

# Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*



**A Tao House Film**

## Engagement Guide

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The 2021 Tao House Production of  
*Beyond the Horizon, the Film*  
Engagement Guide



With *Beyond the Horizon*, Eugene O'Neill led the charge in the quest to establish American tragedy as a genre. Though first produced over a 100 years ago, the play taps into themes that are with us today. The play is set on a small family farm, a place that still has a hold on the American imagination as a setting for hard work, unity and honest, plain-spoken folk. The farm represents for many a place of purity and simplicity. O'Neill's desire to authentically represent the complexities of human experience are brought to life in this truly American setting.

In this play, Eugene O'Neill successfully finds the intersection of the near sacred reverence for the American farm and the American belief in boundless individual opportunities and endless horizons. O'Neill found a uniquely American way to tell the story of the age-old struggle between the desires of the individual and the desires of the group. At this intersection, individual dreams clash with social expectations leading to impulsive decisions that set in-motion the tragic trajectory of the story. Good intentions lead to self-denial, lack of communication, a poor sense of self-knowledge and an over-reliance on assuming what is best for those around us and those we love. Themes that are as topical today as ever. *Beyond the Horizon* succeeds in illustrating that there are no bad guys and good guys, just bad decisions and good decisions. The importance of knowing yourself and effectively communicating with others is often the only difference.

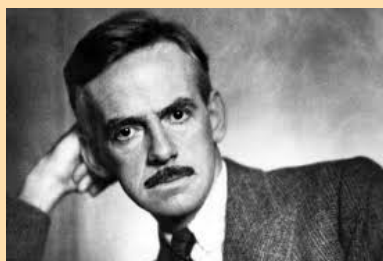
Over the course of the pandemic, the artistic programming for the Eugene O’Neill Foundation, Tao House has evolved from plays presented in the old barn at Tao House, the Eugene O’Neill National Historic site, to digital programming celebrating the work of Eugene O’Neill and the grounds at Tao House as well as the beauty of the surrounding Las Trampas Wilderness. This production of *Beyond the Horizon* falls into the category of a filmed stage play utilizing a stage set in the old barn as well as exterior scenery from the area surrounding Tao House. It is a play. It is film. Most importantly, it is part of the American story.

*Eric Fraisher Hayes*  
Director, *Beyond the Horizon*  
Artistic Director, EONF

## Welcome to the Eugene O’Neill Foundation’s production of *Beyond the Horizon*!

It has been an honor and delight to serve as this production’s dramaturg and work with Eric Fraisher Hayes. The play celebrated its 100th birthday in 2020, and we believe it continues to hold significance and resonance for our current age. It is our hope that this Engagement Guide not only highlights compelling elements in the EONF production of *Beyond the Horizon* but also offers a place of inspiration, provocation, and stimulation as you contemplate the action on stage and the lasting power of O’Neill’s work.

*Beth Wynstra*  
Dramaturg



“Suppose I was to tell you that it’s just beauty that’s calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell which lures me, the need of freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the secret which is hidden over there—beyond the horizon?”

– Eugene O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*

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# The Tao House Film Production of *Beyond the Horizon*, 2021

Robert Mayo----- Willem Long  
Ruth Atkins----- Adrian Deane  
Andrew Mayo----- Kyle Goldman  
James Mayo----- Tim Holt Jones  
Kate Mayo----- Cynthia Lagodzinski  
Captain Dick Scott----- Craig Eychner  
Sarah Atkins----- Bonnie Dechant  
Ben----- Edwin Peabody  
Dr. Fawcett----- John Tessmer



## Character Descriptions

**Mrs. Atkins** - Ruth's widowed mother. Mrs. Atkins vehemently disagrees with the marriage between her daughter and Robert. Although she claims to be near death, Mrs. Atkins is middle-aged and survives until the end of the play. Mrs. Atkins is extremely religious, or else pretends to be, and secretly gives money to Ruth to help keep the farm financially afloat.

**Ruth Atkins** - Daughter to Mrs. Atkins, wife to Robert Mayo, and mother to Mary Mayo. At the start of the play, Ruth is one whose path is seemingly set: she will care for her mother and eventually marry Andrew. When Robert tells Ruth he loves her, the trajectories of all the major characters shift considerably. Ruth's assigned role in the domestic sphere as well as her difficult marriage with Robert will have a profound impact on her.

**Ben** - Farmhand on the Mayo farm. Ben will quit his job because he is so ashamed of how the farm has deteriorated under Robert's management.

**Doctor Fawcett** - Specialist who Andrew brings to care for Robert. Doctor Fawcett will give Andrew the ironic news that had Robert been in a warmer climate just six months prior, Robert would have fared much better from a health standpoint.

**Andrew Mayo** - Son of Kate and James Mayo, brother to Robert. Andrew is described as *"husky, sun-bronzed, handsome in a large-featured, manly fashion—a son of the soil."* He is in love with Ruth Atkins at the start of the play and he happily envisions a life on the family farm. When Ruth and Robert decide to marry, Andrew embarks on the sea voyage Robert was supposed to take. This decision causes a permanent rift between Andrew and his father, one that is never repaired in the play. There is a strong bond of brotherly love between Andrew and Robert.



**Mr. James Mayo** - Husband to Kate Mayo and father to Andrew and Robert. James intends for his son Andrew to take over the family farm, so when Andrew departs on his sea voyage, James is so angry he disowns his son. Their relationship is never repaired.

**Mrs. Kate Mayo** - Wife to James Mayo and mother to Andrew and Robert Mayo. Kate is the only character who sees that Ruth does not really love Andrew and thus Kate

is very happy that Robert decides to stay home from his planned sea voyage. As Robert and Ruth's marriage deteriorates Kate muses that Ruth and Andrew may have been better suited for each other.

**Mary Mayo** - Child of Robert and Ruth Mayo. Mary is afflicted with health problems.

**Robert Mayo** - Son of Kate and James Mayo, Brother to Andrew, husband to Ruth, Father to Mary. Robert is described as a "slender young man of twenty-three" with "a touch of the poet about him." At the start of the play, Robert is looking forward to taking a sea voyage with his Uncle Dick. He decides to forgo the trip and stay home when Ruth, the girl next door, tells him she loves him. Robert's handling of the family farm is disastrous, and both the farm and his marriage to Ruth deteriorate over time. There is a strong bond of brotherly love between Robert and Andrew.

**Captain Dick Scott** - Uncle to Robert and Andrew. At the start of the play Captain Scott is looking forward to having his nephew Robert join him on his next sea voyage. Therefore, he is distraught when Robert decides to stay home and marry Ruth. Scott's temperament will change yet again with the news that Andrew will take Robert's place; Scott is overjoyed at this news and thinks Andrew is more fit for a life on sea than his brother.



Original 1920 production of *Beyond the Horizon*

## Key Themes of Beyond the Horizon

**Romance Over Practicality:** Observe how characters in this play follow dreams, illusions, and fantasies as a way to avoid hard truths or difficult conversations.

**Knowing Oneself:** In this play, characters come to realize truths about themselves and others, but often too late or at an inopportune time. Notice how and when characters come to these recognitions.

**Importance of Role Models:** The older generation in this play have set and certain ideas about how marriages and families should operate. Consider if this older generation is modeling ideal or healthy relationships and interactions with each other.

**Expectations:** This is a play that examines and interrogates expectations around love, romance, careers, marriage, and spousal realms and roles. Think about what O'Neill is trying to convey about expectations and their implications.

**Stubbornness:** The trajectories of certain characters in this work would be significantly different if they would have put pride aside. Observe how one's pride or stubbornness impacts one's health, marital dynamics, financial standing, and/or romantic relationships.

**Communication:** Characters in this play often choose to avoid conversations or authentic interactions with each other in favor of avoiding problems or conflict. Trace how communication, or the lack thereof, functions in this play.





# American Tragedy

At its premiere, *Beyond the Horizon* was heralded as a truly American tragedy. While there are some good, old fashioned tragic elements in the play (characters making one decision that completely determines the rest of their lives, notions of predestined paths, the evoking of God during times of suffering), there are facets that feel distinctly American and speak to the culture and zeitgeist of the 1920's and perhaps our own time.

- **The reverence of the family farm or farmland.** The premier of *Beyond* on Broadway coincided with the recording of a population shift in the U.S. as reported by the 1920 census. For the first time since the census began in 1790, there were more persons living in urban than rural areas. Between 1910-1920 the number of workers on farms declined by nearly 150,000, pushing the increase among non-farm workers to more than 5.2 million. A review for the play in *Life* magazine cheekily said that O'Neill's work "is not calculated to encourage the back to the farm movement." There is a focus in this play of how the farm figures in the characters' imaginations and how ideas about the farm shift when one is away from it or is suffering in it.

- **The struggle between old traditions and new opportunities.** The title of the play is often seen as characterizing Robert and his desires to travel and see a world outside the family farm he has known his whole life. However, Andrew, the brother that leaves and travels, finds that there is pull back to home and to the family farm. Scholar Jeffrey Eric Jenkins makes the point that the "New World longing in the play is always countered by an equally powerful Old World longing." Such a struggle was one felt by the thousands of immigrants arriving on American shores in the early 20th century.

- **America as a place of limitless opportunity.** Travis Bogard, a renowned O'Neill scholar, uses the term "Horizon Syndrome" to argue that *Beyond the Horizon* joined many other early 20th literary works where characters seek prospects, freedom, excitement in new places. Works like Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* or Nella Larsen's *Passing* and any number of modernist poems explore this notion of opportunities for freedom and limitless possibilities America promised to offer. *Beyond the Horizon* challenges such a notion and exposes the fallacies of the American Dream.

## Actors on COVID Pandemic

**Adrian Deane** (Ruth Mayo): “The pandemic slowed down my Actor, the part of me that knows how to perform as someone else and also how to enjoy it. It slowed down everything really, forcing me to reconsider my pace with things I cared about, reconsider things I didn’t care about, and my Actor is ultimately the better for it. I am grateful to our director, Eric, for being my initial introduction back into theatre after over a year’s build-up of rust and change, inviting me to collaborate on a monologue from “*Anna Christie*,” and then on this *Beyond the Horizon*. This actor’s best aspiration is to continue to find souls, like Eric and this team of actors, who value slightly messy co-creation and building sky castles out of hearts, dreams, and whatever we find in the forgotten corners of our houses.”

**Bonnie DeChant** (Sarah Atkins): “Some days it doesn’t really feel as though we are emerging from the pandemic at all. Of course there are online productions everywhere. But as for live theatre, I know companies are going ahead with auditions, but some have pushed back dates, cancelled productions altogether, or masked all performers and audiences, as well as checked vaccine status before entry, etc. It seems difficult to determine when everyone will feel safe again, and back to ‘normal.’ I’m hoping for opportunities, but safety is a priority for me right now.”



**Craig Eychner** (Captain Dick Scott): “With theatre essentially shut down during the last year, we have been pushed to explore other avenues of creativity and expression. This production of *Beyond The Horizon* is an example of how theatre has evolved. As the pandemic continues, the new ‘normal’ might be very different. The best we can do is make the most of every opportunity. That is not just as an actor, but as a person as well.”

**Kyle Goodman** (Andrew Mayo): “Being an actor during this pandemic is definitely not easy, but what’s truly tough for me is seeing so many of my colleagues in the Bay Area theatre scene struggle through it all, as well as the theatres and theatre companies who have struggled to open back up and get back to the business of it all. My number goal during this pandemic is simple: survive. I will not allow myself to let my guard down in any way, knowing what this virus has done to this planet. So though I do wish that I could have more opportunities in acting at this time, the fact that I’m still alive up to this point is what keeps me going. And it helps that I have my current acting gig of *Beyond the Horizon* to fill my acting void. It’s also a great opportunity to dive deep into a character I love and appreciate, and I do believe Andrew can make me into a stronger actor. I’m going to do my part to make it through this pandemic because I do believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I know many feel differently and are tired and depressed about how



the pandemic has greatly affected the theatre world, and I don't blame them. My aspirations are to continue my acting career as much as I possibly can. I was cast with Marin Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* before the pandemic started, and it was postponed to the summer of 2021, then postponed indefinitely after that. I hope that I get that opportunity with that company in the future. And next year, I will start contemplating the decision of becoming an Equity actor."

**Tim Holt Jones** (James Mayo): "I'm trying to stay present and not get tripped up by what may or may not happen beyond the horizon. The uncertainty of these times is unprecedented in my lifetime. I'm glad I have Eugene O'Neill to get me through."

**Cynthia Lagodzinski** (Kate Mayo): "Being an actor during and after a pandemic is nerve wracking and scary. On one hand, it's exciting to be able to gather together again and bring art to life, while at the same time it's scary to be around people, even when they're vaccinated. My day job as a stylist was severely impacted by Covid, and rather than rebuild my client base, I am on a 2 year scholastic quest to add new skills in business via Las Positas College and to return to my alma mater to get my Master's Degree. Ideally, my new horizon would involve either opening a new business or hiring into a theatre company's production or management office."

**Willem Long** (Robert Mayo): "It's very unnerving being an actor at any stage of the pandemic. Even as a vaccinated person the risks to myself and others are clear and ever present. The horizon is as far off and as luring as ever."

**Edwin Peabody** (Ben): "I have to say that being a theatrical practitioner (actor, writer, director, crew, etc.) at this very moment is fraught with danger, due to Covid-19. I see a lot of actors and companies moving toward the live streaming, or zooming, of shows, which is both hopeful and disheartening to me. I am Associate Artistic Director of Onstage Theatre, and a company member of B8 Theatre Company and Orinda Starlight Village Players. My aspirations are localized to the SF Bay Area community theatre scene, but what a rich and supportive community! Personally, the heartbreak of the pandemic, theatrically speaking, has hit twice. In February 2020, I was directing *Same Time, Next Year* and when we were a week out of tech week, it was postponed. Then, just last week, we had to postpone until 2022 a production of *Veronica's Room* that I was about to direct, due to Covid-19 concerns. On the horizon, I see this community battling through this, and hopefully we do it together, because we are not getting through this alone, that's for sure."

**John Tessmer** (Dr. Fawcett): “Being an actor is naturally quite challenging right now... I am, in fact, finding this the most difficult time of the pandemic so far -- because we are in a gray area: we are looking towards opening up, and yet with the variants on the rise against the backdrop of vaccinations being available yet vaccination rates not being what they need to be it is extremely frustrating and difficult to know how to proceed. When we were shut down, it was clear that we had to pivot and adapt and present work online, for example; now it is less clear: how much do we continue to do that versus asking our audience to return to live viewing? I will be looking to continue to produce events outside; so far that has consisted of performances coupling music with spoken word, but I will undoubtedly find plays appropriate for staged reading presentations (what my La Jolla Theatre Ensemble company specializes in) in larger outdoor spaces, especially if the period we now find ourselves in persists through 2021 and beyond.”



## Discussion Questions

1. Do the characters in this play have autonomy or are their futures pre-destined in some way? What do you believe O'Neill is trying to argue or highlight about life choices?
2. How would you characterize the problems Ruth and Robert experience in their relationship? Could these problems have been avoided? How?
3. Why do you believe Andrew decided to leave the farm? Do you agree with his reasoning?
4. What is admirable in the relationship the brothers share? What is problematic?
5. How would you describe how the older generation interacts with the younger generation? What impacts or ramifications do such interactions have?
6. Is there symbolic value to how the characters change over the course of the play? How do you understand the physical, mental, moral development or transformations seen in Robert, Ruth, and Andrew?
7. The ending of the play is somewhat ambiguous. What do you imagine the future is for the characters?
8. How do you see the play as still resonant or significant in the 21st century? What elements speak to your experiences or understandings?



The Texts of O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*: Ruth Mayo, Agnes Boulton, and the Women of Provincetown

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## THE TEXTS OF *BEYOND THE HORIZON*

O'Neill began writing *Beyond the Horizon* in Winter 1918, during the early days of his cohabitation with Boulton in Provincetown.<sup>4</sup> On April 14, two days after he and Boulton had married, O'Neill declared himself "up to the ears" in preparing the script for the producer John D. Williams, to whom George Jean Nathan had been singing his praises.<sup>5</sup> O'Neill soon posted copies of his script to Nathan and to Williams, who, as Stephen Black notes, optioned the play "almost immediately."<sup>6</sup> By April 26, the happily capital-ized newlyweds were headed to New York to see the Provincetown Players' production of O'Neill's *The Rope*.<sup>7</sup>

Black reports that O'Neill "began cutting and revising" the play after he and Boulton returned to Provincetown and that O'Neill "obtained a second copyright in early August for the revised version."<sup>8</sup> Evidently satisfied with his work, O'Neill set about soliciting comments from his former professor George Pierce Baker and his future biographer Barrett Clark. The process advanced slowly. O'Neill was partly to blame: having sent a typescript or carbon to Nathan and one or two to Williams, he apparently left himself short on copies.<sup>9</sup> O'Neill's later reference to Nathan as the play's "godfather" notwithstanding, the critic seems not expeditiously to have returned O'Neill's copy.<sup>10</sup> Clark reports that O'Neill wrote him in 1919, asking if he would read *Beyond the Horizon* "when I retrieve a borrowed script."<sup>11</sup> Nathan is the like-liest delinquent, and the deference with which O'Neill regarded him at this stage of their friendship argues against the possibility that O'Neill would have badgered him about the script. By May 8, 1919, Clark had registered what O'Neill called his "favorable impression" of the play.<sup>12</sup> O'Neill wrote to Baker the next day requesting permission to send him scripts of *Beyond the Horizon* and two other plays. But Clark may have been no quicker to sur-render his copy than Nathan seems to have been. On June 8, O'Neill assured Baker that he had "tried hard to get a script of *Beyond the Horizon*" to him but added that "retrieving a borrowed script seems to be more difficult than selling the play."<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Williams dithered and O'Neill fumed.<sup>14</sup>

Although O'Neill was having trouble motivating his readers and his producer, he had plenty to keep him busy during the twenty months between

Williams's optioning of the play and his decision to stage it.<sup>15</sup> Presumably he would have made time to revise *Beyond the Horizon* in response to comments from his readers, but the printed record contains no mention of any such suggestions or any evidence that he revisited his script during this period. By early November 1919, Boni and Liveright had agreed to publish the play, the second copyrighted version, we may assume.<sup>16</sup> Again the published record does not mention revisions.

This account is long on speculation and not immune from error. At the least, however, it suggests that O'Neill, having had his script vetted by Nathan, Clark, maybe Baker, and either or both Albert Boni and Horace Liveright, had reason to consider his work complete, the more so given his unfamiliarity with the sort of last-minute revision common in commercial drama. This helps explain his peevishness upon finding out in January 1920 that Williams was insisting upon cuts to a script that, its daunting length aside, had passed muster with readers whom O'Neill respected.<sup>17</sup>

The pruning took place from January 13 to 16, 1920. O'Neill reviewed suggested cuts until 2:00 a.m. on January 14, trying to meet Williams's demand to return an approved script by noon that day. His inability to do so reflects his opinion that although "a great many" of Williams's suggestions were acceptable, "some are very silly and I will not stand for them."<sup>18</sup> A marathon follow-up that began on January 15 found him working first with Williams and leading man Richard Bennett and then, until 7:30 a.m. on January 16, with Bennett and a bottle of Pernod.<sup>19</sup> Bennett's suggestions were based on his blue-penciling of the script in November 1919, of which O'Neill had been ignorant. According to Bennett's daughter Joan Bennett, Williams too "had been making judicious cuts around this time."<sup>20</sup> O'Neill's resistance to their recommendations would be softened by the alcohol and, on January 17, a calmer O'Neill informed Boulton that "the *Beyond* script is now straightened out."<sup>21</sup> We do not know which cuts O'Neill welcomed and which he endured, but the play that emerged from these sessions was substantially different from the play that O'Neill had brought to them. O'Neill had become a commercial playwright, compliant in the sometimes vexing systems of collaboration that the designation implies.

The first edition appeared on March 10, 1920, later than Liveright wanted but in time to capitalize on the success of a play often unlike the one it presented.<sup>22</sup> Four reprints appeared before December 1922, suggesting adequate sales.<sup>23</sup> As noted above, the second (1924) edition would incorporate the January 1920 cuts. Contrary to a tenacious critical tradition, however, the 1924 text did not include ad hoc revisions for the *Complete Works*. In 1947 Clark asserted that "when O'Neill prepared it [i.e., *Beyond the Horizon*]



for republication some years after its first production, he reduced its bulk by at least-one fifth.”<sup>24</sup> Clark, who does not mention the January 1920 sessions, presumably reached this conclusion by comparing the first and second editions. In 1959, Croswell Bowen and Shane O’Neill made nonsense of Clark’s statement by claiming that “when [O’Neill] prepared it [i.e., *Beyond the Horizon*] for publication, he cut one fifth of it.”<sup>25</sup> But neither Bowen nor Shane would have had access to the manuscripts necessary to make such a calculation. Neither, sadly, is Shane’s memory to be trusted. Ronald Wainscott did not help when he acknowledged that O’Neill had cut the play in response to Bennett’s concerns but referenced Bowen and Shane in asserting that O’Neill had excised “another 20 percent for publication.”<sup>26</sup> Given that the first edition was in the press during the January sessions, Wainscott must mean that O’Neill undertook a massive revision around 1924, that is, for re-publication. This brings us back to Clark’s unsupported claim.

No evidence has been adduced in support of these interlocking assertions, nor I suspect is any forthcoming. O’Neill’s “work diary” for 1924 is quiet on the matter, except for an entry dated October 11, 1924: “[read] proofs [of] ‘Beyond the Horizon’ & ‘Diff’rent’ & cuts” (13).<sup>27</sup> O’Neill means that he had read proofs of the January 1920 text, not of a further revision. He implied as much in his October 12 remark that reading the set in proof is “a hell of a job but it does serve to acquaint me with stuff that is so forgotten, it’s new.”<sup>28</sup> Firmer evidence is at hand. The *Complete Works* record a 1920 copyright for *Beyond the Horizon*, held by Boni and Liveright. Acting editions published well after 1924 by Random House and Dramatists Play Service jointly, and by DPS alone, record a 1921 copyright in O’Neill’s name. Initial collation suggests that the second edition, the Random House-DPS edition, and the DPS edition are verbally identical.<sup>29</sup> The earlier copyright date indicates that O’Neill’s publisher, having copyrighted a different text for the first edition, subsequently copyrighted the revision. The later date in the DPS and Random House-DPS editions presumably indicates that O’Neill took out a new copyright of the revision in his own name, perhaps after entering minor changes that have escaped detection. Some uncertainty about the copyrights lingers, but the evidence nonetheless shows that O’Neill had completed his revision by 1921 at the latest. Probably he had done so earlier. No printed evidence suggests that O’Neill altered the script in 1921, and in any case he was pleased with the January 1920 cuts. Even before the play opened he took credit for “supervision of the cutting” and acknowledged that the script had benefited from the additional attention.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult to imagine what incentive he could have felt further to revise a successful play that he already completed—at least twice.

The assumptions underlying the canard of a circa 1924 revision situate *Beyond the Horizon* in the late twentieth-century debate about authorship and textual authority. Jerome McGann, the provocateur, criticized the unselfconscious habit among scholarly editors of “imagin[ing] writing and the production of texts as a solitary activity.” Rather, he argued, “[the] author’s intentions are always operating along with nonauthorial intentions, that each presupposes the other, and that no text ever came into being, or could come into being, without interactions between the two.”<sup>31</sup> McGann’s overarching “nonauthorial” category relates to the economically motivated production of print, a joint endeavor as any published author will appreciate. (“Nonauthorial” factors are uniquely abundant in commercial drama, though McGann has no cause to say so.) Their own intentions aside, Clark and his successors obscure the McGannian “social nexus” that produced the second edition of O’Neill’s play—its status as a text created collaboratively and with the unremarkable goal of attracting a paying public.<sup>32</sup> Although I would not want to overstate the point, we reinforce this bias every time we refer to the 1924 text as “O’Neill’s.” The words are his but their juxtapositioning is his, Williams’s, and Bennett’s. O’Neill—a prickly writer with pretensions as a poet—could not have considered the distinction trivial.

The second edition of *Beyond the Horizon* thus prints a text produced in conformity with the tenets of what has become the McGannian orthodoxy. The editorial preference for the second edition accords with an earlier orthodoxy, too, as representing the author’s final intention for his work. Not only did O’Neill decline further to revise his text for the *Complete Works*, but he also decided against reprinting the first edition in that set. Had O’Neill come to regret the revisions, he could have selected the earlier (previously typeset) text for the *Complete Works*, published like the first edition by Boni and Liveright. He did not. The editorial preference for the second-edition text has ample validity in theory.

This is not to say that the debate has been properly theorized. Indeed, because the publication history of *Beyond the Horizon* has developed without reference to theories of editing (the unselfconsciousness that McGann lamented), it has lacked the mechanisms of its own interrogation. The upshot is the reflexive acceptance of one text that happens to be based on a certain conception of authorship and the concomitant rejection of a precedent text that was conceived quite differently. Our avoidance of the 1920 edition is essentially arbitrary and, insofar as it circumscribes primary evidence, injurious to the practice of criticism. Furthermore, the accepted text was completed at least three years earlier than we had thought, separated from its archetype by a brief interlude during which the playwright realized

the necessity of acquiescing in the “social” demands of those on whom the success of his play depended. A study of O’Neill in performance, O’Neill as a commercial artist, or O’Neill after 7:30 a.m. on January 17, 1920, should emphasize the second edition. A study of the younger O’Neill—the O’Neill more deeply enmeshed in the Provincetown milieu, more recently married to another professional writer, and more easily able to insist upon the primacy of his own artistic judgment—should prefer the first edition, regardless of the practice of editors, publishers, and previous critics.

## RUTH MAYO BEFORE AND AFTER JANUARY 1920

The January 1920 sessions created substantially new characters carrying different thematic loads. Cumulatively, the effect of the cuts is to strip Ruth Mayo of reasons for being who she is and thereby to imply a greater strength of character in Robert Mayo. Bennett’s and Williams’s instigation of the revisions is germane. Bennett, a successful actor, wanted a role to suit his status; Williams knew that the play could rise or fall on the strength of Bennett’s performance. The cuts put the spotlight squarely on the character that Bennett wanted to play, as it had not been quite so consistently in the precedent text. When in 1920 William Prichard Eaton wrote that “the character spiral of *Beyond the Horizon* goes neither up nor down, but inward to the point of annihilation,” he was commenting on the newly published first edition.<sup>33</sup> The second edition does not authorize this uniform representation of character. There Ruth is the annihilator and Robert the annihilated. Robert is the butt of capricious fate, and Ruth’s ongoing enmeshment in mundane sordor is evidence of her shallowness, not, as in the first edition, of her ironic exclusion from the apotheosis in which the killer of *her* dreams glories.

Eaton does not speak ill of Ruth, nor does Gilbert Seldes in a review that favorably compared the 1920 edition to the play in performance.<sup>34</sup> The disinterested analyses of Eaton and Seldes could not be farther from the axe-grinding reception of Ruth recurrent in reviews of the performed play and in criticism based on the 1924 text. In its review of the premiere, *Theatre Magazine* initiated a tradition that would over time become less crass but no more kind. Ruth, the reviewer declared, is “a dullard, common, stupid, slovenly, uninterested in the world’s progress, and lacking in amiability in the bargain.” Although she (or even less relevantly the actress Helen McKellar) has a “fairly good figure,” she “isn’t even a good housekeeper.” The tubercular Robert’s waning moments are described with a Dumasian attentiveness, and Robert dies “dreaming of ‘what might have been’ had he taken the road of his

dreams, instead of trudging along the wrong matrimonial lane.” Ruth’s arc is simpler: as she works darkly on Robert’s supposed genius, she “grows still more slouchy and unattractive.”<sup>35</sup>

This review would be easy to dismiss had its biases not endured. Ruth has since been described as exemplifying a “feminine” instinct “that seeks to dominate, even to suffocate the masculine instinct”; as “not only lustful but dishonest” and as “subject to passionate fits of self-assertion”; as “wear[ing] the stain of the fallen Eve” and “punished to live in a hell on earth”; as manifesting “a manipulatively virginal, but willfully destructive, nature”; and as “not even lik[ing] motherhood.”<sup>36</sup> Time has been stingy with its healing balm: in 2011, Ruth was damned as “the sort of O’Neill heroine who tempts a man sexually and then later ruins his life because she cannot support the artist’s artistic imagination and need to create.”<sup>37</sup> Only Doris Falk, writing in 1958, has represented husband and wife as equally in the thrall of hopeless but not contemptible aspiration, although a decade earlier St. John Ervine offered a dyspeptic anticipation of Falk’s egalitarianism when he judged Ruth “little better than” Robert.<sup>38</sup>

These condemnations of Ruth are versions of the “venerable myth” that Barlow faults the play for promoting, and it is unpleasant to find them still being endorsed. But the difference between these accounts and Barlow’s judicious formulation concerns the attractiveness of O’Neill’s enterprise, not its nature. The most sobering aspect of the diminution of Ruth is that it is to some extent defensible—given its mooring in the 1924 text. The first edition authorizes other lines of inquiry.

fantasy can make. Wellman, like O'Neill, illustrates the effects of failure on those other than one's self—a topic rich in interest for a new husband, homeowner, and commercial playwright as it was for female dramatists fed up with Provincetown's sexism. Neither the artist Wellman nor the artist O'Neill argues against devotion to art. But both, like Boyce and like Alexander Pope much earlier, recognize that "a little learning is a dangerous thing." O'Neill worked hard to become a bona fide artist, not a Robert, Paul, Rex, or Taddema. He had spent enough time with that type before his marriage to Boulton.

O'Neill canonized the revised text by selecting it for the *Collected Works*. Without question, it is leaner and tighter, and much that was cut from it was redundant or clunky. But its comparative sophistication does not diminish the value of the first edition as a marker of O'Neill's thought during the period of maturation initiated by his new life with Boulton. The first edition's often-overblown patterns of emphasis tell us much about O'Neill that we cannot otherwise know, and its author is in some sense more interesting than the author, or authors, of the later one. There is a suddenness to his thought during this brief period, an unannounced willingness to reject assumptions, specifically about art and gender, that once came easily to him and that remained evident in many of his contemporaries.

Irony is history's best glue, and this history is plenty ironic. In order to elevate himself above the ranks of such as Robert Mayo—in order to succeed, commercially and artistically—O'Neill needed to attenuate his attack on failure. The revision tilted the play closer to what O'Neill would later call "simon pure uncompromising American tragedy," more dependent on sharp distinctions between hero and nemesis than its Strindbergian original had been.<sup>75</sup> A dignified, thematically barbed Ruth had no place in the revision, as Williams and Bennett must have realized. Her attenuation has muddied a trail that leads back to Boulton, Boyce, and Wellman. It has thus compromised our understanding of the one-time underachiever who had the good fortune to work around these women and the good sense to make something of it.

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**NOTES**

The author wishes to thank Melissa Jean Cooper of Dramatists Play Service and, for assistance with collation, Elizabeth Harmon-Norton.

1. For the reprints, see Jennifer McCabe Atkinson, *Eugene O'Neill: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 66; for digitized texts, see [OpenLibrary.org](http://OpenLibrary.org) and [Google Books](http://Google Books).

2. Judith E. Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," in *Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Michael Manheim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165.
3. Judith E. Barlow, "Susan's Sisters: The 'Other' Women Writers of the Provincetown Players," in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 262.
4. See Agnes Boulton, *Part of a Long Story: "Eugene O'Neill as a Young Man in Love"* (1958), ed. William Davies King (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 82n1, 88.
5. Eugene O'Neill to Nina Moise, April 14, 1918, in *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 82. For Nathan's advocacy, see, e.g., Stephen A. Black, *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 218.
6. Black, *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, 222. Cf. Boulton: "After *Beyond the Horizon* was typed, Gene sent it to the editors of *Smart Set* [i.e., Nathan and H. L. Mencken]. They praised it highly, and Mr. Nathan gave it to the producer John D. Williams" (*Part of a Long Story*, 105). Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O'Neill* (1962; New York: Harper and Row, 1973), endorse this account (see 374) but do not repeat it in *O'Neill: Life with Monte Cristo* (New York: Applause, 2002).
7. See Boulton, *Part of a Long Story*, 106.
8. Black, *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, 224.
9. Joan Bennett and Lois Kibbee, in *The Bennett Playbill* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), imply that Williams and the actor Richard Bennett had separate copies (64), although Williams may have had a copy made, or, per Boulton's account in n. 6, above, Williams's second copy may have come from Nathan.
10. Eugene O'Neill to George Jean Nathan, March 12, 1920, in "As Ever, Gene": *The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to George Jean Nathan*, ed. Nancy L. Roberts and Arthur W. Roberts (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 38.
11. Eugene O'Neill, quoted in Barrett H. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays* (New York: Dover, 1947), 65.
12. Eugene O'Neill to Barrett H. Clark, May 8, 1919, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Bogard and Bryer, 87.
13. Eugene O'Neill to George Pierce Baker, June 8, 1919, in *ibid.*, 89. The printed record does not reveal when Baker received or returned his copy; five weeks after the play opened and three days after the first edition was published, O'Neill reported that Baker "has both read and seen *Beyond* and is delighted with and proud of it" (Eugene O'Neill to Barrett H. Clark, March 13, 1920, in *ibid.*, 119).
14. See, e.g., Black, *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, 225–26, 238.
15. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 224–41.
16. See Eugene O'Neill to George Jean Nathan, November 4, 1919, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Bogard and Bryer, 95.
17. Clark estimates that "if produced exactly as it was written, [*Beyond the Horizon*] would require almost four hours to act" (*Eugene O'Neill*, 68). For O'Neill's eventual acknowledgment of the problem, see Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, January 28, 1920, in "A Wind Is Rising": *The Correspondence of Agnes Boulton and Eugene O'Neill*, ed. William Davies King (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 88.

18. See Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, [January 13?, 1920], in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 61; Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, January 14, 1920, in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 63. Bennett and Kibbee claim that O'Neill initially "refused to cut a line" from the play (*Bennett Playbill*, 64).
19. Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, January 15, 1920, in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 67; and Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, January 17, [1920], in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 69–70. Richard Bennett recognized that O'Neill's original script "was terribly stretched out," with "a lot of words and little active material" (quoted in Bennett and Kibbee, *Bennett Playbill*, 64).
20. Bennett and Kibbee, *Bennett Playbill*, 64.
21. O'Neill to Boulton, January 17, 1920, 70; see also Bennett and Kibbee, *Bennett Playbill*, 64.
22. Shortly before the book's release, O'Neill wrote that "trouble with the printers" had Liveright "tearing his hair" but still hoping for publication "within a week" (Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, [February 25, 1920], in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 127).
23. See Atkinson, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 66.
24. Clark, *Eugene O'Neill*, 68.
25. Crosswell Bowen and Shane O'Neill, *The Curse of the Misbegotten: A Tale of the House of O'Neill* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 100 (my emphasis).
26. Ronald H. Wainscott, *Staging O'Neill: The Experimental Years, 1920–1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 15. Cf. Travis Bogard, "Note on the Texts," in O'Neill, *Complete Plays 1913–1920*, ed. Bogard (New York: Library of America, 1988): "revisions made during rehearsals . . . were included in the second edition" (1090).
27. Eugene O'Neill, *Work Diary 1924–1943*, "preliminary edition," transcribed by Donald Gallup (New Haven, CT: Yale University Library), 13.
28. Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan, October 12, 1924, in "*The Theatre We Worked For*": *The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 64.
29. Melissa Jean Cooper of Dramatists Play Service writes that "DPS made an agreement with Random House in May of 1948 to publish an Acting Edition version of the play" (email to the author, October 4, 2013). For a digitized text of this edition, misdated "1921" (fifteen years before DPS was founded), see OpenLibrary.org. Atkinson, *Descriptive Bibliography*, does not record the Random House–DPS edition or the edition that DPS published alone and, judging from online records, reprinted several times. I sight-collated the Random House–DPS text against much of one undated state of the DPS edition; with an assistant, I orally collated the Random House–DPS text against the second edition. Collations do not account for stage directions and accidentals.
30. O'Neill to Boulton, January 28, 1920, in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 88.
31. Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 66.
32. Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983; Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 48.
33. Walter Prichard Eaton, "Eugene O'Neill," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 4 (October 1920): 288. See also William Lyon Phelps, "Eugene O'Neill, Dramatist," *New York Times*,

- June 19, 1921, on the first edition: “[the play] contains not one single character who has any mark of greatness; they are all just ordinary folk, in an ordinary environment, who suffer horribly” (30).
34. See Gilbert Seldes, “The Theatre,” *The Dial* 69 (July 1920): 104. Phelps (see previous note) does not specifically mention Ruth.
  35. *Theatre Magazine* 31 (1920): 185 (TheatreHistory.com).
  36. Richard Dana Skinner, *Eugene O’Neill: A Poet’s Quest* (1935; New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 52; Emil Roy, “Tragic Tension in *Beyond the Horizon*,” *Ball State University Forum* 8 (1967): 75, 77; Egil Törnqvist, *A Drama of Souls: Studies in O’Neill’s Super-Naturalistic Technique* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 53; Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O’Neill: A New Assessment* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 143; and Brenda Murphy, “*Beyond the Horizon*’s Narrative Sentence: An American Intertext for O’Neill,” *Theatre Annual* 41 (1986): 59. Törnqvist is not the only critic to mistake Ruth for Eve.
  37. Zander Brietzke, “The Reel O’Neill in *Reds*,” in *Eugene O’Neill and His Early Contemporaries: Bohemians, Radicals, Progressives, and the Avant Garde*, ed. Eileen J. Hermann and Robert M. Dowling (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 204. Brietzke groups Ruth with Maud Steele in *Bread and Butter* and, puzzlingly, Muriel McComber in *Ah, Wilderness!*.
  38. St. John Ervine, “Counsels of Despair” (1948), in *Eugene O’Neill’s Critics: Voices from Abroad*, ed. Horst Frenz and Susan Tuck (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 86; see Doris V. Falk, *Eugene O’Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretive Study of the Plays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 37, 38.
  39. References to the first edition appear parenthetically, with references, as necessary, to the second (1924) edition, represented by O’Neill, *Complete Plays 1913–1920*, 571–653. Second and subsequent references to other plays appear parenthetically.
  40. Black, *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, 74.
  41. For *Beyond the Horizon* and the two earlier plays, see Barlow, “O’Neill’s Female Characters,” 165; see also Brietzke, “The Reel O’Neill.”
  42. Roy notices “[the] preordained destruction through choice which becomes O’Neill’s version of the ancient tragic concept of fate,” but considers Robert’s inadequacy evidence of Ruth’s agency: Robert is “inwardly maimed by impotence (an illness brought on by women)” (“Tragic Tension,” 78).
  43. *Ibid.*, 75.
  44. *Ibid.*, 76.
  45. In the first edition, the cabin has also been “all cleaned out and painted and fixed up so’s that Robert o’ yours’d be comfortable” (46). “Comfortable” emphasizes the special status that Dick imagines for Robert on the *Sunda*.
  46. Roy, “Tragic Tension,” 76, applying a passage from Leslie Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Dick’s first speech establishes his contempt for women (see 30; 585).
  47. The definitions are from the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, which dates the first printed American use of the vulgar form to 1888.



48. Boulton, *Part of a Long Story*, 88.
49. Eugene O'Neill, *Welded*, in *Complete Plays 1920–31*, ed. Travis Bogard (New York: Library of America, 1988), 239.
50. King, *Another Part of a Long Story: Literary Traces of Eugene O'Neill and Agnes Boulton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 78.
51. Jeff Kennedy, "Probing Legends in Bohemia: The Symbiotic Dance Between O'Neill and the Provincetown Players," in *Eugene O'Neill and His Early Contemporaries*, ed. Hermann and Dowling, 184. O'Neill had separated himself from the group's daily business the previous year; see, e.g., 181.
52. King, *Another Part of a Long Story*, 80–81, 123, 195. King judges that Boulton "participated, to some degree" in the "creation" of *Beyond the Horizon*, "if only by discussing it with O'Neill" (123).
53. Agnes Boulton to Eugene O'Neill, [February 28, 1920], in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 132 (and see 132n1).
54. O'Neill to Boulton, January 28, 1920, in *ibid.*, 88.
55. Agnes Boulton to Eugene O'Neill, [April 27, 1920], in *ibid.*, 143–44.
56. Agnes Boulton to Eugene O'Neill, [April 28, 1920], in *ibid.*, 144. King notes that Boulton added, marginally: "not mailed—too peevisish probably!" (145n1).
57. After a rehearsal, O'Neill complained that actors "will never—can never—be my Robert, Ruth, and Andy" (Eugene O'Neill to Agnes Boulton, January 23, 1920, in *ibid.*, 79).
58. Boulton, *Part of a Long Story*, 182; the date of the Barrymore discussion is established by Eugene O'Neill to George Pierce Baker, May 9, 1919, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Bogard and Bryer, 88.
59. O'Neill to Boulton, January 28, 1920, in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 88.
60. O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan, August 7, [1926], in "The *Theatre We Worked For*," 124.
61. Boulton to O'Neill, [April 27, 1920], in "A *Wind Is Rising*," 143.
62. King, *Another Part of a Long Story*, 81.
63. Cheryl Black, *The Women of Provincetown, 1915–1922* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 53.
64. Brenda Murphy, *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 38.
65. See Judith E. Barlow, "Influence, Echo and Coincidence: O'Neill and the Provincetown's Women Writers," *Eugene O'Neill Review* 27 (2005): 24; and Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* ([Amherst]: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 21.
66. Neith Boyce, *Winter's Night* (1916), in *Women Writers of the Provincetown Players: A Collection of Short Works*, ed. Judith E. Barlow (Albany: Excelsior–State University of New York Press, 2009), 40.
67. Black, *Women of Provincetown*, 53.
68. See Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1972), rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 119–22, 125; and Murphy, "Beyond the *Horizon's* Narrative Sentence." Bogard and Murphy identify plays that either represent fraternal competitors for inert women or activate women in support of a conservative masculinist model of marriage.

69. Barlow, "Influence, Echo and Coincidence," 24.
70. Barlow, introduction to *Women Writers*, ed. Barlow, 17.
71. Neith Boyce, *The Two Sons* (1916), in *The Provincetown Players: A Choice of the Shorter Works*, ed. Barbara L. Ozieblo (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 122, 124.
72. Neith Boyce, *Constancy* (1915), in *Provincetown Players*, ed. Ozieblo, 61.
73. Murphy, *Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*, 128.
74. Rita Wellman, *Funiculi-Funicula* (1917), in *Provincetown Players*, ed. Ozieblo, 166, 171.
75. Eugene O'Neill to R. W. Cottingham, May 12, 1944, in *Selected Letters*, ed. Bogard and Bryer, 554.

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### DOMESTIC DYSTOPIAS

While many 1920s plays that air questions about domesticity are comedies, or at least dramas with recuperative endings, the decade beginning with the 1919–20 Broadway season was bookended by two pairs of plays that saw little hope for happiness in ordinary housewifedom. “Ordinary” here included homemaking in a midwestern town, on a New England farm, in a Greenwich Village apartment, and in transition from an outer borough (Brooklyn, Queens, or the Bronx) lower-middle-class apartment to a wealthy, perhaps suburban home. *Beyond the Horizon* and *Miss Lulu Bett* present two different domestic dystopias, in each of which a nonurban woman who does not work outside the home is constrained and punished by a male-headed family with no interest in her needs, even when these needs are to be a responsible housekeeper. Roughly a decade later, the heroines of *Gypsy* and *Machinal*, both city women, fail to find satisfaction in either the domestic realm or paid work.

These plays expose the drudgery of most employment available to women at the time, unsettling the idea of home as de facto haven. All four plays offer the possibility of reading domesticity against the then-mainstream critical grain, if one gives attention to the implications of the naturalist compulsion as well as the realist drive for closure and, perhaps more important, if one considers the possible response of female playgoers for whom the domestic activities represented had recognizable everyday referents. That these connections rarely showed up in mainstream criticism does not mean audience members did not make them. It may mean that the frisson just under the surface in many plays was a component that kept viewers coming back for more, even as it escaped the notice of professional male critics.

*Beyond the Horizon*, which opened in February 1920, winning that

year's Pulitzer Prize, charts a male dreamer's disappointment leading to his death—literally from tuberculosis but metaphorically from a broken spirit. Robert, a farmer's son who has always wanted to go to sea, marries Ruth in a moment of mutually mistaken passion; his brother, Andrew, who loves farming and had always thought he would marry Ruth, ships out in Robert's stead. The play traces Ruth and Robert's slide into bitterness and indifference, but virtually all reviewers and most later critics view the tragedy as Robert's and the agon as between the brothers. Ruth comes to resent Robert's lack of order, his reading, being late for meals, and their child's constant crying. Robert, while he recognizes his failure as a farmer, is only intermittently interested in how he might also be failing as a husband and father; Andrew calls Ruth, who admits her mistake, "the cause of all this."<sup>9</sup> Had she married a more successful man, O'Neill seems to suggest, a life of domesticity would presumably have been her dream come true.<sup>10</sup>

O'Neill's text traces Robert's decline scenographically via his wife's slackening housekeeping. By the final act, the main room of the farmhouse, "seen by the light of the shadeless oil lamp with a smoky chimney which stands on the table, presents an appearance of decay, of dissolution. . . . The whole atmosphere of the room, contrasted with that of former years, is one of an habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself" (175). Attention to the visual and active world of the play, and to what characters say about themselves and what O'Neill tells us about them in his novelistic descriptions, can suggest another reading: one in which domesticity itself, not Ruth, is the villain, and in which Ruth has also been denied agency and fulfillment.<sup>11</sup> *Beyond the Horizon* has three acts, each featuring an indoor and an outdoor scene. The outdoor scenes depict the road Robert wishes to travel (i.e., his dreams) and a hill where the family enjoys a picnic, but not the farm that Robert fails to manage. The failure is displayed in the domestic interior—Ruth's domain. Reviewers of the original production derided the painted backdrops depicting the outdoors.<sup>12</sup> The interior was supposedly rendered with more credibility, no doubt in part because the requisite items were a few properties and limited furniture, arrayed within a box set—something more modern than the backdrops and also clearly synecdochal.<sup>13</sup>

The props and what the actors did with them—even two years before American actors were exposed to Stanislavskianism during the

Moscow Art Theatre's first American tour—are telling. A list of props at the end of the Dramatists Play Service acting edition of *Beyond the Horizon* shows that the props requiring ongoing or repeated usage are, with one exception, used by the women. Men carry books, pick up a newspaper, tote a doctor's bag, look at a watch, or remove a pair of spectacles—characterological actions rendered quickly and not germane to the play's main action—but women put wood in the stove, knit, serve a meal, read and then hide letters, or negotiate the stage in a wheelchair—actions that are either repeated, take some stage time to execute, or are significant to the play's conflicts. The single exception is Robert's removing his daughter's shoes and stockings for a nap. Tellingly, he neither knows whether the footwear should come off nor where to put the items once they have been removed, although the child is two and he has had twenty-four months in which to master—or at least observe—such things. The metonymic as well as the symbolic worlds for which these properties stand speak volumes, and naturalist repetition as gendered behavior is everywhere evident.<sup>14</sup>

At the start of act 2 Ruth has prepared a lunch for which Robert is late. Robert's mother, who resides with the couple, offers to help with the dishes, but Ruth refuses, noting that it's far too hot in the (off-stage) kitchen for the older woman. A New England farmhouse in 1917, the year O'Neill started writing the play, would have had a stove that likely burned either wood or coal. The temperature in the entire house would have risen whenever anyone prepared a hot meal, and during the summer, the kitchen would have been blisteringly hot. Household historian Susan Strasser notes that a farm kitchen needed “a large, six-hole stove with a firebox large enough to hold ‘quite big wood.’”<sup>15</sup> Ruth would have been cooking for the help as well as for the family (help hired for Robert's work, not for hers). In the final act, Ruth puts the last of the chopped wood in the onstage (living room) stove to keep her mother warm.

Ruth's mother, the invalid Mrs. Atkins, is confined to a wheelchair and spends the first part of act 2 either knitting or fanning herself, repetitive activities that may or may not lead anywhere but that certainly make known the presence of the person doing them and that speak to the excess energy of a woman removed from domestic labor but not granted any other dominion or independence. Louise Closser Hale, the actress who originated the role of Mrs. Atkins (in a perfor-

mance one reviewer called “remarkably true and interesting”<sup>16</sup>) added something performative to O’Neill’s printed requirements that various other characters wheel her about: she wheeled herself around, too, using the chair as “something to brandish, something wherewith to bridle and emphasize a thought or point a bit of wit.”<sup>17</sup> Women need to have skills to negotiate the domestic world, and actresses have to master these skills to succeed in their professional world.

Over the course of the play, Robert fails out of doors while Ruth withers inside; each denies the other access to the other’s realm. Robert fails to notice the dinner getting cold and, according to Ruth, would make more of a mess washing the dishes than his “help” would be worth. Rather than explore textually the possibility that domesticity without love or respect is a prison (or even that Ruth might have made a good farm hand—she is described as a “healthy . . . out-of-door girl” [130]), O’Neill silences or immobilizes or redirects Ruth at key moments. When Robert’s brother returns and she wants to run to meet him, Robert pushes her away from the door and steers her back into the house toward their child. After learning that Andrew no longer thinks of her, Ruth is written by O’Neill to keep the child in her arms and remain silent. At the end of the scene she takes Robert’s hint and says she’ll get dinner for the child, though we know the brothers’ mother has made a special dinner for Andrew’s return.

What might otherwise have been a break from domestic labor (someone else cooked dinner for once) is taken from Ruth so Robert can punish her with a meaningless domestic chore. While Robert is habitually too distracted to care about the food Ruth prepares, Andrew announces that he’d stay for his mother’s dinner “if I missed every damned ship in the world” (174). The play’s final argument between the two brothers features Ruth sitting silently on the side, her face (according to the stage direction) covered by her hands. The labor she performs is unappreciated; the actions she might perform if given agency by the playwright are proscribed; her participation in the brothers’ discussion is headed off at the dramaturgical pass.

In the final act, with both of Robert’s parents and little Mary dead, the downtrodden Ruth tends to her cranky mother and, in response to a complaint about the dirty lamp, announces that she has a clean one in the kitchen. Arguably the information provides a reason for her mother to request being wheeled offstage as Ruth goes for the lamp.

But for anyone who had used oil lamps, Ruth's statement suggests she can provide a bit of comfort in her own realm (the kitchen) but has no interest in laboring to provide the same comfort in Robert's part of the house. Kerosene lamps required "daily chimney wiping and wick trimming, weekly washing of chimneys and shades, and periodic rewick-ing and dismantling for thorough cleaning with soda, inside and out. Unpleasantly sooty and smelly, these tasks had to be done for decent light."<sup>18</sup>

The original production of *Beyond the Horizon* may have tipped the scales in favor of the male characters because actress Helen McKellar, who played Ruth, left the impression with critics that "she had difficulty with the early, joyous, girlish scenes but felt at home with the suffering, complaining, frustrated wife of the last act."<sup>19</sup> Perhaps. But there is no reason not to posit a gendered way of seeing the play—female spectators may have had a different response to the conflicts at its heart. The 1926 revival featured Aline MacMahon as Ruth. Burns Mantle found her characterization "thin," and Percy Hammond perceived Ruth as "shallow."<sup>20</sup> Katharine Zimmermann, in a rare instance of a woman reviewing for a major daily, said that MacMahon "glides with sureness and understanding from the fresh and buxom maiden, who is loved by both brothers, to the pitiful slattern in whom cares and disappointments have killed even the power to feel."<sup>21</sup> Zimmerman imputes to Ruth the characteristic that critic Joel Pfister says drives all of O'Neill's characters: depth.<sup>22</sup> Her review suggests that Ruth, too, has squelched dreams and has made sacrifices.

Sacrifice for the questionable privilege of performing domestic labor is at the heart of the 1921 Pulitzer Prize winner, *Miss Lulu Bett*, by Zona Gale. Based on Gale's popular novel, the play depicts an unmarried woman (Lulu) who keeps house for her critical, self-absorbed sister (Ina) and the sister's pompous, patronizing husband (Dwight) in a small midwestern town. Lulu's mother (Mrs. Bett) also lives in the house, as do Lulu's nieces, an independent teenager (Diana) and a ten-year-old (Monona) who deliberately tries the adults' patience. A neighbor with a piano shop (Neil Cornish) admires Lulu, as does Dwight's long-lost brother (Ninian), who shows up, realizes Lulu is being taken for granted, and marries her. When it turns out that Ninian already has another wife, Lulu returns to the family circle, where Dwight insists she keep quiet about what happened. In the novel's conclusion, Lulu



