

# Ethical Crises in O'Neill's Modern Theatre: Some Dimensions

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*Accepted: April 12, 2011; Published: June 27, 2011*

## Abstract

Modern drama generally depicts a moral and spiritual wasteland and the resultant crises in the modern society. O'Neill's modern art is a clear instance of the gravity of the impending spiritual and ethical crises. However, little has been written to explain what the specific nature of this crisis is? Moreover, how does it emerge in his tragic art? How far it adheres or differs from the traditions of tragedy? The study takes into consideration these to explore various dimensions of ethical crises in O'Neill's modern theatre. It concludes that the predominance of ethical crises in diverse fashions is an obstacle to block rise in anti-Americanism and dissolve emerging conflict between Pakistani civil society and American desire for greater association with the civil society at micro level in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Eugene O'Neill; drama; ethical crisis; modern theatre.

## 1. Introduction

The Twentieth Century across the globe saw numerous catastrophic upheavals and changes, "crises of thought and speech" [1] that had determinable effects on all aspect of the society. One major setback that it received pertains to the decline of faith and religion in human affairs, generating spiritual chaos and profound sense of loss at all levels in the society. This sordid phenomenon owes a lot to the rise of Western philosophical discourses in such areas as psychology, materialism and secularism. Freud with his theories that focused extraordinarily on erotic/sexual desires as integral to the development of child/adult identity became instrumental in challenging the traditions and religion. He argued that difficulties in the realm of sexuality were the cause of mental disturbances: Clashes between the demands of sexual drives and the internal resistances they raise encourage repression, which in turn creates neurotic symptoms [2]. Nietzsche [3] has remained another prominent influence on modern thoughts concerning human existence and metaphysics. His theoretical stance on God's existence and morality in fact challenged the traditional faith and attempted to nullify all theological and spiritual dimensions of human existence itself. Earlier Kierkegaard (1813-55), the forefather of existentialism strongly asserted the necessity of individualism, especially in relation with God about whose existence he himself was very anxious. Theories of Darwin (1809-82), and their translation into social science by Herbert Spencer and the rise modern science further threatened the religious thoughts and theories. The upsurge of secularism itself speaks of the deep decline in religion in human affairs at all levels [4]. Modern drama generally reflects this rise of secularism and moral emptiness. O'Neill's modern drama is one clear instance of these crises of the modern age. Nevertheless, little has been written to explain what the specific nature of this crisis is? How does it emerge in his tragic art? How far it adheres or differs from the tradition of tragedy? The study takes into consideration these to explore various dimensions of ethical crises in O'Neill's modern theatre.

## 2. Personal context

Ethical crises in O'Neill owe a lot to his personal context. He was born and brought up in a rigid Catholic environment and family culture. Its determinable impact could be seen on his rebellion against the very catholic codes that he was taught to practice and believe. Shaughnessy describes the environment as "authoritarian" [5] with strict laws for regulating the lives of the believers. "No human activity could stand unregulated. The rules of relationship were enforced with parental authority; all moral deviance was considered sinful and was punished. The most egregious offences were called mortal sins (death to the life of grace in soul; death until the sinner

confessed, received absolution, and did penance). The indoctrination in this fashion could be equated with rigid Puritanism that Row highlights in his analysis of Shakespearean play *Measure for Measure*. Rigid Puritanism as Row elaborates is “about rules, constraints and prohibitions; one’s emotions desires and inclinations frequently come into conflict with these rules, and the agent commits a sin if he yields to temptations ” [6]. The constraints and prohibitions, however, instead of serving as a guide to moral improvement, could work negatively to create a kind of rebellious attitude in the follower. This negative impact could be seen in O’Neill’s personal life and his drift towards ultimate abandonment of the very faith. The particular preaching with consistent stress on rules and prohibitions in fact increased his disillusionment from the spiritual and Catholic religious codes itself. “Depressed and sullen ”[7]by such misfortunes as mother’s sickness “he found it harder and harder to keep faith”[8], and when he got undeniable evidence of mother’s addiction, he “gave up all pretence of fidelity to religion”[9]. He became an ardent reader of “mordant poets: Dowsen, Swinburn, Wilde, Rosette, Baudelaire, and Poe (‘whore mongers and degenerates’)[10], committing “every possible prank”; and “incurring the lethal risk of alcoholism and debauchery that ended in suicidal depression. Cynical, angry, and blasphemous, Eugene sought out the companionship of the world’s drop outs: drifters, losers, whores and hoodlums”[11]. This life pattern is a clear example of possible disequilibrium between the indoctrination along specific lines and the real existing conditions. Particular domestic environment and the crises in O’Neill’s case become one major force to question faith in deity/religion. Besides some intellectual influences that coincided with the artist’s sullen state of mind accentuated his personal, moral and religious disintegration. The most significant influences were those of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Strindberg and Freud. Schopenhauer’s [12] *The World as Will and Representation* is a strongly pessimistic account of human life and nature where he makes pain and suffering a stark human reality: “suffering is essential to life, and therefore does not flow in upon us from outside, but every one carries around within him its perennial source.” The gist of his argument is that all existence and life generally are characterized by ceaseless struggle, resulting in inevitable destruction, and involving incessant suffering of one kind or another. The completely human affair, to him is pointless as nothing of any value is achieved and man finds himself confronting an inner emptiness and sense of nothingness. His views on sex and procreation are equally pessimistic. Anticipating Freud he writes, “Indeed, it may be said that man is concrete sexual impulse, for his origin is an act of copulation, and this impulse alone perpetuate . . . his phenomenal appearance.” Schopenhauer’s tragic vision is equally grim. To him tragedy is an exposure of worthlessness of life; its content is the horrible, sorrow of man, and the triumph of evil. O’Neill’s dramatic world is in multiple ways a thorough embodiment of what has been referred to in the work and thought of Schopenhauer. It is replete with emotive and psychic decline with little possibility of resolution of the impending decline. Commentators have found close similarity between O’Neill drama and Schopenhauer worldview [13]. Nietzsche was another determinable influence on O’Neill’s mind and art and number of his plays are reflection of Nietzsche’s arguments concerning human existence and metaphysics [14,15]. He was even “implacably hostile to the whole of morality as it has historically existed and his program is to sweep it away and replace it with the opposite and true values of nature and self-assertion”[16,17]. Moreover, the majority of humankind for him is characterized by slave mentality brought into established mode by the established church and the state. Since what he called the death of God, the slave ethics has become unstable. Hereafter, each man of worth, he said must begin to create his own values and meaning by taking control of his world, and if he is to achieve true stability and fulfill his creative potential, man must forget his old morality and devise a new basis for authority. In addition, this is what O’Neill’s several characters do. His men and women work out their course of life with little concern for what ethics or morality sanctions. Some of them are also explicit in their denial of God and create their own mother God (as for instance Nina in *Strange Interlude*). However, O’Neill has taken “those ideas and perceptions that meet his own psychological needs; the work as a whole has not been rationally pondered and re-patterned in his mind.” Thus, the personal context matters a lot in the depiction of moral chaos in his art. However, the perceptibility of such influences in O’Neill’s does not mean mere appropriation of ideas or modeling plays on them.

### 3. Action defies moral implications

Shaughnessy contends that regardless of his so-called contempt for religious values, especially Catholicism, “he did not truly elude religion’s net” [18]. His catholic training strongly affected his creative and imaginative sensibilities, which, writes Shaughnessy, is to be found principally in the choice and treatment of certain themes, revolving around those of sin, guilt, confession and redemption, without being “an apologist for ‘clean living’”[19].

Nevertheless, despite this stress on sin, the ways things turn out in the plays have enormous impact on the overall sequence of action. Therefore O'Neill's art may carry moral implication; and may imply the consequences of the sin as has been suggested by Shaughnessy, or may lead to redemption, but their manifestation in action in a particular fashion contradicts moral implications of the deed. In scores of his plays, the readers face performers' total immersion in constrained, recognizable and easily definable sexual/incestuous drives in the familial context. This is apparent in such diverse conditions and forms as father-son conflict as in *Desire under Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey*, father-mother conflicts as in *Desire under Elms* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and daughter-mother conflict as in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. One of the most vocal expressions of daughter-mother rivalry having sexual orientations is to be found in Christine's words to her daughter Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, "I know you, Vinnie! I've watched you ever since you were little, trying to do exactly what you are doing now! You've tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You've always schemed to steal my place! [20] Besides it could assume demoralizing and bitter jealousy between brothers for the desired mother as in *Beyond Horizon* and *Long Day's Journey*. Some prominent commentators of O'Neill have tried to inculcate personal oedipal matrix in artist's relation with the mother and other family members. Moorton, for instance interprets *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Long Day's Journey* in terms of artist's own oedipal association with the mother [21]. Mead has taken similar pattern of thought in his interpretation of a touch of poet. Bogard [22], Floyd [23] and Alexander [24] have variably hinted at the similar pattern of artist-mother relation in their respective studies. What emerges out of these incestuous conflicts and relations in the plays is a perfect example of psychic, psychobiological derangement and exhaustion. Jamie for instance in *Long Day's Journey* driven mainly by his incestuous/oedipal inclinations becomes sexually pervert, embittered, cynical and destructively jealous. His younger brother Edmund becomes the direct victim of his deranged and jealous disintegration in the play. Direct admission of responsibility for attempting to ruin younger brother Edmund comes in the last act. "Nix, Kid! You listen! Did it on purpose to make a bum of you. Or part of me did. . . . Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating vampires instead of stupid, diseased slob they really are. . . . Never wanted you succeed and make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet" [25]. Orin in *Mourning Becomes Electra* also undergoes the psychobiological decay in the course of play. In his case, frustration of incestuous drives for the mother and failure to find replacement in sister causes rapid and uncontrollable physical and sexual decline. He assumes a perfect impression of a neurasthenic person who could find escape from the trapped unconscious only through death. In *Strange Interlude*, the unconscious hold on the personas' conduct is replete with traumatized remembrances of their past existence, and readers experience their "constrained attempts both to contest and reinforce the causality of the past" [26]. Nina in particular reveals control of traumatized personal past on her mind and acts. It hovers around her dead fiancé, Gordon who was shot down over France before they could experience sexual fulfillment through matrimonial contact. Her entire behavior is reflection of the underlying traumatic stress caused by her fiancé's demise that ultimately settles into a fixed traumatized behavioral pattern with intriguing strength and constancy [27]. One of the most apt illustrations of their commitment to physical and sexual activity is to be found in Nina's frantic desire for sexual fulfillment through heterogeneous sexual contact. Her predatory sexuality even horrifies oedipal Marsden, "thinking with nervous repulsion, Nina has changed . . . all flesh now . . . lust . . . who would dream that she was so sensual? . . . I wish I were out of this! . . . I wish I had not come here today! . . ." [28]. Then in her desire for a baby, she is even willing to have selective breeding with the best (healthy) male available to her. The dialogue between her and Darrel for the purpose is terribly charged with rapacious sensual cravings and hunger for fulfillment. Darrel thinks this in terms of laboratory experiment with guinea pigs, "I can be for the purpose of this experiment, a healthy guinea pig . . ." [29]. He thinks a lot on this proposition and ultimately decides to be a guinea pig for her sake, "Am I right to advise this? . . . yet it is clearly the rational thing to do . . ." [30]. Nevertheless, , driven by his own lust for the woman, he fails to think about the demoralizing part of what he calls rational/scientific process. Nina frustrated by prospect of giving birth to healthy baby from her husband Sam forcefully presses Darrel to impregnate her for a healthy baby: Nina. (Gently) And I am Nina, who wants her baby . . . . I should be so grateful Ned. . . . I should be so humbly grateful. And Darrel responds after initial hesitation is overwhelming, yes – yes, Nina- yes- for your happiness- in that spirit! (Thinking – fiercely triumphant) [31].

In addition to these psychosexual derangements, quality of life as dramatized on the stage speaks volume of low human conditions. Life for example in early sea plays is conceived as a directionless journey, and the sailors project images of lost souls with no hope of change in their conditions (explained below). In *Strange Interlude*, O'Neill

dramatizes similar low and demoralized human conditions of all the principal characters: biologically exhausted (Nina Leeds) sexually frustrated (Nina, Marsden, Darrel) or charged for heterosexual contacts (Nina). Their worthless conditions is apparent in the very choice of words and phrases O'Neill uses in stage direction to highlight their moods and thought processes. One has to go through every page to find repeated use of such words and phrases as "mocking bitterly", "thinking resentfully", "irritably" "irritated-expostulatingly", "heatedly", "thinking cynically" "smiles with bitter self-mockery" "thinking wearily" "thinking with weary scorn", "thinking-terrified", "thinking tortured", "thinking desperately", "with fierce self-contempt", "thinking timidly", "distractedly", etc. All these are repeated in very first scene of first act of the play, exposing their low inner self. In *Iceman Cometh*, one of his master works several human deranged are seen trying to sustain themselves with last chance delusions. Their behavior as explained below is an embodiment of psychic inertia and complete immersion in their individual pipe dreams without any hope of improvement in the precarious conditions that surround them from the beginning of the play (explained below). Moreover, in *Long Day's Journey*, all members of Tyrone family live out their pitiful and useless lives in the Tyrone's summer home in New England. The mother is a dope addict, the father a destroyed parsimonious actor, one son a drunkard, sexually pervert, jealous of his younger brother to the extreme, and the other son a tubercular, hopelessly morbid expressing sense of life's utter worthlessness. They all suffer from guilty conscience for betraying each other in the past. They realize that they must live on in their slow movement towards death that creates a painful impression of life's continuity in pain and affliction.

A cursory glance at the central thematic concern of all his plays including the early ones would reveal a strong pull towards depressive and deathly life patterns. Death is the ultimate image in most of his early plays. For instance, there is a murder in *The Web*, military firing squad in *The Sniper*, accident in *Bound East for Cardiff*, suicide in *Recklessness*, *Abortion*, and *Before Breakfast*. Even in the plays of the '20s, death predominates in half of these. Both Jones and Yank Smith meet death at the end of their respective expressionistic plays; the protagonists in *Diff'rent* commit suicide; both Abbie and Eben move towards probable death punishment in *Desire under the Elms* for their horrible act of infanticide. Besides, the most terrible dramatic ending occurs in *Dynamo* in which Reuben Light first kills his girlfriend and then electrocutes himself. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* emphasis on grim images of death prevail the thought and structure of the play. Physical deaths in the play appear in the form of murder and suicide of Ezra Mannon, Adam Brant, Christine and Orin. The death also governs the trilogy in the historical context of civil war. Mannon arrives and declares, "All victory ends in the defeat of death" [32]. Orin's first expression on reaching home, "Did the house always look so ghostly and dead" likes a tomb. That's what mother used to say it reminded her of, I remember" [33]. Then the ghosts of the dead haunt and control the life and destinies of the alive. In the previous generation, before the play's first part begins, David Mannon was evicted by Abe Mannon because he fell in love with Marie Brantone – a nurse whom his brother had himself desired. Not content with this, Abe razed the family home to ground and build a new one. David later committed suicide. All events of the present in the play are triggered by this Abe, David and Marie triangle of the past. Then portraits of the dead Mannons hover over the play's action and the characters are overshadowed by the dead. Adam Brant – David Mannon's son – seeks vengeance on the family for his father's death by seducing Christine away from Ezra Mannon. Christine herself driven by lust for Adam conspires with him to poison Ezra and duly succeeds in her objective. However, Lavinia, who had already understood the truth of their relationship, convinces Orin both of the real cause of Ezra's death and Christine adulterous relation with Adam. Thus the death of Ezra triggers another sequence of the death controlling the conscious and the subconscious impulses and thoughts of the living. Lavinia strongly dispossessed by Ezra's death, instigates Orin to take revenge on the murderers. Orin himself driven by incestuous thoughts for mother kills only Adam. This in turn triggers Christine's death, who frustrated by her lover's death commits suicide. Orin too follows the established life and death pattern in the family. Frustrated by the death of his mother, he kills himself, leaving Lavinia to her world of social isolation.

Then there are plays where some particular biological disorder/infection threaten the life and point strongly to death of the victim. In *The Straw* advanced state of tuberculosis from which Eileen Carmody suffers threatens to kill her at the end of that play. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Robert – a self-portrait – is marred by his imaginative nature, his dreams and his bodily incapacities to sustain physical labor continually over a long period. His physical weakness includes his fragile health, and his consumptive state, which incapacitates him to carry on the arduous task of maintaining and developing agricultural farm. He fails to understand his biological strength which disrupts his married life as well as his functioning on farm. Marriage here itself is Strindbergian, an impediment rather than

a process of self-fulfillment and deeper psychological realization of the self and the other [34]. Both these in combination put extra strain on his body and mind, and bring out about decay and deterioration at the personal level as well as at the family level. Death is the only possible eventuality in his life which comes to all – to Robert's parents, to the child of Robert and Ruth, and at the play's and to Robert himself who dies with both emaciated body, and spirit. Disease – tuberculosis or even the fear of that – plays much more powerful role in *Long Day's Journey*. Right from the beginning, the entire family is fearfully struck by the possibility of Edmund being diagnosed as consumptive. The mere sound of his coughing alarms the parents and brother to a disproportionate level.

The overall impression created in O'Neill's art in the above explained fashion could hardly be taken as moralizing and exhilarating experience. It constructs extreme depressive impression of human existence. Brown [35] has justifiably used his depressive attribution style notion to highlight O'Neill's worked out vision in his art. First Brown defines this style as, "a cognitive style, a way of construing causality in one's own life, and is called either 'depressive' or the pessimistic attribution style. It is related to clinical depression but characterizes many people who have never been psychiatric patients. Then he is of the view that a person with "a depressive attribution style takes darkest possible view of any unhappy outcome in his life. He considers it to be internally caused by his own failing. He construes the failure in global terms, not just a little failing but also a very general one. He believes that failing is stable, it is always going to be that way" [36]. Although O'Neill himself, writes Brown would have refused to acknowledge it in his plays, but "in reading Sheaffer's biography, I have noticed how many quotations over O'Neill's full life span meet all criteria - internal, global and stable" [37]. Brown's descriptive analysis in the light of his depressive attribution style substantiates the overall consistent dark impression of human nature and lives in O'Neill's dramatic career. Importantly the drift towards psychosexual crises and death pattern are not followed by requisite and corresponding movement towards resolution of the crises or achieve enhanced understanding of their predicament. Any such movement would have probably rescued the sufferers and the victims from their trapped unconscious or misery and provided moralistic insight to their struggle for existence and coping with the crises.

#### 4. Lack of progression of action

Action in O'Neill's art as dramatized on the stage is not built upon the movement of plot to ultimate resolution with improved imaginative, intellectual insight and understanding. Tragic action as Porter contends is a movement from guilt through suffering to purgation and insight [38]. This factor characterizes Shakespearean tragedy in profound sense of the term. *Hamlet, for instance* effectively exhibits how a character undergoes a progression process from such negative mental states and psychic conditions as grief, pain, or "madness" to achieve positive psychic and emotive conditions and levels of intellectual relief and development in understanding/insight. This change is imperceptibly and naturally transferred to the audience and readers. Jorgensen analyses the progression in this play in terms of therapeutic effect, which is about his regaining of sanity and moral greatness in the middle of the "of those wandering on crooked ways of hypocrisy, dissimulation, and untruth. . . ." [39]. Jorgensen underscores the close relation between his thought processes, therapeutic relief, improved understanding of his predicament and his soliloquies. He contends that the process of recovery in the prince works through his grand soliloquies. His first soliloquy, writes Jorgensen is a reflection of deep-seated grief disturbing rational thought processes. In speaking to his mother, for instance writes Jorgensen he is unfeelingly polite and the tone of the soliloquy and its principal direction points to self-punishment. This self-directed anger becomes much more evident and direct in the second soliloquy, but without his ability to convey it to others, "a dull and muddymettled rascal," "an ass". However, the change starts coming over, contends Jorgensen as the plot proceeds to its resolution. "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56-88) Jorgensen writes is crucial in this progress. The soliloquy, writes Jorgensen is usually interpreted as a contemplation of suicide. "It is certainly, but not totally. Hamlet is still more grieved than angered, more intent upon punishing himself than upon punishing others". The change however appears to be setting in at this vital stage, and is to be observed in the contrasting thoughts revolving around "suffer" or "take arms" in the soliloquy. From this point onward, writes Jorgensen Hamlet's anger begins to assert itself outwardly. He is found lashing against Ophelia and women, clearly indicating the object of his anger and pain. The anger is against his mother, though it is first misdirected against Ophelia and all women. By the end of III.ii, a significant change has set in as Jorgensen asserts. He "is no longer a victim of melancholia, because he has turned the frightening force of his hatred upon the one person who has most cruelly betrayed him and his

father". When he is next seen in the closet scene, he is now not talking to himself, as was case so far, but to another personality who happens to be his mother. Jorgensen terms it the most successful dramatic scene in the play; "Except for the soliloquies, it contains Hamlet's most heartfelt lines where the anger is not so painfully disguised". In the final Act, however, writes Jorgensen, "Hamlet regains full potential by directing his anger against the aggressors, and not against himself". He calls it a new insight that the hero develops in the course of his aggression against the aggressors that shows his therapeutic recovery from initial shock as well as his moral nature. Jorgensen, however, has not hinted at the transference of the same therapeutic progression to the readers. It is important as the whole sequence of act (physical as well as psychological) that unfolds on the stage keeps the readers occupied as well, and they are bound to feel the same as the hero undergoes the process of change.

In O'Neill's plays, on the contrary a static impression imposes itself on the personas conduct and structural pattern of the action on the stage. Unlike Hamlet, a self-developed and self-sustained progression in thought, feelings, moods and action is obviously lacking in many conditions. What specific progression, for instance terrible Tyrone's in *Long Day's Journey* achieve in difficult to assert. A paralysis hangs over the thoughts and feelings that all the four characters reveal on the stage. The memory of Mary's suicide attempt, death of young Eugene and knowledge of Mary's addiction continue to haunt the family up to the last Act and denotes a renewal of the cyclic process of pain and sufferings along the same lines [40]. Had she not uttered the last sentence "that was in the winter of senior years", writes Chotia, the play might have ended and reached "some kind of resting place, however, dismal" [41]. That is not the case and the play seems to have obvious revival of earlier depressive mood and communicative pattern. Mary's mental paralysis springs from her post marriage terrible experiences with James that clashed directly with her pre marriage ideal of a happy married life. Constant traveling with her actor husband, living in cheap and dirty hotels and giving birth to babies there in extremely unsanitary conditions, death of Eugene, all have created a traumatized hold of the past on her mind. Therefore, her present life is consistent return to these past moments for all the ills in the present condition. Past for her becomes the Present and "it is the future too" [42]. Next to Mary, Edmund is the most important persona in the play. Largely modeled on self, he represents the determining grip of all pervasive and constrained thought processes without ample opportunity or inclination for self-initiated and self-sustained improved vision of their predicament. He has "sardonic temperament grins contemptuously and provocatively and that too frequently and grows violent when teased and confronted towards his father, mother and brother equally". His sense of gloom is equaled by his strong desire utter aloofness from the impending environment. Repeated recitation of what Golub [43] calls "decadent poetry" amply reflects his sullen state. Tyrone terms his recitation of lines from the poetry of Dawson and Baudelaire as "morbid nonsense", "morbid filth", and "filth, despair and pessimism". The impending crises create severe desire for liberation from bodily existence reflected strongly in his desire to loose himself in the midst of fog and sea:

The fog was where I wanted to be . . . . Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted -- to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself. Out beyond the harbor, where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land. The fog and the sea seemed part of each other. It was like walking on the bottom of the sea. As if, I had drowned long ago. As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within the ghost [44].

Later on Edmund burst out his inner longing for death in other memorable expression: "I will always be stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death" [45]. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the personas suffer from an intellectual and emotional malaise that makes them victims of unending process of self-torture. The non-conclusive malaise even denies them the opportunity to grow positively in their predicament. Shaughnessy [46] analyses the play as spiritually lethargic, and the relationships dramatized here in his views lack the "dynamic power that permits normal growth and development. Enclosed in a climate of hatred and distrust, resentment and guiltiness, understanding and vigorous exchanges are frustrated again and again. It is in Lavinia's ending, however, that the destructive unending process of torture and denial emerges so effectively. Alexander [47] sees here a clear instance of "the most passionate affirmation" of love among all and imparting a true classical grandeur "worthy" of

this Electra figure. In her desperate cries of love, she reads exaltation of her tragic grandeur. Shaughnessy regards her as impressive as Antigone and having that "implacability of her resolve" [48]. However, what she chooses at the end only the bond with the dead which concludes the play. This ending helps to understand the play's message in its entirety. While, all the characters live and die to show definite psychic entrapment in their past and drives, Lavinia lives to exemplify the living of that very mode even after the death of all other family members. Importantly before she decides to lock herself in with the dead Mannons, she undergoes a virtual physical and psychic transformation from a religious to very sensual, and in the process, she assumes Christine like appearance. This phenomenon of personality transformation expresses her increased inner association with the sensual Christine. Her trip to Pre-moral Island with Orin reveals her sensual self so clearly that it even shocks Orin. As she returns from the island trip, she reveals complete sensual part of the self in her last meeting with Peter. The furies of lust overwhelm her at the end to the disgust of Peter. He is simply shocked by her frenetic expression of "Kiss me! Hold me close! Want me! . . . Take me in this house of the dead and love me! [49], but the disclosure of her sexual initiation with the native at the Island repels him, "(shrinking from her aghast brokenly) Vinnie! You've gone crazy! I don't believe you - you - Couldn't! Her bold reply, "Why shouldn't I? I wanted him! I wanted to learn love from him—Love that wasn't a sin! And I did, I tell you! He had me! I was his fancy woman! Simply horrifies him and he grows convinced of her evilness. She is left alone to her furies of lust to punish herself declaring, "It takes Mannon to punish themselves for being born!" [50]. His *Iceman Cometh* dramatizes another form of inert and paralyzed mental and psychic conditions of all the performers that naturally block the plot from achieving meaningful resolution. The play is painfully concerned with several human deranged trying to sustain themselves with their last chance delusions. One thing that ties them is that all of them have betrayed the causes they had individuality upheld in the past, but now appear to them lost and suspended in a "timeless void" [51], they have given themselves up to drunkenness to deny consciousness as it causes them pain of their failure and betrayal. Importantly, they have given themselves up to this kind of existence "a self-imposed reductivism" [52] which create a vast cleavage between the outer world and the personal world of avoidance and stasis. They have no option, but to remain in that abysmal condition, holding on to their illusive "pipe dreams" of faith in tomorrow. Hickey is an outsider to this world of stasis. His previous visits to these dwellers were always a source of merriment and in a sense the continuation of their statuesque in that bar. This time he comes with an avowed aim to liberate them from their destructive pipedreams. He presents himself as a man who has found peace in his own life by getting rid of his pipe dream of alcohol and adultery sustained by constant forgiveness of his wife. He tempts them to rethink about their respective pipe dreams and compels them to come out of these to face the outer realities. His premise is that once they get rid of their pipedreams in the forms of illusions, they would have the happiness in their life. Hickey's enthusiasm makes them shun their cherished illusions for the time being, but the result is quite demoralizing and self-defeating. They realize that life for them without their illusions is unendurable. In fact it takes out the very will to live, and therefore without illusions their life assumes a steady movement towards death. Only return to their earstwhile condition of avoidance and stasis could ensure their existence. Hickey, the so called liberator (messiah) is terribly mistaken in thinking himself as a person liberated from his own pipe dreams. In fact his life is a movement from one illusive pipe dream to another one. The last pertains to his illusions about his love for his deceased wife. He is robbed of this illusion as well with the realization that he actually hated her and wanted to get rid of her. When this realization strikes him he cries out in despair that he has not "got a single damned lying hope or pipe dream left" and declares himself ready for "the chair" (Act 4). He appears virtually wrecked, murderer and a lunatic who is bent on driving others to destruction through robbing them of what sustains them in their ruined lives. The need of illusion may be a necessity for some to live, but in themselves they do not amount to a reality. Similarly they do not constitute a universally observable human paradigm. On the contrary, they signify a crisis of soul and spirituality. Shaughnessy [53] contends that a true catholic meaning appears in what these derelicts project. "The greatest sin" in O'Neill's universe is neither drunkenness nor adultery, as it is rather to rob the other of his hopeless hope" [54]. Hickey in this sense commits this greatest sin as he comes to rob and shatter the false sense of hope that the Harry Hope's inmates have accumulated over the years. There may be a reflection of O'Neill's abandoned catholic brought up in the play, but like other examples discussed here, the human predicament here in the play is not accompanied by improved insight and understanding of the personas as well as the readers. The ultimate impression is thoroughly depressive and nihilistic, and the readers' predictability to this end is hardly in doubt. Bloom has rightly termed it the play where "harsh expressionism dominates . . . where the terrible confessions are not made to priestly surrogate but to the fellow sinners, and with no hope of absolution. Confession becomes the other station on the way to death,

whether by suicide, or by alcohol, or by other modes of slow decay"[55]. In his *Lazarus Laughed*, a different kind of spiritual/ethical stasis governs personas' thought processes. Quite differently this play is about a kind of unprecedented and unusual liberation from death and fear of death, which as O'Neill writes is the root of all evil, the cause of all man's blundering unhappiness" [56] and herein lies the ethical crisis of the play.

Liberation from fear and death finds eloquent expression in the play's protagonist and other performers' repetitive declaration of "death is dead". O'Neill does not deny relationship between pain and death. Therefore, Lazarus' proclamation of "death is dead" [57] becomes a slogan to liberate people from death and the associated fear and sorrow. The affirmation of life that ensues from repeated chant of Lazarus and his followers generate a feeling of life's ultimate triumph in the face of ever threatening death, murder, massacre; rather Lazarus' follower throw themselves laughingly on the swords of the legions and stab themselves in a mood of exhilaration. It simultaneously expounds their liberation from the perpetual fear of death and extinction. Lazarus' pre-resurrection life had its substantial share of gloom and sufferings. He had suffered from the pain caused by the death of his children, barrenness of his wife Miriam, loss of father's wealth after he had taken over the management of affairs. Nevertheless, post resurrected state bears no impression of any pain that had beset him in his first life phase. His faith in life is so strong in this second phase that he even declares in the midst of the burning flames that there is only life. His last words to Caligula are: "Fear not Caligula! There is no death". Secondly, message that Lazarus spreads associates life with laughter and life's ultimate triumph over death. In reality, laughter assumes the position of necessary corollary to condescendence to what Lazarus proclaims among all segments of society, nation and groups. Larner [58] terms his laughter as "liberating laughter" which is a window to the "eternal round of life in which man dies, but Man lives, and death is dead". However, the stress on liberation from death or fear of death may not be taken here as an affirmative treatment of faith in life as such an approach would contradict the artist's persistent concern with death in the entire range of his dramatic career. In fact, the repetitive chant of death is dead far from establishing glorified and optimistic faith in eternal life reflects a teasing preoccupation with a mood that denies the existence of death as essential to life process. Berlin [59] contends that the yes for life in the play is too excessive even for the dramatist who thrives on repetition and usually makes it effectively serve his purpose. Thus the play denies opportunity to grow positively and develop insight that would mean living with a natural faith in life and death as essential parts of process of life.

##### **5. Lack of social dynamism and appeal**

One very important component of moral/ethical aspect of art lies in its broader social appeal. O'Neill's art is lacking in this ethical aspect as it does not treat art from social perspectives. The lack of social dynamism in analyzed is art could be from number of angles. In the first place, his drama is painfully concerned with what transpired in his life and therefore it is primarily concerned with communicating essentially personal experiences in terms of feelings, moods and thought patterns to the readers/audiences. Scores of studies testify this aspect of his art [60-65]. The strict autobiographical nature of his art preoccupies the readers' interest and keeps them entangled in the labyrinths of his mental states and emotive conditions. The psychoanalytic account of these states and conditions further insulate his art from achieving broader social appeal. Secondly and importantly, O'Neill's personas reveal a constrained range of emotive and psychic experiences and expressions that detach them from broader/global identification across the cultures. His early sea plays, for instance create a situation of a directionless journey, and the personas constrained mental and emotive condition is underscored through their peculiar talk that hover around death, women and prostitution. It is to be discerned in verbal expressions of the personas and preoccupation in such activities as drunkenness, prostitution and violence. The important thing is that all these as dramatized in early sea plays were to become central part of O'Neill's vision and dramaturgy in his later plays and dramatic structures. The crew of the sea plays belongs to different nationalities as their names and dialects emphasize. Yank is an American, Driscoll, Irish; Cocky, a Cockney; Smitty, English; Ivan, Russian; Olson, Swedish; Paul, Norwegian; and Scotty of course Scottish. This coming together of people of diverse nationalities speaks volume of the nature of life that each one has been living since they embarked on their sea routes. It signifies their rootlessness, dissociation from familial affiliation, and from realization of social bond and responsibility. Their detached and alienated interior is effectively revealed through certain moods and expressions that persist throughout these plays. Such verbal expressions as death, possibility of death, or the fear of death for instance, tie together Yank and Olson in a similar mood in two different plays. Yank in *Moon for the*

carribies fearing death, declares, "D'yuh think I'm scared to \_\_\_\_\_" "I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_ . . . I'm going to die, that's what" . . . [66]. Olson on the other hand demonstrates his fear of death in *Voyage* in reflecting upon the possible death of his mother at home: "My mother get very old, and I want see her, She might die and I would never \_\_\_\_\_"[67]. Alienated and detached mental and emotive conditions is further highlighted through depressive account of sea life. Yank, for instance in *Bound east for Cardiff* gives expression to this condition in his words: "Just one ship after another; . . . and when we get into port, just drunk endin' up in a fight, and all you money gone, and then ship away again . . . travellin' all over the world and never seein' one of it [68]. Similarly Olson in *Voyage* reiterates Yank's depressive account in these words: "I come ashore, I take one drink, I take many drinks, I get drunk, I spend all money, I have to ship away for other *voyaeg* [69]. This alienated situation is further strengthened by repeated images of drink, women, and sexuality. *Moon for the Carribies* early on establish a world of sexuality, drink prostitution, homosexuality, and the crewmen total absorption in this alienated world. Driscoll's expression, "I'm dyin' wid impatience to have dhrink; an' that blarsted bumboat nygur woman took her oath to bring back rum enough for the lot av us whin she came back on board tonight [70] reflects the same mood. He is ready to "skin her black hoid off av her if she goes back her words" in response to Lamps statement that she may not bring any rum for them. The arrival of these women with the drink is followed by a brawl. Sensitive and dreamy Smitty uses drink to "stop thinking" and eradicate what he calls beastly memories, but it only accentuates his meloncholininess. In *Voyage* again drink regulates the mind, behavior and nerves of these crewmen. Driscoll and Ivan, for instance drink themselves into a stupor. Ivon's lies like a blarsted corpse whom even "Gabriel trumpet itself cudn't rouse him" [71]. Then O'Neill artistically strengthens this detachment and alienation among the sailors through the images of fog in the plays of the series. *Bound East for Cardiff*, for example places the sailors on "a foggy night". Here dying Yank's impression of haziness and mistiness in fact indicates the swift approaching of death and becomes the symbol of the rest of the crew's existence in a state that is shrouded in isolation and similar to a world of approaching death. Earlier Davis in the play "damns this fog" that separates them from any sight of the wanted shore. In *Bound* images of darkness establishes these moods. In the forecandle the dense fog makes Yank to ask, "How'd all the fog git in here?", and Davis to "dam" it [72]. Later Yank, becomes more and more depressed by the fog and darkness and becomes more and more depressed by the fog and the darkness and declare "I wish the stars was out, and the moon, too;; I c'd lie out on deck and look at them, and I'd make easier to go – somehow". Then with his hope of light being frustrated, Yank sees a "pretty lady dressed in black" and dies.

The same social detachment, aloofness and alienation are to be observed in his plays of middle and late dramatic career. In *Desire under Elms*, *Mourning becomes Electra*, *Long day's Journey*, *Touch of Poet and Iceman cometh*, different behavioral patterns unearth the characters' social detachment and deliberate social withdrawal. In *Desire* mood of separateness is established through Eben's description whose eyes "remind one of wild animals in captivity", carrying un-subdued spirit [73]. However, the determining factor in causing social detachment/withdrawal is that of incestuous love as referred above. These emotions hardly permit social cohesion and affiliation and in fact attempt to create social crises and disintegration. Similarly, in *Mourning Becomes Electra* the character social detachment/withdrawal is revealed through total preoccupation of the principal personas in the realization of their incestuous desires. It even necessitates creating a fantasy world of pre-moral island world. Similar, but much more imaginative and creative dramatization of aloofness/isolation finds terrible expression in *Long Day's Journey*. First of all through imagery and appropriate stage directions an atmosphere of isolation for the whole Tyrone family is created and maintained till the end. The title itself is replete with meaning of isolation. It induces feeling of approaching night that will finally envelop them in darkness and ultimate isolation. The image of night as reflected in the title is further accentuated through the image of fog in the play. The play no doubt opens in the morning but there is a definite possibility of the return of the fog and Mary is sure in the first Act that the fog will return with the night. Hazy afternoon in Act II scene ii testifies her belief in the return of the fog. O'Neill uses the symbol of fog to draw reader's attention to the terrible aloneness that Mary undergoes in the play. A correlation is established between Mary's detached personality and surrounding fog. She speaks out this in her conversation with Jamie, "It's very dreary and sad to be here alone in the fog with night falling" [74]. Beside this impression and symbolic meaning, the fog also represents Mary's morphine addiction; another facet of her inner urge for withdrawal from impending familial situation and fear of death and disease that surrounds Edmund's life in the play. Thus, O'Neill artistically merges fog and dope to highlight deep inner isolation and desire for that in the principal character in the play. Mary herself in Act III highlights this association in these words: "I really love fog. . . . It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it

seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more". The same impression about the association between fog and morphine is recognized by family members. Edmund, for example equates the morphine-induced wall of around his mother to fog: "The hardest thing to take is the blank wall she builds around her. Or it's more like a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself" [75]. This wall condenses as the play grows, and Carpenter [76] argues that as the day fades, Mary "gradually regresses from the sunlight world of reality to the fog-bound world of dope and dreams".

Porter[77] in his analysis of the play elaborates the persistent mood of alienation and impending crises/pain in the play in terms of descent into darkness through his theory of linear time movement. One particular aspect of this linear movement is that of variation in the fog density in the play. In the morning the sunshine becomes a "faint haziness" by lunch, increasingly dense by early afternoon, and a thick fog by evening, resembling "a white curtain drawn outside the windows". By midnight, the "wall of fog appears denser than ever". This accumulation of the dense fog is reflective of the density of the chaos in their lives. Its return in higher degree at the night also informs the reader of the return of the miseries with greater intensity after a daylong introspection and nostalgia around guilt, death, disease and shattering of illusion. Edmund recitation of Baudlair's verse in Act IV capture this unending process of their self-torture: "If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually.". Similarly Brietzke uses the phrase "ceaseless struggle" [78] to describe the above named unending process of torture and pain in this family repetitive acts in the play. Her final sentence, he writes substantiates the long journey they have to take that is however without the predictable end. Indeed, they are all messed up, it's nobody's fault, and they keep going in a direction that they cannot determine, always banging into each other, always hurting each other, mostly unintentionally, but unavoidably. Night brings a new day and the torments begin again as the fog rolls in once more. Furthermore, their aloofness, withdrawal and detachment from social contacts in moves in two circles; one broader that include all the four Tyrones, and the second minor that Mary and sons have built around themselves in that broad isolated circle. Mary's micro circle is her room to which she retires of and on to meet her morphine requirements. The playwright through effective stage directions and dialogic pattern highlights her necessity to retire to the isolated rooms desperately. The sons also try to have their own smaller circle within the broader circle where they can satisfy their drunkenness and peculiar association. These micro circles set them further apart from each other. Mary leaves the male family members for the first time on the pretext of seeing Bridget, but her return clarifies that she had retired to have a bout of opium to relieve her growing nervousness. She enters the room with suspicious glance from one to the other, and all of them instantly get conscious of what she has been up to. She tries to evade their eyes and divert their anxious glances by talking about her rheumatism. Act I closes when all males left her alone to herself. Here in one of the most impressive stage direction, O'Neill builds up her peculiar desire to have another bout of opium: "She grows terribly tense again. Her eyes open and she strains forward, seized by a fit of nervous panic. She begins a desperate battle with herself. Her long fingers, warped and knotted by rheumatism, drum on the arms of the chair, driven by insistent life of their own, without her consent" [79]. The strange coordination between the inner compulsion to have morphine and her bodily response is amazing and has an awful effect of her tense nerves on the readers. When she appears in Act II, she has already taken her "medicine" and looks sharp. The impression of her eyes has specially been emphasized. They look brighter and she looks "a little withdrawn from her words and action". In Act I, scene ii, Mary's aloofness and desperation to return to her private circle is revealed through another effective stage direction. She is terribly nervous, obviously tense at the lunch and her detached behavior even frightens the males. She remains detached throughout the scene and her anxiety to have loneliness for specific morphine purpose is manifested when they leave her alone at the end of the scene. Initially her expressions are full of apprehension, but it soon gives way to relief on being: "you wanted to yourself again. You wanted to get rid of them. Their contempt and disgust aren't pleasant company. You're glad they're gone. She gives a little despairing laugh" [80]. The sons likewise need their own moments of being alone in their own micro circle to give vent to their own feelings and particularly have their bouts of drinking. Their desperation for such moments is evident when in Act I, finding no body close by, they rush to gulp more brandy than what James would have allowed them in his presence.

In *Touch of Poet* (written in 1936, revised in 1939, 1942 was originally conceived as the opening play of his ambitious Cycle of A tale of Possessors and Self dispossessed) once again the theme of isolation amounting to actual withdrawal has been dramatized to support the treatment of such themes in other plays of his dramatic

career. Here in Major Con Melody, O'Neill creates a self-indulgent romantic dreamer. Fiet terms him a "displaced person in an alien society, tied to the past of cultural conflict – peasant versus aristocrat- which is accelerated by new social attitudes and conditions"[81]. The study, however, constructs his personality in terms of deliberate, self-willed withdrawal from social role due largely to certain personality traits. A son of an Irish Peasant, but because of his upbringing and military heroism during Napoleonic wars, Melody develops certain personality traits that greatly render him incapable of social effectiveness. He creates fantasies about the real and imagined past that generates haughty mannerism and insulates him from tenacious poverty that his wife and daughter have to bear. His haughty mannerism is made evident through such stage directions as "He is dressed with foppish elegance in old, expensive, finely tailored clothes of the style worn by English aristocracy in Peninsular war days" [82]. His frequent recitation from Lord Byron's *Child Harold*: "I have not loved the world, nor the world me; I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed" [83] speak of his estrangement from the environment where he lives and even from his family. However, his subsequent humiliation at the hands of police and public beating shakes his pride and forces him to adopt his father's peasant mannerism. He comes home with "big raw bruise on his forehead. . . eyes empty and lifeless" [84], but most importantly thoroughly shaken, out of himself. The symbolic, but terrible gesture of shaking the old ingrained aristocratic superiority complex that had strained his relation with the family and distracted him from the peasants is that of his shooting of the mare. Gregan reports the incident to Sara in these words: "He kilt the poor mare, the mad fool! I found him on the floor, with her head in her lap, and her dead" [85]. Fiet describes Melody's pitiable closure when he stands stripped off his self-imposed haughty posture as failure to find "a role suitable to the needs of his nature"[86]. In *More Stately Mansion*, another of his cycle plays, O'Neill shows his preoccupation with the theme of social detachment in the prominent personas' conduct in the peculiar setting. The play has been read as "the depiction of American greed leading to alienation from the land" [87]. But Petite [88] reads it as a reflection of psychological states. He describes it as a play about "people whose need for protection drives them to build around themselves" [89]. The walls, however, she writes do not provide them security. On the contrary they "guarantee destructive isolation" that drives them to a point of despair to create madness. She builds her thesis of psychic conditions through her theory of power that could pose a threat to the individual and control of others will ensure personal freedom. She explains it through the characters of both Simon and Deborah [90].

## 6. Conclusion

Pakistani society is predominantly averse to increased military and political role of America in and around the country. There has been consistent rise in anti-Americanism in the print and electronic media, religious classes, religio-political parties and middle class moderately educated civil society. Being predominantly a religion-oriented set up, American liberalism is not very welcome among the majority moderately educated middle class and lower low/moderately educated and religious class [91]. Such unfortunate incidents as murder of innocent Pakistani citizens by American embassy official in Pakistan, and burning of the Holy Quran by Terry Jones has further sensitized the civil society to American political clout in the region and liberalism. This development coincides with shift from British literature (popularly termed English literature) to American literature at graduate and postgraduate levels across the country. In the past, British Literature and English Language propagation as an international language [92] served the British imperialist cause of accentuating cultural, intellectual and literary hegemony on the subjugated class and nation in South Asia and elsewhere. One of the corner stones of American foreign policy also works on the same note of expanding control and hegemony through language and literature. As per this policy, American missions in Pakistan encourage greater level of American study courses in Pakistani universities and colleges. This impression is strengthened by free distribution of State Department language Teaching FORUM and policy of creating awareness of American culture, geography and society through US State Department sponsored English Language teaching projects in Pakistan. These projects are specifically for the young Pakistani students [93]. However, the peculiar nature of moral crises, and reflection of modern philosophical ideas as propounded by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Freud and their impact on O'Neill and succeeding American writers is directly in conflict with the majority civil society beliefs [94]. The universality myth is no longer in practice when it comes to this level of crises in American art. Resultantly, there are chances of accentuation of conflict and rise in anti-Americanism in the traditional Pakistani society. However, there is a need of further research into the area. The teachers responsible for teaching modern American Literature, O'Neill in particular, must engage their students in research activities to look into this area and develop guidelines for teaching American literature in

changing global perspective to their students. Through these activities, they will be able to frame questionnaires, and respond to the area meaningfully.

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