

EUGENE O'NEILL'S

# AH, WILDERNESS!

DIRECTED BY STEVEN ROBMAN

MAR.5 – MAY 20, 2017

# Study Guides from **A Noise Within**

***A rich resource for teachers of English, reading arts, and drama education.***

Dear Reader,

We're delighted you're interested in our study guides, designed to provide a full range of information on our plays to teachers of all grade levels.

A Noise Within's study guides include:

- General information about the play (characters, synopsis, timeline, and more)
- Playwright biography and literary analysis
- Historical content of the play
- Scholarly articles
- Production information (costumes, lights, direction, etc.)
- Suggested classroom activities
- Related resources (videos, books, etc.)
- Discussion themes
- Background on verse and prose (for Shakespeare's plays)

Our study guides allow you to review and share information with students to enhance both lesson plans and pupils' theatrical experience and appreciation. They are designed to let you extrapolate articles and other information that best align with your own curricula and pedagogic goals.

More information? It would be our pleasure. We're here to make your students' learning experience as rewarding and memorable as it can be!

*All the best,*

Alicia Green  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

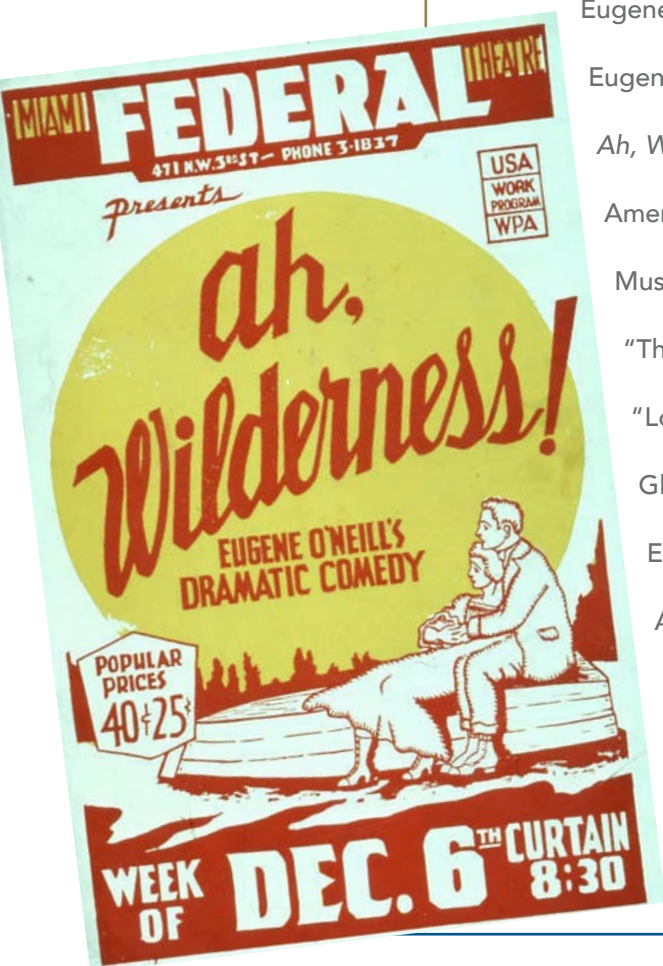


Pictured: Donnlia Hughes, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2016. PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.



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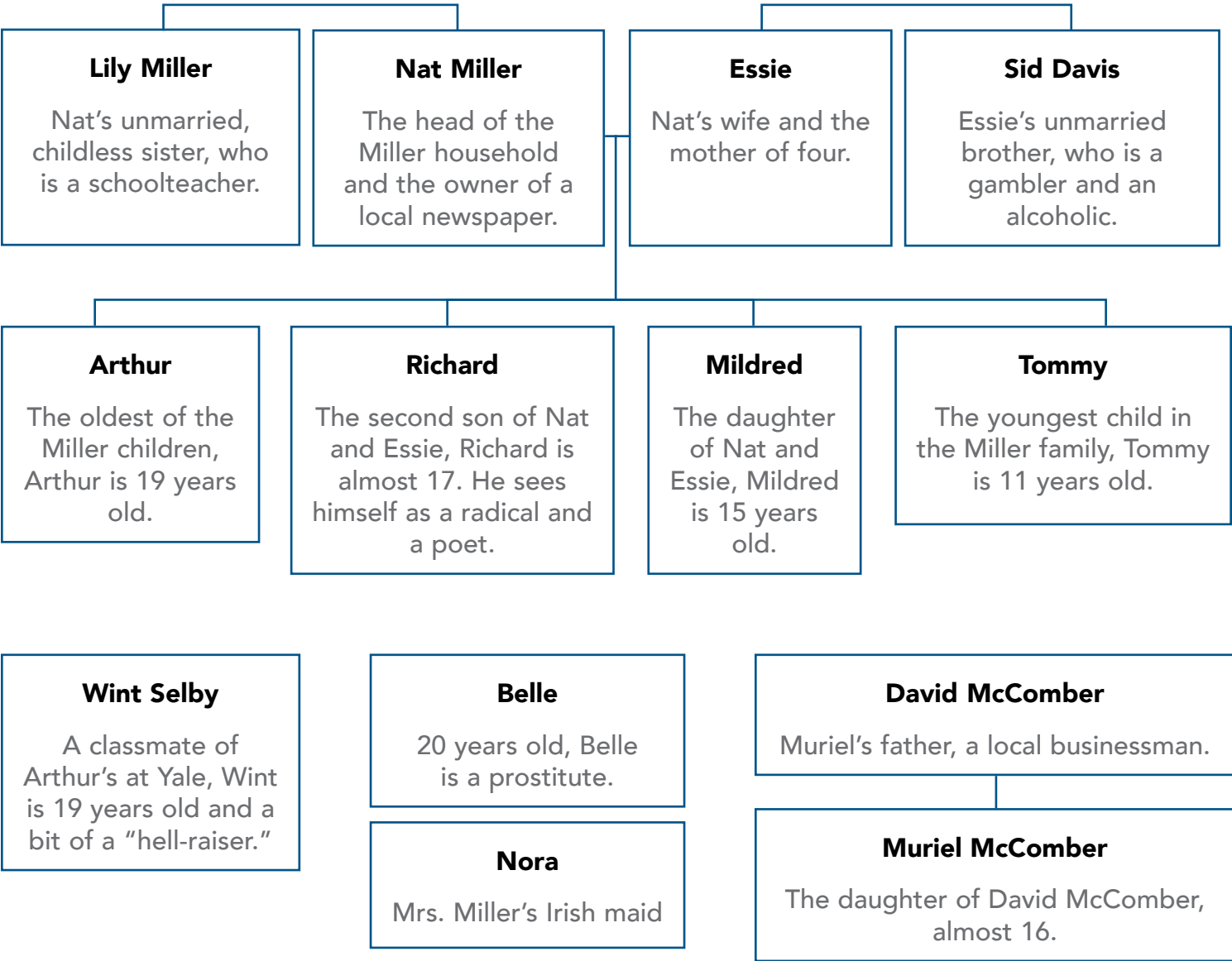
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# Character List



Source: Utah Shakespeare Festival, *Ah, wilderness!* (2001). Retrieved from: <http://www.bard.org/study-guides/characters-ah-wilderness>

# Synopsis

**IN A SMALL** Connecticut town on the Fourth of July in 1906, the Miller family has finished breakfast and is trickling into the sitting room. Richard is the only member of the family who has not come in from breakfast. Essie takes the opportunity to express concern about some “subversive” books Richard has been reading. When Richard appears, book in hand, the conversation turns to socialism and love poetry. Richard defends his reading selections to his sympathetic father but his sheltered mother is shocked.

David McComber, the father of Richard’s girlfriend Muriel, arrives to confront Nat Miller and accuse Richard of attempting to corrupt Muriel with scandalous quotations from his books. Nat, who owns the town’s newspaper, ardently defends his son, despite David McComber being the paper’s biggest advertiser. David has a letter for Richard from Muriel, ending their relationship. After David McComber departs, Nat gently confronts Richard and gives him Muriel’s letter. When Richard reads the letter he is devastated.

Wint Selby, Arthur’s classmate at Yale, drops by hoping that Arthur will join him on a double date. Arthur already has plans so Wint turns to Richard as a substitute. Meanwhile, Nat and Sid return home from a picnic and Sid is obviously intoxicated. Supper is punctuated by Sid’s drunken antics and as Sid marches off to bed, the family roars with laughter.

Wint’s double “date” turns out to be a rendezvous with prostitutes. A naive Richard sits in a hotel bar with Belle, a young prostitute. While Wint is occupied upstairs, Belle unsuccessfully tries to seduce Richard. A salesman hoping to do “a little business” with Belle, lures her away. Richard drunkenly quotes poetry and attempts to start a fight with the salesman, but the bartender intervenes and throws Richard out of the bar.

Nat and Essie are worried that Richard is out at such a late hour. Lily and Mildred attempt to allay Essie’s fears, suggesting that he is just out watching fireworks. Arthur returns from his evening out and a hungover Sid also joins the family vigil. Nat, in a moment of inspiration, decides to



Penny Postcard from Connecticut

use music to calm Essie. He urges Arthur to give them a song or two and he sings a few popular songs of the day: “Then You’ll Remember Me,” “Dearie,” and “Waiting at the Church.”

Richard finally arrives home, drunk and disheveled. Nat is furious, but Essie and Sid prevent him from lashing out at Richard. Sid puts his arm around Richard and assures him that he’ll fix him up as he ushers him off bed. Nat and Essie are left worried and aghast at what mischief Richard may have gotten into that night.

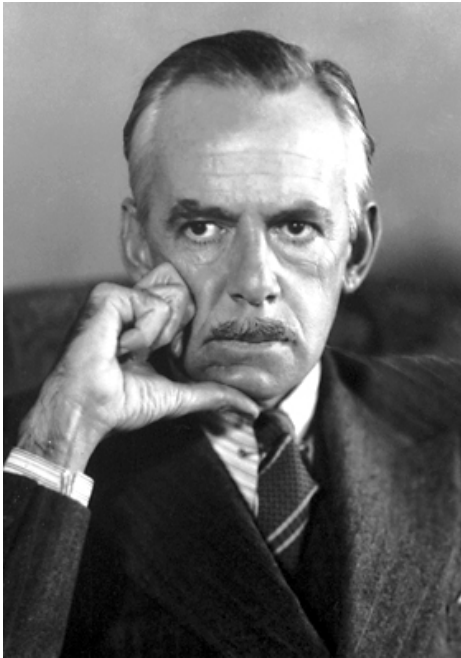
The next day, the entire family, except Richard, has shared a midday meal and somberly file into the sitting room. Nat returns to work without punishing Richard, who has yet to wake-up. When Richard appears, he is still despondent over Muriel. Mildred arrives with a letter from Muriel telling him she will sneak out that night and meet him on the beach. Richard’s mood is transformed to gleeful enthusiasm.

Richard sneaks out to meet Muriel on the beach. When she arrives, they are both unsure of each other’s true feelings. They reassure each other and, after recounting the events of the past twenty-four hours, profess their love for each other and share their first kiss.

Nat and Essie wait up for their son, discussing the “corrupted books” and possible punishments. When Richard arrives home Nat talks to him about the dangers of drinking and loose women. Richard allays his father’s concerns about his character and intentions. The play ends with Richard contemplating the beauty of the moon outside while his parents, Nat and Essie, gently tease each other and kiss in the dark of the front parlor. ♦



# Playwright Biography: Eugene O'Neill



The official website of the Nobel Prize

Famed playwright Eugene O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in a New York City hotel room. He was the son of Mary Ellen "Ella" and James O'Neill, a stage actor.

After Eugene was born, his mother developed an addiction to morphine. She had been given the drug to help her through her particularly difficult childbirth. His father continued on

with his role in a touring production of *The Count of Monte Cristo* shortly after Eugene's birth.

Eugene O'Neill spent much of his early life on the road with his father. Shortly before his 7th birthday, however, he was sent away to boarding school; O'Neill spent years at the St. Aloysius Academy for Boys, where he received a strict Catholic upbringing. In 1900, he returned to New York City, where he attended the De La Salle Institute for two years. In 1906, O'Neill enrolled at Princeton University, but his heart wasn't in his studies and he was kicked out. After leaving Princeton, Eugene O'Neill floundered for a time. He took several sea voyages, ran around town with brother James and indulged heavily in alcohol. He had a brief marriage to Kathleen Jenkins, which resulted in one son, Eugene O'Neill Jr.

In 1912, O'Neill battled tuberculosis. While recuperating from his illness, he found his calling as a playwright, finding inspiration from such European dramatists as August Strindberg and later enrolling in a writing class at Harvard University. O'Neill had his first play produced in Provincetown, Massachusetts, in 1916: *Bound East for Cardiff*, a one-act play that was staged in New York later that year. Also in 1916, O'Neill made a second attempt at domestic bliss. He married fellow writer Agnes Boulton, and the couple eventually had two children together, son Shane and daughter Oona. O'Neill took the theatrical world by storm in 1920 with *Beyond the Horizon*, which won a

Pulitzer Prize. Later that year, another O'Neill masterpiece, *The Emperor Jones*, made its Broadway debut.

In 1922, O'Neill brought his drama *Anna Christie* to the Broadway stage; this tale of a prostitute's return home netted the playwright his second Pulitzer Prize. O'Neill suffered a personal loss with the death of his brother the following year. By this time, the playwright had also lost both of his parents. But O'Neill's private struggles seemed to aid him in creating greater dramatic works for the stage, including *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and *Strange Interlude* (1928). Around this time, O'Neill left his second wife and quickly began a relationship with Carlotta Monterey, whom he married in 1929.

O'Neill reimagined the mythic tragedy *The Oresteia* in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), exchanging ancient Greece for New England in the 19th century. Five years later, he became the first American playwright to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was given this honor "for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy.

O'Neill completed *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in the early 1940s, but he refused to have this autobiographical play produced until long after his death. Around this same time, he had a falling out with his daughter, Oona, over her marriage to Charlie Chaplin.

After several years' absence from the stage, in 1946, O'Neill returned with one of his most heralded works, *The Iceman Cometh*, a dark drama that explores the lives of a group of barflies. The following year, the playwright learned that he had Parkinson's disease, and found it impossible to write due to the tremors in his hands.

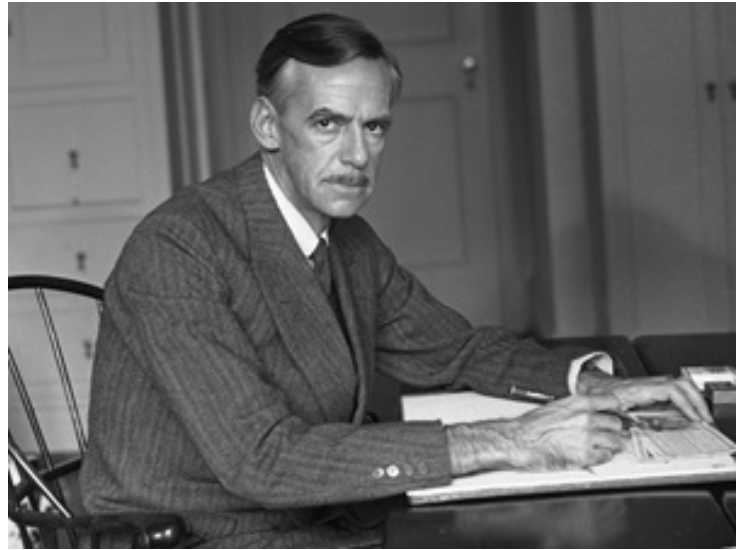
In 1948, O'Neill, never a supportive parent, cut ties with his youngest son, Shane, after Shane was arrested for drug possession. Two years later, his eldest son, Eugene, committed suicide.

Eugene O'Neill died of bronchial pneumonia on November 27, 1953 at the age of 65 in Boston, Massachusetts, leaving behind a tremendous literary legacy of more than 50 plays. In 1957, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* was performed on Broadway to rave reviews; O'Neill received a posthumous Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize for the drama. His work continues to move and fascinate audiences today. ♦

Edited from *Eugene O'Neill Biography*. Retrieved July 2016, from A&E Networks, Biography.com, <http://www.biography.com/people/eugene-oneill-9428728>

# Eugene O'Neill Timeline

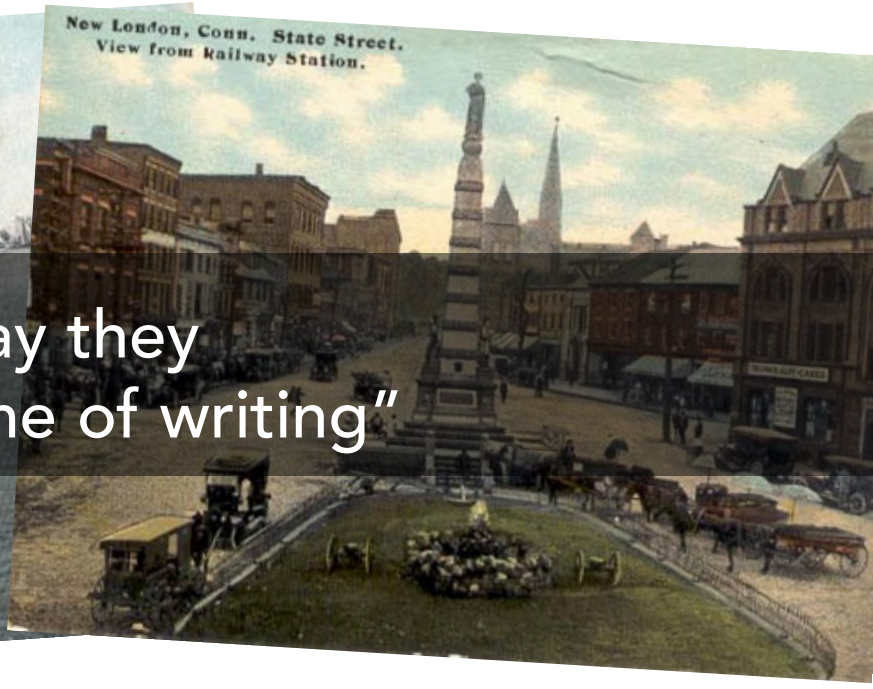
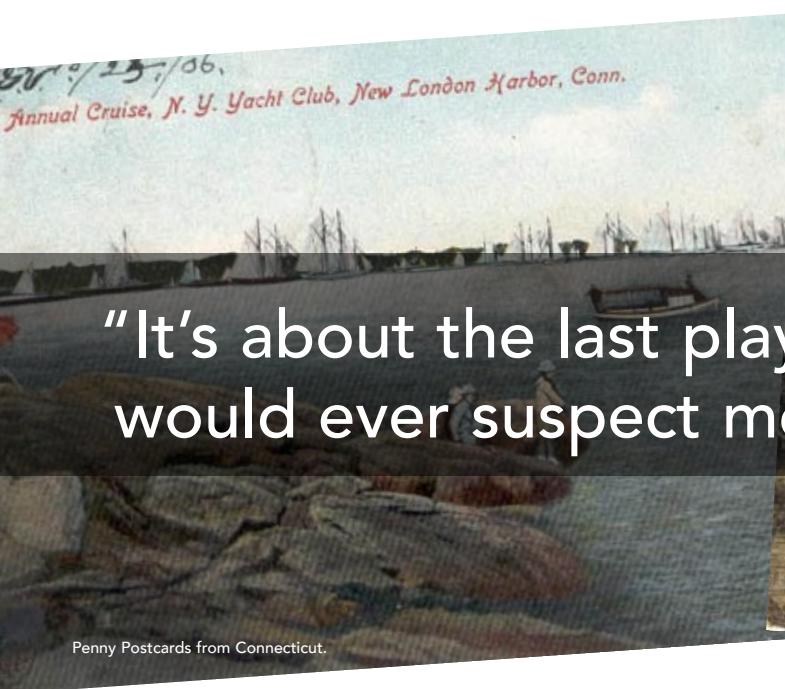
- 1888** — O'Neill is born in New York. His father, James O'Neill, plays the titular character in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a role he played for over 6,000 performances over three decades.
- 1895** — O'Neill enters the strict Catholic boarding school St. Aloysius Academy for Boys.
- 1906** — O'Neill enrolls in Princeton University.
- 1907** — O'Neill is kicked out of Princeton "for poor scholastic standing" and moves back to New York. He also sees Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and is drawn to see it again on nine successive nights.
- 1912** — Drinking heavily and living at Jimmy-the-Priest's boarding house and saloon in New York, O'Neill attempts suicide. In 1919 he will write *Exorcism*, a one-act play based on the suicide attempt. O'Neill contracts tuberculosis and is inspired to become a playwright while reading during his recovery.
- 1916** — O'Neill joins a group of young writers and painters who launch an experimental theatre in Provincetown, Massachusetts. They produce his first one-act play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, one of many plays he will write about sailors or life at sea. The play debuts in New York on November 3.
- 1920** — O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, is produced on Broadway at the Morosco Theater. The play goes on to win a Pulitzer Prize, the first of four in O'Neill's career.
- 1922** — *Anna Christie*, a play about a prostitute returning to her seafaring father and falling in love with a sailor, is awarded a Pulitzer Prize, O'Neill's second.
- 1924** — *Desire Under the Elms*, about a woman who cements her bond to her stepson-lover by murdering their baby, premieres at the Greenwich Village Theater. The play is celebrated as "the first important tragedy to be written in America."
- 1928** — O'Neill wins his third Pulitzer Prize for *Strange Interlude*, a play in nine acts that catalogues the life of a woman, from the death of her fiancé to her listless marriage.
- 1929** — After two previous marriages, O'Neill marries Carlotta Monterey. They remained married for the rest of his life.
- 1931** — O'Neill completes one of his most ambitious works, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, for which he adapts the Greek tragic myth *Oresteia* to 19th-century New England.



- 1933** — *Ah, Wilderness!*, O'Neill's only comedy, opens at the Guild Theatre on Broadway.
- 1936** — O'Neill is awarded the Nobel honor Prize in literature, becoming the first (and currently the only) American dramatist to win the honour.
- 1941** — O'Neill completes *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, arguably his best-known play, which dramatizes the embattled relationship of his parents. Due to the autobiographical content of the play, O'Neill requests that it isn't performed until after his death.
- 1943** — O'Neill's daughter Oona, at 18, marries film star Charlie Chaplin, who is about the same age as her father. O'Neill rejects the marriage and never sees his daughter again.
- 1946** — *The Iceman Cometh* opens on Broadway. It is the last Broadway production of an O'Neill play during his lifetime.
- 1950** — Eugene O'Neill Jr. commits suicide. His note reads: "Never let it be said of O'Neill that he failed to finish a bottle." His father, in failing health, does not attend the funeral of his oldest child.
- 1953** — Suffering from a neuromuscular disorder that has robbed him of the ability to write, O'Neill dies in the Shelton Hotel in Boston. He has written 50 plays and seen 35 of them produced.
- 1956** — *Long Day's Journey Into Night* opens at the Helen Hayes Theatre in New York. O'Neill receives a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for the play.

**Edited from** PBS Online, WGBH. (1997). *Timeline: Eugene O'Neill chronology*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/oneill/timeline/index.html>

# Eugene O'Neill on *Ah, Wilderness!*



"It's about the last play they would ever suspect me of writing"

I dashed off a first draft of another play in September. It came on me all of a flood and working every day 8:30 to five or six I got the whole thing off my chest in one month. It's no idea you have ever heard me talk of—and is quite different from anything I have ever done. It came so easily that I'm scared of it—afraid to go back and read it—even so diffident that I'll save telling you the details until I go back and find I like it. Of course, I know I'll find a lot to do on it even if it turns out worth while [*sic*]. As for whether I will ever allow it to be produced, granted it's good, that will be another difficult decision to make.

— Letter to his son Eugene O'Neill Jr., November 11, 1932

[*Ah, Wilderness!*] has very little plot. It is more the capture of a mood, an evocation [of] the spirit of a time that is dead now with all its ideals and manners and codes—the period in which my middle teens were spent—a memory of the time of my youth—not of *my* youth but of the youth in which my generation spent youth—there is very little actually autobiographical about it except a few minor incidentals which don't touch the story at all. The title, in strict confidence is *Ah, Wilderness!* [...] It's not a play one can explain. Moreover I haven't looked at it since I finished. Don't get the impression I feel I may not *like* it. I have an immense affection for it. But whether it is enough of a play to carry across what I mean in it in a theater is something I'm not deciding for a long while yet. Perhaps if I give you the subtitle you will sense the spirit of what I've tried to recapture in it "A Nostalgic Comedy of the Ancient Days when Youth was Young, and Right was Right, and Life was a Wicked Opportunity." Yes, it *is* a comedy ... and not deliberately spoofing at the period (like most modern comedies of other days) to which we now in our hopeless

befuddlement and disintegration and stupidity feel so idiotically superior, but laughing at its absurdities while at the same time appreciating and emphasizing its lost spiritual and ethical values. ... But what pleasure I got out of writing it! It was such a change from the involved and modern and tragic hidden undertones of life I usually go after. It's about the last play they would ever suspect me of writing. And, really, let me confess it, I think it's pretty damned good, too.

— Letter to Eugene O'Neill Jr., January 14, 1933

It is purely a play of nostalgia for youth, a sentimental, if you like, evocation of the mood of emotion of past time which, whatever may be said against it, possessed a lot which we badly need today to steady us. I mean, not the same thing, that's dead; but the inner reality of that thing conceived in terms of life today. The good idea of the simple old family life as lived by the typical middle class hard working American of the average large-small town which is America in miniature—the coming of the new radical literature of that day to youth (Shaw, Ibsen, Wilde, Omar Khayyam, etc.)—that's what I've tried to do in the play. A play about people, simple people of another day but real American people. But you will see better than I can explain when you read it. And a comedy! It's damned funny (at least to me!). But it makes me weep a few tears, too.

— Letter to Eugene O'Neill Jr., May 13, 1933

Don't think of this play as a New England play!!! It isn't, you know, in any essential respect—and near- to-New-York Connecticut never was real New England, as any New Englander will tell you. It could be laid in the Middle or Far West with hardly the change of a word. There are no





Penny Postcard from Connecticut.

colloquialisms in it, I think, that aren't general American small town. ... I happened to have my old home town of New London in mind when I wrote—couldn't help it—but New London, even in those days was pretty well divorced from its N.E. heritage—was lower Conn., in fact, with New York the strongest influence.

— Letter to Philip Moeller  
(American stage producer/director/playwright/screenwriter)

I was writing about general types of people of that period in any large small-town, and not particular persons. And I make it a point never to put real people I have known into my plays. All my characters are my own fabrication. They may have certain points about them which resemble, at times, certain traits in persons I have known, but the whole character is never true to that of any actual person. [...] What has set them off is that I call the play "A Comedy of Recollection," but I meant recollection of general family life, etc. of that period, as contrasted with today, and not recollection of any specific family. The "Millers" in my play are like thousands of families in America of that time.

— Letter to Grace Rippen, October 16, 1933

I hope you liked my nostalgic adventure into comedy in *Ah, Wilderness!* I think it should hand you many reminiscent grins. You will remember those good old days as well as

I, and you must have known many Miller families. I had a grand time writing it—also a grand time rehearsing, for the cast, taking it all in all from bits to leads, is the best I ever had in a play. They really make it live very close to what I imagined it. A most enjoyable experience in the theater, all told—and how the damn thing moves young, middle-aged and old! It's astonishing. And a proof to me, at least, that emotionally we still deeply hanker after the old solidarity of the family unit. [...]

These two plays [*Ah, Wilderness!* and *Days Without End*] will, I know, set you to wondering what sea change has come over me. The truth is that, after [*Mourning Becomes Electra*] I felt I had gone as far as it was in me to go along my old line—for the time being, at least. I felt that to try to top myself in various other phases of the old emotional attitude would be only to crucify my work on what had become for the time an exhausted formula. I felt a need to liberate myself from myself, so to speak—to see and express, if possible, the life preserving forces in other aspects which I knew from experience to be equally illustrative of the fate in human beings' lives and aspirations. In short, I felt the justice in the criticism that my plays in toto were too one-way and presented only one side of the picture, and that, if only to bring out that tragic side by contrast, I ought to express the others.

— Letter to Kenneth MacGowan, October 16, 1933

# Ah, Wilderness! Themes



4th of July 1906 taken at the intersection of Main and Lassen Street in Susanville, CA.

## Coming of Age

*Ah, Wilderness!* is a coming of age story. Richard tests the social and moral boundaries of the world he knows on his journey toward maturity. In discovering his own identity, he finds true value in his parent's moral views while incorporating different political views. This literary genre focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist.

O'Neill modeled the Miller family not on his own as they were, but what he wished they could have been. The Miller family embodied the ideal of the tight-knit safe haven wherein children could flourish. In this family, "parents care about their children; children respect their parents; siblings torment each other, but in a crisis they support each other" (Bloom 114). Even though Richard searches for his identity outside the values of his family, he is still welcomed home with loving arms.

## Addiction

Sid is a tragicomic character. Through him, O'Neill comedically addresses the tragic effects addiction can have on one's life as well as their loved ones. Sid's addiction has derailed his life time and time again. He has never been able to realize a complete and healthy romantic relationship with Lily or a full and rewarding career. The subject of addiction was very close to home for O'Neill, whose mother was addicted to morphine. O'Neill, who lived through the time of Prohibition, was a heavy drinker and attempted suicide.

## Sex and Social Censorship

Intimate relationships were a taboo topic in 1906, when puritanical mores were still very much the norm. Richard's favorite authors were well known for freely addressing such topics. However, literature that might arouse desire would be considered inappropriate to read or discuss, especially in mixed company. Women were expected to be "chaste" upon entering marriage. When Richard shared sexually charged quotes with Muriel, a "decent" girl, adherents of the social norms of the day would have been scandalized. Apart from sharing sexual ideas with Muriel, Richard seems to have adopted the general sense of what was deemed appropriate behavior; he refused to engage in sexual activity with the prostitute, Belle, and he chose to wait for marriage to Muriel. ♦



# America in 1906

**THE POPULATION** of the United States was 85.4 million. The number of stars on the American flag was 45. Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona were not yet ratified as states in the United States.

The President was Theodore Roosevelt (1901 – 1909). In 1906 he would be the first president to travel outside the U.S. while a sitting president. At 43 he was the youngest president to date and his was a high-energy, optimistic, and progressive presidency. He shepherded the Antiquities Act through Congress, ultimately preserving and protecting huge areas of land as national parks.

Political Progressives were coming to power, experimenting with reforms such as women's suffrage, primary elections, and laws setting minimum wages, work standards, and regulated rates for common carriers and services. Followers of the Progressive movement believed in the perfectibility of man and his society.

Methods of travel were revolutionized by the first transcontinental railroad track set down in 1869, and by 1900, there were five railroad systems spanning North America, over 193,000 miles of track.



Sloan, John. *The Picnic Grounds*. 1906-07. Whitney Museum of American Art.

In April of 1906, the San Francisco earthquake killed 3,000 and left 300,000 homeless. Later that year, also in San Francisco, the school board proclaimed Japanese children had to be educated in separate classrooms. It was the first "separate but equal" ruling in the U.S.

Typhoid Mary, the first asymptomatic carrier of typhoid fever was identified, caught, and incarcerated. By 1915 she would be out and working in a New York City hospital.

*The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair was published. It exposed corruption in the Chicago meat-packing business. Before the end of the year, it would drive passage of the Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drugs Act.



Dufy, Raoul. *4th of July*. 1906. Private Collection. Fauvist Painting.

On the musical front, French singer Maurice Chevalier debuted in 1906. In the United States, pianist "Jelly Roll" Morton was active in New Orleans, giving ragtime a heavy beat and George M. Cohan composed *It's a Grand Old Flag*. "Nobody", a 1906 hit, written by Bert Williams and Alex Rogers, was the first pre-1920 recording inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

People's living rooms still had no radio to turn on and listen to music. Families who wished to enjoy music at home often had a piano around which they would gather and sing. Recorded music was also available on cylinders or discs produced for play on phonographs by companies such as Edison Records, Indestructible Record Company and Columbia Phonograph Company. The ultimate in music technology in 1906 was The Victor Talking Machine. Instead of having an exterior horn like the phonograph did, an interior horn was hidden within a red mahogany cabinet that would blend in with the furnishings of a home.

On Christmas Eve the first radio broadcast with voice and music was aired in Massachusetts by Reginald Fessenden. He played "O Holy Night" on his violin and sang the last verse. ♦

Edited from Owens, C. (2016, May 24). *Connections: Life, love and death in 1906 America*. Retrieved from Life In the Berkshires, <http://theberkshireedge.com/connections-6/> and America at the turn of the century: A look at the historical context. Retrieved 2016, from Library of Congress Digital Collections, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/early-films-of-new-york-1898-to-1906/articles-and-essays/america-at-the-turn-of-the-century-a-look-at-the-historical-context/>

# The Music of *Ah, Wilderness!*



The Fourth of July The Day Before (1906). [Image: Library of Congress]

**ARTHUR BRINGS MUSIC** to *Ah Wilderness!* right from the start of the play. While stuffing his pipe, he hums a song popularized by Billy Murray, "Waltz Me Around Again, Willie." Billy Murray was the son of Irish immigrants and one of America's best-selling recording artists during the phonograph era. He was also a star of the vaudeville stage. Another song he popularized, "Bedalia," plays on the nickel-slot player piano in the bar of the small hotel where Richard and Belle have a drink.

While the Miller family waits up for Richard's late night return home, Arthur sings at his father's behest to mollify his mother. O'Neill chooses "that old sentimental favorite," "Then You'll Remember Me," as the first in the series of songs Arthur sings. This song was popularized by John McCormack, a celebrated Irish tenor who made his operatic debut in 1906. "Dearie," another sad sentimental song of the era, is the next song Arthur sings. This song was so popular that the composer and lyricist wrote an "answer to the famous song" "Since you called Me Dearie."

The last song of the evening, "Waiting at the Church," is a song made famous by Vesta Victoria. Sid says, "You oughta hear Vesta Victoria sing that! Gosh she's great! I heard her at Hammerstein's Victoria..." Born Victoria Lawrence in Leeds on November 26, 1873, Vesta Victoria was one of the greatest Music Hall stars of her era. Her father, Joe Lawrence, was also a performer and Vesta appeared on stage at a very early age with him as "Baby Victoria" and later as "Little Victoria." She was popular in both the United States and Britain. The song that made her famous was "Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me A Bow-Wow," which she introduced in 1893 at the age of 19. She went on to have such great hits as "Waiting At The Church," "It's All Right In The Summer Time," "Our Lodger's Such A Nice Young Man," and "Poor John." ♦

## **(THERE WAS I) WAITING AT THE CHURCH**

Music by Henry E. Pether

Lyrics by Fred W. Leigh

*I'm in a nice bit of trouble, I confess  
Somebody with me has had a game  
I should by now be a proud and happy bride  
But I've still got to keep my single name*

*I was proposed to by Obadiah Binks  
In a very gentlemanly way  
Lent him all my money so that he could buy a home  
And punctually at twelve o'clock today*

*There was I, waiting at the church  
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church  
When I found he'd left me in the lurch  
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note  
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote  
"Can't get away to marry you today  
My wife, won't let me!"*

*Lor, what a fuss Obadiah made of me  
When he used to take me in the park  
He used to squeeze me till I was black and blue  
When he kissed me he used to leave a mark*

*Each time he met me, he treated me to port  
Took me now and then to see the play  
Understand me rightly, when I say he treated me  
It wasn't him, but me that used to pay*

*There was I, waiting at the church  
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church  
When I found he'd left me in the lurch  
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note  
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote  
"Can't get away to marry you today  
My wife, won't let me!"*

*Just think how disappointed I must feel  
I'll be off me crumpet very soon  
I've lost my husband, the one I never had  
And I dreamed so about the honeymoon*

*I'm looking out for another Obadiah  
I've already bought the wedding ring  
There's all my little fal-the-riddles packed up in my box  
Yes, absolutely two of ev'rything*

*There was I, waiting at the church  
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church  
When I found he'd left me in the lurch  
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note  
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote  
"Can't get away to marry you today  
My wife, won't let me!"*



# Those Awful Books

MRS. MILLER: That reminds me, Nat. I've been meaning to speak to you about Those Awful Books Richard is reading. You've got to give him a good talking to...

Richard's mother worries about what scandalous material he is reading; books alluding to sex or promoting political and social ideas contrary to the conservative status quo were considered improper for a young man in 1906. Excerpted here are passages from some of Richard's taboo books.

## From *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (a classic 12th-century Persian poem)

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread— and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
Oh Wilderness were Paradise enow!

...

Yesterday This day's Madness did prepare;  
Tomorrow's silence, Triumph, or despair:  
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why:  
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

## From *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde (1890)

Lying back in the hansom, with his hat pulled over his forehead, Dorian Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city, and now and then he repeated to himself the words that Lord Henry had said to him on the first day they had met, "To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul." Yes, that was the secret. He had often tried it, and would try it again now. There were opium dens where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new.

## From *Anactoria* by Algernon Swinburne (1866)

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes  
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs  
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound

...

That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat  
Thy breasts as honey! That from face to feet  
Thy body were abolished and consume,  
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!



The Steam Man of the West

## From *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* by Oscar Wilde (1898)

I only knew what hunted thought  
Quickened his step, and why  
He looked upon the garish day  
With such a wistful eye;  
The man had killed the thing he loved  
And so he had to die.  
Yet each man kills the thing he loves  
By each let this be heard,  
Some do it with a bitter look,  
Some with a flattering word,  
The coward does it with a kiss,  
The brave man with a sword!  
Some kill their love when they are young,  
And some when they are old;  
Some strangle with the hands of Lust,  
Some with the hands of Gold:  
The kindest use a knife, because  
The dead so soon grow cold.  
Some love too little, some too long,  
Some sell, and others buy;  
Some do the deed with many tears,  
And some without a sigh:  
For each man kills the thing he loves,  
Yet each man does not die.

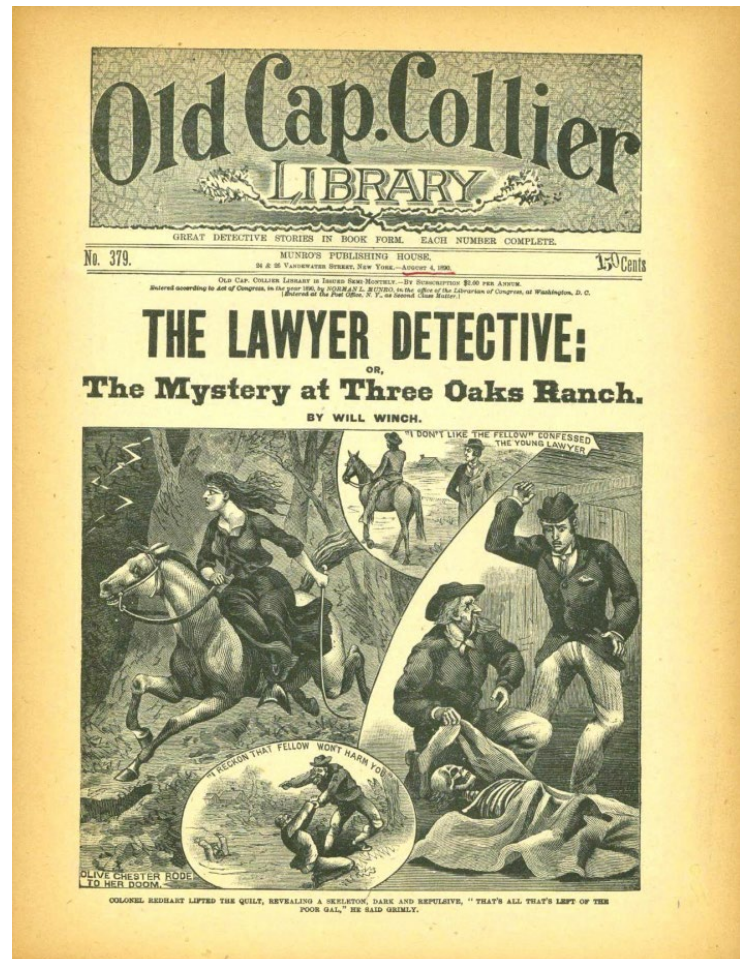
# “Love Poetry” and Socialism (with a Dash of Anarchy)

**RICHARD IS INTERESTED** not only in “love poetry” but also socialist philosophy. In a rhyming mockery of the expression, “The land of the free and the home of the brave,” Richard exclaims, “Home of the slave is what they ought to call it—the wage slave ground under the heel of the capitalist class, starving, crying for bread for his children, and all he gets is a stone! The Fourth of July is a stupid farce!” Living in a conservative small town in Connecticut, his father warns him about making such statements outside the privacy of home. Richard defiantly reminds his father of the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and then opines that that too may be a farce.

The Panic of 1893 was the beginning of the worst economic period in the United States up to that time. The gold reserves became so low that then President Cleveland was forced to borrow \$65 million in gold from financiers. J.P. Morgan was a powerful American banker and corporate financier involved in industrial consolidation. Richard’s suggestion that they should bring out the guillotine for John Pierpont (JP Morgan) instead of celebrating the Fourth of July clearly indicates his sympathy with the anarchist movement of the time. In 1892 anarchists, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were involved in an assassination attempt on another financier of the time, Henry Clay Fick. Nat Miller seems to recognize the similarity between Richard’s suggestion regarding J.P. Morgan and Fick and says, “Son, if I didn’t know it was you talking, I’d think we had Emma Goldman with us.” In 1901 President McKinley was assassinated; the responsible party had been inspired by a recent Goldman speech.

Goldman was a power player in early anarchist political philosophy. Interestingly, it was in 1906 that Goldman began publishing the anarchist journal, ***Mother Earth***. The periodical frequently printed articles regarding the labor movement, government, women’s emancipation, sexual freedom, literature, and education.

The theater has long been a venue for political commentary. In 1914 Goldman authored the treatise, ***The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*** which analyzed the significance of modern plays and playwrights to politics. She analyzed various contemporary playwrights, including Richard’s favorites George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen. In 1890 the British socialist society, the Fabian Society, put out a call for papers on the topic of socialism in literature and in 1891 George Bernard Shaw authored the essay, ***The Quintessence of Ibsenism***. Shaw wrote this essay about Ibsen’s use of strong characters who oppose social hypocrisy.



Old Cap Collier Library- The Lawyer Detective, August 1890

Richard quotes a line of poetry from ***Revolution*** by Ferdinand Freiligrath, “The days grow hot, O Babylon! ‘Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!” Samuel Fielden, an anarchist, also used this poem in his defense. Fielden was one of many accused in the labor demonstration where a bombing culminated in the infamous Haymarket Riot in Chicago on Tuesday May 4, 1886. Interestingly, O’Neill also uses this quote in ***The Iceman Cometh*** for his anarchist character Hugo Kalmar.

The book that has transported Richard to another world at the opening of the play is ***Carlyle’s French Revolution***, authored in 1837 by Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle’s book focused on the oppression of the poor and the human condition. Nat Miller has also read this book, “even a newspaper owner can’t get out of reading a book every now and again.” Nat, unlike Essie, is sympathetic to Richard’s desire to keep a library and as the play progresses we see that this isn’t the only of Richard’s books that he has read. ♦



# Glossary

## TERMS IN THE PLAY COMMON TO 1906 JARGON:

**Blarney Stone:** a stone in Blarney Castle, near Cork, Ireland, said to give the powers of eloquence and flattery to those who kiss it.

**Boola-Boola:** a Yale University fight song. The term has expanded to refer to anything having to do with Yale.

**Bromo Seltzer:** an effervescent headache remedy and antacid.

**Bulldog briar pipe:** a short, stout pipe made from the root of the briar plant.

**Carping:** finding fault with everything.

**Caution:** in this context, one who astonishes or commands attention.

**Delirium tremens:** a violent loss of mental and physical faculties marked by trembling and quaking, often resulting from the excessive and prolonged use of alcohol.

**Dutch courage:** alcohol.

**In Dutch:** in trouble, i.e. "in Dutch with the boss"

**Greenhorn:** an inexperienced, unsophisticated person; a newcomer unfamiliar with local customs.

**Gunwale:** the upper edge of a boat's side. Pronounced "Gunnel."

**Heart Bowed Down:** a song from the Irish opera *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), lyrics by Alfred Bunn and music by Michael William Balfe.

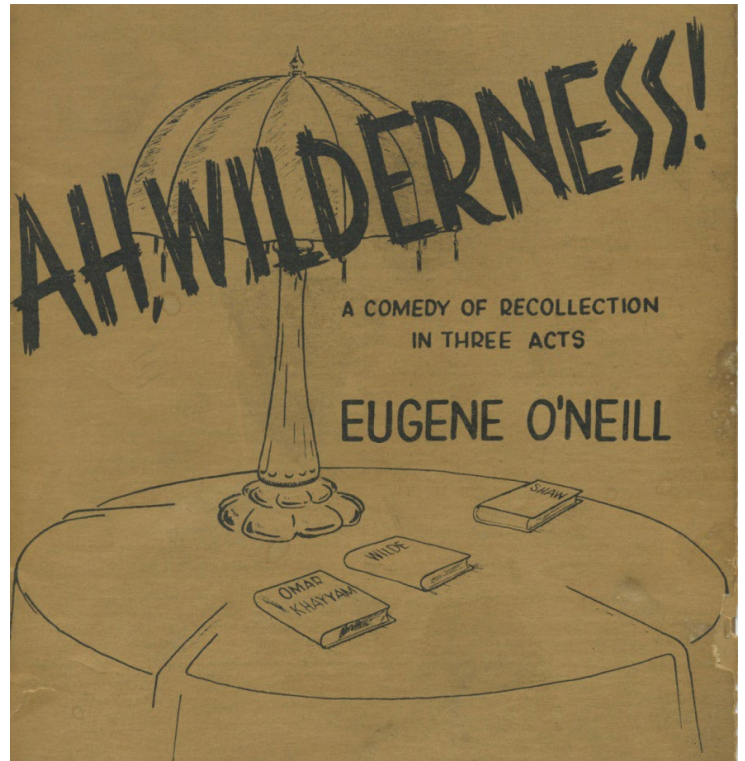
**Jag:** a temporary state of exhilaration, usually induced by liquor.

**Lucretia Georgia:** a confused reference to Lucrezia Borgia (1480-1519), a noblewoman who figured prominently in the Italian Renaissance. A member of an extremely powerful and infamous family, she is associated with ambition, incest, and murder.

**A warm lulu for fair:** something that is striking to the greatest degree.

**Macushla, Mavourneen:** dear or darling; from the Irish.

**Nick Carter, Old Cap Collier:** characters from popular "dime-books" of the late 1800s. These dime-books depicted the romanticized and violent adventures of their protagonists and were frowned upon as having a corrupting influence upon children.



Book Cover of *Ah, Wilderness!*

**Peck's Bad Boy:** a mischievous young character featured in George W. Peck's weekly newspaper column from the late 19th century.

**Piker:** one who plays cautiously or does things in a small way; a cheapskate.

**Pippin:** an admirable person or thing.

**Q.T.:** abbreviation of quiet; used in the phrase "on the Q.T." meaning secretly or quietly.

**Ruitions:** disturbances or riots.

**Sachem Club:** the "sachem" were the most senior members of the Tammany Society, a group that dominated New York City politics throughout much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This term was taken from the title held by Native American chiefs.

**Sandow:** Eugene Sandow (1867-1925) was a body-builder who developed his physique using Greek sculpture as a model. An intelligent man and a major figure of his day, Sandow was one of the first proponents of governmental health agencies. A showman until the end, he died of an aneurysm after lifting a car out of a ditch.

**Second girl:** euphemistically, the maid.

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# Glossary Continued...

**Skinful:** a large quantity, especially of liquor.

**Sloe-gin:** a liqueur made of sugar-sweetened gin in which sloe berries, the fruits from the blackthorn tree, have been steeped.

**Stolid:** having or expressing little or no sensibility; unemotional.

**Sweet:** a cigarette; from "Sweet Caporal," an American brand of cigarettes popular at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Tappee:** a take on the word "tap."

**On tenterhooks:** strained or nervous; from tenter, a frame with hooks along two sides that is used to dry and stretch cloth.

**Tumbril:** a two-wheeled farm cart, used during the French Revolution to carry the condemned to the guillotine.

**Vesta Victoria:** a comedienne popular in East Coast music halls of the late 1800s.

**W.C.T.U.:** the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a national organization of women founded in 1874 to "proclaim [the] message of truth, purity, and total abstinence."

**Water wagon:** a wagon or truck equipped with a tank or barrels for hauling or sprinkling water. To be "on the water wagon" or "on the wagon" is to abstain from drinking alcohol.

**Waterbury:** a city in Western Connecticut, about 20 miles northwest of New Haven, known primarily as a commercial and industrial center.

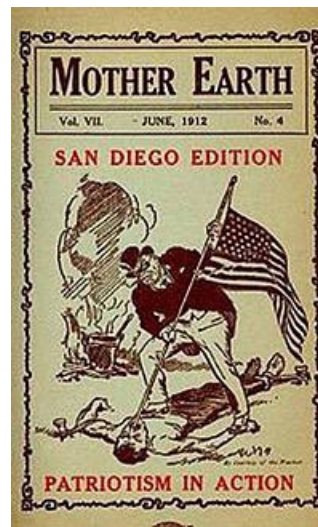
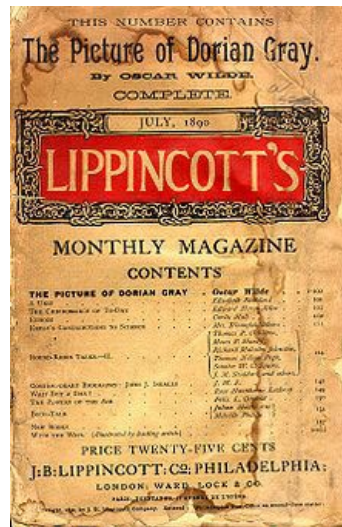
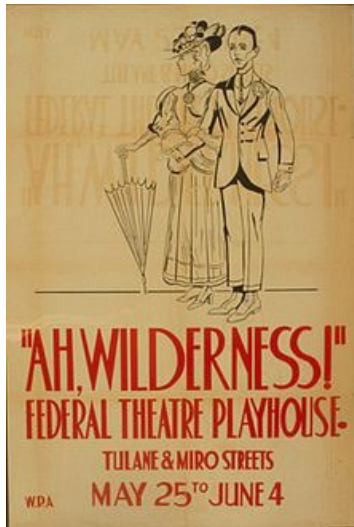
**Waterloo:** the scene of Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, by extension, a decisive or final defeat.

**Whited sepulchre:** hypocrites, devils in disguise; from the New Testament, Matthew 23:27: "Woe unto you ... for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of uncleanness."

**Edited from** *A Selected Glossary*:EOneill.com, retrieved from <http://eoneill.com/companion/wilderness/glossary.htm>



# Essay Questions



## ESSAY QUESTIONS:

- 1) Richard Miller has many intellectual and political awakenings in the play. At almost seventeen years old, he views himself as an artist and a radical. Is Richard's behavior simply a product of being a teenager? Have there been times in your life when you felt that you wanted to rebel from either society or your family?
- 2) Compare and contrast the characterizations of Richard Miller and his brother Arthur.
- 3) The play is subtitled "A Comedy of Recollection in Three Acts." What aspects of the play embody this subtitle? Are there any moments that are dream-like? What are the characters' experiences with nostalgia, memory, and even regret?
- 4) How is the ideal of the "American Family" as it is presented in the play antiquated? What constitutes an American family in today's society? What prevailing images do we have of families in media like film, television and theatre?

# Activities

## ACTIVITIES:

### 1. WALKING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

Within this play, there are a lot of conflicts between expectations for who characters should be vs. the reality of who they are. Some are faced with the questions of if they should change who they are and what they do for someone else's view of who they should be. Even if it's a family member asking you to change, it's never an easy task to pull yourself away from the things that make you who you are. This activity explores how it feels to put yourself in someone else's shoes.

- Have the students walk around an open space.
- Tell them to walk "normally" or how they always walk in life. How do they walk from class to class? How are they most comfortable walking?
- Ask a series of questions for them to think about as they walk around the room- Do they lead with any particular body part-the top of their head? Their shoulders? Do their arms swing? Do their feet come completely off the floor or do they shuffle as they walk? They should not change their walk as these questions are asked, they should just acknowledge what their body is doing.
- Once students are aware of how their bodies feel when they walk, ask them to shift into walking as if they were a 100-year old person. How does this affect their feet, their arms, their back, what they lead with? Then switch to various characters: sullen teenager, very shy person, rock star/celebrity, etc.
- Finally, have students end with returning to their own walk
- Discuss if these physical changes affected their mindset? How did it feel to be old? To be shy? To be sullen?

### 2. BASIC TABLEAUX

- Break students into groups of 4 or 5
- Give each group a theme or a word (i.e. Wilderness, Family, 4th of July)
- Have each group create a tableaux (or frozen picture) of their word/theme
- Have each group share their tableaux with the class
- Discuss as a class what made various still images effective

### 3. NORMAN ROCKWELL PAINTINGS

Like Eugene O'Neill, the painter Norman Rockwell worked in the 1930s and 1940s, creating images of small town New England life. Unlike most of O'Neill's work, Rockwell's paintings most frequently depict happy images of commonly lived experiences. The task in this activity is to create Rockwell-like images of moments from *Ah, Wilderness!*

- Break students into groups, and have each group decide on a moment in the play to capture as a Norman Rockwell painting.
- Assign roles to each person in the group.
- Determine the location of each character in the painting in order to reveal information about character relationships.
- Determine the activity of each character in the painting in order to reveal information about plot.
- Create an aesthetic quality for the painting by including a variety of levels, grouping characters in a balanced fashion, and maintaining a focal point that draws the eye of the audience.

Edited from: Shaw Festival Study Guide



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# Resources and Suggestions for Further Reading

## ARTICLES

A&E Networks (2009). *Prohibition*. Retrieved from History.com, <http://www.history.com/topics/prohibition>

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1906 in music – Wikipedia.org

Article Link: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906\\_in\\_music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1906_in_music)

1906 Top 40 Songs – Playback.fm

Article Link: <http://playback.fm/year/1906/>

"Waltz Me Around Again, Willie," Victor 22 Gramophone 1904.

Billy Murray (singer)- Popular song, "Bedalie" 1903 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glfWsHx-DVU>

John McCormack sings "Then you'll remember me, " from Balfe's The Bohemian Girl. 1916. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqlh6VhR2WY>

"Dearie" - <http://www.lyrics.com/lyric/14008849>

Waiting at the church - Vesta Victoria (Sid loves her singing and saw her perform this song in New York.) – See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqqz5AvUZ7E>

The Accused, the accusers: the famous speeches of the eight Chicago anarchists in court when asked if they had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon them. On October 7th, 8th and 9th, 1886, Chicago, Illinois. Chicago, Ill.: Socialistic Publishing Society, [1886?]

Article Link: <http://www.chicagohistory.org/hadc/books/b01/B01S007.htm>

# About Theatre Arts

## KEY THEATRICAL TERMS

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment.

In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd.

Although playhouses in the past could sometimes be rowdy, participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance today. Shouting out (or even whispering) can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within's* performance of *The Maids*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

**blocking:** The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

**character:** The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

**conflict:** The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

**dramatic irony:** A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

**genre:** Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

**motivation:** The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

**props:** Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

**proscenium stage:** There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience

members have the same view of the actors.

**set:** The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

**setting:** The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

**stage areas:** The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

**theme:** The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

**thrust stage:** A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.



# About A Noise Within

**A NOISE WITHIN** A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 25 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 15,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ♦

## Study Guides

A Noise Within creates study guides in alignment with core reading, listening, speaking, and performing arts standards to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org). The information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with the California VAPA standards, The Common Core, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of A Noise Within's artistic interpretation of the work, statements from directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

## Study Guide Credits

Alicia Green	Education Director and Editor
Leah Artenian	Education Associate
Craig Schwartz	Production Photography
Teresa English	Graphic Design
Anna Rodil	Contributor
Kimberly Kehoe	Education Intern and Contributor



CELEBRATE

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