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Eugene O'Neil
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Eugene O'Neil's "Before Breakfast" and *Long Journey's Day into Night* focus on the American family with all of its dramas, tragedies and taboos. These two works represent a great study of O'Neil's techniques and talent to tell the untold story of the American family.

O'Neil, through well-chosen titles, immediately succeeds to communicate part of his message. Who can even think that something good can happen before they've had their breakfast, or how pleasant a long journey that lasted all day can be? But more than anything else, his remarks about the settings, characters, and their unseen reactions help to clarify any confusion. These remarks represent the readers' eyes, and because of that, the readers feel like insiders, as if they are part of the characters' little secrets, mischievous thoughts and gestures.

O'Neil's characters are followed by unhappiness, because of their broken dreams or unmet expectations. They don't know how to communicate—or they don't even try—and that is why they are condemned to total isolation. There is always an addiction that prevents O'Neil's characters from having a chance at a clean life, for example, alcoholism or drug addiction; and if there isn't an addiction, they are ill, greedy or plain lazy or unmotivated. Also, there is always a conflict; his characters are fighting with each other over and over again, without having any closure, due to a lack of communication between them. When they don't

argue, they are spying on each other, either to ensure that the other person is not doing something wrong, or just to make sure that they are not caught by the others.

In O'Neil's family, parents fail to understand, communicate or help their children. Even if the parents are rich, they refuse to help their children, preferring instead to let them work unusual, unfit, or difficult jobs. Even when their children are sick, they will refuse to get them a good doctor, settling instead for a cheaper one, even if he's not qualified for the job. The wives feel like they've been tricked into marriage, while their husbands are unable to make them happy, failing to understand their wives' real feelings, thoughts, and needs. As a result, they are part of the cause of their wives' unhappiness. O'Neil's female characters are deprived from real friends, and therefore their isolation is even deeper. That is why, they end up having some sort of an addiction. Another trait of O'Neil's characters is their lack of motivation. They don't have the mental strength or motivation to break out of the vicious circle that they're trapped in. They are being consumed by their own little tragedies, finding it easier to blame their problems on each other, rather than finding the strength to better themselves.

The final act of his plays doesn't always bring salvation for his characters, and the ones who find a way out, can't really enjoy their new life, because they are still witnessing the unhappiness of the others. Throughout his works, O'Neil demonstrates a very good understanding of his subjects, and he successfully develops the plot, by including dramatic ironies, suspense, conflicts and crisis. Although his final resolution is not what the readers might wish to see in the conclusion, at least they are introduced to the strange world of unhappy or dysfunctional families. Someone had to tell their story, in a society where Barbie-like symbols promise only happy endings. Because of O'Neil's dramas, the readers have been

warned about the effect that life has had on the existence of such families. By gaining knowledge about their unspoken realities, the readers are grateful for that:

But I suppose life has made him like that, and he can't help it. 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. (O'Neil, 63)

Works Cited

O'Neil, Eugene. *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1989.