



INTRODUCTION

American drama received world recognition only after 1915. Other branches of American literature, namely prose and poetry, had prospered long before. For almost a century, American poetry had become not only more American but more mature, able, abundant and permanently established in world literature. America had produced many important literary figures such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow even before 1900. By the dawn of the Twentieth Century, American poetry not only became a genuine American expression; it had also begun, for the first time, to exercise an influence upon English poets. American prose writers began to reflect the American scene even before the American Revolution. The outstanding American writers—like Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, John Greenleaf Whittier, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Mark Twain—were already recognized. Only the dramatists lagged behind, maybe because printed work of literature can be composed independently but a play must be written for the theatre and involves other persons : actors, stage managers, scenic artists, etc. Before 1915, American plays were mostly melodramas, minor dramas and comedies. Indigenous drama in the United States remained insignificant until the first World War. Even the kindest critics had to admit its inferiority to European drama.

It was Eugene Gladstone O'Neill who introduced the new age of American drama. His Bound East for Cardiff, written in 1916, marked the birth of modern American drama. Eugene O'Neill was

sincere about his own conception of life and drew upon his own emotions in the writing of his dramas. He put so much of himself into his plays that it is impossible to separate him from them. In order to understand the plays one must study his personality since his life affected him in an extraordinary fashion, more so than any other American playwrights of his time. O'Neill's works changed according to his emotions which were the result of personal experience. His early plays of the sea showed a romantic trend such as Beyond the Horizon (1918), Anna Christie (1920), Where the Cross is Made (1918), The Moon of the Caribbees (1916-7) etc. Then after 1920, when he became influenced by the technique of the German expressionists—Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, his plays were of an expressionistic type such as The Hairy Ape (1922); he turned to look more deeply into himself and expressed his inner conflicts from the time of his childhood. After 1925, as the result of his increasingly morbid outlook, his plays became more and more psychological and introspective, such as Strange Interlude (1926-7), Mourning Becomes Electra (1929-31), Long Day's Journey Into Night (1939-41), and The Iceman Cometh (1939) etc.

This thesis consists of two parts. The first part deals with important incidents in O'Neill's life and the environments in which he lived and worked which affected him and colored his plays. The second part concerns his plays and their themes.

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