Now, to conclude, let us first recapitulate what we have said in the preceding chapters. After highlighting the emergence of anti-heroism in the post-War American Drama in the opening chapter called "Phoenix or Ashes?", we have devoted one chapter each to a particular facet or type of the anti-hero protagonist. Chapter II, entitled, "Lowly and Lonely: Tyranny of the American Dream," deals with the victimization of common man in the post-War industrial America. Eugene O'Neill's Hickman in *The Iceman Cometh*, Arthur Miller's Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* and William Inge's Rubin Flood in *The Dark At The Top of The Stairs* are salesman protagonists whose identity is crushed by mercantile forces because they are too feeble to cope with the transcendental socio-economic factors. However, unlike Willy Loman, Hickman is a successful salesman. Willy sells himself, Hickman the truth about material society. Willy's dreams refer to the contemporary society, Hickman's ideals and activities to the moral world. But by making Hickman the advocate of truth, O'Neill exposes the materialistic outlook of a society in which truth is a saleable commodity. The death of the truth of Hickman also symbolizes the death of a society in which salesman is its representative. Gripped by anxiety and despair, Hickman, Willy and Rubin could find solace only in illusion and oblivion. With Hickman given
to alcohol, Willy to dreams, and Rubin to "Uerpel sisters of Ponca city," they are all lowly and lonely victims of the tyranny of the American Dream. Whereas the traditional heroes had spirit and courage to defy gods and fight with supernatural forces, the contemporary Willys and Rubins find satisfaction in passive submission and compromise.

Next we have "The Negative Saint: Victims of Nihilism," the product of the negative forces which fostered scepticism and doubt in the modern world. With history, politics and metaphysics called into doubt, the contemporary playwrights feel that, as a symbolic form of the human spirit, the theatre must dramatize the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of modern man. Such nihilistic, negative attitude is found in O'Neill's Hickman (The Iceman Cometh), Tennessee Williams's Shannon (The Night of The Ignane) and Brick Pollitt (Cat On A Hot Tin Roof). Archibald MacLeish's J.B. too is split between doubt and faith and doomed to live with "unanswered questions." Failing to become a "messianic hero", "a superman" or "a saint" for the society, he emerges instead as a stranger lost in a mysterious universe.

"Trapped and Truncated: Neurotic Women," highlights the emergence of anti-heroic women. American culture being complex and fragmented, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams evolved myths and rituals to project the alienation of their protagonists. Idealization of, and nostalgia for, the past is, thus, a prominent feature of their plays. The central protagonists in O'Neill's
Long Days Journey Into Night, Williams's The Glass Menagerie, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, A Streetcar Named Desire, Sweet Bird of Youth are broken, passive, fragile and truncated personalities. Mary, Amanda, Laura, Maggie, Blanche and Stella Del Lago are the victims of sex repression which inevitably leads to their doom. They long for freedom from the past, from suffocating family responsibilities, old corruptions, illusions and compromises. Since the escape from history is impossible, their struggle leads them to despair, sickness and morbidity. No wonder, Mary becomes a dope fiend; Blanche is obsessed by the values of plantation life now lost to her; Amanda, Laura, Alma, Cassandra disintegrate as they fail to live in the face of absolute uncertainty and loneliness. There being no fixed moral order, the protagonists cry for their identity in a valueless world. Rejecting the traditional heroism, O'Neill and Tennessee Williams created such anti-heroic protagonists as are sick and morbid. Gripped by guilt and alienation, they seek ecstasy in illusions.

The next chapter, "Pervert and Promiscuous: Desublimated Sex," traces the treatment of sexual perversions in Albee's The Zoo Story, Tennessee Williams's Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, William Inge's Come Back, Little Sheba, Picnic, Bus Stop and Robert Anderson's Tea and Sympathy. Projecting theatre as psychotherapy, the broken and lost souls of Williams struggle for human contact. Gripped by anxiety, depression and restlessness, their quest for human contact is an ironic parody of the traditional heroes. While Jerry, George, Martha, Nick and Honey are impotent, lonely, neurotic and sadistic, Inge's Turk, Bo and
Hal are "stud cowboys" - intellectually moron, spiritually bankrupt, morally pervert and promiscuous, and above all devoid of any sensibility and refinement. This "stud personality" of theirs is an extension of the anti-heroic tradition.

"Lost, Fragmented Souls: Escape from Self" explores the escapist attitude of the neurotic "moderns". By analyzing Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, it is shown that Jerry, George, Martha, Nick and Honey, conceived in the avant-garde tradition of absurdist anti-heroism, are alienated and morbid because they live in eternal void. In a fast-changing milieu, devoted mainly to money and material prosperity, alienation of individuals is inescapable. Personal failure in human relationship or profession, unhappy family life, a sense of nausea and angst, and a fear of isolated existence - these are the recurrent themes of the most popular plays of the post-World War American drama. Loneliness as a spiritual condition had always attracted the Greek and Elizabethan playwrights; that is why the phenomenon of loneliness in the traditional theatre was associated with cosmic moral forces.

In the American avant-garde theatre, this phenomenon disintegrates and debases the protagonists who thus become sick, decadent, morbid and neurotic. Like Beckett's tramps, Gelber's protagonists in *The Connection* are drug addicts who seek euphoria to escape from the existential despair. In Arthur Kopit's *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You In The Closet And I'm Feelin' So Sad*, the central theme is the emasculation of the male. Jonathan, the
protagonist, takes out the fire-axe, chops up his mother's Venus's fly-traps, and kills her piranha fish. What ludicrous, anti-heroic heroism indeed!

Last but not least, "The Black Messiah's Rebellion Sans Idealism" highlights the destructive and anarchical "heroism" of the Black protagonists in Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones and Jimmy Garret. Of course, a rebel can be heroic because he has always a certain strength of character and force of personality; but the contemporary Black protagonists are destructive rebels without any ideology or positive cause. No wonder, Walter in *A Raisin In The Sun*, Richard in *Blues For Mr. Charlie*, Clay in *Dutchman*, Walker in *The Slave* and Johnny in *And We Own The Night* are trapped by racial neurosis. Mouthpieces of the Negro playwrights intent on propagating hatred and violence, they are fired with the spirit of revenge, murder, hatred and violence - the negative values which cannot be called heroic in any society. They are passionately out to wreck white morality, white culture, white race, but without suggesting any alternatives.

Indeed, the American drama since O'Neill reveals that the hero is an animal trapped in a rigid social structure. He lacks all the attributes of traditional heroism - courage, spirit of invincibility, revolutionary fervour. The contemporary anti-heroes are sightless people who live and die in confusion. Hamlet too is forced to cope with a totally corrupt society, but to set it right, he sacrifices his life. In the process, his
problem assumes cosmic dimensions. Likewise, Ajax, Achilles, and Antigone inspire serious moral and social commitments because, in spite of tragic flaws, they defy the evil forces to bring moral and spiritual order. Instead, the anti-hero of contemporary drama reacts against all forms of idealism. In a classical tragedy, human potential of the hero is dramatized along with his limits; but the contemporary playwrights are concerned only with man's follies and frailties. No wonder, instead of heroes, we have fragile victims - 'lowmen', neurotics, heretics, narcissists, perverts, or anarchists. Indeed, in the post-World War American drama, protagonists represent variations of victimization rather than of heroism.

The playwrights we have considered represent a peak of American dramatic achievement and their plays deal with those attitudes that are basic to the American view of life. The analysis of the plays has demonstrated that since the contemporary protagonists suffer from identity crisis, their quest for objective truth is based on illusion - an attitude antithetical to the mythical heroes. No wonder, in pursuing the quest, the course they follow is an ironic parody of the quest of classical protagonists. Willy Loman searches for the key to success that has eluded him; the quest is futile and he goes to death without the vision of an Oedipus, because he cannot give up his "false ideals" without destroying his identity. Blanche resorts to sexual promiscuity, Shannon to epic fornications, Brick to alcoholism, George to illusion-mongering, Mrs. Rosepettle to
sadistic pleasures, Leech to dope, and Turk and Hal to homosexual perversions. Feeling isolated, the anti-hero distrusts truth, justice and love, and negates everything conforming to a value-oriented society. No wonder, instead of emerging as a messiah or a saviour, the anti-hero is seen as a destroyer. Conceived under the influence of Freudian and neo-Freudian theories, the modern protagonist is essentially a neurotic, disintegrated self, too weak to confront existence. Reacting against mimetic, humanistic, psychological or aesthetic theories of drama, the anti-hero is trapped by necessity and engulfed by spiritual gloom.

The dramas we have discussed end not in regeneration, but in isolation, nausea, anxiety or despair. In Greek and Elizabethan drama, the quest of the hero inevitably leads him to seek meaning, salvation, redemption and survival in a spiritual sense. In the tragic pattern, the individual is purged of his guilt and readmitted into society; in the comic pattern, harmony is restored to society. Against such creative, resurrective and glorifying heroism, the contemporary anti-heroism is destructive, vicious, corrupting and nihilistic. As if to vindicate Joseph Wood Krutch's lament over the paralysis of tragic power, the contemporary writer's efforts to create tragic or epic heroes have yielded sick neurotics - the victims of their own passions, sensual desires and guilt. Hickman, Willy, Rubin, Brick, Amanda, Shannon, Jerry, George, Martha, Leech suffer from general incapacity to adjust with environment - psychic, physical or moral. Thus rejecting the traditional heroism, they seek
ecstasy in fantasy, alcohol or sexual promiscuity. Tennessee Williams, Eduard Albee, Arthur Kopit, Jack Richardson and Jack Gelber deal with atavistic unconscious, inferiority complex, paranoia, schizophrenia, or mob-mentality. Instead of men of transcendental will and courage, we have victims and neurotics projected as the only hope of mankind. No longer motivated by love, ambition or money, they respond to unconscious feelings of guilt, domestic frustration, the tug of the silver cord, and hangovers of insecurity in infancy. "The progression of dramatic conflict from man against God or Fate to man against man and then man against society has entered another phase - man against his neurosis, or man against his Id."¹

There is no fixed "code" which can consistently integrate the cultural polarities or afford the "symbol of regeneration". As pointed out by Francis Fergusson, the contemporary cultural picture of America is "complex and fragmented, without a neat comic focus."² Thanks to this lack of a fixed "cultural symbol", the playwrights dramatize isolated and unaccommodated protagonists who have no relationship with nature and society. Such a protagonist suffers from a devitalized sensibility, an oppressive sense of a reality that he cannot comprehend. Though powerless to act, he cannot help struggling desperately to know himself. This condition of being a nonself, a no-man, exposes him to the terrifying vision of nothingness. Engaged in an obsessive search for self, he is at war not only with society but also with himself. Hence the dialectical play of opposites within the self. As a
result, the anti-hero today never arrives at a point of consummation, finality or rest; instead, he is perpetually engaged in a struggle without end. We have noticed in the analyses of the plays how frequently the protagonist's personality splits and disintegrates. Too fragile to encounter with the absurdity of existence, the anti-hero becomes a victim of psychological tensions which will never permit him to achieve consummation.

The contemporary American playwrights have broken from the Greek tradition of mythical heroism by substituting for it an anti-hero with his stature shrunk from the titanic to the puny. The theatre of Dionysus was a source of moral and spiritual strength to the Greeks as drama was an expression of the common beliefs for the entire community. No wonder, the Greek hero had something of the divine in him as he could fight with the supernatural powers. As we have seen, in the contemporary American drama, the hero does not figure as Infinite, as a representation of all humanity. Instead, he is projected as a victim in one form or the other, sometimes as a homosexual pervert or a neurotic demonstrating all the symptoms of moral and spiritual fragmentation, alienation, nausea and despair. And the cause of all this is not man's relationship with the universe, but social environment which has become desublimated.

In the developing pattern of the descent of the American hero, "there have been tremendous forces at work, political, social, economical, philosophical, ethical and psychological
which have dehumanized and deflated the American hero. The epic proportions of myth and fantasy shrunk toward the more life-like proportions of reality. " Darwinism evolved the image of the mechanical self; Kepler's laws and Freud's explorations of the unconscious resulted in the disintegration and desublimation of the self. The scepticism of Nietzsche and Kirkegaard led to the nihilistic view of self. The vision of nothingness that infects life finds its objective correlative in the experience of nada, nausea, metaphysical despair, the sickness unto death, the absurd. Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet conceived the existential hero as an outsider who questions everything—his existence, where he comes from, what he is doing, and why. The pathetic, loathsome condition of such anti-heroes does not fill us with pity and fear; we tend to forgive them because we know that, placed in these conditions, they were condemned to this fate. Although we wish that they had been heroic enough to break the delusive trap, yet we understand why they did not.

Indeed, our century has failed to produce "heroes" because of the social, moral, spiritual as well as cultural crisis of the age. The new sense of uncertainty, anxiety and pessimism have resulted in decay, fragmentation, alienation, anguish, morbidity and nausea. "Freud, Jung, and their followers," as Campbell points out "have demolished irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive in modern times. In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon
of dreams. Consequently the new forces have reversed the old classical ideals of "goodness", "nobility", "courage", "love", and "faith". No wonder, these forces have yielded anti-heroic protagonists who are self-seeking, fragmented, truncated, neurotic, nihilistic, absurd, or destructively rebellious.

In the plays of Sam Shepard the practice of delineating characters is scrupulously reversed and what we have in La Turista (1967), Angel City (1976), Red Cross (1966) and The Mad Dog Blues (1971), is not a character or hero in the traditional sense, not even a protagonist in the modern sense, but a performer playing multiple roles to escape from anxiety, fear, alienation and doom. While in traditional drama the character is revealed through his will and action, in Shepard's plays there is no self or will but several selves which are continually assuming different roles. This "transformational character" is full of contradictions and anomalies and his response to different situations is based on his fantasy and illusions. The loss of individualism has further extended the horizon of the anti-hero aesthetics. Shepard prefaces Angel City with this "Note to the Actors":

Instead of the idea of a "whole character" with logical motives behind his behavior which the actor submerges himself into, he should consider instead a fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme. In other words, more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation.
No wonder, in Shepard's plays, not the character but jazz is the central pivot bringing structural and thematic unity. Since the self is disintegrated into bits and pieces, the deflation of the character is total. For instance, the action of his early play, The Rock Garden, runs on different panels as a Boy and a Girl assume different roles to enact stifling, inert existence. Thus images, symbols, fantasy, jazz and verbal narration are the substitutes of protagonists.

If the tragic buskin did not fit the American hero nor did the outfit of the traditional comedy. The Greek comedy covered a wide spectrum of dramatic usage, with potential for the satiric and for the sentimental; Shakespeare also had the versatile genius to harmonize the satiric and the sentimental in his comedies. Since the final image of Greek or Elizabethan comedy is always that of the harmonization of individuals in the society with their own cosmos, the basic movement of the comic action always involves a progress toward marriage, the social symbol of an integrated society. In the sick and decadent Broadway comedy, there is no integrated comic pattern, and thus the individual is never harmonized with the cosmos.

In fact, owing to the anti-heroic core of our times, all efforts at reviving tragedy and comedy in the post-World War II era have proved counter-productive. In a society where self is lost and the individuals are treated like atoms, both tragedy
and comedy are impossible. Hickman, Willy, Rubin, Brick, Amanda, Laura, Maggie, Shannon, J.B., Leech would fit in a comedy no more than in a tragedy. In plays where the hero's main concern is with the quest for identity, and where the personality of the hero is bulldozed by socio-economic forces, life is measured in terms of loss, love by its failure, contact by its absence. Gripped by guilt and instinctual frustration, the protagonists cannot escape the "existence of complexes". They are conspicuous in their duller traits like stupidity, tenacity, anxiety, reluctance and mediocrity. No wonder they are overwhelmed by the ineluctable working of Nature, God and Society, and easily become the victims of biological, economic or psychological determinism.

William Gibson's Two For The Seasaw (1958), Jean Kerr's Mary, Mary (1961) and Robert Anderson's Silent Night, Lonely Night (1959) present common man caught in domestic comedies. In Mary, Mary, Bob McKellaway is a passive, irresolute and unheroic American, who, in his desperate quest for domestic felicity, gets caught in the web of materialistic society. John Sparrow in Anderson's play is a lonely, vindictive, desperate and guilt-ridden man who struggles in vain to find hope in hopelessness, company in loneliness, charm in dullness and value in emptiness. Saul Bellow's The Last Analysis (1964) presents a clown hero, Bummidge, moving at a dead run through a menacing world.
The Broadway comedy invariably projects anxiety and helplessness of heroes who fail to reconcile with a social situation. The Odd Couple (1965$), The Subject Was Roses (1964), The Owl And The Pussycat (1964), Hogan's Goat (1965), Mrs Dally Has A Lover (1962), and Slow Dance On The Killing Ground (1964) are comedies reacting against idealism and utopianism as they mirror the unglamorous strata of society. Here we have docile creatures incapable of heroism or villainy - passive shadows unable to grapple with a situation.

Indeed, "the deflation of the hero has marched with the deflationary times. The simple grain of life before the turn of the century has acquired shading, depth and a complex texture, making it harder to take hold of, less malleable to the individual will, and increasingly resistant to straight-ahead assault." The march goes on in the works of the contemporary playwrights like Sam Shepard, David Rabe, David Mamet, Neil Simon, Tyrone Guthrie, who are interested not in characters but only in such dilemmas and predicaments as tend to dehumanize man.
Notes


