ILLUSIONS-A VITAL NECESSITY FOR FLIGHT FROM REALITY FOR WOMEN: A STUDY ON WOMEN CHARACTERS OF EUGENE O’NEILL

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ABSTRACT
American drama depicts the quest for unattainable or pursuit of a dream but, generally speaking, this quest leans more towards despair rather than hope. Almost all the twentieth century American literature portrays this negative aspect of the dream, born of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with lofty ideals. It is however, in the plays of Eugene O’Neill that one finds this quest raised almost to a cult. Almost every major character, both man and woman displays a dream or a craving for the ideal that is outside the actual life. Throughout the plays, O’Neill constantly shows the ugliness of reality against the beauty of the dream. The restlessness and dissatisfaction with life ultimately leads the characters to go back to the search for the Garden of Eden which is full of love. The struggle for the realization of dream then becomes inevitable and mandatory for being alive. This aspect of O’Neill’s drama- the tragic tension between dream and reality is the major source of O’Neill’s greatness as a dramatist.

KEY WORDS: Illusion, O’Neill, dream, reality, Quest

INTRODUCTION
In today’s complex life, the quest for the unattainable takes several forms. Usually, man strives for what he does not possess. The poor wants to be rich, the rich to be powerful, the powerful to be happy, and so it goes on. Man always dreams, and this dream is hopeless and can never be realized. There is thus a built-in tension between hope and despair. Perhaps the most representative situation that a man faces is the discrepancy between dream and actuality, between the ideal that one visualizes and the instinctive and habitual ways of life. So the paradox is that, the dream becomes essential and must in one’s life, but one cannot surrender completely to the dreams or he cannot completely give up the dreams.

In spite of man’s awareness of the hopelessness of his struggle, he strives endlessly and dreams on for the lost paradise. Whether his dream comes into realization or not is not the issue for him. He keeps on dreaming without which man’s survival becomes questionable:
The image of paradise, in conclusion, helps to order on the physical plane of existence a desire for material ease without labour of hardship as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous existence; on the psychic plane, an infantile regression from the cares of adult life to the warm Nirvana of the womb or mother breast; on the sexual plane, a yearning for the frank, free affectional life prescribed by one's inner nature as opposed to the emotional starvation often felt in an over-rationalized civilization; on the moral plane, a wish to recapture the lost state of innocence which the adult abandons when he acquires a sense of guilt or shame (Sanford 18).

This is an analysis made on dream or quest given by Charles L. Sanford in The Quest for Paradise which is quoted by Venkateswarlu and other co-authors in the work Perspectives on Post-War American Drama.

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**O’NEILL AND HIS ILLUSION**

It is however, in the plays of Eugene O’Neill that one finds this quest raised almost to a cult. Almost every major character, both man and woman displays a dream or a craving for the ideal that is outside the actual life. Fate or circumstances play such a dominant role against the dreamers that the dream not only becomes impossible, but becomes the source of suffering and tragedy for the individual concerned. N.S Pradhan in his article *Quest for Paradise in Modern American Drama* classifies O’Neill’s plays into three groups based on three different treatments of the dream:

The first group, consisting of the sea plays, *Beyond the Horizon* and *The Fountain* depict the impossible, romantic dream, the dream of escape. In the second group, O’Neill turns from the dream to emphasize the ugliness of reality for which he chooses the American social scene. This group contains *The Hairy Ape*, *The Great God Brown* and *Macro Millions*. The third group deals with “the tragic defect of the romantic dream in actual life”. In this group *Lazarus Laug hed*, *Strange Interlude*, and *Mourning Becomes Electra* are to be taken as a trilogy (Venkateswarlu et al., 32).

Throughout the plays, O’Neill constantly shows the ugliness of reality against the beauty of the dream. The restlessness and dissatisfaction with life ultimately leads the characters to go back to the search for the Garden of Eden which is full of love. The struggle for the realization of dream then becomes inevitable and mandatory for being alive. This aspect of O’Neill’s drama- the tragic tension between dream and reality is the major source of O’Neill’s greatness as a dramatist. D.V.K Raghavacharyulu in his article *Achievement and Reaction: Eugene O’Neill* shows O’Neill as a searcher when he says:
He (O’Neill) was always searching for the missing elements in life with a restless curiosity and an uneasy consciousness of the penultimate quality of all human discovery. He moved swiftly from one horizon to another, continually looking beyond the horizon for a clue to the essence. If as a playwright he dramatized with a fascinating variety and ingenuity, the vision of the human torment, as a man of search of his soul, he also projected the torment of the vision. (Venkateswarlu et al., 39).

O’Neill’s characters, both men and women are preoccupied with this search of soul and the lost paradise and his plays attempt to reveal man’s struggle against the mysterious force that shapes his existence and limits him. O’Neill viewed the modern mass man as an uprooted being, uprooted from his own spiritual self, and from his spiritual past as well. All the lost souls in his drama have lost contact with the refreshing currents of Nature, and the remedy lies in a return to the earth – mother. He himself has considered his work as a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening to the American soul. With keen interest, he pursued the mystery that baffled him, the unity of life and art, and its meaning and beauty. Like O’Neill, his characters too are passionate pilgrims always in search of beauty both spiritual and artistic, as a means of triumphing over the betrayals of nature and the treacheries of life. In O’Neill’s words:

I’m always acutely conscious of the force behind- (fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it- mystery certainly)- and the eternal tragedy of man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression… This is the only subject worth writing about…. and it is possible- or can be- to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theater (qtd. in Gelb and Gelb 4).

O’Neill’s heroes and heroines are dreamers and they are always seeking more from life than life can offer them. They are incapable of reconciling themselves to the limitations of the world in which they live. The narrow confines of their environment irk them, and they dream always beyond the horizon into an imaginative world where everything seems to be beautiful and good. Living in these two extremes of reality and imagination, they are continually tortured by the passionate longing of their dreams and the grim reality of their immediate surroundings. The sad end of his characters is mainly because they were incapable of reconciling themselves to the reality of the world in which they actually lived.

As O’Neill has become aware of the multivalent inter-relatedness of illusion and reality in human destiny, he brings out the inner disorder of the human soul, which must either die of truth and disillusion, or live by hope and illusion. Whatever it may be, the soul never resists back nor withdraws from fighting towards its end:

But, in the end, his drama leaves the impression that the disaster which grew out of the dream was somehow a justification in itself, or if not wholly a justification, nevertheless an inevitable outcome of a particular type of human being (Winther 13).
The one and only affirmative philosophy which O’Neill wants to insist in the minds of the readers, is regarding the power of the illusion that leads man to deny the reality and its ultimate effect of meeting the tragic end. Therefore directly his philosophy insists the readers to accept reality and deny illusion which is impossible for every human being. Mankind is driven towards illusion unconsciously and this illusion takes different forms: love, fame, beauty, power, physical passion or something beyond the existence:

When his characters find themselves in the mid-region of illusion and reality they believe that they can bridge the gulf between the two by their “heroic” efforts. But a moment comes when the pressure of their new illusion breaks them emotionally and they submit to the inexorable processes of psychic compulsions (Goyal 117).

However, his plays also suggest the fact that man is prone to live in the world of illusion and it is this illusion that sustains his life in spite of the dreadful reality. His characters are forced to live in illusions and they require them unknowingly to live in this world when they are unable to face reality. O’Neill himself may have his own fondness for these same illusions, which made him forget all the complications that the tragic life has put in front of him. But, he has also tried to bring out the fact that too much of anything is fit for nothing. In the same way, too much of illusion destroys the happiness and leads to inevitable tragedy. From the early one-act plays to Long Day’s Journey into Night, all his characters both men and women follow the gleam of unreal ideals which finally brings disaster to them.

The essential feature of an O’Neill’s character is the tragic tension of opposites like love and disgust, conscious and subconscious, hallucination and veracity, search for self-realization and fantasy about himself. Illusion has become unavoidable in man’s life in this modern society and this is defined by Virginia Floyd in Plays of Eugene O’Neill as, “humanity’s desperate need for a life-sustaining illusion to lessen the despair of soul-destroying reality” (512).

Without a dream, life seems to be worthless. The alienated heroes and heroines have been struggling within a moral world which offered only suffering and sometimes a suggestion of mysterious affirmation. They seemed to struggle against illusions, and their struggle defined their dignity. For O’Neill, everything is an inevitable illusion, and the theatre has become the perfect place to exhibit his concepts and ideas. His characters consciously nourish illusions to make their life worth living. They hide their sorrows secretly and sympathize with each other’s illusion for their contented existence. At times, the characters take refuge in alcohol to forget the harsh reality and at times they get lost in their past histories or in the future dreams. In the words of Winther:

His characters live in two worlds: one, the outward world of physical reality, the other, a world of unfulfilled and passionate desire. This latter world is the one which the dreamer wishes for with all the pent-up powers of his being. To this world he will sacrifice all that life has given him, for there is nothing in life that for a moment is comparable to the genuine reality of his dream (A Critical Study, eOneill.com).
POETIC DREAMERS

His characters are poetic dreamers always dreaming about life beyond existence, fighting desperately to maintain the realities to reach the happy shore of their dreams. They are not satisfied with what they possess and there exist always the anomalies and longing for something beyond that lead them to destruction. This is evident from his characters from the early one-act plays to Mourning Becomes Electra, wherein all the men and women are caught by the romantic illusions that destroy the possibility of happiness. O'Neill tries to bring out that man is incapable of accepting the reality of the world as it is, and in that fact lies the seed of his inevitable tragedy.

In O’Neill’s play Strange Interlude, the tragic life of Nina, the heroine of the play is a fine example of how the illusions and the ideals have become interludes in the lives of human beings who rely too much on them without realizing the reality which life is offering. Nina’s tragic life was not the life which she consciously made. She was brought up by her father, a University Professor, in a home that was detached from reality. The atmosphere of the home and her father’s ideals made her to lead a secular life far away from reality.

Initially, she lived in an illusion that her father and his ideals were prefect and it was this belief that leads her to obey her father’s words in not giving herself to Gordan before he left for war. But she realized soon the false concept of his ideals and his over possessiveness of her and again she was driven towards the false illusion of giving herself to all the veterans. The denial of the fact here was if the professor had not interfered with her, she would have continued her remaining life as a widow with a child to care for. In her illusion, she neglected her father’s advice that she owed nothing to Gordon and that her idea of nursing the wounded soldiers as a compensatory relief for what she did not give was absurd. But Nina, failing to understand the reality, rushes into the fatal grip of another illusion which is more uncommon and tragic. In order to compensate for what she thought was her “coward treachery to Gordon”, she goes to serve as a nurse for wounded soldiers to make a gift of herself for their happiness “without scruple, without fear, without joy except in his joy” (647). But a year’s experience there leaves her more a prey to a guilty conscience than before and more determined to punish herself.

Nina’s second illusionary world of satisfying others by giving herself as a relief of her guilt also gets shattered when she finds that everything goes vain and without satisfying her wounded psychology. Finally, this disillusionment leads her to marry a man Sam Evans, again with a hope of bearing a child for him: “I only married him because he needed me- and I needed Children!” (687). But to her fate, this illusion, too, gets shattered when the truth of Sam’s family and the history of insanity is known to her.
In her disillusionment, Nina regards life as “just a long drawn outlie with a sniffing sigh at the end” (668). Again with an illusion of scientifically breeding a child of Ned Darell, she approaches him. But their experiment fails when she falls in love with him and bears a true child of Ned Darell. And in her final illusionary world, she finds that no single man can give her a sense of fulfillment. So, she had all her three men in her trap- Sam, her husband, Darell, her lover and Marsden, her father. She declares triumphantly:

My three men!..I feel their desires converge in me!.. to form one complete beatiful male desire which I absorb… an am whole… They dissolve in me, their life is my life… I am pregnant with the three!... husband!.. lover…father!.. and the fourth man!... litterman!.. little Gordon! He is mine too!.. that makes it perfect!(756)

Nina’s search for happiness seems to be complete when she has around her all that she needs for fulfillment as a woman – a husband, a lover, a father and above all a healthy son. It is unbelievable. She touches wood lest God-the-Father hears her happiness. But everything seems to be an illusion. Slowly one by one fade away in her life leaving her alone to face the fate. Darell, her lover goes back to his work; Sam, her husband dies; and Gordon, her son, flies with his beloved Madeline.

Anna in Anna Christie is also driven towards illusion and throughout her life, she keeps on running in search of existence. In every walk of her life, she is forced to confront with both reality and illusion. Her father, Chris Christopherson is of the opinion that farm is the land of protected life from “dat ole davil sea”. With this illusion, after the death of his wife, he puts Anna under the care of her cousins in Minnesota. The lines, “Ay tank it’s better Anna live on farm, den she don’t know dat ole davil, sea, she don’t know fader like me” (964) reveals his belief on land.

Anna, too, grows up with the same illusion that land might give her a peaceful life. But the atrocious reality, which she faces, fades all her illusions and it has turned a “Viking-daughter fashion but now run down in health and plainly showing all the outward evidences of belonging to the world’s oldest profession”(968). When she is under the care of her cousins, one of her cousins raps her. Then she escapes to St.Paul and takes up the job of a nurse to serve fellow beings, again with the hope that she can at least find her belonging here. But very soon this illusion also fades away and she realizes the boredom of life. In her own words:

Taking care of other people’s kids, always listening to their bawling and crying, caged in when you’re only a kid yourself and want to go out and see things (972).

She gives up this life and again enters the life of prostitution, which seems to offer an escape from the bondage of life. Thus, she keeps on running from one life to another with the illusion of seeking a secured life, but the reality is wherever she goes, “it was men again hanging around, bothering me, trying to see what they could get” (972).
Finally, she returns to sea to meet her father with the same thought of finding a secured life under the care of her father. Her dream of seeking happiness takes possession of her when she comes in contact with the sea. The moonlight and the fog play an important part in rousing her and making her feel an unearthly joy:

ANNA: (with a trace of strange exultation) I love this fog!... I feel as if I was- out of things altogether - But why’d you s’ pose I feel so- so- like I’d found something. I’d missed and been looking for- ‘s if this was the right place for me to fit in?... I feel clean. Somewhere- like you feel just after you’ve took a bath. And I feel happy for once (979).

Here again, her hope gets distorted when she meets Mat Burke and falls in love with him. Her vision of marrying Mat Burke and settling in life can also be put under illusion since it is not clear whether Anna will find redemption or it is going to be another trap.

Nina’s words “I’ll get a little house somewhere and I’ll make a regular place for you two to come back to wait and see ‘(1026), lead many critics to criticize the illusionary concept of the play that Anna’s marriage is hopelessly contrived and here it can also be predicted that marriage is nothing but a mere illusion for Anna where she is going to wait like the rest of the sailors’ wives for a long period with a hope that their husband will return one day or other. In the words of George Jean Nathan which is again quoted in J.Chris Westgate in Staging the Poor, Wicked Lot: O’Neill’s Rebuttal to Fallen Women Plays:

The happy ending is merely a comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence unwritten…. The marriage of Mat and Anna will be anything but a fairytale ending (The Eugene O’Neill Newsletter).

The happy ending of Anna may also be an illusion in different notion. Man and woman in love are usually or presumably happy at the time of the marriage without knowing the future happenings.

When Anna declares her love for Mat Burke, without knowing her past life, he accepts it and their passion continues up to a point of her confession of her past. When Mat comes to know that Anna is that kind of woman whom he had been used to hiring on occasions, he reacts violently and refuses to marry him. Here comes the true nature of Mat Burke. Later, his acceptance of Anna cannot be put under the character of broadminded ness or gentleness. It is nothing but his desire to possess her overpowers his real nature and compels him to accept her. Therefore, this kind of love cannot be expected to last for long. It might be Anna’s illusion that she is going to live a happy life after marrying Mat Burke. But to the readers it is clear that she is again going to suffer the life of alienation and in an illusion that her father and her husband are going to return some day. Charu Mathur’s statement “she is a woman who has been a prostitute once but is now living happily on her father’s barge and testifies to having preserved a virginal soul” (22 ) leads to an argument whether Anna is really going to lead a happy life in her future or it is going to be a mere illusion.
Like other heroines of O’Neill, Anna is the kind of prostitute who is philosophically conscious about her place in society and the immortality of her profession. But still she becomes a victim of dreams which every human being is prone for. Though she had been unfortunate in being deprived of the sheltering hand of her father in earlier years, and then becoming a victim of her cousin’s passion, she did have some opportunity to set right her life if she had realized her position. Instead of fighting for her life and preferring for some other profession, she decides to take the oldest profession. She did not mind or feel for it. In this reality, she tries to find contentment and peace for her soul. Again after being jailed for thirty days in St.Paul, she could not resist being a caged animal. Her soul, which is always longing for freedom, wants to fly out of it:

Others didn’t seem to mind being in the cooler much-some of ‘em was used to it. But me, I couldn’t stand it. I never could stand being caged up nowhere (970).

Being unable to withstand the life of a caged animal, she moves to the sea to meet her father with a dream that sea will purify her. It was at sea, she met Mat Burke and tries to unite her life again with the dreams of living a happy and secured life. Finally, when both her father and her husband leave her, she continues her life again with the dreams that they will return. Thus, she keeps on moving in her life with highly tormented dreams and her fulfilled sense of belonging is questionable.

Similarly, Abbie Putnam in Desire Under the Elms is a woman caught between illusion and reality and she tries to bridge the gulf between the two by struggling with her psychic tensions. By studying this character, one can find how in the event of the frustration of her illusionary hopes, she suffers from various complexes. Desire under the Elms is a play about a woman who runs from one illusion to another in her quest for belonging, “as the cold touch of reality disillusion her at every step” (Goyal 118).

Abbie is a woman of thirty five, full of vitality with unsettled, untamed and desperate personality. Her eyes are determined with illusionary hopes. Her unsettled and desperate appearance is due to her struggle in life and it is quite evident that in every step of her life she is confronted with her illusions and in every step she is disillusioned. Abbie is a girl who lost her parents and is forced to work into other men’s folk. From the beginning, she is deprived of her illusions and cheated. Her desire of living with her parents gets shattered when she is young and after marriage, her illusion of settling in her life with her husband is also under doubt when she realizes that he is a drunkard. Finally, after her husband’s death, this poor girl’s illusion of finding a place to belong has become a question. As she had no one to care for her, she has complete freedom to decide her own life. But soon she realizes that all her freedom is to work again “in other folks’ hums, doin’ other folks wuk” (339).

Again with a hope of finding a secured home, she marries Ephraim Cabot, a seventy- five years old tall and gaunt man. She marries the old man especially to possess the farm and the house of him. When she enters into her husband’s land with a desire of possessing both the farm and the home, her dreams are
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desperately shattered on seeing her husband’s third son eben and she learns that he is the right owner of the land. her intention of seducing eben is not purely due to his youth and her craze towards him. it is her illusion and desire of possessing the farm land that makes her seduce him:

this be my farm- this be my hum- this be my kitchen

y’ll never live t’ see the day when even a stinkin’ weed on it’ll belong t’ ye’ (339).

anything the eye can see falls prey to desire and this desire is the outcome of the illusion where the mind rejects to see the reality. therefore, abbie is also a type of woman who fails to see reality. if her mind had seen the reality, she would have realized the truth that a stepmother cannot have sexual relationship with her son and it is not loyal to bear a child for him.

when abbie and eben attempt to consummate their sexual union in a space formerly inhabited by eben’s maw, she feels the illusion of something present unseen. “when i fust come in – in the dark – they seemed somethin’ here” (353). the parlour was eben’s mother’s room, and the scene plays out as an exorcism for the dead. abbie claims to hear maw’s voice and tells eben what he must do. abbie uses illusionary concept of eben’s maw to fulfil her desire and it is the same illusion that makes eben finally to justify his act of embracing abbie. his words to abbie, “i see it! i sees why. it’s her vengeance on him (cabot) – so’s she kin rest quiet in her grave”(355) also reveals how eben, too, uses this illusionary concept to fulfil his desire.

the room where abbie and eben are sitting is where eben’s mother was laid after her death, and no one has used the room after that incident. her voice in the room is heard only by abbie and eben, but not the audience, and it directs eben to sleep with abbie as part of a revenge plot and abbie to accept eben:

eben – (with a strange look) maw’s gone back t’ her grave. she kin sleep now.

abbie – may she rest in peace! (356)

it is true that the perception of illusion serves at times as tool for oneill’s women to fulfil their desires and it also serves as escapism for them to live. but they also fail to realize the fact that it is the same illusion that dooms their life and leads them to tragedy:

oneill’s characters grope and flail and stumble in the dark, afraid to turn on the light, or having done so, they fear to confront what appears before them. the inability to see or to gain visual proof of what one sees, creates a context for tragic events (brietzke 169).

abbie’s act of seducing eben is an unconscious effort aroused due to her reconciliation of all opposites, such as conscious – unconsciousness, illusion – reality. throughout her life she had a tough time fighting between love and greed, illusion and reality. and when once she became conscious that her illusion cannot continue, there is no other go to her than to murder her child to prove her reality. both eben and
Abbie feel that even this act of cruelty could have been avoided, if Eben’s mother wouldn’t have gone back to the grave:

Eben : Maw, whar was ye, why didn’t ye stop her?

Abbie : (simply) she went back t’her grave that night we fust done it, remember’. I hain’t felt her about since (370).

Throughout Long Day’s Journey into Night, the present and the past have come together in the search for the cause of the present misery. Each Tyrone gives a heart – rending account of the past. James Tyrone tells about the poverty that made him a miser and caused him to latch on to the money making play, The Count of Monte Cristo, which destroyed his considerable talent. Edmund reflects on his days at sea and claims that “it was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death (812). And Mary Tyrone tells of her early days when she thought she’d be a nun or a concert pianist, but then she met the dashing actor James Tyrone and her life was changed forever. Not only in Long Day’s Journey into Night, but in play after play, characters seize an opportunity to tell each other their past stories, thereby, they seek a refuge from the present. Temporarily, it gives them relief from the present reality:

More often, retelling the past, they enable an ordering, albeit only temporary, of the characters’ sense of self, and thereby an escape from the present (Manheim 195).

Mary Tyrone of Long Day’s Journey into Night had dreamed in her young girlhood of becoming a nun or a concert pianist. But she can fulfil neither of her dreams since she had fallen in love with James Tyrone. For a certain time, she is quite happy. As days passed on, all the illusions of her happy married life got devastated and life became boring and dull for her. Being an actor’s wife, she has to travel with her husband on his road tours and stay in cheap hotels. This deprives her of a real home. Her husband prefers to stay in clubs or barrooms and she feels terribly lonely. Her sense of isolation and loneliness increases when she finds that she cannot communicate with the outside world. Her dreams get shattered when she realises that she has married a man beneath her status and she is unable to go out and meet people. She cannot invite her friends since she has no permanent home.

Haunted by an utter sense of loneliness and homelessness, Mary starts consuming more and more drugs so that she may live in the past which is the only reality to her. Mary longed to become either a nun or a pianist:

I had two dreams. To be a nun, that was the more beautiful one. To become a concert pianist, that was the other (777).
But the dreams of lost faith and spent talent are dreams of escape which affect her as the morphine does by pulling her from the present, from the house, from the irony of Tyrone’s buying property without providing a home, and from her indifference that is like hatred of her family.

Mary always lived in two different worlds. In one of her dreamy past world she is “the simple, unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl’s youthfulness she has never lost- an innate unworldly innocence” (718). In her dreamy world she always lived in her convent days, far from James Tyrone and the shabby hotel rooms that have been her surroundings throughout her married life. She has been always dragged between her adolescence and old age. When she is alone her fingers remain calm and relaxed. When “from the world outside comes the melancholy moan of the foghorn, followed by a chorus of bells, muffled by the fog, from the anchored craft in the harbour” (779), Mary’s face does not give any sign,” but her hands jerk and the fingers automatically play for a moment on the air …. She suddenly loses all the girlish quality and is an aging, cynically sad, embittered woman.” (779).

Mary’s shift from one role to another is given an emphatic treatment by using the movements of her fingers and reminding of her dream of becoming a concert pianist. In her monologue, she expresses her disillusionment. In her dream the Blessed Virgin consoles her, but even this Blessed Virgin is unable to cure from her dope fiend. To escape from the present reality, fog is a shelter for her which is both a disguise from the world and a symbol of her guilty escape.

Escaping from the reality, the characters are doomed to believe themselves and they fail to understand where they are at present. Mary Tyrone, who has been lost in her past, faces this plethora of suffering from believing herself:

How could you believe me – when I can’t believe myself ‘I’ve become such a liar I never lied about anything once upon a time. Now I have to lie especially to myself. But how can you understand, when I don’t myself. I’ve never understood anything about it, except that one day long ago I found I could no longer call my soul my one (769-70).

Mary’s life is almost a solitary life. For her the outer world simply means a place from where she can obtain drugs. To elevate past pleasures she tries to negate present joys. Mary, like Ella, loved to live in make – believe world. The romantic streak in her temperament prevented her from seeing the life as it is. On the contrary, she expected it to live up to her day-dreams. Both her dreams of becoming a nun and a professional musician are shattered and she attributed the cause of her failure to her marriage. Shrinking herself in the world of past she has lost her true self. This is reflected by Charu Mathur in Woman in the plays of Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams:

Mary Tyrone had certainly lost her “true self” in the world of illusions. Her extreme idealization of herself, her parental home and her father never permitted her to see her husband, sons and life in general in its correct perspective. She remembers having had in her girlhood a ‘real’ home yet the memory is illusory …
Idealizing herself as genteel convent-reared, unworldly girl she blames life that demands to be otherwise (63).

Before marriage, being an Irish girl, Mary Tyrone feels that she belongs to her native land. After her marriage and her migration to British, she constantly laments for a home, social acceptance and for her religious faith. In their centuries – long struggle with the British, the Irish were forced to relinquish their possessions and their rights. They surrendered everything but their faith. Therefore, Mary Tyrone’s long day’s journey ends in spiritual despair and she tries to fill the gap between spiritual vacuity with drugs and drink.

The fog which she loves is also an illusion because it hides her from the world of reality. It reflects her drugged state of mind:

It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more! (773)

She hates the foghorn since it reminds her harsh and nagging realities of life. The deepening fog, like the night, symbolizes the family’s hazy spiritual perceptions, but more specifically, it signifies Mary’s mental state. She is afraid of the present reality and so she dreads the sound of the foghorn. “It is the foghorn I hate. It won’t let you alone. “It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back” (773). Enshrouded in the shelter of fog, she is away from her family beyond their reach. “you can’t touch me now— I’m safe beyond your reach” (826). The backdrop of sea and fog against which the plays Anna Christie and Long Day’s Journey into Night take place symbolizes the mystery behind existence. All the searchers are bewildered wanderers in a fog of ignorance and illusions searching to belong - but to what?

In her life, she has learned that home is a place where one is never lonely. But in her husband’s summer house, she never felt the sense of belonging. “I’ve never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start. Everything was done in the cheapest way” (738). She tries to adjust with her present home and the loneliness, but she fails. Even when all the three men leave her alone to go to town, she pretends to be glad to be alone: then she laughs despairingly, “The mother of God why do I feel so lonely?”(771). Then in her frantic loneliness, she consumes drugs and hides herself and finds refuge and release in a dream where present reality is dismissed unfeelingly. Lonely and desperate for companionship, she always finds happiness in her illusionary world of her past and narrates her past story to her maid, Cathleen. Her present world is the dream of her past. In seeking her true self, Mary is looking for a self that does not exist. Repeatedly, she remarks that she cannot find her glasses and therefore cannot see to fix her hair. In other words, she cannot see what she is. She always lives with her past “dreaming and forgetting” (825).

Mary’s refusal of all her responsibilities has bred in her guilt she is incapable of bearing. The morphine must be used to wipe out “the pain—all the pain—I mean in my hands” (103). In the morphine trance, she moves gently back in time, seeking to recreate the illusions of a happier world, before there was a
past to make her what she has become. Her wedding dress is a symbol of something that never was a substantial reality. Her quest is for a hope lost, a goalless search for salvation never to be attained.

Mary’s return to her past is filled with memories of her relationships with the nuns, and she admits that she considered joining a convent at one time. She sees herself as an innocent school girl praying at the shrine of the Blessed virgin, long before the loss of faith, which she laments bitterly. She longs for some faith which she believes that she has lost. “If I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again!” (779). Then, derisively, she reasons that the Blessed Virgin would not be “fooled by a lying dope fiend reciting words” (779).

However, her dream is not enough to sustain Mary, and by the end of the play, illusion enshrouds her. She, who has been searching for her glasses throughout the play, is now a shattered glass. She yearns for something to make her feel complete:

What is it I’m looking for? I know it’s something I lost …… something I need terribly. I remember when I had it I was never lonely nor afraid. I can’t have lost it forever. I would die if I thought that. Because there would be no hope (825 – 26).

Mary seeks return to the virgin and a false escape from her married life through Morphine. While at the close of her play, Mary returns to her childhood faith, she does so in a disillusioned and drug- addled stupor. In her addiction, Mary has grown disconnected from her disappointed and bitter children, both of whom are morally weak and searching for some kind of mother- figure. She, psychologically, reverts to a past life in which her faith in the Blessed Mother was deeply felt and lived. She recalls her lost faith in the present tense by mentally returning to a time before her marriage, specifically, to her convent days. When Edmund tries to bring her back from the past, she briefly returns to lucidity but then slips back into her reverie of the past stating, “You must not try to hold me. It isn’t right, when I am hoping to be a nun” (826). The final curtain of the play falls on the most pathetic and terrifying scene in the entire canon. Mary has withdrawn into the dream of a past, when, as a convent school girl, she still had faith in virgin:

I knew she heard my prayer and would always love me and see no harm ever came to me so long as I never lost my faith in her (828).

In Mourning Becomes Electra, the misfortunes of the mannons are due to their inability to face the reality. From the beginning, the mannons live their life following the false puritan behaviourisms without knowing that man will be doomed to disaster if compelled to live within the confines of a limited creed. They never came outside except seeing the outside world through the coloured glass of the windows. They “shut up inside themselves, so in love with their own conception themselves that only a mirror image of that self can make a suitable mate” (Mathur 48).
The tragedy of Lavinia and her resolution to “live along with their dead, and keep their secrets” is purely due to the Mannon’s belief that their family has been cursed for generations and their illusionary concept of saving their family secrets. Both the mother and the daughter are unable to realize the reality that a daughter cannot steal the place of wife and vice versa. Though Lavinia hides herself from the puritanical inhibitions, yet her real nature longs for freedom and sensual love. She wears a mask of Puritanism and justifies herself that she embodies purity. Her real feminine attitude and her sensual love come out once she goes to the South Sea Islands. The Islands represent the land of freedom for her. In the Islands, she dresses herself in green and arranged her hair like her mother.

During her mother’s life time, Lavinia appeared to hate her mother but inwardly she adored Christina’s love and life. It is this attitude that is let out after her mother’s death and made her appear like her mother. The main reason for the tragedy of the Mannons, is that nobody loved the life of their own. Lavinia’s true motive behind the revenge of her mother is not because her mother cheated her father, but because of her infatuation towards Adam Brant, and this is clear when her tongue slipped the name of Adam instead of Peter. Her escapism has become a mere illusion. She is not able to hide her true self when it dominates her while taking the role of her mother. Even this role does not continue for a long time when she realizes that she cannot escape from the Mannons’ curse finally:

Trying to escape normal emotions “these women,” develop abnormal ones, so much so that even the nectar of paganism proves poison for them (Ahuja 128).

CONCLUSIONS

O’Neill’s women are cheated even by their motherhood. Abbie is much rejoiced after the birth of her child. But her happiness is very soon shattered bringing the tragic misunderstanding between Eben and her. Nina in Strange Interlude is also initially overjoyed by her pregnancy but she is shocked when the truth of her husband’s heritage of insanity is known to her. Then she is forced to abort her child. Similarly Mary’s life in Long Day’s Journey into Night is totally collapsed after the death of her second son. Even the birth of her third son does not give her much satisfaction as it results in her morphine addiction. Normally giving birth to a child is quite natural for a woman and the psychologists and feminists view that a woman’s needs are satisfied by her quest for a mate and child rearing. Even this basic requirement seems to be an illusion for O’Neill’s women.

REFERENCES


