

UNIT 3(II)

EUGENE O'NEILL'S *BOUND EAST FOR CARDIFF*, *THE HAIRY APE* AND *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES (1888-1953)

James O'Neill famous actor *The Count of Montecristo*

Father domineering + mother morphine addict + brother alcoholic

Affair ended in pregnancy and marriage --> father sent him South America

Suicide attempt --> tubercular infection --> first attempts at playwriting.

Double inheritance --> XIX melodrama + naturalistic tradition

Not respect contemporary theater --> dialogue authentic (language & tone)

Human nature under pressure --> characters in extreme situations

Early works (*The Lost Plays of Eugene O'Neill*) = suicides, shipwrecks,

abortions & moral ironies --> Self product of arbitrary forces

Stripping characters of solidities of social world --> exposing falsities

Spiritual dimension of life --> lyric perception of natural world & regret for

loss of harmony man/nature (modern) --> Socialist --> anarchist

Early one-act plays --> death and madness & destructive human relationships

& character collapses under pressure --> Experience = process of acquiring

knowledge + suffering psychological & literal wounds (*Where the Cross is*

Made, 1918, *Before Breakfast*, 1916, *Dreamy Kid*, 1919 & *The Rope*, 1918) -

--> Psychopathology of self product own traumatic recent past Drug addiction

of mother + alcoholism of brother + self-degradation & tuberculosis = vision

brutally deterministic

Playwright of force and originality, but eclectic imagination & undisciplined

intelligence --> powerful but imperfect works.

Clotted prose, moments of pure poetry, self-conscious experimentalism, anguished dilemma of free-will and determinism, creation of characters pressed to extremes of social world & experience itself = imagination always drawn to excess --> human spirit survive disillusioning life

Tragic significant beauty = truth --> Meaning of life & hope

Belief in human ambivalence (Nietzsche/Schopenhauer & Freud) --> irony inclined to dramatize as absurd.

Conflict, tension (death/life) <-- Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

Plays --> desperate illusions acknowledgment of defeat

Tragedy in terms of individual (potential of race)

Darwin = environmental & hereditary determinism --> resisted by imagination to transgress barriers of possible.

Desire Under the Elms (1924)

O'Neill (Nietzsche) --> tragedy life-affirming

Greatest enemy = time

Hero between two fates = stasis (bourgeois) & pain + self-knowledge of spiritual daring

Beyond the Horizon (1920) --> Broadway debut (Pulitzer, 1921)

The Emperor Jones (1920) --> deconstruction of character

All God's Chillum Got Wings (1924)

O'Neill self-conscious experimenter, eclectic to fault --> Theater to be spiritually & emotionally liberating + weapons of poetry (striking image & condensed language) (*The Great God Brown*, 1926, *Lazarus Laughed*, 1928, *Strange Interlude*, 1927, *Dynamo*, 1929, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 1932, *The Iceman Cometh*, 1956, *Days Without End*, 1934, *A Touch of the Poet*, 1958)

Death in lives of character (literal illness) --> balance poet = romantic pose

O'Neill simple social conscience --> *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1957) =

battle between rich and poor (simply focus for broad humor)

Hughie (1958) = life as night terror, dream of dissolution

Lyrical moments about land, sea, sky --> not bounded by time

Absurdity = product of man (gulf between aspiration and fulfillment)

Discrepancy eternal natural world/ephemeral personal --> anxiety

Drama of personal & cultural neurosis for analysis of American society -->

self-interest as moral value --> family becomes an obvious focus for this

concern (Freudian mythology + American mythology + his own family life)

(*More Stately Mansions*, ???)

Egotism = survival no meaning --> Relation = resistance to insensate world

O'Neill interested + in man/God - man/man

For O'Neill dialectic - self/society + contained within psyche --> Mask =

image of doubleness

For O'Neill process conveyed by image --> Plot becomes parody Appearance

= essence coincide --> play stands as expression of O'Neill's fear of final

futility of art --> stories never communicate

Marxist: O'Neill's sense of absurdity linked to assaults on materialism

II. O'NEILL'S *BOUND EAST FOR CARDIFF* (1916)

Creation of atmosphere

Appeal in 'successful approximation to true talk'

Lack of plot = metaphysical & theatrical fact

Sea plays: *Bound*, 1916, *The Long Voyage Home*, 1917; *Ile*, 1917; *The Moon of the Caribbees*, 1918; *In the Zone*, 1917 --> national types = images of

human experience

'SS Glencairn' series (less *Ile*) symbol of life as directionless journey

Against naturalistic setting, ensemble of lost souls (lost opportunities, failed dreams & relationships attenuated by time and experience)

Weakness: sentimentality, melodramatic clichés

Power: image of abandonment (products of mechanical world)

End of plays: revelation (unmasking) (*Bound*)

Dialogue refuses idea of death.

III. O'NEILL'S *THE HAIRY APE* (1922)

American expressionist + legitimate defense of IWW

Alienation --> social indictment, satire on rich & poor

Not revolt, but to 'belong' --> no ideology, no communal allegiance Sexuality

displaced (symbol of reductive power of modern world)

Mildred Douglas out of time with natural world

Weakness: make Mildred state explicitly the apparent

Yank = absurdist figure (moment of consonance is death)

Brute existence

Space minimal for character and language to form, language to coalesce &

social visions to expand --> dominant image of constriction

Sympathy for 'failure'

IV. O'NEILL'S *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT* (1956?)

Transcendent principle to charge life without meaning

Truth: power of individual to create/destroy lives of others, to renew love

Closer to tragedy in final plays: tragic in individual's struggle with own self

Relationships = battles for dominance --> language is a weapon

Fact of time --> existence

Characters: active to passive voice --> retreating behind language

Art as kind of mask (protective device)
 Isolation underlined by fog (Mary Tyrone)
 'Weather progression' (Edmund's picture)
 After emotional turmoil of the play --> silence and immobility
 Archetypal experience (parallelism)
 Notion of character less naturalistic than metaphysical
 Mary principal focus of theme of blunted aspirations (also others)
 Response to existence: love for wife and family + art
 Past: no gap wish/fulfillment, individual/setting. --> Looking back: vertigo
 Past: reassuring --> completed actions <--> Present: incompleteness
 Future: severs lines to future --> community of despair = suspect ==>
 petrified moments
 Language: secondary --> primary + detached from reality
 Lyricism: literary apprehension of beauty and harmony
 Pause as 'dead silence' --> abandonment of language
 Oscillatory rhythm of dialogue in thematic content & structures -->
 ambivalences in characters
 Buddhist 'Nirvana (Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*): (ego-
 instinct/object-instinct) --> state of 'Nirvana' (<-- Barbara Low's
Psychoanalysis)
 Leslie Fiedler: only supportable end of life = life's end
 Drama & bitterness co-terminal (long disease of O'Neill's final) = spiritual
 agony

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS (UNIT 3/II):

- 1.- What is the plot & main themes of O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*?
- 2.- Describe the play in literary terms.
- 3.- How can you relate this play to the Provincetown Players?
- 4.- Explain the plot & main themes in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.
- 5.- Indicate the literary characteristics of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.
- 6.- Did you find any instance of humour in this play? How about symbolic images? What can you say about O'Neill's stage directions?
- 7.- Can you give your personal opinion of O'Neill *Bound East for Cardiff* and *The Hairy Ape*?
- 8.- Explain the plot and themes of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*.
- 9.- Do you see any parallelism between O'Neill's real life and *Long Day's Journey into Night*?
- 10.- Could you name some literary characteristics of *Long Day's Journey into Night* (characters, structure, setting, language, mood...)?
- 11.- Can you find any particular characteristics in the dialogue of characters in relation to the literary technique in *Long Day's Journey into Night*?
- 12.- Do you see special features in the treatment of time in this play? Can you find any instances of symbology in this play?
- 13.- What can you say about the end of the play? What is the main feeling that you get from it?

14.- Comment on your personal opinion about O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Is there anything you find specially agreeable or disagreeable about the play? How can you relate & contrast *Long Day's Journey into Night* with *Bound East for Cardiff* and *The Hairy Ape*?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS (UNIT 3/II):

1.- What is the plot of O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*? Which are the main themes in this play?

(Plot) At the heart of the play is Yank, badly injured in a fall. He lies dying as life goes around him. The play fluctuates between silence and sound, as his shipmates retreat from the fact of his impending death through a neurotic chatter and a desperate reliance on routine. But Yank himself faces death with a certain dignity, a grace under pressure, which O'Neill and Hemingway alike choose to characterize as tragic. If there is no 'plot' it is because there is no conception of private or public history in the play, no sense of progression or direction, no development. Yank may regret the domestic life which he likes to feel that he sacrificed by going to sea, but there is no suggestion that his fate could have been deflected.

Main themes are death, hard life of sailors, human relationship (friendship and professional). Lost opportunities. Failed dreams.

2.- Describe the play in literary terms.

One-act play. O'Neill's first produced play. Successful approximation to true talk. Within the sea plays and the 'SS Glencairn' series. Naturalistic setting (ensemble of souls). Moments of romanticism. (woman in black beckoning Yank)

End of play: movement towards discovery, unmasking.

Weakness: Melodramatic clichés. Sentimentality.

3.- How can you relate this play to the Provincetown Players?

Language becomes a retreat. The presence of death transforms their conversation and their actions, creating an ironic undertow, an absurd commentary on life. The fog which obscures Yank's sight and which on a literal level pervades the naturalistic setting of the play, is symbolic not only of death but of the imperfect perception which these characters permit themselves. Feeling of abandonment in a mechanical world.

4.- Explain the plot in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. Point out the main themes of this play.

(Plot) A sailor, Yank, who works in the stokehole of a steamship, leader of the workers, starts feeling displaced from his world when he meets Mildred Douglas, a rich woman who travels in the same ship. He then goes to New York in search for his place in the world. He is then arrested and led to a prison where he learns about the workers

movement. At the end he visits the zoo, where a gorilla stands inside a cage and is killed by a murderous hug of the gorilla, after entering its cage.

Main themes: Alienation. Social indictment. Satire on the vacuous world of the rich and the soulless existence of the poor. Defense of the IWW (International Workers of the World).

5.- Indicate the literary characteristics of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

Second stage of Provincetown Players.

Expressionistic play in one act and eight scenes --> Main character reduced to type.

No ideology, no real communal sense of allegiance.

Sexuality is displaced --> masculinity goes into the service of the machine (substitute of the live-giving feminine principle). Symbol of reductive power of a modern world.

Yank = absurdist figure (harmony & order <--> refusal of world to manifest it)

Only moment of consonance = moment of death.

Minimal space (for character to form, language to develop, social visions to expand)

Dominant image of constriction.

O'Neill's sympathy for 'failure' --> key: sense of 'belonging'(1057, 1058, 1060, 1089)

Weakness: O'Neill is too explicit in explaining and reiterating in language what is apparent in the play's action. (Yank's ape-like appearance & aridity and inhumanity of rich)

6- Did you find any instance of humour in this play? How about symbolic images? What can you say about O'Neill's stage directions?

Humour: sarcasm (acid) (1076, 1081, 1084). Irony (1089)

Symbolic images: Rodin's *The Thinker* (1068, 1078, 1081, 1086); cage (1053, 1089); steel (1077, 1078, 1082). Also (1077)

Stage directions are very specific and well-explained, leaving no more space for the director to give his lecture of play. It is as if you could see the play while reading it. It also abounds in literary references to naturalism, expressionism and impressions to be conveyed. (1053, 1061, 1065, 1082, 1087)

7.- Can you give your personal opinion of O'Neill *Bound East for Cardiff* and *The Hairy Ape*?

8.- Explain the plot and main themes of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

(Plot) In *Long Day's Journey into Night* a family is reunited in their summer house. The action develops around the familial relationships as well as the past, present and future of the members of that family. Mary Tyrone (mother) is the main character around which the main action develops. James Tyrone (father) and his sons, Edmund and Jamie, also recount their living memories, hopes, and losses.

Main themes: the first theme is the search for truth in man's life. Individual struggle with his own conflicting self and the challenge to the world. Human relationships, especially familial relationships with their frustrations, dreams not fulfilled, hopes, regrets and resentment. Also language as a weapon.

9.- Do you see any parallelism between O'Neill's real life and *Long Day's Journey into Night*?

Mary is a morphine addict, James is an old-fashioned actor, Edmund is a frustrated artist (poet, playwright...), Jamie is a drunkard. They have not been able to control their lives. They look for some kind of transcendental principle (instead of Catholic faith).

10.- Could you name some literary characteristics of *Long Day's Journey into Night* (characters, structure, setting, language, mood...)?

Characters are described in terms of their own language (speech).

Structure is closer to the tragedy in that the characters acknowledge their own conflicting situation with their own self and with the world, which resolves at the end of the play.

Setting is realistic and the dominant feeling is one of oppression and isolation.

11.- Can you find any particular characteristics in the dialogue of characters in relation to literary technique in *Long Day's Journey into Night*?

Dialogue = see-saw rhythm (thematic content + structures)

Regarding the literary technique, the characters are defined and explained according to their speech, their dialogue which acts as a weapon giving relationships the feature of battle for dominance. Characters retreat behind language (no real friends, progressive withdrawal from the world). Art becomes a mask, a protective device. The touch of the poet (mark of many of his characters, betrays a desire to reshape the world, which is equally the origin of that evasion of the real which at times is the essence of their self-betrayal).

12.- Do you see special features in the treatment of time in this play? Can you find any instances of symbology in this play?

Verbs in the play reflect O'Neill's (and his characters') vision of time as present, past and future. Present = incompleteness (menace) --> Past (retrospective vertigo + reassuring (complete actions)) --> Future = community of despair --> inherently suspect.

Symbology = 'Weather progression' --> Act I --> fine morning, fog clearing; Act II --> sunshine dims & Tyrone's optimism; Act III --> distant sound of fog horn --> ominous sign which Tyrone still resists; Act IV --> fog encloses them, which is welcome for Mary (concealment) & Edmund (destroys distinction real/illusory). --> Edmund's picture --> 'narcotic escape' --> fog person = wanderer + peaceful, mistiness, beyond care & vexation. Mary --> unable to face future (yearn innocence --> accuse each other + shifting alliances)

13.- What can you say about the end of the play? What is the main feeling that you get from it?

End = after emotional turmoil --> silence, immobility + characters re-enacting archetypal experience. --> Pessimistic feeling of isolation & oppression. (failure + frustration)

14.- Comment on your personal opinion about O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Is there anything you find specially agreeable or disagreeable about the play? How can you contrast *Long Day's Journey into Night* with *Bound East for Cardiff* and *The Hairy Ape*?