

THE CONCEPT OF THE TRAGIC HERO IN
MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION

THE TRAGIC HERO IN MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA

In this essay I propose to study the modern American concept of the tragic hero as indicated in the works of the most successful American dramatists of recent years. A successful dramatist, for our purposes, is one whose plays have been most favorably received by theatre audiences and most keenly discussed by the drama critics. The playwrights chosen for this study are Maxwell Anderson, Robinson Jeffers, Arthur Miller, Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill, and Tennessee Williams.

The way in which a dramatist conceives his tragic hero depends on his idea of Tragedy. A dramatist's conception of Tragedy will contain some explicit or implicit definition of the tragic hero. Further, the definition of Tragedy will be coloured by the dramatist's conception of the end which Tragedy is to serve. Since it is generally agreed that the end which all art worthy of the name is to serve is that of giving pleasure - not hedonistic, but aesthetic - the dramatist who intends to write Tragedy must decide for himself what sort of pleasure tragic drama is to provide. This peculiar pleasure once defined, the dramatist then is able to develop his theory of Tragedy and to attend to the consideration of that most important ingredient, his tragic hero.

My approach to the study of this important figure - the tragic hero - will of necessity be similar to that which the dramatist makes. At the outset, consideration of a satisfactory definition of Tragedy and of that peculiar end which it is to serve will be my concern; the evaluation

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of the modern tragic hero, which I shall attempt ~~in the~~ in the concluding portion of this essay, will depend on my idea of Tragedy and of its aim. But before proceeding to a discussion of a satisfactory definition of Tragedy, let me anticipate one objection: that no general definition of Tragedy is valid since there is no such thing as a "tragedy", but only the particular tragic play we happen to have before us. In answer to this I offer the words of Mr. Bonamy Dobree:¹

If it be true that all art is an exploration of life, just as philosophy and science are so in their diverse ways, then it should be possible to distinguish between the various forms of art by mapping out the regions they attempt. Precision is not to be hoped for, since overlapping is at once obvious, and the geographer must of necessity be allowed vagueness at the edges.

And the definition, then, will be one that can be most generally applied to the most satisfactory type of tragic drama.

It is virtually impossible to begin a discussion of Tragedy without reference to the first great literary critic, Aristotle. The essence of his definition of Tragedy is contained in this brief statement:

Tragedy then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.²

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- (1) Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Tragedy, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929, p.9.
 - (2) Poetics, trans. S.H.Butcher, in The Great Critics, ed. J.H.Smith and E.W.Parks, New York, W.W.Norton & Co. 1939, p.34; italics mine.

The presentation of an action requires characters, obviously, and what Aristotle suggests as the main character is that of a predominantly good man who has some flaw, or is prone to commit some error of judgment. His tragedy, resulting from this character flaw or from the error he commits, is his fall from felicity into misfortune. In order that this event satisfy us, the hero must not simply be the passive victim of circumstance, but must seem to contribute to the tragic conclusion. The action, then, will show us the hero in a predicament that will permit him to exhibit the flaw in his character, to make the mistake that will lead to his downfall. (Although literary critics and theorists are wont to refer to the "tragic flaw" of the hero, the word Aristotle uses - hamartia - means simply a mistake;³ the character flaw can be implied by the nature of the mistake, and in the Greek tragedies the flaw was the sin of hybris - generally considered as Pride that permits some excess.)

The obvious way to present such a predicament is to confront the hero with some important choice, or to show the hero pursuing a line of action he has already chosen. In either case there will be evidence of a conflict. The conflict will be most striking, visually, if it be external: e.g. the hero against another character; often the conflict will be more intense and more effective for the audience if it be within the hero himself - an internal conflict. The result of this conflict is disaster for the hero.

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(3) cf. F. L. Lucas, Tragedy, Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, London, 1935, p.97.

Ashley H. Thorndike states the proposition this way:

The action of a tragedy should represent a conflict of wills, or of will with circumstance, or will with itself, and should therefore be based on the character of the persons involved. A typical tragedy is concerned with a great personality engaged in a struggle that ends disastrously.

A fuller treatment of this idea is given by Lewis Campbell.⁵

Every tragic action consists of a great crisis in some great life....The crisis is the meeting point of a great personality with great surroundings. As Mr. W. L. Courtney puts it, "a tragedy is always a clash of two powers - necessity without, freedom within; outside, a great, rigid, arbitrary law of fate; inside, the undefeated individual will, which can win its spiritual triumph even when all its material surroundings and environment have crumbled into hopeless ruin....that is the great theme which, however disguised, runs through every tragedy that has been written in the world."

In this quotation an additional element is introduced to the conflict. That power against which the hero struggles whether personified in another character, or suggested as one of the forces that are in conflict within the hero himself, is Fate. Although this element is not mentioned by Aristotle, (there is no specific mention of a conflict in his Poetics, but this^{is} surely implied), one can readily accept the explanation that he simply took it for granted; the fates or the gods were a sine qua non for Greek tragedy, after all. (And one can the more readily accept this explanation of the omission when it is recalled that the Poetics are most probably just lecture notes - notes either for, or from his lectures.) At all events it is important for us today that the role of Fate is called to

(4) Tragedy, Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston & New York, 1908, p.9.

(5) Tragic Drama in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Shakespeare London, John Murray, 1904, pp. 29-30.

our attention, for it is surely obvious that it is an important feature of tragedy. In Greek tragedy Fate is the gods; in modern tragedy Fate is simply that power⁶ which leads us all to our ultimate end. But in either case Fate it is that provides the antagonistic force. Mr. William Archer's translation of Brunetièrè is a propos in that it expresses the more modern concept of Fate.

Drama /i.e. tragedy// is the representation of the will of a man in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage there to struggle against fatality; against social law; against one of his fellow mortals; against himself if need be; against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those around him.

(I disagree, however, with the idea that the tragic hero be - like Conrad's Lord Jim - "one of us"; I hope to show that the successful tragic hero is only in part "one of us".)

Involved in a conflict with Fate, the tragic hero is of necessity doomed at the outset. His tragic flaw or error causes him to be out of joint with the requirements of the gods, and his resultant action brings about his disastrous end. As W. H. Auden says,⁸ "... whatever the hero does must be wrong". The implication is that the hero's apparent choice is, in truth, no choice, and that the conception of W. L. Courtney - that of "freedom within" - is fallacious. The hero is condemned to make the wrong choice, to take that

(6) This power may be, as we shall see, an economic system, a psychoneurosis, a social class, or even society in general; it may be simply that to which we refer when we say "Ah, it is Fate!"

(7) Quoted in Henry Arthur Jones' Introduction to Brunetièrè's Law of the Drama, 1914, in Barrett Clark's European Theories of the Drama, Cincinnati, Stewart & Kidd Co., 1918, p. 461.

(8) Introduction to The Portable Greek Reader, (W. H. Auden), New York, the Viking Press, 1948, p. 21.

line of action which will bring him to his downfall. The vulnerable position of the hero in the tragedy is the result of the curse of Fate, given before the drama begins. Auden has explained this clearly:

He suffers because he has come into collision, not with other individuals, but with the universal law of righteousness. As a rule, however, the actual violation of which he is guilty is not his own conscious choice in the sense that he could have avoided it. The typical Greek tragic situation is one in which whatever the hero does must be wrong....but the fact that he finds himself in a tragic situation where he has sinned unwittingly or must sin against his will is a sign that he is guilty of another sin for which the gods hold him responsible, namely the sin of hybris.....⁹

This is not to suggest, however, that the hero is free from responsibility in our eyes. We see him in a chosen situation and know only what the play permits us to know of him: that he is a good man, though with this flaw that causes him to commit a fatal error. To explain that he has been cursed by the gods is as much as to tell us of a man we meet in our daily life that he contains just these dominant genes in his chromosomes. In other words we tend to take the hero as we find him.

Our attitude is not quite as simple as this might suggest, however. We must, indeed, accept the hero as he is presented to us, but we feel that more is implied in his case than is explicitly stated. We do not, when witnessing a successful tragedy, feel that the hero is absolutely free and, hence, to be held entirely responsible for his acts; we feel the presence of a force that is com-

(9) loc. cit.

elling him to prepare his own disaster. Since the hero is an essentially good man and has won our sympathy (or the dramatist has failed in his task) we regret and would oppose this fatal power that drives the hero to his doom. On the other hand, we are not prepared to call this compelling force evil. (If the play presents its hero as the victim of evil, it is indeed no tragedy.) We feel rather that there has been a conflict between, not good and evil, but two sorts of good - a lower and a higher; the dramatist has succeeded in winning our sympathy for the lower and usually more discernible good, and then manages to suggest that the tragic denouement is the triumph of the higher. For how else explain the almost paradoxical effect of a successful tragic drama? We witness the tragic ending of a life we have come to admire and love, and yet we are not left disgusted or frustrated, but satisfied and calm.

It is not to be supposed that it is the prospect of poetic justice that produces this effect. The error of the tragic hero and its consequences do not in any sense constitute the sort of crime for which we would demand punishment. The hero has not been simply a bad man; his case is much more complex than that. On the other hand, the death of the hero at the end of the play does seem a sort of punishment. But since we have accepted as good that for which the hero has been striving, we cannot feel that his death is a punishment for that striving - that the pursuit of good be punishable is unthinkable. Rather must we refer to this higher good in conflict with which has

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been the immediate and lesser good sought by the hero. A. C. Bradley has explained and differentiated between the higher moral purpose and the lesser good which we find in conflict. He explains that the idea of poetic justice is to be rejected in tragic drama and points out that the justice acting therein is of superior order. He says finally,

...the fact that the spectacle does not leave us rebellious or desperate is due to a more or less distinct perception that the tragic suffering and death arise from collision, not with a fate or blank power, but with a moral power, a power akin to all that we admire and revere in the characters themselves. This perception produces something like a feeling of acquiescence in the catastrophe, though it neither leads us to pass judgment on the characters nor diminishes the pity, the fear, and the sense of waste, which their struggle, suffering, and fall evoke....//We feel// that the moral order acts not capriciously or like a human being, but from the necessity of its nature, or...by general laws,- a necessity or law which of course knows no exception and is as "ruthless" as fate. 10

In other words, we are ready to accept the necessary denouement. We are sympathetic toward the hero but feel that the order of things - often beyond the comprehension of ordinary man - has been maintained. This sense of order which tragedy leaves in the minds of the audience has been seized upon by Lucas as the explanation of the calm we feel at the conclusion of a tragedy. His explanation of it is rather different from that given by Bradley, but it is the result, - the same in either instance for the audience - that concerns us here.

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(10) A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, MacMillan & Co., Limited, London, 1941, p. 36)

...Tragedy, then, is a representation of human unhappiness which pleases us notwithstanding, by the truth with which it is seen and the skill with which it is communicated - "l'amertume poignante et fortifiante de tout ce qui est vrai".
...the world of tragedy //unlike that of every day// we can face, for we feel a mind behind it and the symmetry is there. ll

This is Tragedy's effect. We are left, not with bitter regrets, but with the sense that a destiny has been fulfilled. Of the tragic denouement we feel " 'twas ever thus", but we are here more conscious of order and of the absence of blind chance. Our conclusion is that events have fallen as they must, and the last curtain leaves us calm.

This is not to anticipate a discussion of Catharsis. The attempt has been to explain the apparent paradox of the absence of anguish in the face of the representation of the death of the hero we have admired and respected throughout the play. That we feel the presence of order in the tragic story explains why we accept the catastrophe, without revulsion. The reason for the state of calm we experience following the final curtain is to be found elsewhere - in the understanding of Catharsis. The high pleasure offered in tragic drama resides, in great part, in the cathartic effect it produces.

(11) Lucas, *op. cit.*, p.58.

II

Critics have accepted generally the Aristotelian statement that a tragedy should excite the emotions of pity and fear.¹² What has caused a good deal of argument and speculation is the word "Catharsis". Exactly what, critics have asked, are we to understand by "the purgation of these emotions"?¹³ It seemed obvious that Aristotle was here describing the end result of a tragic performance: the spectator leaves the performance with his emotions of pity and fear purged - or, he leaves purged of these emotions. In either case, the spectator is left in a satisfied mood, and in this lies the chief pleasure of tragedy. This is all very well, and a desirable effect to be achieved, but in order to achieve it we must be sure of what Catharsis actually means.

The possible interpretations of this term reduce themselves to the two suggested immediately above: is the spectator to be purged of the two emotions in question, or are these two emotions to ^{be} purged of impurities? Clarence E. Green deals with these two possible interpretations by making reference to Twining's Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry:

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(12) The most striking exception to this is to be found in the case of those concerned with the heroic tragedy; it was decided that the hero should excite admiration also - that he should be presented as a sort of shining example, an object to be emulated. Such a treatment of the hero necessitated poetic justice, and the true extent of tragedy was thus frustrated. See below.

(13) cf. above, p. 2.

According to the first, the katharsis (sic) is homeopathic, for tragedy purges us of the very emotions that it excites, and leaves us in a healthy state of emotional quiescence. According to the second, the katharsis is due to the moral lesson and example of the drama. 14

And let us dispose with this second interpretation immediately by pursuing a step further the discussion offered by Mr. Green.

A natural consequence of the moral interpretation of the katharsis was the principle of poetic justice....And what, we ask, could be less Aristotelian? Aristotle carefully condemns the tragedy that has "an opposite catastrophe for the good and for the bad." "The pleasure thence derived," he says, "is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to Comedy." 15

This leaves us free to examine the exact meaning of the correct interpretation. The clearest explanation of what Aristotle intended by his statement about the purgation of the passions seems to me to be found in the words of F. L. Lucas. He says

Catharsis does not mean "purification", but "purgation". It is a definitely medical metaphor....Secondly, it is not the passions that are purged of their impurities; it is the human soul that is purged of its excessive passions ...

...In order to be able to live tolerably we must be able to control the passions that struggle within us; but it will be easier and less harmful to control them when we must, if we give them a harmless outlet when we may.... The comic festivals of Athens, like the Roman Saturnalia and the medieval Feast of Fools, gave an outlet to all the Rabelais in man...Similarly in Tragedy those other emotions which, perpetually repressed, might have made man sentimental and hysterical, are given a periodic

(14) Clarence C. Green, The Neo-Classic Theory of Tragedy in England During the Eighteenth Century, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1934, pp.22-23.

(15) ibid. pp.26-27; the quotation from Aristotle's Poetics is to be found in XIII, 7-8.

outlet. This, then, is the famous theory of Catharsis, 16.

Now let us not be seduced into a discussion as to whether or not the theatre is to compete with the hospital. No one sets out to witness a dramatic tragedy with the express intention of having his soul purged of the emotions of pity and fear. Nor was it Aristotle's idea, we can be sure, that this should be the case. He was interested in analysing that peculiar pleasure offered by tragedy, and in offering an explanation of the phenomenon. If we ask someone why he enjoys seeing Comedy on the stage, we are liable to get the answer that Comedy makes him laugh and leaves him with an agreeable feeling that helps him to accept life more easily. In the last analysis the same thing is true of Tragedy: it leaves one the readier to face life. And this is simply the sort of explanation Aristotle was elaborating: "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions".

The effect of a good tragedy is similar to that of "a good cry": you have done with being emotional for the time being and are better able to carry on with the business of every day. But just as it must be something extraordinary that prompts the "good cry", so must it be something extraordinary that permits the tragic drama to effect our emotions of pity and fear to the extent that they are purged and leave us calm. In neither case will the ordinary suffice. This is the point that Mr. William Ridgeway is intent on making when he refers to the words

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(16) (Lucas) op. cit., pp. 24-6.

of Professor Mahaffy:

Professor Mahaffy says that... "with Thespis may have arisen the great conception, which we see full-blown in Aeschylus - the intention of the drama to purify human sympathy by exercising it on great and apparently disproportioned afflictions of heroic men, when the iron hand of a stern and unforgiving Providence chastises old transgressions, or represses the revolt of private judgment against established ordinance. 17

It is important for our purpose to point the emphasis here placed on the unusual or extraordinary nature not only of the affliction of the hero, but of the hero himself. The hero does demand particular attention in the constructing of a successful tragedy. Let us then consider the characteristics of the hero as he appears in the most satisfying of tragic drama.

(17) The Origin of Tragedy (W. Ridgeway), Cambridge, University Press, 1910, pp. 60-1; the reference is to Mahaffy's History of Greek Literature, vol. I, pp. 234-5.

III

We have seen that attempts to define the true nature of Tragedy have necessarily been centred around the tragic hero, and that a satisfactory interpretation of Catharsis has depended on the character of the central figure in the tragic action. It remains, then, to focus the glances that have already been cast at this important personage.

The inevitable beginning lies in the words of Aristotle's Poetics. There the master critic considers the possible types to be used for a tragedy; a completely virtuous man shown in a downfall from prosperity to adversity would merely shock an audience; a bad man shown coming to adversity would provide no tragedy - though it might satisfy the moral sense - in that this prospect would arouse neither pity nor fear; the case of either of these types passing from adversity to prosperity does not enter a discussion of Tragedy. A compromise must be made; this is what Aristotle offers.

There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families. 18

Thus Aristotle places the hero. He amplified the conception of the hero by explicit reference to his character:

 (18) Poetics, XIII, 3; Ingram Bywater, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909, page 35.

In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good....The second point is to make them appropriate...// e.g.// it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly or clever. The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate....The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man...he should be consistently inconsistent. 19

Of these four points indicated by Aristotle two are of particular interest in this study. Our attention should be directed principally to the first - that the hero should be good - and to the third - that he should be "like the reality". Aristotle had earlier discarded the possibility of a completely good man, and the danger, therefore, is that the dramatist make this hero insufficiently good. In the other instance the dramatist is reminded to keep the depiction close enough to reality to win human sympathy. This is in no sense a plea for realism. The way in which these points are aimed gives us the clue to what Aristotle really intended to suggest as the ideal tragic hero. He has begun by emphasizing the necessity of making the hero good - he had already discarded the possibility of the completely good man; ²⁰ this point made, he adds the remainder that will prevent the dramatist from going too far in this direction.

(19) ibid. p. 43.

(20) cf. this note "As tragedy is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man, we...should...reproduce the distinctive features of a man, and at the same time, without losing the likeness, make him handsomer than he is." ibid. p. 45; italics mine.

What must be noted here is that this is the right direction, but care must be taken not to exceed the limit of credibility.

In sum, the hero is to be a great and good man whose descent into adversity is the result of an error he commits. Examples of this tragic hero are to be found in the drama of the first great age of tragic theatre - the classic plays of Greece.

It is well to recall the fact that Greek tragedy began as a religious celebration held at the grave of some great man - the head of a household, or some noble warrior. The celebration probably took the form of a dramatic representation of the great man's life. Of necessity, the action would terminate with the death of the hero. Also it is to be assumed that the great man would by this time be regarded as something of a demi-god; at any rate he would be surrounded by the peculiar aura lent by his dwelling in the other realm. Hence, he would be considered in the representation as something more than simply human - not merely "one of us". His goodness would be seen not as perfect, but modified only to permit the commission of the error that caused his end. Perhaps the representation would suggest that this error was the result of the curse of the gods, that he had somehow incurred the gods' disfavour and was punished by having this momentary weakness that allowed the wrong choice to be made.

Speculation of this sort may be permitted when we consider the type of tragedy that developed from these early religious celebrations in honour of the great departed. In the tragic drama of the great age that embraces Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides it is just such situations as these that we find portrayed, and just such protagonists. The hero is always one of the familiar great men - "Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families". Always there is the suggestion that, though he strive nobly in his troubles, he cannot escape his imminent doom. We are made to feel (contemporary audiences would know it perfectly well) that the hero's inability to escape his destiny - the necessity that he commit his fatal sin - is the result of his having been cursed. That we do not rebel at a capricious Fate, the dramatist shows us something of that earlier weakness in the hero that aroused the displeasure of the gods; the hero's pride, the intolerable sin of hybris.

The suffering of the hero awakens our pity, we regret his death, but we feel it has been necessary in that the gods permit no deviation. The extraordinary character of the hero and the immensity of his predicament have provided the stimulus necessary to excite our emotions to the full; the tragedy leaves us calm, all passion spent. We feel that the catastrophes of our own little life can scarce compare. Purged, we face life with a stoic calm.

Perhaps the nearest approach to the great tragic heroes of the Greeks is to be found in the theatre of Racine.

Here we find the familiar figures of the classic past: Hector's wife, Andromache; Iphigenia; Phaedra; and the rest. In each case Racine has taken care to keep the hero "like the reality", but has simplified the character to such an extent as to render him little more than a personified emotion. This is not to suggest that the hero is become simply a symbol of an emotion, rather the character is presented as reduced to its essence. In consequence, the action is more intense and rapid, being stripped of all non-essentials. The result of this means of character depiction is that the passions that grip the hero stand forth in all their terrible proportions - the hero is raised above the merely human level. The Racinian hero is swept along to the catastrophe by the force of the overwhelming passion which is his tragic weakness. There is less importance given to the role of hamartia in the tragedy of Racine; here the emphasis has shifted to the character flaw. As in the Greek tragedy, we feel here that the hero is under the curse of the gods; the impression given is not that the hero's acts in the play bring the wrath of the gods down on him, but that these tragic acts are themselves the result of the hero's having been cursed already. The difference is that the Racinian tragedy is not pagan, but Christian, and the curse under which the hero is seen to labor is that earned by original sin.

The pity inspired by this type of tragedy, like that inspired by the Greek, is due to the sense of waste felt at

the hero's demise. The weakness that causes the catastrophe is seen as the one blemish in an otherwise admirable character; all the goodness in the character is made victim to this one flaw. The purgative effect can here be attributed to the fact that Racine has purified his characters of all non-essential characteristics to leave them, as I have said, little more than the personification of this one dominant emotion - the passion of love. Thus the emotion stands out in all its enormousness and inspires the unusual sympathy and terror necessary to Catharsis. The Racinian method of depicting a tragic hero that is more-than-human, and not simply "one of us", is different from that possible to the Greek dramatists, but the effect is recognizably the same.

In the great age of English tragedy - the age of Elizabeth - we find that the typical hero bears a resemblance to the types already discussed. We have the great and good man who, because of a weakness in character which permits a fatal error, is pressed to his doom. The Elizabethan hero, like the Greek and the Racinian, is seen caught up in a struggle the inevitable outcome of which brings him to disaster. The difference to be marked here is that while in the classic Greek tragedy the hero is seen to struggle against external forces and while the Racinian hero struggles against himself (although the fatal force is occasionally personified, e.g. Oenone in Phèdre), the Elizabethan hero's struggles are generally both external and internal - the external struggle is not always simply the personification of the internal.

It cannot be said of the Elizabethan hero that he bears the curse of the gods from the outset, and that his error is evidence of the gods' punishment. What does manage to produce a similar effect - and this is what matters to the audience - is the fact that the hero is often affected by supernatural elements; consequently he is not to be held entirely responsible for the choices he makes. This supernatural interference, in other words, partakes in the fatality that drives the hero willy-nilly to his doom. One might refer to the role of Mephistopheles in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and to the Shakespearian tragedies: the Weird sisters in Macbeth, and the ghost in Hamlet come immediately to mind. ²¹ There is the suggestion in the Shakespearian tragedies that the hero has earned the wrath of the gods - just when or exactly how is not indicated; as Professor George Brodersen has observed, the fact that many of the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare go mad before the end of the play strongly encourages the application of the maxim "quem deus vult perdere, prius dementat". ²²

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- (21) Although Mephistopheles is summoned, while the others come unsolicited, the effect is the same: that of indicating that the hero can have intercourse with members of the other world.
- (22) The presence of the divine hand cannot be proved, but the inference is there, certainly. Whether Shakespeare consciously endeavoured to give the impression that the madness fallen on his heroes was a result of the wrath of the gods, or simply felt that this madness would augment the tragic effect, we cannot determine; what can be assumed - and what really matters - is that Shakespeare did depict his heroes in the grip of madness in order to render the play more effective: without analysing the reaction of the audience, he knew it to be the one this touch would produce.

The effect of this sort of treatment of the hero is to suggest his more-than-human quality: here is a character who has intercourse with the supernatural. This is precisely the sort of reaction the Greek dramatist could depend on; the audience's realization that the tragic hero is not "one of us" but something more - more wonderful and awful.

The conclusion to be drawn, is, I think, that the most important consideration in the depiction of the tragic hero is that he be extraordinary. Notice what critics of Elizabethan tragedy have seized upon as the striking feature of the tragic hero. Thorndike says of Marlowe,

He conceived his heroes first of all as men capable of great passions, consumed by their desires, abandoned to the pursuit of their lusts....They linger in the mind as men, absurd, exaggerated, monstrous at times, but appealingly human in moments....Tragedy has become not the presentation of history, myth or events of any sort, but the presentation of the passionate struggle and pitiful defeat of an extraordinary human being. 23

and of Shakespeare,

In Shakespeare's heroes we find...a hero far above the average.... 24

It is this element that most clearly marks the resemblance between the tragic hero of the classic Greek drama, the Racinian, and the Elizabethan. This is the feature that Aristotle emphasized in his remarks on the character of the tragic hero, cautioning only that one not go too far in this, but retain enough of realism to affect

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(23) Thorndike, op. cit. pp.95-6; italics mine.

(24) ibid., p. 160.

the spectator's sympathy. And more recently the same note has been struck by Lewis Campbell:

It is ever to be borne in mind that the tragic fable as such presents the example of an exception, not of the ordinary rule. The tragic masterpieces would not move us as they do with awe and pity if both the greatness and the misfortune were not imagined as extraordinary. 25.

This quality of being superior and extraordinary, common to the tragic heroes of the great ages of Tragedy, is seen to be the most important characteristic of the tragic hero.

In seeking satisfactory examples of the tragic hero I have referred to "the great ages of tragic drama". It is indeed an obvious truth that tragic drama has flourished in particular times and places although it has floundered in others. Perhaps a glance at the great ages of tragedy will enable us to decide what environment is the most conducive to the production of the best Tragedy. (The purpose of this examination is that my evaluation of our present production may explain itself by reference to the suitability of our life and times for Tragedy.)

(25) op. cit. p. 69

It is interesting to note here the way in which Racine has presented this idea that the hero must be extraordinary. We see that Racine understood that superiority in the hero was not enough to assure that the cathartic effect would be achieved; Racine insists that the hero be markedly different. The Preface to Bajazet contains this statement: "Les personnages tragiques doivent être regardés d'un autre oeil que nous ne regardons d'ordinaire les personnages que nous avons vus de si près. On peut dire que le respect que l'on a pour les héros augmente à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent de nous. L'éloignement des pays répare en quelque sorte la trop grande proximité des temps."

IV

In a survey of the history of tragic drama one finds reference to the great ages of tragedy. It is noticeable that the best tragedies have been produced in groups rather than in a steady progression. Apparently particular periods of time in various countries have been especially conducive to the production of great tragic drama. The fertile periods of tragedy to which I have been obliged to refer in this essay are that of the classic Greek, the Elizabethan, in England, and that of Louis XIV in France. What was it that made those times so ripe for tragedy? The best general answer to this may be found in Brander Matthews' discussion of Brunetière:

Brunetière found a confirmation of his theory in the fact that the drama // i.e. tragedy// has most amply flourished when the national will has stiffened itself for a magnificent effort. Greek tragedy is contemporary with Salamis; and the Spanish drama is contemporary with the conquest of the new world. Shakespeare /sic// was a man when the Armada was repulsed; Corneille and Molière were made possible by the work of Henry IV and Richelieu; Lessing and Goethe and Schiller came after Frederick. 26

Exactly what this would mean for the success of tragic drama may not be immediately evident. By taking a more specific example, the age of Elizabeth for instance, we may be able to determine what of value was offered for tragedy. The juxtaposition of two passages from Thorndike's Tragedy presents an interesting explanation.

(26) Brander Matthews, A Study of the Drama, Houghton Mifflin Co., The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1910, p. 96.

In comparison with men of preceding generations, the Elizabethan Englishman faced a world of new horizons, new ideas, boundless opportunities, and alluring rewards....In the stir of free ideas, the surprise of discovery, and the glow of accomplishment, life grew heroic, attainment seemed easy, and no ideals too lofty for the scaling ladders of human aspirations. 27

/Elizabethan dramatists/ were presenting human life as removed from the commonplace, the wordid, the usual, and as the abode of heroisms, splendors, and aspirations....This idealization of life was... characteristic of the national temper and of the artistic impulses in every field of literature... 28

All of which simply means that in times of real heroism, of great acts, people are quite ready to accept the presentation of heroic endeavour on the stage; and in times of apparently unbounded achievement and boundless aspirations, the inflated action of high tragedy is completely acceptable to a theatre audience. It has always been the tragic dramatist's concern to keep his hero from appearing too exalted - not too good or too admirable, but simply too far beyond the ordinary human compass. (We recall Aristotle's word of caution urging the dramatist to keep his hero "like the reality".) The greater the depiction permitted by the audience, the stronger the emotional impact of the catastrophe, and so the more effective will be the Catharsis.

The other remarkable characteristic of the times that produced great tragedy is that of a strong, general, spiritual metaphysics - a willingness to believe in something other than the purely material. It is, I think, noteworthy that tragic drama is a development of religious ritual.

(27) Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

(28) ibid., pp. 132-3.

We have observed that Greek tragedy was a development of religious celebrations held at the grave (usually) of a Hero. Similarly modern tragic drama is an outgrowth of the celebration of Mass. The seeds of tragic drama, then, are to be found bedded in religious celebration itself. We need not expect, nor will it be found to be true, that this general belief be the acceptance of a particular religion; it has seemed to be necessary only that there be a general refusal to accept this material orb as final. As Bonamy Dobree has said,

...tragedy, to reach a successful issue, must more than any other art (since it appears immediately to the mass) be based either on some common metaphysic, or on some general impulse... 29

The explanation of this requirement for tragedy's success can be seen in recalling the fact that divine - or supernatural - interference has marked the great tragic dramas of the past. This interference is not always recognizable as the hand of the gods; the impression is always given, however, that something more than simply human elements is affecting the action of the tragedy. Again, the satisfaction felt by the audience at the conclusion of a successful tragedy has been explained as the result of the audience's acquiescence in the denouement - even though it has meant the death of the hero for whom they have the deepest sympathy; what is felt, is that the higher moral purpose - not wholly comprehended, perhaps, by mere humans, - has been fulfilled. This would not be acceptable to an audience that

(29) Dobree, op. cit. p. 10.

accepted human reason as ultimate, and that allowed only that denouement which satisfied simple human logic.

One concludes, then, that tragedy will not flourish in an age devoted to a materialistic philosophy. This is the conclusion drawn by A. H. Thorndike:

//Tragedy's// methods may not commend themselves in an age of physical and mechanical sciences, its aim may not commend itself at a time when splendid discoveries in the physical world blur the importance of an interpretation of moral and social relations. 30

And an example of the sort of scientific advance to which Thorndike refers is to be found in our times; the resultant attitude which would be considered as discouraging to tragic drama may be summed up under the heading of materialism. For if it can be said that our times are not really conducive to the production of the best sort of tragedy because of the lack of a spiritual metaphysic, the responsibility can, in great part, be laid on the shoulders of Huxley, Comte and men of their ilk. That this materialistic philosophy did not answer expectations would not remove the damage it had done: having discouraged trust in a spiritual metaphysics in order to encourage trust in materialism alone, the betrayal of that subsequent trust would leave one virtually hopeless and bewildered.

The fact that our age is not producing great tragic drama is often explained by saying that our times are simply not conducive to such production. We may, perhaps, attri-

(30) Thorndike, op. cit., p. 377.

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(30) Thorndike, op. cit., p. 377.

bute this unfavorable condition to the effect of the materialism that blossomed in the late nineteenth century - the progress of le scientisme.

I have endeavoured, in the foregoing pages, to construct a background against which we might examine the tragic hero as he is presented to us to-day in the serious drama of the American theatre. The definitions employed and the examples cited seem to me to provide a sound explanation of how the best in tragic drama is achieved. It is not to be supposed that I offer the sum of this as a rule the dramatist must follow if he is to be successful. I simply repeat that the best tragedy exhibits the features discussed. The only conclusion to be drawn is this: that if we are confronted with a drama that we feel is unsuccessful tragedy, we shall find that its failure is due to the omission or distortion of one of these essential ingredients.

THE MODERN PLAYWRIGHTS

1. MAXWELL ANDERSON

The clue to the understanding of Anderson's dramatic technique is to be found in Off Broadway where he explains his theory. He said,

The story of a play is the story of ~~what~~ what happens within the mind or heart of a man or woman....The external events are only symbolic of what goes on within. 1

Anderson continues by saying that the conflict presented is to be between good and evil, "The good and evil to be defined, of course, as the audience wants to see them."² Since he has written primarily for American audiences, we can assume that the "good" which Anderson will present in his plays will be defined in democratic terms, and that the conflict will, then, be between the democratic ideal and its opposite. This is, in fact, what we do find in Anderson's theatre. His history plays which deal with British royalty show the triumph of democratic sentiment: the stern monarch is finally led to the light of democratic thinking, or the monarch~~is~~ with democratic tendencies is led to forsake her beliefs, become the stern ruler, and so meet her tragedy - but not before recognizing her error.

In "Elizabeth the Queen" we have the story of Lord Essex' attempt to gain power in England, first through Elizabeth's love for him, then by opposing her overtly. His better qualities prompt him to be generous to Elizabeth when he has her in his power, and he gives her the opportunity to share her kingdom with him. Elizabeth agrees to do

(1) Maxwell Anderson, Off Broadway, William Sloane Associates, Inc., New York, 1947, pp. 24-5.

(2) ibid., p. 25.

to have him sent away. In spite of Elizabeth's warning to him not to be provoked into taking command of the campaign in Ireland, Essex slips boldly but stupidly into the trap set for him by the Raleigh party. (It is this sojourn in Ireland that enables Essex' opponents to effect the rift between him and Elizabeth). The best that can be said of Essex is that he has himself made the choice, has been responsible for his own fate:

They drew me into nothing.
I saw their purpose and topped it with my own.
Let them believe they've sunk me. 6.

That they have sunk him, if only partially, is shown in the resultant difficulty between him and the queen. Their correspondence has been intercepted and tampered with; as a consequence Essex believes he has lost Elizabeth's love and returns to England to determine the cause of her loss of faith in him. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is led to believe that Essex has turned rebel and is returning to England to lead a revolution. When he is accepted by the queen, Essex behaves quite nobly in offering Elizabeth her freedom though she is his prisoner. He does not flaunt his power, simply states it as a fact in support of his demand for a share in ruling the kingdom with Elizabeth. In this Essex displays a startling foresight and something of democratic tendencies:

(6) page 48.

...I say this now
Without rancor - in all friendliness and love -
The throne is yours by right of descent and by
Possession - but if this were a freer time,
And there were elections, I should carry the country
before me,
And this being true, and we being equal in love,
Should we not be equal in power as well? 7

Elizabeth seizes the opportunity presented by Essex, and agrees to his proposition only to doublecross him as soon as he has disbanded his troops.

With Essex in the Tower, and herself left alone, Elizabeth realizes her love for Essex is too strong to suffer his loss; she sends to offer his pardon, but Essex refuses in a most artificial display of theatrical heroism. Consider the refusal scene:

Elizabeth: You must have known
I never meant you to die.

Essex: I am under sentence from you
From Your Majesty's courts. There's
no appeal that I know of.
I am found guilty of treason on good evidence,
And cannot deny it. This treason, I believe,
Is punishable with death. 8.

Now this is childish behavior, and rather unconvincing al-

(7) ibid., p. 100. It is this sort of confusion that blurs the effect of Anderson's "history" plays - the introduction of such phrases as "if this were a freer time" which are not characteristic of the person that speaks them, but calculated pandering to the audience, is an illegitimate trick of arousing sympathy for the character in question. Anderson can claim a sort of dubious integrity through reference to his theory which says that the good and evil are to be defined by the audience - i.e. give them what they want; here is an attitude which smacks of prostitution.

(8) ibid., p. 123.

though it is not exactly out of character for Essex; Cecil has said rightly of Essex, "My friend, a child could trip him".⁹ But he does rise to a comparatively noble height as he explains that he must accept his death for opposing Elizabeth, and that he realizes his error:

I have a weakness for being first wherever
I am...Pardon becomes impossible. 10.

Essex admits that Elizabeth rules more wisely than he should were he put on, and he turns to meet his executioner.

The fault in Essex was his desire to rule England as he saw fit: to wage severe war regardless of material cost, and for the sake of augmenting the fame of England and of himself. His tragic error, a result of this desire to show his valour, was his accepting the Ireland campaign. The sentiments aroused by this denouement and the action generally are weak and hardly appropriate to tragedy. We can hardly feel pity for this man who has been so simple as to have walked into the trap set for him, a trap against which he is warned by Elizabeth, and which was only too obvious in its springing. His acceptance of the challenge offered by Ireland, in view of this, is not so much bold as foolhardy. His naiveté is well known at court. He is not so much proud as vain, It is the knowledge of these two characteristics that enables the messenger bearing Elizabeth's letter to Essex to save himself from Essex' wrath.

(9) cf. p. 61

(10) ibid., p. 127.

Notice that it is not a reasonable appeal that saves the messenger from punishment, -but an appeal to Essex' vanity;

...I cried out
Not so much for pain or fear of pain
But to know this was Lord Essex, whom I have loved
And who tortures innocent men.

...If my lord Essex
Is as I have believed him, he will not hurt me;
If he will hurt me, then he is not as I
And many thousands believe.... ll.

Essex is unsympathetic because unconvincing. He is inconsistent, and artificially conceived. Consequently he can hardly arouse any real emotion in the spectator; his end is not tragic, it is hardly sad.

Anderson has more successfully aroused our emotions in the play "Mary of Scotland". Here we have the story of a bonnie queen who does arouse our interest and, to some extent, our sympathy. Mary returns to her native Scotland with the best of intentions to rule with a gentle hand, to gain the sincere love of her subjects, and to be as tolerant and indulgent as possible. Her mere presence in Scotland arouses the suspicion of her sister on the English throne. Elizabeth sets about ruining Mary by causing her to marry unwisely and by provoking a civil war. Mary - whose wit has been praised! - falls into the troubles Elizabeth has prepared for her, and finally becomes Elizabeth's prisoner. Mary's chance for freedom if she abdicates in favor of her son is refused. It is the opposition of

(11) ibid., p. 74.

Elizabeth that has caused Mary to cherish her regal power; once she has embraced this absolute power as a good (which all we democrats know it is not!) she is unable to avoid her fatal end. We have here the reverse side of the Anderson coin.

What is primarily displeasing about the story of Mary is the fact that she is led into her difficulties as a result of her best and most likable characteristics. Our sympathy for Mary is aroused by her generous attitude to subjects - her democratic tendencies. This attitude of gentleness and tolerance appears in such lines as these:

...I would have all men my friends in Scotland. 12.

But since you must both live in this kingdom and One must be Catholic and one Protestant, surely it were wiser to be amiable over small matters... 13.

..There's room for all of us here, and for whatever faiths we may choose to have. 14.

Of a piece with this is her lightness of behavior which is often referred to as her "French manners", and which has set tongues wagging in Scotland. As a result of the narrow-mindedness symbolised by the dour John Knox, her council is obliged to advise Mary to seek a husband. An example of the reputation Mary has earned is the report of Randolph in his "latest budget of news":

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(12) ibid., p. 11.

(13) ibid., p. 79.

(14) ibid., p. 81.

"Beautiful, in a grave way, somewhat gamesome and given to lightness of manner among her lords as well as with other company, very quick-witted to answer back, and addicted to mirth and dancing, wherewith she has made many converts to her cause among those most disaffected, though there be also those found to say her manners might more be- seem the stews or places of low resort than so ancient a palace and line -" 15.

Knowledge of Mary's decision to take a husband permits Elizabeth to set her scheme to work. By seeming to advise Mary in her choice of husband Elizabeth provokes her ire. Mary resolves to accept the very man Elizabeth specifically ruled out of consideration - the man Elizabeth most wants for Mary's husband. This is all very unsatisfactorily done in the play. In the first place we can not imagine a woman as sharp-witted as Mary is reputed to be failing to see through the ruse as presented by Throgmorton; in the second place we cannot accept Mary's decision to marry such a fop as Darnley even to anger her sister.

This choice once made, Mary's fortunes decline. This ridiculous choice is Mary's fatal error. In addition to the fact that it signifies Mary's intention of becoming the strong ruler (an evil intention in the eyes of all good democratic persons), it condemns her to a struggle with Elizabeth who is far too great a match in Machiavelian machinations for the essentially benign Mary. Darnley is used as a tool by Mary's opponents in Scotland, and a civil war is ignited. Mary loses, is taken prisoner but flees to

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(15) ibid., p. 19.

England only to find herself in the power of Elizabeth. Freedom is offered to Mary in exchange for her abdication, but she is now so far steeped in the pursuit of power that she cannot willingly relinquish her right to rule. She must face her sad end of life imprisonment.

It is really too bad, we feel, that this good-intentioned and personable woman has been so easily duped. There was something definitely likeable about this patriotic soul that wanted to be a friend to all her countrymen, but she was, after all, such a simpleton. We are not deeply moved at the thought of the horrid mistake she made in taking that ass Darnley as husband - just disappointed at her simplicity and lack of imagination. As she rehearses her fatal choice we can only cluck our tongue and say to ourselves as she tries to be noble in accepting the consequences of her folly,¹⁶ that she deserved it, silly girl.

Hence, the pity is diminished, the terror virtually non-existent, and the tragic effect impossible. We can scarce regret the loss of Mary and feel that no great moral purpose has been satisfied by it. Her whole tale has been too unconvincing, artificial, and theatrical to touch us

(16) cf. "These faults we commit have lives of their own, and bind us to them." ibid., p. 98.

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to any extent.

Two other history plays of Anderson deal respectively with the past of Mexico and Austria: "Night over Taos" and "The Masque of Kings". It is in these plays that another tenet of Anderson's dramatic theory is most clearly exemplified. In Off Broadway Anderson has written this curious definition of the protagonist:

The protagonist...cannot be a perfect person. If he were he could not improve, and he must come out at the end of the play a more admirable human being than when he went in. 18.

We have in each of these plays the story of a great autocratic leader who is opposed by his son; the son in each case represents the democratic ideals, but is unsuccessful in his struggle against his father. The father wins his shallow triumph only to realize in the end that his son had been right all along and represents the new order.

In "Night over Taos" we are introduced to the character of Pablo Montoya who appears to be as satisfactory a

(17) The more recent history of "Anne of the Thousand Days" is similar in intent to the two plays just discussed. Anne, a simple soul desiring only a quiet pastoral romance, is not tempted by Henry's offers of grandeur and power. Obviously a "good" girl by the standards on which Anderson relies. Once she is captivated by the great Henry and admits her love for him - i.e. for this representative of power - she is lost. In order to retain what she has sought in return for this confession of love to Henry, she is obliged to be cruel, to send men to their death. She follows this path to her death which she must accept in order to assure her daughter's accession to the throne. She has fallen victim to the evil desire to rule her fellow men.

(18) Anderson, op. cit., p. 25.

hero in the traditional style as we could want. He is a man of stature, a great leader beloved and admired by all his citizens. The good Father Martinez first introduces us to the great man:

Pablo Montoya is an old hand at mountain warfare. He's never been defeated or even checked. He's not the man to be beaten in a first skirmish, nor to be taken prisoner at any time. 19.

The skirmish to which reference is made is that which has taken place between Pablo's men and the American troops. It is feared that Pablo has been lost, and, in encouraging the eldest Montoya son to accept his father's role, Martinez casts more light on the grandeur of the old man.

...Wherever he went
He carried with him the center of an age,
The center of a culture, and the people's hearts,
Clung to him like vines to rock! 20.

But Pablo has not been lost. He returns to tell his family that he has been betrayed, that the Mexicans were ambushed through traitorous action. We have learned that his eldest son has betrayed him to the Ameridans. Another complicating feature of the plot is that the younger son, Felipe, is in love with Pabb's bridge-elect, Diana. Pablo discovers both these "treacheries", and determines to punish both his sons. The punishment of Federico is generally

(19) Anderson, Eleven Verse Plays, p. 11.

(20) ibid., p. 32.

accepted, but the unjust punishment of the innocent Felipe is held as unnatural by virtually everyone. Felipe at first bows to his father's wishes, ready to give up the girl he loves; then he suffers a change of heart and decides to plead the cause he feels most deeply:

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'm alive... 21.

Pablo is moved by his son's utterance and decides to take himself the poison he has set out for his son and Dianā - he recognizes the value of the freedom for which Felipe has pleaded.

...This is what death's for -
To rid the earth of old fashions. Forgive me, too. 22.

This unexpected about-face has, in my opinion, completely spoiled the play; it has frustrated the possibility of a satisfactory and legitimate tragedy.

This great man who had been so excitingly introduced soon appears on the scene to satisfy our expectations. He is admirable in his commanding presence. He shrewdly detects his son's treachery, and gives ample evidence of the heroic passions of which he is capable:

(21) ibid., p. 127.

(22) ibid., p. 133.

staunch a supporter of his race's tradition to deny in a twinkling all that his life has stood for. Compare, for instance, his declaration of purpose in opposing the northern 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.

...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
Customs and arts and wisdom handed down
To us through centuries. 25.

In short, the glorious death that should have been Pablo's is denied him. Instead of being allowed to adhere to the principles that had guided him - successfully, we must admit - through a long life, he is deprived of this final nobility and made to pander to the democratic emotions of the audience. Consequently, the pity we feel for Pablo is that he has not been permitted to follow his destiny to its logical end. We do, of course, regret the loss of the great man we have been able to admire throughout the play. This is not the full effect we had been led to expect.

Anderson almost achieved a successful tragedy in his play "Night over Taos"; unfortunately he was obliged to adhere to his theory, and he caught the action just in time to turn it to his questionable purpose. "The Masque of Kings" is more successful in achieving the effect Anderson

(25) ibid., p. 57.



seeks. The reason for this is that the equivalent of Pablo, Franz Joseph, is a much less sympathetic character than this noble Mexican. In fact, the figure most in our eyes is the son, Rudolph; Franz Joseph is kept rather more in the background, while young Rudi is the protagonist.

From the outset we are wooed to lend our sympathy to this Crown Prince with the democratic sentiments. He says,

...I've schooled myself
to live my birth down, make apology
where apologies are due, though I writhe within
to say the words. 26.

Rudolph's problem is that he is opposed to the autocratic rule of his father; he feels that his own life, nevertheless, is a waste in that he is allowed no part in the council that advises on the management of Austrian affairs. He longs to be given the governing of Hungary, where he would attempt a more democratic form of government; the Emperor will not allow this. Rudolph has allied himself with a group of advanced thinkers who are ready to attempt a revolution in Hungary. This group and Rudi's mistress are found in conference by Franz Joseph; he scolds them, but arrests Mary Vetsera and imprisons her. This is sufficient to move Rudolph to accept the program of revolution which he has doubted. The first move is to free Vetsera. The proposed attack in Hungary is reported to the Emperor, and he sends most of his troops there to oppose the uprising. Rudi's party, in turn, learns of the Emperor's move and also

(26) ibid., p. 24.

that the remaining troops in Vienna are in the command of one of their members. Austria is theirs for the taking. When Rudolph confronts his father with his demand of surrender, he is told that he will find it difficult to begin his glorious new regime without lopping off a few hundred heads. This so unnerves the tender boy that he gives up all he has gained, leaves the country to his father, and retreats to a hunting lodge!

These democratic sentiments are the chief characteristic that renders Rudolph sympathetic. We cannot but admire his love for his fellow man. Notice that his chief purpose in seeking power in Hungary is to be able to better the lot of the people there:

My first advice would be to grant
autonomy to Hungary, open the franchise
to all men of age to vote, rescind
restrictions on free speech and press
throughout the empire, wipe out clean
all laws that make political crime,
swing open all gates of political prisons.
Sign away to parliament the power to make
and change all laws, keep for yourself
executive and advisory functions.

Franz Jos: You have read too much.

This is an empire, not a democracy. 27.

There is, however, another facet of the character of Prince Rudi that combats his fine desire to bring better life to his countrymen; this is his nearsightedness - the rough steps of revolution are disgusting to him, and he wants to avoid shedding the blood of anyone even though it mean

(27) ibid., p. 51.

great improvement for thousands of others. This is Rudolph's myopic reasoning:

...If I seize on Hungary, there'll be a war, and all reform wiped out for a decade, what advance we've planned toward tolerant government will be ridden down.... 28.

I know your hope. You hope this revolution won't come down to what the history of revolutions predicts too clearly: a struggle for what's there on the part of those who want it. That's my hope, too. And yet I fear that certain men must die if we're to win. And we must win. 29.

Franz Joseph's interference and high-handedness provoke Rudolph to agree with his more eager friends in their plan of revolution. A favorable series of events drops a victory into the hands of Rudolph and his party; just as they are to take over control of the country Rudolph's conscience smites him, and he is unable to accept the power he had thought to use so well. He finds that certain restrictions are necessary, that he must be ruthless for a time in order to establish the new government; he balks at this. A completely inconsistent change of heart in his supporters convinces Rudi that this absolutism to which he is driven to accomplish his ends is unworthy. He relinquishes the victory he has won.

...send them all home to bed.
Our revolution' over. 30.

(28) ibid. p. ~~51~~ 42.

(29) ibid. pp. 76-7.

(30) ibid. p. 114.

Prince Rudolph's subsequent behavior seems calculated to inspire our disgust. He has discovered that his mistress had been sent to him originally as a tool of the Emperor; Vetsera did for a time report on his activities, but she had given up the role of spy long before the revolution broke out. When Rudolph learns of this he behaves quite brutally to Mary - even though she had been instrumental in gaining victory for the Crown Prince!

The frustrating alteration of the character of Rudolph is continued to the closing scenes. The perfectly logical idea that he would be able to work reform in Hungary as a result of his seizing power there, now appears to Rudolph as a ridiculous notion. His explanation of his changed attitude is found near the end of the play.

The faith I had was baseless as a palace of the winds anchored in cloud, a faith that I had found a use for kings, a faith that with skill and wisdom and infinite tolerance, infinite patience, I, the heir of all the Hapsburgs, might strike out a new coinage of freedom, cut new dies for the mind and lift men by their bootstraps till they walked the upper air. This is the faith of fools, but I had it, and I lost it.³¹

This is truly a strange sort of reasoning. We were all prepared to condone Rudolph's initial ruthlessness, for we felt that he was sincere in his desire to do good. He has thrown all his good intentions to the wind.

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(31) ibid., p. 123

According to Anderson's theory, however, this is a laudable conclusion to Rudolph's career. We must reason, then, that Rudolph's error in the play is the choice of attempt^{ing} the revolution with the idea of gaining power as a means to social and political reform. If this is true, the flaw in his character was that he could not sit by idly hoping that something good would happen to his brethren in Hungary. An absurd conception!

Rudolph's death is not tragic. If we feel sorry at the play's conclusion it is not because we regret this death that had to be, but rather we regret that Rudolph reasoned so ill as to suppose his death was necessary. The fact that he chose to be master of his own fate avails Rudeolph little in our eyes. His choice of death was irrational and entirely unnecessary.

One is obliged to make much the same criticism of Anderson's handling of more contemporary situations. In his "The Wingless Victory" and controversial "Winterset" the setting is closer to our own times. Each of these plays exemplifies the peculiar Andersonian conception of the development of the central character - that "he must come out at the end of the play a more admirable human being than he went in". The problem is complicated somewhat by the fact that Anderson is now dealing with men and women more like ourselves than were the characters of his

historical plays. For he has recognized the truth that a great part of the effectiveness of the hero depends on his difference from the average man. He felt that his historical dramas successfully achieved this difference but recognizes the new difficulty presented by the handling of contemporary figures.

There is not one tragedy by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, Shakespeare, Corneille, or Racine, which did not have the advantage of a setting either far away or long ago. With this admonition in mind I wrote "Elizabeth the Queen" and a succession of historical plays in verse 32

The man in the street simply will not do as the hero of a play. If a man be picked from the street to occupy the center of your stage, he must be so presented as to epitomize qualities which the audience can admire. 33.

"The Wingless Victory" relates the story of Nathaniel McQueston's attempt to combat the intolerance and narrow-mindedness of early nineteenth century Salem. Nathaniel has returned home a wealthy man after an absence of seven years. He has brought back with him from the South Seas a negro princess as his wife. His problem is to gain his wife's acceptance by Salem society, and he hopes to achieve this by means of the power and influence his wealth has given him. The truth that good will cannot be purchased is soon proved to Nathaniel: he has generously loaned most of his capital to fellow Salemites, only to find that they all

(32) Anderson, Off Broadway, pp. 53-4.

(33) ibid., p. 25.

have the intention of accepting bankruptcy rather than paying him back. The peripeteia occurs in all its irony when the town requests Nathaniel to send away his wife or face the alternative of a piracy charge. (It has been discovered that Nathaniel has procured his ship, the Queen of the Celebes, through means that may be interpreted as piracy.) Nathaniel chooses to let his wife be sent away and to retain the business he had worked so hard to found. He later changes his mind, but it is too late, for the miserable Oparre has already taken poison. Nathaniel determines to sail away with his dead love.

Our introduction to Nathaniel is quite impressive. He makes an exciting entrance amid the cheering and congratulations of the attending crowd that has borne him shoulder-high to the door of his old home. There is a ring of sincerity in the hearty and unadorned language of this returning conqueror: "...God, God how I'm glad to see you!"³⁴ Surely Nathaniel is no ordinary man-in-the-street. Nathaniel's difference from the average man is accentuated by the appearance of his exotic wife, the Princess Oparre.

He soon encounters the problem he must combat in Salem; his own brother Phineas is the first to impress on him the fact that his black wife will not be accepted.

(34) Anderson, Eleven Verse Plays, p. 27.

A rather heroic anger swells in Nathaniel as he attacks his prudish brother and the faith he represents:

And let me warn you, Phineas, the time's gone by when you're man enough for me. I took your orders once, but the shoe's on the other foot, you'll find!

...You reckon without the power of Mammon, Phineas. For myself, the deacons will be here tomorrow morning wanting to sell me a pew.

Phineas: With a pagan wife and octaroon children?

Nathaniel: Yes, with whatever I have so long as I have money! 35.

And in this heated dialogue appears the flaw in Nathaniel's character: his belief that his wealth will give him influence enough to obtain whatever ends he desires in Salem. We find it difficult to condemn him for this attitude, for he displays that saving quality of frankness that compares so favorably with the hypocrisy of Phineas. Nathaniel says of his money,

I'll keep it, but if I don't I'd lose it to one of these holier-than-thous that pull a long face over their hymns on Sunday and dismember their victims on Monday. 36.

Nathaniel finds that his generosity has availed nothing in gaining him and his wife the friendship of Salem. In his attempt to purchase friendship from his neighbors, Nathaniel has become more deeply engrossed than ever in the material pursuits of his business. He has turned hard, and anover-

(35) ibid., p. 45.

(36) ~~ibid.~~ loc. cit.

weening pride shows itself:

I am myself a bacon-bringer of a fairly engaging sort. Phineas is a medicine man of the approved variety - sharp faced, close-fisted, narrow-brained and even a little tight in the hind quarters. As his superior in mind, quality, and stature I take my place above him in this world, and I occupy this house because it's the best in town and I like it. 37.

This is indeed the pride that goeth before a fall. The dubious history of Nathaniel's ship is soon uncovered, and he is presented with the difficult choice of sending away his wife or facing a charge of piracy. We are shocked, of course by Nathaniel's decision - "Send her back!.... Make 38 away with her if you must, but you'll not get what I have!" - but it is understandable; some preparation has been made for just such a decision earlier in the play. He has made this confession to Faith,

...It's hard to maintain your love -
you begin to gnaw at this thing you're
chained to, even hate where you love -
curse at it in secret, curse yourself
and all the world equally....I'll wake
some morning and find the bed-clothes
stained with blood - and know I've killed
her - her - and the children - and that
damned negroid thing that waits on us ... 39.

The poor Oparre is sent away, but not before she has time to explode her fierce wrath on Nathaniel. (And this is Anderson's most successful scene of terror - an element that is not so convincingly present in any other of his plays.) However Nathaniel is not allowed to continue to

- (37) ibid., p. 62.
(38) ibid., p. 97.
(39) ibid., p. 72.

the denouement that we should call inevitable - the sad and lonely life of money-grubbing to which his choice would have condemned him. He revokes his choice and decides to leave with his loved one. Nathaniel admits his mistake:

If you have words that cut and tear,
loose them on me. I know what hell
you've faced here, for I faced it too
walking alone. - I was mad - to think
a parting could ever part us. -

.....
...A man, must keep something within
or it's no use living. 40.

This seems like a noble sacrifice - all for love, or the world well lost - until we realize that this love of which Nathaniel has spoken so tenderly has really been nothing better than lust. We find this truth hinted in the later speech of the dying Oparre:

...and I'm ashamed to say that you were
mine, and my dark body remembers you. I
hold you free of blame. You're but one
of a colorless tribe, a tribe that's said:
those who are black are slaves, to be
driven, slept with, beaten, sent on, never
loved.

.....
You part the earth among you, burdening us
with your labor and your lust..... 41.

In the light of this, Nathaniel's returning to Oparre is even less noble than his original choice of his wealth. Consequently the pity we might have felt at the close of Nathaniel's unfortunate life is denied him; he does, in fact, appear rather a monster, because the profound pity we feel

(40) ibid., p. 127.

(41) ibid., p. 129.

for the discarded Oparre arises from her being victimised by Nathaniel. Surely Anderson intended Nathaniel's final change of course to be regarded as his recognition of the nobler choice. Unfortunately Nathaniel's action can hardly be so regarded.

A nice distinction between noble choices is made in Anderson's "Winterset". The most immediately contemporary of his plays presents the story of Mio, bent on avenging his father's unjust execution. Mio's trail of evidence leads him to the Esdras home - Garth Esdras is the witness who can clear the name of Mio's father - where he falls in love with Miriamne, not knowing that she is the sister of Garth. Mio's problem is to choose between his loyalty to his father and his love for Miriamne; in either choice there is to be a sacrifice. The question is whether it is nobler to adhere to loyalty to his father's name, or to cling to his love for the girl. Obviously, the modern audience will demand that Mio choose to sacrifice his desire for revenge - his father is dead anyway. But Anderson's task is to make this sacrifice worth while by impressing on us the power of the wonderful love of Mio for Miriamne. That Anderson has succeeded in doing this is questionable.

Mio and Miriamne fall in love in a most unconvincing way; it is a case of love at first sight, (and without the

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benefit of a love-potion). Mio has spoken only one or two words to her - "Looks like rain." etc. - but almost immediately we must take for granted that they have fallen in love. They have exchanged few words before Miriamne says,

Do you want me to go with you?

.....
Wherever you go, I'd go. 42.

After this they tell each other their names! But Mio is already deeply in love:

...When I first saw you, not a half-hour ago, I heard myself saying, this is the face that launches ships for me - and if I owned a dream - yes, half a dream - we'd share it. 43.

If, however, we can accept this love of Mio for Miriamne, our sympathy can go out to them - to Mio in particular. Mio's unhappy love for Miriamne is seen to be condemned from the start; he is bent on vengeance, and must adopt the stern attitude of the cynic. Romantic love is not for Mio. His tone is but half scoffing:

Enduring love, oh gods and worms, what mockery! - And yet I have blood enough in my veins. It goes like music, singing, because you're here. My body turns as if you were the sun and warm. This men called love in happier times, before the Freudians taught us to blame it on the glands. 44.

But it is this strain of romanticism, strong in Mio, that leads to his catastrophe. When he does finally obtain the

(42) ibid., pp. 46-7.

(43) ibid., p. 47

(44) loc. cit.

information he needs to condemn Garth and clear his own Father's name, it is his love for Miriamne that stays his hand. Consider:

Mio: I tried to say it
and it strangled in my throat. I might
have known you'd win in the end.

Miriamne: Is it for me?

Mio: For you?
It stuck in my throat, that's all I know. 45.

If this decision has not been expressly for Miriamne, it has at least been due to the beneficent effect of his love for her. Love has won over hate.

Mio's decision to let Garth go free leads to his death. Had he sent his message with Carr, assistance would have arrived and spared Mio's life. It is Mio's romanticism that has caused him to fall in love with Miriamne, and this love has given Mio an alternative to pursuing his role of avenger. We are obliged to conclude that Mio's error has been in falling in love with Esdras' sister, and that the character flaw which prompted this error is Mio's essentially romantic nature.

There is a quality of faery about Mio; he doesn't belong in our world. He is an orphan and has been deprived of the right of formal education because there is no one to pay school taxes for him. But he is a learned boy, as is his friend, Carr. This impression derives from such unrealistic

(45) ibid., p. 125.

dialogue as this:

Carr: Tennyson.

Mio: Right. Jeez, I'm glad we met up again! Never knew anybody else that could track me through the driven snow of Victorian literature.

Carr: Now your cribbing from some half-forgotten criticism of Ben Johnson's Roman plagiarisms.

Mio: Where did you get your education sap?

Carr:..My father kept a news stand. // !! //

But this sort of thing, of course, is an example of Anderson's attempt to make this hero taken from the street somehow different from the ordinary. What he has succeeded in doing is producing a monster who is, at his most human level, a hopelessly romantic youngster whose love for Miriamne, then, is not to be taken seriously. This trait is indicated by Mio's habit of conscious misquotation - such things as this:

Love in a box-car - love among the children. 46.

or this:

And here I am, a young man on a cold night,
waiting the end of the rain. Being read my
lesson by a boy, a blind boy - you know the
one I mean. Knee-deep in the salt marsh,
Miriamne, bitten from within, fought. 47.

If the exalted idiom of poetry is given to Mio for the purpose of suggesting his difference from the average man in the street, then it should be an organic poetry and should retain a certain level. By permitting it to descend to ~~this~~

(46) ibid., p. 48.

(47) ibid., p. 114.

this rather burlesque level Anderson has spoiled its effect; with these odd misquotations in his mouth Mio drops to the level of you and me as we were in our adolescence. Anderson's idea was, perhaps sound, but he has failed in putting it into practice.

The conclusion is bitterly frustrating. We might have had an ending similar to that of Hamlet if Mio had pursued his original intentions, but since he has given up the revenge motive in favor of love (and so become "nobler") his death is by no means satisfying but rather frustrating. This is a criticism applicable to all of Anderson's theatre: since the main character appears more admirable at the conclusion of the play, then a sad ending is unjustified - it is a cruel and frustrating blow dealt to the audience.

The question of Anderson's use of poetry and poetic language need concern us here only in its relation to the depiction of the characters. In his history plays he has used this form of dialogue for the purpose of suggesting olden times; he is relying on the Shakespeare tradition which demands that the characters of history, when presented on the stage, must speak a sort of poetry. In his contemporary studies Anderson has used poetry to remove his characters from the realm of the average man - it is calculated to make the character "different". I believe that he has failed in both instances.

It seems to me that this exalted language simply gets in the way; it has an inflated, artificial air of burlesque about it, - like that of a little girl out walking in her mother's high-heeled shoes. The impression given by his history plays is that of complete unreality; we submit to them as we might to a high school production of Hamlet - and are as little convinced. (There are the ridiculous punning scenes in the Elizabeth and Mary plays; and that revolting bit of dialogue in Latin in "Elizabeth the Queen" that terminates with Elizabeth's words, "Nay, I can bang you in Latin too!" Horrors!)

Anderson has begun from a false premise, and the presentation of his heroes suffers accordingly. We have seen that on the few occasions where he has managed to depict a character that is convincingly heroic, he is obliged to effect a reversal of intention in him before the conclusion. Anderson does realize the necessity of making his heroes different from the ordinary man, but has failed in his attempt to carry this off effectively. With him the fault is that his characters are become so far removed from recognizable humanity that they no longer touch us.

2. ROBINSON JEFFERS

In Robinson Jeffers' dramatic works we find an attempt, not to write tragedy with contemporary characters, but rather to make the great classics acceptable and understandable to present day audiences that are nourished by the writings of Freud and Adler. Jeffers attempts to replace classic mythology and pagan religion with the more fashionable psychology. If he were to succeed, his success would be legitimate enough, for he has, at bottom, simply given new names to old forces. Whether he has succeeded in his modern presentation of classic tragedy we must determine from an examination of his plays.

In "The Tower beyond Tragedy"⁴⁸ we have the story of Clytemnestra. She is here presented as a woman in whom the fire of sexual desire burns with a fierce brightness, consuming her reason but permitting her a singleness of purpose that will not be opposed. Her powerful will is rather an admirable quality, but it is overshadowed by her fascinating ferocity. She is a ruthless woman who slays her husband on his homecoming and drives out her children, seeking their death:

..... Electra and Orestes
Are not to live when they are
Caught. Bring me sure tokens. 49.

The other fascinating quality in the character of

(48) Robinson Jeffers, Roan Stallion, Tamar, and other poems, The Modern Library, New York, 1935.

(49) ibid., p. 47.

Clytemnestra is her sexual attractiveness and her ability
(and desire) to use it.⁵⁰ Consider her facing the rebellious
army at the palace steps. She confesses her murder of
Agamemnon but holds the mob in awe as she flaunts her body
at them. At first she pleads the righteousness of her
vengeance by referring to Agamemnon's sacrifice of her
Iphigenia - but in these terms:

And the soft-colored lips drained bloodless
That had clung here - here - Oh!
These feel soft, townsmen; these
Are red at the tips, they have
Neither blackened nor turned marble 51.

Later she must simply hold the pack at bay; this she does
by pretending to submit to them:

See, I have no blemish, the arms
Are white, the breasts are deep and
white, the whole body is blemishless:
. 52.

You would see all of me
Before you choose whether to
Kill or dirtily cherish? If what
The King's used needs commending ..
...give me room, give me room,
fellows, you'll see it is faultless... 53

And even when Aegisthus arrives, and the danger is removed,
she cannot resist flaunting herself again at the soldiers

... the poor brown and spotted women
Will have to suffice you. But is
it nothing to have come within handling
distance of the clear heaven,

(50) Clytemnestra is well described in the lines ".....
not a woman but a lioness / Blazed at him from her
eyes:" ibid., p. 34.

(51) ibid., pp. 28-9

(52) ibid., p. 40.

(53) ibid., p. 41.

This dead man knew when he was
Young and God endured him?
Is it nothing to you? 54.

In fact she behaves throughout like a bitch in heat.

The reasons for her killing Agamemnon apart from vengeance for Iphigenia, are merely hinted, but they are revealing. First there is her jealousy, suggested in her anxiety to know the slave girl Agamemnon has brought with him:

What's her name, the slave girl's?
Dear: the girl's name? 55.

and confirmed in Cassandra's trance - like revelation of her possession by Agamemnon:

.... you entered me
I opened my thighs 56.

Secondly, there is the suggestion that Agamemnon has ceased to be a satisfactory lover. She describes him thus:

..... loathesome, unclean
The labors of the Greeks had made him fat,
The deaths of the faithful had swelled his belly ...57.

And ^{he} has been replaced by the more desirable Aegisthus whom she greets with relief:

My lord, my lover 58.

Clytemnestra is a nymphomaniac, her desires must be satisfied. As she has said to the army:

(54) ibid., p. 45.

(55) ibid., p. 24.

(56) ibid., p. 31.

(57) ibid., p. 38.

(58) ibid., p. 43.

It is something to me to have felt the fury
And concentration of you 59.

It is the force of this carnal passion that brings her catastrophe: she has driven away her children - the children of Agamemnon - in an endeavor to appear more appealing, more desirable to Aegisthus:

I will be childless for you 60.

i.e. as much the virgin as possible. The abandoning of Electra and Orestes is Clytemnestra's error: they return to kill Aegisthus at the hunt and Clytemnestra on her palace steps. The responsibility for her catastrophe rests on her own shoulders.

The curse that is on Clytemnestra is that of sexual abnormality. " A house of madness and blood / I married into . . . " ⁶¹ Not only has she coupled with Aegisthus, ⁶² the issue of incest, but is herself incestuously inclined. This quality in her is only suggested, but amply enough, I think. ⁶³

We accept her death as necessary - the punishment she has deserved. Clytemnestra has inspired virtually no pity,

(59) ibid., p. 45.

(60) ibid., p. 44.

(61) ibid., p. 66.

(62) cf. ibid., p. 48.

(63) cf. ibid., pp. 48, 65-6.

only horror and a fascinated admiration for her diabolical power and force. We are as sorry to see this terrifically attractive woman leave us as we are to see the last of Richard III. But there is here no tragedy; rather a striking melodrama - and a captivating psychopathic study. The emotions aroused by this play are the shock of the horror, and the titillation of Clytemnestra's seductive attraction.^{64.}

A worthy successor, all things considered, to this lusty Clytemnestra, is the heroine Medea.^{65.} She is an even more terrifying character than Clytemnestra at her fiercest. Despite the words of the nurse, and of the chorus, what we know of Medea is a monster mouthing monstrous utterances: her first howlings are terrific:

(64) The curse is carried on in *Electra*. Although she wins our pity when she first appears as a slave girl, and with right on her side, to avenge her father, she soon blossoms into a faithful reproduction of her monstrous mother. She is horrifying as she forces Orestes to strike the avenging blow, and she becomes diabolically fascinating as she attempts to seduce her own brother:

.... to let my hand glide under the cloak
O you will stay! these arms
Making so soft and white a bond around you ...
I also begin to love - that way, Orestes,
Feeling the hot hard flesh move under the loose
cloth, shudder against me ... Ah, your mouth. Ah,
The burning - kiss me -

(65) Robinson Jeffers, *Medea*, Random House, New York, 1946.

".....she is not meek but fierce." 66.

If any god hears me: let me die. Ah rotten
rotten, rotten: death is the only
Water to wash this dirt. 67.

The plot is that of Medea's revenge on Jason who has forsaken her for the daughter of Creon. We feel no pity for this barbaric woman whose thoughts are of death and vengeful "justice". She is, like Clytemnestra, a nymphomaniac who has been frustrated - deprived of the object of her passion. There is nothing tender about the love Medea has had for Jason - it has been a fierce carnal desire. Consider the wild excesses to which this passion has forced her:

I betrayed my father for him, I killed
my brother to save him;
I made my own land to hate me forever; 68.

And note that in her intense jealousy of "little Creⁱisa" it is the carnal aspects that concern Medea:

..... This ... man ...
Has left me and taken Creon's daughter, to
enjoy her fortune,
And put aside her soft yellow hair
And kiss her young mouth. 69.

.... I beseech you, Creon,
By the soft yellow hair and cool
Smooth forehead and the white knees
Of that young girl who is now Jason's bride: 70.

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- (66) ibid., p. 3
(67) ibid., p. 8
(68) ibid., p. 14
(69) ibid., p. 15
(70) ibid., p. 25

A rather salacious attractiveness is given Medea in oblique references to her sexual prowess. At the outset the First Woman of the Chorus has made ^{this} observation:

She was a witch, but not evil. She can
make old men young again:
She did it for Jason's father. 71.

Then, in the scene with Aegeus, Medea confesses:

I know the remedies that would make a dry stick
Flame into flower and fruit." 72.

Now, in spite of her previous invocation of Hecate and her proud reference to her black arts, Medea's speech is here pregnant with meaning more readily understandable and credible to a modern audience.

There is, too, something admirable in the spunk Medea exhibits in her determination to stand alone and not shirk punishment nor seek pity.

.....I shall not die perhaps
As a pigeon dies. Nor like an innocent lamb,
that feels a hand on its head and looks
up from the knife
To the man's face and dies. - No, like some
yellow-eyed beast 73.

We do feel some pity for her as she struggles to steel herself for the task of sacrificing her children to her vengeance on Jason.

(71) ibid., p. 12

(72) ibid., p. 51

(73) ibid., pp. 28-9.

I wish all life would perish, and the holy
gods in high heaven die ~~die~~, before my little ones
Come to my hands. 74.

But the horror inspired by her actually carrying out this
sacrifice, the fiendish planning to prepare the right ef-
fect on Jason ⁷⁵ far overshadows any pity Medea has momentar-
ily aroused in us. She says to Jason,

Yet you've not had enough. You have
come to drink the last bitter drops.
I'll pour them for you. 76.

Medea indicates the curse that has caused her plight-
the result of her wild passion for Jason:

The world is a little closed to me, ah?
By the things I have done for you. 77.

Jason defines it neatly as the curse of Venus:

As to those acts of service you so loudly
boast - whom do I thank for them? I thank
divine Venus, the goddess.
Who makes girls fall in love. You did them
because you had to do them; Venus compelled you; I
Enjoyed her favor. 78

And although we wince with Medea at this unmanly taunt,
we recover quickly. Her death she has contrived of her-
self. It is not tragic, for she dies satisfied; her ter-

(74) ibid., p. 78

(75) cf., "If anything happened to them,
Would you be grieved?" ibid., p. 69.

(76) ibid., p. 102.

(77) ibid., p. 37

(78) ibid., p. 38.

rible vengeance is complete.

Like "The Tower beyond Tragedy" "Medea" offers a Freudian interpretation of a Greek heroine. That Jeffers has failed to produce tragedy is not necessarily a criticism of the psychological method. The difficulty of this psychological presentation of Clytemnestra and Medea is that we cannot say of them, "they loved not wisely but too well"; we are reduced to a discussion of their hormones. The principal fault, however, lies mainly in Jeffers' conception of tragedy: the Jeffersian heroine inspires no pity, and is too horridly fascinating to produce the emotional effect demanded of great tragedy.

3. CLIFFORD ODETS

In an introduction to "Paradise Lost" Harold Clurman says "Clifford Odets is a poet of the decaying middle-class with revolutionary yearnings and convictions...."⁷⁹. Certainly Odets' interest and sympathies are with this "decaying" class and its problems. And it is with these problems that Odets deals in his plays. Now one can portray the tragic plight of a social class in one of two ways: either by presenting several representative members of the class, each with his particular ^problem, or by presenting a single character whose problem will symbolize that of the whole class. Odets has employed both these methods in his theatre. It can easily ~~possibly~~ be imagined that the chief difficulty common to both methods is that of fashioning a hero - or heroes - of sufficient proportion to produce the tragic effect. How well Odets has fared in the handling of these difficulties can be determined by the examination of his chief plays.

In "Waiting for Lefty" Odets has employed, not a symbolical hero, but rather a composite hero. We are introduced to this composite hero at the outset of the play - the "committee of workers": Benjamin, Miller, Stein, Mitchell, Phillips, Keller. The tragedy of the class these men represent is seen in the particular tragedies of four of them: Joe Mitchell, a cab driver, Miller, a lab assistant, Sid Stein, another hackey, and Dr. Benjamin, an

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(79) Six Plays of Clifford Odets, The Modern Library, New York, n.d., p. 426.

interne; and the play ends with the words of a fifth committee member, Agate Keller.

Each of these characters is individualized in his own scene, but, since they are to represent a class, they all have certain characteristics in common. It is Joe Mitchell who gives the initial description of them as they sit on the platform at a union meeting:

You know what we are? The black and blue boys!
We been kicked around so long we're black and
blue from head to toes. 80.

They are all quite average people, extraordinary in no way. Their common problem is that they are unable, through no fault of their own, to earn a living. Thus there is one antagonistic force working against them all - Capitalism, big business. Our pity is strongly aroused for each of these characters, and we feel a certain horror at the spectacle of a social condition that permits such misfortune.

Joe Mitchell's particular problem is that his job driving a cab does not pay him enough to support his wife and family. He comes home from work to find his furniture removed because he has not completed his payments, his children in bed "so they won't know they missed a meal", and his wife ready to leave him and prostitute herself. Our sympathy goes out to Joe especially when we realise that he is not responsible for the predicament in which he finds

(80) ibid., "Waiting for Lefty", p. 7

himself; he is simply the victim of the existing economic condition:

I'd get another job if I could. There's no work - you know it. 81.

His real tragedy is that he does nothing to try to change the conditions under which he and his family are living. Joe and other men like him are responsible for allowing matters to remain as they are. Edna suggests "... maybe go on strike for better money." To Joe's reply that "One man can't make a strike", Edna answers with the stirring words

Who says one? You got hundreds in your rotten union!

.
I don't say one man! I say a hundred, a thousand, a whole million, I say. But start in your own union. Get those hack boys together! ...Godamnit! I'm tired of slavery..... 82.

Joe is convinced by Edna's exhortation and determines to do just what she has suggested. Thus the scene ^{ends} on the triumphant note that is to be struck again at the close of the play.

We find this same determination at the end of the next scene of the play dealing with the lab assistant, Miller. His situation is that of an upright young man who is requested by his employer to spy on one of his fellow workers in the lab. Our sympathy is awakened for this ~~apparently~~

(81) ibid., p. 9

(82) ibid., p. 12

apparently virtuous youth who neither drinks nor smokes, as we see that he is obliged to accept the alternative to being a spy - that of losing his job. This is just the tragedy that befalls him, and although he is directly responsible for it, it is not at all due to a flaw in his character; rather it is due to his pre-eminently upright nature. Like Joe, Miller firmly states his intention of refusing to accept the status quo:

Sure hard feelings! Plenty of hard feelings!
Enough to want to bust you and all your kind
square in the mouth! (Does exactly that.) 83.

And of course the man to whom these fighting words are addressed is a representative of the capitalist class - "Fayette, an industrialist".

A younger parallel to Joe Mitchell of the first scene is to be found in Sid, another cab driver. He and Florence are in love but unable to marry due to economic reasons. The decision that they must part is finally made by Sid who sees that nothing better than the horrid existence of the Joe-Edna scene await him and Florie. It is in this scene that the common antagonist is, perhaps, most clearly described.

...the cards is stacked for all of us. The
money man dealing himself a hot royal flush.
Then giving you and me a phony hand like a
pair of tens or something. Then keep on losing
the pots 'cause the cards is stacked against you. 84.

(83) ibid., p. 17

(84) ibid., p. 21

Sid, then, is purely the victim; he has done nothing to merit the misery that has fallen on him. By the time he utters his painful "Good-bye, Babe", Sid has earned our sincerest sympathy. He is broken and does not even show that determination to fight for a change that we have seen in the case of Joe and of Miller.

This fighting finish does reappear in the last of the tragic episodes - that of Dr. Benjamin. In this scene we have the only suggestion in the play of a character slightly better than average:

Benj: But after all I'm top man here. I don't mean I'm better than others, but I've worked harder.

Barnes: And shown more promise.... 85.

The staff of the hospital at which Dr. Benjamin has been "top man" is being reduced, and Benjamin is being dropped, not due to incompetence, obviously, but to make room for "the Senator's nephew", and due to the fact that he is a Jew. Again the victim is in no way responsible for the tragedy that overtakes him. Note that Benjamin is not simply the victim of racial discrimination, but of the same antagonist that has opposed our other heroes:

Barnes: I've remarked before - doesn't seem to be much difference between wealthy Jews and rich Gentiles. Cut from the same piece. 86.

(85) ibid., p. 27

(86) loc. cit.

The last scene returns us to the union meeting where Agate Keller sums up the determination to fight for better life that we have seen expressed by the other members of the composite here.

Joe said it. Slow death or fight. It's war. You, Edna, God love your mouth! Sid and Florie, the other boys, old Doc Barnes - fight with us for right! It's war! Working class, unite and fight!... Let freedom really ring. 87.

This ending stamps the play as rather high comedy than tragedy. We can hardly censor Odets for failing to do something that he did not intend to do; however it is evident that there is a tragic intention in the individual scenes, and it is there that we must look in following the purpose of this essay. It can be concluded briefly that these scenes are not truly tragic, and that the fault lies with the hero in each case. The central character does arouse our pity quite definitely, but he fails to rise to truly heroic proportions: the most heroic action is his showing his desire to fight to change his sorry state - and even the pathetic Sid does not rise to this height. This is really hardly more heroic than the determination of a schoolboy to get better marks. And although we are often deeply moved to pity - indeed because of it - we find the situation revolting and frustrating in that it is entirely undeserved. We must conclude that the central character in each case is simply not of heroic dimensions and, hence, not capable of arousing the truly tragic sentiments.

(87) ibid., p. 30.

A more conventional handling of a similar theme is to be found in "Awake and Sing". Here, again, the "decaying middle class" is presented, but not by means of the composite hero portrayed in various illuminating scenes. This is more nearly a group tragedy - that of the Berger family and their friends. There are essentially two main plots. First of all there is the story of the daughter, Hennie: she is with child by an unknown man and is obliged by her family to marry the colorless Sam Feinschreiber; Hennie has our pity, and when she escapes this depressing situation by running away with a successful small-time gambler, Moe Axelrod, we do not wholly condemn her. The other main plot in "Awake and Sing" is the love story of the Berger son, Ralph. He is ^Amore sympathetic character than Hennie or Sam - a rather more noble person who gains our pity through the recital of the constant frustrations of his life:

It's crazy - all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy! 88.

I never in my life even had a birthday party. Every time I went and cried in the toilet when my birthday came. 89.

Ralph's tragedy is that he is obliged, due to economic reasons and the domineering influence of his mother, to lose the girl he loves.

The most tragic element of "Awake and Sing" is in the sub-plot of the life of Ralph's great uncle Jacob, an ideal-

(88) ibid., p. 42

(89) ibid., p. 46

ist who quotes scripture and Spinoza. He is something of a symbolical figure, and as such is the opposite of his son, Morty. Morty is a modestly successful business man, selfish, materialistic, and not particularly bright. We feel a certain admiration for the idealist Jacob who stands aloof from the frantic materialistic pursuits of the rest of the Berger group. There is a strong mutual attraction between him and Ralph, and it is in order to enable Ralph to free himself from such economic pressure as has forced him to lose his Blanche, that Jacob leaps to his death; he has named Ralph beneficiary of a three thousand dollar insurance policy.

We are sorry at the old man's death, but we admire his courage and sacrifice. There is a certain feeling of frustration at this catastrophe in that it was completely unmerited. There is no hamartia to account for this ending; Jacob is just a victim - even though he took his own life. Nevertheless, we are not deeply moved: we tend to remember the poor old man who walked Bootsie on the roof, and who, after all, had not even read the fine books to which he constantly referred. And, apart from this, Odets has rather blurred the final impression by his attention to the Hennie-Sam-Moe plot, and to the characters of Ralph, Bessie and Morty. One strikes a more telling blow with one large stone than with a handful of gravel.

Similar to this play is the one which appeared some
90
three years later under the title "Paradise Lost": we have
the dominating mother, her quiet, naive, and unhappy hus-
band, the daughter, the son, the somewhat questionable out-
sider (who makes off with Libby just as Moe Axelrod does
with Hennie in "Awake and Sing"); Gus, "a family friend",
whose role here is roughly parallel to that of Jacob in the
earlier play, and the business partner, Sam, who is some-
thing of the equivalent of Jacob's son, Morty. The multi-
plicity of plots and potential tragic heroes is just as
disconcerting here as in "Awake and Sing". Odets' inten-
tion again is to present a group tragedy.

We have, first, the plot concerned with Leo Gordon's
bankruptcy precipitated by his wretched partner, Sam Katz.
Sam, a sexually impotent man with disturbing frustration
compensations, is directly responsible for the Gordon tra-
gedy in that he has taken the firm's money to spend on a
brief, pseudo-luxurious holiday of escape. But Leo is in-
directly responsible in that he was too little concerned
with material affairs even to attend to the practical con-
siderations of his business. He gains our admiration, (or
at least, our approval) through his humane treatment of the
shop delegation, and through the integrity he displays in
repelling the dishonest insurance salesman. We do, then,
feel genuinely sorry for Leo in his catastrophe. Our sen-
timent of pity for Sam is mixed with some revulsion.

It is difficult, however, to be deeply moved by the plight of these little men; anyway, the bankruptcy plot ends on a happy note. That Leo's ruin is not final is due in no small part to the sacrifice made by Gus. This selfish creature has been appealing in his devotion to his stamp collection, and his wistful preoccupation with the beautiful women of the "harem of my head"; he is pathetic in his ineffectual attempt to guard his daughter's honor. Gus' sacrifice is that he sells his beloved stamp collection to raise money for Leo. That Gus has sacrificed a treasured possession to aid his friend is admirable, but since this treasured possession is a collection of postage stamps the heroic element is removed, i.e. it is the kind of sacrifice of which any of us is capable.⁹¹

In Ben Gordon, Leo's son, we have the character intended to be "handsomer" than the ordinary man: Ben has been a champion athlete - a victor in the Olympic Games. Gus' description and appraisal of him sets him quite above the average and makes him a character we are anxious to meet.

(91) Note that I do not maintain that we are all capable of making the sacrifice Gus did; the point is that this sort of sacrifice - the sale of a stamp collection - is open to most of us, and if this is true it is hardly to be considered heroic. The heroic sacrifice is moving, not because it is comparable (that is to say, equivalent) to one we might make, but because it is so much greater than that.

Oh its different with him. He's got the magnetism. A champeen in every muscle of the body. Did you ever think it, that we'd turn out an Olympic champ in our own neighborhood! How like a God, I say. 92

Ben does prove to be a "different" sort of person, but rather a disappointment as far as the heroic is concerned. He is a sympathetic character, however; he is essentially an unhappy man despite his apparently felicitious union with Libby:

Ben Gordon's up and he's down. That's how he
is - moods. 93.

Our pity goes out to him as we learn that he has been deprived of his most important heroic element - his ability to run:

Sure, my heart. I told Libby yesterday. The
doctor says I'm through! 94.

Ben's problem is to find a means of earning a living for Libby and their child. He is unwilling to accept the humble job of selling mechanical toys, but the alternative to this poor but honorable occupation is the taking up with his friend Kewpie in more questionable, though more lucrative, pursuits. The knowledge that this same Kewpie has taken his wife's affection from him - replaced him in his own bed - decides Ben to relinquish the struggle and accept the offer of "easy money". This decision leads to Ben's

(92) ibid., p. 162

(93) ibid., p. 173

(94) loc. cit.

accepting a job in which he meets death at the hands of the police. Lest we should doubt that Ben was responsible for his doom, Kewpie's description presents the matter clearly:

He stood there soaking up cops' bullets like a sponge - A guy with fifty medals for running.

Ben Gordon wanted to die!

... Ben killed himself. That's what he did. He dug his own grave... He couldn't earn a living, and he was ashamed. (95)

His is a sad and regrettable death. In that he met it with willingness, he claimed the noble right of ordering his own doom.

Ben's error was in the wrong choice of a means of livelihood - the unlawful way to "easy money". There is the suggestion, however, that this choice was directed by Fate; Ben was under the curse common to most of Odets' heroes - the overpowering pressure of big business that squeezes the life out of the small man. This fatal force is defined by Pike:

This system! Breeds wars like a bitch breeds pups! Breeds poverty, degrades men to sentimental gibberin' idiots, mentioning no names. (looks sideways at GUS)

There's your children, you, Sam Katz - a big hand got itself around you, squeezin' like all hell gone on! ...Gets you all down to the margin. Dispossessed like me, like another sixteen million in a walking death: unemployed! (96)

The question that we ask ourselves is, how did Ben

(95) ibid., p. 223

(96) ibid., p. 206

and the other characters earn this curse? These poor souls have apparently done nothing to warrant their being cursed.- it has fallen on them unmerited. They are victims. Certainly they have deserved punishment for their petty crimes; since this is true, we can accept their doom as satisfaction of the moral order. But in that they are all victims of a curse that has given them no alternative to the committing of these crimes, their punishment is ultimately an injustice. It is for this reason that the final effect of the play is frustrating.

There is no sense of a great waste in Ben's death. It has simply meant the loss of Ben Gordon; that is unfortunate, but then there are thousands of Bens in the world. His tragedy is not magnified by his being the representative of a whole class, for Ben represents this class in that he is typical - not symbolical. "Paradise Lost" remains the sad story of Ben Gordon and his family.

Nevertheless, the technique of "Paradise Lost" makes it a neater and more effective play than the earlier "Awake and Sing": our attention has been focussed on Ben Gordon, the most important character in the play. This improvement in technique seen in "Paradise Lost" may in part be accounted for by the appearance of the well-made "Till the Day I Die" between these two very similar plays.

In "Till the Day I die" we have the tragedy of Ernst Tausig, a Communist party worker in the Berlin of 1935. Ernst is captured by the Nazis, tortured and used as a decoy fo trap other party members. He is condemned as a traitor by his own party. The irony of Ernst's situation is that he finally commits suicide in order to prevent himself from betraying involuntarily this party which has condemned him.

Ernst's character is much more nearly satisfying as a hero for tragedy than any other Odetsian character discussed thus far. He readily arouses our interest in him and sympathy in his devotion to this cause. We admire Ernst's dedication that has brought him, not quite recovered, from a sick-bed to help carry on the party work. There is also the suggestion that there is in Ernst something finer than the ordinary spirit; he is a musician - a man who loves the better things of life - but he has sacrificed his music to his cause. He observes rather sadly,

My fingers are stiff as boards.

• • • • •
Not to have touched a violin for six months?
Incredible! (97)

When Ernst is taken by the Nazis and subjected to torture we feel sincere pity for him, and are shocked at the horror of his captors' brutality. Indeed Odets tends to insist too much on conveying this impression of horror: the sadistic cruelty exhibited in the guard room scene is on the verge of burlesque.

Old Man: Don't hit me, please don't hit me.

Young Trooper: No, just dusting you off.
(hits hard)

.....
Trooper 4: Taucher...bets anything he can
knock a man out in one blow -
nine out of ten....

.....
Hand over the bets....

.....
I count three. You both hit together. (98)

(And the scene continues with the Troopers' game of knocking out the prisoners). More convincing is the scene in which Ernst, now temporarily freed to act as a decoy, relates his plight to Tilly; here is the crux of Ernst's tragedy.

All the time I was in the Brown House they were offering me bribes, any inducements to turn informer. First a session of endearment. Then a session of torture. The human body is a tower of strength. After a while comes numbness, but the mind begins to wander. I'm afraid, Tilly - do you hear that, afraid! Something might happen. There is no rest, no possible contact with party members permitted. They will seize me again, return me to the same program. I'm afraid of what might happen. (99)

Ernst's fear, of course, is that he will unwillingly betray his party. This is a pathetic and terrible situation; it is rendered more poignant by the irony of the party's condemning Ernst for the very crime he is endeavoring to avoid. Although his condemnation is conditional and reserved, its effect is as devastating as if it had been absolute. Arno best expresses the attitude of the party:

(98) ibid., pp. 124-5

(99) ibid., pp. 138-9.

Personally, I'm sorry for Tausig. But who can take a chance nowadays? Even if he is not guilty, who can take a chance when the secret police have any connections with him? (100)

Burdened with the suffering inflicted by the mental and physical torture received at the hands of the Nazis, terrified that he may betray his fellow workers yet knowing that they have forsaken him, Ernst returns to his faithful Tilly to explain to her that he has decided to accept the only release possible from his dilemma.

Ernst: Do you know what you must do? I brought the whole thing with me. A gun, cleaned, oiled. This morning I did it. With one hand it isn't easy. Kill me! (101)

Neither Tilly nor Carl can face the task of killing their comrade; Ernst takes his own life.

The conclusion produces a very touching effect. We are deeply moved with pity for Ernst, admiration for his unflinching devotion to his belief and faithfulness to his friends, and terror at the ghastly aspect of his taking his own life. We are struck with the sense of waste in this good man's death, and we regret bitterly that he must die although we realize that the circumstances in which he finds himself permit no alternative. This brings us to a realization that his death is terribly unjust. What has been Ernst's error? He has disagreed with the brutal system of government under which he lives, and has been working to change it. Ernst has been prompted to oppose

(100) ibid., p. 144.

(101) ibid., p. 153.

the power of the Nazis by his deep love of humanity:

My present dream of the world - I ask for
happy laughing people everywhere. I ask for
hope in eyes: for wonderful/ baby boys and
girls I ask, growing up strong and prepared
for a new world. (102)

What strange concept of tragedy is it that holds that a man must be condemned because of his love of humanity? This is the "curse" that drives Ernst Tausig to commit the error of joining and working for a party that tries to achieve happiness for mankind. Only in the realm of inverted values - where this play's action is laid - is it possible to acquiesce in the death of Ernst. For us, the conclusion of the play is profoundly disappointing and frustrating. A potentially effective tragic hero has been wasted - as far as the purposes of Tragedy are concerned - in "Till the Day I Die".

The most satisfying of Odets' plays is "Golden Boy". As in "Till the Day I Die", "Golden Boy" concerns itself with one central character; other tragic characters in the plot are governed by the fortunes of Joe. (This is an eminently more successful way of producing a multiple tragic effect - the technique of Racine, for example. The parallel tragedies in "Awake and Sing" and "Paradise Lost" have a much less telling effect; there Odets' striking force is diffused, while in "Till the Day I Die" and in "Golden Boy" this force is concentrated.)

(102) ibid., p. 112

Joe Bonaparte is the younger son in a lower middle class Italian-American family. He is a talented violinist ^{who} loves music, but desires economic security. As a means to get this security - plus a little luxury as well - Joe decides to become a professional Boxer. He proves to be a great success in the prize fighting business, but his success has demanded the sacrifice of his first love, music: boxing has so damaged his hands as to prohibit performance on the violin. Joe's rise to the top of the boxing ladder has cost him most of the people and things he really loved. It is final recognition of this loss of his real self that Joe takes his own life.

Joe is a likeable boy, not vain, but confident in himself. His introductory scene is an important one in winning our sympathy for Joe:

Indeed a good manager, Mr. Moody. You used to be tops around town - everyone says so. I think you can develop me. I can fight. You don't know it, but I can fight. Kaplan's been through for years.Why don't you give me this chance, Tom? (103)

There is the additional fact that Lorna Moon - who has already gained our sympathy in the opening scenes - takes an immediate liking to this self-confident young man. We feel justified in admiring Joe. A pleasing discovery is that Joe is an accomplished musician; we see him as a rounded person, somewhat above the average man. His sub-

(103) ibid., p. 240

sequent trials, sacrifices, and successes concern us more immediately and touch our emotions more surely because we like and admire this character.

Joe does assume rather heroic proportions as he moves from one success to another in the prize fighting world. Although he never becomes the champion of his class, by all means of comparison permitted to us in the play he is the best of his kind. Also it is significant that he wins the love of the only woman that matters in the play - Lorna.

The problem which Joe must solve is the proper choice to make between his music and his boxing. He really loves his music, and it offers him the deepest satisfaction he can know. It cannot gain him economic security. Boxing, on the other hand, offers him not only economic security but a certain satisfaction in his success as a fighter and a measure of luxury of which he has hardly been aware. Joe's choice is difficult for him to make only because he wants to retain the benefits of both pursuits. There is no question of which he holds dearer. He confesses to Lorna,

Music means more to me

.
With music I'm never alone when I'm alone -
Playing music...that's like saying, "I am a
man. I belong here. How do you do, World -
good evening!" When I play music nothing is
closed to me. I'm not afraid of people and
what they say. There's no war in music.
It's not like the streets. (104)

(104) ibid. p. 263

Joe simply wants to "take a vacation - the notes won't run away."⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ He does try to avoid making the choice, but the press of events - specifically the urging of his handlers to attack more boldly in his fights - forces Joe to a decision. He learns that Lorna, the girl he loves, has finally decided to marry Moody, and that his manager's interest in him has been purely mercenary. Just before his important fight with Lombardo Joe ~~he~~ realizes his position: "They're all against me...." ; he wins the fight by the sacrifice of breaking his hand on Lombardo's skull. Joe's choice is decided.

Concentrating solely on his boxing, Joe rises in the prize fighting sphere until he becomes to the most important fight before the championship- his bout with the Chocolate Drop. His victory is at the expense of the Chocolate Drop's life. Recognition of what the "fight game" has meant to his own soul comes to Joe in the words of the Chocolate Drop's manager:

You murdered my boy! He's dead!
You killed him! (106)

In his final scene with Lorna, she and Joe rehearse the tragedy of his life. Although Lorna suggests that there is something left for them to salvage, Joe is convinced of his failure.

I murdered a man...I see what I did. I
murdered myself, too! I've been running

(105) ibid., p. 253

(106) ibid., p. 314

around in circles. Now I'm smashed!

... my hands are ruined. I'll never play again! What's left, Lorna? Half a man, nothing, useless.... (107)

Seeing that he has destroyed himself in spirit, Joe decides to ride away with Lorna to his death.

The error that led Joe to his doom was the wrong choice of the means to a livelihood - a choice that was, in effect, the denial of his spiritual self in favor of his material self. Like Ben Gordon, Joe was cursed by economic instability. A certain inevitability, hence, is seen in their tragic error. The difference between the two characters, Joe and Ben, is that the antagonistic force of "big business" is not felt to be so insistently present in "The Golden Boy". Joe's curse is more nearly that of the desire of material good in preference to the spiritual. Consequently, Joe is much less a victim than is Ben Gordon, Ernst Tausig, or any of the earlier heroes.

The pity and terror aroused by Joe's tragic plight, and the sense of waste at his catastrophe combine to produce a satisfying effect. We regret that Joe must face his doom, but acquiesce in it as a just punishment for one who has preferred a lower to a higher good. What prevents the achievement of the truly cathartic effect is the fact that Joe is really not of absolutely heroic dimensions. He is a hero only in the circumscribed world of the prize ring, after all. Furthermore, he is all too recognizably

(107) ibid., pp. 315-316.

"one of us", and his particular tragedy is precisely of the sort that might befall us. The difference and magnitude demanded for producing a tragedy capable of achieving purgation in the Aristotelian sense is lacking ⁱⁿ Joe Bonaparte.

This lack of difference and magnitude is common to all the heroes of Odets' theatre. Odets, it would seem, is too concerned with presenting the common man as such on his stage to give his attention to the requirements of a really satisfactory tragic hero. His dramas are moving, certainly, but moving in a depressing and frustrating way. Odets has succeeded in producing precisely that state of mind that the great tragedies succeed in discouraging : the attitude of despair.

4. TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:

(108)

In production notes to "The Glass Menagerie", Williams says,

When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibilities of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are...Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.

He says later, in the introduction to "The Glass Menagerie",
"The lighting in the play is not realistic."⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ And in the stage directions for Scene i we find: "The scene is memory and it is therefore nonrealistic."⁽¹¹⁰⁾

It is interesting to note that the suggestion of unreality has been a definite intention of Williams' art. He realizes that the effectiveness of tragedy depends, in great part, on its being not entirely equatable to our everyday life. Whether this has enabled him to produce successful Tragedy will be determined by the following examination of his plays.

"The Glass Menagerie" is the story of two unhappy grown-up children dominated by their mother, a faded Southern

(108) Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie, The New Classics New Directions, New York, 1949, p. ix

(109) ibid., p. xi

(110) ibid., p. 3

belle whose husband has long since left her. The petty misery of the household is pathetic: Amanda seeking compensation in the memories of her popularity as a girl, Tom seeking it in movie theatres, and Laura in her "glass menagerie". Amanda, certainly on the lunatic fringe, is too abnoxious to gain unreserved pity - furthermore she is not really unhappy. Tom, on the other hand, is a miserably frustrated and unhappy person for whom we do feel genuinely sorry. Also we admire his spunk in turning to face his mother, opposing her, and recognizing her evil or at least unhealthy force in the family. Nevertheless he is not heroic; the sacrifice he has made in staying at home to support the family is no greater than that made by countless others, and he ultimately escapes to find his own life elsewhere.

The really tragic element of the plot concerns Laura. Our sympathy is captured completely by this unfortunate girl. She suffers silently as Amanda rehearses her own popularity as a girl Laura's age, and accepts with negligible opposition the efforts of her mother to make her succeed. Her sole reaction has been to withdraw as much as possible into a private world of her own - the fragile world of her glass menagerie.

A moment of happiness is held out to her in the person of Mim who has been invited by Tom, ^{at}~~by~~ Amanda's persuasion,

to come for dinner. Laura's brief bliss reaches its height as Jim's friendliness warms and he kisses her. The terrible peripeteia occurs as Jim, at heart a good enough person, confesses his engagement to another girl and leaves the flat with some haste.

Laura is indeed a pathetic character. Our pity is the greater because she is an innocent victim. For in what way did she contribute to her own catastrophe - what is her flaw that caused the catastrophe? The final effect left by Laura's tragedy is one of frustration and deep disappointment. She is ~~a~~ too passive^a character to permit her assuming heroic stature. Thus it is difficult for her to arouse the extraordinarily profound sentiments conducive to the cathartic effect. There is, nevertheless, an element present that permits an effect similar to that produced by the tragedy of really great heroes; this element is the strange hot-house atmosphere we find in the play. There is something unreal and other worldly about Laura and her surroundings and, consequently, something about the emotions she arouses that make them not quite equatable with those we experience in real life. Just as the effectiveness of the emotions aroused by great tragedy is due to the fact that these are not commensurate with those ordinary emotions we meet in everyday life, so is there a similar effectiveness in the emotions aroused by Laura.

We do not have this atmosphere in "A Streetcar Named Desire" (III) but this play is successful for other reasons. Most apparent is the fact that 'Streetcar' is more conventionally tragic in intent, and a creditable attempt has been made to produce a satisfactory tragic character.

Briefly, Blanche's story is her attempt to escape her past life as a prostitute and find shelter and love with her sister Stella. She does find love in the person of Mitch - the best of the gang of poker players that includes Stella's husband, Stanley. Blanche has felt unable to tell Mitch of her past life, even lying about her age. Stanley learns the truth in all its horrid details and informs Mitch, who can no longer respect Blanche. The culmination of the tragedy is Stanley's rape of Blanche and her subsequent madness.

Blanche is pitiable in her loneliness. She explains the reason of her visit to Stella. Her reference to the loss of Belle Reve, (happily named!) The family home, and her explanation of the death of the family is another means of inspiring our sympathy for Blanche. We are pleased to see a mutual attraction between her and Mitch and we can even excuse her coquetries and her lack of absolute honesty with him when we realize how important it is to her to be loved and how afraid she is of losing Mitch's attentions. Her words are pathetic:

(III) Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire, New Directions, New York, 1947.

...People don't see you - men don't
- don't even admit your existence unless
they are making love to you.
And you've got to have your existence
admitted by someone, if you're going to
have someone's protection. (112)

As far as the action of the play is concerned, Blanche's hamartia is her rather snobbish attitude to Stanley. When the terrible details of her irregular life are made known, the decline of Blanche's fortune begins. The news of the irregularities of her past does not strike us with all the shock it might have, due in part to the fact that this is related by Stanley - whose utterances we tend to tone down before accepting (although we do not doubt the veracity of his disclosures); further, Blanche's explanations of how she was driven to this life makes it less disgusting.

Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers.
After the death of Allan - intimacies with
strangers was all I seemed able to fill my
empty heart with ... I think it was panic,
just panic, that drove me from one to another,
hunting for some protection - here and there,
in the most # unlikely places - even, at last,
in a seventeen-year-old boy but - somebody
wrote the superintendent about it - "This
woman is morally unfit for her position!" (113)

Obviously Blanche had been extremely upset by this experience, which, coupled with the shock produced by the loss of her family, is sufficient to account for her mental condition. Her loneliness and need of love having remained unsatisfied by her life of prostitution, she has developed

(112) ibid, p. 91.

(113) ibid., pp. 140-141.

an unnatural attitude toward physical love. The unnaturalness of this attitude - expressed in her scenes with Stella, and in her treatment of Mitch - is emphasized by the healthy down-to-earth attitude of Stella:

But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem - unimportant. (114)

but contrasted rather favorably with the brutish attitude of Stanley. Sadly enough, her natural desires make themselves heard - note her invitation to Mitch in French. The result of all this is that we excuse Blanche to a great extent for her abnormal sexual behavior - the discovery of which has brought her catastrophe - in that we feel she has not been responsible for it; in short, her moral responsibility has been explained away by means of psychology. The point here is, however, that we are not ready to demand her punishment.

There is a strong note of irony in the fact that her madness is precipitated directly by the kind of sexual activity Blanche sought to escape - the sort she would not permit Mitch to enjoy - the loveless animal act: Stanley's rape. The situation is admirably summed up in the symbolic utterance by Blanche:

I shall die of eating an unwashed grape
one day..... (115)

We can say that this background of Blanche's life, like the curse of the gods in Greek tragedy, caused her to make

(114) ibid., pp. 80-81

(115) ibid., p. 162; Grapes are a Bacchic symbol, obviously.

that error which caused her tragic fate. There is, in addition, something of a suggestion that Blanche is of a cursed house - consider the line, "Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!⁽¹¹⁶⁾..."

The pity and the terror subside as the play closes. We do feel sorry that Blanche has been taken, and we can admit a certain justice. (The justice we feel at work in Hamlet's death - that of the great moral purpose of the universe). The difficulty in the case of Blanche is that she has been deprived of truly heroic proportions; she is too nearly a psychopathic case ⁱⁿ this presentation. The chance for the heroic gesture - her throwing off her past life of sin - is not permitted (just as her past life, explained psychologically, is hardly to be called sin); she had been thrown out of town.

The final effect of Blanche's tragedy is, like that produced by "A Glass Menagerie", slightly similar to the cathartic effect of great tragedy. There is in both of Williams' dramas a quality of unreality - much less marked in "A Streetcar Named Desire" - that permits emotions somewhat different from tragic occurrences^r in real life. There is a value in this, but the effectiveness of the emotional excitement caused by tragedy is^{due} not primarily to its difference in kind, but rather^{to} its difference in degree from that of life's common tragedies. In this lies the secret of the true Catharsis demanded by Aristotle.

(116) ibid., p.27

5. Arthur Miller

A dramatic art similar to that of Odets at his very best is to be found in the work of Arthur Miller. Miller's dramatic purpose is nearly equivalent to that of Odets', but his technique is rather like that of Tennessee Williams - although considerably more conservative. The play in which we are most conscious of Miller's similarity to Odets is that of "All My Sons", the unhappy tale of Joe Keller.

Joe Keller and his partner had been producing airplane parts during the war on a government contract. They are afraid that any slowing up of production in their shop will cause them to lose their contract, and will probably ruin their business. Consequently, they have permitted faulty equipment to leave their shop and to be bought by the government. The faulty equipment causes the death of a score of pilots. Joe and his partner stand trial; the partner is jailed, and Joe is acquitted. The action of the play deals with a new trial of Joe Keller - not in a court of law, but in the bosom of his own family.

Joe Keller is another average-man hero. The stage directions introduce him thus:

....A man of solid mind and build, a business man these many years, but with the imprint of the machinshop worker and boss still upon him. When he reads, when he speaks, when he listens it is with the terrible concentration of the uneducated man for whom there is still wonder in many commonly known things; a man whose judgments must be dredged out of experience and a peasant-like common sense. A man among men. (117)

(117) (Arthur Miller, All My Sons, Reynal and Hitchcock, New York, 1947, pp.1-2)

He is a likable old man: the Keller yard, particular when Joe is in it, is a popular rallying place for the neighborhood. Not only is he friendly with the adult neighbors, but also finds time to play at "cops and robbers" with the children. (118) The scene with little Bertie is a typical example. Joe indulges his wife in her eccentricities and has been a successful good-provider: he says jokingly,

...I don't know, once upon a time I used to think that when I got money again I would have a maid and my wife would take it easy. Now I got money, and I got a maid, and my wife is working for the maid.
Mother. It's her day off, what are you crabbing about? (119)

Withal Joe is a humble man, aware of his ignorance.

When information of the war-time scandal is introduced we are quite prepared to believe implicitly in Joe's innocence. At this point in the play we feel that Joe is raised in our estimation; we admire the generous attitude he displays toward the partner who tried to implicate him in the crime. The latter part of the play consists in strengthening and confirming our doubts of Joe's innocence.

By the time we reach the mid-point of the play's duration, we find that Joe's good qualities are gradually peeled away. Joe is left, finally, as a miserable, pathetic, little man begging for guidance from his wife. ("Then what do I do? Tell me, talk to me, what do I do?") (120)

(118) (ibid., p.8)

(119) (ibid., p.14)

(120) (ibid. p.73)

The one good quality left in Joe is that of a rather short-sighted unselfishness. He attempts to account for his crime:

...What could I do? I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty-one cracked, you're out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (121)

The scenes of recognition and peripeteia follow closely this plea of Joe's. He has maintained that his action was intended to protect his family, the most important thing in the world to him. That he has taken too short a view is explained to him by his wife:

Mother: Joe, Joe...it don't excuse it that you did it for the family.

There's something bigger than the family to him. //Chris//

Keller: Nothin' is bigger!

There's nothin' he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son.

Nothin' is bigger than that (122)

This attitude has cost Joe the love of his son Chris. That it is also responsible for his losing Larry is disclosed by the letter Larry had written to Ann: "I read about Dad and your father being convicted...I can't face the other men... I can't bear to live any more...I want you to know that you mustn't wait for me." Joe's myopic altruism has gained him the alienation of all his sons. He goes sadly to his death.

(121) (ibid., pp. 67-8)
(122) (ibid., p. 74)
(123) (ibid., pp. 81-2)

While Joe has been immediately responsible for his death, it was his wife's error that made his death inevitable. Joe's wife made the slip that confirmed the suspicion of Joe's guilt:

Keller. Say, I ain't got time to be sick.

Mother. He hasn't been laid up in fifteen years...

Keller. (quickly) Except my 'flu during the war.

Mother. Heh?

Keller. My 'flu, when I was sick during...

Mother. (quickly) Well, sure...(to George) except for that 'flu, I mean. (124)

There is, nevertheless, an indication that Joe has been laboring under a previous curse that has rendered him vulnerable for this tragedy. It is the curse of economic pressure. The fear of poverty caused Joe to permit the nefarious act of deception in fulfilling his war-time contract.

We cannot regret Joe's death; we are rather inclined to accept it as a well-earned punishment. The main reason for this is that we feel that we have been tricked into sympathy for Joe. He turns out to have been something of a hypocrite. We have little pity left for him at his death. Nor is there any sense of loss or of great waste, for Joe is completely without heroic stature. Joe Keller is not a tragic hero, not only because he is without heroic stature, but principally because he has participated in no tragedy - simply a sad story. In the last analysis, "All My Sons" is just the sad tale of the unhappiness of an unintelligent little man.

(124) (ibid., p.62)

Another of these sad stories is that told of Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman."^(124a) An improvement in motivation here marks a maturing of Miller's technique! The Odetsian insistence on attributing all evil to Capitalist economy and to the pressure of "big business" is softened, and is, indeed, hardly apparent. The story of Willy Loman - related by the flash-back method of the cinema - is that of a man who has raised his sons to believe in the false ideals that have brought his own failure.

Willy Loman is a tired old man; he is a travelling salesman who is no longer able to succeed at his job. His mind wanders; he talks to himself; he is on the verge of suicide. Willy's philosophy of life has always been that to be well-liked is the surest way to success. A typical statement based on this reasoning is Willy's observation, "The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked." (125) Coupled with his insistence on a well-liked personality is Willy's scorn of formal education - of "book learning". In the earliest flash-back of the play we find Willy, in a rather appealing scene with his two sons, explaining the value of being well liked as opposed to well read: the studious neighbor, little Bernard, has come to see Willy's sons.

Willy: Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?

Bernard: He's gotta study, Uncle Willy. He's got Regents next week.

(124a) Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman, The Viking Press, New York 1949.

(125) (ibid., p.86)

.....
Willy:(angrily) ...With //athletic// scholarships to three universities they're gonna flunk him!

.....
Don't be a pest, Bernard! (To his boys) What an anemic!

.....
Bernard is not well liked, is he?
Biff: He's liked, but he's not well liked.

.....
Willy: That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through. (126)

This empty ideal of the well liked man persists, even when Willy has begun to question its value. When his son Biff, now a man of thirty-four years of age, is about to apply for a job Willy gives him this advice: "Walk in with a big laugh....Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it - because personality always wins the day." (127)

Having taken this philosophy as his life's guide, Willy has developed into a man whose conversation is as empty as his ideals. He speaks as though he were continually quoting advertisements or tourist-attraction pamphlets. In relating the success of his recent selling trip Willy says,

He said, "Morning!" And I said, "You got a fine city here, Mayor." and then he had coffee with me. And then I went to Waterbury. Waterbury is a fine city. Big clock city, the famous Waterbury clock. Sold a nice bill there. And then Boston. Boston is the cradle of the Revolution. A fine city. (128)

(126) ibid., pp 32-3)
(127) ibid., p. 65)
(128) ibid., p. 31)

The mental gyrations of the Loman intellect are pathetic when they result in such confusion as ~~they~~ indicated by these two pronouncements of Willy's:

Chevrolet, Linda, is the greatest car ever built.

That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car! (129)

Of course, it is in accordance with his own preposterous ideals that Willy has raised his sons. Biff, who had been so well liked as a youth, has failed to make a success of himself by the time he reaches the age of thirty-four. This fact bothers Willy who feels responsible for Biff's failure - although he cannot understand exactly how or why Biff has failed. Willy's mind, consequently, becomes particularly unsteady when Biff is at home. (Linda says to Biff, "It's when you come home he's always the worst.") Willy's uneasiness in the feeling that he has been responsible for Biff's failure is well founded. Biff bluntly explains this: "Because I know he's a fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows!" (130)

Those scenes of the play that deal with the present depict Willy's gradual recognition of his own failure and the reason for it. The first inkling of truth comes to Willy early in the play:

...I gotta be at it ten, twelve hours a day. Other man - I don't know - they do it easier. I don't know why - I can't stop myself - I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words. One thing about Charlie. He's a man of few words, and they respect him. (131)

Later that day - following the terrible peripeteia at his boss' office - Willy' meets Bernard, the same Bernard who, as a boy had been the object of so much of Willy's derision. He is now

{ 129 } ibid., pp. 34, 36)
{ 130 } ibid., p. 38
{ 131 } ibid., p. 37

a successful lawyer, and is on his way to plead a case before the supreme court. Willy is surprised but disturbed at this news; he respectfully asks Bernard for the secret of success. By way of answer Bernard asks Willy what has become of Biff, and refers to Biff's trip to Boston just after having flunked his high school examinations. Bernard is making the point that the decline of Biff's fortune seems to have dated from that trip. Willy refuses to answer Bernard and has become very uneasy. Bernard had put his finger on the heart of the problem.

As a direct result of this scene final recognition comes to Willy during his dinner party with his two sons. At dinner he learns of Biff's failure to get the loan that was to have set him up in business. Suddenly the crucial Boston episode looms up in Willy's mind, and the ringing condemnation of young Biff (who had found his father in a compromising situation with a strange woman) resounds in his ears:

You fake! you phony little fake! (132)

At this recollection Willy's mind falters; his one thought is to make amends to Biff. Poor Willy's faulty reasoning leads him to the conclusion that he must commit suicide and leave his insurance money to Biff. What deters Willy from carrying out this plan immediately is the fear that Biff will think him a coward - that he has simply sought an escape. When this fear is dispelled by Biff's pitying confession of love for the old man, Willy drives away to his death.

Although Willy's death is accepted partly as an expiation of his sin with the Boston woman, the curse that has driven him to his inevitable doom is the curse of ignorance. The particular flaw that this curse has produced in Willy's character is his

naive faith in the hollow ideal of the well liked man.

At no point does Willy display any admirable qualities. The best thing that his wife, Linda, can say of him is that which can be said of any man who does not abandon his family:

...you tell me he has no character? the man who never worked a day but for your benefit? when does he get the medal for that? (133)

It is, in fact, difficult not to feel revolted by this vain little man flattering his children's petty egos, condoning and admiring their thievery. He arouses neither pity nor terror, or, at best, that condescending pity we permit ourselves for the most wretched little creatures: the dead mouse in the trap.

The conclusion of the play leaves in us a feeling of frustration, caused by the needless plight of Willy - needless in that a little common sense would have spared him his mild disaster. We have seen this silly oaf contemplating suicide with the joyful expectation that Biff will be paid by the insurance company that has already become extremely doubtful of Willy's being a good risk. The emotion of frustration is virtually the only one aroused in us by the play.

Any emotional reaction of pity caused by the closing scenes is illegitimate in that it depends on identification of the spectator with Willy - there, but for the grace of God, go I. This is precisely what Tragedy must not do; present a tragic situation that is potentially open to the ^{audience} ~~members~~. Tragedy depends for its cathartic effect on the difference, both in kind and in magnitude, of the catastrophic event it portrays. "Death of a Salesman" does not qualify under this rubric for little Willy Loman is of insufficient stature to raise it from the ranks of the sad tale.

6. EUGENE O'NEILL:

"The Hairy Ape" is probably the best of O'Neill's short plays. The plot concerns the meeting of two realms - the stoke-hold and high society. Yank, the leading stoker of a transatlantic liner, comes into contact with a member of the New York social set, Mildred Douglas. Yank is bewildered by the shock this meeting has on Mildred; he feels that he has been insulted by her gesture of revulsion. The major action of the play deals with Yank's attempt to avenge himself on Mildred. At the conclusion of the action we find Yank's dim recognition that Mildred is not the cause of his unhappiness, but only the agent that awakened him to a realization of his unhappiness.

This brief resume describes the plot in so far as it represents the story of a man named Yank and a woman named Mildred. But this play is to be understood at another level beside the realistic. Yank and Mildred have a symbolic value in addition to their value as human beings. The environment in which the action is set suggests that we are not to understand these characters simply as real people enacting a realistic drama. O'Neill's stage directions indicate that an unrealistic atmosphere is to be created by the setting.

The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. (134)

(134) Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays, The Modern Library, New York, n.d., p. 39.

The protagonist, Yank, is intended to be an extraordinary character; O'Neill's description of him runs thus:

He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They respect his superior strength - the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual. (135)

This characterization is exemplified in the first scene. In the isolated little world of the stoke-hold Yank is a hero: he calls for a drink, and "Several bottles are eagerly offered". He is the driving force and inspiration that keep his fellow stokers diligently at their back-breaking toil.

Sling it into her! ... Shoot de piece now!
... Drive her into it! Feel her move!
Watch her smoke! Speed, dat's her middle
name! Give her coal, youse guys! (136)

Yank displays a haughty pride in the physical prowess that gives him superiority in this, his own peculiar world. Here in the hold he feels at home - he belongs, and he is scornful of everything beyond. He proudly announces that he is the responsible force in the world - he sees himself as a wonderful primum mobile:

Everyting else dat makes de woild move,
somep'n makes it move. It can't move
witout somep'n else, see? Den yuh get
down to me. I'm at de bottom, get me?
Dere ain't nothin' foither. I'm de end!
I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild
moves! It - dat's me! (137)

(135) ibid., pp. 39-40

(136) ibid., p. 56.

(137) ibid., p. 48.

This is not the vain boast it appears, for in the narrow world to which our reference is confined - the bowels of this transatlantic liner - Yank's boat^s is largely true. And it is obvious that this confined world is virtually the only one of importance to Yank, The one dissenting voice in Yank's world is that of old Paddy who suggests that this is not the be all and the end all:

We belong to this, you're saying? We make the ship go, you're saying? Yerra then, that Almighty God have pity on us. (138)

At that point in the action where Yank is at the height of his glory an intruder from the outside world appears in the person of Mildred, "dressed all in white". The effect of her intrusion is to upset Yank considerably. Yank had never visualized the possibility of anyone's not admiring him and not recognizing in him the great motive power he believes he is. Not only the sting of insult, but also the anguish of doubt seize Yank; he cannot tolerate the emotional turmoil, and he determines to avenge himself on Mildred.

A marxist shipmate of Yank's offers to aid him in tracking down Mildred. Long identifies her to Yank as a member of the capitalist class, and tries to awaken Yank's "class consciousness". Yank is willing to attack this class

(138) ibid., p. 45

but only because it represents Mildred to him. For a similar reason he attempts, unsuccessfully, to join the I.W.W. Yank's reasoning runs like this: the Wobblies are against the capitalist class; Mildred is a member of this class; the Wobblies are against Mildred so I shall join up with them. Yank's position is made clear in his monologue to the gorilla at the zoo:

So dem boids // the Wobblies// don't tink I belong, neider. Aw, to hell wit 'em! Dey're in de wrong pew - de same old bull - soap-boxes and Salvation Army - no guts! Cut out an hour offen de job a day and make me happy! Gimme a dollar more a day and make me happy! Tree square a day, and cauliflowers in de front yard - ekal rights - a woman and kids - a lousy vote - and I'm all fixed for Jesus, huh? Aw, hell! What does it get yuh? Dis ting's in your inside, but it ain't your belly.... It's way down - at de bottom. Yuh can't grab it, and yuh can't stop it. It moves, and everyting moves. It stops and de whole woild stops. Dat's me now - I don't tick, see? ... Aw, hell! I can't see - it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong! (139)

He realises that it is not Mildred who is his opponent, that she has been only the agent that has awakened the unrest in him. Yank has lost his old confidence. He envies the gorilla its protected existence in its carefully defined, if confining, little world. And in congratulating the gorilla on its good fortune, Yank puts his finger on the heart of his own dilemma: "Sure, you're de best off! You can't tink, can yuh?"⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Yank's trouble arose when a superior element entered his little world and provoked him

(139) ibid., p. 83.

(140) ibid., p. 86.

to thought. This thinking part of Yank strove with his simple animal nature; that the animal part of Yank emerges victorious is symbolized in the gorilla's killing Yank.

The tragedy becomes most meaningful when its symbolical values are understood.

Yank's tragic fault is his pride in his animal nature, his smug satisfaction in the circumscribed world that recognizes his prowess. He is symbolical of the modern man who sees the finite world as the only one, and admits of no power operating in it other than himself. It is this animal nature that brings Yank to his death. But he has been prompted to seek this death as a result of the intrusion of Mildred, a spirit from the world beyond. Mildred represents the spirit that visits all of us, bringing unintelligible whispers of the other realms. Notice that Yank pursues Mildred, as the common man may pursue the strange whispering in his inmost soul, not with hatred but with love. For the hatred Yank displays is for the benefit of his shipmates - just as common man's scorn of things other-worldly is for the consumption of his neighbors.

Paddy:He's fallen in love, I'm telling you.

.....
All: (with cynical mockery) Love!

Yank: (with a contemptuous snort) Love, hell! Hate dat's what. I've fallen in hate, getme?

Paddy: (philosophically) 'Twould take a wise man to tell one from the other. (141)

(141) ibid., p. 60

The spiritual element is in conflict with the animal, but the human animal is necessarily attracted to the higher and must aspire to the spiritual. When this aspiration is not directed, the human yearning for spiritual satisfaction is aimless and so unanswered; man returns to purely material pursuits which can never suffice. This is the tragedy of Yank. His knowledge of something beyond awakens desire for communion with it; because he is ignorant and cannot focus this desire it is frustrated, and he is forced to return to that lesser part of his nature which makes life unsatisfactory.

The curse under which Yank struggles is the curse of ignorance. He is not aware of the means of achieving what this newly-awakened appetite desires. So modern man is ignorant of the way to satisfy the yearning within him. He has been cursed by a philosophy that has taught him that the material world is capable of answering all his needs. The question to be asked is whether Yank has earned this curse or whether it has simply fallen on him. This can only be answered by referring again to that which Yank represents. Has man sought this curse? Has he embraced a materialistic philosophy? Have his fore-fathers such as Comte and Huxley brought down this curse that has persisted from generation to generation? If this curse has been earned, then Yank and the common man he represents are truly tragic figures.

"Desire Under the Elms" is the story of Eben Cabot's attempt to regain the farm his father has taken from his mother who is now dead. Eben's task is complicated by the introduction of Abbie whom his father has newly taken to wife. Abbie is another obstacle to Eben's regaining the farm, an obstacle more difficult to contend with, for she has gained Eben's love. The final twist of complication occurs with the birth of Abbie's child. To Eben's father the child represents a decisive means of depriving Eben of the farm. To Eben it represents as well the love of him and Abbie, and he is torn between his hatred of the child as an obstacle to his gaining the farm, and his natural love for it as an offspring of his own. When Eben learns that Abbie has promised old Eph an heir, he believes that Abbie's love has been feigned. She decides that the only way to convince Eben of her love is to kill the child - she sees this act as the removal of Eph's heir. Eben denounces her to the sheriff, but realizes in time that he has been responsible for Abbie's terrible act, and determines to share the doom he has already prepared for Abbie.

There is an unusual atmosphere about the play; it takes place in a sort of vacuum. This scene is as isolated from the world of every-day as is that of Wuthering Heights.

Eben is a different sort of person - recognizably a farmer, but unlike any farmer we ever expect to meet. He is impressed by the beauties of the countryside and of a sunset in a way that our average farmer (Simeon and Peter, for example) is not. This fact is brought to our attention in one of the opening scenes of the play:

(A door opens and EBEN CABOT comes to the end of the porch...he puts his hands on his hips and stares up at the sky. He sighs with a puzzled awe and blurts out with halting appreciation.)

Eben: God! Purty!

.

Simeon;(grudgingly) Purty.

Peter: Ay-eh. (142)

This characteristic makes Eben an appealing figure; he appears to be of a finer fibre than the others with whom we are allowed to compare him. Another point that arouses our sympathy for Eben is the fact that he is championing the cause of right in attempting to restore the farm to its rightful owner; he appears as the noble avenger of the wrong done to his mother.

Eben manages to retain the position of a third person in the struggle between the force of old Eph to keep the farm, and the desire of Eben's dead mother to regain what was rightfully hers, as long as there are only these two elements in the conflict. When Eph brings home a new wife, Abbie; Eben's problem changes. He is now no longer working

(142) ibid., pp. 137-8.

simply on his mother's behalf; he is now pitted against Eph in an effort to assure his inheritance. Eben sees Abbie as the ~~purpose~~^{person} to whom the farm will be given by Eph, and he feels that he must now strive ~~with~~ Eph to get the farm for himself. What has happened is that Eben's motive is changed from the desire of avenging his mother to the desire of gaining the farm for himself - a subtle distinction, perhaps, but an important one. The change in motivating emotion is from that of love for his mother to selfishness.

It is the introduction of Abbie, as we saw, that effected this change of attitude in Eben. Eben is now prompted by that selfish desire of possession which he is combatting ~~is~~ his father. A further complication in Eben's emotions caused his love for Abbie who^m he sees, nevertheless, as a further obstacle to his gaining the farm. The conflict within Eben is now between his desire of possessing the farm, and his love for Abbie. Notice that this conflict is the same as the original conflict with the possessive desire of Eph and Eben's love (for his mother); the same two forces are in conflict, but now within Eben's breast. What is this but the eternal conflict between good and evil - the goodness of love and the evil of selfishness?

That Eben's love for Abbie has replaced his love for his mother is indicated in the scene in which Eben finally admits his love for Abbie, (who is, in fact, his new mother).

- - - - -

Eben: (to the presence he feels in the room)
Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye
tellin' me?

Abbie: She's telling ye t'love me. She knows
I love ye an' I'll be good t'ye. Can't
ye feel it? Don't ye know? She's tellin'
ye t'love me, Eben!

Eben: Ay-eh. I feel.....

.....
(his face suddenly lighting up with a
fierce triumphant grin) I see it! I see
why. It's her vengeance on him - so's
she kin rest quiet in her grave.

.....
An I love yew, Abbie! - now I kin say it! (143)

This scene is important in its contribution to Eben's
"difference". There is no suggestion in the play that
Eben's mind is diseased, so we cannot legitimately call
Eben's awareness of his mother's departed spirit a result
of metal derangement. O'Neill obliges us to admit to ours-
elves that Eben is endowed with this extraordinary per-
ception, (the perception of Hamlet, Macbeth and others of
their ilk, one might add).

Eben comes to distrust this love of Abbie's for him.
Unable to stomach the action of old Eph in his great joy
at the birth of Abbie's son, Eben exposes the fact that the
child is really his. Eph has a disclosure to make in his
turn - that Abbie has used Eben in order to give Eph an
heir. Although Abbie had indeed suggested something not
too different from that to Eph early in the play -

(143) ibid., p. 179.

immediately after Eben had spurned her advances - we know that she does truly love Eben. Nevertheless this news shocks him. A cruel irony has caused Eben to put yet another obstacle between himself and the farm - an obstacle which he could never bring himself to remove. In disgusted rage, Eben determines to leave the farm. This would break Abbie's heart, and as she tries to persuade Eben to stay and to convince him of her love, she meets this rebuke,

I'm a-goin', I tell ye! I'll git rich...an' come back an fight him fur the farm he stole - an' I'll kick ye both out in the road...an' yer son along with ye - t'starve an' die!

.
I wish he was never born!...It's him - yew havin' him - a-purpose t'steal - that's changed everythin'!

He'll steal the farm fur ye!...a son t'steal! (144)

The distraught Abbie asks Eben whether he would still love her if she could "make it - 's if he'd never come up between us". Eben calculates he would. Abbie smothers the child.

When Eben learns of Abbie's horrid deed, he condemns her viciously and hastens to bring the sheriff after her. He soon realizes that he is as guilty as Abbie, admits this to her, and decides he must go with her to face his punishment at the hands of the sheriff.

Eben: I'm as guilty as yew be! He was the child
o' our sin.

(144) ibid., pp. 193-4

Abbie: I don't repent that sin! I hain't askn'
God t'fergive that!

Eben: Nor me - but it led up t'the other - an'
the murder ye did, ye did 'count o' me -
an' it's my murder, too.... (145)

Thus the unhappy love has led him to accept his death. In this final scene the better part of Eben triumphs, love wins out. But he had prepared his own catastrophe. The evil of selfishness that gripped Eben has been responsible for the chain of events that led to this tragic denouement. We may say that his recognition of Abbie as an heir to the farm is the point at which the tragic decline begins, that here is the instant we are aware of hamartia. The curse under which Eben is suffering is nothing other than his father's blood; a selfish acquisitive desire. The observations made by Simeon and Peter early in the play return to our mind; the two half-brothers repeatedly say of Eben,

Simeon: Like his Paw.

Peter: Dead spit an' image!

Simeon: Dog'll eat dog! (146)

We regret that Eben and Abbie must be lost, for we have felt that they deserved to enjoy their love. Even though we recognize that it was an illicit union - incestuous in some eyes - we feel that it was a good love, perhaps beyond good and evil. We must face the fact that their union did

(145) ibid., p. 203.

(146) ibid., p. 145.

provoke a murder, and for this they cannot be forgiven. We acquiesce in the right ending of a truly tragic plot. Our pity has been aroused for Eben and the woman he loved; we have our touch of horror - most striking in the murder by Abbie of her own child. In that Eben is a "different" character, his tragedy has moved us in a way different from that in which the little tragedies of daily life move us.

"The Great God Brown" is something of an experiment in the use of masks on the modern stage. Of this experiment O'Neill wrote,

...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 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. (147)

The "living drama of the recognizable human beings" in this play ~~is~~ relates the love of two men of apparently widely different temperaments, Dion Anthony and William Brown, for the same girl, Margaret. Dion is of a romantic and artistic nature, while Billy Brown is a hard-headed and materialistic business man. Dion is a failure, although he wins Margaret for his wife. Brown is a success in his chosen field but is

(147) ~~ibid.~~, p. 145. quoted in Barrett Clark's Eugene O'Neill,

disappointed in his love for Margaret. Because of his love for Margaret, Brown tries to help Dion by hiring him to work in the Brown office. Dion's pride suffers at this gesture of pity, but he does accept the job. He has taken to drinking, and finally dies as a result of it - in Brown's office. Brown, who has never stopped loving Margaret, sees the opportunity of enjoying satisfaction by assuming the role of Dion. This feat, which strains our willing suspension of disbelief almost to the breaking point, is accomplished by Brown's taking from the dead Dion the mask he has shown to the world. In Dion's mask Brown enjoys Margaret's love. The strain of living a double life (he cannot let it be known that Dion is dead), and the dissatisfaction of being loved for someone he really is not, combine to overwhelm Brown. He breaks under the strain.

From the outset our sympathy goes out to Dion Anthony. He is a man torn between two desires. The two conflicting elements in his character are indicated by his name; he is an amalgam of the spirit of Dionysus and the spirit of St. Anthony. Dion's soliloquy in the prologue to the play permits us to see the paradoxical nature of his character:

(with a suffering bewilderment) Why am I
afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm
and grace and song and laughter? Why am I
afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty
of flesh and the living colours of earth and
sky and sea? Why am I afraid, I who am not
afraid? Why am I afraid of love, I who love?
Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity?

Why must I hide myself in self-contempt
in order to understand? Why must I be so
ashamed of my strength, so proud of my
weakness? Why must I live in a cage like
a criminal, defying and hating, I who love
peace and friendship? ...Why was I born
with a skin, O God, that I must wear armor
in order to touch or to be touched? (148)

This explains the other self, the mask, that Dion shows to
the world.

We learn, as the action progresses, that Dion's misery
results from his adopting the Dioⁿysus role for which he is
not really fitted. The mask allows him to accept - after a
fashion - and to be accepted by the world. Consider the way
in which he gains the love of Margaret; it is not the real
Dion Anthony she loves, but his mask.

Margaret: // to the unmasked Dion// Who are you?
Why are you calling me? I don't know
you!

Dion: (heart-brokenly) I love you!

Margaret: (freezingly) Is this a joke -
or are you drunk?

Dion: (with a final pleading whisper) Margaret!
(But she only glares at him contemptuously.
Then with a sudden gesture he claps his
mask on and laughs wildly and bitterly)
Ha-ha-ha! That's one on you, Peg! (149)

Paradoxically enough he gladly accepts this love he has
gained under false pretences. Dion is seeking a replacement

(148) O'Neill, op. cit., p. 315.

(149) ibid., p. 317.

for maternal affection. He had suffered with deep pity for his mother, or he was seized with what modern parlance calls a mother fixation. He relates this to Brown:

When he / Dion's father/ lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met the man before. Only at the second of my conception. After that we grew hostile with concealed shame. And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation....I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. (150)

But Margaret did not replace this affection. What she loved in him was his Dionysiac quality.

So Dion persists in his mask, doing his utmost to quiet the true self beneath. The St. Anthony quality reappears from time to time, suggesting that part of what it is combatting is the sort of materialism represented by Brown. We find Dion, who is being employed by Brown as the inspirational part of his architecture business, reading aloud from the "Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis. The line, "Keep thyself as a pilgrim, and a stranger upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world do not - belong", is particular apposite: the talent Dion might have used for nobler endeavors is prostituted.

That Brown has always been responsible for Dion's artificial front, that he was the original cause of Dion's

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(150) ibid., p. 333.

assuming the mask, is explained in the story from their childhood. Dion tells that he had been drawing in the sand Brown had come along and "kicked out" the picture;

It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry,
but him! I had loved and trusted him and
suddenly the good God was disproved in his
person and the evil and injustice of Man was
born! Every one called me cry-baby, so I be-
came silent for life and designed a mask of
the Bad Boy Pan in which to live ... (151)

This confession ended, Dion leaves his unhappy life. His particular tragedy ends here, although the play does not. His mask is picked up at his death by Brown - as we might have expected: Dion has made this accusation of Brown just before he died,

Brown loves me! He loves me because I have
always possessed the power he needed for love,
because I am love! (152)

And although the Great God Brown has appeared up to this point of the action to be the smug, satisfied materialist, we realize that even he, since he is a human being, has been secretly yearning for the love that Dion Anthony had sought. The mask assumed, Brown gets no more real satisfaction from it than had Dion. He is loved by Margaret, loved in a carnal way, - for the Dionysiac character he has assumed - but not for himself. Brown dies as unhappy as Dion. ^{Dion's} And Brown's tragedy are the same; their death's have been simply a repetition of the spiritual death of man.

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(151) ibid., p. 346

(152) ibid., p. 349

This tragedy results from the conflict in man of good and evil. The good here includes all the finer qualities of the human spirit: the artistic impulse, religious emotion, spiritual love - as represented in the real Dion Anthony; the evil, the reverse of these: the prostitution of artistic ability, the worship of the material world - as represented in the Great God William Brown - and carnal love - as represented in Margaret. The error of the heroes in this play is their attempt to satisfy their desire for the spiritual goods (a desire mocked at by the average man) by accepting a lesser and material good, i.e. by assuming the mask of Dionysus. The curse that has fostered this hamartia is the same that lay on the unfortunate Yank of "The Hairy Ape", the curse of undirected spiritual aspiration. In their ignorance, these characters have made the wrong choice. Unable to satisfy their spiritual yearning, they have sought compensation in the material world, and so provided their inevitable doom.

"The Great God Brown" does not offer scenes of intensely gripping horror, but the wilder scene of Dion just prior to his death, and the fascinating scenes of Brown's collapse as he tries to maintain the double role he has chosen for himself, are terrific enough for the purposes of tragedy. The pity we feel for the frustrated Dion and Brown who live a false life of compromise in a vain attempt to derive some satisfaction in a world of material pursuits, is amplified into huge proportions - the realization comes that the

particular tragedy of these two is in reality the tragedy of all mankind. Who cannot wisely direct his spiritual desires to legitimate satisfaction must bear the frustration that leads to the end met by Dion and Brown. We know that this must be so, and no matter how much we regret this truth, we accept it as inevitable - and just.

(I find "The Great God Brown" a very satisfying modern tragedy. I would admit the possibility that the use of masks presents difficult staging problems, and realize that the mask "business" on the stage might very well disconcert the spectator to the point where he would be obliged to withdraw his willing suspension of disbelief. I can only say that as a reading play - the staging difficulties thus overcome by the greatest of all directors, the imagination - this is most satisfying.)

Once again the theme of mis-directed spiritual aspiration is employed by O'Neill as he depicts the life story of Nina Leeds. "Strange Interlude" deals with the attempt of Nina to find compensation for the deep disappointment of her fiance's death. We learn that her fiance, Gordon, had been a remarkably fine person, an ideal man. Gordon treated Nina honorably; he did not possess her before leaving for overseas duty - from which he never returned. Consequently his death left her terribly frustrated - "I'm still Gordon's silly virgin! And Gordon is

muddy ashes! And I've lost my happiness forever!" (153)
Her first attempt at compensating for what she had failed to grant Gordon is a frantic giving of her body to the patients at the military hospital where she has been nursing. Later she regains a healthier mental attitude, and seeks a more normal way of answering the desires Gordon left unsatisfied.

Nina marries Sam Evans on the advice of her friend Dr. Darrell. If he does not answer her desire of an admirable lover, Sam will at least offer her security and give her children. Nina's first disappointment comes when she learns that, due to insanity in the Evans family, she must not bear Sam's child. To save the marriage Nina decides to bear a child for Sam by seeking some other man. She consults Darrell about this, and they decide that they can provide a child for Sam. The result of the union between Nina and Darrell is that they fall in love. Nina's problem is now complicated to this extent that she cannot have the man she loves, nor can she leave the man to whom she is married for fear of sending him mad. The compromise is made - Darrell will remain as her lover, Sam as her husband.

This three-cornered situation continues until the child Gordon is of the age to marry. Sam's death, at this point frees Nina to marry Ned Darrell. They are middle-aged now and find that the desire that prompted their union in young-

(153) ibid., p. 501

er days is not sufficient reason for their marrying now. Nina turns to the faithful old friend Charlie Marsden; she will live out the autumn of her life under his paternal care.

Nina Leeds completely dominates the action of "Strange Interlude" throughout its length of nine acts. We already have a profound pity for Nina by the time she first appears on the scene; it is enough to know that she has lost a fine man in the war. Our pity deepens as we realize the magnitude of her loss. Gordon has been a wonderful person; a handsome man, a great athlete, a college hero who was absolutely unspoiled, and who had a brilliant career ahead of him.

Pathetic, too, is the fact that Nina and Gordon had not married - had not fully enjoyed what their love promised before his death. Nina remained, as she bitterly phrases it, "Gordon's silly virgin!". This fact will surely move the most puritanical to some sympathy, and the extremest advocate of free-love with admiration.

That last night before he sailed - in his arms until my body ached - kisses until my lips were numb - knowing all that night - something in me knowing he would die, that he would never kiss me again - knowing this so surely yet with my cowardly brain lying, no, he'll come back and marry you, you'll be happy ever after and reel his children at your breast looking up with eyes so much like his, possessing eyes so happy in possessing you! (154) (Then violently) But Gordon never possessed me!

Although Nina's first attempt at compensation, giving herself to the patients at the military hospital, strikes us

with a fascinating horror, we cannot escape pitying this girl whose mind is obviously unsteady. We do not condemn her for this seeming immorality, rather the pathos is increased in her resultant nervous collapse. The final touch of pathos, tinged with irony, is her inability to find compensation in her marriage with Sam - she cannot bear his children.

Nina seeks in Darrell the lover that she would have ^{had} in Gordon, and which she cannot have in Sam. Her first move to Darrell is innocent enough; it is a justifiable means to the end of maintaining her marriage with Sam. (Their attempt to maintain an objective attitude to this proposed union is indicated by their use of the third person.)

Nina: ...But she is ashamed. It's adultery.
It's wrong.

Darrell: Wrong! Would she rather see her husband
wind up in an asylum? (155)

This does, however amount to the sin of hybris; Nina and Darrell have, in effect, assumed godhead in deciding to take what nature prohibits. The tragic result of this union, entered with apparently scientific detachment, is that Nina and Darrell fall in love; but it must remain an illicit love. Darrell's fleeing to Europe is unsuccessful in quieting the passion that has arisen between them. On his return the same wretched three-cornered arrangement is resumed:

(155) ibid., p. 569

Darrell: You mean - I can be -
your lover again?

Nina: Isn't that the nearest we can come
to making everyone happy? That's
all that counts. (156)

A further result of this illicit love is that it is losing
for Nina the love of her child. Darrell makes this obser-
vation of young Gordon:

Children have sure intuitions. He feels
cheated of your love - by me. So he's con-
centrating his affections on Sam whose love
he knows is secure, and withdrawing from you. (157)

And the final ironic twist of tragedy is that, as we have
observed, Nina and Darrell cannot accept each other when
Sam's death has finally freed them. Nina turns to the pat-
ernal protection of old Charlie.

Nina: Ned's just proposed to me. I refused him,
Charlie. I don't love him any more.

Marsden: I suspected as much. Then whom do you
love, Nina Cara Nina?

Nina: (sadly smiling) You, Charlie, I suppose.
I have always loved your love for me...
Will you let me rot away in peace?

Marsden: All my life I've waited to bring you
peace. (158)

With this, Nina's long catastrophe comes to a close. Her
turning to Marsden represents no triumph, but rather her
resigned acceptance of rest after her unhappy life.

(156) ibid., p. 612

(157) ibid., p. 625

(158) ibid., p. 679

A rather different effect is achieved by O'Neill in the prolongation of the catastrophe. What the tragedy loses in intensity it gains in duration. Nina's tragedy has been her attempt to find on this earth the satisfaction that remains in another world. Her love for the Ideal that is Gordon can never be satisfied by the real substitutes to be found on earth. Sam, Darrell, and Marsden all participate in the Gordon ideal: Sam, the role of the good provider; Darrell, the role of satisfying lover; and Marsden, that of protector and comforter. None of these substitutes offer ultimate satisfaction; indeed, each demands another sacrifice. Nina's error has been the accepting of illegitimate substitutions - principally the love of Darrell. The curse that had fallen on Yank and on Dion Anthony and Brown struck Nina - the curse of not knowing how to satisfy spiritual aspiration. There is a difference in "Strange Interlude", however; it is not simply that Nina's spiritual aspirations were not directed, they were mis-directed. She has been seeking solace in a materialistic metaphysic:

I was trying to pray. I tried hard to pray to the modern science God. I thought of a million light years to a spiral nebula - one other universe among innumerable others. But how could that God care about our trifling misery of death-born-of-birth? I couldn't believe in Him, and I wouldn't if I could. I'd rather imitate His indifference and prove I had that one trait at least in common! (159)

And although she expresses dissatisfaction in the solace of

(159) ibid., p. 523

science, it is to science she returns in an attempt to solve the difficulties of her fruitless marriage with Sam. Nina has provided for her own tragedy, and yet we pity her. We feel that her initial misfortune has earned her the right to some happiness here below. But since she chose such devious ways to that happiness, we agree that the doom she will suffer and has suffered is just. Her symbolic value, like that of the other of O'Neill's tragic heroes, has magnified ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ the emotion she has aroused, and the cathartic effect has been achieved.

O'Neill reached the zenith of his dramatic production to the present with his admirable trilogy, "Mourning Becomes Electra". This is the familiar story of the tragic loves and hates of Clytemnestra and Electra - Christine and Lavinia Mannon in O'Neill's play. The first part, "Homecoming", introduces the love of Christine for Brant, and the murder of Ezra Mannon; the second part, "Hunted", deals with Lavinia's vengeance on her mother - the murder of Brant, and the suicide of Christine; the third part, "Haunted" with the unsuccessful attempt of Lavinia and Orin to find a normal life of love and marriage, and ends with the suicide of Orin and the solitude of Lavinia.

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(160) Note that O'Neill's convention of permitting the characters to speak their thoughts aloud contributes to the effect of moving this drama - and, hence, the emotions it arouses - from the realm of normal life as we know it or have come to accept it as represented on the stage.

O'Neill's handling of the Electra story presents a plot technique similar to that of "The Great God Brown". We have the two consecutive heroes, both representing the same human tragedy. There is a difference which will become apparent, and which marks an improvement in O'Neill's technique. Christine is the predominant figure in the first part of the play, and it is here that she prepares the tragedy that she meets in the second. Christine and Lavinia are equally prominent in the second part - Lavinia as avenger, and Christine as victim. Lavinia has prepared her own tragedy in the second part of the play; the third part, which she dominates, contains the culmination of her tragedy.

Even though Christine is occupied almost from the very outset with her attempt to enjoy the illicit love of Brant, she earns our sympathy. We rather feel that she deserves the love Brant is able to give her. She faces Lavinia's accusation of infidelity with this:

Christine: (with strident intensity) You would understand if you were the wife of a man you hated!

Lavinia: (horrified - with a glance at the portrait) Don't! Don't say that - before him! I won't listen

Christine: ... You will listen! I'm talking to you as a woman now, not as mother to daughter! ... You've called me vile and shameless! Well, I want you to know that's what I've felt about myself for over twenty years, giving my body to a man I -

... I loved him once - before I married him...
But marriage soon turned his romance into disgust! (161)

(161) ibid., pp. 713-714.

There is, further, a pathetic irony in that Christine is unable to enjoy the love of Brant even after the horrible sacrifice she has made to gain it. She and Brant are never able to sail away to the Blessed Isles of the South Seas, the Isles that have meant happiness to them:

Christine:And we will be happy - once we're safe on your Blessed Islands!

Brant:(with a bitter, hopeless yearning)

Aye - the Blessed Isles - Maybe we can still find happiness and forget!...Aye! There's peace, and forgetfulness for us there - if we can ever find those islands now! (162)

And also her sacrifice of murdering Ezra has cost her the love of the one who has meant the most to her in life, Orin. Although the loss of those she has loved is Christine's fault, we cannot help feeling that the fault was not merely her own choosing. She suggests a Fate behind her actions, causing her to change from what she once was:

If I could only have stayed as I was then!
Why can't all of us remain innocent and loving
and trusting? But God won't leave us alone.
He twists and wrings and tortures our lives
with others' lives until - we poison each
other to death! (163)

Christine is a pathetic enough creature even though she is capable of exciting horror.

Even the scenes of horror for which Christine is responsible are tinged with pity. She is, for example, so overcome at the death of Ezra that she faints and is thus unable to hide her guilt from Lavinia. But whether pathetic

(162) ibid., p. 799

(163) ibid., p. 759.

or not, whether entirely responsible or not, Christine has sinned and sinned viciously; we regret, but recognize as necessary and just, her punishment in death. Christine's tragic error has been her attempt to find satisfaction for her frustrated desire in ^{the} illicit love of Brant. It is this that led to her subsequent crimes. She retains her nobility by accepting the authorship of her own death.

If Christine was the immediate cause of her own death Lavinia was the agent provocateur. Lavinia assumed the role of avenger and pursued her victim to the end. Nevertheless we have as much sympathy for her as for Christine. We learn early in the play that Lavinia has been born under an evil star; she is a child of hate:

(wincing again - stammers harshly) So I was born of your disgust! I've always guessed that, Mother - ever since I was little - when I used to come to you - with love - but you would always push me away! I've felt it ever since I can remember - your disgust!...Oh, I hate you! It's only right I should hate you! (164)

Lavinia's tragic tale is a long series of disappointments in love. To begin with, she loses her father at the hand of Christine; Ezra had been the object of Lavinia's deepest love. ("Oh, I'm so happy you're here!...You're the only man I'll ever love! I'm going to stay with you!") And despite her denial of her Mother's accusation, she has loved Brant. Orin has seen this and, in taunting Lavinia, offers proof of it:

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(164) ibid., p. 714.

...you remember the first mate, Wilkins,
on the voyage to Frisco?...I saw how you
wanted him!

.....
Adam Brant was a ship's officer, too, wasn't he?
Wilkins reminded you of Brant -

.....
...I've written about your adventures on my
lost islands! He'd been there too...Were you
thinking of that when we were there? (165)

Yet Lavinia is obliged to press her brother to kill Brant.
Finally she is unable to accept the wholesome love her
childhood sweetheart has for her. Perhaps the most touch-
ing of all is this, her last attempt at love: their love
would be perfectly legitimate, and they are already in
each others' arms when Lavinia suffers that slip of the
tongue that warns her she can never accept Peter.

Our love will drive the dead away! It will
shame them back into death! (At the topmost
pitch of desperate, frantic abandonment)
Want me! Take me, Adam! (She is brought back
to herself...laughing idiotically) Adam? Why
did I call you Adam?...

.....
(in a dead voice) I can't marry you, Peter.
You musn't ever see me again. (166)

That this pathetic creature is capable of the terrible
crimes that come of her desire for vengeance is a horrible
shock. She dictates the murder of Brant, holding Orin firm-
ly to the nasty job; Lavinia and her brother so vaunt their
victory over Christine that she is driven to take her own
life. Lavinia's domineering way with Orin during the last

(165) ibid., pp. 840-1

(166) ibid., p. 865

scenes of the play break his spirit and finally lead him to his suicide. The cruel determination and singleness of purpose thus displayed in Lavinia's character make her a horribly fascinating woman.

As a result, we accept the justice of her final desolation. She has nobly accepted the solitary death that will be hers. It is not for the terrible crimes catalogued immediately above that Lavinia turns to her doom, but in recognition of the fact that she has loved as illicitly as her mother. This was her tragic error.

The house of Mannon has been under the curse of the gods. We learn this from Orin, who has been compiling a history of the family,

A true history of all the family crimes, beginning with Grandfather Abe's - all of the crimes, including ours...

.....
Yes! I've tried to trace to its secret hiding place in the Mannon past the evil destiny behind our lives!.....

.....
Most of what I've written is about you! I found you the most interesting criminal of us all! (167)

This evil destiny smacks of incest. Every experience of love by the characters in "Mourning Becomes Electra" has the tinge of incest. The very affection of Lavinia for her father, and of Orin for his mother is obviously something more than the usual affection between parent and child. The most obvious, and certainly the most terribly gripping, example of the incest theme is in Orin's attempt to possess his

(167) ibid., p. 840

sister. But consider the strange fact that all the men concerned in the main action of the plot bear a striking resemblance to each other; first, this stage direction -

(...ORIN MANNON enters...One is at once struck by his startling family resemblance to EZRA MANNON and ADAM BRANT (whose likeness to each other we have seen in "Homecoming") 168

Then there is Brant's statement to Christine:

It would be damned queer if you fell in love with me because I recalled Ezra Mannon to you! 169

Orin says as he looks at Brant, whom he has just slain,

This is like my dream. I've killed him before - over and over.

.
Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own?...He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide! 170

Then, too, there is the reference to Wilkins, who reminded Lavinia of Brant, and Peter, whom Lavinia confuses with Brant! These are, in truth, one being - Man; just as Christine and Lavinia are Woman. Or, to carry the symbolism to its ultimate, these are the representatives of the struggle within the human breast.

The fundamental theme in this, perhaps the greatest tragic drama of our day, is the theme we have found in the

(168) ibid., p. 759

(169) ibid., p. 719

(170) ibid., p. 803

other plays of O'Neill: the tragedy of frustrated spiritual yearnings. The symbol of the Blessed Isles represents the realm of spiritual satisfaction. It is of these Isles that Orin thinks when he first returns from the war, the Isles to which he would like to carry his mother away with him, ("I'll make you happy! We'll leave Vinnie here and go away on a long voyage - to the South Seas ⁽¹⁷¹⁾"); this is Orin's attempt to sublimate the incestuous love he feels for his mother. It is to the Blessed Isles that Christine and Brant will escape - escape from the horror of illicit love. Lavinia and Orin are the only ones that ever do get there - and what tragic results the voyage produces!

What happened to Lavinia on the Isles changes her to a complete duplicate of her mother, not only in appearance, but in action. On her return from the Isles Lavinia indicates that she has been moved to seek physical love. Although she had loved Brant, for example, from a distance, she is now able to accept Peter in the closest embrace. Exactly what is to be found on these Blessed Isles is related by Lavinia:

There was something mysterious and beautiful - a good spirit - of love - coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world - the warm earth in the moonlight...the natives dancing naked and innocent - without knowledge of sin! (172)

(171) ibid., p. 808

(172) ibid., p. 834

There was innocent love! And it is the knowledge and desire of this innocent love that has filled Lavinia, and made her blossom forth into a beautiful and desirable woman. As a result Lavinia yearns to find this love in her own world - as her mother had - and with nothing but disappointment.

Lavinia discovers, as had Christine, that this wonderful love is not to be found in our world. The flesh of her partners intrudes - the material world is an obstacle to the enjoyment of the innocent love of the Blessed Isles. For love of the flesh is an evil, and we of the civilised world are condemned to this knowledge - the natives dancing naked and innocent are not. (A recurrence of the situation of Yank's envying the ignorant gorilla.) The Mannon women are condemned to illicit love - to taste, if their appetite is awakened, of fruit they know is forbidden; they find this fruit has a bitter taste.

So man finds that the innocent satisfaction of innocent desires is impossible in our world, and he must make do with what substitutes he can contrive. The key to this understanding of the plot is to be found in Orin's words:

I find artificial light more appropriate for my work // writing the history of the Mannons// - man's light, not God's - man's feeble striving to understanding himself, to exist for himself in the darkness! It's a symbol of his life - a lamp burning out in a room of waiting shadows. (173)

The innocent desires of the natives of the Blessed Isles are the spiritual desires of our world. The means to their satisfaction is not evident in our world. We are squinting beneath the dim glow of man's light, while the natives of the Blessed Isles see clearly by God's light.

"Mourning Becomes Electra" is the tragedy of humanity that has taken "man's light" for a guide. With this wealth of meaning lurking behind the immediate action on the stage, and the vast dimension assumed by the heroes in their symbolism, the play is able to produce a deep and telling effect - an effect as satisfying as that of many of the great tragic dramas of the past.

This ability to cast an aura of unreality over his stage also permits O'Neill to suggest a greater dimension in the heroes he introduces. If the O'Neill world of drama discourages comparison outside itself, the central figure in that world need be of dimensions that are heroic only in comparison with the other characters in that world. Once we agree to believe in all the characters of an O'Neill play, we can easily believe in one, or more, of them as being truly heroic.

The problem for O'Neill, then, is always the nice manipulation of the delicate combination of realism - an absolute necessity if his characters are to be con-

vincing - and of unreality - necessary to the production of O'Neill's hot-house heroes. By hot-house heroes, I mean that the O'Neill characters can enjoy their full and fruitful existence only within this carefully controlled atmosphere of the particular world of O'Neill's plays. That his heroes are of this sort is the major criticism of O'Neill's theatre. The illusion, that the world in which his characters are behaving is the only one to be considered, must be maintained; once this illusion falters and we begin to apply real-life standards to O'Neill's characters, the effectiveness of the play is lost. Usually O'Neill is able to maintain the illusion; hence his success, and his superiority as a writer of tragic drama to-day.

In the theatre of Eugene O'Neill we find the most satisfactory tragic heroes of the modern American stage. The O'Neill heroes exhibit the characteristics that are most nearly those of the great tragic heroes of the past. They are all recognizably human, but are at the same time sufficiently different in kind and degree from the average person of our real world.

O'Neill has contrived by various means to make his characters different in kind. He has used masks and other unrealistic staging devices which make an extra demand on the audience's willing suspension of disbelief. More satisfying in its results is O'Neill's ability to suggest that the action of his play takes place in a particular

world of its own. There is an atmosphere of seclusion in virtually all O'Neill plays, an atmosphere, as we have observed earlier, similar to that of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights. The result is that the audience is obliged to restrict its means of reference to the particular realm of the play alone; the characters in this circumscribed world of O'Neill's theatre do not permit of comparison with the world of our everyday life. I feel that O'Neill successfully captures the spectator's acquiescence in this. And as his ability matures, O'Neill is able to maintain this "world apart" atmosphere while admitting more and more of our familiar world to intrude; in "Mourning becomes Electra", we have Hazel and Peter, and the visitors in Seth's garden, who are people we might meet anywhere.

CONCLUSION

The broadest general conclusion we are obliged to draw is that the tragic heroes of modern American drama are unsatisfactory. They fail in one of two ways: either they are unconvincing characters, (i.e. they are not recognizably human beings), or they are too realistic. (i.e. simply "one of us", and not of heroic magnitude). Another reason why they are unsatisfactory tragic heroes is that they are not used for the purpose of tragedy.

If the main character of a tragic drama is unreal, and, hence, unconvincing, his dilemma will not affect the audience.¹ His emotions will appear as artificial as he himself, and will leave the audience unmoved. If, on the other hand, the hero is all too obviously "one of us",² there is the danger of identification, of the audience's identifying themselves with the hero. If the tragedy in the play is seen by the audience as being potentially their own, its effect is identical in kind with that of the tragedies of everyday life. When the audience is able to feel of the character before them, "there, but for the grace of God, go I", we can be sure that the play is not tragedy in the true sense. And the effect of great tragedy is that of purging the spectator of pity and fear, i.e. of

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- (1) The heroes of Maxwell Anderson are in this category.
 - (2) The heroes of Arthur Miller and Clifford Odets are of this sort; so, to a lesser extent, are those of Tennessee Williams.

leaving him refreshed and better able to face the tragedies of ordinary life. In order to do this, the dramatic tragedy must depict an extraordinary person in an extraordinary tragic situation: they must be different both in kind and degree.

If the ~~hero~~ has been used for purposes other than that of enacting a tragic drama, the fault is in the conception of the play as a whole rather than in the hero alone. The dramatist may have intended to make the play a vehicle for the expression of a philosophy, for example, and is, then, interested in producing something other than the cathartic effect. (This is a dangerous attitude for any artist, of course, for, if "art gets nothing done", we may assume that that which does get something done is not art.) We find, for example, that serious modern drama may have as its purpose the arousing of the spirit of social revolt.

A particular deviation from what we may call conventional tragic drama is to be found in the plays of Robinson Jeffers and, to some extent, in those of Tennessee Williams. I refer to the use of psychological interpretation of the motivation of the tragic characters. Jeffers has attempted to render classic Greek tragedy acceptable to modern audiences by means of this technique. The unhappy results of this technique is that the hero is changed from extraordinary to abnormal.

The explanation of the general failure of modern dramatists to create satisfactory tragic heroes may be simply that our time cannot accept the heroic in any art. We have seen that the great ages of tragic drama were marked by stirring national adventures - foreign conquests, the discovery of new lands - and by a strong religious faith; these were the ages of glorious hopes and glorious achievements. This can hardly be said of our age; ours is an age of sophistication. We live in a time of great scientific discovery and have sought the final answers to the riddle of the universe in science. But our sophistication is sad; our faith in science has not been redeemed. Having placed our hope in the material world, we find ourselves spiritually frustrated.

It has been said ³ that tragedy's methods may not commend themselves in an age of physical and mechanical sciences. The reason for this is given by Joseph Wood Krutch.

(Modern science has) been most fruitful of result when it has attempted to trace our most exalted feelings back to their basis in some primitive physiological urge; to analyze our art into the elements which serve to excite and satisfy some appetite which seems, when so examined, trivial enough, ... It has, then, humbled our dignity and clipped the wings of our aspirations.... To the man in the grip of a romantic passion and uncertain whether "love is all" or merely an infirmity of mind, the modern cure of souls can say no more than that the victim is suffering, perhaps, from a fixation....⁴

(3) cf. above, p. 26

(4) J.W.Krutch, The Modern Temper, Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1933, pp. 67-8

The tragic hero of modern American drama is an average man; he suffers most often from the curse of capitalistic economy or from a diseased psyche. He is incapable of truly heroic sentiments and does not attain really heroic stature (or only comparatively, in the circumscribed realm of his particular dramatic situation). He is actually just "one of us", and his dilemma is depressing to witness because it is potentially our own. The modern tragic hero of American drama cannot excite in us emotions that are extraordinary; he can never be the protagonist of a tragedy that will produce the true cathartic effect.

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