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## LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT; A JOURNEY INTO REVELATION

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### Abstract

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) in his plays *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) has thought a great deal about man in relation to his both individual and social environments and has criticized the whole structure of American society. Eugene O'Neill may not have intended his play, *Long day's Journey into Night*, to be a psychoanalytic work; however, examples of Freudian theory seem to be on every page. The reason for the numerous examples of Freudian concepts derives from the fact that both the play and psychoanalysis are about family, or more precisely "familial relationships". O'Neill did not accept the illusions and the ideals that were created by "The American Dream". He has criticized the social values. His attitude toward American family and its values is critical and in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, he has focused on the failure and the collapse of both American family and American society. The present study highlights O'Neill's exploration on human consciousness and the influence of culture in both familial and social contexts in *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

**Key Words:** Familial Relationship; Capitalism, The American Dream.

### 1. Introduction

*Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) marks the climax of O'Neill's development both psychologically and artistically. *Long Day's Journey* is O'Neill's own autobiographical family drama. Dedicating the play to his wife, Carlotta, O'Neill wrote, "I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play- write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four hunted Tyrones" (O'Neill, 1956, P.7). O'Neill acknowledges that writing the play let him work through his conflict feelings toward his family.

*Long Day's Journey* depicts a very long, painful, heavy and endless day in the New London summer home of the Tyrone family in the year 1912. The year 1912 was the most crucial year in O'Neill's life. In that year, he attempts suicide in Jimmy-the-Priest's saloon in New York City, met his first wife, lived during the summer with his dope-filled mother and stingy father in New London, learned that he had tuberculosis, and entered a sanatorium on Christmas Eve of that year. He left it six months later with the belief that he must be an artist or nothing. I will not discuss O'Neill's family here, but his autobiography shows that from the beginning of its composition, O'Neill had the general plan for *Long Day's Journey* clear in mind. He himself remembered that the play would cover one day in a family's life, a day in which things occur which evoke the whole past of the family and reveal every aspect of its interrelationships. It is a deeply tragic play, but without any violent dramatic actions. The reason for the excellence of *Long Day's Journey* is not immediately apparent. Perhaps it is most remarkable for what it is not.

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It is not a drama of action and violence; although the emotions involved find violence expression in words. Also, it is not a drama of extremes; the lower depths of *The Iceman Cometh* and the domestic depravity of *Mourning Becomes Electra* have been left behind; and the mystical atmosphere of *Lazarus Laughed* appeared only as a remembrance of things past, "The past is the present, isn't it? It is the future too" (P.33) Marry in *Long Day's Journey into Night* claims. *Long Day's Journey into Night* describes the world of middle-class family life, and its greatness lies in its simple domestication both of tragic emotion and of human insight.

## 2. A Journey into American Familial Relationship

There are a father, a mother, and two sons in the play. The father, as an actor is drunk and miser. The mother is a sweet dope fiend. The elder brother is a cynical sot and the younger son is a sick and troubled boy.

One by one, the four people in this family try to explain how and why they become the way they are. Mary says: "The things life had done to us we cannot excuse or explain. The past is the present. It is the future, too" (P.33). All have caught in a destiny they cannot escape from. As they tell of themselves, they become larger than their own small lives. They are looking for something but not knowing exactly what it is.

*Long Day's Journey into Night* that gives title and direction to the play is a different journey through which the characters reveal their own psychological needs. For mother, Mary, it is a sad journey into fog of dope and dream. She exclaims:

I really love fog because it hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that anything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more (P.38).

For Jamie, it is a hopeless journey into the night of cynicism and despair, "The truth is there is no cure and we've been saps to hope" (P.29). For the father, James Tyrone, it is a tragic journey down the wrong road, away from the earlier triumph, he believes: "Maybe I can't help being, although all my life since I had anything I've thrown money over the bar to buy drinks for everyone in the house, or load money to sponges I knew would never it back" (P.59). On the other side, for Edmund, the younger son, it is a journey beyond night, "It was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more success as a seagull or a fish" (P. 63). Dramatically, the psychoanalysis of these conflicting characters and their contrasting journey is the essence of the play.

Louis Tyson explains that "family is important to psychoanalytic theory, because we are each a product of the role we are given in the family-complex" (P.16). It is the family pressure (that is reinforced by society) that dictates the action in the story of Tyrone family. *Long Day's Journey into Night* focuses on a dysfunctional family trying to cope with the serious problems, including drug addiction, moral degradation, fear, guilt, and having dream of the past and a happy life. The Tyrone family is fragmented and each of its members to some degree is alienated from the past.

If a psychoanalyst were cataloging the problems of Tyson family, he would probably be concerned that the family is repressing what Freud called the pleasure principal. Freud believed that the pleasure principal (the idea that if necessity did not dictate working, humans would simply do things for their own self-gratification) is innate in all humans, and when they repress it, there are consequences that may be harmful.

Tyrone is an extreme example of a person who is affected badly by repression of his pleasure principal and it seems that Eugene O'Neill wants to use Tyrone as a model for America since business or working too hard aided in his psychological downfall. America's identity is based on the notion of "The American Dream", which is a dream of self-improvement mainly through economic means or repressing self-gratification in a quest for

something larger. Therefore, it is logical to extend the Tyrone family's problems to America in general. Just as society damaged Tyrone psychologically through the myth of "The American Dream", he in turn damaged his family by extending and even magnifying those same values.

The most obvious estrangement exists between Tyrone and Jamie. Jamie blames his father for Mary's addiction to morphine. Most alienated of all is Mary who is badly affected by the false values of "The American Dream". She talks of her isolation and places such blames on Tyrone for the life career that is promised on her. She says to Edmund:

I've never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start. Everything was done in the cheapest way. Your father would never spend the money to make it right. It's just as well as haven't any friends here. I'd be ashamed to have them step in the door. But he's never wanted family friends. He hates calling on people, or receiving them. All he likes is to hobnob with men at the club or in a barroom. Jamie and you are the same way, but you're not to blame. You've never had a chance to meet decent people here (P.16).

Under the influence of morphine, Mary moves into her idealized past, cut off from the pain of her current life. In fact, she uses different kinds of defense mechanism in order to avoid facing any of her problems. Tyson believes that defenses are "the processes by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in unconscious. In other words, they are the processes by which we keep the repressed repressed in order to avoid knowing what we feel can't handle knowing" (P.18). Mary is living through the most complex defense, regression that is "the temporary return to a former psychological state, which is not just imagined but relived. [...] It is a defense because it carries out thoughts away from some present difficulty" (Ibid) as when Mary flashes back to his past in order to avoid the present unpleasant realities of her present life. Mary does not just have flashbacks to previous times in order to avoid the present; she relives the events in her mind. "Like dreams, regressive states usually hold some symbolic meaning coming from the unconscious" (P. 15) as by the help of addiction to morphine and regression, Mary deceives herself about the unpleasant reality of life. In talking to Jamie, Mary, obviously, attempts to deceive herself with the comforting belief that Edmund is only suffering from a summer cold:

Jamie: [genuinely concerned] It's not just a cold he's got. The kid is damned sick.

Mary: [turn on him resentfully] Why do you say that? It is just a cold! Anyone can tell that! You always imagine things. (P.8)

Clearly, Mary by the use of denial believes that Edmund's illness does not exist. Mary gives birth to Edmund after the death of another child, Eugene. She cannot bear the shock about the illness of the newborn Edmund through infection that made her guilty of being responsible for the death of Eugene. "I blame only myself" she exhorts. This sense of guilt had its manifestation in her refusal to procreate the other one, "I swore after Eugene died I would never have another baby (P.17). Her agony is further evident in her terrible expression: "It was my fault. I should have insisted on staying with Eugene and not let you persuade me to join you [. . .]. Above all I shouldn't have let you insist I have another baby to take Eugene place [. . .]. I never should have born Edmund" (P.18). This thought is based on denial of her duty to procreate. However, she had to procreate the next one, as she needed the new one to overcome her shattering sense of guilt on the death of Eugene. Edmund's birth, however, is not free from pregnancy and birth complications that she apprehended throughout her pre-natal period: "I knew something terrible would happen" (P.18) and the birth made her terribly sick that introduced her to life long morphine addiction.

Self-deception, regression, denial, dream and the other kinds of defenses can be seen among the other characters as well. Jamie, cynical but honest, deludes himself in his search for personal redemption through alcoholism and whoring. Jamie's affairs with women follow a pattern in psychoanalysis that stems from oedipal complexes. He feels like he is in conflict with his father for her mother. He accuses his father of Mary's misery. These feelings "manifest themselves in a pattern called the good girl/bad girl attitude, which places women into two

groups in the mind of the man affected. They are either good girls like Mom or bad girls and thus disposable" (Tyson, P. 19). However, it is likely an oedipal complex is not all of Jamie's motivation for having careless affairs. He is also probably relieving the anxiety he has over the possibility of his family's failure.

On the other side, Jamie is thoroughly jealous, who has virtually ruined himself and his brother under the strong impulse of jealousy through drinking and prostituting. Admittance of ruining self through perverse drinking comes in Act Three by no other than the mother when she tells Edmund again, "His drunkenness has virtually ruined him" (P.50). His bitterness, cynicism and capacity for destroying self-spring mainly from his upbringing in the past. Mary blames past for making him so cynical, "It's wrong to blame your brother. He can't help being what the past has made him. Any more than your father can or you or I" (P.64). Responsibility of what Mary's terms upbringing in the past is related strongly to Jamie's need of mother that has driven him to despair and extreme jealousy. His loathing against her, Edmund and himself springs directly from his sense of loss that he suffers because of Mary's dope addiction and her strong inclinations towards younger brother, Edmund. It is he who calls Mary a "hophead" and who terms her final entrance as "the mad scene. Enter Ophelia!"(P.70). It is he who would not accept mother-taking dope, as he says, "I'd never dreamed before that any women but whores took dope" (P.63). What he feels to be his mother's whore-like behavior has left him paralyzed in thought and belief. His entering home with the most unattractive mother like whore is an attempt to merge maternal whore and mother whose addiction is a whore's addiction. Totally, his feelings toward his mother are complicated.

Mary is not the only one who regrets about the past. Tyrone, as he tells of himself, is haunted by his impoverished childhood and his father's abandonment and eventual suicide:

At ten years old! There was no more school for me. I worked twelve hours a day in a machine shop, learning to make flies. [...] You talk of work! And what do you think I got for it? Fifty cents a week! It's the truth! Fifty cents a week! And my poor mother washed and scrubbed for the Yanks by the day, and my older sisters sewed, and my two younger stayed at home to keep the house (P.60).

In one self-pitying confession, Tyrone expresses regrets for having given up the chance of becoming a great Shakespearean actor in order to take a profitable but artistically unrewarding part in a popular melodrama, "I could have been a great Shakespearean actor, if I'd kept once" (P.61). Both Mary and Tyrone escape to their pasts, Mary to her convent days, when she wanted to be a nun, and Tyrone to a time in his career when he might have resisted trading his talent for wealth, he regrets: "I'd lost the great talent once had through years of easy repetitions, never learning a new part, never really working hard" (P.61). Tyrone begs for understanding by recounting his hard beginning in an Irish immigrant family. His fear of landing in the poor house is honest enough, for he relates to that dreadful time, when he had to work twelve hours in a machine shop to help his family survive. Tyrone has little success in engaging his sons' sympathies. Although Edmund claims to understand his father better: "I'm glad you've told me this Papa. I know you a lot better now" (P. 61), both sons are weary of his stories and are largely indifferent to his past.

In *Long day's journey into Night*, among all the negative and dark visions and relations, we have a relation that is positive and fulfills healthy sexual marital bond between the spouses. It had its origin in Mary's sensual part of love and desire for marriage with stage actor James Tyrone. Her desire appears unusual, as Mary had in fact committed herself to the service of the church as a nun. However, after her first encounter with handsome James Tyrone, she bowed to her sensual part of feminine nature. In fact, his handsome male outlook acts as a powerful stimulation of her erotic sensual self that overrides her religious commitment. Mary recalls her stimulation for marriage in such words:

If you think Mr. Tyrone is handsome now, you should have seen when I first met him. He had the reputation of the best looking man in the country. He was a

great matinee idol then, you know [ . . . ]. You can imagine how excited I was then, when my father wrote he and James Tyrone had become friends, and I was to meet him when I came home from Easter vacation. I showed the letter to all the girls, and how envious they were! My father took me to see him act first. It was a play about the French Revolution and the leading part was a noble man. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I wept when he was thrown in prison—and then was so mad at myself because I was afraid my eyes and nose would be red [ . . . ]. And he was handsomer than my wildest dreams, in his make up and his noble man costume that was so becoming to him [ . . . ]. I fell in love right then. So did he, he told me after wards. I forgot all about becoming a nun or a concert pianist. All I wanted was to be his wife (P.41).

All of the flashbacks, even if they depict happy memories reveal a dysfunctional family pattern. *Long Day's Journey* demonstrates key psychoanalytic concepts including the idea that family defines the person; that social pressures can push a family into dysfunction; and that people are defined and can be understood through their sexual habits. All of the Tyrones first put on mask to hide the truth but later on their masks are dropped and the reality of them is revealed. They are looking for happiness that never comes. Only Edmund can save himself from the misery and he makes a triumphant over the failure and suffering, and just he comes to the truth about the family's dreams and accepts the reality about himself, he say: "Mom! It isn't a summer cold! I've got consumption!" (P. 73). If O'Neill wanted to show the dark side of "The American Dream", then he was successful. If he wanted to prove that people and their problems fit well into a psychoanalytic model, he succeeded there as well.

### 3. A Journey into Capitalist Failure

Capitalism and its values focus on material possession. In this society, the poor man strives to be richer, and a powerless man looks for power. Many of these people, however, do not have access to these goals, and so to be one of the few taking the limited seats of wealth and power they compete. These kinds of people are those who rely on "The American Dream". While capitalism promotes the belief that this dream is achievable, it is more often than not, a literal dream, and leaves its pursuers poor and weak. This keeps the working class powerless and propagates capitalist values. Capitalism by the help of "The American Dream" creates a fantasy world for its pursuers. Many people in this position only perceive themselves to be succeeding but in reality, they are failing at achieving what they most desire.

Capitalism is said to provide the opportunity to achieve "The American Dream". With good work ethic, financial sense, and a little bit of luck, everybody could become a wealthy entrepreneur. However, this dream is hopelessly outdated and become increasingly difficult to achieve. "The American Dream" has turn to a myth and a means of laying blame. People who themselves try to achieve "The American Dream" may suffer the highest costs of this excessive capitalism. "The 'working poor' as they are appropriately termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor to everyone else" (Ehrenreich, P. 221). Tyson believes that it is what the capitalist culture has done to its people, "Every family wants to own its own home on its own land is a capitalist ideology that sells itself as natural by pointing, for example to the fact that almost all Americans want to own their own property, without acknowledging that this desire is created in us by the capitalist culture in which we live" (P. 53).

Marx analysis about "The American Dream" reveals that it is just an ideology, a belief system that is employed by the capitalism, not a natural way of seeing the world. It blinds its pursuers to the enormities of its own failure. O'Neill in *Long Day's Journey* concerns about this failure and reveals the reality of "The American Dream" in the capitalist society. He represents



the failure of American man, American values, and American culture. He shows the man who is looking for a fulfilled life but he cannot find it in the real unequal conditions that are created by capitalism. Metaphorically, O'Neill sees "The American Dream" as a way of escaping from this painful reality.

O'Neill in *Long Day's Journey* copes with an American way of life that has been shaped based on "The American Dream". It is similar to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Williams' *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) in that they portray the materialistic society where characters experiencing financial and emotional crisis. Most significantly, they examine characters trying to overcome obstacles to prosperity and happiness. They are looking for what "The American Dream" has created for them; prosperity, success, fame, and a life full of happiness. By Tyrone, O'Neill shows how he longs for something more than his ordinary life. Tyrone desires for money and escaping from his miserable life. He looks for what James Adams claims in 1931 that "The American Dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world" (P.4). This is the capitalist view toward life and society as "Marxists believe that all social phenomena, from child-rearing practices to environmental concerns, are cultural productions- and that culture cannot be separated from the socioeconomic system that produces it" (Tyson, P. 57) so "The American Dream" is a cultural products that occurs in the socioeconomic system of the capitalist society.

The Tyrone moved from Ireland to America to look for the propaganda of "The America Dream", an improved life, and having a land of their own, however, their dreams were inaccessible:

Jamie: I know it's an Irish peasant idea consumption is fatal. It probably is when you live in a hovel on a bog, but over here, with modern treatment.

Tyrone: Don't I know that! What are you gabbing about, anyway? And keep your dirty tongue off Ireland, with your sneer about peasants and bogs and hovels! (P.11)

They could not achieve their dreams because the condition in the capitalist society is unfair, as Tyrone tells Jamie: "You made no effort to find anything else to do. You left it to me to get you a job and I have no influence except in the theater" (P.10). O'Neill develops his social consciousness and comes to the notion that the promised of equal opportunity is a cruel deception. They come to this summer home for a happy life but Mary says to Edmund:

I've always hated this town and anyone in it. You know that I never wanted to live here in the first place, but your father liked it and insisted on building this house, and I've had to come here every summer (P.15)

Mary's words show that Tyrone is a practitioner of "The American Dream" and he comes to this land for the financial success. The Tyrone are hopeless people that by drinking and consuming morphine try to escape from the reality of their life. They are shocked by the failure of their dreams and now alcohol and morphine are kinds of protection for them. Mary is repeating a song of fatalism that "But I suppose life has made him like that, and he can't help it. None of us can help the things that life has done to us" (P.22). O'Neill addresses the problem of existence in the capitalistic Man. In the words of Zizek, this deadly existence "is the very opposite of dying." It is a sublime but "horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain" (P.292). Tyrone is subjectified by the capitalistic discourse to become the "economic Man." Pettigrew's words offer a concise explanation of this idea: "'Your money or your life!' exclaims Lacan (XI, 212). If you accept the signifier, you lose Being. This is why Lacan speaks quite dramatically of the lethal signifier, the 'lethal factor' (XI, 213). However, if you refuse the signifier, you fall into nonmeaning." (P.194). For O'Neill, the lethal signifier is indeed "Capital" for it opens up a new world of (false) enjoyment for the subject to recognize reality. In *Long Day's Journey*, Tyrone pursues his cultural capital to become a famous Actor, and he subsequently links himself to the capitalistic discourse and befriends McGuire—a false friend—in order to be a "a cunning real estate speculator"(O'Neill, P. 15). He

suffers many losses due to McGuire's advice, but he chooses to remember buying Chestnut Street, McGuire's "famous one stroke of good luck" (Ibid).

In a capitalistic society, a man is not a "Man" until he is subjectified by the monetary discourse. O'Neill has no hesitation in demystifying the "ugliness of American reality" behind the innocent discourse of "The American Dream". Unlike Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, O'Neill chooses not to romanticize the castrating effect of Money with a dreamy outlook, but to foreground how this unconscious language can regulate the living body. In the play, Mr. Tyrone's rise to prosperity represents the birth of the modern, masculine Subject—the economic Man. Marcelle Marini believes that O'Neill forces the reader to see that a man like Tyrone is "caught as a whole, but like a pawn" in the play of the capitalistic signifier, "and this even before the rules are transmitted to him. . . . Such an order of priorities has to be understood as a logical order, that is, as an always actualized order" (P.45). While pleasure in itself may not be a linguistic phenomenon, the idea that Money can give pleasure is certainly related to what James M. Mellard claims, "the ordering function of the culture, a culture that separates man from nature, by inscribing him from the start in language, in the founding law whose primordial interdiction" (P.395-407) is that of the law of the father. The fear of lack on the ontological level is translated by the capitalistic discourse to become Tyrone's fear of poverty, the "fear of poorhouse." In O'Neill's play, Mr. Tyrone has no hesitation in forgoing what he truly likes in order to achieve "The American Dream". With all his money, he ends up saying, "I don't know what the hell it was I wanted to buy" (P.5).

Tyrone measures all human relations based on the notion of "productiveness" or "use value". In Mr. Tyrone's eyes, Jamie is an "evil minded loafer" (P.24) because he is depraved and unproductive. Edmund is disappointing for he is weak in terms of his health or financial well-being. Mr. Tyrone learned this lifestyle from the capitalist society. He is the only character in the play that is exempt from despair and confusion of values. Thus, Mary notes, "Ten foghorns couldn't disturb" (P.17) Tyrone. To a miser like Tyrone, the world is a very stable, easily readable zone: his enemy is the one who wants to "have the house ablaze with electricity at [night], burning up money!" (P.26). He sells his talents for money, spends his money on many "bum piece[s] of property," and ends up celebrating his life by drowning regrets with alcohol. The paradox of success and non-being, happiness and unhappiness eventually leads Tyrone to utter—with clear-headed sincerity—something that he really desires to do and never desires to put it into action: "On my solemn oath, Edmund, . . . I'd be willing to have no home but the poorhouse in my old age if I could look back now on having been the fine artist I might have been" (P.51).

Tyrone is the result of capitalism. He wants to save both his family and his money, but he is unable to manage both of them. In the capitalist society, everything must be sacrificed for money. Tyrone's soul is destroyed by possessiveness and greed. He creates a dream of success for himself but at the end, he and his family go disappointed they find their dream false and inaccessible in the unequal capitalist society. They come to the point that they have been betrayed by what "The American Dream" has created for them.

### **Conclusion**

In *Long Day's Journey*, O'Neill is a critic of American society and of what "The American Dream" has done to both Americans and America. He depicts Tyrone in searching for new values and in pursuit of his highest value—money and shows the other characters vainly dream of what "The American Dream" has created for them, but all condemned to failure. The cause of this failure is the capitalist social system created based on "The American Dream" which is destructive in itself, which spoils every effort to achieve happiness, which puts a value on misery and pains.

O'Neill's characters have illusion in which forget the reality of life and which ultimately lead them to their doom. In *Long Day's Journey*, O'Neill wants to convince the reader that by "The American Dream" man is invited to dream of high achievements, but is dogged by disaster.

Capitalist ideology is blamed for all miseries that happen to Tyrone and his family. Tyrone is more interested in making money than in taking care of his family. It is to say that Tyrone loves money more than he loves his family. It is the lesson that he got from capitalism, to scarify everything for the sake of money.

This study was an exploration from inside to outside, from individual to collective, from unconscious to conscious, in short, it was a revelation of man from family to society. In addition, it considered O'Neill's idea about the reality and provided an opportunity to see how O'Neill revealed the truth of "The American Dream" that is "The American Nightmare".

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