

Romantic Intertextuality and The Never-ending Ache: O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into the Soul* of the Poet

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EN Abstract. This paper explores how Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) retells not only stories of trauma, addiction, and avoidance, but also the soul's ontological longing for belonging and transcendence. While scholars have thoroughly addressed O'Neill's debts to Shakespearean and Greek tragedy, this essay deliberately shifts the Romantic intertexts embodied by the character of Edmund Tyrone, whose poetic sensibility reframes the play, in Vivian Casper's words, as a *Künstlerdrame*. Drawing on Neoplatonic concepts of the *anima mundi*, the Burkean sublime and the long tradition of Romantic poets like Wordsworth, and Shelley, this essay argues that Edmund's monologue positions him as the 'poet of theatre'. By situating Edmund within a Romantic and transhistorical lineage of poets—including Emily Dickinson, John Masefield and Baudelaire—this paper suggests that O'Neill uses intertextuality to haunt modern American realism, bringing to theatre the metaphysical ache of transcendence thoroughly exposed within Romantic poetry.

Keywords. Eugene O'Neill, Edmund Tyrone, *anima mundi*, sublime, Romantic.

ES Intertextualidad Romántica, Eugene O'Neill y El Dolor Interminable: *Long Day's Journey* Hacia el Alma del Poeta

ES Resumen. Este artículo explora cómo *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) de Eugene O'Neill reinterpreta no solo historias de trauma, adicción y evasión, sino también una basada en el anhelo ontológico del alma por la sensación de pertenencia y transcendencia. Mientras que las influencias de la tragedia shakespeariana y griega sobre O'Neill han sido abordadas exhaustivamente, este ensayo desplaza deliberadamente el foco hacia la intertextualidad romántica encarnada en el personaje de Edmund Tyrone, cuya sensibilidad poética, en palabras de Vivian Casper, reconfigura la obra como un *Künstlerdrame*. Apoyándose en conceptos neoplatónicos como el del *anima mundi*, el sublime Burkeano y la larga tradición de poetas románticos, este ensayo sostiene que el monólogo de Edmund lo posiciona como "el poeta del teatro". Así pues, este artículo sugiere que O'Neill utiliza la intertextualidad para traer al teatro realista y modernista estadounidense el dolor metafísico de la transcendencia profundamente explorada en la poesía romántica.

Palabras clave. Eugene O'Neill, Edmund Tyrone, *anima mundi*, sublime, romanticismo.

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1. Introduction: From Modernist Despair to Neoplatonic Aches

Since antiquity, art has served as the vessel through which humanity has expressed its struggles, revelations, fleeting moments of peace and the pursuit of meaning. As Marvin Carlson (2001: 8) states, "Drama, more than any other literary form, seems to be associated in all cultures with the retelling again and again of

stories that bear a particular religious, social or political significance for the public". This assertion, although containing certain truth, carries an undertone of helplessness—as if theatre were condemned to be a mere repetition of life. However, if history itself is cyclical, it is only natural that theatre, as any other branch of artistic expression, continues to mirror what is most vital in human experience, whether political, social or ontological—such as the soul's yearning for transcendence, belonging and communion with the world, for instance. Set over the course of a single day, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) stages the Tyrone family's cyclical confrontations with illness, addiction, artistic failure and emotional repression. Each character seems to embody a distinct mode of escape; nonetheless, it is Edmund Tyrone—the introspective, ailing younger son who has sailed around the world and shows an intellectual affinity for writers beyond Shakespeare—who conveys a poetic sensibility that offers a unique counterpoint to the family's stagnation.

While prominent researchers like Harold Bloom (2002) and other critical studies have long emphasised Eugene O'Neill's play within tragic inheritance and his debts to Greek and Shakespearean drama, this essay redirects the focus toward a less traversed path within O'Neill's *oeuvre*, that is, the Romantic intertexts that emerge through poetry within drama¹. Rather than offering a comprehensive interpretation of the play, this essay focuses narrowly on Edmund Tyrone's poetic consciousness as a privileged site where Romantic and Neoplatonic intertexts surface most clearly. Thus, this investigation contemplates O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) as a work that retells not only stories of trauma, avoidance, and addiction, but also a largely neglected narrative of modernity—the existential unrest of the "fog people" (O'Neill, 1956: 3.86), articulated in Edmund's confession:

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! (O'Neill, 1956: 3.85)

—as well as in his evocations of the sea, the fog and his yearning for death. Within this essay, the depicted despair may be read as not entirely fatalistic, for it can be counterbalanced by the suggested reading of a Romantic ache for communion with the *anima mundi*. Although motifs like the previously mentioned do not establish a direct connection to Romanticism, and have, in turn, been traditionally read within Modernist and psychoanalytic frameworks by seminal critics like Travis Bogard (1988) or William Davies King (2025)—particularly in relation to addiction, symbolic escapism and repression—the proposed reading allows for an approach through a Romantic and Neoplatonic lens that does not intend to become the main path for understanding the intertextualities within the play, but to expand the scope under which the studies on O'Neill have been conducted. In addition, the exposed experiences within the play might invite comparison with American Dark Romanticism—due to the emphasis given to corruption, moral evilness, and a kind of foreboding or stern nature—however, nature, seen must not be seen as evil, but from historical trauma and repetition. Moreover, if understood, nature is not where these concepts are born within the play, but the setting in which they become liminal and put to risk through the sublime experience. Likewise, Transcendentalist frameworks—Emersonian optimism or self-reliance, for example—presuppose a redemptive or affirmative communion with nature based on moral uplifting or self-mastery that Edmund does not convey, for his experiences with the sublime derive into momentary dissolution, suspension and the finding of his own voice as a poet, allowing the Burkean and Neoplatonic frameworks to provide a more precise scope to understand his poetic sensibilities.

Furthermore, situating *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) within its historical and literary context further refines this perspective. Written in 1940-1941 and published posthumously in 1956, the play is firmly rooted in modernism, however, as Suvashree Suvadashinee (2024: 4990) explains, O'Neill "was the only playwright who explored almost all the themes and concepts to satisfy the proper display of his characters and plays whether conventional or unconventional without an ounce of guilt". Therefore, through this fearless research, O'Neill is able to resurrect and bring to the stage a story that was, during his time, somehow forgotten within theatre; but that had been long fought to be preserved within poetry by authors like William Wordsworth (1798), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1904) and even Emily Dickinson (1960) or John Masefield (1916), each seeking to reconcile humanity's fractured consciousness with the living world and soul. In such light, and in spite of the fragmented family presented within the play, who struggles with dilemmas regarding the unseen and unachievable, forcing the past to cling to the present at the same time it suffocates the future (Suvadashinee, 2024: 4991), this essay departs from readings grounded in modernism or postmodern despair to argue instead the possibility of Edmund Tyrone embodying the Romantic figure of the poet within theatre, the bearer of one of the most important ontological questions in history through O'Neill's intricate web of intertextualities.

2. Intertextualities and the Role of the Poet

When one reads *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, 1956: 1.1), the first striking element in the disposition of the setting is a "small bookcase, with a picture of Shakespeare above it, containing novels by Balzac, Stendhal, philosophical and sociological works by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, Kropotkin, Max Sterner, plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, poetry by Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Kipling, etc". Throughout the play, one comes to understand that the prominence of Shakespeare within this catalogue is greatly significant, since, among other elements, he functions as the epicentre around which the family's conversations and identities revolve. James Tyrone, the father who studied Shakespeare for his roles as one "would study the Bible" (1956: 4.131), considers Shakespeare's words as a universal channel for human experience, and educates his

¹ It should be noted that, throughout this essay, the use of the word Romantic will refer to both, a literary-aesthetic tradition and to the cultural figure of the poet as an outsider whose life, sensibility and self-presentation are inseparable from poetic vision.

sons accordingly. His older son, Jamie, though less disciplined, absorbs Shakespeare in order to sustain his feeble acting career, and to be able to communicate with his father; while in her past, James' wife, Mary, was immersed in her husband's theatrical world, and would be able to recognise the playwright easily. Such facts acquire further importance when the rest of the names in the bookcase are considered, for, even in spite of holding equally prominent fame as Shakespeare, they are dismissed and regarded as morbid influences on Edmund's mind by both Mary (1956: 2.2.78) and James (1956: 4.115). These notions convey a clear symbolism that affects the Tyrones as a family and as individuals—while the rest of the family members remain anchored to Shakespeare, regarding him as a medium of communication, Edmund, although making use of the playwright's words to be understood, gradually departs from such inheritance, reaching instead toward philosophy, prose, and most importantly, poetry, not only to communicate but also to understand himself (1956: 4.117). This detachment positions Edmund outside the ecosystem created by his family, but it is not until Jamie reveals his brother's aspiration to become a writer (1956: 4.144) that one can, in Vivian Casper's (2007: 75) terms, identify Edmund as the protagonist of a *Künstlerdrame*—"an immediately recognizable analogous neologistic term for a play which deals with the vicissitudes that go into the development of an artist". This essay, however, proposes to expand such identity beyond the role of the artist, to that of the poet—one whom, taking into account the Neoplatonic inclinations conveyed through his monologue (O'Neill, 1956: 4.133-135), uses his Romantic sensibility to glimpse moments of metaphysical transcendence. His aspirations as a writer and his openness to philosophical and poetic currents situate him not simply within the fatalistic frame of modernism or postmodernism, but within a longer lineage of Romantic—and therefore Neoplatonic—thought. In this light, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill 1956) is reframed not only as a modern tragedy of addiction and decline, but also as a drama haunted by the metaphysical ache that art has always retold and that humanity now strives to ignore—the yearning, not of the being, but of the soul, for connection, meaning and transcendence.

Although this article does not posit a direct line of influence—for it would need a thorough examination that cannot be undertaken due to length constraints—, but that rather situates O'Neill within a possible shared aesthetic essence, to trace Edmund's role as a poet, it is useful to recall Emily Dickinson's (1960: 215) understanding of the poet as someone who "Distills amazing sense/ From ordinary Meanings—", extracting "Attar so immense" from the "familiar species"². Such sensibility is precisely what Edmund embodies in his refusal to accept the fatalistic world of recrimination, illnesses and despair into which he is born—as seen, for instance, in his decision to travel and work independently (O'Neill, 1956: 1.30). Furthermore, his family accuses him of worsening his consumption by filling his own head with a kind of literature that puts "filth and despair and pessimism!" (1956: 2.2.73) in his mind. Yet, as Dickinson (1960: 209) notes, what appears as "Madness" to others is often the "divinest Sense" of the poet, and it could be safe to argue that Edmund's disposition to live life on his own terms while drifting away from Shakespeare is a form of rebellion that strikes his family as a product of "Madness", but that, to him, constitutes "divinest Sense". Moreover, beyond Dickinson, Edmund's sensibility also resonates with John Masefield, Poet Laureate in O'Neill's own time, described as a "superior human being devoid of malice" (Barui, 2018: 300), a "Bohemian" (2018: 297) or even a "gypsy" (Masefield, 1916: 55)—labels attached to him simply for being a poet and acting on his role as one. Like Dickinson, Masefield positions the poet as an outsider whose estrangement from conventional society grants a unique insight into the *anima mundi*. Although writing within different literary traditions, periods and cultures, both Masefield and Dickinson locate a connection between their soul's longing through the Romantic view of life and their conditions as poets. As it is, these Romantic echoes may seem far removed from O'Neill's Irish-American family drama; nonetheless, they do illuminate Edmund's position as a man who belongs not only to a fractured family, but also to a transhistorical community of poets who articulate the same metaphysical ache.

This Romantic lineage surfaces explicitly in Act 4, when Edmund quotes Baudelaire to his father. Tyrone, apparently unfamiliar with the poet, dismisses him, to which Edmund replies: "He also wrote a poem about Jamie and the Great White Way. (...) Although he was French and never saw Broadway and died before Jamie was born. He knew him and Little Old New York just the same" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.72). This passage shows how poetry is not escapism for Edmund, but recognition. Just as James locates his own feelings within Shakespeare, Edmund finds his brother's anguish mirrored in Baudelaire. Here, the distinction between father and son becomes clear. James Tyrone is an actor chained to Shakespeare in order to articulate his experience as a human being on Earth, repeating the playwright's words to communicate his feelings (O'Neill, 1956: 4.130-132). Edmund, however, as the poet in the making he is, tries to express himself even when he knows his father will not understand him (1956: 4.113); therefore, in this solitude and misunderstanding—in this lack of belonging—Edmund reads beyond theatre to find communion with other souls across time and space, and drifts to recognition in others poetry to grasp a sense of resonance and mirroring (1956: 4.114-115) that will help him later to develop his own monologue (1956: 4.133-135).

3. Merging the *Anima Mundi* and the Soul of the Poet

Having acknowledged Edmund's position as the poet of theatre—and knowing it is this condition what allows him to be able to "Distil amazing sense / from the ordinary Meanings— / And Attar so immense / From the

² Given the fact that O'Neill was part of the Provincetown Players circle along with Susan Glaspell, as stated in Linda Ben-Zvi's *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (2005: 170-175), and that she was greatly influenced by Emily Dickinson (Hernando-Real, 2023: 186-193), it would not seem too far-fetched to turn to her poems to expand the framework of this essay, for it opens two new paths of investigation that mean to acknowledge how much did O'Neill know about the poet, and, to which extent was he influenced by her art.

familiar species" (Dickinson, 1960: 215)—it becomes necessary to turn to the concept of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world, to further understand the metaphysical implications of this stance. In *Timaeus*, Plato (2009: 29) describes nature as "a living soul" in which "all existence, visible and invisible, finds rightful sphere and has its appointed part to play in the harmony of the universe". Plotinus (191-266), in *The Enneads*, further develops this idea, envisioning individual souls as emanations of one cosmic soul; and Romantic poets inherited and reimagined this vision. Wordsworth (1798: 102-104) spoke of "a motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things", while Shelley's (1904) *Mont Blanc* evoked a similar dissolution of the individual into the sublime. Therefore, it is through this lineage that Edmund's role as a poet crystallises. Furthermore, it should be noted that his encounters with the sublime reaffirm definition through contrast. Edmund's experience with the fog (O'Neill, 1956: 4.113), often interpreted under metaphors for addiction and psychic escape (Bogard, 1988), is approached in this essay as a liminal space through which he undergoes the Burkean suspension of the senses (Burke, 1757: 73-74). An event that differs radically from Mary's morphine-induced haze (1956: 3.84), or Jamie's drunken stupor (4.136-147); for, even when both of them are able to glimpse the sublime themselves, their need for constant intoxication—one that is not a temporary threshold but a permanent mode of survival—prevents them from being overwhelmed in the way Burke accounts should happen naturally in such circumstances (Burke, 1757: 73-74). James Tyrone is no different, and although his prominent drinking habit—similar to Mary's and Jamie's—is an element that detaches him from the sublime, it is his resignation as an artist and his inability to break a cycle of repetition what prompts him to erase the possibility of risking facing a sublime encounter. Where they continually seek escape from suffering, Edmund embraces it (1956: 4.113), not to obtain a cathartic result, but to recall his fleeting encounters with transcendence and find, through dissolution, a communion that offers not hope—as the Emersonian concept of the Oversoul would suggest—but a sort of home, a place of acceptance that soothes his aching soul.

A distinction must be made, however, between Edmund's reciting of Symons' translation of Baudelaire's prose poem (O'Neill, 1956: 4.114-115), and his own monologue (1956: 4.134-135). As a human being—and more importantly, as part of the Tyrone family—Edmund turns to alcohol to soothe his pain, and that is why he asks his father "Well, what's wrong with being drunk? It's what we're after, isn't it? Let's not kid each other, Papa. Not tonight. We know what we're trying to forget" (1956: 4.114). As a poet in the making, it is only natural for Edmund to retreat to earthly vices to ease the consuming ache of a reality he cannot change. Yet, even here, his turn to Baudelaire marks a crucial moment of awakening. Unlike his father, who is bound to Shakespeare as an emotional medium, Edmund borrows Baudelaire's words to express himself—an act that signifies both apprenticeship and yearning. The recognition of his brother's pain in Baudelaire happens right after he explains his need for drunkenness through the very same poet, but one must acknowledge that Edmund is at a moment of learning. Using Baudelaire's words is an educational experience as a poet in the making for him, which teaches his soul to find its own voice. Furthermore, he still chooses words that fairly depict that, although he might not be able to speak for himself, he knows the essence of what he intends to say, and how it is connected to something greater, vaster, than just a mere repetition of words. In his quoting of Baudelaire, Edmund celebrates the notion of being "drunken continually" (1956: 4.144), but the booze options must be noticed: "Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will" (1956: 4.115). While any other member of his family would stop at wine, Edmund continues to quote the poem, not only giving poetry a special place within it, but also foreshadowing how he will later give it to nature, turning to the wind, the wave, the star, the bird or the clock for answers. As a poet in the making, when despair becomes overwhelming and finds himself away from the sea, chained to the toxic patterns of his family, Edmund must reach for wine and literature. However, when he is surrounded by nature, as he retells in his monologue (1956: 4.133-135), his soul finds the communion it seeks with the *anima mundi*, evoking a sublime experience in which the "veil of things as they seem [is] drawn back by an unseen hand" (1956: 4.135), and Baudelaire's "virtue" (1956: 4.114) is bestowed onto him, therefore allowing Edmund to experience the "state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (Burke, 1757: 73-74).

As his path as a poet in the making continues, such communion allows him to transform his 'drunkenness' into an expression of the soul through his own voice and words, turning them into poetry. For Edmund, this state of 'drunkenness' becomes a way of achieving communion with nature and the role of the poet. And such is an exercise of intertextuality on O'Neill's part, inserting the Romantic quest for transcendence and his own yearning inside modern American realism. Furthermore, it is within Edmund's monologue that O'Neill accomplishes, for a moment, to turn theatre into poetry without leaving the genres adrift, therefore unifying them. Edmund foregrounds his condition as a poet when he admits that all the important events he has lived are "connected to the sea" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134), for the link between nature and the poet is intrinsic of both, and, once he begins his monologue, he finally crosses the threshold into his own poetics. To illuminate the exposed arguments, one must understand that what Edmund calls 'drunkenness' in Baudelaire's "virtue" (1956: 4.114) is just another name for Burke's sublime—an encounter that overwhelms sensory faculties and expands perception (Burke, 1757: 73-74). Edmund's lifting of the "veil" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.135) resembles, for instance, Masfield's "Sea-Fever" (Masfield, 1916: 55), in which his pull towards the sea is a "wild call and a clear call that may not be denied". Similarly, Edmund's description of how "the sky and sea (...) slept together" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134) resembles Dickinson's "The Brain—is Wider than the Sky" (Dickinson, 1960: 312), proving that, even if he is not yet able to recognise it, he is, indeed, a poet; for he is able to perceive the hidden communion between souls and source—a vision that only a poet can convey even when encountered with Lyotard's structural limit of language, which causes words to falter when facing any sublime experience (Kvokačka, 2021: 404).

The emotional intensity of Edmund's monologue dwells in the space between ecstasy and despair—a tension reminiscent of the Romantic poets' pursuit of the Burkean sublime. As it happens in "Sea-Fever" (Masefield, 1916: 55), nature is not merely a backdrop, but an active participant in the drama of the "fog people" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.135). Through the sublime, the lifting of the "veil" (1956: 4.135) or the 'drunkenness' in "virtue" (1956: 4.114) and "beauty" (1956: 4.134), Edmund's being dissolves into nature, and it, as the earthly manifestation of the *anima mundi*, reveals the Neoplatonic unity of all souls emanating from a single cosmic source (Plotinus, 191-266). Moreover, to conceptualise Edmund's experience completely, it is necessary to understand that Burke (1757: 46) rooted the sublime in terror and danger, always experienced from a safe distance. In fact, he regards it as a response that is complex in its emotional aspect and that is also grounded in the paradoxical pleasure that arises from encounters that threaten the self, but that are always mediated by the aesthetic form they present or the receptive disposition of the subject who navigates them. As it is, while Burke (1757: 33) argues that pain and pleasure are "simple ideas, incapable of definition", their psychological effects are deeply distinct. When Edmund begins his monologue, he is under the effects of alcohol, a substance he reaches for when he drifts from his path as a poet, when his alienation takes his sense of belonging from him, and when he is trying to forget the pain instead of accepting it. That state is what prompts him to speak, but once he begins and mentions the "full moon in the Trades" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134), the connection with nature is clear, and he departs from an alcohol induced oversharing, crossing the threshold onto a poetic display of communion with the *anima mundi*—turning him into the actual image of the poet of theatre.

On the bowsprit, Edmund recalls the "water foaming into spume under [him]" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134), presenting the connection he feels not only toward nature, but toward the world itself. When he speaks of the masts and the sails high above him, reflecting the moonlight, it becomes inevitable to recall the fact that, according to Burke (1757: 45), the sublime is an experience in which beauty and danger coexist. Edmund depicts himself as minuscule before the immensity that surrounds him, and such awareness makes him "drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134). In this state, Edmund describes another kind of intoxication—one that, though it renders him small, makes his soul roar. This is Baudelaire's and Burke's 'drunkenness', the exalted loss of the self that prompts Edmund to "los[e] [him]self—actually los[e] [his] life" in the beauty of it (1956: 4.134-135). Edmund is not literally at risk of losing his life, however, his soul soars in such a way that he feels he might even die out of beauty. His self dissolves into the "beauty", "rhythm", "moonlight", "sea", "white sails" and "dim-starry sky" until in that dissolution he rediscovers the sense of he yearned for and feels as if he were "set free" (1956: 4.135). What he eternally longs for when trapped among his family's earthly and toxic coping mechanisms is precisely what he attains when apart from them—not out of hatred or disdain, but because, as a poet, his soul calls for a deeper connection, one he can reach only when alone by the sea, where there is "no sound of man" (1956: 4.135). It is, in fact, when he declares "I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself! To God" (1956: 4.135), that he articulates the culmination of that communion.

Later, as Edmund recounts his second experience, the sea's nature has changed, it is calm, but the feelings of awe and connection remain, for the sea is the same, and part of it lives within him. This mirrors Masefield, who, for writing of such experiences and for "loving all things related to the sea" (Barui, 2018: 299) was thought to be a "sea-product" as well. Similarly, as with Emily Dickinson "The Brain—is Wider than the Sky—" (Dickinson, 1960: 312), where the sea and sky merge as equal parts of one nature, Edmund's description of "watching the dawn creep like a painted dream over the sky and sea which slept together" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.134) marks the instant of "ecstatic freedom", meaning the fleeting sublime experience Burke identifies and Masefield talks about in "Port of Many Ships" (Masefield, 1916: 40), as a place of spiritual and metaphysical rest for all the souls that achieved the ultimate communion with the *anima mundi*, meaning death. Although Edmund is not dead, this loss of control the sublime experience induces, for it suspends reason, clouds perception and dissolves agency (Burke, 1757: 73-74), is what he attempts to explain when he says that he feels a "joy of belonging to a fulfilment beyond men's lousy (...) fears and hopes and dreams!" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.135), when he says that it is "like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand", and that he is able to understand and become the "secret", even if it is for a fleeting moment. The reason it feels fleeting—before "the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on toward nowhere, for no good reason!"—is because, after the sublime experience takes place, the soul is "so entirely filled with its object" that "it cannot entertain any other" (Burke, 1757: 73-74), as it happens to Emily Dickinson when the "little Brig" of her poem "It tossed—and tossed—" (Dickinson, 1969: 354) finally sinks. Moreover, Burke (1757: 76) also argues that obscurity is essential to the sublime—"to make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary"—and Edmund renders such darkness perfectly when he confesses he is again lost within the fog. As a poet in the making, walking his first steps into his role, Edmund does not realise yet that such terrible part of the experience is necessary; however he, he articulates it nonetheless, in his own words and rhythm, in his own poetry. His admission that he "stammer[ed]" (O'Neill, 1956: 4.135) over the experience and could not capture its essence, calling it "the native eloquence of us fog people", reveals not failure but authenticity—the poet's struggle to express the inexpressible. Indeed, such inability is only natural and necessary for the poet. The connection, the sublime experience, it does not need of understanding or of excruciating retelling, it needs of feeling, of conveying, for, as Lyotard argues, the sublime arises at the limits of representation; thus, language will fail to contain the experience, and that is what makes it even more valuable, because, as the poet of theatre within this play, Edmund will be the only one who could bring a tiny glimpse of the communion with the *anima mundi*, of the sublime and the deeper feeling of belonging that his suffering family continually eludes.

4. Conclusion: O'Neill's Realism as a Romantic Vessel

As it is, it should be safe to say that Edmund belongs to a lineage of Romantic and Neoplatonic thinkers—the “fog people” (O'Neill, 1956: 135)—whom Emily Dickinson earlier named “Nobod[ies]” (Dickinson, 1960: 133), and who, ultimately, are simply poets, able to “Distil amazing sense” (1960: 215) through their “discerning Eye” (1960: 209) and “divinest sense” from the “familiar species” (1969: 215). Furthermore, after he begins to express himself with his own voice and poetics, Edmund is right to call himself 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” (O'Neill, 1956: 4.135) because, even though he is still a poet in the making, seeking his voice and freedom, not yet ready to break from the Tyrone inheritance; it is his father's first words after the monologue, the stupor with which he admits his son has “the makings of a poet” (1956: 4.135) that foreshadows Edmund's transformation from a poet in the making to the poet of theatre—a metamorphosis that mirrors O'Neill's own artistic evolution. And it is one of the main reasons why *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, 1956) is not just a chronicle of a family's ruin, but a meditation on the persistence of the poetic soul within the modern world. Through Edmund, O'Neill resurrects the Romantic quest for transcendence amid the disillusionment of modernity, reaffirming that certain ontological questions, issues and concerns prevail no matter the period or the medium by which they have been assessed. Edmund's experiences by the sea reveal that, while the world fractures around him and language falters, the soul continues to seek unity through beauty, rhythms, silence and nature. Moreover, his struggle to articulate the inexpressible does not signify failure, but rather the essence of poetry itself—the endless attempt to translate the divine pulse of existence into human sound. Thus, O'Neill's theatre transforms into a vessel of revelation, where tragedy and Burkean sublimity converge, and the poet's voice emerges from the limits of speech. Edmund's awakening mirrors humanity's recognition that, though condemned to stumble through the fog, glimpses of eternity will always prevail, and it is in that haunting in which resides the poet's duty and O'Neill's triumph—the reaffirmation that art, ever since antiquity, continues to retell the story of the soul's return to its source and the longing it provokes when one finds oneself apart from it. In uniting the Romantic yearning and the modern despair, O'Neill proves that realism, too, can contain revelation and that the stage is not a haunted place of repetition, but a temple where the human voice seeks to echo the divine. Moreover, this essay opens new research paths for future studies that might further explore Romantic and Neoplatonic influences upon O'Neill's plays.

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