EUGENE O’NEILL’S CHARACTERS:
A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY

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SUMMARY

As a literary artist Eugene O’Neill is aptly put in the category of Ibsen, G.B. Shaw, Arthur Miller, Galsworthy etc. He made several experiments on the stage and at the same time revived the Greek tragedies. In the first chapter I have described James C. Coleman’s theories of depression, sociopathic disorders, tensions and abnormal behaviour. Many psychologists find very little difference between normal and abnormal people. The conduct of Nazis and Fascists appeared abnormal during the Second World War. Many historians regarded Hitler a lunatic as he ordered for the killing of more than six million
Jews for the supporters of democracy. The conduct of Stalin was abnormal as he captured all political powers in Russia. In The Emperor Jones Brutus Jones appears abnormal during his stay in the forest as he wants to escape from the Negroes of the Island. James C. Coleman aptly regards 20\textsuperscript{th} century as the age of anxiety. People had to suffer numberless agonies due to two world wars. Many small wars were fought to protect Imperialism, Fascism, Nazism and Capitalism. A lot of merchants worshipped the God of money and ignored ethical values. In his tragedies O'Neill depicts the people who became victims of economic depression, technological progress, cut-throat competition, impersonal bureaucracy, racial prejudices. Very few people had positive approach to life as the masses became selfish and immoral due to unemployment. Prostitution became a popular institution and many gambling-houses were established in U.S.A., U.K., Italy, France etc. People felt a lot of stress due to economic and socio-political factors. They forgot intimate personal relationships.

Sigmund Freud analyzes the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind of people to reach some definite conclusions. A lot of impressions come to the mind of people and stir their subconscious mind. A person has his own feelings and
agonies though he may be passive physically. Freud analyzes his dreams. Alfred Adler asserted that two persons work in a different manner for the same purpose. How can people forget their past. Eugene O’Neill asserted that present is merely ‘an interlude between past and future’. There are people like Evans who suffer due to the curse of insanity in the family. Eugene O’Neill noticed people who survived in the utopian world and hence failed to face the hard realities of life.

As an intellectual Eugene O’Neill failed to accept the theories of Anarchists and Individualists who hated the powers of the state. In *A Touch Of The Poet* he satirizes the people who expect much from the Revolution. In *Desire Under The Elms* he describes the psychology of possessive people such as Cabot, Eben and Abbie. He knows that the world is governed by the theory of cause and effect.

In the second chapter I have described the abnormal behaviour of Robert, Andrew, Ruth and the members of Tyrone family. Due to temporary temptation Ruth forgets her love for Andrew and desires to get married with Robert. It is strange that Robert is suddenly prepared to forget his love for adventure. Now he does not want to look at the outside world. His passion for adventure withers
away. On the contrary his brother Andrew joins the sea-voyage as he can’t tolerate his beloved in the arms of his brother. The father of Robert and Andrew feels shocked to see this new situation as Robert does not know the fundamentals of field life. Since he is a dreamer, he is no good for farming — What will happen to the fields after the departure of Andrew? After a month of the married life Ruth feels disgusted as she has made a wrong choice. Done is done and it can’t be undone at all. Robert neglects the field work and the farm is deserted. Ruth fails to create Robert’s interest in agriculture. But Robert continues to enjoy his book. The conflict widens between husband and wife and they survive only for their small daughter Mary. Basically there is no understanding and joy between them. The situation worsens when Robert is a patient of T.B.

On the contrary Andrew fails to enjoy the life of adventures. Unknown people and countries fail to attract him. He fails to appreciate Hindu philosophy of the people of tropical areas. When he returns home, he is a restless fellow. Since he wants to forget his past, he does not accept the love of Ruth. It is true that he wants Robert to survive and get cured. Yet he is not prepared to marry the widow of Robert. Basically there is no joy in this family. The
situation takes a serious turn with the death of Robert. So, people suffer due to lack of wisdom.

In Long Day's Journey Into Night the artist describes the agonies of the family of James. He fails to provide a decent home for his sons and wife Mary. She feels disgusted when he returns to the hotel in unconscious position. At times James wants to forget himself. His sons fail to love him. Yet he fulfils his promises and remains a successful actor. Unfortunately his schemes to earn money fail. So far he has survived in ordinary and dirty homes. His sons and wife have obsession for decent home. It is true that home means security and comforts. But the conflict widens between husband and wife as he does not consult proper physicians for her. She gets morphine whenever she has pain. Even the son is to be sent to dirty sanitarium for his treatment. Here Eugene O'Neill describes the bitter reality that good doctors were not available at that time in U.S.A. Quacks prescribed cheat medicines and the patients had side-effects of the same. Sons of James are ultimately fed up with their father. Mary fails to adjust with her husband. James Tyrone does not enjoy the comforts of home. Had all the members of Tyrone family been wise, they would have adjusted with each other.
In the third chapter the difference between normal and abnormal behaviour has been described with reference to *Desire Under The Elms*. It is strange that Cabot does not have any love for his sons that a father generally has. It is not usually seen that people get married at the age of seventy five. Simeon and Peter hate Cabot and call him ‘an old dog’. They feel no pleasure in living with their father. Similarly Eben hates Cabot as the soul of his mother could not get peace. His father forced her to work too much on the field. It is strange that Cabot wants to carry his land and animals to the other world. Eben hates Abbie in the beginning and then feels attracted towards her. Her lust continues to grow and they enjoy sex for selfish gains. But the situation changes when lust converts into love. Eben feels happy when Abbie gets a son. There is no limit to her joy and her love for Eben deepens further. But Cabot turns the tables and tells Eben that Abbie has cheated him. Now the field belongs to Abbie’s son and not Eben. As ill luck would have it Eben takes this seriously and hates Abbie from the depth of heart. However, Abbie promises him to prove her love for him. For this she acts in an abnormal manner and kills the innocent infant. The murder of the baby makes Cabot and Eben abnormal and tense. Nobody expected such conduct from her. It is too late when she realizes — Had she killed Cabot, not her son, it would have solved the riddle. As Eben
Informs the police officer, Abbie shows her love for him. Now Eben feels that the son was a part of him too. Cabot does not forgive Abbie for this cruelty. Cabot, Eben and Abbie lose their sense of reason when the baby is killed.

In the fourth chapter I have described the abnormal behaviour of Brutus Jones and Yank. The artist concentrates upon the inner intentions of Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones*. As a monarch Brutus fails to forget his past. He has unsurped the Blacks fully and yet he is greedy for money. He spreads the rumour that he can be killed only with the silver bullet. Due to his sense of pride he does not hope for the rebellion on the Island. But the situation takes a serious turn as the Blacks can't tolerate his tyranny any more. The trader Smithers tells him the reality that the Blacks have organized revolution for him and he must withdraw through the back door. As ill luck would have it, he is still proud of his kingly powers. When nobody attends him, he leaves the mansion and plans to escape. He has deposited his money in the foreign banks and hopes to enjoy now. But alas! All his hopes are dashed to the ground as he fails to find his money and food under the bricks. The darkness of the night is disgusting and the ways are not clear. Due to growing nervousness he throws away the gown of a
monarch and yet sweats. He does not feel normal as he listens the sounds of tom-tom. His past haunts him and he fires at the images of Jeff and the prison guard. Ultimately he is killed by the Blacks. All his glory withers away with his death. Can he escape from the punishment of his fold deeds? Has he not murdered his friend for a little money? Has he not murdered the guard of the prison? Does he confess his guilt in the Church? Why does he think of Chris at the time of final catastrophe? Is he not miserable like Dr. Faustus that thinks of God at the time of departure to hell?

In *The Hairy Ape* the artist describes the restlessness of Yank who has worked hard on the ship. He is proud of the work that he has done so far. Ship is his home. But his faith is shattered by Mildred who is shocked to see his real self. Is he really a brute? Where does he belong to? What is his relation with civilized society? Do the capitalists have any sympathy for poor labourers? Karl Marx highlighted the theory of class war. People like Yank and Paddy don’t know the power of capital. Labour is money and through money the capitalists control the working classes and the political structure. Yank feels that he belongs to the zoo. The artist creates sympathy for Yank in the heart of readers as justice is not done with him. When physical labour is not
rewarded and respected, people behave in abnormal manner.

Actually Yank does not know that he survives in fool’s paradise. The ship belongs to the capitalist as the latter controls the whole socio-economic and ethico-political structure. In *The Apple Cart* G.B. Shaw asserts that money controls administration as well as the Parliamentary system. How can a labourer control the political system? Perhaps Karl Marx never thought of the International Trade that gives profits to the capitalists. The economic conditions changed in the world markets when Eugene O’Neill wrote this tragedy. The roots of capitalism became strong now and people like Long and Yank had no voice in the economic system. When such people raised their voice, they were thrown out and hence proved worthless. What could they do as jobless human beings? Naturally their physical strength failed to help them in the prison.

In the fifth chapter I have described the abnormal behaviour of Nina, Sam Evans and Dr. Darrell. Nina loves Gordon. Her father Prof. Leeds wants security in life. He asks Gordon to marry Nina after he returns from the war. If he dies in war, Nina will be forced to lead the life of a widow. As Gordon dies in war, there is no limit to the agony of Nina.
Unfortunately she decides to surrender her body to the wounded soldiers of war. No normal lady takes such abnormal step. Ultimately she feels frustrated. Then she gets married with Sam Evans. When she becomes pregnant, she is told by Sam’s mother that there is a curse of insanity in Sam’s family. She must accept abortion of the child and get an issue from a healthy person. Now Nina feels mentally shattered as her joy is reduced to nothing. As she wants to possess a child again, she becomes intimate with Dr. Ned Darrell. He makes a scientific experiment and develops physical relations with her. Soon she gets a son and feels delighted. But alas! Her days of joy are short. It is true that she possesses three people — Sam Evans as husband, Darrell as father of Gordon and Marsden as a lover. Sam Evans does not know the reality but Gordon hates Darrell. Dr. Darrell becomes sad and gloomy as his son hates him. Even Nina can’t accept him as the father of Gordon. Marsden doubts the whole situation. As a young fellow her son Gordon loves Madeline and Nina is left alone. The present proves to be an interlude between past and future. She fails to find out the difference between lie and life.

In the second part of this chapter I have analyzed the hatred that exists between Whites and the Blacks. As children Jim and Ella love each other.
As a young girl Ella is cheated by a White named Mickey. Jim is ready to take the risk of life for her. But his surroundings prove intolerable to her. Finally she enjoys the moment when he fails in his law examination. Ella's behaviour is totally abnormal as she fails to decide the aim of her life.

In the sixth chapter I have asserted the positive vision of O’Neill as he can’t be called a mere pessimist. He had his own approach towards love, happiness, justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and economic values. Generally he regarded human beings as strangers upon earth. Let them have faith in the reconciliation between vocation and avocation. It is essential to have commitment to work as people can’t survive in the world of illusion. In *The Iceman Cometh* he confirms that certain people lead a miserable life merely because they are utopian, impractical and irrational. As they spend their time and energy in brothels and bars, they fail to understand the meaning of purposeful life. In the tragedy *The Hairy Ape* he depicts the widening gap between Haves and Have-Nots. Like Walt Whitman, he regards each labourer a keel of the ship. Let the people accept the dignity of work. Through *Strange Interlude* he forces the people to analyze the impact of their past as present is shaped by the same. At the same time they must have vision
of future as the future of family and society are equally important. In *The Fountain* he confirms that love is important aspect of human life and there is no death for it. Love is ‘flower’, ‘a fountain’ that is ever ‘blooming’ and ‘leaping’. In his tragedies he describes various conflicts that he noticed in families and different sections of society and at the same time pointed out the consequences of following the path of pride, lechery, violence, greed, possessiveness, hatred etc.