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The Tragedy of Family in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill

Rodinná tragédie v hrách Eugena O'Neilla

(Bachelor Thesis)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma “The Tragedy of Family in the Plays of Eugene O’Neill” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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1. Introduction

One of the very first dramatists to really bring out controversial topics on the theater stage after times of non-serious melodrama, Eugene O'Neill brings up a significant amount of completely new methods and themes, but also embarks on a renaissance of age-old and popular topics.

In my thesis, I will look into one of the more traditional themes, which is family tragedy. However, O'Neill opens the door to more provocative, therefore more interesting, collisions (sometimes we could consider them destructions) in the family circle and as a result of this, I will simply not try to describe the problems that happened in certain families of the plays, but try to find possible culprits of the breakage, whether it is one member of the family, multiple members or certain materialistic or abstract object. With this treatment, I wish to discover if there is occurring some repetitive pattern in the villain/victim ratio and try to find an explanation why Eugene O'Neill made this a template part of his dramatic works.

Firstly, since Eugene O'Neill is an autobiographical playwright, I will briefly introduce my thesis with a life of Eugene O'Neill, concentrating mainly on his historical background - from childhood through his productive years up to his death. I will follow with linking his dramatic production to the events from his own life and to the production circumstances that influenced themes or characters of his plays. I will follow with my main aim of this thesis – to analyze the works that include family tragedy in order to discover real villains of these plays. I will also divide these plays according to what family relationship was damaged or even destroyed. Firstly, I will look into the tragedy happening between parent and child as is visible in the play, *Anna Christie*. Secondly, I will follow with his love and marriage tragedies which appear to be more fragile, and therefore more frequent in his plays as we can see this theme recurring in multiple of his plays. However, in this thesis I will only analyze the love relationship in his plays, *Beyond the Horizon* and *Anna Christie*. This section of the thesis will be completed by the sibling tragedy shown on the brothers deterioration in the play, *Beyond the Horizon*. The

following chapter will be on total tragedy plays in which all the forms of relationship are corrupted and lead to eventual extinction. These include his plays, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In all my analyzes of the listed plays, I will always firstly describe the progress of the play, quoting all the parts that contributed to the slow progress of tragedy in order to be able to define the main villain and victims. Then I will add my conclusion which will explain the choice of culprit of each tragedy. The following short chapters will deal with the linking and combination of his family tragedy with Greek tragedy and will also look into his divergence from the scriptures for the creation of traditional tragic protagonist. In the last part of the thesis, we will be able to see why *Long Day's Journey into Night* is considered autobiographical and in the final sub-chapter, I will try to link his culprits from the plays to his personal life in order to be able to understand his choice of these particular characters.

2. Life of Eugene O'Neill

It is often believed that the work of artist is a certain portrayal of self-reflection of their life, thus it would be useful to firstly look into an author's background to be able to analyze his works and especially characters.

2.1 Historical Background

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888 in New York City to Irish immigrants. Already as a child, he was surrounded by theater, as his father, James O'Neill, was a successful theater actor. As expected, he spent his childhood touring with his father and watching him in *The Count of Monte Cristo* and as he himself says: "Usually a child has a regular, fixed home, but you might say I started in as a trouper. I knew only actors and the stage."¹ However, at the age of 7 he was sent to a Catholic boarding school, St. Aloysius Academy for Boys.

In following years he attended several institutes. 'However, after a shocking discovery at the age of 15 of his mother's morphine addiction, he started to involve alcohol in his life to solve his depression and became an atheist.'² In 1906, he enrolled in Princeton University. Unfortunately (for still speculative reasons), he decided to drop out of the University just a few months after beginning his studies.

In 1909 he secretly married Kathleen Jenkins, the mother of his future son Eugene Jr. However, after leaking the news of the marriage to O'Neill's parents, as a 21-year-old man, he was sent on a mining expedition to Honduras. After returning home, he decided to join the sea crew of the ship *Charles Racine* and started to drink heavily.

Upon his return to New York, "Eugene O'Neill, a despondent twenty-seven-year-old college dropout and ex-sailor, had spent the last six months lost in a whiskey fog of oblivion in a Greenwich Village saloon known as the Golden Swan Café."³ However, after his return, he tried to publish his first work, *American Sovereign*.

1. Louis Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), quoted in Robert M. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

2. Robert M. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 44.

3. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 1.

In 1912, Kathleen Jenkins filed for divorce after accusing O'Neill of adultery. The day after divorce, he attempted to commit suicide by overdose, but was found by his roommates. Then he got back together with his father and brother, who also joined the theatre group of their father, and toured with them from the south to the north-west of the USA, playing minor roles to make some money. Later he moved into New London and accepted a journalist position in the *New London Telegraph*, the job paid by his father. 'The job did not fit him as he was drunk all the time, but he was allowed to publish some of his poetry.'⁴

In October 1912, O'Neill was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was sent to a sanatorium. During his stay at the sanatorium, he experienced 'rebirth', as he himself later admitted: "It was at Gaylord, that my mind got a chance to establish itself, to digest and value the impressions of many past years in which one good experience had crowded on another with never a second's reflection. At Gaylord I really thought about my life for the first time, about past and future. Undoubtedly the inactivity forced upon me by the life at a sanatorium forced me to a mental activity, especially as I had always been high-strung and nervous temperamentally."⁵ He started to write plays and it made him attend a drama course taught by professor George Baker at Harvard University (he did not complete the course). He became involved with the Provincetown Players, who played his plays and started his career as a dramatist.

With his rising artistic success that brought him a Nobel Prize in 1936, his personal life experienced another series of breakdowns. He married the second time in 1918 to Agnes Boulton, a promising pulp fiction writer, and she gave birth to his second and third children, Shane and Oona O'Neill. In 1923, his brother James Jr. drank himself to death and Eugene O'Neill returned to drinking heavily. 'O'Neill started to fall for an actress, Carlotta Monterey'⁶, who was playing a role in production of his play *The Hairy Ape*, who caused his second divorce. He married her in 1929 and she became his life-time

4. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 88.

5. Michiko Kakutami. "Hospital Remembers Rebirth of O'Neill" *The New York Times* (October 18, 1982). <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/18/theater/hospital-remembers-rebirth-of-o-neill.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

6. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 328.

partner. In 1943, his daughter Oona eloped and married Charlie Chaplin, who was at that time her father's age. In 1950, his eldest son, Eugene Jr., who also suffered from alcoholism, committed suicide, and his younger son became an addict. O'Neill was diagnosed with Parkinson's (later proved to be wrong) which made it almost impossible for him to write. In 1943, he finished his last play *Moon for the Misbegotten* and on November 27, 1953, Eugene O'Neill passed away.

2.2 Production

“Eugene O'Neill was dissatisfied with the old histrionic romantic theater of his father (James O'Neill, the perennial Count of Monte Cristo), so he made profitable use of his three-month hospital stay by reading philosophy, drama, and absorbing the influence of new theatrical movements in Ireland, France, Sweden and Germany, led by J. M. Synge, Eugène Brieux, August Strindberg and Gerhart Hauptman.”⁷

His first unsuccessful attempts to get into the world of writing was by publishing his propagandizing political poetry in the *New London Telegraph* where he occupied the position of reporter. During his stay in Honduras, he wrote western melodramas such as *A Wife for a Life* (1913) and *The Movie Man* (1914). However, his first real dramatical activity began in 1916 when becoming associated with the experimental theater group, the Provincetown Players, who produced his first play, *Bound East for Cardiff*. Until 1920, they produced his plays *In the Zone*, *The Long Voyage Home*, and *The Moon for the Carribbees*, all of them being one-acts reflecting his travels on the sea. In 1918, his drama *Beyond the Horizon* brought him the first notice of critics and two years later his first Pulitzer Prize. Another play that raised his success and brought him his second Pulitzer Prize was *Anna Christie* in 1921, partly a sea-drama and partly a love tragedy. The day after the production of *Anna Christie*, O'Neill's drama *The Straw* came on the theatrical stage but was not well received.

O'Neill took a short break but soon “recovered his creative *élan*”⁸ and started to write his

7. Ranald, Loftus Margaret. “From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924): The Early Plays.” In *Eugene O'Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views. New York, Chelsea House, 2007. Updated version. 83.

8. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 253.

the most popular plays, *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, which was considered “a great work of avant garde theater.”⁹ His experimental production continued with the plays *Marco Millions* (1923-5), *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924), and *Welded* (1924).

In 1924, he published his first full-length play *Desire Under the Elms*, which combines contemporary controversial topics with classical Greek tragedy. He started to abandon his typical sea-novel style and created a new setting of “expressionistic-naturalistic portrayal of New England culture.”¹⁰ A year later he finished writing *The Great God Brown*, another successful tragedy playing with an idea of hiding behind the mask, that became one of the elements typical for O’Neill. He continued to succeed with the plays *Lazarus Laughed* (1926), a Greek Tragedy adaptation, and *Strange Interlude* (1928), another hiding behind the mask play that brought him his third Pulitzer prize, followed by *Dynamo* (1929), which was “another attempt at a biography of a section of the American soul.”¹¹

In 1931, he hit the peak of his successful career with an adaptation of the Greek tragedy story of Oresteia, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which is now considered one of the most important plays of American drama.

Unconventionally, he released his one and only comedy *Ah! Wilderness* in 1933. He then returned to writing tragedies and in 1940 his next masterpiece *The Iceman Cometh*, was produced which follows “the theme of Pandora opening Zeus’s forbidden box: all of the world’s evils have been released from it, but the last thing to emerge, without which humanity could never endure, was the specter of hope.”¹²

His problem with shaky hands caused by his disease forced him to stop writing and in 1941 he finished his last play, *Moon for the Misbegotten*.

His creative masterpiece, *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (written 1941, produced 1956), was published posthumously for its strong autobiographical element, he was awarded his last Pulitzer prize. His last plays produced were *A Touch of a Poet* (written 1942,

9. Dowling, *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 237.

10. Dowling, *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 292.

11. Jackson Bryer, *Selected Letters of Eugene O’Neill* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 308.

12. Dowling, *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 428.

produced 1958), *More Stately Mansions* (produced 1967) and *The Calms of Capricorn* (1983).

Eugene O'Neill not only established a new American stage of dramatic artistry, but his plays became some of the most prominent plays of American Drama. With usage of typical themes like sea and love tragedy, he also created elements typical to him – Greek tragedy, addiction, alcohol and usage of masks.

3. Element of Family Tragedy

The family in O'Neill's plays acts as a strong bond between the members, that slowly loosens up and tears apart, leaving scars and bruises as the final redemption is reached. "The idea of 'The family' assumed tragic dimensions and entered fatefully into the life and old guilt must be avenged, old debts must be paid."¹³ Nevertheless, in Eugene O'Neill's dramas we discover that this tragedy does not run only in one lineage, but floats on the different levels of family relationships. All these tragedies are different and must be looked at from various perspectives to understand the origin of the breakage.

3.1 Tragedy of the Child-Parent Relationship

The first relationship that is ever created is the bond between parent and child. However in the mirror reflection, for Eugene O'Neill it becomes the first relationship that can be destroyed. In multiple plays he finds a crack that later ruptures more and more until this primeval bond is broken into either hate or guilt. But can we conclusively point out who was the one to make the crack and who was the one to widen it.

3.1.1 Anna Christie and Chris Christopherson

One of the first of his plays that shows this element is *Anna Christie*. An old sailor, Chris Christophersen, awaits his daughter Anna, whom he left to grow up on the farm of her cousins, to finally join him on his sea life. In spite of his good intentions, she becomes a prostitute and, with this return, she hopes to forget the past and experience a new beginning of her life. The reason that Chris explains that made him abandon his daughter

13. Frederick Schyberg, *American Tragedy of Fate in Eugene O'Neill Critics: Voices from Abroad* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 51.

is to save her from ‘dat ole davil, sea’¹⁴, a curse “which had claimed many of his ancestors’ lives and widowed their spouses.”¹⁵ Already here we can see the difference between the thinking of the father and the thinking of the daughter. “In fact, the perceptions of O’Neill’s these two characters about the sea reflect their very divergent “theologies”: Chris’s dualistic fatalism and Anna’s romantic transcendentalism.”¹⁶ At this point it is difficult to try to point out who made the first mistake – Chris believed that Anna would be better at the farm where she could stay away from the sea life and Anna blames him that “he let them cousins of her Old Woman’s keep her on their farm and work her to death like a dog”¹⁷ which consequently made her run away from the farm and left her with no option than to become a prostitute. The uncertainty continues when Anna arrives with the belief that her father is a janitor, who turns out to be a captain of coal barge. On the other hand, Chris also believes that his daughter is a nurse. At least we can see some parent-daughter similarity – both are proficient in lying.

After meeting Anna, Chris feels guilt that he has never visited her on the farm. He seems to know that he did wrong by abandoning her and he was not prepared to face it, so he would rather run away to another voyage to have a reason not to return. He strongly believes in ‘ole davil sea’, which adds a mysterious power into the story, but can also be understood, as Barbara Voglino describes in her essay, that “Chris’s superstitious fear of the sea also suggests comedy”¹⁸, as his ridiculousness completely blinds his mind to admit his own mistakes. However in comparison to his gentle behavior, Anna is more stubborn and non-forgiving, her mindset is not like the one in comedies. She does not want to hear excuses, she rather keeps stirring drama without realizing that she is not as innocent as she appears to herself. The crack is here on balance, the quick forgivenesses and

14. Eugene O’Neill, *Anna Christie* (Frome and London: Butler&Tanner, 1923), 15.

15. Barbara Voglino. “Feminism vs Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in Anna Christie.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. New York: Chelsea House, 2007. 116.

16. Thomas P. Adler, “Beyond Synge: O’Neill’s Anna Christie” *The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter Vol. XII*. (Spring 1988). <http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/xii-1/xii-1f.htm> (accessed February 11, 2018).

17. O’Neill, *Anna Christie*, 28.

18. Voglino, “Feminism vs Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in Anna Christie.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. 116.

apologies slow down the breakdown for some time.

However, the more time this father and daughter spend on the sea, the more bursts come out, especially from Anna's side. As she falls in love with the sea, she says: "it makes me feel clean – out here - 's if I'd taken a bath."¹⁹ Chris lacks understanding of her feelings for the sea, one reason could be that she concealed the truth about herself, but also that he rejects the image of the sea as something pleasant. The relationship starts to break down, they are not willing to sympathize with each other, so their lives become too different and too distant.

Everything in their relationship starts to drown when Burke comes to the scene. Chris understands that the only reason Anna likes him is because he is the opposite of her father. He swirls the image of freedom coming from the sea for her, while Chris is the one who is hiding away from it and cursing the sea for Anna's love interest: "Dat's your dirty trick, damn ole daval, you!"²⁰ Anna and Chris keep arguing, he hopes for Anna to realize that the sea life is nothing for her, therefore she would leave Burke and find a husband on the land, but Anna has enough of his fears and warns him: "One day you are going to get me so mad with that talk, I'm going to turn loose on you and tell you – a lot of things that'll open your eyes."²¹ At this scene Anna prompts that she is hiding something, but Chris, instead of being curious about what happened to her when living on the land, says he does not want to know. His fear of superstition now collapses with the fear of reality.

In the next scene we see Chris fighting with Anna's admirer Burke who came to him with an announcement that he wants to marry his daughter. It might seem that Chris really cares about Anna finding a better man to offer her a better future but instead of giving proper reasons for sparing his daughter, he justifies his decision with phrases like a "big fallar like you dat's on the sea, he don't need no wife"²² and "Ay taught it was better for Anna stay away, grow up inland where she don't ever know ole daval, sea."²³ He does not

19. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 42.

20. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 63.

21. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 68.

22. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 72.

23. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 73.

really care for Anna's future nor happiness, he is more terrified of the 'curse' that he believes runs through his family. Anna is no more in the daughter-father bond with him, she has transformed into something that Chris is trying to save to break the curse of the sea and if he will be unable to stop her, she will be just another person to embody the fear for him. Anna does not care for him neither, she calls him 'old devil' and consequently gets tired of him with words: "Why do you come in butting in and making things worse?"²⁴ What would be left for Anna to do if she just listened to her father? Chris would win and she would just take care of the old man who has not seen her for 15 years? But Anna is tired of men trying to decide for her and when the moment of truth comes, Chris is too terrified to listen.

The moment of complete relationship breakdown is when Chris tells to Burke: "Ay tank maybe it's better Anna marry you now."²⁵ Until this scene, he still thought of saving her from the destiny of sailor life, but now she is just another poor prostitute for him whom he is trying to sell for at least some price so that a bad reputation does not lay responsibility on him.

"The projected comedic closure, Anna's successful attainment of a new life, which involves her marriage to Burke despite her father's opposition, has been fulfilled."²⁶ The girl got her forbidden fruit, and by chance, Burke and Chris are gonna leave Anna on a seam boat. However, did Chris really overcome his superstitious fear so that they will live happily ever after on the sea?

When looking at the temperament of the characters and situations that each time started to break the bonds until they crumbled completely, at first view the idea of Chris being a main destructor comes to the mind. "He refuses to acknowledge personal responsibility for anything—even his desertion of his wife for the life of a sailor—but uses the sea as a scapegoat for all his shortcomings and misdeeds."²⁷ Just that would definitely make him a

24. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 85.

25. O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, 95.

26. Voglino, "Feminism vs Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in *Anna Christie*." In *Eugene O'Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views. 117.

27. Voglino, "Feminism vs Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in *Anna Christie*." In *Eugene O'Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views. 119.

passive ‘villain’ of the play, but the huge emphasis of sea offers a quite more vivid fiend. In Act 2 is a scene where Anna talks to Chris:

“Anna: You talk- nutty to-night yourself. You act’s if you was scared something was going to happen.

Chris: Only God know dat, Anna.

Anna: Then it’ll be Gawd’s will, like the preachers say – what does happen.

Chris: No! Dat ole davil, sea, she ain’t god!”²⁸

Instead of ceasing to blame the sea and acknowledging his own sin as other O’Neill’s characters do (such as Abbie in *Desire under the Elms*: “I don’t repent that sin! I hain’t askin’ God t’ fergive that!”²⁹), he rather accuses the sea for making him abandon Anna. Chris automatically considers the sea as some higher mysterious power that cannot be controlled but can control him or his fate. He rejects envisioning the sea as some kind of God, but he definitely fears it. From the incidents occurring there are visible the patterns that refer to the sea representing a higher power that stands behind all the tragedies in the play. Firstly, it has a power to lure a man from the land – that is exactly what happened to Chris when he left his family behind. In this case, the sea acts almost as a mythical Siren – one hears the moaning of the sea, there is no way to return to a normal life. And as if that is not enough, the sea mysteriously throws into water a man that Ann falls in love with and the curse spreads over the both characters.

Even though Eugene O’Neill did not include a Greek tragedy in *Anna Christie*, there is a certain element of Greek mythology involved in the story. The sea acts as a god they have to fear and, very similarly to the plays of Greek gods, the characters are played with, punished, and enchanted by the higher power that keeps watching them and acts upon that.

3.2 Love and Marriage tragedy

The tragedy of love was one of the most popular themes in literature, even before Eugene
28. O’Neill, *Anna Christie*, 46.

29. Eugene O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931* (New York: The Library of America, 1988), 375.

O'Neill included it in his drama. The reason is that in love and marriage the bond is not hereditary, it is the bond at the level of feelings, so naturally it can be very easy to chop the bond off. O'Neill once again plays with this bond and creates friction that slowly turns into tension and breaks the bond off.

3.2.1 Beyond the Horizon: Robert and Ruth Mayo

“O'Neill is concerned with men possessed by the desire for what is out of their reach, 'beyond the horizon'. This phrase becomes the title of play in which a girl vacillates between two brothers and is always disappointed in the one who is with her.”³⁰

Two completely different brothers Robert, an intellectual dreamer, and Andrew, a hardworking farmer, fall for the same girl, Ruth. Robert is in preparation for his voyage 'beyond the horizon', when he meets Ruth and they both confess their love to each other. At the end of Act 1, Robert decides not to go for the voyage and stay with Ruth.

Already at this point Robert feels suspicious of her, because when confessing his love, he says: “You mustn't mind my telling you this, Ruth. I realize how impossible it all is – and I understand; for the revelation of my own love seemed to open my own eyes to the love of others. I saw Andy's love for you – and I knew that you must love him.”³¹ However, Ruth just simply rejects this statement and explains her behavior, with her not feeling educated enough for his taste. Robert might believe her, but there is another reason offering an explanation to us. Ruth is a farm girl that is forced to take care of her sick mother, so naturally, a husband such as Andrew would be a perfect match for her. Not so surprisingly, she suddenly gets interested in Robert as he starts to share his feelings and urge to go on the voyage:

“Those were the only happy moment of my life then, dreaming there at the window. I liked to be all alone – those times. I got to know all the different kinds of sunsets by heart. And all those sunsets took place over there – beyond the

30. Erik Reger, *The Georg Kaiser of America in Eugene O'Neill Critics: Voices from Abroad* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 31.

31. Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* (New York: Random House, 1921), 27.

horizon.”³²

By his talking about his dreams she becomes fascinated: “Oh, Rob, how could I help feeling it? You tell things so beautifully!”³³ It is her astonishment that offers more realistic explanation – she herself wants to go beyond the horizon. She sympathizes with Robert, since she shares the same passion, and because she cannot go beyond the horizon herself, Robert represents that dream for her. She believes that if she can have Robert, it is going to be as if she went to those mysterious places they both dream about. Consequently, heartbroken Andrew decides to go on the voyage instead of his brother and Robert stays with Ruth on the farm, forced to act against his nature. In this way O’Neill’s “perverse mind prepares the audience for Robert’s destruction.”³⁴

At the beginning Act 2, which happens three years later, it is revealed that Robert has married Ruth, has a child with her, and has taken over Andrew’s place on the farm. However, the farm in Robert’s hands is suffering, as well as his marriage with Ruth. In this play O’Neill provided only the happy love confession and skipped the beginning of tragedy, straight to the already worn-out state of marriage. The girl with “a frankly-appealing charm of her fresh youthfulness”³⁵ became a tired mother that does not favor her husband nor life anymore, and the only hope holding all of them together is that lovely Andrew will return and make things better again. Furthermore, Ruth also believes that Andrew’s homecoming will solve their marriage trouble. However, Robert went through the change as well and now is described with “his eyes are dull and lifeless, his face burned by sun and unshaven for days.”³⁶ He is now a man without hopes, the farm sucked out the dreaminess out of him and Ruth is so reliant on a letter they received from Andrew as their last hope to save them. It almost reminds us of an old father with a daughter waiting for her lover to come from the long voyage. Nothing here shows a love

32. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 26.

33. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 27.

34. Voglino. “Feminism vs Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in Anna Christie.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. 116.

35. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 22.

36. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 63.

relationship anymore, and only the connecting point confirming their marriage is their daughter Mary.

O'Neill decided in this act to skip the tragedy and show only the results. Ruth seems to be the biggest victim so far as she married the dream that changed into a useless husband, her own child is scared of her, and the man she regrets not marrying is showing zero signs of return. However, Robert still indicates that inside him is a certain amount of his real self – he still finds interest in books, he does not care much for materialism, and he is often absent-minded. It is actually Ruth who changed the most and with jealousy, she tries to accuse him of her unluckiness with phrases like “I should think you might have some feelings for me.”³⁷ Gradually, they both start to blame their marriage unhappiness on ‘bad luck’, but Robert is at least able to admit: “I am not a farmer. I’ve claimed to be one. But there’s nothing else I can do under the circumstances, and I’ve got to pull things through somehow.”³⁸

The farm continues to collapse and so does Robert’s and Ruth’s marriage. They both understand where their relationship stands and as they start thinking about themselves 3 years ago, the atmosphere becomes bitter:

“Robert: God I envy him! What a trip!

Ruth: I s’pose you’re sorry now you didn’t go?

Robert: Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much! How I’ve grown to hate the sight of them! They’re like the walls of narrow prison yard shutting me from all the freedom and wonder of life!

Sometimes I feel if it wasn’t you and little Mary, I’d chuck everything up and walk down the road with just one desire in my heart – to put the whole rim of the world between me and those hills, and be able to breathe freely once more! There I go dreaming again – my old fool dreams.”³⁹

Their unhappy but stable relationship finally breaks into pieces, and Ruth finally admits

37. O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 67.

38. O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 69.

39. O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 72.

her feelings: “I hate the sight of you. If I could have seen how you were in your true self – like you are now – I’d have killed myself before I’d married you!”⁴⁰ This scene just made a start for the real level of tragedy that keeps escalating as the play goes on. Ruth admits her recently found love for his brother, and Andrew finally returns home, but, to their disappointment, does not plan to stay with them for too long.

Five years later, Robert is discovered sick, Mary has died, and they both again wait for Andrew to return. Robert apologizes for past years, and Ruth just admits: “They’re past now. They were hard on all of us.”⁴¹ Robert starts to believe in their relationship again, but Ruth is too exhausted for a new beginning. There is no chance to start over for Ruth and Robert. At last Andrew returns, but it is too late to save his brother. In the last moments of his life, Robert finds his old self and dies in the way that fits his nature: “alone – in a ditch by open road – watching the sun rise.”⁴²

St. John Ervine describes Robert in his work, *Counsels of Despair*, as “the progenitor of a long line ineffectual egoists whose ambition far exceeds their ability. Incapable of anything but sentimental longing for what he can neither attain nor do, he groans against life, floundering from folly to folly, and blaming existence for his inefficiency.”⁴³

However, Robert is capable to attain what he wishes for – he has a chance to go on the voyage and make his dream of ‘beyond the horizon’ come true. His plans are only ruined after the unexpected confession of love by Ruth, and because he realizes that the chance for love lasts even shorter than his dreams, he decides to abandon his dreams in order to take this opportunity to be with her.

In the play, Robert firstly blames the farm for their unluckiness. Then he changes it: “I curse God from the bottom of my soul – if there was a God!”⁴⁴ The significance of the farm in this play could make it a connection to the higher power of God as the sea does in *Anna Christie*. It might be true, but in spite of that, Ruth seems to be the most obvious

40. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 74.

41. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 101.

42. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 126.

43. St. John Ervine, *Counsels of Despair in from Eugene O’Neill Critics: Voices from Abroad* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 86.

44. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 101.

tragedy starter. She decided to change the plans for Robert in whom she did not even see love for a man, but love for deviation from her basic farmer life. Ruth changed the most in her character, Robert still kept in himself hints of his old temperament but she rejected to see it and instead decides to perceive only things that changed in him. She is blaming him for hiding ‘his true-self’ but instead of dealing with problems, she decides to skip to Andrew and hope for a new, better life. “Ruth Mayo is a Strindbergian character who ruins the lives of two brothers as well as her own by her selfish romanticism. She wants to possess both Robert and Andrew Mayo, the romantic and the stolid farmer. Finally she is left alone, in total inanition, incapable of saving herself.”⁴⁵

3.2.2 Anna Christie and Mat Burke

The love relationship in *Anna Christie* does not follow the typical rules of tragedy, but instead O’Neill decided to ‘test out’ their love by revelations of the past and an unexpected little breakdown.

The first encounter between Anna and Mat comes in Act 2 when Anna Christie wishfully sighs “I love this fog!”⁴⁶, and out of the blue Mat Burke emerges from the depths of the sea. “He is a virile shipwrecked sailor, a savior who has risen from the sea to demonstrate the truth of love.”⁴⁷ Anna, against her father’s will, falls in love with Mat, who impresses her by his proclamation: “I’ll be roaring out like a fog horn over the sea! You’re the girl of the world, and we’ll be marrying soon, and I don’t care who knows it!”⁴⁸

At the end of Act 2 it is already obvious that Burke was brought into the play as a human representation of the sea, which is exactly what Anna fell in love with. However, then O’Neill starts to insert little cracks into their relationship as if testing whether their love is worth it. Firstly, Anna rejects his proposition of marriage with a good intention – she does not feel it is eligible for a girl with her past to marry a good man. However, instead of

45. Ranald, “From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924): The Early Plays.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. 89.

46. O’Neill, *Anna Christie*, 41.

47. Ranald, “From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924): The Early Plays.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. 88.

48. O’Neill, *Anna Christie*, 63.

breaking up, they express their love for each other. Then she reveals her secret and, naturally, Mat repulses her. She is not mad, instead she honestly tells him: “I sized you up as a different kind of man – a sea-man as different from the ones on land as water is from mud – and that was why I got stuck on you, too. I wanted to marry you and fool you, but I couldn’t.”⁴⁹

Mat curses her and does not want to see her again, gets drunk, and signs on to a voyage to Cape Town. To get revenge for fooling him, he tries to murder her, but, as it was supposed to happen, he ends up marrying her and, following her family curse, leaves for the voyage joined by her father, Chris.

The finale of *Anna Christie* could be perceived as a happy romance – she reached the top goal of any relationship, or as a tragedy – the sea swallows up her lover, and she ends up alone once again. However, their love story is not completely tragic. Overall, their relationship has some ups and downs, but the main reason of the collisions is that they do not know each other very well, so when secret surprises are revealed, they just need time to adjust to it. As was mentioned before, Burke was created as a character for Anna to fall in love with, since he embodies the sea, and O’Neill in this drama plays a ‘father’ who just wants to make sure that their relationship is as honest as possible.

3.3 Sibling Tragedy

When it comes to the tragedy between siblings, the most easy way to make them go against each other is to involve them in a love triangle. This O’Neill illustrates in his play *Beyond the Horizon*.

3.3.1 Beyond the Horizon: Robert and Andrew

As was mentioned above, the tragedy between these two brothers is based on a failure of the love triangle. At one side is an intellectual Robert dreaming of reaching for the horizon and on the other side is a practical farmer Andrew. At the beginning of the play, they are on good terms – Andrew understands his brother’s needs of leaving for the voyage, they both even laugh at the image of Robert plowing. Both mutually understand their nature and even though they both like the same girl, Robert grasps the fact that

49. O’Neill, *Anna Christie*, 93.

Andrew is a much better match for Ruth than he could ever be. Everything changes after the sudden confession of love, and “his wanderlust is quashed by the more powerful drive to explore a romantic relationship with Ruth, whom everyone had assumed would marry his more practical brother Andrew.”⁵⁰ When Robert finds out, as a sign of his hatred but also defeat, he decides to take his brother’s place on the ship. He explains his reason for leaving: “I can wish you and Ruth all the good luck in the world, and I do, and I mean it; but you can’t expect me to stay around here and watch you two together, day after day – and me alone. I couldn’t stand it – not after all the plans I’d made to happen on this place thinking – thinking she cared for me.”⁵¹

Three years later, when his marriage is already in the process of decay, Robert waits for his brother to return from the voyage. Robert became a ruined incompetent farmer who relies on Andrew’s return to save his farm and his marriage. “Andrew’s fate is thus also tragic – by following Robert’s path, he falls into a materialistic trap bereft of the spiritual meaning he once knew on the farm.”⁵² And even though it seems that his hatred for Robert has vanished, he decides to continue for another voyage to try his luck in Buenos Aires.

During their final reunion, Robert is dying and Andrew has lost most of the money in his unsuccessful business. Andrew starts to blame Ruth for his brother’s condition, but after the realization of trouble they are in with the farm and money, he forgives her. However, after hearing the diagnosis of certain death, he seems to start feeling that it is his fault – he offers a stay in mountains – but Robert does not want Andrew to treat him like “a coward or an imbecile.”⁵³ Robert expresses Andrew’s guilt perfectly: “I’m a failure, and Ruth’s another – but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on God. But you’re the deepest-dyed failure of the three, Andy. You’ve spent eight years running away from yourself. Do you see what I mean? You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now – my brain is muddled. But part of what I mean is that your gambling with the

50. Dowling, Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts, 173.

51. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 50-51.

52. Dowling, *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 173.

53. O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 117

thing you used to love to create proves how far astray – so you'll be punished."⁵⁴ In spite of that, in the end he starts to blame Ruth again for killing Robert, because she never loved him. At the hour of Robert's release, Andrew admits that both, he and Ruth, caused Robert's suffering.

The tragedy here caused more devilment than it did in other O'Neill's plays. Whom to blame? Ruth certainly stirred trouble between the brothers. However, "the Mayo brothers are 'idealism' and 'materialism' embodied"⁵⁵ and by betrayal of their natures, the consequences definitely lead to the tragedy. Robert tried to accept his new life and make the best of it; he failed, but at the end of that he found a relief in death that took him over the horizon. Andrew did not try accept his new nature, he failed and remains occupied by guilt and blame.

4. Total Collapse

Eugene O'Neill greatly presented aspects of family tragedy in his plays where one crack leads to another with recognizable victims and villains. Nevertheless, in plays that are analyzed above, the defect of relationship is limited to one or two levels. In the plays like *Anna Christie*, *Beyond the Horizon* or *Desire Under the Elms* is the family tragedy definitely being produced, but in spite of that, at the end of the plays there are 'survivors', who remain lesser or more affected by the result of tragedy. However, they still represent a pillar that has not been completely broken. However, O'Neill surpassed this level of tragedy with an exceptional plays, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, where the tragedy circles in the bloodstream of the whole family with a relationship graveyard left at the end of the play.

4.1 Mourning Becomes Electra

"O'Neill appropriated *Mourning Becomes Electra*'s plot and characters from Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and its later adaptations by Sophocles and Euripides."⁵⁶ In spite of extending the

54. O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 118

55. László B. Nagy, *The O'Neill Legend in Eugene O'Neill Critics: Voices from Abroad* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 124.

56. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 382.

story over the classical version, the peaks of tragedy remain in the play, which makes it a perfect example of extensive family tragedy.

4.1.1 Homecoming

The very first character of the Mannon family introduced in the play is Lavinia expressing her attitude to love: “I don’t know anything about love! I don’t want to know anything! I hate love!”⁵⁷ Already this proclamation signals that an element of love tragedy is going to make its part in the story, in this case it is a double-sided one, as is later revealed in the play. There was a tension already between her and her mother before the main story started – Lavinia suffers from an Electra complex while Christine despised her father. However, the abyss between them forms when she discovers her mother’s infidelity, which she takes as a betrayal of her father, and with finding that her lover is Adam Brant, the man who actually courted Lavinia herself. Lavinia’s animosity towards her mother possesses almost a fearful quality, she even hates that her features resemble her, “it is evident that Lavinia does all in her power to emphasize the dissimilarity rather than the resemblance to her parent.”⁵⁸

The roles of mother and daughter seem to be reversed, Christine is almost scared of her daughter, and Lavinia stands quite imperious through her family position. In spite of that, at this point Christine is victorious while Lavinia is just an envious substitution of the role of mother. On top of that, “her love puts her in position unsuccessful rivalry with her mother as she had been all her life before for the love of her father and brother.”⁵⁹

After Brant’s meeting with Lavinia, the tension transfers between them. In the past they had a short romance, but Lavinia stands stiff as ever, taking grudge against Brant as well as against her mother and indirectly warning him about consequences of his and her mother’s actions: “I love Father better than anyone in the world. There is nothing I wouldn’t do – to protect him from hurt!”⁶⁰ The hatred for Brant stirs even more after the

57. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 901.

58. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 897.

59. Alexander, Doris. “Mourning Becomes Electra.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. New York: Chelsea House, 2007. Updated version. 38.

60. O’Neill, Eugene. *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 908.

realization that he is the son of Mannon, who seduced a servant. Brant's own family tragedy plays a blame game in the background as he decides to take revenge on Ezra Mannon.

In Act 2, the game of avoiding eyes and aloofness explodes into an open argument. Lavinia accuses her mother of adultery and Christine admits her love for Brant and her hate for Ezra Mannon. Christine's guilt turns into a confession of suffering and changes into love, she feels guilty for not loving her own child since Lavinia will always symbolize for Christine 'her wedding night and her honeymoon with Ezra Mannon.'⁶¹ In spite of her guilt, she hates Lavinia for sending her son, the only child that felt like hers, into the war with his father. All the bonds are cut off when Lavinia finds out that Christine is part of Brant's revenge plan on her husband, and the connection between Lavinia and Christine becomes a revenge game over power. At this point Christine has the upper hand once again, shaming her daughter for the feelings she had for Brant, which was, once again, arranged by her. However, Christine realizes that as soon as Ezra returns she is in danger. She decides on a final plan with Brant – the murder of her husband.

Ezra Mannon returns and Lavinia's character changes into Christine. She becomes happy and lively just as much as when Christine hears about her son Orin being wounded. The family splits into two parts, Lavinia is on her father's side while Orin takes his mother's side. Nevertheless, Christine hates her husband, who is oblivious to this fact, and has the lover on her side, so, naturally, Lavinia must act as a stronger power to outweigh her side to succeed. Lavinia tries to talk about Brant, but her mother turns it against Lavinia to confirm her position: "Don't let Mother make you believe I – You're the only man I'll ever love! I'm going to stay with you!"⁶² Once the parents are left alone, Christine turns into Lavinia. However, Ezra surprises us with a realization that she does not love him anymore, and asks for a second chance: "Something queer in me keeps me mum about the things I'd like most to say – keeps me hiding the things I'd like to show. Something keeps me sitting numb in my own heart – like a statue of a dead man in the town square. I want to find what that wall is marriage put between us! You've got to help me smash it down! We have twenty good years still before us! I've been thinking what we could do to

61. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 917.

62. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 935.

get back to each other. I've a notion if we'd leave the children and go off on the voyage together – to the other side of the world – find some island where we could be alone a while. You'll find I have changed, Christine. I'm sick of death! I want life! Maybe you could love me now!"⁶³ In spite of that, Christine keeps turning her back to him, either still strongly keeping hatred against him or fearing of acceptance to remain with Ezra and his 'Mannon curse'.

In the play is nothing revealed about Ezra's past nature, just his claim that he has changed. He starts to feel that his wife is not his anymore and accuses Christine of "waiting for death to free her."⁶⁴ Christine has an outburst and tells him about her romance with Brant. Consequently, Ezra has a seizure from anger, and Christine uses this chance to poison him. Lavinia finds her father on the edge of death, mumbling about medicine, and curses her mother for murdering him with her betrayal of love. The tragedy is now projected on the daughter-mother level, marriage level, and father-daughter level.

4.1.2. The Hunted

With the death of Ezra, Lavinia should have ended in the period of mourning (as the title suggests), and Christine should feel the liberty of getting rid of the Mannon curse - "to be forever bound to one's dead relatives"⁶⁵ - as she now broke apart the marriage bond with Ezra Mannon. In spite of her successful fight for freedom, Christine feels unhappiness and fear, with Lavinia in her steps like a ghost of Mannon curse that follows Christine everywhere as she grows restless. A new vehicle of tension between Christine and Lavinia appears on the scene – Orin Mannon, beloved son and beloved brother. Christine realizes that Lavinia will try to get Orin on her side which is the reason why she starts to gather accomplice on her side by telling people Ezra's death made Lavinia crazy. Orin acts as an only bonding medium between Christine and Lavinia, but instead of trying to resolve their hatred for each other, he gets swayed easily by their affection. Lavinia warns Orin of

63. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 939.

64. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 944.

65. William Young, "Mother and Daughter in Mourning Becomes Electra" *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter Vol. VI* (Summer-Fall 1982). http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/vi_2/vi-2e.htm (accessed February 11, 2018).

their mother's relations, and Christine warns him of his sister's lies. However, similarly to Ezra's last husband-like proposition, Christine tries to make things right with her daughter: "I had been a good wife to him for twenty-three years – until I met Adam. I was guilty then, I admit. But I repented and put him out of my life. I would have been a good wife again as long as your father have lived. After all, Vinnie, I am your mother. I brought you into the world. You ought to have some feeling for me."⁶⁶ But once again it is too late as Lavinia already has started her plotting.

Orin's character vacillates between these two women according to which defamation they fill him with. In the end, his Oedipus complex wins over his struggle which ends up in the tragedy. With Lavinia's push to action, he "kills his mother's lover as his rival, not as his father's murderer. As a matter of fact, he kills his father in Brant."⁶⁷

The murder does not only have an effect on Christine, but also on Orin himself: "Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own? He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide!"⁶⁸ The curse of Mannon returns to the scene and remains haunting them as an old ghost.

After the murder, Orin changes into Lavinia. Poisoned by his sister, he accuses his mother of adultery and murder but breaks down in the moment his feelings towards his mother reappear: "Why do you even grieve for that servant bastard? I know he was the one who planned Father's murder! You couldn't have done that! He got you under his influence to revenge himself! He hypnotized you! I saw you weren't yourself the minute I got home, remember? How else could you ever imagine you loved that low swine! How else could you ever have said the things – I heard you planning to go with him to the island I had told you about – our island – that was you and I!"⁶⁹ The initial parent-child tragedy turns into a love tragedy. Lavinia finally feels she achieved her justice and tells her mother to live with it. "In the end, rather than submit to Vinnie's

66. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 960.

67. László, *The O'Neill Legend*, 127.

68. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 996.

69. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1000-1001.

blackmail, she quite literally rather takes her life in her own hands.”⁷⁰

4.1.3 The Haunted

“O’Neill offers a sequel to the *Oresteia*, as he had for Lazarus, that offers the torments of Lavinia (Electra) after her mother’s death.”⁷¹ O’Neill continues with the story after the return of remaining Mannons from their voyage to the Islands in order to “make a stand for life in the temple of Hate and Death.”⁷²

Their trip to the Islands rapidly changed Lavinia. She lost her stiffness and severity and appears to now be talking to Orin in motherly voice – she became Christine. On the other hand, Orin became sickly thin and paranoid, in the face reminding of Ezra, but still keeping his childish behavior as he keeps treating Lavinia like his mother. The house of Mannons became the house of terror and the seal of ‘Mannon curse’, although Lavinia, similarly to her mother, believes that now “it is all past and finished, the dead have forgotten us.”⁷³ However, ‘justice’ that revenged her father, as Lavinia believes, is not fulfilled yet. The only family bond that is left in the play starts to crumble. Orin starts to despise her due to the changes that transformed Lavinia, blaming her of trying to live his mother’s life: “I mean the change in your soul, too. I’ve watched it ever since we sailed for the East. Little by little it grew like Mother’s soul – as if you were stealing hers – as if her death has set you free – to become her!”⁷⁴ In spite of her similarity to mother, she remains manipulative and revengeful Lavinia in the manner of having Orin agree on their mother being an “adulteress and murderess”⁷⁵ and substantiating her suicide as an ‘act of justice’⁷⁶.

However, Orin’s disdain changes into jealousy. For him, Lavinia fully represents his

70. Young, “Mother and Daughter in Mourning Becomes Electra”.

71. Dowling, *Eugene O’Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 382.

72. Alexander, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 43-44.

73. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1015.

74. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1017.

75. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1019.

76. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1019.

mother's soul, so he accuses her of having an affair on the Islands, once again, as if she was actually cheating on him. The sibling bond starts to take the elements of love relationship.

Lavinia frees herself to the extent of feeling love towards Peter but, at the same time, she feels the weight of Mannons on her shoulders with Orin's madness and delusions.

Similarly to her mother, she dreams of escape, but Orin must take action against it in the same manner she did to her mother. He becomes Lavinia from the past merged with Ezra, blackmailing her with his book of crimes within the Mannon family and accusing her of adultery. She tries to excuse herself with: "I am not your property and I have a right to love"⁷⁷ - exactly the same lines that Christine said to Ezra before his death. And similarly to their parents fate, Orin shoots himself.

As opposed to her mother's fear after the murder of Ezra, she still tries to feel liberty after her brother's death. She forces Peter to marry her in a rush: "Take me in this house of the death and love me! Our love will drive the dead away! It will shame them back into death! Want me! Take me, Adam!"⁷⁸ In the end she realizes that there is no escape to the Mannon curse and, with the family tragedy and the love tragedy stains on her hands, accepts her own punishment: "I'm not going away the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there's no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone! I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die!"⁷⁹

4.1.4 Conclusion to Mourning Becomes Electra

"Each Mannon child is enamored of the opposite-sex parent in a drama which features frequent fleeting glimpses of unconscious suppressed desires (as in Vinny's attraction to Brant, who resembles her father), and which exposes a repetition compulsion of character whose later words and gestures reenact moments from earlier scenes, from the recent

77. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1031.

78. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1052.

79. O'Neill, *O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 1053.

past.”⁸⁰ In spite of the title of the play, Lavinia is not the main bearer of tragedy in the drama. The most tragic character is Christine who keeps being resurrected in the form of Lavinia’s newly found spirit of freedom and, therefore, is forced to re-experiment her tragic memories as an eternity punishment for trying to get away from the claws of the Mannons. Christine’s desire to escape could be considered the major contributor to the tragedy but to pick just one influence as a family-breaker would be too vague in this play. Oedipus and Electra complexes already signalize that the Mannon family will be full of reverse roles, taking sides, and jealousy – none of these qualities positively contribute to the family relations. So naturally, Lavinia’s position in the play is supposed to be against her mother, especially after the betrayal of her beloved father. However, the whole story is about the search for freedom. Orin wants to escape his thoughts that he carries with him from the war, Ezra wants to pull down the walls between him and his wife, and Brant strives to free himself from his Mannon part through revenge. Lavinia firstly believes that there is no escape, but, after tasting the same fruit her mother did, she attempts to free herself in the same manner her mother did. Eventually, she is also punished in the same manner for breaking the chains.

Another contributor to the tragedy is ‘the Mannon curse’. “It is the fatal web which binds each character to the others and which ultimately binds the play together.”⁸¹ Similarly to *Anna Christie*, it rules with a supernatural power in the background of the story and returns every once in awhile into the foreground to be used as the medium of justification. In the play, the curse takes a materialistic shape in the house inhabited by the Mannons. “The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its somber gray ugliness”⁸², it stands in the play as the curse in which the family members must remain. However, once they escape (as they did to the Islands), the Mannon course cannot touch them. Christine describes the house: “pagan temple front stuck like a mask of Puritan gray ugliness”⁸³, as she carries flowers to it as if it was a tomb, which the house

80. Robinson, A. James. “The Middle Plays.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. New York, Chelsea House, 2007. Updated version. 109.

81. Young, “Mother and Daughter in Mourning Becomes Electra”.

82. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 893.

83. O’Neill, *O’Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 903-904.

later becomes as all the family deaths happen inside the house. At the end of the play, Lavinia accepts her own punishment by closing herself in the house for eternity – the house becomes her own tomb.

Despite *Mourning Becomes Electra* being the play of accusations and revenges, O’Neill included in his play moments of vindication that could have changed the stream of tragedy. If Christine accepted Ezra’s proposal of burying the wall between them and starting their relationship anew, it would prevent the family from the complete breakage. However, Christine did not want to hear his offer and chose the punishment instead, as the rest of the family did as well.

4.2 Long Day’s Journey into Night

Eugene O’Neill has decided to take a different approach to the family tragedy in this highly biographical play than he applied to the other total collapse play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Instead of letting us experience the acts that lead to tragedy together with his characters, in this play we just watch the results of the past actions that all decided to take its revenge on the family that decays during one single day.

4.2.1 8:30 am

Since we are not able to watch the development of what happened in the past to the family, to gain a bit more understanding of the family history, O’Neill provides us with a detailed description of each character and the changed they went through. Mary Tyrone, the mother of the family, is characterized by “trifle plump figure, extreme nervousness, her hands are never still with crippled fingers, but her most appealing quality is the simple unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl youthfulness she has never lost – an innate unworldly innocence.”⁸⁴ From her conversation with her husband it is discovered that she put on weight and suffers from insomnia. He also keeps reminding her: “You mustn’t let it upset you, Mary. Remember, you’ve got to take care of yourself, too.”⁸⁵

The father of the family James Tyrone, despite his shabby dressing caused by his financial

84. Eugene O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (New Haven&London: Yale University Press, 1989), 12-13.

85. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 16.

failures, is a proud actor.

Jamie is an elder son who resembles his father strongly and shows the results of past through premature disintegration. The younger brother, Edmund, looks more like his mother, especially with the same nervousness, but shows signs of an extreme sensibility. Act 1 reveals the causes of their distress that for now are mainly only personal tragedies. Edmund is revealed to have a bad cough, Jamie has a drinking problem, and Tyrone is mortgaged due to the property he keeps buying. In this state, Tyrone and Jamie have already a crack on their relationship – Jamie blames his father for being in debt and Tyrone grows to despise his son advises: “You’ve never saved a dollar in your life. You’ve thrown your salary away every week on whores and whiskey.”⁸⁶ He also accuses him of sponging on him and having a lack of ambition in following a career that his father chose for him. Later on, he even blames Jamie’s corruption as the starter of Edmund’s sickness: “You’ve been the worst influence for him. He grew up admiring you as a hero! If you ever gave him advice except in the ways of rottenness. You made him old before his time, pumping him full of what you consider worldly wisdom, when he was too young to see that your mind was so poisoned by your own failure in life.”⁸⁷

Jamie also uncovers Edmund’s sailor past, which he admires on him for going away on his own. However, the tension changes once they start to be concerned about their mother’s health who, as is revealed, returned from her treatment 2 months ago and is getting back to her anxiety over Edmund’s sickness. In spite of her own addiction, Mary blames everybody else for her sons behavior and reputation as she herself considers them rotten. In addition to her blame game and addiction, she also seems to suffer from paranoia: “It makes it so much harder, living in this atmosphere of constant suspicion, knowing everyone is spying on me, and none of you believe in me, or trust me.”⁸⁸

4.2.2 12:45 and 1:15 pm

Act 1 prepared for us a sufficient layout of the family past, so the play can begin its stream of tragedy. Play’s original personal-tragedies are turning into the blame games, but

86. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 31.

87. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 34.

88. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 46.

with the main focus on Mary Tyrone, who considers herself purer than the rest of her family, despite her addiction that causes the strongest tension in the family circle. The family is poisoned by addictions – Mary’s morphine addiction and men’s alcohol addiction – which just contributes to and creates the oncoming silhouette of tragedy. Edmund claims to stop drinking after he gets a diagnosis of his disease but, in spite of that, his addiction overpowers him. However, what concerns the family more are Mary’s mood changes as she starts to return to her old habits of occupying a spare room only by herself. She starts to feel paranoid about Jamie spying on her as she tells to her younger son: “Because he’s always sneering at someone else, always looking for the worst weakness in everyone. But I suppose life has made him like that, and he can’t help it. None of us can help things life has done to us. They’re done before you realize it, and once they’re done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you’d like to be, and you’ve lost your true self forever”.⁸⁹ With this statement she pardons her own addiction as something the life made her to do due to her immoral sons and never-home she married into. “She is guilty and secretive about her morphine use, usually denies it, blames her husband, her choice of marriage instead of a career in the church or music, her sons and the loneliness she actually seeks.”⁹⁰ She is also unable to admit that her own family tragedy could re-appear again when Edmund displays the same symptoms that killed her father – consumption and alcohol. With her excuses and lies even her husbands starts to distrust her.

Mary becomes terribly nervous again as they finish their lunch. She keeps talking to herself without bothering herself with hiding the visible results of her morphine addiction that she tried ‘so hard’ to fight. Now she starts to feel paranoid even towards her doctors as a result of her own experience: “I hate doctors! They’ll do anything – anything to keep you coming to them. They’ll sell their souls! What’s worse, they’ll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell!”⁹¹, once again blaming someone else for her failure. Tyrone’s failure works in the similar pattern, blaming his sons for their

89. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 61.

90. Gloria Dibble Pond, “A Family Disease” *The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter Vol. IX* (Boston: Suffolk University, 1985). http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/ix_1/ix-1c.htm (accessed February 11, 2018).

91. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 74.

self-destruction in order to repulse his Catholic faith. However, despite the amount of tragedy in the play and disappointment in each other, Mary and Tyrone still respect their position of parents that is for now the only positive component that keeps the family from sinking into the tragedy.

The first tragedy appears when the doctor evaluates Edmund's condition as consumption. However, unnaturally, it does not hit the family as strongly as expected, rather it causes an argument between Jamie and Tyrone about his father's plan to send Edmund into the cheapest sanatorium: "This is Edmund's business. What I'm afraid of is, with your Irish bog-trotter idea that consumption is fatal, you'll figure it would be a waste of money to spend any more than you can help."⁹² On the other hand, Mary does not even ask about his medical results. She starts to feel paranoid again about Tyrone leaving her alone in the house, but Tyrone just keeps replying with: "It's you who are leaving us, Mary."⁹³ She starts to feel self-pity for losing her friends which she only blames on Tyrone's scandal with his mistress. "The past is present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us"⁹⁴, she implies as she remembers her baby Eugene's death. Mary uncovers the cause of her hate for Jamie – the measles he was sick with that got spread and killed her baby. Despite her blame of the death of her son on Jamie and Tyrone, for the first time she shows the signs of some confession and misconduct: "I knew from experience by then that children should have homes to be born in, if they are to be a good children, and women need homes, if they are to be good mothers. I was afraid all the time I carried Edmund. I knew something terrible would happen. I'd proved by the way I'd left Eugene that I wasn't worthy to have another baby, and that God would punish me if I did. I never should have borne Edmund."⁹⁵ Similarly to *Mourning Becomes Electra*, she has a chance to save herself from the claws of addiction and redeem her guilt when Edmund asks her to, but she just says he does not understand.

92. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 80.

93. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 83.

94. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 87.

95. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 88.

4.2.3 6:30 pm

Previous Acts presaged the inevitable breaking point of the play – Mary takes her dose of morphine. “She has hidden deeper within herself and found refuge and release in a dream where present reality is but an appearance to be accepted or dismissed unfeelingly – even with a hard cynicism- or entirely ignored.”⁹⁶

She is seen sitting with her maid Cathleen, who appears to be drunk, in the living room already under the effect of morphine that causes her to be afraid of solitude. She keeps talking how she loves the fog since “it hides you from the world and the world from you”⁹⁷, but hates a foghorn as it makes you return back to reality. She complains about her husband losing money on his non-profit properties, but admits that she has loved him for many years. Mary laments about her lost dream of being a nun and regrets that she never received a proper house from her husband who forced her to travel with him and his theater company. Then she excuses her morphine prescription with: “It’s a special kind of medicine. I have to take it because there is no other that can stop the pain – all the pain – I mean, in my hands”⁹⁸, not only to try stop Cathleen from judging her but mainly to justify her weakness. Then she returns to remembering the sweet past times of happiness and vitality and is comparing them with the pains that, according to Mary, everybody else caused her.

Mary’s attitude suddenly changes as she becomes super sensitive to anything about her ‘medicine’. Her mood starts to vacillate under the effect of morphine and her desire to be alone keeps switching into a desire to be in company. She gets excited over men’s return home and starts with her memories once again. However, after switching the conversation back to Eugene, Tyrone starts to regret his returning home. Once again, Mary starts with her blame game by accusing Tyrone of spoiling Jamie, who once was a bright child, with his alcoholism. However, Tyrone has enough of her accusations and blasts in anger: “So I’m to blame that lazy hulk has made a drunken loafer of himself? Is that what I came home to listen to? I might have known! When you have the poison in you, you want to

96. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 97.

97. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 98.

98. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 103.

blame everyone but yourself!”⁹⁹

The mood of Mary changes as she gets afraid of being left alone once again. The level of tragedy decreases as they start to remember the times when they fell in love, especially her beautiful wedding dress. However, their contentment is disrupted when Edmund carries out the truth about his disease. She does not want to accept it and begins to blame doctors instead. Finally, Edmund adds his bit into the tragedy by admitting: “It’s pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother.”¹⁰⁰

The scene ends by Mary returning upstairs: “I hope, sometimes, without meaning it. I will take an overdose. I never could do it deliberately. The Blessed Virgin would never forgive me, then.”¹⁰¹ Then she expresses her fear of the death of Edmund, whom, as she admits, she was never supposed to give birth to.

4.2.4 Midnight

“Mary’s further estrangement from her family through the use of morphine seems by far the most probable outcome of this ‘long day’.”¹⁰²

At the beginning of Act 4 Tyrone is seen arguing with Edmund, this time showing his true face of intransigence and authority which ruled over Mary’s young life. However, the tragedy between father and son balances back to the norm as they apologize and drink together. Similarly to his mother, Edmund starts to talk about the fog as he remembers his voyages on the sea : “The fog is where I wanted to be. That’s what I wanted – to be alone – with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself”.¹⁰³ He represents a typical O’Neillian character dreaming of reaching ‘beyond the horizon’, the goal he reached once and found a release in it but was returned back into reality.

Despite Mary’s not admitting her share on the mens drinking, Edmund indicates: “Well,

99. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 111.

100. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 120.

101. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 121.

102. Barbara Voglino, “Long Day’s Journey into Night: The Question of Blame.”. In *Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Critical Interpretations. New York: Infobase publishing, 2009. 144.

103. O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 131.

what's wrong with being drunk? We know what we're trying to forget."¹⁰⁴ When Mary is heard walking upstairs Tyrone mentions not to believe her chats about the beautiful past that she embellished to her own liking by forgetting about her father's consumption and alcoholism. The men both know in what state Mary must be, but, in spite of that, Tyrone tries to excuse her overdose by her being hurt by the news about Edmund's sickness. However, Edmund turns it against him and starts to blame Tyrone for being stingy and not paying for a proper doctor when his mother was sick. Tyrone rejects such accusation as he claims to having spent thousands for the cures, but Edmund, who at this point reminds his mother the most, sees deeper into his father's fault: "Because you've never given her anything that would help her want to stay off it! No home except this summer dump in a place she hates and you've even refused to spend money to make this look decent. You've dragged her around on the road, season after season, on one-night stands, with no one she could talk to, waiting night after night in dirty hotel rooms for you to come with a bun on after the bars closed! Christ, is it any wonder she didn't want to be cured. Jesus, when I think of it I hate your guts!"¹⁰⁵ In the end, the father-son bond breaks apart as they admit their hate towards each other. Edmund is indignant, but not unexpectedly, by father's decision not to spend proper money on his sanatorium. However, he does not want to die because of his father being a cheapskate and stands up against his father's decision. For the first time, Tyrone retreats from his stubbornness and agrees to send him to a better place. By doing so he uncovers his own personal tragedy – poverty when he was a child and inability to succeed in other way than as a one role actor during his whole career. They hear Mary move around again as Edmund says: "Yes, she moves above and beyond us, a ghost haunting the past, and here we sit pretending to forget, but straining our ears listening for the slightest sound, hearing the fog drip from the eaves like the uneven tick of rundown, crazy clock – or like the dreary tears of a trollop spattering in a puddle of stale beer on a honky-honk table top!"¹⁰⁶ To Edmund's prognosis, Mary appears in the front parlor playing piano in her ghostly appearance, and dragging her wedding dress behind her. Edmund turns to her like a terrified boy, but she is too lost in her sad,

104. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 132.

105. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 141.

106. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 152.

morphine dreams.

4.2.5 Conclusion to Long Day's Journey into Night

Unlike the other O'Neill plays where the actions of characters lead to the family tragedy, *Long Day's Journey into Night* is based firstly on character's personal tragedies that during that one single day develop into the family ones. As the gradual revelation of the story unfolds these personal tragedies, the blame game begins. In spite of that, what makes it the most difficult is to determine a real culprit of the tragedy – the characters themselves do not know whom to judge, therefore they find the blame within the members of family by pointing out their biggest mistakes to outweigh their own ones. The most difficult problem with an analysis of this play is that if we are to pinpoint one central cause of the tragedy, we would be forced to take sides with a certain character to reach a conclusion. Once we look into the play without favoritism, due to our inability to watch the process of this family story and provision of only the picture of the family past influenced by each characters claims, it is impossible to establish a definite offender. Despite the complexity of the tragedy, there are affairs that serve as provocations to the tragedy.

Even though her addiction is used as the biggest impact on the breakage, Mary Tyrone seems to be the most tragic member of observed family. Rather than being a human character, she is more of a "ghost haunting the past."¹⁰⁷ "Her addiction to morphine was chosen as the symbol of the curse hanging over them"¹⁰⁸, but also as a version of escape from this miserable past that left some painful bruises in her. The men in the family get disappointed when she falls back into her addiction, but at the end it was only her who tried to stop getting lost in the dream. Her returning desire to become a nun shows that she wants to purify herself and wash away the stains of morphine that made her unclean. Eventually, she is to be ignored when "her husbands and sons have no thought but to restore her to a woman's natural place in the home."¹⁰⁹

However, the main negative influencer in the play is alcohol since all the male characters

107. O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 137.

108. Oscar Fritz Schuh, *O'Neills Dramatic Work: His Image of Humanity in Eugene O'Neill Critics: Voices from Abroad* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 138.

are addicted to it. It seems like the men are destined to become heavy drinkers in this family – from mother’s father to her husband himself and their sons, all of them fell under the spell of alcohol. “They become diseased themselves, warping their behavior to coexist with the disease.”¹¹⁰ Instead of trying to change this habit and admitting their disease, they rather blame each other and judge their mother for her own addiction. Despite Jamie being the heaviest drinker, it was the life of James Tyrone that was the most influenced by liquor. However, “O’Neill shows James Tyrone’s second addiction, greed, in his turning out of lights, compulsive land speculations, and compromises on quality in medical care, cars, clothing, servants.”¹¹¹ His third addiction is his ego that causes him not to care about people around him. Consequently, all his three addictions in some degree ruined in Mary’s life who had to suffer through his failure as an actor, businessman, and husband. There are numerous amounts of other collapses in the play – Edmund’s consumption, poverty in Tyrone’s childhood, jealousy and hate to his own brother, career failure, loss of a child – but they are just peaks of character’s personal tragedies that culminate and blend into the addiction theme. Despite knowing the main suppliers to the tragedy, with a day limit that O’Neill provided us with in the play, we cannot trace the initial starter of the tragedy nor who/what took the biggest bite of the family stability.

5. Family Tragedy and Greek Tragedy

“O’Neill wrote his best play of the 1920s near the middle of that decade by going back to the farm, by stressing elemental human passions, by investing his realistic story with a symbolic significance that touches deeper sources than he ever previously attempted, by continuing his experimentation with stage technique, and by investing his play with the mood of Greek tragedy.”¹¹² As is well known, O’Neill opened a completely new door for

109. Bette Mandl, “Wrestling with the Angel in the House: Mary Tyrone’s Long Journey” *The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter Vol. XII* (Winter, 1988). <http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/xii-3/xii-3e.htm> (accessed February 11, 2018).

110. Pond, “A Family Disease”.

111. Pond, “A Family Disease”.

112. Normand Berlin, *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Eugene O’Neill* (London&Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1982), 71.

American stage with his wide usage of a dark atmosphere stimulating the most sombre out of his characters which he masterly combined with his immoral and controversial themes. As if it was not enough, O'Neill decided to give such plays an actual form where these elements could completely shape themselves – this led to the return of Greek tragedy.

Out of the plays that combine family tragedy with Greek tragedy, *Desire Under the Elms* is his first attempt. He undoubtedly drew inspiration for this play from the myths of Phaedra, Hippolytus, and Theseus. He created the same love and hate triangle with characters of Eben, Abbie and Ephraim as was in the Greek original. However, then he decided to deviate from the Greek story in order to create an original ending.

His main Greek tragedy based play is unquestionably, *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

O'Neill drew from the story of Oresteia, which is also visible from the titles of the acts of the play. Once again, it led to an original creation that is still based on Oresteia's plot but set in New England and its characters wear masks to appear to be more in a disguise and secretive about their actions and intrigues.

In general, we could notice that Eugene O'Neill likes to use Greek tragedy in his plays to have an excuse to create obscene plays. However, he makes up for it with his immense psychological exploitation of his characters, so the plays truly transform into the contemporary masterpiece.

6. Protagonists of Tragedy

In the traditional tragedies, a protagonist should meet with certain traditions or even requirements to be considered the true tragic hero. As is stated in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (in which authors provide their own interpretation of the tragic hero from Aristotle's work, *Poetics*), there are classic rules that the tragedies throughout history have established. "The first is that there is a central character (the protagonist), someone who is noble and with whom we are able to sympathize and identify."¹¹³ Traditionally, it would suggest that the protagonist was mostly a king or at least some kind of a leader with power mightier than other characters in the tragedy.

113. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3rd edition (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004), 103-104.

However, Eugene O'Neill sets his plays in his own times, so there is no space for kings in the modern USA. He displays some protagonists possessing certain power – the Mannon family is divided by the power of one character trying to control another character – but mostly he seems to choose protagonists who are a part of more accessible world to us. “The second is that this character should suffer and preferably die, and that his or her downfall or death should roughly coincide with the end of the play.”¹¹⁴ O'Neill's protagonists certainly suffer, but he makes the suffering so widespread that it eventually devours all the characters of the play. He makes anguish to become the whole mood of the tragedy and only suffering elevated can distinguish the real tragic hero. The death is always a presence in the author's plays, but it acts as the moment of release rather than as the peak of suffering.

“The third is that the downfall or death of the central character should be felt by the spectator or reader to be both inevitable and ‘right’ but at the same time in some sense unjustifiable and unacceptable.”¹¹⁵ However, this would be possible only if we know who is the central character and O'Neill is not so generous to us to provide us with some hint. He creates protagonists that all seem to aim to the eventual downfall or death.

“The fourth element can be referred to as apocalypticism. It is not just the death of the protagonist that we are presented with in the tragedy: in identifying with the protagonist who dies, we are also drawn into thinking about our own death.”¹¹⁶ As is visible in his plays, Eugene O'Neill often creates one character in his tragedy that represents O'Neill himself and, since he is mainly an autobiographical playwright, he only shows the version of the tragedy that is identified by him. As I examined before, he reflects himself in the characters of Orin and Edmund – both characters balance on the line of life and death. This deterioration from the traditional rules for creating a tragic protagonist shows the break from the classical as well as his establishment of the new freedom for the field of tragedy.

114. Bennett and Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 104.

115. Bennett and Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 104.

116. Bennett and Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 104.

7. Family Tragedy in the Author's Life

Eugene O'Neill, as an autobiographical playwright, drew certain elements of family tragedy from his own life and incorporated them into his plays. Many of his plays are reflections of his own memories that, consequently, gave birth to his the most autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

7.1 Eugene O'Neill and Long Day's Journey into Night

Similarly to James Tyrone, his father, James O'Neill, made his life as a one-role actor, dragged his mother on the tours, and became a heavy drinker. His mother, Mary Ellen Quinlan, is reflected in the character of Mary Tyrone who, after giving birth to her youngest child, became addicted to morphine. She also suffered from the death of her child in the same manner Mary did – when his older brother spread the measles on the baby. “O'Neill became convinced in the years to follow that his mother never forgave his older brother Jim, as he called him, for infecting Edmund; and he himself suffered from a tormenting mixture of survivor's guilt and death envy, later naming his autobiographical character in *Long Day's Journey* ‘Edmund’ and the dead child ‘Eugene’.”¹¹⁷ Jamie is an impersonation of his brother Jim who spoiled his childhood by introducing him to whores and alcohol, the addiction that killed Jim at the end.

Eugene's marriage life involved a tragedy as well which he, surprisingly, did not include in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. “The omission of such an important autobiographical details stems from O'Neill's guilt, his wish to erase the entire episode from his memory.”¹¹⁸ Right after his marriage to Kathleen Jerkins he left to Honduras. However, his marriage did not last long, and they were soon divorced despite Kathleen giving birth to his first son. We still could trace some autobiographical elements from this marriage in *Beyond the Horizon*.

“His direct use of this autobiographical material seems to have freed him psychologically to tell at last in undisguised fashion the story to which his whole career had been building, that of his own family.”¹¹⁹ Despite the family tragedy being the largest piece of his own life brought into his plays, he also derives the most longing dream of his suffering

117. Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts*, 34.

118. Berlin, *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Eugene O'Neill*, 32.

characters from his own experience – getting all the freedom beyond the horizon.

7.2 Culprits in His Plays and His Life

Eugene O’Neill proved himself to be able to put his life into his play, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. However, when comparing his choice of culprits in his family tragedy plays and his own life, as described by biographers and his friends, it shows that he started to insert pieces of his life into his plays since the beginning of his successful writing. In *Anna Christie* we discovered that the main culprit of a basically nonexistent relationship between Chris and his daughter Anna seems to be the sea that has a god-like quality in this play. O’Neill himself experienced a turn away from the faith after the discovery of his mother’s addiction and her eventual breakdown. “This unorthodoxy, revolt, seems not so much to have signified O’Neill’s rejection of religion as it mirrored his anguish at his own inability to confirm or deny the existence of god.”¹²⁰ He seems to use god as a presence to blame when there is nobody else to blame, but himself – just as Chris does blame the sea instead of his bad decision in the past. Anna as the main victim here seems to correspond with his mother as ‘a girl gone bad’ due to her abandonment by her father, in Ella’s case it is an abandonment by her husband.

Robert and Ruth relationship in *Beyond the Horizon* reflects his frustration in life with his wives. It could possibly connect Ruth with his first wife, Kathleen, however in reverse roles. O’Neill here tears himself into Robert, who wants to go beyond the horizon but stays, and Andrew, who never dreamt about leaving but is the one who departs. Since so little information about his secretive marriage is provided, it is difficult to determine whether O’Neill put himself into the later character of Robert or Andrew. The play also reflects his second wife, Agnes Boulton. As Ruth was impressed by Robert’s adventurous dreams, Agnes was in the same way impressed that O’Neill is a revolutionary. Also by making Robert abandon his dream, Ruth must know that she is marrying the worse of Robert and in the same way Agnes knew that she marrying Eugene with all his alcoholism

119. Porter, Laurin. “The Icemen Cometh and Hughie: Tomorrow is Yesterday.” In *Eugene O’Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom’s Modern Critical Views. New York, Chelsea House, 2007. Updated version. 14.

120. Esther M. Jackson, “O’Neill the Humanist” *The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter Vol.I* (September, 1977). http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/i_2/i-2b.htm (accessed August 13, 2018).

and flamboyancy. Surprisingly, the play also seems to capture his excitement for his second child, Shane, since Robert adores his daughter Mary. The tragic ending of this marriage and parenthood might show his starting trouble with Agnes and disinterest with his son as he puts all the blame on the Ruth in his play. “There is nothing new in discovery that the women in most of O’Neill’s plays are angels of destruction – especially in regard to the male characters”¹²¹, or if this is mirrored on his own life – to himself. The love relationship between Mat and Anna can be also compared to his first marriage. As this relationship in his play, *Anna Christie*, does not end in the complete tragedy and is merely a collapse caused by a freshness of this relationship. O’Neill also had to leave on voyage as soon as they got married – in the same way Mat leaves Anna. However, the play shows no direct blame of Anna which can be considered that O’Neill never blamed Kathleen for their break up as he never mentions her in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. Brother relationship in *Beyond the Horizon* reflects his link with his own brother, Jim, as O’Neill called him. The break between the brothers in the play might reflect the split between Eugene and Jim. The eventual death of Robert could be used as the ‘replay’ of the bad memories for Jim who was the cause of the death of their little brother. This death of the character, into which O’Neill put himself, could symbolize the death of a young innocent O’Neill who was eventually murdered by alcohol and vices introduced by his brother.

Mourning Becomes Electra is an extremely difficult to compare with O’Neill’s life since it is a play of masks and changing roles of a single character. As I deduced in my conclusion to this play, Christine is the victim in the play and O’Neill seems to reflect his own mother into this character. However, the Mannon curse, used in the play as a ghost the characters cannot escape to, can have two representations in O’Neill’s life – an addiction or solitude, eventually could be a solitude that leads to an addiction. The main blame in the play seems to be on the Ezra Mannon whose charges lie on spreading the Mannon curse on his wife and children. Brant could represent a morphine for Ella O’Neill as her secret lover whom she uses to escape to her solitary and tragic marriage. Christine rather dies than to live in her real marriage, therefore she ends her life in the suicide after

121. Martha Bower, “The Cycle Women and Carlotta Monterey O’Neill” *The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter Vol. X* (Summer – Fall, 1986). <http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/x-2/x-2f.htm> (accessed August 13, 2018).

Brant is murdered. O'Neill might have gave up on his mother's trials for release from her addiction – to him she eventually became the ghost itself as he later described in the final scene of *Long Day's Journey into Night*. However, with Lavinia he also shows us the second side of his mother. With Lavinia's stiffness and strictness she almost reminds of a nun version of Christine. However, both Lavinia and Christine are the same Ella O'Neill because it is their love for Brant that connects them. O'Neill compares two opposite sides of his mother – an addiction stuck ghost of his mother Ella and a young innocent convent girl. Despite these two sides being so divergent, O'Neill loses faith as he makes Lavinia accept the Mannon curse. In this play, the author seems to reflect himself in the character of Orin. He happens to be a poor victim of this family struggle who cannot decide whether to love his mother or his sister. The closeness between Orin and Christine could be a desirable vision for O'Neill as he wishes to have this type of relationship with his own mother. However, with Orin's suicide we can confirm that the morphine ghost of his mother cannot just disappear and it leads to the end of relationship.

As *Long Day's Journey into Night* is a fully autobiographical play, we do not need to compare this play and his life as it is watching the same thing on one stage. Only difference are the roles of dead Edmund and alive Eugene that are turned in the play. This reverse is the only sign in these plays where he blames his own mother for his ruined life. He wants to show that her mother would be lead to the addiction even if the small Edmund was alive. "He had put his father on the stage and called him a miser. He had put his mother on the stage and called her a dope friend. He had put his brother on the stage and called him murderous. And as if this weren't enough, he had put himself on the stage as a loving, innocent, unmarried, non-alcoholic victim of the other three."¹²² In general, O'Neill's convinced himself of his innocence in any matter that contributed to the tragedy of his life.

122. Linney, Romulus. "O'Neill" In *Eugene O'Neill*, edited by Harold Bloom, Bloom's Modern Critical Views. New York, Chelsea House, 2007. Updated version. 165.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore a traditional theme of tragedy of family in Eugene O'Neill's plays, to analyze the actions that led to tragedy, and find a possible culprit that put the first crack into the family bond. It also intended to find out whether Eugene O'Neill applied some repetitive pattern into this structure of culprits that would help us to understand motives for his commitment in these types of plays. At the same time, these deductions also provide a deeper insight into O'Neill's conception of his own family tragedy and confirm his post of an autobiographical playwright.

In my thesis, I managed to analyze the family tragedy and find an offender in most of the plays mentioned above. The second part of my goal was to find whether O'Neill keeps some repetitive pattern in his choice of culprits. Although I discovered some recurring elements in the plays (such as a mysterious power of god, search for beyond the horizon, or hiding in the fog), the cause of the tragedy is not really following any pattern. O'Neill uses similar characters and themes in his plays but outcome usually determines that in the end they differ. Despite this conclusion, we discover that Eugene O'Neill appeared to become an autobiographical author a long time before he wrote down his great autobiographical insight into one day of his younger family life, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. However, not only traits or actions of the characters show us resemblance to the actual people and events in O'Neill's life, but also the culprits of these plays reflect his attitude towards his own ruined family life.

When looking at Eugene O'Neill's plays, each of them can be read as a certain chapter or part of his life that he presents disguised in the storyline. When we look at the conclusions of the individual plays with the family tragedy theme and connect them not only to Eugene O'Neill's well-known life but especially to his personality and attitude described in biographical materials, we can see that O'Neill did not only put himself into the role of playwright, but also narrates how he sees his life from the position of an audience. However, this also means that we cannot judge these plays and characters properly since they have been already prejudged by O'Neill in the stage of its production. They are more like versions that are reflected from his mind, influenced by his emotional state and the way he saw these events to happen. That would mean that it is more like Eugene's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* since he tends to usually play the victim in all of

his tragedies reflecting his life. Like this we could also conclude that these are not the real culprits, but those who felt like ones to O'Neill.

After my comparison of these two main components of his life, that are actually interconnected, and investigation of the characters that O'Neill reflects himself into, it is visible that he keeps using one recurring element – blaming everybody but himself for his tragic family life. He portrays the accusation of his father for ruining his mother's life in plays, *Long Days Journey into Night* and *Anna Christie*. He also blames women, especially his wives, for his unhappiness and uses them as an excuse for his dissolute lifestyle. In the characters of Robert and Andrew from *Beyond the Horizon* he mirrors his approach towards his older brother, Jim. And when he runs out of people to blame, he turns to another thing that disappointed him in life – that seems to be god.

However, apart from himself, he seems to be more lenient with his mother when it comes to blame and guilt. It is difficult to determine what were his real feelings towards his morphine-addicted mother, but O'Neill reflects his mother into characters that internally suffer. His portrayal of her in the character of Christine from the play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, shows his contradictions about pity and revulsion to Ella O'Neill. Nevertheless, his positioning in the character of Orin, whose life ends in suicide after his mother's death, seems to either show his disappearance from this family life or his absolute breakdown after the discovery of his 'real mother'.

As was discovered in this thesis, O'Neill did not only create the character of Edmund based on himself, but he also puts parts of himself or his mind into the characters in other tragedies. However, all these Eugene-like characters are not strong or powerful men whose morality is never questioned. He always puts himself into the weakest and least visible characters in the plays – Orin is a weak man who gets very easily influenced and manipulated because of his love for both his sister and mother, Robert is also weak in the way he gave up on his dream as well as on his life, and finally Mat seems to leave just to not to be forced to take responsibility. All these characters also in some way contribute to the tragedy, however they seem to always be seduced into wrongdoings. Although, he seems to blame others for his ruined life and bad influence, the fact that these autobiographical characters always somehow contribute to the tragedy might serve as the most straightforward confession we can get from O'Neill.

Eugene O'Neill might have not used any repetitive pattern in the circle of culprits in his family tragedy plays, but instead he opened us a window into his life as he lived it himself. Despite this information being biased and fully subjective by O'Neill, it serves now as a proof for his choice of victims and culprits in his plays. The analysis in this thesis also shows how Eugene O'Neill left the traditional tragic heroes behind and departed on the new form of the tragic protagonist whose life blends in with others and every character becomes at least partly a villain as their world starts to fill with dire secrets, addictions and personal or public catastrophes.

Resumé

Cílem této práce je analyzovat element rodinné tragédie v hrách Eugena O'Neilla a najít případného viníka, který započal a následně způsobil rozpad rodinného vztahu. Dalším cílem je se pokusit objevit zda-li autor používá opakovaného vzoru ve své volbě viníků.

První část mé práce se prvně věnuje životu autora a poté chronologicky uvádí jeho produkci a ocenění, která mu byla udělena za literární jeho tvorbu.

Druhá část mé práce se zabývá rozborem rodinné tragédie na různých úrovních rodiny. Jako první se rozebírá tragédie na úrovni rodič-potomek ve hře Anna Christie, kde tragédie mezi Annou a Chrisem je způsobena nadpřirozenými silami, které se převtělily do formy moře. Druhou úrovní v mé práci je tragédie lásky a manželství. Hra Za obzor se věnuje s milostnému trojúhelníku mezi dvěma bratry a ženou, která následně způsobí rozpad bratrství, lásky a manželství. Avšak ve hře Anna Christie, element tragédie je způsoben nevědomím o osobní minulosti druhé osoby a podlehnutí rodinné kletbě. Poslední úrovní, kterou práce prozkoumává, je sourozenecká tragédie ve hře Za obzor. I přes to, že Robert byl schopen utéct z objetí tragédie, oba bratři jsou na vině za podlačení jejich přirozené povahy.

Třetí část práce se věnuje hrám Smutek sluší Elektře a Cesta dlouhým dnem do noci, které projevují rodinnou tragédii na všech úrovních. Ve hře Smutek sluší Elektře, která je adaptací Řecké tragédie, práce analyzuje scény, které způsobily tragédii, a vyhodnocuje hlavní vinu v neschopnosti přijmout smír, který by mohl ukončit tragédii. Cesta dlouhým dnem do noci je analyzována taktéž, avšak vzhledem k omezenému časovému intervalu hry a nevěrohodnosti postav nejsme schopni označit jednoho určitého viníka.

Poslední část této práce odkrývá rodinnou tragédii v autorově životě a porovnává ji s O'Neillovým autobiografickým dramatem.

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Annotation

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Title of Thesis: The Tragedy of Family in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill
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Abstract: The thesis is focused on the element of family tragedy which is used repetitively in the multiple plays of Eugene O'Neill. The focus of this thesis is to analyze the plays that include this element and find a culprit in each play. These culprits are compared in order to discover any repetitive pattern. The thesis also compares author's choice of villains to his own life.

Anotace

Autor:	Aneta Havlíčková (F150966)
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Abstrakt:	Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na element rodinné tragédie, který je základem několika her Eugena O'Neilla. Cílem této práce je analyzovat tyto hry a najít v každé tragédii hlavního viníka a zjistit zda-li O'Neill používá nějaký opakující se vzorec při volbě jeho viníků. Práce také porovnává tyto provinilce k autorově osobnímu životu.