

SUMAIYA TALUKDAR

A Moon for the Misbegotten Essay

In Eugene O'Neill's play, **A Moon for the Misbegotten**, Josie Hogan initially gives the impression of being a woman of extremely ill repute. But, through the course of the play, she showcases her true virtues and a surprisingly high level of morality. Her true character is unveiled on the moonlit night in question, when her real feelings are finally revealed to Jim Tyrone, as well as herself. Through the course of her transition, her desire for such a reputation is revealed as an instrument to aid her in winning the love of Jim Tyrone.

Josie Hogan is considered by everyone around her to be a very promiscuous woman. She herself creates such a negative reputation by bragging about the men she's slept with and making these false statements public. Josie's duplicity fools everyone but the only person she really wants to convince: Jim Tyrone. She wants desperately for Jim to believe her lies; she goes as far as to convince her own brothers of them. "You ought to marry and have a home of your own away from this shanty and stop your shameless way with men," says her brother Mike. "Though it's be hard to find a decent man who'd have you now."¹

Josie's reputation as a loose woman isn't exactly a desirable one, but she believes it is the only way that Jim will be attracted to her. She knows Jim has slept with many girls in New York City. And, since all the Broadway girls that Jim dated were known to sleep around themselves, Josie tries to fit their persona so that Jim will want her. When Tyrone asks how his 'Virgin Queen of Ireland' is doing, she hastily replies, "...don't be miscalling me a virgin. You'll ruin my reputation!"² She thinks that the only women that Jim wants are the promiscuous Broadway type, very far from her virgin Connecticut reality.

It is evident that Josie views herself poorly in comparison to the girls in

New York; she doesn't think she has any qualities that would make her seem attractive to men, or more specifically, Jim Tyrone. She never truly believes him when he says that she is desirable; she chalks it up as another joke that he is playing on her. When he says, "You're beautiful to me,"³ Josie just laughs, and blames the alcohol for making him say things. Since the two are never quite serious with one another, Josie is never quite sure if Jim is joking or not, and thus she doesn't really realize what he wants. And because she doesn't know what he wants from her, she follows in suit with the women he has slept with, thus validating her desire to have a reputation similar to the 'Broadway tarts'. Josie is oblivious of the fact that Jim truly loves her, and he wouldn't treat her the way that he did them. He only wanted sex from those other girls, perhaps to temporarily assuage his pain, but Josie means much more than that to him. She says that they are beautiful, and Jim says that they are "gold-digging tramps." But she wants him so desperately, she thinks the only way she has a chance with him is to pretend to be like them.

Perhaps the only two people that see through her apparent debauchery are Jim Tyrone and Josie's father, Phil Hogan. Hogan plays along with her charade much for the same reason that Josie pretends to need a club to defend herself from him while he's drunk: they don't want to hurt each other's pride. "I never thought I'd see the day when a daughter of mine would be such a coward," he says, "as to threaten her old father when he's helpless drunk and can't hit back."⁴ But her father also knows that the only reason she puts on such a demeaning facade is to win the love of Jim Tyrone. This is why he tricks Josie into thinking that Tyrone is going to sell their farm to Hardy; he knows her pride will never allow her to try to seduce Jim without a pivotal reason. He also knows that she loves him too much to trick him in any way; that is why he makes her angry enough at him with the farm excuse so as to blind her with anger, as well as disappointment. Hogan's whole life is one big ploy; it is no wonder that he thinks he can outfox both Josie and Tyrone into marrying each other.

It is very surprising that Josie isn't on to his ill-fated plans from the beginning. She is usually a quick wit and knows her father better than anybody. When her father devises a plan to catch her in bed with Jim Tyrone, and thus forcing Jim to marry her, the first thing that would have usually crossed Josie's mind is her father's ulterior motives. Instead of seeing his true intentions, to finally get her to admit her true feelings to the man she loves, Josie instead sees the financial side of the coin. "It's the estate money you are thinking of, isn't it? Well, so am I. I'd like to get my hooks on it."⁵ She figures that her father is telling the truth, that the whole scheme will be carried out in order to save the farm from the eager hands of Hardy. But she doesn't see the more human aspect of her father's scheme, the desire to finally see his only daughter happily married to the man she loves. It is her emotional blindness that leads her usual instincts astray; her anger at Tyrone, as well as her burning desire for him keeps her from seeing the truth behind her father's conspiracy.

Phil's scheme, he says, will get Josie and him exactly what they both want: the farm. Except of course, that is only the shallow surface; in reality, they were both after Josie's marriage to Jim Tyrone. Of course Jim's marrying Josie would certainly elevate the Hogan's financial situations; Phil would undoubtedly retain the farm, and Josie would be able to lead a life of considerable luxury with Jim's money. But, though Josie wouldn't dislike a more comfortable life by any means, her love for Jim is truly unselfish. Josie tries to convince herself that she is partaking in the scheme to make sure that her father doesn't lose the farm, but deep down inside she knows perfectly well that Jim would never sell the farm to Hardy. In fact, Tyrone frequently insults Hardy, calling him 'A more eminent grafter than the sheriff. A leading aristocrat in our Land of the Free and Get-Rich-Quick, whose boot are licked by one and all...'⁶ She knows how much Jim hates this Standard-Oil inheritor, and furthermore, she is aware of his love for her father, and on a different level, herself. She is positive in the beginning of the play that Jim will not sell

the land for any price; it is when her father tells her contrary that she begins to worry. But, anxious as she is on the surface, she truly knows in her heart that he will never betray the family. Josie lets herself be tricked to be provided with an outlet for her love for Jim.

It isn't until the very end of the play that Josie showcases how much she truly loves Jim Tyrone. On that moonlit night, she has a world of opportunities not only to physically have Jim, but a surefire way to keep him forever. She knows, as much as her father does, that if Jim has sex with her, he will no doubt marry her. Even without sex involved, if she wants, Jim will marry her. But, her love is not a selfish love; she realizes that what happens that night is a 'miracle'. A sinner was repenting his sins, asking forgiveness like a child from his mother. Josie is wise enough to realize that he isn't capable of loving a woman anymore, not since after his mother died. She understands that he loves her and that he needs her, but not the way she loves and needs him. "What woman doesn't sorrow for the man she loved who had died?"⁷ Josie asks her father. His soul isn't strong enough to love a woman; he can't function in that way anymore. So unselfish is her love for him that she doesn't consider what she wants, and though the last thing she wants is to let him go, she knows she has to. Putting aside her own feelings, and the ensuing years of longing that are sure to follow, Josie does the one thing that the Broadway girls can never do for him: she gives him back his peace of mind.

1 A Moon for the Misbegotten. I. 801.

2 A Moon for the Misbegotten. I. 809.

3 A Moon for the Misbegotten. III. 823.

4 A Moon for the Misbegotten. II. 815

5 A Moon for the Misbegotten. II. 819

6 A Moon for the Misbegotten. I. 809

7 A Moon for the Misbegotten. IV. 831

Sumaiya Talukdar, originally from Bangladesh is currently a senior at St. Peter High School.