

The Domination of Linear Time in Eugene O'Neill's Early Plays

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In this paper, I will consider the development of the sense of time in Eugene O'Neill's early works in relation to his growth as a realistic playwright. My overall hypothesis is that, in his lifelong pursuit of "real realism" or "super-naturalism,"¹ O'Neill surely struggles to represent time, as well as other elements, as realistically as possible in his plays. In some regards, however, this hypothesis seems hard to confirm. For one thing, there are no documents or records that would indicate that O'Neill makes conscious efforts to render time real in his plays, no matter what kind of time O'Neill would conceive as "real." The subject of time that obsesses many of his contemporary modernists does not surface in O'Neill's consciousness at least in a verbal form. For another, there have been no preceding studies to attempt to establish a meaningful link between O'Neill's realism and his sharpening sense of time. Since the conditions of realism as literary convention has been discussed mainly in terms of theme, setting, characterization, dialogue, action,² it is not surprising that O'Neill's contribution to the establishment of American realistic drama has been understood along these lines.

However, there are several interesting analyses of the temporal features of O'Neill's plays, which provide a starting point to explore the complex interrelationship between O'Neill's idea of realism and his sense of time. Many of these studies have been made quite recently. One significant exception is that, as early as in 1965, John Henry Raleigh examines the time spans that O'Neill's plays represent and concludes that "the long- and the medium-sized [time spans] predominate in O'Neill's early career which opens with *Beyond the Horizon* in 1918 and closes in the late 1920's and early 1930's."³ While Raleigh's conclusion is rather arbitrarily because he, intentionally or not, ignores O'Neill's early one-acters written *before* 1918, it is worth considering why he needs such a conclusion.

In most of O'Neill's plays Raleigh hears the repercussions of the nineteenth-century melodrama *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a star-vehicle for the playwright's father, James O'Neill. One of the many evidences Raleigh affords is the similarities of the temporal rhythms between them. He first points out the "eighteen-year gap between Acts I and II of *Monte Cristo*" and then brings the reader's attention to, for instance, "a three-year gap between Acts I and II and a five-year one between Acts II and III" in *Beyond the Horizon*.⁴ To Raleigh, the long span of time that O'Neill's "early" plays deal with serves as a proof that they are melodramatic.

The other temporal similarity Raleigh refers to is the fast-moving tempo created by the swift changes of scenes. The fast-moving tempo and the long span of time of melodrama are interdependent with each other, because melodrama cannot cover a long time-span without skipping transitions between scenes. Whereas the quick tempo contributes to the smooth unfolding of the plot, it also involves the abrupt changes of the feelings or attitudes of the characters, which seem unrealistic. Raleigh contends that since most of O'Neill's plays feature this quick tempo, they are less realistic than melodramatic. Later I will try to contradict Raleigh by demonstrating that the time represented in *Beyond the Horizon* is not altogether melodramatic, but still his thesis that time in melodrama is either long-term or fast-moving is valid.

More relevantly in the context of the discussion of realism, Jean Chothia points out the coexistence of two different kinds of time in O'Neill's late plays.

[A]lthough in the late plays O'Neill does appear to keep to a sequential time span, there is, co-existent with the realistic rhythm of linear time, a different temporal rhythm: a strange recurrence and circularity of the kind that would be explicit in the drama of the post-war period. . . . Time and space are extended in these plays, within the firm structure of the linear plot, by a succession of vignettes of off-stage characters and events which are integrated into the dialogue in jokes, tall stories, reminiscences and involuntary memories.⁵

While Chothia does not articulate how time is structured in O'Neill's early plays, her implication is clear enough: until O'Neill achieves his ultimate goal to "super-naturalism" or "real-realism" in his two "1912" plays—namely, *The Iceman Cometh* (1940) and *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1941), both of which are set in 1912, the very year when O'Neill failed to kill himself and started over his life as a dramatist—, he can only represent "the realistic rhythm of linear time."⁶ Here it is easy to see that O'Neill's shift from representing a sequential, linear time to building the dual structure of mechanical and psychological times is paralleled to the general dramaturgical change from "surface realism" in the nineteenth century to psychological realism in the early twentieth century.

In the same vein, but more theoretically, Anne Fleche tries to explain the dual structure of time in O'Neill's plays by analyzing that of *The Iceman Cometh*. Fleche's basic assumption is that "[i]n realist drama, there is the illusion that the present can be dramatized"; and yet this illusion is hard to destroy because "[t]he exposition telescopes action into a present totality (i.e., inclusive of the past) that reinforces the notion of linear or cyclical history (plot)."⁷ According to Fleche, O'Neill is, along with Ibsen and Shaw, one of the first realist dramatists to question this illusion and show instead that what is really dramatizable is not the present but the past and the characters as archives of the past. Hence O'Neill writes such

plotless plays as *Iceman* to shift the dramatic focus of audiences from plot to character.

Fleche's obvious problem is that she generalizes too easily from her analysis of *Iceman* about the dual structure of time in O'Neill's plays. As Chothia implies and I will later demonstrate, O'Neill is not born with this technique of representing time as dual-structured in his plays. It is *acquired* only after his lifelong creative struggles. Nevertheless, Fleche's point of view is useful in examining how the past is represented in O'Neill's plays.

By introducing the three preceding studies of the temporal features of O'Neill's time, I have implicitly answered the most difficult question that might arise when one deals with the subject of time: how can one decide whether the time represented in a particular work is realistic or not? Actually, this question can be subsumed by a more general question, "How can one decide whether a particular work is realistic or not?" which is much easier to answer. Even if there is no common understanding of what reality is, one can measure the degree of the realism of a particular literary work by examining to what extent it embodies the conventional features of realism. Similarly, by setting conventionalized patterns of time ever represented in literature, it is possible to explore the relationship between time and realism without real knowledge of the nature of time. In the aforementioned preceding studies, one can find the recognizable patterns of time represented in drama: melodramatic, unbrokenly linear-structured, and dual-structured.

I will apply these three patterns of the representation of time to the analysis of O'Neill's early realistic plays. My purpose is twofold: first, I will show that O'Neill attempts to introduce unbroken, linear-structured time in most of his early plays written before 1920, although some of them retain melodramatic modes of time or, in the case of his early full-length plays, O'Neill still employs the melodramatic method of splicing and compressing time *between* acts while he is careful to make time flow sequentially *during* acts. Then, more importantly, I want to prove that O'Neill's perhaps unconscious adherence to linear-structured time makes it impossible for him to pursue his central theme of the past more freely in dual-structured dramatic time until he realizes that there are two kinds of time that can be represented simultaneously in drama.

Before O'Neill wrote *The Emperor Jones* (1920), an expressionist play that marks the beginning of O'Neill's largely unsuccessful experiments to incorporate unrealistic elements in his middle plays, O'Neill wrote twenty-three one-act plays (of which eighteen remain, with five destroyed by the playwright himself), twelve full-length plays (of which nine remain), one vaudeville sketch for his father (*A Wife for a Life*) and two short stories.⁸ Considering the facts that after 1920 O'Neill wrote fewer and fewer one-act plays and that his full-length plays tended to be longer than other contemporary playwrights', one can safely assume that O'Neill in this period devoted himself more to writing one-act plays.

Perhaps it is needless to say that one-act plays, like short stories, are more suitable to capture a realistic sense of time than novels and multi-act plays. As Marvin Carlson and

Yvonne Shafer point out in *The Play's the Thing: An Introduction to Theatre*, it is hard for multi-act plays to realize the French naturalists' ideal to approach life objectively as a camera does, take merely a "slice of life" and present it on stage because "a plotless, unarranged series of events may hold up for a one-act play, but for longer works it is difficult to maintain interest and convey a viewpoint without an organized plot."⁹

In other words, in multi-act plays the unbroken, sequential progress of time may be sacrificed for well-constructed plots. Time is freely spliced, compressed, and sometimes even reversed. On the contrary, in one-act plays time progresses minute by minute as in reality. Moreover, since the span of time represented in a one-act play usually corresponds to its playing time, audiences can easily identify the dramatic time with the real time in which they live and experience. Thus it is only natural that the "slice of life" effect one-act plays create has become synonymous with early realistic plays.

The Long Voyage Home (1917) is one of O'Neill's initial attempts to create such a "slice of life" effect. Olson, a Swedish sailor on the British tramp steamer *Glencairn*, has wearied of life at sea and longs to return to his homeland where he hopes to spend a peaceful life as a farmer with his mother, brother, and possibly, a wife. By the time the play begins, Olson has saved enough money to start a new life on the land. Repenting that he had often drunk away what he earned, Olson has not touched drink for some time. He doesn't change his attitude even when he enters a bar with his shipmates. However, when a barmaid tells a dubious story of her life in which she pretends that she comes from Sweden and could marry him, Olson breaks his oath of temperance to attract her attention, only to be intoxicated, robbed of his precious savings, and transferred to another ship by the bar people before he knows them. The play ends by suggesting to audiences that Olson will have to continue his sea life at least for another several years.

This example reveals another structural-temporal feature of one-act plays.¹⁰ Instead of giving a clear sense of beginning and ending, a one-act play creates an illusion that what is told is a part of a long story that starts far before the play begins and that continues after it ends. In terms of the representation of time, this means that one-act plays do not only depict a certain moment, but also suggest an infinite extension of linear time that is immediately connected to the moment.¹¹ To put it in yet another way, it is synecdochic imagination that operates in one-act plays; the whole time is represented by a part of it.

This synecdochic imagination functions on another higher level in relation to *The Long Voyage Home*. Along with *Bound East for Cardiff* (1914), *In the Zone* (1917), and *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1917), the play constitutes a kind of sea saga called *The S. S. Glencairn* cycle, in which the crew members of the S. S. *Glencairn* alternately play the leading roles. Of course, the four works do not tell the whole stories of the crew and the ship; they represent only tiny parts of them. However, synecdochic imagination stimulates audiences to conceive the total image of the *Glencairn* story. Thus time, again, presents itself as a colossal entity.

Some may dispute, though: if one-act plays represent time as an infinite extension, isn't it any longer realistic because it is beyond human perception, too huge to be humanly grasped? But such time is paradoxically "real" to early realists, who are under the influence of early nineteenth-century positivism. Eschewing the conventional way of representing a sensorially constituted or "internalized" time that melodrama employ (which I will discuss later), they like to describe time "scientifically and objectively" in their works. Time comes to be represented as something plotted along a straight line, as is measured in physics. Thus time becomes an entity totally independent from human experience of it; like a clock, it progresses without regard to any intentions or wills on the part of human beings. Nevertheless, this is the real time early realists conceive.

Interestingly enough, O'Neill conducts an experiment to introduce such physical time directly in the S. S. Glencairn cycle. In the first three plays, the time of the action is precisely designated in the opening stage directions: in *Bound East for Cardiff* it is "about ten minutes to eight in the evening"¹²; in *In the Zone* it is "about ten minutes of twelve on a night in the fall of the year 1915" (471); in *The Long Voyage Home* it is "about nine o'clock in the evening" (509).

Of course, it is difficult to affirm that these mechanically measured times are represented as "real," for audiences cannot perceive them with the same precision as O'Neill's stage directions require. In any of the actual productions, an audience vaguely understands that it is late at night. Perhaps seeing this experiment fail before his very eyes, O'Neill is soon to give up attempting to convey the physicality of time in this manner: in *The Moon of the Caribbees*, the last piece of the cycle, O'Neill no longer employs such a clear designation of time but suggests the time of action, for instance, through the presence of "[t]he full moon, half-way up the sky" (527); in *Beyond the Horizon*, a three-acter written immediately after the Glencairn cycle is completed, the time of the opening scene is more poetically described: "The hushed twilight of a day in May is just beginning" (573).¹³

More generally, in early realists' plays the idea of time as a physical object that exists outside human experiences of it is expressed in a form slightly different from their original notion borrowed from physics. In Newtonian physics, time as independent being in objective reality is value-free and emotionally neutral, whereas the time represented in early realists' works is often regarded as a fearful juggernaut that mercilessly changes the course of the life of an individual. Such understanding of time is born probably because early realists pay a special attention to the vastness and the uncontrollable quality of physical time. Like the notion of "nature" that Zola and other naturalists propose—whether it is human nature that could be compared to that of beasts, or the nature of society that is supposed to be ruled by Social Darwinism, their "nature" is totally different from nature proper that natural scientists observe—, the time as early realists understand it is, as it were, a literary mutation of physical time. It more resembles the classical Greek concept of fate (just as their "nature" does to

some extent) in that it is relentless and not humanly calculable.

The early realist notion of time as something beyond human control is reflected in the fatalistic tone of *The Long Voyage Home* and many other O'Neill's early one-act plays. One-act plays that end up by intimating an ominous future awaiting the characters do not allow audiences a margin of imagining what else might have happened to them, and in so doing, impresses them with the inevitable course of life that the characters are destined to wend, one that is charted on a linear timeline.

Only from this aspect, then, is it possible to contend that multi-act plays can also represent a realistic sense of time, though in a more prosaic manner that one-act plays do. Multi-act plays, with their breaks between acts or scenes that can represent a certain lapse of time, usually deal with a long time and therefore can depict how outside forces influence the lives of human beings over a long span of time. Synecdochic imagination is not required in multi-act plays because audiences witness a long story being told from the beginning to the end, during which the relentless changing force of time is gradually revealed. As I have shown, in terms of the realistic representation of time, multi-act plays have a serious drawback, for, in them the sequential progress of time is always disrupted since a series of events needs to be constructed from a plot-oriented point of view. Nevertheless, Zola and other naturalists continue to utilize this time-honored form, perhaps because it is a more appropriate medium for conveying their notion of time beyond human control to audiences who are lacking in synecdochic imagination.

From this point of view, I will consider the time represented in *Beyond the Horizon*. It is true that, as Raleigh points out, it deals with a much longer term than O'Neill's preceding one-act plays by setting the lapses of time—three years and five years respectively—between acts. Therefore it is impossible to call this play a slice of life any more. But what O'Neill basically does here is to juxtapose three slices of life to accentuate changes in everything in the play over time.¹⁴

First of all, the dramatic focus of *Beyond the Horizon* is on the transfiguration of the brothers, Andrew and Robert of the Mayo farm in eight years as a result of their choices to live out each other's destinies. In the beginning of the play, they are introduced as O'Neill's favorite pair of a poet and a pragmatist. The elder brother, Andy, is a virile, sinewy, and practical mind man of twenty-seven. His four-year younger brother, Robert, is effeminate, slender, and sensitive. Therefore it is only natural that Andy will take over the management of the family farm, while Robert, with no interest in a farmer's life, wants to set sail aboard his Uncle Dick's commercial ship. Robert dreams of seeing the world of the Romantic poets and of leaving behind the farmyard's cows, chickens, tractors and hired hands.

But an ironic twist of events alters their lives drastically. On the eve of his departure, Ruth, a wholesome next door girl with whom both Andrew and Robert are in love, confesses her love to Robert, and asks him to stay with her. Beside himself with joy, Robert changes

his mind and remains on the farm with Ruth, whereas Andy, who thought that Ruth loved him, decides out of despair to take Robert's place aboard the ship. This is the end of the first act.

What is structurally curious about the play is that there are no more dramatic reversals after the first act ends. In acts two and three the story develops just as it is expected: because of long and heavy work on the farm, Robert loses his health and enthusiasm for life; Ruth finds their marriage life unbearable to continue while she confirms her once uncertain love of Andrew; Andrew changes from an easygoing, good-natured young country farmer to a stern and authoritative middle-aged ship's captain. Nothing unexpected takes place or no new important characters are introduced during acts two and three. The structure of the play may make audiences less and less interested as it moves on, but O'Neill deliberately avoids employing the conventional pattern of tragedy that requires the reversal of the fate of the hero to take place toward the end of the play, because he is less concerned about constructing a well-thought-out plot than about impressing audiences with his deterministic view of time. In order to show how time remorselessly stays the course on once it is set, it is necessary to make sure that there are no episodes or characters that could change the course of time involved thereafter.

The relentless changing force of time is also indicated in the change of the outward appearances of the other main characters. The transformation of Mrs. Mayo, the brothers' mother, serves as a good example. In scene two of the first act she is described as follows:

Mrs. Mayo is a slight, round-faced, rather prim-looking woman of fifty-five who had once been a school teacher. The labors of a farmer's wife have bent but not broken her, and she retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the Mayo part of the family. (585)

But in scene one of the second act, after her husband's death and near her own death:

Mrs. Mayo's face has lost all character, disintegrated, become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortless tears. (602)

Moreover, it is not only Mrs. Mayo who is transfigured. Ruth and Mrs. Atkins, Ruth's mother, also change. It is noteworthy that O'Neill makes all the six main characters appear in the opening scene and keeps tracing the process of their transformations. In so doing, O'Neill shows how universally applicable the relentless changing force of time is. If only the two brothers changed, audience might conclude that their failures in life after all come from the wrong choices they made by their own will. But by witnessing that all the other main

everyone regardless of whether they choose their lives rightly or wrongly.

Furthermore, not only people but also things undergo the process of deterioration. For instance, the descriptions of the sitting room of the Mayo farm house in the second scene of the first act, the first scene of the second act, and the first scene of the third act are carefully designed to contrast the three phases of the Mayo farm: in act one, scene two, "[e]verything in the room is clean, well-kept, and in its exact place" (584-585); in act two, scene one "[l]ittle significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed" (602); and in act three, scene one, "the room, . . . presents an appearance of decay, of dissolutions" (631). The unity of place that neoclassicism advocates is observed here; but of course it is not because it is necessary to demonstrate the stability of the world (as seventeenth-century French neoclassicists are expected in order to bear out the solidity of the Louis absolute monarch). On the contrary, O'Neill visualizes the passage of time in the changes of the Mayo farm from prosperity, through gradual decline, to utter ruin, as if to suggest that nothing is constant in the flow of time.

From these evidences, one can conclude that the time represented in *Beyond the Horizon* is more "realistic" and "naturalistic" than melodramatic in that it embodies the inhuman and merciless changing force of time. To corroborate this, I will further consider the characteristics of melodramatic time that Raleigh proposes.

Raleigh's claims are summarized like this: melodramatic time is expediently protean. Whereas improbably long time has passed between acts or even scenes, during scenes the characters show similarly improbably rapid changes of attitudes or feelings, as in the villain's instant conversion or remorse. What Raleigh implies is that melodramatic protean time is a product of plot-oriented dramaturgy, which encourages playwrights to change freely and frequently the tempo and rhythm of their plays to keep audiences in suspense all the way through the dénouement. As a result, as Raleigh would say, melodramatic time is more artificial and clumsy, as compared to the time one experiences in reality.

Yet it is not to be overlooked that melodramatic time, whether it is long-term or fast-moving, is more closely connected to human emotion rather than to physical reality, and that for this very reason audiences may experience it as "real."

In melodrama, for instance, time is extended so as to make more intense love, hate or any feelings that the characters are experiencing, through the unusual length of time during which they harbor such emotions. Imagine a typical melodramatic situation in which the hero, no matter how many years have passed, does not seem to forget his rage or grief. The reason that the hero is possessed with such feelings *so long* is, audiences would naturally assume, that he is possessed with such feelings *so much*. In this strange equation, the length of time is converted into the intensity of emotion. Accordingly, the more audiences empathize with the hero, the less likelihood there will be that they find it unnatural or problematic for such a long span of time to be dealt with in a play.

Melodrama also stops the progress of time to exhibit an extreme state of emotions. The most illustrative example is a dramatic tableau, a technique that is often employed at the end of each act of melodrama to mark a climactic moment. When the characters freeze in various postures to express their heightened feelings in a tableau, time also stands still. But again, it is hard to claim that audiences find such a halt of time unrealistic, because audiences, perfectly attuned to the emotional state of the characters, are also transfixed at the scene for the moment.

Likewise, even when time is compressed for the speedy change of scenes, it is rare that audiences find themselves estranged from the quick tempo. Certainly, in real life one can seldom change one's feelings or attitudes in such a short time. In this sense, the sudden changes of moods or decisions of the characters in melodrama may be unrealistic and contrived only for the smooth unfolding of the plot. But what is important is that audiences understand that there is another mode of time flowing in the mind of the characters, besides the time that constitutes the outward structure of the play. Audiences, adjusted to this psychological time rather than physical time in reality, instinctively know that the characters of melodrama have actually spent some time preparing themselves for their "seemingly" sudden transformations.

In sum, time represented in melodrama is much more "humanized" or internalized in the mind of audiences than early realists' concept of time beyond human control. From this point of view as well, it can be said that the time represented in *Beyond the Horizon* is far from melodramatic.

However, Raleigh's general statement that the time represented in O'Neill's plays is melodramatic is not altogether indefensible. Some of his early plays do retain a melodramatic, humanized mode of time. Here I will examine "*Anna Christie*" (1920), which is an interesting example to reveal the transitional character of O'Neill's method of representing time from depending on melodramatic protean time to consciously introducing realistic, mechanical time beyond human perception.

Although "*Anna Christie*" is published two years after *Beyond the Horizon*, the former is in many ways more melodramatic than the latter. For instance, it is well known that the drama critic George Nathan, having read the script, criticized the ending of "*Anna Christie*" as a conventional happy ending. A self-admitted champion of the then young-and-promising O'Neill, Nathan expected his favorite dramatist to create more than a "sellout to the audience" in which the once prostitute Anna and the innocent sailor Burke are happily united in the end. Apart from the ending, the emotions of Anna are surely described in an exaggerated and hyperbolic manner reminiscent of his earliest plays such as *The Web* (1913) and *Thirst* (1913).

Perhaps the most plausible reason that the play is retrogressively melodramatic is the simple fact that the original version of "*Anna Christie*", *Chris Christophersen* (1920), had already been conceived before *Beyond the Horizon* was written. Accordingly, the time

represented in "*Anna Christie*" is more melodramatic than realistic. It is clear from the stage direction in the beginning of the act four, which follows Anna's shocking confession of her past as a prostitute.

Anna is sitting in the rocking-chair. She wears a hat, is all dressed up as in ACT ONE. Her face is pale, looks terribly tired and worn, as if the two days just past had been ones of suffering and sleepless nights. (1013)

O'Neill's ambiguous explanation, "*as if* the two days just past had been ones of suffering and sleepless nights" (italics are mine), points to his methodological confusion in introducing a realistic sense of time while he is still influenced by the melodramatic use of time. Does it suggest that Anna has really spent two nights suffering and sleepless? If so, why didn't O'Neill employ "because" instead of "as if"? The length of two days is meant to intensify emotional effects in a melodramatic manner; but it would seem that O'Neill himself considers it unrealistic to claim that Anna did spend all nights crying and feeling remorse and contrition, considering her strong character. The expression "as if" thus betrays O'Neill's double commitment to melodramatic and realistic modes of representation.

Nevertheless, O'Neill is making some headway in representing the "realistic" mode of time in the play. In an effort to defend "the conventional happy ending" of the play, O'Neill responds to Nathan:

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

The metaphors of "comma" and "unwritten sentence" are of course construed as an effectual restatement of the early realist concept of time as an infinite expansion in O'Neill's terms.

And O'Neill practices what he preaches. If one reads the play closely, it is easy to see that the future of Anna and Burke is not as definite as they believe it is. The next day of their wedding, Burke is supposed to sail far away to Cape Town, probably for several months. Anna has made a vow to God that she has never loved any other men but Burke, but soon after that Burke finds Anna is Lutheran while he is Catholic. Although Anna tries to convince Burke that, since she has made a vow to the only God, it does not matter what sect she belongs to, Burke cannot shake off his doubt about the validity of her vow. The published version of the play ends with a mysterious mutter that Chris, Anna's father, makes: "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you vas going, no. Only dat ole davel, sea—she knows" (1027).

But it is still doubtful whether O'Neill's intention can be realized in actual productions.

Rather, as O'Neill himself admits, the ending "seems to have a false definiteness about it,"¹⁶ with the result that the play fails to reveal what Murphy terms as the lack of sense of closure in American realist plays. In this regard, O'Neill's attempt to introduce realistic time is not fully successful in the play.

It is also remarkable yet another temporal feature which "*Anna Christie*" for the first time deals with O'Neill's hereafter frequent theme of the revelation of the hidden past of the characters. In this respect, the play makes a radical departure from O'Neill's earlier plays, in which the past is either virtually non-existent or curiously suppressed.

In early full-length plays, there is no hidden past that might cast an ominous shadow on the lives of the characters. In *Beyond the Horizon*, for instance, the main story of the drama is staged from the beginning to the end. No doubt in the opening scene it is revealed as a dramatic exposition that an intimate relationship between Andrew and Ruth has already developed, but the drama really starts when Ruth confesses her love for Robert and he returns his love for her. Also the play ends in Robert's death, which closes the main theme of his quest for the freedom of spirit.

On the other hand, in his early one-act plays like the Glencairn cycle, O'Neill not only confines himself to depicting the present moment as a slice of life, but also attempts to make his characters' pasts seem trivial and insignificant on the narrative level. O'Neill's way of doing this is rather complicated. Seemingly, the characters' pasts are beginning to be revealed in the course of the plays. However, it is soon found in one way or another that these pasts are dubious or simply false. In the opening scene of *Bound East for Cardiff*, Cockey begins to tell his old love story, but no one believes it to be true. In an effort to establish his past as authentic, Cockey adds more specific information, claiming that "'Appened ten year ago come Christmas'" (188). All the same, no one takes him seriously. Cockey's repeated claims of his past is thus dismissed with derision. In *In The Zone*, Smitty is suspected of being the enemy's spy because he has a mysterious black box that he refuses to open. But after the crew force him to open it, it turns out that he hides the love letters from his old girlfriend in it. Smitty's past is suddenly highlighted (Smitty must have been engaged in espionage), but it loses its significance in the end (Smitty has been only sentimental about his lost love). The anticlimactic effect is employed to suggest how trivial and meaningless Smitty's past is.

By contrast, in "*Anna Christie*", Anna's mysterious past compels constant attention by her keeping concealing the truth. The dynamic between revelation and concealment works in the opposite way: that is, the authenticity of Anna's past is established through her insistent gesture of hiding it. Interestingly, this hiding gesture can be seen among the other main characters. Chris once makes Anna believe that he has been a janitor. Burke does not allow Anna to inquire about his past: "Then you think a girl the like of yourself might maybe not mind the past at all but only be seeing the good herself put in me" (991). They all try to keep their pasts secret, which act ironically reveals how much their present lives are influenced by

the past.

The presence of the hidden past has been more and more weighty in O'Neill's plays since "*Anna Christie*", until in his last two masterpieces it virtually commands the action of the plays. In *The Iceman Cometh*, Hickey's murder of his wife, Evelyn, takes place before the play begins. Although this shocking fact is not disclosed until the last act, his horrible memory literally haunts Hickey and, infected with his guilty consciousness, the rest of the characters equally suffer from their own memories of the past. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the mother's morphine addict has initiated far back when Edmund was born, but it constitutes the *basso continuo* of the play, in which nothing really happens in the present.

In fact, these pasts reenacted by the characters in O'Neill's late plays are so vividly "present" in the double sense of the word that they appear to disrupt the linear progress of time in the plays. *The Iceman Cometh* has often been criticized as tediously long and unnecessarily repetitive, because the seventeen derelicts in Harry Hope's bar recount similar stories of their glorious past. While they are recalling their pasts, the time of the play does not make any progress in terms of the development of the plot. Meanwhile, physical time elapses outside the play and audiences get bored.

But actually, as physical time progresses, a Chekhovian inner drama develops in the minds of the derelicts. Through acts two and three, they are gradually obsessed with the threatening presence of Hickey, who persistently demands that they should stop indulging in the glory of their past and the impossible pipe dream of the future and face the present reality of their wretched existences. Certainly, until Hickey's persuasion has a visible effect and the derelicts get out of the bar to start a new life toward the end of the third act, they take no action whatever. They seem to be in a constant inertia, sitting at the tables drunk, asleep, or both. Yet from their ongoing dialogues, it is suggested that Hickey's influence is growing little by little in their minds even before their leave-taking.

Therefore, it is not accurate to claim that the linear progress of time is thoroughly thwarted by the overwhelming presence of the past in *The Iceman Cometh*. While the bums in Harry Hope's bar are reiterating their past stories in delirium, they are simultaneously trying to escape Hickey's mind-control over them. In this sense, they are living both in the present and the past, and the time structure of the play can thus be called dual, with psychological time coexistent with physical time. Nevertheless, in actual productions it is difficult that the inner drama and its linear progress of time are presented effectively. Compounded with the plotless plot, this difficulty creates a false impression that the time in the play stops as if eternally.

In "*Anna Christie*" the past does not affect the linear progress of time in the play as much as in these late plays. For, while *thematically* Anna's past as a prostitute may have a certain significance, *structurally* the main action of the play still happens in the present tense. Audiences witness firsthand how Anna and Burke meet and fall in love with each other, and,

naturally, their concerns are directed toward the future of the couple as the plot unfolds.

But it is also true that, the more significant the theme of the hidden past becomes in O'Neill's plays, the longer the span of time they have to deal with is. Accordingly, his initial method of staging a whole story from the beginning to the end is more and more difficult to carry out. And yet O'Neill sticks to his method during most of his career. The nearly ten hours of the playing time of *Strange Interlude* (1927) reveals how much O'Neill is uncompromising about it; and in his late years, too, O'Neill launches an ambitious project of covering the history of America by writing a cycle of nine plays, which is aborted because of his declining health.

Of course, it would be a mistake to ascribe the tendency of O'Neill's middle and late plays to be uncommonly long to the dramatist's technical defect of not being able to create an effective dramatic exposition that would telescope the past into the present. As I have considered in the case of *Beyond the Horizon*, it is rather the product of O'Neill's dogged struggles to create a single, unified line of time, which is the direct reflection of the early realist concept of time as an infinite extension. To borrow Fleche's terms, O'Neill still cannot break the illusion that "the present should be dramatized," while he is aware of the importance of dramatizing the past.

Yet, significantly, this adherence to the early realists' ideology prevents O'Neill from building the dual structure of time in his plays until in his very late years. Perhaps O'Neill may feel hesitant about employing the "internalized" mode of time that is attuned to the state of the mind of the characters and, through the process of empathy with them, audiences. For one thing, such internalized time is fully exploited for the plot-oriented construction of melodrama. However, as I have shown briefly in the instance of *The Iceman Cometh*, when it is embedded in the outward structure of physical time, it no longer serves as the driving force of the plot. On the contrary, represented as genuine experiences by the characters, such psychological time frequently halts or reverses, conflicting with the enveloping frame of linear time. For another, such internalized time is much more humanized than that time as a mechanical juggernaut which early realists conceive. However, again, in the dual structure of time, the aspect of time as relentless changing force is maintained in the linear progress of outward time.

In every respect, it is clear that the reintroduction of psychological time within the linear structure of physical time is the only solution to the dramaturgical problem O'Neill faces—how to combine the theme of the hidden past with his realistic sense of time without making plays too long to be staged. Nevertheless, the long time it takes for O'Neill to adopt this technique reveals how unconsciously resistant he is to this dual mode of the representation of time. To him, as well as to many naturalists, time is something outside human experience. Human beings cannot control the flow of time: rather, it mercilessly dominates the fate of human beings. Thus, in an effort to represent time as realistically as possible, O'Neill curiously

alienates himself from subjective time, the time experienced in the human mind.

NOTES

- ¹ O'Neill's understandably negative reactions to the so-called "surface realism," which designates nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pictorial and/or historically accurate renditions of Shakespeare (such as Charles Kemble's *King John* in 1823), contemporary melodramas (such as David Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* in 1900), and even some naturalistic plays, have been documented in various forms—letters, work diaries, magazine contributions, interviews, and so on. In most of the cases, he proposes either "super-naturalism" or "real-realism" as an alternative. Although it is difficult to determine what he really means by these terms, O'Neill sometimes mentions Strindberg as one of the few dramatists who realized his ideal before him. Considering the fact that most of Strindberg's plays are now seen as symbolic and pre-expressionistic rather than realistic, it is safely assumed that O'Neill aims at creating plays that depicts the psychological reality—though it then poses another question as to what "psychological reality" is—of human beings.
- ² For instance, in the entry of realism in *The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Ruby Cohn writes: "Realism is the dominant style of modern drama, recognizable in versimilitude of setting, coherence of character, modernity of problems, and prosaic quality of dialogue." In *American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Brenda Murphy proposes to analyze the evolution of American dramatic realism in terms of acting, character, dialogue, dramatic structure, subject, stagecraft, subject matter, and thought (33-49).
- ³ John Henry Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965) 177.
- ⁴ John Henry Raleigh, "Eugene O'Neill and the Escape From the Château d'If," *O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Gassner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 19.
- ⁵ Jean Chothia, *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 189.
- ⁶ Another important point Chothia makes here is that there is a cyclical mode of time within the linear structure of physical time in O'Neill's late plays. And for that matter, Raleigh also mentions "the circular or the timeless" as the third temporal impulse in O'Neill's early plays (*The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* 193). Most recently, in *Struggles, Defeat or Rebirth: Eugene O'Neill's Vision of History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997), Thierry Dubost argues this cyclical time in relation to

the Nietzschean theme of eternal return (174-183). But among Raleigh, Dubost, and many others who have pointed out this cyclical feature of time in O'Neill's plays, only Chothia recognizes that the cyclical time does not exist solely but is enveloped in the structure of linear time, because, whether it is cyclical or not, audiences can only perceive it in the linear progress of time as the plot develops. In this sense, the structure of time in some of O'Neill's plays is dual. And it is needless to say that the cyclical time in them cannot be explored without reference to its relationship to the outward frame of linear time.

- ⁷ Ann Fleche, *Mimetic Disillusion: Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and U. S. Dramatic Realism* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997) 43.
- ⁸ For a detailed checklist of O'Neill's works, see Törnqvist's *A Drama of Souls* 258-265, for instance.
- ⁹ Marvin Carlson and Yvonne Shafer, *The Play's the Thing: An Introduction to Theatre* (New York: Longman, 1990) 356.
- ¹⁰ It is ultimately impossible to separate the time represented in a literary work from its narrative structure. In *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), the French hermeneutist Paul Ricouer finds a "healthy circle" between them and explains the difficulty of dealing with time as an independent factor from narrative proper, by stating that: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience (3). In the same vein, it is inevitable that my study of the time represented in O'Neill's plays more or less overlaps with the classical analysis of the structure of them. However, the structural approach has its limit precisely because it cannot see what is not represented as the structure. Since my point is that there is a mode of the representation of time that refuses to be structured along the plot line in some of O'Neill's plays, my choice of time over structure is justified.
- ¹¹ In *American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940*, Brenda Murphy develops a similar argument by claiming that "[r]ealistic dramatic action opens up into the larger and wider rhythms of life that surround and interpenetrate it but can only be hinted at in the space of a realistic play" (xii). And yet my point of view is radically different from hers, because what Murphy means by "larger rhythms of life" is not so much an infinite extension of time as a kind of anarchic state of reality that refuses to be structured or narrativized according to any conventional patterns of drama, i.e., tragedies or comedies. As her expression "the *space* of a realistic play" (italics mine) suggests, she collapse time and space into one entity. In this respect, Murphy's "larger and wider rhythms of life" curiously resembles Bakhtin's concept of "an actual historical

chronotope," a time-space continuum that is reality, which, according to Bakhtin, literature attempts to assimilate into an artistic/artificial chronotope, but always in an erratic manner (Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist [Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981] 84-85).

¹² Eugene O'Neill, *Complete Plays: 1913-1920* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1988) 187. All references to O'Neill's plays discussed in this paper are taken from this edition and hereafter indicated only by page numbers in parentheses.

¹³ And yet the frequent references to the bells that the characters make in the plays suggests the possibility that these times may be more real and less abstract to the crew of Glencairn and O'Neill himself; the time represented in the plays, the rhythm of seamen's life punctuated by the sound of bells, may be internalized in the characters through long-term habits. If a production could display such an internalized time in the actors' bodies, the audience might feel those times more tangibly through the awareness of the characters. Then it would be possible to claim that the precise designation of time is O'Neill's premature attempt to render absolute time more concrete.

¹⁴ Thus in the eighth volume of *The Revels History of Drama in English* (London: Methuen, 1977) that is devoted to American drama, one of the authors Walter J. Meserve writes: "Structurally, *Beyond the Horizon* is composed of three one-act plays, each with two scenes" (220).

¹⁵ Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer, eds., *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 148.

¹⁶ *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* 148.