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TERROR AND AMBIVALENCE OF THE HUMAN SOUL IN O'NEILL'S THE EMPEROR JONES, AND THE HAIRY APE

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ABSTRACT

This study tries to analyze the Terror and Ambivalence of the Human Soul in the selected plays of Eugene O'Neill which does not seem to have received a significant attention by the researchers. O' Neill constantly looked into the mysterious, terrifying Gorgon-faces of reality with a subjective and artistic passion. In his drama we have life coming full circle as it traces the double pattern of experience passing into art, and art flowing back into experience again. He was always searching for the missing elements in life with a restless curiosity and an uneasy consciousness of the penultimate quality of all human discoveries. He swiftly moved from one horizon to another, continually looking beyond the horizon for a clue to the essence. If as a playwright he dramatized with a fascinating variety and ingenuity, the vision of the human torment, as a man in search of his soul, he also projected the torment of the vision. It is perhaps natural that a cycle of achievement and reaction in the world of criticism. Cargill (1962, p. 2) commented:

> The plays of O'Neill, it seems touch something fundamental in those who expose themselves to their effect. They reach down to frightening depths; they step on private, social, religious, philosophical, aesthetic toes; they either evoke immoderate enthusiasm or provoke immoderate anger.

KEY WORDS: Eugene O'Neill, ambivalence, Terror, Soul, Emperor, Gorgon-faces

INTRODUCTION

O' Neill viewed the modern mass man as an uprooted being, uprooted from his own spiritual self, and from his spiritual past as well. And all the lost souls in his drama are drawn from his central human image; they have lost contact with the refreshing currents of Nature, and the remedy lies in a return to the earth-mother. Their dark journeys proceed from, and progress through, the labyrinth of citified woe and mechanized calamity. Frontiersmen all, they are agonists of the spirit encaged in flesh, of the flesh trapped in metal.

O' Neill's own harrowing experiences in life had endowed him with a tragic hallucination, very close to that of the Greek dramatists. Tragedy was to him the very texture and rhythm of life. O'Neill found that his tragic sense of life could not be expressed through the cheap more passionate and intense form of expression. So, like, Eliot, he turned to the Greeks. He shared the Greek view of the human being as the helpless and tortured victim of the formidable forces of Fate. O'Neill found modern equivalents for the Fates and the Furies in conflict between man and God or man and nature dramatized in Greek tragedy into a struggle within the suffering individual. Only such a struggle could form the theme of great tragedy, tragedy in the classic sense of the term. O'Neil's attempt was to deal with the relation between man and God, the Greek gods being substituted in the modern context by the unconscious. The modern dramatist's duty, according to O'Neill, is ''to dig at the root of the sickness of today'' (Nathan, 1932, p.180), the sickness being diagnosed by him as the consequence of ''the death satisfactory new one''. Out of the tragic predicament of man, he strove to create a sense of dignity of the human being and an awareness of the meaning of life.

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In O'Neill's play the Greek concept of the Fall through the Pride is endorsed by the psychological theories of Freud and Jung. His protagonists commit the fatal error of assuming that the conscious ego can fulfill all their needs without acknowledging the power of the unconscious, the modern equivalent of the gods. They consider themselves the sole arbiters of their own destiny and court destruction. O'Neill's heroes pass through the agonizing conflict between the conscious and the unconscious, arriving at what Jung calls ''individuation'', the gradual realization of the inner personality. All philosophers from Socrates to modern psychoanalysis have understood that the failure to know oneself results in the tragedy of self-destruction, in life as in drama.

O'Neill's characters fight against adverse circumstances and though they are defeated, their spirits are never crushed. They maintain an attitude of defiance. According to Winther (1963) O'Neill has made his characters the victims of the circumstances over which they have no control. They move in a world of dark and minister forces which govern the destinies of men and women helpless and impotent before the workings of these unpredictable powers. This does not mean that his characters are weaklings whose lives are pathetic but not tragic. Just the reverse is true. It is the great characters whose life becomes significant when it struggles against the inevitable. The characters are all rebels against the despotism of facts as these facts move slowly and inexorably to enmesh and destroy their hopes and their happiness. It is their defiant struggle against these facts that lends dignity to their lives, and it is at this point that their universality becomes apparent. Thus strife with adversity is a parallel to the life of all those who do not gracefully or supinely accept the inevitable. The development of characters in O'Neill's drama is always typical and in a sense universal in that it is the common lot of men to feel the heavy power of those circumstances over which he has no control, against which his spirit rebels in bitterness and pain.

O'Neill's characters are pursued by their past misdeeds. A memory of their past misdeeds dogs their lives and it creates tragic atmosphere. According to Raleigh (1965), O'Neill's characters, standing by proxy for mankind itself are haunted by their sins, mistakes, link, that binds them for ever to the terrible things they have done or, equally terrible, what they have not done. An inescapable determinism prevails, and the past, ''sleepless with pale commemorative eyes,'' stands watch on the present. Since it is a fact of human life that bit is often more harrowing to relieve by memory a painful experience than it was to have actually undergone that experience itself in the first place, memory becomes a kind of avenging Fate or a Force that drives the characters back on themselves by its insatiable, of their experiences. And the play itself cannot end until the agony is complete and total.

Argument

> The focal point of O'Neill's plays is to unmask the ambivalent individuals who have hidden themselves behind an idealized self. He finds these individuals the helpless victims of the emergence of an acquisitive order in America which, leads them to mental insecurity, and therefore they find themselves doomed to oscillate between two opposing realms of Self and Force.
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> O' Neill considered America a failure, and he discovered its root-cause in the failure of the spirit. Yet his only positive thesis appears to have been a justification of the status quo. On the surface, there appears to be a contradiction between O'Neill's serious criticism of the American society and his prescription for the American sickness. While this paradox is partly due to O'Neill's art being, like Poe's, as Spiller (1957, p. 62) claimed that, an ''art of contraries and of compensation,'' and partly due to the double nature of the tragic vision, it seems mainly from the sources of the American experience itself'.

Through the analysis of the characters of the following plays, and using the American society as the bedrock, the study tries to reveal the tragic co-existence of two opposing realms of Self and Force, Terror and Ambivalence of the Human Soul.

The Emperor Jones

The play Emperor Jones reads as a play about the racial heritage of the American Negro. O'Neill told the story of the play's origin in an interview printed in the *New York World of Nov.* 9/1924:

> The idea of Emperor Jones came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story current in Heyati concerning the late president Sam. This was to the

> effect that Sam had said they'd never get him a lead bullet, that he would get himself first with a silver one. This notion about the silver bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. About six months later, I got the idea of the woods, but I could not see how it could be done on the stage, and I passed it up again. A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feasts in Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there: how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heart beat of every one present corresponds to the frenzied prospecting for gold in Spanish Hondrous, (pp. 57-58).

Brutus Jones appears to be an ordinary criminal who is said to have killed a white man in the states and has fled to an island in West Indies. He is an ex-Pullman porter who has become emperor of the island through corrupt practices and possesses great wealth. He has exploited the natives to the point of utter subjugation. He is proud of his shrewdness and tact which give him a sense of superiority over the natives. He explains his position to his helper Smithers in the opening scene which gives an extensive exposition of the protagonist's consciousness. '' I tell you, Smithers. Der's little stealin' like you does, and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. Foe de big stealin' dey makes emperor…'' (O'Neill, 1932, p. 8).

The scene shows the extremes of Jone's consciousness which will eventually fail to bring into harmony those extremes. These possibly, are his human aspirations and anti-human norms imposed by the environment. He proclaims to his helper, Smithers that showmanship is the thing which secures success in life. ''Ain't man's talkin' big what makes him big- long as he makes folks believe it? Sho' I talks large when I aim'g got nothin` to back it up….'' (p. 9).

It does not take long for Jones to understand that his spell would not work upon the natives any more. In the end of the expository scene he is told by his helper, Smithers that natives are plotting rebellion against him. They would not turn up if he rings the bell. A dismayed Jones rings the bell up but the natives do not turn up. The character of Jones suffers a moral change. He understands that the day of reckoning perhaps has come. But he falsely believes that he would be able to escape the punishment that the islanders who rebelled had in store for him. ''Well, I's changed in mind den, I cashes in and resigns de job of emperor right dis minute' (p. 12). He starts for the door in rear. Smithers tells him, '' goin` out to look for your'' Orse? Yer won't find any. They steals the` orses first thing. Mine was gone when I went for `em this morning. That's wot first give me a suspicion of wot was up'' (p. 12). Jones' conscious ego starts breaking down disintegration in his conscousness is depicted stage by stage. Natives are after him. He decides to leave his empire. He will cross the forest on foot. He knows the forest and had earlier crossed it several times. If the natives get hold of him, he has got ''five lead bullets in dis gun good enuff to common bush niggers – and after dat I got de silver bullet left – to cheat `em out O` getting `me''(p. 14).

The ambivalence of the protagonist's consciousness is tormenting. The native niggers are not portrayed as characters of flesh and blood. Jones' potential adversaries are his mental inhibitions. His real enemy is his unconscious mind. As Floyd (p. 156) commented ''Jones' consciousness reflects the ambivalence of his position as a tyrant and usurper, as a criminal waiting for the revenge for the wrong he had done''.

He has exploited the natives and now they are at the point of rebellion. They have already plotted against him and Jones must now flee for life. Jones has convinced the natives that only a silver bullet can kill him. He is under the impression that the natives would hardly find a silver bullet; he has forgotten a silver bullet for himself, the sixth, in his gun under the assumption that he would kill himself before the natives get to him.

Jones makes a flight through the forest to the accompaniment of drumbeat which begins at normal pulse beat and grows faster and louder. He is lost in the forest he had thought he knew so well. He is confronted with one ghost after another from his past. These represent his past, his hidden motives, and his fears. He fires his six precious bullets to dispel these little *formless fears*. These visions of his past stem from Jones personal unconscious and collective consciousness. The natives have shot Jones with the silver bullet which they made from money. Jones is revenged and thus, at his own coin. It seems that Jones' fate is outside his character. It is his memory of his racial past which works out his destiny. The stress on the racial past of American Negro makes Jones an archetypal figure. His consciousness of his past provides the

psychological motive of his action. The principal means of characterization in the play is O'Neill's use of interior monologue. The whole play unfolds as a continuous interior monologue of the protagonist, Jones is the victim of his inner sense of guilt. He knows that he is accountable for the cruelty with which he ruled over the islanders. The revenge by the natives is therefore inevitable. This arouses Jones' fear. His attempt to escape his punishment turns into a race inside the vicious circle at the end of which his destiny awaits him. Jones is not merely a criminal who committed crimes. Had he been so, he would not have attracted our attention. O'Neill's Jones is not merely a psychological study devoid of social significance. The sin of others has condemned him. He is the typical American black son who is the victim of social evil. Therefore, the playwright does not simply recreate the protagonist's past but connects it with the history of American black people. He introduces elements of collective memory which Jones did not experience himself. There is the slave auction scene and the scene on board a ship carrying its live cargo of black to America. The crimes committed by the whites against his people are kept alive by the memory of his ancestors. So Jones' behavior is determined by this psychological reality which is social reality as well. ''Jones does not have the mental and verbal ability to express all the intricate associations, connecting his personal story with the history of his people. But he has a rich imagination; and visionary scenes, flashing through his inflamed mind, brilliantly convey both his mental processes and his psychic state. At the same time, they increase the dramatic tension emphasizing the protagonist's inability to control his thoughts; and this, in turn drives Jones to his tragic end.'' (O'Neill, 1932, p. 159).

The disintegration of Jones' consciousness and his attempt to escape it makes the core of the play's action. But Jones remains a victim of social order where blacks must remain as outcasts. ''The playwright denounces the fundamental injustice of the social order that his characters confront and depicts it as the main source of tragedy. But the tragedy of Jones or that of Jim and Ella demands, implicitly, a change of social order'' (p. 150).

O'Neill's expressionistic hero Jones has affinities with the heroes of his earlier plays. It will perhaps be wrong to limit our study of the play by our knowledge of German expressionism.

As Tiusanen (1968, p. 110) observed:

> An error of another kind is to read O'Neill's expressionistic plays too narrowly through the theory of orthodox German expressionism, seeing in their heroes only ciphers. It is hardly feasible to imagine audiences not getting emotionally involved with Jones and Yank, two figures so powerfully characterized. Both of these monologue plays are constructed to have an emotional impact, developed by the continuous presence of the hero on the stage by a wide variety of scenic means.

Probably this is the only O'Neill's play which conforms to the Aristotelian conception of the unity of time, place and action. Time is just one night. To escape his punishment, Jones is to cross the forest in twelve hours' time, place is mostly the forest where the action takes place, beating of Tomtom and dream fantasy bind the action and provide a controlling unity. In the course of his run through the forest, Jones is visited by phantoms and formless fears. He fires six shots to dispel the fear of darkness. He makes an unending effort to remain emperor till the end. He refuses to surrender to his racial past which is symbolized by the crocodile god. He fires his silver bullet; his racial god disappears but Jones, his last resource of emperor-hood exhausted, lies whimpering on the ground. His refusal to surrender and his struggle is heroic. In the Hairy Ape, yank surrenders to the gorilla in the cage in an effort to belong.

Jones is a renegade. He will not surrender to the god which is evil. The dark god punishes him. In the pulses of Jones, one might feel the beat of the jungle drums. Jones' black ancestors paid services to the primitive god. But Negroes no longer serve their dark gods. As Bogard (1972, p. 141) commented:

> In white civilization, he (Jones) has become a new entity an individual not one of a horde, howling in communal self-abandonment. He has acquired a white man's name, an occupation and has assumed the responsibilities of law, judgment, punishment. Evolving from the primitive, he has become something other than his anonymous native essence and has superimposed a new self on his truth.

He starts denying his primordial god and this defiance becomes tragic. Jones is destroyed by his sense of guilt and fears. His encounters with fears give us a sense of irrational

experience. We forget the spatial and temporal reality and are hypnotized by the drum -beat. These expressionistic devices make a psychological analysis of Jones' inner process as well ours. There is a cathartic effect we pass through. As Falk (1953, p. 70) observed:

> In his use of symbols in the *Emperor Jones* O'Neill acknowledged, as do most modern authors, the validity of Jung's theory that great literature strikes a responsive chord in all men because its central metaphors can be traced to archetypal images buried in the unconscious mind of humanity.

Jones becomes a victim, a victim of his own past as well as of his race and in broader context, of humanity. Clark (1947, p. 71) put it in another way:

> As pure Theatre, The Emperor Jones is one of the best of all the O'Neill plays, though most of it is only dramatic monologue. It is a kind of unfolding, in reverse order, of the tragical epic of the American Negro.
>
> The play Emperor Jones contains evidence of O'Neill's social consciousness in the sense that it is the tragedy of a rough character endowed with primitive, animal emotion. O'Neill does not try to make his character nicer. Jones is entirely driven by instincts. It is in Jones himself that we are to observe sharp criticism of the civilization of the modern white man, for Jones is Negroid only in physical appearance and in speech in the opening scene. As Engel (1953, pp.49-50) observed:
>
> He is rather, the American success story in black face. His rise to wealth and power, *from stowaway to Emperor in two years* had been achieved by virtue of his possession of none of the characteristics commonly associated with the Negro, such as shiftless laziness or lack of initiative. During the ten years in which he had served as Pullman car porter he had listened to the white quality….and adopted their ways. What he learned in those years was the whit man's cynicism, shrewdness, efficiency, philosophy between *little stealing and big steeling. For de little stealing,* he informs the cockney smithers, *dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealing dey makes you Emperor…*Having absorbed the ethic of the white is to exploit the Negro.

In the person of Jones, the fate of the American Negro's African past is acted out. Jones particularly during a paroxysm of fear reveals primitive characteristics. The real action is grievous history of Jones Negro ancestors. The Greek tragedies act out the fate of ruling families. These were heroic in the sense of belonging to a past legendry age, intermediate between gods and man. Hence the action of the play used to have a generic and representative eminence. As Williams (1969, p. 22) pointed out,' Aristotle himself, from whom these descriptions ultimately derive, was always concerned with the generic action rather than with the isolated hero.''

Jones, in spite of his typicality retains individual traits which make him convincing to us. He approximates other O'Neillian heroes who rise to material success but he is wiser in his grasp of the situation. Jones had claimed to the peak of success and power but he had never forgotten that fortune is fickle. He had therefore, prepared for the inevitable downfall. By his foresightedness, he proved himself to be a wiser man than any other of O'Neill's heroes who rose to material success. Andrew Mayo spent eight years in the grain business running away from himself; the poet Marco Polo foolishly chose to be a businessman; Sam Evans was simple minded and immature. Angel (1953, p. 51) observed:

> Jones, to be sure, had no dreams, no illusions, no conflicts; he faced the facts of reality squarely, as no other O'Neill Protagonist was to do. It would seem that he observed a worthier adversary than abject terror…Jones was to be the victim of a psycho-biological force, the primitive past which the hysteria of fear dredges up. For the sake of proving that instinct, emotion, necessity, must triumph over man's best laid plans, his free will, his reason; O'Neill employed the concepts of racial memory and of atavism.

But the fact remains that Emperor Jones is an individual tragedy at the centre of which lies the protagonist Jones. Tragic flaw in his character may be traced to his inordinate ambition and greed for money. The natives finally

kill him with the silver bullet made by them by melting coin.

This is symbolic of the tragic sense, the destruction of self by its own pride. Jones dies as he lived with a kind of grandeur. He returns to conscious level of experience and experiences the tragic awareness of his situation. In final analysis the tragedy of Jones perhaps enacts the tragic flight of modern white man who is the victim of greed and power.

O'Neill emphasized heredity and environment as the great tragic forces which lead man in their grasp. This deterministic philosophy makes Emperor Jones convincing. As Winther(1961, pp. 171-172) observed:

> In the end he loses the battle, conquered but not by the physical strength of the natives for they did not even change their position. All they did while Jones circled wildly through the forest was to beat their drums. He was destroyed by the forces of the past.

The Hairy Ape

Like Robert Jones, an ex-Pullman porter, Yank, the hero of this play is an ordinary stoker on the ship. The play The Hairy Ape seems to be a social tragedy. In this play, a determined attempt is made to adapt tragedy to the habits and thinking of ordinary man. The hero is not marked by a social status like his counterpart in Greek or Elizabethan tragedy. He is an ordinary stoker on the ship who is subjected to inhuman torture. His rank becomes a class and once it does so, a new definition of tragedy becomes inevitable.

Like Brutus Jones who is an ex-Pullman porter, Yank is a stoker on the ship and is sure of his physical strength. He thinks that as he moves the engine of the ship, he belongs while the owner of the ship does not have the muscle power to ensure his belonging in a meaningful way. Yank's physical power makes him unnerved in the face of potential danger and he likes to impose his will on the order of the society. He will not surrender his will and consequently will have to face the consequence of his action. O'Neill does not make Yank a nice character. He is rude and speaks a shrill language which the sea-people usually utter to relieve the tension in mind at the sea. Perhaps, for the first time in American drama, Yank, the commonest of man who represents the Calibans of Modern civilization becomes a tragic character. He attains tragic stature because of his inordinate faith in the superiority of his physical vigor. In fact, he is the power behind the ship. He expresses his strength in the words:

> I's de ting in gold dat makes it money; And I'm what makes iron into steel; steel, dat stands for de whole ting. And I'm Steel-Steel-Steel I'm de muscies in Steel, de punch behind it Slaves, hel. We run de whole woiks, All de rich guys dat think dey're Somep'n day aim't nothin' Dey don't belong. But us guys, we're in de move, we're at de bottom, de whole ting is us, (O'Neill, 1932, p. 48).

Yank is sure that he and his companions in the stokehole are better than the first class passengers. He understands that labor is the source of all the riches in the world and the basis of his superiority. The earth does not belong to those who possess but to those who work. The parasitical nature of the rich is juxtaposed with the pride of a man who moves the ships and thus moves the world. This is expressed in Yank's great speech in the opening scene of the play.

Hell in de stoke hole? Sure: It takes a man to work in hell.. It's me makes it move! I'm at de bottom, get me: Dere sin't nothin'foither. I'm de end: I'm de stert: I start somep'n and the de woild moves,! (p.48).

His self image is destroyed by Mildred, a young woman whose father is the president of Nazareth Steel, chairman of the Board Directors. Mildred is a specimen of her class, an artificial product of a decadent society. As Falk (1953, p. 21)) observed, ''Mildred is a decadent, aimless, artificial product of society, who dabbles in social work to uplift the masses''. She enters the stokehole at the bottom of the ship to see how the other half lives. When she sees Yank, she falls back in horror and cries, ''Take me away oh, the filthy beast'' (O'Neil, 1932, p. 58). She faints, Paddy, Yank's companion remarks, ''Sure, 'It was as if she'd seen a great hairy Ape escaped from the Zoo'' (p. 23).

After this incident, Yank loses his sense of belonging. It seems that Yank has been insulted in the very core of his pride. He can think only of Mildred's image of himself as a brute. The

muscular strength which made him feel superior before, now only identifies him with animals. Mildred has stripped away his ideal. It seems to him that he is imprisoned in the cage of the machine. As Falk (1953, pp.30-31) commented:

> From this point onward, Yank devotes himself to an attempt to escape the prison in which he can not be content to belong, but every effort to escape only makes him more aware of the strength of the barrier; and the more conscious he becomes of it, the more hopeless it is for him to attempt to tear it down and to see himself again as a heroic human being. Ultimately, he abandons the search as futile and surrenders himself to the only self image of which he can be conscious that is symbolized by the Ape and the cage.

Yank, the worker is pitted against the inhuman structure of a machine age which plays the role of the antagonist. The playwright points out the malady of an acquisitive society and shows how in our modern machine made world, the workers are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being. Yank'e disintegration starts the moment he realizes that he does not belong to his machine, that he is a part of the machine itself. This thing is beautifully explained by Winther (1961, p. 199):

> Man's work is a necessary part of his personality; it is an extension of his ego, it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and in so far as it does, it leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfied misfit. Yank was such a worker and at the same time conscious of the thing he had lost. He did not want a job simply because it would be a means to earning a living; he wanted a job in which he could live.

Increasing disintegration of the protagonist's consciousness is obviously connected with the emergence of an acquisitive order in America**.** The antagonist is the reality of the bourgeois society as the playwright saw in twentieth century America. The characters who represent the bourgeois world are the steel king Douglas and his daughter Mildred or the fashionable crowd on Fifth Avenue. Yank is in conflict with his class enemy who has exploited him. Long, his companion awakens in him a sense of modern society divided into hostile classes. Instead of personal vendetta against Mildred, Yank decides to destroy the whole system which puts him and his like to savagery. This webs his tragic destiny and ultimately leads him to defeat and death. Unity of action is provided by Yank's continuous effort to resolve the tragic conflict in his mind set up in his character by Mildred. A revenge motive visits upon him when he comes across the Church goers who parade the Fifth Avenue scene all in white stiff-collar. This scene presents a social milieu. Gassner (1964) was of the opinion that the society which the playwright presents in the play with the heiress Mildred Douglas and automation of the Fifth Avenue parade scene has a social meaning:

> The Sunday morning crowd on Fifth Avenue in the Hairy Ape were given masks, and so were the crowds, Jewish, Greek, and Roman, in Lazarus Laughed. Thus, in the plays of the mid-twenties O'Neill repeatedly used masks not only to present the divided man but to bring out some relationship between the individual and the realm of the supernatural, and thus to give the characters a significance beyond themselves (p. 32).

It is Long who seems to be Yank's lumbering consciousness. He takes him out of the stoke-hole and makes him acquainted with the ways of life of the upper class to which Mildred belongs.

The moment he is out of his natural surroundings, the stoke-hole, Yank becomes an isolated being. The very steel, which he thought, he himself was, no longer appears to be the source of his self as a strength. It belongs to Mildred's father. The image of his self as a productive power is shaken. He no longer feels integrated with machine which belongs to the owner. He goes to the office of the worker's union and offers his services in bombing the steel mills. He is thrown out a spy or fool. Yank finds that he is pitted against his own self of ignorance. The knowledge dawns upon him that he does not belong to the rest of mankind. He goes to the gorilla in the cage to shake hands with the caged animal. He feels a kinship with gorilla because like him it is in chains.

He opens the cage but the gorilla does not reciprocate Yank's brotherly feeling. The animal grasps him in a hug and kills him. Yank

falls on the ground and perhaps is integrated with the image of himself as society gives him, as the hairy ape. Playwright commented, ‘‘And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at lost belongs’’ (1932, p.27).this seems to be ironical in the context of Yank’s life long search for identity in a hostile society. Through his tragic defeat, continuity of his struggle for identity is affirmed. The search for identity extends beyond the symbolism of Yank’s struggle. It remains not only a personal problem but collective and in certain sense a universal problem of mankind. O’Neill explained the meaning of the play in a letter The New York Herald Tribune of November 16/ 1924:

> The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way… The public saw just the stoker not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can’t go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can’t go back to belonging either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong’’ (Clark, 1947, p. 84).

Hairy Ape then, symbolizes man in the person of Yank. O’Neill bases his work, to great extent, on human character and not on a type or abstraction. There are critics who feel hesitant to accept Yank as one of human kind. They find a lack of humanity in Yank. Bogard (1972, p. 242) is most critical of Yank as an individual. According to him:

> The Hairy Ape deals with what may loosely be called anthropological subject matter, expressed in terms of a search for the origins of life and making reference to atavistic remnants of primitive man appearing in modern society, ’’. In the same vein, the critic continues, ‘‘O’Neill’s Ape is a Neanderthal stoker, controlling the furnace gang in his ship with animalistic power and the confidence that is born of total security in his place.

The mind of the critic perhaps reflects the mind of many civilized Americans. This is that they do not like to extend their concepts of humanity to the level of Neanderthal stoker. This contradiction in the structure of American society in O’Neill’s time is reflected in the scope of the play. Bogard is not only one who holds a poor view of O’Neill’s stoker hero Yank. Carthy (1968, p.82) goes a step further in his denunciation of Yank, as he commented:

> Symbolically considered, The Hairy Ape is the blind cyclopean Demos that cannot build but only destroy; malformed, powerful when he stirs fair cities topple – thick-witted, dangerous, ugly

An intellectual idea underlies the conception of the play in the mind of the playwright. It grows not out of a single human situation but from certain deductions made by the dramatists about life and society. O’Neill had first-hand knowledge of the stokers and sailors of the ship. At Jimmy-the Priests saloon, he struck a friendship with Driscoll, an able Irish sea-man. This man committed suicide by jumping overboard in mid-ocean. It is the way of Driscoll’s suicide that gave him germ of the play. The play is ‘‘a dramatic extension of the unpublished short story about ship’s stokers written in the summer of 1917’’ (Gelb, 1962, p. 267). The period coincided with O’Neill’s own sense of non-belonging in a hostile, materialistic world. He still was not sure about himself. He wrote to Elizabeth Sergeant ‘‘that the play was unconscious autobiography.’’ ‘‘He chose to write about the hairy stoker, victim of modern industry, a man far removed in circumstance,’’ Miss Sergeant later recorded, ‘‘in order to voice through Yank that social rebellion and sense of buffeted frustration which was his philosophic message at the time’’ (p. 268).

Yank’s inner conflict is objectified and made concrete by means of symbols adapted to the stage. It seems to be a social tragedy in the sense that tragic tension in the mind of the protagonist reflects an outward contradiction of physical forces. This is achieved by means of words, symbols and fantasy. The elements of fantasy are there in the introduction of the cage which stands as a symbol of social oppression. There is brutishness in Yank’s character and his animalistic vigor. But Yank’s brutishness and failure must be studied in right perspective. This background is beautifully provided in the description of the stokehole. It is not that easy to

agree with the contention of critics like Flexner (1969, pp.150-151) who observed:

> There is no attempt to explain the social forces responsible for Yank's brutishness and failure. Yank submits himself to the gorilla in the cage. It is like committing suicide. By his death no revolutionary affirmation is announced much to the dissatisfaction of those who desired a positive revolutionary ending of the play.
>
> We have crossed a long way from the time of Greek tragedy. O'Neill's Yank represents a part of all men, the unending struggle for attaining better goal in life. O'Neill has supported this view in regard to the dramatic identity of Yank's character.
>
> The individual life is made significant just by the struggle, and the acceptance and assertion of that individual making him what he is, not, as always in the past, making him something not himself. As far as there is any example of that in Hairy Ape, it is his last gesture when he kills himself. He becomes himself and other person (O'Neill, 1932, p. 84).

The Hairy Ape is a modern tragedy. It does not present man at odds with supernaturally controlled destiny as ancient tragedies do. The forces which Yank contends are the inhuman forces of modern civilization. Leech (1963, P. 120) observed:

> The playwright, in fact, criticized his civilization here in the Emperor Jones, not because Negroes and sailors ought to have more education, more comfort, but because Jones was infected by the flashy tricks of the Whiteman and Yank was not seen as a fellow human being by those who profited from his work.

Tragedy does not end with the destruction of the hero. The tragic experience of Yank belongs to us ourselves. Whatever happens to O'Neill's Yank, man's struggle for belonging will continue in newer forms.

CONCLUSION

O'Neill witnessed the rise of a mindless and acquisitive middle class. The society which the exploitative capital builds stifles the morals and thwarts the aspirations of the individual. The individual's struggle against the falsity of life ends in Jones' destruction because of his greed and thirst for power, and Yank's destruction because of his alienation from his own soul. This is the root of the tragedy of modern life. Impulse towards faith, love and ideal is frustrated by greed and hate which the tyrannical society generates. So it can be concluded that the study has managed to show that O'Neill has tried to objectify in his plays this conflict between the mindless materialism and man's search for meaningful existence on earth. In O'Neill a common man suffers not because of his extraordinary ambition or pride for he is Macbeth, King Lear, or Julius Caesar, but he suffers of his failure to realize his ideal, to fulfill hid dream to live a life as he wants. Ultimately this suffering leads to terror and ambivalence of his soul which at last makes him drowned in an oozy swamp of the brutal world

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