Chapter III

O’Neill’s Concept of Women

Although O’Neill’s concept of women altered and grew as he experienced life, several dominant characteristics prevail in all of his portrayals of women. From his initial concept of women as Mother, O’Neill retained in all his women characters the maternal protective instinct toward the man-child. This protectiveness does not extend to the mother-daughter relationship, but it is an oppressive Freudian factor in influencing the personalities and actions of O’Neill’s male protagonists.

Moreover, with the exception of the pure Earth Mother type as found in The Great God Brown, all of O’Neill’s women are selfishly possessive. In the early plays their possessiveness does not wield the power over the course of action pursued by the protagonist as is evidenced in the later plays, for example, Strange Interlude, primarily because women in the early are not prominent as individuals in shaping the lives of the protagonists. As O’Neill recognized woman’s power over man, however, her desire to possess man’s soul becomes one of her most dangerous characteristics.

Another outstanding characteristic of O’Neill’s women is that they lack the complexity of nature so pronounced in O’Neill’s protagonists. That is to say, even O’Neill’s most complicated heroines, for example, Nina in Strange Interlude and Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra, do not have the depth of soul, as it were, that, for example Dion Anthony in The Great God Brown is endowed with. A woman is a spiritually simple creature; she does not recognize the ambivalence of man’s nature or that of her own, and she is rarely torn between romantic aspirations and reality. And it is for this reason that she reaches such majestic proportions in O’Neill’s final concept of her, since, unlike man, she possesses unity of purpose, which enables her to defeat man’s attempts to rise above the life which she represents.
Lastly, O’Neill’s woman is the symbol of love, or sex, or both. In short, she is the Life Force against which man struggles to find individual significance and meaning. And in this respect, no matter how minor a role woman may have in an O’Neill play, she nevertheless demands attention. It is from this seed of conviction that O’Neill gradually envisioned woman as the dominating factor that destroyed man’s dreams. With this compelling weapon woman in the later plays dominates the action and the outcomes of the play.

O’Neill’s early women characters, in addition to the traits outlined above possess certain notable traits peculiar to his initial concept. First of all, O’Neill portrays woman as a weak, submissive creature, clinging to man as a source of strength, without which her life has no meaning. Her weakness is exemplified by her simplicity; that is, she can understand only the quest for the attainment of concrete goals in life and utterly fails to recognize man’s need to find spiritual value in life.

Similarly, the early woman is a passive creature. Life’s experiences happen to her; she does not cause them to happen. Although she is a prominent factor in man’s final defeat, she does not consciously challenge his domination over her, nor does realize that she is a tool that Fate uses to destroy man. The strength of her power over the protagonist is, therefore, a natural strength occasioned simply by the instinctive desire of the protagonist to respond to her love.

Finally, woman in the early plays is not a dominating character in the action of the play, or if she does have a primary role, she is not realistically portrayed. Her presence in the play is important only as it is needed as the symbol of the Life force. She is an image of the promise of love and purity woman as an individual with human weaknesses. She is, in the early plays, a distant, loving mother, promising to comfort, love, and protect, yet without individual qualities of good of evil.
Two of O’Neill major plays have been chosen to illustrate his early concept of woman—*Beyond the Horizon*, written in the winter of 1918, represents O’Neill’s first major dramatic achievement. Mrs. Mayo and Ruth Mayo, the two females characters presented in the play, are illustrative not only of O’Neill’s early illusionary vision of women but also of the seeds from which his later women emerged.

The next play, *Anna Christie*, was written in the summer of 1920, over a year after *The Straw* (1919). It shows a definite change in O’Neill’s concept of woman. Anna Christopherson, the play’s heroine, is different from Mrs. Mayo, Ruth, and Eileen, in that for the first time she challenges man’s idealism. Thus, while still being endowed with some of the qualities of the earlier woman, Anna suggests a new female type, the Earth Mother, for which O’Neill forsook his initial concept of woman for a mere dynamic symbol of life.

*Beyond the Horizon* portrays man’s attempt to find happiness through the relationship of his romantic ideals. The effort is a tragic one because man is incapable of losing the bonds of reality in order to pursue his dreams. The struggle is embodied in three--Robert Mayo, his brother Andy, and his wife, Ruth.

The play takes place on a small New England farm owned by the Mayo family. As the play opens, Robert, Andy, and Ruth are presented in harmony with their true natures. Robert, the dreamer, is about to set sail with his uncle on a voyage which will take him out of the menial existence of the farm into the beauty beyond the horizon. Andy, a son of the soil, is making plans to fulfil his life on the farm by marrying Ruth, settling down, and living with the beauty of the farm around him. Ruth is the prize that comes with the farm, and Andy has seemingly won her simply by virtue of his natural love of farming and desire to remain at home.
Suddenly, however, Ruth discovers that it is Robert whom she loves. His poetic declarations to her excite her emotions, and she seems Robert shrouded with mystery and enchantment. Robert is at once confused and overcome by her love for him. He has admitted his love for her without realising the possible outcome of the admission, and, thus, when Ruth begs him to stay on the farm and marry her, he lingers a moment. But he is won over by her tears. Andy’s dreams are crushed by Robert’s revelation to the family that he will stay on the farm and marry Ruth. Impulsively, Andy declares that he will take Robert’s place on the ship.

Thus, the decisions are made, and the characters must bear the consequences of their impulsive choices. The future of the entire Mayo family is decided in one swift moment of emotional folly. Mr. Mayo, who is enraged by Andy’s decision to leave the farm, dies a year later. When he dies, Mrs. Mayo loses all her strength and becomes a body without hope. The farm slowly decays into a pig sty under the inept supervision of Robert. The marriage is, of course, a miserable failure, since Ruth cannot understand Robert’s inability to make her life prosperous, and Rob, therefore, no longer has even his love to sustain him. Andy is successful, but he gambles in wheat instead of growing it, and he, too, loses spiritual satisfaction. The only salvation in the course of events is the birth of Mary to Rob and Ruth, and this, too, turns to tragedy by her death.

At the end of eight years the tragic cycle is completed. Rob has almost completely lost concept with reality and is dying from a lung infection. Andy returns to a once thriving farm now ruined by neglect. He finds Rob at the point of death nurtured by an apathetic wife who, since her first realization that Andy no longer loved her, has ceased to care about life. Ruth is so indifferent that she admits the misery of the marriage to a horrified Andy. But Rob reminds Andy that Ruth, too, has
suffered and that his dying is not punishment but release. At last in dying is not punishment but release. At last in dying Rob is free to wander, and he leaves Andy with the task of finding himself again and rebuilding his life with Ruth.

So it is that Rob, the symbol of universal man, seeks to lift himself above his menial existence in order to find the peace and perfection promised “beyond the horizon.” But in setting these ideals and in dreaming these dreams, man overlooks his basic desires and needs. He ignores reality, or as O’Neill calls it, the Life Force. Hence, the tragedy of Beyond the Horizon lies in the ambivalence of man’s nature. For many have within him two sides to his nature—his basic desires and needs, and his spiritual or idealistic yearnings. He is, in fact, split against himself. He cannot ignore either side, since to forsake his ideals would require the denial of his spiritual significance, and to deny reality is to tempt Fate.

Nevertheless, man does tempt Fate; he does reach out to attain self-realisation and perfection. And he fails miserably. It is interesting to note, moreover, that Fate employs woman as the instrument for defeating man’s objectives. Because of love, symbolized first in Mrs. Mayo and sexually in Ruth, both Rob and Andy are unable to realize their dreams. The emphasis in this play is placed on the latter relationship. However, only through study of all four characters can full recognition be given O’Neill’s early concept of women, her relationship to man’s struggle and her significance in the scheme of things.

Rob’s character is clearly depicted by O’Neill that, “There is the touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin” (Eugene O’Neill, The Plays of Eugene O’Neill, 81). Moreover, because of his nature to dream and to seek spiritual significance in life, Rob is out of harmony with the practical business of
farming. As Andy says to him, “Farming isn’t your nature.... You—well, you like the home part of it, I expect, but as a place to work and grew things, you hate it” (Ibid. 84). But Andy’s understanding goes no further does no further. Recognizing this, Rob tries to explain to Andy why he wants to sail beyond the horizon:

Supporting I was to tell you that it’s just beauty calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East which lures me in the books I’ve read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on—in quest of the search which is hidden over there, beyond the horizon? (Ibid. 85)

Rob, then, has no practical considerations whatsoever for making his voyage. His dreams are his reality, lending to his natural physical weakness; and as long as he is left to his dreams, he is safe from the snares of life. However, he is vulnerable, and love brings him back to reality. When Ruth suddenly declares that she loves him and not Andy, Rob is stunned. He is not prepared for this turn of events, but he gives in to her pleas, as O’Neill out, “..... With happy hopefulness,” exclaiming:

Perhaps after all Andy was right—righter than he knew—when he said I could find all the things I was seeking for here, at home on the farm. I think love must have been the secret—the secret that called to me from over the world’s rim . . . (Ibid. 92).

But Uncle Scott puts the whole matter in its proper perspective: “I’m ashamed of you; Robert, to go lettin’ a little huggin’ and Kissin’ in the dark spile your chances to make a man out o’ yourself” (Ibid. 102).

However, Rob feels that he has “. . . found a bigger dream” (Ibid., 102), and with childlike optimism he marriage Ruth. Reality is a hard taskmaster, though. Three years elapse, and at the beginning of Act II, Rob’s dreams have turned into a nightmare: “His eyes are dull and lifeless . . . . His lips drawn down at the corners give him a hopeless . . . . His lips drawn down at the corners give him a hopeless, resigned expression. The three years have accentuated the weakness of his mouth and chin” (Ibid., 119). The farm is going to ruin under his inept management, and he hates
it, as he exclaims to Ruth: “Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much! How I’ve grown to hate the sight of them! They’re like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life!” (Eugene O’Neill, *Plays*, III, 125-126) Neither has Love sustained him. In truth, Rob recognizes within him the fact that Ruth no longer loves him, and she defeats him completely when she admits that she Loves Andy. Rob has nothing left except Mary, their daughter. Moreover, Mary has inherited Rob’s Physical weakness, and even she is taken away from him. In spite of all this tragedy, Rob is unable to see that he has been defeated by going against his own nature. He is completely incapable of facing reality. He blames God, “. . . if there was a God,” (*Ibid.*, 148) for Mary’s death, and the farm for ruining his happiness with Ruth. Only in his dying moments does he find happiness, as he tells Andy not to feel sorry for him: “Don’t you see I’m happy at last—free—free—freed from the farm—free to wander on and on—eternally . . . It’s a free beginning. . . I’ve won my trip—the right of release—beyond the horizon:” (*Ibid.*, 167).

Rob’s tragedy is accentuated by Andy’s failure. For Andy is a son of the soil, as Rob says: “You’re a Mayo through and through. . . . You’re as much of product of it [the soil] as an ear of corn is, or a tree” (*Ibid.*, 84). Like his father, Andy is strong and practical. He plans to marry Ruth and the farm. Consequently, when Rob announces that he and Ruth will marry, Andy’s world collapses. His impulsive declaration that he will go to sea in Rob’s place enrages Mr. Mayo, who knows that Andy belongs on the farm: “You lie when you say you want to go ‘way—and see thin’s: You ain’t got no likin’ in the world to go. . . . You’re running against your own nature, and you’re going’ to mighty sorry for it if you do” (*Ibid.*, 106). Andy, too, realizes he is courting disaster, but he cannot bear to see Rob and Ruth together: “. . .
It’ll all turn out for the best—let’s hope. It couldn’t be helped—what’s happened” (Ibid., 109). But then he declares, “I feel dead (Ibid., 111).

O’Neill’s description of Andy in Acts II and III shows Andy’s gradual spiritual decay. In Act II Andy’s “old easygoing good-nature seems to have been partly Lost in a breezy, business-like briskness of voice and gesture” (Ibid., 130). Ruth and the farm no longer appeal to him, and he is anxious to get back to Argentina to make his fortune. By Act III his metamorphosis is complete: “His eyes are keener and more alert. There is even a suggestion of ruthless cunning about him” (Ibid., 153). But his true nature, though suppressed, rises up again. He admits that he wants to come home and “really live again.” Finally, his failure is pinpointed by the dying Rob:

I’ve been wondering what a change was in you. . . . You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There’s a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy. (He smiles bitterly) I’m a failure and Ruth’s another—but we can both justly lay some off the blame for our stumbling on God . . . . You’ve spent eight years running away from yourself. . . . You and life were in harmonious partnership (Ibid., 167).

Fate has been challenged and has won. Both Rob and Andy have been drawn into tragedy by their own aspirations for happiness, which are blocked by the compelling love they feel for Ruth. For it is Ruth who convinces Rob to stay on the farm. It is she who has flirted with Andy, whom she casts aside indifferently. And it is her desire to possess both the poetry of Rob and the security of Andy that causes the failure of all three.

Ruth does not consciously destroy, however. Her character does not indicate ruthlessness and cunning manipulation. Rather, she is a pretty young farm girl whose practical approach to life is in keeping with her heritage. For her, the farm is her world, and beauty is the natural flow of day to day living and dying. The world
beyond holds no fascination for her, and she comments to Rob the evening before his departure, “It’s a shame you’re going—just at this time, in spring, when everything is getting so nice” (Eugene O’Neill, Plays, III, 88) Ironically, she uses this argument to persuade Rob to stay: “Please, Rob: We’ll be so happy here together where its natural and we know things” (Ibid., 92).

Ruth does, however, momentarily recognise a certain beauty in Rob’s world. Indeed, it is this faint cognizance of poetic longing that captures her heart. She is “charmed by his low, musical voice. . . .” (Ibid., 89) declaring, “oh, Rob, how could I help feeling it? You tell things so beautifully!” (Ibid., 90)

The spell, though, is quickly broken, and Ruth returns immediately to reality. She is concerned with living, and she soon realizes that Rob is weak, and Ruth hates weakness. She “shudders” when Rob reflects about his sickly childhood but is impressed when he picks her up and carries her down the road after they have decided to marry. Moreover, her mind cannot reach beyond her concrete surroundings. When she sees that Rob cannot make a living on the farm, she hates him, because he is to her no longer a symbol of masculine strength:

What do you think—living with a man like You—having to suffer all the time because you’ve never been man enough to work and do things like other people. . . . I s’pose you think I ought to proud to be your wife—a poor, ignorant thing Like me! (Fiercely) But I ‘m not. I hate it! I hate the sight of you . . . . If I hadn’t been such a fool to listen to your cheap, silly, poetry talk that you learned out of books! If I could have seen how you were in your true self—like you are Now—I ‘d have killed myself I’d have married You! (Ibid., 127).

Her frustration has turned to defiant bitterness, and she literally destroys Rob with her statement and her further admission that she Loves Andy. Andy now represents to her all the strength man should have to be a vital creature. Andy will come home and make things right again, she is sure. But Andy, too, has changed, and
he laughs at his early boyhood love for her. Ruth is defeated; love had cheated her, and she no longer has anything to hold on to.

By the beginning of Act III Ruth’s “. . . pale, deeply lined face has the stony lack of expression of one to whom nothing more can happen, whose capacity for emotion has been exhausted” (Ibid., 144). Like Rob, she has completely withdrawn from life. She no longer hates Rob, nor is she capable of love. As she explains to Andy, “There’s a time comes—when you don’t mind any more—anything.” (Ibid., 156). Only one emotion remains within her—her basic selfishness, for she outwardly shrinks away from Rob in terror when she is told he is dying. In theme last moments he looks to her for some feeling of regret, or at least compassion, but her only thought is her own terror of having to witness death.

For Ruth there can be no release, since she can no longer suffer. Her punishment is the punishment of withdrawal. Even Andy’s promise to start over has no meaning for her: “She remains silent, gassing at him dully with a and humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope” (Ibid., 167).

In summary, on its surface the play presents the lives of two young men whose dreams are shattered by their love for a woman. But the problem goes deeper than Rob’s fatal marriage to Ruth. Both brothers loving Ruth are seeking the same love that was given them by Mrs. Mayo. While drawn sexually to Ruth, they also seek the comfort, Love, and protection of the mother. Ruth also seeks love and protection in the strength of man. In this respect, then, Ruth is like Mrs. Mayo, in that Mrs. Mayo is able to protect and love only so long as Mr. Mayo is alive to sustain her strength. Therefore, although a minor character in point of action, Mrs. Mayo is, nevertheless, of primary significance in the relationship between Ruth and the two brothers.
Mrs. Mayo’s influence on the events that take place in the play may be found in the expository matter rather than through any direct action she may take. O’Neill’s stage description of her, for example, quickly introduces her to the reader:

Mrs. Mayo is a slight, round-faced, rather prim looking woman of fifty-five who had once been a school teacher. The labors of a farmer’s wife have bent but not broken her, and she retains a certain refinement of movement and expression foreign to the Mayo part of the family. (O’Neill, Plays, III, 94)

Moreover, Rob is immediately identified as his mother’s son: “Whatever of resemblance Robert has to his parents may be traced to her,” the alliance indicating sensitivity not found in James Mayo or Andy, who is a carbon copy of his father.

Like any mother, Mrs. Mayo is upset because Rob is about to leave home. It is soon evident, however, that her concern stems not only from worry about Rob’s welfare but also from fear that his leaving will create a void in her life:

MRS. MAYO. ([*Her lips trembling*]) I wish he wasn’t.
MAYO . . . . There, katey!
MRS.MAYO. ([*rebelliously*]) well, I do wish he wasn’t.
SCOTT. You shouldn’t be taking it so hard, ‘s
Far as I kin see. This vige’ll make a man of him . . . .
And it’ll give him a trade for the rest of his life,
If he wants to travel.
MRS.MAYO. But I don’t want him to travel all his life.
You’ve got to see he comes home when this trip is over.
Then he’ll be all well, and he’ll wants to marry . . . and settle down right here. . . . I never realised how hard it was going to be for me to have realized how hard it was going to be for me to have Robbie go—or I wouldn’t have considered it a minute. (Ibid., 96)

She is not thinking, as Andy reminds her, of Rob’s desire only that it will be hard on her for him to go. And she defends her selfish feelings as being mother love: “(on the verge of tears) ‘tis all right for you [Scott] to talk. You’ve never had any children.
You don’t know what it means to be parted from them—and Robbie my youngest, too” (*Ibid.*). The full scope of her selfish desires is brought home to sea. The other member of the family are amazed by the announcement and recognize the error in
judgment. But Mrs. Mayo “rushes over and throws her arms about him about him,”
crying, “I know it! I was just telling your father when you came in—and, oh, Robbie,
I’m so happy you ‘re not going!” (Ibid., 100).

Her selfish possessiveness is further intensified in her ever protectiveness.
When Rob enters the living room in Act I after taking Ruth home, Mrs. Mayo
reprimands him for not wearing a coat out at night. This gesture in itself is not an
indictment except that O’Neill’s stage instructions direct Mrs. Mayo to speak “as if
she were speaking to a child” (Ibid., 99). Recognizing this, Scott quips back at her:
“God A ‘mighty, Kate, you treat Robert as if he was one year old!” (Ibid.99). She also
tries to allay the ensuing quarrel between Andy and Mr. Mayo: “(rushing to Andy and
putting her arms about him protectingly) ‘Don’t mind him, Andy ear. He doesn’t
mean a word he’s saying!’”(O’Neill, Plays, III, 106). As the argument grows more
bitter, Mrs. Mayo tries harder to protect Andy from James’ rage: “(coming from
Andrew to his father, puts her hands on his shoulders as though to try to push him
back in the chair from which he has risen) “Won’t you be still, James? Please, won’t
you?” (Ibid.,107).

Subtly, then, O’Neill suggests the motherly environment of Rob and Andy.
She has cuddled and protected them throughout their childhood. In Ruth they seek the
combined love of the mother and wife. But while Andy would have found these
qualities in Ruth because he is strong and would demand submission and love, Rob’s
weakness turns Ruth into a frustrated and, finally, apathetic mate. Mrs. Mayo also
reacts in this way. In the beginning of Act II she has, because of the death of Mr.
Mayo, “become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being
constantly on the verge of comfortless tears” (Ibid.,122). Her only hope is the return
of Andy, for although she still over Rob, she is no longer able to help him: “Maybe
Robby will manage ‘till Andy gets back and sees to things’ (*Ibid.*, 115). Then she reflects: “I wonder if he’s changed much. He used to be so fine – looking and strong. (With a sigh) Three years! It seems more like three hundred” (*Ibid.* 155). Even so, Rob apparently clings to her death, since Ruth tells Andy in Act III that Rob “. . . never took any interest since way back when your Ma died” (*Ibid.*, p.155).

In essence, O’Neill has suggested rather than outwardly established the power of Mrs. Mayo over the lives of Rob and Andy, since she takes practically no active role in the events of the play, nor does she consciously seek to cause misfortune or wield power over her brood. In truth, O’Neill himself did not perhaps recognize the significance of her presence, for she has a very minor role and does not develop fully as an individual. It is on this very point that stress should be placed at this time, inasmuch as her very lack of individuality reveals the inability of O’Neill to portray woman as an individual, especially as a mother. For although O’Neill had had many contacts with women by the time of writing this play and was at that time married to Agnes, nevertheless, either he had failed completely to understand the female mind and personality, or he did not consciously recognize woman’s significance to the life of man.

In either case, the result is the same. Mrs. Mayo is a sympathetically portrayed mother who has sought to protect and to retain possession of her offspring. She is not a vicious woman, nor does she consciously seek to wreck the lives of her children because of her selfishly possessive nature. But the very fact that her sons look to her for protection and are caught by one who symbolizes her love and promise of protection indicates that she is one of the innocent tools by which her sons are eventually destroyed.
Ruth, her successor, is equally an unconscious tool of destruction. A simple farm girl, Ruth finds strength in loving a strong man, and her frustration and bitter repulsion of Robert are the result of her complete inability repulsion of Robert are the result of her complete inability to understand or protect him. She is not an admirable character, but she alone cannot be blamed for the tragedy. She represents love and life’s reality, but like Mrs. Mayo, her significance as an early O’Neill woman lies in her embodiments as a passive symbol of man’s idealism.

*Anna Christie* is the dramatization of man’s struggle against the sea — the symbol of life. Anna, the heroine of the play, not only challenges the sea of life, but she also joins forces with it as a worshiper of life. Opposing Anna’s love for the sea and for life is Chris, Anna’s father. He hates “dat ole davil sea.” The sea is responsible for all of his suffering and frustrations. Thus, he shrinks from the sea and worships the land, symbolic of withdrawal and sterility.

The struggle between Anna and Chris suggests also the universal conflict between the Mother and Father, a theme which will grow to such proportions as to dominate the later plays. To O’Neill, the primordial Mother, represented in Anna’s universality as the first Earth Mother, symbolizes life and the pagan worship of nature through sex. The Father, on the other hand, instinctively seeks to bar the Mother from living and creating, since to him living means suffering, and he wants only the stagnant peace of withdrawal, thus shielding himself and his own from the forces of Fate. Moreover, Chris’s hatred of Mat Burke, Anna’s lover, reflects the Father’s Freudian desire to possess the daughter’s love for himself, so that the creation of new life will not leave him alone. As Chris says to Mat:

> Vell—Ay don’t vant for Anna gat married. Listen, you faller. Ay’m ole man. Ay don’t see Anna for fifteen year. She vas all Ay got in vold. And now ven she come on first trip—you tank Ay vant her leave me
'lone again? (O’Neill, *Plays*, III, 46)

Besides, chris retinalizes to Anna: “.... Ay like for you marry steady faller got good yob on land” *(Ibid.*, 43).

The first part of the play concerns the reunion of Anna and Chris Christopherson after a separation of fifteen years. Chris, an old Swedish sea dog, has left the sea and is now a captain of a cool barge. He has not seen Anna, his daughter, since he had left her on a farm in the Midwest in order to keep her safely away from the sea. As the play opens, Anna has come to New York to rest after a strenuous two years in a house of prostitution. Although Anna is sceptical of living on a coal barge, Chris convinces her that the fresh air will be good for her health.

Anna soon falls in love with the sea and after two weeks in convinced that she has come home. Chris fears this attachment and has a premonition that something terrible is going to happen. It is then that Chris’s barge rescues four men on a life raft. One of the men is Mat Burke, a big, burly Irish stoker, who immediately falls in love with Anna, recognizes the risk of falling in love with Burke, but she is helpless against it. When Burke asks her to marry him, however, she refuses, since she is too honest a person to marry him without his knowing about her past. He is not satisfied with a mere refusal, though. His ensuing quarrel over her with Chris infuriates her, and she defiantly admits her past. Both men are stunned. Mat threatens her and then leaves, cursing her bitterly. Chris also leaves, headed for the nearest bar in order to drown his sorrow.

Two days later, Anna, left alone, has made plans to return to New York and to her former occupation. The hope that Mat will come back has delayed her departure. Chris is the first to return, dishevelled and sick from continuous drinking. After begging her forgiveness, he tells him that he has signed on the steamer * Londonderry*
in order to provide her with an adequate income so that she will not have to return to
prostitution. Then Mat comes back, admitting that he is unable to forget her; after she
swears that he is the only man that she has ever loved, he asks her to marry him. The
three of them then attempt to celebrate, although all feel the ominous presence of the
sea outside, waiting.

The character of Chris is the portrait of an old man, who, having been beaten
by life, has retreated from it and is content to spend the rest of his days cursing “dat
ole davil sea” for all his misfortunes. Then Mat says to him: “The sea give you a clout
once, knocked you down, and you’re not man enough to get up for another, but lie
there for the rest of your life howling bloody howling bloody murder” (Ibid., 48).
Chris’s lack of understanding of himself and life is at once comic and pathetic, and
while his eyes are described as “. . . twinkling with simple good humor,” his mouth
reflects that he is “. . . childishly self-willed and weak, of an obstinate kindliness”
(Ibid., 5). Like all of O’Neill’s Fathers, Chris” . . . is a short, squat, broad shouldered
man of about fifty” (Ibid., 5).

Chris’s retreat from the sea has been brought about by his fear that he will be
drawn into the sea by the tragic tells Anna that it is the sea that had killed her mother,
for she had died of loneliness waiting for him to come home. He, in turn, always spent
his money and signed on for another voyage instead of coming home: “Ay don’t
know why but dat’svay with most sailor fallar, Anna. Dat ole’ davil sea make dem
crazy fools with her dirty tricks” (Ibid., 22). Moreover, it is the sea that has kept
Chris from having Anna with him while she was growing up. As he explains to Larry
and Marthy, his waterfront mistress: “Den when her moder die ven Ay vas on voyage,
Ay tank its better dem cousins keep Anna. Ay tank its better Anna live on farm, den
she don’t know dat ole davil sea, she don’t know fa’der like me” (Ibid., 9). But
Larry’s humorous reply about Ann’s future is all too prophetic: “(with a wink at Marthy) ‘This girl, now, ‘ll be marryin’ a sailor herself, likely. It’s in the blood’ (O’Neill. Plays, III, 9).

Thus, in Chris’s mind the sea is threatening ominously to reclaim him and his Anna, and her immediate love for the sea confirms his darkest fears. Finally, when Mat and Anna fall in love, Chris is sure that the sea is to blame for their meeting.

When Anna tells both of them about her past, Chris cries out:

Ain’t your fault, Anna, Ay know dat . . . . It’s dat Ole devil sea, do dis to me!” (He shakes his fist at the deer) It’s her dirty tricks! . . . if dat Irish fallar don’t ever come, you don’t never tal me dem tang. Ay don’t never know, and everytang’s all right (Ibid., 62).

Chris’s escape to the bottle after Anna’s confession is further evidence of his retreat from life. He did not want to know about her past—did not want the responsibility that knowledge would certainly place upon him. Even after knowing, he falls her again, for he signs up on a steamer going out to sea, choosing to run rather than to stay home and try to make a life for her. His selfish desire to keep her with him has been replaced by a desire to escape when he is faced with the responsibility for her past and future. He would do anything rather than know himself. She understands him, however, and says: “But, for Gawd’s sake, don’t you see you’re doing the same thing you’ve always done? . . . But what’s the use of talking? You sin’t right, that’s what. I’ll never blame you for nothing no more” (Ibid., 66).

The conflict between Anna and Chris is intensified by the Freudian conflict between Mat and Chris. Unlike Chris, Mat is willing to wrestle with life. Mat is big, egotistical and proud. Like Anna, he loves the sea, but his love is the love of challenge. When Chris says that Mat replies:

‘Tis not. . . . But you know the truth in your heart, if great fear of the sea has made you a liar and coward itself. (Pounding the table) The sea’s the only life for a man with guts in him isn’t afraid of his own
shadow! ‘Tis only on the sea he’s free, and him roving the face of the world, seeing all things and not giving up money, or stealing from his friends . . . \textit{(Ibid.}, 48).

Yet although Mat shows contempt for Chris’s fear of life, he, too, is unable to face the responsibility for life that Ann’s confession forces him to face. His love for Anna is the love for an ideal which he believes she represents. For in one breathe he swears his undying love for her to Chris: “Death itself wouldn’t make me forget her;” \textit{(Ibid.}, 47), yet after she admits her past and begs him to believe that his love has made her clean, he rages: “Clane, is it? You slut, you, I’ll be killing you now” \textit{(Ibid.}, 60). As the symbol of man he, like Chris, is the cause of Anna’s fall, yet he, too, is destroyed by her confession:

I’m destroyed entirely and my heart is broken in bits! I’m asking God Himself, was it for this He’d have me reaming the earth since I was a lad only, to come to black shame in the end, where I’d be giving a power of love to a woman is the same as others you’d meet in any hooker-shanty in port . . . \textit{(Ibid.} 62).

Man, then, cannot and will not face the reality of life unless compelled to do so through the love of women. Both Mat and Chris seek escape when faced with the realization that their symbol of ideal beauty has clay feet. Moreover, they do not try to understand her misery but can only wallow in self-pity. Anna alone understands life and is determined to live. In her character the play is unified, since it is her struggle to find her place in the scheme of things that force Mat and Chris to forget self and meet her need for perceptive love.

It may be seen, then, that Anna, like those before her, is the victim of man’s egotism and pride. Yet, she is no longer a passive victim, but, rather, her determination to live and love compels man to live, thus making her the victimizer as well as the victim. At the end of the play both Mat and Chris sense the foreboding trickery of the sea when they have signed on to the same streamer:
CHRIS: (speaks with somber premonition) 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 ole davil sea do her vorst dirty tricks, yes. It’s so. MAT: (Nodding his head in gloomy acquiescence—with a great sigh) I’m fearing maybe you have the right of it for once, devil take you (O’Neill. *Plays*, III, 78).

But Anna declares:

> Aw, say, what’s the matter? Out the gloom. We’re all fixed now, ain’t we, me and you? *(Pours out more beer into his glass and fills one for herself—slaps him on the black)* come on! Here’s to the sea, no matter what! Be a game sport and drink to that! Come on! *(Ibid.* 79)

For Anna combines not only the self-sacrificing and loving Mother image but also the positive symbol of life. She seeks not to protect from life but to offer life. In Anna is found the first Earth Mother, for she does not fear life she covets it, and her response is life in its most primitive, natural form. Unlike Chris, she does not blame her suffering on others, but, rather, she recognizes and accepts the good and evil in the world, courageously determined not to be beaten but to win against the forces of Fate. As she says to Chris: “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’all.” *(Ibid.* 65). Anna is the first strong women to be found in O’Neill’s plays. She is the noblest of all his women, because she sees the world as it is, and she fights it with the only weapon she has, that is, her desire to live and to create. Anna loves the sea. In Act I, the land has made Anna’s face “hard and cynical” *(Ibid.* 13). But in Act II, “*she looks healthy, transformed, the natural colour has come back to her face*” *(Ibid.* 25). Moreover, she exclaims to Chris:

> .... I feel so—so—like I’d found something missed and been looking for—’s if this was the right place for me to fit in. And I seem to have forget—everything that’s happened... And I feel clean, somehow... And I happy for once—yes, honest!—happier than I have ever been anywhere before! *(Ibid.* 28-29).
Regardless of her sexual promiscuity, Anna is pure in spirit. Furthermore, that O’Neill still held to his feeling for the loving Mother is indicated by the maternal characteristics found in Anna. Her desire to mother Burke is shown in their first meeting on the coal barge, after he is picked up at sea. Even in his weakened condition, Burke tries to kiss Anna, and she pushes him away with such force that he falls against the bulwark and is momentarily knocked unconscious. She at once forgets her anger, “kneels down beside him and raises his head to her knee” (Ibid., 33). When Chris senses that Anna is responding to Burke’s declarations and tries to make Burke go to the forecastle, Anna intervenes immediately and gives up her bunk to Burke to go to the forecastle, Anna intervenes immediately and gives up her bunk to Burke. She even lets him lean on her as she leads him to her cabin. Moreover, Mat is the first man whom Anna loves, but even though she recognizes that he is her only chance for happiness, she refuses to marry him because of her past:

If I’d met him four years ago—or even two years ago—I’d have jumped at the chance. . . . And I would now—only he’s such a simple guy—a big kid—and I ain’t got the heart to feel him (Ibid., 44).

As a new type, Anna’s physical characteristics differ from those of her predecessors:

She is a tall, blonde, 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 clothes are the tawdry finery of peasant stock turned prostitute (Ibid., 13).

She is not, then, the small, refined, delicate Mother with dreamy eyes, as Mr. Mayo. Instead, she is a peasant, large and buxom, following the pattern of the later Earth Mothers. Moreover, Anna is certainly not condemned for her past, but, rather, man is blamed because he seeks to ignore his own creation. Mat brags about his conquests all over the world, but he is not ready to accept a vanquished one. Anna challenges his double standard: “You been doing the same thing all your life, picking up a new girl
in every port. How’re you any better than I was?” (O’Neill, Plays, III, 73). Indeed, Anna makes it clear that man is responsible for making her what she is: “It was men on the farm ordering and beating me and giving me the wrong start. . . . Gawd, I hate “em all, evry mother’s son of ‘em!” (Ibid., 18) And when Mat and Chris finally force her to all them of her past, she rages:

First thing is, I want to tell you two guys something. You was going on’s if one of you 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 (Ibid., 56-57)

Then, defiantly, she adds:

I was in a house, that’s what!—yes, that kind of a house—the kind sailors like you and Mat goes to in port—and your nice inland men, too—and all men, God damn ‘em! I hate ‘em! Hate ‘em! (Ibid., 58-59)

In spite of her seeming hardness and hatred toward men, Anna shows through her nature that she is capable of deep and lasting love. She immediately responds to Chris’s obvious humility about his failure as a father: “(touched but a bit embarrassed) ‘Don’t bawl about it. There ain’t nothing to forgive anyway’” (Ibid., 65). And even when Mat curses her and threatens to kill her, she pleads:

And if I told you that yust getting out in this barge, and being on the sea has changed me and made me feel different about things, ‘s if all I’d been through wasn’t me . . . . and I sized you up as a different kind of man—a sea man as different from the ones on land as water is from mud . . . . I wanted to marry you and fool you, but I couldn’t. Don’t you see how I’ve changed? . . . Will you believe it if I tell you that loving you has made me—clean? (Ibid., pp. 59-60).

Finally, Ann’s strength wins over the shallowness of Mat and Chris, and they, too, are compelled by her love to face life. In Anna, O’Neill envisioned a new woman, whose love is not only a symbol of hope but of challenge. Anna’s love spurns the sham and hypocrisy of illusion and through her honesty man can find love without shame and guilt. Thus, while Anna still retains the early characteristics of woman in
her role as victim of man’s selfish desires, her portrayal indicates O’Neill’s increasing focus on women as individuals. Anna, like all of O’Neill’s women characters, is the symbol of love to man. She possesses, moreover, a unified purpose in living, that is, her desire to compel man away from his idealism to meet her need for love and fulfilment. Most important, however, is Anna’s place in the development of a new O’Neillian female type—the Divine Harlot. Anna is the warm, earthy Life Force, who opposes that part of man which seeks to escape from life by denying life.

Out of the portrayal of Anna Christie emerge two definite O’Neillian concepts of woman—the Seductress and Earth Mother. The Seductress is the girl-woman to whom he seeks to find fulfillment and happiness. Yet, although offering fulfillment, the Seductress is incapable of satisfying man’s desires, since she, too, seeks her own identity. Moreover, the Seductress has become masculine in her need to possess man’s soul as well as his body. The Earth mother, on the other hand, seeks nothing from man. She is the eternal symbol of fertility and warmth, to which man can retreat from the possessiveness of the seductress. She is the personification of sex, which she offers freely to man.

O’Neill thus separates into distinct characters the traits of womanhood. Feeling that woman was no longer willing to remain submissive but was, instead, actively compelling man to her in constant struggle for possession, O’Neill created the Earth Mother to symbolize the warmth, understanding and protection of the Mother, whose desire to comfort all man is manifested in her instinctive sexual promiscuity.

Two plays have been chosen to illustrate the development of another two female types—Desire Under the Elms, and The Great God Brown.
*Desire under the Elms*, one of O’Neill’s best plays, is truly his most pagan plays. Written in 1924, it is a drama of the struggle between the natural, creative Mother and the Puritan Father to win the protagonist son. Abbie Putnam, the heroine of the play, embodies both the creative force of the Earth Mother and the possessiveness of the Seductress, resulting in the most desirable woman O’Neill ever created. Moreover, this is the first play in which the struggle between the mother and father becomes the dominant theme, a theme which becomes all absorbing in any of the later plays.

The second play to be considered is *The Great God Brown* (1925). One of O’Neill’s most ambitious works from the standpoint of technique, it portrays man’s disunity, which is brought about by his desire to create, in a world seeking to suppress and destroy creativeness. Thus, Dion Anthony, the protagonist, must wear the mask of Pan in order to find protection against the stagnant materialism of Billy Brown and the Puritan hypocrisy of Margaret, his Seductress-wife. Only in Cybel, the Divine Harlot, does Dion find love and understanding, and to her, as the symbol of the Mother, does Dion finally return—a return to the warmth of the womb.

As one noted critic has stated, “*Desire Under the Elms* celebrates the divinity of nature, the triumph of pagan naturalism over the indurate religion, the victory of the mother and son over the father” (Edwin A. Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O’Neill*, 126). There are then two conflicts within the framework of the play. That is, the two forces embodied is Abbie Putnam and Ephraim Cabot represents not only the struggle between the mother and the father. Ephraim, the hard, proud Puritan Father, in taking Abbie as his wife, must vie for her possession with his son, Eben. Eben, whose hatred for his father stems from his unhealthy love for his dead mother, feels for Abbie not only the love of the son for mother but also the carnal desire for women.
Thus, in substituting Abbie for his mother and thereafter by taking her as a woman, he has committed moral incest, but at the same time he has fulfilled the mythological cycle of nature in the victory of the son over the father for the possession for the mother.

In his first play dominated by the Mother-Father conflict, O’Neill deals with primitive characters whose thought correspond with their actions, characters who have not yet been polluted by domination of a society which suppresses their instincts. These characters are free to act according to their instinctive drives, and they can, therefore, find fulfillment.

The setting for the play is a farm in Puritanical New England in the year 1850. Ephraim Cabot, the owner of the farm, is returning from the city with his new bride. His sons, Peter, Simeon and Eben, recognize that by their father’s recent marriage they have lost their rights to the farm, and Peter and Simeon set out for California to escape the drudgery of the farm which now has no meaning for them. Eben, however, remains, determined to repossess the farm to avenge his mother’s death. Abbie Putnam, his new step-mother, is, he discovers, a sensuous young woman for whom he soon feels a conflicting passion of desire and hatred. Finding Eben a more desirable Cabot than her new husband, Abbie seduces Eben. She desires not only to win his love but also to provide Ephraim with a son to inherit the farm.

Abbie is successful in convincing Eben that his mother’s spirit will rest if he submits to his desire for her. Abbie bears Eben’s son, and Ephraim declares to Eben that Abbie and her son will inherit the farm. Ephraim is enraged by the news, because he realizes that Abbie has won the farm through her power over him. However, Abbie no longer wants the farm alone, for she loves Eben. Unable to convince him that she loves him and will not rob him of his rights, she smothers the child, believing that its
death will make Eben love her again. Instead, Eben is horrified by her crime and runs off to get the sheriff. Meanwhile, Abbie tells Ephraim about the murder and confesses that Eben is the child’s father. Ephraim’s spirit is momentarily beaten by her confession, and having nothing left to work for, he goes off to turn the stock out, declaring that he will burn the house and leave the land to God. By the time Eben returns, he has had time to realize that Abbie has killed the child out of love for him. He asks her forgiveness and reaffirms his love for her. When the sheriff comes, Eben gives himself up with Abbie, and they are united at last.

Because of the natural environment in which these characters move, they are closely associated with two aspects of nature—the earth and the animal kingdom. Ephraim, who identifies himself with his God (an image of himself), is associated with the stones on his land. As he tells Abbie in Part II:

God’s hard, not easy! God’s in the stones! Build my church on a rock—out o’ stones an ‘I’ll be in them! That’s what he meant t’ Peter! . . . Stones, I picked ‘em up an’ piled ‘em into walls. Ye kin read the years of my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin over the hills up and down, fencing in the fields that was mine, whar I’d made thin’s grow out o’ nothin’—like the will o’ God. Like the servant o’ His hand. It wa’n’t easy. It was hard an’ He made me hard fur it (O’Neill, Plays, I, 237).

His pride in the possession of his farm has become so excessive that he is no longer able to think of himself without believing that his self-image of God the Father is guiding his destiny. He prays to his Puritanic God, his cruel, lonesome, unbending God who condemns sex for any other purpose than producing another like one. Yet, underneath, Ephraim is still the primordial father. He does not let his faith in his harsh God stand in the way of his lust. Indeed, God directs his path; He calls him to take another wife: “Then this spring the call come—the voice o’ God cryin’ in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness—’t go out an’ seek an’ find!” (Ibid., 238). Ephraim, under his mask of the Puritan God-image, is still a pagan. The call of spring arouses
his desire, and thus he goes out and finds the Earth Mother, whom he associates first with the animal kingdom and then with the earth. In Part I, Scene I, he says to Abbie, “Yer two breasts air like two fawns; yer navel be like a round goblet; yer belly like a heap ‘wheat . . .’” (Ibid., 232). Then in Scene II he says, “Sometimes ye air the farm an’ sometimes the farm be yew” (Ibid.,236).

And Abbie is a true Earth Mother. In her personality the play is unified. She is driven by two needs—her desire for possession and her sexual desire. Her desire for possession is evident by her marriage to Ephrain. When Eben tells her that the farm belonged to his mother and is now his, she replies, “Yewr’n? We’ll see ‘about that! (Then strongly)---Waal—what if I did need a hum? What else’d I marry an old man like him fur?” (O’Neill, Plays, I, 226). She then continue, “This be my farm- - this be my hum- - this be my kitchen!” (Ibid., 226). Eben is enraged by her challenge, but she “walks up to him—a queer coarse expression of desire in her face and body—slowly, ‘An’ upstairs—that be my bedroom—an’ my bed!’” (Ibid., 226-227). Eben is hypnotized by her physical desirability. He is, however, determined to fight her for possession of the land; yet, in order to do so, he must also fight his sexual desire for her. She, too, must control her own passion. This she cannot do, since she is above all an Earth Mother, a pagan symbol of sex, and she allows her desire for Eben to overshadow all other desires. In doing so, she conquers Eben’s will to fight, and both succumb to their passion.

Thus, in fulfilling her first desire, Abbie satisfies her second one and so combines her desires into one purpose, to love and to create. She is the human manifestation of the elms—the pagan symbol of fertility—which “. . . bend their trailing branches over the roof [of the Cabot house]. They appear to protect and at the same time to subdue” (Ibid., 202). At the beginning of the play Abbie is described as
“...buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes. ...” (Ibid., 221). When she falls in love with Eben, she becomes the soft, submissive, all-sacrificing mistress-mother, who has realized her desire and has not fought against them. Her whole being is absorbed in her love Eben, and to her, God the Father has no strength or being.

In Eben exist both the parental images. He has inherited both the pride of the father and love of the mother. From the beginning of the play he denies his association with God and Father. He says, “I hain’t his’ n—I hain’t like him—he hain’t me! ... I’m Maw—every drop o’ blood! (Ibid., 207) But his half-brother, Simeon and Peter, see the pride and possessiveness of Ephraim in him, and Simeon tells Ephraim, “Eben’s a chip o’ ye—spit ‘n’ image—hard ‘n’ bitter’s a hickory tree! Dog’ll eat dog. He ‘ll eat ye yet, old man!” (Ibid., 222). Ephraim had married Eben’s mother for land and had not only worked her to death but had also denied and suppressed her spiritual and sexual needs. Her unfulfillment requires revenge as prophesied in the setting by the description of the elms: “There is a sinister maternity in their aspects, a crushing, and jealous absorption” (Ibid., 202). But although Eben is “soft” (Ibid., 222) like his mother, he is still his father’s son. While he declares his alliance with her, he, nevertheless, wants to possess everything that Ephraim’s possesses, his prostitute—his land—and, above all, Abbie. When he takes Min, his father’s prostitute, Eben tells his half-brothers: “What do I care fur her—’ceptin’ she’s round an’ wa’m? The p’int is she was his’n—an’ now she b’longs t’me!” (O’Neill, Plays, 1, 214). Moreover, after he talks Simeon and Peter into singing their share of the farm over to him in exchange for Ephraim’s money, Eben says: “It’s Maw’s farm agen! It’s my farm. Them’s my cows!” (Ibid., 217).
Finally, when Eben takes Abbie, he says that he does so to avenge the unfulfilled desires of his mother: “It’s her vengeance on him—so’s she kin rest quiet in her grave!” (Ibid., 243). And, indeed, in possessing her, he satisfies one of the needs of the mother’s spirit—sexual gratification—for it seems to rest. Yet, avenging his mother is only half of the victory. The next day he shakes hands with Ephraim, and, laughing, he says: “I’m bossin’ yew! ... I’m the prize rooster o’ this roost!” (Ibid., 246). Furthermore, in Abbie are combined both Eben’s need to be protected by his mother and his hesitates to enter into this incestuous love affairs, she helps him to integrate his needs when she says:

I’will take yer Maw’s place! I’ll be everthn’ she was t’ ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! (she pulls his head around. He makes a bewildered pretence of resistance. She is tender) Don’t be afeered! I’ll kiss ye pure, Eben—same’s if I was a Maw t’ ye . . . (They kiss in restrained fashion. Then suddenly wild passion overcomes her. She kisses him lustfully again and again and he flings his arms about her and returns her kisses. Suddenly ... he frees himself from her violently and springs to his feet...) Don’t ye leave me, Eben! Can’t ye see it hain’t enuf—lovin’ ye like a Maw—can’t ye see it’s got t’ be that an’more—much more—a hundred times more—fur me t’ be happy—fur yew t’ be happy? (Ibid., 243).

At this point, Abbie becomes the Life Force, which she has proclaimed herself to beat the beginning of Part II when Eben denies his desire for her:

ye been fightin’ yer nature ever since the day I come—tryin’ ye to tell yerself i hain’t purty t’ ye . . . . Nature—making’ thin’s grow—bigger ‘n’ 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 . . . . Nature’ll beat ye, Eben. Ye might’s well own up t’ it fust ‘s last (Ibid.,229).

Only after Eben has given himself up with Abbie for something the child does he really become united with his mother against the Father. When Abbie tells him that she has killed their son, he declares that she did it to deny him what was his; but he has grown to love her in spite of his material desires, and his sacrificing himself with
her frees him at last from the influence of the Puritanic God the Father. He has now become whole" (Ibid., 98).

Ironically, the life-giving Mother—the Life Force—has, in freeing Eben by giving him life, destroyed him, but together they have idealistically defeated the Father. Their love has raised them above the tragedy of their situation. They have lived and suffered. They have, in denying a physical existence, found life in finding the purpose for living. As Doris Falk has said, “In the young couple’s fulfillment of their desire and in the transmutation of sex to love, reality has finally asserted itself, has struck through the illusory mask of pride” (Falk, 98).

Abbie is, then, the Divine Harlot in her pagan acceptance of sex as the natural expression of life. She is the complete embodiment of O’Neill’s early concept of woman as both mother and mistress, in that she symbolizes both the protective love of the eternal Earth Mother and the pagan lust of the temple prostitute. Yet, Abbie’s desire for possession of the farm and of Eben is the destructive force of Seductress, a possessiveness which she must sacrifice in order to find fulfillment with Eben. When she smothers her child, her sacrifice is complete, and her character integrated. Thus, by overcoming her desire to possess, Abbie attains fulfillment and becomes, in the end, the combined mother-mistress-wife.

*The Great God Brown* is the portrayal of man’s struggle to live and to create in a society requiring obedience to its unnatural laws of morality and conduct. Moreover, his struggle is further complicated by his desire to find acceptance in his society. In order to obtain acceptance, however, man must conceal his self—his innocent longing for love and freedom to love, since those around him cannot endure his idealism; their laws require them to despise man’s instinctive desire as ugly and base, since these desires deny the need for pride and material success. Pure love
requires complete self-sacrifice, and the ideals and goals of society demand that its followers seek first the kingdom of material wealth and self-aggrandisement.

In order to protect his inner self from society’s contempt, man must, therefore, wear the mask of Pan to hide himself from his fellows. Having thus hidden his inner purity, he is now faced with finding something to which he can retreat and in which he can believe, so that his outer mask will not subdue his inner need for love and gradually murder it. Unable to accept the harshness of society’s distortion of Christianity into a Puritan worship of the Father God of judgment, fear, and shame, man turns to the warmth of the Mother—the pagan Earth Mother, whose warmth and wisdom give him strength to die.

The play begins at the graduation dance of three of the play’s leading characters—Dion Anthony, William Brown, and Margaret. Mr. Brown and Mr. Anthony, the fathers of the two boys, have decided that the boys are to go to college to study architecture so that they may join the partnership of Anthony and Brown. Meanwhile, Billy, who has pursued Margaret out into the moonlight, confesses his love for her. However, she is oblivious to his declarations and admits her love for Dion, or, rather, the Pan-like mask which she believes Dion to be. In spite of his obvious envy of Dion, Billy goes off and tells Dion that Margaret loves him. Dion rushes to her, throwing off his mask of Pan and confessing his love for her. She does not recognize the true Dion, however, and shrinks from him in horror. Bitterly replacing his mask, he demands her submission, and they consummate their moment of passion.

Five years elapse. Dion has quit college upon his father’s death and has married Margaret. With the money his father has left him, he has taken Margaret to Paris, where they have had three children and where Dion has studied art. Feeling that
he has failed in his desire to be a great artist and having run out of money, Dion has brought his family home. He now spends his time in dissipation, and Margaret, unconscious of his inner struggle, goes to Billy Brown and indirectly asks him if he will hire Dion as a draftsman. Billy, who still loves Margaret and who has heard of Dion’s escapades, goes off to look for Dion. He finds him in the parlour of Cybel, a prostitute. Billy scolds Dion for his profligacy and drags him out of Cybel’s home. He then offers Dion a job, and Dion agrees mockingly to go to work for him. Two years go by. Dion’s talent has made Billy very successful. Dion spends most of his time at Cybel’s the only place to which he can retreat without mask. (Out of his envy of Dion, Billy, too, goes to Cybel.) When Dion realizes that his time has come to die, he says goodbye to Cybel, tries in vain once more to reveal his true self to Margaret, and then goes to Billy. After brutally making Billy admit his superficiality and envy of Dion all these years, Dion removes his mask for the last time and dies. Billy buries him, puts on his mask and goes off to claim his inheritance of Dion’s family and diabolically artistic talent.

Two months later the result of Billy’s masquerade is shown in the torture expressed in his true features. Dion’s mask is murdering him, for he, too, wants to make Margaret and his clients see the evil in the mask. When he cannot, he appears in Dion’s mask and declares that he has murdered William Brown. He runs home ahead of the pursuit by the police to arrest him as Dion Anthony, the murder of Billy Brown. When he arrives, Cybel comes to him, and he tells her that he is too tired to go on. He shows himself once more in Dion’s mask and is shot by his pursuers. Before he dies, Cybel takes off the mask and comforts him in his last moments by giving him the reassurance of life in the eternal love of the god of laughter and love. Ironically,
Margaret clings to the mask forever—finding her faith in the memory of a personality created as revenge upon her and her society for their denial of truth and love.

The tragedy which the false ideals of our society impose upon man is illustrated in the destruction of the inner man by the outer mask he is forced to wear in order to find acceptance. Both Dion and Billy are destroyed by the mask—yet in a different way. From the very outset of the play Dion’s character remains the same. His inner self is symbolic of purity and truth. Indeed, he is lost. By his very nature he finds himself born into a world of falsity and pride, and no matter where he turns, he cannot find affirmation of the love and faith in life which he seeks. Instead, he finds fear and rejection, shame and denial of love. Therefore, he must wear the mask of Pan in order to protect himself, as he tells Billy:

On day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn’t draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn’t what he’d done that made me cry, but him! I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Everyone called me cry baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy’s God and protect myself from His cruelty (O’Neill, Plays, III, 295).

Thus, Dion is described in the Prologue:

His face is masked is a fixed forcing of his own face—dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately upersensitive, helplessly unprotected its child-like, religious faith in life—into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan (Ibid. 260).

The mockery of the mask terrifies him, for it imprisons him and forces him to deny the creative side of his nature:

(With a suffering bewilderment) why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my
weakness? . . . Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched? (Ibid., 264-265).

Billy’s destruction by the mask, on the other hand, is a positive destruction, in that the pain and suffering caused by his wearing the mask result in the birth of understanding and of love within him. In the Prologue he is the symbol of the average young man—unconscious of any of the deeper currents of life and promising to carry on the false ideals and materialistic aims of his society: “He is blonde and blue-eyed with a likeable smile and a frank good humoured face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence” (Ibid., 252). As an adult he has fulfilled his goals: “He has grown into a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man. . . .” (O’Neill, Play, III. 274) It is the dying Dion who first awakens Billy and makes him acknowledge the failure of his life. He taunts Billy into admitting his love for Margaret, but after Billy’s admission, Dion proclaims: “(with terrible composure) ‘No! That is merely the appearance, not the truth! Brown loves me! He loves me because I have always possessed the power he needed for love, because I am love!’” (Ibid., 298). Brown is so enraged by Dion’s words that he tries to choke him, and when Dion does die, Brown cries:

At last! (He stares at Dion’s real face contemptuously) So that’s the poor weakling you really were! No wonder you did! And I’ve always been afraid of you—yes, I’ll confess it now, in awe of you! Paugh! (He picks up the mask from the floor) No, not of you! of this! Say what you; like, it’s strong if ti is bad! And this is what Margaret loved, not you! (Ibid., 299).

By Act III, however, after having worn the mask for a month, Billy “. . . reveals a suffering face that is ravaged and haggard . . . tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion’s mask” (Ibid., 305). And he realizes with hopeless despair: “Now I am drinking your strength, Dion—strength to love in this world and die and sleep and become
fertile earth . . .” (Ibid., 307). Finally, he realizes the ugliness of the mask, the mocking evil of its power. When he finishes a design on the capitol building which will make him famous, his understanding of himself. The Great God Brown, and the mask is reflected in his real face, now” . . . sick, ghastly, tortured, hollow-cheeked and feverish-eyed” (Ibid., 314). Looking at the plan, he cries: “Ugly! Hideous! Despicable! Why must the demon in me pander to cheapness—them punish me with self-loathing and life-hatred? Why am I not strong enough to perish—or blind enough to be content?” (Ibid. 317)

The pain and suffering Dion experiences, which later are experienced even more poignantly by Billy, are most acutely inflicted by Margaret, as I’ eternal feminine, is the promise of fulfillment and love, and it is to her that Dion turns first for life. Yet, because she does not recognize the inner man, she denies him his desire to love and comfort without shame. When Billy tells Dion that Margaret loves him, Dion cries:

O God in the moon, did you hear? She loves me! I am not afraid! I am strong! I can love! She protects me! Her arms are softly around me! She is warmly around me! She is my skin! She is my armor! Now I am born—I—the I! —one and indivisible—I who love Margaret! (He glances at his mask triumphantly — in tones of deliverance) you are out grown! I am beyond you! (He stretches out his arms to the sky) O God, now I believe! (Winther, 45)

But his popes are crushed when she shrinks from his unmasked face; so he puts back on his mask and makes and makes Pannish love to her. Then he bitterly exclaims:

“Cover your nakedness! Learn to lie! Learn to keep step! Join the procession! . . . be ashamed!” (Ibid. 267) Even without her mask, she is ashamed and begins to cry.

Again moved, he tries once more to let her see the purity of his love: “I love you with all my soul! Love me! Why can’t you love me, Margaret?” (Ibid. 268) But she is again frightened and puts on her mask. Bitterly he puts his mask on, saying: “All’s well. I’ll never let you see again . . . . By proxy, I love you” (Ibid.268).
Margaret’s complete lack of understanding is typical of the eternal girl-woman type which she represents to O’Neill. Her desires are few and simple, her purpose in life being to find a mate to use in aiding her to continue the race—in allowing her to become the mother to another like herself. Moreover, the love she offers is a sordid love, in that it is lust which is ashamed of itself. In the Prologue her unmasked confession to the moon reveals the superficiality of her personality, as she speaks of Dion:

Dion’s so different from all the other. He can paint beautifully and write poetry and he plays and sings and dances so marvellously. But he’s sad and shy, too, just like a baby sometimes, and he understands what I’m really like inside—and—and I’d love to run my fingers through his hair—and I love him! (Ibid., 263).

She works herself into such a frenzy “. . . until at the end she is a wife and a mother.” And she asserts, “And I’ll be Mrs. Dio—Dio’s wife—and he’ll be my own Dion—my little boy—my baby!” (Ibid., 264).

Margaret then seduces Dion by boldly offering herself to him not only as the promise of sexual fulfillment but also as the protective mother. And his yearning for the mother leaves him vulnerable mother. In Act I he recalls bitterly his childhood memories of his father bitterly his father and mother.

Even though in the end he realizes the futility of his love of his love of Margaret, Dion makes one last effort to make her see the depth of his tortured being! “Look at me, Mrs. Anthony! . . . Behold your man—the snivelling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave you have so nobly ignored in the father of your sons!” (Ibid., 292) But Margaret, “staring at him with terror,” cries out, “Dion! I can’t bear it!” (Ibid.292).

The suffering of Dion is magnified threefold by the torture which Billy must endure as the beneficiary of Dion’s life. The mask gives Brown the license to love
Margaret, but her love consume him, too, for it is Billy Brown whom she really loves but whom she rejects without Dion’s mask of pan. When Brown in his suffering sadly realizes that Margaret will never love him as Billy Brown, he finds temporary satisfaction in realizing that she is happy and that he can now love: “Then I have made you happy . . .? Then—that justifies everything!” (Ibid., 309) And she responds:

Of course it does! I’ve always known that, but you wouldn’t be—or you couldn’t be—and I could never help you—and all the time I knew you were so lonely! . . . but now you’re here! You’re mine! You’re my long—lost lover, and my husband, And my big boy, too! (Ibid., 310)

Unable to survive under the suppressive life – denying force within Margaret, Dion first and then Billy turn to Cybel, the wise and protecting Earth Mother. She is described as

. . . a strong, calm, sensual blonde girl of twenty or so, her complexion fresh and healthy, her figure full—breasted and wide—hipped, her movement slow and dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts (Ibid., p. 278).

The relationship which Cybel is capable of offering to Dion is that of mother, friend, and God. She is the most highly developed of the Earth Mothers, for her role is that of reaffirming the Life Force which the Seductress – girl – mistress has denied, and at the same time offering the mother love which “caressed without clawing.” (O’Neill, Plays, III, 282) The mutual understanding and friendship of Dion and Cybel is kindled at their first meeting. Dion’s agony upon “being touched” moves her into a profound sympathy, as she says: “Poor kid! I’ve never had one, but I can guess. They hug and kiss you and take you on their laps and pinch you and want to see you getting dressed and undressed—as if they owned you . . . .” (Ibid., 279) And he understands the agony of her loneliness, as he replies: “You’re lost in blind alleys, . . . . But you’re strong. Let’s be friends” (Ibid., 280).
As the years pass, Cybel offers Dion the solution to his suffering, since her acceptance of life is the natural belief in life as a value in itself. “Life’s is the natural belief in life as a value in itself. “Life’s all right,” she tells him, “if you let it alone” (Ibid. 282). But even she becomes desperate at times when she realizes the tragedy of man’s endless struggle for a meaning in life outside of life itself:

Oh, God, sometimes the truth hits me such a sock between the eyes I can see the stars!—and then I’m so damn sorry for the lot of you . . . . that I’d like to run out naked into the street and love the whole mob to death like I was bringing you all a new brand of dope that’d make you forget everything that ever was for good! . . . but they wouldn’t see me, any more than they see each other. And they keep right on moving along and dying without my help anyway (Ibid., p. 286).

Finally, the protection Cybel offers Dion gives him strength to love and, in the end, to die: “You’re strong.” He tells her, “You always give. You’ve given my weakness strength to live” (Ibid., 285). But she assures him, “(tenderly, stroking his hair maternally) ‘You’re not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark—and you got afraid’ ” (Ibid. 287) Thus, when he starts to leave her for the last time, she comforts him, “Don’t get hurt. Remember, it’s all a game, and after you’re asleep I’ll tuck you in” (Ibid., 288).

It is Mother Earth, then, to whom Dion finally returns. Moreover, it is Mother Earth who in the end gives Billy the answer to life’s suffering. After Billy in Dion’s mask has been shot for the murder of William Brown, Cybel throw “. . . her kimono over his bare body, drawing his head on her shoulder” (Ibid., 322). He snuggles up against her, “gratefully,” saying, “The earth is warm” (Ibid. 322). She tells him to go to sleep.

But he is frightened, and she comforts him:

BROWN . . . . It was dark and I couldn’t see
Where I was going and they all picked on me.

CYBEL. I know. You’re tired.
BROWN. And When I wake up . . . ?
EYBEL. The sun will be rising again.
BROWN. To judge the living and the dead!
(Frightenedly) I don’t want justice. I want love.
CYBEL. There is only love (Ibid., 325).

Then he understands that life is suffering and pain and that “only he that has wept can laugh” (Ibid., 326) Her benediction spoken “with he that has wept can laugh.”84 Her benediction spoken “with a profound pain” completes the tragic cycle: “Always, love and conception and birth and pain again—spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again!” (Ibid.328)

The virtues of Womanhood, then, as embodied in the girl – Woman – mistress of Margaret, have progressed to the point of symbolizing the denial of life rather than its affirmation. As Clara Blackburn has said of Margaret,

She never knows Anthony, the inner man; but she is both wife and mother to Dion, the outer man whom she loves with a possessive love. As a type character, she is not only the wife-mother, the maternal feminine, but also the possessive female (Clara Blackburn, American Mercury, 123).

Thus, Margaret can fulfil neither Dion’s needs nor those of Billy Brown. She cannot and will not protect or comfort. Her purpose is to carry on the race, and in the Epilogue, she is described as having” . . the sad but contented feeling of one who knows her life purpose well accomplished” (Ibid.,324). She has in fact contributed greatly to the destruction of both Dion and Brown, yet she is content in her fulfillment. As the eternal female, she is O’Neill’s most highly developed Seductress, for her power over man has become so strong that her denial of love strips him of all hope of fulfillment.

In desperation, Dion and Billy turn to Cybel, Created by O’Neill to combat their despair. Cybel is the culmination of all O’Neill’s sympathetic whores. She offers
the love and understanding and faith absent in the Seductress. As Edwin Engel has pointed out:

Anna Christie, having been abstracted into a symbol as the Woman in *Welded*, picked up in *Desire Under the Elms* the characteristics of both Abbie, the wanton mother, and Min the whores who was ‘warm like the earth,’ and now makes her re-entrance in *The Great God Brown* as the mythical Cybole, Mother of the Gods and great Asiatic goddess of fertility (Engel.163).

As the Earth Mother, not only does Cybel offer man the answer to the meaning of life, but she is the symbol of life itself she thereby re-establishes man’s faith in life that the destructive Seductress, Margaret, has used solely as a means to an end and has then discarded.

Having reached their highest peak of development as opposing foresee, the Earth Mother and seductress once again converge in O’Neill’s final consolidation of the traits of womanhood into one character is not another compelling Abbie; rather, she is an all-powerful negative force. Though feminine in that within her she possesses the same powerful creative force found in Gibe, she is also masculine in her quest for the ideal. Moreover, the suppression of her instinctive desire to love and to create by the puritanical tyranny of God the Father has made of her the Father’s disciple, for in her determination to defect the Father; she inherits the Father’s pride.

Thus O’Neill’s final concept of women is that of man’s ultimate destroyer. She is a vampire, for she dominates the men in her life, using them to fulfill her feminine needs and destroying them in order to meet her masculine desire for power and possession. Man is no longer able to withstand woman’s lust for power that has progressively increased in each of O’Neill’s later plays. Man has become less and less the central figure around which the plays are built. Indeed, the role of protagonist up to this point had been a masculine figure, but he has become increasingly dominated by his female counterpart. Upon the death the focus of attention; instead, women
dominates the plays. The triangle hero becomes the tragic heroine, a character haunted not only by her natural feminine desires, but also by the increasingly dominant masculine side of her nature.

The discussion of woman as destroyer will be confined to two plays—Strange Interlude and Mourning Becomes Electra. Although these plays were written some years before O’Neill’s death, it is felt that they, nevertheless, represent O’Neill’s ultimate concept of women, for two reasons. First of all, they were written at the peak of O’Neill’s dramatic achievement and at the most crucial personal period of his relationship with the women in his life. Strange Interlude was written during the last two years of his marriage to Agnes and Mourning Becomes Electra during the first two years of his marriage to his third wife, Carlotta Monterrey. Secondly, with the possible exception of the Iceman Cometh, O’Neill’s remaining works were reflectively autobiographical and were not concerned with man’s relationship with woman and with the development of those character types as universal symbols.

Strange Interlude (Written in 1926-1927) is the dramatization of the creative period in the life of Nina Leeds, the heroine of the play. Faced with the suppressive Puritanism of her father, who frustrates her initial attempt to find happiness, Nina sets out to find happiness in life by conquering it, by dominating it, to the end that she is unable to react either spontaneously or deliberately to the events which she herself generates. She does, nevertheless, find some degree of fulfillment in the birth of her son, although her final retreat is the retreat life rather than the tragic exaltation experienced by the heroes of the earlier plays.

Mourning Becomes Electra (1929-1931) portrays the frustration of the heroic quest for the ideal. Though no longer capable of fulfillment even in part, Lamina
Mammon is not forced to retreat, but recognizing her incapability of overcoming the sterility of her heritage, she elects withdrawal rather than defeat.

*Strange Interlude* is the dramatization of women’s struggle to pursue her ideals and at the same time to fulfill her role as the Life Force. Nina Leeds, driven by her desires to design her own destiny through manipulating the men with whom she comes into contact, find that her instinctive need to love and to create must be sacrificed in order to do so. Her struggle, they are a futile one, for in making herself her own god she must forsake her role as man’s refuge and comfort. Nine is, therefore, the Earth Mother dominated by the image of God the Father within her, and her struggle for life against him is a futile one since she can neither love nor comfort, created nor sacrifices. Without these capabilities she cannot defeat the life-denying Father and in the end retreats to his victorious arms. She has used his weapons in order to conquer him, but in doing so, she has also become the conquered.

The play is concerned solely with the productive years in the life of Nina Leeds. Act I begins several months after the death of Nina’s fiancé, Gordon Shaw. Nina, who feels that she has lost her one chance to give herself in love, blames her father’s Jealousy for Gordon’s refusal to marry her before he goes to war. In spite of the protests of both Professor Leeds and Charlie Marsden, a close friend and secret admirer, and in order to make up for having demised Gordon physical love before his death, at the end of Act I Nine leaves home to become a nurse in a veteran’s hospital.

In Act II Professor Leeds has died, and Nina returns home for his funeral. Charlie, who is eagerly awaiting her grief-stricken return, finds instead that she has become cynical and cold. She brings with her Sam Evans, a weak young man who is also a dedicated worshipper of the ghost of Gordon, and Ned Darrell, a cool young scientist from the hospital. Sam is obviously in love with Nina, and Ned suggest to
Charlie that a marriage between Nina and Sam will restore Nina to normally. Sam and
Nine do marry, and in Act III Nina is monetarily content in the knowledge that she is
pregnant. However, Sam’s mother warns Nina that insanity runs in the Evans family
and that Nina must not bear the child. Nina subsequently loses the child through an
abortion.

How desperate for a child. Nina persuades Ned in Act IV to give her one, and
in Act V she is at last fulfilled through the birth of her son Gordon, so named in
honour of the dead hero. Nina’s afternoon with Ned has also resulted in their mutual
infatuation, and in order to escape, Ned sails for Europe. Charlie, whose presence is
felt throughout the play, disturbs Nina’s maternal contentment by telling her of Nina’s
escapades in Europe. However, she is exalted by the end of Act VI Ned returns to her,
unable to forget his passion.

Eleven years elapse, and Act VII presents the rivalry between Ned and the
young Gordon, father and son, for Nina’s love. In Act VIII Gordon has grown into
manhood. He is a handsome young athlete like his namesake and is now a college
senior. Moreover, he is in love, and nine, like her father before her, is jealous. Act
VIII takes place at the boat races, in which Gordon participates. On hand is Ned
Charlie, who secretly hopes that Gordon will lose, since he represents the dead lover
to them. But he wins, and in the excitement, Sam has a heart attack and dies.

Act IX shows the full extent of Nina’s jealousy of her son’s enjoyment. Unlike
Nina’s submission to her father’s will Gordon refuse to submit to her jealous
possessiveness. He goes off his fiancée, leaving Nina alone. Marsden again comes to
comfort her, and at last she is ready for his sexless arms. They marry and retire into
the peace of evening.
Nina’s struggle to find fulfillment is dramatized by her effect upon the men in her life. She is viewed in every conceivable relationship with man—daughter, wife, mother, mistress, and friend. Having been dominated by her father and by him deprived of her one chance for happiness, Nina sets out to conquer the Father by making the Mother the God image. In so doing, she does, in fact, defeat her natural father. She marries San Evans, a weak man, and takes his friend, Ned Darrell, as a lover. After using Ned to give her a son, Nina destroys him by refusing to marry him thereby forcing him to deny his fatherhood. Nina is defeated only by her son, Gordon, inasmuch as he refuses to allow her to ruin his life as Professor Leeds had ruined hers. As a result of this defeat, Nina, as the Mother goddess, must submit finally to the death—in-life of Charlie Marsden, as the symbol of the Father.

Hence, it is professor Leeds who thwarts Nina’s initial love affair. A creative, active life is to him revolting. The professor of Greek and Latin at a small college, Professor Leeds lives in the past, determined to keep the earth smell of sweat out of his existence. O’Neill’s description of the professor’s library discloses immediately Professor Leeds character:

The atmosphere of the room is that of a cozy, cultured retreat, sedulously built as a sanctuary where, secure with the culture of the past at his back, a fugitive from reality can view the present safely from a distance, as a superior with condescending disdain, pity and even amusement (O’Neill, Plays, I, 3).

Moreover, this room is the setting for Act I, and Nina’s retreat from the room is symbolic of her rejection of Professor Leeds as the symbol of sterility, for as he tries to talk her out of leaving his house, she thinks to herself, “. . . I’m going . . . never come back . . . oh, how I loathe this room! . . .” (Ibid., p.15). Furthermore, before she leaves, she shatters his last vestige of reserve when she cries:

Gordon wanted me! I wanted Gordon! I should have made him take me! I knew he would die and I
Would have no children, that there would be big
Gordon or little Gordon left to me, that happiness
Was calling me, never to call again if I refused!
. . . Why did I refuse? What was that cowardly!
Something in me that cried, no, you mustn’t, what
would your father say? (Ibid., 19).

Her frank confession forces him into reality, crushing him, and he admits:

. . . I was jealous of Gordon. I was alone and I
Wanted to keep your love. I hated him as one hates
A thief one may not accuse nor punish. I did my
Best to prevent your marriage. I was glad when he died. There
(Ibid., 20).

The father’s rule is ended, and Nina strikes out in quest of life, leaving the
professor a broken and lonely man. By rejecting the Father, Nina triumphs
momentarily over death. Moreover, her desire to give her body as a sacrifice to love
recalls once more Cybel, the earth goddess of The Great God Brown and Desire
Under the Elms. It is the refutation of the Puritanism is symbolic to O’Neill of the
hypocritical, unnatural standard of conduct which requires man to be ashamed of his
natural desires, thereby robbing him of sexual and spiritual contentment.

Yet, Professor Leeds’ defeat and subsequent death do not free Nina of the
Father’s influence. Charlie Marsden carries on the Father image in her life. In Act I,
she reflects: “Charlie sits beside the fierce river, immaculately timid, cool and
clothed, watching the burning, frozen naked swimmers drown at last . . . .” (Ibid., 13).
And he does wait for her to submit at last to the peace of retreat from life; whenever
she finds temporary happiness, he appears to crush it. In Act v, Nina is temporarily
happy in Ned’s confession of love for her. Then Marsden, mourning his mother’s
death, appears in black, and Nina thinks to herself: “Black . . . in the midst of
happiness . . . black comes . . . again . . . death . . . my father . . . comes between me
and happiness! . . .” (Ibid., 15)
In the end, however, it is Charlie to whom Nina returns, since her productive years are over, and she has learned that the happiness life offers is really life itself, with its endless struggles and frustrations. Charlie offers contentment—peace—the evening—as he says to her in the final scene when she admits the Father's victory:

_(paternally—in her father's tone)_ you had best forget the whole affair of your association with the Gordon... so let's you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude, of trial and preparation, say, in which our souls have been scraped clean of impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace (Ibid., 98).

And she concludes: “Thank you, Father—have I been wicked?—yor’re so good — dear old Charlie!” (Ibid., 200).

The Father’s conquest of Nina, however, is a slow and hard-won battle. In her determination to guide her own destiny, she manages to dominate the lives of the man in her life who seek to find in her as woman the fulfillment of love and desire. Nina in her as woman the fulfillment of love and desire. Nina treats both Sam Evans, her husband, and Ned Darrell, her lover, as mere puppets to gain her ends.

Sam is the luckier of the two. A weak, rather simple man, he is able to find contentment in the belief that he has sired Nina’s son and has, therefore, gained immortality. And Nina never shatters his illusion. When Mrs. Evans, Sam’s mother, tells Nina that she must not bear Sam’s child because of the insanity that runs in the Evans family. Nina accepts the burden of protecting him from failure: “Poor Sam... she’s right... it’s not his fault... it’s mine... I wanted to use him to save myself... I acted the coward again... as I did with Gordon...” (O’Neill, Plays, I, 62). Thus, Nina the idealist for the moment acts unselfishly and stays with Sam. But later she thinks:

How weak he is!... he’ll never to anything... never give me my desire... if he’d only fall in love with someone else... go away... not be here in my father’s room... I even have to give him a home...
if he’d disappear. . . leave me free. . . if he’d die. . . (Ibid., 69).

Characterised by the possessive submissiveness of woman in the early plays, Sam becomes both the victim and victimiser. Behind his back Nina is able to pursue her quest for happiness with Ned, yet because of her pledge to Mrs. Evans, Nina is forced into a secret pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, like Billy Brown, Sam represents a status symbol, and Nina grasps his respectability and refuses to relinquish her hold on him. Instead she chooses to keep both husband and lover. In Act VI, when Darrell returns crawling back to her from Europe, Nina reflects: “I couldn’t find a better husband than Sam . . . and I couldn’t find a better lover than Ned . . . I need them both to be happy . . .” (Ibid., 129).

It is Ned Darrell, then, who suffers most for loving Nina. He is the counterpart of Gordon Shaw, Nina’s dead fiancé, since he represents the virility and sexual fulfillment that Nina lost when Gordon died. By consummating her passion for Ned, Nina is lulled into a semi – contentment. Ned is a strong man, an ambitious young scientist, who indifferently agrees to siring Nina’s child in the interest of Nina’s health. The lovers, however, do not anticipate the power of their passion. When Nina greets Ned for the first time after her marriage to Sam, she thinks: “Strong hands, like Gordon’s . . . take hold of you . . . not like Sam’s . . . yielding fingers that let you fall book into yourself” (Ibid., 79). And their afternoons together turn her attraction into love: “I love you” she tells him silently. “Take me! . . . let Sam die! . . .” (Ibid., 17). And silently he submits, “Christ! . . . touch of her skin! . . . her nakedness! . . . what do I care for anything else? . . . to hell with Sam! . . .” (Ibid. 18). But Ned is unable to accept Nina’s challenge, and he escapes to Europe. When he does, he loses her forever, since he recognizes in his humble return that she can dominate him and Sam without disturbing her own little world of security. He remains in the shadows in the
shadows of her afternoons until the death of Sam. Gordon, their son, sensing the love between Nina and Ned, hates Ned, thus denying him even the love of his own son. As Ned remarks to Nina:

*(sardonically)* Perhaps he realizes subconsciously that I am his father, his rival in your love; but I ’m not his father obstensively, there are no taboos, so he can come right out and hate me to his heart’s content! *(O’Neill, *Play, I, 143)*

And in the end, after Sam dies and Gordon leaves, Nina again denies Ned her love. Her passion is gone, and Ned alone stands between her and the peace of the evening. He realizes this, and as he leaves, he says, “I leave you to Charlie. You’d better marry him, Nina, if you want peace” *(Ibid., 196)*. The tragedy of his resignation is finally brought home when he cries. “Oh, God, so deaf and dumb and blind! . . . teach me to be resigned to be an atom! . . .” *(Ibid., 199)*.

Nina, then, is a combination of all O’Neill’s women—she is Everywoman. She does, on the one hand, desire a fulfillment of her natural drives. She wants to be happy—to love, to sacrifice, to possess, to create. On the other hand, in her denial of the authority of God the Father, she seeks to make herself God the Mother. And God the Mother is ready to exert her own brand of egotism and to exploit all that she possesses. Unlike Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms*, Nina is split against herself. Her dual desires—to give and to take—cannot be reconciled. In being denied her one chance to sacrifice by loving and bearing children, she rejects all Love, conceives a child without love, and then struggles to give life to a male to prove her power. But she cannot be happy in her struggle against God the Father within her. While Anna Christie and Abbie Cabot integrated their personalities by finding love, Nina cannot express her inner desires. She will not allow herself to love Darrell completely since their love is the natural sexual love of man and woman. While this type of love
satisfied Abbie, Nina’s dual self will not be pacified by this love. As Barrett Clark aptly comments,

> With aspirations that can never quite be fulfilled, held in check by inhibitions, driven onward by appetites, she is the incarnation of vitality, a creature that is driven to meddle in the lives of others that her own life may be filled to overflowing. No one is match for her; nothing arrests her progress. . . . (Clark, 175).

Her thirst for life is one continuous struggle to find in other men what she found in Gordon. Darrell calls her quest her romantic imagination, and then bitterly adds, “it has ruined more lives than all the diseases! Other diseases, I should say! It’s a form of insanity!” (O’Neill, *Plays*, I, p.102) And she does destroy Darrell in order to give Sam life. She dominates Marsden because she still needs the Father with her to punish her for her sins against him. Her son, Gordon, is dominated by her until he, too, seeks fulfillment, and she is unable to prevent his leaving her. She has tried to be God; she has tried to manage the lives of those around her. Falling in finding satisfaction through her role as God the mother and Father, she is defeated. By denying the hardness of the Father, she finds temporary comfort in believing in God the Mother, as she says to Marsden:

> The mistake began when God was created in a male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, But men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods—the Boss - has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imaged life as created in the birth – pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life’s rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into her substance, blood of Her blood again, logical and satisfying than having God a male whose chest thunders with egotism and is too hard for tired heads and thoroughly comfortless? (*Ibid.*, 42-43).

Just before asserting this desire, she foretells what she will make of God the Mother in denying the Father: “I couldn’t believe in Him, and I wouldn’t if I could!
I'd rather imitate His indifference and prove I had that one trait at least in common!”

(Ibid., 41).

Because of her imitating the Father, Nina loses in the end. She has succeeded in wrecking her own life and that of Darrell’s. She has worshiped fruitlessly God the mother created in her Father-dominated image. And she finds temporary fulfillment in this role when she feels the love of her three men united in her:

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 the three! . . . husband! . . . lover! . . . father! . . . and the fourth man! . . . little man! . . . little Gordon! . . . he is mine too! . . . that makes it perfect! . . . (O’Neill, Plays, I, 135).

But she cannot maintain the status quo, and she again is the frustrated woman of Act I. At only one other time, during her pregnancy, does she assume a calm and serene composure. Only then is she the Earth Mother of Desire Under the Elms:

. . . my child moving in my life . . . my life moving in my child . . . the world is whole and perfect . . . all things are each other’s . . . life is . . . and this is beyond reason . . . questions die in the silence of this peace . . . I am living a dream with the great dream of the tide . . . breathing in the tide I dream and breathe back my dream into the tide . . . there is no why . . . I am a Mother . . . God is a Mother.  

(Ibid., 92).

But the days of the worship of God the Mother finally end. When Nina loses Gordon, she realizes that she has lost the struggle. She is too old to begin again. God the Father is victorious, and when Nina turns to Charlie for the promise of peace in the cool of the evening after the passion of her afternoons, “. . . at last the life-giving and life-destroying tension between the father and mother-images dissolves. Nina has always seen life as ‘a strange dark interlude in the electrical displays of God the Father. ‘Now the lightning has ceased, its opposite charges neutralized in Charlie’s sexlessness”(Falk, 126).
Nina, then, has inherited both the instinctive creative force of the Mother and the fatal pride and egotism of the Father. She has become the paradoxical duality of death— in-life, and only in her final denial of life can she find peace. The peace she finds, however, is not that of the Mother’s womb, but rather the peace of the decay of the tomb in God the Father.

*Mourning Becomes Electra* reveals the complete deterioration of O’Neill’s concept of the romantic ideal. Through the characters created in this trilogy, O’Neill shows the romantic quest in its final death throes, utterly defeated by the forces of Fate. The struggle is dramatized violently through the events in the lives of a nineteenth century New England family, the Mannons. To this Puritan family Fata has several meanings. It is the outward force of their environment and heritage. It is also their inner struggle to express self—to be free to live by natural impulse and desire. Fata is the past enforcing its influence on the present to the end that they are trapped in a whirlpool of contradiction, and each one is forced to choose death or complete withdrawal from life. It is significant that Lavinia Mannon, the tragic heroine, chooses withdrawal, since she alone recognizes no escape—either in the self-sacrifice once open to Abbie, or in Nina’s rotting peace of the evening.

*Mourning Becomes Electra* is the deliberate modern counterpart of Aeschylus’ *The Oresteia*. The three parts into which O’Neill’s masterpiece is divided are entitled *Homecoming*, *The Hunted*, and *The Haunted*. The entire trilogy takes place in New England immediately following the Civil War. The Mannon family mansion is the main setting for all three plays. The close resemblance to the Greek cycle is obvious throughout the trilogy. The house of Atreus becomes the house of Mannon. In Part I, Homecoming, Christine Mannon (Glytemnestra) awaits the homecoming of her husband Ezra (Agamemnon) from the war. She dreads his return, since during his
absence she has become involved with a handsome sea captain, Adam Brant (Aegisthus), who, unknown to her at the time, is a distant relative of the Mannons. Christine’s daughter Lavinia (Electra), through jealousy, becomes aware of the love affair an writes to Ezra and to her brother Orin (Orestes), hinting of Christine’s unfaithfulness. Christine, determined not to let Adam go, plots with him to poison Ezra upon his return. When Ezra returns, Christine follows through with her plot, but Lavinia, who is already suspicious, discovers the empty box of poison and vows revenge of her father’s death.

In part II, *The Hunted*, Orin comes home for his father’s funeral. Like his mother, Orin is gentle and sensitive by nature, and he is inwardly relieved by his father’s death. Lavinia, who is like her father and who is also jealous of Orin’s love for Christine, realizes that the only way to arouse Orin against Christine to the point of revenge is by convincing him that Christine has deserted him for Adam. Lavinia persuades Orin to follow Christine to Boston, where Christine has gone for a secret rendezvous with Adam on his ship. When Orin sees his mother in Adam’s arms. He becomes hysterical with rage, and after Christine leaves, he and Lavinia shoot Adam and make the murder appear the work of thief. When Christine finds out about Adam’s death the next day, she kills herself.

Part III, *The Haunted*, takes place a year later. Lavinia and Orin are just returning from a long sea voyage, which they have taken in hopes of forgetting the horror of past events. Unable to find happiness even in the primitive atmosphere of the South Seas, they return to the Mannon ghosts. Both have changed. Orin, in the absence of Christine has become warped and possessive of Lavinia. Lavinia has become a desirable young woman and strikingly resembles Christine. In an effort to find happiness, she at last responds to the love of Peter Niles, a long – time admirer.
But Orin threatens to expose the past to Peter if Lavinia tries to leave him to marry
Peter. When he realizes that his affection for Lavinia has become incestuous, he
shoots himself as an escape from the horror of his guilt. His death makes Lavinia
admit that she cannot escape the Mannon heritage of guilt, and she drives Peter away
in a sudden violent burst of passion. She then withdraws into the Mannon house,
vowing, as the last Mannon, to punish herself as atonement for the guilt of all her
clan.

The New England setting for *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a symbolic
background for the conflict between Puritanism and paganism that dominates the
play. The theme is further carried forth in the members of the Mannon family. Ezra
Mannon, as the living head of the Mannons, is the most decadent representation of the
Father found in O’Neill’s works. He represents death – in – life, since he is incapable
of guiltless love and spontaneous emotion. Although he does not appear until Act III
of *Homecoming*, his portraits is described in Act II, and it dominate the occupants of
the Mannon mansion from that point throughout the entire trilogy:

He is a tall man in his early fifties, with a spare, wiry frame, seated
stiffly in an armchair, his hands on the arms, wearing his black judge’s
robe. His face is handsome in a stern, aloof fashion. It is cold and
emotionless. . . (O’Neill, *Plays*, II, 28)

That the portrait has a special living quality is obvious from the fact that all of the
other Mannons speak to it as if it were living. Ezra’s appearance when he enters the
play in Act II:

One is immediately struck by the mask-like look of his face in repose,
more pronounced in him than in the others. . . . His movements are
exact and wooden . . . . When he speaks, his deep voice has a hollow
repressed quality, as if he were continually withholding emotion from

As the judge, as God the Father, Ezra must carry the burden of isolation. Like
Ephraim, in *Desire Under the Elms*, he is aware of his aloneness, and when he returns
to Christine from the war, he, like Ephraim with Abbie, tries to explain to Christine how he feels about himself and the part he is forced to play in upholding the Mannon tradition of death:

That’s always been the Mannon’s way of thinking. They went to the white meeting house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was a dying. Being born was starting to die. Death was being born. . . . That white meeting—house. It stuck in my mind—clean scrubbed and whitewashed—a temple of death! (Ibid., 54).

Then he pleads, finally: “I’m sick of death! I want life! Maybe you could love me now! (In a note of final desperate pleading) I’ve got to make you love me!” (Ibid., 56).

But Christine is unwilling to share the burden of his guilt. Reminiscent of the Earth Goddess, Cybel, who gave Michael Caps and later Billy Brown peace in the knowledge of pure love, Christine, however, is incapable of filling the responsibilities her role imposes upon her. Instead, in her the passive amorality of Cybel has become the aggressive possessiveness so compelling in Abbie. And Christine’s seductiveness has developed beyond that of Abbie, for Abbie’s possessiveness was merely the desire to own materially. She was able to integrate her needs in order to give Eben strength to experience a greater love than the guilty Puritan lust of the Father within him. Christine, however, seeks to possess a perfect love, and to her the weak faltering Father, who wants to be taught how to love, must be eliminated to make room for the youthful lover.

Christine is the incestuous mother and Earth Mother. Her power over God the Father is appalling; yet in her very nature to possess at all costs, she does, in fact, become his agent, and by reason of the dual negative-positive forces within her, she destroys all happiness in her consuming quest for it.

The description of Christine recalls that of Abbie:
CHRISTINE MANNON is a tall striking-looking woman of forty but she appears younger. She has a fine, voluptuous figure and she moves with a flowing Animal grace. She wears a green satin dress, smartly out and expensive, which brings out the peculiar color of her thick curly hair, partly a copper brown, partly a bronze gold, each shadey distinct and yet blending with the other. Her face is unusual, handsome, rather than beautiful. One is struck at once by the strange impression it gives in repose of being not living flesh but a wonderfully life-like pale mask. . . . Her chin is heavy, her mouth large and sensual, the lower lip full, the upper a thin bow, shadowed by a line of hair. *(Ibid., 8-9).*

One of the townspeople further contrasts her to the Mannons : “Folks all hates her. She ain’t the Mannon kind, French and Dutch descended, she is. Furrin’ lookin’ and queer.” *(Ibid., 8).*

After Christine rejects Ezra’s appeal for love, he returns to his loneliness. In their bedroom early the morning after his return, he remarks sombrely: “This house is not my house. This is not my room my bed. They are empty—waiting for someone to move in! And you are not my wife! You are waiting for something!” Although she protests, he goes on:

You were lying to me tonight as you’ve always lied! You were only pretending love! You let me take you as if you were a nigger slave I’d bought at auction! You made me appear a lustful beast in my own eyes!—As you’ve always done since our first marriage night! I would feel cleaner now if I had gone to a brothel! I would feel more honor between myself and life! *(O’Neill, *Plat*, II, 60).*

Then she explodes in a fury of hatred: “I Loved you when I married you! I wanted to give myself! But you made me so I couldn’t give! You filled me with disgust! He begs her to stop talking, but she rages on, confessing her affair with Brant ruthlessly: “He’s what I’ve longed for all these years with you—a lover! I love him!” *(O’Neill, *Plat*, II, 61)* Her confession provokes a heart attack, and when Ezra pleads for medicine, she gives him, instead, the poison. He calls out for Lavinia, and before he dies, points an accusing finger at Christine. Christine admits that she has confessed to him her affair with Brant and that her confession brought on the attack.
Grimly Lavinia screams, “I suppose you think you’ll be free to marry Adam now! But you won’t! Not while I’m alive! I’ll make you pay for your crime! I’ll find a way to punish you!” (Ibid., 64).

In his death Ezra thus gains in power. Two Mannons survive to avenge his murder—Lavinia and Orin. The Mannon suppression of love has forced Christine to seek love in Adam Brant. But he, too, is part Mannon, and Christine is, in fact, drawn to him by his resemblance to both Ezra and Orin (Ibid., p.36). And Adam falls in love with Christine for her resemblances to his mother, whose love for a Mannon had bound her to a life of misery and poverty. Freudian in conception, the love of Adam and Christine is, then, the product of both love and hatred, and it is destined to be defeated. Christine comments prophetically, “It’s as if love drove me on to do everything I shouldn’t.” But she goes on to plot Ezra’s death, and she draws Adam into the plot against his own honor. Adam wants to fight Ezra face to face for Christine, but Christine known that no one would win by this method, and when Adam holds back, she taunts him cruelly:

If you love me as much as you claim, I should think that would rid you of any scruples! If it was a question of some woman taking you from me, I wouldn’t have qualms about which was or wasn’t the way to kill her! . . . But perhaps your love has been only a lie you told me—to take the speaking revenge on him of being a backstairs lover:

The deed is done, but in Act III of The Haunted, both Christine and Adam sense the defeat of their love, and when Christine suggests safety on the Blessed Islands, Brant cries desperately: The Blessed Isles, symbolic of natural love and forgetfulness, elude them. Lavinia ad Orin loom in front of their path to escape, and when Orin
shoots Brant, Christine’s quest for love is ended. She has earlier, in Act I, *The Haunted*, prophesied her hate to Hazel, a young girl who loves Orin.

The conflict between Christine and Ezra becomes even more complex and violent when displayed by their offspring, Orin and Lavinia. Orin is weak manifestation of both Christine and Ezra.

Clearly Orin is allied with Christine against Ezra until Lavinia convinces him that Christine has deserted him for Brant. When Orin returns home for the funeral, he freely admits to Lavinia that he has no feeling for his father’s death: “He was the war that would never end until I died. I can’t understand peace—his end!” (*Ibid.*, 75) Then he goes on to speak jealously of Lavinia’s attachment to Ezra, speaking of Ezra as if he were alive: “She can be soft—one occasion. She’s always coding father and he likes it, although he pretends” (*Ibid.*, 81). Christine interrupts him and demands that he quit talking about Ezra as if he were alive, but Orin continues: “Everything is changed—in some queer way—this house, Vinnie, you, I—everything but Father. He’s the same and always will be—here—the same! (*Ibid.* 81)

Hence, Orin feels the presence of the Mannon ghosts in the house as he tries to recapture his childhood intimacy with Christine. She has, of course, truly deserted him for Brant because she feels that he deserted her when Ezra forced him to go to war. Yet, she fears his jealousy, and she cunningly convinces him that Lavinia has made up the whole Brant affair out of jealousy toward her. Then she tells him: “I feel you are really—my flesh and blood! She isn’t she is your father’s! you’re a part of me!” (*Ibid.*, 90) Orin eagerly agrees. Then she continues: “He [Ezra] hated you because he knew I loved you better than anything in the world!” (*Ibid.*, 86) They both agree that they are glad that Ezra is dead. Finally, Orin is convinced of Christine’s
fidelity to him, and he completely confesses his Oedipian love for her when he, like
Brant, tells her about the Blessed Isles.

Christine is moved and cries: “if only you hadn’t let them take you from me!”
(Ibid. 83). But he strokes her hair caressingly, saying: “Oh, Mother, it’s going to be
wonderful from now on!” (Ibid., 83).

Ezra’s death, however, instead of making things wonderful for Orin, has
brought him into the Mannon fold, for he, now, has become Ezra, and as the Father,
he must guard jealously the Mother’s love. In Act III, The Hunted, Orin’s manner has
already become more masterful, more Mannon. He addresses the dead man:

You and I have seen fields and hillsides sown with them bodies – and
they meant nothing!—nothing but a dirty joke life plays on life! (Then
with a dry smile) Death sits so naturally on you! Death becomes the
Mannons! You were always like a statue of an eminent dead man—
sitting on a chair in a park or staddling a horse in a town square—
looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition—outing it
dead for the impropriety of living! . . . You never cared to know me in
life—but I really think we might be friends now you are dead!
(O’Neill, Play, II, 93-94)

Lavinia enters to shatter his complacency. She tells him that she will prove Christine’s
affair with Brant, and he cries: “If that’s true I’ll hate her! I’ll know she murdered
Father the them! I’ll help you punish her! But you’ve got to prove it!”52 At this point
Christine comes in, and terrified, she say to him: “why do you look at me like that?
You look—so like—your father!” And prophetically, he replies, “I am his son, too,
remember that!” (Ibid., 100).

Christine flees to Adam to warn him, followed by Lavinia and Orin. When
Orin sees them together on Adam’s ship, The Flying Trades, and hears them plan their
escape to the Blessed Isles, his face becomes “distorted with jealous fury” (Ibid.,
109). He kills Brant swiftly and remorselessly when Christine leaves, but after the
deed is done, Orin is fascinated by Adam’s resemblance to the Mannons, and he
reflects to Lavinia: “Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father’s face and finally became my own? (He smiles grimly) He looks like me, too! Maybe I’ve committed suicide!” (Ibid., 115).

Then he admits: “If I had been he I would have done what he did: I would have loved her as he loved her—and killed Father too—for her sake!” (Ibid., 115-116) Orin has, in fact, killed Adam for Christine, not in revenge for Ezra’s death: yet, he is now the Father, and in his quest for the Mother’s love, he has killed love and has denied his own right to love.

In Act V, Orin, now Ezra maliciously tells Christine that he has killed Adam. Then he cries: “I heard you planning to go with him to the island I told you about—our island—that was you and I! . . . But you’ll forget him! I’ll make you happy.” (Ibid., 121) When Christine does not answer, Orin becomes distraught and begins to plead with her just as Ezra had done. But Christine, too, is dead, and when she shoots herself, Orin’s ghosts begin to haunt him. At the end of Act V he hysterically rages to Lavinia: “I drove her to it: I wanted to torture her! She couldn’t forgive me!” (O’Neill, Play, II, 124).

Orin has come home to face the Mannon ghosts, and he is terrified that Christine has left the Mannons forever. He comes in dazed from the study and tells Lavinia: “I’ve just been in he study. I was sure she’d be waiting for me in there, where—(Torturedly) But she wasn’t! she isn’t anywhere” (Ibid., 139-140). Then bitterly defiant he continues: “well, let her go! . . . I’m father’s! I’m a Mannon! And they’ll welcome me home!” (Ibid.).

A month later his identification with Ezra is revealed clearly with his description: “He looks almost as old now as his father in the portrait. He is dressed in black and the resemblance between the two is uncanny.” (Ibid., 149) He speaks to the
portrait: “The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth! Is that what you’re demanding, Father? Are you sure you want the whole truth?” (*Ibid*). When Lavinia comes in, she tries to ignore Orin’s oncoming violence by telling him that he needs light and fresh air.

Lavinia tries to change the subject to hazel, but Orin tells Lavinia to keep hazel away from him because her purity makes him want to confess his guilt. Lavinia tells him that he feels guilty because he still loves Christine, but he retorts that Christine was no worse than she is for wanting to marry Peter. Then Orin tells her that she will never leave him because he has written the Mannon history down in a letter adding, “Most of what I’ve written is about you! I found you the most interesting criminal of us all!” (*Ibid*, 153). He then adds that the “strange hidden things out of the Mannon past combine in you!” (*Ibid*, 154)

The justice that Lavinia demands for Christine’s sins upon the Mannons in *The Haunted* is called down upon her by Orin in *The Haunted*. Now in Christine’s position as the Earth Mother, Lavinia seeks life and happiness and refuses to bend to the Mannon suppression of love. Orin, having lost the Mother, seeks revenge on all love. He refuses to allow Lavinia to live, and when she denies her pagan quest for love on their voyage around the world, he maliciously reminds her of her desires. First, he accuses her of desiring the captain of the ship they sailed on, saying that he reminded her of Brant: “You know damned well that behind all your pretence about mother’s murder being an act of justice was your jealous hatred!” (*O’Neill, Plays, II*, 154) Then he mockingly tells her that she loved the islands because she saw that men desired her, especially the islander Avahanni. She admits that she let him kiss her: “He was innocent and good. He had made me feel for the first time in my life that everything about love could be sweet and natural” (*Ibid*, 154) Thus provoked, Lavinia then turns
on Orin as Christine had on Ezra: “I’m not your property: I have a right to love!” (Ibid. , p. 155) And as Ezra had, Orin becomes violent: “(reacting as his father had . . .) ‘You—you whore: I’ll kill you’ ” (Ibid ., 154) Then she soothes him, begging him to stop torturing her, as Christine had pleaded in Homecoming, but he replies: “Can’t you see I’m now in Father’s place and you’re Mother? That’s the evil destiny out of the past I haven’t dared predict! I’m the Mannon you’re chained to!” (Ibid., 155)

Still Lavinia refuses to give up her desire to live, and Orin gives Hazel the letter confessing all the Mannon history of violence. He tells her to go away and forget him and that if Lavinia tries to marry Peter, to give him the letter.

Finally, Orin’s distorted desire for Christine reaches its climax when he turns to Lavinia as the combined mother and mistress. He intimates that they must stay together forever in the Mannon house as husband and wife. When she cannot believe that he means this, he continues: “How else can I be sure you won’t leave me? . . . You’d never dare leave me—them! You would be as damned as I am!” (Ibid., 165) When Orin says this, all Lavinia’s hatred for him erupts, and she tells him that he is too vile to live, and that he would kill himself if he weren’t a coward. He is at first pitifully shake by her words, but then he sees his escape, and he says: “That would be justice—now you are Mother. She is speaking now through you! . . . Yes! It’s the way to peace—to find her again—my lost island—Death is an Island of Peace, too- -” (Ibid., 166)

Thus, Orin’s escape from the Mannon past is the return to the Mother. Lavinia cannot this escape. She is the true Mannon. Her attempt to find love is thwarted by her own realization that she is the last of the Mannons and that she alone can atone for the Mannon crimes against love and life. Lavinia is the culmination of all the Mannons. She, like Orin, is both Ezra and Christine; but unlike Orin, she is more God the Father
than God the Mother, and although she destroys the Mother in an attempt to take her place, she is too much Mannon to love, and her end is her withdrawal from life.

In *Homecoming*, as God the Father, Lavinia’s whole appearance is in sharp contrast with Christine. Not only does Lavinia wear the physical makeup of Puritan ugliness, but she also seeks to condemn all love. When Peter comes to visit her in Act I of *Homecoming*, she gets furious when he asks her if Orin loves Hazel, and snaps: “I don’t know anything about love! I don’t want to know anything! (Intensely) I hate love!” (O’Neill, *Plays*, II. 14) Moreover, when Adam comes to the house and compliments Lavinia on her resemblance to Christine, Lavinia angrily replies: “What do looks amount to? I ‘m not a bit like her! Everybody knows I take after Father!” (Ibid., 22) Lavinia’s interview with Brant in the play is subsequent to a former meeting during which she had submitted to a moonlight walk with him and had let him kiss her. Now she knows that he loves Christine plagues her into making him admit that his mother was Marie Brantome, a one-time nurse for the Mannons who had run away with her father’s brother, David Mannon. With great satisfaction Lavinia throws up the fact that David Mannon was exiled from the Mannon fold because of his love for Marie. But Adam tells Lavinia that David Mannon had been exiled not because Marie was not good enough for the Mannons, but because Lavinia’s grandfather, Abe Mannon, had loved Marie, too, and had exiled David out of jealous envy. When she tries to leave, Adam stops Lavinia, crying, “You’re a coward, are you, like all Mannons, when it comes to facing the truth about themselves?” (Ibid., 25)

After Lavinia makes Adam admit his heritage, she goes to Christine and tells her she is going to tell Ezra of Christine’s meetings in New York with Adam. Christine retorts knowingly that Lavinia will not tell Ezra because she wants Adam
for herself, and adds: “You’ve tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You’ve always schemed to steal my place!” (Ibid., 33) The truth in Christine’s statement comes through all too clearly when Lavinia goes to Adam’s body after Orin has shot him, and “speaks to the corpse in a grim, bitter tone: ‘How could you love that vile old woman so?’ (But she throws off this thought - harshly) ‘But you’re dead! It’s ended!’ (She turns away from him resolutely . . . )” (Ibid., 115)

Lavinia’s last act as the instrument of Puritanism is the killing of Adam. When Christine shoots herself, Lavinia’s duty to her father is fulfilled, and she comments grimly: “It is justice! It is your justice, Father!” (Ibid., 123) Even then, however, she has begun to take Christine’s place, for when Orin becomes hysterical over Christine’s death, she comforts him: “Sshh! You have me, haven’t you? I love you. I’ll help you to forget” (Ibid., 124)

The return of Lavinia and Orin from the Blessed Isles reveals Lavinia’s complete transformation from the Mannon God the Father to the lovely pagan Mother. She speaks to Orin in a “coaxing motherly tone,” (O’Neill, Plays ,II, 138) and when Orin stops on the steps on the steps where Christine had sat moaning after Adam’s death, Lavinia orders: “That is all past and finished! The dead have forgotten us! We’ve forgotten them!” (Ibid. 138) Later in her father’s study she speaks to the Mannon portraits in “a harsh resentful voice, ‘why do you look at me like that? I’ve done my duty by you! That’s finished and forgotten!’” (Ibid., 139)

Lavinia has truly become the pagan Mother, and Orin tells her that even her soul has become like Christine’s: “I’ve watched it ever since we sailed for the East. Little by little by little it grew like Mother’s soul—as if you were stealing hers-- as if her death had set you free—to become her” (Ibid., 141). This new pagan just finds its prey in Lavinia’s long-time admirer Peter Niles. When Peter comes to see Lavinia
after her return, she “stares at him with a strange eager possessiveness” (*Ibid.*, p. 143). He is, of course, astounded by her change and remarks how well she looks in green as opposed to the black she wore before her voyage. She replies, “with a strange smile. ‘I was dead then’” (*Ibid.*, 144).

Yet, although Lavinia tries to wipe out the past, Orin will not let her forget, and he tells Peter maliciously about Lavinia’s love for the Blessed Isles. And in spite of Lavinia’s denial of her feelings for the islands, after Orin leaves, she passionately describes their loveliness to Peter, and in her confession, she recalls the descriptions earlier given by Adam and Orin:

I loved those Islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful—a good spirit—of love—coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death. There was no hereafter. There was only this world—the warm earth in the moonlight—the trade wind in the coco palms—the surf on the reef—the fires at night and the drum throbbing in my heart—the natives dancing naked and innocent—without knowledge of sin (*Ibid.*, 147)

Lavinia’s interlude with love is, however, ineffectual and short lived. Orin constantly reminds her that she is a Mannon. She looks at him with the same dread that Christine had looked at her and at Orin in *Homecoming*. She tries to bring life into the Mannon mansion by filling the house with flowers, as had Christine. Finally, however, she must sacrifice Orin, in a last desperate attempt to live. When she hears the shot desperate attempt to live. When she hears the shot ending his life, she is in the study, and she turns to the Mannon portraits.

In Act IV, in spite of her vow, she is again a Mannon: “*Her body, dressed in deep mourning, again appears flat-chested and thin. The Mannon mask-semblance of her face appears intensified now*” (*Ibid.*, 170) Literally, as well as symbolically, Orin’s death is the final barrier between Lavinia and life. Peter refuses to marry her immediately out of respect for Orin’s memory, and he is tormented by the strange
violence in the Mannon family. Moreover, Hazel has told him that Orin had written a letter reflecting on the violent family history, and he is suspicious because of Lavinia’s reluctance to discuss it. At last Lavinia sees the futility of her quest for love:

“The dead coming between! They always would, Peter! You trust me with your happiness! But that means trusting the Mannon dead—and they’re not to be trusted with love! I know them too well!” (Ibid., 176) The past intervenes, and Lavinia rejects Peter for self-destruction. Finally, Lavinia orders Seth, her handyman, to board up the house and to tell the maid to throw out the flowers:

I’m not going the way Mother and Orin went. That’s escaping punishment. And there’s no one left to punish me. I’m the last Mannon. I’ve got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I’ll never go out of see anyone! I’ll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I’ll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die!... I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born! (Ibid., 178)

Thus, Lavinia and Christine are representations of the final stage in O’Neill’s development of woman. Christine, the Earth Mother, is no longer the passive pagan force representing life in harmony with nature. Instead, she is the possessive mother-mistress who destroys all forces which stand in the way of her fulfillment. She draws man to her as the symbol of feminine loveliness and animal grace, but once caught in her web, man becomes powerless to oppose her and is finally destroyed trying to satisfy her needs.

Yet, if Christine destroys as the force of love, Lavinia is even more deadly as the force of hate. Lavinia represents all the forces against which the Mother must struggle in order to find fulfillment. Lavinia is God the Father and God the Mother, and the conflict within her between the desires to possess the Mother’s pagan desirability and her will to power inherited from the Father, makes of her an
overpowering enemy of love. Like all Mannons, Lavinia yearns for the Mother’s love and peace, symbolized in the Blessed Isles, but her Puritan sense of the guilt of all love forces her to destroy the Mother and the Mother’s disciplines. Yet, Lavinia’s very act of justice makes death inevitable for her, since she is forced at last to withdraw from life to expiate her crimes against the Mother.

Lavinia’s end is, however, a noble one, since her rejection of love is brought about by the tragic depth of her love and self-sacrifice. She refuses to impose upon Peter the Mannon suppression of life, and she realizes that she is too much a Mannon to love freely. Therefore, she turns upon herself, not choosing the peace of a return to the Mother’s womb, but a withdrawal into a living death.