 CHAPTER - II
THE EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

The related perceptions of existential theorists and dramatic critics have implied that a pattern exists in the works of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams. This type of pattern as William Spanos has described it in his *A Casebook on Existentialism* offers a comprehensive and consistent description of existentialism. This type of amalgamation of related tenets emphasizes a focus in *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a focus emphasizing a conscious affirmation of life which is translated into each constituent of the dramas. This affirmation, born of consciousness, frees man of the deterministic natural order allowing him to create his own being in the world. This facet of an existential dramatic form invests these solemn dramatic works with an underlying sense of optimism. This affirmation of the human spirit, this sense of consciousness butted up against nothingness, nonbeing, challenges the infinite. In so doing, it sets man apart guaranteeing his humanity. He is no longer "a stone among stones," but a being capable of creating his own identity.

In order to determine if an existential-familial dramatic form presents a distinctive vision of reality in Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, it is first necessary to establish exactly what an existential perspective entails. Once a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon has been established, it is then possible to explore those cultural influences which have contributed to its formation. Such an examination may then lead to an illumination of the connection between these specific forces as they have shaped both philosophical ideology and dramatic form.

Although the term "existential" is generally thought of in a twentieth century context, its roots, the scattered fragments of cultural innovation which would continue to evolve over
hundreds of years and become a unified system of philosophical thought, reach back to antiquity. Indeed, certain aspects of the perspective can be traced to landmark innovations in scientific and philosophic thought. Existential philosopher and theorist William Spanos recognized the emergence of scattered fragments of the ontological paradigm in the philosophical, theological, and literary precursors of the twentieth century. Spanos traced these influences, the antecedents of recognizable existential tenets of consciousness, angst, alienation, and spiritual growth based upon spiritual fellowship, in their incomplete and isolated form, to biblical scriptures preceding the birth of Jesus Christ:

The roots of existentialism extend deeply into western history, even beyond St. Augustine to the pre-Socratic philosophers and the author of the Book of Job. But at no time in the past did the existential attitude (a term more appropriate, perhaps, then "philosophy") have the kind of relevance it has for modern man. In the past--as recently as Soren Kierkegaard's day--the existentialist philosopher or artist was an isolated voice of a community that largely ignored or refused to listen to him. As long as the community believed or thought it believed in the existence of a god who offered the reward of eternity as compensation for the suffering and anguish of temporal life, his warning went more or less unheard and the existential attitude thus remained marginal and undefined.¹

Spano's reference to the shattering of conventional religious norms is clarified in his persistent references to Nietzsche, and Nietzsche's announcement," ... God is dead."² To Spanos, Buber, Sartre, and Barrett in the philosophical community, this announcement signaled a radical shift in world view which would precipitate the eventual crystallization of the existential perspective in this century. This shattering of existing norms also pointed to the translation of an emerging existential perspective into every facet of twentieth century life, including the arts.

Spanos' observation concerning the lack of clarity, the ambiguous references to existentialism in the critical writing in lieu of a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon, illuminates a primary reason which has prevented a systematic study of its absorption into
American dramaturgy. Oscar Brockett's *History of the Theatre, Fourth Edition*, a widely used text in university theatre departments, offers a one-dimensional view of this complex philosophical entity. Brockett's concentration upon the aspect of freedom, choice in regard to individual existence excludes the related and most basic concepts of consciousness and subjectivity. This type of exclusive reference to the phenomenon also ignores the related concepts of nonbeing, angst, alienation, human relationships, and spiritual growth:

*The enormous influence of postwar French drama, however, came from existential and absurdist plays. Following the war, existentialism as a philosophical outlook attracted considerable attention, especially through the essays and plays of Jean-Paul Sartre ... denying the existence of God, fixed standards of conduct, and verifiable moral codes, Sartre argues that each individual must choose his or her own values and live by them regardless of prevailing ideas, for to conform unquestioningly to the conventions established by others is the immoral response of a robot rather than the responsible act of a true being.*

By emphasizing a single facet of the philosophical perspective composed of several complementary components, Brockett has presented a distorted description of the phenomenon. His assessment of the perspective is a generalized and loosely defined interpretation of one man's contribution to the form lacking a direct correlation to dramatic form. There is little wonder that the translation of such a loosely defined ideology into dramatic form should remain a mystery for readers of Brockett's *History of the Theatre*.

Samuel Bernstein presents an equally ambiguous and generalized description of existentialism in his *The Strands Entwined*:

*In 1961, in an extraordinary work of theatre criticism entitled The Theatre of The Absurd, Martin Esslin traced the history and elucidated the characteristics of the Absurdist movement. Unlike its contemporary, the Existentialist Theatre, which also responded to our awareness of chaos, the Theatre of the Absurd sought to bring form and subject matter into harmony; according to Esslin, rather than arguing convincingly and rationally about absurdity, this movement sought to present absurdity in the very body and movement of its plays ... Finally, it confronted and presented the bleak side of*
human existence expressed in Absurdist and Existentialist philosophy; at the same time, it took an objective and calm look at human behaviour and presented a highly comic view of the human antihero, which seemed much truer and more responsive to the actualities of modern experience than the vestigial heroic outlook that had lingered on and become an outdated tradition in European literature.⁴

Defined almost exclusively as a by-product of the Absurdist Theatre, or regarded solely in terms of what some critics have loosely referred to as its nihilistic components, the Existential Theatre is dismissed before even being considered. Its place in American dramaturgy is all but ignored. Once again a restrictive or generalized definition of this perspective has clouded its influence upon the development of American dramatic form.

In his A Casebook on Existentialism, Spanos concurs with philosophers like Buber, Sartre, and Barrett, that the same cultural forces predominant in twentieth century life: modern psychology, the threat of global annihilation, anxiety, alienation, and the destruction of conventional religious beliefs, are synonymous with the philosophical perspective, existentialism. To paraphrase Spanos, existential man is in the natural world, chained to it biologically. Yet, consciousness man is set apart from the natural world, kept from it by virtue of his awareness of his own unique existence as man. William Barrett describes this same facet of the existential perspective in a similar fashion in his What is Existentialism? Barrett refers to Heidegger's emphasis upon man as a being concerned with his own existence, knowledgeable of his own being in the world:

Why should man be given this precedence over other beings in nature as a starting point for the new metaphysics (or ontology) that Heidegger proposes? Because, says Heidegger, man is the metaphysical (or ontological) animal: in being he is concerned with his own being. Man seeks to understand his own being, and this search itself is a fact that characterizes profoundly his being.⁵

Both Spanos' and Barrett's observations stressing a radical redirection of philosophic thought shortly after the turn of the century, are shared by a number of prominent theorists in the fields of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and dramatic theory. C.G. Jung corroborates
Spanos' view of modern man in his existential context. Jung refers to man as a being engaged in a spiritual quest, specifying that the primary concern of all organized systems of thought in this century begins with the conscious man's awareness of this own existence as man. This type of precarious existence is realized in an impersonal world bound by natural law. This dichotomy of conscious man, a spiritual being chinned to the objective world by virtue of his physical body, yet separated from it as a result of his self-awareness, constitutes a mainstream in twentieth century thought. It is this existential world view which can be identified in the foremost theoretical pronouncements made by scholars in this century.

In Modern Man in Search of a Soul, Jung connects the advent of the unified existential perspective to those cataclysmic forces of death and destruction permeating entire cultures and alluding to the wholesale annihilation of the human race:

*The revolution in our conscious outlook, brought about by the catastrophic results of the World Ward, shows itself in our inner life by the shattering of our faith in ourselves and our own worth.*

This identification of the First World War as the catalyst responsible for organizing the tenets of the existential perspective into one cohesive world view is shared by several major philosophers. It is also attributed with redirecting artistic pursuits by theatre historians. Garff B. Wilson posits this destructive force, World War I, with shaping the course of twentieth century life in philosophical, social, cultural, and artistic pursuits. In his *Three Hundred Years of American Theatre*, he lists World War I as the foremost cause of this shift in world view:

*Three special influences accelerated the collapse of beliefs in traditional values. One, of course, was the monstrous blood-letting of the First World War. After the debacle, which the United States had entered with gallant idealism, the principles that had drawn America into the war were discredited and repudiated.*

A concentration on this massive destruction of human life led naturally to a similar concern with a threat of nonbeing. This recognition discussed by Sartre in his *Being and
Nothingness, Loerlegaard in *The Concept of Drad*, is based on the individual's recognition of nonbeing, i.e., not simply an acceptance of his own mortality, but an awareness of the ever-present possibility that at any time death could terminate his being in the world. This concentration on existence and consciousness, precipitated by the loss of human life incurred in WWI, brought man's psyche to the forefront, with this concentration upon individual existence, the compatible elements of the existential perspective began to congeal into a unified system.

Jung describes this evolution of philosophic thought in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. He compares this world view, this new found emphasis upon individual consciousness, subjectivity, angst, and alienation, to those beliefs, both theological and scientific, which marked the beginning of the modern age:

*Through his scepticism the modern man is thrown back upon himself; his energies flow towards their source and wash to the surface those psychic contents which are at all times there, but lie hidden in the silt as long as the stream flows smoothly in its course. How totally different did the world appear to mediaeval man. For him the earth was eternally fixed and at rest in the center of the universe encircled by the course of a sun that solicitously bestowed its warmth.*

Jung related this pervasive threat of nonbeing established in the writings of Kierkegaard and Sartre, and realized in the First World War, to the cogent development of a specific philosophical attitude. According to Jung, this perspective encompassed a sense of consciousness and subjectivity, the threat of nonbeing, anxiety, alienation, and the rejection of inauthentic values promoting material concerns. Existentialism was recognized by member of the philosophic community, as springing from those seeds of modern thought also synonymous with the writings of Freud, Darwin, Einstein, and Nietzsche. Just as it owes its foundation to the theoretical observations of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Buber, Barrett, and Spanos, it owes its formal inception to the pressures generated in the holocaust of the
First World War. It owes its inculcation into the disciplines of psychoanalysis, biology, physics, and literature to Freud, Darwin, Einstein, and Nietzsche.

In his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung describes the relationship between the distillation of a philosophic attitude and the scientific perceptions shaping life in this century: *Is it again a mere coincidence that modern thought has had to come to terms with Einstein's relativity theory and with ideas about the structure of the atom which lead us away from determinism and visual representation? Even physics volatilizes our material world. It is no wonder, then, in my opinion, if the modern man falls back upon the reality of psychic life and expect from it that certainty which the world denies him.*

Existentialism draws its sustenance from an amalgamation of philosophical, psychological, scientific, as well as theological thought. Its ideologies parallel several schools of thought responsible for shaping life in this century. A convergence illuminates the significance of the philosophical perspective as a vital force in twentieth century life. A comparison of existential tenets with theoretical proclamations by Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, C.G. Jung, and Fredrick Nietzsche, provides a verification of the subsequent absorption of isolated theories into one system of thought. It also provides an added illumination of the emphasis these scattered fragments of the philosophy have exerted upon the modern world.

Sigmund Freud, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, outlined what came to be the foundation of modern psychology. His admonition of a type of cause and effect relationship operative in the mind; the mind's capacity to organize and to interpret those visual and aural perceptions we label reality; the coexistence of the "id", the "ego", and the "superego", suggests a simultaneity reflecting existential ideologies. Freud's observations suggest a temporal quality in relation to I-time. His perceptions concerning conscious thought and the subconscious, and his interpretation of dreams, which presents a complex symbolic view of reality based on concrete experience, all correlate with the most basic existential
ideologies. Freud's explanation of the workings of the human mind coincide with existential notions of consciousness, subjectivity, and the temporal nature of human existence. He refers directly to the existential notion of Angst in his lectures, and describes that pervasive sense of fear in the following manner:

*We believe that it is in the act of birth that there comes about the combination of unpleasurable feelings, impulses of discharge and bodily sensations which has become the prototype of the effects of a mortal danger and has ever since been repeated by us as the state of anxiety. The immense increase of stimulation owing to the interruption of the renovation of the blood (internal respiration) was at the time the cause of the experience of anxiety; the first anxiety was thus a toxic one. The name "Angst"-- "angustiae," "Eager" emphasizes the characteristic of restriction in breathing which was then present as a consequence of the real situation and is now almost invariably reinstated in the affect.*

In his *The Meaning of Relativity*, Albert Einstein presents a view of time and space which tends to negate absolutes, and which organizes a theory of time dependent upon individual experience. Einstein organizes this theory detailing the subjective nature of everyday life and presenting a summary of I-time, in the following manner:

*The experiences of an individual appear to us arranged in a series of events; in this series the single events which we remember appear to be ordered according to the criterion of "earlier" and "later", which cannot be analyzed further. There exists, therefore, for the individual, an I-time, or subjective time. This in itself is not measurable.*

Einstein continues to explain the subjective nature of human existence, and stresses the temporal nature of man's conscious awareness of his own existence as man in the following way:

*We are accustomed to regard as real those sense perceptions which are common to different individuals and which therefore are, in a measure impersonal. The natural sciences, and in particular, the most fundamental of them, physics, deals with such sense perceptions. The conception of physical bodies in particular of rigid bodies is a relatively constant complex of such sense perceptions. A clock is also a body, or a system in the same sense, with*
the additional property that the series of events which it counts is formed of elements all of which can be regarded as equal.\textsuperscript{12}

Einstein relates his study of physical and of sense perceptions in terms of their subjectivity and in terms of individual experience. "The only justification for our concepts and system concepts is that they serve to represent the complex of our experiences; beyond this they have no legitimacy."\textsuperscript{13}

Charles Darwin in his The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man, documents a struggle for existence which pits man along with other mammals against the ever-present threat of death. Darwin elaborates upon this threat of nonbeing, connecting it with natural or biological law which acts as a determining factor limiting the length and type of existence of organisms in the biosphere. This threat is not viewed as the culmination of a full, or enriched life, but exists as a type of check bound by scientific law. This natural force may eradicate any organism incapable of competing with others in the same or similar species for food and reproductive rights:

\begin{quote}
In the case of every species, many different checks, acting at different periods of life, and during different seasons or years, probably come into play; someone check or some few being generally the most potent; but all will concur in determining the average number or even the existence of the species.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Darwin persists in his comparison of the embryonic similarities between man and other mammals. He develops a consistent and comprehensive hypothesis for the development of the many species from a common ancestor. And yet, even he is force to admit, as existential philosophers have recognized, that man is \textit{in} but not \textit{of} the natural world. He is bound to it as Darwin notes, by a biological link, but he is separated from it because of his enhanced mental capacity, (a capacity which Darwin might have acknowledge, which provides man with the capacity to recognize his own existence.):

\begin{quote}
It is notorious that man is constructed on the same general type or model as other mammals. All the bones in his skeleton can be compared with corresponding bones in a monkey, bat, or seal. So it is with his muscles,
nerves, blood, the most important of all the organs, follows the same law, as shown by Huxley and other anatomists. Bischoff, who is a hostile witness, admits that every chief fissure and fold in the brain of man has its analogy in that of the orange; but he adds that at no period of development do their brains perfectly agree, nor could perfect agreement be expected, for otherwise their mental powers would have been the same.\textsuperscript{15}

Fredrick Nietzsche's \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra} presents in a literary context many of the foremost ideologies associated with the existential perspective. These viewpoints not unlike those scientific perceptions expressed by Darwin, place responsibility upon man himself and upon his determination of his own being in the world. Nietzsche emphasizes man, a conscious being possession will, as the primary motivating force in the universe. No longer does an omnipotent God order moral imperatives. In his absence, man becomes responsible for manifesting his own latent moral perfection. This creation of a new value system to replace what Nietzsche viewed as a antiquated one, is to be orchestrated in the conscious awareness of death, more accurately, in the face of nonbeing:

\begin{quote}
Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadfulness sin, and to rate the heart of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Nietzsche reiterated this same emphasis upon an individual spiritual perspective stimulated by man's awareness of his own mortality, the void which waited beyond, when he stated, "Man is a rope stretched between animal and the Superman--a rope over an abyss."\textsuperscript{17} To Nietzsche, man was nothing other than what he made of himself, a primary tenet of existential thought. And his responsibility was not to an outside entity, but to himself. He was to develop and to act upon a set of authentic values capable of manifesting an unlimited spiritual potential. Nietzsche's \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra} stresses this continuing process identifying man not as a static being, but a constantly changing one, changing and growing with each new experience. He is free to create his own being, and yet, he is somehow set apart in the world, left alone in the universe. His spiritual predilections separate his from the
rest of the natural world, a world bound by objective concerns and scientific law. To Nietzsche, man was first and foremost a spiritual being at odds with the natural world.

C.C. Jung in his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* combines these multifarious existential components into one succinct view of twentieth century man. In so doing, Jung elaborates upon a primary tenet of existential thought, consciousness, and its relation to man's unique existence as man:

*The modern man—or, let us say again, the man of the immediate present—is rarely met with. There are few who live up to the name, for they must be conscious to a superlative degree. Since to be wholly of the present means to be fully conscious of one's existence as a man, it requires the most intensive and extensive consciousness, with a minimum of un-consciousness.*

Jung draws upon the vast majority of existential tenets, the accumulated fragments of philosophical thought, in his conception of modern man and his psyche, what he considers modern man's spiritual quest:

*Indeed, he is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow.*

Jung establishes a direct correlation between this individual spiritual quest which acts as the axis, the cultural fulcrum of twentieth century society, and its relationship to modern science. In doing, he demonstrates the symbiotic nature of these forces of consciousness, an awareness of nonbeing, angst, responsibility and choice. He speculates upon the influence that this concrete presence in the world with its sense of acute immediacy, exerted on all systems of organized thought:

*So also a spiritual need has produced in our time our "discovery" of psychology. There has never, of course, been a time when the psyche did not manifest itself, but formerly it attracted no attention--no one noticed it.*

In recognizing what forces act upon and influence modern man, Jung paraphrases the most primary of existential concerns, the emphasis upon concrete experience and upon
authentic values. Jung explains this pressure to confirm, exerted by an impersonal society, as a primary cause of man's reliance upon inauthentic values.

\[\text{While man still lives as a herd-being he has not "things of the spirit" of his own; nor does he need any, save the usual belief in the immortality of the soul. But as soon as he has outgrown whatever local form of religion he was born to--as soon as this religion can no longer embrace his life in all its fullness--then the psyche becomes something in its own right which cannot be dealt with by the measures of the church alone. It is for this reason that we of today have a psychology founded on experience, and not upon articles of faith or the postulates of any philosophical system.}\]

Scholarly inquiries examining the influence of these several theoretical giants upon twentieth century society are voluminous. Countless articles and dissertations seek to document the influence exerted by Freud, Einstein, Darwin, Jung, and Nietzsche, upon technology, physics, psychology, theology, sociology, biology, and upon philosophy and art, virtually all organized systems of thought. Certainly enough evidence exists both explicitly in the writings of these theorists and in the critical reviews of their theories to connect their perceptions with an existential perspective. The studies employing Freudian interpretations of Hamlet alone abound. The much quoted "To be, or not to be," is consistently utilized as a preface to hypotheses stressing the protagonist's consciousness of his own existence, his hesitation in regard to overt action, and his preoccupation with death. Ernest Jones' \textit{Hamlet and Oedipus} is but one example of the application of modern psychology in providing an interpretation of art, specifically, an interpretation of dramatic form in understanding of the play's protagonist.

The influence of these several theoretical viewpoints upon the amalgamation of existential tenets into a cohesive perspective, and the application of this perspective to the theatre is more than coincidental. This expanding philosophical base, coupled with a number of landmark inventions in the nineteenth century, is largely responsible for shaping the modern theatre. The emergence of new types of dramaturgy shaped by the philosophical
innovations of the nineteenth century, began to appear in the works of Emile Zola and August Strindberg in the last half of that century. The radical alterations in staging practices also occurring in the nineteenth century coincided to a large degree with the establishment of these philosophical viewpoints and their influence upon dramatic form. It would be an overstatement to assert that each new staging device, structural steel, its use in theatre design, set design and cantilever balconies; the incandescent lamp, Steele Mackaye's employment of elevator staging; are all the product of these converging ideologies. Evidence does exist however, to connect the emergence of alternative staging practices which moved away from a literal or representational approach to an existential world view.

In the 1870s Emile Zola applied the most prevalent cultural forces operative in society, in his creation of Therese Raquin. The play was quickly associated with a literary movement, "naturalism." In Zola's self-professed intent, the play sought to present in dramatic form a scientific hypothesis with the outcome governed by heredity and environment. Zola acknowledged his employment of Darwinian ideologies and the "scientific method," in which observation played a key role. Critics then and one evaluate the artistic merit of his work in light of his attempts to unify artistic and scientific forms.

Zola's attempts to develop a dramaturgy reflecting a human reality resulted in the creation of a new dramatic form distinguished by its emphasis upon a "slice of life" format. This stage of reality, meant to mirror more closely the subjective, unordered nature of real life, served as a framework for his plays. As Robert Findlay and Oscar Brockett state in their Century of Innovation:

*His knowledge of life told him that truth is not revealed in a series of complication leading to crisis and resolution, but in a more haphazard collection of events which create a texture and sense of direction. Thus, in the name of truth, he suggested that a play should be "a fragment of existence" without apparent beginning, middle or end.*\(^{22}\)
Although *Therese Raquin* does not adhere to the "fragment of existence" model which Zola identified, it does by comparison; oppose many of the plot contrivances apparent in plays by Alexander Dumas fills, and other playwrights favoring the "well-made play" popularized by Eugene Scribe. Mme. Raquin's stroke, her silent recriminations of Therese and Laurent for their murder of Camille, and her subsequent recovery in the final act; all resemble aspects of the "well-made play" against which Zola revolted. But Zola's theoretical admonitions, his concern for the creation of a new drama more accurately reflecting the true nature of life and its lack of linear regularity, became a hallmark in theatre history. And "naturalism" as a dramatic force flourished in the years bridging the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Henri Becque and August Strindberg authored plays in this tradition. Their efforts produced an outcome among literary critics who chided them for not taking a moral stance in regard to the denouement in their plays. This vast body of critical literature and the play texts themselves identify a new trend in dramatic literature, a trend exploiting a psychological perspective, linear irregularities in plot construction, and man's accumulated acts as a definition of his being.

As a theorist fundamental in the establishment of a new dramaturgy, Zola stated that "naturalism" was founded on truth, but a truth as irregular as the human beings who lent it its credibility. Zola also emphasized the influence of past literature in the eighteenth century with its growing awareness of scientific discoveries, and Stendhal's work which approached literature from a psychological perspective as key motivating factors in the naturalist movement. Zole continued to stress his conception of a type of "slice of life" drama in terms of eliminating the fact of reality, the rigid structural demands of the "Well-made play":

*Instead of imagining an adventure, complicating it, preparing stage surprises, which from scene to scene will bring it to a final conclusion, one simply takes from life the history of a being, or of a group of beings, whose acts one faithfully records.*

23
In his analyzation of dramatic form and in his designation of the proper techniques to be employed when staging these naturalist dramas, Zola specified that the playwright should circumvent the unities in order to present a more truthful picture of man. He stated that stage settings were nothing more than the descriptions necessary to support reality.

Also essential in developing an understanding of the gradual emergence of an existential dramatic form is a brief examination of the work of a playwright whose profound influence upon modern American dramaturgy is perhaps one of the most documented areas of investigation in academic theatre history. August Strindberg's earlier plays, *The Father* and *Miss Julie* in particular, can be traced to Zola's influence. Strindberg acknowledged his debt to Zola, referring to Zola's essays on dramatic form. It is the post-naturalist plays, Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, which provide another pivotal landmark along the evolutionary scale in dramatic form moving toward the emergence of a distinctively existential form. Robert Findlay and Oscar Brockett in their *Century of Innovation* discuss Strindberg's intent in writing *A Dream Play*, and they elaborate upon the influence that Strindberg exerted on later playwrights:

> Of all the later plays, the best known and the most influential is *The Dream Play* (1902), for it sums up most of Strindberg's preoccupations and epitomizes the dramatic form which was to exert so much influence upon later nonrealistic dramatists, especially the German expressionists. In his preface to *The Dream Play*, Strindberg wrote: "The author has tried to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of a dream. Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, imagination designs and embroders novel patterns, free fancies, absurdities and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, vanish, solidify, blur, clarify. But one consciousness reigns above all—that of the dreamer; and before it there are no secrets, not incongruities, not scruples, no laws." Here Freud's conception of dream is given dramatic form.

An analysis of the play's dramatic form, coupled with Strindberg's own statement of intent supplies a direct link between the establishment of a new dramatic form, and the
presence of an emerging existential perspective. Long considered as two distinctively different forms, the existential format and the expressionistic one are actually fledglings derived from the same cluster of cultural influences.

Strindberg's play has been widely recognized for its organization of expressionist constituents into one unified form. Critics Earl Enoch Dahlstrom, Maurice Valency, John Gassner, Robert Brustein, Antony Caputi, Martin Lamm, Paul Landau, and many others have established A Dream Play's respective position in this stylistic category. Although other plays, George Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, or Ernest Toller's Man and the Masses also qualify in being recognized as expressionist dramas, neither has provoked the extensive mass of critical observation that Strindberg's play has drawn. Both Valency and Dahlstrom have offered studies seeking to define the expressionist form. Carl Enoch Dahlstrom's landmark study of Strindberg's work entitled Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism provides a synthesis of expressionistic components which are amazingly similar to existential concerns:

A Dream Play, like To Damascus, is an exquisite expressionistic drama. It is well rounded out with all the characteristics of expressionism; and these are, furthermore, well moulded into the art-product. Typification, autobiographical data, dream character, distortion, contrapuntal method and other factors leave not the echo of suspicion that A Dream Play can be anything but an expressionistic drama.25

Add to this partial list, "the radiation of the ego," which Dahlstrom also identifies, a factor which arranges and manipulates everything on stage in terms of the protagonist's subjective view of reality, his capacity to represent the author on stage, and the two forms become comparable in terms of shared components. In Son of a Servant, Strindberg acknowledge his philosophical debt to Nietzsche, a man considered by many as the founding father of the existential movement in modern literature. Strindberg's descriptions of his identification with Nietzsche's "superman", and his translation of his own suffering into the characterizations in such plays as A Dream Play exhibit a quest for spiritual perfection
synonymous with existential ideologies. Expressionist drama emphasizes dream character, the subjective nature of reality by also including the element of distortion in its vision of reality. It shares these components of a subjective reality with existential drama. Both expressionism and existential drama share a concentration upon subjectivity, concrete experience, I-time, or the coexistence of the past, present, and the future in life experience, and an externalization of the individual mind. Both are also constructed around a plot, a thread spun not chronologically, but arranged in a matrix design, as characters enter into relationships to edify specific truths. In Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, "The Captain becomes the Lawyer and the Poet, and Indra's daughter becomes the Lawyer's Wife."26 And, "The situations also range through a cross-section of human experience: childhood, school days, young love, courtship, marriage, and so on."27 Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay's description of Strindberg's use of character, and his sense of dramatic action point out a dramatic form searching for an inner truth, a spiritual truth not bound by objective reality.

Both forms emphasize the quality of an individual life balanced against an awareness of death. The recognition of nonbeing brings the nature of human relationships and their potential to generate spiritual growth into focus. It also presents a value system consistent with the temporal nature of existence. There is little doubt that the destruction of the Castle in Strindberg’s play and the subsequent budding of a flower atop the burning pinnacle is meant to represent the death of the body and the freeing of the spirit. Maurice Valency in his *The Flower and the Castle* devotes an entire text to an investigation of Strindberg's use of symbolism and his presentation of messianic themes. Valency concludes that Strindberg's unique organization of dramatic constituents in this regard signaled a major turning point in dramatic literature. As Valency summarized Strindberg’s efforts:

*The tricks of realism can no more guide the writer in conveying the subtle nuances of his thought than the tricks of perspective can assist the painter in conveying a feeling of sky or a receding atmosphere.*28
Dahlstrom's examination of the expressionist form, his inclusion of the several components which distinguish it, again, emphasizes the overt similarities between expressionist drama and existential drama. Dahlstrom lists the following characteristics in his *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* as those integral components responsible for providing the stylistic difference between expressionism and naturalism, or selective realism. The several categories which Dahlstrom discusses in Chapter VII of his text include: "radiation of the ego", "objectification of inner experience", "the struggle merit of opposites", "distortion or dream character", "pantomime or telegram style", "ecstasy", "musical quality", "a search for God," and "a socio-political framework."

Dr. Paul Landau, an authority on the expressionist form, develops a strikingly similar list in his article "Strindberg as Dramatiker des Expressionisms" which appears in the May 24, 1920 issue of *Die deutsche Buhne*. And Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay's summary of the expressionist ideal demonstrates the similarity of intent shared by the two forms, expressionism and existentialism.

*The expressionist believed that fundamental truth is to be found within man -- his spirit, his soul, his desires, his visions-- and that external reality should be reshaped until it is brought into harmony with these inner attributes so that man's spirit may realize its highest aspirations. Thus, subjective urge was given primacy over objective appearance.*

Brockett and Findlay's observations as expressed in their *Century of Innovation*, point to a messianic parallel between expressionistic dramas and existential plays. Both are concerned with a spiritual quest aimed at fulfilling the individual man's sense of spiritual perfection through his adoption of values and codes of behaviour capable of realizing this intent. Thus, material concerns are scorned as debased and inconsequential trivialities, while compassion and a loving concern for others is stressed as paramount. Life is equated with a pilgrimage, a reunion with the god-head. The expressionist form offers a repetition of motifs,
themes that present this spiritual quest in concrete form, as each is played and played again with some variation to emphasize the same spiritual necessity.

The employment of overtly stylized sets in expressionist productions compliments that form's emphasis upon dream quality or distortion. It frankly acknowledges the theatrical environment of the plays. Oscar Brockett and Robert Finlay comment upon this evolution in staging practices which coincided with the emergence of the dramatic form labeled expressionism in their *Century of Innovation*:

> The major source of unity in *The Dream Play* is thought, for it is Strindberg’s conception of the human condition, rather than a cause-and-affect arrangement of the incidents, that holds together the motifs, symbols, and allegorical devices. Ultimately, however, it was not Strindberg’s vision, but his techniques which were to be influential, for through them he achieved fluidity of time and place, of identity and appearance, of idea and image.\(^{30}\)

The employment of staging practices which moved away from a literal, representational approach supporting total illusion and the development of practices designed to present a more authentic psychological inner reality can be traced to *A Dream Play* and other such expressionist dramas. Associated with the concept of presentational theatre, acknowledging the theatrical environment with its own inherent sense of poetic truth, many of these practices are detailed by Robert Edmond Jones and Kenneth MacGowan in *Continental Stagecraft*. Their impressions, based upon a tour of European theatre productions in 1922, shortly after the close of World War I, characterize the work of Adolph Linnebach, Leopold Jessner, and Jacques Copeau, as a "realism of the spirit,"\(^{31}\) in deference to a "realism of the flesh."\(^{32}\) This type of production approach coincides with the emergence of a dramaturgy concerned with a psychological reality. For example, Linnebach's employment of simplified, streamlined sets at the Dresden Schauspielhaus in 1914 eliminated superfluous detail and moved away from copying objective detail, surface reality; these sets progressed toward a psychological reality projecting the thoughts and moods of the characters on stage,
externalizing the inner man. As Jones and MacGowan describe this staging approach in their book:

It will go back to romantic periods for a free technique, but it will look forward for its materials along paths which psychological research has lately opened to men and women outside the ranks of true poetic genius. By this it may arrive at the inner truth of Shelley and Goethe, Shakespeare and Aeschylus, while it sacrifices the other truth of Ibsen and Bataille, Pinero and Galsworthy.

Jones and MacGowan continue to reiterate their perceptions of Linnebach's designs, especially his preference for a type of scenic format capable of approximating mental and emotional states on stage. They describe such ventures as a move away from realism. Although this movement away from the representational or literal was originally associated with the expressionist dramas of Masse-Mensch, From Morn to Midnight, Jenseits, and A Dream Play, its extrapolation into other areas loosely designated only as nonrealistic ventures, still remains unexplained. Certainly the relationship of these staging practices to existential tenets provides substantial provocation for additional study. Jones and MacGowan allude to this relationship between the development of the dramatic forms and the emergence of new staging techniques. They cite Joyce's work, recognized for its overt inclusion of a existential perspective:

The playwright works with the register and the artist to this same end. While Dorothy Richardson, Waldo Frank, and James Joyce are busy taking the machinery out of the novel, the playwrights are making machinery unnecessary for drama. They drop "atmosphere," and take up the soul. They seek the subjective instead of the physical. They want to thrill us with the mysteries and clarities of the unconscious, instead of cozening us with photographic detail or romantic color. For all this they need imagination in setting, not actuality. Form carries the spirit up and out.

The impact of Strindberg's early naturalist plays, Miss Julie and The Father, can be traced to the American theatre and Eugene O'Neill's early plays exhibiting the same stylistic tendencies, the same "slice of life" approach designed to reflect the linear irregularities of real
life. Many of the same themes found in Strindberg's plays can also be traced to O'Neill's works. O'Neill's *Welded* reflects Strindberg's concentration upon the domestic strife, "the battle of the sexes," "survival of the fittest," "psychic murder," and a struggle for mental dominance. His couple, much like the Captain and Laura in Strindberg's *The Father*, lacerate one another, berate, accuse, and deny in the name of love. This psychological abuse assumes cannibalistic proportions as husband and wife seek to drain the emotional reserves of their spouse-adversary. And, as with Strindberg's development of theme in his naturalist plays, O'Neill connects this struggle for domestic harmony with a spiritual quest. The final image on stage in O'Neill's *Welded* us that of the tortured and torturing couple coming together, reaching out for one another so that their outstretched arms become a cross. As Doris Falk states in "Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension:" 

*In this traditionally connotative blending of sexual and religious imagery, O'Neill was trying to convey the essence of Welded. The passion of the cross unites within itself the pain and sacrifice demanded by love, and the resurrection is love itself.*

O'Neill credited Strindberg with supplying the creative impulse for much of his work.

In his acceptance for the Nobel Prize in 1936, he acknowledged Strindberg’s influence:

*It was reading his plays when I first started to write, back in the winter of 1913-1914, that, above all, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself. If there is anything of lasting worth in my work, it is due to that original impulse from him, which continued as my inspiration down all the years since then—to the ambition I received then to follow in the footsteps of his genius as worthily as my talent might permit and with the same integrity of purpose.*

Critics have evaluated the success or failure of many of O'Neill's plays in terms of his capacity to effectively incorporate Strindbergian technique and themes, while supplying his own stylistic flair, his proficiency in developing strong characterizations and in placing these dramatis personae in meaningful situations. O'Neill's employment of mask, his use of asides, soliloquies and interior monologues, his extensive and occasionally self-conscious
philosophizing, have devalued the critical reputation of plays like Lazarus Laughed, Marco's Millions, and Strange Interlude. George Jean Nathan recognized O'Neill's employment of Strindbergian themes in Welded. Nathan viewed the play as an awkward attempt to manipulate the same unchanged themes, the same sense of domestic warfare, with little if any original input from the young American playwright:

_Whenever, as in the case of such of his plays as Welded, and The First Man, Eugene O'Neill tries on the whiskers of Strindberg, the results are singularly unfortunate. Following the technique of Strindberg, O'Neill sets himself so to intensify and even hyperbolize a theme as to evoke the dramatic effect from its overtones, rather than, as in the more general manner, from its undertones. His attempt in a word, is to duplicate the technique of such a drama as The Father, the power of which is derived not by suggestion and implication, but from the sparks that fly upward from a prodigious and deafening pounding on the anvil._37

Robert Brustein, in his _Theatre of Revolt_, identifies the influence of Strindberg's expressionist plays upon O'Neill's work, citing not only the biographical similarities shared by both playwrights, but a messianic quest, a type of spiritual pilgrimage which shapes the dramatic form of such:

_Like Strindberg, O'Neill was deeply involved with his mother, as an object both of love, and hate, an similarly ambivalent towards his father. And he was--again like Strindberg--married three times to domineering women, and perpetually rebellious towards authority. O'Neill's relation to his plays, furthermore, is very Strindbergian; he is almost always the hero of his work, trying to work out his personal difficulties through the medium of his art._38

Brustein continues his analogy by stating:

_O'Neill's messianic revolt centers on the dilemma of modern man in a world without God; and it is informed by the spirit of a philosopher who was also important in Strindberg's life--Fredrick Nietzsche. O'Neill's concept of tragedy is obviously influence by the Birth of Tragedy, and his religious ideas are almost all culled from Thus Spake Zarathustra._39

It was Brustein who diagnosed O'Neill's dramatic frailty in terms of his occasional attempts to match Strindberg's genius, copying too closely Strindberg's techniques. To
Brustein this type of close approximation rendered O'Neill's efforts self-conscious and exaggerated reproductions.

As an experimental dramatist, O'Neill would naturally be attracted to the greatest innovator in the modern theatre; and O'Neill's Expressionism is certainly indebted to Strindberg's dream techniques. The difference is that Strindberg's formal experiments grow out of his material, while O'Neill's seem grafted onto his, and thus give the impression of being gratuitous and excessive.\footnote{Brustein}

It was also Brustein who recognized the artistic merit of \textit{A Long Day's Journey into Night}, identifying it at O'Neill's greatest work and as a stunning example, abstracted from this country's dramatic repertoire. Unlike many critics who branded the work as a traditional piece of realism, Brustein recognized O'Neill's employment of Strindberg's psychological drama, this time crafted from his own aesthetic instincts and indelibly molded to suit his own designs:

\begin{quote}
Here combining the retrospective techniques of Ibsen with the exorcist attack of Strindberg, O'Neill compresses the psychological history of his family into the events of a single day, and the economy of the work for all its length, is magnificent.\footnote{Brooks Atkinson}
\end{quote}

Brooks Atkinson, in his review of the play appearing in the \textit{New York Times} on November 8, 1956, also acknowledged O'Neill's successful incorporation of Strindbergian techniques in a form expanding the realistic mold. "Long Day's Journey into Night", is like a Dostoevsky novel in which Strindberg had written the dialogue.\footnote{Brooks Atkinson}

It is with O'Neill, generally regarded by critics both friendly and unfriendly, as "the first dramatist with serious aspirations to appear on the national scene," that American dramaturgy begins to absorb those cultural forces shaping its dramatic vision and to adapt them to the American scene. It is this blend of psychological drama, with an emphasis placed squarely upon consciousness, existence and nonbeing, couple with the family's duel capacity to humanize and to restrict individuation that marks a segment of American playwriting elected in the works of O'Neill, Miller, and Williams.
NOTES

9. Ibid., p. 245.
12. Ibid., p. 2.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 395-396.
17. Ibid., p. 8.
19. Ibid., p. 228.
20. Ibid., p. 232.
23. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
29. Brockett and Finlay, Century of Innovation, p. 158.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 6.
34. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 329.
40. Ibid., p. 327.
41. Ibid., pp. 348-349.

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