CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Eugene O’Neill (1888-1953) was the pioneer American dramatist. He made drama in America a serious literary endeavor and rescued it from such dramatic modes of Naturalism and Realism as in vogue in the contemporary American theatre. Most significantly, he liberated it from predominantly commercial profit-oriented melodrama of disproportionate emotionalism and sensationalism. He was as Beard [1] writes “interested in avoiding realism and pseudo realism that dominated mainstream American theatre at that time”. Being a pioneer, he embarked on a new and unfamiliar literary landscape, which unlike poetry and fiction looked for inspiration to European theatre and theories. American fiction and poetry in particular found its inspirational model in Emerson’s ideas on transcendentalism and Self-Reliance which acquired almost religious passion in the contemporary and succeeding American novelists and poets [2]. Bloom [3] terms O’Neill as “the most non Emersonian author of any estimate in our literature. . . . O’Neill from the start seemed to know that his spiritual quest was to undermine Emerson’s American religion of Self-Reliance”. He turned to such European dramatists as Strindberg [4], Philosophers as Schopenhauer [5] and Nietzsche [6-7] for inspiration both in content and style of his plays. Hartman [8] analyzes O’Neill’s adoption of Strindberg’s “style and subject matter to native material”, and Blackburn [9] reads continental influences on O’Neill’s expressionist drama. His association with contemporary critics Kenneth McGowan, the playwright Glaspell, and George Cram Cook – the founders of the Provincetown Players, whom he joined in 1915 – transformed the decadent American theatre into a vibrant art. They particularly liberated American theatre from the style in vogue in both technique and content. Along with his associates of the Provincetown and other leading professional production company, Washington Square, he made use of the two related modern developments in dramatic art. First was Strindberg’s Naturalism [10] which had already become popular in European theatre. It helped O’Neill tremendously in introducing overdue naturalism to American theatre. His
dissatisfaction with the prevalent modes of surface realism in contemporary theatre on the other hand helped him carry out a revolution in American theatre in the form of his introduction of popular expressionism in American drama, which had gained popularity in European art and theatre. Besides, his theatrical innovations also coincided with the growing vogue in America of Freudian views on sex and anti Puritanism in morals, and middle class materialism. All these and related factors needed to be expressed in the theatre. O’Neill represented them on the stage, and so introduced essential western modern content into the American drama.

O’Neill was also an avid experimentalist. He boldly experimented in form and content of his plays. His choice of form and content in fact has always been a source of wide disagreement among the reader and critics. It is therefore, hardly surprising that there should have been vacillation in his reputation, assessment, and in his appeal to the ever changing and growing readers. For some, he is melodramatic to the extreme and for others a dramatist with ambitious yearnings for probing consciousness of characters. Manheim making a strong distinction between O’Neill’s early and late plays categorically state that his “last plays represent a marked change from his earlier plays, both in their art and in philosophical outlook” and by change he means “successful shift away from the predominantly melodramatic emphasis of his earlier plays”. Moreover, his outlook on life has no less been a subject of controversial opinions. For some O’Neill’s distinction lies chiefly in his “determinism to confer upon man a tragic dignity” while for others his pessimism, his huge despair, and his defiance of American facile optimism is terribly deplorable. Fambrough reads his early Desire under Elms as a play that reflects influence of Greek tragedy on O’Neill’s creative dimensions. Frenz and Mueller have read deeper connection between O’Neill’s Mourning Becomes Electra with Shakespeare than Aeschylus. Colakis associates his Emperor Jones with Senecan tragedy. Black uses Greek model of “experience” to declare his plays as classic tragedies in spirit. Similarly he reads his Iceman Cometh as an embodiment of Greek tragic Anagnarisis. And Antush apprises the readers of O’Neill contribution to not only modern theatre in America, but also about laying foundation of post modern dramatic aesthetics. However, he continues to hold his position as a major modern American playwright. One Nobel Prize, four Pulitzer prizes and scores of critical studies in all forms and dissertations attest to the importance of Eugene O’Neill in the
history of American theatre. The most challenging criticism on O’Neill has come from the Feminists [23-24].

1.1 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study analyses psychopathological patterns in O’Neill’s plays. The principal focus for analysis and interpretation will be on O’Neill’s *Desire under Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Strange Interlude* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night* as the psychopathology is the most pronounced and consistent here.

1.2 PSYCHOPATRHOLOGY: DEFINITION OF THE TERM

Psychopathology in the domain of psychoanalysis exclusively focuses on extreme emotional states, and disturbances that result in strange, extreme, deviant or abnormal human behavioral patterns abnormal behavior or abnormal states. These conditions have been classified differently as psychosis and neurosis etc. Willerman [25] in his *Psychology of Individual and Group Differences* relates psychopathology to what he calls “deviant” human behavior that does not involve superior personal or social adaptation, such as high intelligence, but are characterized by negative, and maladaptive behavioral features and traits. Schneiderman [26] looks upon psychopathology in terms of “severe emotional disturbance or profound characterological defects and not merely anxieties and insecurities of mild or moderate severity”.

The deviant behavior falls into different categories with different generating factors. Psychosis, neurosis, anxiety disorder, and paranoia are its prominent modalities with further subdivisions. Psychosis, for instance falls into schizophrenia and affective disorder, and neurosis into obsessive compulsive neurosis, anxiety neurosis, and dissociative disorder. The last category of neurosis is particularly characterized by multiple personality disorder in which the sufferer alternates between two or more separate ego states[27] Schizophrenics display symptoms like extreme disturbance in thinking, fear, distrust, certainty of one’s worthlessness, inability to feel and experience pleasure (depressiveness) and ambivalence [28]. Affective disorder is likewise featured by depressed mood, belief in one’s worthlessness, guilt, and talkativeness [29]. Neurotics also display prominent traits. Briefly they are: recurrence of unpleasant thoughts (obsessive compulsive disorder), inability to achieve good contact with reality, and anxiety (usually of a harmless object or situation). However, the “neurotic persons suffering from general anxiety disorder are even afraid in ordinary situation” [28]. Paranoia, on the other hand is characterized by “impaired contact with reality, suspiciousness and jealousy” [30]. These variants of psychopathological behavior are,
however, mostly the result of clinical observations of the actual patients suffering from one disorder or the other. In literary text characters are fundamentally fictitious. The text itself with a few exceptions is not representation of essentially the insane or the morbid and the writer does not model his characters on the clinically recorded or observed patients. What appears on textual analysis is likeness of responses and behaviors which render that particular character to psychopathological identity. Advent of psychoanalysis as an independent discipline has facilitated interpretation of literary text for of inquiry and analysis of behavior and personality. The study here focuses on behavioral patterns that characterize regressive emotive /psychic states that render human personality problematical, initiate regressive personality trend or disrupts personality growth along normal lines. The study moves from subjective to objective factors for the psychopathological behavioral tendency and orientation in the artist and his personas.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach used in this study is critical, comparative, interdisciplinary and analytical. The text will be the main source of critical analytic and comparative inquiry into the behavioral disorders.

1.4 RESEARCH PATTERN

Divergence and convergence are the key words that define the pattern of the study. First the study diverges in to four distinct areas of artist’s psychobiography, his dramatis personas, culture and the readers; each then converges exclusively on the variants of psychopathology.

Creativity as a literary activity has been debated quite contentiously by the critics and theorists. Modern development in psychoanalysis has opened up avenues to analyze literary creativity as it shapes in the artist mind and thought processes. Viewed from one perspective that is quite independent of what modern psychology has to say about human consciousness, artist and literary creativity involve for sure the complex process of understanding human nature, exploring human consciousness and even unconsciousness, evaluating his desires, frustration, thoughts etc. Literature in this respect is older than psychoanalysis itself. Sigmund Freud himself admits his appreciation of literature and philosophy in laying open the human mind to the readers: “The poets and philosophers discovered the unconscious before I did” [31]. Sakura develops the argument that the poets investigated the unconscious much earlier than Freud “and that at its subtlest and most wide ranging” [32] which makes them what Sakura says “the literary predecessors of Freudian legacy”. The artist’s probing of human consciousness before the rise of
modern psychoanalytic critical and theoretical approaches was largely in the nature of using psychology to study how the whole mind works or as Sakura writes, “for understanding another human psyche”[33]. It did not address itself to study and analyze diseases or more properly speaking psychopathological states or primitive experiences and their effect on developmental, evolutionary and creative aspects of human behavior. She is of the opinion that “The primary connection between Freud and the poets is a shared mythology: a general insight into human nature, confrontation with experiences neither the poets nor Freud were afraid to see [34]. Nicholas Tingle, Alcorn, and Mark Bracher likewise support close correspondence between literature and psychoanalysis. “There are certainly many differences between teaching literature and conducting an analysis”, Write Tingle et al (1986),” but since the aim of both processes is ultimately the same-assisting humans to become more autonomous and fulfilled-what goes on in one can illuminate and inform what occurs in the other” [35]. Literary texts are basically a complex network of meaning. They are inherently and essentially multi layered, composed of structural network of emotions and thoughts. This complexity of constituents of a text very much resemble human mind itself, which is composed of ideas, and psychic and emotive patterns. Psychoanalysis in focusing on the human mind and matrix of its ideas and emotions at the same time provides a technique for interpretation of text also. Hence literature and psychology have come to assume an interrelationship of abiding creative, theoretical and interpretative interest. Wilbern takes the relationship between literature and psychology back to Greek classical period. “The ancient argument”, he writes, “between Plato and Aristotle about the value of myth and drama is fundamentally a conflict between psychological assumptions and mimesis [36]. Wilfred Guerin, et.al (1992) also look upon psychoanalytical approach in terms of having ancient historical existence finding important place in theories of Aristotle, Sidney, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley regarding catharsis and imagination respectively[37].

The problem of any correlation/interaction between creativity and psychoanalysis of the artist has been debated equally contentiously among the theorists and psychoanalysts. Kauffman and Baer [38] for instance have put together thoughts that those with mental illness particularly female poets are more likely to be drawn to poetry rather than to other forms of prose due to the personal nature of poetry. They conclude that “The adage that creativity and ‘madness’ are linked together is by and large supported by the existing research“. Wooster and Buckroyd [39] in their study of Shakespeare’s All’s Well that Ends Well support the thesis that loss and creativity are
often linked. First they define loss and mourning as a complex process affecting the mind and emotions:

Loss in real and metaphorical ways, as we know, provokes anger, guilt, and sadness. The grief of loss is a complex state of mind with different lengths of duration, and in each individual shows different mixes of other constituent affects, such as anger, guilt, and shame, mixed with envy and jealousy as well as frequently accompanying depression with varying degrees of somatic disruptions”.

Then they analyze the problem of co-relation between loss and creativity by probing some psychoanalytic ideas about creativity. They begin by considering Rothenberg’s *The Emerging Goddess* (1979) as one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the common factors in creativity. They then consider the group in which grief, loss, and creativity can be expressed in different ways. Lastly, they examine Shakespeare, who for them is perhaps the most striking example of all these experiences and whose middle period plays *All's Well That Ends Well* binds together grief, loss, and creativity. It was, however, Freud’s “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” [40] that became pioneering in relating psychology to literature. It gives us insight into what Freud thinks about the artistic creativity. "The creative writer," according to his classic essay on the subject, "does the same thing as a child at play. He creates a world of phantasy.... He builds castles in the air and creates what are called day-dreams." The comparison, as Freud conceived it, affirms that art is a form of wish fulfillment. Wherein he may gratify the desires denied them by society. In his *Gradiva*, he writes that the hero of that novel:

. . .had turned completely away from life.... But nature... had infused into his blood a corrective of an entirely unscientific sort-an extremely lively imagination, which could show itself not only in his dreams but often in his waking life as well. This division between imagination and intellect destined him to become an artist or a neurotic; he was one of those whose kingdom is not of this world.

He continues to write categorically that "The motive forces of artists are the same conflicts which drive other people into neurosis." Fairberg [41] for example, points out that to some extent we all lead "a life of fantasy," and that our "civilized pursuits" on some level of sublimation serve to assuage our repressed infantile desires. It follows therefore that:

Freud saw art . . . as a normal psychic activity . . . [whose] function ... is basically the same as the psychic function of teaching, politics or the practice of law.... This may be defined [in the artist's case] as assuaging the pain of an unconscious conflict by providing a temporary . . . substitute gratification through the agency of a creatively elaborated fancy . . . [which]
can achieve its psychic results because of the survival in adults of the childhood pleasure in fantasy-making, which is closely related to play.

Fairberg’s statement reinforces Freud’s declaration of comparison between artist and neurotic. Manheim [42], however, distinguishes between neurosis and abnormality, and writes that for a Freudian art expresses a "kind of 'abnormality' which is not pathological. Hallman [43] terms it a biological motivation implying that creative urges occur as secondary forms of drives and are derived through reinforcements from more fundamental biological urges”. It also implies that the motivation of adult behavior, including the artist’s creative activities, is oriented towards the past and determined by past conditioning”. Freud’s followers, writes Hallman concur in this explanation. Brill [44] describes the poet as obsessed by pre-genital oral fixations and explains the poems as a secondary elaboration of the infant’s experience at the mother breast. Engelmann [45] believes that infantile phobias and perverse gratifications combine to establish our aesthetic tastes. F. Deri claims that all creative energy flows from pregenital impulses. Van der Stern finds source of creative imagination in oedipal fantasies [46]. Hallman lists numerous other motivations behind complex creativity to drive conclusion that strong motives have more than mere energy thrusts. They fulfill aesthetic function which is transformational as it transforms his primary pragmatic encounters to primary qualitative ones that in turn lead and fuses into aesthetic response [47]. Wright also supports id-psychology. The term Id-psychology was not used by Freud himself, but was adopted subsequently both by the critics and theorists to explain the role of sex as a determining force in human consciousness. Id-psychology centers on the role of the sexual instincts as the determining force of individual life. She argues terms it “vulgar Freudianism” and writes, “The aesthetics of id-psychology is grounded on the notion that the work of art is the secret embodiment of the creator’s unconscious desires” which is exposed through the analysis of his earliest childhood experiences through “what is known in his life and through the fictional characters”[48]. Kris [49] _ego psychoanalyst_ made considerable historical and theoretical contributions in bringing about application of psychology to literature. He termed id-psychology grossly inadequate to explain the creative process. His theoretical orientation is that of ego psychology where he moves away “from the unconscious, infantile sources of creativity focused on by id-psychologists to concentrate on conscious, preconscious and rational thought process” in creativity which diminishes the importance of the repression and repressed sexual drives as the exclusive explanatory concepts of literary creativity. Likewise Schneiderman [50]
in his interpretative work has strongly emphasized the role of personal painful experiences, not necessary libidinal in artistic creativity:

Admittedly old fashioned id psychology, with its emphasis on sexual symbolism and its penchant for body language, did not lend itself to a balanced interpretation of art. I, would argue, however, that the psychoanalytic study of literature cannot dispense with Freud’s id-psychology and substitute an ego psychology that attributes complete rationality and conscious control to the artist. Such a view, in my judgment is out of human context.

He continues to say that “under the right conditions, the author’s response to the challenges of everyday life result in artistic productions of great virtuosity” [51]. He points particularly severe stress as one of the “important ingredient in generating creativity” [52]. and that “one has to read one page of any outstanding modern writer to be struck by the intensity of the personal vision generated by the powerful inter-psychic forces, neither mysterious nor rational but rooted in human experience, especially crises and conflicts” [53]. Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva have further developed these thoughts on sublimation and artistic creativity in the middle of crises and psychological traumas. Klein in one of her most important papers “The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of Ego” refers to the tendency by the schizoid-paranoid subject to engage in creative process in order to displace his ambivalent interest in the object (mother) and symbolizes them in the world which gives rise to interest in the outside world. It is because the external world is endowed with symbolic meaning that it arouses our enormous interest, which is imperative for the purpose of survival. She writes, “Symbolism is the foundation of all sublimation and every talent, since it is by way of symbolic equation that things, activities and interests become the subject of libidinal phantacies” [54]. Kristeva likewise in her Black Sun establishes strong equation between mourning and its sublimation through creativity. Returning to Freud’s theory of mourning, she tries to examine the ways in which loss mobilizes the afflicted towards signification. However she differs from both Freud and Klein in her stress on sublimation through signs and language. Signs she writes

are arbitrary because language starts with negation (Verneinung) of loss, along with the depression occasioned by mourning. ‘I have lost an essential object that happens to be, in the final analysis, my mother,’ is what the speaking being seems to be saying. ‘ But no, I have found her again in signs, or rather since I consent to lose her I have not lost her (that is the negation), I can recover her in language [55]
Thus she like her predecessors in psychoanalytic tradition recognizes the connection between psychopathological disorientation caused by various factors and the creative process. Elsewhere she refers to the peculiar role of pain in mobilizing the afflicted to the creative process:

We find ourselves here before an enigmatic chiasmus that will not cease to preoccupy us: if loss, mourning, absence set the imaginary act in motion and permanently fuel it as much as they menace and undermine it, it is also undeniable that fetish of the work of art is erected in disavowal of this mobilizing affliction [56].

which generates “clinical symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that an individual displays sporadically or chronically, often in alteration with so called manic phase of exultation” [57]. These dual responses of what she terms dejection and exultation and alteration between them “constitutes the depressive temperament of neurotic” [58]. This is followed by her detailed analysis of Dostoevsky in respect to the dual representation or responses. Dostoevsky’s “tormented universe” [59] caused more by his epileptic fits than just grief is reflective of this dialectic of responses. What she writes here is that pain, grief, loss or whatever the form of pain has the diverse role in creativity. It lies in either the acceptance or the denial of the underlying pain in what a writer creates. ’Neill’s creative process has been analyzed in this context of co relation between the artist’ psychopathology and what he creates. It will be argued that the creative impulse inspired by psychic affliction was not for any attempt on the part of the playwright to resolve the crises or come to term with it in the spirit of acceptance of loss as has been upheld. It will be argued that in O’Neill’s art, affliction is persistent and remains unresolved. The affliction has its roots in the artist’s unconscious longing for the mother as a desired object. Therefore the study substantiates oedipal configuration of art-artist relation to investigate the peculiar psychopathological factor in O’Neill’s art. However the nature of this relationship is rife with complexity and no single theoretical notion can adequately address it. The study therefore adds Klein’s [60] stance on personality development to debate the complexity of this relation and its impact on creativity. Klein’s stance highlights different perspectives that have not been explored in interpreting O’Neill art. In her interpretation of child psycho-sexual development, Klein refers to paranoid-schizoid conflict towards the mother and its impact on personality. Thus she rescues the child from Freudian oedipal love, but her stance is equally pessimistic and creates ultimate negative impression of personality. Importantly, she refers to factors other than sexual drives which in her opinion are anxiety, induced by fear particularly of
annihilation. Here in O’Neill it will be argued that the vital conflict towards the mother figure projects the paranoid-schizoid position of the artist. But the preponderance of affliction is so definite and absolute that it goes a long way to “menace” or undermine “imaginary act”. The study contends that the menacing act restrains imagination from achieving transcendence from the loss and achieving universal representation. It also raises other problem relating to intellectual appeal of tragedy, denouement of crises to initiate repair and desirable tragic effect and achieve transference from the stage to the audience on the ground of personal experience particularly in diverse cultural scenario.

The following areas in the study will be debated with reference to O’Neill’s art and creativity:

1. Art reflects artist’s psychopathological identity. Psychopathology here in O’Neill’s case is conditioned by the unconscious. The study elaborates in the light of Freud and Klein’s theoretical notions on personality development.

2. The study also emphasizes that preoccupation with the unconscious and subjective creates its own archeology of limitations and constraints on such a type of art. The most significant limitation is related to that of representation as a concern of the tragic art. Therefore O’Neill’s dramatic art with particular mental states as it unfolds needs to be placed in the broader field of art and creativity to determine its appeal in terms of its representation and appeal.

3. The proponents of relation between loss/affliction and creativity have ignored to highlight the regressive effect of persistent pain, loss and depressiveness on the created works of the artist. The study highlights these regressive effects on O’Neill’s art, and stress the need to liberate art from preoccupation with the unconsciousness as a means towards specific subjective ends.

Chapter 4 analyses diverse deviant behavioral patterns of O’Neill’s personas. In the first place the study here in this segment takes his personas independent of autobiographical identifications and focuses on their different psychologically regressive disorders from multiple stances. The aim here is to project in line with the overall pattern of research annoyingly depressive and regressive psychopathological images in O’Neill’s art that practically permeates the behavioral template of all characters with varying intensity.

Chapter 5 undertakes evaluation of the role of certain societal factors in causing certain deviant behavioral disorders. The study in continuation of the pattern to locate psychopathological patterns in O’Neill’s plays, aims in this chapter to search connectivity
between society and possible role that some social factors play in causing deviance in behavior and generating psychopathological disorders in individuals. Thus it does not merely show the connectivity between art and social customs, traditions etc, or allow art to reveal what lies at the heart of society, but studies the role that social institutions and factors play in generating specific behavioral problems of diverse nature and descriptions. Now society is composed of various elements/institutions. Depending upon preference accorded in each society, social determinants of behavioral deviance and regression range from micro institutes like home and family, to macro ones like ethnic belongingness or differentiation, race, religion, economic conditions etc. In some cases economic factor instigates ruthless and destructive struggle for prosperity to the total denial of ethical, cultural, imaginative, intellectual and artistic elements. The study, however, concentrates on religion and racism as producers of extreme emotional and psychic disturbances and deviance. Significantly analysis of such cultural factors as religion in producing deviant behavior acquires greater relevance in the backdrop of the current national and international focus on possible relation between religious radicalism and negative/extreme behavior.

In Chapter 6, the study includes debate on the role of O’Neill’s grim drama with its predominant focus on regressive human behavior and resultant pessimism on the readers of diverse cultural background. It will be argued that the effect produced is contrary to positive cathartic effect. The conclusions have been drawn in chapter 7.