

## SYNTHESIS OF PAST AND PRESENT IN O'NEILL'S *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

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### Abstract

*Past is essential for an understanding of the present. It develops personal ego or conscious from the memories of one's sins and evil doings and then there is the personal conscious or ego of the individual, which come to a man simply by virtue of his membership in the human race, tribe and family. O'Neill shows how the ego and or self of characters blot out under the impact of fear and how their individual and racial memories kick on upon them, because of the disintegration or regression of his ego or personal conscious. Men commit a fatal mistake when he depends on his ego too much in order to fulfill their desire, without allowing the power of the unconscious. The baffled sense of loss, which the characters feel, the sense of something in life, which evades them, is expressed in the silences, which are built into the text. This study shows that Men are seeking for happiness through falsity keeps them away from others as well as themselves in order to get solace in the present but unable to find solace. So they move the past and isolate themselves from the reality and from their true self.*

*Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) is the most personal of O'Neill's plays. It is a simple naturalistic family drama without any plot contrivance but is remarkable for its uncommonly moving revelation of characters and human relation. The elegiac but harrowing portrayal of a family's love hate conflicts places this play among O'Neill's greatest works. The play deals with the inter-family isolation and shows how an outwardly prosperous and happy family suffers from isolation. They are searching for happiness but unable to find solace. O'Neill's work is concerned with what Camus called "the division between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints!" (Biggsby 116) The following analysis intends to focus the synthesis of past and present through many characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Social thought is based primarily on the liberalism of the days prior to 1914. O'Neill's philosophy reflects the period which followed the World War. He frequently uses the terminology of psychoanalysis, and this terminology is often employed in discussion of his work. But psychoanalysis as a method of psychological investigation has no bearing on O'Neill's play. He tries to sever contact with the world by setting up an inner kingdom, which is emotionally and spiritually independent. (Gupta 120) If we enter O'Neill inner kingdom and examine it critically, we find ourselves on very familiar ground. O'Neill's philosophy is a repetition of past ideas. In this, he follows the line suggested by Freud, the line of regression, a flight to the past. (Gassner 42) Drama is the most objective of the arts, but this great dramatist made personal experience the basis of his plays. This makes a comprehending of his life and character essential for a proper appreciation of his plays. O'Neill father was the best known of American actors, becoming especially popular for the performance in a dramatization of Monte Cristo, he acted on tours through the country. The greater instability comes from James O'Neill's heavy drinking and Ella's addiction to morphine. This is now

common knowledge through O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, become a source of regret to O'Neill; his father, who had been praised by Edwin Booth for his performance as Othello, had the son believed, dissipated, his talents in popular melodrama.

It is important to notice the beginning the play *Long Day's Journey into Night* that O'Neill does not condemn any one of these characters more than any other. Instead, he feels a great sympathy for all four Tyrone's, as he wrote to his wife in 1940 when he completed the play. All the characters have harsh faults, and all are capable of great cruelty. At the same time, they are all part of one family that has stayed together throughout many years of hardship, and they can all be very loving and compassionate. One cannot single out any particular character as the protagonist or antagonist; one can instead see the themes that create conflict in the family and the ways the family repair itself when it falls into disorder.

There are two major health problems in the play, which will slowly be uncovered over the course of the four acts, but they are both hinted early on. The first is Edmund's consumption. We see that he is having coughing fits in the morning, and, even though Mary insists that he has merely a bad cold, we will learn later on that he is undoubtedly inflicted with tuberculosis and will have to live in a sanatorium in order to be cured. The second problem in the play is Mary's addiction to morphine, which began when a doctor prescribed the drug to her after she gave birth to Edmund as a means of stopping her intense pain. As this play opens, Mary has just returned from a long treatment program designed to break her addiction. She shows signs of recovering; she is gaining weight again; but we will learn later on in the play that she has quickly become a full-blown morphine addict once again.

Throughout the play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the issue of the past is one that is brought up quite frequently, by the entire Tyrone family. Each character has had to tolerate their own sufferings, and most of these are related in some way to other family members. From an early age his father left Tyrone and so growing up to him was actually survival. He managed to help provide his small family with a bare minimum of food and clothing, and eventually started making a substantial amount of money through hard work. However, this successful story has resulted in a permanent fault of character. Speaking of his childhood near the end of the play, he explains, "It was in those days I learned to be a miser...once you've learned a lesson, it's hard to unlearn it." (O'Neill 129) The summerhouse seems to be truly a home, and the comforts it offers, though modest, are sufficient to the family's well being. But the illusion of the home is an essential image, to establish for it is not what it seems. Mary never considered the house to be of any comfort, the room is shabby, poorly furnished, a temporary residence at best. It is like the cheap hotels of Tyrone's road tours, where Mary has waited alone, spending nights in idleness. Although Mary and the entire family try to hide this in the beginning of the play, the truth emerges, and we learn that they are trying, ever so desperately, to deny the real world, to fog it up. As Mary says, "it hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more." (O'Neill 84)

The past has made life difficult for Tyrone and his family because even though he is well off, his unwillingness to spend money has cut off many opportunities, the most deliberate being the unwillingness to pay for a hospital for his dying son. Each of the principle characters, James and Mary Tyrone and their sons Jamie and Edmund, is borne toward his final destination by a series of forces, between which he may even seem to go with the flow in the contrary direction. The rhythm of the play is regularly interrupted and regularly resumed. It is Mary's backward movement into drug-addiction, which dominates the play, and the stages of her regress give the play its structure—"the past is the present, isn't it?", cries Mary. It is the future too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us." (O'Neill 75)

O'Neill, the probing artists, seeks in the past for the origination of guilt and blame but his characters seek happiness and dreams. All four seek solace from the shocks of life in nostalgic

memories, which they reach through different paths. Mary's past is happy with her convent school and in her loving family. She wanted to be a nun or a concert pianist but it became dull because of her early marriage with a miser and drinker man. This frustration becomes an obsession for Mary. Mary says:

"I was brought up in a respectable home and educated in the best convent in the Middle West. Before I met Mr. Tyrone hardly knew there was such a thing as a theatre. I was a very pious girl. I even dreamed of becoming a nun. I've never had the slightest desire to be an actress." (O'Neill 87)

During deliberate of her third child Edmund, Tyrone was too cheap to find her a doctor who would have found another way to deal with her pain after childbirth, so she took morphine to kill her pain and became addicted to morphine. This has not only crippled her sense of will power and her physical and mental condition, but has made her fault everyone but herself. This denial is obvious to the other family members, but in their own ways they are all guilty of lying to themselves and others. The children are bitter of the way in which they were brought up; they dislike their mother's addictions and Tyrone's money pocketing ways. (Berlin 173) While sometimes Edmund denies the fact that his mother is back on the drugs, Tyrone denies that he is a miser and a drinker: "I never in my life had to be helped to bed, or missed a performance." (O'Neill 98) Mary also denies to herself that Edmund is seriously ill. She claims that he has a summer cold, nothing more. More importantly, she pretends not to have a morphine addiction. She makes every excuse possible for why she engages in taking morphine, but never confesses to the true nature of her problem: "It's just a pose you get out of books! You're not really sick at all." (O'Neill 78).

As the play progresses into the night, and as we investigate into the mind of Mary, we learn of her many past fantasies. She believed she lived in a loving household, when, in actuality, her father was an alcoholic. She claimed that she wanted to be a nun or a concert pianist. But the dreams of lost faith and spent talent are dreams of escape. She wanted to flee to where she could be sustained by a vision and live a simple, virginal existence. She needed to be alone in a protected silence. In seeking her "true self," Mary sought a self that didn't exist. She places her failures on every member of the family but herself—Tyrone for being niggardly; Jamie for killing Edwin; Edmund for being born and causing her addiction to morphine, "I was so healthy before Edmund was born... bearing Edmund was the last straw." (O'Neill 87) Mary's refusal to accept her responsibilities has bred in her responsibility that she is incapable of bearing, and she uses the morphine to get rid of the pain.

For Mary, the key turns the lock of the past is morphine. It kills the pain. Her addiction betrays her religion, family and home. She cannot pray; she is in a state of despair; and the charge of her family only annoyed her guilt. Throughout the action, she is trying to escape the pain of the present entirely; and at the end, with the aid of drugs she has finally returned to the purity, innocence and hope of her girlhood. Although the title of the play suggests a progress, therefore, the work moves always backwards. The long journey is a trip into the past. (Berlin 174)

O'Neill suggests this in many ways, partly through ambiguous images of light and dark, sun and mist. The play begins at 8.30 in the morning with a trace of fog in the air, and concludes sometime after midnight, with the house fogbound—the mood changing from sunny cheer over Mary's apparent recovery to gloomy despair over her new descent into hell. The night-time scenes occur logically at the end of the day; but subjectively, the night proceeds the day, for the play closes on a phantasmagoria of past time. (Berlin 173)

Under the influence of Mary's drugs –and to some extent, the alcohol of the men-time fades away and stays close, and disappears: past, present, future become one. Mary drifts blissfully into illusions under cover of the night, which function like shroud against the harsh, daylight reality. So does that fog that Mary loves: "it hides you from the world and the world from you", she says, you feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you

any more.” Her love for her husband and children neutralize by her terrible sense of guilt, Mary withdraws more and more into herself. And this, in turn, intensifies the unhappiness of the men: “this, in turn, intensifies the unhappiness of the men: ‘the hardest thing to take, says Edmund, ‘is the black wall she builds around herself. Or it’s more like a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself.... It’s as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us.”

Mary Tyrone makes the evolution most clearly throughout the entire play. In Act 1, her hands move restlessly, and she seems to be quite nervous. When she appears in Act II, one notices no change except that she appears to be less nervous but then one becomes aware that her eyes are brighter and there is a strange detachment in her voice and manner.

“Oh, I’m so sick and tired of pretending this is a home! ....You don’t know how to act in a home!....You never have wanted one never since we were married! You should have remained a bachelor and lived in second- rate hotels and entertained your friends in bar-rooms!” (O’Neill 58)

In the same page she says, “Yes, it is inconsiderate of me to dig up the past, when I know your father and Jamie must be hungry”. (O’Neill 58) These subtle signs of her relapse back to alcohol dependency continue until the final scene, where she is most obviously under the influences of a chemical substance. The morphine seems to make her suggestive of the past. In Act III, she talked about her two childhood dreams of becoming a concert pianist or a nun. By Act IV she has pulled her old wedding dress from the attic and attempted to play the piano again. This presents a psychological reasoning for her decline. She considers herself to be growing old and ugly, “that wedding gown was nearly the death of me and the dress maker too!” (O’Neill 99) and often refers how she was at one time young and beautiful. To her, the ugliness of the hands is the ugliness of what she has become over the last twenty-five years which is why she uses the pain of the rheumatism in them as her reason for the morphine. Thus, it can be said that at one time she used the morphine to rid of pain, and when she realized that it can help to regain her youthful again she became addicted. (Gassner 39)

Being dissatisfied with the present she moves toward the present and she also moves toward the past in search of peace and security. She passionately remembers her thrilling convent days and her romantic affairs with James. She recollects her tragic experience and the life and the death-struggle at the time of Edmund’s birth. She can’t forget the cheap quack that prescribed her morphine to kill her pain, and thus made her a permanent drug addiction. She blames herself for causing the death of Edmund due to her sheer negligence and indifference, she realizes that she has been a liar throughout her life, and has been false not only to others but also to herself. Thus she remains isolated from the present. (Gupta 124)

Mary’s failure is also linked with her inter family relationships. When she was charged of setting back she said it would server all of you right if it was true this suggest that she is seeking good reason to keep on her drug addiction by using her family’s doubts as a reason to set back:

“My mother did not she was very pious and strict. I think she was a little jealous. She didn’t approve of my marrying – especially an actor. I think she hoped I would become a nun....But she was mistaken, wasn’t she, James? I haven’t been such a bad wife, have I?” (O’Neill 99)

On the other hand, Jamie Tyrone is Thirty-three years old son of James and Mary. He is the hellion of the family, drinking heavily, frequenting houses of prostitution, and ignoring his father’s frequent requests to make something of himself. He, like other family members of his family, suffers from a sense of isolation and separation. Although he is highly intelligent, he has been satisfied simply to put in time as an actor in a job his father obtained for him. Jamie’s failure in life is partly due to the guilt he feels about the death of his infant brother, Eugene. When Jamie was a child, Eugene slight measles from him and died shortly thereafter. Jamie’s father and mother continually tell off Jamie because they think he is a bad influence on Edmund.

Jamie is the distress of the family. He gets pleasure from the company of whores and other alcoholic sinks. He was expelled from college because of his excesses alcohol drunk instead of a fine brain. Mary says "...for years after he went to boarding school, we received such glowing report... all teachers told us what a fine brain he had...even after began to drink and they had to expel him," (O'Neill 95) and was an outwardly terrible influence on his younger brother Edmund. His mother finger at Tyrone in search of his addiction, Mary holds responsible Tyrone for Jamie's alcoholism, since he gives food to Jamie a teaspoon of whisky as a child whenever he was restless. Yet Jamie charges his mother for his alcoholism is attached directly to morphine addiction: subsequently by the time his drinking has gone up and gone down in relation to Mary's past. He thinks that if she stroked it he could rid of it.

It is clear that his alcoholism is also the root of his failure in life. Jamie's malicious attitude towards Edmund reveals the main cause of his isolation. He hates Edmund because he is the root cause of their mother's drug addiction. He thinks that Edmund has stolen the loves of his mother's and forced him to live a loveless life. (Gupta 126)

In Act IV, Jamie confesses that he has overvalued his lifestyle in order for his brother to fail. It appears that job; Edmund too has a through alcohol. Although their relationship seems hale and hearty, it is obviously bitter. It is not unusual between two brothers that the younger pay a call on to the elder and Edmund does. Knowing this, Jamie purposely sets a shocking example due to his jealousy of his mother's affection for him. This suggests that Jamie knows the harmfulness of alcohol and continues to inflict the bad practice onto his brother in how he "made getting drunk romantic"! made whores fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobs they really are....Wanted to fail always jealous of you. Mama baby, papa's pet I know that's not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can't help hating your guts!" (O'Neill 146) But Edmund can't remind or believe it. So he almost frightened and said Jamie "Cut it out! You're crazy!" (O'Neill 146)

Edmund Tyrone the younger son of Tyrone's is a victim of isolation and loss of belongingness. His mother's view, he is an unwanted child. His mother says to him "you were born afraid, because I was so afraid to bring you into the world." (O'Neill 96) Even his jealous brother who is the cause of misery, ask in a defensive manner "thou who are blaming? Edmund, for being born?" (O'Neill 34). He suffers severe coughing predicts that worry his family, especially his mother, who are the younger Tyrone son; he is ten years younger than Jamie. Her mother reffuses to believe he is symptoms of a serious illness but a cold bad. His father expects he will be cured. Tyrone says, "I have every hope Edmund will be cured." (O'Neill 69) The other members of the family suspect that he has consumption (tuberculosis), and medical tests prove them right. Edmund shows promise as a writer. Like his father, he enjoys whiskey even though he knows his doctor has forbidden it.

An intellectual and romantic dreamer, he learns during the play that he is afflicted with consumption (tuberculosis), which means that he will have to spend up to a year in a sanatorium. His father's stinginess, his mother's love-hate attitude, his brother's envious nature and, above all, his poetic nature are combined forces behind his lonely suffering. Like his brother and father, he is partially alcoholic, and he has a tendency to squander money, although he works harder than Jamie. Mary always holds out hope that he will become a success on Edmund most vividly depicts why he drinks. He uses alcohol as an escape from thought When he depicts the night he tried to kill himself, "Yes particularly the time I tried to commit suicide at Jimmie the priest's and almost did." (O'Neill 128) His father claims that he was morbid because he was drunk. Edmund reply angrily "I was stone cold sober. That was the trouble. I'd stopped to think too long." (O'Neill 128)

Psychologically, he feels that he will not overcome his illness, so he may as well drink anyhow. (Gupta 128) Edmund says "it was a great mistake, my being born a man; I would have been much more successful as a sea- gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at



home,...who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!.” (O’Neill 135) As he is more attached to his mother, he feels the load of his mother’s dope-addiction, weighing heavy on his heart. Like his mother, he avoids reality and seeks an escape into the fog of unreality: “the fog was where I wanted to be...Everything looked and sounded unreal...As I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost.” (O’Neill 113)

He has always used alcohol as an escape the past, but now it could prove fatal. These two statements clearly pronounce that Edmund uses alcohol in order to forget. There is irony in this because everything that happens that day makes it impossible to forget the past.

James Tyrone is retired actor. Although he is 65, he looks about 10 years younger. He was born into a humble Irish Catholic family and began working hard at an early age, developing an appreciation for money that turned him into a tightwad as an adult. He was a skilled actor but never realized his full potential because he was content to play the same roles again and again. As a wife she never expects that their children blame their father because of his penny saving tendency. So Mary reminds Jamie about their father past. Mary says, “ It is you who should have more respect! Stop sneering at your father! You ought to be proud you’re his! He may have his faults. Who has not? But he’s worked hard all his life. He made his way up from ignorance and poverty to the top of his profession....”(O’Neill 52) Tyrone has a fondness for Shakespeare and whiskey. James is a traveling actor who performed Shakespeare. James O’Neill earned a great deal of money as an actor but, like his fictional counterpart, was unwilling to spend money because of a worrying fear that he might suffer a damaging financial U-turn. He reminds how he learned to be a miser so Tyrone again setting back to the past. He says, “It was those days I learned to be a miser. A dollar was worth so much then. And once you’ve learned a lesson, it’s hard to unlearn it.”(O’Neill 129) He claims that he has never been too drinking to miss a performance, “I’ve never missed a performance in my life. That’s the proof! If I did get drunk it is not you who should blame me. No man has ever had a better reason.”(O’Neill 71)

Yet Mary says, I know what to expect. You will be drunk by tonight. “Don’t think I’m finding fault, dear. You must do as you please. I won’t mind.” (O’Neill 71) Tyrone is the head of the family, and his children are likely to follow his example. As fore stated, Tyrone was blamed for Jamie’s alcohol problems because when Jamie had nightmares, Tyrone gave him a teaspoon of whisky to help him sleep. However such kinds of problematic functions by family head members that can greatly affect on the others family members. The Tyrone family is very dysfunctional, especially in their drinking habit. They seek every scope to drink, and constantly try to justify themselves. Because this is true, their addiction feed off each other and makes abstention nearly impossible. Mary needs for morphine is enhanced by Edmund ill condition and the constant suspicion that she is using again. Edmund, Jamie and Tyrone all drink because Mary has relapsed, and they were hoping that she could beat it. Thus the cycle continues, and each character is justified in their substance use, due to this constant codependency on other members of the family to help them fight their addiction, it is practically inevitable that they will fail. This is quite unfortunate; substance abuse proposes a real danger for Edmund and Mary explicitly, but also for Jamie and Tyrone.

Most of the frame that request picking comes into sight in the past, which is amazingly alive for the Tyrone’s. Mary in particular cannot forget the past and all the dreams she once had of being a nun of a pianist. The Tyrone family is not a unique family, and it is easy to identify with many of the conflicts and characteristics through the synthesis of their past and present. All the conflicts and the problem from the past cannot be forgotten, and the play is all the more tragic because it leaves little hope for the future; indeed, the outlook for the Tyrone’s can only be seen as one long cycle of a repeated past bound in by alcohol and morphine. It is important to note that *Long Day’s Journey into Night* is not only a journey forward in time, but also a journey back into the past lives of all the

characters, who continually dip back into rather continually sliding into despair, as they remain bound to a past that they can neither forget nor forgive.

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