

**Towards the Quest for Self-Belonging in Eugene O'Neill's
*The Hairy Ape***

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Abstract

The impact of industrialization development and technological progress brought a great disaster towards the worker. The enormous growth of Industrialization has reduced the human worker into a machine. The men are designed to do one task where they are instructed to turned on and off by the sound of a whistle which made them loss their individuality and the capacity of thinking independently. The modern man who was exploited and persecuted becomes the completely devoid of human feelings. As a result, he started to behave just like animals only with the capability of physical strength without intellectual thinking. The hard work behind the work doesn't live by bread only but for the struggle of survival, he needs many things to achieve in his life. By these means are not everything he needs but he thinks they are supportive. Modern man expects the patronage from the being and society. He finds a sense of belonging when he finds people like him. Eugene O'Neill, an American Playwright discusses this issue of a man's identity and sense of belongingness in the play 'The Hairy Ape'. This issue of sense makes him as well as destroys him. The protagonist, Yank, is an illustration in this case. Neill has also raised the issue of class conflict and social protest. The aim of the research paper is to analyses the main character in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* who wants to regain his identity. The research is intended to deal the thematic of O'Neill's employment of expressionistic techniques like symbols, distorted language, costumes and monologues to expose Yank's sufferings that machines have replaced human beings and the search for the identity begins within his human being's origin.

Keywords: Eugene O'Neill, *The Hairy Ape*, Industrialization, modern man, intellectual thinking, Sense of identity, Class conflict, Social protest, belongingness, Yank.

Introduction

Eugene O'Neill's was born in New York City in 1888. He was educated at Princeton and Harvard. At the early stage, he worked on a tramp steamer at sea that taught him much about the other side and the dirty side of modern society. The experience what he gained in the working atmosphere helped him a lot when he started to write and change the "Old characters of Melodrama into realistic characters". The appreciation showered him four Pulitzer prizes for his plays. Eugene was awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. The theme for his play by his experiences "goes beyond the surface of life to study the force behind life". O'Neill employed forces represented by fate and psychology of Freud in his plays to mirror the inner conflict of his characters' minds reflecting their instability and to their expectations from the society.

However, O'Neill probe deep into the American society and he succeeded to change American melodrama from its being superficial pictures into more expressive and meaningful reflections of life. O'Neill employed expressionism in most of his plays. He distorted reality to probe into the soul of his protagonists and their real predicament. Thus, expressionism is an X-ray photograph, as J.W. Marriotte pointed out when he compared it to a realistic play of Neill the portrayal which is "based upon superficial observation of detail more photography: but expressionism has been likened to an X-ray photograph."

In a note, expressionism is a movement that started in Germany early in the 20th century. It was initiated by a number of painters who avoided the representation of external reality and, instead, presented a highly personal vision of the world. According to this movement, expressionists will determine the form of the play, and therefore reality will sometimes be distorted to present the inner psychological state of the protagonist's mind. The expressionists employ various forms to convey their ideas such as symbols, disconnected language, masks choruses, lighting, costume, sound effects in addition to monologues. As A.C. Ward state that: Expressionism ... is intensely personal to the author, who aims to create a vision of life reflected through his own individual consciousness of it.

Eugene O'Neill was very much worried about the oppressed industrial working class people and the effect of capitalists on workers. They enslaved the workers and deprived them of their self-esteem and free will. He criticized the capitalist system and attacked the movement that should stand by the workers, fulfil their needs and solve their problem. Oscar G. Brockett stated that his opinion about the thought of Eugene's concept where he describes as "industrialism and science have kept man's eyes on the ground and have reduced him to a machine like a creature"

Industrialism dehumanized man alienated him from society and oppressed his present, past and future. The man was highly affected by the social environment and the materialistic values that started to prevail leaving him easy prey to the danger of his emptiness and insecurity as a result that leads to the loss of faith within himself and to his religion. O'Neill perceived this tragedy in *The Hairy Ape* which was expressionistic "both in technique and in its disgust at modern humanity. The lower classes in it are hairy apes, the upper classes more marionettes."

The Quest for Self-Belonging

Yank, the main character in *The Hairy Ape*, is a symbolic representation of a man who is alienated from the modern world. He believes that he "belongs" to the industrial world through his physical strength, yet he is, gradually, transformed into an ape-like creature. He and the fireman in the forecandle of the ship are described by O'Neill as "beasts cage";

"The room is crowded with men, shouting, cursing,
laughing, singing- a confused inchoate uproar swelling
into the sort of unity, a meaning – the bewildered, furious,
baffled defiance of a beast in a cage."

The stokehole seems to be a symbolic representation of a prison that keeps men disconnected from the outer world. These men need their physical strength and stamina to keep the ship moving, thus; they become machines without the ability of intellectual thinking.

Yank at the beginning, rejects the idea that the capitalist class is the reason behind their predicament and alienation. He believes that he "belongs" and that he is the force that keeps the ship moving; " It's me makes it move ... I'm de end! I'm de starts ... I'm steam and oil for de engines." (9) Yank is unconscious of the bestial and inhumane treatment to which the stokers are subjected. Yet the appearance of Mildred, the daughter of the owner of " Nazareth" steel, in the stokehole changes Yank. He realizes that his sense of belonging and brotherhood is just an illusion, a self-deception and his search for identity starts to obsess him.

Mildred is made to realise the cause for the oppression of the workers where she could not help them as she feels one of the victims since she is imprisoned in her cultural identity. She deliberately considers herself the puppet doll of her father's steel company, "I'm a waste product in the Bessemer process-like the millions.' (11) she wants to be useful to others, as she addresses her aunt; "I would like to be some use in the world. Is it my fault I don't know how? I would like to be sincere in one way or the other, to touch life somewhere." (11)

Mildred intends to discover the life of the sailors in the stokehole, on the other half of the ship. The portrayal of the visual and the audible impact given by O'Neill when depicting the character of Fireman is described as chained Gorillas:

"A line of men, stripped to the waist, is before the furnace door. They bend over, looking neither to right nor left..., handling their shovels as if they were part of their bodies, with a strange awkward, swinging rhythm ...outlined in silhouette in the crouching inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas." (14)

The working-class people lost their identity in the physical work that made them inferior to human beings and as a result, they started in taking the shape of apes in body and gestures. The character, Mildred is terribly scared to witness a scene when Yank embodies the perfect picture of an ape in a cage, "he [Yank] brandishes his shovel murderously over his head in one hand, pounding on his chest, gorilla-like."(16)

Yank's character of 'brutality' in the play and horribly done to the working-class people lead Mildred to collapse and utter "Oh, the filthy beast!". (17) At this moment, an unbridgeable gap takes place between the upper and lower classes. Consequently, Yank starts to lose harmony with his surroundings;" Yank and Mildred confront each other only for a moment, but that one moment is enough to play havoc with the soul of Yank."

The old Irish man in the ship, Paddy, has a philosophy concerning the sailors in the past. Those sailors were free, empowered and valued more than the sailors today. Paddy is conscious of

class discrimination and he tries to explain to Yank that Mildred's behaviour is not personal, and all the rich are alike in their attitudes toward the poor. Yet, Yank insists on taking the matter personally and vows to have revenge upon Mildred. To regain his destroyed myth of belonging, Yank decides to go out on 'a mission of revenge' to the Fifth Avenue.

To intensify class discrimination in the play, O'Neill describes the social environment of the Fifth Avenue as quite an unfit place for Yank: "A general atmosphere of the clean, well-tidied, wide street; a flood of mellow, the tempered sunshine; a gentle genteel breeze." (22) This setting is completely contrasted with Yank who is described by O'Neill as holding the same appearance of the stokehole; "Yank is in his dirty dungarees appearance. A fireman's cap with the black peak is cocked terrible defiantly on the side of his head. He has failed to shave for days and around his ... eyes – the black smudge of coal dust still sticks like make-up." (23)

Such a contrast appearance establishes a further conflict within Yank as he walks deliberately unseen by people in the Fifth Avenue Street. To help his audience probe into Yank's mind, O'Neill tends to employ monologue as an expressionistic technique. Yank is completely thrown out from his natural belongings and his inner conflicts started to burst out.

The detachment from the group of human beings as his appearance seems to be different as a result; Yank is imprisoned because he offends one of the rich people in the Fifth Avenue. The prison is given a description similar to that of the stokehole in the ship which is just like an animal cage, dimly lit and it is surrounded by heavy steel bars: "One rough electric bulb from low ceiling of the narrow corridor sheds its light through the heavy steel bars of the cell at the extreme front" (27)

Yank was astonished about the news while reading about The World American Labour Union in an "anarchist" paper in the prison. Still, he discovers that this union will present to him false deceptive security since it seeks to have the right in a legal and peaceful way. As for Yank, he desires to have revenge by using dynamite to blow the steel factory of Mildred's father. He soon realizes the bitter fact that he is alone, and steel does not give him power, rather, it is a cage wherein he is locked. His thought of opinion is just an illusion and he is incapable to determine his own destiny. He wonders; "where do I go from here?" (37) O'Neill strongly asserts Yank's alienation. The detachment and oppression of the capitalist society made him move nowhere else now he is a hairy ape, so obviously and naturally he belongs to the monkey house in the zoo. The only consolation now he gains and hopes to find "a creature with whom he is in harmony, that there, at least, he will 'belong'."

Through Yank's monologue, we understand that he remains encaged within the person of his soul. He feels worse than the ape in the cage. He does not belong to his surrounding, he has no memories to comfort him and the future is not promising. Yank with complete dejected and sadness when he addresses the gorilla in the cage as he says: "It's dis way, what I'm drivin' at. Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green wood's de jungle and de rest of it. Den yue belong and dey don't

.... But me ... I ain't got no past to tink in, nor nothing dat's coming, ony what's now ... and dat don't belong. (38)

Thus, in his attempt to befriend the animal group, Yank frees the gorilla from its cage. Yet dies as the gorilla "wraps his huge arms around Yank in a murderous hug," (39) Leaving his body, afterwards slips on the floor. This last scene is a terrifying and universal picture of man's agonized soul since, as Dr Tilak puts it; "Yank's sense of alienation and his quest for identity results in spiritual disintegration and death. His suffering is symbolic of the suffering of many an alienated soul in the contemporary world."

The dramatist also aims at describing social protest. During the period between the two world wars class distinction was clearly visible. The views of Karl Marks changed not only Europe but also America. The lower people began to protest and raised their voice. They wanted to bring change in their position. Yank is the voice of such people. The first scene of the play has this reflection. Yank criticizes the upper capital class. He says that they are better than those rich people. He adds 'we belong, and they don't.' His outpouring reflects the anger of the crushed people. The rich people made them machine-like. They have created depressive condition, but they will become stronger and would continue to struggle. The building of the rich people is standing on the base of the labour people. In the second scene, the contrast between the two classes is shown. Mildred comes from the upper class. There is whiteness, cleanliness, comfort and everything good. On the other side Yank and the company faces a horrible life. Their hard life is vividly described in the three scenes. The scene on the Fifty Avenue is again related to social inequality. The tension is more in the seventh scene. It is a reflection of their activities of social revolution. There is an organisation and we find the discussion regarding it as well as their function, but Yank is not happy the way they want to bring change in another being.

In search of his belonging Yank becomes a tragic figure. Earlier he was in the hell i.e working as a stokehole where fire and darkness prevail. His life is that of a wonderer. But there was pride in it. But the fall comes with Mildred's remark. Though it was meant general Yank takes it a personal insult. The quest for identity begins from there. He tries to see his position. He goes to Fifth Avenue but finds that he does not belong there. Even the jail does not keep him. The I. W. W does not help him. The last thing is the cage of the hairy ape but that is also not meant for him. He is thrown from every place. His outburst makes it clear that he is angry and has deep frustration. He considered himself as steel, but it is ironic that steel does not stand, as it melts down.

The play has been referred to as a comedy, but it is the mask to hide the tragic elements. Even real comic scenes prepare the audience to go through tragic experiences. The play is not a comedy but it is a dark comedy. Yank's search makes him a comic figure. His efforts to take revenge upon Mildred shun his sense of thinking properly. But we should not forget that ultimately, he is the winner. The people of his class have not even an idea of their class or their consciousness of belonging. Yank at least has thought of it. He didn't stop after it but struggles to rise. Even in his fall,

there's the rise. That is what our inner sense can get. He has raised above all the common people as he tried to come out from the assigned social position.

Yank is a representation of the modern man. The contemporary world has become the root cause of snatching away man's identity. In the social surrounding man is uprooted and feels alienated. He is an island himself. He wants to be but the world does not allow him to be what he is. Conflicts and confrontations break him down. His life apparently still is actually full of whirlwind and storms in which he is trapped and ultimately disappears from the 'stage' like Yank.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the need to "belong" in Yank's world has lost its significance and vitality. It is an age of steel and materialism, not an age of the free man who can be in harmony with his natural surroundings. Industrialism deprives the working class their spiritual values and humanity. Thus, the play is "a satire on the vacuous world of the rich and the soulless existence of the poor. The hardship and the prime value is not the need to revolt but to 'belong'. Yank dies without knowing his real identity. He is not a part of steel and machinery, but actually, he is their salve.

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