ANNA CHRISTIE

SUMMARY:

Anna Christie is a play in four acts by Eugene O’Neill. It made its Broadway debut at the Vanderbilt Theatre on November 2, 1921. O’Neill received the 1922 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his work. It is the story of a former prostitute who falls in love, but runs into difficulty in turning her life around.

The play opens in Johnny-The-Priest’s saloon in New York City, one afternoon in the fall. Barge captain Chris Christopherson receives a letter from Anna, his daughter, who writes that she is coming to see him. Chris explains that he hasn’t seen her since she was five and lived in Sweden. Since he was a sailor who rarely saw his family, Anna’s mother brought her to Minnesota to live with her cousins on a farm. When her mother died, she stayed on. Chris insists that it was “better Anna live on farm, den she don’t know dat ole davil, sea, she don’t know fa’der like me.”

When Chris leaves to get food, Anna appears in the bar, plainly showing all the outward evidences of belonging to the world’s oldest profession.” She immediately demands of the bartender, “Gimme a whisky — ginger ale on the side. And don’t be stingy, baby.” As she drinks, she relates details of her past to Marthy, the woman who has been staying on the barge with Chris. Anna explains that when the police raided the house where she worked in Saint Paul, she was thrown in jail, and then she was sent to the hospital. She has come to see her father to get rest but does not expect much from him, since men, she claims, “give you a kick when you’re down, that’s what all men do.” She admits that she hated the farm where her cousins worked her to death “like a dog.” After one of her cousins raped her, she escaped to Saint Paul, where she found work as a nanny. She soon became tired of taking care of other women’s children, and so she drifted into prostitution. When Chris returns to the bar, the two have an awkward reunion. Chris is thrilled when she agrees to stay with him on the barge.

Ten days later, Anna walks on the deck of the barge, “Simeon Winthrop,” anchored in the Provincetown harbor, looking healthy and “transformed.” She admits to her father that she loves the sea, which angers him. He does not want her to be ruined by her association with it, but she claims it has made her feel “clean.” Chris worries that she will marry a sailor, and then experience the extreme loneliness her mother felt.
That night, they rescue four shipwrecked sailors. Anna brings one of them, Mat Burke, a drink, and the two begin to talk. She impresses him when she aggressively holds off his advances, and he soon declares he will marry her. When Chris finds the two together, he becomes angry and vows to keep them apart.

When Chris tries to convince Anna that Mat would make a terrible husband, she insists, “it’s me ain’t good enough for him.” Later, Chris attacks Mat during an argument over Anna, but Mat quickly subdues him. Anna declares her love for Mat, but tells him she can never marry him. When Mat and Chris battle over her fate, Anna, who feels as if she is being treated like “a piece of furniture,” explodes and tells them about her past. Chris in “a stupor of despair” and Mat “livid with rage” fall silent with condemnation, which goads Anna into “a harsh, strident defiance.” She blames Chris’s abandonment of her for her descent into prostitution. She tells Mat that she wanted to keep her past a secret from him, but she loved him too much to deceive him. Insisting that she has changed, and that the sea and his love have cleansed her, she pleads with Mat not to reject her. Anna, who feels as if she is being treated like “a piece of furniture,” explodes and tells them about her past. Chris in “a stupor of despair” and Mat “livid with rage” fall silent with condemnation, which goads Anna into “a harsh, strident defiance.” She blames Chris’s abandonment of her for her descent into prostitution. She tells Mat that she wanted to keep her past a secret from him, but she loved him too much to deceive him. Insisting that she has changed, and that the sea and his love have cleansed her, she pleads with Mat not to reject her. Anna, who feels as if she is being treated like “a piece of furniture,”爆炸 and tells them about her past. Chris in “a stupor of despair” and Mat “livid with rage” fall silent with condemnation, which goads Anna into “a harsh, strident defiance.” She blames Chris’s abandonment of her for her descent into prostitution. She tells Mat that she wanted to keep her past a secret from him, but she loved him too much to deceive him. Insisting that she has changed, and that the sea and his love have cleansed her, she pleads with Mat not to reject her. Mat, however, thinking she has made a fool of him, physically threatens her and then leaves, swearing never to see her again. Chris, recognizing Anna’s great love for Mat and her present predicament, is determined to force Mat to marry her. He tells her “dat ole davil sea” is to blame.

Two days later, when Chris returns to the barge, drunk, Anna is packed and ready to go back to her life in Saint Paul. Chris admits, “Ay guess it vas all my fault — all bad tangs dat happen to you,” and he asks for her forgiveness. Chris tells her he has signed onto a steamer that sails the next morning for South Africa, so he can send money to her. Soon Mat appears wanting to have “a last word” with Anna. When he begs her to admit she had lied about her past, Anna swears that she has changed, and that she hated all the men she was with. Eventually, Mat is able to believe her and to forgive her. The two happily embrace and decide they will marry in the morning. When Anna discovers Mat has signed up for duty on the same ship as Chris, Mat assures her that she will not be lonesome for long, since “with the help of God” they will have children.

When Chris discovers that both he and Mat will be leaving the next morning on the same ship, he again blames the sea. Anna tries to reassure them that “we’re all fixed now.” She offers a toast to the sea “no matter what.” The play ends with the “mournful wail of steamers’ whistles.”