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## Abstract

*The aim of this present work has examined the issue of women's new feminine identity in Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), Desire Under the Elms (1924), and in Willa Cather's The Bohemian Girl (1912). To highlight women's hard living conditions and oppression in American patriarchal society, I have borrowed some theoretical concepts from Simone de Beauvoir's feminist thought as developed in The Second Sex (1949). Among these concepts are Immanence, Transcendence, Mothering, Work, and Search for owning. De Beauvoir's ideal about feminine identity construction has proved to be adequate for us to better understand women's family, social and cultural position within the American reality. It also helped to demonstrate their struggles for equality and liberation from the patriarchal oppressive values and norms. This dissertation has been divided into three major sections. Its 'Discussion' section has three chapters; each one deals with one work. The first chapter is entitled 'Patriarchal Oppression and Revolt in E. O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra'. It has analyzed the identity construction process and the gender roles of Ezra, Christine and their daughter Lavinia. The second chapter is 'Work and Search for Patrimony in E. O'Neill's Desire under the Elms' and it has sought to explain the identity problems related to either the masculinity of Ephraim and Eben Cabot or to the femininity of Abbie Putnam. As to third chapter whose title is 'Mothering and Myth as Feminine Identity Obstruction in Willa Cather's The Bohemian Girl', it has centered on Mrs. Ericson, Clara Vavrika and Nils. Each has contended to express identity aspirations throughout personal stands toward major cultural issues such as mothering, man-invented myths and domesticity within a harsh rural setting. As a conclusion, it can be noticed that the two writers gave voice to women in their works; they made them undertake rebellion and defiance against the oppression of the patriarchal society though they often have different personal opinions about the difficulties they have encountered.*

## General Introduction

Any study of society would appear to be incomplete without the study of the status and the position of women in it. That is why American modern literature has been very concerned with the issue of feminism and gender difference though, for a long time, women are dramatically othered, oppressed and marginalized as a mass class. Pillay Navanethem states on her book entitled *Women's Rights in Human Rights System* (2009), "Women were among the poorest and the marginalized, with limited access to rights, resources, and opportunities."<sup>1</sup> They were considered just like objects without power, and Gayle Green and Oppelia Khan claim in their book entitled *Making a difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (1985) that: "Women are the gifts which men exchange between each other."<sup>2</sup> they add: "Men, not women, have the power to determine the value of women in the exchange and meaning associated with them".<sup>3</sup> These traditional roles and status for women in most cultures have relegated them to working at home primarily, household, and childbearing. Women are considered as "Household angels."<sup>4</sup> They were also religiously ordered to be under the male domination (father, brother, or husband). Levi-Strauss, for example, "Considers women to be the passive objects of male activity."<sup>5</sup>

Being for a long time under men's control, feminine reactions to such patriarchal abuses emerged. Feminist writers started to write and denounce patriarchy which is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."<sup>6</sup> They also answered back male hegemonic discourses. For instance, Marry Astell answered and criticized John Lock's ideas about the exclusion of women from human rights doctrine in her book *Reflection upon Marriage* in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

After a long fight for gaining their natural rights, women have, from the beginning of twentieth century, reached positions of power in which they have succeeded to share greater

authority, influence, responsibility and a new identity. A new woman has begun to come into prominence in the western world. This modest dissertation, therefore, suggests making an attempt to capture that rise in woman's social position by appealing to Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist theory and her quest for new feminine identity in Eugene O'Neill's plays, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Desire under the Elms* and in Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl*.

This research will attempt to explore the gender conditions of mostly women characters in the three texts, but also examine the processes of their identity constructions while struggling to transcend the oppressive sway of man, the patriarchal dominance. O'Neill's and Cather's main female characters, as introduced within the three works above, are striving to get more freedom by getting socially, economically, and sexually emancipated. These characters are presented as 'new women' who are distinct and separate from their ancestors; thus, this literary investigation will intend to demonstrate the extent to which they can be analogous to the Beauvoirian model of 'woman'.

## **Review of Literature**

The three works raised important debates among critics and writers all over the world. Eugene O'Neill's ideas on women's status hold an important role in his works. According to Fredrick Wilkins, O'Neill's female characters are always portrayed as inferior to men. In this sense, he argues:

The female characters, with few exceptions, are defined only by their biological roles –in other words, by their relationships to the men in their lives. Other than being daughters, wives, mothers, or lovers, the women have no significant careers, except for Eleanor Cape, an actress in *Welded*. Even then, she is her husband creation, acting in plays he writes for her. The prostitutes, of whom there are many, obviously have a profession, but one which depends exclusively on the favors of men.<sup>7</sup>



This statement demonstrates that the roles of O'Neill's female characters are limited to the domestic works, and all what they do gives them unfairly preferential treatment.

Another critic about O'Neill's representation of women is written by Judith E. Barlow, in her study entitled "O'Neill's Female Characters"(2013). She has explained the given position for women by O'Neill, and how he presented them generally as prostitutes or adulterous characters. In this sense, she claims: "Exposing how Capitalism made prostitution one of the few jobs opportunities for women, he was aware that women are a commodity exchanged among men."<sup>8</sup>

According to Barlow, O'Neill gives voice to women in his works, not for sympathy but to destroy them at the end. She asserts: "Female crusaders are rare in O'Neill cannon, however, and O'Neill's greater debt is to August Strindberg and what critics often call the Strindbergian female destroyer."<sup>9</sup> She adds, "O'Neill female characters are rarely artists, adventurers or dreamers- unless the dream is of love."<sup>10</sup> This statement claims that O'Neill's female characters are always excluded and banned from what men can do outside the domestic sphere.

For his part, Asim Karim discusses the theme of sexuality in O'Neill's plays. He criticized O'Neill's abuse in using sexuality in his plays such as *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Desire under the Elms*. He states: "Sexuality in O'Neill's exists in different forms that are predominantly regressive and degenerative in both individual and familial contexts."<sup>11</sup>

Jarka M. Burian, have signaled its noticeable relatedness to classical Greek myth. She has written: "O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is the best example that depicts the rich sources of classical myth. For instance, readers of this play also witness the domination of the Freudian view of nineteenth-century Puritanism."<sup>12</sup> Her approach has relied on Aristotelian Greek Tragedy theory and on Freud's vision during the nineteenth century, the time at which

the trilogy is set. As for this literary opportunity of transposing Greek plots in modern tragedy, O'Neill declares:

Fate from within the family is the modern psychological approximation of the Greek conception of fate from without, from the supernatural. In Greek tragedy the lives are controlled by external forces: the gods; in contrast, the Mannons are victims of their heredity and their accumulated history.”<sup>13</sup>

For their part, Frenz and Mueller, in a joint study, have compared *Mourning Becomes Electra* to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They have concluded that it is more Shakespeare than Aeschylus.<sup>14</sup> In another significant way, Robert Dowling remarks that this play combines:

Ancient Greek tragedy, modern theories of psychoanalysis, New England Puritan culture, and American history [...] Mourning is gripping in plot and powerfully situated in time and place, and its characters' histories and personalities are well-developed and troublingly clear.”<sup>15</sup>

From the point of view of Murray K. Joel and Michael S. Bowman, *Desire under the Elms* is concerned with the influence of psychology and Nietzsche. They signaled O'Neill's closeness to Freud's psychoanalysis.<sup>16</sup> Stark Yong, on his part, points out to some of its main themes like solitude, aspiration and love.<sup>17</sup>

As regards Willa Cather's literary work, Kathleen Norris points out to the fact that,

Stories seem anachronistic in present-day America, but the monumental rigors of pioneer life are still vivid memory for many [...] It was risky, in the early part of this century, to presume to write fiction about ordinary, rough-hewn people engaged in the rigors of dry land farming frontier Nebraska.<sup>18</sup>

Norris stresses the importance of the realistic picture that makes the lives of Cather's characters so remarkable. She also informs about Cather's 'much gossiped' non-conformity, saying that she dressed like man, had an outlandish ambition to become a doctor and did not hesitate to do man's jobs outdoors. This dissertation will observe all these details of herself and see how they may have been incorporated in *The Bohemian Girl*.

On her part, Katherine Anne Porter realized that being familiar with Willa Cather's childhood is: "To gain a special entry into her art."<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, she senses in her the regional and the provincial from which she could derive the universal. Porter notices that Cather's individuals' lives center on each one's unique person.

Again, Susan Rosowski refers to this artistic universality in Cather's works, writing that they, "Are rooted in place as surely as Joyce's are rooted in Dublin [...] Cather gives to the individual the task of transforming commonplace existence so that he or she may live according to 'the great truths'"<sup>20</sup>

## **Issue and Working Hypothesis**

It appears from the review of literature that O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Desire under the Elms* and Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl* received a great bulk of criticism. It also shows that O'Neill is a conservative and Cather is a liberal. Despite that previous studies dealt with the issue of women and their status in family or society, no research has ever involved the three plays together.

This research aims to explore women's process of identity construction from immanence to transcendence. It also aims to show how women are portrayed in these three literary works and how they questioned the masculine oppression. Both authors focused on the position of women. They gave voice to women so as to show their new identities and their rebellion to oppose the idea of male superiority. Thus, the main female characters preach freedom and equality in society. The 'General Introduction' gives insight about the main claim of this dissertation, which consists of feminine struggles and gender differentiation in these selected plays by E. O'Neill and W. Cather. It also explains Simone de Beauvoir's theory about Feminism as outlined in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), and includes the summaries of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Desire under the Elms*, and Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl*. Its main part is the 'Discussion' section which is divided

into three chapters. The first chapter consists of examining the way patriarchal oppression is exerted upon women and how they revolt against it so as to break free from man's confinement and immanence in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The second chapter deals with issues of work and material possession in *Desire under the Elms*. It attempts to demonstrate that work and wealth could possibly help women to grow to be autonomous beings. As for the third chapter, it aims at seeking to determine how in *The Bohemian Girl* mothering and man-invented myths might impede or obstruct woman from founding a transcendent feminine identity.

### **Endnotes:**

-<sup>1</sup>Navanethem, Pillay (2009), 'Women's Rights in Human Rights System: Past, Present and Future', Law, Democracy and Development vol.13. No.2

- <sup>2</sup>Greene, Gayle and Kahn, Coppelia (1985), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, 7.

- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., 7.

-<sup>4</sup> Elert, Kerstin (1979), 'Portraits of Women in selected Novels By Virginia Woolf and E.M Foster' (PhD Diss, University of Umea), 24.

-<sup>5</sup> Greene, Gayle and Kahn, Coppelia (1985), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, 11.

-<sup>6</sup> Wally, Sylvia (1990), *Theorizing Patriarchy* . Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 38.

- <sup>7</sup>Wilkins, Frederick (1982), 'News Letters: O'Neill's Women'. Vol.vi, No 2. Suffolk University,(Boston Summer-fall)

-<sup>8</sup> Barlow, Judith E. (2013), *O'Neill's Female Characters*. Cambridge University Press, 166.

-<sup>9</sup>Ibid.,165.

-<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 165.

-<sup>11</sup>Asim, Karim (2010), 'O'Neill's Concern with Sexuality and the Behavioral Disorders' (Studies in Literature and Language)

- <sup>12</sup>Jarka, M. B. Reviewed work(s): 'Ancient Greek Myths and Modern Drama' by Angela Billi and 'Myth on the Modern Stage' by Hugh Dickinson. The Massachusetts review vol.11, N°2.pp 401-408: The Massachusetts Review. Inc. (spring, 1970)

- <sup>13</sup>Floyd, Virginia. (1988) *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Frederick Ungar Publishing CO, New York, 1985Goran, Stockenstrom. *Strindberg's Dramaturgy*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 383.
- <sup>14</sup>Frenz, H and Mueller, M. 'American literature' Vol.38, N°1. Duke University Press. (March, 1966) pp 85-100.
- <sup>15</sup>Dowling, Robert M (2009) *Critical Companion to Eugene O'Neill*. New York, Facts on File, 363.
- <sup>16</sup>Murray, Gilbert. *A History of Ancient Greek Literature*. New York, D. Appleton, 1897  
O'Neill, Eugene. *All God's Chillun Got Wings* in Complete Plays 1920-1931, New York, Volume II, The Library of America, 1984
- <sup>17</sup>Young stark, Nov 1924
- <sup>18</sup>Great Plains Quarterly Vol. 2, No 4, Fall 1982, pp. 204-09
- <sup>19</sup>Bennett, Mildred R. 'The Childhood Worlds of Willa Cather' *Great Plains Quarterly* 2, 4 (Fall 1983) pp. 204-9, accessed on June 11<sup>th</sup> 2018, 12:05)
- <sup>20</sup>(Rosowski, Susan, 'Willa Cather's A Lost Lady: The Paradoxes of Change.' *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 11, 1 (Autmn 1977) pp. 51-62)

## **Methods and Materials**

### **1. Methods**

This part of the dissertation sheds light on theory relied to my study. I borrowed some concepts which are relevant to my work from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

#### **Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist Theory: *The Second Sex***

Simone de Beauvoir is a French modern feminist, intellectual theorist, philosopher and novelist. Besides her six novels, plays, and short stories, de Beauvoir wrote many books about cultural criticism and philosophy. Her works became the basis of the modern women's movement. The majority of her writings dealt with the struggles of women in a male controlled world. *The Second Sex* (1949) is one of her famous works which is considered to be as one of the major modern feminist work and perhaps the most important writing on women's rights through 1940s. In this book, de Beauvoir explores two main ideas. The first point is that man, who views himself as the most essential being and who occupies the role of the self or the subject, has made woman as the inessential being who occupies the secondary position as the object or the other. The second point is that femininity is an artificial posture.

Both of these ideas were influenced by the French philosopher John Paul Sartre's existentialism and the feminist theorist Virginia Woolf's works like *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The most famous line of *The Second Sex* is "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."<sup>21</sup> This means that the roles of women in patriarchal societies are not given to them by birth but they are socially constructed.

At the social level, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* deals with many important subjects. She starts with an explanation of the relationship between the ovum and the sperm in different beings, which she links to man and woman in the term of re-production. She affirms that the fact of biology should be seen from the physiological, economic and social

understanding, not from the values, the traditions or the norms. The previous subject led to another one which is the problem of motherhood that has always given opportunity to men to dominate women.

Another social subject which was carefully examined by de Beauvoir is abortion which she considers as a right that every woman should have. She avows also her negative thoughts about marriage and she asserts that:

The principle of marriage is obscene because it transforms an exchange that should be founded on a spontaneous impulse into rights and duties, it gives bodies an instrumental, thus degrading, side by dooming them to grasp themselves in their generality, the husband is frozen by the idea that accomplishing a duty, and the wife is ashamed to feel delivered to someone who exercises a right over her.<sup>22</sup>

De Beauvoir has also dealt with “transcendence” and “immanence”. Transcendence refers to man because it gathers all what is good and positive such as virtues of freedom and responsibility while immanence, which refers to woman, embodies all what is negative like stagnation and objectivity or selflessness. Lietch Vincent B in his book entitled *The Norton Antology of Theory and Criticism*(2001) asserts: “De Beauvoir, critics argue, tends to define what men do as transcendent and what women do\_ childbearing, motherhood, housework\_ as necessarily immanent.”<sup>23</sup>

At the economic level, “inheritance” and “patrimony” are always attributed to man rather than to woman. Simone de Beauvoir has also spoken about economic independence of women; she asserts: “Women wins concrete autonomy because she has an economic and social role.”<sup>24</sup> So if they can support themselves economically, they can do much more powerful things for the improvement of their status and of the whole society. They can achieve a form of liberation.

At the mythical level, de Beauvoir wrote about the various mythical representations of women and demonstrated how these myths have imprinted human consciousness, often for the purpose of woman disservice. She argues: "The myth is a transcendent idea that escapes the mental grasp entirely."<sup>25</sup> That is to say myths are near projection of men's mind; they are not true. De Beauvoir hopes to destroy the persistent myth of "Eternal Feminine"<sup>26</sup> which made women think that they should be altruistic or considering themselves as the absolute "other". Throughout the book, de Beauvoir mentions that some females are complicit in their otherness, particularly with regard to marriage. She claims: "For a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked, because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything."<sup>27</sup>

De Beauvoir discusses another myth which is the myth of "Feminine Mystery"<sup>28</sup> which gives men the right of not understanding women. 'Feminine Mystery' as recognized in mythical thought is a more profound matter. In fact, it is immediately implied in the mythology of the absolute other.<sup>29</sup>

Literature always fails in attempting to portray mysterious women, they can appear only at the beginning of novel as strange and enigmatic figures; but unless the story remains unfinished they give up their secrets in the end and they are then simply consistent and transparent persons.<sup>30</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir concluded her book by describing how even the independent women of her days were still facing big obstacles and challenges than men do because of the traditional values like marriage, reproduction, economic dependency and the perpetuated myths. But she ends up with an optimistic note in which she says: "If women are given equal opportunities, they can achieve just as much as men can"<sup>31</sup>



## **Materials**

### **Summary of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra***

In New England, Ezra Mannon returns from war to renew life with family and his wife Christine. From the beginning, Christine informs Ezra about her love towards Adam Brant before murdering him by changing his heart medicine for tabs of arsenic. Lavinia has known of her mother's guilt and managed to convince Orin, her brother, that Christine is having an affair with Brant and that both of them planned to kill their father Ezra. After Ezra's funeral, Christine and Brant have not been able to escape because Lavinia pushed Orin to kill captain Brant. After hearing this terrible news, Christine goes inside the Mannon home and kills herself. The tragic family fate continues for, a year later, Orin accuses his sister Lavinia of being the most criminal of all and because of the great guilt that he feels, he commits suicide. After her failure to marry Peter, Lavinia has entombed herself in the family mansion to live out her days surrounded by the ghosts of her dead relatives, as a punishment for the deeds of her family. It may be of great use to this literary investigation for the many life reversals and misfortunes of Christine, Lavinia and even of Orin might provide sufficient material to the discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist thought. Their lives and their struggles to go beyond their stagnant states may have connectedness to the feminist philosophy of de Beauvoir.

### **a- Summary of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms***

The play starts with a discussion between the two sons, Peter and Simeon who wanted to go away from the farm to the gold mining in California. Simeon, Peter and their half-brother Eben hate their father Ephraim because of his harshness and toughness. Eben Cabot hates him more because his father inherited his mother's land and was a bad husband for her. Ephraim

has left the house for a long period. After a while, he comes back to the farm accompanied by his third wife, Abbie Putnam. At their arrival, they discover that Peter and Simeon had left the house to find fortune in California. Abbie tries hard to make friend with the remaining son, Eben, because she falls in love with him. But Eben hates her just like he hates his father. Abbie tries to seduce Eben for the sake of having a baby. Eben agrees the copulation just to take revenge of the old Cabot for the ill treatment he made to his mother. A child is born and Eben was told by Cabot that Abbie gave birth to this baby to inherit the land of his mother. Abbie kills the baby to justify her love for Eben, and provoke the final loss of their baby, love and land.

This text revolves around major issues like work, unconventional love and patrimony within a harsh rural American area. These themes are also discussed by Simone de Beauvoir in her essay The Second Sex, in which she considers that economic prosperity and free love can be means for a woman to transcend the oppressiveness of man.

#### **b- Summary of Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl***

The story starts with the return of Nils Ericson to his family home. His mother sees him after many years of absence. No one in the house has thought of his coming back home except his little brother Eric. Nils discovers that his old friend Clara Vavrika was married with his brother Olaf. Clara was not really appreciated by the Ericsons, especially Mrs. Ericson who shows a clear disapproval for her and her father Joe. Nils meets Clara and tells her that he comes back home because he loves her, and that they should run away. One night, as she is on her way back home from her father's, she meets Nils and decides to run away with him. A year later, Eric decides to join his brother and Clara in Bergen, but in his way he recognizes that he cannot leave his mother alone, so he returns back home. Mother and son are happily reunited.

Clara Vavrika's refusal of mothering and Mrs. Ericson's assimilation of all man-invented myths about women would enrich the comments to be done about the way de Beauvoir's feminine ideal can correspond or mismatch with these women's combats against masculine domination.

### **End-Notes:**

- <sup>21</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone (1949), The Second Sex. . New York: Random House, Inc. 2009.330
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 530.
- <sup>23</sup>Vincent B, Leitch (2001), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. English University of Oklahoma, 1405.
- <sup>24</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone (1949), The Second Sex. . New York: Random House, Inc. 2009.140
- <sup>25</sup> Leitch, Vincent B., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1408.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1407.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1411.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1411.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1411.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1412.
- <sup>31</sup>Graddesaver.com

## Results

This research has focused on American woman's struggle to construe a new identity in the selected plays: Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), *Desire under the Elms* (1924) and Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl* (1912). The literary analysis has centered on women's immanent reality and their rebellious reaction against man's domination and transcendence. To achieve my goal, I have borrowed some concepts from Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory as developed in her essay '*The Second Sex*'.

The study of the selected materials from the perspective of de Beauvoir has demonstrated the following results. First, it has been concluded that women are dominated and oppressed even in aristocratic families; Christine Mannon and Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra* partly failed in achieving freedom and autonomy; they could not reach de Beauvoir's transcendent status of women.

The second major result is that the gender roles attributed to women are limited to the household, childbearing and mothering; women are no more than objects of desire. However, those women also sought to go beyond those oppressive and freedom-limited situations. They began a quest for patrimony and property as it is the case with Abbie Putnam, the main female character in *Desire under the Elms* though she has failed to succeed to become economically independent. Thus, Abbie Putnam does not fit the feminist expectations of de Beauvoir's transcendental woman.

Third, relying on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, it has been shown that women have assumed their roles within harsh farming and country environments. And I came to deduce that Clara Vavrika, the main female character in *The Bohemian Girl*, can be considered as de Beauvoir's ideal woman, because she has fought against patriarchal values and norms. At the end, she has gained her freedom and taken control over her life. Though

she does not have a job, she is the only legitimate heir of her father's properties, which makes her economically free. In sum, she has reached gender equality, personal freedom, and property possession, the typical indication to a de Beauvoirian transcendent and autonomous female subject.

As regards the female characters of both playwrights, I have deduced that despite their failure to reach transcendence, all of these female characters can be lined up with de Beauvoir's imagined feminist struggle. It is also demonstrated that Willa Cather's female characters are less oppressed and immanent than O'Neill's women who have often fail to achieve transcendence.

## Discussion

### **Chapter One: Patriarchal Oppression and Revolt in E. O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra***

This chapter deals with Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Its aim is to set out the interaction of this text with Simone de Beauvoir's feminist, and existentialist perspective. De Beauvoir's theory has identified some themes and concepts very important to the feminine struggle for a change in women's social position. The discussion will focus on the heroines combat for their life improvement and their closeness to de Beauvoir's model of a woman. The concluding point will be that O'Neill's female characters may be said to have resembled de Beauvoir's ideal woman.

Like man, the American woman fought to achieve and secure a better position, and identity during the first half of twentieth century. In her quest for equality and rights, she experienced a lot of difficulties, evolved, and might have gone through desperate situations. Therefore, this chapter will endeavor to understand every gender inequality, and examine how these may correspond to De Beauvoir's feminist views.

*Mourning becomes Electra*, is considered as O'Neill's most ambitious work, for it compares his New England to the Greek tragic myth of *The Oresteia*. It discusses topics like love, misery, family, revenge, courage, endurance, adultery and honor which might help to shed light on male and female relationships. The play is structured as a trilogy: *The Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*.

In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, O'Neill weaves the plot around some major themes like love, betrayal, honor, jealousy, adultery, vengeance, destruction and death, in the process of the construction of the identities of Christine, Lavinia and the other male characters like Orin and Ezra. But, as already mentioned, this work will mainly be concerned with the prominent female characters in the play.

At the beginning of the trilogy, Seth Beckwith, the aged manager of the mansion, introduces the Mannon family and Ezra Mannon's personality to the reader. Seth gives a lot of details about Ezra Mannon. The reader is informed that Ezra had been a soldier, a politician, and the mayor of his county. Seth Beckwith gives a lot of details about Ezra and about the imminence of a death occurrence:

Oh, he'd been a soldier afore this war. His paw made him go to west p'int .He went to the Mexican war and come out a major. Abe died that some year and Ezra give up the army and took holt of the shippin' business here. But he didn't stop there. He learned law on the side and got made judge .Went in fur politics and got 'lected mayor. He was mayor when this war broke out but he resigned to once and joined the army again. And now he's riz to be general. Oh, he's able, Ezra is!<sup>32</sup>

From what it is said above, Ezra is portrayed as an intellectual and warrior. But, most important of all, it is the dominating mood of death and destruction that is being announced from the start. Ezra may be associated to the representation of patriarchy in the play and a preliminary announcement of failure to build well-comforted female identities.

After attaining honorable positions in society, Ezra Mannon is killed by his wife and her lover. His death, will envenom the family's life to provoke much more hardships to its members' aspiration for enjoying a happy life. A short while before dying Ezra, Mannon reviews his family life to Christine. He says:

When I came back you had turned to your new baby, Orin. I was hardly alive for you anymore. I saw that. I tried not to hate Orin. I turned to Vinnie, but a daughter's not a wife. Then I made up

my mind I'd do my work in the world and leave you alone in your life and not care. That's why the shipping wasn't enough ---why I became a judge and a mayor and such vain truck, and why folks in town look on me as so able! Ha! Able for what? Not for what I wanted most in life! Not for your love! No! Able only to keep my mind from thinking of what I'd lost! (He stares at her--then asks pleadingly) For you did you love me before we were married. You won't deny that, will you?<sup>33</sup>

From the passage above, he seems as if he has known about Christine's near betrayal and her permanent hatred of him. He asserts how much it is difficult for one's quest for happiness to be achieved. Ezra's several details about his emotional suffering in family and beside Christine may inform more about the gender roles and male-female struggles, which constitute this work's major targets.

In this respect, in her book *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir examined why and how women are considered inferior to men. For this purpose, she studied history, biology, psychology. But she did not find evidence or logical reasons for this inferiority and subordination. Therefore, she concluded that it is the myths and false stories that have been invented by man that relegated women to be second class individuals and be defined as the 'absolute other'. One of these myths, which can be relied to this part of the play, is the myth of "*Feminine Mystery*". De Beauvoir argues that women are shrouded in mystery and portrayed as the other. They are considered either strange or mysterious. Therefore, they cannot be understood. At other instances, they are less human, so they do not deserve equal treatment and the same rights as men. De Beauvoir asserts that, "To say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood; she is there but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances."<sup>34</sup>

In O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, it is the case with the main female character Christine who feels herself oppressed by her husband, and by her expected duty as a mother within, and the Mannon's harsh values and norms. Christine suffers from not being understood by her husband and even her daughter Lavinia. The first part of the trilogy shows



Christine's feelings toward her husband. She says to her daughter, who has suspected her and accused her of adultery that she was never pleased about her relationship with Ezra because she hated him. Christine tried to convince her daughter when she says:

(With strident intensity) you will listen! I'm talking to you as a woman now, not as a mother to daughter! That relationship has no meaning between us! You've called me vile and shameless! Well, I want you to know that's what I've felt about myself for over twenty years, giving my body to a man I...<sup>35</sup>

The 'Feminine Mystery' may on one part explain the conflictual relationship between Christine and her husband. It may also confirm why Ezra Mannon has not started any true examination of his love and emotional affair with his wife. He has been a sailor, law student, mayor and judge but has never had enough bravery to confront his wife Christine. He has been unable to know if Christine loves him or not. On another part, according to Simone de Beauvoir, this masculine behavior can be found in high patriarchal societies in which men do not care about women's feelings. Because they consider their wives as their own property and objects they own. Beauvoir says: "Woman is her husband's prey, his property."<sup>36</sup>

For her part, Christine Mannon is a girl from a wealthy and honorable family, who starts an adulterous relationship with Brant, whom she visits on the plea of seeing her sick father in a distant town. In the following discussion with her daughter Lavinia, Christine reveals many facets of her personality:

(Casually avoiding her eyes) Yes. He's much better now. He'll soon be going the rounds to his patients again, he hopes. (as if anxious to change the subject, looking at the flowers she carries) I've been to the greenhouse to pick these. I felt our tomb needed a little brightening. (She nods scornfully toward the house.) Each time I come back after being away it appears more like a sepulchre! The "whited" one of the Bible—pagan temple front stuck like a mask on Puritan gray ugliness! It was just like old Abe Mannon to build such a monstrosity—as a temple of his hatred. (then with a little mocking laugh) Forgive me, Vinnie. I forgot you liked it. And you ought to. It suits your temperament. (Lavinia stares at her but remains silent. Christine glances at her flowers again and turns toward the house) I must put these in water. (She moves a few steps toward the house—then turns again—with a studied casualness) By the way, before I forget, I happened to run into Captain Brant on the street in New York. He said he was coming up here today to take over his ship and asked me if he might drop in to see you. I told him he

could---and stay at supper with us. (Without looking at Lavinia, who is staring at her with a face grown grim and hard) Doesn't that please you, Vinnie? Or do you remain true to your one and only beau, Peter?<sup>37</sup>

According to Simone De Beauvoir's view point, Christine's position as a woman is determined by her duty as a wife and a mother. Christine rejects these duties and seeks freedom. She denies her motherhood and regrets marrying and having children from a man she does not love. Christine can be seen as one of the mothers who are unhappy, bitter, and unsatisfied.<sup>38</sup> In relation to this issue of motherhood, De Beauvoir argues that, "Motherhood relegates women to a secondary existence."<sup>39</sup> It is an existence that does not fit to Christine's life ideal. After long years of unhappy marriage and unsatisfied motherhood, Christine decides to free herself from these strong patriarchal institutions. However, she is oppressed by her society and family that forbid divorce. This would make her pray for her husband's death in the war, because she knows that he will never accept to divorce her. In this respect, Christine claims:

I don't think you'd propose that, Adam, if you stopped thinking of your revenge for a moment and thought of me! Don't you realize he would never divorce me, out of spite? What would I be in the world's eyes? My life would be ruined and I would ruin yours! You'd grow to hate me!<sup>40</sup>

De Beauvoir considers divorce as a right for a woman as it is for a man. But the society never blames the husband for divorce. Laws accord divorce easily to man but rarely to woman. To illustrate this, De Beauvoir writes: "The law also authorizes the woman to file for divorce in certain rare cases."<sup>41</sup> She adds: "Divorce is prohibited, and marriage has to be a public event."<sup>42</sup>

Christine has admitted not to be able to remain faithful to her '*one and only beau*' Ezra because she does not love him but she loves the captain Brant with whom she has committed adultery. By this act, Christine revolts against the Mannons' patriarchal norms and values; it

was a kind of revenge from family and society, especially her careless husband Ezra. Ezra's oppression and attitudes are being resisted through the betrayal and the infidelity of his wife. De Beauvoir argues: "Women take revenge through infidelity: "Adultery becomes a natural part of marriage. This is the only defense woman has against the domestic slavery she is bound to."<sup>43</sup>

The other important detail is that she makes the confession of not being able to fit in the world of the Mannons because of many reasons related to their norms and customs. Christine Mannon is tormented by a repressed patriarchal force, that prevents her from being respectful to its virtues of harmony and obedience, predominant in the aristocratic and patriarchal world of the Mannon family. This can be the reason why she resorts to start her adulterous adventure with Brant. She could not bear anymore such patriarchal institutions. De Beauvoir believes that woman has always been subject to discrimination and domination by the patriarchal society; she has been considered as object for man. In this sense, Simone says: "Under a patriarchal regime, she was the property of her father who married her off as he saw fit, then attached to her husband's household, she is no more than his thing and the thing of the family (genos) in which she was placed."<sup>44</sup>

Being a part of a famous and a rich family, wife of a hero and a successful husband did not fit to Christine's desired way of living. As a result, she has revolted against the Mannon's patriarchy by doing the shameful act of adultery. To Simone de Beauvoir, even the high class and rich families exert patriarchal oppression upon their women. She notices: "The patriarchal family survives among rich landowners; the more socially and economically powerful man feels, the more he plays the paterfamilias with authority."<sup>45</sup>

As to the fact of killing herself at the end, it may be interpreted as a reprehensible and condemnable act. Christine has not found any other solution to get out of her offending and ashamed situation. Her husband is dead, her lover is dead too and her two children are against

her, that's why she decides to put an end to her life. In relation to this point, Simone de Beauvoir claims:

[...] Exhausting for herself: it is hard to see another solution available to her since she has no positive reason to silence her feelings of revolt and no effective way of expressing them. There is only one solution available to the woman when rejection runs its course: suicide.<sup>46</sup>

As a conclusion, Christine has failed to support her stay at home with her two children; she can no more resist the oppressive system of the Mannons' aristocratic family values. So, the harsh dominant order of her social and family environment is to be paralleled to De Beauvoir's notion of society's desire to maintain woman under man's control and dominance, or in a state of immanence.

Contrary to her mother, Lavinia is a true Mannon woman. She has had bitter and ambivalent feelings toward her mother. This hostile reaction against her mother will be determinant to her position as a woman and to our understanding of it. She confronts her by saying:

(Winning again---stammers harshly) So I was born of your disgust! I've always guessed that, Mother—ever since I was little—when I used to come to you—with love—but you would always push me away! I've felt it ever since I can remember—your disgust! (then a flair-up of bitter hatred) Oh, I hate you! It's only right I should hate you!<sup>47</sup>

Lavinia symbolizes the social and cultural forces that oppress Christine and her lover Brant. She hates her mother and glorifies her father, a hero of a past aristocratic age. Lavinia condemns her mother's immoral adulterous behavior. She wants her to love her husband, and stop her secret relationship with Brant. According to Simone de Beauvoir, Lavinia must be incapable of enjoying an identity comfort because she is living in the age of transition which brings about a set of new ethics and morals she cannot adhere to. Lavinia believes strongly in her family norms and defends them. She accepts the patriarchal domination and desires to

impose it upon her mother. From de Beauvoir's point of view, Lavinia can be seen as a complicit to her immanence and the male domination over her. She asserts: "For a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything."<sup>48</sup>

Unlike her mother, who incarnates the blending of some new ethics and morals with others from the past, Lavinia refuses to adhere to such new morals because she submits herself to the masculine dominant order of her adored father.

To better understand Lavinia's refusal to embrace such 'Beauvoirian' feminist desires, an insight about her double secret attachment to both her father and to Brant, ought to be explored. As regards her secret love to Brant, her mother's lover, Lavinia can be thought to be a representative of only average personality quality, for she refuses to live her own time and fulfill her own intimate desire of declaring her love to Brant. In this sense, de Beauvoir would consider Lavinia as a woman who sees with the eyes of a man. She forbids to herself and to her mother a love outside the family circle. Contrary to Lavinia, Christine has much more personal self-reliance to justify her adulterous relation with her lover.

In addition to this repressed love for Brant, Lavinia is inwardly troubled by an unrevealed incestuous desire toward her father, an Electra-like love. That is why she does not accept her mother who spoils her search for unreachable romantic love. Through such love, she hopes to possibly capture man's world and attain equality. She intends to inflict damage to her mother by threatening to inform her father about the adultery when she says:

(In an anguish of jealous hatred) I hate you! You steal even father's love from me again! You stole all love from me when I was born! (then almost with a sob, hiding her face in her hands) Oh, Mother! Why have you done this to me? What harm had I done you? (then looking up at the window again—with passionate disgust) Father, how can you love that shameless harlot? (then frenziedly) I can't bear it! I won't! It's my duty to tell him about her! I will! (She calls desperately) Father! Father! (The shutter of the bedroom is pushed open and Mannon leans out).<sup>49</sup>

From the quotation above, it can be understood that Lavinia is very affectionate with aristocratic masculine family world. Consequently, she will be unable to fulfill a self-realized identity and build her own personality far from the Mannons' patriarchal system and her father's love. According to de Beauvoir, Lavinia suffers from the Electra complex which bounds her to her father and being obedient to him even under a harsh patriarchal order. Her adoration for him blinds her to his dominance; she always attempts to be like him and ready to punish those who would plan to harm him. In this sense, de Beauvoir claims: "[...] in loving her father, the girl would like to resemble him; and inversely regret strengthens her love: through the tenderness she inspires in her father, she can compensate for her inferiority."<sup>50</sup> Because of this Electra complex, "The girl experiences feelings of rivalry and hostility toward her mother."<sup>51</sup>

Subsequent to this inability to express openly her inner female desires, Lavinia would seek to manipulate her brother Orin for the sake of avenging her mother's immoral behavior toward the holiness of her father, the patriarch. After Brant's assassination, Lavinia and Orin have left for New York. But a year later, the family honor has not been recovered, so they decide to come back home. Therefore, this sorrowful return home to the old patriarchal world of the Mannons can be linked to what Simone de Beauvoir considers to be a difficult state of immanence that is not easily transcended when man's assistance is deficient as is the case for her; her father and her secret lover are both dead, and Orin detests her. As a result, Lavinia has no other choice than being severe toward herself by starting a deliberate seclusion inside Mannon's mansion. She says to the old family servant Seth Beckwith:

(Grimly) Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment. And there is no one left to punish me. I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone! I will have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid

out and the last Mannon is let die! (with a strange cruel smile of gloating over the years of self-torture) I know they will see to it I live for a long time! It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born.<sup>52</sup>

She is doomed to experience personal unsuccessful self-realization because, from the point of view of de Beauvoir, she has rejected a great opportunity to escape from the patriarchal world when she has left for New York, with her brother Orin. She would have stayed there instead of returning to her family mansion. She could not resist her attachment to the Mannons and their traditional values. In this perspective de Beauvoir claims:

Hence a woman makes no claim for herself as a subject because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as the other.<sup>53</sup>

In conclusion, Lavinia fails to resist the masculine dominance of her father and Brant. She does not engage any sort of struggle to free herself from this dominant patriarchal world. Beauvoir sees Lavinia as a girl who has not attempted to do something or even to complain about her situation as immanent and dependent. She states:

The girl does not seek to go beyond the natural and social order; she does not attempt to push back the limits of the possible or to effectuate a transmutation of values; she settles for manifesting her revolt within an established world where boundaries and laws are preserved.<sup>54</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir's ideal woman would, thus, not correspond to Lavinia because she does not have any quality of Beauvoirian ideal woman, starting from freedom longing, to economic independence, and self realization.

## Endnotes

- <sup>32</sup>Bogard, Travis (1998), O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc .895.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., 939.
- <sup>34</sup>Leitch, Vincent B. (2001), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, English University of Oklahoma, 1410.
- <sup>35</sup>Bogard, Travis (1998), *O'Neill Complete Plays* 1920-1931. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. 916.
- <sup>36</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone (1949), The Second Sex. . New York: Random House, Inc. 2009, 206
- <sup>37</sup> Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays* 1920-1931, 903-904.
- <sup>38</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 641.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 641.
- <sup>40</sup> Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays* 1920-1931, 923.
- <sup>41</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 123.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 134.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., 88.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., 118-119.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., 140.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., 736.
- <sup>47</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays* 1920-1931, 917.
- <sup>48</sup>Leitch, Vincent B., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1411.
- <sup>49</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays* 1920-1931, 917.
- <sup>50</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex,30.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., 76.
- <sup>52</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays*, 1920-1931, 1053.
- <sup>53</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex,30.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid., 425.



## **Chapter Two: Work and Search for Patrimony in E. O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms***

This chapter aims at discussing how Simone de Beauvoir's concepts of immanence, transcendence, patrimony and of male-perpetuated myths about women apply to O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms*. The decision to read De Beauvoir might be justified by her intellectual and feminist activity that occurred at times when O'Neill's literary enterprise was developing. De Beauvoir has provided women with noticeable evidence to improve their female status in their society. De Beauvoir insisted for women to struggle to reach gender equality.

As a modernist playwright, O'Neill has attempted to propose a new American identity, for he developed multiple topics such as work, gender difference, sexuality and inner suffering. In *Desire under the Elms* (1924). Ephraim Cabot returns to his farm after a long absence accompanied by Abbie Putnam, a new pretty wife. At their arrival, Cabot's sons Simon and Peter have run off to California. Eben remains alone at home to fall in love with Abbie, his father's wife. So, love is a central theme upon which our analysis is to be based.

In this play, O'Neill has also treated many important subjects that can be related to Simone de Beauvoir's theory of feminism. The major themes in relation to my topic are women's discrimination, betrayal, love, revenge, and adultery. In the beginning of the play there is a discussion between the two brothers, Simeon, Peter and their half brother Eben. They are talking about their sufferings due to working on the farm, the hardness of their father Ephraim and the reasons of their disapproval for him. For instance, Simeon complains that: "We've wuked. Give our strenth. Give our years. Plowed 'em under in the ground\_\_ (he

stumps rebelliously) \_\_ rottin' \_\_making soil for his corps! (a pause) Waal\_\_ the farm pays good to hereabouts".<sup>55</sup>

The brothers wish the death of their father in order to get free from his domination and hardness. Eben is the one who hates his father more because he thinks that he has been the cause of his mother's death. He believes that it is his hardness which killed her:

EBEN\_\_ (fiercely) An' fur thanks he killed her!  
SIMOEN\_\_ (After a pause) No one never kills nobody.  
                    It's allus somethin'. That's the murder.  
EBEN\_\_ Didn't he slave Maw t' death?<sup>56</sup>

These two aforementioned quotations portray clearly Ephraim Cabot and his patriarchal domination over his wives and even his soft sons. The result is that two of his sons fled from the farm to the West. After the escape of Simeon and Peter to California, Ephraim Cabot, Abbie Putnam, and Eben have confronted one another in their processes of constructing their identities within that hard family and external rural area.

To begin, what Ephraim Cabot recalls about his past is crucial for the understanding of his opinion about himself and about his previous wives:

Listen, Abbie. When I come here fifty odd year ago—I was just twenty an' the strongest an' hardest ye ever seen [...] But I give in t' weakness once [...] They was a party leavin', givin' up, goin' West. I jined' em [...] I got afeerd o' that voice an' I lit out back to hum here [...] climbin' over the hills up and down, fencin' in the fields that was mine. [...] All the time I kept gittin' lonesome. I tuk a wife [...] I was allus lonesome. She died. [...] I tuk another wife—Eben' Maw. Her folks was contestin' me at law over my deeds t' the farm—my farm! That's why Eben keeps a-talkin' his fool talk o' this bein' his Maw's farm [...] She never knowed me nor nothin'. It was lonesomer' n hell with her. After a matter o' sixteen odd years, she died. (a pause) I lived with the boys. They hated me 'cause I was hard. I hated them 'cause they was soft.[...] Then this spring the call come—the voice o' God cryin' in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness —t' go out an' seek an' find! (turning to her with strange passion) I sought ye an' I found ye! Yew air my Rose O' Sharon! Ye air like . . . . (She has turned a blank face, resentful eyes to his. He stares at her for a moment—then harshly) Air ye any the wiser fur all I've told ye?<sup>57</sup>

In this long quotation, Ephraim Cabot informs Abbie about some essential events of his past life. References are made to his cold and distant relationships with his two previous wives. He also stresses his feeling of resentment and discontent toward the softness of his sons. For him, they have inherited this softness in personality from their mothers. According to Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, Ephraim Cabot has not relied on his wives to develop his farm

and to grow his sons because he may think that women are not able to work and to do what man can. Ephraim shows clearly his transcendence and domination toward his wives; he considers women as objects of desire, machines of reproduction, and householders. His patriarchal opinion is bound to one idea: that woman's real place is the kitchen; she has no place beside man in working or producing. According to this point, de Beauvoir says: "A woman is shut up in a kitchen or boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly."<sup>58</sup>

His remembrances and memories only make him review his loneliness and the wives' inability to provide him with good heirs. He desires now to forget his past by being beside Abbie, whom he desires to bear him an heir. Ephraim Cabot sees women as reproductive means. He took his two first wives to take care of the house and to bear him children. Then, he took a third one because he was unsatisfied with the softness of his sons' personalities. An important point that should be taken into consideration is that Ephraim Cabot and his family live in the countryside; they work on farm; and in such patriarchal societies the males always desire women who can bear many children and be good householders. For de Beauvoir, fertility and reproduction are a curse, because it links women to the reproductive nature and give them the image of weak creatures that men can exploit easily. De Beauvoir observes: "Pregnancy, giving birth, and menstruation diminished their work capacity and condemned them to long periods of impotence."<sup>59</sup> She adds by quoting an English scholar who put forward: "Women are not only a part of the race, they are not even half of the race but they are sub-species destined uniquely for reproduction."<sup>60</sup> This last quotation can be applied to Ephraim's attitude toward women. This same attitude can be linked to the Beauvoirian myth of 'Feminine Mystery'. These mythical thoughts are created by men to perpetuate women and to have an excuse about the fact of dominating them and of keeping them ignorant. Like all patriarchal men, Ephraim Cabot finds that women are mysterious and not understandable, for

it seems that he has never tried to understand his wives and see their need for love and tenderness, even if they were simple and easy as was Eben's mother. De Beauvoir rejects all these mythical thoughts and attacks men by expressing this same difficulty on the part of women. She claims: "Woman does not always understand man, but there is no masculine mystery."<sup>61</sup>

As a consequence, this quick marriage with the young Abbie Putnam may confirm Ephraim's masculine thought that is controlled by the patriarchal order he symbolizes. He is more hopeful about his future because he thinks about the possibility to make Abbie give him a boy for his farm. To de Beauvoir, Ephraim valorizes motherhood and women's domesticity in order to reduce her to a submissive and inferior gender position.

In this same passage, all the things Ephraim evokes (farm, harsh work, and trips to West) show that his identity is controlled by the laws and morals of his society. Mark A. Mossman comments on this final image of Cabot being isolated when he says: "It seems that Cabot can only connect spiritually with the land, with the farm. He is frustrated in every other single attempt to communicate and connect significantly with the people, animals, objects."<sup>62</sup> Though he seems to desire the establishment of a more intimate relationship with Abbie, he continues to remind her of his dream of having a true heir for work on his farm. This is what de Beauvoir would consider to be a masculine oppressive order. Thus, Ephraim Cabot will not succeed to secure an equal gender position for his young wife. He is not able to transcend his traditional male fixed ethic toward women; he 'despairingly' confesses, "*God A' mighty, I be lonesomer'n ever!*"<sup>63</sup> Ephraim surrenders to the masculine superiority of the old social and cultural values.

Always with reference to the quotation above, Ephraim Cabot has heard, '*The voice of God*'; a religious voice that has always designated man to be the master, and woman, his

slave. Along many centuries of human history, religion has perpetuated woman's image as man has portrayed her. According to some religions and by reference to story of Adam and Eve, women are considered as sinners and devils just like their mother Eve who was the cause of man's banishment from Heaven. And as punishment, God had cursed them with reproduction (childbearing), mothering, and being under male's domination. According to de Beauvoir, man has created religions and legends just to over-dominate woman. She explains that, "Religions forged by men reflect his will for domination: they found ammunition in the legends of Eve and Pandora."<sup>64</sup> She believes that religions exist to oppress women and to be a weapon of domination for men. She argues: "The catholic religion among others, exercise on her the most troubling influences."<sup>65</sup> In this sense, de Beauvoir incites woman to revolt against religion while fighting for her rights against man. She asserts: "There must be women, "real women", to perpetuate religion".<sup>66</sup> not women like Ephraim's wives.

As far as Abbie Putnam is concerned, she marries Ephraim Cabot because she desires to have shelter and home in order to secure a comfortable identity position in society. In the past, she has endured a lot of difficulties, which she reveals to Eben while attempting to seduce him:

(Calmly) If cussing me does you good, cuss all ye've a mind t'. I'm all prepared t' have ye agin me—at fust. I don't blame ye nuther. I'd feel the same at any stranger comin' t' take my Maw's place. (He shudders. She is watching him carefully.) Yew must've cared a lot fur yewr Maw, didn't ye? My Maw died afore I'd growed. I don't remember her no one. (a pause) But yew won't hate me long, Eben. I'm not the wust in the world—an' yew an' me got a lot in common. I kin tell that by lookin' at ye. Waal—I've had a hard life, too—oceans o' trouble an' nuthin' but wuk fur reward. I was a orphan early an' had t' wuk fur others in other folk's hums. Then I married an' he turned out a drunken spreer an' so he had to wuk fur others an' me too agen in other folks' hums, an' the baby died, an' my husband got sick an' died too, an' I was glad sayin' now I'm free fur once, on'y I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' wuk agen in other folks' hums, doin' other folks' wuk till I'd most give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum, an' then your Paw come.<sup>67</sup>

From the passage, it is stated that she was orphan very young, and that she worked hard in other people's homes, dreaming to possess a house of herself one day. From Simone de Beauvoir's point of view, work is an essential starting point to woman's liberation from man's dominance. If a woman is economically independent, she will easily regain her autonomy and freedom. De Beauvoir claims that, "When she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence."<sup>68</sup> She also points out to the fact that when, "She worked either at home or in small businesses; her material independence allowed her great freedom of behavior: a woman of modest means could go out, go to taverns, and control her body almost like a man."<sup>69</sup>

It is only when a woman discovers the importance of work and economic income that she may engage in the struggle of attaining liberty and self-realization. She has started to discover the utility of work for her liberation from the patriarchal institutions like marriage, household, and motherhood. De Beauvoir comments: "Because she has become conscious of self and can emancipate herself from marriage through work, a woman no longer accepts her subjection docilely."<sup>70</sup>

However, because of failing to get her house from personal work, Abbie decides to marry. However, her husband has revealed to be a violent drunkard. She affirms that after marriage he turned to a different man; a man who is violent, drunkard and looser. To de Beauvoir, women are threatened by men's violence just like all other dangers. About domestic violence, she writes: "The gaze is danger; hands are another threat."<sup>71</sup> She also argues that man uses violence in order to show his authority, "because man is sovereign in his world, he claims the violence of his desires as a sign of his sovereignty."<sup>72</sup>

According to de Beauvoir, after her failure in getting a personal home, a happy marriage and a baby, Abbie has turned out to the old woman's trek of using her body, youth and beauty to attract old and even young men to marry them and to have a part of their

property and to be part of their patrimony. In the conversation below, Abbie confesses to Eben that she married his father for his properties:

Eben\_\_ (fighting against his growing attraction and sympathy\_\_ harshly) An' bouth yew\_\_ like a harlot! (She is strung and flushes angrily. She has been sincerely moved by the recital of her troubles. He adds furiously) An' the price he's payin' ye \_\_ this farm\_\_ was my Maw's, damn ye!\_\_ an' mine now!  
Abbie\_\_ (with a cool laugh of confidence) Yew'r'n? We'll see 'bout that! (then strongly) Waal\_\_ What if i did need a hum? What else'd I marry an old man like him fur?<sup>73</sup>

De Beauvoir is completely against such acts to gain the economic independence and owning properties, for she declares: "The women employing their erotic attraction, can induce young men and even fathers of families to scatter their patrimonies, without ceasing to be within the law."<sup>74</sup> She adds: "Some of these women appropriate their victims, fortunes or obtain legacies by using undue influence; this role being regarded as evil, those who play it are called 'bad women'."<sup>75</sup>

Work and marriage as two of the most important patriarchal institutions have not permitted to Abbie to grow and attain equal gender status and redefine her feminine identity. According de Beauvoir's thoughts, her desire to build another identity is turned obsolete by society and its norms. Male dominated society hinders any opportunity for her in the process of achieving equal gender subjectivity. Abbie could be a good Beauvoirian ideal woman if she has not ruined her quest for identity comfort by her marriage to Ephraim. She was free and had a work, so she could have been able to grow to be an autonomous woman. But, she needed something different, for she has thought that by marrying she may reach her dreams. In this sense, de Beauvoir says: "The problem of women can be reduced to that of her capacity for work."<sup>76</sup> Work is one of the most important solutions for women to regain their transcendence. She ensures: "In freely constructed work, woman wins concrete autonomy because she has an economic and social role."<sup>77</sup>

However, Abbie's hope is not only renewed by Cabot's proposal of marriage as she confesses it above, for she intends more and more to renew her feminine personality and identity but also by her love to Eben. She starts to hate Ephraim Cabot because he reminds her of her first drunken husband and of her lost baby. She may believe that whatever belongs to her past life would be a threat to her feminine emancipation. She resumes her dream about owning a house and being a mother to an heir. As already stated above, mothering does, however, offer no possible opportunity to her to reach her dream of possessing a house.

Logically, Abbie's hope is destroyed by her adulterous child and its killing by her. Her adulterous strong love to Eben has marked her submission to the masculine order he represents. Thus, she cannot become a transcendent self to De Beauvoir. Abbie Putnam cannot accept losing Eben, father of her baby. As a consequence, she lies herself to the masculine social norms. In order to preserve Eben, she does not hesitate to kill her baby:

I didn't want't do it. I hated myself. I loved him. He was so purty—dead spit 'n' image o' yew. But I loved yew more—an' ye was goin' away—far off whar I'd never see ye agen, never kiss ye, never feel ye pressed agin me agen—and ye said ye hated me fur havin' him—ye said ye hated him an' wished he was dead—ye said if it hadn't been fur him comin' it'd be the same's afore between us.”<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Abbie does not succeed to construct a real transcendent self, which would make her resemble a Beauvoirian model of woman. Instead, she has lost husband, lover, child and farm.

From the view point of Simone de Beauvoir, Abbie Putnam, who finally submits to the patriarchal practices and beliefs like marriage, loyalty to husband and faithfulness to which the majority subscribes, is incapable of bringing to life a transcendent revolutionary feminine subject.



As to Eben Cabot, he is haunted by his dead mother's love, of which he says what follows:

(Harshly) They was chores t' do, wa'n't they? (a pause—then slowly) It was on'y arter she died I come to think o' it. Me cookin'—doin' her work—that made me know her, suffer her sufferin'—she'd come back t' help—come back t' bile potatoes—come back t' fry bacon—come back t' bake biscuits—come back all cramped up t' shake the fire, an' carry ashes, her eyes weepin' an' bloody with smoke an' cinders same's they used t' be. She still comes back—stands by the stove thar in the evenin'—she can't find in nateral sleepin' an' restin' in peace. She can't git used t' bein free—even in her grave.<sup>79</sup>

Eben's memory about his mother can be interpreted as a double-edged and or ambiguous position toward femininity. First, the memory of his mother stirs a feeling of hatred and revenge toward his father, who is held responsible to her death. This obsessive attachment to his mother has turned him into a sort of 'woman' for he has become the caretaker of the family house; he is always in doing house tasks such as cleaning and cooking. He can be said to be the man who must be ready to offer help and assistance to women in their quest for a new feminine and gender identity according to de Beauvoir.

Perceiving life throughout memories about his mother would block any attempt for him to resist the masculine drives inside him. It is not his true male subjectivity. It is partly his mother's one. That is why he will become more himself when he starts his adulterous love with Abbie, for he will stop working inside the house. He will end his mother's psychological dominance and take on again his return to man's natural and external space, outside to the patriarchal milieu. Therefore, he will return to his masculinity. Eben does not love Abbie from the beginning of their relationship; she has just been an object of desire, and importantly, a means to take revenge from his father. He has accepted the copulation just to free himself from his effeminate state and obsessive attachment to his dead mother. In sum, this sinful relation has made him begin an unsuccessful identity introspection. To de Beauvoir, Eben will fail to save Abbie especially after the baby's assassination, for he is as much imbued with

patriarchal values as is his father. So, he will very probably seek to dominate Abbie all the time.

After having thought to have endorsed a feminine subjectivity, Eben is, thus, awakened by Abbie's love; a love which underlines the unchangeable masculine values of society. As a result, Eben resolves to be punished with Abbie for the child's murder but only as a dominant male self. Despite the endorsement of the responsibility for his adulterous relationship, he submits himself to the social laws that oppress women.

One main conclusion can be that Ephraim Cabot, Eben and Abbie Putnam have failed to symbolize the woman's new feminine identity that Simone de Beauvoir has wanted to establish and put forward as a new model to gender equality.

## Endnotes

- <sup>55</sup>Bogard, Travis (1998), *O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. 320.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., 322.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., 348-349-350.
- <sup>58</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone (1949), The Second Sex. New York: Random House, Inc. 2009, 731.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., 97.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., 175.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., 321.
- <sup>62</sup>Mosman, 1999:1
- <sup>63</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931*. 350
- <sup>64</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 31.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., 351.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., 749.
- <sup>67</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 338-339, .
- <sup>68</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone , The Second Sex, 813.
- <sup>69</sup>Ibid., 157.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid., 189.

- <sup>71</sup>Ibid., 453.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid., 445.
- <sup>73</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 339.
- <sup>74</sup>Leitch, Vincent B., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1407.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., 1407.
- <sup>76</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone , The Second Sex, 89.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., 140.
- <sup>78</sup>Bogard, Travis, *O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931*, 370.
- <sup>79</sup>Ibid., 324.

### **Chapter Three: Mothering and Myth as Feminine Identity Obstruction in Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl*.**

This chapter aims at shedding light on the effect of gender defined roles, in Willa Cather's *The Bohemian Girl*. Like in the first two chapters, an appeal is made to the theory of Simone de Beauvoir, whose philosophical thought had been very influential to the modern authors. De Beauvoir's theory provides clues to the understanding of women's quest for freedom and liberation from male and society domination. *The Bohemian Girl*, which is one of the most known works of Willa Cather, presents subsequent material and topics for consideration and analysis related to woman's subjectivity issues.

In *The Bohemian Girl*, Cather weaves the plot around some essential themes like women's rebellion, love, betrayal, and non-belongingness. The story begins with a detailed description of Nils Ericson's personality and his return to the family home after many years of absence. Nils has always been different from his brothers, for he has wanted to do things different from those of farming and toiling on land. He left everything behind him, for he desired to contemplate other opportunities and reinvent a more exciting life. Incapable of sustaining the rural life on farm, Nils had no other choice than leaving his mother lady Ericson and his brothers Olaf and Eric. Nils, one of the major characters in the play, is portrayed as a very respectful gentleman who admires women and their sacrifices. The harshness of life of these women reveals Nils' attitude toward them. This is explained through the following passage:

Look at them over there," he whispered, detaining Clara as she passed him. Aren't they the old Grads? I've just counted thirty hands. I guess they've wrung many a chicken's neck and warmed many boy's jacket for him in their time." *n reality he* feel into amazement when he thought of the Herculean labors those fifteen pairs of hands had performed of the cows they have milked, the butter they had made, the gardens they had planted, the children and grand children they had

tended, the brooms they had worn out, the mountains of food they had cooked. It made him dizzy.<sup>80</sup>

Following de Beauvoir's thoughts, Nils can be considered as an ideal man because he admires women and sees their lives full of sacrifice and endurance that other men have failed to notice. Unlike others, Nils does not hesitate to offer his help to women within such a harsh patriarchal environment. It is an unusual behavior of masculine gender toward the feminine. Because of his compassionate feelings for women, Nils Ericson has returned in order to save his love Clara from her state of stagnation, and may be liberate her from her undesired marriage, the would-be source of her self-loss and unhappiness. This becomes clear when Nils tries to convince Clara that: There's nothing so dangerous as sitting still. You've only got one life, one youth, and you can let it slip through your fingers if you want to; nothing easier.<sup>81</sup>

In sum, Nils has good intentions toward all women: help and respect for his mother, admiration and amazement toward the old women of the countryside, love, tenderness and complicity for his lover. Thus, Nils could be the man to accompany a woman to the utmost point of reaching gender equality status. In this sense, de Beauvoir asserts: "If the man is scrupulously well-intentioned, lovers and spouses can attain perfect equality in undemanding generosity. Sometimes the man himself plays the role of devoted servant."<sup>82</sup>

As for Nils' mother Mrs. Ericson, she is a widow who raised her children alone after the death of her husband; she is portrayed as a very strong woman who owns properties and takes care of everything inside and outside her home. Like the few rich men of the country, also possesses a car which she bought at a time when it was seldom seen at the countryside. Mrs. Ericson is a very known and respected woman by everybody. After her husband's death, she took his place and became the head and the authority of the Ericson family.

The personality of Lady Ericson can be seen from two sides. The first side is that she is a strong and free woman who owns properties and has the same rights as men whom Simone de Beauvoir describes in her book when she says: “Unmarried or widowed, she has all the rights of man, property grants her sovereignty: she governs the fief that she owns, meaning dispenses justice, signs treaties, and decrees laws.”<sup>83</sup>

The second main feature of her personality is that Mrs. Ericson can be considered as a woman who believes patriarchy because of many reasons. She has endorsed the most oppressive patriarchal values to women. She believes in her society and family values and norms that subordinate and marginalize women. De Beauvoir says that: “Patriarchal civilization’s institutions and values are still, to a great extent, alive.”<sup>84</sup> As patriarchal men, Lady Ericson considers women and even herself as means of reproduction. Women like Lady Ericson are proud in the number of children and grand children they might have got. The bigger the number is, more enormous is their pride. At one instance, Nils has asked about the number of children that she has borne. She has answered saying, “Only thirty one now.”<sup>85</sup> Mrs. Ericson shows a great disapproval for her daughter in law Clara who does not respect the dominant male cultural values, for she refuses to bear children and offer her more grandchildren.

The Ericsons live in the countryside; an area where most families desire to get male children for work on farms. Like her son Olaf, Lady Ericson withstand and struggle against the identity aspirations of both Nils and Clara; these two seem to have high-spirited individualities that operate in contrast to life in the harsh rural setting. Mrs. Ericson can be said to have been deceived by the variety of myths man has created to have control over woman.

For Simone de Beauvoir, many mythical legends and stories have been created by man to dominate woman in very subtle ways. She writes:

Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse. Men need not to bother themselves with alleviating the pains and the burdens that physiologically are women's lot.<sup>86</sup>

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses 'The Myth of Woman', which makes women believe that they should be altruistic or consider themselves as the absolute other even if they are not oppressed or dominated by men. According to Simone de Beauvoir, Lady Ericson is among those women who might believe in the truthfulness of such myths. She considers that these myths relegate women to a secondary position, at which they are made to believe the privilege and benefits they may derive from marriage and not working outside. In this regard, de Beauvoir asserts:

Those [Women] who are not threatened by their fellow men are far more likely to recognize woman as a counterpart, but even for them the myth of women, of the Other, remains precious for many reasons; they can hardly be blamed for not wanting to lightheartedly sacrifice all the benefits they derive from the myth.<sup>87</sup>

De Beauvoir hopes that these myths will disappear someday. She claims: "Perhaps the myth of women will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of Other dies in them."<sup>88</sup>

One other extraordinary description of old women by Nils at the barn dance reveals the complicated life of Johanna Vavrika, Clara's aunt. Similar to Mrs. Ericson, Johanna represents a real householder, who believes in the domesticity of women and housekeeping. Johanna has worked hard in her niece's house; she takes care of everything and everyone. To de Beauvoir, women like Johanna find great pleasure in the household, for it is an essential gender role that makes her happy and proud. De Beauvoir asserts: "She must have held an important place in the household and enjoyed some authority."<sup>89</sup> The pride of Johanna about her working in kitchen is shown in the barn party when she has exhibited the food that she prepared,

There was a great chattering from the stall where Johanna Vavrika exhibited to the admiring women her platters heaped with fried chicken, her roasts of beef, boiled tongues, and baked hams with cloves stuck in the crisp brown fat.<sup>90</sup>

Even if Johanna is not married and does not own a house, taking care of her brother's house and of her niece's house after her marriage to Olaf cause her to feel very happy and satisfied.

The entire management of Mrs. Olaf's household devolved upon her aunt, Johanna Vavrika, a superstitious, doting woman of fifty. When Clara was a little girl her mother died, and Johanna's life had been spent in ungrudging service to her niece.<sup>91</sup>

To de Beauvoir, women often doom and chain themselves to the household; it is either imposed by man and society, or by loneliness and emptiness. In this sense, de Beauvoir asserts: "She allows to herself to be, swallowed up by household cares, devoting whole days to them without managing to finish."<sup>92</sup> She adds: "She takes refuge in the routine that has always been her lot, she makes repetition her system, she throws herself into household obsession."<sup>93</sup>

For her part, Clara Vavrika is a young woman in the thirties who came from a rich family. She has lost her mother since she was a child; it was her aunt Johanna who has taken care of her since and even after her marriage. Being a pianist and musician, Clara rejects housekeeping; she refuses to take hold of her husband's big house and assigns her hard domestic task to her aunt Johanna.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, Clara's marriage is always imposed by certain authority, for "Laws or customs impose marriage on her."<sup>94</sup> From this short quotation, we understand that women have no right to choose; they are obliged to obey to the patriarchal norms and institutions of the society they live in. So, Clara seems to have accepted to marry Olaf Ericson not because she loved him or wanted wedding but because of people's and neighbors' gossip about the reasons of her late singleness. This is well illustrated through the following conversation between Nils and Clara:



You were the last girl in the country I'd have picked for a wife for Olaf. What made you do it Clara?"

"I suppose I really did it to oblige the neighbors"\_ Clara tossed her head. "People were beginning to wonder."

"To wonder?"

"Yes\_why I didn't get married. I suppose I didn't like to keep them in suspense. I've discovered that most girls marry out of consideration for the neighborhood."

Nils bent his head toward her and his white teeth flashed.

"I'd have gambled that one girl I knew would say, 'let the neighborhood be damned.'"

Clara shook her head mournfully. "You see, they have on you, Nils; that is, if you are a woman. They say you're beginning to go off. That's what makes us get married: we can't stand the laugh."<sup>95</sup>

It is clear from the quotation above that Clara Vavrika is oppressed by the norms and the harsh values of her patriarchal society. De Beauvoir believes that marriage has always been meant to enslave women.<sup>96</sup> She adds: "Peace cannot exist in marriage: it had to be the devil's work; or else God did not know what he was doing."<sup>97</sup> Clara's marriage has put her in a state of self-loss which has been remarked by her lover Nils. He has perceived her deepest fears when he has told her that she is losing her real identity because of this marriage. He observes that:

"Bah! You'd lose a good deal more than that. You'd lose your race, everything that makes you yourself. You've lost a good deal of it now."

"Of what?"

"Of you love of life, your capacity for delight."

"And I come back and find you \_\_a bitter woman."<sup>98</sup>

Like Clara, Olaf Ericson has married Clara not because he loved her but because he sees her and her ethnicity only as a means of capturing the "bohemian" vote in local elections and also for her wealth. So, their marriage is thought out as a means for their personal interests, not for mutual happiness. In this sense, de Beauvoir argues: "The relationship of reciprocity which is the basis of marriage is not established between men and women, but between men by means of women, who are merely the occasion of this relationship."<sup>99</sup>

To come back to Clara, it is important to remind that she is strongly opposed to child-bearing and being mother. “Mothering” is like an imprisonment for her and an end for her old way of living. This is well illustrated when Lady Ericson speaks about her to Nils:

His second wife has no children. She’s too proud. She tears about on horseback all the time. But she’ll get caught up with, yet. She sets herself very high, though nobody knows what for.<sup>100</sup>

This quotation shows the rebellious side of Clara’s personality. She expresses rejection to the patriarchal cultural values of her society. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Clara believes that motherhood is as a threat to her integrity.<sup>101</sup> For de Beauvoir, motherhood can be good only when it is freely chosen and desired. She focuses on this idea by arguing: “Motherhood would be freely chosen\_ that is, birth control and abortion would be allowed.”<sup>102</sup> Clara rejects the idea of reproduction because she knows that it will take away her independence. In this respect, de Beauvoir asserts: “The burdens of reproduction presented for them a severe handicap in the fight against a hostile world.”<sup>103</sup>

Clara is ruled by routine; she feels herself in a state of stagnation. She has hoped that something new would happen to the Ericsons or to her even though it might be negative, only to break up the routine that kills her day after day. This is demonstrated when she affirms:

But I’d like something to happen to stir them all up, just for once. There never was such family for having nothing ever happen to them but dinner and threshing. I’d almost be willing to die, just to have a funeral. You wouldn’t stand it for three weeks.<sup>104</sup>

Women see that their utility for their family and for themselves is more important than freedom and transcendence because routine is much more destructive to a woman than man’s domination. Indeed, de Beauvoir claims:

It is easy to understand why she is ruled by routine, time has no dimension of novelty for her, it is not a creative spring, because she is doomed to repetition, she do not see in the future anything but duplication of the past.<sup>105</sup>

As a result, one can consider Clara's case to be much more complex than a woman who might suffer from routine, because this latter may have house tasks, childbearing, and be a mother, which things that Clara has spurned. Clara loves Nils and does run away with him; she has wanted to escape the routine of her boring daily life; however, she notices how much she is linked to the prairie, its memories and sorrows, to which she has powerful ties:

The ground seemed to hold her as if by roots. Her knees were soft under her. She felt as if she could not bear separation from her old sorrows, from her old discontent. They were dear to her, they have kept her alive, they were part of her. There would be nothing left of her if she were wrenched away from them.<sup>106</sup>

After years of paralysis and stagnation, Nils comes back to offer her opportunity to transcend her routine and grow to be an autonomous woman.

As a conclusion, Clara and Nils can be considered to be the de Beauvoir's ideal man and woman, for Nils represents the gentleman who shows respect to women, who admires them and who has no moral and ethical difficulty to consider them equal to him, the masculine. As for Clara, it is mainly due to her rebellion against the patriarchal morals. She is also economically free (she has property), and she chooses her destiny by herself and flees with her lover. Both escape the family oppressive world to enjoy a life full of harmony, love and complicity. In this respect, de Beauvoir ascertains:

Many nuances are possible in the relation of man and woman: in companionship, pleasure, confidence, tenderness, complicity, and love, they can be for each other the most faithful source of joy, richness, and strength offered to human being.<sup>107</sup>

According to the quotation above and Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts, Nils and Clara can be the Beauvoirian ideal couple.

## Endnotes

- <sup>80</sup>O'Brien, Sharon (1992), *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, New York, N.Y: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. 118.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid., 127.
- <sup>82</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone (1949), The Second Sex. . New York: Random House, Inc. 2009, 827.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid., 139.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid., 186.
- <sup>85</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 95.
- <sup>86</sup>Leitch, Vincent B. (2001), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, English University of Oklahoma, 1409.
- <sup>87</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 34.
- <sup>88</sup>Ibid., 196.
- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., 127.
- <sup>90</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 118.
- <sup>91</sup>Ibid., 101.
- <sup>92</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 548.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid., 721.
- <sup>94</sup>Ibid., 92.
- <sup>95</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 111.
- <sup>96</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 127.
- <sup>97</sup>Ibid., 146.
- <sup>98</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 126.
- <sup>99</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 105-106.
- <sup>100</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 96.
- <sup>101</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 9.
- <sup>102</sup>Ibid., 896.
- <sup>103</sup>Ibid., 97.
- <sup>104</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 105.
- <sup>105</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 726.
- <sup>106</sup>O'Brien, Sharon, *Willa Cather Uncollected Stories*, 128.
- <sup>107</sup>de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex, 589.

## General Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation whose title is *From Immanence to Transcendence in Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra, Desire Under the Elms and Willa Cather's The Bohemian Girl*, an attempt is made to explore the issue of woman's new emerging identity in the American society by relying Simone de Beauvoir's feminist thought as explained in "The Second Sex". This theory has helped to better understand women's gender roles and multiple struggles in the American literature. After analyzing the three works, I have come to the conclusion that women's dominance and revolt against oppression is a dominant theme in the literature of the early twentieth century.

From the first chapter of the dissertation that dealt with O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, it has been deduced that women are oppressed by patriarchal society, by men's superiority and domination. From the second chapter that discussed woman's identity and gender roles in *Desire under the Elms*, it has been noticed that women from countryside societies suffer from the same oppressiveness as the women from aristocratic backgrounds; their roles are limited to the household tasks, childbearing, and mothering.

From chapters one and two, one may remark that though O'Neill gives voice to women to express their sufferings and rebellion against the patriarchal world, he very often destroys their dreams at the end, making them less likely to correspond to de Beauvoir's ideal woman.

As for the third chapter, it has analyzed Willa Cather's female characters in *The Bohemian Girl*. It has been concluded that Cather's female protagonist has reached her goal of being free and equal to man after a long fight and of disobedience to patriarchal rules and norms. Cather ends her play with a hopeful ending for women. In this respect, I deduced that she believes in women's freedom and equal-to-man gender status.

All in all, the two authors have shown clearly the struggle of women to reach transcendence, but they did not share the same view about women's quest for new identity and self realization. Cather can be considered to be more committed to woman's dream for gender equality than O'Neill.

Personally, I have come to realize that despite immense and multiple efforts of early feminists, women are still under men's dominance in a way or another especially in some parts of the world like the third world. This can open path to future literary studies in relation to woman's combats toward transcendence in those literatures.

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