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THE HAIRY APE- A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Abstract:

Eugene O'Neill continues his dramatization of the American identity in his works. In *Anna Christie*, he presented an important type of the American identity, the irresponsible, careless, lost, disintegrated and doomed to suffer character. O'Neill is still engaged with the sea plays but this time the journey is from the sea to the land not the opposite. In 1922 O'Neill presents his play *The Hairy Ape*. In this play O'Neill exposes an important problem that was common in the world in general and in the American society in particular. It discusses the alienation of the American individual in the modern technological age and the lost identity of that individual. O'Neill in this play shows the lost identity of the modern American man and his futile attempts in regaining it. *The Hairy Ape* is a one character play which shows the reality and the bad conditions of the American society.

Key words: American identity, social outcaste, reality of working class, modern American man

In this play O'Neill symbolizes the relationship between the modern man and his universe, a universe in which the desires of men to "belong" are mere playthings in the hands of a capricious deterministic force and the capitalists who do not care for the desires of those people. O'Neill focuses his attention on the social outcast, whose rootless and bitter struggle against a hostile society is symbolic of the position of mankind in an indifferent universe (Clark and Roberts: 52).

The play talks about the reality of the working class. Yank, Paddy, and Long are the central characters with Mildred, the representative of the upper class. Yank is the leader of the firemen on a steamship. Early in the play Yank is strong, powerful and confident of himself and his existence. He glorifies himself and his strength; he resembles himself with the machines that he serves. He thinks of himself as the leader and the prime mover of all machinery, he is the maker of the steel. He 'belongs', of course that is his favorite word. He has found a place for him and he is satisfied with it (Ranald : 24).

O'Neill's dramatization of Paddy as animal-like man and his desperate and hopeless condition shows the reality of the American character. Paddy goes to alcohol in order to forget his sorrows and shortcomings. He says that he sings when he is dead to the world, when he is hopeless and desperate. When they ask him to sing he replies "I'm never too drunk to sing. Tis only when I'm dead to the world I'd be wishful to sing at all"(Scene One :144). This means that alcohol is their shelter from the bitter reality of their existence, the means to forget the hard and desperate reality is to escape to the world of unconsciousness, to live in the dreams and illusions. Paddy sings when he is drunk, and he is drunk when he is dead to the world, he drinks to forget his miseries and sorrows.

O'Neill uses characters in the plays without names , he just calls them Voices on purpose in order to suggest their minimumity in their society. These characters where lost underworld and society is ignorant of their being and that is why O'Neill called them mere voices to suggest their loss in life. They are like machines, after each utterance by them O'Neill comments suggestively: "The chorused word has a brazen metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns. It followed by a general uproar of hard, barking laughter" (Scene One :145). This shows their mechanized being, they are treated like machines, they have the same voice, the same laugh and the same qualities .

The Hairy Ape dramatizes the bewilderment of a powerful stoker when his naïve confidence in himself is shaken. Yank expresses his futile attempts to find a place for himself in this world, he symbolizes man's search for a meaning for his life and his alienation in the world. O'Neill's play talks about Yank in relation to his surroundings and

environments, his relation to other characters in the play, and his attempts to find meaning for his reality.

The Hairy Ape dramatizes the theme of alienation and loss of identity. O'Neill draws a character, Yank, a stoker who lives in the bellow deck in the stokehole of an ocean liner. Yank, after he left his home when he was a child, becomes homeless, an outcast; he thinks that he has finally found his warm home which is the stokehole. In this work Yank thinks that he has found his real place in the world and he can achieve something valuable for himself and for society. Having this feeling Yank thinks that he belongs to his society and he is important and counted. O'Neill puts those stokers in the bellow deck and at the bottom of the social ladder and even so they are satisfied and convinced in their lives and positions because they think that they do something for society and society is grateful in return. Yank confirms this illusion to his fellow men

when he says:

We 're better men dan dey are, ain't we? Sure! One Of us
guy could clean de whole mob wit mit. Put one of dem
down here foe one watch in de stokwhole, what'd happen
? Dey'dcarry 'himoffon a Stretcher. Dem biods don't
amount to nothing dey're just baggage. Who make dis old
tub run? Ain't it us guys well den, we belong, don't we?
We belong and dey don't dat's all(Scene One: 147).

Yank has this idea in his mind; he thinks that he and his fellow men are more important and stronger than the others and they can achieve many things for their society, for that reason he thinks that he belongs and has his real and valuable identity. This gives the audience an important clue to O'Neill's vision of the American character at that time. Long, on the one hand supports Yank's ideas that they are better guys and they belong, their real home is the stoker and they have no home other than this one. He says; "Listen 'er, Comrades! Yank 'er is right.'E says this stikin' ship is our 'ome. And 'e says as 'ome is 'ell. And 'e s right. This is 'ell. We lives in 'ell, Comrades" (SceneOne:146).

O'Neill's dramatization of Yank is not individual but there are millions of men and women who are blood relations of Yank in this modern industrial world. Those people, the Yanks of

the world, all their lives think that they belong, counted and have their dignity and human qualities. They feel that they are necessary to their society, a respected and important part of their social ladder. In the first scene of the play Yank appears to have self confidence and satisfaction of his position in the social ladder. Yank tells his friends that this stokehole is their real home, they have no home but this one. Yank considers this stokehole as his real home and he is glad of it. When his friends sing their song about home he tells them that this is their home and they have no home as he says:

Shut up, yuh lousy boob. Where d'yuh get dat tripe?
Home? Home, hell! I'll make home for yuh! I'll 'knoc
yuh head. Home! ...dis is home, see? What d' yuh want
wit home? I runned away from mine when I was a kid.
on'y too glad to beat it, dat was me (Scene One: 145).

O'Neill dramatizes Yank as a man who deludes himself of belonging.

Yank thinks that he belongs to the stokehole, he is proud of himself, he thinks that all the work in these engines depends on him. He feels that he is the force that makes the entire mechanized society moves, that is his credo. He is the man who runs all the works and all the steel that is produced is by his hand. This feeling of pride gives Yank the sense of belonging and contempt of his life in the stokehole. He expresses a satisfaction for the noise that the other men make, he condemns home, women, religion and all these things.

O'Neill here dramatizes Yank as a man who belongs to the world, a man who needs nothing, he is proud of himself because he thinks that he is the provider of the energy and steel of all the world. Yank argues with Paddy saying that he is part of the engines and he likes to be down in the stokehole for, as he puts it, he can eat coal, "...I eat it up! I get fat on it! It's me makes it hot! It's me makes it roar! It's me makes it move" (Scene One :151). Yank sees that all the works of the engines and all the steel produced is by his hand. In the stokehole Yank is stripped to the waist with all his mates, he can outfight, outcurse and outfeel them all, he is proud of himself, of his power and his job as a stoker at the heart of the ship. He lives through the illusions of his own making. He feels glory when he thinks that he is steel and coal and motion (Eaton: 4). "...Dey 're speed, ain't dey! Dey smash trou, don't dey? Twenty-five knots a hour !...Dat's belong"(Scene One :150).

Through the words of Paddy O'Neill draws and dramatizes a specific

portrait of the American society, Paddy cannot face the bitter life and wrongs done to him and his people, he escapes to the past of the beautiful days. He does not think that he belongs to this life and this world, he is unlike Yank; he belongs to the past. Paddy symbolizes another type of the American character which is the nostalgic character. Even the song of Paddy is intended by O'Neill to reveal the real picture of the American society, Paddy sings; "I care for nobody, no, not I, and nobody cares for me" (Scene one:152) .This shows O'Neill's dramatization of the American character, he uses many ways and techniques to reveal his ideas and feelings.

O'Neill's dramatization of the American character appears sometimes in his comments on the characters and the dialogues, in Mildred's conversation with the Second Engineer O'Neill shows the class conflict and the carelessness of the American people for each other.

SECOND ENGINEER --- Hum, excuse me, ma'am, but are you intending to Wear that dress?

MILDRED--- Why not ?

SECOND ENGINEER--- you 'll likely rub against oil and dirt.
It can't be helped .

MILDRED --- it doesn't matter. I have lots of white dresses.

SECOND ENGINEER---I have an old coat you might throw over

MILDRED--- I have fifty dresses like this. I will throw this one in into the sea when I come back, that ought to wash it clean
Don't you think? (Scene Two : 158).

In Scene Three, Yank's world is turned upside down and he loses all his illusions about himself. O'Neill introduces another important character in the play which is Mildred the daughter of the president of all the steel. Mildred has an important purpose in the play, she resembles a turning point in the world of Yank. Mildred wants to know how the other half lives so that she goes down below the deck and then she sees Yank's face as O'Neill describes him, he says: "he branches his shovel murderously over his head, pounding on his chest, gorilla-like...he whirls defensively with a snarling, murderous growl ...his lips drawn back over his teeth, his small eyes gleaming furiously" (Scene Three:163).

Yank realizes that he is no more than a filthy beast in the eyes of

Mildred and her class. He falls under the curse of consciousness, he is conscious of who is he in their eyes. He knows his real value in society and what is his position in the ladder of evaluation. He falls under the curse of bewilderment, despair and hopelessness. He even ceases to think as a man and a meaningful creature, but he despises himself being a hairy ape. Yank now is left to no one, he is abandoned by every one, society, and even his friends mock him being insulted by a woman.

O'Neill intentionally brings Mildred to the stage though he knows that her role is limited and minimal. Mildred's importance in the play lies in her few words that are intended by O'Neill to awake Yank from his illusion. She was a catalyst to shake Yank from within, to make him realize his reality and his value in society. Mildred's appearance represents an awakening from the lethargy and the dormancy of Yank. She shocked him down and forced him to wake up and to reevaluate his existence.

Yank is shocked by this situation when Mildred calls him the filthy beast in front of his friends. He works for society, for Mildred's father but there is no gratitude and no appreciation even. Yank works hard and he is near to the fire that makes him look like an ape. His face is black and he is half naked because he works hard and near the fire. He looks like an ape because he is caged below the deck, the workers cannot stand even because the ceiling is too low, they are caged inside the stokehole and Mildred ignores all that, not only Mildred but all her class because she is a representative of her class as O'Neill intends. For that reason no wonder if Yank questions his existence and his worth in society. He should reconsider his place in the world and his being.

The first thing that Yank wants to do after his insult is to "think". He begins to question himself; he tries to think who is he, "Can't yuose see I'm tryin' to tink?". Then he begins to hate, he falls in hate as he puts it "I've fallen in hate, get me?". Yank feels himself insulted so that he wants to avenge himself and his fellow men also "I'll brain her! I'll brain her yet, wait 'n' see! Say , is dat what she called me –hairy ape?"(Scene Four :169). Now Yank reevaluates himself and his worth in society, he realizes how people looks at him, "hairy ape so dat's me, huh?...i'll show yuh who's ape!... I'll fix her...(Scene Four:170) .

In Scene Four when Yank starts his journey looking for his identity in the Fifth Avenue, it's the first time for him to see people since months or years. O'Neill describes Yank and Long in the street, he says:

Long is dressed in shore clothes, wear a black Windsor tie cloth up. Yank is in his dirty dungarees. A fireman's cap with black peak on his head...around his fierce resentful eyes—as around those of Long—the black smudge of coal dust stills like make-up(Scene Five : 173).

This shows and discloses Yank's reality, how he speaks, how he wears and how he behaves with other people. He tries to attack men and women, he just wants to fight anybody but their reactions shock him severely because no one seems to see or hear him. He begins to speak about his glories and his work in the stokehole; "Sure! I'm steel and steam and smoke and de rest of it! It moves –speed...."(scene Five : 179).

Then he begins to insult them; "Youse simps don't move. Yuh're on'y dolls I winds up to see 'm spin. Yuh 're de garbage, get me- de leavins – de ashes we dump over de side! Now, what 'a' yuh gotta say? (Scene Four: 179). Even his way of talking with others is intended by O'Neill to suggest his primitivism and to reflect his identity. Yank was living down in the stokehole for a long period, he even cannot talk like other people; and his way of talking is not polite with others, his language is intended by O'Neill to suggest his ape-like state.

Yank tries to attack people in his way but they seem even not seeing him and unaware of his existence, they ignore him and just passed him, they seem neither to see nor to hear him. This negative reaction of those people annoys Yank so much so he jumps into fury and begins to insult them; "Bums! Pigs ! Tarts! Bitches!... Git off de oith! G'wan, yuh bum! Look where yuh're goin', can't yuh ? Git outa here! Fight , why don't yuh? Put up yer mits! Don't be a dog! Fight or I'll knock yuh dead! (Scene Five :179).

O'Neill dramatizes the people who are exiting from the church in a very expressive way. He envisions the real picture of the American

society, the rich people move like robots, they even do not see Yank or care about him. They even have no reaction to Yank's insults because they do not count him as human as O'Neill intends. This picture shows the rich people's indifference to the poor .

Yank is taken to the prison for misbehaviour and there O'Neill draws an ironic picture of the American character. Yank is the maker of the steel and it's him "who makes it move, roar"etc. Now he is imprisoned and he is taken behind the steel that he produces. He spends a month in the prison and he never felt that he belonged to this place either, this is the second time that society rejected him, first Mildred and then people. He still wants to avenge himself from that harsh ungrateful society. He tries to find someone who can understand him in this society .

Yank at this moment realizes that steel has betrayed him. He thinks of himself as the personification of steel, but as a result of his experience he now sees steel as something that imprisons him in some kind of a cage, whether it is the cage of the stoker's forecastle, the cage of prison, or the cage of social injustice.

In prison Yank learns about the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Then when he gets out of the prison Yank still has the idea of revenge, he joins this organization in an attempt to avenge himself upon Mildred by blowing up the steel company of her father. However Yank's suggestion is too violent even for the IWW, they think that he is a spy, they just give him another name, a brainless ape, and then he is thrown unto the street. In Yank's conversation with the secretary of the IWW the difference of languages between them appears. The language of Yank is abrupt, fragmentary and full of mistakes and errors. This language is intended by O'Neill to reveal Yank's identity and reality .

In the street Yank is shocked by the other reality, not only Mildred rejects him but even the IWW which is supposed to serve and help the people like Yank. O'Neill here tries to dramatize not only Yank but his surroundings also, the people around him, the social system because the play is not about Yank as an individual but about his world, the Yanks of the world, the surroundings and the social factors who gave Yank his lost identity. O'Neill's criticism is for the government, for the social system like that, what was his fault to be rejected by all people!. O'Neill through this dialogue gives his audience a silent but very expressive picture of the reality of the

American Eden:

POLICEMAN -- what you been doing

YANK -- Enuf to gimme life for! I was born, see? Sure, dat's de charge. Write it in de blotter. I was born, get mee!

POLICEMAN -- God pity your old woman! But I've no time for kidding. You're soused. I'd run you in but its long walk to the station, come on now, get up, or I'll fan your ears with this club.

Beat it now!

YANK: Say where do I go from here?

POLICEMAN: Go to hell (Scene Eight :197)

O'Neill dramatizes the American society and the American character in that society in a way that shows him lost and belonging to nothing, no one care for him; his proper place is hell as the policeman suggests. O'Neill shows the reality of being American inside this mechanical revolution. The American society and the social system do not care for their citizens, they are indifferent to their lives, as did the policeman to Yank. The American individual has no room inside his house, he is dismissed because it's not his house anymore. Their only fault is that they were born, so this is the charge as Yank says, and the sentence for this fault is hell. Hell is the only shelter that is offered by society. But O'Neill's characters never give up to their shortcomings, Yank is convinced that he does not fit in this world, so he moves to another world in an attempt to find out his lost identity.

When Yank realizes that his search to belong to somewhere has been futile, and he has been rejected by all segments of society, the wealthy represented by Mildred, the imprisoned in the prison and the representatives of the masses, the IWW, Yank is confused and bewildered, where should he go and what should he do in this cruel society?. He realizes that he has no place in this mechanized society and this world is not for him. He remembers Mildred's words and applies her theory and goes to the zoo.

In the final scene, Yank visits the gorilla in the zoo. He looks at the beauty of sunrise and realizes that he does not belong to that, now he comes to see how it is with a real hairy ape. Everyone thinks that he is an ape, Mildred has called him "filthy beast" so he might be one. When he approaches the gorilla, he sees the real hairy ape and he realizes the ugliness that Mildred has seen in him. He starts talking to the gorilla, he envies it because,

he says, gorilla can think of the past and should not have to question its being. He envies the gorilla because it has a place and he does not; the gorilla belongs and he does not "you belong! Yuh 're de on'y one in de woild dat does, yuh lucky stiff!"(Scene Eight : 197).

In Yank's conversation with the gorilla, he remembers Mildred's words, he questions his value in her eyes. He considers himself as an ape, he says:
Ain't we both members of de same club- de hairy apes.
So yuh're what she seen when she looked at me, de white face tart. I was you to her, get me? On'y outa de cage—broke out free to moider her, see? Sure! Dat's what she tought. She...wasn't wise dat I was in a cage too—worsen'nyours (Scene Eight:196).

Yank envies the gorilla because it does not belong to human beings, he reveals his bitter experience with the human beings so that he envies the gorilla, he says " on'y yuh're lucky, see? Yuh don't belong wit 'em and yuh know it. But me, I belong wit 'em but I don't, see? Dey don't belong wit me...." (197). Yank justifies his envy for the gorilla that it has a past to think of, but he does not have any. " youse can sit and dope dreams in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it.... but me – I ain't got no past to tink in , no nothin' dat comin', on'y now and dat don't belong"(Scene Eight :197) Yank envies the gorilla's ability to avoid thinking and examining his place in the world(Krasner :63).

O'Neill suggests that man becomes equal to animals yet sometimes even the animal is better than man, says Yank to his "brother" ; "Sure yuh're de best off! I ain't on oath and ain't on heaven, get me?...you belong! Sure yuh're de on'y one in de woild dat does..."(Scene Eight :197).

Yank realizes that man is not his brother but an ape is. He wants to take the gorilla in a walk to Fifth Avenue, he replace man with an ape so he wants to shake hands with his new brother. But the gorilla is not convinced of this brotherhood because it is not reasonable, a man becomes a gorilla's brother!. The gorilla rejects Yank and hugs him murderously and Yank dies at the cage ending his quest for identity.

O'Neill's dramatization of the American character is revealed in this scene. Society is not the only one that rejects Yank, but even the animals do. The gorilla, Yank's brother, also rejects him. The American individual, according to O'Neill, has no place neither

with the humans nor with the animals. "Where do I fit in? Even him didn't think I belong. Christ, where do I get off at?"(Scene Eight : 197). This is the question of the modern American man, he does not fit in society, he cannot live with animals even, so what is the answer of Yank's question? Might be hell as the policeman tells him.

In this way O'Neill dramatizes another type of the American identity, Yank is like Anna; he revolutionizes against the social system in order to have his own identity after he has lost it. Anna moves from the land to the sea to find her identity, she has lost her identity in the land , she comes to the sea in attempt to regain it. But Yank has lost his identity on the sea and he moves to the land seeking for his identity. In both cases the American man fails to find his own identity. Anna suffers in her life and Yank is shocked by reality that he is nothing and belongs to nothing. Yank found belonging and identity in death as O'Neill suggests at the end of the play.

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