LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT:
AN INSIGHT INTO THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

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A Thesis
submitted to the faculty of the
Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Graduate College, University of Arizona

1956

Approved: Albert F. Gegenheimer, August 18, 1956
Director of Thesis Date
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INTRODUCTION

In a letter to Barrett Clark, in 1926, Eugene O'Neill wrote that someday, if he could "muster the requisite interest--and nerve--simultaneously," he might write about his family background. "The truth," said O'Neill, "would make such a much more interesting--and incredible!--legend." 1

Thirty years later, in February, 1956, Long Day's Journey Into Night was published posthumously. The play may have been what O'Neill envisioned, for it is not only his most autobiographical work; it is also incredibly tragic. It is obviously an attempt on the part of the dramatist to look into his own past and to record faithfully, but sympathetically, what he recalled. Although there have been other highly personal, semi-autobiographical plays of O'Neill, none of them have adhered as closely to known biographical data as Long Day's Journey.

At its premiere in Stockholm, Sweden, O'Neill's last play proved itself to be more than just a dramatic memoir, however. According to its reviews, it seems to have survived

the test of performance. The play is reported to have been "gripping and moving theater" despite its preponderance of dialogue and lack of action. The enthusiastic Stockholm audience was held in suspense throughout the long evening.

But the most interesting aspect of Long Day's Journey is its painfully autobiographical nature. The action of the play takes place when O'Neill, as a young man of twenty-four, was confronted by a succession of personal and family crises. His health had become critical, his career was reaching a turning point, and his family had long been suffering almost unbearable anguish resulting from senses of guilt and frustration. That these early years, as revealed by Long Day's Journey, profoundly affected O'Neill's personality and later dramatic works becomes increasingly obvious as one studies this autobiographical play. It is clear that sources of some of his most recurrent themes lie here in his own "Long Day's Journey."

A biographical approach to literature has not always enjoyed the highest repute among scholars. It has sometimes been criticized as being unscholarly, or at best inconsequential. Admittedly, the criticism is not always

unjustified. Scholarship which "proves," for instance, that Shakespeare's references to the sea inevitably resulted from long years of nautical life is somewhat tenuous. Shakespeare was an amazingly objective dramatist, and even if more were known about his life, it might be difficult to discover any ostensible relationship between it and his plays.

In his objectivity Shakespeare was a notable exception, however. Few if any writers can completely divorce their art from their personal lives. They vary, of course, in their degree of subjectivity, but usually they find, at least subconsciously, certain sources of inspiration in their own past. The study of a writer's biography, therefore, will often broaden a reader's understanding and appreciation for his works. To cite only one example, is not our appreciation for In Memoriam heightened because we know it represents the feelings of the poet after the death of a close friend?

Barrett Clark has suggested that "An intelligible discussion of O'Neill's plays must be based on some knowledge of their origin during the years when, however unconsciously, he was groping for a meaning in life...." 3 There can be little doubt that O'Neill has always been

3 Barrett Clark, pp. 5-6.
a highly subjective writer. In fact, one aspect about which most critics agree is this element of subjectivity. Throughout his plays, from *Beyond the Horizon* to *Long Day's Journey*, there has appeared a typical O'Neill hero—sensitive, poetic, and unhappy. The inner struggles of this protagonist—his doubts, his longing for certainty, his knowledge of the dream's appeal—have long been suspected as being projections of O'Neill's own thoughts. 4

Unfortunately, however, the biography of O'Neill has not yet been written. Barrett Clark's work is extremely helpful in outlining the bare facts of the playwright's youth, but it does not presume to be truly biographical. Thus, O'Neill's boyhood and family background have remained a kind of mystery. Critics have sensed the personal nature of O'Neill's writing, but there has been little biographical information to support the impression.

With the publication of *Long Day's Journey* some of this mystery has been dissolved. This autobiographical work sheds a great deal of light upon the mind of the dramatist and his early family life. Because of O'Neill's subjectivity, it also provides a startling insight into many of his earlier plays. It explains the recurrence

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of such themes as the father-son antagonism, the devotion of the son for his mother, and the problem of the creative artist in a materialistic environment. This is not to say that *Long Day's Journey* excludes other sources for these themes. Obviously such a statement would be an over-simplification. It is clear, nevertheless, that O'Neill's family did leave its indelible mark upon his thinking.

In the succeeding chapters of this thesis it will first be shown that *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is clearly an autobiographical work. Once this is established, several of O'Neill's most representative plays will be studied in an effort to demonstrate the autobiographical nature of some of his most recurrent themes.
Eugene O''Neill's last play is a powerful psychological study of an American family. Like most other families, this one is bound together by an inherent love, though it is more often felt than expressed. What is unique, and tragic, about the Tyrone family is that this binding force has for years been threatened by deep resentments, longstanding jealousies, and thwarted dreams. The play is not the simple depiction of a family's disintegration; somehow the reader knows the Tyrones will endure. Rather it is the tragedy of misunderstanding, of estrangement, and isolation.

The protagonist of the play is probably Edmund, the younger son. However, the reader sympathizes with each member of the family, perhaps especially with the mother, Mary Tyrone. We learn early in the play that Mary has returned only two months before from a sanatorium where she was seemingly cured of a dope addiction. Although things have gone well for a time, she has become increasingly concerned about the health of her son Edmund. She tries to convince herself that what is probably tuberculosis, which he has contracted after several years of generally unhealthy living, is only a "summer cold." She can not help remembering, too, that her father died of
consumption years earlier.

In the meantime the reader begins to understand some of the reasons behind Mary's weakness for drugs. The father, James Tyrone, is a well-known and beloved actor who for years has been touring the country acting the lead role in a successful romantic drama. This one play has assured him of thirty-five to forty thousand dollars a season. But because of his poverty-stricken youth, first on a farm in Ireland and later as a young immigrant in this country, he can not free himself from a frugality which is deeply ingrained. In a sense, this frugality has been the undoing of the entire family. Never providing them with a permanent home, he has always housed his wife and children in cheap hotels while on tours and taken them in the summertime to this shabby, poorly-furnished New England house. It is revealed that his wife's addiction began just after her son Edmund was born, when a quack hotel doctor administered an overdose of morphine to kill her pain. Now, each time James Tyrone sends his wife away for a "cure," it is always to the cheapest sanatorium for the shortest time possible. Still, reprehensible though he is, Tyrone is a sympathetic and remarkably well-drawn character.

As this hectic summer day, in August of 1912, progresses, it becomes painfully obvious to each member of the family that Mary has already begun to indulge in her only form of
escape. The older son Jamie, a confirmed cynic who sees only the "worst motives behind everything," is the first to detect his mother's relapse. He is thirty-three, almost ten years older than Edmund, and is aging prematurely because of habitual dissipation. When his younger brother was coming of age, Jamie taught him that getting drunk was romantic and that whores were "fascinating vampires." His present attitude toward Edmund is a mixture of deep-seated jealousy and sincere affection. He can not help remembering that had his younger brother never been born his mother might never have become a dope addict. He is also jealous of Edmund's ability to write poetry and for his success as a small-town newspaper reporter.

Toward the end of the play, when he is more inebriated than usual, he warns him that he will always try to make a bum of him so that he will not succeed. However, Jamie is genuinely distressed by his brother's health, and it is difficult to determine which is his stronger motive, jealousy or fondness.

Two members of the Tyrone family who clearly have little affection for each other are Jamie and his father. Tyrone regards his son as a good-for-nothing bum who has never "learned the value of a dollar," while Jamie considers his father the "tight-wad" responsible for all the ills of the family.
On the other hand the feelings of the rest of the family toward Mary Tyrone are those of devotion and sympathy. The scene in which Tyrone and his sons gradually become aware that she has once again given in to her weakness is poignantly tragic. Each tries not to believe what he secretly knows is really true. But finally each becomes resigned to the hopelessness of Mary’s plight.

By the time Edmund’s "summer cold" is diagnosed as consumption by the family doctor, Mary has become almost lost in her dreams of her early convent days before she met her husband. Jamie resorts to his habitual debaucheries at the local whorehouse. This leaves Edmund and his father for perhaps the most revealing scene of the play. It is here that Tyrone admits to his son that his concern for the "value of the dollar" actually ruined his career. Feeling that he could not afford to give up his lucrative role, he became a slave to it and thereby lost his chance to become a great actor. He also admits that because of his frugality he has allowed the family doctor to talk him into sending Edmund to the state farm for tuberculars. Edmund reacts by saying that, although he can’t help liking his father "in spite of everything," he has every reason to despise him. Mollified, however, by the alcohol which flows freely throughout the play, Edmund philosophizes poetically about his recent years
away from home. He recalls mystical experiences he has had at sea, when perhaps as a lookout in the crow's-nest he could, for a moment, understand the beauty and meaning in life. But immediately the fog would descend, and the beauty would be irrevocably lost.

Finally, late at night Jamie returns on the last trolley, and the three men set about to absolve themselves in alcohol until Mary stops roaming around upstairs and goes to bed. But Mary descends in a dream world of her own, and they are unfortunately shocked into sobriety. She reminisces about her happy girlhood days in the convent. What was it that happened in the spring of her senior year? Oh yes, she remembers. "I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time." 1

Like so many other O'Neill plays the theme of psychological determinism pervades this last autobiographical work. Life has made the Tyrones what they are, and each of them is powerless in his effort to change what must be. It is as Mary says. "None of us can help the things 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." ² Again after Edmund curses his brother for one of his outbursts of cynicism, Mary expresses this mood philosophically. "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." ³ Edmund's father must always be frugal; it is his past, and the past is the tragedy of this family.

In their efforts to escape the past Mary resorts to stronger doses of morphine, her husband and sons to more and more alcohol. The symbolic expression of this desire to escape is fog, a symbol which O'Neill has used in several earlier plays. ⁴ When Long Day's Journey begins, the fog has recently lifted. The atmosphere remains clear throughout the first act, but at the beginning of Act II it has become sultry, and by Act III the fog has rolled in and engulfed the Tyrones' summer home. The audience is constantly reminded of its presence during the last two acts by the intermittent moaning of a fog-horn off-stage. While the family at first dreads the

² II, i, p. 61.
³ II, i, p. 64.
⁴ Bound East for Cardiff, Fog, and Anna Christie
fog's approach, it becomes a source of escape for them once its presence is inevitable. "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." ⁵

Another conspicuous element in Long Day's Journey is the duality of the characters. Each member of the Tyrone family has two personalities, one that accuses and one that apologizes. For example, in Act III Edmund blurts out condemningly to his mother,

*It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother!*

She winces—all life seeming to drain from her face, leaving it with the appearance of a plaster cast. *Instantly* Edmund wishes he could take back what he has said. He stammers miserably.

*Forgive me, Mama. I was angry. You hurt me.*

*There is a pause in which the foghorn and the ships' bells are heard.* ⁶

Much of the emotional tension of Long Day's Journey is achieved by this dual nature of each character. In earlier works this theme necessitated the use of masks, asides, or even two characters. Its treatment in Long Day's Journey is O'Neill's most successful, in my opinion.

Pessimistic though this last play certainly is, it is not completely black. While it is deeply tragic, it still leaves the reader something to cling to. Even

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⁵ III, p. 98.

⁶ III, p. 120.
as late as 1941, when O'Neill was suffering from his "life-sickness," he was reaffirming his faith in love as an enduring force. Mary Tyrone clings to this faith herself. In Act II, Scene ii, she says impulsively to her husband, "We've loved each other! We always will! Let's remember only that, and not try to understand what we cannot understand, or help things that cannot be helped—the things life has done to us we cannot excuse or explain." Though somewhat more obscured, the theme of The Straw, of Lazarus Laughed, and of Ah Wilderness is still present here in Long Day's Journey.

To the reader who is acquainted with O'Neill's other plays and who knows something of the dramatist's life it must be apparent that Long Day's Journey Into Night contains at least certain autobiographical elements. To my knowledge, no review of the play has failed to mention this point. The similarities between the Tyrones and what is known about Eugene O'Neill's family are too numerous to be attributed to coincidence.

Actually, there seems to be sufficient evidence to support the belief that the play is autobiographically accurate in almost every detail. While it would be digressive to examine all such evidence, the assumption

7 p. 85
that the play is autobiographical is a requisite to the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, it will be necessary to examine some of the more convincing evidence, both external and internal.

To most good Irishmen, this writer has discovered, the name "O'Neill" is practically synonymous with "Tyrone." The reason for this fact may be found in the history of the O'Neill family. This family traces its ancestry back in Irish history to a certain Eoghan, one of the fourteen sons of a Fifth Century King Niall. Eoghan's principal-ity was called "Tir-Eoghan," meaning the "region of Eoghan." Gradually this name became altered to "Tir-Owen" and finally "Tyrone." For centuries the region was the territory of the O'Neill family. Now, of course, it is a county in Northern Ireland. It is interesting to note that most of the famous O'Neills in Irish history held the title of Earl of Tyrone. Eugene O'Neill, as the son of a proud Irish-born American, was probably frequently reminded of his family history and certainly must have been aware of the close relationship between these two names. Had he used the name "O'Neill" instead of "Tyrone" he might have detracted from the dramatic merits of the play, by over-emphasizing its autobiographical nature.

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8 Encyclopaedia Britannica, (Chicago, 1955), XXII, p. 656.

9 There was an illustrious Irish-born Spanish soldier by the name of Arthur O'Neill de Tyrone (1735-1814).
One of the most convincing pieces of evidence of the play's highly personal nature is O'Neill's dedication to *Long Day's Journey*. Because of its relevance, the dedication is quoted here in its entirety.

For Carlotta, on our 12th Wedding Anniversary

Dearest: I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem, for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. 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 haunted Tyrones.

These twelve years, Beloved One, have been a Journey into Light--into love. You know my gratitude. And my love!

GENE

Tao House
July 22, 1941. 10

The most significant phrase in this dedication note is "to face my dead." If O'Neill did not mean his own family and all of the sad memories associated with it, then its meaning is a bit obscure. O'Neill's letter to Barrett Clark in 1926, quoted from on page 1, throws further light upon this point. It indicates that O'Neill had been considering writing such an autobiographical work for many years; thus his saying that "at last" he was able to write about his early life becomes more meaningful.

The stipulations O'Neill placed upon the publication and performance of Long Day's Journey likewise suggest its autobiographical nature. It was his request that it be neither published nor performed until twenty-five years after his death. He also asked that the first performance be in Sweden, a country which has long been receptive to his plays. Although Mrs. O'Neill complied with this latter request (the play was performed in Stockholm in February, 1956), she evidently felt that by 1978 much of the play's impact would be lost. Whether she was justified or not in her reasoning, admirers of O'Neill are undoubtedly grateful that they did not have to wait twenty-five years to read Long Day's Journey. O'Neill's reason for the conditions he imposed, especially upon the publication, must be that he considered the play highly personal.

Similarities between Long Day's Journey and other plays of O'Neill provide further autobiographical evidence. It has already been noted in the introduction to this thesis that many of O'Neill's recurrent themes and situations can be traced to data revealed in Long Day's Journey. Studies of these similarities will be made in succeeding chapters. However, two matters of resemblance, one of stage setting, the other of characterization, should be

mentioned at this point.

Ah, Wilderness!, O'Neill's only venture into domestic comedy, was published in 1933. While its mood is somewhat different from Long Day's Journey, it is considered by most critics to be a mildly autobiographical play. O'Neill himself, in a conversation with Joseph Krutch, stated that "he found his imagination haunted by the recollection of a youthful experience, and he dramatized it in order that a ghost might be laid." 12 Because Ah, Wilderness!, by the playwright's admission, contains at least autobiographical elements, any similarities between it and Long Day's Journey might conceivably furnish evidence of the autobiographical nature of the latter play. With this in mind, it is interesting to note the striking resemblance between the two plays in the matter of stage setting. The sitting-room of the Miller home and the living room of the Tyrones' summer home are almost identical, according to O'Neill's descriptions at the beginning of both plays. In fact, the only significant difference between the two rooms is the contents of the bookshelves—the Millers' containing "cheap sets," popular novels, and children's books and the Tyrones' Shakespeare, Karl Marx, Schopenhauer, etc. Since for many years Eugene O'Neill's only home was his

family's summer residence at New London, Connecticut, it seems reasonable to assume that it was this New London house which O'Neill recalled in both his plays.

In terms of its date of completion, O'Neill's last play was actually *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, which was written in 1943 and published in 1952. One of the so-called "misbegotten" characters in this play bears the same name as Edmund Tyrone's older brother, "James Tyrone." From the standpoint of characterization and of physical description of both "Jamie's," it is obvious that O'Neill was writing about the same person. Both descriptions emphasize the signs of dissipation, the "Mephistophelian" quality, the cynical expression relieved occasionally by a youthful charm. Each Tyrone has an aquiline nose and dark brown eyes. And each is described as being the type which is popular with other men and fascinating to women. However, though they are unmistakably the same person, the James Tyrone in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is treated somewhat more sympathetically than his counterpart in *Long Day's Journey*. The reason for this difference in treatment requires a re-examination of O'Neill's note to Carlotta, quoted earlier. O'Neill stated that through love he was enabled to face all of his family with "understanding and forgiveness." Yet, of all the Tyrones Jamie is clearly
the least sympathetic character. It may be that O'Neill was aware of this and tried to do Jamie more justice in the later play. In *A Moon for the Misbegotten* James Tyrone is portrayed as a basically charming, sensitive man who became a degenerate in spite of himself. While he is made no hero, he is shown to be capable of tenderness and sincerity. Had he married Josie Hogan, a thoroughly good, amoral farm girl who loved him deeply, he might have redeemed himself. However, he is too far lost; as the play ends he is heading back to his Broadway life of "wine, women, and song," and extinction.

This leads to the consideration of some of the internal evidence of the autobiographical nature of *Long Day's Journey*. Again it should be noted that there is no biography of Eugene O'Neill. Information about his life is extremely sketchy. Barrett Clark's work, David Karsner's *Sixteen Authors to One*, and Elizabeth Sergeant's *Fire Under the Andes* have been helpful, but they are far from being comprehensive in scope. Thus it is possible to confirm only a small portion of the biographical data revealed in *Long Day's Journey*.

14 (New York, 1927), pp. 81-104.
The little that is known about Eugene O'Neill's mother is that she was a quiet, pious woman who spent much of her girlhood in seclusion. One of her classmates at a Catholic convent in Cleveland was George Jean Nathan's mother. According to her, Ella Quinlan was respected as being the most devout girl in the whole convent. It was in Cleveland that Ella Quinlan met James O'Neill, a gifted and popular actor. Because the kind of society in which she was reared regarded actors as irreligious and also because O'Neill was itinerant most of the year, she found herself cut off from her family and friends when she married this handsome actor.

James O'Neill was born in Ireland in 1847, the son of a small farm owner. When he was only five years old, he was brought to the United States where his family settled in Buffalo, New York. After his father's death, James, still a young boy, found himself required to contribute to the family support. He worked for two years as a machinist but seems to have taken an early interest in the theater. In his teens he is known to have taken part in a mob scene in one of Edwin Forrest's plays. His gifts as an actor must have been considerable, for


later in his career Edwin Booth once said of him that he acted Othello better than he, Booth, did. 17 Incidentally, James Tyrone mentions Booth’s praise for his acting ability to his son Edmund in Act IV of Long Day’s Journey. 18

After their marriage, in July of 1875, the O'Neill spent the major portion of every year touring the country. Although Mrs. O’Neill always traveled with her husband, she never quite accepted his theatrical friends as her equals. 19 Eugene O'Neill himself says that she “had rather an aversion for the...stage in general.” 20 Yet she seems to have followed her husband faithfully and made James O’Neill her one source of existence. 21

In 1882, at the Booth Theater in New York, O’Neill first appeared as Edmond Dantes in The Count of Monte Cristo. Before this event O’Neill had been considered a versatile, up-and-coming actor, but because of the smashing success of Monte Cristo, the public identified him with this one role and wouldn’t permit him to play anything else. Occasionally, it seems, he tried to

17 Barrett Clark, p. 15.
18 p. 150
19 Elizabeth Sergeant, p. 87.
20 quoted in Barrett Clark, p. 16.
21 Elizabeth Sergeant, p. 87.
abandon the role for other parts. However, these attempts were relatively unsuccessful, and he invariably returned to his remunerative play. 22 Eugene O'Neill speaks of his father's career in Barrett Clark. "My father was really a remarkable actor, but the enormous success of Monte Cristo kept him from doing other things. He could go out year after year and clear fifty thousand in a season. He thought then he simply couldn't afford to do anything else. But in his later years he was full of bitter regrets. He felt Monte Cristo had ruined his career as an artist." 23 Finally James O'Neill bought up the sole title and all the rights to Monte Cristo. When the play was no longer appreciated in the legitimate theater, he took it in tabloid form to the vaudeville stage and there it continued to be a financial success. Even during his last years, while he was no longer active in the theater, he helped to make a movie of this infallible drama.

The O'Neill's first-born was a son, James, about whom scarcely anything is known. Being reared in a theatrical environment, he is said to have worked at a stage career himself, "as a line of least resistance." 24 James was

22 DAB, (New York, 1934), XIV, pp. 43-44.
23 Barrett Clark, p. 15.
24 Karsner, p. 112.
ten years older than Eugene, and when his younger brother was in his teens, James considered it his moral obligation to teach him all that he had learned of the ways of the world. Aside from this bit of information, however, James's influence upon the playwright can be only surmised.

Compared with the meager biographical data concerning the rest of the family, our knowledge about Eugene O'Neill's youth seems fairly complete. Although this is actually far from true, the outline of his boyhood and early manhood is reasonably well-known. He was born on the third floor of a cheap New York hotel, the Barrett House, on October 16, 1888. After spending his first seven years touring the United States, while his father was playing Edmond Dantes, he entered a Catholic boarding school in New York. From 1902 to 1906 he attended the Betts Academy at Stamford, Connecticut, and upon graduation there entered Princeton University. He was suspended, however, in June of 1907 reportedly for tossing a beer bottle through a window of President Woodrow Wilson's house. In 1909, after a short-lived marriage and a job at a New York mail-order house, he embarked on a quest for gold in Honduras. The trip was not a success; he contracted tropical malaria and was forced

25 Karsner, pp. 112-113.
to return home with no gold. The experience did, however, whet his taste for the sea, and for over a year, around 1910 and 1911, he lived the life of a merchant seaman, shipping out on tramp steamers and "existing" in waterfront dives in Buenos Aires and New York. Sometimes during the winter of 1911-12, he found himself back in the States, in New Orleans where it so happened his father was playing the inevitable Monte Cristo. He joined his father's company for the remainder of the season and then returned with his family to their summer home in New London, Connecticut. In August of that summer (1912) O'Neill took a job as a reporter on the staff of a local newspaper. The job lasted only a few months, for his health had by this time become critical. His years of wandering, living in cheap rooming houses, and over-indulging in alcohol caught up with him. In December of 1912 he was forced to enter the Gaylord Farm, a tuberculosis sanitorium at Wallingford, Connecticut. 26

With this rather brief presentation of the autobiographical evidence of Long Day's Journey it should be fairly clear that the play represents O'Neill's attempt to face his own dead—the "four haunted [O'Neill's]."

26 This bare outline of the major events in O'Neill's youth is a condensation of Barrett Clark, pp. 14-27.
A more thorough and systematic study could certainly be made, for there are other details which tend to confirm this interpretation. 27 Whether the play is completely autobiographical or not is, of course, a matter of speculation. It may never be established that O'Neill's father was so economy-minded as to deny his family proper medical care, that Mrs. O'Neill found a source of escape in drugs, or that Jamie was intensely jealous of his younger brother. Yet, when all the autobiographical evidence is considered—the similarity of the family names, the dedication, the numerous biographical references—the conclusion that the play is highly personal seems inescapable.

27 e.g., the ages of the four Tyrones compare identically with the ages of the O'Neills.
If *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is a fundamentally autobiographical work, as the preceding chapter has sought to prove, the play then becomes a valuable insight into O'Neill's dramatic works. In the tragedy of the Tyrone family lie the ultimate sources of O'Neill's suffering, and this suffering may, in turn, have been the origin of several O'Neill themes which have recurred throughout his plays.

Each member of the family seems to have conditioned his motivations. His father was evidently a source of at least two of O'Neill's most basic themes—art versus commercialism and the father-son antagonism. Because of his extreme concern for money, James O'Neill lost his chance to become a great actor. The reason for this failure is understandable when one considers his impoverished youth. Yet his tragedy, his selling of his artistic soul for worldly success, must have made a profound impression upon the mind of Eugene O'Neill, for he seems to have translated it into a universal concept. Expressed in various ways as the struggle between art and materialism, between the poet and the businessman, or between the
dreamer and the doer, the theme pervades a number of O'Neill's plays. Even in so early a work as *Fog*, written in 1914, this theme is suggested. Although this particular one-act play was later repudiated and copies of the *Thirst* volume are extremely rare, a synopsis of the play may be found in Barrett Clark. ¹ Its action takes place at sea in a small life-boat which is drifting in a thick fog. The principal characters are a Poet, a "Man of Business," and a peasant woman with her dead child. The boat has drifted alongside an iceberg when the occupants hear the foghorn of an approaching vessel. The Man of Business tries to shout for help, but he is restrained by the Poet who fears that the ship may run into the iceberg. Miraculously the fog then lifts; the survivors are rescued, and we learn that it was the voice of the dead child which led the ship to the spot. Thus, the mysticism of the Poet is triumphant over the practical motivations of the Man of Business. Explicit though its expression may be in this early work, this theme was to become one of O'Neill's most recurrent.

Because of the unfortunate effects of James O'Neill's frugality upon his entire family, the subject of money was evidently a source of considerable resentment and

¹ pp. 71-72.
family quarreling. Mrs. O'Neill seems to have become resigned to her husband's nature, but the sons frequently clashed with their father on the subject. Referring to his younger brother's illness, Jamie reproaches his father in Act I. "It might never have happened if you'd sent him to a real doctor when he first got sick." ² And later in the play, Edmund bitterly accuses his father of being responsible for his mother's addiction. "It never should have gotten a hold on her. I know damned well she's not to blame! And I know who is! You are! Your damned stinginess! If you'd spent money for a decent doctor when she was so sick after I was born, she'd never have known morphine existed! Instead you put her in the hands of a hotel quack who wouldn't admit his ignorance and took the easiest way out, not giving a damn what happened to her afterwards! All because his fee was cheap! Another one of your bargains!" ³ To his son's accusation Tyrone retorts, "Be quiet! How dare you talk of something you know nothing about!" ⁴

Throughout Long Day's Journey there are references to earlier discord and resentment. That this relation-

³ Ibid., IV, p. 140.
⁴ p. 140.
ship, this antagonism between father and son, was deeply intrenched in O'Neill's thinking seems obvious from the number of times he introduced this theme in his plays. In a number of his works (The Rope, Desire Under the Elms, The Great God Brown, Dynamo) there are situations which are strikingly similar to the father-son relationship in the O'Neill family—the stern, headstrong father domineering over sons who resent his authority. With the knowledge that such situations were not remote from the dramatist's experience should come a more sympathetic appreciation and clearer understanding for these plays.

As frequently recurrent as the father-son antagonism in O'Neill's plays is the extreme adoration of the son for his mother. Though scarcely anything is known about Mrs. O'Neill except what is revealed in Long Day's Journey, it is apparent from the play that Eugene O'Neill was deeply devoted to her. Much of both sons' resentment for their father was due to their belief that he was directly responsible for her unhappiness. His failure to provide her with a permanent home denied her normal social relationships. Her resulting loneliness undoubtedly accounted for her continued desire to escape. Thus O'Neill regarded his mother as an innocent woman victimized by her environment. His feelings of devotion are complicated by his own sense of guilt. Not only does he blame
his mother's condition upon his father's frugality; he also blames himself for being born. As Jamie cynically reminds him, had it not been for his mother's illness following his birth, she might never have known the existence of morphine. The element of wanting to atone for injustice to the mother, then becomes a kind of corollary to the mother-devotion theme.

The third member of the family who seems to have conditioned O'Neill's thinking was his older brother, Jamie. Again, were it not for _Long Day's Journey_ Jamie's role as the counselor of cynicism might be overlooked. In the play O'Neill emphasizes Jamie's jealousy and his desire to set his younger brother straight on what the world was like. Both parents were evidently aware of this situation, also. In Act III Mary says to her husband, "But we mustn't allow him to drag Edmund down with him, as he's like to do. He's jealous because Edmund has always been the baby....He'll never be content until he makes Edmund as hopeless a failure as he is." 5 Tyrone repeats this warning to his son, Edmund. "Beware of that brother of yours, or he'll poison life for you with his damned sneering serpent's tongue!" 6

5 p. 109.
6 p. 109.
But it is not certain that Edmund resented his older brother's tutelage. According to Mary, Edmund was born "nervous and too sensitive," and while Jamie's revelations must have come as a shock, Edmund seems to have appreciated learning to wear his older brother's mantle of cynicism.

The spirit of Jamie appears in many of O'Neill's plays. Usually he represents a kind of cynical, Mephistophelian counterpart of the protagonist's own character, as in The Great God Brown and Days Without End. He serves as a protective disguise, one which is needed by the sensitive hero, but one which seeks to destroy its wearer at the same time.

The last member of the Tyrone family who sheds a revealing light upon O'Neill's plays is, of course, Edmund himself. It is even clearer now, since the publication of Long Day's Journey, how often Edmund has appeared in O'Neill's works. As the self-portrait of the dramatist, Edmund is the typical O'Neill hero—unhappy in his relationship with his family, sensitive, and disillusioned. To varying extents, Edmund is the poetic dreamer Robert Mayo, the consumptive writer Stephen Murray, the tortured Dion Anthony, and the poet-

7 II, ii, p. 88.
cynic John Loving. By unveiling Edmund's youth, Long Day's Journey has helped to explain these heroes' motivations.

In each succeeding chapter of this thesis an individual play will be considered in the light of Long Day's Journey. Particular emphasis will be placed upon the themes discussed in this chapter, the father-son antagonisms, mother worship, older brother influence, and the art versus materialism theme.
IV
BEYOND THE HORIZON

O'Neill's first full-length play, written in 1918, is not a particularly autobiographical work. Later in his career O'Neill wrote several plays which were much more clearly projections of his own inner conflicts. But because *Beyond the Horizon* does contain certain subjective elements, it requires consideration in this study.

The play concerns the tragic fate of two brothers who, because of the whim of an unquestioning, possessive woman, live in a manner which is completely contrary to their true natures. The focus of *Beyond the Horizon* is upon the younger brother, Robert Mayo. He was reared on his family's farm, but he has always had an aversion for farming owing to ill health during his youth and a generally sensitive nature. He has always dreamed of someday satisfying his urge to travel. Robert's brother, Andrew, is totally different. A down-to-earth, practical sort of fellow, his one ambition is to carry on with his father's farm. When the brothers' uncle, a salty sea-captain, offers Robert a three-year voyage to the Far East, Robert  

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1 *The Great God Brown, Days Without End, A Moon for the Misbegotten*
feels that his dream is answered. Everything is made ready for his departure when Ruth Atkins, whom the family has always expected Andy to marry, lets Robert know that it is he whom she loves. Thus Robert gives up the voyage, marries Ruth, and tries to become a farmer. Andy, shaken by Ruth's avowed love for his brother, fills Robert's billet and sails with his uncle. The tragedy is inevitable. The farm becomes run down after the death of the father, James Mayo, and Ruth soon realizes it was Andy she really loved. The latter returns after his three-year voyage, which he hated, tells Ruth that he quickly got over any feeling for her, and sails for Argentina to seek his fortune. Robert's daughter, Mary, his only source of happiness, dies while only a child. He himself contracts tuberculosis and is rapidly failing when Andy, after another long absence, returns from Argentina where he has lost most of his money in grain speculation. Robert makes Andy promise to take care of Ruth, and as the play closes he dies watching the sun rise over his beloved horizon.

There are in *Beyond the Horizon* a number of marked resemblances to O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey*. First of all, the two families, the Mayos and the Tyrones, are not unlike. Robert, the younger son, is sensitive, frequently misunderstood, and intellectual. "There is
a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide dark eyes." 2 Like Edmund Tyrone he feels the call of the horizon, though he never had Edmund's opportunity to travel. If he bears any resemblance to either parent, he, like Edmund, more nearly resembles his mother who "retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the Mayo part of the family." 3 He is averse to his father's means of livelihood and once suggests to his wife that they move to the city where he can get a job as a writer. 4

Andrew is the image of his father, James Mayo. Realistic and matter-of-fact, he is the antithesis of Robert. While he can not understand his younger brother, he is deeply fond of him, and the wrath which James Mayo vents upon Andrew for deserting the farm can not break the bond of friendship between the two brothers.

In both the Mayo and the Tyrone families it is the father who reigns supreme. Like Bill Carmody, Abraham Bentley, and Ephraim Cabot, James Mayo is a typical O'Neill father--dictatorial, opinionated, and economy-minded. His wife is a quiet woman who has born

2 Eugene O'Neill, Plays: Beyond the Horizon, The Straw, Before Breakfast, (New York, 1925), I, i, p. 16.
3 I, ii, p. 32.
4 III, i, p. 103.
the strain remarkably well. Although she can not understand her sons, especially Robert, she can offer them maternal protection. This relationship between father, mother, and sons, so often found in O'Neill's plays seems to be too recurrent not to be biographical in nature.

But perhaps the most significant biographical element in *Beyond the Horizon* is the fate of one of the brothers. It has already been suggested that Robert is at least a partial self-portrait of Eugene O'Neill. While the play is primarily concerned with his tragedy—that of the poetic dreamer who does not live according to his nature—it is also concerned with his older brother, Andrew. In fact, O'Neill tells his audience, through Robert, that Andy is the "deepest-dyed failure of the three." 5 The significance of Robert's statement is less meaningful until the play is considered in the light of *Long Day's Journey*.

In Act I Andrew is pictured as being "...husky, sun-bronzed, handsome in a large-featured, manly fashion—a son of the soil...." 6 Clearly he is meant to remain with the soil, for O'Neill stresses this point throughout the

5 III, i, p. 118.
6 I, i, p. 16.
first act. Robert tells Andy, "You're wedded to the soil. You're as much a product of it as an ear of corn is, or a tree." 7

The next time Andy makes an appearance, in Act II, Scene ii, he has just returned from his three-year voyage. The effects of his uprooting can already be detected. "The old easy-going good-nature seems to have been partly lost in a breezy, business-like briskness of voice and gesture." 8 The practical side of his nature, inherited from his father, has become more pronounced, and he is losing his love for the soil. He remains on the farm but one day, then sails for Buenos Aires, where "a fellow has a chance to make good." 9

In the last act, when Andy returns after an absence of five years, the change is complete. He is no longer a "son of the soil." "His face seems to have grown high-strung, hardened by the look of decisiveness which comes from being constantly under a strain where judgments on the spur of the moment are compelled to be accurate. His eyes are keener and more alert. There is even a

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7 I, i, p. 19.
8 p. 77.
9 I, ii, p. 80.
suggestion of ruthless cunning about them." 10 He confesses to Ruth that he was ruined both financially and morally by grain speculation. When Robert sees his older brother, he immediately recognizes the change and reminds Andy of his tragedy. In a partly delirious condition he tells him, "You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy. I'm a failure, and Ruth's another—but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on God. But you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership...your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray—." 11

The theme was one which was to recur again and again. Expressed in somewhat different terms, Andrew Mayo's tragedy is the tragedy of James Tyrone. Both Andrew and Tyrone had been creators—Andy of the products of the soil and Tyrone of dramatic roles. Had either of them lived up to his creative capacity he would have fulfilled a

10 III, i, p. 108.
11 III, i, p. 118.
productive and spiritually rewarding life. But each possessed a kind of tragic flaw, a germ of materialism, which led him to gamble with the very thing he loved to create. While one was financially successful, both were ruined creatively. "So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer--to win back--," warns Robert as he is dying. 12

Perhaps it is more easily understood now why O'Neill considered Andrew such a failure. Knowing that this secondary tragedy was subjective in character may not enhance the dramatic merits of Beyond the Horizon; it should, however, contribute to a fuller understanding of the playwright. It may also explain why Eugene O'Neill's father, who barely lived to see the first performance of Beyond the Horizon, reportedly wept when the play was over. 13

12 III, i, 118.

When O'Neill returned to the setting of the New England farm, six years after *Beyond the Horizon*, he penetrated deeply beneath its surface appearances. What he discovered there may also reflect a more thorough search into his own inner life. *Desire Under the Elms*, written in 1924, contains themes which seem to be more closely associated with O'Neill's family than any previous play. For the first time, O'Neill introduced the violent clash between father and sons. Although there had been stern fathers before this play, the reaction of the sons had never been emphasized. *Desire Under the Elms* is also the first instance of the son's enlistment of his mother's assistance for the purpose of overthrowing the father. Whether O'Neill discarded some of his inhibitions when he wrote the play, or whether he picked up these themes from contemporary literature can not be determined. However, since by 1924 his family had passed out of his existence, there is a possibility that he felt free to write more subjectively.

Though mother and son do achieve a partial victory over the father in *Desire Under the Elms*, old Ephraim Cabot is still far from defeated. Like one of the rocks
he has cleared from his New England farm, he is hard and enduring. Seventy-five years old, Ephraim has gone through two wives and is out looking for his third when the play begins. Eben Cabot, Ephraim's son by his second marriage, hates his father because of the way he over-worked his mother and eventually drove her to her grave. He also contends that his mother held some claim to the farm which Ephraim refuses to recognize. When his father returns with his new wife, Abbie Putnam, who is forty years younger than he, Eben resents her too, because she represents another obstacle toward his acquisition of the farm. However, his feelings of resentment are overcome by a strong physical attraction which exists between him and his young step-mother. Abbie bears a child, to whom Ephraim, thinking of course that the child is his, intends to will the farm. Eben now believes Abbie tricked him and decides to head for California to join two older brothers who have already departed. But Abbie kills her baby to keep Eben and to prove her love for him. Horrified by her action, Eben calls the sheriff. He immediately realizes the unselfishness of Abbie's motive, however. He returns to her, and the two of them, exultant in their love, are led off to their fate.
Throughout *Desire Under the Elms* the reader is never allowed to forget the hatred between father and son. In Part I, Eben prays that Ephraim will die so that the farm may fall to him. ¹ When he returns from a visit with Min, the village prostitute, he gloats over the possession of something his father once owned but no longer does. ² One of the satisfactions in his relationship with Abbie is the knowledge that he has stolen her from his father. Later in the play, when Abbie tells him that she has killed their son, Eben at first thinks it is Ephraim she has murdered.

Eben. (amazed) Ye killed him?
Abbie. (dully) Ay-eh.
Eben. (recovering from his astonishment) An' serves him right! But we got t'do something quick t'make it look s'if the old skunk'd killed himself when he was drunk. We can prove by 'em all how drunk he got. ³

But when Eben learns it is their son she has killed, his reaction is quite different. He "falls to his knees as if he had been struck--his voice trembling with horror." ⁴

Like Robert Mayo and Edmund Tyrone, Eben resembles his departed mother, not his father. This fact seems to irk old Ephraim. He is continually observing that Eben...

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² I, iii, p. 214.

³ III, iii, p. 260.

⁴ III, iii, p. 261.
is "so thunderin' soft—like his Maw," 5 or that "Eben's a dumb fool—like his Maw—soft an' simple!" 6 But the resemblance is not the only link between Eben and his dead mother. Until he and Abbie consummate their desire, Eben is completely possessed by the memory of his mother. He is convinced that Ephraim "murdered" her in order to get the farm and that her ghost still lingers, seeking revenge. While Abbie is trying to seduce him in the parlor, Eben calls to his mother, "Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye tellin' me?" Abbie assures him his mother would want him to make love to his new mother. Eben is inclined to agree, but he can't understand why. Then he suddenly grasps the meaning. "I see it! I sees why. It's her vengeance on him—so's she kin rest quiet in her grave!" 7 His revelation is a happy one, for Abbie frees him from his adoration for his mother. At least she transfers it from mother to step-mother.

Admittedly, it would be impossible "to prove" the source of the father-son antagonism and mother devotion themes in Desire Under the Elms. In all likelihood,

5 II, i, p. 231.
6 I, iv, p. 222.
7 II, iii, p. 243.
there is no one source. By 1924 Freudian psychology had been widely read, and this particular phenomenon—the attraction of a child for the parent of the opposite sex and his hostility toward the other parent—was a psychological commonplace. But why O'Neill should have been so preoccupied with this Oedipus complex and later its counterpart, the Electra complex, is difficult to determine. Exaggerated as Eben Cabot's motives may seem, there are significant parallels between his feelings and Edmund Tyrone's. Each son was convinced that his mother, whom he resembled, had been "murdered" by a hard, unsympathetic husband. The desire to avenge this wrong, to "get even" with the father, is understandable enough.

The purpose of this study is merely to point out the possibility of the biographical source for these themes. Perhaps a future biographer of O'Neill will be in a position to shed further light upon this problem.

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8 See Chapter VII (The Great God Brown), pp. 60-61, for a further discussion of parent-son relationships.
According to George Jean Nathan, Otto Kahn once asked O'Neill to write a play championing the American businessman. O'Neill complied, in 1925, by writing *Marco Millions*. But instead of defending American business, the play almost outdoes *Babbitt* in its satire not just upon the acquisitiveness of America but upon all of western civilization.

The story is amusing despite its incredibility. How anyone could have been so naive as to make this request of O'Neill is difficult to imagine. Furthermore, the playwright hardly needed Kahn's excuse to write *Marco Millions*, for the theme of this play is one with which he had been concerned since 1918 in *Beyond the Horizon*. The tragedy of Marco Polo is, in fact, the tragedy of Andrew Mayo. Each man lost his creative instinct in the search for worldly success. Marco Polo's soul was, perhaps, more fated from the beginning than Andrew's, and the wealthy Thirteenth Century merchant was never made aware of his personal tragedy. Yet there is a basic similarity in the spiritual dissolution

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of the two men.

Marco Millions is a mixture of satire and tragedy. Perhaps for this reason the play is not one of O'Neill's best, for the mixture is a bit awkward. Its satire is directed at Marco Polo, the embodiment of western materialism, and its tragedy is that of Princess Kukachin, the symbol of eastern culture, who can never be understood by the West.

Act I of the play depicts the gradual loss of Marco Polo's soul. It comes over a period of approximately three years, from the time Marco leaves Venice until he arrives at the palace of the Great Kaan. On the eve of his departure he is shown to possess a kind of dual nature. He sings a tender love song to the twelve-year-old Donata. He makes her promise never to forget him, to wait until he returns when they will be married. He is sensitive to the beauty of the night and tells Donata he wishes he didn't have to leave. On the other hand, being the son of a Polo has assured him of an acquisitive nature. Speaking of the Great Kaan, Marco tells Donata, "I'll be on the right side of him from the start, and Father and Uncle both say there's millions to be made in his service if you're not afraid of work and keep awake to opportunity." 2

The next scene finds the Polos at the palace of the Papal Legate Tedaldo, who becomes the new Pope during the scene. They have come to relay the Kaan's request for one hundred wise men of the West to argue the merits of Christianity with representatives of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The Pope, replying that he does not have a hundred wise men, sends the Kaan only two monks. During the first half of this scene Marco has been trying to compose a love poem to Donata. The "poem" is a curious mixture of sentimental love and undisguised materialism.

You are lovely as the gold in the sun
Your skin is like silver in the moon
Your eyes are black pearls I have won
I kiss your ruby lips and you swoon,
Smiling your thanks as I promise you
A large fortune if you will be true....

Humiliated because his father and uncle make fun of his poetry writing, Marco throws his poem away. As they pick up their bags to continue their journey, Marco tarries, however. Torn between his two natures, he finally picks up the crumpled poem and runs wildly after the elder Polos. His soul is not quite lost.

The last three scenes of Act I depict the three Polos' journey through Mohammedan, Buddhist, and finally Tartar kingdoms. The scenes are stylized, being nearly

3 I, ii, p. 360.
identical in each case. In each scene the ruler is surrounded by the symbolic representation of the life of man. There are a mother and her baby, two children, a couple in love, a couple in their middle-age, one in their old-age, and a coffin. By showing Marco Polo's reaction to each tableau the playwright skillfully reveals the young merchant's loss of sensibility.

When the Polos arrive at the Mohammedan mosque, Marco still retains a degree of curiosity and respect for life. As he inspects each phase of the scene, he tries to play with the baby, stands in awe of the two lovers, and shudders at the sight of the coffin. A prostitute enters and offers herself to Marco free of charge. By passing up this bargain Marco shows he is not yet completely materialistic in his outlook.

At the Buddhist temple he is more worldly-wise. Indifferent toward most of the scene before him, he manages to spit contemptuously at the feet of the lovers and to avoid looking at the coffin. His only display of curiosity is when he sees the middle-aged couple eating real rice—something he has done himself. He kisses the prostitute on a bet with his uncle. "It's too bad she's—what she is," he says afterward with some sympathy. But his uncle warns him, "Don't waste pity. Her kind are necessary evils." 4

Finally, when Marco is eighteen, the Polos reach the Tartar kingdom. Marco is now "a brash, self-confident young man, assertive and talky." He hardly even glances at the group symbolizing the life of man. He has evidently been visiting the prostitute for some time. When she enters, however, she says she is through with him now that he has become a man. He demands that she return something she took from him the previous night. "Do you mean this?" she asks, holding up the crumpled love poem. "No," shouts Marco. "I didn't write that." But the prostitute knows better. "You're lying. You must have. Why deny it? Don't sell your soul for nothing." She holds the poem to the wind. "Going! Going! Gone! Your soul! Dead and buried! You strong man!" Thus Marco loses the last vestiges of what might have been a creative urge, and he becomes the embodiment of soulless western culture.

In the remaining acts what had been the dichotomy within Marco's personality becomes the fundamental difference between East and West. Although the play remains satirical, its emphasis shifts to the personal tragedy of the granddaughter of Kublai Kaan, Princess Kukachin.

5 I, v, p. 373.

6 I, v, p. 375.
She unfortunately falls in love with the amazing merchant from the West, and she alone among her grandfather's court believes he possesses a soul. She persuades her grandfather to allow the Polos to escort her by ship to Persia where she is to marry a young Kaan. During their two-year voyage she pitifully tries to make Marco realize her love, but he treats her only as some rare commodity to be safeguarded. The climax of the play occurs at the end of this voyage, just before the Princess is to be turned over to her husband. The elder Polos are counting their treasure which they have accumulated after many years in China. Princess Kukachin asks Marco to look into her eyes for the last time to see if he can detect anything there. For an instant it seems as if Marco will be saved.

(...He looks for a moment critically, then he grows tense, his face moves hypnotically forward toward hers, their lips seem about to meet in a kiss. She murmurs) Marco!

Marco. (his voice thrilling for this second with oblivious passion) Kukachin! 7

At this moment Marco's uncle exclaims "One million!," as he plunks a stack of coins into a chest. Marco is immediately brought back to his materialistic senses, and East and West are destined never to understand each other.

7 III, i, pp. 414-415.
Princess Kukachin is delivered to her Kaan, and the wealthy Polos sail for home. In the last act it is revealed that the Princess died of a broken heart after about a year of marriage. But Marco Polo returns to a regal welcome in Venice where he boasts of his long fidelity to a now fat, middle-aged Donata. At the sumptuous feast provided by the Polos Marco lectures on the lucrative Chinese silk industry. Its most remarkable aspect, he says, is that the industry is dependent upon the activity of "millions upon millions upon millions of worms!" 8

In a sense, this play is one of O'Neill's more objective works, because the central character is not a self-portrait of the dramatist. There is no Robert Mayo to inform a grossly exaggerated Andrew of his loss of soul. Instead, Robert stands aside and simply describes how this exaggerated Andrew might have behaved in the foreign countries he visited.

Yet, just as Andrew's tragedy was a theme closely related to O'Neill's life, so too is Marco Polo's. In this sense the play is not wholly objective. The Venetian merchant's acquisition of millions with the consequent loss of sensibility might be likened to James O'Neill's career. By clearing thirty-five or forty

8 III, i, p. 431.
thousand dollars a season O'Neill's father must have amassed a considerable fortune, but in doing so he sacrificed his creative ability. Of course, O'Neil's father was deeply aware of his failure, while Marco Polo remained oblivious to any personal tragedy. In the Epilogue of the play O'Neill has Marco leave the theater "with a satisfied sigh at the sheer comfort of it all" and resume his life. 9

As compared with Marco Millions, a relatively objective work, The Great God Brown is one of O'Neill's most autobiographical plays. According to Joseph Krutch, it is a "subjective, almost a personal confession." ¹ One of the play's protagonists is another recurrence of the Edmund Tyrone-type hero—artistic, but shy, lonely, and misunderstood. Dion Anthony's predicament, the problem of the American creative artist, is one which deeply concerned both Eugene O'Neill and his father, James O'Neill.

The Great God Brown is both an allegory and a straightforward living drama involving the lives of four people: Dion Anthony, a frustrated artist; Dion's wife, Margaret; William Brown, the successful architect; and Cybel, a prostitute. Read on its allegorical level, the play is frequently subtle and sometimes even baffling. But on both its mystical and narrative levels some of its problems are more easily understood when examined in the light of O'Neill's own family background. The significance of the masks used in the play, the relationship between Dion

and his parents, the attitude of Dion toward Billy Brown are rendered more meaningful by *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

In the Prologue to *The Great God Brown* there are striking similarities between the Brown and Anthony families and O'Neill's own family. First the Browns—father, mother, and son—are shown on the pier of a casino where they have wandered from a high school commencement dance. The father might be called a Marco Polo type; he is a "bustling, genial, successful, provincial, business man, stout and hearty in his evening dress." 2 His wife, who could well be Donata, "is a dumpy woman of forty-five, overdressed in black lace and spangles." 3 Billy Brown, Marco Junior, is a likable, handsome young man of almost eighteen. "His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence." 4 Since it is his commencement they are celebrating, the conversation turns to his future. Mr. Brown, a partner in the firm of "Anthony and Brown: Contractors and Builders," has already made up his mind about his son's career. "Architecture! How's that? Billy a first-rate, number-one architect! That's my proposition! What I've always wished I could have

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3 Ibid., p. 11.

4 Ibid., p. 11.
been myself! Only I never had the opportunity." 5 Mrs. Brown plaintively remarks, "When you proposed, I thought your future promised success--my future--(with a sigh)--Well, I suppose we've been comfortable." 6 Her complaint is reminiscent of Mary Tyrone. She recalls how Billy used to enjoy drawing houses as a child. Yes, agrees Mr. Brown, "Billy's got the stuff in him to win, if he'll only work hard enough." 7 The question is settled. Then, after Mrs. Brown reminds her husband how much warmer the June nights were when she was a girl, the three of them return to the dance.

For a moment there is silence except for the sound of lapping waves and of distant music. The Anthony family now wanders onto the pier for a scene which is outwardly identical to the preceding. This family is surprisingly similar to the Tyrones. The father is a kind of cross between James Tyrone and Ephraim Cabot. He is a "tall lean man of fifty-five or sixty with a grim, defensive face, obstinate to the point of stupid weakness." 8 Mrs. Anthony seems clearly to be a picture

6 Ibid., p. 13.
7 Ibid., p. 13.
of O'Neill's mother. Like Mary Tyrone, she is a "frail, faded woman, her manner perpetually nervous and distraught, but with a sweet and gentle face that had once been beautiful." 9 A few paces behind his parents, "as if he were a stranger," follows their son, Dion, who is probably a portrait of the young Eugene O'Neill. His face is "dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately super-sensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life...." 10 But as a defense against the world which can not understand him, and which he can not understand, he has forced his expression into that of a mask, one which curiously resembles a young Jamie Tyrone. Its expression is that of a "mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan." 11 As in the previous scene the conversation turns to the son's future. Dion's mother, "suddenly pleading," says to her husband, "You simply must send him to college!" But Mr. Anthony is a man who knows his own mind. "I won't. I don't believe in it. Colleges turn out lazy loafers to sponge on their poor old fathers! Let him slave like I had to! That'll teach him the value of a dollar! College'll

make him a bigger fool than he is already! I never got above grammar school but I've made money and established a sound business. Let him make a man out of himself like I made of myself!" 12 The speech is reminiscent of one of James Tyrone's diatribes in Long Day's Journey, when he said to Jamie, "You dare tell me what I can afford? You've never known the value of a dollar and never will! You've never saved a dollar in your life!". 13 Dion Anthony's only response to his father's outburst is, "This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father." 14 Dion's mother informs her husband of the Browns' recent decision to send Billy to college to become an architect and expand the firm. This challenge to Mr. Anthony's pride quickly changes his mind. "Then you can make up your mind to go, too! And you'll learn to be a better architect than Brown's boy or I'll turn you out in the gutter without a penny! You hear?" 15 Dion decides the former choice would be "less laborious." Then Mrs. Anthony recalls the June evenings when she was carrying Dion, and how much warmer

12 "Prologue," p. 15.
15 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
the air was then. As his parents start to leave, Dion calls after them, "(with intense bitterness) Hide! Be ashamed!" Mr. Anthony turns to his wife. "Who is he? You bore him!" But Mrs. Anthony exclaims proudly, "He's my boy! He's Dion!" 16

In the following scene of the Prologue we learn that Billy Brown is worshipfully in love with Margaret, a pretty, vivacious, unquestioning girl of seventeen. She regards him only as a big brother, however. It is Dion she loves, because he can "paint beautifully and write poetry and he plays and sings and dances so marvelously." 17 But Margaret does not know the true Dion, the unmasked Dion. After he once shows her his unmasked face in the Prologue, he promises never to do so again.

Act I begins seven years later, after Dion and Margaret have been married for several years. Living abroad Dion found a kind of happiness, but now that he and Margaret have returned, the duality of his personality has become more intensified. His protective mask has taken on a Mephistophelian quality, similar to an older Jamie Tyrone, while his unmasked face now resembles an ascetic. Because of the family's critical financial condition,

16 "Prologue," p. 17.
17 Ibid., p. 18.
Dion is forced to take a job as a draftsman in the office of Billy Brown, who is now the successful architect his father wanted him to be. This association of the two former classmates is advantageous to Brown, for Dion possesses the creative imagination which had been lacking in his work. Brown becomes wealthier, and the demand for Dion's clever innovations becomes greater. But Dion is forced to be artistically dishonest with himself in order to satisfy the demands of his materialistic environment. The original Pan-like urge for creativity, which at first was not only a defense but also an integral part of his personality, has become perverted into the diabolical mask which now is ruining him.

There is one person, however, who understands the unmasked Dion—Cybel, the prostitute. In their Platonic relationship Dion does not wear his mask nor does she wear her mask of the hardened prostitute. Representing Mother Earth, Cybel satisfies Dion's longing for maternal protection and understanding. In a kind of tortured soliloquy, Dion describes his estrangement from his father, his mother's death, and his search for meaning and certainty. Referring first to his father, Dion speaks of their hostility toward each other.

...What aliens we were to each other! When he lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met that man before. Only at the second
of my conception. After that, we grew hostile with concealed shame. And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity; so I shrank away, back into life, with naked nerves jumping like fleas, and in due course of nature another girl called me her boy in the moon and married me and became three mothers in one person, while I got paint on my paws in an endeavor to see God!..."

When combined with our knowledge of the O'Neill family, as revealed in Long Day's Journey, this speech is one of the most psychologically illuminating in all of O'Neill's plays. Intensely personal in nature, it would seem to be the dramatist's explanation for his preoccupation with father and son antagonism and mother devotion. An earlier chapter of this thesis (Chapter V) discussed the possible sources for these themes. This speech of Dion Anthony's seems to confirm their biographical nature.

Without Long Day's Journey, however, the significance of Dion's confession might well be overlooked.

18 I, iii, pp. 44-45.
Certain passages which would otherwise have remained obscure are clarified by O'Neill's last play. The mixture of hostility and "concealed shame" experienced by father and son are born out by the continual accusations, denials, and apologies which plagued James Tyrone and his sons. The references to O'Neill's mother are now deeply meaningful. Her feelings of loneliness, of being shut off from the rest of the world with only her children to mother, were actually experienced. That "she lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin" might have remained an obscurity were it not for Long Day's Journey. Now its meaning is pitifully clear.

By Act II Dion has become torn between his saint-like faith, which only Cybel understands, and his diabolical skepticism, symbolized by his hideous mask. The doctors tell Dion he will die unless he abstains from the quantities of alcohol he has turned to. He disregards their warning. During their last evening together, Cybel foresees his death. She tells him she is afraid she won't see him for a long time. Like a mother reassuring her child, she cautions, "Don't get hurt. Remember, it's all a game, and after you're asleep I'll tuck you in." Dion is overcome with grief. "In a
choking, heart-broken cry," he sobs, "Mother!" 19

The next evening he visits Billy Brown. Dion knows he is dying, and he feels compelled to speak to Billy. In a half-accusing, half-forgiving tone he reminds him of a childhood incident which was a source of his disillusionment. "Listen!" Dion says, feverishly.

One day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him! I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Everyone called me crybaby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty. And that other boy, secretly he felt ashamed but he couldn't acknowledge it; so from that day he instinctively developed into the good boy, the good friend, the good man, William Brown! 20

Again O'Neill seems to be making a personal confession, one which may be clarified by Long Day's Journey. The incident of the ruined sand drawing appears to be symbolic of the kind of disillusionment O'Neill suffered at the hands of his older brother, Jamie. It wasn't the incident so much as the loss of faith in this person he had "loved and trusted," O'Neill tells us. The other boy, jealous of O'Neill's ability to create, wanted to prevent him from succeeding. In Act IV of Long Day's Journey, Jamie

19 II, i, p. 51.

20 II, iii, p. 60.
drunkenly confesses similar motives. "Never wanted you succeed and make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you." 21 And like the "other boy" in The Great God Brown, whose conscience bothered him, Jamie tried to pose as the protecting older brother, "the good friend." But he goes on to warn Edmund always to be on his guard. "I'll be waiting to welcome you with that 'my old pal' stuff, and give you the glad hand, and at the first good chance I get stab you in the back." 22

Thus disillusioned, his faith in "the good God" shattered, Dion Anthony fashioned his Pan-like mask as a means of self-protection. Patterned after the bad boy, who ruined the sand drawing, the mask becomes more and more diabolical until it finally destroys the sensitive artist. In such a way, perhaps, did O'Neill acquire his mask of cynicism from his older brother.

After the death of Dion, The Great God Brown becomes the tragedy of William Brown. Thinking Dion's mask had been the symbol of creative power, he steals it, but its diabolical perversion quickly ruins him. He too becomes

21 Long Day's Journey Into Night, IV, p. 165.
22 Ibid., p. 166.
inwardly tortured and is forced to devise a mask of his former successful self. Margaret, with whom he lives still posing as Dion, never looks beneath the mask. She remains oblivious to his predicament as she had to Dion's. Finally, as Brown is dying, deprived of both his masks, Cybel appears and reassures him that in death his soul will be born.

The Epilogue helps to unify The Great God Brown into one basic tragedy. Margaret and her three sons wander onto the same pier of a casino during a high school commencement dance. She asks her sons never to forget their father, and then she too recalls how much warmer the June nights were when she was a girl.
VIII
CONCLUSION

It has been suggested that some of Eugene O'Neill's most frequently-stated themes have been projections of his own emotional conflicts. The recurrence in his plays of family situations in which a sensitive son is domineered by an obstinate father and protected by a gentle, loving mother must be attributed in part, at least, to his family background. His concern for the problems of the creative artist—his conflict with the forces of materialism and cynicism—seems also to be subjective in nature. Not that this interpretation is by any means new; critics have long been aware of the subjectivity of O'Neill's writing. Because of astounding lack of biographical information, however, the extent of this personal nature of his plays has not been fully realized.

With the publication of Long Day's Journey Into Night new insights into O'Neill's works have unfolded. It is now more evident that the playwright relied heavily upon his own family background for his thematic material. It is revealed in this autobiographical play that there were grounds for resentment between father and son with resulting feelings of sympathy and devotion of the son for his mother. Long Day's Journey also reveals how intimately
related to O'Neill's family were the effects of commercialism upon the life of an artist. We learn, too, that during his youth O'Neill became disillusioned in his faith in the goodness of humanity.

Individual plays were studied in this thesis in an effort to show how these early family influences affected O'Neill's writing. The idea of the father and son antagonism was introduced in *Beyond the Horizon*, though it was not particularly stressed. Later, in *Desire Under the Elms*, this theme and its resultant, the adoration for the mother, were found to be especially prominent. Dion Anthony, the protagonist in *The Great God Brown*, referred to childhood impressions of his parents which were startlingly similar to situations in *Long Day's Journey*. Other plays might also have been cited for this purpose. Reuben Light, in *Dynamo*, deeply resented his father, the Reverend Hutchins Light, and was also possessed by feelings of guilt over the death of his mother. One of the most important themes in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is, of course, this love of the child for the parent of the opposite sex. Although O'Neill was following the Agamemnon story in presenting these themes, the fact that he selected the Greek tragedy as the basis for his own trilogy seems to confirm the subjectivity of his interest in these family relationships.
The problem facing an artistic soul in a materialistic society is dealt with in several O'Neill plays. The tragedies of Andrew Mayo and Marco Polo were likened to the career of James O'Neill who was forced to sacrifice his artistic talents for the sake of making money. Another O'Neill work, *Gold*, deals with this same problem. Captain Bartlett is madly obsessed by the memory of a chest of trinkets he has left on a coral island. He tries to convince his family and himself that the trinkets were gold, though when he dies he admits they were only brass. The obsession was his downfall; the sight of "gold" forced him to give up his whaling trade, which, like Andrew Mayo's farming, was his natural calling. The effects of commercialism upon Dion Anthony were more complicated. Dion's originally mocking, Pan-like expression became distorted when he was forced to meet the demands of Billy Brown's acquisitiveness. When the artist finally died, his mask had become fiendishly diabolical.

The last theme which was stressed as being autobiographical in its origin was the struggle between faith and cynicism. "Educated" early in life by his skeptical and jealous older brother, O'Neill seems to have suffered from this conflict, himself. Evidently, when he wrote *The Great God Brown*, he felt there was no
solution to the problem, for Dion Anthony is eventually defeated by it. In a later play, Days Without End, the protagonist is also plagued by this duality. But instead of being ruined by this conflict, John Loving overcomes his skepticism in the end by an act of faith. The resolution of the problem was only a temporary one for O'Neill, however. His cynical outlook was too much ingrained, for his next play, The Iceman Cometh, is one of his most pessimistic.

In its review of Long Day's Journey, Time magazine considered the play "...less a drama than a dramatized autobiography." 1 This interpretation seems unfortunate. It would be a mistake to treat this powerful play as only a reference book for autobiographical details or as a tool for unraveling the psychological problems of other plays. The work has considerable dramatic merits of its own and should be criticized from this standpoint. Yet, it is undeniable that the autobiographical element of Long Day's Journey is its most vital aspect and one which is extremely valuable as an insight into O'Neill's other works.

1 "O'Neill's Last Play," Time, LXVII (Feb. 20, 1956), 89.
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