

# Young O'Neill's Dilemma

## A Study of the Earlier Plays of Eugene O'Neill

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### I

Among the earliest works of Eugene O'Neill is an excellent one-act play entitled "Bound East for Cardiff," to which the author once referred in a letter to R.D. Skinner as follows: "Very important from my point of view. In it can be seen, or felt, the germ of the spirit, life-attitude, etc., of all my more important future work."<sup>1)</sup> So it seems worth having a look at his "life-attitude" in it.

This short piece tells of a sailor Yank, who, injured in a ship-board accident, lies dying in the forecabin of the *Glencairn*. In the bunk he looks back upon his hard, lonely life and tells of his hatred to his sailor life with hard work and "no one to care whether you're alive or dead." The hatred to the sea is, naturally, parallel with the longing for the dry land as he says:

It must be great to stay on dry land all your life and have a farm with a house of your own . . . 'way in the middle of the land where yuh'd never smell the sea or see a ship. It must be great to have a wife, and kids to play with at night after supper when your work was done.<sup>2)</sup>

But this is a dream which never comes true. Even his last wish "to be buried on dry land" will not be fulfilled because of the fog that prevents the ship from sailing. A dark night with the fog on the sea is the situation surrounding him. It suggests the blindness and helplessness of man who has no stars nor the moon to guide him. "Damned whistle blowin'" sounds sadly through a

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1) Richard D. Skinner, *Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. viii.

2) Eugene O'Neill, "Bound East for Cardiff," *The Moon of the Caribbees And Six Other Plays of the Sea* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), pp. 17-18.

foggy night as if it were man's cry for help. Fellow sailors snoring around the dying sailor give us a sharp image of his loneliness. And also the fact that Yank was so much impressed with a trivial kindness to him by a barmaid paradoxically proves his loneliness rather than a touch of melodrama as some critics insist.

In this tragic situation Yank fights with his fear of death and, in the end, accepts it. We may see Yank's affirmative attitude to life not only in his acceptance of death but also in his reliance on friendship with Driscoll, his fellow sailor. If we lay stress on another sailor's cry at the fall of the curtain, "The fog's lifted," which is not found in the first version of this play called "Children of the Sea," it may be said that there is a vague expectation of resurrection, as R. D. Skinner points out.<sup>3)</sup> Therefore, in this play O'Neill is not pessimistic, at least less pessimistic. His life-attitude here may be said to be "higher optimism, not skin deep, which is usually confounded with pessimism."<sup>4)</sup>

There is another allusion to resurrection in "The Rope," one of the best short plays in his early days. Abraham Bentley has fixed a rope with an open running noose to the beam in his barn, since Luke, his son by the second marriage, stole his money from him and disappeared. He vindictively wishes Luke to hang himself on the rope when the son comes home again after five years' absence. But has Abraham really wanted to kill his son? The answer is ambiguous. It is true that he has hated his son for five years and also it seems true that he loves him in spite of everything. We can see the father's ambivalent feeling to his son, which is symbolized in the rope. It must be noticed that a bag full of gold is tied to the end of rope, which could not bear even the weight of Mary, a child of ten years. So, even if Luke actually hanged himself on the rope, he could not have been killed and, instead, he might have found out the hidden gold, just as Mary did. The son's "hanging himself" does not mean a *real* death but a *ritual* one. When Luke dies the ritual death as his atonement, he will be possibly given gold as well as, so to

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3) Skinner, pp. 42-8.

4) Eugene O'Neill, "Damn the Optimist!", *O'Neill and His Plays*, eds. Oscar Cargil, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University, 1970), p. 104.

speak, a real new life. There is a possibility of resurrection through death as atonement. Luke, however, refuses to hang himself. So in the end of the play there is no longer hope of resurrection and there only remain the ugliness and emptiness of desires. This is bitterly and effectively pictured in the last scene in which Mary joyfully throws away all of the gold pieces one after another into the sea.

I have seen both O'Neill's hope for resurrection and negation of it in the two serious short plays written in his early days. Though O'Neill himself says that he is "far from being a pessimist,"<sup>5)</sup> he is often called a pessimistic writer. In fact, his pessimistic and gloomy view of life can be easily found in almost all his plays. The despairing ugliness and hopelessness of men in "Thirst"; a tragedy of a man destroyed by his nagging wife in "Before Breakfast"; the ominous fate of the moderns without God in *Mourning Becomes Electra*; the sheer nihilistic attitude of life in *The Iceman Cometh*; these are nothing but expressions of his pessimism. At the same time, however, some of his plays, especially in his early days, are apparently optimistic or at least less pessimistic. It seems to me that young O'Neill is in a dilemma of hope and despair, optimism and pessimism. Is his ambivalence to life not a remarkable characteristic in his early days? In the following chapters I would like to examine O'Neill's dilemma in some longer plays of his earlier works.

## II

In the first chapter, I referred to a sailor's hatred to the sea and longing for the land, which seem to be shared with most of O'Neill's characters in a series of the sea-plays written in his early days. Let me try to make a brief sketch of their view of the sea through these plays.

According to Andrew Mayo in *Beyond the Horizon*, the sea is nothing but a "regular prison." So in "Ile" Captain Keeney's wife, who used to have a romantic image of "the great, wide, glorious ocean," and dream of the free life on the sea, soon finds herself "like a prisoner" on it. It is, in a word, "all-wool-and-a yard-wide Hell."<sup>6)</sup> On the sea, sailors are only "wage slaves"

5) Quoted in Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O'Neill* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 260.

6) Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 108.

whose lives are marked by "too much hard work for little money."<sup>7)</sup> Therefore all of them eagerly wish to get out of the sea and live on the dry land where "no more sea, no more bum grub, no more storms — yust nice work"<sup>8)</sup> are found. Even such a tough man as Captain Bartlett in *Gold* blurts out his yearning for life on the land:

I'll rest at home 'til the day I die . . . . I be comin' home now for good . . . . No more stinkin' blubber on the deck. I'll give up whalin' like ye've always been askin' me, Sarah . . . . I've been dreamin' o' this in my sleep for years. (Act I)<sup>9)</sup>

Their longing for the land, however, is only a dream that will never come true because they are possessed by the sea in some way or other. All they can do is to "wait for something that never comes,"<sup>10)</sup> just as three men in "Thirst" who are drifting on a life raft on a tropic sea hoping in vain to be rescued. In "The Long Voyage Home" their tragic fate is most clearly shown. Olson's dream of getting out of the sea to live on the farm in Stockholm is piteously shattered by a vicious trick of a group of crimps. Thus his "long voyage home" never ends.

If man is frustrated on the sea, then can he secure peace and happiness on the land? O'Neill's answer to this question seems to be "no" as long as found in *Anna Christie* and *Beyond the Horizon*.

Chris Christopherson in *Anna Christie* hates "dat ole davil sea," just as the characters of the other sea-plays do, and believes "it's better Anna live on farm." On the other hand, Anna, his daughter who had been kept on the farm of his cousins till she was sixteen, tells of her hatred to the farm as follows:

The old man of the family, his wife, and four sons — I had to slave for all of 'em. I was only a poor relation, and they treated me worse than

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7) Eugene O'Neill, "The Long Voyage Home", *The Moon of the Caribbees And Six Other Plays of the Sea*, p.18.

8) *Ibid.*

9) Eugene O'Neill, *Gold* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p.17.

10) Eugene O'Neill, "Thirst", *Ten Lost Plays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p.10.

they dare treat a hired girl. It was one of the sons — the youngest — started me — when I was sixteen. After that, I hated 'em so I'd killed 'em all if I'd stayed. So I run away — to St. Paul. (Act I)<sup>11</sup>

Living in “the little home in the country,” as well as “taking care of other people’s kids,” makes her feel as if she were caged in jail. Thus she is defeated by the violent fate on the land till she degrades into a woman of the streets. So O'Neill's characters seem to be defeated whether on the sea or on the land. This time, however, she is purified by the power of the mystic fog on the sea. Anna says that “being on the sea” has changed her and the fog makes her feel clean. She continues:

But why d'you s'pose I feel so — so — like I'd found something I'd missed and been looking for —'s if this was the right place for me to fit in? And I seem to have forget — everything that's happened — like it didn't matter no more. And I feel clean. (Act II)<sup>12</sup>

She comes to believe that the sea is the right place where she should “belong.” This is, from Anna's point of view, a story of her degeneration on the land and purification by the sea. O'Neill suggests here that her misplacing is the cause of her defeat.

Here arise two questions. The first is how the sea can cleanse her; the second whether this play has a happy ending or unhappy one. First, can we believe the mystic power of the fog or the sea is the cause of her conversion? If it is so, she would never go back to prostitution even if Mat Burke, her lover, refused to accept her love. Yet she made up her mind, at least once, to go back to it. In her conversion there should have been another factor.

It was to the town named St. Paul that Anna ran away when she was violated on the farm. This reminds me of the conversion of Saint Paul. Paul (also called Saul) had been one of persecutors of Christians. One day he heard the voice of Christ and was converted to one of His disciples, when he found himself blind. Though his conversion was followed by great suffering,

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11) Eugene O'Neill, *Anna Christie* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), p. 29.

12) *Ibid.*, p.45.

he kept his faith in Christ and at last was accepted by the other disciples.<sup>13)</sup> It is noticed there are some curious resemblances between the conversions of Paul and Anna: sudden conversion without their conscious effort; their suffering that followed; and the acceptance of their conversions, in Paul's case, by his fellow disciples and, in Anna's case, by her lover. As I have said in the first chapter, the fog often suggests the blindness and helplessness in O'Neill's plays. As Chris says, "Fog, fog, fog, . . . You can't see where you was going, no. Only dat ole devil, sea — she knows!" (Act IV), here is suggested, too, the blindness of man. In O'Neill's plays the fog mostly implies the blindness or the ignorance, that is, something that might mislead one without help of, perhaps, God. The fog suggesting blindness is equivalent to Paul's loss of eyesight. So I cannot think O'Neill referred to "St. Paul" without any purpose. We should say that Anna's conversion was, not a result of development of the character, predetermined in O'Neill's mind as B. H. Clark points out.<sup>14)</sup>

At the same time there is one considerable difference between the conversions of the two, which helps to explain to some extent the second question: the ambiguity in the ending of this play. Paul heard the voice of God while Anna heard no such voice nor anything like that. When she is asked by Mat whether she is a Catholic or not, she answers to him, "I ain't nothing." (Act IV) Instead she gets a man's love. She says to Mat, "Don't you see how I'd changed? . . . Will you believe it if I tell you that loving you has made me — clean? It's the straight goods, honest!" (Act III) She is saved by the power of love rather than of the sea.

Since this is apparently a happy ending, some critics accuse O'Neill of its inconsistency with character and of "theatrical quality." But does he really believe that love is able to save people who are trapped by the fate? Surely he desires to believe, but he is too skeptical to do so. It should be remembered that, while blind Paul receives sight again by the grace of God, Anna's future, without help of God, is ominously ambiguous as in the fog, though she is to marry her lover. In this sense it is natural that Chris should

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13) See the Acts, Chap. 9.

14) Barret H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays* (New York: Dover, 1967), p.77.

say, "You can't see where you vas goin'" just before the curtain falls. In a letter to George Jean Nathan, O'Neill himself, insisting on "superstitious uncertainty" of the characters' future, writes as follows:

The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten. (In fact, I once thought of calling the play *Comma*.)<sup>15)</sup>

The happy ending of *Anna Christie* is followed by a touch of the ominous foreboding. O'Neill cannot deny the reality of life is tragic, but if we could not be happy after any suffering, "our suffering would be meaningless," as Robert insists in *Beyond the Horizon*. So he seeks a hope in hopelessness. The ambivalent ending of *Anna Christie* shows nothing but this dilemma of O'Neill between hope and despair. As he entitled the first version of this play *Chris Christopherson*, it was perhaps a play about Chris's defeat on the sea (though we cannot know its content now.) O'Neill's ambivalence, or indeterminateness, is shown also in the very fact that he rewrote Chris's play into Anna's one.

### III

O'Neill searches for a hope in hopelessness in *Anna Christie*, in which love seems to give us a vague hope of happiness, even if it may not be "a happy-ever-after." *The Straw* written in 1919 shows again a victory of love in a sense, though it is more tragic in the situation than *Anna Christie*. It is, in short, a love story of Eileen Carmody, a daughter of an Irish widower, and Stephen Murray, a newspaper reporter, both tuberculosis patients. Eileen, exhausted and taken ill from the care of her large family, is estranged from her family and even her fiancé Fred. Stephen, who has not "much of a family left," gets tired of his tedious job of reporter and finds "a good, long rest with time to think about things" in the sanatorium which he thinks is "like heaven." These lonely man and woman meet at the sanatorium and encourage each other. The tragedy begins when Eileen falls in love with

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15) *Ibid.*, pp.76-7.

Stephen while he shows nothing greater than friendship to her. After he leaves the hospital, Eileen, having lost her will for living, rapidly gets worse until there is no hope of her recovery. When he returns to the hospital to learn her hopeless condition and proposes marriage to her in order to give her at least a transient happiness, he recognizes too late that he really loves her.

In this play are two standpoints; one is Stephen's and the other Eileen's. From Stephen's viewpoint, this is a story of his self-discovery, as Doris V. Falk suggests.<sup>16)</sup> Stephen, who has lost direction of his life, finds his true vocation as a writer with Eileen's help and encouragement. But after having left the sanatorium and becoming a popular writer, he is disappointed at the glory of writing and again begins to lead a meaningless life in inaction. It is then that he comes to see her at the sanatorium and realizes his true love for her as if it were a revelation. He says with "a passionate awakening" to Eileen:

Oh, what a blind, selfish ass I've been! I love you! You are my life — everything! I love you, Eileen! (Act III)<sup>17)</sup>

At this moment he discovers "the real self." At the same time he must be confronted with a menacing reality of her coming death. He desperately tries to clutch at the last "straw," as he goes on:

Love isn't in the materia medica. Your predictions — all the verdicts of all the doctors — what do they matter to me? This is — beyond you! And we'll win in spite of you! How dare you use the word hopeless — as if it were the last! . . . There's always hope, isn't there? (Act III)<sup>18)</sup>

In spite of his desperate strife against their fate, he must feel the tragic end is surely to come. He will have to lose Eileen.

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16) Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neil and the Tragic Tension* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1958), pp. 45-8.

17) Eugene O'Neill, *The Emperor Jones, The Straw and Diff'rent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p.137.

18) *Ibid.*, p. 142.



Viewed from Eileen's standpoint, however, it cannot always be said to be tragic. Her happiness, to be sure, will last only for a short period and she will inevitably know the fact soon. But even if the death comes to her next moment, she will die happily so far as she can believe his love for her. And if she dies happily, she can be said to have lived a happy life. She is no doubt happier than Anna Christie whose future is uncertain and ominous. For not the length of life but the content of it should be a measure of happiness.

Of the two standpoints I have said above, which is O'Neill's? It is hard to say. Yet it should be noticed that the last straw, or "a hopeless hope," in *The Straw* is quite different from "pipe dream" such as seen in *The Iceman Cometh*. The pipe dream suggests a negative and passive attitude to life, while the hopeless hope implies an affirmative and positive attitude. Stephen Murray had once thought that the pipe dream "keeps us all going" but his dream of "tomorrow" never comes. With a revelation of love, however, he learns to believe there is always hope and determines to face up to their tragic fate.

Thus young O'Neill seems to believe that love can give us a hope, at least a hopeless hope. But his skeptical mind cannot allow him to believe in it without any reservation. His hesitation and doubt may be felt in Stephen's unfinished remark in telling of his determination; "I'll make Eileen get well, I tell you! Happiness will cure! *Love is stronger* —" (Act III) (*Italics mine*). And, according to Stephen, "love without a glimmer of understanding" is nothing but a nuisance. It is far from saving man from despair. On the contrary, it may drive him into the depths of destruction as shown in *Diff'rent*, *Bread and Butter* and *Beyond the Horizon*.

In *Diff'rent* written in 1920, Emma Crosby, believing her fiancé is "diff'rent from the rest," pictures an ideal image of Captain Caleb Williams, who is to marry her. But Emma refuses to marry him two days before their wedding, as she knows the fact that he is just the same "plain, ordinary cuss" as the rest. Having similarly a false image of a pure virgin lady about Emma, Caleb keeps on loving her as heartily as ever and waits in vain for her to change her mind for thirty years. His illusional picture of her, however, is shattered when he knows that she is in love with a mean nephew of Caleb's,

who deceives her to get money out of her. He hangs himself in despair and so does Emma, knowing Caleb's death and her own folly. Thus their love without understanding results in a catastrophe for both of them.

O'Neill's earliest full-length play, *Bread and Butter*, which was written in 1914 and not published till 1972 because of having been "destroyed" by him,<sup>19)</sup> is among his worst plays but interesting as a forerunner of his later works, especially as that of *Beyond the Horizon* written four years later.

John Brown, a son of a hardware merchant in *Bread and Butter*, is a romantic who wants to be an artist against his father's wish to make him a lawyer. "I am an artist in soul," says he, "I want to learn how to express in terms of color the dream in my brain." (Act I) With support of his fiancée Maud and her father Steele, a dry goods merchant, he successfully persuades his unwilling father to let him go to art school in New York. Unfortunately, however, Maud as well as Steele does view painting not in the light of "the beauty and wonder of it" but only in the light of a business to make money. It is natural in a sense that, being unable to understand his artistic aspiration and genius, she should think he is throwing both his and her lives away on a whim. About two years later, when Maud appealingly asks him to return to marry her, John is forced to suffer from a dilemma between his ardent wish for painting and his love for Maud, as he says:

Oh, it's hell to love and be loved by a girl who can't understand; who, you know, tries to and cannot; who loves you, and whose life you are making miserable and unhappy by trying to be true to yourself. (Act III)<sup>20)</sup>

In the event, he gives up his artistic career for her sake, because he thinks that life would be meaningless without her. He marries her and gets a good position in the store of Steele as his son-in-law. His love for Maud appears to overcome his ambition. But, as John is too artistic and romantic to be

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19) This play was published in 1972 with three other "destroyed" plays such as *Now I Ask You*, *Children of the Sea* and *Shell Shock* in a book entitled "*Children of the Sea*" and *Three Other Unpublished Plays by Eugene O'Neill* (Washington, D.C.: NCR, 1972).

20) *Ibid.*, p. 48.

interested in the business routine while Maud is too practical to understand him, their marriage has to end in a tragic failure. When she refuses to divorce, there is no way out for him but death. So he shoots himself, saying, "You devil of a woman!" (Act IV) John's love for Maud shatters his dream to become an artist and drives both of them into destruction. Throughout this play no hope can be found. There remain only despair and hatred.

The plot and the characters of *Beyond the Horizon* are essentially the same as those of *Bread and Butter*. Robert Mayo, a John Brown in *Horizon*, is a son of a farmer, but "never cut out for a farmer." He is, like John, a romantic who is always dreaming of "the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East." (Act I) He is a sort of a poet, while John is "an artist in soul" yearning for "the beauty and wonder of it." As he falls in love with Ruth Atkins, another Maud Steele, he gives up his dream of wandering beyond the horizon in order to marry her, saying as follows:

The mystery and the wonder — our love should bring them home to us. I think love must have been the secret — the secret that called to me from over the world's rim — the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me . . . . Our love is sweeter than any distant dream. It is the meaning of all life, the whole world. The kingdom of heaven is within — us! (Act I, Sc. 1)<sup>21)</sup>

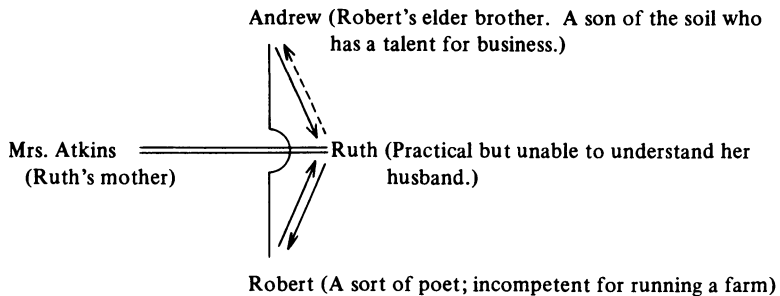
He could dream then that love is nothing but the mystery of the world which gives the meaning to his life. But his dream is never fulfilled. Their marriage proves to be "a crazy mistake" before long mainly because of Robert's incompetency for running the farm and Ruth's inability to understand him. According to Ruth, who is too practical, he is a good-for-nothing who is always reading "stupid books instead of working" and telling "cheap, silly, poetry talk." (Act II, Sc. 1) She cannot understand his dreams nor book-reading at all. Then she comes to hate her husband and finds out, or believes to have found out, that she really loves Andrew, Robert's elder brother who was once in love with her and has run away to the sea in disappointment, while, in *Bread*, John's elder brother Edward is in love with Maud, who

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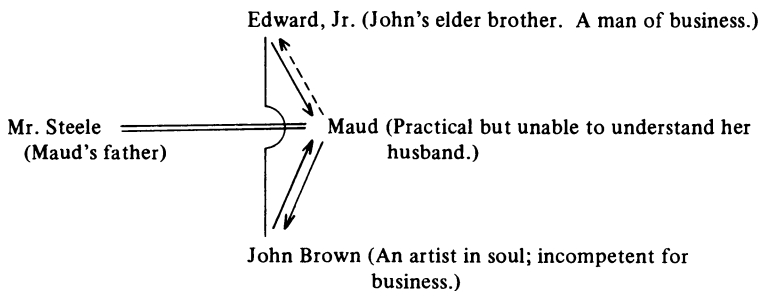
21) Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p.31.

refuses his wooing. These human relations of the protagonists in *Horizon* and *Bread* are shown in the following figures.

A: Human relation in *Beyond the Horizon*.



B: Human relation in *Bread and Butter*.



It is obvious that these two plays have much in common. Or rather we should say *Horizon* is a direct development of *Bread*. At the same time, it must be remembered that they have some important differences, in which we can see O'Neill's ambiguous or ambivalent attitude to love and life.

In *Horizon* as well as in *Bread*, love without understanding seems to shatter the dreams of the protagonists and finally drives them into destruc-

tion. But, when their endings are compared, it will be known that *Horizon* is less tragic than *Bread*. It is not only because Robert dies of illness, not of suicide, unlike John in *Bread*. It is mostly because Robert shows an affirmative attitude to life in a way. After much suffering, he comes to a conclusion that he may discover beyond death "the mystery and the wonder" of the world which he has been dreaming for long. With "the happiness of hope" he says in his last moment:

Don't you see I'm happy at last — because I'm making a start to the far-off places . . . freed from the farm — free to wander on and on — eternally! . . . It isn't the end. It's a free beginning — the start of my voyage! Don't you see? I've won to my trip — the right of release — beyond the horizon! (Act III, Sc. 2)<sup>22)</sup>

In spite of his last speech, it cannot be said that his dream has been realized in this world. Nevertheless, he dies happily in a sense, because his acceptance of death suggests his hope for redemption through suffering. "Andy — only through sacrifice — the secret beyond there" (Act III, Sc. 2), cries he, looking at the sun just rising from the rim of the hills, as if it were a very happy augury. Here the sun clearly symbolizes a happy new life for him.

His vague belief in salvation through suffering is also shown in his suggestion of a new life to Ruth, to whom he says with enthusiasm:

We'll make a new start, Ruth — just you and I. Life owes us some happiness after what we've been through. It must! Otherwise our suffering would be meaningless — and that is unthinkable . . . All our suffering has been a test through which we had to pass to prove ourselves worthy of a finer realization. (Act III, Sc. 1)<sup>23)</sup>

This will lead us to another fact that Robert still loves her even when she comes to hate him. Therefore he even asks Andrew to marry her after his death. It is suggestive that Robert would like to cooperate with his wife in

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22) *Ibid.*, p.173.

23) *Ibid.*, pp.140–41.

making a new start, while John wishes to begin all over again by divorcing his wife. This departure from *Bread and Butter* is very important not only because it tells of the difference of characters between Robert and John, but also, and more important, because it shows his ambivalence in love as well as a change from despair to vague hope. This does not necessarily mean that O'Neill has a strong belief in constancy and stability of love. In *Beyond the Horizon* Andrew, whose disappointed love for Ruth was a cause of his leaving the farm, says that his love was just "a kid idea" and he forgot all about her only six months after his leaving the farm. As we have seen above, Ruth, who once declared definitely she loved Robert and not Andrew, finds out soon after their marriage that Andrew is the one she really loves. Here we cannot help feeling how transient and unreliable love is. Robert's love for Ruth seems to be unchangeable indeed, but love never fulfills his dream that it should bring to them the mystery and the wonder, the secret beyond the horizon. On the contrary, it is nothing but his love for Ruth and their child Mary that always hinders him from realizing his romantic dream of wandering about in search for the mystery. If it were not for Ruth and Mary, says he, "I'd chuck everything up and walk down the road with just one desire in my heart." (Act II, Sc. 1)

Thus in *Beyond the Horizon* love seems to be not only transient and unreliable, but also a hindrance to realization of Robert's own dream. In a sense it can be said that he is driven into gradual death because of love. Nevertheless he will never leave the farm to desert his wife and daughter. Instead, even after Mary's death, he eagerly desires to begin all over again with Ruth. Because love is "the meaning of all life, the whole world," he can never throw it away. And his ambivalence in love which is shown here shuts him in an absolute dilemma between his dream and love throughout the play. Death may be the only way out for him to escape from this dilemma without giving up a hope. Or rather it should be said that he tries to find out a vague hope in despairing life by thinking that death must be the start of his voyage to the secret beyond the horizon.

#### IV

The hatred for the sea forms one of the underlying tones in O'Neill's

earlier plays, though some protagonists of them admire the sea and the life on it; Robert in *Beyond the Horizon* has a romantic image of the fine free life and the mystery on the sea; Burke in *Anna Christie* says that the sea is the only life for a real man with guts in him and only on the sea he is free; Anna believes she has found the sea the right place for her to live on. But Robert has no real experience of the sea life and his image of the sea is illusional. Anna's future on the sea is ominously ambiguous. Burke has a great resemblance in many ways to Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, who can no longer belong to the sea after he comes to know the quite different world from his own on the sea.

The hatred for the sea is always followed by the longing for life on the land. So O'Neill's characters sometimes seem to think that their misfortunes have been brought about only by "misplacing" and therefore they will be able to do well or begin all over again somewhere else. If man's despairing state is caused by misplacing (though, in fact, it is often a cause of tragedy), it does not necessarily follow that we are tragic beings. For in this case the only thing for us to do is to find out a right place to which we can belong or, in other words, to find out the real self. Unfortunately, however, there is not such a place for any of O'Neill's characters to belong and, if there is, eventually they can never be happy on the land as well as on the sea.

About the origin of *Beyond the Horizon*, O'Neill once wrote:

On the British tramp steamer on which I made a voyage as ordinary seaman, Buenos Aires to New York, there was a Norwegian A. B., and we became quite good friends. The great sorrow and mistake of his life, he used to grumble, was that as a boy he had left the small paternal farm to run away to sea. He had been at sea twenty years, and had never gone home once in that time . . . . Yet he cursed the sea and the life it had led him . . . . He loved to hold forth on what a fool he had been to leave the farm. There was the life for you . . . . I thought, 'What if he had stayed on the farm, with his instincts? What would have happened?'<sup>24)</sup>

There is no doubt that Robert Mayo is a figure directly created from this

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24) Quoted in B. H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill*, p.66.

Norwegian A. B. and *Beyond the Horizon* is O'Neill's answer to this question. In a sense O'Neill realized the Norwegian's dream on the Mayo farm. On the farm Robert struggles for security and happiness, but he fails and comes to hate the farm, longing for a free life of the sea.

In making a comparison between Robert and the Norwegian or the protagonists who has more or less the same image as the Norwegian, we never fail to notice a reversal of their attitudes to the sea and to the land, that is, they hate where they actually are and long for where they are not. As O'Neill once said that "life is struggle, often, if not usually, unsuccessful struggle,"<sup>25)</sup> man will never win a triumph in his "self-destructive struggle" with "the Force behind — Fate, God, our biological past creating our present,"<sup>26)</sup> because "most of us have something within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire."<sup>27)</sup> According to O'Neill, man is a tragic being who will be inevitably defeated either on the land or on the sea in the end.

If a man can never attain security and happiness in spite of his any struggle and suffering, however, what meaning has his life to him and how can or should he live? It seems to me that O'Neill's cry for the meaning of life can be heard in Robert's remark that our suffering would be meaningless if happiness will not come to us even after much suffering. So, in order to find the meaning of life, O'Neill's protagonists eagerly or desperately keep having dream that they can get out of the hopeless situation on one hand, and try to find some hope for living in love on the other.

*Gold*, written in 1920, clearly shows us what significance man's dream has for him. Captain Bartlett and his five crew are shipwrecked on a coral island, where they begin to face their possible death from lack of water and food, just when they discover a chest of "gold . . . diamonds and emeralds and rubies." Although they are "nothing but brass and copper, and bum imitations of diamonds and things" (Act I) to the eyes of a sane man, Bartlett believes, or convinces himself to believe, that they are genuine treasure and

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25) E. O'Neill, "What the Theatre Means to Me," *O'Neill and His Plays*, eds. O. Cargil et al., p.107.

26) E. O'Neill, "Neglected Poet," *Ibid.*, p.125.

27) E. O'Neill, "What the Theatre means to Me," *Loc. cit.*



says:

Ye ought to be singin' 'stead o' cryin' — after the find we've made.  
What's the lack of water amount to — when ye've gold before you?  
Gold! Enough of it in your share alone to buy ye rum, and wine, and  
women, too, for the rest o' your life! (Act I)<sup>28)</sup>

“Gold” encourages them to keep a stiff upper lip except for Butler and Abel, who has retained their sanity enough to realize the treasure is “metal junk” and are killed by Bartlett and his men because they told the truth to them. It cannot be said Captain Bartlett had not the slightest doubt as to the genuineness of the jewelry. Even if it were genuine, gold could never be substitute for water nor food. Nevertheless it stimulates their desire for living in the despairing situation. And after being rescued, Bartlett is possessed by the “gold,” because it appears to him to be something like ambergris which he has been seeking for and which might enable him to realize his long cherished dream of getting away from “hard work on the dirty sea,” as he says:

That cook — he said 'twas brass. — But I'd been lookin' for ambergris  
— gold — the whole o' my life — and when we found that chest — I  
*had* to believe, I tell ye! I'd been dreamin' o' it all my days! (Act IV)<sup>29)</sup>

As his dream of gold has become his life, there is no hope for him to live any more when he is forced to realize that it is only metal junk. The end of his dream means termination of his life.

Though the dream of getting out of the ruthless reality is one of the driving forces which keep O'Neill's protagonists living in it, it will never be realized because it is always illusional. In this sense, the fact that Robert Mayo's dream lies beyond the horizon is very symbolic, for there is always the horizon but we can never go beyond it. Then can love mitigate the ruthlessness of the real world and give us the joy of living?

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28) E. O'Neill, *Gold* (London: Jonathan Cope, 1960), p.16.

29) *Ibid.*, p.126.

In *Gold* it is a father's love to his son that made Captain Bartlett confess the truth about the "gold". In *Anna Christie* Anna at last finds a light of hope in her love for Mat Burke, and in *The Straw* love brings happiness, though short-lived, to Eileen. We can say O'Neill eagerly wishes to believe love can give us the joy and meaning of life. In O'Neill's plays, however, love, or hatred as reverse side of it, often drives his characters into destruction instead of giving them joy of love. Young O'Neill seems to say that love without understanding causes destruction to them. We can see some typical examples of it in *Bread and Butter*, *Diff'rent* or "Before Breakfast," an excellent one-act play written in 1916. Only love with understanding, probably thinks he, can give us hope of life, as shown in *The Straw* and *Anna Christie*. O'Neill describes a perfect love with devotion and understanding in a self-sacrificing wife in *Servitude*, which has undoubtedly a happy ending. Here he is forced into a dilemma, however, because love is, as it were, a two-edged sword.

The dream of O'Neill's characters is a romantic one of getting out of the real world. It works as a centrifugal force. On the other hand, love which should mitigate ruthlessness and helplessness of the reality is the centripetal force, which confines a person to the real world. So love conflicts with the dream of getting out of the reality. In order to realize their dream they must give up love, or for the sake of love they must abandon their dream. They cannot keep living without dream and life without love will be meaningless. This dilemma, which is shown most clearly in *Beyond the Horizon*, underlies more or less in many of O'Neill's earlier plays, and it was apparently an important problem for him to solve in his early days. It seems to me, however, that he could show no solution except a few suggestions such as "eternal recurrence" in *The Fountain* and vague hope of resurrection through suffering in *Beyond the Horizon*. Sometimes expressing his hope and something being in the depths of despair, O'Neill often remains indeterminate as seen in *Anna Christie*. Young O'Neill seems to have been lost between hope and despair.

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