O’Neill was a highly conscientious artist. He was determined to be a successful artist. He realized the importance and value of technique. He made every effort to see that he did everything on the stage that had some meaning, and which contributed to the total understanding of the play. That is why, in his efforts to transcend realism he used various devices to highlight the play of the unconscious or bad faith and the conscious, the duality of mind in his plays. He carefully made use of masks, asides and soliloquies, and above all highly effective expressionistic techniques, and thus, tried to enhance dramatic impact.

Expressionism is a style of painting, sculpture and literature that came to limelight between 1910 and 1925 in Berlin, Germany. The movement later on spread its branches and was adapted by writers in literature. The deliberate aim of this movement was to express subjective emotional experiences as opposed to the reading of impressions derived from the external world. The term, expressionism, was first employed by twentieth century German painters but later applied to literature, music and other arts also. Kaiser and Toller were the famous German dramatists of expressionistic techniques. The word ‘Expressionism’ means the externalization of some inner reality or the manifestation, representation, or signification in general of one thing by another. Expressionists try to give form to their strong inner feelings. Expressionists “sought to explore the recesses of the human mind and to divulge its secrets….” (Murfin and Ray 116) They try to depict life as modified and distorted by their high interpretation of reality. To the expressionist, truth or beauty is in the mind, not in the eye. The expressionists cry for a more real reality; but to them reality cannot be found in the outer world. It has to be seen in the inner world of thoughts and visions. Expressionists tend to distort or exaggerate natural appearance in order to create a reflection of an inner world. It is a revolt against realism by distorting objects, exaggeration on, and breaking up time-sequences. It is less concerned with objective facts than with the external world as it appears to the troubled, sick or abnormal mind of a character. The expressionists try to communicate the palpable essence of
things, their qualities clearly defined, not their appearance in reality. By
expressionism they mean intensification, not portrayal of life; means
presentative against representing, means usually the violation of actuality,
the distorted piling up of emotionally effective incident. As M. H. Abrams
says:

The expressionist artist or writer undertakes to express a
personal vision – usually a troubled or tensely emotional vision
of human life and human society. Th...
inadequate because speech does not invariably reveal the working of the mind. So, expressionists depend for correct understanding of human psyche on the slips of tongue, dreams, and informal moments of the characters. In order to help the audience to understand the inside of the character, the expressionists use symbols, metaphors and allegories. They produce blurred figures on the darkened stage to personify good or bad motives. Even unseen voices are heard to express the secret thoughts of the character. Eerie noises, flickering lights and recurrence of the same sound are used to depict the conflicts of the wills and struggles between the dark desires. As Abrams points out:

Expressionist dramatists tended to represent anonymous human types instead of individualized characters, to replace plot by episodic renderings of intense and rapidly oscillating emotional states, often to fragment the dialogue into exclamatory and seemingly incoherent sentences or phrases, and to employ masks and abstract or lopsided and sprawling stage sets. (86)

O’Neill was a great literary craftsman of rare sensibility and sensitivity. His aim as a dramatist was to respond, with the whole being, to specific situations in human condition, and at the same time, stubbornly refused to affect a compromise with his convictions. He was an artist who was primarily concerned with the task of exploring self through the medium of theatre. He was a revolutionary and an idealist. He presented an imaginative reconstruction of life. He never wrote his plays for art’s sake. But at the same time it must be pointed out that he never advocated anything through it. He just presented what he saw and felt. In answer to a question he himself said:

I’m never the advocate of anything in any play except humanity towards humanity. (qtd. in Gelb 552)

Such a dictum gives the reader a keynote to understand the thematic design of his plays. A careful reading of his plays clearly shows that his protagonists always find themselves struggling against the social and racial taboos. The constant clash between the conscious and the unconscious breaks their neck, and sometimes they, being in bad faith, feel completely
disillusioned with the unconscious. The truth is that O’Neill was bound to the medium of drama because of his remarkable facility for writing dialogues and creating characters. The primary material of a dramatist is not facts but persons—living characters that he creates by the creative power of his imagination. Nobody can deny O’Neill the power of creating characters that fascinate us. In fact, his plays are well constructed, full of action and suspense, his dialogues are witty and brilliant, and yet natural and realistic.

O’Neill has used drama for expressing his views on the nature of self, society and contemporary American life. He has dealt with the conflict of self through satire, unconventional philosophy, witty dialogues, irony, expressionism, symbolism and imagery. In his plays he is primarily concerned with the basic fundamental emotions and passions of men. As an artist he knew very well that man’s chief struggle is with none but oneself, with one’s own will. O’Neill is without doubt, a craftsman of unusual gift and distinction. He has the imagination of a poet, the wit of a keen humanist, the conscience of a moralist, the temperament of a philosopher, and the wisdom of a highly experienced man of the world. Thus, like an artist, he is concerned with the task of projecting his philosophic vision rather with the debate regarding certain principles. His interest was not religion or philosophy but the great principles and ideals of life:

I’m always acutely conscious of the Force behind… and of the one eternal tragedy to Man in his glorious, self-destroying struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my proud conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about…. (Falk 25-26)

The most notable thing about O’Neill is that he accomplished a beautiful synthesis and fusion of art and ideas in his plays. The way he employs a number of remarkable artistic techniques to present his ideas, casting them all into beautiful artistic moulds to turn out a play clearly shows that he explored the psychological duality of self, and how it confronts with each other. That is why he advocated the importance of masks. In ‘A Dramatist’s Notebook’ O’Neill wrote:
I advocated masks for stage crowds, mobs – whether a sense of impersonal, collective mob psychology is wanted. This was one reason for such an expensive use of them in *Lazarus Laughed*. In masking the crowds in that play, I was visualizing an effect that, intensified by dramatic lighting, would give an audience, visually the sense of the Crowd, not as a random collection of individuals, but as a collective whole, an entity. When the Crowd mind, Crowd emotion, as one voice of a body composed of, but quite distinct from its parts. (MM 120)

The display of these techniques with unusual success at different stages clearly shows that O'Neill used these devices to understand the nature of ambiguous response to the existing tension between the individual conscious and social conscious. He categorically asserted that human nature remains the same under all circumstances. C. W. F. Bigsby has been rightly pointed out:

As he said in an intriguing aside in his article on masks, Faust and Mephistophiles are one. From him, character is action and reaction. The individual is equally drawn to the material and the spiritual, symbolised sometimes, though not invariably, as the land and the sea. He inhabits a Baudelairian universe of poverty, deprivation and pain from which he retreats into dream or narcosi s. Love is the spur and the reward but, though born of a spiritual yearning, a selfless vision, it has to struggle for survival in a real world. For O'Neill, as for Baudelaire, the purity of the blue sky and sea is tainted by the fog, which is partly a product of the abyss and partly a welcoming concealment of truth. (120)

There is hardly any dramatic mode which he did not use creatively in his plays. Seven years of inactive and hectic life made him incapable of physical response to anything in life that troubled him. During this period of uncertainty, he read, apart from other works, Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* which has been hailed as one of the greatest works of Strindberg. His debt to Strindberg is clear when he said in 1936, while accepting the Nobel
209

Prize:

It was reading his plays when I first started to write, back in the winter of 1913-14 that, above all else, first gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself. (qtd. in Gelb 143)

Expressionism had been developed by Strindberg as a method of representing the repressed states of mind. He attempted to put the thought processes of the unconscious on the stage. He also probed the human psyche, and dramatized the flaws in human character. In his creative efforts to cut below the surface, he used unrealistic patterns of speech and startling symbols, and dispensed with the logical sequence of time, place and action. He created new forms which dramatized the experience of tension, as it were a replay of naturalism but with the character and scenes distorted by the tension itself. Although Strindberg struck the keynote of the expressionistic theory of the theatre, it is not significant whether O’Neill learnt the expressionistic technique from Strindberg or not.

Throughout his long dramatic career, O’Neill employed expressionistic techniques in varying degrees, to impart deeper layer of meanings in order to dramatise the clash between the conscious and the unconscious. It is said that O’Neill was influenced by the expressionistic techniques in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. In these plays, he seems to be exploring the possibilities of maximum expressiveness while staying within the general framework of realism. But his early one-act plays also tended to be expressionists in their symbolic structures. An attempt was made to project the ‘inner’ life of his characters on the stage. In his early efforts O’Neill worked steadily against the stuffy, suffocating romanticism which dominated the American theatre before World War I. He vehemently discarded the commonly accepted belief that the literal transcripions of life were the domain of art. In his own experiments he blended naturalistic detail with symbolic mood, suggestiveness, and symbols. He remained opposite to realism or naturalism, and restored to expressionistic dramatic style of distortion of action, speech and scene. Play after play reflects O’Neill’s disinterest in literalness and dissatisfaction with the naturalism. It
The first expressionistic play that I ever saw …. Was Kaiser’s Morn to Midnight produced in New York in 1922, after I’d written both The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape. (qtd. in Leech 35)

O’Neill, from the beginning to the end of his dramatic career, advocated the rebirth of imaginative theatre. His search for expressive form led him to conduct a large number of experiments with symbolic figures, interior monologues and masks, split personalities, scenic effects, choruses, schematization and rhythms. He was a restless but tireless experimenter, and his experiments were important for broadening the dramatic method in the twenties and thirties of 20th century.

Being an introspective artist, he dramatized the ideas and conflicts within the minds of his characters with deep penetration. He was profoundly interested in probing into the nature of self in order to explore the hidden and most unpredictable emotions which are the products of the subconscious mind, or an outcome of a man’s taking refuge in bad faith. The inner struggle is evident in his repeated efforts to dramatize the subconscious. This, in fact, has led to a critical examination of the problem of dual personality. O’Neill has used the physical man as a means of showing how man willingly or unwillingly hides his true self from himself and from others as well, and it is in this attempt to hide his true self that he is primarily interested. His plays deal with the miseries, delusions, and obsessions of man adrift in the world. The characters suffer from delusion, or ‘pipe dreams.’ They are self-pitying outsiders, haunted, guilt-ridden heroes, or country people with strong desires.

O’Neill made a serious use and application of expressionism ginning to the end of his dramatic career. He made liberal use of masks and in interior monologues. The Hairy Ape, The Emperor Jones and The Great God Brown are in the true sense of German tradition. In The Hairy Ape, he graphically exposes the inner realities of American business world through the character
of Yank. In *The Emperor Jones*, he describes the dilemma of a man who is tortured by unending fears, and feels completely helpless in overcoming them. In *The Great God Brown*, characters are studied in masks who ultimately give them up and reveal their inner hidden emotions and impulses.

*The Moon of the Caribbees and Six other plays of the Sea* contains plays written between 1917 and 1919. The melodramatic element is still present but a thorough reading of these plays clearly shows that the dramatist has acquired a philosophic grasp upon his material. He is able to create a ‘like human comedy of the sea’ in which the characters experience pats and realise that something ‘has broken in’ inside them.

On the other hand, in a play like *Beyond the Horizon*, the dramatist shows how all the characters ignore their true inner nature and just follow the outer, conscious self. It is the story of two brothers. One, Robert, is a dreamer. He wishes to go to sea. He has a burning desire to encounter the world beyond the horizon. The other is Andrew. He is a practical farmer. He places his faith in the daily routine of farm life which provides enough meaning to him. Both of them are in love with the same girl. However, the girl chooses the dreamer. After this, Robert gives up his uncle’s boat. He decides to stay on the farm. On the other hand his brother, Andrew grows bitter at having lost her. He goes to the sea.

As luck would have it, the marriage between Robert and Ruth proves a big curse. Eventually Robert dies of tuberculosis, and his body, like his spirit, is emaciated. He asks his brother, who is morally damaged but physically fit, to take his place. He drags himself out onto the road, and dies while looking at the horizon that he had never been able to transcend. Thus, it is clear that *Beyond the Horizon* represents the writer’s own warring instinctness. One brother is drawn to the world of reality. His fascination with the practical world grows. However, it has been made clear that he is unimaginative but at the same time it has been pointed out that he is creative. However, his creativity serves as a trigger to his will power which dominates his circumstances. He is able to imprint his identity on a world with which he is at harmony. The other is essentially a dreamer. He is also
Environmental pressures weigh heavily on him, and he allows them to dominate his mental world. The one is fond of constructing the world out of facts, and the other is out of pure imagination. However, both of them woefully go against that natural instinct, their inner self. Andrew put an end to his harmonious relationship with the land by becoming a speculator, his brother says:

“You used to be a creator when you lived the farm, You and life were in harmonious partnership. And now ... you - a farmer - to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper, There’s a spiritual significance in that picture.” (O’Neill I: BTH 161)

O’Neill was always acutely aware of the reality and power of determinism, and he had a desire to view it in the light of the conflict between the conscious and the bad faith. *Beyond the Horizon* had been hailed as a great American tragedy, and in fact, as the first modern native tragedy. After the premiere of *Beyond the Horizon* O’Neill said:

“It is meaning of life – and the hope. The noblest is essentially the most tragic. The people who succeed and do not push on to greater failure are the spiritual middle classes. Their shopping at success is proof of their compromising insignificance. How petty their dreams must have been.” (qtd. in Gelb 5)

The action of the play takes places in a highly expressionistic setting. Downer Alan finds the settings “in *Beyond the Horizon* certainly make something about the inner conflict which is O’Neill’s principal concern in the play, and some details in the interior symbolize the change which the action of the play brought about in particular characters.” (43)

The alternating settings shifting from the open road to the farm house interior parallel the choices which confront the two brothers in the action. The opposites are symbolized not only through the action of the play but also in the division of the acts into alternate indoor and outdoor scenes. Clifford Leech has rightly said:

“its arrangement of scenes, moreover, is rigorously patterned, in the fashion that at Strindberg carried to an extreme in *The Rod to Damascus* : each of the three acts has two scenes, one in the farm -
house and one in the country outside… The symbolic significances are obvious; in each of these scenes we are from the farm house, on a road which could lead the characters to far places…

The dramatist himself has said:

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

(qtd. in Falk 38)

The alternation of longing and of loss dramatizes the subjective desires and the reality. *Beyond the Horizon* also follows a systematic time pattern. The play proceeds from spring to fall and from sunset to sunrise.

John Henry Raleigh remarks:

*Beyond the Horizon* begins in happiness in a warm sunset in the spring; it ends in tragedy on a cold dawn in the fall; in between is the heat – and scenes of anger – of the summer. (174)

In *Abortion*, the dramatist has made use of several means of expression to achieve the desired intensification. Lighting, music and song, furnished by the approaching parade of college students deepen the intellectual appeal of the play. “This and not *The Emperor Jones*, as is commonly assumed,” observes Timo Tiusanen, “is the first play in which O’Neill makes use of a repetitive sound effect with an increase in intensity – and does so in a purposeful way.” (44)

*The Emperor Jones* is another important play through which the dramatist highlights the psychological conflict within the mind of an individual. It portrays the psychological terrors and obsession of Brutus Jones. It is a gripping play which would not have produced the desired effect without the use of expressionistic technique. To quote Timo Tiusanen:

*The Emperor Jones* belongs to that sect of expressionism, sometimes called “monodrama” where the distortion is motivated “by a character’s state of mind… The play consists of a realistic exposition scene, a rapid series of six scenic
images, all expressionistically shaped. (101-02)

Expressionistic plays are, generally speaking, loose in dramatic structure but this difficulty has been fully overcome in *The Emperor Jones*. The play has achieved a remarkable concentration of dramatic power by means of several unifying effects.

The presence of Jones in all the eight quick moving scenes, the loud noise and flash of Jones’s revolver, and the beating of the tom-tom(213,681),(560,703) are the three important unifying factors. Edwin Engel points out:

After the first scene, the action occurs between dusk of one afternoon and dawn of the following day in, or on the edge of, the Great Forest. The successive scenes are synchronized with Jones’s revolver, the chamber of which contain approximately as many cartridge as there are scenes; as the gun is discharged the scene changes, approaching the point where the sixth bullet, the silver one, coincides with the complete reversion to savagery. The beating of tom-tom, like the steamer’s whistle in *Bound East for Cardiff*, also serves as an important unifying factor, symbolising as it does the pervasive and inescapable presence of the primitive. (52-53)

*The Emperor Jones* is a study of the involuntary regression of an individual’s consciousness through the stages of its own history to the racial or collective unconscious. John Gassner remarks:

And in succumbing to primal fears, ‘Emperor Jones’ re-enacts the whole drama of atavism, of humanity’s inability to abolish the ghosts of the racial past. (170)

In *The Emperor Jones*, the basic symbols are used to give a feeling of the secret workings of the unconscious of man. The forest becomes the symbol of racial unconsciousness of man. In the same way, the silver bullet becomes the source of strength to the emperor. After initial indifference in running the government, a negro, Brutus Jones, had settled down to rule the natives. Jones became one of the capitalists by amassing wealth and political power. His dress is symbolic of his distinction.

He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons,
heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long — barreled, pear handled in a hoister complete his make up. (O’Neill I: TEJ 175)

This gorgeous dress is contrasted with the dark colour of Jones on the one hand, and on the other, it suggests an unbecoming frivolousness on the part of Jones. This apparel, not being an expression of Jones’s real self got torn in stages to symbolise the gradual weakening of his control over his subjects as well as his own self. While seeking escape from the rebels after realizing his helplessness, he thought he could save his skin in the manner he had decided earlier. But once he was deprived of his power, he was helpless. That is why, the last scene of the play is realistic. Moreover, the irony is complete when Jones is shown dying of the bullet of the same silver which he had thought was his sole possession. It was a hoax played by him on the subject that he alone was the possess or of the silver bullet. The natives had moulded silver coins into a bullet and killed him with it. Silver symbolises wealth. Money is a symbol of the destruction of self by its own pride and greed. Wealth is power in Modern Age and also a source of death — though spiritual. The death of Jones is an example of the defeat of man by the same forces that exalt him, i.e. pride and greed.

In *The Emperor Jones*, O’Neill presents thick Jungle out of which Jones has no escape except through death. In Freudian psychology, tree is a sexual as well as a religious symbol. Jones throws himself at the foot of an altar to pray just near the place from where he had entered the jungle. At the altar, the rights of exorcism took place under the tree because after exorcism man experiences spiritual regeneration. The tree symbolises this birth and spiritual strength. Therefore, it was here that the evil in the form of a crocodile appeared before Jones’s eyes of imagination. The eyes of crocodile fixed on Jones demand his life. Till then, Jones was not aware of the fact that his life would be demanded by evil. Therefore, in an uncertain state of mind, he kills the crocodile, and he is once more his real self. However, in killing of the crocodile, he has killed himself. This is the climax of the play. The death of Jones by the silver bullet made by the rebels is shown on the
stage only to give a tragic touch to the character of Jones.

The *Hairy Ape* is another important expressionistic play which dramatises the conflict between the conscious lack and the unconscious fulness. The writer has artistically changed factual representation to emotional presentation. For instance, descriptive pictures are substituted by images involving or implying a simile, the presentation of shouting stokers in terms of furious beasts clearly establishes O’Neill’s mastery of dramatic art. Their resemblance with the appearance of Neanderthal man; the white steel framework of the tiers of narrow bunks gives the impression of a cage and it creates the impression of a ‘camped space… imprisoned by white steel’.

O’Neill was of the view that *The Hairy Ape* can not be categorized under any sort of ‘ism’; it rather seemed to run “the whole gamut from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism – with more the latter than the former.” (qtd. in Tiusanen 114)

The play is written in eight short and abrupt scenes, beginning in the hold of the steamer where Yank then ‘belongs’, and ending in a Zoo, where he is killed. In the opening scene of the play, the realistic setting is remarkable. The voices create an atmosphere of the stoker’s life whose concern is drinking, fighting and dreaming of women. The attention has been focussed on Yank, and the events take place in the forecastle of a trans-Atlantic liner in a cramped space. Thus, the setting is intended to create an impression – the impression of an expressionist. The stokers have been described in the same vein:

All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. All the white races are represented, but except for the slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, eyes, all these men are alike… Yank is seated in the foreground. He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself then the rest. They respect his superior strength – the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their mo...
highly developed individual. (O’Neill I: THA 207)

In *The Hairy Ape*, the dramatist employs a kind of telegraphic language so characteristic of Expressionistic drama. The rhythm of speeches, abrupt and disjointed, reinforces the impression of the formlessness and confusion of the lives of these sailors and stokers. The sordid, ugly details revealed through their speeches present them as dehumanized victim of mechanical forces. Many slang expressions and profane language add charm of their own to the play. Frederic I. Carpenter rightly observes:

> Yank speaks a dialect so ungrammatical that it sometimes becomes grotesque, while Mildred and her friends speak with the exaggerated artificiality of a Sunday supplement. (100)

In *The Hairy Ape*, the dramatist heightens the dramatic impact by means of contrasts. The class struggle is symbolized in the contrast between the elegant passengers on the deck and the workers in the bowels of the vessel. In the first scene, we have seen the squalor and degradation of these wage slaves. In the second and fifth scenes, we see the frivolousness and insanity of the lives of the rich who are their master:

> The jeweller’s window is gaudy with glittering diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls, etc. fashioned in ornates tiaras, crowns, necklaces, collars, etc. From each piece hangs an enormous tag from which a dollar sign and numerals in intermittent electric lights wink out the incredible prices. The same in the furrier’s Rich furs of all varieties hang there bathed in downpour of artificial light. The general effect is of a background of magnificence cheapened and made grotesque by commercialism, a background in tawdry disharmony with the clear light and sunshine on the street itself. (O’Neill I: THA 233)

O’Neill satirises these through an expressionistic distortion. Yank in his dirty clothes walking with Long in the Fifth Avenue does not belong to this world. He is neglected by everyone on the street.

One of the major characteristics of the expressionistic plays is that
the number of characters is cut down to a minimum. The eye of the dramatist is focused on the central figure. Other characters are given much less importance. They are put merely as background to expedite the action of the play. In *The Hairy Ape*, other stokers except Paddy and Long have not been given even names, not to talk to some role. The prisoners are nameless. Even the secretary of the I.W.W. has not been given any name. This neglect of the characters enables the dramatist to keep his attention fixed on Yank.

In *The Hairy Ape*, expressionism is seen in its disgust at modern humanity. The lower classes in it are hairy apes; the upper classes are marionettes. Both the classes are terribly dehumanized: they are completely alienated from life. The mechanical setup has led to a loss of human identity. The rich world represented by Mildred has also lost all vitality. It shows all the signs of spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy. There is nothing to choose between Yank and Mildred. The play is a condemnation of the whole structure of machine civilization. It is a disintegration of modern civilization and the conflict of their hearts. Thus *The Hairy Ape* with its varied experiments in style and theatrical setting has become expressionistic. Robert F. Whitman rightly remarks:

> The expressionistic techniques are on the whole better integrated (in this play) than in the earlier play. (150)

Another expressionistic effect is added to the play with the help of the light. It imaginatively presents the contrast between the privileged and underprivileged classes and the conflict going on in their minds. While the super race scenes are set in bright sunshine, the sub-race scenes are set in darkness. The contrast is, however, not an end in itself. It conveys symbolically that modern man, unless he is spiritually dead, cannot be at home in either mode of life. Music and songs also contribute to the imaginative appeal of the play. They serve primarily to characterize Yank and to foreshadow his future fate. Mechanical sounds are also very expressive. Fire, engines and steel here contribute to create discount, yet rhythmic, ‘music’ of the modern machine age. The engine whistle sounds are symbol of the reality behind Yank’s fancy that he is the energy that runs the ship, that he is steel, that he belongs.
The dramatist goes on exploring the expressive possibilities of his plays by employing various expressionistic devices. The dramatist is mainly concerned with the ‘inner’ rather than the ‘outer’ use of soliloquies and asides which clearly reflects the conflict between self and the conscious and the sub-conscious. In soliloquies, the hidden motives and conflicts of the inner self are given a free expression. They are used as a telling comment on the unspoken and hidden thoughts.

Masks are also frequently used to add deeper strokes on meaning to O’Neill’s plays. They are used as means of dramatizing a transfer of personality from one man to another. They also dramatize the contrast between the external, public selves, and their inner, private selves.

Most of the dramatic personas are drawn in the true expressionistic manner. They are not individual, but types and bear no specific names. Symbolism, which means the use of any part of a play – character, incident, stage, scene setting to suggest an idea not obviously visible in the surface story, has also been used as a powerful medium through which the deep surging of man’s inner life sheds for a moment its unreal mask. His plays reveal the concealed truth and the unreal reality. They give substance and form to the drama. All the major plays of O’Neill are designed to be symbolically interpreted in several different ways. S. K. Winther has a point when he observes:

An important aspect of O’Neill’s technique is his conscious and studied use of symbolism.... It is done with care and designed to extend the limited boundary of straightforward realism. (253)

The use of symbols with O’Neill was not a matter of literary fashion but a pressing necessity to highlight the duality of self, the inner and the outer one. He evolved his own figurative and symbolic language to present his deep and complex ideas effectively and artistically. Thus all his characters, situations, incidents, stage directions and scenic settings have a far deeper meaning than what is obvious on the surface.

There are multiple symbols in *The Hairy Ape* which aptly highlight the complete break-up between truth and bad faith. In the first place, it
brings symbolically before us Man in relation to Nature. O'Neill has himself explained this symbolic meaning of the play.

*The Hairy Ape* is a symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way ... Yank can’t go forward, and so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But the gorilla kills him. The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject of drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong. (qtd. in Sheaffer 74)

The play is unfolded through four major characters – Yank, Paddy, Long and Mildred. Paddy, with his lyrical evocation of the days that are no more, is a symbol of the past, and Long, with his dreams of a better social order, represents future. Yank, who symbolises present, condemns Paddy for his dreams of the past, and fails to agree with Long that social reform is an answer to man’s tragedy. Mildred represents the material possessions of the present which have resulted in man’s loss of vitality. Both Yank and Mildred are symbolic of dehumanized modern man – Yank through his slavery to machine and Mildred through her slavery to material wealth.

Yank is a composite symbol of American individualism, the philosophy of progress through Industrial Revolution, and of rootless individual in search of a world to belong to. What happens to Yank in the play is happening to millions of men in the modern machine age. He is a typical of the isolated and alienated proletariat at in the industrialised civilization. Yank, being proud of his strength, becomes the symbol of the pride of the modern man who feeds himself on the belief that he has made much advancement in science and technology and culture and civilization. His identifying himself with speed, steam, smoke, express trains, factory whistles etc., symbolises modern man’s belief in the rapid growth and development of the material bases of life. He says:
I’m smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I’m de ting in gold dat makes it money and I’m what makes iron into steel! (O’Neill I: THA 216)

His getting infuriated, and deciding to kill Mildred when Paddy tells him that Mildred called him hairy ape, a filthy beast, symbolises his disenchantment with his false image of life. He gets infuriated as Mildred devo ids him of his identity. His unconscious identification of himself with power is robed of, and to get it back, he decides to kill Mildred. The end of Yank is terrible, a frightful symbol of the decay and disintegration of spiritual values in a mechanized, materialised age. O’Neill himself says:

The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. (qtd. in Falk 34)

In The Hairy Ape, the ship’s low ceiling forecastle and stokehole are suggestive of a prison. In the very first scene, the description of the stokehole is given to communicate an impression of cramped space:

The ceiling crushes down upon the men’s heads. They can not stand upright. This accentuates the natural stooping posture which shovelling coal and the resultant over-development of back and shoulder muscles have given them. The men should resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at. All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. All the civilized white races are represented. (O’Neill I: THA 207)

As a contrast designed to deepen the effect of the prison, there are scenes of sunshine and fresh-air on the upper deck of the sea. The title of the play is avowedly symbolic. O’Neill himself gave it the sub-title, ‘A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life’. The ancient life is represented by the gorilla, the biological ancestor of man, and Yank represents modern life. He is the modern hairy ape. There is regression instead of progression. Yank psychologically retraces the stages of man’s evolution till he sees himself as
a hairy ape. Thus there is a union of the ancient and modern hairy apes, and this union is comedy or a pungent irony. Clifford Leach says:

Thus, then, is offered as a modern tragedy correlative with the ancient presentation of man at odds with a supernaturally controlled destiny; yet is it more truly a comedy, as the subtitle claims... In an interview O’Neill gave in 1922 he made it plain that he was not agitating for better conditions for sailors: ‘Yank is yourself and myself’.

*The Hairy Ape* also represents life’s endless struggle and conflict. This has been artistically brought out through Yank’s endless struggle and his inner conflict resulting into his final death. In this tragedy, the dramatist highlights the threefold struggle of man—the conflict between man and man, between man and hostile society, and between conscious and unconscious or what we can say bad faith or fate. O’Neill believes that lack of faith in some higher, supreme power is the cause of the tragedy of the modern man. His soul is sick on account of too much of materialism, and he suffers from inner emptiness on account of his lack of faith. The dramatist tries to probe into the secret of man’s personality, to find out the hidden ugliness and conflict which are masked under a bright covering. He wants to show man in his nakedness as he really is—mean, ugly and selfish—man engaged in a heroic struggle of self expression against all types of inhibitions. This man is Yank, and Yank is everyman. There is a hairy ape in everyman, and everyman like Yank challenges the world, struggle to the last, and dies.

In *All Gods Chillun Got Wings*, Jim Harris is a symbolic embodiment of the ‘black’, or the darker side of man’s nature, which conflicts with the ‘white’ or socially accepted side. Ella’s feeling of subconscious hatred for him is justified psychologically by his own masochistic self-abasement before her. He desires only “to become your slave that adores you as sacred.” (O’Neill II: ACG 318) She becomes the embodiment of the subconscious racism of American values. Mask also serves as a powerful symbol for Ella. It becomes an embodiment of all the blackness she hates. To her, the Congo mask is a symbol of all she wants to negate.
The Congo mask has come to symbolize for her the social barrier between her and Jim.
The difference between the Black and the White is represented by stage setting and use of songs.

In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black…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 Have to Telegraph My Baby.’ (301)

Desire Under the Elms opens with the description of two enormous elms:

They bend their trailing branches down over the roof…their tears trickle down monotonously and rot on the shingles.

(O’Neill III: DUTE 202)

While these two elms appear to represent the characteristic qualities of that household, they are particularly two brooding symbols of violated material spirit which works its vengeance through Eben and Abbie. The farm and the farmhouse symbolize emotional and material security and stability in their lives, and thus, all desire to possess it. Old Cabot has worked hard so that the farm may prosper, and he may acquire security and prestige as its possessor, Eben desired it to avenge his mother. The farm also symbolises the life—denying sterility of the Puritan ideals, for it warps and twists the lives of those who are slaves to it.

In The Great God Brown, Eugene O’Neill experiments with the use of masks to show the doubts of man’s being which results from suppression of his natural instincts. He uses expressionistic technique to lay bare the soul of his protagonists. The two central characters, Dion Anthony and William Brown, are seen with and without masks, indicating alteration between the conscious and the unconscious or the subconscious, between the ego and the id, between the external social self and the hidden, inner true self. Man’s psychological need to wear another person’s mask, to become what he is not, results in a tragic suspension between opposites. “The ultimate effect of O’Neill’s use of mask is to portray inner action and penetrate the depths of
his characters’ personalities. This is accomplished by the visible relationship between the mask and the real face behind it. The mask represents not only what the world sees but what the character wants them to see—an attitude towards the world expressed in the mask. The real face expresses the true inner state of the character, which is covered by the mask.” (Tedesco 115) The ultimate conflict in Dion’s psychological make-up is reflected in his name. Dion is Dionysus, the mythical God associated with intoxication and ecstatic frenzy, representing primal forces of the subconscious mind. Anthony is St. Anthony representing rational, conscious control over basic human derives.

In *Lazarus Laughed*, the most significant expressionistic characteristics are typification, struggle of opposites and lyricism. The play is a vast symbolic pageant, tracing the progress of Lazarus as he preaches and advises the Jews, the Greeks, and finally, the Romans. There different type of chorus wear masks double the size of the crowd members; secondary characters have half-masks. Lazarus is the only unmasked character. And the symbols of mankind of all ages and sexes are masked.

*Lazarus Laughed* requires more than two hundred and fifty different masks, and almost every scene follows an identical pattern—that of Lazarus disarming his powerful opponents by his laughter. O'Neill makes an explicit remark on the use of masks in this play:

All of these people are masked in accordance with the following schemes. There are seven periods of life shown: 
Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (for Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood), Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The simple Ignorant, the Happy, Eager, the Self Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, cruel; the sorrowful, Resigned. Thus in each crowd (this includes among the men the seven Guests who are composed of one male of each period—type as period one—type one, period two—type two, and so on up to
period seven – type seven) there are forty nine different combinations of period and type. Each type has a distinct predominant color of its costumes which varies in kind according to its period. The masks of the Chorus of Old Men and double the size of the others. They are all seven in the sorrowful, resigned type of Old Age. (O’Neill III: LL 273-74)

Explaining the purpose of mask in Lazarus Laughed O’Neill told Barrett H. Clark:

It’s in seven scenes, and all the characters wear masks. And here I’ve used them right. In ‘Brown’ I couldn’t know beforehand how the scheme would work out. They were too realistic there, and sitting way back in the theatre you could not be sure if the actors had masks or not. I should have had them twice at large – and conventionalized them so the audience could get the idea at once. In ‘Lazarus’ I believe I’ve managed the problem of big crowds better than crowds are usually worked in plays. It’s never quite right. My Jews all wear masks, and it’s the same with Greeks and Romans. I think I’ve suggested the presence and characteristic of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers. I also have a chorus of seven, who chant together, emphasising and pointing the action throughout. (116)

In Dynamo, O’Neill is primarily concerned with the ‘inner’ rather than the ‘Outer’ world of the minds of the characters. He has used ‘spoken-thoughts’ – an important anti-realistic device – to add to the concentration and expressiveness of the play. The tendency of the characters is to avoid direct confrontation when they get engaged in a dialogue, and are asked direct and personal questions. They always prefer to reflect on them more seriously and silently in their minds. Most of the information is not directly communicated, but is made available to the audience when the characters are lost in ‘dope dreaming’ or ‘Mooning’. The characters are often given to dreaming sentimentally of the past, and they can easily move from the
present to the past times. Time as a barrier is fully annihilated, and thus, the ages have been interlinked with each other.

In *Dynamo*, O’Neill has made use of many powerful expressionistic symbols to enhance its imaginative appeal and also to add to its expressiveness. Dynamo is not a lifeless object. It is always signing everything in the world. It is the mother of life; it is the “hymn of eternal generation, the song of eternal life.” (O’Neill I: DY 482) Thunder and lightning stand for primitive fear and it “still hang on in the most sophisticated modern minds.” (Raleigh 13) The chief sound effects are the murmuring of the flow of water over a dam and the hum of the Dynamo.

O’Neill tells the stage designer Lee Simonson in ‘A Memo from O’Neill on the sound effects for Dynamo’:

> It must be realised that these are not incidental noises but significant dramatic overtones that are integral part of that composition in the theatre which is the whole play. (454)

Multiple settings also play a very important symbolic function. The first two acts are laid successively in each of four rooms of the adjacent homes of the religious Lights and the atheistic Fifes. Light’s house bears an old look, and it is a symbol of glorious past. “The Light sitting room and Reuben’s bedroom are revealed. Both are sparsely furnished with the bare necessities.” (O’Neill I: DY 421) Fife’s house bears a new look, and is a product of the modern times: “The Fife house, a small brownish-tinted modern stucco bungalow type, recently built, is at left.” (419) Tiusanen observes:

> It relies fairly heavily on the expressiveness of two settings, one consisting of two dwelling houses with removable walls, the other depicting a Hydro-Electric Power Plant, similarly covered, sometimes partly revealed. (166)

Expressionism also makes it possible for O’Neill to introduce his revolutionary idea of religion of electricity. In a much quoted and important latter to George Jean Nathan, O’Neill outlined his intention in writing Dynamo:
(The Play) is a symbolical and factual biography of what is happening in a large section of the American (and not only American) soul right now. It is really the first play of a trilogy that will dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it... the death of the old God and failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. (qtd. in Falk 128)

The most dominant symbols used in *Mourning Becomes Electra* are those of the house of Mannons and the Isles. These symbols not only form the backbone of the setting but also play the role of a character. The notes to *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) indicate how the mind of O’Neill was first attracted to the problem of giving a broad and universal significance to his theme, as problem he always solves by symbolic representation. The House of Mannons functions as a visual participant in the play. It is described as “a large building... from the ground to the portico.” (O’Neill II: MBE 5) In act one of ‘Homecoming’, the contrast between the portico and the house is further emphasised:

The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its sombre gray ugliness. (5)

The white portico is the symbol of the mask worn by all Mannon, while the house itself becomes a witness to the seething Puritanical inhibitions, to the dark deeds of murder, adultery and incest. The house has been made to portray the symbol of the fate of Mannons. This is the place where life is treated like an outsider. The Mannons are both attracted and repelled by life, but they are inevitably drawn back to the house by its fatal fascination. Commenting on the symbolic significance of the house, Tiusanen writes:

...psychoanalysts might call it to a symbol of the cadaver, or, in this particular context, of mother’s womb. Above all, it is an artistic symbol with multiple layers of meaning. (147)

In this play the islands have been used as symbols of hope of a new life. They represent a paradise. Evil does not exist on the islands; there are
no laws, there can be no consciousness of guilt; there is no conflict between desire and control, between the good of the individual and the good of society. Lavinia walked in the moonlight, and everything was simple and natural:

I loved those islands. They finished setting me free. There was something there mysterious and beautiful — a good spirit — of love — coming out of the land and sea. It made me forget death.

(O’Neill II: MBE 147)

Adam Brant, Orin and Lavinia — all long for peace, freedom and innocence of the islands. To Adam Brant the memory of the island means, “The warm earth in the moonlight, the trade winds rustling the coco palms, the surf on the barrier reef signaling a croon in your ears like a lullaby! Aye! There’s peace, and forgetfulness for us there — if we can ever find those islands now!” (112) For Orin in the island come to mean everything that wasn’t war, everything that was peace and warrant and security” (90), and to Lavinia the islands are a symbol of life, love and freedom. The titles of the three parts of the trilogy are symbolic. Ezra Mannon’s search for his ‘belonging’ in his own home is symbolised by ‘Homecoming’. ‘The Haunted’ points out man’s condition in a society of perverted values, and ‘The Hunted’ is symbolic of man’s relation with the past. This remembrance of the past makes him repent for the wrongs he has done to others and to himself. O’Neill himself says:

Title — *Mourning Becomes Electra* — that is, in the old sense of the world — it befits — it becomes Electra to mourn — it is her fate also, in usual sense — mourning (Black) is becoming to her — it is the only colour that becomes her destiny. (Frenz 12)

The real success of O’Neill lies in the use of complex symbols, having richer tenure, greater density and more comprehensive range. For example, the symbols of ‘sea’, ‘fog’ and ‘home’ are more central and complex than anything else. They are not more surface symbols confined for their effect to a single play; their extent covers the whole range of O’Neill’s drama.
The ‘fog’ has always been something mystifying and supernatural. It symbolises the inner nature of the characters. In *Fog*, the businessman treats it as no more than a threat to life as he cannot see beyond the surface reality. The poet, on his part, correlates it with a meaning in life. The symbol of fog may have originated from O’Neill’s personal life history. With Eugene’s birth, his mother’s habit of taking morphine begins. Morphine and fog, in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, are identical, one for the other.

*Long Day’s Journey into Night* is also known for its expressionistic economy. It is unique for its sheer power and concentration. O’Neill has telescoped the events of months into a single day. It is a four-hour play with such inner concentration that is seldom conscious of time. One reason for this is its style. The past has permeated the consciousness of the character and the speech reflects this consciousness faithfully. The world outside is real enough to heighten the pain of Tyrone family with door; otherwise it has no function in the action. There is no plot, no story, no anecdote. We concentrate on the four members of Tyrone family.

*Long Day’s Journey into Night* is highly subjective – a leading feature of the Expressionistic drama. It is an honest and moving play. Clearly much of its emotion is due to the intimate biographical material it explores, and to O’Neill’s courage in facing the deep pain of such an exploration. It concerns the attempts of O’Neill’s own family, here called the Tyrone, to live together. Based on the dramatist’s early life, it describes the emotional difficulties of the author (Edmund), his brother (James Tyrone, Jr.), his mother (Mary), and his father (Tyrone, Sr.). The Tyrones in their cheerless home near New London, Conn. are unmistakable the O’Neill’s, stripped naked to the soul. Never before has a playwright laid bare the skeleton of his past with such deadly details. The family first names are taken strictly from life except for those of Eugene and his mother. James Tyrone is wealthy, retired matinee idol from whose pendency and blinding vanity stem the individual disasters of his family. His wife, Mary, has become a hopeless morphine addict who long ago has lost her faith in her religion and her hope. Edmund (the Youth Eugene O’Neill) has returned from the sea
with tuberculosis and only as a faint faith in his ability as a poet. Brother James is alcoholic. The play is less an orthodox play than a wilful act of autobiographical catharsis in which the playwright shudders the ghosts of the past from his shoulders, and comes to peace with herself and his family. The results artistically speaking are a solid, unadorned and arresting piece of realism.

The foghorn is the most important expressionistic symbol in Long Day’s Journey into Night. The sustained use of fog to objectify the progress of escapism in the characters is one example of O’Neill’s control of setting to intensify major theme. Prof. Egil Tornqvist observes:

It is more effective in creating an intense mood of portentous foreboding but less effective in its inability to indicate the nature of this foreboding. (162)

The sound of foghorn produces mixed feelings in the minds of the characters. Mary fails to distinguish between it and Jamie’s snoring and she always is completely upset in the midst of these ominous sounds. She is even afraid of losing her freedom. The sound expresses Mary’s acute sense of guilt, containing her not to shirk her responsibility, calling her back to life. To Cathleen, the sound of the foghorn is a symbol of health and sanity.

Even the very title to the play is symbolic. It is a different journey for each of its characters. For the mother, it is a sad journey into the night of cynicism and despair. For the father, it is a tragic journey down the wrong road, away from an earlier triumph. But for Edmund, it is, prophetically a journey beyond night. And dramatically the story of these conflicting characters and of their contrasting journey is the essence of the play.

The characters are types in Long Day’s Journey Into Night. The father embodies all the qualities of petty dictator characteristic of all O’Neill’s father, but he remains more human and more understandable. Mary Tyrone embodies the qualities of unworldly innocence typical both of American womanhood of the nineteenth century, and of all Christian Mariolatry as well – as her name suggests Jamie Tyrone re-incarnates the Mephistopheles of Dion Anthony, but without the artificiality of the mask.
A vague terror underlies the most obviously expressionistic surface of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. A sense of doom pervades the action; symbols emerge; the fog that enshrouds the action; the lust for land, for rootedness, of the father; the mother’s nostalgic return to her wedding gown; the consumption eating up Edmund. But the sadness and frustration that envelops the characters are to be considered as stepping stones to reality, not as indications of man’s doom. The characters face their dilemma and determine to go on trying to understand themselves. O’Neill expresses, in the play, his understanding of man’s position in relation to his creator.

O’Neill’s rejection of the tradition and the experiments with drama in subject-matter and technique gave new direction to the American drama. His portrayal of new themes and delineation of new ideas, and individualism, his preoccupation with spiritual values, and his concern with the tragic vision have enriched his plays. John Gassner has rightly evaluated his dramatic traits,

Combined with a deeply felt (if also fashionably Bohemian) rejection of Victorian gentility, Puritanical prissiness, dollary-idolatry, and the entire cult of go-getting opportunism.

O’Neill’s lofty individualism placed him in the forefront of those who began to modernise the content of American drama no less than its form. His response to the vogue of depth psychology led him to modernise further both dramatic form and content by attempting to manifest subconscious tensions.

In order to probe the abysmal depths of the human psyche, O’Neill finds the existing mechanical devices highly unsatisfactory. He has devised his own radical methods. The inner struggle of modern man, and the tragic intensity cannot be depicted in the traditional manner. He evolves his methods, and they are characteristic of his genius. His achievement is outstanding, and he introduces a sense of modernism and novelty in his plays.

Expressionism thus is a technique of expressing that inexpressible, i.e. the unconscious in which the conscious lie inextricably mixed up, and
the purpose of which is to extricate the conscious from the unconscious, or to come out of bad faith. O’Neill made it possible not only by technical devices such as his stage direction, elaborate at that, but also by placing at the centre of his plays the notion of the unconscious will which is the ground and only true cause of everything that come to be. Every act of the will, however, is blind striving in the every act of willing or purpose in the proverbial sense: where there is will there is a way. The future state is contained in the present existing state and since it cannot be than actually, it must be there ideally. But the process of unfolding the latter is very painful.

It is because willing is involved in elaborately cultivated illusions in O’Neill. All his characters are pipe-dreamers. Robert in Beyond the Horizon is a pipe dreamer. He wishes to go to sea, beyond even the horizon. The protagonist of The Emperor Jones is as incorrigible a dreamer as Yank of The Hairy Ape. O’Neill calls them life-lies, for what one would call the lies of the bums of The Iceman Cometh which are at one aware of realities of their existence. Sartre would call their illusions/lies as expression of bad faith.

However, O’Neill finds that there is an immanent purpose in their dreams. Everything in nature and history is the working of this unconscious purpose. The dramatist only watches over how this purpose expresses itself. It is not Darwinian, for O’Neill seems to have no faith in mechanistic explanation of the world coming into being. On the other hand he finds teleological behaviour in nature. Hickey in The Iceman Cometh is probably the clearest evidence of this behaviour, that after living a life of lie that his wife ran away with an iceman that long, making even a fun of it, he realizes that he cannot suffer it any longer. O’Neill uses a variety of devices to betray the struggle in the hearts of the other inmates of Harry’s house, but fail to free themselves from the grip of the unconscious. O’Neill thus introduces us to depth psychology, and makes it possible for the audience to see through the working out the conscious purpose but relapsing in the limbo of the unconscious. All devices of expressionism including symbolism are used to suggest that mankind as a whole is a long way from being able to make use of consciousness. O’Neill looks at this phenomenon comically.
The subtitle of *The Hairy Ape* is an indication to this effect. Man still clings to the false hope of finding fulfilment of his desires, primarily of belonging, which leads him to perpetrate in evil. O’Neill’s pessimism is theoretically and not just a bewailing of a romantic, an expression of frustrated hedonism. Fortunately he still retains the hope that in the philosophical maturity, mankind will cast off illusions and rest in peace, having grown conscious that desires are merely part of the unconscious primal urge.
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