

## THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S LIFE IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

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**Abstract.** Penelitian ini menganalisa tentang rekonstruksi kehidupan pengarang di dalam drama *Long Day's Journey into Night* karya Eugene O'Neill. Pendekatan teoretis yang digunakan adalah pendekatan historis-biografis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa fakta dalam kehidupan pengarang yang dibangun kembali kedalam fiksi seperti anggota keluarga, konflik ibu pengarang, dan konflik pengarang sendiri. Dari hasil analisis dapat disimpulkan bahwa *Long Day's Journey into Night* merupakan drama biografidarsi pengarang, Eugene O'Neill. Penelitian ini diharapkan memperluas wawasan dan pemahaman tentang hubungan antara karya sastra dan pengarangnya.

**Keywords:** (historical-) biographical approach, reconstruction of author's life

### INTRODUCTION

Literary work can reflect the factual situation of any aspects of human life. Looking back to the creation of the literary work, no doubt, the author can be an important person to analyze. Moreover, if such literary work is committed as the product of an individual creator, it should be investigated mainly through biography and psychology of the author. It means seeking for the significant relationship between the author's life and what he expresses in his work. It can be assumed that the investigation of the life of the writer can somehow illuminate problematic aspect of his writing. Without biographical information, the writer stands in on issue would remain unclear.

The biographical materials can be used to intensify the understanding a literary work. It will explain the context of its creation and the forces impinging on the author's life which promotes or obstructs the completion of a literary work. Even Joseph T. Shipley adds that it may indicate the important source which strengthens the process of creating such literary work and the conscious purpose of the work (Shipley, 1970: 31). The work of literary work can be studied as a means of explaining and explaining the nature of the creative process or literary personality in general. In short, biographical approach is sometimes likely to overemphasize the importance of incidents in a writer's life and find them obsessively repeated in his work.

The present study focuses on investigating life reconstruction of a literary man in his literary work. For the purpose of the study, a biographical play of Eugene O'Neill entitled *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The reason for selecting the play is because it is assumed that *Long Day's Journey into Night* is a biographical play of Eugene O'Neill, "except that the man had already composed the dramatic autobiography of the spirit in *Long Day's Journey into Night*"(Carpenter, 1979: 17). The questions to be proposed in this study are: (a) what are significant aspects of the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's life in his play *Long Day's Journey into Night*? and (b) what are the motifs of the play?

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In the present study, the life of Eugene O'Neill is analyzed to identify significant events in his life that are presented and reconstructed in his play. The motifs of the play focus on the interaction of the characters with Eugene O'Neill's family. It is expected that after studying the play and Eugene O'Neill's life in detail, the result of the study will reveal some significant aspects become the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's life.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The present study adopts the historical-biographical approach. A historical-biographical approach means that a literary work is chiefly seen as a reflection of its author's life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work (Guerin et al.1979:25). A historical-biographical novel (as well as other forms of literary works) is considered more meaningful when either its milieu or that of its author is understood. Therefore, the characters in the literary works are understood to the extent that they are molded by some important historical events. The subject of the study is Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The play is chosen as the subject of because this play is considered as a reflection and more particularly a reconstruction of the author's life. Thus, biographical approach is considered to be the most suitable design for analyzing the play.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of the analysis of the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's life in his play *Long Day's Journey into Night* can be divided into two parts: (1) the life of Eugene O'Neill and (2) the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's life and family. Each part is discussed separately in the following sections.

### 1. The Life of Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill, born in Broadway hotel on October 16, 1888, was the third son of James O'Neill and Ellen Quinlan. His father came from Irish-Catholic immigrant family while his mother was a product of broken and poor family immigrating to America in 1856. In his early life, his father had deserted her mother with four children and gone back to Ireland to die. His mother was well-educated in catholic seminary as her father expected. She actually intended to be a nun but she fell in love with romantic actor, James O'Neill and married him. His father in his childhood had truly watched his mother to make her family exist by working hard as a washer since she was left by her husband. Eugene O'Neill at that time was ten years old quitted the school for working hard in machine shop twelve hours a day. Since that time he learned to value the money.

His father leaving his job as a machinist struggled to be a well known actor. Obsessed by his fear of poverty, he did not want his children to suffer just like he did. He hardly spent his time with his children. In fact the money he got was spent for useless thing such as drinking with his friends in theatre. The life as an actor brought his family to be scattered. In addition his mother, Ellen Quinlan, could not adopt her condition to the constant traveling from one hotel to another for theatrical performance and never had a real home. Her second son, Edmund, died when she was traveling with her husband. Depression and her inability to receive the disaster caused her chronic low spirit. Unfortunately, she could not escape from that and turned to morphine.

Realizing this fact, the domineering father and the morphine addiction mother influenced O'Neill and his eldest brother, James O'Neill Jr. who became an alcoholic man. He was frequently mothered by Sarah Sandy than his real mother. He was unsatisfied of his mother neglecting him. He secretly married Kathleen Jenkins. His marriage was opposed by his father as she was not a catholic and he was jobless. He left her in New York. Ignoring his first baby, he signed on as an ordinary seaman on a Norwegian ship to Buenos Aires. He then went to South America and worked as a cattle steamer. Experiencing life at sea, he was often beachcombing in absolute poverty. Returning to America, he abandoned his family and lived in a bar hotel in New York. He intended to commit suicide but his father saved him. His brother died a year after the death of his father. He then married Agnes Boulton. The familial tremor caused him have Parkinson disease. Fortunately, his third marriage with Carlote Monterey was able to help him solve his many crises in life. He died in Boston hotel in 1953. During his career he got four awards of Pulitzers Prize.

## **2. Reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's Life**

Analysis on the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's life can be divided into three parts: (a) reconstruction of the family members, (b) reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's mother's conflict and (c) reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's conflict. Each part is discussed separately in the following subsections.

### **a. Reconstruction of the familymembers**

In relation with Eugene O'Neill's life and with the significant interaction of each character in the play, Edmund Tyrone in which the name refers to his brother who dies in infancy is regarded as Eugene O'Neill himself, while his real name Eugene is the name of his dead brother in the play. Moreover, the position of Edmund in the play is the same as Eugene's position in his real life. Edmund is the third son of James and Mary Tyrone as Eugene O'Neill in his real life. On the other hand, the position of James Tyrone, Jr. is the same as James O'Neill Jr.'s position in Eugene O'Neill's family. He is the first son of James and Mary Tyrone in the play as James O'Neill, Jr. in the real life

Mary: ..."I knew I'd proved by the way I'd left Eugene that I wasn't worthy to have another baby and that God would punish me if I did. I never should have borne Edmund"(p.88)

Tyrone is chosen as the surname of the father in the play James Tyrone as Eugene O'Neill is proud of his Irish blood. The name of Tyrone derives from the word Tireoghain which means the land of Owen. While his mother's last name, Mary Cavan Tyrone is a name of County in Ulster in Gaelic History. The real name of his mother in the play is disguised from Ella Quinlan to be Mary Cavan Tyrone. It is reasonable to show the close-tied relation between Mary Tyrone and Virgin Mary to stress symbolically Mary's dream of being a nun. Another reason is Ella's Christian name is Mary Ellen, and she is called by that name throughout her childhood. Eugene O'Neill puts that name in order to make her relatives know her.

Eugene O'Neill's impression of his father's boyhood is expressed through James Tyrone. James Tyrone, the father of James Tyrone, Jr. and Edmund Tyrone, comes

from the poor Irish family. His father brings the family to immigrate to America. Being home-sick of his homeland, Tyrone's father goes back to Ireland to die. It means he deserts his wife and four small children. Realizing this bad situation, Tyrone's mother fights to survive her children. All of them must work hard, except Tyrone's younger sisters. His hard work results in success which later can help his own family's endless trouble. His past life makes him stingy:

Mary: .... "His father deserted his mother and their six children a year or so after they came to America. He told them he had a premonition he would die soon, and he was homesick for Ireland, and wanted to go back there to die. So he went and he did die. He must have been a peculiar man, too. Your father had to go to work in a machine shop when he was only ten years old" (p.117).

James Tyrone who works as a mechanist can help his mother to look after her children. Without giving reasons, he leaves his job as a mechanist and turns to be an actor. Later he becomes a famous actor. The glamour and magic that surround him make Mary Tyrone fall in love with him and she gets married soon. This situation is a reflection of the beginning of Eugene O'Neill's father's career. He tries to heighten his father's career through James Tyrone because he is still proud of his father. It seems that Eugene O'Neill describes the beginning of his father's career exactly in the play. The glamour and magic that surround James O'Neill make Ella Quinlan, his mother, fall in love with him. Eugene O'Neill describes it through James Tyrone and Mary Tyrone.

James Tyrone's past trouble and his ambition make him work hard. Nothing must be worried except money, property, and poverty. His effort brings him as a successful actor. No doubt money and property are gained easily. Beside having a lot of money from his performance, he also has lands, real estate and mining operations. In this case he still inherits the Irish peasant habits in saving money on land. His love of property is the description of Eugene O'Neill's father. Eugene O'Neill tells his mother's pride of his father's success through Mary Tyrone. She gets all the profit of her husband's good reputation. Her life is happy as Mary Tyrone in the play because she has a good husband who is the greatest actor and rich.

#### **b. Reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's mother's conflicts**

As the wife of a well-known actor, she does not prepare herself to adapt to her husband's pattern. James Tyrone adores her but his professional life lives entirely in public. He thinks his wife only his partner not a sweet private treasure of his own. He never put her into his professional business. As the reflection of his love for her, he protects her from roughness of the theatre. He is very faithful to his wife during thirty-six years of marriage. Eugene O'Neill describes it as the reconstruction of his mother's expression.

Mary's conflict develops without her husband's consciousness. As a religious woman who has formal education and even an ambition of being a nun, she gets a different sight of her real life. Her husband never stops making engagement with the film producers at the beginning of his career. He does not invest his wealth for enjoyment. It is because his great weakness in facing his long-life, his anxiety about

money and his fear about the poverty in his life. Consequently, he has to bear part of the theatrical travelling and as a wife who loves her husband, she follows him.

Getting married with an idol is her dream actually but she faces the contrast life from her own. She feels withdraw from her real ambition of being a nun and her indulgent father. She has never been protected by her husband. She is not able to enter her husband's world in theatre. She never has been a part in theatrical world. Moreover she feels uncertain with the exact future of her husband. The life in theatre that associates with other ladies, travelling from one place to another, or the prevalence of whiskey causes her to be unable to adapt in the situation. It is what Eugene O'Neill symbolically refers to her mother. He apparently tries to understand his mother's problems.

Her conflict also develops when her first child was born at her friend's house. Having the baby makes her empty when her husband has performance on stage. She must join her husband's travelling with her child. She actually rebels against what she has done. But for her deep love to her husband she has no choice. It becomes difficult when another child, Eugene, was born. Her conflict grows greater when her second child dies. She joins her husband's tour and leaves her children with her mother. She regrets for leaving her sons. It is her regression of herself, her husband, and her first son. She spends most of her time with her husband. It is Eugene O'Neill's awareness of his mother's regression of herself. His mother's conflict becomes his own conflict.

### **c. Reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's conflict**

Edmund Tyrone rebels against the heritage of theatrical world. He cannot accept his father's professional career for not to fix his mother at home. He also protests his mother for she is incapable of parting from his mother. She blames her husband and her sons not herself. Edmund knows that his mother must share her time between her sons and her husband. Even she has to leave them a few weeks in theatrical season. She gives her responsibility to a nursery to look after her children. Edmund never has playmates. His father and mother only immerse in their own concerns. His mother never blames herself in creating her children's attitude.

Mary: "... Jaime and you are the same way, but you're not to blame. You're never had a chance to meet decent people here. I know you both would have been so different if you'd been able to associate with nice girls instead of. You'd never have disgraced yourselves as you have, so that now respectable parents will let their daughters be seen with you" (p.44).

This situation seems to be drawn from the heritage of Eugene O'Neill's father's theatrical travelling. It is the reflection of his unhappiness toward his family.

Edmund Tyrone becomes a sensitive man. He inherits the feeling of his mother's guilt. He believes that all her mother's pains are caused by his father. He accuses his father for her mother's long suffering. He is uncertain of his mother's addiction to morphine. It seems that he is in conflict in determining the causes her mother's illness whether his own birth or his father's stinginess. He thinks that his birth is not actually the reason for her mother's suffering. It can be seen when his father gives her a doctor to bear him. But his mother herself addicts morphine as a means of escaping from all trouble she has. She can do nothing without it. He begins to

realizes that his mother's addict is not his father's fault. He is never sure of his family conflicts. It seems that his family situation is the reconstruction of Eugene O'Neill's real family.

Yet, Edmund Tyrone tries to understand and know his mother's effort to avoid her being addicted. Her mother refuses morphine. In fact, his father's deed is not so abused on his mother. He loves his wife so much. Even he spends his money for the treatment of her breast cancer. He takes her to the most famous specialists in Europe. So what he accuses his father of his stinginess is not all true as it can be seen here:

Edmund: (ignoring this) " After you found out, she'd been made a morphine addict, why didn't you send her to a cure them, at the start, while she still had a chance? No, that would have meant spending some money! I'll bet you told her all had to do was use a little will power! That's what you still believe in your heart, in spite of what doctors, who really know something about it, have told you"(O'Neill, 141)

Eugene O'Neill knows that his mother retreats to the aid of her drug for the problems, torn between her love for boys and for her husband. It is understandable if he reconstructs his disappointment toward his family, especially his mother's case.

## CONCLUSION

Literary work can be considered as the product of the writer. It can reflect the factual situation of the author. The author can be an important factor to analyze it. So it should be judged through the biography of the author. So forth, after analyzing Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, there are similar to the playwright's life. They are reconstructions of his family. He portrays the members of his family. His father, his mother, and his older brother are reconstructed in the play through James Tyrone, Mary Tyrone, Edmund Tyrone. Then, he tries to understand his mother's conflicts by reconstructing them through Mary's Tyrone's regression. The last, he reconstructs his disappointment toward his family especially his mother's case. It is shown in the play through Edmund Tyrone's conflicts. In short, it comes to a conclusion that in some aspects, the play closely parallels Eugene O'Neill's own life that is his own dysfunctional family. *Long Day's Journey into Night* is a biographical play of Eugene O'Neill.

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