Eugene O'Neill's Women: His Life and Selected Plays

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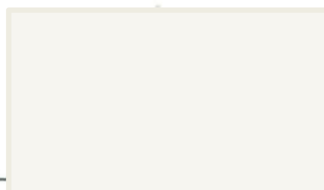

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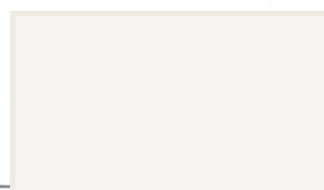

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje ženy ve vybraných hrách Eugena O'Neilla, které byly napsány na začátku a na konci jeho divadelní tvorby. Hry *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), a *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) jsou analyzovány s cílem zjistit, jak moc, zda vůbec, se O'Neillovo vyobrazování žen v jeho hrách během let změnilo. Zároveň je brán potaz na měnící se ženské sociální klima na začátku 20. století ve Spojených státech a jak se dané sociální faktory přenesly do vybraných divadelních her. První část této bakalářské práce popisuje změny žen ve společnosti na začátku století, a jejich uplatnění, i vyobrazení, v divadelních hrách. Analytická část práce představuje autora a jeho vztah k ženám. Dále jsou analyzovány obě hry a jejich ženské postavy, které jsou porovnávány jak mezi sebou, tak i s rolemi žen v americké společnosti.

Klíčová slova: Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, americké drama, rodinné drama, ženy

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the women in selected plays written by Eugene O'Neill at the beginning and end of his theatrical career. The plays *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) are analyzed to determine how much, if at all, O'Neill's portrayal of women in his plays has changed over the years. At the same time, consideration is given to the changing social climate for women in the early 20th century United States and how the social factors in question translated into the selected plays. The first part of this thesis describes the changes in women in society at the beginning of the century and their role and depiction in the plays. The analytical part of the thesis introduces the author and his relationship with women. The two plays' female characters are then examined and compared to one another as well as to the roles that women performed in American culture.

Keywords: Eugene O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, American drama, family drama, women

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor’s/Master’s thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

As the only dramatist to ever win a Nobel Prize in Literature and a four-time Pulitzer Prize-awarded author, Eugene O'Neill is considered to be one of the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century, if not all time. In the roughly 50 plays he wrote throughout his 40-year literary career, he explored various forms of expressionism, interior monologues, and masks on stage, pushing the limits of American dramatic realism.[1] His complicated life served many times as a model for his plays; therefore, his works contain several autobiographical elements.

This thesis examines the women characters in two plays by Eugene O'Neill from distinct periods: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (published 1956, written 1939-41). Both plays are categorized as family dramas and a female character serves as one of the main protagonists, with the dramatic action centered around her. This thesis focuses on to what degree O'Neill's perceptions and portrayals of women changed throughout his career. The theoretical part of this thesis concentrates on women's changing social status in society and acknowledges her transformation into what has come to be called the New Woman. The advent of the New Women brought about several changes in the American environment, one of which was disengagement from Victorian norms and the True Woman. The focus is also on American drama itself, in particular family drama and the roles that women (literally and metaphorically) played in daily life and in the theatre at the turn of the 20th century.

The analytical section will examine O'Neill's women in several categories to better understand their differences and similarities. The female characters in both plays will be analyzed as women in society, wives, and mothers. Since he was a young child, Eugene O'Neill was significantly influenced by women, especially since he saw his mother as the first in a long line of women to have failed him. He spent his entire life looking for the perfect woman, both in his work and in his personal life. Finally, in his last play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, he shows in the troubled character of Mary Tyrone a finely detailed view of the family dynamics surrounding his mother Ella O'Neill.

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[1] David Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 140.

I. THEORY

1 WOMEN'S ROLES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1.1 True Woman

During the late 1800s the roles of men were changing due to the political or geographical situation, and so did their values. During the rapid industrialization of the 19th century, first in the UK, then in the US, men became builders of the new materialistic society. The woman of the 19th century was the beacon of true values in a world that slowly began to fade.[2] Women were expected to marry, have children, and adopt domestic responsibilities during the 19th. Womanhood was glorified by the media, promoting the importance of a woman's role in the home. The propaganda in women's periodicals highlighted that the wife and mother are the centers of the family and that a man may only become a civilized human through her domestic methods. Women's roles in the home were highly valued, and responsibilities like childbearing and housework came to be viewed as independent "jobs" in their own right. These jobs became equal to men's professions and were treated seriously enough that by the 1830s, an entire literary genre was developed, providing women with instructions on how to handle their home duties.[3]

According to a well-known 1966 essay by Barbara Welter, four qualities—"piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity"—were seen as the foundational components of a True Woman, all representing presumed acceptable qualities of a "mother, daughter, sister, wife." According to Welter, the term "True Woman" refers to a member of the "cult of True Womanhood," which promoted the ideal woman of the 19th century. The wellspring of a woman's power and the essence of her virtue were her piety or religion. Women were the ones who could balance, enhance, and redeem the impure world of males, who had to leave the home to earn a living for the family. Religion significantly impacted a woman's life because it helped her maintain their place in society and did not interfere with her ability to perform their domestic responsibilities.[4] A young woman considered purity to be as important as piety, as the roots of the Protestant society remained in the customs. Frontier

[2] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-152, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179.
[3] Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Roles in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 1-3.
[4] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 151-153.

urban and village women thought piety was a direct relationship to God.[5] The absence of a woman's purity was unnatural and unfeminine. Without it, she was merely a lower-class person who had no claim to the title of woman. To maintain their purity for their husbands, whom they gave their complete attention to, women transformed themselves into hallowed vessels without having a physical or psychic existence of their own.[6]

As mentioned, due to the fear that a woman would lose her feminine essence if she entered the workplace, until the early 20th century women were not provided with many opportunities to choose their careers. However, the earliest instances of women working outside the home predate the Industrial Revolution. Women's careers and jobs were both seen as secondary to their responsibilities as wives and mothers; as a result, women were treated as temporary workers in the workplace. The number of women working in education, nursing, and administration increased by the middle of the 19th century since these jobs were perceived as feminine and suitable for unmarried women.[7]

1.2 Patriarchy

According to *Merriam-Webster*, the word "patriarchy" represents "control by men of a disproportionately large share of power."[8] The word dates to the 1560s, and its origin comes from Greek *patriarkhia,* describing "male chief or head of a family."[9] Patriarchy can be described as an environment where the father, the "patriarch," holds power over the household. People living in this environment—women, children, young men, and slaves—had to answer to the head of the family: the dominant man. Patriarchy is a system, an ideology, that refers to male domination in both private and public spheres. According to this ideology, men are biologically predisposed to dominance and more masculine roles due to their physical characteristics, whereas women are more often assigned submissive and feminine roles. Feminists frequently used the word patriarchy to characterize the power dynamics between the sexes to better understand women's perspectives. Nowadays, this

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[5] June O. Underwood, "Western Women and True Womanhood: Culture and Symbol in History and Literature," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1985): 95, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23530950.
[6] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 154-155.
[7] Desirae M. Domenico, and Karen H. Jones, "Career Aspirations of Women in the 20th Century," *Journal of Career and Technical Education* 22, no. 2 (2007), 1-2, https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v22i2.430.
[8] "Patriarchy," *Merriam-Webster,* Accessed March 23, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy.
[9] Harper Douglas, "Etymology of patriarchy," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed March 23, 2023, https://www.etymonline.com/word/patriarchy.

term conjures up images of unequal male-female relationships in which the female sex is dominated by the male sex and considered subordinate.[10]

Arguably until at least the late 1960s, the United States was generally a patriarchy-dominated society. In such a society, women are dependent on men in all domains and are in subservient positions. All the power that concerns a woman's life is thus held by the man, and therefore, the woman is deprived, for example, of the right to vote or to own property. As a result, women are the mere property of men, deprived of the freedom and opportunities that could further develop their character. Women are subordinate to men, occupying a position in the household or society, where the decision-making process is above them. The subordination can be carried out in many ways and take various forms; according to a 2012 article by Professor Abeda Sultana, a few examples of women's discrimination are "son preference, discrimination against girls in food distribution, the burden of household work on women and young girls, lack of educational opportunities for girls, lack of freedom and mobility for girls, wife battering, male control over women and girls, sexual harassment at the workplace, lack of inheritance or property rights for women, male control over women's bodies and sexuality, no control over fertility or reproductive rights."[11] Consequently, it is possible to reject the notion of biological determinism, which argues that men are superior to women simply because of their genetics and that social oppression of women is the main cause of their subjugation. However, subordination can be merely a sort of trade that offers the possibility of cooperation between the superior and the inferior, rather than having malicious intents. In this situation, a woman consents to being treated as a subordinate in return for privileges and security.[12]

1.3 The New Woman

A new conception of femininity developed in late 19th- and early 20th-century America, beginning to influence the public's perceptions and understandings of women's place in society. According to historian Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, who specializes in 20th century U.S. history, the New Woman is "identified by contemporaries as a Gibson Girl, a suffragist, a Progressive reformer, a bohemian feminist, a college girl, a bicyclist, a flapper, a working-class militant, or a Hollywood vamp, all of these images came to epitomize the New Woman,

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[10] Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," *Arts Faculty Journal* 4 (August 2012): 2-3, https://doi.org/10.3329/afj.v4i0.12929.
[11] Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," 6-8.
[12] Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis," 7-8.

an umbrella term for modern understandings of femininity."[13] Coined by the English novelist Sarah Grand in her 1894 essay, the term "New Woman" was intended to stand in opposition to the Victorian "Traditional Woman," changing values and women's place in society. Several social and political factors, such as the growth of female workers, the easing of gender roles, the expansion of the retail fashion industry, and changes to the laws and social norms governing marriage played a role in the emergence of the New Woman.[14] The New Woman challenged old Victorian gender roles with her passion for work and determination for a woman's career, education, or political influence and became part of the feminist movement and the campaign for women's suffrage. These movements promoted equality among the genders, freedom, and independence.[15]

1.3.1 The Gibson Girl

As aforementioned, the New Woman concept went through several stages, each varied by location, class, politics, color, ethnicity, age, time, or historical circumstances. During the years 1890-1900, the image of a Gibson Girl dominated as a symbol of the New Woman. Created by the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, the image of a Gibson Girl usually depicts a young, white single woman with a huge bust and a tiny, corseted waist, wearing a shirtwaist and a bell-shaped skirt. The Gibson Girl was frequently depicted dancing, engaging in group activities, or participating in outdoor hobbies like golf or cycling. Although she was not portrayed as a working woman, she was not a married one either. The Gibson Girl was a young bachelorette who flirts with men and represents an object of desire for them, but she is rarely a married woman or a mother. She served as a symbol for two significant changes that helped give rise to the New Woman in the 1890s: women's participation in higher education and athletics. It was most likely the Gibson Girl style that women adopted, especially young college students who wanted to project an image of athleticism and feminine attractiveness while simultaneously claiming a progressive identity. By showing the Gibson Girl riding a bike and engaging in other athletic pursuits, the Gibson Girl helped society accept women's participation in sports, enabling them to engage in more competitive activities and elevating athletics to a fundamental aspect of the New Woman. Cycling

[13] Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (Oxford University Press, August 22, 2017), 1.

[14] Kathrine R. Kelly, "The New Woman, the Suffragist, and the Stage," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama,* ed. Jeffrey H. Richards, and Heather S. Nathans (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 203-217.

[15] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 1.

represented a woman's ability to leave the domestic sphere and allow herself to explore new opportunities. A bicycle ride became a symbol of a "free, untrammeled womanhood."[16]

1.3.2 The political New Woman

Women called for equal rights and political reform, and the New Woman became primarily known for the women's suffrage movement. In the early 1910s, the fight for women's rights entered a new phase, and the term feminism became the movement's core component.[17] *Merriam-Webster* defines feminism as the "belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests."[18] Feminists, unafraid to challenge male dominance, fought for a higher standard of morality, more opportunities, and respect. If women wanted to compete professionally with men, they needed better access to education that would allow them to obtain better jobs, show their economic potential, and demonstrate that even while carrying the responsibilities of being a wife or a mother, they ought to be respected as career-women.[19] In addition to fighting for the right to vote and political engagement, feminists also desired sexual equality while recognizing their sexual differences from males. The movement sought to alter not only the political, but also the economic, social, personal, and cultural spheres of women's lives.[20]

1.3.3 The Flapper

The "flapper" or "modern girl" emerged as the archetypal representation of the New Woman during the post-war era. With the actions that took place during World War I, the mobilization of women for war purposes and in the workplace, and the new political environment set by the suffragettes, the New Woman drew more attention to her sexual expression, pleasure, and individuality. Women started to place more importance on their appearance, and fashion turned into a representation of female empowerment.[21]

Flappers took on the appearance of new femininity, as they changed brought attention to the lower half of the body by raising their skirts above the knee and rolling their hose

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[16] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 2-5.
[17] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 8.
[18] "Feminism," *Merriam-Webster*, Accessed March 22, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism.
[19] Deborah S. Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," *Educational Theatre Journal* 27, no. 2 (1975): 149, https://doi.org/10.2307/3206108.
[20] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 8.
[21] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 18-19.

below it.[22] By focusing on women's legs rather than their bosoms or waists, the short skirt helped to break the link between women's sexuality and maternity. The flapper ideal represented a rejection of gender expectations associated with motherhood more than a rejection of womanhood.[23]

Women went through several phases at the start of the century that aided in their advancement to an equal position in society. They were able to draw attention to their accomplishments and leave behind the oppressive Victorian age as a result of the feminine movements. Women had improved access to education, which led to many superior professions that enabled them to compete for jobs that were, for the most part, only held by men. These developments in the feminist movement culminated in the representation of the New Woman. However, by 1920, the feminist movement was in decline as the next generation of women lacked the same zeal for the cause. This decline persisted until the 1960s when a powerful renaissance got underway.[24]

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[22] Kenneth A. Yellis, "Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 46, https://doi.org/10.2307/2710772.
[23] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 21.
[24] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 149.

2 AMERICAN DRAMA

The drama was generally looked down upon in the early colonial era and viewed as a diversion from settling new territories and founding colonies. As people's yearning to express themselves via art expanded, the first amateur theatres started to appear in the urban environment around 1700. Improved conditions allowed actors to perform in the English language in the New World just as newly arrived authors from Britain did. New characters, like the "Yankee or the urban fireman," were created as a result of the new surroundings; these personas were influenced by regional characteristics. The 19th century expansion of theatre was rather rapid, thanks to new urban development and the introduction of new technologies. The plays were accommodated to reach as many social groups as possible, therefore the topics were extensive. The theatre played on the adoration for "Shakespearean-style vehicles" as well as on democratizing inclinations, displaying more of what audiences desired. The new plays would be based on historical events, often tragic ones, and would tell the story of these events with passion and romance to arouse feelings. A historical play like *Metamora* (1829) had the power to incite passion over contemporary issues like slavery and Indian removal. Melodrama's goal was to generate emotions through emotive portrayal; hence it became popular throughout the 19th century.[25]

2.1 20th-century American drama

The credibility and relevance of American drama have been an issue since the first US plays were performed and published. Many American critics, such as Brander Matthews or Susan Harris Smith, expressed their disapproval of American theatre[26], the "stepchild" of American literature, noting both its poor structural and action-related conditions as well as its decline before the 20th century.[27] By the 20th century, the perception began to change. The identity of the nation reflects in national literature and its direction. Political upheaval, societal change, and cultural influences all contributed to literary history. Directly or inadvertently, American theatre portrays the social environment of the nation.[28] One of the biggest influences on the theatre industry at the turn of the century was massive economic development and industrial growth. With modern and easier accessible theatre, the demand

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[25] Jeffrey H. Richards, Heather S Nathans, and Oxford University Press, *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2; 5.
[26] David Krasner, *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 1.
[27] Gary Richardson, *American Drama from the Colonial Period through World War I: a Critical History*. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), ix.
[28] Krasner, *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 1-2.

for plays increased, and from the 1880s to the 1920s American dramatists produced numerous new plays. At the turn of the century, Clyde Fitch was among the most well-known playwrights in terms of popularity with audiences. He observed the newly evolving social structures of the industrial era and urban life, which served as his inspiration for his plays. Fitch's melodramas of modern society span the divide between social realism and the history of American romantic melodrama. According to Fitch, the reality of the urban condition should be depicted in a "real melodrama." The representation of the true transformation of American urban culture can be seen in his play *The City*. The city itself is a symbol of the real urban transformation and power of modernization in American society. Other authors used their melodramas as a platform for societal criticism, delving into issues like racism and corruption.[29]

Realism rose to the fore, leaving American romanticism behind. The fast industrialization and urbanization at the time had a significant impact on society. A nation with a greater emphasis on commerce lost its initial purity and changed the contemporary man to fit the system, turning "the human worker into a machine." "The writers of the twentieth century had been disillusioned by social and economic injustices and economic depression," which was evoked by the World Wars,[30] the second of which greatly affected the successful playwright Eugene O'Neill, driving him into depression.[31] The 20th century is characterized by instability and hopelessness brought on by moral dilemmas. Following horrific incidents, people started to doubt their adherence to religion, losing purpose in life and treating it like a meaningless process that ends with death. The modern man seeks out others in society who are similar to him in an attempt to feel like he belongs. The dilemma of a man's identity and sense of belonging was a topic that American playwrights now covered in their works, for example in O'Neill's early expressionistic dramas *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922).[32]

By 1920 the elements of realistic plays had been established and the audience gained a general understanding of these conventions, e.g. removing the "fourth wall" and letting the

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[29] Mark Evans Bryan, "American Drama, 1900-1915," in *A companion to twentieth-century American drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005) 4-6; 8.
[30] Saroj Parihar, Dr. Hemant Kumar Shukla, "A Brief Study of the Twentieth Century American Drama: The Impact of Rapid Industrialization and Urbanization." *Mukt Shabd Journal* 9, no. 8 (August 2020): 1488; 1494.
[31] Stephen A. Black, *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 438-440.
[32] Parihar, and Shukla, "A Brief Study of the Twentieth Century American Drama: The Impact of Rapid Industrialization and Urbanization," 1488-1489.

audience look at various aspects of the common present-day life. The characters in the plays are influenced by their environment, dealing with the everyday issues of a modern man.[33]

2.2 Women in American drama in the early 20th century

By the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, the status of women in the society began to massively change. The supposed New Woman was the image of those who wanted to compete in a male's dominated world. The desire for economic freedom promised women more control over their own lives while simultaneously giving them the feeling of "self-expression" and "self-fulfillment." By the end of the 19th century, more women were allowed to seek higher education. However, although women's rights slowly began to shift, the change in perception in society and literature was rather slow. Between 1865 and 1890, the public did not sympathize with the feminist point of view in the early period of this movement. The portrait of a woman on stage still leaned toward the traditional woman—a woman who is regarded as the most important member of the family, and vastly superior to men because of her ability to bear children, but who is also too fragile for the real world and physically weaker than men.[34]

The literature reflected on the changing climate in society. With the feminist movement and the concept of the New Woman, new literary tropes emerged. The portrayal of women varied: the stereotypical wife, putting her needs aside to take care of a family and sacrificing her dreams; the woman whose main goal is to appear respectable; the unhappy woman who constantly worried that she would not meet a man's expectations; or the perfect example of a strong, independent woman with intelligence, confidence and even humor.[35]

One of the most fundamental plays that introduced a new version of a woman in American drama was James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890). The play depicts a woman's strong input in family matters and ability to sacrifice herself for better and moral good, as well as showing the audience the issue of double standards. The play's theme, the "woman question" in society and literature, brought the feminist movement to a significant extent, despite the fact that it was shocking and controversial at the time. Several authors constantly emphasized woman's rights in their work as well as women who now found

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[33] Brenda Murphy, "Realism in American Drama," in *A Companion to American Literature: 3 Volume Set,* ed. Susan Belasco (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 190.
[34] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 149-150.
[35] Felicia Hardison Londré, "Many-Faceted Mirror: Drama as Reflection of Uneasy Modernity in the 1920s," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 72.

themselves in higher positions.[36] Actively agitating contentiously for more rights, women's organizations pushed for "prohibition, public schools, protection of infants, physical education in public schools, peace through international arms reduction, and protection of women in the industry." Unlike obtaining the right to vote in 1920, many of the other rights women fought for fell short. After 8 years after its approval, the legislation promoting maternal and infant welfare and hygiene was repealed; the child labor amendment had no chance at all.[37]

In the first decades of the 20th century, more female playwrights stepped forward and established a presence on Broadway, focusing on issues such as sexual morality and double standards. Female playwright Rachel Crothers became popular thanks to her American version of what was called "drama of discussion," in which an argumentative case makes up the action and unresolved ideas come into conflict, creating the drama. The characters in Crothers' plays are depicted in household settings, with most of them being from the middle class, and speaking in colloquial dialogue to make them seem relatable to the audience. In a play such as *He and She* (1912), she discusses gender equality and debates over whether a woman should have a career in addition to a family. In contrast to the "happy ending" seen in melodrama or comedy, these plays often have a rather unhappy conclusion. As in the dramas of George Bernard Shaw in Great Britain, philosophical debates and discussion plays became more popular, especially among playwrights who focused on serious marriage-related issues. Jesse Lynch Williams' *Why Mary?* (1917) emphasizes issues like divorce and the economic dependency of women as a justification for loveless marriages.[38] With the increasing rate of divorces in America at the beginning of the 20th century, the portrayal of divorce on stage became very frequent. This theme barely scratches the surface in *Margaret Fleming*, not fulfilling its purpose, while in the play *Why Mary?* Williams points out its increase by providing statistics relevant to this specific period. By stressing the issue of divorce in his plays, Williams warns and implores men to reform their marriage situations.[39]

Another element on the women's freedom agenda was financial independence. Economic freedom for women was criticized by many in the early 20th century society, including some more traditional female authors and commentators. Women earning wages independently would be more likely to be able to support themselves, thus making men's

[36] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 149.
[37] Martha H. Patterson, ed., *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 7.
[38] Murphy, "Realism in American Drama," 188.
[39] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 152.

role in the household insignificant, or in some cases, non-existent. Various authors provided different points of view on financial independence, e.g. that working women are often seeking a wealthy man to save them from financial distress. In another play by Rachel Crothers *A Man's World* (1918), a woman character desires nothing more than being in a marriage, which would solve her financial problems. Thus, the idea of the independent feminist woman is problematized. The 1919 play *Why Mary?* by Jesse Lynch Williams provides a perfect contrast. The story takes a closer look at the power dynamics of marriage between a husband and a wife while also portraying the women's frustration of being trapped by financial dependence.[40] Thus a man is the destroyer of women's life. The play *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) by Eugene O'Neill serves as a contrast. In the play, a woman is depicted as a destroyer, as her husband sacrifices his ideal for the sake of their union. Similar to Williams, but from a distinct perspective in terms of gender, O'Neill examines the yearning for escape.[41]

Women were able to work in a variety of fields as the number of women in the workforce increased, challenging men in their areas of expertise. Women's ambition to pursue more prestigious positions was seen as "unnatural," which led to the abolition of women's traditional role in the home. Crothers emphasizes the struggle of a woman being compared to a man and never being successful in the patriarchal world on their own in the play *A Man's World* (1918). Other plays depict the struggle between career and family. In the play *He and She*, the wife is not only talented, but she is also more successful than her husband, showing that women are just as competent and professional as men.[42]

However, the feminist movement, as well as the image of the New Woman, began to disappear. The movement seemed to achieve its goal, but some extended and younger generations of women slowly lost interest and openness to new ideas. As a result, the year 1920 marked a watershed moment. The number of women in universities began to decline, as well as the previous increase in the workplace. Young women returned to the old-fashioned way of life, leaving their once-worshipped morals behind. As always, the behavior of society reflected itself in literature and drama. In another play by Rachel Crothers, *Mary the Third* (1923), the audience follows a character who reflects on the movement's peak and its demise. The female character in the play became obsessed with liberation and

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[40] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 155.

[41] Linda Ben-Zvi, "Freedom and Fixity in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," *Modern Drama* 31, no. 1 (1988): 19, https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.1988.0025.

[42] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 156-157.

independence; however, in the end, the daughter returns to her parents and chooses to be wed the same way her mother did. In the belief that being outspoken will help her avoid the mistakes her parents made; she adopts the traditional norms of marriage.[43]

The return to domesticity was fully realized by the 1930s. Women's mindset changed back to their traditional way of living. It is plausible to assert that the public perceived the female movement as an emotional outburst that fizzled out as quickly as it began. The woman's attitude towards independence changes as she finds out that even if she fully gives herself to her career, stands proudly next to men as a competitor, and gains more privileges, something in her life will be missing. Rachel Crothers' 1932 drama *When Ladies Meet* depicts a woman struggling with her independence while realizing she is alone. She does not belong to anyone, nor is she loved by a man who could provide her with a home. The play points out that at the end of the eternal struggle for freedom, women will find nothing but loneliness. Therefore, the play implies that a woman's profession will never be enough to fulfill her.[44]

2.3 American family drama in the early 20th century

One of the most popular genres of American theatre in the 20th century and throughout its history was family drama. The depiction of family dynamics contributed to capturing the ever-changing essence of the true American experience.[45]

The trajectory of the American middle-class family began to diverge from that of the American family in the 19th century. In addition to providing a secure environment and financial security for their children, the modern family has taken on new demands. Family life is now expected to be more intimate, including romance, sexual fulfillment, companionship, and emotional fulfillment. At the beginning of the century, Americans became concerned about the future of family life. Psychologist John B. Watson even expressed his skepticism by asserting that marriage will cease to exist in the following 50 years. These conclusions were drawn after considering several factors: after 1870, there was a dramatic increase in divorce rates as well as the drop in childbearing in America caused by the change in sex roles at the start of the 20th century. The recession of fertility rate was affected by the number of women who pursued jobs and held outside-the-home employment increased. Young women were less concerned with performing their conventional duties,

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[43] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 158.
[44] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 159.
[45] Thaddeus Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 1.

which included taking care of their homes and raising their children. The "New Woman" movement and moral upheaval caused changes in the American middle class.[46]

During the course of the 20th century, many Americans have also dealt with a change in ideology, as consumption became essential to corporations and governmental institutions, leaving many individuals and families overwhelmed and motivated to buy even more items, creating a new national (and soon international) capitalist culture of consumption. People's values slowly began to change; the important thing about a product was not its purpose but its value. Commodities' monetary values can alter the way individuals perceive their worth, and economic conventions have done the same. Families are now impacted by this style of thinking and have forgotten the criteria used to determine an individual's worth. Anything can be a commodity, and anything can be valued based on economic determinants. Family members see themselves and each other as objects and commodities whose prices are determined by the market. Inside the family home, the members no longer have their "intrinsic value," but they are viewed as commodities.[47] Eugene O'Neill's play *Desire under the Elms* (1924) examines the greedy desires that are inherent in human nature and can only have negative consequences.[48] O'Neill believed that wealth and power are a permanent element of the human condition and that the desire for exclusive possession corrupts those who abuse it to an extreme.[49]

The decision to display this image to the audience on stage was initially received with resistance, since American advertising, which is closely associated with Hollywood, tried to portray the family setting by upholding the status quo—as only a loving environment. The idealized version of America, where the family is one of the most important social foundations and is characterized as a secure environment, where each member is appreciated and supported, has been disproved. Writers like Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Edward Albee, dispelled the image of the ideal American family and addressed a variety of psychological problems that affect people in society. The authors illustrated how external factors may affect people's behavior and how easily materialistic items might do so, showing the audience how the once-promised haven of a family started to come apart.[50]

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[46] Steven Mintz, and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1989), 107-109.
[47] Thaddeus Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 2-3.
[48] L. I. Wenhua, "Biblical Themes in Eugene O'Neill's Plays," *Canadian Social Science* 9, no. 5 (2003): 65.
[49] John Patrick Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 99-100.
[50] Mehvish Syed, "Family Dynamics and American Drama." *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 3, no. 4 (July 2014): 207-208.

2.3.1 The marriage relationship

Marriages are typically the main catalyst for family formation. Marriages are influenced by social environment, demographic, and economic trends which influence the rates of family formation and childbearing decisions.[51] At the beginning of the new millennium, the United States' divorce rates skyrocketed. In 1916, one out of every seven marriages in a city like Chicago ended in divorce. To discourage marital separation, states would allow divorces only under certain conditions, or prohibited divorces altogether. The divorces nevertheless went ahead despite these restrictions, especially "when many couples were willing to participate in a charade to meet legal requirements for divorce."[52] By 1929, 71.3% of divorces in America were initiated by women. This was because women had additional legal grounds for divorce (such as nonsupport) than men.[53] Naturally, the theme of divorce started to appear in American drama. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Why Marry?* (1917) by Jesse Lynch Williams is a representation of the rising divorce rates, as well as the emergence of the New Woman. The sophisticated comedy acts as a defense of the New Woman who is, according to Professor Judith L. Stephens, "assertive, maintains independent views, and expresses them in a direct, straightforward manner." In the play, the character of Helen views marriage as a "barrier" rather than a union, and she actively opposes marrying.[54] According to Helen: "Modern marriage is a divorce."[55]

The biggest change in the marriage relationship was a woman. Women began to express themselves differently with the development of the New Woman and the women's movement. Women started attending universities and entering the workforce. As a result of this transition, marriage dynamics started to change.[56] The character of Helen in Williams' play *Why Marry?* is an excellent embodiment of the New Woman. She is a well-educated woman with a scientific degree from college. She is pursuing a job in science to generate an independent income and has interests outside of romantic love and marriage.[57] A new concept of sharing rights and responsibilities had started to replace patriarchal control, which had previously denied women an equal role in the home. Unlike the conventional Victorian

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[51] James R. Wetzel, "American Families: 75 Years of Change," *Monthly Labor Review* 113, no. 4 (March 1990): 7.
[52] Mintz, and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 109.
[53] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 152.
[54] Judith L. Stephens, "'Why Marry?': The 'New Woman' of 1918," *Theatre Journal* 34, no. 2 (1982): 185, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207449.
[55] Jesse Lynch Williams, *Why Marry?* (New York: Scribner, 1918), 150.
[56] Mintz, and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 110-111.
[57] Stephens, "'Why Marry?': The 'New Woman' of 1918," 185.

marriage, which glorified a woman as a being capable of defeating man's "animal nature," modern marriages now place a greater emphasis on emotional development, romance, and sexual fulfillment.[58] The play *Anna Christie* (1920) by Eugene O'Neill addresses woman's sexuality as well change in social standing. The protagonist of the play, Anna, used to be a prostitute. She visits her father after a long time while concealing her previous employment. The truth about Anna's background as a prostitute is revealed, and her love interest, Mat, begs for her confession to be a lie. Anna insists she has changed, but she will not deny it. By this, she demonstrates her independence from male dominance by getting the males in her life to acknowledge her past.[59] The drama depicts a strong, independent woman who is capable of marriage despite what Victorians would consider a contentious history since she did not preserve her virtue till marriage.[60] This marks a clear break from the "Traditional Woman" of 19th century Realistic US drama, as depicted, for example, in Herne's *Margaret Fleming*, as discussed above.

2.3.2 Mother and child relationship

It is undeniable that around the start of the 20th century, motherhood evolved into one of the cornerstones of the feminist movement. From a variety of perspectives, mothering might be characterized as an oppressive practice or, on the other hand, praised as an invaluable asset in American society of the twentieth century.[61]

As mentioned, the rate of births in America began to decline at the beginning of the 20th century. The Victorian concept of motherhood, which glorified the woman as "a pious and virtuous figure" and the "guardian of domestic morality," was abandoned by women in favor of the new ideal of woman, which placed an emphasis on reciprocity and sexual fulfillment. The American family abandoned its "traditional economic, educational, religious, and welfare functions" with the increase of urbanization and the development of industrial society. The rising standard of living tended to discourage parents from conceiving.[62] The general fertility rate started to plummet by a large amount—by more than 35%—in the 1920s. This pattern demonstrated that between the ages of 15 and 44, which are considered the childbearing years, births decreased from approximately 121 births per 1,000 women in

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58 Mintz, and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 114.
59 Barbara Voglino, "Feminism versus Fatalism: Uncertainty as Closure in 'Anna Christie,'" in *Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 115-118.
60 Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 158.
61 Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 45.
62 Mintz, and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 114.

1921 to roughly 89 per 1,000 women in 1930. During the Depression (1929 – 1939), this downward tendency would continue, with a further 17% drop. The fertility rate surged after the end of World War II and reached its high in 1957 at over 123 births per 1,000 women.[63] Americans who were drawn to Victorian customs tried to reinstate respect for traditional values by censoring lewd publications and movies, encouraging modest women's attire, and outlawing birth control activism.[64] The campaign to secure women's access to birth control was addressed by a playwright at the time, Susan Glaspell. In her comedy *Chains of Dew* (1922), Glaspell focuses on the birth control movement across the United States and highlights the hypocrisy of many who opposed the movement. In her plays, Glaspell tries "to capture the emotional and psychic alienation of her female characters struggling most assertively against patriarchal society."[65]

Therefore, motherhood was also threatened by the uprising of the New Women. Maternity became a barrier as women fought for society's recognition that they should be seen as more than just mothers and wives—for example, as successful businesswomen. As some women were able to handle the roles of mother and career woman,[66] the New Woman, identified as a flapper, rejected maternity completely.[67] If one were to follow this idea, raising children would be viewed more as a barrier to a woman's success. Crothers' play *He and She* (1920) is one of the first in-depth assessments of the effects of the rise of female professionals to be presented on stage and the depiction of the tension between motherhood and career. The play portrays a talented woman, Ann, whose dream job would take her away from her family. However, when it comes to choosing between her career and her daughter, maternal instincts take over, and she sacrifices her dream for her family.[68]

The shift in consumerism at the start of the 20th century in America was another factor that affected the mother-and-child bond. Family members began to view one another more like objects or commodities as the value of each person was determined by economic factors. Mothers would certainly lose their maternal instinct as a result of this belief since they would have no actual love for their children (or husbands). This ideology is portrayed in Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes* (1939), which is set in the South of the U.S. during the

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[63] Wetzel, "American families: 75 years of change," 8.
[64] Mintz, and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, 113.
[65] J. Ellen Gainor, and Jerry Dickey, "Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell: Staging Feminism and Modernism, 1915–1941," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 40-41.
[66] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 149.
[67] Rabinovitch-Fox, "New Women in Early 20th-Century America," 21.
[68] Kolb, "The Rise and Fall of the New Woman in American Drama," 156-157.

spring of 1900. In the play, Regina is portrayed as a mother and wife who succumbs to materialistic and capitalistic inclinations while using her family to amass a fortune. There is no maternal instinct; her daughter is merely an item and a commodity that helps Regina achieve her selfish objectives.[69]

According to sociological reasons, motherhood in America at the turn of the 20th century evolved. A significant part of this was played by the women's movement, which was fueled by the desire of many women to replace the old Victorian model of motherhood. The emergence of materialism also had an impact on parents' responsibilities. A person who adheres to this ideology appears to forget the true values of the people they care about.

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[69] Wakefield, *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama*, 2; 50-54

II. ANALYSIS

3 EUGENE O’NEILL

3.1 Biographical elements

Eugene O’Neill is considered to be one of the greatest American playwrights. In the course of his active writing career from the 1910s until the late 1930s, almost 50 plays of his were produced in theatres across the United States and abroad. O’Neill won three Pulitzer Prizes for Drama for *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *Anna Christie* (1921), and *Strange Interlude* (1928), as well as a fourth for *Long Day’s Journey into Night* after his passing in 1956. He also became the first American dramatist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936.[70] Unlike most of the other playwrights of his time, O’Neill’s dramas continue to be performed around the world today.

Eugene O’Neill was born on October 16th, 1888, in New York City hotel to James O’Neill, a popular romantic actor of the time, and Mary Ellen “Ella” Quinlan. Ella was not fond of life on the road, too fragile for the constant movement from one place to another, especially when she dreamed about becoming a nun before she fell in love with her husband. Eugene was their youngest son, the eldest being his brother James Jr., and Edmund, who passed away before Eugene was born from the sickness he contracted from his older brother. The family’s mourning did not stop there, as Ella went through a difficult pregnancy and was prescribed morphine on which she later became dependent. This dreadful familial background served as a major source of O’Neill’s inspiration. In 1903 he enrolled at Princeton University, which he only attended for 10 months before getting expelled. After his unfinished studies, he struggled to find his true passion, never holding a certain job for a long time. He was left wandering and trying out different jobs, such as secretary, gold prospector, assistant manager, or even sailor. In 1909 he began to have sexual affairs with a woman named Kathleen Jenkins whom he later married due to her pregnancy. To get away from his husband’s responsibilities, he traveled to South America. It was not until eleven years later that he came back and met his son, Eugene O’Neill Jr., for the first time. O’Neill was diagnosed with tuberculosis in December 1912 and admitted to a sanatorium. During his treatment, he began reading “all the classics” and “all the moderns” and was inspired by European dramatists such as Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. This was the point that he decided to become a writer, and he slowly started working on a series of one-act plays.[71]

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[70] David Krasner, “Eugene O’Neill: American Drama and American Modernism,” 142.
[71] Diggins, *Eugene O’Neill’s America: Desire under Democracy*, 18-21.

Many of his first plays dealt with contentious themes the American audience was not familiar with, for example, "marital stress, infidelity, abortion, prostitution, poverty, and suicide."[72] His second marriage was to the writer Agnes Boulton in 1918, and within two years, the play *Beyond the Horizon* debuted on Broadway, earning him his first Pulitzer Prize. His life began to drastically change (both privately and on stage). For the ensuing years, he was garnering recognition for his plays that covered a wide range of topics, including "race relations, love and marriage, working class," or "modern science and religion," while at the same time, he had to deal with the passing of his family members, including his older brother and both of his parents. O'Neill continued his work, living with his wife Agnes, until he met the attractive actress Carlotta Monterey, who had acted in one of his plays, *The Hairy Ape* (1922). Fully devoted to Eugene himself and his work, Carlotta was the complete opposite of an intellectual Agnes. She was hot-tempered, theatrical, and seductive. After his divorce, O'Neill married Carlotta, his third wife, with whom he moved to Georgia, where he composed his only well-known comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933), in which he put more emphasis on domestic life and expressed his admiration for the idyllic childhood and ordinary family he never had.[73] At the end of his writing career, from 1939 to 1943, he wrote four last plays – *The Iceman Cometh, A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Hughie*, and *Long Day's Journey into Night* – before he came down with an illness that prevented him from creating more.[74]

After World War II., O'Neill's health got worse, as he was stricken with something similar to Parkinson's disease, making it impossible for him to write due to his pain. He, therefore, gave up the role of playwright, as well as the role of father, when he became estranged from his daughter after she married actor Charlie Chaplin. He also ended his relationship with his son Shane after he was arrested, and in 1950 his eldest son committed suicide. Eugene O'Neill died in November 1953 in the Hotel Shelton in Boston.[75]

O'Neill drew many of the themes for his works from his own life, but at the same time, he focused on social aspects as well. In his works, he sympathizes with subjects outside his family sphere, such as minorities and oppressed people in society. In his eyes, society lived in its "pipe dreams" and "escapist enchantment." Therefore, his inspiration did not only stem from his personal life but he was additionally influenced by everything occurring in his

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[72] Steven F. Bloom, "Eugene O'Neill," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama,* ed. Jeffrey H. Richards, and Heather S. Nathans (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 250.
[73] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 25-26.
[74] David Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism," 149.
[75] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 28-29.

environment. The playwright covered a variety of societal issues in his works, but he was never able to forget the strife in his family's past.[76]

3.2 Eugene O'Neill's Women

Like many of his male peers in his time, Eugene O'Neill told mostly the stories of men. From the start of his career, his focus was mainly on male characters, whether it was his preference or simply the traditional way of things that was established. The perception a of strong female protagonist was still very new for many authors, for whom women were rather objects for men than subjects in their own stories. However, as previously stated, social perceptions of females were changing, as was O'Neill's opinion on the subject. In the course of his literary career, he was able to portray women in a variety of ways and give his characters a far more nuanced approach than that of the general American culture of his time.[77]

Since early in his career, O'Neill's female characters have appeared to fit a common pattern and have common traits with many other writers. The portrayal of women in his plays was not always strictly positive. His plays do not explicitly endorse the proto-feminism of his era but do not actively oppose it. Writing about how the social standing of women was altering as a result of women's movements, and manifesting so-called "female crusaders" can barely be seen in his early work. Instead, an aspect that has often been criticized since the 1960s is that his women are depicted as female "destroyers"—bringing their spouses to madness, provoking them to commit outrageous crimes, and destroying everything a man has ever worked for.[78] Judith E. Barlow, a well-known theatre scholar who has written extensively on O'Neill, has commented on how the nature of O'Neill's women in his first works was relatively basic and monotonous due to his lack of exposure to other writers who between the years 1915 and 1922 were highlighting women's aspirations and creativity. In O'Neill's early plays, women were not known for being daring, they did not often want to be artists, and unless they dreamed of real love, they were not thought of as dreamers. Women are not driven by their careers and are not defined by them; men, or less frequently, their children, are the ones who contribute to defining the character of women. The most

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[76] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 19.
[77] Judith E. Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," in *Cambridge Companions to Literature: The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Manheim, Michael (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 164.
[78] Barlow, "O'Neill's female characters," 165.

common career and way for a woman to financially support herself is through prostitution.[79] The theme of "a woman as the intruder who destroys masculine ambition, or disturbs an enclosed, companionable male universe," occurred in most of his plays during his writing career.[80]

Eugene O'Neill's life had a big impact on his work. He gained a great deal of inspiration from being able to on reflect real-life situations in his play. O'Neill's upbringing left a rather negative picture of women, which would later be demonstrated in his plays. His mother became a victim of morphine addiction, which caused her to become more withdrawn, leaving her son to believe in her insanity. During his life, he was left wondering, whether her conditions could be inherited, questioning the stability of his mind. The contrast to his mother figure was the family nurse who stayed with the family for the first seven years of O'Neill's life. O'Neill's real mother, Ella, was addicted, miserable, and, as viewed by him, insane, living most of her life in lost dreams of becoming a nun. She stood next to a "strong, devoted, dependable mother image." One could argue that in the author's opinion, these two women reflect the opposites—the yin and the yang—of the full mother figure. The result of combining the two would be a complete woman, one in whom both power and vulnerability could peacefully coexist and nurture the child within him. As a result, he would subsequently continue to look for the "ideal" woman in both his writing and his personal life, going through two marriages and encounters with prostitutes before settling down with his final wife. She was described as the only person who could put an end to his search.[81]
However, even though his mother's influence was not the only one he experienced from the female sex, it was indeed the one that influenced him as an author the most. Such a negative figure in his life as his mother shaped his viewership towards other women he portrayed in his work, especially mothers. Parent's problems can often be transmitted to their children, and in O'Neill's case, his mother provided him with plenty: her lost and unfulfilled dreams about her career, her post-traumatic stress, and guilt from losing her infant child, and her drug addiction; all of these helped him to develop a "negative anima."[82]

Eugene O'Neill's early plays showed the audience his feelings toward females. In the play *Bread and Butter* (1914), a woman manipulates a man into marriage and ruins his dream

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[79] Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," 165-166.
[80] Margaret Loftus Ranald, "From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924): The Early Plays," in *Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 84-85.
[81] Gloria Cahill, "Mothers and Whores: The Process of Integration in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," *The Eugene O Neill Review* 16, no. 1 (1992): 6; 8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29784433.
[82] Cahill, "Mothers and Whores: The Process of Integration in the Plays of Eugene O'Neill," 9.

career, while driving him crazy enough to commit suicide, showing a woman as a "destroyer." Different plays, such as *Before Breakfast* (1916), investigate the life of an unhappy married couple, which ends in a tragedy when the husband commits suicide, tired of all of his problems, one of them being his wife. The theme of these plays is consistent: a wife and domesticity, if chosen freely, are the most lethal decisions a man can make. A woman is a symbol of the amoral and materialistic bourgeois lifestyle that kills the creative spirit.[83]

O'Neill's female characters became increasingly nuanced and emerged in a variety of forms as his work evolved, including lovers, wives, prostitutes, businesswomen, nurses, patients, and even activists. Women's characters, journeys, and relationships varied from play to play, with O'Neill constantly attempting something new. Playing with the idea of what a woman could do, he often created a character so controlling that it would slowly drain the opposite gender and drive him to insanity. His women can be bold or cunning; they can struggle to control their emotions, leaving them frail, or they can be unconscious of their desire for dominance and power, leaving males wallowing. With such detailed descriptions, the viewer is forced to wonder whether O'Neill genuinely understands who his woman is, or if it is even possible to capture them—in his plays and his real life.[84]

[83] Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," 165.
[84] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 166.

4 SELECTED EARLY AND LATE PLAYS BY EUGENE O'NEILL

This analysis is based on two dramas by Eugene O'Neill written at the beginning and at the end of his career: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956). Set at the beginning of 20th century America, both plays draw on the author's autobiography and depict family relationships and family life, with women serving as the primary protagonists.

4.1 Beyond the Horizon

As mentioned, the play *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) became O'Neill's' first and biggest success; it was regularly performed on Broadway and awarded the author's first Pulitzer Prize. The theme of this play is to show the woman as "a hindrance to man's self-expression," which was a theme of many plays published in O'Neill's early career.[85]

Beyond the Horizon is a story about two brothers, Robert, and Andrew Mayo, who are each destined for a different role in life. Robert, the more poetic and fragile of the brothers, dreams about adventures and life on the road beyond the farm, while his brother Andrew is built for life on the farm and wants to take over when his parents are no longer able to. When the neighbor, Ruth Atkins, hears Robert describe his love for living "beyond the horizon,"[86] she is in awe and confesses her love for him, making him stay on the farm and give up his plans to become a sailor and leave the farm. This decision upsets the family members, especially Andrew, who is secretly in love with Ruth. He resolves to step in for his brother and abandon farm life to avoid the agony of seeing his brother and the woman he loves. This sudden decision by the characters is yet to take its toll on them when everything starts to fall apart. Not built for the role of a farmer, Robert is not able to manage this position and is inevitably leading the farm to ruin, as well as himself. His now-wife, Ruth, starts to despise Robert and slowly realizes she chose the wrong brother, and Andrew travels the world on the sea, doing everything his brother has dreamed of; however, he longs for the farm life as well as for Ruth. At the end of the play, Robert is ill from overworking and depressed about the life he lived. As his brother visits him on his deathbed, Robert tries to make things right and mend fences with his brother and wife, urging Andrew to finally take Ruth as his wife.

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[85] Ranald, "From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924): The Early Plays," 89.
[86] Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* (New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service, 1948), 26.

All three of them watch the sunrise, as Robert speaks his last, joyful words at the thought that he is free at last.[87]

The play highlights the basic choices available to men at the beginning of the 20th century in terms of freedom vs security. The stereotypical plot of comparing the stable farming life compared to a life of adventurous traveling, that one has to be present rather than have their head in the clouds, is today often criticized, which is one of the reasons this drama is rarely performed. The conditions depicted are rather harsh, however, which was seen as ground-breaking at the time in comparison to the light fare generally available on the New York stage, thus the play was successful when it opened in 1920 and was revived again in 1926. By showing Robert's shattered dreams, O'Neill presents one of his fundamental themes: "the misplaced existential dreamer."[88] But with this play, Eugene O'Neill became an important dramatist on the scene.

4.2 Long Day's Journey into Night

Long Day's Journey into Night is considered one of the greatest American plays and an ultimate masterpiece by Eugene O'Neill. Despite the fact O'Neill that worked on this play from 1939-1941, he did not wish to see this play performed. Influenced by the world situation at the time, e.g. his depression resulting from World War II, and the troubles in his personal life with his wife and children, he decided that the play should be published only 25 years after his death, after anyone who had personally known his mother, father, and brother had long since died. His wife, however, published the play in 1956, only three years after his death.[89] This play contains many autobiographical elements, as it describes a family's tragic fate mirroring the events of O'Neill and his loved ones. As described by Edward L. Shaughnessy, author of *Eugene O'Neill in Ireland* (1988), O'Neill had not settled all of his accounts with his kin before they passed away, and he wrote this play to reconcile himself to his past.[90]

The play is set in the home of the Tyrone family on one day in August 1912 and follows the events of four family members: James Tyrone, Mary Tyrone, his wife; James Tyrone, Jr., their eldest son; and Edmund Tyrone, their youngest son; and the family maid, Cathleen. The play portrays a dysfunctional family with flaws in every member. The issues that plague

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[87] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 126-127.
[88] Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism," 146.
[89] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 224.
[90] Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Long Day's Journey into Night," in *Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 70.

the Tyrones are revealed as the play progresses, and the audience witnesses how they gradually break the family as a whole apart. The mother, Mary Tyrone, is once again a victim of her morphine addiction, and while trying to hide it, her family members began to suspect her. Meanwhile, the youngest son, Edmund, has developed a strong cough, most likely suffering from tuberculosis. The family is constantly haunted by their past, and throughout the play, the father is constantly blamed for his poor financial choices and not being able to provide proper care for his family. Eldest son Jamie shoulders the weight of certain expectations from his family and struggles to cope with the feeling of disappointment. Mary imagines the life she might have had if she had never married, and Edmund fights his sickness as well as his depression and the feeling of disappointment. The mother is growing more and more addicted to morphine as the day goes on, and the men continue to drink more alcohol to deal with the family's hauntings, highlighting the fact that one of the play's key themes is addiction.

O'Neill uses his own tragic life as a muse for this play, reflecting real-world experience. Similar to the playwright himself, the characters torment themselves in their quest for happiness and atonement while being haunted by their past.[91] Professor Harold Bloom claims in his *Modern Critical Views* from 2007 that there is not a dramatist who "has matched O'Neill in depicting the nightmare realities that can afflict American family life, indeed family life in the twentieth-century Western world." The play *Long Day's Journey into Night* portrays the domestic tragedy that many ordinary people experience.[92] The themes of a dysfunctional family, alienation, loss of loved ones, sickness, and addiction—all of these can be considered modern problems, thus being one of the reasons why this play is still relevant to this day, and performed on Broadway even in 2016.[93]

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[91] Krasner, "Eugene O'Neill: American Drama and American Modernism," 155.
[92] Harold Bloom, ed. *Eugene O'Neill*. Updated ed. (New York, NY: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), 7-8.
[93] "Long Day's Journey Into Night - Broadway," Broadway.com, accessed May 1, 2023, https://www.broadway.com/shows/long-days-journey-into-night/.

5 O'NEILL'S FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED PLAYS

5.1 Women in society

Both plays, which take place at the beginning of the twentieth century, include elder and younger generations of women. The play *Beyond the Horizon* introduces three women in its story: Kate Mayo, the wife of the farmer James Maye and mother of Robert and Andrew; Ruth Atkins, the neighbor and love interest of the two brothers; and Mrs. Atkins, the mother of Ruth. In this drama, the roles of the women could be seen as traditional, still influenced by 19th century America, and not entirely altered by the changes brought by the women's movement at the turn of the century. Every female character mentioned above at some point in their life enters into a marital union and bears children, fulfilling the role of a True Woman.[94] However, not all women fully embody this role. The closest depiction of a woman with Victorian customs can be seen in Kate Mayo. Her character is an illustration of a woman who fully devotes herself to her husband and her family, but at the same time, her previous career path as a teacher might serve as an example of the women's movement and the desire for gender equality. When outbursts occur between men, she is serving as a mediator and tries to keep harmony within the household. She respects her husband and other men equally, is aware of her social standing, and occasionally feels anxious in their presence, "feeling that she has to say something" and feigning her emotions to appease them.[95] Remaining subservient, she does not long for her dreams and satisfaction, as she puts her family's needs first. Kate adheres to the patriarchal ideology by remaining submissive to the male gender and deferring to the other party's judgment. This is apparent when she states, "I'll do what Robbie says is necessary," indicating that she is willing to act on her son's, a man's, judgment when it comes to making crucial decisions.[96]

More resentful of this ideology is the other older woman, Mrs. Atkins. About forty-eight years old, Mrs. Atkins is a "victim of partial paralysis," which necessitates the use of a wheelchair.[97] Society might view her as a weak link since she is dependent on others; however, she seems to keep her head high and preach her values to others. She is especially outspoken about her daughter's marriage and raises the argument of double standards. While she sees her daughter committing to her wife's duties, she does not seem to see the same

[94] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 152.
[95] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 33.
[96] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 59.
[97] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 56.

effort in her son-in-law, Robert, and claims, that "since Robert's been in charge things've been goin' down hill steady."[98] Additionally, O'Neill employs this character to emphasize the importance of religion to 19th century female decorum. Religion is something dear to Mrs. Atkins, as she acts upon the holy word and believes that behind everything in life is "the will of God."[99]

The last woman of the play is a young woman twenty years old, endowed with beauty and youth, Ruth Atkins. She does not have any aspirations regarding her career; instead, she focuses on her dream of true love. She falsely falls in love with Robert after hearing him describe his dreams about his adventures, and begs him to stay, expressing her love for him: "Don't go away! Please! You mustn't, now! You can't! I won't let you! It'd would break my–my heart!"[100] However, it is only an illusion. Ruth is an example of a "female destroyer,"[101] represented early in the play when she manipulates Robert into thinking that choosing a domestic life with her on the farm will be more beneficial than his travels: "We'll be so happy here together where it's natural and we know things."[102] During the play, Ruth realizes what a hasty decision she made. The feeling of love towards Robert is falling, and she realizes she has chosen the wrong brother. Trying to carry out her marital duties, she starts to despise Robert during the process. Since Ruth is primarily motivated by her selfish interests, she does not reflect the patriarchal mindset like other women in her milieu. Ruth Atkins is a contrast to the True Woman; however, she does not show many character traits to be labeled as a New Woman. She does not have the same values as Kate Mayo, as she acts upon her selfish intentions.

The women in *Long Days Journey into Night* are Mary Tyrone and Cathleen, their cook and housekeeper. Mary Tyrone is fifty-four years old woman with an Irish heritage. Her description is angelic, representing the sense of purity within the True Woman: "Her nose is long and straight, her mouth wide with full, sensitive lips. She uses no rouge or any sort of make-up. Her high forehead is framed by thick, pure white hair. […] Her most appealing quality is the simple, unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl youthfulness she has never lost—an innate unworldly innocence."[103] Mary's character represents the conflict between

[98] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 58.
[99] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 60.
[100] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 27-28.
[101] Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," 165.
[102] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 29.
[103] Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (London, England: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 10-11.

what a woman dreams of, and what is expected of her. She was raised in a wealthy household with great prospects for the future. Although she had dreams of becoming a nun or a pianist, Mary married James Tyrone instead, choosing to follow her heart rather than her dreams: "I might have gone – if I hadn't fallen in love with Mr. Tyrone."[104] Her journey of becoming a New Woman is abandoned, and she devotes her life to her husband James. She chooses to fulfill her role as a wife and a mother, but she finds out this role is not the right fit for her. Mary regrets choosing this role, realizing she was "much happier before you [Mary] knew he [Tyrone] existed, […]"[105] As the play progresses, she longs for the feeling of being a little girl again, and she escapes reality with the help of morphine. Her behavior is often described as "detached" — disconnected from her responsibilities as the matron of the household, as a wife, and as a mother. She does not embrace her status, seeking to get away from it and remove herself from reality.

Just like in the previous play, O'Neill represents two female characters of different generations, and additionally, of different social statuses. The women's relationship is harmonious, and Mary can talk to Cathleen "with a confiding familiarity, as if the second girl were an old, intimate friend."[106] Twenty-year-old Cathleen is depicted as a rather uninteresting young girl who does not take life too seriously. O'Neill describes her as an "Irish peasant, […], amiable, ignorant, clumsy and possessed by a dense, well-meaning stupidity."[107] She does not show any ambition of her own, as she is comfortable in the role of a maid. Mary believes that speaking with other women makes her feel more like the woman she once was, and even the most basic of interactions can let her "forget for a while."[108] Cathleen is Mary's female companion, and as well as her servant at home, she serves as Mary's confessor. She opens up to Cathleen about her problems, lost dreams, and past. Cathleen is Mary's supportive character, and her main role in this play is to imitate the audience, who need to be shown Mary's character.

O'Neill again emphasizes religion. Throughout the play, Mary reflects on her lost dream to become a nun, just as his mother has.[109] Her religious journey consists of finding her faith again, just like she used to have it in her younger years: "some day when the Blessed Virgin Mary forgives me and gives me back the faith in Her love and pity I used to have in my

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[104] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 89.
[105] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 92.
[106] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 83-84.
[107] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 44.
[108] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 40.
[109] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 18.

convent days, and I can pray to Her again."[110] Purity is one of four qualities of a True Woman and is mainly represented in the role of a daughter[111]—a role Mary would like to return to as she believes that only then "she will be so sure of myself [herself]."[112] Her desire to become a nun and her search for her lost faith both intensify as her addiction takes over. At the end of the play, she is aware of the fact she lost something: "Something I need terribly. I remember when I had it. I was never lonely nor afraid. I can't have lost it for ever. I would die if I thought that. Because then there would be no hope."[113] She comes to understand as she delves deeper into her past that, while married to her husband made her happy, it did so only "for a time,"[114] whereas giving over her life to the Blessed Virgin held out the promise of entry into paradise and a future of eternal pleasure.[115]

5.2 Wives

O'Neill presents the roles of women and the marriage relationship from two separate perspectives in his drama *Beyond the Horizon*—a marriage that is based on true love versus a marriage that is based on the mere idea of true love. O'Neill elaborates on the concept of the evil woman, showing them once more as feminine wreckers who finally bring catastrophe to the ambitious man. He provides a contrast between two female characters: Kate Mayo and Ruth Atkins. Whereas Kate is portrayed as the perfect wife for her husband, respectful of the man as the head of the household, and embodying the patriarchal ideologies of a subservient woman, Ruth is a cunning and selfish woman, manipulating men (and her husband) for her personal use.

At the beginning of the play, Ruth is "charmed" by Robert's "musical voice telling the dreams of his childhood."[116] As Ruth listens to him with admiration, he confides his motivations for his journeys and declares his love for her. Unaware that she had fallen in love with the image of a poet, Ruth, caught up in the moment and enamored by him, she returned his affection. The fact Ruth's love is only affected by the situation can be found in Robert's surprised reaction when she reciprocates his feelings: "Do you mean that – that you love me?"[117] Ruth's selfish actions cause the fallout between the two brothers, as well as

[110] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 80-81.
[111] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 152.
[112] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 81.
[113] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 153.
[114] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 156.
[115] Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*, 229.
[116] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 26.
[117] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 28.

between the father and his sons, thus her role as a wife is perceived rather negatively. She is not the pillar of a household, but rather its destruction. In the second act, the scene shifts three years into the future, showing Ruth as Robert's wife, and the mother of two-year-old Mary. The young mother has aged and "her face has lost its youth and freshness. There is a trace in her expression of something hard and spiteful." After Andrew's departure and the death of James Mayo, the farm has been "driftin' to rack and ruin," just as Robert and Ruth's marriage. The couple is angry with one another and can be seen gazing into each other's eyes with "hatred in their expressions."[118] Ruth realized this is not the life, nor the man she pictured her life with and realizes that Andrew was the right one for her, and the farm, while Robert admits that if it was not for Ruth and their daughter he would leave as he intended to:

> [Ruth] "You were saying you'd go out on the road if it wasn't for me. Well, you can go, and the sooner the better! I don't care! I'll be glad to get rid of you! The farm'll be better off too. There's been a curse on it ever since you took hold. So go! Go and be a tramp like you've always wanted. It's all you're good for. I can get along without you, don't you worry. [Exulting fiercely] Andy s coming back, don't forget that! He'll attend to things like they should be. He'll show what a man can do! I don t need you. Andy s coming!"[119]

Ruth uses love to defend her behavior. She reveals to Andrew at the play's conclusion why her marriage suffered: "I couldn't help it. No woman could. It had to be because I loved someone else, I'd found out. [She sighs wearily] It can't do no harm to tell you now–when it's all past and gone–and dead. You were the one I really loved–only I didn't come to the knowledge of it 'til too late."[120] Ruth is blaming her behavior on stereotyped gender determinants because she does not want to be the one to blame, thus she is using justifications like "no woman could."

Tragic occurrences like the deaths of Robert's mother and Mary, the couple's young daughter, further devastate the marriage. Robert, now sick and moments before his death, is feeling guilty for the life gave his wife. Refusing to give up on his dreams, he suggests leaving the decaying farm and starting a new life with her in the city. Once again, Ruth opposes his poetic ideas but after his indignant reaction, fearing for his health, she agrees. After Robert passes away, Andrew, in rage, blames Ruth for his death: "This is your doing,

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[118] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 60-61, 57, 66.
[119] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 74-75.
[120] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 121.

your damn woman, you coward, you murderess!”[121] By not addressing Ruth by her name, but simply as a “woman,” it is possible that O’Neill was trying to state that a woman in general, “is a trope for the bourgeois life, the insensitivity and materialism that annihilate the artistic soul.”[122]

The play argues that to bring happiness to oneself and others, one must follow one’s instincts to their natural conclusion, as the characters are tragic because they have failed to do so.[123] Ruth lived up to her role as a housewife: she remained faithful to the man she married, even though she longed for another; she gave him a child and took care of the home. It is the image of a traditional home, but the marriage itself is empty.

The only woman in a marriage in O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* is Mary Tyrone. She, as well as Ruth, fell in love with her husband as a young woman, admiring him as an actor. She has heard of him before he knew him, falling in love with his image just like other girls Mary’s age: “He was a great matinée idol then,.”[124] The couple fell in love at first sight, and from that moment onward, Mary gave up her dreams of becoming a nun or a pianist. The only thing that mattered was her role as the wife of James Tyrone.[125] Both of O’Neill’s female characters fall in love on the spur of the moment, however, both because of different intentions. In *Long Days Journey into Night,* the characters are given much more depth and O’Neill demonstrates the extent to which a person’s upbringing may have an impact. Before her marriage, Mary’s view on men is skewed by her father’s behavior, as he was the man, she “worshipped” and “she’s never forgotten”[126] that he would provide her with comfort: “He spoiled me [Mary]. He would do anything I asked.”[127] Her innocent point of view clouds her judgment as she believes James Tyrone will provide her with the same comfort as her father. Mary’s consumption expectations are addressed by her mother when she confronts Mary’s father about clouding the child’s judgment: “I pity her husband if she ever marries. She’ll expect him to give her the moon. She’ll never make a good wife.”[128] The critique could have hurt her future role as a wife.

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[121] O’Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 127.
[122] Barlow, “O’Neill’s Female Characters,” 165.
[123] Tamsen Wolff, *Mendel’s Theatre: Heredity, Eugenics, and Early Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 144.
[124] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 90.
[125] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 90-91.
[126] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 32.
[127] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 89.
[128] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 99.

Although formed from love, their marriage is rather unfortunate, similar to O'Neill's real parents who had split views of the changing world at the beginning of the century. This incompatibility made for an "anxious marriage."[129] As a famous actor, James Tyrone is obligated to travel around the country, accompanied by his wife. Mary is not given a proper home she could call her own and therefore is disassociated from her wife's duties. Because of her lack of housewife duties, her husband hires servants for their summer home. Mary complains about her servants and constantly blames James for not giving her a proper home, because according to her: "The really good servants are all with people who have homes and not merely summer places."[130] However, given that she also suggests the need for servants in a real home, this simply serves to demonstrate her lack of competence to care for a home on her own. Just as Ruth in *Beyond the Horizon*, Mary constantly blames her husband for her deficiencies and makes a martyr of herself, reminding him of all the sacrifices she made for him, like giving up a home, "my father's home," to marrying him.[131] The heroine does not reflect mistakes upon herself and fails to understand the reasons of others. She fails to understand the financial struggles of her husband, James Tyrone. Afraid of losing money and ending up in the "poorhouse," she struggles to understand his reasoning. James Tyrone is a self-made man who was raised in poverty and places a high value on money, but Mary does not comprehend his financial troubles because she lacks compassion. She instead questions her role in the marriage and perceives his frugal spending as a sign that she is not important.

O'Neill's failed marriages in these two dramas suggest the two parties mirror each other. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Ruth and Robert's devastated marriage is reflected in their mental and physical health, as well as their looks. Ruth "has aged horribly. Her pale, deeply lined face has the stony lack of expression of one to whom nothing more can ever happen, whose capacity for emotion has been exhausted," meanwhile Robert has lost his strength and his health is declining: "There are bright patches of crimson over his cheek bones and his eyes are burning with."[132] The drama implies that Ruth has lost her mind while Robert has lost his health. *Long Day's Journey into Night,* which uses a very similar concept, depicts Mary's self-destructive morphine addiction having an impact on her husband's drinking as the play unfolds. Her dependence on morphine, which makes her act like "the naive, happy,

[129] Black, *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*, 9.
[130] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 53.
[131] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 62.
[132] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 97-98.

chattering schoolgirl of her convent days," is another factor in why she is unable to perform her duties as a wife.[133]

5.3 Mothers

Once more, O'Neill depicts distinct variations of women in the role of mother. In *Beyond the Horizon*, all women are sooner or later represented as mothers, and their motherhood is reflected in their character. Older women in the play—Kate Mayo and Mrs. Atkins—embody the roles of the Traditional Woman. Bearing children is connected to their legacy and pride as True Women, and a symbol of their femininity, as no man can do the same. They view parenthood as part of their female duty and lean towards the traditional way of life. Nonetheless, Kate Mayo has upheld her female responsibilities despite having a career as a teacher, pushing against the view of society that a working woman will be led away from her domesticity.[134] Whether the character lacks it or not, O'Neill emphasizes maternal instinct. Kate Mayo in *Beyond the Horizon* possesses a natural motherly instinct. While Robert prepares to leave home, she displays her discomfort. When Kate Mayo complains that men do not understand "what it means to be parted from them," O'Neill underscores that the bond between mother and child is stronger than it is for men.[135] When Robert decides not to leave the farm, she joyfully celebrates and throws herself into his arms while expressing her happiness.[136] Her joy does not last long, as Andrew takes Robert's place, and she is mourning again. After Andrew's departure and the death of her husband, Kate is dealing with the loss. Now that her son is in charge of the household and the farm, she stands up for him when he is accused of being a bad husband and farmer. She often finds herself having arguments with Mrs. Atkins, mother of Ruth:

> [Mrs. Atkins] "Robert's late for his dinner again, as usual. I don't see why Ruth puts up with it, and I've told her so."
> [Mrs. Mayo] "Robbie's always late for things. He can't help it, Sarah."
> [Mrs. Atkins] "Can't help it! How do you go on, Kate, findin' excuses for him!"[137]

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[133] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 83.
[134] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 153.
[135] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 34.
[136] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 39.
[137] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 56.

Both women love their children and do not want to accept the fact, their offspring might be at fault. O'Neill demonstrated through this that even loving mothers can become clouded by their love for their kids and lose sight of reality.

The second act of *Beyond the Horizon* introduces Ruth Atkins as a new mother in the play. After three years of an unhappy marriage, her child Mary has acquired some characteristics of their partnership. The two-year-old is described as a "[…] sickly and anaemic looking child with a tear—stained face."[138] In comparison to Kate Mayo, or even Mrs. Atkins, Ruth does not show any maternal instincts when it comes to Mary. She is cold and annoyed with her child, possibly seeing her as a burden she is left to carry for her hasty decision. When Ruth tells Andy: "And then I thought that when Mary came it'd be different, and I'd love him; but it didn't happen that way," she confesses that Mary's purpose was to give Ruth back the feeling of love she once thought was real, but now her daughter is another obstacle standing between her and happiness.[139] Ruth feels even more irritated when Mary constantly chooses her father, which she cannot understand since she sees in him nothing more than disappointment. The child's favoritism of her "daddy," irritates her, often resulting in Ruth's short temper with her daughter.[140] Mary is a constant reminder of her bad decision. As Mary passes away, she does not appear to be in mourning; instead, she talks about how her passing devastated Robert and how awful his health has been ever since, without mentioning how it affected her.

Long Day's Journey into Night is considered an autobiographical play by Eugene O'Neill, and therefore the character of the mother, Mary Tyrone, is closely connected to his mother, Ella. This fact is strongly implied by the morphine addiction that both his mother and his fictional character Mary experience.[141] Mary's motherhood is a tragic one, as her second child, Eugene, dies from the measles he obtained from his older brother, Jamie. This tragic event leaves Mary torn between the blame—"I [Mary] was to blame for his death."—due to her departure to see her husband who missed her dearly. However, in her monologue, she blames her son as well, claiming, Jamie "was jealous of the baby," and "hated him." Mary surprisingly never blames her mother, who oversaw the children at the time. The death of Eugene leaves the mother devastated and believing, she is not "worthy to have another baby," and will be punished by God if she bears a child again. Despite her protests, she is

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[138] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 60.
[139] O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon*, 121.
[140] Barlow, "O'Neill's Female Characters," 171
[141] Anne Fleche, *Mimetic Disillusion: Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and U.S. Dramatic Realism* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 35.

persuaded by her husband to have another child, as he believes the replacement of a new child will make her forget Eugene's death. Mary expresses her fears of potential failure as a mother (again) and confesses to the negative thoughts that occupied her mind while she was pregnant for the third time. Mary thinks that "children should have homes to be born in, if they are to be good children, and women need homes if they are to be good mothers."[142] In the end, the youngest son, Edmund, did replace her dead child, as Mary calls him "my baby" throughout the play. This claim is also supported by the fact that his older brother sees him as his rival in terms of parental affection, just as he saw in Eugene: "Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet!"[143]

Losing her child affected her relationship with her family members, especially with Jamie. In her mind, Jamie is still the one to blame, and her attitude toward him grows cold. He took away something she loved, or at least she cared enough about, and she is scared he will do it again: "I'm afraid Jamie has been lost to us for a long time, dear. [Her face hardens.] But we mustn't allow him to drag Edmund down with him, as he's like to do." It is possible to suggest that she lost Jamie the same day she lost her first child—Jamie is no longer a son of hers, and he is here to make "Edmund as hopeless a failure as he is."[144] Jamie's suspicion of his mother using morphine anger Mary, and when he confronts her, she is in denial:

> [Mary] "I don't know what you're talking about."
> [Jamie] "No? Take a look at your eyes in the mirror!"[145]

His words are also much harder than Edmund's and cause conflicts between the mother and her son. Jamie sees his worries as justified since he was aware of her addiction years before his younger brother.[146] Jamie is affected by his mother's addiction the most, as he sees Mary's drug addiction as the "parallel to his alcohol dependency." If his mother could beat her addiction, he could do the same.[147]

It is possible to analyze the reasons, why Mary lacks her maternal instincts. The play mentions countless times the lack of a proper home. Neither she nor her children could

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[142] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 75, 76.
[143] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 146.
[144] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 94.
[145] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, 55.
[146] Shaughnessy, "Long Days Journey into Night," 74.
[147] Michael Manheim, "The Stature of *Long Day's Journey into Night*," in *Cambridge Companions to Literature: The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, ed. Manheim, Michael (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 214.

prosper in cheap hotels: “If he’d [Jamie] be brought up in a real home, I’m sure he would have been different.”[148] The lack of a decent home—a tranquil setting where family members feel as one—creates a connection between the two plays because neither Ruth nor Mary is content with their living arrangements. Another reason for Mary’s marital detachment is the death of her child. Mary does not believe she is worth being a mother because of her religious beliefs, as mentioned above. She is also afraid to get hurt again, if she would lose another child, and therefore, keeps her distance. An example of this behavior is seen when Edmund starts showing signs of illness, and everyone, except Mary, suspects him of having a consumption. Mary is in constant denial, calling his illness “a summer cold,” not wanting to admit that she might lose her next child. However, it is her denial that draws her away from her children. When Edmund informs her about the seriousness of his illness and his soon departure to a sanatorium, Mary refuses to listen, making Edmund question how real his mother’s love for him is: “All this talk about loving me—and you won’t even listen […].”[149]

Her morphine addiction has the final and most significant effect on her role as a mother. Mary was introduced to the drug during her third pregnancy, which turned out to be painful. Since then, she has been painfully addicted, going through not only the pain of being an addict but also the humiliation of numerous confinements in the hopes of getting help.[150] Mary holds her spouse responsible for her addiction because it was he who initially introduced her to the substance.[151] Mary is becoming more and more lost in her addiction as the play progresses. Conflicts arise from their pointless requests for her to cease as well as her sons’ suspicions. As mentioned before, morphine is a form of escape, and brings Mary back to the days, when she was not a mother but rather hoped “to be a nun.”[152] She would never have children if she dedicated her entire life to celibacy, therefore her delusions brought on by morphine addiction distract her from her motherly responsibilities.

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[148] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 70.
[149] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 104.
[150] Shaughnessy, “Long Days Journey into Night,” 72.
[151] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 64.
[152] O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, 154.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the changing environment for women at the beginning of 20th century America and how these changes were portrayed in American drama, more specifically, in selected works by Eugene O'Neill. The two analyzed plays: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (written in 1939-1941, published in 1956) were written at the beginning and the end of the playwright's career, therefore the focus was also on how much, if at all, O'Neill's views on women changed over the years. The thesis analyzed the characters of women in both plays based on their role as women in society, their role as wives, and their role as mothers. It is important to understand that women played a massive role in the life of the playwright, and on many occasions, he projected his real-life experiences into his work.

The altered standing of women in society became apparent around the beginning of the 20th century. In contrast to Victorian norms, the so-called New Woman rose to prominence in society. The new feminist movements demanded gender equality so that women might be less dependent on men. Changes would be demanded in the educational system, the labor force, or political influence. Naturally, the literature has noted these shifts and provided descriptions of the current situation from many authors. Numerous works started addressing the issue of women, and women's desires received more attention.

Eugene O'Neill shows the impact of changing society in both of his plays, even though women are primarily leaning towards Victorian Traditional Women, by discussing their career paths or work aspirations. In *Beyond the Horizon*, O'Neill presents a contrast between a subservient woman Kate Mayo, a former teacher who is, however, accepting her role in a patriarchal society, and a young woman Ruth Atkins, dominating the male gender and acting upon her selfish intentions. Ruth is driven by her dream of love, and she is willing to aggressively pursue her goals, destroying relationships within the family. The dream of love is also discussed in the play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, where Mary falls in love with James Tyrone however, this was not the only dream she had. In contrast to Ruth, Mary gave up her career aspiration of becoming a nun or a pianist. As Mary represents O'Neill's real mother, Ella, her character signifies deeper philosophical meaning. In contrast to Ruth, her character arc is much more complicated, as most of her life is revealed to the audience with the help of another female character in the play, Cathleen. The drama explores Mary's past as a young girl from a respectable household who, like most women at the turn of the century, had the chance to pursue an education. However, when Mary puts love and her

responsibilities as a wife and mother before her career, her representation of the New Woman is compromised. Both characters, Ruth and Mary, share the burning of misplaced characters, longing to escape reality. While Ruth admits her love for her husband's brother to reconcile with her past, Mary escapes with the help of morphine. Both forms of women's escapism are affecting their environment, and the causes are portrayed rather negatively.

O'Neill's early play embodies his straightforward perspective on the value of love. Contrary to a connection founded merely on the simple notion of love, a marriage established out of sincere compassion has considerably greater potential. In contrast to her mother-in-law, Kate Mayo, Ruth's marriage does not succeed in the play *Beyond the Horizon*, since the relationship did not have a solid foundation, and was rather built on an idea and illusion. Although the marriage was formed out of genuine love, *Long Day's Journey into Night* shows that Mary's marriage is not a perfect one either. O'Neill emphasizes that regardless of how strong the tie between the couple may be, outside influences have the power to change their relationship, which demonstrates the author's evolution as a storyteller.

The last category this thesis analyzes is the relationship between a mother and her child. Both of Eugene O'Neill's plays reflect the influence of his mother; in particular, the character Mary serves as a proxy for his mother, Mary Ellen "Ella" Quinlan, in the play *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The character of Kate Mayo in the play *Beyond the Horizon* is once again the opposite. Kate Mayo is a portrayal of a strong and devoted mother image, while Ruth cannot identify with her role as a mother—perhaps representing the same contrast between O'Neill's mother and the family nurse. Since they both lack maternal instincts and see their roles as obligations to their husbands, neither Ruth nor Mary can accept their roles as mothers. Children are seen as barriers to women's happiness. In *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Mary utilizes drugs to escape the realities of having to be a wife and mother and returns to her convent days when she was a young girl and dreamed of becoming a nun. O'Neill points out how their behavior not only devastates the husbands, but children as well. Ruth's daughter is a sickly-appearing child who is scared of her mother, whilst Mary's addiction and detached attitude are echoed in her two sons, particularly her eldest son Jamie, who uses alcohol to cope with her morphine addiction.

Early plays by O'Neill have unfavorable portrayals of women. As female destroyers, they carry out their simple plans and self-centered intentions, which are motivated by romantic fantasies. The plot of the play *Beyond the Horizon* is a straightforward good vs. evil scenario where a woman crushes other people's ambitions, particularly the dreams of men, to fulfill her own. *Long Day's Journey into Night*, one of the playwright's final works,

provides a window into his personal life. The mother in the story, Mary, is a representation of his mother Ella, who had the biggest and initial impact on his life. The audience can empathize with Mary by learning more about her life, which was filled with love, hardships, and tragedies. The analysis showed that many of her traits are similar to Ruth's, and although Mary too behaves selfishly, her surroundings also damaged her character. O'Neill is attempting to convey to the audience—as well as himself—that her character is molded by harsh reality and that she is insufficiently resilient to exist in this kind of setting. The author wrote this play to cope with his psychological issues and finally make amends with his family. As Eugene O'Neill states in the dedication to his wife in the script of *Long Day's Journey into Night*: "I mean this as a tribute to your love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play—write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the four haunted Tyrones."[153]

[153] O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, book dedication.

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