Long Day's Journey into Night Study Guide

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill

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Introduction

Although Eugene O'Neill had completed *Long Day's Journey into Night* by 1941, it was not produced until 1956, three years after his death. He had originally stipulated that it was not to be produced or published until twenty-five years after he died. However, before his death he gave verbal permission to the Royal Dramatic Theatre to stage it in Stockholm, Sweden, a country that had accorded him a special loyalty throughout his career.

The Stockholm production, which opened on February 10,1956, was very successful and prompted wide interest in the play. Nine months later, on November 7, the play opened to mixed but mostly favorable reviews at the Helen Hayes Theatre in New York. Featured in the cast were Frederic March as James Tyrone, Florence Eldridge as Mary, Jason Robards, Jr. as Jamie, Bradford Dilman as Edmund, and Katherine Ross as Cathleen. Jose Quintero both produced and directed the play.

Carlotta O'Neill, the playwright's widow, saw to the play's publication in the same year. In 1955 she had copyrighted the work as an unpublished play, and in the following year she asked Random House publish it. The editors declined, even though they held a sealed copy of the script that O'Neill had originally deposited with them. Mrs. O'Neill then offered the publication rights to the Yale Library, which arranged its release through the Yale University Press with the provision that the play royalties would be used to endow the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Fund at the Yale School of Drama. The published work met with great critical acclaim and won for O'Neill a fourth Pulitzer Prize.

Author Biography

It was because *Long Day's Journey into Night* was so transparently autobiographical that Eugene O'Neill forbade the play's production and publication during his lifetime. The main characters are thinly veiled portraits of his father, James, his mother, Ella, his brother, Jamie, and himself.

James Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 6, 1888, in a Broadway hotel, son to the popular actor, James O'Neill, and Ella Quinlan. He was raised in the world of theater, and, as a result, in his boyhood and teen years he traveled all over America.

At eighteen, O'Neill entered Princeton but was expelled for a drunken prank and "general hell-raising." Thereafter he drifted. He served briefly as a business firm clerk, tried his hand at gold prospecting in Central America, and finally signed on a ship as an ordinary seaman in the Atlantic trade routes. After three years of wandering, he returned to New York, supporting himself with odd jobs and living on that city's squalid waterfront. In 1912, the year in which *Long Day's Journey into Night* is set, O'Neill broke off his three-year marriage to Kathleen Jenkins. In that same year, ill with tuberculosis and haunted by his "rebellious dissipations," he reached a personal low point and even attempted suicide.

While in a sanatorium recovering from tuberculosis, O'Neill studied the master dramatists of the world and set out to become a playwright. Dissatisfied with his early efforts in the form, he enrolled at Harvard to study the craft, becoming the most celebrated member of George Pierce Baker's famous "47 Workshop." His first plays were published in 1914, and his first staged play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, was produced in 1916. It was followed by *Thirst*, produced by the Provincetown Players in the summer of 1917. It was that group that gave O'Neill his artistic arena and, with its move lo New York, quickly established his reputation as the chief innovator in theater.

O'Neill then began a very prolific stretch of writing that lasted over a dozen years and vaulted him into the front rank of American playwrights. Through the 1920s, he penned a group of major plays, including *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *Anna Christie* (1921), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *All Cod's Chilian Got Wings* (1924), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1926), *Strange Interlude* (1926), *Lazarus Laughed* (1928), *Dynamo* (1929), and *Mourning Becomes Electro* (1931).

O'Neill's personal grief helped shape his dramatic vision. Between 1920 and 1923, O'Neill's father, mother, and brother all died, leaving him deeply troubled. He attempted only one comedy, *Ah, Wilderness* (1933), concentrating instead on the grimmer side of life and relying heavily on the probing psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud. He also mined his own life for his themes and characters, most obviously in his later plays, in which he clearly attempted to exorcise his subconscious familial guilt and sorrow.

O'Neill's reputation in the United States went into something of a decline after 1930, perhaps because his vigorous innovation and experimentation gave way to more

morose autobiographical studies, some of which were not staged at the time. His international reputation remained high, however, and in 1936 he won the Nobel Prize in literature, only the second American at the time to have been so honored.

O'Neill and his third wife, Carlotta, went into relative seclusion in the late 1930s. Thereafter, in the 1940s, he was stricken with a degenerative neurological tremor which impaired his faculties and prevented him from undertaking new projects or completing work on his ambitious cycle of plays tentatively entitled "A Tale of Possessor Self-Dispossessed." However, he finished *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which many critics deem his crowning achievement. Li the work's dedication to Carlotta, O'Neill indicated that he was finally able to pay homage to his family, the "four haunted Tyrones," and to write about his past "with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness."

In his last active years, O'Neill finished plays that now rank among his very best, including *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947). Other later plays include *A Touch of the Poet* (1957) and *Hugkie* (1959), which, like *Long Day's Journey into Night*, were first produced posthumously. By the time he died in 1953, O'Neill had written over thirty significant dramatic works and solidified his reputation as America's premier dramatist.

Plot Summary

Act One

The play, which opens just after breakfast, begins on a hopeful note, evident in the affectionate exchange between James and Mary Tyrone, but it is clear that Mary is being carefully watched by her family. Neither her morphine addiction nor Edmund's obvious ill health are honestly discussed. Instead, the characters fence around the truth with evasive banter, though, at times, resentment and disappointment surface. Tyrone upbraids Jamie, his eldest son, for encouraging Edmund, the younger son, to follow in Jamie's dissolute footsteps. Jamie, ever critical of "the Old Man," in turn derides Tyrone as a miser, ultimately to blame for Mary's addiction and Edmund's ill health because of his penny-pinching reluctance to pay for competent doctors. To the father and sons, it becomes obvious that Mary is growing unstable, but she blames her edginess on a lack of sleep caused by Tyrone's snoring and the foghorn that sounded throughout the previous night. After the men leave to take up outside chores, Mary sinks into an armchair, clearly in a state of nervous agitation that threatens the last vestiges of her self-control.

Act Two, Scene One

The scene opens just before lunch. Edmund and Jamie sneak some of their father's whiskey and then resort to Jamie's usual trick of watering the remaining whiskey to disguise their actions. Their discussion shifts from Edmund's health to their fears about their mother, and Jamie grows distraught because Edmund has let Mary stay upstairs by herself. When she enters, it is evident to both of them that she has succumbed to the drug, smashing their hopes that she had finally shaken herself free of it. Jamie's sneering remarks about his father anger Mary, who excuses her husband's stinginess as the result of his hard life. She also fends off Jamie's insinuation that she has lapsed into her addiction again. Tyrone enters, and he soon realizes what has happened. After his sons exit for lunch, he remains behind with Mary, angry and defeated by her condition.

Act Two, Scene Two

The family returns to the living room after lunch. A telephone call from Dr. Hardy confirms the diagnosis of Edmund's sickness as tuberculosis. Edmund must keep an afternoon appointment with Hardy. Although the full truth remains hidden from Mary, her verbal attack on Hardy indicates that she knows that Edmund suffers from more than "a summer cold." She leaves to go upstairs, and it is clear to the rest that she is going to use more morphine. The father-son recriminations begin again, with Tyrone accusing both Jamie and Edmund of abandoning their Catholic faith to embrace damning alternatives: in Jamie'1 s case, degeneracy, and in Edmund's, a gloomy and self-

destructive philosophy. Edmund leaves and Jamie warns his father not to put Edmund in a second-rate sanatoriurn, prone as he is to look for the cheapest way out. Mary returns and, left alone with Tyrone, complains about her loneliness and Tyrone's tighifisted failure to provide a real home. She bitterly blames Tyrone's lifestyle for past disasters, including her difficult birthing of Edmund and postpartum pain, then begins to drift into the solace of her romanticized past, when she was in a convent school planning to become a nun or a concert pianist, Edmund returns and pleads with her to stop taking the morphine, but it is clearly to no avail. She can only try to make him stop blaming himself for her renewed addiction.

Act Three

It is early evening, and Mary has sunk further into her drug-induced detachment from reality, which, like the gathering fog outside, "hides you from the world." She is alone with Cathleen, the servant who had accompanied her on her automobile ride into town to obtain more morphine. She confides in the girl, treating her like a childhood friend while plying her with Tyrone's whiskey. She tells the servant about her early hopes and her romanticized first impressions of Tyrone. After Cathleen leaves to resume her duties, Tyrone and Edmund enter. Both have been drinking and continue to imbibe while Mary drifts through a reverie on Jamie's alcoholism, her early married life on the itinerant hotel-hopping theater circuit, and her expensive satin wedding gown. When Tyrone leaves to fetch another bottle of whiskey, Edmund tries to tell his mother that he must enter a sanatorium, but she refuses to accept the truth, which, because her own father had died of consumption, she fears is a virtual death sentence. He voices wounding regret that he has "a dope fiend for a mother," but is immediately contrite and hurries away. The act ends in a confrontation between Mary and Tyrone over Edmund's condition. Mary refuses to eat dinner, claiming she is tired, and Tyrone then accuses her of slipping off to "take more of that God-damned poison."

Act Four

It is around midnight. Tyrone, morose and almost lost in an alcoholic stupor, awkwardly attempts to play solitaire. Edmund enters, also drunk, and is immediately accused of "burning up money" by leaving the lights on behind him. Edmund attempts to defy his father, and is quick to defend his brother against his father's ritual complaints about Jamie's debauchery. Edmund then launches into a self-pitying conceit about being "a ghost within a ghost," a soul lost in the comfort of the fog. His father only finds him morbid. Edmund continues, reciting depressing poetry and fueling his father's anger. They begin to play Casino, but they are constantly distracted from the cards by their concern for Jamie and their fear that Mary will get up and come downstairs. They also continue to drink, reflect on their lives, and trade a mixture of recriminations and affectionate concerns for each other. They discuss Mary and her romantic distortions of the truth about her earlier life in the convent and her father's wealth. Edmund then takes up Jamie's theme of Tyrone's stinginess, evident in Tyrone's effort to find an inexpensive sanatorium for Edmund. Tyrone offers his familiar excuse, arguing that his family

poverty and experience as a child laborer instilled in him a desperate fear of the poor house, turning him into "a stinking old miser." He reveals his own deep regret that his fears led him to sacrifice his acting talent for a fixed but secure and very lucrative role in a popular melodrama. Edmund, in his turn, laments the loss of hope found in rare moments at sea, where life, however briefly, seemed to hold some meaning.

Jamie, drunk, lurches through the house and into the room as Tyrone, to avoid a confrontation, retires to the side porch. After recounting his adventure with Fat Violet in a local brothel, Jamie begins a painful confession in which he claims that his bitter resentment towards Edmund has caused him to try to drag Edmund into his own moral quicksand and turn him into a bum. He admits to having been jealous of Edmund and holding him responsible for Mary's addiction. His love for his kid brother, though stronger than the hate, will not stop him from wanting to see Edmund fail.

When Jamie seems to fall asleep, Tyrone returns and begins his litany of complaints about his oldest son, but he is interrupted when Jamie starts up and begins returning fire with caustic, sneering innuendos.

The men, worn down by drink and a lack of sleep, soon begin to doze, but they quickly grow alert when they hear the piano begin a badly rendered Chopin waltz in a nearby room. Mary, carrying her wedding gown on her arm, then makes the entrance the men have dreaded. She is obviously in a narcotic-induced trance, barely aware of her surroundings. She begins a detached and vacant reverie on her childhood dreams and hopes. The men remain immobilized, making only feeble attempts to break through to her, vainly reciting lines of verse that underscore the helplessness of their situation. Mary's reverie continues as the men sit quietly in their chairs and an indifferent curtain finally descends.

Characters

Cathleen

The "second girl," Cathleen is the Tyrone household maid, "a buxom Irish peasant" of about Edmund's age. She is dull, awkward, and slow but very amiable and totally unaffected. She shows no awareness that her familiarity is inappropriate for a servant, and her ingenuousness encourages Mary to treat her almost like an old school chum and confidant

Gaspard

See James Tyrone

Jamie

See James Tyrone, Jr.

The Kid

See Edmund Tyrone

The Old Man

See James Tyrone

Edmund Tyrone

Edmund, the youngest son of James and Mary Tyrone, is twenty-three, ten years younger than his brother, Jamie. Thinner, and a bit taller than Jamie, Edmund more closely resembles his mother than his father. He also shares some of his mother's nervousness, evident in his hands. A fledgling journalist, he is also a poet. He is more of an intellectual than his brother and quickly becoming better read, but he has also seen something of the world, working on merchant ships as a common seaman and drifting through waterfront bars and flophouses. He has a deep and abiding love of the sea, but he also has a morbid view of life that his father finds deeply distressing. He has a special bond with Jamie, for whom he has a great affection. He is ill with tuberculosis, and the consumptive disease is evident in his gaunt frame, wracking cough, and sallow complexion.

James Tyrone

The sixty-five year old family patriarch, James Tyrone is a financially successful and handsome actor whose robust looks and bearing and make him appear more youthful. His popular success has not spoiled him, partly because he is a self-made man from a poor immigrant Irish family deserted by his father. His resulting fear of poverty has turned him into a man obsessed with money and owning property, always looking for bargains, even at the expense of his family's health. From that same heritage comes a lack of snobbery and pretension. He wears clothes to "the limit of usefulness," and thus appears somewhat shabby and careless in his dress. However, he does reveal the "studied technique" of an experienced actor and takes some pride in his powerful, resonant voice and his command of language. His wife's morphine addiction and his sons' profligate lives have made him both resentful and angry. Whiskey offers him some solace, but he is never able to escape the recrimination of his sons, who hold him partly responsible for their mother's drug addiction.

James Tyrone, Jr.

The oldest son of James and Mary Tyrone, Jamie, at thirty-three, shows the physical signs of his dissipation. He favors his father in appearance, but lacks the Old Man's robust vitality and graceful presence. He is an unabashed and unapologetic drunk, with a history of failing at most everything he has tried. He is also a womanizer, spending much of his time haunting saloons and brothels. Afflicted with a caustic cynicism and sneering manner, he mocks his father at every turn, blaming Tyrone's miserly ways for most of the family problems. Though protective towards Edmund, he admits to a desire to corrupt him, to shape his brother in his own image, and he knows why. His beloved mother's use of morphine had begun after bearing Edmund, and apart of Jamie hates his brother as the source of her pain. For Tyrone, Jamie is nothing but a free-loading, ungrateful bum, quickly slipping beyond redemption. Jamie is at least honest enough to agree with that assessment of his character.

Mary Tyrone

Mary, wife to James Tyrone, at fifty-four, is several years younger than her husband. She is described as having a "graceful figure" with a distinctly Irish face, once pretty and "still striking. " From the outset, it is clear that she is on edge, nervously fluttering her fingers, once beautiful but now gnarled by rheumatism. She has been addicted to morphine for several years, and has been in out of sanitariums, desperately trying to get free of her dependency. Under the influence of the drug, she escapes into an idealized version of her girlhood at a convent school, with dreams of becoming a nun or a concert pianist. She finds the real world lonely and depressing, offering little hope or joy. She cannot deal with unpleasant truths; for example, that her son Edmund might be suffering from something more serious than a cold. Still, she retains the unaffected charm" and "innate unworldly innocence" of her youth, explaining her family's protective

loyalty and love and crushing disappointment when she once more falls victim to her addiction.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

The Tyrone family is fragmented, and each of its members to some degree is alienated from the rest. The most obvious estrangement exists between Tyrone and Jamie, both of whom allow their bitterness to overwhelm whatever residual love and respect they have for each other. Jamie holds his father's tightfistedness to blame for Mary's addiction to morphine, while Tyrone cannot forgive what he sees as his son's gutter-bound dissolution. The two are barely civil to each other, and knowing the recriminations their encounters habitually faring, they simply try to avoid each other, especially when drink has dissolved their masks of civility.

More subtle is the ambivalent alienation that Jamie feels towards Edmund. He confesses that a part of him hates Edmund, from jealousy and an irrational association of Edmund's survival with their mother's desperate plight.

Most estranged and alienated of all is Mary. Her struggle with her addiction is desperately lonely, most of the time beyond the others' understanding or sympathy. She talks at length of her isolation, placing much blame on Tyrone for the itinerant life his acting career imposed on them. Under the influence of morphine, Mary drifts into her idealized past, cut off from the pain of her current life.

Deception

Deceptive masks are worn early in the play in an effort to evade unpleasant truths. The other members of the family try to keep Mary from knowing that Edmund is seriously ill, and Mary obviously attempts to deceive herself with the comforting belief that Edmund is only suffering from "a summer cold." Mary also attempts to hide her relapse into drug use with pathetic excuses that simply deepen the family's disappointment. The deceptions even become trivial, in Jamie's efforts to deceive his father by watering down the whiskey, for example, or in Tyrone's efforts to hide his whiskey-fetching forays from the help.

More poignant are the self-deceptions, in which characters mask the truth from themselves. Clearly, the past into which Mary escapes is illusory, a romanticized but comforting distortion of truth. Even Jamie, cynical but honest, deludes himself in his search for personal redemption through alcoholism and whoring.

God and Religion

For Tyrone, a troubling problem is his sons' rejection of their Catholic faith, a foundation stone in their "shanty Irish" heritage. His complaints about their rejection of religion occasions Jamie's scoffing observation that Tyrone himself is a truant Catholic, which

Tyrone must admit. He insists, though, that he still believes in God, which his sons do not. He is particularly upset with Edmund's godless and pessimistic view of life, claiming that it has been learned from reading depressing, atheistic poetry and philosophy.

Guilt and Innocence

Mary's illusory, drug-induced escape into her youth is partly a flight from guilt into a restored innocence and rediscovered faith. In their own ways, the other Tyrones try to unburden themselves of guilt and shame, either through expiation, as seen in Jamie's admission of his jealousy of Edmund, or in pleas for understanding, as seen in Tyrone's attempts to blame his selfish penny pinching on his early poverty. The play's tragic theme is that innocence can not be restored; each character must bear some guilt and pain, even to the grave's edge.

Loyalty

The loyalty of the three Tyrone men towards Mary has eroded because she has repeatedly dashed their hopes for her recovery, but their anger, hurt, and disappointment are an emotional index of their love for her. It is the common loyalty towards her that keeps the family together and explains why, for example, Jamie and Tyrone even tolerate each other.

Memory and Reminiscence

Mary is not the only one with regrets about the past. Tyrone is haunted by his impoverished childhood and his father's abandonment and eventual suicide. In one self-pitying confession, he expresses regrets for having given up the chance of becoming a great Shakespearean actor in order to take a lucrative but artistically unrewarding part in a popular melodrama.

Moral Corruption

Implicit in the responses to Mary's drug addiction is the belief that addiction was an indication of a weak moral will. Public disclosure of her behavior seems to be more threatening to the family than Jamie's disgraceful drinking, gambling, and whoring. In honest moments, Tyrone recognizes that the morphine is a poison and that Mary cannot control her need, but the moral stigma remains. Jamie's moral descent, buffered by his affection for his brother and mother, is treated as less of a social embarrassment, even by Tyrone.

Search for Self

The principal searcher in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is Edmund, O'Neill's alter ego. Both Mary and Tyrone escape to their pasts, Mary to her convent days and Tyrone to a time in his career when he might have resisted trading his talent for wealth. Edmund, having just begun a writing career as a poet and journalist, looks to a future when his drifting ends and he finds an elusive inner peace that he has glimpsed in rare moments at sea. The alternative is to follow Jamie, his dissolute doppelganger, down a self-destructive, unhappy path to a spiritual dead end.

Wealth and Poverty

Throughout *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Tyrone confirms the justice of Jamie's sneering attacks on him as a miser. Old Gaspard, as Jamie calls him, is obsessed with the cost of things, and is always looking for the cheapest alternative. He invariably equates the best with a bargain price, whether he is buying land, cigars, or automobiles, employing servants, or engaging the services of a physician.

On occasion, Tyrone's penny-pinching habits border on the comic. He cannot resist remarking on the most trivial of his marketplace triumphs, and he launches into diatribes about making the electric company rich while he wanders through the house turning off lights in rooms that others have abandoned. But there is real pathos, too, for some of the family problems have their origin in Tyrone's misplaced values, which, in an honest moment, even he admits. Jamie never lets him forget that it was his reluctance to seek out a competent physician that led to Mary's addiction. Jamie fears, too, that Tyrone will attempt to find a bargain sanatorium for Edmund, and repeatedly warns his father against doing so.

Indirectly, Tyrone begs for understanding, even forgiveness, by recounting his hard beginnings in an Irish immigrant family, deserted by his father. His fears of landing in the poorhouse are honest enough, for they relate to that dreadful time, when he had to work twelve hours a day in a machine shop to help his family survive. Tyrone has little success in engaging his sons' sympathies, however. Although Edmund claims to understand his father better, both sons are weary of his stories and are largely indifferent to his past; their concern is with the end result of Tyrone's stinginess, not its cause.

Style

Dramatic Unities

Throughout the four acts of *Long Day's Journey intoNight*, O'Neill preserves the unities of time and place. The setting remains the living room of the Tyrone's summer home in New London, Connecticut, and, in emulation of the classical practice, the action unfolds within a single day in August of 1912, starting in the early morning and ending around midnight. Each scene and act is a segment of that single day, and within each the progress of time is scrupulously faithful to the passage of real world time, relentless and impersonal.

Symbolism

O'Neill, within the realistic limits of his drama, uses symbolism very effectively. Of fundamental significance is the fog. It serves first as a mood enhancing but wholly natural phenomenon. At the beginning of the play, the fog of the night before has lifted, and the optimism of the Tyrone family is reflected in the day's early brightness. But by dinner time in Act Three, the fog has again rolled in, its presence announced by a foghorn "moaning like a mournful whale in labor." Its return suits the encroaching sense of futility and isolation of each of the main characters, particularly Mary. It is she who asks why the "fog makes everything sound so sad and lost."

At a more complex symbolic level, the fog has further significance. It is evoked as a metaphor in the rhapsodic self-scrutiny of Edmund, for example. Confiding in his father, Edmund claims that he desires to melt into the fog, to "be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself," to become "a ghost belonging to the fog."

The fog is also a place of forgetfulness, a place where reality is dimmed, and the world is oddly distorted. It thus serves as a symbol of Mary's druginduced stupor and her escape into an idealized past that offers her a brief respite from pain.

Autobiographical Elements

The "haunted Tyrones" are dramatic portraits of O'Neill's real family, and the events of the play reflect a critical time in his life when he was about to enter a sanatorium with a mild case of tuberculosis. Like James Tyrone, O'Neill's father, James O'Neill, had been a highly successful actor, famous in the role of Edmund Daates in a stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's *Count of Monte Cristo*. Like Mary, O'Neill's mother, Ella Quinlan, became addicted to morphine under circumstances that may have been like those described in the play. And, like Jamie, O'NeilPs older brother was an alcoholic and struggling actor who literally drank himself to death after Ella O'Neill died of cancer.

Many of the play's details are also rooted in fact, including the New London setting and the Tyrone family history.

Allusions

Although the drama is not rich in allusions to public events of the time, it does use references to several writers and often includes parts of poems and character references and lines from dramatic works woven into the dialogue. While the furniture in the living room is both sparse and shabby, its two bookcases are filled with volumes of writers past and present, carefully named by O'Neill in his stage directions and mentioned in the dialogue. Tyrone's preference is for Shakespeare, who is often quoted, while Edmund's is for more modern writers and philosophers, like Nietzsche, Dowson, Marx, Baudelaire, and Swinburne, writers that his father finds gloomy, morally repugnant, or anarchistic. Jamie, too, has read his share of literature. In the final act, it is he who quotes several lines from Swinburne's "A Leave Taking" in choric counterpoint to Mary's painful monologue.

Allusion is also made to the famous American actor, Edwin Booth. It is a point of great pride for Tyrone that he had once acted on stage with Booth, who thought highly of Tyrone's skill. But the memory is painful, for Tyrone is plagued by the belief that he traded his talent short for easy money.

Foreshadowing

Long Day's Journey into Night begins cheerfully enough. The day is bright, and the initial exchanges between Tyrone and Mary are affectionate and playful, but foreboding clues to the play's tragic turn are quickly introduced. Mary's behavior hints at her return to morphine use. We learn that she had spent a sleepless night and that her appetite is poor. She is obviously restless. She also seems slightly disoriented, even mildly hysterical. Her • fluttering hands and obsessive concern with her hair, her inability to find her glasses all these foreshadow her mounting loss of self-control.

Monologue

Lengthy monologues are used in *Long Day's Journey into Night* in at least two important ways: as reveries and confessions. Central are the reveries of Mary, As she plunges deeper into her drug-induced daze, she rambles on about the past into which she desperately wants to escape. At times she seems incoherent; she even babbles. In her final appearance, she begins a long, inchoate monologue, almost totally oblivious to the efforts of other characters to break through to her. Edmund's long poetic discourse on fog is both a sort of confession and a reverie, as is Tyrone's monologue on his earlier life in theater. Almost pure confession is Jamie's meandering fourth act monologue in which he starts explaining why he stayed with Fat Violet and ends with his admission that he has tried to corrupt Edmund.

Naturalism

Naturalism, which espouses a clinical approach in literature, is noted for its "slice of life" action lines. Such fiction often lacks closure, remaining open-plotted and inconclusive. Problems, like those in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, are left unresolved, hanging on and dragging the characters into an implied future beyond the scope of the work. Naturalistic works also tend to be grim. They strip away a character's sense of dignity to expose unpleasant truths that lie at uncomfortable depths, even below the character's conscious being. It is invariably a painful process, and it is one that is central to O'Neill's play.

Oedipus Complex

Often noted is the Freudian influence on O'Neill, particularly his espousal of the Oedipal attachment of sons to their mothers and sexual jealousy and enmity towards their fathers. Although a possible inner source of guilt in Edmund, the character whose behavior most clearly evidences a latent Oedipal guilt is Jamie. He seeks a surrogate mother among matronly prostitutes and reveals a bitter jealousy towards Edmund, his chief rival for Mary's affections in the Oedipal model outlined by Freud.

Historical Context

Public Events

Events of moment from the outside world do not intrude on the Tyrone family dialogue. For example, there is no mention of the April, 1912, sinking of the *Titanic*, which took over fifteen hundred passengers to their watery death, and was the greatest maritime disaster of the age. Nor is mention made of Captain Robert Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole, which ended in March, 1912, when Scott and the last survivors died in a heroic attempt to reach awaiting shelter and provisions.

O'Neill's focus, relentlessly on the Tyrone family problems, simply made unnecessary the need for allusions to such important topical events. They are conspicuous only by their absence, a fact that contributes to the play's claustrophobic impact. An awareness of the outside world is reflected not in events but in the social consciousness of the Tyrones. They have a sense of living on the margins of respectability, not fully accepted by the "Yanks" because of Tyrone's impoverished, shanty-Irish, Roman Catholic heritage.

For the audience there is a foreshadowing of the impending American love affair with the automobile, which Henry Ford made possible when he introduced the Model T in 1908. By 1913, his company was able to sell the model for $500, putting it within the financial reach of most middle-class families. Tyrone, bound by his past, dislikes the second-hand auto he has bought for Mary, and he expresses his preference for the trolley and walking. Only Mary uses the car, and she must be driven by a paid chauffeur, to Tyrone's tight-fisted consternation. Clearly, the world is passing Tyrone by, as in real life it seemed to be passing O'Neill's father by.

A Battle of the Books

Two bookcases occupy the Tyrone living room. The first, small and plain, contains works by modern writers, many of them favorites of Edmund and Jamie: novels by Balzac, Zola, and Stendhal; plays by Ibsen, Shaw, and Strindberg; poetry by Rossetti, Wilde, Dowson, and Kipling; and philosophical works by Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, and Schopenhauer. The second, larger, glass-fronted bookcase contains older works, including three sets of Shakespeare, sets of the romantic fiction of Dumas and Victor Hugo, fifty imposing volumes of the world's greatest literature, several major works of history and miscellaneous old plays, poetry collections, and Irish histories. This second, more venerable appearing bookcase contains the preferred readings of James Tyrone, Sr. There is but one common link: Shakespeare's picture adorns the wall above the plainer bookcase, implying that he holds a place of honor even in the hearts of the sons.

The rift that separates Tyrone and his sons, though firmly based in familial guilt and shame, has been widened by their disparate tastes in literature and philosophy.

Throughout the play, literary allusions and quotations provide a dominant recurring theme in the emotionally charged rounds of repeated accusation and counter accusation. Clearly, Edmund's taste is for the realists and naturalists in fiction and drama, materialists and nihilists in philosophy, and fatalists and adherents to the detached, art-for-art's-sake school in poetry.

Tyrone finds Edmund's tastes deplorable, writers full of nothing but gloom and despair. He dismisses the lot of them as decadent, depressing, and godless. For him, Shakespeare reigns supreme. He even has a theory that the real Shakespeare was not English but an Irish Catholic.

O'Neill's real father, like Tyrone, was one of the last of the matinee idols, working in a theater that admitted little that was new or unconventional. Typical fare was warmed-over Shakespeare and heroic melodrama, works that provided lucrative vehicles for popular actors like James O'Neill but insulated the theater from the real world. Eugene O'Neill would change all that; influenced by the writers whose works rest on Edmund's bookcase, by the 1920s he would revolutionize the American theater.

Substance Abuse: Morphine and Alcohol

By 1912, responsible physicians had stopped the indiscriminate use of morphine as a pain killer and treatment for depression. New laws required pharmacists to dispense it only by authorized prescription, ending its unrestricted use. However, for many Americans like Mary Tyrone, the damage had .already been done. Morphine and laudanum, another opium derivative, had left thousands addicted, and many faced the social stigma and disgrace that drug addiction finally involved.

The excessive use of alcohol was more widely tolerated, at least in men. The saloon was an established American institution by the end of the nineteenth century. It served as a working man's social club where males could imbibe, discuss the day's events, and wager on cards and billiards. Some of the saloons were also haunts for prostitutes, while others were outright bordellos; most, like their English pub counterparts, did not admit ladies.

Many saloon patrons, like Jamie Tyrone, were problem drinkers and gamblers, prone to violence, sexual promiscuity, or insolvency. Their excesses fueled the temperance reform movement, led and supported by a growing legion of women who wanted to protect families from "demon rum" and improve the nation's moral character and health. The movement would finally win a legal victory in 1919 with the passage and ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment. But the victory proved hollow. The ban on alcohol gave rise to illegal bootlegging, bathtub gin, and the infamous speakeasy, a Jazz Age substitute for the old saloon. Unlike the saloon, the speakeasies were patronized by men and the new generation of liberated "flappers," setting the model for the bars and nightclubs that went into legal operation when prohibition ended.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis, called "consumption" by the Tyrones, was a dread disease in 1912, claiming close to 100,000 American lives annually. Treatment, provided in special hospitals called sanatoria, was largely in an experimental stage of development. Although physicians knew that a germ caused the disease, they had no miracle cure, A few used x-ray treatments, but most tried to counter the disease's symptoms with prolonged rest, special diets, and an abundance of fresh air. Edmund, who discovers that he has consumption, faces a period of recovery in a sanatorium, just as O'Neill himself did in 1912.

The Great Depression

Prohibition ended in 1933, a half dozen years before O'Neill started writing *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Throughout the 1930s, America suffered a deep economic depression from which it had not completely recovered by the time O'Neill began the play. Although O'Neill's political sympathies were with the working class, he wrote what has been termed "private tragedy," not social-conscience polemics like Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) and other works of the leftist Group Theatre. In the 1930s, O'Neill's reputation went into a decline, despite the fact that he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936.

World War II

World War II commenced in 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Two years later, on December 7, 1941, the United States entered the war when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Fortunately, by that time O'Neill had finished *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The War's impact and his declining health brought his writing to a near standstill. In 1943, in the middle of the war, O'Neill and Carlotta burned the fragmentary parts of his projected cycle of plays, which by then he knew he would never finish.

Critical Overview

In 1956, the production of *Long Day's Journey into Night* by the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Sweden won much praise for O'Neill. Potential producers soon pressured Carlotta O'Neill to release the work for an American staging, and after several months she turned the play over to Jose Quintero and two associates. Quintero's earlier revival of "*Die Iceman Cometh*, which opened in May of 1956, had already prompted new enthusiasm for O'Neill. His New York production of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, coupled with the play's publication by the Yale University Press, fully elevated O'Neill's reputation and restored him to the front ranks of American dramatists.

Leading critics like Brooks Atkinson, Walter Kerr, Harold Clurman, and Joseph Wood Krutch proclaimed the play's power on stage. Kerr, for example, in his review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, called the play "a stunning theatrical experience," while New York Times critic Atkinson announced that with the production of *Long Day's Journey into Night* the American theater had reached "stature and size." But the critical vindication of O'Neill was not unanimous. Some reviewers subtly condemned the work with tepid praise. Others pondered the play's stage power in the face of what Stephen Whicher, reviewing the Stockholm production for *Commonweal*, claimed were "several massive faults which should have destroyed it." Yet others paraded out old complaints about the playwright's heavy handed, awkward technique, tortured dialogue, painful self-flagellation, oppressive length, and morbid pessimism. One reviewer, Gilbert Seldes, commenting on the published play in *Saturday Review*, faulted the playwright's repetition, long speeches, "passion for reciting poetry," and his "desperate flatness of language." Another commentator, the *New Yorker's* Wolcott Gibbs, complained that the play "is often as barbarously written as it is possible for the work of a major writer to be," and doubted the work's status "as a major contribution to the drama of our time."

The unabashed autobiographical content of *Long Day's Journey into Night* also troubled many critics, some of whom argued that the play simply failed to evoke the emotions appropriate to tragedy because, as C. J. Rolo maintained in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the characters were "not only devoid of heroic attributes" but "even lacking in ordinary dignity and strength." For Rolo, the play failed to produce what O'Neill himself referred to as the "transfiguring nobility of tragedy."

Artistically, O'Neill, a tireless innovator, always had to swim against some pretty strong critical currents. Noting what seem like obvious flaws in his work, some important critics have only grudgingly agreed to O'Neill's status as the dean American theater. There is, for example, Eric Bentley's famous quip: "He is the leading American playwright; damn him, damn all; and damning all is a big responsibility." Bentley's frustration with O'Neill partly stems from what has always bedeviled O'Neill's critics the fact that his texts never seem to suggest the grandeur that their dramatizations often achieve on stage. Away from the magic of theater, under a reader's naked light, his plays can sometimes seem pedestrian and awkward, almost embarrassingly so.

That fact has made some writers circumspect in approaching O'Neill's published plays. Harold Clurman, reviewing the Yale text of *Long Day's Journey into Night* in the *Nation*, remarked that "O'Neill's plays are nearly always more impressive on the stage than on the printed page." O'Neill was "afaulty craftsman," perhaps, but, as Clurman noted, the Swedish production had held its audience transfixed for four and one-half hours, a performance length that modern audiences would normally find unendurable, barely tolerable in a great classic like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which litters the stage with corpses, but not in a play in which there is very little overt action and nothing is really resolved.

The length and perplexing content of *Long Day's Journey into Night* hardly made it common fare in community, regional, or even academic theaters, thus its great power on stage was largely unknown in America's heartland until 1962, when Sidney Lumet's film version appeared. The movie, running under three hours, edited out some of the original play, but what remained was hailed as a remarkable cinematic triumph that remained essentially faithful to the Broadway production of the play. The film version must be credited with once again making O'Neill popular and with revealing to its wide audience the great force that lies, not just in, but around O'Neill's words.

As Travis Bogard observed in his book *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, in Long Day's Journey into Night* O'Neill managed "a return to four boards and a passion," placing great faith in his actors, the interpreters of his text. For Bogard and many other critics, O'Neill's last works are his greatest, "the highest achievement of the American realistic theatre," and of these *Long Day's Journey into Night* is indisputably regarded as the best.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Fiero discusses the differences between the printed and produced versions of O'Neill's play. Fiero is a professor of English at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and an actor.

By the time Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* hit the boards at Broadway's Helen Hayes Theatre, absurdist playwrights like Samuel Beckett and Eugene lonesco had already begun an assault on language as an inadequate tool for authentic communication. In his play, written fifteen years earlier, O'Neill seems to have come to a similar conclusion, though in a much more familiar guise: his relentless and trenchant realism, Edmund, the playwright's persona in the baldly autobiographical play, seems to sum up O'Neill's belief as he concludes his long monologue in Act Four: "I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do. I mean, if I live. Well, it will be faithful realism, at least. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."

In Edmund's words lies the essence of the O'Neill paradox. No other playwright so highly acclaimed on stage is so often found flawed on paper. To the annoyance of many critics, *Long Day's Journey into Night,* often reputed to be O'Neill's crowning achievement, best illustrates that paradox. It is a text that, if merely read, seems to fall embarrassingly short of the glory it has achieved on stage. Unaided by the magic of the theater, at some disjointed and awkward places, the text does seem to stammer, lurch, and sputter along but it does so at least partly by design.

Theater only admits to one cardinal sin boring an audience. Literary trespasses, on the other hand, seem almost infinite. As the premiere production of *Long Day's Journey into Night* in Stockholm demonstrated, on the stage the play was absolved of its literary failings; its audiences sat through its four and one-half hour length, not just without complaint, but with unflagging attention and final approval. That fact perplexed some critics, including Henry Hewes, who in his *Saturday Review* assessment of the Swedish production and the published play ventured the opinion that O'Neill's work improved in translation. For him, the Swedish rendering gave "the play a movement and a music that it sometimes lacks in English." The raw English text, on the other hand, was permeated "with old arguments hashed, rehashed, and re-rehashed." For Hewes, there even seemed to be some emotional chord in the Swedish national character that O'Neill managed to strike, a chord, presumably, not found in the English-speaking world.

Hewes wrote on *Long Day's Journey into Night* again in the *Saturday Review*, after its Broadway opening, during which Quintero and company kept the American audience glued to their seats. The work proved every bit as stage worthy in English as it had in Swedish. For all its real or assumed literary sins, it struck, not just a Swedish, but some universal emotional chords. Hewes recanted. For him the play now became "enormously interesting," with "a breadth ... that may make it the most universal piece of stage realism ever turned out by an American playwright."

The play's stage success may baffle but should not surprise those who read O'Neill's works with some sense of the transforming power of the stage. There is a time-tested truism of theater that says that many plays read poorly but play very well (and, of course, vice versa). In the case of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the maxim may well have its greatest currency, for on paper, O'Neill's craftsmanship, in places, seems almost primitive and his expression flat and even hackneyed.

Yes, *Long Day's Journey into Night* suffers from a comparison with, for example, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's "tragedy of the common man," from the same period, is generally considered the chief rival to O'Neill's play as the greatest tragedy of the American theater. *Death of a Salesman* reads very well, revealing a stylistic mastery presumed lacking in O'Neill's play. Miller's dialogue flows smoothly, even when Willy breaks into his hallucinatory conversations with Ben, as in Act One, when Willy plays cards with Charley while conversing with the specter of his dead brother. It is a marvelous piece of word stitching and control. By comparison, O'Neill's dialogue often seems rough hewn, even crude, particularly in the sudden emotional lurches that move a character from angry recrimination to abject contrition, as in many of Jamie's lines. On paper, these sudden shifts may well seem jarring and forced, although even C. J. Rolo, otherwise hostile in his *Atlantic Monthly review*, characterized the emotional phrasing as "generally convincing."

Critics have carped about other problems with *Long Day's Journey into Night*, "the massive faults" that Stephen Whicher mentions. O'Neill has been damned for his crude technique, for the excessive incursion of borrowed poetry, for example, or his redundancy and attention-challenging prolixity. Some criticism, highly subjective, goes beyond technique to the play's content, its unrelieved gloom, its self-pitying characters, or its skeleton-rattling quest for personal absolution.

A play, of course, is not the text; it is the very thing on stage, a place where, in post-modernist terms, the text is repeatedly deconstructed to the bone. O'Neill, for all his real or imagined textual flaws, had an acute sense of the theater, the only proving ground of drama. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the playwright reveals his great faith in the interpretive artists of the living theater to find the play, not just in, but behind, between, and around his words. As Travis Bogard noted in his *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, O'Neill's "ultimate 'experiment'" was to return to "a confident reliance on his actors." In both *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Bogard claimed that "[everything, now, is in the role. An actor in these plays cannot hide behind personal mannerisms, clever business or habitual stage trickery. O'Neill has stripped all but the most minimal requirements from the stage, leaving the actors naked. They must play or perish."

Nakedness is the play's essential condition. Each character is ritually stripped of dignity and self-control as the outward mask of filial regard and concern falls away, exposing an array of conflicting emotions: love, jealousy, shame, guilt, hate within whose endless jars truth resides. Characters almost immediately begin a ritual of repeated recriminations: the miserliness of James Tyrone, the apostasy and dereliction of Jamie and Edmund, the inability of Mary to escape from her addiction. The play thus becomes

a crucible of pain, whose grinding pestle is the rude and abrasive language that resonates throughout. Characters stammer and babble because the polite and rational language of conversation cannot carry the overload of their discharging emotions. In their most poignant moments, Edmund grasps at the truth of his inner self in his own poetic metaphors, Mary escapes into narcosis, James Tyrone into self-pitying incoherency, and Jamie into the expropriated poetry of others. For each, normal discourse simply fails to bear adequate witness to the character's inner agony.

As John H. Raleigh noted in *The Plays of Eugene 0 'Neill*, throughout the play there is also "a continuous tension between the present and the past." In a ritual quest for absolution, each character is forced, at some point, to confront both. Although Mary seeks to restore her lost innocence in her romanticized girlhood, in Act Three she faces a moment of painful truth: "You expect the Blessed Virgin to be fooled by a lying dope fiend reciting words! You can't hide from her!" But, as Whicher observed in *Commonweal*, "the most poignant effect of the play is the counter-movement by which the mother retreats into illusion while the others move to a clear sight of truth." Ironically, that clear sight comes through alcohol, which thickens their tongues and numbs their minds. They face themselves honestly when least able to convey their honesty in lucid and coherent language.

The men try to cope with their current feelings by a protracted and self-critical examination of their past. Each has at least one confessional monologue, painfully linking the past to the present in an effort to expiate his human failings. James Tyrone, for example, explaining that his miserliness springs from his deep-rooted fear of poverty, evinces some self-disgust because he sold his acting talent short for material security. Although long and somewhat redundant, these speeches are necessary to explain the ambivalent feelings that *Eugene O 'Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretive Study of the Plays* author Doris V. Falk asserted "lead to tense, exhausting, and brilliant drama."

Much of what seems clumsy or primitive in the text becomes poignant on stage the heavy-handed reliance on fog as symbol, for example, or Jamie's mood lurching between sneering accusations and instant regret. The physical gestures and objects, merely described in the play, become very important complements to the dialogue. In fact, the physical objects create a poignant effect in proportion to their very scarcity, particularly in the last act, when the Tyrone family tragedy seems somehow embedded in a single lighted bulb, a worn out deck of playing cards, a bottle of cheap whiskey, and an old, satin wedding gown. Oddly enough, some descriptions in stage directions, richly suggestive on the page, may be impossible to render in the theater. For example, as Mary sinks deep into her morphine-induced narcosis, her eyes grow increasingly brighter. In staging the play, the description can only serve to cue actors, to draw them to a physical focal point revealing Mary's relapse into her addiction and attendant isolation. On the other hand, the fog horn, beginning in the third act, takes on the force of a keening chorus of mourners, a powerful counterpoint to the characters' pain in its melancholic and desolate wail. Its power is only hinted at by the stage directions.

The O'Neill paradox is a troubling problem. Plays that pass into the realm of dramatic literature must ultimately survive as texts to be read, as fixed and permanent as fiction and poetry. The staged play, on the other hand, is ephemeral and forever changing right up to the final curtain of the play's last performance. O'Neill, a great innovator and experimenter, worked tirelessly to test the limits of the stage, not leave behind a canon of literary masterpieces. Unfortunately for his reputation, many of his plays, theatrical swans, are textual ugly ducklings, and, like his actors, must be played or run the grave risk of perishing.

Source: John Fiero, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt from a review of Long Day's Journey into Night that originally appeared in the New York Times on November 8, 1956, Atkinson applauds both the play and the production, asserting: "Long Day's Journey into Night has been worth waiting for. It restores the drama to literature and the theatre to an."

As drama critic for the New York Times from 1925 to 1960, Atkinson was one of the most influential reviewers in America.

With the production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Helen Hayes last evening, the American theatre acquires size and stature.

The size does not refer to the length of Eugene O'Neill's autobiographical drama, although a play three and three-quarter hours long is worth remarking. The size refers to his conception of theatre as a form of epic literature.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is like a Dostoevsky novel in which Strindberg had written the dialogue. For this saga of the damned is horrifying and devastating in a classical tradition, and the performance under Jose Quintero's direction is inspired.

Twelve years before he died in 1953, O'Neill epitomized the life of his family in a drama that records the events of one day at their summer home in New London, Conn., in 1912. Factually it is a sordid story about a pathologically parsimonious father, a mother addicted to dope, a dissipated brother and a younger brother (representing Eugene O'Neill) who has TB and is about to be shipped off to a sanitarium.

Roughly, those are the facts. But the author has told them on the plane of an O'Neill tragedy in which the point of view transcends the material. The characters are laid bare with pitiless candor. The scenes are big. The dialogue is blunt. Scene by scene the tragedy moves along with a remorseless beat that becomes hypnotic as though this were life lived on the brink of oblivion.

Long Day's Journey Into Night could be pruned of some of its excesses and repetitions and static looks back to the past. But the faults come, not from tragic posturing, but from the abundance of a great theatre writer who had a spacious point of view. This summing-up of his emotional and artistic life ranks with *Mourning Becomes Electro and Desire Under the Elms*, which this department regards as his masterpieces....

Long Day's Journey Into Night has been worth waiting for. It restores the drama to literature and the theatre to art.

Source; Brooks Atkinson, in a review of *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) in *On Stage: Selected Theater Reviews from The New York Tunes*, 1920-1970, edited by Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman, Arno Press, 1973, pp. 378-79.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Whicher provides a favorable assessment of the Swedish production of Long Day's Journey into Night, and offers high praise for O'Neill's skill as a playwright, noting especially his talent for writing compelling drama that contains sensitive, moving insights into human nature.

In accordance with the dying wish of Eugene O'Neill, his last play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, was given its world premiere in Stockholm by " *Dramaten*," a group which has gained an international reputation for its distinguished productions of O'Neill plays over a period of thirty years. Their superb presentation of his "last letter to the world" makes clear that it is a *play*, and not a memoir cast in dialogue form as it has been characterized by certain American reviewers of the book.

It is true, as these reviewers point out, that the work has a great deal of autobiographical interest and emphasis. The Tyrone family which it depicts is O'Neill's own, and the story which he lays bare, a story of "the damned," is true to the facts as we know them. Furthermore, the mood of this last play is the same as that which dominates many of his earlier, largely autobiographical works the mood of homelessness, the sense of helplessness, the death-longing, the constant background of the "ole davil, sea" which marked the plays of the S.S. Glencairn group, *Anna Christie, Beyond the Horizon* and, with varying disguises, *The Straw and All God's Chillun Got Wings*.

The significant fact, however, is not that the work contains autobiographical elements, but that O'Neill has transcended them so completely. The undeniable impact of its current Swedish production, for example, certainly cannot be explained by the self-revelation which the play contains. Audiences are not sitting on hard seats night after night, absorbed in this play for over four hours, just because it gives them information about O'Neill. Nor does its autobiographical element explain my own reaction. Starting with a prejudice against O'Neill, and watching its first performance with no knowledge of the play, I found my attention held from first to last, and was moved as one can only be, I would suppose, by real drama. Since then I have studied the English text of the play and have gone back to the stage production to find it just as gripping. If our definitions of tragedy do not fit this work, we should perhaps rethink our definitions.

For this reason, I can not agree with those critics of the play who speak of O'Neill's inability to cut, as if we had another *Look Homeward, Angel* on our hands. I predict that any future Maxwell Perkins who tries to cut this to the limits of an ordinary play will find that it can not be done.

The play as a whole is a solid, sinewy, exceptionally well-built piece of work. O'Neill has left us a big, powerful Something, like a yacht in the living room, which can't and won't be dismissed. Whether we think it ought to or not, this play does prove itself by the only proper test for a play: performance. It is gripping and moving theater.

That being the fact, we need to ask why, for it has several massive faults which should have destroyed it. It austerely ignores almost every means, including action, by which the usual play interests an audience. As Joyce, Proust, and Woolf have written novels that abandon story, so this is a tragedy that abandons "drama," and, further, it makes its journey on the usual square wheels of O'Neill's style, although some speeches are eloquent in context.

Furthermore, the fact remains that he asks actors to sustain and audience to respond to one emotion helpless grief at hopeless loss for nearly five hours. For all his skill and that of his interpreters, that is asking a great deal, by all rights it should have been much too much.

One reason why it is not is the play's masterly construction. Is there a *tour de force* like this in modern drama a play that sustains mounting tension through so much talk and so little action, with no fantasy, spectacle, poetry, or play of ideas to help it on? In *Death of a Salesman* Arthur Miller uses flashbacks that contrast present and past with dramatic sharpness. A book that comes close to O'Neill's play in theme and mood, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, dazzles the reader with its juggling of the time sequence. O'Neill, hewing to the line of strict naturalism, foregoes all this, so that the past can enter his play only as narrated in the present. Yet the past is his subject, or a large part of it. The way he has solved a problem which no other dramatist would have attempted is a revelation of O'Neill's dramatic craft.

The chief reason for the play's success, however is the character portrayal. James and Mary Tyrone are two of the richest roles in dramatic literature. The whole interest of the play is in its character revelation. Its excitement consists in feeling ourselves penetrate steadily deeper into the lives of this family until we reach the full "pity, understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones" with which the author wrote. He not only makes us see, he makes us care; we value these people as they value each other. Nothing has impressed Swedish audiences more than the play's warmth. O'Neill has shown force and insight in other plays, but never this love and compassion for his characters.

Beyond the deep human interest, however, is the tone and mood of the whole, what we must call the religious dimension. O'Neill has constantly tried in his plays to treat the "big subject," the Mystery beyond human life. One can argue that this is what has spoiled some of his work. Here he succeeds; he is not soft, as in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, nor abstract, as in *Lazarus Laughed* or *The Iceman Cometh*. An awareness of life as a mysterious shaping force, a vague dark enemy like the Boyg in *Peer Gynt*, rises quiedy and naturally from the human situation and gives it tragic stature.

A word must be said of the chief device used to give this effect, the foghorn. Perhaps this "sick whale in the back yard" which the Swedes, not having our Moby Dick reflexes, translated "sick elephant" seems over-obvious in the reading. As handled by " *Dramaten*," however, that living yet inhuman voice in the background of the last two dark acts, punctuating and commenting on the action and calling us back, as it does the

characters, to the thought of the fog and sea around us, has sometimes almost intolerable power. Of all the remarkable sound effects in O'Neill's plays, this is the finest.

But the catharsis of *Journey* is not to be achieved by a trick. In this work O'Neill passes his final judgment on the life he escaped surely with relief three years ago. As the night and fog close in, the characters struggle toward honesty, helped on by whiskey, which O'Neill uses here as elsewhere as a kind of truth serum. What they reach is hopeless resignation, helpless love, and a longing for death. Man can live by illusions, O'Neill says, and he can live by faith, which is probably the same thing, but ultimately neither is any good. The most poignant effect of the play is the counter-movement by which the mother retreats intoillusion while the others move to a clear sight of truth. But she knows too: "There is no other way I can stop the pain all the pain." Nor can faith help. The father's Catholic belief is "bog trotter" superstition, scornfully rejected by his sons, who quote *Zamthustra*: "God is dead." The mother's dream of recovering her innocent conventgirl's trust in the Virgin is pathetically futile. One call of the foghorn refutes her.

The climax of the play is Edmund's long speech in the fourth act about the "high spots" in his memories. "For a moment I lost myself actually lost my life. I was set free!... For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on toward nowhere, for no good reason!" Remembering O'Neill's long effort to assert some "meaning," ending with the "electrical display" *of Strange Interlude*, we can hear the sick older man summing up his life through the mouth of his younger self. "I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!"

It may be that *Long Day's Journey Into Night* has succeeded in Sweden because this heartsick pessimism goes down easier here than it would in the United States. Anywhere it makes a strange tragedy. If we accept, for example, Francis Fergusson's formula for drama, that it begins in purpose and works through passion to perception, then we have to say that purpose survives here only as a long-abandoned illusion, that perception is essentially complete early in the play, and that nearly all we have is four acts of agony. This is, rather, a play of discovery, like *Oedipus*, but of discovery for the audience only; the characters have little left to discover.

Yet this may be the modern tragedy. In its passivity, its despair, its longing, its undramatic reduction of human life to meaningless suffering, and its agonized honesty, it strikes a keynote of our modern mood. If we are to write honestly, this is what we must face. If we are to work through to something more "positive," this is what we must overcome. O'Neill's journey is also our own.

Source: Stephen Whicher, "O'Neill's Long Journey" in *Commonweal*. Vol LXIII, no. 24, March 16, 1956, pp. 614-15.

Adaptations

Long Day's Journey into Night was first adapted to film by Sidney Lumet, and starred Katharine Hepburn, Sir Ralph Richardson, Jason Robards, Jr., and Dean Stockwell. A black and white film, Embassy, 1962; available from Republic Pictures Home Video.

Long Day's Journey into Night was produced again as a made for television film by Jonathan Miller, using Sinclair Lewis's adaptation of the play, and starring Peter Gallagher, Jack Lemmon, Bethel Leslie, and Kevin Spacey, in 1988; available from Lorimar Home Video/Vestron.

A third version of the play, filmed at the Tom Patterson Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, was directed by David Wellington, and starred Peter Donaldson, Martha Henry, William Hutt, and Tom McCamus, Stratford Festival, 1996; not currently available.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the history of the use of morphine and the problems of morphine addiction from the time of its chemical isolation from opium in 1806 to the present day.

Research the development of sanatoria or hospitals devoted to consumptive diseases and their methods of treating tuberculosis prior to the development of modern vaccines and chemotherapy.

Investigate the plight of Irish Catholic immigrants to America at the time of the potato blight famine that struck Europe in 1845.

Select one or more of the poets, novelists, or play wrights mentioned or quoted in the play and investigate their literary legacy and influence on O'Neill.

Research the state of the American theater at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly the negative effect that the profit motives of commercial theaters had on the quality of their productions.

Compare and Contrast

1910s: World War I begins in the summer of 1914, with the United States joining the allies against Germany in 1917.

1940s and 50s: O'Neill finishes *Long Day's Journey into Night* prior to America's entry into World War E on December 7, 1941. The Cold War with the Soviet bloc flares into open combat in Korea, a "police action" ending with an armistice agreement signed on My 27, 1953, four months before O'Neill dies. In 1956 the Soviet Union cracks down on dissidents in Poland and Hungary; that same year *Long Day's Journey into Night* wins O'Neill, posthumously, his final Pulitzer Prize.

Today: The 1990s bring an end to the Cold War and to fears of a nuclear holocaust.

1910s: The airplane, automobile, and motion pictures, all in their infancy, begin a radical transformation of daily American life.

1940s and 50s: Films, with sound since 1928, are the most popular entertainment medium; commercial airlines continue to replace trains in distance passenger travel; and American houses start sporting double garages. By the 1950s, television becomes both popular and increasingly affordable; jet engines become common on commercial planes; and large finned automobiles with powerful engines streak through America on a growing network of parkways and highways.

Today: Houses without at least two television sets grow rare; railroads continue a losing struggle to survive; and automobiles, while legally moving faster on interstate highways again, get smaller, more fuel-efficient, and ever more expensive,

1910s: America begins reflecting an awareness of foreign movements in art and letters, of the French naturalists like Zola and Balzac, and the realistic drama of Ibsen, Stnndberg, and Chekhov; O'Neill reveals that foreign influence in his very first plays.

1940s and 50s: American readers remain drawn to the fiction of William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald; the plays of Clifford Odets, Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman, and Robert Sherwood also have a dedicated following, but O'Neill's reputation remains stagnant. By the 1950s, a host of postwar novelists and poets make their mark, challenging Faulkner and Hemingway, Frost and Eliot, for book stall space; the realistic problem play reaches its maturity in the works of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, William Inge, and O'Neill, while avant garde rumblings are heard in the Off- and Off-Off Broadway wings.

Today: Laurels in fiction are up for grabs; in theater, August Wilson, Sam Shepard, and David Mamet continue making an indelible mark.

1910s: Through stricter federal laws governing drug use and the militant success of the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, America seeks to

end drug addiction and alcohol abuse; achieves Prohibition with ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919.

1940s and 50s: With prohibition repealed in 1933, America returns to imbibing alcohol, creating a new, post-World War II problem: the drunk driver; morphine still widely used as a pain killer. The Beat Generation brings "mind expanding" drugs like marijuana closer to the mainstream; middle-class America turns to tran-quilizers to cope with depression; hard drugs begin to plague the inner cities; synthetics like methadone replace morphine in some medical applications.

Today: Drug abuse remains a major problem, with crack cocaine and heroin an inner-city blight and marijuana use common everywhere in America, especially among the young; groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) help stiffen penalties for driving while under the influence, in some states upgrading repeat offenses to a felony.

What Do I Read Next?

A Moon for the Misbegotten, produced in 1947, was written by O'Neill as a eulogy for his brother, Jamie, who is fictionalized as Jamie Tyrone m the play. As he is in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Jamie is an alcoholic who seeks solace in the arms of a series of large women. The play deals with his hapless affair with Josie Hogan. It was a work that O'Neill finally came to loathe, possibly because his own son followed in his uncle's footsteps and committed suicide.

Trouble in the Flesh (1959), is Max Wylie's graphic fictional account of Seton Farrier, whose life as the greatest dramatist of his day is clearly based on O'Neill's biography.

East of Eden (1952), John Steinbeck's fictional saga of the Trask family investigates themes parallel to those treated in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Based on the biblical story of Cain and Abel, the novel focuses on family depravity, sibling jealousy and rivalry, guilt, and forgiveness.

Death of a Salesman (1949), Arthur Miller's great "tragedy of the common man," has some parallels with O'Neill's play, including the tragic consequences of material pursuits and the alienation of sons from their father. Miller's play is the principal rival claimant to *Long Day's Journey into Night* as America's greatest tragedy.

Buried Child (1978), Sam Shepard's mythic study of a dysfunctional family riddled with guilt' for the murder of a real or illusory child, with some parallels to O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* in its themes and retrospective method.

A Hatful of Rain (1955), Michael V. Gazzo's play dealing with the impact of a veteran's drug addiction on the lives of his wife, father, and brother has thematic parallels to O'Neill's work. An excellent 1957 film version won Anthony Franciosa an Academy Award nomination for best actor.

Further Study

Hayes, Richard "A Requiem for Mortality," *Commonweal*, Vol. 64, February 1,1957, pp. 467-68.

A belated review of the Broadway production of *Long Day's Journey into Ntght* praising both the play and the cast for achieving "tragic nobility" within a realistic framework.

McDonnell, Thomas P. "O'Neill's Drama of the Psyche," *Catholic World*, Vol. 197, Apnl, 1963, pp. 120-25.

Argues that *Long Day's Journey into Night* is O'Neill's apotheosis in his quest for a tragedy of self, of his own tormented psyche.

Manheira, Michael *Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship*, Syracuse University Press, 1982

This study's introduction, its chapter on *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and its appendix focused on the play's motifs offer solid help m interpreting the play

Pflster, Joel. "The Cultural Web in O'Neill's *Journey/' in Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse*, University of North Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 203-15.

Relates Mary from *Long Day's Journey into Night* to Ophelia in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Annie Keeney in O'Neill's earlier play, lie.

Raleigh, John Henry. "O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and New England Irish-Catholicism," *Partisan Review*, Vol 26, no. 4, Fall, 1959, pp. 573-92

A helpful background study that relates the "dualism of religion-blasphemy" that permeates the play to Catholicism and Irish myth.

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Seldes, Gilbert. "Long day's Journey into Night," *Saturday Review*, Vol 39, February 25,1956, pp. 15-16

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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