

A Lacanian Reading of Eugene O'Neill's Selected Works:

Long Day's Journey into Night and Desire under the Elms

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to trace psychological problems of the characters portrayed by Eugene O'Neill in *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Desire under the Elms* from a Lacanian viewpoint. Unlike Freud who believes that the unconscious is a chaotic, unstructured "cauldron" of dark passions, Lacan argues that human unconsciousness is structured like language and can be systematically analyzed. The implication of this claim is that language shapes our unconsciousness and our identity through interaction with *others*, especially the *Other* which represents social order and the law of the Father. Lacan bases his theories on the investigation of three psychic orders: *Imaginary*, *Symbolic* and *Real* orders. By identifying the *symbolic* representation of these three orders in O'Neill's plays, the researcher has tried to show how each of them affects the fragmentary nature of the self. Through application of Lacan's theory, it has been proved that the characters of these plays have a fragmented self, caused by experiencing a sort of lack created since having abandoned the *Imaginary* order where they had a perfect union with the mother. They are placed in the symbolic world of language and ideologies where the laws of the father govern and even the shifting desires of the characters do not let them experience the same satisfaction they had in the *Imaginary* order. The father of the family acts as the *Big Other*, whose rules shape the

characters' identity and determine their desires as a result of which they find their selves fragmented.

Key Words: O'Neill, Lacan, Imaginary, Symbolic, Real

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