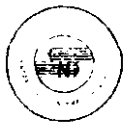


内 容 摘 要

被誉为“美国戏剧之父”的奥尼尔，其作品得到了国内外许多学者的关注。对奥尼尔的研究涉及到对奥尼尔戏剧作品的总体评价、各个创作阶段的作品及其艺术成就、戏剧创作手法、作品中的妇女形象，以及奥尼尔的悲剧意识等等各个方面。相对来说，从东方影响的角度来研究奥尼尔的评论却为数不多。对奥尼尔的东方主义的研究虽然只是奥尼尔研究的一个很小的分支，其重要性却是明显的。东西方一些学者曾经就东方影响进行过研究，但作为东方思想的一个重要流派——道家思想对奥尼尔的影响研究却多被忽略。尽管奥尼尔自己也曾指出他对道家思想的兴趣远远大于其它东方思想，但这方面的研究论著甚少。为弥补这一缺憾，本文从奥尼尔后期的三部作品入手来考察道家思想对奥尼尔的影响。这三部作品分别是《送冰的人来了》、《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》和《月照不幸人》。

道家要义在于道的自然守一，见素抱朴，少思寡欲，清静无为。道家是对自性及客观世界都视为虚幻的哲学，提倡内心平静和谐，反对充满矛盾冲突的物质世界。造生万物的道和揭示这个世界永恒变化规律的阴阳论是道家的基本思想。道家的最高人生理想是实现“天人合一”，超脱个人自身的诸多局限，还人以自然的本来面目。

道家思想对奥尼尔的影响可以从外部和内部两方面来进行考察。对于奥尼尔而言从外部的考察主要涉及其家庭背景的研究。爱尔兰人的神秘天性，天主教幻想的破灭以及不幸的童年都是促使奥尼尔把兴趣转向东方思想的重要因素。之后，青年时期的奥尼尔对老庄著作进行的深入阅读，使他对道家思想有了深刻而全面的理解，并为其晚年能够在道家思想的慰藉下度过艰难的岁月铺设了道路。他后期的这三部伟大作品可以说是在道家思想的影响下创作完成的。这三部作品的创作地点“大道别墅”以及在此创作期间对中国文化思想兴

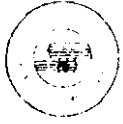


趣浓厚的妻子对奥尼尔的影响都是从旁的有利见证。

外部的考察必不可少，内部的研究却至关重要。作者将重点放在对奥尼尔这三部后期作品的文本分析上，从作品的题材、风格、角色的人生态度和价值观以及主题等几个方面来考察道家思想对其后期创作的影响。这三部剧作在题材上都属于怀旧剧，是作者垂暮之年对自己父母、兄长、及亲密朋友的深切怀念。晚年的奥尼尔返回到自己创作生涯的最初时期，体现了道家“复归其根”的思想。从风格上对奥尼尔早、中、后期作品进行的对比分析表明，道家提倡的“返朴归真”是此三部作品风格的主要特点。“无为”、“不争”、“人生如梦”、“天人合一”的道家思想，强调人应少私寡欲，清静无为，对世界的认识应抱持虚幻的态度，认为人与自然，人与外物，主体与客体之间的关系不是对立、隔离的，而是一体、合一的。这种从道家思想折射的人生态度在这三部作品的主要人物身上都得到了充分展示。生与死、爱与恨、过去与现在的主题是奥尼尔后期作品一个主要特点。生死、爱恨、过去、现在这些对立面之间虽有看似不可调和的矛盾与冲突，在奥尼尔后期的这三部剧作中却充分展示了这些对立面之间的互相渗透、互相转化的协调关系，从而体现了道家思想中阴阳学说的主旨。

本文从内部与外部两方面考察了道家思想对奥尼尔后期创作的影响，从而得出的结论是《送冰的人来了》、《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》和《月照不幸人》这三部剧作无论是在题材、风格、主题还是在角色对人生的态度上都明显受到道家思想的影响，进而证明了从道家思想影响入手研究奥尼尔的必要性。

关键词： 尤金·奥尼尔 / 后期剧作 / 道家思想 / 影响

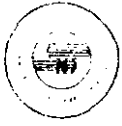


Abstract

The critical studies of Eugene O'Neill range from general discussions of his work to discussions that focus on his theatrical techniques, his tragic vision, his sensitivity to the impact of black and immigrant minorities in American life, and the treatment of women in his plays. The study of Eugene O'Neill from the angle of Oriental influence is a comparatively less explored area. A minor branch as it is, it is yet significant in O'Neill criticism. Although O'Neill's Orientalism has been studied by some critics in both the East and the West, few monographs at home and abroad have specifically discussed the influence of Taoism, a particular school of Eastern philosophy, which, as O'Neill asserted, appealed to him more than other schools of Oriental thoughts. In order to compensate for this limitation, the present thesis sets out to provide a relatively thorough study of Taoist influence on O'Neill's art. The author focuses on the three plays O'Neill created in the last but the greatest path of his writing career – *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Days Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* – to examine the influence of Taoist principles.

Taoism stresses spontaneity, simplicity, passivity and the suspicion that the self and the objective world are illusions. It emphasizes unity, peace and the spiritual rather than division, struggle and the material. Taoism points out the indefinable Tao, which regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the universe and suggests yin/yang dynamic that explains the constant process of transformation and symbolizes the hidden, rhythmic unity of countless oppositions. Taoist philosophy deals with the pursuit of perfection, with the union of an individual human being with nature.

Driven by the need to resolve the inner conflicts that resulted from his dualistic vision, O'Neill turned to Taoism. His Irish Heritage, Catholic school background and miserable childhood all contributed to this turn. The spiritual odyssey he began at an early age turned out to be a lifetime. His considerable reading in Taoism in the 1920s, together with the influence of his third wife, Carlotta, an ardent student of Chinese culture and thought, enabled his accurate and deep understanding of Taoist



principles, and in turn helped him endure his last lonely suffering years. “Tao House”, the name O’Neill gave to the residence where he produced these three last and greatest plays is a good indication of his interest in Taoism at the time.

Taoist element is evident in these final tragedies. Firstly, by examining the style and subject matter of the three final works in comparison with those of the plays O’Neill wrote in the early and middle periods, the present author intends to prove that Taoist view – “return to the root” and “return to simplicity” – has found its clear expression in the late plays. Secondly, O’Neill’s interest in “the force behind” which is shown frequently through the words by his characters of these plays reveals the influence of the Tao, the basic concept of Taoism, on O’Neill. Thirdly, Passivity on the part of all the main characters is shaped by another principle of Taoism – “Wu Wei”. Fourthly, the dynamic polarity – yin and yang helps O’Neill develop a dynamic vision of reality and harmonize the thematic oppositions between life and death, love and hate, past and future in the late plays. Fifthly, the theme of the pipe dream represents another major connection of O’Neill’s late plays to Taoism. In the three works, Chuang Tzu’s view of life as a dream or an illusion is shared by O’Neill’s characters. Lastly but equally importantly, the union of an individual human being with nature pursued by Taoists is reached by Edmund, the protagonist in *Long Days Journey into Night*, who, in fact, is O’Neill himself. Although the experience of being united with the universe is transitory, O’Neill, a western writer, brought up against a dualistic western background, finally, through Edmund, found internal peace and satisfaction.

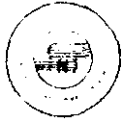
Derived from the detailed analysis of these three late plays, this conclusion can be drawn: the Taoist influence permeates many aspects of the plays: subject matter, style, characterization, and theme. Thus the approach of Taoist influence to the study of O’Neill’s art proves to be significant.

Key Words: Eugene O’Neill Late Plays Taoism Influence



Acknowledgements

This thesis concludes my three years' study at the English Department of Central China Normal University. I wish to express my appreciation to all my teachers in the English Department, to whom I owe much of my knowledge in the English language, linguistics, translation, and especially in literature. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, associate professor Chen Lihua. Without the generous support she has given, this study might not have been conceived, and written. She helped guide me to this thesis, develop and synthesize my ideas, and advised me countless times during the process of composition.



Introduction

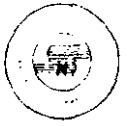
If one were to climb the beanstalk of American drama, what would be discovered at the very top is a giant. His name is Eugene O'Neill. Not only was Eugene O'Neill the nation's first major playwright, he was the first to explore serious themes in the theater and to experiment with theatrical conventions. His plays were translated and staged all over the world; he won the Pulitzer Prize four times and won the Nobel Prize in 1936.

Throughout his career, O'Neill has created a sense of unease in literary and dramatic circles. He thought that his mission as a dramatist was to dig at the roots of the sickness today, which he defined as the death of the old God (echoing Nietzsche) and the failure of science and materialism to provide a new one satisfactory to the remnants of man's primitive religious instincts. In a remark to the critic Joseph Wood Krutch, O'Neill pointed out the fundamental difference between himself and majority of modern dramatists: "Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God."(Tornqvist 1968: 11) But since he had lost his faith in God at an early period in his life, then what is the "God" he referred to? Some scholars thought that the answer could be found in Oriental philosophy. Reacting to this view, O'Neill answered in the negative. Writing to Frederic Carpenter in 1932, O'Neill concluded that Eastern mystical systems were not appropriate to the needs and concerns of Western man. And he claimed, "I do not think they have influenced my plays at all. At least, not consciously."(Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 401) Not all critics of O'Neill's drama have been as



willing as the playwright to discount an Oriental influence on his work, however. Arthur Hobson Quinn asserted as early as 1926 that the “poet and mystic” in O’Neill constituted the profoundest part of his temperament (Robinson 1982: 2). More recent critics dismissed the playwright’s disclaimer of interest in Eastern thought, but limited its impact to a few plays from the 1920s, mainly *The Fountain*, *Marco Millions*, *Lazarus Laughed* and *Strange Interlude*; Doris Alexander and I.M. Raghavacharyulu are the most prominent members of this school (Robinson 1982). Only one O’Neill scholar – Frederic Carpenter – has asserted that O’Neill’s vision betrays deep and consistent affinities with Eastern mystical thought, by stating: “The ‘transcendental’ tragedy of the later O’Neill achieves a goal much like that of the Oriental religion and philosophy which ‘lured’ O’Neill throughout his life, and which found final expression in ‘Tao House’.”(Carpenter 1979: 76) A 1966 essay by Carpenter further describes O’Neill’s Orientalism as “the most important and distinctive aspect of his art,” though also “the most difficult to define.”(Carpenter 1966: 208) Thus, a minor but significant branch of O’Neill criticism has for some time held that Eastern religions illuminate some important aspects of his art. Then in 1982 appeared a book, which was the first extensive study of this subject that had ever been attempted. In this book, James Robinson claimed that O’Neill’s affinity to Eastern mysticism was throughout his whole career, from the early sea plays to the final tragedies.

The present thesis does not aim to demonstrate the influence of Oriental sources on all his works as a whole or on one play in particular. Rather, the author of the thesis proposes to illuminate O’Neill’s affinity to one particular school of Oriental philosophy – Taoism in the final phase of his career. Reasons for this

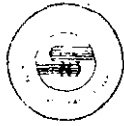


attempt are not few. First of all, among the Oriental thoughts, Taoism is O'Neill's favorite. Once in a letter to Carpenter, the playwright indicated, "the mysticism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu probably interested me more than any other Oriental writings." (Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 401) Secondly, the last period is the most important period of his career during which he conceived and produced his finest works such as *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Days Journey into Night*, and *The Moon for the Misbegotten*. Thirdly, during the last but best period of his career, the physical tremor and unqualified mental despair tormented him so much that he was most likely to feel a more urgent need than ever before for seeking a refuge to escape.

Structurally, this thesis consists of four parts besides an introduction. Part One provides an overview of Taoism. Taoism as a school of Oriental philosophy, together with its earlier classics, is briefly introduced. The core values of Taoism, the difference between Taoism and Western thought, and the significance of Taoism in the Western World of the 20th Century are also referred to. In Part Two, Eugene O'Neill's affinity with Taoism, as a result of his Irish Heritage, his early life experience, his involvement in Taoism, his third wife's influence and the agonizing years in "Tao House", is carefully dealt with through a biographical survey. Part Three offers a detailed analysis of the affinity between Taoist principles and O'Neill's late plays – *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. The analysis is carried out from the following aspects: "return to the root" – memory plays, "return to simplicity" – simplicity in style, the Tao – "the force behind", non-action, yin and yang – the harmony of thematic oppositions, the view of life as a dream, and the union of man with nature. A



conclusion is provided in Part Four. In the three final plays Taoism has informed O'Neill's dynamic vision of reality, influences the style and subject matter, moulds the values and attitudes of his protagonists, and shapes the symbolism and thematic oppositions of the three plays. Therefore, the significance of the approach of Taoist influence to O'Neill's art is called attention to.

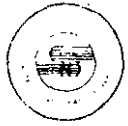


I. An Overview of Taoism

1.1 Taoism and Taoist Classics

Taoism is the indigenous philosophical tradition that has shaped Chinese life for more than 2,000 years. Furthermore, Taoist philosophy has found its way into all cultures influenced by China. In the broadest sense, a Taoist attitude toward life can be seen in the accepting and yielding the joyful and carefree sides of the Chinese character. More strictly defined, Taoism includes: the ideas and attitudes peculiar to *Lao Tzu* (or *Tao Te Ching*), *Chuang Tzu*, and related writings. The sayings of Lao Tzu and the books of Chuang Tzu are usually regarded as the earlier classics of Taoism.

The oldest text of Taoism, the Chinese philosophy is *Tao Te Ching*, translated as the “*Scripture of the Tao and the Virtue*” or the “*Way and Its Power*”. Known also as *Lao Tzu* after its author, a philosopher of the sixth century B.C., this is a short text of about five thousand characters. Because of this feature it has also been named the “*Scripture in Five Thousand Words*.” The text divides into eighty-one chapters and two major sections. The first section deals with the Tao (chaps. 1-37); the second with de or Virtue (chaps.38-81). It focuses strongly on cosmology and the political role of the sage. It deeply deplores the disintegration of this world and advises the return to simplicity in life and mind as the way to its restoration. Lao Tzu’s book is brief enough, yet in it he spoke about many things and sometimes his meaning opens up many different interpretations. *Tao Te Ching* can be read in several different ways, but first and foremost, it is widely accepted as a work that

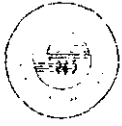


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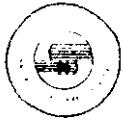
presents a certain cosmological interpretation of the universe and provides instruction on how to live in perfect harmony with this universe to create a world envisioned as ideal. Together with *Tao Te Ching* is *Chuang Tzu*, both of which have shaped and influenced Chinese thought like no other text. In *Chuang Tzu*, we have a well-developed philosophy. Whereas *Tao Te Ching* is addressed to the sage-king, *Chuang Tzu* is the earliest surviving Chinese text to present a philosophy for private life, a wisdom for the individual. Whereas Lao Tzu in his book as well as in his life (in legend) was concerned with Taoist rule, Chuang Tzu, some generations later, rejected all participation in society. The philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu represents the main current of the Taoist teaching. The two books are the most important literature of Taoism.

1.2 The Core Values of Taoism

The Tao's spontaneity and simplicity form, with passivity, the central virtues of Taoism. Vacancy, stillness, placidity, tastelessness, quietude, silence and non-action would be found to be the characteristics of Taoism. Taoism preaches the virtues of indifference to the world, renunciation of desire, and a balance between extremes of behavior. The essential teaching is to withdraw from society and to be without worldly fame.

The Tao

The most important and basic concept of Taoism is the Tao. Tao can be roughly translated into English as "path", or "the way". It is basically indefinable. It

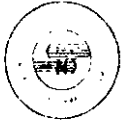


has to be experienced. It refers to a power which envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites. The Tao cannot be described in ordinary language. It is beyond language. As *Tao Te Ching* says, “The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way.” (Waley 1988: 3) All conscious attempts to reach the Tao by means of human sense faculties are bound to fail. Human eyes and ears are limited to the realities of this world; they are attuned to the objects around them, not to the inner subtleties, the underlying potency. The Tao is beyond human perception.

Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it,
It is called elusive.
Because the ear listens but cannot hear it,
It is called the rarefied.
Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it,
It is called the infinitesimal. (ibid.: 29)

However vague and elusive, the Tao is at the root of all existence. The Tao gives birth to all beings, nourishes them, and maintains them. It makes the world function, brings all beings to life, and orders the entire universe, ever transforming and changing continuously.

The Tao gave birth to the One;
The One gave birth successively to two things,
Three things,
Up to ten thousand. (ibid.: 91)



Yin and Yang

There are always two basic distinctions in nature, symbolized by yin and yang (sun and moon, heaven and earth, dark and light, chaos and order, etc.), but Taoism sees balance as the basic characteristic underlying these distinctions.

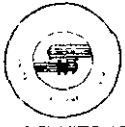
The myriad beings rely on yin and embrace yang.

In them, these energies are merged in harmony. (Kohn 1992: 47)

These two basic polarities (yin and yang) not only balance each other, but also complement each other in cycles. The sun is replaced by the moon, and then the moon is replaced by the sun. Summer is replaced by winter, then winter is replaced by summer. Light is replaced by dark, then dark is replaced by light. Everywhere in nature, you will see these basic cycles. The Tao moves by returning in endless cycles. By yielding, it overcomes, creating the ten thousand things, being from nonbeing. Taoists believe that because these seemingly opposite polarities are actually balanced and work together through cycles, a person can actually produce one from the other. This can be observed in a bamboo stick. Watch it bend with the wind: it overcomes the wind by yielding to it. If it were stiff, it would break because it's so brittle, but because it yields, it overcomes. Thus, weakness produces strength, and strength produces weakness. As yin and yang change into each other at their peak, so all opposites in the world alternate. Whatever is yin can only maintain its yin nature until it reaches its pinnacle. Then it reverts back to yang, and vice versa.

Return to Simplicity

Lao Tzu asserts that it is essential to return to simplicity. People should lead a

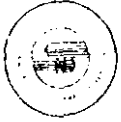


simple life on the outside and develop a pure mind within. One should try to recover his original purity and his harmony with the rhythm of the universe, give up sophistication and luxury.

Non-action (Wu Wei)

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day;
The practice of Tao consists in subtracting day by day,
Subtracting and yet again subtracting
Till one has reached inactivity.
But by this very inactivity
Everything can be activated. (Waley 1988: 55)

According to Taoism, non-action (Wu Wei, or inactivity) is the perfect way to keep the world flourishing and people happy. As to Taoists, everything has its own proper nature. Everything is happy, if it is allowed to be in accordance with its own nature. Every modification of nature is the cause of pain and suffering. Chuang Tzu said: "The duck's legs are short, but if we try to cut off a portion of them, the crane will feel grief. We are not to amputate what is by nature long, nor to lengthen what is by nature short." (Fung 1989: 9) In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu says, "As the heavy must be the foundation of the light, so quietness is lord and master of activity." (Waley 1988: 55) Thus Taoism inspires a sense of confidence in the normal course of nature, expressed in a mistrust of human intervention, the foundation for the Taoist non-intervention (Wu Wei). Chuang Tzu also points out that human beings do not feel at home in the world --- an understanding shared by many of his contemporaries. He claims that people are unhappy in the world because of their



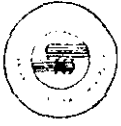
rationally determined minds. To him, the world is good as it is --- nothing one could do or say would make it better. It is reality to be accepted as such. To try to change the world would have sounded absurd to Chuang Tzu. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu try to show the happy excursion, the indulgence in the way of nonaction and self-enjoyment.

The Union of Man with Nature

Taoism is a nature-based philosophy. It starts and ends with observation of nature. In this way, it is just like science, but it is different in that science observes nature objectively, separate from the observer, whereas Taoism observes nature subjectively, seeing the observer and the observed as one entire system. This is a very important principle of Taoism: the union of man and nature. There is not just man, or just nature, but both. Taoism perceives no difference between man and nature, and man descends to an immanent plane where “self” evaporates and there exists no “self” to lose.

1.3 Taoism and the Western World of the 20th Century

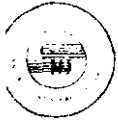
Taoism as a school of Eastern philosophy is quite different from the Western thought. Generally speaking, the Western philosophy as a whole puts its emphasis on reason, ego, will and morality, while the Taoist view holds that mystical intuition liberates the soul into a realm that transcends these entities. Beneath this difference lies a more profound one, involving contrasting visions of ultimate reality. The Western universe is a dualistic and conflictive one, in which man struggles against



himself, nature, history and a personal God. The Taoist cosmos is unified and timeless, where apparent dualities reveal themselves to be contraries that interpenetrate each other in a divine rhythmic movement.

The 20th century is the century of large-scale industrialism beyond reach of any 19th-century imagination. It is the century of mass warfare, of two world wars with toll in lives and property greater perhaps than the sum total of all preceding wars in history. It is a century of a great deal of the turbulence – political, economic, and social — which is the result of desires and aspirations that have been constantly escalating. It is a century too, which witnessed the rapid development of natural sciences not only leading to great gains in material wealth, but also giving rise to all kinds of pessimism. Modern science destroyed man's ability to believe unquestioningly. There appeared a reality with no mythical center, no God. To many western thinkers, artists and writers, the 20th century is a century characterized by a list of disturbances --- the loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the religious uncertainty, the violence of war and a nameless, faceless anxiety.

Such a list of disturbances harassed intelligent, thinking minds. Thus some great modern writers in this world where “God is dead”, explored Eastern philosophy to escape the twin western burdens of time and self and discover a God responsive to modern needs. As James Baird has observed, numerous modern poets have been “unable to discover in recent western culture life symbols to answer the demands of feeling,” and consequently have looked to the Orient, “perhaps fully hopeful of rebirth, but at least intent upon finding substitutions for what has been lost in the West.” (Frenz 1959: 47) O'Neill shared their despair and desires. Unable to respond to a Christian God declared dead by Nietzsche, he sought sustenance in Chinese mystical systems, hoping to satisfy his spiritual yearnings.

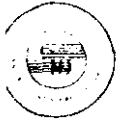


II. Taoism and Eugene O'Neill

2.1 Irish Heritage, Catholic School Background and Restless Childhood

It was at the dawn of his life, in his early formative, most impressionable years that Eugene O'Neill discovered Taoism. Undoubtedly, his early life experience helped prepare the way for O'Neill's later interest in Oriental thought, and Taoism in particular.

Any treatment of O'Neill's relationship to Oriental mysticism must begin with the Catholic faith in which he was raised and confirmed. Eugene O'Neill was born in New York into an Irish-Catholic theatrical family. Like most Irish Americans, his parents were devout Catholics. As a girl his mother had dreamed of becoming a nun; his famous actor-father, who was frequently taken for a Catholic priest, played the part of Christ in a play called *The Passion* with such intensity that people fell on their knees in prayer. James and Ella O'Neill, because of their Irish Catholic heritage, sent their son Eugene at age seven away from them to live at a Catholic boarding school that had strict religious teachers. From his seventh to his thirteenth year O'Neill received abundant religious instruction at the Catholic boarding schools he then attended. At the age of twelve when he received his first Holy Communion, O'Neill's Catholic faith seems to have been at its peak. But then in 1902, the year that according to O'Neill himself marked the turning point in his life, he entered a nonsectarian boarding school. A year later he stopped attending church. At the age of fourteen he had become a renegade. Catholic faith as spiritual

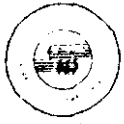


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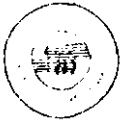
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consolation and support is so indispensable to the Irish Americans that it is hard to imagine what such a spiritual change could mean to the young O'Neill, a child, whose early life was restless and miserable. "Usually," O'Neill declared to a reporter in 1932, "a child has a regular, fixed home, but you might say I started as a trouper. I know only actors and the stage. My mother nursed me in the wings and in dressing rooms." (Unger 1972: 386) Admittedly, O'Neill's reasons for abandoning Catholicism two years after his confirmation were personal as well as philosophical. Firstly, the circumstances surrounding his attendance at two Catholic boarding schools were unfortunate. He vividly recalled years later "the outbursts of hysterical loneliness" (Robinson 1982: 38) that overtook him on his returns to his boarding schools. Life at the school was generally unpleasant, due to its rigid discipline. O'Neill nevertheless strived to be devout, hoping to find in the love of Jesus a substitute for the love of his family; but his devotion failed to console him for the absence of his parents. The unhappy connection between Catholic schooling and his neglectful parents may have prompted O'Neill's remark "religion is so cold." (Sheaffer 1968: 68) Secondly, but more importantly, the shattering discoveries that his mother had been a drug addict for years, and that his own birth had precipitated his mother's addiction, undoubtedly contributed to work this spiritual change in him. He prayed for the cure of his mother from her morphine addiction. But his prayers were futile, helping precipitate his final loss of belief in the benevolent Christian God. The comfortlessness of his Catholic instruction indirectly prompted O'Neill's later interest in Eastern thought, which offered less morality and hence less guilt. Ironically, however, that interest manifested a curiosity about theology that might never have existed without his Catholic school background. Moreover, O'Neill



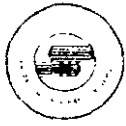
discovered mystical elements in Catholicism. In a way Roman Catholicism encouraged young Eugene to develop a mystical vision that eventually led him to turn east.

Furthermore, seeds cannot take root, if they fail to fall on fertile soil. O'Neill was nourishing ground indeed. The personal influence of his parents and their Irish heritage produced in him an Irish mysticism. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* O'Neill called himself a dark, or black, Irishman, with this mystic nature, which is supposed to put him in close touch with the stuff that dreams, poetry, and tragedy made on. Mystic and religious by nature, he distrusted rationalism, and searched incessantly for a mystical faith to replace the Catholicism he had abandoned in adolescence. The search inevitably led him to Oriental mysticism, especially, Taoism. The dramatist's natural mystical nature was nurtured in later years by his selective reading of and developing understanding of Taoism.

In some respects it was a providential act of fate that led to O'Neill's early rejection of his adolescent concept of Catholicism. For all the years following, subconsciously, he undertakes a spiritual odyssey in his life and work, seeking a substitute for his lost faith. In his search to replace a lost faith, the student, like O'Neill, tried "the mysticism of the East. First it was China and Lao Tzu that fascinated him."

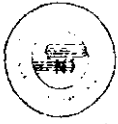
2.2 O'Neill's Involvement in Taoism

And what do you think was his next hiding place? Religion, no less – but as far away as he could run from home – in the defeatist mysticism of



the East. First it was China and Lao Tzu that fascinated him...(O'Neill 1954: 503).

The speech appears in *Days Without End*, written in 1932 by O'Neill. The person described is John Loving, whose spiritual and intellectual history strongly resembles O'Neill's. Writing to Frederic Carpenter the same year he completed *Days Without End*, O'Neill admitted that "many years ago", he "did considerable reading in oriental philosophy and religion." (Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 401) O'Neill studied Taoism during his period of immense interest in all religions in the early 1920s. Once in a letter to Carpenter, the playwright indicated, "the mysticism of Lao-Tse and Chuang-Tzu probably interested me more than any other Oriental writings." (ibid.: 401) No external evidence indicates precisely when he read the volume on Taoism. But various facts indicate that the playwright's involvement with Chinese philosophy and culture was deeper and broader than his interest in other Asian thoughts. He bought several books on Chinese poetry and art around 1922 and 1923 while researching his only play set in the Orient, *Marco Millions*. He recurrently toyed with the idea of writing a play about an ancient Chinese Emperor, and with this in mind read books on Chinese history. He even traveled to china at the end of 1928. Taoism was, it appears, the only one of the Eastern religions for which O'Neill read a translation of the sacred texts, not just a commentary on them. Legge's *The Texts of Taoism* offered one of the first translations (1891) of the *Tao Te Ching* and the writings of Chuang Tzu. It also contained Legge's general introduction to Taoism and his comments on each book of the works of both authors. O'Neill's volume on Taoism, then, provided both a primary knowledge and a scholarly explanation of this philosophy, courtesy of an

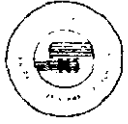


outstanding authority on Chinese philosophy.

2.3 Carlotta's Influence and the Years in "Tao House"

In 1919 O'Neill married Carlotta Monterey. Carlotta was an ardent student of Chinese culture, purchasing numerous books on Chinese history and art throughout her life, and maintaining friendships with Chinese who lived in America. One of such friends, Lin Yutang, once presented to the O'Neills two books, *My Country and My People* and *A Philosophy of Living*, which both repeatedly exposed his deep regard for the teachings of Chuang Tzu.

In 1937, Eugene and Carlotta moved to California where they arranged to build a new residence. Decorating its interior with Chinese art and furnishings, they called it "Tao House". O'Neill, supposedly, when giving such a name, was aware of Taoist Concepts. Thus the name "Tao House" was a good indication of O'Neill's interest in Taoism. Once the dramatist's good friend, Hamilton Basso, visited their penthouse in 1948 and described it in a subsequent article: "It is furnished with things O'Neill has gathered all over the world. The dominant note is Chinese. A small, heavy, vaguely catlike stone animal, turned out by a Chinese sculptor a few centuries before Christ, greets visitors as they enter, and there are ancient Chinese prints on the walls of the living room." (Clark 1947: 120) These furnishings are merely trappings, that is true, but through them O'Neill may possibly have externalized the feelings of inner peace that Taoism gave him, the quietism that brought him patience, forbearance and fortitude, particularly later in life in his last lonely suffering years.



Around the time the couple moved into “Tao House” in October of 1937, Carlotta acquired two books that concerned Taoism: Dwight Goddard’s *Lao-tzu’s Tao and Wui Wei* (a gift received in September 1937), and Dorothy Graham’s *Chinese Gardens* (purchased in March 1938). Containing numerous underlines and sidelines in Carlotta’s hand both books were almost certainly read shortly after they were acquired, for she was curious to learn about their dwelling’s name and wished to model their estate along Chinese lines (Sheaffer 1968: 472-473). In all likelihood, she discussed her reading with her husband; indeed, one of their habits was to read aloud to each other in the evenings and this was a close time in their marriage. Thus, in the years in Tao House, O’Neill possibly found himself thinking about even listening to, the oriental teachings he had studied years before.

Of all the places O’Neill called home during his restless life, “Tao House” was the one that held him the longest, the refuge where he conceived and wrote his last but best plays. During his years there he turned his back on the theater world, giving himself to the “soul-grinding” work and transforming his past into the autobiographical plays (*The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Days Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*) that made him America’s most important playwright. Undoubtedly, the immediate environment in which the three plays were composed played an important role in reviving O’Neill’s interest in Taoism.



III. Taoism and O'Neill's Late Plays

O'Neill's career as a playwright consisted of three periods. His early realist plays utilize his own experiences, especially as a seaman. In the 1920s he swept the old away and rejected realism. Works written in this period were not only ambitious in scale and subject matter, but also innovative in technique. Then between 1934 and 1946 a period of silence intervened in which O'Neill suffered from ill health but planned new plays. Year 1946 marked the beginning of the last and best phase of his great career. When he came back to Broadway he brought with him *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* with which he began the last and best phase of his great career. During his final period O'Neill returned to realism. These late works were viewed by O'Neill himself as the best, as he mentioned in a letter to Carpenter in 1945: " 'Long Day's Journey into Night' written in '40 - '41 is the best of all, I now think. And 'The Iceman Cometh' written in '39 - '40 is surely one of the top flight. So I think is 'A Moon for the Misbegotten' written in '41...."(Carpenter 1979: 73) With this opinion of the author, modern critical judgment, from 1946 to the present, has enthusiastically agreed.

3.1 "Return to the Root" & "Return to Simplicity"

The principle of "return to the root" is well manifested in the subject matter of his final plays and that of "return to simplicity" is in style. A general survey of his career as a whole may help reveal such "return".



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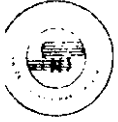
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Many of O'Neill's first plays were based on his experiences at sea. In these plays the dialogue was a striking departure from stage eloquence; it was crude natural, and slangy. Instead of the elegant parlors of drawing room comedy, audiences were faced with ships' holds, sailor's bars, and the kinds of characters who frequented them. The realism was the mode of these earliest works.

Around 1920, his plays became longer, their subject matter broader, and his aims more ambitious. Plays produced in this period range from Strindbergian domestic drama, Ibsenesque social plays, Irish dramatic tone poems, to expressionist melodramas. His first works had been stark and realistic; now he began to experiment with stage techniques partly borrowed from European theatre. He ignored normal play divisions of scenes and acts; paid no attention to the expected length of plays (*the Mourning Becomes Electra* sequence ran for nine hours); made his characters wear masks; split one character between two actors; and reintroduced ghosts, choruses and Shakespearean-style monologue and direct addresses to the audience. He employed sets, lighting, and sounds to enhance emotion rather than to represent a real place. He used drumbeats running through the whole performance in increasing tempo to regulate the pulse rate of the audience and involve them emotionally in the visionary dream-world of the protagonist's consciousness. Having chosen the theater as his form, he seemed determined to work at its limits, to redefine it. Important works from this period include *The Emperor Jones*, and *The Hairy Ape*, both of which are O'Neill's expressionistic masterpieces; *Desire Under the Elms* drawing on Greek themes of incest, infanticide, and fateful retribution; *Strange Interlude*, innovative and revolutionary in style and length, employing techniques new to the modern theatre

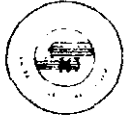


such as spoken asides or soliloquies to express the characters' hidden thoughts; *Mourning Becomes Electra*, based on Aeschylus's Oresteian trilogy, set in 19th-century New England, representing the playwright's most complete use of Greek forms, themes, and characters. During this period, nothing inhibited him. In a very American way he was, he confessed, "always trying to do the big thing". He wanted to create "big work" by tackling a "big subject"(Bigsby 1992: 15).

Then came his final plays. Many critics call these final plays O'Neill's best, which on many levels, can be seen and read many times without exhausting its possibilities. With these final plays, O'Neill's career came full circle. He had started with men of flesh and blood --- his shipmates, often bloody in a quite literal sense --- and he had found in that riotous crew the very qualities he speaks of to Carlotta: pity, understanding, forgiveness. Then followed years of experimentation with Greek, biblical, Freudian, sociological themes; with technical devices --- marks, sound effects, spectacle, and asides. Then, in these climactic plays, he came back to where he started: the simple, direct dramatization of a life situation he knew all too well --- his own. Then O'Neill who had restlessly experimented with form, deconstructed character, vocalized the subconscious, splintered the sensibility, now settled for a drama which, to some degree, seemed conventional. He rode no theory; there was no experimentation: He told these tales and we are left to make of it what we can.

3.1.1 "Return to the Root" --- Memory Plays

Something magical seemed to happen to O'Neill when he moved into "Tao



House”. In 1939 he put aside the massive eleven-play historical cycle and conceived his three greatest plays --- all containing varying degrees of mysticism, all confessional dramas based entirely on his family and friends: *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the misbegotten*, O'Neill's memorable memory plays. By the time he reached this last creative period, from 1939 to 1943, physical and mental travails and his years of deep introspection and Taoist quietude had tempered his soul

“I have beheld them, whither they go back.

See, all things howsoever they flourish

Return to the root from which they grew.” (Waley 1988: 33)

Lao Tzu said in *Tao Te Ching*. It seems that O'Neill strictly followed such doctrine. His final works are all memory plays.

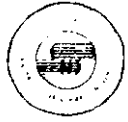
Commenting on *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill said in a letter to George Jean Nathan in 1940: “All of the characters are drawn from life, more or less, although not one of them is an exact portrait of an actual person. And the scene, Harry Hope's dump, is a composite of three places.” (Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 500) The play, therefore is “autobiographical” in setting and in characterization. It describes a group of drunken bums who inhabit Harry Hope's saloon in lower New York --- “a cheep ginmill” modeled closely on “the Hell-Hole” and “Jimmy-the-Priest's” of O'Neill's own beachcombing days. Many of the characters have been identified with his actual friends of that time: “Jimmy Tomorrow,” the gentle dreamer, with James Findlater Byth; “Hugo Kalman,” the anarchist with Hippolyte Hawel, an actual friend of the famous Emma Goldman; and “Larry Slade,” the disillusioned philosopher, with O'Neill's own mentor, Terry Carlin.



Long Day's Journey into Night is autobiographical and an agonized portrait of his own family. The Tyrones of the play are in fact modeled on the O'Neill family. It derives directly from the scarring effects of his family's tragic relationships--his mother and father, who loved and tormented each other; his older brother, who loved and corrupted him and died of alcoholism in middle age; and O'Neill himself, caught and torn between love for and rage at all three.

A moon for the Misbegotten was Eugene O'Neill's last finished play, a lament, conciliatory offering, and funerary monument for his older brother, Jamie, to whom he may have felt he did not do justice in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The play is set in September, 1923. At that time, Jamie O'Neill was in a sanatorium, where he had been carried in a strait jacket the previous May after his mother's death the year before, Jamie had quite literally drunk himself to death. His hair had turned white, he had all but lost his eyesight, and when he died in the sanatorium on November 8, he achieved perhaps the only tranquility he ever knew. In the play, Jamie is a dying man, but about his presence there is no suggestion of the physical horror that came to him in the end. O'Neill, while he did not mitigate the agonizing psychological causes of Jamie's behavior after his mother died, gave him in Josie Hogan a gentler fate. O'Neill wrote this biographical play to afford his alcoholic older brother, James O'Neill, Jr., a fictional moment of confessional and peace that he no doubt never had in life.

O'Neill chose the year 1912 as the time in which his two tragic autobiographical plays take place; certainly 1912 is the most turbulent year of his life and more importantly it is the beginning of his career. In that year's winter of his discontent O'Neill attempted suicide at Jimmy-the -Priest's, a New York



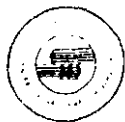
waterfront saloon that helped provide the setting for *The Iceman Cometh*. During that year O'Neill divorced from his first wife Kathleen Jenkins and learned that his chronic cold was really tuberculosis. On Christmas of that year he entered Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Connecticut, commencing a six-month stay that gave him a chance to pause and think about his life "for the first time." "It was in this enforced period of reflection that the urge to write (plays) first came to me." (Berlin 1993: 186-187) During that period he began to read seriously every play he "could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans --- practically all the classics --- and of course all the moderns. Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg,, (who) first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be." (ibid.) At Gaylord Farm Sanatorium O'Neill decided "to be an artist of nothing," (ibid.) as he later wrote to George Pierce Baker, in whose playwriting course he enrolled in Harvard in 1914. Then in the last period of his career, after he had produced so many great plays, O'Neill tried to "return to the root from which they (his works) grow", and created his greatest plays.

3.1.2 "Return to Simplicity" --- Simplicity in Style

Tao Te Ching asserts, Man should renounce all artificial contrivances that facilitate his work but lead to "cunning hearts" and agitated sounds in which the Tao will not dwell. As Lao Tzu puts it: "Give up learning and be free from fear, ... Give up skill and discard profit ... manifest plainness and embrace simplicity"(Kohn 1992: 49). Responding to this statement, O'Neill created his late plays into something he wanted to "make life reveal about itself, fully and deeply and



roundly”, something takes place “in a life not in a theatre”, and something “which can be produced with actors is secondary and incidental to him and even, quite unimportant – and so it would be a loss to him to sacrifice anything of the complete life for the sake of stage and audience” (Biggsby 1992: 16). Austerity, simplicity and biting honesty are the attributes of the best of his late plays: *The Iceman*, *Journey* and *Misbegotten*. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O’Neil got Edmund to express his own ideas. Edmund Tyrone, having told his father of all that has meaning for him, concludes his account of his quest by stating, “I couldn’t touch what I tried to tell you just now. I just stammered. That’s the best I’ll ever do.... Well it will be faithful realism, at least. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog-people.” (Baym 1985: 1310) He was wrong. His final works are not the ones of a stammerer, but of a man who had become a master of his art, a man who leaves no trace of himself in his work as Lao Tzu describes: “Perfect activity leaves no track behind it; perfect speech is like a jade worker whose tool leaves no mark.” (Waley 1988: 57) The technical experimentation of the 1920’s often caused him to beat frenetically against the limits of the stage. In the last three plays, the stage did all he asked of it without strain. The result is the highest achievement of the American realistic theatre. What he asks is simple. Ironically, O’Neill’s ultimate “experiment” was a return to four boards and a passion – to in other words, a confident reliance on his actors. He, who had gone to such elaborate lengths to ensure that his actors would fulfill his purposes, loading them with masks, asides, choral support and an infinity of pauses, now removed all exterior pressures. O’Neill has stripped all but the most minimal requirements from the stage, leaving the actors naked. Essentially, what is needed as setting for the last plays are table surfaces and chairs. Properties are few,



mostly bottles and glasses. Costume requirements are negligible. What O'Neill makes from his simple materials is extraordinary. The time scheme of his last plays is also simple and placed in the grain of the action without special technical elaboration. While in many earlier plays, O'Neill pretended that the carefully designed, detailed planning of the progress of time had meaning.

3.2 The Tao --- “the Force Behind”

Early in 1925, O'Neill once told his friend A. H. Quinn in a letter, “ I'm a most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always, always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the force behind --- (Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it --- Mystery, certainly)”(Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 195). Most probably, by the time he claimed his interest in “the force behind”, O'Neill had read some books of Taoism. Then “the force behind” termed by him is just another expression for the Tao termed by Taoists.

The Tao, the most important and basic concept of Taoism, is best described as the organic order underlying and structuring the world, and cannot be named or known, only intuited. It is unconscious and without name. It is organic in that it is not willful, but it is also order because it changes in predictable rhythms and orderly patterns. It cannot be seen, heard, or felt. Yet it can be reached. If one is to approach it, reason and the intellect have to be left behind. The Tao, though mother of the world and its origion, is present in every one, it appears in human beings in the form of spirit, true inner nature or virtue. Tao, or the Way, the Truth, is everywhere. In



Chuang Tzu, Tung Kuo Tzu asked Chuang Tzu : “Where is the so-called Tao?” Chuang Tzu said: “Every where.” ... Chuang Tzu said: “There is not a single thing without Tao. ...There are three terms: complete, all-embracing, and the whole. These three names are different, but denote the same reality; all refer to the one thing.” (Fung 1989: 7)

Having “the force behind” or the Tao in his mind, O’Neill created his great tragedies. In his late plays, readers may find that this idea haunts the characters from time to time. In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, Mary is aware of such force, thus she said: “None of us can help the things life has done to us. They’re done before you realize it” (Baym 1985: 1310) and “Let’s remember only that, and not try to understand what we cannot understand, or help things that cannot be helped. – the things life has done to us we cannot excuse or explain.” (ibid.: 1274) Similarly, in Act four, Edmund intuitively feels such force as well when he recalls his experience on the sea: “Like a saint’s vision of beatitude. Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For a second you see --- and seeing the secret, are the secret.” (ibid.:1309) In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Josie perceives such force in the moon: She stares at the sky and proclaims, “God forgive me, it’s a fine end to all my scheming, to sit here with the dead hugged to my breast, and the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke.” (Bogard [*Complete Plays*] 1988: 934) Despite all its “scheming”(the ingenious plots of the Hogans), James Tyrone can not love Josie in a real sense but only treats her as his forgiving mother. And the moon’s laughter at the scheme’s futility suggests the contempt for man’s plans of the distant life force, a theme. The moon represents the cosmic force, which knows the destiny of death that awaits those plots and their creators.



3.3 Non-action or “Wu Wei”

By non-action, or Wu Wei, Lao Tzu means: relaxation from earthly activity, from desire --- from the craving for the worldly fame.

O’Neill when he was writing his last plays in the “Tao House”, was sick at heart because of his ill health and because of what was happening in the world. Hitler was on the march. Germany invaded Poland in 1939, when *The Iceman Cometh* was being written. Great Britain and France then declared war on Germany. America entered the conflict in 1941, the year O’Neill completed *Long Day’s Journey*. The miserable state of the world was an important reason for O’Neill’s twelve-year “silence.” No new O’Neill play appeared on Broadway from 1934, when *Days Without End* was produced, to the 1946 *Iceman*. His despairing attitude is captured by Deborah Harford in *More Stately Mansions* when she hopes that “the Second Flood may come and rid the world of this stupid race of men and wash the earth clean.” (Berlin 1993: 185) O’Neill’s dark thoughts were expressed in numerous letters to his friends and in some public statements. At the time in 1939 when he wrote *The Iceman Cometh*, O’Neill’s response as “The whole business ... now has been so criminally, hoggishly stupid That is what sticks in one’s gorge, that man can never learn but must be always the same old God damned greedy, murderous, suicidal ass!” (Bogard [*Contour in Time*] 1988: 423) and “what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.” (Sheaffer 1968: 442) echoed coincidentally with Lao Tzu’s, “Those that would gain what is under heaven by tampering with it – I have seen that they do not succeed. For that which is under heaven is like a holy vessel, dangerous to temper with. Those that tamper

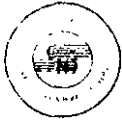


with it, harm it. Those that grab at it, lose it.” (Waley 1988: 61) Shocked by the ghastly acts of man, and sharing the collective neurosis of the time, writers could at best pose questions. All illusions shattered and values having lost all meaning, existence came to be given greater importance than the essence of life. A sensitive man like O’Neill could not but be influenced by the events. In such a situation, it dawned on him that the sickness of the time was spiritual. Depressed by the burden of struggle and questioning the ultimate use of it, O’Neill turned to Chinese philosophy and seemed to accept the idea, which is held by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, that passivity may constitute the best approach to life.

As we shall see, *Iceman, Journey* and *Misbegotten* all raise inaction to the level of art, thereby manifesting the quietism of Oriental mystical thought.

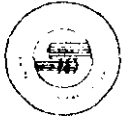
In *The Iceman Cometh*, Harry Hope’s saloon is a refuge where all the derelicts try to withdraw from the outside world. The world in which they live exists beyond desire. Whiskey alone sustains physical life. Hunger for food is not expressed, and notably no movement of any desire disturbs the quiet. Hickey’s arrival causes a stir, but as he leaves, things come back to normal.

When the curtain rises on Act 1, the derelicts in Hope’s hotel, slumbering and sleeping in their chairs and waiting for Hickey to visit them on one of his periodical benders. *The Iceman Cometh*’s opening scene seems to dramatize the ideal of inaction articulated in Taoism. “dis dump is like a morgue wid all dese bums passed out.” observes Rocky, the bar tender in Harry Hope’s saloon (Cohn 1966:417). But even when awake, the derelicts instinctively follow the ideal of Wu Wei enunciated by Chuang Tzu, in which perfect enjoyment is to be obtained by doing nothing. The calmness of the atmosphere was revealed by Larry Slade’s pronouncement to Parritt,



the young newcomer to the bar: “What is it? It’s ... the Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller. Don’t you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? ... No one here has to worry about where they’re going next ...” (ibid.: 422) Able to harmonize because they eschew the competition and frustration attendant upon action, these dregs live in a state resembling the Taoist golden age. “I’ve never known more contented men.” observes Larry (ibid.:427). Larry takes pride in being the most passive and serene of all, for he believes he has transcended the desires that propel men into activity. Formerly a member of the Anarchist-Socialist movement, he became disillusioned and “ took a seat in the grandstand of philosophical detachment to fall asleep observing the cannibals do their death dance”. (ibid.:416) Thus, he pursues the Oriental goal of “tranquility”, which also illuminates Larry’s philosophical temper: “such serenity was conducive to introspection.” (Robinson 1982: 172) Moreover, the other major character, the salesman Hickey, apparently corresponds to Larry in exhibiting the inner calm gained from transcendence of worldly strife. His gospel urges the derelicts to abandon all remaining desires, to “let yourself sink down to the bottom of the sea” where there is “not a single damned hope of dream left to nag you” (Cohn 1966: 479). The derelicts’ serenity, as both Larry and Hickey perceive, rests ultimately on “pipe dreams” about their happy pasts and productive futures: “they manage to get drunk, by hook or crook, and keep their pipe dreams, and that’s all they ask of life,” Larry comments (ibid.:427). And Hickey’s mission to strip away all remaining desires intends to liberate the men into the more genuine serenity that follows transcendence of the world.

Long Day’s Journey into Night also offers a passive confrontation with life.



The play's prevailing tone of silence accords with its static plot. Following the second act revelations of Edmund's tuberculosis and Mary's re-addiction, the situation does not change, but only intensifies. All gradually become resigned to the futility of any effort to escape a past containing Edmund's illness (the same disease which killed Mary's father), and Mary's drug habit. "All we can do is try to be resigned --- again," laments Tyrone, and "or be so drunk you can forget" responds Edmund (Baym 1985: 1297). Impressed by Taoism's passive acceptance of life, O'Neill had Mary claim that "none of us can help the things that life has done to us..." and "The only way is to make yourself not care" (ibid.: 1261-1262). The play's "action" is O'Neill's description of their paralysis, and their attempts to alleviate their misery through drink or drugs. Admittedly, their quietism does not produce the peaceful calm found at Harry Hope's saloon, but both plays manifest the same Oriental intuition that the wisest approach to existence lies in passivity, in relaxation from earthly activity and from the desire for change.

In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the influence of Wu Wei is not so obvious as in the previous two plays. However, the major character James Tyrone may also be found to be an alcoholic trying to accept the life as it is and enduring the torture of life by indulging in drinks and pipe dreams and by doing nothing. James is a modern man who is usually absorbed in deep reflection, lacking in will, suffering from self loathing, and yet donning a mask of bohemian jollity.

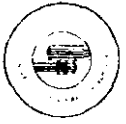
The three plays manifest the same Taoist intuition that the wisest approach to existence lies in non-action.



3.4 Yin and Yang – Harmony of thematic oppositions

In those sacred texts of Taoism, O'Neill not only found confirmation of his own mystical intuition about a universal force (called the Tao by Lao Tzu) but also discovered an encouraging variant of his own dualistic tragic vision as well. For as Jogn Henry Raleigh first pointed out, O'Neill viewed reality dualistically, as a series of unreconciled polar conflicts --- between land and sea, night and day, man and woman, past and present, life and death --- conflicts that doomed man to perpetual, futile struggle (Liu 1992: 21). But the early Taoist texts O'Neill read presented similar dualistic oppositions as ones of complementary polarity, in which the polar principles --- called yin and yang --- alternate and interpenetrate in the dynamic rhythm of the Tao.

The dynamic polarity --- yin and yang is another feature that distinguishes Taoism from other philosophies. Taoism finds that the world involves a constant process of transformation and these transformations operate according to the polar opposites *yin* and *yang*. Originally referring to the sunny and shady sides of a mountain, yin and yang had by Lao Tzu's time come to represent the polarity of all nature. The yin is dark, receptive, female, intuitive and still, and associated with the earth; the yang is light, aggressive, male, rational and active, and associated with heaven. These two forces are not static, but constantly changing in their relationship with each other. As one expands, the other diminishes until the point is reached where the process is reversed ---a cycle that continues throughout eternity. Moreover, Yin and yang also contain seeds of each other, so that these two opposites actually interpenetrate as well. Thus unified by interpenetration as well by



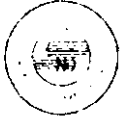
involvement in the same eternal cycle, yin and yang symbolize the hidden, rhythmic unity of countless phenomenal oppositions. The yin/yang dynamic explains an essential theme of the *Tao Te Ching*, the operation of the Tao by contraries. Hence, it is hardly surprising that Taoism appealed to the tormented O'Neill, who longed to transcend his western, dualistic world view and attain a vision of a larger, flowing unity that promised peace and harmony. In his late plays, O'Neill learnt to conceive reality in terms of dynamic polarity. All the three last plays struggle to harmonize their thematic oppositions between life and death, love and hate, past and present in the same way the Tao reconciles yin and yang: by projecting the opposing terms as interpenetrating, or as rhythmically alternating, or as both.

Life & Death in *The Iceman Cometh*

In *The Iceman Cometh*, the Taoist dynamic operates most obviously in the life-death opposites. Hickey, the main character of play, is a hardware drummer, comes to Harry Hope's twice a year regularly on a periodical drunk. He is actually the "iceman" of the title, and of course the clearest representative, and agent, of death in the play. Death comes in the person of Hickey, the son of a preacher who wishes to be a savior and brings life to the derelicts in Hope's saloon but comes the "death" of them, just as he was the death of his wife. Dudley Nichols, a friend of O'Neill and himself a writer, offers this explanation: "The iceman of the title is , of course, death. I don't think O'Neill ever explained, publicly, what he meant by the use of the archaic word, "cometh," but he told me at the time he was writing the play that he meant a combination of the poetic and biblical "Death cometh"... that is, cometh to all living..." (Berlin 1993: 166). The iceman represents death, which



is also pointed out by Larry Slade in the play when he learns that Hickey's wife is dead. "It fits," Slade says, "for Death was the Iceman Hickey called to his home." (Cohn 1966:496) However, Hickey has been awaited as a bringer of life, and in Act 1 the men recall happily the parties he has thrown. Larry in Act 1 talks about Hickey that "(he)'s a great one to make a joke of everything and cheer you up." (ibid.:417) Actually, what Hickey brings to the dregs is the touch of death in stead of salvation. When Hickey exposes their pipe dreams and takes the life out of their alcohol (as the derelicts repeatedly complain), the men shift toward death and only return to life after Hickey's departure. Moreover, after they dismiss his behavior as insane in Act 4, riotous life erupts in the bar. Nor is this interpenetration of life and death limited to Hickey, for it recurs in various contexts, involving both minor and major characters. As for Rosa, Parritt betrays a similar ambivalence. "She'll get life" in prison, Parritt states, knowing it will resemble death, for spiritually "she is dead and yet has to live." (ibid.:527) The equation of life and death also applies to the "End of the Line" saloon itself. "Dis dump is like a morgue wid all dese bums passed out", Rocky observes in act one (ibid.: 417). When Hickey exposes their pipe dreams and "takes the life out" of their alcohol (as the derelicts repeatedly complain), the men shift toward death and only return to life after Hickey's departure. Even Larry Slade, who remains directed toward death at the finish, participates in the life/death interfusion. Larry sagely informs Parritt that the pipe dream gives life to everyone in the bar; his own pipe dreams, of course, include a supposed yearning for death.

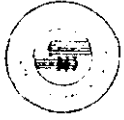


Life & Death in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*

The interpenetration of death and life is scarcely limited to *The Iceman Cometh*. Life-death relationship is also a strong focus of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, in which this dynamic polarity is presented in the protagonist --- James Tyrone. O'Neill once referred to the play as a fine unusual tragic comedy, in which death is balanced against life but at the same time is involved in it. James Tyrone, a drinker, still possessing some of his youthful "Irish charm", is the play's most explicit death-in-life figure. Josie and Hogan confront and baffle the Yankee, T. Stedman Harder, in a scene filled with Irish earthiness and linguistic playfulness, with O'Neill's comic writing. Still, even the comedy of Act 1 cannot erase that first image of James. It is Josie that first discovers death in him. As he's walking up the road, Josie describes: "Look at him when he thinks no one is watching, with his eyes on the ground. Like a dead man walking slow behind his own coffin." (Bogard [Complete Plays] 1988: 874) The description is apt. James Tyrone is spiritually dead and physically drinking himself to death because of a great burden of mind, which he eventually reveals to Josie in Act 3, Then when she kisses Tyrone she finds a touch of death on his lips:

--- (She pulls Tyrone's head back and laughingly kisses him on the lips. Her expression changes. She looks startled and confused, stirred and at the same time frightened. She forces a scornful laugh.) Och, there's no spirit in you! It's like kissing a corpse. (ibid.:928)

Close to the end of the second act, Jamie has quoted Keats in the knowledge that death is good, and that in welcoming it, man can find respite from terror, and in love, transcend pity:



“Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain
In such an ecstasy.
Finally a pervading relief” (ibid.:909)

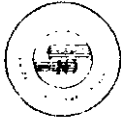
Later on, in Act 3 Tyrone tells Josie that he not only looks dead, in fact, he is dead “ever since (his) Mama died” (ibid.: 928). After Tyrone’s agonizing confession, Josie realizes that her love cannot save the life of the man whose sleep-stilled face has “the drained, exhausted peace of death” (ibid.: 933). Then, in Act 4 even Hogan notices the death in him.

(His eyes fall on Tyrone’s face. In spite of himself, he is startled --- in an awed, almost frightened whisper) Be God, he looks dead! (ibid.: 935)

Since the grieving, guilt-ridden Tyrone loves death more than Josie and since Josie finally recognizes it and still truly loves him, before the final curtain falls, Josie prays for him sincerely with a “sad, tender and pitying” voice: “May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim, darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace.” (ibid.: 946)

Love & Hate in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*

A Moon for the Misbegotten also mingles another pair of opposites --- love and hate --- in a similarly Taoist fashion. In Act 3, the play’s tender and lyrical climax, James Tyrone reveals his deep affection for his mother and his dependence on her when he makes his painful confession to Josie. When she gave up her dope, he gave up his drink, but when she was dying he began drinking again, “And one day she suddenly became ill.... I went crazy. Couldn’t face losing her.... I got drunk and



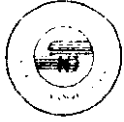
stayed drunk.” (ibid.:930) But this filled him with guilt because his mother saw that he had returned to drink. When she died, he brought her body back to New York from California, where they were living together, and on the train carrying his mother’s coffin he slept every night with a blonde hooker. This act is prodded by revenge derived from hatred. He hates his mother for he loves her so much that he cannot bear her leaving him, and cannot face losing her.

I know damned well just before she died she recognized me. She saw I was drunk. Then she closed her eyes so she couldn’t see, and was glad to die!... To whom I was a stranger. Cold and indifferent. Not worried about me any more. Free at last. Free from worry. From pain. From me... she’s rid of me at last.... It was like some plot I had to carry out.... it was if I wanted revenge --- because I’d been left alone --- because I knew I was lost, without any hope left --- that all I could do would be drink myself to death, because no one was left who could help me.” (ibid.:930-932)

However this hatred fills him with deepest guilt. He needs his mother’s forgiveness, but she is dead. Tortured by this love-hate feelings for his mother, James longs desperately for his mother’s forgiveness. Josie, recognizing James’s desperation that he needs a mother more than he needs a lover, becomes Jim’s mother: “--- I do forgive! ...As she forgives, do you hear me! As she loves and understands and forgives!” (ibid.: 933)

Love & Hate in *Long Days Journey into Night*

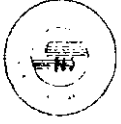
This love-hate dynamic polarity can be found in each of the four haunted Tyrones in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The four major characters meet in the



living room of the family's summer home at 8:30 A.M. of a day in August 1912 and torment one another and themselves until midnight. Tyrone is angry with Mary for her drug addiction; Mary accuses Tyrone of not understanding her, of drinking too much, of depriving her of friends and a decent home, and of making Jamie into a "boozer". Tyrone accuses Jamie of purposely corrupting Edmund and ruining his health out of jealousy of his younger and more talented brother and Mary blames her addiction on Edmund's birth while Jamie and Edmund charge their parents with not being good, responsible parents at all. Yet in spite of everything, Mary resolutely defends Tyrone against criticism from his sons. Mary, toward the end of Act 2, slips into the ultimate evasion. Speaking to Edmund about his brother, she says, "You shouldn't treat him with such contempt all the time. He's not to blame." (Baym 1985: 1272) and "He can't help being what the past made him. Any more than your father can. Or you. Or I" (ibid.:1264).

At the end of Act 2 when the men leave the house --- Edmund (with Jamie) to make his appointment with the doctor, and Tyrone to make his appointment at his club --- one wonders why they should ever want to come back. After such recrimination, how can they face each other again? Each one has said enough, it would seem, to make further communication impossible. But Mary, left alone, says something that marks a turning point.

(She stares about the room with frightened, forsaken eyes and whispers to herself) It's so lonely here. (Then her face hardens into bitter self-contempt) You're lying to yourself again. You wanted to get rid of them. Their contempt and disgust aren't pleasant company. You're glad they're gone. (She gives a little despairing laugh) Then Mother of God,



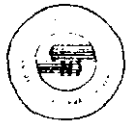
why do I feel so lonely? (ibid.:1279)

Now, after two acts of blaming all the others, and Life, for her plight --- even Edmund for having been born --- she admits she is lying to herself and means it. Five hours later (Act three), when she hears the men coming back, again she feels that strange ambivalence of wanting them to stay away, yet welcoming their return:

Why are they coming back? They don't want to. And I'd much rather be alone. (Suddenly her whole manner changes. She becomes pathetically relieved and eager) Oh, I'm so glad they've come! I've been so horribly lonely. (ibid.:1285)

When Tyrone enters, she "rises from her chair, her face lighting up lovingly --- with excited eagerness." (ibid.) Her ambivalent feeling about the men as they leave and as they return strikes us readers deeply. She loves and hates, condemns and yet forgives, at one and the same time. Then Mary's confessional moment here is the right moment when love and hate intermingle with each other. However this is only the first of a series, involving each of the men, that takes us in the last two acts beyond pity, beyond tears, to the awed silence of the last scene of the play. In Act 4 comes Jamie's confession, centering on his relations with Edmund.

--- Something I ought to have told you long ago --- for your own good.... You better take it seriously. ... Mama and Papa are right. I've been rotten bad influence. And worst of it is, I did it on purpose. ... Did it on purpose to make a bum of you. Or part of me did. A big part. That part that's been dead so long. That hates life. My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at times, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores



fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobs they really are made fun of work as sucker's game. Never wanted you succeed and make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet! [He stares at Edmund with increasing enmity.] And it was your being born that started Mama on dope. I know that's not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can't help hating your guts---! ... But don't get wrong idea, Kid. I love you more than I hate you. My saying what I'm telling you now proves it. I run the risk you'll hate me --- and you're all I've got left. ... I'd like to see you become the greatest success in the world. But you'd better be on your guard. Because I'll do my damnedest to make you fail. Can't help it. I hate myself. ... (ibid.:1316)

Again (as with Mary) comes the recognition of ambivalence --- how he loves Edmund, yet hates him, how he tries to ruin him to save himself from being the only failure in the house, yet runs the risk Edmund will hate him to warn him against himself. It is moving, passionate --- and true. Thus hate and love interpenetrate into each other so that Jamie cannot tell whether he loves more or hates more. Or he is just unable to distinguish love from hate and hate from love. Hate is derived from love, yet gives way to love. For the moment, love is hate and hate is love.

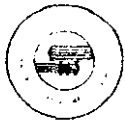
When the play draws to an end, the long day thus journeys into night when all are torn in a war between love and hate, and no one is sure which is the stronger emotion. In a 1940 letter to George Jean Nathan, O'Neill articulated his awareness of the plight of James, Mary, Jamie, and Edmund Tyrone: "At the final curtain there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time



innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget.” (Bogard [*Selected Letters*] 1988: 506) O’Neill’s words point up not only the interpenetration of love and hate, blame and forgiveness, understanding and not understanding but also the interpenetration of the inescapable past and the miserable present.

Past & Present in *Long Days Journey into Night*

The characters in *Long Day’s Journey* are embarked upon a journey that continually brings them home unfulfilled. Although their actual journey through time has been brief (historic time is very short), they are trapped in an eternal return. Like the denizens of Harry Hope’s saloon in *The Iceman Cometh*, they are awake inside a nightmare, unable to sleep, except during the waking moments of the day, when drunk (Mary cannot sleep at all). They are struggling to awake from the nightmare that is history, their history or story. They are sailors beached on the shores of endless time, unable to escape. This point is made again and again in the play by Tyrone, Mary, Edmund, and Jamie. Throughout *Long Day’s Journey into Night* the present and the past have come together in the search for the cause of the present misery. Each Tyrone gives a heart-rending account of the past. James Tyrone tells about the poverty that made him a miser and caused him to latch on to the money-making play, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which destroyed his considerable talent. Edmund reflects on his days at sea, a mystical experience, where for a second he saw the secret of life. He claims that “it was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a



fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!” (Baym 1985: 1309) The cynical and most lost of the Tyrones, Jamie, tells of his great dependence on his mother, how his drinking is connected to his mother’s drug addiction – “I’d begun to hope, if she’d beaten the game, I could, too.” (ibid.: 1314) He recalls the moment he first saw her “in the act with a hypo. Christ, I’d never dreamed before that any women but whores took dope!” (ibid.) And he reveals that he hates his brother, a hatred also connected with his feelings about Mama: “And it was your being born that started Mama on dope. I know that’s not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can’t help hating your guts!”. This immediately followed by, “I love you more than I hate you.” (ibid.: 1316) And Mary Tyrone tells of her early days when she thought she’d be a nun or a concert pianist, but then she met the dashing actor James Tyrone and her life was changed forever. Each Tyrone informs us about a past for which each is and is not responsible. The hellish life each lives now has been made by the past they all helped and did not help to make. When one turns to the actual working of individual memories in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, one is struck by the preponderance of the memory of Mary Tyrone; in fact one could say that for the first three acts this is what the play is about; not only is she the dominant figure in the play, the dominant thing about her is her ever-exfoliating memory. A rough tabulation made by John Henry Raleigh shows that in Act 1 she memorializes some six times; in Act 2, Scene 1 another six; in Act 2, Scene 2 fourteen; and in Act 4 some eighteen (Houchin 1993: 207). Although it is true that while she is off-stage in Act 4 the detailed picture by James Tyrone of his past and the respective revelations of the



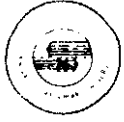
sons considerably reduce the preponderance of the Mother's memory, still she comes on at the end of Act 4 to dominate the conclusion of the play and to give a fairly full recapitulation of her key memory sequence: convent-nun-piano-wedding dress-happy wedding. Furthermore, O'Neill appears to have believed in the existence of a kind of physical or bodily memory, that is to say, the person you have once seen many years before never absolutely goes out of existence and can suddenly reappear, and not as a ghost either. So near the beginning of Act 1 when James kisses Mary:

Suddenly and startlingly ones sees in her face the girl she had once been, not a ghost of the dead, but still a living part of her. (Baym 1985: 1246)

So, literally, the young Mary Tyrone encircles the whole play.

In *Long Day's Journey*, O'Neill posits the past as present. When Tyrone entreats Mary for God's sake to forget the past, O'Neill has her reply, "Why? How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us." (ibid.: 1275) Everything in the present is actually an emanation of past time, like the old light of distant, even dead stars, which reaches us in the present. And our experience of the past is future oriented, for every act of memory contains intentions of expectation whose fulfillment leads to the present. The "long day's journey into night" suggests the journey into past time, but with the promise of the next morning's renewal, is like a river that flows in two opposite directions. Therefore, past and present are inseparable and indistinguishable.

Driven by the need to resolve the personal conflicts that resulted from his family life, O'Neill turned to Taoism, whose rhythmic conception of existence



appears in all the three late plays. Life and death, love and hate, past and present alternate and interpenetrate like yin and yang as that Taoism perceives.

3.5 The View of Life As a Dream

In *Chuang Tzu* we have this story about butterfly dream:

“formerly, I, Kwang Kau, dreamt that I was a butterfly, a butterfly flying about, feeling that it was enjoying itself. I did not know that it was Kau. Suddenly I awoke, and was myself again, the veritable Kau. I did not know whether it had formerly been Kau dreaming that he was a butterfly, or it was now a butterfly dreaming that it was Kau. But between Kau and a butterfly there must be a difference. This is a case of what is called the Transformation of Things.” (Baskin 1974: 176)

Another passage describes life as an illusion:

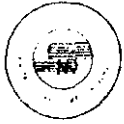
“When they were dreaming they did not know it was a dream; in their dream they may even have tried to interpret it; but when they awoke they knew that it was a dream. And there is the great awaking, after which we shall know that this life was a great dream....” (ibid.:174)

The theme of the pipe dream represents another major connection of O’Neill’s late plays to Taoism. The word “dream” likewise provides a kind of pivot round which the lives of his characters revolve. Such dreams represent simultaneously the possibilities, which sustain them and the unattainable that mocks them. In the late plays his characters seek oblivion through alcohol, through memory or through narrative, repeating the story of their lives as though thereby to create those lives.



They hold the real at bay.

In *The Iceman Cometh*, as Larry proclaims at the outset, “the lie of the pipe dream is what gives life to the whole mad lot of us, drunk or sober” (Cohn 1966: 415). The equation of existence with illusion alludes to the doctrine of Taoism, that our worldly existence involves a cosmic deception. “Things which are real to us are not real in themselves,” as the sage in *Lao Tzu’s Tao and Wu Wei* proclaims (Goddard 1919: 59). *Iceman* applies this observation to all members of its microcosmic society, exposing their beliefs as self-flattering delusions about past and future. Thus, Harry Hope’s conviction that he disengaged from life outside the bar due to grief over his beloved wife’s death is contradicted by Larry’s revelation: “Isn’t a pipe dream of yesterday a touching thing? By all accounts, Bessie nagged the hell out of him.” (Cohn 1966: 434) Jimmy Tomorrow’s belief that he will regain his job the following morning overlooks the fact that he was fired for drunkenness. Similar contradictions characterize the pipe dreams of everyone, including Larry and Hickey. The former claims to desire death devoutly, but hangs on to life; the latter believes he murdered his wife out of love, while hatred was his true motive. Most profoundly, both claim to have discovered serenity through transcendence of illusion, while in fact illusion provides the foundation of their peace. Indeed, existence itself rests on illusion, as the action demonstrates. After he has pitilessly exposed and divested all of their pipe dreams, Hickey, by means of a series of long, brutal individual encounters in the rooms above the bar, forces the dreamers to give over their ultimate link with life, the sustaining pipedream of their worth as human beings. Their dreams hold at least an illusion of life’s essence: movement in purposive action. Action, to be sure, will never be taken, but the dreams reveal a

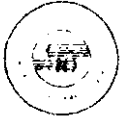


basic human truth: to foster life, man must preserve a minimal dream of movement. Hickey, whose promised peace is predicated on showing the dreamers that they will never take action and that their dream of doing so is a lie, brings the peace of death. Only after Hickey's plea of temporary insanity permits the men to return to their illusions does life return. The world, which the dreamers inhabit has the fragile ecology of a tide pool. The imagery of drifting tidal life is pervasive. It is a world that barely holds to the fringes of consciousness, moving hesitantly between sleeping and waking, fusing the two conditions into a continuous trance-like existence. The light that filters through the dirty windows from the street is pale and insufficient to separate day from night, waking from dream.

In *Long Day's Journey into Night* the connection with Chuang Tzu's view of life is shown in the memorable lines from *The Tempest* quoted by James: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (Baym 1985:1297) which are echoed by the following lines:

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream. (ibid.:1296)

The lines are those of the nineteenth-century British poet Ernest Dowson as quoted by Edmund in Act 4, and they suggest the source of O'Neill's haunting title for the play: "Long Day's Journey into Night." The Tyrone's day is a long one and contains no roses, but appropriately it is mist-enshrouded, moving out of the dim obscurity of one night and proceeding in measured pace toward the foggy gloom of another. Dowson's poem declares that the life seems but a day surrounded on both



ends by darkness and uncertainty.

The fog is a crucial symbolic element in the play. Fog weaves webs of illusion around the confused characters. Each of the characters mentions the fog, but its effect upon Mary and Edmund is profound. The fog blurs one's eyes and makes everything look and sound unreal. Both Mary and Edmund love fog. The attraction of the fog is so powerful for them that in it "truth is untrue and life can hide from itself" and you can find refuge and release in a dream (ibid.: 1297). Like sleep, the fog surrounds the house in darkness and invites the characters inside to dream as they journey toward night.

In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the night scene in Act 3 is impressive. It is vital to see that the night is salvation for both Josie and Jamie. Together, the two lost ones find a way to belong, to become more than merely misbegotten. In their meeting, O'Neill shows them finding their way to a love purified of passion, losing themselves. The moonlight that bathes them casts an effective spell, binding the lovers to one another, and lending them grace. The dawn, so different from the ones Jamie remembered, gives a kind of promise. It is illusory, and the lovers know it. In the moonlight, Jamie is at peace, but both know that with the coming of dawn, what they have found will fade. Beyond the night, nothing exists for them. Yet the long night's journey to dawn is enough. It has been a life time.

3.6 The Union of Man with Nature

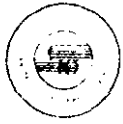
As the heir of a dualistic western tradition that divides self from God and nature, O'Neill discovered himself bound within an isolated ego, prone to guilt.



That isolation tormented him and in the later years of his life he found it extremely unbearable. Western burdens of ego pushes O'Neill to turn to monistic eastern philosophy --- Taoism, which endeavored to heal the breach between subject and object by emphasizing the unity of soul and cosmos in a sphere beyond moral categories. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter V, a man named the Toeless spoke of Confucius as being in bondage. Then Lao Tzu said: " Why did you not simply lead him to see that life and death are one, and that the right and the wrong are the same, so freeing him from his handcuffs and fetters?" (Fung 1989: 13) The knowledge of seeing this is the means to transcend human bondage and to attain freedom. The perfect man identifies himself with the universe, and follows the nature of things. Chuang Tzu said: "The perfect man has no self; the spiritual man has no achievement; the sage has no name." (ibid.:18) Thus to know the eternal, one must forget about himself. The perfect man knows how insignificant he is in the order of nature. But he also knows that if only he can lose himself in nature or God, then, in his own insignificant particularity, the eternal and infinite order of nature can be displayed.

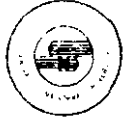
Taoist philosophy deals with the pursuit of perfection, with the Union of an individual human being with the Tao, with the transformation of an ego-centered person into a cosmic being equally at home in the heavens and on earth. According to Taoism, if a person identifies himself with the universe, he will never be lost. If he can see all things as one, and identify himself with the one, then through all the changes of the world, his existence will eternally endure.

In *Long Days Journey into Night*, Edmund experienced such union with the universe when traveling on the sea.



I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern, with the water foaming into spume under me, the masts with every sail white in the moonlight, towering high above me. I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself! ...Then another time, on the American Line, when I was lookout on the crow's nest in the dawn watch ... Dreaming, not keeping lookout, feeling alone, and above, and apart, watching the dawn creep like a painted dream over the sky and sea which slept together. Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams! And several other times in my life, when I was swimming far out, or lying alone on a beach, I have had the same experience. ... (Baym 1985: 1309)

In the state of pure experience, what is known as the union of the individual with the whole is reached. There is no separation of things, to say nothing of the distinction between subject and object, between the "me" and the "non-me". So in this state of experience, there is nothing but the one, the whole. In the order of nature, Edmund's own particular life is of no especial importance. Only being losing himself in nature can he escape the wretchedness of finitude and find the final completion of his life. Edmund's recollection describes his great joy at momentary union with nature, of the individual ego that perceives itself as part of the larger Self. It is worth noting that Edmund is



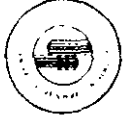
modeled after O'Neill himself. Thus through Edmund, O'Neill seeks oneness with the universe; and rather than retain a sense of self during the mystical experience, he desires absorption into pure being.



IV. Conclusion

Since O'Neill was born and raised a western writer, his native western viewpoint was inescapable. The pessimistic plots of all the three final plays make tragically clear O'Neill's inability to attain thereby the serenity that Taoism offers. But his effort shows the persistence of the appeal of Taoism to his vision. Thus O'Neill's efforts to embrace Taoist approaches to reality must not be lightly dismissed. His attempts to view man and nature as one, to move beyond the separate self, and to reconcile dualistic oppositions into a unified rhythmic process all connect him to the Oriental thought – Taoism. A thorough study of his late works demonstrates that in the three late plays (*The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*) Taoism has informed O'Neill's dynamic vision of reality, influenced the style and subject matter, moulded the values and attitudes of his protagonists, and shaped the symbolism and thematic oppositions of the three plays.

Days before his own death, O'Neill made a telephone call to a Catholic rectory, identified himself, and said, "I would like to see a priest." When the priest arrived, he was refused and told, "There was a mistake." (Liu 1992: 11) Obviously, Catholicism was not the right consolation for him. For O'Neill, to die without a priest around did not mean to die without spiritual consolation. Years ago, he had claimed "to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort the fears of death with", but now, at the last moment of his life, O'Neill realized that death was not fearful at all (Unger 1972: 397). Taoist philosophy would comfort him in his last lucid moments, since according to Taoism there was no fear in this soul's mystic meeting with the



Absolute neither in life nor in death, as Chuang Tzu said, “When the master (he was speaking of Lao Tzu) came, it was because he had the occasion to be born; when he went, he simply followed the natural courses. Those who are quiet at the proper occasion, and who follow the course of nature, cannot be moved by human emotions. These men are regarded by the ancients as having been released by God from suspension.” (Fung 1989: 12) Thus, O’Neill finally attained the serenity that Taoism offers. “He who comes to understand the Tao at dawn can die peacefully at dusk.” (Liu 1992: 3)



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