

CHAPTER ONE

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Anna Christie, a prostitute with the heart of gold and the fallen woman, but basically pure, as sheaffer puts it ;

A work of mixed quality, Anna Christie embodies both such as regeneration through love and fresh material derived from the author's familiarity with the sea and water-front life. Similarly, Anna herself rings true in her grievances against society, especially her hostility to man, and her ambivalence towards her father; yet she also recalls one of the stalest of literary stereotypes the prostitute with the heart of gold,¹ the fallen woman who has remained basically pure.²

Anna the daughter of Chris Christerson, a sea captain, worked as a nurse in a family, away from her father's home. The family where she was working had an old man, his wife and four sons. All of them treated her worse than a servant girl.

She was a girl of good character, but the situation compelled her to become a prostitute. She says ;

ANNA ... It was one of the sons - the youngest started me - when I was sixteen. After that I, hated 'em so I'd killed 'em all if I'd stayed, so I run away to St. Paul.²

1 Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill; Son and Artist, (Boston : Little, Brown, 1973) - p.27.

2 The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, (New York : Random House), 1949-p.18.

Such a bitter experience she got, it was because of her loneliness. There was nobody to tell her regarding her moral behaviour, but the situation forced her gradually to become a prostitute. She hated men. She thought all the men around her were sinners and guilty. She could find no morality in the men she met.

Away from her father's home she was forced to lose her way. She became guilty conscious. Her mental torture forced her to give up morality. She in the beginning tried to guard her character and live the life of a chaste woman. But it was all in vain and she was forced to be a whore for good.

'Anna christie, as the protagonist of her play, has of course, a more complex role than most of the other prostitutes. Though she has become free of her past, it will not leave her alone. When a marriage is proposed to a prostitute, complications ensue, even though the proposer has a sexual past to match that of his prospective bride. Anna's protest to that effect is brief and easily passed over by both men in the play and by the author. Mat brings his pride as a seaman to this marriage, Anna has nothing to offer but a tarnished body.³

Here lies the bitter tragic reality of her life. She found herself in a fix and was unable for some time atleast to adjust herself to this new way of life now imposed on her by the destiny. But at long last the prostitute in her got the better of her concern for a chaste life. It is easy to

3 Doris Nelson, "O'Neill's Women : A Special Section"

The Eugene O'Neill News letter, (Summer fall



become a prostitute of a chaste woman, but it is very difficult to become a chaste woman of a prostitute. It is not possible.

The character of Anna was of a moral type, the calamity broke all the moral bonds. She blamed her father for this, because he was responsible for all that. He neglected his duty as a father. He did not look after her as an ideal father should. He kept her in the service of a family as a servant girl which led her to the moral ruin.

According to Isaac Goldberg the play is consisting the woman's psychology...

From the middle of the third act I feel that play ought to be dominated by the woman's psychology. And I have a conviction that in dumb people of her sort, unable to voice strong, strange feelings, the emotions can find outlet only through the language and gestures of the heroics in the novels and movies they are familiar with - that is, that in moments of great stress life copies melodrama.⁴

Anna encountered many men during her stay in that family. She blamed all the persons there. She hated all the men.

4 Isaac Goldberg., The Theatre of George Jean Nathan
(NewYork, 1926), p. 154.

She blamed God also, She was used as a piece of furniture by the contemporary society. But she was faithful to God in her suffering. Her faith in men died. She considered everyman wicked and therefore she blamed and compared her father and Mat Burke to those men who had seduced her. She hated them and told them to go to hell. She did not bear the mere presence of them.

...She has reached a stage in her life, where she discovers that life is not ruled by a code nor limited in the expression to the confines of a Fixed creed. She knows it is a mixture of good and evil, a struggle in which values that make for the good life, must arise out of experience and may not be imposed by the authority of creed from the outside. The resentment she first felt for her past had largely left her and instead she now faces the future and the possibility of happiness?

Her mind was divided into two, the past and the present. She was unable to keep herself in one of those two states. When she thought herself to be a chaste and moral woman, she was reminded of the immorality of her past life. All this turned her into a psychic case. She dared not look into her dark future. The glossy appearance of her present day reality could not help her redeem her past. To solve this mental problem every ethical standard failed.

5 Keith Saphus, Winter, .. Eugene O'Neill ; A Critical Study.

(New York : Russell and Russell : 1961)

p., ~ 128.

These past experiences of Anna were unknown to Mat Burke. He loved her, but he was completely in the dark regarding her past.

The spoiled life of Anna is reflected in her address to Burke.

ANNA .. First thing is , I want to tell you two guys something. You was going on's if one of you had got to own me. But nobody owns me, see -- ? -- cepting myself I'll do what I please and noman, I don't give a hoot who he is, can tell me what to do I ain't asking either of you for a living. I can make it my self - one way or other.⁶

Being unknown of her past Mat Burke was ready to accept her. She told him nothing except that she was ready to own him. She was in the habit of obeying the dictates of her mind and even immune to all external interference from any one. Thus it was a solitary life of hers.

She was in search of happiness. It made her think about life in a new way. She thanked Mat Burke when he told her that he would kill her. She told him that she was also tired of that game. Burke shouts,

6 The Plays of Eugene O'Neill

(NewYork : Random House), 1949), p.56.

BURKE. Though I do be thinking I'd have a good right to smash your skull like a rotten egg. Was there iver a woman in the world had the rottenness in her that you have and was there iver a man the like of me was made the fool of the world,⁷

It was the actual condition of Anna. He felt sorry for his meeting Anna, a prostitute. He in bitter words expressed his opinion about her.

The title of Chris Christopherson was changed in 1920 to Anna Christie to place greater emphasis on the character of Anna.

The play deals with a sick, down to earth, man hating prostitute, not the idealized fallen woman with a heart of gold. For Mat Burke, sexual intercourse with a prostitute - meant the destruction of his romantic ideal.

In spite of all this . Anna was the woman of resolution. It was the men who seduced her first when she was a servant and a nurse in her early life. Through out her remaining life she was turned into a confirmed man-hater. And that is because those men who turned to her only wanted to satisfy their lust. Her hatred towards all the man-race gradually increased and as a result she became mentally deranged.

7 Ibid., p. 60.

She was not in need of orders but she was in need of love. But still she was doubtful whether the love would make her clean or not. In short, she was tired of this game, she was sick of the entire affair.

In loving Anna Mat found no morality. He felt guilty conscious. He did not experience purity of mind in loving her. Thus it is that he even blamed himself for kissing her. He accused her that she had done a great wrong to him.

She was disappointed by Mat in her attempt to rehabilitate in the main stream of the conventionally moral society. Now she decided to leave for New York. She says to her father Chris ;

ANNA I went ashore to get a train for New York. I'd been waiting and waiting till I was sick of it. Then I changed my mind and decided not to go today. But I am going first thing tomorrow, so it'll all be the same in the end.⁸

Her state was so tormented that she could not find a way out. By which force the things happened she didn't know. She blamed none. She was haunted by such thoughts. Once, she committed the guilty deed, She forever felt the prick of remorse. It was the total tragedy of her life. She did not shelter know how to soothe her tortured mind.

8 Ibid., p.64.

Now the condition of her life was like that of a rudderless boat with nowhere to go.

Mat Burke again came to see her. She in the beginning did not allow him to come close. She showed him the revolver. It was the man in Mat that made her hate him and forcing him to follow suit too. She had lost all her balance. But when Mat came very close to her and told her to shoot him, the revolver dropped to the floor from her hand.

Mat forgave her for all her faults in the past.

He says,

BURKE. And that you'll be forgetting from this day all the badness you've done and never do the like of it again.⁹

All this transformed the life of Anna.

The play suggests the foggy sea, the sailors. The life was also sailing in the Fog. It had not known the directions, because of the fog. But in the end the fog was no more. Mat Burke had removed the fog around the life of Anna Christie.

9 Ibid., p.75.