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Dear Friend,

Hughie is a deceptively simple play. With two characters and a single setting, the play is intimate. In a short period of time, Eugene O’Neill manages to turn two nobodies in a late-night hotel lobby into sympathetic characters. As in all of his plays, O’Neill makes us question how our own lives are shaped by the people we meet.

When undertaking O’Neill, the devil is in the details. The playwright conveys one layer of the story, the private worlds of the Night Clerk and Erie Smith, solely through stage directions. Director Doug Hughes has taken on the formidable task of making these secret worlds just as palpable as the stage the two men share.

In this issue of Asides, we have included an interview with two of our talented artists, Broadway veteran Hughes and star of stage and screen Richard Schiff. Also within this issue, Yvonne Shafer, a member of the Eugene O’Neill Society, discusses O’Neill’s creative process, as well as Hughie’s unique place within his body of work.

Please continue to visit Asides Online (Asides.ShakespeareTheatre.org) for more information about the play and production. I hope to see you in the theatre.

Warm regards,

Michael Kahn
Artistic Director
Shakespeare Theatre Company

Hughie is generously sponsored by Michael R. Klein and Joan I. Fabry.

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Richard Schiff and Doug Hughes are busy men. Schiff (Emmy Award® winner for his work on The West Wing) just performed on Broadway in Glengarry Glen Ross with Al Pacino. Hughes (Tony Award® winner for Doubt) recently finished directing An Enemy of the People at Manhattan Theatre Club and is set to tackle The Big Knife at Roundabout Theatre Company this spring. In between, they have teamed up for the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s production of Eugene O’Neill’s Hughie. STC sat down with them to hear about the birth of this passion project.

Shakespeare Theatre Company: How did this production come about?

Richard Schiff: Last year I was asked to be part of Will on the Hill [an annual STC benefit featuring members of Congress and Washington VIPs performing a mock-Shakespearean play]. It was the cutest I’ve ever seen politicians. Some of them went full hog with the acting, and others were nervous and shy. It was adorable. Afterward I was standing outside Sidney Harman Hall, and I noticed the poster for [O’Neill’s] Strange Interlude. I was talking to [STC Managing Director] Chris Jennings, looking at this poster, and I mentioned how I’ve always been fascinated by Hughie. That’s how it started. I knew Doug, and I immediately thought of him.

STC: Doug, you’ve worked at STC before—

Doug Hughes: I did a production at STC of The Little Foxes with Elizabeth Ashley a decade ago. It was a wonderful experience. Hughie has been on my list for a while. I had heard about Michael’s remarkable production of Strange Interlude, and I’ve always been fascinated by the plays of O’Neill other than Long Day’s Journey Into Night or A Moon for the Misbegotten. I also think that the Lansburgh Theatre is perfectly sized for Hughie. Neil Patel, whom I’ve worked with for a long time, is designing the set.

RS: Neil also designed for In Treatment on HBO, which is a show that I directed.

DH: That’s right! With Gabriel [Byrne].
STC: Doug, you directed Gabriel in O’Neill’s *A Touch of the Poet* [at Roundabout in 2005].

DH: Yes, he was a great Con Melody. These late plays by O’Neill share persistent themes: they’re all about the human being’s inability to face the facts about their lives, and all the remarkable, destructive, funny things they do to avoid getting hip to themselves. *Hughie* is another beautiful example of O’Neill’s clear-eyed genius.

STC: Richard, what drew you to the role of “Erie” Smith?

RS: There’s something very heartbreaking and poetic about Erie Smith. I think we all live in pipe dreams sometimes in varying degrees. I’m interested in exploring his solitude, that way we feel when we end up in this place and just want to connect. Here’s a guy who is bereft of connection—of love, really. His one love affair in life was with Hughie. It’s tough for him to admit. That’s why he’s always saying, “You know, we weren’t really pals,” but he really loved him. Hughie was the one person in his life who gave him a sense of importance or relevance, and now he’s just lost. I think that’s why it touches us.

STC: It’s one of those roles that an actor dreams about.

RS: Or has nightmares about, depending on where you are in the rehearsal process. [Laughter] We’re in New York right now. Working on Broadway and walking to Doug’s office, we’re in the neighborhood that O’Neill was writing about, in the theatre district. You ride the subway and you see all these faces fixed, looking forward, no fluidity in them. They could be sculpted, they’re frozen in their moment. I
look at this play as a Rembrandt. It captures so vividly these people. There is blood flowing through their veins. They’re alive. Their story is all there in the eyes. This play is a beautiful little portrait, of this guy that we would never notice otherwise.

DH: This is one of the great features of this play, this intense scrutiny of what is ordinarily ignored. After completing *Long Day’s Journey*, O’Neill mapped out an entire cycle of plays. The collective title for them was going to be *By Way of Obit*, and in each one you were going to meet someone who was recently bereft of somebody crucial in their lives. They were all going to be two-handers. In *Hughie*, Randall Newsome, whom I’ve worked with a great deal on Broadway, is playing Charlie Hughes, the “replacement” night clerk for Hughie. You learn about Hughie, the deceased in the play, you learn about Charlie, a stranger to the protagonist, and you certainly learn about Erie, the aggrieved one. And what a beautiful notion that was, and what a shame that this is the only one that O’Neill did not destroy.

STC: Hughie is famous for its stage directions, how beautiful and detailed they are—

DH: That they are. You know, O’Neill was known for his stage directions, but in this play they go beyond adjectives and adverbs and become a marvelous part of the composition. At the moment, we are thinking of treating the audience to some of this special knowledge that O’Neill discloses to the reader. I’m interested in using fluid imagery. There’s a way in which O’Neill expands time in the play in order to look at things from a variety of angles. In the second volume of Louis Sheaffer’s terrific biography, *Eugene O’Neill: Son and Artist*, O’Neill said to [critic] George Jean Nathan that he dreamed of a form of theatre that could incorporate all of these elements—the voice that one hears in the stage directions, the images that haunt these men.

RS: He was the forerunner of the Annie Hall moment on the balcony, with all the subtitles.

STC: Richard, when we announced this show, we got countless emails and phone calls. You are a demigod in Washington, for your role as Toby Ziegler on *The West Wing*.

RS: I am Elvis.

STC: Do you have a favorite Washington story?

RS: I was at a cocktail party one year, after the Correspondents’ Dinner. I looked over and there was General Alexander Haig, just staring at me from across the room. He has this old soldier’s gait, and he walks up to me in a straight line. We were eye to eye, nose to nose. And he took his fist, pointed at my face and said, “I find your show eerie.” And I just said, “Thank you, General.” I never quite figured out what he meant.

STC: That’s perfect for *Hughie*, because you’re playing Erie in the show.

RS: There you go. I didn’t think of that. Speaking of which, I gotta go, because I gotta go down to the track and make some bets.
In a letter to his friend and founder of the Theatre Guild Lawrence Langner, Eugene O’Neill said that there were moments in *The Iceman Cometh* “that suddenly strip the secret soul of a man stark naked...with an understanding compassion which sees him as a victim of the ironies of life and of himself.” That, in fact, is an apt description of many of O’Neill’s plays, and very definitely of *Hughie*. In this short but powerful play, we see Erie, “the Broadway sport,” discarding all of his pretensions, his would-be glamour, and revealing himself to a total stranger as a broken-down, impecunious, friendless, lonely man.

Written just after *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, when O’Neill was at the top of his powers, *Hughie* was completed in 1941. O’Neill intended it as a part of a cycle of one-act plays with the overall title of *By Way of Obit*. Writing to his close friend and critic George Jean Nathan, O’Neill explained his idea. The main character in each play talks about a person who has died to a person who does almost nothing but listen. “Via this monologue you get a complete picture of the person who died—his or her whole life story—but just as complete a picture of the life and character of the narrator.” Through the information in the stage directions, the audience would gain insight into the whole life of the person listening.

O’Neill completed only *Hughie*; he destroyed the notes and drafts of the other plays. The play was first performed in Sweden in 1958, at a gala premiere with King Gustaf and Queen
Louise in the audience. The role of Erie was played (in Swedish) by the notable Swedish actor Bengt Eklund. The audience responded with extensive cheers and stamping of feet in approbation. Hughie was next produced in England with Burgess Meredith in the role of Erie. It was first performed in America in 1964 with the actor most frequently associated with O'Neill, Jason Robards; subsequent productions have included actors Ben Gazzara, Al Pacino and Brian Dennehy. Looking at the play closely we can appreciate the playwriting techniques which O'Neill had so carefully developed as well as the themes he used in this and other plays.

Early in his career O'Neill was fascinated by German Expressionism. He saw and admired The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, and he learned German in order to be able to read Expressionist plays in German. The aim of the German playwrights was to move beyond surface realism, delving into the recesses of a character’s mind. One of the techniques often used was the monologue, which O'Neill used in his 1916 play Before Breakfast. A wife is onstage speaking to her husband who is offstage attempting to shave. Through her harangue, her secretive drinking and her self-pity we learn the details of their marriage, not just her life, but that of her husband, a sensitive would-be poet. Only the wife speaks and we see nothing of the husband except his pale, shaking hand as he reaches out for a bowl of hot water. (O'Neill hated acting but he nevertheless performed this part.) Gradually, we see the wife not only as a jealous shrew, but as the victim of their misalliance and her own ignorance and provincialism. This is O'Neill’s only play which is totally a monologue, but even as he moved away from Expressionism he continued to use some Expressionistic techniques, particularly in long speeches which function as monologues although briefly interrupted by words of others.

In Hughie, O'Neill set himself and the actor who plays Erie quite a challenge: the writer had to maintain audience interest in what is essentially about an hour-long monologue. There are an amazing number of lines for Erie. Robards, when interviewed, said he had difficulty learning them because there were only ten or twelve rehearsals before the premiere. In the usual realistic play the actor is responding to lines from other characters; here the only other character, the night clerk, responds little, lost in his own morose thoughts. Because Erie has few prompts to move him along in his lengthy revelations, he has to turn into himself to find the momentum to keep talking and avoid going alone to his hotel room. Moving through his memories of his own life and of the deceased Hughie, the hotel clerk who gave him what he needed, Erie tries to make a contact and find an audience in the new night clerk.

O’Neill also realized the difficulties set up by the thoughts of the night clerk, which are indicated in the novelistic stage directions, filled with the internal thoughts of the characters. How are these to be communicated to the audience? O’Neill indicated that he would leave that up to future directors, who he suggested would use media such as films and technical developments in sound. Somehow the audience must be made aware of these dark thoughts of the night clerk, which include the wish that the entire city be burned down to the ground. Meanwhile Erie attempts to make some kind of connection with another human being, however dismal or primitive it may be.
A discussion of O’Neill’s technique must include his use of sound, a major element in his plays. In many, the use of music (often of popular songs precisely of the period in which the play is set) adds to the play’s appeal, but the sound outside the stage space and its significance to the characters is also a continuing and important element. One remembers the foghorn in *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, and the disturbing sound of Mary’s footsteps upstairs while the men talk and drink and try to ignore it. In the last act of *The Iceman Cometh*, the audience suffers the long wait with Larry Slade until we hear the sound of Parrit’s body hitting the ground.

In *Hughie* the sound functions in two ways. For the night clerk, it tells him how much longer he has to suffer until his shift ends. He has been a night clerk so long that he can tell the time by the various activities, the tap of the police man’s bat on the fences as he walks his beat, the banging of the garbage cans (“I’d bang those cans louder than they do! I’d wake up the whole damned city!”), and the passage of the elevated trains. For Erie, who has contempt for “the sticks,” these city sounds are the soundtrack of his urban world. O’Neill created a microcosm which suggests the continual noisy activity of the Broadway macrocosm.

O’Neill’s work frequently explores the theme of, and need for, communication. In *Hughie*, Erie has tried to evade sorrow and loneliness following the death of the former night clerk, Hughie, by going on a five-day drunk. In the course of the play he tries to draw the new night clerk into some relationship. At various moments, he tries conversation, he starts to leave, he is sarcastic, he tosses the key to the room in his hand. He desperately seeks to establish some kinship, some felt communication, some human warmth. Much of O’Neill’s writing is permeated by the idea of pipe dreams, illusions through which people manage to put off total despair or even suicide to escape what Erie calls “the whole goddamned racket. I mean life.” For Erie, the dreams are all meaningless, because he claims he “ain’t no sap.” Yet, reminiscing fondly about telling his tall tales of big wins and beautiful dolls to Hughie,
he says, “And, d’you know, it done me good, too, in a way. Sure I’d get to seein’ myself like he seen me. Some nights I’d come back here without a buck, feeling lower than a snake’s belly, and first thing you know I’d be lousy with jack, bettin’ a grand a race.”

Some critics and scholars have dismissed Hughie as a minor work, too short and perhaps unworthy of the actors who have chosen to perform it. The record shows, however, that audiences have responded fervently to the play. From the first response in Sweden to that of the audience in Stratford, Canada, with Dennehy, the thrill has been there. Jason Robards performed it with Jack Dodson for more than 30 years in touring commercial productions and at fundraising events. As he said during my interview with him, “O’Neill wrote it...and you can’t go wrong with him.”

Dr. Yvonne Shafer has taught at many universities in the U.S. as well as China, Germany and Brussels, where she had a Fulbright Fellowship. Her 12 books include studies of American Women Playwrights, Ibsen and August Wilson. She recently published Eugene O’Neill and American Society. She often performs “Eugene O’Neill on Stage” in this country and abroad.
Eugene O’Neill’s New York
Wander the streets with America’s greatest playwright
by Theresa J. Beckhusen

People familiar with Eugene O’Neill’s work know his plays combine autobiographical detail with fiction. New York City crops up often as a backdrop, if not as a character itself in some of those works, and O’Neill drew on his own experiences in New York to invigorate the worlds in which his characters lived. He did not identify a particular hotel as the setting for Hughie, but it serves as a composite reflection all the down-and-out way stations populating O’Neill’s city. Below, you can explore some of his New York City.

**Unidentified Hotel**
Side Street, Midtown

[It is] one of those hotels, built in the decade 1900-1910 on the side streets of the Great White Way sector, which began as respectable second class but soon were forced to deteriorate in order to survive. Following the First World War and Prohibition, it had given up all pretense of respectability, and now is anything a paying guest wants it to be, a third class dump, catering to the catch-as-catch-can trade.

Hotels, like the one described above in Hughie, not only bookend Eugene O’Neill’s life, they practically define it. O’Neill used the dramatic possibilities of hotels and New York to frame the new America he put onstage: rougher, more violent, embittered, caustic, alive.

**Golden Swan Café, a.k.a., Hell Hole**
West 4th Street and Sixth Avenue

Near Provincetown Playhouse and situated in a three-story brick building from the 19th century, the Golden Swan, or “Hell Hole,” played host to a variety of New York intellectuals, including O’Neill. Between bouts of drinking and discussions with the owner—a former prizefighter—O’Neill met his future second wife, Agnes Boulton, in 1917.

**Jimmy-the-Priest’s**
242 Fulton Street (at Church Street)

O’Neill modeled the saloon in The Iceman Cometh after Jimmy-the-Priest’s, a dive populated by wayfarers, winos and more downtrodden drifters. O’Neill’s description in the play is exacting in its roll call of slovenliness:

Two windows, so glazed with grime one cannot see through them, are in the left wall looking out on a backyard. The walls and ceiling once were white, but it was a long time ago, and they are now so splotched, peeled, stained and dusty that their color can best be described as dirty.

In the early 1960s, Jimmy-the-Priest’s was razed to make way for the World Trade Center. Anna Christie features Johnny-the-Priest’s, a bar with a strikingly similar name.
Theresa J. Beckhusen is STC's Artistic Fellow and graduated summa cum laude from Susquehanna University with a dual degree in theatre and creative writing.
And the CLERK’s mind is now suddenly impervious to the threat of Night and Silence as it pursues an ideal of fame and glory within itself called Arnold Rothstein...

In Hughie, one word pierces the fog of the Night Clerk’s boredom: gambling. “I beg your pardon, Mr. Erie,” he says, “do you, by any chance, know the Big Shot, Arnold Rothstein?” Suddenly another world opens up before him, a world beyond the gritty, sordid hotel lobby. The real Times Square, just a few blocks away, was the realm of gangsters and showgirls, of high stakes and large bankrolls: the irresistible underworld of New York City in the 1920s. Here, men mastered their destiny and no obstacle—police, law, or rival—stood in their way. It may have been the moral underbelly of the city, but to these men, it was the top of the world. And Arnold Rothstein was at the center of it all.

By the time Prohibition became law, Arnold Rothstein was already notorious as a gambler in New York. He had entered the realm of legend when he was rumored to have fixed the 1919 World Series and grossed a huge sum off insider bets. In typical Rothstein fashion, he ducked the blame in the scandal and still had the nerve to act insulted when he was accused of being involved. Having built his empire on fixed horse races, card games and a Manhattan gambling house, he set his sights on the illegal liquor trade as well. Bootlegging and bribery, rum-running and racketeering, narcotics, loan-sharking, fencing stolen property and cheating on everything from boxing to cards—not to mention of course, murder—Rothstein had a hand in every crime and cash pot in New York. Nicknamed “The Brain” for his incredible intellect and well-heeled demeanor, he built a web of contacts from the top to the bottom, bridging ethnic gangs, politicians and legitimate businessmen.

Rothstein famously used Lindy’s Restaurant in Times Square as an office, taking calls and messages and holding business meetings at his customary table, just a few blocks from Erie’s seedy hotel. Abe Scher, Lindy’s nighttime cashier, described Rothstein’s routine. For the full effect, it’s best to read this aloud:
Every night he comes here. Regular as clockwork he comes here. Sunday night, Monday night, any night. Everybody knows that. Like always, there are some people waiting for him. They are waiting near his table, the same one where he is always sitting...All day and night, they are telephoning for him here. It ain’t that Mr. Lindy likes the idea, but what can he do? An important man like Mr. Rothstein, you do not offend. So like I am saying, he comes in and goes to his table. He is saying ‘hello’ to people and they are saying ‘hello’ to him. Some fellows, they go to his table and they are talking confidential to him. You know, they are talking into his ear...Did he give anyone money? Who knows? Mr. Rothstein you see, but you do not watch...

Sounds like a gangster movie, doesn’t it? In fact, Mr. Scher’s statement is from an actual police report. Arnold Rothstein lived in a real world populated by legends, any of whom might be seen at a nearby table on any given night: Nick the Greek, the famous gambler; Jack Dempsey, heavyweight champion; “Legs” Diamond, a bootlegger and bodyguard; “Titanic” Thompson, so named for the rumor that he survived the sinking of the famous ship; Broadway’s Fanny Brice, of Funny Girl, and her husband Nicky Arnstein, Rothstein’s protégé; and Charles “Lucky” Luciano, who would father the modern mafia, reorganizing New York into five crime families. Luciano says it was Rothstein who dragged him to a department store and taught him the importance of an impeccable suit, the trademark of mafia bosses for generations afterward. These faces blended with countless more thugs, gamblers and showgirls, creating a social landscape whose truth was more incredible than anything the Night Clerk could dream up.

In August 1928, when Hughie takes place, New York City stood unwittingly at a precipice. That November, the untouchable Arnold Rothstein would be shot and killed by rival gamblers for not paying his debts, inciting upheaval in his illicit society and a massive scandal in the city. Less than a year later, the great Wall Street crash upended the economy and signaled the start of the Great Depression. But even as the underworld unraveled and Americans struggled to survive, the gangster life never lost its romance. Even now, Arnold Rothstein and his supporting cast fire our imaginations. Rothstein was the basis for the character of Nathan Detroit in Guys and Dolls, while his cohort “Titanic” Thompson was the model for Sky Masterson. Rothstein also appears in Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby as the gangster Meyer Wolfsheim. In the more recent HBO series Boardwalk Empire, Michael Stuhlbarg’s Rothstein is a recurring character, warring with Atlantic City’s Nucky Thompson, played by Steve Buscemi.

Complete freedom and complete power. In the blazing chaos of the Jazz Age, these men created a new world order, where thugs were as influential as judges, and criminals had a code of conduct and respect more sacrosanct than the clergy. Erie describes how Hughie thirsted for stories about the mobsters, imagining Erie among the bosses. The stories keep both of them going. The Big Shots, as Erie calls them, had the guts to change their circumstances—while O’Neill’s characters can only yearn and pretend.

Laura Henry Buda started as STC’s Education Coordinator in April and was STC’s 2011–2012 Artistic Fellow. She holds an MFA in dramaturgy from the A.R.T./M.X.A.T. Institute at Harvard University.
Play in Process

Hughie CAST

RICHARD SCHIFF*
“ERIE” SMITH

RANDALL NEWSOME*
NIGHT CLERK

STEVE BRADY*
UNDERSTUDY

ARTISTIC TEAM

Doug Hughes
Director

Neil Patel
Set Designer

Catherine Zuber
Costume Designer

Ben Stanton
Lighting Designer

David Van Tieghem
Composer/Sound Designer

Darrel Maloney
Projection Designer

Tom Watson
Wig Designer

Binder Casting
Jay Binder, CSA/
Jack Bowdan, CSA
New York Casting

Daniel Neville-Rehbehn
Resident Casting Director

Drew Lichtenberg
Literary Associate

Hunter Bird
Assistant Director

James FitzSimmons*
Production Stage Manager

Hannah R. O’Neil*
Assistant Stage Manager

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Processional Actors and Stage Managers.

Artists subject to change.

“Erie” Smith

Night Clerk

Costume renderings by Catherine Zuber. Set model by Neil Patel.
Coming, Going and Standing Still

A look at the influence of a hotel setting on storytelling
by Hannah J. Hessel

“People come, people go. Nothing ever happens.”
Dr. Otternschlag, Grand Hotel, 1932

The lights rise on a decrepit hotel in the 1920s. If it feels like a somewhat familiar sight, you are not mistaken. Hotels have long provided a motivating background for drama. As scholar Douglas Tallack writes in his essay “‘Waiting, Waiting’: The Hotel Lobby,” lobbies contain a combination of “movement and stasis.” This tension provides an ideal background for a colorful variety of stories.

In the 1930s cinema audiences were able to indulge in many of these hotel-set stories. In fact, the number of films with credited hotel clerks in film rose from 12 in the 1920s to 151 in the following decade. A Depression-era viewing audience without means for travel could live vicariously through the comings and goings of a wide variety of characters. In the highly successful 1932 film Grand Hotel, later turned into a Broadway musical, the lobby displayed a space where anything is possible. There is irony in Dr. Otternschlag’s reflection that despite the hotel’s comings and goings “nothing ever happens.” As the New York Times film critic Mordaunt Hall reflects: “the audience has seen manslaughter, gambling, a baron bent on stealing pearls, love affairs, a business deal and various other doings.” In a hotel, a great deal can happen. Glamour and mystery enter with each opening of the large door. A new story is ready to start with each front desk check-in.

The cinema may have embraced the allure of hotel life, but theatre artists have frequently turned to the darker side of hotel storytelling. The mid-century is filled with theatrical narratives set in hotels, inns, boarding houses and, as the century came to a close, motel rooms. The stories seen onstage are not projecting a lifestyle of travel and glamour. In fact, frequently onstage we get the opposite story: one of immobility and loss.
Eugene O’Neill opens *Hughie* into this world. His opening stage direction describes the hotel as a “third class dump.” “It is one of those hotels,” he writes, “built in the decade 1900-1910 on the side streets of the Great White Way sector, which began as respectable second class but soon were forced to deteriorate in order to survive.” There will be no elegant travelers here, only those who in a time of opulence cannot afford anything better. It is a hotel for the financially stuck and it can be assumed that those who walk in are not on an upward path. The Night Clerk has been trapped in his job so long he “can tell the time by the sounds in the street.”

Tallack notes that hotels are a gateway. They provide a path between the public world of the street and the private world of the room. The lobby is the conduit but even so it is not always an active space. As he writes, “It is also a place which some people do not pass through immediately, or at all. Instead, it becomes a place of waiting, even for those in a hurry.” There is a purgatorial despair found in hotels. Though some pass through there are always people who, like Erie and O’Neill’s Night Clerk, are trapped and unable to move on, waiting for something.

The hotel is meant to be a temporary space. It is not a home. Christopher Wixon remarks while discussing the brutal hotel play *Blasted* by Sarah Kane, “The hotel is a space of profound alienation.” Within the walls of the lobby or the even more confining corners of a hotel room, characters strain to maintain their humanity. Wixon goes on to say that in American drama “temporary spaces frequently embody the social marginalization and/or alienation of its characters.”

In *Grand Hotel*, Greta Garbo historically remarked, “I want to be alone.” The hotel, divorced from the sturdiness of a home, can be open to the crashes of colliding worlds, secret romances and double dealings. It can also function as a place for profound loneliness. In *Hughie*, Erie enters, talks to the Night Clerk and exits. People come and people go. Nothing ever changes.

A short collection of hotel plays:

- **The Servant of Two Masters**, Carlo Goldoni, 1743
- **Flea in her Ear**, Georges Feydeau, 1907
- **Private Lives**, Noel Coward, 1930
- **The Night of the Iguana**, Tennessee Williams, 1961
- **The Moustrap**, Agatha Christie, 1952
- **Plaza Suite**, Neil Simon, 1971
- **Hot L Baltimore**, Lanford Wilson, 1973
- **Fool For Love**, Sam Shepard, 1984
- **Lend Me A Tenor**, Ken Ludwig, 1986
- **Grand Hotel**, Luther Davis, 1989
- **Blasted**, Sarah Kane, 1995
- **The Old Neighborhood**, David Mamet, 1997
- **Tape**, Stephen Belber, 1999
- **Now or Later**, Christopher Shinn, 2008
- **Suburban Motel**, George F. Walker, 2010
- **Sleep No More**, Punchdrunk, 2011
- **Three Hotels**, Jon Robin Baitz, 2011

Hannah J. Hessel, STC’s Audience Enrichment Manager, is in her second season at STC and holds an MFA in Dramaturgy from Columbia University.
Drew’s Desk
Thoughts, Notes and Queries from Drew Lichtenberg

Last season, the Shakespeare Theatre Company staged Eugene O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude*. As Michael Kahn wrote in his blog for *DC Theatre Scene*, “the play is concerned with some of the deepest themes in modern American life”:

In its own way, *Strange Interlude* is a story of the American dream [...] What is happiness? O’Neill never answers that question, but he does show us all the internal turmoil of the search.

As he did in *Strange Interlude*, O’Neill experiments with dramatic form in *Hughie* to focus on inner conflict, what Michael described as “the internal turmoil” of its characters’ search for happiness.

In *Hughie*, O’Neill gives Erie Smith a number of long, show-stopping monologues in which he tells sadly true stories about his dead friend Hughie—and exaggerated stories of his own gambling prowess. But what gives the role its extraordinary complexity is the manner in which O’Neill leaves Erie’s innermost thoughts unspoken, implying them artfully through his sly evasions and uncertain ellipses. At a telling instance late in the play, Erie has told another one of his customary whoppers, about his acquaintance with the famous gambler Arnold Rothstein. In a stage direction, O’Neill shows us Erie’s true nature: his fear of being caught in a lie.

He darts a quick glance at the CLERK’s face and begins to hedge warily. But he needn’t. The CLERK sees him now as the Gambler in 492, the Friend of Arnold Rothstein and nothing is incredible. ERIE goes on.

The moment is a silent play in miniature: the beginning, middle and end of an action, proceeding from uncertainty to resolution and tragic denouement.

*Hughie*’s frequent and detailed stage directions recall *Strange Interlude*’s “thought asides” and point to a presiding obsession in O’Neill’s experimentation with dramatic form. *Strange Interlude*’s “asides” and *Hughie*’s novelistic stage directions are both O’Neill’s attempts at...
creating a dramatic language for inner thought, a means of communicating his characters’
roiling inner lives through external artifice. Earlier in his career, he had used Greek masks
in *The Great God Brown* and expressionistic devices in plays such as *The Emperor Jones* and *The
Iceman Cometh*. It is a mark of O’Neill’s maturity and virtuosity at the end of his career that
he trusted so completely in using simple silences rather than showy stratagems.

Consider this passage from *Hughie*, in which O’Neill shows us the Night Clerk’s thoughts:

> The CLERK’s mind remains in the street to greet the noise of a far-off El train. Its approach is
pleasantly like a memory of hope; then it roars and rocks and rattles past the nearby corner, and
the noise pleasantly deafens memory; then it recedes and dies, and there is something melancholy
about that. But there is hope.

Compare to this passage, from *Strange Interlude*:

> MARSDEN: *(thinking)* Poor old Charlie! ... damn it, what am I to her? ... her old dog who’s
lost his mother? ... Mother hated her ... no, poor dear Mother was so sweet, she never
hated anyone ... she simply disapproved ... *(aloud, coldly)* I’m all right, Nina. Quite all
right now, thank you. I apologize for making a scene.

Clearly the former are different than the latter. The Night Clerk, often considered a
supporting role to Erie Smith, is given an internal world as rich and complicated as Erie’s
silences and evasions. *Strange Interlude*’s tortured syntax becomes, in *Hughie*, a Proustian
stream of thought and feeling. By the end of his career, O’Neill had given up on trying to
transform live theatre practice and was writing now for an audience only of the mind. It
freed his writing from melodramatic impulses, while preserving his characters’ “internal
turmoil,” their endless seesaw battle between hopes and dreams on the one hand and dim
reality on the other.

One of the lessons we learned while working on *Strange Interlude* is that the asides are
integral to the play. They add dramatic conflict, bolstering the weight of the spoken
“dialogue.” *Hughie*, a play with a similar lack of external conflict, has an equally rich
subterranean texture.

O’Neill, writing in 1941, set *Hughie* in 1928. It was the year Arnold Rothstein was
assassinated. It was the last year of high-tide living in New York before the financial
-crash and the Great Depression. It was also the year that Eugene O’Neill had his greatest
commercial success, with *Strange Interlude*. One has to wonder: did he look
to *Strange Interlude* as a model for *Hughie*, a play so seemingly different and yet so
surprisingly similar?

*Drew Lichtenberg* is the Literary Associate at STC and production dramaturg for *Hughie*. He
holds an MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale School of Drama.
Where does a military leader turn when the government he fought for becomes the enemy itself? This question drives the plot of both William Shakespeare’s Coriolanus and Friedrich Schiller’s Wallenstein. Performing these plays in repertory enables us to examine the draw of power from the playwrights’ times to our own and discuss how leaders can cut and be cut with this double-edged sword.

The pairing of these two plays quickly became self-evident. I’ve wanted to direct Wallenstein for many years, ever since staging Schiller’s Don Carlos in 2001, and Coriolanus hasn’t appeared on our stage since 2000, so this was the perfect time to bring it back. I’m excited to collaborate on Coriolanus with David Muse, former Associate Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Theatre Company and the current Artistic Director of The Studio Theatre. David and I have worked on two other repertories: Antony and Cleopatra and Julius Caesar in 2008, and Richard II and Henry V in 2010. Wallenstein has never before been produced in the U.S. We’re fortunate to have the amazing Robert Pinsky to adapt this epic work in free iambic verse and a modern medium for its American premiere.

I am also pleased to welcome both Patrick Page and Steve Pickering back to STC. Patrick has had terrific turns as Macbeth and Iago for STC and recently finished a great run as the Green Goblin in Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark on Broadway. And Steve was wonderful in our production of King Lear with Stacy Keach. I look forward to working with both actors again on the Hero/Traitor Repertory.

I am also very grateful to Clarice Smith for her significant contribution which is valuable to both the theatre and the audience. Because of her gift, STC will produce plays in repertory for three seasons. We hope you enjoy our first offering, Coriolanus and Wallenstein.
Want more? Check out Asides Online for photos, updates and full versions of excerpted articles in this issue. Asides.ShakespeareTheatre.org

CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS

Join the FREE exchange of ideas! STC’s Creative Conversations give our audiences the chance to connect deeply with the work on stage. Whether you are interested in historical background, creative points of view or voicing your own experiences, we have a discussion for you.

FREE

PAGE AND STAGE
(FORMERLY WINDOWS)
Sunday, February 3, 5–6 p.m.
Lansburgh Theatre Lobby
Hear insights on creating the production from the artistic team and local scholars during this lively event.

BOOKENDS
Wednesday, February 13
5:30 p.m. and post-show
Lansburgh Theatre Lobby
Explore the production with this immersive discussion event. Pre- and post-show discussions give complete access into the world of the play.

FREE

CLASSES IN CONTEXT
Saturday, March 2, 5–6 p.m.
Lansburgh Theatre Lobby
Respond to the onstage production in a roundtable format with savvy theatre panelists.

FREE

POST-SHOW CAST DISCUSSION
Wednesday, March 13, post-show
Lansburgh Theatre
Extend the experience. Talk with the acting company after viewing the production.

For more information, visit ShakespeareTheatre.org/Education.