CHAPTER - III

LOVE AND SEX

Nancy: You make love into nothing - but bodies

Leda: Can you go to bed with a soul? Poetic drivel aside, love may start in heaven but it goes on - or it dies - in bed.

(Eugene O’Neill’s The Calm of Capricorn)

Sex has its place in life. Everyone knows it but only a few acknowledge it. It looms large in the consciousness of even those who deny it. The Reverend Hutchins Light in Dynamo admits to himself, “I must be honest with myself. Who am I to cast the first stone at Reuben if he desires a woman? Wasn’t my love for Amelia been one long desire of the senses?... I should understand Reuben’s weakness and forgive him.”

He does not know that Reuben’s desire for Ada is not a weakness but natural for a boy of his age. If we have an immortal soul, then we have a body of flesh and blood. It naturally follows that love should be physiological as well as spiritual. To stress one and ignore the other can have disastrous consequences. With the Freudian revaluation of sex, the American dramatists have felt impelled to take a fresh look at the place of sex in love. Sex has come out of the fold to be recognized as the central force in human affairs. Sex is no longer a dirty word.

"All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap and men expect them to be\textquoteleft; This is how Amanda Wingfield in \textit{The Glass Menagerie} justifies her elaborate preparation to trap the Gentleman Caller, Jim O'Conner. Pre-marital sex is common in O'Neill's plays. Pre-marital sex and pregnancy are often portrayed as the stepping stones to marriage. His women, willingly or unwillingly, do not hesitate to take advantage of their feminine charm and exploit men's weakness for them to get themselves well established in life. They are willing to gamble, as Simon Harford says, with the highest possible stake. Simon, describing how Sara Melody charmed him says, "I want the old Sara, whose beautiful body was so greedily hungry for lust and possession whose will was so devoid of scruple, as ruthlessly determined to devour and live as the spirit of life itself. The Sara who came to my room on that night - long ago, with her mind made up to use her beautiful body to keep anyone from taking what she regarded as hers." Sara's mother, Nora married Cornelius only through pre-marital sex. The aged Nora is weighed down by the sense of guilt, "the fault of the mortal sin I did with him unmarried". However, Cornelius says, "And be damned to your lying pious shame! You had no shame then. I remember. It was love and joy and glory in you and you were proud!" (TP 18) Rowland in \textit{Before Breakfast} was honourable enough to marry his wife after getting her pregnant. Now he has got another woman, Helen, also pregnant. More than Ruth's love, it is the


\footnote{Eugene O'Neill, \textit{More Stately Mansions} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p 92}

promised sexuality of her that makes Robert Mayo give up his dream. Cape and Eleanor lived together before they got married. Elsa with her Mid-Victorian attitude suggested to John that they should just live together and each should keep entire freedom of action.

The importance of sex is brought out in *Desire* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. It is Christine's relationship with Adam Brant that helped her to get over her Oedipal complex. It is Lavinia's visit to the South Sea Isles and the suggested physical union with Avahanni that cured her of her complexes. Describing Nina's hold over him, Darrell comments, "...her body is a trap! ...I'm caught in it!... She touches my hand, her eyes get in mine. I lose my will! ..."

A liberal attitude to sex is made explicit through Sara Melody. She is a tormented combination of her father's pride, lust and greed and her mother's submissive love. She possesses the promiscuous spirit that caused the downfall of her father but in her case it facilitates her rise in the world. She is desperate because she is an Irish immigrant in America with no future. She knows that success sometimes comes vicariously to women through marriage with well placed men. She finds such a man in Simon. She knows that he is head over heels in love with her. But to her love is a barter. She declares, "I'll love-but I'll love where it'll gain me freedom and not put me in slavery for life." (TP 09)

It is not that she does not love Simon but Simon being a rich heir is the mainspring of her love. She does not love him with the slavishness of her mother

Though Simon has not proposed to her, Sara is confident that she will soon hook him. She declares, "It's my chance to rise in the world and nothing will keep me from

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it." (TP 10) Cornelius pays his daughter a left handed compliment when he says, "My daughter has the looks, the brains - ambition, youth - she can go far." (TP 19) He also calls her a scheming peasant who is laying snares to trap Simon. Nora says that her daughter can charm a bird out of a tree when she wants. Deborah judges her as strong and ambitious who is determined to take what she wants. Sara declares that she will do anything to marry Simon. When Cornelius indirectly suggests to her to trick Simon into getting her pregnant, she is not repulsed by the suggestion. She tauntingly thanks him for his fatherly advice and observes, "I don’t think I’ll need it but if the worst comes to the worst I promise you I’ll remember." (TP 34) She remembers it when cornelius goes out for a showdown with Harford. She will not let her father destroy her plans and dreams. She promises herself, "I’ll show him I can play at the game of gentleman’s honour too!" (TP 39)

It is not as though Sara has to learn from her father a trick or two as to how to trap Simon. Earlier she made the bashful Simon kiss her. Then she became bashful and did not encourage him to go further. She promises herself that next time she will not let her heart rule her head and that she will keep her wits together. Confidently she assures her mother, "You can consider it as good as done, Mother, I’m Mrs. Simon Harford at your pleasure." (TP 19)

When Sara comes back after conquering Simon, there is a dramatic change in her, similar to that of Abbie. "All the bitterness and defiance have disappeared from her face. It looks gentle and calm and at the same time dreamily happy and exultant. She is much prettier than she has ever been before." (TP 40) She is happy and relieved that Simon is hers and that no one can ever take him from her. She admits that in tempting him she
acted as bold as any street woman. She loved him and there was not anything she would not do to make sure that he was hers. Their love making, she claims, was natural, instinctive and spontaneous, though it was she who took the initiative. There was no question of her letting him make love to her. She declares "(Defiantly and proudly). There was no letting about it, only love making the two of us!" (TP 43) While Nora declares that she was dead with shame about her affair with Cornelius before their marriage, Sara declares, "There was no shame in it!" (TP 43) When Nora suggests that God will punish her for her sin, she answers, "Let Him! If He'd say to me, for every time you kiss Simon you'll have a thousand years in hell I wouldn't care. I'd wear out my lips kissing him!" (TP 43) Her justification of her misconduct is that she cannot remain not doing anything "to save my happiness and my chance in life, when I thought there was danger they'd be ruined forever" (TP 42). In her view one can do anything "to have love and be happy" (TP 43). She even claims that she is so drunk with love that she has lost all thoughts and care about marriage. She claims "I'd got to the place where all you know or care is that you belong to love, and you can't call your soul your own any more let alone your body, and you're proud you've given them to love." (TP 44)

Sara is redeemed by love. The play concludes with Sara's vow to sacrifice all her dreams of wealth for Simon's sake. She becomes starry eyed and believes that the devil of pride in her has been overcome - "Now it's dead. - thank God and I'll make a better wife for Simon."(TP 52) There is, however, a latent well spring of greed in her nature and the consuming passion of it is revealed in More Stately Mansions in which her greed merges with lust and corrupts Simon as well as herself. She has already scored a victory of some sort over Simon's American idealism when he agrees to become an equal partner
with a friend who has a cotton mill. Sara "can never resolve the dilemma over whether she truly loves Simon or is only after him for his money because that dilemma is unresolvable. Either alternative is true, or both alternatives are illusions which grow out of feelings of the moments." Henry Hewes rightly says that the play, "is concerned with the large questions of how European romance mixes with American materialism."

In his *Desire Under the Elms* O’Neill introduces a modern equivalent of love at first sight - the awakening of love after the sex act. Abbie and Eben come together in physical desire and their one inspired experience of love making transfigures both of them. The deviation from the convention is a measure of the modern recognition of the place of sex in love. Love rooted in physical desire is not a sick passion but a natural and irrepressible force that is allied to the natural processes of growth and fertility. The idea is forcefully expressed by Abbie to Eben who is fighting against his attraction for her from the beginning: "It’s agin nature, Eben. Ye been fightin’ yer nature ever since the day I come - tryin’ t’ tell yerself I hain’t purty (‘ ye... Nature’ll beat ye, Eben. Ye might’s well own up t’ it fust ’s last."*\(^8\) Nature beats both of them.

O’Neill’s presentation of the subterranean passion between Abbie and Eben and Abbie’s seduction of Eben is brutally frank. That Eben will succumb to the physical charms of Abbie is indicated even earlier. The repressed Eben decides to visit the local

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prostitute, Minnie. All the Cabots, Ephraim, Peter and Simeon have visited her. Eben is repulsed to hear that. But he discovers that the need for something soft and warm is too strong to deny. He says, "...Ay-eh! By God A'mighty she's purty an' I don't give a damn how many sins she's sinned afore mine or who she's sinned 'em with, my sin's as purty as any one on 'em!" (DUE 211) When he saw Minnie, "I didn't hit her - nor I didn't kiss her nuther - I begun t' beller like a cail an' cuss at the same time, I was so durn mad - an' she got scared - an' I jest grabbed holt an' tuk her!" (DUE 214) He proudly declares that he took her and sees his conquest as a form of revenge on his father- "The p'int is she was his 'n - an' now she b'longs t' me!" (DUE 214) "His pathetic revolt shows his desperate need for even the semblance of love, the fleeting contact with another human." His association with Minni is not love. He himself declares, "Love! I don't take no stock in sech slop!" (DUE 214) It is merely an act of sex between a man and woman with no emotional attachment. The physical union of Eben and Abbie, on the other hand helps them to realize that they are in love and that they need each other. They fall in love not at first sight but after their first night.

When Abbie meets Eben, her desire is dimly awakened by his youth and good looks. Eben is obscurely moved and physically attracted to her. With "a queer and coarse expression of desire in her face and body" (DUE 226), Abbie extends an invitation to him when she refers to her bedroom. Eben is "hypnotized" when she puts "her hand on his arm - seductively" (DUE 227). "Their physical attraction becomes a palpable force quivering in the hot air." (DUE 229) Her body, "squirms desirously" and Eben "takes a

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9 Virginia Floyd, The plays of Eugene O'Neill, p 275
step toward her, compelled against his will" (DUE 229). Abbie, "pulls his head back and
covers his mouth with kisses. At first, he submits dumbly, then he puts his arms about
her neck and returns her kisses, ... They stand speechless and breathless, panting like
two animals." (DUE 239) Then the grand seduction takes place in the parlour. Their love
making changes them. Eben seems changed and "his face wears a bold and confident
expression" (DUE 244). Abbie looks at Eben "with tender, languorous eyes" (DUE 244).

Their lust has helped them to realize genuine love and happiness. Even when she loves
him sincerely, her love seems to be rooted in physical desire. When she declares that her
child would not come between them, she asks, "What if I could do it - ye'd love me agen,
wouldn't ye? Ye'd kiss me agen? Ye wouldn't never leave me, would ye?" (DUE 258
259) Justifying infanticide, she claims that she could not bear him goin' off to California
where, "I'd never see ye agen, never kiss ye, never feel ye pressed agin me agen."
(DUE 261). She needs both love and sex from Eben. Before they leave the farm hand
in hand, they kiss each other not minding either Ephraim or the three policemen who
"grin and shuffle embarrassedly." (DUE 269) They are ennobled by love which had its
origin in their lust. Old Ephraim's Puritan conceptions of sex as an ugly, sinful necessity
has perverted all sexuality into a brutal lust. Abbie and Eben show that sex is a
spontaneous, beautiful, unselfish and amoral life force.

If lust transfigures itself into selfless love in Desire Under the Elms, love
degenerates into sinful lust in Dynamo. Reuben is the only son of a rigid Puritanical
father and a jealous, possessive mother. Reuben is in love with Ada, the only daughter
of an atheist. Light, Reuben's father, whips his son for proposing to Ada and he is
encouraged to punish his son by his wife. Initially Reuben displays the passionate ardour
of Richard Miller. It is with a lot of hesitation that he kisses Ada. When Ada’s father pretends to be suspecting Reuben’s motives in loving Ada, Reuben protests with moral self-righteousness, "I respect Ada just as much as I do my mother! I’m going to marry her!" When Mrs. Light asks Reuben whether he is going to marry that little harlot, referring to Ada, he pleads with her, "Don’t you say that, Mother! I love Ada, Mother! I love her with all my heart!" (D 447) When his mother insists on calling Ada a harlot even after his declaration of love for her, Reuben becomes so angry that he declares that he will do, "without a mother rather than have your kind!" (D 450) His faith in his mother collapses when he realizes that his mother has betrayed him to his father. He receives a further jolt when he learns that Ada has played a joke on him "so she could make a fool of me!" (D 452) These shocks, coming in quick succession, shake so much the very foundation of Reuben’s character that the Reuben we meet fifteen months later is an entirely different character.

Reuben savagely reduces his love for Ada to ugly debauchery. The key to the change in his attitude is provided by his statement to Ada’s mother soon after his return: "You can tell her I’ve read up on love in biology, and I know what it is now, and I’ve proved it with more than one female." (D 458) When Ada appears, he boldly kisses her, becomes passionately aroused by her nearness and invites her out to the hill from where he watched the storm the night they parted. "She’s easy now!" (D 459), he tells himself. Ada could sense the change in him. She felt, "His eyes seemed to take all the clothes off me..." (D 462) and she is surprised that she has not felt ashamed but rather felt glad.

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10 Eugene O’Neill, "Dynamo", The Plays of Eugene O’Neil, Vol I, p.438. (Subsequent references to this play will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by D).
With a shudder she recalls, "He never said he loved me." (D 462) In fact Reuben never uses that word again to her. It is now a dirty word for him. He needs just her body. Ada yields herself to him. She regrets having slept with him and asks for his assurance that he loves her. He declares, "What we did was just plain sex - an act of nature - and that's all there's to it!" (D 469) In a trembling voice Ada asks him whether it is all that it means to him. He replies, "That's all it means to anyone! What people call love is just sex - and there's no sin about it!" (D 469) Not that Ada is so old fashioned as to consider sex a sin. She believes in love, sex and marriage. But Reuben claims that they are married by nature and that they don't need "any old fool of a minister saying prayers over"(D 470) them.

Though Reuben has rebelled against Puritanism and the old Puritan God and declared himself free, he carries still in his heart the real doctrine of the Puritans that life is essentially evil and that sex is the source of all that is evil and degenerate in man. He cannot appreciate Ada's love for him and her desire to please him. Rather he thinks, "and tonight she was dead easy...like rolling off a log!" (D 471) He reduces her to the level of a harlot. He thinks it grand to have her around handy whenever he wants sex. He feels that Ada has proved right what her mother told him about her - no better than a street walker.

The Puritanical regimen in Reuben will not let him forgive himself for his debasing act. He claims that his mother came in his dreams asking him to give up the flesh and purify himself. He claims, "And I found the strength to do it. It was hard! I was beginning to really love, Ada."(D 478) He expresses the typical Puritanical idea of dissociating love from sex because sex is mean. Though he manages to keep himself
away from Ada, he is not able to kill his desire for her. He admits, "... Ada keeps coming in dreams... her body... I've beaten myself with my belt... I can't keep on much longer..." (D 478)

In the temple of Dynamo, Reuben sternly warns Ada not to tempt him with her protestations of love. However with a moan of passion he kisses her "as a final test - to prove I'm purified." (D 485). It is a test which he fails to pass. He feels debased. It is the attraction of Ada's flesh that has ruined him once again. He now hates her as much as his mother hated her. Calling her a 'harlot' - that is what his mother used to call her.

He shoots Ada. He throws his arm around the dynamo and is electrocuted. The tragedy of Reuben is that of one who fails to realize that sex is natural and that an act of sex in nothing but an expression of love. Pure sex without commitment or emotional involvement can only result in psychic and physical disorders.

Sexual force can be profoundly destructive unless it is harnessed to the reproductive function. Mere physical love can never enrich life. It can only leave "a heart high - sorrowful and cloyed, a burning forehead and a parching tongue." The degeneration of Darrell in Strange Interlude brings out the destructive influence of pure sex. Darrell is first introduced as a coolly self-sufficient, emotionally self-contained man of science. He is handsome, intelligent, supremely analytical and uncommitted to anything save his work. Even his sexual feelings are a scientific phenomenon to be observed dispassionately. He has experienced pleasure with a number of women whom he desired but never loved. He desired Nina and in a moment of weakness even kissed her, a kiss described by Nina as a mummy's kiss. He steered clear of her as he wanted to take no chances on emotional didos. But this inhuman doctor is trapped when he offers
himself as a guinea pig to help Nina to beget a healthy child. But the afternoon affair traps him. He becomes infatuated with her. He manages to get away from her only to get back to her a year later, unable to quell his all consuming passion for her. He gets back to the arms of Nina, haggard, worn, dissipated, his pride gone and hopelessly in love with her. As she refuses to leave her husband, he agrees to be her sleeping partner. Though he is shocked by her offer to keep him as her lover on the sly, he agrees because a hungry man can never be a chooser. Even half a bread is better for him. Eleven years later, he has grown stout, jowly, puffy, aimless and unambitious. He has to suffer the ignominy of being ill-treated by his own son. He is asked by Nina to leave. He escapes from Nina rather reluctantly. The separation does him good and when he comes back years later he has regained the air of the cool detached scientist. But the obsession has not totally died out. He almost falls a prey to Nina's body. Though old, he thinks, Nina has maintained her wonderful body. He wonders, "how many years since? she has the same strange influence over me... touch of her flesh... It's dangerous". Old as they are, she almost traps him. She reminds him of their afternoons, their mad happiness. He feels beaten by her. The arrival of the drunken Marsden saves Darrell. The degeneration of Darrell becomes complete when he is slapped by his own son whom he cannot claim his own. When, for the sake of putting the records straight, he asks the widowed Nina to marry him, she refuses. His love for her has so withered that he is not upset by her refusal. Rather he advises her to marry Marsden for his long devotion to her. He has not completely got over his obsession with her body. He leaves her hoping

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that they will, "become part of cosmic positive and negative electric charges and meet again... in our afternoons!"\textsuperscript{12}

**LOVE AND REPRESSION**

*Sex* is often treated as a biological necessity. This results in the delinking of sex from love. Love is elevated as a matter of soul. Sex is looked down upon as merely physical and as such an inferior way of showing love. The Victorians dissociated love from crude sex. In their opinion, love based on physical attraction is no love. The moderns dissociate sex from love because sex is an urgent need and love is not easily available. This split between sex and love, soul and body impoverishes love and brutalizes sex into mere lust. The repression of sexual instincts takes its human toll in terms of frustration, neurosis and even tragedy. Love that scorns flesh and love that does not rise above sex are dangerous. While love without sex is incomplete, sex without love is inadequate to meet the challenges of life.

*Diff'rent* is one of the Puritan New England plays of O'Neill reminding the Americans of their Puritan heritage, of that dark period when the joy of life was sanctimoniously crushed by harsh moral codes in the name of a tyrannical God. The Puritanical aversion for sex may develop into an obsessive and impossible ideal of purity and spirituality that destroys human happiness. *Diff'rent* has as its central character a primly scrupulous, narrow minded woman, Emma Crosby, who rejects her fiance because of a single act of sexual indiscretion. The consequent ripple effects of her prudery destroy her as well as her lover.

\textsuperscript{12} *Ibid.,* p.197.
In his description of Emma Crosby, O'Neill brings out her duality, the struggle waged between her nature and the laws of the society. Emma's soft blue eyes "have an incongruous quality of absent-minded romantic dreaminess". 13 "The bulky Bible with a brass clasp, and several books that look suspiciously like cheap novels" (DI 493) found on her table indicate the conflicting traits of her character. When she holds one of Caleb's big hands and her head leans back against his shoulder her eyes are "half closed in a dreamy contentedness" (DI 494) and Caleb "stares before him rigidly, his whole attitude wooden and fixed as if he were posing for a photograph" (DI 494). If Caleb and Emma had not evolved themselves into stiff, repressed individuals and thus acted against their own natures, the tragedy of Emma and Caleb would have been averted. The play, as Skinner points out, is "really a study of the distortion that comes to the feminine soul when it abandons concrete instinct and tries to live in the rarefied atmosphere of an abstract ideal, in other words, when it is not true to its own nature". 14

Emma Crosby is to marry Caleb in two days. She has known him from her childhood. She fell in love with him because she thought him to be 'diff'rent' from other men, her father and brother not excluded. Not that there is any thing wrong with the other men. But he is Caleb, her man and so he has got to be different. Caleb is scared that she wants him "to live up to one of them - high fangled heroes you been readin' about in them - books" (DI 496). Though he promises to do his best, he keeps reminding her that "sailors ain't plaster saints" (DI 495) and asks her not to get the

13 Eugene O'Neill, "Diff'rent", The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, Vol II, p 494 (Further references to the play are indicated by page numbers within parentheses preceded by DI).

notion into her head that he is any better than others. He does not want to be different. However, Emma keeps insisting, "You just got to be diff’rent from the rest" (DI 495) and he has "got to say diff’rent" (DI 495). She considers herself different from the other girls. Her goal is to make herself and Caleb, "a married couple - diff’rent from the rest" (DI 496).

The fantasy world of Emma is shattered when she is told about the joke that Caleb’s friends played upon him in a south sea island. None of them knows exactly what happened between Caleb and the brown native girl. O’Neill makes the act of transgression of Caleb more than excusable by the circumstances. He has done, according to Caleb himself, "nothin’a man’d rightly call wrong" (DI 500). Emma, even without seeking a clarification from Caleb, calls off marriage - a decision that shocks every body. Jack, Harriet and Crosbys make a distinction between love and sex and in their opinion what Caleb does before the marriage is none of the concern of Emma. Jack accuses Emma of "makin’ a durned creepin’ - Jesus out of Caleb" (DI 505). Harriet tells Emma, "If you’re looking for saints, you got to die first and go to heaven." (DI 509) Crosby asks her whether she wants Caleb to be a he-virgin and comments, "If she ever got religion that bad, I’d ship her off as female missionary to the damned yellow Chinks." (DI 514) Emma concedes that Caleb has not done anything terribly wrong. She can understand how it happened and make allowances. But she cannot marry him. She declares, "It’s ’count of something I got in my own head." (DI 504) She has been in love not with the real Caleb but with her conception of Caleb. When that no longer exists, neither does her love. She says, "I don’t love him - what he is now I loved - what I thought he was." (DI 511) Caleb, resigning himself to the inevitable, says that he cannot be held responsible
if she thought him to be different. He observes "I'm human like the rest and always was. I ain't dиф'rent." (DI 517) Emma declares that she will marry nobody and stay single. In her view getting married to a man not different is worse than being an old maid. Caleb advises her, "It's natural in some, but it ain't in you" (DI 517). As Emma's mother tells her, Emma not marrying Caleb is "jest like goin' agen an act of Nature" (DI 512). And for this Emma has to pay a heavy price.

Emma "had demanded the spiritual, nonsexual love idealized in her Puritan society. She cannot, however, reconcile the ideal with the reality of her own passionate nature. Her suggestive behaviour with Benny in Act II shows how abnormal restrictions pervert normal sexuality. When pent-up emotion is finally unleashed, it spends itself and its possessor."15 At the age of fifty, she decides "to get some fun out of what Pa'd left me while I was still in the prime of life" (DI 536). She fails to realize that she is making a fool of herself in the pursuit of youth and romance that have eluded her. Benny, a wastrel and nephew of Caleb, flatters her by pretending to believe her to be young and to be jealous of his uncle. She looks at Benny ardently and kittenishly with ardent love. She is particularly pathetic when she goads Benny to tell her about the French girls and their wicked ways. The topic "seems to have aroused a hectic, morbid intensity in her. She continually wets her lips and pushes back her hair from her flushed face as if it were stifling her" (DI 526). As Virginia Floyd observes, "Deprived of information on sexual matters all her life, she craves a glimpse of the dark, unknown, forbidden pleasures that lie beyond her world."16

15 Virginia Floyd, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p 218
16 Ibid., p.215.
Emma, who rejected Caleb because he was not different, finds Benny different. She claims that she will prove herself different by letting Benny stay with her. She, who refused to forgive the one slip of Caleb, refuses to believe the gossip in the village about Benny's immoral activities. She asserts that his character is as good as gold. She tells Caleb, "I care more 'n I ever did for you!" (DI 542) Caleb threatens to kill his nephew or buy him off. Emma goes on her knees pleading with him not to do any such thing. "I don't love you. I love him!" (DI 543), is her statement to the man who has been devoted to her for nearly thirty years. Caleb sees the hopelessness of the situation. He assures her that he will do nothing against Benny. He adds, "You ain't worth it - and he ain't - and no one ain't, nor nothin'" (DI 543) He punches her right in her face when he declares, "You used to say you was different from the rest o' folks. By God, if you are, it's just you're a mite madder'n they be! By God, that's all!" (DI 543) It is in the rightness of things that the man, for whom she has given up everything she has held dear all her life, rejects and ridicules her as an 'o'ld hen' "that oughta been planted in the cemetery long ago" (DI 546).

The dream of Caleb has been to marry Emma. When he was rejected by her, he told her, "I ain't goin' to stay single, I'm goin' to wait for you." (DI 518) He has thought her to be gold and waited for her. When he realizes that she is clay, not an angel but just human, his world collapses. He opts for suicide. Emma might try to re-create her God in Benny, a lump of mud. But it is not in Caleb to compromise. O'Neill observes:

He belongs to the old iron school of Nantucket - New Bedford Whalemen whose slogan was "A dead whale or a stove boat". The Whale in this case is transformed suddenly into a malignant Moby Dick who has sounded to
depths forever out of reach. Caleb's boat is stove, his quest is ended. He goes with his ship."

It is only after Caleb's death that Emma realizes that Caleb's love for her remained un tarnished while hers for him was flawed. Now there is nothing more for her to do than to follow him.

What Benny says of the villagers, "They don't know how to love and that's a fact" (DII 527), is true of Emma. Emma loses the only chance for happiness because of her Puritan environment, and her own nature - her willfulness and an overweening pride. Her real flaw is not a lack of desire for love but her self-contendedness and prudish guilt. Doris Falk comments: "Nature is the reality which avenges itself upon her egotism. Nature has not only been thwarted but insulted by the Puritan sense of sin, which distorts the desire of normal love to lust."18 According to Lionel Trilling, the message of the play is: "Let the ideal of chastity repress the vital forces, he (O'Neill) was saying, and from this fine girl you will get a filthy haridan."19

Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra is yet another victim of sexual repression. She is rigidly Puritanical. For O'Neill's generation Puritanism was associated, first and foremost, with repressive attitude towards sexual impulses. The Puritans divested sex of its beauty and mystery and reduced it to a disgusting transaction in physiology. Lavinia

17 Eugene O'Neill, "Damn the Optimists", O'Neill and His Plays, ed. Oscar Carqill et al., p.105.

18 Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension, p.72

hates love and she equates it with naked women and sin. To her love means the physical act. She accuses Adam Brant of dreaming dirty dreams of love. She refuses to realize the fact that she is like her mother or Marie Brantome. As Brant says, she is like a Mannon "when it comes to facing the truth about themselves." Christine teases her daughter: "What are you moongazing at? Puritan maidern shouldn't peer too inquisitively into Spring! Isn't beauty an abomination and love a vile thing?" (MBE 45)

It is Lavinia's visit to the South Sea Islands that liberates her, makes her realize that everything about love is sweet, natural and beautiful. She is so changed that now she claims that she is only half Mannon. She is now proud that she is as pretty as her mother. When she meets Peter she stares at him with a strange, eager possessiveness claiming that she is not that awful old stick which she used to be. She kisses Peter and her boldness shocks Peter, though he likes it. Her fear that she may not marry Peter makes her desire to have sex with him before their parting comes about. In a desperate tone, she wildly pleads with him, "Why must we wait for marriage? I want a moment of joy - of love - to make up for what's coming! I want it now! Can't you be strong Peter? Can't you be simple and pure? Can't you forget sin and see that all love is beautiful?" (MBE 176) Lavinia now allows her Dionysian side to express itself in her Christine-like transformation. Virginia Floyd observes, "The manifestation of this repressed side of Lavinia illustrates Jung's conception of the shadow side of the self that one deliberately suppresses." Hoping that things will become straight and strong, she

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20 Eugene O'Neill. "Mourning Becomes Electra". *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, Vol II, p.25. (Subsequent references to this play will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by MBE).

21 Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, p 404
tells Peter, "I hate what's warped and twists and eats into itself and dies for a lifetime in shadow." (MBE 167) With a grateful love for Peter she says, "Love is all beautiful! I never used to know that! I was a fool!" (MBE 147) Regarding Lavinia's final decision to keep herself locked up in the tomb of death of the Mannons, Virginia Floyd observes, "Lavinia knows what she once did to herself by crushing her true self, and this awareness is her tragedy when she deliberately allows the warped nature to dominate at the end of the play and entombs herself." 22

Lily Miller in *Ah, Wilderness* is somewhat similar to Emma Crosby. She loves Sid Davis but refuses to marry him and remains a spinster at the age of forty two. She reduces love to liking and attends on Sid with maternal love and tenderness. In fairness to Lily, it must be said that she is not proud, does not think that she is different from others, and does not expect Sid to be an angel. Neither does she suffer from the Puritanical repression of natural instincts. Sid is not a Caleb. He is an incorrigible drunkard and an inveterate gambler and even an alleged womaniser. Lily does not think that her marriage with an irresponsible, though nice, Sid can be a success. She refuses to take up the responsibility of trying to reform Sid.

Lily Miller, aged forty two, "conforms outwardly to the conventional type of old maid school teacher, even to wearing glasses. But behind the glasses her gray eyes are gentle and tired, and her whole atmosphere is one of shy kindliness." 23 She pretends to find contentment in her husbandless and childless lot, but she cannot and will not conceal

22 *Idem.*

23 Eugene O'Neill, "Ah, Wilderness", *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, Vol.II, p 187 (Further references will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses preceded by AW)
her underlying anguish and particularly the pain that Sid's weakness constantly causes her. When Sid comes back from the picnic drunk, he regales everyone with his jokes. Everybody, including Lily, encourages him. At one stage she objects "... we're all responsible - making it easy for him - we're all to blame - and all we do is laugh!" (AW 233) Miller tells her not to take it that way and it is not as serious as she thinks. She answers bitterly, "May be - it is - to me. Or was - once" (AW 233) Obviously she has reached a stage where she has lost all hopes of reforming Sid. When Sid left for the party, he assured her in response to her mild suggestion, "Oh, I know he'll be careful today. Won't you, Sid?" (AW 190), that he was reformed and that he would not use the occasion to get drunk as in the past. When he comes back drunk, she only blames herself for having been too optimistic. "Yes, I might have known" (AW 220), is her bitter comment.

Sid is a pathetic casualty of life. He is a bachelar at the age of forty-five. He has "the Puckish face of a Peck's Bad Boy who has never grown up" (AW 188). Richard is not very wrong when he says that his care free, jovial fun loving uncle is "a bigger kid than Tommy is" (AW 206). He is jobless now, having lost his job as a news reporter at Waterbury. According to Miller, Sid is the best news getter that the town ever had. But he is ruined by his interest in drinks. He declares, "But I'll tell him he's got to stop his damn nonsense." (AW 234) This is what Lily has been trying to do without much success. Sid may think that drinking is a good man's failing. He may be a victim of his friends and is easily led. There may be no real harm in him. But Lily "can't love a man who drinks" (AW 213). Sid's alcoholism and his taking up with bad women had compelled Lily to break off their engagement sixteen years ago. Ever since they have been locked
up in a love-hate relationship, hopelessly trapped because neither will ever change. He loves her deeply, but as Lily bitterly comments, "never enough to stop drinking for" (AW 213). Not a day passes without Sid proposing to her. Her answer, though spoken with a hysterical giggle is firm - "No. I won't - never!" (AW 232) To her sister-in-law who advises her to marry Sid because, "I know darned well you love him. And he loves you and always has" (AW 213), her emphatic reply is:

Oh, its no good talking, Essie. What's done is done. But you know how much I like Sid - in spite of everything. I know he was just born to be what he is - irresponsible, never meaning to harm but harming in spite of himself. But don't talk to me about marrying him - because I never could (AW 213)

With Arthur singing the popular 'Dearie' playing up its sentimental values for all he is worth, Sid, in a voice choked with tears indulges in self denunciation. He claims that he is "a dirty rotten drunk! No good to myself or anybody else" (AW 258), and wishes that he had got the guts to kill himself.

All her (Lily's) bitter hurt and steely resolve to ignore and punish him vanish in a flash, swamped by a pitying love for him. She runs and puts her arm around him - even kisses him tenderly and impulsively on his bald head and soothes him as if he were a little boy (AW 258)

Lily forgives him as she has always done. She permits Sid to take her to the beach to listen to the band. Mrs. Miller comments, "Poor Lily! Sid'll never change, and she’ll never marry him. But she seems to get some queer satisfaction out of fussing over him like a hen that's hatched a duck - though Lord knows I wouldn't in her shoes!" (AW 291) Lily is a curious case of a lady loving a man but evading the responsibility of marrying and reforming him. She fails to realize that she is doing more harm than good
to Sid by refusing to marry him. In fact she punishes him for his truancy. That is what Sid must have meant when he told Mrs. Miller, "If you remember, I was always getting punished - and see what a lot of good it did me!" (AW 268) Richard’s theatrical outburst, "Do you know what I think? It’s Aunt Lily’s fault. Uncle Sid’s going to run. It’s all because he loves her, and she keeps him dangling after her, and eggs him on and runs his life-" (AW 235), is not unjustified. Lily loves Sid but refuses to accept him as he is and thus denies life by refusing responsibility for love.

FORBIDDEN LOVE

"I intend to use whatever I can make my own, to write about anything under the sun in any manner that fits."24 These words of O’Neill symbolize the freedom that the modern writers feel in dealing with subjects that were once dismissed as forbidden and obscene. Mother complex, father complex, incestuous relationship between brother and sister, homosexuality, lesbianism are no longer treated as untouchables. In fact, incestuous love as a subject has fascinated dramatists right from ancient Greek times. It’s treatment in the American drama is franker and daring. Its presentation has moved from evasion to freer depiction, from horror and open hostility to grudging tolerance. The interest of the modern writers is more in analysing the motivations and studying the darker side of man than in passing judgment on the correctness or otherwise of his or her action. The permissive morality of today that tolerates all varieties of sex and love experience encourages the modern dramatist to make incestuous relationships the topic of their dramatic studies. They may be unnatural and to many of us abhorrent. But the

24 Cited in Louis Sheaffer, O’Neill: Son and Artist, p 127.
fact is that they exist and life is so unreasonable and illogical that it does not always follow a set pattern. Alferi in Miller's *A View from the Bridge* says, "We all love somebody, the wife the kids - everyman's got somebody that he loves, heh? But sometimes... There's too much and it goes where it mustn't." This comment exemplifies the predicament of these so called kinky characters.

The mother complex or Oedipus complex which underlines many plays of O'Neill rears its head for the first time in *Desire Under the Elms*, a play which marks O'Neill's complete acceptance of the Freudian theory of the libido. The mother meest theme is clearly stated in the initial stage direction. Eben is impelled at every step by the image of his dead mother. He desires the farm because he believes that his father cheated his mother out of it. He goes to the village whore because she has been his father's before him and he thinks that he is avenging his mother by taking her away from him. The same motive lies behind his affair with Abbie. He justifies his having sex with Abbie on the ground, "It's her vengeance on him - so's she kin rest quiet in her grave!" (DUE 243) After the night he claims, "Maw's gone back t' her grave. She kin sleep now." (DUE 245)

To dismiss Eben's first night with Abbie as something propelled by his thirst for revenge will be an over-simplistic statement. If it had been so, he could have had her even earlier. Though he is physically attracted by Abbie, he refuses to take the final leap. Just before the grand seduction scene in the parlour, Abbie makes him kiss her passionately in the bedroom of Eben. But he recovers quickly and asks her to get out.

of the room. She decides to go to the parlour unused ever since Eben's mother's death. She asks him, "Won't ye come courtin' me in the best parlour, Mister Cabot?" (DUE 240) and says confidently, "I'll expect ye afore long, Eben."
(DUE 240) The very word 'parlour' seems to arouse connotations (DUE 241) and mechanically Eben dresses himself and follows her, muttering "Maw! What air yew?" (DUE 241) In the parlour Abbie identifies herself completely with Eben's mother. The lady who earlier told Eben that she has no intention of playing his mother's role now acts the role of Eben's mother: It is only when Abbie displays, "in spite of her overwhelming desire for him - a sincere maternal love in her manner and voice - a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love" (DUE 243) that Eben responds to her love and warmth. She says,

Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! (She pulls his head around. He makes a bewildered pretense of resistance. She is tender) Don't be afeared! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben - same 's if I was a Maw t' ye. An' ye kin kiss me back 's if yew was my son - my boy - sayin' good - night t' me! Kiss me, Eben. (DUE 243)

While incest in this play and in Dynamo is more subdued, O'Neill's treatment of the same becomes more direct and blunt, lacking in finesse, in Mourning Becomes Electra.

There is a touch of Oedipus complex in the relationship between Reuben and his mother. It is this complex that stifles him and results in his killing Ada and himself. Reuben's mother is fifteen years younger than her husband and is obviously dissatisfied with her husband's way of living and probably loving too. She behaves more like a jealous lover when she slinks stealthily around to see what her son is doing with Ada. She is restless. She is angry that she kissed him and wonders what else they are doing
in the dark. When Reuben confesses about Fife being a murderer, she is "disappointed that it is not a confession about Ada" (D 447). She is so jealous that she asks her husband to punish Reuben, punish him good for "the very idea of kissing that dirty little" (D 448). When Reuben clings to her, she feels a "sudden strong revulsion" "to think that he has had those same arms hugging that little filthpot this very evening." (D 446) She is unhappy that her son does not cry or yell. She accuses the girl of having changed him. Later, Reuben tells Ada of her mother: "She was so crazy jealous of you she didn’t care what she did. I can make allowance for her - now." (D 461)

After his return, Reuben seduces Ada in an act of pure sex. He is disappointed that he had her so easily, as though proving his mother’s contention that Ada was no better than a street walker. When Ada suggests to him that his mother will now forgive them for loving each other he replies, "You mean forgives us for what we did to night (their sex act)? You don’t know her! she never would!" (D 470) He claims that he had dreams of his mother advising him to purify himself. He tries to keep away from Ada and whips himself to control his nature. In the presence of the dynamo, with which he has identified his mother, he wants to prove that he has got over his hunger for Ada. He fails and is disgusted with himself for having have had sex in the presence of his mother personification. He executes her in a frenzied mood and gets himself electrocuted.

In *Strange Interlude* Prof. Leeds is made to confess that he vetoed Nina’s marriage to Gordon because he wanted to retain her love for himself. He admits, "It is also true 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."
was glad when he died." 26 Defending himself he says, "I am a man who happens to be your father (He hides his face in his hands and weeps softly) Forgive that man!" 27 It is the man in Leeds who desired Nina as a woman and Nina being his daughter is the tragedy. He being her father is not enough to make him act as her father. The wheel comes full circle when Nina becomes jealous of her son’s beloved. She is better than her father in the sense that she does not mind her son having a passing physical attach because she knows that even a mother must face nature. But she will not let him marry his beloved. She goes to the extent of thinking of revealing the parentage of her son to stop the marriage. That, like her father, she too fails in her struggle with nature is a different story.

In Mourning Becomes Electra O’Neill introduces all possible incestual relationships. Lavina is not simply possessive of her father. To Peter, who loves her, she declares that she cannot love him because her father needs her. Peter reminds her that her father has got her mother. Lavina sharply replies that he needs her more. To Adam Brant she emphatically declares that she cares more for her father and that there is nothing that she will not do to protect him from hurt. Brant comes out with a simple, matter of fact explanation that a daughter feels closer to her father and a son to his mother. However, Lavina’s affection for her father cannot be so simply dismissed. The dramatist gives sexual overtones to her actions. Christine accuses Lavina, "You’ve tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You’ve always schemed to steal my place!" (MBE 33) Again when she finds her daughter waiting for the arrival


27 Idem.
of her father, she teases her with a mocking smile, "So he's the beau you're waiting for in the spring moonlight!" (MBE 46)

The behaviour of Lavinia, after the arrival of her father, gives us the feeling that she is more a second wife than a daughter. Though Ezra is visibly embarrassed by the attention of Lavinia, he is inwardly pleased. He wants her to remain his little girl a little longer. He pats her hair, but on noticing Christine's scornful glance he pushes Lavinia away brusquely. We have Orin's statement that Lavinia has always been coddling her father and that he likes it, though he pretends not to like it. His statement is corroborated by Ezra himself. He claims that when Christine started moving away from him, he turned to his daughter. He regrets that a daughter cannot be a wife. Lavinia's excited declaration to her father, "You're the only man I'll ever love!" (MBE: 51) sounds more like a girl talking to her boyfriend than a daughter to her father. She cannot resist interrupting when Ezra makes a clumsy effort to embrace Christine. "She (Lavinia) shrinks back from their embrace with aversion." (MBE: 56) She tries her best to see that they are not left alone. She becomes restless when she is ordered by Ezra to leave him and Christine alone. In an anguish of furious hatred she says, "I hate you (Christine)! You steal even father's love from me again!" (MBE: 57) She asks herself with passionate disgust how her father can love that shameless harlot, referring to her mother. It is a similar question that she asks over the dead body of Brant.

The Electra complex of Lavinia pales into insignificance when compared with the Oedipus complex of Orin. There is something more than what meets the eyes in the relationship of Orin and Christine, with the result that the father is jealous of the son. Christine recalls Orin's early childhood days, when he would hide in the hall upstairs.
hoping to get one more good night kiss from his mother. In his reply, Orin recalls, "And what a row there was when father caught me! And do you remember how you used to let me brush your hair and how I loved to? He hated me doing that, too." (MBE: 90)

Ezra admits that he tried hard not to hate Orin. Disgusted with Ezra and Lavinia, who became a symbol of her wedding night and honeymoon, Christine developed a special fascination for Orin. According to the psychologists, a mother who loves her husband too little starts concentrating all her affection on her man-child. Christine's unnatural thoughts about Orin creates in him a lust for her. She goes on cultivating this abnormal fervour and dominating his life so tenaciously that her son cannot look on any woman with longing. When Orin joins Grant's army, she finds a natural outlet for her feelings in her affair with a more sexually acceptable son substitute, Adam Brant. According to her she fell in love with Adam because he resembled Orin.

Christine claims that if Orin had not been separated from her, she would not have gone to Brant. The normal and satisfactory love of Brant has cured her of her psychic disorder, caused by Ezra's beastly way of love making. When Ezra, after his return from the war, warns her not to spoil Orin again by getting him tied on to her apron strings, Christine's meaningful and categorical reply is, "That passed when he left me." (MBE: 49) She meant what she said. When Orin tries to caress her locks as he used to do in the past, she shrinks away from him with revulsion. Earlier Christine refused to allow Orin to move with Hazel. But when he comes back after the war, she advises him to be good to Hazel. She confesses that at that time she was selfish and even jealous of Hazel. She also reminds Orin that he used to be good to Hazel. Orin gives a shocking reply, "That
was only to make you jealous!" (MBE 84). Then he adds meaningfully, "But now you’re a widow." (MBE 84)

Orin accuses his mother of trying to marry him off to Hazel. He declares emphatically that he does not want Hazel or anyone and then adds, "you’re my only girl!" (MBE 90) Like a jealous husband he questions her about her rumoured affair with Brant. He seems to be happy that Ezra is dead. His competitor to his mother’s love is dead. He suggests to his mother that they should get Lavina married off to Peter. Then there will be just him and his mother. The murder of Adam is not so much an act of revenge as an act to get rid of yet another competitor to his mother’s love. He is agitated that Adam and Christine kissed each other and that they planned to go to the ‘happy isles’ where he intended to go with her. After killing Adam, he pleads with his mother to forget Adam. He will make her happy. He will take her to the South Seas. The suicide of Christine shatters him totally.

From the Puritan point of view, the physical act of love between a brother and sister is the fullest expression of their mutual damnation. O’Neill introduces it in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Adam Brant’s love cured Christine of her unnatural feelings for Orin. The visit to the South Seas Islands cured Lavina of her Electra complex. Orin finds no such outlet. He represses his desire for his mother and transfers it, after her death, to his look-alike sister. It is in tune with the Freudian theory that a man who suffers from Oedipus complex attempts to find as a mate a woman who is either physically or temperamentally like his mother. Even while fascinated by his sister, Orin accuses her of having stolen her mother’s colours. He accuses Lavina of not allowing him to move with Hazel. In the same breath he declares that the purity and innocence of
Hazel make him feel all the more guilty. Hypnotized by Lavina’s hair, a reminder of Christine, he attempts to caress her hair. But Lavina, like Christine, recoils with revulsion. Before her visit to the South Seas, Lavina consoled Orin, distraught over their mother’s death. "You have me, haven’t you? I love you. I’ll help you to forget." (MBE: 124) She took him to the South sea island where he wanted to go with his mother. There she became a romantic to the horror of Orin. She started moving away from him which he was not able to digest.

Orin is unhappy that Lavina wants to get married to Peter. When he finds Peter and Lavina kissing each other passionately, he reacts like the little Gordon in Strange Interlude on seeing his mother and Darrell kissing. Orin "gleares at them with jealous rage and clenches his fist as if he were going to attack them" (MBE: 148). He insists that he is in the father’s place and Lavina is in the mother’s place. She cannot be bound away from him. He is jealous that Lavina is free from any qualms of conscience: "He stares at her and slowly a distorted look of desire comes over his face." (MBE: 164-165). He tries to justify his desire for her on the ground that if he forces her into an incestuous union with him, he can make her feel guilty like him. He reminds her of her promise to him that she would do anything for him. No longer does he regard her as his sister or mother but as "some stranger with the same beautiful hair." (MBE: 165) The look of horrified revulsion in Lavina’s face on hearing his open proposal puts him off. He displays the typical Mannon trait - the conflict between fascination and hatred. Though the thought of revenge makes him think in an abominable manner, though he is fascinated by her Christine like appearance, he is disgusted with himself for desiring his own sister. It is this conflict - self - inflicted torture - that leads to his suicide.
CHAPTER IV

LOVE AND MARRAIGE