Chapter I

Introduction

The study of American drama, interesting and rewarding in itself becomes more meaningful if made in the context of an awareness of the country’s historical and mythical structures. These structures have given shape and substance to America’s culture and traditions. Cultural phenomena like nostalgia, environmentalism, duality and tension in the American psyche and validation in various forms of struggle and achievement owe their existence to the American drama. Any attempt to explicate twentieth-century American drama will certainly become an exercise in compromise only. It has to cover a large number of theatrical productions, movements, and an exhaustive list of playwrights.

The first master dramatist to achieve a worldwide reputation is Eugene O’Neill, who has not begun writing plays until 1913. Before that, live professional drama has been produced in America. Robert Hunter’s Androboros: A Biographic Farce in Three Acts (1714) deals with the theme of political corruption and is noted for its satirical humour. It is viewed as a vent to Hunter’s frustration at the political situation in the Royal colony of New York.

Gary A. Richardson in his American Drama: From the Colonial Period through the World War I - A Critical History has traced the historical development of American drama. William Levingston (1716-1718) has managed to build the first colonial theatre in Williamsbury, Virginia. The Revolutionary period also is marked by the emergence of political playwrights like Robert Roger and Mercy Otis Warren. Rogers’ Ponteach (1766) presents a fictionalized account of Pontiac’s rebellion during 1763-1766 and ends with his defeat by the native Americans. Thomas
Godfrey’s *The Prince of Parthia* (1767) is the first play written and printed in America. It is highly derivative of Shakespeare. It is a historical drama in verse. In 1767 travelling companies like Lewis Hallam and David Douglas have been established in Charleston, Philadelphia and New York. Apart from theatrical companies educational institutions like College of William and Mary, College of New Jersey (Princeton), Universities of Pennsylvania (formerly College of Philadelphia), Dartmouth and Harvard have also endeavoured dramatic performances through the eighteenth century. The next hundred years are marked by only improvements, despite the efforts of playwrights like Royall Tyler, William Dunlap, and Sussana Rowson.

Tyler has first introduced Americans as a theatrical subject in *The Contrast* (1787) a social comedy in the style of English Restoration comedies. Dunlap is often referred to as “the father of American drama”. He is best known for comedies including *The Father; or, American Shandyism* (1789) and romantic, historical verse drama such as *Andre* (1798), both of which attempted to define the “American” character for the national audience. Dunlap the first professional dramatic manager has experimented with Gothic drama among which his *Fontainville Abbey* (1795) is a famous thriller. Rowson, also an actress has written patriotic melodramas, like *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), about Americans escaping from captivity in Algiers.

Richardson has a strong belief that true American drama has emerged only after the Civil War. The period between 1800-1860 is witnessed by the emergence of playwrights like James Nelson Barker, John Howard Payne, Robert Montgomery Bird, George Henry Boker, Dion Bouicault, Bronson Howard, Eugene Walter, William Dean Howells, James A. Herne and so on. Among them, Howells is considered to be a pioneer in ‘American Realism’. Playwrights like Augustus
Thomas, Percy Mackaye and William Vaughn Moody also deserve special mention for their experimental plays that deal with highly complex psychological issues. Playwrights like O’Neill, Tyler, Dunlap, Rowson, and others have made the American drama flourish in the early decades of the American theatre. It has been a natural theatre and the American dramatists have no predecessors to follow or to take them as models. It is not popular even as American dramatists want to create their own dramatic pieces.

The close of the eighteenth century is a period of great dynamism in American theatre. It is known as the Gilded Age. This period is usually referred to the changes in the way theatres are organized. In this period, plays continue to be more spectacle than substance. However, only a few modern plays have gained production in an increasingly syndicated arena that has promoted touring companies around popular shows. This is the period during which James O’Neill, father of O’Neill, has been trapped in the role of Edmund Dantes in a touring production of The Count of Monte Cristo (1883).

Herne’s tale of marital infidelity, Margaret Fleming (1890), is considered the first American realistic play. Dramatist Sheldon has contributed a number of realistic portrayals of the American working class in his plays among which The Nigger (1910) is very famous. Other important writers from this period are Clyde Fitch and Rachel Crothers. Fitch has written more than fifty plays – predominantly incisive satires of materialism and upper-class hypocrisy-culminating in The City (1909). Crothers has written more than thirty plays from the early success of The Three of Us (1906) to Susan and God (1937).
The growth of the Little Theater Movement in the 1910s and the onset of groups like the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players, with their focus on artistic merit rather than box-office potential have offered new artistic freedom and possibility. The group begins in a makeshift theater on an old wharf in Provincetown but soon moves to a small theater in Greenwich Village. Resolutely experimental, their growing reputation for innovation in both staging and material has drawn much critical attention. By the 1920s, the Provincetown Players have become professionally oriented. They continue to produce O'Neill's works and have seen other successes including Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* (1926).

Yiddish theater has been also flourishing and playwrights including Sholom Asch, David Pinsky, and Halper Leivick strive to create something beyond the usual sentimental melodrama or slapstick, taking on serious social topics. They have influenced later Jewish playwrights writing in English, such as Clifford Odets and Arthur Miller. Latin American and Chinese theaters have also existed in this period but are not producing plays in English.

In 1919 the Theatre Guild which has been reformed from the remaining talents of the since disbanded Washington Square Players has begun to present a variety of serious plays. The plays are produced to a high standard of artistry. They have become one of the most influential producing organizations in America making Elmer Rice and Maxwell Anderson the pioneers of expressionistic and realistic plays in America. Rice is known for the expressionistic plays like *The Adding Machine* (1923). Anderson is just as varied, but his biggest contributions are to the development of realism and dramatic blank verse. In the 1930s, he has produced more than thirty plays, including the imaginative verse comedy *High Tor* (1936), historical verse tragedies like *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930) and *Mary of Scotland* (1933), and
the more contemporary verse tragedy *Winterset* (1935). In these plays, he has focused his emphasis on ensemble production and socially conscious drama.

Influenced by the Moscow Art Theatre, the Theatre Guild has also pioneered the naturalistic method-acting philosophies of Constantin Stanislavsky. Sidney Kingsley has given the group its biggest hit, and some financial security, with his meticulously researched and intensely real hospital drama, *Men in White* (1933). The group has brought Odets to public attention with his agitprop drama *Waiting for Lefty* (1935). Agitprop is a style of theatre designed to incite its audience to political action, reflective of the social unrest of the era. Its language and situation are simple and designed to highlight social abuse. The group's aims, however, are more artistic than political. Odets has not only adopted this style but also elevated this style to produce America's best-known play about workers' rights. The play's dialogue is innovative which attempts to re-create working-class cadences. Odets's forceful realistic drama about a struggling Jewish family in the Depression, *Awake and Sing* (1935), has been produced in the same year and shows a subtler side to his writing.

Radical social changes have profoundly affected the American viewpoint that have survived the Roaring Twenties, the Crash, and the Depression, followed by the impact of the Russian Revolution and World War II, alongside a surge of interest in the psychology of Sigmund Freud. The darker side of people has been revealed, and the nation has faced moral, social, and religious crises as traditional values appear to collapse. By the middle of 1940s, America has seen the emergence of two major American dramatists - Tennessee Williams and Miller - who have responded to the nation's growing feelings of disillusionment and unrest. While Williams has explored psychological realism, Miller has expanded the field of American social drama.
Williams' through his The Glass Menagerie (1945) has established his reputation and theatrical voice. Many of his innovations in staging, such as the use of screen devices and musical themes, are set aside. The poeticism of his writing which has been followed by the sensitively created psychologically haunting characters in A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) has become a dominant one. It is voted the most important play of the twentieth century by the American Theatre Critics Association. Miller credits the vitality and the lyricism of A Streetcar Named Desire as liberating him to experiment more freely in his own work. Williams has continued to have a string of successes throughout the 1950s into the 1960s. He has explored similar concerns regarding the nature of success and failure in a variety of social contexts. Many of his plays are made into highly successful movies.

Although inspired by Williams, Miller's work sharply contrasts with his contemporary in both vision and style. Williams focuses on the disconnection between individuals and their society. Miller is concerned with their connection. Miller's first Broadway play The Man Who Had All the Luck has flopped, but his second, All My Sons, has run for 325 performances and has brought him to critical attention. It is followed by Death of a Salesman (1949) which has won numerous awards. It is honest and innovative in form. It shows Willy Loman's consciousness and its impact is emotional and dramatic. It is not a classical tragedy but a modern American tragedy.

During the 1950s, William Inge is often ranked alongside Williams and Miller. He is clearly influenced by the former in his focus on lonely people seeking love. His plays, like Come Back, Little Sheba (1950) with its depiction of the tensions in an arid marriage, and Bus Stop (1955) with its ensemble cast stranded at a dinner during a snowstorm while they work out their issues, are generally more
conventional and so ultimately less influential. His plays are predominantly set in the heartland states. Inge is seen as a spokesperson for the Midwest, bringing its worries, concerns, and the way of life to mainstream view. It is well illustrated in his play, *Picnic* (1953) which depicts a vagabond’s impact on a variety of women in a rural backwater.

One of the major features of all modern American drama is the ‘quest for identity’. It has started mainly as a reaction against the highly artificial and non-realistic popular drama whose exponents are Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas and Eugene Scribe. The leaders of the new movement, Emile Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, and others are motivated by an impulse to search for a new quality and strength in drama which has come from the candid presentation of the natural world. They regard the representation of a ‘slice of life’ as the ultimate goal of all good art. It has given them an opportunity to depict life in the very raw with unbounded psychological frankness about sex and socially disturbing new ideas.

Miller is born on October 17, 1915 in the Harlem section of Manhattan. His father is a prosperous manufacturer and his mother, the daughter of a manufacturer has been a teacher in the public school that Miller has attended in Harlem. In school days, Miller is a poor student. He has failed in many subjects. He is more interested in sports than in school. When the family fortunes have crashed in 1929, Miller has gone to work after high school in an automobile parts warehouse on Tenth Avenue in Manhattan. During this period, he has picked up a copy of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* under the impression that it is a detective novel and has read it on the sub-way to and from work. The book makes an impact on him and he determines to become a writer.
Then Miller is admitted to the University of Michigan as a student of journalism. He manages to maintain himself in college by a small salary as the night editor of the Michigan Daily. In college, he begins to write plays and twice won Michigan’s Avery Hopwood Award. One of these prize plays, The Grass Still Grows, has won the Theatre Guild National Award in 1958. Miller receives his B.A. in 1938 and returns to New York to work with the Federal Theatre Project in its last months. For the project, he has written a comedy but congress has failed to appropriate funds to continue the theatre. Out of a job, Miller turns to writing for radio as well as to working in the Brooklyn Nowy Yard and in a box factory. In 1940, he marries Mary Grace Slattery whom he has met in college and subsequently has two children.

Miller has not relished writing for radio as it has so many taboos and restrictions. Its scripts have to be short and banally simple. A few of his radio scripts have been published. “The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber who was a Man” is a light, saroyanesque fantasy about a talking cat who blackmails some influential politicians into letting him run for governor. Tomcat’s word “the man is evil”, is precisely what bedevils John Proctor at the end of The Crucible and Eddie Carbone at the end of A View from the Bridge. This social concern has been the primary focus of the modern dramatists to show man’s striving for his individuality and identity which will end only in meaningless case histories.

In his mature plays up to The Misfits Miller has postulated that men need the respect of their neighbours. It is that need that makes John Proctor retract his lie and Eddie Carbone insist upon his. Another of Miller’s radio scripts “Grandpa and the Statue” has lesser merit than “The Pussycat” but its theme that man needs society is more evident. Grandpa Monaghan refuses to contribute money for the pedestal for the
statue of liberty. Later, he learns that his decision is wrong. He finds that he needs the
society and must be an integral part of it. His later radio plays like ‘William Ireland’s
Confession’ and ‘The Story of Gas’ also deal with similar themes hence deserve
special mention. Later in 1944, Miller is hired by Lester Gowan, a movie producer, to
visit army camps and gather material for The Story of GI Joe, a film to be based on
Ernie Pyle’s newspaper columns. He regards war as a struggle between the principles
of democratic equality and fascistic tyranny.

Miller’s first professional production of the play Luck has appeared on
Broadway on November 23, 1944. The main character, David Frieber, or David
Beeves as he is called in the produced version, is guilty for being successful without
real merit or effort. He feels destined to pay for his good luck by the stillbirth of his
child. If his child’s birth makes up for his unmerited good luck, he can then, he feels,
sink all of his efforts into raising mink and can succeed for once by his own abilities.
When a child is born perfectly healthy, Beeves becomes obsessed by his need for
success until his wife forces him to let the mink die, although the death of the animal
will wipe away most of their property. The play’s basic theme is that individual
responsibility is not really connected to man’s social responsibility.

Although Miller is primarily a playwright, he has also written a novel and
several short stories. His novel Focus (1945) is about ‘anti-Semitism’ and also its
concern is on the irrational hatred directed towards practically any racial minority.
The story charts the social education of Lawrence Newman, an easy going Gentile
with a vague, casual prejudice against Jews. When a new pair of glasses makes him
appear Jewish, he gets demoted from his job. Affronted Newman resigns, but is
unable to get his particular kind of job elsewhere because people also take him for a
Jew. When his neighbours form a Christian Front to run a small Jewish merchant out
of the neighbourhood, Newman is apathetic about joining, and his actions make the others suspicious that he is again taken by them as a Jew. Newman himself recognizes no kinship with Mr. Finklestein, the merchant who advises him for his own safety to leave the neighbourhood. Newman refuses to leave because he regards his own case as different. No matter what the Christian Front thinks, he is really a Gentile. It is not until he is set upon by a group of toughs when Finkelstein fights them off with baseball bats that he realizes his actual kinship. When he reports the attack, he allows the police to consider him a Jew, thus attaining to himself not so much Jewishness as something broader, the brotherhood of man—his most cherishing identity. Commenting on Newman’s oscillating identity, Robert Hogan in Arthur Miller says:

But Newman in the beginning of the story is pictured as a flabby, middle-aged Prufrock; in the middle he for no convincing reason attracts and marries a beautiful woman; by the end he is almost a hero of popular melodrama, athletically repelling assailants with his baseball bat.

In the smaller matters of Newman’s changing character, Miller is more successful— for instance, when Newman, conscious of appearing Jewish, represses his usual gestures, refuses to count his change, and overtips the waitress. In the difficult larger task of showing how a man’s character changes when his face changes, Miller is less convincing. (16)

Though he has written many radio plays, a novel and a collection of short stories, Miller is famous for his major plays like Sons (1947), Salesman (1949), Crucible (1953), and Bridge (1955). Commenting on Miller’s plays, Eric Mottrum in “Arthur
Miller: The Development of a Political Dramatist in America” says that “His plays are written for and largely from the point of view of a man whose attitudes are not radical and innovatory but puzzled, confused and absolutely resolved not to break with his fellow countrymen” (23).

In the later part of the twentieth century, Miller has been studied from different perspectives – as a moralist, as a social dramatist, as a dramatist of ideas – and his contribution to American drama has been universally accepted and applauded. He has been considered as a tragedian. His plays have been studied under the thematic heading “tragedy” alone. So far no one has produced a study based on identity crisis. Even if it has been taken by some scholars it has been unsystematic and piece meal. A serious attempt has yet to be made to study consistently through all his major plays, the quality of the identity crisis and to discuss at the same time the nature of treatment given to individuals who suffer from identity crisis and the resultant desperation being a nowhere man and an anchorless individual.

Dennis Welland’s Arthur Miller is the first full-length study of Miller’s plays. In the book, he maintains that “central theme has always been integrity – the integrity of the individual towards himself and towards his fellow beings – but the cost of the integrity for most of his characters has been life itself” (26). Hogan in his book Arthur Miller has touched upon the tragic issues. He points out that “An individual is pushed to definition, forced to irreclaimable and self-destructive action. The self-destruction is paradoxically an affirmation of self and its identity as an individual is forced to choose and his agony comes from his awareness of being” (30).

Sheila Huftel in Arthur Miller: The Burning Glass has related Miller’s plays with social and psychological elements. It can be called a comparative study as
Huftel has compared and contrasted Miller with Shaw, Brecht, and Williams. Leonard Moss in *Arthur Miller* focuses chiefly on technical resources – dialogue, style, symbolic devices and structural principles.

Benjamin Nelson’s full-length study *Arthur Miller: The Portrait of a Playwright* traces Miller’s early background and gives an account of the shaping influences on his young imagination. He has traced Miller’s concern for themes like personal integrity and social responsibility. Nelson points out that Miller is a social dramatist, a dramatist with a purpose and a meticulous craftsman with an unerring sense of theatre (319).

Ronald Hayman in *Arthur Miller* has attempted to study his plays in the social perspective and tries to determine the role of society in them. Apart from these major studies, there are a number of articles that deal with Miller’s plays. Mostly they deal with his concept of tragedy and social responsibility.

So, from this short review of the critical material, it is also evident that no serious attempt has been made so far to study man’s consciousness related to his identity and to see how Miller has presented the very theme of identity crisis in his plays. Seeking one’s own identity is a kind of a struggle that the modern man faces during his existence. It involves an awareness of oneself in a conflict-ridden society.

Miller’s *Sons* is based on a true story. Chris Keller, a returned army officer comes to know about his father Joe Keller’s criminal irresponsibility. He doubts whether he is his father or not. The father shoots himself once the son knows the truth. He accepts his fate, but so does the son. In a position of wartime responsibility, Joe has allowed 120 cracked engine-heads to go from his factory into 40 aircrafts, directly causing their pilots’ deaths, the slaughter of his own son’s comrades in battle. He
allows his subordinate and the next-door neighbour, Steve Deever, to be imprisoned and disgraced for his own criminality, but at the age of 61 he realizes that these pilots are “all my sons,” and commits suicide—but with nothing to say about Deever. Joe’s life is a waste; he has forfeited his son’s love and his own good name for a public business ethic which is strictly unusable in private, family and neighbourhood life. The business ethic has made him put financial and social self-interest first, and social responsibility and purpose second. The war exposes the radical moral division. Joe’s horror at his own crime is insignificant besides his larger irresponsibility to “a universe of people”.

**Miller’s Salesman** is produced on Broadway on February 10, 1949. The play has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Its protagonist, Willy Loman, the salesman of the title, is like Joe, a typical embodiment of the modern business morality, but he is also a more universal figure. Joe’s story points up a valid flaw in the American drama. But Loman’s story is larger than one man’s. Miller’s Loman is both an individual and a broadly relevant type. Loman’s universal quality stems from the compassion with which he is presented. The compassion remains dominant in Loman with all his faults – his weakness, his destiny, his pretty irritations, and self-delusions. More generally considered, Loman is the modern man who has accepted wholeheartedly the twentieth-century version of the American dream. In this regard, Hogan in *Arthur Miller* avers:

In Willy’s time, there is a double standard, and he is not entirely aware of it. While preaching to his sons, clean living, friendliness, sportsmanship, and honesty, his life denies these qualities. He has a mistress on the road, his friendliness really does not sell merchandise, and it dimly occurs to him that people don’t really consider it even
friendliness. His son Biff, the star athlete in high school, does not finally win out over Bernard the greasy grind, and Willy’s values do not lead to success and happiness. A basic tolerance for dishonesty permeates his actions, and this dishonesty is reflected in the lives of his sons. (22)

Miller’s *Crucible* is a social drama. It is also a tragedy. Santosh K. Bhatia in *Arthur Miller: Social Drama as Tragedy* says that, “The social element in the play is not limited to the political parallel of McCarthyism with witch hunting, but extends much beyond it to the questions of the individual’s integrity in the face of organized challenges by socio-political forces” (59). In *Crucible*, Miller has explored the nature of relationship between individual and society. McCarthyism only provides Miller a contemporary parallel with the actual historical events of the seventeenth century Salem witch – hunting. It is based on the information provided by the archives and historical evidences.

Robert A. Martin in “Arthur Miller’s The Crucible: Background and Sources” states that the historical evidence is available in two massive volumes lying in the Essex country Archives at Salem, Massachusetts, where actually Miller has gone for the material. However, the play is neither about McCarthyism nor about Salem witch-hunting. The play dramatizes the human integrity; whether or not an individual should surrender his reasoning sense of judgment to social pressures. The witch-hunting is only a personification of the forces of disintegration which Miller has tried to unveil in the play. It represents the web of social evil which the protagonist is called upon to challenge and it ultimately leads to his destruction. The very opening scene introduces the nature of evil the hero is called upon to encounter. There is disease and sickness, mistrust and malice, pretense and calamity. It is dominated by treachery, deceptions
and lies. Bereft of conscience, people start accusing one another unscrupulously in a bid to revenge, old hatred and enmities.

Miller’s *Bridge* is patterned on the Greek classics. There are numerous references to the classical tragedy in prologue and epilogue in the One-Act play. Miller also establishes a geographical proximity between his play and the themes of the classical tragedy. Sicily, from where his characters have migrated, has been the centre of much activity during the ancient times. Elemental passions and the Sicilian code of community have been transferred to the Brooklyn waterfront. The lawyer Alfieri who reminds of the chorus in Greek tragedy is used as the base for tragedy.

Tragic irony is quite obvious in *Bridge*. Eddie suffers for a wrong social code in just the same way as Loman does in *Salesman*. Loman lives in a world which is governed by a success-code. He becomes a deliberate failure. In *Sons* and *Salesman*, there is the same social code which is based on the idea of success. Joe’s drive for success and Loman’s illusions for success are part and parcel of the code which dictates that a failure has no right to survive in a success-oriented society. The irony of suffering for a wrong social code is present in *Crucible*. The question of betrayal and the irony of Proctor’s sufferings lie in his refusal to inform against others. He also suffers for a wrong social code, which expects people to be dishonest.

The irony in *Bridge* is that Eddie suffers for violating a wrong social code which demands that he be silent and thus becomes an accomplice in the crime by giving shelter to illegal immigrants. Eddie is certainly more impulsive than Proctor. The two react differently in almost similar circumstances because Proctor is a man of reason and Eddie is a victim of passions. He is fully aware of the consequences of a breach of code. He has even cautioned Catherine against leaking out any information
about Marco and Rodolpho. Recounting the story of Vinny Balzano, who betrays his uncle and informs about him to the Immigration Bureau, his wife, Beatrice, also recalls:

Oh, it was terrible. He had five brothers and the old father. And they grabbed him in kitchen and pulled him down the stairs – three flights his head was bouncing like a coconut. And they spit on him in the street, his own father and his brothers. The whole neighbourhood was crying. (Bridge : 389)

The irony is that Eddie himself does the same thing even though he has understood the horror of doing a thing like that. In transgressing against the community, he resembles Joe of Sons. Eddie has to face a social boycott. He is shown calling after Lipari and then Louis and then Mike but each one of them, in turn, walks away without caring to look back or listen to him. Earlier, Marco spits into Eddie’s face and that hurts Eddie’s self-esteem as well as his social image. Consequently, he abuses Marco and threatens him that he will take revenge.

The radio plays have a different influence on the development of Miller's mature technique. Two of these plays are stories told by a narrator and one of them concludes with a scene in Heaven. In his mature plays, Miller is absorbed by the problems that Ibsenian realism has not quite satisfactorily solved. These are the problems of how to range more broadly through time and of how to probe more deeply into the mind than the front-parlour drama has allowed. Without wishing to curtail the objectivity of realism, he wants to combine with it some of the subjective strengths to be found in various nonrealistic manners like that of the dream play or expressionism. The struggle taking place in the drama is a struggle at one and at the
same time to write of private persons privately and yet lifts up their means of expression to a poetic - that is, a social - level. His most effective way so far in solving this problem is by the technique of the narrator which he has first used in these early radio plays.

Like Miller, O’Neill is also a major American playwright. He is ranked with other American major playwrights, especially with Thornton Wilder, Williams, Miller, and Edmund Albee. Robert W. Corrigan in “An Introduction” : The Achievement of Arthur Miller relates:

Of the five most important Americans writing for the theatre in the twentieth century – Eugene O’Neill, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee – only O’Neill’s reputation and stature were to build cumulatively over a long period of time. And of the five, only O’Neill (and possibly Williams) approached the level of productivity achieved by their continental counterparts. Each of the other four was granted the status of ‘major’ playwright with the professional production of his first or second full-length play (Wilder : Our Town, first, 1938; Williams : The Glass Menagerie, second, 1945; Miller : All My Sons, second, 1947; Albee : Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, first, 1962). (1)

O’Neill is born on October 16, 1888 in a hotel room in New York in a theatrical district called, Broadway. He is the son of the matinees idol and the successful actor-manager James O’Neill, who has amassed a fortune touring in a melodrama based on Alexander Dumas’s famous romantic novel, The Count of Monte Cristo. Actually, he is born into a tragically disturbed family. His mother is a drug addict. His elder
brother is confirmed alcoholic. Encouraged by his irresponsible actor-brother James, he has been inducted into a bohemian life of theatrical world at a tender age. After a year at Princeton University he is suspended in 1907 for a student prank. In 1909 he enters into a secret marriage but later gets dissolved.

After joining his father’s company again and playing a small part in Monte Cristo followed by several months of intemperate living, he goes to New London in Connecticut, where the family has its summer home and joins the staff of the local newspaper the New London Telegraph as a reporter. He begins to publish humorous poetry in a column of that newspaper. Later he begins to write plays. In 1913 and in 1914 he enrolls in a course in Playwriting at Harvard University. He is taught how to write plays by Professor George Pierce Baker. The next year he moves to Greenwich Village. In 1916 he joins an avant-garde group of writers and artists who have established an amateur theatrical company. He begins to write short plays for them. Commenting on the progress of O’Neill as a dramatist, John Gassner in Eugene O’Neill says:

Eugene O’Neill became a significant figure in America because his early work was a natural synthesis of both the naturalistic and the poetic strivings of the modern theatre. He combines realism of characterization with a sensitive regard for the romantic longings of characters, a naturalistic concern for environmental detail with a metaphysical flight from the particular to the general and plodding realistic prose with a poetic flair for imagery, atmosphere, and scenic imagination; it could be said of him that he was one of the least poetic and at the same time one of the most poetic modern dramatists. (10)
O’Neill starts with short slice-of-life dramas dealing with the miseries, delusions, and obsessions of men adrift in the world. He begins his journey as a dramatist with the appearance of the S.S.Glencairn cycle of sea-plays. He begins his career also with the Provincetown Players’ production of his atmospheric drama of the death of a common sailor, *Bound East for Cardiff*, in the summer of 1916. Then follows the collective quartet of one-actors, *In the Zone* (1917), *The Long Voyage Home* (1917), and *The Moon of the Caribees* (1918). Later he has produced a number of independent plays like, *Ile* (1917), *The Rope* (1918) and *Where the Cross is Made* (1918). *Ile* is especially a representative of his early naturalistic symbolic style with its mordant treatment of a New England sea captain’s obsessive pride in his ability to hunt whales for their ‘ile’ (oil) which has driven his lonely wife mad.

O’Neill also begins to produce early full-length plays. In all his early plays, he has given sense of tragic irony a full scope. *Horizon* is produced in New York in 1920. It is about the thwarted romantic man, Robert Mayo. He is an absolute failure on the farm. His marriage is destroyed by poverty and domestic recriminations. His unromantic brother Andrew actually prospers for a while in his adventuring. He amasses a fortune in romantic surroundings from which the other brother is forever barred. In the end, Robert Mayo has to die in the farm which has been an ensnarement and defeat to him. He makes a wrong choice blinded by sexual instinct.

O’Neill’s *Anna Christie* is produced under a different title in 1920. In it, it is the attraction of the sea that is blamed for the combination of circumstances which makes the heroine a prostitute. She has been neglected by her father, a sea captain incapable of resisting the seductions of seafaring life. The captain unable to understand his own behaviour and overwhelmed by his sense of failure as a father, speaks of the sea as a demon and equates it with diabolic fate.
In *Diff'rent* (1920), fate plays an ironic trick on a New England girl who breaks off her engagement because her sea going fiancé is not chaste enough to satisfy her puritanical principles. She has to doom herself to a life of lonely spinsterhood. In the end, she ultimately rebels against frustration by succumbing to a designing rascal many years younger than herself. Commenting on these two plays Gassner in *Eugene O’Neill* writes:

Whereas *Diff'rent* made crude use of both the irony of fate and the theme of sexual repression attributed by O'Neill's generation to the rigors of New England Puritanism, *Anna Christie* moved naturally and smoothly up to its climax, the rejection of Anna by a young Irishman on his discovering her sordid past. Only the ending of the play seemed marred by vaguely promising a reunion between the lovers. (O'Neill himself was apologetic for this concession to sentiment). But even the concluding scene in which Anna's lover and her father have signed up for a sea voyage after a drinking bout, possessed a raffish mordancy that suited the subject and tone of the work, and did not impair the effectiveness of this justifiably popular play. Although O'Neill's dissatisfaction with it arose from a belief that he must write unalloyed tragedies to fulfill his vision of life and his destiny as a significant tragedian, he nevertheless had no reason to be ashamed of what he had accomplished in this play. He had achieved a wry tragicomedy enriched with fully flavored naturalism in dialogue and background that proved satisfying to playgoers in America and abroad, gave the play a good run on Broadway in the theatrical season of 1921-22, and won for its author a second Pulitzer Prize. (He had
first received this coveted award the year before, with, *Beyond the Horizon*. (13)

The *Straw* produced in 1921, deals with the love of two tuberculosis patients in a sanatorium. One of whom is cured after a few months and has left behind him the girl, whose situation is hopeless and is alleviated only by the illusion that she will join him some day.

In *The Fire Man* (1922), a scientist destroys his prospects of happiness by resenting the intrusion of a child into his married life. *Welded* (1924) is a play written under the influence of Strindberg. It is also steeped in personal experience. In it, husband and wife are consumed with resentment while drawn to each other powerfully by an irrational force that they cannot live apart.

*Desire Under the Elms* (1924), is a tragedy of passion. It involves the third wife of a New England farmer and his son by his diseased second wife. It deals with the destiny of the fateful lovers. Eben and his stepmother Abbie are irresistibly drawn to each other. Eben, who betrays his tyrannical father Ephraim Cabot, is engaged in Oedipal conflict with him. The young stepmother who marries Ephraim seeks security and eventually covets his farm. She becomes tragically involved with her stepson when her suppressed hunger for love turns into reckless passion. Abbie strangles her child in order to convince Eben that she has given herself to him out of love rather than that of a desire to deprive him of his heritage by producing a new heir to his father’s farm.

The plays that follow *Elms* are *The Fountain* (1921) and *The Great God Brown* (1926). These plays represent O’Neill’s strivings to enrich the American drama with styles different from realistic - namely, the romantic, the symbolist and
the expressionistic. In fact, the effort has started earlier with the production of *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and later with *Gold*, an expanded version of the one-actor Where the Cross is Made. *Jones* is an expressionistic drama and *Gold* is a symbolist – romantic drama. Then he succeeds in producing *Macro Millions* in 1928. In *Gold*, a sea captain is driven mad by his lust for gold. When he is contracted on a deserted island and is crazed by thirst he imagines that he has found a treasure trove. He finally understands that there is no gold but only there is love. Its successor *The Fountain* is the story of the legendary search of *Ponce de Leon* the ‘Fountain of Youth’ which becomes obsessive until he finally realizes that there is no such thing. His *Lazarus Laughed* is a nobly concaved drama in which the resurrected Lazarus teaches man to laugh at death.

O’Neill has failed miserably in romantic and symbolist drama. Then he begins to produce expressionistic dramas like *Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922). They are followed by *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924), *Brown* (1926), *Strange Interlude* (1928), *Lazarus Laughed* (1928), and *Days Without End* (1934), a drama of a split personality by two different actors. His *Jones* is written in an expressive form. It deals with the plight of a Caribbean Negro dictator from his aroused victims, a subject suggested to him by Haitian history. It is about the man fleeing through the jungle who is plagued by recollected events from his private past such as his slaying of a prison guard, his meagre knowledge of racial history and his superstitious fears and savage rituals. It is a *tour de force* of imaginative theatre. It is followed by the expressionistic drama *Ape*. On the surface, the play is a series of vignettes dramatizing the bewilderment of a powerful stoker, Yank, when his naive confidence in brute power is shaken. It shows his desperate efforts to find a place for himself in the world on a more sophisticated level. Yank’s fate expresses man’s search for the
meaning in life and his alienation in the universe.

His **Wings** is also an expressionistic drama. It involves the marriage of a famished white girl and a devoted Negro lover. In it, he deals with the subject of miscegenation and an ensuing Strindbergian duel of the sexes. The neurotically jealous Ella destroys her Negro husband’s chances for a career and thereafter tries to kill him. Then she lapses into a remorseful dependency upon his forgiveness and devotion. In his **Brown**, Dion Anthony represents in his dividedness the conflict between the creative pagan acceptance of life symbolized by Dionysus and masochistic life - denying spirit of Christianity symbolized by St. Anthony. In this play the heroine Margaret Anthony’s long suffering wife resembles Marguerite of Goethe’s **Faust**.

O’Neill’s **Macro Millions** is his animus against materialistic society. It is a sardonic comedy on the career of Marco Polo, who turns rapidly into a Philistine. His **Lazarus Laughed** is a return to his metaphysical vein. His **Dynamo** is the story of a calvinistically reared young American, Reuben Light. He falls in love with an antithetical neighbour’s daughter Ada and becomes an atheist. In search of a new faith to replace the old, Reuben adopts the electric generator as the symbol of his belief in science paralleling the virgin and the dynamo. He finds himself worshipping the new God with the same violence with which he forebears worshipping the Old Testament deity. Driven mad by his fanaticism, he kills Ada who makes him violate his vow of undivided loyalty to the dynamo. Then he immolates himself on the lethal machine. His **Interlude** is a play in nine acts. It is about Nina, the attractive daughter of a possessive university professor who has lost her athlete lover in World War I. She regrets for not having consummated her love with him and seeks fulfillment in desperate promiscuity. Then she marries a man to whom she will not bear children as
she is warned by his mother that there is insanity in the family. She gives birth to a son by another man, the neurologist Darrell. In the end she cannot bring herself to leave her husband, a lover, a family friend and an illegitimate son to fill her womanly life while at full tide. She loses her husband to death, her emotionally drained lover to science and her athlete son to a girl of his own age.

O’Neill’s **Mourning Becomes Electra** domesticates or naturalizes the Greek legend. General Ezra Mannon, the scion of a wealthy mercantile family returns from the Civil War to learn that his wife Christine has been unfaithful to him. She has an affair with the seafaring Adam Brant from a rival branch of a family. He is poisoned by her when he seeks reconciliation. His **Ah, Wilderness!** is a family comedy set in a small Connecticut city at the beginning of the new century. It is a nostalgic comedy of recollection. It revolves around a bright and spirited adolescent who has his first and luckily harmless fling at low life when jilted by the daughter of a parochial father. The father disapproves of the boy’s penchant for the pagan poet Swinburne. The boy’s friendly and ever-smiling father who is the local newspaper publisher straightens everything out to his son’s satisfaction.

O’Neill’s **The Iceman Cometh** and **A Moon for the Misbegotten** are memory plays. The first one deals with the period of waterfront days and the second with the broken life of an alcoholic brother James. In Harry Hope’s Saloon, life's exiles and failures lead a besotted and befuddled existence and subsist on hopes of recovering their lost status. Most of them are reasonably happy until their drinking companion, the flashy traveling salesman Hickey shows up for one of his periodic drinking bouts. Instead of joining in the expected revels he is bent upon making them renounce their illusions and face the truth about themselves so that there is nothing more to hope for. Finally they accept his challenge to leave the saloon and they
proceed to accomplish the restitution of reputation and position with which they have long deluded themselves. They sally forth, but only to return, one by one, frightened and dispirited. Nothing feels right anymore, and even the liquor in the saloon has lost its savor and has no effect on them. Contentment returns to them only after Hickey's revelation that he has murdered his long-suffering wife. She is the one who persisted in believing in his eventual reformation as the only way to free her from the misery of loving him, although he has also hated her for her infinite trust and forbearance.

They derive reassurance from the conviction that Hickey who has given himself up to the police is stark mad and relapse into their comforting illusions. The liquor begins to have an effect on them again and all is well with them once more so far as they know or care. The one exception is Larry, the disenchanted radical who turns out to be the only convert Hickey has made. Larry is the only one who has really grasped Hickey's meaning when Hickey calls for the abandonment of illusions as the only way of attaining peace. The death of illusion is the end of life. Larry in fact performs one act of kindness at once. He persuades a miserable youth who has betrayed his anarchist mother to the police to put an end to his inner torment by committing suicide.

O’Neill is destined to become a life-long rebel both in life and in theatre. His own shattering experience of the world has made him revolt against all the artificiality, sentimentality and melodrama. He looks upon life as a manifestation of the dialectical relationship between illusion and reality. From the very beginning he has felt that there has been a tremendous gap between the illusions generated by the American Dream and the actual reality of American society which totally disregards the claims of the dispossessed and the downtrodden.
O’Neill incessantly and continuously searches for an identity which he can transmute into the artistic substance of his plays. Thus his double loss of faith - one in the Irish Catholicism of his race and the other in the dream of success of his nation – has made him look for his identity. His search for identity becomes for him in effect a search for the meaning of life. In a letter to George Jean Nathan published in Intimate Notebooks, he says:

The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it - the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death wish. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work now a days must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer. (The Plays of Eugene O’Neill I : 115)

O’Neill reveals his identity as a radical realist and a perceptive analyst of modern life. Though he has rejected the old mysticism, he appears to remain in the grip of a new mysticism which seeks life’s meanings in the intervention of a supernatural agency. His natural narrative style also provides the gripping effect and flavour to his plays.

O’Neill is the first American playwright both in terms of his artistic vision as well as the prolific number of his writings – forty seven plays. He has inherited the legacy of the European masters of the new drama. Starting with literary naturalism in his early plays and expressionism in his middle plays he has achieved a simple, intense poetic realism in his last plays. He is never tired of experimenting with new
stage devices, using masks, depicting split-personalities, long soliloquies, asides and ballet forms.

O’Neill receives the prestigious Nobel Prize in 1936 at the age of forty nine. At that time he has written thirty-five short and long plays. He attracts attention with two styles: the styles of realism and expressionism. He has also written one-act plays and Encyclopedian dramas which are twice in normal length of modern plays. Gassner in *Eugene O’Neill* writes:

His search for expressive form, in his case a combination of private compulsions and public ambitions to incorporate modern ideas and notions about life and dramatic art, led him to undertake numerous experiments with symbolic figures, masks, interior monologues, split personalities, choruses, scenic effects, rhythms, and schematizations. In O’Neill’s works there is a veritable summa of the modern theatre’s aspirations and achievements as well as its more or less inevitable limitations and failures. (5-6)

O’Neill emphasizes harmony with nature. It is an aspect of primitive communism in which man feels united with his fellow beings. To him modern man is not an abstraction but he belongs to concrete social system. When O’Neill laments man’s lack of spiritual harmony with nature he is actually thinking of man’s position in an exploitative society like that of America. In a metaphysical stance he says that contemporary man is unable to form a harmonious relationship with nature and so he suffers from alienation. O’Neill is much opposed to bohemianism and crass materialism. He admits in *PEO* III:

I'm going on the theory that the United States, instead of being the
most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure. It's the
greatest failure because it was given everything, more than any other
country. Through moving as rapidly as it has, it hasn't acquired any
real roots. Its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess
your own soul, by the possession of something outside it, thereby of it,
too. America is the prime example of this because it happened so
quickly and with such immense resources. This was really said in The
Bible much better. We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it
profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'
We had so much and could have gone either way. (870-71)

In Ape O’Neill identifies Yank as a symbol of everyman whose basic problem of
alienation is both social and spiritual. He declares in Playwrights on Play Writing:

Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But,
apparently, very few people seem to get this. They have written,
picking out one thing or another in the play, 'how true' it is. But no one
has said 'I am Yank. Yank is my own self...’ Yet that was what I
meant him to be. His struggle to "belong" to find the thread that will
make him a part of the fabric of life - as we are all struggling to do just
that. One idea I had in writing the play was to show that the missing
thread, literally, 'the tie that binds', is understanding of one another.

(236)

It makes Yank realize himself in American society. In Ape, O’Neill emphasizes the
Quasi-spiritual dimension of human alienation to the virtual exclusion of its social
aspects.
Oscar Cargil et al. in O’Neill and His Plays: “Four Decades of Criticism” say:

The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace taking the ‘woist - punches from bot' of 'em.’ This idea was expressed in Yank's speech. The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can’t go forward and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to 'belonging' either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, and his attempts to belong. (110-11)

O’Neill’s plays have been classified under different heads. It starts with early plays to the autobiographical plays. Commenting on the early plays of O’Neill, Margaret Loftus Ranald in “From Trial to Triumph (1913-1924) : The Early Plays” says:

His early experimental plays (1913-24) demonstrate the structural influence of his father’s theatre of melodrama, in his instinctive ability to build a scene or action toward a sometimes explosive conclusion, skillfully varying the pace of a play. Just as his audience’s emotion or body flags, he revivifies attention by means of a gunshot, a sudden revelation, or a death. Like Chekhov and Ibsen he also knew that a weapon or important object once displayed on stage must eventually be
used, something surely learned from *Monte Cristo*. (52)

In O’Neill’s New England plays, the dialectical conflict appears in the fight between the decadent customs and institutions of Puritanism and the natural human desire to live a life of fulfillment. The asphyxiating nature of Puritanism has represented the expression of man and has become a hindrance to his healthy growth. He is radical enough to perceive this situation. In fact he dramatizes his encounter with the theological dimension of social and human identity with the man’s indomitable spirit which fights against the repressive attitude of institutionalized religion.

In his autobiographical plays, O’Neill depicts the existential dimension of social and human identity. He sets out to dramatize the various contradictions and conflicts of American society. He finds that man’s existential despair is by and large a social product. It is due to the outcome of the decadent bourgeois values. The social outcasts and derelicts in *Cometh* are the products of philistine society. It is the result of man’s deliberate avoidance of the stark realities of life in such a society. His subconscious mind creates a defense mechanism – illusions – to live by. The dramatic actions of the autobiographical plays are based on events that have really happened to O’Neill.

In these plays, anguish, frustration, despair and agony of man are revealed through his characters. It shows that man seeks fulfillment which alone can give him a sense of wholeness. Man fails to understand himself. In *Cometh*, Rosa Parritt fails to understand this in relation to Larry Slade and Don Parritt. In *More Stately Mansions*, Deborah Harford does not recognize this truth in her relationships with Simon Harford and Sara Harford. In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, James Tyrone and James Tyrone Jr. fail to feel in Edmund Tyrone the pulse of creative being. This pulse
forms the love of his existential reality. The rootless and social derelicts in Cometh are made to live on their illusions. Their illusions reflect an inverted social consciousness.

In his sea-plays, O’Neill sets on the quest for identity. These plays dramatize his encounters with the cosmic dimension of social and human reality / identity. In these plays, land is identified with decadent forces, namely exploitation, dehumanization, depersonalization, and the loss of dignity of man. Tejpal Singh in Eugene O’Neill: Quest for Reality in His Plays says that: “Contrary to the decadent forces of the land, the sea symbolizes the values of purity and cleanliness. The playwright uses the sea as a point from which he can condemn the evil forces of the land i.e. society. But the sea as an expression of cosmic rhythm objectifies man’s need to get away from oppression generated by unequal relationships in a class society” (5).

In the cycle plays, O’Neill has depicted the transitional period from feudalism to capitalism. In A Touch of the Poet, the conflict between feudalism and capitalism is evident in the form of Major Cornelius Melody’s confrontation with the Harfords and the Yankees. In Mansions, the same conflict is also evident. In these plays man has identified himself as an alienated individual. The social derelicts in Cometh, the Tyrones in Night, and the Harfords in Mansions are identified as alienated individuals. In Misbegotten, the human values are identified and damaged but not irredeemably corrupted by the base materialism.

Having made a realistic portrayal of the exploitation of the sailors in his sea-plays, and having focused on the psyche of the suffering man in his Expressionistic plays, and having examined the perversion of the human personality engendered by
repressive Puritanism in his New England plays, O'Neill finally comes to dramatize the agony of “being” in his autobiographical plays. This may be characterized as a portrayal of the existential dimension of reality as the existence of man is in peril due to factors mostly man-made but some inherent in the human situation itself. Antagonism of the warring classes, dehumanization of man, loss of spiritual values, ruthless exploitation of limited natural resources, impending nuclear wars, deepening energy-crisis, pollution of the atmosphere, contamination of water, over-population and the operation of the law of diminishing returns on agricultural products are some of the factors which pose imminent danger to the existence of man. The most fundamental problem is how to preserve and continue the existence of man in those harrowing circumstances.

O’Neill’s character portrayal needs some attention in depth. He has portrayed human characters on three levels. His portrayal of man is accurate as he is concerned with the identity crisis of a man who is tossed upon in the existential struggle. He is confronted and assailed on his ignorance in the surrounding atmosphere which castrates his psyche and makes him a wounded being. Commenting on the character portrayal by O’Neill, Edward L. Shaughnessy in “O’Neill’s African and Irish-Africans: Stereotypes or ‘faithful realism’” says:

O’Neill treated human characters on three levels: the cultural, which shapes the surface personality; the psychological, which examines the mask behavior that derives from the first; and the spiritual, which depends least on the racial-ethnic. Of course, environmental (i.e., cultural) forces, while they are vastly formative, are essentially accidental. Environment produces the "form," or outward self, that is
recognized by others: one's language, codes of dress and deportment, often even one's loyalties, values, and prejudices. On the second level, O'Neill studies the individual's struggle to preserve integrity, his unified self. If he cannot accept the culture's attempt to shape him (to own him), he may seek to preserve his personhood behind an acceptable counterfeit (the mask or persona). But on the third level, O'Neill's characters meet on an existential common ground. Here the playwright achieves whatever universality his art may claim. Accepting Nietzsche's "death-of-God" proclamation, the playwright nevertheless sought to invest his characters with a dignity denied by the narrow assumptions of the prevailing literary naturalism. (Indeed, he once proposed to call his work "supernaturalism") All persons, without regard to the accidents of birth (place, endowment, and race), suffer the ineluctable condition of humanity: the tragedy of time. In this sense O'Neill is more concerned with 'fate' than with determinism. Therefore, his major black plays finally deal less with racial matters than with the more fundamental question of what it means to be human. (150)

O’Neill criticism falls essentially into two categories: (1) the reception of his plays in critical reviews following their performances, and (2) the interpretation and evaluation of his plays by scholars and historians. The former has obviously appeared in newspapers like the New York Times and Magazines like Time, Newsweek, The Nation, and The New Yorker; the latter in scholarly journals and in books devoted to his life and works. From the early 1920s until the late 1930s - the period of O'Neill's heyday as a popular dramatist - journalistic reviews are the chief categories, though
some quasi-scholarly studies also appeared in that period, most notably Barrett H. Clark's *Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays*, which is originally published in 1926. With the appearance of Sophus Keith Winther's *Eugene O'Neill: A Critical Study* in 1934, evaluation of the playwright as a major American dramatist and a significant figure in the world drama has come to predominate, though obviously reviews of individual productions in the United States are increasingly continued to appear abroad.

The most comprehensive survey of what has been written on O'Neill until the year of its publication is Jordan Y. Miller's *Eugene O'Neill and the American Critic* (1973). Miller's work is unique in giving equal attention to newspaper reviews and scholarly studies. Other listings and discussions of O'Neill criticism appear of course in general bibliographical discussions like Madeline Smith and Richard Eaton's *Eugene O'Neill: An Annotated Bibliography* and Margaret Loftus Ranald's *The Eugene O'Neill Companion* (1984).

Mainly O'Neill’s critical studies range from general discussions of his work to discussions that focus on the influence on his plays, of his psychological trauma, his philosophical/religious views, his theatrical techniques, his sensitivity to the impact of black and immigrant minorities in American life, his treatment of women in his plays and his desire to win favor with the influential forces of his time. The general study that undoubtedly has the greatest influence on thinking about O'Neill in the later twentieth century is Travis Bogard's *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O’Neill*. Bogard's approach is straightforward looking at O'Neill's development from early adolescence to full maturity, always in the context of his works.

Each play is dealt along with the theatrical conditions of its production and the
critical and popular response it has generated. There have been other significant books on O'Neil. Clark's Eugene O'Neill (1927) anticipates Bogard by looking at the playwright from a broad perspective. Edwin Engel's The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (1953) looks at particularly the dark side of the playwright as never before, though like Clark Engel in this work is puzzled about issues that later are clarified with the appearance of Night. S.K.Winther's Eugene O'Neill : A Critical Study (1934) and Richard Dana Skinner's Eugene O'Neill : A Poet's Quest, first published in 1935 are other pioneering critical works written without the understanding what Night and the biographies of the 1960s and 70s will bring.

The first important study to use O'Neill's monumental Night in its analysis of the playwright is Doris V. Falk's Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension : An Interpretative Study of the Play (1958) in which O'Neill has dealt with from a psychological perspective. From quite a different perspective though again with insights drawn from Night, is John H. Raleigh's The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (1965), which organizes its discussion around such issues as history and form rather than looking at plays individually and chronologically. And to this group should certainly be added the better general introductions to the playwright: Gassner's Eugene O'Neill (1965), Frederic I. Carpenter's Eugene O'Neill (originally written in 1957, but revised in 1979), and Normand Berlin's Eugene O'Neill (1988), all works analyzing the O'Neill canon in the entire context of the man and his theatre. To this latter group, Virginia Floyd's Eugene O'Neill : A New Assessment (1984) may appropriately be added.

Four studies have dealt with the playwright's emerging dramaturgical techniques : Egil Tornqvist's A Drama of Souls : O'Neill's Studies in Supernaturalistic Techniques (1969), which deals with his methods of characterization;
Jean Chothia's *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1979), which is rooted in Chothia's unique perception of growing sophistication in the playwright's dialogue; Michael Manheim's *Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship* (1982), which reaches conclusions for the entire canon based both on the autobiographical context and language of the late plays; Doris Alexander's *Eugene O'Neill's Creative Struggle: The Decisive Decade, 1924-1973* (1992), which uses an autobiographical context to concentrate on the years 1924-33; and most recently Kurt Eisen's *The Inner Strength of Opposites: O'Neill's Novelistic Drama and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1994), which sees inner psychological conflict in the plays from the perspective of the twentieth-century novel.

The most recent direction that seems to be taking shape belongs to the currently fashionable historicist critical mode and is represented among full-length studies by Joel Pfister's *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse* (1995), the title of which fairly well indicates the nature of its contents. Pfister's approach seems in general not friendly to the playwright in seeing him as primarily, though not exclusively, an exploiter of fashions established by the cultural elite of his time.

Other full-length critical studies are of a more specialized nature and first among these must come the several extensively researched and, surely in O'Neill's case, indispensable biographies. Doris Alexander's *The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill* (1962) has led the way in its perception that the events described in *Night* are more than casually autobiographical in dealing with the one, stupendous psychological trauma of the playwright's early life (his mother's drug addiction). But the two massive biographies to follow are certainly works by Louis Sheaffer's *Eugene O'Neill: Son and Playwright* (1968) and *Eugene O'Neill: Son and Artist* (1973).
Among other things, these works have revealed not only the extent to which the life of O'Neill himself has been crucial to his work but also the lives of his father, mother, and brother.

Other works of a comparably specialized nature are also important. O'Neill on stage is increasingly the focus of criticism. It includes Timo Tiusanen's *O'Neill's Scenic Images* (1968), a discussion of how scenic configurations in the plays often constitute their central-imagery and Leonard Chabrowe's *Ritual and Pathos: The Theatre of O'Neill* (1976). Ronald Wainscott's *Staging O'Neill: The Experimental Years, 1920-1934* (1988) is an important history of O'Neill’s production during the first of the two major parts of his career. Gary Vena's study of the original staging of *Cometh* under the title *O'Neill’s 'The Iceman Cometh': Reconstructing the Premiere* also fits into this category. Similarly there is also John Orlandello's *O'Neill on Film* (1982), an important work which is supplemented by reviews especially of productions of the plays on television. While the later plays have been central to almost all O'Neill criticism since the 1960s, two works are among the first to focus on that importance: Rolf Scheibler's *The Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1970) and Judith E. Barlow's *Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays* (1985). Winifred Frazer's *Love as Death in "The Iceman Cometh": A Modern Treatment of an Ancient Theme* (1967) has been an influential study of that late play. Laurin Porter's *The Banished Prince: Time, Memory and Ritual in the Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1988) focuses attention on O'Neill's massively conceived but uncompleted cycle.

From the vast review of critical studies it is obvious that both Miller and O’Neill are concerned about identity crisis in man. Under modern conditions, man’s identity is always threatened. He is under stress and the construction of an individual
self is a struggle. It entails expenditure of considerable amounts of psychological energy. Contemporary cultural theories and psychoanalysis attest to the intensity and pain of this struggle. It is opposed at every point by the structure and dominant forces of modernity. The consequence of this state of affairs is that the individual self is never secure. It requires unremitting protection and nurture. It is always in danger of being undermined, of withering away or exploding into nothingness. With every move that is made, every step taken to encounter or withdraw from the world, some new turmoil is embraced. Some new source of fragmentation is unearthed.

The problem of modernity for its individual subject lies largely in this condition. There is no absolute stability. Such is the ‘identity crisis’ of individuals in contemporary society. Culture itself has no clear identity. It is characterised by rootlessness, instability, rapid transition from one state to the next, one fetish to another. The discovery of one’s own roots, one’s own centre of consciousness and growth, becomes an impossible task. Consequently, the instabilities of society are internalised as instabilities of the self. The rapidity of external change is experienced as inner turmoil. The fragmentation of the cultural environment becomes a buzzing and booming confusion. The voices of the world produce a hallucinogenic consciousness of great excitement and passion. It introduces new sounds and rhythms which can be genuinely stimulating and creative. This is a part of the up-side of modernity.

The constraints of the past and the narrowness induced by geographical and familial fixedness can be transcended through exposure to a huge range of differing attitudes, expectations, cultural practices and modes of social organization. Perceiving how others live their lives can make it possible to acquire new insights and perspectives on how one lives one’s own. But this can happen only in the context of
some stability of identity. Otherwise, the expansion of consciousness is not possible in the modern world. Thus, exposure to the lives of others is reduced to voyeurism. It produces either a desultory sense of entertainment or a deeply distorting envy. Disparate traditions are collapsed into their common denominators.

Despite the variety of readings of selfhood, ego-function and developmental history which can be found in the psychoanalytic literature, there is a strong shared theme that places a premium on the construction of internal integrity. One can call this the necessity for the achievement of selfhood; some inner, balanced order that allows emotion to be experienced and desire expressed within a context of stability of personal boundaries and openness to relationships with others. In other words, it is to achieve the identity of one’s own.

The present research embarks on the quest to find the identity of the characters as portrayed by the two notable American playwrights, Miller and O’Neill. It aims at bringing out the identity crisis due to various reasons like competition, economy, love-hate relationship, familial feuds, religious ambivalences, cultural shock, religious taboos and practices, gun deals, welfare of sons, and so on. There are various factors that make men and women to lose their identities. They are tossed up and down in their life’s journey. They are fed up with reality. They are fragmented, jolted, assaulted and made to cry for their lost self. They are tarnished and wounded. They remain innocent victims in the cut-throat competitive world where there is no economic security.

This research work is a thematic study and not a comparative study. It is based on the assumption that both Miller and O’Neill being contemporaneous, they share a same problem of identity crisis in man’s life which makes their protagonists rootless
and anchorless in their lives’ odyssey. In this research work both theoretical (existentialism and man’s psyche, and man’s alienation and identity crisis) and analytical tools have been employed to explicate the theme of identity crisis in Miller’s and O’Neill’s plays.