

Alienation and the Dilemma of Man in Eugene O'Neill's

The Hairy Ape

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Abstract

Eugene O' Neill, an American playwright was born into a troubled and an upset family on October 16, 1888. Eugene O' Neill had a quite precarious, wobbly and uneven adolescence as his elder brother was an affirmed alcoholic whereas his mom was a drug addict. This research paper analyzes the alienation, dilemma and the futile struggle of man in the quest of his identity. O'Neill followed the course of a superior and advanced writer looking for a profound focus in the entirety of his significant works. His perspective on humankind in his dramatizations is basically sad and heartbreaking. The author needed to cause man to feel free from all worries and inhale outside fresh air and build up a feeling of having a place in the general public in which he lived. However, it was impractical.

Keywords: - Alienation, Existential Dilemma, Sufferings, Identity

The Hairy Ape (1922) is a work of pure dread of life. At whatever point man attempts to return to the wilderness he experiences demise and realize that this life is meaningless and all our actions are repetitive and futile. *The Hairy Ape* is about disintegration and the breaking down of man looking for some belongingness in life. In the contemporary world, man is not battling with the divine beings but with his own-self. Virginia Floyd observes 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 men must try to retain his humanity to give order and meaning to existence. (Floyd)

The present world of ours demand approval and confirmed adjustments otherwise we'll be dismissed and rejected by it. In a sense, we are indirectly forced to accept the norms in the so called free world of ours, which is the actual dilemma that leads to the poor predicament of man. So, enclosed within this pathetic notion, man keep trying to belong to himself. Misery of life drives man to accept the notion that there is no rescue for him anywhere in the world.

O' Neill wrote number of successful plays in his writing career and had won esteemed honor in his own nation as well as internationally. He also received Nobel Prize for writing at the age of 49 years. O' Neill went through the feeling of instability and trauma during the early stages of his life and so he mostly presents stumbling, hesitant and faltering characters in his dramatizations. May be, he was suffering from Claustrophobia and was in the habit of changing houses because he was unable to adjust himself to all those undersized houses. He suffered even more during the last years of his life and turned out to be progressively confined due to his physical suffering. He had gotten his education and instruction from various private institutions while touring the United States of America along with his parents.

Yank (real name Bob Smith), the protagonist of the play was having a very optimistic notion about himself and was much comfortable with his present before his mental self portrait was mercilessly obliterated. As respects the breaking down current culture of society we need to establish certain attitudes and perspectives towards it. But contrary to this, Yank's sense of belongingness and sentimental attitude was incorrect in this direction. Every man would like to genuinely have a place with, is himself. Being mentally strong, he never

bothered about anyone and was least careful about what other thinks about him. He has a huge confidence and devotion to his obligations in real life. But even then he suffered immensely and thus we can say that he squandered his entire life in his futile struggle to belong and to have a place.

O'Neill says that man must keep on working hard to build up his explanation and meaning of life until he dies in his attempts because man is the solitary creature for whom his own existence and reality is a sort of issue which he needs to tackle grimly and from which he can't get away smoothly. The arrangement of the issue of existence in death has been brought out very finely in the play *The Hairy Ape*. Eugene O'Neill said in a letter published in New York Herald Tribune that:

The Hairy Ape was... a symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not been acquired in a spiritual way. Thus not being able to find it on earth or in heaven, he's in the middle trying to make peace. (Falk 34)

Dismissed by the sparkling world and the great shock on being called a filthy and a messy beast, Yank was left completely broken. He showed complete disdain against the existing social system that he finds totally corrupt and unfair. And thus turned against the capitalistic class of the society. Human existence is by all accounts having no inborn and fundamental sense. It is the man only who gives meaning to it. The quest for belongingness isn't just an individual, but a universal issue. Modern man has lost confidence in himself and is turning into a machine. At last, his pursuit takes him to the zoo where he attempts to build up correspondence with a gorilla.

Mildred Douglas, is a young lady, beautiful, thin and soft. But she was swollen with pride and bears a reluctant appearance of contemptuous predominance. She shows up in the fore-castle when Yank was working and throwing coal into the furnace. Upon looking at

Douglas, Yank was stunned and amazed. He wears a lethal growling look, his eyes were sparkling fiercely and his lips moved back over his teeth. Mildred Douglas was equally shocked to see his shaggy, unshaved chest and his face which was no less than a gorilla. In order to get rid of the horrible sight, she puts both her hands up before her face and call Yank a messy and filthy beast. Yank was frightfully alarmed after seeing her reaction and lost his self-control. He hurls his shovel after them at the door. He felt himself weak, broken, insulted and was hurt at the very heart of his pride and soul. The feeling of weakness and estrangement made breaks and questions in the psyche of Yank about his having a place with the steel world. This incident created a sense of uncertainty and alienation in the life of Yank who now onwards is an upset soul among the individuals who don't get him, nor does he get them. His inner self was hurt, the moment he was called as "a filthy beast". Yank now starts to act like a real monster and beast in the actual life. He was having no body to talk to and express his emotions and inner trauma from which he was going through.

Listen to me! Sure I'm part of de engines! Why de hell not! Dey move, don't dey? Dey're speed, ain't dey! Dey smash trou, don't dey? Twenty-five knots a hour! Dat's goin' some! Dat's new stuff! Dat belongs...I'm young! I'm in de pink! I move wit it! It, get me! I mean de ting dat's de guts of all is. It ploughs trou all de tripe he's been sayin'. It blows dat up! It knocks dat dead! It slams dat offen de face de oith! It, get me! De engines and de coal and de smoke and all de rest of it! (O'Neill, 1998, 1, p.128)

He found himself alone in the cruel world and was fighting for his real image in the society and says that, "Christ where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 254). But all the powers which offer a sort of protection in return for submission and complete obedience have been made by man himself. He is likewise the forlorn carrier of a frightening obligation regarding himself and the race. He has nothing to hold responsible for

his failure and disappointments and no one to take care, except himself. After this occurrence, Yank no longer feels that he has a place and he “belongs”, and completely neglects to understand the significance of presence. Completely embarrassed, he can't just think about anything else except Mildred's picture of himself as a beast. Margaret Loftus observes that:

It is Yank's demoralization confrontation with the bored, bread out young society women, Mildred that destroys him psychologically, leading him to question both himself and Society. (62-63)

During lifetime, man never comes out of his dilemmas and in fact lives with it with no understanding of the importance of his life as an individual. The hairy chest, hard muscular body and the strong strength which caused him to feel unrivaled previously presently just recognizes him with animals like gorilla. Yank's body has become the only solitary image of self and comprises a jail. A man should work upon and make his own qualities of centrality. To look for refuge from this duty regarding his own fate is to run away from oneself.

Yank can't be substance to have a place, so he tries to get away from the jail. But he fails every time and every exertion on his part to flee just makes him more mindful of the strength of the boundary. Gradually Yank became so fixated and fanatical about Mildred's remarks that he acknowledges his demise, peacefully. Finally he found his quest for life as completely futile. The voices incites his psyche that he was sitting in the prison like a monster/beast in the zoo. At the end Yank realizes that he himself is his cage and the issue isn't in the general public nor in Mildred, but in himself and his notions. Yank needs to come out of his invisible internal barriers but he surrendered to his lone self created portrait of Hairy Ape. The deficiency of self confidence and image results in the sad demise of Yank, at the end of the play *The Hairy Ape*. Yank at last dies with the desire for a superior and better social system and says:

He got me, aw right. I'm trou, Even him didn't tink I belonged...Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in? Aw, what de hell! No squakin', see! No quittin', get me! Croak wit your boots on! ... In da cage, huh? ...Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only –*(his voice weakening)* – one and original – Hairy Ape from de wilds of – *(He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs)*. (O'Neill, 1988, 8, p.163)

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