

EUGENE O'NEILL IN CHINA

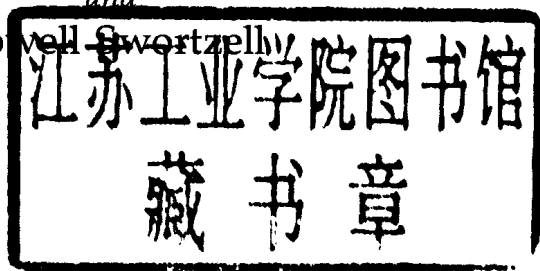
*An International
Centenary Celebration*

Edited by
Haiping Liu
and
Lowell Swortzell

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Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, Number 44



Greenwood Press
New York • Westport, Connecticut • London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Eugene O'Neill in China : an international centenary celebration /
edited by Haiping Liu and Lowell Swortzell.

p. cm.—(Contributions in drama and theatre studies, ISSN
0163-3821 ; no. 44)

Includes index.

ISBN 0-313-27379-0 (alk. paper)

1. O'Neill, Eugene, 1888-1953—Criticism and interpretation—
Congresses. 2. O'Neill, Eugene, 1888-1953—Stage history—
Congresses. I. Liu, Hai-p'ing, 1944- II. Swortzell, Lowell.
III. Series.

PS3529.N5Z6374 1992

812'.52—dc20 91-28744

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 91-28744

ISBN: 0-313-27379-0

ISSN: 0163-3821

First published in 1992

Greenwood Press, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the
Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National
Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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**For Bob and Jerrie Runice who helped me to start,
endure, and enjoy the long journey to this book.
H. L.**

**This book is dedicated to the memory of
Virginia Floyd in appreciation of her many
contributions to O'Neill scholarship, the
last of which are published here.
L. S.**

Illustrations

Illustrations are from the Jiangsu Art Theatre's production of *The Emperor Jones* and follow page xliii.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those individuals and institutions who helped in one way or another in the preparation of the centennial celebration and the present book, and particularly to Frederick Wilkins, Arthur and Barbara Gelb, Travis Bogard, Jordan Miller and Cao Yu, who gave me inspiration and encouragement when I had in mind only a vague notion of the conference; to all my "pals" in *Choubeizhu* (the preparatory team), who helped enormously in developing and materializing the idea; to Yvonne Shafer, James Robinson, and John Scherting for their suggestions and contact with the U.S. Embassy and Consulate and some scholars in the United States; to the China Fund, the United Board, and Occidental Petroleum for the funding necessary for the project; to Margaret Ranald for proposing the fruitful contact with Greenwood Press for this book and for her valuable ideas on editing; to Marilyn Brownstein of Greenwood for her patience and understanding; to Lowell Swortzell for his kindness and courage in agreeing to co-edit this book with me far away across the Pacific Ocean; to Zhao Yu for her unfailing assistance in the work of editing, which must have seemed to her to have no end; and, finally, to Bob, Jerrie, Yun, Qian, and Fei, who gave me confidence, love, and backing to undertake and carry through the whole project.

Haiping Liu

I thank Eugene O'Neill for being the cause of my first visit to China--a wonderful experience in itself, filled with landscapes of great beauty and people of enormous graciousness with a well-maintained tradition

of hospitality.

I thank Haiping Liu for organizing the conference and for his invitation to co-edit this volume. His vision and determination to honor O'Neill resulted in the largest international gathering of researchers and performers to be held anywhere during the centenary observances. He successfully appealed to bureaucrats for money, to officials for space, and to scholars and artists he thought should attend (and who, amazingly enough, for the most part did). He inspired educators to find the funds to take themselves to Nanjing. He challenged theatre companies to produce O'Neill's plays especially for the Festival. All these accomplishments may be termed cultural miracles, considering how monumentally underpaid teachers and artists are the world over. Yet, they arrived in Nanjing for four days of international celebration, ready to deliver their papers and to perform their productions, all because one professor believed that China was the ideal place to proclaim Eugene O'Neill a world playwright.

Of course, he was assisted. Among my fondest memories remain the faces of his many colleagues who greeted and escorted us about Nanjing. They also presented us with O'Neill's somber portrait on conference T-shirts which we still wear with pride and gratitude. To the students who took such great measures to make the daily operations run smoothly, we especially are indebted.

The purpose of this book is to capture the intellectual and artistic stimulation of that conference, allowing readers to share its impressive accomplishment in fostering international studies of O'Neill. Limitations of space, inevitably, make it impossible to include all the papers presented in Nanjing. The final selection represents the major areas of investigation explored by O'Neill scholars today. These papers are organized into divisions similar to the order in which they were originally delivered.

Missing, unfortunately, are the informal discussions that took place between sessions, on excursions about Nanjing, at theatres, at receptions, and during meals. It was these conversations which truly united delegates in their studying, sharing, and probing of O'Neill. Many of these impromptu meetings were with students whose enthusiasm for O'Neill, American theatre, and American life in general proved to be insatiable. To be certain, the Americans and Europeans also asked endless questions about Chinese theatre, education, and society--sometimes well into the morning.

Some of that splendid collegiality is captured in the panel discussion, the last section of this book, in which the Festival productions were discussed in open forum. If one multiplies that lively exchange by a period of four days, the reader will gain a sense of the

comaraderie of the entire conference.

I wish to thank, too, the editors of *The Recorder* for permission to reprint my article on the conference as my introduction to this book.

Richard Spencer has proved to be an exemplary research assistant, particularly in masterminding incompatible computer programs. His contributions include a mind that questions every sentence at least twice, for which both authors and readers should be doubly grateful.

Dr. Leslie White, a former student and O'Neill scholar in her own right, saw the manuscript through its final stages of preparation and, as with two previous books, I am once again indebted to her sharp vision and caustic wit with which she first attacks and then improves my work.

When mail service stopped at the outbreak of the student uprising in June 1989, the diskettes containing the complete conference presentations were hand-delivered to New York by Americans suddenly being recalled home. With their help and the ability of FAX machines to communicate even in the most troubled of times, *Eugene O'Neill in China* surmounted political and diplomatic obstacles that might have delayed or even prevented its publication. With improving United States-Chinese relations comes hope that conferences such as the one reported here will continue to disseminate knowledge and strengthen friendships throughout the world.

Lowell Swortzell

Letter of Greeting from the People's Republic of China

Dear Professor Haiping Liu,

Thank you for your kind invitation to the international conference in commemoration of Eugene O'Neill's centennial. I would indeed like to attend, yet I very much regret to say my poor health prevents me from coming to Nanjing. I hope you will understand and forgive me.

I am so glad to learn that the conference is extremely well planned and prepared. I can imagine how much time you and your colleagues must have put into it. But you can be assured that the conference will be a great, unprecedented event in the history of the exchange of drama and theatre between China and the United States. It will, I am sure, win glory for the academic and theatrical circles.

As for the papers to be presented at the conference, I hope they can be collected and published later as a book, so that other people, either O'Neill scholars or those merely interested in him, might also benefit from the conference and have a better understanding of this great dramatist's work. I avidly look forward to such a publication.

Thank you for inviting me to be an honorary adviser to the conference. I accept the honor with gratitude.

Best wishes for the success of the conference.

Sincerely,

Cao Yu,
President
Chinese Dramatists' Association

Letter of Greeting from the United States

Dear Professor Liu:

I write to salute you on the tremendous success of your monumental task of organizing the international conference *Eugene O'Neill: World Playwright*, which I know will be one of the most significant commemorations of the centennial of Eugene O'Neill's birth and to send officially an expression of admiration and respect from the membership of the Eugene O'Neill Society, which has been honored to co-sponsor the event.

We know very well the massive difficulties involved in organizing so vast and complex an event and we congratulate you and your colleagues for surmounting all the potential obstacles so successfully. It is evidence both of your personal and tireless dedication to America's foremost dramatist and of the respect in which O'Neill is held throughout the world today. Eugene O'Neill was truly a "citizen of the world," and your conference underscores that fact, while also strengthening the warm bond of friendship between our two nations.

The massive array of events and speakers you have succeeded in bringing together is the envy of conference directors everywhere. Having myself done some work in that area, I can say that very personally! And there is no way to express adequately the disappointment I feel in not being able to be present and congratulate you in person. But I hope that you will convey my greetings to the many who will attend and my best wishes for what I am confident will be an occasion of unequalled importance to the worldwide appreciation of Eugene O'Neill. The Eugene O'Neill Society doffs its collective hat in awe!

Sincerely yours,

Frederick C. Wilkins,
President
The Eugene O'Neill Society

O'Neill's Universal Brotherhood: A Theatre for Today's World

Keynote address at the opening ceremony for *Eugene O'Neill:
World Playwright*, June 6, 1988, Nanjing

On this historic day when scholars of the East and of the West meet to celebrate the centennial of America's premier playwright, let us in the spirit of Eugene O'Neill extend to one another warm greetings of friendship and good fellowship. Let us also offer sincere thanks to our hosts, the University of Nanjing and the People's Republic of China, whose foresight made this meeting a reality and particularly to their representative, Professor Haiping Liu, the gracious conference coordinator who smoothed all paths that led here. The People's Republic of China is to be highly commended, as it is one of the few countries in the world that has mounted a massive international conference that is destined to be a learning experience for all who attend. The scope of the four-day program here and the eagerly anticipated plays to be presented here and in Shanghai indicate both a deep dedication to O'Neill and an appreciation of his stature as world dramatist.

How pleased O'Neill himself would be by the great intermingling of peoples from so many nations to pay tribute to him as they explore the many facets of his life and plays. Indeed, this international conference is a significant step forward in the realization of a cherished dream that became a major motif in his plays: the brotherhood of man. Inasmuch as he stood stalwartly Janus-masked, benevolently facing both East and West, throughout his creative career, let us select as the theme of our historic coming together: "O'Neill's Universal Brotherhood: A Theatre for Today's World."

From his years of early adulthood the dramatist sought to expand his mental horizons by signing on as seaman to sail beyond his country's boundaries and its narrow native provincialism. In the process

he was exposed to the many nationalities and ethnic distinctions of his fellow crewmen and learned among these rough, uneducated seamen lessons about the value of friendship, sacrifice, and integrity. Later, when he wrote the early one-act sea plays in the Glencairn series, he was able accurately to depict his ethnic gallery of characters with compassion and understanding.

In the two decades that followed, the 1920s and 1930s, in the plays he actually wrote and in the ideas he conceived for others, O'Neill sought intently to improve the lot of suffering humanity as he explored numerous social issues: discrimination against nonwhites by whites as in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, the dehumanization and exploitation of the working class by indifferent capitalists as in *The Hairy Ape*, the Faust-like nature of the American character, as O'Neill perceived it, as having sold its life and soul for material objects as the eleven-play projected Cycle was to illustrate. The apotheosis of O'Neill's crusade for universal brotherhood is found in *The Iceman Cometh*, which depicts a wide social spectrum: people from many walks of life and of different nationalities. Harry Hope's saloon symbolizes a universal melting pot where all men are equal and the word "brother" is used frequently. O'Neill sought in the play to capture, as he said, "the humor and friendship and human warmth and deep inner contentment of the characters." The greatest harm, as Hickey was to discover, is to break the link that binds. When all the diverse characters gather for Harry Hope's birthday party in a banquetlike setting, as we have here, Harry assures them: "Bejees, you know you're all as welcome here as the flowers in May."

O'Neill has identified this group of pitiful misfits in *The Iceman Cometh* as his "blood brothers," friends he had known during the period when he was a homeless misfit plunged in a personal shipwreck of alcoholic dissolution. Yet it was precisely through his association with these outcasts that O'Neill discovered truths about human nature and the human condition. Other world dramatists may excel O'Neill in lofty lyric power or philosophical discourse. None, however, surpasses him in the sheer magnitude of the men and women who people his plays. O'Neill understood the human psyche, its baseness and its greatness, as few other writers have.

One other tale, besides the friendship saga, obsessed O'Neill: his own tortured, convoluted life story. His relationship to his mother, father, brother, wives, and children is dramatized in endless variations in the canon. Because all human lives pivot around the same types of familial ties, O'Neill's work assumes universal dimensions. He speaks the common language of the heart, expressing the longings of all mankind to love and be loved, to belong, to determine the why of

existence. Because this language is readily understood by people of all classes and races, O'Neill has become an international playwright, respected and produced in countries throughout the world.

O'Neill seems destined to continue to be honored for the legacy he has left us. As Pirandello states in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*: "He who was fortunate enough to be born a character" is immortal; "he cannot die." O'Neill has bequeathed us a vast gallery of immortal, unforgettable mythic figures: the bewildered Yank, crushed by an indifferent society, mourned only by whimpering monkeys; the pathetic Dion Anthony, forced to wear the mask of diabolic cynicism to protect his sensitive, ascetic, vulnerable face; the craggy-faced Ephraim Cabot, condemned at play's end to his life of loneliness, caught in the palm of the hand of his harsh Puritan God, made to his image; the iron-willed maiden Lavinia, turning her back on the world to immure herself in the Mannon home in self-afflicted punishment for her sin; O'Neill's prototype for all mother-as-betrayer figures, Mary Tyrone, in the play's final scene, perhaps the most memorable moment in modern drama, aimlessly adrift, forever lost to husband and sons in her selfish narcotic stupor; the vanishing figure of Jim Tyrone, leaving his safe refuge in the Hogan household, doomed to end his life in blindness and a straitjacket.

The Theatre for Today's World, as O'Neill has defined it, should be "a source of inspiration that lifts us to a plane beyond ourselves and drives us deep into the unknown within and behind ourselves. The theatre should reveal to us what we are." He adds: "Holding the mirror of a soul up to a nation; it is time we returned to this." The theatre, as O'Neill views it, has a twofold purpose: to act as a moral force, making us aware of our ignoble lives when they are lived on the lower plain of reality or revealing our true mystic natures in lives lived on a higher moral level, and to mirror the image of the state of its citizens, gauging the collective moral well-being of a nation. For example, the sickness of soul found in the four Tyrones in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is merely indicative of the sickness of the American character, the microcosm of the family reflecting the macrocosm of society.

As scholars or theatre practitioners, we must perpetuate for posterity the recorded history of twentieth-century man as portrayed in world drama and encourage our fellow citizens to read and see plays, like those of O'Neill, that depict the realities of life with all its complexities and tragedies and that reflect portraits of human beings, victims of a flawed inner self and fated by some behind-life force. There is no limit to what we can do here to keep the spirit of dedication to O'Neill alive.

While I was transcribing the restricted O'Neill material at Yale for publication, I found a short passage in O'Neill's handwriting from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, dated "November 15, 1927 Shanghai." It starts with the familiar lines of the poet saying to his heart that he is a wanderer and mountain-climber and concludes with the self-realization that the poet long has been abroad, scattered among things and accidents. The intriguing question is what experience during his visit to Shanghai inspired these thoughts. He had, as he said, come "to China seeking peace and quiet." The concept of the self long abroad and scattered could, on the creative level, refer to the profusion of his plays; on the personal level, it could mean the outpouring of his being, his thoughts and spirit. In another sense, O'Neill cannot be said to belong mentally solely to any one country but to the world. He had scattered his inquiring spirit afar, that part of him that ever sought truth and wisdom--turning for religious and philosophical inspiration to China and the East, to Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Buddha, as well as Vishnu and Mohammed; and to Europe, to Nietzsche, Freud, Schopenhauer, and Marx, and for theatrical inspiration to Strindberg, Chekhov, Ibsen, Kaiser, and Toller. We, too, during this Theatre Festival should scatter the self abroad, giving to each other in O'Neill's spirit of brotherhood the best that is in us and taking away from this conference the inspiration and determination to sow the germinal seeds of this centennial celebration, each in his own country, to reap renewed interest in O'Neill in the Theatre for Today's World.

Virginia Floyd

Introduction From the People's Republic of China

Haiping Liu

"It was fortunate that Eugene O'Neill was born in 1888."

Many of my friends, both at home and abroad, have made the same remark to me recently. It is true that, were the American dramatist born a year later, there could have been no such enthusiastic celebration of his centenary in China as was launched in Nanjing and Shanghai successively from June 6 to 14, 1988. The social and political upheaval in China in the spring of 1989 and the subsequent return to strained diplomatic and cultural ties between China and the West would have rendered the international conference *Eugene O'Neill: World Playwright*, jointly sponsored by Nanjing University and the Eugene O'Neill Society, and the accompanying Nanjing/Shanghai *O'Neill Theatre Festival* practically impossible. A number of Sino-West academic and art projects scheduled for the summer or fall of 1989 had to be canceled almost at the last moment. While deploring most sincerely the waste of time, energy, and resources on the part of those project organizers and other people involved, I could not help congratulating Eugene O'Neill, all the scholars and theatre practitioners who came from afar to participate in his centennial in China, my colleagues here in the English Department and myself, who together had spent nearly two years in the preparations, on our common better luck.

The statement, however, could also be interpreted from a different direction in time. That is, if O'Neill had been born, let us say, one or two decades earlier, could his centenary in any way have been celebrated in China? The answer would be, emphatically, "No!"

For some thirty years after 1949 when the People's Republic was