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The Chinese Affinity of Eugene O'Neill: A Study of Taoist Ideas in O'Neill's Plays and His Influence Upon Modern Chinese Drama

by

Yongchun Cai 

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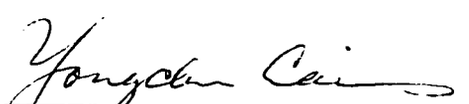

Yongchun Cai

APT 2020
30 Charles ST. W.
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON M4Y 1R5

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University of Alberta

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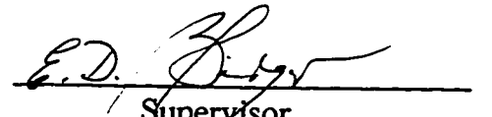
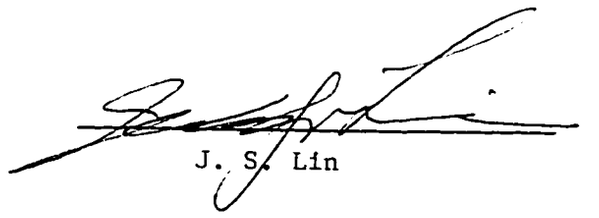


Supervisor
E.D.Blodgett

Milan V. Dimic



J. S. Lin

Date: 1 August 1991

To my wife and son

With love and thankfulness

Abstract

O'Neill's mysticism and quietism are reflected in his Oriental historical plays, which display a salient Chinese Taoist, philosophical dimension of his dramatic thought. In this thesis, the Oriental Taoist underlying yet ultimate principles, such as the incompatibility of dualism between man's materialism and spiritualism, the beginning and return of all divergent existence and the ideal of detachment and transcendence over life and death, are consistently explored in two of O'Neill's middle-period plays *Marco Millions* and *Lazarus Laughed*, which, serving as the basis for the first two chapters, are intended as a whole to demonstrate the playwright's identification with Chinese mystical Taoism.

O'Neill's affinity with ancient China extends his relation with modern China, which is manifested in his own decisive influence on the Chinese dramatic stage, as shown, by way of Expressionism, in *The Yama Chao* and *The Wildness*, the significant plays of the Chinese leading playwrights Hong Shen and Cao Yu, respectively. Cao Yu's other great play *Thunderstorm* is also discussed, by chiefly examining corresponding character relationships, with O'Neill's most powerful tragedy, *Desire Under the Elms*, to evince the "consanguine tie" between the greatest modern playwrights of the two countries. The final chapter is thus intended for a comparative study of reciprocal relations between Chinese drama and O'Neill's influence.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledging the support and inspiration from which one has benefited throughout the process of writing a thesis is usually the last task facing a student as he prepares the final manuscript. It is, of course, a most pleasant one, for he can now recount the many generous acts without which the current form of the thesis could never have been possible.

I must first thank my parents who respect the quest for knowledge, and who, with love and understanding, encouraged me to pursue graduate studies in Canada, which made the completion of this program possible.

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Last of all, though surely this acknowledgment should come first and does so in my mind, I thank my wife He Jie, but cannot thank her enough, for her understanding, encouragement and patience for these years, without which this work would not have been possible either.

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Introduction

Only with Walt Whitman does American poetry arrive in the full sense; only with the appearance of Eugene O'Neill can American drama reach the world level already attained by masters of the dramatic form such as Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov. As a playwright, O'Neill attained a glory as a four-time winner of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize, the highest Award in American literature;[1] however, the culmination of his illuminous achievement comes when he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. An American literary giant, O'Neill was the first American playwright to win this honor. What sustains his reputation is, to a great extent, his consistent examination in his plays of the implacability of an indifferent universe, the materialistic greed of humanity, the problems of discovering one's true identity, and, emphatically, the search for the meaning of life through the Chinese Taoist philosophical perspective. O'Neill's spiritual affinity with and attitude to China and to Chinese culture and philosophy finds an appropriate expression in his managing of his precious Nobel Prize earnings.

In 1937, the year after he received the Noble Prize, O'Neill spent half of the cash award in order to build a two-storied Chinese-styled home in a quiet valley

[1] O'Neill's first Pulitzer Prize winning play is *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), which is also his first play with the "Oriental flavor." His other Pulitzer Prize winning plays are, respectively, *Anna Christie* (1922), *Strange Interlude* (1928), and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956).

not far from a bay in California, and he named it "Tao House." "On the heavy black doorway to their courtyard," the O'Neills "placed four wrought-iron symbols from Chinese calligraphy that spelled 'Tao House'" and "behind the house," they had a brick path built that "twisted and wound--in observance of the Chinese proverb that evil moves only in a straight line."[2] O'Neill's Tao House was "built out of white concrete blocks, with a black tile roof, and doors and shutters painted Chinese orange or red. Dark blue ceilings, 'the very delicate and graceful Chinese furniture against these rough stones,' and the mirrors in various rooms were designed to heighten the Oriental atmosphere inside the house."[3] These descriptions clearly indicate that the spirit of O'Neill's new home is predominately "Chinese."

The construction of the Chinese-styled Tao House in O'Neill's later years is neither the product of a momentary impulse nor is it intended merely as an unconventional invention. Tao House is, in fact, a testimony to his long-cherished interest in, and admiration for, Chinese culture and Taoist philosophy. In any event, O'Neill's use of names is remarkably particular. The titles of his plays, such as *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* are phonetically and thematically fraught with poetic richness and are harmonious in connotation. His previous house in Georgia was

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[2] Louis Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*. Boston: Little Brown & Co. (1973): 472.
[3] Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and China." *Tamkang Review*. 10 1-2 (1971):6.

called "Casa Genotta," a name which is a fanciful combination of half of his own name with half of his wife's (Eu*gene* + Carl*otta*). The name of the house teems with a newly-wedded, Spanish-styled romantic tinge. "Tao House," similarly, must have been picked by O'Neill as a result of deliberate, careful consideration rather than out of ephemeral curiosity. "Tao" in the name is a crucial word for O'Neill and for an understanding of his works; by using "Tao" to name his new home, O'Neill has, in effect, gone beyond the question of mere naming to a confirmed way of life, a harmonious human attitude, and a spiritual destination in a life's voyage that has often compared Oriental and Occidental philosophies. Tao House, in itself, is also suggestive of the Oriental Taoist thought that pervades in the theme, structure, character and even style of his works.

O'Neill's notion of Taoism is basically that of the philosophical Taoism rather than that of religious Taoism. What is to be discussed in this thesis is thus largely the philosophical aspect of Taoism in relation to O'Neill's plays. To O'Neill, Taoism, as a system of philosophy, is based on the great underlying principle of the Tao, which is the source of all being, the governing power of all life (in man and in nature), and the beginning and the return of all divergent existence. The Chinese word "Tao" is usually translated into English as "the Way" or "the Road." However, it is better not to translate the word "the Tao" as it is regarded to be indefinable. Its import is too great to be contained in any one word. The ideograph for the Tao is made up of two radicals: the Head, or Leader, and the

Feet, or Progress by degrees. The Head denotes a principle or beginning, while the radical for the Feet carries the implication of the power of forward movement. Tao is without beginning and without end; it is something formless yet complete, all-pervading yet unfailing. Not only are all forms latent in Tao, but all forms and everything that exists also have a Tao, a "way" to fulfill, and each is in its own "way" unique and constantly changing, growing and developing. The way of the Tao is marked by a kind of passivity, an absence of strife and coercion, a manner of action that is completely spontaneous. This passivity and spontaneity, along with simplicity, constitute the pivotal virtues of Taoism. The passivity of the Tao is usually heavily emphasized in the counsels of the Lao Tzu, the founder of the Taoist philosophy and is associated with the void contained within the Tao. The Tao is also the principle guide which can lead people to perfection, to detachment over the material world, and finally to a kind of spiritual freedom and transcendence of life and death.

O'Neill became fascinated by the notion of the mystic, Oriental Taoist philosophy early in his life, after he lost his faith as a Christian. Seeking a replacement for his former religion, he turned to and found meaning in existence through Lao Tzu's Taoist thought. In his fervid exploration of Taoism, he embarked upon a series of Oriental-flavored historical plays that include *The Fountain, Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude*, and "The Play of Shi Huang Ti" (an uncompleted play which is set in

ancient China.). In the years after he moved into Tao House, he conceived his greatest plays---*The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*---which contain varying degrees of Taoist mysticism and quietism. O'Neill's sustained interest in the Orient and in Oriental Taoism finally led to a detemination to see China for himself; he visited China in 1928 with his wife Carlotta, who was also an enthusiastic student of Chinese culture. He spent a month in Shanghai, absorbing city life, most particularly in the local bars. The gray reality of the Orient in the 1920's, however, did not bring him the "peace and serenity" that he had expected. He felt disappointed and restless, as his one-month stay in Shanghai left him with millions of unassimilated impressions. Saddened by the harsh "non-Oriental" realities and entangled in a turbulent relationship with his wife, he fell into an emotional quagmire. Abandoned in drinking all day long and suffering a serious nervous breakdown, O'Neill was finally hospitalized.

However distressing his stay was, the playwright's fascination with China remained unchanged. Although the scenario for *Shi Huang Ti* was never completed, his consistent exploration of Taoism and his long, sporadic working on the manuscript (1925-1934) suggest his strong, sustained, tenacious interest in and concern with Chinese history and culture. Three years later, in 1937, according to James Robinson, two Chinese friends of the playwright, Sze Mai-mai and Lin Yu-tang, "presented copies of [their own] books on Chinese thought and art to the O'Neills when they moved into their new residence in California, Tao House."

"Lin Yu-tang's two books, *My Country and My People* and *A Philosophy of Living*," as Robinson notes, "repeatedly exposed his deep regard for the teachings of Chuang Tzu. Mai-Mai Sze's two contributions focused more exclusively on Taoism. The first was Legge's translation of the complete writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu...; the second, Dwight Goddard's *Lao-Tse's Tao and Wu Wei*, included a more modern translation of the *Tao Te Ching* and an informal essay on the Taoist principle of inaction."[4] Despite our uncertainty as to how many books on Taoism O'Neill had read, one thing seems certain, namely that his unabated interest in and in-depth understanding of Chinese Taoist philosophy influenced both his attitude toward life and his theatrical creations.

There has been much scholarship in regard to O'Neill's relationship with Strindberg, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Freud, and others, including his affinity with German Expressionist theatre, but only a few scholars have focused their attention on O'Neill's reception of Chinese Taoism and its influence upon him. In this thesis, to be precise, in the first two chapters of this thesis, which are intended as a unit depicting Chinese Taoism's influence on O'Neill, I will attempt to examine the configuration of Oriental Taoist philosophical wisdom in O'Neill's thought by analyzing two of the playwright's middle-period plays, *Marco Millions* and *Lazarus Laughed,* in order to reveal the correspondence of O'Neill's ideas, in full

[4] James Robinson, *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP. (1982):23-24.

or varying degrees, with the writings and doctrines of the Taoist Sages Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

We can ascertain the Taoist influence in many of O'Neill's plays, but I choose to explore *Marco Millions* in the first chapter of the study, because this play, set in the China of the thirteenth century, is highly Oriental in characters, setting and thought, which would forcefully throw into marked relief O'Neill's spiritual affinity with China and with the Oriental Taoist philosophy. In this chapter, a close examination will be made of the spiritual versus material dichotomy, the Taoist polarity principles and the *yin-yang* principles, which are embodied in the Oriental princess Kukachin and the Occidental merchant Marco Polo. The Western Marco represents the *yang* side of the Taoist *yin-yang* principle, namely, the hard, aggressive, and materialistic, which is contrasted, in the light of Taoism, with the Eastern Kukachin who represents the *yin* side, namely the soft, serene, and spiritual. The contrast exposed by the Taoist polarity principle should neither be construed as essentializing "East" as *yin* and "West" as *yang,* nor as an intentional "fabrication" of an incompatible confrontation between "East" and "West." My argument is that O'Neill, disappointed with Christianity and Western material civilization and having turned from his previous faith to seek to achieve oneness with the Orient's philosophical and religious wisdom, intends Marco as a living symbol of the arrested development of Western civilization and presents Kukachin as a sublime embodiment of the Oriental transcendence and spirituality

which the playwright admires so much. What is satirized in the play is the corrupt American capitalism which, reduced to opportunism, hypocrisy, and exploitation, is placed in contrast to a superior Eastern Taoist wisdom. Marco, with his spiritual hump, is perhaps the most amoral, insensitive character in O'Neill's vast gallery of materialists.

In Chapter Two, I will explore the Taoist elements in another of O'Neill's historical plays, *Lazarus Laughed*, but largely from a structural and thematic perspective rather than in terms of textual references to Taoism as in the case of *Marco Millions*. I choose *Lazarus Laughed*, because the play's philosophical concern with the transcendence of the world and indifference to death corresponds to a pivotal concept of Taoism. O'Neill blends the Taoist detachment and transcendence into themes, structure and polarized character relationships, and, in his own way, philosophizes on life and death in the work, inasmuch as he understands that life and death is part and parcel of the Taoist thought of Chuang Tzu. In this chapter, I argue that O'Neill's Taoist thought is displayed in the character relationships and dramatic polarities that interpenetrate the whole structure of the play.

While Chinese culture and philosophy profoundly influenced O'Neill, the American dramatist, at the same time, "enters into" China, the land of Taoism. Among all foreign dramatists, save for Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill has perhaps had the most decisive influence on the Chinese stage, exerting a profound impact upon the

development of modern Chinese drama. The final chapter of this thesis is thus intended for the study of the reciprocity of relations between China and O'Neill.

Thus, O'Neill has an affinity not only with ancient China but also with contemporary China. O'Neill is, in fact, the only American playwright who has made a categorical and, to a certain degree, persisting impact on the contemporary Chinese dramatic scene. During the formative years of modern Chinese drama, from the early 1920s to the late 1930s, O'Neill greatly attracted the attention of the older generation of Chinese "Spoken Drama" writers and directly influenced two highly powerful Chinese playwrights, Hong Shen and Cao Yu; even today, after a long period of being ignored, he still wields a tenacious influence among the younger generation of drama writers and scholars in China. O'Neill's lasting and extensive influence upon the Chinese dramatic stage is certainly in large measure due to the popularity of his works that have been translated, produced and studied in modern China. Before I move to indicate the content of the final chapter of the thesis, it seems necessary to briefly summarize the history of O'Neill's reception in China.

China first discovered O'Neill in 1922 when novelist Mao Dun introduced the latest development in American literature in a critical article carried in *Fiction Monthly* (vol. 13, No. 5): "In drama, new playwright Eugene O'Neill comes out

very popular and is truly the first genius in the American dramatic scene."[5] These are the earliest words introducing O'Neill into China. It was hardly unexpected that O'Neill's name, associated with one of China's greatest writers, would subsequently instigate a long chain of responses and echoes in China; in fact, his plays become a cultural bridge between the two peoples on both sides of the Pacific. The first translator of O'Neill in China was Gu Yuo-chen who published a Chinese version of O'Neill's *The Moon of the Caribbees* in 1930 and, in the following year, a Chinese version of *Beyond the Horizon,* which is the play that established O'Neill as a recognized American playwright. Later, during the 1930s and the 1940s, almost every year witnessed the publication of Chinese translations of O'Neill's plays, except during the years of the national crisis (1937-1945) when all the efforts in China went into the protracted War of Resistance against Japanese aggression. If there had been no national disaster, O'Neill would have been even more widely translated, produced, and studied, especially after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. During these two decades, according to Liu Hai-ping, a Chinese scholar of O'Neill, there were altogether "14 types" of Chinese translations of O'Neill's plays published in China,[6] and some of these are different versions of the same text, which indicates the degree of popular reception that this

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[5] Mao Dun, quoted by Liu Haiping and Zhu Donglin in *Zhongmei wenhua zai xiju zhong jiaoliu: Auonier yu Zhongguo* (*Chinese-American Cultural Dialogue Through Drama, O'Neill and China.*) Nanjing: Nanjing UP. (1988): 77. The translation is mine.

[6] Liu Hai-ping, "Yiujin Aonier zai Zhongguo."(Eugene O'Neill in China.) *Suzhou daixue xuebao* (Suzhou University Journal) 3 (1983): 81.

American playwright has received in China. As far as production is concerned, Xiong Fu-xi, the head of the Department of Drama in Peking University, produced *Ile* in 1930, thus becoming the first Chinese artist to adopt and direct one of O'Neill's plays. In subsequent years, many other plays, such as *In the Zone*, *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Emperor Jones* and *Before Breakfast*, were staged in China. The directors and performers involved in the production of O'Neill's plays often later became the leading artists in the Chinese dramatic world. In addition, a number of movies made from O'Neill's plays, such as *Anna Christie*, *Strange Interlude*, were imported to China and shown during these years. In a word, the period between the 1920s and the 1940s witnessed the first crest of popular interest in O'Neill in China.

The second period, from the 1950s through the late 1970s, saw O'Neill's popularity in China in temporary yet extensive suspension. As the result of the confrontation of East and West during the cold-war years and China's closed-door policy to international cultural intercourse, O'Neill's popularity in China suffered drastically; his plays were by and large brushed aside and rejected. Under this circumstances, his later plays, which are generally regarded as more powerful, were not allowed to be translated during these decades. Nobody could dare to write or publish his critical essays, not to mention to produce his plays on the Chinese stage. He was regarded in China as being only capable of plays that are extremely pessimistic and despairing.

The late 1970s to the present can be regarded as the third period and constitute the second apex of O'Neill's popularity in China. After a long period of stagnation, China instituted an open-door policy reform, which made it possible for Chinese literary and artistic circles to witness a bustling revival of Sino-American cultural exchanges. During this period, many more of O'Neill's plays have been translated while others have been retranslated with an unprecedented zest. A great magnitude of critical essays on this foremost American playwright have appeared in various journals throughout China. Plays such as *Anna Christie, Beyond the Horizon, Desire Under the Elms,* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* have become standard theatrical fare in Chinese major cities. Several of O'Neill's plays have even been televised nationwide, in the process of gaining an enthusiastic audience of millions in China.

The warm, favorable reception of O'Neill in China, especially in the first period, inevitably made O'Neill a considerable influence upon the Chinese dramatic scene. O'Neill, a man influenced by Chinese culture and philosophy, eventually made his influence felt in the works of the paramount Chinese playwrights Hong Shen and Cao Yu, which is my major concern in the final chapter.

The final chapter, more specifically, is a lengthy analysis of five plays by the three playwrights; in a unified context, the chapter will attempt to demonstrate the affinity between the Chinese plays and those of O'Neill. O'Neill's artistic style

and expressionist technique in *The Emperor Jones* struck Hong Shen and Cao Yu as something new that could aid them in revealing the inner soul of their protagonists in a fresher and more effective way. Cultivated in O'Neill's artistic soil, Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* and Cao Yu's *The Wildness* thus become two brilliant flowers of Chinese expressionist drama. In the order of their appearance in China, these two Chinese plays will be examined and compared, with their American prototype in the light of theme, structure, characterization, and devices. Both of the Chinese playwrights admired American master. Both of them, however, in one way or another, are reluctant to acknowledge their literary indebtedness as his disciples. Despite this reluctance, however, numerous parallels and similarities between *The Emperor Jones* and its Chinese counterparts can be drawn; making use of an analysis of structure and devices, the "blood tie" between the master and the disciples will be illustrated.

Another of Cao Yu's great plays, *Thunderstorm*, which is indubitably the most significant work of his career, will be brought into contrast with O'Neill's most powerful tragedy, *Desire Under the Elms,* to show the "consanguine relationship" between the greatest modern playwrights of the two countries. Many critics have noticed the O'Neillian elements in Cao's play, but what I attempt is to probe into the dramatic style of the playwrights by examining the corresponding character relationships in the two plays. As compared to the treatment of *The Emperor Jones* and its counterparts, I will place less emphasis on technique this

time and more accent on the dramatic themes and character relationships, illustrating the closeness of the drama to life. Although the greatest emphasis will be devoted to presenting the similarities between these two plays, a strong accent will also be laid on the contrasting features of the Chinese counterparts, which are the very characteristic strengths that make Cao's play artistically distinct from its model.

Eugene O'Neill, a giant on the world's dramatic stage, plays a thought-provoking, interesting, and unusual role in the context of the mutual cultural communication between East and West. Just as O'Neill's dramatic thought heavily benefited from the ancient Chinese Taoist philosophy, so modern Chinese spoken drama has been markedly influenced by O'Neill's powerful, compelling tragic plays. The influence of Chinese Taoist wisdom on O'Neill and his influence upon contemporary Chinese drama thus are the two organic parts that form the focus of this thesis.

Chapter One

O'Neill's Identification With Oriental Taoist Philosophy: *Marco Millions*

I

O'Neill started writing *Marco Millions* in 1921 and completed it in 1925, four years in the making, a sporadic rather than a sustained effort. The following two years after he began his play witnessed the death of his mother and the subsequent loss of his endeared brother. These two events came as a spiritual blow to him and not only interrupted his writing of the play, but seemed to prompt him to contemplate the Oriental Taoist philosophy of life and death as well as the illusory nature of the egohood, and therefore influenced the structure and form of the play and many other subsequent plays, such as *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1925), *Lazarus Laughed* (1926), and *Strange Interlude* (1927). The transfer of his own mother's body from California to his hometown might have inspired him to dramatize the scene of the return of Kukachin's body in which he focuses and philosophizes on life and death.

It is during this time that O'Neill seemed to begin to acquaint himself with Oriental religion and philosophy, although we can trace his first encounter with the wisdom of Eastern mysticism to Mabel Collins's *Light on the Path*.[7] O'Neill studied Oriental religions and philosophies, particularly Taoism, in the early 1920s. James Legge's translation of *Tao Te Ching* and the first half of the *Chuang Tzu,* contained in O'Neill's library at this time, indicates clearly the playwright's involvement with Chinese religion and culture. In a 1923 letter to Frederick Carpenter, O'Neill confesses to his "considerable reading in Oriental philosophy and religion," which he did "many years ago." "The mysticism and Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu probably interested me more than any other Oriental writing."[8] O'Neill cherished a deep longing for the mysterious Eastern land of China, and expressed a strong desire to visit there at the time after his mother's death. "Our plans for the winter remain chaotic," he wrote in a letter to Kenneth Macgowan in 1922: "we will probably, in a fit of desperation, wind up in China. I'd like that, too, while Europe somehow means nothing to me."[9]

O'Neill's deep interest in Oriental thought and his sad disappointments with American materialism can be palpably found in his exotic historical play *Marco*

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[7] *Light on the Path* (London: Theosophical Society, 1885) is the theosophist booklet which dwells on Hindu conceptions of liberation and transcendence of ego. See also Doris Alexander, "*Light on the Path* and The Fountain." *Modern Drama* 3. (Dec. 1960): 260-267.

[8] O'Neill's letter to Federic I. Carpenter, quoted in "Eugene O'Neill, the Orient and American Transcendentalism." *Eugene O'Neill: A Collection of Criticism* ed. Ernest G. Griffin. 42.

[9] O'Neill's letter to Kenneth Macgowan. Quoted by James Robinson, *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision.* Southern Illinois University Press. (1982): 108-09.

Millions which, set in Medieval China, focuses on the dichotomy of a Western materialistic businessman and an Eastern idealistic princess.

O'Neill's *Marco Millions*, inspired by Donn Byre's *Messer Marco Polo* (1921), dramatizes the romantic story of a Western merchant, Marco, who meets the serene Chinese Princess, Kukachin, during his historical expedition to China. Kukachin is the granddaughter of Kublai Khan, the Emperor of the Empire, and she is a charming, sedate and sensitive beauty, representing the splendour, wealth and spiritualism of the Orient. But what Marco is drawn into and craving for is anything but a pursuit of Eastern spiritual wisdom. Like his elders, he is crassly materialistic, showing a total blindness to the culture and religion of the exotic land. He sees everything in terms of profit and loss. Even in his attempt to write a love poem to his beloved Donata he is materialistic--"You are as lovely as gold in the sun/ Your skin is like a silver in the moon/ Your eyes are black pearls I have won" (39)--and he describes her in terms of precious metal and precious stones. This "love" poem signifies the materialism Marco will embody throughout the play. He is not only insensitive to culture and religion, but also to human emotions. Action is all important to him, particularly when it leads to making money, increasing efficiency and gaining a high position. Marco's mania for money serves O'Neill as an emblem of the loss of spiritual values and the adoption of the material standards of the Western world.

If we look deeper into the story, we will perceive more clearly the clash between Oriental spirituality and Occidental egocentrism which O'Neill intends to display in a Taoist philosophical context. Because of his being good at petty favors, Marco, as the story goes, captures the heart of Princess Kukachin, who sees him as an exotic person, a prince, a knight. The Great Khan, who has been using Marco as a kind of humorous experiment, is appalled by this discovery, especially since the lady is betrothed to the king of Persia. When Marco returns unannounced to the court and tells of his "triumphs," the Khan finds himself no longer amused by Marco's "spiritual hump," (90) and wonders whether he really does have an immortal soul. Kukachin does not believe that he is so grossly materialistic as her grandfather and his counselor, Chu-yin, think. She defends him when the Khan suggests that he does not have a soul, recalling occasions when he has been touched by emotion and has performed disinterested acts. She requests that Marco captain her ship on its voyage to Hormuz where she must meet with her betrothed, the King of Persia.

During the course of the voyage, Kukachin nearly dies on three occasions: once by falling overboard; once during a pirate attack; once by contracting a fever. In each case Marco saves her, though she wishes for death, despairing in the knowledge that Marco saves her not for love but as a means of protecting his investment--a future bonus. On their last night on the vessel, Marco seeks an interview with her, and asks her to request a bonus for him on account of these

extra services so well performed. She tries desperately to make him feel love for her. She is almost hysterical with despair and asks him to look into her love-lorn eyes and say what he sees there, as Chu-yin has requested. Thinking that she may have a fever, Marco touches her feet, and checks her pulse and then looks deeply into her eyes. There is a moment in which emotion and passion momentarily move him and they nearly kiss, but then Marco hears the counting-house voice of his uncle, "one million," and is called back to materialistic reality. He explains the Princess's eyes as "delirious," and suggests she should go to sleep. Kukachin, who "no longer can endure the shame of living" (139), pulls out a dagger with wild despair and attempts to kill herself. Marco disarms her, and now is even more sure of her illness. After Kukachin realizes that Marco's idea of marriage is wholly economic, she knows that she is defeated and has offered herself to an "ox", and can no longer bear the shame of living. She therefore decides to die.

At the end of the play, her coffin, which had been in procession from Persia to Tartary in the prologue, reaches the palace of the Great Khan at Cambaluc. Kulai, Chu-yin and four priests--Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and Moslem--try to find the secret of death and life. Kublai says: "She dies for love like a fool." His counselor, Chu-yin, however, disagrees: "No, she loved love. She died for beauty" (179).

In *Marco Millions,* as we see, O'Neill combines history, love, death and satire, allowing them to unfold throughout the play. This unfolding reveals Marco

as a stark materialistic soul and Kukachin as a sublime embodiment of spirit. We are therefore presented with a clear-cut contrast between the Oriental lofty quietism and the Occidental corrupt materialism. Hence, the play is a dramatization of two opposing forces. Marco, the personification of the Western material civilization, turns a blind eye to the spiritual and emotional values of the Orient--symbolized by the love of Kukachin--and eventually causes her death by his materialistic drive, albeit in an unwitting way. The spiritual beauty of Oriental serenity is thus destroyed by the hard and aggressive forces represented by this Christian merchant. *Marco Millions* assumes a polar conflict of contrary forces and ends up with one force destroying the other.

Apparently the Occidental aggressive force represented by Marco triumphs over the Oriental spiritual force embodied by Kukachin. But if we examine the deeper layer that underlies the surface, it becomes clear that Kukachin is definitely the victor, whereas Marco is absolutely the defeated in the true sense, a tragic figure of bitter satire. Consequently, it is the Oriental mystical spiritualism represented by Kukachin that triumphs over the destructive materialism of the West embodied by Marco. O'Neill discovers this mystical spiritual force in Taoist thought and couches it in this Eastern character in the play, which ultimately affirms the superiority of spiritualism over materialism. Written in the context of Eastern philosophical mysticism, this play is also intended to satirically "show the

tragedy incurred when man's blindness blocks out beauty and love and leaves him in a dark world grasping for objects."[10]

II

The Taoist polarity principle is manifested in the conflict between East and West, represented by Kukachin and Marco respectively. By way of an East versus West confrontation, O'Neill tries to search for the meaning of life. He dramatizes in the play the meaning of life in the Taoist philosophy that is best found in Oriental mystical wisdom. Calm Taoist emotional intuition and spiritual mysticism are dramatically depicted in polar contrast to Western activism and its dominance of rational practicality and worldly materialism, as emblematized by the hero. This dualism is aptly found in Oriental Taoist philosophy, which views everything as a kind of oppositional polarities: *yin* and *yang*, which is one of the most important principles in the Taoist thought. The *yin*, in Taoist terms, can be defined as "Repose, the influence of the negative," and *yang* as "Motion, the power of the positive" (Chuang Tzu's words). The one is inertia, contraction, retreat; the other expansion, advance and aggression. The *yin* is also female, namely, the mother

[10] Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: a new assessment*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. (1985): 300.

aspect, mercy and wisdom, including the most serene and all-embracing compassion and motherhood as represented in China by Guang-yin. The *yang* is the male side, and is practical, hard, methodical, and representative of power. The feminine is the passive, still, soft, and in the body is represented by the flesh, while the masculine is the active, aggressive and rational, and in the body is represented by the bone. In the Taoist thought, the *yin-yang* symbolizes all paired existence, the clashing polarities, partaking of all the symbolism of contrary yet sometimes complementary forces.

The opposing personalities of the two major characters in *Marco Millions* strikingly point to O'Neill's being favorably influenced by and accepting of the Taoist *ying-yang* principle. In his interpretation of the play, Robison also applies the Taoist *yin-yang* polarity principle to the relationship of the main characters. "The Oriental Kukachin, who is feminine, passive and spiritual," as he rightly observes, corresponds to the *yin* principle in the Chinese thought. The Occidental Marco corresponds to *yang*, the masculine, rational and active principle.'[11] These two characters are the very incarnations of the Chinese *yin-yang* philosophy. In the second act of the play, as Robinson further notes, Marco is even more categorically and concretely linked with the *yang* principle when he, about to make a speech to his listeners, places his hand on "the head of a bronze dragon, the

[11] James Robinson, *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision*. Southern Illinois University Press. (1982): 113.

ancient symbol of *Yang*, the celestial, male principle of the Cosmos."(93)[12] This symbolic gesture emphatically suggests O'Neill's intention of making Marco stand right on the Taoist foreground of the *yang* principle. The Christian merchant, due to his bestowed *yang* nature, aspires to an aggressive pursuit of material success after being appointed Mayor of Yang Chau by Kublai Khan, and consistently figures out his "countless clever schemes which evidence a rational, creative and technological mind that needs to keep busy."[13]

O'Neill satirically places Marco, the active mayor, in an active position directly opposed to the whole spirit of the Tao. Marco's "democratic" reform, as we see, causes so many troubles and problems in Yang Chau that "half a million inhabitants" have already complained to the Khan, "enumerating over three thousand cases of his gross abuse of power," but Marco simply writes them off as a "minority of malcontents" (99). Moreover, Marco's taxation scheme, "simply reversing the old system," "taxing every necessity in life" (98), is highly contrary to the non-doing principle, the Taoist political philosophy. His appointing "five hundred committees to carry on my [Marco's] work" (99), an utter installation of a bureaucracy to govern, is what Lao-tzu, the Chinese Taoist philosopher, guards against: "The people suffer from famine because of the multitude of taxes consumed by their superiors." (Chapter 75, Legge 117). His gross abuse of power

[12] *Ibid.*, 113. Quoted by Robinson.
[13] *Ibid.*, 113.

and great disturbance of peace are bitterly satirized by the playwright: "I even had a law passed that anyone caught interfering with culture would be subject to a fine! It was Section One of a blanket statute that every citizen must be happy or go to jail" (98-99). As city mayor, Marco goes so far to abolish the right of free speech, repress ancient culture and imprison those who are not "happy." It becomes clear that Marco, acting like a Fascist or Nazi (though Nazism was not in power when O'Neill was writing), represents the hard, active and aggressive aspect of the Taoist *yin-yang* principle. Evidently, what O'Neill here endeavors to satirically allude to is Marco's blindness to and ignorance of the most significant Taoist creed: Wu-wei, the doctrine of inaction or non-doing, sometimes "non-interference" or "letting-go."

Marco is thus satirized in the context of the Oriental Taoist philosophy because his doings are against the Taoist Wu-wei proposition. Wu-wei, Taoistically speaking, is a policy of naturalness, of "live and let live" and of avoiding friction. It is also the non-desire, the dispassion, which leads automatically to a release from tension and helps towards realization of will. Thus Wu-wei leads to a realization of, and oneness with, the Supreme Identity and the Motionless Mover, the Tao, which "never does yet through it everything is done" (Lao Tzu, Chaper 37; Lin 533).

Marco's ignorance of this basic Taoist proposition of Wu-wei causes him to disturb peace and to create unrest among the people of Yang-chau by way of his

crass interference. His meddling in everything incurs chaotic consequences that overturn the previous balance and destroy natural goodness. His bitter friction with the local inhabitants, his suppression of freedom of speech and individual liberty, and his destruction of natural goodness by his arbitrary interference--all these behaviors are starkly contrary to Wu-wei, the non-action, non-interference precept of Lao-tzu's political philosophy. In Chapter 60 of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoist philosophy, speaks against this sort of man-made interference in governing a country: "Rule a big country as you would fry a small fish" (Chapter 60, Lin:189). Managing a country should be undertaken as carefully and precisely as is the frying of a small delicate fish. Just as a small fish stewing in a pan is likely to be broken up if it is moved about too much, so will the Empire be fatally injured if its natural development is too indelicately interfered with. Hence the only safe course is to follow the Tao. This is why Marco's aggressive doings are exactly what the metaphor signifies not to do: not to meddle violently in the governmental affairs.

O'Neill's satire of Marco takes on a bitter force, especially in Marco's suggestion that Kublai Khan conquer the world by his military power. In order to procure his potent right, Marco even takes the further step of dabbling in weaponry and invents a cannon for Kublai Khan to help him "conquer men" by using a man-made machine to take over the whole world. His bellicose and aggressive action is diametrically opposed Lao-tzu's philosophical and political principle of governing:

"A good conqueror does not fight." (chapter 68, Lin 237). Oriental Kublai, however, is not impressed by Marco's demonstration of the high efficiency of the man-made machine, because he maintains that power and war are not acts of wisdom.

This mercantile mayor, as we see, conditioned by the Western object-oriented aspiration for gaining the material wealth of the Eastern exotic land, arbitrarily contravenes the natural Taoist quietism and primitive simplicity, and ends up with "half a million citizens" accusing him of endeavoring to "stamp out their ancient culture" (98). Marco's worldly ambition for this material goal through his active commercial service, unmistakably leads him nowhere in the mystical, Oriental land of the Great Khan's Empire.

O'Neill's Kukachin, the Oriental character, is portrayed as diametrically opposed to the Occidental Marco, the hard-core materialist. Marco loves the treasures of this world, whereas Kukachin transcends them. What she desires is nothing other than spiritual wealth, or love, to which Marco is so indifferent. Kublai sees through Marco, recognizing his shrewd and crafty greed, and thus wants to "send him to his native wallow" (90) because to his mind this vulgar businessman has only an acquisitive instinct rather than a mortal soul. As Kublai says, "He has memorized everything and learned nothing. He has looked at everything and seen nothing. He has lusted for everything and loved nothing" (90). Kukachin, in fervid quest of lofty love, even goes so far as to offend the supreme

authority of Kublai Khan, the Son of Heaven, by rebelliously coming to stand at Marco's side, shouting,"He has a soul! I know he has!" (91). Aware that her refusal to be betrothed to Arghum Khan, the king of Persia, means a war between the two countries, Kukachin reluctantly accepts the painful marriage against her utmost will, but still requests, on the verge of tears, that the Khan appoint Marco to accompany her on her voyage to Persia. By so doing, she gives Marco one last chance and tries desperately to make him feel love for her, bidding him to "Look into my eyes...Look deeply! I will die if you do not see what is there!" (137). Callous and nonchalant, this Western "ox" sees nothing in her heart, his eyes being so blind to the values of Eastern spirituality.

It is evident here that O'Neill, with a bitter sarcastic note, dramatically satirizes the callousness and hardness of this mammon-serving Westerner's stony heart. Marco, spiritually deformed, is a soulless strong man, as evidenced when the Oriental prostitute laughs at him: "Your soul! Dead and Buried! You strong man!" (67). O'Neill's derision of Marco's death of the soul is actually couched in Lao-tzu's Taoist terms, because, in the Tao, of all the bitter sorrows there is none so great as the death of the soul. To deride Marco's stark insensitivity and indifference to the emotional value and sublime morality, O'Neill accentuates through the mouth of an Eastern harlot the non-existence of soul in Marco's physical body, which, in the Taoist sense, is conceived to be the greatest tragedy of

human life. It is therefore futile to expect that this object-oriented seeker will escape being the object of the Taoist satire.

The revelation O'Neill makes by his Taoist articulation of Marco's spiritual death is that, on one hand, Kukachin's love for this living symbol of Western civilization turns out be a distressing, heart-rending undergoing, completely frustrating her and smashing her confidence in life. The playwright's message here is clearly revealed to be that the material West is incorrigibly corrupt because it denies the values of spirituality.

On the other hand, O'Neill intends Kukachin to be an incarnation of the Oriental values and sublimity that he so admires. She cherishes love and disdains gold, whereas Marco is born to cherish the opposites. She eventually sees through to his true nature: his romance is utterly made of silver and gold, just as his engagement with Donata; she is consequently in the firm conviction that soulless love is "no better than a mating of swine" (141). In Kukachin's mind, life without love is a life fit only for pigs and sows, or low animals, that is, a life fit for beasts whose only concern is eating and rutting. She cannot conceive of a life without spirituality. For her, life is love, idealized with a lover who is a husband, a son and a father combined: "The lover comes/ Who becomes a husband/ Who becomes a son/ Who becomes a father--/ In this contemplation lives the woman" (142-143). It is this whole human relationship, which, for Kukachin, represents all emotions of love. For an Oriental woman like Kukachin, a life of love with a lover who

encompasses the qualities of a husband, son and father, is a beautiful feminine ideal which is rooted in Chinese culture. Once again, O'Neill's humane and appreciative portrayal of Kukachin as a virtuous and lofty incarnation shows the playwright's approbation of and admiration for the Eastern cultural values.

Love is spiritual in nature, but spiritual Kukachin is unable to obtain love, yet she is still relentless in her quest for a love that emulates the spiritual absolute, like that emulated by the Great Khan. Since her love is captured and cheated by the "dog," she has nothing to love but death, for "When love is not loved it loves death" (128). O'Neill's Kukachin faces death with readiness and gladness; unlike many heroines in classic Greek tragedies, however, such as Antigone, Kukachin does not pervert her love by intending her suicide to be an act of revenge on her lover, nor does she reduce her love to mere jealousy and hatred, even though her heart is betrayed and broken. These qualities also correspond to Lao-tzu's Taoist ideal of tolerance and forgiveness. In Chapter 63 of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu says: "Accomplish do-nothing. Attend to no-affairs. Taste the flavorless. Whether it is big or small, many or few, requite hatred with virtue"(Chapter 63, Lin 201). Chuang-tzu, another Taoist Sage, also makes similar remarks on this idea: "To be insulted and not feel angry is the mark of one who has identified himself with the natural scheme of things"(Chapter 63, Lin 203). Having seen through the "Red Dust" of this human world, Kukachin, out of Taoist detachment, releases herself from worldly worries and pains by terminating her lingering in this mortal life and

transcending all human emotions, including jealousy, hatred and revenge. She identifies herself with the supreme Taoist creed of "non-action," which ultimately leads her to a release from emotional tension and helps her towards spiritual realization.

In *Marco Millions*, to summarize, O'Neill enriches his multi-faceted portrayal by contrasting the characterizations of the Oriental Kukachin and the Occidental Marco. These archetypal characters clearly and strikingly manifest Lao-tzu's Taoist ideal of the *yin-yang* principle. The polar relationship between Kukachin and Marco just signifies the opposing personalities of *yin-yang*, and underscores the polarity of the conflict between spiritual East and materialistic West. Feminine Kukachin, the *yin* aspect, and masculine Marco, the *yang* aspect, thus represent respectively the Taoist opposing polarity: soft and hard, weak and aggressive, spiritual and carnal, sublime and vulgar, devoted and gluttonous, fatal and fortunate, and finally "death" and "life." Marco, though returning to the West with millions obtained from the East, is by no means a hero, but rather a tragic figure of satire, a dead soul with only somatic existence. Kukachin, in alignment with the mystical Taoist quest for Eternity, finds the spiritual completion and fulfillment of the purpose of life in death, whose sleep image is a kind of quietude, a kind of non-action, more pleasant than being awake. Influenced by the Taoist spiritual eternity, O'Neill, disillusioned with Western Christianity and civilization, reduces this antithesis of Western materialism and Eastern mysticism into an

irreconcilable resolution sought in a resignation to non-action, and finally to death which becomes a return to life.

III

When analysing the opposing personalities of the characters, James Robinson argues that, "While Marco's insensibility blinds him to Kukachin's passion, her love suggests an attraction" which may lead to "the secret unity of the two characters." He opines that "Marco and Kukachin sail away together on a sea voyage" which "suggests that Marco and Kukachin (like *yang* and *yin*) participate in the same larger, unifying process."[14] If Marco really endeavors to prove the immortality of his soul by his actions, as he claims to, then their "unity" should be achieved in the larger unifying process. O'Neill, however, does not seem to intend Marco to have any possible oneness with the Oriental princess because his object-oriented behavior consistently undermines this possibility of identification. Driven by his earthly desires from the outset, Marco is too callous and blind to perceive

[14] *Ibid.*, 113.

Kukachin's love and thus brings about her initial torment and eventual death, which seems to present the salient evidence that the opposition of the two entirely different pursuits is doomed by their very nature. O'Neill roots Marco's inherent callousness and impassiveness to spirituality in his inherited nature so as to project onto the audience the impossibility of his unity with this Eastern character: "To change one's nature is far tougher than to remove a mountain." This Chinese proverb is aptly applicable to Marco and explains his ingrained, unspiritual, worldly commitment.

In *Marco Millions*, the thematic action of the play is set in the framework of travel and return. The Taoist return motif is also strikingly underscored. While he travels Eastward, Marco's materialistic proclivity intensifies. "The farther he journeys East---through lands whose mystical creeds preach tolerance and renunciation--the more intolerant, ethnocentric and materialist Marco becomes."[15] When Marco was a teenager, as we see in the play, he hankers for a journey to the Orient to make fortune. So when he starts his excursion, he is readily equipped with the temporal desire for personal prosperity and drive to "keep awake to the opportunity" to make "millions" (32). When Marco travels to Oriental India, he has reached the age of seventeen, and "some of the freshness of youth has worn off" (56). His earthly consciousness matures just like his physical body. An Indian

[15] James Robinson also stresses Marco's intensification of his materialistic proclivity as the hero journeys Eastward. *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision*. Southern Illinois University Press. (1982): 111.

snake-charmer is even annoyed by Polo's egoistic snobbishness, and glares at him, spitting on the ground at his feet with angry disgust. Marco assumes the casual, indifferent attitude of the worldly wise, and even eyes with scorn a sacred statue. One year later when he arrives in Mongolia, Marco does not even bother to glance at the local Buddhists. As he travels Eastwards, Marco develops further contempt for human misery and religious trust and learns cunning ways of getting ahead of his father and uncle, and attains his manhood. Before he finally reaches the Great Wall of China, Marco, tempered and toughened through observation of life, grows into a living example of the Western World ready for the Khan. Having reached materialist maturity, Marco is now ready to resume his active and aggressive practicality which is ironically satirized by the playwright in a Taoist context.

Marco boasts to the Great Khan that he is sent in place of the requested wise men and "would be worth a million wise men to you." (73) However, disappointed by his meddling in everything which has resulted in the chaotic state of governing due to his sole materialistic obsessions, Kublai does not truly believe that Marco possesses "that thing called a soul which the West dreams lives after death" (74). His is only a shrewd and crafty greed, as the Khan notes, and so he only deserves returning home, or returning to "his native wallow" (90). Before he leaves, he is told that he must bring out a person who can prove the fact that he has an immortal soul. At this critical moment, Kukachin comes out to profess that she has seen it. So it is arranged that Marco is to accompany the Princess to Persia and

then return to Italy. Even on the journey back, Marco's "soul" still ignores the Oriental Princess's despairing love.

What we are arguing is intended to convey the most significant Taoist motif of *return* standing out in sharp relief against the structure of the play. A brief but closer reexamination of the plot structure aids us to perceive more distinctly O'Neill's deliberate organization of the Taoist cycle of return underlying the structural surface of *Marco Millions*. The return motif in the play is crucial in the Taoist thought because polarities can have cyclic exchanges, which process includes a sense of return. In *Marco Millions*, this sense of return is particularly characterized by the return to the original place--home. O'Neill, in conformity with the Taoist dialectical tendency of the return, thus follows the essential characteristic of Oriental mystical philosophy by setting his protagonists in motion to their own original places. In Chapter 16 of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu remarks: "All things alike go through their processes of activity, and (then) we see them return (to their original state.)" (Legge 59) This is the point at which it is possible for us to discern the significance of the cyclic return as a symbolic structure in the play. To comprehend completely Marco's true colors involves a perception of his necessary return to his origins, where his nature can be revealed with a vengeance. Going, when coupled with returning, forms a circle. Thus this cyclic return to the root, a principle inherent in all nature, is generally considered to be the completion and fulfillment of the purpose of life.

Thus, in the first scene of the last Act, what is presented to the reader is Marco's garish home-returning celebration, where his smug self-complacency and typical gaudy display of wealth is depicted as the apotheosis of Western materialism. This scene is projected on the audience when the Great Khan becomes enraged with Marco because the courier delivers a further message reporting that Marco saw in the princess's eyes no "unnatural change" until the last day when he "noticed a rather strained expression ..., fever due to her Highness's spleen being sluggish after the long confinement in shipboard" (157-158). The Great Khan, almost mad with rage, threatens to destroy the entire West, leading his armies himself and intending to tear Marco limb from limb. Chu-yin, however, dissuades him. Thinking that Marco must have returned home by this time, Kublai Khan calls for his miraculous crystal ball, which magically enables him to perceive what is happening there. This extraordinary expressionistic technique is aptly applied here because the reader can vividly see that Marco's home-returning banquet scene in Venice is satirically brought to the fore.

The banquet scene depicts the Polos' Venetian home, where we see the procession of guests marvel at the gold plate and discuss the return of the Polos and also the now fat and somewhat bovine Donata. Ranks of servants bring in costly food and wines, piling them on the table to the astonishment of all. Then the Polos enter, lavishly dressed in crimson satin. They remove their outer robes and give them to the servants, revealing even more gorgeous robes underneath. Donata

is so proud to declare Marco as her beloved hero. Calling for attention from the crowd, Marco "clears his throat with an important cough and bursts forth into a memorized speech in the grand Chamber of Commerce style" (169). But the gluttonous guests are busy eating and totally ignore his speech. When the Great Khan hears Marco's final words, "millions!...millions!... millions!", the emperor trembles in disgust and antipathy, dashing the crystal ball to the floor and exclaiming, "Now all is flesh!" O'Neill cries aloud against this Occidental material ravenousness through the mouth of Kublai: "And can their flesh become the Word again?" (170)

Strikingly, O'Neill's lampooning of Marco's materialistic hard-core greediness has been set and completed in a perfect cycle of the Taoist return. Marco's worldly acquisitiveness, emanating from his Western materialism, is overshadowed by his rampant lust for wealth, which is notably exhibited after he returns from the East to his "original" condition---the West. The theme of return, here materially rather than spiritually portrayed, projects itself onto the Taoist idea that no human being can escape the natural, inevitable movement toward the destination of his life's voyage. This is exactly what Lao-tzu says: "All things return to their root" (Lao Tzu, Lin 276). The Taoist motif of return employed in the play well assists O'Neill in his forceful presentation of Occidental material avarice and spiritual vacuity embodied in this Christian businessman. As a result, the playwright's projected pattern of return both thematically and structurally

dramatizes in an ironical fashion Marco's egoistic lack of spirituality in both the departure and return of his life's voyage.

The dramatic pattern of the Taoist return is not only acted out by Marco but also by the Oriental princess Kukachin, whose body is eventually carried back to her original place, to her grandfather, the Khan. O'Neill emphatically contrasts Kakachin's serene and peaceful return to her original place with Marco's worldly return to his. The Occidental return is a vulgar celebration of earthly gain while the Oriental one is depicted as a spiritual repose in Taoist transcendence.

Both Kukachin's departure and return are sublime and spiritual. Devoted to the goal of avoiding a war triggerd by her refusal to marry the King of Persia, Kukachin sacrifices herself by departing from her home on a sea voyage to a faraway exotic land. Kukachin's heart, however, has been captured by this Western "dream-knight," who proves to be soulless, as evidenced by his preference for the base and vulgar Donata over Kukachin, who is a person of higher quality. This mean betrayal of heart finally smashes her illusion about him as well as her will to live. Kukachin's reaching Hormuz is not only the end of her journey, but the end of her life. She has reached her end, but at the end there is the return. So, released from earthly worries and suffering, Kukachin decides to end her lingering in this mortal world by seeking a return to her true state of life in death. This *return* constitutes the essential Taoist structure of the whole play. The play, as we see, opens with the corpse of Kukachin on its way home and ends with

its arrival. In both scenes Kukachin appears more alive than dead, which makes the play's structure a self-contained cycle of life and death. This is not a coincidence but rather a result of O'Neill's deliberate arrangement, which makes the life experienced by the Chinese princess structurally conform to the Taoist sage Chu-yin's words: "Life is a bad dream between the two awakenings." (115) Enlightened by the Oriental Taoist ideal of transcendence, O'Neill, in a dramatic way, pushes to the foreground Kukachin's return to spiritual repose and eternity by highlighting the return of Kukachin's physical body to her place of origin.

Death is a homecoming, a motif accentuated intensely in Taoist thought. Death is the end of the human voyage, therein Kukachin can have a long repose. In the play, death thus is smiling at her as she is now determined to follow her final return to her origins. In the third scene of Act Two when Marco confusedly asks Kukachin, "You certainly didn't want to die, did you?", the young princess slowly but intensely answers: "Yes!... I would be asleep in green water!" (133). To Kukachin, and to O'Neill too, death is self-transcendence or self-elevation, which is, Taoistically, a longing after a happy return to home, where there is an eternal stillness and repose:

> If I were asleep in green water
>
> No pang could be added to my sorrow,
>
> Old grief would be forgotten,

I would know peace. (128)

This "peace" is what Kukachin is longing for as it is the true state of life. As the sailors subsequently chant: "There is peace deep in the sea. But the surface is sorrow" (128). "The surface" here represents human life, which is replete with the secular sorrows and worries of this mortal world, while "peace deep in the sea" is obviously emblematic of the perpetual rest found in death. Kuakchi's demise is a peaceful sleep, an eternal repose, a real state of life. It is welcomed by the Khan, the grandfather, in the final scene of the touching end of the play: "So, Little Kukachin--so, Little flower--you have come back--they could not keep you--you were too homesick--you wanted to return--to gladden my last days--I bid you welcome home, Little Flower! I bid you welcome home!" (180).

O'Neill's treatment of death as the Taoist homecoming aptly corresponds to and is set in the context of the Taoist Sage Chuang-tzu's teaching: "How do I know that the love of life is not a delusion? and that the dislike of death is not like a young person's losing his way, and not know that he is (really) going home?" (Chuang Tzu, Chapter 39, Legge 194). To O'Neill's Kukachin, to die is truly to live. Life resides in death and death engenders life. We are reminded that the purpose of the dramatic introduction to this play, where an "unearthly glow, like a halo, lights up the face of Kukachin...The face of Kukachin becomes more and more living" is to indicate life in death (21-22). From the Taoist perspective, life is associated with a dream, a crushed dream, as Chu-yin previously told sad,

melancholy Kukachin, a bad dream between two awakenings. This remark explicitly alludes to Chuang Tzu's sagacious Taoist philosophy of life and death: We are born as from a quiet sleep and we die to a calm awaking; he likens death to "the great awaking, after which we should know that this life was a great dream." (Chuang Tzu, Chapter 39, Legge 195) To die for love is to enter life in "silence," because only there can a peaceful mind and a mental quietude be achieved after a nightmare of life. As Kukachin says, "I have loved and died. Now I am love, and live." (22) The life before death, to Kukachin, is the "day" that is clamorous, turbulent and restless, fraught with humdrum and tumult. To die is to avoid a human nightmare in this mortal world, to enter into complete life in rest and peace. Rest has a renewing and soothing power, just as quietude enables a man to attain equilibrium. To cherish death and the repose found in it is the Taoist ideal of transcendence, is an act of non-action. By providing these transcendental values in the Oriental character, O'Neill reveals to the reader that his Chinese princess, despite being "defeated," unquestionably conveys a strong feeling of triumph, pleasure and quietude in an act of acceptance of death, all of which symbolizes the indomitable and eternal power of justice and spirituality.

In the final scene of the play, as we see, the four priests--Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Moslem--are holding a religious celebration at four corners, which is emblematic of an Oriental world. The value of death as a return to spiritual repose is again reasserted by O'Neill through the Khan: "What is death?" (175) Kublai

asks, "his eyes" resting in "loving contemplation on the body of Kukachin."(175) He finds his granddaughter's "beauty is even in death more living."(175) This "more living" indicates that Kukachin finds in her death the quietness, harmoniousness, and everlastingness of life, and that death is just like returning to the eternity of the stars. Her death is thus depicted as life because death is more real than life. With the beautiful tenderness of grief in his voice, Kublai Khan speaks softly to his granddaughter: "I think you are hiding your eyes, Kukachin...You are playing hide and seek...Let us stop playing!...Open your eyes and laugh!...Whisper your secret in my ear. I--I am dead and you are living!" (179-180). This is a very emotional, touching, and pathetic scene, revealing O'Neill's Taoistic acceptance of the eternal harmony of life in stillness and in death, while showing his conformity to the way of the Tao in the return to childlikeness, as the aged Kublai Khan becomes so *child-like* now, with all pretenses removed. Kukachin is not the one who needs mourning, as her self-negation is a happy return to her original true state, and eventually to her spiritual eternity; it is instead the living who need to be grieved over because they are still hopeless and unable to release themselves from the pains and sufferings in this life. This final scene, in which the *leitmotif* of the transcendent return of death is so forcefully highlighted, doubtlessly suggests O'Neill's staunch effort in his identifying with the Oriental Taoist philosophical wisdom of life and death. This identification is even more

true and profound, as the O'Neill's next play, *Lazarus Laughed,* would reveal.

Chapter Two

Beyond Death is Life:

A Taoist Ideal in *Lazarus Laughed*

I

As in *Marco Millions*, the theme which O'Neill attempts to explore in *Lazarus Laughed* is again the search for the meaning of life, for the true value of human existence. The significant subject of death, which is centeral to the final scene of *Marco Millions,* is carried into the whole process and development of this play, where the fear of death is dramatically denied by Lazarus on the ground of his startling discovery that "there is no death," fundamentally a Taoist ideal, although proclaimed by an Occidental character this time rather than an Oriental character. According to Virginia Floyd, O'Neill is "inspired by the short Biblical story," "recorded an idea for 'Play of Lazarus--the man who had been dead for three days and returned to life, knowing the secret.'"[16] Lazarus, "upon his return" to this life, "proclaims to the world" that "life exists beyond the grave."[17] After his resurrection, Lazarus shocks his family and fellow citizens with what he has

[16] Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment.* Ferderick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc. (1985): 319.
[17] *Ibid.*, 319.

learned in death: that man's life is dominated by fear of death, that his salvation lies in realizing that life does not die, that life is laughter. As a result of his voyage beyond the grave, he emerges as the personification of the affirmation of life. This play, despite its flaws, actually remains O'Neill's most beautiful philosophizing about life and death, inasmuch as we can discern that some of his finest writing and his Taoist thinking went into its creation. It is also the culmination of a series of plays from *The Fountain* through *Marco Millions* and *The Great God Brown*, in which he invariably attempts to forge an Oriental view of life, largely under the influence of the wisdom of the Taoist philosophy.

Lazarus Laughed has seldom been approached by critics as a Taoist-influenced play, as one that relates to the motif of death as the Taoist return. Most published critiques treat the play as an interpretation of Western sources. Cyrus Day considers O'Neill's Lazarus as a "reinterpretation of doctrines of the superman."[18] "O'Neill was under the illusion, when writing *Lazarus Laughed*," he states, "that Nietzsche's philosophy of power could fill the vacancy caused by modern man's loss of faith in God and religion. He created Lazarus, therefore, in the image of a Nietzschean superman, assigned him the dual role of savior and tragic hero."[19] Cyrus Day argues that "the will-to-power--the unifying principle of Nietzsche's philosophy--is variously manifested in the attitudes and conduct of all

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[18] Cyrus Day, "Amor Fati: O'Neill's Lazarus as Superman and Savior." *O'Neill*. ed. John Gassner. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 74-75.
[19] *Ibid.*, 75.

the characters in *Lazarus Laughed*."[20] Egil Tornqvist associates Lazarus to Dionysus, likening O'Neill's interest with the Dionysian and Appolonian opposing forces. Although Doris Alexander seeks a resemblance between Lazarus and Buddha, "pointing out the Indian origin of Lazarus's egolessness,"[21] most critics trace O'Neill's sources in *Lazarus Laughed* to the Western tradtition. Yet, this play's pervasive cycles of return go beyond Occidental sources to its final origins in Chinese Lao-tzu's and Chuang-tzu's philosophical truths, according to which life is perpetual and death is untrue and illusory. Death, in the Taoist belief, is a return home where a new life is to be found.

In *Lazarus Laughed*, everyone except Lazarus wears a mask and harbors a fear of death. The play's theme is actually the fear of death, which is caused by the ignorance of the way of nature. O'Neill presents us with a panoramic picture in which there is a universal fear of death and a universal wish to see death's illusiveness proclaimed by a laughter like that of Lazarus. Back from this voyage from the grave, Lazarus, in his laughter, reveals to those who will listen that "life is" and that death is merely the fear of the passage from life on earth to the after-life. He ardently proclaims to his listeners that death is feared simply because man is ignorant of what death is. It is this ignorance that makes man fear, and this fear of death that makes life sad. True to Taoist ideas, *Lazarus Laughed* suggests that to

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[20] *Ibid.*, 75.

[21] James Robinson, *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP. (1982): 136.

overcome this fear, one must see through the paradoxical appearance of life. In the Tao, when a man has no fear, he has transcended himself and nothing can harm him. No danger can constitute a threat to him. He is no longer vulnerable to any possible natural or man-made attacks and, moreover, he is beyond conquest. O'Neill is explicit in his making Lazarus a spokesman of the Taoist positive attitude toward acceptance of death; after all, in the Tao not only is there no death but death is, in truth, a birth to a new life beyond. By accepting death as a birth, life becomes a movement of reversal. To die is to be born. Released from the mortal fear of death, a man's spirit is sublimated to such a level of transcendence that he grows *younger and younger* instead of older and older as he proceeds to death. O'Neill's Lazarus, by gaining a godly quality, is the very character in the play who grows younger and younger, which signifies the Taoist rejuvenating power. In the Taoist view, man embarks upon the rejuvenating journey to his new life only when he reaches that ultimate attainment in which all prepossession with self is lost.

From the Taoist point of view, if a man is able to rise above his ego and thus transcend temporal existence and fear of death, then he sees through the worldliness of this life and gains godly spirituality, which leads to his resistance of physical aging and to his return to the burgeoning state of life. Not only can he enjoy longevity, but he also comes to possess a deep comprehension of life's true value, which comes from a harmony with nature, and achieves the purity of his

divinity and the serenity of his detachment. Conversely, if one is unable to forget the self, is unable to rise above the attachment to worldly affairs with all the sufferings, afflictions and sorrows of life, then, living in the mental isolation created by fear of death, one drives directly towards defeat by way of senescence on the way to death. Lazarus's wife Miriam, as we shall see, is a typical instance of this situation.

The Taoist transcendent attitude toward life and death is beautifully dramatized in *Lazarus Laughed* through O'Neill's characterization of the two pairs of polarized characters--Lazarus and Miriam, and Lazarus and Caligula. The protagonist Lazarus is the very embodiment of godly spirituality, transcending the man-made fear and death, whereas his wife Miriam and Commander Caligula are depicted as worldly people obsessed with temporal existence and thus inherently incapable of being elevated to a state of detachment above fear and suffering. The Taoist illusory nature of death finds an artistic manifestation in the dramatization of the polar opposition within each of these two pairs of central characters, each representing an idea: Lazarus represents the "transcendent" whereas Miriam and Caligula the "human." This dynamic opposition, revolving around the polarity of the two parings of characters, is critical to both the play's theme and structure.

II

The Taoist ego-transcending outlook of the play can be discerned more clearly by examining the polaristic opposition between the personalities of Lazarus and Miriam, which underlie the thematic structure of *Lazarus Laughed*. These two characters, as can be seen from the play, are gradually "unfolded," although not "developed," because they are fixed characters, each of them symbolizing his and her own natural quality. Lazarus is, so to speak, the "Apotheosis" from the world beyond, whereas Miriam is the "Earth-Mother." The spiritual pole represented by Lazarus and the earthly pole signified by Miriam are thus the two poles around which the play is built. Contrasted with these two central characters are people of all types. Lazarus is profoundly detached from them, while Miriam is totally accepting their "inevitability" as people of this world.

Before moving to Miriam, let us first concentrate on the overriding figure of Lazarus and his significant laughter. *Lazarus Laughed* concerns itself with Lazarus's time on Earth after his resurrection from the tomb by Jesus of Nazareth and with the impact of Lazarus's commitment to spiritual transformation. Lazarus is freed of the fear of death, and he is the only person who does not wear mask. As the result of his inner voyage completed before the play opens, Lazarus undergoes no further spiritual change as he moves from one New Testament land to the next;

he does, however, undergo a physical transformation which is perhaps most strikingly revealed in the rejuvenation of his appearance. Lazarus's unmarked face, like his spirit, is open to the world. At the beginning of the play, he is described as:

> tall and powerful, about *fifty* [The emphasis mine] years of age, with a mass of gray-black hair and a heavy beard. His face recalls that of a statue of a divinity of Ancient Greece in its general structure and particularly in its quality of detached serenity. It is dark-completed, ruddy and brown, the color of rich earth upturned by the plow, calm but furrowed deep with the marks of former suffering endured with a grim fortitude that had softened into resignation (12).

As Lazarus moves from Bethany to Athens, he grows *younger* and more vigorous. By the time he reaches the court of Tiberius Caesar, the process of aging in the world has utterly reversed itself for him: he looks "more than *twenty five"* [The emphasis mine] and walks "haloed in his own mystic light." (100) He has become the living image of a god. The great return, in the Taoist sense, is thus acted out by O'Neill's Lazarus through rejuvenation of his appearance. This return is a Taoist transcendent backward movement in that Lazarus's death-defying laughter reveals to the world a realization that death is unreal and "death is dead" (69).

Lazarus's apotheosis is signaled not only by the rejuvenation of his appearance, but also, emphatically, by the transcendence of his laughter of

simplicity, a laughter invariably identified with life and with defiance of death. Lazaus's laughter is usually associated with the affirmation of life, with joy. As O'Neill describes it, "He begins to laugh, soft at first--a laugh so full of a complete acceptance of life, a profound assertion of joy in living, so devoid of all self-consciousness or fear, that it is like a great bird song triumphant in depths of sky, proud and powerful, infectious with love, casting on the listener an enthralling spell" (22). Lazarus's laughter is completely detached and without fear, casting a contagious and powerful "spell" on the listener; it not only enthralls those who listen, but transforms them into ecstatics who leave their homes and their possessions to follow Lazarus: "The crowd in the room are caught by it. Glancing sideways at one another, smiling foolishly and self-consciously, at first they hesitate, plainly holding themselves in for fear of what the next one will think" (22). The laughter is so infectious and penetrating that it is even commingled into identity with nature:

> Chorus. (*in a chanting murmur*)
>
> Lazarus laughs!
>
> Our heart grows happy!
>
> Laughter like music!
>
> The wind laughs!
>
> The sea laughs!

Spring laughs from the earth!

Summer laughs in the air!

Lazarus laughs!

Laugh! Laugh!

Laugh with Lazarus!

Fear is no more!

There is no death!

(*They laugh in a rhythmic cadence dominated by the laughter of Lazarus.*)(22-23)

It is this laughter that makes men and women follow Lazarus, that motivates the Roman demand for him to journey to Tiberius, and that causes his second and final death. As the title suggests, the laughter is at the center of the play; to laugh is to affirm not only life but human existence itself. Lazarus's laughter points to the Taoist ideal of self-transcendence and self-elevation because it is capable of making people forget their temporal sorrow and pain, their fear and death, enabling them to reach a child-like simplicity and mystical divinity that brings about their return to rejuvenation. Lazarus's joyous laughter is, in a sense, a Taoist affirmation of life that is "a simple, fully positive expression of faith,"[22] as Travis Bogard

[22] Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill.* New York-Oxford UP. (1988): 286.

discerns in his interpretation of the play. This faith is that "death is dissolution into life and God, the end of an interlude. Men, ruled inevitably by the force of life, have no reason to fear a return to their elemental essence."[23] In the Tao, death is never regarded as something fearful and morbid, but is rather viewed as a joyous and happy journey to a new life beyond. Lazarus's transcendent laughter, in accordance with the Taoist ideal, has a divine force that can cure people of their fear of returning to the elemental essence. People find that life is "death" and sorrow simply because the life within them has been "so long repressed" "by fear."(71) "Men call life death and fear it./They hide from it in horror./Their lives are spent in hiding./Their fear becomes their living./They worship life as death!" (72). It is this man-made, invented death that makes them discouraged and sorrowful in their lives. Lazarus's laughter and his revelation upon his resurrection disclose to the world the very doctrine of the Tao that death is man-made, invented, and unreal, thus making it possible for people to celebrate existence, life, and death. Lazarus's reversal of natural process and return to the youth after his resurrection suggests that, through the transcendence of fear and death, age and time are merely illusions. Age and time does not actually exist because they are dissolved into eternity. Within this eternity there is no time, hence no old age. Age and time are therefore merely things of the imagination.

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[23] *Ibid.*, 286.

In a state where death is the true life eternal, this life becomes a process towards the birth of eternity. The effect of the reversal of the process of nature takes place naturally as dramatized by Lazarus's juvenescence. Even many of Lazarus's followers and listeners, infected by his death-defying laughter, are deeply convinced by his preachings and divinity. In Bethany, as we see in the play, Lazarus's followers become only one more set of discordant proponent of a Messiah; in Athens, his followers proclaim him as Dionysus; in Capri, they throw themselves on Roman swords in a paroxysm of devotional frenzy. This action to enter eternity by self-annihilation is a courage motivated by their full conviction that holding fear in contempt and embracing death amounts to a joyous and vivacious return to juvenescence and to new life. Through death, they achieve identification with Lazarus's divine laughter, replete with its spell-binding power. In Lazarus's divine laughter, death is evidently seen as the very threshold to a new life, and thus Lazarus grows younger and younger (while moving farther and farther) to the point of return to the womb, to a new birth so like a "death." This joyous backward movement to the place of origins signifies a Final Return in Lao-tzu's Taoist sense.

In contrast to Lazarus and his transcendent laughter, Lazarus's wife Miriam constitutes the other part of the dramatic polarity of opposition which underlies the play's structure. Lazarus, regenerated from the grave, is free from secular fear and sorrow and represents a life beyond death that transcends the temporal existence

that Miriam represents. Miriam, in somewhat implicit fashion, denies Lazarus's joyful and clear affirmation of existence because she embraces the simple, temporal, and human life of this world, and thus opposes her husband's no-death affirmation. She "is a slender, delicate woman of thirty five" as O'Neill describes her:...she gives "her eternal acceptance of the compulsion of motherhood, the inevitable cycle of love into pain into joy and new love into separation and pain again and the loneliness of age" (13). Lazarus's affirmation and Miriam's denial, taken together, comprise the polarity of their clashing relationship.

Miriam's denial of Lazarus, however, is not so violent as that of Caligula, nor so clearly wrong; as John Henry Raleigh notes, "Miriam's upper face is masked but there is no great discrepancy between her upper mask and lower face, which means that she is, though a lesser being than Lazarus, still a harmonious one."[24] This harmony in Miriam's character makes her opposition to Lazarus all the more disturbing. For the most part, Miriam is silent as she accompanies Lazarus from their home in Bethany to Capri; but when she speaks against his affirmation, she expresses a worldly simplicity and a sympathetic humanness that contrast strongly with the spiritual grandeur of Lazarus:

> I wish we were home, Lazarus. This Roman world is full
>
> of evil. These skies threaten. These hearts are heavy with

[24] John Henry Raleigh, *Plays of O'Neill.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, (1965): 44-45.

> hatred. There is a taint of blood in the air that poisons the breath of the sea...It is a world deadly to your joy, Lazarus ...I wish we were home, Lazarus. I begin to feel horror gnawing at my breast. I begin to know the torture of the fear of death, Lazarus--not of my death but of yours. (105-106)

Miriam's desires for a simple, human temporal life can be seen as opposed not only to the spiritual grandeur and distance of Lazarus, but also to the twisted and murderous individuality of Caligula. She can be taken to represent a more "human" alternative to the laughter of Lazarus; her denial of his transcendent affirmation results not from real fear or loathing, but rather from love.

Beneath Miriam's mask of unfeeling appearance which indicates her patient endurance of suffering and pain, she is a human made of flesh and blood and possesses a sensitive and tender heart. Her mouth is "sensitive and sad, tender with an eager, understanding smile of self-forgetful love, the lips still fresh and young" (13). Her stony mask does not indicate that Miriam does not feel the pain, but rather that she has trained herself to suffer with sympathy and understanding. She dwells so much on the death of her children and of Lazarus that she ages incredibly even during the few months of Lazarus's second life. This *forward* movement to death is signified by her steady progression in senescence. Here we again touch upon the Taoist principle of the Final Return, which operates not only on the level of Lazarus's transcendence but also on the level of Miriam's mundane

humanity. In Miriam's particular case, the principle of *time* as Final Return seems to be the principle of time as the Destroyer. The clearest representation of these two senses of the workings of time--the transcendent and the human--perhaps lies in the contrasting progressions of Lazarus and Miriam. As Lazarus grows younger and more vigorous through the play, returning to the new life beyond the world, so Miriam experiences just the opposite. The cycles of Lazarus and Miriam begin at about the same point of departure, their full manhood and womanhood, but moves in directly opposite directions. In the first act, Miriam is "a slender delicate woman of *thirty-five*...with an eager, understanding smile of self-forgetful love, the lips still fresh and young." (13; The emphasis is mine.) In the next scene, only months later, Miriam appears to have grown older, to be *forty*. The following scene, a few months later in Athens, shows that the process of aging has continued: she appears older, a woman over *forty-five*(The emphasis mine). By the time she reaches the court of Tiberius, "Miriam, in black, her hair almost white now, her figure bowed and feeble, seems more than ever a figure of sad, resigned mother of the dead" (100). Thus Miriam has gone from womanhood to old age in less than a year, precisely as Lazarus proceeds in the opposite direction, growing more youthful. The principle of time as the Taoist *return* consequently operates on these two different levels.

Although Miriam, in a sense, is aged by Lazarus, O'Neill does not seem to suggest a vampiric exchange of energies. Rather, Miriam ages because of her love for the quickly-receding Lazarus. The two polarized characters have come to exist on different planes, to belong to different orders of being. Lazarus represents a transcendent order of being and thereby is freed from the ravages and chains of time. Miriam is trapped in her human world and she cannot receive satisfaction from Lazarus in his transcendence existence; hence, the decay and erosion caused by the force of time in the human world is greatly accelerated in her. The effects of time as Final Return on each of the two can thus be understood to embody the principle of time at work at the levels of existence where each has come to be: Lazarus the spiritual, the ever-renewing, and Miriam the temporal, the eroding. Time in the human world of *Lazarus Laughed*, as is seen clearly, is the Destroyer. For most of humankind time has a slow erosive forces. The nature of change in the mundane world consequently reflects decline rather than progress.

The backward movement of Lazarus and the forward movement of Miriam constitute cycles of the Taoist return because, as we can see, "both drive directly toward death and accept it willingly:"[25] Lazarus is happy to meet his second death in the pyre while Miriam readily accepts the fatal peach poisoned by Caesar's mistress Pompeia. Lazarus the transcendental being becomes younger and younger

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[25] James Robinson, *Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP. (1982):143.

until he returns to the unborn, whereas Miriam the human becomes older and older until at last she reaches her 'home' in death. Robinson points out that the eventual unity of their relationship also "corresponds exactly to the *yin* and *yang* cycles of the Tao, which likewise seem contrary but are actually one. Moreover, the interpenetration of life and death in their relationship reinforces Lazarus's message: life and death cannot ultimately be distinguished because death (as we conceive it) does not exist." [26]

III

In *Lazarus Laughed*, we find O'Neill applying the Taoist polarity principle not only to the opposition between Lazarus and Miriam, but also to the opposition between Lazarus and Caligula. This polaristic relationship between Lazarus and Caligula, though secondary, is of central significance to the theme of the play, because the playwright displays their violent relationship in a more unequivocal way. Caligula is like Miriam in representing the human world of the play and in denying the laughter of Lazarus. His denial, however, unlike that of Miriam, is categorical and open resistance to the natural attraction of the spiritual condition

[26] *Ibid.*, 143.

represented by Lazarus. It is Caligula who is perhaps the primary representative of a flawed and forgetful humanity. O'Neill's portrayal of his appearance reveals the severe discord and deformation of his personality:

> His body is bony and angular, almost malformed, with wide, powerful shoulders and long arms and hands, and short, skinny, hairy legs like an ape's. He wears a half-mask of crimson, dark with a purplish tinge, that covers the upper part of his face to below the nose. This mask accentuates his bulging, prematurely wrinkled forehead, his hollow temples and his bulbous, sensual nose. His large troubled eyes, of a glazed greenish, blue, glare out with a shifty feverish suspicion at everyone...his hair is the curly blond hair of a child of six or seven. His mouth also is childish, the red lips soft and feminine in outline. Their expression is spoiled, petulant and self-obsessed, weak but domineering. (54)

O'Neill's initial description of Caligula, when contrasted to the description of Lazarus, suggests the enormity of the distance between the bound, fearful nature of Caligula and the death-defying calm of Lazarus. Each of them represents in himself a contrary spiritual condition--Lazarus, transcendent bliss and Caligula, temporal concern. The intensity of the O'Neill's portrayal accentuates reader's impression of Caligula as an embodiment of contradictions: half-animal and half-

human, masculine and feminine, child-like and prematurely aged. Caligula contains so many discordant elements that he is almost a catalog of the dark side of humankind.

Lazarus denies the power of death in the sense that he does not fear death, for he recognizes the unity of all things in the enlightened mind. Death, for Lazarus, is a return to a new life, simply another phase of existence, not the cessation of it. This line of thought is exactly what Caligula is so strongly opposed to, because he, beset by his obsession with killing, views death as something most morbid, horrible and fearful, as the severest punishment that can be imposed upon human existence. Caligula represents the deformity and the flawed nature of the temporal world, and, identifying with death, orders his soldiers to "kill laughter," to "kill those who deny death" (87), and swears that Lazarus should not laugh at death because he, Caligula, is Death. Lazarus discovers the severe discord inside Caligula, who both fears death and loves death; he mocks Caligula's divided identity and temporal humanity, touching his tenderest spot by noting that Caligula loves to kill because he "fears to die" (70). Caligula is afraid to die simply because he cannot "see through" life and death.

It is the fear in the human mind that makes life and death seem so different. From a human point of view, there are opposites, but from the Taoist point of view, all opposites are but two sides of the same thing, like a door that swings upon its hinge. For Lazarus, the thing that limits a man is "fear," and fear arises

from not being able to see. This idea exactly corresponds to the philosophy of life and death of the Taoist Sage Chuang-tzu. Both Lazarus and Chuang-tzu advise man to rise above the world and to view death as merely a man-made invention. Like Chuang-tzu, Lazarus urges man to seek self-elevation in the Taoist return to the place of origin and finally to achieve eternity in the Tao through being made from the same stuff as all things.

Lazarus's disapproval of the way that Caligula clings to worldliness finds expression when he tells Caligula bluntly that man, if he wants to achieve his greatness, must accept insignificance and be willing to become a "speck of dust" again. Caligula, engrossed in his pursuit of power and perpetuity, kills Flavius, approves the death of Miriam by poison, and later murders Tiberius, demanding greatness and everlasting life. His cruel actions are utterly contrary to Lazarus's doctrine that the greatness of man is shown by an acceptance of his insignificance, which is essentially the Taoist belief in self-abasement. Caligula, however, refuses to abase himself in the Taoist ideal of non-action (Wu-wei), which accounts for his fear of death and his fear of his enemy. Lazarus exhorts Caligula to liken himself to a speck of dust in order to achieve a new greatness and become a king of self-abasement in the Tao:

> Are you a speck of dust dancing in the wind? The laugh,
>
> dancing! Laugh yes to your insignificance! Thereby

> will be born your new greatness! As Man, Petty Tyrant
> of Earth, you are a bubble pricked by death into a void
> and a mocking silence! But as dust, you are eternal change,
> and everlasting growth, and a high note of laughter soaring
> through chaos from the deep heart of God! Be proud, O Dust!
> Then you may love the stars as equals! And then perhaps you
> may be brave enough to love even your fellow men without
> fear of their vengeance! (70-71)

Lazarus admonishes Caligula to liken himself to the insignificant dust to obtain a kind of self-abasement in the Taoist sense before intending to achieve new greatness. Full of intense hatred and fear, Caligula, however, resists Lazarus's exhortation, ultimately his ego-transcending laughter. Because of his precarious nature of power in the ancient Rome, he is devastated by inner conflict. Fear makes a man isolated. Isolation can lead a man into tragedy because isolation limits him only to himself and makes him unable to understand the life beyond. It is too much for Caligula, a man obsessed with power, to achieve Taoist transcendent self-abasement by accepting his insignificance. Caligula's goal is to be Caesar who, in *Lazarus Laughed*, glories in his possession of power, just as Marco in *Marco Millions* glories in his material wealth. Yet, Lazarus presents and affirms his true self by freeing himself from the power of Caesar through the absence of any fear of death. However, the nature of Caesar is such that there can

be no other "true self" in the world; Caesar owns all or he owns nothing. This intransigence is expressed when Caligula--newly declared Caesar--asserts his "power of death" by taking a spear and completing the brutal execution of Lazarus:

> No I will not laugh! I will kill you! Give me a spear!
> (*He snatches a spear from a solider and fights his way drunkenly toward the flames,* [Lazarus had earlier been condemned to the pyre by Tiberius] *like a man half overcome by a poisonous gas, shouting, half-laughing in spite of himself, half-weeping with rage*) Ha-ah--- The gods be with Caesar Caligula! O immortal gods, give thy brother strength! You should die, Lazarus--die, Ha-ah--! (175)

Thus, Caligula's violent denial of the laughter of Lazarus appears to be grotesquely successful; the voice of Lazarus is stilled, just as his movement towards freedom and light is effectively ended. The victory seems to go to Caligula, but it is Lazarus, however, who is the true victor in the play because Lazarus's transcendent spirituality has overcome Caligula's worldly adherence. By demonstrating his complete absence of fear of death and his ready acceptance of it, Lazarus finally actualizes the Taoist precept, as affirmed to the world, that death is man-made and unreal, nothing but a happy return to a new life beyond.

Caligula's murder of Lazarus is the final movement in the action of *Lazarus Laughed*, and is also the final movement in the central polarized relationship between the two primary articulators of the action of the play: Lazarus and Caligula. This relationship is of crucial import in defining the form of the work, for it is the main axis of the play; its nature, in a sense, is identical with the nature of the play itself. The staunch affirmation expressed by one character, coupled with the stark denial expressed by the other, would appear to indicate an intense thematic conflict in which Lazarus represents transcendence and Caligula the temporal. The opposition of the personalities of the two contrasting characters exhibits the deeper and complex roles of opposites because each assumes, sequentially, a variety of different roles. Lazarus, on the one hand, becomes Caligula's teacher, his father-figure, his nemesis, and finally his God. Caligula, on the other, becomes Lazarus's pupil, his child, his Fool, and his killer. Lazarus is able to assume many roles without loss of his essential identity because of his transcendent, harmoniously integrated spirit. Caligula, by contrast, assumes numerous roles precisely because of his loss of identity. The relationship between Lazarus and Caligula, like that between Kukachin and Marco in *Marco Millions*, gives concrete expression to and presents a striking contrast between both the spiritual achievement of the transcendent and the spiritual failure of the temporal, which is obviously what the Taoist polarity principle ultimately signifies.

In *Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill skillfully dramatizes the interpenetration and alternation of life and death by depicting the two pairs of major character relationships from a Taoist point of view. However, the salient Taoist feature of the play is perhaps the rhythm of laughter, which ubiquitously appears in every scene. This rhythm not only involves the alternation of laughter and dialogue throughout the play, but also juxtaposes laughter with several violent deaths that surround it. Even in the last scene of the final act, this intermingling of life and death manifests itself in Caligula's ambivalent state of mind after he murders Lazarus. Moved by Lazarus's final burst of laughter, Caligula, desperately desiring a human existence in this life, shouts "Lazarus! Forgive me! Help me! Fear kills me! Save me from death!" And then, with "a tender, childish laughter of love on his lips," he yells, "I laugh, Lazarus! I laugh with you!" (178). Caligula's ambivalent personality thus vacillates between his fear of death and his love of Lazarus, which suggests that Caligula not only denies Lazarus's death-defying laughter, but also finally attempts to forge a subtle connection with Lazarus, who preaches eternal cosmic rhythms and provokes rhythmic laughter and dancing. The life-and-death alternating principle can therefore be perceived not only in the polarized struggle of the two major characters, but in their dynamic unity, which signifies the crucial feature of the Taoist reconciliation of opposites.

The Oriental influence leads O'Neill to perceive character relationships not merely through the Taoist polarity principle, but at the same time through the

Taoist reconciliation principle, which expresses the hidden unity of life and death, of man and universe. Caligula's final, subtle unification with Lazarus's death-defying laughter suggests that their apparent polar opposition eventually dissolves into an interplay of dynamic contraries which characterizes the play. The explicit polarity and the implicit unity alike are articulated by means of these contrasting characters and are intermingled throughout the entire structure of the play. The dynamic duality of the play makes *Lazarus Laughed* a work that, as Robinson observes, "alternates male and female, ecstasy and suffering, spiritual and material, comedy and tragedy, and life and death, in a manner best understood from a Taoist point of view." [27]

Lazarus Laughed, like *Marco Millions*, is structurally and thematically set in the Chinese Taoist philosophical framework of life and death, but the commercial aspect and Chinese characters of *Marco Millions* is absent. *Lazarus Laughed* is also unlike *Marco Millions* in that there is little that can be said about the play in terms of textual references to Taoism. O'Neill seems to have assumed or taken on the Taoistic spirit and translated it into the Biblical story in his own way. Nonetheless, in *Lazarus Laughed*, O'Neill can be said to have defined his Orientalism, especially in the Taoist thought that is displayed in the character relationships and dramatic polarities that interpenetrate the whole structure of the play. Lazarus may be said to be "an Eastern spiritual superman" who preaches to

[27] *Ibid.*, 142.

the Western world the Taoist mystical gospel that there is *no* death. Lazarus even actualizes this idea by refusing to act to prevent either the death of his wife Miriam or of his own, which shows a great inner triumph over his own selfish attachment to life. O'Neill's affinity with Chinese Taoist mysticism, as we have seen, contributes heavily to *Lazarus Laughed*, shapes the values and attitudes of the major characters, and reinforces the symbolism and *leitmotif* of the entire play. The manifestation of O'Neill's mystical and philosophical nature, as represented by *Lazarus Laughed* and *Marco Millions* alike, reveals his unmistakable reception of and close tie with Oriental Taoist wisdom.

The plays of Eugene O'Neill, a leading American dramatist, derive great inspiration and strength from the ancient Chinese Taoist mystical philosophy. A decade or so later, however, O'Neill witnessed his own decisive influence on the Chinese dramatic stage as shown in the plays of the leading Chinese playwrights Hong Sheng and Cao Yu. This reciprocity of influence is what I shall consider in the final chapter.

Chapter Three

Hong Shen, Cao Yu and O'Neill:

O'Neill's Influence On Contemporary Chinese Drama

I

It is an amazing and thought-provoking historical fact that, when Eugene O'Neill began to engender American interest in the mysticism and philosophy of Oriental Taoism, the Chinese stage on the other side of the Pacific echoed the sound of the drums of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, which, written in 1920, is the very play that brought O'Neill the status of a famous and promising playwright. The door to China that O'Neill enters, so to speak, is knocked open by the sound of the tom-tom of his play. *The Emperor Jones*, in every way extraordinary, was then hailed as a smash hit, and its production enjoyed tremendous success, with a continuous run of 204 performances. Charles Gilpin, a black actor, created the role of Brutus Jones at the tiny Provincetown Playhouse in November 1920 and scored

a great triumph in the role, which he repeated on Broadway and on tour. His amazing and unforgettable performance, together with the originality of the play, gripped the heart of a young man who was silently watching and listening in an audience seat. This young man was Hong Shen, who later became a pioneering figure in the history of modern Chinese drama.

At the time, Hong Shen was the only Chinese student in the United States who was actively pursuing modern Western drama. He studied playwrighting at Harvard University under the eminent professor George P. Baker, the same teacher whose class O'Neill had attended three years earlier.[28] "Both of us," in Hong Shen's own words, "are Professor Baker's apprentices, though O'Neill is my senior by two years."[29] Thus, it is understandable and natural that Hong Shen, a schoolmate of O'Neill, harbored a special admiration for his learned "senior" and took a particular interest in the originality and ingenuity of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones,* which was creating a sensation on the American scene. The drum sound of the tom-tom on the stage of O'Neill's play reverberated deep in Hong Shen's heart and was eventually to create a chain of echoes on the Chinese dramatic stage.

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[28] O'Neill and Hong Shen can be well said to be "schoolmates" as both of them are George P. Baker's students at Harvard University. O'Neill was admitted out of 300 applicants, and enrolled in Baker's famous "Dramatic Composition," named as "English 47." At the oak table in Baker's class there sat O'Neill in the academic year 1914-1915, and Hong Shen in 1919-1920. See Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill.* rev. ed. (New York, 1933): 35-40.

[29] Hong Shen, "Xiandai xiju daoyan," (Introduction to Modern Drama.) *Hong Shen wenji* (A Collection of Hong Shen's Works.) 4 Beijing: China's Drama Press, (1957): 62. The translation is mine.

After completing his studies at Harvard, Hong Shen returned to China in 1922 and, incorporating "Western styled elements," decided to take the lead in reforming the old-fashioned Chinese drama in which it is characteristic to have male actors playing the part of female characters. He "found O'Neill's symbolic treatment of social and individual ills in *The Emperor Jones* congenial to his own purpose of staging social reform---more specifically, the predominately male cast in O'Neill's play attracted Hong Shen."[30] In the winter of that year, he completed a play, *The Yama Chao,* which, free of female characters, was based on his observation of and meditation on life during a northward journey. Riddance of the female characters in his play bears a technical likeness to O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones,* as Hong Shen vehemently hated the impersonation of females and that kind of outdated, conventional theatrical idea that prevailed on the Chinese stage at that time. "I am extremely disgusted at the male's impersonating female characters," as Hong Shen himself states, "it is perhaps because I have read too much of Freud's works on abnormal sexuality. Every time I see a man putting on the make-up of a woman, I really feel like having goose-pimples all over me. But I still want to stage a play, and consequently the only thing I can do is to write a play which does not require female characters at all. This is one of the reasons why I made up my

[30] Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and China." *Tamkang Review* 10 1-2 (1971):12.

mind to borrow the form of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* when the subject matter of *The Yama Chao* was decided upon."[31]

However, the "most strikingly O'Neillian element about Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao*," according to Frenz, is not the mere removal of males impersonating female characters, but "the increasingly extensive and symbolic use of the forest setting" as an expressionist device in the play.[32] As Frenz further points out, "Like its model, the physical setting of the forest [in *The Yama Chao*] is employed with the express purpose of suggesting---as well as externalizing---the guilt-ridden psychic world of its main character, Chao Ta."[33] Set in the background of primordial jungles, both O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* dramatize the psychic terror of two escaped convicts who are hounded by a guilty past. Both plays dramatize the psychological regression of the respective protagonists from the "civilized state" of their present consciousness to the primitive state of their personal unconscious and the collective unconscious of their class. To both plays, fear is the drivng force of this regression.

A closer look at the story of *The Yama Chao* and the scene structure of its forest section will help us to understand more clearly the formal and technical relationship between *The Yama Chao* and its American model. Set in the early

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[31] Hong Shen, quoted by David Y. Chen, Note 2, "Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*." *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 432.
[32] Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and China." *Tamkang Review* 10 1-2 (1971):12.
[33] *Ibid.*, 12-13

1920s of battling warlord states in China, *The Yama Chao* tells the tragic story of Chao Ta (nicknamed the Yama Chao), an aide to a battalion commander; disappointed by his master and tempted by an unfaithful colleague, Chao Ta steals the payroll money that the battalion commander has secretly appropriated for himself; Chao Ta then escapes, by killing the battalion commander, into a dark forest where he becomes lost and terrified, and suffers a series of hallucinations that are the product of his guilt-ridden psyche. In his terrifying visions, he recapitulates the main events of his life as well as the primitive history of his family. He flees in a wide circle in the dark jungle, amid the increasingly fast and throbbing beat of the drums. He is driven to the brink of madness by his horror; after emptying his pistol at phantoms before his eyes, he is eventually shot to death by the pursuing squad.

The plot-line conception of Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* is surprisingly similar to that of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. A brief summery of O'Neill's play will suffice to throw this resemblance into immediate, clear relief. *The Emperor Jones*, set in an exotic West Indian island populated by semi-civilized blacks, also tells a tragic story; the protagonist, Brutus Jones, is a black fugitive from American justice and a cruel ruler of the semi-civilized blacks. He exploits the "bush niggars" by grinding them down with taxes and appropriating the money. In the face of a revolt, he is forced to take flight into the moonless primordial jungle where he is pursued, to the beat of a tom-tom, not only by the forces of a rival

native chief, but also by his own hallucinations and fears. Having emptied his pistol at the specters of his fevered imagination, Jones is finally shot to death by silver bullet, which his subjects have fashioned for themselves.

We can see even from these brief paraphrases that Hong Shen adopts many things from O'Neill, such as the peculiar forest device, the expressionist handling of visions inspired by fear, the money motif, and the plot structure of the play.[34] If we further our exploration, we will find that the remarkable structural resemblance of the two plays is even more obviously manifested in the division of scenes, a comparison of which reveals the Chinese playwright's affinity with his American model.

Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* consists of nine successive scenes arbitrarily divided into three parts. As in the first scene of *The Emperor Jones*, the first scene of the Chinese play explains the reason for the flight of the protagonist. Quite simply, Chao Ta's desire for money has overwhelmed his sense of duty, in consequence of which he decides to escape with his booty. The second scene through to the eighth scene develops an intense portrayal of Chao Ta, the hounded convict who loses his way in the moonless forest, is confronted with a series of pantomimic visions of his past, and, in his flight, is driven mad with fear. This is

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[34] Hong Shen had been long silent on his intentional borrowing of O'Neill's expressionistic technique in *The Yama Chao*. Not until a critic, in an ironic way, pointed out Hong's imitation of his American master did Hong come to admit unwillingly to his indebtedness by writing a reluctant "confession" in the form of a fictive conversation with O'Neill.

extremely similar to scenes two through seven in *The Emperor Jones*. In order to perceive the formal and structural resemblance and the corresponding expressionistic elements of the two plays, let us enter into a more detailed analysis of the scene structure, first, of *The Yama Chao* and then of *The Emperor Jones*.

In the second scene of Hong Shen's play, Chao Ta, laden with fear, flees into the dark jungle. Confronted with a vision of the blood-stained face of the battalion commander whom he shot in the camp, he fires at the "commander." The sound of the tom-tom increases in volume. In the third scene, the gasping Chao Ta runs wildly, stumbles about, and sees the shadow of a wounded soldier, his former comrade, whom he had buried alive in the aftermath of war. In panic, he frees his pistol and fires at the tree behind him; everything vanishes, only blackness remains. The throbbing of the tom-tom increases both in volume of sound and in rapidity of beat. In the fourth scene, the moon is now emerging behind a cloud. Chao Ta's flight in the forest becomes wilder and wilder. He encounters a vision of Tiger Wang (Wang Gou-zi) throwing dice. Once his fellow soldier, Wang was put to death by Chao Ta for cheating him of his money in gambling. Horrified, Chao Ta panics and fires at the specter to dispel it, and everything returns to silence, save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom. In the fifth scene, Chao Ta, now in his continuous hallucination, visualizes the bloody sack of a city, Nanking, with robbing, raping, killing, and the burning of houses. In the sixth scene, the pursuing squad draws nearer and nearer, and the spirit of terror gains greater and

greater possession of him. Chao Ta, in his increasingly fearful flight, witnesses a phantom of the venal judge, at a trial during the Manchu rule, who wronged him as an evil-doer. He shoots the judge with such rapidity that the two shots are almost simultaneous. In the seventh scene, the tom-tom beats louder, quicker, and with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation. He flees, he is pursued by devils, he hides, he flees again. Breathless and exhausted, he finds his way blocked by the ghosts of Tiger Wang and the Western colonists, who had conspired together to murder his mother and his fiancee. Cursing between his teeth, Chao Ta fires at the Western colonists with three rapid consecutive shots; he then kneels to the ground, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation and his doom draws near.

No reader familiar with O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* can fail to perceive that Hong's Chinese play follows its Western prototype very closely in its division of scenes, dramatic structure and expressionistic devices. Hong Shen obviously must have borrowed O'Neill's dramatic form, structure, and, emphatically, the technical devices that allow *The Yama Chao* to provide a telling revelation of the crimes and injustices of a declining Chinese society in which wardlord-states struggle for power. O'Neill's dramatic structure and technical devices help Hong Shen, in a unique way, to, first of all, "present a panoramic review of the immediate past through individual experiences," and, second, "to achieve the coherency of fragmentary experiences of an individual" by virtue of "breaking the

barriers of time and space."[35] In *The Yama Chao*, what we see is exactly as what Timo Tiusanen finds in *The Emperor Jones*: "Stream of consciousness is expressed in 'terms of stage symbols'; inner reality is suggested in dream-like fashion; the scenes are brief, they alternate between reality and fantasy; stage reality represents subconsciousness, and sources of conduct are explored."[36] To facilitate our discussion, it seems necessary first to describe briefly the expressionistic background and scene structure of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* in order to illustrate *The Yama Chao*'s model and to show Hong Shen's strong affinity with O'Neill in shattering the external reality perceived by the conscious mind in order to express the inner reality of the subconscious mind.

Scenes two through seven of *The Emperor Jones,* as mentioned before, depict the self-proclaimed emperor Brutus Jones, who regresses from the civilized state of his present consciousness to the primitive state of his personal unconscious and the collective unconscious of his race. Jones's attempt to flee the pursuing squad, presented through these scenes, leads him progressively deeper into the forest, deeper into the night, and, deeper into the reality of the subconscious mind. Through these six scenes, his mounting fear is intensified by the beat of the natives' tom-tom, which grows increasingly louder and quicker, while his gradual disrobing, which he feels will facilitate his flight through the forests, indicates his

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[35] David Y. Chen, "The Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*." *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 432.

[36] Timo Tiusanen, *O'Neill's Scenic Images*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, (1968): 101

regression to a more and more primitive state. In these scenes, Jones meets quite a few ghosts who come one after the other from his past. Each apparition represents one appearance of his past experience. His shapeless "Little Formless Fears" (1045 scene two; *The Complete Plays of O'Neill*) appear first. They emit a low mocking laughter and squirm menacingly toward him. Terrifed, he takes out his revolver and fires. The power of the gun gives him self-confidence and he boldly enters the jungle. Then his guilt follows, in two hallucinations (scenes three and four). The first hallucination is Jeff, a middle-aged black man in a Pullman porter's uniform, who crouches in the rear of the triangular space, casting dice with the mechanical moments of an automaton. The second is the ghost of the guard, who lashed him viciously with his whip, and whom Jones killed during his escape from prison. Fightened by the apparition, Jones angrily shoots the "white debil." Instantly, the vision fades and he plods onward. Subsequently, Jones fires his fourth and fifth bullets to dispel the hallucinations of a slave auctioneer and a planter who are buying him from a slave ship (scenes five and six). In the seventh scene, his final vision takes place at a stone altar near a tree where the witch-doctor and the crocodile god are performing Negro rituals. In a final panic, Jones shoots the crocodile monster. By this time, Jones is completely exhausted, and he abandons his civilized self to the unconscious self. The visions that Jones is confronted with, as we can see, are the projections from the increasingly deeper levels of his mind, from his immediate, conscious awareness, through the experiences of his personal

past, to his racial or collective unconsciousness, and finally culminating in a primitive rite of human sacrifice.

It should be quite evident by now, after a detailed comparison of the scene-structure of these two plays, that Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* is undoubtedly in many ways modeled upon O'Neill's first major expressionist experiment, *The Emperor Jones*. The Chinese play's resemblance to its prototype, as Chen points out, is even manifested in "many minor details, such as the five bullets, the white mark (stone or tree) at the entrance to the woods, the lighting of a match, sinner's continuous prayers, and the comment on the fate of the dead made by another character in the play."[37]

A comparison of *The Yama Chao* and *The Emperor Jones* brings into focus the nature of the "expressionism" of these two playwrights. Unquestionably, it is with O'Neill that Western dramatists first "arrive" in contemporary Chinese theater. "His contribution to the technique of modern Chinese drama," as Chen notes, "has been equally as significant as Henrik Ibsen's contribution to the thought of the contemporary Chinese playwrights."[38] Hong Shen enthusiastically embraces O'Neill by incorporating the American playwright's unique expressionist devices within his own dramatic creations. Expressionistic drama, as we know, rised in the early 1910s, and its basic nature is that the fundamental

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[37] David Y. Chen, "Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones.*" *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 435.
[38] *Ibid.*, 431.

human reality resides in man's inner soul, in his spiritual and emotional subconsciousness. Expressionistic drama tends to bring out man's subjective, impulsive flow of consciousness rather than his objective reality, thus underscoring man's innermost revelation rather than his external display. O'Neill's expressionism is just concerned with expressing the visions and the realities of mind, emotion and dream, attempting to capture protagonist's subconscious reality in terms of dramatic symbols, no matter how distorted.

Thematically and technically, Hong Shen's play resembles O'Neill's in dealing with the externalization of internal, emotional states and the radical, subjective transformation of objective reality as the result of an extreme psychological crisis. In the Chinese play, Chao Ta, like Jones, is driven by an overwhelming emotional force, which, growing increasingly stronger, finally shatters the conscious, rational control of the intellect in the apprehension of reality. The dynamic power of the subconscious obliterates the superficial facade of objective reality, as Hong Shen's soldier and O'Neill's emperor reach the limits of the intensification of psychological experience. Both protagonists are hunted and haunted men; in the jungle scenes of the plays, both are wandering through a threatening world, pursued both by visions and real people. In *The Yama Chao*, Chao Ta's hallucinatory encounters are, too, solicited and projected from his deep personal and class subconsciousness, and the visions, as Travis Bogard comments on the visions in *The Emperor Jones*, "become less specific, more emblematic."

The spectator in Hong Shen's play, as in O'Neill's, "at once roused and hypnotized by the drumbeats, is asked to enter into the irrational experience, to feel the panic, to lose his own sense of orientation."[39] Having recourse to O'Neill's unique way of revealing the psychological inner world of the protagonist, Hong Shen successfully converts his play into O'Neill's expressionism.

Hong Shen's expressionist methods, borrowed from his American schoolmate, however, was not well received by the contemporary Chinese audience when his play was staged in Shanghai in 1923. According to the newspaper *Jing-bao*, the performance of this Chinese expressionist play turned out to be a fiasco because "the spectators were utterly disconcerted" and "the man on the stage was mentally ill."[40] The failure of *The Yama Chao* as a theater piece is two-fold. On the one hand, on the popular level, in China in the twenties, as Marian Galik rightly observes, "plays written in the expressionist style, were for many spectators something entirely new, as yet unseen. They were not familiar with European classicism, romanticism, realism. They had not seen symbolic plays and could not understand altogether expressionist plays."[41] On the other hand, on the artistic level, Hong Shen's play does not seem to reflect his own creative

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[39] Travis Bogard, *Contour In Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. New York: Oxford UP. (1988): 143.

[40]. Hong Shen, "Xiandai xiju daoyan," (Introduction to Modern Drama.) *Hong Shen wenji* (A Collection of Hong Shen's Works.) 4 Beijing: China's Drama Press, (1957): 298. The translation is mine.

[41] Marian Galik, "Chao-The King of Hell and *The Emperor Jones*: Two Plays by Hong Shen and O'Neill." *Asian and African Studies* 12 (1976): 131.

personality in its method; that is, he appears to be devoid of spiritual individuality as an artist, of his own peculiar aesthetic experience and his own unique way of perceiving beauty, because his play, though couched in a highly expressionist mode, is at most a creative imitation or a singular cultural transformation of the glowing American model, which is "copied" from his master's formal structure, extrinsic plot, tragic outcome, personal characterization, and specific devices, which are thus not introduced into the play as organic elements of the playwright's aesthetic personality. For example, the sounds of the tom-tom of drumbeat fit well into the American play because the drum-beats are a primitive ritual that bolsters the morale of the semi-civilized blacks and effectively intensifies Jones's inner conflict and his extreme fear in the course of his panic-stricken flight. In contrast, the sounds of iron flutes and copper drums seem rather unnatural and bizarre in Hong Shen's play, as the background of the Chinese play is set in the time of modern warfare in which drums are no longer used in battles. So, in this sense, the Hong Shen of 1922, unlike O'Neill, has not as yet formed his mature creative personality; his aesthetic ideal and "ego" as an artist are as yet still obscure. As a result, *The Yama Chao* is a failure as a theater piece not only because of the audience's ignorance of innovative expressionistic drama, but also of the playwright's simple technical imitation of his master and his dearth of originality both in terms of artistic devices and aesthetic force.

This is not to say, however, that Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* is a mimicry of *The Emperor Jones* from inside out and has no other significance. "In terms of artistic device," as Japanese critic Izuko Yo states, commenting on the two plays, "*The Yama Chao* is devoid of originality and individuality. But as far as the thematic content is concerned, this assessment is utterly inappropriate."[42] *The Yama Chao* is a play that may be called expressionist in its form rather than in its content; in fact, it is a play that, to a high degree, turns from the expressionist style and method towards realism, as Hong Shen endeavors to introduce social reality on the stage. Hong Shen states, "The play is an outcome of my experience of life, of my observation of life, my stimulation by life, and thus it is directly issued out of life."[43]

The contextual social milieu must be examined if we want to go deeper into the play. In his evaluation of Hong Shen's play, Galik lays condsiderable stress on its social significance. According to Galik, Hong Shen's portrayal of the mental states of the hero in the play is very "realistic", and the reality depicted also "has its strong political and social coloring" because "the plot of *The Yama Chao* is set in the cold scenery of northern China in times of a deep crisis:"[44]

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[42] Izuka Yo, "Aonier de yinxian zai zhongguo."(O'Neill's Influence in China.) *Yunnan shifan daxue xuebao.* (*Yunnan Normal University Journal*) 1 (1978): 58. The translation is mine.
[43] Hong Shen, "Shuyu yige shidai de xiju,"(On the Plays of the Age.) *Hong Shen wenji* (A Collection of Hong Shen's Works) 1 Beijing: China's Drama Press, (1957): 448. The translation is mine.
[44] Marian Galik, "Chao-The King of Hell and *The Emperor Jones*: Two Plays by Hong Shen and O'Neill." *Asian and African Studies* 12 (1976):125.

> In the spring of 1922 Hong Shen returned to China and soon after left for the North where earlier the first war had been fought between the Feng-tien clique of Northern warlords led by Chang Tso-lin [12] and the Chih-li clique headed by Wu Pei-fu [13], to collect material for his plays. On the train, he learned from soldiers that the mercenaries, otherwise maintained by Anglo-American capital, used to bury alive the defeated adherents of Chang Tso-lin, who in turn were supported by the Japanese. The aim was to silence them and take possession of the money they had about them. Deeply affected by the emotions elicited by the soldiers' talk, Hong Shen decided to write a play.[45]

The play Hong Shen writes is thus a play that projects onto the audience the darkness of Chinese society during the domination of the warlords. The principal character, Chao Ta, who was originally an innocent and law-abiding peasant, becomes an incarnation of the evils and vices of that dark society, and he is capable of "lying, stealing, robbing, killing, and burying people alive." Not so "primitive as his counterpart in O'Neill's play," [46] Chao Ta is depicted as a modern citizen in an old and declining society; he has his individuality, even though, in reality, he is a social type. By underscoring the individual evil-doings of Chao Ta,

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[45] *Ibid.*, 124.
[46] *Ibid.*, 125.

Hong Shen intends to emphasize, as Chen argues, that "the pattern of behavior of an individual is mainly determined by his historical inheritance and social environment." The playwright attempts to proclaim to the world that "'society should be responsible for the sins of the individual'" and that "There are in the world no such people as morally good or bad by birth---both the good and the bad are products of their environments."[47] Hong Shen, a man of uprightness and moral integrity, has a deeply cherished hatred for the dark, corrupted Chinese society of the 1920's which he views as the root of all the evils of the individuals of that time. He even commiserates with evil-doers like Chao Ta because he believes that "they may all have suffered seriously from the blows of ill-treatment and unhappy experiences, especially when they were too young to be capable of resistance."[48] Thus, he raises a significant question: "Are they sinful or the sinned against? Or, is it because they have been sinned against that they eventually turn out to be sinners themselves?"[49]

It can now be seen that Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* is deeply involved in social criticism with reference to China's national situation and historical background. The playwright blends the relationship between personal vices and social corruption into the expressionist framework, making the play rife with social

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[47] Hong Shen, *Hong Shen wenji.*(Selected Works of Hong Shen.) 2 Beijing: China's Drama Press, 1951. 8-9. Quoted by David Chen in "Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones.*" *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 437. The translation is Chen's.
[48] *Ibid.*, 437.
[49] *Ibid.*, 437.

significance. In Hong Shen's play, the content is more important than the form, whereas in O'Neill's play, the reverse is true. The apparent meaning of *The Emperor Jones* corresponds with the direct theme of *The Yama Chao*: Jones, a black whose mind was poisoned by white culture, cruelly exploits his fellow blacks. The name "Yama Chao" (Chao---King of the Hell) is obviously a variation of "Emperor Jones," and both "kings" abscond with lucre--indicating the corrosive effect of money on humanity. However, the content and theme of *The Yama Chao,* emanating from the playwright's personal experience of life and his feeling for the time, are couched in terms of the alternation of reality and fantasy and are set in the protagonist's spiritual and historical past. For that reason, Hong Shen turned to O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* largely for its unusual expressionist devices and theatrical technique, including the treatment of hallucinations and fear, its structuring of the plot, and its compelling minor details and character types. As far as the guiding theme of the play is concerned, however, Hong Shen's *The Yama Tao* is a realistic play, a play depicting a social-political conflict that is turned into a drama of fear. Drama, to Hong Shen, functions as a tool through which social problems can be anatomized and the purpose of education can be served. Thus, *The Yama Chao* presents a good combination of Hong Shen's realistic ideas of literary creation and O'Neill's expressionist devices for the externalization of internal, spiritual unconscious states.

II

If Hong Shen merely borrows the basic plot and expressionistic devices of *The Emperor Jones* to evince his realistic attitude toward social problems, then O'Neill's influence upon another paramount Chinese playwright, Cao Yu, is more profound and penetrating. Ten years after *The Emperor Jones*, "a more subtle and refined echo" of O'Neill's work could be found in Cao Yu's plays." (Frenz:13) Cao Yu was established as a great playwright largely by his famous trilogy *Thunderstorm* (1934), *Sunrise* (1936), and *The Wildness* (1937), the first and the third part of which "have been linked heavily to O'Neill in terms of characterization, technique and stagecraft."(Frenz:13) Even the second play of his trilogy, *Sunrise*, which is usually considered as a Chekhovian influence, shows O'Neillian elements employed as a novel theatrical device: for example, O'Neill's "idea of dividing the stage into two separate parts with a curtain," thus making it possible for "two sets of actions to take place at the same time."(Frenz:13) Early in 1936, in his postscript to *The Sunrise,* Cao Yu commented on the theatrical technique described above: "It is an ingenious attempt indeed, but I once saw this

device used and proved to be successful in O'Neill's plays."[50] What Cao Yu refers to by saying "O'Neill's plays" is actually O'Neill's *Dynamo* and *Desire Under the Elms*, in which separate multi-partitions of the stage are employed as a technical device to make visible the inner world of different characters as well as to build a mystical stage atmosphere. Thus, it is evident that Cao Yu was quite conversant with O'Neill, the renowned American playwright on the other side of the Pacific.

From a critical standpoint, Cao Yu is most directly linked to O'Neill through *The Wildness* and *Thunderstorm*. In this section, I will further my exploration of Cao Yu's literary indebtedness to his American master by focusing first on *The Wildness*, leaving his *Thunderstorm* to be considered in the last section. Cao Yu's *The Wildness* is much more reflective of an artistic individuality and maturity than Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* in the sense that the technical properties of traditional Chinese drama are flawlessly blended with those of the expressionist theatrical to produce a style that is distinctly Cao Yu's own. Apparently, however, his personal style and artistic pride thus make him capable of an ambivalent attitude toward the O'Neillian influence on his plays. On the one hand, Cao Yu admits to his receptivity to O'Neill: "American playwright Eugene O'Neill is a dramatist who produces no small influence on me."[51] On the other

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[50] Cao Yu, Postscript, *Sunrise. Zhongquo dangtai wenxue yanjiu ziliao* (Research Materials of Modern Chinese Literature.) Sichuan University Press. (1979): 54-55. The translation is mine.

[51] Cao Yu, "Yu juzhuojia tan xiezou" (A Talk with Playwrights on Reading and Writing.) *Xiju* Drama 10 (1982): 67-75. The translation is mine.

hand, he is somewhat unwilling to acknowledge his indebtedness. In his Preface to *Thunderstorm*, Cao Yu even refuses any O'Neill's influence: "For while it is true that in the past ten years or so I have read quite a number of plays and even taken part in some performances myself, I cannot, however, recall exactly which part of my play was written in intentional imitation of which master. Possibly, in my subconsciousness, I have stolen threads and threads of golden yarn from the master's house, used them to mend my ugly and coarse garments and then denied that these discolored threads (for they now become mine) originally belonged to the master."[52] Later, Cao Yu straightforwardly denies any intentional effort to apply O'Neill's form in *The Wildness*: "Some people say that my *The Wildness* is an imitation of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* because there is the drum beat in my play. As a matter of fact, I had never read *The Emperor Jones* before I composed *The Wildness*."[53] A writer has the right to learn and utilize a novel technique befitting to him; however, Cao Yu seems to be indisposed to say anything indicating his liberty to do so, and he covers his indebtedness to his "senior" by brushing aside his kinship with O'Neill. Still, reluctant as he was to acknowledge O'Neill's influence, Cao Yu admitted, after all, to his taking "the threads and threads of golden yarn from the master's house," albeit in his "subconciousness." As some critics, such as Joseph Lau and David Chen, have pointed out, Cao Yu's

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[52] Cao Yu, Preface, *Thunderstorm*. i-ii. translated by Joseph Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 8.
[53] Lu Yi, "Yici juyou kaituo shin de huiyi---Aonier xueshu taolunhui pingshu" (A Pioneering Conference---A Survey of the International Conference on O'Neill.) *Xiju* (Drama) 2 (1978): 29.

"golden threads are distinctly taken from O'Neill, although they may have been interwoven with other strands from different sources."(Frenz:14) Cao Yu's first garment mended with the golden threads is *The Wildness*; the "golden thread" taken from the master is, again, as in *The Yama Chao*, the O'Neillian expressionistic device.

If Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* is a simple technical imitation of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, then Cao Yu's *The Wildness* should be considered as an full-blown creation that "adopts the form and technique from its prototypes with so much flexibility that it works out a pattern of its own."[54] With the gift of his own creative personality, Cao Yu is a mature playwright who is adept at drawing the artistic values and technical devices of foreign masters into his own creation. But although his assimilation of foreign influences is so perfectly fused with his own creation of a personal style, O'Neillian elements in *The Wildness*, emphatically in Act Three, are easily discernible. The "golden threads" of expressionism mended in Cao Yu's garment are so "glowing" that we immediately recall O'Neill's moonless forest setting, symbolic treatment of a fugitive's hallucinations instilled by fear, and his use of the drumbeat as a symbol of the pursuit. Nonetheless, this Chinese play, as David Chen argues, is "a much larger and more complicated work than either *The Emperor Jones* or *The Yama Chao* and is far more

[54] David Y. Chen, "Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*." *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 435.

elaborately composed in terms of its plot, characterization, language, and use of symbolism."[55] To further our analysis, it seems necessary to look at the plot of the first two acts before we come to examine the specific influence of O'Neill on Act Three of Cao Yu's play.

Chou Hu (Chinese meaning, "Vengeful Tiger") is a young innocent farmer whose father owns some land. Still a teenager, Chou Hu witnesses his father cruelly buried alive as the result of an incrimination by Chiao Yen-wang, who desires to take possession of his fertile land. Chiao Yen-wang ("Yama Chiao") is a battalion commander, and he has a big influence among the local forces. Later, to frustrate Chou Hu's motive for future revenge, Chiao Yen-wang simply throws him into prison on false charges and even has him injured in jail. Besides, he has Chou Hu's fifteen-year-old sister sold to a brothel, where the girl is finally forced to commits suicide in despair. He then takes the further step of robbing Chou Hu of his paramour, Chin Tzu, and coerces her to marry his own son, Chiao Ta-hsing, whose first wife had died. This "Yama Chiao" has completely ruined Chou Hu's family.

After long years of imprisonment, Chou Hu finally succeeds in escaping from jail in order to avenge himself and his late father and sister. Unfortunately, to his great disappointment, Chou Hu learns that his deadly enemy, Chiao Yen-wang, who is responsible for the ruin of his family, has been dead for years and he

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[55] *Ibid.*, 433.

suddenly finds himself confronted with the loss of the revenge on Chiao that he has long anticipated. But Chinese culture tells Chou Hu that if the father is dead, then his oldest son must shoulder the responsibility and will become the target. Thus, Chiao Ta-hsing, albeit innocent, must become the object of Chou Hu's bloody thirst for revenge. Chou Hu, however, finds it difficult, in his heart, to take a direct, cruel revenge on Chiao Ta-hsing, who was a good friend in childhood. Chiao Ta-hsing, who has been ignorant of his father's previous brutal offences against Chou Hu's family, once did everything in his power to save his friend Chou Hu when he is maltreated by his father, especially when he has been put into prison. Facing this good pal from childhood, Chou Hu cannot decide and thus suffers an emotionally painful dilemma.

However, the murder of one's father and the ravishment of one's wife are considered as justification for the most deadly hatred, and Chou Hu, obviously, is not going to let these towering crimes go unpunished. Chin Tzu, aware of his hatred, counsels clemency by appealing to his sense of pity, and tries to dissuade Chou Hu from committing the intended murders. But the question of justice is seriously brought to the fore. In order to provoke his good-tempered friend to fight, Chou Hu comes to have sex with his friend's wife, Chin Tzu, so that the killing can be done in self-defense when his rival rises to attack. Unfortunately, Chiao Ta-hsing is such a worthless wretch that he refuses to believe the fact that his friend Chou Hu is the adulterer, even when his blind mother, Chiao Mu,

explicitly tells him so. Chiao Mu begins to fear intensely that her enemy will extract bitter revenge on her son, who is a weakling and no rival for the bloody Tiger. She petitions Chou Hu to spare her descendants, and she will offer him all she has for his satisfaction, even including her daughter-in-law, Chin Tzu. After the failure of her attempt to compromise with the revenging Tiger, Chiao Mu simply sends her neighbor to report to the police in order to prevent the escaped convict from the intended murders.

When Chou Hu is informed that the police are involved, he quickens his step and takes his bitter revenge on the Chiao's family by knifing his sleeping friend and host to death, with Chin Tzu standing outside the room. Immediately he feels the qualms of a guilty conscience. After he has disposed of his target and is about to flee the house with Chin Tzu, the blind mother, Chiao Mu, covertly steps into her enemy's room, intending to give Chou Hu the death blow in his sleep with a heavy iron walking stick. However, she ends up murdering her own grandson, Hsiao Hei-tse (Little Black Boy), who has been placed there earlier by Chin Tzu in order to keep him from screaming. In the wake of these double murders, the police, sent by Chiao Mu, arrive, and Chou Hu escapes into the forest with Chin Tzu.

The preceding section summarizes the complex plot of the first two acts of *The Wildness*, which, presented in a realistic style, pave the way for the dramatic culmination of the play in Act Three. Act Three, divided into five scenes, is the

last act of the play, and is the place where we find the O'Neillian glowing "golden threads" exquisitely mended into the playwright's "garment." This final act of the dramatic climax of the play concerns the panic-stricken flight of Chou Hu and Chin Tzu into the moonless, dark forest, following the murder of Ta-hsing. Cast agaist the backdrop of primordial jungles, *The Wildness*, like *The Emperor Jones*, dramatizes the psychic terror of an escaped convict hounded by a guilty past and externalizes his internal and emotional states. When Chou Hu, at the end of the second act, flees the house by firing at the picture of Chiao Yen-wang on the wall, he begins to fall into spiritual delirium, his heart laden with inner guilt and extreme fear. Meanwhile, the police are pursuing, attempting to capture him, and Chiao Mu is also following his track in the impenetrable dark forest, giving sorrowful, piercing cries summoning the soul of her dead grandson. The drama thus takes an abrupt turn and begins to dramatically unfold Chou Hu's external actions and inner conflicts. The playwright, therefore, must provide a telling revelation of the hero's conflicting innermost being by "capturing those flitting moments of consciousness in the mind of his heros and projecting them meaningfully and visibly onto the stage."[56]

As in Eugene O'Neill's play, Cao Yu's expressionist method is manifested in that the protagonist, fleeing in fear through the dark jungle, experiences a panoramic review of the heavy guilt of his afflicted individual past and confronts

[56] Joseph Lau, *Ts'ao Yu: A study in literary influence*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP. (1970): 51.

an alternation of reality and hallucination. In Scene One, Act Three, Chou Hu, to his horror, plunges into the jungle only to confront a vision of a human figure---Ta-hsing, the murdered son of Captain Chiao. Chou Hu exclaims:

> Ta-hsing! I didn't kill him! I didn't kill the baby. Ta-hsing, you musn't follow me! Ta-hsing! We've been good friends a long time; I've hurt you now, but I'm not bad, it was your father, Yen-wang's evil doing, your father; the cruelty of the baby's death---your mother did it. I'm not ashamed to look at you; you can't follow me, you can't--- (*Unmindfully he draws out his pistol.*) [57]

At this time, Chou Hu, as Chin Tzu finds him, has fallen into the "prison of mind" and is rendered completely deranged and delirious. What is more, the monotonous drum beat coming from a neighboring temple causes Chou Hu to lose his nerve, shattering his civilized self consciousness.

In Scene Two, Chou Hu envisions the blind mother Chiao Mu blocking his way, and with her grandson in her arms and her dreadful, bulging eyes glaring at him. Chiao Hu implores the human figure: "It wasn't me! Not---not me! I didn't mean to kill your baby. I killed---killed Ta-hsing. But I--(gasping) I've had enough

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[57] Cao Yu, *The Wildness*. translated by Chrisper C. Rand and Joseph S. M. Lau. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, (1980): 175.

already, don't look at me that way, don't look at me that way! I didn't kill your grandson, I tell you, I didn't! I didn't! I didn't! I didn't!... (*His words become weaker and weaker; the figure's eyes look unswervring at him; again she walks quietly off to the right.*)"[58] At the end of the scene, Chou Hu encounters yet another vision: the Captain Chiao Yen-wang and his men persecuting his aged father and younger sister. Before his "eyes," he sees "the turned figure orders Hung Lao [Lao Hong] to pull them apart [father and daughter] and tells his two henchmen to start burying the man. The little maiden begins to cry when she hears this, and the old man, spinning around and looking up at the sky, starts to wail out; he looks straight at Ch'ou Hu."[59] Chou Hu, in a fit of rage, swiftly frees his pistol and fires three shots almost simultaneously at the figure. With the sound of shots, the figure suddenly vanishes and only darkness remains. Like Jones in O'Neill's play, Chou Hu regresses from the present state of consciousness to his personal unconscious, which leads him progressively deeper into the forest and deeper into the inner reality of his subconscious mind.

Scene Three (Cf. *The Emperor Jones*, Sc. 4) is the prison scene. In this scene, Chuo Hu, in continuous hallucination, encounters a series of visions. First, he sees that Chiao Yen-wang has not died as he thought, and has now become a prison officer who orders his men to put Chou Hu in fetters and to enslave him.

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[58] *Ibid.*, 168-69.
[59] *Ibid.*, 172.

When the prison officer is attempting to whip him to death, Chou Hu cannot stand the sight of watching himself being tortured; he rapidly fires to dispel the specter of the prison officer, and everything abruptly returns to silence, save for the throb of the tom-tom, which vibrates at an increasing rate. With an unnerving tenacity, the drum beat "follows" Chou Hu, working on his already guilt-ridden conscience. In Scene Four (Cf. *The Emperor Jones*, Sc.7), Chou Hu has a vision that his dead father and sister are still hopelessly in the grasp of Chiao Yen-wang; they are not even able to redress their grievance at the trial in the Underworld. The last scene (Cf. *The Emperor Jones*, Sc.8) presents the death of the hero (his suicide) and the escape of Chin Tzu.

Quite a lot has been written about *The Wildness*. What I am arguing is intended to convey that the O'Neillian scene structure and expressionist devices of *The Wildness* stand out in sharp relief when a comparative analysis is applied to the two plays. It is unmistakable that Cao Yu's play draws upon the American model for the expressionistic technical devices such as "its bold and inventive use of grotesque images, disconnected plots, contrived symbolism, and deliberate pauses between the already sparse dialogues to create tension---all these are clearly part of the common stylistic properties of the expressionist theatre, whose most significant contribution to modern drama is to make man's day-dream and fantasy

expressible."[60] As we can see, Cao Yu's *The Wildness*, especially in Act Three, bears a surprisingly striking resemblance to O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* in its scene setting (the dark jungle), its sound effects (gunshots, drum beats), and in its externalization of the protagonist's stream-of-consciousness. In *The Wildness*, as in *The Emperor Jones*, the reality that is communicated to the audience is a subjective one, a distortion of objective reality as it is filtered through the perceptions of the protagonist. During the course of the panic-stricken flight, the protagonist is driven by macabre figures and scenes from his past, and is constantly confronted with, and mentally tormented by, the apparitions moving like "automatons," and closing in upon him. This juxtaposition of psychologically-based phantasmal reality with complementary sound and visual effects is a typical O'Neillian expressionistic feature. The "golden threads," mended in Cao Yu's "garment," are so scintillating that, eventually, the "stealer" cannot but admit to the genesis of the play: "The play uses what is used in *The Emperor Jones*. At first I was not aware of it, but after I finished writing the play and read it twice, I came to find that I was unconsicouly very much influenced by him [O'Neill]."[61]

However, Cao Yu's *The Wildness* is unlike Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao,* which totally adopts and is enveloped by the expressionist skills and technical

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[60] Joseph S. M.Lau, *Ts'ao Yu: a study of literary influence.* Hong Kong: Kong Hong UP, (1972): 52.

[61] Cao Yu, quoted by Liu Yu in her "Lun Cao Yu de chuangzuo he Aonier de xiju yishu" (On Cao Yu's Plays and O'Neill's Dramatic Art.) *Wenxue pinglun.* (Literary Seasons) 12 (1986): 117. The translation is mine.

devices of the Amercian model. Cao Yu is, after all, a mature playwright who is extremely capable of aptly fusing O'Neill's influence with his own artistic virtuosity, making his play a piece of highly stylized creation. Also, in terms of the scope of the play, *The Wildness* is generally regarded as a "reproduction" that is better and more sophisticated than O'Neill's expressionist prototype. As Joseph Lau states, "in its scope, its intention to make the utmost use of a newly discovered dramatic possiblility, it is a far more ambitious play than its American model."[62] He further argues that *The Wildness* is "more innovative in its use of theatrical techniques, more imaginative in its plot, and more elaborate and soul-stirring in its characterization."[63] The greatness of Cao Yu's *The Wildness* lies in having achieved a highly dramatic art by adopting the form and technique from its prototype with so much flexibility and virtuosity that it manages to work out a style of its own.

The Wildness's "style of its own" is particularly evident in two of its salient features.

First, Cao Yu employs expressionist form to display a realistic content. When the playwright makes use of expressionist devices such as a symbolic setting, apparitions and inner monologue, he has already logically linked the flow of his protagonist's consciousness to the development of the plot and to the

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[62] Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 52.

[63] Joseph Lau, *Shaoshao yu xiju* (Fiction and Drama) Hongfan Bookstore. (1977): 196. The translation is mine.

unfolding of the character's objective reality. *The Wildness* is more true-to-life than either of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* or Hong Shen's *The Yama Chao* in its development of the story from Prelude to Act Two. The progression of Chou Hu's inner psychological state is clearer and much more realistic than that of Jones' in O'Neill's play; in *The Wildness,* well before Act Three, Chou Hu has undergone a long natural psychological process that paves the way for his later collapse into spiritual delirium. In the first two acts, Cao Yu, in a telling fashion, presents the reader with a conflicting inner world in which the good nature of the protagonist struggles with his feudal consciousness and the will to revenge. After Chou Hu completes his action and fulfills his will for revenge, his "shaky" mental state is already almost on the brink of collapse; stricken with the guilt-ridden consciousness of having murdered Ta-hsing and Xiao Hei-tse, he flees into the moonless jungle. Hounded by internal guilt and driven by the external pursuing force, Chou Hu falls into subconscious illusions that, for him, are more "true and natural" than reality. So when Cao Yu effectively utilizes the O'Neillian expressionist devices to externalize the inner reality of his protagonist's subconscious mind, we find that we have no difficulty comprehending Chou Hu's inner psychological experience in which one dreadful apparition appears after another.

Second, Cao Yu lays more emphasis than O'Neill on the combination of expressionistic techniques and realistic devices, which is a distinctive feature of

The Wildness. For example, in dealing with the visions of the hero and the changes in the monologues, Cao Yu, in an ingenious manner, weaves together the subconscious mind of the protagonist with the personal reality of the environment. In O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, in contrast, the protagonist's visions and monologues are monotonously switched off by gunshots, which bring him back to reality. In Jones's mind, the flow of subsconsciousness invariably issues from his inner psychological changes and seems to have nothing to do with the external reality of the environment. In *The Wildness*, however, Cao Yu succeeds in harnessing a combination of expressionistic skills and realistic devices to greatly enrich and vividly portray the external elements that work in concert with the protagonist's inner reality. It is true that in *The Wildness,* Cao Yu, like O'Neill, uses the gunshots to "adjust" the psychological changes of the protagonist's subconscious mind. However, apart from the gunshots and "the sound of the tom-tom and the muted visions, which he borrows freely from *The Emperor Jones*, Ts'ao Yu has 'planted' a number of technical devices of his own invention to enhance the effect of panic."[64] The sound and visual treatment provided in the Chinese play is richer and more evocative than in the American model. In *The Wildness*, for instance, the sporadic gunshots of the pursuing squad, the intermittent sound of the inverted bell, the sorrowful, and piercing soul-summoning cries of the blind mother Chiao Mu---all these are organically

[64] Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 52.

interwoven to deepen the terror of the perilous external environment and to communicate the inner world of the desperate protagonist. Moreover, "the sound effect" is further "heightened by the inclusion of the alluring whistle of the train, the croaking of frogs, the pecking of the woodpecker, the sound of the cuckoo, the chirping of crickets, and the chanting of the old witch from the temple in the heart of the dark forest."[65]

Cao Yu's ingenuity in the art of traditional Chinese theater is impressively shown in his transforming "the 'bleeding' ceremony of the African war dance in *The Emperor Jones*" into "the ghostly ritual of the traditional Chinese 'Soul Summoning,' accompanied by the thumping beat of drums."[66] Chiao Mu's gruesome soul-summoning in a moonless primitive jungle, which is one of the most striking horror features in the play, intensifies the ghostly and bloodcurdling atmosphere. Groping forward in the darkness, and in a harsh-sounding, piercing, unhurried voice, she calls out "Xiao Hei-zi," the name of her dead grandson, accompanied by the concordant beat of drum: "Come back! My little grandson! Gramma didn't kill you! Come back, my little grandson, it was that bad-hearted Hu-tzu---he's the one who killed you. Come back, my baby! Gramma's waiting for you, my grandson, come back!"[67] The dreadful echoes of the soul-summoning voice of the blind woman in the dark jungle take hold of Chou Hu's nerves and

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[65] David Y. Chen, "Two Chinese Adaptations of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*." *Modern Drama* 9 (1967): 435.
[66] Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and China." *Tamkang Review* 10 1-2 (1971):14.
[67] Cao Yu, *The Wildness*. 161.

serve as a psychological hunting force intensifying the inner fear and guilt of the protagonist who, also being pursued by the police, is virtually a frightened, lost animal with no way out.

Well versed in the art of Chinese theatre, Cao Yu has created many other vivid characters, even apart from Chiao Mu, who are intended to help instigate the flow of Chou Hu's subconsciousness. For example, Chang-wu and White Idiot serve as foils, frequently mentioning Ta-hsing in front of Chou Hu and thus helping to induce Chou Hu's visions of his murdered former friend and of other apparitions. Cao Yu declares that the human figures in the play are not real ghosts, but Chou Hu's visions. In order to show that in the play, he especially creates a second important character. This important character is none other than Chin Tzu, who is designed to accompany the hunted and hounded hero, and therefore is definitely a unique invention of the Chinese playwright. O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* suffers from an unfortunate paucity of other vivid characters, a defect which is not shared by *The Wildness*. Cao Yu's Chin Tzu, accompanying Chou Hu in his terrified escape from the very outset, plays a significant contrasting role in *The Wildness*, in addition to her functioning as a source of conflicts. Chin Tzu cannot stand the maltreatment she suffers from her cruel mother-in-law Chiao Mu, nor can she bear any longer her painful, loveless marriage with Ta-hsing. She craves for freedom and hopes to escape with her lover to a place where she believes they

can live happily together. In *The Wildness*, Chou Hu's frantic "muddy" mentality is invariably contrasted with Chin Tzu's sober consciousness. Chin Tzu's rational recollections and calm dialogue serve as an extrinsic driving force shaping the changes of Chou Hu's mood, conjuring up his visions of the unfortunate past of his family and inciting the activity and development of his subconscious mind. Thus the contrasting, juxtaposed role of Chin Tzu achieves a far more real and dynamic effect in transforming the psychological inner reality of the protagonist than the simple monotonous gunshots of Jones in O'Neill's play.

It is should be apparent from the above analysis that Cao Yu's *The Wildness*, as an expressionist play, has proved to be even more successful than *The Emperor Jones* in its realistic revelation of the flow of the complex and conflicting inner consciousness of the protagonist, which is presented through an apt combination of expressionistic technicality with a true-to-life realism.

Thus, the sound of the drumbeat in *The Emperor Jones* finally does echo on the Chinese dramatic stage, and O'Neill's expressionism, as we have seen, finds full yet creative expression in the plays of the leading Chinese playwrights, Hong Shen and Cao Yu, the two "reluctant" disciples of the American master. The exotic expressionist mechanism transplanted into *The Yama Chao* and *The Wildness*, albeit intermingled with the Chinese playwrights' own content and style, is indubitably O'Neill's most significant, ground-breaking contribution to the development of contemporary Chinese drama.

III

O'Neill's influence upon the foremost Chinese playwright, Cao Yu, is far more than just a matter of expressionism. The true greatness of O'Neill lies not merely in his artistic form, but rather in the gravity, profundity, and sublimity of the themes of his tragedies. This is also true of Cao Yu, whose tragedies focus on the revelation of man's intense spiritual affliction and on the disclosure of the characters' deep inner conflict. O'Neill's influence on Cao Yu thus goes beyond the scope of expressionist skills to the handling of the theme of tragedy, the characterization of the tragic characters, and the social significance of the play. Another play by Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*, perhaps the most important play in his career, is believed to be, in some respects, modeled on O'Neill's most powerful tragedy, *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), although Cao Yu is again reluctant to admit to any intentional imitation. Again, however, it is the glowing "threads of golden yarn" sewn into his second garment that make critics suspect that Cao Yu was once more indebted to his American predecessor. The garment he made with "threads of golden yarn" is this time by no means "ugly and coarse," as he

modestly asserted; rather, it is an extraordinary, delicately made and beautiful-looking apparel that is displayed in the cabinet of contemporary Chinese drama.

Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* resembles O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* in many of its facets, such as in the tragic fate of the protagonists, the incestuous relationship between stepmother and stepson, the destruction of the female passion of love, and particularly in the characterization of the two oppressed heroines, Fan-yi and Abbie. The O'Neillian elements in *Thunderstorm* may be explained by Cao's admiration for O'Neill, who deftly employs the utilizable motifs in ancient Greek tragedies to deal, in a revised modern fashion, with the illegitimate desire among characters and the intense relationship of mutual love and hatred. Cao Yu was once deeply moved by the profundity of *Desire Under the Elms* when he read the play, and he believed that O'Neill shows himself a master in unfolding, in an irreconcilable way, the inner conflict between the desire for love and the greed for property. In *Thunderstorm*, as in *Desire Under the Elms*, the playwright's tragic thought and tragic view of life are propped up by the psychoanalytical understanding of desire and "complexes." In both plays, it is desire and complexes that overwhelm the life of the tragic characters, incite their subjective consciousness of life to combat destiny, and finally lead them to the fateful destruction which culminates in the sublimity of tragedy. In both plays, incestuous love triangles are involved in shaping the tragic fate of the characters, who are entangled by love and hatred and various desires. O'Neill's play provides a good

prototype for Cao Yu for dealing with the themes of desire, passion and incest. To facilitate our discussion, let us first briefly examine O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* before we enter into a comparative study of the character relationships in the two plays.

Eben Cabot, the young son who attempts to outwit and outlive his aging father Ephraim, wishes to inherit the New England farm that once belonged to his mother before the old man "slaved" her to death. Greed and the rivalry between father and son pervade the harsh, Puritan existence on the farm. To do away with counterclaims to its proprietorship, Eben plays off his two older brothers and sends them to California; the element of lust is added when the old man takes a young bride in Abbie Putnam. Slightly Eben's senior, Abbie is vital, sensual, and equally desirous of the land. Eben fights against her, arousing her jealousy. However, as Abbie had predicted, nature proves too strong for Eben. Even though he repulses her more than once, she finally persuades him to court her in the best parlor, the room in which his mother's funeral wake had taken place. When the two of them consummate their love in that room, the room becomes theirs, and the restless spirit of Eben's mother vanishes. Abbie and Eben are overcome by a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love. Here the myth of Phaedra and Hyppolytus is relived in the union of the two, together with the inclusion of the Oedipus situation in which Eben supplants his father. Later, Abbie bears his child, providing the deceived Cabot an heir apparent for the farm, and finally leading Eben to feel

betrayed. In a moment of contrition she kills the child that is an obstacle between them. A reconciliation follows: united in love, they face the retributions of the law together.

Desire Under the Elms, as Travis Bogard suggests, "is reminiscent of the circumstances of the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, and in Abbie's murder of the child, the dim outline of Euripides' *Medea* appears. Neither *Medea* nor *Hippolytus* is a precious source for O'Neill's story. He has used his 'source material' much more freely than he does in *Mourning Becomes Electra*."[68]

This is also the case of Cao Yu, who in his own way uses his "source material" much more freely in *Thunderstorm* than in *The Wildness*. By borrowing the familiar Greek element of incest, Cao Yu is able to release the emotion that subject matter permits. However, *Thunderstorm* borrows not only from Greeks, but also from O'Neill, for the playwright aims, via O'Neill, to write a Chinese tragedy based on the traditional Greek model. Like O'Neill, Cao Yu focuses his effort and skill on depicting an illegitimate passion in female characters, superimposing upon it a multiplicity of motifs. He is much interested in the idea of fate as retribution, as brought about by the force of passion. A great measure of success is achieved through the character of Chou Fan-yi, a counterpart to O'Neill's Abbie Putnam in *Desire Under the Elms*. They are both stepmothers

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[68] Travis Bogard, *Contour In Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Oxford UP. (1988): 213.

who cherish an illegitimate desire for their stepsons. The main difference from the American prototype, however, is that the incest theme in Cao Yu's play is double, and much more complex and tragic than in *Desire Under the Elms*. In order to further our discussion in an expedient manner, it seems also necessary for us to briefly review the machinery of the complex Chinese play.

Chou Pu-yuan is a typical representative of the patriarchal family system in old China. He is the rich boss of a flourishing coal mine and the overbearing absolute master of a respectable wealthy family. In his undisciplined youth, he is autocratic, conceited, and dissolute, and even has a surreptitious love affair with one of his house-maids, Shi-ping, who later bears him two sons, Chou Ping and Ta-hai. For fear that his dishonorable affairs would defame the reputaion of the respectable family, Chou Pu-yuan stone-heartedly renounces his maid mistress Shi-Ping, together with Ta-hai, the unhealthy, feeble second son. Chou keeps the first son Chou Ping in the family. Driven by the relentless paramour, Shi-ping makes a despairing attempt to kill herself, but is narrawly saved.

Later, after his return from abroad, Chou Pu-yuan marries a comely, genteel, and well-educated young woman, Fan-yi, who is only several years the senior of her step-son Chou Ping. Before long, Fan-yi grows unsatisfied with her husband whose passion for her declines but who is energetic in his speculation on and exploitation of the mine workers. Neglected and uncared for, Fan-yi gradually steps into a clandestine affair with her gloomy step-son Chou Ping, who, from the

outset of the play, is in bitter conflict with his avaricious and self-willed father. The covert incestuous relationship initially flourishes between Fan-yi and Chou Ping. Finally, however, Chou Ping, probably reprouched by his conscience, switches his attention to a pretty young maid, Si-feng, who is working in his household. His utter attraction to Si-feng makes Fan-yi both enraged and desperate as she is racked equally by her husband's mental torment and her paramour's ruthless perfidy.

Lu Ma (Shi-Ping, the former maid mistress), accompanied by her son Ta-hai, happens to pay a visit to her daughter Si-feng (Ta-hai's half-sister; daughter by Lu Ma and her husband Lu-gui). No sooner does Lu Ma steps into her daughter's employer's house than she is shocked to recognize that her daughter is working for none other than her former paramour of thirty years ago. After learning the truth, Chou Pu-yuan becomes very guilty, having to face his renounced former maid mistress; however, he is starkly rebuked when he tries to use money to atone for his sins. Lu Ma tells Chou that the man named Ta-hai, who comes as a miner's representative to inform him of their determined strike against him, is none other than his own son.

Fan-yi is resolved to take revenge when she finds out that her paramour Chou Ping wilfully elopes with Si-feng without her. She shocks everyone in the family by announcing that she has been her step-son's mistress for years. Without knowing the fatal blood relation of Si-feng and her own son, Fan-yi now attempts

to tear them apart by forcing her son Chou Chong, who himself has been infatuated with the maid, to publicly claim the girl. What she does is in vain. Driven by her fear of betrayal, Fan-yi finally attempts to compell Chou Pu-yuan to prevent her paramour's leaving, but only to prompt her old husband to uncover his true relationship with Lu Ma. Si-feng, who is pregnant now and is unable to face the shame of her incestual relationship with her half brother, dashes out of the house desperately and is electrocuted by a bare live wire on the ground. The same fate overtakes Chou Chong, who, running after her, attempts to rescue her. Having witnessed such a family tragedy, Fan-yi feels bitter remorse by begging her lover's forgiveness. Chou Ping, however, cannot stand to see any more of this sordid reality, and, rebelling against the desperate circumstances of his life, he shoots himself to death, leaving the desperate woman insane in a crazy world.

It should be clear from the contour of this complex play that Cao Yu deliberately introduces a double O'Neillian incest theme into Chinese drama, but what makes *Thunderstorm* so compelling is the construction of its complex plot, its characters, especially Fay-yi, and its stylistic sureness. The tragic action of the play is completely convincing. Many features in the play, as we can see, are immediately reminiscent of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*: the irreconcilable conflict between the patriarchal father and refractory son; the inhuman greediness of the father driven by an ungratified possessive instinct; the symbols of the house representing all that is strong, old, and joyless; the attempts to break free of the

past through an action of incestuous love, and the physical passion which is terribly destructive in the end because it has been so long constrained by the sense of sin. Furthermore, quite a few characters in *Thunderstorm* are similar in one way or another to their counterparts in O'Neill's play, such as Chou Pu-yuan and Ephraim Cabot, Chou Ping and Eben. But the most striking success of *Thunderstorm* is, as I have remarked, achieved in the character of Fan-yi as a salient counterpart to O'Neill's Abbie Putnam. Cao Yu's Fan-yi and O'Neill's Abbie, as Joseph Lau points out, "are bound by the most uncomfortable of kinships: they both cherish an incestuous passion for their stepsons."[69] Fan-yi and Abbie are the most unfortunate in their families as both of them are "smothered" by the possessive greed and the exploitation that is characteristic of their old husbands; meanwhile, they also act as the active destroyers of the old social order as well as the stale family system because their conflicts with their families actually embody their rigid resistance to the ethical order of society. Fay-yi is modeled on O'Neill's Abbie in her primitive passion and in her defiance of traditional morals and values. Abbie marries Cabot as a bargain in which her real purpose is to inherit his land and property; Fan-yi does not marry Chou Pu-yuan for love either, but rather in order to be "well-matched" in terms of the social and economic status demanded by her parents. Thus, she is "a wronged woman to start with as she was 'tricked into the family and [has] a child, Chou Chong, who

[69] Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 15.

[makes] her escape all the more impossible.'"[70] Yet, she is a woman of gross passion, and her sexual impetuosity is an essential part of her nature and not likely ever to be subdued. As the playwright describes her:

> She is obviously a woman of ruthless determination. The faint red of her lips is the only touch of color in her otherwise pale face. Her large dark eyes and straight nose give her face a certain beauty, though a beauty with a sinister cast to it. The eyes beneath her long, steady lashes betray her unhappiness. Sometimes, when the smouldering fires of misery in her heart blaze into life, those eyes will fill with all the anguish and resentment of a frustrated woman. The corners of her mouth are slightly drawn back, revealing her to be a repressed woman controlling herself with difficulty...With her delicate health, her secret sorrows, her intelligence and her love of poetry and literature, she is a woman of old China; yet there is a primitive wildness in her which shows in her courage, in her almost fanatical reasoning, and in her sudden, unaccountable strength in moments of crisis.[71]

Such is Fan-yi, a woman of primitive passion and wild courage. She duplicates Abbie's personality: her fervid passion and gross sexuality; her life

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[70] *Ibid.*, 17. Cao Yu. Quoted by Lau.

[71] Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, (1964): 27-28. translated by Wang Tso-liang and A. C. Barnes.

which mixes cruel love and bitter hatred; her long repressed force of lust and her physical aversion to her oppressive husband. The similarities to Abbie's personality become clearer and more explicit when we consider O'Neill's initial portrayal of his female protagonist: "Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sexuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed desperate quality."[72]

From the very outset, Fan-yi is an incarnation of contradictions and extremities. Though she is a well-educated, genteel woman, she cannot stand for a moment the cold-bloodedness and ruthless mental persecution of her husband, as her vigorous life, permeated by a restrained primitive passion, thirsts for freedom and love. When Chou Ping, young, restless, as ill-treated as herself, comes to "offer comfort and understanding by letting her in on the confidence that he, too, hates his father" no less resolutely than she does, Fan-yi, as if "in deep water to an outreached hand," is moved to the loving commiseration of her step-son.[73] Her bursting passion shatters the chains of morality, and her desire of revenge on her husband meets her desire of satisfying her pent-up sexuality. Despite being a woman of old China in spirit, Fan-yi, walks out of the stifling encirclement of Chou House and bravely defies the feudal moral code by cherishing an unwavering

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[72] Eugene O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms* in *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*. New York: The Library of America. (1988): 335.
[73] Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 17.

love for her stepson, an unforgivable sin by the standards of the social order. She is more than willing to surrender her life and reputation in an exchange for her genuine love. Later in the play, even when timorous Chou Ping becomes fearful and wayward, Fan-yi quickly defends her conduct, contrasting her attitude with his: "I don't regret it. I've never regretted anything."[74] Fan-yi, when attempting to convince her lover to elope, unshrinkingly asserts her innocence of the very deeds that Ping regrets:

> Ping: (*in an anguished voice*) But surely you realize such a relationship must seem revolting to anyone else?
>
> Fan-yi: (*coldly*) How many times have I told you that I don't look at it like that? My conscience is'nt made that way.[75]

Fan-yi, as we can see in the above passage, is first and foremost spiritually emancipated, having smashed the shackles of the feudal ethical values that confine her physical body, which shows the playwright's affirmation of and approbation of the heroine's individuality and of her iconoclasm of the suffocating patriarchal order. Fan-yi's rebellious statement is fraught with conviction and self-assurance and her defiant character can be traced in O'Neill's play, where we can find that Abbie's passionate personality and wild courage are couched in the same rebellious declaration when she defies the stifling Puritanic morality.

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[74] Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*. 58.

[75] Cao Yu, *Thunderstorm*. 138. Translated by Wang Tso-liang and A.C. Barnes. Also quoted by Lau, 21.

Before hearing Abbie's rebellious outburst, let us examine a bit closer O'Neill's heroine. Abbie, as we know, marries Ephraim Cabot with the cherished aim of inheriting his property, but she finds Cabot's exploitive egocentrism overpowering and his greedy personality tyrannical. She is denied the right to inherit his land and is therefore confronted with the prospect of a pathetic, sacrificial and love-starved life, just as Eben's mother was. A woman of emotional vitality and sexual capacity, she advances to her stepson for an avenging release. At the commencement, Eben and Abbie each have their own purposes. As Falk observes, "At first with separate selfish motives---Eben for revenge upon his father, and Abbie to have a son to inherit Cabot's farm---the two determine to satisfy their desire for each other."[76] Abbie finds her relationship with Eben, however, gliding from sexual fulfillment into wakening her compulsion toward love. "Upon consummation of that love," "love has finally had natural expression:"[77]

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

Abbie: (*wildly*) Vengeance o' God on the hull o'us! What d'we

[76] Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension: an interpretative study of the plays*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP. (1958): 96.
[77] *Ibid.*, 96.

give a durn? I love ye, Eben! God knows I love ye.[78]

Eben is eventually struck by feelings of guilt, in relation to his father, and regrets their incestuous deeds; however, Abbie, with a tortured intensity, braves the grave moral issue in a self-assured manner, showing her great courage in defying the suffocating Puritanical morality:

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

Abbie: (*lifting her head as if defying God*) *I don't repent that sin*!

I hain't askin' God t' forgive that.[79]

Cao Yu's Fan-yi is apparently for the most part forged out of the mold of Abbie's character-type. Fan-yi's desire for the genuine love of her stepson is perfectly matched by Abbie's, because O'Neill's Abbie values her incestuous love of Eben more than anything in the world, even sacrificing her new-born flesh and blood as a cruel sign that proves her love. Like Fan-yi's, Abbie's rebellious stand is, too, an open radical defiance of the puritanical moral traditions that long confined man's mind and spirit and therefore incurred countless tragedies to innumerable families.

As we can see from the analysis above, O'Neill's Abbie is evidently the prototype of Cao Yu's Fan-yi, not only in harboring a genuine love for her stepson, in reaping a slashing revenge upon her aging, dictatorial husband, but also in making a daring stand against the victimizing and conventional moral system of

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[78] Eugene O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms* in *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*. New York: The Library of America. (1988): 354-355. Also quoted by Lau. 20.
[79] *Ibid.*, 375. The emphasis is mine.

the Chinese patriarchal society. The cheerless and loveless family that Fan-yi belongs to is characterized by sins, bigotry, and hypocrisy, which is just the reflection of O'Neill's morally confining, puritanical, elm-shaded farmhouse that Abbie lives in. Fan-yi and Abbie shoulder, with their delicate figures, heavy societal moral pressure and meanwhile live their lives in spiritual squalor; to fulfill their desires and achieve true love, they end up entwined in life-and-death struggles with conventional morality. Notwithstanding their craving for their own emotional world, by falling into incestuous defiance of the repressive reality, they cannot fail to be victimized by the moral culture of the times in which they tragically live. The tragic fate of Cao Yu's Fan-yi is blacker and more intense than that of her counterpart in the sense that her dauntless love-seeking heart is inexorably rejected in the end by her lover, who succeeds his authoritarian father by dealing her a second devastating blow. She withstands a double blow, swallows double disappointment, undergoes double affliction, and therefore sustains double tragedy. Her "thunderstorm" character, her rebellious consciousness of struggle, however, are pitted against the conventional ethical values of feudal society, a conflict which the playwright describes with enormous gusto and treats with generous sympathy, because her tragic plight deeply stirs the playwright's feelings of pity and respect.

In *Thunderstorm*, Fan-yi's old husband, Chou Pu-yuan, bears a significant resemblance to O'Neill's Ephraim Cabot with his egoistic obsessiveness. Both Cao

Yu's Chou Pu-yuan and O'Neill's Ephraim Cabot are typical representatives of those self-seeking, pharisaic souls. Chou Pu-yuan, in his youth, is a dissolute, irresponsible self-seeker. In order to find a more suitable match, he later ruthlessly drives from his house both his humble maid-mistress and his sick illicit son. Even when well-educated Fan-yi enters his house, Chou Pu-yuan, the patriarch of a traditional Chinese family, displays in an exasperating way his authorianianism, negligence and audacity, which eventually lead to a series of abnormal human relationships. The sin of Chou Pu-yuan is the ultimate cause of these incestuous complications, and it finally exacts an exorbitant price. Near the end of the play, Chou Pu-yuan totally disregards moral principles and cruelly sacrifices everybody. The whole family is ruined by his initial sins and his tyranical power. By fully exposing the selfishness and hypocrisy of Chou, the patriarch of a traditional Chinese family and a pillar of Chinese society, the playwright provides in the play a disparaging evaluation of such a family and social system.

In O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, Ephraim Cabot, Abbie's aging husband and archetypal New England Puritan, is Chou Pu-yuan's counterpart. He is a firm believer in hard work and the acquisitive mind as the means to glorification. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder. His eyes are close-set and myopic, only focusing on his exploitative interests. Cabot believes that God has ordered him back to the farm, where he built his stone walls and forced the earth into fertility. Cabot, according to Eben, draws his wife (Eben's

mother) to death, who, like her predecessor, was ignored, overworked and love-starved in her married life. His emotions and others' needs are all crushed by his Puritan upbringing. Thus, O'Neill pungently attacked the destructive puritanical force in old Cabot by showing how it has shattered psyches and destroyed lives. Like Cao Yu's Chou, Cabot, as we can see, is more than just an obsessive, self-righteous patriarch, for he is also the Oedipal father whom, in Freudian psychological terms, the son seeks to destroy and supplant in his mother's bed. It is the father's ruthless possessiveness and consistent negligence that bring about the trapped, incestuous human psyches of the Cabots. In the final act of the two plays, both Ephraim Cabot and Chou Pu-yuan are depicted as alone in their houses, despairingly lamenting their inexpiable initial sins that incur the unduly, tragic human relationships that have ruined their families.

The "golden threads" that Cao Yu derived from his master are also evident in the characterization of Fan-yu's lover, Chou Ping. The contradictory dichotomy in Chou Ping's personality, marked by his ambivalent acceptance of Fan-yi's unruly love, is exceedingly similar to that of Abbie's paramour Eben. Saliently inscribed in Chou Ping's character is his maternal side: sensitive, sympathetic, and yearning for beauty. So when Fan-yi advances toward him in a pathetic way, Chou Ping understandably holds her hand in his by commiserating with her misfortunes. His maternal personality, however, co-exists alongside his paternal brutality, atrocity, and mercilessness. His selfish and cold-blooded side, inherited

from his father, asserts itself when he decides to abandon his lover by terminating their incestuous relationship, which actually only serves to precipitate a chain of actions and reactions which finally ruins the prosperous Chou family. In the act of sacrificing Fan-yi, Chou Ping exposes his soulless true self, which leaves Fan-yi with no way out and ultimaltely drives her to tormenting insanity.

In essence, then, the conflicting dichotomy of Chou Ping's personality arises from the double identity of O'Neill's Eben. Eben, as we noted before, is inially "drawn to Abbie not out of love, but by lust, greed, and the desire for revenge."[80] As Falk insightfully remarks:

> Eben wears two figurative masks---one ruthless and self-centered like his father, the other sensitive and hungry for beauty and love as his mother was...While Eben constantly asserts that he is the "heir" of his mother--- "I'm Maw---every drop o' blood!"---his brothers keep reminding him that he is the "spitting image" of his father. His very determination to avenge his mother reflects the personality of his father.[81]

So, according to Falk, Eben is an embodiment of his parents, having inherited both his mother's, and, emphatically, his father's personality traits. His paternal side of avarice and carnality are obviously found in his cheating his brothers and

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[80] Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension: an interpretative study of the plays*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP. (1958): 96.
[81] *Ibid.*, 96-97.

malevolently sending them away to California in order to be in the exclusive possession of the farm, and also revealed in his clandestinely sharing his father's Min, a lovely tavern harlot, and his young wife. However, in comparison to Chou Ping, the circumstances under which his various inherited parental qualities are displayed are quite different. Whereas Chou Ping ends up ruthlessly deserting his former mistress, Eben's maternal endowment triumphs in the last moment over his paternal side in that he "cast[s] off the prideful father" and "break[s] down the mask of egotism," and... "give[s] himself up with Abbie, and accept[s] with her the consequences of the crime."[82] By surrendering himself to the police and sacrificing himself rather than his lover, according to Falk, Eben converts his rancorous desire and cruel greed into a genuine lofty love.[83]

From the above comparative analysis of the three pairs of principal character relationships in the two plays, it should now be manifest that the play *Thunderstorm* was unquestionably influenced by the American model in its characterization, its theme and its corresponding character relationships. Notwithstanding Cao's reluctance to acknowledge this literary indebtedness, he embraces O'Neill, in a lower stratum of his consciousness, as a dramatic "source" from which he draws the nutritious elements into his own creation, which is characterized by a national and realistic dramatic style. Cao Yu proved to be far

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[82] *Ibid.*, 97.
[83] *Ibid.*, 97.

more skillful and experienced than Hong Shen in assimilating what he had learned from his master. Using his master's "golden threads" in an unmatched way, Cao Yu interweaves *Thunderstorm*'s drama of love-and-hate conflicts spurred by passion and desire with "a socalist concern for the plight of the workers under capitalist exploitation and an individual effort to assert personal freedom and happiness under the crippling weight of Chinese patriarchal society."[84] Thus, the characterization of Fan-yi as a Chinese Abbie rebelling under the crippling weight of patriarchal society lends itself well to Cao Yu's original intent of combining drama of social significance with a tragic theme.

Cao Yu's plays are diffused, to a high degree, with an "O'Neillian flavor," but carry, at the same time and in a larger measure, a "Caoian" savor; O'Neill's pervasive influence is deftly incorporated into Cao Yu's own artistic self, which masterfully reflects the successful interaction of various influences. With his creative mind permeated with O'Neill's dramatic aesthetics, Cao Yu is able to enter into the human spiritual world of free-will and fate by psychologically depicting an imaginative mindscape of tragic, contradictory characters who are obsessed with passion and revenge, love and hatred. Cao Yu's dramatic world, much like Eugene O'Neill's, is a world of true-to-life vivacious characters who live a hopeless, agonizing life that impedes their progress towards self-fulfillment and the realization of freedom. Cao Yu's plays, as we have seen, are pervaded by a

[84] Lau, *Ts'ao Yu*. 6.

stifling feeling of oppressiveness and an overwhelming sense of confinement; they reveal, in a more realistic way than those of O'Neill, that the tragic protagonists are trapped both by their suffocating environments and by their self-woven dreams. The characters struggle hard to free themselves from these controlling forces, but inevitably fail, resulting not only in the shattering of their sweet dreams, but also in a blacker tragedy driven by the will to freedom.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have considered two of O'Neill's plays that display a Taoist dimension of his dramatic thought and two other two plays that have made a considerable impact on modern Chinese playwrights. O'Neill's identification with Oriental Taoist philosophy enhances his tragic vision of reality, influences the values and attitudes of his protagonists, and shapes the symbolism and connotation couched in the plays; the "consanguinity" between his plays and the plays of influential twentieth century Chinese dramatists not only makes him popular and honored in China, but has also enabled him to become, like Ibsen, a great foreign dramatist who has exerted an indelible, continuous influence on the growth of contemporary Chinese drama.

As we have seen, *Marco Millions* and *Lazarus Laughed*, two of O'Neill's middle plays, present the reader with a vivid antithesis of themes, characters and character relationships. The first play, in which the mercantile Marco, picked by the Pope to present the wisdom of the West to the East, is replete with deliberate irony. O'Neill intends the rash, philistine emissary of the West to stand in direct and ubiquitous opposition to the Oriental characters Kukachin, Kublai and Chu-yin. "For O'Neill," as Horst Frenz observes, "the shallowness of the action-oriented West seems to be incapable of comprehending the subtleties of the East

whose wisdom lies in a quiet observance of the true course of nature."[85] O'Neill's "sheer disgust with what Marco represents" alludes to "the superficiality of Western civilization," which is contrasted in an incompatible way with "the Taoist wisdom of the East."[86] In the polarized conflict between East and West, O'Neill obviously takes an Oriental stand, as he identifies with Taoism, which O'Neill believes can "offer a cure for the ills of the materialistic West."[87] Commenting on O'Neill's Taoist thought, Frenz points to O'Neill's deep-seated interest in, and long-cherished craving for, Chinese Taoism: "What is worth noting is that O'Neill's disgust with Western civilization has taken on a certain degree of objectivity and detachment to enable him to go beyond his own immediate horizon. To be sure, the setting of the scene in the distant Orient may very well be no more than a theatrical device. But when we look at his rather frequent references to the East and Taoism, and to the Tao House he built for the express purpose of obtaining some peace and quiet, we can assume that there was in him a genuine interest in the Taoist way of life."[88]

O'Neill's philosophy of life and death is the pith of his Taoist thought, which is discussed in the first two chapters. In *Lazarus Laughed,* in particular, O'Neill pursues the ideal of transcendence. By presenting in the play the two pairs

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[85] Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and China." *Tamkang Review* 10. 1-2. (1971): 10.
[86] *Ibid.*, 10-11.
[87] *Ibid.*, 11
[88] *Ibid.*, 11.

of polarized characters---Lazarus and Miriam, and Lazarus and Caligula, O'Neill dramatizes the Taoist transcendent attitude toward death and forges an Oriental view of life. To O'Neill, fear of death is the root of crimes; therefore he urges people to overcome the fear of death by adopting the Taoist attitude in regard to the illusory character of death. According to Chuang Tzu, life and death are not oppositional entities, but are merely two changing states of existence of the same matter. Life is not the beginning, nor is death the end; life is not happy nor is death sad. In O'Neill's play, the boundary between life and death vanishes. However, despite its Taoist ideal, *Lazarus Laughed* can hardly conceal the existence of the playwright's own fear of death because O'Neill's attempt at transcendence through the character Lazarus, to a certain degree, falls short of "real" Taoist philosophy: Lazarus, judged from a Taoist point of view, has not really attained the state of *wuwei* in his idea of self-negation.

O'Neill is a true emissary of Sino-American culture in the sense that Chinese traditional Taoist culture is exquisitely embodied in him and his works and in the sense that through him and his works, the pubescent contemporary Chinese theatre is capable of carrying on a cultural dialogue with mature American drama, based on the common ground of expressionism. O'Neill's expressionism is morning dew that moistens the awakened yet withered minds of the literary young people engaged in the new Chinese cultural movement. Still, expressionistic features are not new to the Chinese contemporary dramatic scene, for the

Scadinanian and German expressionist playwrights, such as Strindberg, Kaiser, Brecht, and others, had already been introduced into China; however, it is O'Neill's expressionist play *The Emperor Jones* that evokes the genuine interest of China's pioneering playwrights in the originality and singularity of Western expressionistic drama, and instigates them to apply the effective expressionist skills to their dramatic creation, thus begetting the two highly influential plays, *The Yama Chao* and *The Wildness*. *The Emperor Jones* is perhaps not the most representative work in a career that spanned over fifty plays, yet O'Neill's deep-rooted affinity with China is further strengthened and tightened by this play, and his incipient celebrity in China was also largely established and augmented by this dramatic work.

O'Neill's influence upon Hong Shen and Cao Yu is of varying degree. Hong Shen's reception and adaptation of O'Neill, especially in his use of expressionist devices is, in large measure, blind and wholesale, which accounts for the loss of Hong's creative personality and his artistic individuality in the play. The multi-faceted yet straight resemblance of *The Yama Chao* to its American prototype has, to a certain extent, tarnished Hong Shen's reputation as a playwright of a distinctive artistic personality. This is not to say, however, that Hong Shen's simple and direct "tie" with O'Neill entirely prevents him from achieving his own artistic self, which is manifested in his content rather than in the form of the work. By employing the expressionist means of alternating between reality and visions of

the protagonist, Hong Shen succeeds in turning a realistic play of social-political conflict into a drama of psychic fear.

From an aesthetic point of view, Cao Yu's artistic relationship with O'Neill is of higher significance and complexity than that of Hong Shen. In Cao Yu's plays, as we have noted, there is many O'Neillian elements, such as the primordial jungle setting, the panic-stricken flight of the protagonist, and the externalization of internal, emotional states in *The Wildness*, and the tragic fate of the protagonists, the incestuous relationship between stepmother and stepson, and the destruction of the female passion of love in *Thunderstorm*. It is undeniable that Cao Yu is a playwright influenced by O'Neill, but differences between them are more important; that is, Cao Yu is a mature dramatist who reveals his kinship with O'Neill only within the bounds of his own artistic virtuosity, so that his plays are distinctly characterized by his own style. *The Wildness* and *Thunderstorm* are imbued with vengeance, fate, and sympathy for human depravity, because the plays, viewed from another perspective, reveal a cognizance of the non-benevolent actions of Nature upon man. Cao Yu's tragic profundity lies in a strenuous attempt to probe into the psychology of human spiritual affliction and retribution and to explore the latent roots of tragedy that incur this human suffering. His drama drives at discovering the truth of tragedy by revealing the complex inner worlds of the protagonists: characters' clear awareness of an unachievable goal always goes hand in hand with the unremitting and pertinacious struggle to attain it. Cao Yu's

plays must also be acknowledged as being rife with social significance. From his appeal to the social "thunderstorm" to his turn to the primitive "wildness," his dramatic horizon becomes wider and wider, and the playwright's pulse is increasingly in tune with the upheavals of Chinese society. Even his dramatic style has its own worthwhile facets: the masterful use of dialogue, the deft manipulation of characters, the artistic presentation of connected and organized plots, and the symbolic resonances between the various components of the "wildness" and "thunderstorm" characters. All these stylistic achievements point to the fact that Cao Yu is a full-blown, preeminent dramatist whose affinity with O'Neill is eminently displayed in an artistic virtuosity that is distinctly his own.

Nonetheless, O'Neill's influence and impact upon contemporary Chinese drama is important and lasting. Without O'Neill, the brilliance of contemporary Chinese spoken drama would have been as much diminished as O'Neill's trans-cultural popularity would have been obscured without the Oriental philosophical wisdom imbedded in his plays. As an American playwright, O'Neill serves as a cultural bridge between China and the West. Recognition of O'Neill's affinity with and influence in China has culminated in an international celebration of his centennial in the land of Taoism and the grand International Conference: Eugene O'Neill's---World Playwright (June 6-9, 1988, Nanjing, China). Chinese scholars and theater practitioners joined their counterparts from afar in celebrating and honoring the playwright's centenary, which is the most truely international tribute

paid to O'Neill since he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936. Thus it can be said that Eugene O'Neill spiritually belongs not only to his home country, but to China and the world.

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