CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The examination of Eugene O'Neill’s plays in the foregoing chapters has induced certain conclusions as to the theme of isolation and loneliness in them, brought out through exposing and analysing their plots, situations, characters, dialogues and techniques. Here, an attempt has been made to embody them into a unified whole. It has been observed that O'Neill is mainly concerned with the sociological, cultural and personal isolation of the individuals who are estranged from one another, and communication and mutual understanding in their lives are replaced by estrangement and hostility. His plays, reveal the social life where one individual looks upon the other as a hostile force. There comes a state when he becomes isolated and estranged not only from others, but also from himself.

O'Neill, being an existentialist, dealt with life in a very realistic and authentic manner; he presented the faithful dramatization of human situation. The most important issue of the contemporary American society is man’s failure to "belong" or to find roots anywhere in this hostile world. Man is isolated not only from himself but also from nature, culture, society, religion, and God. He is a lost and lonely soul and suffers from a sense of anguish as is already evinced through the alienation of Robert Mayo in Beyond the Horizon, Jones in The Emperor Jones, Yank in The Hairy Ape, Jim Harris and...
Ellen in All God's Chillun Got Wings as well as the protagonists in the other plays under this study. This sense of isolation and loneliness of the characters in O'Neill's plays arises out of the American socio-cultural and spiritual milieu. Man's desire to belong is shown in Mourning Becomes Electra; and there we find the utter lack of any sustaining faith in the present time.

The sense of isolation and loneliness in the plays of O'Neill causes suffering to his characters; and their failure to control it in an effective manner brings tragedy to them. This isolation and loneliness may originate from a painful sense of separation from those with whom one has a striking intellectual or spiritual affinity. It looks ironical when one feels a total stranger in the very place where he had thought to have, actually, belonged. An isolated person in O'Neill's plays is one whom circumstances have forced into a self-recognition of separatedness and caused his suffering. The Iceman Cometh shows how man's inability to cope with life can create a feeling of isolation and loneliness in his life, forcing him to withdraw from others. The play dramatizes, very effectively, the alienation and sufferings of the inhabitants of Harry Hope's Saloon, who have long broken their links with outside world and are living in a world of their own making. The Great God Brown shows how a man's persistent efforts to belong to Nature are thwarted by materialism, Christian asceticism, and socially-caused conflict
in psyche. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* the effect of the sense of isolation and loneliness is actually felt by all the members of the Mannon's family; and they are forced to bear its brunt.

We find that too much mechanization of modern life is also one of the important factors responsible to generate the sense of isolation, loneliness, estrangement and insecurity in the life of an individual. It has de-stabilized human life. *The Hairy Ape* shows how Yank is brutalized by an impersonal mechanical social order. Yank, in this play, is one who challenges the supremacy of the machine-age and sacrifices his life to move the workers by making them realize the necessity of revolt against their powerful masters. Besides the impersonal and mechanical social order, another factor responsible for the feeling of isolation and loneliness in O'Neill's heroes is their failure to discriminate between the world of dream and the world of reality. His characters are the willing victims of romantic dreams or illusions; they suffer and feel isolated because of their refusal to give up their dreams. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Robert's romantic dream of going beyond the horizon is pushed beyond his pragmatic bent of mind. *The Iceman Cometh* also indicates how the destructive power of the romantic ideal stands in the way of forming meaningful relationships with the real world, and how, finally, it is the cause of isolation and loneliness. Same things happen in the life of Dion Anthony of *The Great God*
Brown and Sioman Horford of A Touch of the Poet. Having failed in their search for romantic ideal, both the characters are isolated from reality. In Long Day's Journey Into Night, Edmund Tyrone's quest for beauty in a world of dreams is the principal cause behind his estranged life.

Thus, in O'Neill's plays man's over-reaching craving for possessiveness and material gains is one of the vital causes of his isolation and loneliness. How the commercial civilization has made man spiritually bankrupt is given its finest expression through the characters of Ephraim Cabot in Desire Under the Elms and Billy Brown in The Great God Brown. Ephraim Cabot suffers from a sense of isolation due to his excessive materialistic attitude. His thirst for money keeps him apart and separated from his sons and wives. Similarly, Billy Brown exemplifies the successful but empty life of the materialist. He is inwardly empty and devoted only to the exterior things of life.

The Great God Brown shows the isolation deeprooted in American culture. It exposes those who seek money at the cost of truth and beauty and remain severed from others and also from themselves. O'Neill always considers the acquisitive man as the root-cause of all the modern malaise. His is a voice against the craze of material success. To him, a money-minded person is quite complacent and steeped only in material values which cause his personal isolation and suffering. The isolation of James Tyrone and Phil Hogan from their families
in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, respectively, is the cause of their excessive materialistic attitude.

O'Neill's characters suffer from isolation and loneliness also when they try to possess any human being by playing nasty tricks. This kind of possessiveness arises out of insecurity and becomes the cause of their isolation. This forced Prof. Leeds of *Strange Interlude* to remain isolated from his daughter, Nina, when he tried to keep her as a possession for his security. Lavinia Mannon of *Mourning Becomes Electra* faces the same problem when she tries to possess her brother, Orin for her security. Another character who becomes a victim of loneliness and isolation owing to this kind of possessiveness is Nina Leeds of *Strange Interlude*. She turns to be an alienated figure when she tries to possess all her desired men in her possession.

In the way of possessing others, the possessor, sometimes, becomes a possession and remains isolated for ever. The case in instance is the tragic suffering and isolation of Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms*, who tries to trap and possess Eben for the sake of her materialistic fulfilment, but becomes herself a possession of Eben. The suffering of Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is something parallel to that of Abbie. She is trapped by Jamie's selfless love when she tries to possess him, and finally remains isolated from him. Similarly, in *Strange Interlude*, Ned
Darrell is forced to lead an isolated and lonely life of suffering when separated from his beloved and son after being trapped by the power of love. Again, it so happens in the case of Christine Mannon and Adam Brant in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Both the characters are trapped in the way of possessing others and remain isolated and lonely to face their doom. The possessiveness in Brant arises out of revenge and Christine's is the result of her insecurity. But both are the victims of isolation and loneliness.

People in O'Neill's plays suffer from isolation and loneliness owing also to their false pride and ego. In *A Touch of the Poet* Con Melody's false aristocracy is the source of his tragic suffering and isolation. He lives entirely in his memories of earlier gallantry in love and war. He always considers himself as the Major Cornelius Melody. In his pretensions of aristocracy, he hates his low-born wife and worships a high-bred mare and thus remains lonely and isolated from the realities of life. In *Desire Under the Elms* Ephraim's egotistical nature always stands in his way and his failure to adjust himself to new situations always plunges him into ever-increasing loneliness.

Another significant cause for man's isolation and loneliness is the search for lost mother's love. It is an important aspect of O'Neill's plays. There is a profound love of a man for the lost mother and it is a symbol of lost happiness. Having failed to attain it, man remains isolated.
throughout his life. In The Great God Brown, Dion cries to be buried with his mother; and in Desire Under the Elms, Eben fails to forget his dead mother who has been haunting his subconscious mind since the day of her death. In Strange Interlude Charles Marsden suffers from isolation after the death of his mother. The suffering of Orin Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, and Jamie in A Moon for the Misbegotten is the result of search for lost mother's love. These characters suffer from isolation and loneliness after losing the love of their mothers. But in the case of Don Parritt of The Iceman Cometh, the search is something different. In it, O'Neill is preoccupied with the dual aspect of the 'mother-archetype'—that of both the giver and the destroyer of life. Orin tries to regain it through Lavinia, Jamie desperately wants to get in the arms of Josie, and Dion helplessly seeks it through Cybel, but none of them are able to recover it completely. Thus, they are forced to lead an estranged life lacking the love of a mother.

We find the sufferings of individual in the plays of O'Neill through his isolation from self. The characters in his plays are isolated and feel lonely due to their false pretension and their complex of race. In A Touch of the Poet, Con Melody is alienated from his self after rejecting his own Irish Origin. Jones in The Emperor Jones is a victim of self-alienation by hating the negroes to whom he really belongs.
The characters in *Long Day's Journey into Night* also suffer from self-alienation. Each of them is lost and in struggle with himself. Mary is isolated from self and engaged in her past. Jamie's struggle is with himself. He has punished himself by taking wine and indulging in sex. Edmund's self-alienation is the result of his romantic outlook, his desire to identify with the nature.

The isolation in the plays of Eugene O'Neill is shown through the love-hate relationship among the characters. We find it in the case of Evelyn and Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh*. It again happens in the case of Nora and Con in *A Touch of The Poet*. Both the wives are isolated from their husbands owing to this type of relationship. It occurs not only between wife and husband, we witness it also through father-son, mother-son, and father-daughter relationships. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* James Tyrone's love-hate relationship with his sons is the cause of his estrangement. We observe that the same relationship exists between Mary and Jamie and between Edmund and Jamie. In *A Moon for the Misbegotten* both Josie and Phil are the victims of isolation and loneliness due to this love-hate relationship.

In O'Neill's belief man is a lonely sufferer in this helpless world. He finds himself totally isolated in a spiritually sterile universe and, therefore, cannot have a sense of harmony in it. In his search for identity, his need to belong, he feels his lostness deeply. All the protagonists of his plays feel isolated, alienated, and despaired for lack of
centre of belonging. The tension in his plays is commonly related with the struggle against isolation and loneliness. We learn from his works that a man has to face tough times in a world without God, without love, and without faith in life, and that he may belong, but it is possible only after sacrificing his life. It happens in the case of Yank, in the life of Robert Mayo and in the case of Orin Mannon.

Finally, this study reveals that the theme of 'isolation and loneliness' is one of the variations of a common theme in American drama, i.e., the theme of "Quest", to which all the major playwrights are engaged in some form or other. In the plays of Eugene O'Neill, however, this theme has been raised almost to a 'cult', a 'force' in human affairs that seems to dominate all the other aspects of life. Almost every one of his major characters displays a dream or a craving for the ideal that is outside his actual life. In most cases, the revealed situation is ironical. Fate or circumstances always so conspire against the dreamer that the dream not only becomes impossible, but also a source of suffering and tragedy.

This study reveals that the treatment of 'isolation and loneliness' in O'Neill's plays changes from the early to the later plays when his own outlook of life grows more pessimistic and negative. In the early plays the 'isolation and loneliness' is caused by the vague and romantic dreams of the characters, and finally the failure or unfulfilment of these
dreams. In the later plays, O'Neill deals with that aspect of the dream of his characters which, with its rare flashes of revelation, keeps the dream alive and worth-pursuing. The character experiences a submerging of self into the universal whole in a mystical fashion. The character, for a moment has a saint's vision of beatitude. As Edmund says in *Long Day's Journey*: "For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on towards nowhere". This is the kind of 'isolation' we find in the later phase. We see here, that 'isolation and loneliness' makes man spiritually shattered; not only physically, as in the early plays. Here, man feels isolated and lonely because his life is split between the dark reality and his sick existence, on the one hand, and the eternal beauty of a permanent dream of mystical kind, on the other. The dream merges into a mystical-spiritual experience and reveals the larger mystery of the universe itself. O'Neill comes to the realization that the quest for illusion or dream is meaningless and the root cause of his 'isolation and loneliness'; a quest is unnecessary; only a recognition of the eternal unity manifest in God will bring comfort to the isolated, lonely and split soul of man.

O'Neill's plays in the three different phases show that his early plays deal with 'isolation and loneliness' brought out through the failure of the romantic dreams, the dreams of escape. In the plays of the middle phase, the isolation and
loneliness' is caused by the ugliness of reality for which he chooses the American social scene. In the later phase, the 'isolation and loneliness' is caused by the defeat or failure of the ideals, illusion, and romantic dreams in actual life.

The tensions in his plays are nearly always connected with his struggle against isolation and loneliness. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality, but in his rebellion and anger, in an inability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at ease in a world without God, without love, and without trust in life. His plays make it plain that he remained the dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation to the very end of his career.

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