Like Freud, Jung, Adler and other psychologists, Eugene O’Neill knows the causes of abnormal behaviour of people. A lot of people feel tense due to anxiety and frustration. It is not a difficult task for him to analyze the emotions, feelings and obsessions of 20th century people as they had new ambitions due to the growth of a new civilization. Due to the new inventions of science they had conquered the space. Migration became a common feature in many families. The people of Europe had trade relations with Asian and African countries. The authorities of undeveloped nations imitated the western system of trade, communication, industry, education etc. Due to excess of work many people became the patients of depression, dyspepsia and violent behaviour. As R.N. Tagore asserted in his speeches in Europe that people had a large number of material needs and they used their knowledge as a means to gain power. Fascists and Nazis believed in imperialism without bothering for the results of war. Ethical values were totally ignored by the Germans and Italians and the result was Second World War.
In *Stange Interlude* the artist describes the agonies of people who are not satisfied with their possessions. Actually their greed and lust are responsible for their neuroses. Being possessive by nature Prof. Leeds does not allow his young daughter Nina to marry her lover Gordon. As war breaks out he asks Gordon to marry Nina when the war is over. If he gets killed in the war, Nina will be forced to lead the life of a widow. As ill luck would have it, Gordon is killed in the war and Nina feels mentally shattered. Now she hates her father as she could not offer herself to the lover at the time of his departure. On the contrary, Prof. Leeds wanted to enjoy the company and support of his daughter till death. It is strange that he feels delighted with the death of Gordon. For Nina, Prof. Leeds is selfish though he pretends to be highly cultured. There is no denying the fact that he feels himself safe in his library with books of Greek, Roman, French, German, Italian and British authors. He fails to understand the demands of the young generation. Due to the shock that Nina gets, he wants to call a nerve specialist for her. He thinks — College heroes rarely shine brilliantly in after life. (492)
In this tragedy Nina Leeds adopts foul means to get pleasure and consequently remains emotionally disturbed. The death of lover Gordon proves to be a severe blow. As a result she does not obey the social ethics and offers her body to the wounded soldiers. Her dejection is responsible for her abnormal behaviour. Due to stress she fails to take the right decision. Gap widens between Prof. Leeds and Nina. She feels tense due to the curse in the family of Sam Evans. Her tension continues to grow as son Gordon does not respect Dr. Ned Darrell. She is shocked when her son takes flight with his beloved Madeline. Here the artist portrays psycho-neuroses on the stage. Yet he does not forget his positive approach to life. Of course, he feels the importance of the psycho-analysis of his characters. Due to contemporary economic depression Americans felt highly disturbed. He does not assert that every person is abnormal at every time. People behave in abnormal manner due to tensions and depressing feelings. At times they become violent in behaviour and law fails to punish them. But Eugene O’Neill’s treatment of abnormal psychology is admirable.

As a maturist artist he does not assert that everybody feels tense due to economic crisis. In this tragedy nobody struggles for existence. Financially
Prof. Leeds, Nina, Marsden, Dr. Darrell, Sam, Madeline etc. have no problem. But their ambitions make them sad and tense. For example, Marsden survives in the world of dreams and loves Nina. As a Platonist he does not want to marry her. Just he wants to possess her due to her beautiful physique. He admits:

... Mother said she's be come quite queer lately ... Mother seemed jealous of my concern ... why have I never fallen in love with Nina? ... Could I? ... that way ... used to dance her on my knee ... sit her on my lap ... even now she'd never think anything about ... but sometimes the scent of her hair and skin ... like a dreamy drug ... dreamy! ... there's the rub! ... all dreams with me! ... my sex life among the phantoms! (487)

He continues to convince her and she also knows about his passion. His dreams give him joy though he does not get Nina for a long time. As a realist the author mentions the bitter effects of war. For him war means disaster, death, frustration, decay
and the naked game of degeneration. If Prof. Leeds does not allow his daughter to lead the life of a widow, he is justified. How can Nina be allowed to survive in the world of shadows? After all the father thinks of her future. Nina suffers throughout her life as she lacks wisdom and sense of judgment. Due to her defiant nature she becomes angry with her father:

The Professor of Dead Languages is talking again ... a dead man lectures on the past of living ... since I was born I have been in his class, loving-attentive, pupil-daughter Nina ... my ears numb with spiritless messages from the dead ... dead words droning on ... listening because he is my cultured father ... a little more inclined to deafness than the rest. (497)

Prof. Leeds tries to convince her and his words are only ‘ashes’ for her. She plans to serve the crippled soldiers in the sanitarium. No normal young girl offers her body to the wounded soldiers as she does. Her conduct confirms that she is patient of neuroses. James C. Coleman remarks:
... abnormal behaviour includes the more traditional categories of mental disorder — alcoholism, neuroses and psychoses, for complete, as well as prejudice and discrimination against persons because of race or sex, wasteful use of our natural resources ... irrational violence and political corruption — regardless of whether such pattern are condemned or condoned by a given society ... Typically they led to personal distress and often they bring destructive group conflict. (15)

No wise girl survives in the world of fantasy as realities are bitter. Past is not dead for her and she recollects the time she has spent with her lover. In a bitter mood she calls herself Gordon’s silly virgin:

... It's what I didn't give! That last night before he sailed — in his arms until my body ached — kisses until my lips were numb — knowing all that night — something in my knowledge he would die, that he would never kiss me again — knowing this so surely yet
with my cowardly brain lying, no, he'll come back and marry you, you'll be happy ever after and feel his children at your breast looking up with eyes so much like his, possessing eyes so happy in possessing you! (Then violently). But Gordon never possessed me! I'm still Gordon's silly virgin!.

(501)

She fails to control her obsession for Gordon and then behaves in irrational manner. Prof. Leeds and Charles Marsden fail to approve her conduct. Robert Lundin illustrates the cause of such actions:

Compulsive-obsessive individuals are described as having no control over their own actions, behaving without premeditation for foresight with result that appears to be quite unsatisfactory or even disastrous. They often seem to injure themselves quite intentionally. In the presence of a particular stimulus or set of stimuli, their reactions appear completely automatic and just as predictable as a hungry dog's salivation at the sight of food. Compulsive-obsessive behaviour may
not only be quite inappropriate to the immediate circumstances, but often in direct conflict to the rest of one's organized behaviour. (232)

She fails to select the right person as her husband because present is ignored by her. Past haunts her and she fails to control her emotional outburst:

I wanted Gordon! I should have made him take me! I knew he would die and I would have no children, that there would be no big Gordon or little Gordon left to me, that happiness was calling me, never to call again if I refused! And yet I did refuse! I didn't make him take me! I lost him forever! And now I am lonely and not pregnant with anything at all, but — but loathing! (502)

Still she does not want to be unfaithful to Gordon. Marsden fails to control his passion for her. As he is emotionally hurt, she ignores the suffering of her father and he is dead to her. She survives with her imagination and ignores love of Evans.
Unfortunately Evans does not know anything about his heredity insanity. Out of sympathy Dr. Darrell admires Nina’s intentions:

She was left suspended. Then he began to blame herself and to want to sacrifice herself and at the same time give happiness to various fellow war-victims by pretending to love them. It’s a pretty idea but it hasn’t worked out. Nina’s a bad actress. She hasn’t convinced the men of her love — or herself of her good intentions. And each experience of this kind has only left her more a prey to a guilty conscience than before determined to punish herself! (517)

Here the artist analyzes the changing passions of Nina and through Darrell remarks:

... Yes, Evans. He’s in love with her. And it’s one of those unselfish loves you read about. And she is fond of him. In a maternal way, of course — but that’s just what she needs now, someone she cares about to mother and
boss and keep her occupied. And still more important, this would give her a chance to have children. She’s got to find normal outlets for her craving for sacrifice. She needs normal love objects for the emotional life Gordon’s death blocked on in her. (519)

Dr. Darrell feels interested in the life of Nina as he feels lust growing in his heart. He feels tempted towards her. In the beginning he behaves as a normal person. Life has lost zest for Nina. She survives in the gloomy world and tells Marsden:

... You know — grief, sorrow, love, father — those sounds our lips make and our hands write. You ought to know what I mean. You work with them. Have you written another novel lately? But, stop to think, you’re just the one who couldn’t know what I mean. With you the lies have become the only truthful things. And I suppose that’s the logical conclusion to the whole evasive mess, isn’t it? Do you understand me. Charlie? Say lie — (She says it, drawing it out) L-i-i-e! Now say life. L-i-i-f-e! You see! Life
is just a long drawn cut lie with a sniffling sigh at the end! (522)

Here the artist peeps into the minds of Nina and Marsden. The novelist Marsden is not firm in his mind and generally wavers between truth and falsehood, lust and love etc. In this tragedy Eugene O’Neill answers the question — How to live? He satirizes the modern people for having no faith in God. Now people lead a tense life as they have lost faith in positive aspects of life. Nina tells Marsden:

... I tried hard to pray to the modern science God. I thought of a million light years to a spiral nebula — one other universe in numberable other. But how could that God care about our trifling misery of death-born-of-birth? I couldn’t believe to Him, and I wouldn’t if I could! I’d rather imitate His indifference and prove I had that one trait at least in common! (523)

Soon she believes in Mother-God and asks the question — Why do the people find God in the image of man only? She feels that the name of God has not been interpreted properly. Different thinkers
interpret the divine powers in different ways. She says:

... I wanted to believe in any God at any price — of stones, a mud image, a drawing on a wall, a bird, a fish, a snake, a baboon — or even a good man preaching the simple platitudes of truth, those Gospel words we love the sound of but whose meaning we pass on to spooks to live by! (523)

Indians believe in goddess Durga, Sita, Parvati, Lakshmi, Santoshi Maa etc. and hence it is valid to find God in the image of a woman. Why not to get united with Her? —

The mistake began when God was created in a male image. Of course, women would see Him that way, but men should have been gentlemen enough, remembering their mothers, to make God a woman! But the God of Gods — the Boss — has always been a man. That makes life so perverted, and death so unnatural. We should have imagined life as created in the birth-
pain of God and Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life’s rhythm beat from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth. And we would feel that death meant reunion with Her, a passing back into Her substance, blood of Her blood, again peace of Her peace! (524)

Here the artist inspires modern people to trust in God for peace. In the beginning Marsden fails to create her faith in God and she plays the role of a devotee of dead Gordon. She offers herself to the wounded soldiers of war and her attempt to find peace remains futile:

... And I knew too that I was torturing these tortured men, morbidly supersensitive already, that they loathed the cruel mockery of my gift! Yet I kept on, from one to one, like a stupid, driven animal until one night not long ago I had dream of Gordon diving down out of the sky in flames and he looked at me with such sad burning eyes, and all my poor maimed men,
too, seemed staring out of his eyes
with a burning pain, and I woke up
crying, my own eye burning. Then I
saw what a fool I'd been — a guilty
fool! So be kind and punish me! (527)

The artist raises a moral question — How can
people get real peace and joy can with mere sexual
pleasure? She feels tense as the wife of Sam Evans
because she adopts the theory ‘Ends justify the
means’. A curse haunts the house of Sam Evans and
his mother gives a warning to Nina. Actually Nina
wants to know — Why does Mrs. Evans live alone by
herself? —

\But speaking of Sam’s birth, you
really must meet his mother sometime.
It’s amazing how little she is like him
a strange woman from the bit I saw of
her last night. She has been writing
Sam regularly once a week ever since
she’s known we were married, then
most urgent invitation to visit her.
They were really more like commands,
or prayers. I suspect she is terribly
lonely all by herself in this big house.
Sam’s feeling toward her puzzles me. I
don't believe he ever mentioned her until her letters. (532)

Nina knows the reality of married life and tells Marsden:

... You can't live with them (women) and can't live without them. (533)

Actually Marsden fails to forget Nina. In his sub-conscious mind he thinks — Had he married her, she would have been a contented wife. How can he possess her? He fails whenever he wants to possess her. The fact is that he possesses her only in dreams. As Nina is pregnant, she is going to bring fresh pain into the world. The mother of Evans reveals her tension as Nina can't have healthy child from Sam. Hence she boldly checks Nina at this juncture. Still she searches the hope of happiness as Nina loves Evans. Nina and Evans love each other. She is an abnormal lady and compels Nina to follow the path of adultery. After all, the remedy is to be sought for the joy of son. The mother seeks the solution of the problem and Nina feels bewildered for some time. She asks herself — Can't she ignore Sam for ever? Yet Mrs. Evans tells her:
Then it'd be easy for you. (With a grim smile). And I don't believe in Him, neither, nor any more. I used to be a great one for worrying about what's God and what's devil, but I go richly over it living here with poor folks that was being punished for no sins of their own, and me being punished with them for no sin but living much. (With decision) Being happy, that's the nearest we can ever come to knowing what's good! Being happy, that's good! (546)

Here happiness has been identified with joy and not righteousness. Nina tries to forget her present sorrow and accepts abortion of Sam's child. For some time she loses her interest in life. She does not reveal the secret to Evans lest be should feel sad. Now Darrell appears to her the source of joy. She prepares herself to play scientific game with Darrell and explains the present situation. Dr. Darrell feels confused for some time. He feels tense at heart as he knew nothing about the family curse. In a pathetic mood Nina tells him:

Oh, Gordon, I'm afraid this is a deeper point of honour than any that was ever
shot down in flames! ... What would your honour say now? ... ‘Stick to him! ... play the game!’ ... oh, yes, I know ... I’m trying to play the game ... then why do I keep myself from him? ... but I was really sick ... for a time after ... since then. I couldn’t ... but ... oh, I’ll try ... I’ll try soon ... (553)

At this stage she does not want to lose Evans though she has lost her son, father and lover Gordon. She wavers between joy and sorrow and her tension starts growing. For some moments she fails to love Evans as he can’t be a father of a child. Still she does not give up her desire for a child. She finds herself lost without love and relations:

You’ve got to have a healthy baby ... sometime ... it’s now ... it seems cowardly ... to betray poor Sam ... and vile to give myself ... without love or desire ... and yet I’ve given myself to men before without a thought just to give them a moment’s happiness ... can’t I do that again? ... when it’s a case of Sam’s happiness? ... and my own? ... (554)
As a selfish person Marsden tries to create her interest in life. He is really conscious of her growing physical weakness. He asks himself — Is it good writing the biography of Gordon? Soon Darrell feels attracted towards her and both of them start playing with fire.

Nina becomes an island in herself as there is no limit to her agony. Many members of the family of Evans ended life in the mental asylum. Nina becomes an individualist and does not care for the social norms. How can she attune herself to the norms of American society? She ultimately becomes Madam Different as she plans to get a healthy son from Dr. Darrell. Her plan does not create problems immediately. When she gets a son, Evans accepts him as his son and feels happy. The son feels attached with Sam Evans and not Dr. Darrell. This is intolerable to Dr. Darrell as he can’t possess his own child openly. This is a new challenge for him. It is for a short time that Nina feels delighted as she possessed everybody — Dr. Darrell as a lover, Marsden as a benefactor, Sam Evans as a husband and the son Gordon Evans. But the days of joy are short for her as she wants no change in this situation. At this stage Dr. Darrell becomes a little
possessive as new child belongs to him. But Nina does not care for social norms and behaves in an abnormal manner. Her experiences are unique and yet she plans her future in her own way. It is well known that man proposes and God disposes. Same happens with her and she loses the lover, husband and finally the son. She boldly faces social challenges but the son has his own scheme of things. Dr. Darrell, like Eben, fails to forget his son. As there is no permanent adjustment between Dr. Darrell and Nina, the result is disaster. After all the individuals can’t challenge social norms for a long time.

Her depressed position creates sympathy in the heart of Darrell. She also expects a child from a healthy person. Dr. Darrell thinks of her as her beautiful physique has always attracted him:

... what’s happened to their marriage?
... I felt a bit sorry for myself at their wedding ... not that I’d ever fallen ... but I did envy him in a way ... she always had strong physical attraction for me ... that time I kissed her ... one reason I’ve steered clear since ... take no chance on emotional didos ... need
all my mind on my work ... got rid of even that slight suspicion ... I'd forgotten all about her ... she's a strange girl. (560)

The irony is that Sam Evans regards himself to be the husband of Nina. But he cannot be the father of her child. Dr. Darrell plans to give her joy and she cordially accepts his scientific approach to her problem:

... if you had a nice girl to love — or was it learn to love? — and take care of — whose character you could shape and whose life you could guide and make what you pleased, in whose unselfish devotion you could find peace! (More and more bitterly sarcastic) And you ought to have a baby, Doctor! You will never know what life is, you’ll never be really happy until you’ve had a baby. Doctor — a fine, healthy baby! (563)

Darrell fails to understand that he can't call himself the legal father of Nina's child. He feels
restless when Gordon calls Sam his father and hates Darrell. Now life is not always charming for her. Different problems crop-up regularly and spoil the delight of life. People like Darrell suffer for no fault of their own. Nina flirts with Darrell though the feeling of love develops in her heart. Now she is happy as she possesses Marsden, Sam Evans, Darrell, and son. She decides not to have an insane child from Evans. Darrell is highly conscious of his sexual desire and supports her as a healthy pig:

Let me see ... I am in the laboratory and they are guinea pigs ... in fact, in the interest of science. I can be for the purpose of this experiment, a healthy guinea pig myself and still remain an observer ... I observe my pulse is high, for example, and that's obviously because I am stricken with a recurrence of an old desire ... desire is a natural male reaction to the beauty of the female. (567)

In the age of science people adopt foul means to get joy. Unfortunately Darrell feels attached with her forever. He fails to decide if he is unfaithful to his friend Evans? Yet he invites new tension for himself:
Am I right to advise this? ... yes, it is clearly the rational thing to do ... but this advice betrays my friend! ... no, it saves him! ... it saves his wife ... and if a third party should know a little happiness ... is he any poorer, am I any the less his friend because I saved him? ... no, my duty to him is plain ... and my duty as an experimental searcher after truth ... to observe these three guinea pigs, of which I am one ...

(568)

It is true that Darrell succeeds in his experiment and Nina gets a child. As she feels attached with him, Marsden becomes jealous of their secret intimacy. The artist creates the conflict between truth and falsehood, lust and love, friendship and betrayal, good and evil, reason and emotion, chastity and adultery etc. Nina takes a scientific step to possess a baby and makes herself happy for sometime. Now she feels triumphant. She does not have any respect for her dead father. The child gives her new joy and identity:

On, what a goose I was! ... then love came to me ... in his arms ... happiness! ... I hid it from him ...
saw he was frightened ... his own joy frightened him ... I could feel him fighting with himself ... during all those afternoons ... our wonderful afternoons of happiness! ... and I said nothing ... I made myself be calculating ... so when he finally said ... dreadfully disturbed ... 'Loom here. Nina, we've done all that is necessary, playing with fire is dangerous' ... (573)

As she has played with fire, new tensions take birth in the mind of Evans, Darrell and Marsden. She feels divided between husband and the lover. Nina and Darrell feel tense when Gordon does not feel attached with Darrell.

These days Nina is not firm in her mind. As Evans can't give her a child, she hates him. But she has promised Mrs. Evans to make Evans happy. She repents for her past as the wounded soldiers didn't respect her sacrifice. Sam can't give joy to her. She continues to enjoy her dreams:

There ... again ... his child! ... my child moving in my life ... the world is
whole and perfect ... all things are each other's ... life is ... and this is beyond reason ... questions die in the silence of this peace ... I am living a dream within the great dream of the tide ... breathing in the tide I dream and breathe back my dream into the tide ... suspended in the movement of the tide. I feel life move in me, suspended in me ... no why matter ... there is no why ... I am a mother ... God is a Mother ... (573)

But the fabric of life is woven of the warp and woof of joy and sorrow. Her days of delight are short. How can she escape from her share of sufferings? Darrell feels neglected as Nina pays attention to Sam Evans and her son. In his subconscious mind he feels restless and even jealous. Yet he continues to love her. Marsden feels sad as he fails to control his passion for Nina. How to possess Nina? He is curious to know the relation that exists between Ned Darrell and Nina. He asks himself — Why does she pay attention towards Darrell? Is she a changed person? Does she really love Sam Evans? Who is the father of Gordon? etc. In this tragedy Eugene O'Neill highlights the ugliness of modern life:
Darrell ... and Nina! ... there's something in this room! ... like a brutal, hairy hand, raw and red, at my throat! ... stench of human life! ... heavy and rank! ... outside it's April ... green buds on the slim trees ... the sadness of spring ... my loss at peace in Nature ... her sorrow of birth consoling my sorrow of death ... something human and unnatural in his room! ... love and hate and passion and possession! ... no longer any love for me, only mocking my loneliness! ... no longer any love for me in any room! ... lust in this room! ... lust with a loathsome jeer! (581)

Eugene O'Neill portrays the relationship of love-hate between Marsden and Nina, Darrell and Nina and also between Evans and Nina. Nina pretends to be happy with Evans and she has compromised with this situation. She feels herself fortunate these days as she has Marsden as a friend, Dr. Darrell as lover and Evans as husband. But Darrell often feels guilty at heart and reveals his sense of guilt to Nina. Yet he admires her:
Nina (inflexibly) You’re my lover! Nothing else matters. Yes, I remember what Sam’s mother said. She said, ‘being happy is the nearest we can come to knowing what good is.’ And I’m going to be happy! I’ve lost everything in life so far because I didn’t have the courage to take it — and I’ve hurt everyone around me. There’s no use trying to think of others. One human being can’t think of another. It’s impossible (Gently and caressingly) But this time I’m going to think of my own happiness — and that means you — and our child! (585)

He feels sad when his son Gordon does not accept him at all. He smashes the gift that Darrell has brought on his birthday. But Darrell remains unfirm in his mind as his sub-conscious mind pricks him — Has he not sold his soul for her? Is he not a puppet in her hands? Why does he fail to feel free in Europe? Why does he not detach himself from Nina, Sam and Gordon? How can she be cruel to him? Is she not a trap for his whole self? In his sub-conscious mind he feels lost:
By God, I won’t! ... she’ll find out! ... smiling! ... got me where she wants me! ... then be as cruel to me as she is to him! ... love me? ... liar? ... still loves Now Nina finds her Gordon! ... her body is trap! ... I’m caught in it! ... she touches my hand, her eyes get in mine, I lose my will! ... By God, she can’t make a fool of me that way! ... I’ll go away some place! ... go to Europe! ... study! ... forget her work ... keep hidden until boat sails so she can’t reach me! ... (587)

When Darrell goes to Europe to study Biology Nina feels herself lonely and deserted. She survives just with her hopes. The birth of child gives her temporary joy as she hopes for a new life. She hopes to provide joy to Evans:

... he gave me my baby ... the baby certainly doesn’t look like him ... everyone says he looks like Sam ... how absurd! ... but Sam makes a wonderful father ... he’s become a new man in the past year ... and I’ve helped him ... he asks me about everything ... I have a genuine respect for him now
... I can give myself without repulsion
... I am making him happy ... I’ve written his mother I’m making him happy ... I was proud to be able to write her that ... how queerly things work out! ... all for the best ... and I don’t feel wicked ... I feel good ... (593)

In his article Eugene O’Neill John Howard Lawson compares Nina with Shaw’s Candida (46) as he adjusts herself with her environment. However, Nina does not care for traditional social ethics as Candida does. Shaw’s Candida does not offer her body to the wounded soldiers and protects herself in every odd situation. Her husband is proud of the moral support that he regularly gets from her. But Evans, Marsden and Darrell feel attracted towards her on account of her beautiful physique and not moral support. It is true that Nina advocates the theory of God the mother and finds God in the image of woman too. But she fails to convey any moral message with her conduct. Generally she is found as a frustrated woman. John Howard Lawson does not find man-woman relationship in O’Neill’s plays as ‘creative of satisfying’;

Their passion is necessarily evil, because it is incestuous; yet it is unavoidable, because it is the condition upon which they are born. His characters are emotional but sterile. (43)

Nina virtually becomes mad for a child. She feels restless after accepting the abortion of first child. She becomes possessive when she gets Gordon. She does not want to lose him even to Madeline. This possessiveness is responsible for her agony. As the product of 20th century O’Neill depicts modern ideas on the stage.

Marsden fails to forget his love for Nina though she does not care for him. Nina makes regular efforts to seek joy in family life and never boasts of her virtue. She is conscious of the love that Evans and Marsden have for her. But Darrell wants to possess Nina and his son and hence returns to her. Inspite of all certainties and uncertainties she tries to feel contented:

... she looks extremely pretty and this heightened by the fervorish state of mind she is in — a mixture of love, of
triumphant egotism in knowing her lover has come back to her and of fear and uncertainty in feeling her new peace, her certainties, her contented absorption in her child failing her.
(606)

The artist reveals the tension of Darrell as he wants to reveal the reality to Evans. Here the conflict is between love and friendship though Darrell fails to control his passion for Nina. Life is hell without Nina:

Nina! I couldn’t forget you! Other women — they only made me love you more! I hated them and loved you even at the moment when — that’s honest! It was always you in my arms — as you used to be those afternoons — God, how I’ve thought of them — lying awake — recalling every word you said, each movement, each expression on your face, smelling your hair, feeling your soft body — (Suddenly taking her in his arms and kissing her again and again — passionately) Nina! I love you so! (611)
Now Darrell fails to lead a normal life without Nina. Eben loves his son from Abbie and similarly Darrell feels attached with his son. Nina fails to be normal as wife and friend as she wants to remain secure:

My three men! ... I feel their desire converge in me! ... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb ... and am whole ... they dissolve in me, their life is my life ... I am pregnant with the three! ... little man! ... little Gordon! ... he is mine too! ... that makes is perfect ... (616)

Time passes easily and yet people feel new tension. Darrell fails to feel satisfied as his passion for Nina does not subside. She becomes bitter towards him at times though feels obliged towards him. Darrell feels jealous of the joy of Evans as he has behaved madly for him:

... I hope my experiment has proved something! ... Sam ... happy and wealthy ... healthy! ... I used to hope he’d break down ... I’d watch him and read symptoms of insanity into every
move he made ... despicable! ... he only grew healthier ... now I've given up watching him ... almost entirely ... now I watch him grow fat and I laugh! ... the huge joke has dawned on me! ... Sam is the only normal one! ... we lunatics! ... Nina and I! ... have made same life for him out of our madness! ... (620)

It is true that he studies Biology these days. Yet his passion overpowers him. He wants to be treated as the father of the child. Nina can not boldly confess that the child Gordon is the product of their love. She is afraid of social conventions. Darrell does not want to forget his past as the child is the part of his personality. Now Marsden is jealous of Darrell's passion for Nina. He is prepared to be her husband at every cost. The problem is — Darrell wants to protect his honour and yet possess the child. On the contrary Gordon Shaw hates Darrell and becomes the bone of contention for both of them. When her son is madly in love with Madeline, Nina becomes tense. As her son ignores her for love, it is appears unnatural to her. But this present situation is really disgusted for her:
My old lover ... how well and young he looks ... now we no longer love each other at all ... our account with God the Father is settled ... afternoons of happiness paid for with years of pain ... love, passion, ecstasy ... in what a far-off life were they alive! ... the only living life is in the past and future ... the present is an interlude. ... strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living! (646)

A few critics assert that O’Neill can’t ‘think’ on several issues of life. But his tragedies make the scholars think of every aspect of life seriously. Quite often people live in the present and ignore the past and future. But O’Neill relates art and life and asks several questions with new situations. He paints the sub-conscious mind seriously to describe the aims of a particular person. John Howard Lawson remarks:

If O’Neill’s plays conformed literally to those ideas, they would not be plays at all. But his work possesses the power and drive of a fine mind and a burning sincerity. The author’s
creative consciousness and will are in conflict with the sterile thinking which destroys both art and life. This inner struggle is evident in his repeated efforts to dramatize the sub-conscious. This has led to his interest in the problem of dual personality; he tries to use the physical man as a means of showing us the sub-conscious man in whom he is chiefly interested. (44)

A few questions can be asked about Nina such as — Is she a modern woman? Does she have any conscience to analyze the difference between right and wrong? Does she have any moral courage to speak the truth? How does she adjust with the husband who can’t be the father of her child? Does she not accept love as her right? Why does she have a craving for excitement? Why does she sacrifice the present for comforts and luxuries? Does she not adopt ludicrous tactics to gain the desired effect? Actually she lives for the present though she regards it an interlude between past and future.

In spite of her best efforts Nina fails to remove the tensions of Darrell. He does not cool down as Gordon fails to respect him. Nina finds herself helpless as Gordon loves Sam and not Darrell. Like
Eben, Darrell feels cheated though he has satisfied Nina. However, Nina does not lose her interest in Darrell and Gordon. As a realist, Eugene O’Neill describes the facts of poetic justice. Marsden speaks the bitter truth:

This is life and this is sex and here are passion and hatred and regret and joy and pain and ecstasy and these are men and women and sons and daughters whose hearts are weak and strong, whose blood is blood and not a soothing syrup! Oh, I can do it, Nina! I can write the truth! I’ve seen it in you, your father, my mother, sister, Gordon, Sam, Darrell and myself. I’ll write the book of us! But here I am talking while my last chapters are in the making — right here and now — (Hurriedly) You’ll excuse me, won’t you, Nina? I must watch — my duty as an artist! (658)

Eugene O’Neill answers many questions towards the end of the play such as — Why does Marsden feel happy without getting the love of Nina? What does Nina feel about Gordon’s love for Madeline? Can she still possess her son for herself? Can she detach
herself from Darrell and Sam Evans? Does she feel sympathy for miserable Marsden? Does she make a new beginning as a detached lady? Does she feel tired mentally? Does her happiness wither away? Has she failed as wife of Evans and as the beloved of Darrell? Does she not lack wisdom? Why does she give up her sense of possession? Who is responsible for her agony? Marsden feels that Nina has started fading as a rose and needs rest. How can she fight a long battle for mental peace?

But I’ll have to interrupt their biological preparations ... there are many things still to be done this evening ... Age’s terms of peace, after the long interlude of war with life, have still to be concluded ... Youth must keep decently away ... so many and wounds may have to be unbound, and old scars pointed to with pride to prove to ourselves we have been brave and noble ... (669-670)

While writing Strange Interlude O’Neill feels that the modern people suffer mentally because they have lost faith in God, church and religion. They feel no divine support to depend upon in times of crisis. This is true in the case of Marsden, Prof.
Leeds, Gordon Shaw, Sam Evans, Darrell etc. At the same time modern science has failed to give mental relief to these tense people. It will be injustice to regard this tragedy ‘unrealistic’ and ‘unsocial’. However, the artist does not want to present gloomy picture of Americans here.

Nina feels herself lost as Gordon loves Madeline. Due to growing frustration she finds herself miserable. Now she has no interest in life. She feels that she is a stranger for her son. She recollects her past for mental relief. But alas! Past is dead for her. Out of dejection she says — ‘Life is dead’. (673) There is no limit to Darrell’s agony as he can’t live without wife and son. He feels insulted when Gordon wants to hit him. Gordon does not spare both of them. In a bitter mood he laughs at their friendship:

It was just that I wanted you to know how fine I think you’ve both acted. I’ve known ever since I was a kid that you and Darrell were in love with each other. I hated the idea on Father’s account — that’s only natural, isn’t it? — but I knew it was unfair, that people can’t help loving each other any more than Madeline and I could have helped
ourselves. And I saw how fair you both were to Dad — what a good wife you were, Mother — what a true friend you were, Darrell — and how damn much he loved you both! So all I wanted to say is now he’s dead, I hope you’ll be as happy as you both deserve — (676-677)

Nina fails to adjust with the changing situation. Nina fails to prove to be a decent mother. Marsden is unable to share her suffering. Even Darrell feels that his whole life has been a failure. He too fails to avoid the whole distressing episode. Nina has picked up flowers from different gardens and yet fails to feel satisfied. Life is no more a spring for her and she tells Marsden:

Strange interlude! Yes, our lives are merely strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father! (Leaning her head on his shoulder) You’re so restful, Charlie. I feel as if I were a girl again and you were my father and the Charlie of those days made into one. I wonder — is our old garden the same? We’ll pick flowers together in the aging afternoons of
spring and summer, won’t we? It will be a comfort to get home — to be old and to be home again at last — to be in life with peace together — to love each other’s peace — to sleep with peace together —! (She kisses him — then shuts her eyes with a deep sigh of required weariness) — to die in peace! I’m so contented weary with life! (681-682)

So the artist has analyzed the conscious, sub-conscious and un-conscious mind of his characters. Nina does not have free will after the birth of Gordon. As a regular loser she feels tense and bewildered. As the victim of circumstances she feels restless. Future has no charm for her. Through her the artist indirectly asserts the importance of present and Mother God.

In *The Merchant of Venice* William Shakespeare exposes the hatred that exists between the Christians and Jews. In 1861 Abraham Lincoln granted equal rights to the Blacks as he could not tolerate the hatred that the Whites possessed for them. He had to fight Civil War for nearly four years and ultimately achieved the mission at the cost of his life. John
Brown strongly fought for the rights of the Blacks. Henry David Thoreau justified the approach of John Brown on this issue as he found no difference between man and man. Same approach was followed by Eugene O'Neill as he wanted to establish communal harmony in society. His ethical purpose is clear in the tragedy *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. The colour of the skin of Negroes is intolerable to Ella. She leads a life of tension as she can’t adjust with the Blacks at any cost. She fails to grant them equal status and hence suffers mentally. Due to her hatred for their colour she ignores all human feelings and eventually becomes responsible for the miseries of Jim. As a child she was not conscious of such differences and never felt any complex.

Eugene O'Neill observed that even the 20th century Whites had hatred for the Blacks. Quite often the Whites failed to forget the difference of colour of skin and became colour conscious. They felt that they were noble citizens of society. For them the Blacks were wicked and cunning. The question arises — What is the actual relation of love with the skin of a person? Jim consumes chalk to appear White. Here Ella creates tension for Jim regularly. Unfortunately she does not take a lesson from Mickey as the latter has played with her sentiments. As a matter of fact the Whites have
given nothing to Ella in all the bitter circumstances. Who is to be blamed for her agonies and tensions? Mickey hates Jim at every step. As Ella trusts the Whites, she tells Jim not to bother for her:

Jim: No, I — only want to help you, Ella.

Ella: Of all the nerve! You are certainly forgetting your — place! Who’s asking you for help, I’d like to know? Shut up and stop bothering me!

Jim: (insistently) If you ever need a friend — a true friend — Ella — I’ll be lost of friends among my own — kind, I can tell you. (Exasperatedly) You make me sick! (100)

She accepts the love of Jim when she gets no support from the Whites. She gets married with him and respects her love. Now Jim is the only friend in the whole world. At times she analyzes the demerits of Whites. She has been cheated by Mickey and hence does not want to trust them at all. At times Jim also become conscious of his dark complexion and feels helpless:
I can't explain — just — but it hurts like fire. It brands me in my pride. I swear I know more'n any members of my class. I ought to, I study harder. I work like the devil. It's all in my head — all find and correct to a T. Then when I'm called on — I stand up — all white faces looking at me — and feel their eyes — I hear my own voice sounding funny, trembling — and all of a sudden it's all gone in my head — there's nothing remembered — and I hear myself stuttering — and give up — sit down — They don't laugh, hardly ever. They're kind. They're good people (In a frenzy) They're considerate, damn them! But I feel branade. (106-107)

He asks himself — How can he be equal to them? Why does he feel himself inferior to them? Who is to be blamed for the color of his skin? When he has learnt many law books by heart he lacks self-reliance. Still colour consciousness shatters his faith. Due to his complex he forgets his lessons:
... for weeks before I study all night. I can’t sleep anyway. I learn it all, I see it, I understand it. Then they give me the paper in the exam room. I look it over, I know each answer — perfectly. I take up my pen. On all sides are white men starting to write. They’re so sure — even the ones that I know nothing. But I know it all — but I can’t remember any more — it fades — it goes it’s gone. There is blank in my head — stupidity — I sit like a fool fighting to remember a little bit here, a little bit there — not enough to pass — not enough for anything — when I know it all! (107)

He feels highly nervous as if he does not know anything. His hopes wither away and he finds himself doomed. His love for Ella fails to support him in this miserable situation. His past haunts him and he harms himself. He fails to gather courage to face the situation:

Yes! Yes! We’ll go abroad where a man is a man — where it don’t make that difference — where people are
kind and wise to see the soul under skins. I don't ask you to love me — I don't dare to hope nothing — only to wait — to know you like me — to be near you — to keep harm away — to make up for the past — to never let you suffer any more — to serve you — to lie at your feet like a dog that loves you — to kneel by your bed like nurse that watches over you sleeping — to preserve and protect and shield you from evil and sorrow — to give my life and my blood and all the strength that's in me to give you peace and joy — to become your slave! (108)

Due to her false ego, Ella fails to realize the noble ambitions of Jim. Her ego is an end in itself and she fails to get rid of negative approach to life. Actually she has no background of decent education. She has nothing to do with the history of mankind. She does not know the theory of 'impersonal evolution and personal tragedy'. She fails to learn any moral lesson from the life of John Brown who sacrificed himself for equality and fraternity. Mark Twain asserts the importance of humanitarian approach in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as Huck loves his Negro friend at the cost of life.
Critics fail to understand the personal fears of Ella as she has no faith in religion, church and Christ. A few questions arise about her such as — Does she come out of her narrow space? Why does she continue to survive in her world of rigidity? Is she not negative in her approach to Jim’s education of law? Does she want to feel enlightened? Is it not possible for her to feel liberated? What lesson does she learn from the brutal conduct of Whites like Mickey? Had she possessed inner freedom, she would not have behaved roughly with Jim. She fails to gather mental courage to face the racial tension. Had she cultivated history like Martin Luther King, she would have been happy at heart.

Eugene O’Neill feels sympathy for the Blacks as they become the victims of traditional social forces in the society of Whites and fail to fulfil their ambitions. They continue to work hard to achieve success and yet find themselves helpless. Fate has terrible events in store for them and they are generally doomed. For example, Jim makes all preparations for the Bar Examination, and yet forgets the right answers in the examination hall. He fails to survive as a victim of racial prejudice.

As a child, he was not conscious of the racial pride of the Whites. His black skin became the
greatest hurdle for him. As a student he does not lose his interest in Ella and feels delighted in her company. At an early age Ella is not a victim of racial feeling. Due to her love for Jim she is prepared to be a Black. But time makes her feel herself superior to him. As a young girl she becomes conscious of the gap and racial prejudices dominate her conduct:

Jim: Then, Why haven’t you ever hardly spoken to me for years?

Ella: (Resentfully) What would I speak about? You and me’ve got nothing in common any more.

Jim: (Desperately) May be not any more — but — right on this corner — do you remember once?

Ella: I don’t remember nothing! (Angirly) Say! What’s got in to you to be butting into my business all of a sudden like this? Because you finally managed to graduate, has it gone to your head?
Jim: No, I — only want to help you, Ella.

Ella: Of all the nerve! You are certainly forgetting your — place! Who’s asking you for help, I’d like to know? Shut up and stop bothering me!

Jim: (Insistently) If you ever need a friend — a true friend — (100)

Generally Jim is made conscious of his colour by his friends. Often his classmates are not prepared to play with him. Much earlier many Whites asserted the importance of equal rights for the Blacks and still Joe does not accept to be the friend of a Nero and tells Jim in a bitter tone:

... what’s all dis fakin’ an’ pretendin’ and swellin’ out grand an’ talkin’ soft and perlite? What’s al dis denyin you’s a nigger — an’ wid de White boys listenin’ to you say it! Is you aimin’ to buy white wid yo’ of’ man’s dough like Mickey say? ... Tell me befo’ I wrecks yo’ face in! Is you a nigger or is’nt you? ... (101)
Due to sudden outburst of love for Jim Ella is prepared to forget rigid social norms for her love. At times she detaches herself from the society of Whites. Due to her love Jim survives in his dream land. As they belong to each other they don’t want to bother for contemporary scenario. Doris V. Falk remarks:

... he has deliberately renounced his hated self in order to attain an impossible self-image. Marrying Ella and becoming a lawyer are for Jim part of the unconscious longing to achieve what he thinks is mean to be ‘White’. His drives are what Horney calls ‘tyrannic shoulds’ and his fear that he can never fulfil these demands makes him crawl in constant apology to himself and society. (88)

William Shakespeare asserts that love is not time’s fool’ as it does not alter due to worldly considerations. Ella is not prepared to accept all this. As she lacks wisdom she starts quarrelling with him for minor things. At times they recollect the time when their passion of love was strong. Jim says:
Yes. We decided the reason we felt sort of ashamed was we’d acted like cowards. We’d run away from the thing — and taken it with us. We decided to come back and face it and live it down in ourselves, and prove to ourselves we were strong in our love — and then, and that way only, by being brave we’d free ourselves, and gain confidence, and be really free inside and able then to go anywhere and live in peace and equality with ourselves and the world without any guilty, uncomfortable feeling coming up to rile us. (116-117)

Yet Ella fails to be strong due to changing situations. The company of Black people appears disgusting to her though the people are not to be blamed for the natural color of their skin.

In New York they become restless though Jim had come here to plan his future progress. Francis Fergusson says:

And then the real drama begins: the struggle in Jim between his love for Ella and his ambition to succeed in the
world; the struggle in Ella between her love for Jim and her hatred of him as the cause of their exile from her own people. The point of conflict in Jim’s career; for his self respect he needs to become a lawyer, while Ella, who has never really accepted him as her husband, needs to preserve her spiritual ascendancy by preventing him from passing his examinations. Tied together by their love and by their solitude, they alternately take refuge in each other’s arms and fight for mastery or vengeance. (275)

Evil triumphs at the cost of good and hatred prevails against love. P.B. Shelley said that there is no death for love, beauty and delight. But it is not so in the case of Ella and Jim. Ella is not prepared to take any lesson from her past. Mickey has been careless towards her. She is not prepared to learn any lesson from her past misery. Mickey has proved to be a faithless fellow and yet she trusts the Whites. She ignores the reality that she is not intelligent enough to survive without support. He would have passed the law examination if she had supported him emotionally. Ironically she fails to
relish the academic progress of Jim. Naturally she finds herself deserted and disillusioned as nobody likes her. Had they remained children forever, they would not have been victims of racial prejudices. Jim feels mentally shattered when the Whites mock at him due to his complexion. How can he fight against Nature and fate?

Ella fails to realize the reality of life and does not find out the cause of her agony. She is herself responsible for her agony. Had she been reasonable she would have mixed with all sections of society. Why does he hurt the inner feelings of Jim? What is the ambition of her life? Why does she fail to give up her sense of pride? How does she try to improve her lot? How does he try for the success of her married life?

Ella knows how to feel the agony of grief. It is true that she loves Jim during childhood. But she lacks wisdom, prudence and fortitude. Minor events disturb her whole self and she weeps for nothing. All her logic seems fallacious to the critics as humanity is to be considered as one unit and not in parts. She never analyzes the causes of her grief and hence fails to bid farewell to it. Her experience of love is
not fulfilling and everything is left undone by her. She finds herself compelled to accept the results of her hateful conduct. She fails to peep into the real heart of Jim and his family members. Unfortunately she never feels guilty at heart. After all, Jim plans a future for his life and studies law. He makes sincere efforts to get success in the examination. But he finds himself hanging in the middle in limbo. He cries when his examination is over. He feels mentally shattered as the hatred of Ella proves the greatest obstacle in his way. His constant love fails to give satisfaction to Ella. Both of them fail to get rid of their agony. They don’t know the meaning of sustainable happiness.

Quite often Ella does not like any interference of anyone in the family. Still the situation does not improve. All his hopes remain unfulfilled as Ella does not mix up with the members of his family. Like a prisoner, she avoids all friends. In this tragedy Eugene O’Neill asserts the message of universal brotherhood. Many conflicts exist in society due to colour differences. It is true that the Jim and Ella do not quarrel openly and behave as cowards. Jim laments:
We never quarreled a single bit. We never said a harsh word. We were as close to each other as could be. We were all there was in the world to each other. We were alone together. (116)

Ella attaches undue importance to physical factor and ignores spiritual culture. But Jim possesses warmth of human love and hence a memorable person. His tension increases as he fails to be a lawyer. Ella does not appreciate the gift known as Congo Mask. The gift terrifies her. She fails to laugh to her heart’s content as the mask looks ugly:

I’m not scared of it if you’re not (looking at it with disgust) Beautiful? Well, some people certainly have queer notions! It looks ugly to me and stupid — like a kid’s game-making face! (She slaps it contemptuously. Pooh! You need n’t look hard at me. I’ll give you the laugh). (119)

As Ella does not plan seriously their marriage fails. She does not relish the old furniture of the family and even the portrait of Jim’s father. She
Jim tries his best to improve the situation. Future has meaning for him and he analyzed the difference between right and wrong. Doris V. Falk and Andrew appreciate his approach to love and life. But alas! The barrier of skin weaves the net of hatred for her. He gets Ella as his life-partner and he survives in the world of illusion. He fails to return to his childhood and become ‘Jim Crow’ again. In a helpful mood he hopes for joy in the next world and seeks blessings of God:

Forgive me, God, and make me worthy
  : How I see your light again! How I hear your voice! ... Forgive me, God for blaspheming you! Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child and you send me for the women you take away. (133)
As a wise person Jim believes in the working of divine system. Let God protect him. Let his learning be brilliant next time. May there be no conflicts between man and man. He wishes to work for common good and that too without any selfishness. He tries to analyze the meaning of self-illumination. But Ella survives in the world of hatred and hence gets no consolation.
WORKS CITED


