



Anna Christie

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Chris Christopherson, once a seaman on globe-circling windjammers, is now captain of a coal barge, where he lives with an aging prostitute. Years before, Chris's wife moved with their daughter, Anna, from Sweden to Minnesota to live on a relative's farm.

Unexpectedly, Anna sends Chris a postcard announcing her first visit in 20 years. Chris, wanting to look respectable, allows his companion to leave. Anna arrives. Her dress and demeanor suggest that she is a prostitute, but Chris is blind to this.

Anna loves the barge and the sea. One night, she and Chris hear cries for help and rescue five sailors from a foundering boat. The rescued Mat Burke takes a fancy to Anna, and she falls in love with him, seeing in him her chance for a better life.

Chris is jealous; he hates Mat. They fight over Anna, who feels like a chattel, as she did in her past prostitution, which she now admits to Mat and Chris. Appalled, they leave the barge. Ultimately, Chris returns and decides to ship out to Capetown aboard the Londonderry and send money to Anna so that she can gain respectability. Ironically, Mat has also signed on the Londonderry. Finally, Chris and Mat reconcile, and Anna plans to marry Mat.

The ending suggests the pessimistic Nietzschean theme of eternal recurrence. Anna now faces the same lonely existence that ruined her mother's life and that caused her grandmother, wife and mother of sailors, to die of a broken heart.

Bibliography:

Bogard, Travis. *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Argues for viewing the O'Neill canon as the playwright's autobiography. Contains a detailed comparison of the final version with earlier versions of *Anna Christie*.

Estrin, Mark W., ed. *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990. A fascinating collection of interviews with the playwright arranged chronologically from 1920 to 1948. Contains many of O'Neill's comments about the characters and creation of *Anna Christie*.

Floyd, Virginia. *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985. Chapters analyzing each of O'Neill's plays. Asserts that *Anna Christie* is a failure of character and plot.

Gelb, Arthur, and Barbara Gelb. *O'Neill*. Rev. ed. New York: Perennial Library, 1987. A monumental biography of almost one thousand pages with several sections of photographs. An excellent reference for details of the playwright's life and plays.

Houchin, John H., ed. *The Critical Response to Eugene O'Neill*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993. A collection of critical opinions, including reviews of productions from periodicals and scholarly essays, three of which focus upon *Anna Christie*. The diversity of perspectives is useful.

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