

## Decay and Distortion in the Family of The Mennons in Mourning Becomes Electra

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"Human beings are great and terrible creatures when they are in the grip of great passions and that the spectacle of them is not only absorbing but also and at once horrible and deansing", the very absorbing lines by Joseph Wood Krutch in the introduction of *Nine Plays* (O'Neill, *Nine Plays*, Pxx), make it clear as to how these passions are responsible for the destruction of whole humanity. The World of Mennons in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is badly shattered as the characters start following the dictates of their 'Actual Will' and disregard their 'Real Will'. The relationships sets distort even with the inequality springing in terms of material, differences of age, bodily strength, quality of mind and privileges of honour and power. In case of husband- wife relationship, the unequal descent of the two inevitably comes in the way of their harmonious relationship. Unsocial and unnatural relationship comes into being when man finds himself to follow his 'Real Will' and accept the commands of his 'Actual Will'.

The main conflict starts in *Mourning becomes Electra*, when Christine, the mother of Lavinia, falls in love with a Captain Adam Brant and is plotting to murder her husband, Ezra Mannon on his arrival from the war front. Christine quarrels with her husband on the night of his home coming and he is stricken with a heart attack. Christine substitutes poison for his medicine and he died. Here, it becomes clear that she has started following the dictates of her 'actual will' and discard her 'real will'.

The distortion in the family sets in due to the inequality springing from the unequal descent of Ezra Mennon and Christine comes in the way of harmonious relationship between the husband and wife. Christine's descent explains her liberal attitude—the French and traditionally a passionate people. Christine's hate of her husband in turn gives rise to the feeling of hatred in her for her daughter:

I never could make myself feel you were born of anybody but his... (O'Neill, *Nine Plays*, 840)

Christine tries to convince Orin, on his return from war about Lavinia's abnormal state of mind, so that Lavinia might never succeed in convincing Orin about the real cause of their father's death. She does not care for the future of her son and daughter and is ready to desert them and join Adam in matrimony and take her share of the Mannon Estate. She is unable to establish harmony between her self-regarding and altruistic instincts and her relation with other members of the family rot. O' Neill here shows that people who follows the command of their 'actual will' and disregards their 'real will' grab every opportunity to fulfill their selfish desires.

Lavinia is a typical product of the society she lives in. She is a case of repressed emotions and is jealous of her father's affection for her mother. To quote Christine:

You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin. You've always