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Long Day's Journey Into Night (Jonathan Cape Paperback, 46)



Synopsis

Long Day's Journey into Night was written in 1940 but not staged until 1956, after O'Neill's death. Unashamedly autobiographical, it is, as he puts it himself in the dedicatory note, 'a play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood', a harrowing attempt to understand himself and his family.

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Customer Reviews

I have seen the play and enjoyed it. I will see it again soon but this time I wanted to be more 'ahead of the game' so I read it before seeing it. What a difference. I so look forward to seeing it now. It is tragic but there is so much more to the book than just the dialogue. O'Neill has unbelievable stage directions and this does so much in helping to understand all 4 of these pathetic characters. There are so many emotions on display and simple things like smoothing her hair (nervous reaction) or shedding a tear (love or sympathy) helped me to understand. It is amazing this all takes place in less than 24 hours. I could visualize everything on stage from the set to the individual characters. Some of the dialogue is dated, but the story is still contemporary and powerful. O'Neill is a genius and he deserves the praise and awards he received.

Eugene O'Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, and won several Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. "Long Day's Journey Into Night" is generally considered his magnum opus. It was first performed in 1956, three years after his death. For this Kindle edition, with the all-too-appropriate cover, there is an introduction by Harold Bloom, one of the many of this genre that might be easily skipped. Bloom is unequivocal in his praise: "Long Day's Journey Into Night" must be the best play in our more than two centuries as a nation. Bloom performs a tour-de-force of brief comparisons between O'Neill and most other celebrated writers. Warning! If you decide to plod through the intro, you may enjoy the following insights:

"O'Neill seems a strange instance of the Aestheticism of Rossetti and Pater, but his metaphysical nihilism, desperate faith in art and phantasmagoric naturalism stem directly from them. As for the play itself, there are only five characters: James Tyrone, 65, an accomplished actor, his wife Mary, 54, stricken with rheumatism, their son James, 33, a ne'er-do-well, still searching for his place in the world, and the younger son, Edmund, 23, who is not in good health, along with an Irish servant girl, Cathleen. The entire play occurs on one day, in August, 1912, at the Tyrone's summer house (and only house), somewhere along the New England coast. Although the play is set in time more than a century ago, the central theme could be ripped from today's headlines concerning opioid abuse and addiction. Mary got "hooked" on morphine, prescribed to her by a doctor after the death of her second son. She continues to seek its solace, since, as she says: "It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you anymore. Denial is the addict's crutch, as Mary proclaims:

"Now I have to lie, especially to myself. But she is not the only one in denial. At one level or another, all the males in the family skirt around the issue of their wife's / mother's dependency problems. It is just a little medicine for her rheumatism. And the men have their own "dependency problem": alcohol! It is a dependency that has always been more open, and socially acceptable. I had to chuckle at one part of the play. At one time, both my son, and I, when I was my son's age, had roommates who had alcohol dependency problems, and would drink our liquor, and then add water to the bottle so that the level of alcohol would appear to be the same. This technique played out prominently in the play, with the

father James knowing that the sons did this. No question that it is a well-written and structured play. O'Neill utilizes flashbacks to provide scenes from James and Mary's courtship and marriage. Mary had two youthful dreams: to be a nun or a concert pianist – the latter now impossible with her rheumatic fingers. Money issues have continued to be a major issue in their lives. The author has helped push me to finally read Baudelaire since O'Neill has the younger son, Edmund, quote him (to the annoyance of the others) on several occasions ("the vulgar herd can never understand"). It is a depressing play, about an unfortunately depressing and familiar subject. The reader or at least this one wants to shake any one of the characters, and say simply: "Get on with your life – there are a lot of roses that still need to be smelt." I know that is a prime reason I would never re-read this play, and have been tempted to give it only four stars, yet that rating is simply too subjective. O'Neill has written a great, 5-star, timeless play.

I love this play more than I could ever express. Now that it is in kindle form means I can carry it with me everywhere! "You've just told me some high spots in your memories. Want to hear mine? They're all connected with the sea. Here's one... For a second you see -- and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning!... It was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!"

I bought this play after seeing the Broadway revival with Gabriel Byrne, Jessica Lange, Michael Shannon, and John Gallagher, Jr. At a Wednesday matinee. During Ms. Lange's soliloquy at the end, the fat woman sitting next to me had her cellphone ring, didn't know how to turn it off, refused my help, answered the call without meaning to, and steadfastly refused to acknowledge her apparent husband on the other end of the line, who was calling, "Ethyl? Ethyl?" over and over again. Ms. Lange did not miss a beat, but I had no idea what she had said so I bought the play. It is a superb edition of the greatest American play ever written.

O'Neill produced this outstanding drama in 1940 with the instruction that it should not be published until after his death. So its first publication was in 1956. I endorse the view that this play, together with Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman' and Tennessee Williams's 'A Street Car Named Desire'

are the high point of American Drama. "Long Day's Journey Into Night" has a fascinating explosive quality. Its plot is largely autobiographical. Once you start reading a play of this quality, it is difficult to close until you have read through till its end.

An intense and heartbreaking iconic 20th Century American play that reads like a novel when taken with the meticulous stage directions. Autobiographical in nature, and meant to be released after the author's death, Long Day's Journey into Night shines a searing spotlight on addiction within a family of misfits. Dysfunctional doesn't start to describe these alternately repressed and emotionally brutal group. Grim, depressing, honest and brilliant.

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