

Fog and the foghorn  
in long day's journey  
into night



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1. Introduction Fog appears in many of Eugene O'Neill's works. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill uses not only fog but the foghorn as symbol. This paper will analyze the function of the fog and the foghorn in the play, with particular attention to Mary Tyrone. By the help of secondary literature I will emphasize the parallels first between Mary and the fog and then between Mary and the foghorn. Finally, I intend to find out which of the two symbols refers most directly to Mary and serves as a parallel to her mental state.

2. The Fog and the Foghorn

1 Mary and the Fog The first time the motif of the fog appears is when Mary talks to her husband shortly after her return from the sanatorium: "Thank heavens, the fog is gone," she says. (O'Neill 17)

Because of Mary's past, the statement seems to present a weak flicker of hope that she will "resist the temptation this time" and come to grips with her morphine addiction. (Tiusanen 285) Already at this point one can draw a connection between Mary's morphine addiction and the motif of the fog.

(Scheibler 131) Mary returns from the sanatorium and the sun is shining (cf. O'Neill 10), which lets one hope that everything is fine. Later on, when Mary loses control over her addiction, the fog becomes thicker, and by the end of the play darkness is pervasive. (cf. Falk 181) Mary's conversation with

Cathleen also underlines the connection between Mary's mental state and the fog. Mary does not listen to Cathleen at all, instead waxing lyrical about the past and speaking only of the fog: "It wasn't the fog I minded,

Cathleen," she says. "I really love the fog. [...] It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more." (O'Neill 123)

According to the stage direction, Mary says these words in a dreamy way

(O'Neill 113); the fog seems for her a way out of reality. Mary likes the idea  
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of being hidden and protected by the fog. The fog helps her escape into the past and to dream about being a nun or a concert pianist. Mary calls herself “ a pious girl” and points out her permanent longing for a “ respectable home.” (111) She indirectly blames her husband for her situation and unfulfilled dreams: “ I might have gone – if I hadn’t fallen in love with Mr Tyrone. Or I might have become a nun. I had two dreams. To be a nun that was the more beautiful one. To become a concert pianist that was the other.” (113) There are no fulfilled dreams in Mary’s life; she lives with regret and in loneliness, and longs for a real home, a place where someone is “ never lonely” (Bogard 428). She tells Edmund: “ In a real home one is never alone. You forget I know from experience what a home is like.” (O’Neill 80) Scheibler argues that there exists a close connection between the fog and Mary’s morphine addiction. “ For Mary [the fog] is the realm of the imagination, of her narcotic dreams,” Schiebler writes, while “ the drugs kill the senses until she can only dimly discern the objects of reality.” (131) Edmund recognizes this connection as well: “ The hardest thing to take is the blank wall she builds around her,” he says, referring to when Mary takes her morphine and retreats into her dreams. “ Or it’s more like a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself.” (154) Scheibler’s idea that “ even the harmless questions and observations can penetrate the wall of fog around her and destroy the illusion” confirms the appropriate use of the fog as a symbol. Fog hides you in only a superficial way from the outside world. Although one cannot look through fog, fog consists only of water and is therefore no real barrier. Why then does Edmund talk about “ the hardest thing [...] the blank wall” (O’Neill 120)? Naturally, one would expect that such a superficial “ wall” should be easy to break down, especially for family

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members. In this case, however, it seems impossible for the family members to truly connect with Mary and help her; the entire family suffers from isolation and a lack of communication. According to Bogard, “ the fog becomes the physical evidence of the isolation of the Tyrones.”

(425 )Furthermore, Bogard calls Mary’s isolation “ both her need and her terror.” (428) This conflict develops into a vicious circle: on the one hand Mary says that she likes the fog, since it hides her; on the other hand she longs for love and a home. She isolates herself, thereby losing contact with real life and with her family. Mary’s dream “ to escape into a lonely world – into the convent where she could be sustained by a vision and live a simple, virginal existence” suggests that she has always tried to flee from guilt and from her problems. (ibid) As Bogard realizes, Mary’s childhood was anything but perfect and protected; her father was also a drinker, and Mary’s desire to find a salvaged home has never been satisfied. (ibid) 2. 2 Mary and the

FoghornThe sense of security the fog gives Mary helps to explain the contrasting meaning of the foghorn. In the beginning of the play, Mary says: “ I do feel out of sort this morning. I wasn’t able to get much sleep with that awful foghorn going all night long.” (O’Neill 17) She continues: “ it’s the foghorn I hate. It won’t let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back.” (85) These words make clear that, in Scheibler’s words, “ the foghorn disturbs the security and peace [Mary] feels in her dreams and [...] does not let her escape from reality.” (Scheibler

137)Scheibler goes on to argue that the foghorn is evidence that Mary is not as protected as she would like to be in the fog and that her superficial “ walls” are not completely impermeable. There is therefore a positive side to the foghorn; it offers hope that Mary will return to reality. That she hates the  
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foghorn, however, shows she does not want to do so. According to Scheibler, the foghorn can also be seen as a symbol of Mary's pain. Scheibler draws a connection between Mary's moaning and the constant moaning of the foghorn. (138) James Tyrone calls the foghorn " a sick whale in the backyard," (O'Neill 17) and later in the play one finds a description of the foghorn in the stage directions, which picks up on the idea of the " mourning whale" (105). The foghorn is not only a sound that should remind Mary of reality and the outside world, but one that seems to express her inner turmoil and sense of brokenness. 3. ConclusionAs we have seen, the functions of the fog and the foghorn are indisputably contrary; whereas the fog offers Mary, at least momentarily, a chance to escape into her past and dreams, where she feels safe, the foghorn tries to pull her out of her superficial harmony, which is itself just a façade. The foghorn seems at times the last best hope for Mary to return to reality, but in the end the fog wins out. The foghorn goes unheard. 1398 words

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