

From Eugene O'Neil, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, written in 1939, set in 1912

EDMUND [23 year-old son, expelled from college, voyaging, homeless]. Or be so drunk you can forget. [*He recites, and recites well, with bitter, ironical passion, the Symons' translation of Baudelaire's prose poem.*] "Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually.

Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken.

And if sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch, or in the dreary solitude of your own room, you should awaken and the drunkenness be half or wholly slipped away from you, ask of the wind, or of the wave, or of the star, or of the bird, or of the clock, of whatever flies, or sighs, or rocks, or sings, or speaks, ask what hour it is; and the wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: 'It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will.'" [*He grins at his father provocatively*]

TYRONE [father, 65, Shakespearean actor]. I wouldn't worry about the virtue part of it, if I were you. [*then disgustedly*] Pah! It's morbid nonsense! What little truth is in it you'll find nobly said in Shakespeare. [*Then appreciatively*] But you recited it well, lad. Who wrote it?

EDMUND. Baudelaire.

TYRONE. Never heard of him

EDMUND. [*grins provocatively*] He also wrote a poem about Jamie and the Great White Way.

TYRONE. That loafer! I hope to God he misses the last car and has to stay uptown!

EDMUND. [*goes on, ignoring this*] Although he was French and never saw Broadway and died before Jamie was born. He knew him and Little Old New York just the same. [*He recites the Symons' translation of Baudelaire's "Epilogue"*]

"With heart at rest I climbed the citadel's
Steep height, and saw the city as from a tower,
Hospital, brothel, prison, and such hells,

Where evil comes up softly like a flower.
Thou knowest, O Satan, patron of my pain,
Not for vain tears I went up at that hour;

But like an old sad faithful lecher, fain
To drink delight of that enormous troll
Whose hellish beauty makes me young again.

Whether thou sleep, with heavy vapours fall,
Sodden with day, or, new apparelled, stand
In gold-laced veils of evening beautiful,

I love thee, infamous city! Harlots and
Hunted have pleasures of their own to give,
The vulgar herd can never understand."

TYRONE. [*with irritable disgust*] Morbid filth! Where the hell do you get your taste in literature? Filth and despair and pessimism! Another atheist, I suppose. When you deny God, you deny hope. That's the trouble with you. If you'd get down on your knees –

EDMUND. [*as if he hadn't heard*] It's a good likeness of Jamie, don't you think, hunted by himself and whiskey, hiding in a Broadway hotel room with some fat tart — he likes them fat — reciting Dowson's Cynara to her. [*He recites derisively, but with deep feeling.*]

“All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.”

[*Jeeringly*] And the poor fat burlesque queen doesn't get a word of it, but suspects she's being insulted! And Jamie never loved any Cynara, and was never faithful to a woman in his life, even in his fashion! But he lies there, kidding himself he is superior, and enjoys pleasures “the vulgar herd can never understand”! [*He laughs*] It's nuts — completely nuts!

TYRONE. [*vaguely -- his voice thick*] It's madness, yes. If you'd get on your knees and pray. When you deny God, you deny sanity.

EDMUND. [*ignoring this*] But who am I to feel superior? I've done the same damned thing. And it's no more crazy than Dowson himself, inspired by an absinthe hangover, writing it to a dumb barmaid, who thought he was a poor crazy souse, and gave him the gate to marry a waiter! [*He laughs -- then soberly, with genuine sympathy*] Poor Dowson. Booze and consumption got him. [*He starts and for a second looks miserable and frightened. Then with defensive irony*] Perhaps it would be tactful of me to change the subject.

TYRONE. [*thickly*] Where you get your taste in authors — That damned library of yours! [*He indicates a small bookcase at rear*] Voltaire, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen! Atheists, fools, and madmen! And your poets! This Dowson, and this Baudelaire, and Swinburne and Oscar Wilde and Whitman and Poe! Whoremongers and degenerates! Pah! When I've three good sets of Shakespeare there [*he nods at the large bookcase*] you could read.

EDMUND. They say he was a souse, too.

TYRONE. They lie! I don't doubt he liked his glass — it's a good man's failing — but he knew how to drink so it didn't poison his brain with morbidity and filth. Don't compare him with the pack you've got in there. [*he indicates the small bookcase again*] Your dirty Zola! And your Dante Gabriel Rossetti who was a dope fiend! [*He starts and looks guilty*]

Note: just before this, same scene, beginning of Act 4.

EDMUND: To hell with sense! We're all crazy. What do we want with sense?

[He quotes from Ernest Dowson sardonically.]

9. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* 4.1.1 56—58.

1. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), French poet. Arthur Symons (1865-1945), English poet and literary critic.

"They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
Love and desire and hate:
I think they have no portion in us after
We pass the gate.
They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream."

[staring before him] The fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here. Or any of the other places down the avenue. I couldn't see but a few feet ahead. I didn't meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted—to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself.