

## Expressionism, Truth And Beauty in American Modern Drama "The Hairy Ape" By Eugene O'Neil

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American drama it is well known for its dramatic "experimentalism". American drama would not have been recognized as it is now without its various styles, characters and scenes without this major change, giving it a special place in the last decades of the 19th century to US theater, which was dominated by melodrama with naturalistic acting style. However, the early American Modern Dramatists had their influences from European constructs, such as those of Chekov; in order to represent life within drama in a more realistic style. Known as Modern Realism, he represented everyday reality in a style that would seem familiar to the audience that had come to see these new performances. This style quickly became canonized, and in particular it became more popular during the growing social and cultural changes such as the escalation of immigration and poverty, women's rights, depression, the crisis of religious belief, America's "mechanical" development, and ongoing efforts towards "American Dream". Realism had an impact on the American scene in this period, but mostly in terms of realistic scenes (Walker, 2009). This can be seen in Arthur Miller's works, especially at "A View From A Bridge." The show shows all the realistic styles of a realistic drama, "The apartment, clean, simple, welcoming with tables and windows with a naturalist approach as for example a rocking chair. A more naturalistic background allows for less focus on action and the public is able to follow the story and be involved rather than remain distanced, as another form of experimentalism of that period, "expressionist drama". You will be able to experience history as it is, a tragedy, rather than quitting and analyzing the way expressionist dramas tend. The dramatic language of realism was supposed to be close to everyday language. In "A View From A Bridge" Miller uses the daily language of the Italian shipyard workers, as seen in Eddie, who uses a typical naturalist slang of Brooklyn. His lecture is simple but full of hues. This allows the audience to know closely and find themselves in a society as theirs. For social issues that Miller and other dramatists have commented during this period, such as family relationships, American dreams, a realistic approach is more appropriate. Main purpose of this manuscript is the analysis of Eugene O'Neil work, compared to other American authors.

**Keywords:** Expressionism, Truth, Eugene O'Neil, Arthur Miller.

### Introduction

As realism took place in the American drama, expressionism began to become a major part of the experimentalism that was happening during this movement. "Expressionism on the American scene represents a critical stage in the development of American Modern Drama" (Walker, 2009). Expressionism was a style that many such dramatists such as Susan Treadwell and Edward Albee used to portray a changing society as well as the oppression and misfortune that this new emerging society had created, allowing viewers to see it critically. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller used aspects of the form and "In doing so, they not only innovated a new dramatic form, but re-defined playwriting from a theatrical craft to a literary art form, heralding the birth of American dramatic modernism" (Walker, 2009).

Miller's scenic guidelines for his earliest part "*The Death Of A Salesman*" (1949) depicts an expressionist structure - a family in a transparent house similar to a guasch and no walls. When the action is set in the present, the characters behave as if they are in wall-to-wall rooms, when action is taken in the past, they walk through the empty space to another stage, giving the impression that scene events evolve as a "dream." While "*A View From A Bridge*" (1961) has been very realistic in its structure and language, the "Salesman" avoids the naturalism that had overtaken the American scene to the point of adopting the use of the expressionism of the scene events as a symbol for the endearing nature of Willy's life and American daily life in general.

Meanwhile "*Emperor Jones*" (1920) Eugene O'Neill is another expressionist piece, which has expressionist parameters. It begins and ends with realistic scenes in the present, but his six main scenes are played in the twisted mind of the Emperor, while his journey takes him back into the past. Here, technical expressionist equipment - lighting, stage elements, sounds - are used to design the visions of the emperor to discover his spiritual state. If it was the same scene, O'Neill achieves the same effects as to the "*Long Days journey into night*." (1956) He used a well-known expressionist lighting technique and the weather reflects the emotional or mental state of the characters, he used the time to show Mary's mind, as the fog becomes denser, her use of drugs becomes more violent and consequently, so does her confusion. It is also used in "*Emperor Jones*" through the use of lighting, passing from the flare of the sun to the scene for first, where the mind of the hero is clear, in the light of the moon "merged into a veil of bluish mist" in the seventh scene, where fear undermines the clarity of his mind. Such techniques have been used throughout the drama.

Expressionist technology was also reflected in Williams's "*Glass Menagerie*" (1944) due to his growing frustration towards "*The exhausted theater by realistic conventions*" (Williams, 1988).

He is determined to find a new way to express the content of his drama and through expressionism can do it well. His use of drama symbols, such as "Blue Roses," are examples of expressionism that allow a deeper characterization. "Blue Rose" is a symbol of the casual beauty of Laura and her isolation, as blue roses do not exist anywhere in the real world.

## Expressionism

Around 1910, a vast revolution took place in the Western Art and Literature world of art and literature, which can be seen in accordance with radical changes in natural sciences. Between 1905 and 1910 Picasso and his supporters developed cubism in art, while Apollinaire and Max Jacob presented a "Cubistic poetry", which was later called "Surrealism" by Apollinaire. In 1910 Marinetti wrote his futuristic manifestation. TS Elliot began writing "Prufrock" in 1911, and James Joyce "Ulysses" in 1914. In 1913 Strawinsky's work "*Sacre du Printemps*" threw the audience of Paris into a riot. Moreover, Einstein's study on the specific theory of relativity came out in 1905, when only a few years ago was published the Traumdeutung of Freud (1900). These people revolutionized the world by changing our concepts of the universe and the ego. This meant the beginning of a new tradition, precisely the tradition of modern

times. Despite the shocking effects on contemporaries, this was not the birth of a new era, but only a culmination of developments that were characteristic of the entire nineteenth century.

So the term expressionism involves only one aspect of this modern revolution in art and literature. It was first applied to painting and was invented by French painter Julien - Auguste Hervé in 1901. In 1900 this term was especially used to distinguish the early Impressionist paintings from the most energetic individualism of Van Gogh and Matisse. While the goal of Impressionism was to paint the external reality, expressionism was intended to produce and make alive his own reality, his inner idea, or vision, of what he had seen. According to him, it is not only the creation of an imitation of the world, and therefore, it prefers to be against any realistic style. *"New expressionism," writes JL Styan, was entirely subjective, imposing his intense and often eccentric thoughts on the world in what he painted"* (Styan, 1981).

The usable general term was quickly separated from other forms of art. Expressionism was rapidly applied to music, architecture, poetry and prose, but was particularly concerned with drama. The reason for this was that now the scene could be removed from the realistic game of those productions that showed life in a very personal, ideosyncratic way in which the form of expression expressed its content. Such pioneers of imaginative stage such as Adolphe Appia and Edward Craig Gordon tried to simplify and purify the design of the scene in order to emphasize *"the importance of a unified theatrical effect that would highlight the inner life of the play"* (Valgema, 1972).

### **Characteristics and Techniques of Expressionist Drama**

In the earlier stages expressive drama was the dramatization of subconsciousness or a kind of written dream. Consequently, the motivation, character, and rational development of the subject in a well-worked drama were almost lost. Aside from being unformed, the game gained its internal unity through the author's vision. However, the interest of Expressionism in subjective ideas or visions forced them to create specific dramaturgical techniques by distorting reality and forming a world of dream-like images.

Like romanticism, Expressionism does not have a definite definition. Regarding today's use of the term "Expressionism", it is clearly related to the group and the basic techniques that go after the early German drama and not with a distinct conception. As we strive to appreciate the impact of this European movement on American drama, it is evident that American playwrights were most interested in using the techniques of expressionist dramaturgy. This was probably because of the American temperament that was not open to excessive Continental philosophies and topics.

So, in order to realize the main purpose of an expressionist drama, one must first discover the soul of man, the particular characteristics and techniques that have become essential parts of it.

First, the atmosphere was often overwhelming and dreamlike, achieved through unrealistic lighting and visual shifts in the group. The dream effect was also aided by pausing or silence of unusual duration during dialogues or monologues.

The scenes were no longer executed in detail as was the case in the naturalist drama.

Simplification was emphasized and images were more of a symbolic character rather than a photographic one.

Moreover, the display structure was divided into many episodic scenes that were arranged in a very fast sequence, almost as in a movie. However, its coherence was maintained by the joining strength of the construction of the dream.

Characters lose their individuality by being reduced to cartoons or types. In order to get into the light that was essential to man, he exudes all the superficial characteristics. Such characters often represented social groups more than special people and were described in an unrealistic, exaggerated manner.

Finally, the dialogue has often had a shortened style or short phrase. This could also appear in the form of long monologues sometimes being too (ironically) poetic / lyric. Or being replaced by the effects of sound or music in order to support different spiritual states.

By offering these formal innovations, European Expressionism had given a major boost to the development of Modern American Drama, with Eugene O'Neill as one of its key figures.

### **The Hairy Ape Subject and Structure**

When it first appeared on stage, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* drama caused many misunderstandings among critics. And it was not just because of the theme of the drama, but also because of its form and style. Because of the very clear criticism of the capitalist society he never fluttered in such a radical way, people were very frustrated by the mode of expression. For a similar approach to this topic, a realistic presentation was expected (Erzgräber and Paul Goetsch, 1977).

*The Hairy Ape* consists of eight scenes that all can be seen as certain situations in which the main character has to pass. The structure of the drama is circular and thus the initial situation is equal to the last one: The yank which appears in the small window of the furnace is apparently behind the bars as an animal. However, he is not aware of this situation and still firmly believes in his false self-portrayal: "I'm the end, I'm the beginning, I can move the world, I'm mine, and I'm steel - steel - steel" - so at first it has a strong sense of belonging to modern civilization, that is, as he perceives himself as an integrated part of a meaningful whole although he does not reflect this. Here, one of the main motifs is characterized by repeated and different phrases like "We come and dey not" or "Dat belongs" (O'Neill, 1993).

When he sees Mildred shakes back with horror from him, his pride and self-confidence are robbed. Doubt and hatred enter into his soul causing a process of thought that will lead him to reflect on his alienation. On one hand, this process is expressed by another motif (pantomime): "He is seated forward on a bench in the exact attitude of Rodin's *"The Thinker"*(54)". On the other hand, action itself is not just a sequence of scenes, but it also serves as a spatial and chronological visualization of Yank's spiritual quest.

Scenes 4-8 show the inner conflict of a man who is trying to emerge from a brutal state of existence in which he can no longer find pleasure. These scenes can be seen as different steps of Yank's way toward realization, becoming more and more aware

of being locked out of "real", civilized life. After trying hard to find his affiliation in human society, Yank tries to become a brother with a gorilla in the zoo. But being a civilized human being, with the mind he thinks he can not find fulfillment in the pure animal instinct for the initial harmony with nature is lost forever. Thus, Yank is again at its starting point. Like at first he is in a steel cage.

It is undeniable that the circular form of action reveals a fundamental philosophy that is pessimistic. Concluding remarks - which is quite ironic - "*And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs*" (81) makes it clear that every hope that man faces is in vain. All the signs are that O'Neill's criticism is focused on the emotional consequences of society instead of the physical consequences. Yank becomes aware of his alienation not because of inhumane working conditions, but because of being insulted his own self-esteem and consequently he understands that he is not anywhere.

So the theme of *The Hairy Ape* fits very well with the expressionist drama as it deals with certain human states whose search for essential beliefs becomes an indispensable part of life.

As to the structure of the part, it becomes clear that O'Neill uses fast-moving scenes. In this way, action takes on a dynamic flow and confusion within the mind that Yank intensifies.

The interaction of fire, engines and steel produces here an incompatibility, though rhythmic with the "music" of the modern era. In addition, it can also be understood as a warning of the future conflict.

- So for the first time, Yank becomes aware of the barrier between his world and the world in which Mildred belongs: "*This startles Yank to a reaction. . . . He feels himself insulted in some unknown fashion in the very heart of his pride.*" (53) His approach to the world and perception of himself has been attacked. From now on his fate is to seek his belonging within society.

Here, it finally becomes clear that excellent overlapping illustrations can relate to Yank's mind. The surface of reality is distorted so that we can see these scenes just as they look at the troubled mind of Yank. At first, the inner war still lies hidden in its subconscious - in the same way as everything is difficult to do in a small, pale, dull window of the oven. But it is to note Yank's confrontation with Mildred, which represents a world that rejects it.

In contrast to the "clean, regular and wide general atmosphere" Yank and Long are depicted with an almost exaggerated appearance - dirty and filthy: "*He has not shaved for days...the black smudge of coal dust still sticks like make-up*" (60). However, dealing with "puppets" on Fifth Avenue reveals much of Yank's naturalness. Compared to it, these people look very unmatched and almost artificial. A group of people who are leaving the church have been dressed too extravagantly, "*yet with something of the relentless horror of Frankenstein's in their detached, mechanical unawareness*" (63). Here is a good example by which O'Neill describes Yank's inner thoughts in concrete, visual terms. Even though he was angry with people, they remained calm and even completely indifferent, "*they seem neither to see nor hear him*" (65). This irritates Yank and he tries to hit people, but "rather it is he who recoils after each collision" (65) This puppet procession becomes also a cage against whose bars he collides in vain". Then a fat gentleman accuses him of missing the bus and calling the police, "*Many police*

*whistles shrill out on the instant and a whole platoon of policemen rush in on Yank from all sides. The crowd at the window have not moved or noticed this disturbance"* (66). The scene ends with a gong sound of a patrol wagon as if signing another step of Yank's path to his fatal end.

Conflict in this scene is more than a class struggle. On the contrary, the internal human conflict is reflected and strange incidents result from Yank's ego radiation.

### **Typification of Characters And Their Speech**

Typification is very marked in this drama. This of course also applies to the main character Yank. He is a primitive man who tries to find something that he belongs to you. As the author explains, he is *"a symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony he has had as an animal and has not yet gained in a spiritual way."* (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher, 1961, 110). As a typical character, Yank becomes important, not for what he does in a given environment, but for what he symbolizes in a universal effort.

A good illustration of "ego radiation" is in the form of monologues and murmurs of the main character expressing different ideological attitudes, as well as clarifying Yank's internal war, and its main function is not to inform the public but to express a wretched state of a troubled mind.

References to the word "steel" are repeated as a kind of dialogue with musical theme. O'Neill adapts the dialogue to an emotional effect by selecting phrases and repeating them as in a musical composition. So on the first scene Yank is so proud of his strength as he boast, "And I'm steel - steel - steel ...

For describing numerous secondary characters O'Neill uses mostly contrast and exaggeration tools. Thus, on stage III, Mildred's appearance as *"a girl of twenty, slender, delicate, with a pale pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority"* (45) and her aunt as *"a pompous and proud - and fat - old lady"*(45) illustrates their character of caricaturistic type , symbolizing the degeneration and exasperation of the rich bourgeoisie. The important contrast does not lie between "two incongruous, artificial figures", but between them and the environment: *"The impression to be conveyed by this scene is one of the beautiful, vivid life of the sea all about."* (45) As a consequence, their separation from nature and artificial character unfolds surprisingly.

The same thing applies to the "top ranking" puppets of Fifth Avenue - in an even more exaggerated way. Here, their highly artificial appearance "overdressed to the nth degree" is highlighted by gestures and dialogues. They acted as if they were not aware of Yank and his wild explosions, and their speech is usually snobbish and shallow. As they all respond mechanically to the chorus, their resemblance to lifeless machines becomes even more apparent. The same way of mechanic speech can be seen in the workers; their voice in the chorus has a metal sound. The fact that they are more stereotypical than individuals - *"All civilized white races are represented."*(35) - That is why the grotesque and unreal are expressed by the appearance of the Neanderthal man.

Long and Paddy stand outside this group, being special stereotypes and the only

ones who have different opinions about Yank. Long is a typical Marxist follower who makes society with the class responsible for the suffering of the proletariat. "Poet" Paddy is characterized by his nostalgia for the past when man and nature were still in harmony. Here, Paddy's language is affected by poetry. A good example of lyrical poetry is on the first stage in which Paddy recalls the golden seasons of sailing ships. "Oh, to be scud- ding south again wid the power of the Trade Wind driving her on steady through the nights and the days! Full sail on her! Nights and days! Nights when the foam of the wake would be flam- ing wid fire, when the sky'd be blazing and winking wid stars" (41). In contrast to the rhythmic effects that he uses throughout the entire section, O'Neill includes lyricism in order to achieve a stronger emotional effect.

### Conclusions

O'Neill's influence from continental Expressionist dramas and European dramatists, especially Strindberg, is more than obvious. Drama "*The Hairy Ape*" is full of expressionist elements and techniques that have their origins in this European movement. However, a careful study of O'Neill's drama also proves his genius as a dramatic artist. Obviously he developed his own style in expressionist dramas and was not just inspired by his idols abroad. In none of his plays O'Neill has expressed such radical criticism of modern society as in *The Hairy Ape*. Bearing in mind only social criticism, it is easy to be frustrated by the grotesque form of O'Neill's presentation, which is incompatible with such a serious topic. But, in fact, he was especially worried about Yank's character, a human being like anyone else, "a symbol of man who has lost his old harmony with nature."<sup>1</sup> In order to show what Yank's tragic character faces, he creates the inner reality with the unrealistic surface techniques partially symbolically expressed, partly abstractly and partially grotesque. We also have a picture of distorted imaginary figures and and their reflection in the inside of man.

O'Neill implies so many expressionist factors at "*The Hairy Ape*" as in any other drama he wrote. There is no difficulty in finding the elements that pervade Continental Expressionism and also Strindberg. Of the expressionist elements, the most striking ones are ego radiations, typing, sound effects, dialogues with the music theme and the monologue.

Modern American drama can not be defined simply and just in a few words. It does not constitute a vocabulary term that has a definite definition. The Modern American drama can be described as a period in which American writers began to flourish with their works, producing dramatic new and modern pieces. However, after exploring this period, it may be noted that it consists of a summary of experimentalism in forms such as expressionism and realism, topics such as the one of Reality versus Illusion, a language that reflects the society in which they were writing, such as and an exploration of social and cultural change. It may also be noted that the purpose of the American Modern Drama was to talk about a world in which the individual was totally disconnected in an unbelievable way from traditional "anchors", social affiliation, family relationships, and self-determining image. Modern American Drama was a reflection of an extremely emotional and convincing work that paved

<sup>1</sup> O'Neill, O'Neill talks about his plays 110.

the way for the next generations: it is an essential part of literary study in a world that has begun to change and its collection of dramatic works establishes its clearest definition.

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