

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

The Quest for Self: An Eternal Struggle in *The Iceman Cometh*

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

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March 2008

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my teacher and thesis supervisor Mr. Rajendra Kumar Pantheon, lecturer, Central Department of English, Kirtipur, for his invaluable guidance, inspiration and encouragement throughout the study without whose support and guidance this thesis would not be completed in this form.

I am highly indebted to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head, Central Department of English, Kirtipur, for accepting my thesis proposal and encouraging me with scholarly comments and suggestions.

I am equally grateful to my respected teachers Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, Dr. Sanjeev Upreti, Dr. Arun Gupto, Dr. Birendra Pandey and Mr. Puspa Acharya for providing me constructive comments, guidance and information about the research work.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to my friends Krishna Niraula, Suresh Dhungana, Bal Kumar Pandey, Rishi Bhandari and Archana KC who have contributed a lot from their own sides to precede this work. I express my special thanks to my parents for their invaluable support during the completion of the thesis. Finally, I extend my thanks to my entire well-wishers who provided their direct or indirect support to me in the course of writing.

March 2008

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Abstract

O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* is the portrayal of the dreadful condition of existential men in the modern world. All the characters in the play suffer from alienation, horror, frustration and failure but still they keep on struggling to ensure their identity, position and existence. Everyone in the play pretends to be in his/her own world and to be alien from others but still enjoys life in relation with others. Parritt's identity is mixed up with Larry and, on the other hand, Larry is recognized only through the anarchist movement and Parritt's mother. They are totally encircled among them but their attempts of affirming existence through illusory and alcoholic world never finish. Finally their attempts end at the personal failure and realization of absurdity in modern life. Their quest to meet the self identity remains incomplete, and ultimately they accept the futility of their attempts losing confidence and admit the absurdity in human life making their futile struggle eternal.

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I. Failure in Getting Self: An Introduction

The aim of this study is to inquire into the identity problem of the characters in *The Iceman Cometh*, a play by Eugene O'Neill. The struggle in this play is essentially the same as the struggle between the conscious intellect at war with the unconscious drives, the laceration of love and hate in every close human relationship, and the desperate search for self among the mask. This study concentrates on the disoriented action of protagonists to the motifs and tries to show the vision of modern human beings as victims of circumstances they themselves create. However, they seek real peace and try to prolong their lives. In this regard their frustration, agonies, tension and sufferings can be supposed to be their way to achieve real peace, a meaningful life. On the same ground, they have been involved in something they want to forget; they are in pursuits of forgetfulness, of sleep, of death. They spend most of their time in blissful or tormented alcoholic slumber where all bums have no thought of anything beyond their individual well-being which by now has been reduced to the form of drunken senselessness, and the play turns out to be a study of the impossibility of getting at truth, indeed, a warning of the danger of going after it. Being an alcoholic and creating an illusory world, they pretend to be free from all kinds of burden they have. They quest the self aliening from the responsible and reality burdened world living at the same world which itself seems paradoxical and problematic, too.

The theme and the concept of *The Iceman Cometh* are somewhat paradoxical and confusing in mirroring the human problems and dilemmas in the chaotic flux of the twentieth century life. The play is primarily an allegory of man's pitiful estate, a parable of his search for identical self. Each character has the story of fraud and failure behind him; each lives in an alcoholic 'pipe dreams' that they try to lengthen and celebrate freely. But they never can escape from the reality and become the victim of their own dreams. Each character must

repeatedly make a backward journey, groping back into the past for the self he has lost. Only through this act they can relate the present with the past, the consciousness with the unconscious, and by doing so they can achieve complete success or personality what they ignore, and brings tragedy of their own.

The ultimate redemption or the self is possible only in death, but the characters in the play desire to celebrate life with redemption, that is ironic. And the same motif is misguided in action. The saloon is peopled by a collection of society's failures: drifters, pimps, police informers, former anarchists, failed con-artists, ex-soldier, and prostitutes. Their lives have been lived and lost; only memories remain, voiced despairingly through bitter nostalgia.

When the play opens, the characters are still precariously intact. Each member is still attempting to conceal the depth of his resentments and trying to indulge fully in the illusionary world created by him. But during the time which action covers, the final debacle takes place. It is always the fact that men are moved by forces; castrated by the past whose influence or reason can't be justified. Frederic Nietzsche in his essay 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of history for Life' defines human beings as a carrier of the past. For him human beings are history ridden. He says, "Human can not learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he can run, this chain runs with him . . . he (man), on the other hand, braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways . . ." (3).

But O'Neill's bums discard this fact and make impossible efforts to run away from it which ultimately turns to be the doom of life. O'Neill applies the Nietzsche an psychology of compensation for weakness to all who work for a goal beyond their own individual perfection. His characters have the make-beliefs that whatever the world they are celebrating is unaffected by either sides which they use only to compensate for inner failure. In fear of losing their inner power, they are nervous, fretful and discontented. So, the characters in *The*

Iceman Cometh pretend to be cheered up by taking the help of alcohol and intoxication which only arouse pain to them by commemorating their unsuccessful past.

O'Neill's characters are unable to act upon anything to do with the present and future. They rely upon liquor generously furnished by the proprietor as an escape from the outer world. But no longer couldn't they be the reflection of their own history. Slade and Hickey are the two crucial figures in the play; we learn more about them and their past than we do of the others, and in Parrett we meet Slade's past. It rather suggests their interdependency more than free to others.

Almost all the characters, in this play, fluctuate between two parts: visible and invisible man. If their visible, outer man, insists on liquor and to be utopist, the inner one refutes it expressing hatred that leads them to commit error and in doing. So they already plant seed of frustration. The play is heavy with the gloom of loneliness, death, suicide, murder, guilt, pity, and the need for illusion to survive. The existential theme of being asked to face life when there is no meaningful life to be found may have been too much for an American audience. Set in 1912 New York, *The Iceman Cometh* spotlights the failed lives, empty hopes, and perpetual pipedreams of the stew bums, anarchists and hookers of Harry Hope's seedy saloon. This play is rich in dissected wasted lives and failed dreams. There is an iceman – Hickey. He is an iceman in the sense that he kills his wife as a frost kills vegetables and citrus crops also attempts to kill the pipe dreams of the occupants of Harry Hope's hotel and succeeds in killing Larry Slade's pipe dreams as well.

The Iceman Cometh repeats the metaphor of self-delusion. Chronologically, this play, which Eugene O'Neill (1888 – 1953) wrote in 1939, belongs to the later phase of his literary career. So, in this play, he expresses the complex viewpoint of modern human beings. Almost all characters are guided by depression and the play exposes the human need for illusion as an

antidote to despair. Many critics consider this play his greatest work; it looks at a group of drunken outcasts, who are stripped of their illusion by a misguided, guild-ridden savior.

In the play, the single motive of the residents of Harry Hope's saloon is to celebrate their life without any hindrance. Saloon itself stands as a world where people orient there only for drink and to fantasize their illusionary lives. Likewise, regarding its setting, some critics point out the autobiographical elements, too. O'Neill's suicidal attempt in 1912 is reflected on the frustration and suicide of Parritt. O'Neill's personal life was as tumultuous, colorful, and tragedy-ridden as his play. But despite its somber themes this play was written in joy, in the pure pleasure of recapturing a past that he had himself once known but that was not connected with his family.

The most ironic instance in the quest of their identical self in *The Iceman Cometh* is that almost all characters take alcohol as an antidote but alcohol itself is the great nostalgia-invoker bringing back the past in a special way: simplified, happier than it really was, falsified, a little island in time that is warmer than the dreary desolation of present reality: the pipe dream of yesterday. Rather alcohol becomes for them only a depressant than the remedy of pain. The effect of alcohol on relationship is presented in a variety of frames: spousal, parent-child, old friendship and ancient cultural animosities. For the people who are interested in examining possible variants on the theme of alcoholism in the early 20th century in urban America, this play is a good place to begin. In fact, if alcohol was removed from his play, the play itself would disintegrate. But the point to be made is that O'Neill doesn't describe the effects of alcohol realistically; rather drink in his plays is a formal device used to achieve certain effect. So, alcohol, in the play, itself stands as a character that helps to generate the pretending self of the each of the character.

The play forecasts that in all their lives men are doomed to their past, being a history-ridden creature. They live in a fantasy cheering the illusion as they have no connection with their own past which ultimately leads them to the tragedy of life.

Thus, this study is centered on O'Neill's problematic play *The Iceman Cometh*, posing the problems and tendencies of human beings. Why does Hickey kill his wife? Why does Larry escape from the movement? Why does Parritt betray his mother? What are they seeking? And again, what may be the cause of Hickey's surrender and Parritt's suicide? How does the same alcohol which they thought the antidote of despair, stands as the tragedy invoker? These are the questions that may be asked frequently after going through the play. The present study aims to move around these problems. In fact, man is helplessly trapped by unknown force. S/he only desires to go somewhere else in search of privacy that assures him/her security and sense of happiness. For this purpose s/he propagates a world in own fancy. But within that assumed world s/he lives the puppet lives full of psychological disjuncture. It only sounds paradoxical and ironic in action. Thus, the present study tends to explore how the protagonists fail on their mission and what makes their attempt eternal. So, the basic underlying assumption of this study is about the mismatch between the characters' action and their inability to be forgetful and alien from their past and surrounding that make their quest for self an eternal struggle.

To prove the hypothesis, the first emphasis has been given on the text itself. Besides, to interpret and analyze the play, and to understand the identity problem of the character, available supportive materials have been consulted. Likewise the commentaries, articles and reviews related to thematic aspect of the play, as secondary materials have also been incorporated. Library consultation and visiting to the authentic internet websites will be an asset.

To locate the existential instance on action of the characters, the theoretical observation is essential. The first chapter, therefore, gives general instruction and observes the past studies of the play. In the second chapter, existentialism as the theoretical tool is widely discussed. The third chapter has been devoted to analyze the text with high focus on Sartrean concept of existentialism; and the findings of the study and the conclusion have been given in the fourth chapter.

This study also has some obvious limitations. It does not discuss the language, education, social and economic status of the characters nor does it look at the playwright's biography and his other works as well. The study takes shape through textual analysis. The focuses have been given on the analysis of the principal characters Hickey, Larry and Parritt. However, to justify the points other minor characters are not neglected.

Literature Review

O'Neill's play *The Iceman Cometh* has got wide responses since its first performance in 1946 from different perspectives. Some critics comment it on the basis of naturalism, some concentrate on the amalgamation of the traditional setting of drama and the modern absurd theme. John Patrick Diggins takes this play as a means of motivation and self-realization. In his article "The secret of the soul: Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*" he writes, "*The Iceman Cometh* would leave Americans in a weary confusion, for its author had no intention of making Americans become happy about themselves and their country. But O'Neill did want to help Americans understand themselves" (63).

But Mary McCarthy finds it hollow. She, regarding *The Iceman Cometh*, critically critiques over O'Neill that he is commonly described as a great "writer" who could not "write". She complains that O'Neill has no idea of how real drunks behave: no slobbering, no shakes, no hangovers, no "semi-schizoid silences, no obscurity of thought, no dark

innuendoes, no flashes of hatred . . . none of the terror of drink" that culminates in the most horrifying sight, the "destruction of personality" (51). Criticizing its emptiness, she asserts:

The play seems nevertheless estranged from all influences and impressions. Its solitariness inside its rigid structure suggests the prison or the asylum or the sound of a man laughing in a square, empty room . . . O'Neill tries to situate his nihilistic philosophical outlook in the lower depths of the derelicts dive. His intention is symbolic and philosophical, but unfortunately he can not write Platonic dialogue in proper style. (53)

She finds nothing to be suggestive in the play but Sophus Winther calls it O'Neills most "symbolic" (72) whereas Doris M. Alexander finds it "expressionistic" (63). Regarding the thematic aspects Cyrus Day interprets this play about man's desire and confusion at the same time. He further calls it "a most nihilistic play"(86) as well. Reason behind the writing of this play Eric Bentley comments:

The Iceman, of course, has big intentions written all over it. He has written of the death of an old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me anyone trying to do big works nowadays must have this subject behind all the little subjects of his plays. (45)

The Iceman Cometh underlies that men are responsible for their own suffering, problem and sickness. It is a tragedy of modern wastelanders who are spiritually dead and live the lives propagating illusion only. They, who think their prides save them, commit a great sin that can not be pardoned. When they go through their own past, there ultimately arises the question on living. Hence, tension occurs in them and their living too.

Similarly, on the basis of its historicity, Lawrence Dugan takes it as the document of the industrial labor movement of 1905-1917 in the United States. He states:

Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* contains a number of allusions to the Industrial Workers of the World-the Wobbliest. But *The Iceman Cometh* provides only slight mention of the Industrial Workers of the World -the Wobbliest (IWW), though anyone seeing the play or reading it becomes quickly conscious of something called the movement. (109)

O'Neill tries to cast the meaning behind the extraordinary behavior of the habitués of the saloon – the meaning behind their deeply troubled words. Brooks Atkinson comments the play not only about the need of illusion to maintain an interest in life but also comic by taking some funny dialogues of the characters, since they live in a world of befuddled fantasy and talk big to compensate for the puniness of their spirit (review of *The Iceman Cometh* 33).

Eric Bentley reveals that O'Neill himself was influenced by Greek tragedians and by their works dealing with the theme of true nature of mankind and their fate. He finds this play a “democratic snobbism” where there are “no princes and heroes, only bums and drunks” (Trying to like O'Neill 38).

O'Neill gets wide range of response upon the technical aspect of the play, too. Basically the play is taken as an example of the amalgam of the traditional setting and modern absurd theme. Robert Burstein finds O'Neill universalizing Ibsen's theme. He states:

Despite the naturalistic setting, the play is much too schematic to qualify as a convincing evocation of reality. Each act offers a single variation on the theme of illusion; the action never bursts into spontaneous life; and the characters rarely transcend their particular functions. A thematic realism rather than an atmospheric realism

prevails; O'Neill seems reluctant to let the play escape his rigid control.

(95)

Burstein further observes *The Iceman Cometh* on the thematic ground asserts that O'Neill has abandoned myths of incest and romantic love for deeper probes of character. He learns to combine the solipsistic subjectivity of Strindberg with the more detached, ordered and indirectly biographical approach of Ibsen (93).

Similarly, John Henry Raleigh finds it revolutionary in technique. He sees O'Neill a step ahead to his contemporaries. Concerning his challenge to the tradition, Raleigh writes, "O'Neill, attempting a similar (as Melville challenged the ancient epic through his *Moby Dick*) metamorphosis in the realm of tragedy, challenges the historical European notion of tragedy even more insistently" (18). In Introduction of *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Iceman Cometh* he quotes this play "a parable analogous to the famous parable of the cave in Plato's *Republic* where parable ends with the emergence of the philosophers from the cave and stand straight in the sun and see the world for what it is. But here the analogy ends with the "motley collection of derelicts who finally scurry back into the alcoholic darkness of their 'cave', Harry Hopes Saloon" (14).

However, Rosamond Gilder understands him, in the case of *The Iceman Cometh*, a self-centered who gave constraint roles and areas for the characters to perform; and was unaware about the audience. For him, the action taken by subsidiary characters is unjustifiable to them. He states:

The subsidiary characters are not sufficiently important or rounded to demand the time and attention they absorb. They are each set in their groove in the first half hour. They never emerge from the pattern to take on human proportions. Mr. O'Neill seems to underestimate the ability of the audience to grasp his idea, or perhaps more truly he has so fond a

remembrance softened by time and distance of these denizens of his kingdom of despair. (30-31)

Characters practice the constraint authority, the limited area provided by the playwright himself. They act, sometimes unwillingly, whatever playwright desires as a slave of writer's pen. If the case is so, how they can be free in their life; rather their pretension of being free makes them an object of humor. It is ironic that O'Neill's *Iceman* should have achieved success at a moment when so many playwrights were selling maturity, insisting that their characters and their audiences face the facts. The play becomes a defense of those damned tomorrow dreams that Hickey on stage and less attractive men off stage would destroy, presumably for the sake of the dreamer.

The Iceman Cometh is a play about the agony of life. The clients of the tavern have brought their misfortunes on themselves, and to some extent they realize this. The play is more universal; while at the same time it also seems more of a personal confession. One can not forget that many of O'Neill's plays deal with the man who has lost his soul, and struggling in the world where no clear way-out is there. The same human dilemma is analogous to contemporary America.

Speaking simply and innocently a man may say that O'Neill tries to picture out the undesirability of modern American wastelanders and their infertile living with hypocrisy. They fail to grab the time and have no courage to endure the scars given by their own past, that they take as burden and desire to be away from it.

The observation made so far show that the play has undergone diverse sorts of readings and interpretations. Yet, its minute study of the action taken by the characters for the struggle for self and the ultimate reality they have or are bearing is lacked. Its paradoxical themes and actions decorate this study which tries to speak of human problems and

conditions in depth. Therefore, the present study is just an attempt to add one critical interpretation to the play.

II. Existentialism and the Question of Identity

Existentialism is a philosophical movement, which studies human predicament as an isolated existence in the universe, which does not possess inherent truth, value or meaning. To exist means to face the uncertainties of the world and commit oneself passionately to a way by distinguishing one from other. So, it negates simple adaptation of certain belief or going along with the mass society to get meaning in life. The focus of existentialism is on “being” and “subjectivity” as opposed to logical reasoning and objectivity. Individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge is foregrounded in existentialism. As the existentialists are influenced by the idea of subjectivism and individuality, they have challenged the traditional idea about objective truth and absolute being. They have focused on human being – human concern. They believe that human being is determined by his own choice and action. Thus, existentialism talks about individual existence, freedom and choice.

Though existentialism as a philosophical movement is usually traced back to the nineteenth century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, the second half of the twentieth century emerged with a new school of writers with their message of awkwardness of human situation and purposelessness of our existence. This group of writings mainly included existential thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Jean – Paul Sartre. In their writings, we confront the dark, bleak and purposeless aspect of life. They sought to show that man is not at home in this universe, but thrown into it that he has no divine savior or superpower above him. Man has been held as prisoner in an unsafe and vulnerable position and human body, which has its own obligations and limitations that keep one always in failure, anxiety and finally death.

Existentialism is regarded as a modern thought in the field of western philosophy and literature but it can be traced back to Shakespeare, to Pascal, to St. Augustine, and even to

Socrates. It dates back to man's pre-philosophical period, too, where they attempt to attain self-awareness and understanding about existence and the world around us. The concept of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that the modern existentialists are trying to re-establish. Ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from nature to man, man as the center of existence. The nineteenth century witnessed the contending philosophies i.e. pragmatism against idealism, positivism against irrationalism and Marxism against democratic liberalism. As a consequence the contemporary postwar literature was divided such as Marxist literature and the literature influenced by the existential writers. After 1930, and particularly after the Second World War, many writers lost belief in the doctrines that viewed man as the manifestation of an absolute value. Terrified by the nuclear holocaust, people of the western world began to think the role and activities of an individual as irrational. The old concept like unity, rationality and even Christianity stopped working (Perry et al. 755). People saw the world totally absurd, not governed by the laws of providence but by the pure chance and contingency. Anxiety and uncertainty ruled the world. This situation of mankind is known as 'existentialism'. Encyclopedia Britannica observes existentialism as:

It can insist on the transcendence of being with respect to existence, and, by holding this transcendence to be the origin or foundation of existence, it can thus assume a theistic form. On the other hand, it can hold that human existence, posing itself as a problem, projects itself with absolute freedom creating itself by itself, thus assuming to itself the function of God. As such existentialism presents itself as a radical atheism. (73)

Existentialism as a doctrine does render human life possible; a doctrine which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity. The term "existence" comes from the Latin root ex 'out' + sister 'to stand' (Cud don 316). Thus,

existence means to stand out in the universe that is against us, and existentialism means “pertaining to existence”. Nowadays, the term existentialism is used to describe the existence of human, his place and function in the world. J. A. Cud don, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, says, “the term (now) applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world and his relationship, or lack of one with God” (310).

At the crux of existential philosophy, the main concerns are related – what authentic route people may take in the godless world having no values and certainties, how people can cope with the dealings of anxiety, caused by the modern society and what one can think about his own life if there is no universal truth and over-arching meaning. Along with these concerns, the consideration of the role of time and the awareness of death become the challenge to the existential philosopher. That’s why, almost all the time it is charged that they are on the ground of pessimism.

When Hegelianism was questioned by Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard and German idealist Arthur Schopenhauer who advocated irrational as real, people lost religious faith. They both turned the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and living aspect of human existence, which is just opposite of Hegel’s objective and abstract academization of reality. Kierkegaard discusses man’s essence with the existential predicaments and limitations like hope, despair and anxiety. His works discuss man’s existential crisis with consciousness. On the other hand, the horror of the First World War caused man to abandon faith in social progress. People were expecting a radical social change but Russian revolution couldn’t address people’s hope and dreams rather turned into a totalitarian tyranny. As a result people no more believed on rationality, unity and harmony.

Likewise, during the Second World War, barbarism, mass murder and genocide compelled man to lose the religious and spiritual faith. Therefore, the horrific situation of the

war evoked the sense of despair, alienation, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, helplessness and the spiritual emptiness that widely spread in the world society. As a consequence, people's formerly held certainties; the beliefs in the concepts like unity, rationality, morality, value and Christianity were collapsed. This realization gave rise to the idea that human existence is meaningless. There was nobody to accompany them and to share their problems. People felt alien in the universe. They were free and responsible for their own actions. Nobody was there to guide them. That's why; the contemporary writers could not escape themselves from the situation and captured the human loneliness, meaninglessness of actions in their works. The spiritual void, sense of insecurity and cosmic absurdity were captured by the existential writers. Man was just given existence without fixed essence. He was entrapped by morality, fear, uncertainty. No "supreme" being or transcendent absolute was there to fulfill the human life. Richard Tarnas states:

The anguish and alienation of twentieth century life were brought to full articulation as the existentialists addressed the fundamental naked concerns of human essence-suffering and death, loneliness and dream, guilt, conflict, spiritual emptiness an ontological insecurity, the void absolute values or universal context, the sense of cosmic absurdity, the frailty of human reason, the tragic impasses of the human condition. (309)

Insofar as existentialism is a doctrine about human nature, and it is therefore not surprising, quite apart from any impulses originating from Kierkegaard's special concern that most existentialist philosophers have taken up well-defined positions in relation to theology.

In the early years of existentialism in postwar Europe, the emphasis was indeed on gloom and hopelessness. But nowadays even in Europe, existentialism comes to present itself as a positive philosophy, a philosophy of hope. The negative aspects of human existence - such as pain, frustration, sickness and death - become, for existentialists, the essential

features of human society. But still there is no single definition of existentialism for its principal theorists did not adhere to common body of doctrines. Rayon gives an explanation:

Hence there is no single existential philosophy and no single definition of the word can be given. The problem of man is central and that they stress man's concrete existence – his contingent nature, his personal freedom and his consequent responsibility – for what he does and he makes himself to be.

(639)

There are apparently two groups of existentialist thinkers – the theistic and the atheistic. The theistic or Christian group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. Similarly, the atheistic existentialists include Sartre, Nietzsche and Heidegger. The theistic existentialists believe in religious mysticism. Modern man, they argue, can entertain anxiety by submitting himself to the will of God without the intervention of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical church. But the atheistic existentialists, on the other hand, deny the concept of god as an authentic shelter. They regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and support less creature. To face this fate, the atheistic existentialists try to form a system in which an individual is paradoxically free and condemned to choose. At present, it has become an established theory and is employed in interpreting literary text.

Soren Kierkegaard advocates that individual existence is prior to everything. For him individual accounts a lot and so search for objective and absolute truth is meaningless.

Supporting this concept, Jostens Grader remarks:

Kierkegaard has a sharp eye for the significance of the individual. We are more than the children of our time. And moreover every single one of us is unique who only live once. . . . According to him (Kierkegaard), rather than searching for the truth with a capital T, it is more important to find the kind of truths that are meaningful to the individual's life. It is important to find "the

truth for me". He thus sets the individual, or each and every man, up against the "system". (379)

Kierkegaard was the first to assert truth is subjectivity, and that all knowledge relates to existence or only such knowledge as has an essential knowledge. Kierkegaard is different from other existential philosophers in the sense that he believes in the existence of the God. But he takes it as a matter of faith. Through faith only we feel the presence of God. But to keep or not to keep is a matter of choice. Kierkegaard does not dictate anything. For him, religious life is characterized by faith. Kierkegaard also emphasizes the absurdity, which is manifested in the doctrines of Christianity. He stresses, "The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that god has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being . . ." (trad. in Wiener 189).

Like Sartre and Camus, Kierkegaard supports choice. He believes that we are free to make choices and one exists up to the point of making choices. As he thinks, choice is criterion less and it is the individual himself who fixes criteria; but in making a choice, he says, religious command is higher than the ethical one (Wiener 192). He has faith in God but he does not believe in any doctrines, so he insists, "Christianity is, therefore, not a doctrine, but the fact that god has existed" (Faith 857).

Similarly, Kierkegaard believes that truth is subjective and universal. There can't be any truth which is objective and universal. Instead of single truth, there are many truths which are personal. The emphasis on individuality is obviously emphasis on subjectivity. What is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong depend on the individual's decision and thought. For him, traditional values do not work and can't govern the individual. If values attempt to govern the individual, it is necessary that one should protest. In fact, the ethical represents the universal: it refers man to a set of rules, which renders his conduct

comprehensible to others. He stresses that one should protest against the prevailing system and affirm existence by making one's own existence.

Real existence, for Kierkegaard, is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of god, Christianity and man, in the external world. But Nietzsche as an atheistic existentialist calls Christianity as a slave morality and holds the idea that religion provides no truth because God is dead and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disabled people whom he hates. Human beings (and all of life) essentially seek to enhance their power. Even the alleged selflessness of religious individuals is mere camouflage for selfish pursuits. Christianity is also unhealthy because it encourages extirpation of the passions, attacking, in effect, the willfulness which is essential to human vitality (Dictionary of Philosophy 293).

For Nietzsche, western philosophical tradition and Christianity both were corrupt, since they taught abstractions. Western education system is corrupt, since it attempts to prepare the historically educated man; knowledge does not do anything except make him live in abstraction. For him, life should be the center of everything. Nietzsche attacks the general conception of the Christian God and took them as corrupt conceptions as he said there is no God. Gods are, for him, those who are superman, waging war over the masses of inferiors and who are free from any restrictions imposed by the society. In his famous essay "The Death of God and Antichrist" he writes:

The Christian conception of God – God as good of the sick, God as a spider, God as spirit – is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! (912)

Like other existentialists, Nietzsche also does not believe in the idea of absolute truth that governs an individual. For him, individual is the product of his own actions made by his active choices at present. As God is dead, there is nobody to govern an individual, rather he governs himself. In this sense, he emphasizes in the activities of individual and subjective intentions. He supports the idea of individual freedom. He does not accept any sort of imposition laid on an individual. An individual should master oneself. In this way, he supports master morality against slave morality.

Nietzsche is quite positive towards deliberate death (suicide). He seems aware of the fact that death can be one of the choices that a person makes. For him, death can also be a solution somewhere. So, he states, “the thought of death is a great comfort: it is a good way of getting through many bad night” (trad. in Reginald Hill 348). Death is not surrender; it is a means to achieve some goal; brings fulfillment. For Nietzsche, the role and position of an individual is supreme. Individuality is the focal point for Nietzsche. Similarly, he does not take death (deliberate death) negatively. An individual may use it as a weapon.

Similarly, Heidegger analyzes the way of the livings of human beings as distinct from things which he calls 'Dasein'. According to him, man exists in an already existing world which could no more exist without him than he could without it. He exists only as a particular 'he' (Wiener 193). Heidegger talks of the fact that man is born into a world which he did not make and which, hence, sets limits for him.

For Heidegger, the universe is alien to us and we should face explicitly the problem of being as we have to create our own existence by making choices. Heidegger's theory of 'Dasein' a particular way of existing is difficult from other ordinary existence of things. Heidegger rejects the classical Cartesian concept of consciousness and replaces it with the concept of Dasein. The ontological problem related with Dasein is to find out who the one is and what to do with oneself, or as Nietzsche said, how to become what the one is. Heidegger

believes that we have been living in an incomprehensible, indifferent and alien world. He believes that being is not realized in normal situation. It does not occur all the time but it is realized in the state of boredom, anxiety or ill. So, in “What is Metaphysics?” he states, “it irrupts when one is bored, profound boredom drifting here and there in abysses of our existence like a muffing fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals being as a whole” (4).

As Heidegger says, man is bound yet free, free yet enslaved. Man is not an isolated phenomenon; he exists in the midst of the world and is therefore, a being-in-the-world. Man may change the world to suit him or his individuality may be hidden by the everydayness of the world. Heidegger does not deny that an authentic relation between man and man is possible but he gives emphasis to the fact that collective existence robs him of his selfhood and turns him into an impersonal entity (called “das man”).

Heidegger has made a distinction between being and Being. He advocates that the forgetfulness of Being (individual) into the beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence. To get back the lost being, Heidegger suggests “to return back into the group of metaphysics, and find the roots of our existence” (Hellmann and Eielson 808). Similarly, Rayan comments, “he (Heidegger) held the belief that man should face explicitly the problem of being, he has to determine his own existence, create his own possibilities and make choices and commitment” (756). Thus, Dassin and other beings are not same as Heidegger shows. He differentiates Dassin and other beings:

Dassin, this particular way of existing, is different from the ordinary existence of things in the world around us. The difference is that things are determinate and have their distinctive properties. That is their kind of being, but the sort of being that I manifest is not that of a thing-with-properties. It is a range of possible ways to be. I define the individual I become by projecting myself into

those possibilities which I choose, or which I allow to be chosen for me. Who I become is a matter of how I act in the contexts in which I find myself. My existence is always an issue for me, and I determine by my actions what it will be. Human existence is always a projecting of oneself into the future: it is at any moment being essentially 'on the way' from what we were and sought to be, towards what we will be. (Tad. in Meitner 183 – 84)

For Heidegger, the feelings of dread due to the awareness of death may incite us to flee away from the problem of Being. However, if we take the dread of death as an opportunity, we may construct our life unique and our own. That's why one has to tolerate lots of problems in his life. The redemption is possible only through freedom. According to him, the final assumption lies in that freedom, which time alone provides the freedom to make our life what we choose in to be and thereby to change from thrown-ness to resolution (Dread Reveals Nothing 260).

Heidegger defines human beings as a thrown creature in this world for no discernible reason whereas Albert Camus defines human being as an absurd creature. Camus believes that human is an isolated existence in an alien universe. The universe does not possess any inherent truth, value or meaning. For him, the condition of man is absurd and one's search for a purpose is meaningless and fruitless. Therefore, it is absurd to seek meaning in this universe. We are simply keeping the illusion that the universe has a meaning. But there is nothingness in the world. Commenting upon Camus, M. H. Abrams writes:

Albert Camus views a human being as an isolated existence who is cast into an alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning, and to represent human life – in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness where it must end – as an existence which both anguished and absurd. (1)

At the center of Camus's thought is the thesis that human existence is absurd. We have eyes for seeing but for seeing actually to occur, there must be something that is actually seen. Suppose now that everything that can be seen were hidden from view. We should then have "the faculty of seeing that took us nowhere" and we should be aware of living in "an unending night" (Meitner 63). In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus himself states, "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. He is an irremediable exile . . . This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity" (68).

Camus sees the condition of modern man similar to that of Corinthian king Sisyphus. Sisyphus is the martyr and teacher to all modern men, who because of his disobedience to God and his passion of life, suffers eternal torture heroically. So, like Sartre, Camus supports choice. Such choices lead human being towards repetition as there is no meaning in the universe but man always aspires to achieve it. Camus tells us that human, like Sisyphus, make their own fate, their own choices and those extents are in control of their own destinies (Elman and Fiedelson).

Camus supports choice but he does not believe on nihilism. He does not take death as a solution. He believes that one has to take the challenge, but not accept death. Man should not feel hopeless and surrender to death committing suicide; rather he should revolt against the absurdity by taking guidance from the absurdity itself and should make his life meaningful out of these absurdities. The true living of man is the maximum struggle against absurdity. When man struggles against absurdities in the world; he appears to be existed in the real sense.

Camus believes that the choices lead us to absurdity but joy comes out of that absurdity. So, emphasizing absurdity Camus points out that when man's needs confront with the unreasonable silence of the world, man realizes absurdity in life which is not in 'man' nor

in the 'world' but in their presence together. For man, this world where he has been living all his life, at the time of self awareness, he suddenly finds himself in an awkward, foreign and indifferent. Then, at such a situation, every object around him, which he had been so much familiar with for long, becomes mysterious. Then all the things will lose its meanings and the values that we had attached them earlier appear foreign, strange and irreducible to us. Camus argues that this strangeness of the world is the absurd. He further insists that man finally encounters himself, his own body, his own consciousness, his own existence and finally concludes 'it is absurd'.

Although Camus advocates freedom, individuality and choices he never takes suicide (death) as the mode of existence because he believes it as not a proper solution of existential crisis. It's a cowardly act. But Jean-Paul Sartre takes death like any other choice. According to him, by sacrificing oneself one can protect one's choice. One can win something and bring fulfillment. In this sense, it is also a mode of fulfillment. He believes that, "to make oneself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon others is still to choose, and accepting death (suicide) is one mode among others of being-in-the-world" (57).

Sartre mostly focuses on personal freedom and personal responsibility. He defends existentialism against the charge that it gives a bleak view of humanity; it neglects what is good in human life; and it denies reality and seriousness. Sartre believes that existentialism is humanism since it takes human understanding as its points of departure. For him existentialism means "a doctrine which makes human life possible" and, in addition, it "declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity" (Existentialism and Human Emotions 10). Thus, existentialism gives dignity to man. It encourages human actions being optimistic philosophy. Sartre believes that since experience has shown man to be invariably inclined to evil, there must be firm rules to restrain them, otherwise we shall have anarchy. Therefore, he suspects over these people who reproach

existentialism as a realism of despair, anxiety and nihilism by saying that “what is annoying them is not for its pessimism, but much rather its optimism” (12).

Sartre’s primary focus is on existence. He believes we exist, appear on the scene, make choices and create ourselves. For him, there is no predetermining essence but one creates essence from the choices one makes. He thinks freedom and existence go together because “freedom is existence in it existence precedes essence” (Sartre 66). Regarding this fact, Thomas Meitner also comments, "At the heart of his philosophy were a powerful notion of freedom and an uncompromising sense of personal responsibility" (379).

As Sartre talks about freedom he also says that freedom of an individual depends on the freedom of others. In human life, two problems consistently arise-either to choose his own liberty by suppressing others’, which frames the “good faith”, or to accept the liberty of others’ by repressing his own, which frames “bad faith”. But both this options are impossible as one is not completely free from the intervention of another. As regard this, Sartre states:

We want freedom for freedom’s sake and in wanting freedom we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends on ours. Of course, freedom, as the definition of man does not depend on others, but as soon as there is involvement, I am obliged to what others have freedom at the same time want my own freedom. I can take freedom as my goal only if I take that of others as a goal as well. (46)

Sartre defines his central thesis that human beings are essentially free. He frequently talks about freedom. But he does not take freedom as blessing rather as a curse. For him, “man is condemned to be free” (23). Condemned, because he did not create himself; yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does. He thinks that every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man. It is because as one is free to choose

the course of life, he is responsible for his action in life. Life is as one chooses to be. For him, there is no accident in life, community events, which suddenly bursts forth and involves one in it do not come from the outside (54).

Although Sartre thinks of freedom as condemnation, he also says that as honest man always keeps up the quest for freedom. One uses freedom to achieve freedom itself. In this context, he asserts:

I declare that freedom in every concrete circumstance can have no other aim than to want itself, if man has once become aware that in his forlornness he imposes values, he can no longer want but one thing, and that is freedom, as the basis of all values. That doesn't mean that he wants it in the abstract. It means simply that the ultimate meaning of the acts honest man is the quest for freedom as such. (45)

Sartre believes that one cannot be an individual without choice. Even when we do not choose anything, we choose not to choose. Then choice is something, which an individual keeps on making. Sartre argues that conscious is being for itself because it is always free to choose and also free to negate the given feature of the world. He insists that one may be coward or shy but such behavior is always a choice and one can always resolve to change.

Similarly, Sartre distinguishes two kinds of realities: *For-itself* and *In-itself*. According to him, whatever exists and is conscious - not only conscious of other things but also of itself - is For-itself. For-itself means to exist for oneself, for own contemplation and as a matter of one's own concern. Consciousness of human being, for him, is always self-consciousness as well as awareness of other things, events and people, one exists for oneself in his/her conscious life - that is each of human being is For-itself. On the other hand, whatever is real but not conscious is In-itself. In-itself has no will or idea. Although no

conscious being change over time, they have no conception of what they will become.

Therefore, human beings are For-itself but the elements of our bodies are In-itself.

Sartre goes against the charge against existentialism that it dwells on human degradation; paints up everywhere the sordid, shady and slimy; and neglects the gracious and beautiful, the bright sides of human nature. And he advocates existentialism much liberal and humanistic than naturalism does in this day. That's why, Jostein Garder also comments, "Sartre said 'existentialism is humanism'. By that he means that existentialism start from nothing but humanity itself" (Sophie's World 456).

Sartre goes in counter of rationalism that takes essence prior to existence and said that existence proceeds essence. It means that a human being exists before he or she has an essence. An essence is what something is; it is the character, nature or function something; it is what defines the things and distinguishes it from other kinds of things. In the case of human being, the essence is who he or she is. According to Sartre, human beings donot have fixed, full-fledged essences at birth, whereas nonhuman things are stamped with an essence from the first moment they come into being. Instead of having an essence at birth, we are free. We each create our own individual essence - our character - through the way we exist as human beings, choosing and then freely acting on our choices'

Having analyzed the ideas of these leading existential exponents, we can make conclusion that the basic theme of existentialism is 'existence'. Existential philosophy does not take all the things and beings in the sense of existence; it means a being alive does not mean to be in existence. One exists only when one is conscious of one's existence. In this sense, human being exists while animals and plant live, because we are conscious of our existence but animals can't. At the state of anxiety, frustration, alienation, one becomes conscious of his/her existence. So, we shouldn't seek meaning but create meaning through action. We are what we make ourselves. Therefore, the existence is prior to essence.

Similarly, freedom is a major theme of existentialism. Although freedom is not celebrated, it is the basic factor to maintain our existence. In other word, freedom and existence go hand in hand, and freedom of individual depends on the freedom of others. Man has freedom of choice and because of it one chooses what to be and what not to be, and becomes responsible of his actions in life. So, an individual is totally responsible for what s/he is. Thus, individualism is also a matter of emphasis as there is no determining factor for an individual except oneself.

Alienation is also one of the major themes of this philosophy. We are the beings into this alien universe as there is nobody to care or guide. Every individual finds him/her alone and isolated even among the relatives. In this sense, sense of alienation is common phenomenon to man which poisons human relationship.

Another basic theme of existentialism is resistance. One rejects the social norms, customs and the system of society to maintain the true sense of individual existence. The social mechanism always imposes a burden and aspects human being to follow it. But man is stereotyped and does not do anything new, if he blindly follows the tradition of society. The existential man is not governed by the laws that the society has formulated. Rather one governs himself by formulating laws for himself. In this sense, one is the future of one's life.

Existentialists' obvious talking phenomenon is anxiety. When one becomes conscious of one's existence, realizes himself unable to meet his goal finds unsuccessful to act efficiently, perceive accurately, create indefinitely, he feels bored. When the sense of dissatisfaction and despair arises, and anxiety irrupts but still there is no regret or remorse or excuse. In this sense, "existentialism is optimistic doctrine of action rather a doctrine of despair" (Sartre 51).

The existentialists conclude, therefore, that human choice is *subjective*, because individuals finally must make their own choices without help from such external standards as

laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are *free*; but because they freely choose, they are completely responsible for their choices (The World Book Encyclopedia). The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. They criticize the *self-deception*. They insist that individuals must accept full responsibility for their behavior, no matter how difficult. Furthermore, since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they are “condemned to be free” (Sartre).

Since *The Iceman Cometh* does not center with a particular protagonist rather it equally presents a number of characters struggling hard by using their own freedom of choice, making their individual brand of morality, value and ideology upon which they are committed but finally they get nothing except pain, suffering and dread of death which are the features of existential man. Although alcohol is not good for health almost all of the denizens of Harry hope's saloon choose it as the sustaining element. They regard free drinks as the best medicine for what ails them, and end up spending much of their life in a stupor.

Similarly, neither the single character is having 'good faith' as Sartre defines to choose his/her own liberty by suppressing others' nor anyone is under 'bad faith' as to accept the liberty of others' by repressing his/her own. Due to the dread of death Don Parritt left the anarchist movement in search of his self aliening from the movement and indulging on stupor. But still he is in suspense, and ultimately accepts the deliberate death (suicide) which, he thought, can alive his identity rather to be a part of his mother's measure accepting the bombing; what an existentialists does.

Therefore, the succeeding chapter will deal the theme of existentialism i.e. freedom of choice, alienation, despair, failure, frustration and realization of futility of individual determination especially in the main characters like an escapee of anarchist movement Don Parritt, a hardware salesman Theodore Hickman (Hickey), a former anarchist Larry Slade, the street walkers Pearl, Margie and others.

III. The Quest for Self: An Eternal Struggle in *The Iceman Cometh*

The Iceman Cometh, one of the latest plays of Eugene O'Neill, inquires into the paradoxes of existence. It is about a revelation of man's unconscious hatred and desire for death where he ultimately thinks the end of the infinite quest of self. In it there is an understanding of the deeper elements of human nature, a comprehension of the confused instincts that make up the life of mortals, and an evocation of pity for the tortured existence of dazed mankind. So, the real province of *The Iceman Cometh* is that deep, tortuous, problematical territory of human nature where there are two final questions: how much guilt can a human being stand and how can s/he, no matter how degraded the circumstances, preserve some shred or semblance or simulacrum of human dignity. Though man has been defined by Nietzsche as the "laughing animal", *The Iceman* would seem to lean to the Freudian proposition, that he is best described as the "guilty animal". Thus the play is a vast exploration of degrees of guilt from the easy going complaisance of the 'tarts' to the deep-dyed torment of Hickey and Parrett. But the play is not really about the difference between illusion and reality, but the difference between two realities: on the reality of belief, the other the reality of the unrecognized and unknowledgeable forces of existence.

Harry Hope's bar - the setting of the play, where the derelicts take rest having sweet illusion - stands for release, peace, security and freedom for them because bar keeps them far from their sense of guilt and sin. This is noteworthy that the setting of the play from the first act to the fourth is shown in the same place, which gives hints that the characters are ensnared in the bar where they make a new world on their stupor and indulge in it celebrating their so-called free self. Everywhere they face burden, live the bounded and psychologically chained life where they never can practice their existence and as option they are at the bar taking shelter because they have no place to go anymore. The occupants of the bar are homeless

people and it is the best asylum for them. It keeps them comfort and warmth. So, they can't leave it. In reality it represents homelessness of their real selves. That's why, Larry, a keen but unmoved observer, thinks that this is the last spot for each of them and no one can succeed in freeing him/herself from this place. When Parrett asks him what kind of gathering is it, Larry sardonically speaks of the bar thus:

LARRY: What is it? It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The

End of the Line Café, and "The bottom of the Sea Rothskeller!"

Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they're going next; because there is no farther they can go. It's a great comfort to them. (I. 25)

Larry's secret wish here seems to regress to a safe heaven, where his universe is no longer disturbed by any tormenting human problems. Harry Hope's saloon is a labyrinthine world within which their image of living self is locked and their harassment both in day and in night begins because there is no exit for them.

Larry thinks Harry Hope's bar as the last spot not only for himself but for all the bums, where they can exercise their free self, and hence he tries to persuade them not to be worried about their next journey, for they cannot step on the further way. It seems that his self image barricades him within it and the bar only where he and all the derelicts can be happy in peace makes their vision of evil narrow and their insight shallow. But Larry's supposed peace is broken when Parrett arrives in his world. Parrett's sudden entry into the bar, where Larry once imagined that nobody could disturb him, puts him in very critical condition. That's why, in the course of acquaintance when Parrett introduces himself as Larry's old friend and Hacky shares greetings to be a formal, Larry being raged counters with "mind your own business, Hacky. He's nothing to you - or to me either" (I. 84). It clears at the very beginning of Parrott's arrival that he desires to be aloof from any sorts of concern with

him. He found himself clinging around a lady (now Parrott's mother) when he was an active member of the movement, and quitted it in search of his self identity. But still he can't celebrate his free self rather has to live as a part of others. It makes him a warrior.

Hickey, the salesman, also tortures Larry. He assists Parrett with his full support and insists to have pity over him. Larry, in one hand, tries to forget everything of being past, and Parrett, on the other, stands as the mirror. Between these two polls Hickey is casting the mirror towards Larry forcing him to accept anyhow the past only to have the present. Then, being fade up, drawing a deep breath and closing his eyes - as if he were trying to hammer something into his own brain he bursts:

LARRY: All I know is I'm sick of life! I'm through! I've forgotten myself! I'm drowned and contented on the bottom of a bottle. Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery is nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life, and in the end they rot into dust in the same grave. All things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death. So go away. You're wasting breath. I've forgotten your mother.

PARROTT: (*Jeers angrily*) The old foolosopher, eh? (*He spits out contemptuously*) You lousy old faker!

LARRY: (*So distracted he pleads weakly*) For the love of God, leave me in peace the little time that's left to me! (II. 129)

Larry's strong sensitive feelings have poetic quality. He, therefore, is an introvert and is in destitute state. He drinks cheap alcohol and yells in drunkenness. Besides, he is passive and wants to be alone. His introversion can be observed through his predictions, philosophical hunches and strong expression of poetic feeling. He has somehow frequently felt threatened by the shadow in the form of self-doubt. That's why being bitter with bar environment and

seems fighting with him than with others, he murmurs, "I'm afraid to live, am I? - and even more afraid to die!" (III.196). His splitted personality always keeps him on doubt.

Similarly, the relation between Rosa Parritt and Larry Slade is hot throughout the play. Rosa was not faithful to Larry from whom she even mothered a child, now known as Don Parritt. She is not his married wife. Instead she is a virgin mother. She refuses to be faithful to him, and to live under him as well. To her to live under the control of a man is to become his private property. Rather she establishes her superiority over him by destroying even his self-confidence. This leads her on the way to promiscuity. One day a fight takes place between them and leaving Rosa and the Movement, Larry enters into Harry Hope's bar. It is the story of his earlier life, a story of his failure as an anarchist, as a lover and also a father. After this he becomes a philosopher bum, and puts forward his philosophy of detachment.

In the play, Larry Slade, the protagonist, celebrates his expansive and submissive self images. The expansive that he has seen is that of the Anarchist, the active participator in "the Movement". The submissive is seen his drive towards self destruction which he quotes free self. Once in his youth he was lured by evil power within him and became an active member of the movement, and was ruled over by will to power and later gave it up. Later he realized that the movement was merely nothingness and chaos, so was an illusion where he had no self except division. Being desperate he left it. But he still thinks there are good reasons for giving up. When Parritt suspects, he philosophically views the reasons of his leaving the movement thus:

LARRY: You asked me why I quit the Movement. I had a lot of good reasons. One was I, another was my comrades, and the last was the breed of swine called men, in general. For myself, I was forced to admit, at the end of thirty years' devotion to the Cause, that I was never made for it. I was born condemned to be one of those who has

to all sides of a question. When you're damned like that, the questions multiply for you until in the end it's all questions and no answer . . . The material the ideal free society must be constructed from is men themselves and you can't build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure. When man's soul isn't a sow's ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses . . . Well, that's why I quit the Movement, if it leaves you any wiser. At any rate, you see it had nothing to do with your mother. (I. 30)

It shows his alien self within the midst of activists while practicing the movement. "The breed of swine called men" itself causes his escape from his very first so-called identified movement, and ultimately he is on the stupor creating his own self. But still he is questioned here.

Larry is deluded by the pair of opposites. His outward self says he is far from human bondage, but his inward self opposes it. His external man claims he is waiting for death where he gets ultimate peace and identity, and inner man neglects this demand. He is bearing his fluctuating self in the midst of life sickness and death-fear. But if Larry has been able to give either of these selves the value of reality he will have been drawn toward one or toward the other, will have been able to act either in the direction of his political obligation or in the direction of death by suicide, as Parrett does at the end of the play. Since he is pulled in both directions at once, he can only withdraw from the struggle altogether and become a non-participating observer of himself as well as of life.

Larry's power of choice is brought to a standstill because he can't accomplish the preparation for it. His is the problem of projecting value in a world devoid of absolutes. He is with existential dilemma that man's chief struggle is not with something but with nothing, not with Evil but with valueless mess that is neither good nor evil. Once he has overcome this nothing has created his values, man is then free to act according to them, but he is completely responsible both for the values and the action predicated upon them. Such utter self

contingency can be paralyzing: it provides freedom, but it is that terrifying freedom from which most of us feel compelled to escape. In defense of this philosophy as a "humanism" Sartre has pointed out that it is as positive as is negative - as hopeful as it is despairing - where each man has not only the responsibility, but the opportunity, to create his own destiny, and that each individual is ultimately responsible for the destiny of mankind as a whole.

O'Neill has not only placed Larry in the existential dilemma, but has also made him see and live both sides of the dilemma itself. In his youth Larry dedicated himself to Anarchism, an affirmation of nothingness and chaos and of man's freedom to create his destiny; but in his old age he sees anarchy's opposite face, that negation which we call despair.

Don Parritt, on whom we meet Larry's past, is always on the way to prove his self relating with Larry and the entire anarchist movement which puts Larry in its center and Parritt in its periphery. Parritt deceives his own mother thinking that she is the root cause to make him puppet. He claims, "she's (his mother) always decided what I must do. She doesn't like anyone to be free but herself" (IV. 247). He doesn't like to be a part of his mother and the movement, and arrives at Hope's bar seeking his own created self. But still gets no peace here, rather is badly suffered by rootless mess when Larry denies hearing even his single voice. Parritt requests him to take the case and accept the reality because he has enough proof - his letter to his mother. Parritt is here only to reconciliation which, in his thought, gives him self-identity but when Larry rejects him, forces to die instead of torturing, he is in great trouble.

Parritt finds his existing self totally mixed up with his mother, with the anarchist movement and with Larry Slade. He has already betrayed the former two of which he has a sense of guilt as well. Only the option is to mix up with Larry on whom he sees his identity

hidden. But the regular ignorance hypnotizes him to accept the deliberate death as to him a good way out of preserving his self than to bear the rootless ness. He uses all the remaining options accepting the guilt of betray and exposing the ultimate truth hidden behind him and Larry. By generalizing his great sin and putting the information ahead he catches on Larry's throat, thus:

PARRETT: . . . Do you know, Larry . . . if the truth was known, you were my father.

LARRY: (*Violently*) You damned fool! Who put that insane idea in your head? You know it's a lie! Anyone in the Coast crowd could tell you I never laid eyes on your mother till after you were born. (III. 160)

But Larry reacts as a stranger who knows almost nothing about Parrett and his mother; has no concern with them. The same cause also gives the choice to Parrett either to bear the rootless ness or to accept the death as the punishment of his great crime as matricide. And ultimately he chooses the way of ultimate freedom for which he struggles a lot. He has been ready to accept death than to celebrate the life that has no self. Rather his self image is reflected on his suicidal act.

Hickey plays the central role in the play. The other characters just constellate around him. By profession he is a salesman of hosiery goods. He periodically visits his friends in Harry Hope's bar and organizes a grand party to celebrate Hope's birthday. The habitués of the bar as hungry and thirsty are expecting his arrival. He comes and fulfills their wishes, but they find things just against their interests this time. Hickey's coming becomes Iceman's. By the term 'Iceman' they seem to have understood only its superficial meaning. Its deeper meaning is quite different. Their understanding is merely a self-image of its real meaning. They see only its mask but cannot penetrate its actual face. The 'Iceman' hence becomes an unidentified person. He never comes on the stage by this name. In reality, Hickey himself is

the Iceman. So, the Iceman has really come to Hickey's wife, for Hickey himself has killed her. When he kills his wife he convinces that he has done that for her goodness. He believes that such act of him is the result of his good intention, for by doing so he gives her peace. That is why he assumes himself to be a priest, when he performs such an act. At that time, he comforts himself with a thought that he is going to fulfill a sacrifice by purging the world of evil. But in reality, he thinks that only by murdering her he could get relief and peace from her, which he would not find till she lives. So, what he did is not for her sake, but for his own. He kills her because of hatred toward her. However he lies saying that he kills her because of his love for her. It was her unbearable love and ever forgiving kind nature that causes in him hatred, which compels him to hate her. Her innocent love becomes an unnecessary burden to him. It is been clear when he explores, "I got so sometimes when she'd kiss me it was like she did it on purpose to humiliate me, as if she'd spit in my face!" (IV. 239).

When Hickey himself forecasts his past, his hidden identity also blurs out. He was a derelict, a chain smoker before and since he got relation to Evelyn - his wife - where he got his self identity. But the marital love, home and its norms become the barricade for him from where he always desires to be away. He takes his wife's love and own home as a freedom sucker. In a sense he bursts out:

HICKEY: Well, anyway, as I said, home was like jail, and so was school, and so was that damned hick town. The only place I liked was the pool rooms, where I could smoke Sweet Caporals and mop up a couple of beers, thinking I was a hell-on-wheels sport. We had one hooker shop in town, and of course, I liked that, too. Not that I hardly ever had entrance money. My old man was a tight old bastard. But I liked to sit around in the parlor and joke with the girls, and they liked me because I could kid'em along and make'em laugh. Well, you

know what a small town is. Everyone got wise to me. They all said I was ano-good tramp. I didn't give a damn what they said. I hated everybody in the place. (IV. 232)

Hickey is morally restricted to indulge on such activities after getting marriage, and therefore has been ready to murder his own wife with the illusion that he could again begin the celebration of his so-called celestial life. It is Hickey's true past. By murdering his wife he already commits suicide-like act as Parritt does by betraying his mother. Yet he makes jests about his wife and the Iceman to give fun to the out-prone-race, the derelicts. It suggests his irrespective concern to the outer world.

Hickey is convinced that he killed his wife because he loves her and wants to spare her happiness over his uncontrollable drunkenness and dissipation - but as he speaks, his real motive comes through. He hates Evelyn because no matter he does she always forgives him, never punishes him and is always faithful. His running gag with the boys at Hope's has been that Evelyn was betraying him "in the hay with the Iceman", but this is only his own guilt. Hickey kills Evelyn because that was the only way he could free himself from her eternal forgiveness and achieve the ultimate in self-punishment. For him to commit murder is to commit suicide. In a sense, he becomes ready to commit suicide than to live the part of other's life within barricade. Even after the death of Evelyn he could not celebrate the life with full freedom and get identical self. He fails to achieve his supposed goal instead defined through his own past. But still he has an illusion tamed within him that gives him a space to live and let him again to quest his identity there.

Though Hickey kills his wife, he always finds himself a mean creature in front of her. She always overpowers him that he feels, and is committed to make a way clear where there is no condition in front of his any action. It becomes clear when Hickey goes on melting in his frequent soliloquy:

HICKEY: ...I'd get thinking how peaceful it was here, sitting around with the old gag, getting drunk and forgetting love, joking and laughing and singing and swapping lies. And finally I know I'd have to come. And I know if I come this time, it was the finish. I'd never have the guts to go back and be forgiven again, and that would break Evelyn's heart because to her it would mean I didn't love anymore. . . That last night I'd driven myself crazy trying to figure some way out for her . . . She'd never feel any pain, never wake up from her dream. So I . . . So I killed her. (*Dead silence*) . . . And then I saw I'd always known that was the only possible way to give her peace and free her from the misery of loving me. I saw it means peace for me, too, knowing she was at peace. I felt as though a ton of guilt was lifted off my mind. (IV. 240 - 41)

Hickeys own guilt becomes too much for him to face. He tries his best to be an individual until end. But when he fails on each, accepts this failure and confesses the guilt, and gets the possible way of punishment only in surrender that resembles as the suicidal act of Parritt. But still in the course of surrender he creates an illusion by persuading himself that he was insane at the moment of murder. So, he fluctuates time and again as to his fluctuation of struggle.

Joe Mott, one-time proprietor of a negro-gambling house, also faces the identity problem. He is splitted and time and again becomes only a field of joke. Still he never minds. But when the issue gets the race and he becomes the target he somehow loses his temper and stands as a warrior. Once he is almost in fighting with Chuck, a day bartender, due to his insulting address 'black bastard' or 'nigger'. Due to the extreme discrimination, in his thought, he decides to leave the place only to live in a liberal society where he can get his identity. Therefore, he finishes his sip and says to Rocky, "Here's de key to my room. I ain't coming' back. I's goin' to my own folks where I belong. I don't stay where I's not wanted. I's seek and tired of mission' round wide white man" (III. 170).

Though the case differs but the other minor characters Pearl, Margie and Cora have also suffered from the same identity complex. They are the typical dollar street walkers and among them Pearl and Margie are patronized by Rocky and Cora through Chuck. They are presented here only to make the environment sensational and romantic where they present themselves on the same ground. But they are not ready to be called 'whore' instead they make themselves easy addressing 'tart'. They fight long trying to make the environment favorable. Cora becomes ready to be departed even from her own street walkers if they'll accept that they are whore. So, she opposes, "I may be a tart, but I ain't a cheap old whore . . ." (II. 100). Similarly Pearl also can't resist if she is addressed as anybody's since her profession is near to it. When Larry once makes love to her and tries to make her under his grip addressing as his great big beautiful baby doll she violently counters him, "De old Irish bunk, huh? We ain't big. And we ain't your baby dolls! But we admit we're beautiful" (II. 106).

Moreover, Hickey's commitment in the play, seemingly admirable and sensible, and charitable mission of relieving his friends of their pipe dreams that they could get their free self to celebrate, their preoccupations with the past and the future, and all the concomitant guilt is no less than the disaster for two reasons. First, the world does not work that way; second illusions about themselves are one of the saving graces of human beings and without this soothing balm people are liable to turn nasty and cynical, as do the characters of *The Iceman*. There is Hickey and there is Parritt. Both are pouring out their false confessions and professions, and holding back their essential secret. Yet, inexorably, though against their conscious will both are seeking punishment. Their two stories are brought together through Larry Slade whose destiny, in contrast to his intention, is to extract the secret of both protagonists. Hickey's secret explodes, and Larry at last gives Parritt what he wants: a death sentence. But what they supposed, and for what purpose they broke their barricade is still away from their grip. They almost know that it is unachievable and impossible to have the

self without birth, and birth itself relates to past; they're still indulging in fruitless struggle of creating one self after another. It only makes them a chronicle of illusion.

Parritt who betrayed his anarchist communist mother to the police, thereby condemning her to a life sentence in prison claimed originally to have done this in order to get money for girls, but after Hickey's confession he bursts out, "I didn't give a damn about the money. It was only because I hated her" (IV. 241). Both men have felt themselves psychologically "bound" - in a Freudian sense - Hickey to his wife and Parritt to his mother. By killing his wife Hickey has at last rid himself of "all damned dreams and illusions", and he rings for the detectives who will look after him on his way to the electric chair. Parritt who considers that his crime is worse than murder, throws himself out of the window. Death is only way of escape from the world of the 'life-lie'. However, Parritt does the unexpected. Hickey's confession of murder set an example for parritt to confess the real reason why he turned in his own mother to the police - he hated her. Unable to forgive himself for what he did, he simply ends his life - again in imitation of Hickey who, by confessing murder, accepts a death sentence. Larry, though who once said he was bravely waiting for death, now realizes that he fears death. His pipe dream has been killed. Because he also fears life, he exists in a hopeless limbo.

Hickey's more than one name, in the play, and various professions carry the crux of the identity problem in the world. His wife calls him Teddy, friends know him as Hickey, and the detectives name him Hickman. This is not only his case but is also the case of all, of Larry and, of Parritt. However there is a conflict between their outward vision and inward intention, and outer man and inner man in the process of transformation.

It makes clear that the characters are fighting for their individual identity, but still they are enjoying their life with the part of others, that only leads them towards misery, problem, lonely and destruction. What they supposed; what they are doing now; and what

their goal is never match together. They make illusion one after another. They only have a sweet dream that anywhere there will be peaceful life which they can have and celebrate their free individual self unaware to any of outward concern. But as Nietzsche said human being a history ridden who could never be away from it, the characters are around and within to each others history. Therefore each individual self is joint with the next one as Parritt with Larry in the play.

IV. Conclusion

O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* effectively portrays the dreadful condition of existential men in the modern world. A gallery of exhausted personalities - derelicts - attempts to affirm their existence through their illusory alcoholic world, but finally their attempts end at the personal failure and realization of absurdity in modern life. Their quest to meet a new life remains incomplete, and ultimately they accept the futility of their attempt losing confidence and admit the absurdity in human life making their futile struggle eternal.

The play is heavy with the gloom of loneliness, death, suicide, murder, guilt, pity and need for surviving illusions. The existential theme of being asked to face life when there is no meaningful life to be found may have been too much for a modern audience. In it there is an understanding of the deeper elements of human nature, a comprehension of the confused instincts that make up the life of mortals, and an evocation of pity for the tortured existence of dazed mankind.

Hickey initially appears as a mysterious character in the play. Larry seems unique as Parritt a naïve and innocent. But behind the bush, they all commit a great mistake and then lose their previous self-images, and set for the search for their true place where they could rightly fit in or their true identity who actually they were. Believing neither the morals of the Bible or respecting god, they move ahead having faith on their own actions. Accepting the challenges heroically they tackle with them like Sisyphus. Their sadistic treatments bring them nothing but pains and sufferings. They gradually become aware of the absurdities and nothingness of life. The more they become aware of them, the harder they struggle against them.

They suffer from anxiety, alienation, horror, frustration and the repetition of actions but still they keep on struggling to ensure their identity, position and existence. The anxiety,

failure and frustration empower them and their quest to ensure their new prestige cannot be fulfilled. They realize the futile human condition, absurdity, repetition and meaninglessness in life. But from this absurdity, pain and anxiety, they realize the true sense of being because actual existence is obtained at the cognition of absurdity in life. That's why they continue their futile struggle.

"Existence precedes essence" as Sartre says is true to the characters of the play. They exist therefore they struggle. The sign of their greatness is their revolts. They think that they have done nothing wrong, but when they suffer, they suspect themselves guilty. This feeling makes them try to be authentic. They revolt to ensure their triumph of life but they are overcome in the end. Their revolt against the absurdities symbolizes their search for the 'self'.

Hence, there is always struggle that man has to witness and get involved in it. It is not his challenge to others, nor is to God but is to himself and his emptiness. To participate in forgetfulness, one must be willing to indulge his lies and those of his pals but the characters are memorable, archetypes abound. For ultimate freedom, the struggling selves, the outer self and the inner self, must come into a point of reconciliation, which is possible only in death. So, the attainment of the ultimate salvation or self is a difficult task and almost impossible to experience it. But man indulges with a futile attempt which unquestionably leads them to tragedy.

To sum up, the characters are bounded with the story of fraud, frustration and failure. They time and again pretend the world suit for them but they are neither able to resume their pre-images they once lost, nor are able to find the place where they could rightly fit in. They thought they belonged, but their belief is shaken when their self-images are shattered. They search for the meaning in life, but they they find it meaningless. Everything ends in discordance. They do not find any answer to their problem, but still they are continuing their futile struggle which is nothing than an eternal existential struggle.

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