



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1988 Volume III: Autobiography in America

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## An Autobiographical Journey

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Eugene O'Neill's masterful play *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, made its world premier in 1956 in Stockholm, Sweden, under the direction of Jose Quintero. The play originally written (according to O'Neill) in 1939, was not to be published until twenty-five years after his death. It took O'Neill over two years to write the play, working on it mornings, afternoons, and evenings; sometimes crying as he wrote it. Carlotta, O'Neill's wife stated that, "He had to write it because it was a thing that haunted him and he had to write it because it was a thing that haunted him and he had to forgive his family and himself." <sup>1</sup> Three years after O'Neill's death, his widow gave permission to have it published, but Random House felt that it was not right to publish it. Then the play was given to Yale University which published it in 1955. <sup>2</sup>

The plays by Eugene O'Neill have been frequently performed in many countries of the world. Also, in our state, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf and the Yale Repertory Theater have produced *Ah, Wilderness !* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* . In 1986, *Long Day's Journey* was revived in London, headed by Laurence Olivier and Constance Cummings. Sidney Lumet's film version featured Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson, and Jason Robards Jr. Also, in 1986, Broadway revived the play with Jack Lemmon playing Tyrone and Bethel Leslie playing Mary. And now *Ah, Wilderness !* and *Long Day's Journey* , two of O'Neill's New London plays, are being revived at Yale Repertory Theater as part of "Yale's Eugene O'Neill Centennial Celebration." Each time I have seen these two plays they seem to grow in richness, complexity and power.

A trip to New London, Connecticut to see O'Neill's boyhood summer home, Monte Cristo Cottage, will increase the student's desire to experience the play, help them to more fully understand it, and make this unit even more pleasurable. Edmund said about this home, "Well, it's better than spending the summer in a New York hotel, isn't it? And this town's not so bad. I like it well enough. I suppose it's the only home we've ever had." <sup>3</sup> When visiting the cottage, guests are shown a video introducing the O'Neill family with dialogue from O'Neill's plays spoken by Geraldine Fitzgerald, the actress. (In addition, showing the Sidney Lumet film by Films for the Humanities with Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson and Jason Robards, Jr. can serve as a springboard for this unit, too.)

In *Long Day's Journey*, the characters, the setting, events, experiences, and family relationships obviously have a strong autobiographical tone. In his dedication of the play to his wife, Carlotta, O'Neill wrote, "I give you the original script of the play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. Your love enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play." (L, Introduction). Although the play reveals O'Neill's ideas, feelings and family conflicts, it is not just a "true confession" of his family's everyday life. A playwright or author often

chooses, changes and arranges his content in order to make his play more real, artistic, or dramatic. Similarly, Jean Chothia (in “Significant Form: Long Day’s Journey Into Night”) has written that autobiographical writing isn’t always accurately factual. “Although the personal nature of the material may well quicken the writer’s imagination it can only speak to the audience by the way it has been shaped by that imagination into an artistic form with its own unity, apart from that life.” (E, 85). At any rate, the play possesses the power to stimulate an emotional and intellectual response from even the most blase students. I will ask students to think about why it is so difficult and painful for authors to write about close family members and if they are able to view the close relationships realistically.

Most students will project themselves into the characters’ problems and conflicts because Mary, Tyrone, Jamie, and Edmund’s problems are ones that many families have to face today, such as—drug addiction, alcoholism, generational conflicts, mental and physical illness. The play will also evoke questions about the ways and purposes of life that students should think about. As students watch and perform scenes from the play, they will think about how Tyrone, Mary, Jamie, and Edmund are affected and influenced by their long day’s journey. Finally, the play will become part of the students’ life, enlarging it, commenting on it, enriching it, and asking it questions.

The curriculum unit should take four weeks to cover adequately and to experience deeply. Before writing a play, students should be asked to write vignettes, poems, short stories, and dialogue which express their own life experiences and which are engaging to read. With this practice, they will discover their own reality and their own distinct voice. After fully experiencing and dramatizing *Long Day’s Journey* , students will be asked to write an autobiographical play. Then, they can plan sets, costumes and production techniques for their plays. The plays can be performed within the classroom and they do not need to be very elaborate.

*Long Day’s Journey* will come alive for the students through their active participation. The students should be fully involved; thus their learning will be active and participatory. I hope they will take risks and try things that may not work by testing the dialogue through action and the action by returning to the dialogue. I hope to demystify an intense and challenging play, to help my students feel the mounting tension and the increasing pain of the characters in the play.

This curriculum unit is most approachable for students in the eleventh and twelfth grade American literature class or in an advanced drama class that will include other classics such as: *The Night of the Iguana*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* , *The Glass Menagerie* , *Death of a Salesman*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Raisin in the Sun*, *Fences*, *The Emperor Jones*, *Strange Interlude*, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *A Soldier’s Play*, and *Ah, Wilderness* ! as a comparative group of American contemporary plays.

## Objectives:

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1. To improve “literary analysis skills” and comprehension by understanding cause and effect, the differences between fantasy and reality, and past and present.
2. To improve writing skills by providing a variety of assignments, including the one-act autobiographical play.

3. To understand dramatic elements, such as symbols, stage direction, and irony and how they are used in the context of the play.
4. To help students explore and understand the intentions, characterizations, and meanings of *Long Day's Journey* and to interpret the development or lack of it in the four characters.  
To enrich students' vocabulary and to encourage them to use the vocabulary of the theater,
5. such as: climax, exposition, atmosphere, dialogue, fantasy, setting, tragedy, stage directions, tempo, and theme.
6. To have students look deeply into O'Neill's view of his family experiences and his paradoxical vision of life.
7. To have students appreciate the outstanding dramatic and psychological scope of *Long Day's Journey*.
8. To encourage students to bring *Long Day's Journey* alive through oral reading at first and then as a scenario for an audience performance in the classroom.

I expect students to keep a director's or actor's journal while thinking about, feeling, staging, and growing with the play. Moreover, they will write pertinent vignettes and other short pieces when they can take more time to think about and reflect on their experiences with the play. Before reading the play, the class will discuss the following questions: What responsibilities do parents have for their children at different stages of their life? What responsibilities do children have for their parents? As children become adults, how do the responsibilities change? What are the responsibilities that adult children should have toward their parents? What responsibilities should a person have toward him/herself? Are parents' and adult children's responsibilities often in conflict? This is one of the themes dealt with in the play.

In reading and acting out the play, students must envision the setting, visualize the action, understand and interpret the dialogue, and imagine the stage directions which are copiously given by O'Neill. The setting for *Long Day's Journey* is the living room of the Tyrone family's summer home on the New London coast in August, 1912. It is around 8:30 a.m. when the play begins. Sunshine comes through the window. The room is ordinary and unpretentious, comfortable, but rather shabby. The two bookcases are emphasized during different scenes and their contents add understanding to the play. One small bookcase contains "novels by Balzac, Zola, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, Kropotkin, Max Stirner; plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg; poetry by Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde, Earnest Dowson, Kipling, etc." This seems to hold Edmund's books. The other glassed-in bookcase contains sets of Shakespeare, history books, "and miscellaneous volumes of old plays, poetry, and several histories of Ireland." The books reflect the individual interests and passions of Tyrone and Edmund. Later in the play, Tyrone will state the authors which Edmund admires and remark that Edmund's interest in literature is for "filth and despair and pessimism." I will assign one or two authors for each student to research, in order for them to understand what their beliefs were and why Tyrone called them "madmen, fools and atheists."

Important also to the setting are the "two double doorways with portieres" which lead to the living room. O'Neill points out that one leads to a front parlor and the other leads into a dark back parlor which is used as a hallway to the dining room. According to Doris V. Falk, the stage set plays a symbolical role in the play: "All the visible action takes place before these doorways, in a shabby, cheaply furnished living room lined with well used books, the titles of which are largely those of O'Neill's acknowledged influences. The family lives in that mid-region between the bright formality of the exterior front parlor—the mask—and the little known dark of the rear room" (E 10). Another feature of the setting that plays a significant part in the play is the chandelier with bulbs in it which are turned off and on in the last act of the play. To help students imagine the

living room setting where most of the play takes place, they can discuss the answers to the following questions, and later, write the answers in their journals:

1. How many rooms are part of the set?
2. How is the room furnished? With what kind of furniture?
3. Where are the windows located?
4. Where are the double doors located?
5. What is in the background?
6. What is in the foreground?
7. How is the setting lighted?
8. What impression does the opening scene make?
9. What does the description of the setting suggest about the mood and atmosphere of the play?

Alan B. Howes has given some helpful guidelines for teaching plays which can be modified and adapted for different levels and classes.

- Be selective in teaching the play. <sup>4</sup> Some important soliloquies and conversations can be discussed more thoroughly while others can be passed over with less discussion. Moreover, it has been suggested by Tom Whitaker (during the 1983 Drama Seminar) to have the students
1. read the play once, take notes on the characters, plot and action; then read it a second time looking for dialogue and exposition “that confirms, complicates or . . . questions” their first interpretation. Then read it “as an actor who has been assigned a character.”

- Place important passages or scenes side by side in order to show the development of character and the ironies present. (T 77) For example, the description of the “convent girl” quality of Mary in the first act and later in the same act when the stage directions state that one sees in her face “the girl she had once been.” Then later in Act 1 when Mary shows her bitterness and resentment in her remarks about her unhappiness with her life, her home, and her family which makes her long for her previous, better life at the convent. A further juxtaposition is useful in the final act, when Mary plays the Chopin waltz on the piano; then
2. entering through the doorway with her hair braided, wearing the blue nightgown and carrying her wedding dress. She talks aloud about her life in the convent when she “fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time.” (L 176) Many biographers who interviewed those who knew or were related to the O’Neill family have stated that the description of Mary Tyrone closely parallels Mary Ellen Quinlan O’Neill, Eugene O’Neill’s mother. The description is significant, revealing the way the playwright pictured his mother: “graceful” figure, a “once pretty face,” “sensitive” lips, “pure” white hair, once “beautiful” hands, “soft” and “attractive” voice, “simple, unaffected” charm.

- Move beyond the stereotypes in discussing the characters. (T 77) Discuss with students the definition of stereotype—a person or group considered to typify or conform to a standardized concept, lacking any individuality. Continue by explaining that in stereotyping, individual qualities aren't considered. Point out that people or characters, while they might have some traits of a stereotypical person, don't have all the traits of a stereotype. The description of all four main characters in this play is so thoroughly made that each aspect of their
3. characterizations should be examined carefully. Although Tyrone may be stingy, Mary may be mentally disturbed, Jamie may be an alcoholic and Edmund sickly and sensitive, these traits do not begin to reveal all the dimensions of the four characters. Their contradictions, complexity and individuality should be discussed, instead, in order to sound the depths of the characters. Stereotyping the characters does not fully interpret their unique plight nor the importance of the tragedy.

- In helping the students become involved in the play, urge them to move from what happens to why it happens. (T 78) Try to involve them in discussing the different characters' relationships to each other, for example, the animosity between the father and sons. See how
4. much of the mood changes, themes, characterizations, situation, the students can find in the dialogue themselves. Ask about your students' perspectives. Encourage them to ask their questions and point out their problems. Then discuss those scenes, characters, or their problems.

- Encourage students to express their feelings as a character in the play, as a director, or as a person in the audience. (T 78, 79) Involve the students completely in the world of the play.
5. Have them realize that the play isn't a "case history" but a dramatic and artistic creation which should arouse "true sympathy."

- Lead students to see the controversy over the various interpretations of the play by reading the reviews and criticism from *The New York Times*, April 29, 1986, *The New Haven Register*, March 27, 1988, *The Hartford Courant*, March, 1988 and *The New Haven Advocate*, April 25, 1988. Other criticism of the play in periodicals includes: *America*, May 5, 1956, *Life*, November 19, 1956, *New York Times Magazine*, October 21, 1956, *Newsweek*, November 19, 1956 and *Time*, November 19, 1956. For example, Frank Rich in *The New York Times*, April 29, 1986, wrote: In the director, Jonathan Miller's new production, he makes the author's rhythm much faster paced by using overlapping dialogue with ". . . some lines shouted down, others trimmed and still others rattled off so quickly that the mother, Mary, persuades us that her morphine addiction produces symptoms often associated with amphetamines."
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## Suggestions for Teaching Selected Scenes

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### Act One

Assign students parts for the play. Try to choose actors who are physical, uninhibited and with strong, clear and resonant voices. Since sporadic attendance is sometimes a problem, I would suggest doubling up on some of the parts. Have the students read carefully the stage directions by O'Neill, visualizing the setting interpreting the dialogue and following the description with their imaginations. Have the students practice reading their parts independently with different pacing and tone; then have them stage it for the class audience with props, costumes, sound effects, blocking and expression. Redo scenes with different students, different ways. Take student suggestions for casting. Find different ways to read and play the significant scenes; move characters around differently. The focus of what is significant in a scene changes as the movement of the characters changes. This serves to underline character and theme. The follow-up discussion

might include the following questions and students should write their own answers in their journals if time allows during class or at night for homework:

Analyze, as a director would, the first scene and the two characters, Mary and Tyrone, as they enter and converse. What should be the intonation and emphasis in their lines? What gestures and facial expressions should go with them? How should Mary and Tyrone move from one place to another on the stage? Show the students how changes in emphasis and voice tone can give different nuances of meaning. How would you have Jamie and Edmund speak their lines? What words would you have them emphasize, what punctuation, what tone of voice, where to pause, what pace of speaking, where and when to move and why? What kind of clothes would you have them wear and why? If the characters are not speaking, what are they doing? Is the fog used effectively in the first act? Explain. What is revealed about the different relationships in the family by the end of Act One? Do any of the family members show any real understanding of each other in the first act? What is troubling the family members which they are afraid to discuss? How does the atmosphere change from the beginning of the act to the end of it? What is the relationship between Jamie and Edmund? Why is Mary disturbed about her present life? As the scene closes, she sits with her fingers drumming on the chair arm "driven by an insistent life of their own, without her consent." (L 49) What is O'Neill's meaning in his stage directions at the end of Act One?

### **Act Two, Scene One**

Now we'll proceed to Act Two, Scene One. As the scene opens, it is quarter to one on the same day. No sunlight comes into the room now as it did in the first act. The day is still fine, but sultry, with faint haziness. (L 51) Preliminary discussion after the students have read Act Two about the present situation should take place before the acting. What is the attitude of Cathleen, Edmund, Jamie, Mary and Tyrone at the beginning of the act? How do their attitudes change? Cathleen provides comic relief in this scene to relieve the tension of the three men worrying about Mary's drug taking and Edmund's illness. Moreover, in Cathleen's chat with Edmund, the audience understands her ironical comments. Catherine says that neither Edmund nor Jamie is as good looking as their father; that Jamie wouldn't miss the time to stop work if he had a watch; and that Mary is lying down in the spare room. Then Edmund sneaks a drink before Jamie enters and Jamie has one with him. What does this scene show about the two boys and their father? Mary enters from the front parlor looking more detached, withdrawn, but less nervous. In a detached, impersonal tone, she shows that she is under the influence of morphine. Edmund and Jamie are suspicious but "act out their parts." She remarks, "None of us can help the things that life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." (L 61) At this time, it would be stimulating to ask the students if they agree or disagree with what Mary is saying and why. Also, ask: How do you react to Mary? Does she evoke sympathy or irritation from you? Do you know anyone like Mary? What do you think will happen to her? Do you think her problems are similar to those of other women her age during this time? Do you think Mary is alienated from her family and society?

In staging, encourage the actors to recreate the dismal mood and atmosphere of this scene. Is there a mood of suspicion in the atmosphere about Mary's drug taking? Have the students do a related improvisational exercise about suspicion in which the students imagine a situation where several pupils have vandalized a teacher's car. The principal has gathered all the students together in the art room to try to gain information about the suspects. Each pupil should find something he might be doing before the principal enters. They can pantomime all the possibilities of working on art projects. As the students act, other conditions can be added. Talk has spread that some pupils know that several others are guilty of vandalizing the car. Other pertinent



conditions can be added that increase the suspicion. Improvisation can be a very effective tool to help students relate to the characters' situation and to enter into their world and understand them and thus, themselves better.

Give out the playbooks and open to Act Two. Discuss with the students: What time of day does the scene take place? Who is on stage and who enters? Give out the parts to two sets of actors. Take the playbooks away from the actors on the stage and give them to "voice over" readers who will speak the parts from their front-row seats. The actors on stage will pantomime the scenes as the readers in the front-row speak the lines. The actors on stage should move and act as if the dialogues were coming from their bodies, using movements and feelings that are spontaneous without planning. Discuss what happened in the scene. Were the actions of the characters clear? Were the facial expressions effective for the dialogue? <sup>5</sup> What kind of emotion did the scene evoke? How could lights affect the scene? Who is most important in the scenes? Should that person be highlighted? Give the following assignment now: In your journal, discuss the following questions which reflect on your own personal identity: Do you ever feel lonely or depressed? Do you know why? Have you ever not faced reality? Do you have a person that you can tell your innermost thoughts to? What kind of a person could you do that with? Do you love one person more than others? Do you like your parents? What qualities do they have? What do you want to do with your life? Do you think you accept reality?

In studying the second scene of *Long Day's Journey*, I hope that all students will have some kind of performing, directing and audience experience. Getting and keeping the students involved and choosing actors with strong, clear voices are important. I will ask the students to help cast for this scene after the students have auditioned. Students who are chosen for the roles must learn their dialogue by a certain deadline. Experienced drama students who have attended E.C.A. will be the student directors. There is some change in character and development of situation in this scene. The four members of the Tyrone family are returning from lunch to the living room. O'Neill's thorough stage directions reveal the changes of the characters in their thoughts, attitudes and reactions. Tyrone, disquieted, weary and resigned-looking, follows Mary who is aloof, indifferent to what she is saying and "terribly nervous." Jamie, looking cynical and defensive, fills a pipe from a jar while Edmund, appearing heartsick and weak, "sits in a chair . . . , turned half away from his mother so he does not have to watch her." (L 71)

Edmund has been ill with a continuous cough and the family's self-delusion changes with Doctor Hardy's diagnosis of tuberculosis. As the day continues, Mary will crack under the strain and as Jamie, Edmund and Tyrone fear, she will relapse into her morphine addiction, slipping into a "ghost-filled" world of the past. At this time the class can discuss the following: The three Tyrone's all appear to be almost alcoholics or already there, yet they are all extremely fearful that Mary will succumb to her addiction. Why don't they see any harm in their own drinking? Does society condemn drug addiction more than alcoholism? If so, why do you think so? How do Mary, Tyrone, Jamie and Edmund change during this scene? How is Mary actually feeling? What tells you? What is the state of Mary and Tyrone's relationship during this scene? How can it be dramatized? The students can work on this assignment in groups and present their interpretation to the class before staging the scene. They can choose one of the soliloquies by Mary in which she rambles on about the past, or the one before she goes upstairs, or the one where Tyrone, Jamie and Edmund try to understand why she has relapsed into her morphine addiction again. The students can choose a secretary to write down their director's notes and try to give the actors very specific instructions on how to deliver their dialogue—what intonation, what word or words to emphasize in each line, what interruptions or changes in rhythm, what overall tone and changes in tone, what gestures and facial expressions to use; and other characters' movements. Each group will present their scene to the rest of the class after developing it fully. The director will give suggestions for improvement. The class will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the scenes. Students could videotape

their scenes; then they could watch them and write suggestions for improvement.

### **Act Three**

It is about six-thirty in the evening when fog rolls in thick against the window. The foghorn is moaning along with a warning chorus of ships' bells. Cathleen is absent-mindedly holding an empty whiskey glass in her hand while Mary is chatting on and neither person is listening to each other as often happens in the play. One feels that the nature of O'Neill's dialogue is that the characters, instead of hearing each other out, continually talk across each other, talking as much to themselves as to the others—probably because of their fears, guilt and resentments. They seem to want to purge themselves of hostility and resentment. Examining O'Neill's dialogue carefully may enlighten the students about his technique and show what he does so effectively. Questions which will stimulate students to think critically are: How does the use of his dialogue increase the element of conflict? How does it help to individualize the characters and reveal meaning?

An effective dramatic scene that will prove illuminating to stage is at the beginning of Act Three where Cathleen, the hired girl leaves Mary to help Bridget in the kitchen while Mary sits alone and prays the Hail Mary. "Her hands jerk and the fingers automatically play for a moment on the air . . . she suddenly loses all the girlish quality and is an aging, cynically sad, embittered woman." (L 107) She starts to go upstairs probably to take morphine when she hears Edmund and Tyrone coming in. She is resentful at first that her privacy is being invaded, but then her manner changes and she becomes relieved. "Oh, I'm so glad they've come! I've been so horribly lonely." (L 108) Edmund and Tyrone are aware that she has succumbed to her "curse" again and has drifted into the world of unreality. With Mary affected by morphine and Edmund and Tyrone fueled by alcohol, the masks and decorum are torn away as Edmund says: ". . . they're regurgitating old grievances" they've all heard "a million times" before. Every line that the characters speak to each other "seems cancelled out by the line he speaks right after, until a scene which seems straightforward enough reveals the whole history of a relationship. A line that may take only a second to say has twenty years of experience behind it." <sup>6</sup> It would be helpful to involve some students in getting outfits and props for the above scene. Make the scene physical as well as verbal. Encourage the class to direct by making suggestions to the actors on how to speak their lines, what expressions to use and how and where to move. Allow the students to interrupt each time they feel a mood change because O'Neill often involves several moods at once. Have the students evaluate the elements in the staging that seem to work or not work and explain why or why not. They may want to focus on a scene or character or on the relationship between Mary and Edmund, Mary and Tyrone, or Edmund and Tyrone.

For writing in their journals, I suggest: How does one find the strength from within to overcome psychological pain and adversity? Does Edmund show any real understanding of his mother's and father's plight? Do you know people who live in illusory worlds? Do all of us sometimes lose ourselves in fantasies? Is there a difference between people who daydream occasionally and people whose lives are led by illusion? Is it possible at this stage for Mary to be cured of her addiction? Alcohol and drugs are sometimes resorted to when one doesn't face reality or cannot cope with an intolerable life. Have you known someone in a similar situation as Mary's? Do you accept the realities of your life? Have there been adversities and losses in your life that you found difficult to cope with? Explain. What are the masks that the four Tyrone's wear? What insights does Scene Three show about Mary, Tyrone and Edmund? What do you think will happen to them?

### **Act Four**

As the curtain rises it is about midnight. Tyrone is sitting at the table wearing his prince-nez and playing solitaire. The whiskey bottle is "three-quarters empty," but there is another near by. The fog is denser than



before as the fog horn and ships' bells are heard "from the harbor." Edmund returns home drunk, knowing that he must go to a sanatorium for his tuberculosis. The darkness of the scene and the dense fog suggest a pervading gloom. The foghorn as Mary said earlier is a warning signal of danger as the ships' bells ambiguously represent a means of escape. In drinking, Tyrone is trying to escape the realities of his situation as he is "possessed of hopeless resignation." The stage movements of turning the bulbs in the chandelier off and on adds comic relief and decreases the tension.

Edmund and Tyrone seem to be seeking sympathy and a desire to escape. They drink together and Tyrone confides in him telling of the play he bought and how he became an acting failure with it. Then he tells about his hardscrabble childhood, his family's poverty and his frustrated aspirations when Edmund in a moment of transcendence "looks at him for the first time with an understanding sympathy": I'm glad you told me this, Papa. I know you a lot better now." (L 151) Edmund and Tyrone seem to have moved from antagonism to an understanding of each other. Next, Jamie returns after midnight, drunk from Mamie Burn's and Fat Violet's and expresses his ambivalent feelings about Edmund: ". . . I love you more than I hate you . . . I run the risk you'll hate me—and you're all I've got left . . ." (L 166) Mary remains upstairs until the last scene of the play which increases the suspense and the final power of her presence. Her appearance is anticipated by the three men as they listen to her above them and comment about her. (E 99) Emphasize the stage directions for Mary's entrance. Light flashes on at the back part of the setting and all five bulbs come on; then Mary begins to play a Chopin waltz. (L 169, 170) Finally, Mary appears, dressed from the past, carrying her wedding gown. Students can discuss: How should Mary move on the stage? What should Tyrone do? Should he take the wedding gown from Mary and hold it carefully for a while? Why would this be effective dramatically? Where should Edmund and Jamie be at this time? Who or what grouping should the light be focused on? How should Mary speak her soliloquy? After that, she reminisces about her young, innocent life in the convent and staring dreamily before her as a look of uneasiness comes over her face as in a sad dream. She talks out loud to herself pathetically concluding: "Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James and was so happy for a time." (L 176)

An easy exercise which will help students to understand and portray the characters in *Long Day's Journey* more thoroughly is Three Stages. Three people on the stage area will play the same character at a different stage of his life. For example, the character might be Mary before she meets Tyrone; one character, Mary while she is dating him, and another character, Mary when she is first married to Tyrone. First, we would see Mary before meeting Tyrone. The other two student actors could be Mary's parents. All characters will interact to show what Mary's life is like at this time. Perhaps they could show her convent life or Tyrone's hardworking childhood. Next we would see Mary after she has met Tyrone, with the two other student actors in the scene showing another aspect of Mary's character. Finally, we see Mary with Tyrone when they are first married. Thus the audience could more fully understand the change and development that take place in the different stages of a person's life. Discuss the results of all scenes to help those students not acting to participate by carefully listening and watching and then analyzing and critiquing. As students act out the scenes, urge them to imagine the settings, to understand and express the dialogue and to interpret the stage directions.

I hope that I will take my students on an unusual journey into the depths of human nature and help them to emerge from it with some clearer and deeper insights into the complexities of life.

## Some Suggestions for Writing Assignments

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- Travis Bogard has written “. . . the universality of pain makes pity and understanding and forgiveness the greatest of human needs.” Write an essay using his remark as your thesis statement.

- Some critics have argued that many of the quotations O’Neill used in the last act didn’t contribute very much to the play. Do you agree or disagree? Do you think the use of the quotations is effective?

- Argue in a well-written essay, that David Wilson’s, Markland Taylor’s, Margaret Spillane’s or Frank Rich’s appraisal of a certain performance of *Long Day’s Journey* is (or is not) fair and justified.

- State in an essay that *Long Day’s Journey* is or is not the right subject of tragedy. Cite appropriate lines from the play. Support your thesis statement by coming to valid conclusions based on personal study and class discussion.

5. Write a description of each of the four characters in this play.

- Write an autobiographical dialogue between two or more people. Don’t have your characters talk like cardboard figures, but have them talk as they would in real life. The dialogue should deal with a life-like situation. The conversation may lead to a decision or action of some kind. Begin the dialogue with a description of the setting in which the dialogue takes place. Also, describe the characters involved and the relationship between them.

- Choose an artistic or practical object that is important to you because it makes you think of a certain person or experience. Describe the object vividly and write about the characteristics of the person or experience it reminds you of.

- Write an autobiographical play about something that happened to you or a member of your family. Begin with an opening situation and a description of the setting in which the action and conflict will take place. Tell what happened to start the conflict or problem. Describe briefly the characters and show the relationships between them. Decide whether the drama should be a tragedy, satire, T.V. movie, or stage drama. Use stage directions to show movement and facial gestures. How was the conflict resolved? Did anything happen after the conflict was resolved? Students may discuss their plays with the teacher and class.

- Write your autobiography after reading one of the following: Mary McCarthy’s *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* , Richard Wright’s *Black Boy or Native Son* , Maya Angelon’s *I Know Why . . . or Heart of a Woman*, Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, Lillian Hellman’s *Pentimento* or John Wideman’s *Brothers and Keepers* . Include family history, happiest moments, saddest moments, turning points, major decisions, education, special interests, likes and dislikes, vacations, favorite personalities, future plans or aspirations. Include what you want out of life.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O’Neill* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 6,7. All subsequent page references to this text appear in parentheses and are prefaced by the letter “O.”

<sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night* (New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 9. All subsequent page references to this text appear in parentheses and are prefaced by the letter "E."

<sup>3</sup> Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955, p. 44. All subsequent references to this text are prefaced by the letter "L."

<sup>4</sup> Alan B. Howes, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents : Plays* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1968), p. 75. All subsequent references to this text are prefaced by the letter "T."

<sup>5</sup> Mary Hunter Wolf and Victor B. Miller , *Theatre's Different Demands* (Center for Theatre Techniques in Education, 1967), pp. 10, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Long Wharf Theatre, *Study Guide to the 1965-1966 Season* (New Haven Register, 1965), p. 21.

## Student and Teacher Bibliography

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These books and resources reflect my distillation from the numerous ones available. Most of the following books were used in doing research in writing this unit. They are good reference and classroom books for both the teacher and the students. Books especially relevant for students are marked with an asterisk (\*).

\*Bloom, Harold. *Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night* . New Haven: Chelsea House Publishers. Excellent, diverse critical studies of *Long Day's Journey into Night* , generally considered O'Neill's masterpiece.

\*Bogard, Travis and Jackson R. Bryer, eds. *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

\*Bruder, Melissa, Lee Michael Cohn, Madeleine Olnek, Nathaniel Pollack, Robert Previto, and Scott Zigler. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* . New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

\*Bryer, Jackson, ed. *The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth MacGowan* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

\*Cassidy, Pat and Marshall. *An Introduction to Theatre and Drama* . Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 1988. A one- or two-semester course with thirteen full-length plays including historical background.

\*Gelb, Arthur and Barbara. *O'Neill* . New York: Harper and Row, 1987. The most comprehensive study on O'Neill with many good descriptions of his plays and life.

\*Hayman, Ronald. *How to Read a Play* . New York: Grove Press, 1977. A good guide to the technical problems the director and the actors have in bringing the script into three-dimensional life.

Hoetker, James. *Theatre Games: One Way into Drama* . NCTE, 1975. Descriptions and directions for playing theater games.

Howes, Alan B. *Teaching Literature to Adolescents : Plays* . Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1968. Contains

many stimulating guidelines for involving students with drama.

\*Minot, Stephen. *Three Genres : The Writing of Poetry, Fiction and Drama* . New York: Prentice Hall, 1988. A useful introduction to the writing of poetry, fiction and drama, which deals with the creative process and shows students the range of what is possible in each genre.

\*O'Neill Eugene. *Long Day's Journey Into Night* . New Haven: Yale University Press 1956. This is the play book that I used for this unit.

Wolf, Mary Hunter and Victor B. Miller. *Theatre's Different Demands : An Approach to the Classroom Teaching of Plays* . Stratford, Conn.: The Center for Theatre Techniques in Education, 1967. This book presents some useful techniques by which an actor and director get inside a play and make it come alive as theatre.

## Classroom Materials

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### Books:

*Improvisations in Creative Drama* by Betty Keller. Meriwether Publishing Ltd. #W-B138. A year-long program of workshops and dramatic sketches for student actors.

*Theatre Games for Young Performers* by Maria Novelly. Meriwether Publishing Ltd. #W-B188.

### Filmstrips:

*Creative Writing: A Way of Seeing* . Educational Dimensions. This program helps writers to "show," not tell, the reader what is being described.

*What Makes an Actor* . Meriwether Publishing Ltd. #W-F39.

### Videos:

*Using Your Creative Brain* . Educational Dimensions. Students will learn from this program how they can use the potential of their left-brain and right-brain more creatively.

*The Diary of Ann Frank* . Wilson Media 1959, Black and White, 180 mins. The story based on Anne's diary which she kept while she, her family, and four friends hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

*How Theatre Began* . Meriwether Publishing Ltd. #M-M202. An introduction to the history of drama. Beginning with Greek drama and continuing through Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, French, Spanish, English and American forms, giving an overview of how modern theatre developed.

*Long Day's Journey into Night* . O'Neill's play with Katharine Hepburn, Ralph Richardson and Jason Robards. Black and White, No. 05695-90.

*Julia* . Lillian Hellman's autobiographical story. "The writer becomes involved with the Holocaust when her friend, Julia asks her to smuggle money into Berlin." Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave. No. 04413-90. G A Guidance Associates, Inc.

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