On return from Professor Baker's workshop, O'Neill did not write much even though he had all a dramatist needs—deep knowledge of life, an artistic sensibility, an ambition to be an "artist or nothing," a mature mind of twenty-eight, first-hand knowledge of theatre, a professional methodology, practical exercises and, above all, a keen sense of artistic integrity. Possibly this was for him a period of gestation. Feeling the need for a view of life, he was possibly busy trying to reconcile the ironic polarities of his experience and his knowledge—the life as he had seen in the city and on the sea, his companions in the Hell Hole and the Nietzschean Superman that he dreamt about. Mixing with Negroes and artists at Greenwich Village, he marvelled at the poetry in the life of common men, and wondered if the violent underworld and the creative upperworld could ever unite to create an aristocracy of swift brawn and quick brain.

Only in the light of this keen search and preparedness for a synthesis of man can one explain the enormous impact that Terry Carlin wrought on O'Neill. It was not just another "influence": unlike the books that simply offered arguments, here was a man he could argue with and who resolved his doubts in terms of life experiences as well as of books.

Now, before he met Terry Carlin, with a view to resolving the paradoxical tension between man's Being and Becoming (as symbolized in the spiritually rich primitives pining for land and civilization
where they would be dehumanized), O'Neill had been turning to various thinkers, but in vain. Marx and Zola offered interpretations which did not suit his spiritual bent of mind; Hebrew thought was found inadequate as it wanted man to sacrifice his individuality in favour of a doubtful morality; Nietzsche's Life Force, on the other hand, did not take into account man's craving for social existence; and Schopenhauer's Immanent Will was too chaotic and pessimistic. At last he got from Terry Carlin what he needed—the way to affirm life by treating human soul as a part of the Supersoul, society as means to the end of man's personal salvation, and Nature as the environment for action as well as a source of enjoyment. O'Neill was led to feel that there is something mystical about life that justifies it; it is good somehow. He could see now that whatever name it may be given—Christian God, Nietzschean Life Force, Darwin's Biological Force, Schopenhauer's Immanent Will or the Hindu Supersoul—there is some Inscrutable Force which co-operates with man as also determines his course. Thus co-ordinating the Hindu mysticism with Nietzschean Dionysianism, O'Neill came to treat life and Life as distinct terms: Men pass, Man remains.

Thus, acting as a catalyst, Terry Carlin, himself a disillusioned anarchist, weaned O'Neill away from the Marxist socialism towards the Nietzschean individualism. Expounding the tenets of the Buddhist, the Taoist and the Hindu thought, he revived in the playwright an interest in spiritual mysticism that he had inherited from his mother. Of course, it does not mean that O'Neill embraced Hinduism; he neither he, nor perhaps Carlin, ever studied the Hindu philosophy in depth. It meant only sharing nihilistic slant of Hinduism that treats
Kirrana as the ultimate reality. However, so deep was the impact of these mystic ideas on O'Neill that later, when he tried to write tragedy, his frame of reference remained Carlinean. As can be seen easily, the assumptions of Nirvana are least suited for affirming life tragically. One can only wonder, therefore, how different the progress of the playwright would have been had he not met Terry Carlin at all, or if he had met him after, rather than before, encountering Jig Cook.

Anyway, as it happened, Carlin had laid the anti-tragic, nihilistic foundations before Cook appeared on the scene imbued with Hellenic ideals and chasing his glorious dream of reviving the spirit of the Greek tragedy. As he talked eloquently about the need to get back to Greece to create an atmosphere in which the American equivalent of the Dionysian dance could be born, O'Neill was thrilled, awed and tempted to accept the challenging mission. It is here that his search for tragedy started; before this he had been only following Clayton Hamilton's advice: "Keep your eye on life--on life as you have seen it, and to hell with the rest."¹

However, since O'Neill had no deep grounding in the Greek drama or tragic theory, and had instead acquired under Carlin's influence a mystical yet nihilistic view of life, when Cook expostulated about the Greeks and their theatre, he could not really grasp the spirit of the Greek tragedy. Instead of imbibing the essence of the Greek tragedy, he started looking for equivalents of its ingredients. In fact, because of his mental background, O'Neill could not but misinterpret every suggestion that came from Cook. For example, when Jig Cook
talked about the Greek celebration of life, O'Neill thought of Dionysiac ecstasy; when Cook stressed the man's conflict with the gods, O'Neill thought of the Inscrutable Forces; when he was told about suffering on account of hubris, O'Neill recalled monomaniac sailors that he knew. Since O'Neill looked for equivalents of the Greek tragedy in the Carlinean framework, his understanding of the Greek tragedy remained partial, if not exactly perverse.

In fact, more subconsciously than consciously, in his mind O'Neill always tried to synthesize Terry Carlin, Nietzsche and Cook. Thus Jig Cook's telling him that the Greeks tried to get out of life much more than nature allowed had a sympathetic echo in the Nietzschean concept of Superman directing the Life Force—something mysterious and inscrutable, called Supersoul by Terry Carlin. It meant that man's tragedy is rooted in his having a soul. That is to say, where there is a soul, there is a tragedy, as O'Neill once put it. It is the soul that distinguishes man from animals, but then the tragedy is that this very soul gives rise to such aspirations as imply an unequal clash with the mysterious forces—a conflict in which he is inevitably destroyed! That is, so to say, the price man must pay for his spiritual superiority to other creatures. The soulless many, who are content to pursue material gains, do succeed; but in their vegetative existence they are no better than animals. With such convictions, O'Neill came to feel that a tragedy must show a man with a soul pursuing the unattainable and arriving at a point of hopeless hope, even as another man without a soul might be seen leading an inglorious but "successful" life.

Now, it should be naive if we suppose that as soon as he met Terry Carlin and Jig Cook, O'Neill responded to their influence. Only
gradually could incessant discussions with them mould his view and imbue him with an ambition. The companionship inspired O'Neill and, keen to go one better each time, he studied the reactions of his friends and tried to accommodate whatever was found wanting in his previous efforts. Thus, step by step, he learnt the need to avoid "atmospherics" and the purely ironic, to blend irony with horror and pity with fear, to evolve ways and means to bring in hubris, inscrutable forces, hopeless hope, "willing, fighting and living," etc.

To begin with, O'Neill seems to have been content with striking a mystic note; later there was a tendency to bring in hubris-ridden monomaniacs; and later still, he dramatized the hopeless hope. Since each time, he seemed to make only partial gain, he kept modifying his approach in every next attempt. If we chart the exploratory voyage to see the corresponding evolution of his themes, we find a very interesting progress in the form of an almost imperceptible drift: as he probes one field, he feels the possibilities of exploring another, the trying of which suggests still another, and so on.

Most probably, O'Neill started by telling himself that a tragedy should present a tortured soul and lead the audience to that ironic moment when they must feel that life is governed by a mysterious force. Result: "In The Zone," "The Long Voyage Home" and "The Moon of the Caribbees." While working on these plays in 1917, he conceived the idea of The Hairy Ape, although he wrote it four years later. Had O'Neill dramatized the idea of this stage, it should have had the spirit of Beyond the Horizon, of which O'Neill thought approximately around the same time. Of course, originally, Beyond, too, was to be still another version of the Glencairn theme--a tramp on sea; but a flash
of thought reversed the situation: what if he had stayed on? And probably at the same time, another question came to his mind: what if a tramp like him, after his aimless roaming, did make his long voyage home? That became the seed-idea for "The Rope" (Winter 1918). In all these plays, some mysterious ironic force thwarts human aspirations. However, O'Neill seems to have felt that his plays still lacked the power of tragedy—possibly because his heroes did not struggle against the Fate! Probably, he was told that they must fight, will and live—pursue an illusion as if possessed by the furies within them. Result: "The Dreamy Kid", "Where the Cross Is Made," and the idea of The Emperor Jones (all in 1918). It is worth noting that O'Neill's concern at this stage were the tortured souls and not the subconscious. A comparison of "Where the Cross Is Made" and Gold indicates how in 1918 and 1920, handling the same situation, O'Neill strove for things altogether different. The Emperor Jones, conceived at the time he wrote "Where the Cross Is Made", was originally designed to show a tortured soul and not merely a haunted primitive. When the struggle and monomaniac pursuit also failed to yield the expected tragic exaltation for the audience, O'Neill was possibly led to the realisation that it might be possible to strike the truly tragic depths in the situations of hopeless hope; hence The Straw (1918-19) and Chris (1919). But before he could transform Chris into Anna Christie, he had started responding to the impact of modernism. That meant a new approach, and naturally therefore a new epoch of variety and experimentation under diverse influences.

Had O'Neill continued with the pursuit of tragedy without bothering about the modernistic claptrap, it is possible he would have fulfilled
Jig Cook's noble dream, because the way he learnt his lessons shows that even though he did not grasp the precise implications of Cook's exhortations immediately, he was certainly coming nearer and ever nearer to the clear understanding of the tragic process and the tragic impact. It must be added, however, that although maturer in craftsmanship, the "tragedies" of this period do betray unconsciously his essentially ironic genius. After all, he could not help being what life had made him.

The growing influence of Jig Cook may be perceived in O'Neill's gradual drift away from the sea in the Glencairn series. The first play, "Bound East for Cardiff," belongs, of course, to the earlier phase of the unsifted irony when O'Neill had not yet acquired the obsessive aim of writing tragedies. Being O'Neill's first play to be put on the boards, its having received acclaim beyond its intrinsic merit is quite understandable. Also it was quite natural for O'Neill to feel sentimental about the play that brought him luck and fame. But he overplayed his cards when he observed once that it summed up his life-attitudes and contained the germ of the spirit of all his future works. This statement led the critics to discover in the play much more than its budding author could even imply. What's more, they

"For example, Skinner sees in this "spiritual comedy," the departure of a soul after death on a lonely voyage towards richer life (Poet's Quest, 43), Eugene M. Waith reads in Yank's taking Driscoll into confidence an exercise in unmasking (O'Neill, ed. Jassner, Twentieth Century Views, 33), Kenneth Macgowan suggests that O'Neill used the fever of death as a device to unravel the secret of his mind. (See Cargill et al., p.450). For Doris Falk, here is celebration of life and a heroic response to death, (Tragic Tension, p.21), while Frederic I. Carpenter sees in the play emotional experience of the brotherhood of man in the face of death (Eugene O'Neill, p.86). Isaac Goldberg reads in death an escape from the sordidness of life itself (see
convinced themselves that the playwright had declared it as a great tragedy—an impression that they sought to justify by reference to the fact that Jig Cook was bowled over by the play. But we must not forget that Cook's main interest at this stage was experimental drama and that what struck him most in "Cardiff" was not the tragic quality of the play but the novelty of approach—not so much the greatness of the play as the daring with which O'Neill had deviated from the traditional. In fact, it is possible that it was the want of the tragic in the play that made Jig Cook expatiate at length about the concept of the Greek tragedy. The experimentalist Cook liked "Bound East for Cardiff" precisely for the reason that prompted George F. Baker to declare that it was no play at all. Baker was only applying a traditional yard-stick to measure what was a break-away experiment. Being formless and plot-less, built solely on character and atmosphere, such a play naturally appeared "incomplete" to a traditional professor of drama.

In "Bound East for Cardiff", instead of a tragic protagonist fighting heroically against eternal odds and dying wrapped in spiritual glory, we have a character whose life has been too void of experience

Cargill et al., p.237). According to Robert F. Whiteman, on the other hand, O'Neill's intention is to show that death it is that gives meaning to existence, and that only in the face of death man sees sense in an otherwise aimless life (see T2Y, p.145). To the critics who don't attach so much importance to death as such, O'Neill appears to be concerned with the relationship between man and Nature. According to Thomas H. Dickinson (Playwrights of the New American Theatre, p.87), O'Neill's aim was to show the intensity of human soul besides which the storms of the sea are nothing; Edw Winfield Parks, on the other hand, thinks that the spirit of the sea dwarfs man and induces self-pity, reducing them to a state where vulgarity alone is decent ("Eugene O'Neill's Symbolism: Old Gods for News," Sewanee Review, 43, October-December, 1935, p.439)
to be tragic. He dies cheerfully, assured of heaven, precisely because he has been living innocently. Not having dared, he has lived a pure but meaningless life. The glorious moments of his life comprise boozefights, arrests, visits to Buenos Aires, movie pictures and sales. Leading such an eventless and unheroic life, he has denied himself the chance of earning tragic glory. How innocent he is should be clear from his only secret ambition that he confides to his friend only at the point of death—the desire to settle on a farm, with a wife and brats! The innocence of this aspiration is matched by his last wish, viz. to pass away with his eyes fixed on twinkling stars and the moon. Now his secret desire to settle on land symbolizes a craving for more experience; but though that could have made his life more meaningful, he would have become less innocent. Thus the play highlights the ironic paradox that the experience that gives meaning to life makes one less pure. Since his innocence was not assaulted by experience, Yank's life has had height without depth, glow without intensity, glory without triumph, spirituality without tragedy.

Like "Bound East for Cardiff," "The Moon of the Carribbees," too, marks a break from the traditional playwriting. Dispensing with the

*Alexander Scarbrough in "O'Neill's Use of the Displayed Archetypes in the Moon of the Carribbees" (West Virginia University Philological Papers, XIX, pp. 41-44) points out that although the physical setting is traditional for a romance of the high seas—a ship with sailors, an island with natives, a balmy tropical night at sea—the mood evoked is instead pessimistic because of the displacement of the archetypes of the place. Instead of an idyllic, uninhabited island, we have here an island full of rum and prostitutes—a "civilised" island. Then, it is the island which visits the ship. This displacement of the sea, ship and island enhances the irony of the play.
formal action, O'Neill concentrates on the development of mood, atmosphere, emotion and characters. However, it is worth noting that it is not merely a mood play or an atmospheric; neither of the two is there for its own sake. In the quality of the action one can perceive never concerns possibly under the influence of Jig Cook. By this we don't mean to echo O'Neill when he observed:

The spirit of the sea—a big thing—is... the hero... In 'The Moon', posed against a background of that beauty, sad because it is eternal, which is one of the revealing moods of the sea's truth, his silhouetted gestures of self-pity are reduced to their proper insignificance, his thin whine of weakness is lost in the silence which it was mean enough to disturb, we get the perspective to judge him—and the others—and we find his sentimental posings much more out of harmony with truth, much less in tune with beauty, than the honest vulgarity of his mates. ... I consider 'The Moon' an attempt to achieve a higher plane of bigger, finer values... Perhaps I can explain the nature of my feeling for the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays.

If this was O'Neill's aim, it must be said that he failed miserably in his mission. Very few of the critics have spoken of the inscrutable forces, only a few of the finer values, and none of Smithy's pose of self-pity. Is he really a poseur; do we really see in his whine an effort to disturb the silence of the sea? Is the vulgarity of his mates more honest, do their drunken mass-fornication and murderous garrulity represent finer values? Well, Bogard does talk about the amorality of the ritual observances, but at least to us Smithy represents the soul as the rest of the crew represent the senses. The moon, the music, the wine and the women excite their sensuous selves while in his case it is the soul that responds. He alone is a "gentleman," a sort of poet for whom the memories of the past are more real than the
events of the present. No wonder he allows scenes full of activity and violent rioting to pass by without touching him.

Possibly the statement above reflects O'Neill's attitude at the time he wrote all this in a letter to Barrett Clark—in 1919, the year when he wrote *Chris*, in which, of course, the sea does become a real force. In 1917, when he wrote the play, O'Neill possibly thought that he was following the Greeks in presenting man in relationship to nature; but unable to help his genius, he highlighted the ironic rather than the tragic aspect of this relationship. Instead of feeling the faintly shadowed inscrutable forces that reduce man to insignificance, the play highlights the fact that men alone are capable of pushing nature to the background. True, what they do amounts practically to nothing; so much happens and yet things remain what they were. But, then, what would life be without man's enlivening presence? So long as the moon of the Carribbees reigns supreme, everything is dull and melancholy; excitement comes only when men take to action. And yet, of course, at the end, things are as peaceful as the start was placid. The ship is, so to say, epitome of the world in which men play their roles and go away, but Life, symbolically represented by the moonlit sea, goes on. Yet whatever "life" is there, it is owing to Man. The irony if irony is that human activity is only a momentary jarring note in the eternal rhythm of life, and yet without man Life is without "life." Thus when the curtain falls, we tend to indulge, like Smitty, in brooding over this polarity of human life *vis-a-vis* Life. Caught between these contrary pulls of sentiment and melodrama, our response to the play is a gentle melancholy, shared as it were with the atmosphere itself.
That O'Neill did not mean to create in Smitty a mere poseur is borne out by the fact that he figures also in "In the Zone" in which the cause of the sentimental melancholy is once again the same woman. Of course, the atmosphere in the case of the "Zone" is one of war neurosis charged with jingoism and tension born of suspicion. Here the sea does not play any role, and what happens in the play could as well happen anywhere else—say, in a boarding-house of munition workers. This fact, in fact, makes it the weakest of the sea-plays in the series. No wonder, O'Neill himself did not think much of it, despite its great success with the public and the tradition-oriented critics.

Of course, the play has an uncanny power because O'Neill has once again juxtaposed the sentimental and the melodramatic. But whereas in "The Moon of the Carribbees" the two had fused to create in the audience a note of melancholy, here they evoke a sense of guilt shared with Smitty's suspicious colleagues. The story is almost a joke so much so that if O'Neill had given a little hint in the beginning, the whole play could be a hilarious farce. Alternatively, the finale could be given an open anticlimax that might have resulted in a guffaw of laughter releasing all the tension. But the playwright does not let

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*In fact, the personal experience that inspired the play took place on the shore itself. However, William Goldhurst thinks that the source might be Conan Doyle's story, "The Little Square Box," in which the activities of two men on ship are thought suspicious, but at last the box is found to have pigeons! (A Literary Source for O'Neill's "In the Zone," American Literature, XXX, 630-34.)

**Even the bitterest of O'Neill's critics, Francis Fergusson, has grudgingly admitted the moving power of the play (see Cargill et al., pp. 272-73). Since almost all opening night reviews agreed on the theatrical effectiveness of the play, O'Neill grew suspicious about its artistic worth, and the commercial success of the play confirmed his doubts. No wonder, fearing a repetition of his father's fate, he was all too keen to get out of the zone of 'In the Zone.'
us laugh at it; rather, through a master-stroke, he makes it such a sympathetic study that laughter is denied both to the suspicious crew and to the audience. Unreleased, the tension turns inwards and we feel ashamed of ourselves. We have, as it were, a glimpse into Smitty's anguished soul and a concomitant realization that his companions are insensitive brutes. And since we, too, had suspected him then, we feel equally guilty. A tragedy should release the audience of the sense of the shared guilt, but in "In the Zone," it is introduced at the end itself!

Perhaps the best example of how O'Neill's initial efforts at tragedy were foiled by the ironic core of his vision is to be had in "The Long Voyage Home." Maybe, O'Neill did visualize Olson as a hero facing life, fighting against the eternal odds, not conquering, but perhaps inevitably being conquered; but surely neither the odds here are eternal nor the conquest inevitable, nor the feeling evoked at the end exultant in any way. To believe that the frustration of Olson is a result of sea's power to reach out and claim those who belong to it, requires a mystic faith capable of treating Joe, Nick, Freda and the toughs as the minions of the sea! In fact, there is nothing inscrutable about the forces working here. Everything is only too clear, for the trap is laid in our very presence and, like a rodent, Olson moves into it. All this is pathetic, melodramatic and ironic, but by no means tragic!

In fact, irony pervades the author's vision as well as the audience response. Driscoll's warnings and Olson's plans only highlight the

*The marvellous thing is that we get this glimpse without "asides," "soliloquies" or theatrical tricks. What is more, Smitty says and does so little!
contrast between the innocence of the sea-folk and the wickedness of
the people on the land. The irony of irony is that life on land is
supposed to be less savage, more human and therefore fervently sought
after by the sailors! Ironically again, the long voyage home proves
another long voyage away from home. What is more, this separation of
the sailors from their mothers is effected by prostitutes—by Cybel,
the mother-earth!

Now what was O'Neill attempting in the St. K. Glencairn series? Was it
experimentation in group-hero; or was he trying to portray through
these sailors from diverse countries a miniature of our world? Do
they represent alienated mankind, or the bond of brotherhood? Do
they stand for animal-like gregariousness or for the children of the
sea unspoiled by civilization? The fact is that in the crazy fabric
of ironic juxtapositions, they are all this. Eclipsed by the sea, they
too can reduce that sea itself to the position of a background. Indeed,
the intensity of their soul puts into shade the immensity of the sea.
What is more, primitively pure, they pine for land where they are
bound to lose their spirituality in the welter of soulless civilisation.
It is to be noted that in all these plays, the innocence of sea-life
is brought under strain by the contrary life on land which appears
in the form of women, war, or a longing for land and its memories.
No wonder, each play has, as R.D. Rust points out, an ironic title:5

*Egil Tornqvist suggests that home in the title is the Eternal
Home, and that the voyage at end implies death (A Drama of Souls, 92)
the moon of the Carribbean shines only to be disregarded altogether; the zone of the submarine is neglected in favour of a zone around the box; the long voyage home is a voyage towards land where home fleece's you; and Cardiff-ward journey is the reversal of the Westward American movement. Thus the otherwise solid land proves a delusion while the clearest perspective of reality is had in an ever-changing sea. What is more, those who long for land are buried at sea!

These plays are technically smooth, theatrically effective, and distinctly marked by vigour and freshness of life. Their breezy realism, the daring to present ugly truths, the hard and virile pathos, the gradual waning of melodrama, the masterly handling of atmosphere, the growing interest in character as well as in the inscrutable forces—all are signs of O'Neill's artistic evolution. No wonder, convinced that his apprenticeship was over, O'Neill felt confident enough to send the plays to Professor Baker, being at last in a position to chortle triumphantly, "Look, Teacher! See What I done!" But though the counterpointing of melodrama and sentimentality, and reducing of irony have brought O'Neill nearer tragedy, yet the truly tragic is still beyond his grasp. He is aware of the tragic forces, but does not know yet what to affirm in life, and how.

In fact, thanks to his essential genius, his plays are still on the borderline of the tragic and the comic. Thus, whereas Barrett Clark sees in "The Rope" "a tragedy of greed, hatred and madness," it is

*Jordan Y. Miller, in his article, "Eugene O'Neill," American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize (Norman, 1988), went to the extent of observing that if O'Neill had written nothing else, he could survive as one of the great composers of one-act plays!
possible to regard it only as comic counterpoint of the latter-day tragic treatment of greed, lust and hatred in *Desire Under the Elms*. Of course, it is difficult to call it a comedy, even bitter comedy; but it is still more difficult to call it a tragedy. In fact, here the tragic passions are handled comically. At the close, the anti-climactic fall of the bag, Mary's gaiety and pantomime do amuse us, but at the same time, we are aware that at that very moment Luke and Pat Sweeney must be torturing the old man for this very money. As in "In the Zone", the whole action, painful though it has been, is seen as a joke suffused with ironic tricks of fate.

How ironic, indeed, that a father should want his son to come by money only through hanging; also his intentions to celebrate his son's return should result in his being tortured by the son himself! The quoting of the most terrible and serious texts from the Bible for trivial occasions is an ironic version of malapropism. And what makes it still more ironical is the knowledge that the sacred words are being mouthed by a man who lacks Christian values, who has never been to the church for twenty years, and who has a notorious past of sensuality. How very ironic that so long as he utters sombre things, we laugh at him, but later when he grins and kiddingly asks Luke to put his head into the noose, he is felled to the ground. This O'Neilllean Prufrock is certainly not Prince Hamlet, nor was he meant to be King Lear, although both share senility and suffer on account of filial ingratitude. Here is an ironic parody of the Biblical parable of the Prodigal. No wonder Clark felt in the ending a touch that Balzac would have appreciated.
The comparatively quick variations in the quality of O'Neill's plays around this period suggests that O'Neill was constantly being advised by Cook what he should do. Possibly he was told that in the plays that he had written till then sentimentality, melodrama, and irony fell apart and that only by relating the disaster to hubris in the hero can all these be fused together. Since O'Neill's own concept of the Greek tragedy was half-baked, Cook's idolatory praises might have inspired the awed playwright to reflect on life that he knew so as to discover some one resembling the type of tragic hero that Cook was talking about. Possibly he recalled the proud hunters of whales, whose obsessive sense of self-pride involved them in relentless struggle against the brute force of the Sea. Thus perhaps was conceived "Ile" in which Capt. Keeny, in his maniac choice between pride and wife's love, opts for the former—a mad choice that pushes the wife on the other side of sanity. Now in this play, using the Greek formula, O'Neill has certainly brought in a tragic situation, a hubris-ridden hero, a conflict against nature, even a sort of deus ex machina in the sea; but instead of showing man wrestling spiritual glory from an inevitable defeat, here is a man who gains victory over nature by sacrificing his soul. Instead of transcending animalism to become human, he loses humanity and turns an animal. As Capt. Kenney loses reality for a shadow and the self for an image, his mask triumphs over his soul. No wonder, despite its red-blooded and vigorous characterization, the play tends to be depressing, morbid, and therefore untragic.

In fact, the ironic core of O'Neill's genius has perverted the very concept of tragic hero. Instead of seeking to evoke empathy,
O'Neill introduces Keeney through the steward's curses. Since the people on ship are going to mutiny against him, when he enters with hard eyes and tight lips and the steward starts cowering before him, we learn to treat him not as a hero but as the villain of a melodrama. In the various situations in which he is seen hereafter, instead of undergoing suffering like a tragic hero, he is the one who causes suffering to others. Unlike Ahab's monomaniac passion that is relieved by rich humanity, Capt. Keeney's mad pursuit utterly lacks idealism, for the hunt of whale in his case, far from signifying fight with the evil, denotes only material gain. O'Neill seems to stress that material pursuit for its own sake kills man's soul, and that those who direct their will towards material gains, become life-denying monsters whose hands get bloodied with the human sacrifices made to themselves. In short, Capt. Keeney is suffering from spiritual atrophy. We may fear such a man but we cannot pity him, much less admire him. In fact, our pity is reserved for Mrs. Keeney who suffers for no fault of hers. In other words, whereas in a tragedy, hubris of the hero leads to his own tragic suffering and whereas the consequent cathartic process yields a complex emotion of fear-and-pity for the same person, in "Ile", hubris lies in the Captain, suffering in his wife. Animalism of the hero is not transcended but only contrasted with the sweet humanity of the heroine. Thus, because of this bifurcation, our empathy is not transmuted into tragic exaltation; rather, we perceive ironic contrast between the spiritual and the psychological conflicts.

Possibly by way of criticism of "Ile", O'Neill was told by his mentor, Jig Cook, that for a proper tragic impact, a hero's megalomaniac will
must be set in a convincing pattern of destiny. He might as well have added that the all-too-wicked people were by no means more fit for the truly tragic than the spiritually pure ones, and that the heroes should be good men and yet they must also be guilty of something for which they should deserve to suffer. Looking around for such despicable and yet spiritually pure protagonist, O'Neill's immediate surroundings seem to have supplied the answer and he took for a hero a young carp-shooting, gang-leading, gun-trotting darky. Here was a conventionally abhorrent character, presented in a situation where we come to acquire admiration for him. Now Negroes were usually depicted as the primitive monsters of sex or the voodooing devils, but stay at Greenwich Village had enabled O'Neill to see in them much else too--their god-fearing and superstitious nature, inferiority complex, primitive idealism, as well as their hectic pragmatism.

Thus, at long last, O'Neill had in Dreamy Kid a hero who is both cruel and human, animal-like and spiritual, and whose death is the result of his own deeds as well as of chance. One can also see here the working of the inscrutable force, man's hopeless hope, and his "willing, fighting and living." In short, the whole tragic paraphernalia is there; and yet, alas, instead of the tragic synthesis we have ironic counterpointing of O'Neill's favourite polarities--pragmatism v spiritualism, primitivism v civilization, illusion v reality, activity v dreaminess, innocence v experience. No wonder the whole pattern of the plot is ironic. Above all, since the outer action and inner activity are most ironically counterpoised, irony looms large in everything. Dreamy's efforts to be good involve him in trouble, and like Emperor Jones later, every step he takes to seek an escape brings him nearer his death. The old woman, who is so full of affection
for this kid and so keen to die in his presence, becomes the
unwitting instrument to get him hooked. Again, although he risks his
life so as to pray for her departing soul, he is too excited to do
that. To cap it all, when he is mumbling wicked thoughts, she
thinks he is praying! Anyway, more important than achievement and
impact is the fact that even while O'Neill was learning his lessons
in tragedy, already in this play had appeared a new tendency. Dreamy,
in a tight corner, behaves neurotically and thus, under the strain of
fear, he mumbles his thoughts aloud. What is passing in his mind is
as important as what is being done by him.

O'Neill's growing interest in psychology may be perceived in "Where
the Cross is Made" also. The hope against hope acquires the form of
a neurotic tendency to believe in spite of oneself. From this boundary
line, the victim oscillates between conviction and disbelief, and moves
from the plane of reality to one of illusion, and vice versa—all
within a fraction of a moment. So great is the tendency to believe
that even Nat thinks that he is seeing the same vision as does Bartlet.
Of course, O'Neill is not yet treating psychoanalytical theories,
rather as he wrote to Nathan, he enjoyed writing it as "an amusing
experiment in treating the audience as insane." In other words, in
his giving to Nat diverse motivations regarding his keenness to send
the father to the asylum, O'Neill was not unmasking Nat's subconscious
but merely trying to bewilder the audience. It is possible that just
as Jig Cook's wife, Susan Glaspell, had burlesqued Freudianism in her
Suppressed Desires, O'Neill was having his fling at psychoanalytical
approaches. Anyway, a play that aims at making the audience feel mad
cannot be a tragedy. Nevertheless, since the longer version, Gold,
is a much better play—with a vaster canvas, less theatricality, sounder motivation, greater concern with inner conflicts and psychological truth—perhaps, Nathan was right when he advised O'Neill to destroy the "Cross".

O'Neill did not destroy the "Cross", but the way the drama critic bawled at him for writing such stuff convinced him that since his genius lay in tragedy he must avoid other types of drama. Of course, he destroyed some plays, too, but very judiciously he retained the plays on which he had laboured very hard and which later came to establish themselves as his first major works, viz. Beyond the Horizon, The Straw, and Anna Christie.

Beyond the Horizon, having to its credit many a first in the O'Neill canon, has enjoyed reputation for its pioneering position. But if we remember that it was written in 1917 besides the one-acters, it reveals nothing new in the development of O'Neill's art. In fact, in this three-acter, O'Neill has applied the technique of the one-act play with respect to individual acts so much so that each act is a dramatic unit, complete with exposition, development, climax and denouement, and even each scene has its own climax, reversal, calmness of a close and a promise of better things. Hence Nathan's verdict: "a trilogy arbitrarily compressed within a single, regulation-length play." Indeed, instead of creating a multi-cellular play, O'Neill has merely multiplied unicellular technique.

Even with respect to the impact, Beyond the Horizon is akin to the Glencairn plays. The tense and emotional sincerity, bitter ironic strength, strong human appeal, vigour and poignancy—all are there.
What is more, here too O'Neill is struggling to strike a happy balance between melodrama, irony and sentimentality. Besides, we have here O'Neill's favourite polarities, too. Yet, it is not a sea-play; rather, it is a "Tragedy of soil, born at sea".

Whether or not the apocryphal story about a little boy's questions suggesting the theme is correct, the title is apt, because the characters do go beyond the horizons of their nature—"humours" we may call them. So much so that perhaps "Every Man Out of Humour" could be suggested as an alternative title. But for this transgression of their natural bents, all should have been well. That is, of course, like wishing that Othello should have been the Prince of Denmark! Moreover, though such an exchange could have meant normal life, that would have implied losing claim to tragic glory. After all, normalcy is not the way of the tragic heroes who must aspire for higher things of life. Of course, to the extent they aspire, reality must get them!

Because of a tragic choice eight years ago, the whole family goes to seed. Robert, the lover of life, invites death; Ruth, the lover, loses the very power to love anyone; Andrew, the innocent son of the soil, resorts to almost criminal activities. However, instead of "the fortunate fall" of tragedy, we have but "exquisite chromatics of decay"—ironical reversals that yield no spiritual good whatsoever. Whereas in a tragedy, the good becomes better by contact with evil, here there is nothing evil and yet the goodliest of intentions cause so much of suffering. The total impression is one of frustration rather

*Travis Bogard sees in the title's imagery the typically American "Horizon" Syndrome (Contour in Time, 125)*
than of redemption. Indeed, we may as well cry with Robert: "Oh, the whole affair is so senseless—and tragic." (Plays, III, 109)

Obviously, by tragedy O'Neill means the tale of a man who is a victim of inscrutable forces rather than a hero.

In fact, owing to this inherent cynicism, the play is replete with strokes of fatal irony. Whatever they choose, the characters stand to suffer. Love blights their lives whereas quest for joy is reduced to one for suffering. O'Neill divides the cosmos of the play between land and sea, and alternates scenes between the Farm House and the Open to show the working of contrary forces; but all this leads only to ironic contrasts, ironic reversals, and ironic punch in general. Of course, according to Philip G. Hill, the use of irony here is inapt, but by irony he means dramatic irony. Perhaps, having been advised against that kind of irony, O'Neill deliberately avoided it, but irony of a different type is certainly there in the thematic pattern itself. Irony here is an inscrutable force, not much different from Hardy's capricious Nature that warps human lives by "offering to deny." Indeed, the more these characters try to set things right, the worse they grow.

We meet ironic reversals at every turn. "Imagine me reading poetry and plowing at the same time. The team'd run away I'll bet," says Andrew grinning, and Robert laughs back, "Or picture me plowing." (Plays, III, 82) The irony of irony is that Robert has to plough and perhaps to the accompaniment of verses, too. The family talks of Ruth and Andy as ideally matched only to learn that she is going to marry his antithetical brother. The opening scene closes with Ruth and Robert
running off laughing, but this cheerfulness leads to an explosion in the next scene in which the bitterest things are said, not out of hatred but with the best of will. However, at the close, Andrew strikes an optimistic note, "Everything'll turn out all right in the end," but when the curtain goes up again, everything has gone to seed. The conversation between Mrs. May and Mrs. Atkins hinges on ironic contrast between Andy and Bob, the reality and the might-have-beens. There is ironic contrast in the greetings Andrew receives on his first return—a listless "hello" from Robert but a joyous cry from Ruth. In the last act, however, she is indifferent to everything—to Robert's taunts and kisses, to Mary's memory, even to Andy's return. At the close, the circle is complete and the old lovers, Ruth and Andrew, are left to marry each other. But we know their marriage would no longer mean the life they should have had if Ruth had not reversed their relationship in the opening scene. The pity of it all is that this disaster in their lives is the result of no fault of anybody's.

The next play, The Straw is less bitter and more optimistic in close. The rhythm of longing and loss is synchronized in hopeless hope which, though hopeless, is a hope still. Indeed, O'Neill was not attempting a depressing and repellent study in T.B., for had that been his intention there should have been more of coughing in it. In fact, T.B. was to be a prop not for pity but for a new emotion of exaltation. The playwright wanted the audience to perceive the entire life telescoped into the sanatorium. But, unfortunately, though we are moved by the

*A drama critic, reviewing the play, reported that only one percent of coughing in the theatre came from the stage!"
humanity of the play, we know the truth only too well. Viewing things from an angle of omnisciences, we cannot deceive ourselves into believing that perhaps love will prove a stronger medicine. We might have believed so if Stephen rather than Eileen had been the object of our empathy. Indeed, it is a pity that, once again, whereas the dramatic interest lies in Eileen, the thematic interest lies in Stephen.14

This discrepancy between the thematic and dramatic interests has caused much critical confusion. On the one hand, The Straw has been considered a study on the subject of the strength of human hope, on the other it has been interpreted as a story of waste and loss. Similarly, it has been disputed whether it studies the afflictions of a girl's heart or shows how a girl's love wins an intellectual's hesitation. Whereas the average playgoer has found the play too painful, the highbrow have damned it as a vapid, sentimental love-story. In fact, dramatically the play is depressing while thematically it is exalting. The reader finds himself at the ironic level—the line of intersection of the two planes from where he may easily switch to one or the other.

Any way, The Straw did hold out a promise of great tragedies which O'Neill should have fulfilled if he had not been lured away by modernism. In fact, even as he was scribbling finis on The Straw, the "fugitives" had returned from Europe, and soon O'Neill started betraying their impact. What metamorphic influences O'Neill was thus being subjected to is clear from the numerous stages through which the next play passed,
causing, as it were, corresponding changes in the title from *The Tides* to *Chris Christopherson, Ole Devil, and finally Anna Christie.* In the early versions, Chris is the central character and the theme is the old one of the sea plays, viz. possessive Nature claiming its children. But despite its sterling craftsmanship, later *Chris* appeared to O'Neill so traditional and unmodern that he rewrote it. In the process, Chris lost the central position and gradually the focus shifted so completely to the daughter that O'Neill changed the title in her favour. But despite this sea-change otherwise, O'Neill stuck to the idea of a deceptively happy ending. Since that has made the play lopsided, there came bitter attacks challenging even his integrity as an artist. In a letter to *The New York Times* he defended himself by pointing out that the storm is over only for the time being. He insisted that he wanted the close to be treated like a comma in a sentence; though the curtain falls, life goes on—and sea outside is still there, waiting like the lurking hounds of fate.

Indeed, here was yet another version of a hopeless hope—a groping for happiness in an illusive attempt to believe that all is well when, in fact, it is not. It is worth noting that instead of merry wedding bells, the play closes on muffled "mournful wails of a steamer's whistles." Again, as the stage directions show, Mat Burke is not in

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*In a letter to Nathan, O'Neill told that once he had thought of calling the play *Coma, too!* (Cited Bogard, 163)

**J.J. Ranken Towse set the ball rolling when, reviewing the play for *Post,* he averred that the close of the play was most violent expedient to bring about a happy ending, making a concession to the popular taste. Alexander Woollcott talked of the play's bogusness (Gelbs, 480), and Isaac Goldberg, even in 1922 made references to commercial considerations (see Cargill et al., p.240). Irked by insinuations, O'Neill felt so miserable that he confided to his friend, "Either I am crazy, or they all are." (Annoted by the Gelbs, 480).
a jovial mood; rather, his is a mood of grim resignation, and 'gloomy acquiescence'. Chris, too, lost in 'sombre pre-occupation', is muttering curses! The heroine herself is only "forcing a laugh!" with a determined gaiety.

Now can one regard such an ending as tragic? Surely, measuring of human strength with the powers of Nature has been always a tragic theme; but in this play, in the inevitable defeat, no spiritual glory is earned by Anna, her lover or her father. Only a man of Skinner's faith could see in the ending a triumph of faith. The pity is that she has not been accepted as she was. In fact, nothing has been learnt from the experience and neither Mat nor Chris is the wiser for it. Instead, the latter is still busy cursing the sea, even while the former is grumbling his skepticism about the validity of her oath.

The fact is that Mat cannot believe that she is spiritually pure even though physically defiled. It is only to satisfy his physical desire that he tries to reconcile his ethical beliefs by suggesting to himself that such is the will of God. That is why, when Chris suggests that it is the worst dirty trick of the sea, Mat agrees. It is not an exultant acceptance of a woman with all her faults—as we have, for example, at the end of Desire Under the Elms—but a temporary truce dictated more by sensual desires than a spiritual transformation. Since Mat still judges her by the traditional moves, we know that her past would continue to haunt their married life. Indeed, as O'Neill insisted, the scar would remain. Mat's not seeing the purity of her soul is the very point of Anna's tragedy. Alas, he will never understand! Like Angel Clare in Hardy's Tess, he frets, fumes, goes away and returns, but whereas Tess's lover has learnt to appreciate the purity
of her soul and to give the intentions priority to the deeds, Mat is still unconvinced and therefore busy inventing illusive reasons to accept her, for accept he must because of his physical needs!

In fact, Anna's own heroic defiance of fate has also simmered down to a false compromise. Indeed, when she vows to forget all the evil she had done, she sacrifices the integrity of her character, because it is simply not within her powers to forget the past. She is so blinded by her own passionate love that she fails to realise that since animal passion, rather than genuine love, is prompting Mat to marry her, he is in no way better than her former fun-seeking customers whom she hates so much. Certainly, the younger Anna who had left the farm on being violated by a kinsman could not have accepted the lusty Mat. Perhaps too tired of her physical tribulations, on the station she realises that no matter what unhappy life a marriage with Mat might turn out to be, it cannot be any worse than the disreputable existence in the profession itself. This is a false, untragic compromise—an unheroic sacrifice of idealism for physical comfort.

In fact, so unconvincing is Anna's compromise that critics like Bernard de Voto have accused O'Neill of flagrant falsification of life and found the play melodramatic.\(^{17}\) Maybe, O'Neill has failed again because whereas the action centres on Anna, the theme moves round the father.\(^{18}\) This schism is possibly responsible for the ironic fact that although sea was originally supposed to represent an awful inscrutable force, yet Chris's references to it as "ole davil" start sounding ludicrous. Anyway, irony asserts itself in so many other
ways, too. It marks the tenor of the play; it is implicit in the ethical standards and the concomitant relativity of good and evil; it is inherent in the contrasts between illusions and reality, land and sea, experience and innocence, past and present, nature's beauty and man's ugliness. At the close, in the marriage that is not "happy," sorrow is impinged on gaiety, gloom is injected into toasting, and mourning is worked into marriage. Indeed, the audience might as well echo Chris's bewildered cry, "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time!"

Now, this compelling drama, packed with punch, brute intensity, vitality, ironic power, may not be a masterpiece, but it does show O'Neill's having reached the mature stage when he could integrate "social, psychological and existentialistic dialogues into a unified symbolization." A few more attempts in this direction and O'Neill should rank with the Greek and the Elizabethan masters. But with the next step he found himself at the crossroads of modernism. Mistaking a pathway for a short-cut, he landed himself in a wilderness in which he wandered for a dozen years. He did scale many another peak but never the one he had set out to conquer.

*Even the fate of the play was marked by a chain of ironical circumstances. Some ironic force fulfilled with a vengeance O'Neill's wish that the audience should leave the theatre quarrelling about what they had seen; the controversy regarding ending forced him to defend his own integrity as an artist. Later, when he came to treat the play with dislike, it won him a Pulitzer Prize, and as a movie and as a talkie, earned him immense fortune! Commenting on the ironic contrast between his troubles with the Police Department that was pinning the Obscurity Medal on his hairy chest, and the success of Anna Christie in Columbia where the brazen bosom of Anna was being adorned with the Cross of Purity, he shouted amusedly, "It's a mad world, my masters."