**Yank as an alienated Character**

**يانك** : **الشخصية المنعزلة**

Associate Professor. Dr. Zaher Abo Obaida Ahmed. University of Gezira Faculty of languages.

Assistant Instructor. Qazwan Abed Jassim Allo (Ph. D. Candidate). Faculty of Higher Studies, University of Gezira Faculty of Education. Hantoub.

Tel: 009647726937230

الأستاذ المشارك الدكتور. زاهر أبو عبيدة احمد - جامعة الجزيرة - كلية اللغات

المدرس المساعد. غزوان عبد جاسم علو - طالب دكتوراه- جامعة الجزيرة - كلية التربية - حنتوب

**ABSTRACT**

This study is distinctively restricted to Yank as an alienated character in Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape". It aims to simplify studying and reading this character as well as to introduce a comprehensive view of such type of character. This study reflects that Yank suffers a tragic end due to his illusion, obsession and alienation. It also shows the character simply and how the plot minimizes the situations in the course of the play. The representation of this character in modern time has been changed and it has been humanistic and symbolic concerns.

**المستخلص:**

هذه الدراسة تحدد بشكل مميز "يانك" الشخصية المنعزلة المختارة في مسرحية "القرد كثيف الشعر" للكاتب الأمريكي أوجين أونيل. الهدف من هذه الدراسة تبسيط دراسة وقراءة هذه الشخصية وتقدم كذلك نظرة شاملة لهذا النوع من الشخصيات. تعكس الدراسة إن يانك يعاني من نهاية مأساوية بسبب كثر التفكير وانعزاله عن الجميع. الدراسة تبين تطور الشخصية بسهوله وكيف تصغر الحبكة الأحداث في المسرحية. في العصر الحديث تتغير هذه الشخصية وتحمل عدة اهتمامات إنسانية ورمزية.

**1.1. Life of O' Neill**

Eugene O’Neill (1888 – 1953) is known to be one of the most outstanding playwrights of the twentieth century. America has given him a special position in the literary society, as he was as much a playwright of international stature in the world theater of the first half of the twentieth century as George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950). Shaw, the Irish playwright wrote more than sixty plays in his lifetime, and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Lieterature in 1925. To be ranked in the same level as Bernard Shaw indicates Eugene O’Neills standing in Literature. The plays of O’Neill touched something fundamental in those who expose themselves to their rather harrowing effect, reaching down to frightening depths, stepping on private, social, religious, philosophical and aesthetic issues, with no thought of the offence that may be taken by the reader. They either evoke immoderate enthusiasm or provoke immoderate anger. This depends on how the reader looks at it.

Eugene O’Neill is a tragic artist, whose vision of life and human soul is fundamentally tragic. His plays are known for their tragic beauty and sublimity of Modern tragedies which strike at the very root of the sickness of the present day world.

Man suffers and his life becomes a tale of isolation, loneliness and estrangement, ending with the cessation of his earthly life neither because of the hostility of Fate as in the Greek tragedy nor of Hamartia in his character. (Harmartia – a fatal flaw leading to the downfall of a tragic hero or heroine, derived from Greek, which means “to miss the mark” or “to err”. In tragedy Harmartia is commonly understood to refer to the protagonist’s error or flaw that leads to a chain of plot actions culminating a reversal from their good fortune to bad).

Instead he suffers from a sense of alienation because of his loss of faith in some supernatural power of traditional religions, a faith which the Greeks had and which Christianity supplied in the Middle Ages, but which has been eroded by science or materialism today. The old religions have not been replaced by the new ones. Hence man’s soul is sick because of too much materialism and he suffers from inner emptiness on account of his lack of some sustaining faith. He feels orphaned, lonely and at bay. His agony arises from a feeling of “insecurity”, a feeling of “not-belonging” and he is confused and bewildered from within.

Materialistic values prevail and hence life has become too mechanical and impersonal and it has further shaken man’s sense of security. This feeling of insecurity and isolation causes unbearable spiritual anguish, fear and torture.

Sometimes, as in the case of Yank in “The Hairy Ape”, it becomes a terrible obsession, which brings them to their doom. In play after play, Eugene O’Neill’s characters are stretched on the rack, suffering the tortures of Hell. The rack on which he stretches his characters could be the past life, and the torment could come from man’s sense of being separated from Nature, of “not belonging” to any universe as in the Hairy Ape”.

**2. The Hairy Ape** : **Plot**

The Hairy Ape (1921), a masterpiece of this celebrated author, depicts the theme of isolation or loss of identity and loneliness. Apropos of this play, O’Neill writes, “The Hairy Ape” was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who had lost his old harmony, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and had not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth or in heaven, he’s in the middle trying to make peace… Yank can’t go forward, so he tries to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can’t go back to “belonging” either. The gorilla kills him. The subject here is a same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with the Gods, but is now with himself his own past, his attempt to “belong”.”

In the present context, the title “Hairy Ape”, symbolizes the diagnostic character of a savage and ferocious animal in man, with an unusual sense of animality. The most remarkable aspect of the dramatist’s technique in this play is the blending of the constantly repeated image of the ‘ape’ with tragic reality. Besides being the central metaphor dominating the whole action of the play, “The Hairy Ape” conveys the image of mans primitiveness and puts forth a living human reality of the present, making us feel like the ape. The artistic fusion of the image and experience heightens the value of the play as a sustained allegory. The strange tyranny is that man is present in a continual repetition of his past. The ‘ape’ is ingrained in man. He cannot avoid the awaiting doom unless he controls the ape thriving in him.

It seems that the two small words ‘hairy’ and ‘ape’ become the root cause of the tragedy in the life of the protagonist, Yank. They signify the strength and the brutality in the character of Yank, a distinguished stoker on a transatlantic liner who is proud of his physical strength and superior feelings of belongingness. Yank, a true devotee of his work, considers himself as the force behind the moving ship. Dedication to work keeps him aloof from the romantic imagination. In reply to his colleague Paddy’s song, *“Far away in Canada, Far across the sea, there’s a lass who fondly waits, making a home for me.”* Yank, whose only concern is work, says in a bitter voice*, “Shut up, yuh lousy Boob, where did you get that tripe…Home? Home, Hell! I’ll make a home for yuh! I’ll knock yuh dead. Home! To hell with home! Where do you get that tripe? What do you want with home?”*

This shows his indifferent attitude towards home or family, as supported by Long, his other colleague. *“Listen here Comrades, Yank is right. He says this stinking ship is our home. And he says home is hell. And he is right!”*

The Ship is everything to them and they belong to the ship. They are so attached to the ship, that they hardly think of anything, except it, their motto is “Drink, don’t think!” Being aloof from the social trend, they are proud of their working capacity, especially Yank, whose confidence in his physical strength and attachment to the ship is superior to that of the rest. He resembles Brutus Jones, in the primitiveness of his nature, but whereas the primitiveness of Jones is spiritual, that of Yank is entirely physical. Yank

“belongs” and the world’s movement depends upon him, all who do not ‘belong’ have no interest for him.

Comparing himself and his comrades with the capital class (the ship’s owners), Yank rebels, *“Dem boids don’t amount to nothin’. Dey’re just baggage. Who make this old tut run? Ain’t it us guys, well, den, we belong, don’t we? We belong and dey don’t. Dat’s all.”*

When old Paddy dreams of the good old days, Yank violently opposes him, considering stockhole a hell, *“Yuh don’t belong, no more, see. Yuh don’t get de stuff. Yuh too old.”* But he is confident and has great faith in his strength and ability. He considers himself the strength behind all power, without whom nothing can run in the man-made mechanized world. In fact, he considers the power behind the moving world.

**3. Yank as an alienated character**

Yank is a fireman, and is the plays antagonist. He is a fireman on a Transatlantic Ocean Liner. “The Hairy Ape” follows Yank’s quest to find a sense of belonging in a modern, industrial society. Yank, whose real name is Bob Smith, was born in New York City, in a lower class family. He is a burly, sometimes menacing figure, who has difficulty with thought. He is known to adapt the position of “The Thinker”, by Rodin when processing information or dealing with a problem.

At the beginning of the play, he is an ugly, squat, truculent, almost simian figure, the leader of all the firemen on board the steamship. He continually glories in his strength and identifies himself to being a “man of iron”

He perceives himself as the prime mover of all machinery, the maker of steel, someone on whom the entire movement of the industrial world depends. His favorite word “belongs” makes him feel as though he has found a place for himself, one he satisfied with, in the inferno of the stokehole shoveling coal. He considers himself unbeatable and is a bully. Due to his massive size, no one can stand up to him, as his physical strength is immense. He comes across as an uneducated, uncouth man, living in a world of his own.

However, his dream is shattered when Mildred Douglas, a young society woman, visits the stokehole and sees Yank. She is appalled by his dirty, swarthy, coal ridden appearance and calls him “The filthy beast”. This exclamation by Mildred destroys Yank psychologically and he is forced to revaluate his existence. This is when he assumes the pose of “The Thinker”, by Rodin. *(“The Thinker” (French: Le Penseur) is a bronze sculpture by Auguste Rodin. The work shows a nude male figure, over life-size, sitting on a rock with his chin resting on one hand, as though deep in thought. It was created in (1902) and is located in Musée Rodin in France. Source - Wikipedia)*

Thinking is not his strong ability, his ability is bodily strength. However,

Mildred has now made him think. Mildred does not consider him as the “Iron Man”, but as a “Dirty Beast”.

Yank is taken by his friend, Long, a radical activist to visit Fifth Avenue on a Sunday morning, where he is confronted by the conspicuous consumption of the capitalist class. He meets members of this group, bumping into them as they come out of church and they merely say, “I beg your pardon”, or fail completely to notice him, which is a tremendous blow to Yank’s inflated ego.

He is used to being “noticed”, when he was on the ship, ranting and raving at everyone, but this is a different scenario, being treated in this way and he now begins “to think”. Yank becomes violent, attacking a person from the “upper class”. His depressed state causes this violence, which lands him in prison for thirty days. It is now obvious that Yank does not belong to Fifth Avenue.

In prison he learns about the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World). He joins the organization in an attempt to get his revenge on Mildred, by blowing up the steel factory that her father owns. Steel has now betrayed him. His “man of steel” image has now taken a new twist. Mildred is connected to steel and Mildred has destroyed his image. A personification of steel is what Yank always believed himself to be, steel now imprisons him in a cage; he no longer has control over steel, whether it be the stokers cage on the ship, the cage in prison or the cage of social injustice. However, his incendiary ideas are too violent even for the I.W.W. and Yank is thrown onto the street.

He then visits a zoo, and visits the gorilla; trying to befriend him. The gorilla however, rejects him and kills Yank. Yank died, being rejected by human society and the animal society.

Yank is, besides being a tragic hero, a symbol which has a many-sided significance. In order to understand why or how Yank is a symbol, it is necessary to understand the nature of the symbol. A symbol means anything that represents something. Coleridge’s definition of “symbol” means anything that represents something else. In the “Hairy Ape”, Coleridge defined “symbol” as something “characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual.” *(Coleridge Taylor Samuel (1772 – 1834) was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian, who with his friend*

*William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England.*

*His works include – “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), “Kubla Khan” (1816), “Lyrical Ballads” (1798) and in (1816) Christabel).*

Yank is an individual character in the play, but in him we get a translucence of the special. He does not remain an individual, but his individuality spreads over a class, a species of people. What is happening in Yank’s life is happening now to millions of people in the modern age, dominated by science and technology. His terrible and frightful death at the hands of a more frightful and horrifying ape contributes to the symbolic function of Yank.

It seems that the two small words “hairy” and “ape” become the root cause of tragedy in the life of the protagonist, Yank. They signify the strength and brutality in the character of Yank, a distinguished stoker on a Transatlantic Liner who is proud of his belongingness. The long monologue of Yank with the gorilla, a monologue which covers up the entire scene, gives a terrifying picture of a soul in agony. The reactions of the gorilla, carefully noted by the dramatist, impart realism and variety to the fantastic scene. Yank’s sense of alienation and his quest for identity results in spiritual disintegration and death. His suffering is symbolic of the suffering of many an alienated soul in the contemporary world. “The Hairy Ape”, is a forceful statement of the predicament of modern man.

In “The Hairy Ape”, the dramatist has given the play a sub-title – “A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life”. The ancient life is represented by the gorilla, the biological ancestor of man, and Yank represents modern life. He is the modern hairy ape. There is regression instead of progression. Yank psychologically retraces the stages of man’s evolution till he sees himself as a hairy ape, the ‘brother’ of the gorilla in the cage. Thus, there is a union or coming together of the ancient and modern hairy apes, the union is presented as a comedy. No doubt the modern hairy ape dies, but perhaps at last, he now

‘belongs’. Moreover the ancient hairy ape has been let loose, and perhaps, Yank’s dream of getting even with Mildred and her gang would now be realized. Yank dies, but he dies with the hope of a better social order in the near future.

In short, the title of the play, “The Hairy Ape” is apt. It suggests the theme of the play, the morbid obsession of Yank with the insult that has been heaped upon him and the consequent disintegration of his personality.

Alienation is the major them of O’Neill. Man is a gregarious animal. A sense of stability, of security, or belongingness is necessary for his happiness and security. He must have his moorings somewhere, in some home, in the love and affection of parents, friends or other relatives. When this sense of “belongingness”, this sense of “harmony” is lost for one reason or the other, man suffers from a feeling of insecurity, and loss of confidence. He feels orphaned, defrauded and at bay. There was little stability of background in O’Neill’s own life and this accounts for the fact that alienation or loss of identity is the basic theme of most of his major plays. Alienated from their immediate environment, feeling lonely, isolated and unhappy, his characters constantly search for identity, for belongingness, and disintegrate and decay, when they fail to achieve such identity.

Yank, O’Neill’s “Everyman”, never goes beyond his desire to destroy what is. His last decision is his offer to the gorilla: *“We’ll put up one last star bout dat’ll know ‘em offer deir seats!”*

O’Neill gives Yank no other solution than this. Nor does he have the faith in the possibility of this solution. He wishes to destroy the status quo, but he sees no hope for doing so. The only answer O’Neill can find for every human being is death.

O’Neill’s plays of the three different phases show that his early plays deal with isolation and loneliness brought about by the failure of the romantic dreams, the dreams of escape. In the plays of the middle phase, isolation and loneliness is caused by the ugliness of reality for which he chooses the American social scene. In the later phase, isolation and loneliness are caused by the defeat or failure of the ideals, illusion and romantic dreams in actual life.

The tensions of O’Neill’s plays are nearly always connected with man’s struggle against isolation and loneliness. The secret of his dramatic intensity is to be found not in his theatricality, but in his rebellion and anger, and in his ability to resign himself to an arid view and way of life. He could not be at ease in a world without God, love and trust in life. His plays make it certain that he is the dramatist of failure, estrangement and isolation all through his illustrious literary career.

In short, O’Neill is a realist but with a difference. His plays are so many studies in the tension between illusion and reality, and again and again they show that romantic illusions are destructive, and a man’s salvation lies in the acceptance of reality, and adjusting himself to it. He is not merely a prosaic external realism, but a purer and higher psychological realism. It is an inner reality, on what is happening to the soul in the modern age that he concentrates. He uses poetic non-realist techniques like symbolism, expressionism, asides, soliloquies, and masks to reveal the inner life of his characters, their frustrations and obsessions.

In “The Hairy Ape” symbolism has been used with great effect and mastery. Symbolism runs through the play from the beginning to the end. Yank, the central character in the play, is a complex symbol, as he symbolizes not one, but a number of ideas. First Yank is a stoker and he symbolizes their most perfect individuality. He is superior to them in muscle and strength, and he is more adjusted to his work than they are. He is the ideal stoker, an ideal to which all stokers should try to approximate. Secondly, he symbolizes the proletariat, the have-nots working in most difficult and oppressive conditions, producing the wealth on which the rich flourish and live in luxury. Thirdly, he symbolizes the animal-nature of man, the instincts and impulses which man has inherited from his biological ancestor, the hairy ape. He is hairy chested and has immense physical strength. Fourthly, he stands for the primitive in perfect harmony with nature, with work and with his environment. Fifthly, he symbolizes everyman.

**Conclusion**

O'Neill aims at exploring the theme of isolation and loneliness in the “Hairy Ape”. Yank as an alienated character suffers from his obsession and alienation. It is therefore devoted to the theme of isolation and loneliness and brought out by analyzing the play in respect of their plot and the character of Yank and situations adopted by the dramatist.

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