DIRECTING O'NEILL: *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA, LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS, DAYS WITHOUT END*

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Ben Barnes, Miles Potter, Fred Abrahamse and Marcel Meyer, Eric Fraisher Hayes

***Mourning Becomes Electra:* Staying the Course**

Eugene O'Neill International Festival of Theatre, St. Michael's Theatre, New Ross, County Wexford, Ireland, October 13, 2018

Ben Barnes

As distinct from the academic, the theatre director approaches a dramatic work with a very particular set of criteria. What does the dramatist want to say, how does he or she say it, and how can I translate this from the page to the stage? Can I refract this play through the prism of my own time so as to make it feel new minted and as enlightening, moving, and entertaining as it must have been to audiences who first saw it? I believe it is axiomatic that, unless as a director you are interested only in an act of homage to the stagecraft and delivery popular in the time when the play was first produced, then you must find a framing device and a production style that scans and makes sense for the audience of the time in which you live.

I was invited by the first Eugene O'Neill International Festival of Theatre to direct a staged reading of O'Neill's great trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which is based on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. My brief was to present all three plays in one day with afternoon and evening sessions punctuated by a dinner break.

When coming to O'Neill, the first thing that strikes you is that there are a lot of words. You might put this down to a contemporary theatrical sensibility and point out that the entire word count of Pinter's *Betrayal*

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would fit snugly into the pocket of an extended scene from *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (try it), but even in his own day O'Neill had the reputation for using many words where few might have sufficed. When he sailed back to New York from Europe in May 1931, the American newspapers reported his arrival with "six of his trunks filled with the manuscript of one play."

So when you shape up to these plays and their great length you have four options—you cut them, you speak them well, you speak them quickly, or some combination of all three. The third of these options is not as facile as it sounds. I was directing at the Gate Theatre in Dublin in 1992 (a revival of my Irish premiere production of Christopher Hampton's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), and Jonathan Miller was there in technical rehearsals for his production of *The Double Dealer* by William Congreve. We got talking about O'Neill and he regaled me with the story that he had knocked about an hour off the running time of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by having the actors in the argument scenes—which, of course, is most of the play—speak over each other as one would do in a "real-life" argument. Such a technique is now standard in the theatre to the point where authors—Caryl Churchill is a case in point—indicate the caesura where they imagine the overlap to begin.

This was not an approach available to me in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which has the stately formality of a Greek drama and not the excoriating family feuding of the Tyrones that came to define American drama and seems almost modern by comparison. However, the blue pencil *was* available to me and I chose, in all three plays, to eliminate what I regard as O'Neill's self-conscious attempt to replicate the scene-setting of a Greek chorus with his gnarled country folk speaking a peculiar vernacular. Eliminating these "choruses" allowed us to get straight into the meat of the story while still retaining a choral character in the farmhand and general factotum, Seth. It also reduced the actor wage bill! That done, I resisted, for good reasons, making further substantial cuts in the story itself.

From watching O'Neill's work in various productions down through the years and from having directed *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (Theatre Royal, Waterford; Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Geva Theatre Center, Rochester, NY, 2015), I strongly believe that the power of O'Neill's writing is that—to borrow a metaphor from sport—he "leaves it all out on the pitch." O'Neill at a superficial glance might seem excessive and overblown. Is there, for example, another writer who deploys the exclamation mark with such frequency and alacrity? However, on closer examination, the plays are, with a few exceptions, rigorously structured and balanced and at once savage and controlled. The fact is that O'Neill spares no one, least of all himself. In laying bare the

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excesses of human behavior he takes us on an exhaustive and exhausting journey into the heart of darkness. And it is worth staying the course.

Mourning Becomes Electra is full of loathing and betrayal, lust and anguish, and after six hours of harrowing drama, we are left with a defiant Electra/Lavinia in a house haunted by death, contemplating, like Pyrrhus, a victory that is no victory but simply the accomplishment of being the last one left standing. And at what price?

If we are open to it, the journey that takes us there—Christine's adultery with Brant, the murder of Ezra, the revenge on Brant, the suicide of Christine, the madness and death of Orin, the final rejection of Lavinia by Peter—will never let us off the hook through fourteen acts and three separate dramas, and we go out into the night following the performance chastened and having fully felt that pity and terror which Aristotle demanded of the best drama.

However, if this work is capable of touching its public so profoundly, it sets fearsome challenges for performers on account of the intensity of expressive commitment and ensemble playing that each role requires. Characters like Lavinia and Christine, played for me by Judith Roddy and Andrea Irvine respectively, need to be able to sustain high emotion and fierce purpose through long speeches and scenes. Good examples of what I refer to are the scenes at the end of act 2 of *The Homecoming*, when Christine persuades Brant to get the poison for her, or at the end of act 1, scene 2 of *The Haunted*, Lavinia's hopeless struggle to shed the past in her appeal to Peter.

To keep the audience attentive, rapt, and fully engaged requires not only a faultless understanding of the journeys the characters are on but also the capacity to encompass the arc of an entire speech through holding its governing thought throughout and controlling the breath and the pace as one would in a speech of Shakespeare. It also requires tapping into a level of ensemble playing that carries the company along with a unity of purpose and understanding vital to creating the unique atmosphere of an O'Neill play. The edifice of an O'Neill drama is indeed daunting, but through great respect for, and attention to, its language and tropes these are peaks worth scaling rather than skirting around. I believe you cut at your peril lest all you are left with is a *Reader's Digest* series of sensational events where an audience might legitimately ask, "what's all the fuss about?"

In a week of rehearsals and a single reading performance it is only possible to glimpse these difficulties, but the skill of our company and the attentiveness and reaction of our large New Ross audience gave me the confidence to think that in a full staging with the requisite rehearsal time this work—more a marathon than a sprint—would yield up its treasures in a powerful and memorable long day's journey into night.

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BEN BARNES is an Irish theater and opera director. He is a former artistic director of the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theater, and the founding artistic director of Opera Theatre Company, the national touring opera company of Ireland. He has contributed to and edited a number of theatre publications and is the author of *Plays and Controversies 2000–2005*, dealing with his time as artistic director of the Abbey. He is currently consultant artistic director for Theatre Royal Waterford, where he spearheaded a major capital campaign (2007–12) to restore the oldest continually performing arts venue in Ireland.

Thoughts on *Long Day's Journey Into Night*
Stratford Festival, Studio Theatre Stratford, ON, May 30–October 13, 2018

Miles Potter

Like most people who get the opportunity to direct an O'Neill play, I was determined to read all the plays I hadn't seen (most of them), watch a few of those that are on film, and read all the available biographies. I hadn't quite realized that this would put my life on hold for an extended period of time. When I emerged from the dusty book jackets and piles of scripts and articles, I had no real idea how I was going to guide the production, but it felt like the O'Neill clan had set up a permanent encampment in a small corner of my brain; that was fine, and I was hopeful I could call on them when needed.

I knew I wanted to do as much of the text as we could manage; traditionally, overtime being what it is, productions at Stratford are held to three hours. My instinct was that any cut to achieve three hours would really no longer be the play, so I asked for an extra half hour. My hope was that, rather than two very long acts and a twenty-minute intermission, I could structure the performance as the day is structured: morning, noon, and night, with two ten-minute intermissions. I hoped that this would provide a more traditional three-act structure, allowing the text the weight and the time it needs, and not exhaust the audience.

The theatre agreed.

My next hurdle was the cut: even with the extra half hour of playing time, cuts were needed. Uncut, the play runs four hours and change. However, we had two elements in our favor. Because of the repertory system, we had an extended rehearsal period. Most shows get the equivalent of three weeks in the rehearsal hall; because Stratford is a repertory company and five or six shows may be being rehearsed at the same time with the acting company, shows may rehearse over a period of two months, with perhaps three primary rehearsals a week. (Primary rehearsal means the director gets all of his or her actors all day.) My cast was only in *Long Day's Journey* and were not rehearsing any other shows, so I had them all, all the time, and that was a

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great bonus. I also had a cast of very experienced and literate actors, and so I determined not to cut the script in advance. The entire cast sat around the table for the first week and we cut the play together. Some cuts went easily. Some we "fought" over, and other cuts we traded back and forth. One of the most fascinating things about this process was the number of times, deep in rehearsal, one of the actors or myself would have an epiphany about a section and exclaim: "It has to go back! We need this!" or some version of this, and we would rethink. We never cut a scene in its entirety; we worked hard to cut with precision inside speeches; but often, because of O'Neill's intricacy of structure, we would find a line that we had previously thought unnecessary to be vital, and then have to go back and trade it for a less needed one. It felt like the dramaturgical version of brain surgery. It is not a play one cuts lightly. The performers were incredibly sensitive to the fact that though we all wanted to *do it all*, we had to bring it in at three-and-a-half hours.

I had begun the process with several loose overarching themes for the play in my head. As we worked I was trying them out, but one afternoon Seana McKenna (Mary Tyrone) said these lines to Scott Wentworth (James Tyrone): "The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us." It was like she was saying them to the usually quiet O'Neill family lurking in the back of my brain and it woke them up and they said "Pay attention! This is *it*!" I know it is not remarkable to think of *LDJIN* as a ghost story: it's pretty clear that this is a haunted house. In fact, we started our production with the "second girl" Cathleen (Amy Keating) coming out in black mourning dress and removing the traditional ghost light that sat center stage, slowly carrying it out up the center hall as the lights dimmed and the Tyrone family's voices rose. . . .

The Studio Theatre stage, which has approximately the same dimensions of the actual O'Neill sitting room in New London, Connecticut, allowed us to feel the reality of the room while allowing the designer, Peter Hartwell, and lighting designer Steve Lucas to create a back wall of windows that were both real and unreal, expressing in the set what I think of as O'Neill's style in this play, "expressionistic-naturalism," a style so real it's not. So, after hearing Seana McKenna and Scott Wentworth rehearse the "past is present" scene in act 2, scene 1, I mulled it over and then called the cast together and said something like,

> Here's what I believe is happening in this play: I know the themes of drugs and alcohol and family dysfunction are all present and important in the play; but think of it, for a moment, not as a play about those issues; those things are tactics or obstacles or complications.

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> Think of it as having the structure of a horror story. A family is home with the wife and mother who has recently been cured of an infection. This infection makes her desert them and travel back in time. They want her to stay uninfected, but the pull of the past is strong, and the present moment weak. Despite all their efforts, she becomes re-infected. She is now something like a time-monster: a clever, sometimes charming, always manipulative time-monster, because her unconscious intention, which she never surrenders, is to *take them all with her*. Force them all with her back in time. She is the antagonist, and all the others are the collective protagonists. The rest of the Tyrone family wants nothing more than for the world to remain as it is on that sunny morning: Mama well, jokes and stories told, only a mild cough from Edmund disturbing the mood; but *that* may be enough to trigger a memory of a dead child . . . and the infection strikes. Once she re-infects herself, her role is clear: use every possible tactic or advantage to destabilize the family, to loosen their ties to the present, and take them with her, back to what is, for the rest of them, Hell.

The fascination of the individual scenes, which can sometimes seem repetitive, lies in the fact that the rest of the Tyrones have very little "defense" against the infection, and they sometimes repeat the same tactics to try to redirect Mary, over and over (and expecting a different result?); they resist and struggle but ultimately end up joining her on forays to the past. I believe that is why the final scene remains so devastating. In the last moments, Mary reenters, fully transformed as a creature from the past. Jamie (Gordon Miller) has recited his final poem; Edmond (Charlie Gallant) has tried to use his last "tactic"—his deathly illness—but no one can break through. The men essentially give up the struggle; they now sit around the table, barely moving as Mary spins her last "time web." As she moves to the table to join them (together and all seated at the table for the first time), the tableau is a terrible one: they each have cried out to her; now James can only shift, literally holding the past (the wedding dress) in his lap. Their only choice is to surrender to her. At the table she speaks the last words in the play; and there they are, around the table, still and silent . . . and she has won. A terrible victory.

With this slant on the play, my hope was that however "talky" the play may appear, the actors were always able to play an action, trying to resist the siren call of the past, trying to save themselves, and thus resulting in a dynamism that is not always apparent in O'Neill productions. Our hope was that it was a clear life-or-death struggle being played out. This was not a natu-

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ralistic period parlor play with alcohol and drugs. It was a titanic struggle, a tragedy, and yes, an existential horror story.

MILES POTTER has worked at virtually every major venue in Canada over the past thirty years. He has directed eight productions for the Stratford Festival, including *Medea, Orpheus Descending* (both of which were later presented by Mirvish Productions in Toronto), *Richard III, The Three Musketeers, The Physicists* (adapted by Michael Healey), and this season's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. His recent production of *The New Canadian Curling Club* at the Blyth Festival was recently extended for five performances. He has worked on many new scripts, including the premier production and national tour of Michael Healey's *The Drawer Boy* (Dora Award).

Desire in the Eastern Cape: Eugene O'Neill, *Desire Under the Elms,* and the South African Connection

Abrahamse and Meyer Productions: National Arts Festival, Victoria Theatre, Grahamstown (Makhanda), South Africa, July 4, 2014; Baxter Golden Acre Studio Theatre, Cape Town, South Africa, July 9–26, 2014; Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival, Provincetown Theater, Provincetown, MA, September 22–25, 2016; Triad Stage, Greensboro, NC, September 28–October 1, 2016; EgoPo Classic Theater, Mandell Theater, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, October 4–7, 2018

Abrahamse and Meyer Productions is one of South Africa's only independent classical theatre companies. Founded in 2006 by Fred Abrahamse and Marcel Meyer, the company has gained international acclaim for its innovative productions of plays by William Shakespeare and Tennessee Williams. The company has been nominated for or won over thirty national and international theatre awards.

Fred Abrahamse and Marcel Meyer

Our production of *Desire Under the Elms* premiered in 2014 on the main program of South Africa's National Arts Festival, in a small Eastern Cape city then called Grahamstown, recently renamed Makhanda. That year marked the twentieth anniversary of South Africa's first democratic election. In the two decades since the 1994 inauguration of President Nelson Mandela, much in the country had changed for the better, but for many South Africans the promise of the 1994 election had not been realized. The divide between rich and poor had increased, and government corruption under the Jacob Zuma presidency was escalating at an alarming rate. The loud call for the redistribution of wealth and land could no longer be ignored.

We considered three principal factors when adapting *Desire Under the Elms* into a South African context: (1) The urgent questioning of whom South

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Africa actually belonged to; (2) the geographic location of Grahamstown and the troubled historic narrative of the Eastern Cape; and (3) Eugene O'Neill's personal interest in South Africa.

O'Neill's fascination with South Africa was ignited when he heard fantastical stories about the country from his father's publicist, James Findlater Blyth (1866–1913). James O'Neill hired Blyth in 1907, and by 1908 Blyth and the twenty-year-old Eugene had become good friends and regular drinking buddies. Blyth claimed to have worked as a journalist in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War and even professed to have marched with the Boer commandoes during that war. There has been some controversy about the truth of this account; for example, O'Neill biographer Louis Sheaffer speculates that Blyth got his information about South Africa from friends who had fought in the war and later worked in *The Great Boer War Spectacle*, which played at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 and Brighton Beach in Brooklyn the next year (Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* [1968], 130–31). Through Blyth, O'Neill met performers from the spectacle who would inspire the characters of the Boer general Piet Wetjoen and the English captain Cecil Lewis in the playwright's monumental 1939 masterpiece, *The Iceman Cometh*.

By 1909, O'Neill was so entranced by Blyth's tales of South Africa and the Boers that he signed on to a Merchant Marine steamer, shipping mules from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Durban, South Africa. O'Neill was determined to start a new life in South Africa but was refused entry at the port in Durban because he did not have enough funds to cover the required £100 fee to allow him to disembark. We often wonder what would have happened had he had the £100. . . .

Throughout his career O'Neill would incorporate South African characters and narratives into his work. His early sea play *Bound East for Cardiff* (1914) features two sailors, Yank and Driscoll, who recall their shared experiences in exotic ports like Buenos Aires, Singapore, Port Said, Sydney, and Cape Town. Yank fears retribution in the afterlife because he stabbed a man to death in Cape Town. James Anderson in O'Neill's short story "Tomorrow" and James Cameron, or "Jimmy Tomorrow," in *The Iceman Cometh* both return to Cape Town to discover their wives *in flagrante delicto* with a staff officer. (Both these characters are based on Blyth.) In the final scene of O'Neill's Pulitzer Prize–winning *"Anna Christie"* (1922), Anna's father and her fiancé are discomfited to learn that both have signed on to ship out to Cape Town, "at the end of Africa."

Taking O'Neill's fascination with South Africa as inspiration, our production transposed the original 1850s New England setting to the Eastern Cape in the 1890s, reimagining *Desire Under the Elms* as if O'Neill had been allowed to settle, live, and write in South Africa. Geographically and historically,

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the Eastern Cape seemed the perfect location and setting for adapting *Desire Under the Elms* into a South African context. From 1779 until 1879 the Xhosa or Cape frontier wars raged. The series of nine wars between the indigenous Xhosa and the European settlers in the Eastern Cape that came to be known as "Africa's 100-Year War" constitutes the longest-running military action in African colonial history.

In an attempt to defend the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony against the neighboring Xhosa and boost the English-speaking population, the British government helped people from England, Scotland, and Ireland relocate to South Africa. The first settlers disembarked at Algoa Bay, site of present-day Port Elizabeth, on April 10, 1820. The influx of the "1820 Settlers" created one of the largest periods of British settlement in Africa.

The war and the British settler-colonialism that prompted it formed the background of our production. The stern Calvinist patriarch Ephraim Cabot is a direct descendant of the 1820 Settlers, building his farm with religious zeal in the harsh terrain of the Eastern Cape. When Cabot returns home with his new Xhosa bride, Abbie Putnam, he learns that his two eldest sons, Peter and Simeon, have abandoned the farm to seek their fortunes in the Witwatersrand Gold Rush and have left the farm in the hands of his youngest son, Eben. This sets the stage for a dynamic power struggle between Cabot, Eben, and Abbie over the ownership of the land.

Desire Under the Elms's principal theme of possession resonates deeply in a South African setting. Abbie, Ephraim, and Eben all lay claim to the farm, to the point of obsession: the words "mine" and "my farm" resound repeatedly throughout the play, like a mantra. This all-consuming desire to possess the land becomes the catalyst for the Cabot family's tragic trajectory.

We know from recorded accounts that the shortage of women in the colony resulted in some colonial men taking African brides. By making Abbie an African woman, we could give voice and agency to today's South African Indigenes, who were calling for the land to be restored to them, its rightful owners. We emphasized this connection by costuming Abbie in a fusion of Victorian fashion and traditional Xhosa dress.

Another major motif in the play is the spirit of Eben's late mother, who haunts the farm. O'Neill's treatment of the mother's spirit is very much in keeping with the traditional African belief that acknowledges the presence of ancestral spirits. In our "parlor scene," Abbie chants traditional Xhosa hymns while burning *mpepo*, an indigenous African herb used in spiritual ceremonies, to conjure the spirit of Eben's deceased mother. Far from being ghoulish, as it sometimes is in more traditional readings of the play, this scene took on a deeply spiritual meaning in a South African context.

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FIG. 1
Desire Under the Elms, Abrahamse and Meyer Productions, Baxter Theatre Centre, Cape Town, South Africa. Robin Smith as Ephraim Cabot and Mbali Bloom as Abbie Putnam Cabot. Photograph by Pat Bromilow-Downing.

FIG. 2
Desire Under the Elms, Abrahamse and Meyer Productions, Baxter Theatre Centre, Cape Town, South Africa. Mbali Bloom as Abbie Putnam Cabot. Photograph by Pat Bromilow-Downing.

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With *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill created a gripping tragedy of love, lust, passion, and possession that still ranks as one of the greatest modern classics—proof that the work of great writers can be interpreted in many varied social and cultural contexts around the world.

FRED ABRAHAMSE graduated from the University of Cape Town and is regarded as one of South Africa's leading theatre directors. Over a thirty-eight-year career, Abrahamse has directed over 200 productions from classical theatre, opera, and musical theatre to contemporary plays. Productions include: Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado About Nothing*, and Tennessee Williams's *Kingdom of Earth, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, One Arm, Stairs to the Roof, Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*.

MARCEL MEYER trained in acting at the Pro Arte School in Pretoria and obtained his B-Tech Degree (Cum Laude) in Musical Theatre from the Pretoria Technikon. Since graduating in 2003, Marcel has won acclaim for his performances in South Africa, Europe, and the United States. Highlights include the title roles in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, Iago in *Othello*, Romeo in two productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, and several of Tennessee Williams's leading men, including Chance Wayne in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Reverend Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*.

***Days Without End:* A Living Director's Take**

Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Museum of the San Ramon Valley, Danville, CA, January 6–7, 2018

Eric Fraisher Hayes

Days Without End was Eugene O'Neill's last great theatrical experiment. O'Neill, who made a career of writing plays about tormented characters, tells the story of John Loving, a writer, coping with his guilt over marital infidelity. The play uses the theatrical device of two actors playing the character simultaneously: "John" represents the overwhelmed yet struggling-to-overcome side of the personality of John Loving, and "Loving" represents the dark, cynical side of this character who sees death as the answer to his painful dilemma.

The first challenge in staging this play was to help the audience understand, from the opening scene, that the two actors playing "John" and "Loving" are two halves of the same man. The play opens with "John" and "Loving" having an argument in John Loving's office. Actors Teddy Spencer (John) and Chad Deverman (Loving) were dressed in matching blue suits and red ties. As the lights came up on the opening scene, I chose to have them facing each other in profile to evoke the image of a man looking at

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himself in the mirror. Then came a knock on the door from John Loving's co-worker and friend, William, played by Aaron Wilton. I directed "Loving" to slide behind "John" so that, as William walked into the room, "Loving" appeared to be "John's" shadow on the wall. William only saw one man in the office: John Loving. All lines spoken by either "John" or "Loving" were visually attributed to "John." When "Loving" said something sinister, others perceived a disturbed "John" to have said it. Attributing two voices that expressed radically different outlooks on life to one physical person added to a heightened sense that John Loving was unwell and perhaps driven to the edge of madness over his guilt. When William left the room, "Loving" reemerged from behind "John," and the two resumed their previous argument. It was clear to the audience that John Loving was arguing with himself.

Another instance of the physical staging of "John" and "Loving" played an important role in helping the audience see the two actors as one person came in the second half of our production. "John" and his uncle, Father Baird, played by Jesse Caldwell, were sitting on the couch talking about the plotline for "John's" unfinished novel. As the discussion heated up and "John's" thoughts started to darken, "Loving" took over storytelling duties, as if it was a tag-team wrestling match. In mid-argument, "John" left his seat in frustration only to have "Loving" quickly fill the seat and pick up the argument. This way the audience felt the continuity that Father Baird felt, that the wild and erratic ramblings were coming from one tormented man: John Loving.

My work on *Days Without End* in January 2018 comprised only four days and concluded with two script-in-hand performances. In a full production, I would have had the two actors playing "John" and "Loving" learn both parts and rotate the roles in performance. I believe this approach would increase the synergy and fluidity of the shared dialogue and thoughts between "John" and "Loving." Even more than twins or a long-time married couple who finish each other's sentences, these actors, I believe, must feel they are one organic entity.

O'Neill's script calls for "Loving" to be played in a death mask of "John." He felt that the use of a mask would heighten our appreciation of the psychological depth of John Loving's dilemma, and thus the audience would better understand Loving's fatalistic viewpoint that death is his only hope for release from guilt. While I find O'Neill's conceit interesting, as a director with an acting background I felt that the mask robbed Chad Deverman of one of his chief assets: the use of his expressive face. We chose to abandon the use of a mask, and this paid dividends. A good illustration of this came during a section of the play in which "John" was politely conversing with his wife Elsa, played by Elena Wright, and Father Baird. With no dark and brooding feelings being aroused, "Loving" had nothing to say. Chad sat off to the side looking disenchanted, even rolling his eyes once or twice, biding his time,

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waiting for conflict to arise so that John Loving's dark impulses could spring into action. These moments of restlessness or boredom would have been lost to the audience had Chad's face been obscured by a mask.

As is my usual practice with O'Neill's plays, I chose to edit heavily. In the case of *Days Without End*, the play seems to go down the rabbit hole of philosophy many times, and this slowed the action and diffused the conflict brewing in John Loving's tormented soul. Additionally, I frequently chose to shorten some of the expressions of disbelief expressed in the script. Consider, for example, this line from Elsa: "I–I don't understand. He hated love? He wanted to kill it? But that's—too horrible!" By removing "But that's—too horrible!," Elena Wright was able to credibly execute this line. Unedited, these lines sound too naive to be believed, but shortened they worked well. With this approach, we were able to navigate much of the heighten dialogue surrounding "John's" confession of his infidelity. We were aided by the discovery in rehearsal that there was a playable gap between what these crestfallen idealistic characters say to each other and how they really feel. The characters were trying to say what they believed the other wanted to hear, which made otherwise naive lines sound reasonable. Seen as a study in conflict avoidance, this dialogue seemed timely. Instead of the dialogue feeling clunky and unrealistic, it transformed into a very modern feeling of people fumbling to connect.

My brief experiment with staging *Days Without Ends* tells me that this play deserves to be produced. The script's exploration of the effect of guilt on the mind and body could yield much about the nature of mental illness, the ways in which we compartmentalize, and the ever-fascinating gap between who we are and who we present ourselves as being.

ERIC FRAISHER HAYES is the artistic director of the Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House. During his twelve-year tenure, the O'Neill Foundation has become the leading producer of O'Neill in the United States. Eric has directed more than twenty O'Neill plays, ranging from the well-known *Long Day's Journey Into Night, Desire Under the Elms*, and *The Iceman Cometh* to the rarely produced *Dynamo, Chris Christophersen*, and *All God's Chillun' Got Wings*. His *Hughie* and *Long Day's Journey* were featured at the Eugene O'Neill International Festival of Theatre in New Ross, Ireland, in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

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