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***Journey into Night and Death of a Salesman***

庇护还是陷阱——《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》与《推销员之死》  
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申 请 人 姓 名 尹德青

指 导 教 师 岑玮 教授

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**Shelter or Snare: Familial Relations in**  
***Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman***

**By**

**Yin Deqing**

**Under the Supervision of Professor Cen Wei**

**A**

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## Abstract

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), "the Father of Modern American Drama", was an outstanding playwright who made great contributions to American Drama. He was also considered to be the founder of American theatre. Arthur Miller (1915-2005), "the American Ibsen", was another talented and outstanding playwright after Eugene O'Neill. As an important realistic dramatist in contemporary American literature, Miller gained the reputation of "American Conscience" for the morality and social responsibility that rooted in his works and life. Since O'Neill initiated the tradition of modern American drama, the mainstream themes of American drama throughout the twentieth century were inseparable from family life in modern society.

As the most basic unit of society, family is the most fundamental structure on which people rely for survival and development; meanwhile it is also the ethical and moral entity holding people's emotional life and family life. O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* are both realistic works on family issues in modern society. Through detailed comparison and analysis, it can be found that the two plays share many similarities. The two playwrights unfolded their dramatic conflicts through families which are just like the epitome of society. They both exposed the family and social problems faced by common people in an age of extravagance and waste through the description of the tragedy in two middle-class families. The two plays have the same themes: family issues and the disillusion of the America Dream. The characters in the plays have the corresponding relations and the relationship between the characters is interwoven by love and hate. They are both the creators and the victims of tragedy. The two plays reflect O'Neill and Miller's concern and thinking about family and social issues. These family issues are typical and universal. What's a real home? Is it a shelter or a snare? What kind of family relationship is it? Love or hate? Ethical Literary Criticism takes literary text as the object of criticism, reading, analyzing and interpreting different life phenomena described in literature from the perspective of ethics, so as to identify its ethical nature and moral teaching function. The audience can draw the ethical ideals and the desired

family relationship that the authors wanted to convey and pursue by means of the interpretation of the two plays.

This thesis mainly uses the method of Ethical Literary Criticism to compare and analyze the family relationships in the two plays. Based on their similarities, first chapter explains the ethical environment in the works that influence the fate of the characters and family relationships from an ethical perspective. Then, the following chapters focus on the analysis of husband-wife relationship, father-son relationship and mother-child relationship. Family is a paradox to the characters. On the one hand, family makes them extremely disappointed, and on the other hand they are very fascinated by the feeling of being related to their family. The thesis consists of six parts: introduction, four chapters and conclusion.

The introduction offers a brief presentation and description of Eugene O'Neill and his masterpiece *Long Day's Journey into Night*; Arthur Miller and his masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*; and a brief description of the similarities between the two plays. In addition, the theory of Ethical Literary Criticism is also briefly introduced, laying a theoretical foundation for the following study and analyses.

The first chapter takes a systematic analysis into the ethical environment at that time in the two plays, and explains the environmental causes that influenced characters' fate and family relationships in the works from an ethical perspective. The prevalence of materialism, the false of American Dream and the loss of faith constitute the ethical environment on which the two works depend.

The second chapter based on the husband-wife relationship described in the two works analyzes the ethical predicament and dilemma faced by both husband and wife. On the one hand, both husband and wife are deeply in love with each other, care for each other and desire the warmth of family. On the other hand, they complain about their loneliness. As a result, both husband and wife have fallen into an ethical dilemma because they have not fulfilled their corresponding ethical responsibilities.

The third chapter explains the relationship between the father and the sons in the family, and analyzes the ethical problems lying between the father and the sons from a

perspective of ethical identity. Father and sons in the two plays are all confused about their identity no matter at home or in society. The normal family ethical order is negatively impacted by the contradiction between the behavior and identity caused by the confusion and disorder of their identity. It is well known that, fathers have a great influence on their children. So father's negligence and wrong behavior will cause lifetime disaster to his children. The mutual expectation and disappointment between father and sons is an important reason leading to the conflicts between them.

The fourth chapter mainly analyzes the mother-son relationship in the two families. It explains the ethical problem resulted by ethical choice from the perspective of the ethical selection. Different choices could lead to different results. As a mother, she should love and care for her children and give them warmth and support. However, because of their own or external reasons, mother and children face dilemmas of ethical choice, leading to the ethical problem between them.

The last part is the conclusion. The family relationships in the two plays are intertwined with love and hate. And this emotion leads to similar ethical problems in the two families of the two plays. The lonely couples owing to the entanglement of ethical predicament; the hostile father and sons result from the confusion and disorder of ethical identity; and the alienated mother and sons because of the dilemmas of ethical choices. Under a specific environment of social development, the influence of various forces on people is concentrated in the family and reflected by the ethical relationship among family members. Through their works, the two writers expressed their personal value judgment and ethical ideas within a specific social context, and thus reflected the social issues. Through a comparative study of the family relations in the two realistic tragedies, this paper reveals the prevalent problems of family relations, and it also shows the authors' ethical ideal: build up equal and harmonious family relations in which members care and respect each other. By revealing the ethical predicaments and ethical problem encountered by ordinary Americans in business society of the early 20th century, this thesis warns that we must establish correct values and deal well with the relationship between family members under the rapid economic

development at present. Through the construction of ethical order, establish a real home where men could obtain the spiritual sense of direction and belonging; make family a shelter where men could feel love and warmth. Families should distinguish the good and the evil, and form an accepted and recognized ethical relationship by staying behavior accord with ethical norms.

**Key words:** *Long Day's Journey into Night*; *Death of a Salesman*; Ethical Literary Criticism; family relationships

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## 摘要

尤金·奥尼尔(1888-1953)是美国伟大的剧作家,为美国的戏剧发展做出了杰出的贡献,被誉为“美国戏剧之父”。阿瑟·米勒(1915-2005)深切地关注社会现实和底层人物,被誉为“美国戏剧界的良心”。自奥尼尔开创了美国现代戏剧的传统开始,整个二十世纪美国戏剧的主流题材都与现代社会里的家庭生活密不可分。

家庭作为社会最基本的组成单位,是人生存和发展所依赖的最基本形式,是人们情感生活和亲情生活的伦理道德实体。奥尼尔的《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》和米勒的《推销员之死》都是关于现代社会中家庭问题的现实主义作品,把戏剧冲突放置在家庭这个社会的缩影里来展开。两部作品描写了两个中产阶级家庭的悲剧,通过家庭成员间的关系展现面临的家庭问题和社会问题。两部剧有着相同的主题:家庭问题和美国梦的破碎。剧中的人物也呈现对应关系,人物之间的关系都是爱恨交织,他们既是悲剧的制造者也是悲剧的受害者。这两部作品主题的相似性体现奥尼尔和米勒对家庭和社会问题的关注和思考,体现了两部作品关注的家庭问题的典型性和普遍性。真正的家是什么?是庇护还是陷阱?家庭关系是什么样的?爱或恨?文学伦理学批评以文学文本为批评的对象,从伦理的视角解释文学中描写的不同生活现象,挖掘其中蕴含的道德教诲价值。

本论文运用文学伦理学批评的方法对两部剧作中的家庭关系进行比较和分析。基于两部作品的相似性,首先从伦理的视角分析作品中影响人物命运和家庭关系的伦理环境,进而着重分析作品中的夫妻关系、父子关系和母子关系。家于他们而言是悖论式的,一方面家令他们极为失望,另一方面他们又异常迷恋家的感觉。论文共分为六部分,包括引言、四个章节以及结论。

引言部分简要地介绍了作家尤金·奥尼尔及其作品《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》和作家阿瑟·米勒及其作品《推销员之死》,简要介绍了两部作品的相似性。此外,还对文学伦理学批评理论作了简要的介绍,为接下来的论述奠定理论基础。

第一章对两部剧作中的人物当时所处的伦理环境进行了系统的分析。从伦理的视角回到当时的伦理环境,阐释作品中影响人物命运和家庭关系的因素。物质主义的盛行、美国梦的破灭、信仰的丧失等因素同源而生,共同构成了两部作品所依存的伦理环境。

第二章基于两部作品中对夫妻关系的描述，分析夫妻双方面临的伦理困境。一方面，夫妻双方都深爱着彼此，相互关心爱护渴望家庭的温暖。另一方面，却又抱怨孤独寂寞，互相之间有着隔阂和不理解。夫妻双方都因没有尽到相应的伦理责任而陷入伦理困境，进而导致夫妻伦理问题。

第三章基于家庭中的父子关系进行了阐释。从伦理身份的角度分析父子间存在的伦理问题。剧中的父子不论是在家中还是社会中对于自己的身份都存在困惑和迷茫。因为对身份怀有的困惑和混乱导致的行为和身份相悖，冲击了正常的家庭伦理秩序。父亲对孩子的影响重大，父亲的失职和错误行为将给孩子带来一生的灾难，父子间的相互期望和失望也是引发父子冲突的重要原因。

第四章主要分析了家庭中的母子关系。主要从伦理选择的角度阐释母子间因伦理选择的两难而带来的伦理问题，不同的伦理选择具有不同的伦理价值，选择不同则结果不同。母亲和孩子面临两难的伦理选择，导致母子间伦理问题的产生。

最后是结论部分。两部剧作中的家庭关系存在着相似的伦理问题，他们之间的关系爱恨交织是悲剧的不幸的。因伦理困境导致的孤寂的夫妻；因伦理身份的混乱和困惑导致的敌对的父子；因伦理选择的两难导致的疏远的母子。在具体的社会发展环境下，社会上各种力量对人的影响集中于家庭并由家庭成员之间的伦理关系反映出来。作家则通过作品表达伦理思想和伦理观念，传递伦理理想。通过文学伦理学批评对两部具有现实意义的悲剧作品中的相似的家庭关系进行比较研究，揭露普遍存在的家庭关系问题、揭露家庭伦理关系面临的伦理困境和伦理问题，警示我们在当今经济快速发展的情况下一定要树立正确的伦理观念，通过伦理秩序的建构，构建和谐有序的伦理关系，建立“真正的家”让心灵有所归属，让家人感受到爱和温暖的庇护。家人之间要分清“善和恶”，使行为和伦理规范相符，形成被接受和认可的伦理关系。

**关键词：**《进入黑夜的漫长旅程》；《推销员之死》；文学伦理学批评；  
家庭关系

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## Introduction

Eugene O'Neill "the Father of Modern American Drama", and Arthur Miller, "the American Ibsen" are considered to be the most outstanding dramatists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America. As the leading playwrights of the 20th century, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller were famous for their influential modern tragedies *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman*. So far, a lot of thorough studies have been done on the two plays from diverse aspects both at home and abroad. These studies offer us plenty of good points and views to understand the two great plays.

### 0.1 Eugene O'Neill and His *Long Day's Journey into Night*

Eugene O'Neill, the leading American dramatist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was internationally recognized as "American Shakespeare" and the "Father of Modern American Drama" for his remarkable contributions to the development and prosperity of modern American drama. O'Neill is widely considered to be the dramatist who "has shaped the course of American drama in its most significant developmental period" (Bogard xiii). He was the only one in literature history who won Pulitzer Prize four times for *Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christine*, *Strange Interlude* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In 1936, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works which embodied an original conception of tragedy. He was the first and the only American dramatist conferred such an honor till present. Before O'Neill's times, Americans saw only imported plays in the types of farces, melodrama, and sentimental comedies. It was through O'Neill's achievements that American drama was taken seriously by the world as he endowed American drama with serious themes and made ceaseless experimentations in techniques, form and content. On December 13, 1953, two weeks after O'Neill's death, New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson mourned that a giant writer has dropped off the earth; a great spirit and our dramatist has left us, and our theatre world is now a smaller, more ordinary place. "Both the man and his dramatic achievement were unique: there was something monolithic about him. But there was also something protean. O'Neill' was somehow greater than the sum of all his work"

(Carpenter 11).

O'Neill was a prolific playwright. He created 59 plays from his first play *A Wife for the Life* published in 1913 to his last play *A Moon for the Misbegotten* finished in 1943. His literary career can be generally divided into 3 stages. The first stage was from 1913 to 1920, in which O'Neill applied naturalism and realism to his writings. At this period, his plays mainly described the suffering, hardship and tragic life of the homeless and voyagers, based on his early experience as a seaman. The major plays included *Bound East for Cardiff* (1914) and *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1917). The middle stage of his career was from 1920 to 1934, inspired by the enthusiasm for experimentalism. He rejected realism and turned to symbolism and expressionism. During this period his major works were *The Empire Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1921) and *The Great God Brown* (1925). These plays explored human trauma and condition by depicting mental activities and psychological conflicts of the characters. During the last stage, from 1934 to 1943, O'Neill returned to realism and created some of his finest works, such as *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943). In this period he no longer focused on the plot, but paid more attention to the inner world of the characters. Harold Bloom refers to him as "the elegist of the Freudian 'family romance' of the domestic tragedy of which we all die daily, a little bit at a time" (Bloom 5). His tragic temperament was in various themes. In his plays, O'Neill vividly portrayed the people and their life of the early 20th century America, presented a harsh and indifferent world and revealed the weakness, confusion and spiritual dilemma of the people at that time. Most of O'Neill's characters have to face the question whether to choose to die in the cruel reality or to survive numbly in an illusion which is similar to Hamlet's fate.

Among all O'Neill's works, his autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night* a drama written in tears and blood was widely recognized as his masterpiece. This play brought him worldwide fame and the fourth Pulitzer Prize in 1957. Without any zigzag plots or stirring outer conflicts, this play vividly portrayed an ordinary

American family plagued with arguments and disputes. And “the personal struggles have also seemed to recapitulate the universal problems of men’s. “The tragedy of his life is related not only to the dramatic tragedies which he wrote but also to the archetypes of human tragedy” (Carpenter 12). This play focuses on family problems of a common Irish immigrant family in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presenting us with a vivid depiction of a common family in a normal day with the same family problems. “No dramatist to this among us, has matched O’Neill in depicting the nightmare realities can afflict American indeed family life in the twentieth-century Western world” (Bloom 5). “Drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, tuberculosis, and loss of faith may all have been common life experience in 1949s, but they were rarely discussed in so open a forum” (Abbottson *Masterpieces* 108). In this family, none of the four Tyrones functions is property, and none of them expects to be blessed. The father James, an artistically exhausted actor who used to be talented, is a slave to money. His wife, Mary has been a drug addict for twenty years. Their elder son Jamie is a sensual lover of wine and woman and, wants to escape from the reality. And their younger son Edmund is a sensitive young man who suffers from tuberculosis. He is also confused about the life and future. Each of them is so self-centered and self-pitying; they love each other, but meanwhile they blame each other for the present suffocative condition and isolate from each other. The father accuses his son Jamie of being good for nothing, while Jamie criticizes his mother Mary for morphine addiction and thinks it is because of his father’s stinginess. Mary complains about James for his inability to provide her a real home. Besides, Edmund is disappointed at Mary for her drug addiction. Some common features in O’Neill’s works are summarized. Norman Berlin points out the universal significance of this play lies in “representing every loving-hating family” and mirroring the experience of people who is “enmeshed in a tragic net” (20). The relationship between them is complicated and their love to family members mingles with hate. Mannheim once said: “The Tyrones are every family; their experience is universal...the closeness-distance, the loneliness within togetherness, the guilt and need for forgiveness...This is the

human condition, so remarkably dramatized by O'Neill in America's finest play" (91).

Scholars have made lots of studies on this play. Criticism mainly involves in the aspects of autobiography, feminism as well as family tragedy.

The play was adapted from O'Neill's family story written with tears and blood. So many scholars explore autobiographical elements in the play. Robert Brustin discussed that O'Neill's plays revealed his struggle to get himself out of the haunting past. Bruce J. Mann shows the impact of personal experience in the play. Doris Alexander's *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension* argued that the play was O'Neill's writing for his spiritual trauma caused by his mother's morphine addiction. Steven A. Black argued that O'Neill's writing of family tragedy was the final reconciliation with family. George Mandelbaum proposed that the process of creation of plays was a growth of his inner life. It shows O'Neill's understanding and forgiveness for his family as well as his final self-scrutiny and relief. Wang Pinglong argued that O'Neill's tragedy view originates from his family tragedy and irresistible power of the past.

Feminism is also an important aspect to study the play. Ann C. Hall analyzed woman characters in O'Neill's play exposed patriarchy oppression on woman. Laurin Porter put forward that Mary's tragedy of loneliness is caused by her being excluded from male's circle. Yuji Omori argued that Mary's plight is rooted in the patriarchal values imposed on woman to be a doll in house by the society. In China, Shen Jianqing argued that Mary's madness was a passive revolt to the traditional wife and mother roles imposed on women in patriarchal society. Jin Guochen concluded Mary's tragedy is the result of men's superiority to women in the society. Zhang Jing pointed out that Mary's tragedy was rooted in women that were defined as belongings of men; they had to depend on men to live. The majorities of them fix on the inevitable tragedy of Mary in the male-dominated society, which is the common female living predicament.

Research also focused on the family tragedy. The play depicts conflicts and reconciliation of family members. They mainly discuss the overwhelming haunting power of the past which causes the Tyrone family's isolation and tragedy. Norman

Berlin pointed out that the harsh conflicts among the family members indicate they tried to find cause for the misery present, however, fell into endless accusation and regret. Asim Karim argued that the play reveals that trauma of the past affects the family terribly so that they isolate with others and self. Hu Tiesheng discussed that the Tyrone family was trapped in endless plight, it was impossible for them to overcome or transcend their plight. These studies illustrate the family tragedy and make the play more profound.

Some scholars have made analyses on the themes of the play, such as belonging issue, family problems, and loss of faith, the impact of capitalism or materialism on human life. Edmond Gagey noticed that characters were haunted by the problem of belonging. Virginia Floyd argued that the play exposed the tremendous impact that western materialism imposed on people. Tyrone was the typical victim who sold his soul in his illusory success for material. John Orr argued that O'Neill's works express a profound concern with the impact of capitalism on the American way of life. Guo Jide argued that Characters in O'Neill's play tend to look for maternal love with Oedipus complex and Jamie is a character with such complex so he turns to whores to find lost maternal love. Wu Lanxiang argued that Mary's spiritual loneliness arose from her guilt caused by the conflicted Ego, Id and Superego. Feng Pengpeng employed Horneyan psychoanalysis to analyze the spiritual predicament of Mary. These studies provide readers comprehensive understanding of the play and O'Neill.

## **0.2 Arthur Miller and His *Death of a Salesman***

Arthur Miller was another talented and outstanding playwright after Eugene O'Neill. As an important realistic dramatist in contemporary American literature, Miller enjoyed the reputation of "American Conscience" for the morality and social responsibility that rooted in his works and life. "Miller's upbringing was solidly Jewish, providing him with a strong moral and ethical center that is evident in his work" (Abbotson *Masterpieces* 57). In the essay *The Family in Modern Drama*, Miller believed that family play deals with the traditional family figures, the father, the mother, brothers and sisters. At the same time, it uses the family as a prism through which

reflects the author's basic idea. Miller was greatly impressed by the poverty and despair of the 1930s, the Great Depression cruelly broke American miracle into pieces. Economic disaster awoke Miller's social conscience and exerted a permanent influence on his literary career, which triggered his recognition that the fragility and vulnerability of human existence in modern industrial and commercial society. So he dedicated his whole life to investigating the moral plight of the common people through combining in his works a strong sense of social responsibilities with keen insights into the personal weaknesses of his characters. William Aarnes sees Miller's play "both as a dramatization of meaninglessness and as a desperate quest for finding meaning again through dramatic form" (95). Miller regards "the theatre as a vehicle capable of making man more human" (81). And Miller "believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were" (*The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* 3).

As a pioneer of functional American critic, Miller also endeavored to redefine drama in contemporary society. He expanded several important theories on drama based on his insight and practice. His dramatic theories had an integrity and authority of their own, just as Robert A. Martin said "Arthur Miller's essays on drama and the theatre may well represent the single most important statement of critical principles to appear in England and America by a major playwright since the Preface of George Bernard Shaw" (Martin xx). The publication of *The Theater Essays* in 1978 has established Miller's position as an inspiring critic and theoretician in American theater. And Miller's introduction to *The Collected Plays* is recognized as a major document on American drama.

Miller was also a prolific writer. In his fifty-year career, he created 17 plays, countless essays and short stories. He began his career with his first professional play *The Man Who Had All the Luck* which was produced in 1944. As a university student, this play left the audience the impression of being a student exercise. Three years later his first important work, *All My Sons* was successfully performed, bringing Miller the Donaldson Award and Drama Critics' Circle Award. Then his masterpiece *Death of a*



*Salesman* raised him to the rank of international realistic playwright. In 1949, only two years after *All my Sons*, it won the Pulitzer Prize, and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as well as the Tony Award for Best Play. With another two plays, *The Crucible* (1953) and *A View from the Bridge* (1955) performed on Broadway, Miller ranked as one of the 20th century's three giants (Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams) of the American theater. During the 1960s and 1970s, he wrote very little of note. His other major plays included *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1977) and *The Last Yankee* (1993).

As Miller's masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman* deals with the painful conflicts within the Loman family, meanwhile addresses issues that the living plight of common people, the American national value and the illusion of blind faith in American Dream, and attacks the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of the capitalistic system. Critic C. W. E. Bigsby reads this play as "an alternation of little dreams and massive cruelties, a pattern of family betrayals that reflect the social betrayals of American dreams of our era" (*Critical Companion to Arthur Miller* 21). The play shows the relationship between family members in this living environment. Willy Loman, a father of two sons, is an ordinary travelling salesman who always dreams of establishing his own business and a splendid future for his two sons. Willy has worked for over thirty years, but he can't make enough money to support his family. After devoting 36 years to serving the Wagner Company, at the age of 63, he is discharged without any pension when he sold nothing. Painfully realizing that he is cheated, Willy plans to commit suicide hoping that his insurance money will grant the future success to his sons. This play is considered to be the greatest tragedy in American theater after the War. In this play, Miller takes an representative man, Willy Loman, as the protagonist. By showing the painful conflicts within the Loman family, Miller expressed an idea on how the country has failed the people who believe in the American Dream. The play drew overwhelming reactions that "perhaps no other American play has so strongly impacted its society as *Death of a Salesman*" (Centola 6).

Scholars have made lots of studies on this play. Criticism mainly involves in these

aspects: family tragedy, the American dream and social influence, Psychological analysis, feminism as well as moral and ethical conflict.

Reviewers discuss the subject of the play as tragedy. Brook Atkinson proposes the play is a tragic play and describes a tragedy of a common man. Esther Merle Jackson proposes that it's a study of a man's existence in a metaphysical universe and believes that Willy symbolizes the cruel paradox of human existence of traditional tragic heroes. And Richard T. Brucher analyzes that Willy's fail to align new technology to his traditional or agrarian ideal leads to his tragedy.

The American dream and social influence of this play are discussed. American dream is an important subject to study the play. William Heyen discussed that the charm of the play derives from Willy's believing in the dream and dying for his belief. C. W. E. Bigsby thought Willy's tragedy explains the dislocation of American dream which substitutes the spiritual fulfillment with material success. Christopher Innes analyzed the drama's social influence by Willy who is the carrier of American dream. Hu Rong revealed the relationship of American dream and the character's fate from symbolism. Harold Clurman focuses on American dream's devastating effect of the success myth which leads to the suicide of the protagonist. Brian Parker concluded some American values through discussing the technique in the play.

Psychological analysis is used. Schneider uses the psychological analysis to study father-son relationships and their conflicts. Song Xiukui uses Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to find the reason of the tragic ending of Willy which comes from his ideal ego. Frye's mythological archetypal approach is applied by Ma Keyun to interpret that the value of the common man's tragic image is as important as a great man.

Feminist interpretation and gender study. The gender issue is brought up by Guerin Bliquez. His critic argues that the doom of the family is pushed by Linda's blind support to her husband's dream and success myth. Ben-Zvi researches the play from a feminist reading, new historical and cultural studies. Zhang Yuhong employs the Foucault's power of discourse to study Linda's inferior discourse at home. Linda's

subordinate position is the reason of her tragedy.

Moral and ethical conflict is analyzed. Usha Dutta claims that Miller is a playwright who creates works to destroy the moral chaos, convey his moral attitude and opinion. The play showed what happens when lack of values in the commercial world. Ke Jianhua uses ethical literary criticism to point out that Willy's tragedy is related to the conflicts between ethical dream (American dream) and commercial jungle law (morality alienation) and reveals Miller's consideration of ethics construction in society.

Through detailed comparison and analysis, it can be found that the two plays share many similarities. The two playwrights unfolded their dramatic conflicts through families. They both exposed the family and social problems faced by ordinary people in an age of extravagance and waste through the description of the tragedy in two middle-class families. The two plays have the same themes: family issues and the disillusion of the America Dream. The characters in the plays have the corresponding relations and the relationship between the characters is interwoven by love and hate. They are both the creators and the victims of tragedy. James and Willy, the breadwinner of the family, are the chief creators of their family issues. They are eager to realize their financial success even at the cost of the happiness of their family. Their value and behavior are partly caused by American materialism and the American Dream. Mary and Linda, the wives and mothers, are not only the victims of family life and the patriarchal society, but also the promoters of their tragic life. Mary's passive rebellion against the social requirements on women by drug addiction put the whole family in great disappointment and misery. Linda's connivance leads to the downfall of her family though a tolerant and submissive way. The sons escape from reality negatively, and they are also the victims of Oedipus complex. The characters are lonely, fragile, illusive and bitterness. The two plays reflect O'Neill and Miller's concern and thinking about social and family issues. These family issues are typical and universal.

So far, lots of studies have been done on the diverse aspects both at home and

abroad. However, comparative study on the two plays is very little. There are only few papers. Actually there are many similarities between the two plays. Liu Jin's "A Comparative Study of the Similarities Between *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman*" makes a comparative study on the two plays. He explored the similarities in characters, symbolic images and themes through detailed comparison and analysis. Xing Rongfang's "An Analysis of *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman* from Lessing's Thought of Tragedy" uses Lessing's thought of tragedy to compare and study the two plays from the aspect of personal character, citizen play, moral education and expression methods, finding the inherited and innovative elements. Two articles are about parent-child relationship. Liu Lixia's article analyses the cause of conflict between father and sons. Li Chunfen and Tu Jing's article compares Linda and Mary's images as mothers. Therefore, the two works can be more in-depth analyzed and studied to a higher degree.

### 0.3 Theoretical Framework

As a literary research approach developed by Chinese scholar Nie Zhenzhao (1953- ), ethical literary criticism has its own origins both at home and abroad. Ethical criticism has a long history which can be dated back to ancient Greek and Roman times. The eminent Greek philosopher Plato was the first one who attempted to analyze literary works from the perspective of social moral values. Besides, other two outstanding philosophers, like Aristotle and Horace, also used morality to interpret literature. They mainly focused on the moral edification and ethical value that had been reflected in literary text. Aristotle wrote in his famous book *Poetics* that "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids" (Aristotle 168). Since then, most of the mainstream literatures like Greek tragedy and Homer's Epic had dedicated to the reflection of social morality. To some degree, literary works at that time were regarded as mirrors of morality, aiming to give people moral education. Nevertheless, "it was not until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that ethical researches on literature had been tremendously valued" (Nie *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism* 149). And during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many

books about ethical criticism had been published. Most of the critics had expressed their concerns about the absence of humanity as well as morality in literature theories. Therefore, they desired to find a new approach to explore virtues in the literature.

Ethical literary criticism was firstly put forward as a literary critical approach on a national conference entitled “Study on British and American Literature in China: Reflection and Looking Forward” by Chinese Professor Nie Zhenzhao in 2004. In 2014, Professor Nie published *Introduction to Ethical Literary Criticism*. This book comprehensively and systematically introduces the theoretical frameworks of ethical literary criticism. According to Professor Nie, Ethical Literary Criticism takes literary text as the object of criticism, reading, analyzing and interpreting different life phenomena and issues described in literature from the perspective of ethics, so as to identify its ethical nature and moral teaching function. Different from ethics study, ethical literary criticism which mainly concerns ethical and moral factors, highlights the return to the historical ethical field rather than the evaluation of the ethical value of literary works in current ethical standpoint. Professor Nie also draws a classical conclusion on the relationship between literature and ethics,

Literature describes the life and society, which could not be separated from ethical and moral problems... No matter you are a writer who create the literature, or you are a reader who read the works, you could be involved in ethical problems consciously or unconsciously, and you would make your judgment and comment based on the ethical system. (Nie *A New Perspective* 22)

This critic method is to a great extent depending on the basic function of literature.

Ethical literary criticism takes literature as the product of morality, considering that literature is an ethical expression form of the human society in a given historical period, and literature is an art of ethics essentially. Literature ethics refers to ethical relation and ethical order between human and self, human and human, human and society in literature text. The core contents of ethics are the recognized and acceptable

ethical relationships between human and self, human and human, human and society, as well as the moral order formed on the basis of these ethical relations and a variety of norms to maintain the ethical order. “The task of literature is to describe the change of those ethical relation and moral order, as well as the problems and results brought by these change, so as to provide experience and lessons for human beings’ progress of the civilization” (*Introduction* 13). It makes people who standing at the ethical standpoint at that time go back to the historical ethical site to interpret and explain literary works.

In the process of putting ethical literary criticism into actual use, Professor Nie also proposes some important terms and insightful concepts: terms like “ethics, ethical taboos, ethical consciousness, ethical environment, ethical predicament, ethical identity and ethical selection are all core terms of ethical literary criticism” (*Its Fundaments and Terms* 12). In order to have a better understanding of this two plays, terms which are closely related to the plays like ethical environment, ethical predicament, ethical identity and ethical selection will be introduced.

“Ethical environment can also be called as ethical context which refers to the history space where literature exists” (*Introduction* 256). In the field of ethical literary criticism, ethical environment should be paid with great attention because “it is the historical conditions of the production and existence of literature” (*Its Fundaments and Terms* 19). Ethical literary criticism should be carried out in the specific environment so as to avoid the misunderstanding of the literature. Ethical literary criticism is not to make a moral judgment of literature but to interpret it from historical view and to study literature produced in different times from the perspective of ethics. So it is significant to take ethical environment into account when we make an ethical literary criticism of literary works.

In literary texts, ethical predicament refers to the contradictions and conflicts that are difficult for characters to solve caused by ethical confusion” (*Introduction* 258). Ethical confusion means confusion of ethical order and ethical identity or the predicament caused by the change of ethical order and ethical identity. The confusion

and transformation of identity caused the conflict between responsibilities and obligations. Ethical predicament is “created by a clash of apparent competing ethical concerns or the clash of an ethical principle with some other source of pressure” (MacKay & O’Neill 230). It often brings to characters contradictions and conflicts that are difficult to solve, causing them to fall into an ethical predicament when they cannot bear the responsibilities corresponding to ethical identity with the changing of identity.

The meaning of ethical identity is that, “identity is a symbol of his/her existence in the society and one need to undertake the responsibilities and duties granted by this identity” (*Introduction* 263). From the origin, the identity is made up of two kinds. The first kind is innate just like mother and child, and the other kind is acquired, just like actor or salesman. To some degree, the identity of people is the consequence of their own selections which include natural selection and ethical selection. Natural selection enables people to separate themselves from animals. However, ethical selection which aims to clarify the identity from ethics not only has to differentiate human from animal but also has to identify the responsibility, obligation and morality that the identity should possess. Ethical literary criticism lays great emphasis on the study of ethical identity in literature. It is not exaggerated to say that “nearly all ethical issues are closely related to ethical identity” (*Introduction* 263). When we make moral judgment, it is necessary to take ethical identity into consideration. Besides, in reality, ethic requires that the ethical identity should be in accordance with the morality that it takes. Once the ethical identity goes against the ethical norm, ethical conflicts will come into being.

According to ethical literary criticism, ethical selection has two meanings. One is moral choice which enables people obtain moral maturity and perfection. The other is ethical choice which has two or more moral options, and each has its own result. After the ethical choice, people begin to gain ethical consciousness and know how to distinguish the good from the evil. Professor Nie once pointed out that “the essence of ethical choice is to choose to be human or animal” (*Ethical choice and the Sphinx* 4). Ethical literary criticism not only attempts to interpret ethical choice from the aspect of

the essence of human but also regards ethical choice as the core of literary works.

The main reason for a work being regarded as excellent and classic is that it conveys profound philosophical thinking and rich ethical values to readers. *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Death of a Salesman* are the very works that boast affluent ethical values. Analyzing the two plays from the perspective of ethical literary criticism can not only explore the ethical relations of the two plays comprehensively, but also help to discover the writers' ethical preference. The two plays reflect O'Neill and Miller's concern and thinking about family and social issues. Audience can draw the ethical ideals and the desired family relationship that the authors wanted to convey and pursue by means of the interpretation of the two plays from the perspective of ethics.



## Chapter One Ethical Environment: Social and Family Climates

“Ethical environment can also be called ethical context which refers to the history space where literature exists” (*Introduction* 256). In the field of ethical literary criticism, ethical environment should be paid great attention to, because “ethical environment is the historical conditions of the production and existence of literature. It requires criticism to return to the historical scene, that is, to read and analyze and interpret literature in a specific ethical environment” (*Its Fundaments and Terms* 19). In literary works, the ethical predicament faced by the characters, the confusion about their ethical identity and the loss of their identity in ethical confusion are all inseparable from the ethical environment at that time. “The main task of ethical literary criticism is to interpret the ethical function of literature, to explain different phenomena of life and the ethical reasons of their existence from an ethical perspective, and make a value judgment about them” (*Introduction* 16). “Drama focuses on family relations, faces the real life, [...] reveals the tragic facts occurring in ordinary families, seeks the social root behind individual tragedy and family tragedy, and arouses people’s thinking about ethics and morality in commercial society” (Ke 111). The prevalence of materialism, the false of American Dream and the loss of faith constituted the ethical environment on which the two works depend.

### 1.1 Materialistic Bent in a Commercialized Context

With the development of commerce, everything has been commercialized since the world entered into post-industrial society. Under a commercial environment, material and money become the power controlling human. In order to pursue success under the guise of competition all activities transformed into pure buying and selling. In the quest for material wealth, people sell everything; and give up pursuing their original dreams because possession of material wealth becomes the only standard of success. Society needs material wealth and money becomes the standard of human life, which means traditional ethical order has gone ineffective. The conflict between human and material, between humanity and money is unprecedentedly fierce. As O’Neill pointed out, “We keep on talking about the American dream and advocate our American dream

to the world, but for most people, isn't this dream a pursuit of material wealth" (Bowen 406).

Material wealth is abundant in the whole country with the development of business, but a variety of crises are disguised under the superficial prosperity. With the prevalence of materialism, economism and money worship, human became the victims of industrial civilization. "Therefore put money in thy purse. That's the only dope" (Long 168). Making fortune and trying their best to climb up the material social ladder become a capitalism standard, so money turns into the new God, "slip a piece of change to the Judge and be saved" (168). The price of this kind of money worship was that people lose their souls, their conscience was distorted, humanity suffered from being depressed and traditional values was challenged. Therefore, material abundance brought spiritual emptiness and humans became hollow persons who lack of spiritual faith.

In modern society, human nature is corroded and distorted by money and material, so people became indifferent, traditional social morality collapse and material first becomes the creed. People's spirit, mentality, traditional ethical standards have also changed greatly with the changes of economic conditions. What's more, traditional beliefs of sacrificing for love and loyalty to love are replaced by selfish and realistic view of love. It can be seen through the analysis that the well-being of Tyrone and Willy's families was taken away by the invisible hand of capitalist society.

"It was at home I learned the value of a dollar" (Long 149). Tyrone's early experience of poverty kept him zealously pursuing for wealth all the time; his goal of life seemed to be making money and saving money. With this kind of values, he could sacrifice his own artistic future and the happiness of his whole family just for earning money. Therefore, out of his fear of being poor and need for money, he became crazy misery about everything that even his family is unbearable of him. What's more, he was obsessed with making money and abandoned his pursuit for art. "Make the dollar too much and the time came when that mistake ruined my career as a fine actor" (152). It was obvious that the success of *The Count of Monte Cristo* was Tyrone's auspicious

start, but it was also his unfortunate beginning.

The play of *Death of a Salesman* “also explores the changing role of capitalism in society and its impact on people’s live” (Abbotson *Masterpieces* 57). In the business environment where Willy strived, people completely regarded the pursuit to material benefits as the highest value, and people had a serious materialistic bent. Under the suppression of such various values in capitalism society, everything was commercialized and material and money became a power that controlled humans. Howard, Willy’s boss, used a sentence to summarize the relationship between them, “you gotta admit, business is business” (*Salesman* 63). The pursuit of benefits finally changed the relationship between person and person into the one between person and money. When Willy could no longer sell out anything, he was fired by his boss just like a discarded orange peel. But “a man is not a piece of fruit” (64).

Materialistic bent in a commercialized context has a huge impact on the relationship of traditional marriage and family at all levels. Just as Marx pointed out in his *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, “The bourgeoisie has torn away the veil of tenderness over family relations, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation” (Marx 275). Materialism and consumption ethics distort the traditional moral view of marriage and family. As a result, the ethical responsibilities and ethical duties of marital life are neglected and even overturned. Under this environment, marriage or kinship is also a transaction and a money deal. Materialistic bent in a commercialized context destroyed their family relationships and real home.

## 1.2 The False American Dream

The so-called American Dream refers to the ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom that the United States promotes to build the nation, that is, to give the inalienable rights of survival, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness to all as the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence have promised. Traditionally, the American Dream is a symbol of freedom and equality; and being smart, diligent and persistent are necessary conditions for realizing the American Dream. Willy’s father and brother were the kind of Franklin-style heroes. Like the early Western heroes, they

left city to explore the new land and sought to realize their dreams in the wilderness and his elder brother Ben even proved the possibility to realize the American Dream with his legendary experience and wealth.

After the world entered into the post-industrial society, the American Dream has been gradually changed to a symbol of business success. The traditional ethical order has become invalid and money becomes a measure to assess people's life. As a result, what society needs is no longer the diligence, dreams, human dignity or honor but just the wealth. As O'Neill pointed out, we keep on talking about the American dream and promote our American dream to the world, but for most people, isn't the essence of this dream just a pursuit of material wealth.

The typical characteristics of a commercial society are the law of the jungle, bent solely on profit and deceive each other unscrupulously. Commercial rules regard money as God and take the earning of maximum profit as the goal of highest value without taking goodness and morality into consideration. With no doubt, there are conflicts between traditional ethical morality and business value. "Willy Loman's tragedy is caused by the conflicts between ethical dream (American dream) and commercial jungle law (morality alienation)" (Ke 110). Willy's failure tells us that he was educated about the American Dream when he was young and he admired that his father and elder brother worked hard to become wealthy so as to have a dignified personality and life. But sadly, he chose to stay in a city to realize his American Dream. Although the dream had not been really realized, he boasted his successful experience which indicated that he did not understand the ethical connotation of the American Dream at all, nor did he understand the true himself. He was passionate with ambition, hoping to increase his wealth with kindness and be liked. In fact, he knew nothing about the brutal modern commercial rules at all. Essentially, "he was not a treacherous trader so he lacked of the wisdom of trickery and the skills of speculation. In the end, he destroyed himself like a lamb straying into the jungle, with no place to go or no way out" (Ke 112).

The male protagonists in the two plays were all in a humble position. As common

people, they worked hard and tried to shoulder the responsibility of supporting their families. However, both of them grew up with the American Dream and unconsciously dreamed about their own American Dream. Willy used to plan to go with his elder brother to Alaska in order to find their father when he was young. At that time, he met salesman Dave Singleman who was eight-four years old, “and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, he made his living” (*Salesman* 61). Singleman made Willy feel that salesman is the greatest career a person yearns for. And he took it for granted that as long as he had good relations like Singleman did and be well-liked, he could become an excellent salesman, so he had been working for that goal all his life. Tyrone was one of the actors with the greatest artistic promise when he was young. In order to become rich, he acted in a play that was very profitable at that time but with no artistic value. It turned out that he wasted his artistic talent in the constant easy repetition and lost the opportunity to become an outstanding actor in Shakespeare’s plays. He accumulated wealth, but he was always an ordinary actor who wandered around from place to place. For the first time, he bought a piece of land from a real estate businessman and made quite a fortune. And since then, he put all the money made by acting into the investment of land. He continuously bought land from the same estate businessman, but he never made any money from then on. He does not have the ability to be a businessman. Like Edmund said to his father “meet McGuire and let him stick you with another bum piece of property” (*Long* 147). He put his heart into the purchase of land, it became his instinct to accumulate wealth. The two common men were driven by the American Dream, one seeking for fame and the other pursuing profits. But as ordinary people, both of them did not possess the cunning and speculative skills of a businessman. They only saw the kaleidoscopic appearance of the American Dream, while they did not realize the unfairness behind it. When Ben met Willy’s eldest son Biff for the first time, he told him “Never fight fair with a stranger, boy” (*Salesman* 38). Modern people could realize their alleged American Dream only by this kind of barbaric and unfair methods. In this treacherous society, it isn’t impossible for Willy to succeed on his being liked, and for Tyrone who wanted to

realize his American Dream by honestly investing in land.

### 1.3 Loss of Faith and False Sense of Value

Material abundance brings spiritual poverty. People lose their soul, their conscience is distorted, their human nature is suppressed, and their traditional values are challenged. In the end, people become the hollow persons who lack of spiritual belonging and faith. The noble ideal is replaced by utilitarianism, and human value system collapsed, losing the spirit of belonging, and finally leading to human split personality and mental conflict. O'Neill felt "the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of his time and tried to 'get at the root' of human desires and frustrations" (Chang 286). People have lost their foundation of life, their souls are empty, are homeless, and are panic all day. They are stuck in a crisis of survival and faith. The world becomes indifferent, ridiculous and full of uncertainties. People are generally lonely, fearful, and anxious. The structure and order of traditional ethical morality collapse completely. With Nietzsche's cry of "God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died" (Long 80), people are thrown into a huge spiritual panic. In O'Neill's view, human beings have lost their faith in the old gods, but they have not found new values yet. "No relief is felt, no light is seen, and all end in the engulfing darkness" (Chang 287). People have become lost floats in the world of materialistic desires and the lost creatures who want to escape from despair.

"I found I could no longer call my soul my own" (Long 96), Tyrone's family did not know where they belong to because of the loss of faith and they became homeless vagrants in spirit. Especially Mary, she came from a wealthy family and was a devout Catholic. She used to swear that she would devote herself to the church as a nun and serve God all her life. But after meeting with James, Mary fell crazy in love with him and she married him regardless of her religious oath. However, the marriage did not bring Mary the happiness and the peace of mind she yearned for, but instead just the everlasting void and restless displaced life. Finally, because of the unbearable inner pain of violating her religious vows, the hopelessness of redemption, and the disillusionment of the dream of a stable family life, Mary was thoroughly tired of the

life. So she got addicted to morphine subscribed by the quack, and escaped from the misery in reality by the fantasy of drugs. At the end of the play, Mary cried for a lost thing after taking the injection of drugs. It was just her faith which she was lamenting.

Edmund was deeply influenced and edified by his parents' religious thoughts since his childhood. Under the imperceptible guidance of his parents, Edmund had strong and delicate religious feelings, and he understood the mercy of God and the sacred authority of religious belief since he was young. Religious thoughts influenced deeply in his thoughts, and together with his growth constructed his way of thinking. Edmund learned the truth that her mother took morphine when she gave birth to him. So he prayed piously day and night to ask God to help his mother to get rid of drugs, and it did not work. Since then he regarded his mother's drug abuse as the result that God is unable to save her. As a result, Edmund became dissociable, sensitive, introverted, licentious, and a cynical pessimist. "It was a great mistake, my being born a man" (Long 157).

Dutta considered that Miller "showed what happens when there is lack of values in the commercial world... Willy had tremendously powerful ideas, and the fact that he cannot realize his values in the commercial world was driving him mad" (93). The tragedy of Willy's family also rooted mainly in misplaced value concept and the stubbornness of value pursuit. "I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing-" (*Salesman* 77). When Biff was young, Willy often taught him that as long as he had an appearance and be liked, he would be able to make a difference in the business world. You two brothers are both very handsome. Thank God for those. You will never be worried about your life if you are a well-liked person. Just take me as an example "I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. Willy Loman is here" (*Salesman* 26). Willy, "a seemingly strong man who loves his children, yet leads them to suffer because of certain weakness" (*Masterpieces* 57). Because Willy thought highly of his children so Biff believed that he was extraordinary since he was very young and would not like to obey others' orders nor reflected on his own problems, "because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody" (*Salesman* 104).

This brought a terrible result that Willy's behavior of hot air let him and his family live in fancy imagination and they could not recognize the actual conditions of themselves, so they failed to realize their own problems while growing up.

The two plays focused on the influence of American society on individuals and families in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But instead of writing about the society directly, authors chose ordinary families as its core contents to narrate, reflecting the issues caused by social development through the family relationships of ordinary people. The change and development of American society were weakened in the narrative of the two plays and they only were the background of the two plays. The two play writers paid more attention to the fate of ordinary people and family ethical relations in the process of social development and transformation. By revealing family issues arising from the development of commercial capitalism, and family members' emotional entanglements and psychological contradictions arising from this issues, authors expressed their concern and thinking about humanity and conveyed their ethical ideal about family. Therefore, the following chapters mainly analyze the ethical problems of the family relations among husband and wife, father and son, and mother and children in the two works. Through the analysis of these ethical problems we can know well the ethical value of the two works.



## Chapter Two Reality or Illusion: Entanglement of Ethical Predicament

As the cell of society, family is the basic unit on which people depend for survival. The core part of family ethics is marital relationship. The relationship between the husband and the wife is the most important one in many ethical relationships, which directly affects whether a family is healthy. Marriage is an ethical love with legal significance. Both husband and wife should clarify their respective ethical responsibility and ethical identity and follow the common ethical rules in marriage. When there is a problem with the ethical relationship between the husband and the wife, a series of other ethical problems and ethical paradoxes will inevitably appear in the whole family. "All happy families are like one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy 17). Due to the lack of family ethical consciousness and order, family members cannot bear the responsibilities corresponding to ethical identity. The husband cannot bear the responsibilities and obligations under the ethical identity of husband, and the wife cannot bear the corresponding moral responsibilities under this ethical identity. This type of "lack of family ethical order and dislocation of identity often brings to characters contradictions and conflicts that are difficult to solve, causing them to fall into an ethical dilemma" (Nie *Introduction* 258). There are contradictions and conflicts between the husband and the wife in the two plays. It is difficult for the husband and the wife to maintain the established order of family ethics, and they cannot take the responsibility under family ethics either, which leads them into ethical dilemmas. Therefore, families are enmeshed in a tragic net.

In the two plays the husband and the wife love as well as complain about each other. Drama critic Robert Rubinstein commented, "Family is bound together by resentment, guilt and blame, yet it is true that there are chains of love and chains of hate that bind the family together" (351).

### 2.1 Suffocating Marital Fold in *Long Day's Journey into Night*

In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, for Tyrone and Mary, home was originally full of warmth and love. However, the family gradually disintegrated in the face of reality. Home became like a shelter, gradually lacking warmth and understanding and full of

suspicion and accusations. Both husband and wife were eager to escape, only maintained a semblance of normal family with illusion, fantasy and lies. In terms of relationship between the husband and the wife, Tyrone and Mary had a love-hate relationship. They both desired each other's care and love meanwhile they resented and rejected each other. They desired to be close to each other, but also wanted to be alone. Although they had home, they did not feel the warmth of home. Instead, they felt a strong sense of loneliness and cold suffocation that they wanted to escape from. The relationship between the husband and the wife was a kind of hypocritical weak sympathy, lack of real action to solve the problem. Having the sense of warmth and belonging of home is essential for healthy marital relationship.

Their marriage is out of love. Mary fell in love with Tyrone when she first met him. "He was different from all ordinary men, like someone from another world. I fell in love right then. So did he, he told me afterwards" (*Long* 108). Tyrone fell in love right then. All Mary wanted was to be Tyrone's wife after she met him. In ACT 1 Tyrone's arm is around his wife's waist as they come from the back of parlor. They are playing jokes on each other and look relaxed. It looks like a normal happy couple on the surface. After getting married, in order to fulfill her duties as a wife, Mary followed Tyrone's performance and even changed place every day. She was willing to accompany him because of love. They lived in cheap hotels, in trains without Pullmans, eating bad food. When Tyrone went back to the hotel room late at night, Mary had waited in that ugly hotel room hour after hour. She kept making excuse for her husband, she told herself "it must be some business connected with the theater" (*Long* 115). However, when they were still on their honeymoon, Tyrone drank so much, his barroom friends had to help him up to the door of their hotel room. Mary's mother had foreseen their marriage would not turn into a good one with her experience. For a good marriage, besides two young people's passionate and romantic love, there are many other factors that will influence marriage and they should be taken into consideration. After marriage, Tyrone and Mary had to learn how to make a living. Tyrone, the only breadwinner of the family had to work very hard especially after the children were born. Luckily, Tyrone had

some talent in his career, had the opportunity to earn the bread money for the whole family and became a stage manager of an acting group. In order to continue his career and make a living, he had to move from city to city, and Mary had to follow him from place to place with dirty trains and cheap hotels, in order to maintain their marriage.

However, Mary was born in a well-to-do family with a better educational background. She is used to a comfortable life. After marrying Tyrone, she had to live an unsteady life. They lived their lives touring on the road most of the time. Day after day, and year after year this unsteady life style made Mary lose all her dream of becoming a pianist and thirsted for having a steady decent house. Mary felt tired and was not satisfied with traveling life and the endless tedious family issues. Her romantic desire of marriage is totally destroyed by the reality.

Women have greater expectations from the family, because for them "...marriage and the family constituted the principal expressive outlet" (Pfister 28). Mary loved her husband Tyrone, abandoned her rich family for him, and accompanied him to perform everywhere with no fear of hardship. This reflects a wife's responsibility to her husband, her selfless obligation to the family and the family ethics of focusing on the husband. But her husband, Tyrone, failed to give her a loving and decent home, and he was even stingy to his wife during childbirth, which leads to the result that she became addicted to morphine by mistake. While the wife had the possibility to overcome drug addiction, his fear of spending money led Mary to become an addict. Tyrone did not want to face such a wife, so he ran away from her by drinking in a bar. From this point of view, such a husband is selfish and does not fulfill his responsibilities as a husband. He does not understand his wife's suffering, nor takes the responsibility of protecting and loving his wife.

Mary complained that Tyrone had not given her "a real home". She said "He doesn't understand a home. He thinks money spent on a home is money wasted" (Long 64). Tyrone and Mary come from different families with different ways of living and different attitudes toward life. Their different life styles are an important factor contributing to their agony in their own family life. This difference causes many

unpleasant experiences in their family life. Though he was always eager for a home and had spent almost half of his lifetime on the material guarantee for it, Tyrone never understands what a real home is or ever really has one.

Mary had originally chosen her husband for love, and her choice was based on a love instinct, a natural emotion that drove her to abandon her rationality for love and followed her husband regardless of everything. This is the great of Mary's image, and it is undoubtedly that she is a good wife who bravely pursues love. However, Tyrone ignored the feelings of his wife and made her rush around and suffer from loneliness and bitterness, thus Mary turning her love to hatred gradually. Mary also suffered from drug addiction all her life because of her husband's stinginess. Therefore, when her infatuation with her husband faded away, her awakening sense made her think about her life. She began to get tired of the bitterness in the small hotel and the incompatible feeling of loneliness. Especially as Mary's ethical identity changed, she turned from a wife's role to a victim, and became a mother later, she was lonelier. The transformation and confusion of Mary's identities caused the conflict between responsibilities and obligations. She was caught in the hard decision of whether to follow her husband or take care of the child, which made her extremely painful. Later, Mary became addicted to drugs due to childbirth, which intensified her ethical conflict she changed her ethical identity from a wife and mother to an addict. At this time, she did not take the responsibility for taking good care of her children, leading to the death of a son, so she was no longer a good wife and a good mother. In her husband's mind, she became a despicable drug addict. The confusion of these ethical identities and duties and obligations caused Mary to fall into an ethical dilemma. She loved her family, but meanwhile there is resentment against them, because they led her to tragic life. At the same time, Tyrone also fell into an ethical dilemma. His beloved wife became a drug addict who was despised by him and even the society, and this situation was caused by him. They cared about each other and accused each other, which constituted a conflict situation of both love and hatred. Faced with such ethical dilemmas, they all chose to escape. Tyrone used alcohol and Mary used drugs to escape the ethical problems they

faced and maintained the seemingly normal family ethical order.

Mary's complex of dream and home is actually a self-image that the morbid self has imagined in order to avoid inner conflict, get rid of ethical dilemma and maintain herself integrity and unity. Although this idealized self-image is far from Mary's actual life, it can bring false harmony to her heart and find the peace and happiness in a moment. The failure to communicate with her husband and the insuperable estrangement made her have to self-anesthetize in drugs to relieve the anxiety caused by the alienation of marital relationship to seek final spiritual comfort.

Compared with Mary, her husband, Tyrone, has undoubtedly become the model of a faithful defender in reality. He obediently obeyed reality and willingly became a slave to land and money. He enjoyed the sense of security given by land and money. The poverty of his family and hard work of his parents cast a shadow of no attribution on his young mind, which made him develop a kind of intimate attachment to the land. You can keep land beneath under your feet. It can't be lost. Because of this, Tyrone stubbornly believed that "the more property you own, the safer you think you are" (Long 149), while he was unwilling to spend money to give his wife "a real home". He loved her in his own way.

## **2.2 Love and Infidelity between Husband and Wife in *Death of a Salesman***

The relationship between the husband and the wife is exclusive and expressed in the form of marriage. The most basic ethical responsibility in the marital ethics is respect and loyalty. In *Death of a Salesman*, Linda loves and admires her husband, Willy, who works as hard as he can to support the family. But Willy has a deep sense of loneliness, and Linda does not really know about Willy. Linda is in love with Willy, but Willy has an affair with another woman and betrays Linda. The problems faced by the family have caused them to fall into an ethical dilemma that is difficult to get rid of.

Francesca M. Cancian, a sociological professor, advocates in his *Love in America: Gender and Self-development* "Marriage was to be all of a woman's life but only part of a man's" (34). In the beginning of the stage direction we learn that "Linda is more than loves Willy. She admires him" (*Salesman* 8). Linda's attitude to her husband has

remained the same for decades. She is considerate of her husband's hardships and tiredness, takes good care of him in every aspect of his life, and tries every means to comfort and flatter her husband. She takes the responsibilities and obligations as a wife. Willy also has a deep dependence on Linda and seeks spiritual comfort in her. Willy tells her that "you're my foundation and my support, Linda" (*Salesman* 13). However, his praise of Linda is entirely centered on himself. In the process of getting along with Linda, Willy habitually treats Linda in a condescending attitude and manner. Whatever he says, no matter how trivial and contradictory, seems more important than what she says. Willy always interrupts Linda to let her stop, and he completely does not care about her thoughts. Willy has failed in his duty to respect Linda, and she has no discourse power in the family. What is more unfortunate is that although Linda loves Willy despite his failures and the way he treats her, Willy had an affair with other woman. Willy gave away expensive stockings to other women, while Linda, who works at home, often mends the worn ones. While Willy was having fun with other women, Linda was counting the family's expenses at home and putting every penny to good use.

The relationship between the husband and the wife is exclusive and expressed in the form of marriage. Both husband and wife should clarify their respective ethical responsibilities and ethical identities. Therefore, loyalty plays an extremely important role in the relationship between the husband and the wife. Both husband and wife should fulfill their loyal responsibility. But in real life, men tend to be distracted in their marriage. The husband's disloyalty to his wife is the same in both drama and real life. The forms of disloyalty are varied, but in its essence, there are two situations: physical betrayal and emotional infidelity. Willy loves his wife Linda, but he was fooling around with a Boston woman. Therefore, when he saw his wife mending her stockings, he would feel guilty and burst into a fury to scold his wife, because he known that he has not fulfilled his responsibilities as a husband. Centola thought that "Willy's twisted love for his family which in turn destroys him" (37). As a husband, Willy not only betrays his wife physically, but also has no real communication with his wife mentally.

He just tries to meet his wife's needs materially, but never considers her spiritual needs. He disdains to talk with his wife about business matters, even if what he told her is only a daydream woven by him. When he known he could not support his family, he would rather borrow money from Charlie again and again than admitting defeat to his wife. In Willy's world, everything is centered on his business values, and he completely ignores the feelings of others.

As a wife, Linda does not really know and understand her husband. Linda loves and even worships Willy. She carefully maintains Willy's dignity and cares about Willy, but she still cannot understand her husband mentally. Linda does not understand why his husband committed suicide until his husband died. She said at Willy's grave, "Willy, dear, why did you do that? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it" (*Salesman* 112). It can be seen that she does not understand her husband. To some extent, she is also one of the forces that push her husband into the abyss of tragedy. She never persuades her husband to give up unrealistic fantasies. When her husband wanted to go to Alaska with Ben, she said angrily, you are so good here and you can be a partner of the company one day. She is even more convinced than her husband of the illusory dream of success. In life, the ethics between the husband and the wife have deteriorated, the bond of contact is just a relationship of need, and mutual communication is just a mutual deception. As Biff said, "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house" (*Salesman* 104). Linda's behavior of flattering and comforting Willy indicates that she wants to help her husband get rid of all kinds of worries, maintain the normal ethical order of the family, and do her best to maintain the stability and harmony of the family. But she still does not get the respect she deserves. Willy betrays her. He explained his motivation for finding a lover because of loneliness, Willy said, "She is nothing to me. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely" (*Salesman* 95).

Linda is a supportive and patient wife. She always supports and defends her husband but she never speaks up for herself. To save money and relieve Willy's financial pressure, she scrimps. After a hard day's work, when Willy got home Linda always gives him meticulous care. Linda's behavior reflects a wife's responsibility to

her husband, her selfless obligation to the family. However Willy did not give his wife a warm and comfortable home, she had to worry about his health and safety. Otherwise, Willy betrayed his wife. From this point of view, such a husband is selfish and does not fulfill his responsibilities as a husband. He does not understand his wife's hardships and anxiousness, nor take the responsibility of protecting and loving his wife. Actually, that Willy suffered was not only from external physical fatigue, but more from the inner exhaustion. He knew that as the husband and the wife, they should be loyal to each other and care for each other, but in reality, they deceived and concealed from each other, leading to the ethical dilemma of love and hatred.

The premise of marriage is love. The love in marriage includes mutual needs, mutual trust, mutual loyalty, mutual help, shared adversity and responsibilities to society and the family. Essentially, the relationship between husband and wife is an ethical existence based on mutual recognition and interdependence. Therefore, in the ethical relationship of husband-wife, their ethical identity and ethical responsibility must be on the premise of each other. The ideal relationship between the husband and the wife should be a kind of mutual love relationship. Husband and wife should respect and understand each other and share family responsibilities jointly.

Couples should be absolutely loyal to each other both physically and mentally. On the basis of loyalty, mutual communication and understanding are also essential. Effective communication not only strengthens the trust between husband and wife but also reinforces the exchange of thoughts, thus promotes the beautiful and harmonious relationship of couples. Both of them can feel the sense of home and belonging, this emotion and experience is also essential for healthy marital relationship.



### Chapter Three Escape or Embrace: Confusion of Ethical Identity

“In literary text all ethical issues are closely related to ethical identity” (*Introduction* 263). The conflict between the father and sons in the two plays is very intense: the sons rely on as well as reject their father; similarly, their father loves as well as blames his sons. “Ethical identity is the premise for evaluating ethical behavior. In reality, ethics requires identity to be consistent with ethical behavior. If ethical identity is in conflict with ethical norms, which leads to ethical conflicts” (*Introduction* 264). The sons, believing that their father has not undertook his duty as a father, so they tend to hostile and rebel against their father; the father pins hope on his sons, but the sons accomplished nothing. Hence, the father was angry with them for their failure and accused them accomplished nothing; meanwhile, mourned their misfortune. Under the rational will, sons also reflected on their attitudes towards their father; and they thought that they should respect and care for their father. As the father, they also wanted to communicate with their sons calmly.

The father and sons in both the plays are all faced the crisis of ethical identity and confused about their ethical identity; especially the sons, they are confused about what kind of life they should lead and what kind of person they want to be. They even don't know how to choose a right path to gain a recognized identity. Biff said to Happy, “I don't know the future is. I don't know- what I'm supposed to want” (*Salesman* 16). “Ethical literary criticism focuses on the analysis of ethical identity of the characters” (*Its Fundamentals and Terms* 21). “Identity is a symbol of his/her existence in the society and one need to undertake the responsibilities and duties granted by this identity” (*Introduction* 263). From the origin, the identity is made up of two kinds. The first kind is innate just like mother and child, and the other kind is acquired, just like actor or salesman. Identity includes the responsibility and obligation conferred by it. “O'Neill thought the theatre ‘should reveal to us who we are’. Action on the stage can provide a better understanding of ourselves and a better understanding of one another” (Manheim 15). The ethical identity of characters is an essential bond to maintain the relationships among characters, characters and the society in the works. Due to the insurmountable

misunderstandings among them, the father and sons expected as well as blamed each other; resented each other and rethought themselves at the same time. They cannot bear their duties, nor confirm their ethical identities in family and society, which leads to the chaos of family ethical order and the failure to fit into the society. “Human nature has to be formed in a certain ethical environment, and man is perfected by moral teachings” (*Definition of Human nature* 10). So the sons’ confusion about self-identity in the plays is greatly related to their own family background and their father’s education mode. The father failed to give them correct instructions when sons transferred from an individual of the family to a society member. Therefore, because of uncertainty about their ethical identity sons felt confused about their life. Did they escape from the city and live a free life beside the ocean and in the farm, or did they accept the competition of the commercial society and achieve their father’s expectations?

### **3.1 Distorted Paternal Love in *Long Day’s Journey into Night***

Coming from a poor family, Tyrone knew very well about the importance of money, so he placed material and money above everything. Even if he became famous and wealthy, Tyrone still led a frugal life and even turned to a crazy miser. So he considered to be economical as the chief principle in his life. He did everything in the cheapest way. “People need to undertake the responsibilities and duties granted by his identity. Ethical conflicts occur when ethical identity contradicts with ethical norms” (*Introduction* 264). As a father, Tyrone treated the children from the economical perspective but not as father; as if they were someone else, not worth paying much money. “Only after we satisfy our basic needs can we expend energy higher-order” (Ursiny 24-25). He never provided a good living condition for his children. And he did not give his children a good education, nor set a good example for them. On the contrary, he always drunk too much and sadly, he passed this bad habit to his sons. “And if [Edmund] had a nightmare when he was little, or a stomach-ache, your remedy was to give him a tea-spoonful of whiskey to quiet him” (*Long* 113). In the end, he brought his sons up to be a boozier. Tyrone paid little attention to his children, so they could not get much care and protection from their father. When he got along with his

sons, he was not patient enough either. What he usually saw are their shortcomings. Most of the time, his communication with children usually began with rebukes and ended with blames. Or he loved the children too, but he did not know how to get along with and take care of children at all. Tyrone forced his first son Jamie to go to the stage and let him do the job he doesn't like. He always scolded and belittled Jamie because he lost his hope for Jamie. He thought his Jamie "will ever change... You have never saved a dollar in your life" (*Long* 32). He accused him of not being ambitious in his mind, but always fooling around. Even if Jamie worked as a gardener, Tyrone still thought Jamie was always a freeloader and he even attributed Edmund's illness to Jamie's jealousy. Otherwise, Tyrone could not understand his younger son Edmund's interest; he criticized Edmund's favorite books as "damned library", and your poets, "Dowson, and Whitman and Poe! Whoremongers and degenerates" (*Long* 138). It is not surprising to save money he was ready to send Edmund who has consumption to a state farm, which did not cost anything. Jamie taunted his father's unkindness and parsimony disdainfully, "If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be limited" (31). It can be seen that in Tyrone's mind, it was more important to buy land and make money than to take his son to see a doctor. In addition to that, he blamed Edmund's health problem, that his health was ruined by his mad life ever since he was fired from college. The father's love for his son was alienated and distorted by money.

Tyrone's ethical behavior went against a father's identity, causing distorted father-son relationship. Tyrone did not establish his authority as a father, nor did he build up a correct ethical cognition for his sons. That's why there had always been quarrels and conflicts between them. The father considered his son as "idle drunkard", "Ingratitude, the vilest weed that grow" (*Long* 33); the son called their father "the Old Man", and took him as "stinginess", so the relationship between them had been actually distorted and the normal ethical order was destroyed and collapsed.

Jamie had been fighting against his father, and all Jamie did was to get fired and disgraced his father, ridiculing him by all means to fight against his father's authority at

home. With the feeling of hatred and contempt, he sneered at his father as a dirty miser, and despised his father's profession. He also referred to his father as "Old Gaspard, the miser in 'The Bells', that's a part he can play without make up" (*Long* 163). His resentment against his father had departed them from blood ties. Jamie hated his father because of his stinginess: when Tyrone's wife gave birth to their youngest son Edmund, he hired a cheap quack to save money. The quack mistakenly gave morphine to Mary, which caused her to become addicted to drugs. "It never should have gotten a hold on her! And I know who is! You are! Your damned stinging" (*Long* 142). Your stinginess is to blame. This is also the root cause of the conflicts between the father and the sons. When his youngest son Edmund was diagnosed with consumption, Tyrone let him go to the "state farm" where poor patients went, though Tyrone was already quite rich at that time. Tyrone thought that since pneumonia was fatal, it would be a waste of money to spend any more. Spending money on Edmund was not different from throwing money into the water. Therefore, as a father, he did not take the responsibility to love and protect his children.

Jamie did not have any goal or direction about his future, nor did he know what he wanted. "Happy roads are bunk. Weary roads are right. Get you nowhere fast. That's where I've got-nowhere" (*Long* 164). Jamie was absolutely failed: he found a job on his father's recommendation, and he never made any effort to find other jobs; and he did not want to do anything all day except for ridiculing his father's stinginess all the time. He never knows the value of a dollar and never will; he threw his salary away on whores and whiskey every week. All he did was that resented his father and regarded him as his enemy. But he never mentioned the responsibilities he should undertake. He was self-abandoned and led a parasitic life.

In addition to drinking, the younger son Edmund was confused about his identity. He tried to forget the reality with poetic fantasy. He was eager to find his roots, seek his goal and explore the meaning of life. In the long monologue of the fourth Scene, he said, "I dissolved in the sea, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred" (*Long* 156). However, once he came back to the real world, he "lost in the fog again, and

stumbled on toward nowhere, for no good reason” (156). Edmund got to the point that if it could be avoided, who would like to face the true life. They lost their sense of direction of life and belonging of family.

A father has a vital and indispensable influence on the sons and the family. A responsible father can bring order, security and harmony, guiding the children to make life choices, helping them to make clear about their identity. A father also plays an important role in establishing the family order and improving the family ethical relationship. Conversely, the desolation and lack of a father's love not only lead to a collapsed family order, but also aggravate the tragedy of children's lives.

### **3.2 Long term Rancor between Father and Son in *Death of a Salesman***

In Miller's plays, the sons regarded their fathers as God-like figures when they were at high school. They thought that their father was great and they modeled themselves on their father's behaviors, manners, and values. Susan Abbotson has offered an elaborate account on a father's responsibility for his children:

In the 1940s, the father was still viewed as the provider of life, both biologically and economically. Fathers were also responsible for teaching their children proper morals and values through instruction and by setting themselves up as good examples. Children should be able to view their father with the proper mix of awe, devotion, and love. (*Critical Companion to Arthur Miller* 148)

Willy carried American dream and worked tirelessly when he was young. Back then, he was a sales expert who could get 150 dollars a week only for commissions. His love and expectations for his two sons illustrated an image of a traditional father to the audience. Willy always boasted about his accomplishments to his sons when he was young, so the sons admired and trusted him and he was an omnipotent god to his son.

But with the development of commerce, in the materialistic society the material prosperity gradually destroys the traditional ideas which have given people warmth and comfort. Willy worked hard for decades, finally he “finds himself under a pressure

from his society and its ethics, tries in vain to extricate himself from the physical and spiritual” (Chang 299), so he turned to placed his hopes on his sons. However, what made him very distressed was that both his sons were very disappointing. The eldest son Biff is not only a hobo with no skills and no place for living, but also developed a bad habit of stealing; the younger son Happy is a libertine who liked to brag and flirt with women. Therefore, Willy criticized them angrily because they failed to achieve his expectations when sons got home. In terms of the sons, they were also full of resentment toward their father, especially the eldest son Biff. Willy used to put more expectations on Biff because Biff was more talented, he was a promising young football star when he was young. Willy was very proud of him and praised his son with no control. As a result, he cultivated Biff into a person full of superiority and blind confidence, and Biff mistakenly think that his life path would be a flat road full of flowers and success. However, when he stepped into the real society without any mental and psychological preparation, he found that he did not possess the basic skills to succeed in the competitive society. When he sought his father’s help because he failed in the exam, he accidentally encountered his father who was fooling around with other women. At the time, his father’s great image in his mind was instantly shattered. Since then, Biff lost confidence in life and began to give him up, walking into decadence. He seldom went home, but every time he got home there were just quarrel between him and his father. So the relationship between them had been in a long time rancor.

Willy’s education code to his sons was wrong. Willy was a salesman who firmly believed in the “American dream”. He imbued the two sons with the be-liked belief of success since they were very young. He set up false idols to his sons, so they blindly believed personal charming and could not evaluate themselves in the reality. Willy’s blind confidence for Biff also originated from his vanity. Willy, “a seemingly strong man who loves his children, yet leads them to suffer because of certain weakness” (*Masterpieces* 57). He believed that success did not rely on internal qualities such as pragmatic behavior and real knowledge and skill, but on “be liked”. He neglected the

moral education of the children for a long time and imbued them with distorted values by using appearance to win. When Bernard let Biff get math tutoring, he said to Biff that Bernard could get the best marks in school, but when he got out in the business world, you were going to be five times ahead of him. “Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want” (*Salesman* 25). After knowing that Biff stole the football at school, Willy did not scold him or let him send it back, instead, he argued for him, “he’s gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn’t he?” and said to Biff “Coach’ll probably congratulate you on your initiative” (23). If the upper beam is not straight, the lower ones will go aslant. It is his distorted values that led Biff to go astray from success and eventually Biff became a loser without any success. He stole himself out of every good job since high school. Bernard, who used to give Biff the shoulder pads, has now debated in the Supreme Court; however, Biff was doing odd jobs on various farms.

As a son, that he did not get a recognized ethical identity in society is the cause of the conflict between him and his father. Biff was confused because he did not know how to create a life that would satisfy himself and achieve his father’s expectations at the same time. Influenced by the dream made up by his father since he was young, Biff believed that the primary condition to succeed was to be be-liked but not talented knowledge and practical skills. His father’s education made him develop a kind of thought to take chances and be reluctant to work. His father ignored his needs and actual ability only continuously imbued him with the view of wealth and success, which went against his nature. He shouted, “I don’t know what the future is. What I’m supposed to want” (*Salesman* 16). Actually he clearly knew what he wanted to do, but that did not conform to his father’s definition of success. Each time, after quarrel with his father, he left in great anger, but he still chose to come back even if he had to face his father’s blame. Because he wanted to solve the conflicts and contradictions, he was eager to get his father’s support. He wished that his father would say, yes, you should go to the west and you should have your own life.

As a father, Willy “should be bound by the moral restraints consistent with the identity [of a father]” (*Introduction* 264). Because of his admire and trust for his father, Biff went to Boston to find his father in order to get a solution for that he failed in math exam, while he saw his father stay with another woman. Willy’s behavior violated the moral taboo, leading to the chaos of moral order. The great heroic image of his father collapsed in Biff’s heart; his father used to be his idol and model, however, the fact reveled that his father was a hypocrite. Since then, Biff felt despondent and he did not go the summer school to study math, so he failed to go to college. He fell down step by step with no ability to make a living, no fixed job, and no place to live. As Biff’s guide, Willy’s affair gave Biff a fatal blow at the vital turning points of his life.

“A person’s identity is a symbol of his/her existence in the society and one need to undertake the responsibilities and duties granted by this identity” (*Introduction* 263). Willy conveyed a false view of success to Biff, so he could not identify his ethical identity nor clarify his responsibilities and duties. Ethical literary criticism also emphasizes that the essential condition for people to acquire their essential attributes lies in the fact that they have the sense to tell the difference between the good and the evil, that is, rationality. The sense of good and evil just appears in a moment for people. Those who go astray when they are impulsive are everywhere. The attribute of human’s mind should be guided, which requires people to be good and to have a clear direction of life. Like other fathers, he hoped that his sons could respect, love and admire him and they could also succeed in their career. He set high expectations on his two sons. However, Biff was still a poor man with no fixed income, accomplishing nothing at the age of thirty-four, and was still a seasonal worker on the farm in the west, with nothing at all. The younger son Happy was just a store clerk, a dude who muddled along in women. Happy was cynical, merciless and irresponsible. He was merciless to the family, accepted bribes at work, had no dreams and no future, but he was complacent about this void life. He could not understand his father, nor could understand himself. Willy’s false value made Biff struggle in pain; and Biff and Happy’s failure were the heavy blow to Willy’s American dream. Love and rancor between the father and sons



became desired shelter and imprisoned snare for each other.

The father and the son, Charlie and Bernard, was the epitome of Miller's ideal father-son relationship. They clearly know about their identity, they know who they are and what they should do. They recognized and accepted their ethical identity and order and responsibility. The biggest feature of the relation between Charlie and his son was that they never asked each other to become a successful person in their imagination or they would not have wishful and unrealistic expectations for each other. Charlie was a tolerant pragmatist who never told Bernard what to do. He believed that to do is the real deal. He never thought that he and his son must succeed, or should succeed. He was tolerant and modest at work, thus avoiding disappointment. Bernard did not consider his father as somebody yet, and he never thought that he must become somebody. The father and the son did not infringe on each other in action and thought, respected each other, and lived in harmony like the best friends in an atmosphere of equality and humility.

## Chapter Four Indulgence or Rejection: Dilemma of Ethical Selection

A female has three roles in her life: daughter, wife and mother and there are corresponding ethical responsibilities and duties under each identity. When facing their husband and son the women in the two plays fell into a predicament where they have to make a choice as being a responsible wife or mother. When children get along with their parents, especially those with problems, the degree of dependence and love for the mother will affect their ethical choices. Mother is an indispensable and vital role in a family as she is the one whom children express their emotions to at the earlier time. In Lacan's theory of mirror phase, everyone starts to generate a kind of imagined dependence and agreement on their mother when he/she was a baby. The "life-giving /life-destroying mother" is "the source of their love and their hate" (Manheim 216). According to ethical literary criticism, ethical selection has two meanings. "One is moral choice by which enables people to obtain moral maturity and perfection. The other is ethical choice which refers to the choice among two or more moral options; each has its own result" (Nie *Introduction* 267). Choice determines result. Mother plays an important role in the process of children's ethical choice, which is the key for children to achieve moral maturity and perfection and know how to distinguish the good from the evil.

It is widely believed that "parental depression and distress, may lead to poor parenting practices such as low parent-child relationship, lack of warmth and harsh discipline on children" (Conger et al. 531). The mothers and sons in the two plays had encountered a series of emotional entanglements and ethical choices. They fell into predicament and self struggles when making ethical choice. In addition, their relationship was accompanied by resentment and love, which result in that the mothers and children pushed themselves to the abyss of emotion when they were in a dilemma to make ethical choices. In terms of the ethical responsibility of a wife and a mother, Mary and Linda both chose the identity of wife. As a result, the sons were lack of maternal love. More seriously, Mary's morbid maternal care and Linda's disappointment and anguish for her son made the sons live in a long-term emotional

depression. Their sons' moral is not maturity and perfection. They can't distinguish the good and the evil sometimes. Although the sons tended to sympathize with and attach to their mothers, their mothers' own problem annoyed them. Sometimes even the motivation out of love between them leads to hate and resentment.

#### **4.1 Morbid Maternal Care in *Long Day's Journey into Night***

Mary is a mother who kept a mental distance away from his son mentally. She did not take the responsibility of a mother, nor gave them enough care and love as Jamie and Edmund were growing up, which led to an indifferent and distant mother-son relationship. Family was a paradox to Mary because on one hand, family had disappointed her, and on the other hand, the sense of disappointment made her extremely infatuated with home. She always complained that she doesn't have a decent home, these complaints obviously reflected her helplessness in the construction of family order because she could not maintain this kind of ethical order and assert the authority of the role as a mother. Therefore she chose to compromise and escape under the fierce conflicts of inner feeling and brutal reality, losing the ability of love and being loved in real life.

Mary preferred to live with the identity of a wife rather than present herself as a mother when facing the two ethical identities. She gave the first half of life to her father and devoted her later half to her husband. The contradiction Mary showed as a mother was not only due to her own characters, but also because of many external factors. For many years after marriage, she had been accompanied her husband who gave touring performance throughout the year, and thus neglected the care of her young children. As a result, her second child Eugene died when she had to accompany her husband, and she could not get rid of the sorrow and regret of this thing. Because of the instinct of love, Mary abandoned rationality for love and followed her husband regardless of everything else. As Mary's ethical identity changed, she was not only a wife but also a mother. So the responsibilities and duties of various identities brought about conflicts for her and she fell into a dilemma to choose between following her husband and taking care of her children. Afterwards, Mary got addicted to morphine after bringing Edmund into the

world, which intensified her ethical conflicts even more and even changed Mary into a person who behaved in strange ways in her sons' eyes as Morphine caused mental and behavioral abnormalities. Mary also loved her son and this rooted in kinship. At the same time, she resented them because she thought it was them who caused the tragedy and misery of her life.

As the son, Jaime was eager to have a normal mother. When he saw his mother really quit drugs after came back from sanatorium, he said to Edmund, "It meant so much. I'd begun to hope, if she'd beaten the game, I could, too" (*Long* 166). He understood what a hard game to beat she is up against and he had all the pity in the world for her. His mother's rehabilitation gave him new courage, because mother was above all in his mind and she was his only hope to live a good life. However, after his mother started to take drugs again, Jaime fell into unprecedented despair and misery. Even so, he still loved his mother so much. This could be seen from his quoted poem: "If I were hanged on the highest hill, mother o' mine, O mother o' mine! I know whose love would follow me still..." (*Long* 165).

Jaime used to be the sweetheart of his mother who was proud of him. At that time, his mother loved him and he also had a strong attachment to mother. As he grew up, he did not get rid of this emotion and still loved his mother. Since he found his mother took morphine and didn't love him, he abandoned himself with great disappointment and became decadent; he indulged himself drinking and carousing in Broadway, and became cynical and took a derisive and negative attitude to everything. He even dared to call his mother "hophead" when he saw his mother was in a trance.

At the same time, "Jamie was possessed of an overt oedipal drive" (Bogard 121). So his original desire strongly urged him to possess his own mother and even married her, but social ethics made it impossible for him to do so. However, the energy of the original desire must be released, and he had to choose other way to release such an emotion. "The tragedy of Oedipus is a tragedy of self-discovery, self-recognition and self-salvation in ethics and morality" (*Introduction* 185). Therefore, he chose to go to the brothel to find comforts from women. We also could know that Jaime wanted

comforts of women and thirst for love in the dialog with his younger brother. He said, “Don’t forget love. What is a man without a good woman’s love? A God-damned hollow shell” (*Long* 162). This is also Jaime’s self-mocking, because unfortunately, there was no woman who loved him. The reason that he went to a brothel was just to have a big cry in the arms of any woman. He said, “All I wanted was a heart-to-heart talk concerning the infinite sorrow of life” (*Long* 163). He chose whores to comfort his heart which could not get the love from his mother and to forget the misery his mother brought to him.

To alleviate his mother’s pain of losing a son, Edmund came to this world, but caused his mother to get addicted to drugs, which triggered Mary’s grumble to him about his birth in her deep heart. Edmund also chose to abandon himself in a long term self-blame. Besides, the harsh fact that his mother took drugs broke his psychological endurance; he chose to leave, seeking mental free and comfort in the ocean. While Mary always used self-deception to avoid any concern about Edmund’s condition. Before seeing a doctor, Edmund wanted to talk frankly with his mother, however Mary used self-deception to evade his disease and throw his sincerity away. At that moment, Edmund was seized by bitterness, “you won’t even listen when I try to tell you how sick-” (*Long* 122). With an abrupt transformation into a detached bullying motherliness Mary said, “That’s enough! I don’t care to hear” (122). Then with a belittling laugh she said, “If I gave you the slightest encouragement, you’d tell me next you were going to die...” (122). When Edmund answered people do die of it, her father, with angrily Mary responded, “I hate you when you become gloomy and morbid” (123). Edmund could not bear emotional and psychological torture and he was also relentlessly destroyed by his sickness. Anguish from both inside and outside made him get lost and he could not find the way out. Edmund replied in great pain, “it’s pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother” (123). Instantly, he wished he could take back what he had said when he noted his mother’s appearance of a plaster cast. He stammered miserably “Forgive me, Mama. I was angry. You hurt me” (123). As Mary always chose to deceive herself to Edmund’s illness indifferently and Edmund’s

thirst for maternal love dissatisfied him. This kind of emotion broke through rationality and was poured out under his mother's continuous scolding.

Mary's cowardice made her do nothing in the cold reality and she just blindly ran away from being at the mercy of fate. She could not bear the consequences of her own choices, complaining others, closing herself off, and using drugs to pass her time. She recalled the happy memories of the past to fill her empty mind to escape the current life. As a consequence, she attributed the family's situation to the fact that it was fate that was manipulating the family and life. "None of us can help the things life has done to us" (Long 63). Morbid maternal love makes children lived in a family with no warmth and no maternal love. Sons were annoyed with despair, depression and fear; they could not build up a normal family ethical order in their ethical consciousness.

Mary was also neglected, they always left her alone. Their indifference even made her feel helpless. They also mistrust her, "Everyone is spying on me, and none of you believe in me, or trust me... you go out. But I am alone" (47), her family's surveillance and mistrust made her nervous. "Men's constant watchfulness over her drives her to distraction and ultimately forces her to retreat and, under constant pressure of scrutiny, resume her drug habit" (Brietzke 30). Mary is imprisoned where the others' care is "a cruel kindness" (Fleche 133). Because of the imbalanced love for husband and children, the lack of authority of mother, and the morbid maternal care the mother-son relationship is alienated.

#### **4.2 Anguish and Anger of the Mother in *Death of a Salesman***

"What we like to call maternal love is intertwined with hatred, pain, boredom, remorse, and disappointment" (Rurlriok 68). Basically, Linda is a good wife but not a good mother. Even if she looked like a kind mother, but it was the way she treated her husband not her sons. She preferred to choose wife when facing the identity of a wife and a mother. She chooses to defend her husband and blamed her sons when sons clashed with father. Sons' attitudes to their father influence their mother-child relationship, which is also the reason why Linda got angry with their sons.

She took meticulous care of Willy, upholding his dignity and authority. However,

such a gentle Linda was harsh when talking to her two sons. And she would not refute her husband's hot air in his face, but she would accuse Biff of not contacting them and asking him to either get along well with Willy or leave the family. She said to Biff "Either he's your father and you pay him respect, or else you're not come to here" (*Salesman* 43). Besides, she also described her son Happy as "bum". Parents will show concern for their children, especially the marriage of their children. When their younger son, Happy, said that he was about to get married, Linda did not show any enthusiasm, and just said good boy to Happy.

In daily life, Linda's concern for her two sons was far from caring for her husband and even showed her coldness to them, which was more obvious when sons had contradictions and conflicts with Willy. When she knew that her sons desert Willy in restaurant, she seriously criticized them that they "are a pair of animals! There's no stranger you'd do that" (*salesman* 98). Then she threw away the flowers Happy sent her and ordered them go away. Linda with violently said to Happy "Don't you care whether he lives or dies? Get out of my sight! Get out of here...not going near him..." (97).

According to the maternal thinking of Sara Rurlriok's care ethics, "Mother's practice includes three activities: caring for children; emotional education and intellectual education in order to meet the requirements of social groups" (Xiao 216). Linda only completed the biological responsibility of being a mother, but in children's cultivation and education, she was replaced by Willy. Willy imbued the idea of the American Dream into his children and thought that as long as they were be-liked, they would succeed. In terms of education, he ignored the knowledge in books, indulged children with stealing and did not hold a serious attitude to girls. As a result, the eldest son accomplished nothing, bearing the bad habit of stealing, and the younger son was addicted to flirting with women. It can be said that Linda was only a mother in the biological sense, and she did not educate them in emotion and intellect. This leads Biff and Happy can't gain ethical consciousness and the ability to know how to distinguish the good from the evil. Linda's obedience caused her right to educate children to be set

aside by his husband.

Linda chose to acquiesce in Willy's wrong education value, this choice made a driving force behind the failure of her children's education. Her two sons did not succeed in either work or life. Biff is physically strong, while he is poor and confused about his future. Happy is tall and strong, while he is cynical with no sympathy or responsibility. Certainly, Willy should take the main responsibility for Biff and Happy's failure. But Linda acquiesced in Willy's education means, which more or less caused her sons' failure. Although Linda blamed Biff's bad behaviors like stealing football, flirting with women, and not studying hard, Linda was forced to be silence when Willy believed that Biff's behaviors showed that Biff was spiritual and having his own character. Her dereliction of duty was that she knew that Willy's education was wrong, but she did not stop or dare to stop it. So, this compliance with Willy contributed to the failures of Biff and Happy and the family conflicts.

In a male-dominated home, women are marginalized. And there is no right for women to speak at all as they exist in a subsidiary position. However, parents are equally important to children in the family, and sometimes children tend to favor their mothers. When the eldest son saw that his mother was treated unfairly, he spoke out several times to stop his father's behavior, "I don't like you yelling at her all the time" (*Salesman* 51), but this made his father even more annoyed. For Biff, his mother Linda was the victim of Willy's stubborn and rude, a mother who needed protection. Mary's tolerance for Willy made Biff feel extremely angry and jealous. Biff sympathized with his mother and hated to see her live in cheat by saying that his father was a liar, "Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce respect for you" (*Salesman* 43). Nevertheless, in order to protect her mother, he did not tell her about her father's affair. "Your hair got so grey" (44), when Biff saw her mother's gray hair, he felt heavyhearted and pity on her mother, "Mom got awful old" (52). Apart from sympathy, he also lamented that her mother was old and appreciated her contribution to the family. Happy, on the other hand, admired her mother. Although Happy fooled around with many women, he still treated his mother as the model of an



ideal wife and wanted to find a woman like his mother to get married and live a normal life. “I’d like to find a girl-steady, somebody with substance. Like Mom” (19). Regardless of what the mother’s love was like, the sons’ behaviors and choices contained a deep attachment to their mother.

Mather is often the ones who provide emotional support for the family especially for children. O’Neill and Miller’s tone mixed sympathy and judgment, criticism and compassion when they wrote mother-son relationship. They wished readers to understand and pity the two mothers, and forgive them. Then mother and sons can find a way to keep a warm relationship by mutual care and understanding. Mothers should help their sons distinguish the good and the evil; achieve the maturity and perfection of morality.

## Conclusion

The emergence of literature originates from the need of ethical expression of human and it is transformed from the text of human ethical concepts. Writers express their personal value judgment and ethical ideas in their works by showing their concern and thinking about family and social issues. According to the above analysis and comparison, it is reflected by the two plays that the two writers focused on real life, especially on the ethical relationship and the ethical order of the families. There are similar ethical problems in the two families of the two plays. The entanglement of ethical predicament, the confusion and disorder of ethical identity and the dilemmas of ethical choices in the works are the common problems existing in family members. These problems lead to lonely couples, hostile father and sons, alienated mother and sons in the two plays; and the home was not what they wanted. However, no matter how disappointing the family is, they still yearn for warmth of it. The characters should face the reality, clear and embrace their identity, reject the wrong action and make appropriate choice. Family relationship is mainly reflected in the emotion of family members: the interweaving of love and hate. This loving-hating emotion is usually like an ecological balance: when love is absent or diminished, hate naturally increases, while hate actually is the potential need for love, which is also the particularity of family relationships. However, it is this interweaving of love and hate that connects family members with each other. We can see the essence through the words of the two plays. Although life is a mess, it is an amazing irony because it is fair and never biased. The misery of life is also very splendid because the tragedy of life keeps people vigilant. "By resorting to 'the art of unease' and imagining the worst things possible calls for a pursuit of morality and goodness" (Shang 82). Authors revealed characters' living predicament and expressed their deep sympathy for the isolated and helpless situation of modern people through the description of the characters' tragic experience. They also called for the establishment of families full of love and harmony through the emotional writing and rational thinking to the ethical relations of the family.

Under a specific environment of social development, the influence of various

forces on people is concentrated in family and reflected by the ethical relationship among family members. Taking social reality as a starting point, the writers exposed the common family and social problems faced by Americans in an age of extravagance and waste through the tragedy of two middle-class families and the relationship among family members. By analyzing ethical environment: materialistic bent in a commercialized society, faith in the false American Dream, loss of faith and false sense of value in the development of commercial society in the United States at that time we know the reasons caused family problems.

By excavating the moral teaching value from the perspective of ethical literary criticism, reader can get better understand about the moral experience and lessons that the author wanted to convey, indicating the moral responsibility of literature criticism. As Miller said, the purpose of his writing was to make people more humanized and become less lonely. O'Neill wrote the script with deep compassion, understanding and forgiveness for the Tyrone family. Both O'Neill and Miller were actively exploring the connotation of life and seeking a way out for people's spiritual dilemmas. By revealing the existing problems and seeking solutions the authors and works' goals of moral teaching are achieved. The two plays guide people to stay ethical identity accord with ethical norms, and then undertake the responsibilities and obligations assigned by the identity. Then also warn us that we should establish a correct moral value and should deal well with the relationship among family members in modern society with rapid economic development.

The core content of ethics is the accepted and recognized ethical order under the relationship between human and self, human and human, human and society, and the moral idea formed on the basis of the ethical order and the various norms to maintain this order. One of the most important tasks of literature is to describe the changes in this ethical order and the moral problems and the results incurred by these changes so as to provide experience and instruction for the progress of human civilization. Therefore, using ethical literary criticism to analyze the two plays can further explore its realistic significance. O'Neill and Miller's dramas reveal that we should have a correct understanding of ourselves; people must maintain their own personality and dignity; people should have basic trust and respect to each other. In society, people should learn

to adapt to the society, and learn to take advantage of the society to achieve their maximum value. The profound ethical themes in the two dramas directly sublimate the moral and aesthetic significance of the play. The use of ethical literary criticism reflects O'Neill and Miller's ethical idea and ethical thought in a better way, warning us to maintain the ethical order. Through the construction of ethical order, men construct harmonious and respectful familial relationship which is based on rational will and mutual understanding; and establish a real home which can give them the spiritual sense of direction and belonging; make family a shelter where men could feel love and warmth. Families should distinguish good and evil, form an accepted and recognized ethical relationship by staying behavior accord with ethical norms.

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