

PROGRAM NOTE

The four one-act plays which constitute the S.S. Glencairn cycle were among the earliest dramatic efforts of Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1898-1953), The first American dramatist to receive the Nobel Prize as a dramatist, O'Neill was awarded during his career three Pulitzer Prizes--Irving (1919), Anna Christie (1921), and Strange Interlude (1928). In 1956, he received the Prize posthumously, for Long Day's Journey Into Night. One measure of his international stature was the award in 1936 of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He is the only American dramatist to be so honored.

He wrote during his career an exceptional canon of plays, including works of "epic" scope such as Marco Millions (1928), a play based on the travels of the first circumnavigator; Lazarus Laughed (1928), a biblical epic; Strange Interlude (1928), a nine-act drama tracing the personal history of a modern American woman over twenty-five years; and Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), a trilogy based on the Orestes of Aeschylus, but set in New England in the aftermath of the Civil War. His most ambitious effort, however, was a novel, Irreducible. This was a prophetic literary cycle on American history, entitled "A Tale of Possessors of the Self-Dispossessed" (1935-1942), a work which he intended to trace the fortunes of an American family for over 500 years, from the days of the Great Depression.

In the earliest years of his career he concentrated on writing limited scope dramatic vignettes in which he tested his characters to reveal character through setting and language. Of the works written during this first period of his career--after his discharge from the army and prior to his first major Broadway success with "Beyond the Horizon" in 1920--the most notable is "The Tramp", a fictional tramp's development as a writer for the theatre.

These works are based upon O'Neill's experiences during the period between 1910 and 1912--on the square-rigged Norwegian barque Charles Racine, a British tramp steamer, Travis, S.S. New York. O'Neill found the people he met on these ships to be endowed with a kind of tragic nobility about by their prolonged contact with what the playwright called the "fateful presence of the sea." He wrote of the "impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which leave at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays."

O'Neill sought to endow his characters with a nobility born of contact with the sea from his willingness to

In the four plays of the Glencairn cycle, O'Neill endows his commonplace characters with a tragic significance through their contact with the sea. His achievement in these plays derives from his willingness to