Shortly after the film Version of *Strange Interlude* was released, O'Neill had written in a letter to Robert Sisk that he

really didn't give a damn what they've done to it... outside the money the films simply don't exist for me, and nothing they do or don't do seems of the slightest importance to my work as a playwright! (Sheaffer 1973:407)

Since O'Neill here, as elsewhere, was being perfectly honest in calling his relationship to Hollywood a purely financial one, questions may be raised as to the necessity of discussing O'Neill's relationship to the film world or in presenting a paper entitled "O'Neill and Film." This idea is also supported by the fact that unlike Bernard Shaw or Tennessee Williams, O'Neill was not intimately connected with the film versions of his works, which he sold outright, retaining no control over the final product.

This paper will attempt to establish Eugene O'Neill in relation to the cinema, not because he was the leader of the revolution in American drama from 1916 to 1924, but because he was writing in a period when the new art form of filmmaking, in all its gloss, especially in America, was rapidly expanding its horizons, reaching out towards new techniques and innovations. The writers of the period in general were naturally excited by the heady discoveries of the cinema, and attempted to borrow from and rival these in their own literary medium. Without getting into any controversy of whether O'Neill consciously used literary transpositions of cinematic techniques in his drama or not, I shall try to show how, throughout the zigzag or spiral development of his dramatic career, the numerous experiments in both form and ideas that he brought forth in his plays destroyed the stereotypes and were quite close to what the movies were also doing.

O'Neill's association with the revolutionary "little theater" movement helped the Theatre Guild to specialize in the production of plays of a sort, which had previously been impossible in commercial theatres. Starting with short "slice of life" dramas dealing with the miseries, the delusions, and the obsessions of men adrift in the world, O'Neill ceaselessly experimented. In trying to incorporate modern ideas and notions about life and dramatic art, these experiments involved use of symbolic figures, masks, interior monologues, split personalities, choruses, scenic effects, rhythms and schematizations. These techniques were very closely related to the celluloid medium. The film has the ability to disorient, create illusion and fantasy; it has fluidity of movement, it uses montage and spatializes time, and it can synchronize sounds and rhythms. Such cinematic features and ample expression in O'Neill's drama.

In evaluating the movie world and the dramatic framework of Eugene O'Neill, the art of handling plots merits our primary attention. A history survey of the Hollywood plots of the time show that despite the presence of so much individual talent in the twenties, most American films were produced according to formula. Many of them were overcrowded with implausible incidents, artificial implantation of emotion, triteness of material, melodrama and sentimentality. The golden popular-romance formula was used again and again. "Formula," of course, indicated that the cultural values of most of these firms were the typically middle class ones of optimism, and materialism, and romantic escapism. Most of the early plays of O'Neill follow this sort of Hollywood pattern in presenting a strange blend of crassness, materialism and vitality. As a first play, *The Web* is remarkable in that it
includes many of O'Neill's characteristic elements: Violent death, cruelty, tragedy, and a good deal of theatrical action. Another incredibly melodramatic play, Thirst, is quite akin to a movie plot, showing how a West Indian mulatto sailor, a dancer and a gentle man die of thirst after fighting among themselves on a raft. A contemporary play entitled The Straw was described by the elder O'Neill as a Romeo-and-Juliet type of play with a lot of "coughing and spitting" in it. Even the play Ah! Wilderness, written as late as 1932, remains a classic example of the boy-meets-girl-boy-loses-girl-boy-gets-girl formula. The love theme of the play is no other than the pure Hollywood romance of the time. In the Zone was theatrically effective and its sharpest impact came not from the spoken lines but from the physical action when the accuser opens the sinister-looking box and a dried rose petal flutters on the deck. It would therefore be no exaggeration to say that this kind of slapstick brings O'Neill closer to the movies of the time. Even a more established play such as Anna Christie exposes a typical Hollywood ending when Anna and Matt Burke are betrothed at the end and will seem to be living "happily ever after."

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the movies too were in their age of innocence. There was a heavy reliance on screen adaptations of stage successes as well as popular magazine fiction, and stock stories that heightened the sense of unreality were in vogue. Quite well aware of the situation, O'Neill attempted to make fun of Hollywood in an early poor play entitled The Movie Man (1914). The play posits that two representatives of "The Earth Motion Picture Co." go to Mexico and suborn a comic Mexican general to stage real battles for the camera in return for ammunition and liquor.

The later plays of O'Neill became more intensely subjective, experimenting with contemporary psychological theories, and though they proved challenging to his theatre audiences, they were more easily accepted in the celluloid medium. By then, the movies had also grown out of its teens. In Strange Interlude, the device of the characters speaking their thoughts aloud was as much a development of the old-fashioned "asides" used earlier in the Elizabethan stage as it was an outgrowth of the stream-of-consciousness technique of writing that James Joyce and others had begun to employ so effectively. Thinking aloud, or the novelistic technique of "interior dialogue," was prevalent form in the movies by then, and it is not unlikely that O'Neill might have borrowed the technique from the liveliest art of the time.

Both the theatre and the screen have in common the visual, aural, kinesthetic, spatial and temporal experience. Among them, the visual element is the most powerful. Being essentially a theatre-man like Shakespeare, O'Neill's visual sensibility was very strong. As early as 1897, Joseph Conrad (1966) had become a great exponent of visual immediacy by declaring that the task he was trying to achieve was to make us "see." O'Neill's declaration that in college, "Joseph Conrad [was] much nearer to me that Shakespeare" (Bowen 1959:125) establishes the face that he laid great emphasis on the visual perspective of his works. In the realm of the motion pictures, pioneer D.W. Griffith repeats almost verbatim the same idea: "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see" (Jacobs 1939:119). O'Neill's emphasis on the visual perspective might also have been enhanced by his use of expressionistic techniques. Early in the 1920s, his interest in film had been revived by Weine's The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1991), which represents artistic radicalism in its most rabid form and with intense satisfaction. The film, he said, made him "aware of wonderful possibilities ... never dreamed of before" (Sheaffer 1973:351). Like the camera, which can be used to project a relatively passive, unselected kind of vision as well as the highly selective "edited" vision, O'Neill kept on shifting his focus and point of view as and when he pleased. His technique of writing plays from the viewpoint of one central intelligence and of showing the action as it appears through his eyes was nothing but the "camera-eye" technique of fixing focus. In the stokehole scene of The Hairy Ape, the ape-like traits of the workers are seen through Mildred's distorted and neurotic vision; in the Fifth Avenue scene, the robot-like characteristics of the leisure class are seen through Yank's equally distorted vision. On the other hand, O'Neill also makes effective use of the film technique of shifting of focus of the camera and presenting a situation from various viewpoints. In Strange Interlude, in portraying Nina Leeds as a modern woman in
the role of daughter, wife, lover and mother, O'Neill sees that all the incidents are discussed, viewed from various characters.

Closely connected with this visual technique is O'Neill's frequent use of fantasy, and the dream scenes. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, he fictionalized his mother's vision by visualizing the scene as taking place in the grotto of the Catholic boarding school that he himself attended as a young boy. That the entire jungle sequence in *The Emperor Jones* was actually happening within Jones' mind brings the drama quite close to the cinematic use of illusion and fantasy. Even the variety of scenes is once again bear close affinity to cinematic techniques.

A characteristic feature of the motion picture is that it can achieve an uninterrupted flow of action. In other words, it can transcend or modify arbitrary and conventional time-space barriers. O'Neill tried to achieve the same through his innovative use of an exterior-interior setting for *Desire Under the Elms*, a device now routinely called for by playwrights. That O'Neill was conscious of this kind of continuous handling of space is revealed as early as 1918 when he wrote about *Beyond the Horizon*:

I intended at first, in Beyond the Horizon, to portray, in a series of disconnected scenes, the life of a dreamer who pursues his vision over the world, apparently without success, or a completed deed in his life. At the same time, it was my intention to show at least a real accretion from his wandering and dreaming, a thing intangible but real and precious beyond compare, which he had successfully made his own. But the technical difficulty of the task proved enormous, and I was led to a grimmer thing: the tragedy of the man who looks over the horizon (Bowen 1959:124; italics mine).

A similar method of using disconnected scenes is once again very elaborately used by O'Neill in dramatizing Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. George Jean Nathan (1965:83) calls it a more moving picture than a drama:

Under the recent delusion that he made a dramatization of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, what Eugene O'Neill actually made was a moving picture. What drama lies in the poem, he extracted, and in its place put a series of cutbacks and fade-outs that needed only a few additional scenes showing the Bride running through a daisy field, the Third Wedding Guest standing in meditation beside a high waterfall and the Ancient Mariner silhouetted at the close against the evening sky to convert the whole thing into a film of the popular order.

Finally, O'Neill's pioneering use of light and sound, intensified by his acute aural sense, resembles the way sound is used in film. The sound track of a motion picture is used not only to match dialogue with the visual image but also to increase the realistic rendering of a scene. In addition, sound is often used metaphorically in a film. The function of sound in O'Neill corresponds to the way a soundtrack is used in film production. The pervasive sound effects—like the humming of the electrical plant in *Dynamo*, the foghorn in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and most notably the tom-tom in *The Emperor Jones*—could of course be effectively produced on stage, but certain techniques which failed on stage were successful in films. Mention can be made of the choral ensemble and the protracted laughter of *Lazarus Laughed*, the alter-ego of *Days Without End* (audible but invisible to the other characters), and once again the "voice-overs" in *Strange Interlude*.

Because the motion picture, as a time-bound art, is concerned with the problem of how to present real or actual time— with the events happening in the present, past or future, or simultaneously, or at different intervals—the element of time is of major importance in achieving clarity and effectiveness of expression on the screen. With the help of camera devices, the unchanging nature of physical time can be slowed down, speeded up, telescoped or stretched out to remarkable lengths, or even at moments be "freezed" to any stretch. Both the cinema and the theatre are temporal arts. When it comes to Eugene O'Neill's handling of time, chronology is of subsidiary interest. Instead, the makes frequent use of the film techniques of "flash-forward," "flash-back," "slow-motion," "stasis," and "montage."
It has to be mentioned, of course, that just as O'Neill's dramatic experiments throughout his entire literary career were not consistently on the same plane, the affinity with the motion picture technique is also not consistently found. Here we also have to repeat Susan Sontag's (1966:24) view that we should not regard moves as advancing from "theatrical stasis to cinematic fluidity, from theatrical artificiality to cinematic naturalness and immediacy." This kind of view would be too simple and would also underestimate the capabilities of a successful dramatic production. What we can say is that the affinity between O'Neill's drama and the cinema is there and that is what is important. Since O'Neill's style often obfuscates a clear understanding of his works, studying him "cinematically" would prove a new method for elucidating and appreciating his complex style.

In evaluating O'Neill's relationship with Hollywood, critics reiterate the fact that it was purely financial. Even after Strange Interlude was made into a "talkie," O'Neill's only hope was that if it was successful, it might encourage the film people to buy some more of his plays. In spite of the changed relationship throughout his life, directly or indirectly, encounters with Hollywood remained. As a young man, he tried to earn money by writing film scripts which were apparently comedies and romances, but nothing much came of these youthful ventures. Later, in the mid 1920s, encouraged by the silent film version of Anna Christie, he was once again interested in and intrigued by Hollywood. The advent of "talking pictures" made the cinema even more appealing to him, and though the two scenarios that he wrote (The Hairy Ape and Desire Under the Elms) are now untraceable, if we are to believe Richard Watts (1927:15) to whom O'Neill gave them for appraisal, they were "the most important acquisition the motion pictures have made in recent ages."

Towards the latter part of his life, O'Neill's resentment towards the motion picture capital became even more pronounced, and he is said to have "disliked everything about Hollywood, in general" (Bowen 1959:289). Whether this arose from personal reasons we cannot definitely say (Carlotta had acted in several motion pictures and O'Neill did not approve of his daughter's marriage to Charles Chaplin). Talking to his friends, O'Neill liked to refer to Hollywood as "The City of Dreadful Nonsense." Everyone is familiar with the anecdote of how one producer had offered that O'Neill name his own price if he would write a scenario for Jean Harlow, and O'Neill replied with a telegram consisting of the word "no" repeated twenty times. Later, he gave a more reasoned view of his attitude:

I have never even been in Hollywood or Los Angeles .... This doesn't mean I have any prejudice against pictures. It merely means that the screen had never interested me as a medium. So why work at something which doesn't interest me when I have always had work on my hands which does interest me and has always paid me well? It is as simple as that — common sense — although some people seem to regard it as a mad — even inexcusable eccentricity (ibidem).

In spite of O'Neill's declaration that the film people were "scared to touch my stuff" (ibidem:235), it seems quite surprising that his plays have been a counting source for film adaptation, spanning fifty years of Hollywood history from the era of silent films with the 1923 adaptation of Anna Christie to the 1973 American Film Theater version of The Iceman Cometh. The film medium has distinct advantages in the creation of atmosphere and expressive settings, and the most effective of the O'Neill works of the screen recreate O'Neill's dramatic milieu in striking cinematic form. That the forceful themes of the plays attracted noted film directors and were transformed into equally powerful films proves at least one point—the effectiveness of adapted works certainly does not lie in the mere fidelity to the original in either outline or in essence. Besides the nine films made directly from original plays, the two remakes of Ah! Wilderness and Anna Christie emphasize the fact that the directors definitely found in O'Neill's work material which moved away from well-established conventions and were able to destroy the stereotypes. Well known stars have given brilliant performances in these films, including Clark Gable and Norma Shearer in Strange Interlude, Sophia Loren in Desire Under the Elms, and Paul Robeson in the title role of The Emperor Jones. Katherine Hepburn is considered to have given "one of the most devastating performances ever offered by an American actress" in Long Day's Journey Into Night.
Some of the film adaptations are landmarks now for more interesting reasons. The later 1930 version of Anna Christie, for example, is remembered not more as a Greta Garbo vehicle. Watts (1972:232) reviews the film in The New York Herald Tribune of 15 March 1930 thus:

The most eagerly and fearfully awaited cinema ever since the talking pictures got into stride took place yesterday, when the voice of that fascinating, inscrutable, almost legendary personage, Miss Greta Garbo, was heard upon the screen for the first time . . . [she] proves entirely triumphant in her defiance of the microphone.

Watts (ibidem:232) only later acknowledges the fact that the "film version is accurate, handsomely produced, well acted and faithfully managed."

The 1933 version of The Emperor Jones is now remembered primarily as the first major film to star a black man in the role of the protagonist. But this expressionistic film about a black man's disintegration carries the essential flavor of the original drama to such an extent that critics like Harry Alan Potamkin (1972:226) not only call it "excellent theater, a theater of concurrent and joining devices," but also admits the fact that

It is . . . better cinema that theater, for its movement is uninterrupted. The uninterrupted movement can be borne only the film and screen, for the necessity of changing sets obliges an interruption in the theater. There is a central motive of the escaping Jones. The theater has not the capabilities to reveal the textural effects necessary to the drama, such as the increasing sheen of sweat on the bare body. Here is your "photogenic" opportunity! The theater can never equal the cinema in the effect of the gradual oncoming dark, also a dramatic progression in the play. The ominous and frightful shadows, the specters of the boy shot at craps, the phantom gallery — the cinema has long been well-prepared for these. And now the sound . . . . The sounds are part of the drama. The drumbeats, the bullet-shots, the clatter of the dice, the moan of the slaves, and the recurring voice of Jones, his prayer — what a composition these offer for a sound-sight-speech film! This is the ideal scenario for the film of sound and speech.

When we come to the film Long Day's Journey Into Night (1962), the definite advantages of a filmic presentation are clearly revealed. Though critics like Stanley Kauffmann called the play "unadaptable to film," and criticized the changes that director Sidney Lumet brought about, they may be dismissed as following a too literal-minded approach. It is only through the celluloid medium that the director could aptly focus and intensify the battles, internal struggles, as well as the poignant appeals for sympathy and understanding of the characters that O'Neill called the "four haunted Tyrones." Since the play has no well made plot intrigues but only uncommonly moving revelations of characters and human relations, the less perceptive reader/spectator of the play is definitely helped in grasping O'Neill better through this richer visual medium of presentation, without suffering from it. For instance, the way in which the director films Mary's emotional crisis by accentuating the theme of imprisonment in several ways, and especially by the dramatic use of space, would be something difficult to achieve on the stage. Lumet used increasingly longer and longer lenses (i.e., telephoto), and the corresponding loss of depth of field (or clear focus of objects in the background) to further isolate Mary in her own world. During the filming of Mary's long speeches, when the camera zooms in to a close-up of her, thereby removing the listening characters from our vision, an extraordinary filmic effect is achieved. It seems as if we are drawn deeper and deeper into her mind, her feelings, her lost world. When Mary reminiscences about that Spring when she fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time," a small detail is prominent in the film that would be lost on the stage — we see clearly her wedding ring on her left hand, and the irony of the final lines becomes clearer.

O'Neill stressed atmosphere and exact subjective evocation of mood as the criteria by which the success or failure of the work must be judged. This is the realm in which the screen has decided advantages over the stage. Both the versions of Ah! Wilderness, which O'Neill called a "comedy of recollection," are "family-fun films" filled with the spirit of nostalgia and Americana. The earlier version directed by Clarence Brown in 1935 and the later one entitled Summer Holiday (1948) bring into focus the real clues to the temperament of the 1920s and upper class society in just the peculiarly memorable way
Scott audience is definitely given something that most of them are fond of or have heard about from elders — a tender sentimentalized backward glance at a little golden age of American life. The outdoor sequences, especially the Fourth of July celebrations, seem very spectacular.

The filmic versions of Mourning Becomes Electra interests us because the five hours of actual production time were thematically compressed but remained essentially unaltered. It is said that O'Neill agreed to sell the rights of Electra for screen treatment only if Dudley Nichols wrote the screenplay, produced and directed it as well. This was probably because Nichols had earlier established himself as the screenwriter for The Long Voyage Home, which made O'Neill himself call the film "the best picture made from my stuff" (Sheaffer 1973:546). In the description of the setting at the beginning of The Moon of the Caribees, O'Neill mentions that the S.S. Glencairn is "at anchor off an island in the West Indies." Advantageously employing the cinematic potential of fluid treatment of space, the film begins on land rather than on the boat as O'Neill began the play. The long, continuous planning shot of languorous women sitting and standing by trees in the moonlight enhances the visual imagination of the spectator, as does the scene when the ship is searched by flashlight. O'Neill himself was impressed by the film version, especially liking as he said "the talkless parts of the picture" (ibidem).

Leaving aside the critical controversies over the nature of stage to screen adaptations, we can therefore summarize by saying that even an intensely verbal play like The Iceman Cometh was successful as a film. Thus, in spite of the essential differences between the two mediums of film and drama, ideally at least, the process of stage to screen adaptation should be reciprocal. As critic, John Orlandello (1982:166) very aptly puts it: "The film translation should not only shine with a light of its own, but should also help to illuminate the original work."

And that is exactly what these film adaptations were doing. Some critics are of the opinion that the translation of O'Neill from one medium into another was also benefited by the fact that though the tragic strain in O'Neill was not ideally suited to the cinema, it was definitely, attenuated by an underpinning of melodramatic flair quite suitable to the medium. Hence, the film medium does, in many ways, serve as an avenue for a better understanding of the O'Neill oeuvre.

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