquely from behind his desk and cuts a few goatish capers".⁵ Egil Tornqvist

1. Ibid., p. 147.

2. Ibid., p. 177.

3. Ibid.

4. O'Neill, Brown, p. 14.

5. Ibid., p. 93.

points out the significance of dance in this play, Dion being able to sing and dance marvellously but Brown being too fat to dance although once he inherits the mask he designs a capitol with a Silenus dancing on the cupola and finds it hard to avoid dancing himself. The play begins and ends with a dance, Margaret urging her boys to go and join in, thus "giving advice as to the proper way of living".¹

Repetition of action through pantomime in Act One, scene four of Marco Millions allows repetition without incurring boredom. As a contrast to the previous scene, Marco's responses to the Ali brothers and the Prostitute are quite worldly-wise, his new attitude being symbolized in his kiss. Although movements in this scene are quite realistic, O'Neill once again instructs that the loading of the boat by the half-naked slaves should be done with "mechanical precision"² and that the sailors on the mizzenmast perform every action "in unison with a machine-like rhythm".³ In both cases O'Neill is making a social comment, appropriate in this satirical play, about the mechanisation of human lives to which Marco contributes. Opposing this we have the typically O'Neill implication that dance expresses the positive side of life, it being mentioned in association with Kukachin and a troupe of young girls and boys moving in a "gliding, interweaving dance pattern"⁴ at her funeral.

Dances further epitomize the difference in philosophy between the choruses in Lazarus. Lazarus' followers move in "weaving patterns"⁵, which are so infectious that even the old men are impelled to move. But those who do not believe can only manage jerky steps "in a grotesque sort of marionettes' country dance"⁶ or twist their bodies "in bestial parody of the dance of the Followers".⁷ A fight between the two groups itself becomes a kind of dance, the movements stylized as "pushing, whirling,

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1. Tornqvist, p. 144.
 2. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 264.
 3. Ibid., p. 272.
 4. Ibid., p. 299.
 5. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 27.
 6. Ibid., p. 30.
 7. Ibid., p. 30.

struggling"¹, individual figures indistinguishable as "knives and swords flash above the heads of the masks, [and] hands in every tense attitude of striking, clutching, tearing are seen unpraised".² Caligula, like the other non-believers is also unable to move with freedom, his dances being "grotesque, hopping"³ capers "like some grotesque cripple".⁴

In the same way that O'Neill understood the effect of silence, he was aware of the drama of the frozen posture. At Lazarus' first entrance all raise their goblets towards him, "then suddenly they stop, the music dies out, and an awed and frightened stillness prevails".⁵ Lazarus' stature is enhanced as he has had the power to hypnotize his audience. Even off-stage, about to be thrown into the fire, Lazarus has the ability to command absolute attention: "at his first word there is a profound silence in which each dancer remains frozen in the last movement".⁶ These arrested moments are the more striking because of the contrast with the movement.

Occasionally, when O'Neill is seeking a particular effect, he gives exact instructions on grouping. Thus, for example, in Brown, Margaret sits in a chair, the boys surrounding her "as if for a family photo"⁷, or, at the end of the play, they are supposed to loom around her like protective giants. In Days, as Tornqvist points out, the positioning which O'Neill outlines indicates the strength of conflicting desires. At the beginning of the play John and Loving sit next to each other. As Loving gains power, he is positioned in a stronger situation, for instance when looking down at the half-asleep John. The end of the play, which O'Neill actually sketched, instructed that Loving, forced to surrender, slumps forward to the floor onto his back, his head beneath the foot of the Cross with "arms outflung so that his body forms another cross".⁸ John standing likewise, forms a third cross. Tornqvist suggests that these

1. Ibid., p. 35.

2. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

3. Ibid., p. 129.

4. Ibid., p. 59.

5. Ibid., p. 17.

6. Ibid., p. 145.

7. O'Neill, Brown, p. 72.

8. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Days, p. 107.

recall the ones on Golgotha, John and Loving representing the repentant and hardened sinner on either side of Christ.

In an interesting colloquy between O'Neill and Oliver M. Sayler, the critic put the view held by Craig and R.E. Jones that the artist of the theatre should have a thorough understanding of theatre technique and be capable, among other things, of designing and superintending the construction of both scenery and costume as well as inventing the lighting to be used. O'Neill's response, in accord with ^{that of} his designer, Simenson, pointed out that an author's creativity in such crafts would limit the appeal of the play to the playwright's theatre rather than any theatre and that the inner, spiritual unity of the play would be lost. In spite of this answer, O'Neill, the son of a professional actor, with a background of involvement in amateur groups himself, could not help but have a thorough grasp of the technical elements of staging, a knowledge which is reflected in the stage instructions of most of his plays. Influenced by Macgowan, he appreciated the potentialities of the new kind of staging which represented a synthesis of setting, lights, actors and play, and realized that scenery could be simplified and suggestive to both provide a medium for the actor and to suggest a wealth of spiritual and aesthetic qualities. Truth, after all, did not necessarily come from an imitation of reality.

As we have already discussed, the movement of Jones is from the panoramic to the claustrophobic. The audience chamber in the palace, high ceilinged, bare, with pillars and arches offers only a distant view of the hills beyond. But the proscenium arch acts as a kind of camera lens, zooming in on the end of the plain where the great forest begins, moving ever closer to the underbrush and finally the foot of a tree as the vegetation becomes larger and more overwhelming. Set has been used to mirror Jones' psychological state. Colour too enhances the atmosphere and takes on a significance of its own. The play is built on a contrast of black and white, not simply to illustrate the stripping of white civilization from the black man, but to reflect the overwhelming blackness of terror as Jones travels from the whitewashed palace into the gloomy forest and experiences the darkness of his own mind, gradually discarding his clothes so that he too becomes a blacker figure. In the same way that gun shots

pierce the steady throbbing of the tom-tom, so too flashes of colour add fire to the basic colour. Scarlet, the colour of blood (and the words "bloody" and "bleeding" are used again and again by Smithers in the first scene) gives a certain grandeur to the Emperor's throne, strips of matting and Jones' trousers. It is also the colour of the stain covering the witch doctor's body. Emil Roy believes that the use of scarlet together with the blazing sunlight of the first scene implicitly link Jones with "suffering heroes like Prometheus and disguised gods like Apollo, the sun-deity"¹ but it is more likely that the symbolism of blood is being used to suggest Jones' individual and collective past, both of which are marked by bloodshed. His own death is also probably hinted at.

The first production of Jones by the Provincetown Players under O'Neill's watchful eye managed, according to some critics, to blend acting and scenery so that Charles S. Gilpin as Jones "seems fairly painted into the scenic design".² Although the original settings had been constructed as traditional realistic pieces, a few days before the opening Cleon Throckmorton substituted simple cutouts which were used as silhouettes against the dome. Kenneth Macgowan was predictably delighted with the simplicity and suggestiveness of this set:

"For the first scenes of the Emperor's flight, there is hardly more than a dark suggestion of the shadowy night-sky behind the gaunt trees. It blazes out into beauty when we reach the edge of a clearing and see the magnificent naked body of the Emperor silhouetted against it."³

Scene changes may have been a little lengthy, but designers, actors and playwright had worked together to achieve a little triumph and O'Neill had written a play which encouraged the various elements to blend.

Again in Ape O'Neill faced the challenge of objectifying Yank's thoughts and emotions through the setting while adding atmosphere to the play. His particular

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1. Emil Roy, "Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape as Mirror Plays", Comparative Drama, Vol. 2, Spring 1968, p. 22.
 2. Broun, "The Emperor Jones", p. 146.
 3. Macgowan, "The Emperor Jones", p. 593.

achievement in this play however, is to show that Yank does not belong to his environment. Thus the forecastle of the first scene is so cramped that the men cannot stand upright. Again and again the set suggests that Yank is caged in the steel framework of the lines of bunks, in the hell-like stokehole, behind the bars of prison cells and finally in the gorilla's cage. Clara Blackburn even suggests that the procession of gaudy marionettes on Fifth Avenue "is also a cage against the bars of which he beats in vain".¹ The steel bars of the settings, however, provide an ironical comment: the very steel with which Yank initially identifies is in fact what alienates and isolates him.

O'Neill instructed that the treatment of the scenes should by no means be naturalistic. Strindberg had urged that scenery should be asymmetrical and economical, without doors, and set diagonally so that the eye is led to unfamiliar perspectives. In Scene Six O'Neill achieves this by giving the impression that the set extends beyond the stage:

"The cells extend back diagonally from right front to left rear. They do not stop, but disappear in the dark background as if they ran on, numberless, into infinity."²

A limited stage space could only present an example, but clever set design can hint at the impossibility of Yank escaping from a world of cages that stretch into infinity. The effect is enhanced by the compression of the set and the feeling of heat, noise and darkness which so many of the settings require. Some early critics could not cope with the distorted settings: "I believe", wrote Malcolm Cowley in 1926, "that stylization belongs to the technique of painting or poetry rather than the stage, and I disapprove of symbolism in all its forms"³, while Virgil Geddes condemned the stage machinery as substituting for an artist's craftsmanship. But O'Neill was in fact using the setting to

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1. Clara Blackburn, "Continental Influences on Eugene O'Neill's Expressionistic Dramas", American Literature, Vol. 13, May 1941, p. 117.
 2. O'Neill, Ah Wilderness!, p. 172.
 3. Malcolm Cowley, "Eugene O'Neill: Writer of Synthetic Drama", Brentano's Book Chat, Vol. 5, July and August 1926, p. 21.

comment on the play's concerns, the fusion between the theatrical elements being so clever in fact that even the background actors become part of the set, the Fifth Avenue crowd, for example, acting as a kind of moving set-piece as they saunter affectedly across the stage, unresponsive to Yank who bumps viciously into them.

Unlike the two previous plays, Brown comes much closer to realism, Billy Brown's office for example being complete with a swivel chair and telephone. It is in the backdrops, however, that O'Neill places his symbolism, the Anthonys' sitting-room, for instance, having a background painted with "the intolerable lifeless realistic detail of the stereotyped paintings which usually adorn the sitting-rooms of such houses".¹ Brown's office wall is similarly a parody of an office wall with over-meticulous representation of detail. Opposed to this, Cybel's parlour with its dirty, plush furniture has wallpaper which is a dull yellow brown, "resembling a blurred impression of a fallow field in early spring"², and seven years later, the parlour of this Mother Earth figure has a cornucopian design with brilliantly coloured fruits and flowers tumbling over one another. The setting of the Prologue on the pier is railed to suggest a court: "Billy stands at the left corner, forward, his hand on the rail, like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge."³ The effect is repeated in Dion's sitting-room seven years later with an identical arrangement of furniture to suggest a court-room. The two young men are accused in the play of avoiding fulfillment and commitment, as Brown cries out to the Captain of Police as he lies dying: "I don't want justice. I want love."⁴

Strange Interlude too relies on realistic stage settings, full of detail, which may have been in tune with the detail of the monologues but must have appeared at odds with the overall lack of realism of the device. Certainly it is interesting to note that the drab, cluttered sets of the 1928 production gave way to suggestive, stylized scenes in 1965, with transparent walls which reflected the characters' frankness and, according

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1. O'Neill, Brown, p. 25.
 2. Ibid., p. 39.
 3. Ibid., p. 9.
 4. Ibid., p. 107.

to Winifred Dusenbury¹ seemed more natural to the play.

An historical setting was employed in Marco Millions but the contemporary speech of its businessmen ensured that the audience was aware of the contemporary satire. O'Neill is concerned here with the polarity between Western materialism and Chinese wisdom and builds his sets to reflect this and other contrasts. Parallel scenes of the throne room of the Papal Legate, the Mahometan ruler and finally of Kublai Khan which is far more splendid than the others, reinforce the comparison. Perhaps most effective of all is the scene viewed by a weary Kublai in his crystal of Marco's return to Venice. The garish, vulgar banquet is dominated by a table loaded with goods which make it resemble "the front of a pretentious delicatessen store".² When the guests and Marco eat, they are entirely hidden by the piles of food. The scene which follows, however, of Kukachin's funeral in her father's palace is one of contrasting true splendour and grief.

At the beginning of the play O'Neill wanted the architectural facades of five separate civilizations to be presented during the first half hour of playing time. Although these instructions are apparently very demanding, O'Neill, the man of the theatre, had planned for this, the sets calling for an identical framework which not only cut costs of the Theatre Guild production but, by providing parallel settings, would reinforce his theme of polarity and contrasts. Unfortunately he did not fare so well with his use of mute actors as part of the setting in the first scenes. These actors, representing mankind (a ruler, a priest, a soldier, a mother nursing a baby, two children playing, a young couple in a loving embrace, a middle-aged couple, an old couple, and a coffin) were to be seen three times in different costumes. But the Guild omitted them, with O'Neill's consent. The result, according to Lee Simenson, was "dramatically feeble".³

The detailed instructions of Lazarus bear out O'Neill's comment to Barrett Clark:

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1. Dusenbury, p. 176.
 2. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 293.
 3. Simenson, The Stage is Set, p. 116.

"I've worked out every detail of the setting and action, even the lighting. Incidentally, I've done the same thing with all my plays, only . . . I didn't get credit for it."¹

Although not in any sense abstract, the settings of Lazarus are marked by a grand simplicity which is in keeping with the play itself. They are remarkably symmetrical, with a raised platform at the centre back to allow Lazarus to stand above the crowd. There is a constant change between interior and exterior settings, a variation O'Neill had already deliberately employed in Beyond the Horizon, which was presumably consciously used here to give a kind of rhythm and to balance the sense of space with the details. For example, the very first scene is the main room of Lazarus' house which is low-ceilinged and sparsely furnished. This constricted space, however, contains doorways which direct our thoughts outwards to the waiting crowds. The space of the square in Athens or the exterior of Tiberius' villa in Capri allow room for the chorus, which must suggest great crowds. In Act Two, Scene Two, O'Neill even writes of the "laughter of thousands".² Tiberius' banquet hall, an immense, high-ceilinged room, uses different levels with its dais and furniture to reflect the situation of the characters in this, the climax of the play. Thus Tiberius stands initially on the dais but by the end of the act Lazarus has replaced him while Caesar "grovels half under the table".³ Caligula's movements tend to be around the steps of the dais and at Lazarus' feet. Most of Act Four, Scene One in this vast room is played with only four characters, small figures in a room filled with Lazarus' vision of eternity and the laughter of God. O'Neill's instructions and the play itself achieve such a Greek quality of drama as religious and metaphysical ritual, the last scene being actually set in the arena of an amphitheatre, that it comes as a slight shock to read that "the curtain rises"⁴, for O'Neill had conceived the play as being performed in an indoor theatre with picture-frame stage.

1. Clark, The Man and His Plays, p. 117.

2. O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, p. 73.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Although the settings of the two preceding plays were basically realistic, O'Neill broke new ground in Dynamo. The play opens with a view of the exterior of the Fife and Light homes, the front walls being removed to show the different interiors. Both houses are expressive of the dominating characteristics of the inhabitants, the Light cottage, a traditional white frame New England house containing old-fashioned furniture, a washstand with bowl and pitcher suggesting the moral cleanliness of the Reverend Light, Biblical prints and a Bible. By contrast the Fife house, of modern stucco, is ablaze with lights "of a glaring newness"¹ and has as its properties a Victrola and a technical book on Hydro-Electric Engineering. Apart from the disappearance of the walls, however, a device which allows a full comparison of the two families, and reflects the revelation of character through the monologues, the setting is nonetheless realistic at this stage with its detail, its narrow strip of lawn and the lilacs in bloom. Presumably to remain consistent with his constructivist set of the later scenes, Simenson's design for the Theatre Guild production of the houses was a skeletonized, starkly expressive representation which, however, "reduced the subtleties O'Neill wished to achieve in showing an old-fashioned New England house with its testaments of narrow-mindedness, the distrust of industrial progress, the poverty, the piety of the Light family compared to the glaring newness of the Fife family house".² The problem of reconciling the two styles is inherent in the play.

O'Neill's instructions for the dynamo are actually based on a real power-house with windows, sliding doors, chairs and a shaded light. But the author makes it clear that the construction must suggest much more, it must become a kind of monster-god: "with something of a massive female idol about it, the exciter set . . . like a head with blank oblong eyes above the gross rounded torso"³, or the oil switches "with their spindly steel legs, their square criss-crossed steel bodies (the containers inside looking like bellies), their six cupped arms stretching upward, remind one of Hindu idols

1. O'Neill, Dynamo, p. 14.

2. Waldau, p. 48.

3. O'Neill, Dynamo, p. 79.

tortured into scientific supplications".¹ O'Neill revives his old camera-like technique of probing ever closer into the heart of this plant during the last scenes of the play, our first view of it being of the red brick-exterior, then focussing on the dynamo room, when a door is opened, the switch galleries and, finally, the interiors of the dynamo and switchboard rooms being revealed. To Reuben, the confused young man whose bullying upbringing by a Fundamentalist father has left him vulnerable when his mother betrays him and he falls in love with an atheist's daughter, and who is fascinated by electricity, the dynamo comes to represent a reassuring mother figure, a fact spelled out for us when he pleads like a little boy just before he electrocutes himself:

"I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again!
Please, Mother!"²

This symbolism, stressed by the similarity between the two mothers in the play and the dynamo, all of which are large, generative and soothing, was commented on by O'Neill:

"That the dynamo is his mother that he has elevated by devious ways hidden from himself into God the Mother so he can possess and be possessed by her, his electrocution of the Father God in her name, etc., seems to me to stand out in the play like red paint."³

Symbolism was used once more in the final setting of Days Without End, as we have discussed before when considering movement. Compared with the realism of previous settings (although O'Neill did resort again to the use of multiple settings, the opening of Act Four revealing both the study and Elsa's bedroom), the symbolism sits a little uneasily, although it could be argued that the use of a church interior is so rich with representation anyway that O'Neill did not jar any artistic conventions. As occurs so frequently in O'Neill's plays, the symbolism is based in reality, the light of the dawn through the stained-glass windows falls on Christ's face, making it shine with radiance,

1. Ibid., p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. 101.

3. Tornqvist, p. 73.

"as if the sun had risen".¹

Lighting in the other plays as well, usually has some rational explanation. O'Neill was aware of the effects of darkness and colour and used these to enhance the emotion aroused by certain scenes, to suggest through shadow, and define or point through spotlights, and to make visual comments on the play. Many O'Neill plays start in the evening and we progress with the protagonists through dark, night-time experiences, before emerging at dawn, even if the action has taken place over months or even years. Unity is thus given and atmosphere is enhanced. Jones, for example, starts in the late afternoon, the sunlight still blazing, but its yellowness and the oppressive burden of heat, work with the tom-toms to suggest the nightmare of what follows. Jones travels into the gloom of the forest and the night, the moonlight serving only to give a "suffused, eerie glow"² and to heighten the evil of the massed blackness beyond. Dawn re-establishes the normal atmosphere with the entry of Smithers and the abrupt cease of the drum beat. The concentration of light in surrounding darkness, as Travis Bogard writes, suggests the spiritual isolation of Jones and becomes "a significant stage image".³

This image occurs again in the last scene of Ape where a spot of clear, grey light isolates the gorilla's cage in which Yank eventually dies. Lighting effects are used most impressively in this play. Masses of shadow in Scenes Three and Six, where electric bulbs shed just enough light to outline the main character in the stokehole and in prison, give a threatening, sinister quality to the dimly outlined background. In the earlier scene the furnaces pour forth a flood of terrific light and heat, intensifying the claustrophobic feeling and, by outlining the crouching men in silhouette, taking away their human qualities. When Mildred descends she too loses her human stature in this hell, appearing "like a white apparition in the full light from the open furnace doors".⁴ Above the earth we meet the privileged who, by contrast, move in a filtered light.

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1. O'Neill, Ah, Wilderness! Days, p. 108.
 2. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 116.
 3. Bogard, Contour, p. 137.
 4. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 157.

Fifth Avenue is lit by a flood of "mellow, tempered sunshine" while the shop windows, full of glittering jewels, contain electric lights which "wink out"¹ the incredible prices or are "bathed in a downpour of artificial light".² The disharmony between man and nature reflected in this lighting effect repeats the comment made on Mildred and her artificial aunt at odds with the sunshine and sea wind on the deck. It is the same theme that O'Neill was expressing through Paddy's speech about the clippers sailing under a night sky blazing and winking with stars or with a "warm sun on the clean decks"³, a speech delivered in the cramped bowels of a transatlantic liner. Stanislavsky criticised the production he saw of this play in America:

"I cannot see how a producer can darken his stage time and time again, obscuring his leading character, deliberately robbing the latter of one of his most effective means of expression, namely, his eyes and facial expression"⁴,

but presumably what the actor lost in visibility was made up to him through the lighting effects which echoed his own confusion. The new dramatist saw the actors as only part of the whole.

Few of the later plays achieve quite the same effects through lighting as these two early dramas but there are occasional moments when light intensifies the atmosphere. In Brown Dion responds to Margaret's declaration of love by declaring "Let go your clutch on the world! Dim and dimmer! Fading out in the past behind!"⁵ while the moon passes gradually behind a black cloud. A moment of intense blackness and stillness is followed by the light gradually coming on again as Dion's voice, at first a whisper, increases in volume with the light. This play too begins and ends in the evening with most scenes taking place at dusk or at night. Moonlight and desk lamps

1. Ibid., p. 165.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 144.

4. Christine Edwards, The Stanislavsky Heritage: Its Contribution to the Russian and American Theatre, New York, 1965, p. 75.

5. O'Neill, Brown, p. 23.

allow both pools of light and shadows to give the appropriate dark atmosphere. Similarly in Strange Interlude the Professor's death is mirrored in the drawn shades which give the windows a suggestion of lifeless closed eyes. Not only the father's death, but Nina's inner state is shown by this effect.

The flashes of lightning in Dynamo, however, where lighting plays a key role, the difference in attitude to hydro-electricity summing up the difference between the two fathers, are used for more than the establishment of mood. The ironically named father, Light, shamefacedly closes the shutters against the storm while his son later clutches the arms of his chair in superstitious terror before the lightning. In the brightly lit Fife household on the other hand, the lightning is virtually unnoticed. However, the power symbolized by the lightning fascinates Reuben and significantly the dynamo, also a symbol of power, is brilliantly lit at the end. Reuben goes to his death by throwing his arms over the exciter. For a moment the dynamo pauses, a flash of bluish light is followed by a dimming of light and noise. But at the end of the act, light and sound are restored. Reuben's death has, after all, not been of great significance to this mighty force.

Although O'Neill specified in detail the facial attributes he expected from his characters, he was less interested in the visual impact of their bodies or their costume. Mostly clothes are described in terms of colour. Thus Jones, the Emperor who still possesses some grandeur at the beginning of the play is dressed in royal blues, reds and golds at his first entrance:

"He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs etc. His trousers are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side."¹

This rather splendid but anachronistic military uniform, complete with brass spurs on the patent-leather boots and pearl-handled revolver in a holster suggest something false, especially when Jones begins to speak, his accent belying his regal dress: "who dare whistle dat way in my palace?"²

1. O'Neill, Anna Christie, p. 99.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Jones' flight involves the symbolic loss of his clothes as he regresses to a primitive state. In Scene Three he has lost the expensive Panama hat he jauntily placed on his head when he left the palace, and his uniform has rents. By Scene Four it is ragged and torn and he strips to the waist and flings away the spurs which have been tripping him up. His trousers are in tatters by the following scene with his shoes cut and mis-shapen; by Scene Six he is wearing little more than a kind of loin-cloth. Through losing his clothes, Jones must appear gradually blacker, in tune with the darkness of the forest at night. Two images provide a final contrast with the main character: the red-stained witch doctor with his glass beads and bone rattle and the entrance of Smithers in his dirty white drill outfit.

The nakedness of the men in Ape is used to stress their ape-like appearance and to help identify them with the soot and dust of the stoke-hole. In Scene Four, for example, the men have washed but "around their eyes, where a hasty dousing does not touch, the coal-dust sticks like black make-up, giving them a queer, sinister expression"¹ Yank, who has not washed, stands out in contrast to them, a blackened, brooding figure. Immediately preceding this scene, Mildred appeared in her white dress, to Yank's eyes an unreal apparition, "all in white like dey wrap around stiffs".² The black and the white figures are, by implication, the two sides of the one coin. Only at the end of the play does Yank lose the mask-like coverings on his face; swaggering down Fifth Avenue "the black smudge of coal-dust still sticks like make-up"³ and on the day following the fight, in the cells his face is spotted with black and blue bruises and a bandage is wrapped around his head. Even in shore-clothes Yank retains some of the signs of his dark underground life in the stokehole: his tie is black, his cap has a black peak and his dungarees are dirty.

Costume is important in Marco Millions to help the satire. Only clothes differentiate the Christian, the Magian and the Buddhist traders of the Prologue who

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1. ibid., p. 158.
 2. ibid., p. 162.
 3. ibid., p. 165.

otherwise resemble each other in the essential character of body and face. Their aspirations and ambitions, by implication, are identical. O'Neill extends his satire one step further with the appearance of the Polos at Kublai's court in costumes which have modern touches. Their costume "is a queer jumble of stunning effects that recall the parade uniforms of our modern Knights Templar, of Columbus, of Pythias, Mystic Shriners, the Klan etc."¹ Marco himself has the "appearance of a successful movie star at a masquerade ball".² This same jibe at twentieth century western man is repeated at the end of the play when Marco, dressed as a Venetian merchant of the later Thirteenth Century moves from the auditorium to the lobby and gets into a modern luxurious limousine.

1. O'Neill, Marco Millions, p. 254.

2. Ibid.

Thornton Wilder's use of pantomime was designed to help focus our attention on significant aspects of the plays. In Our Town therefore, the routine preparation of breakfast in Acts One and Three, part of the daily ritual is performed with mimed actions and properties. In themselves these movements are not important and the mime serves to stress the typical nature of the preparations, typical to the families of Our Town, but also a recognizably universal ceremony.

On the other hand Wilder also used his visual action to convey succinctly what words could not. "Proserpina and the Devil" contains a cartoon-like scene in which even inanimate objects respond, Noah's Ark "mutely protesting against the part it must play".¹ Satan urges Proserpina to eat a pomegranate and she, with a recollection of the Garden of Eden, tempts him into eating the other half. The cheerless action, with its full implications suggested only by reminding us visually of certain scenes, has gained extra significance from being mimed.

The three following plays similarly use mimed action to disencumber the dialogue. Roderick's illness and near death is conveyed in a few seconds in The Long Christmas Dinner as he rises with a look of dismay on his face, totters towards the portal, but then returns to his seat with a frightened look of relief. Traditional frameworks of time and space are challenged in the other two plays, the actors' miming of lying in bed in Hiawatha for example, dispensing with the realism of beds and blankets which would only hinder the idea of the spiritual journey of the train into the world of ideas and the cosmos.

In Our Town the stage is arrested into a silent tableau at the end of the marriage ceremony, George and Emily held in a kiss, Mrs. Soames frozen in her sobbing chatter and the rest of the guests seen only from the back as they stand facing the back-stage stained-glass window. This marriage, as the Stage Manager has already pointed out, represents all weddings. But extra poignancy is given as the Stage Manager speaks of the suffering and death which will inevitably follow, his words contrasting with the joy and hope contained in the conventional wedding scene frozen behind him.

1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 10.

Wilder carried the idea of the caught moment a step further in Skin, using lantern slides described by an Announcer to open the first two acts. A mixture of humour and seriousness marks the slides which include a picture of the three cleaning women responsible for the theatre, complete with mops and pails, a slide of the glacier which is about to destroy the world, and a picture of Mr. Antrobus smiling and lifting his straw hat and holding the wheel he has invented. Mr. Antrobus may be a typical American, but he also typifies mankind. The projections of Act Two show Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus posed and dressed as they will be a few minutes later. Both the Announcer's introduction and the speeches from the Antrobuses in fact stress the same point: man has come through various challenges by the skin of his teeth and emerged as a creative but flawed mammal. We are seeing typical examples of human beings. A similar point has been made in the first act where Mrs. Antrobus draws up a hassock and is surrounded by her children and the animals to suggest a "Tableau by Raphael"¹, a loving, typical family with mythical overtones. The moment is broken with a shriek, however, when Mrs. Antrobus discovers that Henry's scar on his forehead is showing. The family harmony covers evil and guilt. Man's positive relationships with animals are visually stated when Antrobus takes the goldfish bowl on his lap, pulls the canary cage down to the level of his face, and the dinosaur and mammoth put their paws on the arm of his chair. But Mrs. Antrobus, about to demand that the animals be sacrificed for the sake of her children, faces him across the room like a judge. Again we learn visually that trouble underlies the apparent tranquility of the scene.

Wilder also uses movement for alienation purposes in this play. The fragments of scenery flying around, Mrs. Antrobus flinging the imaginary bottle containing all the things a woman knows to the back of the auditorium, even Sabina throwing her head into her arms in a mockery of "stage" despair remind us that Wilder's stage is presenting us with more than illusion.

Mime helps us adjust quickly to the different frameworks within "Childhood". Within the outer play there is the manipulation of imaginary golf clubs. The play itself

1. Wilder, The Skin of Our Teeth, p. 111.

then becomes a game which is a dream enabling the father to understand his children's thoughts, a dream which it is not possible for Billee to enter because he is too young. Within this dream there is further mimed action, Father becoming a bus conductor and the children taking their seats on the chairs which now represent a bus, but a few moments before had stood for bushes. This bus journey becomes an allegory of family life as it travels through the imaginary perils of early America. The fantasy played out, we return easily to the "real" world, unhampered by realistic visual trappings.

Freedom from detail, from attempts to make the stage a real place and from the domination of a cluttered background were achieved in Wilder's plays through his imaginative and innovative use of stage settings. Wilder acknowledged that the stage is a world of pretense which could not achieve the realism of film and this, together with his belief that theatre is an art which rests on the work of many collaborators, not the least of whom are the audience with their imaginations, inspired him to ignore conventional settings and replace them with a few representational pieces of furniture. As Wilder himself was the first to remind us, these ideas were not new but rather re-introduced old Western and Far Eastern concepts. Because they were novel, however, they did also shock the twentieth century audience into awareness, the teetering flats of Skin for example obviously acting as a symbol for the precarious position in which mankind was placed. But beyond the humour and alienation from slight tricks of set, the stage scenery served a more serious purpose in Wilder's play. As Brecht had outlined, the use of a generalized, stylized set could give hints as to locality not only allowing the play to traverse time and space rapidly and without cumbersome intervals needed for set changes, but could suggest far more than is stated. The dead in Our Town, for example, sit in rows of chairs. They are not in heaven or in an underworld, neither are they on earth. They are lined up as if in graves, yet the people can move. The most accurate description of the scene is simply that they are dead, in a place which simply is. The setting, after all, is not important; what is significant is what is happening and what is being said. By providing nothing more than a few chairs in the play Wilder gives the impression that he is

revealing all his techniques. The setting is not there to delude us. Instead of the audience sitting back and absorbing a visually stimulating setting, they are required to fill in the detail, to participate in the scene, an involvement which is deliberately helped by Stage Managers' chats and by the breaking down of the traditional barrier of the picture-frame stage with actors participating from the auditorium.

When asked why he generally avoided contemporary settings in his work, Wilder replied in part:

"Already, in the one-act plays, I had become aware of how difficult it is to invest one's contemporary world with the same kind of imaginative life one has extended to those removed in time and place."¹

His use of barren settings combined with the detailed verbal descriptions when necessary, allowed him to place his scenes very exactly and yet to endow them with a metaphysical significance as well.

The very first plays show how dramatically Wilder challenged the conventions of set. Extraordinary demands are made for these three-minute plays, "Leviathan" taking place in mid-mediterranean with the sea swaying prodigiously, "And the Sea" set several miles below the surface of the North Atlantic, "Malchus" having as its background the black pockets of space which give birth, at intervals, to a nebula. Certainly these worlds are removed from our own. Even further demands are made on a stage designer. In "Job", the thirty pieces of silver are thrust away by Judas and "hurtle through the skies, flinging their enormous shadows across the stars and continue falling for ever through the vast funnel of space".² The instruction takes us beyond the limits of the play itself. Again ignoring the traditional limitations of stage design, Wilder, as Papajewski points out, translated Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came":

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1. Richard H. Goldstone, "Thornton Wilder", in Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, edited by Malcolm Cowley, London, 1958, p. 95.
 2. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 93.

" 'The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay - ' " ¹

into his own stage instructions: "... the landscape collects itself to listen". ² The setting reflects the general feeling of the play by actually participating in the action.

Possible alienation effects gained from setting were also experimented with in these plays. A revolving cyclorama of the Holy Land rolls behind the donkey's progress in "The Flight". We as the audience watch the puppet show in "Proserpina" but we also watch the manipulators. Chaos and disaster triumph in the marionette world but the final destruction comes when the puppeteers have an altercation behind the scenes. In "Centaur's" we are consciously cast in our role as an audience as Shelley tries to explain his argument across the footlights.

The relatively elaborate demands of the earliest plays give way in the one-acters which follow to a simplicity which in a different way gives significance to the events. A long dining table, set for a Christmas dinner which will be eaten with imaginary knives and forks, with decorated folding doors at the back is all that was required to allow ninety years to be traversed in Christmas. The table becomes the central focus as different characters appear, each participating in the same Christmas ritual, each passing through the cycles of birth and death and each representing mankind generally. Both Malcolm Goldstein and Travis Bogard point to the medieval character of Wilder's stage, the empty plateau giving a sense of infinity and eternity, the "simple theatrical directness reminiscent of the door to the grave in the medieval morality play, Everyman". ³

Two flights of stairs at the back leading to a balcony and chairs carried on by the actors, are all that is required in Hiawatha. The higher level is used by the gossips, the philosophers and the theologians; the chair and the floor are used by the passengers and representatives from Grover's Corners. The Archangels descend from

1. Papajewski, p. 132.

2. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 47.

3. Bogard, "The Comedy of Thornton Wilder", p. 361.

the balcony and then ascend, significantly taking with them the dead Harriet who is ready to be "raised" from the living on the train. It is not stated, but obviously there is the same difference between the everyday oblivious world and the world of understanding and death which is later explored in Our Town, a difference which is symbolized by the different heights. Again the economy of setting allows the play to jump boundaries of space, time and distance and to enter the imaginative sphere of the super-natural, characters simply walking onto the stark stage to say their bit.

The simplicity of the dialogue and the characters is mirrored in the barren stage of The Happy Journey. All properties are mimed: imaginary windows, steps, doors, steering wheels. The Kirbys, a typical American family are the fore-runners of the Gibbs, Webbs and Antrobus family. Isolated on an empty stage it is easier for them to represent a much broader spectrum of mankind.

Although Wilder chose New England, the birthplace of America, as the setting for Our Town the simplicity of the stage furniture helps our imaginations see the events as taking place in any small town. Again and again Wilder suggests that what we are seeing is set in a picture frame, safely distanced and yet containing a world within it. The Stage Manager deliberately leans against the frame itself, reminding us of its presence; he and other characters look directly at us out of the picture and actors in the audience remind us that we are looking back into the picture. Wilder was very concerned when the play was turned into a film that the early scenes should constantly maintain a view of the whole town, different areas receiving attention, with the totality not being lost. It is this whole view which the Stage Manager gives us as he focuses on the features of the town, giving us a miniature sketch of churches and the grocery store, a view extended later by Professor Willard who places the town anthropologically and gives a few statistics. George and Emily's wedding held in a tableau stresses the idea of a framed picture and dead Emily looks back at her twelfth birthday as though through a window; although she takes part and has not yet learned how to keep herself at a distance as her fellow dead have learned, she is sufficiently apart to realize the full significance of the scene as her parents live their lives so

unaware of what it means. Grover's Comers, placed as Jane Crofut's envelope has it, within "the earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the mind of God"¹ is seen, as Wilder says, "through a telescope"², and its events typifying the daily lives of most people, are placed within a huge metaphysical structure.

Our understanding of the town's significance is helped by the stark use of furniture. The play begins, in fact, on a bare stage, the features of the town being described only by the Stage Manager's opening monologue. For those who think they need scenery he produces two arched trellises covered with vines and flowers and tables and chairs to represent the Gibbs' and Webbs' houses. There is a remarkable evenness in all the settings, the stage being split in two throughout. The two houses, the pews on both sides of a central aisle, the graves of the dead balanced by the churchyard which later becomes Emily's home, all three acts allow for simultaneous action but maintain, through the balanced division, a kind of harmony which is stressed by the upright backs of the congregation, by the stillness of the dead as they sit facing the audience in rows, speaking in their matter-of-fact tones, and by the gentle singing of the mourners at the graveside. It is part of Wilder's distancing effect, in tune with the play's theme of the acceptance of suffering and death.

Although our first view of the Antrobus home, a box-set representation of their living room, suggests that this set is going to be more realistic than the chairs and ladder of Our Town, we learn very quickly that Wilder is in fact mocking conventional scenery when a fragment of the right wall leans precariously over the stage and later flies up into the lofts, echoing Sabina's despair at the state of the world. Later Sabina and Mrs. Antrobus pull the walls back into place and set the tables and chairs back in position as they decide to begin again. Wilder makes a further ironic comment on traditional, realistic scenery in Act Two with the shops on the boardwalk represented by two cardboard cut-outs, only six feet high, garishly painted with signs. The audience, a moment ago being addressed by the Antrobuses on the pedestal, now find themselves in the ocean. The set serves a number of functions. We never quite know

1. Wilder, Our Town, pp. 48-9.

2. Goldstone, p. 103.

where we are. The average American commuter's house contains a dinosaur and mammoth and is threatened by a glacier. The maid was raped by Antrobus from the Sabine Hills. Homer, Moses and the Muses appear as New York down-and-outs. This shifting in time allows Skin to suggest many periods, to stress the repetitiveness of the theme and the scenery must be capable of stimulating our imaginations and memories in tune with this. The scenery also reflects the action, the vulgarity of the boardwalk in the scene where Mr. Antrobus is seduced by Miss Fairweather giving way to the gradually darkening sky symbolized by the black discs on the weather signal as the storm approaches. The sheer theatricality of flying scenery also prevents any danger of pretentiousness from Wilder's rather heavy theme, or of sentimentality in more serious moments. Once again Wilder uses a raised platform at the back of the stage for the words of the books, "the steps of our joinery"¹ according to Mr. Antrobus, to be recited by the backstage helpers.

Unlike the parody of the box-set, Wilder's use of lighting in his earliest plays is surprisingly conventional. Far from concluding with Brecht that exposure to lanterns and the machinery of stage lighting helps awaken the energy of the observer so that intelligent decisions are made, Wilder uses lighting in his first plays to give atmosphere and to bring the spectator into the action. In "Childe Roland", "The sun has set over the great marsh, leaving a yellow-brown Flemish light upon the scene"²; in "Angel" "there is a glimpse of a fierce sunlight in the empty streets of our oriental noonday".³ Lowered lights are used in two plays: "Turn down the gas lights, for it is night in Palestine"⁴ and in "Centaurs": "Presently the lights are lowered to a coloured darkness, and the warm glow of the footlights begins again the ancient magic".⁵ This realistic employment of lights has been used to inform on matters such as time of day, to create stage illusion and, in "Childe Roland", to suggest through the setting sun a parallel with the knight's closeness to death. The one-act plays contain no further

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1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 176.
 2. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 47.
 3. Ibid., p. 103.
 4. Ibid., p. 97.
 5. Ibid., p. 53.

Innovations.

Our Town continues the convention, with Dr. Gibbs, for example, blowing out a lamp before going to bed. There are, however, more obvious lighting effects. The Stage Manager, addressing the audience, is isolated on the darkened stage by a spotlight. In the church an image of a stained-glass window is cast from a lantern slide onto the back wall, and later a bright light is thrown on the bride and groom. Only half the stage is lit in part of the final act where the dead sit in dimness while the contrasting scene of Emily's birthday is lit with bright winter sunshine. Above all lighting is used here to focus our attention, although it is doubtful whether any of these effects would be sufficiently evident to create a feeling of alienation in the audience.

The dramatic lighting of Skin, however, is obvious, comic and symbolic. In line with Brecht's injunctions, slides are projected to instruct the audience. As is usual with Wilder, the shock tactic is applied with humour. When Sabina steps out of character and becomes the actress Miss Somerset, the house lights go on and we are in the disconcerting "real" world, allowing the explanation to be made that seven actors have been stricken with food poisoning. This allows the "volunteers" to practise their lines from the classics, still with the house lights on, and to give their own homely explanations of what the words mean. By implication, the thoughts they are expressing are available to everyone, including us the spectators, no longer safely isolated in the dark. Lights are also used non-realistically to suggest atmosphere. The climax of Act Two, with Mr. Antrobus having deserted his family and the flood about to destroy most of the human and animal population, is marked by strange veering lights which whirl about the stage. Their sinister wheeling movement suggests both the storm and the artificial gaiety of the boardwalk in the growing darkness.

On the whole Wilder gives few instructions on appearance and costume, presumably trusting the actor and producer to fill in details appropriate to the kind of character who emerges in the play, characters who can so often be stereotyped as "a mother", "a tramp" or "a doctor". Occasionally he mentions a few features, Brigomeide the mermaid for example having "the green wiry hair of her kind, entangled

with the friendly snail: the iridescent shoulders of all sea-women, and the grey thin mouth".¹

Costume is mentioned when it plays a role in the drama. Proserpina cannot be rescued because of a "matter of pins and hooks-and-eyes"² and Demeter is forced to stand upright watching the ills of her daughter "by the reason of the stiffness of her brocade".³ In The Long Christmas Dinner clothing is used to show the different generations passing, all female characters being dressed alike in non-modern flowing gowns, the male characters wearing morning coats with different waistcoats. The repetitive cycle of events which all human beings undergo is thus stressed. As the characters age they add white wigs and shawls to symbolically denote time passing.

Wilder was conscious of the general effects of costume. In Hiawatha the Hours are beautiful girls dressed like Elihu Vedder's Pleiades, passing like figures from a masque along the balcony above the sleeping figures from the modern world. By contrast, however, Gabriel and Michael are two young men "in blue serge suits".⁴ Perhaps through the modern costume Wilder was making the same point that he made by giving Plato's lines to the coloured wardrobe mistress, Hester. We all belong to the same universe.

One of the most moving images of Our Town is the little group of black-clad mourners, indistinguishable under large umbrellas at the back centre of the stage, gathered about the imaginary grave. From this group Emily emerges, dressed in white, her hair down her back and tied by a white ribbon "like a little girl".⁵ Her white clothes must remind us of the scene in which we saw her previously, full of hope, being married. In both scenes the whiteness represents her innocence, in the last act an innocence which leads to understanding as she re-visits her mother, still dressed in the night-dress in which, it is suggested, she may have died giving birth.

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1. Wilder, The Angel that Troubled the Waters, p. 59.
 2. Ibid., p. 11.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Wilder, Pullman Car "Hiawatha", p. 12.
 5. Wilder, Our Town, p. 80.

Costume is used in Skin to suggest identity changes. Sabina introduced as the traditional maid: "straw-blonde, over-rouged"¹, appears in the second act in a bathing suit of 1905. The seductress is thus made comic and the time placement of the act is broadened. Gladys causes considerable distress in this scene by wearing red stockings for which her father blames Sabina. Again the allusions are widened when Sabina appears in the last act as a Napoleonic camp follower and Henry, the enemy, appears in a traditional uniform over his torn overalls with the remnants of a gaudy admiral's epaulette and vestiges of gold and scarlet braid on his trouser leg. The war which has demolished the Antrobus home is the same as all wars which have caused misery and destruction.

1. Wilder, The Skin of Our Teeth, p. 99.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT THE PLAYS ACHIEVED

It is only too easy for us in the nineteen-eighties to dismiss O'Neill's early plays as experiments which failed. After all, most of the techniques which he trialled he abandoned in later plays, and the plays themselves receive scant attention today from critics and producers. But such an easy dismissal ignores O'Neill's true contribution to American drama, an influence which can best be measured, as Travis Bogard points out, in general rather than in specific terms. His first plays were written at a time when an inadequate, cheap realism held sway in the theatre, making few demands on its audiences and treating minor themes superficially. O'Neill was the young rebel who challenged this drama, questioning both its concerns and its methods. It is unfair when evaluating O'Neill to attempt to treat only one of these two aspects of his plays, the themes or the methods, because to this author, the two were integrated. Many critics have unfortunately attempted to assess only one or the other, an exercise which can only too easily lead to misunderstanding. O'Neill was attempting to dig at the roots of what he saw as the sickness of his day, the alienation of man in a godless civilization whose science and materialism had failed to provide any hope or support. Two enormous topics dominate the plays we have discussed, his concern with a super-natural, mystical force, a concept of fate which rules men's lives from the outside, and a fascination with the unseen, psychological motives which dominate individuals from within. To present these forces O'Neill felt the need for a new language which would replace the old Kodak held up to ill-nature which presented only surface realism, and it was for this purpose that he experimented with new techniques. Far from being "tricks" as so many earlier reviewers believed, the use of characters who had purposes beyond themselves, the carefully constructed plots built on parallels and contrasts, the aural impact of dialogue and sound and the visual effects from mime, lighting and sets were all designed to help us enter an otherwise inaccessible world and to make demands on actor, designer and spectator for the sake of portraying great truths.

Not everyone was ready for the ardent young O'Neill who flaunted the conventions and practical and economic considerations. Many were not prepared to accept the five hours of Strange Interlude which resulted from the attempt to convey the characters' inner lives. O'Neill himself had to compromise when the number of characters and sets in Marco Millions strained the finances of his production company. He was rarely satisfied with actors' interpretations of his roles; the demands of a Lazarus or Nina Leeds on mortal players were, after all, enormous. The sound effects of Jones, added later rather than being integrated as O'Neill wanted from the beginning of rehearsals, caused his displeasure. O'Neill himself recognized that some devices simply did not work—the masking technique of Brown for example sometimes causing confusion or looking inappropriately trite, the happy ending of Days being in uneasy accord with the rest of the play. Breaking into new territory and impatient with more practical concerns, O'Neill sometimes simply went beyond the boundaries of what his audiences and producers were prepared to accept.

His biggest battle, however, was with those who simply refused, and are still refusing, to be sympathetic to what he was doing. Making no attempt to try and understand that O'Neill was investigating a fusion of elements, some reviewers dismiss the early plays as "top-heavy experiments"¹, and condemn the use of effects, seeing the tom-tom in Jones for instance as "little more than a gimmick"² or "a trick whose only virtue is its novelty".³ On the contrary, the sound of this play is part of the meaning, it is no mere sound effect added for atmosphere; it is, as Isaac Goldberg writes:

" . . . part and parcel of the psychological action; at first it is the call to war; then it merges into the Emperor Jones's vision of the slaves rolling to its beat; finally it becomes his own throbbing, feverish temples, and all the while it is our heart beating more and more rapidly

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1. Bamber Gascoigne, Twentieth Century Drama, London, 1962, p. 109.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
 3. Kemelman, p. 491.

as we follow his fate."¹

A similar inability on the part of other critics to recognize that the devices had purposes beyond themselves led to accusations of melodrama. Virgil Geddes, for example, condemned the noise and tumult of early plays, claiming that O'Neill, aided by the post-war fever "stands at the apex of melodramatic writing".² His censure of violence and dinning repetition, however, not only ignores the more dramatic effects of the great tragedies, but suggests a confused definition of melodrama itself. As Homer E. Woodbridge explains, melodrama occurs when the playwright sacrifices truth to life "in either character or events, for the sake of theatrical effects".³ O'Neill as a man of the theatre was certainly aware of what elements could inspire an audience, but his non-realistic plays are themselves a reaction against the shallow and tawdry plays like his father's Monte Cristo which used effects purely for their own sakes; O'Neill's effects are always used to help express something more, to help us see beyond the surface. As John Gassner sums up the situation:

"Moreover O'Neill parts company with the mere purveyors of melodrama by using these means for ends beyond themselves, as did Shakespeare who did not hesitate to strew his 'wooden O' with corpses."⁴

Deaths, crowd scenes, chanting, singing, rape and fights are all used for symbolic purposes in O'Neill's plays or to create an emotional atmosphere which will help us enter imaginatively into the lives of the characters.

Still seeing what they wanted or expected to see, some reviewers were so overwhelmed by O'Neill's methods that they were blinded to what the devices were being used to show. Ape has received a host of inappropriate interpretations,

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1. Isaac Goldberg, The Drama of Transition, Cincinnati, 1922, p. 471.
 2. Geddes, p. 44.
 3. Homer E. Woodbridge, "Beyond Melodrama", in Cargill et al, p. 309.
 4. Gassner, Masters, p. 644.

Gascoigne regarding it as "empty intellectualism"¹, others still expecting realism, defining the play as "a juvenile appeal to ignorance and passion . . . [or] the inner tragedy of a proletarian soul".² So much for modern man caught by his fate. On the other hand the language of the play, similarly isolated from the play's meaning, was described as "vile"³ and unfit for the stage. This was the first of O'Neill's plays to raise official threats of censorship. O'Neill's new methods, devised to make people see more clearly, likewise confused critics of other plays who saw Marco Millions as a romantic play with an attack on American capitalism squeezed in⁴, Lazarus as irrational and Strange Interlude as melodramatic. Fortunately O'Neill has also always had sensitive defenders who understood his efforts to blend theme and method.

Confusion often resulted when O'Neill's plays, so different from the realistic plays of the previous decades, first appeared on the stage. But the question remains of what kind of plays they actually were. The label of "expressionism", adopted from European drama, was applied early and has tended to stick. There are obvious similarities. O'Neill's plays, like their German counterparts, have as their themes the alienation of the individual, use symbolic and split characters together with stylized acting, present objectively the state of their characters' mind (or at least attempt in other ways to reveal inner thoughts), and exploit lighting and stage design. Of course not all O'Neill plays include all of these devices, a fact we will discuss directly. But more importantly, O'Neill, while exploring these non-realistic techniques, constantly falls back on more realistic motivation. The progression of his plays, for example, is usually logical and chronological. There is none of the telescoping of time and space which is found in Wilder. O'Neill himself seemed to waver ~~when~~ applying the expressionism label, declaring that he was developing yet another style. Asked about the description of Ape he replied:

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1. Gascoigne, p. 112.
 2. Jordan Y. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic, London, 1962, pp. 34-35.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Robert Brustein, "Why American Plays are Not Literature", Harper's Magazine, Vol. 219, p. 172.

"Whether [it] . . . is to be classified as an Expressionistic play or not is of little consequence . . . Its manner is inseparable from its matter."¹

But in response to a later interview he said:

"People think I am giving an exact picture of the reality. They don't understand that the whole play is expressionistic."²

In 1935 he wrote in a letter that the play attempted a synthesis:

"[Ape] isn't Expressionism. It isn't Naturalism. It is a blend . . . "³

To some extent the confusion can be attributed to the underlying realism of the play on which the more innovative devices were constructed. As Bogard points out, O'Neill was at heart a realistic dramatist, "lost in an alien territory which he could not quite make his own".⁴ Yank is motivated by realistic feelings and events, his weaknesses and strengths make him more comprehensible as a man than a symbol, his lengthy monologues are given believable inspiration. Nevertheless, O'Neill wanted the play to be something more. The scenes, he instructed on the first page, should not be treated naturalistically. The marionettes of Fifth Avenue and the symbolic crushing to death by the gorilla suggest a new mode, but they too, at a pinch, could be viewed realistically. Later plays like Brown, in which O'Neill allowed realistic settings and plausible motivations to be combined with masks and split personalities, were less successful. The duality of realism and expressionism in the later plays lost its balance. As Bogard writes:

"A mixed style is not in itself a danger unless . . . Its elements work in diametrically opposed ways to achieve their end. O'Neill was successful theatrically in The Hairy Ape and The Emperor Jones because he conceived realistically a character with enough power and

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1. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, p. 499.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Tornqvist, p. 32.
 4. Bogard, Contour, p. 248.

a sufficient command of language to make credible the peripheral presentational expression of the themes. Yank's simplicity is the key. With more complex characters, as The Great God Brown and Dynamo would shortly demonstrate, O'Neill's skill as a playwright was nearly confounded".¹

The mixed style similarly confused the early critics who, presumably unaware that O'Neill was drawing on elements of the new European genre, found it hard to reconcile the realistic and non-realistic elements in the plays. Although they point to various effects that are being used, no broader context is drawn and, as Cargill points out, it is "significant that the words 'expressionism' or 'expressionistic' do not appear in the reviews of The Emperor Jones by Heywood Broun, The Hairy Ape by Alexander Woolcott, All God's Chillun Got Wings by T.S. Eliot and The Great God Brown by Gilbert Gabriel" and that "emphasis is still laid upon 'true talk' (Woolcott) 'exact portrayal of a possible negro' (Eliot) and 'splendidly possible language' (Gabriel)".² Even when the source is recognised, critics are still often unhappy with the new forms in American drama, Robert Brustein, for example describing the techniques of the early plays as "borrowed, ill-fitting robes".³

Underlying the use of a mixed style was O'Neill's declared purpose of blending the meaning of the play with its method. Probably still conscious of his father's virtuoso performance in The Count of Monte Cristo, O'Neill understood the arguments of Gordon Craig and others who had wanted a re-adjustment of the elements that went into a production. In 1925 Moses Montrose had written colourfully of the young men who returned from Europe to America:

"And what did they see? An American Theatre without sensitiveness, with no direct aim or object; everyone in it trying to attract attention: the scenery yelling to be looked at; the actor temperamentalizing all over the stage and murdering both enunciation and gesture; the

1. Ibid., pp. 248-49.

2. Cargill et al, eds., O'Neill and His Plays, p. 5.

3. Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, p. 324.

costumer arraying the players as though they were so many manikins in costly silks and satins . . . ; the playwright pandering to cheap taste, with an eye on the royalty statement."¹

A dislike of naturalism and discordant theatrical elements had similarly formed the basis of the theories of Sheldon Cheney and Kenneth Macgowan, the two men apart from Craig who had exerted the greatest influence on young O'Neill. Both had regarded naturalism as the enemy of drama and both had visualized a dramatic experience which resulted from the collaborative work of designer, director and playwright. Cheney had seen the new stage-craft as existing "to fit the method of presentation perfectly to the play".² Macgowan, in Continental Stagecraft, which he wrote together with Robert Edmond Jones, had rejected attempts at actuality and resemblance which were obstructions to presenting "inner truth". The new style he had called "anti-realistic, presentational or expressionistic".³

A broader classification than expressionism which fits some of O'Neill's early plays very well is Northrop Frye's "archetypal masque".⁴ The growing sense of loneliness, confusion and fear which characterises this genre is the basic message of Jones, Ape, Brown, Dynamo and Days and is also an important element of Marco Millions, Lazarus and Strange Interlude. Typical of this kind of masque is the division of the human mind into elements and fragments which O'Neill portrayed through masks and split characters. The social collapse of Jones, Ape, Brown (where the successful business-man realizes the deficiencies of his life) and the inadequacies of western values in Marco Millions, Dynamo and Days are similarly characteristic of the masque. The death-wish and self-accusation are also common, a desire seen in Dion, Kukachin, Reuben and even Jones (Lazarus of course triumphantly overcomes any thought of death). Only the detachment of settings from time and space has limited application, Jones being the only play which could truly be described as taking place

1. Montrose, Jonas Moses, The American Dramatist, Boston, 1925, p. 424.

2. Bogard, Contour, p. 173.

3. Macgowan and Jones, p. 29.

4. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, Princeton, 1957, p. 291.

in a sinister limbo, like the threshold of death in Everyman.

Such pigeon-holding may be fun, but in the end it is rather irrelevant in the face of the much more important question: how well do the different elements fuse in the plays? J.L. Styan, referring to Elizabethan and eighteenth century drama, makes the point that non-illusory theatre "is the kind that positively encouraged the notoriously English practice of mixing, and sometimes synthesizing dramatic genres and elements which seem to belong on different stages".¹ O'Neill himself saw his aim as a dramatist as combining different techniques out of which his own style would emerge:

"... I've tried to make myself a melting pot for all these methods, seeing some virtues for my ends in each of them, and thereby, if there is enough real fire in me, boil down to my own technique."²

One of the elements which did not always mix too well in O'Neill's melting pot was his use of symbols or isolated incidents designed to select and point out significant action. The mirror O'Neill held up to nature was a focussing mirror which strengthened and enlarged certain reflections and blurred the others. Strindberg, in a discussion on super-naturalism, had presented the argument for using this non-illusory device after describing a realistic play by Zola:

"This is photography which includes everything, even the grain of dust on the lens of the camera. This is realism, a working method elevated to art, or the little art which does not see the forest for the trees. This is the misunderstood naturalism which holds that art merely consists of drawing a piece of nature in a natural way; it is not the great naturalism which seeks out the points where the great battles are fought, which loves to see what you do not see every day . . .".³

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1. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, p. 182.
 2. Eugene O'Neill, "Neglected Poet: A Letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn", in Cargill et al, p. 125.
 3. Strindberg, "On Modern Drama and Modern Theatre", in Cole, p. 17.

Realistic drama may select, but non-realistic theatre, as O'Neill realised, has far greater freedom to point out what is significant as it is not constricted by having to limit its devices to what is "believable". Styan, comparing Ibsen's illusory theatre with Sophocles' non-illusory drama writes:

"The former mode is circumscribed by what is plausible: the latter has infinite flexibility and its drama can circle the globe, pass from the present to the past or the future, and leap from this earth to the clouds."¹

Plays such as Marco Millions used these possibilities to the full. As O'Neill realized, when a particular detail is selected and made prominent, its significance will be heightened. Thus it may become either a symbol, suggesting something else, or it may come to represent a greater number or quantity than could ever be shown on stage. Nietzsche, whose writings we know exerted a strong influence over the young O'Neill, believed that all claims to copy nature must lead to the demand of representing the infinite.²

O'Neill was aware that the details, the clues we are given must suggest far more, particularly in drama, a form of poetry in action, where a limited space and time filled with actors must create a whole world and present recognisable characters. As Shaw put it: "Iago does not exist – all we have is what he says",³ To be successful in presenting the right detail which will suggest much more to the audience, O'Neill had to select the right clue which would arouse the viewer/reader's imagination and then he had to present an empty area which could be used as a screen to fill in the details. Thus O'Neill used stylized sets, symbolic characters and mimed action. But there are also occasions when O'Neill provided too much detail so that the audience was excluded from imaginatively participating in the creative process, and the critics voiced their dissatisfaction. Many of the complaints levelled at the dialogue of Strange Interlude, for example, suggest that O'Neill has filled in too much for us. O'Neill was

1. J.L. Styan, The Dramatic Experience, Cambridge, 1965, p. 3.

2. Gombrich, p. 219.

3. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, p. 2.

also aware that hints could help transform objects into symbols, thereby endowing them with great psychological importance. At their most successful these motifs appeal to our unconscious archetypes¹, although as we see in Lazarus Laughed, a deliberate attempt to use Jungian types to represent these images is not always successful.

That O'Neill was deliberately trying to create evocative symbols which hinted at the mystery behind life, is apparent in his letters and articles. In an address to Arthur Hobson Quinn, O'Neill explained that he was attempting to write about the only subject worth writing about:

"... the Force behind - Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it - Mystery certainly - and of the one external 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."²

Using Greek tragedy as his inspiration, O'Neill went on to explain that this could only be expressed through new methods "in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage".³ This use of transfigured Greek symbols is most clearly seen in O'Neill's introduction of pantomime, or symbolic gesture in The Emperor Jones in scenes like the artificial dumb show of Planters and Auctioneers, in the gaudy marionettes on Fifth Avenue in The Hairy Ape and in the masks of The Great God Brown.

Above all critics were confused when O'Neill introduced characters who were symbolic. Audiences did not always realize that O'Neill wanted his main character to have both realistic and symbolic roles while those who recognised the symbolic intent were not always clear on what Yank was supposed to represent. In an early interview

1. Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, New York, 1964, p. 67.

2. O'Neill, "Neglected Poet", in Cargill et al, p. 125.

3. Ibid.

about the play in which O'Neill explained his purpose of using symbols to represent man who has lost his old harmony with nature, he admitted that:

"The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play . . . The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate."¹

However, O'Neill also regarded it as basic at this stage (a view he apparently modified later with the types in Lazarus Laughed) that the symbolic characters had to also be realistic people:

"I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters. When it sees 'A Man' and 'A Woman' – just abstractions, it loses the human contact by which it identifies itself with the protagonist of the play. An example of this sort of expressionism is Morn Till Midnight, with character abstractions like 'A Bank Clerk'. This is the point at which I disagree with the theory. I do not believe that the character gets between the author's idea and the audience. The real contribution of the expressionist has been in the dynamic qualities of his plays. They express something in modern life better than did the old plays. I have something of this method in The Hairy Ape. But the character Yank remains a man and everyone recognises him as such."²

To some extent the success of a fusion of various elements rests on the readiness of an audience to accept not only new methods, but a mixture of new methods with old. The possible triumph of such a fusion is reflected in Walter Prichard Eaton's review of the 1922 production of Ape which reads in part:

1. Eugene O'Neill, "O'Neill Talks About His Plays", in Cargill et al, p. 110.

2. Ibid., p. 111.

" . . . Mr. O'Neill has been able to use the harshest realism as a spring-board into startling imaginative effects. When the Hairy Ape's soul has been stung with doubt and hatred, the loud laughter of his mates suddenly becomes rhythmic, like the fearful tattoo of a drum. When the boiler-doors are open, six red, searing searchlight-glaires strike into the eyeballs of the audience like flashes from the Inferno. Amid the masked mannikins on Fifth Avenue, the Hairy Ape moves as in a dream, in worlds unrealized."¹

For Eaton this innovative production had used lighting, acting and set in a dramatic and non-realistic way to bring out fully the loneliness of the hero. For us reading the play, such a potentially powerful combination of elements may only be hinted at. It is easier for us to see the discrepancies. Jones moves from the realistic setting of the palace into the nightmare jungle of Jones' mind. But the last scene abruptly dumps us back in the real world again. It was all a bad dream. The change is a little too sudden. In Dynamo too we feel disconcerted by the transition from the realistic world with its boundaries made by the walls of the Light and Fife households to the symbolic sphere dominated by the creature which is the dynamo. Among the later non-realistic plays only Lazarus fully entered into the non-realistic mode, the fusion of language, movement and symbolic character working together to suggest something of the mysteriousness of life.

As Eaton's review has shown, there is justification for evaluating O'Neill's plays from the point of view of their success in production, a point of view particularly important as the plays are aimed at achieving a combination of theatrical, aural and visual elements, and as the author relied heavily on emotional atmosphere rather than reason. These two aspects may be only too easily missed when reading the text. O'Neill himself may not have agreed with our stance. He was impatient with performances, declaring once that he never went to the theatre because he could

1. Walter Prichard Eaton, "The Hairy Ape", The Freeman, Vol. 5, March/September 1922, p. 160.

always do a better production in his mind than the one on the stage, and because, having been brought up in the theatre, he was too aware of the machinery underlying the production.¹ "A play", he told Nina Mosie, "is written about living and is seen on the stage as acting".² The discrepancy between what he wrote and what he saw inspired O'Neill to say in 1929: " . . . I think I will wind up writing plays to be published with 'No Productions Allowed' in red letters on the first page"³, and his wife Carlotta relates how O'Neill used to long for a Good Fairy who would give him money so that he could just write and never go near a theatre.⁴

Others, with different reasons, would agree that evaluations of theatrical performances are invalid. The implication that good theatre cannot be good literature⁵ has informed much American criticism of drama. O'Neill's plays, whose exciting techniques tended to attract audiences, did not fare well in some reviews as a consequence. Nonetheless, the fact remains that O'Neill, in spite of his protestations, did write for the physical theatre. He was interested in having his plays produced, filled his plays with theatrical effects, contemplated establishing an O'Neill repertory theatre, and dreamt of the situation where the author could work together with the other artists of the theatre:

"In no sense will he be their master, except his imagination of his work will be the director of their imaginations. He will tell them the inner meaning and spiritual significance of his play as revealed to him. He will explain the truth – the unity – underlying his conception. And then all will work together to express that unity."⁶

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1. O'Neill, "O'Neill Talks About his Plays", pp. 111-12.
 2. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, p. 326.
 3. Tornqvist, p. 23.
 4. Ibid.
 5. See for example Cargill's summary of this point in O'Neill and His Plays, pp. 11-13, and Brustein, p. 168.
 6. Tornqvist, p. 26.

Although O'Neill also expressed the view that a play which reads as a good play is a good play, critics have perhaps over-stressed his novelistic trend which has resulted in what they believe to be unrealistic stage instructions. Raleigh questions the possibility of the actor playing Lazarus being able to walk "up the steps to the cross and, stretching to his full height, gently push ... the lion's hair out of its eyes"¹ and feels that the sense of humour of the audience and player would be sorely tried when the actress in the role of Nina is directed to fall asleep and give "a soft little snore".² Raleigh is also dubious about the coltish capers in Brown. Arthur and Barbara Gelb feel that the enjoinders to houses to brood and actors to turn all sorts of unlikely colours were typical of his "oddly pedantic stage directions"³; John Anderson regards the instruction that tears stream down the cheeks of Kukachin as "impossible".⁴ Even a sympathetic Egil Tornqvist wonders how Margaret in Brown can deliver a "timeless kiss".⁵ It may not be possible to fulfil these directions to the letter, but to conclude that O'Neill was writing only for a reading public would be to ignore how creative, intelligent actors and producers could use such hints and instructions in a staged performance.

The theatrical experience, a combination of the interpreted words from the page, the technical elements and the emotions engendered in the audience, may allow the feeling that shines through the play itself to emerge most clearly. This concept, what Hindu critics call "rasa"⁶, is probably a valid notion to be applied to the non-realistic dramas of O'Neill and Wilder because it is usually applied to the symbolic rather than naturalistic drama of the far east. It refers to the state of emotional knowledge felt by the audience.

Of all the early plays Lazarus Laughed is probably the one which most

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1. Raleigh, Plays, p. 219.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, p. 381.
 4. John Anderson, "Eugene O'Neill", Theatre Arts Monthly, Vol. 15, November 1931, p. 931.
 5. Tornqvist, p. 27.
 6. Langer, p. 323.

obviously demands performance, but paradoxically it is the play which has been ignored by the professional theatre, its two productions having been given by the Pasadena Community Playhouse in California in 1928, and the students at Fordham University twenty years later. Although O'Neill wrote to De Casseres that the play was better for reading than it ever could be for acting, since it was impossible to do on any stage of today¹, the play was conceived for imaginative theatre and O'Neill hoped enthusiastically that the audience would be "caught up enough to join in the responses – the laughter and chorus statements even, much as Negroes do in one of their revival meetings".² O'Neill wrote of his desire to re-establish the ritual which lay at the heart of early Greek and medieval English drama with its religious function. As director, Tyrone Guthrie, referring to the key element of the shared dramatic experience, wrote:

"I believe that the theatre makes its effect not by means of illusion, but by ritual.

People do not believe that what they see or hear on the stage is 'really' happening. Action on the stage is a stylized re-enactment of real action, which is then imagined by the audience. The re-enactment is not merely an imitation but a symbol of the real thing."³

The hope of recovering the lost religious and mystic sense, the need to grapple with archetypal forces rather than a mundane reality, had helped convince O'Neill and later Wilder that a different approach was needed, that a ceremonial, non-realistic quality should pervade their plays. The use of masks was advocated to help give this quality to Lazarus Laughed. They should be used, O'Neill wrote: "... for stage crowds, mobs – wherever a sense of impersonal, collective mob psychology is wanted".⁴ The change of focus was intended to challenge both actors and audience to participate in a more mystical experience.³ He went on to say:

1. Miller, p. 39.

2. Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, p. 603.

3. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, p. 181.

4. Eugene O'Neill, "A Dramatist's Notebook", in Cole, p. 69.

"So when I argue here for a non-realistic imaginative theatre I am hoping not only for added scope for playwright and director and scenic designer, but also for a chance for the actor to develop his art beyond the narrow range to which our present theatre condemns it. Most important of all, from the standpoint of future American culture, I am hoping for added imaginative scope for the audience, a chance for the 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.

I harp on the word 'imaginative' – and with intention! But what do I mean by an 'imaginative' theatre – (where I hope for it, for example, in the sub-title of Lazarus Laughed: A Play for an Imaginative Theatre)? I mean the one true theatre, the age-old theatre, the theatre of the Greeks and Elizabethans, a theatre that could dare to boast – without committing a farcical sacrilege – that it is a legitimate descendant of the first theatre that sprang, by virtue of man's imaginative interpretation of life, out of his worship of Dionysus. I mean a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as 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!"¹

O'Neill's intention to return to "imaginative" theatre had its source first of all then in his dissatisfaction with contemporary superficiality (a parallel dissatisfaction motivated his desire for new symbols as we have seen and uneasiness about contemporary language: "... I don't think, from the evidence of all that is being written today, that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of

1. Ibid., pp. 70-71.

our time"¹). But he had too the evidence of Reinhardt's The Miracle, produced about a year before he began work on Lazarus Laughed. This "religious pageant pervaded with pagan spirit"² strove to achieve a unification of religion and theatre, impressing the spectator with simple and monumental effects produced by sound, mobs, lights and space so that:

"The petty and unimportant – elements that are not eternal in us – cease to have effect. This theatre can only express the great eternal elemental passions of the problems of humanity. In it spectators cease to be mere spectators; they become the people; their emotions are simple and primitive, but great and powerful as becomes the eternal human race."³

Nietzsche, according to O'Neill himself, had influenced young Eugene more than any other author.⁴ And here in Reinhardt's production was the modern example of Nietzsche's belief that Greek drama had attained the "dissolution of the individual and his unification with primordial existence".⁵ Not only does the language of Lazarus Laughed echo the written style of Thus Spoke Zarathustra whose Old Testament rhythms the eighteen-year-old O'Neill had committed to memory, but Nietzsche's belief that it was the tragic chorus of the Greeks, a "symbol of the collectively excited Dionysian throng" which was the only reality, and which "generated the vision of action and scene and celebrated it with the entire symbolism of dancing, music, and speech"⁶, this belief in the importance of the chorus from the Greeks, via Nietzsche, via Reinhardt, finally prompted the chorus of Lazarus.

O'Neill, the man of the theatre, was only too aware that the devices of Lazarus, the masks, the chorus, the emotional fervour of the play, could obviously be exploited

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1. Eugene O'Neill, "Language in a Faithless Age, A Letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn", in Cargill et al, p. 463.
 2. Engel, p. 86.
 3. Ibid., p. 87.
 4. Brustein, p. 329.
 5. Engel, p. 88.
 6. Ibid.

in front of an audience. Pasadena's production tried seriously to interpret the play as O'Neill wrote it and the group's efforts should not be underestimated, the play being eventually seen by at least thirty thousand people, hundreds of volunteers working on sets, masks and costumes, the cast being composed of two hundred. The play was well received with tribute being paid by the critics to the main actor, Irving Pichel, whose laughter was joyful, "gentle, searching and understanding".¹ Although there is no evidence that the audience did in fact respond by joining in, reviewers comment on the visual effectiveness of the production. Following Gordon Craig's principles, the setting was constructed on two levels with sets of steps, smaller platforms and movable pilasters. Screens were used to gradually unfold and open up the stage. Combined with the movement and colourings of costumes and masks in the ever-changing groups, the effect achieved was one of simplicity, "dignity and massiveness".² George Warren wrote that the director managed to harmonize the various elements of the play by using stylized action and unifying the movements of the crowds to produce "highly coloured tableaux" and "superb pictures"³ in the final scenes. Jordan Miller's description of O'Neill's play as showing a "complete loss of theatrical perspective"⁴ and Philip Hartung's dismissal of it as "the biggest lemon of all in the opera of America's greatest dramatist"⁵ are simply not supported by the success of this or the later production. In the 1950 presentation a musical note introduced into a joyous hush was substituted for the laughter, the cast was cut to sixty, O'Neill's sense of chorus was lost, and the play was produced in a large, open-air, Greco-Roman theatre. Even so, without its more obvious effects, the play's strength, its "rasa", shone through. As Bogard reports:

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1. "Pasadena Community Playhouse Produces Lazarus Laughed", Theatre Magazine, Vol. 48, 1928, p. 73.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
 3. George C. Warren, "Lazarus Laughed", in Cargill et al, p. 179.
 4. Miller, p. 39.
 5. Philip H. Hartung, "The Stage and Screen", The Commonweal, Vol. 48, 30th April 1948, p. 674.

"Framed by this simplicity there emerged a drama of genuine interest. Lazarus' story proved absorbing, and in performance Pompeia, Caligula and notably Tiberius and Miriam emerged as some of the best character studies O'Neill has created. Miriam's continual silent presence by Lazarus's side proved to be exceptionally vital, and, by her light, Lazarus's humanity became a reality."¹

Most of the other plays have fared as well in the theatre. As Edith J.R. Isaacs suggests, the stories and characters of O'Neill's plays can "look naked on the printed page"² whereas the same events and characters can be moving and have depth on the stage. The Emperor Jones, for example, eventually produced in Buenos Aires, Paris, London and even Tokyo with a message which was understandable in many cultures, was capable of gripping an audience, catching them up "into madness"³, its glamour and effectiveness lost in the printed page, but on stage the "ideal play, which rests in the reacting upon one's memory of the acted drama".⁴ We have already mentioned Eaton's enthusiastic response to the amateur production of The Hairy Ape:

"It is something new, something strange . . . and something so profoundly theatrical that it cannot be expressed or even intimated in a printed text."⁵

Reviewers even admitted unwillingly that Brown and Strange Interlude had a power in the theatre. Edmund Gagey, for example, admitting that the theme, symbolism and exchange of masks in the earlier play were somewhat confusing, nonetheless conceded: "Even where we are uncertain about the meaning of the words, they offer at times sudden glimpses of the ineffable mystery of human life",⁶ a

1. Bogard, Contour, p. 289.

2. Edith J.R. Isaacs, "Meet O'Neill", Theatre Arts, October 1946, p. 586.

3. Bogard, Contour, p. 137.

4. Ernest Boyd, "A Great American Dramatist", The Freeman, Vol. 3, 6th July 1921, p. 405.

5. Eaton, "Ape", p. 160.

6. Edmund McAdoo Gagey, Revolution in American Drama, New York, 1947.

response which O'Neill himself predicted when he told Barrett Clark that he felt the mystery of personality and life would fascinate the audience:

"I shouldn't be surprised if it interested people who won't bother too much over every shade of meaning, but follow it as they follow every story. They needn't understand with their minds, they can just watch and feel."¹

He was right; the play ran for nearly a year. Strange Interlude, perhaps more easily read than seen because of its length and detailed instructions, became a national best-seller. But it too was translated and produced in different countries as well as receiving two interpretations in the States, the first by the Theatre Guild in 1928, the second being a Broadway production by the Actors Studio Theatre in 1963. Predictably it caused mixed reactions on both occasions, comments on the first production ranging from complaints by Alexander Woolcott, John Mason Brown and Brooks Atkinson that the play was over-long and forced, to the praise of George Jean Nathan, Joseph Wood Krutch, Stark Young and Dudley Nichols, who claimed that the audience left the theatre after eleven o'clock with the "illuminated faces . . . of people who have shared profound emotional experiences".² Of the second production Winifred Dusenbury wrote:

"Modern critics give the present production grudging approval. Feeling somehow that the play should seem dated, that its length should seem too long, and that its technique should seem unmanageable, they are hard put to analyse its power when none of these expectations prove to be true."³

Finally we must consider the role O'Neill's non-realistic plays played in the development of American drama. Animated predictions by contemporary critics such as Eaton that the asides of Strange Interlude would be the next step forward in

1. Clark, p. 106.

2. Dusenbury, p. 176.

3. Ibid.

playwriting or that the ritual effects of Lazarus had opened new doors in American drama, proved true only indirectly as they were developed in the medium of film. It is misleading, however, to join the chorus of writers who claim that O'Neill's devices, because they led to no new tradition, can be viewed as dated, failed experiments. For a start some of the techniques have been adopted by American playwrights who were not necessarily writing totally expressionistic plays. Kaufman, Connelly, Lawson, Anderson and Moss Hart experimented with scene shifts, lighting and visual effects and dream sequences in the thirties. Even if O'Neill was not the direct source of inspiration, he had helped make writers aware of European concepts. His use of sound and lights as integral parts of his plays has affected most American productions since. Lawrence Kitchen¹ sees the earlier plays as having a direct influence on Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams as well as British authors such as Arnold Wesker. But O'Neill's style, even in his later plays has not been directly copied. To some extent Lionel Trilling regards this as a tribute to the author: technical innovations have not been followed because they are not fortuitious, "they are the result of an attempt to say things which the accepted technique cannot express; O'Neill's techniques have not been copied because no one else wishes to say the things with which he is concerned".²

Above all, however, O'Neill can be regarded as the father of American drama. Almost single-handedly he created a dramatic tradition in what can be regarded as the most significant developmental period of theatre in America, "from 1915 to about 1930".³ In many ways this is a startling claim to make for O'Neill because the period does not include those later plays generally regarded as his finest. But O'Neill's greatest contribution was to challenge the tradition of stunted realism in American theatre and to introduce to the stage a new, demanding type of play which exploded traditional conventions of make-believe realism and which asked producer, actor and

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1. Lawrence Kitchen, Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation, London, 1966, p. 109.
 2. Lionel Trilling, introduction to The Emperor Jones, Anna Christie and The Hairy Ape, Eugene O'Neill, New York, 1937, p. ix.
 3. Bogard, Contour, p. xiii.

designer to work together to express what the playwright wanted to say. Audiences too were asked by O'Neill and his successors to question whether realism on-stage was the most effective way of presenting the truth and to respond to the demanding subject matter which dealt with nothing less than the nature of man and his fate.

Wilder's use of non-realistic devices was informed by the principle expressed by Samuel Johnson that "spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is always a stage, and that the players are only players".¹ Instead of trying to ignore or hide this basic fact, Wilder made the manipulation of make-believe the basis of his technique. Aware too that theatre is an art addressed to the group mind, Wilder deliberately and unashamedly wrote for an audience. To achieve the excitement of the theatre ritual and to justify the presentation of fiction on stage, Wilder knew that he would need to write clear, enjoyable plays with a broad field of interest. In his "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting" he sub-titled the third section "The Theatre is a World of Pretense". After having pointed out that the greatest ages in the history of theatre have employed the greatest number of conventions, Wilder wrote:

"The stage is fundamental pretense and it thrives on the acceptance of that fact and in the multiplication of additional pretenses."²

He saw these devices as springing from the vitality of the public imagination and "from an instinctive feeling as to where the essential and where the inessential lay in drama"³. Two functions resulted from this, firstly the spectator's imagination would be provoked to collaborative activity and secondly, the function which Wilder regarded as of greater importance: "It [would raise] the action from the specific to the general".⁴ Like O'Neill he was impatient with the surface banality of American drama and was looking for a new way of exploring more vital and demanding issues. For Wilder the basic aim was to sympathetically portray man's inability to understand the concept of eternity and the endless cyclic patterns of life, caught as he was in the short span allotted to him. Like O'Neill too Wilder's technique was used for a larger purpose – to entertain certainly, but with the ultimate function of helping the spectator see the vast

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1. Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare", in Perspectives on Drama, edited by Calderwood and Toliver, p. 232.
 2. Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting", p. 11.
 3. Ibid., p. 12.
 4. Ibid.

framework against which human beings acted out their daily rituals. It hardly seems possible if we compare the ambitions of Lazarus Laughed with the understated, domestic Wilder plays that a similar mystic quality can possibly pervade the latter's cosy, family-based plays. Nonetheless we know that Wilder responded fully to Gertrude Stein's theories on the individual and the ability of the human mind to record the timeless and the universal. In 1952 Wilder wrote in an article about Thoreau:

"Unhappy indeed, is the boy or girl who has not known those moments of inexplicable rapture in the open air. There is a corresponding experience accorded to those in later years – awe. In ecstasy the self is infused with happiness; in awe the self recedes before a realisation of the vastness and mystery of the non-self."¹

Whereas O'Neill used large and dramatic effects to convey a religious spectacle, Wilder obviously felt that a revival of Greek techniques was inappropriate in the twentieth century and used instead a diminutive world to hint at the universal vastness and mystery. Thus Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth are "attempts to recover for modern audiences the feeling that there is a meaningful relationship between the individual and nature and mankind and the universe, and to restore to life those elements of mystery and love that are the basis for the affirmation of a higher presence",² but the larger concerns are counterbalanced by comedy, burlesque and the ordinary personalities of the chief characters. There are indeed moments when we feel a sense of ritual such as in The Skin of Our Teeth where the actors pass over the stage carrying the numerals and quoting from classical works, finishing with Genesis, or where the refugees sing, Henry recites his tables and Mrs Antrobus reads from the Old Testament at the end of Act One. But more frequently the ceremony is less obvious. George and Emily get married. It is only when the Stage Manager points it out that we realise that this wedding represents all weddings and symbolizes a universal rite. The final act of Our Town, criticised by John Mason Brown for example as containing words which were "too colloquial"³ provides us

1. Wilder, "The American Loneliness", p. 68.

2. Burbank, p. 87.

3. Ibid., p. 93.

with the contrast of death and life and shows the agony of Emily as she sees that so many have missed the wonder and awe resulting from the "realisation of the vastness and mystery of the non-self". Burbank argues that Our Town takes on the qualities of a myth as it "puts specific characters, actions and themes into a microcosmic relationship with the universal forces that act upon and from within men; it draws together past and present; and it provides an analogy by which deep-felt needs, desires, aspirations and fears of the individual become an expression of those of all men".¹ If we apply the same definition to The Skin of Our Teeth, this play too could be regarded as a myth. Interestingly Wilder later used a Greek myth as the basis for The Alcestiad but added a third act and satyr-play to the Euripides original to give the play religious and metaphysical meaning.

Wilder's development as an author is echoed by The Woman in Deep Red in the very first play of The Angel volume when she tells the boy who has been given the gift of authorship:

"The life of man awaits you, the light laughter and the misery in the same day, in the self same hour the trivial and the divine. You are to give it a voice."²

Like the boy, however, Wilder in these early plays was still not certain how to give the thoughts voice. The thoughts themselves, as he admits in the Foreword of The Angel are, in the broadest definition of the word, "religious".³ The technique, although it hints at many later developments with the plays' compression, simultaneous use of past and present, addresses to the audience and occasional seductive, deceptive simplicity of style, is as yet unformed, as the author concedes, hoping that training in this area will come from assimilating various masterpieces:

1. Ibid., p. 95.

2. Wilder, The Angel That Troubled the Waters, p. 6.

3. Ibid., p. ix.

"The technical processes of literature should be acquired almost unconsciously on the tide of a great enthusiasm, even syntax, even sentence-struction; I should like to hope, even spelling."¹

Wilder did in fact assimilate many ideas from Greek, Elizabethan and far eastern models, concepts which had always been there but which it took a perceptive mind, in tune with what was wanted by a modern audience, to apprehend. The process of devising an original method, as we have Wilder's finely articulated essays on the subject to prove, was probably not as unconscious as he had originally thought.

The Christmas plays are the first to reveal how well Wilder was capable of fusing his theme and his method. In The Long Christmas Dinner the bare staging becomes part of the meaning of the play, the set table representing the feast of life of which each individual partakes, unconsciously following the same pattern as his predecessors. The simplicity of the settings of other plays too gave greater significance to the members of the family or the ordinary people of the dramas. Gone are the weighty characters of Angel, nor was Wilder interested in the topical, social concerns of fellow-writers of non-realistic drama in America and on the continent. His concerns were much more universal. In the most ambitious of these little plays, Hiawatha, the characters on the train blend into a harmonious whole with the humble tramp and the field on one hand, and the philosophers and theologians on the other, a harmony which is epitomised by the orchestra conducted by the Stage Manager where all sounds of the universe are combined. Dissonance is provided by Harriet and the Insane Woman who, as Burbank points out, show some awareness of the "blindness of humans to the gift of life"² and thus serve the double function of emphasizing the ignorance of human beings and illustrating the purpose of suffering. Sound, set and character have fused to present Wilder's purpose.

In Our Town Wilder was faced with the task of telling a difficult tale to his

1. Ibid.

2. Burbank, p. 71.

audience, explaining the cyclical ritual of life, and setting this against death and the cosmos. To do this he used a parable, gently guiding us into seeing that events and characters had a timeless quality, by carefully dividing the story into three parts, the final act counter-balancing normal occurrences against the eternal. We join in imaginatively, unhampered by setting and time. As John Mason Brown remarked having re-read the play after eleven difficult years, the timelessness of the first two acts is the result of Wilder's non-representational form which sets the playwright and audience's imaginations free and unimprisoned within settings. Ordinary, realistic techniques would have dated the play much more quickly. Furthermore the frank use of devices, ladders to represent upstairs bedrooms and a chatty stage manager prevent this ambitious tragedy from seeming pretentious or sentimental, while allowing its application to us to become more personal. Wilder was very aware of this need for effects which would prevent any scene from becoming sentimental, predictable or boring. He was worried about the possibility of the filmed version treating the wedding realistically, mentioning the irregularities of the stage play which supplied novelty by the economy of effect in scenery, the minister being played by the Stage Manager, the thinking-aloud passages, the oddity of hearing Mrs. Soames' gabble during the ceremony, and the young people's moments of alarm. Every few minutes there was, he declared "a bold new effect in presentation-methods".¹ But as he hastily added, in his letter to producer Sol Lesser, these effects were never intended to be used just for themselves:

"I know you'll realize that I don't mean boldness or oddity for their own sakes, but merely as the almost indispensable reinforcement and refreshment that was never intended to be interesting for its story alone, or even for its background."²

1. Wilder and Lesser, p. 369.

2. Ibid., p. 366.

Basically, The Skin of Our Teeth is a very serious play. Its theme of individual responsibility which admits man's weaknesses and folly as well as his strengths and virtues, is presented before a background of both humanistic and Old Testament moral values. The cycle of sin, retribution and redemption is the cycle that Antrobus, Henry, Sabina and the Conveeners act out. To present these concerns Wilder has relied on mythological associations, a grand telescoping of time, sets which reflect the topsy-turvy world which is constantly at sixes and sevens, together with jarring assaults on our sense of stage illusion, very different from the relaxed interruptions from the Stage Manager of Our Town. On top of all these devices there is the humour, Mr. Antrobus appearing like a Key-Stone Cop, the entrance of a dinosaur and mammoth, Sabina's flutterings. The humour has upset a number of critics. Francis Fergusson, for example, feels that Wilder has evaded the problem of embodying form and meaning in character and language, "the marriage of Plato and Groucho Marx"² failing to appeal.

In a thorough, and otherwise positive discussion, Rex Burbank comments that the comical aspect of the play sometimes does its job too well, overwhelming the themes, especially as there is no objective correlative as in the previous play, no concrete fact to balance the theatricalism and the allegory.³ Certainly The Skin of Our Teeth does not present the safe world of Our Town. Writing at a time of stress, and exploring more deeply the negative side of man's nature, Wilder was presenting us with a different balance. Trellises in Our Town become toppling flats in the next. An amiable if not too bright George in the first play becomes a murderous, racially violent Henry in the second. Even our point of reference, the Stage Manager, has disappeared. Humour is only too often of the mocking, ironical kind: Miss Fairweather's seduction of Antrobus in the cabana; the Conveeners jeering at everyone not enjoying himself. There is in fact a dramatic change of atmosphere after

1. Ibid., p. 366.

2. Fergusson, "Three Allegorists", p. 561.

3. Burbank, p. 92.

the beginning of the second act. Dominated by the sinister Fortune Teller's threats of shameful things, by Antrobus' neglect of his family and Henry's violence, Act Two becomes progressively darker as the storm approaches and disaster becomes more likely as the humans (unlike ⁱⁿ Act One) refuse to accept their obligations. While Act Three finally re-establishes some harmony, it too opens in the dark and explores the deepest misgivings of Henry and his father. Theatrical effect, strident as it is, has re-inforced the meaning of this thought-provoking play. Even we are revealed by the house-lights in the third act. We have become as vulnerable as the characters, as the Fortune Teller predicted in Act Two:

"They're coming – the Antrobuses. Keck. Your hope. Your despair.
Your selves."¹

Wilder also combines other elements in his plays. The earliest works show the freedom of movement between realism and non-realism which was to mark all Wilder's plays. A believable meeting between a Steward and Mozart turns into a dream in which the Steward speaks for death. "Proserpina" is rooted firmly in the believable, colloquial scene in which two puppet manipulators are presenting a mime to whet the appetites of an audience for the afternoon performance. But extra significance is given to the play when the puppets refuse to obey the wishes of the puppeteers. By the time Wilder was writing Our Town, realism was also being mocked. The latitude and longitude of Grover's Corners, Professor Willard's explanation of the geological and anthropological data, are details which Wilder delivers with a gentle irony. Over and beyond this, however, this play and its one-act predecessors are firmly based in reality, the typical characters speaking colloquial English and performing every-day tasks. The naturalism is a necessary background, for it is only by establishing this illusion that a *Verfremdungseffekt* can take place. As J.L. Styan writes:

" . . . no dramatist can work outside a channel of convention, since
only this permits continuity of attention. Even when it is his object to

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 136.

break this continuity, he must begin by moving along one of these channels."¹

Thus, to gain his ends, Wilder uses the elements of both the "Dramatic" and The "Epic" theatre of Brecht. Spectators are involved in the action of the refugees and the muses, but then they are suddenly made observers when Sabina enters with a shriek. The stage embodies a sequence of events, but then as a Stage Manager addresses us, the stage narrates a sequence. Experience is communicated when we live through the milk-bar meeting of George and Emily, but knowledge is communicated when we view their wedding. Even more complex is the almost simultaneous balance of effects when Henry, after almost strangling his father, expresses the evil side of man but then, as Henry the actor, makes a boyish plea for sympathetic understanding. As Malcolm Goldstein writes:

"At such moments of the play intellectual stimulus and emotional appeal are in precise balance."²

Like O'Neill, Wilder realized that certain details could be isolated to suggest far more. Influenced by Gertrude Stein's distinction between human nature which clings to the self, to identity, to location in time and place and to the human mind, and opposing this the human mind which knows no time or identity and could realise "a non-self situation"³, Wilder was concerned with presenting the timeless and the universal on stage through individual characters and events. This method, seen again and again in plays such as The Long Christmas Dinner, Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth was based on ideas Wilder developed throughout his life. In 1950-1 Wilder deduced the following conclusions from the works of classical American writers in a series of Harvard lectures:

"From the point of view of the European an American is a nomad in relation to place, disattached in relation to time, lonely in relation to

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1. J.L. Styan, The Elements of Drama, London, 1969, p. 189.
 2. Goldstein, p. 125.
 3. Burbank, p. 83.

society, and insubmissive to circumstances, destiny, or God . . . Americans could count and enjoyed counting. They lived under a sense of boundlessness . . . To this day, in American thinking, a crowd of 10,000 is not a homogeneous mass of that number, but is one and one and one . . . up to 10,000."¹

The usefulness to his drama of the notion that this "one" could come to represent the 10,000 or be juxtaposed against them is seen in a further statement:

"Since the American can find no conformation of identity from the environment in which he lives, since he lives exposed to the awareness of vast distances and innumerable existences, since he derives from a belief in the future the courage that animates him, is he not bent on isolating and 'fixing' a value on every existing thing in its relation to a totality, to the All, to the Everywhere, to the Always?"²

In 1957 Wilder expressed similar ideas in an interview:

"[One or two] ideas seem to have prompted my work before I realised it. Now, at my age, I am amused by the circumstance that what is now conscious with me, was for a long time latent. One of these ideas is this: an unrelenting preoccupation with the surprise of the gulf between each tiny occasion of the daily life and the vast stretches of time and place in which every individual plays his role."³

To illustrate these ideas Wilder quoted from both Our Town and The Skin of our Teeth, pointing to his own discovery after writing the former that the play was full of references to "hundreds", "thousands" and "millions" so that "when finally the heartbreak of Emily's unsuccessful return to life again occurs, it is against the background of the almost frightening range of these things".⁴ "The Skin of Our Teeth", he went on to say, "which

1. M. Cowley, introduction to A Thornton Wilder Trio, New York, 1956, p. 16.

2. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

3. Richard H. Goldstone, "The Art of Fiction", p. 51.

4. Ibid., p. 52.

takes five thousand years to go by, is really a way of trying to make sense out of the multiplicity of the human race and its affections". This gigantic aim is toned down by the low key setting of Wilder's plays with their ordinary, recognisable characters.

Wilder's early one-act plays already show his desire to stimulate the audience's imagination by asking them to fill in the details. Ninety years are traversed in The Long Christmas Dinner with characters entering through the symbolic portal of birth trimmed with garlands and fruits and flowers and going to their death through the opposite portal edged and hung with black velvet. Between the portals lies life itself. In Pullman Car "Hiawatha" the characters mime being in the compartments of a travelling train, a train which makes a spiritual journey. In nearly every play that Wilder wrote, characters have a symbolic role; in The Happy Journey Ma represents the good-humoured, strong, humane Every-Mother, in Hiawatha actors come on to play "The Field" and "Grover's Comers" and in The Skin of Our Teeth Sabina is variously The Maid, the seductress, the camp follower, the representative of an average audience, and, as Antrobus describes her at the end of the play: "The voice of the people in their confusion and their need".¹

Wilder has been attacked for being a "parlor Christian"², for having escaped in his books from the contemporary world, for presenting us with "a sufficiently reassuring setting of The Old Folks at Home"³ in Our Town and the implication "that all fatal and shameful disasters work out somehow for the best" in Skin, as the emphasis is "on a vague, unfocused 'Love' as the solution to the most embarrassing metaphysical and theological problems."⁴ Wilder never intended to take specific contemporary social issues as his major theme, but the urge to be didactic and to warn about man's folly is evident in the plays, most particularly in Skin. As Wilder explained, he had to sit firmly on his desire to teach, the result being that most of his plays are remarkably objective. It is this objectivity which has resulted in our being presented with scenes in Our Town

1. Wilder, Our Town, p. 176.

2. Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's, London, 1961, p. 303.

3. Paul Fussell Jr., "Thornton Wilder and the German Psyche", Nation, Vol. 186, May 3 1958, p. 394.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

and earlier plays which we are invited to regard with sympathetic reason. It is this appeal to our understanding, however, which some critics have misinterpreted as a soothing reduction of our emotions. Wilder wrote of his favourite play, Sophocles' Oedipus Rex:

"Having chosen a subject in the realm of the incommensurable, the will of the gods, and having, through reasons in his own temperament, refused to endow it with the mitigating element of a sympathetically emotional treatment, Sophocles transferred it with an inflexible purity to the realm of the mind."¹

At its best, Our Town, viewed through the telescope, comes close to this definition.

As with O'Neill, it is important to look at the success of the plays in production. Wilder was, after all, writing for theatrical performance and Our Town and Skin were addressed to the group mind, deliberately relying on subjects which were common to the experience of all members of the audience. Wilder's acceptance of the limitations of the commercial theatre together with his refusal to have contempt for it, irritated a number of critics. Francis Fergusson, for example, believed that Wilder wrote down to the mass audience, indulging its desire for bathos and sentimental optimism:

"George and Emily, like Sabina and the other characters in Wilder's two plays, are trying to 'feel good', and it is that action which the audience sympathetically imitates, sharing its Sunday School righteousness and smiling tears of delicious embarrassment."²

On the contrary, as we have attempted to show, Wilder himself was unhappy with the soothing nature of the theatre he found in America. His basic aim was to challenge an audience, certainly by wooing it first of all by presenting a palatable and recognizable reality. But then through the use of his non-realistic devices, ^{he} aimed to prod and lead the spectators into a much larger sphere.

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1. Wilder, introduction to Oedipus the King, p. 20.
 2. Fergusson, "Three Allegorists", p. 571.

There is no doubt that Wilder's plays have been and still are, immensely popular in performance. In 1960 David Edgell claimed that Our Town, which first appeared in 1938 had "not been absent from a stage somewhere in the world in any year since that date".¹ Beloved by school groups, amateurs and professional companies, Wilder's plays have proved favourites first of all in America, but strangely have also had a particular appeal in Germany. A number of productions of the two major plays in most important German theatres after the war, led to interest and revivals of the shorter plays, especially by amateur and student groups. One could claim cynically that the popularity of these plays rests on the simplicity with which they can be staged as they lack effects and scenery, or that Wilder's deliberate appeal to the commercial audience has resulted in unthinking acceptance of the plays. But there are probably other reasons for the success of the plays. Horst Frenz² suggests that Wilder's concern with form, especially the apparent formlessness of his drama, may have reflected contemporary views of life and art in post-war Europe. The demands on an audience, not only to think, but to play a role in the drama, might likewise have particular appeal in a world of alienated individuals. In an age when realism has dominated film and television, it is interesting that audiences have been attracted to the non-realism of these plays.

Wilder's first plays, collected in The Angel volume, were exercises for the theatre, in length, demands for scenery and non-realistic devices too impractical to be presented on stage. Written for the author's own amusement, they were meant for reading rather than performance. Nonetheless they were produced by German amateur and student groups in small arena-styled theatres in the early fifties. Simplified, in line with Wilder's later, basic stage requirements, they were, according to Frenz "very effective and convey[ed] to the audiences many basic truths".³ Nonetheless, as a number of critics pointed out, their poetic simplicity caused considerable

1. Edgell, p. 47.

2. Horst Frenz, "The Reception of Thornton Wilder's Plays in Germany", Modern Drama, Vol. 3, September 1960, p. 128.

3. Horst Frenz, "American Playwrights and the German Psyche", Die Neueren Sprachen, Vol. 10, 1961, p. 175.

difficulties not only in interpretation but also in production as Die Neue Zeitung stated: "for they are essentially moral-philosophical stage miniatures which combine Christian and secular ideas in a clever way and are presented in a drastic and outspoken manner, thus producing startling effects."¹

Performances of the one-act plays were more successful, The Happy Journey being seen as a "hymn of small happiness with a touch of melancholy under the surface"² although some critics balked at its undramatic treatment and "lack of ideas".³ Director Tyrone Guthrie, entranced by these plays, significantly regards them as unlikely to become popular, and complained in 1955:

"In twenty-five years of effort I have persuaded people to let me stage two of them."⁴

His Hiawatha, produced as part of a summer course in drama was well received on the one night of its private performance.

Little things can affect an audience's response, things which in the reading are largely unnoticed. The aside, for example, insignificant in reading can become urgent in performance, an address directed at one member of the audience implies an embrace of everyone. This to some extent may account for the continued success of Wilder's full-length plays. On the other hand, Guthrie mentions the "nipping frost of disapproval"⁵ which settled on a post-war London audience which was tired of austerity, when one of the actresses in Our Town bade the milkman leave three quarts of milk the next morning. The play failed largely because the audience wanted luxurious escapism, not the homely goings-on in front of black drapes. Timing has played an important part in the success of productions. The basic message of hope together with memories of past German theatrical achievement helped the production of Skin to prove "an event of major importance not only in the history of the

1. Frenz, "Thornton Wilder's Plays in Germany", p. 131.

2. Frenz, "American Playwrights", p. 175.

3. Ibid.

4. Tyrone Guthrie, "The World of Thornton Wilder", New York Times Magazine, November 27, 1955, p. 26.

5. Ibid.

German theatre but also in the history of German rehabilitation and self-identification"¹ according to Hans Sahl. A later revival, however, met with more mixed reactions. In the United States the first audiences had difficulty understanding the play, and, in spite of Fergusson's contemptuous belief that this drama works well in the theatre with its wisecracks aimed at the peanut gallery and precariously leaning scenery, in the end it is Our Town which has proved the more enduring and the most loved of Wilder's plays.

In evaluating Wilder's work and influence on others, many have found it easy to dismiss certain techniques as dead-end, an attitude we have already seen in relation to O'Neill. The context of American drama in which Wilder started writing, the dying, artificial realism is ignored. It is true that Wilder's dramatic technique cannot be worked endlessly without the public becoming fatigued. Part of the effect and charm of his plays after all comes from the novelty and surprise of many of his devices. Perhaps it is also true, as David Mayer wrote of a recent revival of The Skin of Our Teeth in England, that the conventions of the proscenium arch stage and the box set are now dead issues:

"Today, in the fully round arena stage of the Royal Exchange [in Manchester], such questions and conventions are immaterial."²

That staging has now moved beyond the conventional picture frame stage (and maybe Mayer suggests we have replaced this kind of auditorium more extensively than is in fact the case), may of course be partly attributable to Wilder's questioning of its function. Clara Menck's statement³ that Wilder's style could not be imitated, incorporating as it does announcers in shirt sleeves to replace curtains and props, could in fact be answered by pointing to not only recent plays but the increasing number of present-day productions which now dispense with curtains and elaborate scenery.

Wilder's influence on contemporary dramatists is obvious. Alan Downer

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1. Hans Sahl, "Wilder and the Germans", Four Quarters, May 16, 1967, p. 8.
 2. David Mayer, "The Skin of Our Teeth", Plays and Players, August 1977.
 3. Frenz, "Wilder in Germany", p. 132.

points to Our Town's Stage Manager as the model for a number of interlocutors in later plays, two of the most memorable being Tennessee Williams' Tom Wingfield and Alfieri, a neighbourhood lawyer in Miller's A View from the Bridge. Other writers see influences in other areas, Malcolm Goldstein believing that the authors of the Theatre of the Absurd who rely on slapstick, allegory, and seeming non-sequiturs for their reports on the meaning of existence, owe a mounting debt to Wilder.

Although many point to Wilder's reliance on Brecht, European dramatists have also been influenced by the American dramatist. As Robert W. Corrigan states:

"Furthermore, no American playwright is more respected by contemporary European dramatists than is Wilder; Brecht, Ionesco, and Duerrenmatt have all acknowledged their debt to this 'great and fanatical experimenter'."¹

A production of Our Town in Zurich in the early part of the war made an enormous impression, according to Frederick Lumley, on what had become the intellectual capital of the German-speaking world. A number of young dramatists such as Max Frisch "were immediately impressed by the breaking up of the box set image and the opening up of the old conception of theatre".² European drama has carried on the tradition.

Thornton Wilder, influenced by the Greeks, the Elizabethans, plays of the far east, by James Joyce and the European expressionists, has always regarded literature as more of "a torch race than a furious dispute among heirs".³ The debt that others now owe him is mounting.

1. Corrigan, p. 161.

2. Frederick Lumley, New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama: A Survey Since Ibsen and Shaw, London, 1967, p. 327.

3. Wilder, Our Town, p. 14.

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