CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

The period from the American civil war to the opening of the twentieth century has on the face of it an obvious unity, from every point of view. The civil war marked a turning point in American history. From the earliest days of the new republic, foreign observers of the American Scene, many of them, of course, hostile to the very existence of a free and democratic United States, had been predicting that the existence of slavery in the Southern States would end bringing about the total collapse of this Republican Society and its institutions. That collapse had seemed to occur, but the victory of the North in the Civil War ensures the survival of the United States in a manner that could only be seen as vindication of its original principles.

But however clearly 1865-1900 may appear to define a “period” in American history, the years between these dates were in no way characterized by cohesion, coherence, or unity of any kind. Their essence rather was rapid, sweeping, and violent change. Here in these years are to be found the roots of the conventional stereotype of American society as dynamic, fast-moving, constantly altering, the
rootless and the restless. Here in these years the brawling, sprawling, powerful, but self-contradictory giant of America—the America that one still recognizes today—was born. Yet the birth-pangs of this new America occurred in the content of an older world that did not disappear overnight. Despite the civil war and its aftermath, the America of the earlier nineteenth century is in no absolute sense cut off from the America of the 1860s, 1870s and beyond. In different areas of American life the currents of history flowed at quite different speeds.

America’s literary culture, for example, was slow to register the scale and scope of the radical charges transforming the many aspects of American Society after the civil war. The entire social, economic, and political bases of American life may have been rapidly changing. But for many it was imperative that American culture should continue to enshrine the values of the traditional past.

Such an attempt to resist the movement of history could not finally successful. America’s literacy culture between 1865 and 1900 is then inevitably involved in the pattern of radical social change occurring between these dates. But within this period, as within others, the links
between literature and society are not mere reflections of each other. Thus it took time for American writers to begin to recognize the kinds of change in this society which had been occurring with often bewildering speed since the close of the civil War.

Just now massive it was can be indicated by a few statistics. In 1860 the population of America was under 40 million. By 1900 that figure had doubled. This population explosion was partly caused by a vast, new, wave of immigrants reaching America’s shores; around 1900, immigration was running at a level of almost one million a year. In 1860, sixty per cent of the working population of America worked on farms twenty-six per cent in industry and transport. Again between 1860 and 1900 the towns and cities of America grew at twice the speed of the nation as a whole. By 1900 a third of Americans lived in towns and cities, while New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago all had more than a million inhabitants.

All these developments were themselves the consequence of the one basic factor, that is, the scope and speed of economic growth in post Civil War America. About 1870 the United States experiences the most rapid rate of industrialization that the world has ever known. As
one historian puts it, overnight this nation of farmers and horse traders has mastered the intricate mysteries of a technical civilization. This startling economic growth was the springboard creating all the other profound changes which were transforming America. Now more than ever, it was the prospect of a better life in material terms that persuaded millions of Europeans to try their luck in the new world. These immigrants in turn helped to swell the rapidly-growing towers and cities of America, and to provide labour for her booming industries. The accelerating pace of economic life led to the completion of the transcontinental rail roads and so to the closing of the moving frontier, so long a crucial factor in the American experience. Better communications made possible a faster exploitation of natural resources – oil, coal, timber, wheat, copper and ensured the emergence of huge commercial corporations taking over the farming mining, forest, range land.

These were so many problems that seemed obviously wrong, like the pace of urbanization business and political corruption, immense inequalities in the distribution of the country’s new wealth, and the irresponsible use of riches by the few who possessed them. None the less, the truth is that for much of the period after 1865, protest was
muted. The essential explanation, perhaps, is that traditional American values could be seen as authenticating what was taking place. America after all was the land of opportunity. The American was the self reliant, self made man. America offered every man the opportunity. America offered every man the opportunity to succeed to improve his lot by his hard work. Such ideas were part and parcel of the American dream. So entrenched were they that is the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, America’s business and industrial leaders hardly needed to make any kind of defense of their activities.

**AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS – A GLANCE**

Towards the middle of the twentieth century two playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, came to the fore much as O'Neill. Tennessee Williams, spent part of his early life at various places in the south with his grandparents and in St.Louis with his parents and his sister. Tensions within the family and the growing illness of his sister figure in the background of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). In this evocative and poignant work, Amanda Wing field, a dominating mother, deserted by her husband, insists that her son Tom bring home a prospective suitor for her daughter Laura, who appears to retire into her own private world of concern with her collection of little glass animals. An attempt is made by Tom and seems to be on
the point of succeeding, until the prospect explains that he is already engaged.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is a serious and bold play. It has very many conflicts. Of a once proud southern family, one sister, Stella has married a very earthly character, Stanley Kowaski, while the other, Blanche, has tried to maintain the pattern of her gentility with complete moral disintegration. Stanley so resents Blanche that he attacks her and she is led off to a mental hospital, still preserving the external form of her gentility. In England and France the play was a great box-office success but encountered some official disapproval. To be precise, there is in it a great deal that is harsh. Instead of some kind of romantic rescue for Blanche, with whom the audience greatly sympathizes, a conclusion is unflinchingly presented that the wages of sin are, if not death, the next thing to it is commitment to an insane asylum and at the end Stella is faced with a bitter conflict - for all of what Williams calls her ‘Chinese’ passivity.

Tennessee Williams’ *Period of Adjustment* turns more in the direction of comedy, emphasizing tolerance and reconciliation. Also somewhat gentler in its implication is *The Night of the Iguana*, set in a ‘rather rustic and very Bohemian hotel’ beside the Mexican rain
forests. The male protagonist, an ex-clergyman, is on the verge of breakdown, placed between the sensual Mexican proprietress and a spiritual understanding New England artist. She has devoted herself to her aging grandfather, an indomitable but pathetic poet, with whose death the play ends. Some of the issues raised in the previous play, gentility vs vulgarity, body vs soul – are here raised again but with great depth, complexity and mellowness and the struggles of the various characters to attain freedom.

Undoubtedly plays of Williams had helped in widening the range of literature by sympathetically presenting many characters who deviate from the norm and by using symbolism to dramatize basic human conflicts.

Unlike Tennessee Williams’, Arthur Miller’s plays have been started in 1950. After growing up in Brooklyn and working during the depression at a variety of jobs, Arthur Miller attended the University of Michigan, where he won several undergraduate playwriting prizes. His full length plays reached New York with *The Man Who Had All the Luck, All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, the latter presenting the pathetic life and ultimate suicide of a travelling salesman. It is a
family drama, changed with a great deal of sympathy for the victims of an entirely bourgeois set of values.

_The Crucible_, a historical drama deals with the Salem witchcraft trials and presents the leading accused female character Abigail as really evil, really witchy, but even more evil are the prosecutors, who become more and more corrupt as the trial proceeds.

The modern implications of the play arise from the fact that during the thirties and forties there had been widespread sympathy among American intellectuals with Communist Russia but in the fifties the investigation of possible Communist infiltration in Hollywood and Broadway sometimes bore the masks of a witch hunt. Miller denied being a Communist and vigorously opposed the methods by which the investigation was being carried on nevertheless, by 1956 he was being intensively investigated by Senator McCarthy. That year he divorced his first wife and married the film star Marilyn Monroe, a marriage which lasted four years. His career as a playwright so comparatively cautious in its earlier phases was understandably jarred by these highly publicized developments.
In 1955 he brought out a powerful play set in the Italian section of Brooklyn, *A View from the Bridge*, in which the central character, Eddie Carbone, because of emotional ties with his ward Catherine, betrays two relatives who are unauthorized immigrants. In violating his community Carbone brings destruction upon himself. This is clearly tragic in a classical sense. Thus Miller showed that he could write tragedies of the classical type, using an American setting. Willis Wager says that Miller's *After the Fall*, however, is more personal and experimental, taking place "in the mind, thought and memory" of the central character who gives his side in the painful experience of being married to a popular celebrity.

Another significant dramatist of the same generation as O'Neill was Maxwell Anderson (1888-1959). His early life in Pennsylvania, North Dakota and California was spent in teaching and journalism but he came to New York for his mature writing career. His first success in the theatre was the result of his collaboration on a rather deglamorized prose was the play, *What Price Glory*, later published in a group of *Three American Plays*. Continuing to write in a number of genres, he turned in 1930 to verse drama with *Elizabeth, the Queen* and gradually adapted his method to include American and contemporary material. One of his distinctive works he derived from
the Sacco-Vanzetti case of 1920, collaborating on working up the material into the prose play *God of the Lighting* and finally into the verse drama *Winterset*, in which the son of an unjustly executed Italian radical tries to establish the guilt of a gangster who has just been released from prison but who shoots him.

The dramatic situation in each of his *Eleven Verse Plays* is conceived of in terms of individual human problems of guilt, revenge, justice, man in direct and personal conflict with political and social forces. Willis Wager says that both Anderson and O’Neill distrusted group solution to essentially human problems. Though not as original as O’Neill, Anderson practiced his art with integrity over a long career.

During the thirties, when ‘socially conscious’ drama was at its height, O’Neill temporarily retired from the theatre but Anderson kept the curtains up with his verse dramas. During the forties and fifties, Anderson wrote verse and prose dramas on historical and contemporary subjects and on occasions dramatized outstanding current novels, notably Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country* under the little *Lost in the Stars* and expressed himself on the subject of drama.
There were many playwrights other than these giants. Elmer Rice, with *The Adding Machine* one of the first successful exponents of expressionism. Sidney Howard, Philip Barry and S.N. Behran were responsible for notable plays rather on the lighter side.

O’Neil was “the founder of the American drama”. Before him no playwright of such importance had emerged. By his influence and example, he practically created native drama in America. To an even greater extent than that of England, American drama of the nineteenth Century was a bastard art form. Though there was here and there loose drama but the legitimate theatre produced very few plays of permanent interest. It was an age when the actor and the producer counted for more than the playwright. But the play itself was not the thing. Often it was imported from Europe. The American theatre lagged behind that of the continent or even of England. In 1900 or there about there was little indication that the United States would make important contributions to world theatre. There were some signs of life in the early years of this century. Different work shops were established and several theatres were set up. New plays began to be tried. In 1915, a number of artists and writers who made up a summer colony at province town banded together to amuse themselves under the name of the province town players. Next
summer the young playwright Eugene O’Neil came to province town
and was soon the leader of the group.

Eugene Gladstone O’Neill (1888 – 1953) “the first name to be
mentioned in any discussion of the American theatre of today” was
responsible for making the American theatre a pilgrimage and the
centre of the essential reality for the artist. The plays he wrote were a
challenge to the exaggerated romanticism which dominated the stage a
generation ago with false dreams, false ideas and false endings. But
O’Neill probed deeper into the realities of life however harsh and
antithetical they may be.

The present research focuses its analysis on the loneliness and
isolation of characters in the major plays of O’Neill, namely Beyond
The Horizon (1918), The Emperor Jones (1920) The Hairy Ape
(1921) Desire under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown (1926),
Strange Interlude (1928), Mourning Becomes Electra (1931) and
Long Day’s Journey into Night (1956). In his shaping of women,
O’Neill is much influenced by the Swedish writer Strindberg.
Strindberg, the naturalist, has attempted in his dramas to understand
and express the ambiguities of the love-hate relationship between the
sexes. Strindberg’s anguish, personal experiences in life with women is more or less the same as O’Neill’s. Strindberg presents the inner conflicts of the characters, how the men are doomed in the hands of women. All his characters are presented as mortal enemies trying to destroy one another. They are sometimes equally possessive and romantic extremists completely engrossed in one another.

O’Neill’s personal life has a bearing on the treatment and nature of presentation of women in his plays. His Irish father James O’Neill a successful stage actor and from whom O’Neill learned to value his art, hardly had time to spend with his family. The constant touring with the father to various towns in the United States created a sort of aversion in his mother Ella Quinlan O’Neill. As James and Ella were different in their natures, it resulted in an emotional struggle in the family.

These conflicts and tensions made O’Neill feel alienated from parents and ultimately from life. When his mother became a drug addict, after his birth, a sense of guilt that he was the cause of it haunted him throughout his life. But still he kept on cherishing the mother image an unworldly, saintly woman, a symbol of innocence, purity and piety. This is reflected in his later autobiographical play
Long Day’s Journey into Night (1956) which won for him the Pulitzer Prize posthumously. Most of his positive feelings towards life and women stemmed from the image of Ella.

When his mother could not take him along, Eugene was entrusted to Sarah Sandy, the Governess, who took him to the park or the Zoo. Once, to his horror, she took him to the Eden Musee in New York where he encountered life like figures of criminals, committing appealing murders. Sarah was the one who thrilled and terrified him with the stories of evil in the world.

His married life also made him unhappy. His first marriage was with Kathleen Jenkins, from whom he expected a sort of love which he did not get from his mother. His second marriage with Agnes Boulton also proved a failure but his third marriage to an actress, Carlotta Montrey in 1928 brought him happiness and companionship that lasted till his death in 1953.

Against the nihilism of his personal despair, O’Neil turned to a lifelong engagement with the theatre. From the time he started writing his plays, his profession became an act of faith – the faith of an artist which resuscitated the broken man into a new resurgent life. “It the theatre not only mirrored the realities of life, but also provided him
with parallel and sometimes alternative existence through which he could assert his creative self.

As his father was a well known actor in a touring company, O’Neill was in touch with the theatre from his earliest days. It is to be said that theatre is his blood. As a child and as a young man he had every opportunity to observe the theatrical condition dominated by a superficial realism which barely concealed a tawdry artifice, against which he decided to rebel when he became a playwright. He arrived at this decision while he was sending six months in a sanatorium in 1913 on account of a touch of pulmonary tuberculosis. Then there followed a period of intense productivity from 1914 to 1934. O’Neill felt for the theatre a heavy dedication. He was never stage struck, yet his feeling was sufficiently strong to bind him closely to the theatre as an institution. The theatre was a natural atmosphere for him.

The American theatre with which he associated himself gave him ample scope to work on new themes. The commercial theatres of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, for a time in the hands of a powerful trust, worked for financial gain in the first place, and therefore did not dream of producing plays that were not satisfactory to the paying audience.
The group in which O’Neill came in touch at province town was a group which knew far better what it did not want than what it did. The activities of the province town in their early days were wrapped in a sentimental mist and memory. Later its members were determined to do something in the theatre and that this something should not be what was ordinarily done. So that for them the first requirement of any play was that it should be different. Their experiments were in the direction, first of realism and second of social protest. “They wanted to present life as it is, even if that meant a good deal that was shocking and unpleasant and they wanted also to expose the injustices, hypocrisies and cruelties of society.

Being in no sense a purveyor of theatrical commodities, O’Neill takes an artist’s delight in facing new difficulties, for an obstacle easily overcome was an obstacle scarcely worth attacking. But there was more to this than the joy of the craftsman. O’Neill was always striving to show his characters and developed his situations in the most emphatic manner possible, to dig down as deep into their soul as he could and to exhibit only what he considered really important.

One of the reasons why O’Neill is revolutionary in his idea is that he just mercilessly exposed the polite sham of the conventional society and made the American Public to understand that women also
have a number of complexes which need satisfaction. As a man who took three wives and who had gone elsewhere in search of sexual satisfaction, he must have had plenty of experiences with women in different strata of American society, and thus reveal a keen psychological insight in his observation of the American women of his time.

This research also makes a study of O’Neill’s woman characters in their roles of mother, wife and daughter in the respective chapters. Generally speaking, the portraits of O’Neill’s women are emotionally all of a piece. Almost all are treated as sexual abnormal. The mothers are almost the same with their love for life. Considering Puritanism as a dogma because it stands for a doctrine of suppression, he condemns it. His probing into the repressed nature of the people with his deep psychological insight discovers women as fixated individuals. By mother fixation incestuous desire for his mother and fixated jealous hatred of his father accompanied by guilt on both accounts due mainly to the incest taboo. In the case of a female child, or an Electra complex, the feelings toward the parents were reversed. The sons of all the mothers, Eben in Desire Under the Elms, Marsden in Strange Interlude, Dion in The Great God Brown, Orin in Mourning Becomes
Electra and Jamie and Edmund in Long Day’s Journey into Night – all are drawn towards their mothers.

The mother’s influence comes to play so dominant a role in Long Day’s Journey into Night that their life is wrecked along with hers. O’Neill sheds light on the character of prostitutes because only they accept life as it is.

The Puritanism stifles the spirit of life at its source and O’Neill directs his scorn against this grosser crime. As a rebel against Puritanism, he is for the joy that comes from accepting life on its own terms, fearlessly and without compromise. Hence his depiction of the failure of marriages when these two extremes are represented in the husband on the one hand and the wife on the other. Abbie, in Desire under the Elms, Nina is Strange Interlude, and Christine in Mourning Becomes Electra are notes for their pagan way of life whereas the husbands are not for it. Hence the clash between the husbands and the wives though Nina’s rebellion is of a different sort. Nine, knowing what it will do to Sam, her husband, if she leave him, remains with his simultaneously being Darrell’s mistress.

In the presentation of the daughters who are driven by Electra complex, nine in Strange Interlude and Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra struggle hard to fight against this puritanic hold once they
realize that it means nothing but death. But when Nina comes out of it, Lavinia’s realization has come too late for her to shackle it off thoroughly and both suffer from their puritan inheritance.

There are a few normal female characters, but their very normality seems to gain the playwright’s contempt as Margaret, the wife of Dion Antony in The Great God Brown. They are almost portrayed as narrow, petty, bigoted and lacking in understanding, in striking contrast to the sexual abnormal female characters, which are presented as noble, spiritual, sympathetic and wise.

O’Neill like Nietzsche directs his attack on Puritanism and other such institutions because they have deprived man of discovering the transcendent glory of what it means to be human. For what he wants of the human being is to live the life and to attain whatever happiness he can in this life and dramas served him as a medium to express all his ideas, because in it he dealt with such struggles of man.

As America’s foremost playwright, he did a great deal to establish the modes of the modern theatre in the United States. His work illustrates, therefore some of the main trends in modern American drama. One of its most striking features is the combination of deliberately drab prose realism and of boldly inventive expressionist technique. It is as though Henrik Ibsen and Bertholf
Brecht had come together in the same person. When O’Neill began to write American drama still had to make to itself the discoveries that Ibsen had indicated a whole generation previously.

In the 1920’s American drama tended to seek its effects in theatre poetry—that is in stage, effects-rather than in the written word. In the 1930’s, the depression and its attendant ideologies impregnated the theatre making the American vernacular seem more impressive than any poetic rendering of the speech. Since then, the patriotic War years and the confused aftermath have shown no strong impulse in any particular direction. The commercial theatre has seen a series of exuberant musicals which make their British counterparts look limp and slickly. But commercialism has on the whole deadened invention. A second factor in the difficulties faced by American drama was also apparent in its beginning. Partially because of the lack of a copyright law protecting playwrights and partially because the primarily middle class individuals who came to the colonies were not particularly interested in theatre, there were very few original American plays written. A side from occasional and ephemeral plays written to commemorate specific occasions or to make political statements most of what was performed through the 17th and 18th Centuries in the new
world were English play with Shakespeare especially popular. It is therefore not surprising that the first two notable American plays were highly derivative.

When O’Neil took to writing plays, the American drama was sickly, suffering from the disease of romance, sentimentality and melodrama. Excessive use of chance and co-incidence and intricate plots was the order of the day. There was a complacent acceptance of materialism and capitalism, of traditional values, and the presentation of life and character was and worthless. Much that is common place and melodramatic persists in the later plays of O’Neill, but from the first his plays reveal better understanding of man and his life.

During the 1920s and 1930s realism was the dominant aesthetic on the American stage. When one considers the dominance of Broadway over the rest of the country, and the predominance of the middle class in the Broadway audience, it is not surprising to see a number of playwrights representing the middle class to themselves and writing about concerns and issues in which they were invested this middle-class realism embraced a wide spectrum of American life, from urban high society to the provincial small town. During the 1920s,
expressionism also appeared on the Broadway stage, with its avant-garde modernist techniques domesticated somewhat for middle-class consumption.

The development of a form of theatre known as the ‘American Style’ is partly owing to the unique circumstance of the American theatre’s discovering realism and modernism at virtually the sometime. It is evident that while realism was the dominant mode during the interwar period, these two aesthetics coexisted in the American theatre throughout the twentieth century, with playwrights often using the techniques of one to enrich the other.

Eugene O’Neill’s emergence in the second decade of the 20th century as an imaginative, innovative, and serious investigator of profound human questions through the medium of theatre was an unexplainable phenomenon. Actually, O’Neill came along at exactly the time when American drama was prepared to produce its most important playwright. American drama had developed from a melodramatic and frivolous imitation of English and continental theatre into and art form, in both its serious and comic manifestations, sought to grapple with consequential matters. Beyond that, the first decade of the
century introduces American audience to the plays and playwrights who were revolutionizing drama in other parts of the world. Not only O’Neill himself learnt a great deal from seeing Ibsen’s works and those of the great Irish playwrights performed, but also American theatre-goers were gradually and gently familiarized themselves with revolutionary new theatrical methods and daring subject matter, because in many instances these plays were produced in the small art theaters that had risen around the country for subscription audiences eager to see them. Commercial risks were minimized as well.

O’Neill’s plays are powerful, poetic fragments of one vast pulsating drama of human existence. Just as his “dramatic creations” were his answer to the challenge of existence, his restless experiments with form were his attempts to find the language of human communication.

Another remarkable feature of O’Neill’s dramatic art in a constructive interrelationship between theme and form, between vision and design. His plays are not merely vital experiments in dramaturgy, but also explorations in the field of human values just as human beings seek order within change, and change within order, so O’Neill sought form
within flow and flow within form a functional continuity in the process of dramatic creations.

O’Neill’s plays provide a keen insight into the predicament of man. “His major theme, “says John Gassner, “Was man’s disorientation, man’s bedevilment form within and from without”. He dedicated a lifetime of incessant creative activity to seeking the roots of man’s disillusionment with life and disenchantment with the cosmos, to searching for faith and human values, to finding the meaning of human tragedy. O’Neill neither believed in art for arts sake nor regarded art as a vehicle for social propaganda. If he stood for anything, it was for humanity.

O’Neill us a critic of the American society if this kind, and also of society as a whole. He thinks of man in relation to his social system. It is not man as an individual alone that concerns him but man as an individual alone that concerns him but man in his social order—tortured, starved, disillusioned, disappointed and driven to disaster by the forces of a system which cares nothing for the welfare of this society. He treats man not as a free detached individual, not merely as an individual in relation to a few characters but as a person against the
background of social forces. It is the social implication that makes O’Neill’s plays lively in the minds of the audience. His importance as a social aspect of the modern social set-up. He points out the disease of America’s acquisitive society. He does not merely stress the fact that workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but shows how in the modern, mechanic-made world, they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well being. Human’s work is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he or she lives modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and leaves the worker a nervous irritable and dissatisfying misfit in society.

O’Neill never feels shy of discussing American Society in a free and frank manner. He does not see eye with those who indulge in a false glorification of the American society and blindly hail it as flawless. His social perspective covers every aspect of modern American society. His plays embody the ideas and conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century and deal with the society and economic issues of the time-materialism, industrialization, human relations, employer-employee conflicts, ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed, hatred and others.
Human beings have lost the sense of harmony with nature and or unable to establish harmony with their fellowmen. Naturally, his work has grown soulless and mechanical and he feels lonely and isolated a mere insignificant part of a big machine, and not a human being busy in creative and purposeful activity. This mechanical life of the humans has led him to the loss of human identity. Isolated from their immediate environment and feeling lonely and unhappy, O’Neill characters constantly search for identity and a sense of belonging, and when they fail to achieve their identity, they disintegrate and decay.

One of the leading problems of human society today is the situation of man in it. O’Neill is at his best in the superb handling of this problem, the theme of ‘belongingness’ in the present world. For him humans remain searchers with no clear-cut destinations. They have no place in the highly industrialized set-up of modern society and remain outsiders, alienated persons from the beginning to the end of their life. They have lost the centre, and move from pillar to post in search of some sense of belonging but they fail to find root anywhere.

The notion of estrangement and isolation is a natural corollary to the idea of relationship with others. Isolation has many dimensions,
such as isolation from self, from others, from God and from nature. The individual feels isolated from all human institutions life state, government etc., which have become innermost centers of power beyond the understanding or grasp of man. This is the cause of frustration and anxiety in modern man but, in spite of his isolation and loneliness he is in constant search of his true self.

Owing to the pressure of society, human beings are forced to live in a self-estranged state. In the modern technological and material society, everything becomes a problem to be solved by reasoning and calculation. There are two extremes of ‘isolation’ between which a self springs; the one is a complete break from God and Society, and other is that where all sense of “self” is lost. There is also isolation from others, because one can never totally understand them. Thus isolation and loneliness can never be removed from the heritage and is the greatest ill of the modern age.

The concept of isolation is the result of man’s absolute freedom in facing a situation. Isolation whether religious or secular, is always a psychological state of mind when one has cut-off all ties, and is
compelled to exercise his freedom in the face of the absurd and meaningless world.

The existentialist philosophical thoughts share certain concepts of “isolation” apart from their insistence on “existence” as essence as the central question. They regard the material or outside world as “absurd” and take a contemptuous view of history, economics and politics asserting that nothing real or basic can be learnt from them.

O’Neill who started his dramatic career after the World War I, has directed his attention on the nature of a strictly American brand of illusion and its clash with social reality. The image of success, chiefly success in money, making in America today, dominated by speed, specialization, mass advertisement, standardized ideals and entertainments, giant monopoly and excitement has become a necessary for the self respecting man.

The existentialist movement actually arose against the corruption of values in capitalist society. Its basic conviction is that the evils are rooted in the very concept and existence of society. It rejects the view of human being as a social animal growing, enriching
himself and realizing his freedom in his social relation with others. Therefore, evil is ascribed to science, the accumulation of knowledge, the exploration of reality, the study of economics and history, the extension of democracy and the devotion to reason – all the tools of progress that have been collectively forged by society. Man has to renounce these in order to concentrate on the essential question of “existence”. If Eugene O’Neill had been a philosopher instead of being a literary figure, he too would have come up with ideas very similar to those of the existentialist philosophers. But he chose literature as the vehicle for his views on matters of fundamental importance.

Search for the human values has been the main concern of O’Neill and he reveals his understanding of the human situation, human existence and the destiny of man. By pointing to the helplessness of modern man, he also describes in dramatic terms, the goals of man and values, and the consequent adjustment of the modes of human self. His plays seem to be apparently the dramatization of man’s indignation against the universe. One can say that his plays attempt to illuminate as well as reflect the condition and predicament of man in existentialist terms, revealing the areas of darkness and
tension in modern man’s consciousness. He believes that man suffers from a sense of alienation in this world, he finds himself completely isolated in a spiritually sterile universe and therefore he cannot have a sense of harmony. In his search for identity and his need to belong, man feels his “lostness” intensely. His works reveal a keen sense of loss of connection with god, nature, society, family. The tensions in his works are connected mostly with the struggle against alienation. It is evident from his plays that a man has to face tough times in a world without God, without love and without trust in life. He presents an existentialist’s view of life, and so existential problems are very frequently dramatized in his works. It is the turmoil of a whole generation that finds its artistic presentation in his plays. He depicts in a very systematic and convincing manner the depth of human anxiety, despair, and emptiness.

There is a constant tension between the real and the ideal in O’Neill plays. Illusion incapacitates a man for meaningful action and yet without them life becomes unbearable. Dreams are a powerful means of denying or overlooking the harsh realities of life. Illusions make us see things in a true perspective. Illusion and reality are not opposed to each other in O’Neill’s plays. A stage illusion ultimately
becomes reality in life. He is never infavour of running away from life, but impressions upon audience that life must be faced in a bold and heroic manner. Dreams are indispensable, and they sustain our interest in life. Illusion and reality together make life.

O’Neill’s great preoccupation with illusions has led the critics point out that there is a ring of pessimism in his plays. They say that the picture of life in his plays is bleak and pessimistic. However, such views of critics are unjustified and it can be stated that O’Neill’s pessimism is of a man in this world in which he must live and justify himself. His pessimism is born of man, not of God. He looks at the worst only to suggest a way out of the evils of the contemporary society. This is not an unrelieved pessimism. In his philosophy, man’s predicament is of his own making and an amelioration of his plight is possible. He is a “pessimistic optimist”, and always hopes for the best. His contention is that a work of art is always happy, as it aims at discovering the truth and helps in getting rid of illusions. His affirmative, of philosophy of life is not a withdrawal from, but a call back to life. His heroes show hope even in the forces of evil and destruction, rather they keep up their attitude of defiance against them. The work aims at exploring the theme of isolation and loneliness in
the major plays of Eugene O’Neill, written during the three phases of his career as a dramatist.

O’Neill is a great tragic artist, whose vision of life and the human soul is fundamentally tragic. His plays are known for their tragic beauty and sublimity. They are modern tragedies which strike at the very root of the sickness of the present day world. O’Neill is not an “ivory – towers” or an escapist in the romantic sense of the term. Being an existentialist, he deals with life in a very realistic and authentic manner. He visualizes life as full of hope and promise and concludes that there is nothing wrong or repulsive about it. He pleads for the total acceptance of life at its face value. His interest in life is not limited to the realization of eternity, but is centered upon making it more meaningful and worth living. As a dramatist, his commitment is to the faithful dramatization of the human situation.

**Eugene O’Neill and Topic under Study**

In olden days the word ‘alienation’ was associated with a person who suffered from insanity. The etymological trace of the word ‘psychotic’, a thoroughly and absolutely alienated person, seems to be ‘alien’ in French and ‘alienado’ in Spanish. In his *Alienation-A*
Case Book. David Burrows presents the definition of alienation according to Marx's system, “Alienation is the “condition of man where his own act becomes to him an alien power, standing over and against him, instead of being ruled by him”. (116)

Alienation in the modern society expounds the relationship, man shares with his work, the things he consumes, the state, his fellowmen and in a much broader scale himself. Man has been in a way, a creator of a world brimming off artificial things which could never have existed before. He has designed a complicated social machine to administer the technical machine he had built. Yet the whole of his creation stands tall enough to tower him. His feelings is far from being the creator or the centre, instead he considers himself as a servant whose hands have served in the making of it. The more powerful and gigantic the forces he unleashes, the more powerless he feels as a human being. Alienated from himself, he has to roughly confront forces which are embodied in things he has created. He is shadowed and dwarfed by his own creation and has lost ownership of himself.

To appreciate the nature of alienation to its core, considering one specific aspect of modern life and the repression of the awareness
of the basic problems of human existence takes exquisite importance.

In *Alienation—A Casebook*, David Burrows presents Seeman’s views on an alienated man:

> a person who finds himself at odds with popular culture and like many intellectuals attaches a low value of goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society. If 'other-directedness' is a simulated behaviour, where the underlying motive is hatred and violent towards others, then this behaviour even when successful, since rise to alienation. (92)

A person controls his deeper feelings and acts in a way which runs as contrast to what he would intend to express. Modern man feels lonely in this world. His petty life seems unimportant and insignificant. He becomes a small drop in the abyss called life. He wonders and searches in the dark stumbling over and over to find the meaning of life.

The feeling of loneliness in mankind is age-old and world wide, its causes are of many kinds. Besides the great insoluble problems in men's mind concerning God. Nature, the meaning of life and death continues to prevail specific problems in each society have forced
individuals to shrink into a shell that causes irrevocable isolation known as loneliness or ‘alienation’. Men have sought to reduce this feeling in literature. The realization that the origin of the theme has barely taken its roots in modern times in either literature or in life does not lessen the importance of its appearance in American manifestations with some peculiarity in the American drama since 1920. To the modern American dramatist, whose principle mode had been that of realism all features around him have supplied to the developing of the core for presentation on the stage. There are enough dramatic qualities in the theme of loneliness or 'alienation' which are seldom limited to a particular time or place. Yet playwrights today have instrumentalized the theme as a reflection of the present day American life.

Many delve into the pathos of being lonely effected by the disintegration from meaningful relationship with other people. Disturbed by this, people who feel alienated sink into awful depression and become irrevocably unhappy. The experience of being alone most of the time is common but we put up with it as it is an undeniable and inescapable fact of our lives. The feeling of loneliness has been worsened by innumerable contemporary developments. The great nobility of many Americans has had the effect of severing close
patterns of friendship. Many people of the city tend to form the absence of intimate relationships, where one either chooses to or naturally closes oneself from maintaining a confidant or companion with whom one can communicate intimately.

Although in American Literature the question of identity runs like a skein, Marx Twain was obsessed with the question of identity of the American and for this he created doubles and twins who often exchanged roles sometimes even the psyche. He detested treating white and black as representative of separate races. They were so thoroughly mixed up and puzzled that their identities could be disclosed only from tiny marks at the tips of the human fingers.

The theme that frequently cajoles the interest of the great artist of the world is ‘MAN’. A poor dramatist presents man, an average dramatist glances over him, a good dramatist probes into him. Man always has internal conflicts with powers beyond his control. The consequence of man’s own tragic fate is his lack of faith in Supreme powers and his extreme faith in materialism. Although O'Neill believed that human life had many problematical and puzzled affairs, he never ceased to be fascinated by man's struggle with the
indomitable force around him. It was sometimes a daydream, sometimes a mystery and sometimes exciting.

O’Neill himself has remarked that the playwright must dig as the roots of the sickness today as he feels it. The feeling of isolation, which has become the hallmark of the modern age, springs from the tragic sense of life. It is variously described as a loss of identity, loneliness, alienation, meaninglessness, loss of faith, values rootlessness etc., it is recognized as a symptom of man’s contemporary crisis, a human problem and a condition of having the experience but a missing the meaning.

Man suffers and his life becomes a tale neither of isolation, loneliness and estrangement ending with cessation of his earthy life neither because of a hostility of fate as in the Greek tragedy nor of Hamartia in his character. Instead, he suffers from the sense of alienation because of his loss of faith in some supernatural power of traditional religions, a faith which the Greeks had an which Christianity supplied in the Middle Ages, but which has been eroded by science and materialism and he suffers from inner emptiness on account of his lack of some sustaining faith. He feels orphaned, lonely and at bay. His urgency arises from a feeling of insecurity a feeling of
not- belonging and he is confused and bewildered from within and from without.

Social environment is also an important factor for man’s isolated state and agony. Basically and essentially, O’Neill’s plays are the embodiments of a cosmic anguish. As he himself says he has studied man not in relation to man, but man in relation to God, living in an impersonal, Mechanical, urbanized and industrialized social environment, today is alienated from God, traditions and religions of the past, nature and his fellow beings. He suffers from loss of identity, inner emptiness isolation, normalness, powerlessness and sense of insecurity. Thus, isolation and loneliness, man’s disorientation as man’s bewilderment from within and from without are the major themes in the plays of O’Neill’s. He once said” Most modern plays are concerned with the relationship between man and man but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God”.(Krutch 17).

The plays of O’Neill were cardiograms of the impatient heart in which he charted the thwarted dreams and elusive hopes of his characters. He has depicted defeated lives and tormented loves whom fate rendered unrealized. By writing plays of personal psychology and
bitter domestic tragedy he has unveiled the secrets of the human heart by portraying his perplexed characters as social derelicts, who are quivering on the edge of society as sailors, alcoholics, fugitives. Spiritual men and women trapped in obsessive relationship when the world callously passed by. His chief concern in his drama was to depict the tragic predicament of man wrestling against self and society for some searching out to his fellow being to finding for himself a niche in a hostile and mysterious universe. He exposed drama to new vistas of freedom with his use of natural symbols, chorus, crowds and their choreographic movements, asides, masks and interior monologues in his plays.

Through this study, the researcher tries to unearth the theme of Loneliness, isolation and portrayal of characters in Eugene O’Neill’s select plays. The first chapter, ‘Introduction’ give a detailed introduction to the origin of American Theatre and Eugene O’Neil’s plays. The second chapter entitled “Loneliness and Isolation in Beyond the Horizon and The Emperor Jones” brings out the theme of loneliness and isolation suffered by the characters in the above said plays. The third chapter entitled Loneliness and Isolation in The Hairy Ape. In addition, this chapter through lights on the portrayal of
mother as a symbol of mislaid pleasure in his select plays”. The fourth chapter is entitled “portrayal of wife as a conflicting force and daughter as a rebel inhibition” elucidates the topic in a clear way. The final chapter entitled “Conclusion” brings out the findings of the researcher.