



# **FAMILY CONFLICT AS MODERN TRAGEDY IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explains how Eugene O'Neill presents family conflict as a form of modern tragedy in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Unlike ancient tragedies, where heroes struggle against gods or fate. The Tyrone family is destroyed by their own past, addictions, and inability to communicate with one another. By the studies of scholars such as Ismaiel, Raja, and Benabdallah, this paper shows how the family home itself becomes a battlefield. The tragic vision of the play is seen in the way the family is stuck in a continuous cycle of blaming one another. Instead of understanding and supporting each other, they repeatedly accuse each other for their problems. Because they cannot escape this cycle of blame, their emotional pain keeps increasing. As a result, their lives become a painful inner journey filled with guilt, sorrow, and darkness of the soul.

**Keywords:** Family Conflict, Modern Tragedy, Addiction, Escapism, Eugene O'Neill

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* is considered a masterpiece of American drama because it shows the painful reality of a family slowly breaking down. The play is not simply about four people living under the same roof. Instead, it presents a deep psychological journey that is metaphorical, gradual, and desperate, revealing the inner struggles of human relationships. The tragedy of the Tyrone family is modern because it happens inside the home, not in public or heroic settings. O'Neill clearly shows that the most painful and destructive conflicts often arise between people who love each other deeply. The play begins in the morning with a sense of hope and normal family life. However, as the day progresses, the strained relationships within the family slowly come to the surface. By the end of the day, the characters become emotionally exhausted and fall into despair.

## **THE CYCLE OF BLAME WITHIN THE FAMILY**

The tragedy in *Long Day's Journey into Night* is clearly reflected in the continuous cycle of "mutual accusations and blaming" (Ismaiel et al., 2024) that exists within the Tyrone family. In this modern tragedy, the characters do not face external enemies; instead, they suffer because of the consequences of their own past actions. According to Dr. Raja, the Tyrone family becomes a "center of struggle and contradiction" (Raja, 2022, p.1). Even though the family members deeply love one another, their love is covered by resentment,

disappointment, and unresolved anger. This inner conflict makes the play emotionally intense and realistic. The characters wish to forgive each other, but they remain unable to do so because memories of past mistakes constantly return. As Raja observes, “Love is overshadowed by the tragedy of the Tyrone family” (Raja, 2022, p.7).

## MARY TYRONE AND ESCAPISM THROUGH ADDITION

Mary Tyrone’s character clearly represents escapism through addiction in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. To cope with the emotionally painful atmosphere within the family, she develops addiction as a way to protect herself. As the mother of the family, Mary is the most tragic character in the play. She is trapped in a constant cycle of addiction and regret. Mary feels heavy pressure to be a perfect wife and a perfect mother, but she believes that she has failed in fulfilling these roles. Because of this guilt and emotional pain, Mary turns to morphine as a means of escape. She withdraws into a “pipe dream” (Ismaiel et al., 2024, p. 3), where she can forget her past mistakes. Her addiction clearly represents escapism, as she tries to enter a world where reality does not hurt her anymore. Mary expresses this desire for escape through the symbol of fog when she says, “The fog was where I wanted to be... I wanted to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself” (Ismaiel et al., 2024, p.5). This statement shows that reality is unbearable for Mary, and therefore she chooses to live in a world of illusion and emotional darkness.

## MALE CHARACTERS AND EMOTIONAL ALIENATION

The male characters in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* James, Jamie, and Edmund also play an important role in the family’s tragedy through emotional repression and escapism. James Tyrone’s suffering begins with his childhood fear of poverty. This fear later turns into extreme miserliness, which leads him to choose a cheap doctor for Mary. This decision becomes the main cause of her morphine addiction. Jamie and Edmund, in contrast, escape their emotional pain through alcohol. Their constant drinking prevents honest communication and blocks any chance of emotional healing within the family. As a result, the Tyrone household becomes a place where the family members are physically together but emotionally distant. Benabdallah and Azmi describe this situation as the “embodiment of alienation” (Benabdallah & Azmi, 2023, p.1). Even when the family sits together, they remain “separated by the darkness of their problems” (Ismaiel et al., 2024, p.1).

## THE POWER OF THE PAST AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FATE

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, the power of the past plays a major role in shaping the characters’ psychological fate. The tragic vision of the play is clearly revealed through the characters’ relationship with time. In this modern tragedy, the past does not disappear. Instead, it continues to influence both the present and the future. Mary expresses this idea strongly when she says, “The past is the present, isn’t it? It is the future too” (O’Neill, 1956; Raja, 2022, p.1). This statement shows that the Tyrone family is trapped in a psychological cycle from which they cannot escape. They are unable to move forward because they repeatedly return to memories of loss, regret, and failure. Their suffering is not controlled by gods or any supernatural force, but by their own personalities, choices, and personal histories. Therefore, the tragedy of the Tyrone family is psychological in nature rather than supernatural.

## CAPITALISM AND THE FAILURE OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, family conflict becomes more intense because of the “contradictions between capitalism and the family” (Raja, 2022, p.1). James Tyrone views his family mainly in terms of money, property, and expenses. This way of thinking prevents him from understanding the emotional needs of his wife and children. His preference for material security over emotional care reflects the failure of the American Dream. The family is traditionally understood as a place of emotional comfort and security, often described as a “haven in a heartless world” (Raja, 2022, p.7). However, in the Tyrone household, the home becomes the very space where emotional pain is experienced most deeply. Through this family, O’Neill highlights the “failure and the collapse of the American family” (Babaee, 2011, p.1) and offers a strong criticism of modern capitalist society.

## CONCLUSION

Long Day's Journey into Night presents family conflict as a modern tragedy by showing how human beings often become their own worst enemies. The play ends in darkness, which symbolizes the absence of hope and resolution for the Tyrone family. They remain "trapped in their problems" (Ismaiel et al., 2024, p.1), and the cycle of addiction, blame, and emotional suffering continues without any relief. An analysis of the play through the critical studies of Ismaiel, Raja, and Benabdallah makes it clear that the tragedy is not confined to a single day. Instead, it represents a lifelong "journey into revelation" (Babaee, 2011, p.1), in which the characters slowly come to understand the depth of their despair. Ultimately, the Tyrone family reminds readers that the most painful tragedies often take place quietly within families that are meant to provide love, care, and protection.

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