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Female Social Conventions in Plays of Eugene O'Neill

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Pamela Wells

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Pamela Wells

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Masters of Arts, hereby recommend acceptance of this thesis

Ayesha Ramachandran - Advisor
Assistant Professor, English Department

Helen Onhoon Choi - Reader
Assistant Professor, English Department

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

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This paper explores the plays of Eugene O’Neill through the eyes social conventions. Social conventions are infused within and influence individuals in all walks of life. Authors, as well, record these social conventions in their writing, either consciously or subconsciously. Studying these social conventions can give us a new perspective of man during different periods of history. In the plays *Anna Christie, Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Eugene O’Neill’s female characters display attributes that stray from what society believes as acceptable behavior for woman. These unwritten rules of behavior I call social conventions. This paper examines the female social conventions of 1850-1930 and then discusses them in the above plays by O’Neill.

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I. Introduction

In 1924, Eugene O'Neill told us in an interview, "I do not write with a premeditated purpose. I write of life as I see it. As it exists for many of us." (Bird 52). Life in this instance can have many meanings. At the basic level, it can refer to how we go about our daily lives. It can also refer to the sequence of events that make up a person's existence, their lifespan. However, life itself is propelled by unwritten rules, conventions that many accept without question.

Societies are forever evolving and as they evolve, so do their conventions. However, often times it is difficult to let go of the conventions that we have known since birth and that are taught to us by our parents. One example of such a shift is the beginning of the women's rights moment. The women's rights movement is not just an effort to obtain equal rights, but it is an effort to alter the way woman are thought about in society. Overcoming definitions defining different groups of people are often difficult to alter. This is because they become part of our psychology, a subconscious judgment of an individual based solely on preconceived notions taught to us by our parents and teachers. These preconceived notions, related to an individual's psychology, I define as social conventions.

Literature is often a source of these social conventions. Historians can look at literature in order to image how individual groups are treated in a given time span. This paper will look at social conventions in the plays of Eugene O'Neill with an emphasis on female social conventions.

O'Neill tells us he writes with no premeditative purpose. In a 1920 interview with Olin Downes, O'Neill commented, "I have never written anything which did not come directly or indirectly from some event or impression of my own, but these things often develop very differently from what you expect" (11). O'Neill's admits his writing contains his impressions and experience, but it is as if he does not recognize himself in his work until the end. The insertion of an impression into a piece of writing may very well constitute the insertion of a social convention. In *Anna Christie, Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, one can find the social conventions associated with women during the time in which O'Neill wrote. These social conventions are recognized in each play's female characters breaking with them. O'Neill's women are depicted as individuals who step out of their conventional roles. They are depictions of women who do not fit the idea of what a proper woman is supposed to be. They are unconventional women, who do not adhere to what is thought of as appropriate behavior. O'Neill's insertion of social conventions may be unintentional, but the sheer fact that O'Neill writes from his life experience implies the presents of social conventions.

In this paper, I will define the social conventions used by O'Neill by looking at primary source non-fiction writings as well at literature produced during the time period of which a particular convention is prevalent. For our purposes we will be reviewing both fiction and non-fiction works in order to determine the various conventions that would be know by O'Neill, either consciously or subconsciously. We will then review three of his plays, looking for the female conventions in each one.

II. Feminist writings in historical and critical perspective

In order to examine O'Neil's works for social conventions, it is important to examine the society in which he lived. For the purposes of this paper, we will examine several literary and non-fiction works of the period, using these works to establish the expected roles of women just proceeding and during the time period in which O'Neill wrote. The examination of writings before the period which he wrote demonstrates the progression of female social conventions, which evolve during O'Neill's lifetime. The passages chosen are popular, well known works and it is most likely that they were personally known to or the ideas they convey are familiar to O'Neill. In addition, it is historically documented that O'Neill studied both Shaw and Ibsen (Estrin XXV).

Feminine social conventions evolve throughout this seventy year period of time. Women of the mid-nineteenth century are seen as not fit to hold property, employment or their own mind. They are not believed to have more ability than a young child. The ideal woman of this time is an obedient wife and is expected to follow her husband's every command. This society has "a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man" (Stanton 59-60).

As we progress towards the 20th century, men such as John Stewart Mill begin to see the woman's role as valuable and necessary to the household, however, the woman is still thought to be better left in the home. By 1875, women such as Susan B. Anthony began to gather at conventions to promote woman's rights. The need for woman's rights is fueled by a need to cleanse society of sinful practices such as drinking and promiscuity. The mere fact that women begin to protest helps to break the times female social conventions. Later etiquette books such as Talmage's *The Wedding Ring* follow this idea of 'social purity' by promoting both male and female chastity. Women are seen as the guardians of morals and if allowed equal rights to men, would improve the morals of society. In addition, *The Wedding Ring* reflects and perpetuates female social conventions prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century, defining the female as a chase, dutiful wife, mother and homemaker. Unlike the mid-nineteenth century woman that is depicted as helpless, the late nineteenth century woman can be trusted to police her own morals and chastity.

In addition, during this period authors such as Ibsen and Gilman write about the mental freedom of women. Women are evolving into intelligent beings, which need physical as well as mental freedom. Ibsen presents the problems of breaking free of old conventions, questioning if a woman that puts herself first can function in a traditional society or will have to cast herself away from all she has known. Authors such as Shaw question the idea of morality itself and candidly present the poor choices a woman has to support herself.

At the dawn of the 20th century, activists such as Goldman and De Bois explore changing female conventions, calling for society to accept the new working woman and not to pass judgment on her. Margaret Sanger challenges women to take back their own bodies with birth control, citing that preventing unwanted births would improve society as a whole. Women are now becoming capable of policing their own morals. However, etiquette books, which are mirrors for the conventions of society, insist young woman still need a chaperone.

a. Stanton's Declaration & Mill's Defense of Women

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born October 16, 1888 (Estrin XXV). Just 40 years earlier, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the essay *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*. This essay, modeled after the *Declaration of Independence*, outlines the wrongs perpetrated against women by men. Stanton's criticism includes the legal ramifications of the institution of marriage itself stating, "He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead." (Stanton 59). Stanton's statement is referring to the English common law enacted in all US colonies and states in the mid-nineteenth century, which declared women to have no legal standing once they are married. "Women were not allowed to own property or land or to control their own assets" (Offen). This inability to own property or to make her own financial decisions affects her in two ways. First, it renders her under the control of her father, husband or brother despite her age or education. Second, it equates her to a child and releases her from the responsibility for her own actions.

Stanton addresses the laws which take the responsibility out of the hands of woman: "He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming to all intents and purposes, her master – the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement" (Stanton 59). Stanton uses the example of criminal behavior to hyperbolize the convention of male only ownership. Her statement provokes the imagery of a woman robbing a bank or taking a life under the watchful eye of her husband in order to create a rhetorically pathetic appeal to her audience about the injustice of the current laws. Stanton's strong appeal exemplifies the emotions of the woman during this period of zero ownership rights.

Although the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, for which *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* was written, "formally initiated the struggle for women's equality and justice" (McMillen 69); the struggle for women was far from over, especially in Great Britain. Twenty-one years later John Stewart Mill, an Englishman, wrote a book entitled *The Subjection of Women,* which compares a woman in Great Britain to a "bond-servant": "The wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called" (Mill 79). Mill's lament, some twenty years later, echoes Stanton's; indicating social change for women was and would be a long, hard journey. Like Stanton, Mill uses a pathetic appeal to emphasize his point, invoking the imagery of a woman in shackles being dragged along by her husband. This imagery provokes sympathy for women and is an example of the emotions created by the injustices towards women that we see during this period.

In Mill's book, he examines the roles of men and women in the household, concluding that "the man earn[ing] the income and the wife superintend[ing] the domestic expenditure, seems…in general the most suitable division of labour between two persons." Mill goes on to state that the role a woman possesses in the household in actuality takes more "bodily and mental exertion" then a man's occupation (81). In addition, Mill debates the issue of a woman working outside the home, stating that although it gives her independence it can also strengthen the dominance of her husband. Mill fears that this may result in a woman being forced to work, while still expected to take care of the home and children. This situation could ultimately be to a child's detriment (Mill 81). Although Mill defends the domestic work of women, his debate misses the point of true equality. This is because he continues to place women into predefined roles instead of exploring the possibility that women can be afforded not only the same rights as a man but the same social definition; namely, the right to choose their role in the household.

b. Anthony's Moral Solution

In 1875, just thirteen years before the birth of O'Neill, Susan B. Anthony wrote her essay, *Social Purity*. *Social Purity* discusses women's rights as a necessity for improving society's morality. Anthony believes that "whoever control[s] work and wages, control[s] morals" (Anthony 90). Anthony advocates for equality in education, equality in marriage, suffrage, and equal representation in government for women in her essay (Anthony 89-91). The desire for representation in government she expresses as the most urgent need because men, who have lower moral standards than women, were more likely to engage in prostitution and abuse alcohol. Anthony spoke out about the abuse of liquor and the subsequent abuse of women and children because of it (86-87).

Anthony's argument for women's equality is justified by the need of social morality. Her need for social morality suggests a male stereotype or convention. The description of men as immoral abusers of alcohol and prostitution suggest they are moralistically inferior. Anthony's essay suggests that women, by nature, have more control over their impulses or have no draw to the evils of salacious sex and liquor. Therefore, men have less control over their impulses, which could be interpreted as a manifestation of the Freudian Id. Following Anthony's logic, we can conclude that women are the 'better' or superior sex. This suggests that activists of the period felt women were superior to men on a humanistic and moralistic level. This is an evolution from Stanton's *Declaration* which calls for emancipation and equality for the female. Perhaps Stanton uses morality as a justification for equality because it is a position that cannot be argued with. However, the intent of a position and what it communicates are two different things. With her speech, Susan B. Anthony places the idea in our heads that woman are moralistically superior.

Anthony goes on to discuss the limited job opportunities for women. During this discussion, Anthony points out the problem of harsh working conditions for meager salaries: "Society, ever slow to change its conditions, presents to these millions [of women] but few and meager chances. Only the barest necessaries, and often times not even those, can be purchased with the proceeds of the most excessive and exhausted labor". Anthony laments that the only way to support one's children is often to either stay with an abusive husband or to prostitute oneself in order to earn sufficient wages (Anthony 89). Again, Anthony's goal is 'Social Purity,' suggesting that higher wages and better jobs for women would improve society's moral fiber. Identifying prostitution as the women's highest paying profession suggests women of the 1870s are valued foremost as sexual outlets. Similarly, Anthony's discussion of abused women suggests that women were in addition outlets for male aggression and the male desire to dominate. The female social convention at this juncture appears very black and white, a woman's choice limited to submitting to the authority of her husband or engaging in prostitution.

The women's rights movement is not the only source of social impressions during this period. Fiction works can be examined as well to help us define conventions of appropriate female behavior. We will look at three fiction authors, Ibsen, Gilman and Shaw in our quest to define female social conventions of the period.

c. Ibsen and the emancipation of self

Eugene O'Neill was educated at several boarding schools in New England and in New York from 1895 – 1906. During this time he studied a vast array of literature, including Ibsen and Shaw (Estrin XXV). Henrik Ibsen, in 1879, wrote the ground breaking play, *A Doll's House*. The play portrays a woman in the act of transforming her feminine role in society from a dutiful wife and mother into a woman who lives solely for herself and to gratify her own wants and needs.

A Doll's House opens with the portrayal of a woman, Nora, completely under the influence of her husband. Her husband, Helmer, refers to her as a "little squirrel" and a "little skylark" (Ibsen 4). The use of the word "little" suggests two things. First, it refers to the smaller stature of Nora to her husband Helmer. This logically could also refer to the smaller stature of a woman biologically to a man. Second, the use of the word "little" relates Nora to a child or pet. Helmer's nicknames "skylark" and "squirrel" both portray Nora as a pet; the helpless nature of these two animals defining her as a child.

Despite Nora's character being defined as a small, helpless child or pet, Nora has a secret. Her secret, that she deceitfully borrowed money to finance a trip to restore her husband's health, gives Nora her first taste of independence. Although Nora is still portrayed as naïve when it comes to her dealings with Krogstad, she nevertheless is seen as a voice of protest to the laws of man from the perspective of a woman's logic. In Act I, Krogstad comes to Nora with a proposition, "Mrs. Helmer, you will kindly use your influence on my behalf…You will kindly see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank" (Ibsen 22). Krogstad's use of the phrase "you will" suggests he believes he can control or dominate Nora. In response to this domineering request, for the first time we see Nora with back bone, staunchly standing up for herself, "If you speak slightly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house…I am not afraid of you any longer" (Ibsen 22). Nora's assertion that she will remove Krogstad from the house suggests power over and ownership of the house, a deviation from the social convention of the time which states men control all properties and assets.

As I mentioned earlier, Nora's transformation is not perfect one, her character is still flawed with the sense she is naïve. When confronted by Krogstad with the knowledge that he can prove Nora forged her father's signature, Nora immediately confesses, "It was I who wrote father's name". Next, when she is accused of legal fraud by Krogstad she replies, "I couldn't take that into account; I didn't trouble myself about you at all" (Ibsen 25). Nora's immediate confession suggests a disregard or lack of knowledge about laws that can hurt her. Her statement that she did not take Krogstad into account implies she did not realize he may later have leverage to hurt her, but it also implies a lack of disregard and disrespect for his person.

Nora's reasoning, despite its naiveté, suggests a woman's reasoning. Nora takes into account motives of a person's actions, an emotional reasoning that would be associated with a woman: "…it must be a very foolish law…Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about the law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that" (Ibsen 26). Nora reasons that man, i.e. the male patriarchy, could not prosecute her for a false signature because her forgery was to spare two men, her father and husband. This logic suggests two things. First, it suggests that the laws of man could not be written to hurt other men. Second, it suggests that law is malleable, able to take shape around a situation. Of course, students of both law and literature know this to be untrue. However, although Nora's logic could be defined as illogical, it reflects a woman's perspective. Nora, in the role of wife and mother, defines herself by how she meets the needs of others. In this line of logic, the law, like Nora, should exclusively consider the needs of others. Nora has no experience with a perspective that puts her first and therefore cannot imagine a definitive law that is first and foremost. Her perspective is less naïve and more socially constructed because of the social conventions she is initially labeled with.

Nora's transformation of self, or her liberation from female social conventions, is ultimately completed when she leaves her husband and children. Her abandonment is essential for her liberation. In Act III, Nora defines her previous life: "…our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was father's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it was great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald" (Ibsen 66). This speech reflects the Nora that is defined in the very beginning of this play, a Nora that is a childlike plaything for her husband, a Nora without a will of her own. The memory of her use of free will, i.e. the taking of the loan, frees her from the doll house that society has caged her in. She is finally able to exit the doll's house and step into the world on her own terms, thinking only of herself: "I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me…I only know it is necessary for me" (Ibsen 67). When asked by Helmer about her duties to her husband and children, Helmer is bewildered by her claim of "other duties": "I have other duties just as sacred." These duties Nora defines as "Duties to myself" (Ibsen 67). The duty to self that Nora professes to desire is incomprehensible to Helmer. This is because in his male dominated world, within the society in which lives, a woman's exclusive duty is to take care of her husband and family. Women who do not do this, as Anthony revealed to us earlier, may have little choice but to become whores. These two definitions of women appear to be the dominant alternating definitions of women in Victorian society. During this time, a woman could be defined either as a dutiful wife and mother or a degenerate woman, a whore.

Nora's choice of abandonment produces the ultimate conundrum, and asks the question, Can a women be free and be a wife and mother? This is a question that Victorians debating woman's rights were undoubtedly wrestling with. This play presents this question in a way that leaves both parties blameless; Nora cannot be blamed for the desire for the liberation that men already possess and Helmer cannot be blamed for wanting Nora to remain in the role of dutiful wife and mother, a role that dominates the society in which he lives.

The turn of the 19th century brought with it new ideas. Two works of literature that came out of these ideas were the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892) and the play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by George Bernard Shaw (1894).

d. Gilman and women's psychological health

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman explores her own 'madness'. The short story is based on Gilman's experiences with a disease referred to at the time as neurasthenia, in which she was prescribed a 'rest cure'(Freedman 'Introduction: The Yellow' 128). This same 'rest cure' is prescribed to Jane, the narrator of Gilman's tale. Jane is a woman trapped in the confines of her conventional female role, and like Nora in Ibsen's tale, goes through a transformation. However, unlike Nora's transformation into a free woman; Jane transforms into a woman driven mad by her societal constraints. The tale opens with Jane identifying her situation in reference to those who surround her. Jane feels that something is wrong with her but her husband and brother both agree she has "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency" and prescribe "tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise" and is "absolutely forbidden to 'work'" until she is well again (Gilman 1). Jane at the beginning of this story is surrounded by male figures that diagnose her mental state and by doing so control her mental state. From the beginning, Jane argues against her husband and brother's position, stating, "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (Gilman 1). The repetition of the word 'personally' suggests the Jane's strong opinion, however it is never expressed verbally to any of the other characters. Essentially, Jane holds all of her opinions inside, unable or unwilling to express them. She later repeats this pattern of behavior when it comes to her obsession with the yellow wallpaper that lines the walls of her room. Although she forms opinions about the paper she does not share her ideas with her husband. Throughout the tale none of her opinions are openly discussed, they are only discussed in her secret diary, which is the text of this story. The constraints under which her opinions are held suggest a jailing in not just the physical sense, but in the mental sense as well. Jane is completely locked down by the constraints of her society.

Similar to Nora in *A Doll's House*, Jane is referred to by her husband John as a "little girl" (Gilman 8). When Jane asks to be taken away because she feels she is not getting better, she is told by John, "Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you" (Gilman 9). According to John, his opinion should be taken as law because he is a doctor. John's repetition of the word "dear" can be interpreted as condescending. Jane's husband John is essentially telling her how she feels. And in doing so literally changes Jane's opinion about her own physical state. After arguing her appetite "is worse in the morning" when John is away, Jane then recants, stating, she is "better in body perhaps--" (Gilman 9). This recant illustrates Jane's mind is easily manipulated and changed to support John's will.

As Jane’s obsession with the yellow wallpaper continues to build, she begins to see a woman in the wallpaper: “The front pattern does move – and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!...And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through the pattern – it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads” (Gilman 12). In this quote, the narrator indicates there is a woman trapped behind the patterns of the yellow wallpaper; this woman shakes the paper to try to free herself from it. This entrapment parallels Jane’s own feeling of entrapment. The fact that no one could climb through it suggests Jane’s hopeless in being free to make her own decisions. The multiple heads represent the multitude of woman in her situation. This strangling pattern in the wall paper is established social conventions.

By the end of this story, Jane transforms into the woman behind the paper. On her way to this transformation, Jane first attempts to capture the woman behind the paper, to prevent her from escaping: “If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!”. This wish to tie up the woman behind the paper suggests that Jane is afraid of freedom from the pattern or similarly possessing her own mind. Next, she begins to peel off the yellow wall paper and while doing so she notices “creeping women” outside her window. The creeping women she refers to are women who have freed themselves from their societal constraints, but are ‘creeping’ because they have freed themselves in secret. This is much like what Jane does throughout the story, in the form of her journal. The story is Jane’s journal, and in it she expresses her displeasure and unhappiness towards her husband’s treatment of her.

Finally, Jane becomes the woman who has escaped the paper: “I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?” but has tethered herself with her rope stating, “you don’t get me out in the road there!”. Jane continues to express her fear of going outside stating: “I don’t want to go outside. I won’t, even if Jennie asks me to. For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow. But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I can’t lose my way”(Gilman 14-15). Jane stating “everything is green instead of yellow” expresses Jane’s fear of change from what is familiar to her; the outside being green, the inside representing yellow. Jane is familiar with her current role and to deviate from it is frightening. Similarly, her comfort with the room expresses comfort with her current social role. The act of circling the room is representative of continued patterns of social conventions for women and the inherited cycle that keeps them repeating those roles.

In addition, in this passage the outside is representative of outward expression of independent thought and the room in which she creeps is her secret diary in which she expresses her opinions without any ones knowledge. Although she is frightened to express her outward thought, we see this by her tethering of herself, she also struggles inwardly with the desire to be free, her last words to John being: “I’ve got out at last…in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (Gilman 15). Jane’s transformation into ‘other’ is indicated through referral to herself in the third person. She is no longer Jane, but the woman freed from the wall paper. As this woman, she wants to remain free, having destroyed her cage by literally pulling it off the wall.

e. Shaw’s Socialist Message

George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession,* questions the definition of morality. His play focuses on female morality and the morality of the world’s oldest profession, prostitution. Shaw was a Fabian Socialist[1]: “I was a Socialist, detesting our anarchical scramble for money, and believing in equality as the only possible permanent basis of social organisation, discipline, subordination, good manners, and selection of fit persons for high functions” (Shaw, *Mainly*, 7). Shaw detests the capitalist system that allows competition for wealth, what he refers to as the “anarchical scramble”. In this statement Shaw is advocating for equality in every aspect of life, in social life, in work life, in government and on a personal level, which he defines as “good manners”. When Shaw asks for equality in work, he is asking for equal respect for all professions. As a Socialist, Shaw does not necessarily believe in equality for women, he instead believes in equality for all. Agenda aside, Shaw’s plays, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* being just one of them, contributes to the discussion of social conventions at the turn of the century, in this case, particularly for women.

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[1] For more on Fabian Socialism see: Pease, Edward R. The History of Fabian Society. 3rd ed. London: Frank Cass & Co, 1963.

Shaw's play portrays an independent, self sufficient woman, Kitty Warren. Kitty is a refined socialite, who supports herself without the help of a man. However, Kitty earns her money in a disreputable way; she is a prostitute who over time has been able to establish a cathouse of her own. Although Kitty's profession is unsavory, it is an equal opportunity profession, one where a woman has the potential to earn as much income as a man. Shaw therefore envisions a society where a woman has equal wage earning potential. Shaw perhaps chooses prostitution to shock his audience, but also to question definitions of morality and the way "immoral" professions are portrayed.

Shaw's play also reflects the society that surrounds him. He is pointing out the limitations that society has placed on women in the workplace. Kitty, in the following passage about her sisters, discusses the work choices for women at the turn of the century:

> They were the respectable ones. Well, what did they get by their respectability? I'll tell you. One of them worked in a whitelead factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week until she died of lead poisoning. She only expected to get her hands a little paralyzed; but she died. The other was always held up to us as a model because she married a Government laborer in the Deptford victualling yard, and kept his room and three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week – until he took to drink (Shaw, *Mrs,* 38).

When Kitty states her sister's were "respectable" she is expressing a condescending attitude towards social conventions. Kitty is asking in this passage, does a woman have to die for respect, does she have to be abused? Shaw uses this passage to emphasize the alternatives to Kitty's chosen profession. He is questioning the social conventions that define respectability for women by recounting horrible situations women put themselves through in order to retain their respect. Shaw's play paints a clear and honest picture of the working conditions for women during this period. He hopes the shocking truth will shake his audience and perhaps effect social change.

Our discussion will now move to an etiquette book written during this time period. Etiquette books are excellent sources of social conventions; they are tangible accounts of what is expected of a person in their society.

f. Talmage and the ideal etiquette

In 1896, T. De Witt Talmage wrote an etiquette book entitled *The Wedding Ring*. This etiquette manual was meant to be a guide book for women on the verge of marriage. Talmage's manual promotes the chastity of the young eligible woman: "I applaud the celibacy of a multitude of women who, rather than make unfit selection, have made none at all. It has not been a lack of opportunity for marital contract on their part, but their own culture and refinement and their exalted idea as to what a husband ought to be, have caused their declinature" (Talmage 25). Talmage in this passage praises chaste women who have reserved themselves for their wedding night. However, Talmage states chastity is the key to finding an equally chaste man. This suggests that Talmage believes that both men and women should be equally moral, which would coincide with Anthony's agenda to use women's equality to boast social morality.

In the section entitled "Duties of Wives to Husbands," Talmage urges a woman to keep a nice home: "I charge you, my sister, in every way to make your home attractive… The holy art of making the most comfort and brightness out of the means afforded, every wife should study" (Talmage 87). In this passage, Talmage defines the ideal wife as being a good homemaker. Talmage states "I charge you," indicating he is bestowing a duty on women to clean their home. This Talmage calls a "holy" art, suggesting that making one's home neat is a divine or religious experience. It also suggests a person is pious or moral in the religious sense if they clean their home. The fact that Talmage states all of this is something a wife should study suggests it is her duty or profession exclusively.

Talmage goes on to voice his opinion on woman with a career: "But my opinion is that the woman who can reinforce her husband in the work of life and rear her children for positions of usefulness is doing more for God and the race and her own happiness than if she spoke on every great platform and headed a hundred great enterprises" (89). Again, Talmage here by using "God" is suggesting a religiously moral obligation for a woman to remain at home and take care of her family. When he states this is for "her own happiness" he suggests if a mother works, she will be unhappy. Talmage is slightly redeemed when he suggests that a woman is reinforcing her husband and is responsible for rearing "her children for positions of usefulness" by indicating she has a purpose.

This passage reinforces the idea that a woman's career is to be a dutiful wife to her husband and a dutiful mother to her children. This manual for women supports and perpetuates the female conventions of the period, stating that the ideal woman is chase, a good mother and homemaker. It reflects the moral majority of the time period.

g. Goldman and the Dawn of the Twentieth century

In 1906, Emma Goldman published an article in *Mother Earth* entitled "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation". This article evaluates the women's movement thus far. Goldman writes: "The problem that confronts us to-day, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be oneself, and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own innate qualities…The motto should not be forgive one another; it should be, understand one another" (Goldman 169). Goldman is not only calling for woman's equality, but the understanding and acceptance of the women as human beings. In this segment she also grapples with the idea of being 'oneself,' and receiving the respect of others, something she dubs as 'oneness' with others. Goldman here is communication the need for a spiritual connection.

Goldman's article criticizes those such as Susan B. Anthony, who moralize politics, believing woman in politics will improve conditions: "politics is the reflex of the business and industrial world…There is no hope that even women, with her right to vote, will ever purify politics" (Goldman 170). She further criticizes a woman's new ability to choose a profession because they are not trained as well as men or respected in the male fields of doctors, lawyers and engineers. She points out the only jobs women qualify for are factory or sewing jobs that pay poorly and are not enticing (Goldman 171). Goldman goes on to note women's strides towards external tyrannies, but points to

> the internal tyrannies, far more harmful to life and growth, such as ethical and social conventions, were left to take care of themselves…Until woman learn to defy them all ['public opinion', 'busybodies,' 'moral detectives'], to stand firmly on her own ground and to insist upon her own unrestrictive freedom, to listen to the voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child, she cannot call herself emancipated (Goldman 173).

Goldman, echoes Gilman's message in "The Yellow Wallpaper" regarding the psychological emancipation of women and of all of society. Goldman believes if a woman cannot be herself because of the fear of social critics; a woman can never truly be emancipated. Goldman cites that a woman should be allowed "to listen to the voice of her nature". This suggests a woman should not be dictated to by social conventions but should be able to act in a way suitable to her own set of person ideas. Goldman also advocates for a woman's ability to choose the man she loves and to give birth to a child. This right to control birth is what Margaret Sanger is famous for and will be part of our discussion of the 1920s.

h. The Dawn of the 1920's

The 1920s represents a decade of great change in the United States. The ninetieth Amendment was passed granting women the right to vote. The American birth control league was founded (Drowne and Huber xviii-xx). Despite these great strides of social change for women, social conventions defining women still fueled the individual world view.

In 1919, W.E.B. Du Bois penned a book entitled *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil.* In this book he defines the 'Damnation of Women' as:

> The world wants healthy babies and intelligent workers. Today we refuse to allow the combination and force thousands of intelligent workers to go childless at a horrible expenditure of moral force, or we damn them if they break out idiotic conventions. Only at the sacrifice of intelligence and the chance to do their best work can the majority of modern women bear children. This is the damnation of women…The future woman must have a life work and economic independence (Du Bois 205).

In his book, Du Bois describes the conundrum that faces women. The ability to both work and raise children is a problem that faces women at the dawn of the 1920s, a problem that is not foreign in today's world. He cites the problem stems from a judgmental society, who sees a childless woman as immoral and judges any woman who breaks out of society's 'idiotic conventions'. We can infer from this passage that the 'idiotic conventions' of which Du Bois speaks refers to the female conventions defining wife and mother, which does not support or find it necessary to educate a woman. This education would in turn allow a woman to work outside the home. Du Bois sees this convention in which woman are caught in and labels it 'damnation' in order to expose its injustice. Du Bois is envisioning a new woman, one with a "work life" and "economic independence". In the society in which he lives, a woman has no such balance. By envisioning the future, De Bois reveals a convention that is plaguing his current society. Women are considered "immoral" or abnormal if they work outside the home and bare no children. Women of this period are not just fighting for their rights but they are fighting against the judgment of their society.

Margaret Sanger is considered the mother of the birth control movement. In 1916 she opened the first birth control clinic and was subsequently jailed for it. (Freedman, 'Introduction: Woman' 211). Sanger believes that the secret of woman's true liberation lies in the ability to control their own bodies through the use of birth control. In 1920, Sanger wrote a book entitled *Woman and the New Race*. In this book, Sanger acknowledges the accomplishments of women, but states although women have claimed the right to vote and regulated their work hours, "she remained a dominate weakling in a society controlled by men" (212). She explains to the reader that the problem with all civilization is the inability to control reproduction. This inability produces unwanted off spring that cannot be cared for or nurture properly, creating a "vicious cycle" that through the reproductive ability has "founded and perpetuated the tyrannies of Earth". Sanger blames over-population on women who are ignorant "about her reproductive nature and…the consequences of her excessive childbearing" (213). She blames the ignorance of women on "dark age laws" that "deny to her the knowledge of her reproductive nature" and women's "own ignorance of the extent and effect of her submission" to the laws of man. Sanger believes that "voluntary motherhood" would allow women to remake the world (214). Sanger's argument for women's rights is similar to Anthony's in that it is an argument to improve society. As Anthony wanted to purify society, Sanger wants to cleanse society of unwanted and subsequently ignorant and abused children. Although she is saying it is a woman's right to give birth, she is also saying that the right to control it, if given to women, will improve society as a whole. Although the fight for women's birth control has begun, authors such as Emily Post are still clinging to these social conventions.

To complete this discussion of female convention, we will again return to books of etiquette. In 1922, Emily Post wrote the national bestselling book *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home* (Drowne and Huber xxi). This book may be considered a bible for conventions in society. For example, in Post's *Etiquette,* Post presents the proper way two people should be introduced. Post writes: "When gentlemen are introduced to each other they always shake hands," however, "When a gentlemen is introduced to a lady, she sometimes puts out her hand – especially if he is someone she has long heard about from friends in common, but to an entire stranger she generally merely bows her head slightly and says: 'How do you do!'" (13). In this example, Post defines two different rules for men and women. Each rule can be considered a social convention. In this passage men should be able to shake hands with each other, while a woman has separate rules of greeting a man dependent on the situation. The rules for men suggest forthrightness while the rules for women suggest propriety and coyness. A woman bowing her head to the side suggests she should present herself as shy and acquiescent. Her verbal communication, however suggests she is approachable; presumably if the gentlemen is a possible courtier.

In chapter 19 of her book, Post discusses the need of a chaperone for the young woman. Post presents all the acceptable types of chaperones, including "a young married woman…especially if her husband is present" then states, "Ethically the only chaperone is the girl's own sense of dignity and pride" (206-7). Post here is pointing to a young girl's chastity, which needs to be guarded. This sentiment perpetuates the different sexual standards for men and women. Of course, Post is just mirroring the society in which she lives. No place in her book does she state that a young man needs a chaperone because in the eyes of society, only young women need such things. Post's statement that a young girl can chaperone herself with "dignity and pride" suggests the possibility of a woman being responsible for herself. In contrast to the women of the mid-nineteenth century, which are defined as childlike and incapable, this idea expresses an evolutionary change in the conventions of women. However, the fact that this book was a national bestseller points towards a society that in the majority wants to hold on to their social conventions.

The time period between 1850 and 1930 holds many social conventions. Many of these conventions have evolved over time. As we have established with Ibsen, Gilman and Shaw, often social conventions are present within works of fiction and reflect the social climate of the period. We will next turn to our discussion of the Eugene O'Neill, looking for social conventions in three of his plays.

III. Female Conventions in the plays of Eugene O’Neill

a. *Anna Christie*

O’Neill’s *Anna Christie* is a tale of a woman who wishes to overcome the shadow of her past transgressions. These transgressions work against accepted social conventions for women. Anna, the daughter of barge captain Chris Christopherson, is sent away when she is very young to live with relatives. Chris explains to the audience why he sent his daughter to Midwestern America: “Ay tank it's better Anna live on a farm, den she don't know dat old davil, sea, she don't know a fader like me” (“Anna” 166). Chris refers to the sea as a “davil,” transforming the sea into a living entity. He also connects himself to the sea when he states it is better off she not know the sea or “a fader like me”. This suggests that Chris sees attributes of the sea within himself. Chris not only wants to protect his daughter from himself, but from the sea as well. The sea is personified throughout the play by the character of Chris. Although O'Neill does not physically capitalize the word “sea” in his text, the sea is nevertheless a living entity, someone her daughter can “know.” This personified sea either positively or negatively affects the characters in this play.

The sea is personified many times throughout the play; each time adding attributes to the sea’s persona. In Act I, Chris blames the sea for his inability to visit Anna while she is living with his relatives: “Dat ole davil sea make dem crazy fools with her dirty tricks. It's so” (“Anna” 179). In Chris’s statement, he refers to the sea as “her,” indicating the sea is a female. Chris also refers to the sea as a having “tricks”. This correlates with Chris’s description of the sea as an “ole davil,” the devil often referred to as a trickster. In this personification, the sea is not only a living entity, but it is also a trickster and it is female. By the end of Act I, the sea is a living character, decidedly female and tricky.

Act II continues to add attributes to O'Neill's personified sea. In the beginning of Act II, Chris and Anna discuss the fog, an apparent trick of the sea. Chris explains to Anna, “It ain't good for you stay out here in fog, Ay tank....Fog's vorst one of her dirty tricks (“Anna” 185). When Chris states the fog is up to one of *her* dirty tricks, “her” is referring to the sea, thus the fog becomes a trick played by the sea. Chris also defines the sea as a killer. Chris states further on in Act II, “My oder bro'der, he saved money, give up sea, den he die home in bed. He's only one dat ole sea don't kill" ("Anna" 187). Chris, in this statement is blaming the living entity the sea for the death of his family. His family did not die *at* sea, they were killed *by* sea, the living entity.

In addition, Chris says of sailors in his family, "Dey're all fool fallar, dem fallar in our family. Dey all vork rotten yob on sea for nutting, don't care nutting but yust gat big pay day in pocket, gat drunk, gat robbed, ship avay again on oder voyage. Dey don't come home. Dey don't do anytang like good men do. And at ole davil, sea, sooner, later she svallow dem up" ("Anna" 187). Chris here is indentifying the men in his family as bad men and indicating the sea "svallow dem up," as if the sea is a judgmental, god like character that rids the world of bad men. The men in Chris's family have attributes which Susan B. Anthony fought against in 1870s. These men lack moral fiber, they do not care about anything, they abuse liquor with money that could feed their family and they sail off again to repeat the cycle. These men also do not fit the definition of the socially acceptable man that are discussed in etiquette books such as Talmage's or Post's, which defined men as individual's with equal morals to and protectors of women. The conventions of good manners that are prevalent in the 1920s trump these bad men defined by Anthony in the 1870s. In addition, Chris's brother, who gave up the sea, saved up money and returned home, a change more suited to society's status quo, is allowed to die in his bed naturally, instead of meeting a violent death at sea.

Last, Chris defines the sea as not God when he tells Anna, "No! Dat ole davil sea, she ain't God!"("Anna" 187-189). Perhaps the sea is a "she" because a female cannot be god, the conventional image of god in western society always being male. Chris is calling this sea female because he does not want to believe there is a god that is in control of him or the people he knows.

In juxtaposition, the sea's manipulation of Anna seems to have a positive outcome. For Anna the sea has curative powers. In Act II she states, "I love this fog!...It makes me feel clean – out here – 's if I'd taken a bath ("Anna" 185). Anna's expression of cleanliness among the fog is interesting. Fog, by nature, is thick and murky, yet Anna feels it cleanses her. Perhaps her feeling of cleanliness comes from the masking effect of fog. Anna can hide among the fog, essentially hiding from her sorted past. In addition, the sea, more specifically the sea's fog, seems to begin to cure Anna of her mistrust towards men. Anna, in Act II states:

> [It's like] I'd been living a long long time – out here in the fog.... - like I'd found something I'd missed and been missing and been looking for –'s if this was the right place for me to fit in? And I seem to have forgot – everything that's happened – like it doesn't matter anymore. And I feel clean, somehow – like you feel yust after you've took a bath. And I feel happy for once – yes, honest! – happier than I ever been before! ("Anna" 188).

When Anna states she has "found something [she] missed," this indicates she has discovered parts of herself she was before unaware of. In other words, the sea has helped Anna discover who she really is. When she states "everything that's happened – like it doesn't matter anymore," Anna is indicating that the sea has helped her forget her past encounters with wicked men or washed away her past transgressions. Further on in the passage, Anna states how "clean" she indeed is and how happy. The sea is washing away the memory of the men that did not allow her to conform to the social conventions suited to a woman. Anna is happier when she meets the acceptable conventions for women, suggesting that conformity equals happiness. To be "clean" can also refer to being moral. The act of cleaning herself may also translate to a return to virginity. The sea begins to heal Anna, but in doing so it begins to transform her into a woman who follows the guidelines of social convention.

However, the arrival of Matt Burke interrupts Anna's healing process. Burke's ascent from the sea is described with powerful imagery by O'Neill: "He is stripped to the waist, has on nothing but a pair of dirty dungaree pants. He is a powerful, broad-chested six-footer, his face handsome in a hard, rough, bold, defiant way. He is about thirty, in the full power of the heavy-muscled, immense strength" ("Anna" 190). O'Neill's Burke is strong, powerful and handsome and appears to break through the surface of the sea, interrupting its flow. This interruption foreshadows the effect Burke will have on Anna. The image of Burke having "full power" of his heavy muscles when the other men do not suggests he possess the strength to defeat the sea. This description of Burke is also sexually charged, as if Burke is a possible symbol of sexual temptation. When Burke first sees Anna, he likens her to a mermaid, "I thought you were some mermaid out of the sea come to torment me" (O'Neill 191). Burke describing Anna as a mermaid gives Anna an equal appearance of enticement and sexuality, each character appearing to lust after each other. Burke's "torment" also is suggestive of lust. Burke appears to have reversed the sea's cleansing effect on Anna by invoking lustful feelings in her. These lustful feelings are a deviation from the social conventions for women that Anna is trying to conform to.

The end of Act II leaves Chris once again cursing the sea: "(*turns suddenly and shakes his fist out at the sea – with bitter hatred*): Dat's your dirty trick, damn ole davil, you! (*then in a frenzy of rage*) But, py God, you don't do dat! Not while Ay'm living! No, py God you don't!" (O'Neill 201). In this passage, the dirty trick that Chris refers to is the arrival of Burke and his wooing of Anna. The sea now gets a venomous warning from Chris, who mistakenly feels the sea is plotting to take his daughter in the form of Burke. However, Burke's arrival suggests a defeat over the sea, as if Burke is the temptation that can corrupt Anna's attempt at fitting in with the conventions of society. It is now up to Chris to convince Burke that conventional roles are more suitable for him. Chris has recently done this himself. He recognizes that his family's past transgressions are against the conventions of society. In addition, he takes in his daughter in her hour of need. In this action, he is reversing his abandonment of his family, and is becoming what society believes is a good father. Chris' recognition of wrong doing makes him worthy enough to save Burke. At this point, Chris takes over the sea's healing properties. The healing is in truth the character's adherence to social conventions.

In Act III, when arguing with Chris, Burke shows admiration for his life at sea:

> But you know the truth in your heart, if great fear of the sea has made you a liar and coward itself. The sea's the only life for a man with guts in him isn't afraid of his own shadow! 'Tis only on the sea he's free, and him roving the face of the world, seeing all things, and not giving a damn for saving up money, or stealing from his friends, or any of the black tricks that a landlubber'd waste his life on. 'Twas yourself knew it once, and you a bo'sun for years (O'Neill 210).

Burke's speech identifies the attributes of the common sailor that Chris had rejected earlier, attributes that are against the social conventions for men. Burke states that Chris has "great fear" of the sea and this has made him reject his old sailor ways. This fear of the sea can be interrupted as fear of going against the traditional conventions of society. The free sea that Burke describes is a method in which to escape the conventions of society and makes the sailor a kind of rogue entity that may indulge in forms of vice when on land, for example prostitution. Burke indicates Chris "knew it once," communicating there is a change in Chris that has brought him closer to society's accepted conventions and a rejection of the sailor's unconventional behavior.

As Chris and Burke's argument ensues, it is revealed that Burke is intent on marrying Anna. Chris violently rejects this because he knows Burke's immoral ways will have him telling that "same tang to [a] gel every port he go!" ("Anna" 214). Chris' protest is a protest against Burke's non-conformity to the conventions of accepted society, i.e. having multiple relationships with women. Chris attempts to protect his daughter Anna from exposure to this non-conformist society. Next, Anna confesses her love for Burke, but reveals she cannot marry him. Anna's unwillingness to marry Burke stems from her fear of being judged for her past transgressions. Anna feels she is unworthy of marriage because society's conventions for women state unchaste women, who do not save their virginity for their husbands, are not worthy of marriage. We saw this convention revealed in Talmage's book, *The Wedding Ring* and Emily Post's *Etiquette,* as well as in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

Chris and Burke begin a tug of war for Anna, trying to exact control over her: "She'll do what I say! You've had her hold on her long enough. It's my turn now" ("Anna" 215-219). Anna protests the men trying to control her, telling them: "You can go to hell, both of you! You are just like the rest of them – you two! Gawd, you'd think I was a piece of furniture!" ("Anna" 219). Burke attempts to control Anna, discussing her as if she is absent from the room. Anna properly labels herself "a piece of furniture," exposing the result of man's attempt to exude power over a woman. This rhetoric is meant to be powerful, allowing the reader to place themselves within Anna's perspective. This attempt at control over a female represents the perpetual passing of a woman from father to husband, as Nora is in Ibsen's A *Doll's House*.

Next, O'Neill reveals the horrors of a woman's choice of employment, just as Shaw does in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. After being raped by her cousin, Anna runs away:

> That was what made me get a yob as nurse girl in St. Paul…And you think that was a nice yob for a girl too, don't you?...I was caged in, I tell you – just like in yail – taking care of other people's kids – listening to them bawling and crying day and night – when I wanted to be out—and I was lonesome – lonesome as hell!...So I give up finally…You – keeping me safe inland – I wasn't no nurse girl the last two years – I lied when I wrote you – I was in a house, that's what! – yes, that kind of house – the kind sailors like you and Mat goes to in port – and your nice inland men too – and all men, God damn 'em! I hate 'em! ("Anna" 222).

Anna in this passage describes herself as “caged in” as in a jail. This is similar to the imagery used by Mill of a woman shackled to her husband because of his financial control over her. Anna admits her lonesomeness is the reason for leaving her employment as a nurse girl. Lonesomeness may be another reason for her next employment choice, a sexual act possibly filling a missing void in Anna. Anna’s anger towards men is clear when she shouts “God damn ‘em! I hate ‘em!,” suggesting an anger towards men who do not fit into male conventions that are thought of as proper by society.

In addition, Anna’s confession gives her power over these men. She has shattered the misconception that she is the ideal woman both men were looking for. Chris is expecting Anna to be a chaste and honorable daughter and Burke wants a chaste and honorable wife. According to social conventions for women, Anna is neither; instead she is what society would consider flawed. Through her confession Anna is free. She no longer has to hide from her past. She is forcing the men to accept her the way she is.

In an interview in 1922, O’Neill tells us: “I have tried to keep my work free from all moral attitudinizing. To me there are no good people or bad people, just people” (Mollan 17). The three main characters in *Anna Christie* are flawed. However, only Anna is made to be forgiven. Although O’Neill attempts to create works devoid of “moral attitudinizing,” conventions prevalent at the time for the female appear to have subsequently influenced his writing.

In Act IV, Anna must get Burke to convince himself she has changed: “If ‘tis truth you’re after telling, I’d have a right, maybe to believe you’d changed – and that I’d changed you myself ‘til the thing you’d been all your life wouldn’t be you any more at all” (“Anna” 240). Burke states he has “a right” to believe Anna has changed. This implies the feeling of control that Burke has, he believes it is his right to forgive Anna, instead of believing Anna should be forgiven. In addition, Burke states he will make himself believe he has changed Anna himself, implying that he must believe he is in complete control of Anna in order to forgive her. This sentiment follows the conventional attitudes pertaining to the husband/wife relationship. Burke is granted control by Anna herself, who replies, “Oh, Mat! That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you all along!" By agreeing to Burke's logic, Anna is allowing herself to be returned to the conventional role for women in the time period which she lives. After Anna is forgiven, she agrees to "get a little house somewhere and I'll make a regular place for you two to come back to" ("Anna" 243). Anna, with this sentiment, is completely allowing herself to be returned to society's conventional roles. She is under control of her male counter-parts, and is setting up a house where she will become the dutiful wife and mother.

In the same 1922 interview, O'Neill spoke about the ending to his play Anna Christie:

> Nearly all the critics accuse me of dragging in a happy ending in *Anna Christie*. Where they got the idea that the ending is happy I don't know, unless it be that there is a kiss and a mention of marriage in the last act.
>
> As a matter of fact, there is no ending at all to *Anna Christie*, either happy or unhappy. The final curtain falls just as a new play is beginning. At least that is what I meant by it. A naturalistic play is life. Life doesn't end. One experience is but the birth of another. And even death- (Mollan 15).

If *Anna Christie* is considered a naturalistic play by O'Neill, then it is supposed to reflect life and the various conventions which surround it. *Anna Christie* is meant to reflect the society in which O'Neill lived. In doing so it reveals to us the uneven conventions that society has for men and women. Anna's men once again return to the sea, but we do not know if they will return to the sinful sailor's life. We only know that the Anna has conformed to the conventions society has outlined for women. O'Neill states that the end of Anna Christie is not an end, but the start of a new play. However, in terms Anna becoming what society considers conventional, her journey is complete. Only the men of this tale go out to live the next story. Further, O'Neill admits that the play has no happy ending; implying he does not see Anna's fate as happier than any other fate that could have been bestowed on her. This observation helps support the theory that O'Neill's use of convention is subconscious. Next we will look at *Desire Under the Elms,* a play that looks at human psychology and society's comfort with the familiar in terms of accepted conventions.

b. *Desire Under the Elms*

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* is a re-imagined version of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. He uses the main plot of Euripides' tragedy and hyperbolizes it, having his two main characters Eben (Hippolytus) and Abbie (Phaedra) consummate the desire that is merely fabricated by the goddess Aphrodite. In doing so, O'Neill lays the blame of human lust strictly where it belongs, in the hands of the tempted. *Desire Under the Elms* explores the taboo of part of Freud's Oedipal complex, desire for one's own mother, in Eben's case, his step mother. The female character, Abbie, is demonized; portrayed as the instigator of the consummated lust. In the character of Abbie we see a woman who strays from all the conventions that society has established for a woman.

The character of Abbie is a conniving and powerful one. Prior to the play's beginning, Abbie has conned her way into the affections of Ephraim, who has made her his wife. From the beginning of her arrival on stage, it is clear what Abbie really desires. In Part I, scene four, as soon as she arrives at the Cabot farm she states: "It's purty—purty! I can't b'lieve it's r'ally mine." The "it" that Abbie refers to is the farm. Abbie reiterates the point further down, "I'll go in an' look at *my house*" ("Desire" 21). O'Neill's notation that emphasis be applied to the words "my house" communicates to his audience that Abbie believes the Cabot farm is really hers. This implies she believes ownership of property passes to her, which is untrue according to the laws of in 1850, the time period in which this play takes place (Shammas 11). Further, the admittance of the belief of ownership implies that one of Abbie's main goals is to secure a house through her marriage and emphasizing the words "my house" draw attention to Abbie's goal. Homeownership, as well as inheritance of property through marriage, is a privilege exclusive to a man and according to society's conventions, not an inherent privilege of a woman.

Abbie, from their first meeting, tries to seduce Eben:

> Abbie—(*in her most seductive tones which she uses all through this scene*) Be you—Eben? I'm Abbie—(*She laughs*) I mean, I'm yer new Maw.
>
> Eben— (*viciously*) No, damn ye!
>
> Abbie—(*as if she hadn't heard—with a queer smile*) Yer Paw's spoke a lot o'yew…

> Eben—Ha!
>
> Abbie—Ye mustn't mind him. He's an old man. (*A long pause. They stare at each other.*) I don't want t' pretend playin' Maw t'ye, Eben. (*admiringly*) Ye're too big an' too strong fur that. I want t' be frens with ye. Mebbe with me fur a fren ye'd like livin' her better. I kin make it easy fur ye with him, mebbe. (*with a scornful sense of power*) I calc'late I kin git him t' do most anythin' fur me ("Desire" 23).

First, Abbie, in this scene uses "seductive tones" to woe Eben into her good graces which is defined in O'Neill's stage directions. Second, she smiles at him "queerly" to enhance the effect of her seductive tones. Third, she undermines Ephraim, calling him an "old man". This sentiment further reveals her motives; she has married Ephraim for money. Fourth, she tries to persuade Eben of her affection for him by calling him big and strong. Calling him big and strong allows Eben to believe he is the one in control, that he is the more powerful one during this encounter. Last, she tries to coax Eben into believing she is his ally by promising to influence Ephraim's decisions in a way that would be favorable to Eben. The stage directions, "with a scornful sense of power" demonstrate Abbie's lust for power.

Throughout Abbie's sedution, Eben is haunted by the memory of his mother. The memory is so powerful Eben manifests her in the kitchen: "She still comes back—stands by the stove thar in the evenin'—she can't find it nateral sleepin' an' restin' in peace. She can't git used t' being free—even in her grave" ("Desire" 8). Eben's implication that his mother is not at rest implies he is constantly drawing on her memory in order to consider his own life. In addition, Eben's statement that his mother is "free" implies her servitude in life. The servitude he is referring to is her role of mother as defined by conventional society. Eben states: "They was chores t' do, wa'n't they? It was on'y arter she died I come to think o' it. Me cookin'—doin' her work—that made me know her, suffer her sufferin'…" ("Desire" 8). Eben in this statement, establishes his mother conformed to the conventions of the society in which she lived. Eben's mother does little more than the work that was expected of a woman, yet, Eben finds the work provokes "suffering". This character revelation is an affirmation of the work that is done by the house wife. This thought reflects the debates going on in society that are addressed by Mill pertaining to the value of women's work. Eben in this instance is placed into the role of mother, this idea plays with the established social conventions. The fact that Eben's mother is not at rest also suggests her memory is kept alive by Eben who has taking over her role as mother.

Part one, scene three, is the climatic seduction scene. In this scene, Abbie uses the memory of Eben's mother as a tool to seduce him. Abbie lures Eben into his mother's parlor in order to invoke his memory. When entering the parlor for the first time Abbie states: "When I fust come in—in the dark—they seemed somethin' here…I kin' still feel—something' " ("Desire" 38). Abbie tells Eben she feels "something" in order to persuade Eben that his mother's presence is in the room. She says she visited the room "in the dark" in order to establish an eerie, haunted atmosphere. Abbie tells this all to Eben while inserting dramatic pauses to intensify this eerie affect. Eben becomes distraught about his mother's presence and confides in Abbie his feelings. Abbie does this in order to have Eben feel closer to her, in order to complete the seduction over him.

When Abbie feels she has stirred up enough emotion in Eben, she cries: "Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! Don't be afeered! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben—same's if I was a Maw t' ye…" ("Desire" 39). Abbie exclaims "Don't cry Eben" to demonstrate kindness and comfort towards him. She next tells him she will take his mother's place. In this instance Abbie is already calculating that Eben is looking for a mother figure. The statement "I'll be everything she was" serves to reassure Eben that she can take his mother's place, filling the hole that has been left since Eben's own mother passed. Abbie next uses Freudian psychology in her wooing of Eben, equating her desire for him with motherly love. She does this by saying her kiss will be pure "same as if I was a mother to you," in an attempt to convince Eben making love to her is as innocent as embracing his mother. O'Neill is playing with psychology, blurring the lines between passionate or romantic love and motherly love. In doing so, O'Neill creates a character that strays from the conventional depictions of both mothers and female lovers.

Eben and Abbie's passionate connection is disturbed momentarily by Eben's thoughts of his mother. O'Neill's stage directions state: "*Suddenly…he [Eben] frees himself from her [Abbie] violently and springs to his feet*" Eben then addresses his mother, "Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye tellin' me?" Abbie's seduction scheme is so convincing that Eben literally feels his mother “haunting” him. Subconsciously, Eben feels making love to his father’s new wife is wrong and this guilt is manifested in a haunting by his mother. Eben’s lust for Abbie is powerful and he is able to justify his actions by stating: “It’s her vengeance on him—so’s she kin rest quit in her grave!” (“Desire” 40). Eben rationalizes that if he makes love to his father’s new wife, this will exact his mother’s vengeance on Ephraim. Eben uses his mother to justify his actions because of his admiration for her. Out of all the characters presented in this play, Eben admires his mother the most because of the work she has done for their family in the role of mother.

Abbie is able to gain power over Eben in this seduction scene. After the two characters make love, Eben feels his mother has “gone back t’ her grave. She can sleep now”(“Desire” 42). This indication that Eben no longer feels his mother’s presents suggests that Abbie has successful filled the void left in Eben from his mother’s passing. Psychologically, Eben has substituted the love of his mother for the love of Abbie. Again, O’Neill blurs the lines of traditional love as defined by the society in which he lives.

Abbie is able to fill the role of mother for Eben until part three, scene one, when she gives birth to his child. Eben wishes to claim paternity of his son. The act of becoming a parent exposes Abbie for what she really is, his lover. Eben can no longer hold on to the misconception of Abbie as a mother figure because he himself has become a parent and is able to feel genuine parental love, exposing the difference between romantic and parental love. The Freudian illusion is no longer justifiable to Eben, therefore he once again calls on the spirit of his mother for comfort and guidance, “I’ll pray Maw t’ come back t’ help me—t’ put her cuss on yew an’ him!” (“Desire” 53). Eben, by invoking his mother, returns to the place he was at the beginning of the play, now loathing both Ephraim and Abbie, wishing to cast a curse on them. This return demonstrates the human psyches return to places that provide comfort. In the same way that Eben feels comfort in his former psychology, so does society, who is comforted by maintaining its conventions pertaining to the traditional roles of women.

Abbie’s seduction of Eben in this play is not the most powerful stray from traditional conventions for women however. In part two, scene three, Abbie commits infanticide. She justifies her actions by convincing herself that the murder of her baby will show Eben how much she loves him: “I’ll prove t’ ye! I’ll prove I love ye better’n…Better’n everythin’ else in the world!” (“Desire” 54). Here, O’Neill is exploring the psychology behind why a woman would kill her own child. Is it possibly for the love of her lover? This exploration in psychology leads to a deeper discussion of the role of the mother as nurture, one of society’s most widely thought of conventions. Ibsen, in *A Doll’s House*, explores the abandonment of one’s child in an attempt at exploring the fears society has about the changing roles of women. Ibsen’s Nora is a depiction of a woman that has chosen to claim freedom of self. In comparison, O’Neill’s Abbie is the embodiment of the fear that society has about the evolution of this free woman. Abbie is the result of a woman’s freedom, depicted as an individual with perverse sexual tendencies and confused distorted ideas about love whose confusion leads to the most heinous crime of infanticide. Abbie’s crime of infanticide can also be interpreted as an act of control. Abbie by first giving birth and then killing her child, claims control over both life and death, essential giving her a god-like quality.

Like Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, *Desire Under the Elm’s* explores the result of changing social conventions. O’Neill’s Abbie shows us a possible result of a woman who breaks with defined social conventions of a woman by trying to seize control over the men around her. Next we will look at O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra*, one of O’Neill’s most intricate works.

c. *Mourning Becomes Electra*

O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* is based on Aeschylus’ *The Oresteia*. O’Neill’s drama is constructed the same way as Aeschylus’ *The Oresteia* is, in three parts, The Homecoming, (Agamemnon) The Hunted (The Choephori or Orestes) and The Haunted (Eumenides or The Furies). O’Neill’s female protagonists, Christine (Clytemnestra) and Lavinia (Electra) battle each other for control of their male counterparts as well struggle with the idea of control of their own female bodies. The men of the story, Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon), Orin Mannon (Orestes) and Adam Brant (Aegisthus) are pawns of our two female protagonists, manipulating these men in their battle for control. Both characters call into question conventional social behavior for women through both their actions and thoughts. However, in the end, each character must face their internal demons (their furies) which are manifested as ghosts of dead Mannons. These ghosts squash all progress towards the attainment of power in Christine and Lavinia and drive our male character, Orin, mad.

The character of Christine, the matriarch of the Mannon family, struggles with maintaining her power over her household when the men of her family return from war. Christine, although feminine in appearance, strives for masculinity with her thoughts and actions. Her character is much like Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, who also wishes to rule over her own household. Like Clytemnestra, Christine takes a lover while her husband is off at war. Also like Clytemnestra, the lover chosen is a man that has a vendetta against her husband. The choice of their lovers is calculated, each women despising and wishing to disposes of their husband. Christine's actions differ from social conventions for women in several ways, the first being the taking of and manipulation of a lover.

Adam Brant is Christine Mannon's chosen lover. Brant through manipulation and use of feminine persuasion is easily convinced by Christine to do her bidding. Christine, in Act II, Part 1 of "The Homecoming," convinces Brant to participate in the plot to kill Ezra. Christine convinces him through persuasion fueled by the idea of femininity, convincing Brant she needs protection when she questions, "Are you going to let him take me from you now, Adam?" ("Mourning" 292). Christine's question speaks to Brant's need to protect his female lover, a convention taught to boys from birth. The idea that a woman needs protection is established in works such as Emily Post's, who state women need various types of chaperones in order to maintain their safety. Christine, for Brant, plays the part of the helpless female in need of his protection. Christine's helpless air is just one factor in this scene that convinces Brant to do her bidding. Although Christine acts the part of the female in this instance, she is using it as a manipulation technique, therefore straying from social conventions of appropriate female behavior.

Christine also uses persuasion and manipulation through her exchange with Brant in that same scene. First, Christine begins by reminding Brant of her love for him, "Seeing you in New York should have been enough for me. But I loved you too much. I wanted every possible moment we could steal!" Christine's proclamation communicates an air of desperation. By saying "Seeing you in New York should have been enough for me" she is simultaneously saying that the New York encounter was not enough for her because her fascination with him is so profound. This leads Brant to believe that Christine's love for him is immense; causing her to lose all rational thought of what is "enough". Christine's use of the word "steal" gives the impression that both character are thieves, that have cunningly, secretly partook in each other's affections. This adds an element of excitement and taboo to their love affair. Christine's stray from social convention becomes exciting because of its taboo.

Christine's next stray from society's conventions occurs when she suggests to Brant the idea of Ezra Mannon's death: "And I simply couldn't believe he would ever come home. I prayed that he should be killed in the war so intensely that I finally believed it would surely happen! Oh, if he were only dead!". Christine not believing Ezra would return validates her decision to engage in a love affair with Brant. By using the word "prayed," Christine passes herself off as pious and pure instead of sinful and adulterous. In addition, her statement that she convinced herself Ezra was dead implies that Christine herself is malleable, giving her an air of naiveté that would be associated with a woman. When Brant answers "That chance is finished now," through the innocent suggestion, "Yes-in a way," Christine is able to convince Brant to kill Ezra ("Mourning" 293). Her use of the phrase "in a way" suggests the pair have other possible alternatives, i.e. murder. All of Christine's techniques are calculated uses of female attributes that are conventionally thought of by society as acceptable behavior for a woman. Plotting to kill your husband is the opposite of the convention that says a woman must be dutiful to her husband. Christine tries to mask her stray from convention by giving the impression that she is holy. She again uses conventions thought to be associated with women to mask her manipulation and treachery.

Christine's murder victim is her husband, Ezra Mannon. Ezra, ex-Judge and General, has all the elements of a powerful male character. However, his time on stage is short, Christine easily dispatching with him. Ezra arrives home in Act III of "The Homecoming". When he and Christine are alone, he begs her to join him in repairing their relationship, "I came home to surrender to you—what's inside of me. I love you. I loved you then, and all the years between, and I love you now" ("Mourning" 309). Ezra uses the word "surrender," a word associated with war. Ezra's "surrender" suggests a reversal of roles, instead of fighting as a brave soldier, he "surrenders" as a woman would. This sentiment is similar to the technique that Christine used on Brant; she makes herself look vulnerable in order to emphasize her femininity. His repetition of the words “I love you” suggests desperation for Christine’s love similar to the desperation Christine expressed to Brant. Ezra becomes the vulnerable female in this scene. Christine does not have to manipulate for Ezra’s control, she is handed it, making it easy for her to dispatch of him. Christine in this scene becomes the dominating masculine character, while Ezra is place in the female role. Their role reversal again suggests a reversal of the ideas put forth by society about acceptable male and female behavior.

In the following Act, Christine, after making love to her husband, accuses him of controlling her body, “Not your wife! You acted as if I were your wife—your property—not so long ago!” (“Mourning” 314). In this exclamation, Christine calling herself “property” suggests the common convention in society which states a husband must chaperone his wife. Christine equates marriage to property, suggesting her feelings of being possessed by someone else. Christine is communicating her feeling of entrapment. In this instance the reason for Ezra’s murder is truly revealed. Christine not only wants to dispatch with her husband to be with Brant, but with the elimination of her husband, Christine reclaims her body, which because of her marriage is Ezra’s property. Stanton establishes the idea of women as property in her speech *Declarations*. In addition, society’s conventions for women, as we saw in Talmage, include the idea of the wife being dutiful and therefore subservient. In this case being dutiful is equated to sexual consummation. In order for Christine to maintain control of all the men in her life and to regain control of her body, she must kill her husband.

However, Christine does not obtain full control; control that would be equal to a man’s for two reasons. First, Christine fainting is commonly a feminine reaction to stress and could depict feminine weakness. Second, Christine kills Ezra with pills, a less violent, ‘manly’ way to commit murder. Although Christine is a powerful, manipulative, murderous female character, O’Neill still gives her female attributes that are conventional in society. However, O’Neill’s character conventions are redeemed in last Act of “The Hunted,” when Christine commits suicide with a gun, a more violent way to kill oneself then poison, making it more masculine. Perhaps the ghostly influence of Ezra had something to do with her method of death.

In the end, Christine does not allow Brant to kill Ezra; she ultimately kills him herself. As with Clytemnestra, Christine’s choice to commit murder with her own hands illustrates the strong nature of her character and the desire for control. With the murder of her husband, Christine is able to win control over her own property and her own body, at last becoming master of her own fate. Christine's quest for freedom suggests a wish to overthrow her traditional role put forth by the conventions of the society in which she lives.

The character of Lavinia is a re-imagined version of Aeschylus' character Electra. Lavinia, from the beginning of the play, is described by O'Neill's stage directions as follows: "She is twenty-three but looks considerably older. Tall like her mother, her body is thin, flat-breasted and angular, and its unattractiveness is accentuated by her plain black dress" (Mourning 267). Lavinia is described as dressed in black, a color worn to a funeral or while in mourning. Her black attire is said to accentuate her unattractive "angular" body. The description "angular" is a description typically used to describe a man. The description that she is "thin" and "flat-breasted" suggest she lacks femininity, while her appearing to be older suggests a lack of youthful glow, perhaps a person that is closer to death. Although dressed for "mourning," Lavinia in actuality is preparing for the homecoming of her father and Orin, a happy occasion. The character set before us is a masculine version of a woman. O'Neill sets Lavinia at the exact opposite of Christine, but by doing so, he creates an emasculated character who is ugly and morose in times of happiness and beautiful and radiant in times of sadness or mourning.

Lavinia, from her first appearance on stage, does not fit society's conventions of a young woman. Although Lavinia in outward appearance is opposite from her mother, the two share a common attribute, their need for control. The first example of this is Lavinia's need to win her father's affections. O'Neill again plays with the psychology of the parent-child relationship, this time, the dynamic between father and daughter. In Act three, scene one, when Christine suggests Lavinia marry Peter, Lavinia replies "You needn't hope to get rid of me that way. I'm not marrying anyone. I've got my duty to my Father" (Mourning 300). Lavinia's reply suggests several things. First, Lavinia's statement that she is "not marrying anyone" because of "duty" to her father suggests that Lavinia feels she must take care of her father in the place of Christine, taking Christine's place as his wife. Second, Lavinia feels that Christine wants to get rid of her because she is threatened that Lavinia will take her place as wife. Third, taking the first two observations under consideration, O'Neill is again playing with the difference between romantic and parental love. O'Neill's experiment creates a bazaar dynamic, as if the two women are fighting for a lover. Lavinia not only does not conform visually to the definition of a woman, her relationship with her father is unorthodox as well. However, Lavinia evolves to a more feminine version of herself by the end of the play, ghosts aiding in her transformation.

The third part of the *Mourning Becomes Electra* trilogy is aptly named. Part III of the trilogy, "The Haunted" is the portion of the play in which the ghosts or Aeschylus' Furies take control. "The Haunted" opens up with a scene of workmen, betting each other they cannot stay in the Mannon house overnight because "The graveyard's full of Mannons and they all spend their nights to hum here" ("Mourning" 379). The townsman Small takes the bet but shortly comes out screaming, "God A'mighty! I heard 'em comin' after me, and I run in the room opposite, an' I seed Ezra's ghost dressed like a judge comin' through the wall—and, by God, I run!" ("Mourning" 382). O'Neill's opening sequence creates an eerie, haunted atmosphere. The Mannon home has been placed outside the realm of the real world. It has become a haunted house, equipped with a graveyard full of Mannons. The insertion of these new characters, characters outside of the story, serves to bear witness to the haunting, which makes its appearance more genuine. O'Neill wants his audience to believe the home is genuinely haunted and not just in the mind of his main characters. This tale of ghosts sets the tone of the rest of the play, informing us that spirits will now be visiting O'Neill's stage.

The section the "The Haunted" suggests the Mannon children, Lavinia and Orin, are possessed by the spirit of their dead parents. When Lavinia returns to the stage in Act I of "The Haunted," she is visibly changed, O'Neill's stage directions state: "One is at once aware of an extraordinary change in her. Her body, formerly so thin and undeveloped, has filled out. Her movements have lost their square-shouldered stiffness. She now bears a striking resemblance to her mother in every respect, even to being dressed in the green her mother had affected." ("Mourning" 384-5). Lavinia visually is now Christine. She is no longer thin and undeveloped as she was at the beginning of the play, but voluptuous like her mother. She has lost her "square-shouldered stiffness," an attribute that could be equated with a male soldier. The fact that she now looks like her mother begins to suggest she is being possessed by her, a fact that is further substantiated as the play continues. Lavinia is now been feminized by O'Neill, her state of mourning for both her father and mother "becomes her," thus the title of the play. Without the presents of her mother, Lavinia is now allowed to take on a more "feminine" role. Her appearance is now more conventional and acceptable to society.

Orin, in addition, points out that Lavinia has taken her mother’s colors: “Did you ask her why she stole Mother’s colors? I can’t see why—yet—and I don’t think she knows herself” (“Mourning” 391). Lavinia steeling her mother’s colors suggests that she has stolen her mother’s light, colors scientifically being a part of a spectrum of light. The soul is often depicted as a ball of light, suggesting that Lavinia has stolen Christine’s soul or is possessed by Christine. Orin goes on to state that Lavinia does not “know herself” that she has transformed, suggesting an either subconscious or supernaturally guided transformation. Although this interpretation seems like a stretch, Lavinia taking on Chrisitine’s soul is later verbally confirmed by Orin.

Orin, in scene two, points out Lavinia’s inner transformation: “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 had set you free—to become her!” (“Mourning” 388). In this passage, Orin is confirming what has been hinted at in previous scenes, that Lavinia is in possession of Christine’s soul. Orin in this passage cites that Lavinia’s soul has changed. Orin has witnessed the transformation, stating “little by little” she has become like her mother. Orin again suggests Lavinia has stole Christine’s soul as she has stolen her colors. The use of the word “stolen” suggests Lavinia consciously has transformed herself into her mother. This suggests Lavinia is open to her mother’s possession, wanting to become more feminine. Lavinia has had a complete character reversal, the character Lavinia from the beginning of the play is more likened to the character of Christine.

The most convincing suggestion of possession occurs in Act III of “The Haunted”. In beginning of Act III, Lavinia states, “I can’t bear it! Why does he [Orin] keep putting his death in my head? He would be better off if—Why hasn’t he the courage--?” Lavinia is questioning why Orin is putting death in her head, suggesting her mind is open to the influence of others, her mind weak enough to be possessed. Her words “I can’t bear it!” suggest she has no control over the thoughts in her head and she is unable to exorcise them. When she states “He would be better off if” she means to complete the sentence with the word dead. This lament is similar to one Christine had in Act IV of “The Hunted”: “He drove me crazy! He kept talking of death! He was torturing me! I only wanted him to die and leave me alone!” In truth, it is Christine, not Lavinia that is loathsome of death. These two passages serve to mirror each other, further confirming that Lavinia has indeed become Christine. In Act I of the “Homecoming,” Christine carries to the house a bouquet of flowers stating: "I felt our tomb needed a little brightening. (*She nods scornfully towards the house*) Each time I come back after being away it appears more like a sepulcher!...Forgive me, Vinnie. I forgot you liked it. And you ought to. It suits your temperament" ("Mourning" 273). Christine refers to the Mannon house as a tomb, an element of death and expresses her dislike for it. Further, Christine suggests that Lavinia is suited to this tomb or death like atmosphere. In this instance, Christine is the individual who dislikes death and Lavinia has the temperament for it. This suggests that Christine's spirit is indeed in possession of Lavinia, Christine's dislikes being projected through Lavinia. This passage also foreshadows the eventual transformation of the house that we see in "The Haunted," an eerie, haunted home where all the Mannon's lay dead. In addition, the statement that Lavinia likes the house, foreshadows her eventual retrieval within in it.

Lavinia's possession does not have complete control however; often Lavinia pauses and interrupts her own unusual thoughts. This type of interruption occurs after the passage above: "*(then in a frenzy of remorseful anguish, her eyes unconsciously seeking the Mannon portraits on the right wall, as if they were the visible symbol of her God*) Oh God, don't let me have such thoughts! You know I love Orin!" ("Mourning" 404). A glance at the Mannon portraits appears to interrupt Lavinia's possession by Christine, causing her to pause and correct her thoughts; indicating she has regained self control. O'Neill's stage directions state Lavinia looks at the portraits as if they "were the visible symbol of her god" and then addresses them as such, "Oh God". Lavinia here is looking to her past relatives, calling on their spirits to help her fight Christine's ghost (Christine's Furies) that possesses her. This is similar to Orestes' prayer to Apollo in *The Oresteia.* The difference is that Apollo comes to Orestes' aid, but no one comes to aid Lavinia. Lavinia is left to fight the spirit of her dead mother alone. Lavinia's abandonment by her gods suggests an atheistic tone on the part of our author. O'Neill, in his teens, rejects his religion after his mother attempts suicide (Floyd 5-7).

Orin, as well, appears to be possessed by the spirit of his father or Ezra's Furies. Like Lavinia, at the beginning of "The Haunted," Orin is physically transformed into the likeness of his father. O'Neill's stage directions state: "His movements and attitudes have the statue-like quality that was so marked in his father. He now wears a close-cropped beard in addition to his mustache, and this accentuates his resemblance to his father" ("Mourning" 385). Orin now possesses the statue-like stature of his father, suggesting an aged Orin, more like the general and judge his father was. The growth of a beard also suggests aging and maturity. The fact that his attitude has changed suggests a mental change in Orin, his way of thinking and therefore the way he carries himself has changed.

In the opening of Act II of "The Haunted," we see Orin in front of the portraits of the Mannon's, according to the stage directions "sardonically addressing" them: "The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth! Is that what you're demanding, Father?" ("Mourning 396). Orin states that his father is "demanding" he record the truth, suggesting that his father is physically forcing him to record the family's sorted past. The phrase "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" is judicial in nature, connecting Orin to his father the judge. Orin's "sardonic" addressing of portraits, inanimate objects, suggests a mental deficiency in Orin, he is being driven mad by his possession as well as the guilt of the possible role he had in his mother's suicide. Perhaps Ezra's ghost believes if the past is recorded, it can be learned from.

At the end of Act II, Orin displays an interruption in his train of thought, much like Lavinia's. After consoling Lavinia stating, "Don't cry. The damned don't cry" according to the stage directions Orin sits in Ezra's "chair and stares at the floor". When he comes out of this stare he "says harshly,"…"Go away, will you? I want to be alone—to finish my work" ("Mourning" 403). In the first part of this sequence, Orin is speaking, consoling his sister and telling her not to cry. The "damned don't cry" suggests the siblings feeling of doom. It also suggests that Lavinia and Orin, trapped in this house of ghosts, have left the conventional world and now are immersed in the world of this 'haunted house,' a symbolic underworld. Next, Orin, sitting in his father Ezra's chair, is repossessed by him, driving Orin to finish Ezra's work, the sorted history of the Mannons. Orin in the first minute is consoling Lavinia but in the next is telling her to "go away," as if someone else has taken over is train of thought, namely Ezra. Orin states the need to finish "my work," suggesting the work is Ezra's and not his own. The dramatic pause inserted by O'Neill adds to the eerie atmosphere of the whole scene, additionally making the stage appear haunted.

Orin points out both his and Lavinia's possession several other times in "The Haunted." In Act IV of "The Haunted," Orin tells Lavinia, "Ghosts! You never seemed so much like

Mother as you did just then" suggesting again that Lavinia has been possessed by her mother, manifesting her attributes ("Mourning" 401). A few lines down Orin states, "Can't you see I'm now in Father's place and you're Mother?" suggesting that both have been placed into Christine and Ezra's life, taken over by them. Orin appears to be finely tuned to his and Lavinia's possession. Perhaps Orin's witness to death during the war has allowed him to see the dead more clearly. In Act 3 of "The Haunted," Orin tells Hazel that her brother Peter should not marry Lavinia stating "She can't have happiness! She's got to be punished!" ("Haunted" 407). Punishment would suggest Lavinia has done something wrong to Orin. Orin's statement is uncharacteristic to how he has treated Lavinia in the past, with an effort to console her. Orin and Lavinia acted together to kill Brant, the only reason he would want to punish Lavinia is if he similarly wanted to punish himself. One is left questioning if it is really Orin that wants to punish Lavinia or if it is the ghost of Ezra wants to punish Christine.

Orin's character recognizes that the ghosts are manipulating him. In Act 3 of "The Haunted," Orin pleads with Hazel, "For God's sake Hazel, if you love me help me to get away from here—or something terrible will happen!" ("Mourning 408)" Orin appears desperately scared for his life, needing to escape in this instance. Orin is communicating he wants to leave the house, suggesting that he is trapped within the house, further illustrating it is outside the normal world. Orin communicates a tone of foreboding, indicating something terrible will happen if he does not escape. Orin, throughout the third part of the play, recognizes the supernatural forces that have control over him. However, his plea to Hazel tells us he cannot removes himself from their influence. He is trapped in the realm of past Mannons.

The Mannon ghosts are manifestations that serve to punish the Mannons that are left alive. In a discussion of female social conventions, the ghost in addition served to transform Lavinia into a more feminine character and then punish her when she has reached the complete transformation at the end of the play. At the open of Act IV of "The Haunting" Lavinia appears physically to have returned to her old self, "Her body, dressed in mourning, again appears flat-chested and thin." Lavinia appears hopeful telling Seth: "I'm going to marry him! [Peter]. And I'm going away with him and forget this house and all that ever happened in it! ("Mourning" 416). Although Lavinia has resorted back to her pervious dress, one of mourning, her attitude has changed. Lavinia is now hopeful of the future and about love. This is opposite from Lavinia in the beginning of the play who states she will never marry. Lavinia, in this sequences states she will leave the house as well as forget it. The abandonment of the house translates into an abandonment of the spirits inside the house.

The spirits wish to hold on to Lavinia. This becomes apparent during her exchange with Peter at the end of the play. Lavinia, once again, appears to be possessed by her mother. Lavinia in this sequence begins a string of irrational thoughts. First, she begins to beg Peter to marry her immediately, on the day of her brother's funeral, "Marry me today, Peter! I'm afraid to wait!". Lavinia's fear suggests she can sense she is about to be re-possessed. Next, she pleads with Peter to make love to her, "Our love will drive the dead away! It will shame them back into death! Want me! Take me Adam!" ("Mourning 421). First, Lavinia wishes to drive the dead away, suggesting that she sees her re-possession is eminent. Lavinia believes the act of human connection, love making, will shame the spirits because it is an act they can no longer experience. Next, Lavinia calls out the name of Christine's lover, suggesting at that particular moment, Christine has re-possessed her and has gained control of her thoughts.

As Lavinia's passage of "The Haunted," continues it becomes more evident that Christine has indeed possessed her. After Lavinia calls Peter 'Adam' O'Neill's stage directions state: "She is brought back to herself with a start by this name escaping her—bewilderedly, laughing idiotically". Lavinia, after hearing Adam's name is able to regain control of her own thoughts from Christine. Lavinia now recognizes her mother's influence, telling Peter: "Always the dead between us! It's no use trying anymore!...Marry someone else. Love isn't permitted to me. The dead are too strong!" (Mourning 422). The statement "always the dead between us" suggests the dead have intervened with Lavinia's departure. The Mannon ghosts wish her to remain with them in the surreal world of the Mannon home. Her statement "It's no use trying anymore" indicates she has completely surrendered to the house and the ghosts within it. She is now the embodiment of the living dead. Her statement, "love is not permitted to me" suggests she has made the mental change into a conventional woman, but now it is being taken away. The Mannon ghosts appear to have given her a taste of conventional womanhood just to take it away. Perhaps they wanted her to feel like a woman would in order to give her more emotion, so when they reclaimed her she would experience more pain.

The characters of Christine and Lavinia both display attributes that are not conventional depictions of woman in society. Christine is destroyed by her quest to reclaim her body and herself. She ultimately takes her own life. Lavinia, just as she is beginning to conform to society's definition of a woman, is destroyed by the ghosts of her past. She is drawn into a hypothetical underworld, where she will be completely hidden by society's watchful eyes, never being allowed to conform. Lavinia's character is essentially destroyed by her situation, punished by her families past wrong doing. At the end of this play, Lavinia is in perpetual mourning, another possible interpretation of the play's title *Mourning Becomes Electra*, reversed it can be read as 'Electra becomes mourning'.

IV. Conclusion

Social conventions associated with women are just one type of convention that can be found among works of fiction. In looking at O'Neill's works one notices the multitude of conventions that can be found. This discussion of female conventions can further lead to the discussion of male conventions, as well as conventions on class and educational levels. This discussion is only the beginning of what can be found in works of literature throughout all periods of time.

Eugene O'Neill's purpose was not to insert conventions in his work. The insertion of conventions is hard to control because of the nature of them. This is why it is such an accurate depiction of the attitudes of current and past society. The study of conventions allows us look at ourselves from a different perspective and to question notions that in the past were unquestionable.

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