

ENGL 4450.001

Fall 2018

Mondays, 3:30–6:20

The Drama of Eugene O'Neill

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"I want to be an artist or nothing."

(O'Neill, 16 July 1914)

Join me for an extensive reading-based (not acting-based) investigation of O'Neill's plays from 1916 to 1944, including *"Anna Christie," The Iceman Cometh,* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. This class is ideal for ENGL, THEA, and Integrative Studies majors and for all lovers of literature, drama, and theatre. All perspectives welcome. Don't let EO's scowl (☹) fool you: the mood will be jovial.

Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) is widely regarded as America's foremost dramatist. The judgment is imperfect (Tennessee Williams? August Wilson?) but has plenty to recommend it. No one in the modern Anglophone tradition has more range and variety; no one in that tradition has influenced more successors. O'Neill's oeuvre encompasses an early and slightly goofy melodrama or two (e.g., *A Wife for a Life*); a cluster of precociously confident exercises in a moody sort of naturalism (e.g., *"Anna Christie"*); a torrent of wildly diverse and unrelentingly experimental mid-period triumphs (e.g., *The Hairy Ape* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*); and the quintet of viscerally realistic and deeply personal late plays for which he is best remembered (e.g., *Iceman*, *Long Day's Journey*, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*). O'Neill's life and work are inseparable, so we will spend ample time discussing the troubled, angry, driven, fascinating, lubricious, and unquestionably brilliant artist behind and within these plays.

O'Neill's résumé includes fifty plays (we won't read them all!); a Nobel Prize; three Pulitzer Prizes; various Tony and Drama Circle Awards; and decades of high-profile revivals, including recent productions with Jessica Lange, Nathan Lane, and others, and 2018 outings (yup, I'll be there!) with Denzel Washington and Jeremy Irons.

ENGL students: the study of modern literature demands a familiarity with O'Neill's work. Keyword: "essential."

THEA students: you can't know modern drama if you don't know O'Neill. His influence is vast, and he's staged constantly. He needs to be part of your toolkit. Keyword: see above.

Students will take weekly quizzes; post online critical responses; write two short papers; read a bunch of fabulous plays; and, optionally, take advantage of a number of extra-credit offerings, text- and/or performance-based. Probably students will talk plenty, too, because my students tend to be a talkative bunch. And I bet we'll laugh a lot, because life is short and because why not, anyhow?

Please don't hesitate to contact me with questions, comments, or anticipatory enthusiasms. I'm easy to reach at alex.pettit@unt.edu.