

Anna Christie

By Eugene O'Neill

Play no. 151

Opening show: 23/02/1957

Hebrew by: Rafael Eliaz

Directed by: Hy Calus

Sets Designed by: Arnon Adar

Cast

Johnny-the-Priest" Owner of a Bar: David Vardi

Longshoreman A: Pesach Gutmark

Longshoreman B: Baruch David

A Postman: Amnon Meskin

Larry, Bartender: David Ram

Chris Christopherson, Captain of the Barged

"Simon Winthrop": Aharon Meskin

Marthy Owen: Bat-Ami

Anna Christopherson, Chris's daughter: Miriam Zohar

Matt Burke, a stoker: Nahum Buchman

Johnson, Dockland on the Barge: Shlomo Bachar

When Chris Christopherson, an old Swedish Sea Captain now confined to a coal barge, enters "Johnny-the Priest's" Bar with his Woman Marthy, he finds a letter, in which his daughter Anna announces her decision to come and join him. Anna had been sent to America when still a child, following the death of her mother. She grew up with relatives on a farm in the Middle West, where she was badly treated and later seduced by one of her cousins. After running away she led a dissolute life, became ill and now hoped to recover with her father, who all these years had known nothing of her hard luck, and imagined her happy on the farm. Chris awaits his daughter with mixed feelings, a sense of guilt for having left her all these years and happiness at the prospect of meeting his daughter again. They live together on the coal barge. Anna recovers mentally and physically as Chris gets both attached to her and afraid of the attraction the sea had for her. In a fog the coal barge picks up some survivors from a wrecked ship. Love flares up between Burke, a burly Irish stoker, and Anna. Burke, in all his voyages had never found himself. Now, for the first time he acquires a sense of belonging. Anna feels purified by his love. The old man, however fights the possibility of losing his daughter, so quickly, and to common sailor; the sea can never bring anybody good. As the fierce conflict develops between the two men, Anna, admitting her love for Burke refuses to marry him. Yielding to his questioning she explains why. Burke's would is shattered; he leaves with a curs only to return, drunk, half with the intention of murdering Anna, half intending to take her as she was. Both men have signed up on a ship going to South Africa. Anna remains, waiting.

"Anna Christie", has the merit of comparative compactness and is free from the more troublesome obscurities of some O'Neill's plays. It is a fairly simple human drama, providing emotions readily acceptable to the audience. Its

pungently colloquial speech and its seedy heroine represent the early portion of O'Neill's career when he rooted the American in naturalism. The play also suggest some of the characteristics of his later writing – mainly his poetic, vein, present here in his feeling for the sea, his concern with obsessed characters and his saturnine sense of fatality in human experience.

Anna Christie grew out of an earlier written play, "Christ" or "Chris Christopheson", produced unsuccessfully and withdraws during its try-out tour. As Barrett H. Clerk, O'Neill's biographer explains, "In its final version Anna Christie is a play about a woman. It was in the beginning a play about the woman's father". Some critics have questioned the "happy ending", suspecting O'Neill of compromising the integrity of the play. This was the only criticism which bothered O'Neill. In a letter to George Jean Nathan, he expressed regret that the conclusion, in which Anna and the sailor are reunited, gave some people the "happy-ever-after" impression that he never intended. "And the sea outside – life – waits", He wrote. The happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten". He added that he had once thought of calling the play "Comma". In support of the author's conception comes Anna's father's foreboding last speech, the Irish sailor's doubts about the non-Catholic Anna's oath, and the implication that although the characters "have had their moment, the decision still rests with the sea...".

Eleanor Flexner thinks O'Neill is at his best in the plays like Anna Christie, where his creative instinct is emotional rather than intellectual, dealing not with "ideas" but with living people trapped by their circumstances. They are shown trying desperately to wriggle out of a net of fate partly their own making, partly woven by the environment to which they succumbed and partly knotted by a destiny undefined but poetically sensed by O'Neill. We may add the possibility that the crudity of the play – that is, a certain in complete fusion of emphases – makes "Anna Christie" all the more genuine, by giving it a feeling of "life observed" rather than of "play plotted".