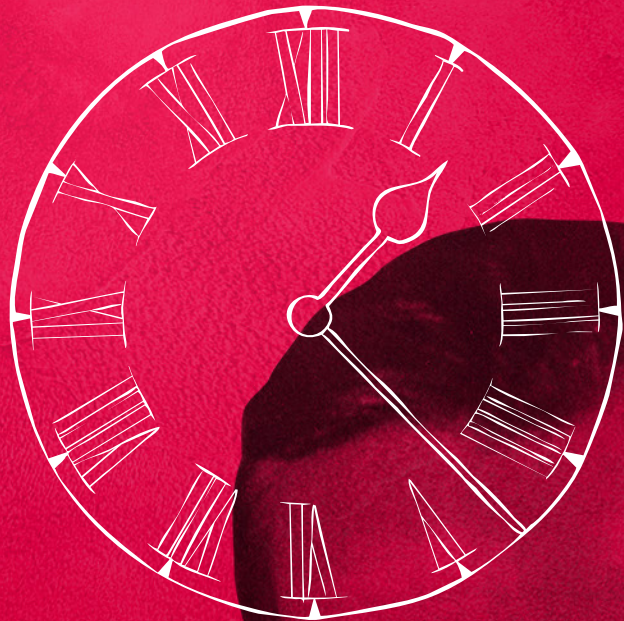


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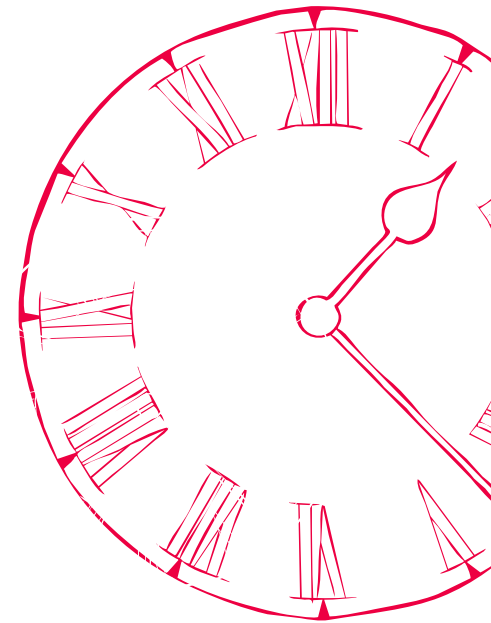


EPISODE FOUR

**AMERICA'S TROUBLED
SHAKESPEARE**

SYLLABUS

Episode Four: America's Troubled Shakespeare Syllabus



OVERVIEW:

Perhaps the greatest playwright in American history, Eugene O'Neill revolutionized theater in the United States. Born in 1888 in New York City, O'Neill spent many years as a child touring with the theater company of his father, James, who was a famous actor. The playwright's disdain for the content of commercial Broadway productions, along with his struggles with alcohol and a tumultuous family life, spurred him to pen some of the most significant psychological and family dramas, including *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh*, to see the stage. By his death in 1953, he was one of the most acclaimed writers of the 20th century, and he is the only American dramatist to ever win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

EPISODE SUMMARY:

Often considered to be "America's Shakespeare," Eugene O'Neill revolutionized American drama. But O'Neill suffered for his art, battling alcoholism and depression for decades, and his own family — including wife Agnes Boulton and daughter Oona — suffered for it as well. We follow O'Neill's life and career from the pivotal summer of 1916 in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where his genius was first discovered — and where he had an unforgettable love affair with journalist Louise Bryant — to his turbulent marriage to Boulton. We also analyze his sickly final years, in which he penned the autobiographical *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, regarded by many to be America's greatest play. Had O'Neill not been so cold, would Oona have searched for a father figure in Charlie Chaplin or gone for the brilliant writer J.D. Salinger, changing the course of history?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions based solely on material discussed in the podcast.

- 1 How did Eugene O'Neill's drinking affect his writing?
- 2 Is great suffering necessary to create great art?
- 3 Why do you think Eugene O'Neill turned back the clock and demanded that it "give me yesterday"?

BONUS QUESTIONS (for college listeners)

- 1 How did Eugene O'Neill change the course of American theater?
- 2 Why did Eugene O'Neill think of writing as a "vacation from living?"



EPISODE QUIZ (with answers)

Questions based solely on material discussed in the podcast. **Correct answers in bold.**

1 Which one of Eugene O'Neill's most famous plays was published after his death?

- a. Beyond the Horizon
- b. The Tempest
- c. **A Long Day's Journey Into Night**

2 What was the nickname of Eugene O'Neill's favorite bar in Greenwich Village?

- a. The Tavern
- b. **The Hell Hole**
- c. The Lamb and Flag

3 Which village in Cape Cod became a haven for artists like Eugene O'Neill in the early 20th century?

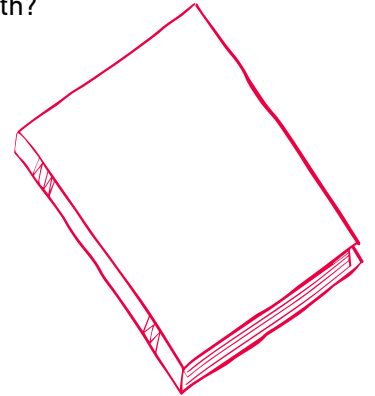
- a. Barnstable
- b. Martha's Vineyard
- c. **Provincetown**

4 What was the name of the American writer who was Oona O'Neill's mother?

- a. Louise Bryant
- b. **Agnes Boulton**
- c. Gloria Vanderbilt

5 O'Neill's father was a famous ____?

- a. **Actor**
- b. Politician
- c. Artist



PRIMARY SOURCES:

- *The Thread*, Episode Four, “America’s Troubled Shakespeare.” Available at ozy.com/thethread.
- *The Thread* immersive story page. Available at ozy.com/thethread.
- Eugene O’Neill, reading from *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Listen at [Yale’s Beinecke Library](#).
- Kevin Spacey in the film version of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Watch on [YouTube](#).

SECONDARY SOURCES:

- *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts* (2014), by Robert M. Dowling.
- *O’Neill: Life With Monte Cristo* (1962), by Barbara and Arthur Gelb.
- *American Masters: Biography of Eugene O’Neill*. Watch on [YouTube](#).
- “A Mint from the ‘Misbegotten,’ ” (1974), by Barbara Gelb. Read in [The New York Times](#).
- “Eugene O’Neill, Master of American Theatre,” (2012), by Sarah Churchill. Read in [The Guardian](#).
- “Carlotta and the Master,” (1988), by Jose Quintero. Read in [The New York Times](#).

