Chapter IV

Dramatic Techniques of O’Neill

O’Neill was a tireless experimenter who experimented with a variety of
dramatic forms and modes. Even when he succeeded in one form or style, he would
move on to another one, and this experimentation continued from the beginning of his
career up to the very end. He started his career with writing plays in the realistic
tradition. In his early plays he rendered life and speech authentically.

When O’Neill took to writing plays in the second decade of the twentieth
century, he brought a fresh whiff of air to the American drama which had hitherto
been pale, anaemic and sickly because of its preoccupation with sentimentality,
romance and melodrama. He brought a touch of reality of the American stage which
had chiefly been a playground of mere shadows and had been cluttered with outworn
clichés and platitudes. O’Neill transformed the American drama from a false world of
neat and competent trickery into a world of splendour, fear, and greatness. From the
beginning he saw life, as something not to be nearly arranged in a study, but as a
terrifying. Illusion and reality are the two poles on which his plays turn.

In his early career as a playwright fidelity to human life and nature was
O’Neill’s chief concern. He uses asides, masks, symbolism, expressionism and other
techniques to convey the real reality. The themes, settings, characters, and language of
O’Neill’s early plays are all realistic. He represents realistically sea-life and sea-
people. He himself had been a sailor and his representation of sailors and sea-life is
ture to life. In the early plays life Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie, Straw, The Web,
Thirst, Indifferent etc., the features of his characters have been realistically described
and even their intonation, their peculiar language they use is the typical language of
seamen. In O’Neill’s plays the readers could find the reality and joy of life; his
vocabulary is rich with the richness of life and work, and his people have that
wildness which civilization accentuates. His speeches are filled with the poetry of
human endeavour and human suffering.

O’Neill provided realistic settings and detailed stage direction to his themes,
the realistic setting can be well appreciated from the stage direction for Act II, Scene
I, of Beyond the Horizon:

“The farmhouse sitting room (as seen in the proceeding act has
changed, so much in its outward appearance as in its general
atmosphere. Little significant details give an evidence of carelessness,
of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed. The chairs appear shabby
from lack of paint; the table cover is spotted and askew; holes show in
the curtains; a child’s doll, with one arm gone, lies under the table.”
(O’Neill, The Plays of Eugene O’Neill, 102)

These details help us in recognizing the place and also help in advancing the plot.

O’Neill’s characters are realistic, well defined in their features and modes and
habits. They are drawn from his observation of life and hence they are life-like. He
portrays the characters realistically. For example, see the portrait of Christine Mannon
in Mourning Becomes Electra: “That’s her! . . . a tall striking-looking woman of forty
but she appears younger. She has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a
flowing animal grace. She wears a green satin dress, smartly cut and expensive, which
brings out the peculiar colour of her thick curly hair, partly a copper brown, partly a
bronze gold, each shade distinct and yet blending with the other. Her face is usual,
handsome rather than beautiful…” (O’Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra, 254).

O’Neill also wrote realistic dialogues in his early plays. His dialogues are both
interesting and credible. In Anna Christie dialogues are powerfully written, e.g.:

“Don’t bawl about it. There ain’t anything to forgive, anyway. It ain’t
your fault, and it ain’t mine, and it ain’t his neither. We are all poor
nuts, and things happen, and we just get mixed in wrong, that’s all”
(O’Neill, The Plays of Eugene O’Neill, 305)
His early characters like Robert Mayo (Beyond the Horizon), Anna (Anna Christie) and others are all based on his personal knowledge or acquaintance with such characters. They are all carried away by some romantic ideal which in the long run destroys them. The theme of the plays is realistic in as much as in all of them, he shows the destructive possibilities of the romantic ideal, of any attempt of escape from life, and realistically affirms the acceptance of life despite its sick, hurry and divided aim. Beyond the Horizon is the best of his plays for studying the theme of the destructive power of romantic illusion. Robert Mayo is fascinated by the Beauty which lies beyond the horizon. But he gives up this illusion to follow another illusion, equally futile and destructive, i.e., the illusion of love. His tragedy is the natural consequence of his false idealism and his everlasting inability to accept the reality.

According to S.K. Winther, “From early one-act plays to Mourning Becomes Electra, O’Neill deals with romantic illusion that destroys the possibility of happiness” (Winther, Eugene O’Neill: A Critical Study, 77). It is as though he would say: “man is incapable of accepting the reality of the world as it is, and in that fact lays the germ of his inevitable tragedy” (Ibid, 78). From Yank who cursed the life of the sea dreamed for how nice it would be to “have a farm with your own cows and pigs and chickens, way in the middle of the land where you w’d never smell the sea or see a ship” to General Mannon, O’Neill’s men and women follow the gleam of unreal ideals to their destruction. The Strange Interlude, Dynamo, etc. are other plays dealing with O’Neill’s realistic acceptance of life and rejection of romantic illusion and dreams.

Soon O’Neill got tired of realism of the nature of Shaw and Galsworthy’s plays. He began experiments with other forms of drama. He made use of symbolism, expressionism, and Freudian psychology. The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape are
expressionistic plays. *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* is a psychological play. It is a clinical study of racial hatred. In *The Fountain* O’Neill plunged into the world of romance and fantasy. The play offers an imaginative and literary treatment of the eternally youth and employing characters and situations that are almost entirely fictions. *The Great God Brown* is a play symbolism and makes use of the device of mask. *Marco Millions* is a fantasy with a pseudo-historical background.

After writing a few plays in the expressionistic technique O’Neill again turned to realism. But this time his interest was not the external reality or the universality of romantic attachment to illusion that sustain life; it was his desire to explore the various unconscious motivation of man and explain some of the behavioural mysteries. Under the influence of Freud and Jung and his own experience, he had learnt to see of unknown interests and clashing and shaping the behaviour and language of man. This exploration of the psychological realism accorded him the status of a virtual psychoanalyst. He was himself psycho-analysed in 1927 and since then was much concerned about the inhibited and suppressed desires of his characters. *Strange Interlude, Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* are very good examples of psychological realism. Although the story of Mourning Becomes Electra is taken from Aeschylus, it is placed in his contemporary world. Seeing his mother Ella actually blooming as a widow, he thought “mourning become her spiritual as well as physical health and destiny. O’Neill wrote after completing the trilogy, in 1931: “I sought to convey that mourning befits Electra: It becomes Electra to mourn; it is her fate; black is becoming to her and it is the colour that becomes her destiny. The image of O’Neill’s mother Ella lingered in his mind so obsessively that he entitled the play after his experience. Leaving aside the Freudian trapping, Oedipus complex, Electra complex, unconscious motivations, super-ego and the life denying
sterility of the puritan conscience, etc., the play is a realistic representation of the mysterious and unknown motivations that guide our actions and operate imperceptibly but effectively in the shaping of our relations inside the family.

O’Neill did not complacently accept the romantic illusion of the perfection of a commercialised and brutalised contemporary American society. His realism is seen in critical appraisal of contemporary social values, myths and illusions. While neither a sociologist, nor a political agitator, he is keenly alive to the disease of the modern age. His attitude towards his country and its money values is critical. In a number of plays he has focussed on the callous, brutal nature of spiritual decay and disintegration which it is generating.

By the time O’Neill had experienced with the psychological realism, he realised his own life had been dramatic enough to be transmuted into art. In his later plays O’Neill decided to write about himself in his plays. He said, “All the most dramatic episodes of my life I have so far kept out of my plays, and most of things I have seen happen to other people. I’ve hardly begun to work up all this material, but I’m saving up a lot of it for one thing in particular, a cycle of plays I hope to do some day.” In his last plays—*Iceman cometh* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, -- autobiography has been effectively combined with objective reality. Not only the experiences that have gone into the making of these plays are real but even the character and situations are real. These plays emerge directly from the depths of O’Neill’s being. Events are arranged in such a manner that they give a sense of unity of time and place. The dramatist was so frank in the depiction of his experiences that he did not want *Long Day’s Journey into Night* to be published during his life time. In this play, his parents, his brother and his own former self, are the prototypes of the four main characters whose relations constantly vacillate between love and hate. He
frequented inns and brothels and there he came across those men and women who were almost discarded by society despite their longing for a home and desire for communication with other respectable people. But in this infernal world inhabited by mostly frustrated men, there were women who could bring light into the dark lives of those down and outs. Such men and women with whom he had himself come in contact move across the canvass of these plays.

Thus O’Neill’s plays deal with different kinds of realities—the social reality, the psychological reality and the autobiographical reality. His concept of realism goes on changing from time to time. His plays deal with the tension between illusion and reality. He also uses poetic non-realistic techniques like symbolism, expressionism, asides, soliloquies, masks, etc., to reveal the inner life of his characters, their frustrations and obsessions. To quote Isaac Goldberg, he is the founder of ‘a truly realistic drama’ in America.

O’Neill was a ceaseless experimenter. He always sought new techniques of expression and communication. He began as a realist, but soon he fused realism with symbolic and suggestive modes. In order to communicate inner reality he used expressionistic techniques. He also used such poetic devices as aside, soliloquy, masks, etc. with the same end in view. In his later plays, he used myth and legend and restored to epic-dimensions in order to convey the sense of over-hanging fate driving men to their doom, e.g., *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Besides the use of pantomime (dumb show) and masterpiece opening, O’Neill also uses symbolism as a technique of communication. Symbolism may be defined as “*use of any part or parts of a play—character, incident, setting, situation, language—to suggest an idea or ideas not conveyed by the surface story.*” By the use of symbols the dramatist is able to enclose vast concepts within little space. It enables him to
suggest the deeper reality and the profounder significance of his theme. It imparts
depth and richness of texture to his plays. Through its use, the dramatist universalises
its theme and extends the scope and meaning of his play beyond the limits of realism.

In Beyond the Horizon, the setting is symbolic. The scenes alternate—one
inside and outside. This alternation is symbolic of the conflict between the fixed
prison and the yearning for freedom. Fog is symbolic of a state of mind. In Anna
Christie, certain aspects of nature, i.e., fog are used as symbols. The first act of Marco
Millions is pure symbolism. “the six scenes of Act I symbolize the progress of Marco
Polo from the West of eternal values, from the world of naive faith in human values to
the world of sceptical philosophy and relative standards...By means of a series of
symbolic scenes Marco makes the transition from a sweet and earnest youth, proud of
his dreams and his hopes, and genuine in his faith to a shrewd businessman, whose
values are profits, and whose ideals are mercenary. “Marco forgets his youthful love,
and by this is symbolised the loss of all that was pure and genuine in his philosophy.

Expressionism as an art-form was a movement that began in Germany before
world war I. It is a revolt against ‘realism’, by distorting objects, exaggerating, and
breaking up time-sequences. It is less concerned with objectives fact than with the
external world as it appears to a troubled, sick or abnormal mind of a character. The
Hairy Ape, as well as The Emperor Jones, of O’Neill, and The Adding Machine of
Elmer Rice are expressionistic plays. They use memory and dream-sequences, shifts
in time, etc., to render inner reality.

Expressionism is a dramatic technique which enables a dramatist to depict
‘inner reality’, soul or psyche of his personages. The emphasis shifts from the external
to the reality. The action moves backward and forward freely in space and time in
harmony with the thought processes of the character concerned. There is a deeper and
deeper probing of the sub-conscious, action is increasingly internalised, and what
goes on within the soul becomes more important than the external action. “Instead of
a dramatic sequence of events, there is a concentration on the stream of
consciousness, the surface of life becomes disjointed, scattered, as in a dream, to
suggest the inner reality which lies beneath the surface. Not concerned with externals,
the expressionist explores the idea, the source of conduct, until reality becomes sub-
conscious, and character mere abstraction. Scenes are often brief; they sometimes
succeed one another without times sequence; they have neither order nor unity, and
they suggest, as they alternate between reality and fantasy, between objective action
and analysis, the disorderly, disconnected feature of psychoanalysis.”

As J.W. Marriot rightly points out, “a realistic play is based upon superficial
observation of detail—a mere photography; but expressionism has been likened to an
X-ray photography.’ Expressionistic method is used when the dramatist aims at a
probe into the unconscious. In naturalistic or realistic play, speech and actions are
used to give an idea of the working of the mind, but the method is inadequate because
speech does not invariably reveal the working of the mind. Speech, much time, is
used to conceal rather than reveal the thought. No human being wants to be seen for
what he really is. This is why an expressionistic playwright depends for correct
understanding of human psyche on slips of tongue, dreams, and informal moments of
the character. In order to help the audience to understand the inside of the character,
the expressionist uses symbols, metaphors, fables and allegories. He produces blurred
figures on the darkened stage to personify good or bad motives. Even unseen voices
are heard to express the secret thoughts of the character. Eerie noises, flickering lights
and recurrence of the same sounds are used to depict the conflicts of wills, and
struggles between the dark desires. “In short, the expressionist uses the disconnected,
distorted and fantastic form of a dream in order to approximate as closely as possible to the stream of consciousness of the given character.”

The use of symbolism in *Desire Under the Elms*, as mentioned by Winther, “has lent a poetic quality to O’Neill’s prose: it has universalized his theme: and it has added an emotional quality to his realism. This method has made it possible for him at any moment in his writing to depart from the orderly, logical language of prose into the psychological sequence of his characters, and at the same time suggest those strange warnings, intuitions, fantastic ideas that play on the periphery of consciousness, or lie buried in the subconscious, but at times assert themselves with painful vividness.”

*The Emperor Jones* was the first play in which O’Neill used expressionistic technique to express the psychological terrors and obsessions of Brutus Jones, long before he had of expressionism or had read the expressionistic plays of Strindberg. Isaac Goldberg writes, “The Emperor, not to be slain except by a silver bullet, is killed by just a bullet moulded by his credulous vassals. So, too, we are slain by the very belief of others in our own deceptions. Here we have a mystery presentation of the degenerative process of fear. The Emperor, once he has fled the palace, the first step in his fear, despite all his bluster, which was a sign of fear, in the first place, wanders through the forest in rapid regression to permittivity. The tom-tom effect is remarkable, and is the culmination of O’Neill’s natural response to such sensory stimuli. This is no mere sound accessory, as it is in the early plays, with their fog whistles. The tom-tom is part and parcel of the psychological action; at first it is the call to war; then it merges into the Emperor Jones’s vision of the slaves rolling to its beat; finally it becomes his own throbbing, feverish temples, and all the while it is our heart beating more and more rapidly as we follow his fate.
“Is the play one long soliloquy, practically? But fear talks much to itself. The visions that rise before his eyes are beholds, and truer to genuine reality than would be a blank stage. It is the surge of the Emperor’s speech that makes these spectres lives for us as they do for him. This part of the play is really of a piece with the melodrama, in that it achieves compete, identification of the auditor with the actor, and presents surrounding reality not as it appears to those outside the action, but in subjective terms of the actor’s self. There are hints of a medium; it is inherent in character of the play; it is the play, and could not have been presented otherwise. Here symbol and psychology merge; analysts have found it a remarkable study, fundamentally as true of the white man as of the black; the Emperor Jones is, in addition, or simultaneously, an unobtrusive symbol of play which would not have been possible without the use of expressionistic techniques.

*The Emperor Jones* is a one-act play in eight scenes. The first and last scenes contain several characters and employ a realistic style while the six scenes in the middle are an expressionistic monologue chronicling Jones’s nightmarish trip through the forest. This middle section is the main part of the play and focuses as much on light, sound, and setting as on Jones’s spoken words. The first and last scenes of the play, then, serve as a framing device, first setting up and then resolving Jones’s night in the forest. However, the first scene of the play is vastly different not only from the middle scenes but also from its companion, frame scene at the end of the play. For it is in this opening scene that O’Neill must provide all of the “exposition” for the play.

“Exposition” is the term used for that part of a play that must give the audience the necessary background information for the main action. It is a very demanding aspect of the playwright’s craft and can be performed expertly or inexpertly, depending on whether or not the information is woven subtly into the
dramatic flow of the initial action. *The Emperor Jones* focuses on the last twenty-four hours in the life of Brutus Jones, but in the first scene O’Neill must inform the audience of Jones’s past—that he is a non-native black man from America, that he has only been on the island for two years, and that in his former life he was a train car worker who killed a friend in a craps game, went to prison, and then killed a white guard in order to escape. O’Neill must also indicate that Jones’s quick rise to “emperor” included a period where he served Smithers as an associate and survived an assassin’s bullet. All of this and more must be indicated quickly and efficiently in order to effectively set up the middle scenes and Jones’s experience in the forest.

At times in this first scene, O’Neill is not very subtle or clever as he reveals Jones’s background. For example, Smithers says, “I wasn’t afraid to hire yer like the rest was—’count of the story about your break in’ jail back in the States.’” At other times, however, O’Neill delivers this exposition very adroitly, as when he reveals much of Jones’s background in a single speech. Jones is responding to Smithers’s skepticism about his claim that he killed a white man in the United States when he says:

> Maybe I goes to jail dere for gettin’ in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits twenty years when dat colored man die. Maybe I gits in ’nother argument wid de prison guard who was overseer ovah us when we’re walkin’ de roads. Maybe he hits me wid a whip an’ I splits his head wid a shovel an’ runs away an’ files de chain off my leg an’ gits away safe. Maybe I does all dat an’ maybe I don’t. It’s a story I tells you so’s you knows I’se de kind of man dat if you evah repeats one word of it, I ends yo’ stealin’ on dis yearth mighty damn quick!(Eugene O’Neill, *The Plays of Eugene O’Neill*,56)

With the simple addition of the single, repeated word, “maybe,” O’Neill conveys much of the necessary background while at the same time suggesting that the information might be false, thus creating an air of mystery about this “emperor.”

Of special interest in regard to the exposition in *The Emperor Jones* is that the 1933 movie version of the play drastically expanded O’Neill’s script by fully
dramatizing this background information. The movie added scenes in America and on
the island that showed the entire process whereby Jones proceeded to his fateful last
day. Thus, over half of the movie is an elaboration of the exposition that O’Neill
provided so briefly in the play’s first scene.

Jones’s night in the forest is a symbolic journey that represents not only his
process of personal self-destruction but also a confrontation with his racial past. Once
he gets to the island, Jones tries to deny what he has been in order to imitate the
successful white men he once served on the train in America. Like his former white
oppressors, Jones wants to dominate and be all-powerful, treating other people like
inferior “trash” and exploiting them for personal gain. In overcompensating excess,
however, Jones tries to set himself apart from all other human beings, only to discover
during his nightmare journey that he cannot escape his connection with other people
or even with his repressed inner life.

The first scenes in the forest show Jones confronting his personal past—his
killing of Jeff, his time in prison, and his lethal attack on the prison guard. After
reliving these personal experiences, Jones begins to confront the history of his race.
He re-enacts the experience of his ancestors coming to America in slave ships and
being sold at auction like property. Then he goes even deeper into his racial past and
confronts the primitive witch doctor who claims him as a sacrifice for the crocodile
god. Jones’s trip through the forest, then, becomes a trip back through time, perhaps
even expiation for his attempted denial of self as a member of the black race.

And the symbolism culminates in the strange figure of the crocodile god,
which is the most evocative and puzzling symbol in the play. As the climax of Jones’s
journey, the crocodile might be seen as a symbol of Jones’s primitive self or as a
symbol of evil—either the evil of Jones or of humanity in general; perhaps it
represents the pagan, non-Christian response to the world; perhaps it is a symbol of Jones’s inner being, which he can’t accept. Any number of interpretations can be made of this figure whose presence brings Jones to his final destruction.

In *The Emperor Jones*, O’Neill uses the symbols of the silver bullet, the Great Forest, the tom-tom, and the crocodile god. The silver bullet is the symbol of that their very riches could save them from the revenge of their victims, just as Jones had made the natives believe that he could be killed only by a silver bullet. The silver bullet is also the symbol of his freedom. Unknown forms of both the glory and horror of his pride and crippling his will. The beating tom-tom symbolises the pervasive and inescapable presence of the primitive. The crocodile stands for the evil of self. Jones’s hopeless flight through the forest is not from the natives at all, but from himself. The progress of Jones is the progress of understanding; it is the stripping off of the masks of self, layer, by layer, just as bit by bit the emperor’s uniform is ripped from his back. In this play the Negro is the symbol of displaced superstitious humanity, of innocence and violence, of elemental simplicity and primal humanity. Jones is a symbol of man’s vain boast of power.

The methods of the German Expressionists have also been effectively used by O’Neill in *The Hairy Ape*. The realistic techniques have not been entirely abandoned, but they have been used to serve non-realistic purposes. Thus in the opening scene of the hairy ape the setting has been realistically given. But the dramatist warns us, “The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is of a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel.” thus the realistic setting is intended to create an impression—here the impression of overcrowding—in the manner of an expressionist. The stokers have also been realistically described “hairy-chested, with long arms of
tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. All the civilized white races are represented; but except for the slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, eyes, all these men are alike. Yank the central figure of the play is seated in the foreground. He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They respect his superior strength—the gnudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual”. Thus Yank is the representative of a class; he serves to create the impression of man as hairy ape; he symbolises the primitive, the animal-like in man. Equally realistic as well as equally symbolic of the artificiality and enervation caused by the contemporary mechanised and materialised urban life. The description of the inhabitants of the Fifth Avenue in Scene v is equally symbolic of modern life: “The crowd from church enter from the right, sauntering slowly and affectedly, their heads held stiffly up, looking neither to right nor left, talking in toneless, simpering voices. The women roughed calcimined, dyed, and over-dressed to the nth degree. The men are in tail-coats, tall-hats, spat, etc. a procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein in their detached, mechanical unawareness.” In this description we get the exaggerated distortion of reality so characteristic of an expressionistic play. By this time, Yank’s self-confidence has already been shaken, he is already obsessed with the idea that he does not ‘belong’ and the description is expressive of his sense of bewilderment fear and horror.

*The Hairy Ape* is often categorized as expressionist theatre. O’Neill’s writing did not exclusively center on this style—in fact, only a handful of the playwright’s work fits the definition of expressionistic theatre. Dramatic expressionism is a theatrical movement that is largely credited to August Strindberg (author of Miss Julie
and a significant influence on O'Neill) Within this genre, a playwright can show a
very subjective viewpoint on life, one that can be interpreted on a number of levels
(which explains why The Hairy Ape has variously been viewed as both pro-socialist
propaganda and anti-socialist criticism).

With expressionism, the playwright depicts life not as it really is but as he (or
his characters) perceives it to be. Often expressionism has found itself connected with
social concerns. It also frequently addresses itself to a future, which may or may not
ever be experienced in the work (such as Long's Utopia of a worker-owned state). The
approach is often seen as pessimistic in that it commonly finds society to have serious
flaws, yet most expressionistic theatre offers some hope for improvement—although a
character such as Yank does not reap the benefits of such improvement.

Within the theatre, the expressionistic approach opened up-the space well
beyond the stage and offered the possibility of involving the audience in a much more
intimate way. The structure of the play does not have to concern itself as much with a
strict chronology of time and sequence, so the playwright has more opportunity to
make use of imagination; O'Neill's intent is less concerned with establishing a clear
narrative path than painting an impression of Yank's character and dislocation. The
playwright can express his views, make use of theatrical devices such as lighting and
sound effects, and can distort or exaggerate characters (while realistic in some sense,
the hyperbolic Yank is a good example of an extreme expressionist character).

While The Hairy Ape has distinct expressionist tendencies, O'Neill infused
realistic elements to set off the more extreme action and define his message. The
structure of the play is somewhat disjointed and has its surreal moments (particularly
the scenes set in the hellish stokehole), yet O'Neill has populated his play with a
variety of recognizable character types and settings. Part of the play's success in
reaching its audience lies in the familiarity of the people and situations it portrays. By allowing his viewers to identify with facets of his play, O'Neill is able to drive home the more subjective, expressionist aspects of the play. Set against relatively normal characters such as Long and Mildred, Yank appears even more grotesque and out of step with society. Likewise, the relative normalcy of the first-class deck contrasts with the fiery, otherworldly stokehole, emphasizing the vast differences between the classes.

In The Hairy Ape symbolism runs throughout the play from the beginning to the end. Yank symbolises a number of ideas. He symbolises the most perfect individuality of a stoker. Secondly, he symbolises the proletariat. Thirdly, he symbolises the animal nature of man, the instincts and impulses, which man has inherited from his biological ancestor, the hairy ape. Fourthly he stands for the primitive in perfect harmony with nature and environment. Fifthly, he symbolises every man.

Mildred Douglas symbolises the rich capitalist class living an artificial life of comfort and luxury, enervated and anaemic, incapable of any originality or vigorous action. The confrontation of Mildred and Yank symbolises the modern class conflict, the confrontation of the rich capitalist class and the proletariat, gradually becoming class conscious and clamouring for rights. This confrontation results in Yank’s loss of belongingness, symbolic of the modern worker’s loss of harmony and creative joy in his mechanical work, a work in which the individual worker plays as insignificant a part as a clog in a machine. The stokehole, the foreman-castle, the Fifth Avenue skyscraper, the cell in the prison all made of steel, are all symbolic of the ‘cage’ in which man is imprisoned in the contemporary materialistic and commercialised age.
The language used is also symbolic. Mildred calls Yank a ‘filthy beast’; she treats him as a hairy ape’. Yank feels insulted in the very heart of his pride. Henceforth, the feeling that he does not belong.

There are some significant and important symbols throughout *The Hairy Ape*. The symbols are employed to reinforce the playwright’s ideas and intentions behind the play. Mildred, with her pure white dress, is a symbol of naiveté, an unspotted, pure life. This innocence sinks into the depths of the ship, disrupting the equilibrium that had existed among the firemen.

The fire of the fumace is tied into the animal energy of the fireman, who is harnessed to a fever pitch when they feed the ship’s engines. The stokehole also symbolizes the hellish nature of the men’s lives. It is an underworld that is uncomfortable to all except Yank, who has, symbolically, sold his soul to the ideal of work.

Steel comes up often in the play. Yank claims he is steel. Mildred is the daughter of a man who makes steel. The bars of the prison are steel as are the bars of the gorilla’s cage in the zoo. Within the play steel represents that hard and irresistible fact of separation and enslavement. Yank mistakenly sees himself as made of steel but it is the steel of society that holds him apart from the rest of humanity.

The ape is a symbol of the animal and basic nature of man, the evolutionary beginnings of the human race. Yank is a kind of missing link between socialized humans and the wilder animals. His persona is one that is to be harnessed or put behind bars; as evidenced by his attack on the high society group in scene 5, it is something that is not safe out on the streets. Yank’s primal state is far from the world of Mildred, who nearly faints when she sees his raw, brutish strength and frightening, ape-like appearance.
In an expressionistic play, the number of characters is cut down to the minimum. The attention is focussed on the central figure, and the other characters are not individualised. They serve merely as a background to throw into sharp relief the central figure. Thus in the hairy ape, the other stokers are merely a chorus of voices. The denizens of the Fifth Avenue are presented merely as a mechanical procession and equally lacking individuality. This enables the dramatist to focus on the obsession of Yank and what goes on within his soul.

Eugene O’Neill was not willing to call The Hairy Ape an expressionistic play. He employed so many of the trappings of expressionism, however, that it is difficult to view it as anything else. It can be considered as well a naturalistic play, dealing with the social and biological determinism that drove Yank to the monkey house and to his death.

When the Provincetown Players had The Hairy Ape in rehearsals, someone suggested to the playwright that the notion of society’s impersonality in dealing with someone such as Yank would be heightened if the actors in the Fifth Avenue scene wore masks. O’Neill adopted this technique and later lamented that he had not used masks in the stokehold scene and other scenes as well. This expressionistic device was used successfully by German playwrights with whose work O’Neill was intimately familiar, as he was with Greek drama, which also made extensive use of masks so that actors were representatives of ideas more than individuals acting out individual roles.

Borrowing from Greek drama, O’Neill also liked to fill the theatre with the clamour of groups of people speaking, only fragments of which the audience could hear in full but from which they could derive a sense of the play’s tone and milieu. Choruses accomplished much of the business of Greek plays, and O’Neill achieved
similar goals with the chattering he introduced into *The Hairy Ape* in the stokehold scenes, the forecastle scene, the Fifth Avenue scene, and the jail scene.

The play is usually staged with little light except in scene 2, when O’Neill purposely builds his chiaroscuro contrast between the stokehold and the passenger deck while simultaneously setting the scene for the ghostly effect Mildred’s white dress is to have on Yank in the following scene.

In some productions of *The Hairy Ape*, the Fifth Avenue scene is a virtual ballet. The scene lends itself easily to choreography and is quite effective when played as a ballet scene. This same dance element can be carried over into the final scene, where Yank’s dance macabre with the gorilla is perhaps rendered more sensitively in the ballet format.

Unlike many traditional plays that utilize the act format, O’Neill designed *The Hairy Ape* to be broken up as eight scenes. An act is a demarcation of action in a play that is often comprised of several scenes. Scenes are typically shorter than acts and limited to one or two locations. By structuring his play’s action around short episodic scenes, O’Neill is able to encompass a variety of settings that depict Yank’s disassociation with both his peers and members of the upper class. The scene format also allows the action of the play to flow quicker, creating a tension that builds to Yank’s death in scene 8.

Partly because scenes in *The Great God Brown* alternate so rapidly, returning to the same few places—office, home, Cybel’s apartment—in a rhythm indicative of Dion and Billy’s living harassed double lives, Eugene O’Neill’s directions call for quick-change backdrops, rather than fixed or revolving scenery. The relative insignificance of place in the play also permits him to focus audience attention on the interior lives of his characters. To provide them with an experience of the sometimes
dazzling complexities within each seemingly singular self, he developed the use of masks far beyond any earlier dependence on them. Not only Dion and Billy but also Margaret and even Cybel have masks, although in the case of the women the masks are simpler, less changeable. O’Neill was familiar with the use of masks among the ancient Greeks, but his purpose was not theirs. The Greeks were concerned with practical visibility in an amphitheatre and with implied universality, when they put outsize masks on their performers. O’Neill’s interest, by contrast, lay in dramatizing mass anonymity in *The Hairy Ape* and conflicting layers of the inner man in *The Great God Brown*, far beyond the triangle of ego-id-superego already introduced into psychological studies by Sigmund Freud.

O’Neill was determined to invent whole new ways of deepening theatrical commonplaces. His awareness of the actor as sacrificing personal identity to the role that he or she plays reinforced O’Neill’s vision of inner-outer divisions in people in general. Similarly, dependence of the acting troupe on cosmetics as a form of conventional mask, to help establish this alternative identity, became an opportunity for O’Neill, in effect, to place masks beneath removable masks. The makeup used to delineate the progressive spiritual conflicts inside Dion and Billy differs from the external masks largely through the flexibility given to that makeup by facial expression. Never before and never again did O’Neill deploy dramatic masks so elaborately. Their use demanded much skilful handling on the part of the actor, since awkwardness would have brought laughter from an audience. Equally, they demanded a willingness on the part of audiences to submit to such unconventional devices in the name of greater intimacy and understanding of the characters.

O’Neill combines elements of realism—a style that makes things look like they would in real life—and expressionism—a style that distorts things to look like
they might come from the point of view of the characters—in *The Great God Brown*. Expressionistic plays often employ masks to either hide the characters’ inner emotions or reflect them. The masks used by the main characters in the play objectify the public images they want to portray and at the same time hide their inner psychological and emotional turmoil. The masks also work effectively to isolate the characters from each another. George H. Jensen, in his article on O’Neill for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, writes, ‘‘The mask is a defence, a pose, a lie that a character presents to the world to protect the vulnerable self beneath it. Only rarely can a character feel secure enough to unmask and reveal his true self. The mask, O’Neill felt, was an unfortunate necessity. It protects the self, but maintaining a mask (the strain of living a lie) dissipates, haunts, and isolates the self.’’ Dion and Billy are ultimately destroyed by wearing masks.

O’Neill employs these non realistic devices in a realistic setting. For example, when Billy assumes Dion’s identity, he not only starts wearing his mask, he also dresses in his friend’s clothes. Billy’s wearing of Dion’s clothes helps him fool people in the office. The non realistic device is set in a realistic setting where realistic events occur. O’Neill also forces Billy to frantically switch back and forth between his own identity and that of Dion’s. When Margaret appears at the office, she will not discover what has happened to her husband. It would be unrealistic if everyone in the office just accepted Billy as Dion when he wasn’t wearing Dion’s clothes.

O’Neill uses mythological symbolism in *The Great God Brown* to illustrate the psychology of his characters. Dion Anthony and William Brown represent two opposite figures in Greek mythology: Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo was the messenger of the gods and the presiding deity of music, medicine, and youth. Dionysus was the god of vegetation and wine. In the latter part of the nineteenth
century, Nietzsche used the terms Apollonian and Dionysian to note the distinction between reason and culture (Apollonian), on the one hand, and instinct and primitiveness (Dionysian), on the other. Many authors in the twentieth century were influenced by Nietzsche’s discussion of these opposing forces. D. H. Lawrence for example, employed Apollonian/Dionysian symbolism in his works to illustrate the theme of intellect versus instinct. O’Neill uses this tension of opposites in his representation of the relationship between Billy and Dion. Billy represents the controlled intellect that is incapable of experiencing any kind of creative inspiration. Dion, whose name echoes Dionysus, symbolizes instinct and the liberation of the senses in an effort to release divine creativity.

Another Greek god O’Neill symbolizes in his play is Pan, the pastoral god of fertility and mischief. In Greek mythology, he was depicted as a sometimes merry, sometimes ill-tempered joker with the horns and the legs of a goat. Later, he became associated with Dionysus. Dion’s mask represents the figure of Pan, and when he and Billy wear it, they take on his personality. This Pan-like mask, however, takes on Mephistophelian characteristics as Dion’s artistic ambitions are continually thwarted. When Billy takes the credit for Dion’s architectural creativity, his growing sense of betrayal prompts him to condemn his friend. Yet, as the mask increases its satanic distortion, Dion’s face becomes more spiritual. Here O’Neill begins to employ more Christian symbolism. Dion’s last name, Anthony, suggests Saint Anthony, who, according to tradition, resisted every temptation the devil could devise for him. By the end of the play, Dion becomes a martyred Saint Anthony, rejecting the temptations of alcohol and the urge to punish Billy for his betrayal of him.

In The Great God Brown O’Neill’s symbolism took the form of masks, a technique that was pushed to its utmost limits in Lazarus Laughed. In this play the
mask are made to bear a heavy load, for each individual mask represents both age and quality. Seven period of life are characterized by the masks and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character s as follows: The Simple, Ignorant: The Proud, Self-Reliant: the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel: the Sorrowful, Resigned.”

“Not only does this symbolism become complex in itself, but as the play develops it is apparent that the combination of these various types and others that follow creates intricate group symbols that offer an interpretation of life-force at war in the history of our whole western culture. The play becomes a symbolic interpretation of life in words, in action, in pictorial effect and in pantomime. This marks the extreme of O’Neill’s symbolism, and perhaps it indicates the use of symbols beyond their effectiveness for drama. If the audience is to be considered, it seems clear that some explanation beyond that of the play itself would be necessary. (These symbolic devices of aside and soliloquy are used in The Strange Interlude and Dynamo. This kind of symbolism is used to universalize the theme and to enlarge the scope of the play. The audience is tacitly required to forget that thoughts are not spoken aloud in the presence of others, in order that it may enter more fully in the psychological analysis of the characters on the stage.

The major dramatic devices employed in the play are the soliloquy and the aside. A soliloquy is when a character is alone on stage and speaks his or her thoughts aloud. A dramatist uses this device to give the audience direct information about a character’s motivation or state of mind. The convention is that the character always speaks the truth as he or she understands it. Acts 1 and 2 both begin with long soliloquies by Marsden; Acts 1 and 5 with a soliloquy by Nina; and act 4 with a soliloquy by Evans.
A related device is the aside, a convention in which a character speaks his or her thoughts aloud but these thoughts are inaudible to the other characters on the stage.

Both the soliloquy and the aside were staples of Elizabethan drama but fell into disuse in the nineteenth century. When O’Neill revived them, he also expanded the possibilities of the aside. Traditionally, the aside was only a short speech, employed occasionally during a play. The asides in *Strange Interlude*, however, are not only much longer than their earlier models; they are also used much more frequently, so that they become a fundamental part of the structure of the drama.

O’Neill’s use of this device enabled him to show not only the discrepancy between the inner thoughts of the characters and their outer words and actions, but also the contradictory nature of the thoughts themselves, according to which a character may think one thought followed by another that flatly contradicts it, followed by yet another thought in which the original idea reasserts itself. This technique has something in common with the stream of consciousness technique used in fiction (also sometimes referred to as interior monologue), which attempts to portray the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings within a character’s mind. Those terms are better left to characterize fiction rather than drama, but O’Neill’s development of the aside tends to give the play the flavour of a novel, especially when it is read rather than seen in performance.

When *Strange Interlude* was staged, while characters were speaking their asides, the other characters would freeze in place, thus making it clear to the audience that they could not hear the aside. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O’Neill has used myth and legend as symbols to give a broad and universal significance to his theme, to make the particular dramatisation of the human predicament general. He writes in
this connection, “modern psychological drama using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy for its basic theme—the Electra story?—the Medea? Is it possible to get modern psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate into such a play which an intelligent audience of today, possessed by no belief in gods or supernatural retribution could accept and moved by?” Another note written two years later, places the emphasis again upon broadening the implications of the original Electra theme, making it include “most comprehensive, intense, basic human interrelationships—can easily be widened in scope to include still others.” When it came to the actual writing of the play his theory and practice of symbolic representation become even clearer. Thus he writes, *Mourning Becomes Electra*—technique—for first draft uses comparatively straight realism—the first draft only for purpose of getting plot material into definite form—then lay aside for period and later decide how to go on to final version—what departures necessary—whether to use masks, soliloquies, aside.” Here it is clear that the straight realistic technique is for O’Neill nothing more than a convenient way of organizing the plot; it is but a means to an end and that end is symbolic representation. In the play, he used the Electra legend to achieve an approximation to the Greek sense of fate, such as would appeal to modern audiences.

Traditionally in Greek tragedies, the chorus consists of masked actors who dance and chant. Generally, they do not participate in the action itself, which allows them to remain objective and offer advice or commentary. They often present background information and represent the community’s position or traditional values. In the *Mourning Becomes Electra* trilogy, the groups of local people whose conversations and actions open the plays serve as the chorus.

Expressionism is a style of art that expresses internal experiences and psychological truth. Such art does not present a realistic image of world, but instead
tries to create in the viewer a powerful “true” experience of a particular emotion, feeling, or state of mind.

Many of O'Neill’s plays have expressionistic elements: masks, which conceal the actor’s faces; and asides, in which actors address the audience without others on stage hearing. Expressionistic elements in *Mourning Becomes Electra* include the pairing of characters (Lavinia resembles Christine and Orin resembles Ezra) and the symbolism of the Mannon house, which resembles a Greek temple.

Naturalism is a nineteenth-century theory that developed in the wake of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Naturalists perceived people as products of their heredity and environment. Naturalistic drama presents a vision of human life as akin to that of animal nature, in which these Darwinian drives motivate people. In many ways, these forces of nature minimize or even eliminate the individual’s free will.

Naturalistic elements in *Mourning Becomes Electra* include the ways the characters’ personal histories and environments determine their actions and motivations. Realistic theatre attempts to present realistic character actions, situations, and motivations. Furthermore, the stage recreates the experience of a real situation. Realistic drama avoids melodramatic acting, stagy effects, and dramatic conventions like a *deus ex machina*, character asides, and soliloquies.

The setting refers to the place in which the play's actions take place. Settings often have a symbolic value. For example, the neoclassical architecture of the Mannon mansion in *Mourning Becomes Electra* resembles a Greek temple, so the setting reminds us that the play itself offers a retelling of a cycle of Greek tragedies.

O’Neill combines the retrospective techniques of Henrik Ibsen with the exorcistic intensity of August Strindberg. As in such Ibsen masterpieces as *Ghosts* (1881) as *Gengangere, Rosmersholm* (1886), and *The Master Builder* (1892) as
Bygmeister Solness, he minimizes the physical action: Properties are few, the setting is simple, suspense is absent, and dialogue is all-important as the characters exhume and examine their past, continually rocking it backward and forward. To quote Mary once more: “The past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won’t let us.”

The play begins with sunshine streaming through the windows, but by lunch time, in act 2, the sun has turned to “faint haziness,” which becomes increasingly dense in the early afternoon, with the fog rolling in by the beginning of act 3 and becoming a wall by act 4. The fog becomes the play’s pervasive leitmotif: Its gradual thickening is an obvious reflection of the increasingly befogged mental state of the Tyrone household. It is a profound, eerily enveloping backdrop for the Tyrones’ various tragedies; its ominous ally, the foghorn, loneliest and most mournful of man-made sounds, broods portentously over the family like a herald of doom. Early in act 1, Mary mentions her inability to sleep well the previous night, with “that awful foghorn going all night long.” Her husband compares it to a “sick whale,” but Mary reminds him that he snored so hard, “I couldn’t tell which was the foghorn!” Act 3’s stage directions mention regularly sounded foghorns, “moaning like a mournful whale in labour.” Mary detests it: “It won’t let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back.” O’Neill seems to be using the foghorn as a manifestation of Mary’s conscience and sense of guilt for having isolated herself from the needs of her family, refusing to bear her maternal and spousal responsibilities.

For the same reasons, Mary loves the fog: “It hides you from the world and the world from you. . . . No one can find or touch you anymore.” For Edmund, his whole life is a lonely, self-hating stumble through a blinding fog. Like his mother, he finds night and fog protective masks from the unbearable horror of existence.
Complimented by his father for his eloquence in voicing his despair, Edmund replies, “Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people.” Essentially, O’Neill has both Mary and Edmund equate fog with not only the evasion of truth and self-awareness, but with death itself.

O’Neill’s use of liquor and morphine to effect the removal of his characters’ defences and disguises is evident. His use of interior lighting, though, deserves notice. At the center of the Tyrones’ living room is a table with a green-shaded reading lamp. It is the only light in the room, illuminating Tyrone’s isolation as he sits close to it, alone, playing solitaire as the final act begins. When Edmund returns home and hurts his knee in the unlit hall, Tyrone’s penuriousness is shown to cause physical suffering, paralleling his preference for a cheap, state-run sanatorium where Edmund’s tuberculosis might be so poorly treated as to result in his death. In an attempt to conquer his miserliness and break through to Edmund, Tyrone turns on the three bulbs in the chandelier as he confesses to his son that he has warped his acting talent for money. Then, fearing Edmund’s contempt, he reverts to habit and turns off the “extra” lights. The darkness is shockingly dispelled by Mary, who begins her final, surrealistic entry by switching on all five bulbs of the front parlour’s chandelier, then playing a Chopin waltz despite her arthritis-stiffened fingers. This is a coup de theatre: The long day’s journey into the night of dreams and loss of self and death turns out, ironically, to be a journey into shining lights while Mary’s mournful last speeches expose this family’s soul-shaking woes. Long Day’s Journey into Night is Eugene O’Neill’s thinly veiled autobiographical study of a dysfunctional family disintegrating because of its inability to cope with drug addiction, life-threatening illness, shame, and guilt.
Throughout the four acts of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill preserves the unities of time and place. The setting remains the living room of the Tyrone's summer home in New London, Connecticut, and, in emulation of the classical practice, the action unfolds within a single day in August of 1912, starting in the early morning and ending around midnight. Each scene and act is a segment of that single day, and within each the progress of time is scrupulously faithful to the passage of real world time, relentless and impersonal.

O'Neill, within the realistic limits of his drama, uses symbolism very effectively. Of fundamental significance is the fog. It serves first as a mood enhancing but wholly natural phenomenon. At the beginning of the play, the fog of the night before has lifted, and the optimism of the Tyrone family is reflected in the day's early brightness. But by dinner time in Act III, the fog has again rolled in, its presence announced by a foghorn “moaning like a mournful whale in labour.” Its return suits the encroaching sense of futility and isolation of each of the main characters, particularly Mary. It is she who asks why the “fog makes everything sound so sad and lost.”

At a more complex symbolic level, the fog has further significance. It is evoked as a metaphor in the rhapsodic self-scrutiny of Edmund, for example. Confiding in his father, Edmund claims that he desires to melt into the fog, to “be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself,” to become “a ghost belonging to the fog.”

The fog is also a place of forgetfulness, a place where reality is dimmed, and the world is oddly distorted. It thus serves as a symbol of Mary’s drug-induced stupor and her escape into an idealized past that offers her a brief respite from pain.
The “haunted Tyrones” are dramatic portraits of O’Neill’s real family, and the events of the play reflect a critical time in his life when he was about to enter a sanatorium with a mild case of tuberculosis. Like James Tyrone, O’Neill’s father, James O’Neill, had been a highly successful actor, famous in the role of Edmund Dantes in a stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas’s *Count of Monte Cristo*. Like Mary, O’Neill’s mother, Ella Quinlan, became addicted to morphine under circumstances that may have been like those described in the play. And, like Jamie, O’Neill’s older brother was an alcoholic and struggling actor who literally drank himself to death after Ella O’Neill died of cancer. Many of the play’s details are also rooted in fact, including the New London setting and the Tyrone family history.

Although the drama is not rich in allusions to public events of the time, it does use references to several writers and often includes parts of poems and character references and lines from dramatic works woven into the dialogue. While the furniture in the living room is both sparse and shabby, its two bookcases are filled with volumes of writers past and present, carefully named by O’Neill in his stage directions and mentioned in the dialogue. Tyrone’s preference is for Shakespeare, who is often quoted, while Edmund’s is for more modern writers and philosophers like Nietzsche, Dowson, Marx, Baudelaire, and Swinburne, writers that his father finds gloomy, morally repugnant, or anarchistic. Jamie, too, has read his share of literature. In the final act, it is he who quotes several lines from Swinburne’s “A Leave Taking” in choric counterpoint to Mary’s painful monologue. Allusion is also made to the famous American actor, Edwin Booth. It is a point of great pride for Tyrone that he had once acted on stage with Booth, who thought highly of Tyrone’s skill. But the memory is painful, for Tyrone is plagued by the belief that he traded his talent short for easy money.
*Long Day’s Journey into Night* begins cheerfully enough. The day is bright, and the initial exchanges between Tyrone and Mary are affectionate and playful, but foreboding clues to the play’s tragic turn are quickly introduced. Mary’s behaviour hints at her return to morphine use. We learn that she had spent a sleepless night and that her appetite is poor. She is obviously restless. She also seems slightly disoriented, even mildly hysterical. Her fluttering hands and obsessive concern with her hair, her inability to find her glasses—all these foreshadow her mounting loss of self-control.

Lengthy monologues are used in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* in at least two important ways: as reveries and confessions. Central are the reveries of Mary. As she plunges deeper into her drug-induced daze, she rambles on about the past into which she desperately wants to escape. At times she seems incoherent; she even babbles. In her final appearance, she begins a long, inchoate monologue, almost totally oblivious to the efforts of other characters to break through to her. Edmund’s long poetic discourse on fog is both a sort of confession and a reverie, as is Tyrone’s monologue on his earlier life in theatre. Almost pure confession is Jamie’s meandering fourth act monologue in which he starts explaining why he stayed with Fat Violet and ends with his admission that he has tried to corrupt Edmund.

Naturalism, which espouses a clinical approach in literature, is noted for its “slice of life” action lines. Such fiction often lacks closure, remaining open-plotted and inconclusive. Problems, like those in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, are left unresolved, hanging on and dragging the characters into an implied future beyond the scope of the work. Naturalistic works also tend to be grim. They strip away a character’s sense of dignity to expose unpleasant truths that lie at uncomfortable depths, even below the character’s conscious being. It is invariably a painful process, and it is one that is central to O’Neill’s play.
Often noted is the Freudian influence on O'Neill, particularly his espousal of the Oedipal attachment of sons to their mothers and sexual jealousy and enmity towards their fathers. Although a possible inner source of guilt in Edmund, the character whose behaviour most clearly evidences a latent Oedipal guilt is Jamie. He seeks a surrogate mother among matronly prostitutes and reveals a bitter jealousy towards Edmund, his chief rival for Mary’s affections in the Oedipal model outlined by Freud.

In the words of Winther, “It must not be inferred from this discussion of O’Neill’s use of symbolism that he deprecates the drama which aims at and achieve success in straight realism. He lays down to inflexible dogma, but for himself he needs the wider field and the deeper, often dimly felt, meanings that some form of symbolism will give. He has written: “Not masks for all plays, naturally. Obviously not for plays conceived in purely realistic terms.” In the same article his criticism of modern drama points towards the further and more universal use of masks for rendering the profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probing of psychology continue to disclose to us. He must find some method to present this inner drama in his work, or confess himself incapable of portraying one of the most characteristic pre-occupations and uniquely significant, spiritual impulses of his time, which is but further evidence of what the drama as an art form means to O’Neill. The drama it him is a powerful medium through its unreal mask. His plays reveal the unreal reality, the concealed truth: they give form and substance to the dream; they lend to that airy nothing which is in reality everything, “a local habitation and a name.”

Eugene O’Neill’s dramatic devices are absolutely essential to a successful production of his play. Of paramount importance is his use of crowds. In order to mount a full-scale production of *Lazarus Laughed*, almost four hundred actors would
have to be employed. With large crowds of Romans, of Lazarus’s followers, and of various religious factions, O’Neill tries to evoke a society in turmoil, tearing itself apart, mesmerized by Lazarus’s lyrical speeches yet afraid to relinquish individual concerns. The volume of sound produced by these crowds is used for a variety of effects: to suggest moments of unity when Lazarus’s message is actually embodied in the behaviour of a society, to suggest the discord and clashing of egos he has been able to surmount, and to suggest the beauty—a kind of sea like calm—that pervades his chorus of followers. These followers engage in a churchlike call and response, a series of refrains that answer Lazarus’s arias of laughter and exhortation.

O’Neill directed that these masses of actors wear masks. In his stage directions, the playwright is quite explicit about what the masks represent: There are seven periods of life shown: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle Age, Maturity, and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned.

Thus, “forty-nine different combinations of period and type” with distinctive colours give the play a panoramic, pageant like quality, as though O’Neill were encompassing the whole of civilization on a single stage. The masks are a brilliant device, allowing the playwright to achieve the unifying effects that a sea of individual faces could not accomplish. Lazarus has no mask, for he is the only truly free character in the play.

Some critics complained about the play’s length (more than four and a half hours) when it was first produced, but the full dramatic values of the play were finally
recognized when it was produced in 1956 (ten years later) at a small Off-Broadway theatre that had formerly been a nightclub. The intimate venue, seating less than two hundred people, and arena staging proved perfect for reproducing the atmosphere of Harry Hope’s seedy saloon, and Jason Robards, Jr., brought a depth and range to the part of Hickey that had been absent from the earlier production, transforming the role into one of the most challenging for subsequent American actors. The length was now seen to be an essential element of the play’s power. O’Neill’s staging was seen to be subtle rather than static, relying on characters passing out or falling asleep onstage rather than a series of awkward entrances and exits to produce different combinations of characters smoothly and realistically. The degree to which this long but carefully constructed play observes the classical unities of space and time became clearly evident only in a well-acted version. Another element of the play in performance is its humour, a quality often overlooked in readings. The camaraderie among the drifters is engaging, and this bleak play begins in an atmosphere of relative warmth. Hickey is presented at first as a character of considerable charm and humour. O’Neill once described *The Iceman Cometh* as a comedy that does not stay funny very long, and the alternative movement between comedy and tragedy has proven crucial to its effective presentation.

The play has been found to be full of hidden meaning at every level, as the wealth of critical literature about it suggests; the very arrangement of the tables on the stage (minutely specified in O’Neill’s stage directions) has proven significant. At Harry’s party, for example, the characters are positioned around the tables exactly as the disciples are in Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of the *Last Supper*, suggesting a range of symbolic meanings without a word being spoken. The twelve residents are the twelve disciples, with Hickey as Jesus, Parritt positioned in the place of Judas, and
so on, as the physical elements of the staging parallel and reinforce the symbolic elements of the characters’ names and functions.

*The Iceman Cometh* is set in the summer of 1912 in Harry Hope’s saloon, a seedy establishment on the downtown West Side of New York. All of the play's action takes place either in the bar or the back room of the saloon, visually affirming O’Neill’s intention that the bar is a world unto itself. The condition of the bar reflects the hopeless squalor of the roomers’ lives. O’Neill describes the walls and ceiling as once white but “now so splotched, peeled, stained and dusty that their colour can best be described as dirty.”

Adding to the play's themes of alienation and isolation, the windows are so filthy that it is impossible to see the outside world through them. The bar is crowded with tables and chairs “so close together that it is a difficult squeeze to pass between them.” This crowded condition adds to the suffocating nature of the bar, its atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. Because the setting changes little throughout the play, the audience gains a gradual sense of the saloon’s oppressiveness.

The only major change in the setting occurs in Act II, when the saloon is decorated for Hope's birthday party. The room has been cleaned, and a space has been cleared for dancing. Added props, such as a piano, presents, and the birthday cake, contribute to the festive atmosphere. But this lighter setting stands in sharp contrast to the anger and accusations that evolve later in the act, as the camaraderie is destroyed by Hickey's proselytizing. In this case, the party setting heightens the effect of the stage action with a visual contrast to the dark emotions that present themselves. In the final two acts, the saloon resumes its atmosphere of dirt and despair. In fact, in the final act, when the rumours have come full circle and returned to their pipe dreams,
the set is once more as it appeared in Act I, heightening the sense that—save Larry's situation—little has really changed.

A recurring criticism of *The Iceman Cometh* is that, at nearly four hours running time, the play is simply too long. This begs the question: Is it proper to fault a play for its length? Such a criticism may seem petty and is rarely levelled at novels or poems. It is this sort of criticism, in fact, that brings into relief an important difference between drama and other forms of literature. Unlike other genres, a written drama is not the play’s finished form. The final work is the production (resulting from the work of actors, directors, set dressers, and others involved with the staging) that emerges from the text. A play exists in time in a way that other forms of literature do not. A production of *The Iceman Cometh* cannot be set aside like a paperback novel, to be picked up later at the viewer's leisure. An audience’s ability to focus on the play over a continuous time period is a factor that must be taken into consideration.

Directors do consider attention spans. It is not at all uncommon for a director to provide his own “criticism” by cutting the playwright’s dialogue. One director, in fact, managed to shave the running time of *The Iceman Cometh* by one hour through extensive script edits. It is important, however, that the student of drama not arbitrarily set an “ideal” length for a play. It is more useful to consider the ultimate effect of the play’s length. Does that length serve a useful purpose? In *The Iceman Cometh* the length of the play adds to the feeling of oppressiveness and hopelessness. The continued repetition in O’Neill’s dialogue, which is sometimes cut by directors who fail to grasp the meaning in its iterations, emphasizes the redundant, looping quality of the characters’ lives. The extreme length of the play contributes to the suffocating atmosphere of Hope’s saloon.
A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something other than itself. In *The Iceman Cometh* the iceman is a symbol of death. In the time period of the play, before there were electric refrigerators, people owned iceboxes which kept food cold by keeping it in an enclosed space with large blocks of ice. The ice was delivered by the iceman, who travelled from door to door.

From the beginning of the play, the roomers look forward to Hickey’s running gag about leaving his wife in bed with the iceman. When they discover how much Hickey has changed, some begin to suspect that he did find his wife with the iceman. The figure of the iceman is easily associated with death. In western culture, death is traditionally associated with cold. In addition, it was once customary to use ice to preserve corpses until they could be buried. From this practice comes the slang expressions “to put someone on ice” or “to ice someone,” both of which mean “to kill” that “someone.” The iceman Hickey left Evelyn with is Death. When used in the title with the word “cometh,” the implication is that Death comes in the present tense—it is always arriving for someone. At the end of the play, Death comes for Parritt. Larry expresses a longing for Death, the iceman, who will eventually come for everyone in the bar.

The unities are the three rules that govern classical drama. They are unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. Unity of time generally means that the action of a play should take place within a twenty-four-hour period. Unity of place means that the action of the play should take place in one location. Unity of action means that events must follow logically from one another.

The concept of the unities originated in the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his treatise *Poetics*. Many, however, consider Aristotle’s discussion of the unities descriptive; he is simply describing the dramatic style of his
own time. During the Renaissance however, the unities became prescriptive—rules for playwrights to follow—particularly in Italy and France. Following the rule of the unities was supposed to make a play more believable for the audience.

In *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill adheres to the three unities. The play takes place in one location, within a relatively short period of time, and with events following logically from one another. O'Neill, greatly influenced by classical drama, may have used the unities in order to create an association between *The Iceman Cometh* and classic Greek tragedy. The unities can contribute to a sense of realism. The audience lives the events as the characters live them and thus experiences the stagnation and despair of Hope's saloon as if it were real.

An autobiographical play about Eugene O'Neill’s alcoholic older brother, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is dramatic realism direct in its simplicity and—like the Hogans’ life and farm—stripped of all but what is essential to its integrity.

The play’s set itself is stark: What the audience sees in all four acts is a side view of the Hogans’ small farmhouse; all of it but Josie’s bedroom is weathered-gray clapboard, and the bedroom itself is covered with tar paper. Before the house and the three steps leading to the door of Josie’s room is a dirt yard in the middle of this is a large, flat-topped boulder that Tyrone uses as a sort of table on which to set his whiskey during act 3. O’Neill calls for the removal of the house’s living room wall for all of act 2. With the wall removed, the audience is allowed to watch Josie rise from the front steps, as the act opens, and stumble around in the living room until she lights a kerosene lantern, revealing the room’s sparse furnishings and, on a bureau, an alarm clock that indicates the time, five minutes past eleven—two hours after Tyrone was supposed to have come to visit her. Clearly O’Neill intends to show that, while the little the Hogans own is old and rudimentary and not worth much, what they
themselves bring to it makes it a home. Most important, the playwright intends for the house to be emblematic of Hogan and Josie, insofar as, like them, it is “placed so perfectly in its setting that it appears a harmonious part of the landscape, rooted in the earth.”

Aside from the set, noteworthy are the demands this play imposes upon the actors portraying Josie and Tyrone, for O’Neill requires that the latter deliver a monologue during the third act that extends over several pages, and he requires that the former appear natural and attentive as she listens to it. Furthermore, Tyrone’s monologue about his mother and his guilt, as well as about the hatred he feels toward his dead father and himself, demands an actor of consummate skill to keep the audience’s attention and avoid a maudlin, monotonous tone. As for the actor who portrays Josie, she must be “so oversize for a woman that she is almost a freak. . . .” While she “is more powerful than any but an exceptionally strong man,” O’Neill indicates in his directions that “there is no mannish quality about her. She is all women.” In the course of the play, Josie must appear strong but vulnerable, bawdy but sensitive, lusty but maternal, hard as nails but compassionate. Indeed, Josie Hogan is considered by many to be one of the great heroines of twentieth century drama.

The three-act play follows a traditional climactic play structure with each of the three acts separated into two scenes: one exterior and one interior. Although O’Neill received criticism for this device, his basic aim was to illustrate the two opposing forces at work on Robert Mayo. The interior scenes provide visual reinforcement of deterioration and decay manifested by Robert’s inability to orchestrate successfully the management of the farm. The main reason the critics faulted the scenic changes was that they interrupted the flow of the dramatic action and, according to American drama critic Alexander Woolcott, exterior scenes are not
always as visually stimulating in practice as they are in the mind of the playwright. Eugene O’Neill, much like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, wrote stage directions that exhaustively describe the environment in which his dramas should be set. Although a lofty idea to juxtapose the beauty and illusiveness of the “horizon” with the eventual decay of the interior farmstead, the playwright’s vision was not realized at the Morosco Theatre.

Another difficulty with the structure of the play is that the endings of acts 1 and 2 seem too abrupt, with little foreshadowing of potential action in the next act, as if O’Neill has not quite escaped the format of the one-act. This difficulty also adds to the interruption of dramatic flow, especially with the extended periods of time lapping between acts. In addition, though the audience is watching the action unfold over eight years, some critics argue that the deterioration of both Mary’s and Robert’s health in that amount of time is unrealistic.

Equally impractical is the suggested age of the daughter, Mary, if one considers the demands of both stage time and dialogue that O’Neill affords to the role in act 2. A role played by an actor near the age of two would be quite a stretch. Hence, believability for the character would surely be compromised with an older child delivering the dialogue as written.

When first produced, the play was labelled a tragedy by critics. It certainly has tragic elements, but it does not hold to classical standards of tragedy for the simple reason that neither Robert nor his brother battles against a fate they cannot control. On the contrary, at the opening of the play they are both embracing their fate, ready to follow their “true nature.” At that initial point of stasis in the play, they each make decisions that irrevocably shape the rest of their lives.
O’Neill’s *Beyond the Horizon* was a striking departure from most of the melodramatic dramas of the day. The play featured real tragedy, which became a hallmark of many twentieth-century dramas in America. Tragedy has a long literary history, dating back to the plays of the ancient Greeks, when tragic events were depicted as a result of a character flaw or defect. Although the definitions and uses of tragedy have changed in many ways since then, most tragedies still hinge on a bad decision by a character or characters. In O’Neill’s play, these decisions are influenced by love. It is Robert’s love for Ruth that causes him to make his impulsive but important life decision, as the stage directions note: “ROBERT (face to face with a definite, final decision, betrays the conflict going on within him): ‘But—Ruth—I—Uncle Dick—.’” Ruth is adamant, however, and finally breaks down crying, the final step that influences his decision: “ROBERT (conquered by this appeal—an irrevocable decision in his voice): ‘I won’t go, Ruth. I promise you.’”

Robert’s decision influences Andy to make his own tragic decision to go to sea. Says Andrew, “You’ve made your decision, Rob, and now I’ve made mine.” Andy also making his decision out of love. He cannot stand to see Ruth with another man, least of all his brother: “I’ve got to get away and try to forget, if I can.” Mr. Mayo exposes Andy’s choice as a brash defence against heartache, “You’re runnin’ away ‘cause you’re put out and riled ‘cause your own brother’s got Ruth ‘stead o’ you.” These two tragic decisions ultimately lead to many tragic consequences, including the deaths of most of the characters. James dies while Andy is at sea, and Mrs. Mayo notes that his death was a result of her husband’s inability to publicly forgive Andy for his decision: “It was that brought on his death—breaking his heart just on account of his stubborn pride.” Mrs. Mayo is in turn affected by her husband’s death as well as by the decay of the farm and her son’s unhappy marriage, as the stage
directions indicate: “MRS. MAYO’S face has lost all character, disintegrated,
become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the
verge of comfortless tears.” In addition, Mary is chronically ill. Says Mrs. Atkins,
“She gets it right from her Pa—being sickly all the time. . . It was a crazy mistake
for them two to get married.” Eventually, Mary dies, too, and in the end, Robert
himself dies, both tragic events brought on by the decisions of Robert and Andy to go
against their respective natures.

The play has a strong sense of dramatic irony, a feeling produced in audience
members when they are led to believe that one situation will unfold, while in reality,
the opposite becomes true. At the end of the play, the audience, like the characters, is
struck with the bitter irony of the main characters’ wasted lives. All three of them—
Robert, Ruth, and Andy—have gotten the exact opposite of what they wanted. Andy
ran away from his farming dreams, thinking it would be worse to stay and witness his
brother and Ruth together. Ruth wanted a happy marriage with a man she loved, but
as she notes to Andy at the end, “You see I’d found out I’d made a mistake about
Rob soon after we were married— when it was too late.” So, Andy runs away out of
his jealousy over the relationship between Ruth and Robert, which ironically fails
shortly after he leaves to go to sea, when Ruth realizes that Andy is the one for her.
Meanwhile, Robert stays on the farm, thinking he will find true happiness with Ruth.
Instead, he finds only misery and death, constantly yearning for the life at sea that
Andy hates.

Even worse, Ruth’s failed marriage has drained her so much that, as she tells
Robert, “I don’t love anyone.” She has lost the ability to love. The tragic irony of
this situation is multiplied when Robert pushes Ruth and Andy together at the end of
the play, asking them to get married and honour his dying wish. At this point, Andy is
willing to give it a try out of duty to his brother: “We must try to help each other—and—in time—we’ll come to know what’s right.” But the damage is irreversible. The situation has changed since Andy left eight years ago, and even if they do get married as Andy had originally hoped, things will never be the same.

O’Neill’s play calls for several staging techniques that are intended to evoke a mood in the audience. One of these, the change in seasons, is particularly effective. When the play begins, the stage directions note the following: “The hushed twilight of a day in May is just beginning.” This spring day in the first act progresses to “a hot, sun baked day in mid-summer” in the second act. Finally, in the last act, it is “a day toward the end of October.” The gradual move from spring—associated with youth and hope—to late fall—a time of fading life before the death of winter sets in—mirrors the tragic action of the play and helps to darken the mood.

O’Neill’s first plays were melodramas. He soon rejected the flat characterizations and unmotivated violent action typical of melodrama, and instead he adopted the tenets of realism, a new literary movement that took a serious look at believable characters and their sometimes problematic interactions with society. O’Neill began to use settings and props that reflect his characters’ daily lives and to write realistic dialogue that replicates natural speech patterns.

O’Neill’s new type of realism rejects traditional forms and digs beneath the surface of everyday reality. In Anna Christie, O’Neill incorporates realistic depictions of men at sea and of the interactions between family members. The play explores the tensions that can arise between family members as a result of feelings of abandonment and guilt. It also illuminates the harsh reality of women’s lives in the early part of the twentieth century. O’Neill creates in the play a lyrical realism in the problematic romance between Anna and Mat.
While the play depicts the harsh life of men who live and work at sea, O’Neill also uses the setting symbolically. The sea becomes almost a character in the play as it affects the lives of Chris, Anna, and Mat. Chris claims that the sea is an “‘ole davil’” that controls the lives of men. He tells Anna that a sailor’s life is “‘hard vork all time. It’s rotten. . . . for to go to sea’” and that sooner or later that “‘ole davil . . . [will] swallow dem up.” Chris conveniently uses the sea as an excuse for his abandonment of Anna, claiming that it continually lured him away from her. He warns Anna not to marry a sailor who would also be tempted by that “‘ole davil’” to be apart from his family for long periods of time. When he finds Anna and Mat together, he vows, “‘dat’s your dirty trick, damn ole davil, you . . . but py God, you don’t do dat! Not while Ay’m living! No, py God, you don’t!’”

Anna, however, regards the sea in a completely different light. After a short time living on the barge with her father, the sun and fresh air out on the water restores her health. The sea also rejuvenates her spiritually, as she notes, when she claims that it has cleansed her of her old life. Anna tells Chris, “‘I feel so . . . like I’d found something I’d missed and been looking for—’s if this was the right place for me to fit in . . . and I feel happy for once . . . happier than I ever been anywhere before!’” The sea also brings Mat to Anna. Mat insists, “‘the sea’s the only life for a man with guts in him isn’t afraid of his own shadow. ’Tis only on the sea he’s free.’”

In *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*, music plays an important part. At the beginning of each of the first three scenes, O’Neill uses a pair of songs to contrast the black world with the white. Thus, as the play opens, the chorus of “‘Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage’” comes from the white street, while from the black side one hears “‘I Guess I’ll Have to Telegraph My Baby.’” The livelier rhythm of the latter reflects the
life-loving spirit that O’Neill ascribes to African Americans, who participate unrestrainedly in nature, whereas the whites are inhibited.

Songs, together with other sounds, also help date events for the audience. “I Guess I’ll Have to Telegraph My Baby” dates from 1898. The next scene, supposed to occur nine years later, ends with the tune of “Bonbon Buddy,” composed in 1907, and the pair of songs that opens the third scene, “When I Lost You” and “Wait in’ for the Robert E. Lee,” first performed in 1912, confirms that five more years have passed. To reinforce this sense of time’s passing, O’Neill indicates how street sounds change. At first, one hears the steam engines of the trains and the hoof beats of horses. By the second scene, the noises have become “rhythmically mechanical” because electricity has been introduced.

Sounds not only date the action and highlight racial differences but also reveal the deepening gloom of the play. The first two scenes begin with laughter and sprightly singing. By the third scene, the laughter has gone; the music “wails” and turns “maudlin.” The song from the white street, “When I Lost You,” adds to the melancholy mood: It is Irving Berlin’s lament for his first wife, who died of typhoid fever shortly after they were married. Only one song introduces the last scene of the first act, and it concludes “with a brooding, earthbound sorrow,” to be followed by the harsh clang of the church bell, more fitting for a funeral than for the marriage that has just occurred.

Even these sounds are absent from the second act, which uses setting to establish mood. In moving from the outside world of the first act to the confined apartment of the second, O’Neill shows that Jim and Ella are trapped. In each of the last three scenes, the space becomes more restricted, so that by the end of the play
“the ceiling . . . barely clears the people’s heads” and the walls are pressing in on the characters.

Two objects play a particularly significant role in this room: a Congo mask that Hattie gave to Jim for a wedding present and the picture of Jim’s father. The latter depicts an elderly man who is “dressed in outlandish lodge regalia . . . with medals, sashes, a cocked hat with frills . . .” Like Jim, the older Harris has adopted the stereotype whites seek to impose on him, covering his natural shrewdness in demeaning attire. The mask, on the other hand, expresses black pride. Even though Ella calls it “ugly . . . and stupid,” her very reaction reveals her recognition of its power. It embodies the essence of blackness that she hates, so she responds to it as she responds to Jim. At the end of the play she stabs the mask; she would have stabbed Jim had he passed his examination, because as much as part of her wants Jim to succeed, she finally cannot accept his equality with her. If he were to prove himself as smart as whites, she would have to kill him. The mask, a proud assertion of Jim’s African heritage, must be destroyed.

Like its donor, Hattie, the mask offers Jim an alternative to his father’s, and his own, acceptance of white values. He could recognize his own worth and not feel compelled to prove himself. Instead, he abandons the mask when he goes to France, for, as he tells Joe, he sees himself as “a nigger.” Thus Eugene O’Neill proved his originality by employing these dramatic techniques. O’Neill was a tireless experimenter who experimented with a variety of dramatic forms and modes. Even when he succeeded in one form or style, he would move on to another one, and this experimentation continued from the beginning of his career up to the very end. He started his career with writing plays in the realistic tradition. In his early plays he rendered life and speech authentically.
Nevertheless, he was not a naturalist, and he struck out, in fact, against the belief that mere transcriptions of life were the province of art. He fused naturalistic detail with symbolist mood, suggestiveness, and symbol. And taking his cue from his admired Strindberg, his resorted to the “expressionist” dramatic style of distortion of action, speech, and scene, as in the weird cavalry of his Emperor Jones through the jungle and the Fifth Avenue scene of The Hairy Ape.

O’Neill did not complacently accept the romantic illusion of the perfections of a commercialized and brutalized contemporary American society. His realism is seen in a critical appraisal of contemporary social values, myths and illusions. While neither a sociologist, nor a political agitator, he is keenly alive to the disease of the modern age. His attitude towards his country and its money values is critical. In a number of plays he has focused on the callous, brutal nature of a commercialized, mechanized age and the fear, insecurity and spiritual decay and disintegration which it is generating.

O’Neill had experimented with the psychological realism; he realized his own life had been dramatic enough to be transmuted into art. In his later plays O’Neill decided to write about himself in his plays. He said, “All the most dramatic episodes of my life I have so far kept out of my plays, and most of things I have seen happen to other people. I’ve hardly begun to work up all this material, but I’m saving up a lot of it for one thing in particular, a cycle of plays I hope to do some day.” In his last plays like Iceman Cometh and Long Day’s Journey into Night autobiography has been effectively combined with objective reality. Not only the experiences that have gone into the making of these plays are real but even the characters and situations are real.

O’Neill’s plays deal with different kinds of realities — the social reality, the psychological reality and the autobiographical reality. His concept of realism goes on
changing from time to time. His plays deal with the tension between illusion and reality. He also uses poetic non-realistic techniques like symbolism, expressionism, asides, soliloquies, masks, etc., to reveal the inner life of his characters, their frustrations and obsessions. To quote Isaac Goldberg, he is the founder of ‘a truly realistic drama’ in the U.S.A.

O’Neill displays a strong sense of form both in his realistic and non-realistic plays. His plays are strictly patterned. The structure of the play, the pattern of the action, even the shaping of the dialogue, always follows a strict design, usually one devised for that particular play. The alternating settings of Beyond the Horizon, shifting from the open road to the farmhouse interior, parallel the choices which confront the two brothers in the action. The fixed non-realistic of the setting in All God’s Chillum Got Wings creates a dramatic symbol of the forces opposed to the self-realization of the hero and the heroine. In Mourning Becomes Electra the completely realistic setting is also completely symbolic.

Tireless in his search for theatrical means of projecting the inner life and the metaphysical idea, he used interior monologue — speech on different levels of consciousness — in Strange Interlude, and he experimented with masks as a method of dramatization — with partial success in The Great God Brown and with virtually none in Lazarus Laughed. He even employed monologue in one highly effective scene of so realistic a comedy as Ah! Wilderness; and he split the protagonist of Days Without End into two characters who had to be played by two actors. This constant, if not indeed always satisfactory, experimentation, is actually another important feature of O’Neill work. It was his role to open all the stops of theatre-art in America, and we have reason to be grateful to him.
O’Neill began his career by writing materialistic plays mixed with symbolism and melodrama. “Melodrama in his plays is of two kinds, one resulting from the improbability of character and situation, and the other resulting from some overpowering obsession which destroys surface reality as well as truth of character. In his later work the element of naturalism tends to diminish, though it never quite disappears; the element of symbolism tends to increase, though very irregularly; and the element of melodrama remains approximately constant, though it appears in various forms. On the whole, though the symbolism greatly heightens the imaginative appeal of some of the plays, it is more often a curse than a blessing and it is disastrous when it gets out of control. In most of the stronger and finer plays — The Emperor Jones, Anna Christie, Mourning Becomes Electra — it is subordinated and used chiefly to create overtones in some of the weakest or most questionable — The Fountain, The Great God Brown, Dynamo, Lazarus Laughed — it becomes dominant, and sometimes in alliance with melodrama, wrecks the play. It is powerfully used in The Hairy Ape through most of the piece; but when near the end it takes control, reality and emotional appeal fade away.

O’Neill’s one ambition was that he should be considered as a poet dramatist. This was an artistic necessity for him, if we take into consideration his matter as well as his point of view. But so long as he wrote about common life — of sailors and farmers and social outcasts — he managed his language securely, often with strong effect, sometimes with poetic overtones appropriate to his subject. When he set out to be deliberately poetic, he failed sometimes embarrassingly. When he turned to middle-class or upper-class society, he missed fire in those parts of his plays in which he tried to generalize a feeling or an idea. Yet it may be conceded that even then he
could achieve a poetic effect of low degree through the full rhythms of his sentences, if not through cadences and imagery.

In an expressionistic play, the number of characters is cut down to the minimum. The attention is focused on the central figure, and the other characters are not individualized. They serve merely as a background to throw into sharp relief the central figure. Thus in The Hairy Ape, the other stokers are merely a chorus of voices. Except Paddy and Long, they have not even been given any names. Similarly, the prisoners in the prison scene are mere nameless voices. The denizens of the Fifth Avenue are presented merely as a mechanical procession and the Secretary of the I.W.W and the other people in its office, are equally lacking in individuality. This enables the dramatist to focus on the obsession of Yank and what goes on within his soul.

In characterization, too, O’Neill prefers to follow a pattern. His characters are not necessarily stereotypes, but he is at some pains from early in his career to make it apparent that each is but an instrument in the revelation of his theme. At first he frequently describes ‘humour’ or manner of a character by the figurative suggestion of a mask. In Mourning Becomes Electra where the Greek myth suggested the employment of actual masks, the realism of the setting forced a compromise. The Mannons, in repose, all have mask-like faces, resembling the mask-like portraits on the walls of their library. Since the Mannons are seldom in repose, the effect is more potential than actual, but it underlies the action as a symbol of the chain of evil that binds them together.

O’Neill’s vision of life was essentially tragic; the human predicament is the theme, of his plays, which are all, with one exception, tragedies. He is a great tragic artist, but with a difference. He writes tragedies of modern life which do not follow
the traditional, Aristotelian form. There are no tragic heroes, exceptional individuals with *hamartia*, in the Aristotelian sense. His tragic protagonists are all drawn from the humblest ranks of society, such as are gathered all Harry Hope’s bar in the *Iceman Cometh*. Each of them has his own pipe dream, his own romantic illusion which sends him to his doom. His tragedies are so many studies in the destructive possibilities of “the romantic idea.” They demonstrate that any kind of escape from the reality of life is self destroying; they assert at every step the beauty and joy of life which must be accepted with all its joys as well with all its limitations. Tragedy results when in the pursuit of some cherished illusion man forgets the reality of life.

Basically O’Neill’s tragedies are the embodiments of a comic anguish. As he himself said, he has studied man not in relation to man, but man in relation to God. Man has lost faith in the God of old religions and has yet found no new faith. Living in an impersonal, mechanical, urbanized and industrialized social environment, man is constantly on the rack. He suffers from inner emptiness, isolation and a feeling of insecurity. John Gassner rightly says, His major theme was man’s disorientation, man’s bedevilment from within and from without.”

O’Neill made himself the dramatist of ironic Fate and of the psychological tensions. He took for his masters the Greek tragedians of fate, to whom he ultimately paid the tribute of imitation in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and Strindberg, the Scandinavian dramatist of man’s division and search for reunification, to whom he also paid the tribute of imitation in *Welded* and *Strange Interlude*. This makes O’Neill a great social critic as well as a great tragic artist whose tragedies soothe, console and strengthen. They never depress and dishearten. They are as much apotheosis of the human spirit as, say, the tragedies of Shakespeare or of the ancient Greeks.
It is only to be expected that unreal and exaggerated characters will talk in an unreal and exaggerated fashion. The diction in O’Neill as just as grandiose and extravagant and unreal as the characters who use it. It is a rare O’Neill’s hero who does not stop the action of the play now and again to deliver a long metaphysical address on the meaning of his existence and it is a rare O’Neill’s prostitute who does not get of some good things on Life and Man and Love — in capitals.

O’Neill’s plot structure reveals a total lack of dramatic scenes. The drama, because of its temporal and mechanical limitations, is a medium for the expression of swift, forceful, and animated action. In O’Neill the action consists entirely of a lumbering analysis of the obsessed and even insane minds of the characters in his plays. Insanity is to be found in most of his plays and in many cases the entire structure of the play is based on some mad obsession of one of the characters. In Gold, for example, the plot is woven surround the obsession of Isaiah Barlett that he has discovered a chest full of gold and jewels. His determination to hunt for the treasure is so great that even the sickness and subsequent death of his wife fail to move him from his purpose. Later on he learns that the treasure is worthless, and overcome by remorse, he drops dead.

Undoubtedly the greatest playwright that America ever produced, O’Neill represents almost everything that is fundamentally modern about the American theatre. O’Neill’s modernity lies both in the ideas that he dealt with and in the techniques in which he wrapped the ideas. A born rebel, O’Neill has been responsible for bringing about a revolt against middle class complacency and common place realism on the American stage. The wide range of his experiments and his constant restlessness and dissatisfaction with forms once tried made him rank high among avant-garde writers of today. It was not just the form of American drama that O’Neill
began to modernize, but it’s very content. His avid cultivation of new ideas, his assertive individualism and his intense unease are expressions of the “lost generation” O’Neill discarded Victorian gentility, and his country’s long tradition of Puritanism, its go-getting opportunity. Instead he voices trends that are quite modern, such as lofty individualism and a careful probing into human psychology.

What makes O’Neill eminent among modern dramatists is not merely that he shares the modern interest in psychological exploration; he also makes use of current issues vital to the set-up of society in his plays. The question of racial discrimination and its effect in determining character figures prominently in All God’s Chillum Got Wings. In this and in plays like The Dream Kid, Emperor Jones, O’Neill has depicted a wide range of Negro life. O’Neill was great because of his imaginative grasp of contemporary life. His plays are gripping because they depict that segment of life which the dramatist knows and with which he sympathizes. O’Neill does not rely on fantasy or far-fetched effects. Even his feeble plays make us feel that he understands the secret springs in the characters whom he portrays. His simple sailors and farmers are thrillingly alive. It is this very quality of his characters, their convincingly genuine nature, and their vitality that makes us experience the authenticity of situation O’Neill’s experience as a sailor stood him in good stead in his characterization. In the forecastle he had known the sailors with all their superstition and their touching credulity concerning tomorrow.

The passionate intensity of O’Neill makes us think of Theodore Dreiser. O’Neill’s plays placed him among the most important writers of the twentieth century. Despite the grimness and gloom of their world O’Neill’s plays convey to the audience a powerful message. This is true especially of the last play Long Day's Journey into the Night which was posthumously staged. But the simple setting and
commonplace characters define O’Neill’s—loneliness, the ideal frustrated by facts of life, the search for ultimate motive, and the desire to belong. The quest for identity, for the understanding of man is a theme that has been found in the great tragedies of the world and is as gripping today as it was in the time of the Greek playwright of the Elizabethans.

O’Neill’s greatness lies in the fact that he has dramatized America’s post-war experiences. His characters are Americans with all the problems that the present-day throws in their faces. His treatment of both characters and situations is always in terms of twentieth century thought even when the period chosen may be the remote days of the Civil War as in *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

O’Neill may have told Americans more that they wanted to know about themselves. He well knew that many upright citizens would go about their lives unmoved by his own troubles as they continued to wear their masks of contentment. Yet year in and year out the American audience came back for more. To welcome the performance of desire and its discontents before our eyes suggests that many Americans also knew the meaning of a long day’s journey. O’Neill would not follow his father’s advice and give the American people a dose of cheerfulness that had little basis in their own lives. That he asked America to struggle from an impossible dream and accept an inevitable defeat can only mean that he saw his country containing spiritual resources that cannot be denied. O’Neill may have experienced his own life as “the curse of the misbegotten.” But he fought defeat and despair until the very end. He remains a friend of all those who endeavour to clarify their own emotions and know their own reasons and refuse to accept excesses as explanations, to deny desire was the unpardonable sin; to live with it the basis of honesty and the beginning of hope. The playwright Eugene O’Neill sought to convey the quality of understanding
that is born only of pain and rises to perception to reach the truths of human passion. For life to be felt as noble, it must be seen as tragic.

Most of the plays of the fifties concern themselves with the problems of adjustment and acceptance. The common pattern is where the protagonist is put into a family situation where his wife, his parents, his child become antagonists and drive him to or save him simple alcoholism, homosexuality, mental breakdown, drug addiction or simple boredom. Robert Anderson’s Tea and Sympathy is a typical example of this. Here the theme is that of the master’s wife saving the student from incipient homosexuality by offering her body as therapy. In general the contemporary American playwright has been engaged in the exploration of domestic relations relying on psychological case books for his situation and naturalism for his techniques. It will not be wrong to recall the comment of Gerald Weals “What we need at the moment are play-wrights willing to rise a great deal. Perhaps we have a theatre without walls. What we need now is a theatre without bounds” (Oscar Cargill, *O'Neill and His Plays.. Four Decades of Criticism*, 116)