2.1: *Desire Under the Elms* - Eugene O’Neill

*Desire Under the Elms* is written by the legendary American playwright Eugene O’Neill (1888 - 1953). It was published in 1924 and performed on 11 November, 1924 it was premiered at the Greenwich Village Theater. The play is set on a New England Farm in 1850 on the background of height of the California Gold Rush. *Desire Under the Elms* has been called as “the first great American tragedy” by several critics. It presents the following characters.

- Ephraim Cabot- a seventy year old farmer, owner of the farm, married twice already
- Simeon and Peter- Ephraim’s sons from the first wife, they are vibrant and beastlike
- Eben Cabot- Ephraim’s son from the second wife, in his early thirties
- Abbie Putnam- Ephraim’s third wife, she is thirty-two years’ old.
- Minnie- young village prostitute

**Setting**

O’Neil provides a special note about the setting:

“The action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse in New England, in the year 1850…Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles…”

**Outline of the Play**

The action of the play takes place on the Ephraim Cabot’s house on the New England Farm. He is an old, conservative man, who believes in the hard work and discipline. He is a hard task master, who generally likes to dictate other members of the family. He has already married twice and begotten three sons- Simeon and Peter from the first wife and Eben from the second. The three sons hate and disrespect their father. Eben resents him the most and even prays for his death. Eben believes that Ephraim is responsible for his mother’s death. Simeon and Peter dream of an easy life
Simeon and Peter looking for gold in California. Yet they stick to the farm with the hope to get their share, once Ephraim is dead. Interestingly all these men, including Eben visits a village prostitute called Minnie.

In the meantime, Ephraim Cabot goes away from the farm without telling anything. He returns with his newly married wife, Abbie to the farm. Eben informs Simeon and Peter to tell them that their father has married again. The brothers realize that the farm will now go to the new wife. Eben offers them money, which he stole from their father, for the journey to California on the condition that they relinquish any claim to the farm. Abbie is a young woman, who makes advances towards Eben. He does not respond to her at all. Abbie wants to inherit the farm, to which Ephraim possesses. Ephraim is ready to give farm to their child only. Abbie declares that she will have a son. In the night itself Abbie appears at Eben’s door and declares her love for him. Though confused at first, he plans revenge on his father through Abbie. They passionately express their love for each other.

The following spring Abbie bears a child. Local gossip suggests that Eben is really the father. Cabot calls for Eben and tells him that now he will not inherit the farm. He describes Abbie’s plot to secure the farm for herself and her child. Even Abbie admits that when she first arrived she had conspired against him, but that she now loves him. Eben calls her a liar, wishes their son had never been born, and vows to follow his brothers to California. Abbie thinks how to prove her love to Eben. A few hours later, while Eben prepares to leave, Abbie tells him that she has killed their child. Eben horribly rushes away to summon the Sheriff. In the meantime, Abbie informs Ephraim about the real identity of the child and what she has done with him. Ephraim tries to strangle her. Eben arrives and tells Abbie that while he was telling the Sheriff of what she’d done, he realized how much he loves her and now hopes they can escape together. Abbie insists that she must pay for her sin. When the Sheriff arrives, Eben tells him that he helped plan the killing, and the lovers are led away, leaving Ephraim to work the farm alone.
2.1.1

*God’s hard, not easy! : Ephraim Cabot’s Discourse of ‘Hard’ Desires*

*Desire under the Elms* depicts a family drama which ends in tragedy as everyone in this play seems to desire for something all the time. The play puts forward the story of Cabot family on the backdrop of the New England Farmhouse. The members of the family, consisting of a father, his three young sons and a newly wedded wife/mother are all having some desire. Desires are mainly material and physical. Ephraim Cabot is the chief character here. He is the owner of the farm and the house. Though he is old, still he is physical very strong. He is a typical New England farmer of the 19th century who believes in the puritanical ideals like hardship, labour, and ‘hardship is worship’. Farm is a prime possession for him. He is prepared to do anything and everything for it. He has already married twice and begotten three sons. He has sacrificed his both wives for the sake of the farm, by making them work hard. There is nothing more desirous than the farm in his life. Ephraim thus becomes a symbol of physical as well as economic powers. He is a strict administrator and a very cold father. He is at the top position of family hierarchy. Obviously he wishes to retain his position at any cost. He has already dominated women and they are represented by ‘two enormous elms’ on each side of the house. Ephraim Cabot is the centre of discourse in this way. He is all powerful and enjoys all privileges of being a father, owner of the farm, / wife Abbie. It would be interesting to note how Ephraim’s dominant or prevalent discourse is responsible for the tremendous ruin in the play. He assumes the central position in the play as he is powerful but because of him the power structures are created, consisting of positions and hierarchies.

Every discourse requires buttress of some institutional framework to make it operational. Institutions provide space and structure through which discursive practices can be enforced and kept in circulation. In case of Ephraim Cobat’s dominating discourse the institutions of family and agriculture set up does this enforcement act. Agrarian system basically centers on hard work, physical strength, thus prioritizing male over female and grownups over adolescents. Ephraim therefore equates farm work with his own identity. The farm-work is not as profitable as other professions yet he latches on to it. It offers him the much needed sense of self-esteem.
Thus farm becomes his own identity. He is the sovereign ruler of that empire where others are always his subordinates. He works not only for produce but for keeping his ‘image’ intact. Farm becomes the object of his desire to the extent that he exploits his family relations for its sake. The agricultural system provides him the platform, on the basis of which he weaves his discourse. Any system like family or religious institution, once utilized for circulating discourse, forms norms and practices for the members. These norms help such systematized discourse to regularize as well as naturalise its discursive strategies. Ephraim is very conscious about the routine, which he has set for himself and especially for others. When he returns to the farm after a break of two months, he sees Simeon and Peter at the farm door. He asks them angrily, “Why hain’t ye wuking”? (Desire Under the Elms 335, henceforth referred as DE) Ephraim has created his own world and created so many rules for his sons. His dominance is so pressing that his sons feel almost captive on the farm like the tamed animals in the barn. Peter expresses this agony,

Here – it” Stones atop o’ the ground – Stones atop o’ stones – making stone walls – year atop o’ year …. making stone walls fur him to fence us in. (DE 320)

Ephraim has exploited his family members by making them work on the farm to keep his image as ‘the strong farm owner’ intact. He does it for long, over stretched thirty years. During this time, he has consolidated his position as the owner as well as the head of the family. Through both these power positions, Ephraim manages his dominance. Simeon speaks about their condition once.

We’ be wuked, Give our strength. Give our years. Plowed ‘em under in the ground – rottin’ – making soil for his crops! Waal – the farm pays good for hereabouts. (DE 320)

Both these expressions are representatives of Ephraim’s dominant discourse. On the one hand he extracts labour from everyone of his family and he keeps them confined. No son of his has the feeling of ‘belonging’ towards the farm. He utilizes the farm for his own material and emotional satisfactions.

Ephraim’s dominant discourse is vividly visible through the image he carries inside and outside the farm. The initial description goes like this,
Cabot is seventy five, tall and gaunt, with great, wiry, concentrated power, but stoop-shouldered from toil. His face is as hard as if it were hewn out of a boulder ..... a petty pride in its own narrow strength. His eyes are small, close together, and extremely near-sighted ..... (DE 335)

This is Cabot’s just outward appearance. His image within the family is more imposing. Both Simeon and Peter look at him as a hard-task master. They cannot think of overruling him though he is out of the farm for two months. They know his public image. Cabot has a good social reputation as he manages his public image well. While referring to his public image, Simeon observes “He got the best of all on’ em. They’d never believe him crazy.” (DE 321) Probably because of this it is extremely difficult to challenge Ephraim Cabot. He, with conscience efforts has carved out his social/public image as the ruthless farmer and astute Christian. He perceives the God as “hard, not easy!” He separates himself from other farmers in this regard. He says,

They reckoned God was easy.” (DE 348) …. God hain’t easy – God’s in the stones! Build my church on a rock – out o’ stones an ‘I’ll be in them!

(DE 349)

Ephraim is the believer in the image of God as described in the Old Testament. Moreover he follows the Puritanical ideals, which have motto, “For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” Ephraim owes a lot to the Puritanical beliefs which emphasis on the righteousness and sovereignty of God. According to this view human beings are depraved sinners incapable of earning merit in the eyes of God. God chooses those who were worthy for salvation. Believing in pre-destination, all human beings were to adhere to the divine law and were justly condemned for failure to adhere it. Ephraim shows strict adherence to the divine law. He projects himself as the hard worker and he too has got the call from the God.

Then this spring the come – the voice o’ God crying in my wilderness, in my lonesomeness – t’ go out an’ seek an’ find. (DE 350)

Thus Ephraim becomes, as actually told by him the rare choice by the God. The very idea that the God calls someone grants a special attention to the person. All this amounts to his dominance over others. It is a special status that Ephraim claims to have from the above. It is very difficult for anyone to question such claims. Ephraim is successful in enforcing the idea that he is the chosen one by the Godfor carrying out
the same task. His self-projected image becomes an instrument to create and consolidate his dominant discourse.

Ephraim Cabot manages to create his image based on the Puritanical ideals. Puritanism itself brought an extreme myopia when it came to the power and influence of religion – with little room for exceptionality. Right from the beginning, Puritanism was established as the ruling class of people and anyone who fell outside those strict boundaries was essentially marginalized. Religious exclusiveness was the leading principle. As the ruling class, Puritans created the rules, regulations and laws to keep themselves as the dominant class and anyone else was considered less than a citizen. Ephraim Cabot seems to fit in this class of dominating Puritans. He uses religion to enforce his own dominance over others. He condemns all those who are unlike him. He hates all those who are soft and cannot prefer hard work. He knows the rage his sons have against him. He puts it in his own logical way. “They hated me ‘cause I was hard. I hated them ‘cause they was soft.” (DE 349). Being a soft is like asin for Ephraim. His opinion about his two earlier wives resembles this imperious mindset. He repeatedly says about both of them,

She was a good woman …. She never knowed me …. She was purty – but soft. She never knowed me nor nothing. (DE 349)

Being a woman means being a soft for him. Moreover his male chauvinism gets expressed when he clearly rejects Abbie’s idea of handing the farm’s authority to her by saying, “Ye’ve only a woman’. (DE 346) Ephraim thus creates his own image by using the Puritanical ideology and his gender position. In general it can be observed that Ephraim has already carved out his position and possessions, his rules and principles and expectations from others. Anyone who falls outside this periphery automatically gets marginalized or at least isolated. Excluding the challenger is one of the frequently used strategies by the dominant individual in a social hierarchy. Mutilating the opponents is the best way to secure your position in any battle. Attack is considered to be the best defense and when it comes down to protecting your interests such domination is must. His attitude towards Eben is that of enmity and grudge, probably because Eben is the potential threat to his authority. He constantly speaks about Eben in contemptuous manner, referring him as ‘soft’ meaning unmanly. He says, “Eben’s a dumb fool – like his maw – soft an’ simple!” (DE 336) Thus Ephraim excludes Eben from any serious attention because of his ‘soft’ nature. Here
the strategy adapted by Cabot can be seen clearly in terms of exclusion and legitimation. Cabot has consciously turned out the domestic situation in his favour by approving certain things and by not approving many things. He wants everyone in the house to be like ‘him’ or at least make efforts that direction. He appreciates his wives for working hard on the farm but he could not approve their contribution completely as they fail to realise Cabot’s philosophy. Simeon and Peter are physically strong and hardworking like Ephraim but they are not passionate for the farm work like their father. Both of them set for California, where they expect to get lot of gold. Moreover they wish to get rid of Cabot’s dictate. Simeon makes it very clear to Cabot, “We’re free, old man – free o’ yew an’ the hull damned farm!” (DE 336) Their exit from the farm largely owes to Cabot’s dictatorial discourse. Cabot fails to create any confidence among his sons about their future. He probably has the greatest problem of adjustment with Eben. Therefore he chooses the strategy of exclusion in his case by making him ‘soft’ and ‘womanly’. He does not approve anything done by Eben. He does not have any expectations from Eben. He makes it clear to Abbie. “I’m gitting t’ feel resigned t’ Eben – jest as I got t’ feel ‘bout his Maw’. (DE 344) By excluding Eben from any kind of serious attention, Ephraim cuts him to the minimum size in order to make him look extremely powerless and mean. He does not appreciate Eben’s contribution inside the house. Rather he is critical about Eben being ‘womanly’. He thus does not allow any kind of identity and place to Eben in the household structure. Like his two dead wives, he marginalizes Eben to a corner of the house, disapproving him any status. He calls Eben as ‘a sinner’. (DE 345) He is ready to kill Eben when Abbie informs him about Eben’s ‘lust’ for her. It seems that Cabot is so unsettled with Eben’s presence. He probably feels more threatened by Eben than by Simeon and Peter. In reality Eben is too ‘soft’ to create any challenge for Ephraim. The only threat that Ephraim could sense about Eben is his intelligence. Keeping Eben’s intellectual ability in the mind, Ephraim Cabot’s dictatorial discourse is directed towards him largely.

Interestingly enough Cabot’s dictatorial discourse can be seen in case of Abbie too. Abbie is young and beautiful woman of thirty-five. She agrees to marry Ephraim, who is more than double of her age. Obviously there must be some ‘practical or material’ reasons for her decision. For Ephraim the reason is very clear that he wants a woman to be at home. He wants someone to take care of his farm, house and of himself too. Actually he wants a slave more than a wife. He tells Abbie at her entry
in the house, “A hum’s got t’ hev a woman.” (DE 335) Even though he wants a woman for his house he does not wish to give her any status in the house except that of a slave. He even does not allow her to own anything apart from the routine domestic work. At the time of entry, Abbie is excited to see such a big house. She gets more exuberated after watching the bedroom.

ABBIE -- ...... It’s a r’al nice bed. Is it my room, Ephraim?

CABOT -- (grimly-- without looking up) Our’n!... (DE 337)

This initial conversation makes it very clear that Cabot is in no mood to grant any status to Abbie. He wants her to satisfy his needs - especially his need of working. His approach gets slightly altered when Abbie decides to have a child from him. He is ready to declare that child as his heir, but obviously not Abbie. He dominates Abbie because she is a woman and moreover she has come from a very humble back ground. Being a woman, Abbie is as it ‘marginalized’ and placed at the end of the family hierarchy. Initially she has been recognized with no status by both - Ephraim and Eben. Surprisingly both of them do not feel anything unnatural about it. The important strategy adopted by majority of dominant discourses is the use of interpellation, which make certain things a part of common sense – a process of creating identities for a ‘subject’. Here Cabot looks at Abbie as an entity more than a human being, which has got some utility. He does not seem to have any concern about her emotions as his wife. Marriage allows him a way to exploit her for his selfish purposes. Their marriage is also a part of his discourse to keep things under his control. By marrying someone, rather anyone, Ephraim wishes to keep his place intact in the family hierarchy. Ephraim is already seventy-five years old yet he has not lost the desire to own everything - the house and the farm. He nowhere can be seen speaking or thinking about his sons’ marriage or settlement. Interestingly enough, their marriage is a kind of end of his authority as the ‘chief’ of the family. He would be replaced by any of his sons as the ‘chief’ and the daughter-in-law would have been equally important. That would have marked the end of his dominance over family. Precisely this could be the reason of his marriage for the third time. That assures him his ‘position and privileges’. Hence his marriage with Abbie is definitely a part of his discourse design. Obviously he projects this in a different way and makes it look normal. His expression – ‘A hum’s got t’ hev a woman’ is crucial in this sense. He projects as if he has married Abbie for the sake of his home – his family. She is there not for him but for
his home and the members within. Contrastingly with Abbie’s arrival his family actually dissipates. Simeon and Peter leave the house. Eben is disgruntled. Abbie too does not seem to accept Ephraim as her ‘true’ husband. Thus this marriage is in no way fruitful or satisfactory relation but just a profitable business proposal for Cabot. He seems to have retained his place in the family hierarchy. A dictator always creates a feeling of normalcy in the minds of those whom he wants to control. Ephraim creates the same picture in the mind of Abbie. He gives her lot of confidence by praising her beauty. He even praises her intellect. He says, “Ye got a head on ye.” (DE 346) He gives her feeling of someone really special for him, “I sought ye an’ I found ye! Yew air my Rose of Sharon.” (DE 350) All these are the tactics to create the feeling of normalcy about what he is doing. He dominates Eben by excluding him from any serious business and misleads Abbie by giving her a false picture about himself and family. Thus Ephraim’s discourse of dominance is developed through difference strategies. He wants to be powerful all the time and with all the people. For that purpose he uses different direct and indirect strategies. Mostly by using discursive and ideological strategies he controls the behavior and thinking of other family members. He uses the Puritanical ideas and even his position for this purpose. He is definitely intellectual and crude in his manners. He exploits very intimate relations like a wife or a son for his petty considerations. He even sacrifices his wives for the sake of keeping his ideology of hard work intact. Though he is old surely he is no way compromising rather extremely defiant and apathetic. For him family relations are a site for exploration just like his farm. Profitability is the keyword for him. He marries Abbie for extracting labour inside the house and keeps Eben on the farm to accomplish agricultural work. Once someone is powerful, he naturally tries to consolidate that power. Ephraim Cabot is a symbol of the dominant discourse which circulates through different relations within a family, including very intimate one.

If Ephraim’s discourse is central in the play then his desire for the farm is central to his discourse. Farm is his prime possession. It is an object for his desire. It is externalization of his desire and this intimacy between farm and desire works to establish a discourse of desire. It is more a discourse of desire than domination as domination is an inventory through which Ephraim reaches to the fulfillment of his desire. He cannot think of anything or anyone else but his farm. Farm is not just a piece of land or a properly for him but a cause for his living. He could not bear the
thought of leaving the farm. He is extremely proud of his hard work with which he has reared the farm. He feels that he is the chosen one to get this opportunity by God. He attaches his success and failures with the farm. The farm is an inseparable part of his identity. He elaborately describes about his attachment with the farm to Abbie. He believes that he is chosen by the God to create this farm which he has shaped out of his own. Farm for him is not just a piece of land but a way to experience divinity. He is attached himself with the farm to the extent that he starts identifying himself with the farm. The farm is a symbol of his attachment with the transcendental powers and his feeling is the representative of the time when farm working is looked as a kind of worship of the God. his desire for the farm is his attempt to show his faith towards his ‘hard’ God and the only way the ‘hard’ God can be appeased. His attachment with the farm and indirectly with the God automatically places him in the higher rank than other members in his family. His discourse of desire is related to the farm but it is operational in the house. Toiling on the farm makes him a ‘hard’ laborer, making it a kind of discursive practice which aims at excluding others from such activity and hence excluding them from any kind of status. Probably this is the reason why he keeps on elaborating to Abbie about his attachment with the farm. He tells Abbie how he shaped the entire farm out of his own efforts, making an explicit statement about himself as a hard worker, a kind of self-sanctioning. He once had gone to rich land and started farming there. However he was restless with the thought that God would not be happy with this. He returned back to this stony place. Ephraim quotes,

    I actoooly give up what was rightful mine! God’s hard, not easy! God’s in the stones! (DE 349)

Such expressions are frequent in his conversion with Abbie which makes it quite clear that the farm is not just a belonging to Cabot but his medium to worship God. This is where farm becomes an institution, a site that relates Ephraim to his desire and retells his discourse. Farm does not remain a life-supporting instrument for Ephraim, but it becomes a medium to experience and serve the divinity. Ephraim is so much attached with the farm that it becomes an object of excessive desire for him. He is unable to live without it, to that extent that he forgets everything else – his family, house and even himself too! He becomes more and more detached from other things. “All the time I kept gittin’ lonesome ….. I was all us lonesome.” (DE 349) Probably his desire for the farm has outgrown to the extent that he has forgotten everything else.
Possession of the farm becomes his only passion for the life. He has developed a strange feeling towards the house. He puts it like this,

It’s cold in this house. It’s on easy. They’s thin’s poking about in the dark – in the corners. (DE 350)

He is referring to some kind of ‘obscured threat’ which is contaminating the atmosphere of the house. It is an evidence of some ‘unidentified fear’ is lurking in his mind. It could be the fear of loneliness, as no one is standing by him. His sons are hostile to him and out of this emotional vacuum, he might have married Abbie. His marriage with Abbie is an attempt to establish new relation as his existing relations are redundant. He knows the situation in his family and even probably conscious about his dictate of the family is responsible for creating this situation. By marrying Abbie, it can be claimed that, Ephraim has indirectly accepted his dictatorial discourse over his sons. He feels left out in the house and is so unstable because of the thoughts of fear in the house that he has to shelter in the barn with the cows. “They’ll give me peace” (DE 350) is what he feels. Ephraim suffers from this ‘loneliness’ as the outcome of his dominant discourse. He understands this but could not amend it. Even at the end the thought of living the farm comes to his mind.

T’ hell with farm ..... I’ll set fire to house an’ barn an’ watch ‘em burn …. an’ I will the fields back t’ God, so that nothin’ human kin never touch ‘em! I’ll be a – goin’ to Californi – a --- t’ jine Simeon an’ Peter ..... (DE 376)

Ephraim can be seen as pronouncing the end of his life on the farm. He is thinking of living the farm after destroying it. Is this a real change at the end or just another way to show his dominance as the owner of the farm? Has he got rid of his desire about the farm? Is this the end of his discourse of desire? Is he repentant? Answers to all these questions have to be negative. Ephraim Cabot though has spoken about burning the farm; actually he could not burn the desire of the farm in his heart. He again uses his ideology to negate his thought. He utters, “I kin hear His voice warnin’ me agen t’ be hard an’ stay on my farm.” (DE 377) He comes back to his old position where he is reluctant to leave anything. Discourse of desire and excessive possession has devastated the otherwise good scenario of the Cabot family. While departing, Ephraim speaks his discursive ideology by saying, “God’s lonesome! hain’t
He? God’s hard an’ lonesome! (DE 377) He tries to prove his position by equating himself with the God who is the only one and hence alone. Just like the God, Ephraim too is lonely at the end. Though isolated and lonely, his spirit is not dampened. The suggestion is that he would continue to fight his battles; outwardly and internal too. By worshipping the hard God for the entire life, Ephraim seems to nurture hard emotions and desires. The expression ‘hard emotions and desires’ is suggestive of the inhuman disposition. He does not seem to learn anything from the experience with Abbie as he refused to learn from the past experiences from the earlier wives. He is back to square one again, he may marry again, he may seek for the child again and he will continue to dominate the scene as usual. Thus like a circle his discourse continues, probably for infinity.

S. K. Winther in his essay ‘The Destructive Power of the Romantic Ideal’ observes about O’Neill’s characters as, “His characters live in two worlds; one the outward world of physical reality, the other, a world of unfulfilled and passionate desire.” (5) Ephraim Cabot’s situation can be equated with the above statement. He lives on the farm and with his family but he keeps longing for so many things at the mental and emotional levels. He has been denied any emotional cushion from the family. He always feels ‘lonesome’ due to the absence of support and is in constant search of identity for himself. That is the only way of leaving for him. Because he lacks any other type of identity, he attaches his identity with the image of ‘hard task master’. He sinks into that image so much that he develops an unsuitable desire for the farm. What he lacks otherwise in the physical reality is compensated by the farm and activities related to that. The prime reason behind Ephraim’s dominant discourse lies nowhere else but in this desire for the farm. He uses all the means – physical, emotional and even religious-cultural to retain his ‘powerful’ position. The reason for his marriages is the affection for the farm. He hates his sons because they are the potential threats to his ‘prime possession’. He hates Eben the most as Eben has a feeling that the farm belongs to his Maw and not to Ephraim. He marries Abbie for keeping his status as the ‘head’ of the agrarian family and is ready to give possession to their son only after his death. Finally he decides to get away from the farm but he is unable to break these shackles. Discourse strategies are conscious creations to protect power positions. Institutional setup, different systems including cultural setup and even relations are utilized to create discursive ideologies to protect and enhance
discourse. In case of Cabot he is already in the privileged position as a male and an economically strong person. In addition he is physical powerful too. He uses religion, especially Puritanical ideals regarding the hard work and salvation. Pre-destination or salvation is type of a discursive practice in the field of religion that automatically marginalizes others or at least the powerless. Interestingly he uses his most intimate relations i.e. son, wife and even a new born baby for his own benefits. He, like any dictator exploits everything for his own gain. All actions initiated by Ephraim are inspired by self-interest. He takes utmost care that his power and position should not be challenged by anyone. The unfulfilled desire for recognition and identity is the chief, instrumental reason for his dominant discourse. Obviously other smaller or anti-discourses evolve around his discourse largely. He is the one who faces maximum resistance for his discursive ideology.

Along with Ephraim’s very obvious and central discourse, there exists another discourse which too weaves its own, independent design for achieving specific position. This subsidiary discourse is of Eben. Actually Eben is the third son of Ephraim. Simeon and Peter are senior to him. He is not as ‘manly’ as them. Generally he is referred as ‘soft like his Maw’ by his father and the brothers. He is seen more into the kitchen, where he is involved in the domestic work like cleaning or cooking. He is generally away from tiresome hard work of the farm. Simeon and Peter are expressive about Eben’s role in the family.

PETER : Mebbe. The cows knows us.

SIMEON : An’ likes us. They don’t know him much.

PETER : An’ thye horses, an’ pigs, an’ chickens. They don’t know him much.

(DE 332)

This is a clear indication that Eben keeps himself away from the farm and the barn. He is more of a ‘woman’ in the family of men. He is thus situated at the bottom of family hierarchy, where he has given a marginal, womanlike status. In addition he is hated by his father and the brothers. Simeon and Peter always accuse him for being like their father. They also speak about him as a threat to his father.

SIMEON : (looking after him) Like his Paw.

PETER : Dead spit an’ image!
SIMEON: Dog’ll eat dog! (DE 326)

On the other hand, his father, Ephraim keeps talking about him in the most derogatory way.

CABOT – (with a contemptuous sneer) Ye needn’t need Eben. Eben’s dumb fool – like his Maw – soft an’ simple! (DE 336)

Both the views about Eben are contradictory and such contradiction may be Eben’s basic problem. He might be facing the same question regarding his own ‘self’ identity. Therefore Eben’s efforts during the play can be seen as the attempt to search and establish identity. He therefore builds his discourse for establishing his ‘self’ identity. The first step in his discourse can be seen in his efforts to support Simeon and Peter to leave the farm. This would serve two purposes – a kind of challenge to Ephraim’s ideology of hard work as well as removal of Eben’s potential competitors in farm sharing. Eben wants to own the farm ‘solely’ because he believes that legally the farm belongs to his mother. He puts it as, “It was her farm! Didn’t he steal it from her? She’s dead. It’s my farm.” (DE 323) He also believes that Ephraim is responsible for his mother’s death. He boldly asks his brothers, “Why didn’t ye never stand between him ‘n’ my Maw when he was slavin’ her to her grave –” (DE 323) He also believes that his mother is very much present with him even after death. She would get salvation only when Eben takes revenge for his mother’s murder. She cannot be free till that time. “She can’t git used t’ bein’ free – even in her grave.” (DE 324) It is here that one can understand the real reason for Eben’s discourse. Like Ephraim, he too wishes to possess the farm. The farm is the object to desire for him and for that matter he is ready to do anything. The farm is not just a piece of land for him but a symbol of his mother’s sacrifice. He competes with Ephraim in this regard. Hence Eben deliberately supports Simeon and Peter for their plans to move to California. He even gives them money from the locker for this purpose. In return he asks them to surrender their right on the farm. Eben does this only because he has got the ambition of possessing the farm. He does everything with perfect calculation. He knows that he is the only heir to inherit the farm after Ephraim. He says once, “Hain’t I as far-sight as he’s near-sight.” (DE 333) Eben’s discourse is directed in the specific way where he expects to get the possession of the farm. He makes it very clear to his brothers, “No, I’m waitin’ in here a spell.” (DE 333) Eben has definitely thought of staying back on the farm in any situation as it is his object of attachment. Every character, including
Eben has some desire and for that he/she is ready to transcend the normal limits. Eben though appears weak, even marginalized in the beginning, builds his own discourse of desire.

With Abbie’s entry, Eben feels threatened and unsure about his plans. Abbie is Ephraim’s wife and hence the new owner of the house. She invariably claims her right on the farm. Eben therefore rejects her and tries to cut down her to size. Hence initially he does not take cognizance of Abbie’s presence or words. Their initial conversation goes like this,


EBEN : (Viciously) No, damn ye! (DE 338)

Eben speaks vehemently with her. He curses he (‘Yew kin go t’ the devil) or compares her with a prostitute who has sold herself (An’ bought yew – like a harlot!) His anger against Abbie can be seen vividly again and again. At one time he calls her, “No, ye durned old witch! I hate ye!” (DE 339) All these expressions show Eben’s hostility towards Abbie. The possibility is that because she has married Ephraim and has come to stay in their house her entry has posed a serious challenge to Eben’s plans regarding the farm. His hostility towards Abbie is the result of his materialistic concerns and the desire to own the farm.

Abbie’s entry in the house has got multiple repercussions. Especially for Eben, it is not just a matter of physical space sharing inside the house but there is an implicit threat to his discourse of desire. He feels that Abbie is trying to replace his mother’s place in the house. Not only that, Abbie would wipe out of the signs of his mother’s existence from the house. Eben’s discourse is of the revenge against Ephraim also. Abbie could be a serious hurdle in this plan. With Abbie’s entry in the scene, he faces more challenges within house as well as emotionally. Abbie is in no way a personality to neglect - as she is physically attractive and intellectual also. Hence cutting down her to size by denouncing her is the way that Eben has chosen to deal with her. Denouncing or deteriorating someone with different accusations is the ideological strategy to marginalize someone. Eben’s initial attack on Abbie is a part of this ideological strategy where he refuses to recognize her with any seriousness.
Eben’s discourse is two folded, as explained earlier, which consists of the desire of possession of the farm; a material desire and the desire to revenge for his mother’s sacrifice; an emotional desire. He creates his own knowledge for this purpose. Opposing Abbie is his necessity by all means. She is the only one who can devastate his discourse of desire. He therefore tries to build the logic for opposing Abbie. He does not adjust with Abbie because he does not want her to share anything with him. However he gives the feeling that he is doing all this for his mother’s sake. He tells Abbie defiantly, “No I’m fightin’ him – fightin’ yew – fightin’ fur Maw’s rights t’ her hum!” (DE 342) Eben is sure that Abbie has married Ephraim with some definite plan of gaining something. Abbie’s gain obviously means Eben’s loss. He, therefore to protect his discourse attacks Abbie with different allegations. He makes her aware that after Ephraim, he is the next power center in the house. It is a direct challenge to Abbie’s plans. He tells her adamantly, “Waal, you’ll find I’m a heap sight bigger hunk nor yew kin chew!” (DE 342) He makes her aware about not thinking of the farm as it is his farm. He bluntly puts this, “I mean the farm yew sold yerself fur like any other old whore – my farm!” (DE 343) It is almost a must thing for Eben to discourage Abbie from making or even thinking about such plans. He tries to discourage her from taking any major decision or position in the family. Eben dominates her mentally to fulfill his desires. Even though Abbie shows the mood of compromise with him, he simply refuses to compliment her. He rejects her out rightly, “I don’t want t’ be happy – from yew’. (DE 351) There are so many instances where Eben rejects Abbie’s compromising expressions. Eben wants to create new hierarchy by replacing Ephraim in the house and on the farm. Such hierarchy would keep Eben at the dominant position. His opposition to Abbie is clearly an act of establishing his own discursive ideology. Even though he speaks about his mother’s sacrifice and revenge for it, he actually cares more for his position and privileges. Thus Eben’s discourse is directed towards Ephraim initially and later on the Abbie. He definitely wishes to create his own position as the chief of the family. In addition to this he seems to be in the effort of creating his own identity. Though he keeps on saying, “I’m Maw – every drop o’ blood!” (DE 322), he actually wishes to come out of that ‘soft’ image. Thus his discourse is directed towards many purposes. He wishes to replace Ephraim’s discourse with his own discourses. One can say that Eben too suffers from the same flaw of character like Ephraim that is being desirous about the possession of the farm. The possession of the farm may label him as the ‘owner’ and it will provide
him a much needed ‘sense of achievement’. His discourse is thus multifarious and extending to different boundaries physical, mental and emotional.

While keeping Ephraim and Eben’s discourse side by side, it is possible to seek certain common threads. Both are powerful, as they enjoy some position of power. Such position can be achieved through social recognition, economic solidarity and even the gender status. Their target is a powerless and marginalized person who can be easily dominated and hence Ephraim dominates Eben and Abbie whereas Abbie is targeted by Eben. The burning desire of possessions is the real foundation for both types of discourses. Ephraim shows desire to possess the farm and dominate others in order to secure his position. Eben too is desirous for his ‘rightful’ claim on the farm and also desire to avenge Ephraim for his ill-treatment of his Maw. Thus both kinds of discourse operate in the same manner. It is through these discursive operations and their residual effects, the counter discourse strategies are developed. Therefore the creation of discourse is the crucial element, rather the starting point in the dialectic structure of discourse and counter discourses. In this sense Ephraim Cabot’s discourse is the seminal one. It is because of his discourse that other smaller discourses and counter resistance point get formulated. Ephraim stands for ‘hard’ things- hard work, hard feelings, hard spirit and hence his desires can be called as ‘hard’ suggesting the obdurate, oppressive, callous and unrelenting way of perceiving the things.
2.1.2

‘Negotiations and Possessions’: Countering Elements in

Desire Under the Elms

S. K. Winther, a renowned critic of O’Neill, has observed “Perhaps the greatness of O’Neill’s characters lies in this very fact: that they are too complex, too involved with the cross currents of life to be purely one thing or the other.” (‘The Destructive Power of the Romantic Ideal’ 4) The observation by Winther, though in general about O’Neill’s characters, aptly fits the bunch of characters in Desire Under the Elms. There is a multiple discourse structure in the play. Owing to this pattern the counter-discourse also can be seen at the two levels. There is a complex formation of counter-discourse. Ephraim is the centre of dominant discourse and hence his discourse is challenged by Eben. This resistance is obvious as Eben wants to establish his own discourse of his own desires. Interestingly Ephraim’s discourse is indirectly challenged, moreover subverted by Abbie. She employs different discursive strategies to counter Ephraim’s patriarchal domination. Ephraim thus faces challenge from both Eben and Abbie. At another level Eben is in efforts to build his own ideological discourse. He too is challenged by Abbie. Thus Abbie can be seen as the emerging and unconventional centre of counter discourse in the play. Eben at least has got some advantages of being a male or having at least some small position in the house. Contrastingly Abbie does not have any such privileges yet she manages to structure her countering spirit to both discourses – Ephraim and Eben very defiantly. It would be therefore interesting to note the different strategies, modes, ideologies involved in this complex web of discourse/s.

Eben is the focal character in the play as he can be immediately juxtaposed with Ephraim. They are father and son but they hardly show any congenial relationship. They are rather hateful and antagonistic about each other. Ephraim’s dominant discourse is largely responsible for Eben’s enmity toward him. Eben is always cut down to size by Ephraim through the denial of any serious status to him in the domestic and agricultural territory. Eben is always accused of being soft like a woman. “He’s so thunderin’ soft – like his Maw” (DE 343) is the representative expression of Ephraim’s attitudetowards Eben. Eben seems to accept this feeling
without any protest. “I’m Maw – every drop o’blood?” (DE 322) is generally his reply in this regard. By accepting the general feeling about him, Eben does not show any rebellious intention openly against Ephraim. The operations of counter discourse are mostly worked out in covert ways. Eben too adapts ideological (related to mind) and discursive (related to action / praxis) strategies to counter Ephraim’s otherwise fortified discourse.

The first and foremost ideological step in the process of countering would be to create awareness about the dominant discourse. To reveal the discursive functioning of the dominant discourse is the essential strategy to counter it. Eben creates and heightens the awareness about Ephraim’s dominance in his brother’s mind. Both of them are physically strong and have contributed in the building Ephraim’s farm. Simeon and Peter, the elder brothers are really ‘hard workers’ as per Ephraim’s expectations but they lack the intellectual acumen. Both of them, as their appearance, actions and expressions suggest, are rather instinctual and barbaric like an animal. The description goes like this …..

_They stand together for a moment in front of the house and, as if with the one impulse, stare dumbly up at the sky ….. their bodies bumping and rubbing together as they hurry clumsily to their food, like two friendly oxen toward their evening meal._ (DE321)

_The three eat in silence for a moment, the two elder as naturally unrestrained as beasts of the field._ (DE 322)

All these expressions go on to paint Simeon and Peter as physically vibrant but lacking mental ability. Eben, who is different from his elder brothers in all respect, seems to understand this fact Eben, right from the beginning appears to be agitated and balky. His initial appearance provides clues about him,

_…. His face is well formed, good looking but its expression is resentful and defensive. His defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal’s in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce repressed vitality about him …. He spits on the ground with intense disgust …. _ (DE 319)

The above description is an indication of tremendous unrest with which Eben suffers. Unlike his two brothers, he is not wild but possesses womanly softness. His strategies
are therefore not physical but he uses his intellectual acumen to counter his father’s dictate. His support to Simeon and Peter’s desire to go to California is conscious; a part of his discourse strategy. He diplomatically brainwashes his brothers about their plight on the farm. He refers to their relentless labour. “An’ makin’ walls – stone atop o’ stone – makin’ walls till yer heart’s a stone ye heft up out o’ the way o’ growth onto a stone wall t’ wall in her heart!” (DE 324) On the one hand, Eben makes both of them conscious about their hopeless state on the farm, whereas at another level he indirectly stimulates the desire in their minds. He makes them aware by stimulating the idea that there is no future for them on the farm. He in a way challenges them that they are not courageous enough to leave farm to fulfill their desire. “Ye won’t never go because ye’ll wait here fur yer share o’ the farm, thinkin’ allus he’ll die soon.” (DE 323) Gradually Simeon and Peter are hijacked by the idea of going to California. Eben, knowing their burning desire offers deal to both, in which he offers three hundred dollars to each of them in lieu of the surrender of their right of the farm. He actually gives them money and transfers their rights to himself. The question is why Eben is pressing for their exit from the farm. There has to be some hidden agenda behind this action. Firstly their exit from the farm is a real challenge to Ephraim’s authority as he opposes any attempts to earn ‘easy’ money. According to the Puritanical ideals, which are followed by Ephraim astutely, Godly people are sober, hardworking and responsible. Ephraim wants his sons to invest their labour in the farm instead of thinking about ‘gold’ in California. Eben precisely does stimulate them by constantly talking about their desires of gold. Eben by making Simeon and Peter go away from the farm created a permanent rift between them and Ephraim. This also can be taken as a direct challenge to Ephraim’s dictate. This is beneficial for Eben in two ways; it poses direct challenge to Ephraim’s ideology about hard work and simple life and at other level it eliminates the competition for Eben to establish his position in the domestic as well as commercial domains. While going away from the house, Simeon and Peter break the parlor-window by stoning. This act is symbolic one, where the fortified dictatorial discourse is challenged by both. Their elated mood at this juncture suggests a kind of emancipation- physical and more importantly mental. The event could be seen as the first sign of the ‘drama of desires’ which is about to commence under the elms. This is possible only because Eben provides them timely financial help. Eben thus indirectly helps to subvert Ephraim’s authority by making both of them aware and capable. Awareness about the hegemonic ideology is the first step to
oust it, and Eben exactly does that. There is a very chance to perceive Eben’s actions with some definite purpose. He has already the news of Ephraim’s third marriage. That obviously means he has to accommodate and even compete with the new mistress in the house. He probably therefore plans to minimize the competition within the house by making Simon and Peter leave the house. While serving for his own purpose, he consciously poses a challenge to Ephraim. Simon and Peter, in their frenzy mock Ephraim’s wedding and speaks about raping his new wife. This is a pronouncement of the events to follow where the physical-sexual desires intertwined with the commercial, ideological desires.

At another level, Simeon and Peter’s exit is a step closer for Eben in achieving his desire of possessing the farm. Simeon and Peter are his competitors in getting the ownership. By removing them, he comes to the point of direct challenge to Ephraim. Alongside this he has elevated his position in the family hierarchy. Invariably Ephraim has to depend on Eben for helping him in the farm. Even Abbie at later stage makes Ephraim aware about it. “…. Ye mustn’t drive him off. ‘Tain’ sensible. Who’ll be get to help ye on the farm? They’s no one hereabouts.” (DE 346) Thus Eben becomes almost indispensable element of new hierarchy on the farm. It is probably impossible for him to achieve this status till the time Simeon and Peter were present on the farm. This could be seen as the first motion to establish his counter-discourse. Eben can be seen as using Simeon and Peter as an instrument to achieve his intention. He is bringing a new mode of apparatus, the use of relations as apparatus. This is a new way of developing countering strategies in the modern times. It underlines the fact that relations are no more a sanctified area but an element in the discursive formations. Even the most cherished and sentimental part of human life has turned out to be a play of power and desire and to achieve the materialistic goal.

Rearrangement of hierarchies is one of the front most functions of any counter-discourse strategy. Eben right from the beginning seems to resist the prevalent hierarchy in Cabot family. He simply refuses to obey any command by Ephraim. Moreover he rejects Ephraim as his ‘rightful’ father.

PETER – He’s our Paw.

EBEN – (violently) Not mine! (DE 322)

His resistance goes to the extent of praying for his death.
EBEN – (with a sardonic chuckle) Honor thy father!

(They turn, startled, and’ stare at him. He grains, then scowls).

I pray he’s died. (DE 321)

Thus Eben has put on his resistance through his mind and action. He offers resistance to Ephraim’s way of living life. He heavily criticizes Ephraim for adapting the hard life and imposing it on others. His derogatory expression like ‘The cussed old miser’ (DE 326) is an indication of his strong contempt for the hardships inflicted because of Ephraim’s Perception of the Puritanical life. He opposes the very act of Ephraim’s marriage with Abbie. His mind speaks through his words, “…. Ain’t he a devil out O’ hell? It’s jest t’ spite us – the damned old mule!” (DE327). Such and so many such expressions by Eben are evidences of his resistance to Ephraim’s action and behavior. It is just impossible for Eben to combat Ephraim physically eventhough he is an old man. Hence he chooses to resist Ephraim mentally and ideologically. He puts big question mark on Ephraim’s Puritanical ideology where the fate of any human being is attached to the favour of God. It is more a terrorizing God. He questions the very image and function of the God, while debating with Ephraimonce.

EBEN – *(breaking in violently)* Yew n’ Yewr God! Allus cussing folks – allusnaggin’ em!

CABOT – *(oblivious to him- summoningly)* God o’ the old God o’ the lonesome!

EBEN – *(mockingly)* Naggin’ His sheep t’ sin! T’ hell with yewr God!

*(DE340)*

Eben has broken the ideological bind created by Ephraim. Now his resistance is not restricted to day to day petty actions but to the whole philosophical foundation of Ephraim’s life. His disobedience to follow Ephraim’s world-view can be seen at the climax point of his resistance. By questioning the philosophical foundations, the counter discourse strategies can create space to enter even in the fortified area of dominant discourse. The roots of the future tragedy on the Cabot farm can be seen, at least to some extent in this questioning spirit of Eben. Any counter-discourse poses itself against the central discourse by questioning the very basis of it. Eben can be seen as doing exactly the same. As Simeon and Peter are already out of the farm, now there
is a direct clash between the rigid, overarching, established discourse of Ephraim and emerging, contesting discourse of Eben. Decentering of the established is the prime motive behind any counter discourse design.

Along with the questioning spirits, the counter discourse consciously develops the new forms of knowledge and social norms. Eben manages to project his resistant as ‘resistance for purpose’. He attaches the issue of his mother’s sacrifice to make his countering spirit more emphatic and acceptable also. He clearly states that he wants to resist and revenge his father for being very cruel to his mother. He even knows that his father has got bitter feelings for him and vice-versa. (…. I hain’t like him – he hain’t me! [DE322]). Actually Eben successfully projects his personal triteness for Ephraim as the feeling of revenge. He firmly believes that Ephraim has snatched the farm from his mother. “It was her farm! Didn’t he steal it from her? She’s dead. It’s my farm.” (DE323). Eben here attaches a cause to his discursive ideology. He even goes on to develop this revenge issue by attaching to her death and after life. His mother dies because of Ephraim’s atrocities. She was never free throughout the life. Hence she has denied any salvation even after her death. He claims that his mother can only rest in peace when he avenges Ephraim by any means. He tells Abbie once, “No I’m fightin’ him – fightin’ yew – fightin’ fur Maw’s right t’ her hum!” (DE342). Eben’s counter discourse against Ephraim thus mixes with his sense of revenge. He wants to oppose Ephraim not just he is a dominating Puritanical strong man but he is responsible for ruining Eben’s mother’s life. During their intimate conversation Eben reveals this burning fire in his mind to Abbie.

EBEN - This was her hum. This was her farm ….

He married her t’ steal ‘em. She was soft an’ easy. He couldn’t preciate her …

He murdered her with his hardness. (DE354).

Eben is clearly elaborating the real cause of his and his Maw’s vengeance against Ephraim. Eben thus successfully creates a cause or a new kind of knowledge to support his counter discourse by mixing his personal opposition to Ephraim with the feeling of revenge for his mother’s murder. The creation of new knowledge helps to consolidate the formation of new hierarchies as well as the social norms and customs.
Eben’s counter discourse seems to create the overall new perspective of looking at the social or community code. Adultery has been considered as the cardinal sin in the Christianity and especially in the Puritanical cult. The woman involved in such act is boycotted and punished heavily (Hester Prince in *The Scarlet Letter* is the befitting example). Adultery was considered to be something unnatural and unholy. Eben and Abbie, for whatever purposes seem to neglect this censorial act. They have their own logic for Eben looks at Abbie as his father’s possession, a kind property. She is also a hindrance in his plan to possess farm as she is the new mother / owner of the house. Eben develops sexual intimacy with her, firstly to possess her as someone else’s property and later on with genuine love emotions. She begets a child from him. This is kept secret by both of them. Thus Eben at a time possesses her but does not bear responsibility socially for his acts. He is a consumer of what is other’s possession and yet he not held responsible for it. Abbie also seems to be comfortable of being one’s wife and other’s beloved. Their relation is a kind of attack on the Puritanical ideals and the contemporary social norms. Eben after revelation, both of he do not reject their relationship. Rather they accept it and ready to face imprisonment for their crime ‘together’. This can be seen as the U-turn in social norms’ indicator. Abbie, unlike Hester Prince gets emotional as well as social support. Interestingly Eben who initiates such adultery manages to get out of the social outcasting. Eben skillfully manages to form new norms by bending the old.

Eben’s counter discourse design consists of many dimensions. Like a kaleidoscope it can be seen from different angles having different formations. His counter discourse is firmly founded on three things – his personal opposition to Ephraim’s ideology and action, his feeling of revenge for his mother’s sacrifice and his own desires – including the farm and the females. Eben seems to share or at least wishes to share everything his father has. He claims his right on the farm. He has already possessed the house. He has acquired Ephraim’s money and gave it to Simeon and Peter and projected himself the only heir left for the farm. He frequently visits Min, or Minnie, a village prostitute. He learns from Simeon and Peter that Ephraim too visits Min, rather he is the first one to do so from the Cabots. After this realization, Eben seems to enjoy Min’s company more and more. He knows that this is a sin as per the religion. However he says, “I don’t give a damn how many sins she’s sinned afore mine or who she’s sinned ‘em with, my sin’s as purty as anyone on ‘em.” (*DE*320). He
even proudly declares, “Yes! Siree! I tuk her. She may’ve been his’n – an’ your’n, too- but she’s mine now!” (DE328). Like an exultant soldier, he informs them about Min’s possession. He is ecstatic because he has possessed something which was in his father’s possession. In a way he overpowers Ephraim’s possessions. “The p’int is she was his’n – an’ now she b’longs t’ me!” (DE329). Eben is using the personal or intimate relations for fulfilling his own physical, emotional desires. Moreover he is exploiting those relations in which Ephraim is at the centre and involved. Hence Abbie’s possession by Eben and later on impregnating her can be seen as the culminating point of his counter-discourse.

Relationship between Eben and Abbie does move along different stages. It begins with utmost bitterness then it becomes more physical and at the end it is emotional and mature. These stages of their relationship can be seen as the part of discourse structure. Eben hates Abbie even before she has entered the Cabotfarm. He rejects her by all means. He devalues her by even alleging by as ‘harlot’ who has sold herself for the farm. Eben’s refusal to grant Abbie any status is also to show resistance to the act of their marriage. It is more of opposition to Ephraim than to Abbie. He rejects her presence as he has a fear that Abbie would replace her mother’s struggle. He makes Abbie aware that he is the sole owner of the farm time and again. “I mean the farm you sold yerself for like any other old whore – my farm.” (DE343). Eben is indulging in direct combat with Abbie and even threatens her. Surprisingly Abbie retaliates his attack rather than getting subdued. She makes her position clear to him. “Ye’re only livin’ here ‘cause I tolerate ye!” (DE343). Eben’s resistance gets resisted by Abbie’s position. He is already physically attracted towards her as she is towards him. She has offered herself to him also. However Abbie’s defiant position proves alarming to him. He probably realizes that direct opposition would not be a good strategy against Abbie. Hence he employs another strategy of ambivalence towards her, mixing attraction and repulsion. There is a turn in their relation. Eben shows lot of contempt towards her but does not oppose her physical advances. Their physical intimacy is established in the following manner,

... Abbie stands for a second staring at him, her eyes burning with desire. Then with a little cry she runs over and throws her arms about his neck, she pulls his head back and covers his mouth with kisses. At first, he submits dumbly, then he puts his arms about her neck and returns her
kisses, but finally, suddenly aware of his hatred, he hurls her away from him, springing to his feet…. (DE 351)

This small event throws light on complexity in Eben’s mind, where he is caught up between his mind and heart. He keeps rejecting Abbie verbally, “I don’t want t’ be happy –any cost. from yew!” (DE351). Although his behavior is hostile apparently, he secretly develops desire for her. Thus Eben’s counter discourse is chiefly directed towards Ephraim and he wishes to use Abbie as an instrument in it however he himself gets involved into it. Hence his counter discourse turns out to be labyrinth. He develops a complex web of emotions for himself. He burns with revenge and hatred for his father. He wishes to destabilize Ephraim’s position at cost. However he gets emotionally involved in Abbie who is his competitor in the ownership of the farm. He at time loves Abbie and hates Ephraim. He wants Abbie as a woman, a beloved but does not wish to compete with her for the farm. His labyrinth consists of diverse feelings- hate, revenge, infatuation, attraction, lust, rivalry and desire to possess.

Eben, as proved earlier also, is an intellectual person. He deploys another strategy to break this maze. He wants Abbie physically and yet he wants to continue with counter discourse against Ephraim. He mixes his personal desire (for Abbie) with his sense of revenge (for his Maw’s sacrifice) against Ephraim. He cleverly places Abbie at his mother’s position. One night he allows Abbie to enter into the parlor, which was used as his Maw’s room. The presence of his Maw is felt by Abbie and she gets nervous. Gradually the fear disappears and Abbie overtakes Eben. The complexity of Eben’s emotions is visible. His heart wants Abbie to replace his Maw – as a mother and as a beloved also. His mental ambiguity is vividly seen through his words, “Ay-eh. I feel – mebbe she – but – I can’t figger out – why – when ye’ve stole her place – here in her hum – in the parlor whar she was.” (DE354). Further he mixes his sense of revenge against Ephraim with his union with Abbie. He puts it this way. “I see it! I sees why. It’s her vengeance on him – so’s she kin rest quiet in her grave.” (DE355). Eben’s discursive motive can be seen here. Loving Abbie is a way of taking revenge against Ephraim. Possessing Abbie physically and emotionally becomes an act of desire and revenge simultaneously. As Abbie replaces his Maw in the family, he too has replaced his Maw with Abbie. He has developed a new version of ‘mother – fixation’, where he perceives her as both – a mother and a beloved. This is the
supreme countering strategy by Eben. Overpowering Abbie is the best way of subverting Ephraim’s ideology and dominance which has got many advantages. It will provide Eben with an opportunity to change his identity as an ‘adult’ rather than just a ‘son’. He becomes ‘owner’ of something. That something is not just an immovable property but ‘a woman body’. Possessing a female body is a kind of privilege for him over Ephraim or even his brothers. In the postmodern discourse studies the human body is problematized as it is considered to be a site for contestation. The dominance is created through ‘subjugation of bodies’ for generating greater utility, efficiency and productivity. Moreover a control on human body, especially a female body is an indication of the power one possesses as compared to others. The one who is in charge of such ‘biopower’ gains the dominant position. Probably that is the reason why Eben becomes all important and all potential ‘adult’ in the house after this relational transformation. That is the reason why he expresses his feelings towards Abbie in the clear-cut manner. “An I love yew, Abbie! – now I kin say it! I been dyin’ fur want o’ ye – every hour since ye come! I love ye.” (DE355). Though he accepts his feeling towards Abbie, his expression shows lot of complexity. If Eben is attracted to Abbie since the time of her entry then the delay in his expression suggests that he was waiting for the right or politically correct time. He seems to plan his expression of love alongside his revenge, and with his acceptance he has he finally decided to use Abbie as the chief weapon to counter Ephraim. This reminds of the ancient battles where the abduction or possession of a princess or a queen would be a chief source to challenge the power of the male dictate. Possessing someone else’s possession has been an important strategy since the ancient times. Women are victimized through such possession just as Abbie has been victimized by both; Ephraim and Eben. Eben’s counter discourse shows different shades of psychological actions. It largely counters Ephraim’s dominant discourse but at the same time weaves his own discourse of desire and influence.

Eben’s counter discourse occupies large space in the entire action of play, stretching almost from the first scene to the last. Analogous to Eben’s counter discourse is Abbie’s two-folded and interesting countering spirit. He countering discourse is directed towards both – Eben and Ephraim. Abbie can be seen as the unique mixture of brain and beauty. Her initial description indicates the intricacies in her life and thoughts.
...Abbie is thirty-five, buxom, full of vitality. Her round face is pretty but marred by its rather gross sensuality. There is strength and obstinacy in her jaw, a hard determination in her eyes, and about her whole personality the same unsettled, untamed, desperate quality which is so apparent in Eben. (DE335).

Abbie’s initial presence puts her in queer position. He is physically attractive but she is not tender. She is determined to achieve something. There is an indication that she lacks certain things in life. She makes it clear, “A woman’s got t’ hev a hum.” (DE335). She suffers from ‘loneliness’ and ‘rootlessness’. She has failed to get permanent abode for herself. She marries Ephraim, who is more than double of her age with certain plans. She makes it very overt while talking to Eben in the very first meeting. She frankly tells Eben, “I don’t want t’ pretend playin’ Maw t’ ye …. I want t’ be frens with ye.” (DE338). Abbie’s approach towards Ephraim to satisfy her material needs. Right from her childhood, she suffers as an orphan. Her first marriage also led her to become homeless. Finally he gets a chance to find a home after marrying Ephraim. She tells Eben, “…… I’d most give up hope o’ ever doin’ my own wuk in my own hum, an’ then your paw come…..” (DE 339). She has the unquenched desire to get home. It is quite clear that why she has taken the bold decision of marrying Ephraim. Thus right from the entry in the house, Abbie starts working with a definite plan. When Eben accuses her of stealing the farm, she replies instantly, “We’ll see out that!... What eles’d I marry an old man like him fur? (DE339). Abbie’s intentions are clear here. She has married Ephraim for materialist concerns. Discourse is circulated through different modes like institutions and rituals. Such modes regularize or authenticate things, which otherwise remain excluded or non-recognized. Ritual and institution of marriage have given Abbie’s desire a much needed protection. He accepts Ephraim and his dominance for this purpose only. Interestingly she accepts Ephraim as her husband not fully but selectively. She looks at him as a ‘farm owner’ rather than a ‘husband’. She looks at her relation with him from ‘commercial angle than ‘emotional’ one. She never shares any intimacy with her. She even uses expressions like ‘my hum’, ‘my room’ instead of ‘we’ or ‘ours’. Her antagonism towards Ephraim can be seen through her actions. In scene II of Part II, at one instance Abbie and Ephraim are sitting in their bedroom during the evening time. Not words
but her body language expresses the mental distance between them, even though they are physically very close.

(He turns away. Abbie looks at the wall. Then, evidently unable to keep silent about his thoughts, without looking at his wife, he puts out his hand and clutches her knee. She starts violently, looks at him, sees he is not watching her, concentrates again on the wall, sees he is not watching her, concentrates again on the wall and pays no attention to what he says.) (DE 348).

It is extremely explicit through Abbie’s action that she does look at Ephraim as a vehicle to achieve certain positions and status. She is more pleased to be ‘Mrs. Cabot’ than Ephraim’s wife. Her intentions of marrying Ephraim are quite evident when she enquires about the ownership of farm to Ephraim. She demands her rightful claim on the farm, bypassing Eben. She gets extremely disturbed when Ephraim shows some soft corner towards Eben. Abbie resentfully asks Ephraim, “What’s all this sudden likin’ ye’ve tuk to Eben? Why don’t ye say nothin’ ‘bout me? Hain’t I yer lawful wife?” (DE 344). When she realizes that Ephraim is not yet under her control completely, she designs a different plan. She informs Ephraim that Eben has got lust for her. “He was tryin’ make love t’ me ….” (DE345) is what Abbie tells Ephraim about Eben, which is far from the truth. This is her deliberate attempt to tarnish Eben’s image. She never wants a peaceful relationship between Eben and Ephraim, as that would be her ‘marginalization’. She wants her to be present at the centre of all affairs. Power can be retained through deliberated created confusions, especially with those parties who are beneficial to your purpose. As Eben uses Abbie to serve his interest, she too uses him as the instrument as a part of her discursive ideology against Ephraim. This false information obviously creates sympathy for her in Ephraim’s mind and more hatred for Eben. In the state of excitement, Ephraim declares that he would hand over his farm to his son only. Abbie latches on to this opportunity and declares, “Mebbe the Lord’ll give us a son.” (DE 346). This changes Ephraim’s perspective of looking at Abbie. He comes in her clutches fully. He too wants Abbie to give him a child. Thus Abbie intentionally prepares Ephraim for physical relation, even though she hardly makes it operational. Abbie is thus a very opportunist woman, who changes her positions like a weathercock. She is always near power-centers for different purposes. The powerless or marginalized can be powerful by being
opportunist or close to power centres. Her countering discourse is more fluctuating as per the requirements. She is in no way opposing or countering Ephraim for any principle but for her own survival. She carves her discourse though the principle of ambivalence, oscillating between two different poles as per her requirements.

Unlike with Ephraim, Abbie’s relationship with Eben is far too complex. She is almost a contemporary to Eben in age and even in the mental condition. He is twenty-five years old as she is thirty-five years. Both of are physically attractive. They are determined and defiant. Abbie is ‘untamed’ as Eben is ‘inwardly unsubdued’. Her obstinacy matches with his vitality. Thus they match each other physically as well as mentally. Abbie gets attracted towards Eben in their first encounter.

Her eyes take him in penetratingly with a calculating appraisal of his strength as against hers. But under this her desire is dimly awakened by his youth and good looks … (DE 338).

Abbie’s approach towards Eben sets tone from this point. She frankly tells Eben that she is not going to behave like a mother to him, but a ‘friend’. In their first meeting itself, she tries to seduce Eben by her physical charm. There are so many instances where Abbie can be seen as beguiling Eben.

ABBIE – (walks up to him – a queer coarse expression of desire in her face and body – slowly) An’ upstairs – that be my bedroom – an’ my bed …. (DE 339).

On the one hand, she tries to charm Eben with her beauty and at another level she tries to appeal his emotions, especially his disgruntle about Ephraim and his philosophy. She hits the right tone by saying, “an’ yew an’ me’ve got a lot in common. I kin tell that by lookin’ at ye’.” (DE 338). Abbie is appealing to the most tender emotions of Eben. She diplomatically tries to overpower him as she must have realized that it is not Ephraim but Eben is the actual block in her plan. It appears that she has already worked out her plan for Eben before entering the family, as she is more concerned about Eben’s role in the family-drama than Ephraim. It is an interesting situation where in a kind of ‘double game’ Eben becomes a chief instrument in Abbie’s discourse, as earlier stated Abbie is used by Eben.
Abbie’s approach towards Eben seems to be properly worked out. At the beginning she confuses him by her calculated physical advances. She tries to be very friendly with him. She makes it very clear that she would not play his mother’s role.

I’d feel the same at any stranger comin’ t’ take my Maw’s place.” (DE 338)… “Let’s yew’ n’ me be frens, Eben (DE 339)

She tries to be friendly with him. At the same time she makes him aware about her position as the ‘mistress’ of Ephraim. Being a wife of Ephraim, she gets certain powers automatically. Power operates from a particular position. Discourse once gets institutionalized is bound to be powerful. Abbie marries Ephraim and her words and actions become more forceful. She mixes her emotions with her sense of power. When Eben derogates her by accusing her as ‘harlot’ or ‘thief’, she tells Eben openly, “Ye’re only livin’ here ‘cause I tolerate ye!” (DE 343) This is an indication if the power that she enjoys in the house and her influence on Ephraim. “ I cal’c’late I kin git him t’ do most anythin’ fur me” (DE 338) Abbie is so confident about her spell on Ephraim that she almost threatens Eben. While keeping Eben in check, she creates doubts in Ephraim’s mind about Eben. She falsely alleges Eben for having lust for her in front of Ephraim. Her claim enrages Ephraim to that extent that he agrees to throw Eben out of the farm and the house. Interestingly Abbie stops from doing so. Abbie is successful in widening the rift between Eben and Ephraim. She requires both for her purpose. She wants Ephraim to keep her wealthy and powerful position whereas she needs Eben to satisfy her emotional and physical needs. Abbie carefully and intellectually uses her strategy of ‘negotiation’ to survive and even subvert the establish strategy. A woman, specially the marginalized one has to evolve the strategies to support her survival in the dominant patriarchy.

Abbie’s negotiating strategy can further be seen in her attempts to take Eben’s mother’s position. Though she says verbally exactly different than this; her efforts are to conquer Eben’s most intimate relation with his mother she deliberately enters into his ‘maw’s’ parlor. There she gets aware of his ‘maw’s’ presence and feels scared. Gradually things settle in that room and Abbie gains confidence about her position as ‘mother’ as well as ‘beloved’. She advances towards Eben and passionately holds him. He too responds to her advances. The physical proximity is suggestive of the mental intimacy between both of them. Actually both of them are in search of the real emotional support; Eben, as he suffers since the beginning as he has never received the
attention or affection in the absence of her Maw. In the same way Abbie always lacks support and sense of belongingness as she lived the orphan’s life. The lack of meaningful relation is the common vacuum in their life. Their intimacy therefore is much awaited as Abbie is as much in search of a meaningful relationship which Eben could only provide. She must have accepted Eben as the real source of her pleasure-physical as well as material. She deliberately takes over the position of his mother as that is the only way to conciliate him. His problems are existential and emotional, as he cannot get rid of the ‘maternal’ influence which continues to create hindrance in establishing new relations. Abbie through her emotional and physical possession of Eben breaks this jinx.

ABBIE --- (both her arms around him ---- with wild passion) I’ll sing for ye! I’ll die fur ye! (In spite of overwhelming desire for him, there is a sincere love in her manner and voice -- a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love.) Don’t cry, Eben! I’ll take yer Maw’s place! I’ll be everythin’ she was t’ ye!...” (DE 354)

She replaces Eben’s mother but retains her physical charm in his mind. She readily agrees to play both these roles as a part of her negotiation strategies. It is quite clear that Abbie has changed her earlier stand. As emphasized in her action, she combines the motherly emotions with the physical lust. In the beginning she made it clear to Eben, “I don’t want t’ pretend playin’ Maw t’ ye, Eben.” (DE 338) In the end Abbie only assures him, “She went back t’ her grave that night we fust done it, remember? I hain’t falt her about since.” (DE 370) This expression is a proof in itself that Abbie has successfully replaced Eben’s Maw. There appears to be a definite cause this paradigm shift in Abbie’s stand as she is ready to take up even Eben’s mother’s position. This is surely not just emotional decision but a well thought out plan to create her value in the Cabot family. Even replacing Eben’s Maw emotionally becomes a part of Abbie’s counter discourse strategy. She develops her counter resistance by using, as Eben has done, the familial relations.

Abbie does not appear to be like a common woman who is just satisfied with her position within the confines of the family. She could not find any satisfaction in being just Ephraim’s wife. That is not at all her purpose for marrying with Ephraim. She wishes to possess the farm and the house. She realizes that it is impossible for her
to inherit the farm solely as Ephraim makes it clear that the ownership can go to his son, and a woman cannot own it.

CABOT--- Ye’re on’y a woman

ABBIE – I’m yewr wife

CABOT--That hain’t me. A son is me—my blood—mine. Mine ought t’ git mine. An’ then it’s still mine--- (DE 346)

Probably this the time for Abbie realization that she should have her son who can inherit the farm after Ephraim; otherwise Eben would be the only possibility for that place. If Eben becomes the owner of the farm, she has to surrender to him as the owner and he would surely dominate her physically and mentally. It would therefore be better to win over Eben before he becomes too strong in the house. After this point she can be seen with changing approach towards Eben. On the one hand she is successful in keeping the rift between Eben and Ephraim and on the other side she manages to win over Eben both physically and emotionally. She perfectly knows that Eben is physically attracted to her physical charm. Therefore he can be win over in that area at any time however that would not her complete victory hence she probably decides to target the most crucial thing in Eben’s life; his mother’s position. Eben is psychologically possessed by his dead mother’s memory and he could not replace it with anything. He therefore could not feel the confident as an ‘adult’; he is more womanly as compared to his brothers. The idea of motherhood dominates Eben’s mind so much that he is unable to think about any other relation. His mother fixation turns out to be self-destructive for Eben. He keeps on struggling to get out of it to prove that he is a grown up adult. Abbie with her sharp intelligence taps Eben ‘psychological preoccupation’ with his mother’s memories, and hence must have decided to explore this point to score over him. Her counter discourse strategies can be seen as working in the definite directions. She must have realized that Eben is psychologically weak and he lacks the ‘motherly love’. He can be attracted by the physical charm but only temporarily. She provides him what he lacks and that is maternal affection and protection. Capturing an individual’s mind rather than his physical confinement is the strategy especially used in the capitalist setup. Such ideologicalan psychological bondage is difficult to overthrow. That is the reason why Abbie captures Eben psychologically as he suffers from that mental and emotional want. She keeps Ephraim
guessing through her physical charm whereas she combines emotions with her physicality as Eben does not fall to her physical advances in the initial stage.

Abbie turns towards Eben positively not only to support him psychologically but even to secure her future. It is quite clear from Ephraim’s statement that Abbie would not get the ownership of the farm. If she wants to own the farm she must have a child of her own. She is least interested and confident that she can beget a child from Ephraim. The only option that she could exploit is Eben and she does that. Her indulgence in sexual relations with Eben can be for securing her claim for the farm. At least in the beginning there is every possibility of such strategy where she gets a child from Eben and gets recognition from Ephraim. Her strategy of negotiation works in different ways here where she chooses the midway of getting involved with Eben emotionally but she could not leave Ephraim for the material concerns. She is accused by Eben for such hidden agenda afterwards.

EBEN –(unheeding) Ye’ve made a fool o’ me ----a sick, dumb fool--- a-purpose! Ye’ve been on’y playin’ yer sneakin’ srealin’ game all along— gittin’ me t’ lie with ye so’s ye’d hev a son he’d think was his’n, an’ makin’ him promise he’d give ye the farm and let me eat dust... (DE 366)

Eben accusations are not completely baseless as Abbie tries to prove this by killing their child. If at all Abbie claims innocence, it is difficult to explain her act of killing the child logically. It is an indirect admission of the impact of her counter discourse strategy on her relations. She by killing the child wishes to preserve her present relations rather than creating new in the form of a child. She in the end is to be certain that human relations per se are required than the material possessions. The play provides enough space to raise such questions regarding intentions behind her acts. The counter discourse strategies work in different manner. At the end of the high emotional drama, Abbie kills their son to prove that she loves Eben genuinely. In the confession of her act, she accepts this fact

But I loved yew more—an’ yew was goin’ away---far off what I’d never see ye agen,… ye said ye hated him an’ wished he was dead—ye said if it hadn’t been fur him comin’ it’d be the same’s afore between us. (DE 370)

Abbie feels that some damage has been done in her relation with Eben after the birth of child. To compensate for this damage, she has to take such tough decision.
She has a fear of losing Eben. The sense of guilt and the hidden fear inside her mind of losing Eben is evident through her action. Her desires appear to grow up so much that she has to stop being too avaricious at some point of time and think about the practicalities of life. It is revealed that she faces severe consequences for entertaining both-Eben and Ephraim for her gains. The play demonstrates how Abbie through her intellectual bend of mind cleverly design the counter discourse strategy as she is powerless and without any status in the society. A marginalized element like her could not do much but to negotiate for self-benefits. She has to think about the multiple possibilities to create her influence in the domestic as well as the social area. Her counter discourse, unlike Antigone is subtle and she works out it by using the unique blend of intellect and emotions. She rationally exploits what Eben and Ephraim emotionally lack. She exhibits how a powerless can dictate the terms even in the man’s world. Though her counter discourse is centered to fulfill the desires, it is an evident of how a woman, lonely, powerless and marginal can create a space for herself through the careful employment of intellect and emotions. Her counter discourse is not for upholding some ideological or philosophical positions but it is for her survival. Her counter discourse is very much linked to her existential concerns. If she had to secure her present and future on the Cabot farm, it is necessary for her to develop such strategies to survive and progress. She by creating these strategies transforms her life from mere survival to development-emotional and material. In the end she even realizes the limitations of the counter discourses strategies which cannot remain active forever. The killing of her child is the decisive point in her counter discourse strategy where she decides to end her ‘selective negotiations’ by explicitly choosing the one of the option i.e. Eben. Her material future might suffer because of this decision but her emotional existence is firmly supported by this act. Abbie becomes a test case to exemplify the expanse as well as the limitations of counter discourse strategies. Thus it can be said after taking a survey of the different counter discourse strategies employed by Eben and Abbie that counter discourse strategies in both cases are different. Eben indirectly provides challenge to the ideological foundation of Ephraim. He works out minor yet very effective strategies to crumble Ephraim’s position in the domestic circle as well as his social status. He mixes his survival concerns with the desire of revenge to counter Ephraim. Abbie on the hand seems to develop her counter strategy on the basis of ‘psychological lacking’ of Eben and Ephraim. For her, existential issues are more predominant than the ideological ones. Thus in both cases counter
discourse strategies do stand for some specific purpose. *Desire under the Elms* thus show not just tragedy and enlightenment of the members of the Cabot family but highlight the way resistance is created against different power centers within a very intimately bonded set up like family.

The play clearly presents the discourse and counter discourse positions, which are posed against each however the play also brings in those notions which do not belong to either of these categories but still create ruptures in the normal way of looking at the events. In *Desire Under the Elms* the ‘farm’ is a key notion of contestation and discourse formation. Everybody in the play seems to be haunted by the idea of possessing the farm, either in a materialistic way or as a psychological attachment. Ephraim has both these positions. He is the owner of the farm and head of the New England agrarian system. He is attached to the notion of ‘farm’ to the extent that he starts identifying himself with the farm. It becomes his psychological needs to survive. Farm does not stand as a piece of land for his but moreover it becomes the life purpose for him. The notion of farm turns out to be overarching for him or to use Lacan’s term ‘arch signifier’ that dominates his thinking and actions, of course unconsciously at large. He could not separate himself from the notion of farm as he looks at it as the means of peace and mental satisfaction, which is denied to him in his family.

*Down what it’s restful—what it’s warm—down the barn. (bitterly) I kin talk t’ the cow… they’ll give me peace. (DE 350)*

Probably Ephraim refers to that peace which could not get at the family level. He looks down at family as he feels ‘lonesome cold’ in the house. He goes back to farm whenever there is some disturbance in the family. Ephraim is unable to get any support from the family due to his excessive possession for the farm. Due to the unnatural attachment with the farm, he could not find anything else meaningful in life; he could not treat his previous two wives with respect and lost them, Simeon and Peter hate him and go away from the family, Abbie is unsatisfied with him—physically as well as emotionally and Eben turns out to be his arch rival. Ephraim could not thus set any meaningful relation with anyone else as the notion of farm is the only controlling image in his mind. His fixation with the farm controls his life. The earlier analysis has depicted Ephraim as the source or initiator of the dominant discourse however the notion of farm dominates him so much that he almost becomes a victim of it. Initially
it appears that he dominates and victimises Eben and Abbie which his Puritanical ideology, which is true in one sense however in the end Ephraim remains isolated, and barren. He even thinks of burning the farm but immediately backtracks as burning the farm means burning his own identity. Ephraim looks the divine spirit in the farm. It is a way of his worship to the ‘hard’ God. If the farm is destroyed, that would end his link to the other world. American romanticism looks at Nature as transcendental; a mode of reaching to the god. Ephraim too seems to have the same idea. He is the ‘conservative carrier’ of the New England agrarian system. In Ephraim’s case the farm is the only system that exists. He has lost family as an institution and instead ‘farm’ has emerged as the institution which develops its own discourse through its operations. The notion of the farm is so dominating discourse for everybody in the play that Ephraim is ready to dispense with his family and all familial ties. Abbie commits incest for the sake of child and even kills it to assure her future with Eben, which again related, though indirectly to the farm. She enters in the house with the intention of possessing the farm. Eben very intellectually subverts Ephraim’s domination and at the same time assures that ‘farm’ comes to him by any way. He uses Ephraim and Abbie as instruments to achieve his target, i.e. becoming the owner of the farm. Eben, unlike Ephraim does have any emotional attachment with the farm but his interests are purely materialistic. He appears to be ‘weak’ and attached to his mother spirit, represented by the elms. However he emerges as the most ruthless though rootless character in the play. He is indifferent towards the things happening on the farm. He is described as the ‘weak’ person who always seeks for the emotional support; first by from his mother spirit and then by from Abbie. However he exploits the relations to keep his interests intact. He first ignores Abbie’s physical advances with resent but then tactfully replaces her with his ‘maw’. He hates his father, non-committed to his mother and even exploits Abbie. Eben not only subverts Ephraim’s discourse but he manages to change the positions. He too possesses the desire for the farm but his desire is not emotional or even spiritual like Ephraim. He represents the flat, insensitive capitalist, emerging in the modern America. It is not a matter of investigation here that how this transformation has taken place and what are its implications but the very crucial thing that whether Eben or Ephraim, two oppositional elements are controlled by the notion of farm. The power relation between both of them is broken by this notion which remains overarching over for them. The very idea of power in the postmodern context is not attached to positions or class but it is
circular, having no fixed position. In *Desire Under the Elms* the battle for the material power can be seen in the domestic circle but the notion of the farm is the controlling force that breaks the conventional and binary discourse between Ephraim and Eben. Everyone in the play possessed and controlled by the notion of the farm. It even victimises Ephraim without letting him know and it replaced him with Eben. The notion of farm creates ruptures in the seemingly dual, flat discourse in the play, by prioritizing the notions over relations.

Thus *Desire Under the Elms* presents a very intricate structure of counter discourse formations which allows a space to the opposing elements to clash, mix, fuse and harmonize against the dictatorial voices and ideological practices.
Adaption of Multiple Myths in the Modern American Context

*Desire Under the Elms*, published in 1924 is a tragedy of the Cabot family set against the New England background during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The play presents the tragic yet enlightening story of the very complex relation between the trio- Ephraim, Eben and Abbie. Their relation is intertwined and dominated by the emotions like love and hate, revenge and repentance. At the end Eben and Abbie realize their true love for each other, sadly though at the cost of their newborn child. The play does not refer to any myth or mythical characters explicitly as in *Antigone* or *The Trojan Women*, yet there are strong undercurrents within the plot and the characters that take us close to not just one but multiple ancient stories. The central issues in the play are related to the Eben and Ephraim relationship and the Eben-Abbie relationship. The Eben and Ephraim relationship is full of tensions as Ephraim is an imposing patriarch. Eben refuses to follow his dominance especially on the backdrop of Ephraim’s inhuman treatment of Eben’s mother. His abhorrence of Ephraim is founded on the firm conviction about the inhuman injustice levied against his mother by Ephraim. He hates his father and loves his mother passionately, though she is no more alive. At another level, Eben and Abbie share an extremely intricate relation; starting with the utter hatred as the stepmother-son later on involving with each other as the committed lovers. Abbie becomes so much intimate with Eben that she kills their child to prove her genuine feelings for him. Thus the entire plot structure rests upon the two issues- the monstrous hatred for the father, as a symbol of patriarchal tyranny and the incest coupled with the grotesque murder of the infant. Though indirectly, the subject matter and the focal events surely direct towards the elements in three myths- Phaedra- Hippolytus- Theseus, Oedipus and Medea. The complex interweaving of the human relations in the cultural context of the past makes *Desire Under the Elms* a tragedy of its own kind and magnanimity, focusing on the key cultural rudiments like sin, redemption and retribution. Through its indirect affinity towards the ancient stories, the events and characters achieve what Longinus calls ‘the grandness of thought and action’. It is therefore termed as “the first great American tragedy” by many critics. Edward L. Shaughnessy remarks that, “O’Neill gives us a portrait of partners in sin who works out their redemption and who, within a modern context, evoke echoes of classical tragedy…” (*Down the Night and Down the*
Desire Under the Elms therefore receives a great attention as ‘a modern tragedy with ancient echoes’.

Any great work of art transcends the spacio-temporal confines through the confluence of the archetypal traits with the present agonies of the living. The archetypal characters largely are predominant presence in the cultural arena due to their allegiance to certain timeless attributes just as Oedipus stands for the incest, patricide as well as retribution and destiny. The immortality of the mythical characters undoubtedly owe to their characteristic traits which gain a kind of ‘metaphorical’ value over the century. Such culture generated metaphors are undoubtedly useful to comprehend the reality for any artist. The twentieth-century artists are chiefly concerned with intensifying aspects of reality; and because he has declined so many traditional values, he has to recreate for himself what his seniors could take for granted. When society is converted into chaos, new systems must be developed, and the artist’s quest is to discover and develop fresh material. In the twentieth-century, writers look back toward the classical world with its ideal of harmonious perfection and its simple elemental aesthetic delights. They feel that somewhere along the line of man’s development order has gone out of the world. As a result “Myth has spread from the confines of anthropology to the ultimate circle of the verbal universe.” (Thompson, 13) The symbolic nature of the characters, setting and events make the myths a journey forever.

Desire Under the Elms, a modern American tragedy contains thematic as well as structural elements which seem to cross the time-space limitations. The main characters- Ephraim, Eben and Abbie are ‘typical’ characters having specific dimensions. Ephraim shows the patriarchal attitude towards his family. He shows the dominant attitude while treating his three sons including Eben. Eben is extremely critical about Ephraim’s treatment with his earlier two wives specially Eben’s mother; his ‘maw’. Ephraim endorses the Puritanical way of life; supporting hard work and moral unrighteousness. His farm is his obsession and his has sacrificed Eben’s mother for it. He marries with Abbie to get a child from her, which would keep Ephraim’s power intact as the ‘family head’. Ephraim shows all the characteristics of the patriarchal order that dominates the family as well as the social life to the extent that the other members are reduced to mere ‘followers’. Ephraim’s dominance gains lot of gravity because of the social and economic dimensions of the patriarchy where
different institutions operate in favor of the master. He perceives the God as a hard god who desires for constant physical labor. Ephraim is fond of physical toil and isolation. Eben and the others hate Ephraim for his insistence of work. There is no emotional bonding between them. He does not have a meaningful relationship with his children. Ephraim provides Simeon and Peter shelter and food, and in return he makes them work in the farm. Their relation is commercial and mechanical. Thus Ephraim stands for the Puritanical ideals which look at life as a kind of punishment and hence one has to work it out sincerely. He also represents the will to dominate the powerless or marginalised by extracting benefits from them. Through such social, domestic, economic and religious dominance, people like Ephraim manage to keep their interests and position intact. He is the metaphor of the double standards followed by the powerful people. Whereas Ephraim loudly voices the need to follow the moral standards in practice he has married thrice and also visits Minnie, a village prostitute. He can be labeled as the corrupt, autocratic patriarch of the modern America.

Eben marks the counter position to Ephraim in behaviour and thought. He simply refuses Ephraim’s philosophy about the God and the religion. He helps Simeon and Peter to get out of Ephraim’s clutches, by giving money for their trip to California. Eben could not set any meaningful relation with his father throughout the life as he is too much attached with his mother. He shows the want of emotions as his mother is sacrificed for the family. Throughout the play Eben firmly clings to the memory of his ‘maw’. He hates his father more for replacing his mother with Abbie in the house. He exhibits the opposition to as well as the subversion of the patriarchal dominance. By overpowering his father’s ‘prime possession’, i.e. Abbie, he challenges the social hierarchy and the age-old values. Eben represents the revolutionary spirit in the sense that he reverses the social and domestic hierarchies through his actions. He has the courage to stand against the currents and accept the responsibility if the consequences. He also shows the dominance of maternal influences which operate as strongly as one’s libidinal forces. The relation between Ephraim and Eben is not just domestic but it points out the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed of any kind, may be social or cultural or emotional suppressions. As pointed out by James A. Robinson, “in *Desire Under the Elms*, Ephraim (the name of an old Testament patriarch) is an
energetic archetype of God-like paternal authority, and Eben represents the active Oedipal (or perhaps Promethean) rebellion against it.” (154)

Abbie is an intricate metaphor as compared to Ephraim and Eben. She is physically charming and intelligent also. She captures Eben’s attention even though he hates her initially. She gradually converts herself into Eben’s lover and much required mother. Since Eben’s mother’s image for Eben is unconscious, it is unconsciously projected upon Abbie. Abbie plays double roles - as a mother and as a lover. She is combination of both maternal and sexual love. When Abbie and Eben enter the tomb-like room which has not been opened since Eben’s mother’s death, Abbie plays her double roles at the same time. She involves with him physically and emotionally however latches on to Ephraim for the economic support. She represents the emotional as well as the existential dimension of human life. By being close to both of them, she manages to exploit them and becomes ‘powerful’ in the process. At the end she exhibits the qualities suitable to a beloved-wife by sacrificing her own blood. She symbolises the creative as well as destructive force within a woman. She is creative as she guarantees Eben his identity which was hampered by his mother’s memory. She is the first woman with whom Eben connect himself physically, and she has a great role in the development of Eben’s masculinity. (He seems changed. His face wears a bold and confident expression, he is grinning to himself with evident satisfaction. [DE 355]). She converts him from an emotionally paralyzed child into a rationally sound adult. Abbie on the other hand destroys Ephraim’s patriarchal domestic and mental structure. She represents the rebellious spirit which though powerless can oust the establish order. Abbie can be understood as the ‘female force’ which can bring new order through the destruction of the traditional establishments.

There are certain other things like the farm and the house which too gain metaphoric values during the course of the action in the play. The farm is the symbol of material wealth and it also shows the objectification of the tyrannical power. Ephraim could not keep away his attachment with the farm as he identifies his social status and domestic prominence. The farm therefore becomes the primemost object for Ephraim. At the end to he wishes to burn his farm. Probably this wish underlines his will to dominate the ownership of the farm. The farm indicates the material desire, which everyone- Ephraim, Eben and even Abbie wishes to possess. The farm occupies
everyone’s consciousness as it is identifies with the power position. It is just like an emblem of power as the royal band or the crown.

The most important symbol in the play comes in the form of the elms tress, which have covered the Cabot’s house. The elms are not just the natural object but they have some human qualities. The description of these trees goes like this,

Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles. (DE 318)

The elms do exist in some sort of humanized form, which care for the house. Their presence can be felt in the house especially by Eben. Their mother like protective positions remind of the Eben’s mother. She is, though not alive very much concerned with Eben’s protection from his father. Any tree signalizes many things like growth and vegetation. Carl Jung explains the meaning of the tree symbol: “Taken on average, the commonest associations to its meaning are growth, life, unfolding of form, in a physical and spiritual sense, development, growth from below upwards and from above downwards, the maternal aspect (protection, shade, shelter, nourishing fruits, sources of life, solidity, permanence, firm-rootedness, but also being “rooted to the spot”) old age, personality, and finally death and rebirth.” (272). The great trees stand for the maternal force which protects but at the same time confines the limits of the growth for other. The two trees seem to have been inspired in part by the statues of Aphrodite and Artemis that flank the action of Euripides' Hippolytus, and they obviously retain the symbolic value of the statues as embodiments of destructive feminine force. The maternal forces protect Eben from Ephraim’s dictate but he is made paralyzed because of that. Eben could not grow as an adult due to the constant presence of these forces, embodied by the elms. His ‘desires’ could not bloom under the elms. It is only when he overpower these forces, his real identity gets established and his desires; emotional and physical get satisfied. Eben’s maw appears to be like
Hamlet’s father, who in the form of a ghost, seems to say ‘Remember me.’ His mother hangs over the house and lurks in the play; she becomes a deterministic force having potentials just like the gods in Greek drama. The elms symbolises the unconscious elements that affect the individual’s personality. The seemingly peaceful house shows the sign of disintegration as the result of constant tussle between the maternal ‘evil’ force and the inhuman dictate of Ephraim. Simeon suggests it.

The halter’s broke—the harness is busted—the fence bars is down—the stone walls air crumblin’ an’ tumblin’! We’ll be kickin’ up an’ rearin’ away down the road! (DE 334)

The status of the farm and the house are indicative of the clashes present amongst the members of Cabot family. In this sense the characters and the objects in the play display different metaphors.

Conversion of dramatic elements into metaphors transcending the time frame helps to achieve the linkage of these dramatic elements to the timeless ingredients of the myths. Ephraim’s inhuman dictate can be compared with the merciless ruler like Theseus. Ephraim, like Theseus, has many wives. Abbie, just like Phaedra gets physically attracted towards the stepson Eben. Like Phaedra, Abbie conceals her growing passion for Eben with the mask of scorn and also considers her stepson as a rival for the farm and asks the son be banished. Eben, assuming the role of Hippolytus rejects advances of his stepmother. She retaliates by accusing Eben of rape. The curse comes from the father Eben on his child, just like Theseus’ curses Hippolytus. At the end of the play Ephraim, like Theseus, remains alone (God A’mighty, I be lonesomer’n ever! [DE 374]) The complicated relationship among Ephraim-Abbie-Eben can be understood as the clash between emotions and positions on the backdrop of Theseus-Phaedra-Hippolytus myth. The failure to maintain the domestic as well as the moral standards is the common guiding principle in both the myths. The breach of standards is the central element in the play, which seems to be borrowed from the Theseus-Phaedra-Hippolytus myth. The idea of sin is closely related with the breach of such moral, religious and social standards.

Another important issue that encompasses the plot development in the play is the mother-son sexual relationship, incest. Eben hates his father and even wishes to kill him. His frustration with his father is due to the fact his father came in-between
Eben and his mother. He could not share any profitable relationship with his real mother. As a part of revenge against his father’s tyranny, Eben develops sexual relations with his stepmother; Abbie. He thus could manage to remove the arch-signifier father figure and consummate physical relation with his ‘object’ of desire. Eben matches with Oedipus, who also is guilty of committing ‘incest’. Probably the most reworked and adapted Oedipus myth, where the son hates the father and desires the mother is at the foundation of the thematic structure of Desire Under the Elms. Freud sketches a picture of the earliest social grouping in which a dominant primal father excluded the sons from sexual access to the females in the group, developing what he calls “the Darwinian concept of the primal horde.” (Totem and Taboo 182) As stated by Freud, “this totem feast, which is perhaps mankind’s first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restrictions and religion.” (Totem and Taboo 183) Religion is based on this primal sin, produced by patricide – the sense of universal guilt for killing the father, who is the prototype for God. The prohibition of incest and patricide is of great importance in the formation of personality. Freud concluded that “the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art meet in the Oedipus complex.” (Totem and Taboo 202) Eugene O’Neill adopts the ancient ‘Oedipus myth’ to structure his play, Desire Under the Elms. It is the tragedy of desire as it appears in the play, human desire. The principal subject of the play is Cabot’s son, Eben. The desire of the mother is essentially manifested in an idealized and exalted mother. The dependence of Eben’s desire on his mother is the permanent dimension of Eben’s drama. Oedipus myth holds the key to understand the socially and religiously unacceptable behaviour from Eben and Abbie. The tale incest is glorified into ‘a tale of destiny and human predicament’ because of its implicit reference to the Oedipus story. As Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto pointed out, “O’Neill attempts to turn his tale of adultery and infanticide into something of a modern Oedipus, where strong passions gain a kind of glory. The son rebels against the father and covets the father’s wife.” (352) The play shapes itself into the form of tragedy mainly because of the many points of identification with the monumental Oedipus myth.

The issue of infanticide is the third controlling thread in the play along with the sin and incest. Eben’s incestuous relationship with Abbie results in the birth of a son
which would be murdered by his mother, referring to another Greek myth, that of Medea. Jason plans to abandon Medea and marry again. Medea decides to kill his children in order to leave Jason heirless. That is the best punishment for Jason according to Medea. Medea kills the children for the man she has loved. Abbie too just like Medea kills her own son, begotten from Eben to win his confidence. She does commit the most hideous crime to negate Eben’s curse (“I wish he never was born! I wish he’d die this minit! I wish I’d never set eyes on him! It’s him-yew havin’ him-a purpose t’ steal-That’s changed everythin’!” [DE 367]). She shows the strong will to choose from two options- the child or the lover-husband. As Edward L. Shaughnessy expressed, “A mother suffocating her own baby surely constitutes an unnatural act. In Abbie we may be reminded of the daunting will of a Medea or Lady Macbeth.” (98)

The overall content and the structure of Desire Under the Elms are dominated by these three myths, which implicitly influences the dramatic elements like plot, characters, setting and of course point of view. Through the well-crafted interweaving of the mythical elements with the modern American context, especially the Puritanical reference the play demarks what Harold Bloom calls as the ‘anxiety of influence’. By the careful overlapping of past and present the play shows perennial presence of the cultural consciousness, which is available for fresh interpretation.

The play provides different metaphors which help to repeat it in innumerable contexts and contains certain implicit norms and social practices which belonged to the American context of the last decades of the 19th century. The last years of the 19th century, as refereed in the play marked complex socio-political-cultural environment. This time in the American society was marked by the Puritanical influences especially on the domestic and moral lives of the people. The play presents the Cabot family and their life in a village located in the New England locale. It present the agrarian set up. During that period, the family was dependent on the farm as it used to be the chief source of their life. The farm and the agricultural activities were the chief occupation. These activities demanded physical labor and hence the male members in the family were chiefly responsible for carrying them out. The agrarian system held up the patriarchy. The male; usually a father was considered to be the center of such families, with whom all the financial and domestic rights would concentrate. Ephraim Cabot represents this patriarchy. He dominates the agricultural activities as well as the domestic decisions. Such male-centered families were created as a part of larger
American culture, especially in the New England area. The male centered families, maintaining a particular social hierarchy could be seen as the smallest unit of the social structure. The Cabot family is representative of the overall picture of the American society during 1980s.

In the agrarian set up the most crucial work i.e. farm activities prioritised men over women. Women members were responsible for the domestic work which was considered to be secondary to the farm activities. Obviously women were given less importance in the social set up. The women were utilized for doing domestic as well as the agricultural work. New England farm women, as well, practiced a remarkable variety of “the useful arts.”Thus they were doubly exploited without giving any recognition for their labor. Ephraim’s attitude towards his wives demonstrates the same views. He has exploited his two wives by making them toil in the farm endlessly, which costs them to lose their life. He marries Abbie to keep his position as the ‘head’ of the family intact. The women during this period were dominated through the Puritanical ideology whereby they were put under severe restrictions in the name of religion. The imbalanced relationship between man and woman is the basic feature of the New England establishments. Ephraim’s arrogance and excruciating behaviour towards his wives is the main cause of the discourse. He highlights the dominating patriarchal force in the New England culture which mixes the gender and religion to supress the other section of the society. The male domination in the social and family life is the crucial issue that gets highlighted through the play. Phaedra and Medea, the women characters from the underlying myth definitely reveal the victimization of the women at the hands of male especially the powerful ones. Phaedra has to suffer at the whims of Theseus and Medea has to kill her child to prove her innocence. Abbie has to undergo both these painful acts in order to survive in the male dominated world. Thus they confirm that women must stay in their place or bring blight upon themselves and people they love. The attitude towards the women during the last half of the 19th century in the progressive New England gets consolidated through its indirect parallelism with the most developed cultures of the antiquity.

The play takes place in the changing environment where new economic and social patterns replaced the old ones in the 19th century. This century marked a major shift in different sectors of American. The industrial development was leaping towards creating a revolution. New England was the first region of the United States to be
transformed by the Industrial Revolution. The rural inhabitants, especially the unskilled workers started migrating towards the big cities. This caused a great labour problem in villages. This issue got intensified because of the Civil War that happened in 1861-1865. Before that, around 1810 New England played a prominent role in the movement to abolish slavery. As a result the farm owners had to manage their activities with meager resources. There were no workers to toil the fields and hence the big farmers had to depend on the family to carry out the agricultural activities. Ephraim’s insistence on the hard work is result of his religious conviction as well as the social conditions. Even Eben seems to suffer due to this change in the working pattern as he has to shift from domestic work to farm care after Simon and Peter leave the house. Even Ephraim is reluctant to send Eben away from the house because of his utility as a labour. Abbie restrains Ephraim from throwing Eben away by providing this very reason. The changing economic patterns had its impact on the overall society and the family life. During this time another important economic event dominated the American scene was the California Gold Rush (1848-1855). It began on January 24, 1848, when gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in Coloma. News of the discovery soon spread, resulting in some 300,000 people coming to California from the rest of the United States and abroad. Many aspirants like Simon and Peter started looking at this event as the ‘golden’ opportunity to achieve their dreams. They were disgusted with the rural, agricultural life as it was not profitable enough. The easy money attracted them. The Gold Rush was responsible for the disintegration of families like the Cabot. Simon and Peter grabbed the opportunity to escape from Ephraim’s clutches. Their action is a kind of protest not only against Ephraim’s dictate but against the traditional agricultural set up of the New England locality along with the religious dogmas. The stringent religious and social atmosphere suffocated the individuals and deprived them from achieving any materialistic success. The changing conditions of the late 19th century intensified the family conflict.

As goes the saying, the social milieu modifies the domestic set up and the domestic structures shapes the social conditions. The domestic life is typified by the family unit. The family was the crucial part of the New England establishment just as it was the core element of the ancient Greek civilization. Family set up binds the members through some goals and aspirations. They share and care for each other. The family works as a support system for an individual’s emotional, intellectual and even
social grooming. Family is the microcosm of the society. Along with these reasons the family gained lot of importance in the predominantly agricultural set up, where the family members had to manage the entire show. The family was headed by the male, generally a father or a husband, whereas other members would work in different capacities. Thus family developed hierarchy where everyone has his/her own place and opportunity to develop. The members were expected to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of the family. The Cabot family in *Desire Under the Elms* is in way a reflection as well as an exception to this traditional portrayal. Ephraim is the head of the family, around whom the entire family affairs revolve. He decides everything- about the farm, the cattle and the financial distribution. His three sons, though quite senior do not any right to decide anything. They find themselves only at the receiving end at all the times. Simon and Peter wished to leave the house as they feel disgruntled in the absence of any promising opportunity for them. They revolted against Ephraim’s inconsiderate behaviour by leaving the house. Peter throws stone at the Cabot house while leaving it. It is a symbolic protest against the smothery atmosphere of the Cabot family. Both of them opted for the direct revolt whereas Eben challenges the family structure by remaining within it. His opposition to Abbie in the beginning and his incestuous relation with her in the later stage demark the challenge to the family values and integration. The relations in the Cabot family do not appear to be natural but rather strained; their relations are commercial and political than intimate. Eben’s rebellion is not just an outbreak against an individual but probably against the falsely constructed family structure. Family is not a well-knotted unit but it becomes a site of diametrical forces, which create a new fabric of family. In this new fabric the traditional relations like mother-son undergo the drastic transformation whereas the bonding is kept at the cost of the child killing. Just like the pulsating Cabot family, the families in the ancient myths of Phaedra, Oedipus and Medea that govern the dramatic elements of the play do show the flux and dynamic interactions. The Oedipus myth shows the ill effects of family matters on the entire empire. King Oedipus suffers as his country because of the violation of the family norms i.e. the incest. In case of Phaedra myth, the same case of violation brings tragedy to the characters of the royal birth. Medea, just like Abbie prefers to kill her own child for the sake of keeping the unity of the family. The familial relations can be the great source of the inspiration and support for an individual but it also can be destructive for
the members if the family norms are not followed. Ultimately one has to understand the fact that family matters!

The ancient stories though different in matter and message underlines the primacy of destiny and the existence of the superpower. Lives of the characters like Oedipus, Phaedra, Hippolytus and Jeson seems to be predestined. Oedipus could not escape the destiny even though his parents tried to avoid the future consequences by deserting him immediately after the birth. The undercurrents in *Desire Under the Elms* make a plea in favour of the reinstatement of faith in God or some ‘unidentified’ superhuman power. The events in the play are directed towards the specific ends as the most of the characters have lost their bearing with the reality and the divinity. The breach of moral codes would only bring misery and misfortune. One can be faithful towards the superhuman power by being loyal to these moral values. It is extremely necessary to maintain the family ties. The plea to be faithful or at least conscious, which guides the overall texture of the play, could be the result of growing scepticism about the Christianity and its impact on life. It was due to the theories of Charles Darwin and the nihilistic philosophy of thinkers like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, there was a growing discontentment about the function of religion and existence of God. The events in the play, as in the case of Greek myths point out the unavoidable role of fate/superhuman power. One cannot ignore the impacting role of these transcendental powers and if one does so he has to face the consequences for it. Eben and Abbie are united at the end of the play however they have to pay the cost of their child for their immoral behaviour. In the same way Ephraim, due to his dominance and hypocrisy is condemned to live all alone. Thus everyone undergoes some sort of punishment because of the transgressive, non-serious behaviour.

The use of the word ‘desire’ and the constant presence of elms signify the unknown and unacknowledged forces that keep operating on the human minds. The presence of some mystery which goes beyond the realistic, naturalistic and positivist ideas of life recurs continually in attempts to define modern tragedy. George Steiner, in the context of the modern tragedy emphasizes the "inexplicable" (128) nature of the forces that destroy the protagonist, forces "which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence." (8) The Tragic element lies life forces are not explainable by way of rationality and scientific analysis. As Steiner explains, the antithesis of tragedy lies not necessarily in comedy but in didacticism, naturalism and
the literature of social criticism, a literature which reduces man's nature and experience
to knowable quantities and hence views all his ills, individual and social, as
remediable. (8) The under textual presence of three Greek myths make it inevitable
argument in favour of the antirationalistic, mystical view that believe in the ‘Force
behind and beyond’ the happenings. Desire Under the Elms contains so many
elements to corroborate the mystical forces e.g. Eben's Oedipus complex goes beyond
any scientific or rational explanation. In the modern adaption the character still exhibit
the fusion of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ concept of fate just like the ancient characters. In
Greek tragedy, action proceeded through the combination of distinguishable human
traits, i.e. character and supernatural forces which register reaction against some
breach of the cosmic order. Thus human and divine are the two planes at which the
action is seen simultaneously. The presence of this superhuman force gets expressed
through Simeon when he says, "No one never kills nobody. It's allus some thin'. That's
the murderer." (DE 322) When Eben asks "What's somethin'?" he replies "dunno." (DE
322) Simeon underlines the fact that such superhuman force is unrecognizable. The
play shows the two levels of superhuman forces; the first level exhibits direct
influences that are operating on the characters—Cabot's Old Testament god, the ghost,
the mystic "Desire". The second level directs towards more distant, more inhuman and
enigmatic will. Abbie refers to this mysterious force when she corrects Eben when he
explains their passion as retribution on Cabot. The force she evokes here is something
much vaster than the hard God Ephraim serves: it can be called Moira, the ultimate
will of the universe itself. Moira signifies as ‘destiny, share or fate’. Abbie seems to be
conscious of its presence. Thus their plight is not exclusively created by them but by
the ‘unknown’ force.

The plays of O'Neill are for the most part unpleasant plays, wrought out of
agony and pain of life. His most successful characters are people of rather
primitive instincts, misfits, suffering from disease, economic inhibitions,
frustrations, from soul-destroying powers which they cannot understand. The poor souls are usually beaten in the battle of life by a
force either within or outside themselves that makes for their confusion
and ruin. (Whitman qtd. in Winther 11)

The play as stated in the above expression emphasizes the centrality mysterious
force, Moira which is even central force in the Greek tragedies. Desire Under the
Elms, therefore is described as "the first of O'Neill's works in which the influence of Greek tragedy is clearly manifest" (Gelb 539). The play makes a strong statement in favour of the inability of human characters to comprehend and control their own lives. The play makes one understand the complex nature of human life which cannot be understood with logic, rationality or scientific attitude. It can be observed that Desire Under the Elms is not a simple adaptation of the Greek myths but it combines the complex aspects like psychological, social, moral, ethical, philosophical and metaphysical of human life by correlating to the timeless human aspirations and pains available in myths. The play, by evoking the ancient events and the colossal tragedy of the mythical characters, brings forth the questioning attitude towards the rationalist, scientific and positivist approach during the 19th and 20th century in America.

Interestingly enough the play does not just proceed to highlight certain rudimentary yet crucial aspects of the New England cultural context but it implicitly questions the same cultural aspects by presenting a counter critique. Cultural sphere is not the static field but a site where oppositional forces are confronted and harmonized. The play while implicitly referring to the three ancient stories- Phaedra, Oedipus and Medea generates the counterpoints of actions by challenging the traditional, established views and practices. As discussed earlier the play makes an advocative argument to reinstate the faith in the cosmic, mysterious force (Moira), it also argues in the favour looking at the concept of God with a fresh outlook. The play through its actions especially those of Eben and Abbie pose a counterview to the issue of divinity. The play seems to present an argument against the Puritanical concept of God and religion. Puritanism is generally understood as the religious reform movement initiated by John Clave in Europe in 16th century inspired by a spirit of moral and religious earnestness. The replica of it was to be founded in America during 18th century when it got established as an institution dominating the spiritual, political and cultural domain.

Puritans believed that it was necessary to be in a covenant relationship with God in order to redeem one from one’s sinful condition. To the Puritans, a person by nature was inherently sinful and corrupt, and only by severe and unremitting discipline could they achieve good. The Puritans believed in the innate depravity of man. They also believed that some people were “predestined” to experience an afterlife with God. One cannot choose salvation, because that is the privilege of God alone. God therefore is the supreme authority to decide the fate of an individual. Each person
should be constantly reformed by the grace of God to combat the “indwelling sin” and do the right before God. Thus, they considered hard work a religious duty and laid emphasis on constant self-examination and self-discipline. The followers of God should be sober, hardworking, and responsible. Puritans believes that their religious purity and salvation could be achieved through self-discipline, self-improvement and their hard work. The concept of a covenant or contract between God and his elect holds central position in Puritanical way of life. There are several types of covenants which are central to Puritan thought: the Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, and Covenant of Redemption. Thus the Puritanical ideals perceive God as the supreme as well as hard to please. The image that Old Testament projects is of a "Killer God," a God who seems to be saying, "If you love Me and do what I tell you, everything will be fine and I'll give you eternal life. But if you don't, I'll have to destroy you. His justice is demonstrated, we are told, by the punishment given at the Judgement to those who don't accept and follow Him, the punishment of burning forever or burning for at least some period of time. Ephraim’s behaviour is clearly inspired by the image of God as ‘hard’. He endorses these views about the life and God through his behaviour. He looks at his toil in the farm as a preparation towards salvation. He could not allow any relaxation for his family from these unwritten rules about work and family life. He has in a way sacrificed his earlier wives for the sake of upholding the Puritanical values.

Paradoxically his views are challenged within his own family. Simeon and Peter feel extremely disgruntle about Ephraim’s hardships without any gain. They leave the house and the farm in order to get the gold, which Puritans kept at a distance in their life. Gold in California suggests the material prosperity and also a new way of living life which is different from Puritanical way. Eben poses the greatest opposition to Ephraim and his ideological foundations. Eben does not believe in the hard work as a way of satisfying God. He therefore helps Simeon and Peter to get way from the farm. During the course of the play Eben is successful in showing the double standards followed by Ephraim under the name of religion and God. Ephraim is so very obsessive about the farm, not because it is related to the pleasing of the Hard God but to maintain his own power position. Ephraim’s dictate his inhuman behaviour with the family members, his three marriages, his visits to Minnie; all these indicate the immoral and selfish acts on the part of him. Eben on the other hand shows a more
considerate, mild way of perceiving reality where a man is allowed to more natural. The New Testament presents more of a ‘benevolent God’ than the hard God. When Jesus came to earth, He came to reveal the complete character of God. Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." (John 14:9) 'I and My Father are one." John (10:30) Eben is looking towards a more assured way of salvation which the New Testament offers. Jesus came to die for sinners, to pay our penalty for sins, and to save those who accept Him. The polysemic positions of the father and the son are indicative of the fact that even the domain of religion and the concept of God are not monolithic but it is open for contestation and interpretation.

The play seems to challenge at many levels the monotheist outlook of the Christianity where certain binary category are positioned to know and judge human life like good and evil, innocence and knowledge, salvation and damnation, God and Satan etc. Simon and Peter represent this dichotomy of the Christian ideas. The Christian ideas of general good and bad are not accepted. Instead the individual’s perception about the evil and the good is projected... Instead the play embodies the more flexible, accommodative ideas related to the morality. The multivalence of opinions could be seen in the way Eben looks at his relationship with Abbie. He feels that they are blessed with true love and hence there is hint of dawn at the end of the play. Their relation according to the Christian standards is immoral and liable for punishment. Eben and Abbie do not feel guilty about their relationship.

ABBIE—(lifting her head as if defying God) I don’t repent that sin! I hain’t askin’ God t’ forgive that!

EBEN--- Nor me—but it led up t’ the other ..... (DE 375)

The play in such short instances neutralizes the Christian influences. The overall structure of the play appears to subvert the fundamental Christian idea of Trinity- a father/God, a son/Jesus and the Holy Spirit. These three elements are represented by Ephraim, Eben and the maternal force respectively. The congenial relation between a father God and a son, Jesus is absolutely absent here rather the father-son relation is fierce. The son disowns his father and the father is ready to kill his son for the sake of pleasure. The Christian idea, "I and My Father are one” is devastated. The father and sons do not share anything in common. The two elder sons leave the house whereas Eben deserts the father at the end. Ephraim remain alone at
the end. There is a spirit present in the play. However it is not ‘holy’. It is rather sinister and destructive in nature. The constant presence of elms, brooding over the Cabot house represents the evil force in the human life which goes against the very idea of the Holy Spirit. Even the positive idea of maternal spirit, of course symbolized by Mother Merry is deconstructed in the play. The presence of the maternal spirit in the Cabot house creates negative impact on Eben. He remains into the ‘infant like conditions where he is obsessed with his mother’s memories. Abbie releases him from this dominant force. Thus the sanctity of the Trinity is totally subverted during the play. The play thus announces strong sentiments against the traditional ideals especially the dogmas in it. The New England locale probably represents the demand for ‘new’ ways of looking at the reality including the religion. The play ends when the sun is about to rise. Eben acknowledges it, “Sun’s a-rizin’. Purty, hain’t it?” (DE 377) This is an indication of a dawn, a new beginning towards a more assured, self-defining and progressive tomorrow. Though they are punished legally, they are convinced that they are not committed any crime.

The names of all the characters too show the different in the conventional meaning and their behaviour. Ephraim meant fruitful in Hebrew. In the Old Testament he is the son of Joseph and the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel. “For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction” (Genesis .XLI. 52). Ephraim Cabot on the contrary is the source of his own and his family’s fall. The name becomes even more ironic when at the end of the play it becomes clear that the baby is Eben’s and not his. Eben comes from the word Ebenezer, which in Hebrew means stone of help. It was the name of a monument erected by Samuel in the Old Testament. Eben, very ironically does not prove to be the stone of help or the stone of hope. He is constantly in strife and rivalry with his father. He even betrays his father by forming an incestuous relationship with Abbie, his step mother. Simon and Peter are the names of the same person; i.e. Simon means "hearing;" Peter means "stone". Simon is the extension of Peter. It is Peter who first picks up a rock to cast at his father threatening to rape his new wife. All of them are contrary in nature and behaviour to the significance attached to their names.

While deconstructing the religious fabric, the play also puts the issue of ‘center’ and ‘hero’ under serious scanning. There is no single hero in the play unlike the Greek or Shakespearian tragedies. Ephraim is in no way a hero by any standards.
He dictates the actions but he does not have the aura like Kreon or magnanimity of Lear. Eben is no hero at all, rather he is an anti-hero. He is physically charming but lacks self-identity. Even he is physically weak and mentally paralyse. He used Abbie, a woman as a weapon in his battle against Ephraim. Abbie too does not possess ‘heroic’ qualities. She is beautiful but she is wicked also. She lacks innocence like Desdemona or she could not stand for any principle like Antigone. She can be called as ‘corrupt’ and ‘opportunist’. Simeon and Peter remain always on the periphery. Thus in no way there is a hero or heroine in the traditional sense in *Desire Under the Elms*. In addition there is no central viewpoint that encompasses the entire action and structure of the play. Eben and Ephraim present distinctive rather opposite view points to look at the things. They represent two opposite tendency to perceive the world around and respond to it. Their relationship can be elaborated through Nietzsche’s ideas of ‘forces’. Nietzsche in *Birth of Tragedy* figures out that Greek tragedies were founded upon the everlasting conflict between forces of rationality, balance, meditativeness represented by the god Apollo and the wild, creative power, vigorous, the impulse to exploit and explore represented by the god Dionysus. The Dionysians are tragic figures because they stand for change, through their actions. They are disfavored by the gods and are seen as rebels. The Dionysians can be understood as the countering element to Apollonian force. There is constant dialectic between them. Nietzsche observes that when the Dionysian prevailed, the Apollonian was routed and annihilated.

In the play Ephraim is identified with the Apollonian force while the Dionysian force is located in Eben and Abbie. Their love relation shows the emotional, intimate, erotic and wild aspects which generally stand in opposition to the rational and established. Abbie transcends her limits as a wife. She takes Eben’s mother’s place; she is his beloved-mother. She exhibits creative force when she becomes pregnant. In her presence the farm becomes warm and fertile, and she and the farm become as one. Eben achieves masculine identity in her presence. He goes out of the limits of the stony walls of the farm and shows readiness to face the consequences of his action. He calls the authorities after Abbie murders the child however he stands firm with her in sharing the crime. Eben is possessive about the farm as he identified it with his mother. Abbie later on replaces his mother. Now she is identified with the farm. At the end Eben possesses Abbie, emotionally and physically and he is even ready to give
away his farm for her sake. By breaking the correlation between the farm and Abbie, Eben displays what Nietzsche referred to as “self-renunciation” as he chooses one over the other. The anti-Dionysian force in the play is embodied by Ephraim, who is an astute Puritan. He is connected with radical, Old-Testament Supreme Being. He is identified with the physical zeal and the life carved out of the stone. His efforts are always directed towards ‘building’ an order and consolidating it. Nietzsche refers to the Dionysian’s taking down Apollonian culture stone by stone, as if that culture had been built in the same way Ephraim erected the stone walls on his farm. Through Nietzsche’s imagery the central conflict between a man who stands for a life of hardship and self-sacrifice and another one who endeavors to achieve ‘a Dionysian intoxication’. It is not just a conflict between two individuals but moreover an eternal battle between the natural and disciplined, impulses and intelligence, masculine vigour and female creativity, hierarchy and disorder. The play definitely carries overtones which refer to the conflict between the unidimensional, orderly, monolithic and monotheistic Christianity and multivalent, not well-knit, polytheistical ancient Pagan religion. The play carries ‘farm’ as a strong symbol which is a representative of the pre-industrial world and especially the ancient civilizations based on agricultural. It is absolutely sure that *Desire Under the Elms* tries to reinvent the ancient culture and tendencies of life by making repeated references to mythical characters and the innate force they embodied. It is probably the inadequacy of the present intellectual, philosophical and theological tool-kit to fix the ‘modern’ fault and hence the ancient religion, culture and characters are asked for the uniting purpose. The modern chaos and disorder could not probably even comprehensible unless the overarching, engulfing system like myth is not reinstated.

The deconstructive Dionysian force continues to make its presence felt through the actions of Eben and Abbie. Eben has established earlier transforms from the embryonic conditions to more assured self, having masculine identity. He could not set any kind of meaningful relation with anyone as he is always haunted by his mother’s spirit. He suffers from what Freud refers as ‘Oedipus complex’. Abbie emancipated him from these mental confines by being his mother and beloved at a time. Eben reciprocates her after the initial resistance. He starts identifying his desires; both material and physical-emotional with her. His incestuous relation with her is a kind of freedom for his own created protected world. It is more of his psychological need than
just a physical desire. He commits this ‘immoral’ act and even begets a child out of it. In the traditional sense, especially on the Puritanical background such sexual licentiousness is non-pardonable. Eben does not approve of this social norm. He accepts his relationship with Abbie and even stands by her in the crime of killing their child. Thus he shows the readiness to face the punishment for the infanticide but not for his relation with Abbie. Unlike Oedipus, Eben is charged with the idea of physical and mental retribution for the forbidden sexual acts, even though unintentionally done. In case Eben he does this act with consciousness and therefore he is solely responsible for it. Oedipus does it unknowingly and largely due to the forces of destiny. Eben refuses to follow the traditional rules regarding the incest as shown by the Greek myth. He would rather prefer to use it for ousting Ephraim’s dictate and establishing his own identity as a ‘capable man’. Incest is not just a sexual act for his but moreover it is an act of discovering himself. His act paves new order in the family as he and Abbie would be husband and wife and Ephraim is displaced as a husband and as a master. For Eben incest is not a taboo, and hence there is question of breaching it. He therefore does not feel guilty about it and does not feel the mental pangs like Oedipus. In the Greek culture incest was looked at the one the most heinous crime along with the infanticide. The wrongdoer had to undergo the punishment which would be physically very taxing. The plucking of eyes by Oedipus is a symbolic retribution of this act.

Eben’s ‘unconventional’ viewpoint reflects the modern attitude towards the issue of incest. Incest becomes the source of challenging the patriarchal regulations and structures. As Eben does the act of incest consciously there is every reason to look at it as an act of rebellion. Apart from psychological/libidinal impulses, there could other ‘desires’ that motivate such socially boycotted a thing. The act of possessing someone or something shows the attempt to appropriate it. Eben looks at his relation with Abbie as an opportunity to possess the land. He is probably looking for getting permanent ownership of the farm by possessing Abbie and begetting a child. In both cases Ephraim would lose the control of the farm and the family. By possessing the possession of his father, Eben initiates a process of re-arrangement of familial and social hierarchies. Hence the incestuous relationship, though morally unacceptable, can be examined in a broader scope as a ‘social mechanism’, as illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari. In their view the land, or territory, is the basis of capitalism which may bring forth a ‘schizophrenic social system’. It stimulates individuals to subvert or
deterritorialize, and then re-territorialize, social groupings, so as to confirm one’s own
standing. Anyone from family, institution or group which occupy a practical or
theoretical “territory,” can undertake the venture of restructuring or re-territorializing
in social system at some point of time. “What they deterritorialize with one hand, they
reterritorialize with the other.” (Deleuze and Guattari 257) Even Ephraim sees Abbie
as a site of re-territorializing his desire, which assures him both physical province as
well as the surety about the future by being a father. Eben too, apart from his
psychological needs, is motivated by the sense of de-territorializing the Ephraim
owned farm. Abbie is the main pawn in this possession game for him. He extends his
limits physically through the sexual relationship and politically through his dominance
as a father and master. Abbie’s killing of her own child can be seen as her way of re-
territorializing where she charts out her relations by delimiting it to Eben only. In this
sense, her action of infanticide is an act, using Deleuze and Guattari’s expression, of
‘decodification of her desire’—desire that was subject to the puritanical sense of
morality in New England. Eben thus not only gives rise to the rebellion through
Abbie’s physical possession but he also effects a re-arrangement of social hierarchies.

In the line of rebels along with Eben his love Abbie can be fitted. Abbie as
discussed in the previous chapter is a rebel against both- Eben and Ephraim. She uses
both of them for her physical and material satisfaction. She belongs to the lower social
strata and she is beautiful. She knows how to encash her beauty. She marries the man
in eighties; Ephraim when she is just in her early thirties. This is an indication of
her material interests behind the marriage. She gets attracted to Eben in their first
encounter only. Abbie thus finds her territory to explore; by targeting Ephraim for the
wealth and by seducing Eben for physical satisfaction. It is reversal of the patriarchal
order where a woman is exploited at the hands of the male domination. In case of
Abbie, she occupies the central position by creating her need for the male members in
the society. She continues to exploit the rift between Eben and Ephraim till the
decisive point when she has to choose amongst Eben, their child, Ephraim and the
farm. She finally chooses Eben for her sheer passion for him. Abbie sacrifices her
child, just like the legendary Medea for the sake of saving her relation with Eben.
Abbie shows the intelligent mode of thinking rather than emotional one which is
generally characteristically attributed to women. Abbie right from the beginning shows
this intelligent mode of behaviour where she almost ruthlessly keeps Ephraim away
from her and at the same time masters Eben as per her desire. She manages to keep the differences alive in Eben and Ephraim for keeping her position intact. She wants to possess the farm at any cost. She wants her child to inherit the ownership after Ephraim. She is quite sure that Ephraim could not give her son. She therefore uses Eben as the instrument to serve her purpose. Abbie thus is different from other women. She is uncharacteristically different from the common women. She is a deadly combination of beauty and brain. She has some goal in the mind. Her actions appear to be illogical and impulsive but they are carefully carved out them to achieve some purpose. Abbie promises to be different woman, ‘new’ women as perceived by John Goode.

In the essay ‘Sue Bridehead and the New Woman’, John Goode illustrates the concept of the ‘new woman’, who is neither stereotyped nor a puppet in the hands of male dictates. She does not accept the established norms of ‘expected’ behaviour and therefore most of the time is a subject of hatred and apathy and even fear. The ‘new woman’ is not a representative woman, who can be categorized in any way. The ‘new woman’ is ‘peculiar’ in her behaviour. As John Goode says about the Hardy-heroine, Sue, “She not only speaks for herself because she is an intelligent rebel, she is called on to speak for herself” (412) is true for all new women. Abbie possesses all the attributes of the ‘new’ women. She is intelligent and she knows where to use that intelligent. Abbie like the ‘new’ woman does not protest about everything but chooses her area of protest. Her ‘peculiarity’ lies in her way of handling her protest against male domination. She chooses to accept Eben at the emotional and physical level but continues to accept Ephraim at the social level. She maneuvers her protest through the strategy of selective negotiations. With her unconventional logic, the ‘new woman’ seems to destroy the lives of order-loving individuals, who follow conventional, male originated social systems. Abbie is chiefly responsible in changing the order in the Cabot family. The ‘new woman’ remains in comprehensible to those who view her in the conventional manner. She becomes a force which counters the ideology of the established class. Abbie’s self-awakening can be traced in the same sequence of protest or rejection of patriarchal modes against them and finally self-discovery. Abbie embodies the spirit of the ‘New’ women by being alert, intelligent and pragmatic. She deconstructs the conventional image of the woman in the patriarchy. She comes from very humble background but she changes her fortune by being brave. Abbie is the
abbreviated form of the name Abigail. The intelligent, beautiful Abigail was Old Testament King David's third wife, described as 'good in discretion and beautiful in form. Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms* seems to match this description.

*Desire Under the Elms* is a play that can be called as more than a tragedy of the Cabot family, of course because of its association with multiple myths. These myths not only influence overall content and structure of the play, but it brings the complex issues in the modern American culture and especially the changing scenario of the Puritanism in the 20th century. By connecting the past to the present, the play focuses on the constant oscillation between the timeless and temporal elements within any culture.
2.2: *Greek* – Steven Berkoff

*Greek* a play written by the contemporary British playwright Steven Berkoff, which was first performed on 11 February, 1980 at the Half Moon Theatre, London. The play is part of the *Steven Berkoff: The Collected Plays, Volume I* published in 1994. The action in the play is in the Tufnell Park in London. The play consists of the following characters.

- Eddy - a low –class born person who goes to become a rich and reputed person
- Dad and Mum - his parents
- Dorren - Eddy’s sister
- Eddy’s Wife - a waitress, whom Eddy meets in the hotel
- Fortune-Teller
- Manager of Café - previous husband of Eddy’s wife, killed by Eddy in fighting
- Sphinx - the creature combing human and animal element, responsible for the city’s curse
- Waitress I
- Waitress II

Outline of the play:

The play opens with Eddy’s explanation about his humble beginnings within a blue-collar family in the London borough of Tufnell Park. His parents, for fun, go visit a gypsy during a carnival who tells them that Eddy would kill his father and sleep with his mother in the bed. Eddy then leaves home to stop the mental sufferings of his family. During his travels, he rests at a café. Eddy gets into an argument with the manager of the restaurant and then kills him. Eddy then runs off with the manager’s wife, a waitress, and marries her. Eddy speaks of his new marriage. Both of them are happy as they proved the gypsy’s prophecy wrong. At the end of the first act Eddy’s Mum and Dad are questioning if they should have told Eddy that he is not their son. Yet, they decide it is not important and they will discuss it with him at a later date.

The second act begins with a decade passed. The plague is almost over, but to ensure its end Eddy must solve the sphinx’s riddle: “what walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening?” To which Eddy responds, “Man! In the morning of his life he is on all fours, in the afternoon when he is young he is on two legs and in the evenings when he is erect for his women he
sprouts the third leg.” By solving the riddle, Eddy has killed the sphinx and ended the plague. Things continue to get better for Eddy. He gains wealth, travels around the world, and is ever devoted and in love with his wife. One evening, Eddy and his wife invite his parents over to dinner to prove to them that the gypsy’s prophecy all those years ago was a scam. It is during this meal that it is revealed that Eddy is not their blood, but instead adopted. His parents explain how they acquired Eddy, which matches the story of how his wife lost a son years prior. Eddy then realizes that the gypsy’s prophecy was true.

Yet in the end, Eddy does not reach the same conclusion as his Grecian counterpart. Eddy does not go blind or lose his wife with the revelation; instead he chooses to remain with his wife/mother. Eddy refuses to suffer the same fate as Oedipus, portraying the ideals of the 1980s. He remains committed to his wife-mother as he was to his wife. He feels that though he is driven out of the paradise, he will surely get a place in heaven.
2.2.1

‘The Unimaginable Wastelands’: Discourse of Degradation

No human being can remain alien to the social and cultural forces. His life especially mental life is formed by the complex matrix of the socio-cultural influences. In this way every human being a ‘social’ construct. It has been proved time and again that ‘human consciousness’ is necessarily a social product. He perceives the things in the ways taught to him and he responds to the social happenings accordingly. In the postmodern times the relation between the social-cultural set up and the individual is extremely complex and even problematic as the society does not provide a congenial atmosphere to any individual all the time. It creates many intricacies in an individual’s life as social and cultural set ups are ideologically and politically influenced. The Berkoff play; Greek is an exemplification of this intricate and formative relationship between the man and the milieu. Eddy, the young protagonist of 1980’s can be seen as the contemporary version of Oedipus. He shares his fate with the Greek King. He suffers the mental pangs of committing the most sinful act of incest and patricide. He goes through the cycle of events – the prophecy, the plague, destruction, revelation, and retribution just like Oedipus. Though the end differs, the events bring tragedy and pathos. Eddy therefore can be called as the modern Oedipus. The striking difference between the two versions would be largely due to the socio-cultural conditions that weave the complex discourse around Eddy. Eddy revolts at the end unlike King Oedipus and yet he gains sympathy. The series of events remains the same in case of Eddy however those events occur in a totally different milieu. The same things gain different values and perceptions with the new type of setting. The discourse of prevailing conditions is the most crucial factor behind Eddy’s behavior and thinking. It is therefore necessary to survey the important social-cultural happening on the background of which Eddy’s tragedy receives emphatic projection.

Eddy is born in such a time and place which Berkoff describes as ‘the unimaginable wastelands’ where there is only degradation at all levels. Everything has reached to its mean end and tragically no one feels guilty for that. Though the formal setting is of England during 1980s, the milieu represents the overall decay of the western civilization symbolically. Reasons may be any but the fact of the matter remains the same that there is overall degradation of the situation. Eddy is born in the
lower middle class society, whose values and perpectives about life have changed drastically as compared to the past. The social conditions are fast degrading, where people can be seen as more concerned with their ‘physical pleasures’ than anything else. The living conditions too are horrible to sustain any quality. Eddy has the consciousness about this social degradation. He expresses his disgust in the following way,

It’s a cesspit, right … a scum hole dense with the drabs who prop up corner pubs, the kind of pub where ye old arseholes assemble …(*Greek 101 henceforth referred as GR*)

The very images of ‘cesspit’ and ‘a scum hole’ convey the life of animals, especially the rat-life, which is the most unpleasant thing. The social life is full of pubs which are propped up, a kind of unnatural and unwanted growth. Pub represents the low condition of civilization where people assemble to have fun. Interestingly these pubs are flooded with the old people. Old people who represents the past, are supposed to be the transformer of the ethical and cultural life. They are the ones who function as the backbone of the social setup. Paradoxically these old people seem to only enjoy the material pleasures. It is quite symbolic that the past fails to provide any assistance to the present and hence the present is diseased. The old ones keep on talking about the petty things like drinks or football matches. They do not have any hope for future. The atmosphere in the pub is ‘stinky’ as it is full of the old people, who lack any kind of zest and hope. Eddy is utterly disgusted with these scenes in the pubs. He faces the manager and his wife, who rob the people. Hence Eddy prefers to stay away from such pubs, “…. So I gave up going to the corner pub with its late night chorus of lurchy…” (*GR102*) It is so filthy and stinky that any young man cannot take his woman there. (…. now could you take her to that pub? [*GR102*]) It just does not depict the scenario in the pubs but comments on the overall decaying conditions of the contemporary society.

Eddy seems to be not only uncomfortable with the old people in the pub but his own relatives. He is extremely critical about those old relatives who line up at his house for ‘Xmas’ party. These people do not have any significant work to do in life. Life is a kind of pastime for them. These are the people, “Who stand all year doing as little as they can while they had one hand in the boss’s till and the other scratching their balls.” (*GR101*) Eddy’s criticism shows the material occupations and the
commercial intentions of the relatives. The old people have the habit of hating the blacks and the young people for no reason at all.

…. rare against the blacks, envying their cocks, loathe the yids, envying their gelt …. hate everything under thirty that walks and fall asleep in front of the telly …. (GR101)

Eddy brings out the dominating and narrow mentality of the seniors where they try to assert their superiority over the blacks and the young ones. Their hatred against black reveals their ‘white’ (racial) superiority complex. Their criticism of the black and the young is a kind of ideological formation through which they demean both the classes. The senior whites represent the colonial or the feudal mentality even though they are living in the democratic setup. Their demeaning could be seen as a discursive strategy by which they keep themselves at the ‘center’ and create ‘others’. Through these small instances, the hierarchies in the minds, though not in reality get revealed. It is an indirect statement about the ‘uncivilized’ status of the blacks and the ‘non-serious’ attitude towards the young people. Both the perceptions are ‘created’ to keep the domination of a particular ‘class’ and ‘race’ intact. Thus the social conditions are diminishing fast but the old people refuse to change the social order. They are rigid and non-accommodative about the margins. It is an indication of the hidden struggle between the new and emerging against the established. Eddy thus brings forth the issue of social stability through these observations. Under the garb of democratic setup, most civilizations retain their old hierarchies. Eddy is the representative of that generation which is young, aspiring, but has to remain on the periphery due to these hierarchies. There are no intimate bonds between the members of the society. It is not a conglomerative structure but rather ‘a heap of broken images’.

The social division and degradation at the macro level has its impact on the family setup at micro level. Eddy introduces his house as, “well it is a bit grotty but homely in a sickly sort of way …. “ (GR103) It creates a very somber picture of Eddy’s family. He furthers elaborates their status.

A few crumbs on the carpet, some evil photos of my sister on the mantelpiece and a picture of granny looking like Mussolini in drag which they all looked like in those far off days of pre-history, the poodle’s shit again behind the cocktail cabinet. (GR103)
The above description creates a picture of lower-class life of a worker or a peasant in the modern society. The lack of financial abundance has resulted in the average life, which is presented by the symbol of ‘crumbs’. The lower stratum of the family is indicated by the display of the sister’s photograph on the mantelpiece. It indicates the low aesthetic taste of the family. The reference to Mussolini keeps the World War II context alive even in the 1990s. Mussolini was a dictator and he is criticized for that. There are different types of dictators who exist in various forms in the society. The photograph of granny connects past and present on this point. Eddy’s life is aptly described as providing subtle clues about the external and inner life. The seemingly average yet normal life is pressed by some type of dominance. This could be taken as the representative emotion of the entire group where they feel pressurized or dominated by some force, either political or economic. The life of lower class is confined in the concerns which are already fixed by the dominant forces. It is non-happening, mundane and extremely orthodox life, which people like Eddy are condemned to live. His negative or hopeless attitude towards the life gets reflected in his perception of the atmosphere.

I look out of the window and see the grey clouds of Tottenham stray across the window pane …. a tiny silver of sun is struggling to peep through, sees what it has to shine and thinks “fuck it – is it worth it’ and beats a retreat …. (GR103)

Eddy’s unalluring personal life is juxtaposed with the degrading external conditions. The grey clouds matches with Eddy’s life colour, which represents ‘inbetweeness’ or ‘mixture of black and white’. It is difficult for Eddy to adjust with life of this sort. His response therefore can be seen as the reaction to such degrading life.

Eddy’s reaction to his mundane and dull life is quiet surprising. Instead of mourning the greyness of his life, he prefers to enjoy the pleasures physically. He indulges himself with petty physical relationship with women. He seems to enjoy their company as against anything in the world. He hates going to the pubs but he prefers ‘wine bars’ where ‘you take your favourite woman there’ (GR102) Eddy seems ecstatic in the company of women as he enjoys physical pleasures with them. He elaborately describes ‘his’ woman.
My woman very nice mate, looks life she’s been just minted and sharp as new mown grass, knickers as white as Xmas, eyes like the bluest diamonds …. a pair of fiery red rubies for lips, the light hits them and shatters your eyes, she smiles and your heart leaps into your throat and you carry a demon between your thighs and up to your chin … the whole time …. I wear shades to protect myself against the brightness of her teeth. 

(\textit{GR 102})

The expansive description of ‘his’ woman by Eddy seems to miss the spiritual element. He looks at relationships from the physical view only. The body is rather more important thing for him. It is the only source of pleasure. The emotion of love too is degraded and desires prevail than genuine feelings. For Eddy she is just ‘a woman’ and not a human being. She is a site for exploration at physical level only. He remarks, “I swim in her like I was plunging into the Jordan for a baptism.” (\textit{GR 102}) Eddy’s response towards the tender feeling of love is only at the physical level. Eddy even fails to respond in the more intimate manner when he accidently kills the hotel manager and praises his wife, a waitress. He attracts her attention with the following words,

I’ll rather treat you fair and square and touch your hair at night and kiss your sleeping nose …. I’ll heave my scepter in thee / your things I’ll praise apart and sink like hot stone into butter / into an ocean of ecstasy for that’s what you are to me / an ecstasy of flesh and blood …. (\textit{GR 118})

Eddy thus thinks about the man-woman relationship at the level of ‘flesh and blood’ only. This is a kind of moral, ethical degradation for him. He is a part of the rotten society and he has been influenced by the external moral corruption. Probably it is an indication that Eddy has accepted only one level of relationship i.e. physical, having no scope for any tender sentiments and spiritual base. Eddy here can be seen as the ‘sufferer’ or ‘victim’ of the degrading social conditions. Discursive formations decide the responses of the people, who are a part of such formations. They are ultimately convinced that things can be appreciated or responded in the particular way only. Eddy’s behavior can be seen as ‘fixed’ or ‘determined’ by the external social conditions. If there is a rampant moral, physical and emotional corruption in all walks of life, an individual cannot save himself from it for a long time.
Eddy’s life changes drastically with an unexpected event, which too has its origin in the social conditions. Eddy’s father informs him about the gypsy’s prophecy about Eddy when he was a small child. The gypsy foretells about Eddy, “…. he sees a violent death for this son’s father …. Something worse than death / and that’s a bunk-up with his mum ….” (GR104) The gypsy clearly pronounces the incest and the patricide at the hands of Eddy. This unwanted prediction devastates Eddy’s domestic life because he leaves the house and goes away from his parents as the ‘safe’ way. Eddy’s relationship with his parents undergoes a sea change after the second prophecy of the same sort after fifteen years. His parents are suddenly skeptic about his behavior. Eddy’s dad asks him,

What do you make of it son / you don’t fancy your old mum do you son!
You don’t want to kill me do you boy? (GR 106)

Eddy’s life is upturned because of this. Although lower and unexcited, his cozy, small world is destroyed by the unknown person. A gypsy’s prophecy is responsible to change Eddy’s life drastically. It is because of this prophecy that Eddy is forced to leave the house. He meets the hotel waitress and kills the manager. He marries the waitress than and leaves happily. After a gap of ten years, Eddy comes to know that the hotel manager and the waitress are his real parents. Though the gypsy’s prophecy becomes true, it creates ‘unwanted’ complication in his calm, peaceful life. The problems in his personal life are intensified because of the degrading social conditions. Eddy perceives that London is suffering from a plague. He watches ‘the garbage-filled London Street.’ His dad too feels, ‘the rats are on the march’ and ‘the country’s in a state of plague’. Thus there is disturbance and filth outside as well as inside Eddy. He seems to suffer from the ‘emotional’ plague as London suffers from the ‘physical’ plague. Eddy seems to have lost his self-belief after the revelation of the prophecy.

…. fancy my mum! I could sooner go down on Hitler, than do anything my old so gravely feared …(GR106)

The gypsy’s prophecy has resulted in the self-destruction of Eddy’s personality and conviction. The gypsy’s are generally known for such prophecies, which are widely believed. They are completely irrational or illogical. In spite of this, a large section of society seems to believe in their predictions for no reasons. This can be seen
to take place not in ancient times only but also in modern and highly civilized societies. They are the part of common sense acceptance, like most of the ideological formations. Such prophecies like myths are the part of commonsense acceptance and hence no one seems to question them. It is taken as ‘normal’ or ‘true’ by almost everyone. Such predictions create different assumptions either about an ‘individual’ or a class / group. The individual may suffer because of such predications and may pay heavy cast for it. Prophecies are ‘hegemonical’ in this sense as they seem to engulf the consciousness of the entire civilization or culture. They create images and functions. They attach individuals with certain labels and qualities. They create categories to include and exclude certain things. They enforce particular behavior on someone. Thus a prophecy is not an innocent act as it appears to be. It is an intricate thing that leads to many consequences. Since the ancient time it can be seen that prophecies are never challenged and always believed, however they are very dubious; a kind of ‘trick’ to be played for fun. It obviously refers to the point that whether human life is such a petty plaything to toss it into the court of fate. Therefore there is a validity of argument against such prophecies by calling them as discursive or ideological formations.

The issue of the gypsy’s prophecy is the key issue that Eddy’s life and his fate revolve around it. Hence the prophecy draws a lot of attention and analysis. It is a prediction about the future, but completely baseless. It accuses Eddy of two most heinous crimes. It tries to establish the ‘truth’ about Eddy. It puts Eddy into the category of ‘guilty’ even before anything is proved. It creates a set of ‘knowledge’ about Eddy, which is generally accepted by everyone. Eddy turns out to be extremely ‘powerless’ after the prophecy. He can only react or retaliate rather than being himself. The gypsy’s prophecy is the representative of the social discourse where the fate of an individual is sealed because of ‘unauthenticated’ predictions. It creates the rift in an individual’s life. Even though this subtle discourse does not have direct categorization like the ‘dominant’ and the ‘dominated’, it definitely ‘corners’ or ‘marginalizes’ someone. It puts Eddy in the opposite camp of his parents. His parents, though unwillingly believes the gypsy as the social custom prevails. The parents are the immediate victim of this discourse whereas Eddy is the ‘life-long’ victim of it. Eddy’s tragedy is definitely not by chance or his own deeds, but he can be seen as the victim of discursive formation. His real tragedy is caused because of the series of events when he is ‘marginalized’ because of the prophecy and he has to leave his house. He is
almost deserted by everyone though they too miss him a lot. The prophecy, as
generally perceived is considered to be a part of traditional knowledge which is
produced anonymously. In spite of the absence of the authentic source, such
prophecies are believed, however they destroy the individual lives. Many of
prophecies are attached with rituals, which give them a solid backing of culture.
Disbelief in them would be an act of impudence and people cannot afford to be
faithless. Hence prophecies are a part of ‘collective social psyche’ and they are like
ideological shackle which are too strong to be broken by an individual.

Another aspect of the prophecy is related to the issue of knowledge formation.
Eddy is a victim of the knowledge formation as his parents believe what they have
heard from the gypsy. The prophecy is a kind of knowledge formation about Eddy.
The society starts looking at Eddy from the knowledge created about him and he too
perceives things from that perspective. His parents too are guilty of following the
‘created’ knowledge. On the other hand the discourse of prophecy hides the real
knowledge about Eddy. His parents never inform him that he is not their real son. He
is kept away from that part of ‘knowledge’. Had Eddy been aware about the ‘reality’,
he would have continued to live at his house? His father feels that they should have
told him about the reality. His mother or mum replies,

“It’s over, its’ past,

It can’t be now undone with words

fate makes us play the roles we’re cast.” (GR 121)

His mother blames fate or chance for not sharing the real knowledge with
Eddy. She too seems the victim of the discursive formations where any ‘non-
explainable’ thing is attached with fate. Actually it is quite possible for his parents to
reveal the reality about Eddy’s past and origin. They didn’t do it and instead only
inform him about the gypsy’s prophecy. They only have shared ‘half’ knowledge with
Eddy by telling him about the prophecy but by hiding the story of real birth. They do
not reveal the fact that Eddy is their adopted son. The mystery remains about their
intention, they could be really worried about Eddy or they did not have enough
courage to speak. Hence they share only half-knowledge, which can be also be seen as
a trick to corner or marginalize Eddy. After these series of events, one can definitely
say that unlike Oedipus, Eddy is not a victim of fate or chance, though it appears so.
He is victimized systematically through selective knowledge sharing and social customs. Eddy’s tragedy therefore is more of man-made, socially constructed than the divinely intervened.

Eddy on the one hand is victimized by the social forces and he indulges with the natural forces when he conflicts with the sphinx. The sphinx stands outside the city walls and torments the passerby. It is responsible for spreading the ‘canker’ and ‘yet no one can destroy her’. Eddy stands against it by showing willingness to solve the riddle. That involves him in the direct verbal combat against the sphinx. The sphinx proclaims as the ‘she’, a female spirit, which stands for power, dominance and destruction. She speaks with tremendous contempt and hatred with Eddy as he is a ‘human’ and especially ‘man’. She address Eddy in the beginning,

Who are you, little man / drip off the prick / mistake in the middle of the night …. fuck off you maggot before I tear your head off … (GR 125)

The sphinx clearly looks down upon Eddy because he is a human being and a man. Her arrogance can be seen in the expression ‘you nothing, you man’. She equates ‘man’ with ‘nothingness’. For her, a man is nothing but ‘the plague’. She comments on the total deterioration of men in the present world. They suffer from not just physical plague but moral, ethical, emotional and spiritual.

….. you are so along and pathetic, love from you means enslavement, giving means taking, love is fucking, helping is exploiting, you need your mothers you motherfucker….(GR 125)

The sphinx describes men as ‘the hollow men’ deprived of any sensibility and sensitivity. Hence she wants to destroy them by asking them the unsolvable riddles. She is so sure that men cannot ever come out of this plague (‘can you ever stop your plague’) because they are unlike her; a woman. According to her, it is better to destroy the men than polluting the world with their presence.

The sphinx represents the devouring and dominating element that wishes to destroy half of the population based on its sexist discrimination. She believes that a man is the contaminated creation from the women (…. somewhere and sometime a reptile left our bodies, it crawled away and became man.) She rates the women over the men in everything. Women are equated with creativity. ‘We create build nourish
care for …. you are from my rib mister’ (GR 126) She feels that the women are in tune of nature and environment.

…. woman was Adam / she was the earth, woman is the tide / woman is in the movement of the universe / our bodies obey the phases of the moon …. (GR 126)

Thus the sphinx argues in favour of the women. The balance between man and woman is important in any society. Both of them are created by nature having some specific purpose. The arguments by the sphinx favour one gender over the other. Though the sphinx is feminine, it represents the dominant spirit. Domination of one societal element by another is not a healthy sign for any society. It shows the degrading aspect of the society. Domination is not limited to any particular gender as such. Anyone, either a man or a woman, who gets unrestricted power, is bound to be autocratic. It is ultimately the power that decides the only two categorizes – dominant and dominated. The sphinx is naturally powerful and therefore can dominate anyone. Eddy is like an insect in front of the sphinx. She wishes to destroy the opposite sex as it is corrupt and insensitive according to her. The sphinx hates the men as they are dependent and too desire-sicken. She wishes to use the men for the some utility. “I’ll farm and fertilizer you and keep you in pens where you will do no harm.” (GR 127) The sphinx wishes to keep the men under its control and to be only used for the purpose of fulfilling the needs. The men have come down to the levels of the animals.

While putting the riddle to Eddy, the sphinx makes him realize the consequences of it. It threatens, “…. and then if you can’t I will kill you. I will tear your cock off…” (GR 127). It is a clear indication of the tremendous rage that the sphinx has for the men. She wants to destroy the symbol of ‘manness’; in a way, desires to destroy the heroism of Eddy. The sphinx on the one hand claims to be ‘creative and productive’ but on the other hand she speaks about the brutal destruction.

The sphinx’s episode can represent so many things. The sphinx is uncontrollably powerful and hence extremely destructive. It represents the discourse of power centers which are created even in the democratic framework. In the Greek mythology the sphinx is ‘a winged female monster having a woman’s head and a lion’s body. It is a combination of the female spirit and the lion’s power. The tremendous power needs to be used consciously by the woman. However the sphinx in the contemporary times has lost the capacity to think and act. It is vicious and
vehement. Her riddle is the strategy to destroy the man or another human element. Such a riddle gives her a chance to destroy those who may challenge her power. The episode raises so many questions about the role of the feminine spirit. The most striking point here would be how the creative spirit can think about destroying the other element. Thus it shows the abuse of power limited to a particular gender only and we have such destructive elements present even in the modern times. The sphinx is in no way just a supernatural element but it represents that element in the society which suppresses the common, powerless man. Eddy’s face off with the sphinx could be seen as discourse of a kind. It is discourse that shows the hierarchies in the social structure where the powerless is always dominated by the powerful. The riddle can be seen as the strategy to dominate the powerless ‘tactfully’, in an intellectual way. Apart from the physical and mental domination, another way would be intellectual domination which suppresses the common person with the awe of knowledge. Riddle is a kind of puzzle, an intellectual exercise that shows a way a common person can be trapped by the powerful. In the modern times this power could be the intellectual one. The punishment for not solving the riddle is fatal. It is quite disproportionate than the actual crime. The question can be asked against the issue of justice. Such injustice and brutality prevail even in the modern democratic society. The entire episode highlights that discourse of dominance in some form or the other continues at different places.

The above discussion about Eddy and the context in which he lives shows the inevitability of discourse in any time or at place. Though we have already got away with the kingship and the royal families, their hierarchies and power relations, the supernatural dominance; yet one is very much a part of discourse. Even a common man from the lower strata of the society can be seen as the victim of this discourse – which is a joint venture of the social conditions as well as the powerful rulers. They create such kind of situation in which the people like Eddy have to surrender or otherwise they will be destroyed. Eddy’s tragedy is the result of the unfavorable conditions created by the social structures and the power creations. The prophecy of the gypsy is an example of the ideological fix which is very difficult to break. In addition to all this the sphinx and its riddle are other controlling strategies of the dominant. Eddy is not responsible for his own tragedy and hence he refuses to undergo the similar punishment like his Greek counterpart. Discourse is an ever present reality in any social structure; incest and murder are considered as the grave sins right from
the ancient time. This is a code of the society, which goes unchallenged. It is a part of the ‘accepted knowledge’ and hence ‘normal’. On the basis of this knowledge, the categories like ‘innocent’ and ‘sinful’ are created. Once these categorizes are established, the related punishment is laid out and any common, innocent man can be punished. It is everywhere; in the ancient Greece of Sophocles or in the contemporary times; in the London of Berkoff; one comes across the encroachment of individual freedom at the hands of different social, religious, cultural institutions and practices. 

Greek; a story set in the 1980s’ environment is no exception to this. Discourse remains the key issue whenever anything is institutionalized and the acts are motivated by the self-interest. In Greek, it is not obvious but hidden strategies of social conditions are the origin of discourse. Eddy is victimized by the atmosphere and social conventions; which ultimately suppresses his overall personality. The play provides a different type of discourse formation where not the powerful individuals but the dominant social conditions and the superhuman spirits, which may be seen in the human form,crumble the powerless people like Eddy. Eddy’s tragedy is not a result of an individual’s deeds but the intricate discursive practices within the social structures which are even hard to understand and resist. Individuals like Eddy are turned down by various sources. Creating an atmosphere of menace and perplexity is also a part of discourse strategy, by which common people are always kept under the thumb. The sphinx is a symbol of ever-pervading menace over the life of common people and prophecies keep confusing them about the world and about themselves. Eddy’s story is therefore a story of the predicament of a common man who suffers due to social, cultural practices, which are nothing but the discursive strategies to keep people in check and maintain power structures.
2.2.2

‘What’s wrong with that?’: Eddy’s (odd) venture to establish the new order

Time has proved it again and again that no power and no dictator can remain at the top perpetually. The way from the top is always downwards. The complex web of autocracy and monopoly crumbles with the gusty resisting wind to give way to some new order. Sometimes this change is obvious and direct, at another place it works in subtleties. In Berkoff’s play this paradigm shift takes place with lot of intricacies. Eddy is the chief promoter of this change toward the new order. Eddy’s behavior though appears to be unorthodox and shocking has the potential to carve out the new order out of the old chaos. He is a victim of the convoluted social, cultural forces. These forces stamp him ‘sinner’ or ‘criminal’ without his mistake in any way. He becomes a victim of these silent yet very dominating forces which work through the social milieu, the traditional customs like the gypsy’s prophecy and the ever and everywhere present crushing forces like the sphinx. They manage to corner Eddy to that extent that he has to leave his house. Consequently he kills the hotel manager and marries his wife. Finally it is revealed that he has killed his own father and married his own mother. Thus he is guilty of two ghastly sins – patricide and incest in the human civilization. His sins can be balanced only through sacrifice and retribution like the great Oedipus. Eddy very boldly refuses to follow King Oedipus’ path. He rather accepts the situation and continues to live. He opts not to ‘leave’ but to ‘live’ with his mother-wife. All these acts by Eddy are not approved, socially, culturally and religiously, yet he stands firm on his stand. In the end he feels that his new life with the changed relationship with his wife a kind of ‘exit from paradise / entrance to heaven’ (GR 140) This can be seen as his pronouncement of the new order. He shows the courage and conviction to challenge the ancient and the accepted. Therefore Eddy’s behavior and thoughts do show the potential of counter discourse. Obviously his counter discourse is not directed against a particular individual or an institution but towards all-pervading influence of the social and cultural practices, which ultimately form ‘the collective unconscious’.
The play presents the endeavor on Eddy’s part to counter the old, established order and to set the new one. ‘Greek de Steven Berkoff’ (1996) has captured the pulse of the play in the following words;

Berkoff confronts the limits of myth in order to overcome it. His goal is the reestablishment of a new model of behavior based on the individual’s ability to respond to his or her desires beyond a blind obedience to an externally imposed archaic order. (Godall qtd in Barberà 314)

Eddy on the one hand refuses to follow the orthodox social and cultural order; at the same time he tries to develop his own philosophy of life. He challenges the foundational ideas like sin and retribution. He stands against the ‘archaic’ order in the social set up. He shows tremendous disgust about the existing living conditions in his house and in society in general. The entire society is degrading fast and the moral standards are at stake. He has a great problem of adjustment inside and outside the home. Inside his home he feels suffocated He says, “Well it is a bit gritty but homely in a sickly sort of way ….” (GR103) The sickness in his home becomes more grotesque outside. Apart from being dirty and diseased, the atmosphere is full of menace and tension. This can be gathered from the conversation of the family members.

DAD: The country’s in a state of plague while parties of all Shades battle for power to sort the shit from the shinolal …. anyone who wants to kill, maim and destroy / arson, murder and hack are being recruited for the new revolutionary party …

MUM: Forte’s …. is recruiting workers from the jungles of South America …. Most of the stores are closed …. Screaming advocates of limited nuclear drop on Hyde Park. (GR109)

All these instances portray the menacing and threatening conditions at outside. Thus Eddy’s counter discourse slowly gets formed because of and through these conditions. It is a complex kind of discourse where Eddy is victimized by the social conditions and later on he exploits the same conditions for his sake. He upturns these conditions to suit his interests. Eddy registers his protest indifferent ways against these conditions and social practices.
Eddy’s life falls into pieces after the prophecy by the gypsy. His father informs about it and his mental dilemma begins. He develops a feeling of self-disgust and utter dispiritedness. His mind can reflect through the words, “….. / fancy my mum! I could so gravely feared…” (GR 106) Eddy’s utter dejection leads him to take the first bold step. He decides to leave the home.

I’ll leave home / split and scarper ….. I’ll piss off tomorrow / I needed to escape this cruddy flat ….. (GR106)

Eddy’s decision is atypical. He is caught into the extra-ordinary situation which demands some immediate and radical action of his part. Eddy endorses the belief of his parents with the prophecy but refuses to accept it completely. His decision to leave the house is unusual in many senses. He exhibits his utter dislike to such ‘unauthenticated’ knowledge by showing back to it. He is nowhere to be seen distorted because of the prophecy but its impact on his parents. He does not wish to trouble them by remaining close to them. He prefers to be a merciless assassinator than to be at the home. The decision to leave the home proves Eddy’s unflinching love and reverence towards his parents. It is a decision which is taken with lot of deliberations. This is a kind of resistance against the social practice of prophecy and also against the traditional way of looking at such things. Eddy does not go out of his mind and becomes irrational. He does not accuse his parents for believing such baseless prophecies. He looks at the entire episode with objectivity and empathetically. His decision has off course his life drastically. He knows it. His earlier life with his parents was cozy and protected, where he could play with ideas. He describes it as, “while I was in my little room plotting and dreaming of ruling the world.” (GR 107) His decision has made him roofless. He is exposed to the ugly conditions of the world which he used to think and detests. Now he has to bare these conditions as that is his reality. He cannot go back to his earlier position as the home. (“Now no more will I escape to my little domain …” [GR 107]) His dislodgement from his house can be seen as the crumbling of some order and hierarchy. He now cannot carry his family and its legacy as he has deserted it. Leaving the home means leaving the family and the past behind. He shows that courage to do so. Probably he has got the rocky conviction to take such decision. He has even thought about not meeting his parents anymore. He especially feels for his mother.
….. as I reached the end of the road I could only see the apron and lost the figure / the apron stayed in my mind the longest. When my old lady went to the happy hunting ground I would frame that apron. (GR 108)

His decision to leave the home can be seen as the first step towards the more definite counter discourse, offering resistance towards the dominant social and cultural conditions.

Eddy’s decision to leave the house has resulted into different implications. He rejects to follow anything like a prophecy. Prophecy is a type of pronouncement having no definite or authentic logic and information. It is more of a created knowledge. Such knowledge is used for dividing people and creating categories. Eddy’s rejection to believe such type of knowledge puts a big question mark on the use or abuse of such knowledge. He continues to fight with this issue of ‘unwanted’ and ‘unauthenticated’ knowledge for the ten long years. He expresses his repugnance in this matter in the sarcastic tone, “I have to laugh when I think of my sappy mum and dad / locked up in council bliss ….” (GR 129) He seems to reject the blind obedience of things like prophecy.

Along with this Eddy seems to challenge the very idea of fate and a man as just a weak fighter against it. Fate is generally held responsible for those events which are otherwise cannot be explained logically. Eddy struggles through out to maintain his relationships – first with his parents; though not real and then with his wife; who turns out to be his real mother. Eddy refuses to surrender to the fate in both these cases. He does not acknowledge the gypsy’s’ prophecy and leave the home. In the traditional sense, he is expected to show his moral uprightness by being at the house. Instead he shows great respect towards his parents but protests their sentimental adherence to the prophecy by quieting the house. His mother; Dinah expresses the conventional view about the fate, “….. fate makes us play the roles we’re cast.” (GR 121) Eddy refuses to play the roles casted or conferred by the fate. He prefers to be different in his approach. After the shocking revelation about his real parents at the end, he decides not to succumb to the pressures of the fate. He after coming to know about the ghastly sins of incest and patricide, which he committed inadvertently, Eddy shows the valor to stand against the indomitable fate. His parents fear that he hates them after they shared prophecy with him. Eddy simply rejects it. He feels the same passion for both
of them. He does not lose his patience even when he comes to know about his birth and his real parents.

“So what if I’m adopted / who gives a monkey’s tit.’ (GR 136)

He simply refuses to follow the code of questioning and rejecting the adapted parents after the revelation. He continues to feel for them though he is bit dejected for the delay in the revelation. His final jolt comes when he refuses to sacrifice his present relation with his wife, surrendering to the fate. He does not agree to give up the feeling of love for his wife, even though she is his mother too now. He feels strong passion – physical and emotional for her and therefore not ready to put it to the dust. He asserts his decision in the bold expressions,

I will hold on to you and I’ll never let you go, hold onto me, does it matter that you are my mother. (GR 139)

Eddy surely challenges the role of fate in the human life. He appears to question the overmastering importance given to the issue of fate. It is almost impossible to define what is fate? It is equally difficult to explain its function logically. The point of attention could be raised is that if there is so much skepticism about the nature and function of fate then it should be not be given so much importance. There could be two views about fate; it is explainable or it is always considered as something decided in the ‘other’ world; a transcendental thing. If this is so then it is not sensible to sacrifice the present relations for the sake of this ethereal phenomenon. Eddy seems to question the very viability of this idea through his act. Counter discourse could be at different levels. It can be seen vividly at the behavioral level; in action but more importantly counter discourse exists in challenging the very foundation of action i.e. the thinking and ideals. Eddy has shown his resistance through his action of leaving the house and battling the world; but here Eddy shows the guts to challenge the very basis of human belief system. The role of fate is accepted unquestionably in most of the civilization throughout the universe. Eddy is the spokesperson of the new spirit in the world, which challenges the very idea of fate. Eddy successfully nullifies the effect or dominance of fate through his unconventional actions. His role therefore is quite praiseworthy as he tries to challenge and destabilize the basis of human consciousness in which fate is always kept at the supreme position. Eddy’s decision of not rejecting his earlier relationship is an evident of this attempt to establish the more practical and
feasible actions rather than the faulty sentimentalism of fatalist attitude. One of the most important strategies that Eddy employs to put up his counter discourse is to forward his anti-fatalist attitude. This makes him the leader of the new order, which deviates from the fatalist legacy which is continued from the Greek time.

Eddy’s overall attitude towards the issue of love is also very offbeat and unorthodox. He never shows any sentimentalism or emotions towards the woman, in his love relationships. He is more prone to physical enjoyment. At the beginning too he shows the inclination of enjoying relation with women only at the physical level. He openly declares his intention to enjoy pleasures with his ‘favourite woman’,

….. I swim in her like I was plunging into the Jordan for a baptism.

(GR102)

Eddy strongly equates the physical love or attraction almost to the religious experience of purification. Physical relation is a way to get purified for Eddy. He never wishes to build any aphysical or platonic relationship with women. He goes on describing the female body elaborately. A woman stands in the form of only a body for him and should be used for satisfaction. In the most eventful part of his life, Eddy accidently murder the hotel manager. After this he immediately expresses his love for the dead manager’s wife; the waitress. There again he expresses his desire for physical pleasures. He openly proclaims such intentions,

Your thighs I’ll prise apart and sink like hot stone into butler / into an ocean of ecstasy for that’s what you are to me / an ecstasy of flesh and blood and fluted pathways softest oils and smells never before uncapped / I’ll turn you upside down and inside out / I’ll strip you bare and crawl under your skin / I’m mad for you (GR 118)

Eddy’s declaration is quite clear here. He wants to enjoy the sexual pleasure. He can imagine his relation with any woman only at the boundary of physicality. The spiritual, emotional concerns do not appeal him at all. At the end also, he wishes to possess his mother-wife physically.

Yeh I wanna climb back inside my mum …. it’s love I feel for your breast, for your nipple twice sucked / for your belly twice known / for your hands twice caressed / for your breath twice smelt, for your thighs, for your cunt twice known ….. (GR 140)
Eddy thus throughout the play cannot come out or rather never tries to come out the confines of the physicality. Does Eddy do this consciously or is it natural in him? Is Eddy unable to think about women in any other way? How can Eddy, who otherwise is so rational and tender, think and behave in instinctual way when it comes to love relationships?

The most striking think about Eddy’s approach towards the issue of love is that he is too tender and poetic about the physical aspect of it. When he speaks about a woman’s body, he is almost like a poet, who keeps on imagining the new avenues for explorations. It shows that he is not a beast who would devour the female body. Hence the question is about his attitude and approach. If Eddy is not brutal and inhuman by nature then has he consciously decided his approach regarding the love relationships? He is extremely disturbed by the prevailing degrading social conditions. He feels that there is nothing pious, clean left in the current social conditions. It is a ‘cesspit’ and there is ‘plague’ everywhere. His attitude towards love and women could have been originated in this environment. Hence there is a possibility that he must have consciously decided not to expect and offer anything but a body in such relations. Human beings have left with their bodies in the contemporary time and everything else is lost for him. He is already devoid of the spiritual and emotional aspects of love relationships. The constant use of images like ‘cesspit’ and ‘rats’ show the animal aspect of the relationship. If this is true then Eddy’s ‘conscious’ decision to keep his love relations to bare minimum is a kind of resistance towards the degrading social conditions. He too remains shallow and mean in his approach. It offers a strong comment on the contemporary conditions where love is sex and all relations are physical only. The conditions in ‘Greek’ are deteriorated to the base. (We are reminded of Eliot’s ‘cheap sawdust restaurants’ and Lowell’s ‘love cars’ where the physical love blossoms). Even the sphinx criticizes Eddy, as a representative of human being on this issue.

love is fucking ….. to love is to enslave a woman to turn her into a bearing cow to produce …. (GR125)

On this background, Eddy’s efforts in not involving in love relations aphysically is an indication of his utter disgust of the existing conditions. He honestly exhibits through his behavior that ‘man is capable of doing what animals generally
do.’ Thus Eddy’s counter discourse comprises of subtle and very thoughtful strategies which moves towards a definitive stand.

Eddy continues to exploit and resist the social conditions around him. He shares very interesting relation with the milieu. He is the victim of those existing social conditions and practices. He has to sacrifice his families in order to respect his parents after the prophecy. Physical satisfaction, violence and insults are common things for him. Naturally he becomes a part of this social discourse. He seems to negotiate with the social practices in order to nullify their effects. He faces severe problems of adjustment when he leaves the house. However he decides to exploit the social conditions for the benefits. He walks through the ‘garbage filled London street’ and comes across the filth of human life. After watching it very closely, Eddy decides on his response to them. One day during the rail journey, he finds this change.

…. my thoughts which were beginning to get formed to take some mighty fine decisions that would shoot me on my path to riches and success (GR113)

This ‘mighty’ decision could be about the negotiating and exploiting the present conditions instead of just resisting them. His immediate dream after this decision indicates his strategy to combat the battles outside and especially inside.

I feel asleep and dreamed …. I saw a dozen pussies on a bed nestled between some soft and squeezy thighs …. like a randy bee I buzzed from one to other …. each like a grasping toothless mouth, hungry like open beaks of little birds while I, like mother, into their open throats would drop my worm which hungrily and devouringly they’d grasp. Then I awake / and rudely saw the world just as it is and started on my adventures (GR 114)

This could be seen as the decisive point in Eddy’s life as he has decided to ‘adventure’ in it. His counter strategy to exploit the living conditions through negotiations has got a definite shape here. From this point his success story begins and within ten years he is rich and successful. In the meantime he marries the waitress. He runs the business of food productions and gets lot of money out of it. He reverses the business order through his constant efforts. He becomes a big name after ten years that there was hardly one to complete with him. Eddy prospers so much in his business that
he almost has a monopoly. He claims that he has cured the plague by providing the nourishment to the people. Obviously his journey is hard. He describes it as,

Ten years have come and gone … toughened my sinews to combat the world …. I made the city golden era time. (GR 122)

He has upturned the situation in his favour by adapting the strategy of negotiations rather than resistance. Though he refers to combats, he actually can be seen to adjust with the situation. He endeavours to set a new order by replacing the ‘swollen carcasses and sagging mediocrity’. This is his a day of operation where he gets away with what is dead, outdated and mundane. He realizes that his talent can be the instrument which can work to upturn the order. He feels proud about his processes through which he can dominate the same society, which has victimized him. His success is shared by him in the following words,

While I each day and year have scored another niche into this world of ours / have moved about and jostled / cut a throat or two …. and shown how what this world doth crave is power, class and form with a dab of genius now and then …. (GR 123)

Eddy seems to have realized the truth about world. There is a sea change in his approach. He felt dejected and disgruntled in the past. Now however he has understood the real nature of the business of the world. Ultimately a man is known by ‘power, class and form’ which can be gained by ‘a dab of genius’. He has exemplified that if you genius you can upturn the old order He has learned to make his presence felt in the business world through this ‘genius’ acts. Therefore he accepts and transforms the social conditions rather than just fighting away. He involves in direct battles wherever necessary but his overall approach is that of negotiations. It has helped him to counter the social discourse successfully. Instead of challenging the social conditions and practices, he seems to mingle with them in order to subvert them.

He is benefitted – physically and financially in the process. Eddy shows a very intricate relationship with the social discourse. He is on the one hand victimized by these conditions and on the other hand he twists them to squeeze benefits out of them. He leaves home and shows extreme hatred towards the prophecy. He finally discards the same socio-cultural practices, which at once discarded him by calling him an ‘unlucky child’. As said earlier, Eddy works out his discourse very subtly. His counter
discourse strategies move in the definite way – he first rejects the prophecy, then leaves the home and gradually becomes an important person in the social hierarchy. He is in a business now and rich. Therefore he gains the important status in the society. He subverts the social hierarchy to include himself into it. Thus Eddy uses the very social fabric to dislodge the social discourse. Eddy is successful in blending the two important techniques – conflict and negotiations to create his own counter resistance. This marks Eddy’s difference on the background of his once ‘marginalized’ position in the social set up. However he achieves the power and position by employing this strategy very effectively.

Eddy, although uses his counter strategies to subvert the social order very subtly, he mixes it with aggressiveness. He enters into direct combat with the sphinx. The sphinx symbolizes the power which transcends the human world. It is the cause of the great trouble for the entire city (“….. there’s something rotten in the city that will not die / a sphinx I read stands outside the city walls tormenting all that pass they say…”)[GR 127]) The sphinx thus is the cause for chaos in the city. She represents that spirit, which dominates the human being, especially the men. Eddy, the modern version of Oedipus, accepts the challenge to solve the riddle. He faces the sphinx heroically to save the city. That shows his commitment towards the same society, which stamped him with the marginalized life. Off course this is a chance for Eddy to come back with honour in the social hierarchy. Therefore he takes up this challenge even if it is fatal for him. He advances bravely towards the sphinx by calling her as ‘old slag’. He confronts the supernatural spirit by firmly saying that the sphinx cannot scare Eddy easily. Eddy, being a normal human gathers lot of courage to combat this evil. Probably he has got enough hatred for the dominant power, which tries to curb the common man. He accuses the feminine spirit by pointing out her barren life. He refers to her as detestable disease, which has brought an atrocious condition to his city. Eddy looks at the sphinx as the feminine personification of the rotten, barren, void and lovelessness. Such elements do exist in the society and they are powerful too. Eddy here shows the great courage to speak against the sphinx. He protests directly against all the claims made by the sphinx. He rejects the claim that the women alone are responsible for creativity and the men are only full of lust and inhumanity. Eddy makes her aware that ultimately it is the balance of genders that are important for the social stability. He refuses any type of extremism. (“without me you are nothing /
without me you wouldn’t exist without me you are an empty screaming hole.” [GR 127]) This is Eddy’s strong message to that social discourse, which creates categories on the basis of gender and tries to create rift in the society. Finally he decides to face the riddle of the sphinx and solves it. As per the conditions he kills the spirit by cutting off her head. This is a kind of final victory for Eddy in the battle. The sphinx symbolizes the archaic spirit, which desires to dictate and kill the common people. Ultimately it is the common people who have got the capacity to control such paranormal spirit. Eddy can be seen here to use the direct resistance to the dominant spirit. However mighty may be the dictator, the strength of the common man can defeat it. Assassinating the sphinx is also a symbolic act for Eddy. The sphinx is a paranormal or mysterious person or phenomena just like the gypsy’s prophecy. Both are unwanted and unauthenticated. Eddy suffers because of the gypsy’s prophecy in his formative years. He therefore looks at the killing of the sphinx as a sort of revenge against this social unconsciousness about such ‘fantastic’ things. Eddy revolts against the very idea of paranormal or transcendental reality, which drastically changes the life of common human beings on the earth. Therefore Eddy’s resistance towards the sphinx can be seen as his counter discourse against all types of ‘unauthenticated’ knowledge and blind beliefs in present in the social setup.

The issue of prophesy is a cardinal issue in the Eddy’s story. His life gets transformed because of that prophecy. A prophecy is held as a true statement about the future though it is unauthenticated. In case of Oedipus, the prophecy or the prediction was delivered by visionary Tiresias, who was blind. He could see the things in future through his exceptional powers. In the contemporary times though visionaries like Tiresias are unavailable. There is no conducive environment for such visionaries. Instead of that we have ‘petty Gypsies’ who predict in return of money. Gypsies are the one who are always on the move and generally unknown. There is no authenticity about their knowledge or claims, yet Eddy’s parents believe in their prophecy. In the Greek period, one could see the visionary people like Tiresias working as a mediator of transferring knowledge. They had the credentials to do so. In the ‘degraded’ contemporary societies, the gypsies transfer the traditional knowledge, without any warranty and conviction. This is ironical that the ‘marginalized’ (because the gypsies are mostly ‘black’ and astray) are the one who are influencing the lives of the people at ‘center’ (white). Therefore it is a kind of paradox as well as the instance of counter
discourse. The one, who has been kept away from the mainstream, is influencing the life of dominant or normal people. This can be seen as a kind of counter discourse to the prevalent social practices. The ‘cornered’ or ‘marginalized’ because the ‘central’ or ‘decisive’ position in Eddy’s life. The play while showing the debased conditions of the society also highlights the changing equations in the social setup. The ‘marginalized’ or ‘depressed’ can create twist in the settled life of normal or socially upper class. Greek presents subtle undercurrents in the social practices which brings the hierarchal shifts and class upheaval. The interdependency of social strata is the marked feature of *Greek*.

Eddy’s final counter discourse comes at the end of the play. This is the time when the drama in Eddy’s life reaches to the climax. He is rich and heroic now. He has got name and money in his business. He becomes hero after killing the sphinx. Now it is a time for Eddy to settle in his life with his parents and his wife. He is too happy to prove that the gypsy’s prophecy was wrong. At this time only, the most crestfallen news is conveyed by his parents about Eddy’s originality. He is their adapted son, whom they found during a storm. Shocking his wife has lost her son in the same lost. It is finally revealed that Eddy is the son of his wife and the man he has killed in the hotel was his real father. Within a moment rich, famous, heroic Eddy is connected with the two ghastly sins – incest and patricide. Eddy, just like Oedipus has lost everything in no time. Oedipus’ sacrifice and retribution are always held high and it becomes a model code of conduct for others to follow. Eddy too is expected to undergo the physical punishment and moral sufferings after this anagnorisis. The social and cultural customs demand the retribution on Eddy’s part. Though unintentionally, Eddy’s acts are still considered to be sinful and hence must be punishable according to the moral law. Eddy is expected to undergo some kind of physical punishment like Oedipus underwent. He is supposed to do self-penance by doing some kind of physical damage. The social code prevails here too. Eddy too feels disgust for his own act. He is totally collapsed and he starts looking at himself with contempt.

….. so I am the squelchy mass of flesh that issued from out the loins of my dear wife / on shits of rats …. so the man I verbal led to death was my real pop … Me who wants to clean up the city / stop the plague destroy the
sphinx / me was the source of all the stink / the man of principle is a mother fucker …. (GR 138)

Eddy feels dejected after the revelation of the truth, which was hidden to him. He is suffering because of the half-knowledge shared by his parents. He even thinks for sometimes to follow Oedipus in the matter of retribution.

What a foul thing I have done, I am the rotten plague, tear them out Eddy, rip them out, scoop them out like ice-cream…. (GR 139)

Eddy here is just thinking of repeating the ancient episode in the modern times. However he does not take the oedipal decision. He refuses to do both, sacrifice (of his wife-mother) and retribution (of plucking the eyes). He takes firm stand to continue his relation of husband and wife as it is without any change. He is unable to understand the sudden in their relationship. He has enjoyed all pleasures of life with her. Their intimate relationship over a period of ten years has witnessed different turns and enlightenment. It gave him off types of experience – physical, sensual, emotional and spiritual. He passionately describes their relation,

I sat and projected her picture on the moon and pored through every page of our life together like a great holy bible of magic events I examined every feature of her landscape and ate up every part of her and loved every part whose sum total made up this creature, my wife. (GR 139)

Eddy’s relation with his wife has offered him the most pious and mysterious experience. However their relation is too based or originated with a crime i.e. the killing of a hotel manager. Any relationship offers an individual some kind of stability. In case of a marriage, it is a kind of social sanction for the people involved in it. One gets some position in the social setup and establishes oneself as the ‘social’ person. Eddy after his tumultuous past ultimately finds some solace in his marriage life. The only satisfactory relation has on the verge of total breakdown for him. He has very limited options to respond; either he could surrender to the present conditions or try to create a new model out of the present by. The first alternative is the routine one which has been followed since Oedipus, but Eddy refuses to become Oedipus. He strongly opposes to surrender his relation with his wife because of the sudden revelation. He looks at this revelation as an ‘unwanted’ accident; which should be kept to minimum. He refuses to change his ten-year old feelings for his wife. It is just impossible for him
to love her as mother and not as wife. He impassioned questions the very idea of sacrifice.

….. does it matter that you are my mother, I’ll love you even if I am your son / do we cause each other pain ….. we only love so it doesn’t matter mother, mother it doesn’t matter. (GR 139)

Eddy seems to have decided the course of their relation in future. For him, the feeling of love is more important that the relation he follows. She may be mother or may be wife but it is his love towards her that is the most crucial issue for him. He cannot desert their relation because of some ‘accident’, which is uninvited. He is quite firm about continuing their relation. He looks at the entire episode as a share ‘accident’ and no one is responsible for it. It is not pre-decided and hence there is no need to forsake their relation. He therefore does not approve the idea punishing himself or his wife in the ancient, brutal way.

Why should I tear my eyes out Greek style, why should you hang yourself / have you seen a child from a mother and son / no. Have I? No. Then how do we know that it’s bad / should I be so mortified? Who me. (GR 139)

Here Eddy seems to question the validity of the ideas like ‘incest’. His questions are like a thundering slaps to all the social practices of sacrifice and retribution. He is referring to the ideological practices which label a particular behavior as ‘moral’ and another as ‘immoral’, the people who decide the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ nature of any action. We must develop a sense to separate the ‘actions with intention’ and ‘actions without intention’, or else the past models of behavior should be followed as it is. There should be some ‘new’ models of behavior in the contemporary situation. Physical suffering or mortification is probably the outdated models to prove your innocence and genuineness as the moral standards from the ancient Greek time do not hold relevant in the postmodern era. Eddy seems to challenge the very foundational ideas in the western civilization like sacrifice, incest, patricide and sin. Counter discourse strategies involve the questioning the prevalent practices and norms. Eddy critically examines the situation rather than being sentimental. He refuses to follow the path led by King Oedipus. He takes ‘Anti-Oedipus’ stand, in which there is no place for sacrifice and physical pangs. Instead of breaking and deserting everything, Eddy prefers to continue the relation with the ‘new’ knowledge dawned upon him. His acts
are heroic in other sense. Oedipus becomes the example of sacrifice and retribution, but ultimately he wasted everything his wife, their relation, the people, the empire and his progeny. He paid a huge cost for following the so called ‘correct’ path. Eddy is not ready for that. He does not wish to lose the life which he and his wife carved out of many difficulties. Hence he gives importance to their genuine love feelings rather than the horrible social practices. Eddy pronounces the ‘new’ order, which stands against the cultural practice of many centuries. Wasting everything for something accidental is indigestible to him. Instead of following Oedipus blindly he questions his actions bluntly,

Oedipus how could you have done it, never to see your wife’s golden face again …. Darkness falls. Bollocks to all that. I’d rather run all the way back and pull the sheets, witness my golden-bodied wife and climb into her sanctuary…. (GR 140)

Gradually Eddy gathers the courage to question the symbol of moral uprightness i.e. Oedipus. He mocks at Oedipus to waste his ‘golden’ relation for no logical purpose. Oedipus’ decision will lead to something dark and tragic. Nothing positive can happen. He probably feels that it is better to continue any relation rather than deserting it in between. Eddy’s expressions are revolutionary. He challenges the age old ideology, which is accepted without any queries. Through Oedipus, he seems to question the entire issue of morality and ethics in the western civilization. He in a way questions those discursive practices which project Oedipus as the ‘hero’ to dominate and marginalized common people. Involuntarily action should not amount to any crime on sin. In the modern law also the ‘intention’ of the actor has been considered as prime. Therefore the ancient rule of sacrifice and physical suffering is outdated in the present situation. Such sacrifice has got the status of ‘ritual’ only. Oedipus’ action can still hold some sense as he was a king and who wanted to set his example for others to follow. His question ‘who me?’ carries the sense that what is his social and moral standing. Unlike Oedipus, he is not a king or even influential person, so why should he do the unnecessary sacrifice. He even wishes to suggest that in the modern time such sacrifices do not hold any place. Eddy’s acts and thinking show that the ancient, established practices may not always hold validity in the contemporary time. For Eddy, a man of new age, the ontological and existential concerns are more dominating than the moral and philosophical.
Eddy’s stance against the entire issue of sacrifice and retribution is more pragmatic than philosophical. He retains both the relations – as a wife and as a mother with his wife. He proves that ultimately the human emotions are supreme than the ideologies and social practices based on it. The feeling of love cannot alter in any condition and there is no need to feel guilty for it. He rather claims that mother-wife is the best relation any man would have. It offers everything that a man, ‘male’ needs – care, protection, pleasure, attention, energy, feeling of completeness. He therefore, instead on mourning on the situation, seems to celebrate this ‘new’ relationship. In the end, he pronounces his definite stand.

Yeh I wanna climb back inside my mum. What’s wrong with that? …. It’s love I feel it’s love, what matter what form it takes, it’s love I feel for your breast, for your nipple twice sucked / for your belley twice known / for your hands twice caressed / for your breath twice smelt … (GR140)

Eddy desires to enjoy both the roles – as a son and as a lover-husband. He has the chance to experience the same woman ‘twice’, once as a mother and second time as a wife-beloved. He feels extremely comfortable in carrying out his relation even though it is against social, cultural and religious stand. All the existing practices demand more stereotypal responses. Eddy refuses such traditional behavior and continues to build a new way for him. He manages to create a solid resistance to all existing discourses and formulate a different system altogether. Like every discourse, every counter discourse tool, attempts to create its own philosophy; a set of episteme to approve its actions and practices. If the counter discourse strategy has to make an impact, it should be supported by the well charted out knowledge formation. If this does not happen then the resistance may prove temporal. Episteme or knowledge helps to consolidate resistance as it creates a situation where one is compelled to believe in the counter discourse strategies as indispensable. Replacing the existing set of knowledge is the major part of counter discourse strategy. At the end Eddy also creates a new set of knowledge when he feels that his new relationship; a mother-wife combination will lead him towards the final bliss and happiness. He describes his situation as ‘exit from paradise / entrance to heaven’. Eddy brings into the religious reference because ultimately he has challenged the religious foundations.

Eddy believes that he has lost the paradise after discovering the new relationship with his wife. He is now knowledgeable and about the ‘sin’ he has
committed according to the religion. Paradise, as generally understood, is the place or state of happiness enjoyed by Adam before the first sin. (Genesis. 2) According to the New Testament paradise is considered to be the original dwelling place for first parents. It symbolizes perfect innocence and integrity. It is has got peace, prosperity and happiness but not necessarily a land of luxury and idleness. Paradise stands for innocence but also ignorance. Adam and Eve had to leave the paradise once they committed sin and became ‘knowledgeable’! Eddy too has committed the ghastly ‘sin’ according to the Greek and Christian religions. He also made knowledgeable after the revelation of his true identity. Hence he has to take exit from the paradise. He was enjoying the paradise like conditions of peace, prosperity and happiness in his life. However everything gets shattered after the revelation. He loses everything just like Adam. He is also conscious about his relation with his wife as a mother. Therefore he has to exit paradise. Although he is out of the paradise, it opens the heaven’s gate for him. Heaven is a paradisiacal relief, as it is the dwelling of God. Earthly being can enter heaven in the afterlife. It is all evil encompassing and beyond everything. It is surely the source of eternal bliss. Eddy feels that though he has to exit paradise, which is more earthly he will surely get entry in the house of God. By differentiating between the ‘paradise’ and the ‘heaven’, Eddy has distinguished between the ‘real god’ and the ‘religious’ systems. He probably wishes to exemplify that even if you do not follow the religious code and practices, still it is quite possible to enter the heaven.

Eddy’s counter discourse now reaches to the levels of religion and spirituality. His stance about his life is ‘Anti-Greek / Anti Oedipal’ as already established. He challenges the Greek standards of measuring and punishing the non-allowed ‘act’. He questions the very idea of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘physical suffering’ which end up at creating utter destruction and waste. He therefore refuses to follow Oedipus. Most of ‘such standards make an individual materially waste’ and socially ‘marginalized’. Along with this he takes up the ‘Anti-Christian’ stand. Paradise is generally associated with sin (‘in whom all have sinned’) and transgression. Adam and Eve had to exit from paradise for being ‘knowledgeable’. Eddy’s question ‘what’s wrong with that’ can be seen as a blow to all these accepted religious practices. How far is it practical and sensible to think about the human beings as ‘sinner’? Are the human beings supposed to remain ‘ignorant’ in order to retain paradise? Is knowledge only confined to non-
humans or sinners? Is it always right to think that human beings would misuse knowledge and would create havoc?

These and so many of such questions design Eddy’s counter-discourse. He demands a revision and scrutiny of all the age-old beliefs and practices on the basis of which the entire cultural edifice stands tall. They very idea of ‘sin’ and ‘incest’ are put under investigation by Eddy. Even the unintentionally committed act is counted as ‘sin’ and one has to sacrifice his entire life for that. How much is this pragmatic? Eddy seems to suggest the same thing over the issue of knowledge. In the present conditions, human beings might have misused knowledge and created hell on the earth (plague – like conditions) yet knowledge is indispensable. One cannot remain ‘innocent’ rather ‘ignorant’ and ‘static’. For the purpose of development and progress, knowledge is necessary. He raises very crucial points like sacrifice versus commitment, retribution versus forgiveness, wastage versus care, ignorance versus knowledge, separation versus bondage, standards versus sympathy, ideals versus practical, denegation versus acceptance, and ancient versus contemporary.

Eddy’s counter discourse not only raises valid points in the contemporary contexts but directs it towards more assured end. His opposition to the fundamental issues like sin, sacrifice and punishment make him the agent of a change. He represents the modern sensibility to approach everything rationally, even challenging the ‘accepted’. His acts may appear odd or shocking but they pronounce the very important message, “Human feelings are more important than the labels of relations they carry’. Eddy’s acts are therefore full of adventures as well as ‘odd – ventures’; as he is trying to achieve and establish something ‘new’ and ‘contemporary’. His road is untrodden, and hence risky. He opts for the ‘unknown’ and ‘new’ and that will surely make ‘difference’ in what he ‘is’ and what he ‘will be’.

Eddy’s counter discourse gets developed through its dialectic with the socio-cultural conditions. In addition to this obvious source of discourse and counter discourse, the notion of ‘incest’ holds a key in the overall discursive formation. Eddy is the chief figure and he commits incest however he denies to undergo the punishment as in Oedipus’ style. He accepts his ‘newly discovered’ relationship with his wife and decides to keep it. He responds to the notion of incest not in the way Oedipus responded it by thinking in terms of causality and effect, and as a king it was probably mandatory for him. The cultural pressures during the Greek times, especially to the
issues related to incest might have forced Oedipus to undergo such punishment. Eddy in the changed circumstance does show the different reaction to the same issue of incest. By breaking the traditional tie between the causality and effect, the notion of incest is problematized. He refuses to repeat the Greek style of retribution and that creates ruptures in the cultural field. Incest is itself a rupture, a kind of unacceptable, abnormal behaviour; allotting it the status of discourse. Eddy repairs this rupture by keeping his relation with his wife-mother even after the realisation. He denies the traditional binary of moral and immoral which directs that immorality should be punished. Instead of following the ‘so called’ objective cultural notion of incest and related punishment, Eddy subjectively responds to this notion, and denies any sanctity to this issue. Eddy’s actions are cantered on the notion of incest. The abnormality of the notion has created disturbances in the traditional field of culture and it is balanced by the punishment which is modelled by Oedipus. By refusing to follow the Oedipus model, Eddy breaks the corresponding relation between the act and the effect and opens the notion of ‘discourse’ to subjective interpretations. By problematizing this notion, Eddy is exploring the possibility which is hidden in Oedipus himself. There could be many positions as stated earlier depending upon the axis one chooses to look from. The notion of incest is looked by Oedipus from a particular axis, might be surrendering to the cultural pressures. The notion has received a fresh interpretation, from a different axis through Eddy’s response. Morality and immorality are not fixed points of reference and hence cannot be followed objectively and universally. The notion of ‘incest’ which is a kind of taboo in most of the societies even today is open for new interpretations and responses. By making it free from the cultural clutches and clichés, the notion of incest has been opened for interpretation. The act of interpretation holds key here as Eddy refuses to follow the traditional view. The postmodern discourse perspective offers more importance to the act of interpretation rather than interpretations itself. Through the problematization of the notion of incest, the postmodern perspective unsettles the entire cultural tradition since the Greek times.

The play, set in the postmodern times, surely show the postmodern spirit of creating ruptures in the traditional flow of culture. The play presents a critique of the very important cultural issue of incest, which gets problematized because of Eddy’s response. His reaction to the issue is odd but it opens a spectrum of new possibilities to look at the traditional notions with new dimensions.
2.2.3

Oedipus in England- Deconstructing the Ancient
in the Postmodern Context

Legendary Greek characters like Oedipus, Antigone or Ulysses never stop fascinating the modern minds in spite of the cultural distancing in time and space. These mythical characters are much in demands to speak for the agonies of the postmodern world, which suffer from so many more diseases than their ancient counterparts. Hall’s assertion that “more Greek tragedy has been performed in the last thirty years than at any point in history since Greco-Roman antiquity” (Hall 2) seems to validate the about claim. When the story Oedipus therefore gets transformed into 1990’s England, one finds the echoes of eternal battles and outbursts. Oedipus myth as delineated by Sophocles has probably the most sought after myth in the world literature. The myth is rather (in)famous for the shocking central events of the incestuous relation between Oedipus and his mother Jocasta and the murder of his father Laius. The story contains those elements which refer to the core of any relation between the opposite sexes. The mother-son relationship is always looked from the emotional point of view, involving lot of physicality but without the sexual connotations. It has therefore achieved a very noble and sacred status. The Oedipus story devastates this nobility by introducing the sexual aspect in this relation. In addition it brings the barbaric element of assassinating the father for establishing the sexual relation with mother. For most of the cultures, even today these events are sour pill to digest for the sheer ‘immorality’ it exhibits. It shows the panoramic tragedy of an individual who gets self-knowledge and identity. The myth involves almost all aspects of human life; psychological, physical, social, sexual and cultural. It therefore is a matter of exploration and experimentation for the creative minds that keep their engagement alive in this ancient myth. Since the antiquity the myth has undergone a lot of adaptations and transformations making it appropriate to different cultures. The finest minds of the world like Voltaire, Dryden, Corneille, Igor Stravinsky (Oedipus Rex), André Gide’s (Oedipe), Jean Cocteau’s (La Machine infernale), Levi-Strauss, Ernest Jones and of course Sigmund Freud all thought that the myth is relevant to their times. The myth still does not get exhausted and makes it presence felt even in the
postmodern conditions in 1990’s England. *Greek* by Steven Berkoff, a living legend in the English theatre is a story based on the Sophoclean legend. The play situates itself in the postmodern conditions of England, and especially of the Tufnell Park. The main focus of the play revolves around the issue of incest and patricide, which involves the fate of Eddy, the Berkovian Oedipus. Eddy’s mental sufferings find an appropriate expression through the Oedipal situation. However the tragedy of Eddy does not end at the same point like his Greek counterpart. The Oedipus myth while changing itself to the postmodern cultural context gets modified. Hence the postmodern Oedipus; Eddy does not suffer the physically as well as mentally at the end. Rather he boldly decides to continue his relation with the ‘mother-wife’ instead of wasting it through the horrible punishment. Therefore it would be a necessary investigation about the possible reasons regarding the ‘different’ end of the Oedipus myth as seen in *Greek*.

While getting adapted to the postmodern cultural context, the Oedipus myth, through *Greek* has already shown the tremendous potential for the interpretation and revision of it. The overall postmodern context demands a serious re-examination of the ‘normal or ‘accepted’ things in the socio-cultural arena. The very concept of culture is under scrutiny in the postmodernity. The fixity of meaning and the homogeneity of the structures are generally non-regarded things. There is growing scepticism about the role of institutions like religion, government, family and education. Instead there is a belief that every phenomenon consists of the elements which are self-dissipating or self-contradictory. The postmodernist thinkers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Lacan and Richard Rorty are disconcerted with the modernist ideas like order, center, originality, meaning, ahistoricity, reality and reason. They believe that in the name of these ideas the western civilization has wrought dominance, oppression and destruction. They have therefore posited their archaeological/genealogical and anti-systemic discourses that notably distance them from their legacy and create space for multivalent, polysemous discourse. The postmodern context liberates an artist to put forth his own philosophical understandings of the existential concerns of that time. No artist is ever happy to imitate the reality blindly but to re-present it by tuning it to his context. The impact of the contemporary culture creates different ‘texts’ by using different clues from the reality around, by then resigning a defined and stable form. In this sense every
adaptation is an act of philosophical appropriation to suit the intellectual as well the existential requirements of the time.

The postmodern writer or artist is in the situation of a philosopher: the text, which he writes, the work, which he creates, is not governed by any set of rules and they cannot be judged decisively through existing categories. The text or artistic work tries to find rules and categories, which allow for a judgment. Therefore, the writer and artist work without rules in order to lay down the rules of that, what will be completed. Hence, the text and artistic work are events. (Lyotard30-31)

Myth as a narrative fits into this postmodern framework where it can show constant dialectic amongst the characters and the attributes. The Oedipus myth, having the multiverse of its own does find an occasion to suit for is adaptation in Greek.

The events in Greek are based on the Oedipus myth. Eddy is just like Oedipus, who is victim of the prophecy and hence has to desert familial ties. His wife resembles Jocasta, who unintentionally marries Eddy after her earlier husband is killed by Eddy in the direct combat. His real father and mother are turned out to be his adapted parents, who keep the secret of his birth till the gypsy’s prophecy. Eddy finally meets his fate or decided end when he realizes, kind of anagnorisis about his birth and his incestuous relation with his wife-mother. The interesting fact is that Eddy has a very marginal role to play in these happenings. Of course he is lucky enough to know about the prophecy regarding his ‘unlucky’ birth as compared to Oedipus, who realizes it only at the end. Eddy, who is a common modern man of 1990s responds to this Oedipus like situation in what can be called as ‘Anti-Oedipus’ manner. He instead of reacting to the situation emotionally registers his rational yet natural response by deciding to continue their relationship. He is comfortable with the idea of having a maternal relationship to the same woman, whom he had loved as a wife. The emotional quagmire created due to these unprecedented happenings is handled by Eddy in the most natural way. He by deciding to keep both his relations intact has shown a different way of dealing with reality. Morally he was not supposed to continue the sexual-physical relationship with his mother. Socially he too could not hold on to the double-binded relationship as it is not a customary valid proposition. He is supposed to undergo the moral, mental and social punishment to save him from damnation. Eddy refuses to follow such traditional way of looking at the things. He develops his own
philosophy towards the issue of incest by keeping his emotions at the front rather than emphasizing the codes.

I love you even if I am your son / do we cause each other pain, do we kill each other, do we maim and kill, do we inflict vicious wounds on each other? We only love so it doesn’t matter mother, mother it doesn’t matter. Why should I tear my eyes out Greek style, why should you hang yourself.... (GR 139)

Eddy makes his position very clear about the issue of incest by refusing to follow the ‘Greek’ style of punishment. He does not approve of the physical wounds to be inflicted on the bodies or the suicide for no offense as such. Eddy seems to struggle with the question, “What has gone wrong? What is his crime exactly?” His struggle can be seen through the expressions like, “…/ have you seen a child from a mother and son/ no. Have I? No. then how do we know that it’s bad? Should I be so mortified? Who me.” (GR 139) The question is direct and penetrating. It emphasizes the fact that it is not directed towards his wife but towards the entire system which made them, or rather everyone believes that ‘it’s bad’. Eddy seems to question the entire modes of operations through which certain things are marked as ‘good’ and other as ‘bad’. Such created forms of knowledge are directed towards the psychological and physical confinements of an individual. It is therefore necessary to counter the ideological formations which codify the human behaviour. Such codification of human behaviour is generally done through culture and its institutionalization.

Greek culture, which was one of the oldest civilizations showed such kind of codification. In Greek culture the importance was given to the family life which was considered as the microcosm of the society. The family was generally headed by the father and the children were supposed to be the silent followers of this central figure. Greek families or oikos consisted of male, a female, and a servant mainly. Caring for the children and continuing the family circle through progeny would be the main concerns. The structure of the family was very compact and every member was assigned with some responsibility. Women were prioritised for the domestic work but they were kept at the margins of social interactions. It was a predominantly male dominated or patriarchal society. Men would decide the things and they were the only ones to participate in politics, a way towards power. Women were given the responsibility to follow religion and rituals.
The sanctity of family ties had to be maintained at any cost. Family relations amongst the members had to be morally upright. Failing to keep this, the members had to undergo a severe punishment, ranging physical atrocities to social boycott. Family ties would even decide the nature of man’s afterlife. Therefore any disturbance in the family ties would affect the god’s Greek. The concept of eusebia (translated as ‘piety’) regulated interaction between members in the community in Ancient Greek civilisation. When one thinks about the Oedipus myth, it is quite clear that why Oedipus had undergone such inhuman retribution. It was almost an obligation for him to pluck his eyes and desert himself in the forest for the sheer reason that he could not face the world after the ‘unintentional’ sexual relationship with his mother. He had broken the sacred tie in the family and he had committed the most ugly sin by involving a family member in it.

Incest was considered to be the most heinous crime in the Greek culture along with the patricide. Both these crimes were again related to the family ties, involving parents. Respect for the law and order based on social and moral codes was the key feature of the Greek society or Polis. The social and family relations were regularised through such codes including the sexual relations in the society. The Athenians would therefore fear to transgression because of the shame which transgression brings to it. Sexual relations were guarded as men and women were not allowed to mingle freely. The Greeks represented male and female sexuality through the various gods they worshipped. Sexual beliefs were intimately associated with religious cults that celebrated human and earthly fertility as represented by female deities such as Demeter. While the heterosexual drive to reproduce is a good and necessary thing, uncontrolled desire (eros), of the kind that would disturb the stable household (oikos) has the harmful consequences within a civilized context. The concept of Eros or love was very broad in ancient times. Sexual desire was, of course, a component but it was also a unifying force that encompassed the desire for anyone or anything.

Gods were all powerful in Greek culture. Every aspect of existence was controlled by some god or another. To get rid of the plague, the gods are consulted to find out what crime brought on the punishment. When the crime is discovered to be murder, the solution is to appease the gods by bringing the murderer to justice. A prophesy for the Greeks was set in stone. It is impossible to avoid it. Human beings would always exhibit the bad side; hubris or pride. It is rather the quality of not
keeping awareness of your human limitations. Most of the tragedies are indicative of this belief in the Greek culture.

These distinctive features of the Greek culture obviously get reflected in the Oedipus myth. It embodies the importance in maintaining the sanity of the family ties and the repercussions caused due to such transgression. Transgression of any sort was unwelcomed especially against the social and moral codes. Such codification was stringent in case of sexual relations. One had to respect these codes or one had to face the music like Oedipus. Even though he was a king and an upright person, could not survive the aftermaths of the prophecy and incest. The Geek society probably would not have been ready to forgive their king for this act. The Greek culture shows a kind of contradictory attitude about the matter of sex and its association with religion and morality. Most of the Greek Gods and deities like Zeus, Orestes and Aphrodite were licentious in their behaviour whereas the human beings had to follow the strict moral standards. Greek myths tend to express larger political, social, and philosophical issues through intrafamilial conflict, and especially through relations or conflict between men and women. The different aspect of the Greek culture got assimilated and consolidated in the myths and hence they are preserved, utilised and reinterpreted over a period of time.

Any myth is not just a story or narrative structure but a complicated arrangement where the certain cultural elements find a place by nullifying others and in turn effectuate formulation of a set of norms and codes to regulate the human thoughts and conduct. In case of Oedipus myth too, the above claim seems to be proven. The myth lays down certain very direct and other subtle practices within a cultural set up. The Oedipus myth presents a set of categories and classifies them as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The myth presents the central concern regarding the mother-son relationship. It does not approve such incestuous relation and connects it with punishment. It is stamped as ‘morally bad’. The person indulged, intentionally or intentionally has to undergone the physical and mental sufferings. These suffering are exemplified by Oedipus’ actions and Jocasta’s conduct. They stand for what is known as ‘poetic justice’. The incestuous relationship draws a line between two types of actions- moral and immoral. Moral is as per the codes prescribed whereas immoral stands for the transgression of these codes. Moral is generally rewarded through the social acceptance whereas immoral is penalised with punishments. Thus the incestuous relation, its immorality or
transgression of ‘normal’ and its penalty are all connected with each other. The participants in this relationship are penalised for their ‘abnormal’ behaviour as against the normal sexual behaviour of the men and women. The movement they are termed as ‘abnormal’, they are cut off from the ‘normals’. They are guilty of the act whereas all others are automatically placed in the position of a judge or a critic or an observer. For normal people the act of Oedipus and Jocasta is a kind of extravagance, which can be chewed for passing the time. The punishment is necessary for keeping the social balance and hence the parties in it must set the examples by doing so. Punishment is a way to show the repentance for the act. One can be saved by the God’s grace if one does this physical and mental penance. The absolute faith in God is considered to be a sign of decency and righteous. In this manner the myth creates so many divisible categories to take care of such exceptional behaviour of the members of the social group for example good and evil, moral and immoral, accepted and forbidden, man and woman, high and low, innocent and guilty, pardonable and punishable, observer and participant, normal and exceptional, believer and non-theist, civilised and barbaric. These binary opposite sets privilege the first category over the other. Automatically the attributes grouped under the first category gain more values that the second category attributes. The person who follow the first category attributes become superseded than the others. Myths like the Oedipus myth embody and circulate such and many more codes regarding the social hierarchies, religious practices and cultural forms. They are the ones who attribute meanings to the acts of an individual. Myths therefore are storehouse of the normative processes through which certain acts of human being are termed as ‘normal’ whereas the other actions are ‘non-acceptable’. These socio-cultural categories and behavioural norms are almost unalterable as they are important to make people ‘civilised’ and ‘progressive’.

The Oedipus myth besides creating categories and the subtle ideological formations, also underscores the importance of various institutions in the areas like religion, government and culture. Oedipus symbolises the royal institution through which different norms and practices are operated. However Oedipus himself is a part of larger institution called religion. Religion and morality related to it operate even on the great souls hence Oedipus has to take punishment. He is a king and therefore the burden of his acts lies heavily on him. He is more guilty as the entire city is suffering from curse because of his act of transgression. Therefore his retributive actions are
awaited by everyone. The myth, by making Oedipus to undergo the punishment highlights the importance of social and moral codes which are enforced by the institutional set up. The same can be said about the act of prophesy which again is held true by the social norms and beliefs. Prophesy was considered as a divine announcement by the Oracle of Delphi or a guess by the wise person like Tiresias. It is a kind of unauthenticated knowledgewhich is believed in general. The agency or the wise person is respected as an authentic source and hence their words are followed. This activity is also supported by the religious and cultural institutions. Even the kings and the queens are not outside its influence. These agencies work in order to regulate the human behaviour. The myth highlights different ways of how different modes of knowledge are created and operated. Nobody seems to challenge prophesy or the predications by Tiresias as it is never being done earlier. Things are like that for years together. What is generally considered as ‘normal’ or ‘obvious’ is also the product of institutional operations. They show how powerful people and authorities create different modes of knowledge to suit their purpose. Knowledge is a product to serve the self-interests of the certain groups. Thus an apparently simple myth contains many elements from the social, political and cultural life of that time. The undertones that a myth carries are the most important aspect for its rejuvenation and adaptation.

The Oedipus myth, as stated earlier possesses lot of potential for expansion in different contexts due to it dynamic nature. It contains at its core the basic struggle of an individual to understand and master the conditions of his living. These conditions always dissuade and win over him. This uncontrollable environment ultimately dominates an individual and shows the ultimate supremacy. These unfavourable conditions are referred as fate or the divine powers. The struggle between an individual and the environment finds suitable contexts time and again. The heroic struggle of Oedipus against his wild environment gets the fertile soil in the 1990’s England where Eddy faces the similar struggle with the environment and with the problems posed by the forces outside his control. The cultural context of the Tufnell Park recasts the Oedipal drama with certain alteration. When the colossal tragedy took place in Greece, the city was all suffering from the plague, which was man-made. Eddy finds himself in the similar conditions, matching the plague-like environment of Greece. The Oedipus myth starts finding its context since this point. The process is expressed by Steven Berkoff
Greek came to me via Sophocles, tricking its way down the millennia until it reached the unimaginable wastelands of Tufnell Park— a land more fantasized than real, being an amalgam of the deadening war zones that some areas of London had become. (GR 97)

The degrading social context, which is compared with the ‘wasteland’, establishes the link between the past and the present. Eddy just like Oedipus tries to comprehend the conditions outside him. The ancient Greece suffered because of the physical plague whereas the situation in London, especially the Tufnell Park is worse than Greece. The overall picture of the contemporary context is established in the most disgusting manner.

In my eyes, Britain seemed to have become a gradually decaying island, preyed upon by the wandering hordes who saw no future for themselves in a society which had few ideals or messages to offer them. The violence that streamed through the streets, like an all-pervading effluence, the hideous Saturday night fever as the pubs belched out their dreary occupants, the killing and maiming at public sports, plus the casual slaughtering of political opponents in Northern Ireland, bespoke a society in which an emotional plague had taken root. (GR 97)

The context is established at beginning where London is shown suffering from an emotional plague. The term ‘emotional plague’, which is emphasized, suggests the degrading conditions of the city and especially the emotional conditions of the people living in it. It is a culture devoid of values and morals. The country is full of violence, treachery, corruption and intoxication; where the people have lost the sense of reality. The once great culture has turned out to be the ‘wasteland’ where no solace is expected. The conditions between the ancient Greece and London are alike but there is a small difference too. The conditions in ancient Greece were resulted because of the misbehavior of a single person whereas London seems to be filled with so many Oedipus’ who have caused the city to pain like anything. The rampant corruption at all levels marks the similarity between the ancient and the contemporary. Eddy’s tragedy turns out to be a mere love story because of the environment in which he lives. Oedipus was a kind of odd man out in the ancient culture. However such sanctity and moral uprightness are rarity in the contemporary times. Eddy is placed in such an environment where there is no possibility of great tragedy but it can be mere a story of
struggle. Though Eddy predicament in the postmodern London is juxtaposed to Oedipus’ existential struggle in the ancient time by referring to the almost same sequence of the events- a prophesy of unknown yet unbelievable source, the sufferings, the diseased environment, riddle by the sphinx, murder of the father and marrying the mother and finally the self-knowledge after the anagnorisis. The story of Eddy holds all the elements which are present in the ancient Greece but with slight differences.

While getting adapted to the postmodern conditions in England during the last decade of the 20th century, the Oedipus myth gets altered in some regard. It becomes more suggestive and symbolic. The events and characters get fresh meanings and the implicit use of Oedipus myth forms the core part of the numerable questions regarding the contemporary cultural, social and ethical framework. The story of a common person, who lives in the area of North London, becomes the hero of story however he lacks the grandeur and magnanimity of his Greek counterpart. Eddy is not just a common man but more of a degrading human being. He lives in the environment where the people are extremely materialist. They are busy in going to pubs and enjoying themselves with the cheap physical, sexual pleasures. They lack any moral foundation. There are no limits set for the human behaviour as everyone is contented to ‘exist’ rather than ‘live’ meaningfully. The disintegrating cultural set up is showed through the observations by the playwright who is more attracted towards the ugly sides of life conditions.

We were the world’s greatest video watchers, since we, since we had lost the ability to speak to each other. We sat in like zombies, strangled in our attempts to communicate, feeding off the flickering tube like patients wired to support systems.(GR 97)

The Oedipus myth is getting a totally contrastive context compared to its earlier occurrence in Greece. The Cockney setting in Tufnell Park is contrastively different from that of Oedipus’s Thebes. The ancient setting stands for a progressive, ethical society where people would respect the institutions like religion and the supremacy of God. The situation in Greek is far more degrading and menacing where there is absolutely no link between the life and ethics or the moral background. Eddy is part of such corrupting ethos which is unavoidable for any modern man especially in the highly developed societies. They pay the cost of being civilized or modern by sacrificing the
social, moral and cultural codes. It is a dismal society where morals do not exist, violence is rampant on the streets, and the upper-class becomes wealthy while the lower-class remained poor. 1990’s was a tough time for the England when it witnessed the degradation because of so many reasons. The unreasonable industrialization created social, economic and environmental issues of critical importance. The social balance got disturbed because of the unequal distribution of wealth. The colonies like the Tufnell Park were the examples of that imbalance. It was filthy, unhygienic and crowded. The easy money led to the easy demand of pleasure. The young ones and the olds are the frequent visitors to the pubs. Sex had lost the passion and it became the source of temporary pleasure without any commitment. The enormous spread of this cheap way to gain pleasure marked the declining moral standards. Eddy’s wife refers to her baby lying ‘amidst the condoms on the junk-filled strand.” (GR 119) it is an indicative of the extremely hell-like condition of the metro. Eddy is the representative character born out of 19990’s London which was a society far from being civilised. It was an environment of the ‘wasteland’; a corruption at all levels- physical, mental, familial, social, cultural and spiritual. The Oedipus myth has found the modern and total antithetical context, where the modern Oedipus has to situate himself with different ‘perspectives and perceptions’. The Tufnell Park context is both distinctive and challenging for the Oedipus myth to get adapted as it signifies utter degrading of all sensitive and moral aspects of human life. It symbolises the disintegrated families and social structure in the wave of swamping industrialization and mushrooming materialism.

The conditions in England during 1990’s were extremely complicated for living. The social and cultural deterioration was the result of political misrule. There was a growing dissent against the Thatcher rule amongst the intellectuals and creative minds. Her policies of free trade and delicensing liquor were heavily criticized by the people. England became the land of promises for the outer world but the internal social structure was totally disinterred. The class differences were converted into the class rifts. The poor people had to face the music of the changing economic structure and the political decisions. Along with this transformation The Thatcher rule was responsible for what is known as The Falklands War. In 1982, the war between Argentina and Great Britain took place over the ownership of the Falkland Islands, a small group of islands in the South Atlantic. Great Britain developed a sense of national pride. It
made Margaret Thatcher a national hero. Her stance brought British victory in the war. Prior to war, Thatcher's public support was low, due mostly to the failing economy. In spite of the victory and public support, Thatcher faced heavy criticism on the humanitarian ground. On one side many artist glorified the victory and the image of Thatcher, whereas other artist made people conscious about the long term effects of this imperial mentality. The artists like Berkoff were extremely vocal about the curbing of individualism by the political authority. He quotes. “Since we are all becoming so drearily politicized that I almost feel the Thought Police might be watching in case, God forbid, the word art is used. No, we have to show the moral decline of Thatcherism!” (Green “Oedipus Revisited”) The cultural context thus posits the paradoxical situation, wherein the image of hero, by way of Thatcherism is projected and the same image is deconstructed through mockery of it. Greek is one of the instances of this deconstruction of the heroic image of the dictator. The context in which the Oedipus myth finds itself appropriate to adapt is full of uncertainty where the earlier, traditional systems and belief systems have undergone a sea change. The context of the Tufnell Park signifies the overall degradations of the modern civilizations due to irrational rulers and fall out of the traditional systems.

Eddy the central character in the modern adaptation of the Oedipus myth is more a representative than the individual. He belongs to the ghettos from lower middle class family. He lives a more carefree life where he enjoys free sex with women. Though his family condition is not very prosperous, he has strong bonds with his parents and sister. Interestingly Eddy is unaware about the prophecy and the effects of it on his future. His life changes drastically after that. The events that follow the revelation- his battle to survive, his clash with the hotel manager and his accidental murder, Eddy’s marriage with the manager’s wife and settlement as a businessman, all show the strong influence of fate. Eddy thus like Oedipus is a victim of fate. His mother makes a statement about it, “… fate makes us play the roles we’re cast.” (GR 121) Eddy is therefore undergoes the series of events matching Oedipus. However his end does not match with the Greek hero. Unlike Oedipus, Eddy refuses to punish himself and his mother-wife after the revelation of their incestuous relation. He instead accepts of the relations and continues their love relation. He refuses the ‘Greek’ style of retribution through physical pains. Eddy choses a different way to react the situation. He does not make his decision by following the traditional role models like
Oedipus. Instead of surrendering to the abyss of death, he prefers to enjoy the life. The force of life proves to be more magnetic than the archaic death model of guilt-cleansing. He accepts the reality of his relation with his mother and yet he wishes to continue it, “Yeh I wanna climb back inside my mum. What’s wrong with that?” (GR 140) Eddy’s similitude with Oedipus ends here. His refusal to act traditionally is a symbolic act of refusal of the entire socio-cultural value system from the ancient world. Instead he devises his own philosophy to face the most uncommon situation. Eddy’s response does not match the great king of Greece as he could never find any similarity with himself in word and spirit. Oedipus chooses the way of penance and hard self-punishment to set an ideal for others as it was expected in the Greek culture. The high moral standards in the ancient world demanded the heavy price for Oedipus’ transgression. The world then was more upright and transgression of such kind would a rarity. Moral transgression was an exceptional behaviour for the Greeks. However in the postmodern Tufnell Park the situation is totally different. The moral standards are at the lowest brink and everyone is a transgressor in one or the other term. The overall degrading social conditions do not provide any fix moral standards. The overall situation is like the wasteland where there is no ‘water’ which can do the task of ablation. When there are no fix standards there is no question of transgression. He accepts the things in the most plain and detached manner.

Me who wants to clean up the city/ stop the plague destroy the sphinx/ me
was the source of all the stink / the man of principle is a mother fucker/….
(GR 138)

The basic question about Eddy’s behaviour is centered on the difficult task of deciding the immorality of his action. In Greek society there were fixed moral standards to judge the human behaviour. Therefore who will decide that Eddy has done something wrong? Rather it is too difficult to decide what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’. The inability to decide the formulas in the fixed terms for judging the human behaviour has made the acts of people like Eddy unpunishable. His question, “What’s wrong with that?” is a question to this entire socio-cultural edifice which has lost the sense of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. One cannot describe the actions in such plain and judgmental ways. Eddy’s behaviour therefore is not just shocking but also rebellious, as he shows the inadequacy of the cultural fabric to support the integrity of the standard human behaviour. Eddy and his action of incest thus create so many questions regarding the
postmodern morality and its social connection. The basic concern that springs out is about the lost link between the human acts and social-moral standards. The absence of this link has made everyone free to judge his/her own actions without getting into the trouble of judging it within a social framework. It is also an indication of the fact that we have lost the idea of culture, as a community property.

Eddy’s act of incest has created a range of question without the fix answers. Eddy is a metaphor more than an individual character that stands against the age-old and worn out ideas of right and wrong. He simply refuses to follow the ‘Greek’ style of retribution as it is outdated. In the new cultural setup, sexual relationship is not supposed be a community matter but a private domain. Eddy defines the limits of his life by refusing to apply the traditional judgments about morality. It is because he himself is convinced that he has not done anything wrong by entering into a sexual relationship with his mother that too unintentionally. He did not do it deliberately and hence his act is pardonable. His question “What’s wrong with that?” is a question that demands serious reconsideration about wasting the remaining life under the label of ‘retribution’. His modern mind could not digest the painful waste of human life, as laid down by the Greeks. He asks,

Oedipus how could you have done it, never to see your wife’s golden face again, never again to cast your eyes on her and hers on your eyes…. I’d rather run all the way back and climb into her sanctuary, climb all the way in right upto my head and hide away there and be safe and comforted. (GR 139-140)

Eddy by making it clear to not follow the Oedipus like way has initiated the ideological as well as the practical battle. The division between the individual and the culture is evident through Eddy’s stance. The individual is set apart from culture which is no more a binding force. Eddy and Oedipus, both are representatives or metaphors with difference. Oedipus shows the unquestioning attitude towards the cultural issues where there is no other way but to follow the code. Eddy on the contrary shows the inability to follow cultural codes as they are almost redundant. He is against the vague thought of retribution through sacrifice, as it is unclear that for whom the sacrifice is made and for what wrong. The postmodern Oedipus is a victim, not of his own actions but of the socio-political conditions, where no fixed concepts of morality exist. Eddy’s response to the situation is concerned with the revelation and articulation of political, social and
personal injustice. It offers a critique of the time when Thatcher’s monetarist policies and her infamous denial that there is any such thing as society, had filled the British streets with the riots and police atrocities. Although the events in Oedipus and Eddy’s life are similar, both of them are not identical. Oedipus is a king of Thebes whereas Eddy belongs to the lower middle class of the London suburb. Eddy could not achieve the social prestige and grandeur of Oedipus. He does not achieve the height of Oedipus and therefore there is no possibility of the great fall. Therefore Eddy’s story could not reach to the level of ‘great tragedy’, but remains a common man’s simple tale. Eddy could not go beyond the physical and the material world. He is constantly attracted towards the sensual pleasures. While answering the sphinx’s riddle too Eddy shows his ‘trivial’ attitude.

Man! In the morning of his life he is on all fours, in the afternoon when he is young he is on two legs and in the evenings when he is erect for his women he sprouts the third leg. (GR 127)

Eddy’s answer is sharply contrastive to that of Oedipus as he emphasizes the ‘sexual’ aspect of human beings. He shows the attributes of a common, mundane person who could not exceed the corporeal conditions of existence. Pau GilabertBarberà, therefore observes “On the whole, epic achievements cannot be expected from such a person, but the risk entailed in his portrayal is once again the one previously mentioned: if Eddy can be taken to faithfully represent the mainstream consciousness of the young people in the world he lives in, it is reasonable to think that they would identify with him …. and even accompany him, at least mentally, in contemplating boldly violating an ancient taboo, since the play is also a love story» in the end.” (312) Eddy is no way fits in the Oedipus type of heroes who would be extremely painful after revelation of knowledge or anagnorisis. Knowledge of the situation or reality does not make Eddy feel repulsive about himself or his wife. Therefore Eddy is not a ‘tragic hero’ in the Aristotelian sense. A tragic hero is supposed to neither completely good nor bad but an ‘intermediate’ person, who suffers from a tragic flaw or hamartia. Eddy is a common man who also suffers from a sense of pride. He has feeling of doing something great for the country by killing the sphinx. (“I’ll go and sort her out.” [GR 124]) While facing the giantly sphinx, Eddy’s pride about his intellectual prowess. “/you don’t scare Eddy ‘cause Eddy don’t scare easy/..” [GR 125]) Eddy exhibits ‘pride’ about his abilities which is bit improper for a common man like him, which can be referred as
his *hamartia*. In spite of this Eddy’s story could not achieve the tragic status as it fails to create pity and fear. The story though proceeds from shocking events ends on the positive note. Eddy decides to live in the heavenly conditions with his wife-mother.

The basic difference between the original myth and the indirect adaptation in the postmodern English context lies in the end of the story. Oedipus’s tragedy is extremely grim and pathetic whereas Eddy’s story is trivial and sentimental. Eddy could not achieve the lofty position like Oedipus as he belongs to the modern society where this feet is impossible to achieve. Unlike Oedipus, Eddy is aware about the degrading socio-cultural conditions and in no way is ignorant and innocent. Eddy is corrupted as he is the part of the corrupt society. He is common and hence he is very much inside the social structure. He is inflicting by those corrupting conditions and hence he speaks against the society in which he lives. The tragedy is not possible with Eddy as “ the essence of horror [today] is neither *hamartia* (tragic error) nor *hýbris* (to persist in error) nor the pathetic event; it is rather the lack of any law that demands a remedy.” (Barberà 307) The chaotic situation of the postmodern societies where there is no fixity of the rules and the norms are only capable of creating stories and not great tragedies. Eddy speaks himself without any punishment in spite of his incest. He escapes the very idea of poetic justice. He gets away with probably the most sinful crime in the western civilisation since the ancient time. He commits two acts- incest and patricide and yet remains unpunishable for whatever reasons. The Eddy’s story shows the problems in the modern world but it is akin of slap to the glorious cultural past of the west. The new age Oedipus symbolises the total collapse of the standards to regulate the human behaviour and the corrupt institutions which take us back to the primitive world, where nothing but the existence prevails the essence.

Berkoff’s Oedipus transgresses the twofundamental prohibitions on which our civilization is based: incest and murder within the clan; and he is unrepentant. Thus he blurs the line separating human beings from animals, according to the astute assertion of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. A sense of what it is to be human has disappeared from Eddie’s world, a brave new world in which human degradation no longer allows us to differentiate ourselves from animals, a plague that “grows and grows” where “there is something rotten that refuses to die”. A final apocalypse, during which every night “the moon becomes blood red.” (Barberà 307)
The above observation about Eddy is clear indication towards the subversion of the idea of moral punishment or poetic justice. It seems to contest the very notion of human beings as the superior creatures than the animals. Human beings are no more different than animals. The new order in the Eddy’s world is based on the crumbling of the traditional social and cultural furniture, which includes the revision of many traditional values and beliefs. The very idea of ‘hero’ or ‘heroism’ is challenged by showing eddy as an extremely mediocre person, rather immoral. *Greek* uses the mythical structure to escape from the traditional structures by deconstructing it through the process of adaptation. It thus deconstructs the instrument which it uses to talk about the reality.

The context of the play is surely postmodern as it is performed in during 1980’s. The postmodern intellectual world, especially the West is dominated by the one word ‘deconstruction’. It involves the process of decentering as well as the multiplicity of the meaning instead of ‘logocentric’ unidimensional positions. There was growing skepticism about the traditional social and cultural set up especially with the institutions. Major figures like Rousseau, Foucault and Lyotard criticized political and social institutions for corrupting human beings. Political and social institutions have created inequality in human beings. So now we have masters and slaves, the cultured and the uncultured and the poor and the rich.*Greek* makes a strong statement against the overuse and abuse of these institutions. The play shows such dominating forces through the Sphinx which dominate the common man. It represents the gigantic institutions which perceive human beings as an insignificant creature. The sphinx echoes this dominance,“Who are you, **little** man/ pip squeak scum /drip off prick/ mistake in the middle of night…. /fuck off you **maggot** before I tear your head off/….” *(GR 125)* The insulting way in which the sphinx approaches Eddy is an indication of the forces which try to appropriate individuals. The common man is dampened by these superhuman powers. The play through the killing of the sphinx at the hands of Eddy sends a message that the new order can be established through the destruction of the old and the dominant. Eddy as established before is neither hero or powerful as he does not belong to the superior socio-cultural class. He therefore can be called as ‘marginalized’ and yet he is the chief character in *Greek*. The play can be described as ‘statement by and for the marginalized.’ Foucault emphasizes discourse towards the oppressed and dominated. He shows interest in marginalized groups of society like
mentally ill, prisoners and homosexuals. He explains how their difference from others keeps them away from political power and reason plays a conspiratorial role in such power exercise. Eddy becomes victim of such institutional sponsored practices like family relations (Eddy’s displacement from his family, the issue of adoption), culture (incest, patricide and the killing of sphinx) and episteme creation (the prophecy by a gypsy).

Distrust in reason is another feature of the postmodernist thinking which can be seen as reflected in the Eddy’s attitude. The anti-enlightenment philosophy of Rousseau did not believe that reason can make human life perfect and that everything can have rational explanation. He criticized reason and truth for promoting egocentrism:

Reason is what turns man in upon himself. Reason is what separates man from all that troubles him and afflicts him. (Discourse on the Origin 37)

Reason thus deprives man of compassion, deepens his self-centeredness and promotes his self-interest. While thinking about civilization and culture Rousseau criticizes the achievements that mankind has made in the name of sciences and arts. Sciences and arts do not free and elevate mankind but rather smother men’s urge for freedom, makes them love their slavery and turn them into what is called civilized people. He believes that civilization has corrupted our natural tendencies. This is very much in line with the postmodern view that there are no fixed and systematic answers in any rational system of knowledge. Eddy is a test case of how individuals are controlled by different elements and they do not get the opportunity to enjoy the freedom offered them naturally.

Instead of reason, the natural tendencies of human being are important for the postmodernist ideology. Man according to Rousseau is by nature innocent and good, content and equal. It is the corrupting influence of civilization that makes him cruel and mechanical. He supplies two categories in this regard; man in the pure natural state and man in the civil state. Rousseau is critical of the category of man in the civil state and opts for man in the natural state. Man’s worth does not depend on his intelligence but on his moral nature. It consists of feeling. He insists on the feeling in our life and rejects the view that reason can bring perfection to man. Only common thing all men possess is feeling and all other activities like arts and sciences differ from man to man.
He strongly believes that the feeling promotes equality and justice within the framework of civilized society. Social codes are always a product a system which is based on some rational thinking. Reasons are given more priority over other issues. The postmodernist thinking reverses this idea by emphasizing the natural tendencies. Eddy’s decision at the end to be with his wife-mother without making any sacrifice seems to be ‘unreasonable’ and ‘sentimental’. In fact it is more natural response towards the entire issue of incest and the sexual-emotional involvement. The point that draws the attention is about the unnecessary sacrifice for the unintended act. Eddy’s action presents a problematic that the new knowledge about your partner means the end of all earlier relations. Eddy is different and not wrong at all in following his heart rather than the ‘socially’ constructed brain. He refuses to be civilized and kill people (“It’s better than shoving a stick of dynamite up someone’s ass and getting medal for it” [GR140]) He prefers to follow the emotions that spring from his heart. “.. it’s love I feel it’s love, what matter what form it takes, it’s love I feel…..” (GR 140) Eddy is almost like a spokesperson of Rousseau, who is pleading his case for being natural. He feels that he has lost the ‘paradise’ but he is making an entry in ‘heaven’. He, like Adam and Eve is knowledgeable after the discovery of the incest. He therefore loses the innocence of his earlier relation with his wife and he has to forbid the paradise i.e. his normal life. However he is sure that with this new knowledge about his wife he still can inhabit the heaven as it the God’s abode where everyone is pardoned. It is love that rules the heaven. Eddy therefore becomes a symbol of the emotional or natural responses to the critical situations rather than solving them through the reason and intellect. The obvious reference to paradise and heaven carries the strong religious overtones where the more humane, all-comprehensive and forgiving ancient concept of heaven is preferred to the stringent, isolating Christian idea of paradise. The play seems to demand the serious reconsideration of the religious ideas like Unitarianism and monotheism to make an accommodative type of religious, cultural set up.

*Greek* is a play of (post)modern spirit which demands reexamination of all those things which are normally accepted as a part of mental and social framework. It poses questions about the mentally deep rooted notions like ‘incest’ and ‘sex’ in the newer light. Man has to follow the codes to make his life livable but to what extent should he compromise with his natural tendencies and impulses. The codes need to be always necessarily suppressive.Instead there should be more harmonize relationship
between the natural and the social. Human life is definitely not less important than the human sacrifice. A human being must be allowed to follow those relations which are not approved by cultural codes. In the modern times the traditional structures including different systems and codes are either politicized or defunct. The postmodern thought takes us much beyond these structures. Thinkers like Rousseau hardly believed in any system of law or convention and tended quite often towards a state of primitivism where lawlessness reigned. This is an open dismissal of the established order and orientation towards anarchy.

The sciences, letters and arts spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called the civilized peoples. (Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences 36)

Eddy too pronounces his disgust for the tradition ways of perceiving the things. His final act of not following the Oedipus path is a beginning towards the new order. The urge for the replacement of the old and worn-out is a step towards the new order. Transitions are always chaotic but from that only the final direction is established. The socio-cultural context of 1990’s demanded a different response to the classical myths like that of Oedipus. By using the mythical apparatus, Greek successfully shows the need for reconsiderations for some of the foundational things in the contemporary set up. The skepticism towards the established modes of knowledge and operational mechanism makes Greek a play of contemporary sensibility. The inability to decide the fixed and permanent meanings of the socio-cultural phenomenon is the watchword of the postmodern philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche introduced such skeptical, atheist and nihilistic mode of thinking in 19th century. He gave a call for ‘revaluation of all values’ and that formed the battle-cry of the movement. The same evaluative method for the entire prevailing cultural phenomenon is seen to be followed in Greek. The play expresses the anti-foundational tones through different ways- the implicit reference to Oedipus myth but the end changes, the use of lower middle class ‘cockney’ language which direct, abusive and repulsive, the degrading setting where no more of moral codes stand out. The play thus deconstructs everything that is traditional, established and imposing. It uses the Oedipus indirectly just to show that there is no possibility of such code-based tragedy and Oedipus cannot survive in the contemporary times.
tremulous socio-cultural structures could not hold their impact on the mind of people. The utter social and psychological chaos at the end of the play is an indicative of the overall disarray.

The plague is not quite over yet. There’s still a plague around this city darling that will not go away, caused by some say some evil deed that has not purged itself, but continues to rot away inside the wholesome body of our state….. (GR 124)

This is not just a physical plague but moreover it is emotional, mental and cultural disease which has engulfed the entire society. In such a contaminated environment it is almost impossible to hold on to the outdated traditional things. In such a time of flux new things are bound to spring even though they seem to be shocking and unexpected like Eddy’s decision. Vincent Descombes observes in this regard,

no original, the model for the copy is itself copy…no facts, only interpretations and any interpretation is itself interpretation of an older interpretation; there is no meaning proper to words, only figurative meanings…no authentic version of a text, there are only translations; no truth only pastiche and parody. (182)

What Descombes refers as the ‘interpretation of an older interpretation’ fits the occasion of Greek. It is a postmodern interpretation of the earlier version of the Oedipus story. It is a new version that is non-tragic, hero less, devoid of pity and fear and obviously more thought provoking than emotional exciting. Greek is a play with different potentiality where myth is used to deconstruct the mythicism of culture and the idea of heroism. It is not a story of deconstructing the Oedipus but it contains the spirit of the postmodern time where everything is undergoing through the process of deconstruction and then reconstruction.