CHAPTER II

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We love, you love, they love, one loves! No one loves! All the world loves a lover, God loves us all and we love Him! Love is a word - a shameless ragged ghost of a word - begging at all doors for life at any price.

(Dion Anthony in *The Great God Brown*)

It takes all kinds of love to make a world!

(Cybel in *The Great God Brown*)

Love is a hardy, perennial theme of literature. Love interest, in one form or another, has always been the backbone of drama, ancient as well as modern. In tune with the changing times, the concept of love has also changed a lot. As Jane in Tennessee Williams’ *Vieux Carre* says, "Lovely old word, love, it's travelled a long way." In modern drama, love is a complex phenomenon. The life of the present day people is so complex and intricate that the traditional concept of simple and natural love is fast becoming an anachronism. Modern writers, thanks to the Freudian re-evaluation of sex, handle the theme of love with greater freedom and less inhibition. While presenting love in all its disguises, the writers probe human relationships at the most intimate level.

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Love in modern American drama is Janus-faced. "It is both old and new - old because the plays affirm the primacy of love and its traditional power to transform human life, and new because they bear witness to a new valuation of love and to the changing love - ethic of modern times." The plays provide evidence to the traditional potency of love. They also record the passing away of the older ideal of virtuous love as 'the marriage of true minds' and the emergence of a newer, de mythicized and a more earthly version of it.

Eugene O’Neill’s treatment of romantic love tends to diverge in two directions - pictures of wildly romantic love affairs of couples who literally give their all for one another and the opposite pictures of frustration and subsequent humiliation. He recognizes the power of love to make and unmake. Darrell who is cynical about love does admit, "... love makes one either noble or despicable!" Even a character like Juan Ponce de Leon whose commitment to his country makes him declare to Maria, "Love, love and always love! Can no other motive exist for you? God pity women", later changes to accept, "There is no God but Love - no heaven but youth!" Lavinia who once held the opinion, "I don’t know anything about love! I don’t want to know


5 Ibid., p.422.
anything!... I hate love!" later realizes that "love is all beautiful" and calls herself a fool for not having realized it. Her volte face becomes complete when she declares to Peter, "Nothing matters but love, does it? That must come first! No price is too great, is it?" When a contrite Christine tells Adam Brant, whom she got involved in the murder of her husband, that she has brought nothing but misfortune to him, Brant replies, "You've brought love - and the rest is only the price. It's worth it a million times! You're all mine now, anyway!"

While asserting the supreme hold that romantic love has on people, O'Neill also throws light on the darker and more lurid aspects of love - adultery, frigidity, repression, sex, incest, mother love etc. His presentation of the theme of love thus runs through the whole gamut from love as an uplifting spiritual force to a lusty celebration of sex, from benevolent love to love as an instrument of destruction, from the joys of fulfilled love to the agony at the lack or loss of it, from adulterous love to love in marriage, and from straight heterosexual love to the many deviant forms of it such as incestuous love, mother-love and even a suggestion of homosexual inclination.


7 Ibid., p.147.

8 Ibid., p.167.

9 Ibid., p.111.
LOVE AND REDEMPTION

"I love love! I'd love to be loved!"\(^{10}\), declares Dion Anthony. The need for love is universal and insistent. Phaedrus in Plato's *The Symposium* declares that love inspires in the humans a high sense of honour, courage and a spirit of sacrifice. It is considered the source not only of the most admirable virtues but also of the most intrinsically valuable of human experiences. Its attainment becomes a privilege that compensates for all failures and a deprivation from it vitiates all success. Freud in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* pronounces, "... We are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love."\(^{11}\) Love is so over-valued that it is made to carry with it the illusion that it is a solution to all our problems, the be-all and end-all of life. But this exaggerated expectation of love has seldom been realized.

Eugene O'Neill had a great faith in the glory and power of love. As one who fell in love more than once, he must have believed in the regenerative power of love. At the same time he was conscious how love was getting debased in modern days and how pure love had to fight hard for its survival against forces that tend to defeat it. When Sam Evans talks of his pure love for Nina Leeds, Marsden ruminates with a grudging


admiration as well as envy, "... pure love! ...it's easy to talk... he doesn't know life..."\textsuperscript{12}

In plays like the \textit{The Web}, \textit{Anna Christie}, \textit{Desire Under the Elms}, \textit{The Straw}, \textit{Moon for the Misbegotten}, O'Neill strongly underlines the power of love to redeem and regenerate seemingly ignoble characters. "The main character in each of these plays is shown as having reached a \textit{cul-de-sac} in his or her life. Love comes in to provide a way out of this impasse through real or promised moral growth, regeneration, or spiritual sustenance."\textsuperscript{13} The power to save is counterbalanced by a sense of failure or loss or uncertainty of some kind. While conceding the fact that love has the magical property to redeem human beings, O'Neill does not seem to be very sure whether we would be able to enjoy the fruits of redemption.

"Though writers have always been fascinated by fallen women, few have been so obsessed by the subject, few have rung so many variations on the theme as O'Neill."\textsuperscript{14} The first of his prostitutes is Rose in \textit{The Web}. She is in an advanced state of tuberculosis. She is terrorized by Steve, a pimp and an inveterate gambler. Steve forces her to walk the streets in the rain. He demands that she gets rid of her baby because, according to him, it is the cause of their being 'broke' all the time. He threatens her with imprisonment, should she disobey him, and beats her mercilessly to teach her to behave. She is rescued by Tim Morgan, a gangster, who is hiding from the police. The two


\textsuperscript{13} Naresh K. Jain, \textit{Love in Modern American Drama}, p.31.

lonely misfits of society instinctively perceive in each other a ray of hope and confess
the sordid details of their wasted lives. Rose recalls the number of times she tried to
break the pattern of her life, with each attempt ending disastrously. She laments, "They -
all the good people - they got me where I am and they’re goin’ to keep me there." Tim’s recollections are equally grim. As a kid he got mixed up with older fellows and
landed himself in a reform school for no fault of his. He complains, "They made me the
goat; and in the reform school they made a crook outa me." (WB 46) Upon his release, he
could find no job and he began to steal to keep from starving. He spent most of his
time in jail where he learnt to be a yeggman. He broke out and robbed a bank. While
hiding out in the room next to Rose’s he overheard her conversation with Steve. Risking
capture, he determined to rescue her. Rose is impressed and tells him wonderingly, "Yuh
took that chance fur me when yuh didn’t even know me!" (WB 48)

Though Rose and Tim do not speak directly of their relationship, they talk with
the intimacy of lovers. In defiance of probability O’Neill manages to project a sense of
their mutual understanding, evolving a relationship that is like love. Theirs is the love
of the misbegotten and from it springs a semblance of hope. He gives her a large roll of
money so that she can move to a country with her kid. Rose protests, "Yuh don’t know
how rotten I am." (WB 49) Disregarding the possibility of getting tuberculosis from her,
he takes her in his arms and kisses her roughly, declaring, "That’s how rotten I think yuh
are. Yuh’re the whitest kid I’ve ever met, see?" (WB 49) Now there is a transformation

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in Rose. "All the hardness of Rose’s expression has vanished. Her face is soft, transfigured by a new emotion." (WB 49)

"Repeatedly in later plays, O’Neill suggests that love or the close bond of friendship and understanding has the power to transfigure two desperately lonely people whose paths fatally intercept, even briefly. They experience what Robert Browning calls, "the perfect moment"; in O’Neill it has connotations of salvation as well as exhilaration."16 Feeling high, Tim even promises to join her in the country when it is safe and assures her, "May be after a time we c’nt start over again - together." (WB 50) At last it seems the web is broken. There is hope for Rose. But her hope is short lived. Tim is killed and Rose is accused of murder. "Her expression becomes one of amazed pain as she sees they think she is guilty of the murder." (WB 51) All that she can tell the policemen is, "Why, I loved him." (WB 52) The money that Tim gave to save her destroys her life. "She realizes the futility of all protest, the maddening hopelessness of it all." (WB 53) There is no hope, no way out of the cruel maze. Life is "a bum game all round." (WB 37)

All are looking at her in silence with a trace of compassionate pity on their faces. Rose seems in a trance. Her eyes are like the eyes of a blind woman. She seems to be aware of something in the room which none of the others can see - perhaps the personification of the ironic life force that has crushed her. (WB 53)

In The Web O’Neill rules out the possibility of the redemption of a prostitute Rose observes. "Reform? Take it from me it can’t be done. They won’t let yuh do it.

16 Virginia Floyd, The Plays of Eugene O’Neill, p.29
and that's Gawd's truth." (WB 45) However, in *Anna Christie*, O'Neill tells the story of
the regeneration of a fallen woman, who has remained basically good, under the
influence of the sea and love. To a present day reader the story of *Anna Christie* may not
sound original as today the redemption of a prostitute has become a literary cliche. The
theme was definitely new when O'Neill wrote the play. In the 19th century England and
America people never thought that a woman once fallen was redeemable.

The Anna of *Christopherson* is a prim, Puritanical former secretary from Leeds
In *Anna Christie* she is a prostitute who drifted almost by accident into a profession that
was distasteful to her. When we meet Anna in 'Johnny the Priest's Saloon', our first
impression of her is that of a street walker. Though a tall, blond, fully developed girl of
twenty, she is now run down, showing "all the outward evidences of belonging to the
world's oldest profession". Her clothes are the "tawdry finery of peasant stock turned
prostitute" (AC 14). Marthy, a prostitute herself, gets Anna's number the minute Anna
steps into the saloon. Anna, we learn, did not go wrong all at one jump. She accuses the
men in her life for her downfall. Her first sexual experience was at the age of sixteen,
forced upon her by a cousin. He started her wrong. "It wasn't none of my fault I hated
him worse'n hell and he knew it. But he was big and strong." (AC 57). declares Anna.
There was nothing she could do to stave him off. It is her father's irresponsibility and his
irrational fear of the sea that left her at the mercy of her cousins. In a fit of anger, she
accuses him. "If you'd even acted like a man - if you'd even had been a regular father
and had me with you - may be things would be different!" (AC 58) However, in a

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references will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses, preceded by AC).
philosophical vein, she refuses to blame either her father or herself for the debacle, "It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine... we are all poor nuts, and things happen, and we just get mixed in wrong, that's all." (AC 65)

Anna ran away from the farm of the cousins, was a nurse for two years and from there she entered a 'joint' and became a professional. The 'joint' was raided and she spent thirty days in the 'cooler'. Now down in health, she thought of recuperating in her father's place. She accepts her father's invitation to stay in his coal barge. At last she has found a refuge from life. There are evidences in the opening Act itself that a little of Anna's acquired hardness is beginning to fade. Before her meeting her father, she has to brace herself with whisky. She does not like putting up the facade of an innocent young girl, which Chris assumes her to be, to her kindly father. "Gawd, I can't stand this! I better beat it!" (AC 24), is her initial feeling.

The redemption of Anna is related not only to love but also to the sea which forms the backdrop to the play. It is the sea which first performs the role of purifying Anna. The rootless and bitter Anna of the first Act looks healthy and transformed ten days later, thanks to the 'ole davil' and the fog. Her sordid past seems to have cancelled itself out. She declares, "And I seem to have forgot - everything that's happened - like it didn't matter no more. And I feel clean, somehow - like you feel yust after you've took a bath."(AC 28) She feels as though, "I'd found something I'd missed and been looking for-"(AC 28) She refuses to share her father's hatred and fear of the sea. She claims that she would rather have "one drop of ocean than all the farms in the world"(AC 27). It is out of the darkness of the sea that the ship wrecked Mat Burke
emerges to take, through his love, the process of redemption of Anna, set in motion by the sea, to its logical end.

Though the sea makes Anna fit enough to be loved, the chief redemptive influence on her is surely that of love. It is Mat Burke who rescues her morally as he himself is physically rescued by Chris' coal barge. Mat emerges out of the sea only to fall roaring in love with Anna as though to prove the dictum, "Who loved that loved not at first sight". He combines his love with the typical rough talk of a sailor. Even in his weak state, he is struck by Anna's beauty. He takes her to be "some mermaid out of the sea come to torment" (AC 31) him. His trial and torment begin right now. When convinced that Anna is, after all, "rale flesh and blood", he assumes her to be Chris' woman. Confident that he is the proper lad for her, even "if it's meself do be saying it" (AC 33), he tries to kiss her but receives a slap from her for his efforts. His pride about his eligibility is humbled. When told by Anna that she is the daughter of Chris, he promptly apologises to her for having mistaken a fine high tempered girl and a real decent woman for the "cows on the water front" (AC 34). He attributes his mistake to his ignorance of her kind! Typical of a romantic lover, he now goes to the other extreme of feeling that he is not fit even, "to be kissing the shoe-soles of a fine decent girl" (AC 34) like Anna, leave alone trying to kiss her on the lips. The same man later goes off to wash Anna's black kiss with whisky.

To Mat, Anna is "the wan woman of the world" (AC 47) and he declares, "Death itself wouldn't make me forget her." (AC 47) He thinks that he cannot live without her. Uniqueness and fatality are essential to romantic love. Mat rather believes that their love is divine ordained. He feels, "There's the will of God in it that brought me safe through
the storm and fog to the wan spot in the world where you was!" (AC 39) He believes that they are fated to be united. He fondly hopes that she may not mind his past at all "but only be seeing the good herself put" (AC 38) in him. He promises to reform himself. In a family way he assures Anna, "'Tis no more drinking and roving about I'd be doing then, but giving my pay day into her hand and staying at home with her as meek as a lamb each night of the week I'd be in port." (AC 38) With a swiftness unexpected of a man just rescued from the jaws of death, he stuns Anna by proposing to her. Anna cannot believe what is going on. "Proposing to me! for Gawd's sake! on such short acquaintance?" (AC 38), wonders Anna. Though she cannot believe that Burke could propose to a girl with a past like her on such a short acquaintance, she is swept off her feet by the speed and swiftness of Burke's proposal. As Naresh K. Jain observes, "Here is a homespun version of the romantic domestic ideal of love so assiduously cultivated by movies, soap operas and popular theatre." 18

Mat Burke's protestations of love may be loud and theatrical. But there is an apparent sincerity about his protestations which Anna cannot ignore. No wonder that Anna who has only seen lecherous men in her life so far falls in love with Mat, in spite of herself. To her father she asserts, "He's a regular man, no matter what faults he's got. One of his fingers is worth all the hundreds of men I met out there - inland." (AC 44) She finds herself caught on the horns of dilemma. On one side, there is her love for this big kid. On the other, is her consciousness that she is unworthy. Cheating Burke would not be difficult. But she would not do that. At the same time she is ashamed to tell the truth. "I wanted to marry you and fool you, but I couldn't." (AC 59), she would say

18 Naresh K. Jain, Love in Modern American Drama, p.38
later to Burke. Though she knows that her salvation lies in her marrying Burke, she will not marry him with him believing a lie. Her declaration to her father is clear and emphatic:

If I'd met him four years ago - or even two years ago - I'd have jumped at the chance. I tell you that straight. And I would now - only he's such a simple guy - a big kid - and I ain't got the heart to fool him. But don't never say again he ain't good enough for me. It's me ain't good enough for him. (AC 44)

These scruples mark an important stage in the moral regeneration of Anna.

Mat Burke pleads with Anna to accept his proposal to marry him. He appeals to her not to destroy him. Anna admits helplessly, "I guess I can't help it anyhow. So I guesss I do, Mat. (Then with a joyous defiance) Sure I do! What's the use of kidding myself different? Sure I love you, Mat!" (AC 51) She assures him assertively that she has never loved a man in her life before - "You can always believe that - no matter what happens." (AC 52) An exultant Burke assures her that they will have a grand, beautiful life together to the end of their days. He tries to kiss her. She turns away her head. "Then overcome by a fierce impulse of passionate love, she takes his head in both her hands and holds his face close to hers, staring into his eyes. Then she kisses him full on the lips." (AC 52) Then in a broken laugh she declares 'good by'. Even as Mat is gloating that he has beaten Chris fair and square, she makes him understand the implication of her 'good by'. She tells him, "I can't marry you, Mat - and we've said good-by. That's all." (AC 53), because, "it's the best way out I can figure." (AC 53)

With both Chris and Mat claiming right over her, Anna is provoked to tell them her shady past. She owns up everything fair and square. Chris and Mat react in
predictable ways. Yet another chance for Chris to blame the 'ole davil' for sending up Mat. Mat's love for Anna turns into real torment. He alternates between violent outbursts and wallowing in self-pity. He laments that he has given the power of love to a slut like Anna. He cannot help whining, "I'm destroyed entirely and my heart is broken in bits!" (AC 60) He is furious that all his dreams of fine life with Anna are shattered. He conveniently forgets his earlier assertion that he will marry her, if she is not married to anyone else. The man was least prepared for the bombshell that Anna has dropped. It is but natural that he loses his head and goes off to drown his sorrow in whisky.

The reactions of both Chris and Mat are of a typical conservative male. Despite his casual indulgence in sexual pleasures, Mat expects sexual purity from his woman. Angered by his taunts and insults, Anna takes a swipe at Mat: "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?" (AC 73) Mat has no answer but is convinced that Anna is hardened in badness.

O'Neill chooses to give a conventional ending to the play - the ringing of the marriage bells. With Chris and Mat deserted her, Anna finds herself in a blind alley. Her plight now is far worse than ever before. Though she is reformed and feels cleansed, she finds herself rejected by the other world. In a gesture of empty bravado, she states that she will go back to her old profession. In a state of fond hope she waits for Mat to come back, though she asks herself what she is waiting for. Her hope becomes a reality when Mat comes back. He is unable to forget her and his overwhelming need for her forces him to sweep aside the objections of conventional morality. He fears that without Anna, he will become a person fit only for a mad house. Now he longs for an excuse to accept her. It comes with Anna's passionate declaration that she has never loved anyone other
than Mat. He is immensely pleased by her vehemence. A light begins to break over his face. Though "torn between doubt and the desire to believe" (AC 74), he believes that he has in him to make a new woman out of Anna. "so I'd never know, or you either, what kind of woman you'd been in the past at all" (AC 74) Anna plays upto him by assuring him that he would. The issue would have been settled then and there itself if Anna had not been unduly enthusiastic. Her assertion that she will do anything to prove her love to him gives Mat the idea of asking her to swear on the Catholic cross, which she does. Her subsequent declaration that she is not a Catholic Lutheran puts yet another obstruction in the path of love - the obstruction of religion Winther is right when he observes that the desperate search for a sanction, for a supernatural guarantee, is indicative of a never fully quenchable suspicion. Yet love triumphs. Independence on Anna is so complete that he declares, "I was loving you in spite of it all and wanting to be with you, God forgive me, no matter what you are I'd go mad if I'd not have you!" (AC 76) He is willing to accept her "oath or no oath" (AC 76) He acts like a true lover when he agrees to accept her "naked word for it and have you anyway" (AC 76) True love can conquer all and even wipe out the past, no matter, how unsavoury it be. Love shores up the sagging morale of a vacillating Mat and Anna finds herself redeemed and is in with a chance to lead a good and decent, if not a happy, life. A confident Anna starts planning for their future, though the lovers face an immediate separation.

Perhaps O'Neill was not very happy about ending the play on a happy note. Yet he is not for denying Anna and Mat happiness, as like the other characters of O'Neill, they do not attempt to live against the lines that the impulses of their blood have chartered. If Anna goes back to prostitution or the old man kills Mat or Mat really quits
and ships to Capetown, "the delicious fantasy of Gael and Gall goes all to pieces, and ugly common-sense emerges. It is therefore necessary to cheat. The least loss is involved in a somewhat inglorious happy ending." O'Neill could have given a tragic end. It would have been, he felt, "so tragically easy! But realistically false - theatrical!" The ending may be melodramatic, but, O'Neill felt, "in moments of great stress life copies melodrama." In defence of the end O'Neill said that it could have been easier for him to douse their lights in palpable tragic catastrophe and added:

But looking deep into the hearts of my people, I saw it couldn't be done. It would not have been true. They were not that kind. They would act in just the silly, immature compromising way that I have made them act, and I thought that they would appear to others as they do to me, a bit tragically humorous in their vacillating weakness.

O'Neill gives the play a happy ending but makes us feel uneasy about the ending. Chris refers to the 'ole devil' and the final words of the play are his "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you vas going, no. Only dat ole devil, sea - she knows!" (AC 78) Frederic Carpenter is guarded in his optimism: "Love triumphs, but the future remains bleak."

19 Francis Hackett, "Anna Christie", O'Neill and His Plays, ed. Oscar Cargill et al., p 154
The climax of the play has been the focus of much attention. The critics are divided whether the ending is a happy one or not. Those who consider it a happy one wonder whether a happy ending is possible under the circumstances. The objection is not on moral considerations but on aesthetic grounds. They feel that it is a happy ending at whatever cost to the artistic conscience. The ending has been variously dubbed as contrived, a sell out, and the worst anti-climax. Louis Defoe feels that a story which so logically travels the path of tragedy has been tampered with in order to give it a hopeful, if not quite a happy ending. Virginia Floyd calls it a pseudo tragedy with a happy ending. O'Neill, however, wondered from where critics got the idea that the play has a happy ending, "unless it be that there is a kiss and a mention of marriage in the last Act".24 In his view there is no ending at all to the play. He claimed: "The final curtain falls just as a new play is beginning. At least, that is what I meant by it. A naturalistic play is life. Life doesn't end. One experience is but the birth of another."25 He has solved their problem "for the moment but by the very nature of its solution involving a new problem".26

In a letter to Nathan O'Neill claimed, "The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten."27 He even thought of calling the play 'Comma'. However, he admitted that

25 Idem.
on a second reading of the play, he felt that he had not done enough "to make my "comma" clear. My ending seems to have a false definiteness about it that is misleading - a happy - ever - after which I did not intend. I relied on the father's last speech of superstitious uncertainty to let my theme flow through and on.**28** Regarding O'Neill's claim that the play, like life, has no end, Fergusson observes, "Life doesn't end but a work of art does; a work of art is a bounded whole."**29** Clark observes, "The union of two lovers is a happy ending, no matter what is hinted at regarding their future."**30** His claim is that neither the characters know what is coming nor does the audience care.

What happens to Anna and Mat after their marriage is immaterial. The play remains, according to Bogard, "a story of love finding its way over parental and societal opposition."**31** In the words of O'Neill himself, there "never was a more sentimental gesture of defiance at fate than that of Burke and Anna agreeing to wed."**32** They may be on the treadmill but it is a tribute to their love that they could come this far. Frank R. Cunningham's words sum up the play:

Anna rises above her meretricious past to an altruistic love. Burke transcends his Puritanical prejudices against "bad" women and

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28 *Idem.*


31 Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time*, p.164.

establishes a connection to life through his love for Anna. And Chris learns the most important romantic lesson: that man cannot shut out life.\footnote{Frank R. Cunningham, "Romantic Elements in Early O'Neill", \textit{Critical Essays on Eugene O'Neill}, ed. James J. Martine, p.66.}

In \textit{The Straw} O'Neill indicates that it is possible that love can cure diseases. Probably O'Neill cannot buy this concept totally. So he ends the play suspended between hope and despair. The play shows the redemption of a terminally sick patient, Eileen, through the love of Stephen Murray. Eileen's love helps to cure Stephen of his angularities. "Stephen Murray, dangerously close to death, finds not only strength and life but love and the release of his thwarted abilities as a writer through a healing contact with a feminine instinct and through readiness to sacrifice himself.\footnote{Richard Dana Skinner, \textit{Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest} (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p.65.} That a bitter and self centred man like Stephen can make an offer to marry a woman like Eileen is a tribute to the immense power of love.

\textit{The Straw} is the love story of Eileen Carmody and Stephen Murray, two tubercular patients in a sanatorium. Their intimacy develops in a place where the authorities are strictly anti-cupid and do not allow any intimacy to grow beyond the casual. If Christopherson's irresponsibility results in Anna turning a prostitute, the indifference and callousness of Carmody land Eileen in a tubercular sanatorium. Eileen graduated from a college, became a stenographer, relinquished the job to take care of the family when her mother died. Home responsibilities, we are told by the doctor, are the main cause of the breakdown of her health.
Fred Nicholas, whom Eileen has known since her childhood, is her fiancé. When the petty, calculating man, that Fred is, comes to know of Eileen's sickness, he becomes far more alarmed by the dangers of a contagion than by her health. The way he avoids the heart-broken Eileen, when she tries to kiss him, shows that love can wither as fast as it blossoms. "Eileen's eyes grow wide with horror" as she realises the depth of Nicholas' love for her. In sharp contrast is Stephen Murray who does not mind kissing Eileen and be kissed by her though she is in an advanced stage of tuberculosis and he himself has been a tubercular patient not long ago. What he does may appear unscientific but is not love blind, as he himself says.

Nicholas comes to the sanatorium to admit Eileen in the manner of one "who is accomplishing a necessary but disagreeable duty with the best grace possible, but is frightfully eager to get it over and done with." (SW 351) He stoops to the level of accusing Eileen of having got her eyes on Stephen Murray, that too, when they have been in the sanatorium for hardly a few hours. He even comments insultingly, "Well, go ahead if you want to. I don't care." (SW 355) A drunken Carmody gets a chance to abuse Nicholas of having got "no guts of a man" (SW 353) in him. That is why, he is so anxious to leave Eileen to whom he has been engaged to marry and who has been his sweet heart for years. Though Murray advises a deeply hurt Eileen not to take these lovers' squabbles seriously, he himself later wonders what a girl like Eileen could see in a man like Nicholas. "Love must be blind" (SW 370), philosophises Murray. Realizing

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36 Eugene O'Neill, "The Straw", The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Vol.1, p.347. (All subsequent references will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses, preceded by SW).
that Nicholas has never loved her and could never love anyone but himself, Eileen breaks off her engagement, possibly to the relief of Nicholas.

Stephen Murray, despite a cheerful front that he puts on, is bitter and cynical about everything, his job as a reporter in a small time newspaper and his relatives. "From what I've seen that blood-thicker-than-water dope is all wrong" (SW 359), claims Murray. He feels happier in the sanatorium. Eileen encourages him to start creative writing which he has not been able to do because of his laziness and shittleness. He asks her to play the critic and tell him when his writings are rotten. She offers to type his stories. He holds the despondent girl's hands and cheers her up. Miss Howard asks Murray provocingly, "Well, is it love at first sight?" (SW 363) They do not fall headlong into love at first sight but their love progresses slowly but surely. First, Eileen is struck by his kindness: "the only real friend I've had up here" (SW 371) - but soon it blossoms into love. While Eileen realizes it early, to a self-centred man like Murray who does not believe that he has "ever thought much of loving anyone" (SW 409), the realization dawns a bit late, not too late anyway.

In the first four months of her stay Eileen has grown stouter. Murray has sold his first story and he attributes his success to Eileen. Murray has filled up solidly and he is sure to be discharged soon. There is a sharp decline in Eileen's health, she having lost as many as three pounds in just three weeks. Mrs. Turner, the matron, rebukes Eileen:

I think I can guess your secret. You've let other notions become more important to you than the idea of getting well. And you've no excuse for it. After I had to warn you a month ago, I expected that silliness to stop instantly. (SW 377-378)

Obviously that silliness did not stop.
Murray, like Marco Polo, is insensitive to the overtures of love from Eileen. "She looks at him as if imploring him to comprehend (SW 370), but Murray stubbornly refuses to respond. Before he leaves the sanatorium, Eileen decides to tell him her love. She meets him at night at the 'crossroads'. Eileen, unusual of her character, dominates the scene in which she declares her unconditional love for Stephen. Murray tries to avoid the subject by talking about his future plan. When she informs him that she has broken off her engagement to Nicholas, he refuses to take the cue. He tries to defend Nicholas and then callously suggests, "You must get one of the right sort next time." (SW 389) Breaking down she tells him, "I love you, Stephen - you! That's what I wanted to tell." (SW 390) Even as she declares her love, "she gazes up into his eyes, her face transfigured by the joy and pain of this abject confession" (SW 390) Impulsively she kisses him and regrets her action. Stung to the quick, Stephen atones for his indifference by kissing her passionately. She tries to make him feel at ease by indicating that she knows that Murray does not love her - "It's all right, dear. You can't help what you don't feel." (SW 390) Like Burke, she too feels that her love is preordained. "And I've loved you - such a long time now - always..."(SW 390), is her declaration, though she has known him for just four months. Like Anna, she too suggests that she cannot help falling in love - "Oh, it was stupid - I shouldn't - I couldn't help it, you were so kind and - and different - and I wanted to share in your work and - and everything." (SW 391) She does not expect him to respond. She would not want him to leave the sanatorium without being told of her love. Her love is not dependent on Murray's feelings towards her - "It's been beautiful - all of it - for me!" (SW 391) - and loving him even when she knows that he does not love her has made her "happier than I've ever been" (SW 391). She is quite philosophical about the whole thing - "I know - you like
me a lot even if you can't love me - don't you?" (SW 392). She reserves the right to hope till she dies and pray that he will soon find out that he does love her. Her parting shout to him to remember that she loves him hits Stephen so hard that he "stamps on the ground furiously, his fists clenched in impotent rage at himself and at Fate" (SW 392) and mutters, "Christ!"

Four months later, Murray comes back for a regular check up. Eileen's condition has worsened further and she is to be sent in a few days to the State Farm to die. Murray has not done anything worthwhile in New York. His life has resolved itself into aimless wandering and dissipation. The urge to write seems to have deserted him. His not getting letters from Eileen did not help matters but left a big hole in things. His meeting with Eileen inspires him and he acknowledges gratefully, "I really believe it is you. I haven't forgotten how you helped me before." (SW 405) Obviously Eileen is his salvation.

Miss Gilpin who has a soft corner for Eileen informs Murray that Eileen is dying. She declares, "She's given up hope, she hasn't wanted to live anymore." (SW 408) Though now it is too late to save her, she wants him to make her happy in the little time that she has. It is his duty because Eileen has suffered so much only because of him. She asks him bluntly, "Don't you think that's something you can give in return for her love for you?" (SW 410) Strangely stirred, Murray declares that he is going to marry Eileen and he feels that he owes it to her. Still he thinks as though it is a duty that he has to perform. When he meets her it is with "a great pitying tenderness in his eyes" (SW 410). He kisses and declares his love for her. Eileen is immensely happy. She declares, with a happy laugh, "Why, it's just that, just you I've needed!" (SW 411) as though he is what God has prescribed for her sickness. Now Murray experiences, "a passionate awakening-
a revelation" (SW 412) that he loves her and needs her. He realizes that he has been a blind, selfish ass and declares his love for her with such a new, ringing sincerity that Eileen can perceive a change in him. "Suddenly his face grows frozen with horror" (SW 412) as the impending death of Eileen confronts him face to face as a menacing reality. He lets her see her fate in his eyes. "Her face suddenly betrays an awareness, an intuitive sense of the truth." (SW 413) He grasps at a last straw and tells her that he has a relapse of tuberculosis and that he needs her to save him.

Murray tells Gilpin that he has proposed to Eileen not out of a sense of duty or pity but out of sheer love. He declares, "I suddenly saw - how beautiful and sweet and good she is - how I couldn't bear the thought of life without her." (SW 415) Though the odds are against him, he confidently asserts that they will win together. "We can't! We must! There are things doctors can't value - can't know the strength of!" (SW 415) Obviously he counts love to be one of them. He will get her well. "Happiness will cure! Love is stronger than- " (SW 415) Struck by the pitying negation which Gilpin cannot keep from her eyes, he breaks down, "Oh, why did you give me a hopeless hope?" (SW 415) Though Gilpin never used the expression "hopeless hope", he shouts at her how she dared to use that. In reality he was shouting at himself for having despaired. With renewed vigour he declares, "There is always hope, isn't there?" (SW 416) All that Gilpin can do is to pray - "God bless you."

The play ends with Eileen in a tone of motherly, self-forgetting solicitude comforting Murray. The light of renewed hope begins to dawn for them both. The final word has not been spoken. As he asks Gilpin, "What do you know? Can you say know
anything?" (SW 416) Gilpin admits that she knows, "nothing - absolutely nothing " (SW 416).

"The play ends sadly in the shadow of the heroine’s probable death, but it ends ‘happily’ with the triumph of true love over death" 36, says Carpenter. Love and the prospect of marriage have already brightened Eileen’s outlook of life. At least, temporarily, it has been proved that love succeeds where medicines fail. "One is left hoping that cure may be effected but with very little to base one’s hope upon. This is the only play where one is left guessing what the end may be; it is also the only play in which O’Neill is a sentimentalist " 37. Whether what Stephen is offered is a hopeless hope or not, there is at the back of it, "some promise of fulfillment - somehow - somewhere - in the spirit of hope itself" (SW 415). As O’Neill said in a different context, "He with the spiritual guerdon of a hope in hopelessness, is nearest to the stars and the rainbow’s foot." 38

The purity and transfiguring power of love is brought out in a dramatic and convincing manner in Desire Under the Elms. It is with hesitation that one has to use the term ‘love’ without any adjective to an affair between a step mother and her step son which is variously labelled as incest, though technically incorrect, forbidden love, adulterous love etc. Love is too strong a passion to be confined by logic, reason and

36 Frederic L. Carpenter, Eugene O’Neill, p.44.
38 Eugene O’Neill, "Damn the Optimists", O’Neill and His Plays, ed. Oscar Cargill et al., p.104.
moral considerations. In *Desire Under the Elms* O’Neill illuminates the most sordid and blind alleys of life. There is nothing noble or human about either Abbie or Eben. Both are greedy and their sole concern is to possess the farm of Ephraim. But love ‘ennobles’ them to transcend their animal nature. Their passage from lust to love is similar to the transmutation of lead into gold. Lust, which is tied to the body, is finite and transient. Love which transcends body is infinite and eternal.

Like the legendary Phaedra, Abbie Putnam is smitten by an uncontrollable desire for her step son. And the step mother and step son, in spite of their conflicting natures, are irresistibly drawn to each other from the start. As Abbie tells Eben, ‘Yew an’ me’ve got a lot in common.” "a fierce repressed vitality about him”(DUE 203). Eben finds “himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued”(DUE 203). Abbie is “full of vitality” and she has “about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben”(DUE 221). Both are greedy. She marries the old Ephraim for security and she claims right over Ephraim’s farm by virtue of being his wife. Eben believes that the farm is rightly his because it belonged to his mother. He looks upon his own father as an interloper and a robber.

Ephraim’s third marriage to Abbie changes the equation for Eben and his brothers. Eben resents Abbie furiously as an intruder. Abbie’s first word in the play is “hum”, spoken with a lust for the word and with her eyes glistening over the house. She

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39 Eugene O’Neill, "Desire Under the Elms", *The Plays of Eugene O’Neill*. Vol III, p.226 (Further references to this play will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by DUE).
sees Eben as a threat. "Her eyes take him in penetratingly with a calculating appraisal of his strength as against hers." (DUE 225) At the same time, "her desire is dimly awakened by his youth and good looks" (DUE 225). She introduces herself to Eben as his 'maw' but adds significantly, after referring to her husband as an old man, "I don't want t'pretend playin' Maw t' ye, Eben." (DUE 225) Eben finds himself "obscurely moved, physically attracted to her" (DUE 225). He swears at her and she takes it sportingly observing that she would have done the same thing if she had been in his place. She tries to win his sympathy by narrating her past. Eben has to fight against "his growing attraction and sympathy" (DUE 226). She is supremely confident of subjugating the rebel in Eben. She advises him not to fight against nature.

In the meantime Ephraim develops a curious tolerance of the softness he finds in Eben. Abbie is worried as to what will become of her if Ephraim, getting older, decides to leave his farm to Eben. Ephraim shocks her by declaring that nobody inherits his farm, that he will set fire to his farm and turn her free along with the cows. She discovers a weak chink in his armour. Ephraim desires another son. Abbie realizes that if she can bring him this last blessing in his old age, he will give her anything she asks, including the farm. This further strengthens her resolve to seduce Eben at the earliest. She can not only satisfy her lust but also beget a child through him and thus assure herself of her husband's farm. She takes advantage of Eben's complex love for his mother, covers her evil designs with a veneer of motherly love and finally in the parlour of the house, the room in which Eben's mother was laid before burial, she persuades him that by having sex with her, he will only be revenging his mother's death in the hands
of his father. "Thus Eben, by the false road of an incestuous love, thinks he has
discovered freedom from the softness and humiliation of his youthful resentment." 40

Abbie cold bloodedly seduces Eben but during the process she falls desperately
in love with him, as he does with her. She, who proudly declared earlier, "Did ye think
I was in love with ye - a weak thin' like yew? Not much! I on'y wanted ye fur a purpose
o' my own - an' I'll hev ye fur it yet 'cause I'm stronger'n yew be!" (DUE 240), now
realizes that, for all her cleverness, she has aroused in her heart a passion that is going
to wreck all her plans. In arousing the repressed passion of Eben she has forgotten or
perhaps she has never known that sex instinct cannot be easily controlled. She finds
herself caught in her own web. Her lust has transformed into love and now she cannot
be without Eben. To her nothing else matters. She declares, "What d'we give a durn?
I love ye, Eben! God knows I love ye!" (DUE 244) Eben too releases his pent up passion
- "An' I love ye, Abbie! - now I kin say it! I been dyin' fur want o'ye - every hour since
ye come! I love ye!" (DUE 244)

Eben is shocked beyond words when Ephraim tells him that Abbie always
despised him and that she wanted to have a son only to deprive him of his farm. Eben
is not so much worried about his losing the farm as by the fact that Abbie has tricked
him through claims of love. He says, "But 't ain't the farm so much - not no more - it's
yew foollin' me - gittin' - me t' love ye - lyin' yew loved me - jest t' git a son t' steal."
(DUE 258) Abbie is upset that Eben thinks that she has used her love only to cheat him.
She realizes bitterly that the very son with whom she wanted to possess the farm now

stands in the way of her possessing the only thing that matters to her - the love of Eben. She declares, "If that's what his comin' 's done t' me - killin' yewr love - takin' yew away - my on'y joy - the on'y joy I ever knowed - like heaven t' me - purtier'n heaven - then I hate him, too, even if I be his Maw!" (DUE 258) Eben fails to read the intensity of her feeling and wishes that his son was never born and that he would die this very minute. Abbie assures him that she might, "make it 's if he'd never come up between us" (DUE 258) and prove to him that she was not scheming to steal the farm from him. Though moved Eben asks bitterly whether she is a God. But she can play the role of God. With strange intensity she tells him, "Mebbe I kin take back one thin' God does!" (DUE 259) She loves him with such a tortured intensity that she will do anything to prove that she loves him better than anything else in the world.

Abbie smothers to death her child and goes to meet Eben with her face "full of terror, yet with an undercurrent of desperate triumph" (DUE 259) Eben rushes to the Sheriff, to complain about the murder. He returns, after informing the Sheriff, to be welcomed by Abbie with a cry of anguished joy. On his knees, Eben seeks her forgiveness. Abbie is ecstatic. Declaring, "I'd forgive ye all the sins in hell fur sayin' that!" (DUE 266), she kisses his head, "pressing it to her with a fierce passion of possession" (DUE 266). It was when he was waiting for the Sheriff that Eben got to thinking how much he loved Abbie. He says, "It hurt like somethin' was bustin' in my chest an' head. I got t' cryin'. I knowed sudden I loved ye yet, an' allus would love ye!" (DUE 266) When Eben suggests that they run away to escape the police, she stoutly refuses saying that she has got to take her punishment. She is unrepentant about her illicit love. She declares, "(lifting her head as if defying God) I don't repent that sin! I hain't
askin' God t' forgive that!" (DUE 266) It is for killing the child that she wants punishment. She takes away from God and others the right to criticize her or pass judgement. Love is justified by the happiness it brings, irrespective of the moral label that the society might put on it. Ephraim's comment about his son going to the Sheriff is interesting - "He'd ought t' been my son, Abbie. Ye'd ought t' loved me. I'm a man. If ye'd loved me, I'd never told no Sheriff on ye no matter what ye did, if they was t' brile me alive!" (DUE 265) Coming from the rigid and Puritanical Ephraim, there can be no better testimony to the power of love than this.

O'Neill believed in sin and retribution. Abbie has decided to suffer for the infanticide. Eben has to suffer for his lack of faith in Abbie which led to her killing her child. Eben chooses his own punishment. He insists on sharing the punishment with Abbie, "prison 'r death 'r hell 'r anythin'" (DUE 267). The world without Abbie is not a world worth living for Eben. He has lost the farm, his baby and he may be imprisoned or hanged. But it does not matter, "if I'm sharin' with ye, I won't feel lonesome, leastways" (DUE 267). Even Ephraim cannot avoid staring at Eben with a trace of grudging admiration. Eben and Abbie move through a sequence of false attitudes towards each other to true understanding and love. They have sacrificed their greed, farm, child and freedom at the altar of love - a world well lost. Their love transfixes, ennobles and saves them.

The play ends as an apotheosis of love. The two lovers, purified by their acts of mutual self-sacrifice, stand "looking up raptly in attitudes strangely aloof and devout" (DUE 269) at the pretty sun rising. The mutual self sacrifice of the lovers illustrates how, in the words of Virginia Floyd, "desire can be spiritualized when it transcends the
physical and is transformed into love."\(^{41}\) Doris Falk says, "Through the lovers, reality has found its paradoxical, destructive - affirmative expression; in their death they have found life."\(^{42}\) Raleigh says, "Abbie is sex and greed ennobled finally by love. Eben is revolt against the father, once more ennobled finally by love."\(^{43}\) The ending is a sad one, but no ending can be happier than this one. Carpenter raises the question, "Is this sentimental immorality, or tragic exultation?"\(^{44}\) and he himself answers, "The play refuses to judge - and therein lies much of its greatness."\(^{45}\) The recognition that they are indissolubly bound to each other brings exultation to the lovers which, in O'Neill's language, means, "an intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming".\(^{46}\) Abbie and Eben accept "with exultation the tragic irony that love has not come to fruition until the moment of inevitable loss, just as they accept without question the justice of their fate".\(^{47}\)

\(^{41}\) Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, p.285


\(^{43}\) Raleigh, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, p.53.


\(^{45}\) *Idem*.


LOVE FOR LOVE'S SAKE

"It's love's slaves we are, Mother, not men's," declares Sara Meolody in A Touch of the Poet. Such an absorption in love is displayed by many characters of O'Neill. The most important of them is Caleb in Diff'rent. Caleb's devotion to Emma Crosby till his end may make him an ideal lover. He may also be viewed as a silly sentimentalist for having wasted his life for a woman who has repeatedly made it clear to him that she has no intention of marrying him. As a sea-faring man, Caleb is singularly good. It is also true that he tries hard to live up to the expectation of his lover, Emma Crosby, whom he has known since childhood. Emma expects him to be different from other men. He realizes that her expectation is too unrealistic and he repeatedly advises her to get rid of the notion that he is different. A silly prank played by his fellow sailors results in his falling a prey to the charms of a native girl and the slip proves that he is human and not a plastic saint. His one slip is enough for Emma to stop the marriage. Caleb declares that he will marry no woman but Emma and wait for her to change her mind. He does wait for her for thirty years. Emma changes her mind only to fall in love at the age of fifty with Crosby's nephew. She calls Caleb a sot, an old fashioned critter and tells him that she does not love him but only his young nephew. Caleb realizes, "Thirty o' the best years of my life flung for a yeller dog like him to feed on." The shock that his woman is no different from a common slut is too much for him. He declares, "Folks be all crazy and rotten to the core and I'm done with the whole


kit and caboodle of 'em'. He hangs himself in the barn - a tragic end for a true lover.

In John in Welded there is a near ideal lover. He is an exception to the theatre people. His love for Eleanor is so deep and platonic that he refuses to take advantage of her even when she offers herself to him. He rightly accuses her of having treated his love with the most humiliating contempt. Before her marriage, she offered herself to him as the price of her career. Later, she tried to have sex with him in an attempt to kill her love for her husband. On both occasions he rejected her sacrificial offer. Eleanor is so touched by his tenderness that she wishes that fate had let her love John instead of Cape.

Billy Brown's love for Margaret in The Great God Brown is also of a selfless variety. He literally worships her. He stands respectfully behind her when he proposes to her. When he realizes that she loves Dion Anthony and not him, he acts as the messenger of love. He remains unmarried. Of course, he does have women on the sly. Though he has no soft feelings for Dion, he offers Dion a job in his firm. Her sufferings upset him and he decides to give Dion a good talking, which he does. When Dion asks Brown whether his poor wife begged him to give her husband a job, he objects strongly warning that he will not listen to him talking that way about Margaret. He accuses him of having sunk into the gutter and dragging Margaret with him. He loses his life in the process of living a Dion to satisfy Margaret after Dion's death.

50 Idem.
In Sid Davis and Lily in *Ah, Wilderness* we have a pair who love each other deeply but who cannot marry because Davis cannot give up his bad ways. Both remain unmarried and singularly devoted to each other.

The early death of Gordon makes him a hero for Nina and to her he symbolizes an ideal - a good husband, a great lover and an understanding companion, all rolled into one. She carries on her romance with her ideal even well after her marriage to Sam.

**REVENGEFUL LOVE**

Intense love can lead to deep hatred, particularly when the object of one’s love does not live up to one’s expectation. When Abbie finds that Eben is going to a prostitute ignoring her advances, she becomes so incensed that she tells Ephraim that Eben misbehaved with her. Her foul mood changes when an angry Ephraim claims that he will kill Eben. When Darrell leaves Nina in a sneaky way, Nina becomes so angry that she thinks of telling Sam of her relationship with Darrell in the hope that he will go after his wife’s lover. She hopes that Sam will kill Darrell and in return for which she will offer to love him. However, her revengeful mood does not last longer.

Abe Mannon was in love with the nurse girl, Marie Brantome, in the typical Mannon way. When he found that Marie and his brother David were in love and that Marie was seduced by David, he drove both of them out of the house and cheated David of his rightful share in the property of the Mannons. He burnt down the house in which the seduction took place and built in its place the temple of death and hatred. Ezra, as a boy, had a fascination for Marie. He could not forgive her when she married his uncle,
David. When in a helpless state, Marie asked aid from him, he flatly refused and had his revenge.

Love can drive people to do horrendous things. Abbie kills her own kid. Christine murders her husband. Lavinia gets Adam Brant murdered because he spurned her for her mother who is five years older than him. With deep hatred, and jealousy, she warns her mother, "He'll still be in his prime when you're an old woman with all your looks gone! He'd grow to hate the sight of you."! Lavinia can never accept the reality that she loved Adam. Her loud protestations that Adam means little to her make one conclude that 'the lady doth protest too much'. Christine claims that Lavinia loves Adam as much as she can and that saving the name of the family is not the real reason for her asking Christine to give up Adam. Later, Orin claims that it was Lavinia's jealous hatred that was behind her pretence about Adam's murder being an act of justice. He accuses, "You wanted Brant for yourself!" (MBE 154) Lavinia loudly protests that it is a lie and that she hated Adam. Pat comes the retort from Orin, "Yes, after you knew he was her (mother's) lover!" (MBE 154). Whether Lavinia hated Adam because he was responsible for her father's death or because he preferred Christine to her is a matter of debate. But what she states over the dead body of Adam is interesting - "How could you love that vile old woman so?" (MBE 115) Then as though she has said something which she should not have spoken, she states, "But you're dead! It's ended!" (MBE: 115) Then she offers a prayer, "May God find forgiveness for your sins! May the soul of our cousin, Adam Mannon, rest in peace." (MBE 115) These words of Lavinia cannot be taken

Eugene O'Neill, "Mourning Becomes Electra", The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Vol II. p.34. (Subsequent references will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by MBE).
merely as a token of good gesture on her part for the man who is dead because at that
age she was incapable of finer feelings. She thinks that her love for Adam had ended
It is not so. When she pleads with Peter to hold her and kiss her, she addresses him as
Brant and that makes her realize that she cannot rid herself of the past - her love for
Adam and her revenge in getting him killed.

LOVE AND SUCCESS

Love and success are two values cherished by the Americans. Success as an
American value goes back to the Puritan idea of obeying God's laws and having a store
of worldly goods to show of it. The exclusive worship of the bitch goddess, success,
caught up. But the bitch goddess demands exclusive worship from its votaries. As such
it exacts a price which may be anything from the loss of freedom, greater insensitivity
or family discord to the denial of one's true self, emotional emptiness or spiritual
sterility. The pursuit of success imprisons a person in himself and thereby impairs and
sometimes completely destroys his capacity for love. Hence material success, both in
pursuit and achievement, is considered inimical to love. Material success calls for
sharpened acquisitive instincts and a certain amount of ruthlessness. Love needs mutuality
and some sense of sacrifice. This sets up love and success in opposition to one another.

Marco Polo in Marco Millions embodies the ideal American businessman who
succeeds through hard work, thrift, loyalty and the ability to take calculated risks. He
does better than his father and uncle. He rises to be the Mayor of Yang-Chau, the highest
post in the service of Kublai Khan and is worth two millions in gold when he returns
home. In the course of his pursuit of success, he becomes increasingly insensitive to
beauty and love. Social and personal relations do not matter to him except as a means to making money. "O'Neill's purpose in this drama is to show the tragedy incurred when man's blindness blocks out beauty and love and leaves him in a dark world groping for objects." ⁵²

The central point of the play is Marco's practical attitude to love. The dramatist brings out how Marco gets gradually insensitized by his quest for gold. We first meet him as a youthfully handsome, well made boy of fifteen in love with Donata. He is found kissing her in a gondola. He even writes a full poem. His poem indicates the things to come. Commenting on the poem, Tedaldo says, "Your lady is a bit too mineral, your heaven of love a trifle monetary." ⁵³ Marco is ashamed and assures that he will not be a fool as to write a love poem again. He throws the poem only to pick it up again. It is the last time that he exhibits the faintest trace of having a soul which, like Dr Faustus, he sells for wealth and power.

Marco assures Donata that he will come back and marry her. He conquers his youthful tendency successfully and permanently. He gradually learns the ways of the world and to suppress his romantic idealism. The gradual degeneration of Marco is indicated by the way he handles the prostitute. When the prostitute, for the first time, invites him to kiss her, he is confused but strugglingly he rejects her request because he has promised to be faithful to Donata. Second time, he kisses her but is "genuinely


⁵³ Eugene O'Neill, "Marco Millions", *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, Vol II, p.361 (Further references to this play will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses, preceded by MM).
overcome by a sudden shame" (MM 371). But he is increasingly becoming conscious of her prettiness. The third time he meets her as a brash, confident young man and promptly goes to bed with her. He is free from feelings of guilt. Later he claims that he is not a he-virgin and that he has played with concubines at odd moments. He justifies his acts on the ground that he needed relaxation and that it is only human.

It must be said to the credit of Marco that he stands by his commitment to Donata, but unfortunately for wrong reasons. He is not inspired by love. He does not even write to her during his absence for twenty years. He has a wonderful conception of marriage. When he learns that the king to whom Kukachin is to be married is dead and that she has to marry the prince, he is not unhappy. Philosophically, he comments, "And you'll be Queen just the same, that's the main thing." (MM 410) Similarly his marriage with Donata "will bring two firms into close contact" (MM 356). He does not mind Donata being fat and stupid. He does not need a great thinker around the house. He is after "sound commonsense and a home where everything runs smooth." (MM 416) He is confident that Donata will not have married another, not because she loves him but because "her family needs an alliance with our house" (MM 416). No wonder that a disgusted Kukachin bluntly comments, "There is no soul even in your love, which is no better than a mating of swine." (MM 416) Marco is happy with himself. He marries Donata, and showers her with wealth - the symbol of his modern mercantile success. His infidelities with the ladies of the East do not affect him. "Since his conscience is a highly obtuse affair, if it exists at all, he feels quite satisfied with himself as a keeper of promises over the years!" 54

54 Skinner, Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest, p.160
Marco's obtuseness to love and beauty comes out most clearly in his reaction to Kukachin's love for him. Both Kublai Khan and Chu-yin see him for what he is - "He has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct. He has lusted for everything and loved nothing. He is only a shrewd and crafty greed" (MM 387). comments Kublai. But Kukachin, in an impressionable age, falls in love with him. To her Marco, as Chu Yin says, is "a strange, mysterious dream knight from the exotic West" (MM 388). Kublai thinks it impossible for Kukachin to fall in love with Marco Chu-Yin is philosophical and realistic - "Love is to wisdom what wisdom seems to love a folly." (MM 388)

The love sick Kukachin has Marco appointed as the admiral of the fleet to escort her to the bridgeroom's country. She hopes to kindle his love during the long journey. Marco is enjoined by Chu-Yin to "look carefully and deeply into the Princess's eyes" (MM 404) everyday and note what he sees there. Marco is more interested in getting permission to trade in the ports along the way and getting a bonus from the bridgeroom. He sends a verbal message through a courier of his having safely delivered Kukachin to Ghazan Khan. He gave the messenger no money for delivering the message but promised him that Kublai would reward him nobly. Such is his love for gold.

The voyage to Persia lasts two years. He detects from the love-lorn eyes of Kukachin symptoms of billious fever and nurses her through the fever. He saves her from drowning and defends her against pirates. But he never discovers the secret in her eyes. In a desperate attempt to strive to arouse Marco's jealousy, Kukachin tells him how her would-be husband would look into her eyes and see that she is "a woman and beautiful"(MM 414). Marco's response is that it is a husband's privilege. Nothing works
with the dollar crazy Marco. As a last try, Kukachin asks him to look deep into her eyes, not as those of a princess but as those of a woman. "He looks for a moment critically, then he grows tense, his face moves hypnotically toward her, their lips seem about to meet in a kiss." (MM 414-415) In a voice "thrilling for this second with oblivious passion" (MM 415), he calls her by her name. But the spell is broken when he hears the voice of Maffeo saying, "one million!" He regrets what he has done. He admits that he felt feverish when he looked into her eyes. He claims, "I felt like one of those figures in a puppet show with someone jerking the wires." (MM 415) He claims that he saw in Kukachin's eyes, not her love for him but the future Mrs. Marco Polo, Donata. Kukachin blames herself for having implored an ox to see her soul. She calls him "an exquisite judge of quantity" and "an idol of stuffed self-satisfaction." (MM 418) The outraged Kukachin throws a handful of gold at the kneeling Polos and orders them to guzzle, grunt and wallow for her amusement. The lure of lucre has turned Marco into a money making machine, impervious to all beauty and grace. Kukachin's passionate search for the lost trace of Marco's soul fails and she dies broken hearted.

Juan Ponce de Leon in The Fountain is described as "a romantic dreamer governed by the ambitious thinker in him". The sole aim of this 16th century Spanish noble, is to gain glory for Spain. When Maria de Cordova confesses her love for him, Juan is visibly annoyed. To him love is a weak he of poets and minstrels. He has no time for love. He declares, "What you call love - they were merely moods - dreams of a night or two - lustful adventures - gestures of vanity, perhaps - but I have never loved. Spain

Eugene O'Neill, "The Fountain", The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Vol.III, p.377. (Further references to this play will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses, preceded by FN).
is the mistress to whom I give my heart." (FN 381) As he sets sail with Columbus, Maria warns him, "You will go far, soldier of iron - and dreamer. God pity you if those two selves should ever clash!" (FN 381) The clash does take place. As the ageing Governor of Puerto Rico, he falls desperately in love with Beatriz, the youthful daughter of Maria. To him Beatriz becomes the reincarnation of his youth and romance, all that Maria might have been to him had he been free and capable of love then. The old man is desperate to regain his youth and he pleads with Nano to lead him to the magical fountain. He cries, "Nano, I burn to hell! I love!" (FN 415) He rejected Maria's love as he loved glory then. Now he loves Beatriz passionately - "She was all that I had lost. She was Love and the Beauty of Love! So I loved her, loved her with all the intensity of Youth's first love when youth was dead!" (FN 422) He realizes that it is a monstrous folly. He cannot help it. Now to him God is love and heaven is youth. He even asks Beatriz to promise him that she will not marry until he returns from his search for the fountain or she hears him to be dead. His search fails and he becomes reconciled to his own inevitable age and death and gives his blessing to Beatriz to marry his young nephew.

Stephen Murray in The Straw narrowly escapes being grouped with Marco and Juan. He is neither a materialist like Marco nor a dreamer like Juan. He is a cynical egotist who cannot love anybody. He sympathizes with Eileen, cajoles her and cheers her up. In turn her feminine touch enables him to realize his literary potential. Proud of his achievement and feeling self-sufficient he refuses to acknowledge Eileen's pathetic efforts to communicate her love. Even after her declaration of her love for him, he only feels sorry that he cannot respond. When Eileen tells him that he knew even earlier that she loved him and that he did not want to reciprocate it, he can just mumble a miserable.
"I'm so sorry!" (SW 391) When he comes back to the sanatorium, he is a mellowed man, with his creative career having come to a standstill. He first agrees to marry Eileen out of sympathy. It is when he kisses her that he realizes that he has really loved her all along. Nothing happens, as in Marco's case, to break the spell.

Marco never realizes what love is. Love and marriage are matters of convenience to him. As a youth Juan mocks love only to regret it later. When he chooses to fall in love, youth is not on his side and the girl is not in a mood to reciprocate. In Stephen's case, he is initially too self centred to realize what love is. He realizes the strength of love belatedly but realizes it so strongly that he is willing to sacrifice his own happiness for the happiness of his lady love.

ADOLESCENT LOVE

_Ah, Wilderness_ is a play that literally oozes with love. Miller tells his wife, "Then, from all reports, we seem to be completely surrounded by love!" His wife replies, "Well, we've had our share, haven't we? We don't have to begrudge it to our children." (AW 292) In this play we have the settled, marital love of the Millers, the strange love of Sid and Lily with little prospect of leading to marriage, the adolescent love of Richard and Muriel and the flirtations of Mildred.

The seventeen year old Richard Miller is one of the best loved and most often performed male adolescents in American literature. As Woodbridge says, the love affair

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56 Eugene O'Neill, "Ah, Wilderness", _The Plays of Eugene O'Neill_, Vol II, p 292. (All subsequent references will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by AW).
of Richard is treated, "directly and honestly, and with more sympathy than calf love generally gets in the theatre." 57 We find Richard in the adolescent throes of reading Swinburne, the Rubaiyat, Bernard Shaw and Ibsen. He is in love with Muriel, a crotchety neighbour's daughter. The neighbour McComber thinks that a boy who reads such stuff is a bad influence for a young girl. He registers a violent protest with Miller. Miller defends his son though he feels that Richard's letters to Muriel are not in good taste. All that Miller does is to ask his son about his intentions towards Muriel. Richard replies with shocked indignation that he loves Muriel and that he plans to marry her after graduation. Miller leaves the matter there, happy that his son's intentions are honourable.

McComber forces his daughter to write a letter to Richard breaking off their engagement. This plunges the ardent youngster into a fit of Ibsenesque despair. He undergoes depression and melancholy. He exudes tragedy. Yet he would like to believe that he was just kidding Muriel to have a little fun and that Muriel was silly enough to take him seriously. He goes for a night out just to show the heartless lady how little he cares for her. But he does not succeed in doing much more than getting very sick on two strong drinks and in having an itinerant lady's advances fall flat before the image of Muriel still stoutly entrenched in his mind.

Muriel and Richard find a way to break all parental obstacles and are once more in the seventh heaven of 'youths sweet scented manuscript'. Richard becomes a changed man when he receives Muriel's letter begging him to meet her that night. He is determined to see her that night even if it is the last thing he will ever do. To his sister

57 Homer E. Woodbridge, "Beyond Melodrama", The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, ed. Oscar Cargill et al., p.318.
who is a flirt and who believes that there is always another man along he says, "The trouble with you is, you don't understand what love means!" (AW 274) Muriel has to admit, "Gee, it must be nice to be in love like you are - all with one person." (AW 273)

The lovers meet at the beach. The reunion proves rocky at first, neither fully trusting the other until they agree that the separation made them suffer. Dramatically Richard narrates his adventures the previous night, distorting the actual facts. Muriel is shocked and tries to run away. When he tries to stop her, she bites his hand and dashes off until Richard's assurance that the belle meant nothing to him stops her. She is willing to forgive and forget if Richard will assure her that Richard never even thought of loving that tart. Richard gives her that assurance. She kisses the place where she bit him, "You shouldn't - waste that - on my hand" (AW 286), is his trembling response. He finally obtains the long awaited kiss which is followed by plans of their honeymoon. The love struck Richard wants to skip Yale so that he can soon get married to her. But Muriel advises him to complete his studies, an advice for which she is complimented later by Miller. Richard comes back home walking like "one in a trance, his eyes shining with a dreamy happiness" (AW 292). Mrs. Miller is worried whether Richard has drunk again. Miller's reassuring reply is, "No It's love, not liquor, this time." (AW 293)