

AN ANALYSIS OF NINE TRAGEDIES BY AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS:
EUGENE O'NEILL, MAXWELL ANDERSON, AND LILLIAN HELLMAN

A Thesis
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the Faculty of the Department of English
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Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about contemporary American drama, and much will be written in the near future. For a master's thesis, the writer has chosen a problem in the field of contemporary American drama, a study of tragedy regarding three contemporary American dramatists: Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, and Lillian Hellman.

The aim and purpose of this thesis. The aim and purpose of this thesis is to analyze three representative tragedies of each of these three writers, to compare them as to characterization, mood, theme, and conflict, and to consolidate into one symposium the opinions, both good and bad, of representative American critics concerning the selected authors and their representative tragedies.

Importance of this study. To the writer's knowledge, these particular selections from these particular authors have never been analyzed in a study such as this one, and the author believes that such a research study should be of value as a consolidating reference.

A. CONCEPTS OF TRAGEDY

The term, tragedy, is a term which has been so much debated that a simple and brief definition is impossible. Generally, tragedy is that form of drama in which the protagonist undergoes a morally significant struggle; in which the conflict is rather within a character than between a character and external forces (though the conflicting elements may be symbolized in external form), or between characters; and in which the protagonist, although treated sympathetically, incurs guilt of which the expiation (by suffering, death, or other means) is part of the dramatic problem.¹

World concepts. World authorities will be examined for enlightenment. Aristotle, in his Poetics, says:

A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.²

¹John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting, p. 52.

²Aristotle, De Poetica, Chapt. 5, p. 1449 b., as represented in The Works of Aristotle, edited by W. D. Ross and translated by Ingram Bywater.

upon which John Milton, in his essay "Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem Which is Called Tragedy," comments:

Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath ever been held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by Aristotle to have power by raising pity and fear, or such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.³

Joseph Wood Krutch, in his essay "The Tragic Fallacy," is inclined to modify the Aristotelian dictum that "Tragedy is the imitation of noble actions":

If tragedy is not the imitation or even the modified representation of noble action, it is certainly the representation of actions considered as noble, and herein lies its essential nature, since no man can conceive it unless he is capable of believing in the greatness and importance of man. Its action is usually, if not always, calamitous because it is only in calamity that the human spirit has the opportunity to reveal itself triumphant over the outward universe which fails to conquer it; but this calamity in tragedy is only a means to an end, and the essential thing which distinguishes real tragedy from those distressing modern works sometimes called by its name is the fact that in the former alone it is that the artist has found himself capable of considering and of making us consider that his people and his actions have that amplitude and importance which make them noble.⁴

³Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama, p. 209.

⁴Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Tragic Fallacy," The Modern Temper, p. 122.

In his essay, "The Tragic Blueprint," published in Broadway in Review in 1940, John Mason Brown turns from the Poetics to the Bible:

The finest statement of what is enduring in high tragedy's timeless blueprint is not to be found in the Poetics, but in the book of Job. Although Aristotle was on the threshold of truth when he spoke of tragedy's being an imitation of an action, serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, and insisted, however erroneously, upon its effecting through pity and fear the proper purgation of these emotions, the sage of Stagira halted at truth's portals as Eliphaz, the Termanite, did not when he was exhorting that prince of suffering known as Job.

"Man is born unto trouble," said the Termanite, "as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number . . . Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole."

In all tragedies concerned with the unsearchable, hence high because of the altitude of their search, no less than because of the elevation of their agony, the sparks fly upward as men and women, born unto trouble, are made whole by their suffering. By these sparks, which are great words struck from the anvil of great sorrow, are we kept warm in the presence of pain endured by these wounded men and women who are tragedy's favorite sons and daughters, and illumined in what would otherwise be the darkness of their dying.⁵

Maurice Maeterlinck, in his essay "The Tragical in Daily Life," defines the inspiration of tragedy:

⁵Ibid., p. 553.

The chief interest of tragedy does not lie in the struggle we witness between cunning and loyalty, between love of country, rancor, and head-strong pride. There is more beyond: for it is man's loftier existence that is laid bare to us. The poet's secret: and there comes to us a sudden revelation of life in its stupendous grandeur, in its submissiveness to unknown powers, in its endless affinities, in its awe-inspiring misery.⁶

Joseph Addison, in an essay in The Spectator, April 14, 1711, expresses his opinion of the dramatic form called tragedy:

As a perfect tragedy is the noblest production of human nature, so it is capable of giving the mind one of the most delightful and most improving entertainments. "A virtuous man," says Seneca, "struggling with misfortunes, is such a spectacle as gods might look upon with pleasure." And such a pleasure it is which one meets with in the representation of a well-written tragedy. Diversions of this kind wear out of our thoughts everything that is mean and little. They cherish and cultivate that humanity which is the ornament of nature. They soften insolence, soothe affliction, and subdue the mind to the dispensations of Providence.

The modern tragedy excels that of Greece and Rome in the intricacy and disposition of the fable; but, what a Christian writer would be ashamed to own, falls infinitely short of it in the moral part of the performance.⁷

Cleanth Brooks, a modern American critic, is inclined to agree with the moral issue:

⁶Ibid., p. 412.

⁷Ibid., p. 227.

The essence of tragedy is the inescapability of the issue. The situation is moral, and the individual has to cope with a universe. The Protagonist has a sense of moral order -- the universal with which he must deal. It is none the less real for existing in his mind; indeed, it is the more real for not being a physical or personal enemy that can be destroyed, or a society that may disintegrate and thus perhaps justify the individual. In its intangibility lies its indestructability, its universality. There is no escape, and in this sense tragedy may be said to be concerned with fate or destiny.⁸

Finally, a discussion on "The Essence of Tragedy" by one of the playwrights to be considered in this thesis, Maxwell Anderson, offers valuable exposition:

Anyone who dares to discuss the making of tragedy lays himself open to critical assault and barrage, for the theorists have been hunting for the essence of tragedy since Aristotle without success. There is no doubt that playwrights have occasionally written tragedy successfully, from Aeschylus on, and there is no doubt that Aristotle came very close to a definition of what tragedy is in his famous passage on catharsis. But why the performance of a tragedy should have a cleansing effect on an audience, why an audience is willing to listen to tragedy, why tragedy has a place of its own in the education of men, has never, to my knowledge, been convincingly stated.

. . .
The theater originated in two complementary religious ceremonies, one celebrating the animal in

⁸Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, Understanding Drama, p. 44.

man, and one celebrating the god. Old Greek comedy was dedicated to the spirits of Lust and Earth, spirits which are certainly necessary to the health and continuation of the race. Greek tragedy was dedicated to man's aspirations, to his kinship with the gods, to his unending blind attempt to lift himself above his lusts and his pure animalisms into a world where there are other values than pleasure and survival.

. . .
And since our plays, aside from those which are basically Old Comedy, are exaltations of the human spirit, since that is what an audience expects when it comes to the theatre, the playwright gradually discovers, as he puts plays before an audience, that he must follow the ancient Aristotelian rules: he must build his plot around a scene wherein his hero discovers some mortal frailty or stupidity in himself and faces life armed with a new wisdom. He must so arrange his story that it will prove to the audience that men pass through suffering purified, that, animal though we are, despicable though we are in many ways, there is in all of us some divine incalculable fire that urges us to be better than we are.⁹

From Aristotle to Anderson, a variance of opinion as to structure, approach, and essentials of the tragedy as a dramatic form has been demonstrated. An examination of the criticisms, however, reveals general concensus of opinion on certain aspects of the tragedy: well-written tragedy has a timeless and universal appeal; tragedy is based primarily upon the spiritual, as opposed to the animal,

⁹Clark, op. cit., p. 546.

conflict in man; and tragedy arouses emotions such as pity and fear in the reader or viewer.

Recognition of contemporary tragedy. Few modern critics will admit, however, that any great tragedy has been written by contemporary dramatists:

Once the Tragic Spirit was a living faith and out of it tragedies were written. Today these great expressions of a great faith have declined, not merely into poetry, but into a kind of poetry whose premises are so far from any we can really accept that we can only partially and dimly grasp its meaning.

We read, but we do not write tragedies. The tragic solution of the problem of existence, the reconciliation to life by means of tragic spirit is, that is to say, now only a fiction surviving in art. When that art itself has become, as it probably will, completely meaningless, when we have ceased not only to write but to read tragic works, then it will be lost and in all real sense forgotten, since the devolution from Religion to Art to Document will be complete.¹⁰

But we are not alone in devaluing contemporary tragedy; this has been typical of epochs other than ours, as witnessed by the following excerpts. Maeterlinck, in 1896, said of Continental drama:

From time to time in the past a true genius, or sometimes the simple and honest of talent, succeeded in writing a play with that profound background, that mist above the summit, that feeling

¹⁰Krutch, op. cit., pp. 142-3.

of the infinite here and there which, having neither name nor form, permitted us to mingle our images of it while we spoke, and seemed necessary in order that the dramatic work might flow by, brimming to the banks, and attain its ideal. Nowadays, our drama almost always lacks the third character, enigmatic, invisible, but everywhere present, which we might well call the sublime character, and which is perhaps no other than the unconscious though powerful and undeniable concept of the poet's idea of the universe, which gives the play a far greater reach, a certain aspiration for existence after the death of other things, and makes us return to it without ever exhausting its possibilities of beauty. Such a genius, we must also admit, is wanting in our life as well. Will he ever return? Will he arise from a new and experimental conception of justice, or from the indifference of nature, from one of those general laws of matter of mind which we have just begun to catch sight of? In any event, let us keep a place for him. At least let us see that nothing else takes his place while he is getting clear of the shadows; and let us see to it that we do not set up any more phantoms. Our very waiting for him, his empty place in life, are in themselves of far greater significance than anything we could put on his throne, which our patience is now reserving for him.¹¹

Two centuries before Maeterlinck, Joseph Addison expressed the same lament:

The English writers of tragedy are possessed with a notion that when they represent a virtuous or innocent person in distress, they ought not leave him in distress, they ought not leave until they have delivered him out of his troubles, or made him triumph over his enemies. This error they have

¹¹Maurice Maeterlinck, "Preface to the Plays," *Theatre*, translated by Barrett H. Clark, and quoted from Clark, op. cit., p. 228.

been led into by a ridiculous doctrine of modern criticism, that they are obliged to an equal distribution of rewards and punishments, and an impartial execution of poetic justice. Who were the first that established this rule, I know not; but I am sure it has no foundation in nature, in reason, or in the practice of the ancients. We find that good and evil happen alike to all men on this side of the grave; and as the principal design of tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the minds of the audience, we shall defeat this great end if we always make virtue and innocence happy and successful. Whatever crosses and disappointments a good man suffers in the body of the tragedy, they will make but small impression on our minds, when we know that in the last act he is to arrive at the end of his wishes and desires. When we see him engaged in the depth of his afflictions, we are apt to comfort ourselves, because we are sure that he will find his way out of them; and that his grief, howsoever great it may be at present, will soon terminate in gladness. For this reason the ancient writers of tragedy treated men in their plays as they are dealt with by the world, by making virtue sometimes happy and sometimes miserable, as they found it in the fable which they made choice of, or as it might effect the audience in the most agreeable manner.¹²

Cleanth Brooks presents the logical conclusion as to the relative value of contemporary tragedy, when he states:

We have no right, of course, to demand that every play be a tragedy -- either in intention or in fact. We have to be grateful for the sensitive and intelligent play wherever we are so fortunate to find it. We need not cease to enjoy them, though we acquire a finer discrimination of the nature of tragedy. Yet the fact that our age rarely produces tragedy, in spite of its evident dramatic talent, may tell us something about the nature of our age and of ourselves.¹³

¹²Joseph Addison, quoted by Clark, op. cit., p. 416.

¹³Brooks and Heilman, op. cit., p. 315.

Summary. The concepts of tragedy, as quoted from world authorities in the preceding material, have been so elevated that few writers, past or present, have soared to their heights. Real tragedy, the critics concede, is universal, timeless, and powerful; few would be willing to admit that any real tragedy had been written within their own generation. As Brooks points out, the art of tragedy will decline and disappear unless the audience reserves for it a place in the theater; the negative and disparaging treatment, by the critics, of modern tragic endeavor will hasten this decline. The serious plays treated in this thesis, those of O'Neill, Anderson, and Hellman, are indeed more like "clinical studies in environment and psychology"¹⁴ than were the tragedies of Aeschylus, Racine, and Shakespeare; but does this mean they should be rejected as inferior by the modern American critic? Should they not be considered under present conditions -- psychological, sociological, and spiritual? The audiences have exhibited their appreciations of the plays included in this thesis (excepting Night over Taos, a box-office failure). They shall be considered herein according to their literary structure, acknowledging critical opinions available as to their respective literary merits.

¹⁴Loc. cit.

B. THE PLACE OF O'NEILL, ANDERSON, AND HELLMAN
IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

It has been only since World War I that American drama has thrown off the stifling old-world conventions and established a place for itself in world drama. Many European and English obsolete devices and techniques have been discarded, and in their place has come inspiration from dramatic revolutions in such experimental theaters as the Theatre Libre in Paris, the Freie Buhne in Berlin, the Moscow Art Theatre, and the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The result, in America, has been the forming of little theater groups, beginning with the Washington Square Players in New York, in 1915, and offering understanding production for experimental drama, as well as encouragement for emerging American dramatists.

Eugene O'Neill, the first of the dramatists to be considered in this thesis, drew from the Provincetown Players, one such group, his inspiration.

Tragedy was pre-eminently in the hands of O'Neill, who saw no peace for men now that Freud had revealed the inescapable conflicts in their souls. The relentless Fate of the Greeks was metamorphosed into bewildering drives within men's personalities, which brought inescapable friction with their environment and with one another. O'Neill's tragedies provided a diapason of uncompromising

conscience in the reckless twenties, which led him a little later to the dark mysticism and dour promise of salvation.¹⁵

The great depression of the 1930's brought a sobering influence upon our playwrights; so did the threatening shadow of Fascism in Europe. The new talking pictures in Hollywood caused a shrinkage in legitimate theater audiences.

This was no time for "comedy," nor for mere artistic experiment with symbolism and expressionism, nor for detached Freudian speculation about the individual and his neuroses, nor for querulous attacks on Mr. America and Main Street. O'Neill alone remained aloof until after he retired in 1934. The leading comedians -- Barry, Behrman, and Sherwood -- turned serious, and the serious playwrights, such as Rice and Anderson, took to preaching, much to the detriment of sound playwriting. The reckless twenties became a dream, remembered at first with bitterness for their irresponsibility, and only recently with an affectionate nostalgia as the last carefree age that America is likely to know for a long time. The American ideal of material success through free enterprise seemed now discredited and a new ideal of social responsibility was increasingly discussed on the stage in the New Deal days. The three leading figures in the second generation -- Sidney Kingsley, Clifford Odets, and Lillian Hellman -- were all fired by a new social consciousness, and brought to light the poverty of the underprivileged and the growing social unrest in the United States through the era of the depression.¹⁶

¹⁵Robert Warnock, Representative Modern Plays, p. 10.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 13.

1. EUGENE O'NEILL

At home and abroad, Eugene O'Neill is America's greatest dramatist. His plays have been translated into most of the important European languages, and have been given almost continual performances in the theatres of the world. No other American has matched him in the scope of his subjects or in the power and depth of his probing into the tortuous inner secrets of man.¹⁷

Of the dramatists America produced after World War I, Eugene O'Neill was the most successful; probably the greatest factor influencing this success was O'Neill's own life experiences, in and out of the theater.

Life. Born in New York City in 1886, the son of a gifted actor, Eugene traveled for the first seven years of his life with his father's financially successful road company production of The Count of Monte Christo. Then he attended various boarding schools, graduating in 1906 from Betts Academy, whereupon he began a brief session at Princeton -- being suspended after one year for tossing a beer bottle through the window of the president, then Woodrow Wilson's, campus home. O'Neill did not return to college, choosing, instead, for his education the hard school of experience, which included being secretary to a

¹⁷Harlan Hatcher, Modern Dramas, p. 267.

mail-order jewelry firm, gold-hunting in the Honduras where he contracted malaria, and being assistant manager of the road company starring his father and Violet Allen in The White Sister. The romance of "beyond the horizon" soon called O'Neill to Buenos Aires, where he was unsuccessful in the business world and so retired to the waterfront, working occasionally, but primarily observing the raw, unrefined life of the waterfront characters, and drinking in their fantastic yarns -- enough material to have supplied Jack London for life, according to Hatcher.¹⁸

After one voyage to Durban, Africa, as a mule-tender on a steamer, O'Neill was returned destitute to Argentina and a life of beachcombing; but in 1911, via tramp steamer, he finally made it back to New York City, at the age of twenty-three. A penniless existence in the waterfront dive of Jimmy the Priest, a berth on the New York, and then association with another road company, this time as an actor, ensued.

Now O'Neill needed training in putting his many interesting experiences into words, and this was provided by Frederick P. Latimer of the New London Telegraph, who

¹⁸Ibid., p. 268.

gave him a job as a reporter, and encouraged him to write.

But the terrific beating O'Neill had given his constitution in his vagabond, drinking, carousing years now claimed its price. He developed a soft spot in his lung, and had to go to Gaylord Farm Sanitarium at Wallingford, Connecticut.¹⁹

His stay at the sanitarium gave him time, at the age of twenty-five, to stop and ponder what his fast and furious life was all about; he had done enough writing with the newspaper to be very interested in the art, and his purpose toward creative writing was formed. He had to spend another quiet year after leaving the sanitarium, reading the great literature of the past -- especially enjoying the Greek and English dramatists, as well as Ibsen and Strindberg. He practiced writing one-act plays, long plays, and verses.

Needing technical knowledge in creative writing, he enrolled in the Harvard 47 Workshop of Dr. Baker in 1914. Classroom routine, however, could not hold this experienced, restive young man, who walked out of the class.

Fortunately for O'Neill, at this moment there was a movement beginning among play-conscious intellectuals, among them Susan Glaspell, Mary Heaton Vorse, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Harry Kemp, and Hutchins Hapgood, to form little

¹⁹Loc. cit.

guilds of players, writers, and producers for the expression of new trends in American drama, a revolution against the staid English models, and an acceptance of the European techniques which led to the formation of the experimental theaters. O'Neill joined the Provincetown players in 1916.

Following his year at Harvard, he had lived in Greenwich Village where he had learned to criticize the scheme of things, where he had made acquaintance with the radical laborites, the Negroes, the Italians, and had added to his collection of characters to be used later in plays.²⁰

Works. The Provincetown produced two of O'Neill's plays in the summer of 1916, giving O'Neill a small acting part in each: "Bound East for Cardiff" and "Thirst" -- both of which produced a profound and startling effect on the audience. The group moved to the Village, opening the Playwright's Theatre at 139 Mac Dougal Street with "Bound East for Cardiff." More of O'Neill's short plays followed: "Fog," "Before Breakfast," "The Sniper," "The Long Voyage Home," "Ile," and "The Rope"; in 1918 appeared "Where the Cross is Made," and "Moon of the Caribees"; in 1919, "The Dreamy Kid," followed by "Exorcism" in 1920.

²⁰Ibid., p. 268.

The Provincetown players were a group which knew much better what it did not want than what it did want; the members wanted to do in the theatre that which was not ordinarily done. Their chief requirement of a play was that it be different: realistic, presenting life as it really is, however unpleasant, and a social protest, exposing the injustices, hyprocrisies, and cruelties of society. O'Neill's sea plays fitted this pattern adequately. The first of his full length plays, Beyond the Horizon (1920), is even more clearly realistic, showing the grim life of the farmer, and ending on a note of frustration. Anna Christie, his next work, is also realistic. The Emperor Jones and, later, All God's Chillun Got Wings could be considered O'Neill's contribution to the Negro problem, and The Hairy Ape, a work of revolutionary propaganda in the new form of expressionism.²¹

Some playwrights have limited their work to a very narrow area, employing a perfected formula in play after play; i. e., Philip Barry and S. N. Behrman. O'Neill, on the other hand, seems desperately trying to avoid any repetition of himself. His plays represent every modern dramatic

²¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, Introduction, p. xv.

type -- from the naturalistic tragedy of Desire Under the Elms, the symbolism of The Great God Brown, and the psychological case history in Strange Interlude, to folk comedy in Ah Wilderness! Most of the contemporary styles, realism, naturalism, expressionism, romanticism, may be found among his works, as well as unique technical devices -- the masks in The Great God Brown, the asides and soliloquies in Strange Interlude, the trilogy form of Mourning Becomes Electra, and the Alter Ego character in Days Without End.

Criticism. Although exceedingly different in type, style, and technique, there is a certain affinity among the plays of O'Neill: the enveloping mood of the play, and the undercurrent of moral idea that obsesses them. In what Warnock terms "the most ambitious and provocative study of O'Neill's work that has yet appeared, "R. D. Skinner traces "a poet's quest for resolution of the moral conflicts of modern man in a world dedicated to materialism."²² Warnock cautions, however,

This full-length critical analysis undoubtedly ascribes a more consistent design to O'Neill's plays than he himself was aware of, but it does not

²² Warnock, op. cit., p. 279.

falsify the facts in arguing for an underlying pattern of ideas that might reveal a cycle of question and answer in the mind, or the conscience, of the artist himself.²³

Warnock then presents his own opinion on the subject of O'Neill:

Being both an Irishman and a Catholic by background, he possesses that curious combination of mysticism and almost Calvinist conscience that has haunted so much of modern Irish literature. Despite the testimony of Days Without End, O'Neill has never returned to the faith of his fathers, but he has been temporarily unable to accept the godless materialism of our century, which dwarfs the dignity of man and tries to dispel the mystery of the universe. For O'Neill, the revolution wrought by physical science and psychoanalysis has not destroyed the realities of older periods of man's spiritual life, but given him an understanding of their meaning. To the interpretation of these spiritual realities, he has brought not simply the soul-baring realism of Strindberg and Freud, but also the cumulated tradition of centuries of inquiry.²⁴

Arthur Hobson Quinn presents an interesting analysis of O'Neill, the man:

One group of our playwrights may go on painting amusing pictures which the comic supplement throws upon the screen of American life. That our audience should crowd the theaters where such plays are produced is easily understood. But it is encouraging to see that when an artist like Eugene O'Neill resolutely sets his face against the picturing of the merely little things of life, he

²³Loc. cit.

²⁴Ibid., p. 281.

should have won the wide recognition he already enjoys. He paints little souls and big souls, but he never consciously gives us the unimportant or the mean. We may not like all of his characters -- we may even shudder at them -- like the Emperor Jones, himself, but O'Neill found in that thief and murderer a spark that distinguished him from all the natives of that imaginary island. We agree with the epitaph of Smithers: "E's a better man than the lot of you put together."

O'Neill found that spark, of course, because he put it there. Even in the most degraded man, O'Neill recognizes the saving grace that comes from his divine origin. Nearly a century ago, Emerson called this universal brotherhood in us the creation of the Oversoul, the Life Force that animates everything, and founded on this conception his gospel of hope. O'Neill has dared to go further into the depths than Emerson or Hawthorne, for the Puritan had reactions of conservatism from which the Celt is free. But it is a pitiful stupidity of criticism that sees only the repellant in All God's Chillun Got Wings or Desire Under the Elms. I confess frankly that on reading the first I could see little beauty in it, but in the theatre I recognized again the vision of the poet who saw more deeply than I. I felt, too, my academic objections to soliloquy on the stage go by the board, when I recognized that to these characters, soliloquy was natural. But I have become accustomed to seeing theatrical rules broken with success by O'Neill because he practically never breaks dramatic laws. It is a great thing for art when academic definitions are shattered by creative genius, and it is to be hoped he will go on shattering them. For he has become the concrete expression of the greatest principle in art, that of freedom, freedom to choose one's subject anywhere, to treat it in any manner, provided always that the characters are great figures and the treatment is sincere.

It is fortunately too soon to pass any final judgment upon Eugene O'Neill, but it is high time to arrive at some perspective concerning him. For he is, I think, passing through a phase of his development. His material has always been romantic, whether it be chosen from the slums of New York or Xanadu in the thirteenth century. But he began with a treatment which is essentially realistic in

Beyond the Horizon and proved that there is no antithesis between romantic material and realistic treatment, but that the latter corrects and adjusts the imaginative processes of the first. With The Hairy Ape he passed into a stage of symbolic treatment which may have reached its height in The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed. The danger here lies in the fact that romance and symbolism mix too easily, and the result may become confusion. But no matter what new phase in his development may come, there will be apparent still the poet, brooding and creating, and the mystic, letting speak through him the Creative Force that lifts humanity from the beast that passes to the man who eternally aspires.²⁵

Joseph Wood Krutch, in his introduction to a collection of nine plays of O'Neill's, praises O'Neill's perceptions:

True tragedy may be defined as a dramatic work in which the outward failure of the principal personage is compensated for by the dignity and greatness of his character. But if this definition be accepted, then it must be recognized that the art of tragic writing was lost for many generations. Neither the frigid rhetorical exercises of the Victorians nor the sociological treatises of Ibsen and his followers are tragic in the true sense. The former lack the power to seem real enough to stir us deeply; the latter are too thoroughly pervaded by a sense of human littleness to be other than melancholy and dispiriting. O'Neill is almost alone among modern dramatic writers in possessing what appears to be an instinctive perception of what a modern tragedy would have to be.

Unlike the plays of "literary" playwrights, his dramas have nothing archaic about them. They are, on the contrary, almost cynically modern in their acceptance of a rationalistic view of man and the universe. Yet he has treated his characters

²⁵ Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day, pp. 205-6.

upon so large a scale that their downfall is made once more to seem not merely pathetic, but terrible.²⁶

John Gassner, in his book entitled Masters of the Drama, admits readily that O'Neill is one of the most imperfect of the theatre's great men, but believes it folly to ignore the greatness because of the imperfection:

The nature of this greatness cannot, however, be summarized coldly. It is a matter of his generally somber and sardonic tone, of his demoniac possession and writhings, and of reality honestly caught, intensely hated, and passionately defied by him. His realism has indeed neglected reality as a phenomenon that might be clarified or ameliorated by social analysis and action . . . Moreover, the common reality of society has a way of remaining under his feet even when he is ascending from private infernos toward the Empyrean and the Primum Mobile. Even in his metaphysical flight, O'Neill has caught the reality of common people living on sea or land; he has presented humanity struggling against inherited or acquired limitations and facing racial prejudice, poverty, the hardness of a stony soil, the frustrations of puritanism, and the effects of a materialistic world which thwarts or perverts the spirit.²⁷

O'Neill was engaged in a cycle of plays representing a long and impressive period of American life, before his death in April, 1954. None of the plays was to be published or produced until all were finished. Two other plays, as yet unrevealed, had been completed outside the cycle. Whether he had moved into new thought and new technique or

²⁶Joseph Wood Krutch, introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, xxi - xxii.

²⁷John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 641.

had remained in the great tradition of his earlier work is yet to be seen. Regardless of whether these works succeed, he stands unchallenged as the topmost dramatist of our theater.

Summary. Tragedy in the modern American theater seems to be, for the most part, in the hands of Eugene O'Neill. Sensing perceptively what the modern tragedy should be, O'Neill, the most unliterary of the modern playwrights, has created some powerful and moving plays in the tragic mood; excellent theater vehicles, these tragedies of O'Neill's have gained for him the most popular acceptance as America's leading playwright. His recent death leaves many questions about his work unanswered, and the posthumous publication of his last plays should afford enlightenment.

2. MAXWELL ANDERSON

Life. Two years after the birth of Eugene O'Neill in New York City, Maxwell Anderson was born, December 15, 1888, in Atlantic, Pennsylvania. Since his father, the Reverend William Lincoln Anderson, was appointed to various churches in the Middle West during Anderson's youth, Maxwell was educated primarily in North Dakota. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1911 from the University of North Dakota, and taught school in Dakota and California before going to Stanford University where he received his Master of Arts degree in 1941. While at Stanford, Anderson

worked as an instructor of English.

Turning to the journalistic field, Maxwell Anderson joined the reportorial staffs of the Grand Forks (North Dakota) Herald, the San Francisco Chronicle and Bulletin, where he remained until 1918. As an editorial writer, he was employed by the New York Evening Globe, the Morning World, and the New Republic until 1928, when he left the newspaper world for a literary life.

He first established his reputation in the world of letters as a poet, becoming famous enough to be invited to join with Padraic Colum, Genevieve Taggard, and others in the founding of a poetry magazine, Measure, in 1920.

In 1911, Maxwell Anderson married Margaret Haskett, who died in 1931, leaving three sons. In 1933, he married Gertrude Maynard,²⁸ by whom he has one daughter. The Andersons live in New York in the winter, and on their farm thirty miles from the city in the summer. Mr. Anderson is a heavily built man, although he is not a sportsman, preferring to walk and drive around his estate, and collect old American songs for hobbies. He is a hard, industrious worker, however, and has little time for recreation.

²⁸ Gertrude Maynard's name appears in the original cast of Night over Taos, produced in 1932, the year before their marriage. She played the part of Conchita. (See Appendix).

He is a member of the Playwrights' Group, along with Elmer Rice, Robert Sherwood, S. N. Behrman, and the late Sidney Howard, where the plays of its younger members are selected and produced.

Works.

Because Mr. Anderson's first great success was his collaboration with Laurence Stallings in What Price Glory?, it is usually thought that he, like Stallings, served in the first World War. The first-hand experience, however, from which that play was drawn was entirely contributed by its other author.²⁹

Maxwell Anderson next wrote two more plays in collaboration with Mr. Stallings, but neither was successful. Outside Looking In, his next endeavor, was an adaptation of Jim Tully's Beggars of Life. From this time on, with the exception of Gods of the Lightning, whose details of the Sacco Vanzetti case were supplied by Anderson's close friend, Harold Hickerson, in 1928, Anderson worked alone. In 1927, he produced Saturday's Children; in 1930, Elizabeth the Queen; and in 1932, Night over Taos. The play in 1933, Both Your Houses, won for Anderson the Pulitzer Prize in Drama.

²⁹ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 23.

The next thirteen years were equally productive for Mr. Anderson, some of his more distinguished plays being Mary of Scotland in 1933; Knickerbocker Holiday in 1938; and The Eve of St. Mark in 1942. He received the Drama Critics Award twice, with Winterset in 1936, and with High Tor in 1937.

Criticism. During the early part of his career as a playwright, Anderson wrote and said little about the art and craft of writing plays, but some of his prefaces to his plays, his addresses, and a few articles he has written concerning this subject have been collected and bound together into a slender volume entitled The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers, 1939, which has already been utilized in this thesis as a source for quotation.

Anderson's pronouncements on theater and drama are clearly the outgrowth of his basic philosophy (foreshadowed in his volume of published verse, You Who Have Dreams, 1925) and of his concern as craftsman and artist in shaping his plays for production in the contemporary theater.³⁰

Since The White Desert in 1923, Anderson has never stopped writing, and in the 1936-37 season, he had the satisfaction

³⁰Clark, op. cit., p. 544.

of seeing three of his most serious plays launched simultaneously.

The undercurrent of serious themes, even in his musical comedies indicates that Anderson is essentially a very earnest writer, with high objectives in the realm of art, as well as in the realms of social criticism and political reform.

Although he has been uniquely successful in reviving the romantic verse play on our stage, no single work of Anderson's can suggest the scope of his writing. He is second only to O'Neill among modern American playwrights, though his fame is confined largely to the United States.³¹

Anderson has been both praised and crucified by the critics, usually concerning his employment of the blank verse poetic style for modern stage productions: some enjoy and understand this device; others pass it off as archaic and unnatural.

To the increasing regret of his admirers, he has apparently become wedded to the idea of writing his plays in verse -- and frequently in blank verse, which with its archaic air makes realism in a contemporary play seem absurd, and fails to redeem even non-contemporary plays -- as witness the flat failure of Journey to Jerusalem in 1940. Without going so far as to agree with Edmund Wilson that Anderson is "at his worst in verse," since he is in

³¹Warnock, op. cit., p. 434.

the non-dramatic field an authentic poet, it is true that his later plays would have been stronger had they been written in forthright prose. They have sometimes read better than they acted, never a compliment to a play written to be performed on the stage; and they have sometimes been strained and dull. Nevertheless, in all of them there have been passages of great beauty.³²

Robert Warnock compliments Anderson on his output and his diversity:

In the sheer quantity of his output and the diversity of his achievements, no American playwright excels Maxwell Anderson.³³

In A History of the Theatre, George Freedley and John A. Reeves praise Anderson's poetry:

Anderson has always been a dramatist who requires reading for complete comprehension. His poetry is the finest currently being written in the theatre.³⁴

Allardyce Nicoll, in World Drama, points out Anderson's "true vision":

As a whole, the plays of Maxwell Anderson may be considered disappointing, but they are disappointing in a grand way. No dramatic author of our age has higher or clearer concepts of what he wants the theatre to be; no other author has made more determined efforts to replace the figure of tragedy in the niche that for so long has been left empty. "I have found my religion in the theatre,"

³²Kunitz and Haycraft, op. cit., p. 24.

³³Warnock, loc. cit.

³⁴George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre, p. 606.

he has said recently, "where I least expected to find it, and where few will credit that it exists. But it is there, and any man among you who tries to write plays will find himself serving it, if only because he can succeed in no other way. He will discover, if he works through his apprenticeship, that the theatre is the central artistic symbol of good and evil within men". Anderson has the true vision. He recognizes that our present-day playhouse has sacrificed broader interests to the presentation of merely passing entertainment, and he is convinced that unless the quality that evoked an Oedipus Rex or a Hamlet can be restored to it the theatre will die of inanition or sink to becoming a thing of no consequence in our lives. Even those writers who have most at heart desire to introduce things vital and appealing have, as he sees it, failed to do more than bring to the stage the elements of journalism.³⁵

Lawson maintains that

Anderson's method is based on the belief that quality of character is of final value and must triumph over a possible environment. He takes no interest in social causation because he assumes that the environment can be changed whenever people wish to change it. Thus ideals (the same ideals which Ibsen found so reactionary and dangerous) become the basis of the drama. This is evident in Anderson's historical plays, which interpret history as a conflict of the passions and whims of exceptional people. The fate of nations is decided by persons who know no necessity beyond their own personal emotional needs. Since the emotions are timeless, man's relationships to the universe are substituted for his relationships to his environment; emotional rift is substituted for racial causation.³⁶

In "The Tragic Blueprint," John Mason Brown is also concerned

³⁵Nicoll, op. cit., p. 865.

³⁶John Howard Lawson, quoted by Barrett Clark, op. cit., p. 146.

with Maxwell Anderson's great concepts of tragedy:

No contemporary understands the exaltation of the tragic pattern better than Maxwell Anderson. No one has written about it with more fervor or eloquence. Mr. Anderson is well aware that if we save our necks by losing our souls, we might better be six feet under. As a dramatist whose understanding of the tragic is profound, however disappointing his tragedies might be, he knows the mere act of being alive does not mean any one of us is living. He is as conscious as we all are that the number of unburied living who clutter up the earth's surface is legion. He is no less aware that the spiritual and intellectual zombies to be met with daily are countless. As a dramatist, at least aiming at the tragic, he is not interested in these zombies except as they redeem themselves. As such a dramatist, he knows it is only by losing our necks that we can save our souls.

. . . Much as one may regret that the fly of this emotion has not been embalmed in the amber of great language, one is also forced to realize that when Mr. Anderson follows the tragic pattern, he is too well aware of its theory for his own creative good. He writes of ecstasy by rote rather than by inspiration. And the pattern shrinks whenever it is memorized, not felt and rediscovered by the spiritual needs of each dramatist who feels the great need of employing it.³⁷

In conclusion Warnock states,

From 1924 -- he has been known to the public almost exclusively through his long series of vigorous plays, not consistently skillful or successful, but always high-minded and filled with energy and aspiration. At his worst, Anderson can be pretentious and pompously rhetorical, but even his mistakes have been committed in a worthy cause.³⁸

³⁷Clark, op. cit., p. 557.

³⁸Warnock, loc. cit.

In Twentieth Century Authors, Kunitz and Haycraft make a similar statement:

Mr. Anderson has been a playwright markedly uneven in attainment, but one to be criticized only on a level of high seriousness. He has written nothing trivial, even in his one-act plays, "The Feast of Ortolans" and "Second Overture"; and the worst that can be said of him is that sometimes his reach has exceeded his grasp, as what writer's has not? At his best, he is among the half-dozen most considerable dramatists of our time.³⁹

Summary. It has been shown that there is much difference of opinion about the quality of Anderson's work, but general agreement as to the quality of Anderson's aims. The background of education and journalism qualifies Mr. Anderson to be considered one of the more intellectual of our dramatists, as opposed to Eugene O'Neill, whose education was received, for the most part, from the hard school of experience.

The third author, Lillian Hellman, the only woman included in this study, will be the subject of the following pages.

3. LILLIAN HELLMAN

Life. Much younger than the men dramatists included in this thesis, is Lillian Hellman, who was born

³⁹Kunitz and Haycraft, loc. cit.

June 20, 1905, in New Orleans. Little biographical data has been made available concerning Miss Hellman; so the writer will refer to the brief, terse statements which Miss Hellman has made at various times about herself, and which have been collected in the book of Twentieth Century Authors by Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft:

I was born in New Orleans. My mother's name was Julia Newhouse until she married my father, whose name was Max B. Hellman. They were both Southerners: my mother came from Alabama and my father from New Orleans. I moved to New York when I was five years old, returned to New Orleans for long visits each year, went to public schools in both places. I went to New York University, did not graduate. Immediately upon leaving college I worked for Horace Liveright, the publisher. I have been writing since I was a child. I wrote many short stories, had few accepted - understandably. In 1931 I wrote an unproduced play (Dear Queen) with Louis Kronenberger. In 1934 I wrote The Children's Hour, in 1936 Days to Come, in 1939 The Little Foxes, in 1940, Watch on the Rhine. I have adapted plays for pictures: The Dark Angel, These Three (screen version of The Children's Hour), Dead End.^{40,41}

Politically I am a liberal. I choose to think that means I believe more in the rights of the working man than I believe in any other rights. I like to read Henry James, Dreiser, Dostoevsky, Mark Twain, melodrama, poetry. I was married to Arthur Kober; we were divorced in 1932. I live at Hardscrabble Farm, Pleasantville, New York.⁴²

⁴⁰Kunitz and Haycraft, op. cit., p. 634.

⁴¹Works to be included within Life paragraph because of the direct quotation from Miss Hellman.

⁴²Kunitz and Haycraft, loc. cit.

The editors of Twentieth Century Authors go on to describe Miss Hellman's personal appearance: medium height, slim, reddish-blond hair, dark eyebrows and eyes. It is explained that she left New York University at the end of her third year, without taking a degree, and that she returned briefly to college work when she enrolled in Columbia University for one semester's study of Dante.⁴³

She has worked as subscription manager and promotion agent for a stock company in Rochester, New York, and was employed for several years as a reader for a publishing house, during which time she "discovered" Vicki Baum's Grand Hotel.

Much criticism has come to her as a result of her trip to Europe in 1936-7, when she spent a great deal of time in Soviet Russia, and in Spain, where she was "under bombardment" by Franco's forces. She has suffered a great loss of reputation since her loyalty to the United States has been questioned in recent investigations.

"I am a writer," she has said; "I am also a Jew. I want to be quite sure that I can continue to be a writer,

⁴³Loc. cit.

and that if I want to say that greed is bad, or persecution is worse, I can do so without being branded by the malice of people who make a 'living by that malice."⁴⁴

Criticism. Allardyce Nicoll, in World Drama, considers Miss Hellman's best, most characteristic scenes those which appear in The Children's Hour and The Little Foxes:

It is the vicious soul that attracts her most; her understanding of human evil is acute, and she knows how to make it theatrically effective. Indeed, we might almost say that she has won her success by devising a formula for an up-to-date melodrama where the villain, instead of being a black-mustached squire or factory-owner, is revealed unexpectedly as a child possessed of inherent wickedness and where the dialogue is impeccably true to the tones of current speech.⁴⁵

Brooks Atkinson, in the introduction to Sixteen Famous American Plays, is most complimentary:

As a craftsman, Miss Hellman is the chief representative of the well-made play. She has a clear, organized mind; she can plan a plot that yields excitement, and her literary style is dramatic.⁴⁶

Allan Halline, professor of American literature at Bucknell University, is not:

⁴⁴Loc. cit.

⁴⁵Nicoll, op. cit., p. 830.

⁴⁶Brooks Atkinson, introduction to Sixteen Famous American Plays, edited by Bennett Cerf and Van Cartmell.

If the foregoing (Kaufman and Hart) are the elder playwrights, Lillian Hellman belongs to the group which came into prominence during the thirties. She has been a painstaking, somewhat non-imaginative, but nonetheless gripping writer; her mordant dramas have struck a responsive chord in contemporary audiences. Not strictly comedies or tragedies, her plays are serious dramas with sinister overtones; their significance lies in their frank portrayal of situations and people as Miss Hellman finds them -- which is usually unpleasant. In all her plays, except the war plays and the last adaptation, the main purpose seems to be to exhibit the characters in all their rancor, selfishness, cruelty, and perversity, with little or no redemption from the forces of darkness. In one of her war plays, however, the miasma is offset by a faith that one side is in the right and will win. Miss Hellman is a scrupulous writer, arouses compressed emotion, and asks sharp questions; but her constricted imagination may anchor her to her period.⁴⁷

In an editor's note prefacing Hellman's Watch on the Rhine, in the second series of Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, John Gassner reveals yet another aspect of Miss Hellman:

Miss Hellman works slowly and conscientiously on her plays, and is bent upon squeezing the last ounce of iron out of her matter. She has a quick mind and a strong spirit, minces no words, and spares no sensibilities. She is also a stern moralist even her severest critics will grant that she drives ahead with unusual power, and that like the Canadian Mounties she always gets her man -- or woman.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Allan G. Halline, Six Modern American Plays, xx.

⁴⁸John Gassner, Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, p. 642.

Summary. Miss Hellman has risen to the position of "Number One Woman Playwright" in the American theatre on the crest of the social reform which followed the Great Depression. She is criticized for writing "well-made" plays, and for portraying the evil in humanity; one must admit, however, that certain of her plays have power, and have given her considerable success on Broadway, as well as substantial box-office receipts. From her background of work in the theatre, Miss Hellman has the ability to make her plays theatrically effective; and from her acute knowledge of human nature, she has created characters hard to forget. Although her tragedies border on the melodramatic, they will be considered, for the purpose of this thesis, under the appellation of "tragedies."

CHAPTER II

THREE TRAGEDIES OF EUGENE O'NEILL: THE GREAT GOD BROWN, STRANGE INTERLUDE, AND DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

Although O'Neill has had only one new play produced on Broadway in the last fifteen years (The Iceman Cometh), he has not been superceded as America's foremost playwright.¹ Observing the suffering, brutality, dissipation, and sorrow of actual life in the forecastles of ships, and the back rooms of Jimmy the Priest's, O'Neill was able to translate what he saw into a new, bold, imaginative drama. Under the influence of Strindberg, the synthetic and primitive schools of stage production, and the Greek dramatists, as well as Freud and the psychoanalysts, O'Neill has created some of the most sensitive, powerful, and expressionistic tragedies of the present period.

Eugene O'Neill's career is of especial significance, both because of the abundant vigor and poetic richness of his earlier dramas, and because of the confusion which devitalizes his later work. In a sense, O'Neill's case is not typical, because his preoccupation with the subconscious and with the destiny of the soul seems to be of a special kind and intensity. But this also accounts for the

¹Allan G. Halline, Introduction to Six Modern American Plays, p. viii.

importance of his work: he reveals the ideas which affect the modern theatre in their most intense form.²

In the following chapter, three representative tragedies of O'Neill's will be examined, according to their literary structure: characterization, mood, theme, and conflict; both favorable and unfavorable critical comments on each of these plays will be considered, and an attempt made to summarize the materials thus presented.

The first play to be considered is The Great God Brown, a searching character study developed in an unusual manner: by the employment of masks as expressions of shifts in character.³

²John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting, p. 129.

³Production Note: On January 23, 1926, in the Greenwich Village Theatre, The Great God Brown was produced. Symbolism is the dominant characteristic of this play, in which the author uses masks to mark the person as he appeared to others and which he doffed to reveal his real being. It is a passionate cry of the artist in the modern world of commerce. Its mysteriousness, its use of masks did not deter the public and the play with William Harrigan, Anne Shoemaker and Robert Keith attracted a wide public and accustomed its audiences to a higher conception of theatre than they normally held. (George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre, p. 601)

A. THE GREAT GOD BROWN

The Great God Brown is one of the subtlest of all of O'Neill's plays, although it expresses more fully than any other the poet's sense of the rhythm and harmony and multiplicity of life. The language invokes shades of half-realized meanings that are difficult to shape into phrases and sentences, but "on the whole, the style is better fitted to the subject than in any other of the later plays except Strange Interlude." Barrett H. Clark continues,

Yet it is not as perfect technically as Desire Under the Elms, or even The Hairy Ape; it aims too high, it puts a burden upon the director and the actor that neither has successfully borne. To produce a play of this sort, we must have simplicity of mind and an extreme plasticity of emotion, in order that the purely theatrical qualities of the show, as a show, stand out above every shade of individual interpretation on the part of actor or director.⁴

Characterization. Instead of employing separate actors to personify aspects of a personality as did Alice Gerstenberg in her one-act play, "Overtones," O'Neill has employed masks which the characters don or remove as their personalities change, or they wish to present their various selves to the other characters; this may be called expressionism.

⁴Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, The Man and His Plays, p. 164.

When speculation was rife as to the meaning of this interesting but complicated play, O'Neill wrote as follows:

I realize that when a playwright takes to explaining he thereby automatically places himself "in the dock." But where an open avowal by the play itself of the abstract theme underlying it is made impossible by the very nature of that hidden theme, then perhaps it is justifiable for the author to confess the mystical pattern which manifests itself as an overtone of The Great God Brown, dimly behind and beyond the words and actions of the characters.

I had hoped the names chosen for my people would give a strong hint of this. (An old scheme, admitted -- Shakespeare and a multitude since.) Dion Anthony -- Dionysius and St. Anthony -- the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony -- the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion -- creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself. (In the play it is Cybele, the pagan Earth Mother, who makes the assertion with authority: "Our Father, who Art!" to the dying Brown, as it is she who tries to inspire Dion Anthony with her certainty in life for its own sake.)

Margaret is my image of the modern direct descendant of the Marguerite of Faust -- the eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race.

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

Brown is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth -- a Success -- building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, and uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main-current of life desire.

Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the supersensitive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath but it also sneers at and condemns the Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles. It is as Mephistopheles he falls stricken at Brown's feet after having condemned Brown to destruction by willing him the mask, but, after the mask falls off as he dies, it is the Saint who kisses Brown's feet in abject contrition and pleads as a little boy to a big brother to tell him a prayer.

Brown has always envied the creative life force in Dion -- what he himself lacks. When he steals the mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively while in reality he is only stealing that creative power made self destructive by complete frustration. This devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him. It enters him, rending him apart, torturing him and transfiguring him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his Success, William A. Brown, before the world. Thus, wearing Dion's mask towards Margaret and the children, he is really not himself to anyone. And thus he partakes of Dion's anguish -- more poignantly, for Dion had the Mother, Cybele -- and in the end, out of his anguish, his soul is born, a tortured Christian soul such as the dying Dion's, begging for belief, and at last finding it on the lips of Cybele.

And now for an explanation regarding this explanation. It was far from my idea in writing Brown that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proportion the living drama of the recognizable human beings, Dion, Brown, Margaret, and Cybel. I meant it always to be mystically within and behind them, giving them a significance beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend. And that is as clearly as I wish an audience to comprehend it. It is Mystery -- the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event -- or accident --

(--) in any life on earth. And it is this mystery I want to realize in the theatre. The solution will probably have to be produced in a test tube and turn out to be discouragingly undramatic.⁵

The structure of this play follows that of the Greek tragedy, having a prologue, four acts, and an epilogue. Characterization is accomplished by using masks, as has already been explained in the quotation from O'Neill. In the surface story, Brown is a smug, complacent, successful business man, lucky in all his undertakings except love; for he loved and lost Margaret to a Bohemian-type friend, Dion Anthony, who is fascinating to his feminine associates although financially a failure. Dion and Margaret marry, have two sons, but Dion cannot support his family, so Margaret asks Brown to give Dion a job in his business. Dion's creative ability is just the additional touch needed for Brown's architectural designs, but Dion fades away in the light of Brown's success, and dies at Brown's feet; Brown decides to masquerade as Dion in order to be close to Margaret, but this life of deceit costs him his life, and he dies in the arms of his (Brown's) mistress, finding his soul in the death pangs. The characters are definitely

⁵Donald Clive Stuart, The Development of Dramatic Art, p. 645.

overshaded by their symbolism, and sometimes do incredible things. Certainly O'Neill did not intend for these characters to be taken as simple individuals, and the struggle between the genius (Dion) and success (Brown) is symbolically the eternal story of aspiration and frustration.

Mood. Of all the plays to be considered in this thesis, the mood of The Great God Brown is the most difficult to describe, because it is, in the opinion of this writer, the most subtle. It centers around O'Neill's theory that the true nature of man, however unpleasant, must be faced with realism to precede any final security. "Like Socrates, he must know before he can find contentment and rest. Like Dante, he must go through the inferno of horror and disillusionment to reach the truth and the eventual peace of spirit."⁶

In the very first scene, when the elder Browns and Anthonys attend the sons' graduation dance, the frustrations of the central figures are begun, as the parents plan futures for the boys without regard for the boys' own wishes. From this moment on, the boys are caught in a whirlpool of adherence to convention, necessitating the

⁶Robert Warnock, Representative Modern Plays, p. 279.

use of masks with which to face the world, while their own true selves are being stifled and degenerated from lack of scope. This regression hangs ominously and broodingly over the entire play, giving the external love scenes a lack of reality, both to the participants and to the audience.

The extension of the symbolism and the use of the masks into the play develops a mood of mockery and defiance for Dion's scenes, of maternal but misguided love in Margaret's, and of complete frustration in Brown's. There is pathos in the scenes between Dion and Cybel, and a touch of irony as Brown dies in Cybel's arms:

BROWN. I know! I have found him! I hear Him speak! "Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh!" Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears and out of Earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God. (He dies.)

CYBEL: (gets up and fixes his body on the couch. She bends down and kisses him gently -- she straightens up and looks into space -- with a profound pain) Always Spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always forever again! -- Spring again! life again! Summer and fall and death and peace again! (with agonized sorrow) -- but always, always love and conception and birth and pain again -- spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! -- (then, with agonized exultance) bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again! (She stands like an idol of the Earth, her eyes staring out over the world.) 7

⁷Eugene O'Neill, The Great God Brown, Act IV, scene ii, reprinted in Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. 374.

In summary, the mood of The Great God Brown could best be expressed in just two words: aspiration and frustration.

Theme. The central theme is suggested by the half-despairing, half-exultant cry of its hero, "I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sung and wept" -- the effort to transform into some peace-giving beauty the crude and obvious fact that life is vivid and restless and exciting and terrible.⁸ In a conversation with Joseph Wood Krutch, Eugene O'Neill stated, "Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God."⁹

In a letter quoted in the Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, O'Neill writes,

The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it -- the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer.¹⁰

⁸Joseph Wood Krutch, introduction to Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. xvii.

⁹Loc. cit.

¹⁰Loc. cit.

Conflict. The conflict has already been shown to be that between genius and success, between aspiration and frustration, as depicted by the characters of Dion Anthony, the genius, and William Brown, the success. On an expressionistic level, the conflict lies between introversion and extroversion; between man's primitive instincts and his civilized mores; between what man desires to be and what he actually is; between maternal love and sensual love, and between the material and the spiritual, as well as between appearance and reality.

Criticisms. There are some interesting and varied comments available from modern critics concerning O'Neill's unique play, The Great God Brown.

John Lawson calls it O'Neill's most interesting play, as far as the conscious will theory which he developed concerning O'Neill's philosophy is involved.

The most interesting of these, as far as the conscious will is concerned, is The Great God Brown. In the other two plays Strange Interlude and Days Without End, the asides and the split personality are merely ways of showing what characters think and want -- which are aspects of the conscious will. In The Great God Brown, O'Neill has set himself seriously to the task of building a play in which the conscious will play no part at all. The play deserves careful study because it is the only instance in dramatic history of a sustained attempt along these lines by a competent craftsman. O'Neill's statement of his purpose reminds us of Maeterlinck's desire to present the "intangible and unceasing striving of the soul toward its own beauty and truth." O'Neill says

he wishes to show the "background pattern of conflicting tides in the Soul of man." This pattern is "mystically within and behind" the characters. "It is Mystery -- the mystery any one man or woman can feel but not understand as the meaning of any event -- or accident -- in any life on earth."

Feeling is accepted as the fundamental principle of drama. The "conflicting tides" have nothing to do with either conscious purpose or logic. Environment is discarded as a factor, because the mystery applies to "any event -- or accident -- in any life on earth." Evidently the use of masks is intended by the author to show us what is "mystically within and behind" the characters. But this brings us to the first difficulty: the masks do not, and can not, show us anything of the sort. When a character's mask is off, we see his real self, the conscious desires which he is concealing from the other persons -- but we cannot see anything else, because neither the characters nor the audience can attain consciousness of anything else. O'Neill seems to realize this difficulty, and he is determined to overcome it. He chooses the only means by which it might conceivably be overcome; and he goes beyond dual personality and shows us "the background pattern of conflicting tides" is not individual, but really universal. In a word, the soul has only a partial individuality; it follows that the masks, and the personalities behind the masks, are to some extent interchangeable.¹¹

It is this interchangeability, Mr. Lawson explains, that results in confusion for the audience. In the play itself, Dion Anthony represents two characters: the pagan acceptance of life, and the "life-denying spirit of Christianity"; Brown, also, represents two characters: the successful businessman, and the failure in personal satisfaction. As the play continues, these four personalities are scrambled when

¹¹Lawson, Op. cit., p. 133.

Dion dies, and Brown confiscates his mask:

BROWN. Gradually Margaret will love what is beneath -- me! Little by little I'll teach her to know me, and then I'll finally reveal myself to her, and confess that I stole your place out of love for her. (Then he kisses the mask of Dion) I love you because she loves you! My kisses on your lips are for her."¹²

and so here Margaret becomes confused with the other four personalities.

Lawson continues:

The play proves that men without will and environment are not men. As far as the plot is concerned, or has any meaning at all, it is based on relationships that are factual and even obviously melodramatic. It takes no dual, or plural, personality to explain that Brown loves Dion's wife and wants to take Dion's place with her. There is no mystery in a situation in which a man is killed because he is mistaken for another man. There is no additional meaning, no "background pattern" which conforms to the author's intention; the disorganized expressions of purpose which slip from the characters almost in spite of themselves, are all that distinguish them from lumps of clay.

The Great God Brown has genuine poetic power; it represents O'Neill's confused philosophy with fervor and honesty. The play is undramatic because the philosophy is undramatic. The poetry, as such, has nothing to do with the characters. Like their personalities, the poetry is interchangeable. The play has beauty because, in spite of its confusion, it represents the author's consciousness and will. But it lacks clarity or dramatic truth, because the author's conscious will is concentrated on a refusal of reality.¹³

¹²O'Neill, The Great God Brown, Act III, scene 11, p. 360.

¹³Lawson, loc. cit.

Regarding the use of the masks, Lawson says:

The purpose of the masks in The Great God Brown is instantly understandable; we are all in the habit of hiding behind an imaginary mask on certain occasions, while at other times we speak frankly and unmask ourselves. We accept the masks the moment we see them; the difficulty lies in the author's own confusion in regard to the end served by the use of the masks; we become gradually more confused, because he tries to make them mean more than they do.¹⁴

Conversely, Donald Clive Stuart believes O'Neill's interpretation of the masks is valuable to the theater:

The Great God Brown is a drama which minutely analyzes personalities and at the same time attempts to carry, as an overtone, a mystical background of conflicting tides in the soul of Man. O'Neill's explanation of his methods and aims is an important document in the history of modern drama. It shows the possibilities and limitations as yet inherent in such forms of art.¹⁵

But Allardyce Nicoll takes a dim view of the mask device:

Then came The Great God Brown (1926), in which O'Neill tries another device -- the use of masks -- for the purpose of presenting what he obviously intended to be a great philosophic drama, but which can only confuse and perplex. His hero is Dion Anthony, a man within whose self, as the author explains, is combined the quality of Dionysius -- "the creative pagan acceptance of life" -- and of St. Anthony -- "the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity." For a heroine, he has Margaret, Faust's Marguerite, "the eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining

¹⁴Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁵Stuart, loc. cit.

the race." Brown is "the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth -- a Success -- building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the main current of life-desire." With these and other characters, each possessing masks and donning first one and then another, we get a drama, animated no doubt by the highest motives, that seeks to do in the theatre what the theatre by the very nature of its being cannot attain.¹⁶

Lack of coherence in The Great God Brown is also pointed out as a significant weakness by John Gassner, in his book, Masters of the Drama:

The same uncertainty but provocativeness of effect as in The Hairy Ape appeared when O'Neill began to schematize human personality in The Great God Brown. Many deep perceptions appear; it contains the finely realized inner torment of the artist, Dion Anthony, whose extreme sensitivity in a materialistic world makes a neurotic and drunkard of him. His mother-fixation is only one factor in his bedevilment; he is, as his name (Dionysius St. Anthony) implies, the artist who is torn between pagan sensuousness and the flesh-denying Christian conscience he imbibed in childhood. O'Neill describes him and others like him penetratively when he writes that Dion's torment is the result of "creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive..." There are also fine perceptions in his wife's character, and in his successful friend and employer Brown's uncreative complacency which keeps the latter safe only so long as he does not acknowledge Dion's imaginative anarchism or sensibility.

¹⁶Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama, p. 888.

Unfortunately, however, O'Neill simultaneously schematized his characters so crassly and endowed them with such complexity that the play is neither a clear character sketch nor a rounded portrait of real people. Juggling masks in a furor of melodramatic complications when Brown assumes Dion's personality, O'Neill also failed to develop a coherent story. He paid the penalty for trying to make a play perform the dual functions of an expressionist drama and a Dostoyevsky novel.¹⁷

In Allan G. Halline's introductory preface to an anthology, Six Modern American Plays, he rather oversimplifies the problem:

One of O'Neill's two most searching character studies is The Great God Brown (1926), the other being Strange Interlude. In this play, the approach is the idea that most persons change their characters according to the company they are in; the employment of masks in this play to mark the shift in basic character makes possible an unusually subtle analysis of both static and changing characters.¹⁸

Arthur Hobson Quinn, however, is guardedly complimentary:

In The Great God Brown, produced January 23, 1926, at the Greenwich Village Theatre, Mr. O'Neill represented symbolically the struggle between the creative artist and the modern world. The characters wore masks at times, which concealed their real natures, and the tragedy which overcomes Brown, the business man, when he inherits the mask of Dion Anthony, the artist, and is torn by the duality of his nature, made a profound impression.¹⁹

¹⁷John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 654.

¹⁸Halline, op. cit., p. xi.

¹⁹Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative American Plays, p. 934.

Summary. Although the plot, in its simplest form, of The Great God Brown is relatively simple and melodramatic, on the symbolic level of interpretation which O'Neill intended to convey to the audience, the complexities are so great that confusion results--not only for the audience, but for the actor and director as well; many of the critics have labeled it "impossible" for the modern American stage production.

The characterization, however, is second only to Strange Interlude, the next of O'Neill's plays to be considered, in its minute perceptiveness. The language employed by O'Neill is sadly lacking in heroic beauty, with few exceptions, and as has been mentioned, the poetry is interchangeable among the characters, as are the personalities.

The technical device of the masks, ancient in origin but certainly a bizarre and innovating technique on the modern stage when used to portray facets of one personality, has merited from the critics, for the most part, disapproval, because of the ensuing confusion within the play. The fact remains, however, that because of its experimental expressionistic devices, The Great God Brown is a play that must not be overlooked as a step in the development of the American tragedy.

Closely akin to The Great God Brown, as a character study, is the nine-act, impressive production entitled Strange Interlude, which will be examined in the following pages.

B. STRANGE INTERLUDE

Strange Interlude, written in 1928, is O'Neill's closest approach to the novel; it portrays the facets of the characters' subtle psychology through the device of the aside or stream of consciousness, in a manner that only the novel had heretofore attempted. These inner thoughts, viewing the conflict from various angles, make the plot of Strange Interlude complex and lengthy:

Once more a novel theatrical device is introduced into Strange Interlude, a drama made extraordinarily long by its somewhat tedious and fundamentally undramatic elaboration of the quite worthy convention of the "aside" into a pretentious artistic instrument.²⁰

While avoiding the grandeur of the Elizabethan and Greek tragic premises based on religion and philosophy, O'Neill has chosen, instead, the psychoanalytical framework of Freudianism; his purpose is to present a contemporary "world view," neither anachronistic nor poetic, but rational.

²⁰Nicoll, loc. cit.

Man, deprived of the importance which Religion conferred when it made him important to the universe as a whole, here raises himself by his own bootstraps, and by the very strength and articulateness of his passions asserts the dignity which a rationalistic psychology denies him.²¹

Characterization. Nina Leeds, the central feminine figure in this play, is one of the most complex characters in modern drama. Neurotic almost to the point of psychosis, Nina gradually deteriorates morally from a fine and beautiful young gentlewoman into a promiscuous, demented martyr who believes she must give herself to wounded veterans because she had denied herself to her hero-fiance, and he had been killed in the war. Her father, Professor Leeds, had indirectly caused this mental breakdown by insisting that the young couple wait until more settled times to be married; he was motivated by an unnatural love-possessiveness of his daughter, the single object of his affection after the death of his wife. When he is forced to confess this jealous scheming against Nina's marriage, he agrees that she should leave home, and try to find satisfaction by serving as a nurse in a nearby Veterans' Hospital.

²¹Krutch, op. cit., p. xix.

John Howard Lawson, in the Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting, uses the character of Nina as an example of a well-developed character, comparing her with Hedda Gabler:

Strange Interlude is the most important work of O'Neill's later period. Although there are mystic overtones in this play, the plot-structure is national and the characters are modern men and women whose problems grow out of definite conflict with a definite environment.

I have already suggested that Nina Leeds is a replica of Hedda Gabler. It may be objected that Nina is more unconventional, less inhibited, more modern than Ibsen's heroine. To be sure, there is a superficial difference, because the conduct in each case is conditioned by the conventions of the period. But in their attitude toward these conventions, the two women are remarkably similar. Both are free of moral scruples; but both are dominated by fear of conventional opinion, and are never guilty of defying conventions. Hedda sends a man to his death and burns his manuscript without a qualm of conscience; but she is terrified at the idea of a scandal. Nina has no conscience in pursuing her emotional needs; but she never has the courage to speak the truth. Both women have unusually dull husbands; both regard love as a right with which nothing can interfere; both have father complexes; both are driven by a neurotic craving for excitement; both have what O'Neill calls "a ruthless self-confidence"; both have a strong desire for comfort and luxury, which motivates their acceptance of conventionality; at the same time, both are super-idealists, hating everything which is "ludicrous and mean."

Hedda fights to find an outlet for her will. Unable to accomplish this within the restrictions of her environment, she dies, rather than submit. Nina never faces her problem in this definite form. Like Shaw's *Candida*, she is able to achieve a sufficient satisfactory adjustment within her environment. But *Candida* expressed her will through a free choice. Nina lives in an emotional trance; she never chooses or refuses; her "ruthless self-confidence" does not

involve any choice of conduct; it is her way of justifying her pursuit of emotional excitement, which leads to accepting every sensation which is offered. In Act II, Nina confesses "giving my cool clean body to men with hot hands and greedy eyes which they called love." Throughout the play, her actions involve no independent decisions; she lives for the moment, and follows any suggestion which makes a momentary impression.²²

Charles Marsden, the old family friend, faithful, reliable, and philosophical, is in love with Nina; but he suffers from an over-attachment to his mother, as well as a feeling of sexual inadequacy. Charlie becomes the final focus point for the distraught Nina after her life has been fruitlessly spent seeking sexual satisfaction; he is the father-image for the repentant woman-child, Nina. Among the other male characters in Strange Interlude is Doctor Ned Darrell, a calm, efficient, but manly neurologist who takes Nina in hand psychologically, but falls prey to her seductive powers and becomes father to her child. He becomes her lover after marrying her off to a rather insipid young intern, Sam Evans. Sam, the eternally youthful, shy, selfdebasement hero-worshipper, accepts Nina with humility and love, expecting nothing in return. Nina accepts Sam because she wishes to have a child, and it is ironic that after she has conceived, she discovers that insanity is a dominant factor in the seemingly robust Evans family, and

²²Lawson, op. cit., p. 135.

that she must not allow this child to be born. Sam's mother, Mrs. Evans, is a rather shadowy figure; revealing the disgraceful family secret to Nina, and describing the unhappiness and heartache which had preceded Sam's birth for her, she urges Nina to keep the secret from Sam, and have a child by some healthier man. This advice seems incredible, even for a Freudian; however, one has become so involved in the intricacies of Nina's mental gyrations at this point that one hardly questions the mother's inconsistencies; the advice is accepted as necessary for the further development of Nina's psychological dilemma. Sam, of course, suspects nothing wrong, and accepts the new baby with pride and happiness as his own.

Gordon, the son, grows up in the latter part of the play, falls in love with an intelligent young lady, and astutely analyzes his mother as the complex character she is; thus he escapes her clutches. Madeleine, however, the outsider, is the one who comes closest to actually understanding Nina:

GORDON. (still indignant) All I meant was that she must have fallen in love with Darrell long after she was married--then she sent him away for Dad's sake--and mine too, I suppose. He kept coming back every couple of years. He didn't have guts enough to stay away for good! Oh, I suppose I'm unfair. I suppose it was damned hard on him. He fought it down, too, on account of his friendship for Dad. (Then with a bitter laugh.) I suppose they'll be getting married now! And I'll have to wish them good luck. Dad would

want me to. He was game. (With a bitter, gloomy air)
Life is damn queer, that's all I've got to say!

MADELEINE. (thinking with a tender loving scorn for his boyish naivete) How little he knows her!... Mr. Evans was a fine man but...Darrell must have been fascinating once...if she loved anyone she isn't the kind who would hesitate..any more than I have with Gordon...Oh, I'll never be unfaithful to Gordon... I'll love him always!...²³

Dr. Darrell prevents Nina's hindering Gordon's romance, and becomes the object of her hatred. Only Marsden, good old Charlie, remains for Nina, and the father-child relationship with which the play began is reestablished.

All the causes, the sexual relationships and emotions, which O'Neill regards as basic are presented in this opening scene, and lead directly to the conclusion.²⁴

Mood. The mood of Strange Interlude is one of seeking and frustration; love and lust; winning and losing. The dominant tragic impression is brooding. The tempo is fast, and the scope and discursiveness are reminiscent of the novel; the time is extended over an entire period of twenty-three years: part one having five acts occurring within a period of two years, and part two, four acts encompassing

²³Eugene O'Neill, Strange Interlude, Act IX, op. cit., p. 668.

²⁴Lawson, op. cit., p. 237.

twenty-one years.²⁵

Marsden expresses O'Neill's conception of pure emotion as "dark intermingling currents that become the one stream of desire."²⁶ Nina says of her three men: "I feel their desires converge in me!...to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb."²⁷

This emphasis on pure emotion is a pragmatic application of the mysticism of The Great God Brown to the conduct of living people. This accounts for the plot structure of Strange Interlude. The action rests chiefly on a sense of foreboding, the threat of horrors which never materialize.²⁸

The asides are not a novel device except in the manner in which they are used by O'Neill, not to expose the inner secrets of a character, but to heighten the sense of foreboding, and foretell what is to happen, thereby taking the sharp edge off the tragic action; there are no clear-cut scenes--all have been lengthily drawn out and explained,

²⁵The time required to present this play is unusually lengthy: in the performance given by the Theatre Guild, January 30, 1928, enacted by Lynne Fontaine, Glen Anders, Earle Larimore, Tom Powers, and Helen Westley, the performance began at five-thirty in the afternoon, recessed at a quarter-to-eight so the actors and audience might eat, and resumed at nine o'clock for slightly more than two hours. However, it was admirably accepted by the critics, and maintained a performance record of 432, the longest of any produced by the Theatre Guild (at that time). Freedley and Reeves, op. cit., p. 602.

²⁶O'Neill, op. cit., Act VI, p. 615.

²⁷Ibid., p. 616.

²⁸Lawson, op. cit., p. 135.

sometimes needlessly, in the asides. Lawson believes that this delay technique is significant of the author's own reticence in coming to actual grips with reality.²⁹

In O'Neill's Working Notes and Extracts from a Fragmentary Work Diary, we find the author's own explanation of the length of the play:

Nov. 3, 1931. Interlude never got credit for this technical virtue--without which its successful production would not have been possible--that the first part rounded out a complete section of Nina's life with a definite beginning and end and yet contained the suspense at its end which called for Part Two--otherwise the dinner interval would have wrecked it--no other two-part play, as far as I know, has accomplished this synthesis of end and beginning.³⁰

There are many shades of mood within the play itself: it begins on a note of tragic nostalgia, with the old Professor Leeds sadly recalling his deceased wife, and announcing his own inadequacies in coping with his only daughter's present melancholia over the death of her fiancé. Charles Marsden, an old family friend, carries with him a mood of omniscience, of brooding obeisance to his aged mother, and of complete repression of his natural physical attraction toward Nina. Nina's scenes at the

²⁹Loc. cit.

³⁰Quoted by Clark, op. cit., p. 536.

beginning of the play are filled with pathos, frustration, and self-abasement. In Act II, immediately after the death of the professor, the mourning quality which we usually demand of such a situation is sadly lacking: instead, Nina's ironic resignation to her father's death overshadows the more cheerful scene where Sam Evans, a very likeable young intern, makes Charlie's acquaintance with the hope of winning his approval of Sam's proposed marriage to Nina. Dr. Darrell is also introduced at this point, objectively trying to help Nina make a satisfactory adjustment; there is a keynote of suspicion immediately felt upon the meeting of Darrell and Charlie--to foreshadow their future rivalry of Nina's affection. No one feels animosity toward the cheerful, boyish Sam, only pity and tenderness, putting him out of the picture as a tragic figure, or as any real threat in the love affairs of Nina. However, he becomes her husband, and the trip to his family home by the newly-weds throws another shadow of gloom into the play: here Nina discovers that Sam is genetically unfit to be a father because of insanity in the immediate family. Thereafter, she finds it difficult to hide her disgust from her husband, especially in scenes where they are alone together. After conceiving Darrell's child, her personality changes, and she determines to make Sam happy, pretending that the child

is his. She is over-attached emotionally to her son, because he symbolizes her lost lover, Gordon Shaw, having been named Gordon with the complete approbation of poor, unsuspecting Sam. She is considerate, if not loving to Sam, and Dr. Darrell becomes the pitiful character, having no place in her conventional life as Sam's wife and Gordon's mother, the latter role being her favorite; he is unable to remain aloof from her, and yet his presence in the Evans home is greatly resented by the young Gordon. So Darrell shuttles back and forth to Europe, returning every several years to be with Nina.

Because of the many issues brought up in each act obliquely, most ideas are left undeveloped to any extent, and the moods are somewhat confused, if not lost altogether. The threads become tangled in the lengthy asides and profuse explanation.

Theme. The theme of this play, in the opinion of this writer, is the inadequacy of sensual satisfaction for the complex, civilized person, combined with the eternal striving toward security, the peace and harmony of childhood, by the neurotic adult. In examination of O'Neill's philosophy, the writer would like to present the theories of John Howard Lawson:

While Ibsen presents emotion as a means of salvation, O'Neill can find no salvation outside religion.

This gives us a somewhat confused picture of O'Neill's confusion, but we can clarify these tendencies accurately in terms of general philosophy; we begin with psychoanalysis, which supplies us with the Oedipus complex (and its variations) and the subconscious. O'Neill has no use for these in their modern semi-scientific forms, so he goes back to earlier modes of thought. The Oedipus Complex becomes the universal physiological impulse, which originates in Schopenhauer, and is the basis of Zola's "blood and nerves" materialism. The subconscious becomes the soul of early nineteenth century romanticism. This is a repetition of the earlier dualism; the "blood and nerves" fight the spiritual ego, just as God and the devil fought for the soul of Faust. Goethe saw this conflict clearly according to the thought of his time: Goethe accepted dualism, he accepted Hegel's absolute idea as a satisfactory solution of man's relationship to the universe. But O'Neill cannot accept this because acceptance would mean acknowledgement of both sides of dualism. O'Neill insists on escaping the corporeal side altogether. So again he goes back to earlier forms of thought, and again he finds his allegiance divided. In its extreme form, his mysticism is as final as that of Hildegard of Bingen, or Hugo of St. Victor in the twelfth century, or of St. Theresa in the sixteenth. But this brings the author no relief, because it is based on a way of life and a pattern of thought which the modern man can neither understand nor assimilate. So he doubles back to the middle of the seventeenth century and combines personal mysticism with Spinoza's pantheism, which is impersonal and deterministic. This is as far as O'Neill's thought can go, and his nearest approach to a rational philosophy is to be found in passages which suggest Spinoza's conception of God as one substance interpenetrating life and nature: "Our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the father." (Final act of Strange Interlude. Note that this closely parallels Thomas Wolfe's "phantom flare of grieved desire, the ghosting and phosphoric flickers of immortal time.") [Look Homeward Angel, sic.] But O'Neill cannot remain faithful to this idea, because it would mean accepting the material world. The passage just quoted illustrates this difficulty. Our lives are "dark interludes"; the "electrical display" is outside our lives. So O'Neill adopts a partial

pantheism (which is a contradiction in terms), a universality from which the universe as we know it objectively is excluded. This leads him back to Schoepenhauer, whose emotional pessimism he adopts in its most extreme form.

The special character of this circle of ideas is the consistent dualism of pragmatism and mysticism. In terms of action, this means the combination of non-logical conduct with the attempt to explain this conduct in terms of the most sublime vagaries about time, space, and eternity. The cult of the sublime in modern literature and drama is invariably accompanied by the denial of standards of rational or irresponsible behavior. This is so inevitable that it takes (almost) the form of a mathematical formula: the emphasis on eternal beauty and truth is in exact proportion to the need to justify conduct which may properly be called sub-human because of its aimlessness, brutality, or cowardice.

The author's creative consciousness and will are in conflict with the sterile thinking which destroys both art and life. This inner struggle is evident in his repeated efforts to dramatize the subconscious. This has led to his interest in the problem of dual personality. He tries to use the physical man as a means of showing us the subconscious man in whom he is chiefly interested....in Strange Interlude the asides are ostensibly used for this purpose.³¹

In his attempt to escape reality, O'Neill has tried to explain emotion in terms of lust and greed, hate and egotism. In Strange Interlude, these emotions are sentimentalized, and abstract in a "rarefied desire for happiness."³² In his introduction to O'Neill's Nine Plays, Joseph Wood Krutch adequately explains:

³¹Lawson, op. cit., pp. 131-2.

³²Loc. Cit.

Like the hero of The Great God Brown, all of the characters of both these dramas can truthfully say, "I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sung and wept." But absorbing as each of these things is, it is never, for a human being, quite enough. He needs to feel that loving and lusting, singing and weeping mean something beyond themselves, that there is some justification in the nature of things for that importance which they have for him. And if religion--the belief in a supernatural power capable of investing them with meaning--has decayed, then man must discover some attitude toward himself capable of investing him once more with the dignity he has lost. Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra are essentially efforts to do just that--to achieve the self-justifying grandeur of tragedy without having recourse to any conceptions, religious or otherwise, which the mind of modern man cannot sincerely entertain.³³

Conflict. The conflict in Strange Interlude lies between Nina and life itself; she is inadequately equipped emotionally to cope with the situations in which she finds herself, and tragedy results. Minor conflicts occur between characters: between Marsden and Evans; Marsden and Darrell; Nina and Madeleine; Nina and each of the male characters as their inadequacies are revealed. The simple story of Strange Interlude, on a first level analysis, is a common one to the modern theater: a married woman has a child by a man who is not her husband. Lawson compares Strange Interlude in this respect to Philip Barry's Tomorrow and Tomorrow, and Paul Hervieu's The Nippers.

³³Joseph Wood Krutch, introduction to Nine Plays, p. xviii.

The three dramas are identical in point of view. In the final scene of Hervieu's play (produced in 1895) the woman says to her husband: "We are only two miserable beings, and misery knows none but equals." At the close of Strange Interlude, Nina says: "--to die in peace! I'm so contentedly weary of life." and Marsden answers, speaking of himself as "dear old Charlie...who, passed beyond desire, has all the luck at last."

Hervieu treats the situation as a social problem which must be faced. The characters are forced to adjust themselves to their environment under conditions which they themselves have created. The play develops to a climax in which the wife confesses the truth.

In both Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Strange Interlude, one looks in vain for open conflict. In both plays the husband never discovers the truth.³⁴

One of the characters in Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Dr. Hay, the father of the child, says: "Emotion is the only real thing in our lives; it is the person; it is the soul." Since the emotion is the end in itself, it need not express itself through the conscious will, and need have no connection with the actual activity of the character, according to Mr. Lawson.

Criticism. Variances of opinion as to the merits of the aside are expressed by contemporary critics. Arthur Hobson Quinn is complimentary:

The Guild produced Strange Interlude on January 30, 1928, a profound study of a woman's clutch upon

³⁴Lawson, loc. cit.

the lives of five men: her father, her husband, her son, and her two other lovers, who represent the spiritual and physical elements in love. In this play which held audiences spellbound through nine acts, Mr. O'Neill prefaced the words spoken by the characters to each other by thoughts uttered aloud, which the art of production made natural and impressive.³⁵

Of Strange Interlude, Richard Halline says:

This drama is noteworthy for three reasons: its probing analysis of emotion and thought; its tracing of character change through three decades; and its dramatization, by the use of asides, of the divergence of what we think and what we say. This portrayal of character duality gives the play its particular power.³⁶

Another positive criticism is presented by John

Gassner, in his volume entitled Masters of the Drama:

The indubitable fascination of this analysis, regardless of its scientific validity, would alone suffice to give Strange Interlude a unique position in the history of the drama. And some eminence would also be earned by its peculiar effect, for Strange Interlude, with its asides and lengthy progression, is nothing less than a stream-of-consciousness novel, despite its dramatic structure. But above all qualifications for effectiveness must be set the simple fact that O'Neill succeeded in endowing his contemporary Hedda Gabler with genuine life and passions; ... The so-called aside in Strange Interlude is not so much related to the older conventions of the drama as to the stream-of-consciousness technique of Strindberg's expressionist plays and James Joyce's Ulysses. And this, too, was a notable innovation in the theatre, since in using this device with absolute lucidity, he was the first dramatist to "make full

³⁵Quinn, op. cit., p. 935.

³⁶Halline, op. cit., p. xi.

use in the drama of that introspection without which it would be impossible to imagine the existence of a part of modern literature." (Quoting from Joseph Wood Krutch, review of Strange Interlude in The Nation.)

O'Neill, it is true, paid a heavy price for so ambitious an undertaking. The aside is sometimes overworked or obvious, and it becomes somewhat tiresome, even when it is entirely appropriate. This nine act play is too long by about two acts, if perhaps only because his invention was not strong enough to keep them pitched on a sufficiently high level of dramatic effectiveness. The play reaches no climax, except that of exhaustion when it closes with the completion of Nina's sexual energy or the termination of her strange interlude.³⁷

Concerning the character of Nina Leeds, Gassner

relates:

Nina Leeds is a memorable character because each of her emotional states is both vividly actual and psychologically complementary. A whole woman somehow emerges from the different elements of this chronicle of fixations and frustrations, and from their successive discharge in relation to a male character. Nor does Nina, who is an emancipated modern daughter of the middle class and therefore takes some daring steps where her emotions are involved, enter her relationships with cold deliberation. Even her deliberateness is present, as when she gives herself to Darrell in order to bear a child, her conduct is a result of her emotional need and of a dramatized situation--for example, from her intensely effective discovery that there is insanity in his [sic] chromosomes. Nor are the men mere automata: the brilliant young physician Ned Darrell embittered by frustrated desire for Nina and for his unacknowledged son, Sam who grows from a weakling into a self-confident businessman when he receives both financial backing and a son from his friends, Nina's son Gordon

³⁷Gassner, op. cit., p. 656. (an incorrect pronoun reference is indicated. Gassner should have written "Evan's chromosomes.")

Evans with his boyish jealousy and intuitions, and even meek Charlie Marsden with his very active unconscious--all are vivid portraits. O'Neill was able to achieve this because with the expertness and daring of a technician, he allowed his characters to express their unconscious thoughts verbally.

...

The character of Nina also suffers from the extreme length of O'Neill's analysis: as revealed by her detailed inner life, she may strike an objective observer as too unlovable to be honored with so much attachment by her "three men." Tragic intensity is hers indeed by virtue of rebellion against frustration and her passionate search for fulfillment, but her resemblance to another well-known female insect, known as the preying mantis, is too uncomfortably close for a genuinely tragic exaltation.³⁸ The playgoer must derive that exaltation in part from the joy of participating in O'Neill's brilliant analysis with his own mental activity. All told, however, Strange Interlude was a stunning performance.³⁹

Expanding the already mentioned Freudian influence, in his preface to O'Neill's anthology Joseph Wood Krutch notes:

In both (Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra), the intellectual framework is supplied by Freudian psychology. All that happens is capable of being interpreted in terms of "complexes," "repressions," and "fixations," but there could, nevertheless, be no error more fundamental than the error of assuming that the ultimate purpose of the plays is to illustrate the all-sufficient adequacy of such interpretation. Like every great tragic

³⁸John Howard Lawson's point that Nina is driven on by instinct, that she lives in an "emotional trance", that she "never chooses or refuses" is well-taken. This reduces the possibility of tragic grandeur, though it does not prevent her from impressing us intensely. The preying mantis also fails to choose and is morbidly fascinating.

³⁹Gassner, op. cit., p. 657.

writer, O'Neill must accept the premises of his audience, and it so happens that those premises are not the premises of ancient Greece, or Elizabethan England, but the premises of modern psychology. They, better than any other, represent the "world view" of today and they, as a matter of fact, constitute the only inclusive theory of human conduct which would not render any drama based upon it anachronistic or "poetic" in the very sense that O'Neill is anxious to avoid. But they are the foundation, not the structure, the beginning, not the end, of what the dramatist has to say. The greatness of the plays lies in the fact that they achieve a grandeur with their rational framework is impotent even to suggest. Man, deprived of the importance which religion conferred, when it made him important to the universe as a whole, here raises himself by his bootstraps, and by the very strength and articulateness of his passions, the dignity which a rationalistic psychology denies him.⁴⁰

Of the two trilogies (sic), Strange Interlude is the most discursive, brooding, and "novelistic." All the incidents are discussed, viewed from various angles, and commented upon by various characters. The effect is to combine to a remarkable extent the vivid directness of the drama with the more intricate texture of the modern novel, and, indeed, the play brought to the stage certain subtleties which only the novel had hitherto seemed capable of suggesting.⁴¹

Some very adverse criticism may be found in Allardyce

Nicoll's World Drama:

Once more a novel theatrical device is introduced into Strange Interlude (1928), a drama made extraordinarily long by its somewhat tedious and fundamentally undramatic elaboration of the quite worthy convention of the "aside" into a pretentious artistic instrument. The story of the play is, in the main, concerned with the heroine, Nina Leeds, who, having lost in the war

⁴⁰Previously quoted in this thesis, p. 54.

⁴¹Krutch, op. cit., pp. xviii - xix. This writer questions Mr. Krutch's term "trilogy" in reference to Strange Interlude, a play having only two main parts.

the one man who might have satisfied her whole nature, drifts from male to male. Finally we find her with three lovers--her husband, Sam, Dr. Darrell, by whom she has had a son, and Charles Norsden [sic], a novelist who tends to look on her as though she were his mother. It is all psychoanalytical and very subtle and very long.⁴²

Summary. Strange Interlude, with its lengthy asides and neurotic heroine, is a very interesting play. The characters are drawn with detail, and the brooding mood is enveloping. The asides are less confusing to the audience than were the masks of The Great God Brown, although they sometimes interfere with the progress of the narrative. The theme of eternal striving and frustration is repetitive of the other O'Neill plays, but Nina Leeds, the central figure, has been created on a much more grandiose scale, at times touching the heroic. The play's structural entity, regardless of its length, is astounding, a twenty-three year scope usually being relegated to the novel rather than the drama; O'Neill has stated that the play never received proper credit for this technical coherence. Regardless of one's opinion of the moral issues involved in Nina's "amours," Nina is a character who will remain in the memory of any who has witnessed this spectacular tragedy.

⁴² Nicoll, loc. cit.

C. DÉSIRE UNDER THE ELMS

Desire Under the Elms, written in 1924, has been called, by Joseph Wood Krutch, "O'Neill's first play to reveal clearly the promise of his genius in handling the deep, psychological, artistic problems."

Outwardly this play is concerned with certain violent events in the life of a family of puritan New Englanders. Outwardly it is a realistic, if heightened, study of the manners, morals, and psychological processes of a definite society. But it is impossible not to realize that O'Neill is here interested less in New England as such than in an aspect of the eternal tragedy of man and his passions.⁴³

The action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse in New England, in the year 1850. O'Neill chose that time and place because he was familiar with them, and "the stern repression of New England customs makes the kind of explosion with which he proposed to deal particularly picturesque and violent,"⁴⁴ and because every story has to have a setting.

All questions concerning the accuracy or inaccuracy of any detail are essentially almost as irrelevant as similar questions would be in connection with one of Shakespeare's Roman plays. The events really occur out of time and out of place.⁴⁵

⁴³Krutch, op. cit., xvi.

⁴⁴Loc. cit.

⁴⁵Loc. cit.

Characterization. Desire Under the Elms is written in three parts, rather than acts, each part having four scenes, and moving almost alternately from the exterior to the interior of the Cabot farmhouse. The first part introduces the three sons of Ephraim Cabot: the two elder animal-like step-brothers, and the youngest son, Eben, a sensitive, intelligent young man. The first scene reveals the fixed hatred of the trio toward their arrogant, domineering, cruel father, who has gone to town to get a third wife. Because the farm belonged to Eben's mother, he does not wish to share it with his step-brothers, or his father's new wife; so he gives the step-brothers, who have been detained only by lack of capital from participating in the California gold rush, his father's secret hoard of gold coins. That leaves only the new wife to be rid of, and when he meets the young, determined, greedy woman in the last scene of Part I, he realizes this will not be easy.

In Part II, Abbie makes Ephraim promise to leave the farm to any son born of their union, and then proceeds to seduce young Eben so that a son might be born; Eben, believing that this is real revenge against his father, agrees to the unholy union. Part III, a year later, opens with a celebration of the birth of a son to Ephraim and Abbie; the townsfolk suspect that the child is more likely Eben's. Eben

quarrels with his father, and Ephraim reveals that he has promised Abbie to leave the farm to their son; they fight, Ephraim getting the best of Eben until Abbie intercedes. Eben swears his hate toward Abbie, whom he accuses of tricking him with the baby. Abbie has fallen deeply in love with Eben, and because it is the baby which has come between them, she smothers the child in its crib. Eben, grief-stricken at the loss of his child, for he had loved the baby, goes to get the sheriff. When Abbie tells the whole story to Ephraim, although he is shocked and enraged at the deception, it is ironic that he takes the stand that had the child been his, he would have stood by Abbie, rather than deserting her as Eben had done. Eben, meanwhile, has realized how much he loves Abbie, and has run all the way home to be with her when the sheriff arrives; he admits his conspiracy in the crimes, and they are both taken away.

In Desire Under the Elms, O'Neill shows a group of peasants, tenacious in their passion for land, for justifying their hardness by their fear of the wrath of God, for power, for beauty of a kind, and for sexual gratification. These people--unlike people in everyday life--are cruel and greedy; they talk freely of shameful things fit only to be printed in the Bible. Ephraim, his sons, and his wife are strange composites of good and evil; "vice" followed at once with a swift punishment; a woman seduces her step-son, and both parties to the crime actually exult in their passion.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Loc. cit.

O'Neill's style of writing characterizations in the play script makes his works excellent reading as well as easily interpreted by the actor. Some of the characters in Desire Under the Elms O'Neill describes thus:

(Eben) He is twenty-five, tall and sinewy. His face is well-formed, good-looking, but its expression is resentful and defensive. His defiant dark eyes remind one of a wild animal's, in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce repressed vitality about him. He has black hair, mustache, a thin curly trace of beard. He is dressed in rough farm clothes.⁴⁷

Ephraim is seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great, wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder, yet there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its own narrow strength. His eyes are small, close together, and extremely near-sighted, blinking continuously in the effort to focus on objects, their stare having a straining, ingrowing quality. He is dressed in his dismal black Sunday suit.⁴⁸

Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty, but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed

⁴⁷ Eugene O'Neill, Desire Under the Elms, Part I, scene 1, reprinted in Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. 137.

⁴⁸ Ibid, scene iv, p. 155.

desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben.^{49,50}

Mood. O'Neill has made this play a study of man and woman under the pressures of ancient frustrations, traditions, and defeat mechanisms.⁵¹ The relentless Fate of the Greeks is metamorphosed into the personalities of the characters, bringing inescapable friction with their environment and with one another. There is a supernatural element in that the dead mother of Eben is hovering over and about the Cabot place, seeking revenge on Ephraim; she returns to her grave when Eben finds Abbie's love, thus stealing Ephraim's only happiness. The harsh atmosphere gloomily forebodes evil, and all happiness in the play is short-lived, because it is based on evil.

In the Philadelphia Public Ledger, January 22, 1922, two years before Desire was enacted, O'Neill explained:

Sure, I'll write about happiness if I can happen to meet up with that luxury, and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word. What does it mean? Exaltation; an intensified feeling of the

⁴⁹Loc. cit.

⁵⁰Production note: In the original cast, Walter Huston as the husband, the warm and glowing Mary Morris as the wife, and Charles Ellis as the guilty son gave extraordinarily fine performances under the sensitive direction of Robert Edmund Jones, who also designed the sets, which are considered some of his finest works. (Freedly and Reeves, op. cit., p. 601.) Nov. 11, 1924, at the Greenwich Village Theatre.

⁵¹Thomas H. Dickinson, An Outline of Contemporary Drama, p. 276.

significant worth of man's being and becoming? Well, if it means that--and not a mere smirking contentment of one's lot--I know there is more of it in one real tragedy than in all the happy-ending plays ever written. It's mere present-day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy! The Greeks and Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous lift to it. It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty considerations of everyday existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy; all else is unhappy . . . I don't love life because it's pretty. Prettiness is only clothes-deep. I am a truer lover than that. I love it naked. There is beauty to me even in its ugliness.⁵²

Theme. Wherever the human heart is troubled and searching for the cause of its unrest, there O'Neill finds sufficient material from which to create a tragedy. In Desire Under the Elms is further evidence of John Lawson's oft-reiterated theory of the Freudian concept of incest as the basic theme behind many of O'Neill's plays:

There is no drama of O'Neill's in which an intense love relationship between man and woman is presented as creative and satisfying. The deepest emotional drive in his plays is always based on the father-daughter, mother-son relationship. His use of the Freudian formula serves to negate any conscious struggle on the part of his characters. Their passion is necessarily evil, because it is incestuous; yet it is unavoidable, because it is the condition upon which they were born. His characters are emotional but sterile.⁵³

⁵²Quoted by Clark, op. cit., p. 146.

⁵³Lawson, op. cit., p. 129.

Arthur Hobson Quinn best expresses the theme of the play in an introduction to one of O'Neill's plays in his anthology, Representative American Plays:

Desire Under the Elms is a searching study of the New England nature with a background of the middle of the last century. It reveals in the characters of Ephraim and his son, Eben Cabot, a combination of profound belief in the supernatural; the determination to win in a hard struggle even against God; the recognition of God as an opponent who is to be respected rather than loved; and at the same time a shrewd disposition to maintain one's own property rights.⁵⁴

Conflict. There is violent physical conflict in this play--even murder--yet the primary conflict is between man and his desires; between guilt and retribution; between conscience and obsession. Each of the characters is in a state of mental turmoil; he is frustrated by ill-fated conflict with his environment and Fate. The ignorant step-brothers, secretly rebelling against their father's cruel misuse of them, have another conflict: greed for the gold of California as opposed to fear of the unknown, and of their father's anger. They have only the simplest perceptions and animal desires, and their conflict is the most easily resolved--Eben gives them gold and encouragement, and they set out for California. What lies ahead for them

⁵⁴Quinn, op. cit., p. 934.

neither the author nor the audience knows, or even cares.

The conflict between Eben and life is more complex: his mother's ghost urges him to revenge her upon his father, and he is ill-equipped to handle the situation. He is opposed to his father's personality, as sensitiveness is always opposed to callousness; he has inner compulsion to attempt to regain the farm, which was his mother's, and therefore rightfully his. His father's new wife poses another problem for Eben, because she is committed to grasping everything material the old man has--consequently, Eben's farm will go to her offspring.

Eben and Abbie, mortal enemies, are both repulsed and attracted to each other; their attempt to cuckold the old man results in their falling in love with each other, an impossible situation under one roof.

Ephraim's violence runs its course, and he is a pitiable character in the end when he alone remains "under the elms": his grandchild having been murdered by its mother, and the parents committed to prison for the crime.

Criticisms. Most criticisms concerning Desire Under the Elms have been complimentary, although in original production when District Attorney Banton of New York attempted to prevent its performance on moral grounds, theatrical authorities such as Brander Matthews, Percy

Mackaye, and Edward Shelton aroused public opinion by newspaper stories and the play was allowed to go on.⁵⁵

John Gassner calls Desire Under the Elms a "true tragedy" and points out that it is not only well-integrated, but has superb characterization:

The fact is that he took both the social scene and human nature in his stride, subordinating the first to the second by conditioning his characters by their environment like a true naturalist.

He repeated this procedure, in fact, in the equally relentless but more integrated peasant tragedy of Desire Under the Elms. No firmer picture of the tenacious life of a New England farm could have been written. On the stony soil which Ephraim Cabot subdued with his labor, men hunger for land and emotional release. Land is not easily available or fruitful; men therefore guard it greedily, like Ephraim, desire it frantically like the youngest son Eben, or try to acquire it doggedly at the price of a loveless marriage like the orphaned Abbie Putnam, who marries old Ephraim. But the land and a hard religion also play jangled tunes on the other passions. Ephraim was a hard husband to his gentle first wife⁵⁶ whom he worked to death and whose child, Eben, he has hated for resembling her. This son actually avenges himself on him (the father) by possessing himself of his father's new wife, Abbie. She, in turn, yields to Eben in order to secure her position by giving the old man a child. The birth of a child, which the selfconfident Ephraim believes to be his own, leads to further complications. Eben, who is now loved by Abbie genuinely,

⁵⁵Freedley and Reeves, op. cit., p. 601.

⁵⁶Although Gassner refers to Eben's mother as Ephraim's first wife in this quotation, she actually must have been Ephraim's second wife, since the two step-brothers of Eben are older than he, and their mother would have been the first wife.

suspects her of yielding to him merely in order to strengthen her claim on the land, and only Abbie's frantic murder of the infant to prove that she no longer desires the farm for herself dispels his doubt. This is the end for what little happiness they wrested out of their land-locked and frustrated lives; overcome with remorse, Eben notifies the sheriff, and announces himself as accessory to the crime.

Powerful characterization and dialogue are combined here with a stark elemental theme and a sultry kind of nature poetry. Eben's Oedipus complex, the effects of farm life on it, and an inhibited religion are fused into a tragic unit; they are so inter-related that it is difficult to isolate them and the play is another example of how, intuitively the creative artist can be in advance of the scientific thinker.⁵⁷ Desire Under the Elms is consequently the most consistently wrought of O'Neill's plays and marks the peak of his relatively naturalistic period. Moreover, this is true tragedy; the power of the passions, the impressiveness of the characters, and the timelessness of the inner struggle between a son and a father ensure tragic elevation.⁵⁸

Quite the opposite opinion is expressed by Allardyce

Nicoll in his chapter on O'Neill in World Drama:

Desire Under the Elms is a powerful play of sexual repression and of sex-satisfaction; of the metaphysical qualities out of which tragedy arises, it has none.⁵⁹

⁵⁷In a footnote, Gassner explains: "I have found a trend in this direction in science, in the thought of Hogben and Haldane, and the work of the psychoanalysts Otto Fenichel and Wilhelm Reich; it is apparently also present in the studies of Soviet scientists. But O'Neill's intuitive synthesis--which he did not of course systematize or pretend to make a point of--came before and was, apparently, not influenced by any theory.

⁵⁸Gassner, op. cit., p. 651.

⁵⁹Nicoll, op. cit., p. 888.

Barrett H. Clark, however, in his book Eugene O'Neill, The Man and His Plays, calls Desire O'Neill's highest point of achievement as a tragic writer, for in this play he "sounds the depths, and faces life with courage and sanity."⁶⁰

Summary. Desire Under the Elms, written in 1924, was written earlier than the other two O'Neill plays already considered in this thesis; however, it clearly reveals the artist's genius in handling problems of human nature, and is superior in that it is not obscured by a bizarre technical device such as the masks and the asides. The action is less subtle than in the other two plays, and there is more physical violence. The setting of this play has challenged many of the great set designers of this era, but the original set by Robert Edmund Jones was remarkable in effect. The giant elm tree overhanging the upstairs bedrooms of both Ephraim and Eben symbolizes the hold which the land has over the personal lives of its inhabitants, and warns us of its impending danger. Violent, passionate, God-fearing, austere—these New Englanders live and breathe in Desire Under the Elms in a manner that is both awesome and terrible.

⁶⁰Clark, loc. cit.

D. SUMMARY

Having considered three representative tragedies of Eugene O'Neill, this writer would set forth the following conclusions about O'Neill as a tragic writer: his plays are very much concerned with man's relationship to God; the characters are viewed psychologically, the author probing their mental depths; the problems are those of incest and other Freudian concepts; the characters act according to Fate rather than free choice; and the characters are emotional rather than intellectual, and sometimes sterile.

Exploring, probing, inventing, intensifying, Eugene O'Neill won for himself the title of America's number one playwright, on the basis of his tragedies. Having recently died, O'Neill yet remains the leading playwright of the era, and it is this writer's speculation that his successor will be one of the other two playwrights to be considered in this thesis.

CHAPTER III

THREE TRAGEDIES OF MAXWELL ANDERSON: WINTERSET, ELIZABETH THE QUEEN, AND NIGHT OVER TAOS

Maxwell Anderson's Winterset represents the closest approach to real tragedy, in this writer's opinion, occurring in contemporary American drama. Anderson more closely understands the essence of tragedy than any other living writer of drama, and is articulately equipped to handle the tragic theme. He is concerned with world concepts, universal truths, and human justice; he builds his plays around these lofty themes, and his characters approach the heroic. The language employed by Maxwell Anderson carries out the epic quality of his works, and elevates them to a poetic level. Elizabeth the Queen, representing his historical poetic drama, and Night Over Taos follow the general pattern which Anderson set forth in his essay, "The Essence of Tragedy," quoted in Chapter One of this thesis, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Because of the loftiness of his aims, Anderson has limited his appeal to the more intellectual audiences; he has failed to reach the standard set by Winterset and has been accused by the critics of having worn out his tragic pattern, his plays becoming sterile repetitions

successively. Certainly he has had a variety of success in actual Broadway production, and there is yet time for Anderson to produce another great play.

A. WINTERSET

Maxwell Anderson, in 1935, first attempted to apply the new poetic medium which he had hitherto exercised only on historical subjects,¹ to material drawn from contemporary life. This attempt was deemed especially successful, even when presented to an audience accustomed to stark realism in colloquial language. The tragic story of an ill-fated love set among the denizens of New York's underworld in the early '30's, beneath the towering Brooklyn Bridge, is noble in theme, and haunting in beauty both of language and emotion. The universality of the theme is pointed out by Joseph Wood Krutch: "The whole emphasis of the treatment is such as to stress the eternal rather than the local aspects of the passions involved."²

Characterization. After the failure of an earlier play, Gods of the Lightning, which Anderson wrote in a heat of fury over the injustice perpetrated, the playwright

¹Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland.

²Joseph Wood Krutch, quoted by Charles H. Whitman, Representative Modern Dramas, p. 1010.

waited until he could approach the problem objectively, and Winterset, also based on the Sacco-Vanzetti case, was a great success.³ It is concerned with the return of the son of a man who has been electrocuted for a murder he did not commit to the scene of the perpetration of the crime. Here he encounters, by coincidence, the gangster who actually committed the murder, the judge half-crazed by his guilty conscience, and the only living witness to the crime--who had not testified in behalf of the boy's father for fear of the gangster's retribution. Ironically, the boy, Mio Romagna, falls in love with Miriamne Esdras, the sister of the witness, Garth Esdras, against whom Mio has sworn revenge. When Mio is killed by the gangster, Trock Estrella, Miriamne chooses to die at his side, killed by the same gunman.

Mio offers the modern actor a supreme test of interpretation; he is strong in resolve, philosophically intense, yet vacillating at times, especially when resolution will bring harm or sadness to Miriamne. He is intelligent, poetic, cynical, and bitter; he is a tender lover but a

³Production note: Set beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, so magnificently suggested by Jo Mielzner's setting, with Guthrie McClintic's penetrating direction, it caught the mood of all-pervading Fate. Burgess Meredith as the boy, Margo as the girl, and Richard Bennett as the mad judge gave such moving performances as to identify themselves completely with Anderson's characters. Freedley and Reeves, op. cit., p. 605.

relentless enemy. He is the foil of Garth Esdras, the witness who is weak, indecisive, and cowardly, as well as of Trock Estrella, the gangster, who is crude, vicious, and treacherous.

Garth's father, the Rabbi Esdras, provides the second male part of importance. His speeches remind one of the immortal bard, and represent some of the most beautiful poetic drama since Shakespeare:

ESDRAS. Yes, if you hold with the world that only those who die suddenly should be revenged. But those whose hearts are cancered, drop by drop, in small ways, little by little, till they've borne all they can bear, and die--these deaths will go unpunished now as always. When we're young, we have faith in what is seen, but when we're old, we know that what is seen is traced in air and built on water. There's no guilt under heaven, just as there's no heaven, till men believe it--no earth, till men have seen it, and have a word to say this is the earth.

GARTH. Well, I say there's an earth, and I say I'm guilty on it, guilty as hell.

ESDRAS. Yet till it's known you bear no guilt at all--unless you wish. The days go by like film, like a long written scroll, a figured veil unrolling out of darkness into fire and utterly consumed. And on this veil, running in sounds and symbols of men's minds reflected back, life flickers, and is shadow going toward flame. Only what men can see exists in that shadow. Why must you rise and cry out: That was I, there in that ravelled tapestry, there, in that pistol flash, when the man was killed. I was there, and was one, and am blood-stained! Let the wind, and fire take that hour to ashes out of time and out of mind! This thing that men call justice, this blind snake that strikes men down in the dark,

mindless with fury, keep your hand back from it,
pass by in silence--let it be forgotten, forgotten!
Oh, my son, my son--have pity!⁴

Miriamne, the only female part of importance in the entire play, is less a real woman than an ideal woman; she probably exists only in the minds of romantic playwrights like Maxwell Anderson. A few of her lines are beautifully poetic, such as the climactic speech:

MIRIAMNE. How can I help you?

MIO. You have.

MIRIAMNE. If I were a little older--if I knew the things to say! I can only put out my hands and give you back the faith you bring to me by being what you are. Because to me you are all hope and beauty and brightness drawn across what's black and mean!⁵

Most of her lines, however, simply furnish Mio motivation to philosophize, and her character is too typically simple. She meets Mio and within several hours has so fallen in love with him, platonically, that she gladly sacrifices her life to join him in death. Even to the modern viewer, this all happens too fast; the audience remembers the more slowly-moving, easily comprehended Romeo and Juliet, and Winterset suffers by comparison.

⁴Maxwell Anderson, Winterset, as reprinted in Arthur Hobson Quinn's Representative American Plays, Act I, scene 11, p. 1114.

⁵Ibid., Act III, scene 1, p. 1146.

Carr, the philosophic companion of the road to Mio, offers little challenge in portrayal of emotion; he remains calm, strong, and realistic throughout his small part in the play. He offers contrast for Mio's emotional stress and weaknesses. He expresses the modern materialistic conception of justice in his advice to Mio:

CARR. The State can't afford to admit it was wrong, you see. Not when there's been that much of a row kicked up over it. So for all practical purposes the State was right and your father robbed the payroll.

MIO. There's still such a thing as evidence.

CARR. It's something you can buy. In fact, at the moment I don't think of anything you can't buy, including life, honor, virtue, glory, public office, conjugal affection and all kinds of justice, from the traffic court to the immortal nine. Go out and make yourself a pot of money and you can buy all the justice you want. Convictions obtained, convictions averted. Lowest rates in years.⁶

It is interesting that the scene between Mio and Carr before the girl appears in the first Act is written in prose.

Judge Gaunt, the mentally disturbed judge who sentenced the elder Romagna to death, is rather an incomprehensible and didactic character. He is emotionally unbalanced, supposedly due to his twinges of conscience about having sentenced an innocent man, Mio's father, to death. In his lucid moments he seems to be the typical

⁶Ibid., Act I, scene iii, pp. 1116-7.

judge, strong in his assertion that the laws of the land are just and must be upheld to the letter; in his weakness, he is a pitiable old man, unable to remember even his own name, or his own address. He wanders the streets and alleys of New York, searching fruitlessly for the one man who can shed light on the Romagna case, Garth Esdras; and he happens upon the residence of Garth by chance, and meets Mio there. The audience does not hate the Judge, although he has sinned against the central figure, Mio; they feel pity for him, and for the inadequate justice he represents.

The minor characters, Pliny, Lucia, Shadow, the Hobo, the girls, the sailor, and the policeman, introduce comic relief and variety to the otherwise heavy plot of Winterset. Trock Estrella, the gangster, has much more significance to the development of the actual narrative. He is a powerful figure, and whenever he is on stage, he dominates the scene. His part is purely villainous; neither his words nor his actions could justify any favorable emotion from the audience. His dialogue is written in the virile, powerful idiom of the underworld; Anderson has achieved in this character an almost impossible undertaking-- the portrayal of a tough, merciless, shrewd, and thoroughly vile underworld character through the medium of poetic verse. "Trock and the other gangsters who were the real criminals are as

vivid a set of rascals as the stage has seen."⁷

Mood. The tragic mood quality of Winterset is aimed at the exhilarating terror and the agonized serenity of the true tragic concept, and reflects Anderson's dependence on Shakespeare for inspiration. In the creation of Mio, echoes of Hamlet are plainly visible; the storm scene in which the half-crazed Judge Gaunt wanders into the tenement seeking protection from the furious elements is modelled upon the storm scene in King Lear, and the Mio-Miriamne relationship based on family bitternesses bears close resemblance to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The universal theme of the forces of evil combining and acting against the central figure fits the modern play as well as the Elizabethan one or the ancient Greek tragedy.

There is suspense and adventure present in the opening scenes as each set of characters is introduced: the Esdras, and their dreadful secret; the gangsters, and Trock's "six months to live"; Mio and Carr, and Mio's sworn revenge. The audience sees the interweaving of these threads of exposition, and foresees the fatal, inevitable clash among these three forces. The minor characters afford

⁷Quinn, op. cit., p. 1105.

comic relief in the manner of the grave-diggers of Hamlet, and allow Mio and Miriamne to become better acquainted. When Gaunt appears, there is pathos, and the climax occurs when Mio discovers the truth from Gaunt, and meets the real gangster. His discovery of his tragic flaw, when Miriamne tells him that his father would have "forgiven", is the resolution of Mio's emotional wanderings, and the beginning of hope for the young lovers' happiness. When Esdras goes to get help for Mio, the hope is built up further, until he crawls back, bloody and beaten, to reveal that Trock was waiting at the street above, like a hunter stalking his prey, for Mio to appear. Miriamne, desperate with fear for Mio's safety, urges him to try to escape--he walks right into the gunman's bullets. This scene is one of the most effective in the play, and when portrayed with proper restraint, is one of the most beautifully tragic scenes in the modern theatre. Mio, bullet-ridden and dying, crawls to the arms of Miriamne, trying not to believe that she had sent him to his death. Miriamne embraces him, assuring him that she does not want him to die, and he expires in her arms. Not wishing to go on living without her lover, Miriamne goes to the top of the stairs, shouting her knowledge of the criminal and his crime, inviting death from his bullets. She manages to reach Mio's body before she, too, dies, and Esdras and Garth are left to bury the

dead, and go on living. Esdras sums up the final mood of the play with these words: "This is the glory of earth-born men and women, not to cringe, never to yield, but standing, take defeat implacable and defiant, die unsubmitting."⁸

Theme. Winterset was written with a specific theme, the injustice committed in the Sacco-Vanzetti case in New York in the early 1930's; yet the contemporary theme has been so couched in philosophy and beautiful language and tragic concepts as to become timeless and universal in application. It exemplifies Anderson's recognition that in the current struggle between the democratic idealists and the "rats," the "rats" sometimes conquer, the tender-minded idealists being unable to cope with the powers of evil, and the men are destroyed, but are transfigured by their heartening nobility.

Winterset was, however, a wintry sequel to the springtime affirmations of Valley Forge; for here, in a play written only a year later, the democratic dream was being pushed to the wall, and the rats were distinctly gaining ground. Nowhere in its author's work have his anger and grief been so glowing, his irony and laughter so bitter, his characters so tortured and anguished.⁹

⁸Ibid., Act III, p. 1148.

⁹John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 682.

"There's no heaven," says Esdras, "till men believe it"-- and people of modern America have ceased to believe; and since tragic drama is essentially metaphysical and religious, there can be no tragedy without belief.

Thus, in the want of a common faith in our midst, the playwright who aims at tragic expression is given no basis on which to stand!¹⁰

Conflict. In Winterset, the conflict lies between Mio's hatred of the murderers of his father, and his intense love for Miriamne, the sister of the man he hates. There is an underlying pattern of conflict in the theme of social justice - the futile conflict of the little, innocent man (Romagna) against the cold, encompassing laws of the land concerning circumstantial evidence and capital punishment. This is a protest against the misuse of those laws, symbolized in the deterioration of Judge Gaunt.

There is further conflict within the Esdras family. Garth vacillates between desire to confess his crime, and desire to live. He is afraid of Trock, the gangster, who presents physical conflict with each of the other characters, even his own henchman, Shadow, whom he kills. The Rabbi Esdras, in conflict with his religious training, urges his

¹⁰ Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama, p. 867.

son to remain quiet and remain alive. And Miriamne, the sister, is torn between her love for her brother, and her love for Mio Romagna. As Mio expresses it: "A body lies between us, buried in quicklime; and your allegiance is on one side of that grave, and mine another."

When Miriamne assures Mio that his father would have forgiven, his conflict is resolved, and he is able to face his future with resolve and determination. He chooses to sacrifice his own safety so that Garth will not be killed by Trock, and in this noble act he redeems his own soul.

Criticism. Winterset is generally conceded by the critics to be Maxwell Anderson's best play, to date. In his preface to Winterset, Anderson recognizes the difficulties which beset any playwright who deals with contemporary theme in verse. "Whether I have solved the problem in Winterset is probably of little moment. But it must be solved if we are to have a great theatre in America."¹¹

Arthur Hobson Quinn commends Anderson for this ambition:

The superiority of the universal over the particular for dramatic purposes was illustrated by the contrast between Winterset, 1935, and Gods of

¹¹Arthur Hobson Quinn, introduction to Winterset, Representative American Plays, p. 1105.

the Lightning, 1928. The flavor of propaganda was absent from Winterset, for while the central motive was the devotion of a boy whose father had been unjustly convicted of murder, the audience was not disturbed by the controversy concerning a doubtful case, and could enjoy the lofty poetry and could sympathize fully with the son who gave his life in an effort to clear his father's name. The atmosphere of Winterset, laid in a dark street under the shadow of a mighty bridge near the river in New York, was heavy with fate. Through this figure of the youthful son of Romagna, Anderson uttered a protest against two powerful agents of injustice, made concrete in the persons of Trock, the chief of the murder gang, and Judge Gaunt, who had presided at Romagna's trial and whose conscience has driven him insane. Anderson has expressed his philosophy of composition in the introduction to Winterset. He believes that audiences are ready for plays "which will take up again the consideration of man's place and destiny in prophetic rather than prosaic terms." He may be an optimist, but in any event, he has helped to bring back the spells of splendor into the American theatre. Like O'Neill, he has had the courage to face comparison with the highest standards, for the resemblance of the central motive of Winterset to that of Hamlet is evident. But Anderson proved not only that the fidelity of a son to his father's memory may be expressed in modern terms with a new meaning, but also that poetry may interpret modern life without apology, if the playwright is a poet of eminence.¹²

In World Drama, Allardyce Nicoll also praises

Anderson's courageous attempt to create tragic drama out of contemporary subject-matter:

From Aeschylus onward the playwrights have found that distance in time and place is well-nigh essential for the full and satisfying exposition of tragedy's spirit, and perhaps even Anderson himself was conscious of the unlikelihood of his achieving perfection of utterance in a theme selected from the

¹²Arthur Hobson Quinn, History of American Drama, p.271.

underworld of his own day!

Yet the attempt forms a symbol and a challenge. Through writing Winterset Anderson has shocked many of his companions into a recognition that the theatre of our time, if it is to win greatness, must once again be prepared to welcome the poetic imaginative processes couched in appropriate language; and there is no other modern playwright who has done more towards trying to bring this poetic concept within the framework of the common commercial playhouse.¹³

Allan G. Halline, in his anthology, Six Modern

American Plays, says of Winterset:

In the field of contemporary drama and tragedy Anderson's Winterset (1935) has remained the best known. This story of an American youth's effort to avenge his father's death, ending in the irony of his own death at the hands of the antagonists, invites comparison to Hamlet: although in Anderson's play the tragic hero is redeemed through love from the necessity of revenge, and is thus closer to modern psychology, yet he has neither the emotional nor intellectual stature of his prototype.¹⁴

John Gassner presents a negative view of the poetic form, but admits the creditable aspects of Winterset as well:

As a discharge for the problem of social justice raised by Judge Gaunt's own words, the third-act conclusion is patently inadequate; in fact, it is no discharge at all. Nor does the pseudo-rabbinical peroration make any sense as a commentary on that problem since it is pure rubbish for Esdras to say that Mio and Miriamne died unsubmitting when they actually went to their slaughter like lambs. This inconclusiveness cannot be concealed, in the final analysis, by a mass of verbiage and by the affecting Romeo-and-Juliet story of Mio and Miriamne who are divided by conflicting family interests. There is

¹³Nicoll, op. cit., p. 869.

¹⁴Allan G. Halline, Introduction to Six Modern American Plays, p. xv.

also much else to criticize in this play. Nevertheless, it stands at the peak of Maxwell Anderson's accomplishment. It is touched with greatness in language, characterization, and atmosphere. Moreover, it possesses consistency in two ways, both adequate in themselves: as a modern Hamlet story climaxed with a flat renunciation of vengeance that even the reflect-hero of Shakespeare's tragedy could not arrive at in the Elizabethan age of Vendetta philosophy (though Mio's quest is not rightly vengeance!); and as an exemplification of the Andersonian point that the rats conquer and that the men are destroyed but are transfigured by their heartening nobility.¹⁵

Summary. Although most of the critics laud Anderson for his contributions to the theatre, and his ambition to write tragedy, most of them agree that it is at best difficult to write tragedy about contemporary material. Anderson has most nearly approached the tragic spirit by employing blank verse for the dialogue, and making his characters speak universal truths. Winterset is conceded to be Anderson's greatest work, and Anderson, himself, to be the greatest contender for the crown of Eugene O'Neill as America's Number One Playwright.

The writer has had occasion to produce Winterset in senior high school theater, and has found that this play is far superior to any other with which she has worked. The actors became vitally interested in the rhythm and meaning of the dialogue, and request rehearsal of the play at short intervals in order that they may recapture its

¹⁵Gassner, loc. cit.

beauty, and recommit its lines to memory, even though the performances of the play have ceased. The director finds that each rehearsal is a work of art, and is rewarded by the enthusiasm and appreciation the youngsters have shown for this poetic drama.

B. ELIZABETH THE QUEEN

The first of Anderson's poetic plays was Elizabeth the Queen, in 1930.¹⁶ Although this play has historical basis, it is not restricted to accurate historical fact, and its treatment is neither heroic nor modern. Using the cadenced prose of blank verse, Anderson has recreated the character, atmosphere, and language of Elizabethan times.¹⁷

Characterization. In Maxwell Anderson's Elizabeth the Queen, Elizabeth herself is a very appealing character. She is portrayed as both a queen and a woman. Her love for Essex is purely a human affair, between a man and a woman who love, and fight, with equal vigor, whose determination toward power makes a final reckoning, or death struggle,

¹⁶Production note: Elizabeth the Queen was first produced at the Guild Theatre, New York, on November 3, 1930, a notable performance directed by Philip Moeller, with a splendid cast headed by Alfred Lunt as Essex, and Lynne Fontaine as Elizabeth.

¹⁷Charles H. Whitman, Representative Modern Dramas, p. 1009.

inevitable. All the facets of the queen's personality are presented--high temper, caprice, ambition, imperiousness, and bawdy language--putting the affairs of state firmly before the affairs of heart. In this aspect, the audience is made supremely aware that here is the epitome of royalty, the true ruler, dedicated to the country's best interests.

Essex, her ill-fated lover, appears in all his splendor, wit, greed for power, and ill-humour, struggling with the queen, his mistress, unceasingly for command of England. The opening scene shows Essex's arrival at the palace after a successful adventure in conquest, and points out the conflict between Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh with the incident of the silver armor: Raleigh has been the object of admiration at court in his new suit of solid silver armor, attracting even Elizabeth's praise. The Earl of Essex, jealous of Raleigh's gain, has ordered suits of silver armor made for every member of the palace guard, in order to humiliate Raleigh. Essex is always suspicious, and rightly so, of Raleigh and Lord Cecil, the minister of state under Elizabeth, who are plotting to rid the court of Essex.

When Essex and Elizabeth are together, they always quarrel; two strong wills must invariably clash, despite all the soft, tender love expressions and gestures. Essex is not willing to become Elizabeth's consort; he must rule

with equal power to Elizabeth's. This determination eventually is discovered as his tragic fault.

Raleigh and Cecil trick Essex into going to conquer Ireland, against the Queen's wishes and better judgment, and while he is gone they intercept all the correspondence between the lovers, letting each think the other has deserted him. Essex gathers his army together, refuses to disband them on his return to England at the Queen's orders, and marches on London. When he has the palace surrounded and all seems lost for Elizabeth, he forces her into an agreement of equal rule in return for her freedom. She tricks him with a woman's wiles: she promises him equal power, and when he has dismissed his guard at her request, she summons her own men to arrest Essex and throw him in the Tower, where he will be executed for treason unless he asks the queen's forgiveness. This he is too stubborn to do, and he is executed at the queen's command.

Sir Walter Raleigh, Essex's foil and enemy at court, is given an interesting supporting role. He contrasts with Essex in appearance and personality. Where Essex is hot-headed and rebellious, Raleigh is calm, quiet-mannered, and loyal. He and Lord Cecil, the shrewd and crafty statesman, conspire against Essex, as has already been stated. Lord Cecil is presented as brilliant, scheming, and a dangerous enemy of Essex, who has no chance against cool, calculating

scheming.

The scene of Essex's return to Elizabeth's palace, prepared to seize power by force and popular acclaim, best presents the true character of the central figure, Elizabeth. She agrees to share her kingdom with Essex, and has him dismiss his guards; then,

ELIZABETH.

I have ruled England a long time, my Essex,
And I have found that he who would rule must be
Quite friendless, without mercy--without love.
Arrest Lord Essex.
Arrest Lord Essex! Take him to the Tower--
And keep him safe.

ESSEX.

Is this a jest?

ELIZABETH.

I never
Jest when I play for kingdoms, my lord of
Essex.¹⁸

The difference in the ages of Elizabeth and Essex is emphasized by Maxwell Anderson in the closing scene of the play, when Elizabeth sends for Essex, to offer him one more opportunity to ask her forgiveness and retain his life. But Essex is the Andersonian tragic hero, and fulfills Anderson's requirements of discovery of a tragic flaw and subsequent moral growth. He reveals his tragic fault to Elizabeth in a very moving scene:

¹⁸Maxwell Anderson, Elizabeth the Queen (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1934), Act II, scene iii, p. 94.

¹⁹Ibid., Act III, p. 110.

ESSEX.

I've lost conceit of myself a little. A life
In prison's very quiet. It leads me to thinking.
You govern England better than I should.
I'd lead her into wars, make a great name,
Perhaps, like Henry V, and leave a legacy
Of debts and bloodshed after me. You will leave
Peace, happiness, something secure. A woman governs
Better than a man, being a natural coward.
A coward rules best.¹⁹

And Elizabeth, upon his voluntary departure to his death as the only possible solution to the tragic situation, becomes suddenly old and weary:

ELIZABETH.

Then I'm old, I'm old!
I could be young with you, but now I'm old.
I know now how it will be without you. The sun
Will be empty and circle around an empty earth--
And I will be queen of emptiness and death--
Why could you not have loved me enough to give me
Your love and let me keep as I was?²⁰

Among the servant characters, Penelope is the outstanding figure, partly because of her nobility and partly because of her nearness to the queen. She is the only significant lady in waiting, and speaks transition dialogue, drawing the subtler character traits from each of the major characters; she also has succumbed to Essex's vast charms, but shows grandness of nature in the last act when she acknowledges her love for Essex to the queen, but convinces the queen that Essex really loves only Elizabeth. Mary, Theresa, Ellen, and the Fool all provide comic relief in

²⁰Ibid., p. 113.

true Elizabethan rowdiness.

Francis Bacon, at first Essex's friend, then turning to the winning side, presents an interesting character study of a great historical figure, aptly described by Alexander Pope in "An Essay on Man":

If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shined,
The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind.²¹

Burbage, an actual actor and playwright of the Elizabethan stage, falls short in the Anderson version. Although one of the finest actors of the age, he is allowed to "ham up" his portrayal of Falstaff in a performance before the queen of Shakespeare's Henry IV. The queen, hoping to be distracted by her favorite diversion, watching plays, cannot keep her mind on the performance, and berates both the actors and the dialogue for their mutual shortcomings.

Mood. The tragic mood of Elizabeth the Queen is heightened by clever staging in the third act, which is set in the Tower of London. Elizabeth grimly awaits the execution of Essex in a tensely dramatic scene; she is nervous, and distraught, but haughtily resolute that Essex should beg her forgiveness. In her heart she realizes that his stubborn pride will never allow him to do this, and

²¹Louis Bredvold, Alan McKillop, and Lois Whitney, editors, Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, p. 383.

therefore he is hopelessly lost to her. This imminent loss has been foreshadowed in an earlier scene between the Fool and Penelope. Elizabeth wanders aimlessly about her apartments in the Tower, imperiously seeking distraction--and finds it not. When Penelope begs her to send for Essex, and assures her of Essex's true love for her, Elizabeth becomes further upset. She berates Lord Cecil:

ELIZABETH.

It's your day. Cecil.
I dare say you know that. The snake-in-the-grass
Endures, and those who are noble, free of soul,
Valiant and admirable--they go down in the prime,
Always they go down--

CECIL.

Madam, the guard
Is needed at once--

ELIZABETH.

Aye--the snake mind is best--
One by one you outlast them. To the end
Of time it will be so--the rats inherit the
earth.²²

When she calls for Essex, she dismisses Penelope in order that Penelope's youth might not reveal Elizabeth's age, and then in a sad last meeting, Essex assures Elizabeth that his execution must take place; that he cannot live and allow Elizabeth to retain her throne, and therefore he must die. Alone on the stage at the closing curtain, Elizabeth's body

²²Anderson, op. cit., Act III, p. 106.

expresses the sadness of defeat in victory.

Within the play, the moods vary from the suspense about the arrival of Lord Essex in the opening scene, to the strife in the argument at the door about the silver armor, and expectancy as Essex comes face to face with Elizabeth in the first act. There is bitterness in this meeting, and tenderness intermingled; the audience is made to feel that nothing good will come out of this strange relationship. The mood of the scenes between Raleigh and Cecil is cold and calculating, and ominous toward Essex. The scene of the council meeting is fast-paced, tense, exciting, and cleverly manipulated by Raleigh and Cecil--here is fury, hot-blooded retaliation against the enmeshing schemes of the elder statesman: here is heartbreak for the old queen as she sees her favorite ensnared, and is powerless to prevent it.

There is humor in the scenes between the fool and the queen, as well as between the fool and the ladies in waiting. There is pathos in the play enactment scene, as well as in the entire second act, where Elizabeth is convinced of having lost her lover by his apparent neglect during the Ireland adventure. The changes of mood are subtle, and played with restraint, as are most of Anderson's tragedies.

Theme. The theme of Elizabeth the Queen is essentially the ill-fated love affair between the Earl of Essex.

and Elizabeth the queen, but imbedded deeply into the warp of this tapestry may be found an exposition of the treachery of politics, and of the callousness of the human being when power is at stake. The gallant Essex is destroyed by the conniving "rats" of the court, as well as by his own personal deficiencies. Elizabeth is the epitome of the monarch who must put aside all human leanings, and remain soulless, and self-sacrificing in the interest of her kingdom.

Conflict. In Elizabeth the Queen, the conflict lies between Elizabeth's overpowering love for Essex and her desire to rule England alone; in her obsession to keep Essex always safely by her side in England, and her compulsion to send him off on dangerous expeditions to further the cause of the kingdom, and to satisfy her counselors of state; to be sure that Essex loves her as a woman in spite of her age and unattractiveness, or to believe the court gossip that Essex is using his favor with the queen to gain power and position; between the passionate desires of her heart, and the calm, calculating demands of her reason.

In Essex's own personality there is great conflict; between his ambition for power and fame, and his love for Elizabeth as a woman. His hot-headedness causes many conflicts to arise when he is at court, with various of the court favorites. He clashes with Sir Walter Raleigh, through jealousy, and with Lord Cecil, through ambition, and brings

about his own defeat through their combined machinations against him. The actual conflict between Elizabeth and Essex comes about when Essex refuses to disband his army at the queen's command, and instead, marches against her palace and seizes the queen herself in a bid for power. The queen is then forced to order his execution for treason.

Criticism. Although the critics present variances of opinion concerning Elizabeth the Queen, Anderson must be given credit for attempting to make human beings out of historical figures, and in the medium of blank verse. Arthur Hobson Quinn has great praise for the blank verse dialogue employed by Maxwell Anderson in Elizabeth the Queen:

Fortunately Anderson next turned to the creation of historical figures and rose to his unquestioned position in the front rank of living playwrights. In Elizabeth the Queen (1930) he drew a stirring picture of the conflict between Elizabeth's love for Essex and her desire to rule alone. He transferred to the stage the ambition, the cruelty, and the sensuous passion, the keen sense for reality and the royal dominance, which make the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn such an arresting figure. The Earl of Essex, who is ambitious to be king of England and who considers that his own blood is quite as good as the Tudors' or the Boleyns', is almost as well drawn. Anderson wrote the play in a blank verse singularly well-adapted for the stage. He did not imitate the conventional measure, but keeping the spirit of the older verse rather than its pattern, he wrote a flexible line, preserving the four [sic] stress beat, but breaking up the lines to suit the thought. In other words, knowing the history of English poetry, he made the thought rule the verse. The curtain speeches of Act II, when Elizabeth has

tricked Essex into dismissing his guard, illustrate this.²³

Conversely, quoting MacLeish as saying of blank verse that "as a vehicle for contemporary expression, it is pure anachronism," Lawson maintains that:

Maxwell Anderson has failed sadly in attempts to breathe life into Elizabethan verse forms; the result is dignified, fluent, and uninspired.²⁴

Considering Anderson's interpretation of history, he says:

Anderson's method is based on the belief that quality of character is of final value and must triumph over a possible environment. He takes no interest in social causation because he assumes that the environment can be changed whenever people wish to change it. Thus ideals (the same ideals which Ibsen found so reactionary and dangerous) become the basis of the drama. This is evident in Anderson's historical plays, which interpret history as a conflict of the passions and whims of exceptional people. The fate of nations is decided by persons who know necessity beyond their personal emotional needs. Since the emotions are timeless, man's relationships to the universe are substituted for his relationships to his environment: emotional rift is substituted for racial causation.²⁵

Allan G. Halline, professor of American literature at Bucknell University, in the introduction to Six Modern American Plays, considers Anderson's historical plays

²³Quinn, op. cit., p. 267.

²⁴John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting, p. 287.

²⁵Ibid., p. 146.

notable contribution to the American theater:

In the field of historical tragedy, Anderson has made a notable contribution. The distinctive qualities of these plays are: their presentation of historical personages in psychological terms that give the sense of present reality without destroying the illusion of the past; their skillful stagecraft which effectively makes use of conventional forms and introduces a few innovations; their frequent employment of blank verse; and their embodiment of Anderson's theory of tragedy which includes (a) the portrayal of an inner conflict between good and evil, (b) a protagonist of exceptional qualities who represents the forces of good and wins, and (c) a protagonist who is not perfect at the beginning and is ennobled in the course of the action. Anderson's first play in this group, Elizabeth the Queen (1930), is an account of the love-ambition contest between Elizabeth and Essex, done with a rapier-like precision of a courtier's duel; add to this the swift etching of the minor characters, and the result is a tense, polished drama.²⁶

In an introduction to one of Anderson's plays in the anthology, Representative American Plays, Quinn praises the impressive characterization:

It was in Elizabeth the Queen (1930) that Mr. Anderson established his right to be considered one of the foremost playwrights in the history of the American theater. Here he created the stirring conflict in Queen Elizabeth's nature: between her love for the Earl of Essex and her determination to rule alone in England. Essex, who deems his own race quite as royal as either the Tudors' or the Boleyns', is almost as well drawn.²⁷

John Gassner praises Anderson's depth of perception,

²⁶Halline, op. cit., pp. xii-xiv.

²⁷Quinn, Representative American Plays, p. 1104.

and his distaste for producing merely entertaining plays:

In each of Anderson's important plays, finally, there is a core of meaning to support his perceptions of character and mankind; he has never cared for mere entertainment.

• • •
In Elizabeth the Queen the gallant Essex is destroyed by the small-minded conniving men who run Elizabeth's government; "those who are noble, free of soul, valiant and admirable--they go down in their prime, Always go down . . . the rats inherit the earth." A tragedy of the two conflicting lovers, the Earl of Essex and the Queen Elizabeth, this play is essentially a tragedy of character. But their love relationship and its tragic climax when Essex loses his handsome head on the block are imbedded in the treacherous quicksands of human evil.²⁸

Charles Whitman, in his volume Representative Modern Dramas, offers further praise of Anderson's treatment of historical material:

The first of Anderson's poetic plays was Elizabeth the Queen. The play is neither a biting satire nor the dramatization of Lytton Strachey's Elizabeth and Essex, as some have thought, but a bit of dramatic tragedy which takes such liberties with historic fact as the need for greater dramatic tensions seems to warrant. It may be that the writer has wavered a bit between the heroic way of treating historical material, of which Shakespeare is the great exemplar, and the modern way, that is Shaw's, but for the most part he has created an amalgamation of character, atmosphere, and language that serves admirably to bring back the "spacious times of great Elizabeth." For his purpose he has evolved a flexible medium--partly a cadenced prose, partly a loose sort of verse often touched with lyric beauty and eloquence, with just enough of the archaic to suggest Elizabethan speech.²⁹

²⁸Gassner, op. cit., p. 681.

²⁹Whitman, loc. cit.

Summary. In 1930, Maxwell Anderson scored a remarkable success with his historical play, Elizabeth the Queen, the first of his plays in blank verse to become accepted by the modern theater audience. It is particularly noteworthy for this success, because Anderson hence became the first American playwright to profitably employ this new medium. The play is interesting, the scenes moving slowly to the splendid tragic climax in the last act; and the characters, magnificent historical figures, become living, breathing persons possessing human emotions and frailties, for their brief episode on the stage. The blank verse dialogue is unrealistic, perhaps, but fitted to its subject-matter better than in any other Andersonian play. It represents an attempt to elevate modern tragedy to its former poetic realm, and paved the way for other important plays both in the historical and blank verse modes, such as Mary of Scotland, and Winterset.

C. NIGHT OVER TAOS

One of the lesser known tragedies of Maxwell Anderson is Night Over Taos (1932), which is nevertheless representative of his tragic style. It is concerned with the final struggle of the Spanish conquistadores against the development of United States territory; of the aims, ideals

and social mores of a dying race, set on New Mexico soil in the year 1847. It was not a box office success, and falls short of the standard set by Elizabeth the Queen.

Characterization. The characters of Night Over Taos are less real people than symbols of the vanishing race of Spanish conquistadores who overran New Mexico before its accession to the United States. The action centers about the family of one Pablo Montoya, a rico and the leader of the small village of Taos. Pablo is an old man, sixty years of age, described by Anderson as "having burning eyes, gray hair, and an intent face." ³⁰ He is a dominant figure, powerful, and the village priest, Martinez, says of him:

His father was lord of life and death before him, and he's been a god so long here in this valley that he thinks he's a god in fact. That's his strength, too, though it sometimes makes him a fool.³¹

His entrance into the play is dramatic, after all hope of his survival has been lost; the enemy, the United States Army, had surprised Pablo's forces in a mountain pass, and destroyed them all--all, that is, except Pablo's eldest

³⁰Maxwell Anderson, Night Over Taos (Los Angeles: Samuel French, 1932), Act I, p. 87.

³¹Ibid., p. 21.

son, Federico, who had betrayed the Spaniards to the enemy in return for his life and the retention of family lands under the new order. Pablo's entrance speech is eloquent and reminiscent of the quality of the poetry in Winterset:

Men of Taos, I have come home, and I bring
 Only a doubtful victory. Women of Taos,
 What victory we have, little though it is,
 Has saved us from slavery, and those we must thank
 for that
 Lie now on the mountains. They chose rather to die
 Than live not free. First, let us mourn them.
 Mourn with me, women of Taos. They were my friends,
 And your heartbreak's mine. But our mourning must
 be brief,
 And forgotten in anger. Let the women go out.
 All save Diana.
 (The women go)
 This was no defeat! We were betrayed at the pass,
 Betrayed from within. If that were not so,
 We'd have spilled them like water, and not one death
 Would have been needed!³²

As he announces their betrayal, he describes the unhappy end awaiting the betrayer when he is discovered. He becomes rhetorical as he continues to address the ricos, urging their continued assistance in the fight against the invaders:

. . . We come of an old, proud race,
 From that part of the earth where the blood runs hot
 and the hearts
 Of men are resentful of insult. We are either lords
 And masters of ourselves, or else we die.
 And who are these conquerors who intend to take
 Our places and our rights? For this is our place,
 We wrought it out of a desert, built it up
 To beauty and use; we live here well, we have

³²Ibid., p. 88.

Customs and arts and wisdom handed down
 To us through centuries. They would break this up,
 And scatter it, these tricksters from the North.
 They come here penniless, homeless, living with squaws
 For women, vagabond barbarians, with hardly
 A language, no laws, no loyalty,...traders...whatever
 They have they'll sell...behind each other's backs.
 They've sold me a thousand rifles! And I have them!
 And when next we fight you'll use them.³³

He represents the old order for the ruling aristocracy, as
 he explains in a speech to Martinez:

All rule is based on fear. . .
 On fear and love. . . but when they know too much
 They neither fear nor love you! Teach them too much
 And you tear your empire down, and what you have left
 Is what there was before there were empires! This
 Is all your progress...and they won't thank you for it.
 Nor will women. They don't want freedom! But they'll
 take it,
 And laugh at you for giving it!³⁴

It is precisely this theory about women which causes
 his tragic downfall; he has chosen for his fourth wife a
 young captive girl named Diana, of the race to the North,
 who is coveted by Pablo's eldest son, Federico, but who
 actually loves his youngest son, Felipe.

Federico, the eldest, is a selfish, cowardly, and
 dangerous enemy to his father. He has already seduced his
 father's present wife, Dona Josefa, and plans to take over

³³Ibid., p. 90.

³⁴Ibid., p. 119.

his father's place in the village, on the 18,000 acre estate, and with Diana, after having settled with the enemy. He returns to the village after his father's entrapment, and persuades the peons that they must flee from the oncoming invasion, led by Felipe--a scheme to eliminate Felipe as a rival for Diana, and enable Federico to retain everything for himself. Felipe, however, soon sees through his brother's clever little plan, and challenges him to fight; it is as they are fighting that Pablo enters.

Pablo describes Felipe's devotion and loyalty to him; how he risked his life searching the mountain pass for the body of his father:

Wait, Make the old men soldiers. Old men are swift, violent, crafty, lecherous, unscrupulous in winning, relentless in defeat, putting their cause before their affections. Young men are much too tender, much too true. When I was lost on the hills, tonight, and some thought me dead, I was hidden in a cave with three companions, because the rifles of the trappers had swept the trails. And I heard a voice calling my name. Up and down the pass it went, calling my name. It was your voice, my son, and you were risking your life needlessly. Had I tried to reach you I should have been killed, and I lay there, nursing my wrath at the enemy, knowing when next we met them our rifles would outnumber theirs. Had I been young as you I would have tried to warn you and been slain for my trouble. And I learned then that in a battle youth is too tender and too true. You should have

known that if I were dead it would do me no harm to lie a night in the snow, that if I were alive, I would find my way alone.³⁵

Captain Molyneaux, the brave, shrewd Yankee whose double-dealing with the Spaniards brought about their downfall, is captured by Pablo's men; although he is too brave to be forced to reveal his secrets, his two henchmen are of lesser courage and tell Pablo the truth about the dagger and the map of Pablo's estate which are found on their persons. It is then that Pablo realizes that his son, Federico, is the guilty one, and reveals it to the ricos who have gathered for his wedding feast:

Someone told me the truth,
And that's his reward for it. The Yankee trader
Who traded with you is dead. Look, look, Felipe. . .
That was my eldest. . . that one there with the face
That twitches. . . but the deed is cancelled now.
The party of the second part is dead,
And the party of the first part's dying.

. . .
Take our Federico
And chain him at the plaza gate, let him feel
What it's like to hang in irons before we hang him
The last time for the buzzards.³⁶

And when he hears that Federico, having been secured in chains at the gate, is inciting the villagers to rise against Pablo, he rushes out and stabs his own son to death before the assembled crowd of villagers, in the last scene

³⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 155-6.

of Act II.

But Felipe and Diana, left alone at this time, vow their true love to each other, and consider returning to the land of her birth, where they may live and love in peace. Pablo has vowed that no man should live who comes between him and what he wants; so Felipe must die. The priest, Martinez, tries to point out the error of Pablo's passions:

Whether he's guilty or not,
To kill him means we're beaten. You'd never gather
Your army around you tomorrow. There'd be no army;
Your leadership depends on the trust they have
In your strength and wisdom. If you execute Felipe
They'll no longer respect you. The news will spread
That Pablo Montoya's raving in his house
And murdering his sons. Can you command them
With that in their minds?³⁷

The last scene in Act III, when Pablo has been persuaded to allow Felipe to live, Felipe warns him that it will not be wise to allow him to live, just as Essex warned Elizabeth, the queen:

I'm a son of Taos. I've been loyal to Taos,
And its ways are deep in my blood, but still it's true
That I'm a rebel at heart. Somewhere within me
Something cries out: Let us go! Let us be free!
To choose our own lives! Sometimes, if you let me live,
It will be the worse for Taos that I am alive...³⁸

Diana, given her choice, gladly chooses to die with Felipe rather than marry the old man whom she does not love.

³⁷Ibid., p. 173.

³⁸Ibid., p. 192.

Pablo, taking out a vial of poison with which the boys' mother had tried to kill him before her death, asks the lovers to drink of it; then, reconsidering, he rescinds the order:

The Spanish blood runs thin. Spain has gone down,
 And Taos, a little island of things that were,
 Sinks among things that are. The North will win.
 Taos is dead. You told me this before,
 And I wouldn't believe it. I believe it now.
 Yes, and it's right. It's right
 Because what wins is right. It won't win forever.
 The kings will come back, and they'll be right again.
 When they win again. Not now. The gods are weary
 Of men who give orders, playing at god. And why
 Should a man, an old man, looking forward to nothing,
 Take pride in breaking men to his will? Meanwhile
 The years creeping up at his feet, and all he has
 Going down around him? And then to stand there, alone,
 Helpless...an old man, playing at God. Go out,
 Leave me, be together, be free! In all Taos
 There is only one man who could not surrender and live,
 And his heritage is darkness. I drink to your mother.
 She had her way.
 (He drinks from the phial.)³⁹

Thus the tragic hero, Pablo Montoya, recognizes his fatal weakness, and causes his own death in expiation. Once again Anderson has fulfilled the requirements he set up in "The Essence of Tragedy" as the primary requisites for a true tragedy.

There are too many minor characters in this play; they serve to confuse the real issues, and do not deserve

³⁹Loc. cit.

to be treated here. Characterization presented concerning the major characters followed the line of the narrative necessarily, lacking the usual depth of character trait, and material for analysis.

Mood. The mood of Night Over Taos is somewhat obscured by the rhetoric: it is somber, violent at times, and melodramatic. The old-world atmosphere of the Montoya household prevails broodingly against the struggling of the young lovers to free themselves from its binding conventions. There is a sense of decay, of repulsion at the old man who forces so many individuals to conform to his will. There is tenderness in the plight of Felipe, who loves his father devotedly, but is drawn toward Diana, his father's intended bride; their love scenes fall far short, however, in the opinion of the writer, of the heights to be reached in Winterset by Mio and Miriamne. The characters seem flat, two dimensional, and not entirely credible. This hinders the communication of emotion which the author must have intended.

Theme. The theme of Night Over Taos is the vanishing of the old order, yielding place to the new. Pablo Montoya represents the old order, along with Federico and the ricos of the village of Taos. They are the Spanish nobles who possess everything around them, land, buildings, peons,

women; and will not readily give up their lives of luxury and ease. The new order is represented by Felipe, Diana, Martinez, and the peasants. They own nothing, and have not even the freedom of choice in matters pertaining to them, regardless of importance. Even in the matter of retention of life, they must bow to the will of Pablo and the ricos. The new forces are augmented by the United States armies pushing westward, bringing social change into hitherto isolated foreign territories, replacing despotism with democracy. The United States is a nation against whom Spain's feeble outpost forces can scarce stand, for even the new Spanish generation is looking forward hopefully to her envelopment. The rule by force policy of Pablo Montoya so removes him from the confidence of his people that there is no longer a place for him in their hearts or lives. Realizing that the little village can no longer hold out against the oncoming nation, and that he must yield his place of power to his more modern and popular son, Pablo chooses death, since he alone cannot submit.

Conflict. In Night Over Taos, the conflict between the old order and the new takes precedence over any semblance of plot or characterization intended by the author. Pablo Montoya is a symbol, the symbol of the old way of life, the Castilian domination of land, peons, village and women under

the Feudal Spanish conquest in the empirical system. The setting of Taos, New Mexico, places the conflicting force as the growing, strenuous, democratic young United States against whose insurging forces the decadent old man and his weakened forces cannot hope to stand. The futility of the conflict is apparent from the very beginning of the play when the old tyrant's own sons conspire against him, for power and for love.

The most important conflict occurs within the Montoya family, the complications arising from Pablo Montoya's choice of a young Northern slave girl to be his next wife. Both sons, Federico and Felipe, desire Diana, the slave girl, for themselves, and the other wives of the household do not wish to find themselves usurped in the domination of the household by a former slave. They set about to prevent this at all costs, and Pablo finds himself alone in his heavy-handed ambition. He gains weak support from the ricos of the village, but they in turn leave his forces to join those of his popular son, Felipe. The village priest, Martinez, also turns against the old order, represented by Pablo, by educating the peons and promising them freedom and opportunity under the newer way of life.

Criticism. Because Night Over Taos, written in 1932, was a box-office failure on Broadway, not many critics

have chosen to discuss, or even mention this later romantic tragedy of Anderson's. Consequently, this section of the thesis must perforce be brief and somewhat sketchy. Arthur Hobson Quinn sums it up in two sentences:

Night Over Taos, 1932, a romantic tragedy laid in New Mexico in 1847 was vivid in its pictures of the dying ideals of imperialistic Spain. There was too much discussion, however, about the social and political conditions and too many minor characters, and the play failed.⁴⁰

In John Gassner's Masters of the Drama, although a considerable amount of space is devoted to Maxwell Anderson, no mention is made of his Night Over Taos; nor does Joseph Wood Krutch broach this play in The American Drama Since 1918.

Allardyce Nicoll in World Drama gives the play one line:

Between these (Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland) comes an Indian play, Night Over Taos, 1932, also in the poetic style, . . .⁴¹

Hurburt O'Hara simply notes that Night Over Taos closes on a note of love, a slight variation of the same tune Anderson employs in several plays. (Winterset, Valley Forge, and The Masque of Kings, for instance.)⁴²

Arthur Hobson Quinn, in his introduction to Winterset

⁴⁰Quinn, History of American Drama, p. 268.

⁴¹Nicoll, op. cit., p. 865.

⁴²Hurburt O'Hara, Today in American Drama, p. 33.

in Representative American Plays, treats it more fully:

Night Over Taos (1932) was a romantic tragedy, in verse, laid in New Mexico in 1847. The gallant but futile effort of this Spanish outpost to defy the advance of the United States was well portrayed. The play did not succeed in its first production in New York, but in the summer of 1937 it was the artistic climax of the season at the Pasadena Playhouse in California.⁴³

Charles Whitman offers the most comprehensive criticism:

The poetic historical play, Night Over Taos 1931 (sic), falls short of the standards set in Elizabeth the Queen. The theme is a glamorous one, having to do with the last stand of the Spanish feudal lords of Taos, New Mexico, in the year 1847, who defy the rapacious forces of the growing republic of the North. Though the play has dignity and romantic beauty, and makes an appeal to the imagination, it seems remote and over-literary, and somewhat lacking in warmth. One gets the impression that the writer is not psychologically inside his material, but is "outside looking in."⁴⁴

Summary. Because Anderson's work is of varied quality and has gained varied acceptance by the theater audience and by American critics, Night Over Taos, a romantic tragedy of the last outpost of the Spanish conquistadores in America, was included in this thesis as representative of the numerous Anderson plays which failed.

⁴³Quinn, Representative American Plays, p. 1104.

⁴⁴Whitman, loc. cit.

An effort was made to show that although some of the lines have poetic beauty, most of the dialogue is archaic and rhetorical, and the characters without depth or credibility. The plot, at times, becomes heavy and melodramatic; i. e., the murdering of his son Federico by Pablo. The lovers fail to impress the viewer as having any depth of emotion, and the result is a loss of mood. Pablo, as the tragic figure, is too small in stature for lasting tragedy.

D. SUMMARY

In considering three representative tragedies of Anderson, Winterset, Elizabeth the Queen and Night Over Taos, this writer concluded that of the playwrights writing in America today, Maxwell Anderson must be considered as having the noblest aims; whether he lives up to these aims, or not, is a matter of opinion. In Winterset he touches high tragedy; Elizabeth the Queen is outstanding among poetic historical plays; and Night Over Taos falls far short of Anderson's own goals.

CHAPTER IV

THREE TRAGEDIES OF LILLIAN HELLMAN: THE CHILDREN'S HOUR, THE LITTLE FOXES, AND WATCH ON THE RHINE

Belonging to a younger school of writers than the two men previously studied, the school of social criticism, Lillian Hellman has earned for herself the title of the foremost woman playwright in America. Widely experienced in the theater world, from reading plays professionally to writing and directing successful Broadway productions, Miss Hellman is a conscientious, plodding worker. She maintains that she always develops plays from personalities rather than plots; we shall see in the plays to be analyzed in this thesis that she has a number of meticulous characterizations to her credit. It is true that most of these characters are evil ones, but Miss Hellman believes in being truthful about the fact of evil, and does manage to evoke pity for such pitiable figures as Birdie Hubbard in The Little Foxes, and affection for the good characters, as Sara's family, in Watch on the Rhine.

While working in the producing office of the very able Herman Shumlin, as a play reader, Miss Hellman came across the records of an unusual lawsuit in Scotland; these she utilized in one of the most powerful plays ever produced on Broadway, The Children's Hour, the first of Miss

Hellman's plays to be considered in this chapter.¹

A. THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

Lillian Hellman's first successful play, produced on Broadway for a record number of performances² has currently been revived on Broadway and has enjoyed considerable success. Although there may be found psychological weakness within the third act, the first two acts are dramatically forceful, and this play has made an immense impression upon the theater-going public of America, both favorable and unfavorable.

Characterization. The demoniac child, Mary Tilford, dominates the first two acts completely. The child is intolerable from the very beginning of the play, when she declares the injustices being forced upon her by the school and its headmistresses, Martha Dobie and Karen Wright. These

¹John Gassner, Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, p. 642.

²Production note: The Children's Hour, a powerful play hinting at sexual abnormality, created a furor and ran for 691 performances in its first production in New York City, Nov. 20, 1934. (Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 634); it was adapted by Miss Hellman for the screen, but These Three, a watered-down version, fails to portray the power of the vicious lie adequately.

two young women have already been introduced to the audience in the opening scene, revealing their determination and courage in meeting the financial problems involved in the operation of their new school. They are rational, kind, and devoted to their work, and the audience is unwilling to accept Mary's unjust accusations at face value; this consideration is confirmed as is seen how tenderly and tactfully Karen handles the maladjusted child, Mary. One cannot help feeling pity for Karen in this situation, for she must keep the child in her school for financial backing from the child's grandmother. It is hard to believe that a child could be so vicious at such an early age, but Mary is a very credible character. She speaks in appropriate dialogue, in character, maliciously refusing to say the accusation aloud, but whispering it into the grandmother's ear. She schemes quite cleverly for her age, but she makes the typical childish mistakes. She has taken advantage of every situation around the school in which she can find or represent some wrong-doing to hold over the head of another child, and thus dominate her completely. She uses blackmail tactics indiscriminately, and takes a child's life-savings for the bus fare to her grandmother's, after she decides to run away from the school. She is brutal toward the other children, twisting arms, bullying, to maintain dominance. She hates the school, the teachers, the

curricula; she even hates the other children for being so weak as to fall prey to her schemes.

As many essentially evil persons do, Mary has a very saccharine exterior which she can put on at will; and it is this sweet self which she presents to her grandmother. Her uncle, Dr. Cardin, however, is not fooled by the young tyrant; he sees her for what she really is--a spoiled brat. He visits the school often, being the fiance of Karen, and he is consulted when Mary fakes a faint in order to escape punishment. He serves as liason between the school and the grandmother, his aunt.

Martha and Karen are not as fully-developed characters as Mary; there must be some vagueness about them in the first act for the story which the child tells to be credible. They have been close friends since childhood, and have worked very hard and long to begin the joint operation of the school. In the opening dialogue, the girls discuss Karen's approaching marriage to the doctor, and a slight touch of resentment is evident in Martha's attitude toward this alliance.

The foreshadowing action comes when the scatter-brained, fading actress aunt of Martha's is dismissed from the teaching staff of the school, and retaliates by accusing Martha of having been unnaturally fond of Karen since childhood.

Unfortunately two little girls, friends of Mary's, have been listening outside the door. They, of course, do not understand any of the derogatory implications in the aunt's vehement words, but when they repeat the conversation to Mary, her devious little brain makes the most perverted conclusion possible from the words, and she plots to turn them to her own advantage. At last she has a weapon with which to strike at her hated oppressors; so she goes immediately to her grandmother with the weird tale.

The grandmother, Mrs. Tilford, more wealthy than sensible, dotes upon her evil grandchild, for she does not recognize in her those vicious tendencies so evident to everyone else, even the uncle. She listens to the child's distorted gossip, believes her, and proceeds to call each of the other pupil's parents, urging them to remove their child from the horrible influence of the school immediately.

When the children are withdrawn, the girls do not know how to fight the spreading evil. They go to the home of Mrs. Tilford, asking her to retract her slanderous statements. Mrs. Tilford, however, maintains that she must do what she feels is right, and therefore uphold her allegations, so the girls countermand with a lawsuit. Upon Dr. Cardin's insistence, the child is brought out to face the two victims of her malicious accusations, in a powerful and dramatically tense scene at the close of Act II. Mary carries off the

situation with aplomb, ever forcing another child to offer substantiating testimony.

The friends, Karen and Martha, lose the suit in court because the instigator of the rumor, Martha's aunt, refuses to return home to testify in their behalf. Thus they are labelled "unnatural lovers," and have become entangled in a web of lies from which they can never be extricated. Karen sends Dr. Cardin away, refusing to believe that he too does not consider them guilty. Dr. Cardin's leaving without question seems to the writer to be a weakness in Miss Hellman's characterization; in real life he could not be so easily dismissed.

The girls, moneyless, friendless, and honorless, are reduced to a state of complete apathy, and Martha comes to believe that the allegations had actual basis, and she has loved Karen in an unnatural way. In futility, she commits suicide. Karen, left alone in the deserted school, the body of her faithful friend lying in the next room, is visited by a repentant Mrs. Tilford, contrite, admitting her mistake, and begging forgiveness. The play ends on a note of frustration, inconclusion, and vagueness.

Mood. The mood of The Children's Hour ranges from vengeance and hatred to neurotic futility, and a bitter acceptance of a fate which can neither be understood nor

opposed. The lie upon which the play is based is ugly and distasteful, thereby evoking an emotion of horror in the viewer when the child's maliciousness is revealed. There is a certain tension in the scenes between the two girls. However, the doctor's associations with the girls lacks credibility. When the child, Mary, is on the stage, an aura of evil surrounds her and pervades the entire scene; her scenes with other children are sickeningly vivid, and her wickedness is not the least obscured by the presence of adults on the stage.

There is a bawdy humor in the actress aunt's pathetic situation, and real pathos in the girls' futile attempt to fight the lie. There is a great deal of tenderness and pity in the scene directly preceding Martha's suicide. The mood of the last scene is intangible; it might best be described as resignedness.

Theme. Lillian Hellman maintains that the theme of The Children's Hour is "good and evil."³ Halline calls the theme "abnormality"⁴ while Nicoll describes it as "the effect of an original lie working on a gossip-ridden community."⁵

³Lillian Hellman, Four Plays by Lillian Hellman, p.vii..

⁴Allan G. Halline, Six Modern American Plays, p. xxi.

⁵Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama, p. 831.

Perhaps the theme concerns all of these ideas, and cannot be reduced to the dichotomy of Miss Hellman's quotation. The play might be said to have two distinct threads of plot: the one of Martha's affection for Karen, interrupted by the appearance of the doctor as Karen's suitor; and the other, the vicious lie instigated by the neurotic child, and its far-reaching consequences--both threads ending in a mist of fog in the third act. It is impossible, in this writer's opinion, to find meaning in the denouement which would justify its being.

Conflict. Because of the indeterminateness of the action in The Children's Hour, the rather full treatment given the play by John Howard Lawson in his book, Theories and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting will be recounted here as authoritative comment:

In The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman, we have a weak climax (Martha Dobie's suicide) which is preceded by a strong obligatory scene (the close of the second act, when the demoniac child is brought face to face with her two victims).

If we examine the climax of The Children's Hour, we find that it ends in a fog. It is impossible to find emotional or dramatic meaning in the final crisis. The two women are broken in spirit when the last act opens. Their lives are ruined because a lying child has convinced the world that their relationship is abnormal. Martha confesses that there is really a psychological basis for the charge: she had always felt a desperate physical love for Karen. Dr. Cardin, Karen's fiance, who has loyally defended the two women, talks over the problem with Karen and she insists that they must break their

engagement. But all this is acceptance of a situation: their conscious wills are not directed toward any solution of the difficulty--it is assumed that no solution exists. Martha's suicide is not an act which breaks up an unbearable tension, but an act which grows out of drifting futility. There is a feeling of acid bitterness in these scenes which indicates that the author is trying to find expression for something that she feels deeply. But she does not dramatize her meaning.

The rising action of The Children's Hour is far more vital than its conclusion. But the weakness of the climax infects every minute of the play. The scenes between the two women and Dr. Cardin in the first act are designed to indicate Martha's jealousy, her abnormal feeling for Karen. But the idea is planted awkwardly. The scenes are artificial and passive because they have no inner meaning. The relationship between Martha and Karen cannot be vital because it has no direction; it leads only to defeat.

The rumor started by the neurotic child constitutes a separate (and much stronger) story. The child, Mary Tilford, hates the two teachers. In revenge for being punished, she runs away to her grandmother. Not wishing to return to the school, she invents the yarn about the two women. They deny the story, but it is believed. Now the last thing we notice about this series of events is that it is too simple. Several critics have asked whether it is plausible for the child's grandmother, and other witnesses, to so quickly accept her testimony. Certainly there is nothing fundamentally impossible in two lives being ruined by a child's gossip. The situation gives us the impression of being implausible because it is not placed in a solid social framework. This is evident in the inconsequentiality of the suicide at the end. The root action lacks adequate compensation and extension. Without a social framework we cannot gauge the effects of the child's gossip on the community; we do not know the conditions within the community; we have no data as to the steps by which the scandal is spread and accepted. Therefore the psychological effect on the two women is also vague, and is taken for granted instead of being dramatized.

What would be the effect on the construction of The Children's Hour if Martha's confession had been placed in the first act instead of the third?

This would permit unified development of the psychological and social conflict; both lines of action would be strengthened. The confession would have the character of a decision (the only decision which gets the action under way at present is the child's act of will in running away from school). A decision involving the two women would clarify the exposition; it would enlarge the possibilities of the action; the conflict of will engendered by the confession would lead directly to the struggle against the malicious rumors in the community. The inner tension created by the confession would make their fight against the child's gossip more difficult, would add psychological weight to the child's story, and greatly increase its plausibility. This suggestion is based on the principle of unity in terms of climax: if Martha's suicide has been correctly selected as the climax, the exposition must be directly linked to this event and every part of the action must be unified in its connection with the root action. Martha's emotional problem will thus be dramatized and woven through the action. In order to accomplish this, her confession must be the premise, not the conclusion.

The rising action of The Children's Hour shows the danger of following a line of cause and effect which is so simple that it is not believable. The indirect causes, the deeper meanings, are lacking--these deeper meanings are hidden (so successfully hidden that it is impossible to find them) in the final scene.

In spite of this, the play has a great deal of forward drive. The author's sincere way of telling her story brings her directly (without serious preparation, with a good deal of emotional impact) to the obligatory scene: Mrs. Tilford is shocked by her granddaughter's story. She telephones to all the parents to withdraw all the children from the school. Martha and Karen come to protest. They demand to be confronted with the child. Mrs. Tilford at first refuses. (Here it almost seems as if the author were hesitating, trying to build the event more solidly.) When she is pressed, Mrs. Tilford says that being honest she cannot refuse. One senses that the author's honesty is also compelling her (a little against her will) to face the obligatory scene. The drive toward the obligatory scene is over-simplified, but effective, because it shows the child's conscious will setting up a goal and striving to bring everything in line

with it; the second act progresses by projecting a series of breaks between the possibilities of the child's decision and the actual results of it. Our expectations are concentrated on the obligatory scene, which embodies the maximum possibilities as they can be foreseen.

But the author cannot show us any rational result of this event, because she has achieved no rational picture of the social necessity within which the picture is framed. The last act turns to the familiar pattern of neurotic futility, faced with eternal destiny which could neither be understood nor opposed. One is reminded of the line in Sherwood's The Petrified Forest, "Nature is fighting back with the strange instruments called neuroses. She is deliberately afflicting mankind with the jitters." The attitudes of the characters in the closing scene of The Children's Hour, in particular Martha's confession of feeling, are based on the acceptance of "the jitters" as mankind's inexorable fate.⁶

Criticism. The proper way to begin a study of the criticism of Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour is to preface it with Miss Hellman's own explanation:

I started reading the proofs as I started writing these plays with The Children's Hour. It took a year and a half of stumbling stubbornness to do the play. I remembered, in the hodge-podge that came back last night, those many times I tore it up, how many characters I took out and put back and took out again; how I reached back into my own childhood and found the day that I finished Mlle. de Maupin; the day I faked a heart attack; the day I saw an arm get twisted. And I thought again of the world of the half-remembered, the half-observed, the half-understood which you need so much as you

⁶John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Play-Writing and Screenwriting, pp. 263-5.

begin to write. It is always there for you. God help you to use it right. Right? Right for what? Right to have something to say and to say it well.

There are, of course, many things wrong with The Children's Hour. (Even with my new clarity, I have not seen them all, which is just as well, and better for my health.) The play probably should have ended with Martha's suicide: the last scene is tense and overburdened. I knew this at the time, but I could not help myself. I am a moral writer, often too moral a writer, and I cannot avoid, it seems, that last summing up. I think that is only a mistake when it fails to achieve its purpose, and I would rather make the attempt, and fail, than fail to make the attempt.⁷

Brooks Atkinson considers The Children's Hour successful:

Lillian Hellman's first successful drama, The Children's Hour, was produced in the autumn of 1934. It was an excoriating record of the mischief caused by idle gossip . . .

As a craftsman Miss Hellman is the chief representative of the "well-made play." She has a clear, organized mind; she can plan a plot that yields excitement, and her literary style is dramatic.⁸

But Arthur Hobson Quinn considers the popular reaction to the production of The Children's Hour as irritating:

It was irritating, also, but for a different reason, to see the critical and popular reaction to The Children's Hour (1935). Lillian Hellman is a much more talented playwright than Clifford Odets, and when she finds a theme worthy of her, she may make important contributions. For she reveals in her study of this intolerable child, who wrecks a school by her slander of the two women principals,

⁷Hellman, loc. cit.

⁸Brooks Atkinson, introduction to Sixteen Famous American Plays, pages unnumbered.

a mastery of exposition that was striking. But having established the situation, she did not know what to do with it, and the play went to pieces in the last act.⁹

Lillian Hellman's ability to make such a theme as that of The Children's Hour theatrically effective is praised by Allardyce Nicoll:

Within the realm of what may be called commercial realism, no author has recently shown more skill or won more fame than Lillian Hellman, who first came before the public in 1934 with The Children's Hour ... It is the vicious soul that attracts her most; her understanding of human evil is acute, and she knows how to make it theatrically effective. Indeed, we might almost say that she has won her success by devising a formula for an up-to-date melodrama where the villain, instead of being a black-mustached squire or factory owner, is revealed unexpectedly as a child possessed of inherent wickedness and where the dialogue is impeccably true to the tones of current speech....the real dramatic interest of the play lies in its vicious little Mary Tilford, whose original hint that her schoolteachers, Karen Wright and Martha Dobie, have Lesbian relations succeeds not only in arousing this community's anger against a couple of largely innocent women, but also infecting their souls with ugly thoughts. This is by no means so great or original a drama as was once thought; we cannot, however, deny its impressive technical ability.¹⁰

John Gassner also compliments the effectiveness of Hellman's writing in the following paragraph:

But the writers who were located on the periphery of this movement (insurgency) were even more effective. Some of them actually produced under Broadway management without jeopardizing their integrity. Of these, easily the most effective and

⁹Arthur Hobson Quinn, History of American Drama, p.300.

¹⁰Nicoll, op. cit., pp. 829-831.

the best integrated was Lillian Hellman, whose masculine mind and vise-like grip on her characters produced two powerful plays. The first, The Children's Hour, in 1934, was essentially a psychological tragedy caused by a neurotic brat and a homosexually inclined teacher; but associated with the theme was the related, if greatly subordinated one of the destructive power of ready prejudice on the part of a well-to-do community.¹¹

John Howard Lawson is concerned with the structural unity of the play, especially the link between the obligatory scene and the climax:

The play ignores time and place. The prejudice against sexual abnormality varies in different localities and under different social conditions. We are given no data on this point. Only the most meager and undramatic information is conveyed concerning the past lives of the characters. This is especially true of the neurotic child. The figure of the little girl burning with hate, consumed with malice, would be memorable if we knew why she has become what she is. Lacking this information, we must conclude that she too is a victim of fate, that she was born evil, and will die evil.

But the detailed activity, especially in the first two acts, shows that the playwright is not satisfied with this negative view of life. The scheme of the play is static, but the scenes move. In the relationship between Karen and Martha, the author strains to find some meaning, some growth in the story of the two women. She wants something to happen to her people; she wants them to learn and change. She fails; and her failure is pitilessly exposed in the climax. But in this failure lies Miss Hellman's great promise as a playwright.¹²

¹¹John Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 688.

¹²Lawson, loc. cit.

In his American Drama Since 1918, Joseph Wood Krutch treats The Children's Hour as

. . . the story of a fiendish child who threatens and cajoles her way from one despicable triumph to another until she has crowned her slighter achievements in making other children wretched by the wreck of four adult lives. It is a study in malice as disinterested as that of Iago, and it proved powerful enough on the stage to enjoy a run of almost seven hundred performances despite the fact that its cruelty seemed singularly gratuitous and, as it were, a propos of nothing.¹³

and Allan G. Halline briefly comments:

It was in 1934 that Miss Hellman established herself with The Children's Hour as a writer meriting serious attention. The analysis of character in the play is sharp, and the boldness in treating the theme of abnormality is balanced by a taste that keeps the story from being merely sensational; but the ending has been justly described as lacking an "Aristotelian purgation."¹⁴

Summary. In The Children's Hour, Lillian Hellman has produced a powerful and emotional tragedy, rising to great heights in the first two acts, although literally falling apart in the final act. The climax of the play is weak, but the characterizations, especially that of the demon child, are ~~especially~~ vivid. There are some psychological weaknesses, and the conclusion is inadequate.

¹³Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, p. 131.

¹⁴Halline, loc. cit.

However, this play has had, probably due to the sensational theme, tremendous audience appeal.

B. THE LITTLE FOXES

Being the daughter of an Alabama woman, and having been born in New Orleans, Lillian Hellman is well equipped to present an authentic play about the mores of the deep South, and of a very interesting, though atypical, family. In The Little Foxes, Miss Hellman produces a memorable feminine character--Regina Giddens--one of the few created in recent years on Broadway. Regina is made especially outstanding by the interpretation given the role by Tallulah Bankhead, and it is about Regina that the play revolves.¹⁵

Set in 1900, in any small town in the South, the play is not written in dialect; Lillian Hellman wisely

¹⁵Production note: On a night in February, 1939, it also gave Tallulah Bankhead her first popular success in this country. After shuffling through a number of inconsequential plays, Miss Bankhead strode through the part of Regina Giddens with a great singleness of purpose like an actress awakened by a well-written part. Patricia Collinge also gave a notable performance as the humiliated Birdie Hubbard. Brooks Atkinson, loc. cit.

chooses to assert in the preface that "it is understood that the accents are Southern, although no attempt was made to write Southern dialect."¹⁶ The play is a unified whole integrated as is usual in a Hellman play, and rises to a sensational climax.

Characterization. Regina Giddens, the central figure, is the vortex of the centrifugal action of the play; together with her brothers, Ben and Oscar Hubbard, she has set out to make a place for herself in society, as well as millions in finance, at the expense of anyone unfortunate enough to get in her way. She is beautiful but cold-natured; greedy and grasping; heartless and cruel. She takes advantage of her husband's illness, heart trouble, to force him to invest in a cotton mill with her brothers, and when he refuses, she causes his death:

REGINA. But you believed it. I couldn't understand that. I couldn't understand that anybody could be such a soft fool. That was when I began to despise you.

HORACE. (puts his hand to his throat, looks at the bottle of medicine on table) Why didn't you leave me?

REGINA. I told you I married you for something. It turned out it was only for this. (Carefully) This

¹⁶Lillian Hellman, The Little Foxes, reprinted in Sixteen Famous American Plays, edited by Bennett A. Cerf and Van H. Cartmell (New York: Random House, Inc., 1941), p. 798.

wasn't what I wanted, but it was something. I never thought about it much, but if I had (Horace puts his hand to his throat) I'd have known that you would die before I would. But I couldn't have known that you would get heart trouble so early and so bad. I'm lucky, Horace. I've always been lucky. (Horace turns slowly to the medicine) I'll be lucky again. (Horace looks at her. Then he puts his hand to his throat. Because he cannot reach the bottle, he pulls his chair closer. He reaches for the medicine, takes out the cork, picks up the spoon. The bottle slips and smashes on the table. He draws in his breath, gasps.)

HORACE. Please. Tell Addie--the other bottle is upstairs. (Regina has not moved. She does not move now. He stares at her. Then, suddenly, as if he understood, he raises his voice. It is a panic-stricken whisper, too small to be heard outside the room.) Addie! Addie! Come--(Stops as he hears the softness of his voice. He makes a sudden, furious fling from the chair to the stairs, taking the first few steps as if he were a desperate runner. On the fourth step he slips, gasps, grasps the rail, makes a great effort to reach the landing. When he reaches the landing, he is on his knees. His knees give way, he falls on the landing, out of view. Regina has not turned during his climb up the stairs. Now she waits a second. Then she goes below the landing, speaks up.)¹⁷

She is not only handsome, but shrewd in handling men, as is evidenced by her charming reception of Mr. Marshall, the factory representative from the North:

REGINA. Mr. Marshall, I think you are trying to console me. Chicago may be the dirtiest, noisiest city in the world, but I should still prefer it to the sound of our horses and the smell of our azaleas. I should like crowds of people and theaters, and lovely women--Very lovely women, Mr. Marshall?¹⁸

¹⁷Hellman, The Little Foxes, Act III, pp. 842-3.

¹⁸Ibid., Act I, p. 801.

She bullies her brothers, a difficult task, into giving her the largest share in the proposed business, by taking advantage of their need for her capital:

REGINA. Well, I don't know. I don't know about these things. It would seem that if you put up a third, you should only get a third. But then, there's no law about it, is there? I should think that if you knew your money was very badly needed, well, you just might say, I want more, I want a bigger share. You boys have done that, I've heard you say so.¹⁹

She has no maternal scruples, ^{even} ~~either~~ using her only daughter, Alexandra, just seventeen years of age, as a pawn by considering an alliance with Leo Hubbard, Oscar's son, for the sake of keeping the money in the family. The tragic consequence of Regina's inhumanity is her being left entirely alone in the final scene, not even her daughter remaining to love or care for her.

The foil of Regina, and the most interesting character in the play as an outstanding feminine role, is Birdie Hubbard, Oscar's wife. Although Birdie is the only member of the Hubbard clan who has any title to aristocracy, she has been so ill-used by the Hubbards, by insult, sarcasm, and even physical violence, that she has degenerated into a mere shadow of a noblewoman: silent, fearful, and resigned to life's misery. She turns to drink for solace, and Oscar

¹⁹Ibid., Act I, p. 810.

invents the myth of "headache" to cover her indisposition; she reveals the truth in the pathetic scene at the beginning of the third act, when none of the Hubbards are present, and Birdie, Horace, and Alexandra are enjoying a brief respite from their aggressions:

BIRDIE. (sharply, turning to her.) I've never had a headache in my life. (Begins to cry hysterically.) You know as well as I do. (turns to Alexandra) I never had a headache, Zan. That's a lie they tell for me. I drink. All by myself, in my own room, by myself, I drink. Then, when they want to hide it, they say, "Birdie's got a headache again--"20

When Alexandra asks her why she married Uncle Oscar, Birdie replies:

BIRDIE: (speaking very rapidly, tensely.) My family was good and the cotton on Lionnet's fields was better. Ben Hubbard wanted the cotton and (rises) Oscar Hubbard married it for him. He was kind to me, then. He used to smile at me. He hasn't smiled at me since. Everybody knew that's what he married me for (Addie rises.) Everybody but me. Stupid, stupid me.21

By her meekness and submission, Birdie is the perfect foil for Regina, who certainly could be said to possess neither of these qualities, even in minute quantities.

A less interesting female character is the young daughter, Alexandra. She watches the petty scheming and jealousies, greed and hate, from the comparatively safe

²⁰Ibid., Act 111, p. 838.

²¹Loc. cit.

distance of childhood. She is the special concern of Birdie's:

BIRDIE. (furiously) Well, don't. Don't love me. Because in twenty years you'll be just like me. They'll do all the same things to you. (Begins to laugh hysterically.) You know what? In twenty-two years I haven't had a whole day of happiness. Oh, a little, like today with you all, but never a single, whole day. I say to myself, if only I had one more whole day, then--(the laugh stops) And that's the way you'll be. And you'll trail after them, just like me, hoping they won't be so mean that day, or say something to make you feel so bad--only you'll be worse off because you haven't got my mama to remember--(turns away, her head drops. She stands quietly, swaying a little, holding on to the sofa. Alexandra leans down, puts her cheek on Birdie's arm.)²²

She is naive and reticent at the beginning of the play, placidly obeying her mother's wishes, and tolerating Leo's cruel treatment of the horses, as they take Mr. Marshall to the station in the first act. She basks in the love her colored nurse, Addie, a loyal and fairly intelligent old Southern negress, and her doting, but ill, father, Horace, lavish upon her. When she goes, at her mother's command, to bring her father home from the sanitarium, she assumes a more believable role, that of taking meticulous care of her father. After his death, however, she becomes able to stand up to her mother, suddenly, and decide her own course of action for the first time in her life. Since this occurs in the last two pages of the play, we hardly have time to

²²Loc. cit.

accept her in this new personality. Miss Hellman prefers to let the spotlight remain on Regina, and fails to develop Alexandra into a plausible teenager.

Of the masculine roles, the character of Horace, the stricken husband of Regina, allows the widest scope of emotional acting. He is gentle, soft-spoken, but intelligent; firm in upholding what he believes to be right, even at the expense of alienating his wife. Dialogue between Regina and Horace reveals that he has not denied himself certain luxuries:

REGINA. (Sharply turns to him.) What do the doctors think caused your bad heart?

HORACE. What do you mean?

REGINA. They didn't think it possible, did they, that your fancy women may have--

HORACE. (Smiles unpleasantly.) Caused my heart to be bad? I don't think that's the best scientific theory. You don't catch heart trouble in bed.

REGINA. (Angrily) I didn't think you did. I only thought you might catch a bad conscience--in bed, as you say.

HORACE. I didn't tell them about my bad conscience. Or about my fancy women. Nor did I tell them that my wife has not wanted me in bed with her for--(sharply) how long is it, Regina? (Regina turns to him) Ten years?²³

But he also reveals a certain astuteness concerning Regina's technique in the same speech, "...Did you bring me

²³Ibid., Act II, p. 826.

home for this, to make me feel guilty again? That means you want something. But you'll not make me feel guilty any more. My 'thinking' has made a difference."²⁴ He even manages a clever scheme to tie the hands of Regina: Leo, Oscar's son, has "borrowed" eighty thousand dollars in bonds from Horace's safe at the bank. Horace discovers the loss, but instead of prosecuting Leo, he changes his will to read that the bonds are to become Regina's after his death, all else going to Alexandra. He informs Regina that he is going to say that he lent the bonds to Leo for temporary investment. In order to salvage something for herself, Regina has to see that he dies before he can reveal the "loan"; and this hastens the tragic climax.

The brothers, Ben and Oscar, are alike in their unscrupulous scheming to acquire the greatest amount of wealth with the least amount of actual work on their part; they are selfish, cunning, and without moral obligation. They differ in personality, however, Oscar being a tool for Ben's determination. Oscar never says anything original, or even interesting; he repeats Ben's surmises or allows Ben to do the talking. The only time Oscar asserts himself is in his brutal domination of Birdie, whom he married because Ben wished it. Leo, Oscar and Birdie's son, is the

²⁴Loc. cit.

typical weak, degenerate son of the old South, dissipated, immoral, and egotistical; he works as little as possible, and enjoys running the fine carriage horses until they are tired, then beating them for being unable to go faster. When the opportunity presents itself, he does not hesitate to open his uncle Horace's safety deposit box and steal eighty-eight thousand dollars' worth of bonds. Neither Oscar nor Leo can stand up to Ben. Ben is a typical exploiter of the decaying South, and emperor of all he surveys. He is not satisfied with just being rich:

BEN. (to Birdie) But that isn't the tale I'm telling Mr. Marshall. (to Marshall) Well, sir, the war ends. (Birdie goes back to piano) Lionnet is almost ruined and the sons finish ruining it. And there were thousands like them. Why? (leans forward) Because the Southern aristocrat can adapt himself to nothing. Too high-toned to try.

MARSHALL. Sometimes it is difficult to learn new ways.

BEN. Perhaps, perhaps. (He sees that Marshall is listening to the music. Irritated he turns to Birdie and Alexandra at the piano, then back to Marshall.) You're right, Mr. Marshall. It is difficult to learn new ways. But maybe that's why it's profitable. Our grandfather and our father learned how to make them pay. They work. (Smiles nastily) They are in trade. Hubbard and Sons, Merchandise. Others, Birdie's family, for example, look down on them. (Settles back in chair). To make a long story short, Lionnet now belongs to us. (Birdie stops playing). Twenty years ago we took over their land, their cotton, and their daughter.²⁵

²⁵Ibid., Act I, p. 804.

He receives a sadistic pleasure in making Birdie, the aristocrat, suffer for the snubs her family had given the Hubbards before their obliteration. He makes Oscar do all the things he does not care to do for himself, and takes a connoisseur's pride in his table, as evidenced by his obesity. He alone is capable of meeting Regina on her own ground, and forcing a deadlock. When she apparently has the upper hand in the bond situation, after the death of Horace, Ben laughs pleasantly and points out that he, like Alexandra, questions Horace's being found dead on the stairs, and the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death; then exits gracefully. The audience is left to feel that although he is temporarily down, he is by no means out, and will force the issue with Regina at a later, more convenient date.

Cal, the old Negro butler of the Giddens household, represents the typical Southern retainer: uneducated, but gentle, loyal, and honest. He is resigned to his station in life, and content to serve Mr. Horace Giddens whom he loves. Addie, Alexandra's colored nurse, is a very intelligent, sincere, and devoted companion to her young charge--more of a mother to the child than the real mother, Regina. When the father, Horace, is preparing to die, he gives instructions for Alexandra's welfare to Addie, rather than Regina; and he rewards Addie's long, loyal service by presenting her

with a large sum of cash that he had kept secret from Regina, for they both know that she would never get anything, will or no will, from Regina after Horace's death. It is she who finally gives Alexandra the moral courage to stand up against her mother, and become free.

Mood. The all-pervading mood of the play is heartless domination. Regina's strong will is felt throughout all the scenes and acts, even when she is not on stage. Malice, greed, and self-indulgence permeate the scenes in which Regina and her brothers appear. Miss Hellman places the following significant quotation on the title page:

"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines; for our vines have tender grapes."²⁶

Regina and her brothers, the "little foxes," become to the audience symbols of the mercenaries throughout the world, who prey on the weak and down-trodden for financial gain. The universal application looms larger than the actual play, most of the time, and keeps the play from being melodramatic.

There is pathos when Birdie appears on the stage; the audience cannot help but love Birdie, for all her faults--false pride, docility, and drunkenness. Horace, too, brings pathos, but the audience feels admiration for his courage

²⁶Ibid., p. 795.

and stamina, which renders him a less pathetic figure; by his death, he is released from the oppression, but for Birdie, there is little hope. Regina's cold, inhuman cruelty coupled with her handsome features give a diabolical flavor to her scenes. One is tempted to believe in Satan incarnate in the person of this beautiful, but evil, Regina.

Theme. The theme of The Little Foxes is best expressed in Lillian Hellman's own words, as spoken by the colored nurse, Addie, in the final act:

ADDIE. Yeah, they got mighty well off cheating niggers. Well, there are people who eat the earth and eat all the people on it like the Bible with the locusts. Then there are people who stand around and watch them do it. (Softly) Sometimes I think it aint right to stand and watch them do it.²⁷

and again in the curtain scene, when Alexandra announces her independence:

ALEXANDRA. You couldn't, Mama, because I want to leave here. As I've never wanted anything in my life before. Because now I understand what Papa was trying to tell me. (Pause.) All in one day: Addie said there were people who ate the earth and other people who stood around and watched them do it. And just now Uncle Ben said the same thing. Really, he said the same thing. (Tensely) Well, tell him for me, Mama, I'm not going to stand around and watch you do it. Tell him I'll be fighting as hard as he'll be fighting, (Rises,) some place where people don't just stand around and watch.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., Act III, p. 837.

²⁸Loc. cit.

The new order of industry, avarice, and deception replaces the old order of romantic sentiment, dominates it, and crushes it beneath its heel, thus as the Hubbards and Regina Giddens have crushed Birdie.

This broader, social concept is emphasized thematically by Joseph Wood Krutch in his informal history, The American Drama Since 1918:

Then came The Little Foxes, which was a study of successful villainy, though here some attempt was made to suggest the wickedness of the central characters is somehow connected with the social system and we are asked to study it as a sort of malignant ulcer, interesting for its diagnostic value, rather than, as in The Children's Hour, to contemplate a flower of evil, a beautiful specimen of flourishing corruption. The two brothers and a sister who dominate the play exhibit minor vices, including a sadism which leads one to maltreat his wife and to love a son who abuses horses, but it is acquisitiveness which dominates them and leads them to delight in attempts to swindle one another whenever it so happens that they are not for the moment united in effort to swindle outsiders or to terrify the weak. Plainly the play is directed against contemporary society which is assumed to have acquisitiveness as its mainspring, and yet the actions seem almost too extraordinary as well as too artificially contrived to serve as a very effective indictment, and one is again driven back upon whatever satisfaction can be obtained from the contemplation of unadulterated meanness, and villainy wholly triumphant.²⁹

Conflict. The basic conflict in The Little Foxes is between the avaricious members of the Hubbard family,

²⁹Krutch, op. cit., p. 132.

and their desires: "the little foxes" and "the tender grapes" already mentioned by Miss Hellman in the preface to the play. It is an age-old conflict, universal in its application: Shakespeare used the idea in The Merchant of Venice; Michiavelli expounded it; and the Inquisition exaggerated it.

Within the play there are minor conflicts, between characters and their environment, between characters, and between characters and fate. There is a clear picture of good versus evil, with the good characters, Horace, Alexandra, Addie, Cal, Birdie, and Mr. Marshall lined up on one side struggling to survive against the vicious plotting for their defeat by the evil characters, Regina, Ben, Oscar, and Leo. There is a semblance of fate in the situation of Alexandra, substantiated by a quotation from the Old Testament, Ezekiel XVIII, 2: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."

Frank Hurburt O'Hara, outstanding producer and professor of drama at the University of Chicago, expresses the resolution of the conflict adequately in his book, Today in American Drama:

Of course we do not know just where Alexandra [Giddens] goes after the final curtain. We only know that she is of a new generation, with some of the old way and some of the new way in her, and the best of each. Somewhere along the line she will find adjustment; at least she will be building steadily toward

it. Her father did not find adjustment; death opened a final and not unwelcome door, but he only partly escaped defeat. Probably a kind of curtailed adjustment for Ben and Oscar; they are the strong of the earth, and the strong win out over the thoroughbreds like Birdie who never had a chance. For Regina? She too is strong: stronger than her brothers; so strong that success may only bring defeat because, when she realizes finally that Alexandra has no need or place for her, she will stand very much alone. And know it. Success for her is at best a brittle achievement. But we feel that Alexandra's spirit will continue to elude the hand of circumstance. Her future may be uncertain as to events; but having understood when to escape from what and why, her own integrity will become her surety.³⁰

Criticism. Most of the criticism about The Little Foxes is favorable, and Lillian Hellman is praised for her excellent characterizations, plot structure, and unusual effect. Allan Halline calls The Little Foxes Miss Hellman's most representative work:

With the production of The Little Foxes (1939) Miss Hellman achieved what seems to be her most representative work; it is here that her specialty in unmasking malice is exercised with balanced skill, and the play is notable as a picture of internecine family strife.³¹

The theme of The Little Foxes is considered notable by John Gassner, in his book Masters of the Drama:

³⁰Frank Hurburt O'Hara, Today in American Drama, p. 100.

³¹Halline, loc. cit.

The second, The Little Foxes, written in 1938, drew an unmerciful picture of the rise of an American fortune, of the predatory nature of the entrepreneurs who established industrial capitalism in the nation, and of the warping of human nature produced by unlimited greed. Presented in terms of character rather than exhortation or diffuse exposition, this analysis was a notable encaustic.³²

Brooks Atkinson also treats the theme of this play as being an outstanding feature:

The Little Foxes, produced in the fertile year of 1939, is Lillian Hellman's second successful drama... The Little Foxes... is the story of greedy brothers and a greedy sister who coldly devour the earth, scheming, twisting, driving their way to material success. . . What she has to say in The Little Foxes she says concretely with great decision, and her portrait of voracity is a bitter one.³³

Joseph Wood Krutch is reluctant to place much value on Lillian Hellman's works, and comments:

Neither Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934) nor her more recent play, The Little Foxes (1938) can be called genuine tragedy if that term is assumed to imply some resolution of the emotional tension which tragedy sets up. Indeed, the somewhat unusual effect of both plays depends in part on the dissonances upon which they conclude and both might, in view of the violence of the actions, be called melodramas which end in the triumph of villainy. Both are, nevertheless, striking plays which have earned for their author a considerable reputation in the current theater and seem to imply the existence of a talent which has not completely realized itself.

³²Gassner, loc. cit.

³³Atkinson, op. cit.

. . . The fact that one tolerates The Little Foxes at all, that it, like The Children's Hour, is indeed as tense as it is disagreeable, implies no small tribute to the skill of the writer whose gift for characterization is superb and whose only defect as a craftsman is a certain tendency to over-contrive her situations. One does feel, however, that the plays are defective as works of art for the simple reason that the fables are not really suitable vehicles for the emotion which they are intended to carry. The rage which seems to dominate Miss Hellman is genuine; it seems to have as its source a sense of the world's injustice. But the stories she tells are too highly colored and too extraordinary to justify an attitude so inclusive as that which she has adopted. They seem invented to discharge an emotion generated by a representation. When their author has discovered a theme more truly central to her own concerns she may not unreasonably be expected to produce a genuinely important play.³⁴

The importance of such a play as The Little Foxes is comprehensively pointed out by Hurburt O'Hara:

No one recently has looked at a family with more relentless realism than Lillian Hellman in The Little Foxes. And that she chooses the spring of 1900 as the time of her play does not mean that she is any the less aware of today in her analysis; indeed, it is in part because of the time of the action that she can point what she has to imply about our own day. The particular "little foxes that spoil the vines" are the members of the Hubbard family; but we are left with the feeling that it is not only at the beginning of the century that "our vines have tender grapes."

This play, within the conventional restrictions of a theater-piece though it is, seems somehow to have the dimensions of a novel--characters fully drawn, circumstances in perspective. Behind the main action of the play looms the shadow of "social forces" which

³⁴Krutch, loc. cit.

our day can see more realistically than could those who lived in the day of which the playwright writes. Behind this play about the Hubbards there seems to be another play on a grander scale, depicting the rise of industrialism sowing its own seeds of future confusions, . . . and a play about the inefficacy of all those who, like Birdie, do not understand the forces which threaten their extinction, . . . and a play about the dawn of some new day when youth will begin life again "some place where people don't just stand around and watch." But those other plays which we sense, towering above the Hubbards, are also plays about people, about multiplied numbers of individuals, whom we see through the Hubbards. Characters: essentially there is no other material to make a play about. Characters sufficiently like ourselves, one way or another, so that their triumph over circumstances or their defeat by circumstance--the interpenetration of themselves and circumstance--matters a great deal to us.³⁵

Summary. Perhaps the best of Lillian Hellman's plays, The Little Foxes is a superb character study of an avaricious Southern family. The character of Regina Giddens is one of the most outstanding vehicles for modern actresses that recent Broadway has produced. The plot, at times, becomes melodramatic and studied, but the theme and mood are excellently carried out throughout the play. One of the most memorable of fictitious characters is Birdie Hubbard, the helpless, degenerate Southern aristocrat.

The dynamic audience appeal of this play might be accounted for by its universal application of theme. For

³⁵O'Hara, loc. cit.

everywhere we find "little foxes" so dangerous to our "tender grapes." As a theater vehicle, The Little Foxes has probably the greatest appeal to a general audience of all the plays considered in this thesis. As a tragedy, it has little finality; there is no tragic conclusion or expiation through which the tragic figure, Regina, must go. Perhaps she wins, after all. The audience must be satisfied with Alexandra's salvation.

C. WATCH ON THE RHINE

The most interesting of Lillian Hellman's plays, to this writer, is Watch on the Rhine. Coming at a time when few writers had the courage to face or expose the Nazi threat, in April, 1941, Miss Hellman "wasn't fooling, nor did the audience think so."³⁶ There is drama, warmth, human understanding, and even pathos in this play; the tempo and mood are carefully constructed to heighten the intended effect. There is a variety of character, for the first time in Miss Hellman's works, and we find the main character being one we admire for his good qualities, an occurrence quite unusual for a Hellman play.

³⁶John Gassner, Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, p. 642.

Characterization. In the opening scene, we find Fanny Farrelly, a handsome, rather scatter-brained woman of about sixty-three, but well-preserved and active. She is a subsequent of the actress-aunt in The Children's Hour and seems somewhat akin to Birdie in The Little Foxes in that she does very little thinking for herself. Fanny simply parrots the utterances of her husband, a well-known diplomat, now deceased, and is little concerned with reality. She is wealthy, has a beautiful home and servants, as well as two fine, grown children, David and Sara. She entertains lavishly, usually having several Europeans in her home as guests. At the opening of the play, these European guests are the Count and Countess de Brancovis, Balkan nobility at the present time "down at the heels." Fanny lives in the past, in the memory of her beloved husband, devoting her energy to social activity, gossip, and making her son a replica of his father. She is the giddy, ever-youthful representation of the wealthy American dowager, the type portrayed by Faye Bainter on the screen; her speech is a conglomeration of puns, witticisms, and cliches, which she considers quite impressive.

The son, David, is an intelligent, average, wealthy young American lawyer, well-schooled, devoted to his family, and busily dodging his mother's matrimonial traps. He wishes

to choose his future wife himself, and has learned, through the years, how to avoid being entrapped in his mother's social machinations. He unwittingly becomes the victim of Marthe's love-scheme, a manner of earning a living for herself and her husband, but he actually causes Marthe to forget her wiles and fall sincerely in love with him.

When Marthe, a cultured European countess, was a young lady, her mother, a friend of Fanny's, had great social ambition for her daughters. She managed the marriage to the Count de Francovis without consulting Marthe; marriage to the Count, however, was not the bed of roses her mother had imagined. The Count, penniless, indolent, a spendthrift, and a gambler, had nothing to offer the young Marthe but a life of running from debts, mooching on friends and social climbers such as Fanny, and heartache. Teck is the villain of the play, and in his own way he loves Marthe, and is not anxious to allow her to leave him for David.

For retaliation, he threatens to expose Kurt Muller, David's brother-in-law. Sara, David's sister, and Kurt have just entered the United States from Germany, where Kurt is a secret worker in the anti-Nazi underground.

Sara is a motherly, stocky, and entirely unglamorous woman of about forty. She is thrilled to see her mother again after a period of twenty years. She does not regret,

however, having given up the luxurious life of a wealthy American to become the hunted, haunted, and often hungry wife of an underground politico, for she loves Kurt deeply, and is devoted to their children: Joshua, aged fourteen, Fabette, aged twelve, and Bodo, aged nine. The children, trained to be intelligent and alert during their difficult existence in the old country, have manners more like adults than children; in fact, their grandmother, Fanny, remarks to Sara: "Are these your children? Or are they dressed up midgets?"³⁷ When on stage, they "steal the show" with their touching, tender, yet reserved affection for their parents, and their grandmother; they are versatile, educated, polite, yet sincere, and one feels that Kurt and Sara have done the best possible job in training these children. One does not worry but that they will make their way quite ably in the world, depending on no one.

Bodo, the youngest, is the clown, or humorist, of the group, and his verbal combat with his grandmother, who specializes in getting the last, witty word, are most amusing. Somehow Fanny is no match for the clever Bodo, who has, however, a genuine respect and admiration for her

³⁷Lillian Hellman, Watch on the Rhine, Act I, scene 1, as reprinted in John Gassner, Best Plays of the Modern American Theater (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 651.

ability. Fanny is very impressed with the children's linguistic ability, a result of their living in the various European countries.

Kurt Muller, the hero and a secret agent for the German underground, an anti-Nazi force, is a very interesting person. He is devoted to his country, Germany, and has given his life to keep it free from the tyranny of Nazism. He served in the First World War, and resisted the rise of aggression from within. He built radio stations, crossing the border into France and joined the Spanish troops fighting Nazism. He was captured many times, at one time having both his hands crushed in torture. He has risen to a position of importance in the underground movement, and has come to the United States to pick up a large sum of money (twenty-three thousand dollars) to take back to support the underground. The leader of the underground, Max Friedank, has been captured by the Nazis, along with the next two ranking leaders; only Kurt is free to effect their rescue. And between him and his return to Germany stands Teck de Brancovis, blackmailing him for ten thousand dollars for secrecy. Kurt has no choice. Fanny and David, upon learning of the situation, gather the money to pay Teck, but Kurt realizes that Teck is not to be trusted. The only way to silence him is to kill him, which Kurt does in a melodramatic scene in Act III, Sara

and the children, reacting automatically cover the traces of the violence in a precision-like manner that is to be envied. Sara arranges a flight out for Kurt, and Joshua, the oldest son, helps Kurt dispose of the body. They explain to the family, when they enter.

SARA. For seven years now, day in, day out, men have crossed the German border. They are always in danger. And they always may be going in to die. Did you ever see the face of a man who never knows if this day will be his last? (softly) Don't go out on the terrace, David. Leave Kurt alone.

FANNY. (softly) Sara! What is it?

SARA. (quietly) For them, it may be torture and it may be death. Some day, when it's all over, there may be a few of them left to celebrate. There aren't many of Kurt's age left. He couldn't take a chance on them. They wouldn't have liked it. (suddenly, violently) He'd have had a bad time trying to explain to them that because of this house, and this nice town, and my mother and my brother, he took chances with their work and with their lives. (quietly) Sit down, Mama. I think it's all over now. (to David) There is nothing you can do about it. It's the way it had to be.³⁸

In his farewell talk with his children, Kurt makes a profound impression upon the audience. In realistic prose, he expresses the beautiful philosophy of a man going to die for a cause he believes to be right and just:

KURT. (shakes his head.) Now let us get straight together. The four of us. Do you remember when we read

³⁸Ibid., Act III, p. 679.

Les Miserables? Do you remember that we talked about it afterwards, and Eodo got candy on Mama's bed?

BODO. I remember.

KURT. Well, he stole bread. The world's out of shape, we said, when there are hungry men. And until it gets in shape, men will always steal and lie and kill. But for whatever reason it is done, and whoever does it--you understand re--it is all bad. I want you to remember that. Whoever does it, it is bad. But you will live to see the day when it will not have to be. All over the world, in every place and in every town, there are men who are going to make sure it will not have to be. They want what I want: a childhood for every child. For my children, and I, for theirs. Think of that. It will make you happy. In every town and every village and every mud hut in the world, there is always a man who loves children, who will fight to make a good world for them. And now, good-bye. Wait for me. I shall try to come back to you. Or you shall come to me. At Hamburg, the boat will come in. It will be a fine, safe land--I will be waiting on the dock. And there will be the three of you and Mama and Fanny and David. And I will have ordered an extra big dinner and we will show them what my Germany can be like.³⁹

Mood. The mood of Watch on the Rhine is its most powerful element. Lillian Hellman, often accused of mere craftsmanship, employs all her extensive knowledge of dramaturgy in this play to carefully build and heighten the mood. She begins on a jolly, whimsical note with the amusing character of Fanny, and sets the audience to expectantly awaiting the arrival of the central figure, Kurt Muller. The first act is devoted to this arrival, the joy of the

³⁹Ibid., p. 681.

return "home" for Sara, the intense love between Kurt and Sara as contrasted to the lack of affection between the other husband and wife team of Teck and Marthe de Brancovis.

There is suspense as the portrait of the villainy of Teck de Brancovis is begun with the exposure of his immorality in the scene between Marthe and Teck, as well as in the foreshadowing of the clash which is to come between Kurt and Teck. Teck stealthily searches Kurt's luggage and briefcase, and finds not only a gun, but a large sum of money. Teck's connection with the Nazi embassy is revealed, and his nasty character made nastier by the loss of Marthe to David, in Act II. Through dialogue between Kurt and Teck, the blackmail plot is presented, and the information of Kurt's underground activity is exposed.

There is always a contrast between the conversations of the Europeans, Kurt and Teck, and the Americans, Fanny and David. The Europeans are not unaccustomed to the vicious double-deals such as Teck suggests, and neither is Sara, having lived as an European for twenty years. There is an atmosphere of calm deliberation in their scenes. The scenes in which the children appear are filled with humor and pathos. The Americans bring an excitedness, hurriedness, impatientness on stage with them, and infect the scene with their impetuosity.

Act III is most unusual for its emotional impact. When Teck comes downstairs for the final clash with Kurt, and Fanny and David go to get the blackmail money, the emotional crisis is reached. Kurt and Teck, mortal enemies, are in a deadlock. Kurt knows that he must kill, for the sake of the whole underground movement; he must bring disgrace upon his wife's family and desert his wife and children--for a cause that will determine his children's future existence. It is a hard decision to make, and Kurt is full of fears. He grabs Teck and begins to choke him into unconsciousness, as the audience experiences a feeling of both horror and poetic justice, akin to that experienced in the melodrama, except that this scene being enacted concerns the whole world, and is therefore too big to be labeled melodramatic. The pathos of the wife and son's calm and courageous acceptance of this necessary act and imminent departure, perhaps for forever, of their husband and father, is extremely touching. One is proud that Sara, an American, is such a strong figure, and even Fanny and David become admirable characters in the closing scene, enabling Kurt to escape by covering for him even at the risk of scandal. Fanny gives Kurt her money, several thousand dollars, for his cause, as well as her blessings, and makes a very sensible closing speech:

DAVID. Mama. (She turns.) We are going to be in for trouble. You understand that?

FANNY. I understood it very well, We will manage. You and I. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you--I'm happy to learn.⁴⁰

And the curtain falls on a note of hope--hope for men like Kurt, doing what they have to do for a cause they believe is right, and for Sara and the children, waiting, hoping, unselfishly giving for their loved ones, and for the freedom of the world.

Theme. Miss Hellman said that the theme of The Children's Hour was good and evil; this simple explanation would fit any of her plays. On a general level, the good characters, Sara and her family, are fighting desperately for survival against the overwhelming forces of evil, the black-mailers like Teck, and the Nazi aggression in their homeland. On a symbolic level, the theme is the continuous struggle of the individual man of conviction against enslaving world forces; of democratic philosophy versus tyranny and political domination.

From another viewpoint, the theme might be considered the self-sacrificing love of a man for his family and his country, and the unselfish, genuine affection evinced by his

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 683.

family for him. Love of country causes Kurt to give up everything he holds dear and devote his life and energy working to defeat persecution, to make the world a better place for all children to live. It is this heritage which he leaves his own children: the promise of a better world.

Conflict. The conflict in most of Miss Hellman's plays is obvious; the forces are clear-cut good and evil. In Watch on the Rhine, the central figure, Kurt Muller, represents the national German, the German who fought against the tyranny of the Kaiser, and who would gladly give his life for the return of freedom to his beloved country. The forces with which he is in direct conflict are, of course, the Nazis, and traitor Europeans who would gladly sell deadly information about underground agents leading to their capture. Teck de Brancovis is just such an infamous informer. The conflict involved in the action of the play is their conflict--the result being the death of the traitor, de Brancovis.

Criticism. Comments on Watch on the Rhine by American critics are for the most part extreme. Most favor the play but a few crucify it with scathing remarks. The favorable comments will be considered first at this point, and the writer will conclude with a quotation from Miss Hellman in answer to the negative criticism.

Euphemia Van Rensselaren Wyatt, drama critic for the Catholic World, praises the thematic quality of Watch on the Rhine:

For years there have been intermittent attempts at anti-nazi drama. Most of them dealt at close range with the accepted facts of Nazi brutality and one, indeed, so magnified the wickedness of a mythical Goebbels that it unwittingly steered the sympathy of a puzzled audience toward the Fuehrer. None of them achieved importance although Claire Boothe's melodrama of last season had some box office popularity. It is to the credit of Miss Lillian Hellman, the intelligent author of The Little Foxes, to have reversed the order of procedure and instead of taking for her theme the Nazi's wickedness, she has written a study of a liberal German. Her hero, a gentle Viennese engineer, Kurt Muller, forces himself to face violence and martyrdom for his country's salvation. Muller, by nature, lacks the robust force of Dr. Valkonen. Muller suffers from the fear which is native to a man of imagination but his spirit is secure in its faith as was the Finnish scientist's. Miss Hellman's play is not so compact a piece of literature as There Shall Be No Night, but it is brave and very human and gives dramatic impact to the contrast between America's beautiful security and Europe's pitiful and chaotic want.

. . .

Watch on the Rhine is designed to remind us not only of our blessings but of the proximity of menace to them. Its success is a gallant one.⁴¹

Allan Halline is inclined to agree with Mrs. Wyatt:

With the advent of World War II, Miss Hellman was among the first of the dramatists to respond. Even before Pearl Harbor she had produced Watch on

⁴¹Euphemia Van Rensselaren Wyatt, "The Drama," The Catholic World 153: 215-6, May, 1941.

the Rhine (1941), an anti-Nazi play which revealed that the war was already being fought on our own shores in the activities of foreign agents. As a clear and foreboding expose, Watch on the Rhine made a vivid impression on the tense American public.⁴²

John Gassner also emphasizes the importance and the timeliness of the theme of Watch on the Rhine:

Before, as well as after, December 7, 1941, our most immediate problem, however, was not peace but war, and by far the most effective realization of its coming was written by Miss Lillian Hellman, already the author of such impressive pieces as The Children's Hour and The Little Foxes. Miss Hellman, who was by then a master of taut drama, saw the finger of fate pointing to America, which was still nominally neutral when Watch on the Rhine was produced on April 1, 1941. The play brought the European struggle into an upper-class American home that had been a model of well-bred amiability until a German underground worker and a Nazi tool prefigured our destiny by fighting each other to the death within its walls. Miss Hellman made her Watch on the Rhine one of the most forceful plays of the crisis because she let her symbolism and prophecy emanate from vividly realized characters, especially from the underground leader Kurt who is a lovable family man and deprecates violence even when he has to commit it.⁴³

Wolcott Gibbs, critic for the New Yorker, attempts an objective criticism of the play:

Miss Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine is unquestionably the best serious play of the year, and perhaps of several years. It is hard to say what our children will make of it, this story of a political refugee who murders a guest in a peaceful American household with everybody's complete approbation and even their connivance. Paradoxically,

⁴²Halline, loc. cit.

⁴³Gassner, op. cit., pp. xxiii and xxiv.

it is probably the hope of the world, as well as Miss Hellman's unselfish purpose, that they won't be able to make anything of it whatever. If Watch on the Rhine still means much to anybody twenty-five years from now, if the peril to free men which it attacks can still be readily identified and the behavior of its protagonists is still credible, it will have failed, along with many other things of infinitely greater importance. It is a fine, honest, and necessary play, but I would be glad to think that someday people who happen to run across it in libraries may find it melodramatic and improbable for all its eloquence.

There are defects, and it seems to me very serious ones, about Watch on the Rhine. Miss Hellman moves at a very leisurely pace through her first two acts, wandering down a good many pleasant but aimless byways (the love affair between the murdered man's wife and the handsome son of the house, for instance, accomplished nothing that I could see beyond leaving a rather awkward little anti-climax to be disposed of at the end.) She is also mistaken, I think, to diminish the last and moving scene by making her hero, on his way back to Germany and probably death, say goodbye to each member of the cast at length and separately, until he has somewhat of the air of a nervous guest who doesn't know quite how to break away from a cocktail party. I'm not even quite sure I admired the precocity of the youngest refugee child, on the ground that this kind of humor is of too elementary design to be quite worthy of Miss Hellman's attention and perhaps distracting as well.

These complaints and one or two others, however, amount to very little compared to the many brilliant, subtle, and touching things she has done. The play is full of moments you won't forget: the speechless enchantment of Kurt Mueller (sic) and his family as they come out of the murderous darkness of Europe into the cheerful, sunlit Washington living room and, finding that people still live there in peace and dignity, can only say at last, "Yes, this is a good house."; Mueller's contempt for the idea that "they" are invincible, but also his agonized question, "Why does our side always have to fight them with our bare hands?"; the scene in which the Count de Brancovis, not the traditional Nazi villain but only a product of a bankrupt and dying culture, left alone with the man and the woman he plans to betray, says "Now we can talk. We

understand one another. We are Europeans."; and at the end, Frau Mueller's despairing acknowledgment that she wants her husband to go back to Berlin, though aware that she and her children are not likely to see him ever again.

Altogether Miss Hellman's play deserves a much more detailed and thoughtful review than I can give it here. I can only say for the first time, as far as I am concerned (and I'm not forgetting There Shall Be No Night), the fundamental issue of our time has been treated with the dignity, insight, and sound theatrical intelligence it demands. At one point in the evening, Herr Mueller asks his hostess if the word "noble" is always used as a light insult, a term of derision, by Americans. I'm afraid I've often used it that way myself, but I won't if I'd happen to choose it this time.⁴⁴

The most vitriolic criticism this writer encountered concerning Watch on the Rhine was that of another Catholic writer, Grenville Vernon, in an article in the Commonweal:

I went to Watch on the Rhine with high hopes, as I had read the reviews of several of my fellow critics, and with one exception they declared Miss Hellman's play a masterpiece, beautifully acted and superbly directed. My hopes were not realized. I found it a poorly constructed play, with much of the dialogue strained and unreal. Moreover, many of the characters seemed equally unreal, and the author's knowledge of how American people of tradition act and speak seemed, to say the least, peculiar. In fact it seemed incredible that the woman who wrote The Little Foxes should have written Watch on the Rhine. I am not attacking most the spirit which animated the play, though why Miss Hellman should continually employ the term "fascist" instead of "Nazi" is difficult to understand. The play is about a German anti-Nazi who kills a Roumanian blackmailer so that he may return undetected to Germany to rescue some of his comrades. Perhaps the clue may be found in some remarks interjected by the

⁴⁴Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre", The New Yorker 17:32, April 12, 1941.

youngest member of the cast, the anti-Nazi's ten year old son. They are decidedly of a Communist tinge, and it may be that Miss Hellman wanted to write such a play but didn't dare. But these remarks, as well as the use of the word "fascist", are distinctly out of place if we are to take the play as anti-Nazi propaganda. An anti-Nazi play with occasional obeisances to Moscow is a contradiction in terms.

But my objection to the play is not one of message; it is simply that aside from the refugees themselves it is unreal in characterization, that the first two acts are a bore, and that the true ending of the play occurs immediately after the murder, while the interminable farewells of Kurt Mueller which follow are theatrical and tiresome.

The play is in essence a melodrama, but the melodrama comes only in the last act. The scenes before are probably supposed to be comedy of manners, but, as I have suggested, the manners are peculiar. They may well be those of New York vulgarians of wealth, but they certainly do not belong to Washingtonians of breeding. The way, for instance, the lady of the house yells at her companion, and her companion yells at her is out of place in the milieu Miss Hellman has chosen. Equally impossible is the scene in which the wife of the Roumanian tells him she is going to leave him before an audience of practically the entire cast. In short, Watch on the Rhine is a sad come-down after The Little Foxes.⁴⁵

It is only fair to consider at this time Miss Hellman's own comments about this play's assets and liabilities, as they were written for the preface to her anthology, Four Plays by Lillian Hellman; she is discussing the usual critical comment of "unconvincing":

Something does not convince you. Very well, and that is all. But if they convince you, or

⁴⁵Gerville Vernon, "The Stage and Screen," The Commonweal 34:15-16, April 25, 1941.

partly convince you, then the dislike of their being well-made makes little sense. The theatre has limitations: it is a tight, unbending, unfluid, meager form in which to write. And for these reasons, compared to the novel, it is a second-rate form. (I speak of the form, not the content.) Let us admit that. Having admitted it--as a step forward, since most of us are anxious to claim the medium by which we earn a living is a fine and fancy thing--we can stop the pretentious lie that the stage is unhampered. What the author has to say is unhampered: his means of saying it are not. He may do without scenery, he may use actors not as people but as animals or clouds, and he still must pretend the empty stage is a garden or an arena, and he still must pretend that living people are animals. He has three walls of a theatre and he has begun his pretense with the always rather comic notion that the audience is the fourth wall. He must pretend and he must represent. And if there is something vaguely awry, for me, about the pretence of representation--since by nature of the stage it can never be done away with--it is not that I wish to deny to other writers their variations of the form, but that, for me the realistic form has interested me most.

Within this form there must be tricks--the theatre is a trick--and they are, I think, only bad when they are used trickily and stop you short. But if they are there, simple, and come to hand, they are justified. In the last act of Watch on the Rhine, Kurt Muller is about to leave. He wants to say goodbye to his children who are upstairs. He asks his wife to bring them down. Now it is most probable that in real life a man would go upstairs, find the children in their room, say good-bye there. But it seemed to me, when this problem came up, that kind of unwellmadeness was not worth the candle. It seemed messy to ring in another set, to bring down the curtain, to interfere with a mood and a temper. The playwright, unlike the novelist, must--and here is where the charge of well-madeness should be made--trick up the scene. This is how he has to work. It is too bad, but it is not his fault. If he is good, and drives ahead, it will not matter much. If he is not good, the situation will worry him, and he will begin to pretend it doesn't exist, and so, by pretending, fret and lengthen it.

I think the word melodrama, in our time, has come to be used in an almost illiterate manner. By

definition it is a violent dramatic piece, with a happy ending. But I think we can add that it uses violence for no purpose, to point no moral, to say nothing, in say-nothing's worst sense. (This, of course, does not mean, even by inference, that violence plus the desire to say something will raise the level of the work. A great many bad writers want to say something: their intention may make them fine men, but it does not make them fine writers. Winning the girl, getting the job, vanquishing the slight foe, are not enough.) But when violence is actually needed stuff of the work and comes toward a large enough end, it has been and always will be in the good writer's field. George Moore said there was so much in War and Peace that Tolstoi must surely have awakened in the night frightened that he had left out a yacht race or a High Mass. There is a needed return to the correct use of the word melodrama. It is only then the critic will be able to find out whether a writer justifies his use of violence, and to scale him against those who have used it.

I do not want to talk here of Watch on the Rhine. Only eleven months have passed since it was finished, and that is not time enough for me to see it clearly. Even now, of course, I know many things should have come clearer, many speeches cleaner, many ideas should have been said with more depth and understanding. I have not wanted to write here any final word on the play. Some day, perhaps. Some day when I have greater faith that I will be the writer I now, on January 14, 1942, want to be. In any case, while there is much in all the plays that is wrong--and it did not hurt me to see it last night, as it once would have hurt me to half-see it--this much has been right: I tried. I did the best I could do at the time each play was written. Within the limitations of my own mind and nature, my own understanding, my own knowledge, it was the best I could do with what I had. If I did not hope to grow, I would not hope to live.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Lillian Hellman, Four Plays by Lillian Hellman, Introduction, pp. viii-ix.

Summary. Coming at a time when America was not yet involved in World War II and tended to isolate herself from the European turmoil, Watch on the Rhine was at once hailed as being prophetic, patriotic, and sincere, as well as intense, dramatically speaking. Miss Hellman delivered her message with great skill, using conventional stage technique and depending upon the emotional power of the dramatic situation to carry the play. The characters are cleverly created, and quite believable--except to Mr. Vernon of the Commonweal⁴⁷, who incidentally didn't like the play. The mood and temper of the play ~~is~~^{are} exceptionally well-handled by the author, and her dramaturgy proves quite effective. Some of the scenes approach eloquence, but all are realistic, in the preferred style of Hellman. For its timeliness and its sincere message, Watch on the Rhine is an outstanding contemporary tragedy.

D. SUMMARY

Although Miss Lillian Hellman is a very controversial figure, as far as contemporary critics are concerned, she has produced some rather remarkable tragedies, especially

⁴⁷See p. 175.

remarkable in their box office appeal. Her trademark is the study of characters in evil, and their effect on characters who represent good; this does not especially apply to Watch on the Rhine, however, for in this play Miss Hellman took the side of the good character, Kurt Muller, and allowed him to prevail against the evil forces.

Driving ahead with considerable force, Miss Hellman utilizes in each play the extensive knowledge of dramaturgy gained by her association with Broadway production. Her plots are always spectacular, although often labeled "unconvincing", "well-made," or "melodramatic" in the derogatory sense of the word. It is evident, however, that Miss Hellman's plays are well-constructed, powerful, and memorable tragedies, the outstanding contribution by a woman playwright to the American stage.

CHAPTER V

A COMPARISON OF THE TREATMENT OF TRAGEDY AS SHOWN IN THE REPRESENTED PLAYS

As a final chapter, the author must attempt the most difficult task of all, that of comparing the plays treated within this thesis as to their literary structure in the tragic form. These plays were chosen for their representativeness of the authors' dramatic work in the field of tragedy. The plays of O'Neill will be considered first, along with those of Anderson; then O'Neill's and Hellman's plays will be compared, followed by those of Hellman and Anderson.

A. EUGENE O'NEILL AND MAXWELL ANDERSON

Eugene O'Neill and Maxwell Anderson have little in common except great ambition for writing tragedy in modern American drama. Perhaps Anderson is able to state more clearly his philosophy, having been educated and trained in the literary field.¹ O'Neill, living and experiencing the material from which he writes, lacks the clarity of concept and the ability to put his ideas into eloquent

¹Cf. p. 6 et seq.; pp. 24-26.

language.²

Characterization. However, O'Neill has done more with characterization, basing his approach on Freudian psychology and presenting human thought processes as realistically as possible within the limits of the theater, than Anderson has ever been able to accomplish. O'Neill seems to be inside his characters, looking out and speaking through their mouths in realistic dialogue.³ O'Neill's characters speak the hard, realistic, and sometimes tough language of modern America; this element contrasts vividly with the dialogue of the typical Anderson character--poetic, rhetorical, eloquent, and sometimes archaic. It is easy to visualize the O'Neill character existing in the present world; it is sometimes difficult to accept the anachronistic Andersonian character, even from the remote pages of history.⁴ One will never forget the vivid impressions received from the characters of Dion Anthony, Billy Brown, and Cybel in The Great God Brown, Nina Leeds and Charlie Marsden in Strange Interlude, or Eben, Abbie,

²Cf. pp. 14-17.

³As Nina Leeds in Strange Interlude, p. 55.

⁴As Pablo Montoya in Night Over Taos, p. 115.

⁵p. 6.

and Ephraim in Desire Under the Elms, and many other O'Neill characters not treated in this thesis.

It is much more difficult to recall specific character traits of the more literary, two-dimensional characters created by Maxwell Anderson to be the mouthpieces of his beautiful dialogue. The longest remembered will be the lovers, Mio and Miriamne in Winterset and Elizabeth and Essex in Elizabeth the Queen, not because of their human warmth or understanding, or because they are vividly real, but because they are eloquent types of magnificent figures: heroic, and grandiose in both stature and language.

Mood. In the area of mood, Eugene O'Neill and Maxwell Anderson are both masters. O'Neill's plays are reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe's central impression theory in the field of the short story: the building up of events toward the single, central impression or mood, usually that of horror. Horror runs through the O'Neill plays with a dominant impression: there is horror when Abbie murders her baby in Desire Under the Elms; horror when Nina discovers the insanity in the Evans family, and must dispose of the conceived child; horror in The Great God Brown when Dion dies at the feet of Billy Brown, a victim of the Mephistopheles mask.

Maxwell Anderson's works exemplify his philosophy

of tragedy as presented in his essay, "The Essence of Tragedy," quoted in Chapter I.⁵ His mood depends upon the discovery of the hero's tragic fault, and his moral growth by the expiation for that flaw, as Mio in Winterset discovers his error in hating his father's murderers, and forgiving them, chooses death as expiation; Essex in Elizabeth the Queen confesses his tragic fault to be ambition, and goes to his death; Pablo Montoya's tragic fault is domination and stubborn pride--he too must die in expiation.

O'Neill uses many unique stage devices in building up mood within his plays: masks, asides, sensational words and ideas in the dialogue, shocking action, and psychological discoveries. The basis for many of his plays, the unnatural relationships between characters, is not new to the theater; O'Neill borrowed it from the ancient Greeks, as well as certain dramatic forms: the incest in Desire Under the Elms and the structure of The Great God Brown--prologue, four main parts, and epilogue. His scenes are theatrically effective, although sometimes too lengthy, as occasioned by the asides in Strange Interlude. The Freudian psychology of most of O'Neill's work is repeated rather monotonously: the relationship of Eben with his father's wife in Desire Under the Elms; the relationships

⁵See pp. 6-7

between Nina and her three lovers, as well as with her son and her father in Strange Interlude; and the relationship of Margaret and Cybel to the male characters in The Great God Brown, less sexual than maternal.

Anderson, on the other hand, is less concerned with mood than with sincerity of message, and his people treat universal concepts philosophically, as illustrated by Pablo's quoted speeches from Night Over Taos, and Esdras' from Winterset.⁶ Being a craftsman, Anderson creates some great scenes, and memorable dialogue; his central impression is one of lasting value to the audience, as the social injustice and its tragic effects on the lives of two innocent young lovers in Winterset, or the passing of the old order in Night Over Taos. Not as obvious a writer as Eugene O'Neill, Anderson's finer work is sometimes lost on an unsympathetic audience, and he must depend upon the more intellectual types of audiences for popular support.⁷ In some cases, such as Night Over Taos, his plays read better than they may be enacted, and consequently fail as stage productions.⁸ When comprehended, the mood of Anderson's

⁶See p. 120; p. 88.

⁷Cf. p. 82; p. 83.

⁸Winterset, a play of great depth and meaning, was more widely acclaimed in the movie version, starring Burgess Meredith, after it was adapted by forcing a happy ending, and playing up the gangster plot in true Edwin G. Robinson fashion, to fit popular tastes. Little of the original poetry was retained in the screen version.

plays is dynamic and lasting; the stark sensation of the showpieces produced by O'Neill, however, is most striking and vivid, although the audience, after running the gamut of powerful emotion evoked by one of O'Neill's plays, leaves the theater wondering just what the author had been trying to communicate--an after-effect which would never result from an Anderson production.

Theme. The themes of these two dramatists are repeated throughout their plays: O'Neill toying with the Freudian ideas of incest and promiscuousness, and man's relation to God; and Anderson being very much concerned with man's relation to man, social injustice, and human relationships. Seeking, frustration, loving, lust, winning, and losing--all these basic ideas appear in the plays of O'Neill; these words come from the O'Neill characters themselves, who frankly admit their animal desires, and seek their fulfillment, turning at last to denouncement of physical want and a religion of a sort. Dion Anthony--half-pagan, and half-saint--best typifies the O'Neill theme, and dies begging forgiveness for his sins.

Mio Romagna, Anderson's typical tragic hero, discovers his tragic flaw, that of a personal hatred toward the murderers of his father, and forgives, preferring to be killed rather than bring retribution upon these very

people. This theme is repeated in Elizabeth the Queen, when Essex reveals that he must not be allowed to live, for his ambition could bring naught but danger to Elizabeth. Night Over Taos follows the same pattern, and Pablo Montoya dies in expiation for his tragic fault.

Conflict. The basic conflicts in the O'Neill plays are within the characters themselves, rather than between the character and his environment, or the character and his external world. In Strange Interlude, Desire Under the Elms, and The Great God Brown, the O'Neill plays treated within this thesis, may be found the psychological inner struggle becoming the conflict, with moral repatriation the result of considerable suffering. The axiom from Pope's "Essay on Criticism": "To err is human; to forgive, divine," seems to be the general principle around which O'Neill's philosophy is centered.

Anderson, on the other hand, has stated very clearly his concepts about what the theater must strive for;⁹ in his plays, he attempts to fulfill these rather lofty aims. Going back to Aristotle's Poetics,¹⁰ Maxwell Anderson has evolved a theory of tragedy: a central heroic figure has a

⁹See p. 97.

¹⁰Quoted on p. 2.

tragic flaw; he discovers this flaw in the climactic scene, and attempts to expiate himself through suffering or death. In Winterset, Mio Romagna fulfills his destiny according to this pattern, as does Essex in Elizabeth the Queen, and Pablo Montoya in Night Over Taos. The conflict is here between man and his destiny; man and his environment; man and man (or woman). The Greek theory of tragedy is more closely adhered to in Anderson's plays than in those of any other living American playwright.

Summary. Very different types of writers as to style, technique, theater background, and education, Eugene O'Neill and Maxwell Anderson offer more contrast than comparison. They are alike in their aims toward the "great tragedy," although their approaches are entirely different. O'Neill specializes in realistic and detailed characterization, as well as spectacular psychological plot, neglecting the areas of language and moral tone.

Anderson, on the other hand, neglects characterization and realism in concentrating on language, poetic form, and moral integrity. His plays appeal to the more intellectual audiences, which, unhappily, are not as numerous as the sensation-seeking crowds who throng to see O'Neill's more spectacular productions; hence O'Neill carries the title of America's Number One Playwright, and Anderson is relegated

to a more sedate second place. Because of O'Neill's recent death¹¹ the title may be presented to another playwright; Anderson and Hellman will be prominent contenders for it.

B. EUGENE O'NEILL AND LILLIAN HELLMAN

Alike in theater experience and technical knowledge, Eugene O'Neill and Lillian Hellman have little else in common. Similar use of dramaturgy is evident in the death scene of the husband, Horace Ciddens, in Hellman's The Little Foxes, and the death scene of Dion Anthony in The Great God Brown, by O'Neill. The obligatory scenes devised by both authors--the scene in Strange Interlude by O'Neill in which Nina is forced to fall back on "good old Charlie" after all other romantic alliance has failed, and the scene in Hellman's The Children's Hour where the vicious little girl is brought face to face with her victims--certainly have parallel structure and effect. However, the experimenting of Eugene O'Neill in technical devices, such as masks, asides, trilogies, nine act plays, contrasts greatly with Miss Hellman's use of standard or conventional stage technique.

¹¹See p. 23.

Characterization. Eugene O'Neill's constant psychological probing into the mental depths of his characters is an extreme opposite to the calm acceptance of the good and evil in human nature by Miss Hellman. Not questioning the inner reasons why her characters behave as they do, Lillian Hellman paints a two-dimensional portraiture so vividly through dramatic dialogue that the characters seem to have actually lived. Content to paint black as black, and white as white, her people have absolute meaning and memorable qualities. O'Neill's shadings of grays obscure the characteristics, and remove his creations from reality, into a "misty, mid-region of Weir." Viewing their actions and reactions from so many aspects, the audience is at times confused or bored by the repetition; however, this technique is certainly more ambitious than that of Miss Hellman, who does nothing new in the theater, preferring to present the "well-made" play with a social purpose.

Mood. The moods of Miss Hellman's plays, being simpler and more direct, are usually more easily communicated to the audience than those of O'Neill. The O'Neill plays, however, are not surpassed in dominant effect, or emotional appeal. Miss Hellman creates certain scenes, such as the closing scene in Watch on the Rhine, full of pathos, and verging on the melodramatic; she builds very carefully to

the climax, and meticulously reaches a high point of emotion. O'Neill, though, tends to reach a peak at the very beginning of his play, and attempts to sustain the emotion almost to maudlinity, throughout unusually long episodes. The result is, the plays of these two authors taken as entities, that O'Neill's plays have made a much more powerful impression on the theater audience than have Miss Hellman's. Frustration, seeking, winning, losing, all are to be found in the plays of both authors which are treated in this thesis; the difference lies in the author's attitude toward that mood, and consequently the character's own reaction to it. O'Neill's characters' complex attitudes overshadow the simple, uncomplicated emotions presented by Miss Hellman's.

Theme. As O'Neill himself explained, "I am not interested in the relationship between man and man, but between man and God,"¹² the general theme behind O'Neill's dramatic works is a clinical case study of the mental conflicts of his characters, such as Nina's case in Strange Interlude, Dion's in The Great God Brown, and the Cabot family in Desire Under the Elms.¹³ Miss Hellman, again

¹²Quoted on p. 46.

¹³Cf. pp 55 et. seq.; 41; 76.

selecting the easiest way out, prefers the simple theme of good vs. evil, which she employs in The Children's Hour, The Little Foxes, and again in Watch on the Rhine.¹⁴ Most of her plays are concerned with the evil in human nature, and its effect on the good, or spiritual, characters. She is not concerned with why a character, such as Mary Tilford in The Children's Hour, is evil, but with the evil she can effect on innocent persons with whom she comes in contact. The same theme is evinced in The Little Foxes, only this time the evil figure is a mature woman, Regina Giddens.

O'Neill's characters are neither all good or all bad as individuals, but emotionally disturbed and fluctuating in behavior. The O'Neill characters are offered salvation through repentance at the end of the play; Miss Hellman's characters never consider repenting, and remain evil throughout the entire play. The good characters, however, are usually salvaged by Miss Hellman for poetic justice. At the close of The Little Foxes, Regina is as far from repenting her evil as she was in the beginning, but Alexandra, the good character, is saved from her devastating influence. In The Great God Brown, for instance, Dion dies with a prayer on his lips, repenting his many sins and

¹⁴Cf. pp. 133; 153; 169.

hoping for salvation. Abbie and Eben Cabot confess their adultery and prepare to expiate themselves through legal conviction at the close of Desire Under the Elms.

Conflict. In the typical O'Neill play, the conflict is between the outer man and the inner man, rather than between the man and external forces. Miss Hellman's plays are always concerned with good and evil, man and society, man and inherent evil. The Hellman "good" characters in The Children's Hour and The Little Foxes struggle for survival against overwhelming evil in the form of the central characters, and in these plays, evil prevails. A difference of theme is evinced in Watch on the Rhine, however, where the "good" character is allowed to prevail over the "evil" one for a social purpose.¹⁵ The conflict in the Hellman play is much more clearly presented and defined than the subtle and sometimes obscure conflict of the O'Neill play.¹⁶

Summary. There is little similarity between the O'Neill tragedies and the Hellman tragedies; the difference is that of depth. Miss Hellman is content to remain along the surface of human struggle, while O'Neill is obsessed with exploring the complexities of the human mind. The

¹⁵Cf. p. 169.

¹⁶Cf. pp. 47;66;79.

consequence is the shallow, "well-made" play of Hellman as opposed to the expressionistic, and often confusing, play of O'Neill.

C. LILLIAN HELLMAN AND MAXWELL ANDERSON

More closely allied than the other sets of authors compared, Maxwell Anderson and Lillian Hellman are less original, less experimental, and more conventional than O'Neill. The essential difference between these two authors, Hellman and Anderson, lies in the form and subject matter used as dramatic expression.

Characterization. The characters created by the pen of Lillian Hellman, although surface characters, are vivid and realistic. Miss Hellman has admitted that she always begins a play with the personalities involved; the plot follows. The role of Regina Giddens, in The Little Foxes, and the vicious child, Mary Tilford, in The Children's Hour, have proved to be some of the most outstanding feminine roles on Broadway in recent years. The families presented in Watch on the Rhine are warmly human and credible; the villain, truly despicable.

Mr. Anderson's characters were created as instruments for the poet's profound message to mankind. The characters are not significant as individuals, and many of their speeches are interchangeable. The philosophy of Pablo in

Night Over Taos might have as well been spoken by Felipe; at his best, Anderson's beautiful speeches seem most appropriate to the eloquence of a particular speaker, as those of Esdras, in Winterset. At times the beauty of the thought and poetry surpasses the ordinary, and ascends into the superb.¹⁷ The rhythms and carefully chosen words remain with the viewer long after the last curtain has closed and the theater is darkened. Had Mr. Anderson been able to sustain the emotional power he evinced in Winterset, he could have become America's greatest playwright. Lacking the expansive genius of O'Neill, he has allowed himself to become repetitive and preaching.

Miss Hellman, on the other hand, having chosen much simpler goals for herself, has been pushing steadily upward in her creative writing, and if she does not become involved politically with the Left Wing, or with the artificialities of screenwriting, she shows great promise of further development.

Mood. The mood of the Anderson play is enhanced by the beauty of the language; the Hellman play depends upon the careful construction to build up and further the mood. One has the beauty of ethereal aspiration; the other,

¹⁷The speeches of Esdras quoted on p. 88.

the verity of everyday existence. Miss Hellman is content to build interest slowly, ploddingly, and fulfill the expectations of the audience in a structural climax, such as the suicide of Martha in The Children's Hour, or the death of Horace in The Little Foxes. Mr. Anderson wishes to stimulate the thought processes of the viewers, and communicate a vital message through the media of eloquent dialogue. The basic difference between the playwriting of a man and that of a woman, according to George Jean Nathan, is that a woman cannot resist wringing an emotion to excess, nor present an objective plot without committing herself definitely in favor of one side.¹⁸ There is contrast in the restrained atmosphere of the Anderson play to the melodramatic, frankly emotional moods evoked by Miss Hellman.

Theme. The themes utilized most frequently by these two authors, Hellman and Anderson, are social ones: injustice, aggression, oppression, and domination. Although they veer in different directions politically, they believe strongly that there is need of social reform, and have set about to expose the social evils through the medium of the theater. Mr. Anderson has evaded the dichotomy of Miss Hellman, that things are necessarily either black or white.

¹⁸George Jean Nathan, "Playwrights in Petticoats." The American Mercury, June, 1941, p. 750.

He probes into social causations, environments, heredities, and human weaknesses; he manipulates his characters to do something about the situations in which they find themselves, and makes them grow, morally, in expiation, as did the Greek tragedians.

Miss Hellman is an acute observer of human behavior, but fails to give the characters any depth, or look beyond the surface motivations for causes or effects. Consequently her plays do not present any answers to a problem; they never explain why the problem exists in the first place, or why the characters react as they do. They accept at face value a situation, and the human reaction to the problem. They offer little of lasting value, or universal application.

Conflict. The conflicts presented in the Hellman and Anderson plays are similar in that the characters must overcome some social or environmental obstacle as opposed to the psychological obstacle imposed by O'Neill in his plays; yet they differ greatly in the depth of the conflict, and its solution. Mr. Anderson considers the significance of man, and his ability to rise above seemingly insuperable obstacles; man is allowed to face his problem squarely, analyze it, philosophize about it, ~~and~~ discover his own shortcomings, or tragic flaws in relation to the problem,

and expiate himself through suffering or death.

Hellman's conflicts are surface conflicts: between good and evil, between black and white. Often no definite conclusion is reached, ~~as~~^{for} her adherence to reality will not allow a clear-cut decision, as in the third act of The Children's Hour, when Karen remains indecisive, alone on the stage, not knowing what course she must now take. No explanation is offered as to the origin of the struggle; it merely exists. One of the most interesting speculations that remains unanswered is the reason for the little child, Mary Tilford's, viciousness and evilness in The Children's Hour. No conclusion is presented; life does not always "tie the package up in a neat ribbon." The struggle exists for the interim of the performance, and Miss Hellman is usually taking sides, but allows no absolute victory.

Anderson's conflicts are heroic, and their outcomes are important to the universe; Hellman's conflicts are ordinary, and their outcomes usually important only to the characters involved and the immediate audience, as in The Little Foxes and The Children's Hour, although Watch on the Rhine may have greater importance to the world as a whole.

Summary. While the writer agrees, as does George Jean Nathan, that parallel comparison is well-nigh impossible

between the plays of a man and those of a woman, the plays of Anderson and Hellman offer material for contrast. Alike in the basic theme of social reform, their plays constitute the two extremes in the theater--melodrama and poetic drama; the appeal of Hellman to the masses is as great as her repulsion of the intellectuals; Anderson's appeal is greatly limited to intellectual audiences, and the ordinary theater-goer finds him "too deep." Both being expert craftsmen, their plays are successful and prominent in the contemporary theater. Their plays are well-written, and interesting, and each has its niche in the history of modern tragedy.

D. SUMMARY

In the preceding pages, three representative plays from each of three representative American writers of tragedy have been examined, concerning characterization, mood, theme, and conflict. Criticism, favorable and unfavorable, has been presented, and values evolved.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact requirements of real tragedy, but from certain world authorities, prerequisites were set up in the opening chapter. The plays chosen as tragedies do not fulfill all the requirements; many critics contend that there is no tragedy being written today. The writer has attempted to analyze these contempo-

rary serious dramas as tragedies, and compare them respectively.

Looking back upon great tragedy of the past--such as that of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, or Ibsen--we find timelessness in the representation of a specific time or era, such as the Elizabethaness of Shakespeare's plays. On this premise, one can defend the modern psychological approach to tragedy: the Freudian concepts in O'Neill's plays, the contemporary subject-matter of Winterset, and the modern characterizations of Lillian Hellman. Are these current problems and portraits of such small significance and stature as modern critics would assign them in the genre "tragedie bourgeoise",¹⁹ or are they true tragedies of modern life, and therefore of lasting value?

This writer believes that each age creates its own tragedy, valid and noble in aspiration; each author striving toward the eternal, the sublime, with his own individual creative ability, philosophy, and ambition. And this is as it should be. Naturalism, expressionism, impressionism, symbolism--all these ideals, techniques, and interests come and go with the crest of the time, and the dramatic authors ride atop that tidal wave, interpreting the pulsations of the mighty current of life into "sounds and symbols

¹⁹Eric Bentley, The Playwright as a Thinker, p. 46.

running through men's minds."²⁰ If there is a deeper, religious sincerity lacking from contemporary tragedy, does this not also reflect the philosophy of the era? When Mio addresses the bright, ironical gods in a plea for mercy in the third act of Winterset, there is no hope that his prayers will be answered. The audience does not expect it, because they, too, believe only in "what is seen."²¹

Two of the plays considered in this thesis, Maxwell Anderson's Winterset and Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, are real tragedies, and adequately represent the tragic endeavor of contemporary American dramatists. It remains to be seen how well they will withstand the ravages and objectivity of time and vituperative critics.

Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, and Lillian Hellman have established themselves as leading American writers of tragedy. There is field for future study in the further analysis of other tragedies by these particular playwrights and their contemporaries.

²⁰Esdras' speech, Winterset, Act I, scene i, p. 88 of this thesis.

²¹Loc. cit.

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APPENDIX

THE GREAT GOD BROWN

First produced at the Greenwich Village Theatre, New York City, January 23, 1926.

Cast of Characters

William A. Brown	William Harrigan
His mother	Milano Tilden
His father	Clifford Sellers
Dion Anthony	Robert Keith
His father	Hugh Kidder
His mother	Eleanor Wesselhoedt
Margaret	Leona Hogarth
Cybel.	Anne Shoemaker
Margaret's three sons.	Starr Jones
	Paul Jones
	Teddy Jones
Two draughtsmen.	Frederick C. Packard, Jr.
	John Mahin
Client	Setti Kendall
Three committeemen	Adrian Marsh
	William Stahl
	Stanley Barry
Police Captain	Ellsworth Jones
Margaret'd three sons, four years later.	Tupper Jones
	Starr Jones
	Paul Jones

Directed by Robert MacGowan, Robert Edmund Jones, and Eugene O'Neill.

Staged by Robert Edmund Jones.

STRANGE INTERLUDE

First produced by the Theatre Guild at the John Golden Theatre, New York City, January 30, 1928.

Cast of Characters

Charles Marsden	Tom Powers
Professor Leeds	Philip Leigh
Nina Leeds.	Liane Fontaine
Sam Evans	Earle Larimore
Edmund Darrell.	Glen Anders
Mrs. Amos Evans	Helen Westley
Gordon Evans, as a boy.	Charles Walters
Madeleine Arnold.	Ethel Westley
Gordon Evans.	John J. Burns

Staged and directed by Philip Moeller.

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

First produced at the Greenwich Village Theatre, New York City, on November 11, 1924.

Cast of Characters

Simon Cabot	Allen Nagle
Peter Cabot	Perry Irvin
Eben Cabot.	Charles Ellis
Ephraim Cabot, their father	Walter Huston
Abbie Putnam.	Mary Morris
A young girl.	Eloise Pendleton
Farmers	Romeyn Benjamin
	Arthur Mack
	William Stahl
	John Taylor
A fiddler	Macklin Morrow
An old woman.	Norma Millay
A sheriff	Walter Abel
Deputies.	Arthur Mack
	William Stahl

Directed and staged by Robert Edmund Jones.

WINTERSET

First produced at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York City, September 25, 1935.

Cast of Characters

Trock	Eduardo Ciannelli
Shadow.	Harold Johnsrud
Lucia	Morton L. Stevens
Pliny	Fernanda Eliseu
Miriamne.	Margo
Garth	Theodore Hecht
Esdras.	Anatole Winogradoff
1st Girl.	Eva Langbord
2nd Girl.	Ruth Hammond
The Hobo.	John Philliber
Judge Gaunt	Richard Bennett
Carr.	Billy Quinn
Mio	Burgess Meredith
Sailor.	St. John Terrell
Radical	Abner Beberman
Policeman	Anthony Blair
Sergeant.	Harold Martin
Two Young Men	Stanley Gould
	Walter Holbrook

Directed by Guthrie McClintic.

Staged by Jo Mielziner.

ELIZABETH THE QUEEN

First produced by the Theatre Guild, Inc., at the Guild Theatre, New York City,
November 3, 1930.

Cast of Characters

Sir Walter Raleigh	Percy Warren
Penelope Gray	Anita Kerry
Captain Arvin	Philip Foster
Sir Robert Cecil	Arthur Hughes
Francis Bacon	Morris Carnovsky
Lord Essex	Alfred Lunt
Elizabeth	Lynne Fontaine
Lord Burghley	Robert Conness
The Fool	Barry McCollum
Mary	Mab Anthony
Tressa	Edla Frankau
Ellen	Phoebe Brand
Marvel	Royal Beal
A man-at-arms	Charles Brokaw
A herald	Vincent Sherman
A captain of the guards	Edward Oldfield
Burbage	Whitford Kane
Hemmings	Charles Brokaw
Poins	Curtiss Arnall
Ladies in waiting	Louise G. Huntington
	Anabelle Williams
Courtiers, Guards, men-at-arms	Michel Borodin
	George Fleming
	Stanley Ruth
	Nick Wiger
	Henry Lase
	Gut Moore
	James Wiley

Directed by Philip Moeller.

Settings and costumes by Lee Simonson.

NIGHT OVER TAOS

First produced by the Group Theatre, Inc., at the 48th Street Theatre, New York City, March 9, 1932.

Cast of Characters

Indian slave	Robert Lewis
Dona Vera.	Mary Morris
Valeria.	Virgiana Farmer
Maria.	Paula Miller
Raquel	Margaret Barker
Conchita	Gertrude Maynard
Nuna	Eunice Stoddard
Carlotta	Dorothy Patten
Cristina	Sylvia Pennington
Graso.	Friendly Ford
Dona Josefa.	Stella Adler
Father Martinez.	Morris Carnovsky
Diana.	Ruth Nelson
Diego.	Harry Bellaver
Federico	Franchot Tone
Narciso.	Herbert Patner
Captain.	Art Smith
Don Hermano.	Lewis Leverett
Don Miguel	Stanford Meisner
Felipe	Walter Coy
Santos	Gerrit Kraber
Pablo Montoya.	J. Edward Bromberg
Andres	Clement Wilenchick
Don Fernando	Luther Adler
Don Marip.	Philip Robinson
Mateo.	Clifford Odets
1st Trapper.	William Challee
2nd Trapper.	Grover Burgess
Peons.	Sylvia Hoffman
	Byron McGrath
	Burgess Meredith
	Robert Porter

Directed by Lee Strasberg.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

First produced at Maxine Elliott's Theatre, New York City, November 20, 1934.

Cast of Characters

Peggy Rogers	Eugenia Rawls
Mrs. Lily Mortar	Aline McDermott
Evelynn Munn	Elizabeth Seckel
Helen Burton	Lynne Fisher
Lois Fisher.	Jacqueline Rusling
Catherine.	Barbara Leeds
Rosalie Wells.	Barbara Beals
Mary Tilford	Florence McGee
Karen Wright	Katherine Emery
Martha Dobie	Anne Revere
Doctor Joseph Cardin	Robert Keith
Agatha	Edmonia Nolley
Mrs. Amelia Tilford.	Katherine Emmett
A grocery boy.	Jack Tyler

Produced and directed by Herman Shumlin.

Setting designed by Aline Bernstein.

THE LITTLE FOXES

The Little Foxes was first produced at the National Theatre, New York City, on February 15, 1939.

Cast of Characters

Addie	Abbie Mitchell
Cal	John Marriott
Birdie Hubbard.	Patricia Collinge
Oscar Hubbard	Carl Benton Reid
Leo Hubbard	Dan Duryea
Regina Giddens.	Tallulah Bankhead
William Marshall.	Lee Baker
Benjamin Hubbard.	Charles Dingle
Alexandra Giddens	Florence Williams
Horace Giddens.	Frank Conroy

Produced and staged by Herman Shumlin; Settings by Howard Ray; Costumes designed by Aline Bernstein.

WATCH ON THE RHINE

First produced at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York City, on April 1, 1941.

Cast of Characters

Anise	Eda Heinemann
Joseph.	Frank Wilson
Fanny Farrelly.	Lucille Watson
David Farrelly.	John Lodge
Marthe de Brancovis	Helen Trenholme
Teck de Brancovis	George Coulouris
Sara Muller	Mady Christians
Joshua Muller	Peter Fernandez
Bodo Muller	Eric Roberts
Babette Muller.	Ann Blyth
Kurt Muller	Paul Lukas

Produced and staged by Herman Shumlin; settings designed by Jo Mielzner;
costumes designed by Helene Pons.

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

Desire Under the Elms was produced in the Greenwich Village Theatre on November 11, last. It immediately aroused wide discussion, but it was not until it had played for eight weeks on Christopher Street, and moved to the Earl Carroll Theatre that it began to play to capacity audiences. The wrath of the District Attorney directed against Desire did accentuate the business of the O'Neill play, but it can not be said in any sense that Me. Banton's pronunciamento was the stroke that established the vogue of Desire. The play was a solid hit long before it aroused the suspicion of Banton.

Nor has Desire, since moved to a third theatre, the George M. Cohan, lived on the reputation it gained through its duel with the law. In its advertising Desire has followed a dignified course, and no attempt has ever been made by its producers to realize on the publicity the play received through the judgments of the Play Jury. Its audiences, for the most part, are made up of people with a genuine admiration for the character and accuracy of the play. Its realism has in no sense proved a deterrent to its popularity.

Prest for an opinion, any Broadway producer would have given Desire a twenty week run, and that would have been a liberal estimate. The O'Neill play has now established a long run record for a tragedy in America. Although statistics are not available, it is believed that Desire's run compares favorably in length with any run registered by any tragedy at any time, anywhere.

Desire has definitely established Eugene O'Neill as America's foremost writer of tragedy. His reputation in this field is now international. He is represented, and he is the only American who is represented, in the repertory of the Pirandello Theater, Rome, and his plays have frequent presentation in London.

(Literary Digest 86:23-4, August 8, 1925, quoting the New York Herald Tribune.)