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Brenda Murphy
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CHAPTER I

THE NEW YORK PREMIERE

THE LONG ROAD TO BROADWAY

The first record of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* appears in Eugene O'Neill's work diary for 6 June 1939, where he wrote: "Read over notes on various ideas for single plays – decide outlines of two that seem appeal most, and see . . . N[ew]. L[ondon]. family one."¹ The notes for *Long Day's Journey* in O'Neill's work diaries begin on 25 June 1939. He completed a six-page outline for the play nine days later, and then returned to work on *The Iceman Cometh*. In January 1940, he finished "trimming" *Iceman*, and began work on *Long Day's Journey*. After writing the outline, he wrote, "want to do this soon – will have to be written in blood – but will be a great play, if done right."² He worked steadily on the play throughout the winter and spring, writing detailed notes throughout February and early March, and beginning the dialogue on 21 March. After finishing a draft of the first act at the end of April, he put the play aside, explaining to friends that he was unable to work because he was depressed and demoralized by the escalating war in Europe. In June he told the critic George Jean Nathan that he had begun work on "Long Day's Journey Into Night":

not concerned with the present world's crisis, as the title might indicate, but the story of one day, 8 A. M. to midnight, in the life of a family of four – father, mother and two sons – back in 1912, – a day in which things occur which evoke the whole past of the family and reveal every aspect of its interrelationships. A deeply tragic play, but without any violent dramatic action. At the final curtain, there they still are, trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time

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innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding and yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget.³

On 26 June O'Neill reviewed his draft of the first act, and was surprised to find himself "deeply held" by it. In July, he was back at work on the play, finishing a complete first draft on 20 September 1940, and a second draft on 16 October. Judith Barlow comments that, contrary to O'Neill's usual practice, "he made substantial additions during revision: the first act grew from twenty-two pages to twenty-eight."⁴ Then his wife Carlotta began the long and painstaking process of typing a copy of the script from the playwright's minuscule handwriting, while O'Neill returned to his work on the "Tale of Possessors" cycle and other projects. On 19 March 1941, O'Neill recorded in his work diary that he had finished "going over" the "typed script – second and I think final draft – like this play better than any I have ever written – does most with the least – a quiet play! – and a great one, I believe."⁵ After checking dates, quotes, etc., he pronounced the play finished on 1 April. Carlotta typed a second version of the script, which she finished in mid-May 1941, and on which O'Neill made minor corrections.

Between 13 January and 8 February 1942, O'Neill's long-time friend and editor at Random House, Saxe Commins, visited the O'Neills at Tao House, their home in the hills above Danville, California, and typed four copies of the final *Long Day's Journey* script. What happened to the script from this point on is the subject of considerable disagreement, and was to have a fundamental effect on the circumstances of the play's production. One copy of the manuscript remained at Random House until June of 1951, after the O'Neills had twice separated and been reconciled. Part of the terms of the second reconciliation included a new will, which O'Neill made out on 28 May 1951, designating Carlotta as his executrix and sole heir, and disinheriting his two living children Shane and Oona (Eugene, Jr. had committed suicide the previous year), and thus giving Carlotta the sole right to dispose of his literary properties in

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1 Eugene O'Neill with Carlotta at Tao House, at about the time he was writing *Long Day's Journey*.

the event of his death. O'Neill's manuscripts on deposit at Random House were immediately sent for, with one exception. O'Neill wrote to Random House President Bennett Cerf on 13 June 1951 to thank him for sending the scripts, adding, "No. I do *not* want *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. That, as you know, is to be published twenty-five years after my death – but never produced as a play."⁶ Cerf responded that he would keep the script of *Long Day's Journey* exactly where it was.⁷

In December 1951, on Carlotta's birthday, O'Neill gave her the typescript of *Long Day's Journey*, with the well-known inscription that she published in a volume of his inscriptions to her.⁸ He also had a detailed document drawn up, which "irrevocably" gave Carlotta full ownership and command of all his writings, published and unpublished, the author "being desirous of relieving myself of the

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burden of dealing with, managing or otherwise handling my literary properties to enable effective utilization thereof." Shortly after O'Neill's death on 27 November 1953, Carlotta wrote to Anna Crouse that she had "but one reason to live & that is to carry out Gene's wishes," mentioning the O'Neill Collection at Yale and saying that "the 'twenty-five year box' is the most interesting part of it – all personal except *Long Day's Journey Into Night* – & not to be opened until twenty-five years after Gene's death."⁹

O'Neill's determination to keep *Long Day's Journey* sealed for twenty-five years and the trust he bestowed on Carlotta by giving her a copy of the script were to haunt her efforts to have the play published and produced, efforts which began shortly after his death. In January 1954, Carlotta had O'Neill's agent Jane Rubin acquaint Random House with her plan to remove all of the scripts that remained in their vault. These consisted of the one-act *Hughie* and *Long Day's Journey*. Rubin sent *Hughie* to Carlotta, but noted that she had just learned from Donald Klopfer, a Random House editor, that *Long Day's Journey* was the manuscript under contract to Random House to be published twenty-five years later and so was to remain in the vault.¹⁰ This was not the end for Carlotta, however. She instructed Rubin to withdraw the script from Random House. Her request received a reply from Klopfer that Random House had explicit instructions to keep it in their safe until twenty-five years after O'Neill's death, at which time they were to publish it. Under the circumstances, he concluded, it would be a breach of trust for them to allow the manuscript out of their possession for any purpose whatsoever.¹¹ Taking another tack, Carlotta recorded in her diary that she gave Bennett Cerf permission to read *Long Day's Journey* on 20 June 1954, with the intention of releasing it for publication. Cerf wrote her a letter in which he said he would relinquish the rights to publication rather than violate the twenty-five year ban. In her diary Carlotta is silent about Cerf's refusal to publish the play, implying that it was her decision: "I can't allow Random House to publish 'Long Day's Journey Into Night' – they haven't the *understanding* or

the *feeling* for such a book!", she wrote.¹² She soon began negotiations with Yale University Press, which published the play in February 1956.

O'Neill's wishes may have been set aside in Carlotta's decision to publish and produce the play, but the twenty-five year ban was still the dominant factor in her strategy for publishing it and pursuing an eventual Broadway production. The circumstances leading to *Long Day's Journey's* world premiere in Stockholm, in Swedish, began with a conversation between Karl Ragnar Gierow, the director of Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre (Dramaten), and Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish Secretary of the United Nations, in December of 1954. Gierow later recalled that he had heard about the existence of an unproduced play that O'Neill "was unwilling to release" in the spring of 1950. After O'Neill's death, Gierow thought of the play, but was reluctant to approach O'Neill's widow because he was "in some measure familiar with her reputation as a person of a highly volatile disposition, whom one would be wise to avoid."¹³ He mentioned to Hammarskjöld, the world's premiere diplomat and a lover of the theatre, that he might pass on the word that Dramaten was eager to undertake production of an O'Neill play should the occasion arise.

This happened in June of 1955, and Gierow wrote to Jane Rubin applying for permission to produce *Long Day's Journey* and noting that Hammarskjöld had given him to understand that the reasons for postponing production in the US might not apply to a production in Sweden. On 14 June, Carlotta wrote to Hammarskjöld, saying that she had intended to write to Gierow to ask if he wanted to do the play without royalty, as a gesture to Sweden and the theatre that produced O'Neill's works so faithfully and so well. She also declared that the play would be produced in neither the United States, nor Canada.¹⁴ Carlotta wrote to Gierow on the 16th, reiterating her intention to have Dramaten produce the play "*sans* royalties" and saying that a short time before Eugene O'Neill died, he had asked her to promise him not to permit *Long Day's Journey* to be produced in

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the US, but had said that he wanted it produced by Dramaten.¹⁵ Gierow wrote back thanking her for her confidence and her generous offer, but suggested that the royalties be used for an “O’Neill Stipendium” to be awarded to actors, rather than dispensed with. This was the arrangement that was finally agreed upon. Carlotta’s explanation for her course of action in publishing the play and allowing it to be produced in Sweden was laid out in a letter she wrote to Gierow in August, claiming that a few weeks before O’Neill died he had dictated a long list of things he had wanted done, and not done. She said that he told her to publish the play if and as she wished, but that it was not to be produced in a US theatre. She went on to say that O’Neil had wanted the Royal Dramatic Theatre to have it as a gesture of gratitude for the excellent productions of his plays and for the Nobel Prize.¹⁶ When the *New York Times* announced the Stockholm premiere, it said that the play was being produced in Stockholm “in keeping with the playwright’s deathbed request to his wife that this last of his major dramatic efforts be staged by the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Stockholm, which has produced more of his plays than any other city.”¹⁷ Subsequent reviews and articles referred to this “deathbed request,” even going so far as to say that O’Neill had “willed” *Long Day’s Journey* to Dramaten.

Negotiations for the sale of production rights to *Long Day’s Journey* in Europe and North America began shortly after the Swedish premiere, and continued throughout 1956. In May, Carlotta signed an agreement setting out terms for optioning an English-language production of *Long Day’s Journey* to Blevins Davis in London, with royalties.¹⁸ In July, she signed a contract with the young Swedish producer Lars Schmidt, granting him the rights to production in the French language. The author’s royalty was 6 percent of the gross. Meanwhile, the publication of the play was proceeding in the US. After Random House relinquished the rights, Carlotta gave the American and Canadian publication rights to the Yale University Library. Under the deed of gift, all royalties from the

sale of the book were to be paid to Yale for a Eugene O'Neill Memorial Fund, which would be used to maintain the Eugene O'Neill Collection, to purchase books in the field of drama, and to establish Eugene O'Neill scholarships in the Yale School of Drama. Thus Carlotta received no publication royalties for *Long Day's Journey*. To her dismay, however, Eugene O'Neill's twenty-five year ban became well-known upon the book's publication, and Carlotta's renunciation of the profits did not absolve her in the eyes of the press and the public for violating O'Neill's wishes.

The issue of the twenty-five year ban was also a major factor in Carlotta's negotiations throughout 1956, leading toward an American premiere. She had a number of requests for the rights, but the major negotiations for a Broadway production were with the premiere Broadway designer of the 1950s, Jo Mielziner, and two friends who wanted to join with him to produce *Long Day's Journey*, the actors Karl Malden, who had recently acted brilliantly in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *On the Waterfront*, and Mildred Dunnock, who had originated the roles of Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and Big Mama in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Mielziner had first discussed *Long Day's Journey* with Carlotta in February of 1955, when she had given him the script to read and had asked him to dinner to discuss it. Writing to thank her, he had replied to her question of who the best director in the American theatre was, naming Elia Kazan, the hottest director on Broadway, who had worked with all three of the would-be producers.¹⁹

In May of 1956, Mielziner renewed the contact with Carlotta, and she gave a dinner for him and Malden and Dunnock at which she expressed her enthusiastic acceptance of their plan for an American production. Their idea was for Kazan to devote six weeks to rehearsing a first-rate cast, subject to Carlotta's approval, behind closed doors at Actors Studio, and then show the performance to Carlotta for final judgment as to whether it should be produced on Broadway. Mielziner assured her that almost anybody in the American theatre would tell her that Kazan, one of the founders of Actors Studio, was

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the best director to do this. If Carlotta should choose, they would forgo production and do a staged reading of the play at Yale, the extensive rehearsal period assuring its quality.²⁰ This arrangement was reported by Sam Zolotow on 11 May in the *New York Times*. Under the heading, "Schools May See Drama by O'Neill," Zolotow reported that "Eugene O'Neill's request to withhold the presentation of his autobiographical drama 'Long Day's Journey Into Night' in this country until 1978 (twenty-five years after his death) is likely to be modified. Such a possibility was acknowledged yesterday by the widow of the dramatist, Carlotta Monterey O'Neill." Should the plan reach fruition, Zolotow reported that Carlotta would impose certain restrictions: "The play will be done only at schools and colleges in the form of concert readings, eliminating scenery. Consequently, Broadway is excluded from the itinerary, a point confirmed by Mrs. O'Neill. The tour would start at Yale, where the playwright's collection is on exhibition."²¹ Mildred Dunnock and Arthur Kennedy, who had played Biff in the original production of *Death of a Salesman*, were suggested as possibilities for the cast.

On 3 June, Carlotta gave an interview to theatrical columnist Lewis Funke that suggests she was re-thinking the staged-reading plan. Funke suggested that "the clamor and din for an American production of Eugene O'Neill's autobiographical 'Long Day's Journey Into Night' increases." He drew a picture of a harassed Carlotta, besieged by demands to have the play produced, adding, "aside from a certain disillusionment Mr. O'Neill is supposed to have felt toward Broadway because of its commercial aspects, he also, his widow says, was convinced that 'there was no actress in America who could portray the role of his mother.'"²² On 17 June, Funke reported on the plans for the staged reading that were then in effect. He noted that Mielziner had disclosed the previous week that the triumvirate had the rights, that "intensive negotiations were in progress to persuade Elia Kazan to stage the venture," and that the author's royalties would be turned over to Yale. Under the heading of "Guesswork," Funke suggested that nothing "could be more intriguing than

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the rumor last week that if Elia Kazan stages it, it could very well wind up on the New York stage.”²³ Carlotta communicated her disturbance by Funke’s article to the producers, and Mielziner and Dunnock made haste to calm her. Dunnock wrote, telling her that she understood her being upset and assured her that nothing would ever be urged on her that she did not wish.²⁴

On 26 June, Carlotta sent a public statement to Funke in order to “clarify” Eugene O’Neill’s position on the production of *Long Day’s Journey*. It went as follows:

Because of the repeated misunderstandings and confusions that have appeared in the press concerning my husband’s wishes for the publication or production of ‘Long Day’s Journey Into Night’, most recently in your column of Sunday, June 17th, I have finally been persuaded that I should give you the full background.

When the play was first written, my husband did express the wish and stipulated with his publisher, Random House, for a twenty-five year withholding. This stipulation was made, however, not because my husband was in any way reluctant to have the play produced, but because he had been urged to do so by his son, Eugene, Jr., for his son’s own personal reasons.

Sometime after his son’s death, which took place in 1950, my husband told me that he could no longer see any reason for withholding production or publication of the play, and we had many discussions before my husband’s death looking forward towards its early release.

You can appreciate, I trust, the desire that I have had to keep this portion of family history confidential. I would be grateful, therefore, if you feel that it can remain so. If, however, you feel that it is necessary to use all or any part of this letter to clear the record, you have my permission to do so.²⁵

O’Neill had of course reiterated his intention not to have *Long Day’s Journey* published until twenty-five years after his death, and never to have it produced, in his June 1951 letter to Bennett Cerf several months after Eugene, Jr.’s death.

On 27 June, Mielziner sent a public statement to the drama editor of the *New York Times* that read:

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Due to conflicting prior commitments involving the key figures in the proposed production of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, Mrs. Eugene O'Neill and the producers, Jo Mielziner, Mildred Dunnock, and Karl Malden, have decided to postpone any definite plans until a later date when those involved can give their full time to this project.²⁶

Funke reported Carlotta's statement on Sunday, 1 July, noting that "ever since the death of Eugene O'Neill in 1953 there have been assorted reports, counter-reports, rumors and denial concerning the playwright's wishes in connection with the publication and/or production of" the play. The column also reported the postponement of the staged-reading plan indefinitely.

Carlotta's story that O'Neill banned the play's production and publication at Eugene, Jr.'s request has been reported by his biographers with varying credulity. Louis Sheaffer quotes an elaboration of the story in the letter to Funke that Carlotta gave him in an interview shortly afterward, in which she said that Eugene, Jr. thought *Long Day's Journey* "a very wonderful play," but asked his father to withhold it for twenty-five years because he felt it would not "be good for my social position at Yale," and O'Neill assented to his request.²⁷ Sheaffer, however, adds that the credibility of Carlotta's story is undermined by the fact that O'Neill had reaffirmed his twenty-five year ban when he wrote to Random House in 1951. He also mentions an interview with Eugene, Jr.'s friend Frank Meyer, who said that Eugene had told him about the play and the ban, "and he didn't think it was a good idea; he thought it should be released without delay."²⁸ Judith Barlow notes O'Neill's letter to George Jean Nathan in January 1941, seven months before Eugene, Jr. had read the play, in which the playwright wrote that "there are good reasons in the play itself why I'm keeping this one very much to myself, as you will appreciate when you read it. It isn't a case of secrecy about a new play merely for this or that practical reason, as with 'The Iceman Cometh.'" ²⁹ Even more telling is O'Neill's letter to Eugene, Jr. on 28 April 1941: "In the past two years I've written two plays I'm really enthusiastic about: *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into*