CHAPTER FOUR

O'NEILL'S MODERN TRAGEDIES

This chapter consists of three sections in which each one of O'Neill's three selected tragedies will be approached according to the trends of realism, naturalism and expressionism respectively. O'Neill makes use of these ‘isms’ to portray modern man's tragedy. These tragedies established the reputation of O'Neill as a great American dramatist. He was able to present a new type of tragedy which shares some features with the Greek and the Elizabethan but still has O'Neillian touches in theme and structure under the impact of modern influences as we saw in Chapter Three. O'Neill concentrates on a tragic anti hero as a protagonist in each of his tragedies to reflect the tragic crisis of modern man. These tragedies won for O'Neill the Nobel Prize for literature; they were wholly American and not derived from European culture sources.

4.1 O’Neill’s Beyond the Horizon: Experimentation with Realism

*Beyond the Horizon* marks a milestone in O’Neill’s dramatic career. It established for all the reputation of O'Neill as a great American dramatist. It is the first Broadway success that leads him to get his first Pulitzer Prize in 1920, the year of its publication. Of this realistic play, O’Neill writes, “It is the first serious attempt to do something bigger than my short plays express.” Indeed, it is O'Neill's first comprehensive portrayal of a young farm-born dreamer frustrated in his quest for happiness by hostile materialistic forces with consequent mental and physical decay, resulting in a tragedy of futility and despair. Though it is termed a "new American tragedy," it is a tragedy which might occur
in any civilized country of the world where marriage is a recognized institution and this may be one of the reasons for its universality. Moreover, it interprets the misery which follows the union of a man and a woman who are incompatible; an intellectual, a dreamer, a man with the soul of a poet, who marries a woman mentally is his inferior. Thus, the characters, the setting, the language and all events are so realistic that the audiences and readers can feel it as well because it is their own real picture of a family and a society.

### 4.1.1 Structural Approach and Plot Development

*Beyond the Horizon* is a three-act play which centers on the triangular relationship between two brothers, namely Robert and Andrew Mayo, and Ruth Atkins, a neighbour. At the beginning of this tragedy, Andrew (Andy) seems in love with Ruth, while Robert confesses his desire for a world beyond the farm where he lives. Robert is bookish, frail, and poetic; Andy is sturdy and blunt. Andy is meant for the outdoor life, making him the logical heir to the family's farm.

In the opening scene, Robert confesses to Ruth his love for a world beyond the horizon. She is captivated by his eloquence and, while caught up in the moment, confesses her love for Robert. As a result, instead of Robert leaving the farm as he wishes, Andy leaves, defeated and jealous due to the love relationship he discovers between his brother Robert and Ruth. Moreover, the hasty decisions made by all three principal characters are catastrophic. Robert, in his ineptitude, tends the farm incompetently; Andy journeys to the sea, but longs for Ruth and the farm; and Ruth grows cynical, realizing that it is Andy, not Robert, whom she truly loves.
The structure of the play emphasizes the conflict of the two opposing ideals of adventure and security and of the two brothers who embody them. The two opposing ideals are symbolized not only in the action, but also in the division of the acts into alternate indoor and outdoor scenes. Of these divisions, O'Neill says:

…in *Beyond the Horizon*, there are three acts of two scenes each. One scene is out of doors, showing the horizon, suggesting 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 loss. 2

Act One starts with the dream of Robert's haunting obsession with what lies beyond the horizon. 'Pointing to the horizon-dreamily', he tells his brother Andrew in the first scene 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, joy of wandering on and on-in quest of the secret which is hidden over there beyond the horizon. (1.1.7.20 ff)*1

This motif (the quest of the secret) reveals itself at the beginning of the play. Robert's longing to leave the farm in order to explore the external world is as strongly charged as possible, as he says to Ruth:

I used to stare out over the fields to the hills … (*He points to the horizon*) and somehow after a time I'd forget any

*1 www.eoneill.com O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*. E book. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition, number of the act, scene, page and the line (s) will appear after each quotation.
pain I was in, and start dreaming. I knew the sea was over beyond those hills… and I used to wonder what the sea was like, and try to form a picture of it in my mind. There was all the mystery in the world to me then about that far-off sea – and there still is! It called to me then just as it does now. (1.1.10.21 ff)

Robert projects his romantic obsession on other things around him; he believes that the road has the same longing to the far-off sea. Dreamily, he tells Ruth:

And other times my eyes would follow this road, winding off into the distance, toward the hills, as if it, too, was searching for the sea. And I'd promise myself that when I grew up and was strong, I'd follow that road, and it and I would find the sea together.

(1.1.10.26 ff)

The preceding quotations reveal two facts, which are decisive in determining the future life of Robert, namely, the deceptive nature of his dreams and the fact that he is an invalid since childhood.

Act Two opens with a description of the sitting room in Robert's farm house three years later. The description is meant to be an index of the extent to which the farmhouse has sunk in poverty and destitution. The stage direction tells us:

Little significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency… The chairs appear shabby… the table cover is spotted… Holes show in the curtains… a number of books are piled carelessly on the sideboard… even inanimate objects seem to wear an aspect of despondent exhaustion.

(2.1.29.9)
Not only the place, but also the characters have changed a great deal. Mrs. Mayo's face "has lost all character, disintegrated, become a weak mask wearing a hopeless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortable tears," while Mrs. Atkins, Ruth's mother, is a "victim of partial paralysis… and has developed the selfish, irritable nature of the chronic invalid."(2.1.21.19) Indeed, the ravages of time on the characters are stressed by the stage direction and constitute a clear evidence of dissolution. Moreover, the decay evidenced by the setting itself expresses a sense of exhaustion.

In Act Three, five years later, the deterioration in the conditions of Robert's household and the farm is beyond repair. In a heart rending description, the stage direction reveals:

The room, seen by the light of the shadeless oil lamp with a smoky chimney which stands on the table, presents an appearance of decay, of dissolution. The curtains at the window are torn and dirty… The whole atmosphere of the room …is one of a habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself.

(3.1.53.7)

Moreover, both Robert and Ruth have aged horribly. Their faces and bodies betoken sickness, emaciation, and suffering. In a desperate attempt to set things right, he tells Ruth that he would give up his foolish pride and ask for Andrew's financial help. Unfortunately, this is another of Robert's unfulfilled dreams, for Andrew, who has returned after five years absence, is not the rich man Robert is thinking of, for he has lost
nearly all of his fortune in grain-speculation business. He is punished because he wants easy profits and tries his hand at illegitimate trading.

Completely disappointed, Robert tries to diagnose the causes of their failure. Recalling his father's prophetic statement, he tells Andrew:

I've been wondering what the great change was in you. …You-a farmer- to gamble in wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy. I am a failure and Ruth's another- but we can both justly lay some of the blame for our stumbling on god. But you're the deepest failure of the three. Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself. You used to be a creator when you loved the farm. You and life were in harmonious partnership. …your gambling with the thing you used to love to create proves how far astray- So you'll be punished. You'll have to suffer to win back. It’s no use. I can’t say it.

(3.1.65.33 ff)

The punishment takes the form of a request made by Robert who is terribly sick and dying now. He asks Andrew to marry Ruth after his death to compensate her for the wretched life she has had with him. This action serves the double function of rectifying the wrong done to Ruth when Robert married her and of providing Andrew with the suffering he needs for his own redemption.
4.1.2 Thematic Approach

O'Neill, throughout the play, emphasizes the importance of having a dream in one's life as something real that can be found in any human being. In his opinion, any life that merits living lies in the effort to realize some dreams, and the higher the dream, the harder it is to be realized. This shows that as a tragic dramatist, O'Neill cherishes this situation of the dream of happiness and its frustration as a major factor in modern tragedy. This may shed a light on the bigger subject that most of his successors write about, the American dream of something great—an ideal which is turned upside down to become a mere nightmare for those who dream of it.

The tragedy of Robert starts when he is offered a chance to realize his dream at the beginning of Act One. He is about to sail on a three-year sea voyage with his uncle Dick Scott to discover what is beyond the horizon. On the eve of his departure, Ruth meets Robert who is sitting out on the fence. She persuades him to tell her the second reason why he is planning to leave. It is her love, he confesses. While Robert knows well that she is his brother's beloved, he accepts her admission of love. Moreover, she emphasizes "I don't! I don't Love Andy" when he asks her about her relation with his brother Andy. She asks him not to go out to the sea and leave her alone. Having long been in love with her, Robert gives up his life-long dream, in favour of staying in the farm and marrying Ruth. In so doing, Robert actually betrays himself and forgets all thoughts of the world beyond the horizon. Thereafter, O'Neill's intention is to show the tragic effect of Robert's wrong choice and the dangers of betraying one's own nature. In choosing to stay behind and marry Ruth, Robert feels that love is perhaps what he has hoped to find in his search for happiness. He tells Ruth:
I think love must have been 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. It is the meaning of all life, the whole world!

(1.1.12.41 ff)

In Ruth's love, Robert believes that he has found a 'bigger dream'. Moreover, the decision to stay in the farm means for Robert "the beginning of a new life… in every way." (1.2.20.22) However, shortly after the marriage, clouds of problems invade them and in a few years the farm has deteriorated under Robert's management and the family become destitute. Robert gradually realizes his inability to overcome the circumstances, which he finds himself entangled in. In spite of this, Robert clings to his early idealism hoping that one day he might change his life for the better. Unfortunately, Robert is defeated as he admits that all his life efforts to run the farm and domestic life end in failure at the end of the play. We follow, through the subsequent years, the physical and psychological decay not only of Robert but also of the members of his own household. The real reason behind Robert's defeat according to R. R. Khare is not circumstances but the delusive quality of his own dreams. In choosing to stay, he has substituted a deluded dream of love for his true dream of adventure. 3 Bigsby has a different viewpoint. He points out that the failure of the characters in *Beyond the Horizon* "derives not from the greatness of their dreams, or even the courage with which they tackle a task imposed by fate." Rather it is "a consequence of their capitulation to biological impulse, of their capacity for self destruction, of their willful abandonment of dreams for immediate satisfaction of one kind or another." 4 The characters Bigsby is talking about are Robert's brother, Andrew and Robert's wife, Ruth. Bitter at having lost Ruth, Andrew suddenly
decides to sail in Robert's place, thus revealing the same tendency to betray his own nature. Furious with Andrew's decision, the father cries prophetically, "you are runnin' against your own nature, and you are goin' to be mighty sorry for it if you do."(1.2.24.18)

The father's prophecy is fulfilled in the following two Acts which are designed to exhibit the tragic consequences of living contrary to one's true nature. In fact, they help to reveal primarily what was obvious from the start; that Robert was not cut out to be a farmer and that Andrew, in his turn, was not meant to be a sea adventurer.

Besides the financial problems, Robert receives another shock when he realizes that Ruth no longer loves or cares for him. Pleading earnestly for his wife's emotional support, Robert is informed that he is a 'curse', which befalls not only the farm but also Ruth herself. In a scene of poignant domestic strife, Ruth reveals her utter callousness and insensitivity when she scornfully tells Robert that it is hateful to be "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." (2.1.39.36) Her utter disappointment culminates in her painful confession that she did not love him. She adds "I hate the sight of you! Oh, if I'd only known! If I hadn't been such a fool to listen to your cheap, silly poetry." Hence, the very basis of Robert's rejection of his dream—Ruth's professed love—has collapsed. However, Ruth here has placed a foolish hope in something 'beyond the horizon'; for she persists in cherishing the delusion that Andrew still loves her. As he later admits to Robert, Andrew has forgotten Ruth six months after sailing abroad. More important, during his sea voyages, he comes to consider his love affair with Ruth a silly desire of adolescence.
The changes that befall Ruth are twofold: physical and psychological. Her face has lost its youth and freshness. There is in her expression something hard and spiteful and she believes that the tragedy of her life began when she unwisely took the wrong decision: marrying Robert. Ever since then, she remarks that there was always something wrong in her life. Her feelings of bitterness and resentment make her treat her child harshly. Her life becomes empty of all meaning and hope. Here O'Neill produces one of the most important and recurrent themes in his plays: man's tragic inability to reach out to his fellow human beings. In fact, he never stops portraying the husband and the wife as strange persons living together, but 'communicating in codes' with neither ever able to find the other's key.

Instead of love and compassion, the marital life of Robert and Ruth is marked now by resentment, indifference, and perhaps, even hatred for each other. Unable to render his work in the farm productive, especially after the death of his father, Robert comes to regard it as a prison that stifles his best expectations of life. He tells Ruth:

Oh, those cursed hills out there that I used to think promised me so much! How I've grown to hate the sight of them! They are like the walls of a narrow prison yard shutting me in from all the freedom and wonder of life.

(2.1.38.42)

Ironically, this romantic dream to leave the farm in order to explore the external world and to breathe freely once more also collapses under the heavy blows of Andrew's practicality and his realistic business-like manner of describing the East. "The East", Andrew tells Robert, "is stench", for one can find nothing in its narrow streets but filth
and sordidness; this goes to demolish another of Robert's long standing illusions about the places he dreams of going to.

Having been forsaken by the persons they most love, Robert and Ruth no longer see any meaning in life beyond the love of their child for whose sake they continue to live together. The ultimate blow comes when their child Mary dies due to neglect and sickness which renders their life utterly meaningless. Like the absurd dramatists, O'Neill here conveys the sense of impotence and sterility felt by modern man due to the bankruptcy of love and the absence of what makes life meaningful.

In Act Three, symbolically, O'Neill sets the death-scene of Robert against the sunrise. Robert crawls out of the farmhouse to die with his unfulfilled dreams. Death is not an end, Robert thinks, but it is a new beginning in another life and a triumph over all the ills of his body and soul. However, the nature of Robert's death is debatable. "Seen objectively," Goyal points out, "Robert's death is an escape, not a victory. It is a sorry compensation for the barren life wasted in a futile search for identity. His effort to transcend the boundaries of real life is a negation of life; an affirmation only of death." Although Robert offers his suffering and his last act of sacrifice as a form of grace, the play ends on a note of resignation and exhaustion rather than hopefulness; for the final stage direction suggests a sense of stasis from which recovery is impossible. Andrew tells Ruth that they should try to help each other, "but Ruth, if she is aware of his words, gives no sign," for she remains silent, "gazing at him dully with the sad humility of exhaustion, her mind already sinking back into that spent calm beyond the further troubling of any hope." (3.2.71.13)
The subtlety and complexity of the play derive from the modulation of this pattern of alternation, which the action develops, and from the conflicts within the minds of the brothers that it describes. In this respect, the play foreshadows the later developments in the tragic vision of O'Neill, for Robert, like O'Neill's other characters, is "entangled in circumstances which, if not tragic in any strict sense of the term, were destructive of happiness." This makes *Beyond the Horizon* a tragedy of character wherein the protagonist is tricked by fate to become a farmer, when all his life he has longed to go to the sea.

However, Engel believes that Robert is predestined to suffer endlessly even if fate had not intervened in his life. It is evident from the outset that Robert, who is an invalid person since early childhood, is as ill fitted to be a sailor as he is to be a farmer. Furthermore, Engel ascribes the inevitability of Robert's sustained suffering and Andrew's punishment not to fateful circumstances in the action of the play but to qualities inherent in the characters themselves; namely their ability for self-destruction. Joseph Wood Krutch remarks that this makes O'Neill "come nearer than any other American dramatist to writing tragedy in the sense of the Greeks and Shakespeare." He notes that the play should be seen as an "instinctive discernment of the laws of such writing," and adds:

The play is marked by a sense of tragic fitness which is by no means the inevitable accompaniment of vigor or honesty … In the hands of another dramatist, this story might have become a vehicle for mere pathos or sentiment… Divesting himself of every trace of faith in the permanent value of love and presenting it as merely one of the subtlest of those
traps by which Nature ensnares Man, O'Neill turns a play which might have been merely ironic \textquotesingle into an indictment not only of chance or fate but of that whole universe which sets itself up against man's desires and conquers them.\footnote{8}

4.2 O'Neill's \textit{Anna Christie}: Experimentation with Naturalism

If O'Neill won his first Pulitzer Prize for his first successful and critically acclaimed full length realistic play, \textit{Beyond the Horizon}, it was \textit{Anna Christie}, the naturalistic play, for which he won his second Pulitzer Prize in 1922 which gained more wide-spread popularity for the playwright. \textit{Anna Christie} was considered one of the most popular plays that dealt with a serious social malady which proves to be the corruption of a family. O'Neill made this play naturalistic in order to convey his message in a truthful representation of life under the impact of heredity and environment. As a naturalist, the focus is not on the plot and the scenes start and end arbitrarily. A lot of the events are reported; they are not physically represented on the stage. The audiences know nothing about the past of most of the characters, which is merely informed to us; this is true of Chris' past, the death of his wife, his desertion of his daughter as well as Anna's past enslavement and drudgery in the farm. The aim is to present a slice of life to be studied scientifically in realistic situations.

\textit{Anna Christie} is considered one of O'Neill's most enduring plays. It has a secure place in American cultural history. Beyond that, however, it is highly regarded "for its fine storytelling, its rich characters, its striking theatricality and its suggestive ambiguities."\footnote{9}
4.2.1 Structural Approach and Plot Development

Anna Christie, we can say, is a sea play for three of its four acts are set aboard the barge (Simeon Winthrop) at sea. The only act not set at sea is Act One which takes place in Johnny the Priest’s a bar near the sea in New York City. I do believe that the setting of the first act on land is intentionally done by O'Neill who wants to establish the tension between land and sea that is at the heart of his tragedy—as contrary places where his characters are looking for security and safety.

Act One opens with a dialogue of two longshoremen who come to the bar to have a drink. A postman enters with a letter from Anna to her father, Chris, the old captain of a coal barge, telling him that she is on her way to New York to stay with him after fifteen years of separation. The father tells Marthy, a woman in her thirties and Larry (the bartender) that Anna had moved to the United States from Sweden as a little girl when her mother became tired of waiting at home for him to return from the sea. Anna was left with her cousins after her mother died. Chris believed that this is better for her than moving back to be with him; and he intended to keep her away from the sea and the fate of seamen.

My woman-Anna's mother- she gat tired vait all time Sweden for me ven Ay don't never come. She come dis country, bring Anna, dey out Minnesota, live with her cousins on farm… den she don't ole davil, sea, she don't know fader like me."*2

(1.1.41 ff)

*2 www.eoneill.com O'Neill's Anna Christie, E book. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. The number of the act, page and line (s) will appear after each quotation.
Anna arrives the bar just after her father has left the bar. She is "a tall, blond, fully developed girl of twenty …her youthful face is already hard and cynical beneath its layer of make-up." (1.9.2) When she enters the bar, she asks Larry for a drink directly. Then, she introduces herself to Marthy and starts to tell her about her past and the father whom she does not expect to be better than men whom she has met. "But I ain't expecting much from him. Give you a kick when you're down, that's what all men do. Men, I hate 'em--all of 'em! And I don't expect he'll turn out no better than the rest." (1.10.33-35) Moreover, Anna tells Marthy her story of exploitation and abuse by her relatives in the farm, as well as by other men when she worked as a nurse. Yet with nowhere else to return, she has come to New York in search of her father who may become a shelter for her to enjoy the warmth of the family. This may also show her desire for stability and a clean new life.

Anna is introduced to Chris by Marthy who then leaves the bar; Anna and Chris are left alone in a critical situation for both. The father--daughter meeting is strange. Both feel embarrassed with each other. They feel that they have lost the intimacy that should prevail between them. Chris starts to justify why he left Anna years ago. Anna rejects her father's excuses. Moreover, she knows that he is not a janitor, as he told her once, but a sailor, which means that he himself cannot offer her the shelter that she is eager to have.

In Act Two, after ten days, Anna appears "healthy, transformed; the natural color has come back to her face."(2.16.10) She tells her father how much she hates the farm and the sea which obliged her indirectly to live in that cursed farm. "I've told you a hundred times I hated it (decidedly)." (2.17.32) After awhile, Anna is introduced to a sailor whose steamer was wrecked; he is big, strong, handsome, in his thirties and his name is Mat Burke. Both are attracted to each other as they exchange some opinions.
about sea life. After some days, Burke proposes marriage to Anna who does not reject his proposal. This leads the father Chris to curse "dat ole davil, sea" again, this time for bringing Anna and Burke together as the father fears that if his daughter marries Burke, she will be forever doomed to the lonely life of a seafarer's life.

In Act Three, as Anna's relation with Burke becomes strong, she tells her father how much she likes Burke, but also, rather mysteriously, confesses that she will not marry him because "she is not good enough for him." (3.28.16) When Burke finds an opportunity to announce his intention to marry Anna, the father mocks Burke. The argument ends with both attacking each other. Anna comes back to them. While each of them is trying to exercise his authority over her, she declares her independence from both of them:

You was going on's if you had got to own me. But nobody owns me, see? – 'cepting myself. I'll do what I please and no man, I don't give a hoot who he is, can tell me what to do! I ain't asking either of you for living. I can make it myself--one way or other. I 'm my own boss. So put that in your pipe and smoke it! You and your orders! (3.19.23)

Anna proceeds to tell the true story of her abuse by the men on the farm that eventually drove her to prostitution, and in spite of her pleading with Burke to believe that she has changed, Burke reacts with violent anger. He curses her for deceiving him, promising to sail away from her as far as possible. Chris reacts with a combination of repulsion and guilt, as Anna blames his failure as a father for her situation. "And who's to blame for it, me or you? If you'd ever been a regular father and had me with you may be things would be different!" (3.19-21) Chris puts it all in the context of his belief that "dat ole davil,
sea" is to blame for everything bad that happens to him. Then he departs, to get drunk and forget all this pain and frustration, leaving Anna alone on the barge.

When Act Four begins, it is two days later, and Anna "looks pale and terribly tired". Suddenly, Chris enters and apologizes to his daughter: "But Ay'm not sick inside head yay you mean. Ay'm sick from tank too much about you, about me Ay'm sorry, Anna."(4.40.17-18) Anna agrees to forgive him and relieves him of his guilt with a sentiment: "It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and ain't his neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we yust get mixed in wrong, that's all."(4.41.17-18) Chris informs Anna that he has signed on to sail away on a steamer, and that his earnings will be paid directly to her, so that she will not have to work as a prostitute anymore, his way of making restitution for his wrongs against her. Anna discovers that Chris has a revolver in his coat, and he confesses that he originally purchased to use it against Burke, but never bought the bullets. Anna takes it from him, as he exits to sleep.

Within a few minutes, Burke returns to the cabin, with signs of heavy drinking and fighting. "There is an expression in his eyes of wild mental turmoil, of impotent animal rage baffled by its own object misery." (4.43.13) At first Anna defends herself by the revolver she has confiscated from her father. Burke expresses his anguish and Anna surmises that she is not in any physical danger from him. Anna asks him to forget her past and forgive her because of the change she feels with him. "Listen, Mat! You hadn't come, and I'd give up hope. I'd bought my ticket …But I got thinking about you … don't you see I've changed? Can't you forgive what's dead and gone and forget about it?"(4.45.10) After a long debate on her past life and probable love affairs Anna, asks Burke to believe that she is changed and that she did not really love anyone before the
real love she feels for him. "You got to believe it, Mat! What can I do? I'll do anything
you want to prove I'm not lying!"(4.47.20 ff) Burke asks her to swear on a cross given to
him by his mother that he is the only one she loves, and that she is leaving her sordid past
behind her forever. When he realizes that Anna is not a Catholic, meaning that the oath
she swears on his mother cross is empty, he accepts her "naked word for it."

As Anna and Burke embrace, Chris reenters and proposes a toast to the couple's
reconciliation and impending marriage. Anna informs them that both men have,
ironically, signed on to sail on the same ship, so they will be bound together aboard ship,
while she intends to live in a house on land and wait for them to return. Distressed when
he learns that Anna and Chris are Lutherans by birth, Burke, for the first time, expresses
some reservations about their fate:

    Chris _ (Moodily preoccupied with his own thoughts-speaks
with somber premonition as Anna re-enters from the left.) It's
funny. It's queer, yes you and me shipping on same boat dat vay.
It ain't right. Ay don't know-it's dat funny vay ole davil sea does
her vorst dirty tricks, yes. It's so.

    Burke_ (nodding his head in gloomy acquiescence- with a great
sigh) I'm Fearing maybe you have the right of it or once, devil
take you. (4.49.28 ff)

Anna, however, who has painted a picture of domestic happiness, continues to cling to
that vision: "Aw, say, what's the matter? Cut out the gloom. We're all fixed now, ain't we,
me and you? … Come on! Here's to the sea, no matter what! Be a game sport and drink
to that! Come on!"(4.49. 37-39) Yet, it is the skeptical Chris who gets the last word in the
play:
(Looking out into the night-lost in his somber preoccupation-shakes his head and mutters) Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you vas going, no. Only dat davil, sea- she knows! (The two stare at him. From the harbor comes the muffled, mournful wail of steamers' whistles. (4.50.3)

Thus the play concludes with ambiguity, with hope in the face of anticipated inevitable doom. O'Neill, however, recognizing and acknowledging that he had written what could be construed as a happy ending, conceived its significance differently:

The happy ending is the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten. (in fact, I once thought of calling the play Comma)...My ending seems to have a false definiteness about it that is misleading – a happy ever-after which I did not intend....A kiss in the last act, a word about marriage, and the audience, grows blind and deaf to what follows.10

Ultimately, we can say that how a reader or viewer interprets it depends largely on the internal and external world of that individual viewer. Whatever O'Neill's intentions, once his work is published, its meaning is out of his hands, and it is subjected to the reader-response theory and the way it reflects the work.
4.2.2 Thematic Approach

*Anna Christie* is both a romance about Anna and Burke and a revelatory family tragedy about Anna and her father, Chris. When Anna first appears in the saloon in act one, she reveals that she has been abandoned by her father and is now seeking reconciliation with him. They each approach this reunion with false impressions of the other. Chris thinks Anna is a respected nurse, and Anna thinks Chris is a janitor. He has admitted leaving her with relatives in Minnesota, but he believes it was for her own good, to keep her away from "dat ole davil, sea." Because of this superstition, he has deprived his daughter of a normal paternal relationship, for which she has harbored a good deal of resentment toward him.

As a naturalistic play, O'Neill portrays real human beings in a realistic situation and doing naturalistic things which are telling lies, dreaming of a good future and having a hope of something good towards others. Anna is not a governess as her father believes and he is not a janitor as Anna believes. Both have an idea of something good towards each other until they meet to discover their truths. When confronted with the truth about each other, Anna recognizes that, as Marthy has informed her, Chris is "a good one", but Chris continues to see what he wants to see in his daughter. In spite of all the outward evidence of her profession, Chris treats her as if she were a "good girl." For example, when she asks for a drink at the end of Act One, he apologizes that they don't have "fancy" drinks at this saloon. When Anna reveals the truth about her past to both Chris and Burke in Act Three, Chris's need to believe otherwise is so desperate that he curses the sea for bringing Burke to his barge in the fog, not because Anna is becoming involved with Burke, but rather because the fighting between Anna and Chris over her relationship
with Burke leads her to reveal the truth about herself to Chris. He would prefer to believe in his own illusion: "Ay don't never gat to do-dat vay- no more, Ay tall you. Ay fix dat up all right". (4.40.29) Thus, it is believed that sometimes human beings have to tell lies so as to manage living peacefully specially when there is no way to tell truth in the sense that telling truths may lead to disastrous results.

Chris attempts to control whom his daughter marries, which transforms their hopeful reunion into a strained battle. In the end, Chris apologizes for his role in her unhappiness and vows to stand aside if marrying Burke will make her happy, thus following the path of many parents who struggle as they instinctively attempt to protect their children until the children strike out on their own and reject the parents' protection. In this case, Chris hopes that marrying Burke will bring Anna happiness, yet he ultimately accepts his impotence and irrelevance in setting the course of his daughter's adult life.

This struggle for control between father and daughter is, of course, part of a larger metaphysical question that is raised in many of O'Neill's works, which is who or what controls the course of human lives. When Chris asks Anna for forgiveness in act four, she says: "There ain't nothing to forgive, anyway. It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, and it ain't his {Burke's} neither. We're all poor nuts, and things happen, and we yust get mixed in wrong, that's all." (4.41.16 ff) The implication of Anna's statement is that her father's belief in the power of "dat ole davil, sea" may not be so crazy, after all. According to Chris, the sea makes bad things happen, and the sea is therefore to blame for everything, so people like Chris, cannot be blamed.
The questions of guilt and blame place O'Neill's tragedy firmly in the tradition of twentieth century existential drama, in which the issue of personal responsibility defines the struggles within and between the characters. If things just happen that are beyond the individual's control, then no person has to take responsibility for his or her behaviour. Many of O'Neill's characters want to believe in some higher power like the sea to relieve them of the awesome responsibility that comes with free will. Yet these same characters continue to be nagged by guilt, as is Chris. Is it true to say that Chris had no choice but to leave his daughter on the farm in Minnesota, or for that matter, that Burke has no choice but to return to the barge after Anna's revelation, or that Anna has no choice but to marry Burke? Could they each have behaved differently? Each must take responsibility for his or her action, which leads to the ambiguity at the end of the play. It would be easy to blame the sea if things do not work out for Anna and Burke, but each has made a choice to be together, and each is responsible for making it work. To relinquish that responsibility and blame someone else, or the sea, would be living in bad faith, as the existentialists would have it.

Moreover, O'Neill presents the sea as a symbol for his characters. Anna believes that the sea is a place where she can find shelter and sanctuary, and by the sea, she will be away from this cruel and hostile world with all its knots and complexes and ultimately, she will be able to make a new start for her clean future. It is the sea that purifies Anna's soul, reconciles her with her father and introduces her to Mat Burke, the ideal husband. "I love it! It makes me feel clean out here –'s if I'd taken a bath"(2.17.16) On the other hand, for Chris, the sea is a symbol of bad fate and domineering power which is beyond the control of human beings. It is the sea that ruined Chris' life, devouring his age and
separating him from his family. Thus, O'Neill presents life as it is with characters who think and behave sometimes according to their desires and mostly according to their environment and other forces that are beyond their control. In this sense, there is no hero or heroine as far as the naturalistic plays are concerned, because the aim is to present a slice of life, not a character or a plot; i.e. we can see a type of anti heroic protagonist who is an individual in a tragedy in which he or she ruin themselves; it is not their choice but the impact of the pressures of life which defeats them. They are weak, disappointed and frustrated characters. So the dominant force is that of fate, the power which is beyond the characters' control, as the determinists believe.

4.3 O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*: Experimentation with Expressionism

In terms of Expressionism and Symbolism, O'Neill presents *The Hairy Ape* (1922) as an attempt to symbolize the relationship between modern man and his universe, a universe in which the desire of man to belong is thwarted at the hands of capricious deterministic forces. He focuses his attention on the social outcast, whose rootless, bitter struggle against a hostile society is symbolic of the position of mankind in an indifferent universe. O'Neill attempts to portray inner reality in non-realistic terms by the use of abstraction, symbols and distortion. This method provides him with an excellent medium for satire and social comment. The main character, Yank, is not so much a character as a symbolic representation of a type of man who cannot belong in this modern world. He embodies a type rather than individuality in order to present intimations of certain psychological states of mind. As such, *The Hairy Ape*, considered “by contemporary standards”, as Krasner states, “…O'Neill's expressionistic phenomenon.” 11
4.3.1 Structural Approach and Plot Development

In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill dramatizes the plight of his hero in eight short scenes, using both realistic and expressionistic techniques. The settings and environments of this play reveal larger social and cultural realities. Yank and the firemen exist within the cramped and hot forecastle and stokehole, described as a formidable cage: "The firemen's forecastle is crowded with men, all are dressed in dungaree pants, heavy ugly shoes, resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at."(1.1.15ff)*3 In contrast, Mildred and her Aunt's environment, the Promenade Deck of the ship, is filled with fresh air and sunlight. The ocean that surrounds them is infinitely spacious and the general feeling of freedom abounds. “...the sea all about-sunshine on the deck in a great flood, the fresh sea wind blowing across it."(2.7.19) The promenade deck is also symbolically situated at the top of the ship, far above the stokehole. Both the stokehole and the promenade deck setting epitomize the lifestyles and characteristics of the ship's actual decks and the upper and lower classes on board.

The story of *The Hairy Ape* is simple. Yank's position at the bottom of the social ladder and his opposition to those at the top are established in the first four scenes; in each subsequent scene, he attempts to find a place for himself in society. Unable to fit in anywhere, he ends up in the gorilla's cage at the zoo, where he dies alone.

Yank is the strong, respected leader of the stokers aboard a transatlantic liner sailing from New York City. The opening sets the scene below deck in the firemen's forecastle, where the stokers drink, sing and pass the time when they are not working. Arguments break out about their lot in life, with Yank resisting Long's calls for a revolt.

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*3 www.eoneill.com O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. E book. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition, number of the scene, page and the line (s) will appear after each quotation.
against the capitalists above deck, declaring the natural superiority of himself and his mates, who "run de whole woiks," over "all de rich guys dat tink dey're somep'n, day ain't nothing! Dey don't belong, de whole ting is us."(1.6.30 ff) Convinced that he "belongs," Yank's worldview is shattered when a young, aristocratic woman, named Mildred, who is introduced in Scene Two on board as the daughter of the ship's owner traveling with her aunt, almost faints at the sight of him stoking coal in the stokehole. She calls him a "filthy beast" in Scene Three. In one fell swoop, Yank falls from the top of the evolutionary ladder ("de whole ting is us") to the bottom (a "great hairy ape"), and, egged on by his shipmates in Scene Four, he is determined to regain his rightful place at the top: "I'll show yuh who's a ape." (4.15.5)

In Scene Five, Yank, accompanied by Long, seeks out Mildred and her ilk on Fifth Avenue on a Sunday morning. As the ladies and gentlemen emerge from church to walk along the avenue like automatons, they ignore Yank, avoiding eye contact and staring without affect, no matter how much Yank rails at or provokes them. Finally, due to a quarrel with a gentleman in the street, Yank is besieged by a group of policemen who beat him down and arrest him. Alienated from the elitists on Fifth Avenue, Yank next attempts to connect with his fellow human beings in prison in Scene Six, in which the prisoners are represented as disembodied voices that taunt and provoke him. When he mentions the name of Mildred's millionaire father, one of these voices suggests that he join the Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World, or I.W.W., a labor organization actively and nonviolently opposed to big business. The I.W.W. recorded its highest membership and greatest influence in the early 1920s, when it also became the target of government repression. The inmate's Voice reads excerpts from a news article of a speech
by a right-wing senator opposed to the Wobblies, who accuses its members of being a violent threat to the very fabric of democracy. In his frustration, Yank responds positively to the volatile language with which the senator describes the Wobblies and wants to join their cause, to "blow up tings" and "turn tings round". Then, worked up into a rage, he bends the steel bars of his cell to make his escape.

Scene Seven takes place about a month later, when Yank goes to the I.W.W. local headquarters and attempts to join the union. The stage direction suggests that this is a meeting room where members freely and openly congregate: "The whole is decidedly cheap, banal, commonplace and unmysterious as a room could well be."(7.24.7) Wary of police and other officials because of its antigovernment activities, Yank arouses the suspicions of the secretary with his expectations of secret handshakes and passwords. When he explains that he wants to help their cause by blowing up Mildred's father's steelworks, they suspect that he is a spy sent by the government to entrap them, and they literally kick him out of the building (tellingly calling him a "brainless ape.") Discouraged that even the Wobblies are not committed to the kind of meaningful action that he seeks against his perceived oppressors and therefore, not belonging there either, he is confused as to where to turn next.

Finally, Scene Eight finds Yank at the monkey house at the zoo. A gorilla is in plain sight in a cage, while a "chattering" noise (reminiscent of the noises at the prison) suggests that others are nearby. From outside the cage, Yank compares his plight to that of the gorilla and decides that they are both "members of de same club – de hairy Apes." (8.27.23) In an attempt to cement the bond between them and have the gorilla join his cause, Yank frees the gorilla from his cage, only to have the gorilla hug him so hard that
he cracks Yank's ribs and kills him. The gorilla escapes and throws Yank in his cage, where Yank dies. The stage direction provides the playwright's intended meaning for the conclusion of the dramatic scene: "And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs." (8.29.44)

The structure which O'Neill employs in rendering this unending quest of modern man is distinctly expressionistic and symbolic in form. With the absence of plot in the conventional sense of the word, this play represents the working out of a psychological state, in which conflicts with other human beings are clearly subordinate to the psychological conflict within the hero. Each of the eight short scenes seeks to depict a state in this psychic process. Here, however, the expressionistic techniques are explored more boldly, and as the action becomes more intense, the settings lose their correspondence to reality. They strive to reflect the psychological condition of the hero.

_The Hairy Ape_ is, as we said, expressionistic and symbolic in form because the author deliberately subordinates plausibility of language and situation to the essential need of making his theme clear. The characters do not talk or act as they would in real life, because O'Neill wishes to give us things they feel, which reach us only by faint and allusive indications. Given the nature of his subject and his technique, one can readily attest to _The Hairy Ape_ as a symbolic tragedy of modern man.

Yank's unconscious imitation of Rodin's statue, _The Thinker_ is symbolic of Yank's need to think. While he physically embodies the cultural symbol of a "thinker" he cannot think himself. Every time O'Neill's stage direction calls for the actor to take the position of "The Thinker" Yank has come up against an obstacle that cannot be tackled by any other means but thought, when Yank cannot process the realities before him. After Yank
is thrown out of the I.W.W. he immediately gets into The Thinker pose. He is desperate to make sense of his situation and understand why the union would throw him out.

For Yank, thought is the ultimate boundary. Whether pressing his fingers to his head or sitting in the position of Rodin's "The thinker", he cannot muster enough thought to make sense of or come to terms with the world around him. Thought only becomes necessary for Yank after he encounters Mildred in the stokehole. Mildred and her class present a new threat that Yank cannot eliminate or get rid of by physical might. Yank is forced to think how he can defend himself. This transition is exemplified in the "tink" joke among the men. Before Mildred enters the stokehole Yank finds thinking ridiculous and unnecessary, he laughs when he tells the men that he is "trying to tink". However, after the encounter, Yank earnestly tells the men that he is trying to "tink". When they joke and correct him in a mocking chorus, "Think!", he is genuinely hurt.

4.3.2 Thematic Approach

The resounding theme in O'Neill The Hairy Ape is man's attempt to discover himself and his place in the order of things. This consideration makes his play universal and enduring. Among the early plays, The Hairy Ape best reflects modern man's struggle for self-awareness and his effort to belong, to give life meaning. In the figure of Yank, O'Neill depicts the dilemma twentieth-century man faces when his faith in the machine and the world of materialism it symbolizes is shattered, and he can find nothing in himself or in his world that can replace this lost faith. O'Neill captures the mood of pessimism that prevailed in the 1920s, when man discovered that while the industrial world provided him with material benefits it also crushed and threatened to obliterate his
humanity. The typically somber O'Neill thesis prevails in the bleak world of *The Hairy Ape*: that man has lost his place and his belief in himself and in God or anything external to himself, that life without faith can only end in despair and death, and that man must strive to retain his humanity to give order and meaning to existence.

In his effort to dramatize the displacement of modern man on the distorted universe that followed World War I, O'Neill abandoned the realism of his first plays for expressionism. O'Neill had read the plays of Strindberg, and he and other European expressionists were directly influenced by them. What distinguishes the American playwright from other expressionists and aligns him more closely to Strindberg is what John Gassner calls the "metaphysical mode of expressionism" in *The Hairy Ape*. The play examines not only the nature of man's role in society but the nature of being. Using the technical devices of expressionism, O'Neill moves his hero, Yank, through a series of rapidly changing scenes in his quest to belong, to find his place in the universe; yet in his highly subjective treatment the dramatist never neglects to present the effects of dislocation and loss of faith on the human psyche.

While he needed a nonrealistic approach to dramatize Yank's outer struggle and inner suffering, O'Neill, uses cause and effect and retains the character motivation of realism. O'Neill's catalyst for Yank's questioning of and awakening to his true condition is woman as the destroyer and nemesis of man. It is his encounter with Mildred, who emerges out of darkness like the unconscious, shadowed side of him that rouses this slumbering automaton from his lethargy. Her rejection of his physical presence, the sum total of the self he had known until then, stuns him. He is thrown off balance when she classifies him as an animal, and his pursuit of her becomes a quest for his own identity.
Critics believe that the artificial light above the stairs leading down to the stokehole illuminates not only Mildred but a part of Yank which has always remained a dark mystery to him. But it, on the other hand, proves to be ineffective illumination. Although light has always been a symbol of enlightenment, this artificial glow reflects an artificial woman who, like the modern technology that breeds her, cannot provide Yank with insight.

Until this time Yank has responded to his environment by a series of conditioned reflexes. As "part of de engines," he has adapted to his environment mechanically, bypassing conscious decisions. He has worshipped the machine, becoming one with it. It, in return, has crushed his humanity. Yet, at the beginning of the play, the union of machine and the brute strength of man have produced in Yank a godlike feeling. He is an extension of the machine; its power is personified in him. Yet even before Mildred's appearance, Yank has made feeble attempts to "tink", to understand the complexity of existence.

The dark region of the stokehole he inhabits reflects the underground of his mind. Proud of his animal strength and his ability to satisfy the insatiable appetite of the machine, he has never developed a social presence. Yank is not sophisticated enough to assume a mask to project a socially acceptable image. His arrogance and ignorance leave him vulnerable. In his first major contact with it, society, in the form of Mildred, crushes and rejects the raw natural state of man he represents.

Yank's unconscious, repressed desires never appear on the surface until Mildred's ethereal appearance. Through Mildred, daughter of the president of Nazareth Steel, the world's new plastic Virgin Queen, descending "a mile of ladders and steps to be havin' a
look" at her slaves, O'Neill makes a strong anti-capitalist statement. Her forebears were once vital, productive, and purposeful. In contrast, Mildred is described as pale, anaemic, "looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived."(2.7.22) Nervous, disdainful, discontented with her life in spite of great wealth and social position, she is vaguely conscious of being a "poser," as her aunt claims, and of lacking a purpose in life. Somewhere in her unconscious lies a yearning for the primitive, the animalistic, and the primordial heart-of-darkness jungle, peopled by creatures like her grandmother "with her pipe beside her--puffing in Paradise."(2.8.3) The horror that Yank sees but does not understand when he looks into her eyes is her realization that here in him are not only her roots, her past, but, if she would allow her sexual and emotional drives free expression, her vital self.

This vision of Mildred has a twofold effect on Yank: it makes him aware of his social inferiority and conscious of his inadequacies as a human being. Before this encounter, he had been an integral part of the vast industrial complex that produced steel girders, rising godlike in the sky. Their majesty was something tangible, strong and impressive like the brute power of his own body. It is inconceivable to him that Mildred, the daughter of steel, would reject him, the son of steel. Before Mildred came into his life, he had been the pure animal, a leopard, stalking through his domain, proud of the spots, the dirt and sweat that gave him identity. When Mildred calls him a "filthy beast," Yank's safe, known world is destroyed; he is dispossessed. The feminine wonder of Mildred touches a chord of humanity within him that has never been struck before. He responds with a growing arousal of sensitivity and seeks to find his place on the ladder of evolution. When his pitiful attempts to belong fail, he wants to hurt the creature who gave
life to the displaced monster in him but who has neglected to sever the umbilical cord that
ties him to his animal world. He says, "She grinds the organ and I'm on de string. She'll
get on her knees and take it back or I'll bust de face offer her!"(2.8.33)

Mildred can do nothing to help him or anyone else. For her own attempts to
become fully human have failed; and she is left, as she says, "a waste product of the
Bessemer process, I am sired by gold and damned by it."(2.8.34) Nor can Yank help
himself. He cannot discover by reflection who he is or where he belongs; he simply does
not have the mental capacity to do so. Therefore, vainly, he turns outward to society for
guidance, understanding and compassion. Society, assuming in the last scenes the shapes
of the stylized chorus on Fifth Avenue, the prisoners at Blackwells Island, and the
members of the IWW, persistently rejects him.

In his search to discover himself, Yank moves from one cell to another, from the
cage-like stokehole of the steamer to the cell on Blackwells Island to the final death cage.
Although he does not reach the end without a degree of awareness of the meaning of
existence, he must suffer the limits of his perception. In the past Yank had been content
to worship the god of steel, had taken pride that he belonged to it. As a result of the
rejection he has experienced, the idol is shattered. Now he knows that girders and beams
and steam are not enough, that the newly aroused instincts within him crave nourishment:

Dis ting's in your inside, but it ain't your belly. 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 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. Aw, hell! I can't see--it's all dark. (8.29.33)
When he realizes his search to belong somewhere has been futile, and he has been rejected by all segments of society, the wealthy, the imprisoned, and finally the representatives of the masses, the IWW, Yank sits in a gutter, "bewildered by the confusion in his brain, pathetically impotent." In desperation, he "turns a bitter mocking face up like an ape gibbering at the moon" and says: "Man in de Moon, yuh look so wise, gimme de answer, huh? Slip me de inside dope, de information right from de stable--where do I get off at, huh?" (8.28.12) Abandoned by and now abandoning humanity, Yank makes his way to the zoo and the gorilla's cage. Remembering Mildred's words, he thinks man's house of classified beasts is where he might belong. It is twilight, that gray-light time between day and night, suspended precariously, even as Yank is, between heaven and earth, humanity and animality. Watching the gorilla who sits like The Thinker, a pose he had often assumed earlier, Yank says, "Youse can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. But me--I ain't got no past to tink in.... You belong."(8.29.3) He confronts the beast, looking for traces of himself, and calls it "brother." Yank settles not for brotherhood with man but with animals. Recklessly, he opens the door of the cage, and the gorilla embraces him "in a murderous hug" and throws Yank's crushed body into the cage.

Yank's world ends in despair and death. As O'Neill depicts it, his plight is that of modern man who has become dislocated, disillusioned, and destroyed by his highly technological world. As long as man does not question this world nor seek a better one, he is allowed to function by society, though only on an animalistic, mentally stultifying level. Only when he begins to question, however feebly, the validity of this world and tries to discover a more meaningful existence does he meet with rejection. The tragedy in
modern society is not that man has been reduced to Yank's level but that he has even lost the will to attain to Yank's admirable though ill-fated quest. Having rejected his former place as "son" of God, he emerges as the bastard child of materialism, industrialism, and all the other "isms" that symbolize his godlessness and his inability to provide substitutes. Rootless, bereft of a meaningful role and place in the structure of the universe, he becomes an alien in a hostile world.

O'Neill would agree with Freud that complete self-awareness is an impossibility; man can never explore fully the deep recesses of the unconscious and fathom the secret storehouse of the source of rational decisions. The mind of man is a bottomless pit. What O'Neill seems to be demonstrating in *The Hairy Ape* is that man should at least engage in a search for the self and question the meaning of his existence. Turning back to live complacently on the animal level brings with it moral death and destruction; turning inward to discover the self can provide a degree of awareness of our humanity. Perhaps O'Neill wanted to show that life is an ongoing exploration; that man, like Yank, is still in the process of evolution.

The play is a scathing criticism of contemporary industrial society. But criticism of the class conflict, social inequality or social injustice is not the real theme of the play. The playwright is more concerned with the psychological implications of the machine age. And the importance of O'Neill as a social critic lies in the fact that he emphasizes the psychological aspect of the modern social order. He points out the disease of our acquisitive society. He does not merely stress the fact that workers are exploited to create wealth for the few, but shows how in our modern machine-made world they are deprived of the sense of harmony and mental well-being that comes from doing something that
seems important and necessary. Man's work is a necessary part of his personality; it is an extension of his ego; it makes him feel that he is a necessary part of the life of the world in which he lives. Modern industry tends to destroy this psychological counterpart of work, and in so far as it does so, it leaves the worker a nervous, irritable and dissatisfied misfit. Yank was such a worker, and at the same time, conscious of the thing he had lost. He didn't want a job simply because it would be a means of earning a living; he wanted a job in which he could live.

*The Hairy Ape* is centered on Yank's loss of faith and belief in himself as well as in the world in which he lives. Yank, in his search for identity, discovers firstly, that he is alone and the world is impossible to live in, and secondly, that steel is no power within him but a prison around him. Steel makes the ship, which represents power but it also makes the cage in which Yank is imprisoned.

Yank had thought that he was the creative element in the ship, the workingman but now "it is dark" and groping blindly he asks: "Where do I go from here?" Ironically enough, he ends up at the zoo and, creeping close to the gorilla he asks: "Ain't we both members of de same club- de Hairy Apes?" (8.22.23) At this point, Yank surrenders himself to the only self image of which he can be conscious—that symbolized by the ape and the cage. It is here that his sense of disillusionment is complete. This scene portrays the complete and final disintegration of Yank.

*The Hairy Ape* is a great tragedy but it is not a conventional tragedy in the Aristotelian tradition due to its modern features. Aristotle laid down that the hero of a tragedy must be an exceptional individual, a man of high rank, a king or prince, so that his fall from his former greatness would arouse the tragic emotions of pity and fear, but
Yank, the hero of the play is not a man of high rank, he is not a king or a prince or some other exalted individual. He is a humble stoker whose business is to shove fuel into the furnace of the ship's engine. For long hours, he has to work in the cramped and low-roofed stoke hole. He is beastly, filthy, vulgar and coarse. He has no mind. He cannot think; he can use only physical force, like the hairy ape that he is.

Thus Yank, the tragic hero, is not a man of high estate, a figure of national importance in the Aristotelian sense. Further, Aristotle had held that the hero must fall and suffer owing to some error of judgment or fault of his own. He must have some "tragic flaw" in his character. This was considered necessary because the fall from greatness of a perfectly good man would not be tragic but merely shocking and impious. The tragic hero must suffer because of some fault of his own, and not merely because of the hostility of fate or some malignant deity.

In this respect also, Yank differs from the tragic heroes of Aristotle. He does not suffer from any fault of his own; but because he is in conflict with his environment, with certain social forces that are much stronger than him. Yank is driven to his doom by these forces, against which he struggles, and which are too much for him. In the opening of the play he is quite contented and at ease, quite happy and self-confident because he has a sense of belongingness, a sense of identity. But this sense of security, this sense of belongingness is soon shattered by Mildred, who comes to the stokehole to look down upon them as on wild beasts in a zoo. She calls Yank a "filthy beast" and looks down on him as if he were a hairy ape. Yank feels insulted in the very heart of his pride, his confident sense of belonging is gone. He realizes that he is not steel and steam which make the ship go, but the slave of those who own the ship.
Aristotle stated that action (or plot) is the soul of tragedy. In The Hairy Ape also there is enough of action, but the action which counts is internal. The action develops rapidly through eight short scenes, and every scene is a step in the disintegration of Yank's personality. If there is any villain in the tragedy, it is not God or Fate or any human being, but the mechanical forces of the social environment. Society is the real villain of the piece, the forces of a soulless, mechanical-social order, with which he is in conflict, for we are explicitly told that Yank is alone, that he had run away from home early in life. Attention is focused throughout on the spiritual decay of Yank. That he has been called a hairy ape becomes an obsession with him till he begins actually to see himself as a hairy ape. The delusion carries him step by step to the gorilla-cage, and so to a horrible death.

4.4 Conclusion

In these three O'Neillian experimentations with realism, naturalism and expressionism, the tragedies reflect the modern trends, attitudes and experiences of people. Tragedy no longer portrays the supernatural hero who defies gods and monsters and struggles to assert his being. These codes are replaced by the codes of the modern anti-hero who is caught in a struggle to find his identity among a people or a family with whom he cannot live peacefully as a man.

Accordingly, it is the duty of the dramatist to dig deep into the roots of today's sickness. O'Neill ascribes this sickness to the collapse of spiritual values and the failure of science and materialism to give satisfying answers to the dilemmas of modern
American man. This results in the dominance of the feelings of insecurity, alienation and dislocation in modern American man's life which lead to his tragedy.
End Notes


5. B.S. Goyal, p. 143.


10. Ibid. p. 63.