Chapter III

Lurking Identity

“Identity” is a highly complex issue. It is a state of mind in which all human beings experience a loss of identity at one point of their lifetime or the other. The theme of identity crisis is predominant in O’Neill’s plays. It shows that man is not able to identify himself with the society in which he lives. He is confronted with the harsh realities of life. Further, he is ostracized by the environment which results in geophysical alienation or separation. He is exorcised by the monstrous appearance of the land or the sea. However, a greater meaning is thrust upon the territory – be it a land or the sea. In O’Neill’s early plays, sea is identified with purity and essence of life. It is realistically portrayed with all the good virtues. It gives a sense of solace and comfort to those who identify themselves with it.

O’Neill sets out his dramatic quest for identity in his early sea plays. In these plays, the sea represents the cosmic dimension of reality, which forms a sort of counterpoint to the social dimension of human reality. Human reality, which aspires for the finer values of life, gets bogged down in the mire of the exploitation, injustice, slavery and oppression of a class society. O’Neill has also presented sea as a complex, archetypal symbol. On one hand, it is identified with man’s aspiration for a life of freedom and happiness. On the other hand, it is identified with treachery, fear and danger of the unknown. In his sea plays, O’Neill creates a myth of the sea. The sea is a denotation of nature. It is identified with the human values of purity, beauty and cleanliness. His portrayal of the sea is not idealistic but realistic, as the sea is both redemptive and punitive. In this way, the sea stands for the unknown and the uncertain. Consequently,
O’Neill projects the sea as a point from which he can castigate and pass judgment against the man-made evil forces of the land. The myth of sea lodges a protest against the corrupt ways of society, where the deprived and the enslaved are denied of human dignity and are subject to crucifixion. In some of O’Neill’s sea plays, the values identified with the sea stand in contrast to the values represented by the land. The land is identified with the decadent forces such as exploitation, corruption, cruelty and dehumanization of man which are the direct outcome of an economic system based on the exploitation of man by man.

In the sea plays, O’Neill’s greatness as a humanitarian attributes significance to the petty lives of sailors. The neglected, ignored and disinherited people who belong to the lowest strata of society have been made heroes in his sea plays. In O’Neill’s sea plays, the sailors are trapped almost hopelessly in a treacherous and unknown sea and on the corrupt and exploitative land. They complain against their inhuman conditions and at the same time, they are unaware of their exploitation.

In O’Neill’s early full-length sea plays, Christie and Horizon, sea is identified as a projection of cosmic reality in contradistinction to social reality symbolized by the land. When Chris Christopherson in Christie denounces ‘dat ole davil sea’, his indictment is directed against an unjust and oppressive social system which compels people like him to go to the sea for their very survival. Chris says:

All men in our village on coast, Sveden, go to sea. Ain’t nutting else for dem to do. My fa’der die on board ship in Indian Ocean. He’s buried at sea. Ay don’t never know him only little bit. Den my tree bro’der, older’n me, dey go on ships. Den Ay go, too. Den my mo’der she’s left all ’lone.
She die pooty quick after dat—all 'lone. Ve vas all avay on voyage when she die. [He pauses sadly.] Two my bro’derdey gat lost on fishing boat same like your bro’ders vas drowned. (PEO III : 27)

Sea is identified as a symbol of liberation. This becomes more obvious when Mat Burke in Christie says

The sea’s the only life for a man with guts in him isn’t afraid of his own shadow! ’Tis only on the sea he’s free, and him roving the face of the world, seeing all things, and not giving a damn for saving up money, or stealing from his friends, or any of the black tricks that a land lubber’d waste his life on. (PEO III : 48)

Mat indicates that man is really free on the sea. However, Chris identifies his own limitations. He identifies himself as a typical sailor. His words describe the lives of the sailors. He tries to justify himself to Anna.

CHRIS... Ay vant come home end of every voyage. Ay vant see your mo’der, your two bro’der before dey vas drowned, you ven you vas born—but—Ay—don’t go. Ay sign on oder ships—go South America, go Australia, go China, go every port all over world many times—but Ay never go aboard ship sail for Sveden. Ven Ay gat money for pay passage home as passenger den—[He bows his head guiltily.] Ay forgat and Ay spend all money. Ven Ay tank again, it’s too late. [He sighs.] Ay don’t know vhy but dat’s vay with most sailor fallar, Anna. Dat ole davil sea make dem crazy fools with her dirty tricks. It’s so.” (PEO III : 21)
Chris’s justification that “that’s vay with most sailor fallar” reveals a typical aspect of the sailors’ lives. Yank in *Cardiff* also says: “The sailor life ain’t much to cry about leavin’” (*PEO* I: 486) and Olson’s speech in *Home*: “I mean all time to go back home at an end of voyage” (*PEO* I: 506) testify their predicament and identify them as sailors.

In *Christie*, Mat Burke is identified as an exponent of individual adventurism. He is in the image of Yank in *Ape*. Both are Irish and are boastful of their physical strength. Both suffer from Megalomania. However, Mat is not a fully developed character as Yank or Chris or Anna. After the discovery of Anna’s past life, he is tormented but very soon he gets away from it. He is not frustrated as he has not developed a sense of alienation. He is a romantic hero, who falls in love with Anna. Burke knows the hardship of the sea life. He knows of the exploitation and sexual life in the ports. He admits:

...It’s a hard and lonesome life, the sea is. The only women you’d meet in the ports of the world who’d be willing to speak you a kind word isn’t woman at all. You know the kind I mean, and they’re a poor, wicked lot, God forgive them. They’re looking to steal the money from you only. (*PEO* II: 37)

As an individual, he believes in his own individual adventurism. It is evident, when he says:

For I’ve a power of strength in me to lead men the way I want, and women, too, maybe, and I’m thinking I’d change you to a new woman entirely, so I’d never know, or you either, what kind of woman you’d been in the past at all. (*PEO* III: 74)
Prostitution is identified as a socially man-made institution in Christie. In the play, Anna holds men responsible for turning women into prostitution. In the play, Anna tells her father that she is sexually molested and exploited by one of her own cousins. She also blames her father for not fulfilling his parental obligations to protect her. Prostitution is the result of physical desire. It is considered a sin by the society. However, the tradition carries it. John Patrik Diggins in Eugene O’Neill’s America : Desire Under Democracy says that “O’Neill was carrying on the classical tradition in seeing desire as a form of blindness and carrying on in the Christian tradition in finding in desire what the mind is helpless to command”. (4)

O’Neill’s Caribees one of the earliest short plays, realistically casts a panoramic view of the state of affairs in a society based upon exploitation. The realistic picture emerges from a dream-like world in an atmosphere of romance. The setting—the main dock of the British tramp steamer ‘Glencairn’ in the calm waters of the West Indies under a full moon – makes a contrasting picture of reality in uncanny surroundings. A melancholy Negro chant coming from the distance adds eeriness to the atmosphere.

In Caribees, the sailors are identified with poverty. “The majority are dressed in patched suits of dungaree. Quite a few are in their bare feet and some of them, especially the firemen, have nothing on but a pair of pants and an undershirt” (PEO I : 455-56). As the play opens, the atmosphere is identified with gloom and sullenness. The cause of their sullenness is boredom. It is caused by alienation. The sailors aboard Glencairn suffer from alienation because they are denied of their creative fulfilment in their work. They are mere wage slaves who try to relieve their boredom with liquor, sex, or violence. The news of the arrival of a Negresses with wine is enough to give their bored lives the
appearance of meaningfulness. The sailors identify sex with exploitation – exploitation of labour. In the play, the donkey man identifies the universal brutal treatment of sex when he says: “They’re all the same-white, brown, yeller’ n black. A whack on the ear’s the only thing’ll learn ‘em’ (PEO I : 470). O’Neill identifies the melee in which a sailor is killed as a means to give vent to their pent-up emotions. This fight indicates that the owners of the ship have made no proper arrangement for the healthy expression and channelization of the surplus energy of the sailors. Failing to identify their responsibilities, the male blames the Negresses for the fight and threatens to confiscate their money. The men identify rum as the cause for the entire melee. O’Neill writes: “Rum, my God! So, that’s the trouble!... (To the women, harshly) you won’t get any ... That’ll teach you to smuggle rum on a ship and start a riot” (PEO I : 473).

The play opens with Driscoll’s speech condemning the Negro chant as “Keemin” or crying. This shows how the sailors are so alienated. They cannot identify their fate with the fate of the other exploited sections of the society. It is a matter of cultural differences. It denotes their lack of sympathy and appreciation for a symbolic expression of their own fate. It is suggested by O’Neill at the end of the play where he writes: “There’s silence for a second or so, broken by the haunted, saddened voice of that brooding music, faint and far off, like the mood of the moonlight made audible” (PEO I : 474). It provides a link between the Negro chant and the mood it creates. Tejpal Singh in *Eugene O’Neill: Quest for Reality in His Plays* says:

At this level, human reality with all its accumulated agony of frustration, generated by exploitation, becomes a part of the cosmic reality which, in its own way, reinforces the nature of the human predicament by becoming
a pretext for the expression of an eternal, unchanging human condition.

(21)

The theme of man’s exploitation by his fellow beings and the endeavours of the exploiter and his agents to seek confirmation for their inhuman practices in the working of the cosmos can be seen in Cardiff. In this play, the disinherited and exploited sailors identify their terrible living conditions on the ship. It is given in the following dialogue by O’Neill:

SCOTTY : (Indignantly) It’s a starvation ship.

DAVIS : Plenty o’ work and no food—and the owners ridin’ around in carriages!

OLSON : Hash, hash! Stew, stew! Marmalade, py damn! (He spits disgustedly.)

COCKY : Bloody swill! Fit only for swine is wot I say.

DRISCOLL: And the dish wather they disguise wid the name av tea!
And the putty they call bread! My belly feels loike I’d swallowed a dozen rivets at the thought avut! And seabiscuit that’d break the teeth av a lion if he had the misfortune to take a bite at one!...

PAUL : And rot-ten po-tay-toes!” (PEO I: 480-81)

One of the sailors, Yank, is seriously injured while working on the ship. He has been given poor medical care and attention. The apathy of the owners treats them as
commodities. It is evident in the following conversation:

DRISCOLL : ‘Twas enough to make a saint shwear to see him wid his gold watch in his hand, tryin’ to look as wise as an owl on a tree, and all the toime he not knowin’ whether ‘twas cholery or the barber’s itch was the matther wid Yank.

SCOTTY : (Sardonically) He give him a dose of salts, nadoot?

DRISCOLL : Divil a thing he gave him at all, but looked in the book he had wid him, and shook his head, and walked out widout sayin’ a word, the second mate afther him no wiser than himself, God’s curse on the two avt him! (PEO I : 479-80)

The chorus of protest against this most dehumanizing conditions gets fuller expression in Yank’s speech:

YANK: This sailor life ain’t much to cry about leavin’—just one ship after another, had work, small pay, and bum grub; and when we git into port, just a drunk endin’ up in a fight, and all your money gone, and then ship away again. Never meetin’ no nice people; never gittin’ outa sailor town, hardly, in any port; travelin’ all over the world and never seein’ none of it; without no one to care whether you’re alive or dead. (with a bitter smile) There ain’t much in all that that’d make yuh sorry to lose it, Drisc. (PEO I : 486)

Yank does not mince words. He epitomizes the essence of a life deprived of its legitimate
requirements of material and spiritual sustenance and enrichment. Existentialists claim to provide a philosophical justification for an agonizing and meaningless human condition. Tejpal Singh in *Eugene O’Neill: Quest for Reality in His Plays* admits: “O’Neill’s success lies in projecting the truth of the human condition in almost existential terminology while providing an incisive analysis, from a critical point of view, that takes due note of the social disparities causing a sense of futility in life among the illiterate and exploited” (23). Yank’s realization of the harsh face of social reality makes him dream of those simple joys and comforts of life which would give him a sense of well-being and fulfilment. He lives a life of loneliness and deprivation. Yank’s material deprivations cause his spiritual despair. In the later play, *Ape*, Yank rejects these comforts and pleasures for not providing a solution to the problem of his spiritual and cosmic alienation. Yank of *Cardiff* says musingly:

> It must be great to stay on dry land all your life and have a farm with a house of your own with cows and pigs and chickens, ‘way in the middle of the land where yuh’d never smell the sea or see a ship. It must be great to have a wife, and kids to play with at night after supper when your work was done. It must be great to have a home of your own. (*PEO* I : 486)

Yank’s protest against a dehumanized and dehumanizing social order is repeated in the *Home* in the speech of Olson. Olson says: “No, I don’t never ship on sea no more. I got all sea I want for my life – too much hard work for little money. Yust work, work, work on the ship. I don’t want more” (*PEO* I : 502). It is identified that the speech makes a powerful denunciation of the American Dream of success, equality, and happiness for all. O’Neill himself admits in *O’Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism*:
The big business leaders in this country! Why do we produce such stupendous, colossal egomaniacs? They go on doing the most monstrous things, always using the excuse that if we don’t the other person will. It’s impossible to satirize them, if you wanted to. (84)

Captain Keneey in Ile is one of a stupendous, colossal maniac. He is doing monstrous things. He is an egomaniac. He is a product of the philistine culture where the extent of a success of a person is measured by his amassing of wealth and other material things. Obsessed by the myth of success, Keeney says:

It ain’t the damned money what’s keepin’ me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can’t go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barel of ile. I’d die fust. I ain’t never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain’t that truth? (PEO I : 542)

He is hypnotized by the myth of success. He has committed gross violations of human rights and the law of the land. When his employees protest against his breaking the terms and conditions of the agreement, he says: “To hell with your law courts! We’re at sea now and I’m the law on this ship” (PEO I : 544). He brutally tortures the rebels and suppresses the mutiny on his ship. He plays havoc with his wife and has reduced her to insanity. All her illusions of his being a hero have been shattered. His wife has understood the brute in him. She says “I wanted to see you the hero they make you not to be in Homeport. And instead – (Her voice goes tremulous) All I find is ice and cold – and brutality: (Her voice breaks)” (PEO I : 545). In the play, Captain Keeney is identified as the product of the bourgeois society.
Captain Isaiah’s identity in *Where the Cross is Made* is like that of Captain Keeney in *Ile*. Both men are the products of a money-obsessed world. The crux of the problem in Isaiah’s case is that he has created illusions to support illusions. The construction of a Captain cabin on the roof of his house is a projection of his dream-world in which he awaits his sunken ship, Mary Allen loaded with gold. The most tragic aspect is that he has totally brain-washed his crippled son, Nat, and has imprinted the same illusions in him. It is an irony of fate that in order to cure his father Nat sends him to an asylum, but he himself becomes a victim of hallucination. Nat’s sister, Sue, identifies the reality. She has imbibed in herself the good qualities of the sea, purity and cleanliness. She is sad at her father’s death. She is far more miserable when she finds her brother, Nat, has inherited the legacy of illusions from his father and like him has become a victim of hallucinations and insanity. It is identified that the tragic tension of the play, between illusion and reality, is represented by Isaiah and Nat on the one hand and Sue on the other. Sue is too weak to continue the conflict. She watches the consequences of their illusions. Isaiah and Nat have to pay a heavy prize for their illusions and for living in an illusory world. The former dies insane and the latter lives to suffer indefinitely, holding on to his illusions on the verge of insanity.

In this play, O’Neill has identified the conflict between human relations and private property. He has presented the social reality. Mr. Smith, the mortgagee, is worried over the price of the property mortgaged with him being devalued by the presence of an insane person on it. Nat tries to send his father to an asylum in pursuance of his own selfish-ends. It is revealed in the following dialogue:
NAT: Old Smith told me I could live here indefinitely without paying—
as caretaker—if—

SUE: (Fearfully—like a whispered echo) If?

NAT: If I have him sent—where he'll no longer harm himself—nor
others.

NAT: Smith said he would give two thousand cash if I would sell the
place to him—and he would let me stay, rent free, as caretaker.”

(PEO I : 565)

In this play, women are identified as more humane than men. When Nat tries to win
Sue’s support by bribing her, she flatly turns down his offer and condemns him for his
inhumanity. She says: “Ah, how vile men are!” and “Blood-money! Do you think I
would touch it?” (PEO I : 565-566).

All the characters in The Rope become maniacs in their desire to acquire a
treasure-trove. They become prey of their own illusions. Abraham Bentley, a victim of
penury, suffers illusions of suspicion and revenge. He quotes the scriptures to justify his
devilish actions. Annie and Pat Sweeney have the illusion of becoming wealthy while
Luke Bentley enjoys the illusion of being prodigal. Mary has the illusion of
frolicsomeness. They are identified as men and women who are blind and deaf towards
reality. The word ‘Rope’ in the title of the play is identified as a symbol. It symbolizes
wealth. It has caught all the characters in its coil. Abraham Bentley is identified as a man
who has lost all sense of family ties and warmth and has become a perverted man under
the influence of his desire for wealth. Suspicion and revenge have driven him to insanity.
Parsimoniousness has alienated him from his family and society. He has become a ruined
and a disintegrated personality. Sweeney, having an expression of mean, cunning and cupidity and Luke with a certain devil-may-care recklessness and irresponsible youth in voice and gesture have entered into an unholy alliance to find a treasure-trove. They are identified as devil incarnates. Motivated by the evil of avarice, they have forgotten human values. In order to extort money from Abraham no diabolic action is found inappropriate by them. Luke admits:

... I know a trick or two about makin’ people tell what they don’t wanter...
We’ll git even on him, you ‘n me –and he’ll tell where it’s hid. We’ll just shove this into the stove till it’s red-hot and take off his shoes and socks and warm the bottoms of his feet for him. (Savagely) He’ll tell then—anything we wants him to tell.” (PEO I: 600)

The transitional period is identified with the production of O’Neill’s Horizon. The play portrays the collapse of a small nineteenth-century farm. James Mayo, the competent farmer of the old order, dies within one year of Andrew’s departure. Symbolically, his death is identified as the end of the old order, i.e. employment of manual order on the farm. Ben, a farm hand, leaves Robert’s farm because he has been ridiculed for working on a mismanaged farm. Andrew engages an experienced farm hand to assist Robert before his second departure. Later, the experienced hand also cheats Robert due to mismanagement of the farm. Andrew, once a competent farmer of the nineteenth century, does not settle on the farm even after his failure in the corn market and after Robert’s death. The ruin of the farm is the result of mismanagement and inability to employ the latest means of production. The predicament of the sensitive and sickly Robert is that he is a victim of his circumstances. Since his childhood, Robert Mayo has been dreaming of
breaking his shackles.

ROBERT... [Pointing to the horizon—dreamily.]“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?” (PEO III : 85)

He wants to be free but his efforts are too weak to break the chains. In his marriage with Ruth, Robert has lost another chance of freeing himself. Following his marriage, he is more imprisoned than before. He is not made for the farm. He is a failure on the farm. His love and absorption in his daughter, Mary, is an attempt to escape from drudgery at the farm. In Mary’s death, his only source of solace is lost. He is a typical speculator. He fails miserably at the corn market. He fails to understand comprehensively the laws of demand and supply operating at the corn market.

In Jones, Jones’s journey in the dark forest is a gradual progress of casting away one illusion after another leading to reality. The first three episodes relate to his personal unconscious that is inner-reality, whereas the next three episodes deal with racial reality. The darkness can be identified as a point where illusion and reality meet and confront each other. Tejpal Singh in Eugene O’Neill : Quest for Reality in His Plays relates that “The thumping of a tom-tom synchronizing with the increasing heart-beat of Jones is the chorus of the play which tells of foreboding consequences”. (44)

The duplicity and hypocrisy of the rulers in an unjust class society are thoroughly
exposed in *Jones*. Brutus Jones is an ex-convict, obsessed by the lust of power and greed, which he has learnt from the civilized white world, while working as a Pullman Porter. He becomes a self-styled emperor of an island in the West Indies. He has to identify and expose the value system of the exploitative society. He tells Henry Smithers, a cockney trader, that he has been colluding with the system, where corruption is the ruling norm. He says “Ain’t I perfected you and winked in de broad day? Sho “I has – an me makin’ laws to stop it at de same time!” (PEO III : 177). In the play, he ironically says that the biggest thief becomes the emperor and the smallest one goes to jail. He admits:

Deve’s little stealin’ like you does, and all deve’s big stealin ‘like I does. For de little stealin’ dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin’ dey mokes you Emperor and puts you in de Hallo’. Fame when you croaks (Reminiscently) if dey’s one thing I learn in ten years on de Pullman ca’s listenin’ to de white quality tak, it’s dat same fact. And who I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years. (PEO III : 198)

In fact, Jones is identified with Yankee bluff”, which is nothing but the capacity to talk big and fool others. It is usually the big play of politicians and Jones follows the same. Jones admits:

“Ain’t a man’s talk in ‘big what makes him big-long as he makes folks believe it? She; I talks large when I ain’t go nothin’ to back it up, but I ain’t talkin’ wild just de same. I know I kin fool ‘em-I know it – and dat’s backin’ enough to ‘my game” (PEO III : 179)
Jones is able to practice “Yankee Bluff” with considerable ease because as an exploiter and a ruler, in his previous identity, he has failed to identify himself with his own people whom he contemptuously identify as “de low-flung, bush niggers”. Instead of identifying himself with the racial and cultural struggle of his people, he isolates and alienates himself from them and becomes a black-white man, a new identity, a mulatto identity, who is destined to break apart under the weight of his own compulsive contradictions. Jones thinks that he can break all his ties with the past without affecting the present in any way. Singh in **Eugene O’Neill : Quest for Reality in His Plays** points out that,

> This is his big illusion which is shattered when he is haunted in the dark forest by the reality of his past and is unable to recover his mental balance. The ghosts from his past are meant to serve as living reminders that no man can survive the snapping of his roots. Again and Again, we become aware that Jones’s acceptance of the ‘Yankee bluff’ as a sure road to success will prove to be his undoing. No amount of power can turn a bluff into a permanent truth. Perhaps Jones was blinded by the glitter of white civilization without realizing that even the most glorious civilizations came to an ignominious end when they were based on tyranny, injustice, and exploitation. Jones actually represents a caricatured version of the stark realities of American capitalism. (44)

Jones is shrewd enough to realize that the insurgency of the people, whom he has been calling ‘bush niggers’, is some kind of revolution. Like all politicians of his time, he identifies his own failure. After quitting as emperor, he has lots of money in a foreign bank. He knows that the machinery of exploitation that he has set into motion cannot last
long and that he may have to leave his empire. Jones fails to understand that the collective strength of the people will not let him escape from the island. He strongly believes in the myth he himself has created to threaten the native people that he can be killed only by a silver bullet. Even though he successfully reaps some momentary benefits from creating this myth ultimately he is trapped in his own myth, when he is killed by real silver bullets. “The silver bullet, symbolic both of the values of white civilization as well as of money-worship in a bourgeois society, becomes the cause of Jones’ final destruction. It speaks volumes for O’Neill’s artistic maturity that he is able to coalesce myth with reality, past with present, and symbol with substance into a unified whole” (Singh, Tejpal : 44).

Jones is portrayed as a man who is capable of cheating others. He is moved by greed and not by ambition. His portrayal is to satirize the politicians, who play tricks on people. Jones is contemptuous of glory. He is moved more by greed than greatness. Jones, with his fixation on "de long green", also knows something that political philosophers could well ponder: that all power, however absolute, is impermanent. Thus, when Smithers tells Jones that a rebellion against his regime is underway, Jones is fully prepared to escape into the jungle. He has stashed his treasure as well as supplies of food, and heads to the coast where a French gunboat is anchored. The swaggering emperor can run away from everything but himself. The successive scenes of Jones in the jungle confront him with his previously suppressed fears. Jones conjures up memories of his people confined to the hold of a slave ship crossing the Atlantic. He imagines himself on the auction block being sold in a slave market. He relives his murder of the prison guard and the dice-shooting Pullman porter he knifed to death. He encounters a Congo Witch-
doctor who tries to lure him to death in a river where a crocodile god awaits. As he crawls toward the open jaws in a penitential panic, Jones uses his last silver bullet firing at the phantoms of his imagination. In each scene, he discards pieces of his clothes and all the trappings of the white society. In his twisted mind, Jones ends up in Africa. He has to face the black identity and heritage he has once scorned, with nothing left but his fears and superstitions. He is killed by the rebel soldiers with their own silver bullets.

O’Neill, in *Jones* and in *Ape*, explores the psychic dimensions of human reality to find its deep inter-relationship with the economic, political, and other aspects of social reality. In *Jones*, the cause of the tragedy of the Negro protagonist is that instead of overcoming the memories of his tyrannical, oppressive, and slavish past by fighting for the liberation of his people from man-made bondage, he establishes his own tyrannical rule over them in the manner of the white imperialists. Jones is identified as a victim of his racial past. Though his skin is black, he tries to imbibe the inhuman values of the white imperialists and colonialists. In this way, he doubly alienates himself – from the nourishing vitality of his own culture and from the demand of a just social order based on equality, freedom and justice. The psychic terror of his own past haunts him only because the victim and the victimizer become one in him. He cannot free himself from his past.

In *Ape*, when Yank faces insult in the ship, he tries to attract the people’s attention physically by his outbursts and tries to assert himself. Ultimately he is sent to jail by the police. The cell is described as, “A row of cells in the prison on Black-wells Island. The cells extend back diagonally from right front to left rear. They do not stop, but disappear in the dark, background as if they ran on, numberless, into infinity”.
The following voices tell of the inhuman living conditions in jails where human beings are treated as animals.

**VOICES**: (With mocking laughter) You’re in a cage are right

A Coop!

A Pen!

A Sty!

A Kennel! *(PEO III : 260)*

Yank has been tortured so much by the police that he is confused and confounded. His head is wrapped with blood-stained bandage. The voice says: “Aw, don’t pay no attention to him. He’s off his nuts from the beatin-up he got” *(PEO III : 241)*. In scene VII, Yank goes to the office of I.W.W. but is rebuffed there. The treatment he gets at the hands of the trade-union bosses is no better than what he has already got from the police. In the same way, he is humiliated, manhandled and thrown out. The Secretary says: “He’s too stupid... well, you dirty spy, you ratten agent provocator... You’re a brainless ape” *(PEO III : 249-250)*. Yank becomes a victim of the bourgeois value system. He becomes a victim along with his companions like Paddy and Long. Singh in his *Eugene O’Neill: Quest for Reality in His Plays* observes:

Yank, as his name suggests, is a typical representative of an ethical substance of the American Dream which derives its sustenance from aggressive individualism and romantic adventurism. Yank is not only an embodiment of the spirit of the American working class, which because of its illiteracy and subservience to the capitalistic class structure is not at all or at best insufficiently imbued with radical consciousness, but also of
man’s constant search for identity, which in the play assumes both sociological and psycho-spiritual solution for a problem which is basically sociological. In the process, he undergoes a wide gamut of experimental agonies in order to reach the embrace of death finally. (45)

Yank’s own experience of home is bitter. He denounces it. He seeks another home in the ship. He thinks that he can belong to the ship. But he cannot belong to the ship as he happens to be a wage-earner or a slave in it. Yet, he is rightly proud of his labour as he identifies himself as a creative contributor to the ship’s movements. Yet, he fails to identify the truth that his belongingness to the ship is contingent on the over-all pattern of social relationships which he obtains in the society in which he lives.

Similarly, in Ape, Mildred is identified as an embodiment of artificial values and a morality of double-standards. Mildred has all the illusions typical of her class. When she tells her aunt “I would like to help them. I would like to be some use in the world”, her aunt’s reply “Be artificial as you are, I advise” (PEO III : 219) exposes her nature of being artificial in a pseudo-sophisticated society. Further, it is revealed in a scene in which the second engineer asks her not to visit the stoke-hole as her white dress will get spoiled. But she says to him “I have fifty dresses like this. I will throw this one into the sea when I come back” (PEO III : 221). All her illusions of social service have been shattered when she comes face to face with the harsh reality of the stoke-hole. Meeting Yank in the stoke-hole and finding the environment suffocating, she cries out: “Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!” (PEO III : 226) and faints. Yank feels greatly insulted, at the height of his pride, when Mildred passes remarks of him. He is compared to a baboon. “PADDY... In this cage, is a queer kind of baboon than ever you’d find in darkest
Afrizy...Sure, it was as if she’d seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo!” (PEO III: 229-230). It makes Yank lose his identity. He is not identified as a stoker but as an ape - a hairy ape. It brings humiliation and insult to him. Commenting on the character of Yank in *Ape*, John Patrick Higgins in *Eugene O’Neill’s America: Desire Under Democracy* avers:

Significantly, as the play progresses, Yank regresses, losing all confidence and sense of identity, and the other workers, stoking the engines that power the cruise ships of affluent society, know only the meaning of their own powerlessness. The notion of "false consciousness," which the Left sees as the sickness of the bourgeoisie alone, O’Neill recognizes as the plague of the proletariat as well. Yank assumes that he is society's life force, the co-agency of steel, coal, and turbines that drive the industrial world. O'Neill's play questions not just Marx's faith in the proletariat rising to consciousness but Hegel's faith in power relations that somehow dialectically reverse themselves so that in the course of history the slaves take over from the masters. Lucas' book had been influenced by that Hegelian black magic. In Hegel's scheme of history, the master class can only consume and waste while the working classes produce and create; in the end, it is the slaves, bondsmen, and laborers who win the struggle for recognition. It is such a struggle that compels Yank to leave the ship and to try to seek revenge on a society that dubs him a "hairy" Neanderthal. But the wealthy leisure class promenades down Fifth Avenue serenely oblivious of Yank's pathetic presence. Hegel's promise was that we can
become aware of ourselves only when others are conscious of us. Nietzsche, in reaction to Hegel, taught us why we should forget about others. O'Neill shows why Yank cannot forget when the wounds of insult bore so deeply into the psyche. (75)

Yank is a rare character for O'Neill. Until Yank is inflicted with an insult that goes to the core of his being, he is at one with himself and his occupation. But once he is thrown into utter disorientation, the object of his desire is to wreak revenge on the society he hates. He is a strange proletarian figure, one who can cope with a life of exploitation but collapses into a question mark at the first touch of humiliation. In the final scene of *Ape*, Scene VIII, Yank lands in the zoo. He finds that man is born free, yet he is in chains everywhere. His condition is even worse than an animal in a cage. Yank comes to this awareness gradually. He broods: “She wasn’t wise dat I was in a cage, too-worser ‘n yours – sure a damn sight – ‘cause you got some chance to bust loose-but me-” (*PEO III*: 252). He does not belong to the world. He miserably fails to identify himself with the things around him. He admits, “... I was lookin’ at de skyscrapers—steel—and all de ships comin’ in, sailin’ out, all over de oith—and dey was steel, too. Sure, it was great stuff... I couldn’t belong in dat. It was over my head...” (*PEO III*: 252)

Yank has understood the human predicament. He admits that thinking is hard. The miserable condition of man is revealed by Yank in his posture of Rodin’s “Thinker” as he says, “... I ain’t got no past to tink in, nor nothin’ dat’s comin’, on’y what’s now—and dat don’t belong... I ain’ to noith and I ain’t in heaven, get me? I’m in de middle tryin’ to separate ‘em, takin’ all de woist punches from bot’ of ‘em...” (*PEO III*: 253)

The very existence of man is in danger. Man has been degraded from his status of
manhood and has been reduced to the level of animal by the human conditions of the society. In the end of the play, before his death, he tells a gorilla in a cage: “Me ‘n’ you, huh? – bot’ members of dis club!” (PEO III: 253). As the time of his death approaches, Yank awakens to a sense of loss, despair and alienation. He says “(... with sudden passionate despair) Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?” (PEO III: 254). Dehumanization and depersonalization of man result in the case of Yank. Yank is reduced to mere non-entity. Yank laments:

... (In the strident tones of a circus barker.) Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only—(His voice weakening)—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). (PEO III: 254)

Yank explicitly explains how his society has reduced the creative potentialities of a human being to insanity, to the sub-human level of the ape in a circus. It is because Yank cannot go forward. He goes backward. This is what his shaking hands with gorilla meant. He cannot go back to belonging either. The gorilla kills him. He has lost his dignity and identity. Yank has lost his belonging. He is reduced to a level of an animal and is killed. Dehumanization has reduced him to insignificance. In it, O’Neill has attempted the depiction of the psychic dimension of the reality of a debased, degraded, dehumanized, and alienated man in a society – a hostile society which recognizes no one.

In Ape, Paddy is nostalgic about the feudal system. But Yank knows that the feudal system with all its value is no more and has been supplanted by the more powerful capitalist system thereby negating all the humanistic relations. Yank says: “Aw, Yah
Crazy Mick!...Aw dat’s all right. On’ yit’s dead, get me? Yah don’t belong no more, see... I belong and he don’t. He’s dead but I’m livin’; listen to me! Sure I’m part of do engines” (PEO III : 215). Yank identifies himself with the new order which has superseded the old. He identifies the typical characteristics of the American working class. He admits:

... It’s me makes it hot! It’s me makes it roar! It’s me makes it move! Sure, on’y for me everything stops.... I’m de end! I’m de start! I start some p’n and de woild moves! It—dat’s me!—de new dat’s moiderin’ de old! I’m deting in coal dat makes it boin; I’m steam and oil for de engines; ... I’m smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; 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 punch behind it!” (PEO III : 215-216)

In Wings, the problem of identity is the result of the racial conflict. It is about the racial problem of Negro and White. O’Neill has gone to the core of racial prejudice, tackling the sexual relations and miscegenation between the two races by presenting a black-white marriage. John Henry Raleigh in The Plays of Eugene O’Neill suggests that “The classical O’Neill play about the American Negro, and one of the best on the subject, is All God’s Chillun Got Wings, and since it is one of the most serious, compassionate and profound artistic treatments of the racial problem in America ever written comparable to Huckleberry Finn or Pudd’n Head Wilson or The Sound and the Fury, it has caused the most furor” (110). O’Neill has clearly presented the diametrical opposites in the way of living, cultural background and manners of the two races. Even
in the stage direction of Act I, Scene I, it is articulated as follows:

A corner in lower New-York, at the edge of a colored district... In the street leading left, the faces are all white: in the street leading right, all black... One hears only their laughter. It expresses the difference in race...

From the street of the whites a high-pitched, nasal tenor sings the chorus of 'Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage.' On the street of the blacks a Negro strikes up the chorus of: 'I guess I'll rave to telegraph my baby. (PEO II: 301)

It is explicit from the stage direction that the distinction as well as the discrimination between the blacks and the whites are artificially created and imposed on those who are the victims of inhuman and unjust social system. Jim Harris has an ambition of becoming 'white' which stems from his obsession of self-abnegation and hatred of his own race. This obsession is the product of an inferiority complex developed in him by the colour of his skin. This self-destroying illusion ultimately brings about catastrophe. The obsession of turning white develops in Jim Haris right from his childhood. In the first scene of the first Act, Jim tells Ella, his white girlfriend, about his vain efforts of becoming white by taking chalk as prescribed by Tom, the barber. He says: “I been drinkin’ lots o’chalk ‘n’ water tree times a day. Dat Tom, de barber, he tole me dat make me white, if I drink enough” (PEO II: 304). The obsession of becoming white becomes stronger in the second scene of the first act after nine years. It has also earned for Jim a double hatred— from the whites as well as from the coloured people. It results in the total alienation from his vital culture. Mickey remarks sarcastically about Jim being white: “Stay where yeh belong, see! Yer old man made coin at de truckin’ game and yu’re tryin’ to buy yerself
white” (PEO II : 309). The same allegation of buying white is also made by Joe, a Negro, who angrily shouts at Jim: “What’s all dis denyin’ you’s a nigger... Is you aimin’ to buy white wid yo’ o ‘man’s dough...” (PEO II : 311). Jim feels inferior with Ella. Jim takes white for good things and black for all bad things. Jim has a mania for whiteness. It becomes a psychological problem that has originated from racial prejudice. He used to tell Ella that he loves white and so he loves Ella but internally he suffers from racial prejudice which makes him feel inferior. He feels it to the extent that he fails to pass his law examination. It is evident from the following dialogue:

JIM : I work like the devil. It's all in my head—all fine and correct. Then when I'm called on—I stand up—all the white faces looking at me - and I can feel their eyes. - I hear my own voice sounding funny, trembling - and - all of a sudden it's all gone in my head - there's nothing remembered - and I hear myself stuttering—and give up - sit down - They don't laugh, hardly ever. They're kind. They're good people ...

ELLA: Poor Jim.

JIM : For weeks before I study all night. I can't sleep anyway. I learn it all, I see it I understand it ..., On all sides are white men starting to write. They're so sure - ... but I can't remember any more-it fades - its goes - its gone... (PEO II : 316)

He fails in his law-examination and remains a victim of Jim-Crowism. Psychologically, he is not able to overcome the feelings of racial inferiority. Yet, he is a megalomaniac in his desire for success. His entering a bar is to him, admission into the white race. His
psychological problem is based on social and cultural prejudices which are deeply interwoven and remain inseparable. His racial inferiority drives him to masochism in his relations with Ella. His racial consciousness destroys him completely and reduced him to the level of a slave. It deprives him of the dignity of a freeman. He says to Ella:

... I don’t ask you to love me – I don’t dare to hope nothing like that!... – to lie at your feet like a dog that loves you - ... to become your slave! ... – your black slave that adores you as sacred! (... In a frenzy of self-abnegation, as he says the last words he beats his head on the flagstones).” (PEO II : 318)

Even when Ella and Jim come out of the church after their marriage, they face racial prejudice. O’Neill directs the stage as follows:

... people – men, women, children – pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenements to the left, blacks from the one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes. (PEO II : 319)

And as a result, Jim and Ella, being too weak to face the racial prejudice, flee to France. In the first year of their married life, they live like brother and sister. The consummation of their marriage is postponed. As Ella’s sense of shame increases, she withdraws herself into her own world. She alienates herself by totally isolating herself from the world of reality into a world of make-believe in the second year of their married life. Jim complains to Hattie:

... But she never did get to wanting to go out any place again. She got to
saying she felt she'd be sure to run into someone she knew— from over here. So I moved us out to the country where no tourist ever comes—but it didn't make any difference to her. She got to avoiding the French folks the same as if they were Americans and I couldn’t get it out of her mind. (PEO II : 325-326)

Ella’s alienation is complete and total. Jim’s colour drives Ella to insanity. She fails to have sexual relations with her husband, Jim, as she fears that she will have a black child. Jim’s idea of buying white remains a wrong one. Jim, being a black man, cherishes the values of the whites. He sees himself as he imagines the white man. This distortion is caused by the snobbery of the white man. It creates an inferiority complex and corrodes his psyche. He fails to establish himself as a black man by living like a Negro with dignity. His Jim-Crowism is traitorous to his race. The Negro primitive mask is a symbol of racial identity. O’Neill writes: “a Negro primitive mask from the Congo - grotesque face, inspiring obscure, dim connotations, in one’s mind, but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit” (PEO II : 322). The Negro primitive mask has different meanings. It has been used as a religious reality in Africa. To Hattie, it is one of the best pieces of art. To Ella, it is the ugliest thing, inspiring bitter irritation in her. It is a reminder of black art, culture, and race to her. Its very existence is a challenge to Ella. It drives Ella to insanity. Singh in Eugene O’Neill: Quest for Reality in His Plays says: “It functions as a red rag to the bull, to rouse Ella’s fury. Ella’s plunging the knife through it is symbolically an art of genocide, the culmination of the expression of her hatred for Jim and his race. Ella’s shame drives her to isolation and the oblivious state of a second childhood. In this connection, when the artificial walls of alienation breakdown
leading to a possible exposure, she is driven to insanity” (59-60). Ella’s relationship with Jim is ambivalent. She feels the contradictory feelings of love and hatred for Jim. The obsession of the guilt of having married a coloured man gives a fatal blow to her sanity, leading her to personality-trait-disturbance. The guilt of having married a coloured man is carved deeply in the farthest layers of her unconscious mind.

O’Neill, in his play Brown, dramatizes the reality of the destruction of the artist’s creativity. It dramatizes the psychic dimension of reality by demonstrating the anguish of a suffering artist, Anthony, who is exploited by Brown. The play exposes the exploitation, torture and suffering of Anthony. Singh in Eugene O’Neill : Quest for Reality in His plays says that “William A. Brown and Dion Anthony are reproductions of O’Neillian archetypal characters, ‘the Businessman’ and ‘the poet’. They are Andrew Mayo and Robert Mayo of Horizon and Janie Tyrone and Edmund Tyrone of Night, respectively” (62). Brown identifies himself as a bourgeois. His motivation is to amass wealth. He has to collect exterior things, but he remains inwardly empty. Brown has achieved success in his profession of architecture and has amassed unlimited wealth. The interior decoration of the library of his home and the costly furniture in it testifies to his voluptuous way of life and the sensuous pleasure he enjoys. A stage direction runs:

... A backdrop of carefully painted, prosperous, bourgeois' culture, bookcases filled with sets, etc. The heavy table at center is expensive. The leather armchair at left of it and the couch at right are opulently comfortable. (PEO III : 294)

Brown purchases a prostitute, Cybel, with his money as he needs her. He purchases the
sex of Cybel but not her love. He also purchases Dion’s ideas and exploits his creative capabilities. At the same time, he wonders why he is not able to purchase Margaret’s love despite his riches. In fact, Brown is created without a soul. He has his own deformities. He becomes a victim of his own obsession of excessive possessiveness. He has worked Dion to death. After Dion’s death he takes his mask. His taking of Dion’s mask is in a way taking his identity. In fact, Dion Anthony is a blend of Dionysus, the god of fertility, and St. Anthony, a symbol of Christian suffering and asceticism. O’Neill describes him as follows:

... Dion Anthony—Dionysus and St. Anthony—the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony—the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion—creative joy in life for life’s sake frustrated, rendered, abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith, now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself. (Qtd in Clark: 104)

Dion has regarded Brown as a God. Brown has failed Dion as a God. In order to escape from Brown, Dion designs a mask of the Bad Boy Pan for himself. The mask of the Bad Boy Pan undergoes a change with Dion’s becoming a victim of further injustice. As his sufferings increase, the mask simultaneously changes. In the play it is given as: “The mask, too, has changed. It is older more defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean” (PEO III: 269). In Act II, Scene I, it
further changes: “The mask is now terribly ravaged. All of its Pan quality has changed into a diabolical Mephistophelean cruelty and irony” (PEO III : 285). In Act II, Scene III, when he finally comes to settle his accounts with Brown, he is at the height of his suffering. His manhood turns him into a freak. When Dion is not able to defend himself from Brown’s tortures, he turns ascetic. The self-destroying qualities of Christianity and asceticism make him a masochist. He becomes stoic and wonders at his own impotent attitude towards life.

Dion—(with a suffering bewilderment) Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? (Clasping his hands above in supplication) Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched?...” (PEO III : 264-265)

Dion takes shelter in Christianity and ironically glorifies meekness and poverty. Dion says: “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit graves. Blessed are the poor in spirit for they are blind” (PEO III : 273). Likewise, an artist is alienated in the society. He finds himself in the deplorable condition of being unable to communicate with others. Dion has experienced hostility from his birth. His father, in place of giving him affection, has
always maltreated and humiliated him. However, his mother has loved him well. So that only at the death of his mother, Dion feels abandoned, deprived and deserted with no source of love and protection. In the end, when he is not able to face reality he turns to escapism in the form of alcohol, Christianity and Cybel, revealing how the sensitive and creative artist is condemned in a society and is alienated.

Darrell, like Anthony of *Brown*, is exploited. He is an intellectual man and has the identity of the O’Neillian archetypal hero. On the other hand, Sam Evans is identified as a representative character, who turns to be an exploiter like Brown of *Brown*. He possesses the wife and son of another person. He is analogous to Brown. He is identified as the child of the age, who is always on the move and is an embodiment of the myth of success in America. Marsden says:

What a form of meaningless energy he’s tapped... always on the go... typical terrible child of the age... universal slogan, keep moving... moving where?... never mind that... don’t think of ends... the means are the end... keep moving. (*PEO I* : 122)

Commenting on the play *Brown*, John Howard Lawson in “Eugene O’Neill” says

The play proves that men without will and environment are not men. As far as the plot has any meaning at all, it is based on relationships which are factual and even obviously melodramatic. It takes no dual, or plural, personality to explain that Brown loves Dion’s wife and wants to take his place. There is no mystery in a situation in which a man is killed because he is mistaken for another man. There is no additional meaning, no “background pattern” which conforms to the author’s intention; the
disorganized expressions of purpose, which slip from the characters almost in spite of themselves, are all that distinguish them from lumps of clay. This is evident in the lines quoted: Brown talks about what he, as a person, will do in relation to other people. (45)

Hence, it is understood that O’Neill is pre-occupied with the theme of identity crisis in his early plays. Right from Christie and Horizon, through Cardiff, Home, Caribees, Where the Cross is Made, The Rope, Jones, Ape, Wings to Brown all his characters suffer from identity crisis, the main reason being failures and they cannot relate themselves to others as they are humiliated, thwarted, frustrated and neglected by others.