



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

A STUDY GUIDE

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A Touch of the Poet

What's Happening, Where It's Happening and Who It's Happening To

“O’NEILL’S MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION WAS THAT A LIFE OF ILLUSIONS IS UNPARDONABLE, BUT THAT LIFE WITHOUT ILLUSIONS IS UNBEARABLE.”¹

A Touch of the Poet by Eugene O’Neill is the third play in a cycle of plays that was to deal with the history of America. The title of the cycle was *A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*. Its central theme was to be the corruption of character through greed, a strong part of O’Neill’s mature philosophy. However, in *A Touch of the Poet*, greed plays less of a factor than the history of each character. Each seems to wrestle with his/her own past and background while also struggling with the force of tradition.

Major Cornelius “Con” Melody is the son of an Irish innkeeper but fancies himself a “Lord Byron” standing in the crowd but part not of it. The knowledge that his family once owned an estate in Ireland, the fact that he fought bravely under the Duke of Wellington in the Battle of Talavera and his ownership of a thoroughbred mare feeds his aristocratic notions. Con runs an inn, which he was duped into buying on a Yankee’s false assurance of new highway construction nearby. This construction didn’t happen and the inn, located outside of Boston in 1828, barely ekes out a living, while Con himself does little or nothing to make it a success.

Con’s pretensions to refinement cost his family dearly and his isolation makes him a lonely man. He refuses to mix with the “Irish scum” and is not accepted by the Yankee aristocrats. His wife, Nora, has worn herself out supporting his fancy ways; yet her drudgery goes largely unappreciated by Con. Instead, he rebukes her peasant ways. Con’s daughter, Sara, wants to rise in the world and be somebody. She also toils for Con but denounces the self-indulgence that stands in her way.

The situation comes to a head when Sara schemes to marry Simon Harford, the son of a wealthy Yankee businessman who



Illustration by Scott McKowen

has been staying at the inn. Simon’s father’s attorney is sent to buy Con off; insulted, Con sends him packing and then furiously sets off to avenge his honor. Con’s campaign degenerates into terrible disappointment and, illusions shattered, he returns home. He can no longer believe that he is a great man for whom all things are possible, so he returns to the past that he so desperately tried to escape. ■

“Thus, in this play about poetry and illusion, imagination and its powers, it is time who remains the enemy. The future holds forth dubious promise, and memories of the past cannot redeem the present.”²

EUGENE O'NEILL

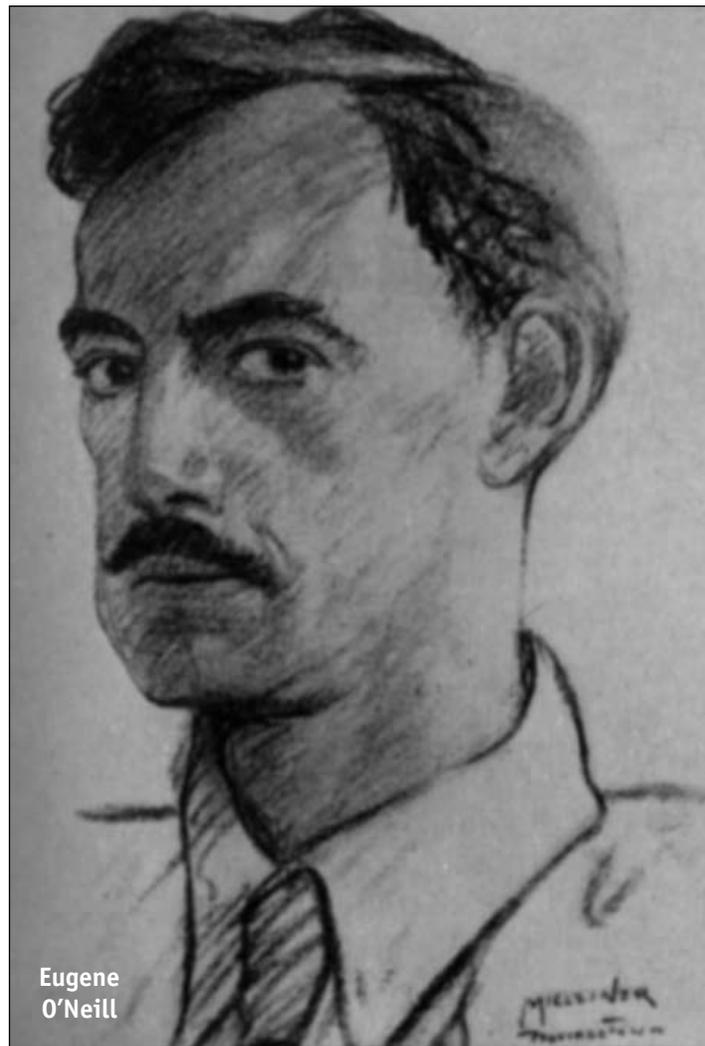
"Tragic is the plight of the tragedian whose only audience is himself! Life is for each man a solitary cell whose walls are mirrors."
—Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill was born in a Broadway hotel on October 16, 1888. His father, James, was a popular actor of romantic melodrama and spent most of his life touring and playing the lead in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a role he later claimed stifled his career. Eugene's first seven years were spent with his mother, Ella, and his older brother, James, Jr., as they toured along with his father. From the age of seven to 13, he attended boarding schools, including Betts Academy in Stamford, Connecticut. After graduation from Betts in 1902, he entered Princeton University where he spent a year. In June, 1903, he was dismissed from Princeton for throwing a beer bottle through a window of President Wilson's house. He was bored with college and left to become a secretary in a New York mail-order house. After a series of odd jobs, he married Kathleen Jenkins in 1909, a union that ended in divorce in 1912. The marriage produced one son, Eugene O'Neill, Jr., who committed suicide at the age of 40.

The next few years were his years of wandering: to Honduras where he went gold-prospecting; to Buenos Aires where he became a bum on the docks; to Africa where he journeyed on a cattle steamer; to New York where he lived at "Jimmy the Priest's" waterfront dive, and finally to New Orleans where his father was performing the perennial *Count of Monte Cristo*. James refused to give his son any money, but he did give him a part in the play. At the close of that season, the O'Neills returned to their home in New London, Connecticut, where Eugene became a reporter for the local newspaper, *The Telegraph*.

In 1912, Eugene was diagnosed with tuberculosis and entered a sanitarium. There he became an avid reader, especially of the Greeks, the Elizabethans, Ibsen and Strindberg. To rebuild his health, he disciplined himself to a life of exercise and hard work and began to write plays. In the fall of 1914, he enrolled in a playwriting course taught by George Pierce Baker at Harvard and, in 1915, moved to Greenwich Village in New York.

O'Neill joined forces with an avant-garde group of writers and artists that had established an amateur theatrical company. The group's first season in the summer of 1915 was presented on an abandoned wharf in the artists' colony of Provincetown, on Cape Cod, Massachusetts and the artists called themselves the Provincetown Players. O'Neill's early association with them gave him the opportunity to write his plays and see them performed. Such one-acts as *The Moon of the Caribees*, *Bound East for Cardiff*, *The Long Voyage Home* and *In the Zone* were produced there. In 1917-18, three of his plays were published in a magazine of protest against the self-satisfied middle class. It was



called *Smart Set* and was edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, both literary critics.

The production of his full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, in 1920 brought O'Neill his first Pulitzer Prize. From then on, his output of work was prodigious and he became the leading American playwright of his generation. In 1918, he married Agnes Boulton Burton, with whom he had two children, Shane and Oona. Shane drifted into a life of emotional instability; Oona, at 18, infuriated her father marrying Charlie Chaplin and he cut her out of his life.

O'Neill's works include *The Emperor Jones*, *Anna Christie* (his second Pulitzer), *The Hairy Ape*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *The Great God Brown* and *Strange Interlude* (his third Pulitzer). With *Mourning Becomes Electra* he used Greek forms, themes and characters in a New England setting in the Civil War era. *Ah, Wilderness* was his only comedy and *The Iceman Cometh* arguably the most complex of his tragedies.

O'Neill's plays were written from an intensely personal point of view. They were derived from the scarring effects of his family: his father, a frustrated actor and failed husband; his mother, a morphine addict; his elder brother, an alcoholic who died of the disease. The parents loved but tormented each other. This preoccupation with his past is dramatized in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill's most autobiographical play, written in 1941

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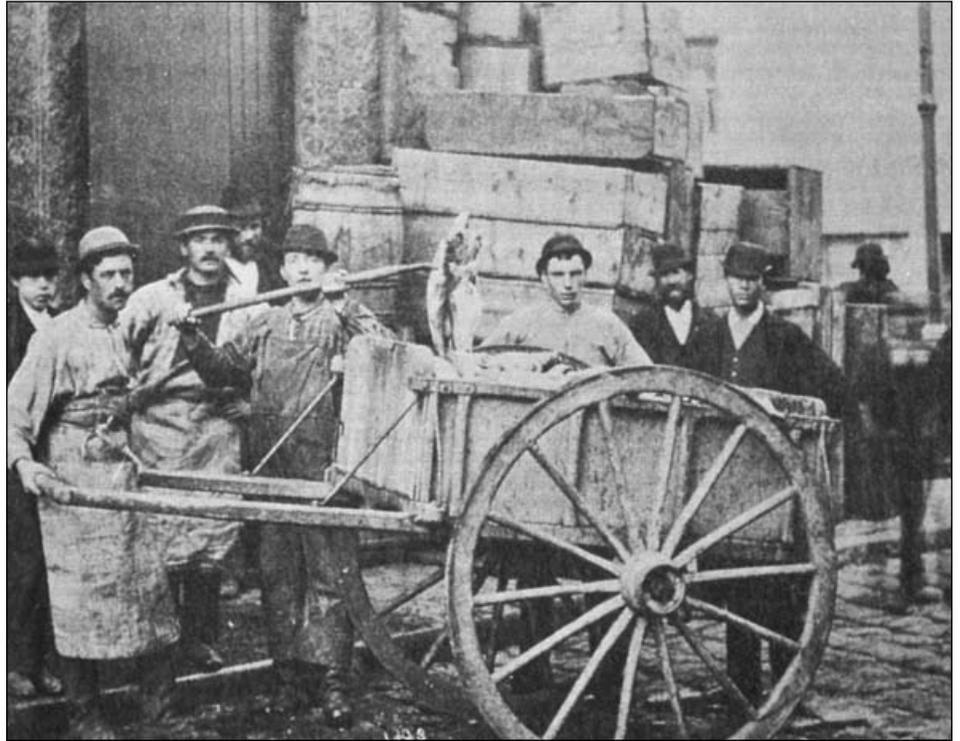
CORNELIUS AND THE IRISH IN O'NEILL'S CYCLE

"The Irish are a fair people; they never speak well of one another."

—Samuel Johnson in
Boswell's Life, February 1775.

Cornelius "Con" Melody was part of the early Irish migration to the United States that occurred well before the Great Potato Famine (1850-60). Most of these immigrants did not settle in cities, but in rural areas as Con did. Some were agricultural workers, but others were in a variety of ancillary trades; they were blacksmiths, coopers, millers, storekeepers and innkeepers. From the early years on, Irish-Americans had a vested interest in bad-mouthing their forebears. This is demonstrated in the play when Nora hopes England will be crushed in the next war so that Ireland will be free. Cornelius' contemptuous reply is: "Ireland? What benefit would freedom be to her unless she could be freed from the Irish?"³ His response propagates the myth that the Irish were too technologically backward and too financially irresponsible to save enough money to get into frontier farming. The truth, according to Donald Akenson, is that "the Irish migrant was quicker, more technologically adaptable, more economically alert" and less chained to the cultural limits of the Old Country than is usually believed.⁴

Cornelius' case was somewhat different from the average Irish immigrant. His father, Ned Melody, tried to establish himself as one of the Irish gentry, but



Young Irish immigrants at work on the wharves of Boston.

since Ireland had no aristocracy of its own, Ned tried to imitate the status of the British landowning class. When he was not acknowledged by this group, Ned sent his son, Con, off to Dublin with plenty of money to prove himself the equal of a gentleman's son. Con's superiors sneered at his pretensions and he, instead, joined the British army to attain recognition. As a British officer, he received the opportunity he desired in Portugal and Spain. There, he was welcome in the houses of the nobility. This

opportunity was soon lost when he was forced to resign his commission in spite of his bravery in battle. He was compromised by a romantic liaison resulting in a duel and forced to resign in disgrace.

Con could not return to Ireland where social mobility was non-existent, so he migrated to America. In this land of opportunity and freedom, a man with Con's money and education should have been able to rise to the top. Con, however, was held back by his misguided adher-

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but not staged until 1956, three years after his death. It won him his fourth Pulitzer Prize.

During his final years O'Neill was stricken with an obscure degenerative disease which made writing and finally even moving difficult. Though his mind was clear, he was frustrated and irritable and restless. He moved with his third wife, Carlotta, from Oregon to California to Marblehead, Massachusetts and finally

to a Boston hotel where he could be close to doctors. With difficulty, he destroyed most of his later writings, including most of his planned 11-play cycle, *A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*. He died on November 27, 1953 in the Boston hotel at the age of 65.

O'Neill was the first American dramatist to regard the stage as a literary medium and the only American playwright ever to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Through his efforts, the

American theatre grew up from melodramas and musicals to a cultural medium that could take its place with American fiction, art and music. For more than 20 years, with his dramas and his inspiration to other serious dramatists, O'Neill set the pace for the blossoming of American theatre. ■

"Born in a G.—D.— hotel room and dying in a hotel room."

—O'Neill's last words from Louis Shaeffer's *O'Neill: Son and Artist* (1973)

THE PLAY IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Courtesy of Arena Stage

1783: Cornelius Melody is born at Melody Castle in Galway, Ireland. His mother dies in childbirth.

1788: Nora, Cornelius Melody's future wife, is born to peasant parents. George Gordon, Later Lord Byron, is born.

1789: The French Revolution begins.

1804: Cornelius Melody completes school and enters the British Army.

Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself Napoleon I, Emperor of France.

1807: Cornelius marries Nora and leaves that same year for the Peninsular Wars (the operations conducted by the British, Spanish and Portuguese armies against the French, 1808-14). Sara Melody is born to Cornelius and Nora.

1809: Cornelius fights in the Battle of Talavera on July 27. His bravery is commended before the British army by Lord Wellesley. He is now a captain in the dragoons. Cornelius' father dies

1812: Napoleon invades Russia and occupies Moscow. Andrew Jackson beats the British at New Orleans.

Cornelius Melody is promoted to major in the Seventh Dragoons; he fights in the Battle of Salamanca as he draws closer to promotion to colonel.

Cornelius is discovered by a Spanish noble in a compromising position with the noble's wife; the two men duel and Cornelius kills him. Cornelius eventually escapes court-martial for the murder because of his battlefield bravery, but he resigns from the army.

Lord Byron publishes "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage".

1813: Cornelius emigrates with his family to America and purchases a tavern outside Boston that was supposed to be located along a new coach line.

1817: Henry Thoreau is born, a poet who, like Simon Harford, lived alone in a cabin in the woods.

1820: Cornelius Melody gains American citizenship and voting rights.

1824: Byron dies.

1827: Cornelius Melody rents a cabin on his property to Simon Harford.

1828: Andrew Jackson is elected president.

July 27. The day of the play.....

IRISH continued from page 3

ence to a code of behavior he had adopted in Ireland. In America he could not pretend to be an aristocrat while he retained his peasant stature as a poor innkeeper. In this new land, he behaves like his superiors in Ireland and sneers at the successful businessman. He fails to recognize that America operates under a different code. Neither in Ireland nor America is Con able to recognize and adopt a viable strategy to ascend the social scale. His behavior makes him a local character without dignity or respect.

It is up to his daughter, Sara, to offer some hope. She begins the climb up the American success ladder by transforming her dreams into the reality of marrying Simon Harford, the son of a wealthy Yankee.

It was O'Neill's intention to follow the progeny of the Harford-Melody clan as this letter to Robert Sisk indicates:

It's a cycle of seven plays portraying the history of the inter-relationships of a family over—a century. The family is half Irish, half New England in the beginning. But the New Englanders are a bit different from any I've tackled before—and so are the Irish.⁵

After *A Touch of the Poet*, tentative titles were given to the plays. *More Stately Mansions* was nearly completed in 1942 and published and staged after O'Neill's death in 1953. It concentrated on Sara and Simon's marriage and their relationship with Deborah, his mother. The scenario for *Calms of the Capricorn* was completed, but the drafts for *The Greed of the Meek* and *Give Me Death* were burned by O'Neill before his death. *The Earth is the Limit*, *Nothing is Lost Save Honor* and *The Man on Iron Horseback* were never written. The plays appear to have been

connected to the development of transportation throughout the 19th century, from coaches and canal boats to clipper ships, railroads and automobiles. In each play, the developing lines of transportation are the routes for the possession of the country, moving through the landscape like greedy fingers, bringing power to the possessors. It was also to be the personal stories of the Melody-Harford. In each generation we would have seen the destructive results of a dream denied and idealism lost. ■

"That O'Neill finished A Touch of the Poet is perhaps not surprising. ...Here the motifs, in miniature, are set forth. A Touch of the Poet is a microcosm of the cycle, asking the central questions: What happens to a man who cannot deny his dreams? What happens to his women when he fails to deny them?"⁶

In his book *A Role: O'Neill's Cornelius Melody*, Lennart Josephson writes that O'Neill wanted to make the character complex and evidently drew from memories of different people as well as literature. Even though James O'Neill, Eugene's father, is depicted in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, characteristics of him appear in Cornelius. In appearance, James was "big-chested, walked erect, with an almost military carriage. He had a fine profile; his hair was iron gray. When he was not playing a role, there was a good deal of Irish peasant about him."⁸ James O'Neill, like Con, was cheated in real estate deals; he also invested money in worthless mining enterprises. Like Con, James also had a fondness for talking, had a weakness for drink and a tendency to dwell on his past triumphs. As Cornelius bragged about the praise given him by the Duke of Wellington, so James O'Neill liked to flaunt the fact that Edwin Booth, a famous actor of the 19th century, claimed O'Neill's portrayal of Shakespeare's *Othello* was superior to his own.

A fictitious figure at the center of a work is often, more or less, the author's self-portrait. Cornelius liked to pose in front of a mirror and so did O'Neill. When taunted for his vanity he replied: "No, I just want to be sure I'm here."⁹ As a student at Princeton, O'Neill liked to quote the same part of "Childe Harold" that Melody did and was fond of declaiming other speeches as well. As Melody had volatile feelings for his wife, Nora, so did Eugene for his second wife, Agnes Boulton. He would shout obscenities at her one moment and the next beg for her forgiveness. This behavior is also witnessed in Melody's invectives against his daughter, Sara. This hostility might also mirror the enmity between James, the father, and Eugene, the son.

O'Neill drew a great deal of inspiration from the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, especially his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Nietzsche had a contempt for Christianity and Melody criticizes the church and its teachings. Nietzsche condemned the ignorant rabble and wrote of loathing "the mob." We have a direct counterpoint in Melody when he says: "There is a cursed destiny in

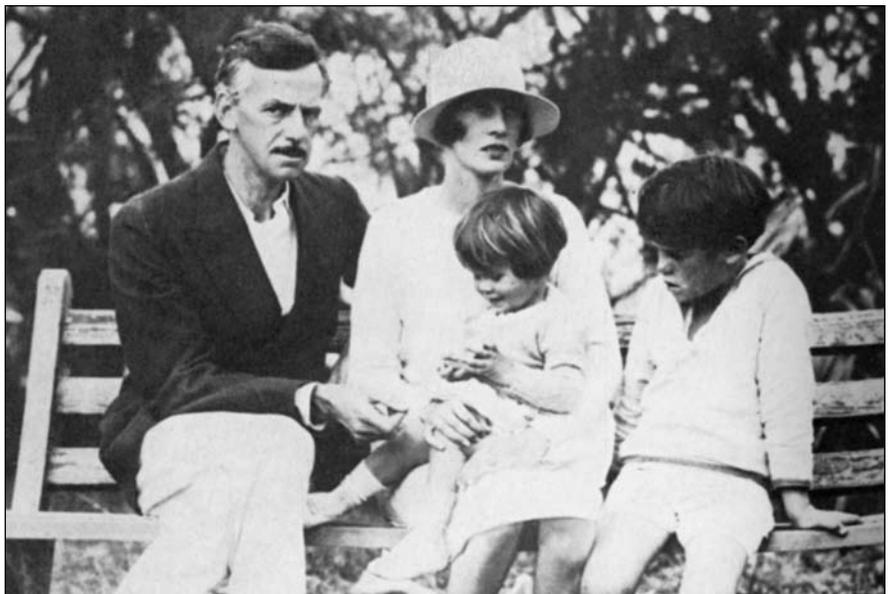
"WHAT (THE ROLE OF CORNELIUS MELODY) NEEDS IS AN ACTOR LIKE—MY OLD MAN—ONE OF THOSE BIG-CHESTED, CHISELED-MUG, ROMANTIC OLD BOYS WHO COULD WALK ONTO A STAGE WITH ALL THE APLOMB AND REGAL SPLENDOR WITH WHICH THEY WALKED INTO—A BAR, DRUNK OR SOBER. MOST ACTORS IN THESE TIMES LACK AN AIR."

—Eugene O'Neill

these decadent times. Everywhere the scum rises to the top."¹⁰ Most importantly, Nietzsche believed in the liberation from the past. This liberation depends on the capacity of the individual will to embrace all existence in the present, the pleasant as well as the unpleasant. We must experience all time and space, all joy and sorrow, and dissolve the distinctions between

then and now, here and there, subject and object. Then all things become possible. Unfortunately, though the characters in the play try time and again to break the vicious cycle of memory, they fail to do so. So the cycle repeats itself and the characters reiterate the same pattern of events with all their limitations and imperfections. ■

"[O'NEILL] DESCRIBES A BATTLE BETWEEN PRIDE IN AN OLD WORLD TRADITION AND THE ACTUALITY OF A HARD-WORKING AND DEMOCRATIC NEW ONE. THE INHERITANCE OF THE PAST IS USELESS AND WRONG AND MUST BE ROOTED OUT—BUT THE PROCESS IS A PAINFUL ONE."¹¹



O'Neill and his second wife Agnes, with their children Oona and Shane.

CORNELIUS AND LORD BYRON

In 1809, Lord Byron, with his friend John Cam Hobhouse, left England for a tour of Portugal, Spain, Malta, Albania, Greece and Turkey. When he returned in 1811, he had completed two cantos of a long, semi-autobiographical poem he called "Childe Burun's Pilgrimage." ("Childe," in this sense, is a medieval term for a squire on the verge of taking his vows of knighthood.) Publishers and tastemakers retitled the work "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and published it in 1812. Then as Byron said, he awoke one morning to find himself famous. From 1812 to 1815, he enjoyed an almost unprecedented renown in the literary and social world of England.

In 1815-16, however, Byron's immense popularity almost became public animosity. Smarting from his unhappy marriage to Annabella Milbanke and socially ostracized because of his rumored liaison with his half-sister, Augusta Byron Leigh, Byron left England in 1816, never to return. In the first two years of his self-imposed exile, he completed Cantos III and IV of "Childe Harold." These two later cantos have seemed to many critics more powerful and honest in their articulation of despair than the first two and represent Byron's closest approach to Romantic poetry. They are also a commentary on the events of the time. In 1815, Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. The aftermath of that defeat was the reconsolidation of the old European monarchies. To libertarians and revolutionaries this was a grimmer threat to freedom than the unified Europe of Napoleon's dream. So the "deepening of tone" of Cantos III and IV may



“AMONG THEM, BUT NOT OF THEM!
BY THE ETERNAL, THAT EXPRESSES IT!
THANK GOD FOR YOU, LORD BYRON—POET
AND NOBLEMAN WHO MADE OF HIS
DISDAIN IMMORTAL MUSIC!”

—*Cornelius*, *A Touch of the Poet*

ideal of the aristocrat is the one he aimed for most throughout his life. ■

“From the poetry of Lord Byron they drew a system of ethics compounded of misanthropy and voluptuousness—a system in which the two great commandments were to hate your neighbor and to love your neighbor’s wife.”
—*Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay on Moore’s Life of Lord Byron, 1831.*

be the poet's conception of the flawed but gigantic character of Napoleon.³

However, Andrew Rutherford in *Byron: A Critical Study* finds much of Canto III of "Childe Harold" unsatisfactory. In the passage quoted by Cornelius: "I have not loved the World, nor the World me." Rutherford finds a "histrionic and self-pitying figure... his self-flattering, self-dramatizing self-deception is his [Byron's] greatest weakness.... The presentation of humanity as a crowd of base, hypocritical, rank-breathed idolaters, forming a single entity (the World) which is contrasted with the one great individual—himself—is obvious and deplorable."⁴ Thus, O'Neill's allusion to this particular poem is apt. Byron, previously society's darling, is writing in self-imposed, self-deluding exile, a situation that is very similar to Con's.

Byron, to the very last, remained extremely conscious of his rank and proud of the position he once enjoyed. Even though he satirized society in later years, the

EXCERPTS FROM
**NO KINGDOM
BUT A HORSE**

by Cathy Madison
Courtesy of Arena Stage

*"To confess that you are totally ignorant about the Horse, is social suicide: you will be despised by everybody, especially the horse."
—W. C. Sellar (1898-1951)*

When Cornelius Melody, the self-deluded hero of Eugene O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet*, wants to lash out at his daughter Sara, he compares her to his horse. For horse enthusiasts, that may not be considered an insult. However, through the venomous words of Con, the comparison is anything but favorable. Says the hurtful Con, "Why are you so jealous of the mare, I wonder? Is it because she has such slender ankles and dainty feet? Keep your thick wrists and ugly peasant paws off the table in my presence, if you please! They turn my stomach." The horse represents everything that Con once had in life (or so he claims) but has now lost—power, position, elegance and affluence. In fact, his family is forced to sacrifice other things in order to maintain his proud mare.

The horse signifies the most absolute relationship between man and beast in the history of our civilization. Although the dog is considered "man's best friend," it is the horse that has carried man across huge distances, supported and even protected man in battle. For Con, the horse provides an emotional, rather than physical, pillar of strength and endurance. It lends some credence to Con's pretenses and dreams. In Con's eyes, if no one else's, as long as he owns his mare, he can't be a complete failure. To quote the French naturalist Georges-Louis Buffon, "The horse is a creature who sacrifices his own being to exist through the will of another...he is the noblest conquest of man."

Con seems to fancy himself an English nobleman in his adoration of the horse (he is actually of Irish birth). The following is an excerpt of an essay by Barbara W. Tuchman about "The English Gentleman and His Horse" (1966), which helps elucidate the character of Con—at least in terms of his profound attachment to his horse.

The English gentleman was unthinkable without his horse. Ever since the first mounted man acquired extra stature and speed (and, with the invention of the stirrup, extra fighting thrust), the horse had distinguished the ruler from the ruled. The man on horseback was the symbol of dominance, and on no other class anywhere in the world was the horse so intrinsic a part as of the English aristocracy. He was the attribute of their power. When a contemporary writer wished to describe the point of view of the county oligarchy in equestrian terms that he used: they saw society, he wrote, made up of a "small select aristoc-

racy born booted and spurred to ride and a large dim mass born saddled and bridled to be ridden."

In 1895, the horse was still as inseparable from, and ubiquitous in upper-class life as the servant, though considerably more cherished. He provided locomotion, occupation and conversation: inspired love, bravery, poetry and physical prowess. He was the essential element in racing, the sport of kings, as in cavalry, the elite of war. When an English patrician thought nostalgically of youth, it was as a time "when I looked at life from the saddled and was near heaven as it was possible to be...."

But the true passion of the horseman was expressed in the rider to hounds. "To gallop over the downs with hounds and horsemen," wrote Wilfred Scawen Blunt in a sonnet, "was to feel my horse a thing of wings, myself a God." The fox-hunting man never had enough of the thrills, the danger and the beauty of the hunt; of the wail of the huntsman's horn, the excited



yelping of the hounds, the streaming rush of red-coated riders and black-clad ladies on side-saddles, the flying leaps over banks, fences, stone walls and ditches, even the crashes, broken bones and the cold aching ride home in winter. If it was bliss in that time to be alive and of the leisured class, to hunt was a rapture. The devotee of the sport—man or woman—rode to hounds five and sometimes six days a week. It was said of Mr. Knox, private chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, that he wore boots and spurs under his cassock and surplice and "thought of horses even in the pulpit." The Duke's family could always tell by the speed of morning prayers if Mr. Knox were hunting that day or not.

Older than fox-hunting, the oldest role of the horseman was in war. Cavalry officers considered themselves the cream of the army. Polo, learned on its native ground by the regiments of India, was their passion and the cavalry charge the sum and acme of their strategy. It was from the Cavalry that the nation's military leaders were drawn. They believed in the cavalry charge as they believed in the Church of England. ■

CORNELIUS AND ANDREW JACKSON

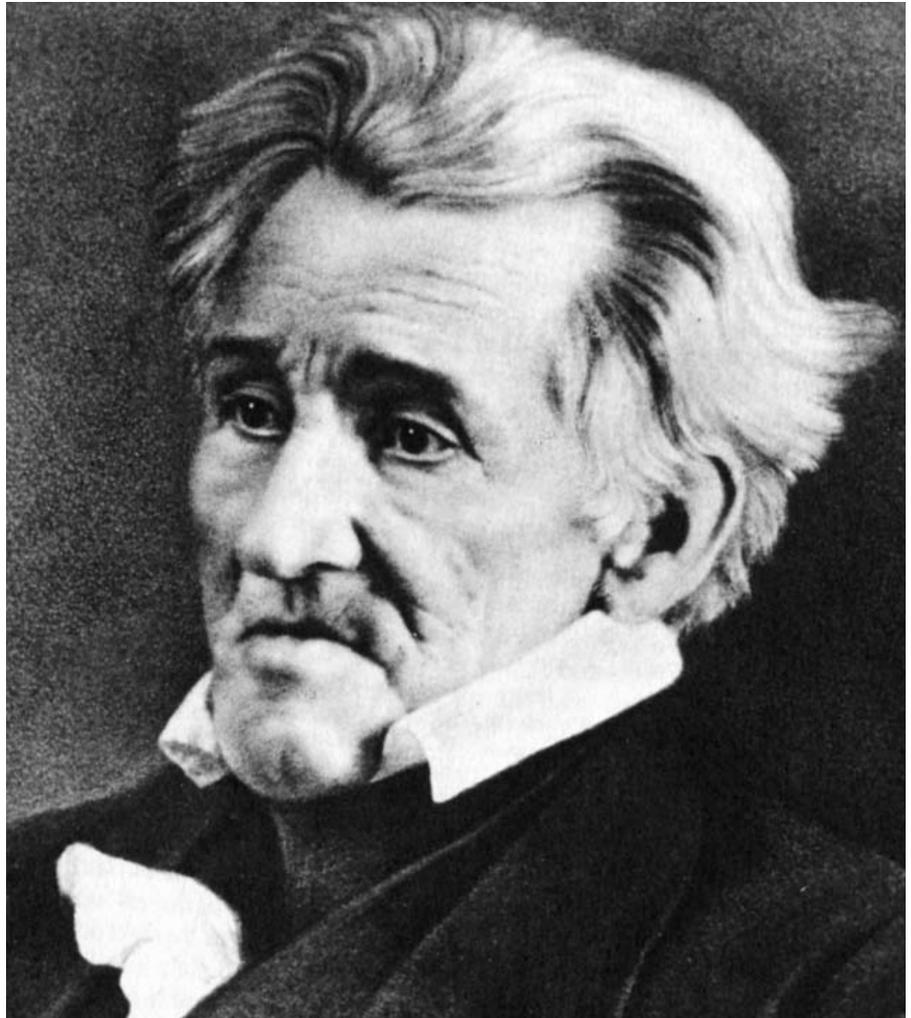
*"The paper is full of the latest swindling
lies of that idol of the riff-raff,
Andrew Jackson—Everywhere the
scum rises to the top."*

—Cornelius, *A Touch of the Poet*

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) was the first President born in a log cabin. His predecessors had come from aristocratic families, but Jackson was the orphan son of Scotch-Irish immigrants. His fame came as an Indian fighter and as a general in the War of 1812 where he was nicknamed "Old Hickory" because of his toughness and tenacity. He was one of the founders of the Democratic party. Deriving his support from farmers and workingmen in the new frontier states, he stood ready to argue with Congress or the Supreme Court in the name of all the people. His slogan was "Let the people rule."

In the election of 1824, Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans, was the popular favorite with 99 electoral votes. John Quincy Adams received 84 and other candidates received 78. Since no candidate had a majority, the election went to the House of Representatives where its members selected John Quincy Adams for President. Jackson and his supporters smelled a "corrupt bargain," but the charge was never substantiated. Jackson never forgave Adams and did his best to make him look foolish during his administration.

The presidential campaign of 1828 was one of the most bitter in American history. It was also the first in which all nominations were made by state legislatures and mass meetings held by congressional caucuses. Jackson was nominated by his party to oppose the incumbent, John Quincy Adams. The campaign was characterized by insults and acrimony. Adams' supporters accused Jackson of executing six Tennessee militiamen in the War of 1812; his wife, Rachel, who had been married and divorced, was



**"IF (GOVERNMENT) WOULD CONFINE ITSELF
TO EQUAL PROTECTION, AND, AS HEAVEN DOES
ITS RAINS, SHOWER ITS FAVORS ALIKE ON THE
HIGH AND THE LOW, THE RICH AND THE POOR,
IT WOULD BE AN UNQUALIFIED BLESSING."**

—Andrew Jackson, *veto of the Bank Bill, 1832.*

called a "convicted adulteress." For his part, Jackson repeated the charge of "corrupt bargain" and accused Adams of misusing political patronage.

Jackson won a sweeping victory with 178 electoral votes to 83 for Adams. At his inauguration, hundreds of cheering admirers—frontiersmen, farmers, women and children—fol-

lowed Jackson down Pennsylvania Avenue and into the White House where they eagerly consumed the cakes, ice cream and punch, while standing on chairs, breaking china, tearing drapes and generally terrorizing the staff. President Jackson escaped through a window. ■

CORNELIUS AND THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

CON: —Today is the 27th! By God, and I would have forgotten.

NORA: Forgot what?

CON: The anniversary of Talavera!

NORA: Oh, ain't I stupid not to remember.

CON: I had forgotten myself and no wonder. It's a far cry from this dunghill on which I rot to that glorious day when the Duke of Wellington did me the honor before all the army to commend my bravery."

—*A Touch of the Poet*

The Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852) was a British soldier and statesman who was known as "The Iron Duke" because he defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. Later, he became a leader of the Tory party and served as Prime Minister.

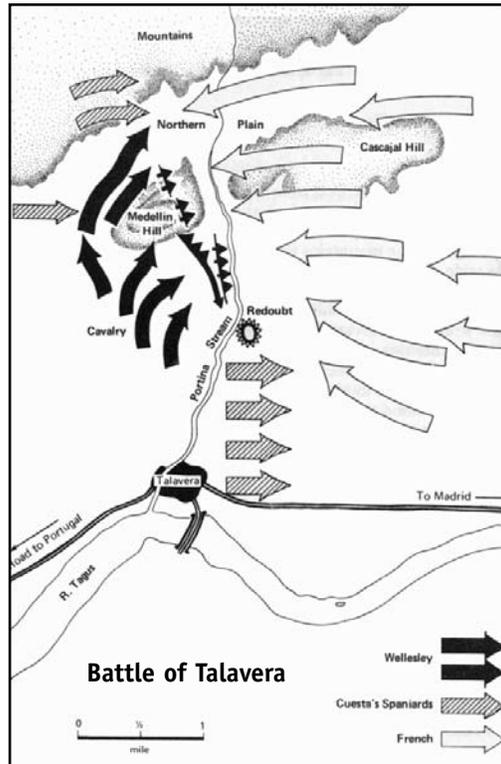
In 1808, Spain revolted against Napoleon and France and the British sent troops there to help the Spanish. Wellesley took command of the British divisions fighting in the peninsula of Spain and Portugal. The Battle of Talavera, though not a turning point of these Peninsular Wars, became extremely popular in England.

On July 27, 1809, French forces attacked the undernourished British troops at Talavera in southwest Spain. Wellesley ordered his regiments to retire behind a slope and lie down, a maneuver interpreted by the French Marshall as a retreat. The over-confident French were smashed by volleys and bayonets, and a single division lost 1,300 of its men in 40 minutes. After the battle, thirsty men on both French and British sides drank from the little Portina River, fraternized and carried off their wounded.

The main French assault came on July 28 when 30,000 Frenchmen attacked the whole British line. The counter-attack was carried too far; the line suffered heavily, but Wellesley stepped in and remedied the mistake. Another brigade of British cavalry destroyed itself by charging into a deep ravine, and men and horses lay tangled in death and agony. To add to the horrors, the long dry grass on the plain caught fire and the British wounded who lay there were burned to death. But every French attack was beaten off and two hours before dawn on July 29, a weary, hungry, but still-standing little British army waited for fresh attacks that never came. The French, under cover of darkness, had slipped away. Talavera had no strategic results, but in the actual fighting, 16,000 British troops with 36 guns had met and defeated 26,000 French veterans with 80 guns. The British lost 5,000 men to the French 7,000, and Lt. Gen. Arthur Wellesley became Viscount of Wellington.

"(Our army) is composed of the scum of the earth
—the mere scum of the earth."

—*Duke of Wellington to Earl of Stanhope, 1831.*



NOTES

1. Kalem, p. 236.
2. Porter, p. 249.
3. O'Neill, p. 35.
4. Akenson, p. 75.
5. Bogard, p. 376.
6. Bogard, p. 389.
7. Gelb, p. 885.
8. Josephson, p. 88.
9. Shaeffer, p. 239.
10. O'Neill, p. 30.
11. McConnell, p. 25.
12. Rutherford, p. 64.

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STUDENT ACTIVITIES

HONOR, VIRTUE AND THE DUEL

"He'll apologize to me— more than that, he'll come back here this very evening and apologize publicly to my daughter, or else he meets me in the morning! By God, I'll face him at ten paces or across a handkerchief! I'll put a bullet through him, so help me, Christ."

—Con, *A Touch of the Poet*

When Major Melody in *A Touch of the Poet* threatens to duel with the elder Mr. Harford over an insult to the Melody family's honor, he is acting in accord with a long and aristocratic tradition. The duel...was first introduced in 501 AD by Gundobad, King of the Burgundians. By the 1100s, dueling had become an important legal tool. Until 1600, in many parts of Western Europe, the duel took the place of a court of law in deciding disputes involving property ownership, robbery, murder and other crimes. [from *Arena Stage A Touch of the Poet* study guide p.34]

THE DUEL

The Duel was a private judiciary fight between two persons; a trial resolved by battle, prearranged and fought with deadly weapons usually in the presence of two witnesses (called seconds), having for its object to decide a personal quarrel or to settle a point of honor. The original way of fighting to defend that place was brute force and endurance. Then it was replaced by the rapier and blades, including daggers. It then evolved to pistols. However, any weapon could be used because the person challenged selected the weapon of his choice.

HONOR

Honor is personal repute, esteem, high respect, or a person's good name. A person is deemed honorable if they have strict allegiance to what is due or right. These seemingly incontestable standards of what was right were applicable only within the context of some prevailing conventional thinking or fashionable standard of conduct.

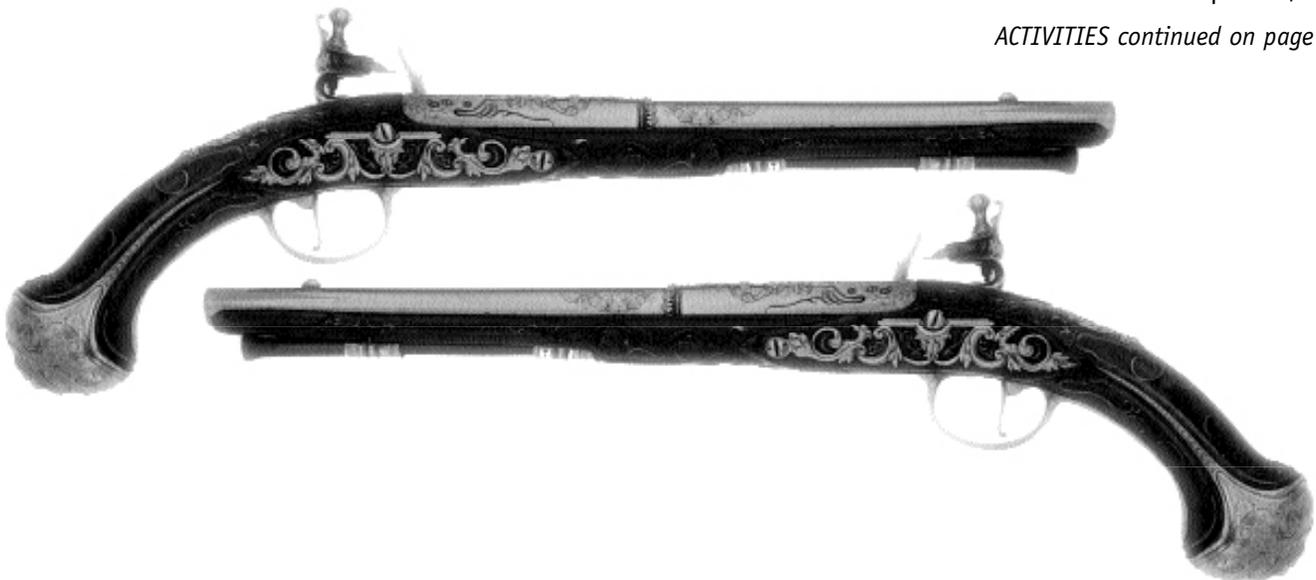
Virtue is not something you have, it is something you do. Virtue exists only in action. Honor is the widespread recognition of virtuous action—not a virtuous self.

Many people do not think of themselves as having an independent "self"; behavior and belonging to a group mean everything. It was believed that each person had a place in the social order. Honor is the recognition of that place. If you allow someone to publicly state or imply by their actions that you are of a lower place, everyone will treat you as such.

QUESTIONS

1. How hard is it to be an individual, an independent thinker? What are the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a group?
2. What if the group to which you belong does something that you do not think honorable? Can you protest?
3. Do you think of honor as defined by yourself, by another person, or

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by a group? Is honor ever more important than life itself? If so when? Can you think of another way other than battle to defend your honor?

4. Are honor and respect permanently linked? Might you be respected within a certain group because you are honorable according to the code of that group, but not respected outside of that group? What about "honor among thieves?" What could that phrase mean?

ACTIVITIES

Set up a situation with conflicting codes of honor. The duel is a verbal one; the object of the duel is to persuade your opponent to accept your point of honor.

Example:

1. One group believes that holding the door for a female is a virtuous action. The other believes that both sexes are equal so this is not necessary.
2. One group believes that cheating on a test is dishonorable. The other group believes that success is the most important issue.
3. Pacifist group versus soldiers on the subject of killing.
4. One person believes in "ratting" on his/her friends is dishonorable. The other feels it is dishonorable to lie.

This discussion could be carried over into such subjects as:

- Gang activity.
 - Professional groups (the police or the American Medical Association protecting their own when members of the group have committed a crime)
 - Members of Congress attacking one another but refusing to enact laws that might prevent a problem or make an activity illegal
5. After finishing this activity dis-

cuss codes of honor again. Does honor (virtuous action) exist only in a certain context?

6. Does might make right or does it corrupt?

STATUS

Position or standing in society, in a profession and the like. The legal definition of status: the legal standing or position of a person as determined by his/her membership in some class of persons legally enjoying certain rights or subject to certain limitations; condition and respect, e.g., of liberty or servitude, or marriage or celibacy, infancy or majority. From the Oxford English Dictionary.)

STATUS CARD GAME

Materials Needed: A deck of cards

Choose five students and have them stand in a line in front of the class. Each student receives a pre-chosen card. Do not let the student see his/her own card; students must place the card face out on their foreheads and hold it there, or you can tape it to their back with masking tape. Explain that the cards' ranking is equal to the students' status in relation to the other students. For instance, a student possessing a queen would be very important, but a king or an ace would be even more so, and a two would be the lowest status.

Set up the situation by giving students a "where" such as a party, a club, a school football game, anywhere that students would gather. They must determine their status based on how other students treat them in this "where." Students are to treat each other as the cards dictate. Because the students cannot see their own cards, they must behave in the position that their peers treat them. After the "improv" has gone on for awhile ask the students to line up, from high to low,

in the order they think they best fit. Discuss how it feels to be treated well/badly by your peers. What are the traits of high and low status? How about those in the middle?

VARIATION For a variation, the student volunteers can be given cards as described above, but each student may only look at his/her own card and no one else may see it. The improvisation is set up in the same way, but the audience must try and guess who belongs where. It will also be interesting to see two high or two low status students compete for position since they will have no idea if they have the highest or lowest card distributed. This makes it clear what choices people make when they believe themselves to have high or low status.

DISCUSSION Discuss what makes a person powerful—internal or external values? In what ways do we judge ourselves? How and where does our status shift during the day?

Compare the characters of Nora and Sara. What do they value? How are they alike; how do they differ?

What motivates Cornelius Melody? Why did he leave Ireland? Why doesn't he fit in in his adopted country?

Describe the change in Con at the end of the play. What happens to elicit this change?

What is the symbolism behind the shooting of the mare? What does she represent?

Why is Sara upset with her father at the beginning of the play and why is she upset with her father at the end of the play? ■

GLOSSARY

acrimony rudeness, unpleasantness, wrath, anger
allusion mention, implication, indirect reference
ancillary supplemental, additional, subordinate
articulation utterance, speech
avant-garde new, original or even experimental
canto a major division in a long poem
cooper a person who makes barrels or casks
decadent decayed
deplorable unfortunate, dire, distressing
enmity malice, hatred, loathing, animosity
exile banishment, exclusion, ostracism
idolater worshiper of idols, zealot
invectives criticism, abuse

liaison relationship, personal business, romance
libertarian advocating a theory of free will—
embodying the principles of liberty
medium the means, the way, the approach
melodrama drama of good versus evil where the
good always wins. *Star Wars* is melodramatic.
misanthropy distrust of human nature
ostracized exiled, banished
pretentious pompous, inflated, showy
prodigious huge, immense, gigantic
riff-raff low-class people, scum, rabble
voluptuous indulgent, extravagant, luxurious



Denver Center Theatre Company

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director
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Inside Out is intended for students
and teachers but may be enjoyed
by audiences of all ages.

Sally Gass
Contributing Writer

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