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Eugene O'Neill and The Hairy Ape: a Study in Background and Production

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The following is an in-depth study of Eugene O'Neill: his life, his philosophy and his work as a dramatist. It tells of his early life, the various influences upon his thought and work, and his perception of man's place in society. A society from which O'Neill felt inexorably isolated.

Although the paper deals with the complete body of O'Neill's work, particular attention is given to *The Hairy Ape* and my interpretation of that work. An interpretation reached through a study of O'Neill's life and work, and through my own direction of *The Hairy Ape* which culminated in performances in February of 1985.
The theatre to me is life—the substance and interpretation of life.

Eugene O'Neill
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Eugene O'Neill is a revolutionary of the American theatre. His dramas, unlike any before his time, invaded the melodrama-soaked consciousness of the American audiences of 1920 and forced them to revalue the theatre experience of their times. As O'Neill was a unique dramatist, he pulled subject and sources from personal experience as well as from the society and theatrical conventions which surrounded him. What was particularly interesting about his approach to theatre was the way in which he allowed it to become his interpretation of life. Each of his plays, beginning with Bound East for Cardiff, and ending with the chilling autobiographical tragedy, Long Day's Journey Into Night, dramatizes a facet of his existence. Coupled with this fact is that O'Neill offers to American audiences each work as a unique gift to their selves, to be analyzed, discussed, pondered, and eventually absorbed and understood.

O'Neill's message is generally, with a few exceptions (Ah Wilderness!), pessimistic. O'Neill saw life through the eyes of a man who felt that an understanding of the self linked an individual to the meaninglessness of existence. Human beings have no real sense of belonging in a world without purpose or significance. Life to
O'Neill consisted largely of the struggle of the self with itself. The motion and the spirit which animate all thinking things is the search for identity. It is a universal collective problem of mankind.

_Hairy Ape_ embodies this struggle. The play centers on one character, Yank, who is the symbol of the American victimized by a perverted democratic system. Yank believes he is a leader—the super-stoker, "de start"—of the universe. His illusion is quickly destroyed by the appearance and subsequent verbal insult of Mildred Pierce. Mildred represents the aristocracy—the upper class; she is equally as dissociated with the reality of her existence as she claims Yank is. Yet her adoption of the typical artificial facade of her class allows her to be indifferent to this fact. What is ironic is that her inability to belong is as strikingly obvious as Yank's. There is clearly no true spiritual difference between social classes of human beings.

Yank, however, is totally destroyed by Mildred's insulting epithet. He has never before conceived of himself as a "filthy beast," and he has not imagined that another person's perception of his self would be so contrary to his own.

Therefore, Yank is obsessed with the idea of revenge against his tormentor. The rest of the play deals with
Yank's two-fold quest: revenge against Mildred Pierce, and a search for his identity. The dichotomy of his search, all too clear in the Fifth Avenue scene, eventually gives value only to Yank's search for his identity, as he begins to comprehend that the hypocrisy predominating in Mildred Pierce, aristocrat, includes all of American society.

When Yank finally confronts his nemesis—the ape—in the final scene of the play, O'Neill has opened him up to a degree of sensitivity seldom achieved by Americans.

It is at this point that O'Neill's unconscious radiates through the drama and the words, and exposes a message amply qualified for analysis. Yank, in the gorilla cage, screams to the sky, after he has been crushed by the ape: "Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?"

This moment of agonized sensibility echoes the feelings of many Americans, including O'Neill, during the first decades of the twentieth-century. O'Neill urged American individuals to become introspective and search for a possible meaning to their existence in an increasingly meaningless world. The answer, O'Neill seems to promise, will not ignite the soul with wonderment and joy. Rather, what will be discovered is the futility of life and its absolute meaninglessness. Yank dies at the end of the play. With his death, his suffering is over; he finally belongs. Yet, for the audience, the citizens of the United States,
the agony is just beginning. O'Neill hoped that Yank's death would provoke a confrontation with the mechanized, depersonalized, one-dimensional, valueless society of twentieth-century America. He did not really believe Americans could change, however. He did, nevertheless, hope that his message would open the minds of Americans to an introduction to the never-before-encountered reality of their lives.

O'Neill's revolutionary tendencies extended themselves into his role as social critic. In his personal life, he associated with those radicals and bohemians who disagreed with, and were discontented with, the "progressive" politics of the country. O'Neill saw this "improvement" as a sham. He perceived American mass culture to be contrary to the democratic principle of the country. Furthermore, he found the atmosphere of contemporary America to be inimical to individual expression. His drama fervently mirrored this opinion. It was unlike any American theatre seen by Americans in any century. O'Neill did not want to cater to the comfortable definition associated with the American theatre of his time. His drama would be different. O'Neill created discomforting messages and modes of presenting these themes which exposed the audience and its surroundings as artificial and potentially void of all individual characteristics.
Eugene O'Neill was obsessed with the idea of belonging. It stemmed from his own personal experiences and encompassed his reactions to the American theatre and society of his time. O'Neill was deeply committed to trying to sort through the conflicting emotions and beliefs which resided in his mind. He could never quite reconcile himself to his existence nor to his identity. In a way, O'Neill's emotional and spiritual confrontations are a blessing for the American public. These personal crises generated revolutionary plays which mark the birth of a "new" American theatre in the twentieth century.

My goal in this paper is to account for one of those contributions, O'Neill's expressionistic play, The Hairy Ape. The analysis includes an investigation of O'Neill's personal life: his wavering faith; his alcoholic binges as a mode of escape from his unconscious feelings; his relationship to his family; his love of the sea; his own belief that he did not belong. Coupled with this investigation are two shorter sections which involve an exploration into the theatre of O'Neill's time; the Provincetown Players and David Belasco, as well as the expressionist influences of such playwrights as Augustus Strindberg, Ernst Toller, and George Kaiser. And the third chapter which traces the first two decades of American society in the twentieth-century, conjoining actual events with the
themes in the plays as interpreted through the mind of O'Neill. The fourth and final section of my paper is my personal interpretation of *The Hairy Ape*.

It is my belief that *The Hairy Ape* transcends the ages of American theatre. Its theme of self-identity is one with which Americans in the 1980s are just as concerned with as they were in the 1920s. Eugene O'Neill had the vision to foresee this fact. His contribution to the American theatre, however, goes way beyond this single transcendent work. He shares his plights, agonies, fears and answers with all of America, and subsequently makes all Americans do the same for themselves.
CHAPTER 1

Eugene O'Neill's Personal Background (1888-1916)
On October 16, 1888, there was born to the American theatre a revolutionary. This man would pave the way for a drama which would probe into the deeper inner motives of man's behavior. Through his plays, some Americans would discover the complexities of their inner and outer existence. That which Americans had lost, their obsessions with their unfulfilled desires, and the fear resulting from their inability to connect with their true identities would be key themes in the drama of Eugene O'Neill. What is important to understand is that these themes are the products of O'Neill's personal psyche. His need to belong, his urge to love, and his fear of losing faith in his own purpose are represented and embodied in his drama. It would be thirty years before Eugene Gladstone O'Neill penetrated American theatre circles, but his indelible mark began at birth.

Eugene O'Neill was born on Broadway and Forty-Third Street at the Barrett House in New York. His ironically situated birthplace is representative of that which was to come. O'Neill was almost literally born in the theatre. His father, James O'Neill, was an enormously popular "classical" actor who frequently toured throughout the United States with his family in tow. Ella Quinlan O'Neill, Eugene's mother, on the other hand, suffered from their constant travels. She was a frail, devoutly
Catholic woman who developed a dependency upon morphine immediately following Eugene’s birth. It is suggested in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, O’Neill’s autobiographical play, that Ella’s addiction resulted from her husband’s miserliness. At Eugene’s birth, James had engaged the services of a quack doctor who alleviated Ella’s birth pains with morphine. Subsequently, Eugene always blamed himself for his mother’s morphine addiction. Indirectly, he knew he was the reason for her pain.

This conviction became important in O’Neill’s creative life. The fact that it occurs at the beginning indicates that blame, guilt, and misappropriated responsibility were cornerstones of his view of human life. O’Neill felt that he should not have been born, that he did not belong. The character of Edmund in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, representative of O’Neill himself, tells us: "As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death." ¹ This sentiment, although expressed in Edmund’s adult years, is a reflection of an unconscious feeling which began at O’Neill’s birth. It demonstrates O’Neill’s suffering and alienation from his family and

himself.

His own sense of self-worthlessness is repeated over and over in many of the characters of his plays. Yank Smith in the final scene of *The Hairy Ape* questions the reasons for his birth and searches desperately for a justification for his existence. "Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?"2 Such anguish is expressed by O'Neill throughout a great part of his life. He lamented having been born, and he was convinced that his inability to belong somehow stemmed from the conviction that it was his birth that had made his mother into a narcotics addict. This guilt prompted an alienation and loneliness which O'Neill could never fully overcome.

O'Neill's sense of alienation increased as he grew older. He had no secure emotional environment to rely on and fall back on. His brother Jamie, ten years his senior, was constantly away at boarding school. His mother's addiction allowed her to be quietly detached from her young son, her husband, and her surroundings. His father, the greatest stage "Count of Monte Cristo" of all time, was an intimidating man who seemed more concerned with his profession and fame than for the needs of his youngest son. This lack of attention transcended O'Neill's con-

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cious to his unconscious and was falsely perceived by him as an intangible untouchable flaw in his own character. Eugene's emotional needs were so great that the constant traveling which occurred during this time exacted a psychic cost upon him. Eugene always longed for roots and permanency. He yearned for an environment in which he could find stability. He longed for an identity which would decrease the insistent pangs of isolation and alienation.

One possibility of a pleasurable escape was in books. O'Neill was an intelligent, perceptive child who read voraciously rather complex works at a very early age, by such authors as Kipling, Anatole France, and Tolstoi. "Even as a child he was detached from his physical background, preferring to escape into an imaginary realm where he could not be hurt by a remote mother or an overwhelming father. He was moody and oversensitive." This sensitivity can be directly linked to his feelings of insecurity. O'Neill lacked the proper environment, both physical and emotional, which aid a child in creating a strong self-identity. Yet what is particularly important about his detachment is the fact that he used books as a creative outlet. Tolstoi gave the young Eugene a reprieve from

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continuous introspection and self-pity. His reading afforded him the occasion to lessen his guilt over his own existence. Eugene realized that if he avoided his feelings by some kind of outlet, he would not continuously feel as if he lacked a place in the world. His urge to be loved and belong would lessen the greater his focus upon the fantasy provoked by his escape into books. This method of non-involvement is a constant theme in O'Neill's life and his plays. The stokers of *The Hairy Ape* drink excessively, (much the same way O'Neill would in his early adulthood), to escape the realities of their oppressive conditions. Hickey, in *The Iceman Cometh*, uses alcohol as a medicine to numb the pain of his existence. Brutus Jones, in *The Emperor Jones*, creates his own private kingdom to satisfy his lack of connection in a repressive racist society. Each of these creations is a recreation of O'Neill's early reliance upon books as a means of security and detachment. Yet, it must be stressed that the books were a positive influence, whereas the alcohol was a negative escape vehicle. Both were related to O'Neill's insecurities, which stemmed from the fear he connected with the recognition of his alienation. It was these feelings which prompted his reclusive reaction.

During O'Neill's early childhood, biographers have identified two strong physical influences which relate
directly to his psyche, and thus to his work. The first was his nanny, Sarah Sandy. Sarah was a good-hearted woman, much devoted to Eugene. Nevertheless, she delighted in the macabre. She invented horror tales of her own and enjoyed regaling Eugene with the sordid details of contemporary murders. For diversion, she often took him to the Chamber of Horrors at the Eden Museum.

She probably channeled her frustrations into this vivid form because she felt as isolated and belonging as Eugene; her terrified but attentive listener was a perfect captive audience...her lurid stories may have begun to stimulate an imagination that was later to hold audiences spellbound with vivid accounts of terror and doom.4

Sarah had an obvious unconscious influence upon O'Neill. Because she was an authority figure, he obeyed her and believed her. Their experiences together were undoubtedly stored away in O'Neill's mind only to emerge later in his work. We may recognize a hint of the wax figures of the Eden Museum in the mannequin-like Fifth Avenue people in The Hairy Ape. This reflection, intended to represent the dimensionless personalities of American men and women, is perhaps a carryover from Eugene's early museum experiences.

It is O'Neill's theatrical experience, however, which can be classified as perhaps the most positive aspect to

4Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 61.
his childhood life on the road. Eugene's early acquaintance with the theatre was extraordinary. He was always allowed into the privileged wings. There he would watch his father play countless versions of the "Count of Monte Christo" and he would perceive the technical backstage operations of many classical productions. By the age of five, he considered himself sufficiently steeped in the ways of the theatre to understand that he would never be able to respect its lack of realism. Eugene's experiences with the classical productions of his father were influential to the extent that they spurred his revolutionary dramatic tendencies. O'Neill disliked the superficiality of the theatrical productions of his childhood. In retrospect, he considered this embryonic feeling as one of the catalysts behind his playwriting.

My early experience with the theatre through my father really made me revolt against it. As a boy I saw so much of the old, ranting and artificial stuff that I always had a sort of contempt for the theatre. 

This contempt became the impetus of the avant-garde theatre movement in America. The plays of Eugene O'Neill are a direct antithesis to all that the traditional theatre, embodied by his father, represented. O'Neill rebelled against the stifled, mothball-like atmosphere of American drama at an early age and unconsciously assumed a position

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5 Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 64.
which would put him at the forefront of new American theatre in the twentieth century.

O'Neill's education became more traditional when he was placed in a Catholic boarding school at the age of seven. This change of environment did not, however, decrease his sense of loneliness and alienation. At the Academy of Mt. St. Vincent in Riverdale, New York, O'Neill continued to be immersed in his books and was a solitary and obedient young man. He learned and recited his catechism and seemed to be completely satisfied with Roman Catholicism. His religious faith, however, did little to assuage his sense of instability. O'Neill was unable to use his religion as a means of connecting with some kind of self-identity. His Catholicism was a learned faith. It did not appear to be deeply felt by the young O'Neill in any way whatsoever. It was not until his high school years that Eugene seriously thought about and questioned his faith. It was at this time that his attachment to his religion was severed forever. Two major reasons figured in his decision, and both involved a member of O'Neill's family: his mother and his brother.

In the summer of 1902, O'Neill became aware of his mother's morphine addiction for the first time. Ella O'Neill, having run out of morphine, had tried to commit suicide that summer by throwing herself from a dock.
O'Neill never quite forgave her for this incident. Indeed, it would appear that the suicide attempt aggravated O'Neill's already guilty relationship with his mother. In many ways, as detailed in *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, O'Neill had regarded his mother as he would the Virgin Mary, whose very innocence consummated his feelings for her. Her suicide attempt, and the reasons for it, destroyed all the illusions and faith O'Neill had in his mother. The reason for her morphine addiction, although at that point still unclear (yet unconsciously and guiltily understood by O'Neill), justified many of O'Neill's contradictory feelings toward his mother and himself. To a great extent, Ella could be blamed for Eugene's alienated identity. Her inattentiveness, based heavily upon her morphine addiction, was the basis for a great deal of unhappiness in Eugene's early life. O'Neill became completely cognizant of this fact during the summer of 1902.

In the fall of 1902, O'Neill's entrance into Betts Academy, in Stanford, Connecticut, a non-sectarian preparatory school, allowed for further crystallization of his atheist opinions. At Betts, O'Neill was—probably in reaction to the emotional shock of his mother's suicide

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attempt and his own wavering religious faith—a constant rebel. He continued to be consumed by reading. O'Neill found the erotic Baudelaire, with his Jansenist tendencies, to be a perfect combination for the company of the liberated Oscar Wilde, the political poet Dawson, and the superman philosophy of Zarathustra from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. O'Neill had lost his faith. This condition was aggravated and perpetuated by his brother Jamie. "Jamie symbolized hard-boiled masculinity and stimulated his revolt against easy social graces which a prickly youngster tried to envy and emulate." Jamie's "social graces" were really vicarious methods of escape. He, like Eugene, suffered greatly from his unstable family. At the age of twenty-four, Jamie was a cynical alcoholic. He had a formative and destructive influence on his brother, primarily related to the idea of alcohol as an escape from the realities of his existence. While Eugene was at Betts, Jamie made it a point to introduce his younger brother to liquor and brothels. At the age of fifteen, Eugene had become a hardcore drinker and womanizer.

Croswell Bowen in his article "The Black Irishman," finds the roots of O'Neill's rebelliousness in this
characterization: "A man who has lost his faith and who spends his life searching for the meaning of life, for a philosophy in which he can believe again as fervently as he once believed in the simple answers of the Catholic catechism.\textsuperscript{8} A Black Irishman is often a brooding, solitary figure who drinks to escape the nagging of his guilty conscience. Eugene, Jamie and James Sr. all appear to suggest elements of the Black Irishman, particularly with their excessive drinking, which was an O'Neill family ritual. The fact that it was a method of escape must be stressed. For Eugene specifically, it replaced the earlier positive escape with books. Now, he could completely numb his senses and continue to avoid his feelings of isolation and alienation toward his existence.

O'Neill continued his drinking when he entered Princeton University in the fall of 1906. His behavior at this time is characteristic of a young adult who is desperately trying to find some purpose to his existence. Rich and ivied Princeton, unfortunately, was not for him a useful environment for this self-discovery. O'Neill felt that Princeton was excessively traditional, self-consciously superior, clannish, and intellectually

unstimulating. O'Neill had an abhorrence for the artificial, developed at an early age in reaction to the excesses of classical theatre, but now beginning to dominate other areas of his life. Princeton embodied all that was false and dimensionless to O'Neill. He did not feel that he belonged there, so he escaped constantly from its stifling atmosphere. He had few friends and drank whatever he could get his hands on—particularly absinthe. A brothel in Trenton, New Jersey, became his favorite hiding place. At the end of his freshman year, O'Neill was expelled for poor grades and drunken carousing. His inability to connect with the university is yet another example of his fear of finding himself. In spite of his unconscious desires to become a fulfilled individual during his lifetime, O'Neill's erratic behavior at Princeton seems to indicate that he was fearful of any profound self-understanding. His mode of escape was the allowance given to him by his father; he used the money on whoring and absinthe-binges.

O'Neill's relationship to his father was always strained and discomforting. We have no indication that the two had ever maintained any sort of normal father/son relationship. Yet James wanted Eugene to be successful with his life. He had aspirations that Eugene would rise above his disadvantageous childhood and emerge as a
responsible adult. Thus Eugene's suspension from Princeton widened the gap between father and son. James was a source of money for Eugene, an aggravating "banker" who had to be occasionally placated in order to assure the drink which numbed the son's existence. The O'Neill family avoided honest familial relationships. There were too many vulnerabilities which would compromise each one's pride and increase the instability of the other family members if they were confronted. This lack of communication is yet another indication of the repression of feelings exhibited by O'Neill during the greater part of his life. He did not feel free to discuss his anxieties with anyone. The O'Neill's never talked out family problems. James O'Neill stressed conventional success as measured through dollars and cents. Eugene's rebellion was as strongly anti-materialistic as his father's values were monetary.

After Princeton, O'Neill held a variety of jobs in New York City. Most notable was a twenty-five dollar a week secretarial job in the New York-Chicago supply company. O'Neill, however, took little interest in his work and was more concerned with running around Hell's Kitchen, Greenwich Village and the Tenderloin district with his friends Edward Keefe and George Bellows, later a noted artist. They also sampled the New York theatre together.
from Ibsen to vaudeville. Losing his job, O'Neill subsisted upon a reluctantly given fatherly allowance. He used this money in January of 1909 to spend a freezing month on a farm owned by James O'Neill in New Jersey where, along with Keefe and Bellows, he did some writing and a great deal of drinking.

Eugene's bohemian rebellion reveals his desire to spite his father. His behavior during the summer of 1909 exposed this fact and all of its accompanying idiosyncrasies, and brought his irresponsibility to a climax in 1909 when he met and married a young socialite named Kathleen Jenkins. It was suitably ironic that O'Neill was not in love with this well-bred young woman. It was rather the romantic image of her love for him that attracted O'Neill. They were married on October 2, 1909, in Hoboken, New Jersey. One week later, O'Neill, terrified of his new responsibility, joined a friend of his father's, Frank Stevens, on a gold prospecting expedition to Honduras. He left his pregnant wife behind.

It is obvious that O'Neill's impulsive decision to leave his bride is yet one more indication of his confusion about his own identity. He consciously knew that he was not yet ready to be a husband, yet he married Kathleen because of his desperate need to assume a role which he felt could give him a purpose in life. Eugene continued
to need to belong. A satisfactory connection was not found with Kathleen, nor was it possible in the gold fields of Honduras. O'Neill hated the jungle, contracted malaria, and returned to New York six months after his departure, during the spring of 1910. His divorce from Kathleen was finalized in White Plains, New York, in 1912, on the grounds of adultery.

O'Neill's pattern of existence up to this point in his life is very distinct. It involves a series of searches, approaches, retreats, and escapes. The pattern is circular. Each escape leads into the next search. O'Neill's psyche is never at ease. The escape constantly prompts a new search. Clearly O'Neill was completely uncomfortable with his own rootlessness. He could not identify with himself. Thus while he constantly searched for an environment where he hoped he could belong, each new set of experiences proved unsatisfactory to him. His nagging self-doubt and feeling of isolation threatened him constantly. His only possible response was to escape, to free himself from responsibility both to his own standards and to those who were involved with him. The sea seemed to offer the perfect vehicle for this flight to freedom. Hence, in the spring of 1910, O'Neill, just recovering from the malaria encountered on another escape, decided to go to sea.
O'Neill's need for a release from his circular existence was fulfilled by the sea, which became a constant source of nourishment from the moment he shipped out in 1910 until his death in 1953. He lived near the sea, swam in it, wrote about it, and pined for it when he had to go inland. It fed his mind and soul, giving him a sense of peace which he felt nowhere else in his life. His association with the sea was total and complete.

The alliance was consummated when O'Neill signed on as a working passenger on the ship the Charles Racine, which was headed for Buenos Aires. His experience aboard this ship was influential in two areas: the sea itself, and the sailors aboard ship. O'Neill's sea experiences provided him with a connection to his soul and unconscious which he had never before allowed. O'Neill felt as if he could be his own person aboard ship; his responsibilities were limited to his own existence. The idea of caring for a wife and child was completely overwhelming to O'Neill.

In New York, he also felt suffocated by the snobbish attitudes of the uptowners and his own inability to formulate any sort of sustaining opinion about his goal in life. The sea allowed O'Neill the opportunity to forget the stifling atmosphere of everyday existence. On ship, a man was a man. He worked for his bread, swapped stories, and sang simple chanties. Life was simple, and for
O'Neill this simplicity made the sea tremendously appealing.

Shipping out was an escape from circumstances which were suffocating him, into an atmosphere he sensed would set him free. The moment he felt the deck roll under his feet he realized he was, at last, in his natural element. For the first time in his life, he felt he belonged. 9

O'Neill's period at sea was a revolt against his well-to-do Victorian upbringing. He was shirking the traditional ideas of responsibility and ambition and satisfying his own need to feel a certain identity with his existence. The freedom of the sea exhilarated O'Neill, inducing a romantic euphoria that is reflected in several of his poems and plays. Paddy, the wizened old stoker of The Hairy Ape, recalls beautifully the feelings of O'Neill when he first went to sea:

Oh, there were fine beautiful ships them days—clippers wid tall masts touching the sky—fine strong men in them—men that was sons of the sea as if 'twas the mother that bore them. Oh the clean skins of them, the clear eyes, the straight backs and full chests of them! Brave men they was, and bold surely! We'd be sailing out bound down round the Horn maybe. We'd be making sail in the dawn, with a fair breeze, singing a Chanty song wid no care to it. And astern the land would be sinking low and dying out, but we'd give it no heed but a laugh, never a look behind. 10

9 Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 144.
O'Neill's identification with the sea was absolute. It symbolized a source of life and a final ecstatic freedom from the burden of life. O'Neill felt serene in the ever-moving waves of the sea, protected and nurtured like a child.

O'Neill's affinity for the sea heightened his appreciation of the men who worked upon it. In his eyes, there were no more masculine males in the world. They were a welcome release from the affected theatre buffs surrounding his father, and the rich snobs of his home-town, New London, Connecticut. Sailors were not like the New York society phonies.

[Sailors] have not been steeped in the evasions and superficialities which come with social life and intercourse. Their real selves are exposed. They are crude but honest. They are not handicapped by inhibitions. In many ways they are inarticulate. They cannot write of their own problems. So they must often suffer in silence....I like the man of the sea. He is free of social hypocrisy. 

The personalities O'Neill met aboard ship are prototypes of many of the characters in his early sea plays. They were of many nationalities: Swedes, Englishmen, Irishmen and Frenchmen. O'Neill learned from his shipmates. Many of them had spent their entire lives at sea. A great majority of the men were members of the Industrial Workers of the World, the I.W.W., a revolutionary, leftist

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11 Eugene O'Neill, quoted in Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 147.
union of the 1920s. Among working sailors, there were no clear class differentiations. The crews usually consisted of poverty-stricken runaways, sailors who came from all races and nationalities, and they seemed to O'Neill typical of a class whose spirit had been broken by the capitalist system. O'Neill was tremendously sympathetic toward these men politically, emotionally, and creatively.

His understanding, however, only increased O'Neill's admiration of the forbearing qualities of the sailors. Their crude sincerity overwhelmed O'Neill. These sailors were incredibly naive about the sophisticated ways of the world, and their innocent approach to life gave O'Neill occasion to slip into a pseudo-identity he believed was his own. All men were equal in the sight of the sea. He did not have to assume an identity which justified his upbringing, nor did he feel the need to account for his choice of vocation.

The seamen of the Charles Racin helped Eugene achieve a sense of identification with humanity. They wore no masks and among them he needed no masks either. There was never any condescension on his part toward his less educated companions—whom he accepted on their own terms as they did him.12

America's emphasis upon radical individualism repulsed O'Neill. He could not bear the artificiality of

12 Gelbs, O'Neill, pp. 165-166.
assumed individuality. Conventions and traditions bored him, especially if they were used to prop up the unworthy. O'Neill never had any need to feel superior to others. He sometimes doubted his own identity; however, he did not try to acquire a personality that denied his feelings. Facades were abhorrent to O'Neill. Thus, his association with the sailors, who did not really understand assumed social identities, seemed completely pure. He wallowed in their crudely innocent approach to individuality. His spirit connected with their lack of conventionality.

O'Neill continued his alcoholic binges during his sea voyage experiences. In August of 1910, the Charles Racing landed in Buenos Aires. Eugene quickly spent all the money he had earned on booze. Sleeping on park benches and begging for food, money and liquor, he headed for the gutter and the security of knowing he had searched the depths where there was nowhere else he had to go. O'Neill's degradation is not inconsistent if measured against the implied security he felt aboard ship. We have seen that O'Neill used the ship as an island on which he could escape the oppressive realities of his on-shore existence. His self-esteem was generated by his lack of conventional, traditional responsibilities. If the seagoing O'Neill was "free," the on-shore O'Neill felt desperately out of touch with his potential creativity.
Thus in Buenos Aires he drank, as he had so many times before, to escape his suffocating thoughts and to relieve the tension of his guilt for as long as his body could stand it. Therefore, he decided to drink his way to perdition. Knowing that he was a miserable failure, O'Neill also believed that this condition was inescapable. This naturalistic theme transcends his own personal experiences and is echoed in many of his plays. Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*, is defeated in life by his vain attempts to find a fulfillment which O'Neill was certain did not exist. Yank is crushed by the very source of energy and strength he felt he embodied.

The specific character from *The Hairy Ape* was characterized directly from a man O'Neill knew during his sea-faring days. While serving aboard the S.S. *New York* O'Neill befriended a stoker named Driscoll, later immortalized in *The Hairy Ape*. He was a big, burly man whose body radiated strength. O'Neill said of Driscoll:

> He thought a whole lot of himself, was a determined individualist. He was very proud of his strength, his capacity for gruelling work. It seemed to give him mental praise to be able to dominate the stokehole, do more than any of his mates.\(^{13}\)

O'Neill admired Driscoll's emphatic physical prowess. But O'Neill also found such strength problematic. Driscoll

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\(^{13}\) Gelbs, *O'Neill*, pp. 165-166.
may have embodied the masculine qualities of physical
vigor that O'Neill felt contributed to his individuality,
yet it was this personal strength which also was an
impetus for Driscoll's downfall. The stoker's suicide,
just months after his friendship with O'Neill, affirmed
O'Neill's belief that physical force was a meaningless
quality in the pursuit of a positive identity. Driscoll's
suicide, however, did have a significant effect upon
O'Neill.

He concluded that Driscoll's sense of belonging
had been shaken. Later he supplied a dramatic rea-
son in The Hairy Ape by showing Yank's disintegra-
tion when his faith in the importance of his
super-human endurance in the stokehole was shat-
tered. 14

Driscoll's alienation from his work-related identity was
similar to O'Neill's to the extent that both men felt iso-
lated and alienated from worlds to which they did not
belong. This problem was not alleviated by their indivi-
dual "talents". Driscoll was a super-stoker, a man of
incredible physical endurance. O'Neill was a writer. His
feelings with regard to this potential creativity were in
their embryonic stage of development. The conception had
occurred at birth. O'Neill had unconsciously begun
cataloguing his significant life experiences and was using
them to develop his philosophy of failure. He believed

14 Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 171.
ultimately in the ability to fail, and failure alone. O'Neill was concerned with men possessed by the desire for what was out of their reach—"beyond the horizon". Human reactions were movements made against this absolute reality. This was the irony of existence. Fulfillment was possible only through the recognition that we fail.

Driscoll, despite his efforts to the contrary, became cognizant of the fact that his life encompassed failure. He could not cope with this reality. Thus he committed suicide. O'Neill feared that his efforts, utilizing his "talent", might lead him down a similar path of enlightenment and revelation. He feared a direct confrontation with the meaninglessness of existence. Thus he assumed a stagnated position in order to dislocate himself from the belief that his life would ultimately end in a fashion similar to Driscoll's.

Back in the United States by August of 1911, O'Neill followed the same pattern of alcoholic extremism in New York that he had before his sea journey experiences. He lived at Jimmy the Priest's, a saloon on Fulton Street, which he later immortalized in The Iceman Cometh and Anna Christie. At Jimmy the Priest's, O'Neill shared a three dollar a month room with a man named Joe Smith. He and his mates were drunk as often as possible. George Jean Nathan, theatre critic and longtime friend of O'Neill's,
describes O'Neill's life at Jimmy the Priest's as O'Neill had told it to him:

This fraternity, hardly ever with more than fifty cents at a time in its combined treasury, subsisted on raw whiskey for breakfast and on what free lunch it could collect off the end of the bar during the rest of the day.... The favorite tipple of the brotherhood was, aside from the Breakfast Rye, Benedictine drunk by the tumblerful. But such treats were rare and makeshifts were necessary. Alcohol with camphor was found--after one got used to the taste--to have a pretty effect. Varnish diluted with water was also discovered to have its points. And there were days when even wood alcohol mixed in small doses with a spoonful of benzine to give it a certain bouquet was good enough in the brothers' view, for any man who wasn't a sissy. 15

Surrounded by bottom-dogs drinking themselves to death, O'Neill had no desire whatsoever to be introspective. He chose to drink because liquor allowed him to remain outside of his own personality. Yet by January 1912, O'Neill was so distraught that he too tried to commit suicide by overdosing on veronal. He was discovered in his room comatose and (reports vary) was revived eventually by his sodden companions.

All of the reasons for O'Neill's attempted suicide have never been clearly understood. When asked to discuss it in retrospect, O'Neill would laugh off serious psychic explorations. Either he did not wish to remember the

event at all, or he chose to store it away in his memory as a type of school-boy prank. Yet examined more closely, the attempted suicide reveals to a great extent the despair characteristic of O'Neill's life at that time. His unconscious in complete chaos, O'Neill had no relish for a life without obvious significance or purpose. His overdose of veronal was not only a protest against the self-perceived meaninglessness of his own existence, but against the futility of the times in which he lived.

O'Neill's life seemed to him a manifestation of the society which surrounded him. He sincerely believed that the ultimate value of existence was failure. He had seen it in many of his friends (Driscoll), and had felt it himself all of his life. His conscious ego had wrestled with his unconscious perceptions and willed itself to a quick death. O'Neill was revolting against the meaninglessness of existence. He affirmed his own disintegration as the price he must pay for life without meaning, without identity. O'Neill was once again trying to escape responsibility for his own life. His fear of life and his potential for death had made him an unmitigated disaster. He believed he belonged in the gutter. His soul, however, revolted against this inferior definition. It was his unconscious mind which propelled him beyond the squalor of Jimmy the Priest's toward a less tortured connection with
his own identity. O'Neill would soon begin to confront the fear of self-introspection which he had tried to escape through alcohol. His life from this moment forward connected with an area of his unconscious mind—his ability to write plays—which needed to release its agony and frustration.

In the summer of 1912, O'Neill began his writing career. As a cub reporter for *The New London Telegraph*—his hometown paper—O'Neill was to be both straight reporter and popular poet. He was poor at both jobs: his reporting was as lazy as his poetry was sophomoric. An example of O'Neill's lack of poetic brilliance can be seen in an untitled poem he wrote for *The New London Telegraph*, dated September 6, 1912:

All night I lingered at the beach
And trod the boardwalk up and down—
I vainly sought to cop a peach.

I had prepared a charming speech
To woo the fair ones of the town—
All night I lingered at the beach.

Quoth I, "Sweet Damsel I beseech
That you will smile on me, poor clown."
I vainly sought to cop a peach.

With the persistence of a leech,
I clung to every passing gown—
All night I lingered at the beach.

I swore my love to all, but each
Passed me the haughty freezing frown—
I vainly sought to cop a peach.

I prayed to all, both white and brown—
They only "kicked my dog around."
All night I lingered at the beach--
I vainly sought to cop a peach.  

O'Neill could not express his frustration with existence in poetic or journalistic form. His brief encounter with journalism, however, is significant to the extent that it is the earliest documented evidence of O'Neill's motions toward a more meaningful life. His desire to find a place for himself in the world had now superceded his belief that life was meaningless. Newspaper reporting gave O'Neill an opportunity to sample an aspect of his conscious that was not completely absorbed by his own self-pity. The creative outlet had given O'Neill the occasion to go beyond drink. It was a small but important assertion of self.

O'Neill's attempts to identify with New London were as hopeless as his previous efforts to connect with his own sense of self-worth. The Connecticut society to which his family aspired was shot through with self-importance and snobbery. The O'Neills were snubbed by the elite of New London. The family, famous as it was for its theatre reputation, was still Irish, and WASP New Londoners of that time had always assumed that the Irish were servants. O'Neill was very conscious of this ethnic prejudice.

Knowing ethnic bias to be typical of a false and superficial society, O’Neill nevertheless had to feel unfairly excluded and stigmatized by a narrow-minded New London. Finding himself lumped with the shanty Irish by a prejudiced WASP elite, O’Neill had to reassess his own feelings about his social identity. All his experiences aboard ship had indicated that any sense of superiority could be understood as a need for social security. Americans categorized themselves out of a need to create a worthwhile image and identity for themselves.

O’Neill felt that this sort of "social" definition was antithetical to his desire to find a true identity of his own. He had been born a Catholic, yet he no longer believed in Catholic dogma. O’Neill now believed that a reliance upon God was a more cowardly escape than a reliance upon alcohol. Therefore, New Londoners’ classification of individuals according to their religious beliefs was a consequence of their own need to solidify an existing social hierarchy. O’Neill found this stratification as meaningless as his drunken sprees. Rejection of this elitism and ethnic prejudice moved him toward a formulation of a different identity. His belief that New London was a shallow and valueless society led him to a deeper understanding of his own identity.
This idea crystallized and gained perspective during his stay at Gaylord Farms Sanitarium in the early months of 1913. O'Neill had been hospitalized for tuberculosis. Although ill, it was here that O'Neill began to write plays.

It was at Gaylord that my mind got the chance to establish itself, to digest and evaluate the impressions of many past years in which an experience had crowded on another with never a second reflection. At Gaylord I really thought about my life for the first time, about past and future. Undoubtedly, the inactivity forced upon me by life at a "san" forced me to mortal activity especially as I had already been high-strung and nervous temperamentally.17

O'Neill's euphoria at his newly acquired outlet resembles religious exaltation. In a sense it is almost as if his loss of faith in Christianity had been replaced with a new faith in creative writing. This pseudo-religious experience was the impetus behind O'Neill's playwriting. Creation involved a fulfillment which had never before been felt by O'Neill. It was through his playwriting that O'Neill was able to unleash the enormous number of conflicting emotions which had been stifling him since birth. "When I was writing I was alive."18 This life is the rebirth of Eugene O'Neill. It is the moment where a con-

nection occurred between his creative possibilities and his instinctive need to unburden his unconscious.

Once he had begun to write, O'Neill could not stop. Some demon was driving him forward and channeling his creative juices into writing plays never before performed on the American stage. O'Neill was investigating his unconsciously revealed thoughts and feelings that he had never before allowed himself to explore. In a letter from New London dated July 16, 1914, O'Neill voiced his enthusiasm about playwriting to George P. Baker, director of the Harvard 47 workshop on playwriting:

> With my present training I might hope to become a mediocre journeyman playwright. It is just because I do not wish to be one, because I want to be an artist or nothing, that I am writing to you.  

O'Neill studied with Baker one semester, from September 1914 to January 1915. Baker's influence upon the fledgling playwright is uncertain. O'Neill did not claim any great debt to Baker until years after his workshop experience. Indeed, at the time, O'Neill's behavior suggests that he was not the least bit satisfied with the class. He openly rebelled against Baker's traditional, structured approach to creative expression. O'Neill found the class stifling. The classroom was hardly the place to become a great playwright. After one semester, O'Neill, by now

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19 O'Neill quoted in *O'Neill and His Plays*, p. 20.
positive that he had learned all that he could from Professor Baker, left the Harvard workshop and opted for life among the Bohemians and leftwing intellectuals of Greenwich Village.

Still drinking heavily, O'Neill became a member of the Greenwich Village Liberal Club (later the Washington Square Players and still later the Theatre Guild), where he met a myriad of well-known socialists and liberals: John Reed, Louise Bryant, Max Eastman, Dorothy Day, Lawrence Langer, George Cram Cooke, Susan Glaspell, Edna and Norma Millay, Terry Carlin and Louis Halladay. In 1915 the Village was aflame with radical ideas, rejecting the American middle class as conventional and contemptible. "The Greenwich Villagers were all passionately striving to be and to express themselves, and if the result of this individualism sometimes appeared as naivete, exhibitionism or even borderline lunacy, it was undeniably alive." This freedom was an essential connection for O'Neill. Life in Greenwich Village was decadent, individualistic, and full of the possibilities for creative expression that he craved. He sought the people in Greenwich Village because they seemed more alive than the "professional" and precious uptowners. The favorite haunt was a dirty and cheap Irish saloon called The Bell Hole.

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Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 282.
Here, O'Neill and his liberal cronies would gather and argue about radical politics.

O'Neill's political affiliations are unclear. It would appear however that this flirtation with leftist politics reinforced his rebelliousness and influenced his playwriting at this time. O'Neill could not consciously connect himself with the supposed vacuousness of twentieth century upper-middle class conventions. The liberal attitudes of the bohemians of Greenwich Village assuaged O'Neill's anger over the intellectual emptiness of the upper classes. The Village was a haven where untraditional creative thought could be expressed and heartily accepted. O'Neill adopted this attitude. He acclimated himself with the unstructured freedom that embodied the philosophy of Greenwich Village.

His political beliefs, however, would appear to have been fervent only in terms of their creative influence. O'Neill was lawless. He did not subscribe to any one set of values or one means to realize those values. His political beliefs, expressed in some of his plays, are strident yet particularly significant in terms of the method in which they are developed. His village days served as a part of his creative furniture. In essence, his beliefs were an acceptance of the poetic whole of the philosophies, not necessarily of the politics themselves. It is
clear that O'Neill found a liberal atmosphere more conducive to expanded thought and better living. However, that did not involve O'Neill in any definite political affiliation. He was sympathetic towards those who suffered discrimination because of the narrow values of mechanized/commercialized America. Village intellectuals condemned the obvious oppressions of race, color, sex, religion and creed and attacked any violation of the human spirit. O'Neill believed that there was a great deal of soul and humanity involved in the leftist politics. The liberals seemed to believe in total freedom of expression and the unshackling of the human spirit.

This freedom was clearly sympathetic to O'Neill. Nevertheless, during the fall and winter of 1915, he drank, discussed Nietzschean philosophy, lamented his lost Catholicism with his friend Terry Carlin, and wrote anarchist-oriented poems with titles like "Revolution" and "Dirty Bricks of Buildings," and several others which express a gloomy interest in the condition of his heart. His days and nights were filled with drunken poetic reverie and carousing. It was not until the spring of 1916 that he once again hit bottom and decided to try to realize the potential of his existence. At this time, O'Neill headed for Provincetown, Massachusetts where he was finally to find the recognition for which he had been
searching since birth.
CHAPTER 2

Theatrical Influences on Eugene O'Neill
The Provincetown Players was organized by George Cram Cook and his wife, playwright Susan Glaspell, in 1915, in protest against the commercialism of Broadway. George Cram Cook—"Jig"—was repelled by the bourgeois values of contemporary America which he saw as suffocating the traditional individualism there. "The problem, as he saw it, was to re-establish lost values and in particular to generate a literature with the power not only to embody but to promote these values."¹ Cook felt that his social message could be delivered through the theatre. He wanted to assert the rights of the human soul. His vehicle would be contemporary, native, uncommercialized American drama.

The Provincetown Players was a part of growing rebellion by elite artists of all sorts against the cultural traditions of mainstream America. Indeed, the core group, organized in 1915, consisted of several subsequently famous anarchists and rebels, specifically John Reed, Louise Bryant, Kenneth MacGowan and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Provincetown was the summer retreat of many in this developing counter-culture. The Players was organized out of this intellectual and creative atmosphere:

One sees among the pre-war rebels an intense awareness of self and mortality, the rejection of the materialistic life; urgent quests for new

¹ C.W.E. Bigsby, Twentieth Century American Drama, Volume One, 1900-1940 (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 56.
kinds of personal fulfillment, and expectations that new overarching meanings and designs for living were just on the horizon. There was a hungry exploration of modern art and ideas from Europe, an increasing sensitivity to instances of social oppression, increasing criticism of the capitalistic system and special sympathy with the labor movement. 2

The Provincetown Players wrote, produced, and directed their own plays. During the first two summers (1915-1916), the players put on their plays at the Wharf Theatre, provided by a member, Mary Heaton Vorse, in Provincetown. In September of 1916, the group became better organized and brought the experiment back to Greenwich Village with them. They performed in two theatres on MacDougal Street for six years and were instrumental from the outset in generating attention and acclaim for the "new" American theatre of the twentieth century.

The Provincetown Players were revolutionaries in thought and action. Their plays rebelled against the vacuous pleasantries of Broadway theatre, in hopes of expanding America's consciousness. Their intent was to free America of its over-commercialized, conservative values and replace these values with ideals more consistent with the essence of the human potential. Cook wanted to tackle the big issues and teach America something about itself.

The public who went to Broadway shows during the first two decades of the twentieth century demanded little more than escape and entertainment. Most native plays on Broadway amused the public with superficial comedy, romantic love stories, stereotyped melodrama, or fledgling musicals. 3

The American drama of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seemed to Cook and his sympathizers vapidly sentimental and entrenched in bourgeois values. O'Neill himself called it: "scribble on the surface of things." 4 Yet even "popular" drama took itself very seriously. It was the theatre of William Vaughn Moody, James A. Herne, Clyde Fitch, and David Belasco, all conservative businessmen. These men controlled forty theatre houses on Broadway. They were responsible for a theatre which resolutely ignored reality and accurately reproduced the excitement of melodramatic behavior. It was a theatre of great moments and mechanical wonders. A perfectly apt example is Belasco's dark-to-dawn sequence in Madame Butterfly. An aura of splendor was conveyed from the opening moment of the play with flickering floor lights and birds singing one by one.


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The first fifteen years of the twentieth century in the American theatre were largely dominated by these businessmen. They were not interested in theatre as a vehicle for serious ideas. Rather, their desire was to make money by providing purely popular entertainment, sentimental and sensational melodramas. For most Americans, this was the only theatre available.

They were cheap melodramas especially rigged so that heroes could be snatched from the jaws of giant cranes and cross to safety, carrying a lighted dynamite bomb, on a telegraph wire; so that trained dogs, horses, or bears, could plunge into burning buildings to save the assorted babies that were invariably left lying about; so that ex-prizefighters and ex-safecrackers could demonstrate their specialties; so that Indian chiefs, Geisha girls, and wall scaling Zouave troops from North Africa could parade about, somewhat pointlessly, to decorate the proceedings.\(^5\)

Conventional operettas like Babes in Toyland (1903), and The Merry Widow (1907), were mixed in with honkeytonk, minstrel shows, burlesque, and the Ziegfeld Follies.

These popular entertainments were complemented by the Broadway "book musicals" of George M. Cohan and Jerome Kern, and the more serious theatre of playwright Edward Sheldon. Sheldon's three plays, produced between the years of 1908-1910, foreshadow the idealism of the Provincetown Players. The first, produced in 1908 and titled Salvation Well, followed the life of a scrubwoman in New

\(^5\)Joseph Golden, The Death of Tinkerbell, p. 36.
York City. The second, produced in 1910, dramatized the problems of race in the South and was called The Nigger. The third play, produced in 1911, has similarities with O'Neill's The Hairy Ape. Titled The Boss, it is an expose of machine politics.

Mr. Sheldon was a graduate of Professor George P. Baker's Harvard 47 workshop, which may account for his similarities to O'Neill. What is striking about Mr. Sheldon's drama, however, is that it precedes the "serious" theatre in America in terms of its realistic approach to theme and subject. Each of Mr. Sheldon's plays tackles a controversial issue in American society whether it be poverty, race, or corruption.

The popularity of Sheldon's theatre, however, was unusual. In general, theatre remained the commercialized escapist vehicle into which it had developed. In the second decade of the twentieth century, Laurette Taylor, a famous actress of the time, starred in a shallow little piece titled Peg O' My Heart. The Barrymores emerged as a major acting family in 1916, John Galsworthy's Justice, starring John Barrymore, received tremendous acclaim. Altogether, 1918 saw the production of one of the all-time successes of the American stage, Lightnin'. In September of 1920, a mystery play of simple diversion concocted by Avery Hopwood and Mary Roberts Rhinehart, The Bat, began a
two-year run on Broadway. This play epitomizes American popular theatre of the day.

The Provincetown Players was not the only theatre organization rebelling against the commercialization of the American stage. Several small theatre groups across the nation unified against Broadway and used the stage as a means of education, exploration, experimentation, and information. One of the first and most notable was the New York Stage Company, established in 1912. A little later, the Liberal Club, on MacDougal Street—run by Henrietta Rudman and a meeting place for writers, socialists and university people—formed its own drama group which specialized in skits satirizing the beliefs and commitments of its own members. The Chicago Little Theatre of Maurice Brown was also founded in 1912. Specializing in the classics—specifically European—this small theatre's impact was felt nationwide. The Neighborhood Playhouse was also established in 1912. This organization grew out of the activities of the Henry Street settlement, which had been developed in 1890 to deal with the influx of immigrants and subsequent social problems in the New York City area. The Neighborhood Playhouse was not interested in a revivified American theatre; rather, it served a community. Its productions were eclectic—drawing on Noh drama and Hindu plays as well as works by European and
American playwrights.

But [the Neighborhood Theatre's] real significance lay in the presumption that theatre could play a role in uniting the heterogeneous elements of an immigrant community, that the theatre spoke a language which was relevant to people trying to read the code of American society and looking for a reflection of their own uncertain apprehension of the real. 6

The tradition of European plays as an approach to cultural unity was also seen in Boston at the Toy Theatre, established in 1912. This organization was influenced by the Irish players of Dublin's Abbey Theatre. In New York, the Washington Square Players, located on East Fifty-Seventh Street, was established in 1915. The group lasted from 1915 to 1918 and produced 62 one-act plays and pantomimes as well as six full-length plays. The Theatre Guild developed out of the Washington Square Players, which staged a number of original productions of Eugene O'Neill.

It was with the Provincetown Players, however, that O'Neill had his serious theatrical beginnings. The relationship between O'Neill and the Players was mutually beneficial. They produced his plays, he packed their playhouses. When O'Neill arrived in the summer of 1916, suitcase full of plays in hand, he was eager to work and to establish a certain identity for which he had been searching. The first reading O'Neill did for the

Provincetown Players was a tragic one-act, _Bound East for Cardiff_. George Cram Cook and his wife, Susan Glaspell, recognized O'Neill's talent and quickly put _Bound East for Cardiff_ on their bill for the summer of 1916. _Bound East for Cardiff_ turned out to be the perfect beginning of the Provincetown Players' theatre in 1916. It consolidated the Players as a theatre group. The one-act play, part of the _S.S. Glencairn_ sea play group, is set in the forecastle of a ship. The plot revolves around five seamen, one of whom is Yank, lying on his bunk, near death, after seriously injuring himself in a fall into the hold. _Bound East for Cardiff_ is really a dialogue between Yank and his friend Driscoll. The play deals with the sea as an omnipotent force, but intertwined with this idea is the characters' search to find some meaning in their lives. O'Neill implies that a purpose for their existence can be found through the ultimate decency of human friendship.

_Bound East for Cardiff_ was a tremendous success for the Provincetown Players. It also marked the beginning of Eugene O'Neill's career. The play was produced in New York at the Players' MacDougal Street playhouse on November 3, 1916, receiving this enthusiastic comment from the _Evening Sun_ critic, Stephen Rathbun: "The play was real, subtly terse, and avoided a dozen pitfalls that
might have made it 'the regular thing.'

The Provincetown Players thrived as O'Neill's plays proved to be successes. Attendance at the theatre was limited to members. In the first year of their New York presentation (1916), the Players had 450 subscribers. During that year and into the next, the Players produced several additional O'Neill one-act plays, including Fog, The Sniper, Before Breakfast, and Thirst. Bound East For Cardiff was the most favorably reviewed. Other playwrights, nevertheless, particularly Susan Glaspell with Trifles and Suppressed Desires, received enthusiastic praise.

The following season, 1917-1918, was greatly affected by World War I. Cook, Glaspell, and O'Neill believed that the theatre should confront the issue of war in a creative fashion. They issued this statement at the beginning of their third season in New York:

It is now often said that theatrical entertainment in general is socially justified in this dark time as a means of releasing the strain of reality, and thus helping us to keep sane. This may be true, but if more were not true—if we felt no deeper value in dramatic art than entertainment—we would hardly have the heart for it now. One faculty, we know, is going to be of vast importance to the half-destroyed world—indispensable for its rebuilding—the faculty of creative imagination.

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That spark of it which has given the group of ours such life and meaning as we have is not so insignificant that we should let it die. The social justification which we feel to be valid now for makers and players of plays is that they should keep alive in the world the light of imagination. Without it the wreck of the world that was, can not be cleared away, and the new world shaped.  

The Provincetown Players were holding steadfastly to their belief that theatre could be a significant educational instrument in American society. Indeed, O'Neill was continuously raising "big" issues in a great majority of his one-acts. The O'Neill-Glaspell-Cook manifesto combined with the maturation of the Provincetown theatre itself, led in 1920 to the group's greatest success, The Emperor Jones.

The Emperor Jones is in several ways the forerunner to The Hairy Ape. As an eight-scene expressionistic play, it deals with identity and the irony attached to the title. It employs sound and set design as an avant-garde method of reinforcing the theme of the play. The Emperor Jones probes the collective unconscious of the black race. O'Neill explicitly suggests that modern civilization has not helped the black man at all. Yet the play had racist overtones—a black man in a jungle—which were not overlooked at its first production. Nonetheless, it should be

taken as a serious attempt at the use of a new theme, the black psyche. It was also tremendously important in terms of its expressionistic technique.

Expressionism is an attempt to portray inner reality in nonrealistic terms by the use of abstraction, symbolism, and distortion. It tries to penetrate life's surface reality in order to depict man's inner world.

Nightmarish visual images controlled the action; compressed syntax led to an abbreviated pattern of speech; three-dimensional, psychologically developed characters yielded to exaggerated caricatures or abstract types; coherent structure gave way to episodic and often disconnected brief scenes.⁹

O'Neill was fascinated by the possibilities of expressionism. The ability to place the inner experience above the external life was an avenue he longed to explore. The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape became his vehicles for that experimentation. He had obviously been influenced by visual artists like Vassily Kandinsky, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Edward Munch, as well as by the classic German and Swedish expressionist dramatists like Buchner and Strindberg.

Several expressionist plays deserve mention in order to reinforce the technical and thematic interest O'Neill had in expressionism. In 1837, George Buchner, a German

⁹Mardi Valgenae, Accelerated Grimace, p. 3.
scientist and political revolutionary, had written a controversial murder-play, *Wojzeck*. Never produced until 1913, *Wojzeck* deals with the tragedy of a common soldier who murders his mistress. Buchner had chosen to record the tension and struggle within Wojzeck's mind. Most of the characters in the play are known only by rank or profession. They are caricatures of the individuals they represent. George Wedekind, a countryman of Buchner's, wrote a play called *Spring's Awakening* in 1890. It is a frank portrayal of the sexual awakenings of adolescents. The Wedekind play features a scene in which a dead man with his head under his arm and a masked man carry on a dialogue. They are meant to represent the struggle inside an individual, a struggle between suicidal thoughts and the life instinct. Wedekind's second play, *Julia*, was equally controversial because of its subject, a heroine dominated by her sexual instincts.

Augustus Strindberg has been called the father of expressionism. Indeed, his influence on O'Neill was considerable. Strindberg's significant plays—*A Dream Play*, and *Ghost Sonata*—had a profound impact upon O'Neill's conception of themes and set design. In *Ghost Sonata*, Strindberg changed the concept of staging and scenery.

For painted perspectives and glaring footlights he substituted simplified settings and spotlights. He made use of symbolic, suggestive, and often distorted scenery. He introduced brilliant
colors. And he rediscovered the mask as well as the potential of the human body in creating expressive gestures.  

Each of these techniques was later employed by O'Neill. The Fifth Avenue scene in *The Hairy Ape* epitomizes Strindberg's influence on O'Neill, who used bright colors, distorted scenery, and masked characters to accentuate Yank's alienation in the same play.

Several other expressionist playwrights stimulated and influenced O'Neill. Richard Johannes Songe's *The Baggar*, a play of collective characterization and grotesque exaggeration, foreshadows O'Neill's stokers in *The Hairy Ape*. George Kaiser, with plays like *From Morn to Midnight* and *Gas* --both stories of a man's bondage to machines--portends the theme of a loss of identity in *The Hairy Ape*. Similarly, Ernst Toller, creator of *Man and the Masses*, also influenced O'Neill. His play--alive with surreal spotlights, colors, masks and sound--traces the passion and martyrdom of a protagonist at the hands of the brutal capitalistic society. Toller's play attempts to analyze the conflicting ideologies of individuals, the state, and the masses.

In expressionist drama, actions and objects are seen symbolically. The dialogue is stripped of all but the

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essential words. Sound effects are important. A rapid sequence of scenes are meant to shift with cinematic speed. All of these techniques were incorporated into The Hairy Ape. However, their degree of importance varies according to the production and the director's interpretation. O'Neill, it is claimed, uses the expressionistic techniques in the play to reinforce his condemnation of American society. And I agree that the play is more successful as a dramatized piece of social criticism than as a "pure" expressionistic work. O'Neill could not fully conceive of expressionism. He borrowed expressionistic techniques—primarily from the German and Swedish playwrights—in an attempt to go beyond the fundamentals of theatre. The Hairy Ape is a significant play in this respect as it allows for an intermeshing of the typical O'Neillian sea drama with the expressionistic tendencies of a naive, yet eager, playwright.

The Emperor Jones proved to be an incredible success for O'Neill and the Provincetown Players. It gave them notoriety that they had never believed possible. Their subscription list swelling, they moved The Emperor Jones to Broadway, where its popularity continued. The critics echoed the public's praise of the play. Typical was Heywood Broun in the Tribune on November 4: "...the most interesting play from the most promising playwright in
America." Kenneth MacGowan wrote in the Globe the same day: "An odd and extraordinary play, written with imaginative genius." And Alexander Wollcott of the Times on November 7 hymned the play as "an extraordinary, striking and dramatic study of panic and fear....for strength and originality, O'Neill has no rivals among the American writers for the stage." Summing up the general view, the Brooklyn Eagle on November 9 trumpeted, "The Provincetown Players have justified their season if they do nothing else this winter." 11

Ironically, the Brooklyn Eagle's statement became a sort of prophecy for the Provincetown Players. The Emperor Jones was not only the summit of their achievement, but it also in effect marked the end of the Players. Jig Cook had become increasingly discontented with the direction of the theatre. He saw the Players' increasing professionalism as imitative of the commercialism of Broadway. What had started out as an experiment in living as much as an experiment in theatre had ultimately become an out-of-town try-out for Broadway. The transfer of The Emperor Jones to Broadway was thus a betrayal.

Cook's disappointment was accentuated during the production of O'Neill's second expressionistic play, The

**Missy Ape.** Cook was assigned to direct the play, but O'Neill felt that he was not professional enough; his directing was uneven. Thus, Cook was replaced.

Jig had convinced himself by this time that he had not failed but that others, particularly O'Neill, had failed him. He felt that O'Neill had exploited him and the Provincetown Players, and now, tossing him aside, was using the MacDougal Street Playhouse merely as a tryout place for Broadway.\(^{12}\)

It is important that O'Neill's transference of support and authority be seen in direct relationship to his place in American theatre in 1920. *The Emperor Jones* had established him as the "most promising and exciting" playwright then on the American scene. His success, contrary to the radical assertions set forth by the Provincetown Players in 1916, was nevertheless creating the possibility for a new and different theatre in America. Certainly O'Neill's dramas were honest, realistic, and often so true to their subject that the audiences and critics would only sit in utter amazement. And O'Neill was socially critical and politically radical during a time when conservative politics dominated American culture. His plays were totally overshadowing the melodramatic, pretentious dramas which characterized the American theatre before him.

Nevertheless, his radicalism was not enough for Cook. On February 23, 1922, he and his wife Susan Glaspell, and

\(^{12}\)Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p. 79.
other members of the Provincetown Players, including O'Neill, agreed that the playhouse would take a year's recess following the production of *The Hairy Ape*. Immediately following this decision, Cook and his wife left for Greece in search of a different connection with life and theatre. Because Jig Cook died two years later in 1924, he was never able to witness a single performance of *The Hairy Ape*.

The play had its first run in the MacDougal Street playhouse in 1922, and starred Louis Wolheim, an ex-Cornell football player. *The Hairy Ape* was on the whole enthusiastically reviewed. Robert Benchley in *Life* magazine called it "The most powerful thing he has done"; Alexander Wollcott, in the *Times* characterized it as "a bitter, brutal, wildly fantastic play"; and Arthur Pollock in the *Brooklyn Eagle* was positive: "the best play by an American we have ever seen." There were a few negative reviews: J. Ranken Touse in the *Post* weighed in with this judgment: "an exceedingly juvenile performance"; and Heywood Broun, the *World* wrote that "A little bit of it is fine. Much of it is dull."¹³

Despite the uneven reviews, it was generally agreed that O'Neill with *The Hairy Ape* had at last consolidated his position in the American theatre. At the age of 33, 

¹³Sheaffer, *O'Neill: Son and Artist*, p. 88.
he was seen as the best playwright America had produced. His dramas were both important and revolutionary. The fact that Broadway had finally embraced him with such fervor may have been contrary to the goals of the Provincetown Players, but it was an important and revolutionary gesture for American theatre as a whole. O'Neill remained affiliated (in name only), with the Provincetown Players until the company broke up permanently in 1926. Still, the Players had done their job; the American theatre was firmly launched on a new path. And O'Neill, despite being the newest darling of Broadway, was its radical and revolutionary leader.
CHAPTER 3

Societal Influences on Eugene O'Neill (1900-1920)
The turbulence of spirit, the potential for social unrest that underlay the conflicts in *The Hairy Ape*, reflected O'Neill's environment in the opening decades of America's twentieth-century. During the Progressive era, the nation experienced dramatic increase in the power of business and a political attempt to regulate monopolies and reform the uncaring entrepreneur. The millions of immigrants arriving on American shores, largely from Eastern and Southern Europe, faced a native population which feared them and tried to improve their lot through "Americanization" programs. Social reformers, drawn from the middle-class, entered the urban slums seeking to determine how the "other half" lived and ameliorate conditions. Their "search for order" became the foundation for one part of the Progressive "impulse". It was an attempt to restore social stability in a rapidly changing nation, and a desire to bring rationality and efficiency to all phases of national existence. The American Progressive era was, as Charles Dickens had said of revolutionary France, "the best of times, the worst of times," a period of revision and reform, of new ideas and a nostalgia for the values of an earlier America.

In the fifth scene of *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill fuses his interpretation of the Progressive movement with a dramatic expressionism, which heightens the negativism of
his message. Through the use of masks and dialogue, O'Neill implies a dichotomy of personalities which were contrary to the purported values of the Progressive movement. The socialites of Fifth Avenue are directly contrasted with Yank and Long. The lower class is exposed to the upper, while the upper typically ignores the lower. O'Neill documents a situation which he found to be present in the first two decades of the twentieth-century. The rich are concerned with the plights of the poor: "We must organize a one-hundred percent American bazaar. And let everyone contribute one-one hundredth percent of their income tax." Yet they do not see them. Yank and Long, despite their efforts to disturb the socialites seeming indifference, are completely ignored. The rich are more attentive to the monkey fur and its cost. Yank and Long are reduced to their own pitiful frustrations.

This ambiguous relationship between the rich and the poor is viewed by O'Neill with complete contempt. The socialites of Fifth Avenue represent the artificial and superficial. Their appearances are juxtaposed to their purported progressive values and imply a conflict in direction; inward--involved with the self, instead of outward, consistent with the Progressivist philosophy. It is no wonder therefore, that the working class of America

1O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, p. 207.
felt forced into a situation whereby they could organize and unite for the good of their class.

No organization was more alarming to the Progressives however than The Industrial Workers of the World, established in 1905 by William Heywood. The "Wobblies" rejected all forms of political action and recommended strikes and sabotage as the only way to make the world over. The I.W.W. sat outside the American Federation of Labor, a conservative union which based its philosophy upon the idea of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

The Federation, unlike the I.W.W., was not the least bit prone to strikes or boycotts. Conversely, "Big Bill" Heywood was an aggressive leader who instigated many violent strikes in many industries.

The I.W.W. exerted a strength out of all proportion to its numbers. The membership basically consisted of unskilled and migratory workers. The wobblies saw their mission as the total destruction of capitalistic exploitation and the forming of a new society within the shell of the old. "It's goal was the establishment of one big union; it was revolutionary in its aims, and it sought to abolish the wage system rather than to make it workable."²

sachusetts, and silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, the I.W.W. played a prominent role. The dramatic Paterson strike incorporated the idea of social realism into agitation. Approximately 1000 silk workers marched to Madison Square Garden, on June 7, 1913, where before a crowd of 15,000 people they reenacted the events of their prolonged strike against mill owners. This social drama idea was the brainchild of John Reed, (later a friend of O'Neill's at Provincetown), and added fuel to the antagonism already exhibited toward the I.W.W.

In reality, the I.W.W. as an organization wished only to emphasize that America's upwardly mobile direction was a misconception. It did not include all Americans. Most members of the I.W.W. did not own model T's, nor did they even hope for such a possession. Rather, they wished to be acknowledged for their participation in American society. Furthermore, they wished to be treated as human beings. "Big Bill" Haywood expressed the frustration of the I.W.W. individual most convincingly when he said:

I have had a dream that I have in the morning and at night and during the day, that there will be a new society sometime in which there will be no battle between capitalism and wage-earner...there will be no political government...but...experts will come together for the purpose of discussing the means by which machinery can be made the slave of the people instead of part of the people being made the slave of machinery.3

3William Heywood quoted in Bailyn, The Great Republic,
This idea of slavery is commensurate with the beliefs of O'Neill with regards to the Progressive era. He saw the increasing mechanization of America as an enslaver of its citizens. The American corporation was usurping the creativity of American individuals for the sake of economic and political advancement. Indeed, in World War I, the significance of American business was so strong that labor was effectively regulated by the government labor boards. These boards were led by Progressives and American business owners. They were very successful at incorporating full scale American labor participation in the war. However, in 1919, after the war had ended, disillusionment with the labor system set in. Government and business, acting together turned toward a more conservative policy which demanded a cut in pay from the workers, regardless of the increase in the standard of living. The result: immediate and sometimes violent strikes. In 1919, there were 3500 strikes involving four million American workers. In January of 1919, a shipbuilders strike in Seattle, Washington became so intense that it eventually led to a general strike, shutting down the entire city. The government took immediate action and sent the Marines into Seattle to put down the strike.
In Boston in September of 1919, a similar strike, this time by policemen, captured national attention. As in Seattle, the government took action, fired all the striking policemen, and hired replacements. Similar treatment was exhibited at the U.S. steelworkers strike in 1919. The Unions had been crippled by the government. There was no possibility for any kind of bargaining.

The defeat of strike efforts in 1919 meant a gradual weakening of labor in the 1920s. Throughout the decade, the American Federation of labor, led after 1924 by the conservative Phillip Green, would concentrate on maintaining its strength among already unionized skilled workers. The industrial workers, those who had been the object of the I.W.W. activity, were ignored by the AFL. Without the interest of the AFL, and with the Wobblies' loss of strength and popularity, the industrial worker would have no ally and few advocates in his struggle for improved conditions.

O'Neill's interpretation of the I.W.W. in The Hairy Ape does not correspond with his sympathies toward the labor movement. O'Neill presents the Wobblies as paranoid ineffective individuals who are as dissociated with their purpose as Yank is to his own identity. Yank, has presented himself to the I.W.W. in the hopes of being accepted as a loyal participant in their reactionary work.
The Wobblies view Yank, a potential member, with suspicion. They treat him as a foreigner, neither sure of his next phrase or gesture. O'Neill constructs these conflicting messages in order to underlie his feeling that the I.W.W. is not succeeding in twentieth-century America. Indeed, his argument culminates with the bruised and battered and completely disillusioned Yank being bodily thrown out of the I.W.W. warehouse.

O'Neill's criticisms of the I.W.W. tend to reveal the fact that he did not agree with the I.W.W. using its workers for its own organizational ends. His presentation of the I.W.W. in *The Hairy Ape*, implies a dissatisfaction with the underlying relationship between the rights of the worker and the rights of the organization as a whole. In doing so, O'Neill suggests that the I.W.W. was working at cross purposes. Thus, it was destined to fail unless it redirected itself towards the needs of the workers, and placed less emphasis on the overall status of the organization. Unfortunately, O'Neill's criticisms are correct, but they do not include outside antagonisms: the strong opposition the I.W.W. experiences from employers, and the 1919-1920 Red Scare.

In 1919, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, under the auspices of the Wilson Administration, launched the "Palmer raids". These raids, in which federal agents
arrested Americans and immigrants suspected of subversive activity, effectively dampened criticism of the government, and significantly reduced the power of controversial organizations such as the I.W.W. Despite the successive founding of the American Communist Party in 1920, radical political groups found themselves on the defensive during the decade. Ironically, O'Neill, who professed to sentiments sympathetic to social radicalism, made no mention of these traumatic days for the American Left.

A more subtle element in *The Hairy Ape* which also reflected important social changes during the late 'teens appeared in O'Neill's treatment of women. Mildred Pierce represented a transitional figure between the idealistic suffragist and social reformer of the Progressive era, and the more self-concerned "flapper" of the 1920s.

Mildred Pierce is an upper class American aristocrat, who despite her emancipation is completely enslaved to the values of her class. This bondage is ambiguously presented as Mildred makes an attempt to present herself as a bleeding heart missionary. Here O'Neill is trying to stress the misconception of the female movement. Mildred is a candidate for a finishing school. Her values have so whitewashed her abilities to associate with the female social movement of the time that she has adopted this benevolent facade. Her connection is with the artificial-
ity of the upper class, the socialites of Fifth Avenue, who, much in the same way as the middle class, are intermeshed with a mass culture. The difference lies within the hierarchical structure. The aristocracy, of which Mildred Pierce is a representative, felt itself superior because of their financial connections. In reality, O'Neill is saying that, viewed in a social context, their disassociation with the political/economic happenings in America is as clear as that of the middle class.

Mildred cannot represent a feminist movement as she is not a female who feels a need to move anything. Her values are commensurate with her artificiality. Her "search for order," is symbolically linked to that of the upper class and the I.W.W. O'Neill implies that all three, the individual, the class, and the organization, were ordering in an inwardly fashion, which greatly conflicted with the Progressive movement of the time.

The Hairy Ape is a documentation of O'Neill's response to the social, political and economic movements during the first two decades of the twentieth-century. As a dramatist, O'Neill has license to be selective, in order to strengthen his message. Thus, he is able to ignore certain historical incidents of value, which would weaken his argument. The Red Scare of 1919 to 1920 is a perfect example. Through his dialogue, O'Neill implies a dissa-
tisfaction with the direction of the labor movement, par-
particularly the more radical groups, for example, the
I.W.W., as well as the social hierarchy which existed
between the upper and lower classes. O'Neill used Yank as
the catalyst for his personal reactions. In *The Hairy Ape*,
Yank is thrust into environments where he hopes to belong.
Unfortunately, as O'Neill perceives it, American society
and its individual components (whether they be labor, pol-
itically or equality oriented), deemphasized the indivi-
dual for the sake of personal or organizational status.
Thus, in O'Neill's opinion, although American societies'
 attempts to order itself were somewhat successful on a
superficial level, they did little to solve the deeper
penetrating problems. Yank would never belong. *The Hairy
Ape* serves as a transitional piece of theatre. It
involves the closing moments of Progressivism and the new
shape of the America to come. O'Neill's message, as
interpreted through *The Hairy Ape*, does not seem to echo
the enthusiasm toward the positive upward direction hoped
for by the Progressives during the first two decades of
the twentieth-century.
CHAPTER 4

An Interpretation of Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*
That *The Hairy Ape* is an expressionist and naturalist play, O'Neill himself wrote in a letter to Kenneth MacGowan in 1921:

> It seems to run the whole gamut from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism—with more of the latter than the former. I have tried to dig deep in it, to probe in the shadows of the soul of a man bewildered by the disharmony of his primitive pride and individualism at war with the mechanistic development of society.¹

This play also incorporates many of O'Neill's personal feelings and reactions. Failure to belong, a consistent O'Neill theme, is fundamental to *The Hairy Ape*. Yank, the tragic hero of the play is killed because of his lack of identification with the reality of his own existence. He cannot identify with anyone or any group; he is a permanent scapegoat. O'Neill implies that twentieth-century society has a great deal to do with Yank's demise. He interprets the values of American individuality to be mechanistic, dimensionless, and totally self-absorbing. Yank is both a victim and an antagonist of this depersonalizing process.

Yank is a creature of twentieth-century America. Its values are his values: it lives on steel, he is steel, he "belongs." He can be happy as a machine because the world is a machine. The inhuman, mechanistic nature of Yank's universe is powerfully represented by the below-deck setting

in which we first see him. 2

In this sense, The Hairy Ape becomes a vehicle for social criticism. It was considered especially powerful at the time it was first produced in March 1922. So strong was the language that the chief magistrate of New York City, William MacAdoo, considered prosecuting the producers of The Hairy Ape for obscenity, indecency, and impurity.

The theme of the play was equally electric and comparatively antagonistic. The useless and proud struggle of a man to individuate himself is juxtaposed with his world's refusal to consider him anything more than a cog in a machine. This identification is a theme which transcends the ages. It was my desire in directing this play to force the audience to question its own identity. Yank's plight is meant to represent the plight of all American individuals. "Yank is really yourself and myself. He is every human being." 3

My feeling is that Yank represents a facet of American individuality. The other parts are comprised of the romanticism in Paddy, the cynicism in Long, the amiability

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in the Big Swede, the vapidness of Mildred, the superficiality of the Fifth Avenue socialites, and the paranoia of the I.W.W. members. The significance of each facet varies according to the spectator. Yet their identification should be with the play as a whole. The message of *The Hairy Ape* suggests that we must not only question the meaning of our existence, but also the way in which we co-exist with one another--with the society which surrounds us.

O'Neill's fundamental criticisms have not lost their bite. He demands a personal introspection and asks America to do the same. His fear is that there is no real purpose to existence; we are all cogs in the wheel. Our introspection will lead us to understand this phenomenon. Yet without this investigation, American individuals will evolve into dimensionless personalities lacking in any self-awareness. Yank's journey involves this self-introspection. It is forced and complex. Each scene makes him more aware of the reality of his existence. His ending provides the audience with two chances. They can choose to dissociate themselves from the message; or they can identify with O'Neill's theme and choose to act upon it. Yank's death is meant to symbolize the death of a man who ultimately understood his existence and subsequently his insignificance. This connection created his downfall.
For O'Neill, this demise is the reality of existence. He feared that all American individuals, like Yank, really had no purpose. They constantly escaped this reality and hid behind masked personas—or in the case of the stokers alcohol—to avoid meaninglessness.

The Hairy Ape embodies many of the essential social themes of America. It is more than just an attack on American society and the theatre of O'Neill's time. It is more than just a simple analysis of one man's lack of identity with the reality of his existence and his struggle to understand it. O'Neill attacks America's lack of humanity. This criticism is multi-faceted and requires further development in the proceeding scene-by-scene textual analysis.

The first scene of The Hairy Ape establishes a reality of character and place. The stokers are presented as Neanderthal-like creatures who have become acculturated to their surroundings. The fireman's forcastle is oppressive. O'Neill in his stage directions hints at a stifling atmosphere which is emblematic of a cage.
The symbolism is neither subtle nor sophisticated. From the outset, the audience is confronted with the caged-in existence of the stokers. These men, who represent all the "civilized white races," are walled in by their existence.

The importance of the opening moments of The Hairy Ape cannot be underestimated. It is essential that atmosphere is established immediately. Our production featured a forecastle set which would quickly convey the oppressive atmosphere endured by the stokers. The bunks and walls are grey/black—dirty and made of steel. They close in upon the stokers as if the walls were prison blocks. These stokers live in a world of steel; it is impeding their growth and development. They are stooped over, long armed and muscular, ape-like. Their simian appearance is accentuated in the first scene by their drunkenness. They swagger and fight and laugh and shout and sing. Yet it is painfully obvious that alcohol is used as an escape—a respite from their oppressive existence. The audience should become sensitive to the murkiness of the forecastle. Dark lighting aids in creating this effect.

The stokers are inextricably linked to their work. O'Neill unites scene with character to such an extent that the first 22 lines of the play are random drunken expressions meant to reinforce the stifling arena. At this point, there can be no visible differentiation of character. The men act as a unit—passing bottles, joking, drinking, singing, and fighting. They are products of the environment both physically and mentally. Broad-shouldered, long-armed, and mostly illiterate, they appear to have resigned themselves to their brutish and repetitive days.

The seeming lack of individuation is purposely established by O'Neill in the first scene. It is meant to evoke the expressionistic tendencies of the play. It also reinforces the theme. Stokers cannot easily express individuality. These men's lives could be interchanged. There is, however, among this group, a primitive established hierarchy.

It is immediately obvious that Yank is set off from the other stokers. During the opening moments of the first scene, he is seen sitting on a bench—in what appears to be a thinking position. He is visibly more brutish and confident than the rest.

He represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly
developed individual.  

Yank is their leader. An unexpressed respect for Yank must be created from the outset of the play. Here, O'Neill borrows from the Greeks. It is as if the stokers are the chorus and Yank the tragic hero.

The chorus effect was intended to suggest that the men were no more than machines. It is an attempt to move behind life—a clearly expressionistic device.

The stokers echo Yank's enthusiasm and his anger. Their admiration for him stems from his physical prowess. He is the greatest stoker aboard ship, and his self-confidence radiates from his person. He controls the other stokers. This fact is established very early in the first scene: the stokers are drinking; Yank is thinking. When the carousing reaches a frenzy, a fight ensues. Yank immediately orders them to stop all singing and all fighting—and focus their attentions upon him. The stokers obey him immediately. The chorus serves its master. Furthermore, Yank is aware of his control over the other men, and revels in his authority.

In spite of the fact that O'Neill chose to play down the individual characteristics of his stokers in order to

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reinforce his theme and atmosphere, as director I felt it more valuable to create individual characteristics which would accentuate what I consider the principal theme of the play: belonging. Each character, as representative of different facets of humanity, would further embody the essence of the play.

O'Neill had assigned each stoker a distinctive nationality. I asked each actor to expand upon this label and thus create a person from generic nationality. The team-like unity is not lost. The characters, although more individual continue to represent "the civilized white races." Their varied personalities, however, allow for a stronger differentiation from Yank.

This contrast is particularly clear and important with respect to the characters of Paddy and Long and Yank. These three men have adopted strategies which enable them to cope with (in the case of Yank, thrive on), their stifling existence. Paddy lives in the past. He dreams of returning to the days of his youth when sailing was a man's job and did not resemble the sterility of a machine-like existence. Long has adopted a personal version of a socialist theory which he truly believes will solve all the problems of the stokers; capitalist domination of the world is the reason for their oppressive situation. He reads The Communist Manifesto and loudly
calls for a revolution. Yet, to a certain extent, he is parodied by O'Neill as a weak and ineffective socialist who hides his own inadequacy behind an escapist ideology. Conversely, Yank believes he is an essential part of America. He believes he runs the ship, because without him the mighty liner would not move. Yank is so proud of himself that he is sure no ideology—especially Paddy's nostalgia or Long's socialism—could have any significance for him.

O'Neill has created confrontations to shake Yank's seemingly strong foundation—his belief in his life—from the outset of the play. Yank's downfall is foreshadowed from the moment Long begins his socialist ranting and is predictably furthered by Paddy's total revulsion with, and denial of, the importance of a stokers' existence.

This second confrontation is essential to the thematic construction of The Hairy Ape. With the use of monologue O'Neill creates a confrontation of world views. O'Neill juxtaposes the differing philosophies of Paddy and Yank for our understanding. Paddy's seems to be the voice of Eugene O'Neill mesmerized by the lost romance of the sea and revolted by the mechanization of the twentieth century.

'Twas them days men belonged to ships, not now. 'Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all to-
gether and made it one. Is it one wid this you’d be, Yank—black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea, smudging the decks—the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking—wid divil a sight of sun or a breath of clean air...Is it to belong to that you’re wishing? Is it a flesh and blood wheel of the engines you’d be?7

Paddy’s recreation of the simple past clashes with Yank’s belief that he belongs in America and that he is an important part of the increasingly mechanized world. Paddy, on the other hand, can find nothing in modern life to which to attach himself. Life in mechanistic America is wholly inhumane. And stokers stoke only to survive.

Yank tries to refute Paddy’s pessimistic perception of life. He is his own voice—confident that without him, America would be severely flawed and altered. At this point, he represents all those American men and women who (in O'Neill’s eyes) refuse to confront the futility of their existence and as a result adopt a definition which conforms to their desires. Yank believes that he is steel, a support, a man who creates the system:

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 this....I’m de start. I start somep’n and de wouldn moves. It—dat’s me!—de new dat’s moiderin de old! I’m de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I’m steam and oil for de engines. I’m de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I’m smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles. I’m de ting in gold dat makes money. And I’m what makes iron into steel! Steel dat stands for de whole...7

Yank believes he is the impetus of the entire modern American dream. What is ironic is that he unconsciously supports Paddy's contention that America is inhumane by emphasizing the materialistic. Yank does not understand the fact that he lives for one purpose only: to stoke coal on a second-class steel ship. He is the quintessential machine tender, the servant of a boiler, without any but the most tenuous connection to other people, to human identity.

Yank refuses to believe in this purposeless existence. The other stokers as a chorus echo Yank's enthusiastic endorsement of his "purpose" and importance to the world. O'Neill seems to imply that a denial of the reality of existence (conscious or not), is easier than a reconciliation with the truth. The stokers want to believe they have a purpose. As leader, Yank epitomizes their values. Therefore, his belief becomes their belief. This pattern reinforces the chorus-like structure of scene one, while it further emphasizes the play's theme of man's rage to connect, to belong.

In defense of his own argument, O'Neill ends the scene with the sounding of eight bells which prompts the

The stokers are kept slaves to the machine. Realizing this absurd predicament, Paddy chooses not to give in to mechanization:

To the divil wid it: I'll not report this watch. Let thim log me and be damned. I'm no slave the like of you. I'll be sitting here at me ease, and drinking, and thinking and dreaming dreams.\(^9\)

Yank's response, conversely, is predictably typical and drives him deeper into his own self-delusion. He vehemently defends his own rationale for enslavement: "Yuh make me sick. Yuh don't belong." Yank is denying any possibility that he may be wrong, a trap about which O'Neill is warning all Americans to be conscious. O'Neill is urging America to recognize the potential alienation of its citizens because of repetitive, mechanistic, and dehumanizing jobs. Yank, representative American, does not belong. Thus, in O'Neill's eyes, no one belongs. True identity can be established only if, like Paddy, one recognizes the degeneration of human values and finds one's own means of coping with death-in-life absurdities like the stokehole.

Mildred Pierce and her aunt represent the upper class of twentieth-century American society. Their snobbish and brittle values are so intertwined with the superficiality of America that O'Neill seems convinced they will achieve dimension only in materialism and sophistry. In scene two of *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill contrasts Mildred and her aunt with the natural surroundings of the sea in order to further accentuate their vapidity.

The impression to be conveyed by this scene is one of the beautiful, vivid life of the sea all about—sunshine on the deck in a great flood, the fresh sea wind blowing across it. In the midst of this, these two incongruous, artificial figures, inert and disharmonious, the elder like a grey lump of dough touched up with rouge, the younger looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived, so that she is the expression not of its life energy but merely of the artificialities that energy had won for itself in the spending. 11

The scene is intentionally constructed to accentuate this contrast. O'Neill wishes to emphasize the disunity of the two women from their "natural" surroundings.

Mildred is a well meaning (albeit rich), social worker, her life devoted to "observing" the poor. O'Neill implies that Mildred feels as if her very presence among the poorer classes will be invigorating. Able to see through Mildred's poses, the aunt, however, is as shallow as Mildred is fickle. Her values are wholly monetary. As

Mildred's guardian, she looks after her and in turn is well taken care of by her brother—Mildred's father. The aunt is a woman who believes that self-preservation is a religion to be revered. Her addiction to her creature comforts supercedes all else. Therefore, she endures Mildred so that she may have the luxury to which she has become accustomed.

Scene two of The Hairy Ape is unusual in so far as it allows for only a very short glimpse at what turns out to be a catalytic character in the play. Mildred and her aunt revel in their own shallowness. A scene is all that is required to illustrate the one-dimensional characteristics of their identities, which revolve around their belief that their class defines their individuality. O'Neill places them in the scene directly following one featuring Yank and the stokers so that the audience may analyze both the contrasts and similarities in the group of characters. Mildred and her aunt differ from the stokers in two ways. The first is obviously related to class: Mildred and her aunt are firmly ensworned in the upper classes, while Yank and the stokers are enMBEDed in the lower. Yet it is these very class based values which allow for a greater contrast between the individual and the surroundings. The stokers have acclimated themselves to their life in the stokehole. Conversely, Mildred and
her aunt are depicted as artificial and decadent snobs wholly alienated from nature (the sea) and from any meaningful contact with other human beings.

Ultimately Mildred and her aunt fail to connect to anything. Their lack of identity however, is similar to Yank and the stokers only to the extent that it is a shared reality. Neither the upper class, nor the lower has attained an identity which is true to the reality of their existence. Yet, Mildred and her aunt are more guilty than the stokers as they have adopted facades in order to further the distance between the individuals they really are and the characters they appear to play. In O'Neill's eyes, they have no truly human characteristics.

This lack of humanity is particularly emphasized in Mildred's relationship with her aunt: a mutual abhorrence which exemplifies and accentuates their artificiality and inhumanity. In scene two, in a continuous dialogue between the two characters, each tries verbally to "out nasty" the other.

Aunt: [with spite] Yes, you are a natural born ghoul. You are even beginning to look like one, my dear.

Mildred: [in passionless tone] I detest you, Aunt [looking at her artificially] Do you know what you remind me of? Of a cold pork pudding against a background of linoleum tablecloth in the kitchen of a--but the possibilities are wearisome. [she
closes her eyes[12]

This dialogue is typical of their exchanges. O'Neill seems to suggest that this verbal slicing and dicing is their only real reason for being. Hatred is the emotion they can share, and even their hatred seems brittle and artificial—passionless—as befits these upper-class mannequins, yet these cat-fighting aristocrats must be played as "real"; O'Neill saw Mildred and her aunt as far more dangerous than caricatures or parodies.

The set design for this scene is equally realistic. It is absolutely essential that the stokers and Mildred appear at different levels, thus underlining the division between the upper and lower classes. Mildred establishes this division. "She divides the world into two parts: One is where she and her kind belong; the stokers are the denizens of the other half." [13]

This dichotomy is further accentuated by the correct lighting. In my production, I emphasized a cold, harsh yellow light in order to increase the ugliness and inhumanity of the characters. These malformities were further emphasized upon at the end of scene two. O'Neill


has written that Mildred should slap the aunt. I found that this physical action undermined the severity and nastiness of the moment. Therefore, I had Mildred throw her drink in her aunt's face as she called her an "Old Hag." This action seemed to me a clearer expression of Mildred's character and rather ironically exposed the "missionary to the poor" as the "poser" her aunt had been calling her all along. The now clear tension between audience and characters builds toward the central image of the play, which takes place between Mildred and Yank in scene three.

The third scene of *The Hairy Ape* is the visual and thematic core of the play. Action and sound effects must be coordinated in order to achieve a powerful coordinated impression. For these reasons, it is a very difficult scene to design, and several elements must be emphasized. The first is the nature of the stokehole itself. It must convey unbelievable heat and noise in cavern-like surroundings. It is a modern hell where Yank is very proudly toiling as the self-appointed leader of his fellow stokers. The audience must sense this atmosphere. It must also understand the significance of the surroundings. Yank had raised himself to a God-like level in scene one. He related his personal identity to his physical surroundings. "Who makes dis old tub run? Ain't it us guys? Well den. We belong don't we? We belong and dey don't.
Dat's all." Ironically, it is only in hell that these exploited stokers find some sense of "fraternity."

O'Neill juxtaposes Yank's belief in his own importance to his dismal surroundings in order to heighten his lack of perception about his own misfortune. In reality, Yank belongs to nothing. He is merely a cog in the machinery of twentieth-century industrial society. His labor has been deemed necessary to keep the ship moving. Yank has been relegated to a hell on earth, and he is completely unaware of his condition.

Scene three is visually powerful as well, heightened by very warm, direct lighting. Oranges and yellows can be used to create a sense of heat. The furnaces of the stokehole further accentuate the inferno-like surroundings. Blasts of orange escape when the doors are opened. The men are silhouetted by the flames of the furnace, and the heat is overwhelming. It justifies but does not indicate Mildred's reaction. Observing the inferno from a higher deck, she is stupefied by the energy of the stokers. Yet her social "superiority" is emphasized once again by her position above Yank and his mates below in the stokehole. Yank's vulnerability must be made clear in the scene. Symbolically, as in scene two, she is above them. This differentiation of space increases Yank's

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vulnerability when he is directly confronted with Mildred.

Scene three begins, like scene one, with overwhelming noise. As in scene one, O'Neill emphasizes further the relentless inhumanity of steel by using the clang of furnace doors, the clattering of Yank's shovel on a steel bulkhead, the whistle overhead, and staccato voices. The intensity is such that the men can barely hear one another over the noise. The shoveling of the coal increases the intensity. The coal should be real, as no other sound can duplicate the terror and force of metal against coal. The combination of light and sound, with the foreboding presence of the belching furnaces, identifies the place as the inferno described by O'Neill in the stage directions.

This man-become-machine idea is displayed by the rhythmic motion of the shoveling stokers. They swing back and forth, like pistons, hurling coal into the open mouths of the furnace--turning, shoveling, groaning, sweating, hurling--in continuous motion. This mechanical movement has implied sexual overtones because Yank seems to treat the furnace as a female. The act of shoveling suggests a sexual act for him as Yank's own speech of scene three shows. Furthermore, the scene's dialogue is rhythmically constructed to accentuate a kind of sexual movement. As the moment begins slowly and builds, a climax is suggested.
One--two--tree Dat's de stuff! Let her have it! All togedder now! Sling it into her! Let her ride! Shoot de piece now! Call de toin on her! Drive her into it! Feel her move! Watch her smoke! Speed, dat's her middle name! Give her coal, youse guys! Coal dat's her booze Drink it up baby! Let's see yuh sprint. Dig in and gain a lap. Dere she go-o-es. 15

The desired effect is a mechanized sexuality. The men are exhausted immediately following their frantic efforts. The suggestive language of the speeches is punctuated with exclamation marks, each sentence denoting a stroke. The diction has sexual undertones as well: "sling," "shoot," "speed," "give," and "dig in." This association lends itself to the atmosphere of the scene, and it foreshadows the frustrating Yank/Mildred confrontation. The environment is sexually charged both physically (heat and the sweating men), and symbolically. Mildred enters into this intense arena with totally different expectations. She is used to the wretched poor. Thus her reaction upon entering the stokehole should highlight her surprise, shock, and sense of unconscious sexual stimulation, each emotion intensely felt and directly contrasting to her sterile and mechanistic demeanor in scene two. She finds herself emotionally stirred.

Yank is the catalyst for her emotional high. The one man verbal intimidation match he is having with an unseen

whistle blower is emblematic of Yank's usually angry
dialogue. O'Neill has exceeded the boundary of decorous
language by filling this monologue with steamy profani-
ties, thus heightening the drama of the moment. Head
upturned, Yank is searching for his tormentor with shovel
brandished, the noise, heat, and light of the stokehole
all are pouring upon him. As Yank yells defiance at the
whistle, Mildred watches him from above.

Toin off dat whistle! Come down outta dere, yuh
yellow, brass buttoned Belfast bum Yuh! Come down
and I'll knock your brains out! Yuh lousy stinkin
yellow mut of a Catholic-moiderin bastard! Come
down and I'll moider yuh! Pullin dat whistle on
me, huh! I'll show yuh! I'll crash yer skull in!
I'll drive yer teet down yer troat! I'll slam yer
nose down the back of yer head! I'll cut yer guts
out for a nickel, yuh lousy boob, yuh dirty orum-
my, muck eatin' son of a --- 16

Mildred's reaction during this monologue is extremely
important to the state of her identity. The atmosphere of
the stokehole, compounded by Yank's intensely emotional
outburst, spawns emotions in Mildred that she has never
before felt. For the first time in her whole effete life,
Mildred is sexually aroused. This time it is by Yank, and
the heat, and the sweating bodies, and the profanity,
which send her into unaccustomed orgasmic elation. Mil-
dred is wholly unable to control her instinctive sexual
response. My decision to feature a sensual hand movement

as part of that reaction (Mildred touches her breasts) was
made in the hope that this naturally stifling yet obvi­
ously provocative movement would accentuate the intensity
of the moment.

At first, Yank is absolutely unconscious of Mildred's
presence, caught up as he is in his fight with the
whistle-blower. The other stokers play voyeur, as does the
audience: all are observing Mildred's sensual act. Mil­
dred, however, has eyes only for Yank and his overpower­
ingly muscular body. Yet her instinctive physical action
(touching her breasts), and her social stature conflict.
Therefore, the sensual hand movement is her attempt to
stifle her instinctive sexual arousal. That movement,
however, betrays this very emotion.

Scene three's climax occurs when Yank sees Mildred
for the first time. This is the focal scenic image of the
play. Mildred is dressed in white, in dramatic contrast
to the smoky surroundings. In the middle of his outburst
Yank senses something behind him and turns. After a
moment's hesitation, the connection of the two is
achieved. The upper and the lower become one for a second
in time. But almost immediately, Mildred once again real­
izes who she is, what she has been doing: and she banishes
Yank to proletarian oblivion with the whispered line, "you
filthy beast." \(^{17}\) In reality this statement betrays Mildred's attraction to Yank and arousal of authentic sexual urges. However, carnal passion is not characteristically manifested for stokers by the pampered daughters of steel barons. She may be stirred by Yank's phallic power, but as an upper-class "innocent" she will escape by fainting dead away.

I changed Mildred's line because O'Neill's original speech was simply too melodramatic for credibility in 1985. O'Neill may have inherited a bit of the classical theatre he so despised when he wrote Mildred's reaction as: "Take me away! Oh, the filthy beast!" \(^{18}\) The excessive melodrama of the original line contributes nothing to the thematically important moment. Nevertheless, Mildred's aristocratic disgust and disdain do destroy the identity of another human being. Yank is crushed, insulted by a white apparition in front of the men who hold him in highest esteem. This woman's contempt calls into question his self-identity as the king of the stokehole. Indeed, Mildred's whispered judgement destroys Yank's belief that he belongs to something significant. The line, therefore, has to accentuate the class conflict but still remain credibly realistic. After the fainting

\(^{17}\) O'Neill, *The Hairy Ape*, p. 192.
Mildred is carried off, Yank stretches the tension by leaping atop the coal bin and hurling his shovel at her vanishing entourage. That his frustration, despair, and anger are evident is demonstrated in his final exclamation, "God damn yuh." The crushed Yank knows neither what to say nor how to feel. The scene ends with a final blast of the intrusive whistle—a reminder of the mechanized compulsions of the stoker's workplace and the depersonlized inhumanity of Yank's existence.

Scene four, the final scene of the first act, begins Yank's newly generated quest for his Mildred-destroyed identity. From the outset, he is obsessed with a desire for revenge. He wants to prove to Mildred that he is a significant man and not the animal that she shrinks from. But he feels his dominance of the stokehole slipping away, his role as leader of the stokers eroding after Mildred's rejection. O'Neill heightens Yank's increasing alienation by constructing a barrier between Yank and his chorus.

Yank has always been the chorus leader; now the stokers are all against him. The few words uttered by the chorus members have, repeatedly, a brazen metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns.

Mildred's disparaging remark now wholly dominates Yank and

20 Tiusanen, *O'Neill's Scenic Images*, p. 120.
creates feelings within him which he cannot control. The other stokers do not understand Yank's confusion, nor his inability to laugh at the peculiarity of his confrontation with Mildred. Paddy's sarcastic jokes about the situation underline the significance of the event.

'Twas love at first sight, divil a doubt of it. If you'd seen the endearing' look on her pale mug when she shriveled away with her hands over her eyes to shut out the sight of him. Sure, 'twas as if she'd seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo.21

The smug Paddy has understood from the very beginning that Yank's identity was tied to the same degradations as his own.

At this crucial point, it is important to stage this understanding correctly. Paddy's knowledge places him above Yank. His position is unconsciously higher because his comprehension is greater. Thus, Paddy must be physically higher than Yank. In my production, I placed him on a top bunk in the forecastle. This was not meant to denote a supremacy of position, but rather my desire to imply Paddy's superior comprehension of the situation. During this entire scene, it is Paddy's understanding which clashes so obviously with Yank's anger and despair. The other stokers understand neither position clearly.

Long, typically, attempts to rationalize Mildred's

reactions by employing a socialist explanation. The others are simply numb. Yet Yank’s frustration is exacerbated by Paddy’s "wit."

Mildred has immediately come to stand for everything that Yank can never attain. She is an archetype, a piece of light, something he can not be. Yank feels he must rid himself of this apparition in order to reestablish his validity in the world.

Youse all kin bet your shoits. I'll get even wit her. I'll show her if she thinks she--she grinds de organ and I'm on the string huh? I'll fix her! Let her come down again and I'll fling her in de furnace! She'll move den. She won't shiver at nothing den. Speed, dat'll be her. She'll belong den.22

By now completely consumed with his desire for revenge, Yank feels he must rid himself of his own feelings of insignificance. The scene ends as Yank rushes to the door of the forecastle in a rage. The four remaining stokers, minus Paddy, trap him and pin him to the table, thus suggesting still another degradation of Yank. Yank now is meat on a table, meat that must be controlled. His final speeches convey his extreme frustration: "She's done me doit! She done me doit, didn't she? I'll git square wit her! I'll get her some way! Git off en me, youse guys!

Lemme up! I'll show her who's an ape! It is with this climactic moment that I decided to end the first act.

The second act of *The Hairy Ape* deals specifically with Yank's downfall. It encompasses a greater variety of expressionist techniques including a continuously distorting set. Scene design became an ever important factor in the second act, as I felt it was the clearest vehicle through which I could immediately convey certain aspects of the expressionist values of the play, particularly that the chaos in Yank's mind be clearly visible to the audience. Mildred's statement in the previous act had so completely cut him off from his prior existence that all his faculties were warping the physical reality of his surroundings. Yank was no longer sure of the existence of his identity.

The evolution of the set design corresponds to the disorientation of Yank's mind.

Yank is a Neanderthal Alice in a hostile wonderland. What an audience sees is a kind of reality but distorted as it might be when filtered through Yank's consciousness.24

It was my feeling that the audience should be immediately overwhelmed with Fifth Avenue, much as Yank is. Thus, I

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decided to use bright, primary colors in my design of a
cubist-like representation of the famous street. Fifth
Avenue was painted on three canvas drops without dimension
except that given to the length of the street which seemed
to stretch into infinity. Dimensionlessness was specifi-
cally chosen to heighten the fragmentary nature of Fifth
Avenue and the society which peopled it. The whole feel-
ing is artificially gaudy, bright, insensitive, and visu-
ally unreal. Fifth Avenue is a symbol of the perversities
and decadence of twentieth-century society; it represents
materialistic values and dimensionless personalities. In
O'Neill's mind, those who chose to identify with this
atmosphere were in "tawdry disharmony" with their own
identities.

The entrance of Yank and Long into this scene relates
specifically to the design of the set. The desired effect
is dramatic in the sense that it is clearly obvious the
two men are in a foreign environment. Their very dialogue
is indicative of this fact.

Long: [indicating it all with an oratorical ges-
ture] Well, 'ere we are. Fif' Avenue. This
'ere's their bleeding' private lane, as yer might
say. [bitterly] We're trespassers 'ere. Proletarians keep off the grass.

Yank: [Dully] I don't see no grass, yuh boob.
[staring at the sidewalk] Clean, ain't it. You
could eat a fried egg offen it. The white wings,
got some job sweepin' dis up. [Looking up and
down the avenue--surlily] Where's all de white-
collared stiffs you said was here--and the
skoits—her kind?

Long: In church blarst ‘em! Arskin’ Jesus to give ‘em more money.\(^{25}\)

Yank and Long do not feel that they belong on Fifth Avenue. They are out of their element, trespassing on the values of another class. Yet, for O'Neill, it is this implied alienation which is catalytically important to the play. Once the king of the stokehole, Yank no longer connects his identity to his surroundings. His obsession has led him out of the environment to which he felt the greatest affinity, and into a world where even religion has supposedly become a capitalist enterprise.

Long defines the ambiguities of Fifth Avenue as a capitalist problem. This classification is typical of his character, yet atypical of O'Neill's philosophy. As evidenced in the first act, O'Neill did not seem to have any serious sympathies for the Marxist/Leninist ideology. In fact, in scene five—Long's final appearance—O'Neill seems to be polishing up the parodied character of act one. Long is too ignorantly passionate about communism; he declares that all the problems of America could be solved within a communist framework. Although O'Neill was sympathetic to some sort of reform, Long's are not specifically his opinions.

It is my feeling that O'Neill used Long to form the third side of a philosophical triangle. He was a buffer for Yank. His suggestions that Yank adopt the communist ideology as his own is meant to add dimension to Yank's dilemma. Even when it is clear that Yank will not choose political dogma as a means to create an identity, this ironic possibility—coupled with the distorted, inhuman surroundings of Fifth Avenue—frustrates Yank further. He is trapped by his obsessional desire for revenge and his inability to connect with either his own identity or the unreal surroundings.

Long: Just look at this 'ere bloomin' mess! Just look at it! Look at the bleeding' prices on 'em—more'n our 'ole bloody stokehole makes in ten voyages sweatin' in'ell. And they—'er and 'er bloody clars—buys 'em for toys to dangle on 'em. One of these 'ere would buy scoff for a starvin' family for a year!26

There is no clear justification for the materialism of Fifth Avenue. It increases the disparity between the individual and the self, as money becomes a means by which an individual can distance himself from the reality of his existence. In actuality, what occurs is that the individual becomes a product of his possessions: he is what he owns. The soul vanishes in this type of existence.

O'Neill himself seems to be making this point through Long, who voices his bitterness at the price of a monkey

fur coat. "They wouldn't bloody well pay that for 'airy ape's skin--no not for the 'ole livin' ape with all is 'ead, and body, and soul thrown in." Long's is a direct reference to the inhumanity of the inhabitants of Fifth Avenue. This type of person would pay more for appearance (a fur coat) than the life of another human being (a hairy ape).

Yank understands this phenomenon. In fact, it is the only clear connection he makes between himself and Fifth Avenue. He is cognizant of the fact that the basis for the artificial values of upper class America are purely monetary. His desire is to defeat this assumed reality, a defeat which will reestablish his identity. O'Neill's irony lies in the fact that Yank believes he can beat the system with his own physical prowess--just as he felt he did in the stokehole: "Force dat's me! De punch dat's me every time, see! Yank is impatient to justify his existence. He wants to prove himself to the very people he felt took away his feeling of belonging. Yank wants to identify with himself again. Yet, his own naivete has led him to believe that he can achieve this end through physical force. In reality he is creating a deeper chasm between himself and his true identity. His alienation

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becomes complete upon the entrance of the Fifth Avenue socialites.

It is at this point that I chose to heighten the expressionism of the play by employing masks. O'Neill had suggested that masks be used on all characters in the play, with the exception of Yank, following scene three.

In *The Hairy Ape* a much more extensive use of masks would be of the greatest value in emphasizing the theme of the play. From the opening of the fourth scene, where Yank begins to think, he enters into a masked world; even the familiar faces of his mates in the forecastle have become strange and alien. They should be masked, the faces of everyone he encounters thereafter, including the symbolic gorilla's.29

This technique was meant to immediately heighten and underlie Yank's alienation, a suggestion I found confusing in terms of the contrasting messages which would be conveyed to the audience. I felt it was wiser to use dramatic expression—through voice and body language—to highlight Yank's alienation in scene four. However, with scene five, masking the Fifth Avenue men and women seemed to me thematically appropriate and artistically correct.

The entrance of the Fifth Avenue socialites is the culmination of O'Neill's condemnation of their values. With the appearance of these men and women, O'Neill justifies all of his previous criticisms concerning elitist

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29 Gelbs, *O'Neill*, p. 496.
values. Their very appearance embodies all the artificiality of Fifth Avenue.

The crowd from church enter, sauntering slowly and affectedly, their heads held stiffly up, looking neither to right nor left, talking in toneless, simpering voices. The women are...overdressed to the nth degree. The men are in Prince Alberts, high hats, spats, canes, etc. A procession of gaudy marionettes, yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein monsters in their detached mechanical unawareness.30

O'Neill attacks this Fifth Avenue sense of identity from all corners. Through this description, he implies that the elite are mechanized, depersonalized, commercialized, materialistic, zealous, androgenous "monsters."

They have no souls. O'Neill so labels them as such by allocating to them only the title of "voices." They are pure representatives of their class, nameless creatures who like automated robots are sensitive only to that which is directly tangible, to that which controls their jaded sensibilities.

--we must organize a hundred per cent American bazaar.

--and let everyone contribute one one-hundredth percent of their income tax.

--What an original idea! 31

The staging of this scene was perhaps the most difficult of the entire play because of the mechanics involved. I felt that it was absolutely necessary that the Fifth Avenue socialites give the appearance of being totally unaware of everything that did not personally involve them. I wanted them to wander alone and occasionally in pairs across the stage admiring shops and prices. Yet their ambling had to seem imbued with a contrived purpose. The men and women had to walk with a sense of pretentious meaning. Indeed, that is the very essence of this moment in the play. Appearance, that which is seen, the material, is everything to these people. They are completely unaware of anything else.

The masks help to create this effect. They represent the ultimate in an appearance-conscious society. These men and women are so detached from their real identity and existence that they cannot even bear to present their true faces to the world. The mask is a means of achieving formal detached expression of the artist's emotion coupled with a means of representing psychological truths.

For O'Neill the mask has a symbolic value, which is not too far removed from that of the Greek tradition. For even though by the use of a mask, he wished to symbolize the essential duality of

31 O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, p. 207.
man, let us not forget that man is before anything else what he is under the mask, the cluster of instincts and complexities, modern psychology presents to us.  

The Fifth Avenue socialites hide a great deal under their masks. Yet, in their case, the use of a mask is also a vehicle for repression and ultimately escape from their true selves. These men and women have stripped themselves of all individuality and fear any sort of introspection or self-enlightenment. They put their hands in their pockets, (or their pocketbooks), take out their money, and buy. Their lives are based upon a series of commercial prospects on which material objects are a God to be reverentially worshipped.

It is into this atmosphere that Yank has thrust himself, a totally alien being. Coupled with his alienation is his desire for revenge which results in his need for antagonism. Yank tries desperately to get the attention of the Fifth Avenue socialites. He runs into them, screams at them, punches them, and tries to solicit sexual responses from them. No one responds. Fifth Avenue is completely unaware of the by-now raging Yank. As the snobs walk by and inspect the shop windows on Fifth Avenue, Yank

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tries to get their attention with the sheer force of his physical presence. He tries to prove to these indifferent men and women that his sense of belonging stems from his unique strength.

Aw, g'wan de lot of youse! Yuh give me de eye-ache. Yuh don't belong, get me! Look at me, why don't youse dare? I belong dat's me! See dat building goin' up dere? See de steel work? Steel, dat's me! Youse guys live on it and tink yuh're sumpt'n. But I'm in it, see I'm de hois-tin' engine dat makes it go up! I'm it--de inside and bottom of it!^33

Yank, in this self-glorifying speech, is trying to revivify his sense of belonging. He believes that his physical force has given him an absolute self-identity in the world. However, Fifth Avenue is oblivious to his dramatic remarks. The elite there continue their automated, oblivious wandering. Because of their indifference, Yank becomes more completely alienated than ever before, almost frantic because he has lost his power of persuasion, his ability to maneuver and control. Now, it is he who is being controlled. Yank needs to reestablish his identity. Yet ironically, he needs the Fifth Avenue socialites, as representatives of Mildred Pierce, to "recognize" his importance. It is only through their validation that Yank will again feel himself complete.

The inhumanity of Yank's situation culminates in a final vicious blow from the socialites. Their attention is focused upon the two-thousand-dollar monkey fur coat which had so shocked Yank and Long. They admire its beauty, its uniqueness, its price. This insult infuriates Yank. The individuals from whom he had so desired recognition are now labeling him in the same way that Mildred Pierce did in the stokehole. Yank's anger and frustration is by now extremely intense. In what resembles an almost hallucinatory pathological state, Yank tries to rip up the curb of the street and hurl it at the socialites, obliterating their existence forever, much in the same way that they have his. He is kept from this destruction by a man who runs into him while trying to catch a bus. Yank hits the barrier, the physical assault leading to Yank's downfall and allowing for the subsequent additional repression.

Yank's crime was not the assault on the man, but that he dared to get in the way of the elite. Coupled with this fact is that Yank has allowed himself to believe that upper-class attention could define him. In fact, socialites would admire his physical strength in the same way that they admire the jewels on Fifth Avenue. Yank, in his naivete, is guilty of contributing to his own demise. His punishment is greater than his imprisonment. In his own
mind, the upper class has more fully validated the fact that he may just be what Mildred has defined him as being—a hairy ape, a filthy beast. In high society’s eyes, he is nothing more than a minute incident in their day.

The sixth scene of The Hairy Ape compliments its predecessors. It is expressionistic in scene design and theme. I made the prison scene as dark as possible. Thus, all of the prison cells were designed with lights only, with intangible bars, created by the spectra of light. I further accentuated the cavernous quality of the prison by employing a large steel door at the upstage center area of the theater. This door is opened only once—when Yank is thrown into the prison—and closed with a startling finality. As a dramatic technique, the final slam reinforces both the physical and mental gloom of the prison and accentuates Yank’s disorientation and detachment from the reality of his surroundings. Using the bars of light as prison cells, I felt, would heighten Yank’s distorted perception upon his surroundings. It implies, as did our design of scene five, that Yank’s obsession has warped his ability to see things as they really are.

The voices of the prisoners, (labeled only as voices—an expressionist technique) project from the shadowed murkiness of the prison, accosting Yank from all
sides. This technique further accentuates Yank's alienation. He is completely alone—in a prison—battered and floundering, "I was a fireman—stokin' on de liners...I'm a hairy ape, get me? And I'll bust youse all in de jaw 'if you don't lay off kiddin' me." By this time, Yank no longer knows who he is; apparently he has accepted Mildred's definition of him. It is clear that he is not able to dissociate himself from her insult. In his mind, Yank views his situation as a reflection of the distinction which society has allotted him: he is a hairy ape. And he is "caged" for it.

Yank's confidence seems to have completely vanished in this scene. He has resigned himself to allowing others to control his existence, a notion in sharp contrast to his attitude in the stokehole (scene three of the first act) in which any authority whatsoever was immediately challenged by Yank. In scene six, we are presented with a completely different Yank.

We do see however, certain vestiges of the old self-confidence prone Yank, particularly with regard to to his obsession.

But I'll get back at her yet, you watch! And if I can't find her I'll take it out on de gang she runs wit....I'll show her who belongs! I'll show her who's in de move and who ain't! You watch my

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34 O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, p. 212.
This contradictory reaction is not an unusual one for Yank. Yet, if it is compared to the monologues of act one, a pattern of disintegration can be seen. Now in prison, Yank is more desperate; he senses the futility of his existence. Yank gropes excessively in his dialogue—searching for a way out, for a release of his frustration. His confidence is highest when he directs his ambivalent feelings to Mildred and the upper class. This is an arena with which he can relieve the self-created tension in his mind.

There is another opportunity which is made available to Yank with the discussion of the I.W.W. These moments in scene six were created as a foreshadowing of that which is to come. O'Neill's parody of the relationship between the I.W.W. and the rest of society is particularly interesting in that it favors neither side. The following quotation demonstrated O'Neill's irony about radicals and reactionaries. A "voice" reads from a newspaper the pronouncements of a Senator Queen on the I.W.W.:

There is a menace existing in this country today which threatens the vitals of our fair Republic—as foul a menace against the very life-blood of the American Eagle as was the foul conspiracy of cataline against the eagles of ancient Rome....I refer to that devil's brew of rascals, jailbirds,
murderers, and cut throats who libel all honest working men by calling themselves the Industrial Workers of the World; but in the light of their nefarious plots, I call them the Industrial Wreckers of the World.36

With this description of the I.W.W., O'Neill not only sets up the action for the next scene, but he also underlines the ridiculous pretensions of the conservative politician. These reactionaries are as fascist as they believe the I.W.W. to be terrorist. In O'Neill's eyes, neither organization (conservative politicians nor the I.W.W.), will allow a human to live to discover identity according to their ideology. A title, no matter what it is, is not the answer. Yank, however, naively hopes to find a new home in the I.W.W., thus taking one more giant step towards his downfall. Yank has finally recognized the hypocrisy that characterizes the American society. He is not steel, nor is he really a human being. He is repressed, forbidden to express his true self.

In this discovery there is also a reversal and a further complication. Now Yank, fully realizing how unimportant he is, makes a complete change of plans. Instead of personal vendetta against Mildred he decides he wants to destroy the whole system. 37

Yank truly believes that he can still beat the American process. This idea is just another example of the complete distortion of his identity. His behavior and thought patterns are retrogressive. Yank talks of destruction—destroying all that he believed he built, whereas in act one, he glorified ultimately his role as constructor. Yank's dialogue suggests two interconnected ideas. The first is that society in its role as repressor and policeman has contributed mightily to his downfall. This fact cannot be denied. Yet Yank's personal relations with the very society which is helping to destroy him is almost parasitic. He allows himself to be directed down the path of mechanized worthlessness which ultimately leads him to his own self-destruction. Yank no longer voices his belief in the strength and importance of steel, neither does he feel that he is its representative. He is now firmly convinced that his identity will be found with the "wreckers" of the I.W.W.

The seventh scene of The Hairy Ape is fraught with tensions. This scene focuses an ironic difference between the reality of the I.W.W. and Yank's conception of it. This illusion leads Yank even further towards his own downfall and is heightened by his alienation which is now at a climax. Yank believes that the I.W.W. is an organization which will help him destroy the Mildreds and her
fellow elite who repress him—specifically the U.S. Steel works. Naively, he believes that the I.W.W. is dedicated to revolutionary change in America. This misconception is consistent with the theme of alienation in the play.

Yank, believing a revolutionary myth of the I.W.W., has adopted the organization as his own personal terrorist group. His entrance into the scene is indicative of this fact. He is shocked by the tameness of his surroundings.

Yank opens the door slowly, gingerly, as if afraid of an ambush. He looks around for secret doors, mystery, is taken aback by the commonplaceness of the room and the men in it, thinks he may have gotten in the wrong place, then sees the signboard on the wall and is reassured. 38

The ambiguity which exists between Yank's perception of the I.W.W. and its reality must be conveyed to the audience through set design as well as acting technique. It is important that the I.W.W. location seem ordinary. Yet, for the expressionist purposes of the play, I felt it necessary to distort certain physical aspects of the warehouse in order to compliment more fully the dilemma which exists in Yank's mind. Angles were accentuated. The metal of the walls was corrugated and in certain areas resembled the blown out walls of a bomb shelter, symbolic of Yank's destructive desires:

Dat's what I'm after—to blow up de steel, knock

all de steel in de woild up to de moon.\(^3\)

The lighting heightened this effect. It reflected a dinginess of space which was commensurate with the ideologies of the men who filled it.

The I.W.W. members were all masked—one mass—consistent with O'Neill's own stage directions as well as my own interpretation of the theme of the play. Yank, unmasked, obviously does not belong with the I.W.W., and his "naked" face contrasts sharply with the masked (i.e., hypocritical paranoid) I.W.W. functionaries. Their purported ideology was inconsistent with their hidden selves. They masked themselves to hide the person which existed beneath the mask. Their identities are two-fold. The masked man is an I.W.W. member (remaining within the law), while the man beneath the mask is a reflection of a truer self: the angry frustrated worker who believes that direct violent action is the only means to gain a worthwhile end. The mask is, therefore, a necessary vehicle to use for escape purposes. The I.W.W. members give the appearance of civility, despite their violent tendencies.

O'Neill's interpretation of the I.W.W. is similar to his feelings about the Marxism of Long in act one. In his eyes, this organization holds out no solutions to the

problems of identity in twentieth-century society. Indeed, these individuals, masked as they are, underline the superficiality which in O'Neill's opinion had pervaded contemporary political radicalism. Their identity as I.W.W. members is not a valid definition of their need to belong. In fact, O'Neill seems to suggest that these men do not belong at all. Although they are trying to create identities for themselves through their political actions, they are consistently misunderstood and alienated by the very society which they are trying to reconstruct and penetrate. The masks of the I.W.W. members indicate that they are neither prepared nor capable of throwing off the oppressive shackles of the process of the twentieth century. Their masks tend to reinforce their lack of connection with their supposedly anarchistic societal beliefs.

Yank's interpretation of the I.W.W. threatens the masked members. His enthusiastic approval of their supposedly covert terrorist activities makes them increasingly suspicious. Yank is completely unaware of the fact that his definition of their organization is not commensurate with their desired appearance. Thus, each misappropriated phrase pushes Yank further and further toward an inability to "belong" and thus toward increasing alienation. Yank's final error takes place when he confesses his desire to blow up the steel factory and everything
connected with it. He is immediately tackled, thrown to the ground, and accused of being a spy.

No by God you're such a bonehead I'll bet you're in the Secret Service! Well you dirty spy, you rotten agent provocateur, you can go back and tell whatever skunk is paying you blood money that he's wasting his coin.  

Yank is thrown out of the I.W.W. because the members believe that he does not belong. Yank's naivete had led them to the conclusion that he was not what he appeared to be. The secretary of the organization unconsciously validates this fact when he calls Yank "a brainless ape" before throwing him out the door.

This statement connects the I.W.W. with the same false pretensions in Mildred Pierce and the Fifth Avenue socialites. By defining Yank as an inferior animal, the I.W.W. has demonstrated the same lack of compassion which is so evident in upper-class society. O'Neill is stressing the inhumanity of all Americans toward other Americans, regardless of their position in society. The members of the I.W.W. are as intertwined with the paranoia of the class system that they supposedly despise as the Fifth Avenue socialites are to their money. Thus, despite their seemingly worthwhile revolutionary intentions, the I.W.W. has become as corrupt as any of the other groups

towards which O'Neill directs his contempt.

Yank can no longer play this game. His experiences since the stokehole have led him to a greater connection with his soul. His increasing alienation has led him even closer to an understanding of the failures of his life so far. Yet it is this revelation which is the impetus for his downfall.

Dis ting's in your inside, but it ain't your belly. Feedin' your face -- sinkers and coffee -- dat don't touch it. It's way down -- at de bottom. Yuh can't grab it, and yuh can't stop it. It moves, and everything moves. It stops and de whole wold 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 wold. Now I ain't steel and de wold owns me. Aw, hell! I can't see -- it's all dark, get me? It's all wrong! 41

Yank recognizes the fact that in society's eyes, he has no identity. He can no longer relate absolutely to the steel. "Using the verbal image of steel, Yank sees himself as a victim of spiritual, or if the word is too fine, mental dissatisfaction with the machine age. His longing is not to be satisfied with material goods alone. 42 Yet Yank's obsessional need to reestablish himself within the framework of an organization -- a group -- leads him even closer to his final failure. The O'Neillian irony plays a large part in this revelation because it is

42 Tiisanen, O'Neill's Scenic Images, p. 123.
at this moment, during Yank's final voyage into total darkness, that he is able to see the cruel light: he will fail—as he has always been destined to fail. Yank's only success, in O'Neill's eyes, will come if he connects with the reality of his existence before his ultimate capitulation, death.

Yank has one final human confrontation before his final destination. It occurs hours after the I.W.W. incident and is important in that it immediately follows his pleading with the "man on the moon"—the light—to give him an answer: "Where do I get off at, where do I fit in?" O'Neill responds with the entrance of a policeman—a symbol of authority—the perfect representative of the mechanized twentieth-century society. His response to Yank's plea: "Go to Hell."

This banishment relegates Yank to a mythic place as far away from human relations as he will ever get; Yank has no identity on this earth. He belongs in Hell. Yet, in his eyes, Hell is the place from which he sprang. He knows that he can never return to the stokehole. He recognizes the fact that his former super-stoker identity was not a true connection with his human self.

He is faced with a world where belonging has lost all vitality and become merely going through the proper motions, where he can have no significance because nothing has....If the world is empty, so is Yank; if it has lost its harmony with nature, so has he; and his last vain effort to find something which will give meaning to existence ends in death.\textsuperscript{45}

For all that, Yank still does not understand which direction he is meant to take. Few avenues are now open to him. It is this ironic limitation which propels him finally toward the monkey house at the zoo.

Since Act 1 scene 3 of \textit{The Hairy Ape}, it has been clear that Yank is eventually destined to confront his nemesis. The eighth scene establishes this fateful conclusion. Yank has been insulted, beaten, harassed, misunderstood, jeered at and taunted. By now, he is completely defeated. He goes to the zoo with the idea that perhaps he will find his identity among those to whom he has been compared, a pathetic gesture on his part, and clear evidence of the demise of Yank's spirit. He cannot make a "human" connection in his world.

The set design for this scene should compliment Yank's frame of mind. I took the expressionistic techniques one step further by designing cages which would overwhelm the stage. Steel is everywhere, but not in the

\textsuperscript{45}Eric Bentley, "Trying to Like O'Neill," in \textit{Eugene O'Neill's Critics: Voices from Abroad}, p. 150.
shape of regular bars. It is distorted, a reflection of Yank's mind, a prison.

In order for this scene to work dramatically and thematically, there must be very low intense lighting. The time of day is just before dawn, symbolic of Yank's finally seeing the light. Within the largest cage sits the ape, played as realistically as possible. I felt that it was thematically necessary to try to accentuate the beast symbol. Thus, I required an ape costume. The ape is more than just a symbol of an oppressed animal, he is the natural repressed: a creature whose wild instincts and yearnings for the wilderness have been numbed by captivity. The ape shares a cage with the men and women of the twentieth-century. The only difference is that the ape's cage is obviously tangible; he can feel the bars around him.

The chorus plays a significant role in this scene. Its importance lies within its accentuation of the symbolic significance behind Yank's demise. The chorus has regressed to an animalism like Yank's. It is now a tribe of primates. This change is rather ironic if the chorus of Act I scene 1 is considered; there the stokers were the representative chorus. By scene eight, O'Neill implies that even Yank's counterparts are monkeys. They react to his outbursts, echoing his anger with their wails
and screams. Yank is a catalyst for their responses. This technique is another example of O'Neill's desire to foreshadow Yank's demise. His identification with the monkeys is so complete that even the evolutionally inferior primates confirm Mildred Pierce's whispered insult of Act I scene 3.

Yank's confrontation with the ape is his final attempt to reconcile himself to an identity which he now feels is his. Relinquishing human identity is, however, a mistake on Yank's part. He has accepted Mildred's beast image of him. Yet an ape is a nonthinking animal, seemingly satisfied with existence, and when Yank turns to thinking, even if it is hard and painful, he is becoming less and less a hairy ape.

Yuh can't tink can yuh? Yuh can't talk neider. But I kin make a bluff at talkin' and tinkin' -- a'most git away wit it--a'most-- and dat's where de joker comes in. I ain't on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em takin' all de woist punches from both' of 'em.46

Yank has finally recognized this place as hell. He is suffering. This revelation should be startling and overwhelming to the audience. Yank's sensitivity emerges from brute emotion into the light of understanding. His suffering has been monumental. The agony is pitiable.

Yank’s human pain and sensitivity, are particularly significant with regard to their relationship to Paddy’s philosophy. He has finally understood what Paddy had said regarding the dehumanization of a machine civilization. Yet, for Yank, this comprehension is not enough. He refuses to go back to the stokehole, as Paddy did, and resigns himself to a hell-on-earth type of existence. During his speech to the ape, Yank tells of the moment he connected with Paddy’s philosophy:

I seen de sun come up. Dat was pretty too -- all red and pink and green. I was lookin’ at de skyscrapers -- steel -- and all de ships comin’ in, sailin’ out all over de with -- and dey was steel, too. De sun was warm, dey wasn’t no clouds, and dere was a breeze blowin’. Sure it was great stuff. I got it aw right -- what Paddy said about day being’ de right dope -- only I couldn’t get in it, see? I couldn’t belong in dat.

Yank has finally identified with nature and placed the "steel" of his existence in the proper perspective. It is these connections which establish the answers to his identity for which he had been searching, at least since his confrontation with Mildred. Yet this revelation is not enough. It does not satisfy Yank’s need to belong, nor does it gratify his desire to understand society’s perception of his identity. His suffering has led him to a greater knowledge of himself. However, Yank is perfectly aware that this comprehension, gained through the

suffering, can not redeem a lifetime of progressive and brutal numbing. This knowledge will destroy Yank rather than liberate him.

Yank's direction in the play is regressive in the sense that it is a return to a more primitive lifestyle. Nevertheless, it is a progressive evolution to the extent that he is finally able to see himself clearly for the first time in his life. The knowledge of the realities of his existence, however, can not justify his miserable sufferings. Nor does it lessen the intensity of his feeling at this moment. Yank is enormously frustrated by the American system. Ultimately, he does not understand why or where he is meant to fit in to the grand scheme of things.

The truth, according to O'Neill, is that individuals can find no real identity in society. America has evolved into a mechanized nation in which individual characteristics are unnecessary and unproductive. Yank has been relegated to the bottom rung. He is worth no more than he can produce, a concept of capitalistic exploitation typical of O'Neill. He interprets economic control and manipulation processes to be contrary to America's fundamental "democratic" principles. And Yank is a victim of this repressive system. In spite of his fervent desires to overcome the burden of his existence,
he was clearly destined to fail.

_The Hairy Ape_ reaches its "failure" climax when Yank decides that he will attempt to make connections one last time, (with the ape), and physically destroy the obstructions of his existence.

Sure! Yuh're reg'lar! you'll stick to de finish! Me'n' you, huh?--both' members of dis club! We'll put up one last star bout dat'll knock 'em offen deir seats! Dey'll have to make de cages stronger after we're trou! 48

This moment in the play is particularly pathetic in that it demonstrates one man's desire to deny the inevitable failure of his life. Yank tries recharging his strength, but he ends up by allowing an ape to dominate his plans. It is clear that Yank does not REALLY believe that the American socio-economic system is going to bow to his physical prowess. This fact has been revealed to him all too often in the past. Still, his persistence in spite of his dearly acquired knowledge, increases the audience's perceptions of his suffering and frustration. Yank no longer wishes to be caged like the ape, nor does he believe that the ape should be caged. Society has caged the ape because it is fascinated with, but cannot find a way of relating to, the essential brutality, the primitive nature of all men.

48 O'Neill, _The Hairy Ape_, p. 231.
The ape represents this natural quality, and Yank has the potential at any rate of being its human physical counterpart. However, his decision and actions are not progressively possible. His desire to physically overwhelm American society in fact is not inconsistent with the delusive super-stoker qualities of his former definition of self. Yank's thoughts and actions are in constant turmoil. He cannot dissociate the knowledge acquired from his suffering from his physical actions. This inconsistency is fatal to Yank.

Yank releases the ape from the cage unconsciously convinced that he will be killed by the beast. Nevertheless, on a conscious level, he makes an effort to deny this death wish.

Pardon from de governor! Step out and shake hands! I'll take yuh for a walk down Fif' Avenoo. We'll knock 'em offen de oith and croak wit de band playin' Come on, Brother. Shake—de secret grip of our order.49

His freeing of the ape symbolically suggests a freeing of his own self. And the handshake is once again emblematic of Yank's ironic need to "connect". O'Neill, typically takes the theme one step further to include Yank's only possible occasion for liberation, and that is his death. Yank by now had realized this fact. As the gorilla

49O'Neill, The Hairy Ape, p. 231.
crushes Yank, the only thing that is purged within him, and within the audience as well, is the tremendous suffering that is lifted from Yank in death. O'Neill's final message to the audience is one of total pessimism. His statement overtly denounces all those who have chosen to adopt the false values of twentieth-century America as their own, and he implies a direct link between the suffering/ultimate revelation of Yank and the possibilities of "belonging" in a society which ultimately denies him any identity.

Yank's death suggests that the zoo may be the only "society" in which he could truly belong. O'Neill himself implies as much in the final stage suggestions of the play: "He [Yank] slips in a heap on the floor and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering and whimpering wail. And perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs." The chattering and wailing of the monkeys reinforces this conclusion.

Society had destroyed Yank, but at the same time he had allowed himself to be destroyed. O'Neill cannot reconcile this dilemma. All men and women are ultimately pulled in two opposing directions: toward the reality of their existence, and toward their dreams. The conflict can be fatal if an individual wishes to discover truth by searching exclusively on either side. Yet O'Neill

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EUGENE O'NEILL

THE

Hairy

APE

Colby College
Directed by Sue Perry
Eugene O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City. His father was James O'Neill, the famous dramatic actor; and during his early years, O'Neill traveled much with his parents. In 1909, he went on a gold prospecting expedition to South America; he later shipped as a seaman to Buenos Aires on one of the last square riggers the "Charles Racine." This experience coupled with that of his return trip on the British tramp steamer, "Ikalis" provided O'Neill with the background for several sea plays. O'Neil's last sea voyage was on the luxury liner, "S.S. New York". It was on this ship that O'Neill encountered the stokers which he so vividly characterized in "The Hairy Ape." He returned to New York destitute, then worked briefly as a reporter on a newspaper in New London, Connecticut, at which point an attack of tuberculosis sent him for 6 months to a sanitarium. This event marked the turning point in his life, and shortly after, at the age of 24, he began his illustrious career as a playwright. His major works include, "The Emperor Jones," (1920); "The Hairy Ape,"(1922); "Anna Christie," (1922); "Desire Under the Elms,"(1924); "The Great God Brown,"(1925); "Strange Interlude," (1926-27); "Mourning Becomes Electra," (1929-31); "Ah Wilderness," (1933); "Days Without End," (1934); "A Moon for the Misbegotten," (1945); "The Iceman Cometh," (1946), and several plays produced posthumously, including "Long Day's Journey into Night," A Touch of the Poet," and "Hughie." During his career, O'Neill received three Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize for literature. Eugene O'Neill died in 1953.

"The Hairy Ape" is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French Inc., New York.
“By common consent, Eugene O'Neill is acknowledged to be the most distinguished of the group which created the serious American drama. He was one of the first to emerge, and the very bulk of his successful work would make him stand out, even if it were not true (as it is) that the best of that work is also the best of our contemporary dramatic literature. His is the first to be mentioned in any discussion of American theatre of today, and he is the only one of our playwrights who has a wide international fame. Moreover, there are, as we shall see, certain respects in which his aims and his methods differ sharply from those of his fellows, and because of that fact he is not only the outstanding member of a group but also, and in an important way, unique.”

—Joseph Wood Krutch
Rehearsal
THE CAST

Tom Valinote
Tom Cushman
Jim Meltsner
Patty Cirigliano
Edie McGill
Todd Wallingford
Rodney Krause
Gary Ruping
Jonathan Radtke
Deirdre Paul
Liz Eddy

Robert Smith, "Yank"
Paddy, Policeman, Guard
Long, I.W.W. Member
Mildred Douglas, 5th Avenue Socialite, I.W.W. Member
Aunt, 5th Avenue Socialite, I.W.W. Member
Frenchy, Policeman, I.W.W. Secretary
Big Swede, 5th Avenue Socialite, Prisoner, I.W.W. Member
Dutchy, 5th Avenue Socialite, Ape
Second Engineer, 5th Avenue Socialite, Prisoner, I.W.W. Member
Fourth Engineer, 5th Avenue Socialite, Prisoner, I.W.W. Member
5th Avenue Socialite, Prisoner, I.W.W. Member

PRODUCTION CREW

Nicholas Hauer
Sheila Rudolph
Charles McCabe
Kenneth Harris

RUNNING CREW

Andrea Hoffman
Kenneth Harris
Andrew Smith
Clifford Diamond

Nicholas Hauer
Linda Elliot
Kathleen Gillespie
Michael Donnellan
SCENES

ACT 1

scene 1 The firemen's forecastle of an ocean liner an hour after sailing from New York.
scene 2 Section of promenade deck, two days out-morning.
scene 3 The Stokehole. A few minutes later.
scene 4 Same as Scene 1. Half an hour later.

There will be a 15 minute intermission.

ACT 2

scene 5 Fifth Avenue, New York. Three weeks later.
scene 6 An Island near the city. The next night.
scene 7 In the city. About a month later.
scene 8 Central Park. Twilight the next day.
SPECIAL THANKS... Charles Bassett, Martha May, Mark Benbow, Howard Koonce, Tina Mitchell-Wentzel, Gina Werfel, Michael Marlais, Adrian Lo, Dick Sewell, Peter Kingsley and Eric Binnie for essential advice and strong doses of professionalism...
Catherine Young, Kathleen Gillespie, Julia Farwell, Shireen Shahawy, Lynn Brunelle, Karen Judkins, Marita Stapleton, Charles McCabe, Nick Hauer, Andrew Barnes, Glenn Cummings, Ryan Stinneford, Donna Boyler, Robin Bye and Dan Murphy for keeping me sane...
John Bates for his creative excellence, and a very special thank-you to Stephen R. Woody, for without his constant support and guidance this play would not have been possible.

PRODUCED BY POWDER AND WIG

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The original production of "The Hairy Ape" was produced by the Provincetown Players on March 9, 1922. O'Neill said of Yank, "He is really yourself and myself. He is every human being." The society of 1922, with its emphasis on the artificial, concentration on industrialization, and seeming lack of individuality balked at O'Neill's definition. However, some were touched by the plight of Yank and understood it as a symbolic representation of their own. Yank believed he belonged—that he had an important, significant place in society.

All the people Yank encounters, excluding those who share his position in society, prisoners and stokers wear masks. They are totally devoid; they are one dimensional symbols of the lack of individuality which prevailed and continues to prevade in 20th century society.

I have chosen to direct "The Hairy Ape" because not only is it important as an experimental play, or a work of art, but because the play has an important message for all of us. As individuals we must, as Yank does, try to come to terms with who we are and where we belong.

-Susan A. Perry
Conclusion
An essential part of my insight into the work of Eugene O'Neill was gained through my direction of *The Hairy Ape*. The production was the core of this O'Neillian experience and allowed for further exploration of O'Neill's life as well as the times and surroundings which influenced him. O'Neill's complexity as a dramatist lies within his ability to penetrate into the inner consciousness of mankind. Through the written word, he expresses feelings which echo the sufferings of the soul. The difficulty for a director is the realistic representation of these discoveries. In *The Hairy Ape*, Yank, clearly a representative of the American individual, is the vehicle through which O'Neill presents his perceptions. O'Neill's message is most effectively communicated through the dramatic performance. I conclude by submitting the program from my February 1985 production of *The Hairy Ape*. 
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