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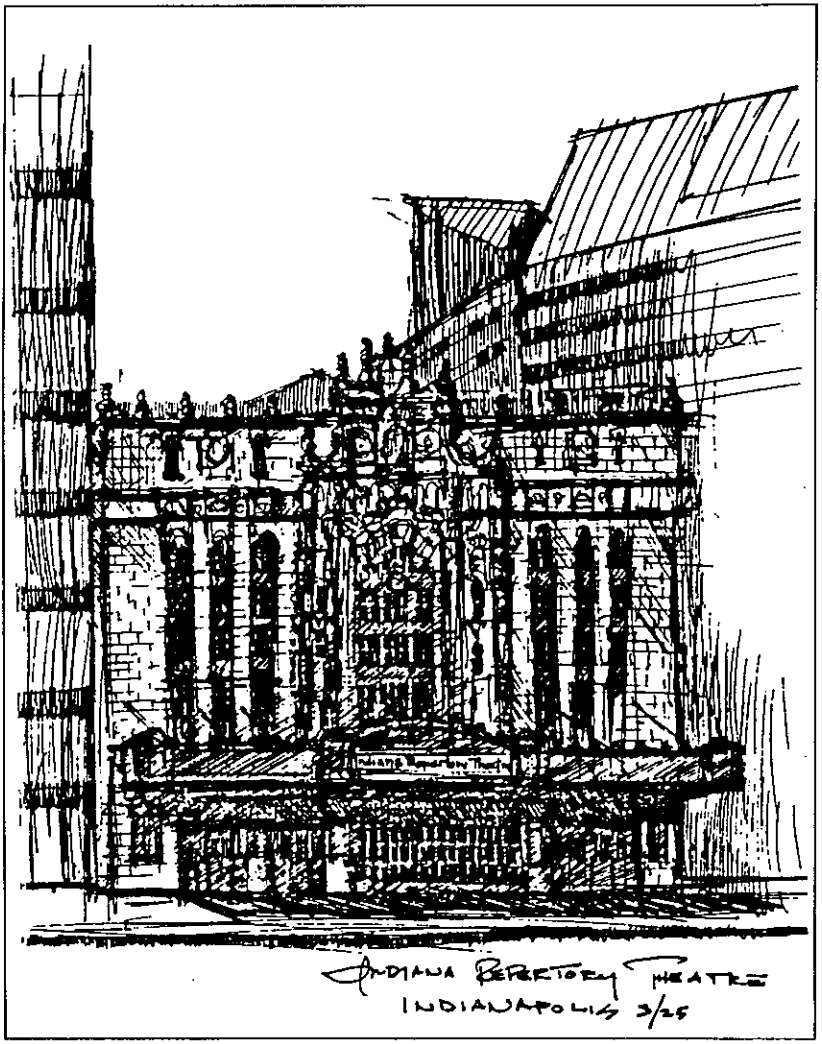
Study Guide



Indiana Repertory Theatre

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

Indiana Repertory Theatre
Sept. 21-Oct. 16, 1988

CAST OF CHARACTERS

James Tyrone

Mary Tyrone, his wife

James Tyrone Jr., their elder son

Edmund Tyrone, their younger son

Kathleen, their house maid

The action of the play takes place in the course of one day in August, 1912, in the Tyrone home in New London, Connecticut.

The play is an autobiographical drama of the playwright's life.

IRT's Educational Program
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Cover Art by G.W. Mercier

Celebrating the O'Neill Centenary
Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953)

October 16, 1988 marks the 100th anniversary of Nobel Prize-winning dramatist Eugene O'Neill's birth on a rainy day in a New York City hotel. His life and his works were to become a legend which theatres across the country are celebrating this year by recalling his influence and producing his plays.

The Indiana Repertory Theatre joins this celebration by producing O'Neill's autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which is, by common consent, his masterwork (playing on the Mainstage Sept. 21-Oct. 16). In addition to being a bold statement of the playwright's own life, this play revolutionized American drama with its candor and its striking universality.

Additional programs are being planned to celebrate O'Neill's influence: an O'Neill film festival will feature three film adaptations of his plays on consecutive Friday nights during the run of *Long Day's Journey* (Sept. 30, Oct. 7, and Oct. 14 at 8:00 in IRT's Upperstage), and a marathon of scenes from his plays will be presented by Indianapolis-area theatre organizations on the birthday itself, Oct. 16. (5:30 pm, IRT Cabaret).

Spearheading the country's celebration are festivities at O'Neill's Connecticut and California homes and the Broadway revivals of two of his greatest plays, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *Ah, Wilderness!*, starring Jason Robards and Colleen Dewhurst. Although O'Neill died in relative obscurity in 1953, following a number of years in which he was unable to write due to poor health, America's theatre community pays special tribute to him in this, the centenary year of his birth.

Eugene O'Neill—a Biography

"O'Neill gave birth to the American theatre and died for it."
Tennessee Williams

Eugene O'Neill's father was the actor James O'Neill, a man who abandoned a career dedicated to serious drama for the certainty of money and success in the ever-popular role of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Ella, his mother, gave up her dream of becoming a nun to marry O'Neill and take up the wandering, unsettled life of wife of a touring actor; she became a morphine addict after the difficult birth of her third child. Jamie (an alcoholic who frittered away his talents), Edmund (who died in infancy) and Eugene (born October 16, 1888, in a hotel overlooking Times Square) were their children.

O'Neill toured with his father and popped in and out of boarding schools when he was young; the O'Neill summer cottage in New London, Connecticut, was the only home he knew. He dropped out of Princeton, married secretly, fathered a child and then was divorced. Jamie initiated him into the pleasures associated with chorus girls and New York saloons. He tried office jobs, managing his father's tour, prospecting for gold in Honduras, shipping out as a merchant seaman, reporting for a New London newspaper and suicide. He became a drunken drifter in the dives and flophouses of Buenos Aires and New York. Finally, in 1912, at age 24, he was faced with incipient tuberculosis.

Something changed in O'Neill then, and during his convalescence he devoured world drama; in 1914 he studied playwrighting in Professor George Pierce Baker's "Workshop 47" at Harvard. The next year he joined a group of young writers working on experimental theatre, the Provincetown Players; they mounted the first production of an O'Neill play. (We meet O'Neill in this Provincetown milieu in the film *Reds*, where he is played by actor Jack Nicholson.)

O'Neill's writing was a restless quest, and he experimented: with forms, with means of showing the hidden forces that drive people, with reworking Greek tragedy, with dramatic autobiography. Through his early plays run two thematic strains. The first is the idea that individuals have their sources of power, frequently in nature; not always the same source, either—for some the sea, for some the land or the jungle, and so on; that to accept the life force is to live fulfilled (although not necessarily self-aware), while to deny the power or to seek alternatives to it is to become alienated even to the point of destruction. His second theme, an elaboration of the first, dealt with "the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."

O'Neill received four Pulitzer Prizes: for *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *Anna Christie* (1922), *Strange Interlude* (1928) and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (given posthumously in 1956). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1936. Among his other plays of distinction are: *Desire Under the Elms, Ah, Wilderness!, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Hairy Ape, A Touch of the Poet, The Iceman Cometh,* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. He was in the midst of writing an 11-play cycle tracing the heritage of one family through two centuries when his health failed. He determined to destroy the cycle rather than run the risk of someone finishing it after his death.

O'Neill was married three times and fathered three children: his oldest son Eugene Jr. committed suicide three years before his father's death. O'Neill eventually disowned his younger children, Shane and Oona (Oona married Charlie Chaplin). O'Neill's third wife, the actress Carlotta Monterey, nursed him through many years of failing health, and served as her husband's literary executor.

By his death in 1953, O'Neill had completed more than sixty dramatic works, 38 of which were produced in his lifetime. With Shakespeare and possibly Shaw he shares the distinction of being the world's most translated and produced dramatist.

Fragments

Through indolence,
Irony,
Helplessness, too, perhaps,
He let the legends go,
The lying legends grow;
Then watched the mirror darken,
Indolently,
Ironically,
Helplessly, too, perhaps,
Until one final day
Only a ghost remained
To haunt its shallow depths—
Himself,
Bewildered apparition,
Seeking a lost identity.

[written by Eugene O'Neill, Sept. 10, 1942]

***Long Day's Journey Into Night*—A Synopsis**

If ever there was a story crafted from the raw materials of one man's life it is Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. So strongly, in fact, did O'Neill feel about the personal nature of this autobiographical work that he forbade either its publication or performance during his lifetime. Consequently, the four-act play, which stands today as O'Neill's catharsis for the youthful anguish which for so long embittered his soul, was completed in 1941, but was not published until after his death in 1953.

Set amidst the waning days of a sultry 1912 Connecticut summer, the action within *Long Day's Journey Into Night* takes place over a span of approximately 18 hours—from breakfast until midnight. It unfolds within the slightly dilapidated summer home of the Tyrone family (Tyrone being the pseudonym O'Neill chose to replace his own family name).

As Act One opens, James Tyrone, the family patriarch, has just enjoyed a leisurely breakfast with his wife Mary, and his two grown sons, Jamie and Edmund. While Jamie and Edmund linger in the dining room laughingly indulging a close comraderie, James and Mary enter into the adjoining living room.

At 65, James Tyrone is still a handsome man, who has strongly upon him the stamp of an actor who, having once been great, must now face possible obscurity as well as encroaching age. From the deeply booming voice even to the way he wears a threadbare, shapeless suit there is an instinctive flamboyancy about Tyrone that is at once both careless yet somehow arrogant.

In contrast, his wife Mary is the very portrait of the genteel lady, born and bred, who at 54 is still an obvious, if now faded, beauty. Beautifully groomed, and dressed, if not in the height of fashion, attractively and scrupulously neat, all visual signs combine to enhance the appearance of this woman whose gay laughter and flirtatious bantering with Tyrone suggests the air of a once practiced coquette. A strange nervousness seems now to surround her.

Presently, the senior Tyrones are distracted by the hacking noise of a violent coughing fit that drifts in from the dining room. The coughing immediately preoccupies Mary and prompts her to express her worry about what she is convinced is nothing more than Edmund's nagging summer cold. Instead of eliciting an immediate reassurance from James, Mary's nervously voiced worrying prompts him to quickly warn her to look to her own health, which has recently been restored by a stay in a sanatorium from which she has only been released some two months earlier. Mary, resentfully picking up on the implication beneath James' wraning, snappingly informs him to stop being so concerned about her health. Their bitter exchange is interrupted only by the arrival of Edmund and Jamie from the dining room.

Edmund (O'Neill's counterpart in the play) is obviously ill. Having just

returned from a stint as a merchant seaman (desperately undertaken as a bid to gain independence from his family), 24 year-old Edmund has returned home pale, tired and weakened from an illness seemingly far graver than a summer cold. But even despite his obvious ill health, his disposition presents a sunnier facade than that of his brother, Jamie.

Jamie, at 34, is a self-absorbed cynic. Although Jamie bears a strong physical resemblance to his father, his habitual pessimism and drunkenness have reduced that resemblance to a shadowy veneer.

It is his cynicism that spurs Jamie to study Mary surreptitiously for hints of the same signs of ill health that had earlier worried James. Catching Jamie, Mary grows nervous and self-conscious about her appearance, and in a gesture of nervous desperation she channels her unease into what has become by now a constant nagging at Edmund about his "cold," and complaint about the fog horn which has disturbed her night's sleep.

Edmund, who has long since become adept at dodging that nagging, launches into a humorous anecdote about a man that rents one of James' numerous properties. But even these efforts fail to halt the tension which has quietly crept into the room and ensnared its four inhabitants.

Bitter remarks from James and explosive responses from Jamie force first Edmund, then Mary from the room and the ensuing conversation, instigated by Jamie, turns to the probable incompetence of Edmund's doctor, who has been hired by James. Jamie taunts his father with having hired a "cheap quack," implying that his miserliness has overridden his concern for Edmund's health. James defends himself loudly, and cautions Jamie not to excite his mother with worrying over Edmund. Jamie reveals to his father that the previous night he had heard his mother wandering from room to room, a sign that has in the past indicated her growing mental unrest.

Mary returns, wondering what they are arguing about. Both men quickly cover the serious nature of their conversation by determining to launch their day by getting outside to do some yard work. Jamie, who has observed that Mary's composure has deteriorated slightly to reveal what past experience has taught him to recognize as an ominous vagueness, cautions her to be careful about her health as he goes out to join his father.

Edmund returns to the room, having gone upstairs to fetch his book. He tells his mother that he purposely stayed upstairs until his father and brother had gone out, hoping to avoid any further argument. Mary fusses over Edmund, alternately concerned over his health, and teasing him for being a baby. Edmund attempts to caution her against indulging her own illness, a caution which Mary interprets as suspicion. Edmund, after all, has always been the one who defends her, and even he has turned away. Edmund goes outside to watch his father and brother work; Mary, left alone in the living room, seems to experience a moment of panic.

Act Two, Scene One opens with Edmund alone on the stage; it is slightly past noon. He is quickly joined by the family's maid, Cathleen, who has brought a bottle of whiskey from which the Tyrone men will take an "appetite stimulating" drink before lunch, as is their tradition. Edmund enjoins Cathleen to call for James and Jamie so lunch can get underway. Jamie arrives first, and over a stolen drink (they are only allowed to drink their father's liquor when he offers it to them) they discuss their mother's condition. At this point it is revealed that the mother's problem is drug addiction, and the fear that the men share is that Mary has returned to "the needle," thus destroying the cure she has so painfully won in the sanatorium. Edmund defends his mother, denying the signs that have so clearly indicated her relapses in the past. Mary re-enters the room. With sickened hearts, Jamie and Edmund indeed come to see that Mary has fallen into the emotional vagueness that confirms their worst fears. It is significant to note that no one mentions the dreaded word "morphine" until late in the Fourth Act.

Mary begins to ramble—another of the telltale signs of drug influence—about her ambivalent feelings toward James. She resents his miserliness and the demands of his profession, which have caused them to spend years on the road without a real home. When James eventually enters the room from outdoors, he first notices that his sons have been helping themselves to his bottle. He murmurs token protestations and joins them. Mary, once again starts hurling condemnations at Tyrone for the shabby way of life that his profession has forced upon them. With this, Tryone quickly realizes that Mary is under the influence of morphine, which to him constitutes betrayal of the promise she has made to resist temptation. He covers his deep hurt with accusations. Mary, seeing the hurt on his face, acknowledges, in a rare moment of self-recognition, her weakness, only to quickly resume her litany of denial. They go in to lunch.

As Act Two, Scene Two begins the family, having completed lunch, are preparing to see Edmund off to the doctor where he expects to receive a diagnosis of his illness. As Edmund changes his clothes, James receives a phone call from the doctor confirming the tuberculosis (consumption) diagnosis, which James then shares only with Jamie. Mary, caught in the middle of this secretive behavior from the men, makes an excuse to retire to her room, which elicits a barrage of accusations from James. Alone with his father, Jamie launches into a tirade, blaming James for Mary's illness and Edmund's poor medical care. Mary wanders back into the room, her grasp of reality fading with each trip she makes upstairs. Callously, she infers that her love for Tyrone has ruined her life—she cannot escape the haunting guilt of the lose of her second child Eugene, who died of measles in infancy when Mary was on tour with James, having left the children behind. Unable to watch the deterioration of Mary's spirits, James leaves the house to go to his Club, and Jamie accompanies Edmund to the doctor, a trip which promises to include a side excursion to a barroom, to spend the $10 that James has given Edmund out of guilt. Left alone, Mary at first seems to register relief, followed by a paralyzing fear of lonliness.

Evening has fallen as Act Three opens. The fog has returned and the eerie bleat of the foghorn adds to Mary's misery. Mary, clearly in the grip of the morphine she has taken, has grown alarmingly dishevelled in appearance. She and Cathleen, her maid, exchange some frivolous banter about men while furtively sneaking some nips off the whiskey bottle. They have been out for a drive in the car, an excursion that Cathleen enjoyed until she was forced by her mistress to go into the drugstore to refill the morphine perscription. Mary begins to reminisce about her early days of marriage to Tyrone, days during which she thought herself to be truly happy. But just as the old bitterness returns to swamp the good memories, Mary dismisses Cathleen bluntly and Tyrone and Edmund, slightly drunken, arrive home.

Although Mary is clearly glad to see them, she cannot help noticing Jamie's absence and begins to revile him as a shiftless ne'er do well, a condition which she blames on James' poor influence on him. She goes on to reveal, much to Edmund's horror, the extent of the resentment she feels toward James. The men console themselves with liquor, trying to ignore Mary's urgent ramblings over the past and James exits momentarily to fetch another bottle. Seizing upon this moment alone with her, Edmund tries to make his mother understand the extent of his illness, and that he must go away to a sanatorium if he is to recover his health. Mary, remembering her father's own death from consumption, refuses to listen, launching into an irrational denial of Edmund's ill health, accompanied by a hysterical denunciation of the doctor. Mary reminds him that this same doctor was the cause of Mary's suicide attempt when, several years earlier, she had tried to throw herself off the dock in the middle of the night in a drug-crazed fit. Just as it seems that there can be no communication that is free from guilt and recrimination, Cathleen calls them all to dinner. Mary, instead, goes upstairs, seeking further oblivion in morphine while all the time denying that there is anything amiss.

As Act Four opens, midnight is approaching. The haunting sound of the foghorn punctuates this act. Tyrone has obviously spent the evening drinking; Edmund has returned from a walk in the fog that led him to a barroom where he has tried to drown his sorrows. They begin a drunken argument over the cost of electricity—Tyrone has turned on only one light in the house to save money. Caught in a waiting game between Mary's upstairs wanderings and Jamie's return home on the last trolley, father and son engage in a desultory game of cards, punctuated by Edmund's recitation of Beaudelaire on drunkness and James' condemnation of Edmund's gloomy taste in poetry. Suddenly a noise from upstairs reminds them of the problem they all share and Edmund lashes out at Tyrone for causing Mary's retreat into drugs. The argument soon blossoms to include Edmund's own misfortunes and his fear that James will consign him to a state-run sanatorium to save money.

Habit, however, soon forces a drunken reconciliation between father and son and in turn urges a confession from Tyrone about the poverty-stricken childhood that has shaped his life and habits. He recollects his failed promise as an actor and reveals to Edmund, for the first time, that he regrets having compromised his talent to make money. Edmund shares with his father an equally intimate part of his own life: the contentment and soul-expanding freedom he has experienced at sea. Tyrone is surprised and impressed by Edmund's eloquence in describing his experiences and an unspoken understanding is acknowledged between the two.

Jamie stumbles off the last trolley from town and James retires to the dining room to avoid encountering him. Jamie first regales Edmund with his evening's conquests, which included a visit to the local brothel. As the story turns, Jamie confesses a lifelong resentment and envy of his younger brother, feelings that have led Jamie to calculatedly lead Edmund down a road of debauchery. But as Jamie watches his words register disbelief, dismay and finally shocked acceptance upon Edmund's face he relents and, in a painful moment of candid sobriety, Jamie admits his love for Edmund. As Jamie passes out in a blaze of self-pity, Tyrone returns to warn Edmund against Jamie, who quickly awakens to confront his father.

Just as the men seem to have arrived at a drunken truce, Mary enters the room and the men are frozen by the sight of her. She is dragging her wedding gown and has regressed in her mind to her girlhood, when she longed to become a nun. She shows no signs of even recognizing her family, except for the brief moment in which Edmund, trying to shock her out of her stupor, pleads with her to accept that he has consumption. Rather than goading her into acceptance, his outburst has the opposite effect: she regresses further into a personal oblivion in which they cannot reach her. Her final musings are punctuated by Jamie's recitation of Swinburne's poem "A Leave-taking," as the play comes to a end.

Long Day's Journey Into Night as Autobiography

Thomas Wolfe may have titled a novel *You Can't Go Home Again*, but few American writers, Wolfe included, have ever taken his warning seriously, and most have returned home again and again to find the material for their best work. Particularly is this true of America's playwrights; our strongest plays derive their inspiration and their power from each author's thinly disguised analysis of his own family relationships. Thus, Tennessee Williams has rarely been more successful than when he deals with Amanda Wingfield, her haunted daughter Laura, and her creative son Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, a nostalgia piece in which Williams views his own past through the gauze veil of time; nor has Arthur Miller ever been more persuasive than when he shatters the illusions of the Loman family in *Death of a Salesman*. It is therefore not surprising that in the last years of his life, our greatest playwright, Eugene O'Neill, closeted himself in his California home for over two years and wrote with great pain his own agonized family document, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The result is the supreme achievement of a certain dramatic tradition and the summit of a fine artist's development.

On June 15, 1940, in the midst of writing *Long Day's Journey*, Eugene O'Neill described the play in a letter to a friend as "the story of one day, 8 a.m. to midnight, in the life of a family of four—father, mother and two sons—back in 1912—a day in whic things occur which evoke the whole past of the family and reveal every aspect of its interrelationships. A deeply tragic play, but without any violent dramatic action. At the final curtain, there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget."

In those words, O'Neill described the action of *Long Day's Journey* with great accuracy. But he left out one salient feature: the Tyrone family of the play was modeled directly on O'Neill's own family. James, Ella (Mary Ellen), Jamie and Eugene O'Neill are transformed into James, Mary, Jamie and Edmund Tyrone, and whereas Eugene O'Neill had a brother, Edmund, who died in infancy, Edmund in the play had a brother Eugene who died in infancy.

When the play was completed, O'Neill dedicated a copy of it to his wife Carlotta for their twelfth 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."

Eugene O'Neill's Art

Eugene O'Neill is America's first great playwright. Before him there were few important plays, especially tragic plays (to which O'Neill devoted most of his career) and no major playwrights. This is especially surprising because our first great novelists and poets—Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson—were writing some of their best work well before O'Neill was born. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, Eugene O'Neill was the first American playwright to succeed in writing American tragic plays.

He was an extraordinarily skillful dramatist. He was able to create exciting and believable plots and real, three-dimensional characters. He has frequently been criticized for faulty dialogue; nevertheless, there is reality and depth which comes out whenever the vast majority of his characters speak. He had a very good ear for the sounds of actual speech and experimented repeatedly with different forms of dialect and slang. Perhaps most importantly, O'Neill placed great emphasis in character development, where most of the plays of the past had focused on plot alone.

O'Neill also knew the theatre, having grown up watching his father from the wings. He knew that dialogue, while being the primary part of the play, was not the only part. In many ways, the dialogue in a play is like the tip of the iceberg; it only hints at the larger structure of action, characters and emotion underneath. Also, on the stage, dialogue becomes part of a larger whole which includes movement, gesture, scenery, props, costumes, lighting, sound effects, music and song. Because he knew this, O'Neill took great pains with his stage directions which explain to directors, designers and actors how the playwright sees the play on the stage. O'Neill was very concerned that audiences see the total play as he originally conceived it.

O'Neill's importance as a playwright also derives from his courage to handle difficult taboo subjects, important subjects like sex, race, drugs, alcoholism, politics and religion which many other dramatists would or could not write about, either honestly or truthfully. His plays continually ran into trouble with local censors (in the 1920's and 30's) as a consequence, but O'Neill never treated such subjects simply for the shock value or for box office appeal, but rather, because these are subjects that concern people's lives.

Finally, O'Neill did have a powerful, tragic view of life, a view he communicated on a strong emotional level to his audience, in part by many of the non-verbal elements of theatre. Yet, especially in his later tragedies, O'Neill revealed a fine sense of the comic and the ridiculous. No other playwright is perhaps as successful in generating waves of both laughter and tears in the same audience in the same evening with the same play.

The World in 1912

Long Day's Journey Into Night is set in 1912, a year in which many significant events occurred in history and art—events which seem hardly to exist in the world of the play. The Tyrone family is insulated from the outside world: insulated by virtue of their transient relationship to the community, and by the secrets that bind them together. But the world beyond their walls was changing rapidly: from a Victorian world to a modern world, from a peaceful world to a world on the brink of war. The following historic facts serve as an interesting counterpoint to the action within the enclosed familial circle of the play.

1911-12

History and Politics

Arizona and New Mexico become states of the U.S.
Woodrow Wilson wins U.S. presidential election
Escalation of the Balkan Wars (first use of aircraft)
Revolution in Central China
Lenin takes over editorship of "Pravda"

Literature and Philosophy

August Strindberg dies
Eugene Ionesco born
J.M. Synge writes *Playboy of the Western World*
D..H. Lawrence writes *Sons and Lovers*
C.G. Jung writes "The Theory of Psychoanalysis"

Visual Arts and Music

Picasso creates "The Violin"
Renoir creates "Gabrielle with a Rose"
Sarah Bernhardt stars in film version of "Queen Elizabeth"
D. W. Griffith beginning filmmaking career
Gustav Mahler dies
Strauss, Ravel, Debussy at height of creative careers
Irving Berlin creates "Alexander's Ragtime Band"

Science, Technology

Marie Curie wins Nobel Prize for Chemistry
Rutherford formulates theory of atomic structure
R. F. Scott reaches South Pole
Polish chemist coins the term "vitamin"

Daily Life

5,000,000 people visit cinemas daily in U.S.
S.S. Titanic sinks on her maiden voyage, 1513 drowned
F.W.Woolworth Company founded