CHAPTER 1
The creative career of Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) spanned the crucial period between the two World Wars. The period of three decades from 1914 to 1945 was charged with intense dramatic potential which O'Neill used to good advantage by writing some highly stirring plays. His works reveal a varied and colourful thematic and structural spectrum. They touch upon a large variety of themes and show theatrical experimentation with virtually all sorts of devices and pattern. Even in size and shape his plays range from very short plays to those of epic dimension. O'Neill's works, thus, show a restless and creative spirit at work. This is so because he never felt at home in the socio-cultural and economic milieu of the capitalist-materialist culture of grab-and-loot around him. He always aspired to a life of creative fulfilment which he was denied in a country that in the name of individual freedom and equality only perpetuated a philosophy of bondage, elitism and an all-pervasive jungle-law carrying the fancy name of laissez-faire.
O'Neill is a critic of this American society and society as a whole. He thinks of man in relation to his social system; it is not man as an individual alone that concerns him; it is man, in his social order, tortured, starved, disillusioned, disappointed and driven to disaster by the forces of system which cares nothing for the jungle welfare of this society. He treats man not as a free, detached individual, but merely as an individual in relation to a few characters, but he treats him against a background of social forces. It is the social implication that makes O'Neill's plays have a life in the mind of the audience.

His importance as a social critic lies in the fact that he emphasizes the psychological aspects of modern social set-up. He points out the disease of America's acquisitive society. He does not merely stress the fact that workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but shows how in our modern, machine-made world they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being. Man's work is a necessary part of his personality; it is an expression of his ego; it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work and leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfying misfit in the society.

A man of firm conviction, O'Neill never feels shy of discussing American society in a free and frank manner. He does not see eye to eye with those who indulge in the false glorification of the American society and blindly hail it as flawless. He said in 1946, "I am going on the theory that the
United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure."¹ His social perspective covers an aspect of modern American society in particular and his plays embody the ideas and conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century and deal with the social and economic issues of our time: materialism, industrialisation, human-relation, employer-employee conflicts, ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed and hatred etc. One of the most leading problems of the human society today is the situation of man in it. O'Neill is found at his best in superb handling of this problem: the theme of 'belongingness' in the world today. For O'Neill, man remains a searcher with no clear cut destination. He has no place in the highly industrialized set-up of modern society and remains as an outsider, an alienated person from the beginning to the end of his life. He has lost the centre and moves from pillar to post in search of some centre of 'belonging', but he fails to find root anywhere. And it is quite ironical that man, who is responsible for changing the very complexion of society on earth, has no place in it. He has fallen prey to a cosmic anguish. Seen in relation to God, he has lost faith in the God of old religions and has found no new faith. Living in an impersonal, mechanical, urbanized and industrialised social environment, he is constantly on the rack. He suffers from inner emptiness, isolation and feeling of insecurity; he is bedevilled from within and without. In other words, isolation from

the society, loneliness, and search for identity make the real theme of O'Neill's plays.

Man has lost the sense of harmony in nature, he is unable to establish harmony with his fellowmen, his work has grown soul-less and mechanical and he feels lonely and isolated, a mere insignificant part of a big machine, and not a human being busy in creative and purposeful activity. This mechanical life of man has led him to the loss of human identity. Isolated from their immediate environment and feeling lonely and unhappy, O'Neill's characters constantly search for identity and belongingness and when they fail to achieve their identity, they disintegrate and decay.

There has never been a generation in the course of human history with so little ground under its feet, as the modern generation. Antagonism to society has become a way of life and there looms the reality of crisis: complex and cumulative. Nothing can avoid this crisis, neither dialectical materialism and triumphant technology, nor the undivinely and dissatisfied youth of today. In fact, multiple fears have become the foundation of the twentieth-century society. This feeling is shared alike by all. Out of step with nature, with self, and with the laws of evolutionary growth, the modern man has gone out of focus. At the very hour of its grandest victory, when it had won the supreme conquest over material things, the world civilization turned into a tragedy, i.e., into the spiritual crisis of modern man. The modern man, who for long pitied his ancient and medieval fathers, is now himself to be pitied; he is a misfit in a world he himself
has created. Torn between what man is and what he ought to be, he, living in an 'Age of Anxiety', is forced to become aware of himself. Along with the disappearance of accepted traditional norms, moral values seem to have gone overboard. Human-engineering and future shocks have created unheard-of situations. Opportunism and irresponsibility never grew so wild as today. The fear of solitude is one of the hidden fears of man. We live among lonely crowds. The notion of estrangement and isolation is a natural corollary to the idea of relationship with others. Isolation has many facets, like isolation from self, from others, from God and Nature. The individual feels isolated from all human institutions, like state, government etc., which have become innermost centres of power beyond the understanding or grasp of man. This is the cause of frustration and anxiety in modern man. But, in spite of his isolation and loneliness, man is in constant search of his true self.

Owing to the pressure of society, man is forced to live in a self-estranged state. In the modern technological and material society everything becomes a problem to be solved by reasoning and calculation. "Having" becomes more important than "being"—of car, house, pleasure, pain, etc.—is a source of isolation because by the hold on the things we have, we are actually under the hold of the things. There are two extremes of 'isolation' between which a self springs. The one is a complete break from God and society and the other is that where all sense of 'self' is lost. There is also the isolation from others because we can never totally understand them. The isolation and loneliness can never be
removed from our heritage and is the great ill of modern age.

The concept of isolation is a result of man's absolute freedom in facing a situation. Isolation, whether religious or secular, is always a psychological state of mind when one is cut-off from all ties and is compelled to exercise his freedom in the face of the absurd and meaningless world. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus experienced isolation from religion and cried out for a drop of Christ's blood. Karl Marx's labour experiences secular isolation on the eve of deciding to throw himself body and soul into the class-struggle. Behind all this lies the paralysing state of mind when one is, as Sartre put it, 'condemned to be free'.

The existentialist philosophies share certain concepts of 'isolation' aside from their insistence on "existence" or "essence" as the central question. They regard the material or outside world as "absurd" and take a contemptuous view of history, economics and politics, asserting that nothing real or basic can be learnt from them. All posit their concept of freedom and the separation of individual from society. The individual, however, does not withdraw to monastery or cave but carries his personal despair, or existential predicament, wherever he goes, and must exhort others to see life similarly. He is not free from society but is engaged in it as a self-proclaimed "outsider". Soren Kierkegaard's remark, "The whole of existence frightens me... the most inexplicable thing of all is my own existence" is applicable to

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^2 \text{Quoted in K.F. Reinhardt, The Existentialist Revolt (New York: Ungar, 1960), p. 27.}
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the man of the present generation. The world is to him something implacably hostile, instead of being a place where he can stretch his wings and grow. Man is to be "saved" by recognizing that the world is "absurd" and must be countered by a faith itself "absurd".

Again, Kierkegaard attacks "worldliness";

What is called worldliness is made up of just such men who (if one may use this expression) pawn themselves to the world. They use their talents, accumulate money, carry on worldly affairs, calculate shrewdly, etc., etc., are perhaps mentioned in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually understood, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything...3

Kierkegaard attacks all worldly affairs; not only greedy profit-seekers but also those whose talents run to other ways, to science, to art, to the expansion of boundaries of knowledge, to the liberation of people from oppression, misery and poverty. Worldliness means attention to this world. And the penalty for worldliness is despair, isolation, estrangement, loneliness and the sickness onto death. The modern American man has no limits to his ambition; he is pragmatic, restless, energetic, ambitious, self-centred and lives in a world of illusion. Substitution of human values by material comforts, constant need of adjustment to the changed situation, the acceptance of the image of material success as the only worthwhile goal of life make the average man a prey to a sense of inferiority, anxiety, insecurity; his lonely world is populated by illusion.

3 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness on to Death (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954) p. 168.
Eugene O'Neill, who started his dramatic career after the World War I, has directed his attention to investigating the nature of a strictly American brand of illusion and its clash with social reality. The image of success—chiefly success in money-making in America today, dominated by speed, specialization, mass advertisement, standardised ideals and entertainments, giant monopoly and excitement—has become a necessity for the self-respecting man. Illusion, however, has a very different meaning to Eugene O'Neill. It, on his stage, takes the shape of dark, gloomy, uncontrollable forces that make sport of man's life. He has a tragic view of 'illusion' which causes suffering and shock to its victim. O'Neill's plays are deeply replete with the theme of isolation and loneliness disclosed in family and social relationships, and the impossibility of one person to know another is advanced in them as an undying truth of life. The concept of isolation and loneliness is vividly illustrated by the title of David Riesman's sociological treatise, The Lonely Crowd, and deeply analysed in Jung's Modern Man in Search of a Soul. Riesman elicits that in a lonely crowd the individuals are estranged from one another, and communication and mutual understanding are replaced by estrangement and hostility. Jung has advanced his thesis that science, knowledge, reason, civilization and material progress only do violence to the natural forces which


in turn seek revenge, causing crises and upheavals. Paul Tillich writes, "Mankind is in the state of universal existential estrangement." The situation is one of all encompassing isolation and loneliness of mankind.

The existentialist movement actually arose in revolution against the corruption of values in capitalist society. Its basic conviction is that the evils are rooted in the very concept and existence of society. It rejects any view of human being as a social animal: growing, enriching himself, and realising his freedom in his social relations to others. Therefore, evil is ascribed to science, the accumulation of knowledge, the exploration of reality, the study of economics and history, the extension of democracy and the devotion to reason—all the tools of progress that have been collectively forged by society. Man has to renounce them in order to concentrate on the essential question of "existence".

Had Eugene O'Neill been a philosopher, instead of being a literary figure, he too would, perhaps, have come up with ideas very similar to the ideas of the existentialist philosophers. But he chose literature as the vehicle for his views on matters of fundamental importance. Sartre, Camus, Dostoevsky and many other thinkers had found that philosophy was not always the right medium for expressing deep thoughts about so illusive a thing as human soul. That is why they chose the medium of fiction to

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express their ideas indirectly. That is why Unamuno insisted that a philosopher is to be a poet as well, and that is why the American playwrights—O'Neill, Miller, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee—chose drama to be able to express their attitude towards contemporary man and his crisis.

O'Neill was the first American playwright to rival the great European dramatists. His works took American theatre out of its infancy and at once endowed it with strength and majesty. He is primarily a dramatist of ideas. He was the most preoccupied with the major concerns of human life and destiny and man's quest for a meaning in life, his unceasing groping into 'self'. In doing this he was leading a revolution in American drama. Search for human values has been the main concern of O'Neill and he reveals his understanding of human situation, human existence and the destiny of man. In pointing to the helplessness of modern man he also describes, in dramatic terms, the goals of man and his values, and the consequent adjustment of the modes of human self. His plays seem to be apparently the dramatization of man's indignation against the Universe. But a close scrutiny of them reveals a subtle and unmistakable affirmation of the self and universe. We can say that O'Neill's plays attempt to illuminate, as well as reflect the condition and predicament of man in existentialist terms, revealing the areas of darkness and tension in modern man's consciousness. He believed that man suffers from the sense of alienation in this world; he finds himself completely isolated in a spiritually sterile Universe and, therefore, he cannot have a sense of harmony. In his search for identity and his need to
belong, man feels his 'lostless' intensely. His works reveal a keen sense of loss of connection--of connection with God, nature, society, family. The tensions in his works are connected merely with the struggle against alienation. It is gathered from his plays that a man has to face stiff time in a world without God, without love and without trust in life. He presents an existentialist's view of life; and existential problems are very frequently dramatized in his works. It is the turmoil of a whole generation that finds its artistic presentation in his plays. He depicts in a very systematic and convincing manner the depth of human anxiety and despair, emptiness and willinglessness.

Friederich Nietzsche exercised tremendous impact on O'Neill's mind and had gone a long way in sweeping his intellectual sensibility. O'Neill followed him in his affirmation of life. He similarly, stressed the need for living a purposeful life and not for the sake of eternity. But O'Neill differs from Nietzsche in his concept of God, and refuses to believe that "God is dead." He is interested in the relationship between man and God and had a monistic vision of the Universe, with God and man as parts of its unity. He has openly criticised the commercial civilization for making man spiritually bankrupt.

Arguably, O'Neill can be regarded as an existentialist humanist in his own right. His inquiry into the nature of human condition is made in the existentialist mode. The recurring themes in the plays of O'Neill--man alienated from an absurd world, the individual estranged from society; the individual's isolation and subjectivity; his consequent feelings of anxiety, anguish, despair,
nal nausea; the individual facing his own nothingness, or confronting his guilt; his assertion of personal freedom through irrevocable choice, particularly in extreme situations, -- show his preoccupation with the existentialist element. His main interest in his plays is the tragedy of the individual in society in the modern world.

O'Neill presents a stark, existential picture of life; and existential problems are frequently dramatized in his works. It is the turmoil of a whole generation that finds its artistic presentation in his plays. He studies man in his immediate situation or context and the way it affects man's life. He depicts in a convincing manner the depth of human anxiety and despair about fate and death, emptiness and meaninglessness, etc. He dramatizes the feeling of anguish, guilt and despair which are the direct outcome of modern man's search for self-hood and belongingness in this hostile world. The Emperor Jones is an example of the lost self and of the confusion, dread, guilt and despair Jones experiences when forced to confront the real world. The Strange Interlude is concerned with the anguish of Everyman.

The bums in Harry Hope's Saloon in The Iceman Cometh suffer from alienation and have desire to communicate with the outside world. Hughie presents paralysed view of life modern man's existential situation, in which under-developed characters find themselves misfits in an over-developed society. The characters live in isolation and have no desire to come in touch with others. The play finally shows that the essence of human existence lies in
human interdependence; in the transformation of isolation into communication, and bitterness into love. *More Stately Mansions* deals with the theme of mankind's universal prostitution and utter lack of humanity. The play shows modern man's degeneration in the moral scale and his readiness to sell himself to get petty ends.

There is a constant tension between the real and the ideal in O'Neill's plays. Illusions incapacitate a man for meaningful action and yet without them life becomes unbearable. Dreams are a powerful means of denying or overlooking the harsh realities of life. Illusions make us see things in their true perspective. Illusion and reality are not opposed to each other in O'Neill's plays. A stage-illusion ultimately becomes a life-reality. O'Neill is never in favour of running away from life but impresses upon us that life must be faced in a bold and heroic manner. Dreams are indispensable and they sustain our interest in life. Illusion and reality together make life. Reality often becomes so unbearable that one should have one illusion or the other to make life livable. Illusions are destructive but they are also necessary. The bums in *The Iceman Cometh* do not feel the need to distinguish between reality and illusion; and for them illusion is reality. Paradoxically, their illusions are the only reality for them.

Illusions can also be very dangerous and destructive if they are nourished in excess. Such illusions are likely to disturb human relations and can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. O'Neill's too much pre-occupation with illusions has let the critics point out that there is a ring of pessimism in his plays.
They say that the picture of life in his plays is bleak and pessimistic. However, such views of critics are unjustified, and it can be stated that O'Neill's pessimism is of a man in this world in which he must live and justify himself, if life is to have a meaning. His pessimism is born of man, not of God or the universe. O'Neill looks at the worst only to suggest a way out of the evils of the contemporary age. His is not an unrelieved pessimism. In his philosophy man's predicament is of his own making and an amelioration of his lot is possible. He is a "pessimistic optimist" and he has always hoped for the best. His contention is that a work of art is always happy, as it aims at discovering the truth and helps us in getting rid of illusions. His affirmative philosophy of life is not a withdrawal from, but a call back, to life. He strikes a characteristic note of affirmation, of faith in man and God, and of joy in living. His heroes show hope even in the forces of evil and destruction, rather they keep up their attitude of defiance against them.

The present thesis aims at exploring the theme of isolation and loneliness in the major plays of Eugene O'Neill, written during the three phases of his career as a dramatist. It is, therefore, devoted to study the plays of Eugene O'Neill in their chronological sequence in the chapters that follow. The theme of isolation and loneliness has been brought out by analysing the plays in respect of their plot, characters, situations, dialogue and the stylistic devices adopted by the dramatist. Thus, the three chapters, i.e. Chapters II, III, and IV which form the body of
the thesis are directly devoted to the discussions of the plays under study. Chapter V, "Conclusion", brings together the threads of this discourse and shows how the main body of the thesis has fulfilled the task undertaken.