CHAPTER V

USE OF SYMBOLISM IN O’NEILL’S PLAYS
Chapter fifth is entitled as **Use of Symbolism in O’Neill’s Plays** in which an attempt has been made to discuss in detail the use of symbolism in the plays of O’Neill and how the use of symbolism makes O’Neill a great playwright. Symbolism is a literary device and the writer makes use of the character, setting, incident, language and his thoughts. The playwright clarifies his ideas, concepts in a short way by making the use of the symbols in his plays. The mind of the character is disclosed with the use of symbols. His plays *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, Desire Under the Elms, Beyond the Horizon, The Great God Brown, Marco Millions, Dynamo, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude, Long Days Journey into Night* etc., are full of symbolism.

There is a network of symbolism in the play *The Emperor Jones*. He uses it from the beginning to the end of the play. And all these symbols are related to another and move around the central figure, Brutus Jones. The action of this play starts in the afternoon that symbolizes confidence. In this play, the night, day, forest, daylight, moonlight, are full of symbolism. We come across that the beating of tom-tom, the silver bullet, the white colour, dazzling scarlet, red colour of the blood, the crocodile are all
symbolically used in the play. The night is the symbol for terror, retrogression, and disintegration.

The play *The Hairy Ape* is a symbolic play. The Hairy Ape is Yank who is a symbol of man. He has lost his old harmony with nature. Yank is the main symbol of modern man’s quest for identity. The machine age is also symbolic. Mildred symbolizes the fashionable humanists. The ending of the play is ambiguous. The setting of the play, characters, dialogues, techniques, language etc., is symbolic. *Beyond the Horizon* is also full of symbols. The road, the horizon, hills, fields, stone walls, rough snake fences, the dark earth, fall-sown rye, piled rocks, apple tree, twisted branches, twilight of a day in May, the horizon hills etc., are used as the symbols. The title *Long Days Journey into Night* is very suggestive. It signifies the characters’ separation from reality. It is not forward journey but a journey in the backward direction, especially for Mary. The interior set has its symbolic value too. Mary is also the inverse image of the Earth Mother for whom her sons long. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the use of external and internal scenes becomes symbolic. The external scenes in this play convey the main characters who desire to escape into some land of peace, on the other hand the internal scenes represent the suppression and denial of natural instinct to live. The characters have a ‘mask like face’ and it suggests their split, and inner disharmony. The song by Seth explores the theme of the play. It also symbolizes an un navigable gulf.

*Beyond the Horizon* was written in 1918. Its first production was at Morosco Theatre, New York, 3 February 1920. Its first London production was at Regent Theatre (The Repertory Players) on 31 January 1926. O’Neill has depicted the characters of James
Mayo, Kate Mayo, Captain Dick Scott, Andrew Mayo, Robert Mayo, Ruth Atkins, Mrs. Atkins and others in *Beyond the Horizon*. The character of Robert Mayo plays a very significant role in this play. He is introduced in the first Act, Scene I of this play. In the beginning of the play, he is discovered sitting on the fence. He is a tall, slender young man of twenty-three. There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined, leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin. He is dressed in gray corduroy trousers pushed into high laced boots, and a blue flannel shirt with a bright colored tie. He shuts this, keeping a finger in to mark the place, and turns his head towards the horizon, gazing out over the fields, and hills. His lips move as if he were reciting something to himself. In this play, the character of Robert is search for self, as unconsciously, are his wife, Ruth and his brother, Andrew.

*Beyond the Horizon* is the first major play written by O’Neill which established his reputation as a playwright by winning the first Pulitzer Prize for him. As his first full-length play, it is naturally built upon all his significant earlier works. The play deals with his sense of special relationship between man and his environment. The play depicts the tragic story of Robert Mayo, the true tragic protagonist who has lost his harmony with the environment. Owing to this loss of harmony, he is unable to belong to his circumstances, and so suffers from a sense of isolation throughout his life. His loss of belongingness and the conflict between his dream and desire compel him to live between hope’s eternal optimism and the inevitability of despair. Ultimately, he remains an alienated person till the end of his life. The plays deal with the tragic story of two brothers, Robert and Andrew. Robert is a young farm born dreamer, whose romantic
mind and frail body yearn for the open sea, the swarming ports of the mysterious East, and the beckoning world beyond the line of hills which enclose his native town. Both the brothers are opposite to each other in nature. Andrew has no interest in all sorts of romantic imagination. He is a real Mayo, a true son of the soil, born to do nothing but work in the field.

Robert and Andrew are brothers who are in love with the same girl, Ruth. Both the brothers are opposite to each other in nature. In their approach towards life, both have very opposite views. Robert is a young farm born dreamer. His romantic mind and frail body yearn for the open sea, the swarming ports of the mysterious East, and the beckoning world beyond the line of hills which enclose his native town. On the other hand, Andrew has no interest in all sorts of romantic imagination. He is a real Mayo. He is a true son of the soil, born to do nothing but work in the field.

This play is like a fugue, developing with variations the theme of the suspension of life between opposites. We feel the balancing pull not only between reality and idealism, but also between the earthy and the spiritual, joy and sorrow, love and hate, hope and despair. The opposites are symbolized not only in the action of the play, but also in the division of the acts into alternate indoor and outdoor scenes. Of these divisions, O'Neill said in a magazine interview,

“In Beyond the Horizon, there are three acts of two scenes each. One scene is out of doors, showing the horizon, suggesting the man’s desire and dream. The other is indoors, the horizon gone, suggesting what has come
between him and his dream. In that way, I tried to get rhythm, the alternation of longing and of loss.”


We find that Robert is a poetic dreamer who was a childhood invalid. From his pain grew the longing for beauty which he thinks must lie in the unknown beyond the horizon. Robert is about to leave the farm for a three-year voyage to the beautiful foreign world beyond the horizon. But at the time of his departure, he comes to know that Ruth loves him and not his brother Andrew. After that Robert says to Ruth that he is going to cancel his three-year voyage to the foreign land. We find that the character of Ruth is the symbol of love. Robert loves Ruth but more that that he would like find something else. He hopes that definitely there must be something beautiful beyond the hills. So, we may say that Robert is the optimistic person in his life. His last words are full of hope,

“Robert : (in a voice which is suddenly ringing with happiness of hope) You must not feel sorry for me. Don’t you see I’m happy at last - free - free! - freed from the farm - free to wander on and on - eternally ! Look! Isn’t it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voice calling me to come - (Exultantly). And this time I’m young. It isn’t the end. It’s a free beginning - the start of my voyage! I’ve won to my trip - the right of release - beyond the horizon! Oh, you ought to be glad - glad - for my sake!”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.167-168]
Having long been in love with Ruth, Robert remains behind to marry her. He feels that love is perhaps what he had hoped to find in his search. Andrew sails in his place, and Robert hopefully accepts his new position as a family man and farmer. After that, we find that Ruth is defeated. Robert is seriously ill with tuberculosis, still reaches out desperately for assurance that happiness may be found somewhere beyond the limits of reality. There must be some self-image to which he can conform besides that of the abject failure. Perhaps he would be successful in the city. They can move there to find the secret beyond the horizon. Then Robert goes to the window to see the sun rise, but reality again denies the dream.

“No sun yet. It isn’t time. All I can see is the black rim of the damned hills outlined against a creeping grayness.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 151]

The back rims of hills can disappear for Robert only when the grayness of death has finally crept over them. At that moment, the imprisoning hills of material reality - of the finite limitations of the self - fade before a truer revelation for Robert of the secret beyond the horizon. Robert at last sees clearly the nature of his search and that of Andrew and Ruth. They have all taken their self-images from a false ideal formed by the needs of the age - when by losing the ego in sacrifice; they might have found a new, attainable, and richer ideal. In Robert’s dying speeches, O’Neill makes this explicit, as he does the significance of the tragic suspension between opposites. As Doris Falk rightly remarks,
“The suffering does have meaning, but not because there is hope of relieving it—the suffering itself frees us from pride. It gives birth to sacrifice, loss of self, and happiness, just as Robert’s early pain gave birth to his dream of the beauty beyond the horizon. When Robert comes to accept the inevitable—at the point of death, however, when it is too late to use his knowledge—this meaning becomes clear to him and he regains his self-respect; he finds his own ideal, poetic selfless self that has no long been lost.”

[Falk, Doris V., 1958. p, 40.]

There are three Acts and each act comprises two scenes in this play. All these scenes convey different meanings in the play. But all these scenes are related to the main theme of the play. All the scenes are symbolic in meaning. The first scene is set on the road and the sunset of a day in spring is a symbol. It has a particular symbolic meaning. It is a section of country highway. O’Neill has used the symbols of the road, the horizon, hills, fields, stone walls, rough snake fences, the dark earth, fall-sown rye, piled rocks, apple tree, twisted branches, twilight of a day in May, the horizon hills, a faint line of flame, the sky glows with the crimson flush of the sunset etc. We come to know that the action of the play begins in the spring season. This season stands for the optimism and the richness in the life of the farmer. But at the same time, the playwright makes the use of the symbol of the sunset that stands for a little upsetness in the mind of Ruth who loves Robert. The characters of Robert Mayo, his brother Andrew, Ruth are also introduced in the first scene of this first Act. He thinks that beauty must lie in the unknown beyond the horizon.
In the second Act, there is a sitting room of the farm house about half past twelve in the afternoon of a hot, sun baked day in midsummer, three years later. All the windows are open, but no breeze stirs the soiled white curtains. A patched screen door is in the rear. Through it, the yard can be seen, its small stretch of lawn divided by the dirt path leading to the door from the gate in the white picket fence which borders the road. The room has changed, not so much in its outward appearance as in its general atmosphere. Little significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed. A place is set at the end of the table, left, for someone’s dinner. Through the open door to the kitchen comes the clatter of dishes being washed, interrupted at intervals by a woman’s irritated voice and the peevish whining of a child. In this scene, O’Neill has used a number of symbols relate to farm. The noon of the summer day is also symbolic. Other symbols are like - sun-baked day, open windows, breeze, white curtains, patched screen door, small stretch of lawn, dirt path, white picket fence - these things represent the carelessness and inefficiency of the people. Then we have a child’s doll, a hoe, a number of books piled carelessly. In this scene, Robert is shown as the optimistic character. He tells Ruth that both of them should try to do better the things in the farm. He expects for improvement in future. But in the end of this scene, we find that the relation between Robert and Ruth is broken. Ruth also comes to know that Robert is not interested in the farm and he is unsuccessful in it. She hates Robert. She also says to Robert that she loves Andrew. So in this scene, we come across that the things are totally changed. The dream of Robert is broken. He becomes gloomy and frustrated in life. At this scene, the character of Robert stands for pessimism and the character of Ruth has depicted as a symbol of optimism as she is interested in Andrew.
In Act III, scene I, we find that O'Neill is interested in the symbolic problem; he presents Robert and Andrew more as metaphors of each other than as individual types. Robert obtains his release from the horizon through his death, and Andrew and Ruth awaken to their true self through a contact with suffering. The horizon is presented as a unit of felt experience, in which illusion and reality mingle and separate in consonance with the shifts in the dramatic mood.

The play begins with the incident that Robert is about to ship on a voyage with his uncle. His brother is very happy with the farm. His brother is looking forward to his marriage with Ruth Atkins, his childhood sweet-heart. When Robert tells Ruth that he loves her, her response causes him to abandon his chance of escape and to marry Ruth. On the contrary, Andrew replaces his brother on the sea voyage. Robert proves inept and temperamentally unsuited to farming, and brings the farm to slow disintegration and ruin. He realizes that his wife has become resentful and morose. She has always loved his brother. Anyhow, they have managed to pass their time for the sake of their daughter and mother. But after the death of his mother and the baby, Robert becomes more helpless and faces a lot of economic trouble. Then, Andrew returns, successful and wealthy. Andrew finds Robert surrounded by the ruins he has created and dying of tuberculosis. On his death-bed, Robert still dreams of freedom beyond the horizon and of reconciliation between Ruth and Andrew. The play opens with the description of a country-yard atmosphere. This atmosphere projects the inner life of the characters....

“The road runs diagonally from the left, forward, to the right, rear, and can be seen in the distance, winding toward horizon like a pale ribbon between
the low, rolling hills with their freshly-ploughed fields clearly divided from each other.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 81]

This suggests the separateness of Andrew and Robert, “A straggling line of piled rocks, too low to be called a wall, separates this field from the road.” This symbolized the attitude of the two brothers towards life. The field stands for Andrew, the elder brother who believes in work. The road is indicative of the day-dreamer Robert who aspires what lies beyond. On account of their own nature, they are separated from each other by a wall of piled rocks. These are symbolic of the naked realities of life. At first, we find Robert sitting on the fence, reading a book in the beauteous atmosphere of the fading sun. His appearance expresses his personality,

“There is a touch of the poet about him expressed in his high forehead and wide, dark eyes. His features are delicate and refined leaning to weakness in the mouth and chin.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 81]

This individuality of his character keeps him apart from the rest of the characters in the play. It seems that he is haunted by a sense of isolation which ensues from his romantic nature ever in search of beauty. O’Neill describes him thus,

“......... he turns his head toward the horizon, gazing out over the fields and hills. His lips move as if he were reciting something to himself.”
On the other hand, Andrew is returning from his work in the field, “an opposite type of Robert - husky, sunbronzed, handsome in a large-featured, manly fashion - a son of the soil, intelligent in a shrewd way, but with nothing of the intellectual about him.” This shows his devotion towards work in contrast to Robert’s worship of beauty. Both the brothers are sharply distinguished by their thoughts. Being a farmer’s son, whose duty is to work in the field, Robert’s expectation lies beyond the horizon. His high ambition is the cause of his loneliness, which compels him to seek some peace in a lonely atmosphere, for which he is isolated from his family. This discussion reveals the fact that Robert is about to go on a sea voyage to the beautiful foreign world beyond the horizon with the uncle, Captain Dick Scott. As he is not satisfied with the environment to which he belongs, he says to Andrew,

“What I want to do now is keep on moving, so that I won’t take root in any one place.”

This clearly shows that he has lost his roots, his identity. His motive behind the voyage is nothing but his search for identity. He thinks that his search for identity may be fulfilled by his urge for beauty. He describes the cause behind his journey to Andrew,

“Supposing I was to tell you that it’s just beauty that’s calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, the mystery and spell of the East, which
lures me in the books I’ve read, the need of the freedom of great wide spaces, the joy of wandering on and on- in quest of the secret which is hidden just over there, Beyond the Horizon? Suppose I told you that was the one and only reason for my going?”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 89]

Robert’s longing for beauty is marred by the confession of Ruth. On the eve of his departure, he comes to know that he is being loved by Ruth, who, he thought, loved Andrew. For the sake of Ruth, he changes his plan,

“Ruth told me this evening that - she loved me. It was after I’d confessed I loved her. I told her I hadn’t been conscious of my love until after the trip had been arranged, and I realized it would mean - leaving her. That was the truth. I didn’t know until then...I hadn’t intended telling her anything but - suddenly - I felt I must. I didn’t think it would matter, because I was going away, and before I came back I was sure she’d have forgotten. And I thought she loved someone else ... And then she cried and said it was I she’d loved all the time, but I hadn’t seen it (Simply). So we’re going to be married - very soon - and I’m happy - and that’s all there is to say (Appealingly.) But you see, I couldn’t go away now-even if I wanted to.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.100]
At first, Robert insists Ruth to accompany him in his voyage. But she refuses, citing the reason of her mother Mrs. Atkin’s illness and her own outlook on life. She says to Robert,

“I wouldn’t want to live in any of those outlandish places you were going to. I couldn’t - not knowing anyone. It makes me afraid just to think of it. I’ve never been away from here, hardly and - I’m just a home body. I’m afraid.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 100]

Her bent of mind is entirely practical, contrary to the poetical mind of Robert. In fact, she is trapped in the cage of illusion - she hopes she will lead a life of conciliation with Robert. But the nature of Robert is incompatible with hers. Robert is a man living in the world of imagination, i.e. poetry, and she, for this transitory charm, woos him. In order to satisfy Ruth and to marry her, he chooses the wrong way and decides to stay at home instead of leaving. Now he begins to think that perhaps he may be able to find all his dreams and desires in his life with Ruth. Robert says,

“I could find all things I was seeking for here, at home on the farm. The mystery and the wonder - our love should bring them home too, I think love must have been the secret - the secret that called to me from over the world’s rim - the secret beyond every horizon; and when I did not come, it came to me ...... Oh, Ruth, you are right; Our love is sweeter than any distant dream.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 101]
Robert’s changing of decision astonishes the members of his family because farming is entirely different to his nature. His father does not like his idea, but with all his confidence, Robert tries to convince him: “I’m going to settle right down and take a real interest in the farm, and do my share. I’ll prove to you, Pa, that I’m as good a Mayo as you are - or Andy, when I want to be.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 102.]

Although his confidence is completely based on his false idea, he again goes on saying:

“I know what you’re going to say, and that’s another false idea you’ve got to get out of your heads. It’s ridiculous for you to persist in looking on me as an invalid. I’m as well as anyone, and I’ll prove it to you if you’ll give me half a chance. Once I get the hang of it, I’ll be able to do as hard a day’s work as anyone. You wait and see.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 102.]

Therefore, Robert remains behind in marrying Ruth, feeling that love is perhaps what he hoped to find in his search. By knowing the decision of Robert, Andrew suddenly decides to take the place of his brother and this is another matter of surprise for everyone. He does so because he himself had loved Ruth and he was expecting to marry her. He is anguished. In order to release, his anguish and not to become an obstacle between his beloved and his brother, he leaves for the sea voyage - the world of dreams where he can mitigate the pain of his heart. From this point, he wants to be alienated, to
be away from the rest of the world. His father James Mayo warns him against the wrong
decision.....

“Your place is right here on this farm- the place you was born to by nature-
and you can’t tell me no different. I’ve watched you grow up, and I know your
ways, and they’re my ways. You’re running against your own nature, and you’re
goin’ to be a mighty fir it if you do.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.106]

Despite the warning of his father, Andrew sails in place of his brother in order to
forget Ruth. He confesses the reason of his leaving to his brother. “But you can’t expect
me to stay around here and watch you two together, day after day - and me alone.” [p. 95] Andrew’s stay around here and watch you two together, day after day - and me alone.” [p. 95] Andrew’s decision of leaving the farm is nothing but a way of escapism. He
does not want to witness the happy life of the couple, and suffer alone in the farm. After
his departure, Robert hopefully accepts his new position as a family man and farmer.
Arthur and Barbara Gelb remark......

“Ruth makes the mistake of declaring his love for Ruth and staying with
her on the farm, instead of following the sea as he had planned. Thus, by winning
he loses ......Andrew who having lost Ruth, takes Robert’s place as a sailor. But it
was pure art that enabled O’Neill to alter an unresolved personal situation into
one in which the poet wins the girl while losing his soul and the adventure grows
materialistic in the face of poetic experience he cannot appreciate.”

118
Both the brothers change their ways and are finally separated from each other. Shortly after the marriage, the reality falls upon romance. The false fabric, which has covered both Ruth and Robert, begins to break and they are now to face the pangs of the bitter realities of life. The setting of Act II becomes quite different from that of the first. The room is no longer set in order. The details in interior setting evoke the image of decay......

“The room has changed .... The chairs appear shabby from lack of paint; the table cover is spotted and askew; holes show in the curtains; a child’s doll, with one arm gone, lies under the table; a hoe stands in a corner; a man’s coat is flung on the couch in the rear; the desk is cluttered up with odds and ends; a number of books are piled carelessly on the side board.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 112.]

This symbolizes the change from prosperity to disintegration in the family and characters. The chaos of the room symbolizes the chaos in the lives of the characters, especially Robert and Ruth. Robert is proved as a misfit to the environment. Still he tries his best to manage the farm for the sake of his child and wife. But there occurs a strange change in the character of Ruth. She becomes peevish, and is indifferent towards Robert. One day she even tells him that she did not love him. She loved Andrew, but the momentary charms of Robert made her to say that she loved him.........
“What do you think - living with a man like you - having to suffer all the time because you’ve never been man enough to work and do things like other people? But no! You never own up to that. You think you’re so much better than other folks, with your college education, where you never learned a thing, and always reading your stupid books instead of working. I s’pose you think I ought to be proud to be your wife - a poor, ignorant thing like me! (Fiercely) But I’m not. I hate it! I hate the sight of you; Oh, If I’d only known! If I hadn’t been such a fool to listen to you cheap, silly, poetry talk that you learned out of books! If I could have seen how you were in your true self - like you are now - I’d have killed myself before I’d have been together a month. I knew what you were really like - when it was too late.”

[Beyond the Horizon, Act II, Scene I, p. 127.]

All the remaining hopes of Robert are shattered. From the very beginning, Ruth is a practical woman. Her only aspiration is to lead a happy life with Robert. It becomes difficult for her to suppress her desires. She becomes more outspoken day by day. He also realizes his mistake. She says,

“..... And now - I’m finding out what you’re really like - what a - a creature I’ve been living with. (With a harsh laugh) God! It wasn’t that I’ve kept on telling myself that I must be wrong - like of fool! - like a damned fool.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 127]
The relation between Ruth and Robert becomes more polluted day by day. The reality tortures both so terribly that they are from this moment completely alienated from each other. The remaining hopes of their union are lost. Neither Robert nor she finds any meaning in other. The remaining hopes of their union are lost. Neither Robert nor she finds any meaning in life except the love of their child, for whose sake they continue to live together. They have reached the point from where there is no return. Both are in anguish. So both lay open their hearts to each other. Robert calls Ruth a ‘slut’ and she cries ‘Andy’ Andy’. But Robert absorbs this shock because of his romantic nature. He reticently takes the decision about fulfilling her desire. He is able to do so because he may live a dejected life on account of his very nature of living in the world of dreams. In the meantime, Andy arrives and the curtain falls, ending the First Scene of Act I.

The setting of Scene II is also symbolic like the other early settings. The hot and cloudless day signifies the breaking of illusion and disturbance of mental peace. The bleached, sun-scorched grass symbolizes the withering of the illusion of Robert by the sun of truth. We see,

“Robert is discovered sitting on the boulder, his chin resting on his hands, staring out toward the horizon seaward. His face is pale and haggard, his expression one of utter despondency.”

[Beyond the Horizon, Act II, Scene II, p.129.]

The alteration between the spacious and cramped sets illustrates the conflicting desires of the two brothers, Robert and Andrew. The details in the outdoor setting
suggest movement and distance. These express Robert’s dream for the ‘beyond.’ We find Mary, his
daughter, paling outside him and insisting him to play with her. But he shows no keenness. He is indifferent to her because she is the symbol of his withered love with Ruth........

“MARY : (Pulling at his hand solicitously) Is Dada sick?

ROBERT: (Looking at her with a forced smile) No, dear, why?

ROBERT: (gently). No, dear, not today. Dada doesn’t feel like playing today.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 129.]

Robert is disgusted with life. He sits in the farm when Andrew comes. Robert has acquired his previous temperament. He again wants to absorb himself in the dream world where he can forget his mental and physical agony. Inevitably, he gets close to his past. He cannot live alienated from his past. We mark that by marrying Ruth, who is forgetful about her past, all sorts of sufferings surround him because he is severed from his very nature. On the other hand, his brother Andrew is no happy with his sea voyage. He travels through a number of places, some of which like Argentina, where he has business opportunity, are of his interest. Although he has travelled a lot, he does not find any pleasure in the sea. He says to Robert..........

“Had to do something or I’d gone mad. The days were like years. Nothing to look at but sea and sky. No place to go. A regular prison. (He laughs.) And so
for East you used to rave about well. You ought to see it, and smell it; and the
chinks and Japs and Hindus and the rest of them - you can have them; One
walk down one of their filthy narrow streets with the tropic sun beating on it
would sicken you for life with the ‘wonder and mystery’ you used to dream of. I
can say one thing for it through it certainly has the stink market cornered up.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.132.]

Basically, Andrew is a farmer. He is a son of the soil. He feels happy only over the
land. This shows that both the brothers are sharply opposite to each other in their nature
on account of which they are alienated from themselves. If Andrew had stayed at home
and Robert had gone to sea, each would have held true to his essential nature and been
able to live in harmony with the elements of his environment. For, Robert belongs to sea
and Andrew to the land. By changing their paths, both have lost their sense of
belongingness to their surroundings. Robert, in the cup of the hills, cut off from the
horizon, is imprisoned forcibly and held back from joining the elements to which he really
belongs. His weakness and his romanticism are irrelevant; until he can unite himself with
the sea, he cannot be strong. On land, the unyielding furrows are sterile, and likewise
Andrew does not find any interest in voyage, but travels furrows are sterile, and likewise
Andrew does not find any interest in voyage, but travels unmoved to charming shores,
seeing only abused land. Ruth now gets diverted from Robert and is attracted to Andrew.
She starts talking to Andrew in the same way as she talked to Robert before their
marriage. She is the root cause behind the tragedy of both the brothers. She has
repeated the history set by beautiful women. O’Neill describes her in these words...
“She is a healthy, blonde, out-of-door girl of twenty, with a graceful, slender figure. Her face, though inclined to roundness, is undeniably pretty, its large eyes of a deep blue set off strikingly by the sun bronzed complexion. Her small, regular features are marked by certain strength - an underlying, stubborn fixity of purpose hidden in the frankly appealing charms of her fresh youthfulness.”

[Beyond the Horizon, P.112-113.]

As men are very insecure creatures, they certainly need a lot of love and need beautiful women. But unfortunately beautiful women are seldom able to provide love. Love is eternal, an essential, in every human being, but Ruth’s conception of love is entirely based on her self-interest. The real intention behind her approach to Andrew is nothing but only security. Living a hopeless life with Robert, she becomes helpless and insecure, at least economically. Therefore, in order to get security, she insists Andrew to stay in the farm. She says,

“.... Oh, Andy, you can’t go! Why we’ve all thought - we’ve all been hoping and praying you was coming home to stay, to settle down on the farm and see to things. You mustn’t go..... - and how the farm’ll be ruined if you leave it to Rob to look after. You can see that.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 120-121]

From this time, Andrew has no more interest in her. Like others, he is passing of isolation which has affected Ruth and Robert. He has borne the pain of separation to
such an extent as he no more longs for the union. He is dejected... “Everybody hereabouts seems to be on edge today. I begin to feel as if I’m not wanted around.” [p. 125] Therefore, he prepares himself again for the sea voyage. The first scene of the third act begins with the description of himself again for the sea voyage. The first scene of the third act begins with the description of the interior setting, the sitting-room of the farm house. It is somewhat similar to the first scene of the second act. This alteration between indoor and outdoor setting has a greater significance in the life of Robert. The indoor scenes, which are cooped in a small room, evoke his imprisonment. The outdoor settings are correlated with the actions of the character. The relationship among the characters is, more or less, the same. But physically, Ruth as well as Robert is deteriorated. Eugene O’Neill describes their physical conditions thus....

“She (Ruth) has aged horribly. Her pale, deeply lined face has the stony lack of expression of one to whom nothing more can ever happen, whose capacity for emotion has been exhausted. When she speaks, her voice is without timbre, low and monotonous ... His (Robert’s) hair is long and unkempt, his face and body emaciated. There are bright patches of crimson over his cheek-bones and his eyes are burning with fever.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 132]

Robert has been the victim of tuberculosis. His nature has become peevish. Though apparently, he says that he is quite healthy, yet actually he is approaching, gradually towards the death. Both he and Ruth are isolated form each other to an extent
which cannot be compensated by any other means. He desperately kisses her. The intensity of the pain of separation is reflected here....

“One kiss - the first in years, isn’t it?”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 141]

This reveals that there has hardly existed any relation between them for some years.

Robert’s condition worsens continuously. He slowly moves towards his end. In the meantime, Andrew returns from his voyage with a doctor for Robert. The doctor also feels that the things have gone worst. Only some miracle can save Robert. Andrew believes in miracle because of his optimistic nature. But Robert is devoid of any hope, any positive attitude towards life. In Ruth, there is a great conflict between her inner and outer selves. She did not marry Andrew. Instead, she chose Robert. But now she realises that she had committed a mistake. That is why, she again loves Andrew. Her conflicting attitudes separate her from other as well as from her own self. Though with someone, she is alone. She says,

“I didn’t want to be alone with him that way.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p. 143]

She answers to Andrew about her relation with Robert...

“ANDREW: And you’ve lived together for five years with this horrible secret between you?
RUTH : We’ve lived in the same house - not as a man and wife.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.168]

Her answer clearly shows that she is divided within herself. Neither she belongs to her husband nor does she entirely belong to herself for which she suffers from a sense of insecurity and loneliness. Robert now is no more interested in his life. His disease is not terrible; still he does not try to save his life. Haunted by the sense of aloneness, he still wishes to witness the sight of horizon. He orders Andrew,

“.... Pull the bed around so it’ll face the window, will you, Andy? I can’t sleep, but I’ll rest and forget if I can watch the rim of the hills and dream of what is waiting beyond ... And the shut door, Andy. I want to be alone.”

[Beyond the Horizon, p.164]

He would better like to go beyond the horizon i.e. beyond any illusion, any falsity, which is possible only after death. He thinks that death will break the wall of isolation between Ruth and Andrew. He takes a promise from Andrew of marrying Ruth after his death. In the last moment, Robert’s attempt to re-establish a vision parallels the manner in which his early dream originated. He says,

“.... Don’t you see I’m happy at last -because I’m making a start to the far-off places - free- free; freed from the farm-free to wander on and on-eternity; Even the hills are powerless to shut me in now …. Look; isn’t it beautiful beyond the hills? I can hear the old voices calling me to come…. And this time I’m going -
I’m free; it isn’t the end. It’s a free beginning - the start of my voyage; don’t you see? I’ve won isn’t the end. It’s a free beginning - the start of my voyage; don’t you see? I’ve won to my trip - the right of release - beyond the horizon. Oh, you ought to be glad-glad for my sake; Andy; ... Remember Ruth --.”

[Beyond the Horizon. p. 173]

He dies, but his sacrifice will not fulfill his hopes because the realities with which Ruth and Andrew have been acquainted will ever stand between them. They will never be able to establish any real contact. Therein lies the tragedy of Robert’s life. By losing their identity, their sense of belongingness, all the three major characters have failed to establish the real communion among themselves and have remained alienated from one another as well as from their environment. In this regard, Doris V Falk rightly remarks,

“Robert’s death is an escape, not a victory. It is a sorry compensation for a barren life, wasted in a futile search for identity.”

[Falk, Doris V, 1958, p. 41.]

_The Emperor Jones_ by Eugene O’Neill is one of the finest dramas in the field of American Literature. The production of this play in 1920 established O’Neill as a regular dramatist. This play, effectively mounted, well directed, and imaginatively acted by the colored actor Charles Gilpin, was a popular success. It has been often revived both with Paul Robeson and again with Gilpin. As a pure theater, this play is one of the best of all the O’Neill’s plays, though most of it is only a dramatic monologue. It is a kind of unfolding, in reverse order, of the tragical epic of the American Negro. The play is
divided into eight scenes. The central character in the play is Brutus Jones. He is a negro. He becomes the emperor of an Island in the West Indies. The play was first staged on Nov. 1920 in the Provincetown Players Theatre. It got a huge success. After that, it was shifted from the village theatre to Broadway, where it was first staged on December 27, 1920. The play gained the admiration both of the audience and the critics.

This is his much talked-about play. In it, there is an eternal conflict with those powers which are beyond man’s control. Man is represented in relation with God. The play deals with the rise and fall of Brutus Jones, the negro and fugitive emperor. He becomes the emperor through deception and corruption. He becomes the possessor of great wealth on an island in the West Indies. Obviously, he is isolated from that class of people to which he himself belongs. Outwardly, he is very ambitious and determined. But inwardly, he is always haunted by a sense of unknown fear and loss of security. Jones reminds us of the Shakespearean tragic hero Macbeth. In this regard, Julius Bab remarks,

“This Negro is only an insolent tyrant in a Caribbean island; yet the collapse of his criminal egomania, the defeat of his extraordinary vitality by the imaginings of his own brain - these are represented so magnificently, so movingly, that the play seems to me to offer a complete parallel with Shakespeare’s Macbeth.”

[Bab, Julius, p. 350]
Eugene O’Neill has given us an account of the way in which the play came to be written. He has also given the various influences at the time of the making of the play. He writes,

“The idea of *The Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story current in Haiti concerning the late President Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they would never get him with a lead bullet: that he would get himself first with 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, A year elapsed. One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there, how it starts at a normal pulse and slowly intensified until the heart-beat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre? The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by. It was the result of my own experience while prosecuting for gold in Spanish Honduras.”

[Clark, Barrett H., 1924. Pp. 71-72.]

Thus we find that the root of the play is in the personal experiences of the dramatist. Clifford Leach is of the view that the most important formative influences on O’Neill were the works of Wed kind and Strindberg. O’Neill has made use of the expressionistic technique very effectively in this play. The movement of expressionism began in Germany before World War I. It is a revolt against realism. It became one of the
dramatic devices of the playwrights. The dramatists make use of this dramatic device to express inner reality of the characters. Strindberg was the first dramatist who made the use of expressionistic technique in his plays. Eugene O’Neill has made the use of the expressionistic device in his plays *The Hairy Ape, The Emperor Jones*. One of the critics rightly observes O’Neill’s own statement,

“The first expressionistic play that I ever saw,’ he answered, ‘was Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*, produced in New York in 1922, after I’d written both *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape.*’ I had read *From Morn to Midnight* before *The Hairy Ape* was written but not before the idea for it was planned. The point is that *The Hairy Ape* is a direct descendent of Jones, written long before I had ever heard of Expressionism, and it’s from needs no explanation but this.”

[Clark, Barret H., 1924, p. 83.]

In *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus Jones is the main character. He represents Everyman as well as a brute. He is both a symbol (type) and an individual. He is a symbolic figure, but he has also his own individual and distinctive qualities. He is very much different from the other negroes. There is something distinctive about him. He has more intelligence, more strength of will, and is more self-confident that other members of the race who are generally crazy, weak of will and servile. His gaudy dress is symbolic of savage fondness for loud colours. But he is so majestic and stately in his manners that his gaudy dress does not make him look ridiculous. So majestic and stately in his manners that his gaudy dress does not make him look ridiculous. He has a way of carrying it off
which is distinctive and unique. He has animal instincts and impulses. He has his own qualities and features. The action in this drama moves around this figure. We meet him in the opening scene of the drama:

“He is tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically aneroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face—an underlying strength of will, a hardly, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner, he is shrewd, suspicious, and evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent-leather laced boots with brass spurs and a belt with a long barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene I, p.5.]

In the above paragraph, we find the features of Brutus’s personality. There is confidence in his personality. He is shrewd, suspicious, and evasive. He puts on a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. He wears his patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster completes his make up. He has a talent and strength. He is self-confident so he differs from other Negroes. But this Brutus Jones is a
murderer. He has murdered another negro, Jeff, for cheating at dice. He was given the punishment of life-imprisonment but has escaped from the jail by killing the prison-guard. He goes to the island of West Indies and due to his cunning nature, within two years, becomes the Emperor of the island. Jones says,

“Whar’s my shovel? Gimme my shovel till I splits his damn head! (Appealing to his fellow convicts.) Gimme a shovel, one o’you, fo’ God’s sake! (They stand fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the ground. The GUARD seems to wait expectantly, his back turned to the attacker. JONES bellowls with baffled, terrified rage, tugging frantically at his revolver.) I kills you, you white debil, if it’s de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene IV, p. 31.]

Brutus Jones plans for future life. He has collected a lot of wealth in a foreign bank. He recognizes that his emperorship is not permanent and in the course of time, at any time, it may come to an end.....

“I sho’ has! And it’s in a foreign bank where no puss on don’t ever git it out but me no matter what come. You didn’t s’ pose I was holdin’ down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho’! De fuss and glory part of it, dat’s only to turn de heads o’ de low-flung, bush niggers dat’s here.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene I, p. 8.]
The dramatist minimizes everything on the stage which stands between the author and the audience. By using this device, the dramatist tries to talk directly to the audience. There are eight scenes in this play. From Scene II to VII that take place at night in the forest, the play is full of expressionistic technique.

“Nightfall. The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear, the forest is a wall of darkness divining the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom, can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet, this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest’s moans in the air. relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene II, p. 21.]

This scene takes place in the forest. It is the time of night. The foreground is sandy. The level ground is dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes. The forest seems to be a wall of darkness. This scene is a sustained piece of monologue.

“Oh Lawd, Lawd! Oh Lawd, Lawd! (Suddenly he throws himself on his knees and raises his clasred hands to the sky - in a voice of agonized pleading.) Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I’se de po’ sinner, a po’ sinner! I knows I done
wrong, I knows it! When I eoteches Jeff eheatin wid loaded dice my anger
overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong!”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene V, Pp. 32-33.]

This scene takes place at one O’clock in the forest. Brutus Jones confesses his sin
and calls him a sinner. He pleads God to have His mercy. We come to know that Brutus
Jones would like to express his repentance by praying to God. Here, we find that the
playwright shows the inner reality and the acceptance of the crime of the protagonist
had done in his earlier life. This expression and acceptance of the reality is symbolically
shown by the playwright. The playwright makes use of symbols, metaphors, fables,
allegories to understand the inside of a character. O’Neill has used the expressionistic
device in The Emperor Jones to manifest the psychological terrors and obsessions of
Brutus Jones.

The story of the play The Emperor Jones is the gradual revelation to him of what
lies behind the mask - the hollow evil in which his true self has long been lost. The terms
of this revelation are those not only of O’Neill, but also of Jung. O’Neill was always
defensive, and with some justice, towards accusations like that made by Barrett Clark.
Some of his plays were expressed and patterned somewhat too precisely after Freud and
Jung. O’Neill’s answer were expressed and patterned somewhat too precisely after Freud
and Jung. O’Neill’s answer to Clark was in part as follows:

“Authors were psychologists, you know, and profound ones before
psychology was invented. And I am no deep student of psychoanalysis. As far as I
can remember, of all the books written by Freud, Jung etc. I have read only four, and Jung is the only one of the lot who interests me. Some of his suggestions I find extraordinarily illuminating in the light of my own experience with hidden human motives.”

[Clark, Barrett H., 1924. p.56.]

The suggestion which excited O’Neill in The Emperor Jones was Jung’s fundamental premise - the existence and power of the collective unconscious.

“The man of a given man contains ideas from the collective unconscious which come to him simply by virtue of his membership in the human race, as well as ideas inherited from his own specific race, tribe, and family. His mind contains unconscious ideas and symbols arising from his unique personal situation to make up the structure of his personal unconscious. Finally, from this personal unconscious emerges his own unconsciousness, his ego.”

[Falk, Doris, V., 1958, p. 66.]

In The Emperor Jones, Brutus Jones, the central figure is conveyed through a gradual breaking down of his conscious ego and the revelation of his personal and collective unconscious. We find the primary symbolism of his movement through the forest in a circle, hypnotized by the rhythm of a drum beat and ending where he began. Jones makes the exploitation of the natives. He has convinced the native people that he will be killed only by a silver bullet.....
“I tells’em dat’s cause I’m de on’y man in de world big enuff to git me.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene I, p. 10.]

There is a scene at a stone altar near a tree - sexual as well as religious symbols. Jones goes back to the primitive world of the unconscious. He finds out that he has returned to the clearing where he entered the forest; he is back where his journey began. A Congo witch doctor enters and begins a wild dance in which Jones joins:

“The whole spirit and meaning of the dance has entered into him, has become his spirit. Finally, the theme of the pantomime hats on a howl of despair and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased. The WITCH DOCTOR points with his wand to the sacred tree, to the river beyond, to the altar, and finally to Jones with a ferocious command. JONES seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VII, p. 40.]

Here, we come across that the witch doctor summons from the river a terrifying crocodile. The playwright has used the symbols of the dance and the silver bullet. The crocodile stands for the evil of the self. We also find that Jones is shot by the natives using the silver bullet. This is the symbol of the destruction of self by its own pride and greed. We may say that there is the impact of Jung’s theory on the play The Emperor Jones. When we conclude this in the words of Jung,
“The secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of participation mystique - to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual, and at which the weal or woe of the single human being does not count, but only human existence. That is why every great work of art is objective and impersonal, but none the less profoundly moves us each and all.”

[Falk, Doris, 1958, V., p. 70.]

Symbolism is a literary device and the writer makes use of the character, setting, incident, language and expresses his thoughts. The playwright clarifies his ideas, concepts in a short way by making the use of the symbols in his plays. The mind of the character is disclosed with the use of symbols. Eugene O’Neill has made the use of this dramatic device in his earlier and later plays. There is a network of symbolism in the play The Emperor Jones. He uses it from the beginning to the end of the play. And all these symbols are related to one another and moves around the central figure, Brutus Jones. The action of this play starts in the afternoon that symbolizes confidence.

“It is late afternoon but the yellow sunlight still blazes yellowy beyond the portico and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat in the air.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene I, p. 2.]

In this play, the night, day, forest, daylight, moonlight is full of symbolism. We come across that the beating of tom-tom, the silver bullet, the white colour, dazzling scarlet, red colour of the blood, the crocodile are all symbolically used in the play. Here,
we find that the time is also symbolic. The night is the symbol of terror, retrogression and disintegration,

“Scene - Nightfall. The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins.

The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind ....Well, heah, I is. In de nick O’time, too; Little mo’ an’ it’d be blacker’n de ace of spades heahaouts.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene II, p. 21.]

The play *The Emperor Jones* tells us of an American Negro, a Pullman Porter, who, by some chance or other, comes to an island in the West Indies, ‘not yet self-determined by white marines.’ In two years, Jones has made himself Emperor. Luck has played a part, but he has been quick to take advantage of it. Once a native tried to shoot him at point-blank range, but the gun missed fire, whereupon Jones announced that he was protected by a charm and that only silver bullets could harm him. When the play begins, he has been emperor long enough to amass a fortune by imposing heavy taxes on the islanders and carrying on all sorts of large-scale graft. Rebellion is brewing. When Emperor Jones rings the bell which should summon his servants, no one appears. The palace is deserted, but from deep in the jungle, there comes the sound of the steady beat of a big drum. The islanders are whipping up their courage to the fighting point by calling on the local gods and demons of the forest.
Jones, realizing that his reign is over, starts to make his escape to the coast where a French gunboat is anchored. First, it is necessary for him to travel through the jungle and as time presses, he must go through at night. Back in the states, he was a good Baptist and he begins the journey through the dark places unafraid. But under the dim moonlight, he cannot recognize any familiar landmarks and hard as he runs, the continuous drum-beat never grows any less in his ears. Then demons and apparitions begin to torment him. First, it is the figure of a negro he killed back in the states. He fires and the dim thing vanishes, but immediately he reproaches himself, for in his revolver now he has only five shots left. Four are lead bullets and the fifth is a silver one which he has reserved for himself, if by any chance capture seems imminent.

Other little ‘formless creature’ creeps in upon him. As his panic increases, the fears become not things in his own life, but old race fears. He sees himself being sold in a slave market and then, most horrible of all, a Congo witch doctor tries to lure him to death in a river where a crocodile god is waiting. It is at this point that he fires his last bullet, the silver one. During the night, he has discarded his big patent leather boots and most of his clothes in order to run faster from the drumbeat. But it is louder now than ever and in the last scene, we find the natives sitting about in a circle weaving spells and molding bullets. And it is to this spot that the defenseless and exhausted emperor crawls; having made a complete circle in the jungle as his panic whipped him on.

In the play, the playwright has focused his attention on the central character i.e. on Brutus Jones. The other characters are shown only as the background figures. Brutus Jones symbolizes the irrational and brutish in every man; the silver bullet is the symbol of
his pride. It also symbolizes worldly wealth and greed for money. The dark and dense forest stands for the inner darkness and confusion of Jones. The last scene of this play takes place near the dividing line of forest and plain. We have the characters like Lem, Smithers and the soldiers. They are in search of Brutus Jones. The reports of several shots come from the forest. The beating of the tom-tom suddenly ceases. They come to know that Brutus Jones is dead.

SMITHERS: (With a snarl) Ow d’yer knows it’s ’im an’ ow d’yer know ‘e’s dead?

LEM: My mens dey got ’um silver bullets. Dey kill him shore.

SMITHERS: (Astonished.) They got silver bullets?

LEM: Lead bullet no kills him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VIII, Pp.43-44.]

After his father’s death on 10th August 1920, Eugene O’Neill entered an intensely creative period. In mid-September, he began to work on a new play, *The Silver Bullet*, which he finished on 2 October and renamed it *The Emperor Jones*. This play also contains elements drawn from anecdotes, books and current theatrical trends. For example, from a circus friend who had toured the West Indies, O’Neill had heard a story about the Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam. Sam had purportedly boasted that if he were ever overthrown, he would not let himself fall into his enemies’ hands but would kill himself with a silver bullet; a lead one was not special enough. *The Emperor Jones* was
further influenced by Gordon Craig’s *The Theatre Advancing*, which he had read earlier in the year.

The play is introduced in the following words,

“The Emperor Jones was a resounding success for the Provincetown Players, one that would ironically lead to their demise. Audience flocked to the box office wanting to become members in order to see the play. This play would seem to have limited attractions for a modern audience, but recent London revivals at test otherwise. For instance, reviews of Stuart Wood’s production of *The Emperor Jones* at the Offstage Downstage Theatre in Camden Town, which opened on 17 January 1991, show that modern sensitivities view the racial aspect of the play in different ways; while some critics were embarrassed by the patronizing dialect given to Jones, others saw the play as a condemnation of while ‘civilization’. In addition, it is still viewed as a bold theatrical experiment, offering great opportunities as well as dangers to designer and director.”

[“Introduction”, p. xv, xvi, xix.]

One of the critics Robert Spiller in his book rightly remarks,

“From the start of his career, O’Neill reflected the influences of both the naturalistic and the expressionistic currents in the drama. The similarity of his work to that of Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, and Chekov gives sufficient
evidence of the forces that were feeding his powerful originality, whether he was aware of them or not.”

[Spiller, Robert E., 2006, p. 187.]

O’Neill finds that rational factors do not reveal the depth of any incident or situation. He frequently presents inarticulate characters who belong to something beyond themselves which drives or lures them. The absence of belonging is the great loss. He once said,

“Most modern plays are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God. Thus, man’s fate, man’s destiny, and man’s judgment under God is ever present to O’Neill’s concern with dramatic involvement and character.”

[Tiusanen, Timo, 1968, p. 170]

Brutus Jones is the hero of the play. He is a symbolic character in the play. In the play itself, O’Neill describes his nature as,

“Brutus Jones (remembering that in Shakespeare’s play Brutus was one of the murderers of Caesar) in spite of his own rational arrogance has within himself the seeds of his own disintegration. He is less the symbol of Negro that
he is symbol of man’s ignorance and fear, lightly covered by a coating of culture or intellectually. Man’s rational nature may not always penetrate the inscrutable mystery.”

[Tiusanen, Timo, 1968, p. 172]

_The Emperor Jones_ is a tragedy in which the dramatist makes use of the three classical unities. There is a tragic symbolism in the play. It is a modern tragedy in its theme and subject. Emperor Jones is the central figure. We come to know the past life of Jones through the conversation between Smithers and Jones. The play begins at afternoon and ends with the dawn of the next day, “It is the late afternoon, but the yellow sunlight still blazes beyond the portico and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat in the air.” [p. 02] The Last Scene also begins at the same dawn as the Scene Two,

“No the dividing line of forest and plain. The nearest tree trunks are dimly revealed, but the forest behind them is still a mass of glooming shadow. The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beats.”

[The Emperor Jones, p. 41.]

We find that the Unity of Time and Place has been observed. The playwright has also maintained the Unity of Action. The action of the play moves around the central figure i.e. Brutus Jones. We do not find other episodes, digressions etc. Lastly, Brutus Jones dies and the play ends.......

144
“LEM : (Calmly) Dey come bring him now (The SOLDIERS come out of the forest. Carrying JONES’s limp body. There is a little reddish-purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They earn him to LEM, purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They earn him to LEM, who examines his body with great satisfaction.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VIII, p. 44.]

O’Neill is mainly the writer of tragedies and he had tragic conception of life. He believed that a really worthwhile life is always tragic, because a man of high ideals rarely attains those ideals, and therefore, his life is tragic. When he was accused of unmitigated gloom, and of having a pessimistic view of life, O’Neill replied,

“To me, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life and the hope. The noblest is eternally the most tragic. The noblest is eternally the most tragic. The people who succeeded and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle classes. Their stopping at success is the proof of their compromising insignificance. How pretty their dreams must have been! The man who pursues the mere attainable should be sentenced to get it - and keep it. Let him rest on his laurels and enthrone him in a Morris chair, in which laurels and hero may wither away together. Only through the unattainable does man achieve a hope worth living and dying for - and so attain himself. He with the spiritual guerdon of a hope in hopelessness is nearest to the stars and the rainbow’s foot.”

We may say that *The Emperor Jones* in one sense is a modern tragedy because the central character Brutus Jones does not fulfill the principles as Aristotle has laid down about the hero. He is a criminal and exploits the native people. He has certain faults. He is proud, overconfident and cunning. But in the end, we find that he is killed by the native people with a silver bullet,

“Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the’ eight o’ style, any’ owl!”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VIII, p. 44.]

Explaining his point of view, he says that life is a struggle, often, if not usually, unsuccessful struggle, for most of us have something within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire.

Another character in the play is Henry Smithers who is a Cockney (London) trader. He carries his business to the island where Jones is the emperor. He is a “tall man, round-shouldered about forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam’s apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow, and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red. His little washy - blue eyes are red rimmed and dart about him like ferrets. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous. He is dressed in a worn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, and spurs, and wears a white cork helmet. A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand.” [Scene I, p. 03] He is a hypocrite, a very monster of jealousy, and cunning, mean and treacherous person. He is very much pleased at the emperor’s death.
O’Neill has given so much significance to sound effects in this play. In this play, he has used a lot of sounds with a specific intention. In Scene II, there is the use of sounds of the Great Forest. ....

“A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest’s relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its breading, implacable silence.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene II, p. 21.]

The sound that is heard throughout the play is the beating of the tom-tom. It is a kind of big drum that the natives play on various occasions for various reasons. It was sounded to encourage the tribes to attack a hostile tribe or to defense against the attack of an enemy,

“As the scene opens, nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than in the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene III, p. 26.]

“The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beats.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VIII, p. 41.]
We find that the dramatist has used the colour symbols in this play. The silver bullet, the white, the dazzling scarlet red colour of the blood are all symbolically used by the dramatist in this play. Brutus Jones is very self-confident, intelligent man. So, he becomes the Emperor of the island within two years. He befools the natives. One day a native Lem tried to kill him but Jones was not killed. After that Jones spreads the rumour that he could be killed only by a silver bullet and not with a lead one. He always carries with him that silver bullet. The natives also believe in it.

“Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the eight o’ style, any ow!

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VIII, p. 44]

Eugene O’Neill has made use of the forest as the symbol of the primitiveness of the negro as contrasted with the culture and civilization of the whites. It also symbolizes the inner darkness of Brutus Jones. There is the image of light in the surrounding darkness which symbolizes Jones’ spiritual isolation....

“JONES stumbles in from the forest on the right. His uniform is ragged and torn. He looks about him with numbed surprise when he sees the road, his eyes blinking in the bright moonlight. He flops down exhaustedly and pants heavily for a while. Then with sudden anger.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene IV, p. 28.]

In Scene VII, Jones is in Congo. He sees there a sacrificial altar, witch-doctor, a crocodile-god. He has to fire his silver bullet to kill the crocodile, for it is all he has left.
Brutus Jones looks around at the tree, the rough stone altar, the moonlit surface of the river beyond, and passes his hand over his head with a puzzled bewilderment......

"JONES. What- What is I doin? What is - dis place? Seems like - seems like I know dat tree - an’ dem stones - an’ De River. I remember - seems like I been heah befo’. (Tremblingly) Oh, Gorry, I’ se skeered in dis place! I’ se skeered! Oh, Lawd, perfect dis sinner!"

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VII, p. 38.]

After that, the figure of the Congo Witch-Doctor comes out. There is a bone rattle, a charmed stick in his hand and he casts his spells, Jones becomes completely hypnotized. Jones beats his forehead abjectly to the ground. The crocodile heaves more of his enormous bulk on to the land. Jones squirms toward him. The WITCH-DOCTOR’s voice shrills out in furious exultation, the tom-tom beats madly. JONES cries out in a fierce, exhausted spasm of anguished pleading.

The significance of the play lies in the character of Brutus Jones, conveyed through a gradual breaking down of his conscious ego and the revelation of his personal and collective unconscious. His hopeless flight through the forest is not from the natives at all. This flight is from himself. This is from his fundamental self from which his blind pride and its self-image have so long separated him. This is the primary symbolism of his movement through the forest in a circle. This is ending where he began. The progress of Jones is progress in self-understanding. It is the stripping off of the masks of self, layer by layer. This is just as bit by bit his ‘emperor’s uniform is ripped from his back. At the end,
he must confront his destiny himself - in nakedness. Nowhere in his work is his theatrical skill more evident than in Jones’s flight through the jungle to the drumbeat. This begins at normal pulse rhythm, growing faster and faster, louder and louder.

As Jones proceeds, he is confronted with one ghost after another from his past. Each of these represents an aspect of himself or a hidden motive for his past action. Each of these can be dispelled only by his firing one of his six precious bullets. First appear his ‘little formless fears’, then his guilt, in two visions - the ghost of the Negro, Jeff, for whose murder in formless fears’, then his guilt, in two visions - the ghost of the Negro, Jeff, for whose murder in a gambling fight he was sent to prison, and the ghost of the guard whom he killed in his escape from prison. These three episodes, stemming from fear and guilt, come from Jones’s ‘personal unconscious’ while the three following ones emerge from his ‘collective unconsciouses’. He must fire his fourth and fifth bullets to dispel the vision of a slave auctioneer. He thinks the auctioneer is about to sell him from the block. By this time, Jones is naked and exhausted. He lies down to rest and is surrounded by a group of savages - his ancestors - whose voices, beginning with a low, melancholy murmur, rise in a desperate wail. The scene of this final vision is laid at a stone altar near a tree - sexual as well as religious symbols. Jones has shed the last layer of his civilized outward self and has gone back to the dark - primitive world of the unconscious. Then he has thrown himself at the foot of the altar to pray. At this time, he realizes that he has returned to the clearing where he entered the forest. He is back where his journey began. Here the rites of exorcism must take place. A Congo witch-doctor enters and begins a wild dance in which Jones joins...
“The whole spirit and meaning of the dance has entered into him, has become his spirit. Finally, the theme of the pantomime halts on a howl of despair, and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice…. Jones seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice.”

[The Emperor Jones, Scene VII, p.40.]

Jones has sacrificed all other values to the Evil because Evil has been his god. The witch doctor summons from the river a terrifying crocodile. He stares at the glittering eyes in paralyzed fascination at first, then, shouting defiantly. From the symbolism of the dance, and the use of the silver bullet, evil represented by the crocodile is the evil of the self. Jones, in killing the crocodile, has killed himself, which distorted image of the self. This was his life motivation. He has performed the justice demanded by the dance.

Finally, the natives have shot Jones with the silver bullet which they made from money. This is an appropriate symbol of the destruction of self by its own pride and greed. The tragic pull between the selves no longer exists nor does life. The integration has cost Jones everything, but he got what he wanted. In his use of symbols in this play, O’Neill acknowledged the validity of Jung’s theory. It is that the 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. In this play, O’Neill has achieved a dynamic synthesis of symbol and dramatic action. The focus of the play is inward, but it is consistently inward. The final revelation is the logical climax of the revelations which have gone before. In his plays, outward reality has the first and last word.
Throughout his life, he tries to maintain a life of his own, cut off from society, indulged in gambling and killing. Vaguelessly he seeks a new identity, but always finds him insecure. Though lastly, he cries for God out of fear and insecurity, yet he refuses God from the beginning. He himself is responsible for his destruction. His over ambitiousness and his blind pride alienate him from his own self as well as from God and society. But O’Neill provides a heroic death to him. The rebellion shoots him with the silver bullet, which is the key to his death. The stage technique of the play has added much more to the thematic dimensions of the play. It projects the inner life of the character in a more prominent way. The sense of belongingness either to a faith or to a feeling has been an inborn quality of man. For his happiness and tranquility, he needs a sense of security and stability. When this age-old belief shatters, he becomes isolated from his being.

O’Neill considers himself a different person, completely alien to his circumstances. Being isolated from his immediate environment, he feels lonely, alienated and unhappy, and this leads him to seek an identity of his own. When he fails to achieve this lost harmony, he suffers from a sense of isolation. Thus the isolation and loneliness are the major themes of this play of Eugene O’Neill. The tensions in his plays are nearly always connected with man’s struggle against isolation and loneliness. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality, but in his rebellion and anger, and in his inability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at ease in a world without God, love and trust in life. Thus his plays make it certain that O’Neill is the dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation all through his illustrious literary career. *The Emperor Jones* is a drama of human fear which becomes the binding
force to fuse the entire play into a complete picture of human soul fighting against its own evils against the fate of his forefathers - their exploitation and the ignorance of centuries.

*The Hairy Ape* was written in 1921. It was first produced at Playwrights’ Theatre, New York, on 9 March 1922. Its first London Production was at Gate Theatre on 26 January 1928. Like *The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape* also deals with the question of belonging but differently. The society in which the 20th century man is seen living is a dehumanized, industrial, mechanical society which has lost spiritual values. In the modern century, man does not know what exactly he is and what he is born to achieve. There are some assumptions related with the concepts. If man identifies himself with the traditionalists, he is damned as a conservative. If he is an individualist, he could be treated as an anarchist. If he takes love as a source of strength and highest goal of man, he could be damned as a sentimentalist. All schools of philosophy have evolved to explain the mystery of the universe.

The play *The Hairy Ape* is a symbolic play. The Hairy Ape is Yank who is a symbol of man. He has lost his old harmony with nature. He is unable to find the harmony on earth or in heaven. He is in the middle, trying to make peace. He cannot go forward, so he tries to go back. But he cannot go back to belonging. The gorilla kills him. This is the subject of the play that is man and his struggle with his own fate. This is struggle which is used to be with the Gods. This struggle is now with himself, his down past, his attempt to belong. Man can only hope to belong to themselves in this world. The sickness that a man experiences in this life is not on account of loneliness or anxiety in making choices.
This sickness is on account of the despair born of one’s willingness to be oneself. This is the trouble of Yank.

The world of Yank is hell-like. This is confined as a crabbed envelope of steel, the stokehole; Yank was happy thinking him really belonging to it. In the process of mechanizing the society, man also has been mechanized. Likewise, Yank has also lost the sensibility of a real human being. He is a man living of the illusion of the superiority of strength. The steel world was the source of his energy. Feeling self-sufficient, he did not need anyone, neither a woman nor a friend nor a Government. This absorption in his work and insensitivity to other aspects of life had blinded him to the external and the internal world.

He is overruled by his own pride. At last, he thought that he was at the highest peak in his world. He felt insulted in an unknown manner when he saw Mildred faint. He was in her a total contrast to himself. Her scorn for him confirmed his feeling that he was a nobody. This experience shook his faith in his superiority and his belongingness. He was no more an integrated man. The feeling that he was a hairy ape was confirmed when he moved among the gentleman of the Fifth Avenue. It was only for his muscular energy that he was discarded by the I.W.W. Secretary and the Fifth Avenue gentleman. He thought that he had no place in the world. The only place where he could go was to the gorilla in whom he was his real brother.

One of the critics Raghavacharyulu rightly remarks,
"The Hairy Ape is O’Neill’s The Waste Land. Like Eliot, he too is concerned with the loss of identity of the individual in a dehumanized industrial-mechanical society, marked by the erosion of all spiritual values. At the same time, the individual himself is a heap of broken images, a hopelessly fragmented personality. By reducing the outer and inner realms of man’s life to nothingness, O’Neill presents Hell as a Zero. The outer reality of Yank is the stokehole, a cramped envelope of steel. Man in his incongruous presence in a perfect mechanism hopes to live at last as a biological residue. Yank is at first sufficient unto himself, because he has been able to fuse together the personal and the public images of himself. Others see him as a man of superior strength and respect him for it, even though out of fear. He sees himself as a Promethean figure."


Yank’s psychomachia took him from the positive to the negative phase. He moved from speed to stillness. His regression from the power-house to the animal house is universalized as everyman’s quest for a centre of belonging in a social surface without any centre. Jones and Yank are haunted characters. In their strife, they give up the will to live. Jones ends his life from where he had begun from the edge of the forest back to the edge, travelling without arriving. In this effort to forget his selfhood, Yank found to his surprise that he was an alien in his own world. He chose his world again and lost his life. Thus he was metamorphosed from Man into a thinker. The effort of Yank to transcend his self is the theme of another play of O’Neill.
Yank is the central character in this play and other characters are moving around him. The stokehole, the sky-scraper in the Fifth Avenue, the prison cells etc stand for Yank’s increasing sense of himself as hairy ape. This is the symbolic description and this conveys the mechanical, purposeless nature of life in the machine age....... 

“The crowd from church enter from the right, sauntering slowly and affectedly, their heads held stiffly up, looking neither to right nor left, talking in toneless, simpering voices. The women are rouged, calcimined, dyed, overdressed to the nth degree. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein’s in their detached, mechanical unawareness.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene V, p. 38.]

The short-story from which the play The Hairy Ape was developed was drawn from an experience which provided background for at least three of the later plays - Anna Christie The Iceman Cometh, A Touch of the Poet. As a young seaman, O’Neill lived for a period at Jimmy, the Priest’s dilapidated flophouse-saloon on the New York waterfront. In his note to The Hairy Ape in the Wilderness Edition, he describes the genesis of the play,

“It was at Jimmy the Priest’s that I knew Driscoll, a Liverpool Irishman who was a stoker on a transatlantic liner. Shortly afterwards, I learned that he had committed suicide by jumping overboard in mid-ocean. Why? The search for an explanation of why Driscoll, proud of his animal superiority and in
complete harmony with his limited conception of the universe, should kill himself provided the germ of the idea for *The Hairy Ape.*”


*The Hairy Ape* is a story of a stoker Yank. He knows along with others in the stokers’ pit. He takes a sort of romantic pride in himself and his work as something that was real in an unreal world. But when the daughter of the President of the line’s board of directors recoils from him in a horrified manner as from a loathsome hairy ape, he gets an impression that he does not belong to this world. In the course of the rest of the play, this fact is driven home to him still further. At last, the hairy ape is found dead inside the cage of the gorilla in a zoo. In the form in which it appears, however, O’Neill is saying that the motion and the spirit that impels all thinking things is the search for identity. In saying so, he has extended the symbolism of Yank’s struggle beyond psychology to philosophy and in a sense, to anthropology. The search for identity not only is a personal and individual problem, but becomes the collective, universal problem of mankind. O’Neill explained this meaning in a letter to 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. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he’s in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the ‘woist punches from bot’ of ‘em’. This idea was expressed in
Yank’s speech. 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 what 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.”

[Falk, Doris V, 1958, p. 34.]

At all, according to Yank, everything belongs in the past, is dead. Yank is alive; he is the power behind the ship - behind the modern world.

“I’m smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I’m 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 muscles in steel, de punchbehind it! (As he says this he pounds with his fist against the steel bunks. All the men, roused to a pitch of frenzied self-glorification by can be heard bellowing.) Slaves, hell! We run de whole works. All de rich guys dat tink dey’re somep’n, dey ain’t nothin’! Deys don’t belong. But us guys, we’re in de move, we’re at de bottom, de whole ting is us!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 13-14]
We find that the self-image of Yank is destroyed by Mildred. Her father, the President of Nazareth steel, chairman of the board of directors of this line. Mildred is a decadent, aimless, artificial product of society, who dabbles in social work to uplift the masses. We come across that when Mildred sees Yank, she falls back in horror. She cries,

“Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene III, p. 25.]

After this incident, Yank no longer feels that he ‘belongs’. He feels unrest and thinks only of Mildred’s image of himself as a brute - an image which takes its form from consciousness not of power, but of limitation. The muscular strength which makes him feel superior before, now only identifies him with animals, with the body itself, not with the power that body can produce. His body becomes the only symbol of the self and constitutes a prison. Yank tries to escape the prison and ultimately surrenders himself to the only self-image which is symbolized by the ape and the cage. Yank’s confrontation with Mildred marks the beginning of the disintegration and decay of his personality. Yank’s prison - symbolized by the steel bars of the jail, in which he is now actually imprisoned,

“Sure - her old man - President of de steel Trust - makes half de steel in de world - steel - where I tought I belonged - drivin’ trou - movin’ - in dat - to make her - and, cage me in for her to spit on ! Christ! He made dis - dis cage! Steel!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VI, p. 47-48]
In Scene VII, we find that Yank goes to the office of the I.W.W. [Industrial Workers of the World] He talks of blowing up the plants of the steel Trust. The I.W.W. people throw Yank out. Even they do not think he ‘belongs’. He realizes the final truth, that the source of his trouble is not in society nor in Mildred, but in himself........

“Dis ting’s in your inside, but it ain’t your belly. Feedin’ your face - sinkers and coffee - dat don’t touch it. It’s way down - at de bottom. You can’t grab it, and yuh can’t stop it. It moves, and everything moves. It stops and de whole woild stops. Dat’s me now - I don’t tick, see? - I’m a busted Ingersoll, dat’s what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain’t steel, and de woild owns me.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VII, p. 55.]

In this scene, we find that Yank is rejected by civilized society. Regression alone is possible for him. He goes to the zoo, thinking that there at least he must belong. He is an hairy ape, and so naturally, he belongs to the brotherhood of the apes. Reaching the monkey-house, he stands face to face with a gorilla in its cage, and talks to it as to a friend. They are both members of the same club. But the gorilla wraps his arms round him and crushes him to death. It throws his body into the cage, and walks off menacingly. To the ape, he says,

“Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh belong and dey don’t. Den yuh kin laugh at’ em, see?
Yuh’re de champ of de world. But me - I ain’t got no past to tink in nor nothin’
dat’s comin’, on’y what’s now - and dat don’t belong.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, p. 58.]

Some critics have called O’Neill as Expressionist, because *The Hairy Ape* and in
another way, *The Emperor Jones*, resemble certain plays of Toller, Hasenclever, Kaiser
and other so-called Expressionist. It is also asserted that he has been considerably
influenced by the young Germans. O’Neill answered that Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*
was his first expressionistic play that he had ever seen. We have the fine setting of this
expressionistic technique in the beginning of the play,

“The fireman’s forecastle of a transatlantic liner an hour after sailing
from New York for the voyage across. Tiers of narrow, steel bunks, three deep,
on all sides. An entrance in rear. Benches on the floor before the bunks. The
room is crowded with men, shouting, cursing, laughing, singing - a confused,
inchoate, uproar swelling into a sort of unity, a meaning - the bewildered, furious,
baffled defiance of a beast in a cage. Nearly all the men are drunk. Many bottles
are passed from hand to hand. All are dressed in dungaree pants, heavy ugly
shoes. Some wear singlets, but the majority is stripped to the waist.

YANK : Choke off dat noise ! Where de’yuh get dat beer stuff? Beer, hell!
 Beer’s for goils - and Dutchmen. Me for somep’n wit a kick to it!
 Gimme a drink, one of youse guys.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 5.]
Instead of intensifying a particular man, O’Neill has symbolized him in the person of Yank. The light-effect in the play is powerfully expressionistic. It presents a contrast between the rich exploiting class and the poor exploited class,

“MILDRED DOUGLAS and her aunt are discovering reclining in deck chairs. The former is a girl of twenty, slender, delicate, with a pale pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p.15]

We find that the stokers toiling themselves in the hell of the stokehole. In Scene III, there is the terrific light emitted by the furnaces and it suggests how capitalism is consuming the poor workers - as the furnaces are consuming coal,

“A line of men, striped to the waist, is before the furnace doors. They bendover, looking neither to right nor left, handling their shovels as if they were part of their bodies. With a strange, awkward, swinging rhythm. They use the shorelsto throw open the furnace doors. Then from these fiery round holes in the black flood of terrific light and heat pours full upon the men who are outlined in silhouette in the crouching, inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene III, p.21-22.]
In Scene VII, we find that the illusion of taking revenge single-handed is broken. The moonlight on the narrow street suggests the illusion of Yank to “belong” and the buildings massed in black shadow suggests the despair that awaits him.....

“Moonlight on the narrow street, buildings massed in black shadow. The interior of the room, which is general assembly room, office, and reading room, resembles some dingy settlement boys’ club.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VII, p. 49.]

O’Neill has made use of the soliloquies of Yank and it is also one of the devices of the expressionistic technique. Yank is thrown out of the I.W.W. office and he thinks that the I.W.W. men don’t think that he “belongs”. Yank says,

“Dis ting’s in your inside, but it ain’t your belly. Feedin’ your face - sinkers and coffee - dat don’t touch it. It’s way down - at de bottom. Yuh can’t grab it, and yuh can’t stop it. It moves, and everything moves. It stops and de whole world stops. Dat’s me now - I don’t tick, see? - I’m a busted Ingersoll, dat’s what. Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain’t steel, and de woild owns me.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VII, p. 55.]

In this play, we have the use of the telegraphic technique, as in the chorus of stokers in the first scene, which reads,
“VOICES :  Gif me trink dere, you!

’Ave a wet!

Salute!

Gesundheit !

Skoal !

Drunk as a lord, God stiffen you!

Here’s how!

Luck!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 4.]

_The Hairy Ape_ has proved to be the most interesting in regard to its theme of its expressionistic presentation. It is the tragedy of man. Yank is only a means with whom O’Neill has revealed a natural and real drama of the human emotions. He has lost his harmony not even with nature but with his own conscious self.

In _The Hairy Ape_, almost all the characters are engaged in the quest for identity. Paddy nostalgically remembers the bygone days of his youth. Long deplores man’s alienation from his work and condemns his hellish existence in the capitalist society. Mildred wants to establish her identity afresh by doing something meaningful in her life. She wants to be ‘sincere, to touch life somewhere.’ Yank is the main symbol of modern man’s quest for identity. O’Neill has extended the symbolism of Yank’s struggle beyond psychology to philosophy and, in a sense, to anthropology. The search for identity becomes the collective universal problem of mankind. O’Neill’s view of the human dilemma suggests that of Sartrian existentialism. Man’s very ‘lostness’, his need to
belong, is the key to his humanity. O’Neill has stated the dilemma in words which almost paraphrase the explanation of *The Hairy Ape*............

“Self-awareness, reason and imagination have disrupted the ‘harmony’ which characterizes animal existence. Their emergence has made man into an anomaly, into the freak of the universe. He is a part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home, he shares with all creatures.... Being aware of himself, he realizes his powerlessness and the limitations of his existence. ......

Reason, man’s blessing is also his curse; it forces him to cope everlastingly with the task of solving an insoluble dichotomy...... Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve and from which he cannot escape. He cannot go back to the pre-human state of harmony with nature; he must proceed to develop his reason until he becomes the master of nature, and of himself.”

[Falk, Doris V., 1958, p. 36.]

In the modern industrialized world, there are several Yanks. They have grown up with the faith that they belong. They think that they are the vital parts of a social order. In fact, they are merely part of a machinery world. This can be replaced according to the need of the machine. Yank’s urge for belongingness, his search for identity, carries him to the office of I.W.W. Unfortunately, there he fails to find any answer to his problem. He is
suspected by the Secretary of I.W.W. as a spy. He is thrown out of the office. His rejection by the I.W.W. is a terrible shock to his belief. The main source of the trouble is not in the society, nor in Mildred, but in himself. Now, he realizes the truth, and becomes aware that the entire system is wrong. There is no real solution to his problem. He thinks as if he were in a state of complete darkness. In fact, O’Neill never suggests any solution to the problems of his characters. He sees no hope for man in his suffering. Whatever hope he sees for man lies in individuals. He sees that most individuals have hopelessly dehumanized. His heroes are in search of new values. They are so ingrown, tormented and doomed that they are not likely to lure one into following their example. O’Neill’s characters are really pleasant, conventional, unthinking bourgeois. At least, they are capable of the affection of others. He accepts no answer to life but death. This is what happens in the cage of Yank. The dramatist has described the most helpless condition of Yank in a more realistic way. He is thrown out of the I.W.W. building. His helpless answer to the policeman shows that he has lost all his way for the sake of his identity.

The setting of the play is also symbolic. In the beginning of the play, the description of the stokehole is intended to convey an impression of cramped space, of overcrowding. Yank and the other stokers are not quite human. There is something ape-like about them. It is described as......

“The men themselves should resemble pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at. All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. All the civilized white races are represented, but except for
the slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, and eyes. All these men are alike.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 3-4.]

Eugene O’Neill has depicted Yank as the central character in this play. This symbolizes a number of ideas. He is a stoker and symbolizes their most perfect individuality. He represents the animal-nature of man. He has immense physical strength. He stands for the primitive in perfect harmony with nature. He is introduced in the first scene of the play.....

“He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They respect his superior strength - the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last work in what they are, their most highly developed individual.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 4.]

Robert Smith, who is popularly known as Yank among his fellow workers, is a composite symbol of American individualism. O’Neill says that he is

“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.”

[Falk, Doris V., 1958, p. 34.]
Yank is proud of living in a world different from that of the pre-Industrial Revolution Era, a world of machine, which he thinks, is governed by strong workers like him. Here he appears as a symbol of pipedream or illusion...

“What's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to do wit us? We're better men dan dey are, ain't we? Sure! One of us guys could clean up de whole mob wit onemit. Put one of'em down here for one watch in de stokehole, what'd happen? Dey'dcarry him off on a stretcher. Dem boilds don't amount to nothin', Dey're just baggage. Who makes 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.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 9.]

The machine age is also symbolic. He stands for many things. He is steam and oil for the engines. He stands for the noise that makes to hear us. He is smoke and expresses the trains, steamers, factory whistles. He is a thing in gold which stands for the whole thing. He is steel, steel, and steel. He stands for the muscles in steel, the punch behind it. As a symbol of machine age, he says,

“I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil fro de engines’ I'm de ting noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel - stee- steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p.13]
An ape has so much physical strength and primitive simplicity. It has little brains. He is incapable of thought and knows only the use of physical force. It is these qualities which Yank has. He is hairy-chested with long arms of tremendous power. Throughout the play, he broods and broods over the words ‘hairy ape’ used for him. His confident sense of belongingness is gone. He is no longer in harmony with his work; the confrontation with the girl marks the beginning of the disintegration and decay of his personality. Mildred rightly remarks,

“Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene III, p. 25.]

Yank behaves like a hairy ape. His desire for revenge carries him to the Fifth Avenue. Yank remarks,

“Hairy ape, huh? Sure! Dat’s de way she looked at me, aw right. Hairy ape! so dat’s me, huh? Yuh skinny tart! Yuh white-faced bum, yuh! I’ll show yuh who’s a ape!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene IV, p. 31.]

When released from the prison, he approaches the office of the Industrial Workers of the World to get enrolled as a member. But he is thrown out of the meeting hall. Again, it is impressed on his mind that he does not belong. At last, he goes to the zoo to establish his fraternity with the apes. He hopes that the gorilla will accept him as the human community has rejected him. “Yank walks up to the gorilla’s cage and, leaning
over the railing, stares in at its occupant, who stares back at him, silent and motionless.

There is a pause of dead stillness. Then YANK begins to talk in a friendly confidential tone, half mockingly, but with a deep undercurrent of sympathy.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, p. 57.]

“...And why wouldn’t yuh get me? Ain’t we both members of de same club - de Hairy Apes?”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, p. 57.]

Then gorilla scrambles gingerly out of his cage. He goes to YANK and stands looking at him. With a spring, he wraps his huge arms around YANK in a murderous hug. The gorilla lets the crushed body slip to the floor; stands over it uncertainly, considering; then picks it up, throws it in the cage.

“The YANK moves, groaning, opening his eyes, and there is silence. He mutters painfully. Say -dey oughter match hi -wit Zybszko. He got me, aw right. I’m trou. Even him didn’t tink I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in? Aw, what de hell!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, Pp. 59-60.]

Then he slips in a heap on the floor and dies. Another character in the play Mildred is introduced in the Scene II of this play. She is the daughter of the President of Nazareth Steel and Chairman of the Board Managing Ocean liner. She is a girl of
“twenty, slender, delicate, with a pale, pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority. She loves fretful, nervous and discontented, bored by her own anemia.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p. 15.]

O’Neill writes about her personality,

“The younger looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived, so that she is the expression not of its life energy but merely of the artificialities that energy had won for itself in the spending.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p. 16.]

Mildred symbolizes the fashionable humanists who take pride in their lip service to the down-trodden humanity. She has studied sociology at her college where she found interest in the study of the working conditions of the poor. She says,

“Please do not mock my attempts to discover how the other half lives. Give me credit for some sort of groping sincerity in that at least. I would like to help them. 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, to touch like somewhere. But I’m afraid I have neither the vitality nor integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p. 17.]
Mildred stands for the capitalist class in the play. She shatters the dream-world of Yank for ever. Due to her, Yank has to think his belonging in the world. Mildred’s aunt is also introduced in Scene II of this play. O’Neill writes,

“A pompus and proud - and fat - old lad. She is a type even to the point of a double chin and lorgnettes. She is dressed pretentiously; as if afraid her face alone would never indicate her position in life.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p. 15.]

She represents aristocratic isolationism. She again and again calls Mildred ‘poser’.

AUNT: “Poser!

MILDRED: Old hag!

AUNT: I said Poser!”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene II, p. 21.]

The character of Paddy is introduced in the first Scene of the play. He is an old sailor. His face is extremely monkey-like with all the sad, patient pathos of that animal in his small eyes. The stokers request him to sing whisky song;

“Oh, whisky is the life of man!

Whisky! O Johnny! (They all join in on this.)

Oh, whisky is the life of man!

Whisky for my Johnny! (Again chorus.)

Oh, whisky drove my old man mad!

Whisky! O Johnny!
Oh, whisky drove my old man mad!

Whisky for my Johnny!"

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, Pp. 6-7.]

Paddy is the symbol of modern man out of tune with the machine age. He wants to go back to days of simplicity and naturalness and says to Yank:

“We belong to this, you’re saying? We make the ship to go, you’re saying? Yerra then, that Almighty God have pity on us! Oh, to be back in the fine days of me youth, Ochone! Oh, there was fine beautiful ships them days – clippers wild tall masts touching the sky - fine strong men in them - men that was sons of the sea as if ’twas the mother that bore them. Oh, the clean skins of them, and the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them! Brave men they was, and bold men surely! Work - aye, hard work - but who’d mind that at all? Sure, you worked under the sky and ‘twas work wide skill and daring to it. ‘Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and a man part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one. Is it one wild this you’d be, Yank - black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea. Smudging the decks - the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and coal dust - breaking our backs and hearts in the bell of the stokehole - feeding the bloody furnace - the sky like bloody apes in the Zoo! Ho-ho, devil mends you! Is it to belong to that you’re wishing? Is it a flesh and blood wheel of the engines you’d be?”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, Pp. 11-12.]
Paddy gives a very bright picture of the days of his youth. They sailed their ship and sang happy songs because they enjoyed full freedom. They worked hard but never felt bored or tired. Those days a ship was a part of the sea and man was a part of a ship. He has grown old with the burden of this nostalgia. Every moment, he is waiting for death. Paddy says,

“I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 14.]

Paddy becomes a true representative of the old generation still in love with its virtues. He is unhappy with the change which science and technology has brought out by replacing wind-driven ships by steam-propelled liners.

Another character Long comes on the stage in the First Scene of the play. He is excessively drunk. He jumps on a bench excitedly with a bottle in his hand. Long is the symbol of radicalism in American politics, of Marxian concepts of class struggle and workers’ alienation from their work. He does not agree with the views of Yank that they belong. He says,

“Listen’ere, Comrades! Yank ‘ere is right. ‘E says this ‘ere stinkin’ ship is our’ ‘ome. And’e says as ’ome is ‘ell. And’ e’s right! This is ‘ell. We lives in ’ell, Comrades - and right enough we’ll die in it.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene I, p. 8.]
He is always conscious of his duty. When Yank would like to take revenge on personal plane, Long says to him that they must impress their demands through peaceful means.

As a politically conscious worker, he wants to exploit every situation to the cause of his political philosophy. He tells us the other stokers that they have been insulted by the girl in i. e. Mildred and the engineers. At this occasion, he jumps on a bench - hectically, and says,

“Hinsultin’us! Hinsultin’ us, the bloody cow! And them bloody engineers! What right’ as they got to be exhibitin’ us’s if we was bleeding’ monkeys in a menagerie?”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene IV, p. 28]

In the last Scene of the play, we find that Yank is bewildered. He stands face to face with a gorilla in the zoo. The gorilla is caged because society is fascinated with, but cannot find a way of relating to the essential brutality, the primitive nature in all men. Yank talks aloud to the gorilla.......
dat bein’ de right dope - on’y I couldn’t get in it, see? I couldn’t belong in dat. It was over my head. And I kept tinkin’ - and den I beat it up here to see what youse was like. And I waited till dey was all gone to git yuh alone.”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, Pp. 57-58.]

The ending of the play is ambiguous. It is fantastic, unnatural and unconvincing. It ends on a tragic, sad and unconvincing note.

“Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only - one and original - Hairy Ape from de wilds of - (He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs.)”

[The Hairy Ape, Scene VIII, Pp. 59-60.]

In the last Scene of this play, the symbol is visually presented, in the shape of the gorilla in its cage. Eugene O’Neill has made the use of symbolism in the setting of the play, the characters, dialogues, techniques, language etc. The language of the play is also symbolic. The title itself is symbolic. It refers to primitive civilization. The phrases and the words as - ‘filthy beast’, ‘hairy ape’, ‘belong’, ‘I do not belong’, etc are symbolically used in the language.

The title *The Hairy Ape* symbolizes the diagnostic character of a savage and ferocious animal in man with an unusual sense of animality. The blending of the constantly repeated image of the ‘ape’ with tragic reality is the remarkable aspect of
O’Neill’s dramatic technique. The play conveys the image of man’s primitiveness. The living human reality of the present is like the ape. Man is present in a continual repetition of his past. The ape is ingrained in man. He cannot avoid the awaiting doom if he does not control the ape thriving within him. There are two small important words ‘hairy’ and ‘ape’. These words become the root cause of tragedy in the life of the protagonist, Yank. These words signify the strength and the brutality in the character of Yank. Yank is proud of his physical strength and superior feelings of belongingness. Yank is a true devotee of work. He considers himself as the force behind the moving ship.

Yank’s concern is only with the work. Yank says in a bitter voice which shows his indifferent attitude towards home or family as supported by Long, his another colleague....

“Listen’ere, Comrades! Yank’ are is right.

“E says this ‘ere stinking ship is our ‘ome.

And ‘E says as ‘ome is ‘ell. And ‘E ‘s right!”

[The Hairy Ape, p. 11.]

Ship is everything to them. They belong to ship. They are so attached to the ship. Their motto is “Drink, don’t think!”

[The Hairy Ape, p.7.]

They are proud of their working capacity, especially Yank. He resembles Brutus Jones in the primitiveness of his nature. Yank is confident. He has great faith in his
strength and ability. He considers himself the power behind the moving world. He thinks
that he is end and he is the start. He is the oil for the engines. He is the thing what makes
the iron into steel. He is steel, steel and steel. This sense of belongingness is his
attachment to work. He is ready to prove his belongingness. He has no place for the
romantic past of Paddy in his heart. He has no idea to consider the sense of beauty. His
only pride is that he belongs. This kind of thinking of Yank symbolizes the modernity, the
steel age, the industrial commitment, the machine age.

Mildred Dougles is a rich academic girl. Her father is the President of the Steel
Trust. She is the representative of a world entirely different from that of Yank. She is
pale, colorless, decadent and an artificial product of society. She never dreamt of seeing
such a sequence and a person like Yank. Her looks and attitude express much more than
what she comments. Yank feels himself insulted in some unknown fashion in the very
heart of his pride. The story here begins to change Yank’s life. He becomes confirmed
about the look of Mildred when Paddy conveys him:

“Sure, ‘twas as if she’d seen a great hairy ape escaped from the Zoo!”

[The Hairy Ape, p. 62]

This is the greatest blow to Yank’s blow. He begins to think that he suffers
humiliation at the hands of a woman. His body has become now a prison for him. After
that crucial incident, he no longer feels that he belongs. Therefore, he tries to escape
from the prison where he cannot be content to belong. The more he thinks about the
incident, the more helpless he feels. Finally, he reaches a position where he is described as Rodin’s ‘Thinker.’

Yank has lost his sense of belongingness, so he is now motivated by his strong desire for revenge on Mildred. Then arises the immediate problem for him: Where he stands? He has been identified with the ship and the stoke-hole. Then he loses his old identity, the immediate problem for his is to find out a fresh one. To search for identity or self is the basic nature of each and every individual. His search for a new identity and his urge for belongingness lead him to Fifth Avenue for taking revenge on the upper aristocratic society. This is represented by Mildred. Thus, Yank stands for every individual. Yank is the representative of those who are in search for identity. Yank is a symbolic character of the modern steel age. Yank represents every individual who has the sense of belongingness. The world in which Yank enters is artificial, materialistic world. This is a world of different type beyond his knowledge. In this world, people lead a mechanised life. Yank also tries desperately to impinge his identity on the upper class society. Yank wants his own recognition. This is not only a problem for Yank. But it is the problem of the whole social system to which persons like Yank belong. Eugene O’Neill has studied this crisis of identity in American society very closely.

Yank’s experience in Fifth Avenue makes him aware of his position because this world is far away from the people of his stature. He becomes more helpless than before. This helplessness in a crowded civilized world compels him to seek recognition through his second nature i.e. violence. At last, he finds himself in jail after assaulting a person of the upper class. According to him, in the beginning, steel represented steamers, engines,
buildings. But now he finds the real steal which symbolizes cages, cells, locks, bolts, bars like the dream of every American which is based on “Liberty! Justice! Honor! Opportunity! Brotherhood!”

[The Hairy Ape, p. 76]

But these are far from reality. Dreams and realities are poles apart. Throughout the play, Yank is linked with the evolutionary process - a thinking ape. Society, faced with the desire of the beast to become human, places him in cage after cage. This arouses emotions of protest against a world that victimizes any of its citizens this way. Yank’s unconscious self accepts the fact that he is a ‘Hairy-ape’ in a cage of steel. The word ‘hairy-ape’ continues to torture him. He considers prison as a zoo. Behind the steel-bar in the prison cell, Yank starts realising the naked reality of life. He feels that his power and strength is nothing but a false ego. This is merely a dream, an illusion. His force of thinking steel is reality - is in reality no strength at all. The idea that he is steel is completely wrong. He becomes aware that the power does not belong to him. Instead, it belongs to Mildred’s father.

In the Stokehole, Yank belongs. His Credo is that he is the force at the bottom that makes the entire mechanized society move. This is right. He is such a force until the meeting with Mildred causes him to doubt himself and sends him out in a frenzied effort to destroy the God of power he has served at his furnace altar. But he finds no solution to his problem either in his acceptance or in his rejection. To live alone is the most difficult task for a man. Now Yank is rejected by the society. He does not belong to the human-world. Suffering from this sort of isolation, he tries his best to belong to
somewhere, even to the animal-world. Search for identity becomes an obsession with him. It leads him to the zoo where he stands face to face with a gorilla in its cage and seeks its companionship. He considers even the position of Gorilla better than his. Like other human beings, he has neither the sweet past nor the memory of home life. The life he has chosen places him at the point of no return. But this is not the end of his search for identity. To join the class of ape, he invites the ape. He is finally seized, thrown by the brutish animal. Before meeting his tragic end, he says,

“He got me, aw right. I’m trou. Even him didn’t tink I belonged..... Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?”

[The Hairy Ape, p. 60.]

With a doubtful note – “And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belong”, [The Hairy Ape, p. 59.] the dramatist ends the play.

The question arises, where does Yank belong to? Torn between two worlds - the animal and the spiritual, - he does not know where he stands. Thus O’Neill has extended the symbolism of Yank’s struggle beyond psychology to philosophy and in a sense to anthropology. The search for identity is not only a personal problem. But this becomes the collective universal problem of mankind. This is the vital problem of the modern world. There is a search for man’s true identity. There is an earnest plea for the recovery of clearly established moral and religious values set against an awareness of evil and guilt. There is a revolutionary will to create new form of expression. Yank cannot go forward to the spiritual nor can he go back to nature from where he has come. So he
stands in between, taking all punishment. Finally, he remains an isolated and lonely person. With a deep sense of responsibility, Yank searches for an image of himself. But he cannot see beyond his conscious self. The barrier can be overcome only by death. This is the symbolic meaning of the play. Yank stands for the search for identity. He has no way to choose now. He cannot go forward nor can he return to his own place where he has started.

Social environment is an important factor for man’s isolated state and agony. In this play, Yank is a man as well as worker, brutalized and mechanized by an impersonal and mechanical social order. We find that too much mechanization of modern life is also one of the important factors responsible to generate the sense of isolation, loneliness, estrangement and insecurity in the life of an individual. It has de-stabilized human life. *The Hairy Ape* shows how Yank is brutalized by an impersonal mechanical social order. In this play, Yank is one who challenges the supremacy of the machine-age and sacrifices his life to move the workers by making them realize the necessity of revolt against their powerful masters. Besides the impersonal and mechanical social order, another factor responsible for the feeling of isolation and loneliness in O’Neill’s heroes is their failure to discriminate between the world of dream and the world of reality. His characters are the willing victims of romantic dreams or illusions. They suffer and feel isolated because of their refusal to give up their dreams. The tensions in his plays are nearly always connected with man’s struggle against isolation and loneliness. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality. But this is to be found in his rebellion and anger, in his inability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at
ease in a world without God, love and trust in life. His plays make it certain that he is the
dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation all through his illustrious literary career.

Eugene O’Neill finished work in *Marco Millions* in March, 1925. But he had been
busy with it for a long time before. The play deals with the dehumanized attitude of the
modern materialistic civilization that has no recognition of spiritual values. Life, Death,
Despair and Eternity are the issues dealt in *Marco Millions*. Marco, Maffeo and Nicolo,
are the three Polos, the persons belonging to materialistic class. Kublai Kaan-the king of
China and Chu Yin a Cathayan sage, symbolize the mystic experiences of the East. Marco
Polo goes to China as a religious representative. His father and uncle also accompany
him. Thereafter, getting a job as a second class commission agent, Marco Polo gradually
rises to the status of a Mayor of Yang-Chan. As an official, he exploits each and every
citizen. He even desires to marry himself the princes Kukachin, the Kaan’s grand
daughter. Marco Polo is a person of lusts, not loves in life. In the following scene, Princes
Kukachin leaves for Persia for her marriage with some other man. The next scene brings
the news of Kukachin’s sad demise. The old king gets completely despaired and hurt. He
becomes filled with philosophical questionings about life and death etc.

O’Neill’s Foreword to Marco is worth looking at:

“This play,” he writes, “is an attempt to render poetic justice to one long
famous as a traveler, unjustly world-renowned as a liar, but sadly unrecognized
by posterity in his true eminence as a man and a citizen—Marco Polo of Venice.”

[Barrett H. Clark, 1929, p.109]
The play is a romantic satire on Occidental hard-headedness set against a colourful background of medieval Oriental civilization. In ten scenes, we find that Marco Polo is shown pursuing his career from boyhood to early middle age and finally to success. He begins as a nice young man and ends up a Babbitt, minus Babbitt’s idealism. The beauty and romance, the serenity and wisdom of an age-old culture, mean nothing to him. The loveliness of a way of life so different from what he has known, and what he desires, is utterly wasted on him. His sojourn in the land of Kublai Khan is merely an opportunity for amassing a fortune.

The first Act of Marco Millions is pure symbolism. O’Neill has used the symbols in the prologue. In the prologue three great religions are represented, each being an outward symbol without inward meaning, except as a justification for such prejudices as serve the practical ends of each who professes it. In Marco Millions, O’Neill writes:

“A sacred tree on a vast plain in Persia near the confines of India. Votive offerings, pieces of cloth torn from clothing, bangles, armlets, ornaments, tapers, have been nailed on the trunk or tied to the branches. The heavy limbs spread out to a great distance from the trunk. Beneath them is deep cool shade, contrasting with the blinding glare of the noon sun on the sandy plain in the background. A merchant carrying in each hand a strapped box that resembles a modern sample case, plods wearily to the foot of the tree............. He is a white Christian, middle-aged, average-looking, with a moustache and beard beginning to show gray. His clothes in the style of the Italian merchant class of the thirteenth century are
travel-worn--------. A Buddhist, a Kashmiri traveling merchant comes in, puffing and sweating, from the right.”

[Marco Millions, p.211]

The six scenes of Act I symbolize the progress of Polo from the West to the East, from the world of limited, practical values to the world of eternal values, from the world of naive faith in human values to the world of skeptical philosophy and relative standards. Marco, together with his merchant uncles, is treated satirically throughout the play. Marco is never conscious that Kukachin, the sensitive grand-daughter of the ruler, Kublai Kaan, loves him and dies of her love. Kukachin’s death song expresses the mystical or inner justification of her fate. The Mongol Chronicler comes forward to fulfill his function of chanting the official lament for the dead. O’Neill writes in the play:

“We lament the shortness of life. Life at its longest is brief enough.
Too brief for the wisdom of joy, too long for the knowledge of sorrow.
Sorrow becomes despair when death comes to the young, untimely.
Oh, that her beauty could live again, that her youth could be born anew.
Our Princess was young as Spring, she was beautiful as a bird or flower.
Cruel when Spring is smitten by Winter, when birds are struck dead in full song, when the budding blossom is blighted!
Alas that our Princess is dead, she was the song of
Songs, the perfume of perfumes, the perfect one!”

[Marco Millions, p.301-2]

By means of a series of symbolic scenes Marco makes the transition from a sweet and earnest youth, proud of his dreams and his hopes, and genuine in his faith, to a shrewd businessman, whose values are profits, and whose ideals are mercenary. *Marco Millions* is an excellent study in the social concept of the Western business ideal. Marco serves as a symbol for big business. It is a satire on the modern businessman. O’Neill has chosen Marco Polo as his principal character because through him and his exploits he could contrast the East and the West. O’Neill points to the whole philosophical conception of life which dominates our world and indicates where the real cause of disaster lies. Life is the only justification for living, and life is not measured by mechanical inventions.

The characters like Marco, a Buddhist Traveler, a Mongol priest, a Buddhist priest, a Taoist priest, a Confucian priest, a Moslem priest, are symbolically used in this drama. Some of them have religious aspect. The action, setting, atmosphere, the seasons, time have also a touch of symbolism. In the end of the play, Kukachin dies and Kublai, the Great Kaan is beside the death body who says:

“I think you are hiding your eyes, Kukachin. You are a little girl again. You are playing hide and seek. You are pretending. Did we not once play such games together, you and I? -------you are pretending even that you are dead! Let us
stop playing! It is late. It is time you are asleep. Open your eyes and laugh! Laugh 
now that the game is over. Take the blindfold from my dim eyes. Whisper your 
secret in my ear. I—I am dead and you are living! Weep for me, Kukachin! Weep 
for the dead! So, little Kukachin—so, Little flower—you have come back—they 
could not keep you—you were too homesick—you wanted to return—to gladden 
my last days—I bid you welcome home, Little Flower! I bid you welcome home!"

[Marco Millions, p.303]

Kublai remembers the childhood days of his grand-daughter. The language used 
by O’Neill is full of symbolism. The words little flower represent the delicateness and 
sensitiveness in the life of Kukachin. There is also the use of emotions and feelings in the 
above conversation by Kublai.

The common features of Desire Under the Elms (1924), The Great God Brown 
(1925), Strange Interlude (1927), and Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), are adultery, 
insanity and possessiveness. The most important characters, especially the protagonists 
are victims of their situations and, for the most part, play in the hands of fate. Owing to 
their mental conflict and insecurity, they struggle hard to get a place either in society or 
in the heart of some specific person. But their ill-luck stands like rock in their way, and 
isolates them from one another. They have lost the harmony of situations. One of the 
notable features about these plays is that they are dominated by the female characters. 
The male characters are puppets in the hands of their woman counterparts. These plays 
are concerned with the story of the family.
Another common feature of these plays is the concept of God. In *Desire Under the Elms*, we find Ephraim Cabot as the worshipper of hard-god; in *The Great God Brown*, we watch Cybel in the form of mother-earth; and we notice Nina Leed’s assumption of mother-god in *Strange Interlude*. One can easily feel the Hellenic influence on O’Neill in these plays. As regards the dramatic techniques, the dramatist has employed Masks, Soliloquies and Asides frequently to expose the hidden motif of his characters, and thus he makes a landmark in the realm of American theatre.

Man’s inner conflict and his suffering in utter loneliness fascinate Eugene O’Neill. He effectively delineates this isolated state of man through his dramatic skill. Sometimes, man’s own ego is responsible for his suffering, while at times he is forced by some outer force. Ultimately, through this conflict, he reaches a state of isolation. According to Monica Gupta,

“O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* reveals the same story of conflict in the mind of its characters that arises from their desire to possess. It dramatizes the fierce struggle of three main characters to possess a rockbound farm in order to give a direction and meaning to their insecure and lonely lives. Their quest is similar to that of Yank; basically they desire something to which they can ‘belong.’ In their search for belonging, they pass through one illusion to another and at every step the cold touch of reality disillusiones them. In the way of belonging, they lack the real communication and become alien to one another.”

[Gupta, Monika, 2001, p.63]
The action of the entire play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse in New England, in the year 1850. The south end of the house faces front to a stone wall with a wooden gate at centre opening on a country road. The house is in good condition but in need of paint. Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles.

There is a path running from the gate around the right corner of the house to the front door. A narrow porch is on this side. The end wall facing us has two windows in its upper story, two larger ones on the floor below. The two upper are those of the father’s bedroom and that of the brothers. On the left, ground floor is the kitchen—one on the right, the parlor, the shades of which are always drawn down.

Dr. Neeta Dixit rightly observes,

"Desire Under the Elms (1924), the first great tragedy comes to focus on man. It has a concept which he has developed in so early a play as The Web, and which in his final plays he will develop into a major statement that when all is lost, the only good is in finding another, equally lonely and alienated, as Eben meets
Abbie in whose presence comfort can be gained and loneliness forgotten a time.

After their confession of the infanticide, the reunion of the lovers is a solution for those who cannot belong.”

[Dixit, Neeta, 2004, p. 147]

*Desire Under the Elms (1924)* deals with the tragedy of a New England farmer of 1850’s, Ephraim Cabot, who is unable to communicate either with his wives or with his sons. His belief of a hard God and his fierce possessiveness of a relationship with the members of his family. In order to escape the tyrannical eyes of their father, Simeon and Peter, the first two sons from the first wife, leave the house after selling their shares to Eben, their half-brother. In the meantime, Ephraim marries for the third time, at the age of seventy-six, Abbie Putnam, a young and voluptuous widow of thirty-five. His step son Eben is filled with resentment because he will thus be disinherited from the farm which belonged to his deceased mother. As Ephraim is impotent owing to his old age, Abbie starts seducing young Eben in order to have a child by so that she might claim for Ephraim’s farm. Finally, she becomes the mother of a son, whom Ephraim believes as his own. Having come to know that he is the instrument of his own disinheritance, Eben becomes furious at Abbie. She while seducing him really falls in love with him; and to prove her fidelity she kills the new born baby. After realizing that he is also responsible for the crime committed by her, both he and Abbie surrender themselves to law, leaving the old Cabot sitting lonely in the best farm of the country.

The title of the play symbolizes that the persons who seek shelter under the ‘Elms’ have several desires within. The setting—the visible exterior and interior—stresses
the separateness of the characters in the play. The alternation between interior and exterior signifies both the domestic lives of the characters and of the farm which is the sole aim to their lives and a consuming object of their desires. The father, who worships a hard God, always sticks to his possession. The two elder sons roam about the gold-field of California, and the third one desires the possession of the entire farm from his greedy father.

“Peter: Waal—she’s gone. (This with indifferent finality—then after a pause) They’s gold in the West, Sim.

Simeon: (still under the influence of sunset—vaguely) In the sky?

Peter: Wall—in a manner o’ speakin’—thar’s the promise (Growing excited) Gold in the sky—in the West—Golden Gate—Californi-a!—Goldest West!—fields o’ gold!”

[Nine Plays by Eugene O’Neill, p.138]

Even the new members of the family, Abbie, steps under the ‘Elms’ with her desire of possession to get a secure place, to get a new identity of her own. They all try their best to fulfill their ambitions in their own way. Thus, before entering the possessive world of desire, O’Neill describes:

“The south end of the house faces front to a stone wall with a wooden gate at center opening on a country road. The house is in good condition but in need of paint. Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches
down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p.136]

The setting not only evokes the nature of stony farm, but it also symbolizes the dominance of female characters represented by the Elms trees in the play. In the light of psychoanalysis, it may be explained as a symbol of the maternal spirit. It interprets Eben’s case as a struggle between two masks, the proud paternal and the submissive maternal. The Oedipus complex fits into the structure of the play, because Ephraim Cabot strikes as the Primordial father and the longing of Eben for his mother is silenced only when he has an incestuous love affair with Abbie. Eben is introduced at the opening of the Part One-Scene One. O’Neill describes in the play as:

“His eyes fall and he stares about him frowningly. He is twenty-five, tall and sinewy. His face is well-formed, good-looking, but its expression is resentful and defensive. His defiant, dark eyes remind one of a wild animal’s in captivity. Each day is a cage in which he finds himself trapped but inwardly unsubdued. There is a fierce repressed vitality about him. He has black hair, mustache, and a thin curly trace of beard. He is dressed in rough farm clothes.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 137]
We find that the playwright has shown the conflict between human desire and Puritanism in the setting of the play. The sky above the roof is suffused with deep colours and the green colour of the elms glow; but the house in shadow, seems pale and washed out by contrast. The green elms glow with natural passion, while the farmhouse is infected with Puritanism. The stone walls symbolize Ephraim’s hard God. O’Neill writes in the play as,

“The south end of the house faces front to a stone wall with a wooden gate………………Its walls are a sickly grayish, the green of the shutters faded. Two enormous elms are on each side of the house. They bend their trailing branches down over the roof.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 136]

In the opening scene of the play, we come across that Ephraim Cabot is absent from the house. His sons Simeon and Peter talk about the hard nature of their father i.e. Ephraim Cabot as well as their loneliness and isolation. They desire only to possess something by which they may satisfy themselves. They dream about the gold field of California, whereas Eben’s dream is to possess the farm. Both the desires are unconsciously associated with women. Simeon’s restlessness is merely a reaction to the loss of Jenn, his deceased wife, and Eben’s desire of possessing the farm is associated with his dead mother from whom, as he believes, his father has stolen the farm.

Simeon and Peter are disgusted with the life, provided to them by their father. They are aware of the hardships they have met in cultivating the stony land of their
father. They are so much disgusted with him that they do not hesitate to wish him dead or mad. It clearly indicated the Ephraim’s principle of worshipping the hard God is solely responsible for the isolated lives of his sons. As O’Neill writes:

“Simeon: We’ve wuked. Give our strength. Give our years. Plowed ’em under the ground,--(he stamps rebelliously)—rottin’—makin soil for his crops! (A pause) Waal—the farm pays good for hereabouts.

Peter: If we plowed in California, they’d be lumps o’ gold in the furrow!

Simeon: California’s t’other side o’earth , a’ most. We got t’ calculate—

Peter:--(after a pause) ‘T would be hard fur me, too, to give up what we’ve earned here by our sweat. (A pause. Eben sticks his head out of the dining-room window, listening).

Simeon: Ay-eh. (A pause) May be—he’ll die soon.

Peter: (doubtfully) May be.

Simeon: May be—fur all we knows—he’s dead now.

Peter: Ye’d need proof.

Simeon: He’s been gone two months—with no word.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p.139]

We find that no one is free from the tyrannous eyes of Ephraim. Eben accuses his brothers who did not stand beside their mother when she was suffering and leading a lonely life. Eben believes that the spirit of his dead mother still haunts the house.
Eben’s desire to possess the farm is a type of unconscious revenge upon his father’s tyranny. He accuses Ephraim for the fatal end of his mother. All the three brothers are leading isolated lives. The first two are cut-off from all the warm sides of life, and the third one confines himself to the kitchen which is haunted by the spirit of his mother. There is no cordial relationship between Eben and the elder brothers. Their sense of possessiveness keeps them mentally apart from one another when Simeon and Peter are planning for their monetary condition. O’Neill writes in the play as,

“Eben: (decisively) But t’aint that. Ye won’t never go because ye’ll wait here fur yer share o’the farm, thinkin’ allus he’ll die soon.

Simeon: (after a pause) We’ve a right.

Peter: Two-thirds belongs t’us.

Eben: (jumping to his feet) Ye’ve no right! She wan’t yewr Maw! It was her farm! Didn’t he steal it from her? She’s dead. It’s my farm.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p.142]

When they assert their rights over the property, Eben violently opposes. Eben says:

“Ye’ve no right. She wan’t year Maw; it was her farm. Didn’t he steal it from her? She’s dead. It’s my farm.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 148]
Then, we find that Eben’s visit to prostitute Minne signifies much more than the physical attraction of a male to a female. In spite of knowing that his brothers and father have slept with her, he is proud of his relationship with her. In every respect he wants to share with his father’s possession. Eben says:

“What do I care fur her—‘ceptin’ she’s round an’wa’rm? The p’int is she was his’n –an’ now she b’longs t’me!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 148]

Even Simeon has the same sort of feeling in this respect. By revealing the secret to Eben about her relationship with their father, he says,

“Ay-eh’ we air his heirs in everything!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 144]

After this, we find that Simeon and Peter decide to leave the house in order to search a new life when they hear the news of Ephraim’s marriage. They would like to free from the hard principles of their father. At the same time, they discuss about the fate of Eben after their departure. On the other hand, Eben sticks to his possession of the farm, and believes that the whole property belongs to him. He gives the reason:

“Eben: (with queer excitement) It’s Maw’s farm agen! It’s my farm! Them’s my cows! I’ll milk my durn fingers off fur cows o’mine!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 151]
Simeon’s and Peter’s search of new life compels them to be alienated from their own land, and so they sell their share to Eben for six hundred dollars. In meantime, Ephraim returns with his newly married wife, Abbie, whose marriage to Ephraim is entirely based on her self-interest. It is for security that she marries Ephraim. She narrates the insecure life of her by-gone years to Eben:

“My Maw died afore I’d growed. I don’t remember her none. (A pause) But yew won’t hate me long, Eben. I’m not the wust in the world—an’ yew an’ me’ve got a lot in common. I kin tell that by lookin’ at ye. Waal—I’ve had a hard life, too—oceans o’ trouble an’ nuthin’ but wuk fur reward. I was a orphan early an’had t’ wuk fur others in other folks’ hums. Then I married an’he turned out a drunken spreer an’ so he had to wuk fur others an’ me too agen in other folks’ hum, an’ I was glad sayin’ now I’m free fur once, on’y I diskivered right away all I up hope o’ever doin’ my own wuk in my own hum, an’then your paw come………..”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 160]

After this in the play, we see that Abbie keeps her eyes on Ephraim’s property which is the real security for her. Abbie’s greed and possessiveness for the farm motivate all her actions in the beginning. As soon as she enters the house, she feels that the entire property belongs to her. Her strong determination of possessiveness can be felt from her outward appearance. It is difficult on her part to suppress the strong urge for desire. Looking towards the house, she exclaims:
“Abbie: (with lust for the word) Hum! (Her eyes gloating on the house without seeming to see the two stiff figures at the gate) It’s purty—purty! I can’t b’lieve it’s r’ally mine.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 155]

It seems as if she has got everything which she had desired for a long time. Both Simeon and Peter have left the house, and therefore the only obstacle in her way is young Eben and she thinks she can easily win him. In her encounter with Eben, she tries to win his sympathy by telling him her story of loneliness and hardship. But it seems too difficult on her part to mould him for her purpose owing to his strict sense of possessiveness. After listening to the story, he says to her:

“An! Bought yew----like a harlot----An’ the price he’s payin’ ye---- this farm ----was, my Maw,s damn ye!----an’ mine now!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 160]

Abbie is so determined in her mission that the words of Eben hardly matter to her. She says:

“(defying him) This be my farm—this be my hum—this be my kitchen!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 161]

Her immediate response to the farm reveals her greed and possessiveness. From the very beginning, she smells the mutual physical attraction between Eben and herself,
and is confident of winning him. On the other hand, Eben is confused although he appears to be determined to fight her out.

The foremost reason behind Abbie’s desire of possession is her sense of insecurity. She has suffered a lot in her past, and hence the real cause of her possessiveness is her desire for security. She wants to belong. She wants to identify herself with the farm of Cabot. This sense of belongingness leads her to establish an illegal relationship with Eben. What she needs is an heir of her own through whom she can assert her authority over the farm, and for that she decides to use Eben as an instrument. As Monika Gupta observes:

“Gradually, Eben is trapped by her sensuality. His longing for the lost mother’s urge finds a ray of hope in Abbie. His search for a lost maternity compels him to be a victim of Abbie’s lust and purpose. Like Simeon and Peter, at first, he seeks satisfaction in a dream of material possession; but as the play proceeds, it becomes clear that his hatred for his father and his legalistic claims of ownership are only signals of a truer desire to rediscover the security through identification with the land.

In reality, Eben is opposite of his father and his brothers. He has an undefined poetic sensitivity and gift of femineity about him. He is the hero touched with poetry. But unlike Robert Mayo, he is not sentimental, talking out his frustration in a longing for beauty. He has in him a repressed vitality, an animal quality that gives him maturity and manliness foreign to the earlier dreamer. Yet, like Mayo, he reveals the same need to belong. He seeks the same identification with nature
and moves listlessly in alien places like the kitchen—the world of women where he can speak no roots.”

[Monika Gupta, 2001, p. 69]

Abbie successfully tries to hit the nail of ‘purpose’ in the soft layer of Eben’s sentiment and successfully exploits him in the name of his mother for her own purpose. With their physical union in the room of Eben’s mother, the haunted spirit of his mother returns to her grave. The room loses its oppressiveness, tomb-like atmosphere. Both Abbie and Eben discuss it as follow:

“Abbie: I’m goin’t’ leave the shutters open and let in the sun ‘n’ air. This room’s been dead long enuf. Now it’s goin’t’ be my room!

Eben: (frowning) Ay-eh.

Abbie: (hastily) I meant—our room.

Eben: Ay-eh.

Abbie: We made it our’n last night, didn’t we?

We give it life----our lovin’ did

Eben: (with a strong look) Maw’s gone back t’ her grave. She kin sleep now.

Abbie: May she rest in peace!”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 180]

This shows how successfully Eben is trapped by the scheme of Abbie. She not only proceeds in her ‘purpose’ of getting an heir for her own security, but also asserts her possession of the room of Eben’s mother. Eben becomes conscious of the motive behind
her love when a son is born to her. Being aware of her real intention, he threatens to
leave her. On the other hand, during the process of seduction, she desperately falls in
love with him. In fact, she is so deeply attached to him that she cannot convince him that
in the beginning she did make love to him for an ulterior purpose. In order to prove that
her love for him is neither for the child nor for his inheritance. She kills the child.

After the murder of the child, Eben becomes aware of his guilt. He realizes that he
is also responsible for the infanticide committed by Abbie. He thinks that he has forced
her for the sin. As a result, both of them surrender before law. Their war for material
possession ends with the crime. They get neither the property nor any security of their
own. They may be satisfied with their love, but one cannot deny the fact that the gap
between the old Cabot and the lovers remains unbridged throughout. They are alienated
socially with their imprisonment, and thus will be expiated in a long and solitary process.

Though the play seems to deal with the story of two young lovers, yet actually the
real spirit behind the play is Ephraim Cabot who dominates the action from the beginning
to the end by his indomitable will-power and stone-like strength. Throughout his life he
works hard, but suffers in loneliness in search of human understanding. He fails to
establish any harmonious relationship with others except the rocks and stones of his
farm. No one but he himself is responsible for the barrier created by him on account of
his possessiveness, ownership and his belief in hard God. There is hardly any cordial
relationship between the father and the sons. They have suffered a lot by obeying and
following the hard principles of their father.
On the other hand, Ephraim is also haunted by a sense of loneliness and insecurity. He is worried thinking about the future of his hard earned farm. This sense of loneliness increases when Simeon and Peter leave the farm. Helplessly, he is in search of a right heir for his possessiveness which causes a sense of insecurity within him.

Ephraim’s possessiveness, his belief in hard God and his sense of superiority make a wall within himself and the others. His talking of hard God and easy God distinguishes him as well as his life from the rest. His belief in hard God and his total identification with this force is the direct cause of his alienation.

Ephraim wonders whether any man or woman really understands him. His devotion to hard God prevents him from establishing any relationship with others. Desperately he tells the tragedy of his isolated life to Abbie, and says how he has been misunderstood by his sons. He says:

“Listen, Abbie. When I come here fifty odd year ago—I was jest twenty an’ the strongest an’ hardest ye ever seen—ten times as strong an’ fifty times as hard as Eben. Wall—this place was nothin’ but fields o’ stones. Folks laughed when I tuk it. They couldn’t know what I knowed. When ye kin make corn sprout out o’ stones, God’s livin’ in yew!.......God hain’t easy. An’ I growed hard. God’s hard, not easy! God’s in the stones! Build my church on a rock—out o’ stones an’ I’ll be in them! That’s what He meant t’ Peter! Stones. ...............I tuk a wife. She bore Simeon an’ Peter. She was a good woman. She wuked hard. We was married twenty year. She never knowed me. I was allus lonesome. She died. The farm
growed. It was all mine. I tuk another wife—Eben’s Maw. She bore Eben. She was purty—but soft. After a matter o’ sixteen odd years, she died. I lived with the boys. They hated me’ because I was hard. I hated them because they was soft.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p.172-173]

Owing to this lack of communication and his belief in hard God, he remains as a lonely man throughout his life. He feels alienated from his God, and more lonesome than before. Neither the hard God nor any of the women that come in his life are able to fill the solitude of his life. The root cause of his tragedy is that he is never understood by anybody. Having failed to make any understanding with other human beings, he feels cold and uneasy in his house and tries to find peace in his rocky farm.

Ephraim’s own complexity keeps him apart even in the crowded atmosphere of his house. When everyone is celebrating the function of the new born baby, he does not find any peace in his house. He says:

“They’s no peace in houses, they’s no rest livin’ with folks. Somethin’s always livin’ with ye. I’ll go t’ the barn an’ rest a spell.”

[Desire Under the Elms, p. 189]

After knowing the relationship between Eben and Abbie and the truth about the child, he becomes more helpless. In a fit of madness, he threatens to burn the farm and says that it is a signal from God for him to seek an easy life in California. But he is aware of the hardship ahead. He knows he has to face a more solitary life then ever before,
after the imprisonment of Eben and Abbie. He is destined to spend the rest of his life within the stone-walls of his farm. As Monika Gupta writes,

“The desire to possess grows out of the feeling of insecurity, helplessness or instability. Therefore, O’Neill’s vision of life is without foundation, without beliefs or creeds, struggling for a symbol of security in a stony land of a new England Farmstead, where Abbie, the young wife, desires a home for security, Simeon and Peter desire freedom from the hard labour of a rock-bound farm, Eben desires to possess the farm of his mother, and old Ephraim, disappointed by his wives and sons, desires to escape from his tragic sense of aloneness by possessing the farm he has made out of rocky land. Thus, there ensues a war of possession in which all the members of the family are defeated by the sense of isolation.”

[Monika Gupta, 2001, p. 73]

*Lazarus Laughed* is the play of mask-symbolism. In this play a large number of characters wear masks. This play is an exposition of the philosophy of life and death. The masks in this play bear the equivalents of illusions of pain, fear, loneliness and death etc. When men live under illusions, remain ignorant of reality of life. For such men Lazarus regards death a reality and life an illusion. They avoid all that is meaningful and creative in life and accept instead what is sterile, destructive and meaningless in life.

In this play, the aim of Lazarus after his resurrection is to preach. The audiences attending him are the people from different faiths and from different parts of the world.
Lazarus wants to lift man above the animal nature. Miriam, his wife is a symbol of the conscience of humanity. Married to the ideals of Lazarus, she is above suffering. Caligula, Tiberius and Pompeia represent men and women believing in lust and hatred as the ‘Values’ of life. O’Neill writes about this play as:

“It was the most successful thing I ever did. I think I’ve got it just right. It is, from my viewpoint. It’s in seven scenes, and all the characters wear masks. And here I’ve used them right. In Lazarus I believe I’ve managed the problem of big crowds better than crowds are usually worked in plays. It’s never quite right. My Jews all wear Jewish masks, and it’s the same with the Greeks and Romans. I think I have suggested the presence and characteristics of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers. I also have a chorus of seven, who chant together, emphasizing and ‘pointing’ the action throughout.” ..........O’Neill calls his work a “Play for an Imaginative Theatre.”

[Barrett H., Clark, 1947, p. 116-117]

Lazarus of Bethany, his father, his mother, Martha, Mary his sister, Miriam his wife, seven Guests, neighbors’ of Lazarus, Chorus of old men, an orthodox priest, Chorus of Lazarus’ Followers, A Centurion, Gaius Caligula, Crassus, a Roman General, Chorus of Greeks, Seven Citizens of Athens, Chorus of Roman Senators, Seven Senators, Chorus of Legionaries, Chorus of the Guard, Tiberius, Pompeia, Chorus of Youths and Girls, Chorus of the Roman populace Crowds etc. are the major and minor characters used by O’Neill in this play. There are four Acts in this play and each act is divided into two scenes.
In the opening of the play, there is Lazarus’s home at Bethany. White walls, fading daylight, a crowd of men, a crowd of women suggest something else. There are seven male Guests grouped by the door. They watch Lazarus. There is also the Chorus of Old Men, seven in number facing Lazarus. We find that all these people are masked in accordance with the following scheme:

“There are seven periods of life shown: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned. Thus in each crowd (this includes among the men the Seven Guests who are composed of one male of each period-type as period one—type one, period two—type two, and so on up to period seven—type seven) there are forty-nine different combinations of period and type. Each type has a distinct predominant colour for its costumes which varies in kind according to its period. The masks of the Chorus of Old Men are double the size of the others. They are all seven in the sorrowful, Resigned type of Old Age).”

[Lazarus Laughed, p. 381-382]

*Lazarus Laughed* is first of all the exposition of a philosophy of life and death. Here we are concerned more with the idea than with the characters. Lazarus has risen from the tomb and after Jesus departed he began to laugh. He says:
“There is only life! I heard the heart of Jesus laughing in my heart; There is
Eternal Life in No,” it said, “and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes! Death is the
fear between!”

[Lazarus Laughed, p. 387]

The Chorus chant:

“Laugh! Laugh!
There is only life!
There is only laughter!
Fear is no more!
Death is dead!”

[Lazarus Laughed, p. 388]

Lazarus has returned from death, resurrected by Jesus, in whose eyes he found
the secret which he knows is man’s salvation. His mission is to preach the doctrine of his
discovery to mankind. The play is a vast symbolic pageant, tracing the progress of Lazarus
as he preaches to the Jews, the Greeks, and finally, the Romans. In Rome, he meets the
resistance of Caligula and Tiberius, who represent the primary inhibiting forces which
Lazarus must fight—pride with its accompanying fear of loneliness; the false desire for
life which is actually a whimpering fear of death. Lazarus is finally burned at the stake.
Lazarus learns that death is only a stage of natural process, one step in the continuum of
perpetual “becoming” which is existence. Death is no more good or evil than its
opposites, life and birth. It is man who projects death’s evil significance upon it—and then
fears it—fears in a sense, his own creation. This is the insight Lazarus has gained beyond the grave—that death is man’s invention and can exist only by virtue of man’s persistent fear of it. The message Lazarus brings from Jesus is:

“There is Eternal Life in No,” and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes!

Death is the fear between!”

[Lazarus Laughed, p. 387]

*Lazarus Laughed* is a hymn to life. O’Neill’s conception of immortality, though not new, is a happy and courageous one. Throughout this play, O’Neill has made the use of the characters, the setting, time, the masks, the nature, the language, the myths, the gods, as the symbols suggesting something else.

Eugene O’Neill has made the use of mask device in some of his plays. In his, *The Great God Brown,* the symbolism took the form of masks. O’Neill has made this device of wearing a mask central to the action. He has exposed the hidden motives of the characters and their dual nature owing to which they are separated from one another. The play shows how man’s persistent efforts to belong to Nature are thwarted by materialism, Christian asceticism, and socially caused conflicts in the psyche. In the words of O’Neill himself:

“The Great God Brown” was the greatest miracle in New York theatre has ever achieved.”

[Monika Gupta, 2001, p.73-74]
The play was written in Bermuda in 1925 and was produced at the Greenwich Village Theatre in January, 1926. In his Memoranda on Masks (American Spectator, Nov.1932) O’Neill writes that:

“for certain types of plays especially for the new modern play, the use of masks will be discovered to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist’s problem as to how ....he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probing of psychology continue to disclose to us............”

[Barrett H., Clark, 1947, p. 103-104]

Eugene O’Neill has made the use of mask in this play which is an integral part of the theme. We find that how a man loses identity wearing a mask of unreality, and moves away from his own self. This agony becomes more intensified when he experiences only the torture of the aspired self without sharing any of its creative urges. This reduces him to a mere lifeless mask, instead of being a living creative creature. Besides showing the two faces of man, the mask expresses the basic polarities inherent in human existence, such as life and death, saint and Satan, art and materialism in the modern world and the lack of communication with others, force a man to wear a mask is nothing but the lapping of ripples against the piles and their swishing on the beach—then footsteps on the boards and Billy Brown walks along from right with his Mother and Father. The Mother is a dumpy woman of forty-five, overdressed in black lace and spangles. The Father is fifty or more, the type of bustling genial, successful, provincial business man, stout and hearty in his evening dress.
“Billy Brown is a handsome, tall and athletic boy of nearly eighteen. He is blond and blue-eyed, with a likeable smile and a frank good-humored face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. He is in evening dress.”

[The Great God Brown, p. 307]

In the Prologue, we come across that the language, the words as a moonlight, mid-June, sound of the school quartet, barber-shop, a faint echo, footsteps on the boards, black lace and spangles, evening dress, blue-eyed, good-humored face, are symbolically used by O'Neill and these words have implied meaning in themselves. They suggest something different in the play.

There are four Acts in this play and except the last one, the first, second and third acts have three scenes in them. The fourth Act has two scenes. There is a Prologue in the beginning and the Epilogue in the end. William A. Brown, Dion Anthony, Margaret, Cybel etc. are the characters in this play. It deals with the four helpless persons’ futile search for happiness. Dion Anthony is the torn and tortured artist. Margaret is his wife. William (Billy) Brown is his friend and Cybel is the prostitute. These characters stand for conflicting selves as well as conflicting elements in the society. In the beginning of the play, we find that Dion and Billy as boys are in love with Margaret. Their fathers are partners in a construction firm. Billy is a simple boy who wears no mask. Dion wears a mask of Pan to conceal his real poetic nature. Margaret loves Dion’s mask. These characters hide their reality by wearing mask. We have the dialogue between Dion and Margaret in the play as,
“Dion: (dazedly, to himself) Waiting—waiting for me! (He slowly removes his mask. His face is torn and transfigured by joy. He stares at the sky raptly) O God in the moon, did you hear? She loves me! I am not afraid! I am strong! I can love! She protects me! Her arms are softly around me! She is warmly around me! She is my skin! She is my armor! Now I am born—I—the I!—one and indivisible—I who love Margaret! (He glances at his mask triumphantly—in tones of deliverance).”

[The Great God Brown, p.316]

Then we find that the domestic life of the alien couple turns to be a miserable one. Dion has spent his money, and the tenderly loving Margaret suggests him to work for his friend, Billy, now the successful businessman William A. Brown. Dion hesitatingly sends Margaret to get the job for him. After knowing the reality through Margaret about Dion’s failure as an artist and a father, Brown agrees to take him as the chief draftsman in his firm. Instead of painting the nature, Dion becomes a building designer.

We come to know Dion is dissatisfied with life and he seeks consolation from Cybel who embodies the honest qualities of earthly love. She accepts him without his mask. Brown is jealous of Dion’s creativity. After long and bitter circumstances, Dion mockingly wills Brown his mask, and the latter puts it on and tries to fulfill his desire of possessing Margaret in the disguise of Dion. Replacing his own identity with Dion’s mask, he manages for a time to alternate between the two selves, but is unable to continue to play the double role: One as Dion, and the other as Brown. He then assumes the character of Dion, for good, and is accused of murdering Brown. In a confused chase by
the police who accuse him of murder, Brown is shot. He dies in the arms of Cybel, who affirms the existence of God and love. Disillusioned Margaret finds fulfillment in a state of falsity with her sons and her timeless love for the mask of Dion. Man is trapped in the mask by circumstances, and by his own fears.

The lack of communication with others is the main cause of Dion’s alienation. Nobody understood him properly, not even his childhood friend, Billy, whose hostility has compelled him to use the mask for the first time to hide his real self. After his marriage and the death of his parents, he becomes more helpless and insecure. Gradually, he loses his interest in life and his family. In search of happiness, he becomes spend-thrift drunkard and visits low women. His relation with prostitute Cybel is the result of his longing for his mother’s love. For him, his mother is the symbol of all the warmth of life that he has lost for ever. Cybel says:

“And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity.”

[The Great God Brown, p. 333-334]
Margaret is a practical lady. She can compromise with life easily. In the beginning of the play, she admires the artistic quality of Dion, and accepts him as her husband. But when she faces the problem of bread and butter, she forces him to take the job of a designer. She does not care for reality. In the play, Cybel symbolizes the rootlessness of the modern world and its corrupt value-system. Choosing the life of a prostitute, she has separated herself from the society. She prefers to lead a solitary life.

_Dynamo_ was written in France in 1928 and it was produced by the Theatre Guild in February, 1929. In an article that appeared shortly before the opening Kenneth McGowan described its origin. One day O’Neill stood watching a dynamo at a plant near Ridgefield, Connecticut, where electricity is generated from the waters of New England Rivers. There was something in the machine that suggested a new god, just as the stone images of the past symbolized the old gods. The great hydro-electric generator in the play as Barrett H. Clark observes,

“is huge and black, with something of a great massive ebony idol about it, the ‘exciter’ set on the main structure like a round head with oblong eyes above the squat torso.”

[Barrett H., Clark, 1947, p. 120]

At the beginning of the play Reuben is caught in a feud between his father and an atheist, Ramsay Fife, whose daughter Reuben loves. Using this love as a weapon against the minister, Fife involves Reuben in a scheme which ultimately makes Reuben appear to
be a coward and his father a fool. Reuben confides in his mother who, jealous of his love for Ada Fife, betrays him to his father.

Tormented by his mother’s possessiveness and duplicity and by his father’s fury, Reuben leaves home renouncing his parents and the God in whose name they have justified their behavior. Ada, too, has been false to him by taking part in her father’s scheme. Reuben rejects her and romantic love, seeing her now as an object only of physical desire.

Thus Reuben’s new materialistic attitude along with the Puritan restrictions of his heritage has turned love to lust. This is in contrast to the simple, amoral sexuality represented by the Cybel figure of this play, May Fife, Ada’s mother. With her own unthinking faith in the cycle of love, marriage, and birth, she tries to reconcile the lovers, but Reuben, of course, is cut off by his own drives from this world of freedom which May represents.

He turns all the forces of his frustrated need of God and love into a worship of electricity. In his fascination with his new god, he loses his fear of lightning—of the old God. To Reuben the dynamo is God and Mother. In a much quoted and important letter to George Jean Nathan, O’Neill outlined his intention in writing *Dynamo*:

“[The play] is a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American (and not only American) soul right now. It is really the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel
it—the death of the old God and failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory 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 that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is scribing around the surface of things, and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer........”

[Doris V., Falk, 1967, p. 128]

O’Neill has obviously used the Oedipus pattern in order to give the symbolic conflict a basis in “factual biography.” Reuben prays to the dynamo as,

“O Dynamo, God of Electricity, which gives life to all things, hear my prayer! Receive me into the Great Current of Your Eternal Life. Bless me with your secret so that I can save men from sin and sorrow and death! Grant me the miracle of your love.”

[Barrett H., Clark, p. 121]

_Mourning Becomes Electra_ is no ordinary play. It is essentially different from the other late works of O’Neill, being neither a poem, nor a slice of life, nor a dramatized philosophy, nor the evocation of a mood: externally, it is a retelling of the tragic tale of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Orestes and Electra.

The title of the play means-‘it befits Electra to mourn.’ It is a realistic presentation of a Greek play _Oresteia_ by Aeschylus. O’Neill has adopted the old story but reproduced
it in modern context in which psychological complexes and obsessions decide the 
relations in a family. The play’s structure is trilogy on the Greek pattern. To its three plays 
titled as ‘The Homecoming,’ ‘The Hunted,’ and ‘The Haunted. O’Neill has divided them in 
scenes accordingly. The names of the characters have also a similarity with the names of 
the characters as in the Aeschylean play.

According to B. H. Clark O’Neill’s trilogy is a tearless tragedy, remote, detached, 
angst, artfully shaped, cunningly devised, skillfully related and magnificently conceived. 
O’Neill expresses his concern not only for the evils of Puritanism but also for the evils of 
war, man’s quest for beauty, and his wish to belong. It also shows how man fails to 
achieve these ends; he finds himself in a miserable condition to justify his existence, and 
is compelled to remain as an alienated person.

The action of the trilogy, with the exception of an act of the second play, takes 
place in or immediately outside the Mannon residence, on the outskirts of one of the 
small New England seaport towns. The three plays take place in either spring or summer 
of the years 1865-1866.

The past story of the Mannons is rather sordid. David Mannon and Abe Mannon, 
the two brothers loved a poor girl Marie Brantome. She becomes pregnant by David. Abe 
Mannon forced both David and Marie to marry and then drove them out of the house so 
as to save his family from scandal. He even demolished the house and built a new one. 
Abe grew rich and his son Ezra Mannon inherited the property. Poor Marie had to face 
starvation. Her son Adam Brant resolved to wreck vengeance upon Ezra who is a man of
puritanical ideals. Ezra’s wife Christine finds in Ezra a romantic lover before her marriage but her hopes are belied. Ezra has had a varied career. He joined army, gave it up, established a shipping firm, studied law, became judge, joined politics and was elected mayor. When the American Civil War broke out he again joined the army.

The play opens shortly after the end of the Civil War. Brigadier General Ezra Mannon returns home after a bitter experience of the war. He has seen the dance of death around him in the battle fields. He wants both the physical as well as emotional supports from Christine in whose eyes he feels some strangeness that is like a barrier between him and her. When Christine tells him about her love with Adam Brant, he has a heart attack and asks Christine to give his medicine. Christine gives him poison instead and he dies. Lavinia who has been tossing from one point of affection to another, develops hatred against her mother who has always been her rival in love. Lavinia also loves Adam Brant and has always regarded her father with all the feelings of proud and affection. She suspects her mother’s hand in the death of her father. After Orin, her brother, returns from the war, she accounts him about Christine’s love with Adam Brant. Both Lavinia and Orin, spy on the mother’s adultery. They follow her to Brant’s ship and when Orin finds it to be true, he shoots Adam dead and admits the murder before Christine. Being unable to bear the shock of Adam’s death, she commits suicide. After the mother’s death, a sense of guilt haunts Orin who holds himself and Lavinia liable for the murder of Christine. He locks himself up in the house to wait for a slow death in self-punishment. Lavinia, who is left alone, wants to forget what has happened. She believing the Mannon house ‘a temple of Hate and Death’ hopes to marry Peter Niles and thus keep herself away from the guilty conscience haunting in her. She bravely tries to
overcome the situation but the guilty conscience finally haunts in her. And she resolves “to have the shutters nailed closed so that no sunlight can ever get in.” She says, ‘I’ll live alone with the dead and keep their secrets, and let them hound me until the curse is paid and the last Mannon is let die.’

The characters and speeches of the members of the Mannon family reveal frustration and mental torments. And on the pattern of Greek and Elizabethan tragedies, O’Neill has also concentrated in the play on recognition as a part of tragedy. The play depicts the story of man’s unending suffering for the sake of search for identity. O’Neill has partially borrowed its plot from the famous Greek tragedy Oresteia. In a letter to Robert Sisk, O’Neill clarifies:

“It is founded—in the outline plot—on the old story of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Electra, and Orestes on which the Greek dramatist wrote trilogy. I modernize this story to a psychological drama of human interrelationships, using no Gods or heroes and interpret it with many variations and improvisations of my own.”

[Monika Gupta, 2001, p. 97]

All the major characters of this poignant tragedy suffer from the sense of insecurity, though they belong to a single family. It seems that all of them are living a life without any sense of relatedness with others. Ezra Mannon, the senior member of the family, is haunted by the same sense of isolation. He has a masklike look which symbolizes the split of his life. In the Act-II of Home Coming, O’Neill writes:
“He is a tall man in his early forties, with a spare, wiry frame, seated stiffly in an armchair, his hands on the arms, wearing his black judge’s robe. His face is handsome in a stern, aloof fashion. It is cold and emotionless and has the same strange semblance of a life-like mask.”

[Mourning Becomes Electra, p. 711]

In search of security, Christine Mannon marries Ezra. But instead of getting a loving husband, she finds a cold-hearted person in him. She is separated from her husband mentally. The character of Orin Mannon also suffers from isolation and loneliness in the play. Throughout his life, he remains a puppet in the hands of Christine and Lavinia. Actually, Orin’s mother-fixation is the root cause of his disillusionment. His strong attachment with his mother symbolizes his longing for peace and security. In Act-II of The Hunted, Orin says:

“I read it and reread it until finally those Islands came to mean everything that wasn’t war, everything that was peace and warmth and security. I used to dream I was there. And later on all the time I was out of my head I seemed really to be there. There was no one there but you and me. And yet I never saw you, that’s the funny part. I only felt you all around me. The breaking of the waves was your voice. The sky was the same color as your eyes. The warm sand was like your skin. The whole island was you. A strange notion, wasn’t it? But you needn’t be provoked at being and island because this was the most beautiful island in the world—as beautiful as you, Mother!”

[Mourning Becomes Electra, p. 776]
But Orin’s dream of peace, warmth and security is broken into pieces. Lavinia proves his mother’s adultery. The title, “Mourning Becomes Electra,” symbolizes alienation in a different way. The dramatist provides a double meaning to the title. O’Neill states: “It befits—it becomes Electra to mourn,” and the second meaning has its ironical significance: “Mourning (black) is becoming to her—it is the only colour that becomes her destiny.” It clearly suggests the suffering of human beings in a state of loneliness which is justified through the character of Lavinia, the modern Electra. Even the sub-titles of the trilogy are symbolic. “Home Coming” symbolizes Ezra Mannon’s search for belonging in his own home that has remained a strange place for him. Again, it symbolizes Christine’s search for security in the arms of Adam Brant. “The Hunted” symbolizes man’s relation with his past which compulsively makes him an alienated person. The setting of scenes in this play is well-planned, and explores and communicates the theme.
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