Abstract

Name: P. Vijay Anand
Date of Degree: January, 2015
Institution: Annamalai University
Location: Annamalinar, Chidambaram,
Tamil Nadu, India
Title of Study: “The Development of Eugene O’Neill’s Concept of Men and Women: A Study”

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Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: English

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of this study is to unravel O’Neill’s concept of men and women from a thorough scrutiny of his plays *viz.* *Beyond the Horizon* (1918), *Anna Christie* (1920), *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), *The Great God Brown* (1925), *Strange Interlude* (1926), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1929), *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1941), *A Touch of the Poet* (1942), and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1943). In the process this study traces the evolution of O’Neill’s dramatic genius, and the several ways that he deals with, in his portrayal of men and women characters.

Findings and Conclusions:

A close scrutiny of O’Neill’s plays selected for this study reveals that O’Neill is mainly concerned with the sociological, cultural and personal isolation of the individuals who are estranged from one another, and communication and mutual understanding in their lives are replaced by estrangement and hostility. O’Neill, being an existentialist, deals with life in a very realistic and authentic manner, and presents a faithful dramatization of human situation. The most important issue of the
contemporary American society is man’s failure to “belong” or to find roots anywhere in this hostile world. Man is isolated not only from himself but also from nature, culture, society, religion and God. He is a lost and lonely soul, and suffers from a sense of anguish. In essence, Eugene O’Neill was a dramatist haunted by the need to express man’s struggle to find positive meaning in life—to reach beyond the realm of his instinctive needs in order to create, to possess, to will his own future. Opposing man’s desire to find individual meaning in life is what O’Neill calls the Life Force—the subconscious procreative powers in man that draws him away from his personal ambition and bids him fulfill his role in nature. What stands out in the end is that O’Neill’s greatest plays are concerned not only with men, but also with women.