CHAPTER III
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THE MIDDLE PHASE

This chapter explores the theme of isolation and loneliness in plays of Eugene O'Neill: Desire Under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown (1925), Strange Interlude (1927), and Mourning Becomes Electra (1931). The common features of these plays are adultery, insanity, and possessiveness. The most important characters of these plays, especially the protagonists, are victims of their situations and, for the most part, play in the hands of Fate. Owing to their mental conflict and insecurity, they have struggled hard to get a place either in society or in the heart of some specific person. But their ill-luck stands like rock in their way and isolates them from one another. They have lost the harmony of situations. One of the notable features about these plays is that they all are dominated by the female characters. The male characters of these plays are puppets in the hands of their women counterparts. The plays are concerned with the story of the family. They are not like the plays of the Early phase which deal, for the most part, with racialism, nor are they like those of the Later Phase which are based on the autobiographical element. Another common point in these plays is the concept of God. In Desire Under the Elms, we find Ephraim Cabot, the worshipper of hard-god, in The Great God Brown, we watch Cybel in the form of mother-earth, and Nina Leeds's assumption of mother-god in Strange Interlude. One can easily feel the
Hellenic influence on O'Neill in these Plays. As regards the
dramatic techniques, O'Neill has employed Masks, soliloquies and
asides frequently to expose the hidden motif of his characters
and achieves a landmark in the realm of American theatre.

Man's inner conflict and his suffering in utter loneliness
fascinate Eugene O'Neill. He exclusively expresses this isolated
state of man through his dramatic skill. Sometimes, man's own
ego is responsible for his suffering, sometimes, he is forced by
some outer force. Ultimately, through this conflict, he reaches a
state of isolation. O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms reveals the
same story of conflict in the mind of its characters, that arises
from their desire to possess. It dramatizes the fierce struggle of
three main characters to possess a rock-bound farm in order to
give a direction and meaning to their insecure and lonely lives.
Their quest is similar to that of Yank; basically they desire
something to which they can 'belong'. In their search for
belonging they pass through one illusion to another and at every
step the cold touch of reality disillusiones them. In the way of
belonging, they lack the real communication and become alien to
one another.

Desire Under the Elms (1924) deals with the tragedy of
Ephraim Cabot, a New England farmer of 1850's, who is unable
to communicate either with his wives or with his sons. His
belief of a hard God and his fierce possessiveness of a rocky
farm prevent him from achieving a harmonious relationship with the
members of his family. In order to escape the tyrannic eyes of their father, Simeon and Peter, the first two sons from the first wife, leave the house after selling their shares to Eben, their half-brother. In the meantime, Ephraim marries for the third time, at the age of seventy-six, Abbie Putnam, a young and voluptuous widow of thirty-five. His step son Eben is filled with resentment because he will thus be disinherited from the farm which belonged to his deceased mother. As Ephraim is impotent owing to his old age, Abbie starts seducing young Eben in order to have a child by him so that she might claim for Ephraim's farm. Finally she becomes the mother of a son, whom Ephraim believes as his own. Having come to know that he is the instrument of his own disinherence, Eben becomes furious at Abbie. Abbie, while seducing Eben, really falls in love with him; and to prove her fidelity towards true love she kills the newborn baby. After realising that he is also responsible for the crime committed by Abbie, both he and Abbie surrender themselves to law, leaving the old Cabot sitting lonely in the best farm of the country.

The title of the play symbolises that the persons who seek shelter under the 'Elms' have several desires within. The setting, the visible exterior and interior, stresses on the separateness of the characters in the play. The alternation between interior and exterior signifies both the domestic lives of the characters and of the farm which is the sole aim of their lives and a consuming object of their desires. The father who worships a hard God, always sticks to his possession. The two
elder sons roam about the gold-field of California and the third one desires the possession of the entire farm from his greedy father. Even the new member of the family, Abbie, steps under the 'Elms' with her desire of possession, to get a secure place, to get a new identity of her own. They all try their best to fulfil their ambitions in their own way. Thus, before entering the possessive world of desire O'Neill describes:

The South end of the house faces front to a stone wall with a wooden gate at center opening on a country road. The house is in good condition but in need of paint. Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from the intimate contact with the life of man in the house on appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains they tickle down monotonously and rot on the Shingles.¹

The setting not only evokes the nature of stony farm but it also symbolises the dominance of female characters, represented by the Elms trees, in the play. In the light of psychoanalysis, it may be explained as a symbol of the maternal spirit. It interprets Eben's case as a struggle between two masks, the proud paternal and the submissive maternal. The Oedipus Complex fits into the structure of the play because Ephraim Cabot strikes as the Primordial father and the longing of Eben for his mother is

¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays (New York: Modern Library 1941), p.136. Hereafter the quotes from Desire Under the Elms will refer to this edition and be indicated only by the page number in parenththesis in the body itself.
silenced only when he has an incestuous love affair with Abbie.

The conflict between human desire and puritanism is also expressed by the setting. The sky above the roof is suffused with deep colours and the green colour of the elms glows, but the house, in shadow, seems pale and washed out by contrast. The green elms glow with natural passion while the farm-house is infected with Puritanism. The Stone walls symbolise Ephraim's hard God.

When the play opens, Ephraim Cabot is absent from the house. His sons are discussing about his hard nature and their longings and desires. It seems they are lonely men living in an isolated land. Walking hopelessly through the tired routine of their lives with the desire only to possess something by which they may satisfy themselves. Simeon and Peter are dreaming about the gold field of California whereas Eben's dream is to possess the farm. Both the desires are unconsciously associated with women. Simeon's restlessness is merely a reaction to the loss of Jenn, his deceased wife, and Eben's desire of possessing the farm is associated with his dead mother from whom, as he believes, his father has stolen the farm.

Simeon and Peter are disgusted with the life provided to them by their father. They are aware of the hardships they have met in cultivating the stony land of their father. They are so much disgusted with him that they do not hesitate to wish him dead or mad. It clearly indicates that Ephraim's principle of worshipping the hard God is solely responsible for the isolated lives of his sons. No one is free from the tyrannic eyes
of Ephraim. Eben accuses his brothers who did not stand beside their mother when she was suffering, leading a lonely life. Eben believes that the spirit of his dead mother still haunts the house.

Eben's desire to possess the farm is a type of unconscious revenge upon his father's tyranny. He accuses Ephraim for the fatal end of his mother:

She'd got too tired. She'd got too used t' bein' too tired. That was what he done (with vengeful passion) An' sooner 'r later, I'll meddle. I'll say the thin's I didn't say then t'him: I'll yell 'em at the top o' my lungs. I'll see t' it my man gits some rest an' sleep in her grave (p.183).

All the three brothers are leading isolated lives. The first two are cut-off from all the warm sides of life and the third one confines himself to the kitchen where haunts the spirit of his mother. There is no cordial relationship between Eben and the elder brothers. Their sense of possessiveness keeps them mentally apart from one another. When Simeon and Peter are planning for their monetary condition:

EBEN (decisively). But' t' aint that. ye won't never go because ye'll wait here fur yer share o' the farm, thinkin' allus he'll die soon.

SIMEON (after a pause): We've a right

PETER Two-thirds belongs t' us (p.142).

When they assert their rights over the property, Eben violently opposes: "ye've no right. She wa'n't yewr Maw; it was her farm. Didn't he steal it from her? She's dead. It's my farm" (p.148).

Eben's visit to prostitute Minne signifies much more than
the physical attraction of a male to a female. In spite of knowing that his brothers and father have slept with her, he is proud of his relationship with her. In every respect he wants to share with his father's possession. Eben says 'What do I care fur her- 'ceptin' She's round an' wa'm? The p'int she was his'n--an' she b'long t'me:' (p.148), Even Simeon has the same sort of feeling, in this respect. By revealing the secret to Eben about her relationship with their father he says, "Ay- eh' we are his heirs in everythin":" (p.144).

Hearing the news of Ephraim's marriage Simeon and Peter decide to leave the house in order to search a new life where they can be free from the hard principles of their father. At the same time, they discuss about the fate of Eben after their departure.

On the other hand, Eben sticks to his possession of the farm and considers the whole property belongs to him. He gives the reason: "It's Maw's farm agen: It's my farm" Them's my cow; I'll milk my durn fingers off fur cows o' mine', (p.151). He is even ready to pay for the share of his brothers. Simeon's and Peter's search of new life compels them to be alienated from their own land, and so they sell their share to Eben for six hundred dollars.

In the meantime, Ephraim returns with his newly married wife, Abbie, whose marriage to Ephraim is entirely based on her self-interest. It is in pursuit of security that she marries Ephraim. She narrates the insecure life of her by-gone years to Eben:
I've had a hard life, too— oceans o' trouble an' nuthin' but wuk for reward, I was an orphan early an' had t' wuk for others in other folks' hums. Then I married an' he turned out a drunken spreer an' so he had to wuk for others an' mee too agen in other folks' hums, an' they baby died, an' my husband got sick an' I was glad sayin' now I'm free fur once, on'y I diskivered right away all I was free fur was t' wuk again in other folks' hums' doin' folks' wuk till I'd most give up hope O'ever doing my own wuk in my own hum, an' then your paw come....(p.160).

After passing such an insecure phase, obviously, she aspires a secure life to which she can belong. She keeps her eyes on Ephraim's property which is the real security for her. Abbie's greed and possessiveness for the farm motivate all her actions in the beginning. As soon as she enters the house she considers the entire property belongs to her. Her strong determination of possessiveness can be felt from her outward appearance.

It is difficult on her part to suppress the strong urge for desire. Looking towards the house she exclaims 'It's purty--pury: I can't b'liye it's r'ally mine" (p.155). It seems as if she has got everything which she had desired for a long time. Both Simeon and Peter have left the house, therefore, the only obstacle in her way is young Eben and she thinks she can easily win him. In her encounter with Eben she tries to win his sympathy by telling her story of loneliness and hardship. But it seems too difficult on her part to mould him for her purpose owing to his strict sense of possessiveness. After listening to the story he says to her: 'Ah: bought yew--- like a harlot... An' the price he's paice he's payin' ye---this farm---was my Maw's dramn ye---ah' mine now" (p.160). Abbie is so determined
in her mission that the words of Eben hardly matter to her. She replies, "(defying him) This be my farm--- this be my hum- -- this be my kitchen" (p.161). Abbie's immediate response to the farm reveals her greed and possessiveness. From the very beginning, she smells the mutual physical attraction between Eben and herself and is confident of winning him. On the other hand, Eben is confused, although appearing to be determined to fight her out.

The foremost reason behind Abbie's desire of possession is her sense of insecurity. She has suffered a lot in her past, therefore, the real cause of her possessiveness is her desire for security. She wants to belong. She wants to identify herself with the farm of Cabot. This sense of belongingness leads her to establish an illegal relationship with Eben. What she needs is an heir of her own through whom she can assert her authority over the farm and for that she decides to use Eben as an instrument.

Gradually, Eben is trapped by her sensuality. His longing for lost mother's urge finds a ray of hope in Abbie. His search for a lost maternity compels him to be a victim of Abbie's lust and 'purpose'. Eben's "quest for the source of feminine power in the land sets him apart from his brothers and brings him into fatal opposition with Ephraim and his hard God." Like Simen and Peter, at first, he seeks satisfaction in a dream of material possession, but as the play proceeds, it becomes clear that his hatred for his father and his legalistic

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claims of ownership are only signals of a truer desire, to rediscover the security, through an identification with the land. For Eben, the true, the consummate condition of 'being' is to belong to the land as an unborn child belongs to the womb.

In reality, Eben is opposite of his father and his brothers. He has an undefined poetic sensitivity and gift of feminity about him. Eben is the hero touched with poetry, but unlike Robert Mayo, he is not a sentimental creation, talking out his frustration in a longing for beauty. He has in him a repressed vitality, an animal quality, that gives him maturity and manliness foreign to the earlier dreamer. Yet, like Mayo, he reveals the same need to belong. He seeks the same identification with nature and moves listlessly in alien places, in the kitchen, the world of women where he can seek no roots.

Abbie successfully tries to hit the nail of 'purpose' in the soft layer of Eben's sentiment and successfully exploits him in the name of his mother for her own purpose. With their physical union in the room of Eben's mother the haunted spirit of his mother returns to her grave. The room loses its oppressiveness, tomb-like atomosphere. Both Abbie and Eben discuss:

ABBIE ... This room's dead long enuf. Now it's goin' t'be my room' my room;
EBEN (frowning) Ay-eh
ABBIE (hastily) I meant- our room
Eben Ay-eh
BBIE We made it our'n last night, didn't we? We give it life-our lovin' did
EBEN (with a strange look) Maw's gone back t' her grave. She kin sleep now. (p.130)

This shows how successfully Eben is trapped by the scheme of Abbie. She not only proceeds in her 'purpose' of getting an heir for her own security but also asserts her possession of the room of Eben's mother. Eben becomes conscious of the motive behind Abbie's love when a son is born to her. Being aware of her real intention, he threatens to leave her. On the other hand, during the process of seduction, she desperately falls in love with Eben. Now, she is so deeply attached to Eben that she cannot convince him that in the beginning she did make love to him for an ulterior purpose: she is now completely mastered by her passion. She frantically tells him that she loves him for his own sake; but he will not listen. Therefore, in order to prove that her love for Eben is neither for the child nor for his inheritance she kills the child.

After the murder of the child, Eben becomes aware of his guilt. He realises that he is also responsible for the infanticide committed by Abbie; he thinks he forced Abbie for the sin. His conscience pricks him and compels him to share with Abbie's punishment. As a result, both of them surrender before law. Their war for material possession ends with the crime. They get neither the property, nor any security of their own. They may be satisfied with their love, but one cannot deny the fact that the gap between the old Cabot and the lovers remains unbridged throughout. They are alienated socially with their imprisonment, and thus will be expiated in a long and solitary process.
Though the play seems to deal with the story of two young lovers but actually the real spirit behind the play is Ephraim Cabot who dominates the action from the beginning to the end by his indomitable will-power and stone-like strength. Throughout his life he works hard, suffers in loneliness in search of human understanding. But he fails to establish any harmonious relationship with others except the rocks and stones of his farm. No one but he himself is responsible for the barrier created by him on account of his possessiveness, ownership and his belief of hard God. There is hardly any cordial relationship between the father and the sons. They have suffered a lot by obeying and following the hard principles of their father, and considering their lives as hell:

EBEN Dis n't he slave Maw t' death?
PETER He's slaved himself t' death. He's salved Sim 'n' me 'n' yew t' death--on' y none o'us died—yit. (p.14)

On the other hand, Ephraim is also haunted by a sense of loneliness and insecurity. He is worried thinking about the future of his hard earned farm. This sense of loneliness increases when Simeon and Peter leave the farm. Helplessly he is in search of a right heir for his possessions which cause a sense of insecurity within him. But to his ill-luck Eben is 'soft-headed Like his Maw Dead Spit 'n' Image. No hope in him'... A born fool" (p.182).

Ephraim's possessiveness, his belief of hard God and his sense of superiority make a wall within himself and the others. What he considers a good life is nothing but the life of
hardship, self denial, and struggle for which he hates those who seek an easy life. His talking of hard God and easy God distinguishes him as well as his life from the rest. His belief in hard God and his total identification with this force is the direct cause of his alienation.

Ephraim wonders whether any man or woman really understands him. His devotion to hard God prevents him from establishing any relationship with others. Desperately he tells the tragedy of his isolated life to Abbie, and says how he has been misunderstood by his sons.

All the time I kept gittin' lonesomer. I took a wife. She bores Simeon an' Peter. She was a good woman... She wuked hard... She never knewed me. She helped but she never knewed what she was helpin. I was allsu lonesome (p.172-73).

When Ephraim finishes, he finds a blankness on Abbie's face and realizes that he has been waisting his time, narrating what she can never understand. In fact, during his narration, Abbie's heart was with Eben.

He also fails to make any understanding even with Abbie. Owing to this lack of communication and his belief in hard God he remains as a lonely man throughout his life. The voice on the wilderness has led him to Abbie, but in her presence as in the presence of the other women, he feels divided from his God, more lonesome than before. It is as if he had been driven by an alien force that stimulates desire and breeds weariness within him. Always, he finds himself in a lonely state. Neither the hard God nor any of the women that come in his life are able to fill the solitude of his life. The hard God he has served is no
longer there to hear him, and as always when women come to
the farm, he is wretched in his loneliness. The real source of
his tragedy is that he is never understood by anybody. Having
failed to make any understanding with other human beings, he
feels cold and uneasy in his house and tries to find peace in
his rocky farm.

Ephraim's own complexity keeps him apart even in the
crowded atmosphere of his house. When everyone is celebrating
the function of the newborn baby, he does not find any peace in his
house, "They's no peace in house, they's no rest livin' with
folks. Something's always livin' with ye... I'll go to' the barn
an' rest a spell..." (p.189).

When he learns about the relationship between Eben and
Abbie and the truth about the child, he becomes more helpless.
In a fit of madness he threatens to burn the farm and says that
it is a signal from God for him to seek an easy life in
California. But he is aware of the hardship ahead. He knows he
has to force a solitary life than ever before, after the
imprisonment of Eben and Abbie. He is destined to spend the
rest of his life within the stone-walls of his farm.

The desire to possess grows out of the feeling of insecurity,
helplessness or instability. Therefore, O'Neill's vision of life is
without foundation, without beliefs or creeds, struggling for a
symbol of security in a stony land of a New England Farmstead,
where Abbie, the young wife, desires a home for security,
Simeon and Peter desire freedom from the hard labour of a rock-
bound Farm, Eben desires to possess the farm of his mother, and
old Ephraim, disappointed by his wives and sons desires to
escape from his tragic sense of aloneness by possessing the farm he has made out of rocky land. Thus there ensues a war of possession in which all the members of the family are defeated by the sense of isolation.

The Great God Brown (1925) stands as a milestone in the career of Eugene O'Neill because of its technique that suits its theme. Providing mask, the dramatist exposes the hidden motives of its characters, their dual nature owing to which they are separated from one another. The play shows how man's persistent efforts to belong to the Nature are thwarted by materialism, Christian asceticism, and socially caused conflicts in the psyche. The play achieved a tremendous popularity in the twenties. In the words of O'Neill himself: "The Great God Brown was the greatest miracle the New York theatre has ever achieved".

The use of mask in this play is an integral part of the theme. The play shows how a man loses identity wearing a mask of unreality and becomes away from his own self. This agony becomes more intensified when he experiences only the torture of the aspired self, without sharing any of its creative urges. This reduces him to a mere lifeless mask instead of being a living, creative creature. Besides showing the two faces of man, the mask expresses the basic polarities inherent in human

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existence, such as life and death, saint and satan, art and materialism, creation and destruction. The growing materialism in the modern world and the lack of communication with others force a man to wear a mask in order to get security. In a world where illusions appear to be realities, masks are worshipped as real faces, while the real faces cry for recognition.

The Great God Brown deals with the futile search for happiness of the four helpless persons. They are Dion Anthony, the torn and tortured artist; his wife Margaret, his friend William (Billy) Brown and Cybel, the prostitute. They represent conflicting selves as well as conflicting elements in the society. The play begins with a prologue in which we find Dion and Billy, as boys are in love with Margaret. Their fathers are partners in a construction firm. Billy is a simple boy who wears no mask and obediently promises his parents to study architecture. But Dion wears a mask of Pan to conceal his real poetic nature. He is too sensitive to stand in the misunderstanding of the world. Margaret loves Dion's mask, which protects his sensitive nature from intrusion, and never comes to know his inner self. She, without ever understanding him, marries him, bears him children. It is here that the play properly opens in their ugly home. The domestic life of alien couple turns to be a miserable one. Dion has spent his money and the tenderly loving Margaret suggests him to work for his friend, Billy, now the successful businessman William A. Brown. Dion hesitatingly sends her to get the job for him. After knowing the reality through Margaret's about Dion's failure as an
artist and a father, Brown agrees to take him as the chief draftsman in his farm. Instead of painting the nature, Dion becomes a building designer.

Being dissatisfied with life, Dion seeks consolation from Cybel who embodies the honest qualities of earthly love. She accepts him without his mask. But here Dion also finds Brown as his competitor as he was in the case of Margaret. Brown is jealous of Dion's creativity though Dion has played a significant role to promote his business. After long and bitter circumstances Dion mockingly wills Brown his mask and Brown puts it on and tries to fulfill his desire of possessing Margaret in the disguise of Dion. Replacing his own identity with Dion's mask, he manages for a time to alternate between the two selves but is unable to continue to play the double role, one as Dion and the other as Brown. He then assumes the character of Dion for good and is accused of murdering Brown. In a confused chase by the police who accuse him of murder, Brown is shot. He dies in the arms of Cybel, who affirms the existence of God and love. Disillusioned Margaret finds fulfilment in a state of falsity with her sons and her timeless love for the mask of Dion.

Wearing a mask is not a matter of choice. Man is trapped in the mask by circumstances, by his own fears and inhibitions. When he fails to find some communion with the world beyond his cells, he separates himself from all other human beings. But his solitary journey never ends until his doom. This happens in the life of Dion Anthony, the distinguished character of the play. When we first meet him, he appears a stranger even in
the company of his parents. O'Neill describes him:

...lean and wiry, without repose, continually in restless nervous movement. His face is masked. The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face-dark spiritual poetic, passionately super-sensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life—into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gaily scoffing and sensual young Pan.

The lack of communion with others is the main cause of Dion's alienation. Nobody understood him properly. Not even his childhood friend, Billy whose hostility compelled him to use the mask for the first time to hide his real self. Ironically he discloses the fatal incident that changed his entire life:

Listen: one day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him: I have loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born. Every one called me cry-baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protest myself from his cruelty. (p.64).

Thus, the innocent boy, at the age of four, experienced the sudden shocking awareness that God is to be neither loved nor trusted. Humble, meek and pure in heart, the little boy discovered not 'he kingdom of heaven, but a world of evil and injustice. This proved to be a death-blow to his concept of friendship and artistic aspiration. In order to protect himself from further assault he caged himself in the mask of bad boy Pan.

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4 Eugene O'Neill, The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed
London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1960). P.11. Hereafter the quotes from the Great God Brown will refer to this edition and be indicated only by the page number in parenthesis in the body itself.
this was the beginning of his suffering. The materialistic attitude of his father added fuel to his agony. For his father money was the only means of living. His father does not want to continue his study because "colleges turn out lazy loafers to sponge on their poor old father! Let his slave like I had to! That will teach him the value of a dollar!" (p.12) In this context, we are reminded of the attitude of Ephraim Cabot and his worship of hard-god. Like the old Cabot of Desire Under the Elms he imagines as if he is the God, the father, who has every right to design the future of his son. This is the foremost reason owing to which Dion is separated from his father since his childhood. Dion's wish to paint beautiful painting is marred by his father's dictatorship. His father tells him: "you 'll learn to be a better architect... or ill turn you out in gutter without a penny" (p.13). In place of a loving father, he finds a cold-hearted businessman and remains a stranger to him. Awfully he recollects his lonely childhood:

What aliens we were to each other: when he lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met that man before. Only at the second of my conception. After that we grew hostile with concealed shame.(p.45).

The painful revelation of the early childhood possesses him entirely, and he can not rest until the promise is somehow fulfilled. So, cut-off from his friend and father, he desperately wants to communicate his real self to his beloved, but finds her only in love with his masked self. When he tries to show his inner self, she recoils with horror. He realizes that there is no human being he can comprehend or whose comprehension enables
him to unmask himself and thus free himself from loneliness.

After his marriage and the death of his parents he becomes more helpless and insecure. Gradually, he loses his interest in life and his family. "His real face has aged greatly, grows more stained and tortured" (p.25) and his mask becomes "more defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean" (p.25). He turns to be a split person tortured by the conflict between his inner-self and the mask. In search of happiness he becomes spend-thrift drunkard and visits low women. His relation with prostitute Cybel is the result of his longing for his mother's love. Perhaps her mother is the only person who understood his artistic sensibility, because his father considers him identical to his mother. For him, his mother is the symbol of all the warmth of life that he has lost for ever. He recollects pathetically:

And my mother? I remember a sweet strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. (p.45).

In search of understanding and love, he marries Margaret but to his ill-luck, instead of loving him she loves his mask. He expresses the agony of his tragic alienation when he says to his wife mockingly: "This domestic diplomacy: we communicate in code when neither has the other's key" (p.28). He becomes a stranger to his wife and loses the feelings of a devoted
husband. Pretending his failure as an artist when Margaret approaches Brown for a job to him, he considers it her pride not her loyalty. Similarly, when Cybel reminds him about his worried wife, he says:

She knows—but she'll never admit to herself that her husband ever entered your door (Mocking) Aren't women loyal—to their vanity and their other things! (pp.51-52)

Because in his concept, "girls only allow themselves to look at what is seen" (p.20) he considers himself a moneymaking machine for his family. Living a life of stranger he realizes the hypocrisy. Actually, Dion is disgusted in playing the role against his will. He is not satisfied with the life provided to him. Instead of painting waves on the sea and the skimming flight of clouds over the tops of trees, he is forced to sketch the plan for municipal buildings. The dream of a painter is washed away by the growing materialism of the world.

Brown's vindictive attitude and possessiveness are the other factors behind Dion's tragic life. Always, he finds Brown as a competitor in various ways. Describing Brown's jealously in the case of Cybel, Dion says:

What first aroused his passion of possessing you exclusively, do you think? Because he knew you loved me and he felt himself cheated. He wanted what he thought was my love of the flesh: he feels I have no right to love. He'd like to steal it as he steals my ideas—complacently—righteously. (p.52)

Between the conflicts of outer mask and inner self Dion shatters mentally. His mask acquires a sinister reality and completely overshadows his inner-being. He realizes that it is really difficult to live in a world of strangers under the falsity
of the mask. His lonely suffering ends in his death. Before the end he decides to bequeath the mask to William Brown.

The theme of alienation is also projected through the character of William Brown in the play. O'Neill describes him:

"Brown" is the visioless demigod of our new materialistic myth—a success building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, and uncreative creature of superficial preordained social groves, a by-product forces aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life-desire.

He represents the materialistic modern man for whom human relationships have no meaning. He symbolises the anguish of the uncreative man, the despair of the person who cannot dream. In this regard, he reminds us of Andrew Mayo of Beyond the Horizon. Like him, Brown is an 'anti-poet' by nature. He says: I never could memorize poetry with a darn" (p.15). Due to lack of this artistic sensibility he is rejected by Margaret and cheated by Cybel. His possessiveness and envious nature separate him from Dion and force him to wear the mask of Pan to 'possess', he madly accepts the mask of Dion, Margaret as his wife and Cybel as his mistress. This is quite ironical that the person, who has forced Dion to wear the mask of falsity, himself seeks shelter under the same mask. O'Neill explains this turn in his play:

Brown has always envied the creative life-force in Dion—what he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively, whereas in reality he is stealing that creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration.

5 Quoted in Gelb, O'Neill, p. 580.

6 Ibid.
The real tragedy with him is that he cannot create as he is the man without vision, without any artistic capability.

He may be a successful businessman but cannot be a creator. As Dion says, "He couldn't design a Cathedral without it looking like the first supernatural Bank! he only believes in the immortality of belly!" (p.68) Putting on the mask of Dion he loses his own identity, is separated from his own self, and turns to be a split person. He tries to merge his identity with the identity of Dion and plans to live in his disguise to enjoy the fame and fortune of the latter. At the same time, he helplessly asks the mask of Dion in a doubtful tone, "What's that? She'll never believe? She'll never see? She'll never understand? You lie, devil!" (p.84) Gradually, he reaches a state of hypocrisy. Kissing the mask he reveals the reason for loving it, "I love you because she loves you! My kisses of your lips are for her" (p.85) But it is not the reality. It is merely a dream never to be fulfilled. Rather, it is the self-satisfaction of a hypocrite separated from his own self and possessing other's fortune. He is compelled to play the role of both Dion and Billy simultaneously and becomes a split personality.

Brown's hope of possessing Margaret shatters because she never accepts him in his real self. He, In the disguise of Dion, cannot oppose Margaret when she, taking him to be Dion, scolds him. Pathetically, he exclaims: "Poor Billy, poor Billy the Goat! (with mocking frenzy) I'll kill him for you! I'll serve you his heart for breakfast!" (p.90) Even knowing Margaret's attitude of negligence towards him, he hypocritically cooperates her.
I tell you I'll murder this God-damned disgusting Great God Brown who stands like a fatted calf in the way of our health and wealth and happiness! (p.90)

His hope of possessing Margaret is diminished completely when she reveals: "I've never thought of Billy Brown except as a friend, and lately not even that! He's just a stupid old fool" (p.91)

His desire to get the place of Dion proves as a futile effort. He realizes that it is Dion who is enjoying all the fortunes that he desired for a long time. But his tragedy is that he cannot destroy the image of Dion who is residing with him safely. Brown, the visionless 'demi-god' who never believed in the supreme power, is now compelled to beg Him for the strength to get rid of the clutches of Dion's mask.

Having changed his identity for the sake of materialistic fulfilment, he is isolated from God. But now he realizes his mistake and begs, pathetically:

Mercy, compassionate Saviour of Man! Out of my depth I cry to you! Mercy on the poor Clod, they colt of unhallowed earth, they clay, the Great god Brown! Mercy saviour! (p.103).

However, it is a partial vision; the half-successful attempt of the acceptance of his power and strength. Because when he touches the mask of Dion he realizes the mistake of denying his own self. The illusion becomes clear. Brown cannot create, for creation depends on vision and Brown, devoid of vision, moves in the dark. What he cannot possess, he destroys: as in childhood he destroyed Dion's sand castle and as he finally destroys, himself. In a tone of mocking despair considering himself the Almighty, he says:
Bah! I am sorry, little children, but your kingdom is empty. God has become disgusted and moved away to some far ecstatic star whose life is a dancing flame! We must die without him (Then addressing the mask harshly) Together—my friend! you too! Let Margaret suffer! Let Margaret suffer! Let the whole world suffer as I'm suffering. (p.103).

With the rejection of supreme power, his tragic suffering of alienated life meets its doom. His death under the mask of Dion also keeps him apart from the real death in the eyes of others. The suffering of Dion and Brown reminds us of the tragedy of Robert and Andrew of the play, Beyond the Horizon. Like Mayo brothers, Dion and Brown are opposite to each other by nature. Moreover like them, both the artist and businessman suffer from alienation by choosing the wrong profession.

Margaret and Cybel, the female counterparts of Brown and Dion, also suffer from a sense of isolation and loneliness. Like the visionless Brown, Margaret is a practical lady. She can compromise with life easily. In the beginning of the play, she admires the artistic quality of Dion and accepts him as her husband. But when she faces the problem of bread and butter, she forces him to take the job of a designer.

Although her practical and compromising nature keeps her away from suffering but her satisfaction is entirely built on falsity and illusion. She does not care for reality. Earlier, she rejects the inner-self of Dion and later, she accepts the falsity of Brown. In the real sense, she is separated from Dion, because she is not satisfied with the life she has spent with him. She reveals this truth of Brown when he is in the disguise of Dion. She discloses her lonely suffering of early life
and her indifferent attitude towards Dion:

... I could never help you-- and all the time. I knew you were so lonely! I could always hear you calling to me that were lost, but I couldn't find the path to you because I was lost too! That's an awful way for a wife a feel!(p.87).

After the death of Billy in the mask of Dion, she is left alone with the memory of Dion's love.

One the other hand, Cybel symbolizes the rootlessness of the modern world and its corrupt value-system. Choosing the life of a prostitute, she has separated herself from the society. Since she has not been able to belong to the general trend of the society, she prefers to lead a solitary life. She finds: "Life's all right, if you let it alone" (p. 42). Her conception of love is entirely different from that of others. She says to Dion: "What makes you think love is so important, anyway? It's just one of a lot of things you do to keep life living" (p.49).

Being disgusted with the life, she says: "What's the good of bearing children? What's the use of giving birth to death?"(p.53).

But her acceptance of Dion's inner-self and her sexless involvement with him reveal a different aspect of her character. She represents both the glory and ignominy of womanhood, highlighting existence of a vicious circle of corrupt values established by the seekers of her flesh and playing the role of mother for the inumerable, lonely souls in quest of faith in life and love. O'Neill describes her:

"Cybel" is an incarnation of cyble, the Earth Mother, doomed to segregation as a pariah in a world of unnatural laws but patronized by her segregators, who are thus themselves the first victims of their law.

7 Quoted in Gelb O'Neill, p.580
The prevalence of perverted human values in the society makes Cybel wear the mask of a prostitute, though she is truly and essentially the Incarnation of the warm Earth-Mother. But on the contrary, Margaret does not to wear any mask. Both build their lives on externals. Alienated from the terrifying realities of existence both of them continue to live in a state of falsity.

More or less, all the characters of the play suffer from the sense of isolation and loneliness in different ways. To conclude with the words of Travis Bogard:

Significantly, neither Dion nor Brown finds any genuine human relationship to sustain him. Both men in the play love Margaret, but the love is little more than a subject for declamation. Margaret, consumed with her sons and her house work and her unperceiving love for husband, is perhaps intended as an example of one who lets life alone.... With Cybel, Dion has a communion, but again it is not such a profound human relationship that it can redeem life's pain.

Strange Interlude (1927) is the longest play ever written by O'Neill. It is a powerful presentation of man's search for identity, for belief and belonging. About its source the playwright writes:

... the story of a girl whose aviator fiancee was shot down just before the Armistice... The girl had gone to pieces from the shock. She had married not because she loved the man, but because she wanted to have a child. She hoped through motherhood to win back a measure of contentment from life.

In this play, O'Neill touches many themes including his favourite one: man's loss of belonging and his dissatisfaction with the what he has. Again it depicts the story of both the

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8 Travis Bogard, Contour in Time, pp. 277-78.
9 Arthur and barbara Gelb, O'Neill, p. 629.
outward and inward conflicts.

The play focuses on Nina Leeds, a young lady of twenty-two, who lives with her father, Prof. Leeds. Nina inherits the passionate, selfish hunger for love from her father who determines her fate. Professor Leeds has persuaded her lover, Gordon Shaw, not to marry Nina until he returns from the war. But Gordon is killed in the World War I, and Nina is left with agonizing regret and a sense of guilt. She insists neither upon marriage, nor she surrenders herself physically in the arms of her sweet-heart before he left. After the death of her lover, she hates her father and grows neurotic. Chosen to be a nurse in a soldiers' hospital, she offers herself to wounded war-veterans in the name of sacrifice of her dead lover. But the promiscuity which she thought of as 'sacrifice', turns out to be a sordid, masochistic attempt at oblivion and brings only further guilt and self-hatred. She is intensely admired by the ineffectual novelist Charles Marsden and the brilliant young physician, Dr. Ned Darrell. But neither of them is willing to marry her. Therefore, after her father's search for the thread that will bind her to life she marries Sam Evans, the dull Simpleton.

The tragic reversal occurs when Nina learns from her mother-in-law that, unknown to Sam, his family has a long history of hereditary insanity and that is why, Nina should not bear his child. She deliberately aborts the child. But, for Sam's sake as well as for her own security she feels to have a baby from some man other than her husband. She successfully persuades Dr. Darrel for this. But before their son is born,
Darrell and Nina have fallen in love. The possessive nature of Nina wants her lover and child all to herself. She plans to desert Sam but Darrel refuses to be party to that crime and leaves on a long journey, not to return for years. The son, Golden, is born and Nina turns to him to fill her need to love. But, to her ill-luck, the child is more attached to Sam Evans. Sam, believing the child to be his, is inspired by his supposed fatherhood to have confidence in his business career. Thus, Nina loses both Darrell and her son. Sam dies, the affair with Ned is over; and Gordon, her son, flies away after marrying Madeline.

Now, Nina is too old and tired to batter any longer at the wall of self in order to find love from some other person. Finally, she desperately surrenders herself in the hands of her silent lover, Marsden, thinking to be the last place for her feelings of 'belongingness'.

There are many sources of tragedy in O'Neill's plays. The most important of these is man's failure to 'belong' or to find roots anywhere in this hostile world. The present play depicts the same story of man's anguish, how he is isolated from himself and from others. The play begins in the study of Prof. Leeds in the small University town of New England. The atmosphere of the room symbolises the deserted character of the old professor who has been isolated from the mainstream of life. Professor Leeds confines himself into the cosy atmosphere of the study: "a fugitive from reality can view the present safety from a distance...". His love for old classics reveals the

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10Eugene O'Neill, Selected Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1957), p.285. Hereafter, the quotes from Strange Interlude will refer to this edition and be indicated only by the page number in parenthesis in the body itself.
possessive side of his character. Living in the shadow of these illusory ideals, he keeps himself and his daughter cut-off from the world of reality. He considers that by keeping Nina away from the reality he would be able to keep her love for himself.

This sense of possessiveness led him to prevent his daughter's marriage because he wanted to keep Nina with him like an old collection for his study. His sense of fear and egoism that arises from insecurity, stood like a barrier between Nina and him. From the beginning of his life, professor Leeds has spent a different life, completely severed from the general, social trend. After the death of his wife he becomes more insecure. He tells Marsden".... but it's terrible to be so alone in this... if Nina's mothers had lived... my wife... deat!" (p.290) Therefore, in order to mitigate the pain of solitude, he tries his best to reserve the love of Nina for himself. But the love of Gordon made a wall of hatred between them. Prof. Leeds admits to Nina:

It is also true I was jealous of Gordon I was alone and I wanted to keep your love... I did my best to prevent your marriage. I was glad when he died... I wanted to live comforted by your love until the end. (p.300)

But his well-constructed plot goes against his expectation. In order to free herself from the mental agony Nina decides to leave the home to serve as a nurse in a military hospital. Not only the 'possessiveness' but his strong sense of puritanism is also the cause behind Nina's revolt against him. In this context he can well be compared with the old Cabot of The Desire Under
the Elms. Like Abbie and Eben, Nina rebels against her repressive puritanic father who denies her all possible opportunities for the fulfilment of her desires. As a result, the possessive father has to spend the last breath of his life in a state of wilderness. In his sanctuary-like home, he is compelled to think about Nina’s hatred towards him. In sheer despair, he is bewildered: "... she still must hate?... oh, God ... I feel cold! I feel cold!... alone this home is abandoned. The house is empty and full of death" (pp.301-302) He expects to die someday there, lonely and crying for help. This expectation of the professor becomes true very shortly. He dies a helpless death after spending the remaining days of life in utter loneliness. Neither he keeps Nina as his possession, nor is he able to get security for himself in his self-created no man's land. Throughout his life he remains isolated from others. Undoubtedly, he is one of the key characters of the play and under his shadow the entire play moves.

A strong sense of possessiveness can be felt in the character of Nina Leeds, the heroine of the play. She is the most powerful character around whom all the four male characters act like puppets. O'Neill rightly remarks: "Strange Interlude is Nina's play".11 She is the protagonist of the play who lives in a world of unreality since she does not find anything real to which she can belong. This sense of conflict arises out of her

possessiveness, her desire to keep all men she wanted, for herself. An inescapable past becomes her whole life. When she realizes the illusory nature of her quested values, she feels embittered and then moves in another direction to clutch at a new illusion. But she fails to achieve her goal of possession and remains an alienated person throughout her life.

The tragic story of her life begins with the death of Gordon Shaw, her fiancee, whom she cannot forget throughout her life. Her longing for Gordon and to be the mother of his baby, leave her in a state of isolation. Life becomes meaningless for her: "Gordon is dead! What use is my life to me or anyone" (p.298). She accuses her father of preventing their marriage. She wanted to be in the possession of Gordon, "But Gordon never possessed me; I'm still Gordon's silly virgin" (p.299). She awfully regrets for not giving herself of Gordon so that she could have Gordon's baby as possession for her security. But now she considers herself a barren woman, who stands lonely in the wasteland of life. She miserably confesses: "And now I am lonely and not pregnant with anything at all, but - but loathing". (p.299) She considers herself a coward on account of her failure to make love with Gordon. She says: "I must pay for my cowardly treachery to Gordon!" (p.299) Her payment for her guilt becomes horrible for her. From this point she is separated from her father and this separation leads her to leave him and the home and accept a promiscuous life.

Nina has lost her mental peace owing to the insecurity which arises after the death of Gordon. Her act of promiscuity
does not fill the vacuum created within her. After the death of her father she says to Marsden: "You know—grief, sorrow, love, father—those sounds our lips and our hands write" (p. 315). The sense of security that she has lost never returns to her. Her first attempt as a nurse proves to be a futile search, but her search for belonging never ends. To satisfy her longing, she decides to marry Sam Evans on the advice of Darrell and Marsden. Both the well-wishers of Nina consider that marriage is the only solution to her problem. After her marriage to Sam Evans, she somehow tries her best to regain her lost sense of security through her baby, who is still in her womb. She says, "I hope it is a boy... healthy and strong and beautiful... like Gordon" (p. 325). It suggests as if Gordon is not only a man for her; he is the symbol of her security, her identity. But her aspired security, for which she longs, is shattered into pieces when Sam's mother reveals the family-curse of insanity. The cruel fate strikes another blow when Mrs. Evan forced her for an abortion and suggested her to get a baby by somebody, instead of Sam.

The story of insanity creates a gap between the wife and husband. She loses her interest in Sam. She thinks: "I only married him because he needed me— and I needed children!" (p. 334) Both Nina and Sam are separated mentally. This separation and the memory of Gordon increase Nina's agony. She begins to forget her duty as a wife. The reason for her dissatisfaction with Sam after the abortion is nothing but the
memory of Gordon. She confesses: "...I loved him; so it seems at times that Gordon must be real father, that Gordon must have come to me in a dream while I was lying asleep besides Sam:" (p.351). But her dream shatters with the operation and a sense of insecurity again clouds over her. By any means, she needs a baby who can give her mental satisfaction as well as security. To satisfy her urge for the security she chooses Dr Darrell for the father of her baby, violating all the code and conducts of a loyal wife. At first Darrell refuses; but owing to his pressing desire for her, he is mesmerized to prescribe himself scientifically for the act. On the other hand, Nina considers her illicit affair as a sacrifice like her previous attempt as a nurse. She thinks:

Of picking out a healthy male about whom she cared nothing and having a child by him that Sam would believe was his child, whose life would give him confidence in his own living, who would be far from him a living proof that his wife loved him. (p.353)

Though her prophecy about Sam proves fruitful, yet she fails to play her own part. She no longer remains faithful to her husband. Gradually, remembering their sexual act, she inclines towards Darrell. The never ending process reaches a state where she considers Sam a bogus man and Darrell means everything to her. For the sake of her happiness she wants to desolate Sam in favour of Darrell. Sexual relation seems to be the principal reason behind her misery which she fails to bridge the gap between her and the men whom she meets. When she
fails to give herself to her fiance she has a conflict with her father and becomes an alien daughter. Now, for the sake of Darrell, she wants to throw Sam. But when Darrell rejects her proposal of marriage and decides to leave, she wants to avenge him. Instead of breaking down, she thinks to use Sam as an instrument for her revenge. This selfishness and passion for possession keep her apart from her family members and friends.

Not only her sexual jealousy, but also the lack of correlation between her thought and action makes her an indifferent lady. Due to her own mistake, she always finds herself in a state of agony and guilt. The security which she is craving for is expressed in her thought, not in her action. She realizes that no single man can provide her a sense of fulfilment. So, she tries to get all the men she knows into her trap, and to some extent, she gets the taste of success. As she says triumphantly:

My three men: I feel their desire converge in me:... to form an complete beautiful male desire which I absorb... and am whole...they dissolve in me, their life is my life... I am pregnant with the three:;; (p.395)

But this is not the truth. It is an illusion which is marred by her cruel and capricious wilfulness and a power to hurt not only herself but all men whom she knows.

Dissatisfied by the men, she asserts all her hopes on Gordon, thinking him to be the last resort of her belonging. She says:
These men make me sick... I hate all three of them: They disgust me... the wife and mistress in me has been killed by them: Thank God, I am only a mother now:... Gordon is my little man, my only man: (p.406)

Here also the luck playes its role contrary to Nina's expectation because her conception of belonging is entirely based on falsity. Her futile pursuance of an unattainable romantic ideal is destroyed by her son, when the latter flies with his beloved. In a state of fear, doubt and loneliness, she loses her faith in God. She does not find a way out to her self-created problems. She fails in her quest for personal happiness; she broods over old age and death, recalling with sentimental retrospection the irrecoverable afternoons of passion. She is tortured by the confusion of truth and reality. Sadly, in a voice of reconciliation she thinks:

The only living lifed is in the past and future... the present is an interlude... Strange Interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living!...(p.420)

Nina has always dreamed to love and happiness. But how does her dream shape into reality? The death of her real lover, her betrayal by her father, her horrible experience as a nurse, her tragic marriage with Sam, her physical and emotional involvement with Darrell, and her failure to keep the love for her son Gordon—all her encounters with reality break her till she becomes the ghost of her former self. Where does she belong? She can neither be a lover, nor a wife or a mother.

In the evening of her life she is left alone with Marsden.
Darrell goes back to his work; Sam dies; and her son flies with Madeline. The tragic pull between her need to give and her need to take is over. She is so drained and exhausted emotionally that she wants a security in which she may find her lost sense of belonging, for which she has been struggling throughout her life. Finally, she decides to marry Charles Marsden, her silent lover, to end her long journey of insecurity. She considers life as "merely strange dark interlude in the electrical display of God the Father!" (p.449).

Another distinguished character of the play, who suffers a lot through isolation is Dr. Edmund Ned Darrell. He seems to be the most wanted person in Nina's list of men. Clifford Leech describes him: "much needed than the others of understanding Nina." professionally, he is a physician; emotionally, an ardent lover, and from human point of view, a weak person. First, we meet him when Nina returns from the hospital. He is a young man of twenty-seven, whose charming physical appearance attracts the attention of a woman easily. He is a rootless person having no familiar attachment like Sam Evans or Charles Marsden. He enters the story as a sympathizer to Nina but turns to be an isolated one due to his deep attachment with her. His hypocritical attitude is the root of his disillusionment owing to which he suffers from a deep sense of anguish throughout his life. He is attracted towards Nina in his first meeting, but instead of

12 Clifford Leech, O'Neill (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1963), p.79
marrying her, he proposes her for Sam Evans. He admits the truth to Nina later: "Sicne I first meet you, I've always desired you physically" (p.367). In the beginning, the proud scientist within himself does not allow him to accept the truth. Therefore, he considers his physical involvement with Nina only a scientific approach for breeding children, and love is only the physical union of two guinea pigs. This illusory concept of love is shattered when he finds himself truly in love with Nina. As love is an overwhelming and mysterious power against which neither science nor human will can prevail, Ned, separated from Nina, no longer finds any interest in his study and ruins his career. To mitigate the pain of separation he involves with other women but is never able to get satisfaction.

In the search of happiness he returns to Nina after spending a long period of frustration and separation. He confesses before Nina:

I was n't noble, I'll confess! I thought of myself and my career! Damn my career! A lot of good that did it! I did n't study! I did n't live! I longed for you—and suffered. I paid in full, believe me, Nina: But I know better now! I've come back. The time for laying is past: You've got to come away with me. (p.391)

But the destiny has played its part. It has left Darrell in a state where he finds himself alone, helpless before the force of circumstances. He has lost his beloved and his son. Realizing his situation he asks to Nina: "You think I'll stay--to be your lover--watching Sam with my wife and my child--" (p.392). But he must accept the truth that he has reached the same state of
nothingness from where he had started his futile journey for happiness. Submitting himself before the cruel hands of reality, he choses to remain as a father alienated from his son and a lover isolated from his sweet-heart for the remaining years of his life.

Charles Marsden is another victim of the disease of romantic imagination. He is the only male figure who came in contact with Nina much earlier than others. For a long time he loves Nina but cannot express his feelings to her. The cause behind his silence is his conception of love and his deep attachment with his mother.

His indifferent attitude towards sex and his hidden love affairs keep him apart from others. For Nina, he is "womanless" and a "slack bachelor". Disclosing the cause of his bachelorhood, he admits: "You were my only true love, Nina. I made a vow of perpetual bachelorhood when you threw me over in Sam's favour" (p.377) But he has no sufficient courage to disclose his inner feelings, from the beginning. His conception of love is different than Darrell's scientific approach. His is the Platonic love as he passionately says:

*My love is finer than any she has known! I do not just for her:... I would be content if our marriage should be purely the placing of our ashes in the same tomb... our urn side by side and touching one another... could others say as much, love so deeply.*

(p.406)

This illusory concept changes after the death of his mother, his only companion in his lonely life, who has a strong influence on
him. Undoubtedly, Marsden loves Nina but his love for Nina is suppressed by his real love for his mother. His work as a novelist, his friendships, his travels and all the major events are governed by the dominant will of his mother. So, naturally, he becomes helpless after her death. He says:

... and I have nothing!... but utter loneliness... If only mother had lived:... how horribly I miss her!... My lonely home... who will keep house for me now?

(p.376)

Marsden's solitary suffering, his long waiting, comes to an end, breaking his last illusion, with Nina's offer of marriage. Contrary to his conception, he has always been fascinated by Nina's physical beauty; but now he gets a shattered, completely broken and an elderly woman to look after her as a guardian. Finally, he accepts the truth with a tone of reconciliation:

My life is cool green shade wherein comes no scorching zenith sun of passion and possession to neither the heart with bitter poisons... My life gathers roses, coolly crimson in sheltered garden, on late afternoons in love with evening... rose heavy with after blooming of the long day, desiring evening... My life is an evening... Nina is a rose, My rose, exhausted by the long, hot day, leaning wearily towards peace. (pp.438-39)

The other two characters who suffer isolation are Mrs. Evans, the mother of Sam, and Gordon Evans, the authorised son of Sam. Mrs. Evans spent a lonely life in order to save her son from the family curse. She narrates the story of her suffering to Nina, how she is forced to play the role of an alien mother to her only son. Her tragic alienation is expressed when she says:

"I never let him come home... I was making him forget he had a mother" (p.333). In case of Gordon jr. the isolation is of a
different type. He remains unknown to his real identity. His real paternity acquires a mystery when we realize that "biologically" he is the son of Darrell, "spiritually" he is the son of Gordon Shaw, and "morally" he is the son of Sam Evans. Above all, Sam Evans, who enjoyed a normal life, does not know the falsity of his life that he is an alien son to his mother, alien husband to his wife, and alien father to his son.

Through these characters O'Neill successfully represents the predicament of a generation and causes of the sickness of the modern times. It deals with the very problem of existence in the face of annihilating forces of a dark tradition that offers only an escape from reality and a dead past that spreads its sinister shadows into the present and chokes all the life out of it. The play presents life as a suspension bridge, "a strange interlude between unknown sinister past and the unexplored and unknown future". It reveals the tragic consequences of the suppression of the basic urge of life, through the characters of prof. Leeds, Nina, Marsden, Darrell, Sam, Mrs. Evans and Gordon.

"All of them live in a world of masks of the self and others". The root-cause of their suffering is their romantic imagination, a disease owing to which they suffer from estrangement and become alienated from one another.

The title of the play Strange Interlude also evokes the theme of alienation. It is twice mentioned in the text. On the

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first occasion, Nina sees the barrenness of the present moment, a strange interlude between memory and expectation that becomes the cause of her isolation. On the second occasion, at the end she sees the whole of life like that, as a mere interval between an unknowable past and future in which she and her dreams have no existence. As far the dramatic technique is concerned, O'Neill's use of monologue serves the function of mask in as much as it shows the gulf between a character's thought and his open words. Inner thoughts reveal the real feelings of a character—love, hatred or disgust. This device allows O'Neill a freer hand to plumb into the continuous fluctuations going on in the minds of his characters. In this sense, 'asides' are modified 'monologues'. The characters in the play reveal their true self with the help of this 'monologue'. 'Asides' which are heard by the audience but not by other characters create an atomosphere of secrecy. They help the audience to understand the true motives of the characters from their duality.

Mourning Becomes Electra (1931) is one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century, which depicts the story of man's unending suffering of search for identity. It proudly proves O'Neill's artistic craftsmanship as a playwright and his power to tell a story superbly. Praising the play, B.H. Clark observes:
"O'Neill's triology is a tearless tragedy, remote, detached, 
august, artfully shaped, cunningly devised, skillfully related and 
magnificently conceived." Through this triology O'Neill 
expresses his concern not only with the evils of Puritanism but 
also with the evils of war, with man's quest for beauty, and 
with his wish to belong. It also shows how he fails to achieve 
these ends; he finds himself in a miserable condition to justify 
his existence and is compelled to remain as an alienated person.

For presenting man's helplessness in the modern world, 
O'Neill has partially borrowed its plot from the famous Greek 
tragedy Oresteia. Like the Aeschylean tragedy, Mourning Becomes 
Electra consists of three plays--'Home Coming', 'The Hunted', 
and 'The 'Haunted'. In a letter to Robert Sisk, O'Neill clarifies:

It is founded--in the outline plot--on the old story of 
Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Electra, Orestes on which the 
Greek dramatist wrote triology. I modernize this story to 
a psychological drama of human interrelationships, using 
no Gods or heroes and interpret it with many variations 
and improvisations of my own.

Though some of the important elements are brought from the 
Greek story, they are presented in a modern form by the 
dramatist. The moral pre-occupation of the Greek tragedian 
, 
commensurate with the social, political and religious values of 
the contemporary Greece, has been replaced by the eternal

15 B.H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: the man and His Plays 
(New York: Dover, 1947) p. 170

16 Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill, p. 368.
struggle of man against external forces and his ultimate groping in the darkness of his own guilty self. However, the Greek concept of fate has been translated in terms of modern experience, where fate means man's personal, familial and racial past and the forces of heredity and environment. Inspite of its similarity with the Greek tragedy, it remains a modern play treating the fundamental problems of the time in terms of modern values.

This story of isolation and separation is rooted in Mannon's family much before the play's beginning. David Mannon, the uncle of Ezra, loved Marie Brantome, a girl below their rank. When she was pregnant, Abe Mannon, brother of David, forced him to marry the girl and drove them out of the house. Abe grew rich; Ezra inherited his property; the poor Marie had to face starvation and death; and her son Adam Brant resolved to wreak vengeance upon Ezra. Ezra has had a glorious career, he joined army, gave it up, established a shipping firm, studied law, became a judge, joined politics and was elected Mayor, and when the American Civil War broke out, he again joined Army.

When the play opens the American Civil War has ended and General Ezra Mannon is about to return home to his wife, Christine and daughter, Lavinia. Lavinia adores him and is jealous of his affection for her mother. When she discovers the illicit affair between Adam Brant and her mother, she seeks to avenge her father by turning the family against her mother. When
Ezra comes home, Christine, who has never loved him, poisons him, hoping to escape from the Mannon family with her lover Captain Brant. Orin, Lavinia's brother, who has been considered as Mama's boy, returns just after the death of his father. Lavinia tells him of Christine's unfaithfulness and of the suspected murder of General Mannon, which had appeared to be a heart-attack. In a fit of jealousy, Orin kills Brant in his ship, his mother shoots herself. Orin then realizes that he has irrevocably lost his mother's love and, consumed by guilt, edges close to madness. In order to get rid of the gloomy surroundings of Mannon's castle Lavinia and Orin go for a long sea voyage in search of mental peace. After the long sea-voyage Lavinia has the emotionally twisted Orin under her control. He, in turn, is insanely jealous and possessive of his sister. When Lavinia tries to involve with Peter, Orin threatens to expose their past, and commits suicide. Peter deserts Lavinia, who is left alone to let the past haunt her until the Mannon-curse is shift. The problem of isolation is closely related to the loss of security and quest for one's happiness. All the major characters of this poignant tragedy suffer from this sense of insecurity, through they belong to a single family. It seems all of them are living a life without any sense of relatedness with others. Ezra Mannon, the senior member of the family is haunted by the same sense of isolation. Like all the Mannons, he has a mask-like look which symbolizes the split of his life. Outwardly, he is a successful man in every respect but inwardly he is a helpless
personal entirely cut-off from the marital bliss. He is hated by his wife owing to his Puritanic attitude: a common characteristic of the Mannons. In his life, he always seeks peace and happiness, tries to belong to somebody, but fails miserably. His longing for love is marred by the indifferent attitude of his wife. In search of belongingness when he returns home after the end of War, he finds himself in the same state of loneliness. He says: "I can't get used to home yet. It is so lonely". He admits to his wife, "there'd always been some barrier between us--a wall hiding us from each other! I would try to make up my mind exactly what that wall was but I never could discover" (p.54). It clearly shows that he is an alien husband to his wife.

After his marriage, he is haunted by a sense of nothingness that makes him a different man. He says, "something keeps me sitting numb in my own heart--like a statue of a dead man in a town square" (p.55). Being dissatisfied with his wife he turns to his daughter in search of peace which creates another barrier between the mother and the daughter. His joining of Mexican War after his marriage and his engagement in various business is the result of his wife's negation. Mocking at his achievement in life he admits that the real reason behind his success in business is not his capability but his desire to be free from the isolated atmosphere of his home.

17 O'Neill, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1955) p.54. Hereafter, the quotes from Mourning Becomes Electra will refer to this edition and he indicated only by the page number in parenthesis in the body itself.
To bridge the gap, finally, he wants to surrender himself to the arms of his wife, but, to his ill-luck, he fails to find any thread of belongingness. Realizing the reality of their relation he says to his wife in a bitter tone:

Is that your notion of love? Do you think I married a body?... You were lying to me tonight as you've always lied! You were only pretending love! You made me appear a lustful beast in my eyes; as you've always done since our first marriage night! I would feel cleaner now if I had gone to a brothel! I would feel more honor between myself and life (p. 60).

But this is not the final realization; to his great amazement and horror, Christine tells him, before giving him the poison instead of medicine, that she loves Adam Brant. Thus, finally a brave warrior like him dies a treacherous death plotted by his own wife.

The suffering of Christine Mannon is something different from that of her husband. She suffers not for the Puritanic attitude but for her sensuality and possessiveness. Rather, she is a rebel against the Pruitanism of Mannons. In search of security she marries Ezra. But, instead of getting a loving husband she finds a cold-hearted person within him. She feels her marriage with him quite unfortunate. As she is traditionally passionate due to her French origin, she cannot be able to adjust with her Puritanic husband. Soon, her marriage turns romance into disgust and she is separated from her husband mentally. She accuses her husband: "You've used me, you've given me children, but I've never once been yours:" (p. 61) Her longing
for a happy life stops its breath under the Puritanic atmosphere of Mannon. Neglected by her husband, she gradually turns towards her son, Orin, to fill the vacuum. But she again finds herself in the same state of loneliness after his joining the army. Even she has lost her motherly affections towards her daughter and considers her as a competitor in the war of possession. She accuses Lavinia: "You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin" You've always schemed to steal my place" (p. 33). This hostility reaches the climax when Lavinia discovers her mother's illicit relation with Adam Brant. Christine's affair with Brant is the result of her loneliness that arises owing to the absence of Orin. She confesses: "I never would have fallen in love with Adam if I'd had Orin with me" (p. 32). She wants to go away from the house of Mannon through Brant, leaving all the sufferings behind. In search of happiness and 'belonging' she kills her husband, betrays her son, but finally fails to attain that. After the murder of Adam by Orin, she loses both her lover and her son. Her dream of a happy life, and her desire of possession are shattered by the well-managed plan of Lavinia. She commits suicide to end her lonely life.

Another character who suffers from isolation and loneliness is Orin Mannon. Destiny has provided a bitter life to him. Throughout his life he remains a puppet in the hands of Christine and Lavinia. After feeling disgusted with Ezra when Christine turns towards him, he becomes an alien son to his
father. As Christine says: "He hated you because he knew I loved you better than anything in the world:" (p.86) Actually, Orin's mother-fixation is the root cause of his disillusionment. His strong attachment with his mother symbolises his longing for peace and security. While away at war, Orin dreamed of his mother as an island of peace:

Those Island came to mean everything...that was peace and warmth and security. I used to dream I was there...There was no one there but you and me. And yet I neve...saw you... I only felt you around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same colour as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you. (p.90)

But, contrary to his dream, he finds himself in a strange atmosphere created by his mother and sister. Orin's arrival marks the beginning of the struggle between Christine and Lavinia. Each, tries to win him over to her side by showing him extra-sympathy and loyalty. Each tries to poison his mind against the other. His sense of security and his dream of happy island shatter when Lavinia proves his mother's adultery. Disappointedly he says: "I should never have come back to life--from my island of peace: ... But that is lost now:" (p.101). Out of jealousy he shoots Adam Brant on account of which Christine commits suicide. From this point Orin leads a life of suffering and disillusionment. The memory of his dead mother haunts him. He feels himself guilty for the suicide of his mother. Being trapped by Lavinia's possessiveness, Orin tries to fulfil his desire for longing of mother and is ready to share the
burden of guilt. He feels that he does not have a right to love, nor does Lavinia. He realizes:

The only love I can know now is the love of guilty for guilty which breeds more guilty—until you get so deep at the bottom of hell there is no lower you can sink and you rest there in peace. (p. 160).

Gradually, he reaches a state of insanity that arises from his sense of guilt. He accuses Lavinia of being responsible for the mother's suicide and suggests that they should "confess and atone to the full extent of law: That's the only way to wash the guilt of our mother's blood from our souls:" (p. 152) Orin's deep attachment with Lavinia is nothing but the same quality of love and loathing for oneself that has always dominated Mannon-relationships. Orin hates Lavinia as much as he likes her. He does not like that Lavinia should marry Peter and threatens her to disclose the crime committed by them. Realizing the reality of Lavinia, he tells her, "There are times now when you don't seem to be my sister, nor mother, but some stranger" (p. 165). Finally, his guilt compels him to commit suicide like his mother, so that he may be able to regain his 'lost-island'.

The theme of isolation is aptly projected through the character of Lavinia Mannon, the modern Electra of O'Neill whose action dominates the play from the beginning to the end. Torn between the Puritanic father and the sensuous mother she is haunted by a sense of loneliness throughout her life. She desperately wants to merge with the identity of her father but finds her mother as a rival. She is the product of a disgusted romance of her parents. She realizes:
So I was born of your disgust: I've always guessed that, Mother—ever since I was little—when I sued to come to you—with love—but you would always push me away: I've felt it ever since I can remember—your disgust. (p.31)

Her alien childhood is the result of her mother's negation and her father-orientation. She is not only cut-off from her mother but also separated from her brother. As Orin says: "he (father) always sided with you against Mother and me" (p.97). In spite of her difference with her mother, Lavinia unconsciously feels that vacuum. She says: "Oh, mother" Why have you done this to me? What harm have I done you?" (p.57) On account of this atmosphere of hatred Lavinia has lost all the warm feelings of life. She becomes ruthless "cold and calm as an icicle" (p.98).

Deprived of mother's love, she is deeply attached with her father and is in search of security which begins to crumble by the interference of Adam Brant. With all her efforts, she tries to keep her mother away from Brant for the reputation of her father. This makes the relations between the daughter and the mother bitter. Each tries to find some lame excuse to humiliate the other. Finally, the long-drawn war of possession for Ezra Mannon between Lavinia and Cristine ends with the death of Ezra. The death of her father is a terrible blow to her conception of security and belongingness for which she has been longing from her childhood. She is now haunted by the same sense of loneliness again, and becomes more possessive. Her plan to snatch Orin for herself from her mother is the cause of her insecurity: a common characteristic of Mannons. In search of
security and to keep Orin in her possession, Lavinia drives her brother first to kill Brant and then to drive Christine to commit suicide. But the death of Christine caused a new threat to her possession because Orin slowly turns towards insanity. Both Lavinia and Orin are haunted by the sense of guilt. In order to be free from the haunted surroundings of the home, Lavinia plans for a sea-voyage, but her futile search for happiness again results in bitterness. They are constantly chased by the memory of ghosts, which compels them to return. Their own guilt divides them. Both Lavinia and Orin turn alien to each other in the haunted atmosphere of the house. She asks Orin: "But now you've suddenly become stranger again. You frighten me" (p. 141).

After returning from the voyage, Lavinia finds herself in a terrible state of solitude. She turns colourless and looks like the ghost of her dead mother. Her possessiveness forces her to act, like her mother, for Orin; and she tries to make him forgetful of his loss. She pleads before him to forget the past and to develop a more meaningful relationship with the immediate present. Even she hopes to mitigate the pain of isolation by marrying Peter. But she fails miserably in her attempt. She realizes that playing with human lives and human emotions is not a mechanical game with foreseeable results. Comparing Lavinia with Nina of Strange Interlude, Harry Slochower says:

In Nina and Lavinia, O'Neill presents the ultimate in self and social alienation. Both are the masochistic products of modern rationalistic probing. Both attempt
to wield and possess people's lives, as if they were "god and had created them." Nina renounced at the end. Lavinia remains defiant even in her acceptance of suffering.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Inspite of her excessive desire to fall in the love of Peter}, she rejects the proposal of marriage. She realizes that Mannons have no right to love or to be loved in this world. She has decided to spend the remaining days of her life in the isolated house of Mannons. Before entering the lonely cell, she says: I'm the last Mannon. I've got to punish myself" Living alone here with the dead is a worse act of justice than death or prison: I'll never go out or see anyone: I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead,...(p.178)

Lavinia, however, is made of different stuff. Both Christine and Orin are cowards; they cannot bear agonies; they cannot repent and expiate sin. Lavinia, on the contrary, has tragic heroism in her. In fact, she realizes the power of the curse working upon the Mannon family, and in order to get rid of it she thinks of paying for it. Therefore, she has surrendered herself to isolation and remains alienated, for ever.

Though O'Neill has provided little space for Adam Brant, his involvement makes him an important character in the play. Destroying himself, he adds fuel to the isolated suffering of Mannons. His passion for revenge and his hatred towards Mannons provide him an isolated life. Being a Mannon he is entirely

\textsuperscript{18} Harry Slochower, "Eugene O'Neill's Lost Moderns," in \textit{O'Neill and His Plays}, ed. Cargill et al., p.386.
cut-off from the family. He has been separated even from his parents. He tells: "At seventeen I ran away to sea--and forgot I had a mother" (p.26). He hates his father David Mannon because he was the man who loved his mother and left her in miserable condition. Instead of giving her a happy life he made her life hell. For the same reason he hates Ezra Mannon because the latter refused to help his starving mother after the death of David Mannon. By possessing Christine he wanted to fulfill his desire for revenge but in the way of possessing her he became her possession. The other two characters who suffer from separation are Peter and Hazel. Their longing for love remains unfulfilled till the end. Neither Peter is united with Lavinia nor Hazel with Orin.

The title, setting and technique have played an important role to reveal the theme of isolation and loneliness in the play. The title *Mourning Becomes Electra* symbolizes alienation in a different way. Like the dual nature of his characters the dramatist provides a double meaning to the title. O'Neill states: "It befits--it becomes Electra to mourn"\(^{19}\) and the second meaning has its ironical significance that "Mourning (black) is becoming to her--it is the only colour that becomes her destiny"\(^{20}\). It clearly suggests the suffering of human beings in a state of loneliness which is justified through the character of


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Lavinia, the modern Electra. After the death of all major characters, she is left alone to suffer in a state of wilderness. Even the sub-titles of the trilogy are symbolic. "Home Coming" symbolizes Ezra Mannon's search for belonging in his own home that has remained a strange place for him. Again, it symbolizes Christine's search for security in the arms of Adam Brant. "The Haunted" symbolizes man's condition in the society of perverted values. "The Hunted" symbolizes man's relation with his past which compulsively makes him an alienated person.

The setting of sceness in this play is well-planned and explains the theme. The use of external and internal scenes becomes symbolic in the play. The external scenes indicate the chief characters' desire to escape into some land of peace, while the internal ones symbolize the suppression and denial of natural instinct to live.

O'Neill's use of symbols and masks reveals the hidden desire of the characters. In this play, he uses mask-like faces instead of masks. Almost all the characters of this play have a 'mask-like face' which symbolically suggests their split, the inner disharmony. This mask-like face has created a barrier between the common people and the Mannons. The important symbols in the play used by O'Neill for exposing the theme of alienation are 'the house of Mannons', 'the South Sea Island' and 'the song chanty Shenahdoaz'.

The House is characteristic of the Mannon family and its fate. It functions as a visual participant in the action of the
play. The life within the house is in sharp contrast to the life outside it. The indoor life reveals hypocrisy, selfishness, isolation; and the life outside is quite attractive but terrifying. The contrast between the portico and the house is also suggestive. The white portico is suggestive of the mask that all Mannons wear—the mask of isolation and secrecy, while the house itself becomes a witness to seething Puritanical inhibitions, to the dark deed of murder and suicide, of adultery and incest. It is the place of death and suffering, shutting out life like an outsider.

In contrast to 'the house of Mannons' 'the South Sea Island' symbolizes the longing peace and security for Mannons. The Mannons are separated from one another, always they have been haunted by a sense of insecurity. They search for identity because they are not able to belong to the ghostly atmosphere of their house. All of them long for peace, security, and innocence of the South Sea Islands. But in reality the Islands are unattainable. The vision and the dream cannot be realized; for the Mannons, there is no escape from complexes and illusions.

Another suggestive symbol used by O'Neill to expose the theme is 'the sea-chanty Shenandoah'. "Home-Coming" opens with the song sung by Seth, the housekeeper of Mannons. The desire to put to sea—"the sailor is bound away across the wide Missouri" (p.6)—results in frustration and separation, and "oh, Shenandoah, I can't get near you" (p.6)—symbolises an un navigable gulf. The song that recurs at Christine's suicide—"She's far away across
the stormy water" (p. 124) reveals that the separation is final. The stormy waters that separate man from his desire cannot be crossed except by the death. In the closing scene of the play Seth mournfully sings the song as if to bid farewell to Lavinia for her unending journey of suffering.