Eugene O’Neill’s first success was a very modest performance of a one-act play Bound East to Cardiff in 1916, prepared with the group of artists organized into the Provincetown Players (Downer 36). That was a mark of the change coming to the American theaters, as before O’Neill the American drama has never been so experimental and modern. The American theater in the twentieth century was still using and presenting the methods from the past. Its main function was to entertain, so the theaters were producing big melodramas...
Thus Spake Zarathustra (1885) (Törnqvist 1998, 18-19), which gave him a view on the meaning of life and the years later engrossed himself in the German philosopher's writings, especially The Birth of Tragedy (1872) and Nietzschean philosophy changed his world perception. O'Neill abandoned the Catholic Church and a few

The influence of Nietzsche on O'Neill was very profound and important in the life of the writer, because the attitudes to the subjects of humanity; that is, O'Neill's struggle with his own biography in his works, his tribute of family and marriage can be ascribed to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and August Strindberg.

What is more, while analyzing O'Neill's dramas, it is important to remember about the outer influences on his attitudes to the subjects of humanity; that is, O'Neill's struggle with his own biography in his works, his tribute to writers like August Strindberg or Henrik Ibsen, and to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. All these influences had a great impact on O'Neill's development as a person and as an artist, and are clearly visible in his dramas. First of all, both Desire Under the Elms (1924) and Long Day 's Journey into Night (1941). These two plays are going to be the subject of this dissertation, because their analysis allows to perceive the author's developing interests in the condition of a family in the modern world, and his literary skill which changed from the earlier period of his writing represented by Desire, till the very late play Long Day 's Journey.

Both plays present difficult relations in the family circle. The lives of the Cabots and the Tyrones are dominated by rivalry as well as mutual love between each other. The relations between the characters are a powerful means to present their characteristics, because the heroes in drama are only characterized when exposed against another ones. Therefore, the relations between husbands and wives allow to have an insight into the psychology of the spouses, into their motives and characteristic features; which are only revealed in the context of such a relationship. Then, also the children's characteristics become visible after contrasting and comparing them with their parents. The two types of relationships between the members of a family; that is, the relations between husbands and wives, and the ones between parents and children; are going to be analyzed in this dissertation in order to prove that the context of these relationships allows to understand the characters' personalities.

The main aim of O'Neill's plays is the presentation of human lot in different conditions; therefore, most of his dramas deal with problems like the inter-family relations which cause conflicts and build tension between the characters, as well as allow to express and feel the great love. The dominant struggle of O'Neill's characters is the conflict between the conscious intellect and the unconscious desires, and the feeling of love and hate present in every relationship (Falk 157). Two dramas which show these types of relations, where the characters are involved in a struggle of contrasting feelings, are Desire Under the Elms (1924) and Long Day 's Journey into Night (1941). These two plays are going to be the subject of this dissertation, because their analysis allows to perceive the author's developing interests in the condition of a family in the modern world, and his literary skill which changed from the earlier period of his writing represented by Desire, till the very late play Long Day 's Journey.

Both plays present difficult relations in the family circle. The lives of the Cabots and the Tyrones are dominated by rivalry as well as mutual love between each other. The relations between the characters are a powerful means to present their characteristics, because the heroes in drama are only characterized when exposed against another ones. Therefore, the relations between husbands and wives allow to have an insight into the psychology of the spouses, into their motives and characteristic features; which are only revealed in the context of such a relationship. Then, also the children's characteristics become visible after contrasting and comparing them with their parents. The two types of relationships between the members of a family; that is, the relations between husbands and wives, and the ones between parents and children; are going to be analyzed in this dissertation in order to prove that the context of these relationships allows to understand the characters' personalities.

What is more, while analyzing O'Neill's dramas, it is important to remember about the outer influences on his attitudes to the subjects of humanity; that is, O'Neill's struggle with his own biography in his works, his tribute to writers like August Strindberg or Henrik Ibsen, and to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. All these influences had a great impact on O'Neill's development as a person and as an artist, and are clearly visible in his dramas. First of all, both Desire Under the Elms and Long Day 's Journey into Night; more or less consciously; are modeled on the biography of the dramatist - some characters serve as a presentation of the members of O'Neill's family or of himself. Ephraim Cabot, for example, is viewed either as the figure representing O'Neill's father (Raleigh 1967, 373), or the writer himself (Pyzik 126); while Edmund Tyrone is clearly the young Eugene, and the remaining Tyrones are also modeled on his own family (Black 1998, 15). In this light, the intensification of problems between the characters may be understood as a way of dealing with the author's own family history. Thus, as Desire is the unconscious biography while Long Day 's Journey is the conscious one (Gelb 2), the image of the father is similar in both plays: "the father is portrayed as an older man who is powerful, patriarchal and penurious. Both men have an intense passion for property" (Gelb 2, quoting dr. Philip Weissman, a psychoanalyst). However similar it may be to the Freudian definition of the Oedipal complex, O'Neill definitely did not want to be perceived as a Freudian writer and denied any influence of psychoanalysis on his work (Highsmith 19). The psychoanalysis just happened to be popular at the same time, but O'Neill did not use its ideas in his writings. He even declared that "Whatever Freudianism is in Desire must have walked right in 'through my unconscious" (Gelb 3). The only influence on O'Neill's attitude to the subject of family and marriage can be ascribed to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and August Strindberg.

The influence of Nietzsche on O'Neill was very profound and important in the life of the writer, because the Nietzschean philosophy changed his world perception. O'Neill abandoned the Catholic Church and a few years later engrossed himself in the German philosopher's writings, especially The Birth of Tragedy (1872) and Thus Spake Zarathustra (1885) (Törnqvist 1998, 18-19), which gave him a view on the meaning of life and the
shape of tragedy. O'Neill followed Nietzsche's belief in the supreme position of Greek tragedy, and wanted to recreate this position in the modern theater; therefore, it is observable that the characters in O'Neill's plays try to find the unity with the Life Force, try to be the part of the “mystical Dionysian experience” (Törnqvist 1998, 19). The life should be an interchangeable term for the tragedy; in which not one life is important, but the lives in terms of the Life Force - the highest spirit ruling the world (Törnqvist 1998, 19-20). These ideas are mostly visible in Long Day’s Journey into Night, where Nietzsche is even quoted by one of the characters, Edmund Tyrone. Whereas in Desire Under the Elms, the Nietzschean Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy of the world is the reason for Ephraim's problems with communication (Ranald Character Analysis, 4). Thus, it is observable that Friedrich Nietzsche’s influence on Eugene O’Neill was of great importance and shaped the two dramas that are going to be discussed.

Secondly, Eugene O’Neill was also an avid reader and viewer of Henrik Ibsen, whose Hedda Gabler production in 1906-07 gave O'Neill a view on the condition of the modern theater (Törnqvist 1998, 23-4). Therefore, there are observable parallels to Ibsen in many plays of O'Neill; for example, Long Day’s Journey very much resembles Ibsen’s Ghosts, especially in the use of retrospective technique and gradual revealing of the past guilt (Törnqvist 1998, 25). However, much more significant influence on O’Neill had the works of another Scandinavian writer, the already mentioned August Strindberg. The Scandinavian master was a precursor of naturalism in drama, and his plays put impact on the characters description, not on the plot; and also follow the principle of the unities of time and place (Törnqvist, Steene 2007, 15-16). August Strindberg became a kind of literary model for Eugene O’Neill, as his dramas appeared to be strikingly real and modern, truly appealing to the American playwright; therefore, O’Neill, together with the Provincetown Players, introduced Strindberg to the theaters in the United States and made him very popular (Törnqvist 1998, 26).

Strindberg was a master of simple dramas with profound meaning; he dealt with “psychological and metaphysical problems in a dramatically conceiving way” (Törnqvist 1998, 30). He “praised ‘the great naturalism’ which ‘delights in the struggle between natural forces’” (Törnqvist, Steene 2007, 16), which gave him possibility to describe the basic human urges and motives. In the speech accepting Nobel prize in 1936, O’Neill said that he owned every original impulse in his writing to Strindberg, and praised the Scandinavian’s naturalism (Törnqvist 1998, 26-7). What is more, Strindberg also opened O’Neill to write about his own life, as both dramatist had very similar backgrounds and struggled with similar problems in their lives; for example they both felt as unwanted children and burden for their families, which O’Neill so vividly presented in Long Day’s Journey - his best play (Törnqvist 1998, 29-30). “The intensification of dramatic action, of which O’Neill was so found” (Törnqvist quoting George J. Nathan 1998, 30) is the greatest feature of O’Neill’s dramas, as well as his interests in the topics of “the war between the sexes” and “the torment that people, loving people, will inflict upon one another” (Raleigh 1967, 368). All these features are very much indebted to the influence of August Strindberg.

Having the important influences in mind, it is visible that the similarity in the themes of Desire Under the Elms and Long Day’s Journey into Night gives a possibility to compare and contrast them. The family relations become the source of multiple conflicts, but also of deep feelings between the characters, which gives an opportunity to have an insight into their motives for the particular behavior towards each other. The powerful human and family drama is beautifully described in both plays, but their comparison allows to perceive the difference in the author’s attitude to the subject. It is evident that the earlier play is based on the naturalistic motivation for possession, on the ancient mythological story and a bit on O’Neill’s own relations with his parents; while the latter one is purely a psychological dealing with the deep problems of author’s own family, based on the ancient unity of plot, time and place. Although both plays are very good and profound with meaning, it is Long Day’s Journey into Night which is considered as the best American drama of the twentieth century. O’Neill’s most mature and deeply psychological play is the peak of his artistic abilities. Nevertheless, Eugene O’Neill’s attempts to deal with the family drama and the deeply rooted intricacies between the characters are visible in both plays; therefore, the analysis of them both will provide a picture of the dramatist’s development and will allow to understand the characters’ actions and motives in the context of their relationships.

The thesis is divided into two chapters, and each chapter is divided again into two parts: the first subchapter deals with the relationships between the characters of Desire Under the Elms, and the second with Long Day’s Journey into Night. The first chapter shows the impact of the marriage relations on the lives of the older generation of the families. The marriages of Ephraim Cabot in Desire Under the Elms are means of presenting...
the character’s features. Ephraim’s loneliness becomes understandable after the analysis of his problematic relations with all his wives, and the motives for his particular behavior become clear after considering his peculiar attitude towards the world and other people. Then, the character of Abbie, Ephraim’s youngest wife, is also analyzed in the context of her relationship with Cabot, and her drives and urges become clear after the analysis of her behavior towards her husband and her young stepson. The second part of the first chapter presents the relations between the marriage couple from Long Day’s Journey into Night, Mary and James Tyrone. Their mutual love and grievances become clear after the consideration of their past experiences and disillusionments with the failure of their dreams. The characteristics of Mary and James are presented when the characters are contrasted with one another on the stage, and their turbulent relationship, mutual dependencies and mixed feelings towards each other become understandable for the viewers or readers of the play. The marriages in both plays are powerful means of showing the characters’ personalities, of presenting their driving forces and motivation for their behavior towards each other, and for the analysis of their characteristic features which place them in these particular relationships.

The second chapter presents the impact of the relations between the parents and the children on the characters’ lives. The younger generation of the two families; that is Eben Cabot and his two older brothers Simeon and Peter, and Jamie and Edmund Tyrone; are going to be analyzed in the context of their relationships with their mothers, fathers, and with each other. The sons are also characterized by their behavior in the relations with others, therefore the impact of the parents’ choices is an important part of their personalities. All the young men have a difficult relation with their fathers and feel a special bonding with their mothers, which influences their personalities to a great extent. Their characteristics become visible after the analysis of these relationships, because the impact of their life choices and their parents’ reactions to them is an important part of their personalities. The second chapter is also divided into the two parts, one dealing with Desire and the other with Long Day’s Journey, and then both plays are compared and contrasted in order to present the author’s different attempts to present the subject of family relations and his development as an artist.

Both in Desire Under the Elms and Long Day’s Journey into Night the context of a relationship facilitates the expression of deeply hidden feelings towards each other, and provides an opportunity to express the characters’ minds, which reveals their true features. Only in relation to one another are the characters able to talk about their problems, and the analysis of their behavior provides an insight into their minds. Therefore, in this dissertation I am going to argue that the features of O’Neill’s characters become visible only in the context of their relationships, because the basis for their construction are the given relations, determined by their choices and emotions.

Chapter I Relations between Husbands and Wives

The inner human drama is the most important problem discussed by Eugene O'Neill in his plays. He presents human urge to understand the meaning of life, death and suffering (Pyzik 126); therefore, his characters have very rich psychological profiles and are involved in many intricate and difficult relations. One of such relationships is marriage, which presents not only the conflicts and relations between the spouses, but also highlights their own choices and emotions which caused these conflicts. Therefore, the heroes of O’Neill’s dramas can be only analyzed in relation to one another, because then their emotions, attitudes and expectations of each other become visible.

Difficult marriages are portrayed in Desire Under the Elms and Long Day’s Journey into Night. In both plays these relationships are filled with contradictory feelings, full of love and hate; and the outburst of emotions between the characters leads to a tragedy. All the characters are psychologically complicated, and the relations they built are very complex and interwoven, that it becomes difficult to separate single motives and urges. All the choices from the past and present influence the current state of affairs and communication between the characters, it is all connected. Such a dealing with the presentation of dramatic problem comes from O’Neill’s fascination with the classical drama, and the references to the classical ideas of unity are observable, especially in Long Day’s Journey. Therefore, the marriage relations become one of the means to understand the characters, because they express their true emotions to the other person and in this way reveal their true personality.

Then, both plays have the marks of author’s biography - while Desire Under the Elms is still only partially
reflecting O'Neill's own relations with his father, Long Day's Journey into Night is a fully recognizable and conscious autobiographical drama, where the Tyrones stand for the O'Neills (Gelb 2). Therefore, the portrait of marriage relations between James and Mary Tyrone is a reflection of O'Neill's parents' difficult relation, which intensifies the tragic discourse of the play. Besides his biography, O'Neill was also greatly influenced by the writings of Nietzsche and Strindberg, whose works had a great impact on the dramatist both as a writer and as a person (Chothia 196). Nietzschean philosophy and Strindberg's dramas opened O'Neill to seek new meaning of expression in theater, which resulted in great plays filled with intense human emotions and human drama. Therefore, O'Neill modeled his own ideas on the example of Scandinavian naturalism, and that resulted in developing interests in topics of the war between the sexes and of the entrapment of an individual in a relationship (Raleigh 1967, 368). Such themes are visible in both Desire and Long Day's Journey, where the marriage relations perfectly represent the difficulties of loving each other. The relations between the characters of these plays are built around these two problems. However, as Long Day's Journey is one of the best and most mature of O'Neill's dramas, there is a visible difference in the deepness of understanding the family problems in comparison to Desire. Nevertheless, both dramas still manage to convey the emotional drama of characters, especially between the husbands and wives.

Marriage appears to be a particularly poignant human relationship, as it presents both love and hate, mutual dependence and lack of forgiveness or closeness. In both O'Neill's plays the marriage relations are an important part of the whole drama, because they allow to understand the deep independencies of both spouses. Whereas Ephraim Cabot is unable to create any deep bondage with any of his wives because of his blind belief into the loneliness and hardness of life; James and Mary Tyrone build a loving family, but terribly tormented by their past faults and unfulfilled dreams. Both plays present difficult marriages and intricate relations between husbands and wives. The relationships between the spouses in Desire Under the Elms and Long Day's Journey into Night are going to be analyzed in this chapter, in order to present how the complex relations reflect the personalities of the characters. The features of a character become visible only in the context of relationships, thus the context of relationships is important to understand the complexity of the motives and driving forces which built the characters.

1. Desire Under the Elms

Desire Under the Elms is one of the early plays by O'Neill, written in 1924, but already very profound in meaning and dealing with difficult themes. The relationships between the characters in this play are very much influenced by the urge to possess the farm, that is, by the wealth. Their driving forces are almost animalistic, presented in a naturalistic way which is ascribed to the influence of Strindberg. The basic instincts are here the most important and have the biggest influence on the decisions of the characters. What is more, the play was written in the time when O'Neill lost almost all members of his closest family, therefore the characters also deal with the difficult loss (Black 1998, 11-12). Then, the interests in Nietzsche's philosophy, especially the ideas presented in The Birth of Tragedy (1872), are reflected in the view of the world presented in Desire - the duality of Dionysian and Apollonian forces causes the difficulties in the life of Ephraim Cabot, who is torn between these two polar opposites. Therefore, the marriage relations between Ephraim and his wives are quite complicated and bring a lot of drama to their lives. The real features of personality become visible in the context of marriage, because this relationship gives possibility to analyze the characters in their interactions.

Actually, there are three marriages in Desire Under the Elms, all of Ephraim Cabot: to a simple country woman who does not even have a name, to Eben's mother and to Abbie Putnam. All of them were unhappy and unsatisfactory for both the husband and the wife. All the marriage interactions between the spouses reveal the individuals' characteristics. It is almost impossible to analyze the husband and the wives separately, because their affairs are too much interwoven. However, as all the problems emerge from his attitude to life and relationships, we should start with the characteristics of Ephraim Cabot, the head of the family.

Ephraim Cabot comes into view in the play only in the fourth scene of Part I, but from the beginning his figure appears in the words of his sons, and these are not pleasant recollections:

PETER. (...) I calc'late we might git him crazy by the court.

SIMEON. (...) We got t' wait--till he's under ground.
It looks like Ephraim is not loved in his house by any of his sons. They all want to get rid of him. When Cabot finally appears in person, stage directions tell us that:

Cabot is seventy-five, tall and gaunt, with great, wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder, yet there is a weakness in it, a petty pride in its own narrow strength. His eyes are small, close together, and extremely near-sighted, blinking continually in the effort to focus on objects, their stare having a straining, ingrowing quality.

The description provides not only his physical characteristics but also some personality features - his face reflects both his strength and his weakness. Ephraim is built from some contradictions: he is equally strong and weak, proud and petty. The dualism probably comes from his attitude to life, because although Ephraim manifests his strong belief in the harsh Puritan God, he sometimes temporarily falls into the easy life. As an archetypal Puritan, Ephraim believes in a God that is insensitive and demanding, and trusts that he will find salvation in fulfilling the God’s will and performing his hard work. He even claims that he can hear God speaking to him: "(...)—but somethin' in me fit me an' fit me—the voice of God sayin': 'This hain't wuth nothin' t' Me. Git ye back t' hum!'" This trust in the Nietzschean Apollonian forces - that is the logical order and stiff sobriety - causes Ephraim’s loneliness and distance from his family, and devotion to his farm and work as means of fulfilling God’s message. There he sometimes longs for the ease of the Dionysian forces - the forces which are creative, healthy, wild and instinctual, connected with creation and procreation. But the impact of the harsh God is too extensive and Ephraim always comes back even more convinced that God is hard; for example, he lets himself dance joyfully at the small celebration of the birth of the youngest son, but just after that he stays completely alone on the farm and again calls for the "hard an' lonesome" God. This Puritan devotion to the hard God caused the choice of a lifestyle, which made Ephraim so bitter and unhappy. He became an old patriarch, a New England Puritan fanatic who cannot understand the needs of other people. From the beginning of the play his relations with his family almost do not exist; his sons claim to hate him and his wives never understood his personality.

The loneliness of Ephraim Cabot is his own choice. He wants to follow the will of God who, as he believes, obliges him to be lonely. By building the farm house, he believes that he makes God’s will come true. In addition, he gives life to the stone- ridden land, but at the same time kills the relations with his family. Ephraim's obsession about the farm causes his conflicts with his sons, and accelerates all the tragedies - Eben's mother's death and the affair between Abbie and Eben. The farm is his life, he hears the voice of an angry God that wants him to work on his land, he belongs to this land, has become a part of it: “Ephraim has become in effect the rock-strewn, hardscrabble farm, both in its difficulty and its fertility.” Ephraim identifies himself with the stone walls of the house which he built with his own hands, and with the land which he made fertile by removing all the stones. The stones constitute his life - he made the stone-ridden land fruitful and that gave sense to his being; he could self-evaluate himself while referring to the development of the farm. For example, he explains the connection to the stonewalls of the house while talking about his hard work on the farm:

(...) Ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin' over the hills up and down, fencin' in the fields that was mine, whar I'd made thin's grow out o' nothin' like the will o' God, like the servant o' His hand. It wa'n't easy. It was hard an' He made me hard fur it (...) (2.2.31).

The hard Puritan God had such a great influence on Ephraim, that he devoted his whole life to the fulfillment of God’s will, destroying by that his relationships with other people. He feels connected only to his livestock and secluded from his people: ‘I kin talk t' the cows. They know. They know the farm an' me. They'll give me peace.” Only with the beasts that work just as hard as Ephraim does he feel safe and understood. His trust in the harsh God causes his separation from his wives and family who cannot understand his attitude. This emphasis on the land and Puritan devotion places O’Neill among typical American themes’ writers. Still, the construction of the play based on constant repetitions about possessing the land appears to be the most tiring and weakest feature of the play; however, it gives the center of conflict to the plot, and all the characters are grouped around it. The desire to possess the farm, which provides wealth, is the driving force for all the characters.
Having Ephraim’s characteristics in mind, it is easier to understand why he failed as a husband. His attitude to the world and belief in the necessity of hardships in life put a great impact on his relationships. Ephraim remains faithful to the hard Apollonian God, while his wives and sons seek the Dionysian easiness, which causes this difficult polarity and impossibility of communication (Waterstradt 3). Thus, all of Ephraim’s marriages did not bring him any consolation or ease to his hard life. First of all, he was married to a simple country woman who gave birth to Simeon and Peter. Even though this marriage was not very significant to the development of the plot, it gives much information about Ephraim’s personality. Although that woman was a good worker and helper in the farm work, Ephraim still felt lonely - his wife could not understand him: “She was a good woman. She wuked hard. We was married twenty years. She never knowed me.” (2.2.31-2). Although she presented a similar attitude to the work on farm, the first wife never managed to understand Ephraim. He was too much connected with the stones, than with the people. When she died, Ephraim got married again - to Eben’s mother. This woman does not appear in the play but her presence is easily detectable. She is being referred to as ‘Maw’ and has an impact on all the characters, especially on Eben, as he can feel his mother’s presence even after her death. ‘Maw’ was a very soft woman, completely not able to live up to the hardiness of life worshipped by Ephraim. She therefore died unhappy, being “slave t’ death” (1.2.6). The sons remember her as a loving and a caring creature, but Ephraim always refers to her as ‘too soft’. He cannot understand that it was his harsh treatment of her that brought her to death. He is simply convinced that she was not capable of living on a farm. What is more, Ephraim believes that this marriage caused even greater loneliness for him, as she could not understand him and his zeal for hard work: “She was purty – but soft. She tried t’ be hard. She couldn’t. She never knowed me or nothin’. It was lonesomer ‘n hell with her.” (2.2.32). These two marriages ended and Ephraim did not feel any resentment after his wives because he, in fact, did not have any deep relationship with any of them. He assessed his wives by the terms of being useful on the farm, never spoke of any feelings for them. Actually, he felt the loneliness but gratified himself with the view of a farm growing more and more beautiful: “The farm growed. It was all mine! When I thought o’ that I didn’t feel lonesome” (2.2.31-32) (Waterstradt 3). Therefore, the claims of the ‘Maw’’s family to the farm were even more hurtful and infuriating for Ephraim, as he felt that they wanted to take away from him the only thing he ever felt connected to. The relationship with his second wife caused not only even greater loneliness with a woman who was completely different and not able to understand him, but also left the unfinished business of the ownership of the land.

The spirit of ‘Maw’ hovers over the house, she is like a difficult memory which does not want to leave the place. Her presence is detectable in the enormous elms which embrace the house (Barlow 168-9). The trees bring both the maternal and sinister quality, which reflects the duality of the mother’s influence on the family. She brings both comfort and danger, just like the elms “appear to protect and at the same time subdue” (2). That is why the spirit of ‘Maw’ protects Eben from the relationship with Abbie and at the same time pushes him into it. What is more, the elms also stand in opposition to the stone walls of the house, which reflects the antagonism between female brooding qualities and male rigid patriarchy (Barlow 169). The setting reflects the problem of understanding each other between the spouses - the mother wanted to provide the house with love and care, while the father, Ephraim, brought only the stones to build the walls of the house. They had different understanding of the sense of life and that caused the lack of happiness in their marriage. She needed closeness and feelings, while he found the essence of life in hard work.

This “story of solitude, physical solitude, the solitude of the land” (Young 49) produces feelings of pity and understanding for Ephraim, but also makes the readers/viewers angry about his stubbornness. If it was not for his strong belief that life must be hard, maybe Ephraim could have been happy with his ‘purty’ wife. However, he believed that “God’s hard, not easy! God’s in the stones!” (2.2.31), and only that mattered in his life. Stating it simply, he was not able to love and that killed his relationships. Still, the harsh God did not give him any consolation and the lonely life was becoming unbearable. Then, another ‘God’s voice’ made Ephraim go for a journey to California and find her - Abbie. At least, that is what he believes in: God wants him to have another wife, to give birth to another, suitable son (Ranald Character Analysis, 3). It is his loneliness that pushed Ephraim on this journey, he became “bitter ‘n wormwood” (2.2.32), even too much connected to the farm which was his only sense of life. He himself became a part of these rock-ridden land and decided to find a wife that would gratify the loneliness (Ranald Character Analysis, 3).

Abbie Putnam seems to be the woman Ephraim was looking for - young and pretty, able to give birth to a strong son who could inherit the farm. What is more, she seems to be the prize from God, Ephraim’s “Rose o’ Sharon” (2.1.27), the consolation to his lonely life. There are actually no reasons given why Ephraim brings Abbie to his house, besides his constant repetition of making God’s will come true and fulfilling His orders. It
looks, however, like he got married simply for fear of being alone for the rest of his days (Ranald Character Analysis, 3, 4). Ephraim became one with the farm, felt connected only to the land and the livestock, and the loneliness following it was becoming unbearable. Nevertheless, it seems that Abbie would not fulfill his expectations. She does not share Ephraim's point of view and even does not treat him as her rightful husband: she often looks at him with disgust or hatred, or speaks in such a way as to make him follow her plans; for example, cajoles him into having a son (like in Part II, Scene 1). Abbie's relationship with Ephraim shows her as a cold and calculating woman who does not care about her husband at all, but only follows her instincts and desires of a man (Eben), and of the possession and wealth (the farm).

Abbie Putnam appears in the play along with Ephraim, in Scene 4 of Part I, and in the stage directions O'Neill describes her as a very attractive woman:

Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben (1.4.18).

This description provides the most striking features of the new Mrs. Cabot, especially her extremely appealing looks and the atmosphere of sexuality that she brings to the house. Abbie's attractiveness is her greatest power, as by using it, she is able to manipulate both the father and the son. Also the two psychological features visible in her face are important to later events: her obstinacy and determination - these brought her to this place and caused her develop a relationship with Eben. She also bears the quality of desperation which makes her similar to Eben. This similarity of the young people may indicate the polarity of Appollonian and Dionysian powers in their house - Ephraim stands for the old order of hard God, while Abbie and Eben seek the ease of Dionysian powers (Waterstradt 3). Abbie obstinately follows her desire to have a home and to find love and peace in life, while nothing else is important for her. She wants to fulfill her instincts of possession, both of the spiritual and the material goods. That may come from her past: she revealed to Eben part of her past life which was quite hard and lonesome - she had always worked in somebody else's houses, never possessed her own, had had a brutal drinking husband and lost her child. What is more she was an orphan from the very early childhood so she never really experienced a real family life: “I was an orphan early an' had t' wuk fur other folks' hums (. . .) till I'd most give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum” (1.4.21-22). These may be the extenuating circumstances in the readers' understanding of Abbie, as she seems to be a simple woman looking for happiness. Although, she later proves to be clever and manipulating. Margaret Loftus Ranald describes Abbie as “a ripe woman who responds to the stirrings of her nature, and indeed finds herself one with it” (Character Analysis, 4) - she behaves like an animal, acts in response only to the natural calls of her body and desires of wealth.

Ephraim Cabot appeared in Abbie's life unexpectedly and changed it thoroughly - he gave her home, stabilization and love. Nevertheless, she is not very grateful. She even reacts with disgust to Ephraim's feverish declarations of affection and feels almost physical repugnance to her husband, for instance:

Abbie sees him and turns away quickly with unconcealed aversion (2.1.26).

He covers her hand with kisses. She does not seem to notice. She stares before her with hard angry eyes (2.1.27).

What is more, she even admits that she married Ephraim only for gaining home “Waal—what if I did need a hum? What else'd marry an old man like him fur?”

(1.4.22). Saying these words she reveals her cold calculating attitude towards Ephraim; she treats him like an old senile man able to be persuaded to do anything for her, which she proves by cajoling him into having a new son that would assure her the inheritance of the farm.

The possession of the farm is the most important driving force for Abbie, she desires to be wealthy by all means. The 'purty' farm seems to be the dream come true for her, and just from her entrance she calls the land and the house 'hers'. That attitude causes rage in Ephraim, who would rather destroy the farm than leave it to anybody, but Abbie manages to persuade him to change his mind. She is clever enough to see Ephraim's difficult relations with his sons and their mutual antagonism, and uses that as her tool in manipulating them. Moreover, she is also able to influence Ephraim by her physical attractiveness and promise to bear him a son:
ABBBIE: (suddenly) Mebbe the Lord'll give us a son.

CABOT: (turns and stares at her eagerly) Ye mean— a son— t' me ‘n’ yew?

ABBBIE: (with a cajoling smile) Ye’re a strong man, hain’t ye? (. . .)

(2.1.29).

Ephraim and Abbie have too different approach to the world and family life to make a happy marriage. First of all, there is a lack of love from Abbie’s side, and from Ephraim’s it is a religious fervor and physical attractiveness that keeps him with her, rather than love for the actual woman. Secondly, the farm stands between them; they are both focused on the possession and want to own the farm; the feeling of greed overcomes them. What is more, they have diverse attitudes to life: Ephraim blindly believes in the necessity of hard work and sacrifices his happiness for it, while Abbie, although is also focused on the possession, seeks happiness and love which she proves in the act of killing the baby for regaining Eben’s love (Randal Character Analysis, 5). Ephraim’s belief in the hard, judgmental God deprived him of the ability to love (Ranald Commentary, 2) and left him alone on his ‘purity’ farm, where he is surrounded only by rocks and animals. However, it is Ephraim who is considered by many critics to be the only heroic character because only he has a “clear sense of his own identity and realizes how and where he belongs; (. . .) and ultimately only Ephraim values life” (Waterstradt 4). Even the loss of family, of his wife and all the sons, did not break Ephraim’s faith into life that is ‘hard an’ lonesome’ (Freedman 571). His only real relationship was with his farm - he felt connected only to the land he worked so hard on, and to the animals which worked equally hard with him.

The marriage in Desire Under the Elms is very gloomy and unhappy, but it presents life in a naturalistic way - shows people driven by passions, by their desires (both physical and psychological). However, the structure of the plot is very predictable and based on repetitions, which are intended to remind the reader/viewer that it is not real life, but art, which is a characteristic feature of O’Neill’s early plays (Raleigh 1967, 372). What is more, in his first period of drama writing, O’Neill often plotted his plays within his family, and many of his works have some autobiographical elements (Raleigh 1967, 373). In Desire, it is very probable that Ephraim Cabot stands for Eugene O’Neill’s father, James, and that the play presents the tyrannical influence of the father on the lives of the other members of the family (Raleigh 1967, 373; Gelb 2). Then, a direct inspiration for the plot of Desire was the play by O’Neill’s literary mentor,

August Strindberg, The Son of a Servant (Hartman 1961, 362; Hartman 1966, 218-19). The misogynistic attitude to women who are presented as evil also comes from Strindberg. ‘Maw’ from Desire reminds one of some mother spirits from Strindberg’s Miss Julie, Swanwhite or The Father (Hartman 1961, 363). Such an attitude to women, and especially to mothers, comes from both authors’ difficult relationships with their own mothers, feelings of being unwanted children, and the struggle they had to endure to earn the mother’s love over the possessive father. They were also both interested in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who were first to infuse their art with hatred for women (Hartman 1961, 361-2). All these factors are the reasons why O’Neill’s portrayal of the Cabots is filled with contradictory feelings, unfulfilled desires and urges for more. The characters’ relationships are very complicated but give us the possibility to have an insight into their minds, because only in the interactions with one another, do they show their real motives; for example, only in the context of Ephraim’s and Abbie’s marriage the characters reveal their real attitude to wealth, love and religion. Although at first Ephraim appears to be only an old miser, in a moment of honest conversation with Abbie he reveals his deep belief in the Puritan order of things and necessity of hardships in life. Then, Abbie at first seems to be focused only on gaining the possessions, but later chooses love and decides to sacrifice the promise of wealth, that is her own child.
Relations Between the Characters as their Construction Basis in Eugene O'Neill’s “Desire Under the Elms” and “Long Day’s Journey into Night”

College
University of Gdansk

Grade
1

Author
MA Magdalena Przytarska (Author)

Year
2011

Pages
108

Catalog Number
V286238

ISBN (eBook)
9783656865186

ISBN (Book)
9783656865193

File size
863 KB

Language
English

Notes
Dissertation written in English with a summary and titles in Polish

Tags
American literature, Eugene O'Neill, MA thesis

Quote paper

Comments
No comments yet.

Sign in to write a comment
Read the ebook
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDIES - LITERATURE

Illusion and Reality in Eugene O'...

Martin Pejchal

About Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey Into Night"
A Dreary Analysis

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDIES - LITERATURE

About Eugene O'Neill's "...

Rafaela Alvarado

The function of drugs in Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey into Night" and Tennessee Williams "A Streetcar Named Desire"

AMERICAN STUDIES - LITERATURE

The function of drugs in Eugene O'...
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDIES - LITERATURE

Expressionistic Elements in Eugene O’...

ANGLISTIK - LITERATUR

Eugene O’Neills The Iceman Cometh

AMERikanistik - LITERATUR

The Hairy Ape - Eugene O’Neill

AMERICAN STUDIES - LITERATURE

Eugene O’Neill and the fairer sex...
AMERICAN STUDIES - LITERATURE

Eugene O'Neill and the fairer sex...

Of desire and passion - A comparison...
AMERIKANISTIK - LITERATUR
Die Desillusionierung des amerikanisc...

AMERIKANISTIK - LITERATUR
Dramenverfilmung im Vergleich: Tennes...

ANGLISTIK - LITERATUR
Homosexualität als lyrisches Thema be...

ANGLISTIK - LITERATUR
Thematisierung und Inszenierung von W...
Die Mircosoft-Entscheidung des EuG - ...

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDIES - COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The Picture of Dorian Gray. A book wi...

GESCHICHTE - AMERIKA

Die Relation zwischen der gesellschaftlichen Situation der Black-...
Female characters as neurotic male pr...
Desire Under the Elms is a drama play in four acts written by American playwright Eugene O'Neill in 1941–42, first published in 1956. The play is widely considered to be his magnum opus and one of the finest American plays of the 20th century. It premiered in Sweden in February 1956 and then opened on Broadway in November 1956, winning the Tony Award for Best Play.