CHAPTER V
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CONCLUSION

Man is in dire need to ‘belong’. A sense of stability and security is necessary for his happy and peaceful life. He must have his moorings somewhere. Man longs for love and affection of parents, friends and other relatives. When this sense of belonging is lost for some reason, man suffers from a feeling of insecurity and loss of confidence. He feels orphaned and lost in the world of reality. O'Neill himself feels that he has been isolated from the society. Alienation is the basic theme of most of his major plays.

Most of O’Neill’s characters feel that this world is not their home and they find nothing to which they can ‘belong’. They are alienated from God, the world, fellowmen and themselves, O'Neill's characters need to belong to something outside themselves. However, they fail to belong in life. No matter how hard they try, they only find an escape in death. They do not see death as a terrible thing but as a liberator from
painful life. They prefer death to life as they find peace and a sense of ‘belonging’ in it.

O’Neill, a name to be remembered as far as American drama is concerned became a significant figure in America chiefly as the result of his persistent efforts after 1915. He was one of the first noteworthy persons to emerge, and the very bulk of his successful work would make him stand out, as a unique and singular writer. With his ceaseless experimentations in the dramatic field, he made modern and significant contribution to the theatre.

Eugene O’Neill has tried to discover the causes that erected barriers between man and his self between man and human society and between man and the universe. He found that one of the basic causes of human tragedy was the failure of the instruments of human communication. Man uncounted “nothingness” at every step and a malignant shadow of emptiness hovered over him as he set out to discover the meaning of life. The hostile universe made him wing in
terror and he sought shelter in human company. But, to his great
dismay, he found that nobody knew the language of the other and so
there could be no communication that was so badly needed to establish
the ties of harmonious human relationships. Thus the principle and
almost insurmountable problem for the artist was to seek a universal
language of communication which could make people understand each
other, thereby reducing the tensions causes by their estrangement from
each other.

O’Neill’s basic concern as a playwright had been with the need to
find the meaning of human existence in spite of man’s skepticism his
feeling of alienation, and his struggle against various negative forces and
disvalues. In the apparent meaninglessness and absurdity of life,
O’Neill’s protagonists strive hard to seek their identity with other
fellowmen. In this eternal drama of man’s endeavor to “belong”, Neill’s
personal life also became a major character in many of his plays were
born out of his psychic and spiritual compassions which made it
necessary for him to write in order to counteract the threat to his
existence posed by the annihilating forces of the self, society, and the cosmos.

An examination of Eugene O’Neill ‘s plays in the foregone chapters leads to certain conclusions regarding the theme of isolation and loneliness explored through an analysis of their plots, situations, characters, dialogues and techniques. It may be affirmed that O’Neill is mainly concerned with the sociological, cultural and personal isolation of the individuals who are estranged from one another, and communications and mutual understanding in their lives are replaced by estrangement and hostility. His plays reveal the social life where one individual looks upon the other as a hostile force. There comes a state when he becomes isolated and estranged not only from others but also from himself.

All O’Neill’s plays are great tragedies; but they are not tragedies of the conventional sort in the Aristolean tradition. They are tragedies with a difference. Their themes and subject matter may be the same but
their form is different. They are modern tragedies, which strikes at the very root of the sickness of to-day. To quote his own words,

“ The playwright must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it – the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer”. (Winther 38).

O’Neill’s tragic heroes are neither king nor princes, nor great military generals. Aristotle had laid down that the tragic hero must be an exceptional individual so that his fall from his former greatness may arose the tragic emotions of pity and fear. But O’Neill’s tragic personages are all drawn from the humblest ranks of society. They are
ordinary men and women, suffering and down-trodden. Yank is a stoke, Brutus Jones is a poor negro. His characters are ineffectual egotists, whining for opportunities they are incapable of using.

They are not heroes in the conventional sense of the term. O’Neill’s tragedy is truly an apotheosis of the human spirit. These crippled people emotionally ennoble and exalt them. Both Brutus Jones and Yank are exalted by the very intensity of their respective obsessions. One feels that there is nothing mean and petty about them; their grandeur and heroism is truly tragic. It terrifies, but it also soothes and strengthens. He shows man as he really is, in all his nakedness, selfish and mean and yet, such is his art he gives to this sordid human material an exalted, beautiful shape. In his plays like, *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape*, one sees the transfiguring nobility of tragedy in as near the Greek sense as possible.

In *The Emperor Jones*, O’Neill achieves a dynamic synthesis of symbol and dramatic action. The focus of the play is inward, but is consistently inward, and the final revelation is the logical climax of
revelations which have gone before. However, in O’Neill’s best plays, outward reality has the first and last word. Brutus Jones emerges as a gigantic figure brought by the very forces which exalted him. The conception of death is as evil as it is mistaken. Death is no more good or evil than its opposites, life and birth. It is man who projects death’s evil significance upon it and then he fears it.

If fear of death is a projection of man’s needs and values then the cure for it lies within man. He can and he should embrace his destiny with the positive love which is only the inevitable opposite of that negative hate which produces fear. And one cannot love life without death, since they are phases of the same cycle and are significant only in relation to each other.

In referring to death as eternal life, O’Neill does not mean the eternal life of the individual will or conscious ego. It is the individual will that the self limits us and which makes us proud and fearful of the loneliness and loss of that will, which is death.
The Hairy Ape is thus centered on Yank’s loss of faith and belief in himself as well as in the world in which he lives. Yank, in his search for identity, discovers, firstly, that he is alone, lonely and the world is impossible to live in, and secondly, that steel is no power within him, but a prison around him. Steel makes the ship, which represents power, put it also makes the cage in which Yank is imprisoned.

In the Victorian era, following the researches of Darwin and other evolutionary scientist there was a wide-spread faith in the gradual advancement of mankind towards an era of perfect peace and prosperity. It was felt that the golden age was round the corner. In America, Walt Whitman and Emerson shared this faith, and this note of confidence and triumphant assertion runs through their works. But by the time O’Neill took to writing this dream has been shattered. The fruits of science and technology had already turned to dust. O’Neill is the mouthpiece of this disillusionment. His works are an expression of the disintegration of society of the spiritual and cultural wasteland that contemporary western
civilization has become. The disintegration of American industrialization and mechanized society. What happens to Yank in the play was happening to millions in the post-war world. This spiritual loneliness and sense of isolation was a widespread phenomenon after world war I.

O’Neill being an existentialist, deals with life in a very realistic and authentic manner, and presents a faithful dramatization of human situation. The most important issue of the contemporary American Society is man’s failure to “Belong” or to find roots anywhere in this hostile world. Man is isolated not only from himself but also from nature, culture, society, religion and God. He is a lost and lonely soul, and suffers from a sense of anguish as is already evinced through the alienation of Robert Mayo in *Beyond The Horizon*, Jones in *The Emperor Jones*, and Yank in *The Hairy Ape*.

Doris V. Falk presents O’Neill’s view of the human dilemma here is that of Sartrian existentialism. Man’s very loneliness, his need to belong, is the key to his humanity. Man is at the mercy of forces outside himself and beyond his control. Yet all the forces which offer him a
secure environment in exchange for obedience to society, the authority of religion, of the state, of tradition has been created by man himself. They have no existence of their own except by virtue of man's existence. He is in actuality free from all outside authority in the determination of his fate but he is also the lonely bearer of a terrifying responsibility for himself and the race. He has nothing to lean on for support but himself, nothing to blame for his failure but himself. Human life has no intrinsic meaning or order, no harmony like that of nature except the meaning that man projects upon it. He should create his own values and impose upon his universe. Man can really hope to belong to himself. His ‘sickness into death’ is not his loneliness and anxiety in making choices and bearing responsibility.

O’Neill unfolds his tragic vision that flashes through the consciousness of Yank who experiences his innermost feeling of belonging, alienation, love, hate and of primitivism and modernity. His play projects the image of man’s primitive past and against the backdrop of the living reality of the present. The happy mixture of image and
experience enhance the beauty of the plays and their worth as a sustained allegory.

O’Neill’s exposed the ill-effects of warfare in the man, but also showed the influences of the cold-hearted business mentality, which he strongly denounced; he saw greed as a guiding principle that gave the one-sidedness to people’s characters and distorted their human instincts. He saw materialism an antagonistic to men’s social, cultural, and spiritual lives; it unleashed the less honorable traits of people’s selves and revealed greed, exploitation, and dehumanization. His views of materialism were developed in some of his best plays, such as *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922).

The sense of isolation and loneliness in the plays of O’Neill causes suffering to his characters, and their failure to control it in an effective manner brings tragedy in their lives. This isolation and loneliness may originate from a painful sense of separation from those with whom one has a striking intellectual or spiritual affinity. It looks ironical when one feels a total stranger in the very place where he
intensely wants to live with a sense of belongingness. An isolated person in his plays in one whom circumstances have forced into a self-recognition of separation, resulting in his suffering.

One finds that too much mechanization of modern life is also one of the important factors responsible to generate the sense of isolation, loneliness, estrangement and insecurity in the life of an individual. It has de-stabilized human life. *THE HAIRY APE* shows how Yank is brutalized by an impersonal mechanical social order. Yank. In this play, is one who challenges the supremacy of the machine – age and scarifies his life to move the workers by making them realize the necessity of revolt against their powerful masters. Besides the impersonal and mechanical social order, another factor responsible for the feeling of isolation and loneliness in O’Neill heroes are their failure to discriminate between the world of dream and that of reality. His characters are the willing victims of romantic dreams or illusions; they suffer and feel isolated because of their refusal to give up their dreams. In *Beyond The*
Horizon, Robert’s romantic dream of going beyond the horizon is pushed beyond his pragmatic bent of mind.

Thus, O’Neill’s plays man’s over-reaching craving for possessiveness and material gains is one of the vital causes of his isolation and loneliness. O’Neill always considers the acquisitive man as the root-cause of all the modern maladies. His is a voice against the craze of material success. To him, a money-minded person is quite complacent and steeped only in material values which cause his personal isolation and suffering. O’Neill’s characters suffer from isolation and loneliness also when they try to possess any human being by playing nasty tricks. In the way of possessing others, the possessor sometimes becomes a possession and remains isolated forever. People in O’Neill’s play suffer from isolation and loneliness also owing to their false pride and ego. Another significant cause of man’s isolation and loneliness is the search for the lost mother’s love. It is an important aspect of O’Neill’s plays. There is a profound love of a man for the lost mother,
and it is symbol of lost happiness. Having failed to attain it, man remains isolated throughout his life.

One finds the sufferings of an individual in the plays of O’Neill through his isolation from ‘self’. The characters in his plays are isolated and feel lonely due to their false pretensions and racial complex. Jones in *The Emperor Jones* is a victim of self – alienation by hating the Negros to whom he really belongs.

Isolation is the plays of Eugene O’Neill is shown through the love-hate relationship among the characters. In O’Neill’s opinion, man is a lonely sufferer in this helpless world. He finds himself totally isolated in a spiritually sterile universe and, therefore, cannot have a sense of harmony in it. In his search for identity, and also his need to belong, he feels his lostness more intensely. All the protagonists of his plays feel isolated, alienated, and despaired for lack of the center of belonging. The tension in his plays is commonly related with the struggle against isolation and loneliness. We learn from his works that a man has to face tough times in a world without God, love and faith in
life, and that he may belong, but it is possible only after sacrificing his life. It happens in the case of Yank.

O’Neill, a powerful and sensitive artist, had a talent for dramatizing the variety and quality of his experiences. His plays are worked out in such a pattern that by reading them, life could be understood. O’Neill’s belief that women play important roles in the lives of people around him found expression in his plays. His longing for the affection and love of his mother go into the making of his mother characters that stand as symbols of love, innocence and purity. His mother has become a drug addict after O’Neill’s birth. As a result of that she became disinterested and at times detached from the family members. The son found it very hard to become reconciled to this fact of her addiction. His disappointment in bringing her back to her normal self made him desperate, causing him to seek mother substitutes so as to escape from the bitter reality. His mother characters reveal his longing for mother’s love – a wish fulfillment.
O’Neill is almost alone among modern dramatists in possessing what appears to be an instinctive perception of what a modern tragedy would have to be. With his deep psychological insight he presents the inner life of the characters. Most of O’Neill’s characters do not deal with life in a normal way. The Oedipus complex, the extra-ordinary attachment of the son to his mother, O’Neill sees as a result of puritan repression. Hence the depiction of the sons life Eben, Orin, Gordon – as mother fixated individuals. Afraid of life, they seek in their mother’s protection and security.

Carlotta, O’Neill’s third wife and an extra-ordinary woman, provided O’Neill with the image of a mother, wife and friend. Moreover O’Neill’s experiences in the Catholic boarding school in his young days have turned him into a rebel against Catholicism and Protestantism. O’Neill equates the life-denying spirit of Puritanism with his concept of God the Father, a possessive and jealous God. O’Neill rejects this concept in favour of God the mother, a life-loving and pagan god. Hence the central theme that runs through almost all his
plays-the effort to transform the crude into some peace giving beauty.

The obvious fact seen in is plays are that life is vivid and restless and exciting and terrible.

O’Neill through the depiction of his wives shows that only tragedy will be the ultimate result when the husband and wife are of an entirely different nature. The pagan positive aspect of life set in opposition with the repressive and negative attitude of puritanism wrecks the family life, leading to marital complexities. The Puritanism of the husbands like Cabot and Ezra inhibits, forbids, its denial leads to fear, prejudice and narrow hatred, thwarted personality and a beggar’s attitude at the door of life.

The puritan inhibition is shown to be very destructive in the portrayal of O’Neill’s daughters. Being brought up in a strict puritan atmosphere, they meet their own destruction when the feeling which so long repressed well up now and seek gratification. The daughters like Nina Leeds and Lavinia Mannon are delineated with deep psychological perception. Being repressed in their childhood, they want to wriggle out
of their puritan inheritance when they come to know the value of life and love. While Nina comes out of it, Lavinia finds it hard to break the puritan bond that has for a long time mastered her. Here O’Neill shows that man deprived of the importance which religion conferred when on him it made him important to the universe as a whole here reises himself by his own boot straps, and by the very strength and articulateness of his passions asserts the dignity which a rationalistic psychology denies him.

O’Neill’s unique experiments with woman characters in his plays are genuine and powerful expressions of the spiritual anguish and helplessness which O’Neill himself knows only too well in his life. O’Neill produced an impression of greatness by virtue of the absolute demands he made upon life and art and no other American dramatist has attained that stature which this Faustian aspirant, O’Neill, has attained.

Finally, this study reveals that the theme of isolation and loneliness is one of the variations on a common theme in American drama, i.e., the theme of ‘Quest’ to which all the major playwrights are
engages in some form or the other. In the plays of Eugene O’Neill however, this theme has been raised almost to a ‘Cult’, a ‘force’ in human affairs that seems to dominate all the other aspects of life. Almost every one of the major characters displays a dream or a carving for the ideal that is outside his actual life. In most cases, the revealed situation is ironical. Fate and circumstances always so conspire against the dreamer that the dream not only becomes impossible but also a source of suffering and tragedy.

The work characteristically evinces that the treatment of isolation and loneliness in O’Neill’s plays changes from the early to the later plays when his own outlook in life grows more pessimistic and negative. In the early plays, isolation and loneliness are caused by the vague and romantic dreams of the characters, who finally meet with the failure of unfulfilment of these dreams.

The protagonists of all these plays are seeking their proper places in the scheme of things, seeking to belong. The answer to their need cannot be found in any mystic force outside themselves, but can be found only in the vast and foggy realms of their own unconscious, where
they seek a self which they can visualize only as a self-image, an abstract identity which will give them the line, a direction in which to move.

The shape of the forecastle suggests Yank's anguished feeling of loneliness and imprisonment in life, which reaches a climax in his death struggle. By placing Yank at the apex, he is isolated from his mates in the narrowest part of the room. O'Neill indicates both alienation and anguish.

While O’Neill has seen the search for identity as one of the impelling forces of life, he has also perceived that a lifetime spent in searching for self may be a soul stifling struggle. In O’Neill’s plays the actual empirical self of a given character is composite which is readily perceived by the audience. The ideal self is the character’s projected image of what he should be, which often confuses with what he is. This confusion results ultimately in conflict and disintegration to clear up the confusion, to determine the nature and values of the ideal image, to reconcile conflicting images and to search either in the masks on themselves or beneath them for the real self. This is the complex motivation of O’Neill’s protagonists. In this present group of dramas, the
leading characters search for their identity from which they have become alienated.

O’Neill was convinced that men lead lives of desperation and clamorous despondency. Their attitude towards life is the baffled, bewildered and perplexed defiance. Resembling both Neanderthal men and chained gorillas, they act in unison, laugh as if they are barking, drown themselves in whisky, soothe their harassed mind with pipedreams and delude themselves with the thought that they belong. The penalty that one pays for defying his fate and trying to raise above it is mental torture, spiritual harassment and self-destruction.

Modern man cannot be saved by materialism, socialism and anarchism. He is nevertheless given a glimpse of heaven, a sight of paradise, a golden age when he was in harmony with Nature. The virtues of nature in the past apparently aggravate the situation, intensify the artificiality of the modern age and invigorate the sordidness of life today.
O’Neill’s vision of life was essentially tragic. The human predicament is the theme of his plays. He is a great tragic artist. His tragic protagonists are all drawn from the humblest ranks of the society. They are ordinary men and women who are downtrodden and who bleed inwardly. Each of them has his romantic illusion, which sends him to his doom. They demonstrate that any kind of escape from the reality of life is self-destruction. They assert at every step the splendid beauty and tremendous joy of life, which must be accepted with all its limitations. Tragedy results when one pursues some cherished illusions forgetting the reality of life.

O’Neill’s tragedies are basically the embodiment of severe sufferings. He says that he has studied man not in relation to man but in relation to God. Man is lost in the wilderness of despair and he is persistent in his search for a contented and meaningful life. He suffers from an inner emptiness, isolation, a feeling of insecurity and hopeless despondency.
The tensions of O’Neill’s plays are nearly always connected with man’s struggle against isolation and loneliness. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality, but in his rebellion and anger, and in his inability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at ease in a world without God, love and trust in life. His plays make it certain that he is the dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation all through his illustrious literary career.