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Images of Adversity:
A Chronological Study of Women
in Selected Plays by Eugene O'Neill

by

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Professor in Charge

Chairman of Department
There is in every true woman's heart
a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant
in the broad daylight of prosperity; but
which kindles up, and beams and blazes in
the dark hour of adversity.

-- The Sketch Book, The Wife
Washington Irving

There's a sorrow in his eyes
Like the angel made of tin
What will happen if I try
To place another heart in him.

-- "Tin Angel"
Joni Mitchell
In memory of my father.
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This study focuses chronologically on Eugene O'Neill's heroines as they reflect the playwright's increasing concern for woman's integration, identity, and self-fulfillment in a male-dominated world. Diff'rent's Emma Crosby finds herself unable to reconcile the code of New England Puritanism with the moral doctrine of her sea-faring village. Like Anna Christopherson, she cannot acknowledge concurrently her passionate and emotional selves. By murdering her child in order to win her stepson's love, Abbie Putnam, in Desire Under the Elms, rises above inane desires and embodies the Earth Mother, the predominant female in O'Neill's plays. Often referred to as his first Freudian-influenced play, Strange Interlude, recounts the life story of Nina Leeds who, much like Mary Tyrone in Long Day's Journey Into Night, can function emotionally only by returning to her role as daughter. Finally, in A Moon for the Misbegotten, Josie Hogan dramatizes O'Neill's composite heroine, as well as his most complete portrait of self-renunciation, depicting not a defeated sex but a gender acutely conscious of its limitations.
INTRODUCTION

Images of Adversity:
A Chronological Study of Women
in Selected Plays by Eugene O'Neill

Prior to Eugene O'Neill's emergence in 1914, American theatre depended largely on the cursory romances, comedies, and "social" plays of Americans such as Fitch, Sheldon, and Thomas, as well as the plays of their European contemporaries. There was no "theatre of the absurd," no existential school to influence dramatists. Strindberg and Ibsen were produced in isolation. By transforming drama beyond its earlier status, O'Neill dramatized, through his experiments in form and subject matter, both personal and social preoccupations. He sought always to fashion his moments of personal significance into plays with universal appeal. Chief among his obsessions was the fixation upon the Eternal Woman, all-accepting, all-healing. His own life told of a persistent need of a sustaining belief in woman's strength.

It is now commonly known that Eugene O'Neill's birth was blamed for his mother's morphine addiction.
His autobiographical *Long Day's Journey Into Night* chronicles this event and its subsequent effects on the family. In order to come to terms with his own guilt and resentment towards woman, in order to appease the violated maternal spirit, O'Neill portrays woman with a complex realism absent from the American stage before 1914. He brought to the stage women of integrity, emotion, and insight, compelled by their need to clarify their potential within the limits of a man-centered world. His mothers and daughters, as well as his harlots and wives share a common fate --spiritual atrophy.

In the six plays I have selected for this study, I will illustrate the theme of the abject woman, which becomes apparent in a chronological analysis of O'Neill's heroines. While the scope of his plays, from *The Web* to *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, contains many women desiring wholeness but caught in limiting circumstance, the six women I have chosen exist in the most apparently suppressed world and are, therefore, representative of O'Neill's real life women. Anna Christie, Emma Crosby, Abbie Putnam, Nina Leeds, Mary Tyrone, and Josie Hogan embody lover, wife, mother, mistress and daughter in their inevitable submission.
to a life process that finally demands self-sacrifice. This is not to imply these women never fully display the powers, both creative and destructive, of which they are capable. In fact, going beyond the bounds of externally inflicted roles marks a strength of will often lacking in many of O'Neill's major male figures. Yet theirs is also the account of oppression from within, for they demand as much from themselves as from the world. To combat the threat to their development, they necessarily establish illusions, or "life-lies." But as O'Neill's own chronology shows, illusion must finally be abandoned in favor of reality or, ultimately, death. Consequently, the strengths of his women characters are both admirable and pathetic.
Eugene O'Neil was never quite satisfied with the ending of "Anna Christie," for while the "resolution" suggests that Anna establishes herself as a land-bound wife and daughter, the interpolation of a more foreboding future dominates the end. The public and critical reception, however, underscored the subliminal element. In a letter to George Jean Nathan, O'Neil discussed his play's ending:

The sea outside--life--waits. The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten. (In fact, I once thought of calling the play 'Comma'). One thing that I realize, on a rereading of the last act, is that I haven't done enough to make my 'comma' clear. My ending seems
to have a false definiteness about it that is misleading—a happy-ever-after ending which I did not intend.

Therefore, because the ambivalence of its conclusion depends largely upon one woman's self-fulfillment as it is projected beyond the final curtain, "Anna Christie" best illustrates O'Neill's early treatment of the theme of the abject woman.

As a weary and bitter prostitute at the age of twenty, Anna Christopherson actively seeks out her father as a last resort for a "rest and cure." Finding that he is not the landbound janitor she thought him to be, but instead a coal barge captain, she reluctantly agrees to take a chance on life on the sea. Her acceptance of Chris's meagre housing establishes another episode in the ill-fated Christopherson family history, for just as the "dirty ole devil" sea has swallowed the men of her family and left the women to die in loneliness, it must inevitably claim Anna for its own.

As the major agent of change in "Anna Christie," an exhilarating but sinister force, the sea hovers

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1Isaac Goldberg, The Theatre of George Jean Nathan (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), pp. 154-55. This letter to Nathan is dated 1 February 1921.
over the whole play. In the opening scene, Chris's resentment of the source of his livelihood becomes apparent in his reply to Larry's prediction that Anna will marry a sailor like her father because "it's in the blood."² Chris swears in rage against the sea, for his experience has taught him to blame the "ole davil" for his own irresponsible nature. He professes to be addicted to its powers but desires her to "marry steady fallar got good yob on land. You have little home in country all your own" (III,43).

Yet Anna delights in the transforming effects of the sea. It provides her with isolation and the new beginning she seeks. Veiled beneath her desire for rest and cure from an illness she contracted while in jail, however, lies a desire for a love devoid of passion. She recoils from Chris, clearly embarrassed and uncomfortable at his show of paternal affection, and later rejects Burke when he is mystified by her beauty. Bent upon upholding the dichotomy of love and passion, she finds herself incapable of justifying

men's physical advances. The theme of the play hinges upon Anna's effort to accept a physical union grounded in a genuine and sustaining love. O'Neill depicts this struggle in his parallel of land and sea, with the land representative of the sexual nature of love, and the sea emblematic of its emotional essence.

Old Chris has not seen Anna "since she was little gel in Sveden five year ole" (III,9), nor has he seen his wife for many years before her death. Though Anna's mother died in Minnesota, Chris did not return to care for his daughter, because, as he tells Larry, "Ay tank it's better Anna live on farm, den she don't know dat ole davil, sea, she don't know fa'der like me" (iii,9). Ironically, although Chris attempts to prevent Anna from discovering his own shiftless life among the ports and women of his voyages, Anna herself is but a mirror of his own women thirty years earlier.

O'Neill's sensitivity to the prostitute's life becomes apparent in his depiction of Marthy Owen, who has been "campin' with barge men the last twenty years" and "been born and dragged up on the water front" (III,11). She is capable of perceiving Chris's dilemma at having to provide housing for his daughter while she herself has been living aboard the barge
with Chris. She plays with Chris's uneasiness, "taking in his embarrassment with a malicious twinkle of amusement in her eye" (III,11). Finally, though, her accusations of Chris yield to a sensitivity and comradeship later mirrored in her meeting with Anna.

When Larry answers the family entrance door bell at Johnny-the-Priest's Saloon, he is clearly unmoved by the sight of another "tramp" from the waterfront. O'Neill describes Anna as

>a tall, blond, fully-developed girl of twenty, handsome after a large Viking-daughter fashion but now run down in health and plainly showing all the outward evidences of belonging to the world's oldest profession. Her youthful face is already hard and cynical beneath its layer of make-up. Her clothes are the tawdry finery of peasant stock turned prostitute. (III,13-14)

Yet, to Chris she is a goddess. Mat Burke imagines that Anna is "some mermaid out of the sea come to torment" him (III,31). So while Marthy and Lanny are capable of knowing Anna's "number" at first glance, Chris, drunk with paternal love, and Burke, near-delirious from roaming the sea, elevate Anna far beyond her status.

In the impersonal hollow of the saloon's back room, the prostitutes eventually reach out to each other in friendship. Like Emma Crosby, Anna feels different from her peers. She tells Marthy:
The judge give all us girls thirty days. The others didn't seem to mind being in the cooler much. Some of 'em was used to it. But me, I couldn't stand it. It got, my goat right--couldn't eat or sleep or nothing. I never could stand being caged up nowheres. (III,16)

This revelation clearly makes her a true 'Christopherson; like her father, she has an affinity for the freedom of the open sea.

Marthy's presence cushions the meeting between father and daughter, and reveals Anna's potential for rising above her kind. In an ironic tone, the old prostitute contradicts Anna's negative impression of her father: "That's what comes of his bringing yuh up inland--away from the ole devil sea--where yuh'd be safe" (III,17). But in bitter, long-established resentment, Anna replies:

His bringing me up! Is that what he tells people! I like his nerve. He let them cousins of my Old Woman's keep me on their farm and work me to death like a dog. . . . The old man of the family, his wife, and four sons--I had to slave for all of 'em. I was only a poor relation, and they treated me worse than they dare treat a hired girl. (After a moment's hesitation--somberly) It was one of the sons--the youngest--started me--when I was sixteen. After that, I hated 'em so I'd killed 'em all if I'd stayed. (III,17-18)

She tells Marthy that, as a result of her experience on the farm, she ran away to St. Paul to
work as a governess, a position which was yust what finished me. Taking care of other people's kids, always listening to their bawling and crying, caged in, when you're only a kid yourself and want to go out and see things. At last I got the chance— to get into that house... It was all men's fault--the whole business. It was men on the farm ordering and beating me--and giving me the wrong start. Then I was a nurse, it was men again hanging around, bothering me, trying to see what they could get. (She gives a hard laugh) And now it's men all the time. Gawd, I hate 'em all, every mother's son of 'em! (III,18)

Anna's conscious resentment of men results from her father's abandonment of her after her mother died. But she seeks him out at Johnny-the-Priest's Saloon in hopes of finding respite from four years of ill-treatment. Her search for her father, however, creates yet another compromising situation, for it serves a two-fold purpose. In addition to illustrating the daughter's longing for the father, it belies the female's dependence upon the male's capabilities in what is essentially a male-dominated environment.

Yet Anna's bitter hatred of men has nurtured in her a callous defense of her life as a prostitute.

3 Edwin Engel objects to Anna's rationalization here. He says, "Voluntarily to substitute prostitution for tending children on the ground that in the latter position one is 'caged in' and 'lonesome' is both novel and improbable. . . . Anna's tragic choice appears to have been as much out of consideration of O'Neill's views as her own." The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 41.
She insists that she does not regret a lifestyle which she adopted only by coercion. The implication is that receiving payment for the use of her body has somehow legitimized her relations with men. She has rejected the possibility of experiencing a genuine loving relationship with a man. The prostitute's life has bred in her a hatred of unnatural proportions. Her recoiling from both her father and Mat Burke therefore appears plausible.

Though Chris expresses paternal joy upon seeing his daughter, Anna resents his affection, saying, "You talk the same as they all do" (III,20). He recounts his voyages for Anna and tells her of the vicious trap in which the sea has caught him. He surmises that he owes his neglect of his family to the mysterious and deceptive "old davil sea." Just as Anna's pride makes her defend prostitution, his resentment of the sea's power over him compels him to justify his work on the barge: "Dis ain't real boat on sea. She's yust old tub--like piece of land with house on it dat float. Yob on her ain't sea yob. No. Ay don't gat yob on

4 She tells Marthy, "At last I got the chance--to get into that house. And you bet your life I took it. (Defiantly) And I ain't sorry neither" (p. 79)
sea, Anna" (III,21). He pledges that on the barge, she will see "everytang dat's pooty" (III,23). In their new-found roles of father and daughter Chris quells his drunken, jovial sea spirit, while Anna must maintain the facade of an undefiled, innocent daughter.

She necessarily yields to this role because it provides her with the only care and concern for which she does not have to offer her body. Her broken sobs reveal an oppressed and shaken woman, caught between the idealism of the daughter's role and the realism of the whore's plight.

On the barge, Anna gradually regains her health, yet the fog cloud, later re-introduced in Long Day's Journey Into Night, works to anesthetize her. She tells Chris: "I love this fog! Honest! It's so--

(She hesitates, groping for a word) funny and still. I feel as if I was--out of things altogether" (III,25). The fog makes her feel "nutty." Specifically, it acts as a catharsis in its two-fold ability to cloud the past and clarify the present:

I seem to have forgot--everything that's happened--like it didn't matter no more. . . . I feel happy for once--yes, honest! . . . I don't know how to tell you yust what I mean. It's like I'd come home after a long visit away some place. It all seems like I'd been here before lots of times--on boats--in this same fog. (III,28-29)
In its capacity to cause death, therefore, the sea numbs her past, just as it envelops her in a state of eternal belonging. In addition, the cleansing of body and spirit which Anna undergoes while on board the *Simeon Winthrop* redefines her womanhood. She says of the fog, "It makes me feel clean--out here--'s if I'd taken a bath" (III,28). Later she agrees with Mat Burke's assertion that a sailor's death is truly a clean death. Her new environment moves her from the "house" of prostitution to a spiritual "home."

Similarly, Anna's obsession with the lives of the seafaring men of her family illustrates her transformation from carnal life to spiritual life. She senses the barge is the "right" place for her. Ironically, deracination brings comfort, for only in the eerie fog does she sense a home.

At the same time, Chris finds in Anna's musings the reproach of the sea. Clearly, he believes the sea has a destructive power which attracts his daughter, and since all the men in his family, save one, have been swallowed by the sea, he tells Anna he is determined to die ashore in bed. He calls the sea "rotten" and the fog the worst of her dirty tricks.

The approach of Burke's disabled craft and his cry
of distress threaten Anna's sea idyll: "Why don't that guy stay where he belongs?" (III, 29). As Chris rouses his ship for the rescue, Anna "walks back toward the extreme stern as if she wanted to remain as much isolated as possible. She turns her back on the proceedings and stares out into the fog" (III, 30). Her repulsion upon meeting Mat Burke is surely not without justification, for "his dark eyes are bloodshot and wild from sleeplessness. The muscles of his arms and shoulders are lumped in knots and bunches, the veins of his forearms stand out like blue cords" (III, 20). Clearly, he is proud of his brute strength and prides himself on his will to survive. Anna is used to his type. Yet, when he swears, she becomes demure, reminding him that she is a lady. Upon learning that Anna is not, in fact, the captain's whore, but his daughter, Burke issues a series of rhapsodic, apologetic comments, praising her beauty and admonishing himself for his hasty generalization. Taken by his "simple frankness," Anna assumes yet another role, a maternal one elicited by Burke's physical and mental need to lean upon women.

The juxtaposition of land and sea (evidenced in Anna's "fall from grace" and subsequent return to
"cleanliness") emerges in this second act as Burke clarifies his shiftless life as a sea hand and rejects the life of a farmer, "digging spuds in the muck from dawn to dark" (III,38). Just as Anna revels in the replenishing effects of life at sea, so too does Burke find the sea to be the source of the only fulfilling life a man might live. He makes a veiled proposal to Anna:

If it's in the stokehole of a proper liner I was, I'd be able to have a little house and be home to it wan week out of four. And I'm thinking that maybe then I'd have the luck to find a fine decent girl--the like of yourself, now--would be willing to wed with me. (III,38)

Of course, Burke's statement anticipates the conclusion of the play, yet he speaks without the father's intervention or the daughter's revelation.

Chris overhears Burke's determined proposal as Anna maneuvers Burke into the cabin, and he swears at the "ole davil sea" for another of her "dirty tricks." In his discussion of the sea as dual agent, serving as both God and devil, Richard Dana Skinner suggests that "nowhere has O'Neill dug deeper into the roots of evil possession than in this scene--into its subjective character and its challenge to will
and fate. Consequently, the old sailor fails to recognize that he himself has earlier proposed that Anna marry and procreate according to the Christopherson heritage. Burke promises Anna, therefore, a life equivalent to if not more noble than that which her father envisions. Sadly, both of their plans for Anna's future rest upon her total acquiescence to the male will and therefore to the land. These parallel standards which O'Neill establishes between the two men lead directly to Anna's assertion of independence:

You was going on 's if one of you had got to own me. But nobody owns me, see? --'cepting myself. I'll do what I please and no man, I don't give a hoot who he is, can tell me what to do! I ain't asking either of you for a living. I can make it myself--one way or other. I'm my own boss. (III,56-47)

Anna necessarily represses her feelings for Burke because of her past. She regrets not meeting him earlier and tells her father that she is not good enough for Burke. Chris cannot tolerate or understand her self-effacement. The argument between father and lover climaxes in Anna's revelation of her life

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inland. Consequently, Burke invokes God's curse upon Anna while Chris calls her story a lie. Once again, Anna curses all men for her condition and finally breaks into frantic sobbing. Reminding Burke that he has promised to marry her despite any occurrence in her past, she half pleads with him to believe that she has, in fact, undergone a genuine change in character. In order to confirm the depth of her transformation, she implores him: "I couldn't marry you with you believing a lie... Will you believe it if I tell you that loving you had made me--clean?" (III, 59-60). Here, she contends that love, like the sea, has the power to purify, to rise above physical union, in effect, to renew chastity.

Even as Burke responds with rage and despair, cursing the "black shame" of his having loved Anna, Chris demands that Burke marry her; he attempts to impose righteousness where he believes it ought to be. Even as the two men go off to seek their solace in the barrooms of Boston, Chris refuses to recognize the part he has played in his Anna's life:

Ain't your fault, Anna, Ay know dat. (She looks up at him softened. He bursts into rage) It's dat ole davil, sea, do this to me! . . . It vas all right on barge with yust you and me. Den she bring dat Irish fallar
in fog, she make you like him, she make you fight with me all time! If dat Irish fallar don't never come, you don't never tal me dam tangs, Ay don't never know, and everytang's all right. (III,62)

O'Neill's sensitivity to the double standard is apparent in the after-effects of Anna's revelation. Man must be forgiven his failings, his promiscuous nature, yet woman must be held accountable for her loss of virtue, for her efforts to escape loneliness. But few critics have assessed this drama as sympathetic to a woman's plight. Sophus Winther discusses the play in terms of its fixed values. He alone condemns the men's demands upon Anna, saying that

in the shelter of their creed they knew what was good and what was bad, and as their creed was fixed by tradition so likewise was their conduct, for they held that one mode of behaviour may be good for a man and bad for a woman.6

Chris's "house of cards" is crushed by the weight of truth. Mat Burke forgets his earlier plea to Anna:

Then you think a girl the like of yourself might maybe not mind the past at all but only be seeing the good herself put in me? (III,38)

The first three acts of "Anna Christie," therefore, depict a woman trapped in a life that has offered

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only the most degrading form of survival. Anna has sought to ease her loneliness and assert her independence in prostitution, where mechanical sex and alcohol filled the years remaining after her early drudgery. Anna rises above the men in this play in her sensitivity to a value system that, remarkably, she has sustained over the past four years. As she manages to overlook the shortcomings of these men—her father's blameless mutterings, his abandonment of her, Mat's liaisons with women in all the ports he has traveled—she herself affirms her past with no pretensions. In this light, Act IV proves all the more disturbing.

Upon his return, Old Chris seeks Anna's forgiveness for abandoning her; he feels sick and

7 Edward Engel calls Anna "an uncommon O'Neill heroine, displaying unparalleled integrity, ingenuousness, and nobility of spirit" (p. 41).

8 Again, Winther cites the primal self-concern governing Mat's desire for Anna. He says that Mat does not accept her "as a human being with past experiences, with a power to live and suffer. He is accepting her as an institution, as an ideal that was created and fixed by an immutable law of life. Anna is looked upon as an end, a goal, as something beyond the reality of life, which is a struggle, pain, change and potential of every shade of variation from ugliness to beauty, from pain to happiness" (pp. 129-30).
pleads with Anna not to hate him. Anna replies:

Don't bawl about it. There ain't nothing to forgive, anyway. It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we yust get mixed in wrong, that's all. (III,65)

While this softening of spirit and passing off of blame to fate appears harmonious with the turn of events in Anna's life, a closer examination of the text reveals some underlying causes. During the two days that her father and lover seek to ease the burden of her revelations, Anna actively contemplates a return to her life as a prostitute. Furthermore, her father's attempt to "fix something up for Anna" amounts to little more than his passing on his monthly salary to her from his sailing on the steamer *Londonderry*. This solution parallels the relationship between Chris and the wife he abandoned. In addition, Burke's return serves to perpetuate the fate of the Christopherson women. In the course of two days of thinking, Anna has obviously concluded that prostituting herself is no longer an option but a necessity. The ending of the play, rather than denying this option, enhances it in a number of ways.

When Burke returns to the barge, he tells Anna he has returned because he is a fool. More importantly, he wants Anna to reject her story and tell him that it
was a lie. But she maintains the truth of her past.
After he ascertains the depth of her love, Burke's,
hostility and misery dissipate in a triumph of the
"male will":

> If 'tis truth you're after telling, I'd have a right, maybe, to believe you'd changed--and that I'd changed you myself 'til the thing you'd been all your life wouldn't be you anymore at all. . . . For I've a power of strength in me to lead men the way I want, and women, too, maybe, and I'm thinking I'd change you to a new woman entirely, so I'd never know, or you either, what kind of woman you'd been in the past at all. (III,74)

Clearly, he believes himself capable of destroying the past, regenerating her, and reshaping her destiny.

The resolution of the play calls for Chris and Burke to travel as shipmates to Cape Town, while Anna remains a sailor's wife and daughter. In a final act of submission, she encourages the father and husband to rejoice in the future:

> That's where he belongs, and I want him to go. You got to go, too; we'll need the money. . . . And as for me being alone, that runs in the family, and I'll get used to it. . . . I'll get a little house somewhere and I'll make a regular place for you two to come back to. (III,77)

Love and her marriage to Burke convince Anna that she can adjust to the loneliness of her future life. Her lonely little house somewhere merely serves to parallel
the land-locked "house" from which she has "escaped."
In this sense, the future offers a legitimized version
of her past. It perpetuates her subjugation to male
strength. She must overlook Mat's not returning to
his home in fifteen years. Even Chris's earlier
warning is far-removed from Anna's memory as she
contemplates marriage to Burke. Finally, after toasting
his children's future with characteristic melancholy,
old Chris reflects: "It's funny. It's queer, yes--
you and me shipping on same boat dat vay. It ain't
right. Ay don't know--it's dat funny vay old davil
sea do her vorst dirty tricks,yet" (III,78).

In a review of the play, Francis Hackett suggests
that in this final scene O'Neill takes the literary
liberty to which he is entitled, for, as a dramatist,
he "has gone the limit in hanging the female kitten

9 When Anna questions Chris concerning life at
sea, he tells her that the men of his family have all
been fools: "Day all vork rotten yob on sea for
nutting, don't care nutting but yust gat big pay day
in pocket, gat drunk, gat robbed, ship away again on
oder voyage. Dey don't come home. Dey don't do any
tang... Any gel marry sailor, she's crazy fool!" (p. 92).
over the abyss from which she's been rescued." The resolution becomes melodramatic out of necessity. As O'Neill himself views the ending, the old sailor's words are intended to suggest ultimately that only the sea rules the beaten Swedish sailor, his misled daughter and her Irish-stoker husband: "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you vas going, no. Only dat ole davil, sea--she knows!" (III, 78).

In an earlier, slightly altered version of the play, "The Ole Davil," Anna laughs at her father's somber musings and passes them off, exclaiming, "Oh, for gawd's sake!" In the final version, O'Neill notes her determined gaiety and her forced laugh. More in keeping with his intended meaning, this strained closing gesture affirms "that all of them at the end have a vague foreboding that although they have had their moment, the decision still rests with the sea


10a Claude Flory discusses the final version of the play in light of its two earlier drafts, "The Ole Davil" and "Chris." "Notes on the Antecedents of 'Anna Christie,'" PMLA 86 (1970), 77-83.
which has achieved the conquest of Anna." To further undercut the "happy ending" that many critics sought, a German production in 1923 closed with Anna's suicide.

The uncommon prostitute in search of a "rest cure" finds in the sailor coughed up from the sea a chance at love that overshadows the passion of her former profession. The female spirit rejoices only in the sense of appeasement. "The mournful wail of steamers' whistles" (III, 78) prefigures the pain created by Anna's marriage to Burke, and provides a backdrop for her future that has as its core loneliness, frustration and anxiety. The powers of the sea dominate, for in its vastness it possesses the power of God. As the archetypal mother, it warns both men to fight for Anna. When Burke holds up a crucifix for Anna to swear on, he unconsciously grasps at the ancient chance that perhaps only the "will of God" can help him blot out Anna's past in his own mind. Even

11 Goldberg, p. 155.
when he learns (much to his horror) that the Christophersons are Lutherans, he musters a blind faith. For him, Anna evokes lust for women in ports-of-call, and he must, therefore, nod his head in acquiescence to his fate.

In defense of his play's ending, O'Neill asserts that as a naturalistic play, "'Anna Christie' attempts to translate life into its own terms." The ambiguity of the ending must be overcome. He says,

I tried to show the dramatic gathering of new forces out of the old. I wanted to have the audience leave with a deep feeling of life flowing on, of the past which is never the past--but always the birth of the future--of a problem solved for the moment but by the very nature of its solution involving new problems.

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14 Egil Törnqvist, A Drama of Souls: Studies in Eugene O'Neill's Supernaturalistic Technique (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969). Törnqvist points out that O'Neill may deliberately have sought to cloud this final scene in mystery (p. 94).

The equivocal ending must be understood in terms of
the varieties of human experience. No absolute can
apply here. Anna assumes the role of the subjugated
wife and daughter. She must perform within the limits
of roles that (if we are to accept the past as Chris
relates it) can only temporarily suspend the misery
of her circumstance at the beginning of the play.

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Writing to Arthur Hobson Quinn in 1925, Eugene O'Neill set forth his concern for expressing the paradoxical nature of human character:

I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind--(Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it--Mystery certainly)--and of the external tragedy of Man in his glorious self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its own expression.16

Too often, however, this Force deceives; it falsely encourages autonomy. Frequently, it poses as self-control, until, suddenly, it inhibits, smothers, and finally deadens the spirit it once nurtured. This process is wholly apparent in Diff'rent.

Though this drama of a New England spinster's love affair is not usually considered one of O'Neill's major melodramas,17 it contains a significant link


to the theme of the abject woman. Driven by the demands of Puritan idealism, Emma Crosby depicts a fatalism of obsession with the romantic ideal. The play elaborates on the emotional destruction of excessive pride and the inevitable doom of human determinism. Like Anna Christie, Emma Crosby finds herself victimized by a male-ordered society, a predicament which, for her (as for Nina Leeds and Mary Tyrone), can lead only to self-destruction. But, whereas Anna bends to the demands of the male will (after a brief moment of self-assertion) in order that she may live, Emma necessarily exaggerates her Puritan self to grotesque proportions, both inhuman and irreversible.

Once again, the dichotomy of love and passion manifests itself in the sea/land pattern. While in "Anna Christie" the sea encompasses the mysterious, ineffable nature of human love, in Diff'rent it stands for the corruption of love to lust. It is dark, spontaneous, overpowering. Emma maintains that her sailor, Caleb, must conform to her land-locked notion of purity, and punishes him for yielding to nature.

Diff'rent is divided into two acts, each marking the eccentricity and abnormality of the play's heroine.
The span of thirty years between the two acts further reinforces the lack of growth apparent in Emma. In Act One, the over-stuffed sterility of the Crosby home reveals itself in Emma's "incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess . . . self-willed stubbornness . . . [and] underlying constitution of reserve power and wealth" (II,494). In addition, Caleb's discomfort at having to dress in his black Sunday best further reinforces the stark self-consciousness that perfection demands. In Act Two, "the scene is the same but not the same" (II,519); the emotional atmosphere is grotesque, Emma appearing chaotic and revolting. In contrast to Caleb's controlled gentility in Act One, Benny Rogers' raucous youth dominates.

As a study of women, Diff'rent cannot be easily dismissed. Skinner glosses over the play in the most condescending terms. He says,

It is really a study of the distortion that comes to the feminine soul when it abandons concrete instinct and tries to live in the rarefied atmosphere of an abstract ideal, in other words, when it is not true to its own nature.18

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18 Skinner, pp. 91-92.
But is the play not also about the underlying causes of such behavior in the feminine soul? Is it not also about the double standard that permits men to demand purity in their women, yet refer to their own sexual escapades as jokes and occasions to shock the women they love? Surely, Emma defies nature, but is not her recalcitrance fed by a deeply-rooted dissatisfaction with the inconsistencies all too apparent in her environment?

Human nature cultivates obsessions that are at once healthy and decadent, hopeful and tragic. It sparks by degrees the desires common to all men, and, in doing so, defines the individual. When obsessions are blocked or limited, the continue to grow— inwardly, upon themselves. In the absurdity of the Puritan ideal, Emma grows; is it unreasonable that she demands Caleb's fidelity? This question forms the crux of the play. In her attempt to elaborate her ideal, she must assume an excess of pride. In short, by its nature, her obsession narrows to a fixation upon difference. On one hand, Caleb asserts that he has done "nothin' a man'd rightly call wrong" (II,500); on the other hand,
19 Joseph Wood Krutch suggests that the "obsession to belong," common in O'Neill's characters, fosters the pride evident in Emma. He says, "The heroine of this play is reduced to smallness before it is over, but she is not, whatever else she may be, merely small in its first act. She 'belongs' to an austere ideal of herself." The American Drama Since 1918, (New York: Random House, 1939) pp. 82-86.
he questions, "women folks ain't got to know everything, have they?" (II,501). Apparently, Emma must remain ignorant in order to function according to the customs of the sea-faring village. 20

Though Emma undergoes a significant change in appearance in the second act, the ideal of Act One still maintains its hold on her. In the opening setting of each act, O'Neill catalogues and juxtaposes each detail of the Crosby parlor. Most importantly, he notes that "only the old Bible, which still preserves its place of honor on the table, and the marble clock on the mantle, have survived the renovation" (II,519). Religion and Time--these are the instruments of Emma's undoing. The Puritan ideal has bred in her an abhorrence of sex she cannot reconcile in the face of reason.

Harriet, her intended sister-in-law, tells her "If you're looking for saints, you got to die first and go to heaven. A girl'd never get married hereabouts if she expected too much" (II,509). Her parents admonish her for considering Caleb's lust for the heathen girl a sin:

Mrs. Crosby. If you've been wide awake to all that's happened in this town since you was old enough to know, you'd ought to realize what men be. . . . You're gettin' to think you're
better'n the rest of us. (II,509-510)

Mr. Crosby. I know them brown females like a book. And I tells you, after a year or more aboard ship, a man'd have to be a goll-durned geldin' if he don't... [then, to his wife] If she ever got religion that bad, I'd ship her off as a female missionary to the damned yellow Chinks. (II,514)

Caleb himself warns her that "sailors ain't plaster saints" (II,495). But her religion has told her otherwise. In the same manner, Emma upholds her virtue as timeless; not even thirty years, she tells Caleb, can make her love him: "It ain't a question of time, Caleb. It's a question of something being dead. And when a thing's died, time can't make no diff'rence" (II,517). Consequently, when Caleb calls on the girl/spinster thirty years later, hoping to renew their engagement, he discovers her oblivious to time:

Caleb. Do you know what time this be, Emmer?

Emma. (puzzled) I don't know exactly, but there's a clock in the next room.

Caleb. (quickly) Hell, I don't mean that kind o'time. I mean--it was thirty years ago this spring. (II,537)

Instead, Emma belongs in a world of suspended animation, where she plays the coquettish girl that
her former identity would not permit; she is a "mockery of undignified age snatching greedily at the empty simulacra of youth" (II,520). She satisfies passions vicariously through Benny Rogers' stories of French whores, and becomes resentful after learning of his visits to Tilly Small, the town harlot.

Emma's kinship with the native of Caleb's island is perhaps more apparent than critics acknowledge. Like the heathen woman, wildly swimming out to Caleb, Emma Crosby adorns herself in the gaudy dress of whores, seeking Benny's affection. In their final pleas to the male ideal, there is a primitive symmetry. It lies beyond the bounds of Puritanism--perhaps beyond the bounds of time also (for "civilization"--Caleb and his crew--exhibits a corresponding yearning for the aboriginal).

Though Emma may have sinned against nature in denying herself to Caleb (as her mother tells her), she is neither a "fanatic" nor a victim of "prudish guilt."²¹ Her final act is preceded by a stark

²¹ Falk, pp. 71-72. Also, Falk notes that Emma is forty in the second act; however, if Emma was twenty in Act One, and thirty years have passed, she is (as O'Neill tells us) fifty at the time of Act Two.
gesture of elimination in which she literally sweeps the parlor of its facade. Travis Bogard finds this a pathetic but insufficient gesture. However, given the chronology of events in the play, Emma's action here must be assessed as a positive assertion of her will, for she has no knowledge of Caleb's suicide. She eradicates the Puritan Emma along with the imitation Emma. Time, as well as her Bible, has mocked her.

Concerning his treatment of woman in Diff'rent, O'Neill strikes out at his critics:

Diff'rent, whatever its faults may be, has the virtue of sincerity. . . . Some critics have said that Emma would not do this thing, would undoubtedly do that other. By Emma they must mean 'a woman.' But Emma is Emma. She is a whaling captain's daughter in a small New England seacoast town--surely no feminist. She is universal only in the sense that she reacts definitely to a definite sex-suppression, as every woman might. The form her reaction takes is absolutely governed by her environment and her own character. Let the captious be sure they

22 Bogard, p. 147.
know their Emmas as well as I do before they tell me how she would act. 23

The finality of O'Neill's tone serves to reinforce the contention that the play is less concerned with the nature of Emma's dream than with the process by which she reaches it. 24 In grasping at the ideal, in not compromising, as would a Harriet or a Mrs. Crosby, she emerges ahead of the "spiritual middle-classers" 25 inhabiting this domestic drama.

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23 "Eugene O'Neill's Credo and His Reasons for His Faith," New York Tribune, 13 February 1921, p. 1. Anonymous, but known to have been written by O'Neill.

24 Bogard suggests that Diff'rent fails because Emma does not define her dream, but she can hardly be expected to do so, given her environment. The circumstantial and psychological explanations he demands (p. 145) are evidenced in her inaction in Act One, and corresponding action in Act Two.

25 O'Neill admonishes the compromising spirit, saying, "The people who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle classers. Their stopping at success is proof of their compromising insignificance. . . . Only through the unattainable does man achieve a hope worth living and dying for--and so attain himself." New York Tribune, 13 February 1921, pp. 1, 6.
On April 15, 1926, after taking an oath that the play they were about to perform was in fact the identical presentation given at Los Angeles' Orange Grove Theatre on February 18, 1926, seventeen actors, under producer Thomas Wilkes, staged "the most unusual performance in the annals of the theatre . . . before the most critical audience ever assembled in any theatre." The actors' performance before a Los Angeles obscenity court marks the culmination of public controversy surrounding presentations of Desire Under the Elms. The idea of a woman seducing her stepson, as well as the use of "damn," "hell," and "whore," so offended the agents of morality that the play's fate was placed in the care of a jury of twelve men and women, only to have the same jury dismissed, with eight of its members voting for

conviction and four for acquittal. Though the intensity of conviction with which the public regarded the play suggests both the ardent cries of moralists and the new wave of liberalism shaping the mood of post-war America, it also draws attention to the contradictory nature of the drama itself, for never before had O'Neill touched so crudely the roots of narcissism or the depth of self-sacrifice as he did in *Desire Under the Elms*.

This play is perhaps the most "womanly" of O'Neill's dramas. Long before Abbie Putnam walks into the kitchen of the Cabot farmhouse to claim its dishes and hearth as her own, the feminine spirit manifests itself in four agents: the elms, towering over the farmhouse in a "sinister maternity" (I,202); Jenn, Simeon's dead wife (I,204); the spirit of Eben's dead mother, to whose goodness both Peter and Simeon attest (I,207); Minnie, the Scarlet Woman, whose bed all the Cabot men have shared (I,210).

Furthermore, undermining this play is Mother Earth—the primal soil, yielding both stone and fertile pastures. Essentially, Abbie is the product of this soil, for she arrives in early summer as the culmination of spring, and, as such, claims the land. She embodies a mystery that neither Cabot nor Eben can
articulate. In addition, she represents the four feminine elements. She is, like Minnie, a whore, intent upon luring Eben with her rapacious call. Like Eben's dead mother, she seeks revenge for the wrongs inflicted upon her in the past. Abbie also evokes Jenn's spirit, for just as the memory of her hair, "long's a hoss' tail--an' yaller like gold" (I,204) animates Simeon's and Peter's longing for the promises of the golden West, so, too, does Abbie's sensuality inspire both Ephraim's and Eben's greed for land and wealth. Most importantly, Abbie resembles the elms, which "appear to protect and at the same time subdue" (I,202). Their tears of rain trickle over the farm house, yet there is about them an aspect of "crushing, jealous absorption" (I,202). In the same way, Abbie's natural beauty is "marred by its rather

27 Abbie tells Eben that her mother died when she was a young child. She reveals the injustice of her life prior to her arrival at Cabot's farm (p. 226).

28 Though his hatred for his father extends to his new step-mother, Abbie, Eben is "confused and torn" in her presence. Momentarily, he acquiesces to her will "as if hypnotized" (I,227). Cabot is moved in Abbie's presence, but with her promise of a son--which she reveals as "second-sight"--he turns from her, saying, "Ye give me the chills sometimes. (He shivers) It's cold in this house. It's oneasy. They's thin's pokin' about in the dark--in the corners" (I,238).
gross sensuality" (I,221). She covets her "hum" but assumes a motherly pride as its mistress. This duality, therefore, transforms her from rapacious schemer to self-sacrificing lover.

Desire elaborates on the theme of the violated maternal spirit in its pursuit of sexual and spiritual appeasement. Like Eben's dead mother, Abbie has been denied fulfillment of her womanly role. She has labored under the disillusionment of life manifest in a drunkard husband and a dead child; hence, her bitter determination "t' fight for what's due me out o' life" (I,227). Essentially, she is the put-upon woman who must assert her will to possess at a time when women's desires could be met only vicariously, through the sheltering wing of the pioneer male. Yet the absence of a community of women, coupled with the peripheral feminine spirit, intensify her tenacity.

Most frequently, Desire is discussed in terms of its mythic proportion. With the advent of Freudian and Jungian psychology, the play has been assessed and reassessed as a study of the primal family. 29

On one hand, the action consists of the mythic "struggle between the father and the son for the mother," while, on the other hand, the play is viewed as the celebration of "the victory of mother and son over the father." Surely, Desire suggests O'Neill's preoccupation with man's Oedipal nature, but it also recounts the tragedy of un consummated love. Though Abbie evokes the vengeful maternity found in Medea and the Oresteia, she also mirrors the hopeless, obsessive spirit of Hedda Gabler and the Strindbergian heroine. She is not neurotic, as is Nina Leeds; instead, her illusory radical nature results from unfulfilled promises and constant compromise.

Abbie's marriage to Ephraim guarantees her that from which modern woman longs to be free—the right to work in a home of her own and the freedom to toil for the external symbols of identity. She defies Eben's claim to his mother's land: "This be my farm—this be my hum—this be my kitchen. . . . An' upstairs—that be my bedroom—an' my bed!" (I, 226-227). The need to belong and the desire to possess are temporarily satisfied.

30 Chabrowe, p. 129.
31 Engel, p. 126.
Two months following her marriage to Cabot, however, Abbie is listless and bored, unfulfilled in her "freedom." Clearly, she discovers that being heiress to Ephraim's property offers little guarantee of happiness. Specifically, she lacks natural outlets for her sexuality, thereby intensifying her desire to possess Eben. In his presence, she grows passionate and eager, yet becomes irritated at his passivity. He, in turn, feels a need to assert his hatred for her, denying his own sexual attraction. Their wordless ritual in the heat of a summer Sunday is in itself a form of lovemaking (I,228-229). She taunts him by chuckling and sneering; in "exaggerated disdain," he spits and slams the door. But "their physical attraction becomes a palpable force quivering in the hot air" (I,229); it moves Abbie to her most impassioned plea:

It's agin nature, Eben. Ye been fightin'
yer nature ever since the day I come--tryin' t' tell yerself I hain't purty t'ye. (She
laughs a low humid laugh without taking her eyes from his. A pause--her body squirms desirously--she murmurs langourously) Hain't the sun strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it burnin' into the earth--Nature--makin' thin's grow--bigger and bigger--burnin' inside ye--makin' ye want t' grow--into somethin' else--till ye're jined with it--an' it's your'n--but it owns ye, too--an' makes ye grow bigger--like a tree--like them elums--(She laughs again softly, holding his eyes. He takes a step
toward her, compelled against his will).
Nature'll beat ye, Eben. Ye might's well own up t' it fust 's last. (I,229)

Though moved momentarily by this prophetic outburst,
Eben instinctively counters her foresight by confirming his struggle as material rather than sensual: "I'm fightin' him--fightin' yew--fightin' fur Maw's rights t' her huml"(I,229). To further antagonize Abbie, he compares her to a whore for selling herself in order to gain the farm.

Only by producing a son for Cabot can Abbie assure her ownership of the farm.32 Her lust for Eben therefore takes on the double purpose of satisfying both her sexual and material desires. Though she succeeds in transforming Eben into a helpless, confused adolescent, a force more plausible

32 Cabot's animal nature bars him from recognizing his wife's capabilities as a woman; instead, he says that she is ignorant of his nature. He, therefore, demands that she produce a son to "redeem" herself from her sin of ignorance (I,238).
than lust must sanction their union. The spirit of Eben's dead "maw," interred in the parlor, provides this justification. Responding to the connotations behind Abbie's call to join her in the parlor, Eben dons his Sunday clothes, an action reminiscent of his mother's funeral scene and his visits to Minnie.

Yet within the tomb of the parlor the lust of the previous scene pales, for a change comes over Abbie--"she looks awed and frightened now, ready to run away" (I, 241). The actions of the two are mechanical, dictated by a force from without. They respond to the spirit of the dead woman as acolytes before the shrine of their god, united in their hatred for Ephraim's "hard" God. As Eben recounts the father's crimes, Abbie confirms that these are in fact the same injustices she endures:

Eben: Maw b'ars him a grudge.

Abbie: Waal, so does all o' us.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Eben: This was her hum. This was her farm.

Abbie: This is my hum! This is my farm!

Eben: He married her t' steal 'em. She was soft an' easy. He couldn't 'preciate her.

Abbie: He can't 'preciate me!
Eben. He murdered her with his hardness.

Abbie. He's murderin' me!

Eben. She died. (A pause) Sometimes she used to sing fur me. (He bursts into a fit of sobbing.)

Abbie. (both her arms around him--with wild passion) I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! (I,242-241)

The maternal spirit placated, Abbie and Eben respond as mother and son, rising up against the father. The impulse to acquire is transformed to the impulse to give. In a consecration of selfhood, they unite as lovers.

The transformation which culminates the play is thus complete in the reciprocity of their love. But while their passion matures to love, it grows in secrecy, without communal acknowledgement. The locals, numb on their "likker," join in the hypocrisy of Cabot's paternity, while his "son's" true parents remain distanced from the festivity. Clearly Eben and Abbie yearn for a further dimension of love--public proclamation of their attraction for each other.

Only when Ephraim has so humiliated his son, forcing Eben to reject Abbie as a "damn trickin' whore" (I,256) does the demonically possessive mother assert the depth of her self-sacrificing nature.

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The significance of her deed--murdering her child--arises from its complete lack of self-interest. True, she kills the child in hopes of regaining Eben's affection, but the essence of the murder is the proof of her love. She has so associated the arrival of the child with the death of their love, that she resorts to murder. The threat of enduring the void of uncomsummated love proves more than she can bear. Unlike Emma Crosby, she rejects the religious and moral code of her tradition.

Upon hearing of her crime, Eben invokes his mother's memory. But, as Abbie acknowledges, the vengeful feminine spirit found appeasement in their first night together, Abbie reminds him of his promise: "ye said ye hated me fur havin' him--ye said ye hated him an' wished he was dead--ye said if it hadn't been fur him comin' it'd be the same's afore between us" (I,261). It is this promise which causes Eben to acknowledge his complicity in the child's murder. While Abbie's crime may appear as her attempt to be God, it springs from the "hard" God, demanding recompense for sins against nature.33 This God is of course the God-the-Father who suppresses Nina in Strange Interlude. Ultimately, however, Abbie acts

33 Bogard, p. 223.
upon her own volition here; she told Eben earlier, "Vengeance o' God on the hull o' us! What d'we give a durn?" (I,244). The violated maternal spirit will, therefore, not bend in the face of a "lonesome God"; instead, it grows in the pursuit of desire.
In his characterization of Nina Leeds in *Strange Interlude*, Eugene O'Neill unites the unrelenting spirits of Abbie Putnam and Emma Crosby in a grotesque search for completeness in life. Nina prefigures the ill-fated heroines, Lavinia Mannon and Mary Tyrone. She is more than the culmination of the O'Neill female figure, for while she brings back the Dionysian woman of the stage, she goes beyond the temptation of self-destruction and emerges as Woman-as-Overseer of a triad of love, passion, and maternalism. As a portrait of Everywoman, *Strange Interlude* details one woman's
energetic determination to come to terms with the wholeness, the truth of her life.

O'Neill's experimentation with asides, his employment of the psychological breakthroughs of Jung and Freud, and his exploration of drama's length in *Strange Interlude* all provided discussion on the future of the theatre. In addition, the play's narrative, which deals clinically and openly with matters of abortion and adultery, risked creating a scandal. 34 Most importantly, the play presents woman in a new light. In going beyond the superficiality of modern drama, O'Neill intended "to tell not merely the life story of a woman but of Woman, weak and strong, benevolent and destructive, in her various roles of daughter, wife, platonic friend, mistress and mother." 35 He strove to present woman in a controlled management

34 Unauthorized excerpts from *Strange Interlude* were published privately, perhaps by "The Mayor's Committee" in Boston in September, 1929. Distributed among clergy and other "moralist" groups, the pamphlet condemned the play as obscene. A Bibliography of the Works of Eugene O'Neill, Together with the Collected Poems of Eugene O'Neill, eds. Barrett H. Clark and Ralph Sanborn (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), pp. 76-78.

of these roles. Ultimately, Nina Leeds moves the drama by her need to achieve unity in the God-force—the only stance which allows her freedom of movement throughout the play.

In *Welded*, the man/woman unity creates the God-force, and in *Desire* the supreme authority emerges as the "hard," lonesome God of man, but in *Strange Interlude*, O'Neill declares that the woman is the God-force. She is the one source of power to which man looks with admiration and scorn. Nina, however, does not use her power to destroy; we cannot blame her for any of her impulsive actions, because the forces which cause them are part of an unending stasis which governs the play.

Though Nina is the self-appointed creator of her own destructive triad, she is not a *femme fatale*. This is probably her most significant break with the domineering woman of the stage, such as Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, for Nina is neither overbearingly flirtatious nor incessantly cunning in her relationships with men. She desires to control her destiny, but to achieve this control she must piece together the fragmented maleness around her. She desires to direct her reality and impose order on her life, which has been distorted.
by un Consummate love for her fiancé Gordon Shaw. For
the first time in O'Neill's drama, a woman's desires--
both physical and spiritual--take precedence over a
man's. Not since Diff'rent and "Anna Christie" has
O'Neill so allowed a woman to dominate a play. Though
Abbie, in Desire Under the Elms, embodies masculine
strength, she is ultimately at the mercy of the male
will; in Strange Interlude, Nina desires and rules
with a masculine sensibility, relinquishing her power
only to the most feminine of the males, Charles
Marsden. Whereas Abbie yields to Eben's grotesque
suggestion and murders their child, admonishing herself
in the final scene of Desire, Nina does not accede to
the ruinous pleas of Darrell, nor does she submit to
the temptation of self-destruction. Even Marsden,
with his paternal accusations, cannot persuade his
"Nina Cara Nina" to deny her sensuality until twenty-
five years have passed and he welcomes her "after the
long interlude of war with life" (1,188).

In her role as God the Mother, Nina becomes the
unifying force of the trinity by taking possession of
the outer masculine qualities of lover, husband, and
son. In this world chaotically governed by men, she
must assume the role of creator and plot the lives of
her men. Yet Nina does not deny her femininity, for she must maintain her stature as a woman in order to secure the masculine role. As the female counterpart of God the Father, Nina demands equal power "to select and choose who shall live and who shall be the source of whatever life is permitted to live." None of her three men is capable of fulfilling her need for love. In her attempt to integrate all three of their loves for her, Nina assumes that she can overcome their incomplete visions of life. Ultimately, however, she cannot support herself and three tragic visions at the same time. Her anger at the inability of men and women to express themselves openly is evident when she says, "How we poor monkeys hide from ourselves behind the sounds called words" (I,39-40). In fact, O'Neill implies throughout the play that words often serve as a mask for physical inadequacies. For instance, Charles Marsden's Oedipal struggle emphasizes the "words as mask" pattern; he often says the opposite of what he speaks in his asides. While outwardly extending his confessor's kindness to Nina, he calls her a "whore" and a "cruel bitch ... no kinder at heart than dollar tarts" (I,40).

36 Skinner, p. 198.
The numerous asides in *Strange Interlude* often indicate the inability to come to terms with reality. Moreover, the asides also suggest a conflict between nature and spirit, between the physical and emotional. They assert what a sense of decency prohibits. Inhibitions prohibit Nina from divorcing Sam; they stop Ned from revealing his fathering Gordon to Sam; they halt Charlie in his incessant longing for Nina; and, especially, they won't allow Gordon Evans to confront his mother and Darrell with his knowledge of their affair.

In essence, Nina must assume the role of God the Mother because her father has not allowed her to express her most primal desires. By acting as the God-force of life, Nina hopes to vindicate herself for not marrying Gordon Shaw before he went off to his death in war. When Professor Leeds, "in whose gigantic shadow the entire play is acted," tells Marsden that he suspects Nina despises him for forbidding Gordon to marry his daughter, he notes that Nina has difficulty distinguishing the actual world from her fantasy world. Yet, Nina (and perhaps Mrs.  

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37 Falk, p. 122.
Evans, had she been of a later generation) is the only character capable of accepting the grim facts of her life and working toward an active participation in that life. For Nina, "life is just a long drawn out lie with a sniffing sigh at the end!" (I,40). Her father, in a last consideration for his life, brings about his death with self-interested thoughts:

my salary will go farther now . . . books
I really need . . . . I will have more leisure
and peace of mind. . . . four hours more . . .
she'll be packing . . . then good-bye . . .
a kiss . . . nothing more ever to say to each other . . . and I'll die here some day . . .
alone . . . gasp, cry out for help . . . the president will speak at the funeral . . . Nina will be here again . . . Nina in black . . . too late! (I,22-23)

As the father figure governing the masculine triad, Leeds lets Charles Marsden, whose sexless presence undermines Nina's actions in the rest of the play, usurp his power.

Following Nina in her despair at the life process, the audience sees in her marriage to Sam Evans an attempt to quell her powers and, in doing so, make a career of following Sam in his career; she says she longs for "surface life--no more depths" (I,46). Ned Darrell assumes that Nina's marriage to Sam will provide "normal outlets for her craving for sacrifice" (I,37). But in her submission to the marriage, Nina
mimics the indifference of God the Father, proving that she has "that one trait at least in common" (I,41). Subsequently, Nina seeks an outlet from the marriage, once again affirming her indifference. Convinced that her web of self-sacrifice must be untangled, Nina confronts Darrell, who has prescribed a child to cure the boredom in her marriage, and asks him to marry her as soon as she divorces Sam. But Darrell replies:

\text{Marry? Do you think I'm a fool? Get that out of your head quick! I wouldn't marry anyone--no matter what! } \ldots \text{ Be sensible, for God's sake! We're absolutely unsuited to each other! I don't admire your character! I don't respect you! I know too much about your past (Then indignantly) And how about Sam? Divorce him? Have you forgotten all his mother told you? (I,102)

Clearly, O'Neill implies that just as Nina was denied the happiness marriage was to afford her, she must also be denied the passion that "those afternoons" of physical bliss with Darrell provided.

Because God is depicted in a male image, Nina finds the cruel injustice of men's indifference to the birth-pain more than she can tolerate. She says that the superiority of a male God "makes life so perverted and death so unnatural" (I,42). In defiance of woman's life duties, Nina assumes the role of the creator over
the created; her egotism resounds throughout the play. Ironically, though, she does not willfully seek an unfulfilling marriage; she does not intentionally fall in love with Darrell as a result of their "scientific" union. Instead, she attempts to cope with the perverse lives around her by imposing order on bizarre circumstances. Adultery, abortion and promiscuity are necessary vehicles to sanity and stability.

Any contentment Nina experiences initially in her marriage to Sam is suddenly shattered by the threat of insanity prophesied by Mrs. Evans. Sam's mother promises Nina: "You'll learn to love him, if you give up enough for him" (I,62). Mrs. Evans is forty-five years old when she reveals the family "secret" to Nina; Nina is forty-five years old when she encourages her son Gordon to carry on the "life-lie." In addition, Mrs. Evans, like Nina in the conclusion of the play, looks much older than her actual age—a fact which further reinforces the pain of the female at bearing the "life-lie." She, too, has lost her belief in God the Father; she resents his punishing poor folks "for no sins of their own" (I,64). It has been her life's work to keep Sam from knowing the truth of his past; hence, Nina must promise to "give up enough" so that
Sam might further be spared the truth. But Darrell tells Nina that their agreement to produce a child for Sam's ego "has no more to do with love than a contract for building a house" (I,102). Subsequently, Nina is left with a loveless marriage, a passionless "lover," and a "life-lie" inherited from her mother-in-law.

Though they fail to satisfy Nina's craving for wholeness, none of the men is blind to his inadequacies; they are all carefully drawn characters. Professor Leeds realizes the injustice he has committed towards his daughter. Charles Marsden perceives his Oedipal struggle, while he outwardly allows himself to remain in the guise of "good dog Charlie." Ned Darrell, the striving scientist, feels the pain of his love more acutely than Nina imagines, but he seldom uncovers his fear of marriage and suppresses his confusion over sex; when we do witness his release of passion and love, we see that he does so with regret. Sam Evans discerns his inadequacies as a lover and a husband (he wanted to get into Gordon Shaw's flying outfit, but couldn't pass the physical), but he is a constant striver, relishing the satisfactions that a middle-class life and a mediocre marriage
provide. Gordon Evans reasonably justifies his mother's loving Darrell, but he ultimately cannot admit that a physical union exists between them—though he sees himself and Madeline reflected in their union. In some way, all of these men require self-sacrifice of Ninà—each of them causes her spiritual atrophy.

As observers of Nina's triangle of power, the audience may come away from *Strange Interlude* feeling voyeuristically cheated by the incompleteness of the triad, for it never witnesses a true sexual union. Even in the asides, there is never a clear sense of the ecstasy which Darrell and Nina may have found in their afternoons. In anger, Darrell laments: "Her body is a trap! . . . I'm caught in it!" (I,105). Nina must therefore yield to self-deception at the end of the play, when she falls into Marsden's arms. This rather subliminal conclusion, however, has undertones of a bizarre reality—a reality that misshapes one woman, for Nina must become a child in order to be loved. Her final action in the play reconciles the ideal and the actual. Unlike Emma Crosby, Nina accepts
the consequences of having espoused the romantic ideal. 38

O'Neill has not drawn a portrait of a stagnant, conceited manipulator in Nina Leeds. 39 He does not spare her merely to emphasize the deep complacency of her nature. Though *Strange Interlude* "depicts the anguish of sharing a woman with a friend," 40 it goes beyond this purpose by portraying a woman's struggle to find adequate outlets for her love; even among a husband, a lover, and a son, she has difficulty fulfilling herself. Furthermore, since childhood, this woman has met the accusing silences of a

38 Engle feels that "O'Neill offered no sufficient cause for Nina's increasingly sad condition nor for Darrell's protracted suffering. The purpose of all this is, presumably, to exemplify the destructive quality of the romantic ideal, but it fails to rise to the occasion because of its immersion in a tenacious sensibility" (p. 223).

39 John Howard Lawson concludes that emotion is abstract in *Strange Interlude*; therefore, "Nina's lust and greed, hate and egotism, are sentimentalized and take the form of aspirations. Nevertheless, these are the only emotions of which she is capable." *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* (New York: Putnam, 1936), p. 140.

Puritanical father, during his life and later through his successor, Marsden. She has been deprived of union with her first love; she has lived the role of the professor's pupil/daughter; she has borne her mother-in-law's haunting prophecy and utilitarian philosophy; she has tolerated the irrational tactics of a lover/neurologist; she has, most importantly, inflicted upon herself a role of inhuman proportions. Essentially, she imposes upon herself a reality that no one in the play shares. Though Ned may be closest to her, even he does not endure the daily deception she struggles to maintain.

Any melodrama in the play is not attributable to Nina alone, but rather to the males of the play. Sam's unflinching belief in the stability of his marriage, Marsden's overriding concern for the dead, as well as his pastoral vision of reality, and Darrell's cynical self-pity are all obvious throughout the play. Nina, however, undergoes the necessary changes in spirit; she submits to "the destructive

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41 Chabrowe, p. 134. Mr. Chabrowe concludes that the play reaches conclusions that burden the audience with a sentimentality too falsely contrived.
element in life. Her crime may be the "disease of romantic imagination," as Darrell calls her attempts to love; her craving for motherhood may itself have been the catharsis of her return to the solitude of childhood in the closing scene. Her mistake, however, was surely her aspiration to usurp the power of God the Father. In the scene most indicative of her possessiveness (and her joy), we see her exalted—temporarily free from the haunting spirit of Gordon Shaw, far-removed from the death of her father, and fulfilled in the three spirits of passion, love, and maternalism:

My three men! ... I feel their desires converge in me! ... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb ... and am whole ... they dissolve in me, their life is my life ... I am pregnant with three! ... husband! ... lover! ... father! ... and the fourth man! ... little man! ... little Gordon! ... he is mine too! ... that makes it perfect ... (With an extravagant suppressed exultance) Why, I should be the proudest woman on earth! ... I should be the happiest woman in the world! ...

(I, 135)

But in assuming that she has the power to mold perfection in this trinity, in being "pregnant with all three," Nina also must assume an inhuman responsibility, for immediately she recalls her place...
as God the Mother and senses a possible threat to her goodness:

(Then suppressing an outbreak of hysterical triumphant laughter only by a tremendous effort) Ha-ha . . . only I better knock wood . . . (She raps with both knuckles in a furious tattoo on the table) before God the Father hears my happiness! . . .

(I,135)

As Nina's fabric of emotions unfolds and her son Gordon grows in the image of his namesake, the strength which she possessed earlier in her life begins to fade. The ephemeral nature of happiness and the burden of the "life-lie" overpower and embitter her. Once again she contemplates her men:

These men make me sick! . . . I hate all three of them! . . . They disgust me! . . . The wife and mistress in me has been killed by them! . . . Thank God, I am only a mother now! . . . Gordon is my little man, my only man! . . . (I,149)

The contrast between these two musings over her three men becomes the core of O'Neill's comment on the triad. Passion, love, and maternalism cannot be corrupted to unnatural dimensions.

In the first aside concerning her men, Nina alludes to her pregnancy with all three men, but she is not actually pregnant at the time. In comparison, she omits her title of "daughter" in the latter aside, admonishing only the lover and husband. In both
soliloquies, she finds refuge in the role of God the Mother, but cannot come to terms with the father image; in fact, she fears the father, because his is the power of creation. Whether or not she challenges the unfairness of woman's position in the "death-born-of life" process, she fears the Father's retribution.

In a last attempt to sustain her mastery of the maleness in her world, Nina aspires to overcompensate for the loss of her husband and for the rejection of her lover by pouring her energies into molding her son Gordon into the elusive image of Gordon Shaw, thereby recreating the opening scene of the drama. Only by destroying Gordon's union with his fiancé, Madeline, can she hope to succeed in having at least one male accept her love. But as she failed in her attempts to achieve a tripartite life with Marsden, Darrell, and Evans, once again she must yield to the loss of her son to Madeline. While Gordon rows toward the Gordon Shaw ideal, Nina thinks:

I hear the Father [her father and God the Father] laughing! . . . O Mother God, protect my son! . . . let Gordon fly to you in heaven! . . . quick, Gordon . . . love is the Father's lightning! . . . Madeline will bring you down in flames! . . . I hear His screaming laughter! . . . fly back to me! . . .

(1,181)
42 Skinner says, "Perhaps if there were real renunciation in Nina's farewell to Gordon, if her giving up of him were for his own sake, and not a last gift to Sam, the man of surface, and if her final peace were not the involved peace of a return to Charlie, the one who makes no demands, but rather the peace of sacrifice, there would be more spirit of hope, more rumor of ultimate victory in this tortured, arrogant, possessive and bitterly self-accusing play. But as a story in which all the deeper realities are sacrificed to build up lies and false values and things of the surface, its ultimate peace seems . . . false" (pp. 201-02).
Yet she remains acutely conscious of Darrell's earlier warning: "You've got to give up owning people, meddling in their lives as if you were God and had created them!" (I,169). So, as Sam lies dying, she promises him, "Dear husband, you have tried to make me happy, I will give you my happiness again! I will give you Gordon to give to Madeline!" (I,183). Gordon's determination to marry Madeline results perhaps from the mother's wish to rectify her own mistakes. 43

Inescapably, Nina longs for the time before she "fell in love with Gordon Shaw and all this tangled mess of love and hate and pain and birth began" (I, 191). Recognizing that her need for love undermined her success as a God-force, she comes full circle in her aspirations. Failing to integrate the males of her life so that she might love as she loved Gordon Shaw, she yields to Marsden's "cool green shade wherein comes no scorching zenith sun of passion and possession to wither the heart with bitter poisons" (I,187).

43 John Henry Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965). Mr. Raleigh believes that "since one of the themes of the play is the instability of human relations, Nina's felicity cannot last, and if she is always the magnet for the males, the steel filings are always, kaleidoscope-like, rearranging themselves." He suggests this perpetual attraction/repulsion is a primary motivator in the play (p. 136).
In Charlie's "afternoons," she will recreate her childhood and reestablish her dreams. 44

In Strange Interlude, O'Neill diagnoses the neurotic sickness of the age, and, while admitting the danger apparent in romantic illusion, he even more vehemently warns of the isolation inherent in believing science a panacea. 45 Ned cannot accept Nina's encouraging her son to seek happiness as she had searched for it; instead, he denies emotion, telling her:

I'll get back to my cells—sensible unicellular life that floats in the sea and has never learned the cry for happiness! . . . Oh, God, so deaf and dumb and blind! . . . teach me to be resigned to be an atom! (I,198-199)

Nina, however, admits the restrictions of her power.

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44 She looks at Marsden, and thinks: "He will be tender . . . as my father was when I was a girl . . . when I could imagine happiness" (I,197).

45 Charles I. Glicksberg, The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff, 1971). Glicksberg says that in Strange Interlude, O'Neill "exhorted the realistic, tough-minded, truth-seeking spirit, though fully aware of man's inescapable limitations of Knowledge, his inability to grasp the absolute truth" (p. 79).
In her world "beyond desire," she contemplates Darrell's return to his surrogate son, Preston:

My having a son was a failure, wasn't it? He couldn't give me happiness. Sons are always their fathers. They pass through the mother to become their father again. The Sons of the Father have all been failures! Failing they died for us, they flew away to other lives, they could not stay with us, they could not give us happiness! (I,199)

Instead of striving for unity that the God-force achieves through birth, Nina must accept the role of woman, and find goodness in the "strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father!" (I,199). If, as she affirmed earlier, "love is the father's lightning," then the "electrical display" provides only intermittent illuminations by which she can clarify life. When Marsden tells Nina, "there was something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and fantastic" (I,199), O'Neill suggests that the unreality lies precisely in the perverted life that Nina has endured. Marsden tells Nina that he regards the past as a "distressing episode . . . of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace" (I,199). He then implores Nina to deny her
passion, love, and maternalism, and urges her to purge herself, through the "scraping" and "bleaching," of the womanhood which she fought to maintain. A return to the feminine father figure marks the end of her growth, the exhaustion of her determination.

Rather than integrating her roles, Nina must eventually eliminate her role of God the Mother. Any resolution in the play comes from her echoing her father's egotism in Act One; her spirit emerges triumphant precisely because she realizes the impossibility of her struggle. In this closing scene, "Nina is reminiscent of all O'Neill 'villains,' male or female, she is an object of compassion, herself longing for a mother, for peace, for love, for innocence." 46 The lightning of God the Father illuminates truth, and the paternal echo of Act One resounds in the closing scene to cast an aura of truth over this woman who dared to seek happiness and ablation by momentarily mastering a trinity of "manless" men. 47

46 Falk, p. 125.

While the last act of *Strange Interlude* depicts the continuum of human emotion, it goes beyond this purpose in suggesting that emotional satisfaction sometimes necessitates an aberration from "normalcy"; in fact, it may oblige grasping at even an approximation of reality, as apparent in Nina's attempt to uphold the facade of her son's true conception so that she might find happiness in marriage. Nina's resignation recalls her sorrow at not giving herself to her lover Gordon, her unselfish abortion of Sam's child, her twenty-three years of accommodating Sam in a superficial marriage, her recognition of the loss of passion in her liaison with Darrell, her ungrudging refusal to reveal Gordon's paternity to him (thereby destroying his vision of his father), and confirming that duty alone compelled her devotion to Sam, and, especially her conscious abnegation of the role of God the Mother. Ultimately, Nina abides in the reality of masculine supremacy, for at forty-five, her ability to challenge the male God no longer takes precedence in her life. She moves back into the life stream as a daughter, after having been denied the passion, love, and maternalism that any woman might reasonably expect in life.
Insofar as it embodies the theme of the abject woman, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is a direct descendant of *Strange Interlude*, for in it, O'Neill allows Nina Leeds' spirit to flourish for one final day, expressing the horror at discovering that time no longer permits reconciliation with the past, that the hopes of youth pale under the demands of the present. It tells of the loss of giving oneself over to love. The burden of the past makes self-renewal impossible. Like Nina Leeds, Mary Tyrone embraces romantic illusion, but whereas Nina's sigh of resignation involves a triumph of romantic agony, Mary's exhaustion echoes its defeat. Thus, *Long Day's Journey* examines woman's role in light of her capability to transcend the past, and, in so doing, to commit herself to the will-to-illusion.
That Mary Tyrone is patterned after Ellen Quinlan O'Neill and is therefore the character closer to life than any other O'Neill character suggests the playwright's need to come to terms with the mother figure. Mary says,

"None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever."

Her speech summarizes a philosophy O'Neill affirmed in his own life: despite one's attempts at self assertion, heredity and environment finally rule destiny. The extent to which O'Neill himself sought to reconcile his past is perhaps best illustrated in his dedication of Long Day's Journey. He writes to his third wife, Carlotta Monterey, on his twelfth wedding anniversary:


49 Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 61. All subsequent references to the play will be taken from this edition and noted parenthetically within the text.

Dearest: I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem, for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead and write this play—write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones.

(p. 7)

The play, therefore, sheds an intensely autobiographical light, particularly in its elaboration on psychological and physical homelessness. The "old sorrow" of O'Neill's dedication refers to the wounds of the family, inflicted both from within and without, not only of his family but of the universal family as well. As the Eternal Girl-Mother, Mary Tyrone embodies both the idealism and despair espoused simultaneously by all the Tyrones. Her journey of regression, though much too apparent, is crucial to the play, for it moves the family to acknowledge complicity in her failure as wife, daughter and mother. Sadly, her desire to communicate remains unfulfilled; she says, "If only there was some place I could go to get away for a day, or even an afternoon, some woman friend I could talk to—not about anything serious, simply laugh and gossip and forget for a while" (p. 46).

The oscillation between anger and forgiveness, compassion and resentment throughout the play creates
a sincerity lacking in the previous plays, where, in Nina's asides, it was overtly contrived, or, in Anna's betrothal, it was necessarily acquiescent. Its jealousy, cynicism, rivalry, and compulsion may make Long Day's Journey "the most universal piece of stage realism ever turned out by an American playwright."\textsuperscript{51} Mary Tyrone at once condones and admonishes the family's instability. Her inability to fulfill the demands of her roles nurtures in the other family members a sense of the inevitably tragic; they are collectively incapable of regeneration.

The Tyrones' helplessness stems primarily from the overwhelming burden of the past. Mary's extreme nervousness and her sensitivity concerning her hands belie "the simple, unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl youthfulness she has never lost" (p. 13). Her husband's and sons' staring prompts an acute self-consciousness in her; she instinctively reaches to arrange her hair in response to their attention. James Tyrone, on the other hand, is without nerves. His impulsive sentimentality borne of "his humble beginnings and his Irish farmer forebears" (p. 13) often gives way to temperamental outbursts and childlike moodiness spawned by his actor's versatility. The Tyrone sons

mirror their parents. While the elder, Jamie, is most like his father, exuding the romantic irresponsible Irish charm, but easily given over to fits of resentment, Edmund is his mother, possessed of her nervous sensibility and diffidence. In short, they reveal a familial dualism, capable of intense love and hatred.

As the child of the family, Edmund has been sheltered from the disgrace of his father's excessive miserliness, his brother's debauchery, and his mother's morphine addiction. The onslaught of Edmund's consumption, however, causes a corresponding physical and emotional collapse of the family. The extent of James Tyrone's greed is apparent in his sending Edmund to a state-supported sanatorium; he justifies his choice by reasoning that his tax payments support such institutions, and that he is, in fact, "land poor" (see pp. 143-146). Even when Edmund confronts him with his penny-pinching, Tyrone is slow to admit his failing; his mother's poverty has bred in him a fear of "the poorhouse." He tells Edmund:

> It was in those days I learned to be a miser. A dollar was worth so much then. And once you've learned a lesson, it's hard to unlearn it. You have to look for bargains. If I took this state farm
sanatorium for a good bargain, you'll have to forgive me. The doctors did tell me it's a good place. You must believe that, Edmund. And I swear I never meant you to go there if you didn't want to. (Vehemently.) You can choose any place you like! Never mind what it costs! Any place I can afford. Any place you like--within reason. (P. 148)

Tyrone's financial "poverty" emerges, therefore, as a spiritual impoverishment, evident in his clumsy, qualified response. Furthermore, his greed compels him to usurp the mother's role as distributor of goods within the family. "His role should be that of acquiring necessary family commodities, but he attempts both roles: acquisition and distribution; this leaves the mother, Mary, deprived of one of her most necessary functions." Tyrone's self-discipline, learned from his lesson in depravity, partially saves him from the role of villain, but he does not emerge "more victim than culprit," as has been suggested. His insistence upon the most economical means of reaching an end, his greed for his wife's love, his own addiction to alcohol, and his ineptitude at managing the family prevent his blamelessness.

52 Long, p. 207.

53 For a favorable interpretation of Tyrone's character, see Scheaffer, Son and Artist, p. 515.
Jamie's relationship to his brother appears in context as typical sibling rivalry and harmony. But, as O'Neill himself points out, they are the father's and mother's sons, respectively, and, therefore, emulate the parents' relationship. Jamie's infatuation with Broadway, bourbon, and whores contributes to Edmund's instability. Tyrone reminds Jamie that he, more than anyone, is responsible for his brother's degeneration:

You made him old before his time, pumping him full of what you consider worldly wisdom, when he was too young to see that your mind was so poisoned by your own failure in life, you wanted to believe every man was a knave with his soul for sale, and every woman who wasn't a whore was a fool! (p. 34)

Jamie denies that he has had such influence over Edmund, but acknowledges his sneering jealousy, calling his brother a "bum reporter" who works on "a hick-town rag" (p. 36). Again, after his "heart-to-heart talk" with Fat-Violet, "concerning the infinite sorrow of life" (p. 160), the intensity of his envy controls him. He inflicts a series of psychological wounds upon his brother, telling him, "I made you! You're my Frankenstein!" (p. 164). Typical of all the Tyrones,
Jamie finds the courage to reveal his emotions only when anesthetized:

I've been a rotten bad influence. And worst of it is, I did it on purpose... to make a bum of you. ... My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at times, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobs they really are. ... Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet. (p. 165)

Yet Jamie's resentment goes even further; he reminds his brother, "It was your being born that started Mama on dope. I know that's not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can't help hating your guts" (p. 166). Jamie's emotions, like his father's, are deeply rooted in the past. Mary reminds Tyrone that he has reared his children on alcohol. The bottle of bourbon was always on the bureau in cheap hotel rooms, ready to soften the nightmare and cure the stomach-ache, an anodyne for transient childhood.

In addition to his father's blatant greed and his brother's bitterness, Edmund must further come to terms with his mother's resentment. The relationship between mother and son echoes Abbie and Eben's union, for the bonds are at once both grotesque and divine. Because his conception was a gesture aimed at blocking out the
memory of her dead child, Eugene, Mary blames him for her addiction. She, in turn, tells Tyrone that Edmund's ill-health and subsequent unhappiness stem from her own nervousness and sensitivity while carrying him. Edmund senses the ill-fated circumstances of his origin; therefore, like Mary, he seeks the refuge of the fog. Both he and Mary find the same shelter in the fog that Anna found; Mary says, "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" (p. 98). Edmund tells his father, "the fog was where I wanted to be. . . . Out beyond the harbor where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land" (p. 131). The fog cushions reality, providing a "world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself" (p. 131). In his sojourn on the beach, Edmund returns to the womb; his words reveal the unsettled fetal existence (p. 131). Mother and son are thus united in painful, primal origins.

Mary, unlike Nina, desires only escape from her three men. Love, once again, resounds in the Father's lightning, threatening the world of Woman by its implications, for it causes . . . the birth-pain, demands sexual and spiritual reciprocity, and claims as its right life-long devotion to the male will. Unlike
Nina, Mary craves the night, where she can return to the dreams of childhood, beyond the reach of the painful present. In this world of suspended animation, she recreates the "pipe dreams" of youth, and suppresses her sexuality by outfitting herself in the nun's purity. The convent cloaks her in sustaining faith—the "something" she has lost and for which she searches in her "mad scene" (pp. 172-173). She recounts for Cathleen her father's introducing her to the "great matinee idol," James Tyrone, an event which made her "forget" her two dreams to become a concert pianist or a nun. "All I wanted was to be his wife," she tells Cathleen (p. 105). But the foghorn, which she despises for its ability to censure her journeys to the romantic past, transforms her to "an aging, cynically sad, embittered woman" (p. 107). She subsequently relapses further in her illusions:

You're a sentimental fool. What is so wonderful about that first meeting between a silly romantic schoolgirl and a matinee idol? You were much happier before you knew he existed, in the Convent when you used to pray to the Blessed Virgin. (p. 107)

Mary recognizes the facade of Tyrone's summer "home," and, thus, longs to return to second-rate hotels; "At least I don't expect them to be like a home," she
tells Tyrone (p. 72). While Mary's childhood home fell short of the ideal that she envisions (p. 137), its memory provides the only alternative to her present misery. O'Neill makes it clear that "her desire, even as a girl, was to escape into a lonely world--into the convent [,] where she could be sustained by a vision and live a simple, virginal existence." Love has, therefore, violated her spirit and defiled her purity; in the midst of her quest for a sustaining faith, she says, "Something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I feel in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time" (p. 176). Subsequently, because she cannot meet the obligations which men's love asks of her, she yearns for the fog and its accompanying illusions:

\[
\text{I will find it again--some day when you're all well, and I see you healthy and happy and successful, and I don't have to feel guilty any more--some day when the Blessed Virgin Mary forgives me and gives me back the faith in Her love and pity I used to have in my convent days. (p. 94)}
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In her discovery of the source of her loss of innocence, Mary mirrors Nina, who longed for the time before she

54 Bogard, p. 428.
met Gordon Shaw. But Mary's need of encapsuled purity, her return to girlhood, emanate not from an awareness of the biological end of loving (as did Nina's), but from a deeper understanding of the spiritual nullity of giving oneself in love. Ironically, she is the one Tyrone most capable of achieving the aesthetic distance necessary to self-discovery. 55

Mary's wavering between shy, convent schoolgirl and cynical, embittered woman recapitulates the dialogue between recrimination and exculpation carried on throughout Long Day's Journey. Perhaps O'Neill's arraignment of his mother stems from "his own pathological inability to accept guilt," for he gives little indication that Ella Quinlan O'Neill overcame her morphine addiction. 56 The search for blame

55 Long, p. 211.

56 Hugh Leonard, "Can a Playwright Truly Depict Himself?" The New York Times, 23 November 1980, Sec. 2, p. 26. Though almost twenty-five years have elapsed since the play was released for publication, critics still question O'Neill's treatment of Mary Tyrone (as she depicts Ella Quinlan O'Neill). In assessing the legitimacy of "autobiographical drama," Mr. Leonard concludes that O'Neill's portrait of Mary remains unjustified: "Hers is the last speech, and we leave her incurably (O'Neill implies) a victim of morphine. The author gives no hint that she was to rid herself of the addiction two years later. She is not allowed even that small entry in the credit column" (p. 5).
finally centers on Mary, as the sons and father bemoan her betrayal of their hope; they develop a sense of imprisonment in her fate. They, unlike Mary, fail to sense the temporal nature of their happiness and remain under the illusion that, were it not for her morphine addiction, theirs would be a true home.
CHAPTER FIVE

Renunciation and Mother Love

A Moon for the Misbegotten

Returning to the New England farm of Desire Under the Elms, O'Neill presents his pieta, A Moon for the Misbegotten. His composite heroine, Josie Hogan, recalls the women of each play in my study. Like Anna and Abbie, she yearns for an identity transcending sexual roles, and, like Emma Crosby, self-imposes an unnatural restraint. Josie's determined spirit, initially appearing to stem from a crude and vengeful source, echoes Nina's. No less is Josie a descendant of Mary Tyrone, for beneath their self-effacement, both women crave expression of a pure and sustaining maternal love. In fact, Josie appears second-handedly in Long Day's Journey as the outcast whore, Fat Violet, in
whose arms Jamie cleanses the wounds of his disillusionment. Again, like the town harlot, Min, in *Desire Under the Elms*, she extends her maternal breast to the confession-seeking male youth, always concurrently hiding her own life pain, crying her sorrow inwardly.

Because Josie combines all the contradictory elements of the eternal feminine, she takes on mythical proportions. The physical requirements of her character, according to O'Neill's specifications, make casting the role a virtual impossibility in professional theatre. Mary Welch, in a revealing commentary on her pursuit of the role, talks of O'Neill's extreme sensitivity and generosity toward her. The Theatre Guild's original production of the play in 1947 proved unsuccessful, but its failure was not largely caused by casting difficulties. More importantly, it was censured as an "obscene slander on

57 "Softer Tones for Mr. O'Neill's Portrait," *Theatre Arts*, 41 (May, 1957), 67-68, 82-83. In her personal account, Ms. Welch notes the "overly stark and limited portrait of O'Neill" common among writers during his lifetime.
American motherhood."\(^{58}\) Despite, dialogue changes demanded by moralist groups,\(^{59}\) the play closed after a short run. Perhaps O'Neill's own lack of interest in the play, as well as his illness throughout the rehearsals, contributed to its theatrical failure. Mrs. O'Neill thought the play unnecessary after Long Day's Journey Into Night.\(^{60}\) Finally, O'Neill acknowledged his own dislike for the play; in his inscription to Carlotta, he says:

>This token of my gratitude and awareness—a poor thing—a play she dislikes, and which I have come to loathe—dating back to 1944—my last.\(^{61}\)

The play's overwhelmingly harsh critical response echoes its author's distaste for it. Engel cites the play as "feeble and pale,"\(^{62}\) while Eric Bentley says

\(^{58}\) Bogard, p. 447.

\(^{59}\) Mary Welch recalls one of the Detroit censor's "brilliant" contributions: "'Well, you can't say tart, but you can say tramp'" (p. 83).  


\(^{61}\) Inscriptions: Eugene O'Neill to Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, ed. Donald Gallup (New Haven, 1960), privately printed. This inscription is signed by O'Neill and dated 22 July 1952.  

\(^{62}\) Engel, p. 295.
it leaves the "impression of neurotic fantasy
unorganized into art." Nevertheless, A Moon for the
Misbegotten cannot be denied its worth. It is a ritual
of confession that hinges upon woman's self-
renunciation, and, in doing so, completes the cycle of
the O'Neill heroine.

As a sequel to Long Day's Journey, A Moon for the
Misbegotten recounts Jamie's embittered life after his
mother and father have died. Particularly, it focuses
on his abandonment of his mother, and subsequent guilt
over his lecherous behavior while riding in the train
car bearing her coffin. Clearly, he finds himself
on one hand committed to drunkenness, drawn to the
Broadway "tarts," whom he willfully manipulates, while
on the other hand he craves sober recognition of love,
not bought, but given freely. His remorse at having
appeared drunk at his mother's deathbed (thereby

63 The Dramatic Event (New York: Horizon, 1954),
p. 33. In addition, Mary McCarthy calls the play
"Desire Under the Elms grown old and hoarse and randy." Review of A Moon for the Misbegotten, the New York
Times, 31 August 1952; rpt. in O'Neill and His Plays:
Four Decades of Criticism, eds. Oscar Cargill, N.
breaking his promise of sobriety to her) so overwhelms him that he must objectify his role as son, distancing himself from the haunting episode. In Josie he finds his mother, and, like Eben, therefore, desires to appease the violated maternal spirit. But Jamie is the damned soul, an outcast from society, waiting only for the proceeds of his mother's estate, so that he might purchase the anodynes for his pain. However, there can be no retribution for his past mistakes. He is a corpse who has "poisoned his happiness" (p. 125). For him, there is no possibility of a sustaining "vision of beatitude," but only the wish that he might die in sleep (pp. 134, 150, 156).

Like Jamie, Josie is ostracized by society. She proudly wears the stamp of the whore and carries a

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64 He tells Josie of his mother's deathbed scene: "I know damned well just before she died she recognized me. She saw I was drunk. Then she closed her eyes so she couldn't see, and was glad to die! . . . There are things I can never forget--the undertakers, and her body in a coffin with her face made up." A Moon for the Misbegotten (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p. 131. All subsequent references to the play will be taken from this edition and noted parenthetically within the text.

sawed-off broom handle to wield her authority. Though five foot eleven and one hundred and eighty pounds, "there is no mannish quality about her. She is all woman" (p. 13). Her coarse features are softened by a charm apparent in her eyes and smile. Her duality is further reinforced by a notorious sexual prowess and corresponding virginal compassion. While she cloaks herself in a myth of unquenchable desire no man can appease, there is about her an unfulfilled yearning for love without pretense. Early in the play, she acts as agent of freedom, urging her brother Michael to follow his brothers in flight from their father's enslavement, thereby precluding her role as Jamie's confessor.

Josie is not Demeter-like by design. She evolves naturally from the alienation and disharmony of the farm's landscape, and, as such, easily weathers her father's indignities. He calls her a "great slut" and an "overgrown cow," yet she responds with characteristic pride. She says, "I'm an ugly overgrown lump of a woman, and the men that want me are no better than stupid bulls" (p. 35). At heart, she is bitter at the freak nature has made of her, and senses that spiritually she is superior to the "pretty little tarts"
on Broadway. Her complicity in her father's ancient scheme to blackmail Tyrone is, in fact, superficially imposed. Always "on the verge of tears," she cannot acknowledge her longing to be ordinary. At the height of their scheming, she goes to her room under the pretense of applying makeup, so she might look like one in her "trade"; instead, only tears of humiliation fall on her cheeks. Hogan observes: "A look in the mirror and she's forgot to light her lamp. (Remorsefully.) God forgive me, it's bitter medicine" (p. 93).

Only in the cleansing bath of moonlight do Josie and Jamie's self-contradictory natures become apparent. Their comic pretensions cannot sustain them in their mutual need to be touched. Like Nina, they come to acknowledge their night as only an interlude in life, commanding Jamie's psychological death in the womb and Josie's resignation to virginity. Longing to appease ghosts of their own, they perform a purification ritual, with alcohol and moonlight as the matter of their sacrament. As Jamie acknowledges, they are kindred souls:

You can take the truth, Josie--from me. Because you and I belong to the same club. We can kid the world but we can't fool
ourselves, like most people, no matter what we do--nor escape ourselves no matter where we run away.... You pretend too much. And so do the guys. I've listened to them at the Inn. They all lie to each other. No one wants to admit all he got was a slap in the puss, when he thinks a lot of other guys made it. You can't blame them. And they know you don't give a damn how they lie. (p. 121)

In conceding her affected role as whore, Josie is free to love Tyrone, but in her shame, she mistakenly assumes that he has called on her sexual self. Impulsively, he responds: "I know what you want, Bright Eyes. . . . Come on, Baby Doll, let's hit the hay" (p. 123). Repulsed by his "Broadway lingo," she comes to a deeper recognition of his nature; for her it is an awakening that requires a sacrificial regression into sexlessness. She offers her breast in maternal tenderness, while fighting the love that responds to him as a man. Essentially, she calls him as a mother, evoking the deeper implications of his sob song: "And the baby's cries can't waken her/In the baggage coach ahead" (p. 134). The depth of her sacrifice is borne out in her anguished longing:

It's a fine end to all my scheming, to sit here with the dead hugged to my breast, and the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke! (p. 137)
In the fusion of their loves, Josie and Jamie achieve a selflessness not witnessed in the earlier plays. There is no grandiose triumph of spirit (as surely there never could be in O'Neill's plays). Yet, that mother and son have endured the night and witnessed the dawn suggests that for even "the fog people" redemption is possible. In that dawn, however, Josie alone realizes they have passed beyond hope; only she comprehends their natures' deformities.

Though her body sags from holding Tyrone, Josie does not waken him "until the dawn has beauty in it" (p. 139); she longs to create for him a morning apart from his "grey" dawns. Josie's power to transform the negative energies of Tyrone's confession into positive emotion establishes her integrity. In her final self-renunciation, O'Neill achieves what one critic calls "the right kind of pity." Jamie senses

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their night has been an exercise in unmasking: "It's hard to describe how I feel. It's a new one on me. Sort of at peace with myself and this lousy life--as if all my sins had been forgiven" (p. 150).

Immediately, however, he becomes self-conscious and cynical. Likewise at the close of the play, Josie necessarily resumes her mask as contented daughter; internally, however, she remains faithful to the mother, as she tells her son, "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim, darling. May you rest for ever in forgiveness and peace" (p. 156). In these, O'Neill's last words to be written for the stage, the abject woman resigns herself to compromise. It is perhaps significant that they are spoken by a madonna scorned, a misbegotten woman who has no illusions about her illusions.

68 This "tough" style functions as an ironical mask for sensitivity. "The prime symptom--or perhaps prime cause--of this embarrassment," says Eric Bentley, "is fear of sex--fear of woman as woman, longing for her as mother or as virgin" (pp. 32-33).
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VITA

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