CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

This chapter comes as an attempt to recapitulate the foregoing discussion and points out the conclusions of the study. Also, it will try to identify a few topics for further studies.

6.1 Conclusions of the Study

1. Any analysis of the concept of tragedy as it finds expression in modern drama, and with O'Neill in particular, must recognize that Aristotle's famous definition cannot be applied to these plays, at least not as it has been traditionally interpreted. The full implication of the traditional interpretation as applied to drama from Sophocles to Shakespeare will not serve for O'Neill. At the same time, it is recognized that no discussion of tragedy can avoid Aristotle, nor can O'Neill be discussed as a writer of tragedy without reference to Aristotle's definition; whatever the departures from Aristotle may be, that O'Neill does belong in the great tradition of tragedy is certain.

2. In Greek and Shakespearean drama, tragedy was born out of the impossibility of a clear cut victory in man's struggle with powers greater than himself. In modern tragedy, according to O'Neill, the struggle itself seems doomed from the start. If the would-be hero is saved from a meaningful death he will be condemned to a meaningless life.
3. O'Neill's tragic plays perhaps come at a time when they seem to oppose the assumption of the death of tragedy after the First World War; this assumption states that there is no such thing as modern tragedy because our philosophical assumptions are non tragic and we lack the kind of culture, mythology and theology that sustained tragedy in the Greek and the Elizabethan theatre. Moreover, there was also the claim that tragedy had become impossible in our time as there has been a 'coarsening' or a 'stiffening of the bone' in our imaginations and our language emptied out by a century of atrocities. As against these points of view, some scholars and critics argue that the forms of thinking, the ideologies that dominated the twentieth century such as Marxism, Freudian psychology, Existentialism etc, are inherently tragic in substance and spirit. Man can achieve fulfillment of his life only after violent conflict. He is torn by intolerable contradictions, in a condition of essential absurdity. From these inescapable propositions and from their combination in so many minds, it is not surprising that so much tragedy has in fact emerged.

4. The modern plays are in this sense more complex than those of the Ancients, because the moderns have the advantage of the great tradition of drama – the experiences and the rules of the ancients, as well as the life and nature of their own age, available before them, which they imitate and represent in their plays. With the combination of the insights and themes inherited from the ancients and the new developments in modern thought and philosophy, modern dramatists are able to add new dimensions and introduce new features and have discovered much that is new in Drama.
5. Unlike the works of Greek and Elizabethan dramatists, O’Neill’s tragedy has no concern with the growth of the society or the history of a nation. His tragic focus is on the individual who is trapped by the circumstances of his life and the inescapable bonds of his heredity.

6. O'Neill's plays exhibit a keen sense of loss of the individual's relationship with his family, his society's values, nature and god. Science and materialism fail to give O'Neill's heroes a satisfying meaning for life, or comfort from the fear of the unknown. Still, they are engaged in a heroic struggle against total alienation.

7. Many of O'Neill's plays centre on the question of whether illusions are, after all, the only thing that makes reality bearable.

8. O'Neill consistently incorporates the insights of Freudian psychology in his work in an attempt to project the subconscious levels of his protagonists.

9. Each tragic play written by O'Neill adds something new to our knowledge and experience because it discusses real subjects dealing with real human conditions; these plays help us to discover something about the world that we had not experienced before. In this sense, he too, like his predecessors, portrays the mystery that is human destiny.

10. O'Neill's tragic vision encompasses the life of the acquisitive middle class. Tragic characters wage a heroic battle against the crippling circumstances of a
materialistic society which eventually prove stronger. Their tragedy lies in their protest and struggle, if not in their magnitude or in their heroism.

11. As opposed to the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, we can say that O’Neill writes naturalistic tragedies. There is no supernatural destiny presiding over the O'Neillian universe. The past history of his family, and the biological and capitalistic social structures made by man prove catastrophic to the protagonist's desire to realize his/her human aspirations upon earth.

12. O'Neill's conscious use of Greek myth in the plot structures of his tragedies *Desire Under the Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, is proof of the fact that he was indebted to Greek tragedy as most men of literature should be. He returns back to the classics for certain themes and characters as a source of inspiration to revive serious theatre in America.

13. O'Neill presents his Anti-hero or heroine as a tragic protagonist or principal character who lacks the attributes of nobility and magnanimity of the traditional protagonist or hero. The anti hero is exemplified by the following traits:

a- Imperfections that separate him from typically heroic characters; these include failings such as selfishness, ignorance, bigotry and prejudice.

b- Lack of positive qualities such as courage, physical prowess, fortitude and general helplessness in a world which is alien and a life over which he has no control.

c- Qualities normally identified with negative/antagonistic characters such as
amorality, greed and violent tendencies.

d- Unseen, unknown, covert ‘noble motives’ often pursued by bending or breaking the law in the belief that ‘the ends justify the means.

These negative characteristics of the anti hero often reflect modern man's ambivalence towards traditional moral and social virtues.

14. O’Neill’s antiheroes differ from tragic heroes of the Elizabethan period because a tragic hero (even a villainous protagonist like Macbeth) is still primarily heroic but with a fatal flaw that brings about his downfall; while an antihero's flaws are often more prominent than his heroic qualities. Antiheroes are not doomed to a great tragic end like the tragic hero, either. Their suffering and death are not ‘grand’ or elevating in the classical sense.

15. The traditional tragic hero is classically depicted to possess an image that is larger than life. He is generally expected to be more physically attractive, stronger, braver, and more charismatic than the average everyman. O’Neill’s tragic heroes lack these traits. They lack the glorious appeal of earlier heroic figures.

16. However, O'Neill's modern anti heroic protagonists reveal an increased moral complexity. They are recognizable by their lack of identity and determination.

17. The continuing popularity of the antihero in modern drama and modern literature may be based on the recognition that a real human being is fraught with human frailties, unlike the archetypes of the knights and the noble warriors, and is therefore more accessible to readers and viewers.
18. The modern hero's life and death do not require the protagonist to undergo the traditional anagnorisis or self-discovery to bring the story to a close. He/she may die without any justification of his destiny and may suffer without the ability to change events that are happening to him. The story may end without closure and even without the death of the hero.

19. O'Neill presented the American of his day in his tragedies. Among the subjects O'Neill chose to present are social injustice, the ruin of families and the conflict of capital and labour, and, to borrow a term from sociology the problem of ‘man versus machine’. These are the themes O'Neill has the honour of bringing to the American stage and audience for the first time.

6.2 Topics for Future Studies

1- The Frustrated Protagonist as a Reflection of an Era: A Study in Eugene O’Neill’s Selected Plays.

2- The Impact of Psychology on Contemporary Critical Trends.

3- The Image of the Defeated: A Study in Eugene O’Neill’s Selected Plays.

4- The Concept of Justice: A Study in the Modern Perspective of Eugene O’Neill’s Selected Plays.